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### ***Mexico Madness: Manifesto for a Disenchanted Generation.***

Eduardo García Aguilar. Trans. Jay Miskowiec. Aliform Publishing, Minneapolis (2001)  
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*Mexico Madness: Manifesto for a Disenchanted Generation* by Colombian journalist/novelist/ poet Eduardo García Aguilar is an often insightful and moving, sometimes self-indulgent essay inspired by García's journey to Chiapas in December of 1995, one year after the Zapatista uprising. The author has lived in the United States and Mexico and currently resides in Paris. He was in Chiapas to cover the first year anniversary events for Agence France-Presse, but he warns in his preface, "In no way is this book about Mexico, much less about Chiapas and the Zapatistas." This is true. While the book is written in the form of a diary covering the sixteen days of his sojourn and each entry begins with observations of the events in Chiapas, García Aguilar uses this format to write about a much larger historical and cultural context. His often poetic ruminations are a manifesto against the abuses of global capitalism inspired by the very hopeful Zapatista uprising. And while his criticism of the social, economic and cultural destruction caused by global capitalism is biting harsh, the small struggles against globalization, such as the one in Chiapas, make him optimistic about the future.

This diary covers a broad range of topics in Latin American history and literature that serve as background for García's autobiographical musings. He writes of his literary and historical heroes - Neruda, Paz, Gallegos, Bolívar, Juárez, Che, and Fidel - and he sees Marcos as their heir: "He is young, genteel, the mask increasing his mystery; he is eloquent and witty, his impeccable voice even more impressive over the loudspeakers of his realm." García sees Latin America's hopeful future in the rejection of first world notions of progress and neoliberal economic policies that pervert the possibility of a more native development. He believes that Mexico is as enslaved today as it was during the Porfiriato, that Mexico continues to live with the burden of foreign debt, loss of sovereignty, and poverty. Emiliano Zapata and his troops resisted the científicos' definition of progress in the early 20th Century, preferring to preserve their old customs. Marcos and his late 20th Century followers also want to be left to their old ways. García wonders when these 20th century heirs of the científicos, the free marketers, will understand that Indians are not wrong because they don't want to eat McDonald's hamburgers.

García writes most poetically about Latin America's history of resistance and its circular nature as he compares the original Zapatista movement to the events he is in Chiapas to cover:

"This is the spinning wheel of history, a circular repetition that demonstrates in its capriciousness the vanity of linear progress. That past episode occurred in the state of Morelos, one of the first lands conquered by Cortés and the other conquistadors and Maximiliano's viceregal seat; at this moment history repeats itself in distant Chiapas near old convents and churches."

His lovely descriptions of the people he sees in Chiapas capture this same circularity. "I make out the eyes of old Indians on this starry night, eyes of silence, eyes of light, eyes a thousand years old, eyes joined to the earth." and "An Indian girl named María smiles at us, too beautiful to be devoured by the period of her history here and turned into that skinny grim-faced old woman with gray braids and dirty hair."

García is at his best when writing how the circle of Latin America history wound up in Chiapas in 1994. But, as he says in his introduction, this is not a book about Chiapas. His diary is trying to "allow ideas and colors, memories and landscapes to germinate and bud, call forth ghosts, capture passers-by, not let escape a sole aroma I smell, a sole woman I see, a sole church bell I hear." It is this self-indulgence that, in my opinion, distracts from an otherwise nicely written collection of essays. In García's mind, he is different from his fellow journalists in Chiapas because he is "first of all poet, a writer, a novelist" who looks beyond the "sad, petty task" of phoning in their stories to their station chiefs. García sets himself apart from other journalists because of his "literary need to flee from the wires and the press and

invoke something else." According to him, there are very few writers in Latin America because it is so difficult to maintain an ardent sensibility. In fact, he says that writers have to be heroic. Many aspiring writers of his generation, he claims, didn't have sufficient valor to go on and sold out to become lawyers, doctors, politicians, and businessmen.

Jay Miskowiec, García's translator, writes in his note at the beginning of *Mexico Madness* that this book proposes the most idealistic of agendas: "that we esteem poetry and myth as much as political discourse and public relations." In that respect, Eduardo García Aguilar's poetic chronicle of Latin American history and politics successfully fulfills that agenda.

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