

New Journeys in Iberian Studies

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A (Trans-)National and (Trans-)Regional Exploration

Edited by

Mark Gant, Paco Ruzzante
and Anneliese Hatton

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INTRODUCTION

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The present volume, *New Journeys in Iberian Studies: A (trans-)national and (trans-)regional exploration* gathers new and emerging research in a range of sub-fields of Iberian Studies. As the title suggests, there is a strong emphasis on trans-national and trans-regional approaches to the subject area, reflecting current discourse and scholarship, but the contributions are not limited by these approaches and include an eclectic range of recent work by scholars of history, politics, literature, the visual arts and cultural and social studies often working in transdisciplinary ways, a range which characterises current research in Area Studies. The geographical scope of the transnational processes considered range from intra-Iberian interconnections to those with the United Kingdom which are the subject of several chapters and to transmediterranean processes as well as transatlantic influences between the Peninsula and Argentina, Cuba and Brazil.

The volume has been divided into three sections of six chapters each dealing with 1) memory, time and place in contemporary literary narratives; 2) explorations which redefine a range of aspects of cultural and political identities in Spain and Portugal and 3) transnational dialogues in twentieth century politics, culture and society. The book contains contributions by established academics such as Cristina Pérez Valverde of the University of Granada and also provides a space for a number of early career researchers drawn from the UK, Ireland, Spain, Portugal, Belgium, Brazil and India to open up some pioneering new directions in research in Iberian Studies as well as variety of fresh approaches to hitherto neglected aspects of more familiar issues. The periods of dictatorship in Spain and Portugal, the Spanish Civil War and its antecedents and violent political struggle in the Basque Country/Euskadi continue to provide ample material for scholarship, focussing on a range of identities, ideologies and influences and newer developments in memory and the self in fiction and film are also proving very fruitful. The book has its origins in the 39th Annual Conference of the Association for Contemporary Iberian Studies

held at the University of East Anglia, Norwich in September 2017 and its eclectic yet interconnected range typifies the work of the association and the research presented at its conferences.

The first section of the book, *Innovations in Iberian Narratives*, is opened by Cristina Pérez Valverde who explores how life is fictionalised by the self through memory and the use of intertextuality, analysing her own novel *La memoria de agosto* as a piece of autofiction from her perspective as an academic scholar of literature. Deirdre Kelly, writing on Rosa Montero's generically hybrid auto/biographical grief memoir *La ridícula idea de no volver a verte* shares an interest in ethics, imagery and reading the gaps in the text in her discussion of writing, memory and trauma. María Teresa Navarrete Navarrete's chapter follows, in which she applies the themes of silence and memory to the neglected issue of transgenerational trauma in Spanish Civil War narratives. In a similar vein, Durba Banerjee goes on to consider how the autofictional use of the narrator/protagonist is deliberately used as a tool for engendering debate about the memory industry and the Civil War in her chapter examining Javier Cercas' *Soldados de Salamina* and *El impostor* in the light of theory controversy. Also touching on a Civil War theme in the form of Paco Roca's *El faro*, is Julio Andrés Gracia Lana's chapter on the graphic novel, a contrasting aspect of recent narrative, not strictly a literary genre but bridging both literature and the visual arts. Gracia Lana presents how the graphic novel in Spain has consolidated its status as an art form in recent years through significant exhibitions in a number of galleries and museums alongside a growing range and quality of publications. The section is closed by Holly Foss who examines carceral specialities, identity, belonging and Otherness in *Nerea and I* and *The Lone Woman*, two fictional texts taking Basque female political prisoner terrorists as their subjects and in which she sees spaciality as taking protagonism in the portrayal of their transregional and transnational exiles and returns.

The second section, *Redefining Iberian Identities*, takes as its focus a range of sites of research which have in common the relationship between ideologies and identities in periods of socio-political change. In the first chapter Roncesvalles Labiano maintains the theme of political violence in the Basque Country considered in the last chapter of the previous section but shifts attention to the changing representations of the victims of ETA from the Transition to Democracy to the present, highlighting that, as the political situation has evolved from violent conflict to abandonment of the armed struggle, their absence and invisibility has been giving way to empathy in the struggle for recognition and memory. The relationship between film narrative and ideological shifts is also the subject of Ana

Asión Suñer's chapter which interrogates the lesser known category of third way cinema which trod a path between the commercial and the intellectual in representing and entertaining Spanish society amidst the political social and ideological flux of late Francoism and the Transition. Cindy Pinhal also considers ideology and film in her chapter on Francoist cinema showing it as both orientalisising and orientalist as she explores nationalism, identity, sexuality and Spanish colonialism in Morocco through the 1948 film *Locura de Amor*. The use of cultural products by Iberian dictatorships for propagandistic purposes in constructing national identities is also explored by Annarita Gori in her chapter on how Portugal's Estado Novo legitimised itself through the presentation of past and present in two of the six significant exhibitions organised by the regime between 1934 and 1940, drawing in part on models from Italy. Though João Santana da Silva covers a wider period in his chapter tracing the relationships between industrialisation and the development of football in urban Lisbon between 1910 and 1950, starting with references to British influences, he includes a discussion of the impact of social control by public institutions as a key factor in the accelerating decline of working-class neighbourhood clubs. The final chapter in the section, by Manuel López Forjas, turns our attention away from Lisbon to Madrid and to a more legal approach to identities as he explores the influence of the contribution of Joaquín Costa to the Krausist attempt at recovery of customary law (influenced by the German philosophical current) and the consequent integration of municipalism in the socialist project of the Second Republic, highlighting the Krausist belief in the contrast between the "real Spain" and the "official Spain"; between the dominance of Castile and the diversity of traditions inherited by the regions.

