

Anécdotas de primera magnitud

Author:

Anna Molina

Reader:

Laura McGloughlin

*Anècdotes de primer magnitud* is a collection of twenty-four short stories in Catalan, interwoven with subtle ties of time, memory and love that gradually become apparent to the reader.

In itself, each story is a snapshot of life, focusing on small moments of human connection or disconnection: in 'Dues tasses/Two Cups' a woman receives a mystery delivery she assumes is a surprise from her husband, with devastating consequences, while in 'Geranium' a husband prepares dinner to bid farewell to his marriage, while hinting at his wife's infidelity. However, little by little, moving through the book, subtle links between the stories begin to be revealed. Three old friends reminisce about their adolescence and secrets untold in 'Fum/Smoke', one of whom is the main protagonist struggling to breathe years later in 'Aire/Air'; a young girl sleeping on the terrace of the house where she is staying with her parents in 'La casa del poble/The Village House' grows up to be an overworked public speaker in 'Anècdotes de primer magnitud/Anecdotes of Considerable Magnitude'; a rejected lover in 'La foto/The Photo' opens her heart to someone on the other side of the world in 'Converses/Conversation'.

I really liked this book. Each story has a distinct feel, whether poignant or terse or dream-like, and the threads connecting one story to another never feel gimmicky or contrived, rather as circumstantial and complex as life itself. This cross-referencing conceit could have ended up as a confusing, tiring tangle, but with Molina's controlled writing it makes this book an alluring read, with human relationships the arrows pointing to connections binding the stories together. As stand-alone stories I especially liked 'Vies paral·leles/Parallel Lines' and 'Coincidències de la vida en general/Coincidences of Life in General', while thinking of two separate stories as a pair I found 'Fraternité' and 'Paternité' to be the most effective and atmospheric. As is often the case with a collection of short stories, however, not every story proved to be as vivid or memorable, and I didn't find 'Una tassa/One Cup' or 'Dos metres quadrats/Two Metres Squared' as engaging as the others. However, this is a minor quibble in what is overall a very enjoyable book.

According to her biography, the author has lived in Denmark for more than twenty-five years, and this international influence is reflected in this collection, with stories set in places like Bangkok, rural Thailand, London, Venice, Burgundy and Paris, as well as Catalonia. Such broad reach adds to the book's appeal in international markets and the precise, limpid prose also makes it a strong candidate for translation into English. One potential obstacle to translation might be resistance to a short story collection: historically many publishers in the Anglophone book landscape have shown a marked preference for novels in translation, and the market for short stories is perhaps not as robust as it is elsewhere. That small caveat aside, in these stories Molina has woven a spider's web

of human connection where love and loss are inextricably entwined, and it would no doubt enthrall readers in English.