Prologue for a War
Author:
Iván Repila
Reader's name:
Danielle Maxson

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ON A SCALE FROM 1 - 10 (10 being the highest score) how would you rate this book?10

Prólogo para una guerra **(Prologue to a War) tells the story of architect Emil Zarco, who has received his first commission for a project – an entire neighborhood – to be built in the city where he lives. As he becomes more involved in the project, which is meant to express his vision of the destiny of humankind, Emil's own life disintegrates around him. He loses touch with others, even co-workers and Oona, the woman he lives with and loves. As he seems to descend into madness, his primary human contacts become merely physical and mechanical, and his world is laden with nightmares full of violence and death, reflecting the pessimism he builds into his project.**

In contrast to Emil and curiously linked to him is the character of El Mudo (The Mute), a man who stopped speaking after a tragic loss. Accompanied by a dog he rescued from an abusive situation, he spends his days traveling through the city on foot, learning about the city itself and the lives of the people who live there. El Mudo becomes obsessed with Oona and spends much of his time following her and learning her routines. Eventually El Mudo gains a friend, a woman named only H (spelled Hache in the text). She in turn tells others about El Mudo's lifestyle and draws to them a community of fellow travelers. The trajectory of the novel sets up an inevitable meeting and reckoning between the two men, with Oona weaving in and out of both their stories.

The book itself is divided into five main parts, each named for a phase of an architectural construction project, plus an appendix of free verse poems written by Emil and collected in a red notebook that he owns. The five parts of the novel are themselves broken into short sections of a few pages each. Each section is numbered, but the numbers do not proceed logically in order as they would in most books. The author uses them to perform a variety of functions. Similar passages in different parts of the book, for example, carry the same number. These numbers also differentiate between Emil's narrative and El Mudo's, and some of the later sections are numbered in reverse order to count down to the final, climactic confrontation between the two main characters.

The interplay between these parts, and the contrasting experiences and reactions of the two main characters, allow the author to explore a variety of themes that will resonate with

readers, including the nature of urban living and changes wrought with the passage of time, the effects of government involvement in the daily lives of residents, and individuals'responses to forces beyond their control.

An American audience will not see many specific elements of either North American or Spanish culture, and in this case that could be a good thing. The urban environment Repila has created can be read as European but is not particularly tied to any one place. It is more of an Everytown where he explores the themes listed above. Rather than link his story to a recognizable geography, Repila has populated it with references to architectural details that echo the construction of Emil's master work in the construction of the novel's descriptions and plot points.He also references art historianswhose who will not be recognized by a lay audience, but researching each personality and their importance is not necessary for a reader who simply wants to follow the plot.

Prólogo para una guerra **is not a typical mass market paperback, but rather a densely constructed story in a somewhat baroque style that will reward readers who are willing to give it a chance. This is the third novel by author Iván Repila, who has had one short novel published in English (The Boy Who Stole Attila's Horse). Sophie Hughes' translation of that text has been consistently praised, which suggests that another book by the same author could also translate well. As with all texts, there are a couple of areas that could present technical challenges, such as the name of El Mudo's friend, H. Scattered through the story are references to what the letter H, pronounced Hache in Spanish, could stand for:** ***huella (footprint), huérfano (orphan),*** **and others. Finding a way to preserve the meanings of these terms with words all starting with the same letter will be difficult, but careful use of synonyms or changing the name to a different letter may help. All in all,** ***Prólogo para una guerra*** **is a timely work with an intriguing structure, and translating it would offer the US audience a type of story that it does not often see.**

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