La bajamar
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La bajamar [Low Tide] (Penguin Random House, 2022) is a moving fictional account of three generations of women—grandmother, daughter, granddaughter—as they open up about their pasts and motherhood. At the same time, each woman's perceptions of and relationship with their own mother were formed through their experiences as daughters, experiences that have largely gone unshared, unprocessed until now.

Author Aroa Moreno Durán is known for her successful 2017 historical novel *La hija del comunista*. *La bajamar*, released this winter, has been well-received in Spain. The novel is engrossing and each narrator offers perspective on the zeitgeist of her corresponding time and place in Spain, and above all on the universal complexity of motherhood. The epigenetic weight of memory is heavy in this novel, told in the alternating voices of each woman as they gradually reveal their experiences and, by doing so, open the possibility of a more healed future.

Adirane is a forty-year-old mother of one struggling with her role in her own nuclear family, which she has left behind in Madrid without explanation. She travels to her hometown on an estuary in northern Spain to record her nearly bedridden grandmother, Ruth, as she recounts her experiences as a child during the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939). Adirane's childhood home is shared with her estranged mother, Adriana, Ruth's caretaker.

As if opening a Pandora's box, Adirane wants to draw out her grandmother's story while she's still alive and lucid, to add to the historical record of their gritty town and of a generation. As she does so, she has the opportunity to repair or give closure to her own strained relationships. "No estoy bien," she says—she's unwell, though she can't quite articulate the cause of her malaise despite what seems from the outside to be a relatively comfortable life in the capital with her partner and daughter.

Juxtaposed with the current generation's relative stability, Ruth and her sister were part of a group of children evacuated by boat in the 1930s and sent to live with host families in France and Belgium for the duration of the war. Separated from their parents and brother who stayed behind in Spain, Ruth and her sister are thrown into temporary new lives that opened their eyes to the misery of their hometown, one sister resigning herself upon return to a traditional life in Spain, and the other longing for more opportunities. The impact of what they experienced while abroad—and what went on in their absence—reverberated through future generations and relationships.

Ruth's nuanced stories give the reader a true feeling for the era, and in contrast, this novel offers less factual information that would situate the other two narrators within their own historic contexts. For instance, we can infer that the Basque conflict was the backdrop to Adriana's relationship with

Adirane’s father, a presumed domestic terrorist, though this is not made explicit.

Historical and collective memory has become relevant in Spanish society following a shaking off of *Pacto del Olvido* [Pact of Forgetting] that followed the death of dictator Francisco Franco. This is increasingly reflected in contemporary literary and film production, such as the documentary *El silencio de otros* [The Silence of Others] (2018) and *Madres paralelas* [Parallel Mothers] (2021), the latest from Pedro Almodóvar. Indeed in many nations around the world, literary and artistic expression in myriad forms helps us grapple with our collective pasts, whether they involve the legacies of war, slavery, or imperialism.

The more the reader learns about each woman’s life, the more engrossing the book becomes and the more invested we are in the healing of each character through telling, listening, and understanding. What is *not* said, and the absent perspectives of tertiary characters such as Adirane’s partner or her absent father, is just as important as what’s revealed through the scant dialogue. Interestingly, much of what’s exchanged, verbally or emotionally, is recounted from the perspective of another narrator.

There’s a sense of heaviness in the air in the port town that is reflected in the stories of these three women, and in Adirane’s inability to fathom her own motherhood in a spirit worthy of her daughter, aptly named Luz (Light). Despite it all, the reader hopes that in shedding light on the lived experiences of her mother and grandmother, Adirane will be able to crack the door open to the possibility of forgiveness, a balm for the sadness passed down through generations under literal and figurative pacts of silence. When the waters recede at low tide, what remains is still silent.