



## Anatomia di un istante

*Javier Cercas , Pino Cacucci (Translator)*

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Javier Cercas vuole raccontare in forma di romanzo il tentativo di colpo di stato del 23 febbraio 1981 in Spagna. Scopre, però, che «per una volta la storia è stata coerente, simmetrica e geometrica, e non disordinata, casuale e imprevedibile», che quella realtà possiede in sé «tutta la forza drammatica e il potenziale simbolico che esigiamo dalla letteratura». E allora decide coraggiosamente di rinunciare, o forse di fingere di rinunciare, alla fiction per fare l'«anatomia di un istante» ed esporre i fatti: quelli che videro il colonnello Tejero entrare armi in pugno nel parlamento di Madrid. Ma i «nudi fatti» non sono per nulla semplici: sono anche la loro interpretazione e il loro racconto.

Ciò che Cercas vede in quell'istante cruciale, mentre le pallottole dei golpisti fischiano nelle Cortes e i parlamentari cercano riparo sotto i banchi dell'emiciclo, sono tre uomini – il primo ministro Adolfo Suárez, il tenente generale Gutiérrez Mellado e il segretario del partito comunista Santiago Carillo – simbolo di valori diversi e perfino opposti, che rimangono seduti ai loro posti a sfidare il golpe. Nel suo racconto, quel loro gesto dà senso alle rispettive traiettorie esistenziali, illuminando al contempo un'epoca, un Paese e il suo futuro.

## Anatomia di un istante Details

Date : Published August 26th 2010 by Guanda (first published 2009)

ISBN : 9788860886439

Author : Javier Cercas , Pino Cacucci (Translator)

Format : Paperback 462 pages

Genre : History, Nonfiction, Cultural, Spain, European Literature, Spanish Literature

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## From Reader Review *Anatomía de un instante* for online ebook

### Max Rebo says

Cuando ocurrió lo del 23-F yo era un niño y no entendía mucho. Sólo recuerdo a mi madre asustada diciendo 'qué pasará ahora?'. Con los años, mi percepción del golpe pasó a ser la de una astracanada digna de una película de Berlanga o, para ser más exactos, de un cómic de Ibáñez. Desde luego, el bigote de Tejero recordaba al mostacho del Súper, y la ocupación del congreso por parte de la Guardia Civil, un plan tan disparatado como algún invento del Profesor Bacterio. Es ahora cuando he acabado de entender la coyuntura del 23-f, las implicaciones que tuvo y las que pudo haber tenido y el papel de sus protagonistas. El apasionante libro de Javier Cercas debería ser de lectura obligada para comprender este episodio crucial de la historia de España.

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### Guillermo says

Javier Cercas escribe en un castellano muy hermoso y tiene buenas ideas.

En una crónica que se niega a si mismo la posibilidad de novelar, se impone contar solo verdades. Y es un ensayo sobre las vida real, sobre los grises, sobre el cambio. Sobre lo muerto que parece vivo y sobre lo vivo que parece muerto.

No hay que estar interesado en particular sobre esos sucesos para disfrutarlo. Y en estos días está por morir Adolfo Suárez así que viene bien esta lectura para entender lo que dirán los periódicos.

Y también es una historia sobre lo que es una vida, que tristemente termina siempre en la decadencia y la tumba.

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### José Vivas M. says

Tremendo. Cercas construye un detalladísimo análisis sobre un momento de la historia política reciente de España -un fallido golpe de estado de 1981- a partir de minutos de video, y del gesto que se captura en él del presidente de gobierno saliente Adolfo Suárez al no protegerse tras su curul de los disparos cuando irrumpen en el Parlamento militares sedicentes. Y el análisis va capítulo a capítulo diseccionando los puntos de vista y los arcos de vida de cuantos coincidieron en ese momento histórico: el exfalangista Suárez y su papel en el desmontaje del franquismo y la construcción de la democracia española, el alzado coronel Tejero y los últimos resabios del militarismo, Santiago Carrillo, líder comunista y contraparte vital de Suárez, el general Gutiérrez Mellado, militar que contribuyó a desmilitarizar el poder, el rey Juan Carlos...

