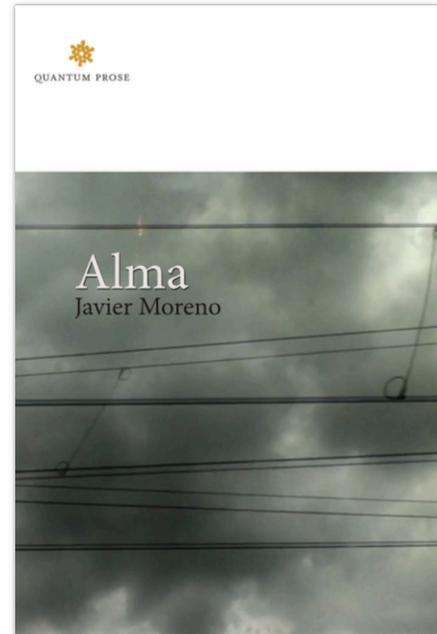


Alma translates into soul in English, a reference that cannot be ignored when reading the 2018 publication of critically acclaimed poet, novelist, and literary critic Javier Moreno. What ensues in the text is a striking, often discordant revelation of a man's innermost thoughts, desires, and self that reflects the joys, sufferings, and wants of his soul. The anonymous narrator is eerily reminiscent of Moreno: a mathematics teacher from Murcia who lives in Madrid and whose voracious consumption of literature transforms him into an encyclopedic authority of Spanish letters and culture. In addition to the first person narrator who lays bare his soul in the novel, the reader meets Maria, a strange figure obsessed with fragments and images, and Eduardo, a character whose strangeness far outweighs that of his acquaintance, Maria. Through the interrelated narration of the three key protagonists, *Alma* produces a radical examination of life and literature in our undeniably digital age.



ALMA
Javier Moreno

The novel's reliance upon the fragment makes Moreno's poetic background apparent. Short sentences come together in the novel to weave a complicated text of being and writing that shares many characteristics with poetry. In foregrounding the fragment as a building block of the novel, *Alma* may seem illogical and difficult to some readers. The intentionality of its form, however, is clear. At one point, the narrator admits, "Plot has never been what drives my interest in novels." He later intensifies this statement with "plots bore me." Indeed, it is difficult to sequence the events in *Alma* chronologically. In this way, the novel focuses on the act of writing and producing characters and their attendant relations as a vital function of narrating the soul.

What *Alma* ultimately demonstrates is a clear preoccupation with the ways that we see, interpret, and project ourselves. The narrator writes, "That's why we never see ourselves in our dreams. If indeed we do appear it's in the form of a character, with a mask that's different from our pronoun." Self-projection and self-mediation arise throughout *Alma* in writing, in Internet technologies and social media, furniture selection—manifest in Eduardo's inexplicable fascination with IKEA—as objects, digital configurations, and narratives that exist in relation to ourselves coalesce to reveal our souls. *Alma*'s insistence upon the fragment as a speck of the self thus attains increasing significance in a world where a status update, a caption, a book, or an avatar come to symbolize the person in "the real world", in the publishing community, and online.

Alma is a stunning novel that reveals the depths of the soul of twenty-first century humanity, a narrative trip that invites the reader to journey into the unseen corners of the world the anonymous narrator, Eduardo, and Maria inhabit. This translation will leave a lasting impression on its readers as it compels them to reflect upon the complexities of postmodernity, as we navigate bearing our souls across a variety of media.

N. Michelle Murray
Vanderbilt University