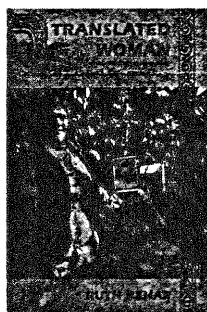


## Reviews

### BOOKS

***Translated Woman* by Ruth Behar  
(Boston: Beacon Press, 1993) 400 pp.,  
\$25.**

When Ruth Behar, a Cuban American anthropologist, assigned herself the project of writing a biographical story of



Esperanza, a Mexican peddler, she could not have known what a personal odyssey the project would become.

This biography, *Translated Woman: Crossing the Border with Esperanza's*

*Story*, does more than discuss and examine physical borders; it takes on the subject of margins and separations.

Over a seven-year period, Behar, an anthropology professor at the University of Michigan, and her husband David Fried, also an anthropologist, journeyed back and forth to Mexico to talk with Esperanza, a woman who had married young and was abused by her husband. She had also suffered several betrayals by her own family and finally fought her way to some kind of freedom.

Behar originally went to Mexquitic to research information on witches during the Mexican Inquisition. Instead, thanks to gossiping townswomen and her own formidable persistence and imagination, Behar met Esperanza. Soon they are talking at the kitchen table and trying to record Esperanza's life story.

In Esperanza's town, some call her a witch and accuse her of causing her former husband Julio's blindness. By the end of the book, whether or not the reader believes in the occult, there is the thought that what happened to Julio was a balance for his cruel actions.

"I have six *angelitos*, and I put out six candles for them, and I light them," Esperanza tells Behar, describing the rituals she performs to honor her dead children. They died during her abusive, sixteen-year marriage, in which Julio beat her while she was pregnant and then refused medical care to any of the children who survived.

Stories of domestic violence are common, but the victim is often portrayed

as accepting her condition. Esperanza neither accepts her position, nor does she try to raise herself spiritually above it all. She struggles to deal with her past life and present reality.

One point that constantly confronts the reader throughout this book is Esperanza's *coraje*, which is her salvation. Anger motivates her to leave her husband and take up the struggle to support herself and her children.

Within the biography, Behar examines her own borders. Her Latina-gringa conflict surfaces, as well as a realization that she may have lost precious parts of herself and her culture trying to pattern herself on the American Dream.

Either Behar is one of the bravest, most honest writers and anthropologists around, or she is a great fiction writer. The book is a demanding and intensely satisfying read. "The border Esperanza and I seemed to transgress so effortlessly a moment before now stands between us again," Behar writes as she realizes that Esperanza's life and freedom is and will remain different from hers. But borders can be negotiated and a meeting space is found where two women, Esperanza who venerates Pancho Villa, and Behar, with her reverence for academics, talk of border battles, defeats, and victories.

*Beverly Sanchez*