MEAT
Author:
Rosa Montero
Reader's name:
Lisa M. Rodríguez

READER'S NAME:Lisa M. Rodriguez

DATE:April 18, 2018

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

Rosa Montero is well-known in the Spanish-speaking world for both her fiction and non-fiction writing. She is from Madrid and has been writing for the influential newspaper *El País* since the 1970s. *La carne* is her fifteenth novel. Montero's work also includes at least nine collections of essays as well as scripts for both theater and television, and she has received dozens of awards in acclamation of her decades of work as a writer.

La carne was published in Spanish in 2016, and translations into Portuguese, French, and Bulgarian already exist.

This novel is relatively short, just 216 pages in the current Spanish paperback version, and the title translates roughly to *Flesh*. The protagonist is Soledad Alegre, a Spanish woman who works as a curator of art exhibits. She is unmarried and childless, and she has just turned sixty. The plot revolves around the consequences of her lack of acceptance of traditionally accepted limitations of age.

La carne, however, is not a novelized version of Nora Ephron's *I Feel Bad About My Neck*. Rosa Montero weaves the themes of sexuality, age, responsibility, and risk into a page-turner. The story begins as Soledad makes the decision to hire an escort for an evening at the opera. She hopes to make a former lover jealous.

Soledad continues to hire the young escort, resulting in a series of complexities, some of them humorous and some of them dangerous. At times the reader wonders how Soledad could possibly have made such poor decisions. As the story gathers speed, the true nature of Soledad's supposed mistakes and their consequences are revealed. The reader glimpses and then gradually obtains a full picture of her courage and her humanity.

When Soledad is faced with truly difficult circumstances, every reader, male and female, will experience self-recognition in the kinds of choices Soledad makes and the reasons underlying them. Soledad is a woman of sixty who uses her body, her mind, and her spirit to live life to the fullest. Her choices may not be typical, but her motivations are simply, and fully, human.

Montero's prose style in this novel is uncomplicated. Sentences are relatively short, with more

grammatical coordination than subordination. Montero is focused on Soledad's story even as the broader themes develop.

The vocabulary Montero uses is from everyday life in large Spanish cities. What is stunning about the prose and dialogue is her ability to provide enough visual detail for the reader to vividly experience the action, even as the protagonist's concerns move from introspection and daily life to dangerous adventure.

Sex matters to Soledad, and we are invited to smile indulgently at her needs and then to recognize them as universal. Her *Flesh* holds the energy that moves Soledad forward.

Rosa Montero makes a brief appearance in the novel in the role of herself, the famous journalist and novelist, a wink to the reader. The dozen or so other characters are believable representatives of the groups to which they belong. Everyone has met people like them, and the reader can imagine the backstories as Soledad deals with an aggressively ambitious but woefully under-experienced colleague, a hardworking young mother with dreams of a better life, or a wealthy woman who uses social events as opportunities to raise her own status by "humble bragging" about the difficulties of juggling picture-perfect teenage children and an enviable career.

The character who cannot be easily placed into a pigeonhole is Soledad herself. Her desire to live, and to live as a physical being, is not dependent on her job, a spouse, or children. She is herself and she depends on herself. And she is a marvel, in spite of her flaws.

*La carne*is well-worth a translation into English for a U.S. audience. No adaptations or changes would be required. Soledad is a modern adult woman, and the primary context of middle and upper class Spanish society depicted would pose no difficulty whatsoever to U.S. readers.

Check out the online HTML CheatSheet and save the link because you might need it while composing content for a web page.