

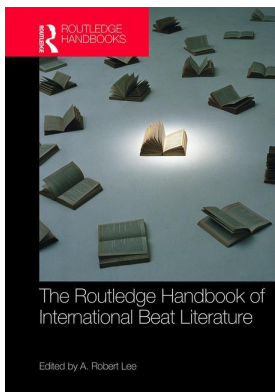
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The Beat Presence in Mexican Literature

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THE BEAT PRESENCE IN MEXICAN LITERATURE

Alberto Escobar de la Garma

Mexico, legendarily, has long been Beat terrain. Whether for simple adventuring, to escape from North American conformity, or to seek drugs and sex, the culture has been a magnet. Burroughs, Kerouac, and Ginsberg, not to mention Bonnie Bremser/Brenda Frazer, all feature. In this regard Mexico takes on near mythic standing: a seemingly magical domain from Tijuana to Mexico City to San Cristóbal de las Casas, where nature and indigenous and Euro-hispanic legacies mix. Not only the Beats, but a considerably wide range of authors have so been drawn to the country, notable among them Antonin Artaud, D. H. Lawrence, André Breton, and Malcolm Lowry. Few of the Beats, however, found Mexico to exert readier appeal than Jack Kerouac, his interests at once ongoing and considerable, and rarely more exuberantly expressed than in *On the Road* (1957) and *Mexico City Blues* (1959). Kerouac, like other Beats, and even if at times he was prone to idealize the culture, provides a link with the body of Mexican writing which might be considered Beat.

Mexico has long vaunted its own literary canon, from the pre-Colombian and colonial periods to ranking moderns like Octavio Paz and Carlos Fuentes. It is against this background that the names and texts of “Beat Mexico” invite consideration. Here we are speaking of poets like Sergio Mondragón (1935–), Homero Aridjis (1940–), José Vicente Anaya (1947–), Alberto Blanco (1951–), Mario Santiago Papasquiaro (1944–1998), and José Eugenio Sánchez (1965–). Narrative fiction can look to Salvador Elizondo (1932–2006), José Agustín (1944–) and Parménides García Saldaña (1944–1982). These writers all give grounds to be qualified as Beat, considering their willingness to court controversy and speak to issues traditionally kept silent in Mexican society, and their endeavors to forge a new poetics. Women writers have been scarce, but in Carolina Estrada (1960–) and Zazil Collins (1984–) this has been partly improved.

The Mexican Cultural Background in the 1950s: The Pursuit of Modernization

When the Beats took to making Mexico a place of sojourn in the 1950s and then on into the 1960s, it featured for them as principally a realm with ancient values that harbored a more relaxed and simpler way of life. Paradoxically this was a time when the political ideology of the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) was aiming for modernization, almost precisely the opposite values of those being sought by Ginsberg, Kerouac, and other Beats, who were interested in traditional cultures’ values. The idea was to move the nation into synchronicity with the international landscape. The arts and culture were slated to play a key canonical role, a support to this end. Rita Eder usefully describes the situation as:

a tension between the arts and the ‘stabilizing development’ initiative undertaken by the Institutional Revolutionary Party and its administrations, which sought to promote a stable economic policy while boosting the creation of educational and cultural institutions. These strategies enabled the creation of a powerful image of the state, whose modernization ran parallel to the preservation of a national identity – to which a ‘Mexican School’ of arts was of great service. The greatest challenge was disrupting the prevailing canon in the arts – which leaned heavily towards localism and nationalism – and refuting the value of what endures in the notion of identity.

Eder 2014, 25

Mexico’s Beat connection had a special outlet in the case of *El Corno Emplumado* (*The Plumed Horn*), the bilingual quarterly magazine edited by the Beat-connected poet Margaret Randall and Sergio Mondragón—the latter one of the Mexican writers most especially interested in revolutionary forms of art. From 1962 to 1969 the magazine had a clear objective: to share different styles of aesthetic and political outlook and to foster interaction between cultures beyond barriers of national language. Luna Chávez gives the following account:

At a time when cultural migration was crucially relevant, the magazine was a point of convergence for the need of a steady intercultural exchange of all kinds of written matter. This allowed for the publication of important poems hitherto unknown in Mexico, such as Allen Ginsberg’s ‘Kaddisch’ [sic] and ‘Howl,’ which *El Corno* famously published in Spanish for the first time.”

