Paraíso alto (High Heaven)
Author:
Julio José Ordovás
Reader:
Isabelle Kaufeler

Alto Paraíso begins with the town's self-appointed angel introducing the reader to himself and the town. Alto Paraíso (literally High Heaven) is an abandoned town in the Spanish mountains whose emptiness and atmosphere make it an ideal destination suicidal people, who seem subconsciously drawn to it. Even the angel himself, who remains anonymous, but we can deduce is a man in mid to late life, arrived in Alto Paraíso with the intention of killing himself, but a few days of wandering around listening to the trees and talking to the rocks lead him to recognize his current calling of 'angel'.

In the normal way of things, a suicidal person appears in Alto Paraíso every week or two and the angel has taken it upon himself to welcome them and talk to them for a while and show them around the town before they take their lives. He then disposes of any means of transport that brought them to the town and buries the body in the cemetery. In between 'appearances', as the angel refers to the arrival of suicidal visitors, the angel occupies himself with keeping the town presentable, exploring the abandoned houses and bouts of depression and positivity.

Paraíso Alto is a highly original, intriguing and quirky book. Although there are various books that focus on death and suicide, the concept of the town and the character of the angel are unique.

As the first person narrator, the angel is relaxed, informal and engaging and, although we are not given a description of him other than the fact that he has scavenged some good black suits, it is somehow still easy to imagine him drifting around the town or visiting Carmen for supper. This may in part be due to the strength of Ordovás' dialogue. The angel is keen to talk to everyone who appears in Paraíso Alto and these conversations all read naturally and authentically despite the distinctly bizarre circumstances under which they take place.

The sheer originality and bizarre premise of the book also engage the reader and their curiosity so that, while there is not a great deal of traditional action, in particular in the first part of the book, the reader is left wanting to read on to find out more.

In my personal opinion, Paraíso Alto is an original, enjoyable and engaging book and one that I would recommend to any friends or family looking for something a bit different.