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## No hay que morir dos veces

Report by Annella McDermott

The novel is set in Barcelona, the time is now: this is the Spain of the credit crunch, celebrity culture, immigration from Cuba, North Africa and the Indian sub-continent, and Islamic terrorism. The detective is Inspector Méndez of the Spanish National Police, an elderly man, near retirement, not in peak physical condition, with deteriorating eyesight, and carelessly dressed, his suit pockets deformed by his habit of always carrying around books. He is something of a maverick, naturally, disobeying orders from his superior to drop a case that seems to be leading nowhere, only to demonstrate that in the end it is the apparently dead-end case that allows him to solve the main mystery. He is disenchanted with certain aspects of the modern world, such as mobile phones and texting, the ban on smoking in public places, or the habit of holding wedding receptions in remote hotels in the middle of nowhere, to avoid parking problems in town.

The novel is extremely well constructed and well paced. The majority of chapters are short, the action moves quickly, and the story is packed with surprises. Initially the reader is presented with three mysteries, apparently entirely unconnected with each other: one involves an ex-convict, engaged by a stranger to carry out a contract killing, a second story involves abuse of a beautiful young girl with Down's syndrome and the third story, a bride who shoots and kills her fiancé in the minutes preceding her wedding. The narration moves in turn between these three stories, with the connections between them gradually unfolding, to the reader's frequent astonishment.

The author was for many years a journalist for leading Barcelona newspapers, which furnished him with a thorough knowledge of the city's streets and neighbourhoods, and its social, political and financial elites. The language of the novel is mainly clear and straightforward, with occasional touches of lyricism.

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