

*The Traps of Faith* is an impeccably written book, as one would expect from one of the greatest stylists of the Spanish language. The text seduces us not only with its accessible and enjoyable style but also with the breadth of perspectives offered and the sensitivity in its reading of Sor Juana's poetry. It is a passionate and exciting book. There are few studies of this magnitude in Hispanic culture written by one poet about the life and work of another. Recreating a world, reconstructing and updating a life, deciphering and critically analyzing a body of work, this book exemplifies two of the essential features which Paz encounters in the life and work of Sor Juana: rigorous passion for knowledge and obstinate intellectual independence.

*Anthony Stanton*

**El Colegio de México.**

Essay originally published in *Literatura Mexicana* Vol. 1 (1990).

**The Enormous Vogue of Things Mexican**

*Helen Delpar*

University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa and London, 1992. 274 pp.

*The Enormous Vogue of Things Mexican: Cultural Relations between the United States and Mexico, 1920-1935* reads like a lively biographical dictionary of Mexican and American intellectuals and artists who crossed the U.S.-Mexico border in their endeavors. Helen Delpar has produced a well-structured book that looks at many aspects of cultural relations between Mexico and the United States. She proceeds chronologically, covering the 1920s and picking up some of the same people in a chapter on the '30s. Anthropologists and archaeologists are dealt with in a separate chapter, as are exchanges in literature, music and the performing arts.

**Structure and patterns**

Delpar begins each chapter with a brief sketch of the cultural and political history of each of the two countries. She sketches major events and trends, providing a framework for individuals and their creative work.

The background is followed with statistics presented in clear tables, which substantiate her hypotheses. We learn about the number of students enrolled in Spanish classes in the United States; those enrolled in summer school in Mexico; the number of Mexicans who emigrate to or return from the United States in a given period; the number of films with Mexican subjects; works of fiction about Mexico, and other facts.

Once the stage is set the author proceeds with a complex narration of people, their work, their friends, their opinions, and often citations from their work. When the material has to do with specific plays, movies and books, Delpar also quotes a selection of critical reviews.

Although she does not include her own opinions, selective quotes allow the reader to glimpse her views on the political positions of people such as Carleton Beals, Ernest Gruening, Frank Tannenbaum, Bertram and Ella Wolfe and others she describes as "left."

**Overwhelming wealth of information**

It is difficult to describe the amount of information included in this book. Delpar covers a plethora of well-known, lesser-known and downright obscure intellectuals active in the U.S. and Mexico. Yet the section on Mexican muralists' influence in the United States regrettably omits Lucienne Bloch Dimitroff, a woman who worked with Diego Rivera in New York and Detroit and went on to create many of her own fresco murals.

We are treated to anecdotes illuminating relationships among the intellectuals, their activities during a given period of time, their past and

what lay ahead for them. This includes considerable detail on peoples' comings and goings: there are Americans who settle in Mexico, such as William Spratling; others such as John Dos Passos only visit; Ernest Gruening stays for a while to research his book, while others, such as Katherine Anne Porter, go back and forth. Detailed information is given on those who receive Guggenheim grants, among them Hart Crane.

Similar descriptions are given of Mexicans who travel north, among them Salvador Novo, Miguel Covarrubias (who lived in New York for extended periods of time and became a part of that city's intellectual community), José Clemente Orozco, Diego Rivera, Rufino Tamayo and Carlos Chávez.

Then there are those who are simply impossible to classify. One of them is Anita Brenner, who was born in Mexico, left during the Revolution of 1910, subsequently returned to Mexico City and later went to New York to do her doctorate at Columbia University under Franz Boas, before returning to Mexico once more in 1943. She was both a Mexican and an American.

Brenner was a member of the multinational group that the artist Jean Charlot describes as a "family" of intellectuals and artists in Mexico City. Rather than a "link among the various Americans and their Mexican friends" (as Delpar calls her on p. 40), she became a bridge between countries whose writing focused on making Mexico understood in the United States.

**Social scientists: anthropologists and archaeologists**

Delpar also provides an in-depth chapter on the relationship between Mexican and American anthropologists and archaeologists, presenting a detailed history of excavations and those who led them. She does an excellent job of describing the complex links between

anthropologists, which often go back to work at the same institutions. U.S. scholars' respect for Mexico's post-revolutionary education policies for adults and efforts to integrate indigenous peoples into the mainstream is duly noted. Manuel Gamio is credited as a pioneering cultural anthropologist who focused on those denied the benefits of

education under the Porfirio Díaz regime.

Delpar traces Gamio's entry to Columbia University to Zelia Nuttall, an American archaeologist who settled in Mexico and participated in several digs, including the still controversial identification of the site of Cuauhtémoc's tomb. Although the relationship between Gamio and Franz

Boas is mentioned, regrettably Boas' work in Mexico is not included.

The book also presents a chronology of excavations in the Yucatan, and the subsequent broadening of work there from archaeology to ethnology, identifying Robert Redfield's early work with Alfonso Villa Rojas.<sup>1</sup>

#### Resource for students and scholars

The information gathered in *The Enormous Vogue of Things Mexican* provides students and scholars with an impressive volume of notes and bibliographical references. The author has provided a starting point, a thread for researchers on U.S.-Mexico relations, cultural links or the humanities in general. There are few exceptions to this volume's high standard of scholarship. One is the inclusion of Anita Brenner in the list of people who received the Aztec Eagle Award for foreigners from the Mexican Government, omitting the fact that Anita Brenner refused the award on the grounds that she was a Mexican, not a foreigner.

Delpar's position is readily identifiable as that of a U.S. scholar who covers an overwhelming amount of accessible documentation. Bicultural and Mexican souls will bristle at some of the quotes which subtly take stabs at Mexico. Those unfamiliar with the work of the intellectuals and artists included will not recognize the omissions and slants.

The author is to be commended for producing an excellent resource that will be a reference for students in an increasingly popular field, which in recent years has witnessed a veritable "vogue of the 1920s and '30s in Mexico."

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<sup>1</sup> See *Voices of Mexico* 30, p. 89.

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