

A Crack in the Wall

Claudia Pineiro

Miranda France, Translator

Bitter Lemon Press (Aug 1, 2013)

Softcover \$14.95 (218pp)

978-1-908524-08-9

An atmospheric, Hitchcockian maze reveals architect Pablo Simó's entanglement in a crime set in contemporary Buenos Aires.

Claudia Piñeiro—Argentine journalist, playwright, and best-selling author of the award-winning novel *Thursday Night Widows*—lures readers in from the start by revealing the death of Nelson Jara, his entombment beneath a building's foundation, and the perpetrators. In 2007, a young woman seeking information on Jara confronts the boss and two employees (including Pablo Simó) of an architectural firm. The trio's complicity in covering up Jara's death three years earlier threatens to be exposed, leading Simó to reflect on the man, and to further involve himself with the woman, both out of the need to find out what she may know and by passion. This ingenious premise allows Simó to backtrack through memory toward his first encounter with Jara, who complained of a crack in his wall purportedly caused by a neighboring construction site. He traces the subsequent days, which lead to the night of Jara's death, while simultaneously discovering in the present that Jara was not the victim he'd believed him to be. Guilt and obsession weave with everyday marital problems, creating a psychological drama of insidious thoughts that widen toward a disturbing conclusion.

Like San Francisco in *Vertigo*, Buenos Aires takes on an eerie, oppressive nature as Simó winds through familiar haunts only to be lead back to the site of the crack that started everything. Along with the story of Jara, Piñeiro cleverly weaves themes of marital dissolution after decades of familiarity, mid-life reflection on one's purpose and which side of the social divide one should side with, the consequences of secrecy, bonds forged through crisis, and more.

This is an especially noteworthy work for its character development. Despite knowing that Simó has participated in an unspeakable act, as the novel unfolds different facets and truths emerge that reveal more sympathetic sides. Encounters with his teenage daughter, for example, and through the gradual realization that he and Jara were not, after all, dissimilar in being "vermin." When Simó finally decides to rectify the past and reinvent his future, the ambiguity as to whether his obsession has finally become complete or whether something else is at play leaves readers delightfully chilled.

Piñeiro's third work in translation brilliantly traverses long-held silences in relationships and the changes that happen when passivity is shaken.

KAREN RIGBY (Fall 2013)

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