The third section of the book, entitled Transitional Iberian Dialogues is rooted in transnational historical processes of diverse kinds, though these are also present, of course, in many of the preceding chapters. The section is opened by Susana Rocha Relves who takes up the theme of regional and national identities discussed in the previous section as she considers how transnational and transatlantic communication and silence functioned in the contribution of Portuguese influences to the construction of Galician identity in the flourishing of cultural relations witnessed by the 1920s. Nathaniel Andrews calls our attention to the underexplored transatlantic dimensions of anarchist movements between 1917 and 1936 in presenting historiography in this area and preliminary findings of his own investigation of the subject. He continues by providing a lively rationale for further research into this aspect of anarchist counterculture as well as its contemporary relevance. Cláudia Rio Doce moves on to consider a very

different transatlantic interaction in the shape of the Brazilian anthropophagy, as expressed in the *Revista de Antropofagia* in its radical expression during the 1920s, simultaneously destroying and assimilating the Other in a rejection both of imitations of the Portuguese coloniser and of European conceptions of primitivism in its propositions for national culture and identity. She points out that, paradoxically, anthropophagy, while playing a key role in developing a Brazilian national identity was constrained in its wider global impact by its expression in Portuguese which in turn means that Rio Doce's work itself places an important role in contemporary diffusion of information about the subject. A very different transnational dialogue is contained in Stephen Rainbird's chapter analysing the evolving response of the British diplomat John Leche to the Republican cause which forms part of emerging research shedding new light on the historiography of the period and revealing a more complex dynamic in terms of the positions of front line diplomats regarding the combatant sides than has been hitherto understood. Moving on to a later phase in the development of transnational relationships between the United Kingdom and Spain, Nick Sharman's chapter examines the British informal colonial relationship with Spain in the mid-twentieth century and the extent to which London's economic interests were used in justifying non-intervention against the Franco regime at the expense of support for democratic aspirations. In the final chapter of the book Paco Martino Ruzzante continues the theme of the interrelationship between the Peninsula and the U.K. in the mid-twentieth century as he considers the previously under-emphasised importance of transnational influences on the creation of Iberian welfare systems seen through the impact of the Beveridge Report on the Italian-influenced corporatist policies of the authoritarian regimes of Franco and Salazar in Spain and Portugal, highlighting its transnational role as a predecessor of the European project.

The range of current objects of study and the new light shed on the (trans)national and (trans)regional processes identifiable throughout the book are testimony to the vigour and breadth of research taking place in Iberian Studies and to its interrelations with other fields. Since many of the projects represented in the volume are continuing to develop, the stimulating work of a number of newer researchers is also introduced.

The editors wish to thank all contributors for their collaboration and collegiality. Chapters Five and Eight were translated by Mark Gant and Chapter Fifteen was translated by Anneliese Hatton, other contributors wrote in English. The editors are also grateful to the staff of Cambridge Scholars for all their assistance in preparing this text.

SECTION ONE:
INNOVATIONS IN IBERIAN NARRATIVES

CHAPTER ONE

THE LANDSCAPES OF MEMORY: FROM LIFE NARRATIVES TO THE FICTIONAL SELF

CRISTINA PÉREZ VALVERDE
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Introduction

In 2010 *La memoria de agosto* was published. It was my first novel, and seeing it in print represented the culmination of a journey that began with the firm decision to leave aside academic writing for some time and devoting myself entirely to fiction. So, the year 2010 marked a turning point in my life.

Writing is usually an early vocation. At least it was in my case. I grew up with the idea of being a writer. From as long as I can remember, I enjoyed making up rhymes, playing with sounds and words, and was often enthralled by the evocative power of poetic images. The possibility of creating meanings through language, of venturing along the paths of imagined, dreamt, or remembered landscapes, was a wonderful discovery. Later on, writing acquired a new dimension: that of reflecting or re-enacting what had already been or what could have been but was not. Writing, as I saw it, was living twice, re-living and re-visiting experience.

And then I grew up and made a career out of teaching literature. There were doctoral theses and academic articles, and only occasionally did I write poetry and publish a few short stories. However, one day I sat in front of the computer determined to write a novel. What was it that prompted me to do so? Since I had already got my tenure, one might think that the achievement of a permanent position gave me freedom and time. This indeed helped. However, what transpired was the need to apprehend and give meaning to a powerful life event.

Was it in any sense autobiographical or inspired in true facts? How much of myself was there in Belén, the main character? Questions like this were asked time and again once the novel was finally in print, while I kept providing a non-committal answer.

Taking my experience as a fiction writer as a case study, in the following lines I will analyse the ways in which lived episodes become fictional material. Starting from an exploration of the human ability to tell stories, I will then move on to explain Manuel Alberca's theorizing on the intermingling of fact and fiction in what he terms "las narrativas del yo", with a view to locating *La Memoria de agosto* within the context of a particular genre included within this umbrella category.