Luna Chávez 2014, 185

Another link is to be found in the 1963 issue of *Revista de la Universidad de México* (*The University of Mexico Review*), edited by Jaime García Terrés, poet, translator, and diplomat, and a leading presence in *El Fondo de Cultura Económica*. Terrés’ aim was to modernize different cultural fields of Mexico. In the magazine’s eighth volume, he laid out a prospectus for new directions with the university as working base. This led to the compilation titled *Nuestra década: La cultura contemporánea a través de mil textos* (*Our Decade: Contemporary Culture Through One Thousand Texts*), which found a widespread readership. It contained writings by Miguel León-Portilla, and by Luis Buñuel as leading film-maker, and works by Mexican authors like Sergio Pitol, Juan Rulfo, and Elena Garro alongside renowned Latin American writers of the period such as Julio Cortázar and Gabriel García Márquez.

The section dedicated to poetry included national and international names, notably among them Allen Ginsberg and Lawrence Ferlinghetti. The magazine was a touchstone because it aspired to an open view of the world but with a focus on Spanish as axial language:

[The] openly cosmopolitan spirit of the magazine – its definite position in the debate of the time that set Mexicanity against universality – is part of the character imprinted on it by a man of the stature of García Terrés [...].”

Escoto 2014, 523

Out of this legacy a number of Beats, over time, would participate in poetry readings and lectures in Mexico due to the support of cultural institutions such as the High Arts National Institution (INBA), which invited Ferlinghetti to the Palace of Fine Arts in Mexico City in 2002 to present the first Mexican edition of his book *La noche Mexicana*. He made a point of praising local poetic talent. As early as 1981, during the First International Festival of Poetry, the National University had invited Ginsberg to Michoacán along with writers such as Günter Grass, Vasko Popa, and Lasse Söderberg.

The next year, Ginsberg participated in a TV program conducted by Octavio Paz, *La poesía en nuestro tiempo* (*Poetry In Our Time*), where he discussed poetry's relationship to life and death with the Mexican poets Álvaro Mutis and Homero Aridjis, the latter a poet with an especially close relationship with the Beats. More recently, Anne Waldman gave a lecture and a poetry reading in 2016 in Mexico, and the next year she curated the *Poesía en Voz Alta* (*Poetry Out Loud*) festival in Casa del Lago, one of the venues created by the University in the 1960s to provide a forum for new poetic voices. Without the efforts of modernization made by the Mexican state during the 1950s, it is highly probable that the presence of the Beat generation would have been yet more delayed. Much as modernization was criticized by the Beats it was, ironically, that very factor that helped give them exposure in Mexico.

Modern Mexican Literature

As noted, the presiding cultural and artistic institutions were supported by the state in order to promote an agenda focused on presenting Mexico as a modern nation, able to take its place with the more "advanced" countries of the world. As such, any kind of artistic expression that stood out of line with this effort was to be kept at the margins or even silenced. The role Octavio Paz played in this period to outline and legitimize what would be considered the official culture was crucial, as he was the embodiment of the Mexican intelligentsia in the service of the state: "One of the basic worries of power institutions in Mexico is their relationship with intellectuals. Intellectuals have appeared as the state's main spokespersons, who can be used as thermometers to rate how society sees and appreciates the government" (Rodríguez 2015, 26). Paz was involved with several artistic movements of his time, though his personal taste tended to favor traditional values that could at the same time appear synchronous with modern life. These factors are quite decisive when trying to track down the influence the Beats had on Mexican writers. There was the question of availability of Beat texts in Mexico. If the Beats were to be regarded as US dissidents, what were the implications for Mexico—Ginsberg and the others in their own right but even more for like-minded Mexican authorship? How, too, were these same Mexican authors to forge a Mexican Beat idiom, if at all?

Furthermore, we must keep in mind the long-standing cultural as well as political antagonism between the United States and Mexico. This rivalry dates back to 1846, with the American invasion of Mexico which led to the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 and ended the Mexican–American war but ratified Mexico's loss of large parts of its northern territories to the US. Since then, and through to modern southwest border disputes, it has almost become the norm for both sides to be suspicious of each other—often leading to mutual denigration as "wetbacks" and "gringos." Naturally this relationship was, and remains, infinitely more nuanced, its complexities the subject of considerable ongoing analysis. The Mexican Left, very resistant to US policies, took a wary view of literary and other dissidence coming in from north of the border. The upshot was a real ambivalence: writers might have shared Beat's countercultural impulse but they were also heirs to resisting US cultural imperialism. Ginsberg and Kerouac, not to say Burroughs, held interest but were not to be afforded unadulterated welcome:

American foreign policy has been damaging to the Latin American region. Unfortunately, in this predisposition we frequently include American artists, some of whom, paradoxically, are often enemies of the same State.

