Entre visillos
Author:
Carmen Martín Gaite
Reader:
Margaret Jull Costa

The novel is set in Salamanca and paints a vivid portrait of what life was like for young women in Franco's Spain in the 1950s. Martín Gaite creates a whole gallery of characters. Gertru is Natalia's best friend, and Natalia is horrified when Gertru reveals, rather proudly, that her fiancé doesn't want her to continue her studies, arguing that women don't need to study, and that, besides, another girl at her school has recently fallen pregnant. The dangers of education! Natalia, on the other hand, is eager to study and learn. She and her sisters, Mercedes and Julia, are in deep mourning, following the death of their mother, and their father is eager to protect them from gossip and worse…

The novel expertly captures the constraints under which women lived at the time, with girls from wealthy families expected to have no other ambition than finding a rich husband, although only after the requisite three-year engagement, during which time they must never be seen alone or holding hands. Gaite has a wonderful ear for dialogue and for the torments suffered by young women who wanted something other than what their parents wanted and what life in a provincial town could offer. Education and escaping to Madrid appear to be the only ways out.

Carmen Martín Gaite (1925-2000) is one of Spain's finest novelists, but has never really received the recognition she deserves in the English-speaking world. Only four of her novels have been translated into English, but none has really met with the enormous success her work has enjoyed in, say, Italy or France…

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