The Fountains of Silence

By Ruta Sepetys

1. We are quickly introduced to the el matadero, where Rafa serves blood to masses of women, and to the concept of the matador ring, the image of Franco, the cruelty of the Guardia Civil, and the concept of taking a stand against fear. How did the tone Sepetys strikes here prepare you for the rest of the book?

2. Sepetys uses short chapters to keep the pacing tight and handle multiple settings. How did this reading experience affect the emotional impact of the book for you?

3. The historical records and remembrances that Sepetys places throughout the novel serve to create a larger context for what the characters are experiencing. Did you find any facts or statements especially illuminating?

4. The title The Fountains of Silence is filled with symbolism. In which way are the main characters “fountains of silence”? How does that title resonate for the various characters in the book?

5. The tradition of bullfighting has a long history in Spain. How do Rafa and Fuga become fixated on this way of life? Did you find symbolism in the inclusion of these scenes?

6. Of all the characters, whose story did you find the most intriguing and want to follow longer? Were there any characters you found difficult to understand or relate to?

7. Daniel stands in for the readers in many ways, collecting pictures, putting them in order, wanting to see beyond the physical image. What role does Daniel’s upbringing and privilege play, and how does it affect his personal lens and decision-making? In what ways does he remain a “fountain of silence” once he leaves Spain? In what ways does he speak out?

8. The Castellana Hilton Madrid somewhat serves as another character in the book and is the playground for rich Americans in Madrid. What are some of the ways Sepetys uses this setting to illustrate the contrast between Daniel and Ana? How do you think the hotel affected those employed there or who lived/worked nearby, especially during the 1950s?

9. Puri realizes that her complicity with the church’s selling of children has affected her own family. What do you think she should have done at that point? Why do you think she keeps her secret for 18 more years?

10. Fascist regimes work by showing disdain for human rights, controlling and censoring the media, and identifying enemies as a means of uniting people. In that context, what did you think about the character of Lorenza? Was she unredeemable, or did you have compassion for her because her father was in the Guardia Civil? Could she have behaved any other way?

11. Did you know anything about the Spanish Civil War, Franco’s regime, or the hundreds of thousands of missing children potentially affected by it before starting this novel? If not, how compelled do you feel to do further research on this topic? What most affected you about the historical events depicted in the novel?