Yépez 2002, 6

In his *Luna creciente: Contrapoéticas norteamericanas del siglo XX*, Heriberto Yépez summarizes matters vividly:

How can we expect such a serious literature, like Mexican literature, to accept with good will the presence of the Beatniks or any 'gringo' that could be mistaken for one of them? [...]

If, when Artaud wandered dirty and lost through Mexico, Xavier Villaurrutia saw him with disgust, how can we expect Octavio Paz to take Gregorio Corso seriously?

Yépez 2002, 138

Beat, for Mexican writers of similar disposition, was hardly likely to win over traditional Mexico with its neo-colonial implications, the sexual and gender politics, the drugs, the uninhibited cascades of alternative language, and most importantly, the received idea that poets and artists in general should embody traditional values related to “civilization.” Citizen decency, often rooted in Catholicism, was to be upheld at all costs. “Degenerate” art, and those who either advocated or practiced it, could have little or no acceptability.

In *The Return of Comrade Ricardo Flores Magón* (2014), Claudio Lomnitz argues that intellectuals, that is, the persons who started to write down the history of Mexico since its establishment as a nation in the nineteenth century and the generation of humanists after the Revolution (1910–1920), actually reproduced the role village priests had with the community as social advisors:

Perhaps because it is, at heart, a Catholic and provincial society, Mexico has always had a special preference for these chroniclers, and they have thrived even in today’s mass society. Carlos María Bustamante, Guillermo Prieto, and Ignacio Manuel Altamirano were figures of this sort in the nineteenth century, as was Salvador Novo in the decades following the Mexican Revolution. Currently, writers such as Carlos Monsiváis, Héctor Aguilar Camín, Enrique Krauze, and Elena Poniatowska fall into this category. Even intellectuals who have kept a greater distance from the bustle of the day to day, such as the late Octavio Paz, or Carlos Fuentes, descend from their lofty heights, like bishops going to a confirmation, when it comes to consecrating the truly important events: the 1968 student movement, the earthquake of 1985, or the Zapatista revolt of 1994. The cronista [sic] accompanies the community, guides it through its dilemmas, consoles it in its grief, and shares in its triumph. Mimesis with the people is such that this intellectual is a natural representative of the nation.

Martino 2015

It is not difficult to see why there was reluctance to give widespread endorsement to the Beats in Mexico. Theirs was a lifestyle, not to say a body of literary expression, genuinely uncongenial to most of the national society.

Even so, and whatever the guardianship of literary respectability practiced by Octavio Paz and his like, a significant number of Mexican poets and writers actually did embrace Beat. They did so in the face of considerable prejudice and hostility. Some of them survived more or less like a caricature of the Beats, while others looked with genuine curiosity to the changes stimulated by the Beats—especially in the field of poetry. Many of these “alternative” literary intellectuals, such as the *Infrarrealistas*, a group of young writers in the 1970s who went against the official Party-directed culture and its representatives, had their work suppressed. Much of it was rescued only decades later.

Mexican Beat Writers

Two aspects of the relationship between the Beats and Mexican writers can be said to come first into the reckoning. The first focuses on poetics, Ginsberg and others as compositional models, the second on the role of the writer as anti-establishment force. One key forerunner has to be Salvador Elizondo (1932–2006) known mainly for his celebrated novel *Farabeuf* (1965) which was conceived with Eisenstein’s montage theory in mind. Elizondo was deeply interested in the superposition of images, visual or literary, in order to create new meanings. In a short-lived magazine he directed in the 1960s titled *S.Nob* there was a superb use of collage with unusual overlaps of works of art, photography, drawings and images calculated to go beyond mere illustration and to trigger responses both to and

beyond the written word. The way he understood language and semantics brings to mind the cut-up technique by Burroughs, whom he says he met while staying at Manhattan's 23rd Street Chelsea Hotel:

Burroughs' intellectual world, when I met him, was similar to the one Pound has adjudged to himself: a world where words are emptied of their sense and that is because after certain experiences of reality that have not resulted enough to reveal those worlds that, just as Pound's, could have been induced by an excessive poetic toil, but in the case of Burroughs they were just glimpsed through the lenses, maybe excessively clear, of the perceptive expansions achieved through chemistry.