Cada magistral parrafada de Cercas, dispuesta en el orden y momento justo, sopesa el papel de cada uno de estos personajes en la intriga golpista y en la transición de España a la democracia tras años de Franco; diríase que los breves instantes de video del episodio en la cámara de diputados reflejan y resumen el papel vital de cada uno en ese proceso. Y la minuciosidad de la explicación del origen del golpe, sus justificaciones, su lugar en la historia de la transición desde el punto de vista de cada actor, si bien puede llegar a apabullar por la cantidad de nombres y situaciones, dota al libro de músculo y ritmo de novela. Que fue, como explica Cercas al inicio del libro, lo que quiso escribir en un primer intento, para luego llegar a esta ¿crónica novelada?

Fascinante en todo caso, soberbiamente escrita, henchida de datos, profusa en perspectiva, y como leí en otros reviews por aquí, un libro que debería formar parte del plan de estudios en su país. A mí, como

habitante de la perpetua transición (¿a qué cosa exactamente?) llamada Venezuela, me da sin duda luz sobre fuerzas políticas en pugna, maneras acordadas de atacar diferencias, y compromisos históricos necesarios para no matarse en otra guerra civil fratricida. Si tan solo se leyera más...

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### **Mauricio says**

Muy bueno el libro de Cercas y más teniendo en cuenta que no sabía absolutamente nada sobre el golpe del 23 de febrero. La manera en que Cercas va desengranando el golpe y cómo nos va mostrando uno a uno a los protagonistas es muy impresionante. Recomendable.

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### **Chas Smash says**

Cuando habla de Anatomía es realmente una anatomía, un examen exhaustivo y minucioso de cada uno de los detalles que llevaron a la España de principios de los 80 a desembocar en el golpe de estado de Tejero. Es una lectura densa y repetitiva en algunos tramos pero no deja de ser interesante, aunque unas páginas menos se hubiera agradecido.

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### **Megan says**

Although I have a few more pages to go, I am enjoying this book so much that I wanted to provide an early review. I was lucky enough to win this via the Goodreads FirstReads, so thanks for the opportunity to read this one early!! I lived in Spain a few years ago and studied Spanish history, including the 23 Feb attempted coup. The more I read, the more I'm remembering...and learning. I love the way the author has dissected the 35 minutes of the video and looked at the coup from so many different angles. In the first section of the book, it seemed like all roads were leading to this attempted coup and it was only a matter of time before it happened. I particularly enjoyed Cercas' description of the Communist Party leader who seemingly had little in common with Adolfo Suarez...and yet their lives and political careers ended up being more alike in the end. Reading this book in February is particularly interesting, given that's when the events occurred 30 years ago. I also am finding it interesting to read during this period of time with everything that has happened in Egypt. This book has been one of the most unique I've read in a long time. Thanks again to Goodreads for treating me to this gem!

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### **Nancy Oakes says**

Jorge Luis Borges once wrote that "every destiny, however long and complicated, essentially boils down to a single moment -- the moment a man knows, once and for all, who he is." Thirty years ago in February of 1981, that moment came for three people who refused to comply with the demands of Lt. Col. Antonio Tejero and other members of the military, who came into a session of the Spanish parliament waving a gun and ordered everyone down to the floor. It was, it seems, the beginning of a coup. Film footage caught that moment and likewise caught these three people in their own gestures of resistance: Antonio Suárez, the prime minister; General Manuel Gutierrez Mellado, deputy prime minister; and finally, Santiago Carillo, the head of the Spanish Communist Party. Suarez stayed in his seat. Gutierrez Mellado looks to be challenging

Tejero and his men to put down their weapons and is simultaneously guarding Suarez. Carillo just sits there, smoking a cigarette. At first Cercas thought that the story would be the background of a new novel, but as he writes,

"I decided that the only way to erect a fiction on the 23 February coup was to know as scrupulously as possible the reality of the 23 February coup. Only then did I dive into the depths of the mishmash of theoretical constructions, uncertainties, embellishments, falsehoods and invented memories surrounding that day. For several months...I worked full time at reading all the books I could find about 23 February and the years that preceded it...They were obsessive, happy months, but as my investigation advanced and my vision of the coup d'état changed, I began to understand very quickly...that the reality of 23 February was of such magnitude that for the moment it was invincible...and it was therefore futile of me to propose the exploit of defeating it with a novel...even though I was a writer of fiction, for once reality mattered more to me than fiction or mattered to me too much to want to reinvent it by substituting it with an alternative reality..."