Life narratives, or the storytelling subject

Every life is in search of a narrative
(Kearney 2002, 4)

The need to tell stories—as well as the ability to do so—seems to be inherent to the human condition. We tell one another (and ourselves) stories all the time. From the quiet conversation between friends while on an evening stroll or from the hurried exchanges of information typical of a casual meeting to the silent soliloquies of the mind, we spend most of our time engaged in narrative making.

As Walter Fisher puts it, we humans are essentially storytellers. Not only do we understand and make sense of our lives in narrative form, as a series of ongoing narratives, each with their own conflicts, characters, beginnings, middles and ends, but we also experience the world as a set of stories from which we choose those that are akin to our values and beliefs. Besides, all meaningful communication takes place through storytelling (Fisher, 1984, 1985). These are some of the basic tenets of the so called Narrative Paradigm, the theory of communication developed by Fisher himself, which has had important repercussions on subsequent studies of the role of storytelling in the construction of self and community.

For Fisher, as for many other narrativist scholars, there is an essential relationship between life and narrative, self and story. In this regard, philosopher Richard Kearney's book *On Stories* (2002), in which he delves into the ways in which subjectivity and identity are negotiated through narratives, deserves special attention. Stories, the scholar tells us, offer some of the most enduring insights into the human condition; apart from entertaining us, they can also determine our lives and identities.

Narratives enable us communicate to others who we are, and cast light on life experiences:

When someone asks you who you are, you tell your story. That is, you recount your present condition in the light of past memories and future anticipations. You interpret who you are now in terms of where you have come from and where you are going to. And so doing you give a sense of yourself as a *narrative* identity that perdures and coheres over a lifetime. (*On Stories* 2002, 4)

The relationship between life and narrative was widely explored by Jerome Bruner, probably the most influential narrative theorist and cognitive psychologist to date. Throughout his prolific work, the scholar insisted on the fact that stories pervade our lives and greatly influence our vision and understanding of the world. And, of course, not just the stories we construct, but also the ones we are exposed to. He laid emphasis on the fact that logical thought or reasoning is not the only or even the most ubiquitous mode of thought; for there is another form of thought which is highly responsible for our construction and interpretation of events, namely “the form of thought that goes into the construction not of logical or inductive arguments but of stories or narratives” (Bruner 2004, 691). In “Life and Narrative” (2004), he stretches his theory to explore the complex nature of self-narrative making or autobiographical storytelling. We seem to have no other way of describing “lived time”, he claims, save in the form of a narrative.

This (human) need to tell and retell experience, to recount “lived time”, is at the basis of all autobiographical writing. But lived experience can also become inspiration for fictional discourse, and it is this type of literary narrative based on autobiographical facts that I will be addressing in this chapter.

Recounting the past

During the summer of 2017 I often visited my mother in the coastal town of Almuñécar, at an apartment complex where lots of retired people spend many good times together (breakfasts on a terrace overlooking the sea, long mornings sitting on the beach or by the complex swimming pool, quiet walks at sunset [...]) There, I was told countless stories: a childhood in the Spanish protectorate of Morocco, the hardships of migration and the discovery of a new life in the Germany of the fifties, the loss of dear ones, the finding of a new love in the old age [...]. This is not to say that all of the stories and monologues I heard were recountings of key past

experiences or episodic autobiographical memories. Quite on the contrary, most of the reports and conversations concerned either daily routines or the current lives of sons, daughters, and grandchildren. It was just a few of these ladies—for most of my storytellers were women, some well passed their eighties—that were eager to tell their life histories. One, in particular, confessed to me in several occasions: “I want to write a novel, the novel of my own life”.

These ladies epitomize a sort of truth “universally acknowledged”: although we all are, to a greater or lesser extent, natural storytellers, some of us seem to be especially prone to a) narrate our stories and life histories in oral form any time circumstances allow, and/or b) put our narratives on the page, sometimes with literary purposes in mind. Whether the first type ever makes the jump to writing or not, at any rate they often provide the raw material of literary fiction.

While storytelling is traditionally associated with old age, conceived as a means of rescuing past time in order to pass on to future generations the legacy of personal experience, cultural practices, and historical circumstances; revisiting the past through narrative occurs in all life periods, as well as the urge to put present experiences and past memories in writing. Apart from the communicative purpose inherent in all narrative making, recasting past events is also a way of bringing them into the present, of re-enacting precious and cherished moments, thus “living” them a second time. Sharing our stories with others is a way of being once more immersed in the context, the circumstances, the universe recreated through the power of words. Indeed, we are sometimes carried away by nostalgia, and it is this nostalgic stance that makes us idealize the past and indulge in experiential storytelling. If, as acknowledged by Dinwoodie, much of the power of both oral and written literature resides precisely in its capacity for activating the “there-and-then” in the “here-and-now” (2002, 32), in experiential narrative and autobiographical literature this activating capacity will not only apply to the reader, since it will have a distinct effect on the writer—both during the writing process and upon subsequent readings—, in as much as the text recreates portions of her/his own life as filtered through memory.

But memories are not always pleasant, and therefore self-narrating may be a painful experience, despite its possible cathartic effect. Thus, stories of suffering and trauma, both individual and collective, abound in autobiographical writing, both fictional and non-fictional. These texts provide a most valuable testimony to human struggle and injustice, and often rewrite history from the perspective of the oppressed.

