

**THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR IN CONTEMPORARY SPANISH FICTION:  
*SOLDADOS DE SALAMINA, LA MULA AND LOS GIRASOLES CIEGOS***

by

**AURELIO RAMOS CABALLERO**

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**Department of Hispanic Studies  
School of Languages, Cultures, Art History and Music  
College of Arts and Law  
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## INTRODUCTION

Spain has seen few processes that have generated so many interpretations and debates as the Civil War. It is a framework of feelings and intense experiences, full of polemical and controversial issues. (Iniguez, L, *et al.* 1997, p.237)

Controversy over the Spanish Civil War is equalled by its topicality, with a considerable presence especially in politics and art. Franco's dictatorship imposed a unilateral vision of the Civil War and subsequently a condemnatory silence upon the Republican side, which resulted in a society that could not assimilate this traumatic event. After the agreed amnesia and silence during the transition to democracy, the maturing of Spain's democracy eventually provided an appropriate atmosphere to revisit the past. This socio-political context has supported the creation of the *Asociación para la recuperación de la memoria histórica* in 2000, which has one main objective: "Localizar todas las fosas comunes de la Guerra Civil Española e identificar el máximo posible de cadáveres" (El País 2007). This is not the only group devoted to the memory of the Civil War, other similar associations have been since created: *Associació de Familiars de Represaliats pel Franquisme*, *Asociación Víctimas de la Guerra Civil Española*, *Agrupación General de Estudios de la Memoria Histórica Antifranquista*, *Asociación Descendientes del Exilio Español* (Ministerio de la Presidencia 2008), among others. The Government passed the "LEY 52/2007, de 26 de diciembre, por la que se reconocen y amplían derechos y se establecen medidas en favor de quienes padecieron persecución o

*violencia durante la guerra civil y la dictadura*” (Ministerio de la Presidencia 2007), commonly known as *Ley de la Memoria Histórica*, whose intention is:

Reconocer y ampliar derechos a favor de quienes padecieron persecución o violencia, por razones políticas, ideológicas, o de creencia religiosa, durante la Guerra Civil y la Dictadura, promover su reparación moral y la recuperación de su memoria personal y familiar, y adoptar medidas complementarias destinadas a suprimir elementos de división entre los ciudadanos, todo ello con el fin de fomentar la cohesión y solidaridad entre las diversas generaciones de españoles en torno a los principios, valores y libertades constitucionales.

While the Civil War has often been the subject of works of fiction since it began in 1936, recent changes show that it is still a fresh issue. In 1976, the film director Carlos Saura affirmed: “La guerra española ha estado y está todavía gravitando sobre nosotros, pertenece a un pasado inmediato que difícilmente puede separarse de nuestro presente” (Deveny 1990, p.129). These words are valid still today. New generations who have no experience of the war or the harsh reality of the post-war period are revisiting the conflict in a range of films and literary works. This also seems to reflect the popularity of the topic and the wish of Spanish society to understand more about what happened. This dissertation will focus on the representation of the Civil War in literary works published in contemporary Spain since the mid 1990s. The aim is to analyse how a traumatic event that finished more than 70 years ago is presented to a contemporary audience in fictional works. The diversity shown in such representation reflects the diversity of possible solutions that Spanish people are taking into consideration in order to resolve this traumatic event in its recent past. Fiction is playing a major role in this process by offering a wide range of perspectives on the war.

The texts to be commented on, *Soldados de Salamina* (henceforth *Soldados*), *La mula* and *Los girasoles ciegos* (henceforth *Los girasoles*), were chosen on the grounds that they are:

- texts published in Spain and in Spanish in the 21<sup>st</sup> century
- texts with a certain literary recognition and public reception
- texts showing substantial differences in terms of content and form
- representative of other texts which take the Civil War as their subject

*Soldados* was published in 2001 by Javier Cercas, who was not particularly well-known at the time. The novel had 21 editions in its first 16 months, obtaining a spectacular success in terms of criticism and sales. *La mula* was written by Juan Eslava Galán, a well-known and successful author and historian, and was published in 2003. The fact that the author is also a historian enriches the relationship between history and fiction. *Los girasoles* was published in 2004 and is the only work by Alberto Méndez, who worked in national and international publishing companies. It was awarded with the prestigious *Premio de la Crítica 2004* and *Premio Nacional de Literatura 2005*. It is worth mentioning that there are film versions already released of *Soldados de Salamina* (2003) and *Los girasoles ciegos* (2008), and a version of *La mula* is being filmed at the moment, which show the interest and success of these three stories.



These three texts are interesting to be compared because they have some features in common but also are very different in several ways. The common threads could be in three or two of the texts: first, they challenge certain discourses, past as well as present, which have developed around the Civil War; second, they deal specifically with the relationship between history and fiction; and third, they problematise the representation of the past in the present. Nevertheless, their differences are also significant: first, the novels represent the relationship between the Nationalists and the Republicans in quite different ways; second, they offer different solutions to the problem of recreating historical events in a fictional story; and third, they take different approaches to the portrayal of the figure of the war-hero. The analysis of these differences as well as the unveiling of the common threads will provide an example of the current panorama regarding how the Civil War is represented in contemporary Spain.

### **History and fiction.**

Due to the nature of this research, most of the theoretical background revolves around the issue of the relationship between history and fiction. This theoretical introduction identifies key issues involved in the attempt to define the boundary between history and fiction, a problematic and complex process.

Traditionally, history has been associated with evidence provided by documentation, whereas fiction has been the domain of imagination, unreality and fantasy. However, history and fiction are deeply intertwined. An example of the depth of this connection is given by Paul Ricoeur:

History and fiction each concretize their respective intentionalities only by borrowing from the intentionality of the other [...] This concretization is obtained only insofar as, on the one hand, history in some way makes use of fiction to refigure time and, on the other hand, fiction makes use of history for the same ends. (Ricoeur 1988, III, p.181)

Any historical account is the work of a person, whose role is essential in the selection and in the transmission of events, becoming a filter of facts. Every historical account is therefore impregnated with the style and intentions of the author; that is why it is always important to analyse carefully the role of the narrator. Linda Hutcheon has pointed out the active and creative role of any type of author when revisiting the past:

Meaning and shape are not *in the events*, but *in the systems* which make those past “events” into present historical “facts”. This is not a “dishonest refuge from truth” but an acknowledgement of the meaning-making function of human constructs. (Hutcheon 1988, p.89)

A reason why this ‘meaning-making’ process is necessary is because there might exist two or more versions of the same event or sets of events. Thus, the historian or author decides to elaborate an account in order to present their definitive version (White 1987, p.20). There is a key idea for many authors when they challenge the distinction between history and fiction: the questioning of the objectivity of the historical discourse, which “is in essence a form of ideological elaboration” (White 1987, p.36). Objectivity of

the historian or author is also challenged since imagination “is present above all in the effort [...] to enter sympathetically into the minds or consciousnesses of human agents long dead [...]. This is often described as putting oneself in the place of past agents, seeing things from their point of view” (White 1987, p.67). All this leads us to an awareness of the lack of objectivity in the historical account and the closeness between history and fiction.

In fiction, real characters usually co-exist with fictional characters. They are all true in the fictional narration as they share the *reference*, term which means “a set of internally consistent criteria which constitute the truth-conditions of a discourse” (Hutcheon 1988, p.147). Therefore, as far as both fictional and historical characters develop within the same reference, the combination of history and fiction will work. In the case of narratives of the Spanish Civil War, López-Criado has written about how real historical figures can be monumentalised or demeaned and treated as ‘heroes’ or as ‘antiheroes’, a process which is pivotal to our understanding of the relationship between history and fiction in the texts to be analysed:

Children and grandchildren of ex-combatants still meet to discuss a particular series of events in which they did not participate, but which has engendered all the heroes, myths, and monsters [...] They represent the collective fears, hopes, and delusions of more than one lost generation of Spaniards. (López-Criado 1989, p.46)

A key concept in the relationship between history and fiction is what Paul Ricoeur called *the truth-claim* of the historical account. This is a feature which a fictional text would allegedly lack: “Only historical narrative claims to refer to a ‘real’ past, that is, one that actually happened. Fiction, on the

contrary, is characterized by a kind of referring” (Ricoeur 1988, III, p.5). However, we could always ask: can a fictional work not have the same aim of being ‘true’? The answer will be affirmative, taking into consideration that the truth of fiction is not the same as that of history, so there is room for truth in fiction. Also, when searching for the truth-claim of a text, can the perception of the reader be more important than the aim of the writer or vice versa? This last question leads us to a possible criterion for distinguishing history from fiction: it may depend on the intention of the writer or the interpretation of the reader rather than on semantic or rhetorical issues. In this sense, the texts analysed here show evidence of wanting to be considered ‘true’ through the inclusion of the historical discourse in the story, which “is a strategy that in this instance puts the reader in direct contact with ‘facts’ ” (Herzberger 1989, p.40).

The transmission of events is an interesting issue regarding history and fiction and will be relevant when approaching the selected texts. Events need to be organised in order to be explained; this organisation can be done “analytically, statistically, discursively, etc” (Herzberger 1995, p.5). Therefore, events might be arranged in different ways according to different purposes. Afterwards, the account is received by a reader, who will reorganise and even reconstitute it “into new patterns of sense” (Herzberger 1995, p.5). Contemporary fiction makes this process visible and openly reflects on this issue, on how events are told, retold, remembered and forgotten.

The relationship between history and fiction, then, depends on several principles: first, our definition of history and of fiction; second, the intentions of the writer and of the reader; third, the notion that the difference is one of degree rather than of category.

### **History of the Civil-War Novel.**

The representation of the Civil War in Spanish fiction started with the conflict itself and has since been elaborated in an enormous variety of fictional works. Therefore, the relevance and contribution of the texts analysed in this dissertation will stand out when located within this thematic current that reaches contemporary Spain. In his account of the novel of the Spanish Civil War, Gareth Thomas (1990) analyses different aspects related to this literary form, using as a corpus a wide range of texts published until 1975. My current overview on the Civil-War novel until 1975 will follow the same structure as that of Thomas' research. In order to have a better understanding of the analysis of the novels, it would be helpful to draw some basic lines regarding the time framework of these novels. Thomas quotes Anthony G. Lo Ré, who:

identified two waves of novelistic production, the first in 1937-39 and the second in 1954-59, with a relative fall in production in between. The crest of the first wave (25 titles in 1939) is considerably higher than that of the second (13 titles in 1954). (Thomas 1990, p.14)

Thomas adds a third wave taking place around 1969, when “whatever the reason, more Civil War novels were published in Spain [...] than in any other year since 1939” (Thomas 1990, p.208).

In Thomas’s view (1990), the typical first-wave novel shows a group of common technical solutions. The author lived through the conflict, so they could not write critically as they did not have sufficient distance in time. The writer, thus, tended to recount anecdotes, chronicles and personal experiences with an immediate vision of the events; this figure is usually closer to an observer than to a novelist. Another relevant feature of the first-wave novel is closely related to certain nineteenth- and early twentieth-century popular literary genres such as the *folletín*, the short novel, the crime novel, the detective novel and the romance novel. All of them have a certain influence in the early Civil-War novels, contributing with their schemes to typical episodes of the Civil-War novel such as the narration of the atrocities of the war, action scenes, melodramatic events and love affairs. One common technique in both the popular novel and the first-wave Civil-War novels is the *authorial intromission* (Thomas 1990, p.34), either through direct comments from the author, which break into the story, or through the use of a character who is the voice of the author. Another point in common with the popular novel is caricature or exaggerated characterization. The Manichaeism imposed by the Establishment, which only accepted two stances - either with it or against it - affected in some way literature, so that characters are usually represented as villains or saints, imitating the political discourse of the period. Hence, their portrayal was normally biased, affected

or exaggerated, whether they were describing enemies or heroes. The enemy is villainous, stupid and contemptible; the hero, depending on the faction, is humane, righteous and a crusader in the Nationalist novel, written during and after the conflict, and class-conscious, a hard-worker and just in the Republican novel, also written during and after the conflict. This feature, together with the lack of ability to mould language, results in poor characterization and deficient plots (Thomas 1990, p.59).

