

THE NATIONAL AWARD IN NARRATIVE LITERATURE AND THE ROLE OF ART IN  
DEMOCRATIC SPAIN (1977 - 2011)

BY

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DISSERTATION

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## ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, I examine the history and function(s) of the National Award in Narrative Literature—a prize that is sponsored by the Spanish state—to highlight the role the award has played in the creation of “national cohesion” and therefore in maintaining a specific idea of Spain and of Spanish literature in the democratic period. Although the issuing of the National Award is just one of many practices that informs how the concept of the nation is understood, I argue that it is one of few that allow us to analyze ways in which literature has explicitly contributed to the image of Spain as a multicultural, yet cohesive nation-state.

In order to further explore this idea, I first analyze the rules that have governed the National Award at four different stages in the democratic period to show how the prize has evolved to include a wider variety of author/texts of diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds than ever before. I then demonstrate how, as one of the more visible literary prizes in the country, the National Award also serves to promote a specific idea of literature as a “high art” worthy of praise. I maintain that it is because literature is viewed as a distinct space, one that is both tied to and distanced from reality, that the idea of a multicultural yet cohesive national literary canon can be sustained. Finally, I also explore the role the National Award plays in promoting democratic values, in general, and active citizenship, in particular. I claim that, in addition to being a practice that benefits the state, the National Award also has the potential to be a platform from which to discuss a wide variety of social issues. In all, I argue that the National Award in Narrative Literature can be read as a powerful metaphor of the limitations and possibilities that nearly thirty-five years of democracy have brought to Spain.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

In a talk given at the 1959 University of Kentucky Foreign Language Conference, literary scholar José Sánchez (University of Illinois) opened his paper on Spanish Literary Prizes with the following affirmation: “No existe en el mundo de hoy país donde haya más revistas literarias, reuniones literarias y premios literarios que en España. Los premios literarios españoles son una plaga, tal vez una plaga incurable, una enfermedad crónica en la actualidad literaria española” (“There is no country in the world where there are more literary magazines, literary meetings and literary prizes than in Spain. Spanish literary prizes are a plague, perhaps an incurable plague, a chronic sickness in contemporary Spanish literature”; 189).<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, at the time Sánchez was writing there were only 175 literary prizes in Spain. If Sánchez thought this sum were indicative of a “plague” what would he say now that there are an estimated 1,800 literary prizes in the country today (Rodríguez Marcos)?<sup>2</sup> As a point of comparison, Nicole Witt points out that

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<sup>1</sup> All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> The number of literary prizes has continued to increase exponentially in democratic Spain. In 1996, for instance, there were an estimated 1,000 different literary awards in the country (Rodríguez Marcos), a figure that rose to 1,300 by 2000 (Witt 306), 1,500 by 2001 (Belmonte Serrano 44), and is now thought to be around 1,800. And, if we take into account the number of prizes that are available to Spanish citizens online, the number almost doubles. The website *premisliterarios.com*, for instance, offers its subscribers access to over 3,500 literary prizes (qtd. in Rodríguez Marcos).

in 2001 there were only 700 literary prizes issued in Germany (306), and in a 2009 article in *El país*, Peruvian writer Fernando Iwaski was quoted as saying, “La cantidad de premios [literarios] que hay en España es algo que sorprende a cualquier extranjero, sobre todo si viene del Perú donde sólo hay tres” (“The quantity of [literary] prizes in Spain is surprising for any foreigner, especially if one comes from Peru where there are only three”; qtd. in Rodríguez Marcos). In fact, there are so many literary competitions in the country each year that Rodríguez Marcos has gone as far as to claim that for writers in Spain today, “A la hora de comer, o formas parte del jurado de un premio literario o de los candidatos” (“At the end of the day, you either form part of a jury of literary prizes or you are one of the candidates”). Similarly, well-known writer Javier Marías has argued that the plethora of prizes in Spain makes it impossible for the public to truly appreciate each work that wins. Even winners of the most popular competitions are quickly forgotten. Instead of being celebrated and remembered, such accomplishments are left to the wayside in light of the profusion of prizes that dominate Spanish daily life.

What’s more, not only do prizes tend to lose their uniqueness amongst the proliferation of competitions, honors and distinctions, but, as Javier Marías laments, such public recognitions also tend to negatively affect the creation of art, especially with respect to the profession of writing. “La gente se afana y trampea por triunfar en competiciones u obtener distinciones que cada día dejan menos huella, entre otras razones porque hay demasiadas y nuestra memoria no da abasto. Ganar o perder viene a dar lo mismo” (“People toil and struggle to win competitions or to obtain distinctions that with each day make less of a mark, among many explanations because there are too many and our memory cannot cope with it. Winning or losing does not make a difference”). And yet it is quite rare for writers (or artists in any field, for that matter) to reject the prestige or monetary award that accompanies literary prizes. In fact, as I will show in this

dissertation, although imperfect, literary awards form an essential role in the parceling out of cultural ideas in democratic Spain. Not only do literary awards serve as a marketing tool that brings attention to Spanish texts, thus causing a spike in sales and readership, but they also inspire increased critical attention, which makes them a potentially powerful vehicle through which to communicate a wide variety of social ideas and values.

At the most basic level, literary awards aid in the promotion of literature and the various people and institutions that comprise the industry. Yet, the public recognition of literary works is also part of the creation and circulation of meaning in a more general Foucauldian sense, given that the way a text circulates and the types of ideas it spreads derive from and are maintained by a network of power relations, whose interests and social influence overlap and vary. The reputation of a particular prize, the amount of exposure a prize-winning text receives or the manner in which a work is marketed, for instance, all grant literary awards the ability to influence the way a text and the many ideas it conveys are understood.<sup>3</sup> In addition, the institutions that sponsor literary awards—public and private alike—are also able to use prize-winning works to promote their own financial and/or political agendas.

In this dissertation, I study the history and logic behind one literary prize in particular, The National Award in Narrative Literature (*El Premio Nacional de Literatura, Modalidad*

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<sup>3</sup> In a talk given at the University of Illinois, for instance, well-known writer Laura Freixas demonstrated that women writers are often marketed in gendered ways, which tends to influence how they are critically received. For instance, whereas male writers are more typically interviewed individually, women writers are often interviewed in small groups, and their interviews are frequently organized by gendered themes, such as love, family, life as a women, etc. In addition, it is common for interviewers and critics to assume that women writers *only* write *for* women, thus positioning the male writer as the universal norm and the female writer as the exception. These sorts of cultural assumptions (or stereotypes) about women writers impact the way their texts are understood. They are not random assumptions about women; instead they are “normal” views that are discursively imbedded in a myriad of social practices, from the infrequency with which women writers are published in comparison with men to the type and amount of exposure they receive in the public sphere (“Is”).



*Narrativa*)—a governmental prize that is issued by the Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports (referred to in this dissertation simply as the Ministry of Culture)—in order to analyze the multiple (often contradictory) functions the prize has played in democratic Spain.

Specifically, I examine the way the issuing of this state-sponsored award has contributed to the formation of a particular idea of the Spanish nation, of Spanish literature and of the artist/citizen's importance in the democratic period (1977-2011). On the one hand, I argue that conferring of the prize represents a specific technique of power that allows the Spanish state to attach itself to individual/citizens and to interpolate their works as “national,” a category that has had a long and often polemical history in Spain. On the other hand, I also show how the award simultaneously functions to support a particular image of literature, as a discipline whose potential social impact in the public sphere is not exclusively tied to the Spanish state. Thus, although the issuing of National Awards might serve the state in its attempts to market Spain as a multicultural, yet cohesive nation state, it also functions as a means of bringing public attention to literary texts, and the many values and ideas they contain. In all, the aim of the project is to show how the giving and receiving of National Awards is a paradoxical act that both protects and promotes artistic freedom of expression while also attempting to constrain it by influencing how the concepts of the nation and of national literature are understood.

### 1.1 *The Birth of National Literary Prizes and their Role in Contemporary Spain*

According to British author and cultural commentator Tom Chatfield, the tradition of publicly recognizing literary works dates back to the Greeks and has often had a nation-building function. Grecian calendars, he argues, were “stuffed full of formal contests, most of which were either poetical, athletic or some combination of the two.” The festivals held in honor of Dionysus,

for example, often included dancing, sacrifices and collective readings of poems. As part of such events, there were often athletic and literary contests that pitted Greek citizens against each other and often the participants were awarded special recognition. Evidence of such celebrations can be found on walls, pieces of pottery or vases—or *amphoras*—on which scenes of such festivities are visible. Unlike contemporary literary competitions that consist of individual celebrity authors, publicists and critics, the Greeks often performed literary readings with music in large groups. Indeed, the chance to be the best of the day was one that was highly sought after by festival participants; the victors received generous awards, and their triumphs were considered to be a great honor for the state. As Chatfield puts it, “Rivalry [in these festivals] was intense and winners’ prestige was huge. Just as sporting spectacles offered citizens the vicarious thrill of watching the human body pushed toward its limits, so the quest for supremacy in words turned the deepest concerns of the mind—birth, death, politics, love, inheritance, loss—into a transcendent game.”

The tradition of recognizing literary works did not die with the Greeks. During the Renaissance, for example, patrons would often choose to single out and reward artists for their work. By recognizing individual artists at the patron’s whimsy, the practice of issuing literary awards during the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries lost much of the collective nature that the Greeks had valued, and they instead became a means of exalting the generosity of the families and clubs that sponsored artistic practices. The criteria by which works of art were chosen thus became an increasingly subjective practice; instead of being chosen by the communal cheers of the crowd, great works were selected by rich oligarchs who could elect works according to their own standards.

As the concept of the modern nation emerged in the nineteenth century and the idea of literature began to change, literary awards took on a different function.<sup>4</sup> The patron was replaced by the concept of the specialized jury, and, literary prizes began to play a small but significant role in the parceling out of “good” and “bad” literature. In effect, with the onset of industrialization and the emergence of literature as a profession (or at least as a passion or calling, given that many authors at the time came from wealthy families, so earning money was not their primary concern, as it is for many young writers in Spain today), the category of literature as we know it began to take shape, and was increasingly associated with “*imaginative* or *creative*” works of “high art” as opposed to “unimaginative” or “popular” works written for the masses, which were seen as inferior and even dangerous for the vast part of the nineteenth and into the twentieth century (Williams 186).<sup>5</sup> Consequently, the ability to discuss “highbrow” literary texts

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<sup>4</sup> Not all critics agree that the idea of the nation originated in the nineteenth century. To simplify a little for the sake of argument, in general, there are two critical positions: the *primordialist* perspective and the *modernist* perspective. The *primordialist*'s view is that the nation is an ethnic/cultural construct whose origins lie in the distant past. *Modernists*, on the other hand, argue that the idea of the nation is a political concept that was invented in the nineteenth century. Although many *primordialists* might agree with *modernists* that the nation is a recent discursive construction, from their view “the *primary* concern of nations is not with ‘modernity’,” but rather “central to nations is a concern with identity and history” (Hutchinson 76). As a result, for *primordialists* the “nation” is just the modern-day name for a type of social and cultural cohesion that has been supported institutionally in one form or another since the beginning of human history. Although the difference of opinion between the two perspectives seems great, in my opinion, they form two parts of the same logic. That is, for me, nations are *modern-day constructions of nationalist—and therefore also ethnic—sentiments*. After all, the modern idea of the nation could not have been created in the nineteenth century if the cultural or ethnic seeds for national unity were not already deeply embedded notions.

<sup>5</sup> According to Raymond Williams, the term “literature,” first came into English around the fourteenth century and generally referred to the simple act of “learning through reading” (184). This idea of “Literature” as something that should be read for educational purposes continued well into the seventeenth century, until which time the category of literature was broad enough to automatically include a wider range of disciplines than it does today—that is, there was not a distinction between “Scientific” “Philosophic” or “Fictional” Literatures for most of history (185). It was not until the nineteenth century that literature began to take on the more

became a hallmark of one's culture in the double sense of the term. On the one hand, the ability to recite, understand and generally 'know' literary texts was viewed as a sign of one's level of sophistication and/or education. On the other hand, the literature that one was 'expected to know' also often carried with it a particular view of society (and of literature), including values, norms, and examples of 'proper' behavior (and ways of reading), which could be said to influence the way a reader understands his/her culture.<sup>6</sup> Within this context, literary prizes played an important role in highlighting the "worthiness" of certain author/texts and their vision of society in contrast to the perceived futility of the more "lowbrow" works that were popping up in literary magazines across Europe.

Similarly, having a strong literary tradition composed of 'high' works of art and literary prizes became one of the ways developing nations showed the world they were modern or 'civilized.' As Williams confirms, "the sense of 'a nation' having 'a literature' [was] a crucial social and cultural, probably also political, development" (185). Indeed, for a country to be

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contemporary meaning of "creative works." And as literacy increased and the mass production of literary magazines and newspapers began to spread, "good literature" started to take on an increasingly narrow definition and only included certain "high" texts of a perceived quality.

<sup>6</sup> If we consider the canonization of the epic *Cantar de Mio Cid* (*The Lay of the Cid*), for example, we will notice that it is often referred to as the "first Spanish epic." When looked at more closely, however, such a label can only be described as fictional. Although it may be true that *Cantar de Mio Cid* was the 'first epic written in the Spanish language' (that we know of) it could not possibly have been considered 'Spanish' in its historical moment for 'Spain,' as a unified nation, did not yet exist in the twelfth century when the text first appeared. And yet, at some point in their education, every Spanish student will learn that their national literature began with this medieval tale of Spanish conquest, a tale that both extends the idea of the nation beyond its modern construct, while also serving as a vehicle through which hegemonic values have been discussed and disseminated in Spain. In the nineteenth century, for instance, the Cid was seen as a national hero and his cultural significance continued to reemerge time and again as a model of Spanish endurance and faith. And in the twentieth century, "the 'triumph of Franco', was explicitly compared to the exploits of the great warrior heroes and empire-builders of the past, like Philip II and El Cid" (Richards, 16). Indeed, this quixotic tendency for literature to become emblematic of a nation's character, much like the idea of the nation itself, is pure invention.

considered ‘modern,’ it not only needed to have a viable political system, but it also required the existence of a common culture, an idea that the circulation of “national” literary texts certainly made more visible.

In this way, literature played an essential role in the formation of the modern nation. “Great texts” became a “national” mark of a given country that helped to set it apart from other nation-states. As literacy increased in the general population, these national texts also became tools with which to indoctrinate a particular understanding of the nation and its relation to modernity and capitalist systems of production.<sup>7</sup> As French philosopher Jacques Rancière has argued, “Politics and art, like forms of knowledge, construct ‘fictions,’ that is to say *material* rearrangements of signs and images, relationships between what is seen and what is said, between what is done and what can be done” (39). For Rancière, that which constitutes “Literature” and that which makes up the idea of the “nation” thus rely on a similar logic: both are composed of an elite minority of “experts” and are governed by comparable ethical, representative and aesthetic regimes (20-21). That is, they are both historically contingent self-regulating entities whose significance is determined and maintained through the cultural practices of institutions and individuals (50).

Moreover, the two concepts of politics and art not only function according to similar logics, they also have a history of supporting each other. Indeed, as the modern concept of the nation was forming one of the many ways nationalist sentiments were publically disseminated

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<sup>7</sup> In her book *Capitals of Fiction*, for instance, Ericka Beckman shows the role literature played in helping to legitimize capitalist systems of production in Latin America. The frequent references to economic processes in nineteenth century Latin American texts—what Beckman refers to as the *export revere*—was one of the social practices that made the exportation of resources (such as rubber, coffee, bananas, etc.) a “normal thing.” For further discussion, see Beckman.

was through the promotion of literature. This process was facilitated, in part, by the birth of the “literary celebrity,” whose public figure not only helped to make the consumption of ‘great’ literature an essential component of one’s education, but whose fame could also be used to reiterate the nation’s worth and the values it upholds (after all, not just any text will be considered “national”).<sup>8</sup>

The nineteenth century also saw the birth of national literary prizes, whose function was to exalt national texts of merit in an effort to increase the nation’s prestige. Interestingly, the first national literary awards in Spain did not come from the center but were instead inaugurated in the peripheral nations in an attempt to compete with the cultural authority of Madrid.<sup>9</sup> The national literary awards issued as part of the Floral Games, or *Jocs Florals* in nineteenth-century Catalonia, for instance, served as evidence that the Catalan culture was distinct from the rest of Spain and played an important role in fueling the cultural *Renaixença*, or renaissance, that was taking place in Catalonia at the time. There were also similar public acts in Galicia and the Basque Country as well, which likewise formed part of movements that aspired to achieve cultural and political autonomy from Castilian-speaking Spain.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The nineteenth century also saw the birth of the international celebrity writers. The English author Charles Dickens (1812-1870), for instance, was a literary success in the United States as well (Garber 8).

<sup>9</sup> “Peripheral nationalism” is the term Balfour and Quiroga use instead of “regionalism” to refer to the nationalist sentiments that are felt in some of the Autonomous Communities. Specifically, they are referring to the Basque, Catalan and Galician nations.

<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, in addition to issuing National Prizes, in the Basque country national literature was also celebrated publicly in a manner that was quite reminiscent of the Greeks. Indeed, the Basque tradition of the “Romería,” or springtime collective festival, often includes dancing, music and group recitations of lyrical poetry—a custom that continues in the Basque Country to this day.

The revival of the peripheral national identities in the nineteenth century was short lived, however, and by the 1940s these minority cultures were all but erased from the national imaginary under the fascist rule of Francisco Franco, whose attempts to homogenize the Spanish Nation as a Catholic, conservative, and decidedly Castilian-speaking country, are now well known. This particular and more traditional view of Spain has its origins in nineteenth-century practices of literary historiography, which as Ríos-Font points out, were not written by Spaniards, but by foreigners, whose ‘gaze’ attempted to fix Spanish identity as “oriental,” “southern” and “religious” (30). This perspective, she argues, was based on a chronological ordering of the past in which the reign of the Catholic Monarchs, from a foreigner’s perspective, was seen as a justifiable (and ‘natural’) division between “ancient” and “modern” Spanish texts (Ríos-Font 19). Accordingly, these foreign accounts of Spanish literary history imposed certain models of how to recount Spain’s literary past, thus resulting in the dominant representation of “Spanishness” that can still be seen in some literary histories today. More specifically, Ríos-Font has identified four basic characteristics of “Spanishness” that are present in most literary histories of Spain, all of which, she proves, originated from this ‘foreign gaze.’ That is, “Spanishness” is seen as being inherently Catholic, monolingual, and traditional (conservative) (30). These same qualities were deemed to be inherently ‘national’ during the Franco Regime (1936-1975), and were publicly supported through a variety of techniques, including the sponsorship of literary prizes.

Whereas in the nineteenth century there were relatively few literary competitions per year—in addition to the National Awards that were issued in the peripheral nations, several literary magazines often sponsored competitions amongst writers. Once Franco came into power in 1939, their presence on the national stage began to multiply. Even though some prizes projected an illusion of independence from the state, such as the Nadal Prize, which was created

by the Publishing House Espasa Calpe in 1945, in reality all cultural products that circulated during the immediate postwar years (1945-1953) were heavily monitored and controlled by the Spanish state, some more explicitly than others. In 1951, for instance, the Franco regime began to issue its own “National Awards” in various artistic genres—poetry, narrative, essay, plastic arts—as part of its attempts to control the way the nation was perceived both in Spain and abroad. If we look at the list of works that won the National Award in Narrative Literature under Franco, we see that it exclusively includes texts that uphold the dictator’s conservative values.<sup>11</sup>

The death of the dictator in 1975 might have put an end to his more repressive policies, but it did not mean the end of National Awards. In fact, even though the institution that issues them has changed names several times in the democratic period, the contemporary Spanish state continues to sponsor the same awards that Franco created. What’s more, even though democracy may have brought many concrete changes to Spain, when looked at more closely, it seems as if the issuing of National Awards continues to serve an identical purpose as it did under the dictator. Namely, much as the Franco Regime used the award as a means of promoting national values, the Spanish democratic government likewise has employed the award to endorse its own particular image of the country as a multicultural yet cohesive nation-state. Studying the history and purpose of the National Award in Narrative Literature in the democratic period (1977-2011) thus allows us to better understand the role that the individual artist/citizens and their National

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<sup>11</sup> In 1956, for example, the National Award went to Carmen Laforet’s *La mujer nueva*, which tells the story of Paulina Goya, an upper-middle class woman who, after divorcing from her husband, decides to raise their child by herself. Although the thematic has since been deemed “quite progressive,” especially since it deals with divorce, the novel ends with the protagonist finding a new path in life through the church, thus promoting traditional values that would have been upheld by the Franco Regime, who saw the Civil War as a necessary crusade for the nation’s soul.



Award-winning texts have played in the formation of the contemporary idea of Spain, an idea that has its origins in, but is not bound to Francoist conceptions of the nation.

When looking over the list of texts that have won the prize in the democratic period, for instance, we immediately notice a very revealing trend: the majority of texts that have won the prize were originally written in Castilian and almost all of the authors have been men who were born in Spain. The few exceptions to this rule are the following:

Total number of National Award-winning works written:

By women: 2/34	Carmen Martín Gaité's <i>El cuarto de atrás</i> (1978) and Carme Riera's <i>Dins el darrer blau</i> (1995)
By men born outside of Spain: 1/34	Bryce Echenique's <i>Reo de nocturnidad</i> (1998)
In Basque: 3/34	Bernardo Atxaga's <i>Obabakoak</i> (1989); Unai Elorriag's <i>Sprako tranvia</i> (2002) and Kirmen Uribe's <i>Bilbao – New York – Bilbao</i> (2009)
In Catalan: 1/34	Carme Riera's <i>Dins el darrer blau</i> (1995)
In Galician: 3/34	Alfredo Conde's <i>Xa vai o griffón no vento</i> (1986); Manuel Rivas's <i>¿Que me queres, amor?</i> (1996) and Suso de Toro's <i>Trece badaladas</i> (2002)

In addition to representing dominant notions of the concept of the author as a male and Castilian-speaking entity, the types of works that have won the award also promote a specific idea of literature. In fact, around 85% of the works that have won the National Award are set almost exclusively in Spain and around 20% of the novels that have won are autobiographical, both of which serve to further highlight an ethnocentric and territorialized view of art. When looked at as whole, the list of National Award-winning narratives thus symbolizes a very specific idea of Spanish literature, one that is dominantly Castilian-speaking, yet multilingual and multicultural and predominantly includes texts that portray art as a purposeless means of expression rather than as a tool that might disrupt the *status quo*.

The institutionalization of novels as being representative of the “best of Spain” thus not only helps to shape the way the “national character” is perceived; it also influences the way literature, as a discipline, is valued and understood. As Nicole Witt points out, one of the main benefits of the National Awards is that they help to bring attention to specific texts (305). Luis Landero’s National Award-winning novel *Juegos de la edad tardía* (1989, National Award 1990), for instance, is currently in its eighteenth edition, an accomplishment that was motivated, in part, by the fact that Landero’s text carries the label “National Award-winning” (Rodríguez Marcos). The juries in charge of issuing the awards, thus, have a certain amount of power in Spain to influence the types of literary texts that are considered to be worthy of representing the prize, and by extension the space of national literature. By issuing the National Award to texts written in languages other than Castilian, for instance, the jury has extended the space of Spanish national literature to include a wider variety of linguistic and cultural communities than ever before (though it could be argued that in so doing they incorporate cultural differences only to homogenize them as “National”). What’s more, certain artists who write in the minority languages of the state, such as Unai Elorriaga, might not have had such a successful career if they had not won the National Award. Elorriaga was, after all, relatively unknown outside of the Basque Country before the Spanish state decided to bestow him such an honor. Consequently, the National Award in Narrative Literature could be said to benefit individual artists/citizens just as much as it benefits the state, and in this way becomes a powerful metaphor of how democracy works in contemporary societies today. That is, by issuing prizes to a select group of artists and their creative works, the Ministry of Culture does not invent the National character, but rather it allows jurors, individual artists and critics a certain amount of freedom to actualize the space of

“National Literature” as they see fit.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, each time an artist accepts the award, the democratic state’s authority to issue the prize, and by extension its right to govern the country, are tacitly reinforced.

### 1.2 *The Significance of the National Award in the Land of a Thousand Prizes*

As a label of high cultural worth, the National Award is thus an effective means with which to market a particular image of the nation and of national literature in democratic Spain. Moreover, of the thousands of prizes that exist in the country, it is also one of the few more visible literary awards that exist, which has the ability to extend its social influence. A prize such as the Planeta award, which is organized by the publishing house of the same name, is generally thought of as bringing more monetary advantages for an author than cultural prestige (Díaz Barrado 33). Perhaps because the Planeta currently comes with a prize of 600,000 euros and the texts that win (with few exceptions) tend to be “best sellers,” many in the literary community see the Planeta award as a marketing tool more than they see it as an indication of a text’s “greatness.” In fact, when Antonio Muñoz Molina’s *El jinete polaco*—which many consider to be the “best” novel to have won the Planeta—only sold about 50,000 copies after winning the Planeta (about half of its first edition), founder José Miguel Lara was quoted as saying that Muñoz Molina’s novel existed as proof that when one issues this award to a text of quality it does not necessarily increase its readership, perhaps explaining why the Planeta most often goes

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<sup>12</sup> Of course, the state does still have a certain amount of influence over the process of issuing the award, given that it is the Ministry of Culture which decides who will be on the jury each year.

to more “popular” texts (Belmonte Serrano 51).<sup>13</sup> The Critic’s Prize, on the other hand, is one of the more respected awards in democratic Spain even though it does not come with a monetary award. Not only does the jury meet in different cities each year so as to avoid giving preference to a particular region of the country, but it also grants a separate award in each of the languages, rather than grouping them all in one pool as is the case with the National Award (Witt 310).

In addition to these more famous prizes, there are also many lesser-known literary competitions throughout Spain each year. According to Díaz Barrado of the 1,800 literary awards in Spain up to 70% are publicly funded (32). Although I was unable to verify his estimate, the figure is not really surprising given that, until the economic crisis hit in 2008, nearly every town, city, village, municipality, and autonomous region in Spain has been organizing its own literary competitions.<sup>14</sup> Whereas these smaller prizes tend to have more of a “social” purpose, the more visible prizes in Spain, such as the Nadal or the Alfaguara, are typically motivated more by financial concerns, given that they are issued by publishing houses.<sup>15</sup> According to Witt, the Nadal prize, which was created by Ediciones Destino in 1945, was very much respected when it first came out because it was designed to go to young talented writers in Spain in an effort to help launch their careers—the first Nadal Prize, for instance, went to Carmen Laforet’s *Nada*

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<sup>13</sup> As another example of an “exceptional” text that won the Planeta, Belmonte Serrano also mentions Vázquez Montalbán’s *El premio* (The Prize; 1996), which is a sarcastic portrayal of the world of literary prizes. Even though the novel criticizes prizes such as the Planeta, Lara decided to issue it the Planeta award in 1996, saying its negative portrayal of prizes did not matter to him as long as it sold well (qtd. in Belmonte Serrano 43).

<sup>14</sup> As local, regional and state budgets continue to decline, however, it remains uncertain how many of these smaller literary competitions will survive.

<sup>15</sup> Other major literary awards of a similar nature include: the Primavera Award (the Spring Prize), which is issued by Espasa Calpe and includes a 200,000 euro prize; the Herralde Award, which is issued by Anagrama and includes a 18,000 euro prize; and the Hiperión (an award for poetry), which has been issued by the publishing house of the same name.

(Nothing; 1945)—in later phases of the award, however, it was increasingly criticized as being a marketing tool instead of a mark of good literature (312).

For its own part, the Alfaguara prize, which was created by the publishing house Alfaguara in 1998 in an attempt to promote literature written in Castilian on both sides of the Atlantic, is a fairly well respected award that comes with a significant monetary prize (175,000 euros). Some of its most famous recipients include Eliseo Alberto (*Caracol Beach*), Sergio Ramírez (*Margarita, está linda la mar*), Manuel Vicent (*Son de Mar*), Clara Sánchez (*Últimas noticias del paraíso*) and Elena Poniatowska (*La piel del cielo*) (“Premios”). In fact, the majority of the most important prizes in Spain, such as the Nadal and the Alfaguara, are exclusively bestowed on works written in Castilian, which gives these works a certain advantage. There are, of course, literary awards issued in each of the Autonomous Communities in Spain that serve to highlight the merit of non-Castilian texts, but such awards do not tend to ensure works the same amount of publicity and prestige as their Castilian counterparts.

In effect, the National Award in Narrative Literature is one of the few prizes that is well respected and considers works of literature written in any of the official languages in Spain. Instead of grouping texts by language—as is the case with the Critic’s Prize—the National Award conceptualizes “national literature” as a multilingual space. This was not always the case, however. In fact, as I will show in chapter 2, for the first eight years the prize was issued in democratic Spain, the rules stated that the National Award could only be issued to texts originally written in Castilian.<sup>16</sup> It was not until 1984 that the Spanish government decided to change the rules to allow juries to consider texts written in other languages.

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<sup>16</sup> Because in English the word “Spanish” is both a noun that refers to the language that is spoken in Spain and Latin America as well as an adjective that signifies that something or someone is from Spain, I will use the term “Castilian” throughout this dissertation to refer to the

This, in part, is what makes the National Award so intriguing to study: on the one hand, the texts that win constitute a cultural archive of how the notion of “Spanish literature” has developed in the democratic period, given that very act of “packaging” each text as “prize-winning” at the national level embodies a particular relationship between the state and the author/text, one that has the potential to alter the way the space of national literature is perceived in the democratic period. To compare the first narrative text that won the National Literary Prize in the democracy, Luis Acquaroni’s *Copa de sombra* (1976; National Award, 1977), to a more recent prize-winning novel such as Uribe’s *Bilbao-New York- Bilbao* (2008; National Award, 2009) is to bear witness to a vast transformation in the way the very concepts of “the nation,” “literature” and “democracy” are circulated and produced both within the pages of the texts themselves and in the press. According to the archives of the national newspaper, *El país*, for example, since 1977 there has only been one article published about Acquaroni’s text. Uribe’s work, however, has already been the main story of at least fifty articles since it won the prize in 2009. In addition, whereas the articles about Uribe’s text are very detailed, the sole article about Acquaroni’s text is plain and simple. It merely states that the text won the prize and includes the following quote from the author: “Me satisface mucho este premio, porque creo que marca una nueva época. La época de la democracia, sin condicionantes políticos para obtener premios” (“I am very satisfied by this prize, because I believe it marks a new era. The democratic era, without political determinates to win prizes”; “Javier Tussel”). Unfortunately for Acquaroni, though, with the onset of democracy and the explosion of texts in the market that had previously been forbidden by the regime, *Copa de sombra* went relatively unnoticed by critics. Uribe’s text, by contrast, has received plenty of publicity in the short time it has been on the shelves, in which the

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Spanish language, so I may reserve my use of the word “Spanish” to indicate people or things that represent the “Spanish” (central) nation-state.

National Award consistently appears as a label that accompanies the title. Hence, by comparing these two cases, we can infer that the *value* and *function* of the prize has increased since Acquaroni's time. Moreover, the fact that Uribe's *Bilbao-New York-Bilbao* is the third text originally written in Euskera to win the prize—the other two being Bernardo Atxaga's *Obabakoak* (Premio Nacional, 1989), and Unai Elorriagoa's *SPrako tranbia* (Premio Nacional, 2002)—is evidence of another important cultural change: the inclusion of non-Castilian texts in the National Literary Imaginary (or, as some might see it, the interpolation—in the Althusserian sense—of non-Castilian texts as “Spanish”).

In addition to serving as archival evidence of how the concept of the nation has evolved from the state's perspective, the narrative works that have won the National Award in Spain are also representative of how *literature* has been valued and perceived in post-Franco Spain. Although it is true that the list of texts that have won the prize may appear somewhat arbitrary or “random” in the sense that many texts *could have* won in a given year, texts that *do* win the National Prize have been overtly endorsed by a group of experts who represent, or “stand for,” various literary institutions in Spain. The jury's public validation of these novels thus makes this list of texts a unique representation of Spanish literature in the democratic period. It is not that there is an internal logic to the selection of texts that have won, but rather, in its partial “randomness,” this list embodies a sampling of the “official” attitudes towards literature that have existed since the inception of the democracy in Spain. It does not discriminate by publisher or language; instead, as a *National* Award, it aims to present itself as an honor that includes a wide variety of citizens and artistic styles.