So rather than create a fiction based on that moment captured on camera, Cercas came up with a narrative of events leading to the coup, the coup itself and the aftermath, told via the political lives and careers of Suarez, Gutierrez Mellado and Carillo. He also delves into the motivations of the leaders and some of the participants of the coup and explores the position held by Spain's king. *Anatomy of a Moment* is a history, but the author also interjects a great deal of personal insight and reflection as well as speculation. Nearly every chapter ends and begins with a series of questions that Cercas explores, and although it is quite dense at times, it's absolutely fascinating and engrossing. The amount of research Cercas must have done to produce this book must have been staggering, as he goes back into the politics and players of the Spanish Civil War, coming full circle back to the coup and its meaning for the legacies left by that period of Spain's history.

It took me a while to finish this book, but it was definitely well worth every second of time spent reading it. My only issue with this book is that Cercas often launches into nearly stream-of-consciousness type observations with long, drawn-out sentences that I often needed to parse to stay on track. I think it would appeal most to readers of politics, European history, or people who have a great interest in the Spanish Civil War. It's definitely not a project for those who prefer their reads light, and it's not like most histories that are written to read like novels. But if you're interested, I wouldn't miss it.

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### **Susana says**

Javier Cercas lo logra de nuevo: un libro extraordinario. Por momentos me perdía de la trama y los personajes, por tratarse de un momento histórico prácticamente desconocido para mí. En un punto, incluso, estuve a punto de abandonar la lectura, pero volvió a atrapar mi atención. El epílogo bien vale la pena, porque explica la razón para que Cercas escribiese este libro.

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### **Ubik 2.0 says**

#### **La Storia e le storie.**

L'ometto buffo, tappo e ciccio, che strepitava come un cartone animato con quei baffoni e il ridicolo cappello tricorno, me lo ricordo bene in tv, ma come molti italiani avevo liquidato l'episodio come una

cialtronata patetica , forse perché al tempo si era distratti da avvenimenti nostrani ben più tragici (l'esplosione della stazione della mia città era avvenuta solo qualche mese prima quando, guarda caso, io mi trovavo proprio in Spagna).

Le analisi critiche di questo libro sono rivolte particolarmente al suo collocarsi in un'area ibrida fra romanzo, cronaca e saggio storico, poiché "Anatomia di un istante" presenta in effetti svariati aspetti di ognuna di tali categorie e l'autore stesso, ben consapevole di ciò, ne fa oggetto di un lungo ed articolato prologo. Per mia natura sarei propenso a liquidare tali catalogazioni come accademiche, traendo soddisfazione proprio dall'inclassificabilità dell'opera, in un filone che annovera un crescente numero di esempi di testi "borderline" che attingono in varia misura alla fiction e alla realtà, mescolandole a piacere come in una ricetta estrosa, originale e in qualche modo irripetibile.

Posso comunque dire di essere uscito dalla lettura del libro più appagato e soddisfatto per la ricchezza dell'approfondimento storico delle vicende (di cui non sapevo quasi nulla e ora so molto), che ammaliato dalla valenza letteraria di "Anatomia di un istante" nel quadro della letteratura spagnola contemporanea. L'idea di leggere in filigrana da un singolo e breve episodio (mai come in questo caso così sotto gli occhi di tutti, anche dei nostri e anche oggi, se vogliamo rivivere su youtube i momenti clou dell'evento) mezzo secolo di storia della Spagna nonché il fulcro dell'esistenza di alcuni uomini, Adolfo Suarez soprattutto, è molto suggestiva e ben sviluppata: Cercas la carica di riflessioni, interpretazioni, analisi psicologiche, citazioni, in una meticolosa cronologia dei fatti da cui filtra un'inquietante implicazione: forse c'è mancato poco e si deve anche a circostanze fortuite l'aver evitato un massacro in Spagna e, visto il contesto politico globale dell'epoca, conseguenze imprevedibili sull'intero continente.

