La nostalgia de la mujer anfibio
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I enjoyed this book and found it to be original, insightful, and interesting from a historical, literary and philosophical point of view. At the heart of the story is a shipwreck that occurred off the coast in Galicia in 1921 and its enduring influence on the residents' lives.

Set in rural Galicia, in northwestern Spain, the novel would give English-reading audiences a look at a part of Spain that is likely unfamiliar to them. Words in *gallego*, the local language, are sprinkled throughout, which I think readers would find interesting and reveal the area's cultural and linguistic ties to Portugal. The descriptions of local customs also reveal the history of Celtic influence. The novel's timeframe spans the 1920s through the mid-70s, just after the death of Franco, providing a perspective on the political and social shifts Spanish society was undergoing during that period. Especially interesting is the discussion of local views on the first elections to follow the dictatorship.

The writing draws on elements of magical realism but is not steeped in these convention, using the device judiciously to complement surreal elements of the abrupt changes in Spanish society (the arrival of a mysterious stranger calling himself "Ziggy Stardust," exposing the villagers to the mores and hippie/glam style of the 1970s) or for character development (the bats that fly out of the main character's tangled hair, which she has never cut, once she finally reveals the secret that has shaped the course of her entire life).

The novel's main theme is the power of memories, both real and distorted, to influence how we view ourselves and our lives. On the day of the shipwreck, Lucha, the main character, whose wedding is later that day, has a short but passionate encounter with a survivor - an Englishman - she comes across on the beach. For the rest of her life, she clings to that memory and the sense that she could have pursued an alternate, more fulfilling life, had she thrown convention to the winds and fled the prospect of a loveless marriage to escape to England with him. Unbeknownst to her, however, her new husband, Manuel – alerted by Lucha's mother – hunted down the Englishman that very afternoon, murdered him, and threw his body into a well, where it is discovered decades later by a similarly ill-fated intruder (the erstwhile Ziggy Stardust). Manuel later perpetuates his wife's delusions by writing her letters purporting to be from the Englishman, recruiting the postman and local schoolteacher into the deception. By the end of the novel, this lie is exposed, along with the uncomfortable truth that the villagers, hailed as heroes for rescuing survivors of the shipwreck, also plundered their possessions and even murdered some. This dark secret casts a shadow over their lives, and they eventually band together to keep the past safely buried.

The only reason I am not giving this book a score of "10" is that, even given the overtones of magical realism, certain elements of the plot stretch credulity or are inconsistent. For example, when Lucha begins receiving letters from the Englishman, she believes they are real because he refers to her by

the nickname he coined for her on the beach, "*mujer anfibio*" (Amphibious Woman), after seeing how dependent her life – and Galicia in general - is on the sea. How could Manuel, the real author of the letters, have known this? Nevertheless, this is a masterfully written, engrossing novel; in fact, I found it so intriguing that I plan to look for further titles by this author, whose body of work incudes other novels and short stories set in Galicia. I wholeheartedly recommend it for translation.