

**Cercas, Javier. *Anatomía de un instante*. Barcelona: Mondadori, 2009.**

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23-F: the coup attempt on the Spanish government on February 23, 1981. As I began reading the book, I of course already knew what the outcome would be. But Javier Cercas' version of the events reads so much like a good detective novel that I could not put his book down! *Anatomía de un instante* (Mondadori 2009) takes a fresh look at the fateful events that tested and ultimately consolidated democracy in Spain. Further, "el 23 de febrero no sólo puso fin a la transición y la posguerra franquista: el 23 de febrero puso fin a la guerra [civil]" (428).

Cercas' project is three-tiered. First, the book offers a summary and analysis of the events of the coup. Biological metaphors (we need look no further than the title) abound as the author uncovers the "placenta" of the coup, all those figures who contributed to the 23-F: Adolfo Suárez; Tejero, Milans del Bosch, and Armada (the organizers of the coup); the King; Manuel Fraga; the General Gutiérrez Mellado; PCE leader Santiago Carrillo; the Church; the military; and all the other forces that Suárez felt were conspiring against him. Cercas shows how ultimately the coup fails because the triumvirate cannot agree on the form of government that will substitute the vacuum the coup would create, however the image of the placenta is tantamount to distributing equal blame for the near-collapse of democracy.

A second phase of Cercas's project is aesthetic and literary in nature. Exposition, narration, and a blending of genres work together to blur and question the boundaries between History and fiction. The author's recourse to unconventional methods (i.e. each section begins with a transcription of part of the video footage of the coup) and seamless story-telling, engage the reader in a game as they attempt to determine the genre of the book. Initially Cercas began researching the coup with the idea of writing a novel but soon changed his mind and thought it more responsible to write a non-fiction text. Book-sellers and librarians classify *Anatomía de un instante* as non-fiction and place it with other contemporary History books. At the same time, Cercas is constantly reminding the reader of the fine-line between History and fiction and even places structural signs consistent with a work of fiction, for example beginning the text with the designation "Epílogo de una novela."

Finally, and arguably most important, Cercas' venture is highly personal; researching and writing *Anatomía de un instante* is a way to understand his recently-deceased father's politics. His father had been a staunch Suarista, which had been a point of contention with his son since (Javier) Cercas had always viewed Suárez as an opportunist. The book brings Cercas closer to understanding his father's character which had been influenced by the tumultuous historical events of 20<sup>th</sup> century Spain, and

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enables him to recognize Suárez's "coraje" and "intuición histórica" since he was one of only a handful of people who stood up defiantly in the face of the coup. As Suárez remained "permaneciendo en su escaño mientras las balas zumbaban a su alrededor en el hemiciclo durante la tarde del 23 de febrero, Suárez no sólo se redimía él, sino que de algún modo redimía a todo su país de haber colaborado masivamente con el franquismo" (385).

This book is an important contribution to 20th century Spanish culture, History and literature and goes hand-in-hand with a recent renewed interest in Spain about revisiting the past in order to understand the present and to ensure a healthy future.