The second-wave novel took place in the 1950s. Thomas comments first on the Nationalist novel written and published in Spain; afterwards, Thomas continues with the Republican novel written and published in exile. Nationalist writers lived in a country oppressed by powerful propagandistic machinery, epitomised in the portrait of the hero/heroine who encapsulated the ideals of the regime: the hero is strong, healthy, brave, of sound racial stock and obedient to the Catholic Church and the principles of the regime. The heroine is described as virginal, soft, beautiful and well-spoken. Thomas quotes the description of a Nationalist woman in the novel *El espantable caso de los 'tomadores' de ciudades*, by Benítez de Castro: “sus rubios cabellos, los ojos entornados por la fatiga, la boca pequeña y bien formada, la frente espaciosa y clara, el cuerpo virgen” (Thomas 1990, p.75). Hero and heroine must be prepared for martyrdom. Catholic mythology inspires these heroes. Ideas of heroism are still a key topic in present-day fiction on the Civil War.

Regarding the second-wave Republican novel, Thomas mentions the works by Ramón J. Sender, Max Aub, Arturo Barea and José R. Arana. One of the main features of this type of novel is the construction of dialogues, which have a powerful content. The use of intellectual discussions between characters conveys thought-provoking political material and comments on historical events. One of the most important themes in this discussions is class consciousness; writers demonstrate this concern with a variety of narrative techniques such as caricatures of Nationalist stereotypes, the inclusion of biographical episodes in a socially depressed environment, naturalistic descriptions of poor and unjust living conditions and, finally, the construction of an archetype “who will serve as the bearer of their [novelists’] message: the proletarian hero”. (Thomas 1990, p.111)

Thomas moves on to analyse one particular theme that has pervaded the Civil-War novel for four decades, and is also to be found in contemporary fiction: political disillusionment. Writers convey this message using different techniques: for instance, the use of the description of war atrocities in order to condemn such atrocities and to question their worthiness. Also, detailed and bloody descriptions manage to shock the reader and manage to defamiliarise a language that had become a stereotype in literature. Descriptions can be as explicit, as found in *Cuerpo a tierra*, by Fernández de la Reguera: “negros, horripilantes [...] los montones humeando en el atardecer. La brisa trajo un hedor repulsivo... Los camaradas muertos. Los enemigos muertos” (Thomas 1990, p.132). These last words “Los camaradas muertos. Los enemigos muertos” shows an attitude less



revanchist and less differentiating. Another way to recount the atrocities during the war was the use of metaphors and symbols, a recurrent feature in the Republican novel. For instance, it is very frequent to find the depiction of torture, agony or the death of animals; focus on animals rather than on human beings helps to keep a hideous atmosphere in the story when presenting war atrocities but at the same time reduces the level of disgust by preventing reader's identification with a human being (Thomas 1990, p.140).

Finally, Thomas comments on the Civil-War novels published in the late stage of the dictatorship (1967-1975), a period where the third wave took place with authors like Camilo José Cela and Juan Benet. The literary panorama during that period of time is mainly known for the technical experimentalism in fiction. This experimentalism brought new modes of expression that meant a break with the former literary current, Social Realism. The Civil-War novel reflected this interest in innovating and experimenting via fragmentation of events, incoherence, ambiguity, magical elements and subconscious thought. The writer could make the structure of the novel meaningful in itself by showing the chaos and psychological conflict of their characters in the allegedly chaotic structure of the story, as in *Si te dicen que caí*, by Juan Marsé. This is one example of an artistic current that was refreshing not only the novels of the Spanish Civil War but also the literary panorama in Spain.

The year 1975 meant a turning point in the history of 20<sup>th</sup>-century Spain: it marked the end of the dictatorship of Franco and the beginning of the democratization of the country. Although changes in the political scene do not necessarily have to make an impact on literary production, one novel published in 1975 has been considered evidence of a shift towards Postmodernism:

Solamente la diáfana narración y el juego irónico de Eduardo Mendoza en *La verdad sobre el caso Savolta* parecía excluirse de campo acotado; simplemente sucedía que nos faltaba entonces el término adecuado para calificarlo: *posmoderno*. (Rodríguez 2005)

Postmodernism is visible in Spain in the late 1970s, when Francoist regime disappears, although most intellectuals welcomed it with scepticism (Maginn 1995). This shift leads to the end of the experimentalism in the 1960s and 1970s. The 1980s will see a focus on the story and on the author as a storyteller. Fernando Valls realises that “hay búsqueda e insatisfecha exploración a partir de un lenguaje y unas estructuras heredadas que no podían seguir vigentes” (Catelli 2005), which shows the search for a change: leaving experimentalism behind and looking towards story-telling.

The general reaction towards the past, that is, the war and the dictatorship, during the years of the *Transición* was dominated by an agreed ‘pacto de silencio’:

We must not forget that the transition to democracy in Spain was founded on a compromise between the inheritors of General Franco's policies and representatives of the opposition, all of whom agreed to forget past controversies and sometimes even their own biographies prior to 1977 [...] In a 1983 survey on the war, conducted by the Spanish Institute of Public Opinion and published in four issues of the magazine *Cambio* 16, 73 percent of those interviewed maintained that the Civil War was "the most shameful moment in Spanish history and is best forgotten". (López 1989, p.246)

Despite this extended attitude, the Civil War was still present in fiction, albeit not at a level to be considered a new wave: "La muerte de Franco no supuso, contrariamente a lo que se esperaba, una avalancha de obras" (Bertrand 1996, p.12). When democracy was firmly established by the mid-1980s, the issue started being present in the public arena. For instance, in 1986 – the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the outbreak of the Civil War-, different opinions and attitudes came to the fore: on the one hand, the Government refused to fund any commemoration; on the other, publications on the topic were abundant. According to Maryse Bertrand in her article quoted above, there were two main literary currents in the Civil-War novel in the 1980s: autobiography and mythification. The former features a first-person narrator who is usually also the author. There were political autobiographies and non-fiction novels where the story is also a testimony, a confession or a personal relief. Mythification of the war is a legacy from the 1970s but acquired status with *Mazurca para dos muertos* (1983) by Camilo José Cela. The process of mythification in the case of the Civil-War novel works as follows: "La guerra civil sigue absolutamente necesaria al desarrollo de la trama pero ya no se utiliza [...] para justificar una ideología precisa, ya no sirve más que de pretexto para relatar conflictos eternos" (Bertrand 1996, p.13).

Postmodernism has a distinctive attitude towards the past: “Postmodern fictions [...] are particularly difficult when it comes to history, since on the face of it they generally reject the very concept of history and the way in which we have tried to write the past” (Herzberger 1995, pp.117-118). Therefore, fiction is not afraid to show how historical events are constructed, manipulated, transmitted, etc. This is a common feature in contemporary fictional texts dealing with the Civil War in Spain, as it will be explained in this study. It is important to bear in mind that these contemporary writers have been educated in a democratic environment and their concept of historiography is different from that of previous generations.

The new revival of the Civil War novel occurs in this context, reaching wide audiences and impregnating political and artistic scenes since the mid-1990s. It is an interesting literary and social phenomenon due, first, to the distance in time between the events and, second, to the nation-wide interest in the topic. This distance provokes a particular perspective towards history. According to the literary historian José Carlos Mainer: “Ahora hay una visión quizá más blanda. Uno de los riesgos que corre el tema de la Guerra Civil es una cierta trivialización sentimental [devida] a la distancia” (Rodríguez 2005). About this time distance, Cuñado (2007) mentions a term coined by Marianne Hirsch, *postmemoria*, defined as “la memoria recibida por aquéllos que no han vivido un momento histórico concreto [...] un tipo de experiencia ‘of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth’”; that is, the new generation of novelists who only lived through late Francoism but which has not been able to escape the influence of such a historical event. There is

then a link between this idea of *postmemoria* and the figure of the narrator-character in many Civil-War novels. This narrator-character usually receives some information about a Civil-War event and that triggers some research in order to know what really happened or to recover the memory of a past event. The task of the narrator-character goes beyond to unveil an event: “that past is not out there to be visited and photographed like a foreign country; the past always has to be reconstructed and reconstituted” (Gómez 2006, p.36); the reader witnesses the process of acquiring that knowledge, of reconstructing the past, which in technical terms has been named as “novela de confrontación histórica, es decir, una novela en la que la investigación de un determinado pasado ocupa tanto lugar como ese pasado mismo” (Gómez 2006, p.24). Examples of such novels include *Soldados de Salamina* by Javier Cercas, *Las guerras de Etruria* by Julio Manuel de la Rosa and *Tu rostro mañana. Fiebre y lanza* by Javier Marías.

Neither the forced silence imposed by the dictator nor the agreed silence during the transition managed to prevent Spanish society from remembering. José Manuel López de Abiada quotes some examples of the impact of the revival of the Civil War in the media and the publishing sector:

También se debe a la sensibilización paulatina de la opinión pública, nacida al socaire de los trabajos de muchos estudiosos *menores*, y a la iniciativa de asociaciones no siempre oficiales (*Archivo, Guerra y Exilio; Asociación para la Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica*, por ejemplo), de programas de televisión (*¿Quién sabe dónde?* o *Línea 900*), de títulos contundentes y no siempre meritorios (*Desaparecidos de Franco*, de Torres; *Los mitos de la Guerra Civil*, de Pío Moa, o *El futuro no es lo que era*, de González-Cebrián). (López de Abiada 2005)

The Civil-War novel of the democratic period does not fall into one category or stream; there are novels which develop and reinvent features of previous periods, such as *Beatus Ille* (1986) by Antonio Muñoz Molina, with his cervantine approach to fiction; novels which alter history, such as *En el día de hoy* (1976) by Jesús Torbado, where the war is won by the Republicans; novels which link the past and the present in order to revise the former, as in *Manuela* (2005) by Francisco Perejil; novels whose action develops entirely during the conflict, making no reference to contemporary Spain and portraying a mythical past, as in *En el remolino* (2007) by José Antonio Labordeta. In all this complex plurality, some common or general lines in contemporary fiction can be identified. There are seven features which can be traced in the fiction about the Civil War since the 1990s. Some of these are inherited from the previous period and some of them are the result of the new approach to the Civil War in present-day Spain:

1. The presentation of the war as more plural in its political and ideological content since different perspectives can be exposed in a democratic state where official censorship does not exist.
2. The narration of episodes from the front line as well as from everyday life, with personal and nostalgic tones.
3. The representation of two diametrically opposed sides is less popular: it is now more commonly accepted that there were good and bad people on both sides.
4. It is the generation of grandchildren who is asking questions and usually providing answers.

5. Violence usually appears in the stories as legitimate in the Republican faction, since they were attacked, and as illegitimate in the Nationalist, as they revolted against a democratic system. The main type of violence in contemporary novels is not irrational or destructive, but can be even called a *violencia productiva* (Gómez 2006, p.175): Republicans were supposed to fight for values such as equality and justice; the representation of the Republican fighter as a hero is recurrent in these novels.

6. Utopia is associated with main Republican ideals, such as:

La recuperación de un contacto orgánico con la naturaleza, la visión de la infancia como símbolo de la inocencia social de la Segunda República, la re-sacralización del arte o la interpretación de éste como un espacio cultural esencialmente solidario (Gómez 2006, pp.189-99).

These values are attached to the Second Republic as if it were a Golden Age. The dissatisfaction with a violent Spain torn apart by war and with the contemporary world has made the Second Republic a model society, a “final significant reality” (Gómez 2006, p.202) and a static utopian period<sup>1</sup>.

7. Finally, there is an interesting phenomenon which even questions this long literary tradition of the representation of the war: the problematisation of such representation, a feature that will be studied in the analysis of *Soldados de Salamina*. The following words by

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<sup>1</sup> *Static* in the sense of the classic idea of the utopia: “una estampa estática, ya dada, idéntica a sí misma y quieta [...], erección de un pasado bucólico, casi a-histórico, tan distinto del presente, tan distante, tan armónico y pleno, que termina por perder cualquier relevancia para dicho presente” (Gómez 2006, pp. 279-81).

Quintana were applied to *Soldados de Salamina* but could be extended to a new way of re-writing the Civil War:

Abrió un nuevo rumbo en los relatos sobre la Guerra Civil, ya que rompió con la transparencia para crear una cierta conciencia sobre cómo la memoria de un determinado presente, el de los nietos de los luchadores, podía articular una narración sobre el pasado. (Quintana 2004).

The Spanish Civil War is represented in different ways in contemporary fiction but there are a few main threads that link all these diverse representations. This will be reflected in the analysis of the texts which are the corpus of this dissertation. Differences as well as similarities will be highlighted together with unique features that make the texts so relevant for this study. Each chapter is devoted to each of the texts and will show the relationship with its previous chapter/s.



