Cristina Morales

Easy Reading

Lectura fácil

Presented by: Marta Gburzyńska

The novel *Lectura fácil* (*Easy reading*) was published in 2018 by Cristina Morales distinguishing her on Spanish literary scene. The novel was awarded Premio Nacional de Narrativa, a prize handed out annually by the Spanish Ministry of Culture. The nomination sparked some surprise as Cristina Morales' work criticizes ferociously institutions and points out flaws and hypocrisy of democracy. Set in contemporary Barcelona, the novel tells the story of four women who struggle to find their place in a new city after escaping from a centre for persons with disabilities. Presenting social service not only as caregiving institution, but also a source of violence, the novel provides a glimpse into the world of anarchist movements as an alternative way of living.

Nati, Ángels, Marga and Patricia live in a social housing situated in a prestigious spot in Barcelona. All of them are diagnosed with intellectual disability and they are allowed to live together under the conditions imposed by social service – participating in integrative events, creative workshops and self-governance meetings. However, deep down each of them prefers to spend their free time independently – Nati is a devoted dancer and ferocious activist, Ángels writes novel on WhatsApp chat, Marga seeks sexual experiences and Patricia watches TV all day long. Meanwhile, social service expects appreciation and gratitude for all the integrative activities it offers, the main characters of the novel perceive it rather as an unsolicited burden and tiresome obligations. They just want to exist and fulfil their basic necessities, however the system expects them to follow certain rules. Therefore, the novel raises critical questions: Is it possible to live outside the social contract? To what extent do democracies apply violent measures to guarantee the participation of the citizens? The plot of *Lectura fácil* depicts the characters' witty ideas and frustrating struggles to slip away from the system and, finally, reveals the punishment they face.

Escaping to Barcelona, the protagonists find themselves in a vibrant, yet tumultuous city where the globalization and gentrification meet with Catalan independence movements. It is a wealthy European metropolis with a well-developed social services network and cultural centres that offer a vast range of integrative events. *Lectura fácil* dialogues with other novels that depict highly developed societies that, despite their progress, are not able to guarantee happiness to their members. In less than a decade after 15-M movement there are plenty of anarchist collectives in Barcelona and alternative communities that try to live a different life. If "They don't represent us" was the slogan of 15-M movement, "We don't need anyone to represent us" would be the slogan of the protagonists.

In the novel, Cristina Morales combines different narrative voices and genres: first-person narration by Nati who tells her everyday life, excerpts from Ángels' novel, transcriptions of the hearings of all four characters concerning Marga's incapacitation case and a fanzine created by Nati. The title of the novel, *Lectura fácil*, refers to the work that Ángels types in WhatsApp group. At first, she writes

the novel following some rules of simplified reading, but finally she subverts them as she realizes that instead of facilitating comprehension, these strict rules impose limitations. Creating her text, Ángels pays special attention to defining key concepts. The result is double: as she declares, it makes the text more accessible to people with intellectual disabilities, but it also makes the reader reflect on basic notions such as being sane, educated or what does *adequate* mean.

The chapters narrated by Nati offer insight into the dance community. Even though contemporary dance is often associated with liberation, Nati points out that at the same time it is full of social norms. Dance serves as a crucial metaphor of the novel: a group of people moves at the same time and place, just as citizens hustle in a city. Some individuals have the power to impose the movements, expecting others to follow. This power dynamic is specially visible in integrative dance, where the teacher expects dancers with disabilities to perform certain figures that are not comfortable for their bodies. Dancers are also discouraged from expressing their sexuality during the dance, as sexuality is still perceived as a taboo, Nati suggests. In this context, the inclusive language used in dance classrooms turns out to be a superficial solution that cannot change reality and, worse still, that conceals violent practices.

Lectura fácil is a novel that disrupts the self-complacency of democratic societies. It is political on multiple levels – not only it reflects whether persons with disabilities are included in “the distribution of the sensible" (Jacques Rancière) and analyses the process of incapacitation as a tool of exclusion, but it also addresses the struggle to live outside the democratic system and the punishment it implies.

LANGUAGE: Spanish / Español

CENSORSHIP STATUS: