

che, el plenilunio aporta una luz extraña, cambiante pero clarificadora, que no asegura el futuro, pero ilumina y ayuda a comprender el presente.

Rica, compleja y plena de significado, *Plenilunio* es una novela que corrobora el espléndido momento de Antonio Muñoz Molina.

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Soledad Puértolas. *Una vida inesperada*. Barcelona, Anagrama, 1997, 318 pp.

«Más de una vez he dejado a la mitad, y hasta en sus primeras páginas un libro de estos [«seleccionados»], porque no soy una de esas personas que tienen que acabar todo lo que empiezan, y me produce una gran liberación dejar de repente algo que no me gusta nada» (*Una vida inesperada*, 205)

If, like Soledad Puértolas's nameless narrator, I had stopped reading *Una vida inesperada* in the early pages because I was not liking it at all, I would have missed what was ultimately a very satisfying, intelligent, and enjoyable novel. Fortunately I *am* one of those people who have to finish what they start, and I had promised to write this review.

Slogging through the first fifty pages in which the narrator tells of her early idolatry of Olga, a popular older girl in her elementary school who befriended the shy, sickly younger narrator and later permitted her to sit in on the most fashionable tertulia at the University, I thought, «Josús, two hundred and sixty-eight pages of whining to go! We were all shy, unloved, and unsexy back in school. Get over it!» As someone who was a dead ringer for Dawn Wiener in my callow youth (though not as popular or well-dressed) I had little sympathy. By page one hundred, after hearing of the narrator's disastrous first marriage, disappointing affairs with two of Olga's lovers, and fragmented, unhappy cohabitation with a man who loved her but committed the crime of agreeing to support her and her child by another man while she stayed home and kept house, I thought I had heard this story too many times before in North American feminist fiction of the seventies and was bored spitless at tales of «how men ruined my life». Get over it, I thought again. But halfway through the book, when a sinecure as director of a library falls in the narrator's lap, and she discovers the joys of swimming at lunchtime every day, there was something suddenly compelling in her repeated insistences that these two pillars were «resolving» her life, keeping her from falling into an abyss of depressed hypochondria. I began to re-evaluate the pages already read, turning back to read a passage here and there. Puértolas certainly sketches deft portraits of student activists and intellectuals through the tertulias scenes at the cafe «Somos». Many writ-

ers of Puértolas's «*promoción*» have explored the disappointments of the generation that thought would change the world, and there is delicious satire in reducing its best and brightest women to the opportunistic Olga on one extreme —always scrambling onto the winning cart— and the agoraphobic narrator on the other —a woman under whose nose we sometimes want to place a mirror to see if it fogs up. The vignettes of egotistical novelists, apologetic painters, hippies turned haute bourgeoisie, *niñatos* turned heroine addicts, and gray bureaucratic workers are also incisive. The relationship with the narrator's son, Guillermo, is touchingly frawn, and Puértolas fashions the woman's psychology convincingly, I grudgingly admitted. But why had she *wanted* to? I was still impatient with the scenes of the woman waiting desperately for this or that man to call, of her incessant navel gazing, her pathological «I» trouble. I was bored at seeing her world through such a distorted lens that barely even permitted the recounting of a snatch of conversation. I was exasperated at the narrator's saying over and over, as through sucking after sympathy, that her friends were slipping away, that she clung to the comforting regimentation of a job and exercise routine that for the most part were hollow rituals. When Colometa obsessively paces up and down the corridors of her house at night or flees from the company of other housewives at the Parc Güell, we figure she has earned her neuroses *a pulso* in the war. But what is this narrator's excuse? Isn't she a little too quick to threaten reaching for the funnel when she has a kitchen full of food and parents willing to help her out in a pinch? Does the world really need one more novel in which a woman who lives without a man is portrayed as a neurotic loser? Do we really need to be reminded that life is made up largely of meaningless trivia?

I want to read books about people who struggle for creative solutions in the face of their existential crises or at least fail in an interesting way, stories by people like Günter Grass who rethought Camus's Myth of Sisyphus to say that even if the rock keeps rolling back, the world would be a worse place if we never tried to push it up at all. Hell, I want more from women novelists today! I want to read about people who invent pulleys and fulcra and who engineer vital solutions to get the boulder higher and keep it up there longer.

But by page one hundred and fifty I noticed that when I got up to answer the phone, I no longer found a dozen excuses to put off returning to my reading, but hurried back (lest in my absence Olga turn to hawking Porcelanosa on TV!). I was fighting with the text, but enjoying the wrestling match. I found myself admiring and warming to Puértolas's difficult discipline in creating a world, stone by stone, through the eyes of a narrator who vainly attempts to avoid the unbearable heaviness of being human through escape, evasion, hiding out, slipping away —finding instead an equally unbearable lightness.

By the last hundred pages, I had stopped wishing for the narrator to

«snap out of it» into conventional action, and accepted her limitations, just as I began to accept that her pains and illnesses might be real, not imaginary. Appreciation washed over me for the skillfull, incremental repetition of phrases and images that gradually acquired new meaning. By the final pages, turned as avidly as any in recent years, I was steeped in the narrator's gradual realization that she had not avoided life, but chosen a life that kept her from death, from the need for suicide or other, slower self destruction. Her bags of prescription medicines and endless laps of the pool in the end were no more pathetic than the survival strategies most of us employ every day. She, like the novel, appeared much more ingenious after scrutiny than on first view.

*Una vida inesperada* ultimately delivers an unexpected novel, through an intricate narrative process in which, as in life itself, the importance of events can only be understood in retrospect. Just as we may be surprised to discover depth and loveability in an initially off-putting person whom we have nevertheless taken the time to know, we who persist here are sure to be overtaken by the pleasure of the text. Like the narrator, we know, «no hay nada mejor que estar leyendo un libro interesante... lo que consuela y lo que reconforta» (205).

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Javier García Sánchez. *La vida fósil*, Barcelona, Ediciones B, 1996, 365 pp.

Cualquiera que haya frecuentado la literatura de Javier García Sánchez sabrá que es un escritor tan apasionado (le gusta recordar la máxima hegeliana que afirma que sólo de la pasión puede nacer algo grande) y sincero, como arriesgado y ambicioso. Y aunque todas esas características no aseguran la calidad de una obra, entre su ya abundante producción literaria, cuenta con aciertos como *La dama del viento sur* (1985), *Última carta de amor...* (1986), *El Alpe d'Huez* (1994), sin olvidar un puñado de buenos cuentos. No es poco si aceptamos el segundo juicio valorativo y no olvidamos el primero.

*La vida fósil*, su nueva novela, está compuesta por el torrencial discurso de un quiosquero de cincuenta años que, desde el solitario reducido en el que desempeña su trabajo (un quiosco llamado «Europa» y enclavado en una estación de trenes, en el que se expende prensa, tabaco y chucherías varias), como si se tratara de un encuadrado puesto de observación, perora contra todo. Así, se nos muestra su concepción binaria del mundo y sus conflictivas relaciones con su peculiar familia, sus clientes, con el mundo en general y consigo mismo.

Plantea el texto diversas cuestiones de sumo interés. Llama la atención, en primer lugar, el punto de vista que adopta: una primera persona disfrazada de tercera. Quizás el discurso hubiera funcionado mejor