



Young Adult Literature from Latin America

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The Wild Ones

Antonio Ramos Revillas

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**Fundación Cuatrogatos Prize
Winner, 2022**

**A pan-Americas organisation
based in Miami, USA**

Included in the prestigious 2021

**White Ravens
Catalogue**

**from the International Youth
Library in Germany which selects
recommendations from more than
50 countries and in over 30
languages.**

A coming-of-age novel about trying to fight against poverty in northern Mexico amidst societal prejudice and lawless gangs

About the author

Antonio Ramos Revillas is a Mexican author of books for adults and young people. In 2015 he was selected to participate in the México 20 project by the Hay Festival. This project brought together twenty Mexican writers under the age of forty and paired them with British translators, resulting in the México 20 anthology, published by Pushkin Press.

He has received numerous regional and national awards for his writing. On an international level, his 2014 novel *La guarida de la lechuzas* was honoured by the Fundación Cuatrogatos prize in Miami, as well as winning the International Latino Book Award. His books for young readers have also received the Banco del Libro Award in Venezuela as being recommended by IBBY Mexico. *Salvajes* is his third book to be chosen for the White Ravens. Several of his short stories for adults have been translated into English, French and Polish.

None of his books, for adults or children, have yet been translated into English.

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THE WILD ONES

ANTONIO RAMOS REVILLAS // MEXICO

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Overview

Fifteen-year-old Efraín and his two younger brothers live in the last house on a hillside in Monterrey, northern Mexico. They are left to fend for themselves after their mother is wrongly arrested for theft. Now falls to Efraín not has to clear Má's name, but to look out for his younger brothers, too.

Má has raised her boys to keep out of trouble with the local gangs and to study for their future, but they are viewed by society as good-for-nothings or criminals simply because of where they live. And with their Má now in prison, the only people offering any kind of support are the local gang members – but everything comes with a price tag.

Ramos Riveras portrays the difficulties of trying to make something of yourself when society's expectations for your life are set by who you are and where you come from. The novel is violent and unflinching, yet is not voyeuristic in its portrayal of the characters. As we see reports in the news of Central America's violent cartels, this novel shines a light on the young people who live these realities and the difficulties they face.

Why This Book?

In 2020, Jeanine Cummins's adult novel *American Dirt* was published to great acclaim, only to become mired in controversy. The story is based on Mexican migration, following a mother and her son who flee Mexico for the USA. It has, however, drawn much criticism from Mexicans for its stereotypical Mexican characters portrayed by a white American, highlighting the need for own voices. It is vital to present accurate and authentic descriptions of the realities of life for young people in Mexico, written by the people who live there.

The novel is set in Ramos Revillas' home city of Monterrey, a large city in northern Mexico, which according to [Wikipedia](#) is one of the one of the most "liveable" and "developed" cities in Mexico. Stories set in Mexico are often located in the capital, directly on the US-Mexican borders, or travel through the country on the way to the USA, so to focus on a city that is none of those things is refreshing. It also highlights that while on the surface, the situation may appear "liveable", there is often an undercurrent of social injustice.

This is a great book about the responsibilities that many young people carry on their shoulders and their struggles to provide themselves and their families with a better future than the one imagined for them by society, authentically depicted by this award-winning Mexican author.

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Themes

Social Injustice and prejudice

Efraín lives in the very last house at the top of a steep hillside, a physical reminder that he and his family live on the very edge of society where very little is expected of him other than trouble. Despite Efraín's desire to improve his situation through education and hard work, he and his family are judged on their appearances and where they live. We feel real empathy with Efraín who is trying his absolute best for himself and his brothers but gets knocked down time and again.

Despite this prejudice, we also see glimpses of hope: in his quest to find people prepared to support them, he ultimately does find people who are willing to stand up for the family in court.

Police brutality

Ramos Revilla uses this book to criticise the police. Their behaviour when they arrest Efraín's Má is brutal and violent. In chapter two, we see the impact of the police on young people and their understanding from an early age that "the law doesn't apply to you" – the police are not there to protect them.

Trying to make something of yourself when the odds are stacked against you

Efraín is hugely loyal to his mum and his brothers. Despite the local gang trying to pull him in to their circle and involve him in their activities, Efraín remains firm in his resolve to support his family in the way he feels is right, even if this path is more difficult. There's a significant section in chapter 13 where Efraín considers the options: work for a pittance while doing something decent, that doesn't "compromise his future", as his mother has told him, or join a gang and have whatever he wants but live life more dangerously. This is a choice that will resonate with many communities around the world.

Efraín is a likeable character, and he sometimes makes mistakes or poor choices, but ultimately he's trying his best in circumstances that are really stacked against him.

In the end, Efraín has to leave school so he can work to support his family, but he has succeeded in holding to his moral beliefs and continues to live according to his principles. He has also come to see that there are people who believe in him and will support their family without the need for gang protection.

Youth culture in Northern Mexico

In 2020, the award-winning film *Ya no estoy aquí* (I'm no longer here) was released on Netflix. This film portrays the culture of the Cholombianos or kolombias, a distinctive youth subculture only found in the working class suburbs of Monterrey, Mexico. Ramos Revillas refers to this subculture in his book, describing the distinctive dress and music tastes of this group.

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Comparisons

While there are books written by Latinx writers that deal with social injustices, like Matt de la Peña's 2010 *We Were Here*, I am not aware of any young adult novels written in Spanish by Mexican authors dealing with the topic of social realism that has been translated into English.

In 2019, Juan Pablo Villalobos' non-fiction title *The Other Side: Stories of Central American Teen Refugees Who Dream of Crossing the Border*, published in the US by Farrar Straus Giroux, was shortlisted for the Global Literature in Libraries Initiative Translated YA Book Prize. It was a finalist in the Kirkus Prize for Young Readers' Literature as well as a Kirkus Best Book of the Year 2019.

Other comparable books originally written in English are award-winning novels ***Orangeboy*** by Patrice Laurence, and ***Crongton Knights*** by Alex Wheatle. Both of these books involve characters living in challenging neighbourhoods who have to navigate gang life. Like the characters in these two books, Efraín at times feels he has no other option but to do what the gang wants in order to protect his family, but ultimately he backtracks and refuses to be dragged in any deeper. While set in a different landscape, Efraín's struggles will resonate with communities around the world.

**For more details, full synopsis and translated extract,
please contact claire@cslanguages.co.uk**

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