

Yuri Herrera

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About this Person

Born: 1970 in Actopan, Mexico

Nationality: Mexican

Occupation: Novelist

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PERSONAL INFORMATION

Born 1970, in Actopan, Hidalgo, Mexico. **Education:** Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico, B.A., 1997; University of Texas, El Paso, M.F.A., 2003; University of California, Berkeley, Ph.D., 2009. **Addresses:** Office: Tulane University, 100 Jones Hall, New Orleans, LA 70118. **E-mail:** yherrera@tulane.edu.

CAREER

Writer and educator. Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico, teaching assistant, 1993-94; Universidad Iberoamericana, lecturer, 1995, 2009-10; Lycee Charles Peguy of Orleans, Spanish instructor, 1999-2000; University of Texas at El Paso, teaching assistant, 2001-03; University of California, Berkeley, graduate student instructor, 2003-08; Tulane University, Mellon Fellow, 2011-. Visiting assistant professor, University of North Carolina, Charlotte, 2010-11.

AWARDS

Programa de Apoyo para Estudios en el Extranjero Fellowship, Mexican Fondo Nacional Para la Cultura y las Artes, 2001; Premio Binacional de Novela Joven, 2003, and Otras Voces, Otros Ambitos Prize, 2008, both for *Trabajos del Reino*; Best Translated Book Award for Fiction, *Three Percent*, 2016, for *Signs Preceding the End of the World*; PEN Translates Award, 2019, for Lisa Dillman's translation of *The Fire in El Bordo Mine*.

WORKS

WRITINGS:

NOVELS; EXCEPT WHERE NOTED

- *Trabajos del Reino*, Fondo Editorial Tierra Adentro, 2004.
- *Este es Mi Nahuatl!* (children's book), Gobierno del Estado de Hidalgo/Fundacion Arturo Herrera Cabanas, 2007.
- *Señales que precederan al fin del mundo*, Periferica (Caceres, Spain), 2010, translation by Lisa Dillman published as *Signs Preceding the End of the World, And Other Stories* (High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire, England), 2015.
- *La Transmigración de los Cuerpos* (title means "The Transmigration of Bodies"), Periferica (Caceres, Spain), 2013.
- *El incendio de la mina El Bordo*, El Quinqué Amarillo Publicaciones (Guadalajara, Mexico), 2019, translation by Lisa Dillman published as *The Fire in El Bordo Mine, And Other Stories* (Sheffield, England), 2020.

Editor, *El Perro* (literary magazine), 2007--. Member, board of editors, *Revista de Literatura Mexicana Contemporanea*, University of Texas, El Paso, 2002. Contributor to anthologies, including *Interviews from the Edge: Fifty Years of Conversations about Writing and Resistance*, Bloomsbury Academic (New York, NY), 2019; *Mexican Noir: Rethinking the Dark in Contemporary Writing and Visual Culture*, Peter Land (New York, NY), 2020.

SIDELIGHTS

In his first novel in English translation, *Signs Preceding the End of the World*, Mexican author Yuri Herrera portrays a Mexican woman named Makina as she prepares to cross the border into the United States. Her brother crossed a few years earlier, and she and her mother have not heard much from him since. Her journey starts with a bad omen; Makina watches a sinkhole open beneath her and swallow a man, and she believes that she will die too. The story follows Makina as she finds the men who will help her enter the United States, and they task her with delivering a mysterious package. In this manner, Makina is thrust into a criminal underworld, one she struggles to escape in order to begin her new life in America.

Discussing the volume on the *Skinny* Web site, Angus Sutherland noted that the novel examines government sanctioned xenophobia, as well as the drug war. He noted: "Herrera works away at these dated legal institutions and the old-order nationalism that underpins them. Makina, the book's astonishing roaming protagonist, is confronted, alongside fellow migrants, by an American police officer. She holds a mirror to his prejudice, acknowledging that they are indeed 'people who came to take your jobs, who dream of wiping your shit, who long to work all hours.'" Sutherland went on to report that "Herrera characterises this sequence as 'a sort of ironical lament. Because it was not about being patriotic but about confronting all the prejudices that might come with patriotism. So instead of explaining what should be self-evident, you confront that with a savage version of those prejudices.'"