Although it could have been interesting to study the trajectory of the National Award in other literary genres—such as Poetry or Drama—from this same critical perspective, I have

chosen to study only Narrative texts that have won the National Award in the democratic period for three main reasons. First, the prize for the best Narrative text, like the prize for the best poetic work, has a long trajectory in the democracy, which allows me to study the evolution of “prize-winning” texts from the beginning of the democracy to the present.<sup>17</sup> Second, in today’s world, narrative texts tend to be more popular (and often more economically successful) than texts of these other two genres, and they often receive more critical attention, which means there is more data to work with.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, there is a vast body of work regarding the crucial role the novel and the nation have had in shaping each other. In fact, in most western countries, the novel, the middle-class and the modern nation developed in tandem. Finally, I have also chosen to study narrative texts because many of them deal explicitly with the concepts and themes I aim to explore—the nation, literature, democracy and freedom—which allows me to consider artistic responses to the more theoretical issues discussed, such as the contemporary boundaries of the Spanish state, the function and purpose of National Awards in the country, and the role the artist/citizen plays in democratic societies today.

Although I discuss how the concept of the nation has evolved from the beginning of the democratic period to the present in my analysis of the history of the prize (chapter 2) as well as of specific texts (chapters 3 and 4), I do not overtly discuss the particular policies of each of the different administrations that have governed Spain since 1978 for two main reasons. First, it is my contention that if I were to approach National Award-winning texts as being representative of the particular political party in charge of issuing the prize in a given year, I would inadvertently

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<sup>17</sup> Whereas the National Prizes in Poetry and in Narrative both started in 1977, the National Prize in Drama does not begin until 1992 when the prize was given to Francisco Nieva for his drama, *El manuscrito encontrado en Zaragoza*.

<sup>18</sup> In addition, several of these texts—especially in the genre of poetry—are difficult to find, and some are even out of print as early as the year after they won the prize.



assume a hierarchy between art and politics that I do not wish to impose. Indeed, this type of top-down approach to studying texts would be quite useful if, for example, I were studying novels that won National Prizes during the Franco regime—a regime known for its strict policy of censorship, which not only affected what could be printed in terms of content, but also controlled all aspects of the printing process (Lafuente 51). For prize-winning texts of the democracy, however, the relationship between aesthetics and politics is not as straightforward and vertical as it once was.

Even if we could somehow prove that those in charge of issuing National Awards in democratic Spain have had the goal of imposing a certain ideology on the public, I am not sure that the relationship between the author/text, and the nation-state would be similar at all. Whereas during the Franco regime, writers and their texts were expected to be at the service of the state, in the democracy, anybody *can* write (that is, everyone *is allowed to* write and thus *could be* published) about *almost anything* in *any* style, and controversial texts cannot be so easily dismissed (though they may not always get published). Furthermore, the issuing of National Awards for Literature, specifically, would also be distinct in the democracy, given that the committee members that judge texts and issue National Awards, although they work for a governmental agency (the Ministry of Culture), are not obliged to agree with the ideology or practices of the administration in charge as they were under Franco. Of course, whom the Ministry appoints to the jury each year is likely to influence the types of texts will be chosen (it is unlikely, for instance, that the Ministry of Culture would select judges who are vocal opponents of the administration in charge looking to reward controversial texts). Nonetheless, there is no doubt that jurors of the National Award have more freedom and flexibility in democratic Spain than they did during the Franco regime.

Second, despite the administration in charge, one of the main objectives of the National Award has been to present Spain as a multicultural, yet cohesive nation-state, a “fantasy” that both the left and the right share. As L. Elena Delgado has recently shown, since the inception of democracy in Spain, conservatives and socialists alike have promoted a similar narrative:

la del paso de un país en estado de excepción a otro de normalidad y modernidad. Esta narrativa es . . . una fantasía que arranca desde la transición pero que afianza en democracia, y que se invoca (aunque de distinta forma, desde luego) tanto por gobiernos conservadores (el Partido Popular) como teóricamente de izquierdas (el Partido Socialista), así como por varios partidos autonómicos de distintos signos. (9)

one that [describes] the move from being a country in an extraordinary state to being one of normality and modernity. This narrative is . . . a fantasy that came out of the transition but becomes consolidated in the democratic [period], and is invoked (albeit in different manners) as much by the conservative governments (the Popular Party) as it is theoretically by the left (the Socialist Party), as well as by various regional parties of distinct affiliations.

The idea of a unified Spanish nation is one that continues to dominate headlines and dinner conversations. Although several critics have written about the nationalistic “cultural branding” that took place under Franco, less attention has been paid to the ways in which the contemporary Spanish government employs similar strategies to market its own image of democratic Spain as a free, multicultural, yet cohesive, country—an idea that, if we look at the country’s history, could only be described as pure fantasy.

In effect, over the last several years, an increasing number of scholars have written about the need to rethink the category of “Spanish literature” in contemporary Spain (Delgado “If”; Epps; Epps and Fernández; López de Abiada et al. (eds.); Mainer; Perriam et al; Prieto de Paula and Langa Pizarro; Ríos-Font, Sánchez-Conejero, amongst others). Indeed, since the Francoist regime ended with the dictator’s death in 1975, *Spanishness* has had “many meanings and connotations aside from a simple identifier of citizenship” (Sánchez-Conejero 3). At one end

of the spectrum, *Spanishness* simply refers to all inhabitants of “Spain,” “a nation of nations”(Balfour and Quiroga 2). From the “peripheral nationalist’s perspective,” however, “Spanishness” is seen as the “Other,” and Spain might be best described as a *state* of nations (3). Officially, the second article of the 1978 Constitution defines the “Spanish Nation” as: “The common and indivisible homeland of *all* Spaniards,” and says that the constitution “recognizes and guarantees the right to self-government of the *nationalities* and regions of which it is composed and the solidarity among them *all* (*Constitución española*, emphasis added). Hence, it seems that, from a legal standpoint, Spain is a stand-alone nation, a nation of nations, and, more importantly, as the first sentence reminds us, also a nation of individuals.

Although the constitution is quite clear on this point—that is, the Spanish nation is consistently described as a multilingual and multi-national country throughout the document—in contemporary Spain there is still a clear hierarchy between the central state and the peripheral nations in that one is obligatory and the others are not. Consequently, many scholars of Spanish Nationalism maintain that there is still an urgent need, both in Spain and abroad, to “reinvent” how people conceptualize “Spain” and “Spanishness.” For example, Balfour and Quiroga have argued that Spaniards must reexamine the relevance of traditional national *myths* in a “rapidly changing social, economic, and political environment where they have less and less meaning” (6). Sánchez-Conejero has argued there is a need to redefine *Spanishness* as “all things related to Spain” (7), and Suso de Toro, a well-known fiction writer in both Galician and Castilian, has urged Spaniards to create a *new nationalism*, by which he means: “Un nacionalismo *democrático*, que respete al *individuo*, a cada individuo; . . . que reconozca la evidencia de que los ciudadanos españoles tenemos lenguas y culturas nacionales diversas y de que eso es precisamente uno de nuestros rasgos connacionales (*sic*)” (“A *democratic* nationalism, that respects the *individual*,

each individual; . . . that recognizes the evidence that we Spanish citizens have diverse languages and national cultures and that it is precisely one of our conational traits”; 35 emphasis added).

Although many scholars have begun to deal with the changing nature of “Spanish literature” in the contemporary period, there is still much work to be done, given that the majority of these studies primarily tend to include texts written in the twentieth century, or the studies are more general in nature and do not discuss the complex nature of Spanishness in the twenty-first century.<sup>19</sup> Perriam et al.’s study *A New History of Spanish Writing 1939-1990s* (2000), for example, ends around the mid-1990s and only discusses texts originally written in Castilian (which is true of several studies conducted since the beginning of the democracy). For its own part, the 2009 edition of *The Cambridge History of Spanish Literature* includes an article by Brad Epps that goes as far as 2002, and includes a discussion of non-Castilian texts alongside Castilian ones, but at only nineteen pages, its account of twenty-first century Spanish Narrative Literature is schematic at best.

Specifically, in a country with four official languages (and another few unofficial ones in the mix), it is the “Spanish” part of the category that has caused many literary scholars to begin to rethink this particular categorization of “national literature.” This is because ‘Castilian-centric’ Spanish nationalism is often articulated in opposition to Basque, Galician, and Catalan

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<sup>19</sup> In addition, another recent trend has been for scholars to take a more “thematic approach” to the study of contemporary texts. For instance, there are several studies that deal with the representation of the Civil War in contemporary literary production like Fiona Schouten’s *A Diffuse Murmur of History: Literary Memory Narratives of Civil War and Dictatorship in Spanish Novels After 1990* (2010). There are also studies that exclusively focus on one aspect of Spanish Culture such as studies that only focus on literature written by women – such as Sonia Núñez Puente’s *Reescribir la femineidad : la mujer y el discurso cultural en la España contemporánea* (2008) – or studies that only focus on Queer literature, for instance – such as Gema Pérez-Sánchez’s *Queer Transitions in Contemporary Spanish Culture From Franco to La Movida* (2008).

nationalisms, whose cultural claims to the ‘Spanish territory’ are as historically rooted as Castilian ones. Although this may not seem problematic—“Spanish” as an adjective could simply refer to people or objects from a territory of multiple cultures called “Spain”—in reality, the debate over whether Basque, Catalan and Galician authors should be included in a syllabus of “Spanish Literature,” for example, continues to challenge the idea of a monolingual and homogeneous ‘Spanish’ national anything—from culture and literature to politics and even food. In other words, should Basque literature be taught in a Spanish, Italian and Portuguese department? Or is it not part of Spanish literature?

Over the last few years, several studies have begun to appear that attempt to address these types of questions.<sup>20</sup> In my opinion, one of the reasons it has taken a while for scholars to begin writing about these more cultural questions with respect to twenty-first century literature is that since the mid 1990s contemporary “Spanish Studies” has shifted to include more than just traditional literary texts. The subfield known as “Spanish Cultural Studies” practically originated as an exclusively non-literary space, as the 1995 introduction to Labanyi and Graham’s now famous text, *Spanish Cultural Studies: An Introduction*, testifies:

Of all the areas of modern Spanish cultural production, literature has been the most studied. The essays in this volume that deal with literature have avoided straightforward literary history and the analysis of individual works – both of these things have been done well elsewhere – in order to pinpoint and problematize cultural issues. Readers should thus not expect to find in this book a

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<sup>20</sup> Some examples include: José Romera Castillo’s *Teatro, novela y cine en los inicios del siglo XXI: Actas del XVII Seminario Internacional del Centro de Investigación de Semiótica Literaria, Teatral y Nuevas Tecnologías* (2008), Cristina Sánchez Conejero’s *Spanishness in the Spanish Novel and Cinema of the 20th-21st Century* (2007), Carmen Urioste-Azcorra’s *Novela y sociedad en la España contemporánea, 1994-2009* (2009), *Writers In Between Languages: Minority Literatures in the Global Scene* (Ed. Mari Jose Olaziergi, 2009), Parvati Nair’s *Configuring Community: Theories, Narratives, and Practices of Community Identities in Contemporary Spain* (2004) and *New Spain, New Literatures* (Ed. Luis Martín-Estudillo and Spadaccini, 2010).

comprehensive survey of major writers. [...] Our aim in so doing is not to discourage detailed textual analysis but to provide a context of cultural debate into which such analysis can be inserted. (vii)

Although it is true, as Labanyi and Graham suggest, that by the mid 1990s literature had received far more critical attention than had other forms of cultural productions, in today's world, with very few exceptions, most critics who study "Spanish Culture" do not study literature exclusively, but rather tend to study films, TV, comics, advertisements, and other such cultural forms of expression.<sup>21</sup>

In my opinion, then, there is a need for my project at this time. Not only does my study help to extend Spanish literary studies into the twenty-first century, but by studying how the concepts of the "nation," "literature" and "democracy" are dealt with through the genre of prize-winning literature, my project also highlights the ways in which these concepts are literally circulated and produced in the pages and in the reception of these National Award-winning novels. It is my contention that this particular grouping of texts—the works that have won the National Award—offers us a unique perspective from which to analyze the contemporary world

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<sup>21</sup> *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Spanish Culture* (first published in 1999) is one of the few studies that includes a whole section on "Culture and Prose," in which there are two articles about post-Franco literary production: Jo Labanyi's "Narrative in Culture, 1975-1996," and "Culture and the Essay in Modern Spain" by Thomas Mermall, both of which, like other literary studies, do not extend beyond the mid-1990s. In recent years there has been an influx of articles about literature in the *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies*, but the trend has been either to look at narrative texts from the nineteenth century or to analyze contemporary poetry, but very little space has been dedicated to analyzing contemporary narrative texts from a Cultural Studies perspective. The 2002 text *Constructing Identity in Contemporary Spain: Theoretical Debates and Cultural Practices* (Labanyi) on the other hand, is almost exclusively comprised of non-literary texts.

of Spanish letters, given that each work was selected to *re-present* the space of “Spanish Literature” by a specialized jury of cultural and literary experts.<sup>22</sup>

This is not to say that the juries of literary prizes—national or otherwise—only take the “literariness” of a text into account; on the contrary, as Witt has pointed out, there are often many extratextual factors that influence a particular jury’s decision (306).<sup>23</sup> When a private company, such as a publisher, sponsors a text, the author’s reputation and his/her ability to generate sales is of primary concern. When issued by the National government, however, the principal aim is quite political.

According to their website, the Ministry of Culture’s main purpose for issuing the National Award in Narrative Literature is to “estimular la creación literaria mediante el reconocimiento público de la labor de los autores cuyas obras han destacado especialmente a juicio de un jurado de expertos en cada modalidad” (“stimulate literary creation by publicly

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<sup>22</sup> The jury that chooses the “best” text each year is made of thirteen people: the President and Vice President of the Ministry of Culture, a representative of the Real Academia in each of the four languages, five representatives from the “cultural world”—including, but not limited to representatives from: *La Conferencia de Rectores de las Universidades Españolas* (CRUE), *La Asociación Colegial de Escritores* (ACE), *La Asociación Española de Críticos Literarios*, and *La Federación de Asociaciones de Periodistas de España* (FAPE)—and the two previous authors who won the National Award. In addition, there is also a designated Secretary who can participate in all debates, but does not vote.

<sup>23</sup> Even in the nineteenth century, literary prizes were sometimes issued for extratextual reasons. José Sánchez, for example, ends his paper on literary prizes in Spain with an anecdote about how the winner of an 1893 sonnet-writing contest in honor of the four hundred year celebration of the “discovery” of America was chosen. According to Sánchez, the jury, which was comprised of Juan Valera, Pardo Bazán and José Ortega Munilla, received so many submissions (6,000 in all), that after reading about 400 terrible sonnets, the three of them decided to have Valera write a sonnet under the name of the Zorrilla, another famous Spanish writer who had just passed away. Not only did they not want to have to suffer through the other 5,600 submissions that remained, but more importantly, they fixed the results so that Zorrilla’s widow, who was penniless at the time of her husband’s death, could benefit from the prize money. Oddly, nobody questioned the results; that is, even though Zorrilla was deceased, he still *seemed* like a logical winner for the contest. For more, see Sánchez.

recognizing the labor of authors whose works especially stand out to the jury of experts in each genre”; Ministerio, “Presentación”). Although at first glance the state’s aims may seem innocuous, when looked at more closely, however, we see that their goals contain a particular ideological perspective, one that assumes *a priori* that the Spanish state has the right to publicly recognize the labor of its citizens. After all, writers do not apply to be considered for the prize; instead, a jury of experts interpolates their works as “national.” In my dissertation, I analyze what this imposition entails for writers in Spain, both for writers who write in Castilian and for those who use one of the minority languages of the state, and I highlight the ways in which the National Award serves as a “normalizing” tool with which to construct and promote a particular image of the Spanish nation as a unified space, whose internal differences are easily neutralized within the space of the prize. By issuing National Awards to texts written in Basque, Catalan and Galician, the Spanish state is able to recognize the linguistic and cultural diversity of the “other” cultures of Spain, while simultaneously reclaiming them as “national.” At the same time, however, by publicly distinguishing the literary merits of diverse citizens, I argue that the National Award also plays an important role in constructing a particular image of “literature” in Spain, as a space that cannot fully be controlled by the central state.

In order to explore these ideas, this project contains three additional chapters, each of which focuses on a different aspect of the prize. In the following chapter of my dissertation (chapter 2), I analyze the rules that have governed the National Award in Narrative Literature at four different stages in the democratic period in order to highlight the ways in which the Ministry of Culture, and by extension the Spanish state, have used the prize as a means of promoting a particular image of the nation. Drawing from the theories of Michel Foucault, I show how the contemporary government is not so different from the Franco regime in that both regimes



appropriate the labor of its citizens through practices such as the issuing of National Awards and both are capable of turning writers/citizens into state subjects. Indeed, even though the image of Spain has greatly changed since the dictator's death, the techniques of power used have not, and are actually quite similar, even though the list of National Award-winning texts in the democratic period does include a wider variety of authors of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds than ever before. That is, I argue that the prize continues to serve a similar "normalizing" function as it did under Franco. The issuing of the prize to texts written in Basque, Catalan and Galician, specifically, which most often circulate in their Castilian translations, can be said to form part of the state's attempts to neutralize political tensions in the realm of literary creation. This desire to present Spain as a culturally unified nation without fractures or tensions is one that has dominated the Spanish political scene since democracy first arrived to Spain (Delgado, "El estado" 21). Though many in the peripheral nations may aspire to gain independence from the Spanish state, within the space of the prize the minority cultures appear to exist as "additional components" of the Spanish character.

The ability of the National Award to influence the way the space of national literature is perceived, however, does not derive from the state's influence alone. On the contrary, the value of the prize is first and foremost predicated on the idea that literature is "high art" worthy of praise. In my third chapter, I analyze what this supposition entails by examining the role the National Award plays in the construction of a specific idea of literature. In particular, drawing from the writings of Jacques Rancière and Margerie Garber, I consider how the prize has (not) contributed to the success of two novels—Alonso Zamora Vicente's *Mesa sobremesa* (*After Dinner Conversation*, 1979; National Award 1980) and Antonio Muñoz Molina's *El invierno en Lisboa* (*Winter in Lisbon*, 1987; National Award 1988). I then examine the way the idea of

literature is represented in the pages of these two works in order to demonstrate the ways in which literature is conceived of as a series of practices and opinions in *Mesa sobremesa* and as a liminal space that transcends spatial and temporal boundaries in *El invierno en Lisboa*. In all, the goal of the chapter is to reveal the ways in which the idea of literature can only be partially influenced by the institutions and people who actively govern it; for at its core, literature is a creative form of expression that relies on a logic of its own making, one that is both tied to and divorced from the power relations that may attempt to evaluate and determine the “worthiness” of a given text.

In the fourth and final chapter of this dissertation, I analyze two autofictional texts that won the National Award at distinct historical conjunctures—Carmen Martín Gaité’s *El cuarto de atrás*, which won in 1978 during the transition from dictatorship to democracy, and Kirmen Uribe’s *Bilbao-New York-Bilbao*, which won in 2008 and was originally written in Basque—in order to demonstrate the role individual Spanish citizens have played in the democratization of art in Spain.<sup>24</sup> Specifically, following the theories of Hannah Arendt, Grace Lee Boggs, and Roberto Esposito, I look at the way each novel propagates the idea that the reality of a given *demos* (or group of people) is never fully determined by the objectives of the state, or any other dominating force, but also by the creative practices and attitudes of its citizens, a truth the history of the National Award also embodies. After all, the Spanish government would not be able to benefit from the circulation of “national” prize-winning novels if its author/citizens were unwilling to accept—and therefore embody—it with their literary texts. On the contrary, as I will show, it is only because various social actors continue to participate in the giving and receiving

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<sup>24</sup> To be more specific, I read the Castilian translation of Uribe’s novel written by Ann Arregi, an issue I also explore in the chapter.

of the National Awards that the state and the field of literature are able to “use” the prize as a means of reiterating their worth and legitimacy.

In her forthcoming book, Delgado has argued that the idea of Spain as a cohesive nation-state is one that relies on ideas of “normalcy” and “consensus” that depend on the elimination of tensions (“El estado” 9) and the absence of internal antagonisms (24). Similarly, by issuing National Awards to narrative texts that are not overtly controversial, the Spanish government has been able to present itself as a “cohesive” nation state. Likewise, the National Award, as a label, is also one of the many factors that help to influence (if not control) the way Spanish literature is viewed. This is because our understanding of “Spanishness” (in any sense) changes according to what is visibly (or invisibly) associated with the country on the national stage. Institutionalized practices, such as the conferring of National Awards, thus have the potential to shape the way “Spanish literature” is taught and practiced by “Hispanists” both in Spain and abroad. The contemporary debates over what to call the study of texts from Spain—Hispanism, Peninsular Studies, Iberian Studies, etc.<sup>25</sup>—are indicative of the ways in which the perceived nature of a country’s literature can also impact the way the country is viewed.

Although the National Award is just one of many practices that serve to inform how the idea of Spain and of Spanish literature are understood, my study argues that it is one of few that allow us to analyze the ways in which literature has explicitly contributed to the formation of these ideas. Not only do National Award-winning texts receive a considerable amount of publicity, thus extending their exposure and potential social influence in the public sphere, but, as we have seen, they also tend to be unproblematic works that uphold the *status quo*. There is only one National Award-winning novel, for instance, that deals with the contentious nature of

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<sup>25</sup> For more, see Delgado’s “If we build it, will they come?”

Spain's imperialist past: Carme Riera's *Dins el darrer blau* (1994; National Award 1996) even though there are six texts total that are set during Spain's Golden Age. And of all the texts published in minority languages, none are particularly polemical from the perspective of the state; instead they all tend to be works that proudly carry the state-sponsored label. What's more, over 50% of the works that have won are about the production of art and around 30% of them are metafictional novels in which the creative process is on display, both of which help to contain National Award-winning works within the aesthetic realm away from the more complicated (and often polemical) nature of reality, where ideological tensions are not so easily resolved.

In the chapters that follow, I look at the way the concepts of "the nation," "literature" and "democracy" are promoted in connection to the National Award by examining the way these concepts are represented in the pages and in the reception of select prize-winning works. By analyzing how these ideas are imagined both discursively and creatively within the space of the prize, my project aims to reveal the many (and often conflicting) roles that the National Award has played in democratic Spain.

## CHAPTER TWO

### IN THE NAME OF THE NATION: THE NATIONAL AWARD IN NARRATIVE LITERATURE AND THE PROMOTION OF STATE CULTURE IN DEMOCRATIC SPAIN



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Since we talked to them so much about democracy and human rights they  
thought we were demanding both for them.

It was a misunderstanding.

- El Roto (*El país*, 5 Feb. 2011)

On November 4, 2010, Santiago Sierra was declared the winner of the National Award in the Plastic Arts, an annual award issued by the Spanish Ministry of Culture, a state-sponsored entity. Instead of accepting the prestigious prize, however, as every other artist of the democratic period has done, including artists of various genres and of diverse linguistic and cultural

backgrounds, on November 5 Sierra released a statement formally declining it. In his letter to then Minister of Culture, Ángeles González-Sinde, a copy of which was also posted on the artist's blog, Sierra justified his decision in the following way:

Estimada señora González-Sinde,  
Agradezco mucho a los profesionales del arte que me recordasen y evaluasen en el modo en que lo han hecho. No obstante, y según mi opinión, los premios se conceden a quien realizado un servicio, como por ejemplo a un empleado del mes.

Es mi deseo manifestar en este momento que el arte me ha otorgado una libertad a la que no estoy dispuesto a renunciar. Consecuentemente, mi sentido común me obliga a rechazar este premio. Este premio instrumentaliza en beneficio del estado el prestigio del premiado.

...  
El estado no somos todos. El estado son ustedes y sus amigos. Por lo tanto no me cuenten entre ellos, pues yo soy un artista serio. No señores, No, Global Tour. (Sierra)

Dear Mrs. González-Sinde,  
I am very grateful to my fellow practitioners of the craft for thinking of me and evaluating me in the way they have. However, and in my opinion, prizes are given to someone who has carried out a service, like an employee of the month for example.

It is my desire to declare publicly at this moment that art has given me a [type of] freedom that I am not ready to renounce. Consequently, my common sense obliges me to reject this prize. This prize instrumentalizes the prestige of the recipient to the benefit of the state.

...  
The state is not all of us. The state is you and your friends. Therefore, don't count me as part of you, since I am a serious artist. No sirs, No, Global Tour.

In the part that I have omitted from his letter, Sierra specifically accuses the state of engaging in politics that only represent an international and local minority instead of the common good. As proof of his claim, Sierra mentions the state's engagement in unpopular wars, its decision to help bail out the banks in early 2010, and its attempts to get rid of social security benefits gradually as part of new austerity measures designed to further reduce the country's deficit (Sierra). More than his reasons for rejecting the prize, however, what interests me about

Sierra's response are the rhetorical distinctions the artist makes throughout. Whereas the jurors of the prize are portrayed as an extension of the state, the artist appears to exist independent of the state.<sup>26</sup>

Furthermore, the way the letter mockingly thanks them for their professional actions, which are defined as "thinking of him" and "evaluating him as they did," belittles both the worthiness of the prize and the jury's authority to administer it. The tone becomes even more sardonic in the following sentence when Sierra compares winning the National Award to that of receiving a prize for employee of the month, implicitly drawing similarities between practices that are done in service of the state and those that are done in the context of business. Indeed, as becomes increasingly clear in the subsequent paragraphs, at the heart of Sierra's letter lies a desire to impose a clear distinction between art and the state and the world of commercial business on the grounds that such affiliations are seen as threats to the freedom that unbound art has the potential to provide on both national and commercial levels.

In many ways, it is not difficult to agree with Sierra's overall sentiment; that is, as I argue in this chapter, I too believe that the issuing of National Awards is a practice that benefits the Spanish state. Furthermore, given that much of Sierra's art can be read as an attempt to 'lay bare

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<sup>26</sup> Admittedly the members of the jury that awarded Sierra the prize all came from agencies that are sponsored, in part, by the state (and often, in part, by private businesses as well). The acting president of the jury, M.<sup>a</sup> Ángeles Albert de León is the General Director of the Arts and Cultural Wellbeing and the representatives from the art community that formed the rest of the jury include Daniel Castillejo Alonso, director of ARTIUM, an art museum and cultural center that that is sponsored by the Institute for Contemporary Art (*IAC*); Guillermo Solana Diez, head of the Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, designated by the San Fernando Royal Academy of Fine Arts; Laura Revuelta Sanjurjo, an art critic representing the Association of Contemporary Art Directors in Spain (*ADACE*); Gloria Moure Cao, an art critic from the Union of Associations of Visual Arts (*UAAV*); Francisco Javier San Martín Martínez, an art critic representing the magazine "Arte y Parte," and Begoña Torres González, the Subdirector of General Promotion of Fine Arts, who acted as the Secretary, but did not vote (González-Sinde, 264 91857- 91858).

of the device,' it might have even seemed hypocritical of him if he had not rejected the state's nationalist and bourgeois prize, an award that is calculated to reduce resistance to state and economic powers. Sierra is, after all an artist who is known for things like paying prostitutes in heroin to tattoo lines on their backs or for paying homeless men to masturbate in front of a camera. In fact, almost Sierra's entire career has been based on this type of 'shock art.' He once hired men from Central and South America to hold up giant horizontal pillars during one of his shows in New York in an effort to condemn the exploitation of immigrants. He has also paid people to remain in boxes for long periods of time, and he gave veterans money to remain facing the corner during an exhibition that lasted several hours as a means of denouncing the practice of sending citizens to, what Sierra perceives to be, an unjust war.<sup>27</sup> Thus, not only is the majority of Sierra's art based on denouncing exploitative practices, but his refusal of the National Award can also be read as an outright rejection of nationalist and capitalist values. Indeed, embedded in Sierra's decision not to accept the award is the idea that all state-sponsored practices are corrupt, and, as such, every speech issued in association to it will only serve to reinforce bourgeois and statist understandings of art.

It is also possible, however, that Sierra's rejection of the Award was just a marketing scheme, as some bloggers on *contraindicaciones.net* have suggested. After all, every single "refusal" the artist has made creates a lot of publicity for him, whether this is his final intention or not. In 2003, for instance, Sierra caused quite a stir at the Venice Biennale with his piece "Pabellón de España" ("The Spanish Pavilion"), which aimed to denounce unjust laws of

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<sup>27</sup> Not all of Sierra's art is displayed in museums. In one of his more recent public acts, artist Julius Von Bismarck and he managed to project the word "No" above the Pope's head when the leader of the Catholic Church visited Spain, in an effort to denounce the Spanish government's financial support of the Pope's visit to the country (Prometeo).



immigration in Spain by only allowing those who could verify their Spanish citizenship to enter the exhibit. Even the Venetian organizers of the festival were not allowed entry because they did not have the proper identification. At one point, they even warned Sierra that he would not be considered for any of the festival's prizes unless he allowed the Venetian judges to enter, but Sierra still refused. When asked if he was bothered by the judges' decision to disqualify his work, Sierra comically answered: "Será una amenaza o será una simple prueba para saber si realmente se puede saltar el muro" ("Is it a threat or a simple test to find out if it is really possible to jump over the wall"; *Reuelta*). Perhaps we could ask Sierra the same question now: was his rejection of the National Award an actual threat to the state in an attempt to liberate art, or was Sierra just testing the height of the walls that separate the two?

Moreover, considering that Sierra is now an international artist, whose Spanish passport has allowed him the luxury to travel and speak his mind as he does, would it even be possible for Sierra to separate himself or his art from the Spanish state? As L. Elena Delgado has recently argued in her article about the perception of minority literatures in Spain,

While we [academics, and I would add artists like Sierra] keep writing our papers challenging the relevance of the nation-state, and celebrating our transnational hybridity, in practical terms it is still nation-states that define for us what our relative location is in relation to the global. Therefore, it is better to hold on to our European or American passports, visas, and work permits, and more honest to accept that nobody exists outside of nationalism, banal or otherwise. ("Astigmatic" 135)

No matter how many prizes Sierra rejects or how many controversial pieces he may produce, the artist's identity will always be tied to his country of origin. That is, he will most likely continue to be referred to as a 'Spanish artist' (if not 'the Spanish artist who rejected the National Award') when his name is mentioned, and he will be tied to the Spanish state indefinitely despite the fact that he has lived in Mexico the last ten years of his life.

Of course, Sierra's association with the Spanish state also carries certain advantages. That is, is it not, in part, because Sierra comes from a democratic nation that he has the right to exercise freedom of expression with his controversial art in the first place? Fifty years ago, at the height of Franco's fascist rule of Spain, for instance, an artist like Sierra most likely would not have been recognized by the Spanish national government; instead his art would have been deemed too subversive and therefore bad for the country. In democratic Spain, however, not only is Sierra free to create polemical art and show it throughout the country and the world, the state even tried to reward him for it. What he is not free to do, however, is fully reject his association to the Spanish state.

Although Sierra may have preferred to be a 'free-floating' artist, as a Spanish citizen he is ultimately powerless to control the state's ability to appropriate his labor for its own benefit. In fact, when Sierra rejected the National Award, the Ministry of Culture did not seek out another suitable recipient; instead, it chose to institutionalize the artist's decision in the form of a *BOE*, or *Boletín Oficial del Estado* (Official State Bulletin):

Habiendo sido comunicado la propuesta de concesión del Premio al artista, éste ha renunciado al galardón, por lo que he resuelto:

Artículo único.

Admitir la no aceptación por parte del artista Santiago Sierra del Premio Nacional de Artes Plásticas correspondiente a 2010. (González-Sinde, 282 97319)

Having been communicated that the prize had been awarded to the artist, he renounced the award, for which I have resolved:

Article one.

Admit the non-acceptance from the artist Santiago Sierra of the National Award in the Plastic Arts corresponding to 2010.

By formally accepting the artist's non-acceptance of the prize, the state still managed to attach itself to Sierra's work, and, in so doing, to present itself as a tolerant, free and democratic nation, where acceptance of state prizes is optional.

What's more, the year after Sierra rejected the National Award in the Plastic Arts, the state took one step further to establish a permanent connection to the artist's work. After issuing the 2011 National Award to the artist Elena Asins, the Ministry of Culture issued an official statement justifying its decision, which included a list of the winners of the prize from previous years. Interestingly, for 2010, instead of writing "No se otorgó en este año" ("No [prize] was issued this year") as the Ministry has done in other instances when the prize was not issued for one reason or another, it states: "Santiago Sierra (renuncia)" ("Santiago Sierra (renunciation)"; "Elena") thus further attaching the artist's identity to the prize, and by extension, the state.

