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Author

Gonzalez, Omar

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Rechy, John.
After the Blue Hour. Grover, 2018.

OMAR GONZÁLEZ
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES

John Rechy, author of the groundbreaking text, *City of Night* (1963), and other genre-expanding works, such as *The Sexual Outlaw* (1977) (a “mixed-media” text challenging institutional and cultural homophobia of law enforcement, the legal system, and heterosexual society at-large), *Rushes* (1979) (set in a 70s leather gay bar and structured as a Catholic Mass with each chapter beginning with one of the Stations of the Cross), *The Miraculous Day of Amália Gomez* (1991) (a novel documenting the life of a Chicana single mother who suffers as Christ and inflicts pain like Pontius Pilate), numerous essays (collected together in the anthology, *Beneath the Skin: The Collected Essays* (2004), three plays, and a memoir, *About My Life and A Kept Woman* (2008), exists in the twilight of Xicanx literary recognition. Recipient of the initial Pen-West USA literary award 1997, Rechy’s work exists in the margins, as he himself proclaimed in an interview that he is often excluded from lists of gay writers, L.A. writers, Texas writers, and Xicanx writers. With his latest novel, *After the Blue Hour* (2017), a self-proclaimed “true fiction,” Rechy continues to straddle the borders of truth, fiction, and memory, ultimately blurring them into beautifully tragic prose. As Gloria Anzaldúa writes of her “thin edge of barbwire” (3) in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), Rechy’s “blue hour” represents a liminal space between dusk and night when everything reveals itself as it is. The “blue hour” is akin to the ancient Mesoamerican concept of “nepantla,” a disconcerting middle-space of psychic upheaval and continual transformation.

Rechy's oeuvre precedes Xicanx literature and transcends the genre, yet his corpus demands to be contextualized within it, as he is the son of Mexican immigrants who escaped to the border city of El Paso to flee the turmoil of the Mexican Revolution and grew up in the historically significant neighborhood of El Segundo Barrio of south El Paso. After graduating from Texas Western College (now the University of Texas at El Paso) and serving in the armed forces during the Korean War, Rechy wrote articles describing the racial discrimination against Chicanas/os in Texas when he wrote for the progressive beacon, *The Nation*, thus establishing his Xicanx bona fides. *After the Blue Hour* represents a culmination of a writing career spanning seven decades and a developing genre in which Rechy blurs the lines between fiction and reality.

The plot of *After the Blue Hour* begins in mystery and in true Rechy fashion from a nepantla chapter of his life—post-Army, pre-*City of Night*—when two leading literary journals publish two short stories of his, both subsequent chapters in *City*, and which arouse a peculiar correspondence. An admirer of his stories, the author of the letter extends an invitation to Rechy to spend time on his private island during the summer of 1960. The stranger, Paul, arrives alone to retrieve Rechy and informs him of the residents—his son Constantine (Stanty) and his “intimate friend” Sonya. Paul reveals his admiration for Rechy's craft yet remains elusive as to the motive behind the invitation. Instantly, Rechy establishes the mood by subtle observations about his host—refined clothes and aging well yet attempting to bond with the youthful Rechy with his use of the vernacular, “man.” Paul escorts Rechy to the island while referencing a neighboring island that befell a tragedy which he chooses not to explain.

The metaphor of the island recalls one of Rechy's earliest works, *The Fourth Angel* (1972), a novel of cruel games amongst four teen-agers, a sort of mixed-gender, proto-*Heathers* (1989), and symbolizes the social isolation of each member of the quartet. The ringleader, Shel, masks her own trauma by manipulating the three boys into sexual barbarisms. Paul, Rechy senses, harbors guarded motives yet remains aloof and prepares to enjoy the grandeur of the estate and the secluded environment. Rechy makes an allegiance with the beautiful Sonya and begins a mentor-like bond with fourteen-year-old Stanty. After dinner on the home's deck at sunset, Rechy explains to Sonya:

“It’s the blue hour,” I told her.

“How beautiful. The blue hour. What is that, John?” she asked.

“It’s not an hour at all, just a few seconds of blue light between dusk and night,” I said. It was a light I cherished . . . “Some people claim that’s when everything reveals itself as it is, Sonya . . . They say everything is both clearest and most obscure—a light that challenges perception, revealing and hiding.” (24–25)

It is within this lens of the blue light that Rechy draws the reader into his twilight world of hidden desires and twisted machinations.

As in *City of Night*, Rechy reflects on the dichotomy of his parents—the violent rage of his father juxtaposed against the “gentle love” of his mother. A similar dynamic develops in the house as Rechy continues to develop a mental and emotional alliance with Sonya but remains wary of the motives of Paul, and even of the young boy, Stanty, whom Rechy had to correct when he attempted to utter the homophobic slur, “queer,” when alluding to two schoolmates. Moreover, Rechy recognizes a domineering quality in Paul, with whom he develops an odd rivalry. The novel unfolds into a psychological game of erotic desire between the three adults, the cruel immaturity of the adolescent Stanty, who at one juncture threatens Rechy with drowning, near the mysterious, allegedly uninhabited island, and the origin of the “gray couple,” the mansion’s servants. Ultimately, Rechy’s *Blue Hour* is emblematic of his oeuvre—he exposes the dark underbelly of erotic desire, power, and submission—and critiques the cruelty of such provocation yet admits to its seduction. In true Rechy fashion, *After the Blue Hour* reveals and problematizes the liminality between erotic desire/pleasure and cruelty/domination, as his corpus continues to expand the Xicanx literary canon.

