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The Transcantabrian

A journey on the 'Coal Train'
 Juan Pedro Aparicio

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 José S. Carralero & Maribel Fraguas
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Juan Pedro Aparicio (León, 1941) studied law in Oviedo and Madrid, though he went on to dedicate himself entirely to literature. His first book, *The Origin of the Ape* (1975) incorporated fantastic elements into a realistic narrative, a feature which he would develop in *Render unto Caesar* (1981), and would characterize all his later works. Critical and public recognition came with *The Year of the Frenchman* (1986), which was followed by *Ambiguous Portraits* (1989), winner of the Nadal Prize. Among his other works special mention should be made of *The Shape of Night* (1984), one of the most outstanding contemporary novels on the Spanish Civil War, and the detective thrillers starring inspector Malo, of which two have so far appeared: *Malo in Madrid*, or *The Case of the Polish Widow* (1996) and *The Great Fog* (2001). His short stories have appeared in the most prestigious national and international anthologies, and in 2005 won for him the Seteniel Prize for the best book of short stories for that year. As well as novels, he has written essays, journalism and travel books, of which the best known is *The Transcantabrian* (1982) which gave rise to a tourist train of the same name. At present Aparicio is the director of the Cervantes Institute in London.

For many years travellers used to take the old narrow gauge railway that went between Bilbao and León, following in reverse the route of the old steam trains that carried coal to the iron and steel works of Vizcaya. Then, one day, the writer Juan Pedro Aparicio did the same journey, and Literature changed forever the destiny of the 'Coal Train' or *Hullero*. From that moment onwards the train acquired a new name, The Transcantabrian, and was immortalized in what became a classic of travel literature. Aparicio's powerful writing broadened the railway's narrow tracks, and turned the worn out Hullero into an iron dragon tied to a landscape which acquires fantastic dimensions on going through the provinces of Vizcaya, Santander, Burgos, Palencia and León. This is the story of a train journey, but it is also the story of the train itself, of those who drive it, of those who use it, and of the regions through which it passes, with all their history, natural and artistic treasures, and their ghosts... This is an example of how a modest train can help to create a giant masterpiece. The one hundred watercolours painted by José S. Carralero and Maribel Fraguas faithfully follow Aparicio's text, and add an extra dimension to this most enjoyable of literary journeys.



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