



Milagros y Creencias

Alejandro Valenzuela Verdugo

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To paraphrase the endorsement on the back cover this Spanish language book “cannot be considered a novel in the strictest sense.” It is rather a series of connected vignettes. Valenzuela Verdugo a native of Mexico has also published books of his poetry.

Although there is little mention of setting astute readers will pick up clues that point to Mexico as the setting for the story. After the introduction black and white drawings introduce each chapter.

In *Milagros y Creencias* (Miracles and Beliefs) six male friends who studied business together in college reunite after many years to discuss their lives over coffee—looking for the miraculous in the trials and triumphs they each experience. Since they so enjoyed their first reunion they decide to continue to meet letting each man take a turn at having his say.

At times the book’s punctuation leaves readers questioning exactly who is speaking. With six possible speakers this can create complications.

As the book opens Efraín the narrator gives a brief sketch of each man to set the stage for each story. He also interjects his thoughts into the narration as his friends tell their tales.

The optimistic Gabriel tells of his beloved but troubled uncle. As a child Gabriel thought the world of his uncle and didn’t realize that his uncle has problems with alcohol. Even as an adult he still views his uncle with the unconditional love he felt for him as a child.

Reserved René survived childhood disease and an accident involving a motorcycle among other things. He begins his story with a description of life inside the womb and sees something miraculous in all of his narrow misses.

Joaquín is jovial but burdened by financial and marital woes. Although he has his doubts about his girlfriend’s sincerity Joaquín marries her and later wonders if he did the right thing.

Carlos considered the group’s anchor has strange dreams. He turns away from his wife and spends his nights out on the town. At one point he feels he is under a curse and tries various ways to escape it.

Salvador is the serious one and says that his life is nothing spectacular. When a long-awaited opportunity is taken away he ends up with an overbearing boss whose behavior he excuses.

Finally Efraín looks over his life and questions his accomplishments. At the same time he is appreciative of life’s beauty. His friends are pleased when Efraín asks their permission to write about their talks.

The way the group encourages Efraín in his writing ambitions is typical of the way the men relate throughout the book.

This is one story that flies in the face of generalizations about men not wanting to talk about their lives.

While there is no doubt that the narrative imparts valuable life lessons these life stories connected by coffee and conversation make for instructive but less than compelling reading.

JADA BRADLEY (March 25, 2008)

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