## **SOLDADOS DE SALAMINA**

### **Introduction.**

*Soldados* was critically acclaimed and achieved huge popularity, which made it a highlight in the panorama of the Civil-War novel published in democratic Spain. Javier Cercas is the narrator, the main character, and the name of the author. Cercas, the character, is a Spanish journalist and writer who found out, in the course of an interview, the story of the failed execution of Rafael Sánchez Mazas, one of the founders of Falange, the Fascist party in Spain; after this failed execution, Sánchez Mazas hides in the forest where an anonymous Republican soldier finds him and saves his life by pretending not to have seen him; Sánchez Mazas walks around the forest and meets three Republican soldiers and deserters, the *amigos del bosque*, who help him while the Nationalists arrive. Sánchez Mazas finally returns safely to Madrid, where he will become a minister. These events took place at the end of the Civil War. Real people are providing Cercas, the character, with information about that episode, which gives the novel its documentary style. Cercas manages to finish his story on Sánchez Mazas – which he insists in defining as a ‘relato real’ – but decides to find the anonymous soldier in order to make his story complete. That is when Cercas meets Antoni Miralles, a Republican soldier who fought against Nationalists in Spain and also against Nazis in Africa. Since Cercas is narrator and character, he acts as a filter of the events and the reader knows only what Cercas tells. However, he is not afraid to make this visible and shows his doubts and uncertainties. This

relates to the exposition on the role of the narrator in the Introduction of this study, page 5.

Documentary is understood in this dissertation as an account whose legitimate picture of the world “derives from a fidelity to actually existing situations and circumstances which they represent. Their predominant sense must be of the ‘real world’, the material and social world in which people live” (Chaney and Pickering 1986, p.29). This definition is closely related to the question of history and fiction, core to this study. The documentary section of *Soldados* lies in the interviews that Cercas the character carries out with *los amigos del bosque* in order to obtain first-hand information about a period in Sánchez Mazas’s life. However, the documentary style continues throughout the novel until the third section, where the content is mainly fictional.

The idea of the ‘relato real’ is very recurrent in *Soldados*, which makes the novel an interesting case of intertwining of history and fiction, since the expression itself brings together fiction (relato) and history (real), apparently a contradiction in terms. The main character insists on his aim of writing a ‘relato real’:

- [Conchi says] Espero que no sea una novela
- No – dije, muy seguro -. Es un relato real.
- ¿Y eso qué es? [...]
- Será como una novela – resumí-. Sólo que, en vez de ser todo mentira, todo es verdad. (p.68)

- ¿Qué? – preguntó irónico [the director of the newspaper] -. ¿Otra novela?
  - No – contesté, satisfecho-. Un relato real.
- Le expliqué qué era un relato real. Le expliqué de qué iba mi relato real. (p.74)

- ¡Chucha, Javier! – exclamó Bolaño -. Ahí tienes una novela cojonuda. [...]
- No estoy escribiendo [...] y no es una novela. Es una historia con hechos y personajes reales. Un relato real. (p.166)

This emphasis is significant since, first, the narrator is defining his work and, second, the reader is constantly reminded that what they are reading is a story where history and fiction coexist. The historical event concerning this study is not the Civil War as a whole but almost exclusively the failed execution of Sánchez Mazas. It is this event which is constantly repeated throughout the novel and the one that triggers the action.

The fact that *Soldados* is a 'relato real' implies that there are historical as well as fictional characters. Most of the characters are real people and some of them were involved in the Civil War: Rafael Sánchez Mazas, Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio, Andrés Trapiello, Pere Figueras, Joaquim Figueras, Daniel Angelats, María Ferré and Jaume Figueras. It is not so easy to be sure about the historicity of some other key characters such as Conchi, Antoni Miralles, or Miquel Aguirre. However, this distinction between historical and fictional characters is challenged by the critic Spires who thinks that real people who are characters of a story become fictional: "Pero al ser mentado dentro de una novela, el hombre real se convierte en un personaje irreal, en fantasma" (Spires 2005, p.83). Nevertheless, *Soldados* seems to

portray fictional characters in the same way as it does real people, in other words, both types of characters share the same reference, term explained by Hutcheon (see Introduction, p.6). On the other hand, the relevance of the inclusion of real people is based on the documentary style of the story in order to recover and commemorate the forgotten soldiers who fought in the Civil War. Cercas the character manages to speak with most of the protagonists of Sánchez Mazas's story: María Ferré and two of the three *amigos del bosque*: Joaquim Figueras and Daniel Angelats. Their testimonies are not reproduced literally but they will be elaborated in order to shape the second part of the novel: 'Soldados de Salamina'. The reader is given the sense of a fieldwork, of a documentary that is recording oral testimonies which must not be lost. After all, the generation which lived through the Civil War is disappearing. This idea is reinforced by Antonio Gómez, who affirms in *La guerra persistente*:

*Soldados de Salamina* apuesta por el testimonio [...]. Esta novela puede ser analizada, de hecho, como un largo discurrir hacia un testimonio final que, dramática y temáticamente, supone la culminación de la trama. (Gómez 2006, p.53)

The Civil War is also present via the amount of historical information provided by the narrator, such as the SIM – Servicio de Inteligencia Militar (p.32), the checas – Republican torture prisons (p.32), General Líster – Republican military officer (p.33), Victoria Kent – Director General of Prisons (p.89), José Antonio Primo de Rivera – founder and head of *Falange* (p.90), Indalecio Prieto and Largo Caballero – Republican politicians (p.91), the battle of Belchite (p.156) and the V Cuerpo del Ejército del Ebro – a section of the Republican army (p.187). The inclusion of such historical data might suggest

an intention on the part of the author to both inform his reader and highlight the historical reality of his text, contextualizing his fieldwork and contributing to the documentary style. It also helps to support the truth-claim that is core to the relationship of history and fiction according to Ricoeur (see Introduction, p. 6).

### **The Civil War in *Soldados de Salamina*.**

*Soldados* has a particular approach to the Civil War: it problematises the representation of the conflict in present-day Spain. Actually, it seems that the Civil War is reduced to a single brief event which is repeated throughout the story: the failed execution of Sánchez Mazas, his brief and fortunate encounter with the anonymous Republican soldier and his few days with the *amigos del bosque*. From a technical point of view, this is repetitive frequency: “telling n times what ‘happened’ once” (Rimmon-Kenan 1989, p.57). If we take into account what Rimmon-Kenan says about repeating events<sup>2</sup>, then we must conclude that Sánchez Mazas’s escape acquires different meanings as it is told throughout the course of the story. Thus, these events problematise the possibility of any real knowledge of what happened. The text clearly casts doubt on the transmission of the events: “Mi padre supo de inmediato quién era – dijo Jaume Figueras- [...] O por lo menos eso era lo que él decía siempre. No sé si será verdad” (p.54). The narrator himself confesses: “Así pues, lo que a continuación consigno no es lo que

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<sup>2</sup> “Strictly speaking, no event is repeatable in all respects, nor is a repeated segment of the text quite the same, since its new location puts it in a different context which necessarily changes its meaning” (Rimmon-Kenan 1989, pp.56-7)

realmente sucedió, sino lo que parece verosímil que sucediera; no ofrezco hechos probados, sino conjeturas razonables” (p.89). Nevertheless, the problematisation goes even further. It is also said in the text that the more an event is repeated, the less it may be connected with what really happened: “Lo que Sánchez Mazas le había contado a su hijo (y lo que éste me contó a mí) no era lo que recordaba que ocurrió, sino lo que recordaba haber contado otras veces.” (pp.42-43). Thus, the repeated verbalisation of an event tends to end up as a modification of what was said at first, not of what actually happened. That is the case with stories of the Civil War, an event which happened more than 70 years ago, stories which have been told repeatedly through decades and generations and which take new meanings in the present. *Soldados* realises that this is an issue to be taken into consideration when recovering the memory of the conflict.

Because *Soldados* expresses openly this problematisation, it echoes some of the general reactions towards the Civil War which were much extended in the 1980s and 1990s; first, people who did not live through the conflict used to think that it belonged to a forgotten past:

Tras la entrevista con Ferlosio empecé a sentir curiosidad por Sánchez Mazas; también por la guerra civil, de la que hasta aquel momento no sabía mucho más que de la batalla de Salamina o del uso exacto de la garlopa, y por las historias tremendas que engendró, que siempre me habían parecido excusas para la nostalgia de los viejos y carburantes para la imaginación de los novelistas sin imaginación. (p.21)

Second, people who lived through the conflict supporting the Republican side felt forgotten by the nation for which they fought:

La segunda [letter] era más dura; estaba escrita por un hombre lo bastante mayor parece haber vivido la guerra [...] “Termina bien [the history of Spain] para los que ganaron la guerra”, decía. “Pero mal para los que la perdimos. Nadie ha tenido ni siquiera el gesto de agradecernos que lucháramos por la libertad. En todos los pueblos hay monumentos que conmemoran a los muertos de la guerra” (pp.26-27).

As seen in the Introduction of this study (p. 1), one of the main aims of the organizations in charge of recovering the historical memory is to name those who have been forgotten, especially those buried in common graves. *Soldados* shares this aim and so some characters name people who perished fighting for the democratically established Republic. It is a reaction to the agreed silence during the *Transición*. Miralles and Cercas are holding a conversation about heroes and the former tells what happened to his friends, who died fighting and now no government commemorates them:

No hay ni va a haber nunca ninguna calle miserable de ningún pueblo miserable de ninguna mierda de país que vaya a llevar nunca el nombre de ninguno de ellos [...] pero yo me acuerdo, vaya si me acuerdo, me acuerdo de todos, de Lela y de Joan y de Gabi y de Odena y de Pipo y de Brugada y de Gudayol. (p.201)

In spite of this documentary nature, the reader's understanding of the war is partly dependent on the role of a fictional character who is presented in heroic terms. The discussion about heroism criss-crosses *Soldados* from beginning to end: from the episode of the anonymous soldier in the first part to Sánchez Mazas as the anti-hero in the second part and to Miralles the hero in the third. It is this last part, 'Cita en Stockton', the one which displays

the main discussion around the figure of the hero. The novel offers different points of view regarding what a hero is. It is very significant that this discussion takes place in this third part for two reasons: first, while the first and second parts contain more material which has been documented, the third one is the most fictional part, where the relationship between history and fiction is more visible:

En 'Cita en Stockton' Javier Cercas protagonista aprende qué es la literatura, qué es la vida y cuál es la relación que ambas mantienen: se asimilan por la indefinición, la ambigüedad y su naturaleza paradójica e insondable. (Satorras 2003, p.233)

The second reason is that it is the longest part of the story, yet it covers the shortest period of time. The importance of this comes from the technical category of text-time: "the disposition of elements in the text" (Rimmon-Kenan 1989, p.45), that is, the extent of events in the text. It is an important category since it provides valuable information about where the focus in the text is: the more extended a certain time period is in the text, the more relevant it is for the story. It is worth noting that the first part, 'Los amigos del bosque', which narrates events from the summer of 1994 to 2000, occupies 57 pages; the second, 'Soldados de Salamina', which covers the period 1894 to 1966, occupies 63 pages; finally, the third one, 'Cita en Stockton', running from February 2000 to possibly May of the same year, occupies 66 pages. So, the shortest period of time is presented in the largest number of pages, which reveals the importance given to the events narrated: the search for the anonymous soldier, the discussion on heroism and the completion of the 'relato real'.



This third part is devoted to the search for and meetings with Antoni Miralles, an ex-Republican soldier who fought against the Falangists in Spain and against the Nazis in Europe and Africa. This fight is essential in order to contextualise the discussion about what a hero is. The contrast with Sánchez Mazas helps to enhance Miralles's portrait, especially considering the possibility that they once met in a forest in 1939. *Soldados* mentions the Falangist conception of the hero "Ese pelotón de soldados que a última hora siempre ha salvado la civilización" (p.208-9), depersonalized in a uniform and aware of their own heroism. Nevertheless, the idea of the hero that Cercas has when meeting Miralles is different: the saviour of one of the founders of the Falangist Party and instigators of the war is a soldier who had to make a vital decision: kill him or save him. Why did he not shoot? Cercas keeps asking himself this question throughout the text with no eventual answer. Whatever the answer could be, the result is the ennobling picture of a young man who decides not to kill an enemy in times of war. According to the narrator, that moment turns him into a hero because he made the right decision, which is what distinguishes a hero. When Cercas leaves Miralles behind, he reflects on his encounters and on the idea of a hero in these terms:

Hablaría de Miralles y de todos ellos, sin dejarme a ninguno [...] pero sobre todo de Sánchez Mazas y de ese pelotón de soldados que a última hora siempre ha salvado la civilización y en el que no mereció militar Sánchez Mazas y sí Miralles, de esos momentos inconcebibles en que toda la civilización pende de un solo hombre y de ese hombre y de la paga que la civilización reserva a ese hombre [...] un hombre que tuvo el coraje y el instinto de la virtud y por eso no se equivocó nunca o no se equivocó en el único momento en que de veras importaba no equivocarse. (pp.208-09)

It is interesting to note a contrast between two characters deeply involved in the discussion around heroism. The presentation of heroism begins in the first part of *Soldados*, where the documentary style dominates. Therefore, the episode of the anonymous soldier who becomes a hero in the novel is presented as factual. So, according to *Soldados*, there were heroes in the Civil War. The other character that provokes the discussion on heroism, Miralles, belongs to the more fictional third part, a part whose relevance in the whole story is to look for answers and to draw conclusions. Cercas the character insists in finding the identity of the anonymous soldier, even if his 'relato real' was already finished<sup>3</sup>. This implies that Cercas, the narrator, did not really find answers (or at least satisfactory answers) to his questions in his factual research, so that he continues the analysis of the figure of the hero in fiction with Miralles. Fiction is the continuation of the supposedly factual section of the novel; together, fact and fiction form a continuum, a field in which questions can be asked and – perhaps - answered.

