

Reviews

REVIEWS



Juego y revolución.
La literatura mexicana de los años sesenta
(Games and Revolution. Mexican
Literature in the 1960s)
(Corrected and expanded edition)
Juan Antonio Rosado
Octavio Antonio Colmenares y Vargas, ed.
Libros para ser libres Collection
Mexico City, 2011, 168 pp.

When looking closely at a specific period of Mexican culture, the threads of an intricate weave come to light, but only someone who studies them with a keen eye can show them to us. In *Juego y revolución. La literatura mexicana de los años sesenta* (Games and Revolution. Mexican Literature in the 1960s), Mexican author Juan Antonio Rosado embarks on a journey of this kind as he explores the artistic movement of the 1960s, a voyage that defies rigid limits given the meandering, dynamic nature of the process, through which readers are guided with an open mind.

An analysis of the characteristics of a particular literary period cannot be restricted to the study of the actual written work; what defines it is how it reflects the social and historic era in which various disciplines interact with one another. In his book, Rosado presents a broad, multifaceted view that allows the reader to trace part of the origins of contemporary Mexican culture.

As clarified at the beginning of the book, the scope of the publication is limited, since a detailed investigation would

take decades of research and also because the author studies those artists with whom he feels a certain empathy. Nevertheless, the essays in the book are committed, constructive, and, above all, honest and critical.

Until the 1950s, the 1910 Mexican Revolution was the central theme of much of Mexican literature, but as of the 1960s this trend was broken. Writers with different points of view began to experiment with other themes as well as language tone and structure. These changes signified a shift from the realistic and historic to the imaginative and fantastical. Although they coincided in some aspects, each writer proposed a different world; Juan José Arreola, Carlos Fuentes, and Juan Rulfo transformed and reinvented tradition. Meanwhile, bold, multifaceted artists like Alejandro Jodorowsky and Juan José Gurrola brought theater to life by fueling the imagination. The cultural movement of the 1960s engendered the founding of magazines, important publishing houses (like ERA and the late, lamented *Diógenes*), and television series. Museums were inaugurated and forums were organized to promote culture.

Ironically, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) governments —disgraceful, undemocratic, and deceptive— triggered the rebellion of many artists against their yoke. Art became a vehicle for speaking out against repression, opening the way to new forms of expression and themes, like rock music, the city, drugs, and a sudden liberalization of sexuality, all through renewed, fun, informal language. The literary generation of provocative, rebellious writers began to evolve in the tradition of *En la ruta de la onda* (On the Road to Cool), as the ill-fated author from Orizaba, Veracruz, Parménides García Saldaña, called his third novel.

The focus on rural life was replaced by an emphasis on urban areas, and young writers like José Agustín, Gustavo Sainz, and Parménides García Saldaña discovered an open form of expression through the use of irony and colloquial language.

Just as narrative experienced great changes, many different languages coexisted in the world of poetry. Some of these

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outstanding poets, like Carlos Pellicer and Salvador Novo, belonged to the generation of the Contemporaries. While Octavio Paz experimented with his poem “Blanco” (White), Renato Leduc was noted for his humor. Jaime Sabines and Rubén Bonifaz Nuño stood out, as did the members of the “Workshop” group, such as Efraín Huerta. The so-called Half-Century Generation was at its peak. It included several women, like Enriqueta Ochoa, Rosario Castellanos, and Dolores Castro, who, although they already had long literary careers behind them, were only just beginning to win recognition. What is remarkable about this review is that Juan Antonio Rosado whets the reader’s with eleatic appetite and incites our impulse to go beyond the apparent and choose kindred spirits amid this artistic torrent.¹

Juego y revolución pays special tribute to several writers who are constant reference points in the author’s formation, as well as in the development of his theme: Juan García Ponce, Salvador Elizondo, Inés Arredondo, and Juan Vicente Melo, members of the “Casa del Lago generation,” which poet

and writer José Emilio Pacheco was also part of. All of them are noted for their insightful prose, experimentation with themes like the sacred and eroticism, and their commitment to language.

The 1960s opened the way for a more cosmopolitan outlook, and the cultural movement was enriched by what was produced in other languages and foreign art influences, such as the Beat Generation. Essential publications, like the magazines *El corno emplumado* (The Plumed Horn) and *La espiga amotinada* (The Mutinous Stalk), were founded to promote both young and established poets. The Casa del Lago (the Lake House), in Chapultepec Park, was the most important cultural center of the time, becoming the forum par excellence for artists, and, therefore, for the dissemination of poetry, drama, music, and the arts. About that time, the university project “Voz viva de México” (the Live Voice of Mexico) also emerged, which made recordings of renowned works read by the writers themselves.

In the visual arts, muralism was shunned, while another, more personal type of painting emerged, also focusing on ontological research. In a crossover of disciplines, many wrote essays on art and cinema, both Mexican and international. During those years, the Andalusian Luis Buñuel directed several films in Mexico using Mexican actors.

