

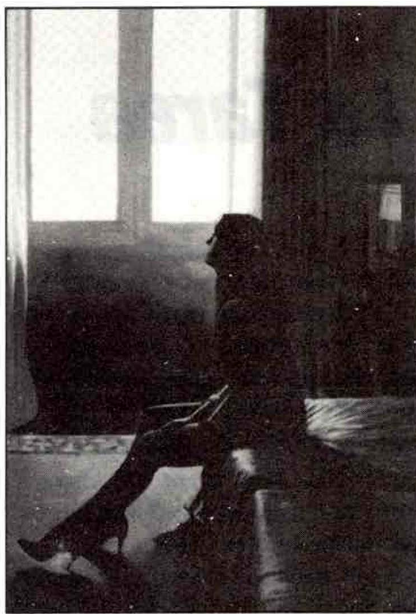
Reviews

The hidden night

Sergio González Rodríguez

La noche oculta.

Cal y Arena editores
México, 1990. 170pp.



The Hidden Night, by Sergio González Rodríguez, is a breath of fresh air for recent Mexican literature. González Rodríguez' style—a mixture of literature-noire, esoteric research, and fantasy—is a serious crack at solving the problem faced by the Mexican novel. By definitely breaking away from magic realism and fantasy-reality, which are a tourist's view of what is Mexican (or rather of all that is Latin American in general), González Rodríguez has given a necessary twist to recent Mexican narrative.

To escape from Macondo and Comala, to break free from the most

transparent region, to flee from the circularity of the cultural myths (revolutionary, Native Indian, nationalistic, Prehispanic, Third-World) that once fed Mexican and Latin American narrative, a strategic return to the brevity of the anecdote and to the lightness of characters stripped of symbolic or emblematic connotations was necessary. González Rodríguez' prose is a return to precise, rapid, and visible narration devoid of verbal plays on words that pretend to be experimental. The same thing had happened with Joycean-like narrative, puns, the attempt at making a beachhead of *la nouvelle vague*, or the all-embracing pretensions of the historical novel and classical realism: it was necessary to learn how to write the story over again.

In *The Dregs* (1988) González Rodríguez had already explored the subsoil of our cultural obsessions with sexuality and nightlife through the trio of brothels-bohemianism-café. In this, his first novel, he established himself as a distinct narrative voice. If Roger Bartra, in *The Cage of Melancholy* (1987), made a herpetology of Mexican culture, González Rodríguez, for his part, did his teratology in *The Dregs*. In Bartra, metamorphosis and identity; in González Rodríguez, deviation and secret life, alcoholics, drug-addicts, homosexuals, prostitutes, secret societies, suicides, and the depressed make up the fauna that continually have to face the attacks of modern life that seek to render them normal. This perspective enabled González Rodríguez to dissect modern Mexico

through the meeting places of bohemia.

Jesús Vizcaya, the main character of *The Hidden Night*, with his fifty-odd years, his hat and the secret of his hidden night, is a creature in the category of Larsen (Onetti's *Corpse-Collector*). Jesús Vizcaya represents a real and possible human character in a literature that has previously devoted itself to the search for mythological, historic, and grandiloquent characters.

Conversing with D.H. Lawrence, enduring a thrashing outside the Catacombs, participating in a spiritualist session, and seducing a young waitress are some of the book's everyday adventures. Nevertheless, *The Hidden Night* is not a realistic novel, nor is it a detective story or a fantasy: it is the sum of all these elements and much more. Within its stance as minor literature resides its occult (and erudite) secret: beneath the anecdotic narration lie innumerable quotes and intertextual games from Walter Benjamin to Malraux.

González Rodríguez explores the hidden side of culture—esoteric books, old photographs, crime, sexual violence. He searches—like the surrealists read by Walter Benjamin—for all that is hidden in unused objects, things that are out of fashion, popular mythology, or badly-spelt pornographic books. He has made well-loved places in the city visible and palpable once again, such as the hotels and cafés downtown, the parquet floors of apartments in the Condesa area, the aristocratic

turn-of-the-century architecture in the Santa María neighborhood.

An investigation into the past and childhood, the novel is full of leaps in time. In this sense it is not a linear narration, but a discontinuous one which allows the author to insert fragments of life, deviations, and essay-like asides. Unlike *Foucault's Pendulum* by Eco, (an obligatory reference) González Rodríguez' novel does not attempt to exhaust the highways and byways of occultism,

and it does not confront us with jumbled discussions or interminable historical investigations.

In *Foucault's Pendulum*, what Eco intends to be a mockery, an ironical representation of occultism and esotericism, ends up as a consecration of it in five hundred pages. *The Hidden Night* is not a criticism of esotericism or occultism: it uses them as means. At the same time it shows us that there are revelations as atrocious or

marvelous (if not much more so) than those hidden in a ouija board, tarot cards or horoscopes. A firefly can eradicate the fear of night creatures; an old photograph of a nude woman can contain more meanings than the signs of the zodiac; and in anyone's past there may exist secrets that are simply best not revealed.

Mauricio Molina

Staff Writer