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### **Andy Chirls says**

Some history is written as the product of the sweep of events and great forces, and other history is written as influenced by individuals. This book focusses on the individuals, and it does so beautifully. The writer works hard to convey the complexity of how the key individuals involved acted from moment to moment, and to convey the difficulty of understanding some of their motivations. As literature, it is beautifully written, with long, contemplative sentences that convey the complexity and beauty of chains of events and motives. It ties the present to the recent past. It repeats just enough, and is written so beautifully as to make the repetition a pleasurable indulgence.

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### **Íñigo says**

Bien escrito. Dice hasta cosas interesantes sobre el 23-F. Uno de los pocos escritores españoles contemporáneos vivos y publicados a los que se puede respetar.

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### **José says**

Cercas manages to crank out nearly 400 pages on the 1981 coup attempt in Spain. At the center of the story is Adolfo Suárez, described by Cercas as the accidental hero of this incident and the successful transition of democracy in Spain. While I am not certain how the author made his decision to organize the content of the book (which seemed a bit disjointed), the frequent repetition of certain themes and phrases cast an almost musical aura over this work of non-fiction. Cercas leaves no stone unturned, sharing both facts, testimony,

and conjectures to help us arrive at our own conclusions (although Cercas doesn't shy away from stating his own opinions) as to the motivations of Lt. Col. Tejero, Generals Armada and Milans i Bosch, King Juan Carlos, the various political parties, and a host of other greater or less protagonists in this defining moment in Spanish history. Bravo!

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### **Jesus says**

Un relato detallado y claro del intento de golpe de estado, el 23F, en 1981. Está estructurado alrededor del instante en que todos los parlamentarios se tiran al suelo, menos Suárez, Gutiérrez Mellado y Carrillo. De paso me ha servido para entender la transición.

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### **Seán says**

Cercas is a novelist who found his literary attempts to arrive at the truth of Spain's February 23, 1981 coup d'etat no match for the mysterious reality of the event itself. Instead, he assumed the role of the historian, conducted interviews of the coup's central and peripheral figures and read everything he could on the subject. Cercas also watched endlessly the 35 minute video recorded inside of the Cortes where, as guns blazed and rightwing golpistas charged about, outgoing Prime Minister Adolfo Suarez refused to quit his seat for the ignominy of the floor.

Though a work of scholarship, Cercas is less concerned with the history of the coup (though he does expend much effort laying out persuasive possibilities for the unverifiable bits) than with the motivations of the event's central figures. We are told within the coup lies a key to knowing the essence of post-Franco Spain as well as a parable illustrative of the violent mechanics of power. Yet, though a grand tale with various meanings and implications, its the video of the first minutes of the coup that really fascinate Cercas. The video, or the rich, symbol-ridden story as rendered by the video, has all the attributes of a great short film: it serves as a further abstraction of the event and contains even more mystery and less comprehensible meaning. Cercas' whole endeavor amounts to an effort to overtake the Suarez of the video and capture his unknowable and unutterable flash of ego, guts and mania.

Though Cercas opted for non-fiction, he still had recourse to his repository of literary methods. Often he constructs deeply perceptive word sequences. Repeating these key phrases becomes a sort of subtle incantation that mimics the effect of constant reviewings of the now iconic moments of the coup footage (e.g., "solitary, statuesque and spectral in a desert of empty benches," "pure politician," adopting a critic's concept of the "hero of retreat," repeatedly offering parenthetical counter-explanations, etc.).

It very and truly rules.

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### **Luís C. says**

*The story repeats itself. Marx remarked that the deeds and great characters appear twice in history, the first time in a tragedy and the second in a farce, as if, when profound changes, men, frightened by their responsibility, summoned the spirits of the past, adopted their names, their gestures and their currencies to represent, using the prestigious disguise and the false language, a new historical stage, as if it was a*

*conspiracy of the dead. On February 23, the intuition of Marx holds, although it seems incomplete. The legend is partially false: General Pavía had not stormed Congress on horseback but on foot; under him ...*

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## **R. says**

Fantástico libro de un autor del que me ha gustado absolutamente todo lo que he leído de él (Soldados de Salamina y La velocidad de la luz).

