

La Guirnalda Polar

La Redvista Electrónica de Cultura Latinoamericana en Canadá
Los Tesoros Culturales del Mundo Hispanohablante

Interview with mark fournier

Entrevista por Rubén del Muro.

R: How did you decided to become a `libraire`, `librero` ?

M: I could have joint the music industry or the food industry. The book industry above the arts, is the last one with people still with ethics in it, the music industry is completely run by `Mafiosi` or advertising; and the food industry is completely run by chemical companies or big egos, so there was no much choice left.

R: As a `librero` (not a book-seller), promoter and generator of culture, what do you think is your proposal?

M: Well, we are in an interesting era right now, from the U.S comes a certain flow of information that some of the other western countries are trying to emulate; we are entering in a revolution were the newspapers are coming to disappear, but according to numbers, paper companies are making much more profit than internet companies right now. It has never being so much paper printed, we are dealing with the printing matter when we are dealing with books. I think is interesting to be someone that promotes books in the middle of this hype of electronic-information. History has proved that when a new system comes in, it never replaces the previous one, but it finds their own eligige. So I put the reasoning even farther, the bookstore I've created is the anti-thesis of a big bookstore it has specialties.

Especially in a city like Vancouver, where everybody realizes that there is people from all over the world. I decided to create an hybrid bookstore where you can find books in different languages and books to learn these languages; but also including the other universal languages-images, things about cinema, photography, design, movies. I am open to a lot of possibilities.

R: We are in the middle of a technological revolution. How this affects the book industry, specifically small bookstores? Has it become more difficult to create new spaces and opportunities?

M: I will say less obvious, but they still exists. Small general bookstores, which not offer specialties, are closing. At the same time, here in Vancouver, there are bookstores dealing only with Cooking, New Age or Spirituality books and their sales are increasing. What we see is mega-bookstores carrying mass market taste for mass market people, but they leave out all the specialties because for them is time consuming, it's not worth, they don't have the expertise and they can't afford it. There also are cultural differences, the languages and cultures that I represent in my bookstore, are cultures with a very strong relationship and history with a certain type of `Bookstores` most people with a European, French, Spanish, Italian, or even Japanese background have a very strong relationship with paper. I don't think that the people in Portugal, Spain, Mexico, Colombia will embrace the E-book right away, I doubt it. It's going to be practical in some little things, but I don't think that everybody will rush out to download a Garcia Marques's book when it comes out. Creating a smaller bookstore that is friendlier, livelier, a little bit messy, that is the opposite of the mega bookstore with no atmosphere, makes a big difference.

Mark Fournier, bookseller and promoter of the Latin culture in Vancouver.

R: What is your impression of the Latin-American community here in Vancouver?

M: First of all, the Latin-American community is so diverse. One of the things they have in common is the language, which in a way puts the things together. The Spanish-speaking community is quite unique, just like the Portuguese-speaking, in the sense that the offspring of the New World is bigger in number and almost stronger in culture than the roots of that offspring. Latin-American authors start to do very well in Spain, which is very good, but there used to be a complex of inferiority... you could see that here too, where for awhile ago the community used to be really divided. One thing that is quite unique, is a very strong appetite for Auto-ayuda books, self-help books. I think the main reason of this is the proximity to the United States. Also you can see this phenomenon in the French language within Quebec, where Quebec is a great producer and consumer of self-help books, spirituality and New Age. You can see this in Mexico, where there are four publisher houses specialized in this field, in Colombia and Venezuela, but as you go south there are less and less readers of these type of books.

R: You are also member and organizer of the Vancouver International Writer's Festival, can you tell me what has been your experience working with Latin-American authors?

M: I have either through the bookstore or the Writer's Festival invited few Spanish-speaking writers. Eight Years ago, Guadalupe Rivera Marin was the first one to come, this was possible during the opening of the Spanish section in the bookstore I used to work. She is a lady and that event attracted so many people.

Another writer was Alberto Ruy Sanchez, who participated in various events in French, in Spanish and in English of the Writers Festival. Last year, we have Alberto Guzman from Guatemala and now living in San Francisco, he made a translation of the 'Popul Vuh'. When you are very far like Vancouver you need to get a 'Name' in order to attract people. We have been trying to bring people like Homero Aridjis, but is very difficult; he is a very busy man. I personally think it will be great for him to come here to Vancouver, but sometimes you deal with difficulties that are more logistics than anything else, Eduardo Galeano has confirmed and cancel several times. Vancouver is very far, it's at the middle of everywhere, but at the end of everywhere; that makes it very difficult, specially the cost of bringing the writers, but we are going to continue with this, for sure.

R: You have also had the opportunity to go to some book fairs in Latin America, how was that?

M: It's always interesting during these fairs, specially when you go and tell the merchant that you are selling books in Spanish in Canada. I will say for half of them it doesn't make sense to start with, so they don't believe you. Sometimes I spent more time explaining what I'm doing than how I want the things done. For many people it makes absolutely no sense that someone in Vancouver with a French name sells books in Spanish, many people who live completely in a Spanish environment, they just not understand it. That is very funny, it creates an interesting atmosphere. I know my authors and I want to discover some others, so I go straight to the writers when they

are there or sometimes with the publicist, and after that is just numbers.

R: So can we call you a discoverer or an explorer of this era of re-born of Spanish? Oh...no. I still have too much to learn, for example, we brought once Paco Ignacio Taibo II and with him I discovered a whole new type of literature done in Mexico City that deals with clashes between communities and all this underground. You can find the established people everywhere, but I really like to dig and see what is being done behind, to see who is the writer that is pushing things. In Spain there is an author who writes in Catalan directly who I personally admire for his style. . This is what I should do when I go to these fairs, is to discover this little hidden treasures and bring them back here and try to suggest them to the local population that sometimes they`ve never heard of them. And it is not because you were born in Chile 21 years ago that you know what is going on the literary world of Santiago right now. So we create a funny situation, where there is a Non-native-speaker Spanish person, who is suggesting authors of an area where my customers are coming. Is typical Vancouver, is natural in this city.

R: While I was snooping around in your bookstore I found a Vasco writer, Bernardo Atxaga, and I became really interested, but also I was wandering, that if you also cover some other languages, minority languages, some indigenous languages. Do you also bring these writers, these literature?

M: I think is really important. There is a fact that comes with immigration and it`s interesting to observe, for example. Someone born in Venezuela within a certain social class moves to Vancouver, after some time of being far, he starts missing his culture and traditions, after this he starts discovering more about his country. Sometimes you learn more outside that if you had stayed over there. Latin-America is really social stratified, sometimes is not always easy for some people to snoop around in other classes, it could be difficult, but by removing yourself and looking with a distance eye, you start to be more aware of the reality of where you are coming from.

R: What are the futures plans for your bookstore?

M: First of all, the bookstore is just two months old, so we still dealing with that now, but I love music and I would like to include some music in the future.

Este Documento es parte de una publicación literaria por parte de:
- "La Guirnalda Polar"

Redvista Electrónica de Cultura Latinoamericana en Canadá
Redvista es: (una "revista" que se publica en el internet)

- Número de la Publicación: 42
 - Título de la Publicación: Sobre los libros
 - Titulado: Interview with mark fournier
 - Género: Entrevista
 - Autor: Rubén del Muro.
 - Año: 2000
 - Mes: marzo
 - URL: <http://www.lgpolar.com/page/read/27>
-

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