Kingwood
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The biggest danger in a protracted crisis like the one Venezuela faces is that people forget what they used to be. Art has a purpose in such a crisis. Art in all its forms, and the written word in particular, is an antidote to forgetting.

In each of the 12 short stories, Venezuelan author Antonio López Ortega opens a porthole into the minds of 12 different men in transit: their sense of self, the *"Who am I?"* at the center of every human mind (which is inextricably linked to language and place). Though each narrative stands independently, as a whole they are linked through movement-- movement between physical places, mental spaces, and time.

The characters' physical transit through the real country, from Maiquetía to Caracas to Cabo Negro and other geographical spaces in Margarita present an opportunity to capture the country as a real place and yes, record the deterioration. A tension is palpable between geographic transport by foot, trains, planes, and even *machitos* and stagnation. It is a metaphor for the nation that was, the nation that could be, and what feels like the mire of the now.

The movement between each character's present state and the spaces of his mental life-- his thoughts, creations, dreams, and memories--present an opportunity to capture the country as an ideal. There is movement through the past and present, from individual memories of spaces and people, to what should be the collective memory of the artistic cannon. Reverón, Cristóbal Rojas, Arturo Michelena, Eugenio Montejo are among those artists dusted and rediscovered in these stories. If not overtly nation-building, Ortega's work at least attempts to awaken the national consciousness with the treasures of the Venezuelan cultural legacy, and to raise the national conversation from the coarse to the enduring and excellent.

This is not a book for passive envelopment. Rather, like the best pieces of art, it invites its audience to interact with it repeatedly, to contemplate, observe, and consider. It elevates. Dissertations could be written on this intellectual work--on the the purpose of art, the nature of language, and philosophies of being; on the opposing themes of life and death, light and dark, the unconscious and the conscious mind. But at its essence, it attempts to rescue a people from the powerful currents of a mental Lethe, from unmindfulness, forgetfulness, and oblivion.

It is a necessary book for this in-between time in Venezuela. It is a timely invitation to an American audience where the national conversation stands to be raised.