Distintas formas de mirar el agua
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The novel tells the history of a family through the voices of its various members.

Virginia and Domingo had always lived and worked as farmers in the same remote village in the northeast of the province of León, a very beautiful, mountainous part of Spain. Then, when they were in their forties, by which time they had four children, they were told that the local river was to be dammed to make a reservoir and that their village and others in the area would be submerged. They were given some financial compensation and moved to an area that had once, ironically enough, been a lake, but was now a flat, featureless plain. Initially, they were put up in temporary accommodation until proper houses were built. They continued to farm, adapting to the different and more difficult circumstances, but Domingo always longed for the old life, for the old familiar landscape, although he always refused to go back to see the reservoir. In the end, with their children scattered and as they themselves became increasingly frail, Virginia and Domingo moved into an old people's home, where Domingo quickly succumbed to dementia. To his devout wife's consternation, he had always insisted that his body be cremated and for his ashes to be scattered on the waters of the reservoir where his village had once stood. That moment has now arrived, and nearly all the members of his family have travelled from their various parts of Spain to be there for the scattering of the ashes. In each chapter, we hear the thoughts of each of the family members present.

In his earlier novel, La lluvia amarilla (The Yellow Rain), Llamazares described the death of a village, as its inhabitants gradually left, family by family. He himself was born in one of the villages that were submerged by the reservoir described in the novel, and he writes with great knowledge and sensitivity about the fate of the inhabitants of those lost villages, about the diaspora of children and grandchildren, who have become separated not just from their parents and grandparents and from a particular landscape, but from an entire way of life. I found the book very moving and very true, and although the fate of villages in Britain has been slightly different, I feel sure that a British readership could relate to the lives described here, especially to the changes of attitude down the generations as families move away from a particular place and a particular way of life. Llamazares writes in a beautifully simple Spanish that would, I think, translate well into English.

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