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Otoño 2013

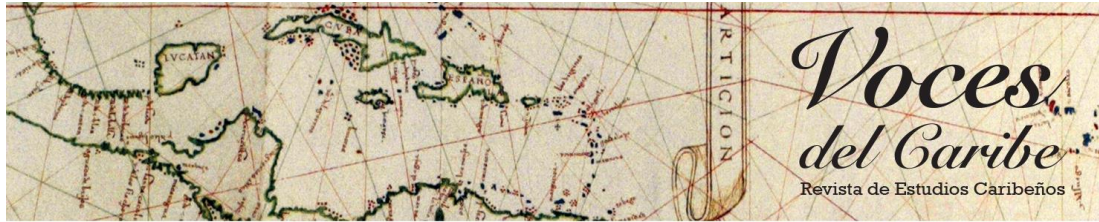
Raúl Rosales Herrera. *Fictional First-Person Discourses in Cuban Diaspora Novels: The Author Within and Beyond Textual Boundaries*. Edwin Mellen Press, New York, 2012 (284 pp.).

Raúl Rosales Herrera is an Assistant Professor of Spanish at Drew University where he has been teaching since 2004 and where he also completed his undergraduate degree in 1999. Raúl was born in New York City to Cuban parents, and grew up in New Jersey. He earned his M.A., M. Phil., and Ph. D. in Spanish from Columbia University.

His latest work, *Fictional First-Person Discourses in Cuban Diaspora Novels*, published in 2011 by The Edwin Mellon Press (284 pages), was born of his life experiences and insatiable appetite for autobiographical and life-writing as well as an undying interest in autobiographical theory and modalities within fictional discourses. Raúl develops these interests in a study of Cuban diaspora novels, where he examines several texts that contain fictional discourses intended as an act of autobiographical self-representation. The authors studied in this book negotiate through the use of this fictional discourse the experiences of “separation and integration, of living in the adopted (adoptive?) country and remembering another.” The first person discourses within the text represent both a physical and psychological journey, a struggle to recover identity, and to cope with physical and emotional displacement. With the publication of this book, Raúl intends to open a dialogue regarding “how literary expression and the realm of the imaginative may well be the most adequate routes for individual self-understanding and for the negotiating of ever-shifting cultural identities.” To accomplish this, Raúleffectively dividesthe text into three parts, examining three separate waves of Cuban immigration: the 1980 Mariel generation, the Special Period (1990-95), and first-generation Cuban exile writers (1995-present)

Raúl points out the fact the Mariel generation differs from first-generation writers in that they lived under the Cuban Revolution for two decades. Thus,



