Conciousness
Author:
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Along the lines of *Blade Runner* or some episodes of *Black Mirror*, *Conciència* (Conscience) creates a dystopian future world where life is unlike the one we know. Teresa Colom builds this future as a technologically hyper developed, a world where climate change has already reached its maximum peak of damage to all species but the human. The plot is built through flashbacks and flash-forwards between 2037 and 2090, with several chapters in between (2070, 2061-65, 2066, 2037, 2064, 2054, 2061, 2063). The novel is imbued by a deep criticism to economic interests over more ethical concerns, but does not hold a didactic tone: all human and corporate actions have consequences that are displayed on how life looks like in the future.

At the beginning of the novel, Laura Verns, main character of *Conciència*, has been dead for twenty years. Or her body has been, due to a terminal cancer—her mind is still alive and inhabits in a "system." There is a mystery around her: someone wants to disconnect her but it is unclear who or why. The novel revolves around this enigma with a few key characters: Nikolai, Laura's former lover; Mou, an occasional lover and former co-worker; Zhu, a system-savvy mysterious mind; Pierpaolo, Laura's first psychologist in the system; Benjamin, her current psychologist; and a mysterious character whose identity is never revealed. After twenty years of her joining the system, Nicolai visits her for the first time to warn her about an imminent threat that she will have to trace. Someone wants her disconnected and she will have to investigate—mainly through alternative mental channels so as to not raise suspicion in the system—why would that be.

Her successive encounters with Nikolai, Mou, Pierpaolo, and Benjamin (some of which are clandestine) help her put together a pretty unclear puzzle: her memories—some of which were erased when joining the system—are combined with her alternative thoughts to realize, in the final chapters, that her current psychologist—Benjamin—is none other than her forgotten son, Denzil, whom she had asked to forget when joining the system. Since this relationship breaks all rules in the system due to ethical conflicts, it is at the core of the reason why she must be put down/turned off—although it is not clear to the readers who is behind that decision. In an ambiguous ending, she makes all available efforts to hide this information to the system so her son can still work as a therapist in the system after she is gone.

The main plot is not as important as how the novel builds a vibrant and well-defined image of this new world with very specific details: chapter are devoted to constructing precise episodes of this future history with gut-wrenching descriptions. 2037, for example, is the year when the four seasons disappeared from language: all animals and plants died with no apparent reason, causing a tremendous feeding problem all over the world. Daily life is also described with surgical precision: from what clothes, streets, and homes look like, to how appearances matter so much as to impact people's lives like drugs (there is a drug called "Likes" that destroyed the life of Laura's father), this

new world brings all sorts of ethical concerns into question. Three main companies hold an “oligopoly” over the systems that allow people to keep living after their bodies die, called “continuation lifes” (“vides de continuació”). By the year of the first chapter, 2090, several changes were made to these systems, due to technical problems occurred in previous years mostly connected to inherently human characteristics that were not foreseen by engineers and designers. Memory, for example, and human relationships play a key role in all these ethical issues: what the novel calls “The crisis of the Marks” (La crisi dels Marks) was the massive failure of the first attempt to create “lives of continuation” because memories were untouched and living people had power over the minds in the system.

In this dystopia, Teresa Colom dares to imagine a very dark future where intrinsically human aspects challenge even the best planned of worlds: it is a novel that will be very welcome by readers looking for alternative realities in which the technological future does not bring all the answers. The female main character is an asset. The ostensibly imprecise location of the novel makes it very easy to translate for an English-language readership, and the mother-son component might be a distinctive feature that *Conciència* is putting in the center of the stage.