Elizondo 2000, 65

His thoughts on the use of drugs also yields parallels with the quests and experiences lived and described by the Beats:

Around the individual the emptiness of loneliness looms ever closer, ultimately absorbing him into bewilderment, for the only thing that is truly his in the end is the body, his body. Within the narrow limits of sober sensations he is autonomous, but at a certain point in reality, the world is insufficient to fill, through his senses, the emptiness that surrounds him within the "human group" he belongs to. It thus becomes necessary to broaden the spectrum of the senses, sharpen them so they can transcend the dread that fills them when peering into the exuberance that is to be found beyond.

Elizondo 2004, 4

It was natural that this line of thought was not very visible within the Mexican intellectual landscape and, even though Elizondo had a respectful friendship with Paz, he remained not widely known. His work also invites comparison with Gary Snyder's interests in the East and its art and practices. Both were introduced to Chinese poetry by reading Ezra Pound. Impressed by Fenollosa's *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*, as edited by Pound, Elizondo made a translation into Spanish of the text while starting to learn Chinese. He never went as far as to travel to Asia as Snyder did, but his interest in Chinese culture and literature was unique in the Mexican cultural landscape. It anticipates the wider Mexican-Beat interest in Eastern cultural tradition.

Though likely better known for his co-editorship of *The Plumed Horn*, Sergio Mondragón (1935–) is also the poet who came under the influence of the Beats—learning from them “the sacramental vision of reality, the long breath of the verses, and the taste for jazz” (quoted in Méndez 2007, 66). Mondragón worked in the 1960s as a teacher in the United States and later as a correspondent in Japan through the recommendation of Octavio Paz. There, he lived in a Zen monastery and began to study Buddhism in depth, a yet further confirmation of Beat affinity:

Many of [the Beats] were also Buddhist aficionados. The Dharma is a set of universal laws, they are the principles that reign over the cosmos and human life. To be a Dharma bum is to affirm that the cosmos is one's house and that it is accepted and it feels good and existence itself seems good enough.

quoted in Méndez 2007, 76

Throughout his poetry Mondragón deploys Buddhist and jazz references much in the manner of Ginsberg, Kerouac, and Snyder. He also gives emphasis to everyday life, as to be found in his poem “Rupture of the discipline”:

January and February march hand in hand
March the ides of March are getting closer

meanwhile, the beer foams between my jaws
the wind of my tobacco teaches me a stocking with closed eye
I wonder what unconscious mechanisms I am putting
work
in order to see in the face of the Maestre an approbatory smile
and as a memory
while I write this poem
while I hear Monk climb the stairs
while this litany of pianos and woods
of elastic musics this litany
snaps between my fingers
like jazz
like Nina the photographer
like piece of chess moved over an immense board
with me the cosmos spins
with me all the innumerable beings
from that Buddhist pray go hand in hand:
all the passions, even though inextinguishable, I promise
to put out
meanwhile, the beer goes glu glu through the throat
while, I slip on the slide of my destiny
from my place on the wheel
from my sacred karma I don't dare to break
that I don't dare to break

Mondragón 1998, 74¹

The use of repetition at the beginning of the line has its analogue in “Howl” and many other verses by Ginsberg. Mondragón, it can be noted, was not the only Mexican poet to forge a Japanese connection. José Juan Tablada (1871–1945), diplomat and among other literary interests haiku poet, would wait until the 1950s for his reputation to be better established. Both he and Mondragón can be credited with bringing Japan, and indeed wider Asia, into Mexican awareness. The implications for a Beat Mexico are again not to be missed.

In the same vein as Gary Snyder or Michael McClure, Homero Aridjis (1940–) is a poet who has long been concerned with the politics of ecology. He founded “Grupo de los Cien” in 1985, along with other Mexican intellectuals and artists, in order to defend Latin American biodiversity. His ecopoetics can be found in books such as *Los espacios azules* (*Blue Spaces*) (1969) and *La montaña de las mariposas* (*The Mountain of the Butterflies*) (2000). Aridjis has been one of the main protectors of the monarch butterfly, and his belief is that poetry and ecology are activities that everyone should practice actively; his commitment to both is notable and in complete harmony with the ecopoetics that the Beats—especially Gary Snyder—promoted.

