

Anita: Selective Memories

Ana B. Castano

Quantum Discovery

(120pp)

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Confident and celebratory, Anita is a memoir about self-discovery across several continents.

Traversing multiple countries, Ana B. Castano's memoir *Anita* is a decisive story of love, loss, and self-awareness.

When she was young, Castano's anti-crime work in Colombia put her life at risk. Even knowing this, she was conflicted about leaving home. She worried about how she would fare away from her family and the landscapes that she loved. Surrounded by coffee trees and blooms on her ancestral land, she at first buried such emotions. But once she was granted asylum in the United States, she decided to settle in Miami. There, she faced new, still difficult choices regarding her family and career. Later, her oldest son (a teenager at the time) came from Colombia to live with her in the US.

Castano's later travels through the United States, Europe, and Africa are covered in the book as well. These are often marked by emotional interrogations, with Castano asking herself questions about the natures of failure and success, both in relation to business and when it comes to her personal life. She recalls learning to accept changes as they came and to celebrate complex challenges. And she makes room for self-praise, boasting about her artistic abilities, business sense, and relationship savvy. But the book's punchy declarations, including "I became friends with money" in relation to Castano's developing business sense, also reflect its reliance on light generalities. When reflecting upon the end of a relationship, for example, Castano bemoans that she gave love and "never asked for the delivery receipt."

The book's tone is enthusiastic. Castano sets herself up as someone who embraces change, and her narration reflects this. Nonetheless, it also reflects leaps forward and backward in time at the cost of its cohesion and flow. Even within its discrete, time-limited scenes, as with Castano's memories of the day she received her asylum papers at the Miami immigration office, it is too jumpy. In a few spots, updates are inserted to jarring effect, as when memories of Castano's children when they were young are interrupted with a startling statement about one of their deaths. The book is often short on identifying details, too, including around names and places. As it hurries through Castano's numerous life transitions, its work becomes too hazy to hold interest. Its agreement errors and run-on sentences add to its overall sense of disarray.

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MICHELE SHARPE (May 11, 2023)

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