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# POSTWAR SPANISH FICTION AND THE PURSUIT OF SPANISH REALITY

*David K. Herzberger*

During the first two decades following the Spanish Civil War (1936–39), and well into the 1960s, most Spanish novelists stood primarily as literary and political outliers. This is so for a number of reasons. Above all, nearly all of the writers whose work garnered critical recognition in Spain during this period sharply opposed the very existence of the Franco regime: a dictatorship that had used raw military might to defeat the opposition during the War set out over the next two decades to consolidate its power and sustain its authority over government institutions, all forms of media and communication, and the diverse strains of cultural production. To a large extent during these years, Spain stood isolated from European and other Western democracies. This led in many ways to prolonged economic scarcity and rampant poverty in large segments of the Spanish population, yet it also coincided with an on-going celebration by the Nationalist (Francoist) victors of what they viewed as a return to the values and ideals of the authentic Spain. The trauma caused by the Civil War itself remained broadly suppressed for several decades, but in fact it was hidden in plain sight. The Regime sought to create (without consent of the people) laws and normative values for Spain whose purpose was to forge a mythic and unified national identity summarized in the lapidary assertion of “one language, once race, one religion.”

The repeated insistence by the Regime on a canonical and permanent set of national values circumscribed nearly the entire cultural context of postwar Spain. As writer and Franco supporter Manuel Fraga Iribarne proclaimed, these values were constituted “ante Dios y ante la Historia” (1958, 516). While God was evoked naturally and easily by the Regime with the support of the Church, History was less easily managed, though the government persistently sought to do so. Indeed, the recurrent claims of conformity and consonance for Spain as a nation held sway over the writing of history, the purpose of which was to create a usable past to support the aims of the Regime. Such a posture, of course, inflicted sharp intellectual violence on the possibility of fully understanding history and precluded the construction of a meaningfully open culture in the present. More specifically, it engendered a past that became radicalized as essentially and rigidly authentic, while confining to the periphery all that stood outside the narrowly conceived core. As José Antonio Biescas put it, “Los vencedores del 39 quisieron hacer tabla rasa de toda aquella tradición que no fuese la suya, dogmática, institucionalizada, identificada como la nacional; el resto era marginado, expulsado de la convivencia intelectual” (1980, 516). This marginalization, of course, applied to Spanish novelists, whose work, as we

see in this chapter, became important venues for representing elements of Spanish culture that defied the “convivencia intelectual” desire by the Franco regime.

In this context, the role of language itself in the composition of the novel and in the general composition of the cultural milieu in Spain bears mention. To a large degree the Franco regime repressed, and frequently disallowed, the use of regional languages – Basque, Catalan, and Galician – in various forms of cultural production. While it is not my aim here to offer a history of the novel in these languages in the postwar period, a few observations might summarize the challenging context of writing fiction (and representing the reality of Spain) in languages other than Spanish. First of all, the Regime’s main cultural enterprise to impose unity on the nation was based less on the idea of conversion of the many into one (the idea of *e pluribus unum*) than to deny or suppress the very concept of the many in its history – the essential and authentic Spain was to be rooted in the erasure of differences to begin with. Thus, following the Civil War the Regime set out to diminish and in many instances prohibit the use of other languages in the education system, in administrative functions, and in various forms of oral and written culture. As Chris Perriam and his collaborators have noted in the history of postwar writing in Spain, names of people, streets, towns, and commercial products could be recorded only in their Castilian versions; even inscriptions on gravestones had to be in Spanish. Books in Catalan, Basque, and Galician were destroyed, and publishing in these languages (regarded as inferior ‘dialects’) was made virtually impossible throughout the 1940s (2000, 5).

