

An Unusual Literary Heroine

Otilia Rauda, by Sergio Galindo. Editorial Grijalbo, Mexico City, 1986.

Sergio Galindo's latest novel is part of contemporary narrative literature in Mexico and the rest of the Spanish-speaking world. The author was born in 1926 in Jalapa, capital of the state of Veracruz. He attended the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) and later studied in France. Back in Mexico he taught aesthetics at the School of Drama in his hometown and went on to win a scholarship from the *Centro Mexicano de Escritores* (Mexican Writer's Center). Galindo also headed the University Press of the Universidad Veracruzana at Jalapa, whose publications have played an essential role in Mexico's literary development.

Galindo began his career as



a writer in 1951 with *La Máquina Vacía* (The Empty Machine), a collection of short stories, and later published his first novel, *Polvos de arroz* (roughly Rice Dust or Ground Rice). The novel has been his chosen form ever since, with books such as *La justicia de enero* (January Justice) in 1959, and *El bordo*. Sergio Galindo's own very realistic style is already present in his early works. Basically, he breaks down folkloric and revolutionary (from the Mexican Revolution) stereotypes with their social themes that tend to predetermine the character's evolution and fate, and relies on essentially literary devices. Thus, his novels tend to transcend their specific time and place and stand as universal examples of human tragedy.

Los dos angeles (Two An-

gels), published in 1984, deals with the encounter between childhood and old age in the form of a Mexican boy and an old Spanish refugee from the Civil War. Through this relationship Galindo illustrates the connections between two countries, between two worlds in which one was once the conqueror and the other the conquered. Another novel, *El hombre de los hongos* (The Mushroom Man) was published in 1976 and takes an entirely different course from *Angels*. This work deals with magic, and the author superimposes space and time and fudges the border between reality and fiction, unleashing a rush of fantasy on the reader.

The Autonomous University of Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, granted Sergio Galindo the José Fuentes Mares Literary Award for his latest novel, *Otilia Rauda*. In this book Galindo further develops the literary devices he began working with when he first started writing. He is clearly an heir to the classical 19th Century linear-plot novel and is immersed in the Mexican narrative tradition which began in the early part of the 20th century with fictional literary accounts of the Mexican Revolution. In *Otilia* Galindo once more resorts to the same topics and techniques, but this time as part of the Latin American literary boom and its emphasis on the use of language as the basic creative device, leaving social and political issues on a secondary level that springs forth from the artistic work itself.

Otilia Rauda is impressive in its simplicity and narrative effectiveness. The plot unfolds in almost chronological order through an independent narrator who at

times becomes part of the different characters' psychology and inner conflicts. This is a love story, and it centers around Otilia Rauda, the extraordinary main character who is unique in Mexican literature. She is a woman of great strength who combines a nearly masculine sense of determination with extremely feminine sensuality and passion. Otilia is what we could call an anti-heroine in the way she breaks with the traditional image of women in Mexican literature.

The story is set in the small, narrow-minded town of Las Vigas, in the setting Galindo usually uses, the state of Veracruz. It opens in 1907—the beginning of the century and eve of the Mexican Revolution—and continues on into the 1940's, covering the

period of instability that followed the Revolution. Even though time and place are precise in the novel, with clear references to the decline of Porfirio Díaz' dictatorship and including a splendid description of the 1910 Independence Centennial celebration at the Port of Veracruz, it is really the characters who constitute a complete universe. They include Otilia Rauda and her lover, the suspected murderer Rubén Lazcano, Otilia's parents and godmother, her wicked husband Isidro Peña, and others.

The novel deals with the interaction between Otilia and the townspeople, a relationship characterized by the neighbors' envious gossip about the woman who is different. The community shuns Otilia and discriminates



against her, yet she is strong enough to continue to be herself and to earn the friendship and love of those capable of going beyond social prejudice. Rubén Lazcano is Otilia's counterpart and complement, the other discriminated character whose story is told as a novel within the novel.

Galindo successfully manages to captivate the reader and involve us in the characters' conflicts, problems which might very well be our own, no matter the time and place we live in.

Adela Iglesias