To summarise, we can narrate all sorts of lived and witnessed events: the ordinary and the extraordinary. We can write to share what we have lived or have been witness to, to praise or to denounce. We can write to explore feelings, to dissect the human condition, to analyse the lives we—and others—live. Personally, what I find interesting, borrowing Thomas Pavel's expression, is not adventure writing (as in fast-paced action), but getting into "the adventure of writing" (Pavel, 1986). I am inclined to write about what happens inside us while the action unfolds outside, to explore how people face life, to interpret events. For me, the act of writing goes beyond creating an illusion of reality, well beyond the purpose of entertaining. I often refer to what I have termed "warm writing", namely a type of writing that seeks to rescue emotions, in which introspection features highly and soliloquies of conscience are laid before the reader. Besides hard-boiled action adventure, in short, there is also the adventure of thinking; there are the ins and outs of the mind, that sometimes lead us to border on madness, and that are often never shared. In that sense, in *La Memoria de Agosto* we are witness to Belén's mental disquisitions, philosophical ramblings and emotional reactions, and many a good reader has brought to my attention the fact that she or he identifies with Belén's thoughts, with "what goes on in her head".

As I said before, I am referring here to fictional, literary, narrative. In particular, to a type of writing in which the main objective is not to provide a faithful record of personal past events, but rather to use elements of the writer's own life as raw material for the production of a literary fiction. That was my aim when writing *La memoria de agosto*. Notwithstanding the reasons that led me to embark upon the project, from the moment I started writing what mattered was the fictional universe, the internal coherence and the literary merit of the text. Whatever bits of my own life were there, they ceased to be life itself to become something else.

The ambiguous pact: *La memoria de agosto* in the context of "las novelas del yo"

On account of its intimate nature and the similarities between the main character and myself in terms of age, education, and geographical location, I have often been questioned about the biographical substratum of *La memoria de agosto*, a question that I have eluded to date and I am addressing here for the first time.

Like many other works combining remembered factuality and fictionality (or factuality in disguise), *La memoria de agosto* probably resists easy classification. However, I will attempt to place it within the

category of autobiographical fiction, mostly relying on Manuel Alberca's extensive study on what he terms "las novelas del yo" in his work *El pacto ambiguo* (2007). Alberca's comprehensive study addresses the intermingling of fact and fiction in literature, as well as the possibility of carrying out the autobiographical pact and the fictional pact simultaneously, focusing mainly on autofiction, but deepening also into the nature of the so called autobiographical fiction.

As is well known, it was Serge Doubrovsky who first coined the term "autofiction" to refer to a type of fiction in which reality and the *imaginaire* are intertwined. The neologism was applied to Doubrovsky's own novel *Fils* (1977). According to Doubrovsky (1988), this hybrid genre partaking of fiction and autobiography is characterized by the fact that author, protagonist, and narrator share one identity. Alberca follows Doubrovsky in this triple identification. However, besides this onomastic identity of author and protagonist-narrator, the Spanish scholar insists on the fact that what characterizes autofiction is the possibility of reinventing the writer's own self or selves. In that sense, the person who writes can construct and reconstruct her/his own identity, create a new life, and imagine her/himself in different situations. In autofiction, person and character are thereby mixed up in a variable interplay of factuality and non-factuality, hence the ambiguous pact. Alberca exemplifies the construction of the genre in contemporary Spanish literature through the analysis of a good number of writers and works, amongst them Javier Cercas (*Soldados de Salamina* 2001, *La Velocidad de la Luz*), Manuel Vicent's trilogy (*Contra Paraíso* 1993), *Tranvía a la Malvarrosa*, (1994) and *Jardín de Villa Valeria* (1996), Julio Llamazares (*Escenas de Cine Mudo* 1994), Sonia García Soubriet (*La otra Sonia* 1987), Francisco Umbral (*El Hijo de Greta Garbo*), Justo Navarro, Juan Goytisolo (*Juan sin Tierra, Reivindicación del conde don Julián*), Luis Goytisolo (*Estatua con palomas* 1992), Luisa Castro, Felipe Benítez Reyes and Francisco García Pavón, amongst others. He particularly focuses on several novels by Enrique Vila-Matas, Javier Marías and Antonio Muñoz Molina. Likewise, he approaches the production of autofiction by Hispanic writers such as César Aira, Fernando Vallego, Severo Sardy, Jaime Bayley, Juan Pedro Gutiérrez, Roberto Bolaño, Darío Jaramillo (*El juego del alfiler* 2002), Guillermo Cabrera Infante (*La Habana para un infante difunto* 1979), Carlos Fuentes (*Diana o la cazadora solitaria* 1994), and Mario Vargas Llosa (*La tía Julia y el escritor* 1977).

To put it briefly, according to Alberca's theorizing of the genre, an autofictional novel is a literary work in which the writer invents a personality and existence keeping their real identity, their true name. The

greatest aspiration of autofictional writers would be that of constructing a story with the panoply of inner selves they feel as inhabiting their own mind or either with all the ones they may invent.

