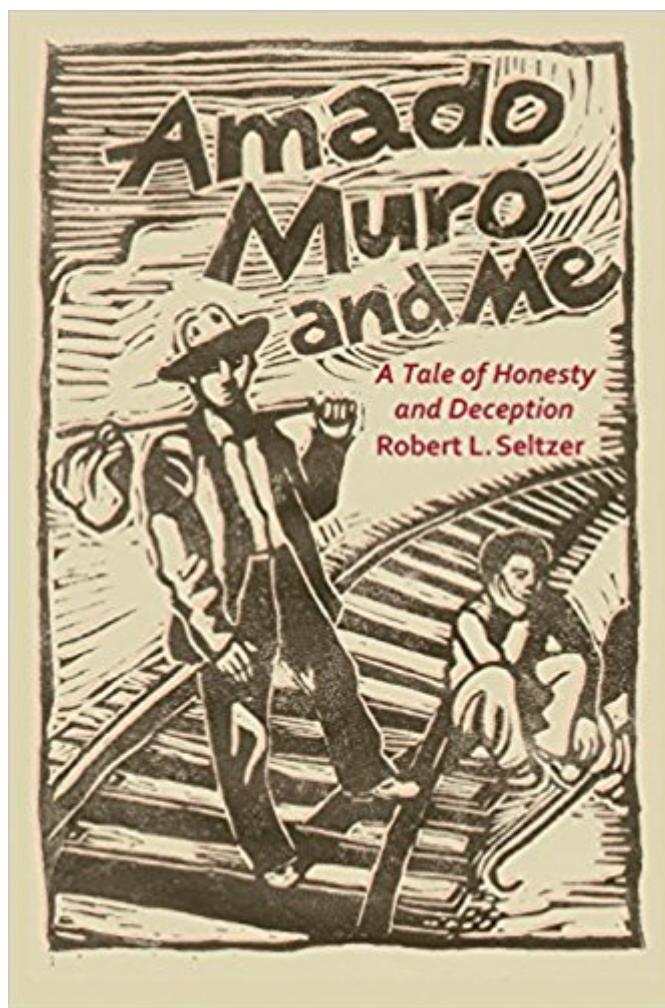


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Amado Muro And Me: A Tale Of Honesty And Deception



Synopsis

In Amado Muro and Me, ten-year-old Robert Seltzer discovers that his father, Chester, actually leads two lives—“one as a newspaperman and father who somehow always knows what his son is thinking; the other as Amado Muro, a passionate and gifted writer whose pseudonym is adapted from the name of his Mexican immigrant wife. Chester was born in Cleveland, Ohio, but in Amado Muro’s stories, he channels an intense love of Mexican culture to create deep, strong roots in Chihuahua, Mexico. Throughout the pivotal year of this memoir, the family moves from El Paso, Texas, (home to Robert’s Mexican grandmother, Alita, and always home to Robert) to Bakersfield, California. Robert experiences everything from bullying and young love to racism and cross-culturalization. Chester guides his son through this difficult period with the wisdom he gained from the “dark turn” he himself faced as a young man. Robert, who knows his father as “the old man,” now begins to learn about “Young Chess.” Tying it all together is Amado Muro, who from time to time abandons Robert and his mother and hops freight trains in order to write his wonderful stories. Reaching beyond background research, Chester’s alter ego lives the life in order to share the tale. Robert’s ethnicity is the result of his mother’s ancestry, but his father chooses his Mexican identity. It is through this perspective, as a man who sees bridges where others see barriers, that the father helps his son deal with his first, jarring experience of racism and so much more. □

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Customer Reviews

"Robert Seltzer has given us a wonderful gift: a wise and compassionate memoir about growing up the son of Amado Muro, the near-mythical writer from the Mexican border whose very life turned the concept of race and identity upside down. As the author comes to terms with the duality of his father, he begins to comprehend his own life. Yet, the more we learn, the more the mystery of Amado Muro deepens — and ultimately redefines what it means to live on the border." --Rus Bradburd, author of the forthcoming book, *All the Dreams We've Dreamed*

A native of El Paso, Texas, ROBERT L. SELTZER earned a journalism degree from the University of Texas at El Paso. He has worked for newspapers such as the Houston Chronicle, the Philadelphia Inquirer, and the San Antonio Express-News, where he is currently the public editor. He has won state and national awards for his news, feature, and sports reporting.

MEMOIR/BIOGRAPHY Robert L. Seltzer, with introduction by Naomi Shihab Nye
Amado Muro and Me: A Tale of Honesty and Deception Texas Christian University Press Paperback, 978-0-87565-636-6, 224 pgs., \$22.95 September 16, 2016 Robert Seltzer's father was the journalist and short story writer Chester Seltzer, who wrote under the pseudonym Amado Muro. Most readers never knew he was Anglo. Born and raised in Cleveland, Ohio, Chester was afflicted, or blessed, with a powerful case of wanderlust. During his wanderings, he fell in love with Mexico. Later he married a Mexican woman, Amada Muro, whose family fled the Mexican Revolution for the safety of El Paso. A man born to money and privilege, Chester was an iconoclast who rejected these values, finding his compatriots in society's alienated. " [My father] did not just write his short stories," Robert writes, " he lived them. . . . A kind of latter-day Jack London . . . he rode the rails throughout the Southwest, writing about men who never saw the good times that followed the Great Depression." In *Amado Muro and Me: A Tale of Honesty and Deception*, Robert writes achingly of a father he did not fully comprehend until after his death. Chester spent much time writing, and much time away from home. " His stories were heartfelt and lyrical," his son writes, " but they exhibited a compassion toward others that should have been directed toward his family." This memoir is Robert's nuanced, subtly beautiful, belated appreciation. In 1964, the family moved from El Paso to Bakersfield, California, where Robert was the only Latino in his new school, and the fifth-grade bully informed him that he was a " beaner." Robert uses this single year of his life, when he was ten years old and first encountered racism, to show us the character of his father and to explore their relationship. As it turned out, Robert's father (who, as his abuela explained to him, had chosen to be

Mexican) was the perfect person to guide him through. The narrative is steady and engaging, treating us to a couple of Chester's short stories when they serve to illuminate a point. The photographs, especially one of Robert's grandmother before the Mexican Revolution, are historical companions to the text. Robert's writing viscerally conveys the homesickness, heartbreak, and confusion of the child he once was. But there is humor here, as well. When Robert tells his mother that he was called a beaner, she advises him to call the bully a hamburger or a hot dog because those are American foods. When his father takes him along to deliver food to a "hobo" camp, Robert describes himself as "a little Margaret Mead among the Samoans." And there is sweetness in his vocabulary lessons with his father, a thinking man who believed in the closely examined life and gifted his son with words. A few critics have objected to an Anglo adopting a Hispanic pen name, as if he had perpetrated a fraud or did not have the requisite experiences to qualify him to write from a particular point of view. Naomi Shihab Nye addresses these concerns in the introduction to *Amado Muro and Me* in which she claims the right of imagination for all artists, disputing the recent hot-button topic of cultural appropriation, asking "What if we could only write as ourselves?" We would all be poorer for that. Originally published in *Lone Star Literary Life*.

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