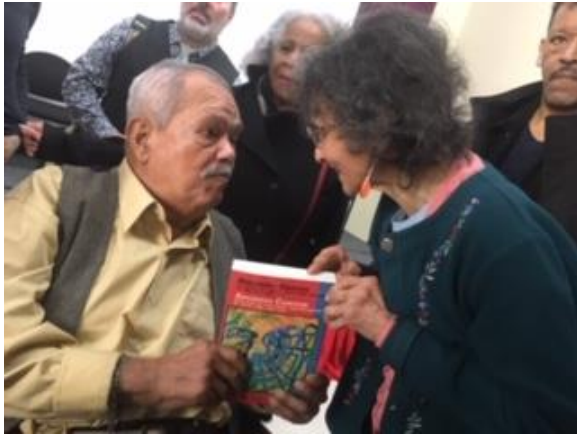


Myrna Nieves

Three Experiences with Miguel Algarín



I would like to describe three experiences with Miguel Algarín that was significant to me. Miguel read his poetry several times (1990, 1993, 2002) at the Boricua College Winter Poetry Series I was coordinating in Brooklyn, and that, besides events at the Nuyorican Café in which I participated, was our main place of contact. I remember Miguel reading his work at the Poetry Series with, among other poets, Anita Vélez Mitchell. I had titled the event *The New York Poets*. He asked me: “Why did you title it like that and not “Nuyorican Poetry?” I told him that I thought Anita’s poetry

was of a different style, to which he replied something like: “All Puerto Ricans who write [in English] in New York write Nuyorican Poetry.” I smiled, amused, but later on thought that his understanding of Nuyorican Poetry was deeper than mine, and his willingness

I also remember that he always supported my poetry and, like him, I sometimes performed with music (two guitar players). I thought that, if I strongly visualized what I was describing, and re-enacted deeply (inside me) the feelings involved in the poem, I could create a “dimension” in which the audience could enter. In truth, I thought that my strategy helped me to read my poems better and, maybe construct a “real” thing that could actually happen. At one reading at the Nuyorican Poets Café, I did that in a particularly intense manner. After the event, when most people were gone, Miguel told me that what I had created there was amazing and looked around the room, like still perceiving the scene and sensations that I was describing. What a great listener of poetry he was! Miguel listened to poetry much beyond the words being said. He directly apprehended its soul!

Lastly, I compiled an anthology of Puerto Rican women writers and wanted a blurb from him. I am grateful that he was willing to meet me, and he suggested a bar near the Café so that I could explain my project to him and listen to his suggestions. Miguel helped me to finish up the Introduction to the book (the last sentence of the Introduction is his) and wrote a wonderful blurb for the back cover that I am very proud of. Sometime after the publication of *Breaking Ground*, Miguel participated in a panel on literature in Taller Boricua, in East Harlem. All the panelists were men, except a translator. When it was Miguel’s turn to talk, the first thing he said was: “What I do not understand is why Myrna Nieves is not sitting on this panel.” I was both embarrassed, and grateful. I was also surprised because I had not thought of it, either. I did not think that I could be on that panel and had not questioned, in my mind, the exclusion – involuntary or not – of women!

All I have for Miguel is admiration for his immense work as a poet, scholar, and a cultural force for our people. All I have for Miguel is appreciation for his invariable kindness towards me.

Myrna Nieves' literary work has been published in anthologies and magazines in the USA, Latin America, Canada, India, and Spain. She was director for 20 years of The Boricua College Winter Poetry Series. Published books: Tripartita: Earth, Dreams, Powers; Libreta de sueños (narraciones); Viaje a la lluvia: poemas; Another Version of Hansel and Gretel; and Breaking Ground: Anthology of Puerto Rican Women Writers in New York. Nieves is a curator for the magazine And Then and Spanish Editor for homeplanetnews online. She has a BA from the UPR, an MA from Columbia University and a PhD. from NYU
<http://mnieves23.wix.com/myrna-nieves>