Lux
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Reader's name:
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- **STORY LINE, STYLE OF WRITING**
- **PREDICTABILITY AND VARIETY OF PLOTLINES AND HOW THEY BLEND TOGETHER**

In the beginning, it wasn't the word, but the excitement;" with these gripping words the narrator prepares to lay out the context for the novel and introduces its first narrative strand, the story of a contemporary society emerging from a pandemic that took the lives of one in ten; where right wing elements blame immigrants for bringing the plague, feel laws are too soft on criminals, that government is corrupt, and ethnic separatists want to tear the country apart. This is the setting from which the novel's many narrative strands develop: The narrator's personal tragedy, anger, struggles with identity, and his role and culpability in the events that unfold; the blueprint and players - the masterminds, the opportunists, the thug enforcers and the charismatic everyman patsies who are the face of the movement – in the construction of an ultra-conservative populist movement and government; the subsequent, inevitable erosion of human and democratic civil rights and the rule of law; the narrator's relationship with a young gay man and his world; the narrator's relationship with the young man's mother. With the narrator as the constant in each one, primarily as an onlooker, not a principal actor, Cuenca Sandoval skillfully grows each narrative strand independently then masterfully braids them together in a crescendo of events that takes place during the first of what is the twenty-year span of the novel.

- **WHETHER THE OVERALL IDEA SEEMS DIFFERENT AND UNUSUAL**
- **WHETHER IT DEALS WITH A COMMON THEME BUT TREATS IT IN AN ORIGINAL WAY**

Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* (1924) is credited with being the first dystopian novel. Those with which I am familiar are generally situated in some more or less remote future, and have a fantastical or science fiction character. *LUX* flips the genre on its head as the novel is not a projection of a dystopian future, but a memoir written some twenty years hence looking back on an imaginary Spain's (identified by the narrator as the first quarter of the 21st century) devolution into an anti immigrant, anti-LGBTQ+, misogynist, white supremacist society with a fervent ultra-conservative Christian sector. As in other novels of the dystopia genre, the protagonist narrator is himself a victim, but in *LUX* he is also an insider in the movement. While not a perpetrator, the narrator stands just outside the inner circle; he is an enabler who fervently believes the means, as terrible as they are, justify the ends.

Dystopian, definitely, fiction, barely. There is nothing fantastical or sci-fi about the *LUX* world of

fake news, alternative facts, technologically manipulated social media, digital tracking and spying, conspiracy and white replacement theories, conversion therapy for sex and gender orientations deemed aberrant, a nationalism where, “if you don’t agree with me, you’re a traitor to the country.”

- **WHETHER THE SUBJECT MATTER WILL TRAVEL WELL IN THE US**
- **SIMILARITIES TO OTHER POPULAR BOOKS**

It’s not a question of if the subject matter of *LUX* will “travel well” in the United States, it’s already here. US Americans are already living in a LUX world, fighting or supporting it, and we have been, intensively, over the last several years. The LUX party had its flags, in the US it’s red hats emblazoned with the acronym of the party motto.

I found myself literally shaking my head as I read *LUX*. It felt like I was reading the news feed on my iPhone, not a novel. I talked about it with everyone around me, all the ways the novel mirrors present-day reality. I do not belong to a book club, but I would jump at the opportunity to discuss the book’s themes, warning lessons, and details such as the parable of the hunter, the dog and the fox’s den, or why the narrator refers to his son as “Hector, tamer of Horses,” a title historically assigned to the Prince of Troy.

LUX has had the same sort of impact on me - although even more jolting and urgent – as did reading Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985) and *The Testaments* (2019.) The former has been tremendously influential, inspiring a TV series and the iconic Handmaid cape and bonnet worn by protesters all over the world in the name of women’s rights.

- **THE PLAUSIBILITY OF THE DIALOGUE**

As a memoir, this unapologetic confession is written in the first person and is fundamentally a monologue. Dialogue exchanges occur as indirect reported speech. Heard through the filter of the narrator’s subjective selection and placement of exchanges, the voices are nonetheless distinct and consistent (vocabulary and manner of expression, description of accompanying behaviors) with the *persona* of the interlocutors’ whose speech he reports. The narrator claims at times to quote his interlocutors verbatim and presumes to be certain he knows how they would think and feel. This literary approach moves the various story lines along at a pace that is swift, but feels natural and continuously piques the reader’s interest.

- **SUITABILITY FOR TRANSLATION**

LUX absolutely lends itself to translation into English. I did not identify a single word, culturally-based concept or allusion in the text that will require special maneuvering by a translator.

The novel’s Latin title, and the phrases and quotes from classical Latin literature can be included in an English translation exactly as they appear in the Spanish language original, and to the same effect.

- **THE AUTHOR AND HIS PREVIOUS WORKS**

I cannot address LUX vis à vis the body of Cuenca Salazar’s work as I was not familiar with the writer before I received the book. I want to learn more about him, and have tried but been frustrated because the Internet gives up little information (perhaps a limited digital presence is his choice?) beyond a few biographical facts and that he has been publishing prolifically, especially poetry, since at least 2005 and been recognized with several distinguished awards for his writing.