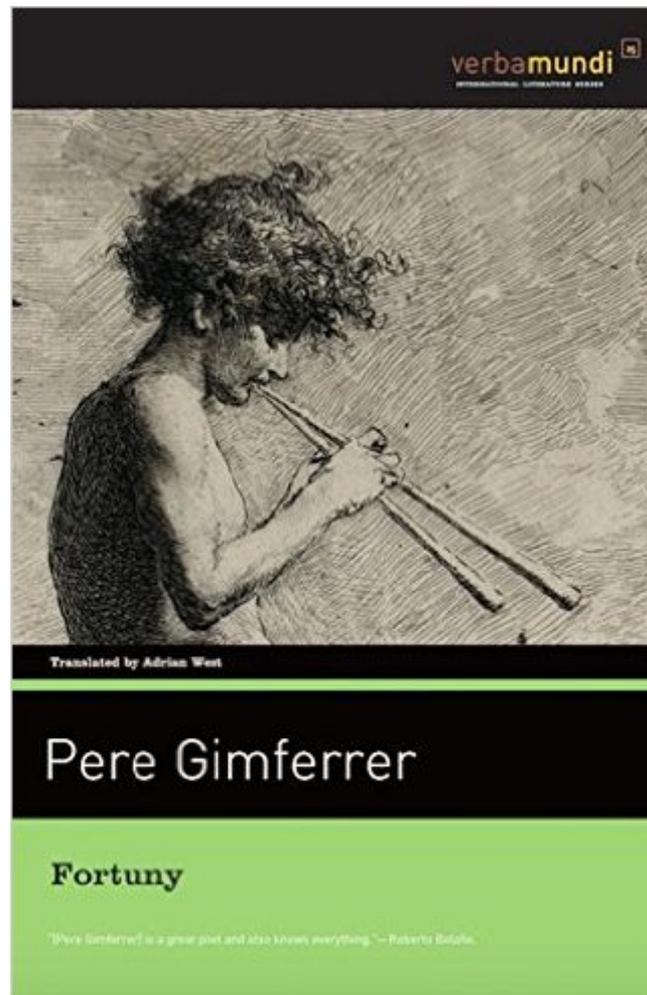


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Fortuny



Synopsis

'[Pere Gimferrer] is a great poet and also knows everything.'-Roberto Bolaño
Scion of an artistic dynasty, inventor, photographer, and costumier of genius, Mariano Fortuny was a touchstone of the Belle Époque: he built stages for Wagner, designed dresses for Sarah Bernhardt, and was a crucial inspiration for Proust's philosophy of memory. The list of his illustrious acquaintances ranges from D'Annunzio to Chaplin, from Caruso to Isadora Duncan, and in this, the first novel by Spain's Pere Gimferrer to be translated into English, they gather like actors on a stage, in Venetian palaces, in Parisian apartments, and in the village squares of the small towns of Catalonia, forming an historical tableau of the vigor and dissipation of Europe's artistic demimonde from the end of the Third Republic to the outbreak of the second World War. Employing the unmatched lyrical inventiveness and range that have made him recognized as Spain's most distinguished poet, Gimferrer has composed a paean to vanished artistic grandeur, suggesting the fragility of the line dividing the real from the imagined: Whatever the eye can see dissolves into a tapestry of prose woven of light and shadow. Proust's description of Fortuny's fabrics applies equally to Gimferrer's words: 'faithfully antique but markedly original, [they] brought before the eye like a stage décor, and with an even greater evocative power since the décor was left to the imagination, a Venice saturated with oriental splendor . . .'

Book Information

Paperback: 136 pages

Publisher: Verba Mundi Books (February 25, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1567925502

ISBN-13: 978-1567925500

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.9 x 8.4 inches

Shipping Weight: 8.3 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (1 customer review)

Best Sellers Rank: #1,077,265 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #292 in [Books > Literature & Fiction > Poetry > Regional & Cultural > European > Spanish](#)

Customer Reviews

Of all the indoor and outdoor gowns that Mme. de Guermantes wore, those which seemed most to respond to a definite intention, to be endowed with a special significance, were the garments made by Fortuny. Is it their historical character or the fact that each one is unique that gives them

so special a significance? Marcel Proust While its meaning has changed, the term vignette (a little vine) originally referred to a small, borderless embellishment, often a vine, drawn on the page around some image or text. In this way, a vignette served more as an indistinct frame than an image or text itself, lending significance, but only by distinguishing something else. Fortuny is a book of vignettes in both senses of the word. In one way, populated by such figures as Henry James, Marcel Proust, and Charlie Chaplin, it is a work of the historical flâneur, a collection of fleeting impressions that arise in idle passing. Through these opulent images, though, Pere Gimferrer gives a borderless definition to Mariano Fortuny, framing his life and times without presuming to contain them, only once inserting dialogue when Fortuny recognizes himself in his father's painting with the words "it's me." While trying to convey Fortuny's double character, others have compared it to a rich cloth, more significant in its weave than a larger structure; I, however, imagine it as a dress, revealing and concealing the body, but beautiful, shapely, and shifting nonetheless. When glancing at the folds of this dress, much like Proust, I struggle to elucidate its special significance. True, it evokes a historical character, capturing a sense of saudade for the figures of the Belle Époque, a time that, by its very name, is forever tied to this feeling.

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