Praising *Signs Preceding the End of the World* on the *Rumpus* Web site, Alina Cohen explained that "Herrera adopts a simple narrative structure that allows him to focus on language and character." She added: "At the end of the novel, Herrera turns his work into a meditation on the power of the written word. On topics that receive so much journalistic and political attention, Herrera's lyricism adds a new dimension to the conversation. The author employs language and a literary perspective you won't soon forget, his images haunting like a dream." Adam Z. Levy, writing on the *Music and Literature* Web site, was also impressed, and he found that "transference across borders and between languages can be marked by a beginning and an end: the moment when something stops being one thing and becomes another. In *Signs Preceding the End of the World*, Herrera interrogates the nature of that change, its inevitability, its often brutish force, as it sweeps through a time and a place and a people." Yet, Levy remarked, "despite its best intentions, the novel does not dig deep enough into the dirt of human consequence, even if we understand her fate. [Makina's] fear is described but not adequately felt; the slow change that we expect in her is lost in a hurried conclusion, underground. In its hundred-odd pages, *Signs Preceding the End of the World* manages to be many things at once: an allegory, a dark myth, an epic, a compelling meditation on language. In the end, however, Makina and the reader are left with the darkness."

As *Books/ut* Web site correspondent P T Smith pointed out, "incidents, phrasings that suggest the novel could shift to another realm continue. They are pregnant with potentiality, and tension of potentiality is one of life's great pleasures, even, especially, in the discomfort that comes with it. It creates only one of the ways that *Signs Preceding the End of the World* holds you in rapture." According to Smith, " *Signs* is a novel of language, meant to be translated because it is so aware of the journeys language takes, from one to another, and within their boundaries. ... This slippery world lives in her way of being, in the language of versing, in the dislocations of place, and in the descriptions of the physical realm Makina moves in." Offering further applause on the *3:am Magazine* Web site, Jason DeYoung asserted: "A slim novel with a narrative large in scope, it refreshes the immigrant's crossing with a tale worthy of our time, one simple in its telling, but complex in its rendering. With themes touching on economics, power, gender, sexuality, language, and cultural differences--along with vivid metaphors and ancestral allusions--Herrera has written a novel that connects the contemporary with the timeless." For, DeYoung, "*Signs Preceding the End of the World* takes us full circle in many ways. The very first words in the novel that we hear from Makina are 'I'm dead' as the sinkhole opens at her feet, and by the end of the novel it is true, in a sense. The final image of the book is of a man handing her new identity papers. ... Her old world goes out with a whimper, but for a novel about hybridity with a character as 'malleable' as Makina, it's appropriate."

FURTHER READINGS

FURTHER READINGS ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

PERIODICALS

EFE World News Service, March 22, 2008, "Mexican Tells Story of Drug Lord, Poet in Debut Novel."

New Internationalist, March, 2015, Peter Whittaker, review of *Signs Preceding the End of the World*, p. 36.

Publishers Weekly, August 4, 2014, review of *Signs Preceding the End of the World*, p. 29.

ONLINE

And Other Stories Web site, <http://www.andotherstories.org/> (November 3, 2015), author profile.

Bookslut, <http://www.bookslut.com/> (November 3, 2015), P T Smith, review of *Signs Preceding the End of the World*.

Music and Literature, <http://www.musicandliterature.org/> (April 6, 2015), Adam Z. Levy, review of *Signs Preceding the End of the World*.

Rumpus, <http://therumpus.net/> (September 7, 2015), Alina Cohen, review of *Signs Preceding the End of the World*.

Skinny, <http://www.theskinny.co.uk/> (July 30, 2015), Angus Sutherland, "Author Yuri Herrera on 'The American Problem That Mexico Is Suffering.'"

3:am Magazine, <http://www.3ammagazine.com/> (November 3, 2015), Jason DeYoung, review of *Signs Preceding the End of the World*.

Tulane University, Stone Center Web site, <http://stonecenter.tulane.edu/> (November 3, 2015), author profile.*

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