In effect, what Sierra's story actually reveals to us is the complicated way that relationships of power work in democratic societies today. As the political cartoon in the epigraph suggests and the Sierra anecdote corroborates, when looked at more closely, many of the state's actions in the democratic period, such as the issuing of National Awards, can seem quite self-serving in the sense they aim to promote the state's authority to oversee cultural activities in the country just as much (if not more) than they serve to support the world of art. The government may "talk about democracy and human rights," as the cartoon in the epigraph says, but it does so just as much to justify its own actions as it does to promote the general well-being of its citizens. This is because imbedded in the very practice of issuing National Awards is a specific technique of power that allows the state the authority to turn individual citizens into state subjects. This form of power, as theorist Michel Foucault has argued:

applies itself to immediate everyday life categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him that he must recognize and others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power that makes individuals subjects. (Foucault, "Subject" 130)

I do not mean to suggest that the state is the only power relationship at work in this example (the 'worthiness' of artists and their works is also determined by publishing houses, book venders,

readers, critics, etc). As Foucault has noted, the forms and specific institutions of power “in a given society are multiple; they are superimposed, they cross over, limit and in some cases annul, in others reinforce, one another” (“Subject” 141). I only mean to highlight the fact that the issuing of National Awards is one of the many practices that allow the state to visibly exercise its power and authority in democratic Spain. Every time an artist or his/her work is referred to as ‘National Award-winning,’ the cultural and political legitimacy of the Spanish state, and its ability to subject individuals to labels like ‘National Award-winner’ are tacitly reinforced. In this way, such awards have often served the state in its efforts to promote a particular image of itself as a free and democratic nation.

Although it is probable that the Spanish state does not always appreciate the content of an artist’s work (like Sierra’s), if it is to remain ‘democratic,’ however, the state cannot simply ban that which it does not like. Instead, practices such as issuing National Awards allow the Spanish government to praise an artist’s work without actually addressing any of the political or cultural concerns s/he brings to light. No matter how much public praise an artist may receive after winning a National Award, the cultural or political relevance of his/her works most often remains negligible at the level of the state. Thus, not only does the National Award allow the state to appropriate certain forms of dissension in an attempt to prove its ‘democratic openness,’ it may also actually play a role in neutralizing the content of an artist’s work.

In this chapter I further explore the cultural and political consequences of issuing National Awards in democratic Spain (1977-2011). Specifically, I look at the logic and purpose behind one prize in particular, the National Award in Narrative Literature, in order to show how the power of the state and the concept of what constitutes the Spanish nation have evolved from the beginning of the democratic period to the present. I argue that the issuing of the National

Award in Narrative Literature has contributed to the ‘democratization’ of the idea of Spain by making national literature appear to be an increasingly inclusive, yet privileged space. First, I present an overview of the history of the institution in charge of issuing the prize, the Spanish Ministry of Culture, so as to better understand its ideological mission. Second, I offer a close reading of the way the idea of the Spanish nation has been discursively constructed in the rules that govern the prize, and I show how the issuing of the National Award in Narrative Literature serves as a tacit endorsement of the state’s authority. I propose that the trajectory of the National Award in Narrative Literature can be divided into three phases (1977-1984, 1984-1996, and 1996-2010), each of which projects a unique image of the cultural boundaries of what has been considered “national” in democratic Spain. In my analysis of each phase, I argue that the issuing of the National Awards may very well be one of the democratic state’s more effective means of branding itself as a multicultural, yet politically unified, nation.

### *2.1 The Ministry of Culture and the Making of Democratic Subjects*

In 1977 the Spanish National Award in Narrative Literature was issued for the last time by the Ministry of Information and Tourism, a governmental agency created by the Franco regime in 1951 as a part of the totalitarian dictator’s attempts to control the way the image of the Spanish nation was produced and circulated. In 1978, however, the National Award suddenly reappeared under the direction of a new entity, the Spanish Ministry of Culture, whose stated goals were to promote social cohesion *and* recognize cultural diversity in democratic Spain (“Lines of Action”). Whereas during the Franco regime, the word “national” had a specific meaning that all texts published in Spain were expected to uphold, with the onset of democracy and the signing of the 1978 Constitution, Spanish citizens gained the right to express themselves

more freely, and the idea of the nation was much more contested. Even the individual citizens who, in one way or another, represented the state—such as those that form juries for National Awards—were no longer obliged to agree publicly with the ideology of the administration in charge as they were under Franco. In addition, the very meaning the “nation” itself began to change, as the so-called historical nationalities—the Basque, Catalan and Galician nations of Spain—began to challenge openly the exclusive use of the word to refer to the central nation-state (as the example of the very hotly debated *Estatuo de Catalunya* (Statute of Catalonia) demonstrated, in which the Catalan government polemically tried to redefine Catalonia as a “nation”).

By contrast, during the Franco regime, the issuing of National Awards was carefully controlled, as was everything that circulated publicly. The press was particularly monitored; not only were newspapers highly censored, but they also lost the right to hire managing editors of their own choosing (the state was responsible for these appointments). In addition, the state also imposed a new certification process for journalists and editors (Sinova 45), which made political dissent nearly impossible, especially since every journalist was forced to sign an affirmation professing loyalty to “God, Spain and the Caudillo” (Lafuente 51). What’s more, before the arrival of democracy to Spain, the peripheral cultures (or nations, as some might see it) were systematically excluded from the national imaginary since at least the eighteenth century when Spain officially became a monolingual and politically centralized country. And in the twentieth century these minority cultures were all but erased under Franco’s rule, whose attempts to homogenize the Spanish Nation as a Catholic, conservative, and Castilian-speaking country, are

now well known.<sup>28</sup> It is therefore understandable that ‘Spanishness,’ or any such term that might suggest a unified Spanish national culture, remains a polemical issue in Spain to this day, especially as globalization and immigration add new challenges to the (re)configuration of the country’s sociopolitical landscape.

Although much has been written on the ‘cultural branding’ that took place in Francoist Spain by well-known scholars such as Manuel Abellán, Jo Labanyi, Michael Richards and Justino Sinova, amongst others, less attention has been paid to the ways in which state-run institutions employ similar techniques in modern-day Spain to market the country as a free, multicultural, yet politically unified nation-state. In fact, the National Awards that the contemporary Spanish state sponsors have not changed much since the dictator initiated them over sixty years ago. Prieto de Paula and Langa Pizarro have even gone as far as to suggest that, at an institutional level, the Ministry of Culture was merely “una reconversión” (“a reconversion”) of the Ministry of Information and Tourism, given that the latter initiated many of the programs that the former still practices today (14). Others, however, have argued that although the political mechanisms in place may be similar, the fundamental importance and level of influence such entities have are null in the democratic period.

When prompted in a 1982 interview to reveal why he thought state-run institutions in Spain no longer had the same level of control as they once did (under Franco, for instance), well-known writer Francisco Ayala (1906-2009) bluntly replied: “eso de los Ministerios de Cultura fue una invención de los regímenes totalitarios, pero en una democracia son inocuos” (“the

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<sup>28</sup> In his book, *La censura de la Prensa durante el franquismo*, Justino Sinova calls the verticalization of the press under Franco and the totalitarian control of what could be printed “a perfect system”: the press could only publish the pre-authorized stories that the state sent them, and there were censors whose job it was to read every article that came out to make sure that all had complied with their orders (275).

matter of Ministry of Cultures was an invention of totalitarian regimes, but in a democracy they are innocuous”; Antolín 18). For his own part, critic José-Carlos Mainer has called the creation of the Ministry of Culture and Well-Being in 1977 (simply referred to as the Ministry of Culture after February 1978), “another great innovation” that helped to advance “state culture,” and “which had very little to do with the former Ministry of Information of Tourism.” He goes on to point out that the practices the Ministry of Culture supports in democratic Spain have become “indispensable realities” for many of the arts. In particular, Mainer claims that its sponsorship of theater through the creation of the *Centro Dramático Nacional* (“National Drama Center”) helped to breath new life into the discipline by replacing dwindling private support with public funds. Likewise, the plastic arts have benefited from the Ministry of Culture’s large-scale promotion of the arts and its creation of art centers throughout Spain. The state’s sponsorship of Culture Counsels in each of the Autonomous Communities also helped to pave the way for the reemergence and national celebration of local cultures nation-wide (692). Although these and the many other positive contributions the Ministry of Culture has made to the world of art are undeniably commendable, this does not mean, however, that its intentions are completely altruistic, let alone “innocuous,” as the case of Sierra that I analyzed above demonstrates.

In fact, on its website the Ministry of Culture states that the scope of its actions revolves around “three central themes: the acknowledgement of cultural diversity, the strengthening of co-operation and the consideration of culture as a tool for economic development and social cohesion” (“Lines of Action”). It is interesting to note that the word nation is absent from the Ministry’s description of its objectives, though, given Spain’s history, it is not really surprising. As I mentioned above, and as many contemporary scholars have noted (Labanyi, “Conclusion”; Balfour and Quiroga; Sánchez-Conejero, amongst others), since the inception of Democracy and



the creation of Autonomous Communities in Spain, it has become increasingly difficult to speak of Spain as a culturally unified nation. Nonetheless, we can justifiably infer that the idea of a united Spanish nation is still one of the Ministry's primary concerns in the democratic period, not only because we can understand its purpose to "use culture as a tool for economic development and social cohesion" as an attempt to endorse a unified image of the country, but also because many of its practices, including the issuing of various artistic awards are categorically represented as "national."

In effect, much as when Franco was the head of state, and his censors were doing all they could to ensure that Spain was consistently portrayed as a Catholic, Castilian and masculine nation that was "one, great and free" (*una, grande y libre*), in democratic Spain, the various programs that the Spanish state has in place to promote culture—such as the issuing of National Awards—likewise carry a political, albeit more democratic, agenda. The principle difference between the two political regimes thus seemingly has more to do with the particular image of the nation each promotes rather than the means by which each maintains its authority and sovereign power.<sup>29</sup>

As Foucault has argued, however, it would be impossible for any one social body to be solely responsible for the dissemination of knowledge in society. Instead, if one were to try to analyze how any democratic nation maintains its political authority and power,

one would thus reveal a body of political knowledge that is not some kind of secondary theorizing about practice, nor the application of theory. Since it is regularly formed by a discursive practice that is deployed among other practices and is articulated upon them, it is not an expression that more or less adequately 'reflects' a number of 'objective data' or real practices. It is inscribed, from the

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<sup>29</sup> The sponsoring of National Awards is, of course, merely one of the Ministry of Culture's many functions. It also oversees the co-operation between the Ministries of Culture of each Autonomous Community, it stores and preserves cultural and historical archives and it runs and promotes several national museums and libraries.

outset, in the field of different practices in which it finds its specificity, its functions, and its network of dependences. (*Archaeology* 194)

The Ministry of Culture's sponsorship of National Awards is one such "real practice" that relies on a vast "network of dependences" (writers, jurors, publishers, bookstores, readers, etc.). It is also one of the many practices that actively maintains and contributes to the discursive construction of the state's authority. Not only does the issuing of National Awards to many culturally diverse citizens make the state seem more "democratic," but the circulation of their works as "nationally award-winning" also serves as a tacit reminder of the state's desire to promote a unified image of the nation, as well as its ability to interpolate individuals as national state-subjects.

In the following sections, I closely examine the history and logic behind one of the prizes the state sponsors, the National Award in Narrative Literature, as well as the reception of a few key prize-winning texts, in order to reveal how the concept of the Spanish nation has evolved from the beginning of the democratic period to the present. Although the Ministry of Culture has changed names several times since the inception of democracy in Spain it has always been in charge of issuing National Awards.<sup>30</sup> In particular, I argue that by relying on the actions of its diverse citizens to perform the acts of giving and receiving the prize, the Ministry of Culture does not have to invent the national character, but rather it may just appropriate the individual's

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<sup>30</sup> In addition to the short period it was known as the Ministry of Culture and Well-Being (1977-1978), under the presidency of José María Aznar (1996-2004) it was called the Ministry of Education and Culture and then in 2000 it was the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports. Later with the election of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero (2004-2011) it was changed back to the Ministry of Culture, and most recently with the election of Mariano Rajoy in late 2011, the organization will now once again be called the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Sports, and will be run by the newly created *Secretario de Estado de Cultura* ("State Secretariat for Culture"; Fraguas). In this chapter, however, I will use the name "Ministry of Culture" to refer to the particular branch of the Spanish government that has issued the National Award since 1978, despite the fact that, at times, it has formed part of a larger political entity, as it currently does.

labor for its own purposes, which are, of course, ‘nationalistic’ in the sense that the prize serves to promote literary value that is presented as representing the nation. As I will show, what this means, however, and whom the label ‘national’ might include have continued to change throughout each phase of the democratic period.

## 2.2 *The Inception of Democracy and the Who’s Who of National Literature (1977-1984)*

The democratic version of the National Award in Narrative Literature officially began on September 28, 1976 when then Minister of Information and Tourism, Andrés Reguera Guajardo issued an Official State Bulletin formally declaring an end to the National Awards in Literature that had been created by “Orden de 25 de mayo de 1940” (“Order of the 25 of May”; Reguera Guajardo, 233 18943). Although the text does not specify it, the ordinance in question was one that had been issued during the Franco regime; thus, Reguera Guajardo’s formal denunciation of it, suggests an end to the Francoist systems of awards. Ironically, however, this decree to annul the law that created the previous National Awards appears as article thirteen of an ordinance whose main purpose was to outline the criteria by which the National Awards in Literature were to be issued as of 1976. Moreover, even though the inclusion of article thirteen can be read as an attempt to disassociate the prize from its previous incarnations, paradoxically, the document’s opening sentence seems to suggest the contrary: “*Como en años anteriores y con idéntico propósito de contribuir al estímulo y difusión de la creación literaria, se convocan los Premios Nacionales de Literatura 1976 en los distintos géneros especificados en la presente Orden*” (“*as in previous years and with the identical purpose of contributing to the diffusion of literary creation, we announce the National Awards in Literature 1976 in the distinct genres specified in the present ordinance*”; Reguera Guajardo, 233 18942, emphasis added). If the National Award

was to have the “identical purpose” as in previous years, then why bother to add article thirteen at all? Had the rules of the prize really changed enough to merit such a complete separation from its predecessor?

In looking over the policies that govern the National Award in this first phase of the democratic period, we see that most of the procedures are the same as they were in the Franco regime: there is a jury made of literary professionals in charge of choosing the winners for each genre (essay, poetry and narrative literature); the only texts that are eligible to win the prize are those that were published in Spain the previous year; each individual writer is guaranteed a monetary award of 500,000 pesetas (about 3,000 euros, an amount that continued to rise throughout the democratic period); the state pledges to buy “an important number of copies” and use its connections with national public television and radio stations to ensure that the texts receive an adequate amount of publicity; and, most importantly, the only narrative works that were issued a National Award were those that were originally written in Castilian. On the surface, thus, not much had changed from one political regime to the next.

The two histories are also symbolically linked in a work like José Luis Acquaroni’s 1977 prize-winning novel, *Copa de sombra*, which was the last text to receive the National Award in Narrative Literature from Franco’s Ministry of Information and Tourism, yet, it is also listed as the first text to have won the prize in the democratic period on the Ministry of Culture’s website. Moreover, when Acquaroni was awarded the prize, *El país* quoted him as saying: “me satisface mucho este premio, porque creo que marca una nueva época, la época de la democracia, sin condicionantes políticos para obtener premios” (“I am very pleased to have won this prize, because I believe it represents a new age, the age of democracy, without political factors [determining who] receives prizes”; “Javier Tussel”). Even though the Constitution had yet to be

signed and Acquaroni had received the award from an agency that was founded by Franco, his use of the word democracy, and his inclusion on the Ministry of Culture's list of prize-winning novels suggest a break from Francoist conceptualizations of the nation, and the emergence of a new age.

Yet because Acquaroni had been a successful writer under Franco, his acceptance of the National Award also suggested that things were not so different. Moreover, with the onset of more democratic policies and the flood of texts in the market the year Acquaroni won the award, *Copa de sombra* was somewhat overlooked by the critics. Biographer José Jurado Morales has argued that it was precisely Acquaroni's association with the dictator that caused his works to be overlooked (43). In addition, his works were often distributed by lesser-known publishers, which also contributed to their lack of success (45). In fact, for all practical purposes, José Luis Acquaroni has been all but erased from the Spanish literary canon. There is really only one scholarly work about the author, which was inspired by a conference that took place in honor of Acquaroni, the year after he won the award. The proceedings, however, were not published until 1999, the year the author would have turned eighty years old, and the volume was not widely circulated (Pablo Bermúdez 9). Thus, Acquaroni's contribution to literature in the democratic period has been small at best. Nonetheless, as the first National Award-winning novel, *Copa de sombra* clearly represents an evolution away from the former Francoist regime.

To begin with, *Copa de sombra* does not present Francoist Spain in a favorable light, and thus would have most certainly been forbidden by the regime. In the democratic period, however, it won an award. After a long life, the main character, Abel Adón is dying, and as he drifts in and out of consciousness, he contemplates what life was like for him as a soldier during and after the Spanish Civil War. In particular, he focuses on how Franco's repressive social policies affected

him once the war had ended. The novel even begins with a list of soldiers who died during the war in “Puerto de Santa Maria de Humeros,” a made-up place thought to be based on Sanlúcar de Barrameda, which was one of the first cities to fall in Spain during the Civil War. Franco’s army massacred many citizens there between 1936 and 1937. Indeed, the fact that a novel with such obvious sympathy and support for Republican ideas received a National Award in Spain was of great symbolic importance. Even the novel’s title, which is an intertextual reference to a line from Antonio Machado’s poem, “Siesta,” can be read as an attempt to forge a new era in Spain’s history:

Con la copa de sombra bien colmada,  
Con este nunca lleno corazón,  
Honremos el Señor que hizo la Nada  
Y ha esculpido en la fe nuestra razón. (lines 14-18)

And with this glass full of shadows,  
With this never full heart,  
We honor the Lord that made the Void  
And [who] has sculpted our reason in faith.

Antonio Machado (1875-1939), of course was a well-known poet before and during the Spanish Civil War (sometimes categorized as a “Generation 98” poet). The poem’s existential themes and melancholic tone perfectly complement the novel’s desire to show the limits of adhering steadfast to any ideology. Much as the lyrical voice praises his ability to make decisions in life to fill the Void, Abel recognizes the influence “reason” can have on a society, and he shows how blind allegiance to any ideology can lead to disastrous consequences. By condemning the “reasons” that justified the brutalities caused by the Franco Regime, the novel implicitly corroborates, if not welcomes, the political and cultural changes that came with the onset of democracy in Spain.

This desire to start anew is also visible in rules that outline the eligibility requirements for the National Award. In 1976 the Minister of Culture published an Official State Bulletin that described the guidelines for the different genres. Surprisingly, in the genre of poetry the rules stipulate that to be qualified, the collection must have been originally written in Catalan, a language that was forbidden in Francoist Spain (Reguera Guajardo 233 18942). Although, as far as I know, no such prize was ever issued (the reasons for which remain unclear), the gesture to include other languages suggests a certain desire on the part of the state to expand the meaning of what could be considered “national” in democratic Spain. It does not, however, explain why the state would have chosen to consider Catalan works and not Basque or Galician ones; we may only speculate about the motives behind this decision.

Equally perplexing, in 1977, the rules of the National Award in Literature slightly changed again: this time they included two awards for poetry, one in Galician and the other in Castilian (Reguera Guajardo, 132 12407). Once again, the decision to single out just one of Spain’s three minority languages as eligible, in many ways, seems rather arbitrary (and perhaps even patronizing). And, as in the previous year, the desire to recognize poetry written in one of Spain’s minority languages seemingly remained stuck in the realm of good intentions because according to the Ministry’s website, the only prize-winning poetic work in 1977 was awarded to Miguel Fernández for his work *Eros y Anteros* (1976; National Award 1977), originally written in Castilian. Even though the state may have discursively tried twice in this first phase of the prize to include poetry written in one of the minority languages (perhaps as part of an attempt to move away from Francoist policies), without anyone to accept the award and symbolically embody these changes, the Castilian language still dominated the space of the prize, and by extension, that which could be considered “national.”

Similarly, the description of the National Awards in this same Bulletin for both the best essay and narrative texts specify that eligible works must be originally written in Castilian, which precluded works written in other languages from being considered, thus more explicitly echoing Francoist views of the nation. Yet, since the Ministry of Culture was also supporting works in this first phase that most definitely would not have been published during the Franco regime due to the nature of their content, such as José Luis Acquaroni's *Copa de sombra* (1976, National Award 1977), Jesús Fernández Santos's *Extramuros* (1978; National Award 1979) or Carmen Martín Gaité's *El cuarto de atrás* (1975-1978; National Award 1978), it is also possible to identify a clear attempt to move away from Francoist notions and practices.<sup>31</sup>

Even though the issuing of National Literary Awards most certainly existed under Franco, on the Ministry of Culture's website the list of prize-winning narratives is said to begin in 1977. Moreover, there does not seem to be a list of earlier recipients of the National Award in Literature anywhere on the site. The only mention of National Awards prior to Franco's death appears on the Art and Music page, where there is a list of seventeen previous winners of the prize in the genres of music and theater ("Lista"). By only including a fragment of its connection to the Franco regime, it is as if the Ministry of Culture would like to present itself as a distinct entity with its own genealogy, despite the fact that the origins of the prize and the way it is administered suggest otherwise.

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<sup>31</sup> The dictator would have most certainly forbid the way Fernández Santos's *Extramuros* criticizes the church and includes homosexual characters or the manner in which Acquaroni's *Copa de sombra* and Martín Gaité's *El cuarto de atrás* portray Francoist Spain as a culturally repressive environment. While these early prize-winning texts could be considered somewhat tame in comparison with the great variety of cultural productions that were circulating during the first years of the democratic period, in which nudity, sex and drugs were rather common, they still represent a drastic change from what was considered acceptable under Franco.



In many ways, the history of the National Award in Narrative Literature is an important symbol of the political nature of the transition to democracy in Spain; both officially began with the death of Franco in 1975, but it would take years for either to remove immediate connotations of the former regime. Similarly, it is likewise difficult to determine exactly when the transition to democracy began. Some have argued that aesthetically speaking, we can see signs of democracy as early as 1970 with the proliferation of experimental texts that are influenced by more democratic ideas such as *Reivindicación del conde don Julián* (Count Julian) by Juan Goytisolo, which incidentally was published outside of Spain and was considered to be an ‘illegal text’ in the country until after Franco’s death (Prieto de Paula and Langa Pizarro 139). Regardless of when it began, once in motion, the official transition to democracy in Spain happened rather quickly; after Franco’s death, the country held its first free elections in 1977, and the constitution was ratified in 1978, legally transforming Spain into a Constitutional Monarchy.

Culturally, however, the transition to democracy was somewhat slow. Consequently, the early years of the democracy (1979-1982) are known as the *desencanto* years (years of disillusionment) precisely because the new democracy could not usher in a radical enough break from Francoist policies. That is, things may have been different politically, but culturally they ‘felt’ the same (Labanyi, “Conclusion” 396)—a reality that is well documented both in the rules of the prize as well as in the circulation of texts that won it in the early years of the democratic period. For the first eight years the National Award in Narrative Literature was issued in democratic Spain, not only was every text still obliged to be published in Castilian, but also everyone who won was already a well-established writer by the time democracy arrived in Spain: José Luis Acquaroni (National Award 1977), Carmen Martín Gaité (National Award 1978), Jesús Fernández Santos (National Award 1979), Alonso Zamora Vicente (National Award 1980),

Gonzalo Torrente Ballester (National Award 1981) and José Luis Castillo-Puche (National Award 1982). That is to say, with the exception of Francisco Ayala, whose award symbolically represented more of a ‘welcoming back’ of the national subject, a gesture I will look at more closely below, these writers were all considered to be exceptional authors by the Francoist government.<sup>32</sup> In fact, Torrente Ballester and Castillo-Puche had even already won the National Award in Narrative Literature under Franco, and Cela, who would go on to win the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1989, had been employed as a censor for the Francoist state. As a group, then, these author/citizens and their prize-winning works tell us a lot about the Transition to democracy; namely, that it was more of a gradual change than an instant break from Francoist policies and practices.

Along these lines, Javier Gómez-Montero has recently argued that although the texts that won the National Award in this early phase might represent somewhat of a ‘before and after Franco’ (especially since many of the works deal with what would have been considered to be ‘controversial themes’), with the exception of Martín Gaité’s novel, “difícilmente podría afirmarse que, en su conjunto, esas obras encarnen un “espíritu” de la Transición o sean canónicas para la Transición literaria” (“it would be difficult to affirm that, as a group, these works embody a “spirit” of the Transition or that they are canonical for the literary Transition”); 10). Although I agree with Gómez-Montero that the list of prize-winning works does not represent the diverse body of literature that was produced during the Transition, I do think these texts have much to say about the period. On the one hand, as prize-winning novels, these works

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<sup>32</sup> As is commonly known, Ayala chose to exile to Argentina (and later Puerto Rico and the United States) rather than have to live in Spain during the Franco regime. He had a summer-home in Spain, though, so he was not completely removed from the National literary scene. His prize-winning work, *Recuerdos y olvidos: el exilio* is an autobiographical account of his years in Argentina.

tell us that from the state's perspective the cultural boundaries of national literature had only slightly expanded with the inception of democracy. On the other hand, as individual forms of expression, these works also tell us about the nature of the Transition from the perspective of the individual author/citizen, as well as the role of art during this period.

For instance, a novel such as Alonso Zamora Vicente's *Mesa sobremesa* (After Dinner Conversation, 1979; National Award 1980) can be read as a satire that sheds light on the corrupt, self-serving nature of the art world in Spain during the Transition years. The novel takes place at a ceremony celebrating the achievements of a Professor of literature who is also a writer. It is not a linear narrative; instead, it has a fragmented structure that, for the most part, is comprised of the many dialogues and thoughts simultaneously taking place at the event. Many of the chapters are even divided so that the top half of each page shows what is being said between particular guests, while the bottom half of each page shows what one or more of the participants are thinking. The many disparities that result between what is thought and said often produce a comical effect, which bares a cynical tone. Throughout the novel there are several instances in which the characters are aware that merely because Franco has died, does not mean that everyone in the world of letters will suddenly act differently.

On the contrary, the fact that the celebration takes place in honor of a man who is said to have also been a writer in Francoist Spain suggests that not much had changed in the art world since the dictator's death. Zamora Vicente's text is by no means an all-encompassing representation of the Transition years, but it is, nonetheless, still quite telling of its historical moment, and in effect, can be read as a material manifestation of how the political transition to democracy has since been interpreted: as a slow and gradual transformation from a Francoist view of the nation to a supposedly more democratic one. And yet, the very fact that the Ministry

of Culture chose to recognize Zamora Vicente's novel—a work that could be said to criticize those that work for state-run institutions like the Ministry of Culture—also attests to the fact that democracy had in fact brought concrete political changes to Spain.

Perhaps more telling of the moderate changes that were taking place at a cultural and political level in Spain is the case of Francisco Ayala (National Award 1983). As a well-known writer from before the Civil War and active member of the Spanish community of writers in exile during the Franco Regime, Ayala's acceptance of the National Award for his autobiographical text, *Recuerdos y olvidos: el exilio* (Memories and Forgotten [Thoughts]; 1982, National Award 1983), carried great symbolic importance for the Spanish state. Whereas all other writers who had won the prize in the democratic period were already well-established writers during the dictatorship—that is to say, they were authors who were not “uncomfortable” for the dictator—Ayala was the first exile writer to be publicly recognized by the newly formed democratic state through the issuing of the National Award. Although it would be difficult to say with certainty why the Ministry of Culture chose to issue the prize to Ayala that year, the fact that they did was cast as a “public return” of the exiled citizen, an image the state used to help distance its activities from Francoist Spain.

Even a year after Ayala won the National Award in Narrative Literature, then Minister of Culture Javier Solana continued to elevate the importance of this “public return,” commenting “El premio a Francisco Ayala es algo obligado . . . se lo debemos, se lo debíamos en justicia, y soy consciente de que con él no colmamos nuestras obligaciones para con él” (“[Giving] the award to Francisco Ayala was something necessary . . . We owe it to him, we owed it to him in justice and I am conscious that with it we don't fulfill our obligations to him”; “Entregados”). Although many might agree that offering a National Award to a writer like Ayala, whose works

were widely read in exile, was an appropriate act for one reason or another, such a gesture raises many questions. For instance, why would the Minister of Culture in democratic Spain say that “we owe” recognition—by which we can infer he means “we the Ministry of Culture,” and by extension “we the state”—to an artist who had only recently moved back to Spain? Why Ayala in particular and not other writers like Ramón J. Sender (1901-1982), who after living in the United States for nearly forty years, applied to renew his Spanish citizenship in 1980, or Carlos Blanco Aguinaga (1926- ), who exiled to Mexico at the start of the Civil-War, and also returned to Spain in 1980 to work as a professor at the newly created University of the Basque Country from 1980-1985? What made Ayala such a desirable choice? Was it the content of his work? The style? The perspective it portrays? Or was it simply that the author was due a certain amount of recognition as the Minister of Culture proposed?

It is well known that Ayala enjoyed great success upon returning to Spain in 1976. It seems logical, thus, that the newly formed government might want to take advantage of Ayala’s prominent place in the public sphere to promote its own democratic agenda. Not only did Ayala’s works published in exile enjoy multiple re-editions upon his return and were talked about everywhere, but also his newly published works, such as his prize-winning memoirs *Recuerdos y olvidos*, which was reissued with additional chapters several times throughout the author’s life (1982, 1983, 1988 and 2006), brought Ayala even more cultural and monetary capital on the national stage. From the state’s perspective, then, Ayala would have been an ideal recipient for the prize, especially given his supportive attitude towards the democratic government and his particular view of exile. As critic José María Naharro Calderón puts it, “Ayala, a sociologist by training, understood that in order to be considered within the hegemonic cultural canon in democratic Spain, exile labels had to be rejected” (620). Whatever its motives

were, the way Ayala's text was publicized in connection with the prize certainly suggests that there is more at stake to winning a National Award than the quality of the work in question.

In fact, by only looking at the Ministry of Culture's website, one might assume that the author is the determining factor of the award because when one clicks on the title of each work that has won, it links to a page about the author and not the text itself. In fact, until recently, there was not a single synopsis of any of the texts that have won the National Award in Narrative Literature on the entire website. The only place where there are descriptions of prize-winning works is on the Ministry of Culture's newest website: *www.españacultura.es* ("Spain is Culture dot com"), which describes itself as "a web site with the best of our [Spain's] cultural heritage" ("About Us").<sup>33</sup> In questioning the motives behind the National Award, I do not mean to suggest that the texts that have won it (or their authors) do not deserve the money and status they have received; I only mean to point out that the way the Ministry of Culture markets National Award-winning novels suggests that perhaps the promotion of literature is not the state's principal concern.

Moreover, if it is not the work in question that the state necessarily aims to recognize, what might this tell us about the Ministry of Culture's motives? Is it possible that the state prefers to honor an individual so as to more concretely connect its actions to a specific place and time rather than gamble with the potential longevity of a text? The National Award is, after all, issued annually, so the winning texts need not last long in the market before the state will attach itself to another "prize-winning author/text." Indeed, more than the works themselves, the state requires the bodies of men and women enacting the award's importance in the public sphere.

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<sup>33</sup> The site includes more than just summaries of prize-winning texts though, in addition to offering small synopses of many works produced in Spain, it also advertises itself as a place for citizens to plan every aspect of their trip to the country. It even includes a feature that will help the visitor make all arrangements ahead of time.

Although writers like José Luis Acquaroni, Alonso Zamora Vicente, Carmen Martín Gaité and Francisco Ayala may not have been the most extreme examples of how the arrival of democracy affected the arts, they do certainly attest to (and more importantly, they physically embody) the changing nature of Spanish politics and culture on the national stage.

