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FOREWORD REVIEW ♥♥♥♥♥ GENERAL FICTION

El Indio Jesus

Gilberto Chavez Ballejos
Shirley Hill Witt
University of Oklahoma Press (September 2000)
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> *This uncommonly common man, so ordinary, so invisible, carried himself in an unassuming way that spoke of strength.*

El Indio Jesus, the "uncommonly common man," is introduced in scenes describing his activities during a typical week in his life. The week begins with the arrest of El Indio for driving a suspicious looking vehicle: his latest incarnation of the "caro troquita," a VW Beetle transformed into a miniature pickup truck that is perpetually impounded, stripped, and reborn again.

As the week progresses, the increasingly complex layers of this seemingly simple man are peeled away to reveal his true nature as a philosophical thinker, influential mentor, and smuggler of political refugees into the United States.

The characters that take supporting roles in this drama/comedy are as colorful and varied as the murals created by the young "grafiterios," or graffiti artists, that El Indio encourages as purveyors of the social consciousness. Anglos raised in the midst of barrio life take varied paths under his watchful eye. One lives and dies in the barrio, another becomes a State Police Captain with a side job supplying drugs, and a third uses his post with Immigration to aid the transportation of illegal aliens into this country.

There is no mistaking the authors' political leanings as El Indio Jesus and his compadres discuss the social issues facing their communities. The evidence is found in their assertion that the bartering and trading of skills involved in lowrider automobile construction is a socio-economic bond of borderland communities. It is also obvious in statements such as, "the fear of Yellow Peril is still alive and thriving in this country even today. We just can't quite grasp the idea that race and geographical origins are not legitimate criteria for denying asylum."

The strong political messages will be easier for those with more left leanings, but the drama and intrigue of this magnetic story will appeal to a wide audience. The novel is written primarily in English, with some Spanish words and phrases adding flavor to the mix. A glossary of all Spanish terms used is included at the end of the novel.

El Indio Jesus is an intriguing journey past the faÃ§ade of a simple man and into the ever-thickening layers of his personal, quiet warfare against injustice in all of the Americas. It is a story that provides important insights into the social structure and political viewpoints of the mixedbloods who inhabit the border region between the U. S. and Mexico.

CHRISTINE CANFIELD (September / October 2000)

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