Si, como la mayoría de los que éramos niños durante el 23F, careces no sólo de memoria histórica propia, sino que además flaqueas en conocimientos históricos propiamente dichos, en este libro te das un baño fabuloso de todo lo que estaba ocurriendo en España mientras todavía jugabas al escondite. El autor hace una exposición de los hechos sobre los que se ha debido documentar más que bien y luego saca conclusiones muy, muy interesantes. Además es que lo hace desde muchos ángulos con lo que aparentemente no deja casi ningún hilo suelto.

La conclusión principal que yo saco, en contra de lo que nos han hecho creer, es que nadie es un héroe ni nadie un completo villano en este importante capítulo de nuestra historia. Todo el mundo tiene un lado oscuro y una razón oculta por la que hace las cosas.

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## **Caroline says**

Only two of the books I read this year made it to my favorites list, and this was one of them.

Anatomy of a Moment is difficult to get into, but well worth the diligence to persist. The reader is gripped by Cercas's rhythmic delving into the players on both sides of the 1983 failed coup attempt in Spain that started with the rebels' incursion of the Cortes, the Spanish legislature. It is a gradual peeling away of first the surface version, the iconic televised pictures of Adolfo Suarez, General Manuel Gutierrez Mellado, and Santiago Carillo facing the army invaders while the deputies drop to the ground to protect themselves. Then Cercas starts to really study the events and relationships that led these three men to stay standing, starting with the the former Francoist General Gutierrez Mellado's contribution to building an army for a new democratic government after he was coopted by Suarez, even though it led to his being reviled by the army he had served his whole life.

In one sense this is a book of semiotics. Cercas asks himself: What does the gesture of Adolfo Suarez mean, as he refuses to dive for cover? The entire book uses this question as a touchstone, each section starting with a flashback to that scene, which was captured on film and replayed thousands of times on television. Each section takes a different tack in looking for the meaning, sometimes focusing on individual players in the drama, other times on the pervasive undermining of Suarez' administration and what it had accomplished by the wealthy, the church, external governments, and the military. Other sections unravel the intrigue of the plotters or follow the event of February 23 itself. But each section ends up back with Suarez standing rock solid for a democratic state he had, to everyone's surprise, perhaps even his own, created against the odds.

The book is also an eloquent endorsement of the path Spain took to moving on from Francoism. There was an explicit agreement that there would be no retribution for the brutality of Francoism, that Spain would look



forward. But Cercas makes it very clear that not taking vengeance did not mean forgetting. This not forgetting could be unfortunate, as in the case of the military generals who thought Suarez had tricked the country into actually leaving the substance of Francoism behind, when they thought he was only going to remove the trappings. Or it could be the salvation of democracy, as the men who resisted the 1981 coup attempt remembered Francoism and decided they would defend the young democracy with their lives if needed. As Cercas puts it:

“In any case, if the politicians of the transition were able to fulfill the pact that this involved, not making use of the past in political combat, it was not because they’d forgotten it, but because they remembered it very well, because they remembered and they decided that it was undignified and abject to settle scores with the past in order to be right at the risk of mutilating the future, perhaps of submerging the country in another civil war.”

*Anatomy of a Moment* is also a tour de force in rhetoric, of a style I seldom see any more. Cercas uses repetition, irony, symmetry, parallel constructions, and I presume many other rhetorical devices that I didn’t recognize but was captured by. Certain phrases repeat across the sections, such as the plotters’ and underminers’ camouflaged (and in Cercas’ hands ironic) claim of needing a coup to put in place a ‘coalition, or caretaker, or unity’ government. In fact most of the actual plotters were aiming a return to military-backed dictatorship. The story becomes epic poetry with these devices.

