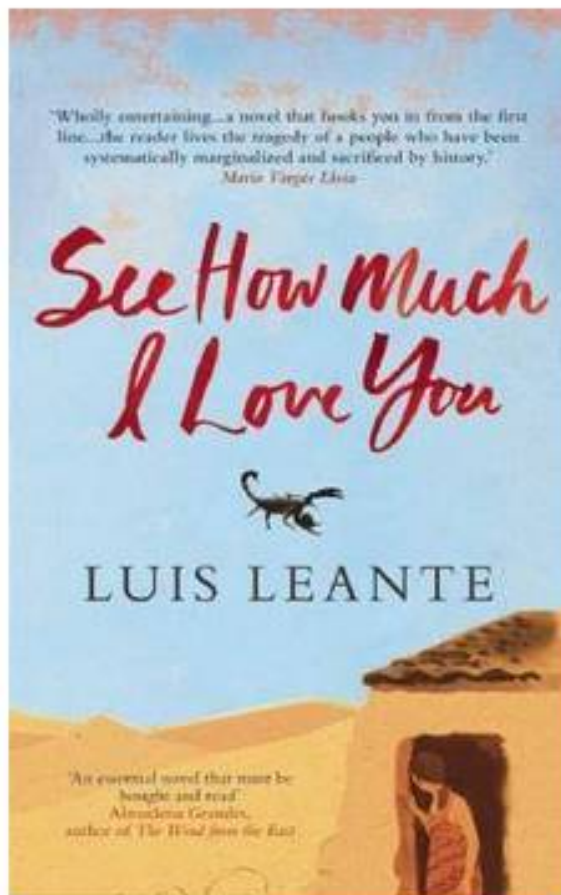


October 2017



Our book of the month was [See how much I love you](#) by [Luis Leante](#).

Leante graduated in Classical Philology from the University of Murcia. He has lived in Alicante since 1992, where he worked as a high school teacher until 2009. He published his first novel at age 20, but it was not until 2007, after winning the Alfaguara Prize with his novel *See How Much I Love You* (in Spanish, *Mira si yo te querré*), that he began to devote himself entirely to literature. His latest novel, *Red Moon* (in Spanish, *La luna roja*), published in Spain in 2009, is a gripping story between a writer and translator, between Alicante, Berlin and Istanbul.

The shocking thing about this novel has nothing to do with the novel per se, the writing or the style. It came

with the realization that this work takes as its focus a political tragedy so ignored and buried that it's hard to get information about it. Colonialism still leaves waste the landscape in its wake.

The novel is a bit of a slow starter. It is to some extent diffused by cutting back and forth between periods, between characters. There are not really any redundant or unnecessary characters, and a few are quite memorable. But the stories are parcelled out in such a way that the reader-character bond never develops fully for any of them.

The story is decidedly non-linear, but it's not that this causes confusion but that there's so much of it that it seems to have crossed the line from stylistically adventurous to unnecessary. We are introduced to Montse (Dr. Montserrat Cambra) as she wakes up in a hospital after having almost died from a scorpion bite in the desert. She's being nursed back to health (both physically and mentally) by a nurse named Layla. We don't know why she's there, or where she is. We find out little by little, though the full story of the how and why comes to us fully only at the end.

Montse grew up in Barcelona, as did Santi (Santiago San Romain), but from opposite sides of the track. They meet in the spring of their lives and fall in love. Montse is pre-med and Santi is post mechanic, though Montse doesn't find this out until later. Things happen and they part on bitter terms. From time to time they think of each other, though for Montse, many years go by without a second thought. She's busy living her life, while it turns out that Santi is busy just staying alive in the West Saharan desert. Still, much of the story is pushed along by Montse's quest at long last to find out just what happened to her young lover.

On her quest (she has come to the Western Sahara in her mid-forties), she is helped by Layla and Aza, two Saharawis women. After Montse dumped Santi (for ambiguous cause, although he has lied to her repeatedly) he goes off to the Dark Continent, posted to the last vestige of colonialism, the Western Sahara, home of the Saharawis. Many of these parts are suspenseful, tragic (it's war after all) and eye-opening. The trek to the camps after the Spanish abandon the protectorate to the Moroccans and the Mauriticians, is especially well done. The plight of these people who have been refugees for a generation (there are thousands of adults who have never seen their homeland) is heart-breaking. Unfortunately, their story is now mostly forgotten, the tragedy a victim of aid-fatigue. If Leante's novel can in any way revive world focus on this political impasse, then the novel, flawed or not, will have done important work. Our group wondered if the translation of the novel had been satisfactory as it did not seem to be well written. The fact that it shed light on the little known situation of much suffering and little hope would be the main reason for reading it.

Ratings: Janet 2.5, Penny 3, Nicola 2, Margie 2, Judith 3, Viv 2.5. Alexa, Glenda and Kim did not finish the book.

Other Books We Read

October 2017

Our book this month was *See how much I love you* by Luis Leante, but we also read other books. Maximum rating is 5.

The Songs of Trees David by David Haskell, 3

Hotel New Hampshire by John Irving, 4

The Golden House by Salman Rushdie, 3.5

Half the Sky by Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn, 4

Ministry of Utmost Happiness by Arundhati Roy, 4.5

The Birds by Tarjei Vesaas, 3.5

Stay with me by Ayobami Adebayo, 3

Extinctions by Josephine Wilson, 4

Jean Harley Was Here by Heather Taylor Johnson 3

Hinterland by Steven Lang, 4

A Legacy of Spies by John Le Carre', 3

Nothing Holds Back the Night by Delphine de Vigan, 3.5 and 4.5

The Notebook Trilogy by Agota Kristof 3.5

Understory by Inga Simpson 4