### The novel of social realism

Given the firmly drawn parameters of the cultural context in Francoist Spain that were either created or sanctioned by the Regime, Spanish novelists writing in the 1940s and 1950s (and with strong carryover even into the 1960s and early 1970s) faced both esthetic and ethical dilemmas. To a large extent, they resolved the esthetic challenge by evoking both the tradition and methods of realism, which provided them at the same time with a vehicle for their ethical response to the Regime. For example, in 1959, at a gathering of authors from Europe and the United States in Formentor (Spain) to discuss the current state of novel-writing, nearly all of the non-Spanish writers proclaimed the death of the grand narratives of realism from the nineteenth century. Not only had that kind of writing been superseded in their view by the more stylized, experimental, and formal paradigms of the best writers of the twentieth century (Faulkner, Joyce, Proust, and Kafka, to name only a few) but also the very idea of a hyper-realism bound to the faded principles of representation and referentiality were cast aside as both naïve and ineffective. Spanish novelists, however, dissented from the mainstream, proclaiming not only the power of the novel to re-present the real but also the ethical obligation to do so in a society that had scant access to information about the social ills and unequal justice that plagued the nation beyond individual circumstance.

Censorship and government control had indeed succeeded in excluding from public discourse most forms of cultural production that might undermine the felicitous view of Spain that had been promulgated by the Regime through its support of writers and publishers sympathetic to its ideas. Camilo José Cela, writing in the prologue of his 1951 novel *La colmena*, perhaps most poignantly describes (and prescribes) what may be seen as the foundational ethos of novel-writing for an entire generation of authors during the 1950s and 1960s: “Mi novela *La colmena* no es otra cosa que un pálido reflejo, que una humilde sombra de la cotidiana, áspera, entrañable y dolorosa realidad [de España]” (1967, 9). In 1962, when realism in the novel had flourished for more than a decade as an important literary tool for social criticism among a group of young writers known as the Generation of 1950, many Spanish novelists echoed the

intentionality of Cela's earlier observations in a series of interviews. Armando López Salinas seemed to best sum up the prevailing attitude among novelists of this generation: "El servicio que puedo prestar a los otros hombres de mi país es el de desvelar las relaciones sociales y mostrar el mundo tal y como creo que es. La obra literaria, en un amplio sentido, puede ayudar a la creación de nuevas condiciones [sociales]" (Corrales Egea 1971, 61–62).

In the early 1940s, before the emergent novelists of the Generation of 1950 brought realism to prominence, Carmen Laforet had portrayed postwar Barcelona in her novel *Nada* (1944) as an impoverished and decayed city in which few were able to flourish. Although family life was set forth as one of the cornerstones of Francoist propaganda, it is portrayed in *Nada* as a gloomy, nightmarish, and violent institution for the young narrator, Andrea, who begins her university studies after arriving in the city from a town in rural Spain. Andrea meets sons and daughters of the wealthy at the university, but her own life is marked by scarcity (of food, clothing, and opportunity) as her once middle-class family in Barcelona is barely able to survive its own disintegration. Laforet represents both existential emptiness and social vulnerability as the foundational elements of postwar Spanish reality, but she does so without directly attributing these to the War itself, and certainly not to the policies of the Regime. To do so, of course, would have invited official disapproval and perhaps the silencing of her work. Nonetheless, the inferences to be drawn about Spanish society are clearly marked in the novel – deprivation and decay permeate the infrastructure of postwar Spain, a nation that is barely able to sustain itself.

Representing the Civil War directly remained a privilege of the victors in postwar Spain, but the implicit link between the War and the Franco regime on the one hand, and the general inability to explore the destructive consequences (political, social, economic) of the conflict on the other, shaped much fiction until the dictator's death in 1975. This can be seen in two principal ways: first, in the overt representation of contemporary Spanish reality viewed from the margins in the works of the Generation of 1950, who set out to frame their works as instruments for social change. The novels of this period, therefore, grow largely from the desire to represent all that is observable in contemporary Spanish society but frequently absent from reporting by the media. Although Spain as a whole, and thus many individuals as well, carried the burden of the lived trauma of the War (especially those who had opposed the Franco forces), the novelists of the Generation of 1950 showed scant interest in probing the lives of individual characters or exploring postwar anxiety with psychological depth. Instead, they tend to create a collective protagonist in their works (e.g., the impoverished people of Madrid in Cela's *La colmena*; the bored youth of the bourgeoisie in Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio's *El Jarama*, 1955) with a focus on the quotidian and external events of their lives. In *La colmena*, for example, the narrative evokes various aspects of the daily living of more than 300 characters, with a vivid representation of the lower classes struggling to survive amid the postwar poverty of Madrid. As Cela himself wrote about the novel, it is "un estrato determinado de la ciudad, que es un poco la suma de todas las vidas que bullen en sus páginas, unas vidas grises, vulgares y cotidianas" (1958, 14). In contrast to the story that the Regime wished to tell, Francoist Spain emerges in *La colmena* not as a tranquil and prosperous country but as a cauldron of misery with no prospects for change.

