

★ Among the Lost

Emiliano Monge

Frank Wynne, Translator

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Emiliano Monge's *Among the Lost* is a harrowing novel about migration and human trafficking, told from the points of view of both victims and victimizers.

Set in an unnamed country that resembles Mexico and taking place over the course of one day, the novel tells the story of Estela and Epitafio, two traffickers who betray and brutalize migrants hoping to escape to a place they call Paraíso. Estela and Epitafio were themselves trafficked and abused as children, but they are still vicious to their victims. They are also obsessed with their love and imagining their future together. Their day is frantic as they try to reach each other while their victims remain bound and suffering, locked away in the backs of trucks.

The novel's tone is unsparing and grim, but Monge's prose also includes many moments of beauty. The characters travel through a landscape that is harsh and unwelcoming but majestically rendered. Even as Estela and Epitafio, accompanied by assorted other traffickers and corrupt officials, wreak havoc and destroy lives, their inner worlds are sharply, convincingly drawn. Their personal dramas are entertaining, and their rage-filled bumbling provides occasional much-needed dark humor, at the same time as their enterprise evokes horror and disgust.

Interspersed throughout the novel are quotations and paraphrases from Dante's *Divine Comedy*, as well as quotations taken from real-life Central American migrants. These sections, italicized and sometimes offset from the rest of the text, are unattributed, so the voices of anonymous, real people mix seamlessly with lines from Dante's epic journey to form a heartrending counterpoint to the traffickers' cruelty.

Major plot events are infrequent but dramatic, and the novel maintains forward momentum with its shifts from character to character, its cacophony of voices, and its mesmerizingly evoked hellish landscape.

Among the Lost is a timely novel of immigration that is as beautiful as it is horrific. It is a multilayered, emotionally complex artistic triumph.

REBECCA HUSSEY (May/June 2019)

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