In contrast to the above, in autobiographical fiction—the second genre included by Alberca under the umbrella term “las narrativas del yo”—writers project their own experience to a greater or lesser extent, albeit in a disguised form, i.e. by changing the name of the characters, altering the setting, etc. And it is under this category that *La Memoria de Agosto* falls.

Rather than exploring the possibilities of the self, in autobiographical fiction the literary construction of the self materializes through the elaboration of remembered factuality. The events and characters in autobiographical fiction are thus based on the author’s own life, although lived experience is often presented in camouflaged form. The writing of autobiographical fiction, Alberca concludes, is a literary phenomenon that answers to a basic psychological process, namely the human disposition to tell stories about our own life in order to reaffirm or reconstruct the self. It involves two apparently contradictory urges: the need to reveal and the need to conceal. As examples of autobiographical fiction, Alberca mentions Julio Llamazares’ *El cielo de Madrid* (2005) and Antonio Muñoz Molina *El Jinete Polaco* (1991).

There is no way of knowing whether a novel contains autobiographical elements, unless the reader is acquainted with the author’s biography. However, some hints might be dropped to orient the reader. In the case of *La Memoria de Agosto*, the novel opens with a quotation that could be read as a statement of intent: “My story will be faithful to reality, or at least to my personal recollection of reality, which is the same thing” (Jorge Luis Borges). And yet, inasmuch as the text is presented as a novel, that is, as fiction, the reference could be taken as no more than a literary device. Hence the ambiguity of the reading contract. This is what differentiates autobiographical fiction from autobiography. In this regard, according to the definition provided by French scholar Philippe Lejeune (1989), autobiography is not a guessing game; in fact, it is exactly the opposite. The autobiographical contract between writer and reader implies the affirmation in the text of the identity between author, narrator, and protagonist. This identity must be made explicit, and should already be announced in the cover of the book.

Regarding narrative voice, in autobiographical fiction there is no restriction in terms of narrative person. In my novel, I resorted to the third person limited point of view, which marks a relative distance between narrator and main character. We get to know what Belén, the protagonist, knows, and are exposed to her thoughts and feelings. However, the

narrator's interpretation of the events does not always concur with the manner in which Belén saw things at the moment they were happening. To use Lejeune's expression, in this game of splitting in two (Lejeune 1989, 51), the person who is narrating the story is and is not Belén. Or, to put it more clearly, it is Belén at a different moment of her life, looking back in retrospect and occasionally judging her own (past) actions.

The fact that the person who writes is no longer the person who lived the events narrated is explicitly stated in the novel, at the beginning of chapter five, in a metafictional passage in which the narrator goes back to the very moment in which Belén got the idea of fictionalizing her love story:

When they reached the room, they noticed a small volume. It contained short stories nominated for an award sponsored by the hotel chain. It's funny how events sometimes lead you where you secretly wanted to go. Because it was precisely at that moment when the idea of writing their story came to her [...]

[...] she stops at the names, somehow envying those unknown people whose fictions have managed to see the light of day. They had chiselled artefacts, distilled truths, and at some point, their little creatures had detached themselves from the maternal body and become autonomous entities, self-engendered spores able to reach a thousand remote places [...]; ready to outlive their stem cell and continue spreading themselves around *ad infinitum*, with an unpredictable, sometimes inconstant effect on their surroundings.

And rescuing what they are living is suddenly a burning need: the spore-story will cease to belong to them and, instead, will form part of a system that is shared, anonymous, global. It will go beyond their vital, existential boundaries. She fails to see, however, that at the time of writing, she will no longer be the same person. Chained to time, susceptible to evolution, she does not know who she will be in four years' time. She will have to work out who she is [...] (138-39)

The four years mentioned in the text indicate the span of time elapsed between the period at which the events began to take place and the present of the narration. So she now casts a critical eye over her experiences, trying to understand what happened.

But there are other clues in the text pointing to its autobiographical nature. In the epilogue, entitled "What is there after the last page?" reality and fiction are interwoven in such a way that the happy ending is suspended. A decision needs to be made, a decision for which the Belén-narrator of the present seeks the complicity of her readers. Once the story has been told, the narrator addresses readers asking for advice. And now what? What should be done? She is implicitly telling them: "read this, and

help me decide”, unable to resist the temptation of transforming her fictionalised experiences into an interactive story. And so a blog address is provided. The audience is thus engaged in the story. For, as the narrator goes on to explain, the story will continue after the last page of the book. Perhaps even those reading it will eventually become part of its continuation. There is no closed ending. There cannot be, since at this moment there is no more to tell, as the fictional story has reached the very point at which the author’s life is right now. And the author has not made up her mind yet. Thus, without yet having decided, the narrative voice announces that she is going to meet her future. “If all goes well, she will not come back to these pages.” If she has suspended life during the telling (writing) of the story, now she must return to it outside the pages of the novel. Thus, the text concludes: “And this is why the story has not ended. The story has only just begun”. This device reflects one of the typical features of autobiographical fiction as theorised by Alberca. The autobiographical author emotionally involves readers and invites them to be their confidants. In such a context, the hero or heroine of the novel is regarded by readers not just as a mere fictional being, but also as a real person for whose thoughts and secrets they become concerned.