Second, rural Spain was presented no less harshly by writers of this period, who voice a purposeful dissonance from the rhetoric emanating from the Regime. The image of a bountiful and prosperous country (one chosen and blessed by God, according to the rhetoric of the time) is perhaps most persistently portrayed in the schools and textbooks during the Franco years. As Andrés Sopena Monsalve notes in his humorous memoir of Spanish education during the 1950s and 1960s, everything about Spain taught in the schools – its history, its imperial

influence, its cultural standing – elevated the nation to the level of myth, with Franco and his followers portrayed as heroic warriors who had saved the nation from the infidels (the Republicans during the Civil War) just as El Cid and his followers had rescued Spain from the Moors eight centuries earlier. Beyond the heroic nature of Francoist soldiers during the War, however, Spain itself was proclaimed to be physically and geographically blessed, and thus able to flourish more vigorously than other nations. As Sopeña Monsalve notes, his textbooks offered more propaganda than intellectual scrutiny of Spain. For example: “El Señor quiere mucho a España. Por eso la puso en el mejor sitio del mundo, donde no hace ni mucho frío ni mucho calor. (Pues en otros sitios o está siempre todo helado o hace tanto calor que no se puede vivir.) . . . Y le dio un cielo muy azul, y unos montes muy altos, y unos campos muy grandes y muy ricos” (1994, 164). As a result of its favorable geographical position, Spain was destined to prosper without the aid of others: “Rodeada por el mar en su mayor extensión y embellecida con los mejores regalos de la Providencia, España lo contiene todo y es una de las naciones más completas del mundo” (165). In brief, as the textbook explains, “todos los hombres querían vivir en España” (165).

But, of course, many Spanish novelists of the time proposed an alternative reality in their works. Jesús Fernández Santos’s *Los bravos* (1954) serves as a prime example. The novel is set in an unnamed rural village in northern Spain. There is a kind of geographical determinism at work in the town, whose inhabitants are submerged in a desolate landscape from which they cannot hope to escape – a sharp contrast with the sanctified Spain proclaimed by the Regime: “El pueblo estaba vacío. Las casas, el río, los puentes y la carretera parecían desiertos de siempre, como si su único fin consistiera en existir por sí mismos, sin servir de morada o tránsito” (1954, 12). Further, the infertile land fails to provide the villagers any hope of earning enough money to leave the area, and each year the meager harvest continues to diminish. This sense of isolation amid the hostility of the natural environment defies representations of Spain offered by the Regime of the wealth and abundance provided by the Spanish earth and, of course, by God himself. To be sure, rural Spain in the novels of this period is seen as a trap – a space of unforgiving harshness that impinges upon daily survival rather than nourishes it.

### The novel and the nation

The isolation and paralysis of the small town portrayed in *Los bravos* is also sharpened by the suspension of time, which is pointedly conveyed by the image of the clock on the church tower: “El reloj aparecía inmóvil, falta de sus saetas, en una hora inverosímil . . .” (1954, 12). For the Franco regime, time became a critical component for the legitimization of their victory in the discursive practices of writing history. As the Regime saw it, past time and present time must be understood as bound up with the victory by the Nationalist forces in the Civil War. But it was a tricky intellectual maneuver to demonstrate that the past of Spain inevitably progressed toward the outcome of the War while proclaiming that progression beyond the current state of affairs was no longer required. On the one hand, a happy ending had been reached with the establishment of the Franco regime, while on the other the Regime asserted that a debilitating stagnation would not set upon the country even as history had come to a close. Franco himself viewed the Civil War as a culminating moment of liberation from the forces of the anti-Spain and labeled the Nationalist victory as “la coronación de un proceso histórico” (1940, 20). In this way he was able to assert the inherent value of the present linked to the past at the same time that he envisioned the arresting of temporal progression because Spain had now reached the legitimate apex of its destiny. The principal task of the Regime for defining the future thus became the preservation of the actual.

