

The Valley

Estampas del Valle



Rolando Hinojosa

*Recipient of the National Book Critics Circle
Lifetime Achievement Award*

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Rolando Hinojosa



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"The Border Door": site specific performance/installation/intervention. Media: gold painted wooden door, hung and framed, keys. Chicano artist Richard A. Lou placed a workable freestanding gold painted door with 134 detachable keys on May 28, 1988 on the Mexico/U.S.A. border, 1/4 mile east of the Tijuana International Airport. After installation of The Border Door, Lou returned to the house of his youth in la Colonia Roma and distributed over 250 keys, inviting people he encountered to use The Border Door, as he walked to La Casa de Los Pobres in la Colonia Altamira. Both neighborhoods are in Tijuana, BCN. "The Border Door" photo credit: James Elliott.

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To Patti, Clarissa and Karen Louise, again

PREFACE

Some forty years ago as a young graduate student, I marveled at the literary world represented in Rolando Hinojosa's *Estampas del Valle* that seemed to have sprung from nowhere. Here were characters, a language and a setting that had never before been the material of literary arts. Never in my wildest dreams did I think that one day I would become the publisher of *Estampas* and of all the subsequent works written by Rolando Hinojosa. I fondly remember that at a 1973 conference on Tomás Rivera and Chicano literature, Hinojosa said that he would be delighted if someday I would write about his works. Many years passed before I could take him up on that invitation. But more importantly, since the early 1980s, Arte Público Press had inherited the mantle of Quinto Sol and published the works of Rolando Hinojosa. Now it is my pleasure to add a few lines to the volumes that have been written in many languages about Rolando Hinojosa's creative world.

What you hold in your hands, dear reader, is one of three foundational works of Chicano fiction, having won the Quinto Sol Award that forever designated Rolando Hinojosa's *Estampas del Valle* (1973), along with Tomás Rivera's . . . *y no se lo tragó la tierra* (1971) and Rudolfo Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima* (1972), as the models for the nascent literary movement that would inspire and guide hundreds of Mexican-American and other Latino narrators for at least the next forty years.

Estampas del Valle and *The Valley*, Hinojosa's re-creation in English of this novel, present a mosaic of the picturesque character types, folk customs and speech of the bilingual community in the small towns in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas. While his sketches and insights are at times reminiscent of the local color *crónicas* published in 1920s Spanish-language newspapers, his experimentation with numerous narrative forms in his various novels that follow *Estampas*, ranging from reporting to epistolary to

detective fiction, make Hinojosa's art one of the most sophisticated contributions to Latino literature. *The Valley / Estampas del Valle*, along with the first novels by Tomás Rivera and Rodolfo Anaya, constitute what the Quinto Sol editors hoped would be the basis for a Chicano literary canon, a bulwark for the creation of a Chicano cultural nationalism.

Regardless of the canonicity or not of what were back then marginal, minority group texts at Quinto Sol, they opened creative pathways and were emulated by literally thousands of writers in an effort to provide a language and literary corpus for what had been cast as the "sleeping giant" of Mexican-American and Latino people in the United States. Thus for more than forty years, Hinojosa's writing has served as a model and inspiration for Latino writers of diverse backgrounds. At first, what was noteworthy to scholars was Hinojosa's characters who, despite or because of their apparent isolation from a larger world, were stubborn and unashamed in their affirmation of place, tradition, dialect and worldview. Hinojosa's work even pointed to an apparent Golden Age, a time of cultural origins prior to the coming of the Anglo, when language was pure, traditions were established and a sense of identity and place were well formed. But *The Valley / Estampas* was just the beginning phase of a continuing novel, the Klail City Death Trip (KCDT), articulated through a series of books with different titles and structured in diverse genres that have become a broad epic of the history and cultural evolution of the Mexican Americans and Anglo Americans on Texas' border with Mexico. All of the books in the continuing and ongoing series, with some twenty installations at times published in separate Spanish and English editions (not translations), are centered in the fictitious Belken County and focus on the lives of two characters and a narrator—Rafe Buenrostro, Jehú Malacara and P. Galindo—all of whom may be partial alter egos of Hinojosa himself. What is especially intriguing about Hinojosa's Klail City Death Trip Series is his experimentation not only with various forms of narration—

derived from Spanish, Mexican, English and American literary histories—but also with English-Spanish bilingualism.

