Guillem
Author:
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Guillem

Guillem is a hard-hitting and highly original novel about the murder of Guillem Agulló i Salvador by far-right skinheads in Montanejos in 1993, which won the Valencia Negra Best Novel Prize in 2020. Using a stunning blend of newspaper reportage, family interviews, court transcripts and fictional narrative, Cadenes details the events and background leading up to the fateful event, and the trial by media and miscarriage of justice that followed and are still being felt today.

Guillem Agulló i Salvador was a young Valencian, talented swimmer and active member of the independentist and revolutionary political organisation Maulets (of which the author was a founder). One weekend while away with his friends, he was pointed out by someone who knew him by sight as an anti-Nazi activist and was set upon by five young men involved in far-right organisations and stabbed to death, his heart pierced by a knife. At the trial two years later, four of the five youths charged were absolved of all crimes, and only one, who confessed to the stabbing, was sentenced to fourteen years in prison. He was released after four years for good behaviour.

One of the strengths of this novel is Cadenes' decision to eschew a straight, linear narrative in favour of a multi-voiced chronicle. Anecdotes from Guillem's family are interspersed with court transcripts and articles from the press, and this plurality of voices throughout the novel serves to highlight how a murder affects not only a victim's family, but ripples out through their wider community too, and this style makes the impact of the story all the greater.

The other highlight of this novel for me was the character development. Guillem, as the titular victim, is the absent-yet-present heart of the story that grows ever more vivid in the reader's mind as the novel unfolds.

While this novel is deeply rooted in Spanish society (and Valencia in particular), the rising visibility of the far-right across Europe affords it an increasingly urgent relevance in translation. Guillem doesn't pretend to have a neutral perspective - the author is an avowed radical - but it is a highly original, impactful novel which I highly recommend for translation into English.

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