While obstacles to publishing in languages other than Spanish were slowly removed during the Franco years, novelistic production was clearly affected. Nonetheless, it is possible to affirm in broad terms that the development of the novel in Galician, Basque, and Catalan for the first two decades after the War followed the tendencies of the postwar novel written in Spain in general. The Galician novel of the 1950s, for example (often associated with the Galaxia publishing group), tended to provide a realistic portrayal of the harsh conditions of the Galician countryside linked to temporal stagnation, but with an overarching “local” nationalism that stood in sharp contrast to the Spanish nationalism promoted by the Regime. In other words, while the content of the Galician novel of this period drew from the regional reality of northwestern Spain, the foundational elements of this novel reflected a shared perspective on the nature and purpose of the novel written in Spanish at the time. This can be seen, for example, in works such as Xosé Neira Vilas’s *Memorias dun neon labrego* (1959), which portrays merciless poverty among the young people of Galicia. As linguistic restrictions eased in the 1960s, the Galician novel gained moderate prominence as it turned from the realistic esthetic of the 1950s (similar to the novel written in Spanish) to works that use memory and fantasy to portray a complex Galician social structure and at times a contentiousness related to conservative versus liberal political positions and the shaping of Galician nationalism: the works of Xosé Luis Méndez Ferrín, for example, convey many of these issues, as well as the feminist and nationalistic fiction of María Xosé Queizán. It should also be pointed out that a major outlier from the dominant fiction of the 1950s and 1960s is Alvaro Cunqueiro, who produced works of fantasy in Spanish that were well received at the time, but who also wrote important novels in Galician such as *Merlin e familia* (1955) and *As crónicas do sochantre* (1956).

The Basque novel of the postwar period also generally evolved following the course of fiction in Spain in general, from a realistic, even “costumbrista” portrayal of local conditions during the 1950s to an existential focus in the 1960s with a heightened sense of universal dilemmas and experimentation with novelistic technique. However, translations of American and European novelists began to appear during this time (e.g., Twain, Hemingway, Kafka, and Camus), and a more modern approach to fiction can be seen in novels such as Ramón Saizarbitoria’s *Egunero hasten delako* (1969) – highly sophisticated technically, it also draws to the fore the political realities of ETA (the pseudo-military organization in Spain and France fighting for Basque independence). The first edition of the novel was suppressed by the Spanish government and, as Mari Jose Olaziregi has noted, “readers chose to see it as a nationalist [Basque] manifesto” (2008, 252).

The Catalan novel by far has been the most produced and consumed in Spain outside of fiction written in Spanish during the postwar period and transition to democracy. But it too suffered from the rigorous restrictions imposed by the Franco government. This is seen not only in literature, of course, but in Cataluña as a whole – its desire for greater autonomy (and self-rule, for many), its widely supported tilt toward Europeanization, and with it, the embrace of modernity all clashed with the normative values promulgated by the Regime. These values, of course, mirror those that the government sought to overlay on resistant cultures throughout Spain: “Catholicism, Castilian monolinguisism, and conservative social and political structures,” as Josep Miquel Sobrer has shown (2008, 227). As occurred with a large number of writers and intellectuals throughout Spain, many Catalan novelists left the country after the War and during the early years of the Regime, and little that was written in the Catalan language during the 1940s and 1950s has made its way into the mainstream today. In 1962, however, Mercè Rodoreda published *La plaça del Diamant* (written from exile in Switzerland), the first novel of the postwar period in Catalan. The work gained significant recognition

(especially when it was translated into Spanish), with its focus on life in postwar Barcelona. In general, Catalan fiction followed the broad social and existential trends of the novel in Spain during the first two decades of the Franco regime (with Manuel de Pedrolo's *Una salva com la teva*, 1960, serving as a prime example).