While there are many Latino writers of historical or generational fiction, Hinojosa is unique not only in developing a multi-book and multi-genre trajectory but in articulating his fiction in separate re-writings in English and Spanish of the original texts. Hinojosa's series is not a historical novel in the common understanding of such, in which a narrative is constructed in a remote time period; KCDT evokes and recalls the foundational period of Valley culture and updates it in an irrevocable path toward extinction of the original cultural base, at least extinction of the "old ways" on a path toward a new, hybrid culture in this chronicling of Mexican and Anglo-American culture clash and then blending across the generations. It is the linguistic and ethno-cultural diversity represented in Hinojosa's texts that can only be understood, on the one hand as a synthesis and on the other as a breach between Anglo and Mexican pretensions of nationhood, an interstitial area that speaks and acts for itself and is a cradle of creativity and affirmation beyond national assignations.

The Valley / Estampas del Valle is nothing more than the first chapter of what Hinojosa's narrators would call *El cronicón de Belken* or *El cronicón del Valle*, that is, an ongoing, open-ended epic. Hinojosa's art is not just a simple chronicling of the ebb and flow of two cultures in contact, of farm and ranch and town real estate, financial and legal interests, of families and personalities, their conflicts, marriage lines and separations. Hinojosa's has been a highly literary experiment in which he not only gives artistic form to a life heretofore never represented adequately in literature and art, but his experiment also has involved, nay demanded, seeing how far he can adapt and mold the literary tools he inherited to capture that life at the crossroads of two cultures and two nations. His experimentation has led him to explore and recapitulate the complete history of literary genres, from oral lore and epic to *nueva narrativa lationamericana*, from both the Spanish-language

and English-language traditions, from his tipping his hat to *El Cid* and the *Quijote* to Ambrose Bierce, Faulkner and other American writers.

The Valley / Estampas in its apparently simple depiction of endearing characters, regional dialect, subtle humor and irony, has many deeper layers for the reader to explore: anti-clericalism, cultural integrity and sense of place, multiple and fragmented perspectives on what is socially constructed as truth. . . . But most of all, *The Valley / Estampas* is an entertaining and intriguing read that needs no philosophical or literary analysis to be enjoyed.

Nicolás Kanellos, Ph.D.
Publisher

Born between two worlds, one dead and one as yet unborn.

—Matthew Arnold

ON THE STARTING BLOCKS

The etchings, sketches, engravings, et al that follow resemble Mencho Saldaña's hair: the damn thing's disheveled oily, and, as one would expect, matted beyond redemption and relief.