Time and memory

Going back to the genesis of my writing project, I believe that this first novel came to be as the result of a need to apprehend a strong emotional experience. Somehow, I felt overwhelmed by happenings that were experienced and felt as out of the ordinary. Such intensity required capturing in textual form: the happenings would then be rescued from their own historical moment and preserved into fiction. This idea of rescuing lived experience from time is suggested in several occasions within the body of the novel, e.g. in the following quotation from W.B. Yeats’s youth poem *The Wanderings of Oisín*: “but the tale, though words be lighter than air, must live to be old like the wandering moon”.

Likewise, the introductory Machadian line opening the last chapter: “Today is always still”, points also to the power of literature to perpetuate experience. But the quotation has a double meaning in the text, for it also proclaims and celebrates the fact that it is not too late for the character-narrator to fulfil her love story. The possibility still remains open, or it has been newly opened up, a fact that tallies with the final decision to which I was referring above. This is only revealed in the last part of the book, when Belén gets a letter from César, the man she is in love with, asking her to marry him after a long distancing between them.

The above does not imply that the story is narrated chronologically. The temporal architecture of the novel is quite complex, defying the constraints of linear time, as announced in the second page:

This novel does not begin at the beginning of the story. If you'd rather find out how everything commenced, you should move on to chapter II. Perhaps only those immersed in the chaos, the madness of frustrated love should venture through the early pages. Coming back? Just whenever. In fact, beginnings are not as important as they say. And endings [...] endings do not even exist any longer. What matters is what happens in the middle. Or, to be more precise, what matters is just you within these pages.

The reader is thus led into the story, a story that pivots around the very word and concept of *memoria* (memory). The fact that the word appears in the title of the novel is far from gratuitous, for memory itself is the main protagonist here, almost a character in its own right, understood both as a cognitive function and as the store of memories and recollections to which the narrator resorts to give form to each of the passages. In this sense, the events narrated took place between 1999 and 2003, and the narration begins a year later. The first chapter opens with the recollection of a very intense moment in the character's life:

VIENNA, 10th August 2004
A year ago today I went back to Riazor.

The chapter narrates a reunion that ends in estrangement. Belén, after a period of distance with César, goes to his city out of a sudden impulse, and the meeting turns out to be a disappointment. And it is precisely this disappointment on Belén's part that prompts her to go through her memories and tell the tale. It was in the month of August of 2003 that she made the latest attempt to recover their love, and it is in August, a year later, that she begins to write.

It is worthwhile here quoting Rodríguez López-Vázquez's study of the concepts of time and memory in the novel. In the words of the scholar,

Frente a títulos clásicos como *Memorias de Adriano* de Marguerite Yourcenar o *Memorias de un solterón* de Emilia Pardo Bazán, esta novela de Cristina Pérez Valverde asume el singular y el artículo determinado como espacio de la escritura y altera también las coordenadas habituales en que el plural *Memorias* engloba una existencia y actúa a manera de legado histórico o ficcional. Se trata aquí de 'La memoria', como un agente dinámico activador de distintos tiempos narrativos que cristalizan en un mes concreto: agosto. Y en un día concreto, el 11 de agosto, festividad de Santa Clara, en donde entrevemos ya un eje de composición temporal

anclado en el imaginario del Kairós cristiano (Rodríguez López-Vázquez, 2011).

Memory here functions as a mediator between past and present, articulating several temporal frames, and allowing the narration to assemble and contrast different perspectives. Thus, the reader is sometimes shown a) what happened at a particular moment (observable, plain facts and events), b) the manner in which these happenings were lived by the main character at the time (emotional experience), and finally c) the way they are recovered at a later stage (re-vision and interpretation). Memory is whimsical, capricious, but above all is cyclical and recurrent, it jumps and spirals, and this is reflected in the structure of the novel which somehow recreates the manner in which thoughts work: they are indeed recursive, always returning to their own commonplaces.

But this exercise of memory, according to Rodríguez López-Vázquez, goes beyond the mere reconstruction of personal experience, for “lived time” becomes “mythical time” in the novel:

Obviamente la trayectoria previa de la novelista, traductora de la mitología irlandesa, experta en W. B. Yeats y traductora también de cuentos y novelas de la literatura inglesa decimonónica, avala esta interpretación del sistema de tiempos organizados en torno a un kairós mítico. No parece que sea un riesgo crítico el hecho de asumir algo que corresponde a la trayectoria intelectual de una escritora, a su densa y compleja formación cultural. La ‘memoria de agosto’ expone ya en su título el mes canicular por excelencia, sitúa el arranque de la escritura en un viernes 10 de agosto, en que, a manera de diario, la frase inicial del relato propone un orden, una articulación temporal: “Hoy hace un año que volvió a Riazor”. Hemos dicho a manera de diario, y no ‘en forma de diario’, porque la tercera persona del relato le confirma al lector atento que se trata del diario de otro yo, o, según el desvelamiento clásico conocido desde Rimbaud, sucede que “je est un autre”. Del mismo modo que el ‘hoy’ correspondiente en el relato al 10 de agosto de 2004, no puede ser el ‘hoy’ de la escritura de la novela. Se trata de un hoy explícito en la memoria y más concretamente en la memoria articulada por el tiempo canicular de agosto. En buen castellano popular, estamos en ‘las calores’. O, para ser más precisos, en una memoria de ‘las calores’ puntuada por los distintos tiempos, espacios y viajes de ese ‘yo que es otra’; una memoria capaz de articular los hechos y las cadenas causales de hechos y explicarlos en función de un tiempo mítico, de un kairós ordenado por la festividad medieval de Santa Clara (Rodríguez López-Vázquez, 2011).