In addition to observing artistic expressions, Rosado also looks at social changes and the transformation of important concepts, like eroticism. The years of the sexual revolution gave birth to the contraceptive pill and to publications like *Caballero* (Gentleman), a men’s magazine devoted to exploring the theme, and which contributed to the cultural movement by bringing together celebrities of the time and publishing notable articles, reportage, and photographs.

Several very informative interviews are to be found in the book: one with Emmanuel Carballo on the founding and later disappearance of the Diógenes publishing house; and another with Juan Miguel de Mora, an unusual person who was a journalist, war correspondent, writer, critic, and India scholar, especially on its ancient medicine and culture. This interview opens a different perspective on the 1968 Tlatelolco massacre, as well as on the cultural and daily life of Mexico during those years.

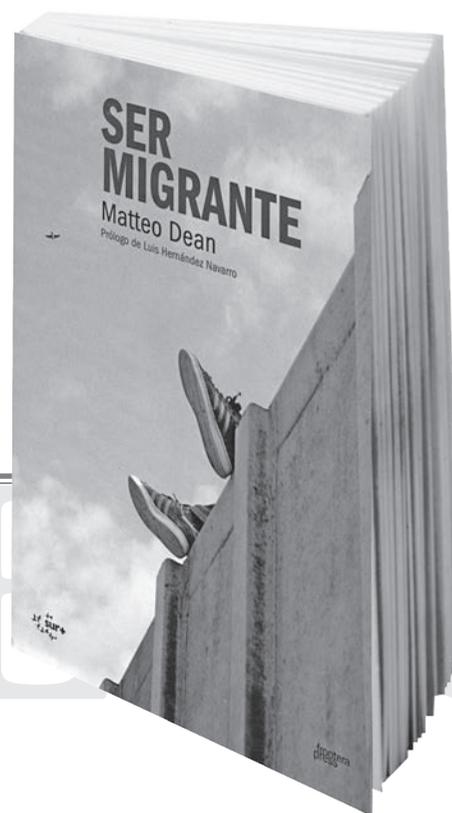
Juan Antonio Rosado also pays tribute to two outstanding creative individuals: Carlos Valdés, writer, critic, and editor, who died 20 years ago, and who presented new aesthetic ideas to the narrative of the time; and the prolific musician Juan Antonio Rosado Rodríguez, born in Puerto Rico, who discov-

ered Mexico as a country where he could teach and compose daring, eclectic works that deserve to be better known. As well as providing a disquieting cultural journey, this book is a struggle against oblivion, and a rousing incentive to continue exploring and enjoying art. **MM**

Carlos López
Writer and editor

NOTES

¹ The Eleatics were a school of pre-Socratic philosophers at Elea (now Ve-
lia), a Greek colony in Campania, Italy. The group was founded in the early
fifth century BC by Parmenides. [Editor's Note.]



Ser migrante
(Being a Migrant)

Matteo Dean

Sur + ediciones

Mexico City, 2011, 186 pp.

THE DISASTROUS UNDER-RECOGNITION
OF MIGRANTS

The late Matteo Dean's book of op-ed articles and essays, *Ser migrante* (Being a Migrant) starts with a crack. Until recently, Dean points out, according to the Royal Spanish Academy, the word "migrant" (*migrante*) did not even officially exist in Spanish. "Inmigrado" and "emigrante" existed, but not, simply, "*migrante*." A person could, then, in the official registers of the language, be entering or leaving a country, but between, in transit, or back and forth, there was a linguistic crack, a space of non-definition the migrant fell into. And what befalls a migrant in this crack—this interstitial space outside national protection or recognition—is the material of *Ser migrante*.

But the rather recondite linguistic analogy is not just limited to Spanish. In the United States as well, not only are migrants *not* guaranteed freedom—they seem rather to be guaranteed both violence and exploitation—they are not even guaranteed a respectful definition: routinely and pejoratively referred to as "illegals," "wetbacks," "tonks," or "aliens."

Our basic freedoms—the right to speech, freedom from oppression, fair trials, the pursuit of happiness—are defined and protected by our national constitutions. But where some countries do not guarantee these freedoms, or do not abide by their own guarantees, the International Declaration of Human Rights serves to extend them to all persons, especially those, like migrants—there are an estimated 212 million worldwide—who are liable to fall, as in Dean's linguistic example, into the unprotected spaces between the limits of national protection, into *the cracks*.

Reading Matteo Dean, you start to realize that there are cracks all around us.

Ser migrante is a collection of articles (averaging 3 short pages) most of which were originally published in Mexico's daily paper *La Jornada*, describing the many ways these 212 million migrants are exploited, abused, murdered, kidnapped, hoodwinked, incarcerated, enslaved, mistreated, misinformed, and altogether stomped on by the laws or lack of laws in Europe, Mexico, and the United States. By detailing these horrors abroad—most but not all of the essays concern migration in Europe—Dean sheds light on the horrors at home. That is,