



77

Guillermo Saccomanno

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“How can you narrate terror?” This question is a central focus of Guillermo Saccomanno's *77*, set during the 1977 reign of terror in Argentina, the Dirty War. The military coup d'état of 1976 led to the killing of over thirty thousand Argentinians suspected of left-wing propaganda. Saccomanno was in his twenties when he lived through this; here, he returns to that time through his narrator and protagonist, Professor Gómez.

77 is a taut historical thriller with noir overtones. The novel opens with a prologue introducing Gómez, a gay man now in his eighties, who recalls his life in 1977, when he was a literature professor in his fifties. He posits the question of narrating terror in the prologue as a jaded man who recognizes his own cowardice and complacency during that time, but who showed humanity no matter the consequences.

Gómez is also always on the prowl for sex, anonymous or not, which leads him into dangerous situations. Most alarming is his relationship with a homophobic, married cop who is connected to the militant government. Even his favorite student, Esteban, who is convicted of leftist propaganda, draws Gómez's attention because of his looks.

In flashbacks, Gómez shifts between his twenties and his fifties, with parallels in each story line. The time periods are vivid and compelling. Saccomanno infuses the story with an increasing sense of fear and paranoia, especially through Gómez's relationships with dissidents. As his characters grapple with love, allegiance, and daily life under a dictatorship, every action is a form of resistance.

Gómez's late-night wanderings through the streets of Buenos Aires of the seventies energize the novel along with Saccomanno's judicious use myth and superstition. These noirish elements deepen the suspense with a foreboding moodiness that enhances the paranoiac tone. Saccomanno's *77* is a trenchant thriller recounting the murderous epoch of the Dirty War.

MONICA CARTER (January/February 2019)

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