Cercas is a novelist, not a historian. His first version of *February 23* was a novel, but he was dissatisfied with the first draft and decided he hadn’t gotten at the truth of the event. So he spent years doing more research and interviews, ending up with this non-fiction history and analysis. In several places the records do not clarify exactly happened, and Cercas is left with conflicting versions, many of them from participants trying to exonerate themselves by putting others in the driver’s seat of the coup. Cercas meticulously examines the factual plausibility of each, but he also occasionally and explicitly takes a novelist’s flight of imagination to follow the thread of a less-likely, but intriguing tale.

Cercas’ skill as a novelist shows as he gradually weaves in backstories and observations on the Civil War, ETA, etc, and how they contributed to an environment where everyone knew a coup was coming, just not when or where. The repetitions and the gradual addition of more players, more background, and more complexity make it possible for a non-Spaniard to follow the story and to become as fascinated by it as one would by a novel.

His novelist’s background also shows in the depth of his character studies of the major players on both sides of the coup. The most interesting men are the three protagonists who stay upright in the Cortes: Suarez (a former falangist turned forger of Democracy), Carillo (lifelong Communist who kept his party in check to help Suarez secure the end of Francoism), and Gutierrez Mellado, a general who became an unlikely but critical backer of Suarez along his difficult path. Interestingly, Cercas holds back the full biography of Suarez until the very end of the book, so that someone not familiar with Spanish politics has only his actions near the time of the coup to work with in puzzling out the meaning that Cercas seeks. This actually works very well, as one can consider all the possible meanings of his keeping upright on February 23 as Cercas presents them, rather than going into the book with a preconceived notion of his motivations. Cercas’ foundation as a novelist also shows in the writing that is more than history, that makes every sentence artful and constructed on several levels.

[on Suarez’ decision to legalize the Communist Party and Communist labor unions] “because the Communists had been the main and almost sole opposition to Francoism, and because a democracy without Communists would be an abbreviated democracy, perhaps internationally acceptable but nationally

insufficient.” That ‘acceptable’ vs ‘insufficient’ is wonderful writing.

Over the last two years I have read three stories of writer-vagabonds wandering through the Spanish countryside before the Republic (Laurie Lee, John Dos Passos, and Jose Cela), and also Orwell’s *Homage to Catalonia*. In past years I read many mysteries that were either set during the years of Franco, or involved people settling scores from those years. So it was fascinating to follow Cercas’ meditations on how his heroes of the transition mediated those emotions and wangled a working democracy out of what could have been a bloody renewal of the Civil War or a stalemate. At the very end of the book, Cercas takes recent leftist critics of Suarez to task, arguing that what he accomplished under the circumstances was truly remarkable. And that one of the strengths of the democracy he forged was that it was not a frozen structure but one that could evolve into something better over time.

[I would welcome reactions from people who know Spanish history: what do you think of Cercas’s backing of Suarez? Also, he doesn’t ask two questions that I was left with. Why did the soldiers in the Cortes fire their weapons if there was so much emphasis on a soft coup (although if I remember correctly that action was led by the proponent of a hard coup, so maybe that answers the question) and why didn’t they hit anyone?]

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### **Matias says**

Es bastante guay haber leído en los tiempos que corren en España esta novela casi educativa acerca de la transición. Para ser más capaz de interpretar la información.

El libro se escribe a partir del 23F, el intento de golpe de estado de Tejero, que es buen gancho y le da ese ingrediente de suspense necesario para que algo sea entretenido además de instructivo, pero que termina siendo también una reconstrucción bastante creíble de la partida de ajedrez política que tuvo lugar en los primeros increíbles años del gobierno de Suarez.

Luego Cercas escribe lo suficientemente bien como para resultar interesante, en algunos momentos te lleva a las fronteras del arte, pero le falta poesía y power para cosas mayores.

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### **Alejandro Bandera says**

Interesante libro que me ha hecho aprender y penar mucho sobre el golpe de estado. Recomendable si te gusta la historia reciente.

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### **Lilly Roth says**

An interesting approach to non-fiction. Javier Cercas X rays a moment in Spanish history as if it were suspended in time. He digs into each and every character, their past and present, excavating into their souls and minds to understand what drove their actions.

An fabulous page-turner!

