

From Klail City to Korea with Love

Two Master Works



Rolando Hinojosa

Recipient of the National Book Critics Circle

Lifetime Achievement Award

Praise for the Work of Rolando Hinojosa

“Although his sharp eye and accurate ear capture a place, its people and a time in a masterly way, his work goes far beyond regionalism. He is a writer for all readers.”
—*The New York Times Book Review*

“Another unusual police procedural is Rolando Hinojosa’s realistic-feeling *Ask a Policeman*. As this case about cross-border murder and drug-smuggling unravels, Hinojosa gets to you in his sneaky way. He’s witty about the Orwellian bylaws in the middle-class neighborhoods of Klail City, Texas . . . and once in a while he nails a character with a single line of dialogue. Hinojosa is also mordantly funny about the local law enforcement honchos who queue up at the U.S. federal trough.”
—*The Washington Post on Ask a Policeman*

“Rolando Hinojosa has established himself as sole owner and proprietor of fictional Belken County, which, like the author’s native Mercedes, is situated in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. If Belken is the Lone Star Yoknapatawpha, Hinojosa is its Faulkner.”

—*The Texas Observer on Ask a Policeman:
A Rafe Buenrostro Mystery*

“The timeless truths of war—the slaughter of civilians, atrocities condoned, legions of refugees—are related with near-documentary realism in this powerful novel of the Korean War. Hinojosa draws on his own experience in Korea to reveal the racism that Mexican Americans faced from fellow soldiers. Hinojosa gives us a graphic picture of the unchanging face of war—raw, gritty and inhumane.”

—*Publishers Weekly on The Useless Servants*

“Hinojosa’s novel is in the form of a diary kept by a young Mexican American soldier serving in the Korean War. Its spare style, heavily spiced with military lingo, and episodic form are intended to recreate the fragmented process of discovery that occurs when one is at war. But what the narrator, Rafe Buenrostro, discovers is not heroism or patriotism, but the futility of war and its heavy human toll.”

—*Booklist on The Useless Servants*

“Like Faulkner, [Hinojosa] has created a fictional county (Belken County), invested it with centuries of complex history and populated it with generations of families and a host of unique characters. The saga is a rich mosaic, and Hinojosa renders the collective social history of a

Chicano community. Hinojosa's tack in this novel is to dramatize how the community responds to *la mujer nueva*, the Chicana who eschews traditional roles and asserts her independence and individuality. [He] spins the story of Becky and her twenty-five friends and enemies with sensitivity, humor, wit and keen insight into the history and attitudes of the people of the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas."

—*World Literature Today on Becky and Her Friends*

"Hinojosa turns his Faulknerian gaze upon a particular family struggle, in this case a divorce. It is an opportunity to observe a master of voice and characterization at work, to watch a web-spinner weave a narrative masterpiece."

—*The Texas Observer on Becky and Her Friends*

"Themes which predominate and are explored in a humorous, good natured fashion include: the migration experience of Texan Mexicans, family feuds, the ongoing conflict between Anglos and Mexicans and the experiences of Mexicans in the Korean conflict and the Second World War. While Hinojosa explores the exploitation of Texas Mexicans at the hands of Anglos, his message is never heavy-handed or didactic, but rather pointed and understated. Hinojosa has an unusual talent for capturing the language and spirit of his subject matter."

—*Western American Literature on Klail City*

"Hinojosa's *Dear Rafe* effectively uncovers social, economic and political relationships along the Texas border. A mystery of sorts, it permits readers to make their own judgments about the reality of Klail City. The dozens of characters speaking in their own voices create not a babble but a sort of call and response pattern between cultures, classes and generations. With a quiet irony and persistent understatement, Hinojosa describes an alien place that is part of who we are as a people."

—*Newsday on Dear Rafe*

"Hinojosa's obvious and heartfelt feminism, his linguistic facility, erudite allusions, and, above all, his witty, colloquial, epigrammatic pronouncements make this novel a feast for scholars."

—*Choice on Dear Rafe*

"*Rites and Witnesses* has delighted and mystified [Hinojosa's] audience. In the very ambiguity of the documents, his purpose becomes known. The issues are clear, the battle lines are drawn, the reader now knows that what is at stake is the death of a culture."