### Social and cultural transformations

By the middle of the 1960s Spain was experiencing inevitable social and economic changes (though political transformation remained more than a decade away), which served as a catalyst for cultural change as well. In 1959, for example, the American president Dwight Eisenhower traveled to Madrid to sign an agreement that called for military bases in the country, a move that not only signaled international political support for the Regime as Spain increasingly moved to open its doors to foreign capital, but also brought to the nation the coincident influx of outside ideas. This new openness was further enhanced by a dramatic increase in tourism, which Franco himself lauded as part of a prosperous Spain. While such an increase was generally welcomed by the Regime, it also made what drew tourists to the country – the sun and the beaches, of course, but also the perception of Spain as an exotic other to the mainstream cultures of central and northern Europe – even more entrenched. The tourist slogan “Spain is different” thus became double edged: the nation embraced and marketed its distinctive essence (gypsies, bulls, horses, flamenco, and Moorish culture, among other things) while becoming vulnerable to the influx as well as the demand for more liberal ideas and permissive behaviors.

In the Spanish novel, social realism began to fade in the early 1960s, and writers slowly embraced the new literary techniques associated with the Latin American “boom” and the high modern novels of twentieth-century Europe and the United States. Yet for the most part the social focus of the novel on the reality of Spain remained strong. The portrayal of the Civil War (still somewhat tentative, given the political climate of the time), the relatively underdeveloped Spanish economy, with its coincident poverty, and the undemocratic conditions of Spanish society remained the referential base of much Spanish fiction, while many of the novelists who had embraced the techniques of realism in the novel during the 1950s created their work anew. In brief, as Spain drifted toward a more open social and political climate in the final years of the dictatorship, and then moved to create a democratic state in the early years that followed Franco's death in 1975, the social reality of Spain remained the primary focus of many Spanish novelists: trauma, violence, the Civil War, and memory sustained much of Spanish narrative even as no single movement or generational esthetic coalesced in the same way that social realism had shaped the writing of young authors following the War.

### History and the novel of memory

Perhaps the most significant turn in narrative fiction of the 1970s and early 1980s coincides with a more purposeful attempt to explore the past, at the same time that both the Franco regime and the new democracy in Spain continued to resist opening the past to scrutiny. That is to say, while the official stance of the political institutions (and to a large extent, the judiciary as well) was to seek reconciliation for the nation by avoiding or willfully “forgetting” much of the suffering of the previous four decades, many novels of memory set out to explore the lived past of the Civil War and the strains of dissent that anticipated the conflict and persisted in its aftermath. Though by no means single-voiced in its propositions or tied to a precise set of literary principles, the novel of memory commingles past and present to seek definition of

the self located within the flow of history and the social and political elements that constitute it. Importantly, however, while the earlier novels of social realism transferred life to literature through the principles of logical causality and narrative followability (i.e., past events accumulate to present consequences) the novels of memory unravel the plots of the past that had been denied or appropriated by the Franco regime and thus offer a more intimate rendering of the historical realities of Spain that for four decades had often been repressed and censored.

One of the most important aspects of the novel of memory has to do with how it engages writing about the past – the writing of history – that had been overtly restricted and manipulated by the Regime. Although an engineer by profession, Juan Benet (1927–1993) stands as one of the most prominent writers of the second half of the twentieth century to explore an alternative history to that promoted by the Regime, and he does so both in his fiction and his essays. From the beginning of his career in the early 1960s, Benet had staunchly opposed both the intention and the practices of social realism when it came to representing Spain and its past, yet by no means did he disengage from historical reality. For example, he wrote forcefully to protest the obstacles faced by historians attempting to understand much of the military strategy of the Civil War. As he pointed out, the “facts” of the war contained in the files of what the government called the “Archives of the War of Liberation” had remained closed to scholars who did not parrot the official posture of the Regime (1983, 60–61). His own brief history of the war, *¿Qué fue la guerra civil?* (1976b), draws out the violence perpetrated by both the Republican and Nationalist forces in the conflict, and he sees complete annihilation (not only victory) as the end game of both sides. Published a year after Franco’s death, Benet’s book sparked considerable controversy – one might say a healthy debate that most likely would have been disallowed a few years earlier.