### 2.3 *The Transition to Democracy and the Re-Mapping of National Culture (1984-1995)*

In many countries the inception of democracy begins with a tale of revolution. In both France and the United States, the narrative of the arrival of democracy is one where enough citizens revolted against their perceived oppressors to gain independence from tyrannical powers. (Of course, it has been said that this narrative of “liberation” has been greatly exaggerated.) In Spain, however, the inception of democracy begins with a much more aseptic script that includes the natural death of a dictator, transitional uncertainty and business as usual led by the heir to the Spanish throne, Juan Carlos I, who instead of maintaining a military state as many of his more conservative supporters might have preferred, on July 4, 1976 appointed Adolfo Suárez (a moderate social democrat and former leader of the National Movement (*Movimiento Nacional*)) as the 138<sup>th</sup> Prime Minister of Spain.<sup>34</sup> Unlike its fellow nation-states, Spaniards did not free themselves from Franco’s dictatorship through force to bring about democracy, but rather the political process began with the dictator Francisco Franco’s timely death in 1975, and continued with the confirmation of an heir who would little by little untie what his predecessor considered “firmly tied” (*atado y bien atado*).

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<sup>34</sup> The next year Suárez would go on to become the first democratically elected Prime Minister of Spain, a position he held until 1982.

This is not to say that the Transition to democracy was a period free of violence; on the contrary, several critics have argued that the political transition began in Madrid with the 1973 assassination by four Basque members of ETA of Luis Carrero Blanco (Ferrerias 41; Prieto de Paula and Langa Pizarro 13), an event that would have far reaching cultural and political consequences.<sup>35</sup> In many ways, Carrero Blanco's death set in motion the democratization of Spain, by preventing Franco's orders from being carried out when the dictator died. Instead, the interim government, led by Suárez (and guided in large part by King Juan Carlos I), decided to take a more constitutional approach to the formation of the new national government in Spain.

As I mentioned above, the transition to democracy (better known simply as *La transición*; The Transition), however, refers to more than just a change in the political structuring of a nation-state; it also includes the many cultural and ideological implications that such a (re)-configuration implies. Thus, even though the political transition to democracy in Spain was rather swift, at the earliest, the cultural transition to democracy is said to have lasted until 1982 when the socialist Felipe González (1942– ) was elected president of Spain, a position he held for fourteen years. In the conclusion to his 1996 book chapter, however, Ferrerias goes so far as to suggest that the transition to democracy was still not complete at the time he was writing (55). If we look at the rules that govern the National Award in Literature, however, it seems as if 1984-1986 might be a better approximate ending point to the cultural transition to democracy for two reasons: first, as we shall see, because 1984 marks the conclusion of the Castilian-only phase of the award, signifying a new age in what could be considered “national” in Spain; and second,

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<sup>35</sup> Euskadi Ta Askatasuna, or ETA, is (perhaps was) a Basque organization known for using violence as part of its fight for Basque independence. The group formed in the 1960s in response to police brutality against Basque citizens. In 1973 the group assassinated Luis Carrero Blanco, Franco's chosen successor by placing a bomb in a sewer below the street where Carrero Blanco traveled every day. Recently, however, the group has declared “a definite end to its campaign of violence” (Goodman).



as Gómez-Montero has argued, because in addition to having set up the national government and the Statutes of Autonomy and of Linguistic Normalcy in Catalunya, Euskadi, and Galicia, 1986 was also the year Spain officially entered the European Union, symbolizing a new phase in the country's political history and cultural place in the world (8).

For more than forty years the label “Spanish National Award in Narrative Literature” automatically implied that the prize-winning work was originally written in Castilian, and the images of Spain circulating abroad were (and often still are) primarily associated with the Castilian-speaking part of the nation (Flamenco dancing and music, bull-fighting, sunny beaches, etc). In 1984, however, the Ministry of Culture issued an Official State Bulletin permanently altering this implication. As then Minister of Culture, Solana Madariaga explained:

Para aplicar lo dispuesto en el artículo 149.2 de la Constitución Española que señala el servicio de la cultura como deber y atribución esencial del Estado, el Ministerio de Cultura ha estimado necesario replantear la configuración de los Premios Nacionales de Literatura tanto en su espíritu como en el procedimiento de su concesión. (Madariaga 20215)

In order to apply that which appears in article 149.2 of the Spanish Constitution, which indicates the promotion of culture a duty and an essential function of the State, the Ministry of Culture has deemed it necessary to reorganize the configuration of the National Awards in Literature as much in spirit as in how it is issued.

The notice goes on to specify that because this Award is “National” all texts written in “las lenguas oficiales españolas” (“official Spanish languages”) should be eligible to win it. In extending the space of the prize to include texts written in Català, Galego and Euskera (Catalan, Galician and Basque), the state performed a double action; it simultaneously recognized cultural diversity in Spain while also controlling it. Not only are the minority writers interpolated as national subjects under the paternalistic category of “official *Spanish* languages” within the

space of the prize, but also the fact that the entire document is justified by references to the Spanish Constitution, legally and culturally binds the peripheral nationalities to the Spanish state.

In addition, the procedures by which the prize functions also changed slightly in 1984 to further reflect the state's goals to promote literature on the national stage. First, the monetary award increased from 500,000 to 2,500,000 pesetas (from around 3,000 to 15,000 euros), making the award more desirable to receive for writers of all backgrounds. Second, the Ministry modified the rules to allow anyone to submit a text for consideration as long as the work met the criteria of the prize—that is, any text could be considered as long as it was published in Spain and was written in any of the official national languages. Finally, in order to facilitate the consideration of texts written in the minority languages, article five of the 1984 Official State Bulletin stipulates that some of the members on the jury should be from each linguistic community. Although to a certain extent all of these changes do help to democratize the award by making it more representative of the literature that is published in Spain, they also work to further extend the power of the prize to serve as a space where individual citizen authors, publishers and judges become state subjects, in the Foucauldian sense. For Foucault the word “subject” has two meanings: “subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge” (“Subject” 130). Although it is doubtful that the authors wrote their works with the promotion of the Spanish state in mind, as “national prize-winning narratives” each text ends up categorically aligned with (or subjected to) the state. In this way, the logic behind the prize is identical to the logic of the state in that it is an authoritative technique of power that “subjugates and makes subject to” (Foucault, “Subject” 130). The artists do not choose to win the prize, they are chosen by a jury, whose actions

ultimately subjugate the artists to the authority of the Ministry of Culture, and by extension the Spanish state.

Moreover, in article six of the same Bulletin, the rules are also changed to eliminate the separate categories of writing in favor of issuing a single prize in “Literature.” In doing so, it is as if the Ministry of Culture wanted to say, “literature is literature” no matter the style, genre or the language.<sup>36</sup> This is especially obvious in the case of Catalan poet, Joan Vinyoli, whose work *Passeig d’aniversari* (Birthday walk; 1984; National Award 1985), originally written in Catalan, was the first non-Castilian text of the democratic period to win a National Award. Vinyoli’s story is particularly interesting because the poet never had the opportunity to acknowledge himself as a prize-winning subject, given that the National Award was issued to him posthumously.

Nonetheless, because his wife publicly accepted the prize (and the monetary award) in the poet’s place, the label of the prize remains attached to Vinyoli’s text, allowing the state to interpolate his work as national. I do not mean to suggest that Vinyoli’s work is now considered to be a Spanish text because he won the prize. Even the Ministry of Culture refers to Joan Vinyoli as a “Catalan poet” (“Paseo”). What it does reveal, however, is the power the state has to use the prize to extend the cultural boundaries of citizenship in democratic Spain to include works whose authors might define themselves otherwise.

Interestingly, in the article announcing that Vinyoli had been given the National Award in Literature, more space is dedicated to describing how the rules of the prize had changed to

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<sup>36</sup> In order to justify such a change, the Ministry also suggests that the jury meet more frequently to discuss all nominees, “ajustando su actuación a lo establecido para los órganos colegiados en el capítulo II de la Ley de Procedimiento Administrativo de 17 de Julio de 1958” (“adjusting its action to that which was established by the collegial organs in chapter II of the Law of Administrative Procedure from July 17, 1958”; Madariaga 20216). Whereas during the first phase of the prize there was an effort to legally disassociate the National Award in Narrative Literature from its previous incarnation, paradoxically, in this example the connection between the two is institutionally reinstated.

include texts written in all the official languages than there is to a discussion of Vinyoli's text or to the validity of the jury's decision to give it the prize ("El Premio"). Moreover, the fact that their description of these changes is so similar to the ones included in the Official State Bulletin that I quoted above, is suggestive of the ways in which national literary awards serve to legitimize the state's authority to issue the award, and by extension, its right to redefine the boundaries of what can be considered "national." It is an effective strategy because it discursively reinforces the state's political authority to include the peripheral nations in its conceptualizations of the national space.

We can see these same sorts of tactics at work in the circulation of Alfredo Conde's prize-winning Galician novel, *Xa vai o griffón no vento* (The Griffon 1986; National Award 1986)—the second "non-Castilian" text to win the prize. When Conde received the award, instead of having to explain the inclusion of non-Castilian texts as they did when Vinyoli won, the newspaper article in *El país* seems to be more of a defense of the prize's integrity. Towards the end, the article states: "Jesús Alonso Montero, jurado gallego, refuta cualquier tipo de inclinación nacionalista entre los miembros del jurado, y dijo: 'Somos ciudadanos de la patria de la cultura española'" ("Jesús Alonso Montero, member of the Galician jury refutes any sort of nationalist inclination amongst the members of the jury and he said: 'We are all citizens of the homeland of Spanish culture'"; "Alfredo"). In phrasing Alonso Montero's defense as it does, the article establishes a clear distinction between "nationalist inclination[s]" and the existence of a "Spanish cultural homeland." The particular words used are interesting because they suggest that Spanish culture is a separate "more neutral" space that belongs to all the cultures of Spain, when in fact the very concept of national literature is a product of the nineteenth century impulse to define and redefine national boundaries that have historically excluded the minority cultures

from the national imaginary. Again, it is this type of reasoning that permits the state to subsume the peripheral nationalities within the “national” space of the prize, thus corroborating the state’s desire for its actions to seem more democratic and in tune with the goals described in the Spanish Constitution.

Yet, by changing the rules of the prize the state did more than make itself *appear* as a more inclusive space; it was also one of the many practices that helped to promote the field of literature in various communities of Spain, benefiting more than just the state’s interests.<sup>37</sup> Not only does each individual author receive a sizable monetary award upon winning the National Award (currently set at 20,000 euros), but the publishing houses involved can mention the prize in their marketing campaigns, the members of the jury can exercise their expertise while benefiting from the nice hotels and dinners on the state’s dime for a few weeks of the year, and individual consumers of literature can feel good about purchasing a “prize-winning” text and gaining cultural capital, which store owners are happy to sell and critics (academic and non-academic alike) are content to judge and analyze. Within the context of the prize, the production and consumption of literature is often greatly aided by the state, which, in turn, receives publicity and praise for its actions.

This perhaps explains why in 1986 the rules of the prize changed once again to reinstate a separate category for each genre of literature. If the Ministry of Culture’s goal was to find a way to promote a certain image of the country, one that was both culturally diverse yet cohesive, then

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<sup>37</sup> There are, of course, other institutional bodies that also help to promote the importance of literature in Spain such as the *Federación de Gremios de Editores de España*, “a non-profit, private professional association created in 1978 to represent, manage, enhance and defend the general common interests of the Spanish publishers on a national, European and international level” (“Who”). There are also Ministries of Culture in each of the Autonomous Communities, whose actions are similar to those of the central state, but their aim is to promote their own national cultures.

what better way to do so than to offer national literary prizes to more groups? The list of recipients that could be promoted as “national award winners” would be longer and more diverse. In addition to adding back separate categories to the list of works eligible to win the National Award, there was also an explosion of other awards created in the following years (from a prize for the best circus in 1990 and a prize in Dramatic Literature in 1992 to an award for best Publishing house in 1994).<sup>38</sup> At a time when Spain was becoming an important member of the European Union, the existence of many National Award-winning works helped to portray the country as a multicultural and free democratic nation where culture and art is valued and respected. For the state, sponsoring the world of art, thus, became an invaluable investment that raised the country’s cultural prestige abroad, as well as one that allowed the state to project a particular image of itself as a plural but unified nation.

This trend is particularly visible in many of the narrative texts that have won the National Award in Narrative Literature. Not only are there now seven prize-winning novels that were written in languages other than Castilian to circulate as proof of Spain’s linguistic and cultural diversity, but also all of the works that have won have been presented as being noteworthy in some way, confirming the richness of the nation’s cultural heritage. It is as if each jury in charge of issuing the award has been conscious of the need to make the Spanish Arts more visible on the European stage, a campaign that was made more difficult by the large variety of literary movements that have occurred in Spain. As Rosa Montero has argued, “with the arrival of democracy a large number of new writers, male and female, started to publish, each writing in his or her own individual style rather than forming a coherent movement; and they were

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<sup>38</sup> In 2011, the National Award for Best Circus was awarded to the Asociación de Malabaristas de Madrid (Association of Jugglers in Madrid) in recognition of its famous circus school, which is said to have educated more than 10,000 circus performers in seventeen years (“La Asociación”).

discovered by the reading public, who identified with them as *their* writers” (317). The Ministry of Culture might have been able to facilitate and encourage artists, but it was becoming increasingly difficult to approach culture from a singular nationalistic perspective, especially as tensions continued to escalate between the peripheral nations and the central state.

Certain works, such as Antonio Muñoz-Molina’s *El invierno en Lisboa* (Winter in Lisbon, 1987; National Award 1988), for instance, are fairly easy to classify as national because they were originally written in Castilian by authors who identify themselves as Spanish. When works originally written in other languages started to win the award, however, several tensions began to emerge. Although nearly all of the non-Castilian texts that have won the award have been very successful both in their linguistic communities and in their many translations, they all “fit” a certain image. Namely, they are all texts written by authors who are not vocally opposed to the idea of a unified nation state, even though they very well may be actively engaged in the promotion of culture in their respective Autonomous Communities and often identify themselves as Basque, Catalan or Galician more than “Spanish.”

For the most part, the minority writers who have won the National Award in Narrative Literature in democratic Spain have tended to be “team players,” who have been corporative in helping to boost the image of the prize, and by extension the Spanish state. By simply being part of the list of texts that have won the prize, at the very least such texts serve as evidence of the state’s efforts to promote all cultures of Spain. Of course, also inscribed in the list is a particular hierarchy in which the Spanish state has subsumed the minority cultures of the political territory under one cultural umbrella, a move that both promotes multiculturalism, but also attempts to contain it. On the English page of the Ministry of Culture’s website, for instance, Alfredo Conde’s text is described in the following way:

The novel interweaves two stories separated by four centuries. The first story relates the arrival of a visitor from the Holy Office to Galicia at the time of Philip II. The second narration focuses on the amorous adventures of a professor of Galician literature, who embarks on a literary project on the history of the griffin, a mythical beast with the head of an eagle and the body of a lion.

The work enjoyed great success and won the National Narrative Award and the Critics' Award in 1986. These distinctions led to the definitive establishment and valuation of literature from Galicia. ("El griffón")

The description of the novel is accurate and yet somewhat misleading. Although it is true that the novel has two parallel stories, the way the synopsis is written makes it seem as if the whole novel takes place in Galicia, when in fact the majority of the "contemporary" parts are set in France. Moreover, the website's sketch of the text is somewhat dry, and does not leave the reader with much insight as to how the two worlds might interact or as to the types of themes the work integrates. Instead, the focus seems to be on emphasizing the novel's connection to the Galician culture in the first paragraph, and in the second, the Spanish state's role in overseeing the promotion of the peripheral cultures through the issuing of prizes. The way the text attributes the "definitive establishment and valuation of literature from Galicia" as being aided in large part by "these distinctions" (the National Narrative Award and the Critics' Award—a non-state run prize), highlights the state's involvement in the promotion of Galician culture more than the recipient's achievements. Essentially, in the last paragraph, the state implicitly claims that without its sponsorship (the prize) Galician literature would not be what it is today.

Ironically, after winning the national prize for his second novel *Xa Griffón*, Conde began to publish almost exclusively in Castilian. In fact, his third novel, *Los otros días*, was Conde's first novel to be written in Castilian before it was translated into Galician. The novel was such a success that it even won the Premio Nadal in 1991. Between the two awards, it is very likely that Conde experienced great monetary success. In Galicia, however, he lost a lot of respect from his



fans when he stopped publishing in Galician. “The feeling among Galician-language writers and critics was that Conde, who continues to write in Spanish, had betrayed his public duty as *conselleiro* to protect and promote Galician culture, a betrayal that [Valavedra has] attributed to commercial pressure” (qtd in Hooper 279). Thus although the Ministry of Culture might want to cast Conde’s career as one that greatly aided Galician literature (due in large part to state sponsorship), winning the award might also have been one of the catalysts that seemingly drove Conde away from his nationalist roots.

In addition to being able to take the credit for “helping” minority literatures and cultures through its sponsorship of prizes, the list of minority writers who have won the prize exclusively includes writers who mesh well with the state’s preferred image of itself. That is, all the minority writers who have won the prize happen to be citizens who are not too militantly “Other” from the state’s perspective. The first Basque writer to win the prize, for instance, Bernardo Atxaga (pseudonym of Joseba Irazu Garmendia; 1951– ), is well known for rejecting “nationalist” labels, as scholar Jon Kortazar explains in his description of recent tensions in contemporary Basque literature:

[T]he emblematic writer Bernardo Atxaga (Asteeasu, Guipúzcoa, 1951) has reflected on the stamp placed on literature that is written in a minority language and yet looks to establish itself as universal creative form. It goes without saying that this reflection attempts to reveal interesting new reflections on the role of the writer within society. It should be reiterated that underlying Bernardo Atxaga’s words is a preoccupation with the relationship between the writer and her environment, as well as with the relationship between the writer’s opinion of herself and her literature and the opinion of the society in which that literature is inscribed. Because of this, and because of his idea of literature, Atxaga rejects the notion that he is a national writer. (139)

Although Atxaga would later redefine his position slightly at the 2008 Reno Conference (Kortazar 141), when Atxaga won the National Award for his novel *Obabakoak* (1988) in 1989, his attitude towards Basque nationalism harmonized well with the National government’s

perspective towards Basque culture. He was a public figure who defined himself as Basque without condemning the central state. In the talk he gave in Reno, which was later published as part of *Writers In Between Languages* in 2009, Atxaga acknowledges that although when he wrote *Obabakoak* he felt his decision to write in Basque was not a political one, he openly admits that the preservation of Basque culture has since become one of his principal life goals. Instead of nationalism, however, which could potentially been seen as a threat to the Spanish state, Atxaga explains that he prefers to think of his works as a type of “nationalism”—“love of what is one’s own, and, above all, the defense of one’s own world against aggression” (58), a quite palatable worldview for the central state, indeed.<sup>39</sup>

In fact, in many interviews, and most recently in his paper from the Reno Conference, Atxaga has been very vocal about his appreciation of the Spanish state’s support of Basque culture: “Let’s not forget: the Basque Writers’ Association receives a direct annual subsidy of approximately 600,000 euros or \$940,000. There is no parallel outside of the Basque Country. Writers of other literary institutions have it far worse” (“The Cork” 61). What’s more, although *Obabakoak* was written in Basque and includes many references to Basque myths and culture, the fact that the novel takes place in Obaba (an imaginary Basque town), only further contains Atxaga’s “Basque” novel within the realm of fiction and away from the political, making it an ideal work to promote from the state’s perspective.

Given his warm acceptance of the prize, Atxaga was a great spokesperson for the state too. In one interview, the author explained the success of *Obabakoak* in the following terms: “De repente me he encontrado en un remolino. He acusado el cambio y me he cansado bastante”

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<sup>39</sup> I further explore Atxaga’s view of literature and the nation in chapter 4 of this dissertation as part of my analysis of the third prize-winning text originally written in Basque: Kirmen Uribe’s *Bilbao-New York-Bilbao* (2008, National Award 2009).

(“Suddenly, I find myself in a whirlpool. I acknowledge the change and am exhausted”; Larrauri, “En un país”). For Atxaga, winning the National Award was one of many events that helped to solidify the author’s prominent place in the contemporary world of letters. In addition, *Obabakoak* also won the *Premio Euskedi* (Euskedi Prize issued by the Basque government) as well as the *Premio de la Crítica* (Critic’s Prize issued by the *Asociación Española de Críticos Literarios*—the Spanish Association of Literary Critics) and the Foreign Language Category of the *Prix Millepages* (a French Literary Award issued by the well-known bookseller, Millepages located east of Paris in a suburb called Vincennes), all of which brought a lot of attention to Atxaga’s work. Not only was it successful when it first came out—in the first six months alone, *Obabakoak* sold 6,000 copies, nearly doubling the average sale of texts written in Basque at the time (Larrauri “Atxaga”)—but it has since been translated into twenty-six languages, making it one of the most widely circulated Basque novels to this day. And because each edition carries some mention of the National Award (it is on the cover of some editions and part of the author’s biography page in others), the novel will most likely continue to reinforce the prize’s significance, and by extension the Ministry of Culture’s authority to administer it.

Of course, Atxaga’s acceptance of the National Award was not without controversy. As would be the case for almost all of the minority writers who would win the prize in the democratic period, when Atxaga’s novel was chosen by the jury, the Castilian edition had yet to be published. Some Spanish citizens took this to mean that the jury had not even read *Obabakoak* and thus had only chosen Atxaga’s novel *because* it was published in Basque. This of course was a lie. Those that could read it in the original and the remaining jurors read an unpublished translation of the novel in Castilian and had chosen it to be the best novel that year.

Others were angry that the state had chosen to issue an award to a Basque novel at a time when attacks conducted by the ETA (*Euskadi Ta Askatasuna*; Basque Homeland and Freedom, the well-known terrorist organization), were still fresh in the minds of many. In fact, 1989 was the year of the first of several ceasefires that have occurred (the last of which was in January 2011) since the bloody attacks of the 1970s and 1980s, which are estimated to have caused the deaths of around 820 people (“What”). The “Basque question” was a frequent topic of conversation in the media and at the dinner table, and there was great fear and mistrust on both sides. Thus, one of the reasons that *Obabakoak* was so successful is precisely because it is not an overtly political text. Instead, it is most often read as a beautifully written novel that celebrates the global art of literature. The way the author plays with intertextual references, for instance, points to his desire to connect with literary movements worldwide rather than close off the Basque world of letters (Epps 721). For these and many other reasons, I would argue that *Obabakoak* has done a great deal to help build the image and credibility of the National Award.

Unlike Conde, though, Atxaga has continued to publish in Basque, which has established him a permanent place as a “great Basque writer.” Nonetheless, the fact that the novel has a higher circulation in Castilian than it does in the original Basque version carries with it many cultural consequences. To begin with, as well-known scholar Lawrence Venuti has argued, “translation can never simply be communication between equals” (*Scandals* 11). Instead, the translation of a foreign text into dominant languages occurs “in accordance with values, beliefs, and representations that preexist it in the translating language and culture, always configured in hierarchies of dominance and marginality, always determining the production, circulation, and

reception of texts” (*Translator’s* 14).<sup>40</sup> This is because translation is not a culturally neutral practice; on the contrary, every step in the process—“from selecting a foreign text to implementing a translation strategy to editing, reviewing, and reading the translation—is mediated by the diverse values, beliefs and representations that circulate in the translating language, always in some hierarchical order” (266). In his second book, Venuti even went as far as to liken translation practices to “those that underwrote European colonialism,” given that they often establish uneven relationships between “major and minor languages, between the hegemonic and subordinate cultures.” For Venuti, the main difference between translation and colonialism is that “translation now serves corporate capital instead of a nation state, a trading company, or an evangelical program” (*Scandals* 165). In the case of Spain, however, where translation between the four co-official national languages remains largely unequal, I would argue that translation is still very much tied to questions of the nation state and the cultural and political hegemony of Castilian.

In his analysis of the history of the Critics Prize, for instance, literary scholar Mario Santana shows how the translation of works into Spanish differs greatly from the amount of works that are translated into Basque, Catalan and Galician. Whereas translation *from* texts written in one of the minority languages *into* Castilian are “relatively common (63 percent of Catalan, 45 percent of Basque, and 57 percent of Galician works recognized with this prize have been translated into [Castilian]), . . . not a single Spanish-language book winner of the Critics Prize in these three decades has been translated” *into* Basque, Catalan or Galician (216). Santana

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<sup>40</sup> In his books, Venuti argues that the practices of translation often render the translator “invisible.” That is, a good translation is one that seems to be a “transparent” version of the original, in which both the foreignness as well as the mark of the translator are occluded (*Translator’s* 97). Venuti also shows how “in current law, the producer of a derivative work is and is not the author,” both in terms of cultural prestige and in terms of copyright (*Scandals* 50).

then goes on to offer an analysis of the reception and circulation of Bernardo Atxaga's *Soinujolearen semea* and its Castilian translation *El hijo del acordeonista* (The Accordionist's Son, 2003), both of which were written by Atxaga himself, in order to demonstrate the ways in which translation of minority texts into Castilian "can be instrumental in the *displacement* of the original text from its originally intended readership" (217). Thus, not only does the translation of texts into dominant languages have the potential to "domesticate" the foreignness of texts, as Venuti has shown, but when a text that was originally written in a minority language is translated into the dominant language of a multilingual state, such as Spain, the translation often becomes direct competition with the original even amongst bilingual readers. What's more, in some cases, the translation is so successful that it overshadows, if not fully eclipses, the original version in the public sphere, making the translation appear as equivalent to the original text. This is especially common when minority writers translate their works into Castilian themselves, such as Bernardo Atxaga, Alfredo Conde, Carme Riera and Unai Elorriaga.<sup>41</sup> In such cases, the translation is perceived an equal and legitimate source.

In his analysis of *El hijo del acordeonista* Santana shows how the translated version often overshadowed the Basque original. Not only was the Castilian version more widely read by Basque readers and non-Basque readers alike, but it also received more attention in the press, especially after winning the Critics Award in 2004. Unlike the National Award in Narrative Literature, however, since 1977 the Critics Award has issued awards to works written in each of Spain's official languages (i.e. there is a Critic's Prize in Castilian, in Basque and so on). Thus,

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<sup>41</sup> Conversely, when a National Award-winning minority writer does not translate his/her own work, as is the case for Manuel Rivas, Suso de Toro and Kirmen Uribe, the notion of equivalency between the Castilian translation and the original is even further questioned, an idea I explore in my analysis of Uribe's novel, *Bilbao-New York-Bilbao* in chapter 4.

when a work originally written in Basque wins the Critics Award, it is assumed that all jurors read the original version. When works win the National Award, by contrast, it is well known that only some of the jurors read the original and the rest read the Castilian translation. To say a minority text won the National Award, therefore, is to make reference to two separate works and sometimes multiple authors that comprise a single honor.

All distinctions aside, when minority texts also circulate in Castilian there is a tendency for the translated version to receive more critical attention than the original, whether there is a separate translator or not. In fact, most reviews that appear in the mainstream press are more likely to be based on the translation of minority texts than the originals. When the translation of Atxaga's *Soinujolearen semea* came out, some critics, perhaps inadvertently, even categorized the novel as a "Spanish" text. What's more, though Atxaga's novel is one of few minority texts that is translated into all of the official languages of Spain, the translations into Catalan and Galician were based on the Castilian version rather than the original Basque, a practice that is deemed to be acceptable, given that Atxaga is unquestionably the author of both texts (Santana 221). The translation of minority texts into Castilian, thus, plays a fundamental role in the domestication of minority cultures (or self-domestication in the case of authors who translate their own works), and interpolating them as part of the *Spanish* culture. In effect, the decision to publish a translation of a novel that was originally written in a minority language is fundamentally a political one that has the potential to erase the cultural specificity (and potential political legitimacy) of minority cultures while also bringing attention to them on the national stage.

For both Venuti and Santana, then, there is an urgent need for translators, writers, critics and anyone else that makes up the institution of literary studies to be aware of the potential

domesticating effects that translation can have on minority languages. By acknowledging the *remainder*—“the textual and linguistic features that are added to a translated text and frustrate any attempt to domesticate the work within the target language”—, Santana argues, we can begin “to make visible what the dominant languages of globalization would rather keep invisible under the pretense of universal transparency” (214-15). What’s more, in his analysis of *El hijo del acordeonista*, Santana not only provides an example of this type of scholarship, but he also highlights the ways in which the novel itself “resists assimilation into the majority language and forces the strangeness of the Basque original upon the reader of the translated text” (226-27). He does so by analyzing both the paratexts that surrounds the novel—including, but not limited to, its reception, the book jackets that are used, and the way the novel was marketed in various languages—as well as the novel itself and the way the Castilian version internally negotiates the issue of translation. For Santana, the fact that Atxaga chose to leave some of his “foreignness” on display is indicative of a dissident attitude, one that can be interpreted as a rejection of complete cultural or political domestication.

We see a similar technique at play in the reception and circulation of *Obabakoak*. Even though by accepting the National Award, Atxaga was cast as a “national” (and therefore also Spanish) subject, Atxaga most often used the increased fame that accompanied the prize to promote Basque culture and language. For instance, when the author translated *Obabakoak*, he decided to leave the title in the original language (which translates as “in a place called Obaba” or “Those from Obaba”), because the possible translations of the title did not quite “sound right” to him. By leaving the title in the original, Atxaga insured that the “foreignness” of the translation would always be on display. In one interview, the author even pointed out that the first work published in Basque, *Linga basconum primitiae* by Bernard Detcheperre, employed a



foreign language for its title in the *lingua franca* of its time, Latin. Atxaga, on the other hand, chose to leave the title in Basque, perhaps in an effort to recall the work's true origin; he was, after all, quite known for saying “es la versión en castellano de un libro escrito en *Euskera*” (Larrauri, “En un país”). What's more, the Castilian translation does not have the same number of chapters or stories as the original. In the Basque version there is a short story called “José Francisco” that seemed “impossible to translate” from the author's perspective, so he simply chose to leave it out. In this way, although the many translations of the novel do allow citizens from all over the globe certain access to Atxaga's text, only the Basque readership will have access to all its content, a gesture that ensures something of the process will be exclusively “for Basque readers.”

In his assessment of things, scholar Brad Epps has argued that when works written in Catalan, Galician and Basque win the National Award in Narrative Literature, the “equivalence of Spanish and Castilian is implicitly questioned.” Indeed, once the rules of the prize changed to include works written in all of the official languages of the state, the meaning of the word “Spanish” began to lose its exclusive attachment to the Castilian language. Epps goes on to argue that the four prize-winning authors who had won the National Award for texts written in minority languages at the time he was writing—Alfredo Conde's *Xa vai o Griffón no vento*, originally written in Galician (National Award 1986); Bernardo Atxaga's *Obabakoak*, originally written in Basque (National Award 1989); Carme Riera's *Dins el darrer blau*, originally written in Mallorquín, a dialect of Catalan (National Award 1995) and Manuel Rivas's *¿Qué me quieres amor?*, also written in Galician (National Award 1996)—“engage the promises and pitfalls of writing in so-called “minor” or minoritized languages and advance pluralistic conceptions of the past and the present” (721). Although many critics and writers have reflected on the trials

minority writers face when publishing their works in their native tongues, I think Bernardo Atxaga said it best when he wrote “To be Basque sometimes means working overtime. At other times it means having it made, working a soft job” (“The Cork” 61). On the one hand, writing in a minority language means an author will have to be prepared to promote both the original and (with luck) many translations if s/he is to have monetary success. On the other hand, when a writer does come from a minority culture, s/he has a certain advantage over writers that come from the center. According to Atxaga, often

the road ahead of the Basque author [or writers of other minority languages], a road that in the 1960s and 1970s was so hard—dangerous even—is much less bumpy since the founding of democracy than that of his neighbors to the south [those that write in Castilian]. I refer to the relative ease of publishing a first novel, and the media attention the publication would draw. (Atxaga; “The Cork” 62).

This is not to say that *any* Basque text will be successful just because it is written in a minority language; as Atxaga goes on to say, in the end, “if a book does not resonate with the reader, if it does not provoke laughter, or console, or transport through poetic space, or teach something, or stimulate thought then everything else [the benefits of being Basque, for instance] counts for nothing” (59). The state may have financed Atxaga’s career for a brief time, but it was always his own natural talent and charisma that gained him popularity and notoriety in the Basque Country, in Spain and abroad.

In effect, with the success that Atxaga and the other minority writers who have won the national prize have enjoyed, it is likely that these writers have done more to help build the credibility of the prize (and by extension the authority of the Spanish state), than the award did to build their respective careers. Not only did the inclusion of minority writers in the list of National Award-winning authors help to expand the space of literature in each of the national languages of the state, it also functioned to re-map the national imaginary to be more inclusive of

all cultures of Spain (albeit in a manner that also often erases cultural specificity). It is not just citizens in the peripheral nations who have to be convinced of this new, expanded meaning of Spanishness, it is also necessary to work against any resistance towards the increased presence of the minority cultures on the national stage.<sup>42</sup> In this light, the National Award has served a crucial role in helping to finance the promotion and cultural acceptance of “minority literatures” in Spain (a task that will most likely always be a ‘work in progress’).