—*Houston Chronicle on Rites and Witnesses*

From Klail City to Korea with Love: Two Master Works

Korean Love Songs
From Klail City Death Trip

Rites and Witnesses
A Comedy

Rolando Hinojosa



Arte Público Press
Houston, Texas

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Recovering the past, creating the future

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Acknowledgments

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Korean Love Songs

To Patti, Clarissa and Karen Louise

I

December 1949

Good Times In Peacetime
Japan

June–December 1950
The Pusan Perimeter.
Breakout. Crossing the 38th
Parallel. The Drive North.
Encounter With the Chinese.
The Rush South. Caught in the
Pass. Defeat of the Eighth
Army. Holding and Delaying
Actions. The 3000 Casualties
of the Second Division.
Pyongyang Afire. Brief Stand
at the Taedong. Loss of Seoul.
Back to Pusan for
Reorganization. First Rest and
Recuperation.

The Old Army Game

Rookies Under Stress Acting
Tough

Friendly Fire

The Evening Shift

A Sheaf of Percussion Fire

The Eighth Army at the
Chongchon

Chinaman's Hat

Rear Guard Action I

Rear Guard Action II

Rear Guard Action III

Rest Due and Taken

II

January–May 1951

From Pusan to Wonju. January
Chinese Offensive. The 30,000
Chinese Dead.

Counteroffensive. Drive
Northward. Retaking of Seoul
and Recrossing of the 38th
Parallel. Charlie Villalón Has
Been Dead Since the
Chongchon River Action. War
of Attrition. American and
Chinese Dead in the Days of
Strong Patrols.

The Daily Dead Count.
Personal Losses: Vielma,
Frazier and Hatalski. Brief
Hospital Tour.

Possession for All Time

The January–May 1951
Slaughter

Until Further Orders, the
219th Is Firing Blind

Night Burial Details

Boston John McCreedy
Drinks with Certain Lewd
Men of the Baser Sort

Incoming

Above All, the Waste

New Battery Position

Brodkey's Replacement

One Solution

Liquor Ration

Jacob Mosqueda Wrestles
With the Angels

Visiting Hours

Fit for Duty

III

September 1951

Second R&R in Japan. Friends	Old Friends
at Shirley's Temple. Sonny	Kobe Station
Ruiz. Promises Kept. Nara.	Nagoya Station
	Brief Encounter
	At Sonny's and Tsuruko's
	At the Aoyama
	Hiro Watanabe
	South to Nara
	The Last Day

January–March 1952

Korea Redux. Taking Care of	Up Before the Board
Tina Ruiz. More Dead. End of	A Matter of Supplies
the Road. Back to Texas.	This Is Where We Came In
	Vale

According to the Japanese, the Spring of 1950 had been the warmest in the island of Honshu since the Disaster of 1945; at the end of that Spring, the understrength 219th Field Artillery Battalion was completing its seventh month as part of the occupation force in Japan.

And, on August 3, 1950, a week before the 219th Field joined the Second Division of the Pusan Perimeter, Rafa Buenrostro, David Ruiz, José Vielma and Rosalío Villalón, deposited eight hundred and seventy dollars in the Kobe Nihongo Bank; an additional one hundred and forty dollars were left in the care of Miss Toshiko Ogura of the Pages of Wisdom geisha in Tokyo.

The sum, \$1,010.00, was a gift for Hiro Watanabe, 9, and for his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Kazuo Watanabe of the Boso Peninsula.

And Jehu said, What hast thou to do with peace?

The Old Army Game

Talking about Ben Fletcher,
our barracks sergeant at Sill;
the four of us marked him down as a son-of-a-bitch,
and he didn't disappoint us.

Three weeks before we finished the course, the talk was
he was up for transfer. Well, so were we,
but the brown-nosers took up a collection anyway:
 "One buck is all . . . Whaddayasay? Just a buck each for Old
 Fletch."

 "Screw Old Fletch," the four of us said.

Now:
Guess who didn't get a three-day pass when the training was
 over?

The world remains as round as ever, and
with any luck at all,
 one will run into old friends.
You see, there's just a set number of artillery outfits over here,
and there's Old Fletch
conducting a course on quadrants.
But you've probably guessed by now:
 He's due to be transferred in three weeks.

So, the four of us refuse again,
but this time,
guess who got the shit kicked out of him
 as he left the noncom club?