



## False Calm: A Journey through the Ghost Towns of Patagonia

**María Sonia Cristoff**

**Katherine Silver, Translator**

Transit Books (Oct 2, 2018)

Softcover \$16.95 (225pp)

978-1-945492-14-3

Personal memoir, travelogue, and history combine in María Sonia Cristoff's *False Calm*, a journey that peels back the layers of the ghostly fog blanketing Patagonia to reveal engrossing complexity.

With quiet introspection, Cristoff travels this neglected region, occasionally noting tidbits of its history. Her chronicling is never a dry reporting of facts; rather, she gives Patagonia a face—even multiple faces—as she draws out riveting stories from people whom many might otherwise ignore.

Francisco, an enthusiastic pilot, delights in the feeling of flying. Ramiro is a Catholic priest in training who finds wisdom in the writings of Charles de Foucauld. Under the shadow of the local legend of Maruchito—the vengeful spirit of a murdered boy—Milka is attempting to unite the women of El Cuy to help heal the divide between evangelicals and Catholics. Sandra is convinced there is a conspiracy to control the people of Las Heras through television and the invasion of dreams. Everywhere, the kaleidoscope of human experience is evident.

In illuminating moments, Cristoff turns the mirror upon herself. Never intrusive or self-indulgent, these instances slide seamlessly into her vibrant tapestry. A discussion of Hannibal Lector enters the narrative and is a surprisingly piquant examination of the way a writer consumes the stories of others, making them a part of herself. Cristoff also revels in books as an escape and confronts “that old anxiety, that fear of being trapped” in El Caín where it is “impossible for [her] to read.”

Sketched in lovely prose, *False Calm* opens up vistas to the true heart of Patagonia. The turbulence within the inhabitants whom Cristoff encounters belies the region's halcyon facade.

MEAGAN LOGSDON (September/October 2018)

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