The presentation of the hero is that of a special unique individual: "Toda la civilización pende de un solo hombre" (p.209) but also of an everyday person, undistinguishable from the crowd, as the description of Miralles suggests:

Su gorra calada, su tremenda barriga de buda, inscribiéndose en el registro del camping e instalándose de inmediato en el lugar asignado. A partir de aquel momento Miralles no volvía a vestir en todo el mes más que un bañador y unas chanclas de goma. (p.154)

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<sup>3</sup> This sense of completion is necessary for any historical account, and Cercas the narrator wants *Soldados* to be 'real': "The demand for closure in the historical story is a demand, I suggest, for moral meaning, a demand that sequences of real events be assessed as to their significance as elements of a moral drama" (White 1987, p.21).

Therefore, every person can potentially be a hero when making the right decision at the right moment: “La nobleza moral es lo que hace al hombre héroe, no su apariencia o la adecuación a unas pautas de comportamiento regidas por ideologías o convencionalismos”. (Satorras 2003, p.243)

Miralles encapsulates the description of the hero in the novel but he was not alone, his fellow soldiers against Fascism and Nazism are also heroes. Miralles remembers and commemorates his friends, who died fighting, since they have been forgotten by the Spanish democratic state. They are true heroes for him because they died – another fundamental requirement to be a hero according to Miralles:

Los héroes sólo son héroes cuando se mueren o los matan. Y los héroes de verdad nacen en la guerra y mueren en la guerra. No hay héroes vivos, joven. Todos están muertos. Muertos, muertos, muertos. (p.201)

Therefore, war is an appropriate environment for heroism and glory does not have to be the hero's reward, as the character of Miralles shows. The discourse of the Falangist hero is challenged in *Soldados* with its depiction of a different type of hero, be it Miralles or his friends. In fact, Miralles does not have any awareness of having done anything heroic. This contrast is explained by the comments of Vargas Llosa:

El gran personaje del libro de Cercas [...] es el pobre Miralles, guerrero de las buenas causas por pura casualidad, héroe sin quererlo ni saberlo, que [...] sobrevive como un discreto, invisible desgraciado, sin parientes, sin amigos, recluso en una residencia de ancianos de mala muerte, a donde va a sacudirlo de su inercia y su aburrida espera del fin, un novelista empeñado en ver épicas grandezas, gestos caballerescos -pura literatura- donde el viejo guerrero sólo recuerda rutina, hambre, inseguridad, y la imbecil vecindad de la muerte. (Vargas Llosa 2001)

Despite the constant search for the identity of the anonymous soldier who saved Sánchez Mazas's life and for the answer to why he did so, the text does not give any answer. Instead, Cercas, the narrator-character, establishes identification between the anonymous soldier and Miralles. For him, they are the same person, even if Miralles denies it is so. However, ambiguity is encouraged towards the end of the conversation between Miralles and Cercas; even Miralles's final negative answer fails to convince either Cercas or the reader. For instance, that last conversation remains unfinished when Miralles says something that Cercas, already inside the taxi, could not hear:

Luego bruscamente dijo algo que no entendí (tal vez fue un nombre, pero no estoy seguro) porque el taxi había echado a andar, y aunque saqué la cabeza por la ventanilla y le pregunté qué había dicho, ya era demasiado tarde. (p. 205)

After reading Miralles's and Cercas's ideas about heroism, it is the reader who is left to decide what a hero is. It is also the reader who must decide if that anonymous soldier and Miralles are the same person and who must guess why the soldier did not shoot the Falangist leader. Therefore, heroism is presented in *Soldados* as a complex concept: first, because different characters introduce different concepts of heroism, and second, because the reader takes an active role in the construction or definition of such a figure.

In spite of this difference established between the concept of Falangist heroism and the heroism identified with the Republican Miralles, the depiction of both sides of war is not that of opposition but of collaboration. This challenges a traditional discourse existing in Spain during

the war and the dictatorship: Republicans and Nationalists were bitter enemies and reconciliation was not an option. Francoist propaganda re-elaborated history and constructed an evil image of the II Republic in order to legitimise the rebellion and the subsequent dictatorship, during which confrontation was maintained and supported:

Lo que se vio en abril de 1939 no fueron unos comienzos de paz o de reconciliación; más bien se anunció la institucionalización de la venganza a gran escala contra la izquierda derrotada [...] Franco se empeñaba más que nadie en mantener abierta la herida de la guerra. En el lenguaje oficial sólo existían “vencedores” y “derrotados”, “buenos españoles” y “malos españoles”, “patriotas” y “traidores”. (Preston 2004, p.120)

Instead, *Soldados* tells how Sánchez Mazas was protected and saved by Republicans, his alleged enemies, on three occasions: first, Indalecio Prieto, a Republican minister and an old friend since their North-African experiences, orders to release him when caught at a checkpoint in Madrid; second, an anonymous Republican soldier saves his life after finding him hiding in the forest; third, *los amigos del bosque*, Republican deserters, look after him until the arrival of the Nationalists. In return, Sánchez Mazas will use his political position to free Pere Figueras, one of *los amigos del bosque*, from prison. Besides defying the Francoist propaganda, *Soldados* also draws the picture of a war where political ideologies were not always the priority or the defining feature: *los amigos del bosque* were not convinced Republican warriors (two of them deserted) and Sánchez Mazas set aside his political views when in danger and accepted the help offered by Republicans. Moreover, none of them fought until the end; actually, Sánchez Mazas never fought, but ran away from war to hide in the Chilean embassy, and two of *los*

*amigos del bosque* left the Republican army before the end of the war. Readers of *Soldados* can construct a representation of the war where both sides were not radical enemies deeply separated but connected; there were two sides that were living together, which implied collaborating and needing each other.

### **Conclusion.**

The portrayal of the Civil War in *Soldados* follows a common contemporary pattern in Spanish culture: a person or a group of people belonging to a generation who did not live through the Civil War decide to start doing some research on a specific event or set of events in order to know what happened and to recover the historical memory of some other person or people. This pattern can be observed in the documentary sections of the story, where real people who lived through the conflict from the Republican side tell their stories and name people who were killed in an attempt to keep their names alive; something that was forbidden during the dictatorship and publicly avoided during the *Transición* and early years of democracy. However, this recovery of the historical memory is problematic as the events in question happened about 70 years ago and memory retains not only what happened but also what has been repeatedly told – thus, a distorted version of reality. Also, the recovery is done by new generations with no direct experience of the war. Therefore, the Civil War is presented as a past event full of relevance in present-day Spain, where people are still looking back for answers in order to meet needs in the present.

*Soldados* shows a civil war where massive executions took place and where two sides fought against each other, but most importantly where collaboration between the two sides also took place. This presents a very relevant message that challenges previous propaganda learnt by some generations of Spanish people under the dictatorial regime, as well as left-wing propaganda: the irreconcilability of the two Spains, left and right, Republicans and Nationalists, religious and non-religious.

War in *Soldados* is also portrayed through personal experiences of both known and anonymous people, although the focus is on the anonymous. Politicians, ideologues, army leaders are not the main material of *Soldados* but rather people with no such social relevance: *los amigos del bosque*, María Ferré, Jaume Figueras and Antoni Miralles. This aspect has an impact on the way that war is presented: the conflict affected people in different ways. People with different backgrounds thus did not share a unique vision of what war was and people did not have to fit completely into the scheme and ideas of their side, be it Nationalist or Republican. This statement undermines the simplification the war as a conflict between two distinct groups where there is no space for individuality and personal thinking.

Finally, the Civil War had its heroes and *Soldados* goes deep into the idea of the hero: what makes a hero and what they became. War times are prolific in heroic types, although war is especially full of abjectness and baseness as well. *Soldados* presents the hero, Miralles, as a common

person who looks just like anybody else and who is not aware of his heroic actions (or else who keeps denying them). However, under certain circumstances, this heroic type makes the right decision at the right moment and that is what makes them a hero. This was also the case for the anonymous soldier. Unfortunately, that hero will not be officially acclaimed and decorated – no streets will be named after him; *Soldados* shows how heroes were – and are – always eventually forgotten.



## **LA MULA**

### **Introduction.**

*La mula* and *Soldados* share several characteristics: first, Nationalists and Republicans are not just enemies, there are examples of collaboration and friendship among them; second, the focus on the personal experiences of unknown people instead of on famous politicians and ideologues; and third, the discussion of what a hero is. However, *La mula* is distinctive in other ways: first, it does not establish any connection with the present, the story is set in the past, mostly during the war; second, the main tone is humour, which is highly significant and effective in a representation of the war<sup>4</sup>; and third, there is only one dominant main character and he is a Nationalist, although the main current in present-day Spain usually focuses on Republican characters, the ones who were forgotten and silenced.

The protagonist of *La mula*, Juan Castro, is a Nationalist soldier who deserted the Republicans and who is in charge of the mules that transport armaments. He finds a mule, Valentina, in the country. Apparently, this mule ran away from the Republican side too or at least that is what Castro likes to think. The mule will become the depository of Castro's aspirations and the excuse to evade the present and to dream of his life after the war. This mule is also important because she will trigger another key event in the story: she will be lost again and, when Castro finds her at the edge of the Republican

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<sup>4</sup> The writer, Eslava Galán, said in his personal correspondence with the author of this dissertation that humour “es algo que preside todas mis obras” (17/08/08). Even in his historical approach to the Civil War – *Una historia de la Guerra civil que no va a gustar a nadie* - humour is a key element.

zone, a few Republican deserters will beg him to take them as prisoners so that they can safely reach the Nationalist side. They already knew that the Nationalists had won the war and wished to surrender before being killed. This event marks the beginning of Castro's accession to the category of a national hero and the portrait that *La mula* makes of Nationalist heroism. Castro has a relationship with Concha, a Falangist girl that he meets in a gala dance; they start dating and eventually become engaged. This love story helps to divert the attention from the harshness of the war, so does the mule Valentina, and also shows the lifestyle and way of thinking of part of the Falangist population. During the war, Castro manages to see his old friend el Churri, who is a Republican. Many Republicans and Nationalists meet regularly in a friendly way in order to exchange goods. Finally, Castro is going to be decorated as a hero by Franco himself and travels to Burgos, the Nationalist capital city. That is a trip that deeply impresses Castro and that, as we will see, reveals the mechanisms of the Francoist propaganda.

The main body of this chapter will also comment on the fact that this story is based upon real events: Castro is actually the father of the author; both were deserters and became in charge of the mules and of the transport of armaments. Eslava Galán explained:

La historia ocurrió así; hubo un Juan Castro que era mi padre, que se pasa de bando y que se encuentra una mula y hace su guerra particular para defender a esa mula. Hay muchas anécdotas que pueden parecer un chiste, pero ocurrieron de verdad. Son anécdotas de guerra [...] Por ejemplo, la escena de un herido de guerra que nota un líquido por su pierna y desea en voz alta que sea sangre lo que siente en vez del licor que tiene en el bolsillo. (Elmundolibro 2003)

Furthermore, the writer has acknowledged in his correspondence with the author of this dissertation, which will be detailed below, that two key parts of the story are fictional: the character el Churri and the trip to Burgos.