The impact of the state’s contributions to the arts in the various Autonomous Communities through the issuing of the National Award has not been equal, however, In fact, in looking over the list of minority texts that have won the National Award in Narrative Literature, it is interesting to note that only one of the works was originally written in Catalan: Carme Riera’s *Dins el darrer blau* (1994; National Award 1995).<sup>43</sup> The novel is not set in contemporary times; instead, it takes place in seventeenth-century Mallorca, and tells the tale of a group of *conversos* (Jews recently converted to Christianity) who in 1687 attempt to flee the far reaching grips of the Spanish Inquisition by boat. The novel discusses the attempted escape, capture and ultimate execution of thirty-seven *conversos* in 1691 (they are burned at the stake in four *Autos de Fe*). The novel is very realistic and includes many well-researched details about the daily life of Jews at the time. In fact, when Riera received the award, she was praised for the quality of her

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<sup>42</sup> As is the case with citizens of the central state, the believed importance and use of the minority languages is not uniform throughout each Autonomous Community either. In the Basque Country, for instance, not only are there several dialects that often are not mutually intelligible, but even when citizens do claim to “know Basque” it does not always reflect the frequency with which they choose to use it. In fact, it is estimated that only “about 20% of informal conversations [are] actually conducted in Basque” (Amorrortu 69).

<sup>43</sup> *Dins el darrer blau*, was not written in standard Catalan, but rather in an older form of Mallorquín, which is a dialect of Catalan that is spoken in Mallorca in the Balearic Islands.

writing just as much as she was for her historical accuracy. The novel even attempts to capture the way Mallorquín would have been written and spoken in the seventeenth century.<sup>44</sup>

Riera, of course, was not new to the literary scene when she won the National Award. Since she wrote her first novel, *Te deix amor, la mar com a penyora* (I Leave you, My Love, the Sea as my Pledge, 1975), she has been well received by critics and readers alike. Some of her other titles include, *Una primavera per a Domenico Guaríni* (A Springtime for Domenico Guarini. 1980), *Joc de miralls* (Play of Mirrors, 1989) and, of course, *Dins el darrer blau* (Blue Horizons of no Return, 1995), which won the National Award in 1995.

According to *El país*, the jury had a difficult time deciding who would win the award that year because some wanted to give it to Javier Marías for his novel *Mañana en la batalla piensa en mí* (Tomorrow in the Battle Think of Me, 1994) and others wanted it to go to Almudena Grandes for her novel *Malena tiene nombre de tango* (Malena – the Name of Tango, 1994).

Algunos arguyeron que el libro de Marías ya había recibido varios premios—el Rómulo Gallegos y el Fastenrath—y que la obra de Grandes ya era un éxito de ventas, por lo que apoyaron un libro menos popular. Los miembros del jurado tuvieron una dificultad añadida para valorar una obra que todavía no está publicada en castellano. Al final ganó Riera por ocho votos a tres frente a Marías (Moret).

Some argued that Marías's book had already received various prizes – the Rómulo Gallegos and the Fastenrath – and that Grandes's work was already [having] great success in sales, as such they supported a less popular work. The members of the jury had an additional difficulty in trying to evaluate a work that is not yet published in Castilian. In the end Riera won by eight votes to three against Marías.

Not only did Riera face the same “controversy” as Atxaga given that the Castilian version of the text had not yet come out when she won the award, but the fact that she was chosen because hers

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<sup>44</sup> For some native speakers of Catalan, it can be difficult to read Riera's text in the original because the language used is so historically accurate. It would be similar for a native speaker of English reading a Shakespearean play without footnotes.

was the “less popular work” proves that the state has more than aesthetic concerns in mind when choosing the winners of the prize.

Moreover, it is curious that *El país* would mention the other texts Riera was competing with, given that in most other cases I have come across the names of the other nominees are not typically mentioned. Perhaps it is because of the particular writers she was up against—after all, both Marías and Grandes were, and continue to be, major names in the field of literature—we can never know for sure. The way the article is worded, however, it seems more intent on justifying why the jury strategically chose Riera’s text (so as to use the power of the central state in a positive and useful way) than it does on justifying the artistic merits of Riera’s novel. The title of the article alone can be read as an indication of the jury’s more social intentions: “Carme Riera gana el Nacional de Narrativa con una novela en catalán de tema judío” (“Carme Riera Wins the National [Award in] Narrative [Literature] with a Novel in Catalan about Jewish theme[s]” Moret). In reading the headline we can figuratively see the checking off of the cultural differences the article highlights about Riera’s text. (The writer is a woman, check. She won the award for a novel written in Catalan, check. And, to complete the multicultural package, it deals with Jews, another cultural group that has been excluded from the national imaginary on several occasions, so, perhaps we might issue a double check for this last one.) All joking aside, the way Riera’s novel is portrayed in this article is indicative of the central state’s goal to use the prize to promote literature, not just for aesthetic purposes, but also for political ones.

For her own part, Riera was thrilled to receive the National Award, saying:

El premio me parece muy importante porque, además de valorar mi novela, es un reconocimiento a la narrativa catalana actual . . . . Creo que la literatura que se escribe actualmente en catalán es equiparable a la que se hace en castellano y a la de escritores del resto de Europa. . . . Considero muy positivo . . . que el jurado haya tenido en cuenta que un país es más rico cuando tiene más lenguas” (Moret).

The prize seems very important to me because, in addition to valorizing my novel, it is an acknowledgment of current Catalan fiction . . . I believe that today literature written in Catalan is comparable with works written in Castilian and in the rest of Europe. . . . I consider it very positive . . . that the jury has kept in mind that a country is richer when it has more languages.

Whereas the article portrays Riera's reception of the prize as a means of helping along a "less popular work," Riera defines her triumph as an "acknowledgement" that Catalan fiction and the knowledge of "many languages" are valued in Spain. Although it would be impossible to say for sure which of these two versions might best define what Riera's win really symbolized, it is likely that the truth lies somewhere in between. For on the one hand, because Riera has been a very successful figure with a positive view of the National Award, she is a popular figure for both the Catalan and Castilian-speaking populations in Spain. She was cast in a particularly sympathetic way with the promotion of *Dins el darrer blau*, given that she wrote it because "La persecución de los judíos dejó huella en Mallorca . . . y las historias de los *xuetas* son algo que a mí me asombraba de pequeña. Si escribí esta novela fue, quizá para pedir perdón" ("The persecution of Jews left a footprint in Mallorca . . . and the stories of the *xuetas* (the *converso* community in Mallorca) are something that astonished me as a kid. If I wrote this novel, perhaps it was to ask for forgiveness"; Moret). The mistreatment of the Jews is a tragic reality that is part of history for speakers of Castilian and Catalan alike. The author's need to ask for forgiveness, thus, is a gesture that communicates across contemporary cultural and political divides, making Riera's work a perfect symbol of national literature in 1995, three years after the nation hosted the Olympic Games.

On the other hand, it is somewhat curious that Riera's novel remains the only Catalan text to have won the prize in the democratic period, which might potentially highlight a limit of the state's ability to impose the label of the prize. That is, perhaps there are not more Catalan novels

because Catalonia is most likely the Autonomous Community with the largest (and most publicly vocal) group of citizens who would like to see their designated territory become an independent sovereign nation. This is not to say that everyone in Catalonia shares this desire, but it is one that has become increasingly visible since democracy came to Spain. In her recent article, for instance, Delgado analyzes the ways in which the Spanish victory at the 2010 World Cup became a divisive event in the country. On the one hand, it was heavily promoted by the Spanish state as a “normal” multicultural and national affair, given that although the members of the team were from all over Spain, several major players were from teams in Catalonia (including Cesc Fàbregas and Andrés Iniesta who played a fundamental role in the last game of the World Cup in helping Spain score the only goal in the final minutes of extra time against the Netherlands). On the other hand, the abundance of press the World Cup received greatly overshadowed another important event that was taking place in Catalonia at the time, the signing of a new statute of autonomy. In fact, just two days before the Spanish national soccer team would go on to win the World Cup nearly one million Catalans “marched in protest of the decision by Spain’s Constitutional Court to remove important parts of their new statute” (Delgado “Sound” 271). Instead of allowing the Catalan government to pass a new statute in which Catalonia was defined as a nation with an increased level of sovereignty, the Spanish courts declared that Spain only had one nation and forced the Catalan government to revise the document. These and other such examples attest to the growing resistance towards the Spanish state that exists in Catalonia and other parts of Spain, and perhaps explains why there are not more Catalan authors on the list.

No matter what the reasons were for its decisions to confer the prize on each of the minority writers, their inclusion on the list of National Award-winning texts has permanently altered the national scene(s) of literature throughout the country. Whereas in the first phase of the

prize, the award-winning authors did not represent much of a break from Francoist Spain, by the mid 1990s the face of national literature within the space of the prize had greatly changed. Not only had the state enacted many policies to promote a particular image of Spain as a multicultural state on the national stage, but they also helped breathe new life into the literary markets of each Autonomous Community.

#### *2.4 National Subjects and the Cultural Boundaries of Citizenship in Democratic Spain:*

*(1995-2010)*

When we look at how the rules governing the National Award have continued to evolve since 1985, we notice that while the basic procedures remain constant, the description of each aspect of the prize has become increasingly specific and the language has progressively changed to further echo more and more the Spanish Constitution. Whereas the 1985 Official State Bulletin directly references article 149.2 of the Spanish Constitution in its description of its purposes, by 1995 the words from the constitution merely appear unquoted in the first paragraph as if they were written specifically with the prize in mind, with one interesting twist. In Article 149.2 of the Constitution, the state declares that it shall “consider the promotion of culture a duty and an essential function and shall facilitate cultural communication between the Autonomous Communities, in collaboration with them” (Spain). In the 1995 State Bulletin outlining the rules of the National Awards, however, the purpose of the prize is explained in the following way:

El fomento de las actividades culturales, entendido como servicio a los ciudadanos, constituye objetivo fundamental del Ministerio de Cultura. La convocatoria y correspondiente concesión de los premios nacionales es, entre otros muchos, un instrumento importante para el cumplimiento de dicho objetivo y viene a traducir el reconocimiento de la sociedad a la labor de personas o instituciones que, bien con sus obras, bien a través de su participación activa en diversos ámbitos de la creación artística o literaria, contribuyen al enriquecimiento del patrimonio cultural de España. (Bataller 19768)



The promotion of cultural activities, understood as a service to citizens, constitutes the Ministry of Culture's fundamental objective. The announcement and acceptance of the national awards is, amid many, an important instrument with which to achieve said objective and it manages to translate society's acknowledgement of individual and institutional labor that, whether it is with their work or through their active participation in diverse environments of artistic or literary creation, contribute to the enrichment of Spain's cultural patrimony.

When we compare the two texts, we see that the Official State Bulletin portrays its similar goals according to a slightly different logic. In the Constitution, the focus is on the state and its duty to facilitate "cultural communication" amongst the different Autonomous Communities (perhaps in an effort to ensure that all communication must go through the state). In the 1995 State Bulletin, however, the promotion of culture has been recast as "a service to citizens [of the Spanish state]," whose purpose is to acknowledge both individual and institutional labor. It is not just the prize-winning work that will represent the state, but the network of power relations and the actions of its many citizens that will sustain it. What was called the "promotion of literature" in one document became "the acknowledgement of individual and institutional labor" in the other. Significantly, the State Bulletin does not exclusively perceive "literary creation" as valorized "Art," but rather it has the more concrete meaning of social "labor." In effect, for an author to perform the prize correctly s/he must also *do* more than just write fiction and accept the prize. As is outlined in the 1995 version of the "rules" of the prize, s/he must also promote the book as "prize-winning" through more interviews, talks and public appearances than ever before, many of which are accessible through the web. In addition, s/he must also serve on the jury of the prize for the next two years after s/he has won, thus extending his/her expertise beyond his/her individual work.

Furthermore, in the previous phases of the prize the rules were rather simple: the texts had to be written by a Spaniard, published in Spain, and as of the second phase of the award, the

texts could be written in any of the languages of the state. In this most recent phase, however, the rules of the prize become increasingly specific: the award became something that must be received in a public act (*un acto publico*). Although, the writers in this third phase were not the first to receive the prize publicly, they are the first group of writers who are formally expected to do so. It is as if the Spanish state wanted to ensure that each prize-winning author would be obliged to associate himself or herself directly with the Ministry of Culture for all of the country (and world) to see.

With this increased visibility with each prize-winning text, the state can assure that its desire to promote Spain as a multicultural yet unified nation-state is well known. As French philosopher Jacques Rancière has argued: “Politics and art, like forms of knowledge, construct ‘fictions’, that is to say *material* rearrangements of signs and images, relationships between what is seen and what is said, between what is done and what can be done” (*Politics* 39). In the case of the Ministry of Culture, by changing the rules of the prize to first include minority writers and then to stipulate that each winner must participate in more public events than ever before, suggests that the state was working hard to control how its own fictional version of the nation was being constructed. It is unlikely, for instance, that any author would accept the National Award and then turn around and talk badly about the state. And when a recipient does try to speak against the state, as was the case with Sierra, the Ministry of Culture has found ways to still spin the criticism into positive publicity. Indeed, for the most part, the issuing of National Awards has been an effective means of promoting the state’s cultural agenda.

What’s more, in addition to ensuring that the issuing of the National Award would become a more visible national affair, in 1995 the rules were also amended to describe in more detail both the composition of the jury as well as its duties. Although the members of each jury

have always been known, their actions have not always been as transparent. In the 1995 Official State Bulletin, however, the jury is said to serve three functions: the jurors are supposed to nominate texts (eliminating the right for authors to submit their works independently), then deliberate (in a closed space), and vote by secret ballot. It even declares that the state will help pay for any expenses the jurors may incur traveling to and from the various meetings. Essentially, the state's sponsorship of the award in this most recent phase of the prize, indirectly assures its presence at every step in the issuing of the prize.

It also justifies its authority to issue such awards by specifying that the Bulletin "recoge la experiencia adquirida en la ya larga vida de los premios nacionales" ("gathers the acquired experience in the already long life of national awards"; Bataller 19768). Whereas in the first phase of the prize, the Official State Bulletin was worded to make the prize seem like a new and separate activity, in this phase the state takes advantage of its "long" history to augment its credibility. Whether we understand "long life" to mean just the life of the prize in the democratic period or its whole life in Spain is not specified; what is clear, however, is the state's desire to make the prize seem like something normal and everyday; as if it had always existed. This view is consistent with way Delgado has characterized the 1990s in Spain as a period of "normalization." In many cultural productions of the moment (in particular, in the genre of essay, as Delgado shows) there has been a palatable obsession to present Spain as a "normal" European country, one that maintains its own unique cultural landscape ("La normalidad" 195). The changing of the rules to be more vertical and more visible certainly echoes this desire. Rather than representing a specific image of the nation, however, what makes the National Award an effective promoter of national culture is the variety of social actors that have helped to shape it.

Furthermore, much like other ordinary, or banal, reminders of the nation, for the most part, the National Award is seen as a non-political, everyday label that first and foremost connotes literary value, and only secondarily is viewed as a practice that validates the state's authority to govern. As Michael Billig has argued, it is often through the presence of ordinary practices or objects, such as the much-studied 'mindless flag,' that nationalistic sentiments are most deeply present, and therefore effective. When such banal references to the nation are observed, their political significance is often "not remembered," forgotten, or simply taken for granted. This is because for Billig in such acts,

the flagging of what is nationalism (and by implication what is not nationalism) occurs beyond the level of outward argument. It is ingrained into the very rhetoric of common sense, which provides the linguistic resources for making outward arguments. (196).

Similarly, for most people, the "National Award" is not often thought of as an ideological label that supports a particular idea of the Spanish nation. Although there are probably citizens from the minority cultures who might see the prize as an imperialistic tool, from a centralist perspective, the giving and receiving of such awards is seen as a "normal" act that merely serves to elevate literature. What is often ignored, however, is the way in which these types of banal acts also form an essential part of the rather recent rhetorical construction of Spain as a democratic multicultural nation-state.

In their article, "Everyday Nationhood," Fox and Miller-Idriss extend Billig's argument—that the nation is primarily constructed through the presence of "banal objects"—and add that it is also reinforced in the "routine practices of everyday lives" (553). The use of the term "everyday lives" is significant because it can be read as a direct reference to a specific branch of Cultural Studies that sees culture as "ordinary" (Williams) or "everyday" (de Certeau; Lefebvre). As Fox and Miller-Idriss explain in their first footnote, "In this sense, everyday life is

to be distinguished from that field of activities coordinated and pursued by (national elites)” (558). Although the winning of a National Award is, by definition, a mark of exceptionality, the act of interpreting its importance is not. Whether one sees the prize as a mark of quality or as a tacit endorsement of the state, the consumption of “National Award-winning works” becomes an ordinary activity that forms part of the citizen’s everyday life.

Moreover, just because a text has won the National Award does not mean it will always circulate as a “national award-winning text” either; in the case of José Millas’s Castilian novel, *El mundo* (2007; National Award, 2008), for instance, the National Award is almost never mentioned. And if the label does appear frequently with a text, as is the case with Unai Elorriaga’s Basque novel, *SPrako Tranbia* (The Streetcar in SP; National Award, 2002), it does not mean that the text is expected to circulate a predetermined image of the nation. On the contrary, even within the context of the National Award, literature is still portrayed as an independent space where ideas can be freely discussed and disseminated.

In fact, most often literary awards are cited as an indication of the text’s literary worth. In academic writing, for instance, it is common to see the title of a work followed by a list of prizes it has won in parenthesis (much as I have been doing throughout this chapter). What’s more, in some cases, the National Award has even served to initiate the careers of several writers. Unai Elorriaga’s *SPrako tranbia*, for example, became an instant success when it won the National Award. Perhaps this explains why the National Award consistently appears with the novel as a label. In November of 2011, for instance the *Mancomunidad de Sakana* (a Basque organization formed by several city councils) and the AEK (*Alfabetatze Euskalduntze Koordinakundea*, ‘Coordination for the Alphabetization and Teaching of the Basque Language’) organized a public event in honor of Elorriaga’s prize-winning novel. In the short press release announcing

the event, not only is the National Award mentioned in the first sentence as evidence of the text's worth, but in the last sentence the organizers specifically mention that they decided to announce the event ahead of time "para que aquellos que no hayan leído esta novela se animen a acercarse a este *clásico* traducido a diferentes idiomas" ("so that those who have not yet read this novel might decide to pick up a copy of this *classic*, [which has been] translated into different languages" ("Unai"). Both the use of the word "classic" and the choice to mention that the novel won the prize and has been frequently translated suggest that Elorriaga's work will most likely be considered an example of "great" literature for many years to come; perhaps, in part, because of the prize. The winning of the National Award, and the many events such an honor inspire, thus can be said to be a formal recognition of a text's literary greatness as well as a means by which to perpetuate this view of it.

It is less common, however, for critics to discuss the ideological implications of literary awards, and if they do, literary awards in Spain are typically viewed as an inadequate representation of "Spanish literature" (Gómez-Montero 10; Valls 199; Witt 309). Although he does not mention the National Award specifically, Valls has argued that literary prizes, in general, have become one of many intermediaries (literary agents, publishers, etc.) that "buscan la recuperación de la inversión, más que la calidad del libro" ("are looking to for ways to recuperate their investments more than for the quality of books"; Valls 199). Gómez-Montero has said that the transition to democracy was just too varied for the list of National Award-winning texts to represent it (10). Yet, in trying to describe the different literary texts that should represent the space of Spanish literature, both critics end up listing several National Award-winning texts at one point or another in their articles (Valls mentions over half of the thirty three prize-winning texts), a gesture that shows that the list of National Award-winning narrative

includes works by several major authors who are now considered to be quite canonical. Thus, though the list of texts may not represent a ‘complete’ image of the field of literature in Spain, it does represent a serious attempt on the state’s part to recognize authors, whose works have come to define certain aspects of the literary canon.

This is not to say that the texts that have won the National Award necessarily represent an all-inclusive image of Spain or of Spanish Literature, though. On the contrary, according to the 2011 *Anuario de estadísticas culturales* (Almanac of Cultural Statistics) published by the Ministry of Culture, Education and Sports, there were more women involved in the profession of writing than men in 2009 and 2010, and in a separate governmental document women are said to read more than men (“El índice”).<sup>45</sup> Yet, as we saw in the previous chapter, only two women writers have won the National Award in the democratic period—Carmen Martín Gaité and Carme Riera. In fact, ironically, more women writers actually won the award under Franco than have won in the democratic period—Concha Espina for her novel *Valle en el mar* (1949; National Award 1950), Carmen Laforet for *La mujer nueva* (1955; National Award 1957) and Ana María Matute for *Los hijos muertos* (1958; National Award 1959)—which indicates that the literary map of Spanishness in contemporary times remains a decidedly masculine one from the state’s perspective.

What’s more, as Witt has pointed out, statistically speaking there are far fewer texts published in the minority languages in Spain each year compared to texts published in Castilian.

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<sup>45</sup> The first statistic may be a little misleading, however, given that the category used in the study includes “writers, creative and interpretive artists, archivists, librarians and assimilated professionals and assistants” (64). It is only by grouping all of these occupations together, that the Ministry of Culture can claim that there are more women than men involved in the profession of writing. In a personal conversation I had with writer Laura Freixas, she said the actual percentage of women writers is unknown, but is thought to be around 20% (at least in terms of who gets published).

Yet, of all the narrative texts that have won the award (thirty four in all), there have been seven that were originally written in one of the minority languages (about one fifth), which could make it seem like minority texts are more prominently read in Spain than they are. In fact, in her assessment of the relative frequency with which minority writers have won the National Award, Witt has even commented that it makes it seem as if “el mero hecho de estar escrita en catalán, gallego o vasco puede empujar una novela hacia delante en dirección al galardón” (“the mere fact that it is written in Catalan, Galician or Basque could push a novel towards winning the prize”; 309). She goes on to explain that she does not mean to suggest that these works do not deserve the prize, only that their abundant inclusion on the list of prize-winning texts makes it seem as if these texts had a political advantage. Personally, I think it would be unfair to say that the texts won simply *because* they were written in other languages, though when we consider the cases of Ayala and Riera analyzed above, it does seem as if every winner of the prize is chosen for more than just their literary skills. In all, it seems that the list of prize-winning texts represents, at best, an idealized version of national literature in Spain, one that makes the nation seem multicultural and diverse, yet united, especially because nearly all of the texts that have won (no matter what language they were written in) were very successful and often also won other literary prizes, making the Ministry of Culture seem like an astute judge of talent from today’s perspective.

On the inside jacket cover to Juan José Millás’s *El mundo*, for instance, Millás’s accomplishments are organized by the texts he has written, the professions he has had and the prizes he has won. The last line of his biography “Su obra narrativa se ha traducido a 23 idiomas” (“His narrative work has been translated into 23 languages”), culminates his worth by showing how far it has extended itself across the globe. All of these facts together help to confirm that



Millás is an exceptional writer, which, in turn, makes the National Award as a label of literary quality seem that much more legitimate. Moreover, *El mundo* is also an entertaining and well-written novel that has been generally well received. In fact, when Millás won the National Award, the Spanish newspaper *ABC* quoted him as saying, “Con este premio también se cae ese tópico según el cual las novelas con premio tienen algún estigma” (“with this prize the stereotype that prize-winning novels have some type of a stigma ends”; “Juan”). Although Millás’s words seem somewhat self-serving, they are also quite revealing. On the one hand, the fact that the author felt it necessary to call for an end to the stigma against national awards, suggests that the literary community in Spain has not always favorably received the Ministry of Culture’s prize. On the other hand, Millás’s statement is also indicative of a new more positive view of the existence of state prizes; one that urges the reader to interpret them as being indicative of a text’s literary value.

Much as the rules of the National Award in Narrative Literature have continued to change throughout the democratic period, the award itself seems to take on a different meaning each time it is issued. Moreover, the ways in which the rules of the prize have changed throughout the democratic period, suggest it is more than just the texts that change from year to year, but also the idea of National Literature that is altered as each text takes its turn embodying these ideas. This is because as Foucault has argued, the logic of the nation-state relies largely on the “political technology of individuals,” which Foucault defines as the ways in which “we have been led to recognize ourselves as a society, as part of a social entity, as a part of the nation or of a state” (“The Political” 404). In the case of democratic Spain, one of the ways individuals have been “led to recognize” themselves as “state subjects” (at least culturally, if not politically) is the issuing of National Awards. The resulting image of the nation, however, is not a static concept,

but rather it is something whose meaning is formed and reformed through the ways in which individual citizens continue to articulate its significance at different historical moments. What is constant, though, as the epigraph to the chapter and the Sierra anecdote I analyzed at the beginning suggest, are the mechanisms of power the state uses to legitimize itself in democratic Spain. In fact, to quote the epigraph, when looked at more closely, there is no misunderstanding: the majority of the state's actions, including the issuing of National Awards are self-serving. As we will see in the next chapter, however, the issuing of National Awards is also one of the many practices that have helped develop and maintain the discipline of literature in the democratic period. As literary critic and judge Tom Chatfield once put it: Prizes may seem like “an attempt to mould, and to pre-empt, posterity. Their answers rarely satisfy; they seem, sometimes, to possess an astonishing capacity for ignoring talent. Yet they occupy an increasingly crucial, and volatile, position amid those imperfect processes by which writing is turned into literature.”

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE NATIONAL AWARD AND THE ART OF LITERATURE IN ZAMORA

#### VICENTE'S *MESA SOBREMESA* AND MUÑOZ MOLINA'S *EL INVIERNO EN LISBOA*

Prizes are a vital part of the modern market for serious literature, but they're also increasingly flawed and compromised. At their best, however, they can still be an important mechanism for ensuring literature's future as a public art.

- Tom Chatfield

What does it mean to say that a literary text is nationally award winning? Does it mean that the work in question possesses an intrinsic political or aesthetic value? Or are national literary prizes primarily issued as a means of promoting and maintaining a specific image of the nation, as my analysis of the Spanish National Award in the previous chapter suggests? Indeed, in a land with multiple (and often contradictory) national affiliations, the National Award is arguably one of the few practices that are capable of embodying (and therefore actualizing) the idea that democratic Spain is a multicultural, multilingual yet cohesive nation-state, where art is appreciated and rewarded. Yet, as the epigraph suggests, because prize-winning texts are first and foremost products of free expression that are privately consumed, the public recognition of such works also serves to promote a particular idea of literature, as a “high art” worthy of recognition.

In this chapter, I further explore this second function of the prize, by analyzing the role the National Award has played in the perpetuation of a specific idea of literature in Spain. I argue that in addition to being a tool with which to promote a particular image of Spain as a free and democratic country, the National Award also serves to endorse a specific view of literature as

“something pure and harmonious,” an idea that, as Pascal Casanova has argued, dominates the literary world today (42-43). In looking over the texts that have won the National Award in the democratic period, it seems that the majority could be said to be works that value literature more for its ability to exist as a space of its own design than for its ability to communicate particular social, cultural or national values. In fact, of all the texts that have won, the two most “politically engaged” works are probably Manuel Vázquez Montalbán’s *Galíndez* (1990; National Award 1991) and Javier Cercas’s *Anatomía de un instante* (2009; National Award 2010).<sup>46</sup> Although both novels could be said to portray art as a potential weapon of change, as National Award-winning novels, however, even these more politically engaged works are marketed as examples of ‘great literature,’ a gesture that has the power to neutralize their potential social or political influence. As Pascale Casanova has argued, when literature is viewed as a “distinct world in opposition to the nation and nationalism, a world in which external concerns appear only in refracted form, transformed and reinterpreted in literary terms and with literary instruments,” it tends “to obscure the political origins of literature; and, by causing the link between literature and nation to be forgotten, encourages a belief in the existence of a literature that is completely pure, beyond the reach of time and history” (86). In essence, by promoting works that in their content and circulation portray literature as a “distinct world,” one that abides by its own rules and logic, the Ministry of Culture is able to obscure the more political intentions it has to use the National Award as a means of promoting cultural unity.

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<sup>46</sup> *Galíndez* is about an American PhD candidate who is conducting research on the kidnapping and murder of Basque refugee, Jesús Galindéz, a well-known critic of the Trujillo regime in the Dominican Republic. For its own part, *Anatomía de un instante* focuses on the 1981 attempted *coup d’état* in Spain, led by Antonio Tejero. Instead of exclusively presenting the hegemonic versions of the various events and people they portray, these novels attempt to undo such ‘myths’ by including a wide variety of perspectives. As journalist Anne McLean said in her review of *Anatomía de un instante*, in this novel, Cercas “forces us to abandon the fiction, the legends of the coup, and look at the pictures and story anew in all their complexity” (Eaude).

In this chapter, I further explore these ideas by first analyzing the contemporary meaning(s) and use(s) of literature, and how this idea is actively maintained by a wide variety of cultural practices, including the issuing of literary prizes. In the remaining pages, I examine the way the idea of literature is represented in the pages of two National Award-winning novels—Alonso Zamora Vicente’s *Mesa sobremesa* (*After Dinner Conversation*, 1979; National Award 1980) and Antonio Muñoz Molina’s *El invierno en Lisboa* (*Winter in Lisbon*, 1987; National Award 1988) in order to highlight the role the National Award plays in the parceling out of a specific idea of literature. In particular, I demonstrate the ways in which literature is conceived of as a series of practices and opinions in *Mesa sobremesa* and as a liminal space that transcends spatial and temporal boundaries in *El invierno en Lisboa*. In my analysis of each work, I also consider how the National Award, as a label, has (not) contributed to the success of these two literary texts by analyzing the ways in which each was critically received. In all, the goal of this chapter is to reveal the ways in which the idea of literature can only be partially influenced by the institutions and people who actively govern it; for at its core, literature is a creative form of expression that is both tied to and divorced from the power-relations that may attempt to evaluate and determine the “worthiness” and “value” of a given text.

### 3.1 *The National Award and the Idea of Literature*

In his book *Keywords*, Raymond Williams begins his definition of “literature” with the following statement: “Literature is a difficult word, [to define] in part because its conventional contemporary meanings appear, at first sight, so simple” (183). In a world in which the foundations of education have included the study of literary texts since at least the nineteenth century, most citizens of Western countries are likely to claim that they “know” what literature

is: written works of great aesthetic value, such as those by Borges, Cervantes or Shakespeare. And yet, even current usages of the word suggest that literature is not as uniform a notion as it might appear. Although in the modern context, literature does generally refer to fictional texts that may or may not form part of a literary canon, in both Spanish and English it can also refer to texts written by experts that one might consult to learn more about a given topic (Garber 9). When one reads the sentence ‘enclosed, you will find a review of the literature on race relations in the United States,’ or ‘literatura sobre alcoholismo’ (‘literature about alcoholism’), for example, one does not expect to read sonnets or plays. Instead, one would presume to find a collection of written documents that are most likely nonfictional in nature. Thus, even though literature may appear to be a “simple” term, attempting to define it proves to be a difficult task.

Much as the meaning of literature may be somewhat unclear, the significance of literary prizes is likewise ambiguous. Do texts win literary awards because they are “great” or do they become so upon winning awards? In the previous chapter, I focused on the ways in which National Award-winning narratives have helped to actualize the idea that democratic Spain is a multicultural yet cohesive nation-state. The Spanish state’s ability to benefit from the circulation of national prize-winning texts, however, depends greatly on the perceived quality and value of literature in general. That is, if literature were not understood *a priori* as an important practice of great social worth and value, it is unlikely that any institution would be able to benefit from the public circulation of award-winning literary texts, national or otherwise. The National Award in Narrative Literature would most certainly lose a certain amount of prestige if literature were not perceived as an important discipline worthy of public recognition. Thus the ability of the National Award to elevate the concept of the nation or of literature requires that both already possess a certain amount of status and legitimacy.

Whereas the nation's purpose to organize and protect life has an immediate 'value' or 'use,' however, the worth or usefulness of literature is not as clear or obvious. According to scholar of English literature Marjorie Garber, over the course of history the debate over the "value" or "use" of literature can generally be divided into two poles:

One pole is utilitarian or instrumental: the idea that literature is good for you because it produces beneficial societal effects: better citizens, for example, or more ethically attuned reasoners. The other pole might be characterized as ecstatic, affective, or mystical: the idea that literature is a pleasurable jolt to the system, a source of powerful feeling that – rather like Judge Potter Stewart's famous pronouncement about pornography – is unmistakable even if undefinable. (For Stewart's "I know it when I see it," we could substitute "I know it when I read it / hear it.") (9).