For the scholar, unlike what happens in the case of memoirs or books of memories, the recounting of memory is hiding and revealing here that the

text, the mythical fabric of the events narrated, is more than the memory of a personal narrative instance. For events are recounted as parts of a mythic framework. An archetypal quality seems indeed to reverberate in almost every page, probably the result of the manner in which the experience was lived and felt. I feel here tempted to refer to this type of writing with the label “mythical realism”: the story is endowed with a sort of mythic reverberation, and the realism of the work tainted with many a symbolic resonance.

The self fictionalized: by way of conclusion

But who is that woman who tries to orient herself between the pull of her memories and the need to continue her life? What is the meaning of her search? And who is the writer behind her voice? On the one hand, the novel enquires into the unconscious, the intuitive, into the reasons why things happen or don't happen to us. On the other, it is about the very fact of writing.

Belén is a thirty-four-year-old woman who works at a publishing house in Granada. She tells us the story of her relationship with César, a psychoanalyst fifteen years her senior. Their love was forged through an exchange of emails. While writing to each other, ancient voices seemed to appear in a sort of automatic writing, as if they were replicating a former love story, which leads them to think that their story goes beyond the two of them, that they are twin souls predestined to be reunited.

The Belén-narrator compares her own love story to that of Jane Eyre, the independent, self-empowered governess who falls in love with the mysterious Rochester, and sees in the Galician landscape echoes of the Celtic myth of the poet Oisín and the golden-haired Niamh, the goddess who came from Tír na nÓg in search of her love. She enters Montesino's cave and gazes quixotically at the windmills while visiting Tomelloso with her beloved.

Moving on to the authorial level, the novel is laden with a panoply of intertextual references. Far from being a mere rhetorical device, this circumstance reflects the manner in which the literary competence of the writer-narrator influences her own perception of the world around her and own interpretation of events. Life and fiction are thus inextricably linked, informing each other in both the narrator's psyche and the author's narration.

For some, *La Memoria de Agosto* is a love story. But love is part of our life, and what really interested me was to recreate the everyday, considering that it can be rather unusual. As I see it, this is a novel about

the very act of writing. It thematises the manners in which we fictionalize life, but also the way we live our fictions on a daily basis, as well as the (self's) need to tell and retell through the exercise of both writing and memory.

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CHAPTER TWO

AESTH/ETHICS OF DISTANCE: (UN)VEILING GRIEF IN ROSA MONTERO'S *LA RIDÍCULA IDEA DE NO VOLVER A VERTE* (2013)

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Introduction

This chapter will analyse the generically hybrid auto/biographical grief memoir, *La ridícula idea de no volver a verte* (2013), by the well-known contemporary Spanish author and journalist, Rosa Montero (b. Madrid, 1951), as a singular text within the Spanish tradition of life writing.¹ The book traces a number of parallels between Montero and her biographical subject, the Polish scientist and two-times Nobel Prize winner, Marie Curie—particularly regarding their respective grieving processes in widowhood. In order to discuss Montero's ethics and aesthetics of distance and how she negotiates with the autobiographical genre—specifically the grief memoir—first it is important to contextualise the author and the text within the Spanish tradition of life writing.

¹ Life writing is an umbrella term which refers to any narration of experience of the self or an “other”, including autobiography, biography and autofiction. In *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (2001), Smith and Watson refer to life writing as a wide-ranging term to denote “writing of diverse kinds that takes a life as its subject”, which may be biographical, historical, novelistic or—through explicit self-references to the writer—autobiographical (88-91).

Spain and the Autobiographical Tradition

Contrary to Francophone and Anglophone countries, Spain does not have a strong tradition of grief memoirs about spousal loss.² In fact, Spain's relationship with the autobiographical genre is complicated and impacted by specific socio-cultural and historical circumstances. As Blanco and Williams point out, notwithstanding the boom in auto/biographies since the late 1970s, life writing in Spain and Portugal "has not been as rich or as important as elsewhere" (2017, 18). Manuel Alberca cites social and religious reasons for this (2008, 89). For her part, Laura Freixas claims that as a result of latent misogyny in Spanish literature and culture, Spanish women writers have tended to conceal their biographical material beneath "el disfraz de la ficción"; she associates this "intento de eclipsarse" with "el miedo a la intimidación" (2004, 118; 2009, 7-17). According to these critical perspectives, a writer such as Montero is likely to have a reticent approach to the autobiographical genre, as a result of her gender and nationality. Indeed, Montero—a fan of writing and reading biographies of others³—has a contradictory relationship with autobiography, and, as we will see, both flees from and moves towards self-expression in writing. She provides her own reasons for her wary attitude to the autobiographical genre in *La ridícula idea*—as she had done in her 2003 autofiction, *La loca de la casa*—and puts her theories into practice in the pages of the text.

