

Oswaldo Navarro: a Crucial Individual

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Even if he is just another person, Oswaldo Navarro is one of those crucial individuals who should be defined on his own terms, because generalizations cannot be used to describe him. A modern philosopher might say: “he is different unto himself.” His literary work, which is one with his life, stems from his imagination, sensitivity (to an almost excessive degree), and a logical way of thinking that is somewhat strange for someone of his generation.

He always did what he had to do, no matter when in his life. As a geometrist, he was precise and put himself entirely into what he did without compromise. This is what we call living life to its “fullest.” Even when he made mistakes, he believed in what he was doing. Yet, to be honest, I cannot say what it was that Oswaldo Navarro ever did wrong. Probably nothing, even if that seems impossible.

He came of age at a time when he could believe in the Revolution’s craziness. But he was of age when he criticized it, too. He also found the time and clarity of mind to leave us a novel that personally documents the end of an age of enthusiasm and the true beginning of an era of self-consuming politics on the olive drab island. I am refer-

ring to *Hijos de Saturno* [Saturn’s Sons] (2002), an intense, self-critical, profoundly ethical work. It garnered him many literary prizes, among them the coveted *David* for poetry (1973), which is one of the few believable prizes given in Cuba, which poets such as Alberto Rodríguez Tosca and Oswaldo Sánchez, both of whom he admired greatly, also won.

He related intensely to books, people, songs and cities. His favorite city is a toss up between Havana, Moscow and Mexico; but he had a lover who drove him to desperation, and he kept it as though it were a forbidden love: I am referring to Miami. Oswaldo and Miami are one of those couples with which friends decide not to interfere. It’s not that he greatly admired this town; but he did always save a special wink for it. After all, as he, himself said: “it is the city of my friends and family.”

A few years ago I wrote a review of his novel *El caballo mayaguara* [The Mayaguara Horse] (1984). It was a very complimentary review, almost an excuse to reveal my admiration for the work and ethical nature of its author. Months later, I had to write another review of his new novel, *Hijos de Saturno*. Since I had been so generous with the first one, I decided to be

a bit more critical with the second, which he very much appreciated.

“I’m going to shake him up a bit and see what he says,” I told myself. What ensued could best be described by employing a car metaphor. I attacked him with a tiny Mazda and he slammed me back with a tank. Osvaldo’s response to that brief review of *Hijos de Saturno* is an epistolary gem of literary criticism. It was the product of ethical intellectualism, and clear and coherent thought. Something else I have to say about Osvaldo is that he was agile, knew how to argue, manipulate, parry, block and, finally, win in an intellectual discussion. He was great in the aforementioned debate. After citing a list of philosophers and theoreticians I should read, he finally told me that if had no time to do so I should forget all that and read an essential text.

Naturally, he recommended I read the essay “Acerca del reflejo de la realidad en la poesía cubana actual” [On a Reflection of the Reality of Contemporary Cuban Poetry,” of which he is the author. He had read it at the Alejo Carpentier Center back in March of 1984. It was, in effect, a masterpiece.

Osvaldo was full of love and generosity, but also knew how to fight, and how to employ a *devastating* sense of humor and irony. He had a tragic vein but found a way to create happy endings.

Today we are releasing his latest poetry collection, *Horror al vacío* [Fear of Emptiness] 2008]. Let us say it is full of omens and is very Cuban, using an idea Father de las Casas expressed about the people he encountered on the island long ago: “They suffer from a malaise that causes them to make things that are going to happen come about sooner.”

Horror al vacío is a well-thought out and heartfelt work. It is serious and sometimes hard. As is almost always the case, I like his rhyme better than his free verse. He cannot escape his own nature: Osvaldo is a classical romantic who creates insurgency. He does not write about restoration or a monarchy. He is not an avant-garde writer, at least not in his poetry. Much of his work is unpublished, one of the pieces being a book titled *Saldo de cuentas con Mari* [Settling Accounts with Mari] that gets ahead of us all. As his wife Professor Elena Tamargo put it, Osvaldo has left us a great deal of work.

Note:

The above written was read at the headquarters of the Editorial Iduna publishing house on February 29, 2008. My intention is that this be a posthumous homage to Osvaldo Navarro, who was working as the Spanish editor for *ISLAS* at the moment of his untimely passing.