The argument over the value of literature is one that is well documented. From Plato to Kant to *los modernistas*, the value or use of literature has been a frequent topic of debate.<sup>47</sup>

In many ways, the practice of issuing National Awards in Spain could be said to highlight both views of literature. On the one hand, the very act of sponsoring literary prizes stems, in part, from the Spanish state's desire to "use" literature as a means of branding a particular image of the nation. Likewise, authors "use" their prize-winning novels to sell more works and as a means of earning money, and the reading public can "use" prize-winning texts to gain a certain amount of cultural capital.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> One of the first philosophers to contemplate the potential "use" of literature was Plato, who thought poetry and music were "key elements for training the soul and body." Whereas the realm of philosophy was aligned with reason, the world of fiction was said to "serve a moral and social function," by teaching cultural elements such as "goodness, grace, reason and respect for law" (Garber 16). For the Enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant, on the other hand, the most endearing quality of literature, and art in general, was their "uselessness" or "purposiveness without purpose." In other words, for Kant, the best works of art were those that were motivated not by desire, money or fame, but by the pure love of art itself.

<sup>48</sup> In addition, through its sponsorship of literary texts, the Ministry of Culture does more than just recognize the "value" of literature; it also helps bring to public view a wide variety of social issues. In the next chapter, I will look at the reception and circulation of Carmen Martín

On the other hand, the act of receiving a literary award also carries a very different connotation, one that relies on a distinct understanding of literature and sees writing as purposeless means of artistic expression. As Garber explains drawing from the theories of Immanuel Kant, it is common for literary purists to regard “book contracts and lecture fees as suspect while exalting the idea of literary prizes (from the Booker Prize to the Tony Awards) as disinterested rewards for excellence” (20).<sup>49</sup> Thus, even though the issuing of National Awards in Spain can be said to promote a particular idea of the nation, few authors would claim to have written their works with the prize or the nation in mind. Instead, literary prizes are most often viewed as something that adds value to texts *a posteriori*, given that to receive an award, ideally a text would already possess some sort of admirable characteristic that would make it worthy of praise.

When asked in an interview what he thought about literary awards, prize-winning author Francisco Ayala echoed this view of literature when he said the good thing about literary awards is that they often bring fame and attention to literary texts, causing readership to go up. The bad thing, however, is that

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Gaite’s *El cuarto de atrás* (1975-1978; National Award 1978) and Kirmen Uribe’s *Biblaio-New York-Bilbao* (2008, National Award 2009) in order to discuss the ways in which these two novels have contributed to the discourse on feminism and Basque identity respectively. In publically recognizing these texts as “nationally prize-winning,” the state is able to “use” literature to make itself seem more accepting of diverse views, and authors may “use” literature to share political and social ideas with the reading masses, whose numbers have continued to grow exponentially throughout the twentieth and into the twenty first centuries.

<sup>49</sup> The idea that art should be disinterested, which is at the heart of a Kantian notion of aesthetics, has served as inspiration for many artistic movements overtime. In the nineteenth century, for instance, the phrase *l’art pour l’art* (most often translated as “art for art’s sake”), first coined by the novelist Théophile Gautier (Garber 22), directly inspired the emergence of *modernismo* in late nineteenth-century Spain, and would later indirectly serve as motivation for the poetry of *los novísimos* in the 1970s.



Hay escritores que escriben para ganar premios, para los honores, para sacar dinero y que les aplaudan en los sitios adonde van. ¡Eso me parece tan absurdo! Hay muchas maneras de ganar dinero y hacerse famoso, qué sé yo, los negocios, la ruleta, los cantantes o los presentadores de televisión... Pero usar la literatura para ser conocido me parece degradante. (Antolín 187).

There are writers who write to win prizes, to receive honors, to make money and have everyone applaud them wherever they go. This seems so absurd to me! There are many ways to earn money and become famous, I don't know, business, roulette, singers, TV presenters... But to use literature as a means of making oneself known seems degrading to me.

Embedded within Ayala's view of literary prizes is the idea that they should not be an end goal in and of themselves, but rather literature is something that should exist for its own sake, and prizes should merely be seen as evidence of a text's literariness. Thus, for writers like Ayala, true literary creation is not motivated by financial desires—that would be “degrading.” Instead, literature is viewed as something that exists separately from material concerns.

Although literature may aim to exist separately “for its own sake,” its significance is ultimately determined by the individual members of society who consume it, some of whom will appreciate literature for literature's sake, while others will make haste to “use” it however they can. Indeed, whether one appreciates literature for its more mystical side or its utilitarian value, both understandings of literature's worth are shaped and informed by the types of texts that are deemed to be “great” in a particular context. What makes a text “great,” however, is not determined by a text's aesthetic qualities alone. On the contrary, as British author and cultural commentator Tom Chatfield once wrote, “it is a central paradox of writing that true greatness only becomes apparent over time, and yet that the judgements of the future are substantially dependent on what the present chooses to publish, publicise and preserve” (Chatfield). In other words, for a text to be “great,” it must continue to be viewed as such by each new generation.

Thus, what each period chooses to recognize and honor plays a large role in shaping how the idea of “great” literature is perceived.

Amongst the many practices that serve to elevate and highlight the value and merit of literary texts, the issuing of literary prizes plays an important role. The extent to which literary prizes can influence the success of a text, however, depends on many factors, including, but not limited to: the perceived quality of the text, the reputation of the author publisher or the prize itself, the number of copies printed, and the amount of publicity a text receives. Moreover, even if all of the above conditions are met in the most ideal way, the issuing of literary awards will not necessarily ensure that a text remains in public view beyond its initial date of publication. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, José Luis Acquaróni’s *Copa de sombra* (1976, National Award 1977), was all but ignored by the critics, despite the fact that it was the first text to win the National Award in the democratic period.<sup>50</sup> Thus, although the Ministry of Culture may make every attempt to choose texts that are worthy of the label ‘national,’ it is the public that ultimately decides the ‘value’ of a given text. Nonetheless, because the vast majority of texts that have won the National Award in democratic Spain have been well received by the public and critics alike and many of the authors are now considered to be canonical, the National Award also serves as a reputable label of what should constitute ‘good literature,’ which, as I will show, often means that literature is viewed as a separate, apolitical space that has greater aesthetic than political value.

In order to further develop these ideas, in the following sections, I analyze the literariness of Zamora Vicente’s *Mesa sobremesa* (1979; National Award, 1980) and Muñoz Molina’s *El*

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<sup>50</sup> On the other hand, as I mentioned in chapter 1, Unai Elorriaga’s *SPrako tranbia* (2001) became an instant success after winning the National Award, and as such exists as proof that the prize *can* influence the way a text is received.

*invierno en Lisboa* (1987; National Award, 1988), in order to show the ways in which both novels uphold the Ministry of Culture's preferred view of literature as a separate incorruptible space. I have chosen to study these two texts in particular because each comments on the world of literature in distinct but related ways, which help us to understand the idea of literature as purposeless means of expression. Specifically, I reveal how literature is portrayed as a realm of (occluded) opinions and practices in *Mesa sobremesa* and as a discipline that fuses with other artistic genres and is not so easily contained within definitive categories in *El invierno en Lisboa*. In addition to being novels that embody the National Award's preferred view of literature, both texts are experimental novels that, in their form, extend the idea of literature beyond traditional boundaries. Finally, in my analysis of each text, I also show how they each reflect a different view of the potential utility of the National Award, suggesting that literature's worth is not something that can be determined by institutional practices alone, and instead is informed by something else. Studying the two together thus allows us to better understand the unique qualities that make "literature" a "high art" worthy of the Ministry of Culture's national praise.

### 3.2 *The Idea of Literature and the Muddled World of Public Opinion in Mesa, sobremesa*

Although Alonso Zamora Vicente (1916-2006) may no longer be a common name in academic circles today, for much of the twentieth century he was a highly esteemed scholar, literary critic and writer in Spain. According to literary scholar, Jesús Sánchez Lobato, Zamora Vicente "pertence a la generación de los madrileños que se criaban en la calle" ("belongs to a generation of writers in Madrid who grew up in the street"). Growing up on the streets of Madrid in the 1920s and 1930s not only affected the way Zamora Vicente viewed life—his fictional works are often more sympathetic of proletarian ideas, for instance—but it also paved the way

for a lifetime engagement with the Spanish language through two distinct but related paths: a scientific path and a literary one (Sánchez Lobato 5). As a dialectologist, Zamora Vicente wrote many books about the Spanish language, focusing on both Latin American and Iberian varieties, and he held multiple university posts in several parts of the world; for example, he served as the director of Philology at the “Colegio de México” (“College of Mexico”) for one year, and as the director of the Institute of Philology at the University of Buenos Aires for four years (Sánchez Lobato 6).

In his work within the world of literature, Zamora Vicente was both a writer and a celebrated literary critic. Many of his articles on authors such as Garcilaso, Cervantes, Valle-Inclán, Lorca and César Vallejo are still read today. His critical studies of the works of writer Camilo José Cela, in particular, were highly praised by Cela as being “el mejor” (“the best”) at dealing with his works.<sup>51</sup> Cela was also a great admirer and supporter of Zamora Vicente’s fictional works. In fact, when Zamora Vicente won the National Award in Narrative Literature in 1980 for his novel, *Mesa, sobremesa* (After Dinner Conversation, 1979), Cela was a member of the six-person jury in charge of issuing the prize, which might explain why the jury chose his text that year (“Alonso”). Of course, we could never know for sure what motivated the jury’s selection, and yet, the text’s overall lack of popularity and virtual elimination from the Spanish world of letters does make it somewhat difficult to understand why *Mesa, sobremesa* won the National Award, especially since it is one of only a very few prize-winning texts that was not well-received by the literary world.

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<sup>51</sup> Perhaps Cela’s views of Zamora Vicente’s reputation as a critic are, in some ways, influenced by the fact that the two were friends, a relationship that was greatly valued by both.

Even though *Mesa sobremesa* has won the same award as Carmen Martín Gaité's *El cuarto de atrás* (1978), the difference between the amount and type of exposure each text receives in today's literary circles is enormous. Whereas *El cuarto de atrás* has become one of the most canonical texts of the transition period (1975-1986), *Mesa sobremesa* has been all but forgotten. In fact, the only copy of the novel I could find (online, in the United States or in Spain) was in the library at the University of Illinois. Even after trying for months to buy my own copy, I was forced to admit that, for all practical purposes, Zamora Vicente's *Mesa, sobremesa* has disappeared from the world of Spanish letters despite the fact that it won the National Award.

Regardless of how *Mesa, sobremesa* has been received, in some ways, as a National Award-winning novel, it will continue to exist as an example of "great literature" that is on par with the other prize-winning works. This is because the National Award, in addition to being a label that has the potential to highlight a text's 'national' worth, as I showed in the previous chapter, is also an intertextual reference that alludes to the existence of other prize-winning novels, whose more positive reputation has the ability to add value to a text regardless of how it was received. In every article I have read on Zamora Vicente's text, for instance, the prize is consistently mentioned, adding value to it, even though *Mesa, sobremesa* has been otherwise ignored by the contemporary literary community.

In his article, critic Joaquín Juan Penalva even went as far as to claim that "*Mesa, sobremesa* ha sido una de las obras más celebradas de Zamora Vicente, y a ello ha contribuido no sólo el galardón recibido, sino también el ejercicio de vivisección de la sociedad española del momento retratada en la novela" ("*Mesa, sobremesa* has been one of the most celebrated of Zamora Vicente's works, which has not only contributed to the prize received, but also to the

vivisection of Spanish society at the moment that is portrayed in the novel”; 343). Although I agree with Penalva that *Mesa, sobremesa* is a fantastic portrayal of late 1970s’ Spanish high society—a point I return to below—I think is somewhat of an exaggeration to refer to the novel as “one of the most celebrated of Zamora Vicente’s works.” In fact, if we look at his reception as an artist, it seems that quantitatively speaking, his first novel *Primeras hojas* (1955) is probably his most renowned fictional text instead of *Mesa, sobremesa*. Moreover, although studies on Zamora Vicente’s literary works continue to appear from time to time (the most recent being an article by Juan M. Ribera Llopis that came out in 2007 on the representation of feelings and cities in *Primeras hojas*), *Mesa, sobremesa* is not typically discussed. In fact, scholars were most actively writing about Zamora Vicente’s fictional works in the 1970s, well before *Mesa, sobremesa* was written. In light of these considerations, it is difficult to maintain Penalva’s claim that the novel is “one of Zamora Vicente’s most celebrated works.”

Perhaps Penalva’s enthusiastic portrayal of the novel was, in part, motivated by the nature of the event he attended, which was organized to celebrate the fact that Alonso Zamora Vicente had been named “Doctor Honoris Causa” at the University of Alicante. By the way he characterizes the novel, however, it is also possible to infer that Penalva’s statement may have been influenced by the fact that *Mesa, sobremesa* had won the National Award, making it an instant ‘classic’ in the mind of the critic. He does, after all, say that the novel won the prize *because* it was so highly celebrated, even though, as we have seen, it has essentially been ignored by critics since it first appeared and there may have been other factors that contributed to

Zamora Vicente receiving the prize besides the text's literary qualities, such as the author's high social position or his friendship with Cela.<sup>52</sup>

For my own part, I do not quite understand why Zamora Vicente's *Mesa, sobremesa* has not been better received. Not only does the novel represent a scathing criticism of upper class Madrid, but it is also a technically innovative novel that is entertaining (and funny) to read. Perhaps part of the answer can be found in the work itself, which depicts literature as a discipline that is largely controlled by public opinion. The overarching story takes place during a celebratory dinner in honor of don Carlos—who we are eventually able to infer is an important socialite who gained his prominent place in Spanish society during the Franco regime<sup>53</sup>—and is set in late 1970's Spain, a time of great cultural and political uncertainty.

The event is not narrated in the traditional sense of the term, but rather the various proceedings it depicts throughout the dinner are told through multiple voices that represent a wide variety of cultural 'types' typical of 'high society': the priest, the professor, the journalist, the psychologist, the archivist, as well as various other 'cultural' gatekeepers and the many girlfriends, spouses and sycophants such a group is bound to attract.<sup>54</sup> Even though the dinner takes place in democratic Spain, it is obvious that many in the room are members of the

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<sup>52</sup> In addition to being a well-known scholar, critic and writer, at the time he won the National Award, Alonso Zamora Vicente was also Secretary of the *Real Academia Española* (*The Spanish Royal Academy*), a position he held from 1971 to 1989, which could have also contributed to him winning the National Award that year.

<sup>53</sup> For Sánchez Lobato, don Carlos is most likely a philanthropist (40), given that many of the guests at the party seem to be indebted to him in some way. For Penalva, on the other hand, don Carlos is representative of a typical Madrilenian "bigwig" (*gerifalte*) who most likely has his finger in several metaphorical political and cultural pies.

<sup>54</sup> The novel also includes the perspectives of the waiter and *maitre d'* possibly to offer a more complete version of events.

bourgeois elite who gained their social status under Franco and are somewhat out of touch with contemporary issues. As Sánchez Lobato puts it, in reading *Mesa, sobremesa* “asistimos al charloteo de una sociedad que debería ser solidaria, pero prefiere seguir siendo esclava de la hipocresía, las ignorancias y los prejuicios egoístas; colectividad que no tienen arrestos para reconocer su complicidad en el actual desbarajuste de ideas, actitudes, creencias...” (“we are privy to the chit chat of a [sector of] society that should be [celebrating] solidarity, but instead prefers to continue being a slave to hypocrisy, ignorance and egotistical prejudices; a collectivity that’s not bold enough to recognize its own complicity in the current chaos of ideas, attitudes, beliefs...”; 40). The word chaos is particularly appropriate in the case of Zamora Vicente’s novel, which depicts this sector of society through multiple perspectives and voices so as to highlight the artificiality (and increasing irrelevance) of their actions and opinions in democratic Spain.

In this respect, it is important to keep in mind that the transition to democracy in Spain was not instant. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, for the first several years of the democratic period—often referred to as *la Transición* (the Transition; 1975-1986)—the future of the nation was quite uncertain and change was all around. Several ideas that had once seemed permanently ‘fixed’ under Franco, such as ‘the nation,’ ‘the role of women,’ or ‘the place of religion,’ gradually evolved and began to take on new meanings. The idea of literature too began to change and eventually extended to include a wider variety of authors, texts and themes than ever before. Whereas throughout much of the twentieth century, the literature that circulated in Spain was largely controlled by what Zamora Vicente might call “el maremágnum de las grandes estructuras culturales...” (“the chaos of the great cultural structures...”; 10),<sup>55</sup> in the democratic

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<sup>55</sup> In an interview, Zamora Vicente once claimed that having lived through the Spanish civil war caused him to learn his most valuable life lessons. “Me ha enseñado, por ejemplo, que es mucho más importante la decencia que la *cencia*, me ha enseñado que es mucho más importante



period literature is perceived to be an unrestricted space of free expression, an image the National Award in Narrative Literature also aims to promote (of course, whether this is actually the case could be debated). What's more, with the signing of the 1978 Spanish Constitution, the power and relevance of those that once held great power and influence under Franco began to shift towards cultural institutions that promoted a more inclusive view of society and the texts it produced. As the third novel to win the National Award, I would argue that *Mesa, sobremesa* depicts all such changes in sharp detail.<sup>56</sup>

*Mesa, sobremesa* represents this shifting notion of literature in various ways throughout the novel. To begin with, it includes characters (or “types”) who have a particular, perhaps antiquated, view of literature. There is Casilda Henestrosa, who is said to be the widow of celebrated poet Federico Encinares, don Apolinar, a University professor of literature and a writer himself, and there is also a character in the section “Consomé” who is married to Ricardito, a literary critic and juror of literary prizes. Even the guest of honor, don Carlos, is shown to be involved in the world of letters. Although his exact social position is unclear, there is textual evidence that suggests he is also a published writer. In fact, the nature of the dinner is seemingly connected to a book the guest of honor has just published, given that everyone in the room has a

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el acercarse a la gente como la gente es y aceptarla como es, que no perderme el maremágnum de las grandes estructuras culturales” (“It has taught me, for example, that decency is more important than *science* [written phonetically in the original as “ciencia” pronounced with a Madrilenian accent], it has taught me that it is much more important to approach people as they are and to accept them as they are, and to not lose myself in the chaos of the great cultural structures” (qtd. in Sánchez Lobato 10).

<sup>56</sup> During the Franco regime, for instance, (1936-1975), literary texts were greatly censored by the government's “cultural machine” so as to control their potential influence and social use. And even though in democratic Spain there are many programs in place to promote literature—such as National Awards, reading campaigns and *ferias* (book fairs)—the ‘cultural machine’ works differently than it did under Franco. A novel like *Mesa, sobremesa*, for instance, most certainly would have been banned by the Franco regime for the negative way it represents the dictator's values.

copy. At one point, several of the guests feel quite deceived to find out that don Carlos has signed each of their copies with the same dedication. When a drink falls on one of the guest's copies, Rosenda responds: "Mire, si le parece, se lo cambio por el mío... Total, la dedicatoria dice lo mismo para todos..." ("Look, if you want, I can trade your copy for mine... In the end, the dedication is the same for everyone"; 168). Of course, if don Carlos is based on a real person, I was unable to catch the reference, but the type, the socialite/writer who was famous under Franco and strives to remain so in the democratic period despite the fact that most guests at the party secretly have a very low opinion of him, would have been one that was quite familiar during the transition to democracy in Spain when the novel was published.

The other literary figures in the novel would likewise be familiar. Considering that Casilda's husband, the poet, is deceased, it might be safe to assume that Federico Encinares was a celebrated poet under Franco. Thus, the fact that Casilda is an invited guest at the party suggests that at least some in the room still adhere to a more traditional notion of literature as a discipline comprised of recognized (conservative) writers. Of course, in 1979 Spain most writers who were "well known" had also been writing under Franco, but the fact that Casilda's husband continues to be honored by this specific sector of society in the democratic period suggests that his works may have been aligned with Francoist values in particular. Even though the exact nature of Casilda's husband's poetry is never mentioned, it is clear that many of the more conservative guests in the room appreciated his works, which could suggest that the type of literature this group may choose to appreciate would likewise be rooted in Francoist notions of literariness.

For his own part, don Apolinar—the professor—is portrayed as someone whose works were never really appreciated by the literary community in Spain. In fact, in one conversation he

has with a fellow guest at the party, the reader learns that the professor's works are currently only sold abroad "para que los extranjeros aprendan a hablar español..." ("so that foreigners learn how to speak Spanish"; 132). It is not clear whether his works were published abroad due to their content; nor do we know whether to interpret the second comment positively or negatively (is it *only* good for teaching foreigners or is it *so good* that it is taught to foreigners as an essential part of the literary canon?). Nonetheless, given that his works are not known in Spain, it might be fair to assume that don Apolinar's invitation to the party was not based on his literary reputation alone, but rather on his scholarly activities and social status as a professor of literature. His presence at the party, thus, aligns him with a specific more conservative branch of the cultural machine (the university), which was known for "using" literature to promote national values during the Franco regime.

In effect, the whole group seems quite out of touch with contemporary culture, especially with respect to the world of literature. At one point in the novel, for instance, the psychologist, don Timoteo decides to perform a "cultural test" and the one question everyone in the room gets wrong is the one that deals with literature written in exile during the Franco Regime, a category of literature that would have been fresh in the minds of contemporary readers who, for the first time in forty years, could easily purchase texts that had once been banned by the Franco Regime, and campaigns to promote such texts were all around.<sup>57</sup> And yet after taking the test, don Carlos unabashedly proclaims: "también me preguntaron por mis lecturas, pero ahí no me defendí muy bien, ya que no conozco a los escritores exiliados..." ("they also asked me about my reading [habits], but in that case I didn't do very well, given that I don't really know the [works of the]

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<sup>57</sup> As I discussed in the previous chapter, the welcoming back of exile writers like Francisco Ayala, who won the National Award in 1983, formed an important symbolic role in the democratization of Spain.

exile writers”; 130). In effect, though literature may be part of “high society,” the way its meaning circulates throughout the novel suggests that what is perceived as literature by this group (and possibly by those that issue National Literary Awards) may be somewhat removed from the way other sectors of society view it in democratic Spain.

The novel, however, is more than just a sarcastic portrayal of don Carlos and the upper class society he represents, it is also a novel that, in its form, challenges traditional boundaries of literature in favor of a more experimental view of literature that places great emphasis on form. In fact, Penalva has even said that instead of being a novel in the conventional sense of the term *Mesa, sobremesa* might best be thought of as “una construcción discursiva y lingüística” (“a linguistic and discursive construction”; 348), given that it lacks a central plot and is primarily constructed through dialogue and inner monologues. When the novel won the National Award, the Spanish newspaper, *El país*, referred to it as “una colección de narraciones breves” (“a collection of short stories”; “Alonso”), since the work is divided into seven sections—eight if you count the “carta prólogo” (“the letter prologue”), whose incorporation, as we will see, adds additional layers of meaning to this already complex novel.<sup>58</sup>

When read from cover to cover, I would argue that the novel almost reads like a seven act play, given that much of it is constructed through a combination of dialogues and inner monologues. Moreover, as is the case in traditional theater, the work takes place in one location,

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<sup>58</sup> Each of the seven sections of the main text represents a different course of the meal, including the Spanish tradition of the *sobremesa*, which has the potential to extend a dinner well into the evening. Of the seven courses—“Aperitivo” (“Appetizer”; 19-34); “Consomé” (“Clear Soup”; 35-42); “Congelados” (“Frozen [foods]”; 43-90); “Guarnición para adelgazar” (“First Course to Loose Weight”; 91-178); “Siempre salen del bolsillo interior” (“They Always Come Out of the Inside Pocket”; 179-92); “Cada mochuelo a su olivo” (“Time to Head Home”; 193-218); and “Otra vez la misma cara de la moneda” (“Once Again the Same Side of the Coin”; 217-19)—the last two could said to be representative of the *sobremesa*, the world of conversation, drinks and tobacco that follows a meal.

(the dinner party) deals with one theme (the upper class elite) and happens in less than twenty-four hours (in this case, it lasts the length of a long Spanish dinner). In addition, the descriptions of events, actions and people are so sparse that they often read more like stage directions than the words of a traditional narrator. The opening of the novel, for instance, sets the scene much like stage directions would in play:

Agresivo lujo burgués del comedor de cinco estrellas. Moquetas que ahogan los pasos, rebullir de camareros engalanados. Van y vienen entre las plantas tropicales, encaramadas a su cielo ilusorio. Fondo de música que nadie escucha. En una pared, un gran retrato: en general a caballo, replete de bríos y medallas, con una lejanía de explosiones e incendios, cadáveres, guerra. . . . Algo que despierta con viveza el escalofrío de la Historia nacional. Ajetreo sofocado de conversaciones, suavidad de pieles costosas, modelos de modistos destacados, una tolvana de perfumes . . . Ir y venir de camareros, prisas, órdenes calladas, múltiples bandejas en pertinaz ofrecimiento, el metre sudando a chorros, bocanadas de una cocina próxima, portazos, blasfemias sofocadas . . . (21-22)

Aggressive luxurious five-star Bourgeois dining room. Wall-to-wall carpets that drown the path [for] the stirring of the dressed up waiters. They come and go between the tropical plants, held on high in their illusory heaven. Background music nobody is listening to. On the wall, a great portrait: a general on horseback, complete with spirit and medals, with a far-off portrayal of explosions and fires, cadavers, war. . . .

Something that awakens the shiver of national History. The suffocating hustle and bustle of conversations, the softness of expensive furs, models of famous designers, [and] a dust storm of perfumes . . . The coming and going of waiters, haste, silenced orders, multiple trays of constant offerings, the *maitre d'* sweating streams, gusts from a nearby kitchen, doors slamming, suffocated blasphemies...

Instead of introducing us to specific characters, the narrator sets the scene by including a series of physical and auditory details similar to that of a dramatic work. The choppy description not only introduces us to the event that the reader will vicariously attend via the characters in the novel, but it also indicates the types of society that will be depicted. The descriptions of fur and jewels confirm the guests' affluent status in society, and the waiters are said to be running around working hard to satisfy the demanding group. The inclusion of the "portrait of a general" on the wall also suggests that the guests may have a particular pro-military (and possibly pro-

Franco) view of the world, further aligning them with a particular sector of high society Madrid.<sup>59</sup>

As I mentioned before, this type of description is quite rare in *Mesa, sobremesa*. Instead, the novel is primarily constructed through dialogue or the inclusion of inner monologues (and sometimes both simultaneously). This being said, it is not really surprising to learn that of the few critical articles that exist on *Mesa, sobremesa*, it most often has been studied for its linguistic value. For instance, Tudora Sandru Olteanu has argued that *Mesa, sobremesa* is an excellent record of colloquial Spanish of the “Transition” in general, which she proceeds to use as a sort of “archival” source in her discussion of colloquial speech in Post-Franco Spain. Carlos Galan echoes this view when he argues that dialogue plays an important role in helping the reader identify character types at the party because even though dialogue markers are noticeably absent from the text, we know who is talking primarily by *how* each character speaks (qtd. in Sánchez Lobato 187). Instead of discussing the potential political implications of *Mesa, sobremesa*, these early critics were exclusively motivated to discuss its formal qualities, a move that helped to keep Zamora Vicente’s novel contained within the literary realm.

In many ways, it is not surprising that Zamora Vicente’s *Mesa, sobremesa* has most often been studied for its form; given that the *way* the novel is written impacts the way the reader views the people and events it includes. The overall lack of punctuation and indications of who is speaking in many sections, for instance, serve to capture the overall tone of the evening itself as

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<sup>59</sup> In other instances in the text, some of the characters’ allegiances to the Franco regime are made quite explicit. In describing her recently deceased father-in-law, Rosenda specifically compares his more conservative views of society to the guest of honor: “[mi suegro] siempre fue de derechas, de derechas de toda la vida, igualito que el boceras éste del homenaje. Compañeros de Universidad, de mili en paz y en guerra de empresas de cacerías...” (“[my father-in-law] was also to the right, a rightist for life, much like the mouth scum of the guest of honor. University classmates, in the military in times of peace and in times of war in the business of hunting...”; 116).

“trivial” or void of any “real” meaning, where everything that is said seemingly runs together into a cacophony of voices and opinions. In one point in the novel, there are two women talking but their dialogue is written without breaks for paragraphs or tag lines of who said what; instead the reader is forced to keep track of the back and forth nature of the conversation. Moreover, the things they say are so trivial and disconnected it does not really matter which one of them is speaking; what is really of importance is the banality of their conversation. At the end of their dialogue, for example, one of the speakers makes the comment that women still do not have the right to “speak out” for themselves (*rechistar*), which is followed by her interlocutor’s trivial need to know the name of the fish they just ate (52).<sup>60</sup>

In other parts of the novel, the pages are divided into two sections, the top half of which includes a dialogue between two or more guests at the party on a variety of topics ranging from serious discussions of the nation (105) to more frivolous comments about how great it is to travel by train (52-62). The bottom part of the page, however, is written in italics, does not include any paragraph breaks and represents the continuous stream of thoughts of one of the people involved in the conversation. Sánchez Lobato describes the novel’s tendency to jump around as an attempt to employ a type of “multiple flash” (40); not a detailed image, but rather a small look at different (often contradictory) aspects that define this upper class world. For his own part, Penalva has described Zamora Vicente’s novel as a “polyphonic discourse,” given that the novel does not try to recreate any specific conversation or event that takes place throughout the course of the evening. Instead, it is as if the reader is a fly on the wall that is only able to catch a glimpse of the many micro-narratives that are taking place throughout the party (345).

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<sup>60</sup> In this respect, it is important to note that women’s rights were becoming an increasingly important topic at this moment in time; in fact, Carmen Conde was only elected as the first female member of the Spanish Royal Academy one year earlier in 1979 and divorce was not legal in Spain until 1981.

When Casilda is introduced in the third part of the first section, for instance, although the reader may not completely understand everything by *what* is said (mostly due to a lack of context), but s/he is able to discern that what is said does not always match what is thought by the *way* the words appear on the page. I will quote the first page of the section at length, so as to give an idea of how structure and typography work together to create a sense of simultaneity and to capture the overlapping nature of what goes on in a conversation.

--¡Casilda, hijita, qué miedo tenía de no encontrarte!... Si no llegas a venir...  
--¿Y por qué no iba a venir? ¿Cómo iba a faltar yo a esta reunión, niña?  
--¿Quieres calamares? Están bomba, mi amor. Huy, mira, mira, ya llega don Mario, el espiritista, un tipo muy cachondo, de veras, se para fenómeno con él... Procura que nos sentemos cerca, será la mejor manera de sobrellevar este banquete. Adivino cada plasta...!  
--¿Sí...? A mí no me enrolla todo ese lío de los difuntos escondidos en la mesa Camilla, ¿sabes? A otro perro...  
--¡Hija, siempre tan así, qué barbaridad!... ¡Anda, proporcióname un pedazo de empanada, voy a buscar un sitito para sentarme...

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*Tengo que venir, exhibir mi viudedad, sonreír, no queda otro remedio, hay que pasar por muchas cosas, porque, luego, que si los ascensos, que si el mal humor del jefe, y las becas para los chicos, ojalá haga Dios que no me toque al lado de ese fulano que a cada paso se anda con sus chistecitos de mal gusto, payasadas viejas, reviejas, y sus insinuaciones, no me extraña nada de lo que dicen por ahí, si le corona o no le corona la mujer, a ver, . . . (27)*

--Casilda, sweetie, I was afraid I wouldn't see you here... If you weren't coming...  
--And why wouldn't I come? How could I miss this reunion, girl?  
--Do you want some calamari? They are gorgeous, my love. Ohhh, look, look, don Mario, the spiritualist just arrived, [he] is a real scream, with that cat, for real, one has a good time... Make sure we sit close to him, it will be the best way for us to survive this banquet. I can already envision all the boring people...  
--Oh yeah? I just can't let myself get caught up in this whole thing with dead people hidden under stretchers, you know? To someone else...  
--Girl, you're always like this, what madness!...Come on, cut me a slice of empanada, I am going to look for somewhere to sit...