### **The Civil War in *La mula*.**

Characterization in *La mula* follows two principles attributed to the historical novel that are going to be developed in this dissertation: the first one is the depiction of significant historical figures: “El precepto de la novela histórica tradicional de rehuir a la gran figura histórica como protagonista de la ficción” (Talens 1996, p.405); the second one is the use of language, which is an essential device in order to achieve ‘the specifically historical’ (Lukacs 1936, p.19). Regarding the first principle – the depiction of prominent historical figures –, *La mula* includes two: Franco and Queipo de Llano, two of the three leaders of the Nationalist rebellion against the Republic Government – the third being Mola, who is not part of the story. Their relevance during the Civil War is undeniable. However, their participation in the novel belongs to a secondary level. This is in accordance with the principle in traditional historical novel mentioned above in the quotation by Talens. Indeed, *La mula* focuses on anonymous people and their everyday lives; the story is not about key battles, war politics or relevant people. Despite this, the portrait of both generals is meaningful since they are centres of the humorous tone of the novel. Furthermore, it provides an example of the treatment of historical figures explained in the Introduction, p.6, that is,

successive generations tend to monumentalise or demean historical figures, intertwining history and fiction.

Queipo de Llano was a prominent military leader who eventually conspired against the Republic because of its left-wing measures. He seized Sevilla and Málaga for the Nationalist rebels and was very popular for his use of radio broadcasts to spread propaganda and for his cruelty in occupied territories. In the novel, however, he is a mere background figure and is only mentioned once. When Castro stops in Córdoba in his way to Burgos, Queipo is there:

El famoso general ha llegado de Sevilla [...] Mientras Queipo explica a la prensa en qué va a consistir el nuevo estado nacido de la victoria de la facción sana del ejército sobre la facción podrida del pueblo español, el cabo Castro deambula perdido por los corredores conventuales y medita sobre el envidiable destino de la caterva de emboscados que habita en aquel edificio. (pp.174-75)

Queipo serves as an instrument to show the Falangist discourse and works as a contrast to Castro's situation in Córdoba in the sense that, while Queipo is giving a solemn speech full of the Falangist baroque clichés: "el nuevo estado nacido de la victoria de la facción sana del ejército sobre la facción podrida del pueblo español" (p.173), Castro, the alleged Nationalist hero, is wandering around, lost in the building, absent-minded and jealous of the bureaucrats, who have no idea of the suffering in the war front. Therefore, a Nationalist historical figure of considerable relevance is turned into a rather secondary figure in the story, reducing the impact of his ideology to a few words and highlighting the difference between political rhetoric and the

venality of Castro's experiences. Also, the inclusion of Queipo in the story supports the historical reality of *La mula*, albeit not to same extent as *Soldados*.

Franco features in one episode where he is demeaned. Neither his voice nor his physical appearance impress, they rather provoke surprise and disappointment in Castro. When Castro sees Franco in the ceremony of decoration, he is surprised by the appearance of the general: "más bajito y moreno de como Castro lo imaginaba [...] atraviesa el amplio espacio central a paso rápido, con zancadas todo lo largas que le permiten sus cortas piernas" (pp.199-200). The novel depicts Franco's words in direct speech, so the reader has the impression of listening to the Caudillo and receives some historical information on Nationalist principles and on some guidelines for the future dictatorship. But that historical material is presented within a humorous situation: the picture of Franco, the artificiality of the ceremony and the real thoughts of Castro; Franco's message is delivered in a solemn way and is full of propagandistic stereotypes such as: the Republicans are "la canalla masónica y judeomarxista a sueldo de Moscú" (p.202), "la hidra roja" (p.202), "la barbarie asiática" (p.203), "el militar y el sacerdote, los dos oficios más altos de la Patria" (p.202), "el Movimiento Nacional no ha sido nunca una sublevación. Los sublevados son ellos" (p.202), "porque nuestra guerra es una guerra religiosa" (p. 202). But that is not what Castro emphasises when he is back with his fellow soldiers; what matters is the ridicule of Franco: "Recortaíto. Muy alto no es, y panzoncete [...] Los pies muy chicos, ¿sabéis?, con sus botas altas y [...] un poco culón, creo yo"

(p.225). This portrayal is significant for two reasons: first, it depicts the most important protagonist of the war, so anything said about Franco will have an impact on how the war is represented; and second, it reinforces Castro's lack of ideological commitment and ignorance on politics.

Most of the characters in *La mula* are Nationalists and are portrayed with more psychological depth than the Republicans. Nationalist characters outnumber the Republicans; for instance, Juan Castro and his fellow soldiers such as el Chato, sergeant Barrionuevo, Aguado, Pino, Heliodoro, Amor, Petardo; also, Cárdenas, bishop Cosme Redondo, Concha, doña Concha and Pilar Valbuena. However, Republicans are only represented by el Churri, yet critical in order to understand the relationship between Nationalists and Republicans and the portrait of the latter, and Manolico; both are old friends of Castro's. This difference in the quantity of characters determines the focus of the story: the Nationalist side. There is much more information about the Nationalist than about the Republican; also humorous scenes - including ridicule - aim the Nationalist side.

After having analysed the first principle of the traditional historical novel, that is, the depiction of prominent historical figures, the second principle of the traditional historical novel is the use of language, especially when depicting the characters. According to Lukacs:

What is lacking in the so-called historical novel before Sir Walter Scott is precisely the specifically historical, that is, derivation of the individuality of characters from the historical peculiarity of their age. The great critic Boileau [...] insisted only that characters should be socially and psychologically true. (Lukacs 1962, 19)

*La mula* exemplifies this intention to remark 'the historical peculiarity of the age' when characters speak. There are five footnotes in the text, where the narrator explains some vocabulary: *nicanoras* - a type of canyons - (p.64), *güina* - Arabic pronunciation of *buena* - (p.70), *arrojo* - Spanish-Arabic for *loco* - (p.71), *coger metralla* - to have a sexually transmitted infection - (p.71) and *naranjitas* - slang for Italian grenades - (p.82). As we can see, explanations are given when vocabulary is technical or jargon or non-used by a contemporary audience. It also clarifies the pronunciation of an illiterate non-native speaker<sup>5</sup>. Footnotes are then a useful solution for the narrator to keep the realistic tone of the story and for the reader to understand. Also, footnotes break the suspension of disbelief in the story and are an intrusion of the writer into the text. They show the writer's authority over what is being told and also reinforce the presentation of the text as containing real facts through the use of a realistic discourse that is deeply rooted into war and into everyday life. The author explains that he wanted his characters to speak as if they were actual people, according to their cultural background:

He puesto mucho empeño en que los personajes hablen con arreglo a la mentalidad, al vocabulario y a la sintaxis que debían tener. A mí como lector de novela me molesta que un carbonero hable como un abogado. Sin embargo, la riqueza del personaje también puede radicar en su pobreza idiomática o ideológica. También he querido reflejar el vocabulario específico de la guerra. (Elmundolibro 2003)

So far, the representation of the Civil War in *La mula* has been analysed through the approach to characterization. We would like to approach the representation of the conflict from another point of view: de-

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<sup>5</sup> That is the case of the character Mohamed, a young Moroccan who sells commodities in a street market in Spain.

dramatization. War is a cruel place but, in *La mula*, it is also full of entertainment, love, friendship and sex. These aspects, along with the humorous tone of the novel, contribute to the process of de-dramatization of war; it is remarkable the negligible presence of war scenes in the novel.

Nevertheless, there are two examples which show the cruel side of war:

La mejor mula del lote, *Capitana*, está echada sobre un charco de sangre y heces y cocea con las patas enredadas en sus propias tripas, abierta en canal, los ojos blancos, el belfo lleno de tierra y espuma. A Castro se le arrasan los ojos de lágrimas. (p.19)

The description of the agony of the mule Capitana after an attack symbolises the devastating effects of war without involving any human being. The fragment is as highly effective as if a person was affected by the attack but less shocking. It is an indirect way to convey a cruel image of war, as it was already mentioned in this dissertation when studying the political disillusionment in the Republican novel (see Introduction, p.11).

People are also horribly affected by war. First, El Churri dies in an attack and his corpse is found by Castro and his company. The detailed description of the corpse bears the effects of war on people. And war produces insalubrious environment and can make people lose their minds, as in a group of soldiers:

Casi todos lucen barbas de muchos días, comidas de piojos y con costras de rascarse [...] un soldado del último reemplazo que se volvió loco, se metió una granada Breda en la boca y se voló la cabeza. (p.95)

These are in fact all the cruel images of the war depicted in *La mula*; the rest of the novel does not go through descriptions of the horrors of war but



focusses on life as it goes on in spite of the war. This is even more relevant if we remember that *Soldados* did not show either much interest in these cruel events and in horrific war scenes. During the last 10 months of the war, Castro had time to go out, flirt, date and be left by Concha. Even during his working hours, he is usually thinking either of his life after the war with his mule Valentina or of making up excuses to go to see Concha, mainly to try to have sex with her. Sex is a favourite topic in the story, contributing to the de-dramatization of war through the portrait of a reasonably relaxed atmosphere of everyday life, supporting the realistic tone of the story and providing the scene for several comic situations. Castro is not the only one who is in need of a better sexual life; his fellow soldiers talk exclusively about sex almost all of the time:

-¡Atenta compañía! [...] Aquí traigo un permiso para vestirse de limpio y echar un quiqui [...] Ramón Aguado.  
- ¿Para qué va a ir Aguado si le da asco follar? - replica Pino.  
(pp.23-24)

A second example is when Castro comes back from being decorated by Franco as a national hero. That ceremony, which is loaded with Nationalist, Falangist and National Catholic ideological principles in every single detail (greetings, speeches, flags and so on), would have been the dream of any Nationalist soldier, the epitome of a career, a most solemn moment. However, when Castro is telling his experiences, some of the reactions and interests from his fellow soldiers are: “Habrás follao...” (p.226), “Cuenta lo de las putas”(p.227), “Pero... ¿ella estaba desnuda ya?”(p.229) and “¿Te la tiraste?”(p.230). The contrast between the supposed grandeur of the decoration and the actual interest of the soldiers gives an idea of how

seriously the narrator, the characters and the reader must take the Nationalist affectation in *La mula*. The number of such conversations in fact enriches the picture of the everyday life at war by sprinkling the narration with talks unrelated to warfare, as in the first-wave novels analysed by Thomas (1990) where action, detective and love stories co-existed with the war stories.

As this is a Civil-War novel, interest naturally turns to the question of the depiction of both sides. The description of how both sides relate to each other shows what war means for the characters and so conveys a representation of the conflict. Nationalists and Republicans are not two static delimited groups fighting against each other with no connection. The novel provides a picture of two sides that are fluid and dynamic in the sense that they were continuously changing due to deserters and to the connections between them. Castro's case is meaningful: his village was part of the Republican zone but he escaped to the Nationalist side. Desertion is mentioned quite often in *La mula* as a common but dangerous phenomenon. Appearances deceive also in war and the best example is Alférez Estrella. He is an admired Nationalist soldier of a certain rank, second lieutenant, but wants to desert and join the Republic. The narrator displays these hidden Republican feelings outside any dialogue, as if keeping a secret:

El alférez Estrella [...] asistía a los mítines de izquierdas [...]. En su último año de universidad, su padre le regaló el diccionario de la Real Academia de la Lengua y lo primero que hizo fue tacharle la palabra "Real" del frontispicio y repintar sobre la corona del escudo otra republicana [...]. Castro le ha resultado simpático [...]. Si alguien le explicara algún día el funcionamiento de la sociedad [...] comprendería y se pondría del lado de la justicia. (pp.66-67)

Eventually, Alférez Estrella, drunk, will confess his real inclinations to Castro, whom he admires for having been brave enough to desert and being consequent:

-Pues sí, yo te tengo admiración porque tuviste los cojones de pasarte. A mí me faltan esos cojones [...] ¡No tengo cojones de pasarme a los rojos! – confiesa con voz ronca-. Allí es donde tenía que estar, con los míos, defendiendo a la República. (p.92)

The connections and relationships between both sides are key elements in *La mula*, as they were in *Soldados*, where Republicans and Nationalists establish close relationships. It serves to deconstruct the myth that in the Civil War participants were easily divided into two enemy groups. There are regular friendly meetings between both sides and the novel describes one of them. The purpose of these meetings is to exchange commodities, mainly tobacco, smoking paper, soft drugs and chocolate: Nationalists do not have paper and Republicans do not have tobacco, so they do need each other and meet every other day. At such meetings, weapons are banned. This scene centres on the conversation between Castro and el Churri. They both reflect the closeness between history and fiction: Castro is based on a real person and el Churri is completely fictional. It is another example of the concept of reference explained by Hutcheon (Introduction, p.6). Both characters become symbols of the two sides: they have a close relationship brought into conflict by the polarization of ideologies and the subsequent outbreak of war. Their dialogue reveals much about each of the sides and about the war. Castro belongs to the Nationalist side; he believes in the propagandistic image of the Republicans, admits that Nationalists are reluctant to social changes and recognises that right-wing

supporters normally are afraid of ideas because they are a negative influence:

Desde luego, ya lo decía mi abuela, la pobre: las ideas, eso es lo peor que hay en el mundo [...] Y mi madre me lo advertía, no te creas que no: “No te juntes con el Benito, que tiene ideas”. (p.118)

El Churri is the opposite, a cultured class-conscious Republican who fights following a code of ideals and wants to stop the Nationalists at all costs: “Tienes que ver que somos esclavos de la tierra [...] Pues eso dura hasta hoy y no hay derecho. La República lo ha querido remediar con la reforma agraria” (p.114) and “Quiere decir que hay una cosa que no podemos ceder a cambio de la vida, y es la libertad” (p.118). The character of el Churri is critical for *La mula*. The author told the writer of this dissertation: “El personaje de Churri es pura ficción para introducir un elemento ideológico en la novela [...] tenía que transmitir mi propia postura frente a los sucesos de la guerra” (20/08/08). Despite these differences, which are tearing the country apart due to the influence of radical ideologues, Castro and el Churri are still fond of each other and manage to maintain their friendship. However, the conversation is not always peaceful and tension erupts when talking about political issues. Castro says: “[...] pero tú tienes tus ideas y yo tengo las mías. Ni tú me vas a convencer a mí ni yo a ti” (p.119). They accept these irreconcilable differences but that does not prevent their being friends:

- Bueno, Juanillo [Castro], ¿tan amigos?  
Titubean entre estrecharse la mano o abrazarse. Se funden en un abrazo apretado.
- Ea, Juanillo, no sé si volveremos a vernos, pero que sepas que el pasado está olvidado y que aquí tienes un amigo.