But it is in his novel, *Volverás a Región* (1967) where Benet draws fully on history and memory to portray the destructive past of Spain as a determinant precursor to its ruinous present. The novel consists of a complex framework of third-person narration and first-person memories evoked by the two principal characters (Marré Gamallo and Dr. Daniel Sebastián), who recreate the past from the pre-Civil War period to the present in the isolated town of Región in northern Spain. Through the memories of the two characters (and with the historical backdrop of the twentieth century filled in by the third-person narrator) we are able to reconstruct the ruination of Región and its inhabitants throughout its history. Of primary importance, however, Benet uses the novel as a kind of metonymic remembrance of Spain as a whole over four decades. As Ricardo Gullón notes in the title of his well-known essay on Benet, Región indeed is “una región laberíntica que bien pudiera llamarse España.”

Benet portrays the war and its aftermath as a lingering trauma, both for Spain as a nation and for the survivors of the conflict in Región. In effect, the people of the town (and in particular the two main characters) are so completely overwhelmed by the past that the present ceases to exist and the future is merely a continuation of all that has come before. To the dismay of these people, as Dr. Sebastián fully understands, “El presente ya pasó y todo lo que nos queda es lo que un día no pasó; el pasado tampoco es lo que fue, sino lo que no fue; sólo el futuro, lo que nos queda, es lo que ya ha sido” (1967, 245). In contrast to writers of social realism, whose testimonial perspective focuses on the pure present that is observed and recorded, and whose representation of trauma seems unhinged from specific events that may have caused it, Benet locates trauma along a temporal path that implies it is both aftermath and consequence. The Civil War stands prominently at the center of the historical trauma of Spain, and the memories of the two principal characters remain shaped by the conflict two decades after the Nationalist victory.

Another crucial aspect of *Volverás a Región* turns upon its implied renunciation of Francoist historiography. Francoist historians repeatedly characterized Spanish history as a movement



from chaos to stability, with the rigid truth of myths asserted as the essential and eternal Spain. As we have seen, the Regime envisioned itself located at the end of history, which was signaled by the present time of peace and prosperity – the destiny of Spain fulfilled as the nation returned to its unifying core in language, race, and religion. In *Volverás a Región*, as well as in many of his essays on history, Benet purposefully undermines both the Francoist writing of history and the mythic structures that underpin it. For Benet the past is always closely bound up with how we express our desire to understand it. In other words, it is dependent always upon the telling of stories, upon the nature of narration and upon the belief that narration configures the past rather than simply reflecting it as if it could be told in a single story with a single truth.

Above all for Benet, narrative combines with time to eliminate from our understanding of the past what he calls “el demonio de la exactitud” (1976c, 48), while he asserts the contrary idea that “sólo la ambigüedad tiene capacidad de hacer historia” (1976a, 56). Thus in *Volverás a Región*, for example, when Benet writes at length about the political, historical, and even military aspects of the War, ambiguity, enigma, and contradiction move to the fore. His historical representation bears scant resemblance to the coherent structures of historiography as outlined by historians of the Regime – he construes the truths of narrative as well as of history as wholly contingent and deathly pale. This view permeates every aspect of his representation of *Región*. In this sense, Benet’s *Región* echoes Cela’s Madrid of *La colmena*, but with a critical difference: while both present the tragedy of the present, Benet’s Spain is deeply rooted in history, which the characters seem helpless to overcome. In contrast to Francoist historiography, Benet proposes an end to myth rather than to history, and thus at least opens the past to re-presentation, if not to redemption. Not only does this subvert the Francoist approach to creating a usable past that serves the oppressive actions of the Regime, but also it suggests a diverse Spanish reality whose meaning is open to scrutiny and transformation. This, of course, represents a crucial turn in how Spanish fiction depicted Spain at the time.

