
A few glimpses of the Book Fair in Havana

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The International Book Fair, Cuba 2019, has concluded in Havana. As a unique epilogue, the annual event now begins its journey to 15 other cities in the country, to culminate April 14 in the eastern city of Santiago de Cuba.

During this 28th edition, the ancient San Carlos de la Cabaña Fortress, the fairgrounds for the last several editions, hosted dozens of book launches, colloquiums, conferences, awards, stands, and bookshops.

Granma International offers readers a few snapshots to give an idea of the happenings there.

- Eduardo Heras León: writer, journalist, editor, literary and ballet critic; 2014 National Prize for Literature winner, to whom the Fair is dedicated. Along with the colloquium in Nicolás Guillén Hall on the life and work of someone who is widely known as “Chino” Heras, readers were gratified to find new editions of a number of his most important works, including *La guerra tuvo seis nombres* and *Los pasos en la hierba*, as well as new titles like *El libro de los elogios*, *El libro de las entrevistas*, and *El libro de las presentaciones*.

- Mirta Yañez: The Fair honored this writer, philologist, teacher, and member of the Cuban Academy of Language with the 2018 National Prize for Literature.

Considered one of the most important intellectuals of her generation, Mirta Yañez (Havana, 1947) has excelled in practically all genres she cultivates: poetry, stories, novels, and essays.

Among her narrative titles, outstanding are the novel *Sangra por la herida*; short story collections *Todos los negros tomamos café*, *La Habana es una ciudad bien grande*, and *El diablo son las cosas*; and poetry to be found in *Un solo bosque negro*, and *Las visitas y otros poemas*.

She is one of the principal investigators of the female voice in Cuban literature and the co-author of the anthology *Estatuas de sal*, with poet Marilyn Bobes.

- 500th Anniversary of Havana's founding: The anniversary led to the publication of more than a dozen books with Havana themes, a program headed by the City Historian's publisher Ediciones Boloña. The novel titles were presented in the Plaza de Las Armas, in the heart of city's central historic district, a World Heritage Site.



Azzedine Mihouni, Algerian Minister of Culture, presented his novel *El juramento de Atocha* at the fair, which featured Algeria as the guest Country of Honor. **Photo:** Juvenal Balán

This is how readers got their hands on classic works like the novel *Cecilia Valdés* or *La Loma del Ángel*, by Cirilo Villaverde; the anthology *Crónicas habaneras*, by Alejo Carpentier, who Graziella Pogolotti, the title's presenter noted "contributed to the construction of the Havana myth," and *Cuadernos de historia habanera*, volumes IV, V, VI, VII, VIII, IX and X, by Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring, Havana City Historian from 1935 until 1964. The first three volumes released in 2018 are now joined by seven more, bearing the notebooks numbered 11 through 36.

- Two publishing events: The re-issue by Letras Cubanas publishing house of *Oppiano Licario*, the unfinished novel by José Lezama Lima; and *Rayuela*, the uncommon work of Julio Cortázar, as part of the Casa de Las Américas' Classics of Latin America collection.

Published for the first time in 1977, a year after Lezama death, the new edition of *Oppiano Licario* was presented, 40 years later, at the Dulce María Loynaz, Cultural Center, while *Rayuela*, with the study by Lezama Lima for the first edition, exactly half a century later, was celebrated at Casa de Las Américas headquarters.

- Algeria, Guest Country of Honor: Arriving with a delegation of 30 writers, the sister nation opened a beautiful pavilion displaying more than 200 works on their patrimony and history, plus children's literature and novels.

Presented during the fair were 18 titles by Algerian authors in Spanish including the novels *Tierra de mujeres*, by Nassira Beyoula; *El viento del sur*, by Abdelhamid Benhadouga; *Un mar sin gaviotas*, by Djilali Kellas, and *El juramento de Atocha* by Azzedine Mihouni, now the country's minister of Culture.

Mihouni's book is a serious reflection on the phenomenon of collective violence, with episodes that continue to occur around the world, which the author hopes will be taken as a message "in favor of peace and the need to promote dialogue and understanding among peoples, since culture can build bridges."

- The literary celebration in figures: 1,300 literary and artistic presentations; more than 80 lectures; some 50 panel discussions, 45 prizes and tributes; more than 100 poetry readings and 150 book launches, concerts, film screenings, and art exhibits.

During the Fair's closing ceremony, February 17, Juan Rodríguez Cabrera, president of the Cuban Book Institute, reported that more than 4,000 titles and four million copies were made available to readers; the public purchased some

409,395 books, more than 5,000 more than were sold during last year's edition.

A quote from the great Jorge Luis Borges serves to celebrate Cuban readers

"Let others boast of the pages they have written, I am proud of those that have been read."

- Other prizes: The Paper Door, for the best titles published by the country's 22 regional houses, was awarded to ***Las memorias vacías de Solange Bañuelos***, by Maité Hernández-Lorenzo (Ediciones Matanzas); the Readers' Prize, for the best-selling book of 2018 went to ***Cien Horas con Fidel***, by Ignacio Ramonet (Editorial Nuevo Milenio and the Council of State publishing house); and the Mirrored Door, awarded by the José Martí National Library's reading program, went to writer and journalist Marta Rojas, for ***El equipaje amarillo***, the most requested book of 2018.

Cuban intellectual Miguel Barnet, winner of the 1994 National Prize for Literature, made an interesting reflection during the 11th edition of the Fair in Havana, which was dedicated to his works: "I believe that book fairs are growing in Cuba and around the world, because books cannot be replaced by anything, they establish an intimate, strong, igneous, erotic, and sensual bond with people that cannot occur with a cold screen."

Despite the influence of novel and varied digital technologies and doomsday announcements, books are still desired. The 409,395 copies sold in La Cabaña February 7-17 can allow us a certain smile.