

Abstract

The Cave of Naltzátlan

A YOUNG MAN'S JOURNEY INTO HIS MAGICAL PAST

NEW ENGLISH TRANSLATION

BY

Arnoldo Carlos Vento

La Cueva de Naltzatlan, México D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1987.103 pp.

La Cueva de Naltzatlan represents the first major novelistic publication of Arnoldo Carlos Vento. Published in 1986, it marks the first time a Mexican-American or U.S. writer publishes a literary novel with the prestigious government funded literary publishing house, *Fondo de Cultura Económica* from Mexico City. Written in the summers of 1980-81, it is the first of a trilogy of works, which have as its purpose, the presentation of a major historical moment of western man in the last 2000 years. The style of these works is modeled after Magical Realism prevalent in the 20th century Spanish-American novel. This style, while present as a post-expressionistic art form in the twenties, was actually present as a literary form in Mexico much earlier. Its realism is one that encompasses a multi-dimensional reality, a space-time reality inherited from pre-Columbian times. *La Cueva de Naltzatlan*, written originally in Spanish, employs, moreover, a sprinkling of Latin, English and Aztec Nahuatl in addition to various dialects

in Spanish. Most important, it focuses on the sensitive question of the philosophical and cultural clash between the Hispanic Europeans and Native-Americans. One main objective was to present the “other side of the coin” with regard to the Conquest/ Invasion of the Spanish via existing historical documents as well as the oral histories which have been passed on to particular native families and *Maestros* in Mexico since 1521. This was a time when *Anauakan* nations experienced the first broken treaty of the Americas by the Spanish/Europeans. In this Novel, two major narrators, the Ancient Sage and the *Conchero Maestro*, both purveyors of the Ancient/Oral Tradition present a pre-Columbian worldview. This native worldview is radically distinct from the Western/ European, Greco-Roman perspective of reality which was used to interpret Post-Conquest codices during Colonial times and much to the chagrin of the natives, in present day Mexico and U.S.

La Cueva de Naltzatlan is also a novel of roots for “*la Raza*”, projecting three realities in three distinct time/ space planes by three different but similar triplicate characters representing Pre-Columbian Mexico, Colonial/ Modern Mexico, and South Texas Chicano reality. It is a novel that shows different philosophies of two distinct cultures, their approach to life, the environment and behavior to his/her fellow man/woman. While this work is out of print within two years, it remains a critically sensitive work to the middle class Mexican who has, unfortunately, inherited through the institutions in Spanish-America, a neo colonial attitude and philosophy, a problem discussed in great length by Nobel Laureate Octavio Paz among many other Mexican intellectuals of the 20th century. The second novel of the trilogy (*En el nombre del Padre y del Hijo..*), continues the model established in *La Cueva de Naltzatlan*, that of a quest by a young protagonist, this time within another important historical moment of Western man i.e. the Christian Crusades and the involvement of the Church and religion in the secular affairs of the State, the re-definition of the Christian Church and the militaristic/ hegemonic model inherited by Western nations.

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