- Lo mismo digo. Ojalá que la guerra termine pronto y que lo celebremos juntos en La Quintería, con un choto y una bota de vino. (p.119)

The meaning of this encounter is powerful: first, the author is making clear who had some intellectual formation at the time - the Republican - and who was an ignorant - the Nationalist. Second, Castro and el Churri have a good time together despite their explicit differences and they never use violence to resolve them. This can be considered a metaphor of the author's perspective, as he explained in an interview:

- ¿Se podía haber evitado la Guerra Civil o los españoles no tenían otra salida que abocarse a ese pozo terrorífico?
- Era perfectamente evitable. Lo que ocurre es que nos venden que fue inevitable. Una inmensa mayoría del pueblo español estaba en una situación desfavorecida frente a una minoría privilegiada. La República intentó un reparto de bienes y los privilegiados se cerraron en no ceder nada. Además, ciertas fuerzas de la izquierda pretendían la revolución y entorpecieron también la marcha de la República. Y pusieron su granito de arena para que se llegase a las manos. (Belausteguigoitia 2005)

Civil War is also represented in *La mula* with a substantial load of social issues in Spain at that time. Three aspects, deeply intertwined, evoke a picture of Spain before and during the war: poverty, inequality and ignorance. In the 1930s, the Spanish economy was based upon agriculture, despite the existence of important industrial centres in Cataluña, País Vasco and Madrid; more than 40% of Spanish farmers in 32 provinces were considered poor (Anon 2005a, p.23). That number even surpassed 80% in 8 provinces. At the same time, more than 25% of the land, in some provinces in southern Spain even more than 40%, was in the hands of only a few owners. Castro comes from a poor family which earns its living by serving

the Marquis of Pineda, the owner of a large estate. El Chato, a friend of Castro's, becomes an example of the extreme poverty shared by other secondary characters:

Es hijo de unos piconeros que [...] se arrimaba de vez en cuando a Los Escoriales, el coto del marqués de Pineda, donde mi familia [Castro's] sirve, y mi madre le echaba unas tajadas de carne en una lata y así medio lo crió, porque, si no llega a ser por ella, se hubiera quedado rojo. (p.87)

*La mula* echoes this inequality in the main character. Castro is aware of the differences between rich and poor but considers this gap natural: "Yo no pienso nada, usía. Siempre ha habido ricos y pobres" (p.55). Other characters also mention this injustice. Alférez Estrella defines Castro as "un obrero desclasado por el hábito de la esclavitud, que se pasó al lado de los explotadores y vive tan feliz en su ignorancia" (p.67). But it is el Churri who tries to make Castro see clearly the depressed situation of Spain:

¿Sabes lo que trae a maltraer a este país?: la incultura. Que la gente no sabe, que somos una partida de analfabetos, que una buena persona como tú es tan ignorante que no es capaz de darse cuenta de que toda su vida y la vida de su padre y la de sus abuelos y sus tatarabuelos ha estado marcada por la injusticia, que desde hace miles de años se ha dejado explotar por los curas y por los reyes. (p.116)

These could be the author's actual words since he revealed in an interview his personal view on the reasons behind the war: "La guerra sólo se comprende porque España era un pueblo de analfabetos; de otro modo nunca se habrían consentido muchas cosas que se consintieron" (Elmundolibro 2003). When Castro travels around Spain on his way to the Nationalist capital city, Burgos, to be decorated, he is introduced to high

society as the national hero. He then realises that the abyss between high society and his lifestyle is even larger than he thought:

¿Es desdén o simpatía lo que manifestaba aquella sonrisa [Pilar's]? En cualquier caso, una objetiva superioridad de clase. Castro [...] presiente su propia simpleza al descubrir tantas cosas nuevas, cosas extraordinarias que forman parte de la cotidianidad de seres privilegiados como Pilar. [...] El mundo de los marqueses de Pineda y de sus hijos [...]. Era natural que hicieran una guerra, y murieran si hiciera falta, por defender todo aquello. (pp.212-213)

Fiction contributes significantly to the representation of the war since the trip to Burgos is fictional, as Eslava Galán told the author of this dissertation (personal correspondence, 17/08/08). This trip is essential to understand the novel: the trip shows Francoist propaganda at its most, especially regarding the construction of the hero, and also the depiction of social inequality at the time.

What the narrator emphasises the most, however, is the influence of ignorance and illiteracy. We have seen that the author considers these elements to have played an essential role in the situation that made war possible and their presence in *La mula* is very visible. The level of illiteracy in 1930 was 45% (Anon 2005a, p.20). Castro is fully aware of his ignorance and will eventually agree with el Churri on the unfair distribution of wealth according to social classes; despite that, he does not consider changing:

¿Usted sabe lo que me respondió el señorito Federico, el hijo del marqués, cuando se lo pregunté [what a zeppelin is]?: “Tú ocúpate del arado y no pierdas el tiempo mirando a las nubes” [...] ¿Y sabe usted lo que le digo?: que ahora veo que las cosas no son tan sencillas como creemos los ignorantes. Lo que pasa es que uno ya está encarrilado y tiene que seguir en la ignorancia, pero ahora entiendo muchas cosas que me decía mi amigo el Churri. (p.105)

Finally, Civil War is also portrayed through the presentation of the war hero. The depiction of the hero in this text is contextualised in the general humorous tone of the novel. Castro is decorated by Franco as a national hero for a feat that was manipulated with the intention to contribute to the propaganda of the Nationalists and to lift soldiers' spirits. When Castro returns to his camp with nine Republican prisoners, he tells the truth, that is, he went out to look for his mule and these Republican deserters asked him to pretend that they were real prisoners so that they could safely reach the Nationalist side. But his superiors prefer to turn that action into a heroic feat: a private soldier managed to capture nine enemies in a brave action. Benavides, a journalist forced to publish heroic news in a Nationalist newspaper, heard of Castro, took a photo of him and wrote an article presenting Castro as a national hero, although his true feelings about Castro were quite different: "Este palurdo, con un poco de suerte, nos va a dar un reportaje estupendo" (p.160). But Castro insists: "Oiga, yo no quiero medallas. Yo lo que quiero es que acabe pronto la guerra y volver a mi pueblo" (p.160). These words show Castro's defining principle throughout the novel. The contrast between his intentions and those of the rest of the Nationalist characters allows for a humoristic representation of events. The section on the stay in Burgos is rich in these situations. The visit to the core of Nationalism is supposed to impress any Nationalist soldier, especially if the reason is to be decorated by Franco as a hero. But it does not seem to move Castro, who is excited for quite different reasons:



Castro va contento por cuatro motivos: porque está lejos del tomate, porque todo lo que lleva es de estreno, hasta los calzoncillos y las botas, porque lleva en el bolsillo más dinero del que ha tenido en su vida y porque ve mundo. (p.183)

Once in Burgos, this humoristic tone continues as Castro does not really fit in the solemn ceremony full of high military ranks, alleged heroes and upper-class Falangists. While Franco is exposing the solemn principles of the Nationalist ideology, Castro:

No puede evitar que se le vaya el santo al cielo y lo arrebatan las ensoñaciones del regreso a La Quintería [...] Castro piensa en Concha, ¿dónde estará a estas horas? [...] Se la imagina en la cama, arrebujada, con las manos entre los muslos. (p.203)

The story of Castro as a hero ridicules the construction of the heroic figure by highlighting first, the manipulation of information; second, the deliberate creation of myths in order to support a certain ideology; third, the mechanisms to achieve these objectives. *Soldados* also discussed the figure of the war hero but it highlights the dialogue between two characters about what a hero is, with no definitive answer, and the anonymity of the hero. Despite these differences, it is worth noting how the figure of the hero is still significant for contemporary fiction.

## Conclusion.

The Civil War is generally remembered as a time of killing and death; this novel, however, focuses on other issues: friendship with fellow soldiers and with enemies, love affairs, illiteracy, ideology, and poverty. In fact, the emphasis is on ordinary people, soldiers and civilians who took the conflict as part of their everyday lives, just as we explained in the case of *Soldados* as well. These characters do not seem to live the war according to a convincing set of ideological principles; Castro is the best example. They do not consider war as a radical division between the two sides; the relationship of Castro and el Churri shows. The novel reflects a desire to recover a personal historical memory in the figure of Castro, as Eslava Galán remembers his father's experiences during the conflict. This leads to a reconstruction of the everyday lives of ordinary people, with little emphasis on prominent historical figures. Castro and his relationships with other characters send two clear and powerful messages through this representation of the war: first, the war was fought by many illiterate people with no real ideological background, who were easy to convince with propaganda, and second, the terms *Civil War* and *reconciliation* are not antonymous.

Humour is a key aspect that dominates most of the story. It mainly appears in two ways: first, via the depiction of Nationalist characters, discourse and lifestyle. Franco is ridiculed by emphasising some features such as being short and having a high pitched voice. The second way to

include humour is via the contrast of the solemn ideology-loaded Nationalist atmosphere and the rather uncaring behaviour of absent-minded Castro, whose political commitment is almost non-existent. It is meaningful that Republicans are not ridiculed. There is no humour at the expense of the Republican side. At this level, there is a right and a wrong for the narrator, who takes sides for the Republicans. Therefore, humour attacks ideological and political Nationalist scenarios. However, humour is not applied evenly to the Nationalist side. Castro and his fellow soldiers are protagonists of comic situations because of their sense of humour. It is different with ideologues and military ranks; they are ridiculed *per se*. *La mula* seems to take sides and to paint a positive portrait of the Republican side, although the textual presence of this side is minimal from a quantitative point of view. Republican characters are not laughed at; the main Republican character is a cultured person who is aware of the reason why he is fighting and who shows some critical thinking and historical perspective on events. Nevertheless, the case of the representation of the Nationalist side is the opposite: it covers almost all the story and is demeaned by the use of humour.

Finally, taking into consideration the importance of his mule for Castro emotionally as well as economically, the fact that he loses her towards the end of the story suggests he lost the war or at least suffered an enormous loss because of the war. The presentation of the end of the war does not show any triumph in the Nationalist characters. *La mula* is making clear statements about war, statements that have been studied in this dissertation.

## ***LOS GIRASOLES CIEGOS***

### **Introduction.**

*Los girasoles* share with *Soldados* and *La mula* the focus on anonymous characters and the challenge of the Nationalist discourse. However, it does the latter in a very different way: if Francoist propaganda demonised the Republicans throughout the regime, *Los girasoles* demonises the Nationalists for present-day Spain. It is a counterattack that sends a powerful message to the audience, a message which does not support any reconciliation between the two factions.

The story starts during the last days of the war and the main action takes place during the immediate post-war, that is, the early years of the 1940s. The focus on the terrible events happening after the end of the war suggests that the war had not actually finished in 1939, but its horrors continued for years under a dictatorial government.

