Una bala para el recuerdo (A Bullet for the Memory)
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Set in 1938 during the Spanish Civil War the story begins in the small town of Baruelo where Miguel, 13 years old, lives with his family. His father, a miner and Republican fighter, has been missing presumed dead for two years. Unexpectedly his family receive news that his father is in fact alive, in a prison camp in Oviedo. Miguel's mother begs him to go and bring his father home, so Miguel sets off on a 200 km journey with only his faithful dog, Greta to keep him company.

Amazingly Miguel succeeds in finding his father and what's more helps him to escape – nursing him back to health after he survives a firing squad. Miguel's journey takes him over great distances physically and emotionally. He crosses mountains and treks through forests running the gauntlet of wolves, deserters and the Civil Guard. He falls in love, steals food to survive and sees the devastation wrought across his country by the fighting: the destruction both of property and of dignity.

Whilst the war is the backbone of the narrative the story contains many powerful themes. The book very much about Miguel's transition into adulthood, it also tells of courage and optimism in adversity and of the diversity of human relationships. The plot is strong and contains many surprising turns of event which draw the reader in and make it hard to put the book down! The main character is engaging and the relationship he has with his dog, which is central to the story, is genuine and touching.

As Miguel progresses on his journey across Spain the reader sees him transition out of boyhood. I think that many adolescents will identify with how Miguel is portrayed as wanting to be adult and often behaving in a very mature way but also still being very young and at times retreating into childhood. On one hand, Miguel feels he must be a man and take on his mercy mission, for his mother and his siblings. He also shows an adult sensibility in many situations such as where he comforts a prisoner telling him his wife and children are alive and well, realising that this dying man does not need to know the truth of the horrors they have suffered. On the other hand, there are moments when Miguel can't help but be a child such as when he is offended that his father shares the food brought for him with his fellow prisoners, and when he makes the (potentially

fatal) misjudgment of crawling into the prison camp to spend a night cuddled up with his father. All

of this is beautifully written. The reader gets a real sense of Miguel's courage but also his acute loneliness at times and we empathise with him and through him, with the other characters.

The narrative has a good pace. There are many moments of heightened tension … The relationship between Miguel and his parents is complex and subtly portrayed.

Miguel's other most important relationship is that between him and his dog, Greta. This loyal, intelligent creature is key to Miguel's survival – she fends off danger, keeps him company and encourages him through the worst moments of his epic journey. She is a fully rounded character, and, at the end of the story, her final act of self-sacrifice is one of the most moving moments in the book.

In summary, I think this book could be a candidate for translation into English. This author has a deservedly good reputation in Spain and could be successful in translation. The story is a good read and its characters are well developed and engaging. The themes which the book deals with have universal appeal and are given a thoughtful treatment.