



Death in Veracruz

Héctor Aguilar Camín

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Journalism and politics in a 1970s Mexico replete with petro dollars, corruption, and murder of the voiceless.

Death in Veracruz is the first of Mexican journalist Héctor Aguilar Camín's novels to be translated into English. First published in Mexico thirty years ago, *Veracruz* is a Byzantine knot of friendship, betrayal, love, ambition, politics, money, oil, and murder.

Rojano and the unnamed protagonist, nicknamed Negro, are high school friends who go on to university and become rivals over a shared love of Anabela. Rojano becomes a lawyer, marries Anabela, and goes into government with the PRI, where he wears platinum bracelets and develops a vaguely unsavory reputation, but not unduly so, given that this is Mexican politics in the 1970s. Negro becomes a journalist and moves on. Several years later, Rojano comes to Negro with tales of conspiracy and murder involving poor farmers who refused to sell their lands and a powerful oil labor union boss whose motto is "Destroy to create. He who can add can divide." Rojano asks Negro to investigate.

Camín has a gift for evocative images and elegant phrasing. He offers a fascinating explanation of the symbiotic relationship between government and journalists. "Our cautiously professional relationship existed in the strange limbo of mutual usefulness well known to journalists and Mexican politicians ... Newspapers are the government's seismograph, and columnists are the seismographers."

Camín also excels with cultural commentary:

In the distance, a homely array of squat buildings crept along the horizon in an astonishing display of money and bad taste topped by a clear blue sky riddled at intervals by smoke from the gas flares surrounding the city. ... We crawled past imported eighteen-wheelers, pickups, and cranes, symbols of a kinetic petro-civilization, its machinery, and its debris. A bulky accumulation of wealth had grown up with no traditions or culture of its own. The city was full of junkyards piled with drills, pulleys, and the rusting hulks of cast-off vehicles and the high-priced vulgarity of first class hotels with polarized windows set in gold frames.

The plot is much simpler than the many threads make it seem, and the pacing holds your attention, never lagging. *Death in Veracruz* is recommended to fans of politics, thrillers, history and Mexico.

MICHELLE NEWBY (Fall 2015)

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