Perhaps the first *group* expression of Mexican Beat writing given to emulating the Beats was that known as *Literatura de la Onda* (Literature of the Wave).² Their resolve was to write in an idiom un-literary, dynamic, and drawn from real experience. They were against the government and the establishment, and they came under fire almost immediately from older writers who consider them to be pandering only to the young and not “serious” enough to be studied deeply. José Agustín (1944–), author of several novels, made his mark with *Contra la corriente* (*Against the Stream*) (1990) as an endeavor to understand and map the counterculture of the second half of the twentieth-century. Agustín focuses on his peers and their achievements as promoting a whole counterculture of behavior, fashion, musical interests, and way of thinking. Their aim was to break the ruling assumptions of the prior literary generation in a manner that faced reality head-on and in its rawness. Agustín also

reassesses the contributions of Parménides García Saldaña and Carlos Castaneda in their challenge to past literary concepts and manners.

Literatura de la Onda took as its main purpose that of trying to escape from Mexico's usual literary canon, not least with their well-known use of pop culture references. The writers of "la onda" were among the first listeners and enthusiasts of rock 'n' roll music and were not afraid to invoke relevant songs, bands, and lyrics. In this respect Parménides García Saldaña (1944–1982) is especially interesting for his allusions to rock icons and their music: The Beatles, and more importantly, The Rolling Stones. For Mexico in the 1950s and into the 1960s, listening to rock 'n' roll remained a sign of rebellion. Their very mention, as it seemed, signaled counterculture, dissidence. Saldaña's novel, *Pasto verde* (*Green Grass*, 1968) is a cornerstone of the *Literatura de la Onda*. It addresses the role of the government in the massacre of Tlatelolco, in which hundreds of students died or disappeared in 1968. It stated clearly that the system was corrupt and needed to be changed. But not only did the novel take aim at this episode, Saldaña availed himself of Beat fashioning and idiom, a style nothing if not evocative of Kerouac's "spontaneous prose":

it makes me sick not to feel free in life baby you have to be free free as the wind free as the
birds and the bees as the trees and flowers
the institutions killed Christ baby
who preached good love heaven life
and I am looking at you bankers merchants law graduates soldiers fuzz-recipients I am
looking at you crucifying Christ.
I am looking at you bastards you the dignified representatives of the institutions!
you the owners of jewels and buildings you the mister directors of the public
offices you caesars masons of the hatred owners of others' lives
the good thing is that I've never thought I'm a lapdog the good thing is that I never
followed models I've instructed myself I've read foreign books unaffiliated to your idio-
syncrasy or idiocyrazy but don't be afraid shortybourgeois I only know how to read in
English and everything I'm saying I read in the plays of Shakespeare and also in the life of
the Swindler by Quevedo more than Mexican, I must be a French charro and since then
I go on the road giving away Howl which is a poem by Allen Ginsberg!

García Saldaña 1968, 29–30³

Another writer with a Beat-like interest in Asia is poet Alberto Blanco (1951–). Though he has largely written free verse poetry he has been drawn as though in the steps of Kerouac to haiku:

The cradle	Maternity	My daughter's eyes
crescent moon	<i>One by one</i>	I lean out and see
a boat in high seas	<i>the clouds don't get tired</i>	the best of myself
and a boat in calmness	<i>of looking at the moon</i>	in your pupils
		Blanco 1993, 119 ⁴

We know for certain that Blanco learned from the Beats, because they appear in considerable number in the second volume of an anthology that he prepared called *Más de dos siglos de Poesía Norteamericana* (*More Than Two Centuries of American Poetry*). There, he writes about the Beats: "The conformism and good manners that existed in the American poetry of the 50s were behind. For the Beats, just as for the Surrealists, art and life were not separated." (Blanco 1994, 17). Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Jack Kerouac, Robert Creeley, Allen Ginsberg, Philip Lamantia, Gregory Corso, Gary Snyder, Michael McClure, Diane di Prima, and LeRoi Jones are all given space, with translations by Blanco himself. Even though Spanish translations of Burroughs and Kerouac had been available

since the 1960s, this was the first time that a wide range of Beat poets had been available to Mexican readers.