*Los girasoles* is formed of four short stories: 'Si el corazón pensara dejaría de latir', 'Manuscrito encontrado en el olvido', 'El idioma de los muertos' and 'Los girasoles ciegos'. They all work perfectly as autonomous entities and they still have a distinctive meaning by themselves. Yet, when collected under the same title, they are not only a collection of short stories with a similar theme, but they manage to construct a text impregnated with two common elements: first, defeat as a core topic; second, the roots of all

four stories is the same national tragedy: the Civil War. The four short stories can be divided into two groups according to their characters: on one hand, 'Manuscrito' and 'Los girasoles' share characters, members of the same family, albeit experiencing different tragedies. It is the family Mazo who undergo suffering, agony and death due to the war. On the other hand, 'Si el corazón' and 'El idioma' tell the story of Captain Alegría, although his presence in both stories differs: he is the main character in the former and a secondary character in the latter.

Thus, the text is shaped in a very distinctive way since it can be considered, first, as a collection of four independent short stories; second, as two sets of stories focussing on the same characters; and third, the text as a whole, dealing with the theme of the defeat in the framework of the Spanish Civil War. This structure leads to the conclusion that the genre of *Los girasoles* can be defined as a:

“ciclo de cuentos”, una modalidad a la que también pertenecen, por mencionar un par de buenos ejemplos, *Dublinese*s, de Joyce, y los *Cuentos del Barrio del Refugio*, de José María Merino. En estos libros de relatos, las piezas, aunque mantengan su valor independiente, aparecen asimismo trabadas, generando otra unidad de sentido distinta. (Valls, 2005)

## **The Civil War in *Los girasoles ciegos*.**

*Los girasoles*, as the other two texts analysed in this study, puts together real and fictional events and people. Characterization is a clear example of this collaboration between history and fiction. Also, characterization contributes to the general message that the work is transmitting: the sharp distinction between evil Nationalists and good Republicans. History and fiction are intertwined to reconstruct, interpret or impose new meanings on the past, as seen in the Introduction (p.5). Alberto Méndez recognized that he used real people as inspiration for some of the characters in *Los girasoles* (Rendueles, 2004). Thus, Captain Alegría and Eulalio the poet existed but under different names. This re-naming of real characters and the naming of fictional ones is very relevant if we take into consideration the meaning of those names. Examples such as Alegría (joy), Eulalio (well spoken), Salvador (savior) or Mazo (mallet) create a sad, and sometimes ironic, contrast within their own stories. In the cases of Juan Senra and Colonel Eymar, Méndez kept their real names. However, their stories are not intended to be historiographical and the author made some modifications in order to construct his fictional work. For instance, there was a Republican flag in the hut where Eulalio and his son were found dead. The author decided not to include it in the story because he preferred to avoid great feats or proclamations (Rendueles, 2004).

The main characters in *Los girasoles* belong to two clearly differentiated groups which represent both sides of the war; on the one hand, the victims: the family of Ricardo Mazo and Elena, their daughter Elena and their son Lorenzo, Eulalio Ceballos (Elena's boyfriend) and Rafael (Eulalio and Elena's baby). This family is the centre of two short stories: 'Manuscrito' and 'Los girasoles'. The other main victims are Captain Alegría and Juan Senra, who share the prison in 'El idioma'. Captain Alegría is also the main character in 'Si el corazón'. All of them have lived through the experience of the Civil War and are suffering the revenge of the victorious side. The second group is that of the victors. Two characters stand out: Colonel Eymar, who is judging Juan Senra, and Brother Salvador, who is harassing the Mazo family. Both clearly represent the two main oppressive powers during the war and the subsequent dictatorship: the army and the Church, allied against any element out of step with the National Catholic doctrine.

Psychological depth appears in different levels depending on the sides of the war: the inner life of the Republicans is portrayed in a deeper way than that of the Nationalists. There is a remarkable implication regarding this portrait: the Manichean dichotomy of 'Republicans (suffering victims and main characters)' vs. 'Nationalists (cruel victors and secondary characters)'. The author is reinforcing certain ideologies in a very obvious and simplistic way with these basic portraits of the two sides of the war. *Los girasoles* seems to be a counter-balance for the reductionist Francoist propaganda spread during the dictatorial regime but turns out to be equally reactionary. This technique was already present in first-wave novel, as seen in

Introduction, p.10. However, there two exceptions in this depiction of characters: Brother Salvador belongs to the victorious band but is given a deep psychological description. He displays his thoughts during the confession of his guilt: he used his privileged position within the Catholic Church to harass Elena and to trigger another tragic event in the Mazo family. Captain Alegría could be considered another exception in this dichotomy; he is in between both worlds: he is a Nationalist who surrenders because he realises that his side is killing for the sake of it; his surrender results in everybody condemning him, Nationalists as well as Republicans. The defeated have to bear prosecutions, capital punishment, accusations, rapes and isolation, to name just a few torments. In *Los girasoles*, the end of all this suffering is usually death. The case of Eulalio, the young Republican poet, is an example of the general depiction of Republican characters. He undoubtedly captures almost all the attention in the second short story through the reading of his tragic diary, which confers on him a wide range of nuances. The reader has access to his deepest thoughts. That is not the case of the characters in the victorious faction. As secondary characters, they reach neither the psychological depth nor the descriptive levels of the Republican characters. This provokes a powerful impact on the reader: the defeated Republicans appear more humane and then awake certain sympathy on the reader. It is a clear statement from the author's point of view and position.



As in *Soldados*, one of the stories, 'Los girasoles', problematises the remembering of past traumatic events. This problematisation is achieved through a technical device: three focalizers<sup>6</sup> from different time periods tell the same story, which is textually presented as a collage with distinctive handwritings according to the storyteller; it is a case of multiple focalization since the same event is presented through the perspective of different focalizers, internal as well as external. The internal focalizers are Brother Salvador and Lorenzo, both participants in the terrible events; the third focalizer is a narrator-focalizer, not part of the story, who gives a bird's eye and simultaneous view of the events. This multiplicity shows how frustration and defeat affect everyone – the oppressor as well as the oppressed –, involved in a merciless abuse of power and also speaks up for those in an unprivileged situation. This presentation of the text is highly effective since the reader immediately obtains a glimpse of the conflictive juxtaposition in the telling of the same story. Furthermore, it transmits the idea of how much some past wounds remain open for years in the victims and how difficult is to heal them; that is an issue for present-day Spanish people who are dealing with those same wounds; that is why adult Lorenzo is telling his childhood story in a bitter way and confesses his troubled state of mind in this exercise of recovering tragic memories, being aware of the impossibility of a true account:

Probablemente los hechos ocurrieron como otros los cuentan, pero yo los reconozco sólo como un paisaje donde viven mis recuerdos. Sigo preguntándome cómo eran los árboles cuando los plantaron o cómo era mi madre siendo joven o qué aspecto tenía yo cuando era niño. (p.107)

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<sup>6</sup> Following the terminology and categories used by Rimmon-Kennan (1989)

The typology of the narrators is significant regarding the depiction of the war in two short stories. The narrator of the first short story is extradiegetic and overt; very present indeed, as he/she refers very frequently to himself/herself as “we”: “Ahora sabemos” (p.13), “Sabiendo ahora lo que sabemos” (p.14), “Según nos ha contado” (p.24) or “Tenemos sólo datos imprecisos” (p.24). This narrator seems to be a person interested in the figure of Captain Alegría and is personally involved in recording and praising Alegría’s actions. It is then an extraordinary example of the recovery of the memory of war events and people, a phenomenon that is not exclusive of present-day Spain but that the story locates in the early years of the dictatorship.

The two narrators in the second short story belong to different time periods and both are diegetic in the sense that they tell their own stories and took part in what they are telling. Eulalio writes down his terrible experiences in 1939, which are literally reproduced and sensibly commented on by the editor, a narrator located at some point between 1952 and 1954. Again, the reader is given another example of the recovery of the memory of the defeated: a person who is living in the harder years of Francoism shows respect and even sympathy for the suffering of a Republican; actually, what he is doing is editing and commenting the testimony of an enemy of the regime.

The Civil War in *Los girasoles* equals death, defeat, loss and fear. 'Manuscrito' echoes this presentation in a particularly intense way. From the horrors that the young poet saw, a reflection is formed with no dialogue, almost a monologue, about war and other related topics such as the death he has seen, the death he is still seeing and the one he is expecting; also, the fight against Fascism at all costs, defeat, fear and the assassination of the Republican teachers: "Hemos perdido una guerra y dejarnos atrapar por los fascistas sería lo mismo que regalarles otra vez otra victoria" (p.42) and:

Yo he perdido una guerra y Elena, a la que nadie jamás hubiera pensado en considerar un enemigo, ha muerto derrotada. Mi hijo, nuestro hijo, que ni siquiera sabe que fue concebido en el fulgor del miedo, morirá enfermo de derrota. (p.46)

As seen in this quotation, war, fear, death and defeat are intertwined concepts. Afterwards, he will reinforce the idea of death: "Pero he vuelto a revivir el olor de la sangre, he vuelto a oír el ruido de la muerte, he visto otra vez el color de las víctimas. Y eso es malo" (p.50). This picture of the external world establishes a huge contrast with the figure of the poet, locked in the hut, who describes himself in these terms: "Además yo sólo sé escribir y contar cuentos. Nadie me enseñó a hablar estando solo ni nadie me enseñó a proteger la vida de la muerte" (p.41), or "Debo confesar que no he soportado la comparación de la vida y de la muerte" (p.44). This contrast leads to the image of the small hut in the mountains as the setting of an atavist and mythical fight between life and death. The dying young poet seems to symbolise fragility and idealism but at the same time determination and coherence against adversity and chaos. The Civil War appears as a

host of disasters and atrocities and as a place with no justice, surrounding the small dying world of the young poet.

War is not a place for ideals either. The short story 'El idioma' represents the Civil War through the life of a cello teacher, Juan Senra. In an exercise typical of Scheherazade, Juan Senra manages to prolong his life by inventing stories about how heroic was Colonel Eymar's son, Miguel Eymar, although Miguel was in fact a criminal, an informer and a traitor. This is a good metaphor to illustrate a most recurrent representation of the Civil War in *Los girasoles*: war has little to do with heroism and idealism and is much closer to baseness and abjectness:

[Miguel] había matado a un pastor del pueblo de Fuencarral para robarle unos corderos y venderlos después de estraperlo. Pero el hijo del pastor, apenas un niño, le clavó un biello en el estómago y a punto estuvo de morir. Juan Senra le atendió [...] Miguel Eymar se ofreció a hablar si no le condenaban y contó cuanto sabía de las organizaciones de delincuentes. (p.74)

This character also works as a contrast with Senra's honourable behaviour during the war, which enhances the reader's sympathy for the Republican. The omniscient narrator, who is telling the story in a retrospective way, gives some biographical notes about the characters through a series of flashbacks. One of Juan Senra's prison mates is Eugenio Paz, whose reason for taking part in the war and supporting the Republican faction was that his uncle, whom he hated, supported the Nationalists. Thus, the narrator tells us:

Participó en la guerra como quien juega, sólo para que no ganara el adversario, sin ideales, sin pensar en las razones de su toma de postura. Y, como en un juego, cumplió las reglas hasta el final, disparando como francotirador cuando las tropas de Franco entraron en Madrid llevándose por delante a todos lo que se encontraban a su paso. (p.71)

To make an even clearer statement about the lack of heroism during the war, narrator goes on: “Al final le detuvieron, pero no haciendo la guerra sino violando el toque de queda [...] cuando iba a ver a su novia, que le esperaba en un portal” (p.71). This secondary character, Eugenio Paz, is in accordance with one main idea of the short story mentioned above. Another character, the protagonist of the first short story, will reach the same conclusion, namely that war is a time for baseness and abjectness, not for heroism. It is Captain Alegría. He appears in this short story as another of Juan Senra’s prison mates and the narrator gives some more biographical notes about him in order to explain how and why he was involved in the conflict. Alegría went to the war to protect his property. That is a reference to the radical left-wing changes that some Republican parties wanted to carry out in relation to private property:

La República se muestra en principio decidida a impulsar la reforma agraria y a aliviar la situación de los más desfavorecidos. Para la derecha no cabe duda alguna: el nuevo Gobierno se ha empeñado en hacer la revolución a cualquier precio. El ministro sostiene que la reforma agraria pretende, sobre todo, remediar el paro agrícola, redistribuir la tierra – expropiando las grandes fincas señoriales y los latifundios que no se explotaban y entregándosela a los trabajadores del campo—y racionalizar el cultivo. (Anon 2005a, 74)

Despite his ideals, Alegría “no fue un héroe ni alcanzó a sentir el miedo de la guerra” (p.87) as his role was merely bureaucratic.