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*I have to come, show off my widowhood, smile, there's no solution, one must go through a lot, because, later, whether it's a promotion, or the boss's bad mood, and the scholarships for kids, hopefully God won't allow me to sit next to*



*Joe-Blow over there who keeps telling little dirty jokes, the clown-like women, the old ones and their insinuations, nothing they say strikes me as odd, if they crown or if they don't crown the woman, let's see, . . .*

As this excerpt illustrates, both the conversation and the inner monologue that accompanies it, only slightly make sense. The reader doesn't know with whom Casilda is speaking, for instance, nor does the reader completely understand all of her complaints on the bottom half of the page. Instead, what the reader takes away is the frivolous nature of their conversation, and the idea that not everyone in the room is excited to be there.

In fact, throughout the novel, we learn that essentially everyone would rather be somewhere else (especially the servers). Even the guest of honor is shown to have a negative attitude towards the event. In a later section with a similar structure to the one analyzed above, the guest of honor happily shakes hands with several of the guests on the top part of the page, while the bottom of the pages shows him bitterly thinking to himself:

*Toda esta tropa que está aquí, puros hambrones, sebosos de las narices, no saben lo que se pescan, tiene uno que aguantarles al infinito, todos me deben algo, y algo de importancia, aquella escrofulosa pintarrajeada, parece un quetzal guatemalteco, pues su maridito del alma sobrevive porque yo le he prestado el dinero que necesitó cuando la trampa de la inmobiliaria. (71)*

*This whole troop that is here, a bunch of hungry [wolves], greasy up to their noses, they don't know what they are fishing for, one has to put up with them infinitely, all of them owe me something, something of importance, that scrupulous [written phonetically in the original to indicate a Madrilenian accent] woman with clown make-up, seems like a Guatemalan quetzal [a colorful bird typical of Guatemala], well her little beloved husband survives because I lent him the money he needed when the housing trap [occurred].*

The world of the social elite is thus presented as a highly frivolous and superficial one.

Throughout the dinner, the reader becomes increasingly aware that everyone in the room is playing a role at the party—that is, nobody really says or does anything they genuinely feel. Instead, they are all there to *aparentar* ('to appear'/'to be seen').

Though these high power figures seemingly have control of many realms of high society from the press and politics to universities and religious organizations, the idea of literature they seemingly uphold is one that may not be as relevant in the democratic period. Perhaps this explains why twice in the novel Zamora Vicente explicitly draws a line between his works and the view that high society has of art by presenting himself as an outsider of this group. Towards the end of the novel, for instance, the party has ended and as Casilda walks home she thinks to herself:

*...qué bueno llegar a casa, descalzarte, echarte sobre la cama, tomar la taza de té que te traen calladamente, ojear el periódico, mirar la tele . . . y si la tele no ayuda, porque nos han colocado una de esas gringadas violentas, que ponen nervioso a cualquiera . . . leeré alguna página de Zamora Vicente, una página de material dialectal, y entonces será infalible la llegada del sueño, a ver, tanta y tanta fricativa, tanto y tanto tejemaneje foneticolexicomorfosintáctico, ya casi me estoy cayendo sólo de pensarlo... (204)*

*...how nice it is to arrive home, take off your shoes, throw yourself on the bed, drink a cup of tea that is quietly brought to you, flip through the newspaper, watch the tele . . . and if the television doesn't help, because they are showing one of those violent gringo movies, that make everyone feel nervous . . . I will read a page from Zamora Vicente, a page of dialectical material, and then the arrival of sleep will be infallible, that is, so many fricatives and such phoneticallexicalmorphologicalsyntactical bustle, I can already feel myself getting sleepy just thinking about it...*

Although Casilda's opinion here does not necessarily reflect that of others, as someone who has attended the celebratory dinner and doesn't even have to make her own cup of tea, it might be safe to assume that she is a member of the privileged elite. Although it is unclear whether she is referring to Zamora Vicente's scientific or literary works, Casilda's opinion that his books are only useful for putting one to sleep not only adds an element of humor to the novel, but it also indirectly places the author in a separate category from the type of texts that one might typically consume in high society. Finally, the fact that Casilda categorizes Zamora Vicente's works as

she does, places them in a non-ideological realm, one that does not cause any tension for the reader, good or bad.

This idea of Zamora Vicente as an outsider is also one that the author himself upholds in the prologue to *Mesa, sobremesa*. The prologue, or “Carta-prólogo” (“Letter-Prologue”) is written in the form of a letter addressed to José Luis Sastre, the director of the publishing house that published the novel. In the first paragraph of this short text, Zamora Vicente explains that he has written the “Carta-Prólogo” “*para cumplir con los hábitos editoriales*” (“*to comply with editorial norms*”), but has decided to do so in his own comical way: in the form of a letter to the editor. “*Cuando usted lea mi carta*” (“*when you read my letter*”), he goes on to say in the second paragraph, “*estoy seguro [que] telefonaré a más de uno de nuestros comunes amigos para comprobar si le engaño o no... ¿A que sí? . . .*” (“*I am sure [that] you will call more than one of our common friends to find out if I am tricking you or not... Isn't that right? . . .*”; 7). I suppose if Sastre did call up his friends to find out if Zamora Vicente was serious, in the end, it seems he did take the author seriously; not only was the “Carta-prólogo” printed with *Mesa, sobremesa*, but also every critical article I have read mentions it for one reason or another (Sánchez Lobato; Penalva).

This type of mocking or sarcastic tone continues throughout the “Carta-prólogo,” as the author proceeds to use its inclusion as a means of distancing himself (and his text) from the social group the novel portrays. In the first part of the letter, for instance, the author offers the reader an overview of his early texts. Instead of focusing on the texts themselves, however (as many prologues might), the “Carta-prólogo” primarily focuses on the way Zamora Vicente’s texts have been received by the critics. Specifically, the prologue mentions that Zamora Vicente’s first novel *Primeras hojas* was heavily criticized by the literary community for not

adhering to proper rules of punctuation or spelling. Another critic disparaged the way the novel was constructed, complaining that Zamora Vicente's was a pathetic attempt at copying James Joyce, to which the author responds, "*Vaya por Dios*" ("*What a shame*"; 8). His second novel, *Smith y Ramírez, S. A.* (1957), was chastised by critics for representing the world of letters a little too diligently. Some critics even advised him not to publish it so as to not offend anyone in particular (8-9). No matter what the critics reproached him with, however, it seems that Zamora Vicente may have had a somewhat defiant attitude towards this group's view of his works, given that *Mesa, sobremesa* not only includes phonetically spelled words and nonstandard punctuation, but it too could be said to represent the high society it portrays a little too closely.<sup>61</sup>

In addition to having an irreverent, if not rebellious, attitude towards the way critics have received his works, Zamora Vicente also contemplates the (in)utility of prologues in general by comparing some of the worst and best ones that have been included with his works. He specifically criticizes one critic for the convoluted way he introduced one of his later works (9), and he praises his good friend Camilo José Cela for writing a prologue that aptly captured and recognized Zamora Vicente's literary talent.<sup>62</sup> Essentially, Zamora Vicente's entire prologue can be read as a bold declaration of the artist's ability to refuse to be influenced by his critics. No

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<sup>61</sup> Zamora Vicente tells us that at least one early reader of the novel "*juzgaba absolutamente insufrible que yo, un hombre con figura social . . . hiciese tan pertinaz exhibición de mi mala leche*" ("*he judged it absolutely insufferable that I, a man of social status . . . would make such an obstinate exhibition of my nastiness*"; 13). Another of his critics suggested that he remove the scatological references from Rosenda's story, but he left them in (the story she tells about her grandfather's gastronomical problems takes up about eight pages of the novel and includes several grotesque details; 116-124).

<sup>62</sup> In this same section Zamora Vicente also mentions that he and Cela were great friends: "Camilo y yo somos amigos desde los diecisiete, los dieciocho años. . . . Y debemos ser análogamente raros, figúrese, aún nos gusta juntarnos a charlar, a pasear" ("Camilo and I have been friends since we were seventeen or eighteen. . . . And we must be equally weird, imagine, we still like to get together to chat, to walk around"; 10).

matter what they may think of his work, throughout his career Zamora Vicente continued to make art according to his own standards and artistic preferences.

As a means of addressing his critics more directly, the “Carta-prólogo” ends with the authorial voice asking his characters for advice on how to deal with the various suggestions his erudite friends might offer him with respect to the novel. One character asks him to tone down the details of her affair, which he does. Another helps him come up with the novel’s title: “*Se tardará en leer su crónica más o menos lo que dura una comida larga, con una sobremesa bien nutrida de eructos, somnolencia y majaderías. ¿Por que no llamar a su relato así, sin más, Mesa, sobremesa*”? “*It will take about the same amount of time to read your book as it would to have a long meal, with a nice long sobremesa with lots of burps, sleepiness and stupidity. Why don’t you call the book like that, nothing more, After Dinner Conversation*”?”; 15). By speaking to the characters directly, the “Carta-prólogo” blurs the lines between reality and fiction, which serves as a rhetorical reminder to any potential critics to keep the fictional nature of the work in mind upon consuming each page.<sup>63</sup>

In the closing paragraph, the authorial voice begs Sastre (the editor) to “take care of the text,” and also requests that he “*haga repasar la ortografía. No quiero trifulcas luego*” (“*revise the spelling. I don’t want commotion later*”; 15). In closing his comical prologue as such, Zamora Vicente acknowledges that his text will be read and judged by the same types of characters that appear in the novel. Having learned what poor punctuation and spelling can do for a text in the world of letters, he is particularly careful to request that Sastre edit these things for him before the novel comes out. This request is of course moot, given that the novel intentionally

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<sup>63</sup> One of his characters even seeks out Cervantes for advice. Such a detail has both a comic effect and it also serves to further distance Zamora Vicente’s fictional world from reality.

includes various misspellings of words and often lacks standard punctuation markers. The demand, much like the prologue itself, is thus a mere gesture that mimics the same social conventions the novel ridicules.

If we take these sarcastic comments and gestures at face value, we might assume that for the real Zamora Vicente, literature *should not* be the product of opinions and formal practices as it is portrayed in the pages of the novel (and mocked in the prologue). Instead, it should be something else. When looking at the great care with which *Mesa, sobremesa* was written and constructed we might conclude that this something else is related to literature's unique ability to create fictional worlds and to portray them in unique ways. What's more, we could likewise assume that the members of the jury that decided to issue the National Award to Zamora Vicente that year were of a similar opinion. Perhaps they too were hoping that the prize would serve as recognition of the author's achievements and as a means of promoting a particular idea of literature as a separate space.

As a material object that was sold in bookstores, however, the novel's lack of popularity also tells us that Zamora Vicente's novel may have had very little 'literary' influence in democratic Spain. After all, if a text is no longer read, can it really still be said to form part of society's idea of literature? Does society's opinion of literature even matter? In looking at the way Zamora Vicente's text has been received, I would have to say that though society's opinion of a text does matter to a certain extent; it most certainly does not affect a text's literariness. As we have seen in this section, *Mesa, sobremesa* depicts literature as a discipline that is, in part, informed by social practices and opinions. As a novel, however, *Mesa, sobremesa* also proves that literature is something else that is more difficult to define; it is an art that creates worlds not

for their *meaning*, but for their very *existence*, a quality that is present in many National Award-winning novels.

### 3.3 *The Essence of Art and the Search for Meaning in El invierno en Lisboa*

In her analysis of what she calls the more “mystical” side of Literature, Garber includes a few lines from a poem by Archibald MacLeish as a means of explaining what literature *is* from this perspective:

A poem should be equal to:  
Not true.  
And  
A poem should not mean  
But be. (qtd. in Garber 10-11)

Indeed, the debate over the use of literature—as something that *should* transport meaning or as something that simply *is*—is one that has dominated literary circles for centuries. Instead of representing opposing views, however, when looked at more closely we see that the two positions are actually quite interrelated. After all, a text cannot “mean” anything if it goes unread. Likewise, for a text “to exist”—or be present in society in any meaningful way—it must continue to be consumed and interpreted by readers, whose search for “meaning” is part of what helps turn literary works into great works of literature.

The reader thus plays an essential role in perpetuating both the “existence” and “meaning” of literary texts. As a result, literary texts can never fully be separate from the real societies in which they are produced. After all, the very act of reading itself depends on a cultural text’s intelligibility, which is, in part, informed by the society in which it circulates. That is, the reading public must be able to comprehend the linguistic signs and the artistic or cultural references present in a text for it to continue to *be* or to acquire *meaning*, which may vary over time. Often

what causes a text to fall out of favor (and therefore cease to “exist”) is that it is perceived to be unintelligible or culturally irrelevant in some way. Consequently, literary texts are always bound to the outside world, despite any attempts a narrator, author, or National Award may make to remove all connections to external reality.

In the following pages, I would like to explore further this idea by analyzing the way “art” is represented in Antonio Muñoz Molina’s *El invierno en Lisboa* (“Winter in Lisbon”; 1987). As it is a novel about a musician who travels from town to town, I argue that *El invierno en Lisboa* portrays the production and consumption of art as ephemeral experiences that are connected to, yet also distanced from the so-called ‘real world.’ As I will show, much as music is portrayed as being capable of carrying the listener into another realm, Muñoz Molina’s text uses the written word to paint a world of its own making, a world that relies on a logic that is internal to the novel itself yet is also informed by its paratexts, including the awards it wins and how it is perceived by the reading public.

Antonio Muñoz Molina (1956- ) was born in in the town of Úbeda, in the eastern part of the Autonomous Community of Andalusia in southern Spain. As one of few in his rural community (and family) to pursue a university education, Muñoz Molina often felt like an outsider growing up. Thus, after completing his degrees in art history at the University of Granada and in journalism in Madrid, the author established permanent residence in Granada where he lived and worked as a journalist and writer for twenty years. This is not to say that the author ever lost his agrarian roots. On the contrary, his first novel, *Beatus ille* (1986), which is set in the fictional town of Mágina, was heavily influenced by the author’s rural background.



Although *Beatus ille* was generally well received by the literary community, it was the publication of his second novel, *El invierno en Lisboa* (“Winter in Lisbon”; 1987) that really set his career in motion. As critic Salvador A. Oropesa explains:

Esta novela obtuvo en 1988 el doblete del Premio Nacional de Literatura y el de Crítica, lo que implica que el mundo de la literatura la recibió muy bien. Además, fue un best-seller, fue adaptada al cine y traducida a varios idiomas, entre ellos, el francés y el alemán. Es decir, el público lector la convirtió en un éxito. Esto es importante porque indica que hay excepciones al divorcio entre crítica y público mayoritario, el axioma que se ha mantenido desde la vanguardia, de que sólo la literatura minoritaria podía ser de calidad. Y, lo más importante, consagró a Antonio Muñoz Molina y le permitió convertirse en un escritor profesional. (55)

In 1988 this novel obtained the double [honor] of winning the National Award in Literature and the Critic’s [Award], which implies that it was well received by the literary world. In addition, it was a best seller, it was made into a movie and translated into various languages, including French and German. In other words, the reading public turned it into a success. This is important because it indicates that there are exceptions to the divorce between criticism and the public at large, the axiom that has been maintained since the *avant-garde*, that only minority literature could be of value. And, more importantly, [the novel] consecrated Antonio Muñoz Molina’s career and it allowed him to become a professional writer.

With this one novel, not only was Antonio Muñoz Molina able to make writing his full-time profession, but the institutions involved in promoting his text were likewise able to benefit, or “use” *El invierno en Lisboa* for their own purposes. It was an ideal text to win the National Award in Narrative Literature, in particular, given that the cosmopolitan view of society the text upholds, matches well the Europeanization of Spain that was occurring at the time. After all, the novel came out in 1988, just two years after Spain had entered the European Union.

Even though, as we will see, there are several factors that connect the novel to its historical moment in time, overall, *El invierno en Lisboa* is a work with very few direct references to reality. In fact, in one interview, Muñoz Molina said that his aim in writing the novel was to “resaltar lo literario de la literatura” (“highlight the literariness of literature”; qtd. in

Ferrari). Like many prize-winning novels of the democratic period, *El invierno de Lisboa* is a fragmented and highly artistic text. The central plot takes place in various European cities—Berlin, Lisbon, Madrid, San Sebastián, amongst others—and revolves around the tale of Santiago Biralbo, a musician, who falls in love with Lucrecia, a married woman. The novel includes twenty chapters and is told primarily from the perspective of the narrator (who remains nameless throughout), as he listens to Biralbo talk about his relationship with Lucrecia and the many adventurous (and sometimes dangerous) situations that their illicit affair embroils them in.

Though he plays a major role, there are very few descriptions of the narrator in the novel. He is never physically described, his profession is not mentioned; essentially, the reader knows nothing about him except that he is Biralbo's friend (Rich 59). Instead, like the reader, the narrator serves as Biralbo's interlocutor for much of the novel as he listens to the musician account his many encounters with Lucrecia. For literary critic Salvador A. Oropesa, the narrative technique in *El invierno en Lisboa* is particularly effective "porque al ser alguien quien sólo conoce las historias parcialmente, obliga a los lectores a estar muy atentos y a tener que buscar pistas que confirmen lo afirmado" ("because in being someone who only partially knows the stories, it forces the reader to be very attentive and to have to look for clues that confirm that which has been affirmed"; 18). Much as the sidekick in classical detective fiction, the narrator and reader work together from the same ignorant position to piece together the sordid love affair between Biralbo and Lucrecia.<sup>64</sup>

The novel begins with the narrator encountering Biralbo in Madrid after not having seen him for two years, and the conversation that ensues leads to a series of flashbacks that inform the

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<sup>64</sup> In his analysis of the novel, Jaime Aguilera García argues that the narrator of *El invierno en Lisboa* functions as a modern-day "Watson" who accompanies the detective, Sherlock Holmes (in this case Biralbo), as he attempts to solve the mystery. For more, see Aguilera García.

reader about Biralbo's romantic involvement with Lucrecia and how the two were hunted by Lucrecia's husband, Bruce Malcom, because of a murder and a stolen Cezanne painting. It is a novel full of intrigue and suspense, yet it is also a highly metafictional novel in which artistic creation is constantly on display, which helps to contain the characters' adventures within the literary realm. As López-Valero Colbert has argued, "there is a high degree of self-reflection in this novel, in the sense that we perceive the creative process of music, and the musician's task is equated to the writer's task" (111). In other words, in addition to the central plot, *El invierno en Lisboa* is also about the production and essence of artistic expression, a quality that was both praised and abhorred by the critics.

In his analysis of the reception of *El invierno en Lisboa*, Oropesa argues that despite the novel's success in the public sphere, the provincial newspapers did not have a uniform view of its literary merit. For some, such as journalist Ramón Jiménez Madrid, *El invierno en Lisboa* was a literary masterpiece because "Muñoz Molina procede desde la imaginación literaria antes que desde la realidad de una España concreta y específica" ("Muñoz Molina stems from literary imagination rather than from a concrete and specific [idea of] Spain"; qtd. in Oropesa 55). Provincial journalist Manuel Villamor, on the other hand, expressed a much more negative view of the novel when he referred to *El invierno en Lisboa* as an "entertaining novel" that

...nada dice, poco aporta, a no ser esas brillantes frases cursis la mayoría insistentes, y metáforas fugaces, continuas y enloquecedoras, que si bien es cierto que abruman a lo largo de la obra, no llegan a cansar de forma absoluta, como para que abandonemos el libro para mejor ocasión, cuando el ánimo se muestre dispuesto a entretenerse con obras de diversión y futilidades. (56)

...says nothing, contributes little, except for these brilliant empty phrases the majority of which are repeated, and fleeting metaphors, continuous and maddening, that although they appear throughout the work, do not manage to take on any exact form at the end, it is as if we are to abandon the work for a better moment, when we are in the mood to be entertained by futile works for fun.

Although at first glance these two viewpoints may seem entirely opposed, when looked at more closely, we see that they form part of the same logic. That is, both critics view *El invierno en Lisboa* as a highly artistic literary work. What makes their views differ, then, is the value each places on this quality. For Jiménez Madrid, who represents the more dominant view of the novel, the fact that *El invierno en Lisboa* is more “literary” than “real” is what makes it so exceptional. Villamor, on the other hand, perceives the text’s lack of an overt moral message—or any other discernable connection to reality—as a weakness. For him, *El invierno en Lisboa* is not “high art” because it is not morally engaged in bigger social issues.

In many ways, the two viewpoints of Muñoz Molina’s novel mirror the debates over the “value” or “use” of literature that I outlined in the first part of this chapter. That is, for the latter it is a flaw that *El invierno en Lisboa* is not an overtly political or ‘socially useful’ novel, but for the former this is one of its strengths. For my own part, I tend to agree with Jiménez Madrid that *El invierno en Lisboa* is a highly artistic novel that plays with the written word in intriguing ways. Yet, I also agree with Villamor that what takes place in the novel is largely irrelevant or “futile,” except that unlike Villamor, I do not see these as negative qualities, but rather as evidence of a particular view of literature’s ideal purpose to exist for “its own sake.”

In fact, one of the most striking things about *El invierno en Lisboa* is the way it distances itself from reality by constructing the narration through a wide variety of artistic genres and styles. To begin with, due to its structure, tone and content, the novel has often been interpreted as a tribute to *film noir*. Critic Ana Carlota Larrea, for instance, has analyzed the many references to urban settings, the inclusion of a *femme fatal* character and the focus on late night culture in general as intertextual references to the filmic genre. The novel also includes references to many other cultural products and artistic genres as well—from literature and music

to television and the plastic arts.<sup>65</sup> For this reason, there has been a tendency amongst critics to refer to *El invierno en Lisboa* as a ‘postmodern text.’<sup>66</sup> References to mass culture appear so frequently throughout the novel that popular culture could be said to form the foundation of the characters’ worldviews. Phrases such as, “I had the strange feeling I was in a movie” (27) or that such-and-such character “had read too many books” (39) can be found in nearly every chapter.<sup>67</sup>

For his own part, Oropesa has argued that the references to popular culture are so frequent that it is almost as if the novel aims to suggest that “la cultura popular y masiva se ha convertido en nuestra historia colectiva” (“popular and mass culture have become our collective history”; 61). Although I agree with Oropesa in principle that the characters’ world is largely influenced by popular culture, I do not think this necessarily reflects “our collective history.” Rather, it is my contention that the multiple references to popular culture contribute to the multilayered literariness of the novel. Not only are characters frequently described through references to popular culture, but also the texts they mention are often just as imaginary as the characters themselves. At one point in the novel, for instance, the narrator is listening to

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<sup>65</sup> López-Valero Colbert has argued that: “the writing in this novel attempts to resemble jazz” in many ways: improvisation, rhythm, repetition in structure (there is a constant recurrence of encounters, disappearances, smoke, etc.” (112-13). Similarly, Olympia González contends that the novel is similar to jazz because in “el efecto evocativo compite con la descripción.” (“the evocative effect competes with description”; 43). Instead of representing an homage to jazz music, however, for González *El invierno en Lisboa* is a parody of the genre (42).

<sup>66</sup> This shift towards postmodernism is evident in several works of the 1980s and 1990s. In some cases like *El invierno en Lisboa*, texts are “postmodern” because they mix genres. In other cases, they are considered postmodern because they mix styles and perspectives such as Bernardo Atxaga’s *Obabakoak* (1988, National Award 1989). In almost all instances, however, postmodern texts are *pastiche*, in that they do not discriminate between higher and lower forms of art (Labanyi, “Conclusion” 402).

<sup>67</sup> In the third chapter of her book, López-Valero Colbert argues that the characters in *El invierno en Lisboa* are similar to Cervantes’s classic character, don Quijote, in the sense that the cultural texts they consume influence the way they perceive reality.

Biralbo's band play a song called "Burma." As the song plays, the narrator is reminded of abandoned streets, the tinted glare of a nearby streetlight, and men with guns that flee because they are chased by shadows. Then suddenly the narrator has a realization, "ese recuerdo que agravaron la soledad y la música no pertenece a mi vida, estoy seguro, sino a una película que tal vez vi en la infancia y cuyo título nunca llegaré a saber" ("the recollection grew more vivid as I listened, alone, but I knew it wasn't mine; perhaps it came from a film I saw as a child, whose title I'll never know, called by the persecution and terror in that song"; 24; 15).<sup>68</sup> Within this example the layers of fiction seem endless: the narrator, a literary character, is listening to a fictional song that conjures up particular emotions and images for him that are based not on real life, but on a fictional movie, whose title cannot be remembered and so remains in the realm of the imaginary as well.

What's more, as many critics have pointed out, though they may seem quite "real" (or at least realistic), in the novel not one of the characters is based on real people. As Thomas R. Franz has argued, "although the details are highly specific, too many are attributable or inaccurate. No single pianist, to the exclusion of others, fulfills all of the requirements necessary to be Santiago Biralbo" (Franz 162). Thus, like the music the character hears, the people and places referred to in the novel are not real, but rather they are fictional types that only gesture towards concrete reality without actually reaching it. Because the references to reality are so ambiguous, the reader is forced to fill in the gaps with his/her own image of the type of cultural product or feeling the text describes (there are many songs the reader may imagine, for instance,

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<sup>68</sup> All English translations are taken from Sonia Soto's version of the novel, published in 1999.

that are capable of evoking images of dark street corners and feelings of sadness, as “Burma” does for the narrator).

Perhaps more telling of this quality is the novel’s portrayal of Biralbo as a musician. According to Muñoz Molina, Santiago Biralbo’s race and the word “jazz” are never mentioned in the novel, even though nearly every critical article I have read states that Biralbo is a “black jazz musician” (Costenla).<sup>69</sup> The reader may infer that the characters are jazz musicians by the instruments they play—the trumpet, the piano, the bass and the drums—but the text does not make it explicit. Thus, the overwhelming tendency to refer the novel as a work about a “jazz musician” is indicative of the ways in which readers are influenced by their own historical contexts. For a twentieth/twenty-first century reader, the textual references and descriptions of music would nearly always point to “jazz” even though this concept does not necessarily exist in the novel itself.<sup>70</sup>

As for the musician’s race, I think Muñoz Molina may have been a little mistaken when he said that the color of Biralbo’s skin is *never* mentioned. In one part of the novel, for instance the narrator makes the following observation about the group’s chemistry: “Mirando al contrabajista pensé que esa manera de sonreír es más frecuente en los negros, y que está llena de desafío y orgullo. . . . pensé también que el baterista nórdico, tan ensimismado y a su aire, pertenecía a otro linaje, y que entre Biralbo y el contrabajista había una especial de complicidad racial” (“Looking at the bass player, I reflected that Biralbo’s smile, defiant and proud, was more

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<sup>69</sup> Interestingly, as a member of the *Real Academia Española* (The Spanish Royal Academy), Muñoz Molina was asked to write the definition for “jazz” for the entry in the *RAE*’s well-known dictionary (López-Valero Colbert 114).

<sup>70</sup> At one point in the text, Biralbo does compare all of the multiple events that unfold in his life because of Lucrecia as working together “como los instrumentos de una banda de jazz” (“like the different instruments in a jazz band”; 96; 89).

common in black people. . . . it occurred to me that the Nordic drummer, so lost in himself, was of a different lineage, but between Biralbo and the bassist there was a kind of racial complicity”; 11; 3). Although the novel does not explicitly state that Biralbo is black, as this quote shows, it most certainly implies it. Similarly, most critics agree that the novel does not take place at any particular historical moment (López-Valero Colbert 115), and yet chapter six begins with the bar owner Floro Bloom’s backstory, who is said to have grown up in Canada until the 1970s because his parents left Spain due to “persecuciones políticas de las que no hablaba nunca” (“political persecutions which he never talked about”; 57; 49). Thus, even though there are very few images in the text that derive from “the real world,” the more ambiguous details ultimately do take on “real world” meanings as the written word takes shape within the reader’s imagination.

This ability of art to hint at, but not faithfully reproduce life is also echoed within the novel itself. In the same excerpt analyzed above, the narrator goes on to specify why listening to the song “Burma” made him think of the unspecified “sad” movie:

porque en aquella música había persecución y había terror, y todas las cosas que yo vislumbraba en ella o en mí mismo estaban contenidas en esa sola palabra, *Burma*, y en la lentitud de augurio con que la pronunciaba Billy Swann [el cantante del grupo]: Burma o Birmania, no el país que uno mira en los mapas o en los diccionarios sino una dura sonoridad o un conjuro de algo: yo repetía sus dos sílabas y encontraba en ellas, bajo los golpes de tambor que las acentuaban en la música, otras palabras anteriores de un idioma rudamente confiado a las inscripciones en piedra y a las tablas de arcilla: palabras demasiado oscuras que no pudieran ser descifradas sin profanación. (24)

[the recollection of the film was] called up by the persecution and terror in that song. All the things I glimpsed in the music or in myself were contained in a single word, ‘Burma’, and in the way Billy Swann [the singer of the group] pronounced it with slow foreboding. *Burma*. Not the name of the country as it appears on a map or in a dictionary, but a hard sound, an incantation. I repeated its two syllables and found there, beneath the drumbeats emphasizing them in the music, words from an ancient language crudely inscribed on stone, or clay tablets, obscure words, indecipherable without sacrilege. (15-16).



Though the narrator is listening to the band play, his focus on the word “Burma” connects his musings with the novel itself. After all, if “Burma” is merely a sonorous referent in the song, it is likewise so within the pages of the text. Instead of describing a real place “one sees on the map,” the novel empties “Burma” of its social connotations and fills its linguistic signs with its own conceptual metaphors. No longer a city, “Burma” becomes a symbol of an ancient need to cry out in the night, to capture feelings in artistic ways—through song, the printed page, or on clay tablets, as it were—and to record (and thus continue to relive) reality not as a series of concrete events with *meaning*, but as a sensorial experience that is *felt* or intuited.

Even the narrator makes a similar observation after listening to Biralbo speak for hours when he comments,

Noto que en esta historia casi lo único que sucede son los nombres: el nombre de Lisboa y el de Lucrecia, el título de esa brumosa canción que aún sigo escuchando. Los nombres, como la música, me dijo una vez Biralbo con la sabiduría de la tercera o cuarta ginebra, arrancan del tiempo a los seres y a los lugares que aluden, instituyen el presente sin otras armas que el misterio de su sonoridad. (89)

I realize that in this story what happens is limited to names—Lisbon, Lucrecia, the title of that hazy song I still listen to. Names, like music, Biralbo once said with the wisdom of the third or fourth gin, take the people and places they refer to out of time, and evoke the present simply with their mysterious sound. (82)

The first line of this quote is particularly telling, as the use of the phrase “I realize that in *this* story” could be understood as a reference to the stories he hears from Biralbo, and it could likewise be understood as a reference to the novel itself. After all, the novel also carries the image of Lisbon in its title and it too “evokes the present with its own mysterious sound,” words. What’s more, this idea that music, literature and perhaps art in general are forces that establish the present is one that is echoed throughout the novel. At one point, for instance, Biralbo insists that “un músico está siempre en el vacío. Su música deja de existir en el instante en que ha terminado de tocarla. Es el puro presente” (“a musician always operates in a void. His [or her]

music ceases to exist the moment he [or she] stops playing. It's pure present.”; 13-14; 5).

Similarly, a literary text such as *El invierno en Lisboa* could likewise be said to only exist as it is being read.

Moreover, the novel is seemingly aware of this limitation. In fact, on the last page when Lucrecia comes to Biralbo's hotel room only to find the narrator sitting alone instead of her musician/lover as she expected, without saying anything she simply walks away and, as he watches her, the narrator thinks to himself: “Reconocí en su manera de andar mientras cruzaba la calle, ya a convertida en una lejana mancha blanca entre la multitud, perdida en ella, invisible, súbitamente borrada tras los paraguas abiertos y los automóviles, como si nunca hubiera existido” (“I recognized her way of walking as she crossed the street, now a distant white smudge in the crowd, lost in it, invisible, suddenly erased behind the open umbrella and cars, as if she never existed”; 221; 213). Much as the song begins to fade from existence as soon as it stops playing, the story of Lucrecia too fades off into the distance as the novel ends. Moreover, the last line of the novel, she walked away “as if she never existed,” further ties the narrator's story to the realm of fiction by reminding the reader that none of the characters in the novel are “real.”