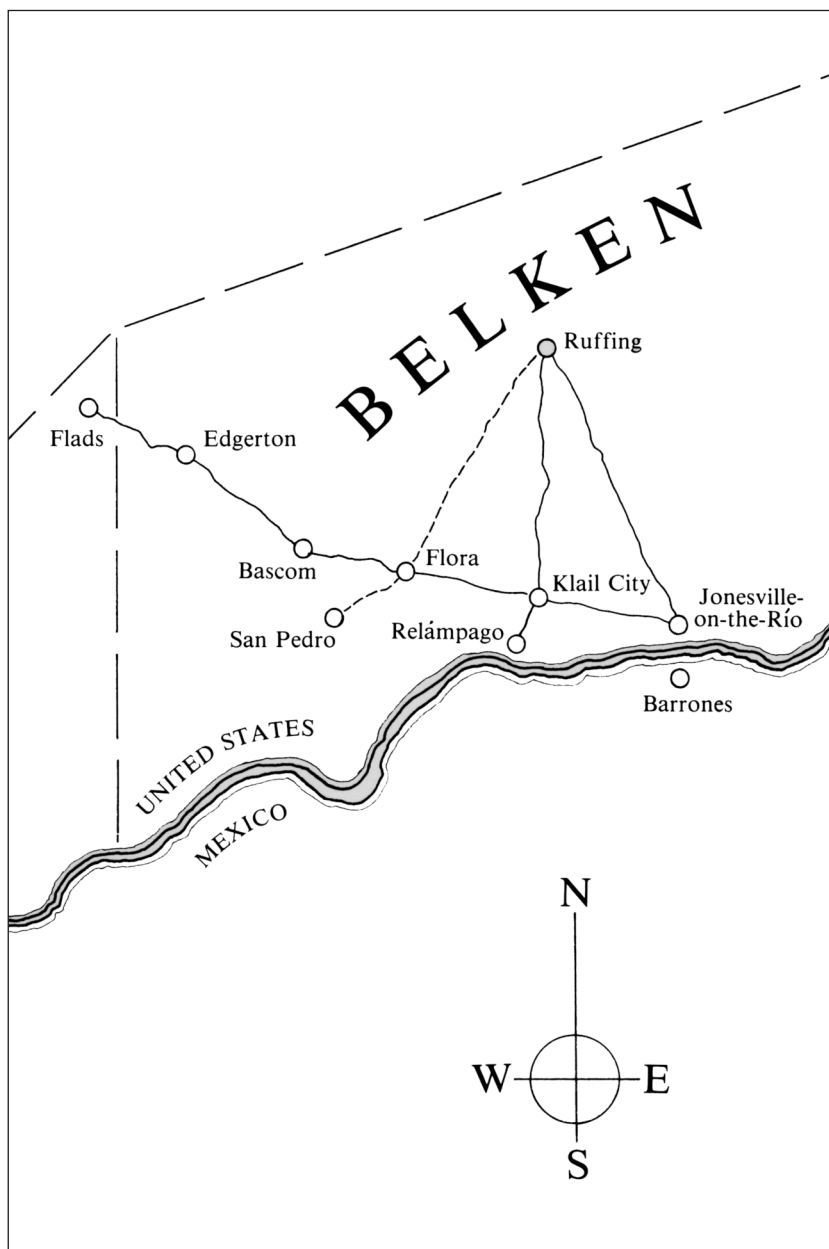
A WORD TO THE WISE (GUY)

What follows, more likely as not, is a figment of someone's imagination; the reader is asked to keep this disclaimer in mind.

For his part, the compiler stakes no claim of responsibility; he owns and holds the copyright but little else.

An Olio

One daguerreotype plus photographs



BRAULIO TAPIA

Squat, what the Germans call *diecke* and thus heavy of chest and shoulders, Roque Malacara carries his hat in his hand; this last shouldn't fool the reader, however, since R.M.'s step is firm and resolute.

I'm standing on the doorway on the east porch of a hot Thursday afternoon, and he says: My coming here alone isn't a matter of disrespect, sir, it's just that I've no money for sponsors.

He then asks me for my daughter Tere's hand; I nod and point to the living room. Hat held in a firm hand, he follows with the same and sure unwavering step.

He then reminds me that I gave him permission to call on Tere: it's been over a year and a half, sir. Again I nod and this time we shake hands.

Turning my head slightly to the right, I catch a glimpse, or think I do, of my late father-in-law, Don Braulio Tapia: long sideburns and matching black mustache á la Kaiser; Don Braulio raises his hand to shake mine as he did years ago when I first came here to this house to ask for Matilde's hand.

By that time, with Doña Sóstenes' death, he'd been a widower as I now am and have been since Matti's death years ago. Don Braulio nods, takes my hand and bids me enter.

Who did Don Braulio see when he walked up these steps to ask for his wife's hand?

TERE MALACARA NÉE VILCHES NORIEGA

I'm bushed, beat and dead to the world; know what I mean? I'm a dollar short and three days behind, and I can't even blame it on staying up, which I don't, anyway. It's this life, that's all. It's hard.

I know there are other women worse off . . . still . . . well, take the barmaids, now. Why, they're pawed at by anyone with the price of a glass of beer. Or, and maybe worse, the housemaids. It's known that neither danger nor the devil blink an eye, and the housemaids had better not, either: I mean, there's the Mister and the Mister's son, and (I know what I'm talking about) it's best to keep an eye on the Mrs. herself, you bet.

Yeah, I know that the servant girls and the barmaids are worse off, but what's that to me? I'm both dog and bone tired, and that's a mortal fact.

Now, if I were educated I'd be able to say this much better, wouldn't I? Finer, maybe, but the trouble is, I'm just plain tired.