Finally, the last short story, 'Los girasoles', adds another nuance to the representation of the Civil War: religion. Events are presented in a chronological order and are located in 1942. There are three narrators and their versions and visions of the same story are placed so that they alternate with each other. Having three narrators telling the same story exemplifies the role of the narrator that was explained in the Introduction, p.5: a filter of facts, a subjective creator of an ideological elaboration, following White (1987), and a meaning maker, following Hutcheon (1988). The most significant narrator regarding religious connotations is Brother Salvador, who tells his reasons and intentions towards the Mazo family during his confession. The most repeated image in his discourse is that of the crusade, which received heavy propaganda during Franco's regime and had the support of the Catholic Church, as seen in what Enrique Pla y Deniel, bishop of Salamanca, wrote at the end of the war:

La bendición de Pío XI nos dio ya la seguridad suficiente, que como obispos necesitábamos, para publicar unas semanas más tarde, el 30 de septiembre [1936], nuestra carta pastoral *Las dos ciudades*, defendiendo la tesis de que no se trataba en España de una mera guerra civil, sino de una verdadera cruzada por la religión, por la patria y por la civilización cristiana. (Anon 2005b, p.73)

The aim of this propaganda was to disguise the rebellion against the Republic with a religious veil and spread the idea they were fighting for the preservation of Western civilization and faith. Moreover, it was an effective way to attract international support, especially from the Vatican, creating a friendly opinion in other Catholic countries. Brother Salvador reproduces this idea with words belonging to the Nationalist discourse: "Combatí tres años

en el frente participando en la Cruzada” (p.105) and “Ellos pretendieron alterar el orden de las cosas, modificar los designios de Dios [...] Tuvimos que glorificar nuestra Victoria” (p.107). Nevertheless, not even religious principles will be safe from frustration in this time of war. Brother Salvador accepts his defeat:

¡Qué arduo, Padre, haber vencido para ser víctima de nuevo! Toda la satisfacción que me produjo durante tres años formar parte de los elegidos [...] se fue convirtiendo poco a poco en un fracaso: fracaso al cambiar mi sotana por el uniforme del guerrero, fracaso por ocultar la altivez del cruzado tras la arrogancia de la gleba. (p.146)

Not only does he not proclaim himself as a hero but also he even admits to have betrayed the principles that took him to the war: “Cierto es que no fui ejemplo de santidad porque, ante tanto horror, los instintos son, a la postre, un ancla de la vida [...] Contribuí con mi sangre a transformar el monte Quemado en un monte Exterminio” (p.105).

What makes the fourth short story outstanding is the fact that that negative representation affects also the victors. This nuance enriches the representation of war and gives a more complete idea of what the conflict meant for people’s lives, regardless the faction they fought for.

## Conclusion.

The structure of a literary work conveys meaning in the sense that it directs the process of reading and, by so doing, conducts the reader's comprehension (Rimmon-Kenan, 119-120). Therefore, the complexity in *Los girasoles* is very meaningful. It gives the idea of a general suffering, almost choral, widely spread across time and space and extended throughout the story, linking different periods, spaces and human groups. Every level and every connection among characters supports the perception of a deeply frustrating and painful life after the conflict. Thus, suffering reaches every time period and every person: main and secondary characters, in 1939 or in 1942, victors and victims, young and mature. Méndez elaborates a message full of despair, tragedy and sadness for a present-day audience, showing also widely divergent re-tellings of history. Méndez does not seem to fit in the current tendency within the Civil War novel to turn the conflict into a background for another story or into a mythical far place full of vagueness or into a story of reconciliation. *Los girasoles* exposes the cruelty of war and the suffering of the defeated against the abuse of the victors.

As seen during this study, the representation of the Civil War in the four short stories of *Los girasoles* is much related to multiple failure, anti-idealism and deep frustration. It is also relevant to notice that war dominates the work even if the story begins in 1939, just before the war finishes. The impression is that the story jumps constantly over the time line that divides war and post-war and seems to avoid that limit as if the war and its cruelties



had not finished on 1 April 1939. For many, this is what really happened in Spain as the dictatorial regime managed to keep alive ancient hatred between sides, chasing and assassinating the defeated. *Los girasoles* does not seem to look for reconciliation but to contribute to that long enmity by dividing the story between the good Republicans and the evil Nationalists, despite the exceptions of Captain Alegría, who is rejected by both bands, and the editor of Eulalio's diary, who shows sympathy and respect for the Republican poet; it is perhaps trying to balance the Francoist propaganda of the evil Republicans and the good Nationalists. Along with this, *Los girasoles* seems to send a clear message: the recovery of the memory of the defeated in the war, the Republicans. This recovery is set in two levels: first, it is a text that commemorates exclusively the Republicans; second, the story shows examples of the early recovery of the Republicans' memory; for example, the case of the editor of Eulalio's diary. That connects Méndez's work with a controversial issue still running in contemporary Spanish society: whether the recovery of the past should include the victors, largely remembered during the dictatorship, or only the Republicans, forgotten and humiliated by Franco.

## CONCLUSION

The study of the three texts analysed in this dissertation has revealed shared similarities and also features which are unique to each of them, which reinforces the contrast between them. All three focus on unknown characters involved in the Civil War. With the exception of Sánchez Mazas, who acquires certain relevance in two chapters of *Soldados*, the rest of the main characters in the three texts are not prominent historical figures: Javier Cercas, 'los amigos del bosque' and Antoni Miralles in *Soldados*; Castro, his fellow soldiers, el Churri and Alférez Estrella in *La mula*; and the Mazo family, Brother Salvador, Captain Alegría, Eulalio and Juan Senra in *Los girasoles*. In spite of the presence of Sánchez Mazas, none of the texts presents the war in relation to the historical figures that controlled and decided its course, the authors preferring to explore how that war affected ordinary Spanish citizens in different ways. It is the necessity or wish to complete what history books say or to confront them with the individual and the particular. Fiction seems to be an appropriate field to do so.

The three texts also provide a positive view of the Republican side and a negative view of the Nationalists. In *Soldados*, the true heroes seem to be the anonymous soldier and Antoni Miralles, both Republicans. In *La mula*, el Churri, the main Republican character, is presented in a dignified way. Finally, *Los girasoles* also makes clear that the Republicans were victims and people of honour. On the other hand, the Nationalists are, first, presented as anti-heroes like Sánchez Mazas in *Soldados*, second, ridiculed as in *La mula*,

or third, depicted as cruel victors as in *Los girasoles*. As with the on-going process of the recovery of historical memory in Spain, it is the Republican voice which is being promoted after having been condemned and silenced for so long under Francoist regime.

All three texts, in different ways, also reflect more directly this attempt to recover the historical memory. *Soldados* recovers the memory of 'los amigos del bosque', whose names and biographies are included in the story. The novel also recovers the memory of Sánchez Mazas, a minor writer and one of the founders of the Falangist party Falange, although the novel does not praise him. *La mula* is the recreation of the experiences of the author's father throughout the conflict, offering an example of how the Civil War still affects the private life of current Spanish people, far from being a distant event. In *Los girasoles*, there is the recovery of the story of real people such as Juan Senra. Therefore, fiction and politics go together in this nation-wide phenomenon of the recovery of the historical memory.

In the context of this focus on ordinary people and the recovery of memory, a key theme in all three novels is heroism. Both *Soldados* and *La mula* contain explicit debates on what makes a hero. *Los girasoles*, on the other hand, simply portrays those heroes without explicit comment. In *Soldados*, Javier Cercas and Antoni Miralles discuss the nature of heroism without reaching a final conclusion or direct definition of what a hero is. In *La mula*, by contrast, there is a clear definition of what a hero is not. *Los*

*girasoles* presents some of the Republicans as defeated heroes, for instance Eulalio, the young poet, whose figure acquires mythical status.

In spite of these similarities, the three texts are also different from each other, having its own unique features; the main characters, for example, reflect the variety of the representation of the Civil War in contemporary Spain. Javier Cercas, the fictional character, is a present-day journalist and a writer who is intrigued by an event that happened during the Civil War. His research can be read as a representation of a wide phenomenon which is taking place in Spain today as many Spanish people search for answers about other people involved in the conflict. *La mula*, in contrast, focuses on Castro, a Nationalist who is portrayed in a positive way; he is just a poor soldier who does not really know what is going on in the war. This sympathetic portrait of a Nationalist soldier, especially his friendship with a Republican, might reflect a search for reconciliation in contemporary Spain between Nationalists and Republicans. Finally, in *Los girasoles*, all main Republican characters are seen to suffer the cruelty of the Nationalists in a text which seems to reject any type of reconciliation. The recovery of the memory of those silenced for decades is still an accusation against the Nationalists.

A feature shared by *Soldados* and *La mula*, is that both portray the relationship between Republican and Nationalist characters in a positive light: they are not all the bitter enemies many simplistic accounts of the war would suggest. *Soldados* presents the collaboration between the Republicans

'amigos del bosque' and the Falangist Sánchez Mazas. However, this collaboration must be understood in the context of a struggle to survive in times of war. Although not really a friendship, despite the label 'amigos del bosque' given by Sánchez Mazas to Pere and Joaquim Figueras and Daniel Angelats, they help each other out in difficult moments. *La mula* shows more significantly these connections between the two sides through the intimate friendship between the Nationalist Castro and the Republican el Churri and through the friendly meeting of both sides to exchange commodities. This portrait breaks a simplistic view of the war as two sides being bitter enemies and shows a contemporary desire in fiction for a deeper understanding of the people who had to live through the war. This idea connects with the emphasis on anonymous people mentioned above.

Another relevant feature shared by two of the texts is the problematization of the representation of the war, as we can see in *Soldados* and the story 'Los girasoles'. These texts relate to events which happened, in some cases, about 70 years ago and which the writers themselves did not live through; somehow, writing about the Civil War is an exercise of the memory in two ways: first, people who experienced the Civil War try to remember what happened, and second, following generations try to remember what they were told. This phenomenon is present in fiction. In *Soldados*, the failed execution of Sánchez Mazas is told repeatedly and it makes explicit the doubt over whether what is being told really happened or is only what is remembered to have been told before. In the case of 'Los girasoles', the distance in time and the trauma caused by the horrible events

prevent the adult Lorenzo from remembering clearly the tragedy he had to go through when he was a child.

After having pointed out the differences and similarities between these three texts regarding the presentation of the Civil War, it is worth remembering how they relate to previous and contemporary fictional accounts of the Civil War. There are techniques that were used by previous Civil War novels (see Introduction, pp.8-12) and that are still present in contemporary texts. The Manichaeism of the first-wave novel is still alive in *Los girasoles*. The difference is that today's Manichaeism is not imposed by the Establishment, as just after the war; the roles have been reversed so that the Nationalists are now seen as evil and the Republicans as good. Another feature still present is the thought-provoking material regarding the Republican side. The best example is *La mula*, where there is a large significant dialogue between Castro and el Churri in which ideas about the property of land, social injustice and religion are presented and discussed. *La mula* also shows a third technique that has survived from the second-wave Civil-War novel: the use of animals as metaphors to recount the atrocities of the war. In a novel where cruelty is almost absent, the detailed description of the dead mule is remarkable. It works as a metaphor for what people suffered due to the atrocities committed in the war. Therefore, these contemporary texts can be placed in a thematic tradition in 20<sup>th</sup>- and 21<sup>st</sup> century Spain.

The three texts under discussion also share features with other contemporary works that have the Civil War as a main theme - as mentioned at the end of the Introduction – (Gómez 2006): first, the presentation of the war is plural, containing different ideologies in the text, except the case of *Los girasoles*; second, the depiction of war includes both the front line and the everyday life; third, the Republicans are portrayed so that the reader feels empathy or sympathy towards them; and fourth, there is a problematization of the representation of the war.

This study of three fictional texts related to the Civil War has shown how they reflect the plurality and complexity of the issue in contemporary Spain and how they relate to a wider phenomenon, seen also in the political sphere. Although on the surface they are quite different texts, there are common lines running through them, and also through present-day representations of the war. As the conflict has been represented in fiction since 1936, it is possible to identify an evolution in the treatment of the war; therefore, contemporary fiction on the Civil War can be inserted in a long literary tradition, but also has its own particular and unique features. The solutions to a traumatic event such as a civil war are varied, as the differences between the texts prove, and fiction is being an appropriate vehicle to revisit the past and convey questions and answers. Fiction has provided discussions and depictions of essential issues for which these texts are relevant. Each author creates meaning in a unique way, that is why the variety of points of view, and fiction becomes an extremely useful means to revisit the past.

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