Although both Mondragón and Blanco tended towards a more formal, and even academic style of writing, they nevertheless were instrumental in promoting authors drawn to Beat as an ethos, a poetics. Both, discernibly, belong to a previous generation. Their appeal lay in spoken mores of poetry, experiments in voice, image, genre, topic, and the use of quotidian life, as against “high culture” schemes of reference. In this regard we need to return to the “Infrarrealistas,” launched in Mexico City in 1975. The Infrarrealistas, more than any group or confluence, come the closest to being a Mexican Beat generation. Younger poets such as Miguel Santiago Papasquiario, Roberto Bolaño, Carolina Estrada, and José Vicente Anaya drew together through their common opposition to the government. Their exchange of viewpoint and shared discussion of each other’s writing was integral to their politics. They also repudiated Octavio Paz, believing that as a leading presence in Mexico’s “official” culture he was out of touch with the condition and needs of the people.

Mario Santiago Papasquiario, born José Alfredo Zendejas Pineda (1953–1998), takes his place as one of the main poets of the group. With Bolaño, Papasquiario was searching for new poetic and life horizons in Europe; but when he returned to Mexico he won little success and barely found his way into publication. His poems carry a playful charge, not least in the form of deliberate typos and use of mathematical numbers and the ampersand. These, and other effects, alter and concentrate the visual presence of his poems. Jazz makes a frequent appearance. He also runs close at times to Burroughsian cut-up, discordant images aligned in a way that creates absurdist effects. These can especially be met within a poem like “Tribute to John Coltrane: Fight in Just 1 Round with Jack Johnson”:

As it happens in these blackouts & arrhythmias of life
1 learns to face up to bite acid
to turn on even with screams the oven of 1 self

even the whole ArcofNoah crashing against bad timing
nodding off because of sport delirium or turmoil
for of each hit and bump
for each tunnel scratch run over-price

1 steals also the smile
& the blood in which otter skin swims
the obsessive mischief
[...]
because you breath like *that*
as in trumpet language
[...]
& they make you cry / but of laughter
as 1 tree of charlots
that greets you raising the little leg
earthquakes–earthquakes–earthquakes
such an earthquake flower
extremely precious earthquakes

Papasquiario 2008, 13–14⁵

Just as the writers from *Literatura de la Onda* preceded the Infrarrealistas, Papasquiario belongs to a younger generation of writers who found their inspiration not only in the rock and pop music of their peers—Elvis Costello and The Rolling Stones are mentioned in his poems—but also in jazz as the music of their heroes. This, notably, was the first time jazz icons such as Miles Davis and John Coltrane appeared in Mexican poetry as dedicatees. In a period when it was not that easy to

get albums from the Anglophone world in Mexico, it is a clear sign of openness to other traditions. Some of the Infrarrealists such as Carolina Estrada (1960–), one of the few women with an active presence in this rebellious group, were in touch with punk culture. In her poem “Escenario punk” (“Punk Stage”), Estrada portrays with irony the contradictions that society could find in her: “me (God a gal) that raises the via crucis of / imagination / me an invention that makes me dream / me crazy being / me demon / me god / me punk” (quoted in Méndez Estrada: 2009)⁶ The presence of Estrada among the Infrarrealists is highly important to note, since she is practically the only Mexican Beat woman from the period, though she maintained a low profile as a poet later on.

José Vicente Anaya (1947–) is perhaps the Infrarrealist who reacted most deeply to Beat and who most assiduously gave his poetry a Beat patina:

My mother is the one who gets up to wake up the world
with her noises of dishes she plays the drums for Charlie Parker
The wings in my back disappear
the ones that made me fly over junkyards
where I play during the day
And I just look at the sad face of my father

Anaya 2014, 54–55⁷

Anaya would also be responsible for the Beat anthology *Los poetas que cayeron del cielo: La generación beat comentada y en su propia voz* (*The Poets that Fell from Heaven: The Beat Generation Spoken and in Their Own Voice*) (1998) and translations of poetry by Ginsberg and Corso.

These several authors set the standard for a Mexican Beat tradition. They were early to recognize their own affinities with the Beats or won affinities in matters of outlook and style. Theirs was not only a challenge to official canons of literary culture but to the politics that lay behind it. Time has validated their effort—recent government responses have given notice of a change towards the relative acceptability of Beat and similar countercultural modes of expression.

