



The Back Room

Carmen Martin Gaité, Helen Lane

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Winner of Spain's National Prize for Literature

In the middle of the night, a woman awakens to find a stranger in her bedroom. Though she cannot determine who he is—or, indeed, whether he is even real at all and not just an extension of her dreams or her writing—she is drawn into a conversation with her unexpected guest. What she tells him becomes the story of a woman coming of age in the repressive Spain of the Franco era.

In *The Back Room* Carmen Martín Gaité spins out a hypnotic evocation of one woman's life counterpointed against the social history of modern Spain. The growth of a personal identity and the terrors of fascism are woven together within the delicate fabric of this dreamlike narrative. The result is an intimate and existential confessional—part autobiography, part fiction. In direct and simple language, Martín Gaité envisions life within a world besieged. This, her finest work, explores the back room of memory with a quiet but irresistible power.

"The winner of Spain's 1978 National Prize for Literature, Gaité's postmodern novel interweaves dreams and fantasies with autobiography and Spanish history, resulting in a book that is complex and elusive, but more than worth the effort."—*Publishers Weekly*

"A serious, fascinating work, indeed a great novel...leaves its readers mesmerized."—*ABC Literario*

"Excellentlly plotted and written with that perfect simplicity that tends to escape notice and which has characterized Gaité's novels from the start...She has once again made the difficult art of writing into easy reading."—*El Mundo*

"...intensely serious, literary and wryly humorous, [her] mesmerizing, labyrinthine sentences induce a sense of wandering the corridors and topiaried gardens of Marienbad."—*Sunday Times*

"Some of the cultural specifics in this 1978 novel from Spain—songs, doll furniture, movies—may be meaningful only for Spanish readers. But Martín Gaité's novel, the first in Columbia's new Twentieth Century Continental Fiction Program, is artful and engaging nonetheless, a book of intelligent moods modulating into one another."—*Kirkus Reviews*

Carmen Martín Gaité was one of Spain's leading novelists. She was the author of numerous works of fiction and criticism, including *Variable Cloud* and, most recently, *The Farewell Angel*. *The Back Room* was the first of her novels to appear in Spain after the death of Franco, and the first to be translated into English. In 1978 it was awarded Spain's National Prize for Literature.

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David Wolverton:

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