El valor de la memoria: de la cárcel de Ventas al campo de Ravensbruck.
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El valor de la memoria: de la cárcel de Ventas al campo de Ravensbruck. The Value of Memory. From Ventas Prison to Ravensbruck Camp

'El valor de la memoria' is a non-fiction memoir by the Spanish resistance fighter Mercedes Núñez Targa, who died in 1986. Published in 2016, it combines her two previously published memoirs: "Ventas Prison" (originally written in Galician, first published in France in 1967) and "Destined for the Crematorium" (originally written in Catalan, first published in Spain in 1980). This volume, compiled by her son, also includes photographs, documents and letters from the author, as well as two introductions and a brief biography to provide context.

Born into a wealthy family, from a young age Núñez Targa became interested in communist politics, joining the Unified Socialist Youth, the Unified Socialist Party of Catalonia, and even working as secretary to Pablo Neruda when he worked for the Chilean consulate. Active in the Communist movement throughout the Civil War, in 1939 she was finally arrested, charged with "joining the rebellion", and initially sentenced to death. This is later revised to 12 years imprisonment, and it is here the book begins, in March 1940.

Núñez Targa is a deeply talented writer, presenting her experiences in a clear-headed and frank manner. This is not to say she lacks emotion in her writing. Her experiences are harrowing and heartwarming in turn, and she has a great skill for drawing the characters of the women she meets. She is excellent at creating tension, even when we know the end result – she won't be shot at Ventas, or gassed at Leipzig, and the war will end, but nevertheless we are still on the edge of our seats. While the book is unquestionably a difficult read, it is still shot through with optimism, demonstrated through its pervading sense of solidarity and forgiveness. Núñez Targa ultimately seeks to deliver a testimony on behalf of the many people she met in these terrible places, and she certainly does them justice.

… Her focus on solidarity and perseverance in the face of hardships makes this a book with fairly universal appeal… To have survived both life in a Spanish Civil War prison and a Nazi concentration camp is an extraordinary experience, and Núñez Targa's story should definitely be known by more people.

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