La marca del meridiano

AUTHOR: Lorenzo Silva
PUBLISHER: Planeta
GENRE: Police procedural/mystery
READER'S NAME: Sara Martínez
DATE: July 1, 2013
ON A SCALE FROM 1 - 10 (WITH 10 BEING THE HIGHEST SCORE) HOW WOULD YOU RATE THIS BOOK? 8

Lorenzo Silva’s latest installment in the Bevilacqua & Chamorro series, La marca del meridiano, is a solid police procedural. Rubén Bevilacqua narrates the investigation into the horrific murder of former mentor and retired fellow officer subteniente Robles; an investigation that takes him into his own troubled past to ponder the path he has chosen. His path is that of a straight-edge, dedicated and competent officer who navigates the convoluted Spanish public safety bureaucracy with ease. Bevilacqua engages in a lot of interior monologue but keeps the secret he shares with the victim until it comes out with the investigation. The dialogue flows naturally; in some scenes while in Barcelona, he incorporates Catalan phrases.

Silva has published both fiction and nonfiction: He is most comfortable telling stories and has published some award-winners (this novel won the Premio Planeta 2012). It is a compelling tale that portrays the police as the fragile boundary that protects civilization from chaos.

Police procedurals are a popular subgenre in the U.S. and novels about police corruption are certainly popular as well. Women readers will appreciate the prevalence of capable, professional women characters at every level from guardias to brigadas to judges. Some female readers may lament the scarcity of romance and physical passion. All readers will appreciate Bevilacqua’s relationship with his team - respectful, friendly and bantering but deadly serious when necessary.

While this procedural would be a good choice for translation into English, some consideration should be given to translating the series from the beginning. Many U.S. readers will not begin a series in the middle and although this novel can be read as a stand-alone, readers will miss the back story and history between the main characters. The hierarchies and bureaucracy of the Spanish policing structure will be a challenge for readers to follow. Some readers may feel robbed by an ending that doesn’t offer an emotional pay-off [while the bad guy and his goons are killed; they are not brought in by Bevilacqua or the police and their bosses seem to be off the hook or at least outside of their jurisdiction]. Others may miss the adrenaline and suspense of most American mysteries.

However, many popular procedurals have been translations from foreign countries and cultures. Examples of popular mystery authors that have been successfully translated into English from Spanish include Arturo Pérez-Reverte, Alicia Giménez-Bartlett, Carmen Posadas, Paco Ignacio Taibo II (México) and Leonardo Padura (Cuba). Bevilacqua and Chamorro’s relationship could be the inverse of Giménez-Bartlett’s duo, Delicado & Garzón. Brazilian author Luis Alfredo García-Roza’s Inspector Espinosa mysteries are another example of a police procedural successfully translated into English that are very similar to Silva’s Bevilacqua series. U.S. readers will recognize many references from American popular music and movies.

Silva’s foray into police corruption and the limits of integrity when confronted with economic hardship and the prospect of easy money is a unique take on these questions confronted by public safety officials in any culture.

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