La fragilidad de los cuerpos

AUTHOR: Sergio Olguín
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READER’S NAME: Adán Griego
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ON A SCALE FROM 1 - 10 (WITH 10 BEING THE HIGHEST SCORE) HOW WOULD YOU RATE THIS BOOK? 10

Great writing can take the grotesque and abhorrent elements of urban life in a place like Buenos Aires and craft it into an intriguing narrative that keeps the reader hooked at every turn of the page, even for those who don't follow detective fiction, like this reviewer. That's what award-winning writer Sergio Olguín has given readers in La fragilidad de los cuerpos.

The text opens with a bizarre scene: a patient undergoing therapy for having accidentally killed a few people while conducting a train jumps off the top floor of his psychologist's office. In those first paragraphs Olguín has set the stage for a successful novela negra, or roman noir, as the French would call it. The incident catches the attention of Veronica Rosenthal, who takes up investigating the case for her magazine, Nuestro Tiempo.

From then on the novel leads the reader through the intertwined and often raw experiences of a host of characters, from corrupt politicians to predators recruiting poor youngsters. “Bring me boys with a manly spirit,” commands the soccer coach with motives beyond mens sana in corpore sano

Above all stand Veronica and Lucio, a tortured train conductor, who becomes an informant and lover to the persuasive and attractive female journalist. Theirs is a tumultuous love affair that starts with a one-time encounter in a seedy motel and develops into a series of consensual, sadomasochistic encounters. A violence that parallels that of the working-class youngsters convinced to play Russian roulette by standing in front of a fast-coming train to see who endures the longest, with the “luck winner” getting a meager financial reward. The macabre encounter often ends with a fatality, not to mention the scarred for life train employees or those who gather to gamble on a late night, in a far-away train overpass.

The story set in the Argentine capital could take place in any poor section of a European or U.S. large city. In fact, at times, it feels like an episode of Law and Order, familiar to television audiences, not just in the United States. It is this Anglophone public that would easily welcome Olguín’s novel, where even the future Pope Francis appears meeting with parishioners at one of the slums on the outskirts of Buenos Aires!

Segio Olguín has not been North of the Rio Grande but is so “familiar” with life in the United States that he recreated it all in his 2007 novel [Vivir] en Springfield, where three Argentine students travel via Route 66 and experience the “American way of life” in its multiple manifestations.

Olguín has already been translated into German and it is only fair that English-speaking readers not be deprived of the masterful writing of this 40-something Argentine writer who has already authored more than ten books, including seven novels. La Fragilidad de los cuerpos would be a great starting point. Besides, the author has hinted that Veronica, with all the freedoms of male protagonists of detective novels, may be present in future works.

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