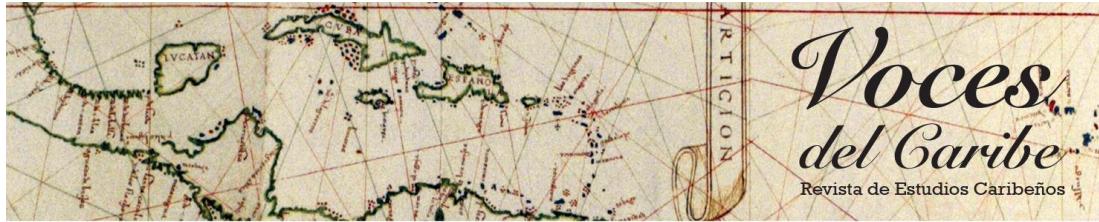


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the marielitos were to experience a greater sense of discrimination and alienation within the United States, which added to their sense of eternal “limbo” amidst their physical, psychological, and cultural displacement. Raúl poignantly exposes various artistic journals ()as the “creative space” in which these writers would seek to (re-)establish a collective identity outside of mainland Cuba. He uses as evidence *Boarding Home* by Guillermo Rosales, a novel which never finds publication outside of the journal *Mariel*, a journal that came to be the universe in which exiled Cuban writers would gather to discuss issues deemed most important to their time and situation. The fact that Rosales’ work is in every way exiled from public space by the publishing houses echoes and embodies the entire *Mariel* generation, a generation that was never fully embraced by the United States and never truly occupied a space within the adoptive american culture. While the first section of the book dealt largely with a group of Cuban authors who lived under the Cuban Revolution for decades, the second section examines the autobiographical acts in works by those involved in the Cuban exodus of the nineties. This era is “marked by material deprivation, accentuated social distress and specific government efforts to combat the crisis” within Cuba and sparked the “balsero crisis” in the summer of 1994, in which Cuba allowed more than thirty thousand Cubans to emigrate in rafts toward U.S. shores. Raúl poignantly states that “these writers were perceived by established exiles as the witnesses and chroniclers of a Cuban system and society that exiles in the United States wished to expose.” To examine this boom more closely, Raúl analyzes Zoé Valdés’s *La nada cotidiana* (1995) and Daína Chaviano’s *El hombre, la hembra y el hambre* (1998). Both of these fictional novels can be seen as literary exploration of self on multiple levels. By fully embracing the reality of the times and by chronicling the larger social dynamics of Cuban culture, the authors are able to capture the rampant poverty, to study female sexuality and power, and to “symbolically reclaim the territory of their individual bodies and the creative space of the text.” This is evident through Raúl’s analysis of the character Yocandra in *La nada cotidiana*. The novel reveals the autobiographical account of a woman marked by the Cuban Revolution. She is given the name Patria by





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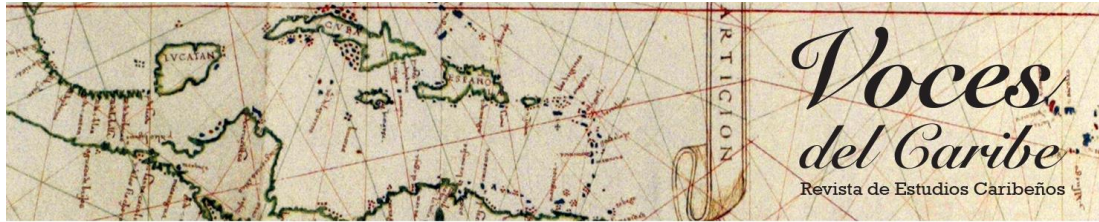
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her father after being born during a Ché Guevara rally in 1959. She later rejects the name and changes it in adulthood. Thus, Patria becomes Yocandra, a woman whose life mirrors that of Valdés as well as provides a rather clear view of the sordid reality in which she finds herself. Raúl reveals that her life is one of deprivation and she is consumed by an intense desire to escape, to flee the island, but the asphyxiating social environment in which she is trapped, “and that will reach its height with the Special Period,” holds her back. Yocandra, then, uses her sexuality as a means of mental escape and as an expression of freedom. Raúl writes, “Yocandra’s sexual experiences are portrayed through autobiographical acts, self-referential enactments that operate as the vehicles of escape and resistance.”

The final literary example given by Raúl is Hilda Perera’s *La noche de Ina*. Raúl examines this book as a representation of “Spanish language Cuban exile literature” that continues to be written by first-generation authors of the sixties and seventies. These writers continue to produce literary texts in English and are farther removed from the actual space of Cuba and from the exilic experience which defined previous generations. Raúl examines the inadequate quantity of attention given to these novelists as well as the subsequent impact that a more in-depth study would have upon the ever-expanding Cuban community within the United States. The novel depicts the story of Ina, a woman who will stop at nothing to preserve her “Cubanness” within the context of the larger and ever imposing American culture intent upon assimilating her and devouring her ethnic identity. Raúl intends to illuminate the dire need of a more concentrated analysis of this body of works and the autobiographical content of them, as it clearly demonstrates an evolution of the Cuban exilic experience and a move from Cuban to Cuban-American, a cultural shift that will define an entire generation and change our perception of the Cuban diaspora.

This important and masterfully written text reveals individual and cultural representations of individuals caught up in the experience of exile through the





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examination of fictional first-person discourses in Cuban novels. Raúl demonstrates how the authors are inextricably linked to their texts and how their lives become the very foundation of the fictional work which they create and populate with self-revealing characters that trace the evolution of culture identity. The writers strip away the mask of literary artifice and weave their stories from the fabric of their extra-textual experiences which become “deliberately intensified within a creative narrative framework.” The text provides a solid foundation and point of departure for subsequent analysis of Cuban identity within works of fiction, which Raúl shows to be “performative”, an act of historical significance, and an important reflective experience for those souls that have been displaced, abandoned, or forgotten.

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