One of the best-known memory novels of this period, Carmen Martín Gaité’s *El cuarto de atrás* (1978), also challenges the Francoist view of history that the Regime utilized to frame the present. Published three years after Franco’s death during the early transition to democracy, the novel rejects the testimonial representation of contemporary Spanish reality but by no means eschews the task of using Spanish society as its principal reference. It does so, however, with a commingling of memory and fantasy and explores both the present and past of Spain. The narrator (who is referred to as C, and clearly the voice of the author) shuttles between the present and past during the course of the novel, and the reflections that she offers on her life are intimately bound up with the past of Spain. The historical myths propagated by the Regime about Isabel la Católica serve as a highly pertinent example of how Martín Gaité challenges the single-voiced narrative of Francoist historians, and relates as well to the way in which the lives of women were shaped during the Franco years. Indeed, just as historians of the Regime exalt Isabel as the visionary matriarch who gave birth to Spain and its imperial glory and who cast pureness for women as the coequal of Spanishness, Martín Gaité locates Isabel at the center of the Francoist myths that are used to understand the past. Above all, the narrator of the novel recalls the imposition of values in her childhood by the state education system that come directly from the myth of Isabel: “Se nos ponía bajo su advocación, se nos hablaba de su voluntad férrea y de su espíritu de sacrificio, había reprimido la ambición y el despotismo de los nobles, había creado la Santa Hermandad, expulsado a los judíos traicioneros, se había desprendido de sus joyas para financiar la empresa más gloriosa de nuestra historia” (1978, 95).

It is clear, however, that the narrator evokes the myth of Isabel not to embrace it but to expose it as a paradigm for control instigated by the government – indeed, C is too astute a student of history not to penetrate the truth of the historiographic deceit that has shaped the myth.

As she reflects on how the past has impinged on her own life, this deceit moves to the fore: “Le escucho pensando en Isabel la Católica, en la falaz versión que, de su conducta, nos ofrecían aquellos libros y discursos, donde no se daba cabida al azar, donde cada paso, viaje o decisión de la reina parecían marcados por un destino superior e inquebrantable” (1978, 103–104). What is critical here, of course, is the way in which the narrator now sees the past always as contingent. The influence of that past on her own life, though still profound, is now open to question and doubt that was always discouraged and often disallowed for nearly four decades.

There are, of course, many other novels of memory written near the end of the Franco dictatorship and the early years of the transition to democracy – from Juan Goytisolo’s *Señas de identidad* (1966), in which the protagonist evokes his life from the Civil War to the present (his rebellion not only against the Franco regime but also his rejection of the traditions and history of Spain as a whole), to Luis Goytisolo’s 1973 masterpiece, *Recuento*, in which he criticizes overtly the barren lives of the young bourgeoisie and political Left in postwar Spain. These and other novels to a large degree seek to evoke past time in the context of the present, with Spain as primary referent near the end of Franco’s rule and during the early years of its fledgling democracy. Also during this period the historical novel gains a prominent position in representations of the past, often linked to memory. Antonio Muñoz Molina’s *El jinete polaco* (1991), for example, begins with a compulsion by the main character Manuel to disremember the past and to live outside of history, but the novel in fact shows that this is impossible to achieve. When Manuel returns to his hometown of Mágina after a long absence, he is forced to explore the lived history of the Civil War, the Franco regime, and what he has always thought of as a vacuous period of transition to democracy.

Lourdes Ortiz’s *Urraca* (1982) explores the more distant past – the life of Urraca (1080–1126), first queen of the Christian kingdoms of León and Castile – but with clear relevance to democratic Spain during the transition. Narrated in the first person by Urraca, the historical perspective of the novel depends primarily on defining herself and medieval Spain against the grain of perceived orthodoxy. Above all, the world that she portrays is deeply rooted in a perspective that was largely rejected by mainstream Spanish historians for many centuries: the essential hybridity of Spain as a nation born of different cultures. Not only does her narrative speak to an Iberian community enriched by the mingling of Jews, Christians, and Moors, but also lays out a key historiographic concept – the essence of Spanish history, as well as its identity, grows not from the unifying imposition of Christianity on diversity but rather from a fusion of cultures that allowed diversity to engender a richness unique to Spain and central to its national identity.