In this respect few writers have carried the new generational torch further than José Eugenio Sánchez (1965–). Transgressive, full of humor, pitched to escape solemnity, Sánchez’s poetry makes frequent use of American pop culture icons and songs in his poetry. His poem “helpless (and in my mind I still need a place to go)” offers a typical instance with its references to the lyrics of Neil Young’s 1970 song “Helpless”:

in the authentic bed where the first elephant gave birth
in captivity
where charly parker played the saxophone for the last time and
a woman at the same time
and – years before – jesus meditated his sermon on the mount
of olives
is where I understand that each bed is a country that doesn’t
exist if not with your presence

Sánchez 2009, 14⁸

Sánchez draws from a close American background (he currently lives near the border with the USA) and this is reflected in his poetry, especially in matters concerning the Beats. “I reread a lot,” he writes, “Whitman, Dickinson, Sexton, Ginsberg, Kerouac, Corso, Creeley, Shepard, Strand, Simic. The ones from Black Mountain College and the New York School, indigenous poets like Jerome Rothenberg.” (Frías 2016). He has long lamented the solemnizing of poetry, and in this again takes his cue from the Beats, their playfields and riffs: “Beat poetry allows poetry to be also a show, it opens the possibility that stand-up comedy, monologues, and spoken word are part of it.” (Frías 2016). In his most recent book *Jack Bonner and the Rebellion* (2014) Sánchez creates a fictional story where Kerouac writes a

book of haikus never published but which in fact is the book we are reading interspersed with poems about other members of the Beat generation:

useless notebook come up from pocket notes
dated on the first days of November
jack supposed an idea from the ingredients
but expected that a surprise happened
it's told that he said:
silence is a buffalo herd dying
outdoors

Sánchez 2014, 33⁹

The text can be considered homage without becoming biography. The Beats serve as prompts to new and not a little comic-irreverent estimates of Kerouac, Cassady, and others. His poem "*la verga de neal siempre había puesto de buenas a carolyn hasta que la vio en la boca de allen*" (*neal's cock had always put carolyn in a good mood until she saw it in allen's mouth*) gathers about it the willingness to be bold, un-deferential, teasing:

technically carolyn tasted allen's cock when she kissed
neal
(some substance must be transmitted)
technically jack also did it when he kissed carolyn
and technically allen sucked himself when he kissed
jack¹⁰

Conclusion

For all the proximity of Mexico and the US, it remains a fact that Mexican authors were initially hesitant to read, let alone emulate, Beat poets. Things have changed but only in relative degree. A Beat mentality, the subversive view of culture, is not one much to appeal to the average Mexican reader—and assuredly was not to do so in the 1960s. Yet little by little, the Beats have been integrated and assimilated by a limited number of writers, albeit much adapted to a Mexican frame of reference that embraces both poetics and philosophy. These "Beat" Mexican writers were, and remain, a minority cultural stream, yet the dynamic continues. It will be interesting to follow the development of a new tier of poets like Julián Herbert (1971–), Sergio Ernesto Ríos (1981–), Zazil Collins (1984–), and Yaxkin Melchy (1985–). Likewise, a Beat focus is to be met with in the magazine *Generación*, whose editor Carlos Martínez Rentería (1962–) espouses "gonzo" journalism with an emphasis on life lived among addicts, drunks, nomads, and Beat-like poets. His writing is but one of several countercultural vehicles. The novels of Guillermo Fadanelli (1963–) also invite attention, notably *La otra cara de Rock Hudson* (*The Other Face of Rock Hudson*) (1997), which portrays the life of a young Mexican city boy drawn into a life of delinquency. This outsider vision readily calls up Kerouac or even Burroughs.

One continuing issue is the paucity of available Spanish translations of the original Beats. Except from Mangos de Hacha, a small and independent publishing house that has translated, among others, the Robert Creeley and Charles Olson correspondence, publishing houses in the country have been reluctant to make the Beats available in part because of historic antipathy towards the USA (to include its language) and in part because they so expressly flaunt Mexican conventions of conservative cultural manners and behavior. Even so, as this essay confirms, there has indeed been a Beat literary tradition in Mexico, a lineage however much produced by a literary minority and fashioned in its own way. That invites both attention and ongoing investigation.