² As the Spanish-born American literary critic and author, Concha Alborg, points out in the preface to her own grief memoir after the death of her husband, *Divorce After Death: A Widow's Memoir* (2014), "Widowhood has become a timely topic" (4). Alborg observes that the American author, Joan Didion, was one of the first to address the subject in her book, *The Year of Magical Thinking* (2005), followed a few years later by Joyce Carol Oates's *A Widow's Story: A Memoir* (2011). In Spain, the theme of widowhood in life writing lags behind that of its American counterparts. Notwithstanding this, Alborg points out—with a passing reference to Montero's *La ridícula idea* (2014, 5)—that it is gaining in popularity on this side of the Atlantic. Indeed, a year after the publication of Montero's hybrid text, Lea Vélez published her own grief memoir of spousal loss, *El jardín de la memoria* (2014). Although it is presented as a fictional novel, Inma Monsó's *Un hombre de palabra*—translated from the Catalan, *Un home de palaura* (2006)—also deals with the theme of widowhood.

³ In the prologues to her biographical compilations, *Historias de mujeres* (1995) and *Pasiones: Amores y desamores que han cambiado la Historia* (1999), Montero emphasises her interest in reading and writing biographies of others.

Critical Response to Life Writing: Ethics and Aesthetics

In order to discuss how Montero navigates life writing—particularly grief memoirs and auto/biography—in *La ridícula idea*, it is worth considering the critical response to these generic categories. A number of journalists and literary critics denounce these genres for ethical and aesthetic reasons. For instance, the *New York Times* literary critic, Joan Maslin, calls grief memoirs a “lucrative loss-of-spouse market” (2011). According to Frances Stonor Saunders, “[t]he great pitfall of the grief memoir [is] using the dead as ‘writing meat’” (2011). The judges of the 2008 Orange Broadband Fiction Prize criticised the number of “misery memoirs” that they claimed were “infecting” women’s fiction (2008). In relation to biography, Janet Malcolm compares it to burglary (Gudmundsdóttir 2003, 187), while Angier and Cline state that: “Betrayal and the exploitation of the dead: these are the recurring themes [...] in a trade that deals in the private lives of real people” (2010, 9). In *La ridícula idea*, Montero grapples with the ethical and aesthetic issues which come to the fore when writing about a deceased loved one, as she oscillates between revealing and concealing intimate details about herself and her husband.

La ridícula idea de no volver a verte: A Generically Hybrid Text

Montero provides her typical metafictional commentary, as she describes the genesis of the text within the pages of the book itself. She explains that three years after the death of her husband, Pablo Lizcano, to cancer, while she was going through a period of writer’s block, she was contacted by her publisher, Elena Ramírez, and asked to write a prologue to a short diary written by Marie Curie in the year after the premature death of the latter’s husband, Pierre. The author confesses that Marie’s diary moved her to such an extent that what began as a prologue soon transformed into a book of its own, with the Polish scientist’s diary forming an appendix at the end (2013, 17). Throughout *La ridícula idea*, Montero identifies with Marie’s feelings of loss and grief caused by the death of her partner. However, this hybrid text is far from a conventional grief memoir. On the surface, it would seem that a great part of it focuses on the life of Marie Curie and her husband Pierre. Yet, it oscillates between a “biografía poco convencional” of the scientist, an “autobiografía poco

convencional” of the life and musings of the Madrid author,⁴ an “ensayo narrativo”,⁵ and a photobiography.⁶

“Una biografía poco convencional”

Montero clarifies in her postscript that she employed “la gran Marie Curie como paradigma, un arquetipo de referencia con el que poder reflexionar sobre los temas que últimamente me rondan insistentemente la cabeza” (2013, 209). Thus, the diary and life of the Polish scientist serve as a springboard for Montero to reflect on the author’s own life, her personal memories, her relationship with her deceased husband and coming to terms with his death, as well as a number of questions which had been playing on her mind in the preceding years, such as the difficulties of the parent-child relationship, the restrictions of conventional social and gender roles, and contemplations on the enormous obstacles women have had to face in order to work and study in a patriarchal world. These musings form a series of labels, or hashtags, which recur throughout the text, such as “el #LugarDelHombre”, “el #Lugar o el no #LugarDeLaMujer”, “el #HacerLoQueSeDebe”, “#HonrarALosPadres” and “la #Ligereza”.

Montero and Curie each go through a process of mourning, and both use writing as a cathartic means of coming to terms with the loss of a loved one. However, each one expresses their bereavement in very different ways. Whereas Marie Curie writes her diary in the year immediately following her husband’s untimely death, Montero underlines the importance of having temporal distance from trauma, and is only able to write about her grief—albeit in an oblique manner—three years after Pablo’s death. Marie Curie articulates her most intimate emotions in a direct style in her diary which is addressed to her deceased partner. Conversely, Montero dialogues with her implied reader using the informal “tú” form of address. At times, Montero camouflages her testimonial and autobiographical experiences. On other occasions, she mentions her own feelings and personal occurrences in a direct way, yet she always contextualises them in a larger framework, by placing them alongside stories about others who have experienced similar emotions.

⁴ Montero in interview with Jon Bandrés, 2013.

⁵ Montero in interview with Marta Caballero, 2013.

⁶ Fabien Arribert-Narce refers to Gilles Mora’s definition of “photobiography” put forward in *L’Été dernier: manifeste photobiographique* (1983), as “a biographical or autobiographical genre in which the photographic image plays a crucial role, be it simply mentioned, described or actually reproduced within the text” (Fabien Arribert-Narce, 2008, 49).