Novels in regional languages create diverse paths during this period, but frequently share an interest in history and memory. For example, during the late Franco years, and as Spain moved deeper into the transition to democracy, the Basque novel (like other literature) developed in a variety of directions that lacked a unified center. It is clear, however, that the novel of memory became an important way for writers to evoke the cultural past that had been largely suppressed and ignored for many decades during the Franco years, as well as the recent past associated with the violence of resistance and terrorism associated with ETA. Ramón Saizarbitoria’s *Hamaika pauso* (1995) represents the reality of ETA for many of those involved in violence, while Bernardo Atxaga’s *Gizona bere bakardadean* (1993) explores the devastation brought on by such violence.

In the Catalan novel during this period, there is a visible attempt to treat a more diverse range of topics, especially toward the latter years under Franco as Cataluña gained a greater sense of independence from Madrid and was increasingly seen as a vital center for literature and the arts with close ties to Western Europe. At the same time, however, there appears a

more intensely critical view of the middle- and upper-class society of Barcelona not unlike that found in the novels of Luis Goytisolo (e.g., *Recuento*) or Juan Goytisolo (*Señas de identidad*) written in Spanish. Beyond these well-known works in Spanish, however, Terenci Moix's *El día que va morir Marilyn* (1966), and a novel such as Montserrat Roig's *El temps de les cireres* (1977), which portrays the angst of a young woman who had sought an abortion in England, both aim their criticism at the Catalan middle class even as the region emerges from decades of repression by the central government of Madrid.

### Conclusion

The desire by Spanish novelists to represent the reality of Spain in the postwar period grew from the perceived distortion of its representation in nearly all forms of writing sanctioned by the State. It is important to point out, however, that the novels written during the first decades of the Franco regime were not born from a utopian quest to change the course of Spanish history but, somewhat more modestly, to dissent from claims about the felicitous state of affairs made by the Regime now that the authentic Spain had been restored and the anti-Spain had been kept at bay with the Nationalist victory in the Civil War. When the Franco dictatorship ended in 1975, the lingering desire to explore the present and to uncover the past remained a powerful concern among novelists, but democratization opened Spanish society and culture in ways that were at once embraced and resisted – the desire to know the past and work through its still present trauma was countered by a coincident desire to forget the past for the sake of reconciliation.

During the 1980s, what Robert Spires (1996) has termed “post-totalitarian fiction” began to take shape with new works by familiar authors, as well as by younger writers less concerned with Franco and the Spain of the recent past than with more universal concerns related to gender, identity, and the wielding of social authority. Furthermore, as Spain entered into a more mature phase of democratization, no compelling set of esthetic norms or a common perspective on political dissidence guided the novel, as had occurred during the four decades of dictatorship. It is hardly the case, of course, that Spanish novelists ceased to write about various aspects of life in contemporary Spain. However, the novel in general during this time might be best understood as shaped not in opposition to an overriding state of oppression in which writers sought social redemption for their work, but as an affirmation of openness to new ideas and techniques. Indeed, urgency to dissent, to use fiction as an instrument for social transformation or historical enlightenment, yielded to a more diffuse type of fiction that no longer set out to explore, as Teresa Vilarós has aptly noted (citing Rob Wilson and Wisural Dissanayake), “an ‘imagined community’ of coherent modernity [shaped] through warfare, religion, blood, patriotic symbology, and language (2003, 254). In other words, Spain as a nation, and large parts of its cultural production, began to lurch toward internationalism in ways previously eschewed under Franco, when Spain had persistently (and officially) imagined itself as different from the rest of Europe. The ethos of difference, of course, changed dramatically when Spain was admitted to the European Community in 1986 and was able to proclaim, “We are finally European.”

The novel of memory of the 1970s and 1980s, with its interest both in history as well as the writing of history, managed to lay bare the truths and deceptions of those who sought to remember the past and those who preferred to forget. No longer circumscribed by the authentic Spain envisioned by the Franco regime, Spanish novelists used their freedom, in fact, to be free of many of the encumbrances that had plagued their writing for nearly forty years. Trauma and injustice, inequality and national identity are topics still woven into the basic fabric of the

Spanish novel during the 1980s and beyond, but they are not framed by a single point of view or even by a single language. Hence the role of novelists is no longer to incite readers to action, as during the 1940s and 1950s, but as is the case with literature in general, to stir the public to contemplate anew the complex world that surrounds them.

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