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Notes

1 “Ruptura de la disciplina”

Enero y febrero marchan de la mano
marzo los idus de marzo ya se acercan
mientras, la cerveza espumea entre mis fauces
el viento de mi tabaco me enseña una media con el ojo
cerrado
me pregunto qué mecanismos inconscientes estoy haciendo
trabajar
para ver en el rostro del Maestro una sonrisa aprobatoria
y como de recuerdo
mientras escribo este poema
mientras oigo a Monk subir los escalones
mientras esta letanía de pianos y maderas
de músicas elásticas esta letanía
chasquea entre mis dedos
como jazz
como Nina la fotógrafa
como pieza de ajedrez movida sobre un tablero inmenso
conmigo gira el cosmos
conmigo van de la mano todos los seres innumerables
de aquella oración budista:
a todas las pasiones, aunque inextinguibles, prometo
apagar
mientras, la cerveza se va glú glú por la garganta
mientras, yo me deslizo por la resbaladilla de mi destino
de mi sitio en la rueda
de mi karma sagrado que no me atrevo a romper
que no me atrevo a romper

2 “Wave” is an inadequate translation of “onda.” Back in the day, young people coined the word to use in several situations, for example, the expression “¿Qué onda?” as slang for “What’s up?”; “agarra la onda” for “understand,” etc. It is still in use nowadays.

3 In the original:

me enferma no sentirme libre y en la vida nena hay que ser libres libres como el viento libres
como los pájaros y las abejas como los árboles y las flores
las instituciones asesinaron a Cristo nena
que predicaba el bien el amor el cielo y la vida
y los estoy viendo a ustedes banqueros comerciantes licenciados en derecho militares pelusarios
los estoy viendo crucificando a Cristo
¡Los estoy viendo a ustedes bastardos ustedes los dignos representantes de las instituciones!
ustedes los dueños de las joyas y los edificios ustedes los señores directores de las oficinas públicas
ustedes césares albañiles del odio dueños de las vidas ajenas
lo bueno es que yo nunca me he creído un perro faldero lo bueno es que yo nunca he seguido
modelos yo me he instruido he leído libros extranjeros ajenos a su idiosincrasia o idiotagracia
pero no se espanten chaparrobargueses yo sólo sé leer en inglés y todo lo que estoy diciendo
lo léi en las obras de Shakespeare y también en la vida del Buscón de Quevedo yo más que
mexicano debo ser un charro francés y desde entonces ando en el camino regalando Howl que
es un poema de Allen Ginsberg!

4 In the original:

La cuna	Maternidad	Los ojos de mi hija
Cuarto creciente	Una por una	Me asumo y veo
un bote en altamar	las nubes no se cansan	lo mejor de mí mismo
y un bote en calma	de ver la luna	en tus pupilas

5 “Tributo a John Coltrane: Pelea a 1 solo round con Jack Johnson”

Como sucede en estos apagones & arritmias de la vida
1 aprende a apechugar a morder ácido
a prender así sea a gritos el horno de 1 mismo
así sea partiéndose toda el ArcadeNoé contra el destiempo
cabeceando por deporte delirio o descontrol
por cada golpe e hinchazón
por cada túnel raspadura atropellante precio
La sonrisa también la roba 1
& la sangre en la que nada piel de nutria
la obsesiva travesura
[...]
porque respiras ya *así*
como en lenguaje de trompeta
[...]
& te hacen llorar/ pero de risa
como 1 árbol de charlots
que te saluda levantando la patita
terremotos-terremotos-terremotos
qué flor de terremotos
terremotos preciosísimos

6 “Escenario punk”

yo (Dios una morra) que levanta el vía crucis de la
Imaginación
yo un invento que me haga ensoñar
yo ser loco
yo demonio
yo dios
yo punk

7 In the original:

Mi madre es quien se levanta a despertar al mundo
con sus ruidos de trastos toca la batería de Charlie Parker
Desaparecen las alas de mi espalda que
me hacían volar sobre los basureros
donde juego de día
Y sólo miro la cara triste
de mi padre, queriendo recordarse

8 “helpless (and in my mind I still need a place to go)”

en la auténtica cama donde parió la primera elefanta
en cautiverio
donde charly parker tocó por última vez el saxofón y
a una mujer al mismo tiempo
y —años antes— jesús meditó su discurso del monte
de los olivos
es donde entiendo que cada cama es un país que no
existe si no es con tu presencia

9 In the original:

cuaderno inservible surgió de unas notas de bolsillo

fechadas en los primeros días de noviembre
jack suponía una idea de los ingredientes
pero esperaba que resultara una sorpresa
se dice que dijo:
el silencio es una manada de búfalos muriendo a la
intemperie

10 In the original:

técnicamente carolyn probó la verga de allen al besar
a neal
(alguna sustancia se debe transmitir)
técnicamente jack también lo hizo al besar a carolyn
y técnicamente allen se la mamó a sí mismo al besar
a jack

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