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Historia personal del Crack: entrevistas críticas by Tomás Regalado López (review)

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Regalado López, Tomás. *Historia personal del Crack: entrevistas críticas*. Albatros Ediciones, 2018. 278 pp. ISBN: 978-84-7274-348-9.

Tomás Regalado López's new book *Historia personal del Crack: entrevistas críticas* presents, in the first half, a sociological study of the Mexican Crack, as a literary group attempting to carve out its own place within the Mexican publishing industry and the national literary tradition more broadly. The second half, as the title implies, compiles personal interviews that Regalado López has conducted with the individual writers. Regalado López has been a close friend throughout the years to various members of the Crack, having studied at the University of Salamanca while Volpi and Padilla were there doing their doctoral work. As such, the author offers a distinct, insider's view of the group. He carefully traces the various stages and details of the writers' rise through the ranks from their early days as aspiring newcomers, to their current place as cultural gatekeepers of the cosmopolitan tradition in Latin American letters. What is more, his own association with the writers shines through as he foregrounds one of the most essential components of this literary group—friendship.

The first part of the book, “Crack y campo literario (La parte del crítico),” presents an insightful Bourdieusian reading that explores the Crack's entry into the institution of Mexican letters. Regalado López explores the politics of the publishing industry, as well as the group's leveraging of media to advance their literary project. One of the many strengths of Regalado López's approach to scholarship is his ability to account for market stratagem, without diminishing from what the author implicitly sees as the value of the Crack's aesthetics. Rather than blithely eschewing the Crack movement for its relation to the neoliberal market, Regalado López traces their savvy use of publishing politics and media campaigns in order to realize a desirable aesthetic shift within the niche of Latin American letters toward a more demanding literature.

According to the author's analysis, the key figures of the Crack like Jorge Volpi and Ignacio Padilla capitalized off of an already international market for what José Eduardo González terms “post-nationalist” literature made up of a readership looking for cosmopolitan, “deep” novels. Through Volpi and Padilla's acceptance into Spanish publishing houses, they are able to gain international attention, sell the translation rights to their works at a lucrative rate, and ultimately gain a degree of notoriety with a readership beyond the Spanish language. Such success obviously allowed them to carve out their own place within the national *campo* of Mexican letters, even if they had still not received entry from the old guard. One of the strengths of Regalado López's study lies in his ability to map this interface of the international literary industry and consumption habits with the national institution of letters. The author shows how market interest can redefine expectations for Latin American literature. Rather than offering a close reading of key entries within the Crack canon (which Regalado López has undoubtedly done elsewhere), the author delves into the fascinating dimension behind-the-scenes, examining the politics of literary institution and the publishing industry.

In the second part of the book, Regalado López includes his own interviews with Volpi, Urroz, Padilla, Estivell, Palou, Chávez Castañeda and Herrasti, allow-

ing them to all muse about the Crack and their own works in detail. The more compelling moments in these interviews center on the writers' own memories of their early camaraderie. As they reminisce about the reading groups held at Eloy Urroz' residence, their social gatherings at Estivell's house, or their work sessions at *Sanborn's*, one is left with the impression that beyond the similar aesthetic tastes, what binds this group together is a shared experience of youth. The writers wax nostalgic about memories of joint discovery and artistic development, while at the same time remembering the more mundane details of their gang of friends. As Alejandro Estivell notes: "Nos reunimos los sábados en mi casa; mis padres enojados porque iban a llegar los cuates de Alejandro, que dominaban el estudio y se mecían en las sillas de mi mamá, que se iban a romper" (177). After reading this book, the Crack group seems more like a group of friends from way-back-when, whose current acclaim as writers will always be determined by that mythical and wondrous period of early adulthood. One also gets a hint of the insecurities that go along with any social clique. Alejandro Estivell touches upon his self-doubt as a writer alongside the intimidating prowess of a Volpi or an Urroz, a feeling that seems to have been with him since their early affiliation in the 80s.

Alongside the ebbs and flows of friendship, one also notes in the more recent interviews a certain melancholia about the untimely passing of Ignacio Padilla in August, 2016. Such sorrow does not enter as full-on bereavement, given the academic nature of these interviews. Nevertheless, alongside the nostalgia for their youthful association, one gets a sense that a key player in this group has been lost. In his interview, Jorge Volpi goes as far as to say that Padilla's death, and their inability to reunite the group in its entirety in Guadalajara in December '16, where they had planned to read a *postmanifiesto*, marks the end of the Crack:

No sé si todos están de acuerdo, creo que no —Pedro, por ejemplo, no está tan de acuerdo— pero para mí el Crack sin Nacho ya no es lo mismo, no creo que exista realmente. A lo mejor no exista desde hace más tiempo, que es algo que llegó a decir también Eloy y que el propio Nacho llegó a insinuar, pero que el punto de quiebre fue el año 2016: la muerte de Nacho, la escritura del postmanifiesto y la imposibilidad de vernos todos juntos en Guadalajara en diciembre. (109)

Volpi's comment reinforces the "personal" association at the origin of this group, and at the center of this book as its title implies. What remains to be seen is if the association will be fortified in the future, or if they will, in Ignacio Padilla's words, become ever more "islas solitarias."

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