

The Dream of Reason

Author:

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This 416-page noir novel with a twist —the central character is a feminist and liberated female detective— continues González Harbour's hardboiled saga, in which commissary María Ruiz will solve another Kafkaian case filled with labyrinths and dead-end streets. This time the setting will be the city of Madrid oscillating between the historical and the contemporary. Familiar places and unexplored dark corners, from the Manzanares river where a young female victim has been found chained to a railing, to the M-30 highway tunnels, bring to the reader a conspicuous and powerful portrait of a nation in peril.

Spain's capital, as allegory of what is wrong with the country, will be the ultimate central protagonist. In this sense, what distinguishes González Harbour's work from other Spanish women writers—Clara Peñalver's trilogy following detective Ada Levy, or the detective Petra Delicado series by Alicia Giménez-Bartlett— is the critical view on Spain's political, economic, and social problems, thus, engaging the reader beyond the stylistic nuances of the genre.

"Por la miseria que albergaban las tripas de Madrid y porque esa miseria tuviera como anfitrión un niño de andar seguro y semblante solitario que a todas luces no procedía de la pobreza, la ignorancia y la necesidad, aunque moraba en ellas. Como Sara Muñoz, habitante de una casa okupa gélida y desasistida a pesar de su estatus en la universidad (p. 129.)" (Due to the misfortunes that Madrid's guts harbored, and because they were part of a child with an assured walk and a lonely countenance, who clearly did not come from poverty, ignorance and need, although he dwelt in them. Like Sara Muñoz, inhabitant of an icy and neglected squatter house despite her status at the university") —points out the narrator. In this way, she brings to the center of discourse what has been persistently left on the backburner by those who control and impose their agendas, that is to say, more opportunities of a better life for the new generations, trap in a circle of unemployment or subemployment, and in some cases, a life cut short as it was with Sara Muñoz, the victim of abusive men from her teenage years to her murder.

The failures of a capitalistic system that devours its children has, as in Francisco de Goya's painting, a privileged place within the story, creating an interesting parallelism between his black paintings and the blackness of contemporary Spain where, as Goya himself stated, "el sueño de la razón produce monstruos" (reason's dream produces monsters.) In a quest "to vindicate Goya's dark art" (p. 337) the detective opens her own Pandora's Box, confronting the monsters of her past and the curses of her present, probably to be continued in the next volume of the series.

El sueño de la razón will appeal to an American reader interested in the crime genre, in the range of

writers such as Tess Gerritsen and her detective Jane Rizzoli series, or Karin Slaughter's Grant County series with detective Lena Adams as one of the main characters. Also, to those attracted to the ties between Goya's art, noir fiction and the Madrid unknown to vacationers, in these times of uncertainty and unforeseen threats.