



Voices
from the
Gaps

Strong Box Heart

Sheila Sanchez Hatch

Author Sheila Sanchez Hatch portrays herself as the eternal adolescent, the precocious girl who eschewed innocent play to instead pore over her journals with melancholy tales of forgotten love and death.

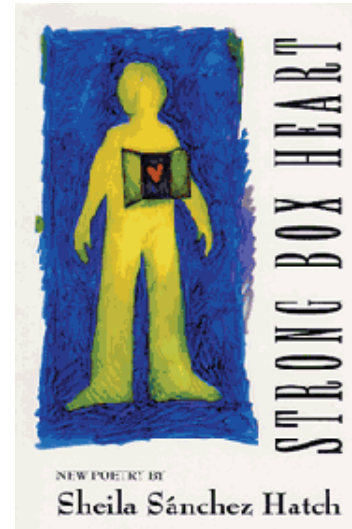
She probably was not the average girl in your school, but the introspective one who sat in the back of class doodling in the margins. Now an adult, she draws upon her youth within the modest volume of elegant poetry, *Strong Box Heart* (Wings Press), containing verse that is delicate in structure, yet heavily weighted in emotion.

Divided into three sections (Strong Box Heart, Love's Acrobatics, and Brown Woman Artist), the book traces a young girl's ascent into adulthood with budding artistic promise. The rich opening selections are bittersweet with irony like the honey from a bee's sting. As she writes in the first poem in the volume, "a dream of bees":

*the hive
belongs to you
and not those
who should feel the sting
of your bodies' last goodbye
not those
who haunt your children's dreams (p. 3).*

She later provides refuge for a young friend within the context of her intuitive "comforting Benny":

*it is the destiny
of every Mexicano
to be pulled back
into that paradise
tropical garden
hide away home (p. 5)*



Publisher: Wings Press,
2000



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As a Tejana writer born in San Antonio, Sanchez Hatch's visions of Mexico often appear reminiscent and obscured by the passage of time. When she isn't disclosing her own youth, her poems appear as collected testimonials from elders (real or imagined). Like a young Alan Lomax, she gives much of her work a historical context and her verse resonates with nostalgia, as in "Diamantina":

*a Kelly Girl in '46, your
red shoes stepping into
downtown's Club Oasis
where you danced
to your favorite song by
the Inkspots or
was it Gene Krupa. (p. 9)*

The image of home is never far from her mind, as she speaks warmly of Texas in the ode "recuerdos de San Anto":

*your love
covers me
like San Antonio
too full of stars
a river running
right down center
soft and languid. (p. 31)*

With a reflective mind revealed in her poems, Sanchez Hatch relies on identifiable character traits and situations. She is one writer with the ability to recall scenes from everyday life, snapshots of those who could share a multitude of stories, if prompted. As in "joyous; still sleeping," found in the section tenderly titled Love's Acrobatics:

*6am
naked and curled up snugly
you're a pink and fragile world (p. 26)*



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The section concludes with a poem marked “adios,” ushering in the third installment entitled Brown Woman Artist, which allows a mature Sanchez Hatch to encounter the absurd with witty references to Franz Kafka and launch into meditations on the mundane with “all-nite laundromat. “ Having published in a number of literary magazines and anthologies, writing for children as well as adults, Sanchez Hatch contains a range of appeal for readers of all ages who wish for insight into the heart and mind of a young, female artist.

Reviewed by Kate Silver