We see another example of this “not real” quality of art highlighted when Biralbo tells the narrator about his encounter with Lucrecia in Lisbon. While he waits for Lucrecia to freshen up, Biralbo stares at the stolen Cezanne painting—the reason for which they were pursued by her husband, Malcom Bruce—and the narrator imagines Biralbo thinking to himself: “Como algunas veces el amor y casi siempre la música, aquella pintura le hacía entender la posibilidad moral de una extraña e inflexible justicia, de un orden casi siempre secreto que modelaba el azar y volvía habitable el mundo y no era de este mundo” (“The painting—like love sometimes, and music nearly always—made him understand the moral possibility of a strange, inexorable justice, an

order, nearly always hidden, that shaped destiny and made the world habitable"; 188; 179). Here, the musician (and, by default, the narrator) does not value the painting for *what* it depicts, but for *how* it makes him feel. In other words, that which makes art "great" is not its "use" or "value," but rather its more mystical qualities, its "strange, inexorable justice" and "hidden orders."

In many ways, it is precisely literature's slight distance from reality that allows a given work to inspire multiple readings. In fact, the entire discipline of literary studies is predicated on this idea. Whereas for much of the twentieth century, literary scholarship almost exclusively centered on discussions of the artistic merits of literary texts and the lives of the authors who wrote them, over the last forty years or so, however, literary criticism has evolved to include theories from many adjacent fields, such as anthropology, history, and philosophy that have expanded the vocabulary and the manner with which critics approach the study of literature. As part of this so called "cultural turn," the sociopolitical context in which a text was produced became just as important as the work itself. One of the pitfalls of this approach, however, as Garber points out, is that within this mindset "literature is often undervalued or misunderstood as something that needs to be applied to the experiences of life" (13). In *El invierno en Lisboa* this idea of literature as something that *should* always be applied to real life is one that is visible both in the novel itself and in the way it was received. As I mentioned before, in the novel it is common for characters to compare what is happening to them to popular cultural items that they have seen or read. In addition, when Bruce Malcom finally has the opportunity to confront Biralbo (his wife's lover) towards the end of the novel, he explicitly accuses the two of using literature and music as a way to talk about themselves (and not as means of discovering "art for art's sake"): "hablabais de ellas [películas] y de vuestros libros y vuestras canciones pero yo sabía que estabais hablando de vosotros mismos, no os importaba nadie ni nada, la realidad era

demasiado pobre para vosotros, ¿no es cierto?” (“you talked about them [movies] and your books and your songs but I knew that you were really talking about yourselves. You didn’t care about anyone or anything, reality was too ordinary for you. Isn’t that right?”; 165; 157).

Likewise, when *El invierno en Lisboa* first came out, it was highly praised by most; the majority of the critical articles that were written about it dealt with themes that would have been popular at the time, such as the text’s postmodern nature or its inclusion of “jazz” music (Larrea; Franz; González). As the practices of academics began to be more influenced by cultural studies, critics like Joseba Gabilondo and Tom Lewis began to look beyond the surface of the novel and the world it portrays towards the more ideological or political implications it also conveys. Specifically, both critics interpret *El invierno en Lisboa* as a novel that erases cultural difference in Spain by representing Madrid as the “center of both narration and subjectivity” (Gabilondo 262). In other words, they argue that even though the novel takes place in San Sebastián as well as Lisbon, by showing only the inside of bars and hotel rooms, the novel homogenizes each city to look just like Madrid. Although I agree with both critics that the actions that take place in each city are somewhat similar, more than an attempt to be an accurate or realist representation of Madrid or San Sebastián, the novel’s portrayal of the two cities, much like the song “Burma” are fictional. That is, the “Madrid” that exists in *El invierno en Lisboa* is a literary reference that alludes to but does not *have to* stand for the actual capital of Spain. As both critics remind us, however, although Muñoz Molina’s novel may attempt to disassociate itself from its immediate reality through its “fictionalization” of people and things, the signifiers “Burma,” “Madrid” and especially “San Sebastián” could never be separated fully from their real world meanings. As such, *El invierno en Lisboa*’s representation of them seems quite superficial, and perhaps even

patronizing, in the sense that the novel characterize each place according to its own whimsy and not according to that which makes each unique in the real world.

Aside from the clubs, hotels and train stations, the descriptions of Madrid are sparse. Even though the narrator and Biralbo are in Madrid for much of the novel, their conversations mostly take place in the nightclub or at the hotel. Occasionally, however, the novel includes a few brief descriptions of the city. When the narrator and Biralbo first enter the hotel room in Madrid, for instance, Biralbo opens the curtains and briefly observes the night scene unraveling on the streets below. He notes the dark skinned men wearing parkas congregating in front of the Telefónica store across the street. Next to them, he sees the painted women standing alone “que paseaban despacio o se detenían como esperando a alguien que ya debiera haber llegado, gentes lívidas que nunca avanzaban y nunca dejaban de moverse” (“[who] walked slowly up and down, pausing as if waiting for someone who was late. They seemed mechanical, never getting anywhere and never stopping”; 20; 12). This quote is particularly telling for two reasons. First, the last line could be read as an example of the novel’s intertextuality in that it recalls the episode in chapter 2 of Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking Glass* (1871), when Alice and the Queen are running through the forest: “ ‘Well, in *our* country,’ said Alice, still panting a little, ‘you’d generally get to somewhere else—if you ran very fast for a long time, as we’ve been doing.’ ‘A slow sort of country!’ said the Queen. ‘Now, *here*, you see, it takes all the running *you* can do, to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that!’ (127). Biralbo’s observation about the Madrilenians below who “seemed mechanical, never getting anywhere and never stopping” is essentially the same as the Queen’s portrayal of one running as fast as you can to stay in the same place. Second, this quote is also indicative of the ways in which the novel tends to elude making concrete references to the cities in which it

takes place. Indeed, aside from the Telefónica, which was a common phone provider in both Spain and Latin America, essentially there is nothing in the narrator's description of the street that ties the novel to Madrid specifically.

In other parts of the novel, however, the narrator does mention a few "real things," such as *la plaza de la Constitución* (Constitution Plaza) in Madrid (48) or the Kursaal bridge in San Sebastian (49), but even such references are so fleeting that the cities the characters visit could essentially be anywhere in the Western world. In fact, even if the novel were based on real people and places, the characters it includes are from all over the world, they often speak English to each other (58; 147) and all of them consume products from around the globe from movies like *Casablanca* (165) to the American Cigarettes that Lucrecia smokes (78). If it is the real Madrid, San Sebastián and Lisbon that are on display in this novel, the particularities of each place are overshadowed by the character's associations to them and the events that occur in each.

Whether real or fictional, within the novel each city is said to have a particular character. "Madrid," for example, is associated with the characters' present time, in which Biralbo has taken on the pseudonym Giacomo Dolphin after having murdered Lucrecia's husband and he and Lucrecia are no longer together. San Sebastián, on the other hand, most often correlates to a specific and happy moment in time that was full of music, adventure and love. This is particularly evident in the case of Biralbo, whose musical style is also distinct in each city. "Cuando tocaba en el Lady Bird [en San Sebastián]" ("When he was playing at the Lady Bird [in San Sebastián]"), the narrator comments, "su trato con la música se parecía al de un enamorado que se entrega a una pasión superior a él" ("his relationship with music was like a man in love, yielding to a passion stronger than himself"). When the narrator sees him playing at the Metropolitano club in present-day Madrid, however, this playful romanticism seems "ausente,

excluida de su música, ya invisible en sus actos” (“absent, from both his music and his movements”; 14; 6). Perhaps this is why the narrator describes San Sebastián as one of the cities “a las que se vuelve siempre” (“to which you always returns”) and Madrid as “un lugar de tránsito” (“just a place to pass through”; 49; 41). As a place full of pleasant memories in the novel, San Sebastián is where the narrator and Biralbo long to return. Madrid, on the other hand, is portrayed as city of transit where the two main characters—the narrator and Biralbo—have ended up and from which they long to leave. Neither city is presented as a specific place with its own cultural identity, but rather as particular stages in each of their personal lives. Thus, although it is true, as Gabilondo and Lewis point out, that the novel does maintain a rather Castilian-centric view of the world, it also uses the images of people, places and things to evoke emotions that are particular to the text. In essence, in the novel all localities and specificities are erased in the subjective experience of the characters.

In some parts of the novel, the images of places and times are conveyed through flashbacks in which the action *is happening*—when Biralbo tells the tale of his struggle to the death with Malcom Bruce in Lisbon, for instance, the reader witnesses Malcom fall from the train in the night (180). In other parts of the novel, however, the past coexists with the present in the form of a memory, and art, in particular, is portrayed as an effective force for conjuring up feelings and images of the past:

Sólo el instinto de la música lo guiaba [a Biralbo] y le impedía perderse, llevándolo a reconocer lugares que había visto cuando buscaba a Lucrecia, empujándolo por pasadizos húmedos y callejones tapiados hacia las vastas plazas de Lisboa y las columnas con estatuas, hacia aquel teatro un poco sórdido donde resplandecieron las luces y sombras sincopadas de las primeras películas al final de otro siglo del que sólo en Lisboa era posible descubrir señales . . . (209)

Only his instinct for music guided him and kept him from becoming lost, leading him to places he recognized from his search for Lucrecia, pushing him past damp passageways and walled-up alleys, towards Lisbon’s vast squares and statue-

topped columns, arriving at the slightly seedy theatre, where the syncopated lights and shadows of the earliest films shone, relics from the end of another century only found in Lisbon. (201-02)

In such passages, the past is not described in the form of a flashback that *was happening*, or as a series of events that *happened*, but as a sensation that happens / is happening because of the music Biralbo is playing in the present (fictional) moment.

Similarly, the way the music and images are described in the novel forces the reader to form his/her own associations of such portrayals based on his/her own present-day conception of reality. In his 2007 analysis of the novel, for instance, López-Valera Colbert is quick to note that “Lisbon in *El invierno* becomes “the other”: the Portuguese language is portrayed as undecipherable . . . Furthermore, when Biralbo is talking to Oscar, one of Billy Swann’s musicians from Paris, the phone connection makes Lisbon sound much more distant than it is geographically” (118). Much as Gabilondo and Lewis argue that Muñoz Molina’s “lyrical invention” of Madrid and San Sebastián erases the cultural character of each place, from today’s perspective the novel’s representation of Lisbon likewise could be said to empty the city of its own essence and to replace it with one that could seem demeaning, as López-Valera Colbert has noted.

With respect to the representation of Lisbon, in particular, however, the novel makes it abundantly clear that the sign “Lisbon” is meant to be more of an idea than a place. In addition to appearing in the title and functioning as the setting for the novel’s climax, in which Biralbo and Lucrecia meet up again for one last encounter, it also serves as the name of one of Biralbo’s most famous songs, “Lisboa.” When Biralbo is with Lucrecia in Lisbon, she puts the song on and the two have the following somewhat humorous exchange:

—¿Quién toca eso?—le preguntó: la música le ofrecía un consuelo tan tibio como el aire de una noche de mayo, como el recuerdo de un sueño.



—Tú—dijo Lucrecia—. Billy Swann y tú. *Lisboa*. ¿No te reconoces? Siempre me he preguntado cómo pudiste hacer esa canción sin haber estado en Lisboa.

—Precisamente por eso Ahora es cuando no podría escribirla. (185)

‘Who’s that playing?’ he asked. The music offered solace as warm and sweet as a summer night, as the memory of a happy dream.

‘You,’ said Lucrecia. ‘You and Billy Swann. “Lisbon”. Don’t you recognize your own playing? I’ve always wondered how you wrote that song without ever having been to Lisbon.’

‘That’s exactly why I could do it. I couldn’t now.’

Once again, the novel confirms that not all references in art are meant to signify the way these same signs are understood in reality. *Lisboa* may be a powerful song, one that is capable of offering “warm solace,” but its presence in Biralbo’s song (and in the novel) is predicated on an idea, not a place.

Similarly, according to Manuel María Morales Cuesta, Muñoz Molina also wrote the title of his work long before he visited Lisbon. He thought the title, *El invierno en Lisboa* sounded like a story that needed to be told, so like Biralbo, he too decided to create a work in which part of the action took place in a city he had never visited. Although he did ultimately end up traveling to Lisbon in the final phases of writing the novel, “intentando construir una novel ambientada en una ciudad que no conocía fue cuando se dio cuenta de que no se escribe para contar cosas sabidas, sino porque es la única forma de que el autor se cuente a sí mismo las cosas que ignora” (“Trying to write a novel that takes place in a city that he wasn’t familiar with is when he realized that one does not write to relate things that are known, but because it is the only way for an author to write about the things of which he is unaware”; Morales Cuesta 38). Whatever his personal or artistic motivations may have been, it is clear that the novel’s portrayal of places is more connected to the realm of fiction and the desire to create a feeling of evasion than it is tied to a wish to accurately depict the world in which we inhabit.

In the world of literature, art can easily transcend spatial and temporal boundaries. Santiago Biralbo's band plays all over the world, and with the exception of the last part in which Biralbo must assume a fake identity to hide from the police there is no mention of passports or different languages ever being an issue. The Cezanne painting that Lucrecia steals eventually makes its way to Zurich (192) and is then sold in Geneva to "uno de esos Americanos de Texas que no hacen preguntas" ("a Texan who didn't ask questions"), to which Biralbo adds, "Supongo que lo guardaría inmediatamente después en una caja fuerte. Pobre Cézanne" ("I suppose he's locked it up in a safe. Poor Cezanne"; 194; 185). What these examples reveal is the novel's tendency to view art as a force that needs space to make itself visible in order to exist. When locked up in a safe, a Cezanne painting may retain its value as Art, but it ceases to exercise its ability to move the spectator, which, as we have seen, is portrayed as one of art's most essential attributes. What's more, because many of the artistic genres the novel puts on display—jazz music, movies, painting—are essentially nonverbal artistic works (many of which are also not Spanish), they more easily cross cultural and linguistic barriers. Jazz, in particular, and music in general are represented as indiscriminate forms of art that are capable of moving from place to place without losing their artistic specificities. No matter where the musicians play in the novel, their music trickles out note-by-note to a beat of its own rhythm.

And yet, as I mentioned at the beginning of this section, *El invierno en Lisboa* is also a novel that could have only appeared when it did. As López-Valero Colbert has shown, much of Muñoz Molina's public persona has its origins in 1980s' Spain, a time when a good sector of the Spanish population aspired to be "cosmopolitan," especially the young to middle-aged (118). This desire to break free from static, more conservative notions of culture to ones that were more global in nature, not only had a positive effect on the sale of texts, but it also affected the way

authors approached the act of writing. As Morales-Cuesta notes, the end of the 1980s “suponía un momento óptimo para escribir buena literatura, porque ya se había roto definitivamente el chantaje de tener que usar la literatura como arma política, ya no había que demostrar tampoco que se era “progre” o experimental, cada cual podía como quisiera o supiera” (“was thought to be an optimal moment for writing good literature, because writers were no longer seduced into using literature as a political weapon, one no longer had to demonstrate that s/he was “liberal” or experimental, everybody could write about what they wanted or knew”; 41-42). Within this sociopolitical context, it is no surprise that *El invierno en Lisboa* was so well received.

In fact, *El invierno en Lisboa* was so popular, it is not clear whether winning the National Award helped Muñoz Molina’s text gain attention. By the time he won the National Award, Muñoz Molina was already a recognized writer. Not only was he well known for his first novel *Beatus Ille* (1986), which won the Ícaro Prize, but also the year before he won the National Award, he had also previously received the Premio de la Crítica (The Critic’s Prize) for *El invierno en Lisboa* and talk of turning the novel into a movie was in the works.<sup>71</sup> In effect, it seems the most positive consequence the winning of the National Award brought to Muñoz Molina was the prize money that accompanied it. As an article in the Spanish newspaper *El país* (The Country) put it: “éste es el primer premio que no supondrá un castigo para su bolsillo, pues aunque los anteriores otorgaron más prestigio que riqueza, las celebraciones fueron en cambio sonadas” (“this is the first prize that didn’t suppose a punishment for his wallet, even though the other [prizes] may have given him more prestige than riches, the celebrations, on the other hand,

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<sup>71</sup> The movie version of *El invierno in Lisboa*, directed by José Antonio Zorrilla came out in 1990 and starred Christian Vadim, Dizzy Gillespie, Eusebio Poncela, Fernando Guillén, Hélène de Saint-Père, and Michel Duperial. In fact, for jazz musician Dizzy Gillespie, starring in and playing on the soundtrack of *El invierno en Lisboa* effectively revived his career after an eight-year break from public view (“Dizzy”).

were much talked about”; “Muñoz”). As this quote illustrates, the National Award may have financially contributed to the author’s success, but it did not necessarily bring the author additional fame, as he was already considered to be a “great” writer and *El invierno de Lisboa* had already been well-received by the literary community before the prize was issued. Several months before Muñoz Molina won the National Award, for instance, one reviewer referred to the publication of *El invierno en Lisboa* as the “triumfo de una escritura” (“the triumph of writing”), because with it “le llegó finalmente [al autor] el éxito completo. Bien recibida por el público y la crítica, suponía a la vez una toma de conciencia de sus propios límites y una maduración de sus técnicas expresivas” (“it brought [the author] complete success. As a text well received by the public and critics alike, the novel simultaneously supposes an awareness of its own limits as well as a maturation of its expressive techniques”; “El triunfo”). Indeed, it was not prizes or publicity alone that made *El invierno en Lisboa* stand out; instead, it was its literariness that made it “great.”

The extent to which the novel will continue to be perceived as “great” largely depends, however, on the text’s ability to continue to attract readers. After all, as the narrator reminds us at one point in the novel,

Billy Swann solía decirle [a Biralbo] que lo que importa en la música no es la maestría, sino la resonancia: en un espacio vacío, en un local lleno de voces y de humo, en el alma de alguien. ¿No es eso, una pura resonancia, un instinto de tiempo, y de adivinación, lo que sucede en mí cuando escucho aquellas canciones que Billy Swann y Biralbo tocaron juntos, *Burma o Lisboa?* (96-97).

Billy Swann used to say [to Biralbo] that what mattered in music was not skill but resonance—in an empty space, a club full of noise and cigarette smoke, or in somebody’s soul. Isn’t it that, a pure resonance, a moment of time and prophecy, I feel when I listen to those songs—‘Burma’ and ‘Lisbon’—that Billy Swann and Biralbo played together? (89-90)

Much as music must resonate in someone's soul to exist, literature likewise requires the active participation of many social actors—including writers, publishers, readers, critics and jurors of literary prizes—to successfully thrive. When thought of in this way, we might even conclude that literature “uses” readers as a means of ensuring its own survival, just as much as those that represent the literary industry “use” literature to earn a living and/or gain cultural prestige in their daily lives. If literature or art is to remain relevant, it not only needs to be experienced continually, but its “essence” must remain malleable. Indeed, as my analysis of *El invierno en Lisboa* suggests, perhaps the true secret to what makes a literary text (or any artistic work, for that matter) appear “great” is its ability to capture specific elements of reality in great detail and yet remain open enough so that the reader may create his or her own particular meanings of the signs present on the page. Readers may use literature as a means to discuss many issues, but literature also uses its readers as a means of safeguarding its own existence.

In conclusion, although the National Award in Narrative Literature may serve to endorse a particular idea of Spain, it also plays a large role in promotion of literature, as a unique form of artistic expression. As I hope my analysis of *Mesa, sobremesa* and *El invierno en Lisboa* have shown, that which constitutes “literature” is always dependent on the opinions and practices of the reading public. Although winning the National Award in Narrative Literature often does bring positive exposure to a text, it will not always guarantee that a work remains in the public sphere, which is what, I trust, my analysis of the reception of Zamora Vicente's novel has demonstrated. On the other hand, even though not *every* text will benefit from winning literary prizes, such practices still serve an important role in the promotion of a particular idea of literature as a discipline worthy of critical attention and public praise.

As an academic whose career began during the Franco regime, Zamora Vicente's novel had relatively little impact on the literary world despite the fact that it won the National Award. Muñoz Molina's novel, on the other hand, has become one of the most canonical texts of its moment, and, as such, has become one of the works that has helped to build the credibility and prestige of the prize, an image from which all National Award-winning texts benefit. Winning the National Award also helped to set Muñoz Molina's career in motion; indeed, in addition to generating high sales, winning the prize also put the author in direct contact with many influential people.<sup>72</sup> Although in many of his later novels Muñoz Molina does deal with more political or historical issues (sometimes in polemical ways) and as such is sometimes thought of as a modern chronicler of "official" Spanish culture. Interestingly, the novel that started his career as a prominent Spanish writer was precisely one in which literature is valued "for its own sake," cities are portrayed as fictional and art is seen as a "universal" conveyer of "meanings," traits that helped Muñoz Molina's novel stand out amongst the proliferation of texts that flooded the cultural scene in 1980s' Spain and which were amplified, in part, by the National Award and the exposure such an honor brings.

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<sup>72</sup> In fact, since he published *El invierno en Lisboa* Muñoz Molina has become a very public figure. In 1995 he became a full member of the Royal Spanish Academy, and in 2004 and 2005 he served as the Director of the Cervantes Institute in New York City, where he still lives today. Currently, in addition to writing fiction, Muñoz Molina also works with the Creative Writing Masters Program at New York University.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DEMOCRACY AND ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP IN THE PRIZE-WINNING WORKS OF CARMEN MARTÍN GAITE AND KIRMEN URIBE



Reality is a stage that we construct.

Quit your philosophy and pass me the bolts!

- El roto (*El país*, 24 July 2010)

As I have shown in the previous chapters, the issuing of the National Award in Narrative Literature is a practice that benefits the Spanish state, by making the nation seem “culturally diverse” yet “cohesive” (Spain). It also serves an important role in supporting a specific idea of literature as an elite “purposeless” practice worthy of recognition. The logic that governs the

prize and the promotion of this specific idea of literature, however, much like the logic of the democratic state, cannot be achieved through bureaucracy and politics alone. As the political cartoon in the epigraph reminds us, the reality of a given *demos*, or group of people, is a “constructed stage” that is realized through the concrete actions of individual citizens. The perceived nature of “democratic Spain,” and of “Spanish literature” therefore, are not concepts that could have been determined exclusively by policy nor by specific practices alone, but rather they are constructed notions that are informed by the way “Spanish citizens” have continued to represent them and act them out on a public stage.

In this chapter I further explore this idea by first examining what the concepts of democracy and citizenship theoretically entail. I then look at the way democracy and citizenship are represented in two prize-winning novels that were published at different ends of the democratic period: Carmen Martín Gaité’s *El cuarto de atrás* (The Back Room, National Award 1978), originally written in Castilian during the transition to democracy, and Kirmen Uribe’s *Bilbao-New York-Bilbao* (National Award 2009), originally written in Euskera in our contemporary times (2008). In particular, drawing from social theorists such as Hannah Arendt, Grace Lee Boggs, and Roberto Esposito, I analyze the ways in which both novels portray literature in Post-Franco Spain as a space where author/citizens have the legal right (and, perhaps, the ethical obligation) to participate in the creation of their collective reality.

I also highlight the role the National Award plays in endorsing this active view of citizenship, by examining the ways in which both Martín Gaité and Uribe have used the space of the prize to promote their own cultural and literary agendas. As James English has shown in his analysis of the history of cultural prizes, prizes are caught up in many systems of meaning and exchange that assume “certain basic continuities between economic behavior (that is, interested



or advantage seeking exchange) and the behavior proper to artists, critics, intellectuals and other important players in the field of culture” (4). As National Award-winning novels that were well received, both novels have helped to maintain a certain image of the prize, as a cultural label of value, which, as we saw in chapter 2, also serves to legitimize the state’s authority to issue National Awards, and, by extension, its right to govern the country. Yet, as I will show, as texts that have been widely read and discussed, both novels also contribute to a specific idea of literature as a vehicle for cultural exchange through which political ideas are communicated and social revolution is made possible. Whereas, as we saw in the previous chapter, most National Award-winning novels portray art as a “purposeless” space of creative expression, both Martín Gaité’s and Uribe’s novels promote a different view of literature and art as a means of instigating social change.

Although at first glance, aside from having won the National Award, these two works may have seemingly little in common—after all, *El cuarto de atrás* was originally written in Castilian during the transition to democracy in Spain (1978-1986), and *Bilbao-New York-Bilbao* was originally written in Euskera in our contemporary times (2008)—both are first-person, self-reflexive tales about how daily life has changed in Spain since the beginning of the twentieth century, and both are autofictional in nature.<sup>73</sup> That is, both *El cuarto de atrás* and *Bilbao-New York-Bilbao* include personal memories, intertextual references and real people, places and things are mentioned, all of which contribute to the overall realism each conveys. Yet they also include purely fictional references and multiple genres as well, which makes it difficult at times to demarcate what is ‘real.’ In one interview, for instance, Kirmen Uribe lamented having lost

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<sup>73</sup> By autofictional, I mean that they are autobiographical novels that are fictional in nature. Whereas autobiographies are seen as subjective accounts of person’s “real life,” autofictional novels are works of fiction that incorporate details from the author’s real life.

many emails from his fans because they had written to him at the address printed in the novel instead of the one that appears on the actual writer's website ("Esto" 10). What's more, not only are both texts aware of the thin line each walks between reality and fiction, they each skip, jump and dance down it, reveling in the ambiguity created.

Moreover, as works that are organized around the act of remembering, both can be considered "novels of memory"—or "memories" in the case of *Bilbao-New York-Bilbao*, which includes memories told to the narrator as well his own. As Hertzberger has argued, "in the novel of memory, the narrator moves through time and space to regain contact with the past, to interpret it from the perspective of later experience, and to recover it within a field of meanings whose boundaries are defined by a remembering self" (*Narrating* 120). As National Award-winning novels of memory that were published at two ends of the democratic period, each novel carries with it its own distinct understanding of Spanish society and the individual author/citizen's place in it. Studying the two together thus allows us to perceive changing structures of feeling in Spain with respect to the way the concepts of democracy, citizenship and freedom have been circulated and understood from the individual artist/citizen's perspective at two ends of the democratic period (1978 and 2008). Here, of course, I am borrowing Raymond Williams's now famous term "structure of feeling" which he generally defines as "the culture of a period" or "the particular living result of all the elements in the general organization" (64). As we will see, not only do both *El cuarto de atrás* and *Bilbao-New York-Bilbao* deal with cultural issues that are specific to their respective times, but each can also be said to form part of the production and circulation of meaning, not just in the realm of literature, but also at the level of

society as a whole, thus adding another dimension to each work as an example of the ‘creative’—or generative—capacity of art each text promotes.<sup>74</sup>

What’s more, as National Award-winning novels, both texts also work to question the dominant idea of literature as an apolitical space that the prize tends to promote. Instead, as I will demonstrate, both *El cuarto de atrás* and *Bilbao-New York-Bilbao* depict literature, and art in general, as ‘productive’ and ‘liberating’ forces that have the potential to make and inspire ideas that do not always reflect the ideology of the state. In addition, each real-life author has used his/her prize-winning novel as a platform from which to publically discuss a wide variety of social issues, ranging from the state of literature and the nation’s contentious past to matters related to gender and Basque nationalism. In studying the two together, I argue that both authors (and their novels) promote an active understanding of citizenship, one that acknowledges the citizen’s role in the promotion and actualization of artistic freedom in democratic Spain. What this means, however, and the extent to which a citizen has the power to make and spread ideas in democratic Spain, is unique to each individual author/text.

#### 4.1 *Democracy and the Call for Active Citizenship*

Democracy is a term that appears frequently in the press. In countries that form part of the United Nations, the word is often used as a justification for specific actions, such as militaristic interventions abroad, even though the term is not uniformly valued or practiced in each nation-state. The term is noticeably absent from the United State’s Constitution, for

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<sup>74</sup> In this chapter I will use the term “art” in a very generalizing way to refer to individual forms of creative expression that circulate in a given period. For me, art consists of literature, painting, and music, as well as other genres, such as magazines, television shows and romance novels, all of which contribute to the structures of feelings that are at play in a given society, an idea that is evident in both novels.

instance, even though, ironically, it is one of the loudest promoters of democracy in the world. Although some might argue that the phrase “we the people” with which the Preamble to the United States Constitution begins, could be said to represent the desire to promote democratic ideas, the presence of the Electoral College and the great inequalities that still exist between races, genders and social classes in the country could suggest that “we the people” is an ambiguous (and perhaps meaningless) signifier, especially since the *demos* do not have as much power to make decisions at the level of the state as some law makers might have their constituencies believe.

In surveying the Constitutions of other modern nations, the word democracy appears one time in the Swiss Constitution, twice in the Canadian Constitution, three times in both the Mexican and Ecuadorian Constitutions, four times in the French Constitution, and a whopping twenty-nine times in the German Constitution, though, like the United States, it is absent in the Italian one. In the case of the Spanish Constitution, the word democracy exists nine times—eight times as an adjective and once as a noun (though, for some inexplicable reason it only appears six times in the English translation). Perhaps the most important reference to the term occurs in the first Article to the Spanish Constitution, which seeks to define the political nature of the country as “un Estado social y *democrático de Derecho*, que proponga como valores superiores de su ordenamiento jurídico la libertad, la justicia, la igualdad y el pluralismo político” (“a social and democratic State, subject to the rule of law, which advocates as the highest values of its legal order, liberty, justice, equality and political pluralism”; Constitución 7, emphasis added; Spanish 9). But what exactly does it mean for a country to establish itself as a social and democratic state of law in our contemporary times?

The word democracy comes from the Greek *dēmokratia*, which, according to Étienne

Balibar, was originally a pejorative term that “referred to the anarchic element brought into aristocratic cities when the mass or the populace, the *demos*, was actually endowed with the power to make political decisions” (525). Balibar goes on to show that the Greeks had other names to describe a more positive view of the citizens’ participation in the common governance of life. Specifically, he mentions the word, *isonomia*, which he says has most often been translated as “‘equal right’ or ‘equality before the law.’” Following the works of contemporary philosophers like John Rawls, Balibar states that he prefers to translate the term as “equal liberty,” or *equaliberty* as one word, in order to denote the importance of promoting equality before liberty, given that liberty is often a precondition of equality (whereas equality is not always a prerequisite of liberty). Furthermore, unlike equality, in democratic countries liberties must be restricted at times for the benefit of society as a whole. One only need to think of the way liberties are equally restricted in American airports to see this principle at work: we all must remove our shoes and limit the amount of liquids we carry in order to project a uniform image of safe travel (of course, whether these restrictions are necessary and/or actually lead to safe travel are separate issues that could be debated).

In looking at the way democracy is used in the Spanish Constitution quoted above, it seems *isonomia* may be what the state actually means to uphold more than the traditional idea of democracy as the participation of all citizens in the governance of the Spanish state. Indeed, the values it claims to uphold—“legal order, liberty, justice, equality and political pluralism”—seem to echo Balibar’s notion of *equaliberty* more than *dēmokratia*. In fact, upholding “legal order, liberty and justice” could even be said to preclude true democracy from taking place, given that each of these concepts requires a ‘social contract’ of sorts (in the Rousseauian sense) that has the potential to limit the liberties of citizens for the common good. It is hard to imagine that a

country could exist where *every* citizen had a say in the political decisions of the state. Instead, as philosopher Jacques Rancière has recently argued, it seems more probable that the idea of democracy is more of “an imaginary portrayal designed to support this or that principle of good government.” Societies, he goes on to argue, are instead most often “organized by the play of oligarchies. There is, strictly speaking, no such thing as democratic government. Government is always exercised by the minority over the majority” (*Hatred* 52). While this view may seem somewhat pessimistic and cynical, Rancière’s logic is undeniable. No matter which country we use as a model, it appears that state power is frequently in the hands of a small privileged elite, whose decisions, for better or for worse, are often influenced by financial gains and losses that will impact a large number of citizens whether they agree with the choices made or not.

This does not mean, however, that the *demos* in democratic societies are powerless. On the contrary, as Rancière argues, the democratic process might best be thought of as a “perpetual bringing into play” (*Hatred* 62), or as Balibar has said of democratic societies, there is a constant attempt to promote the “democratization of democracy” (526). That is, since true government by all is not really something that can be achieved, the democratic process always implies a “permanent struggle for its own democratization and against its own reversal into oligarchy and monopoly of power” (528). For both social theorists, then, the danger of the flagrant use of the term democracy is that, when unchecked, it often has the power to internalize and make legitimate the exclusion (and often exploitation) of many in the name of ‘democratic principles.’

In his article, Balibar discusses the situation of French citizens who live in the *banlieues*, or suburbs, of Paris, who, he argues, are often at a political disadvantage, especially those of African decent. Quoting Robert Castel, he demonstrates how many in the *banlieues* do not have the same access to resources as those who live in the city. Although technically, many are French

citizens, and therefore have the same political rights as those who come from the center, even third generation immigrants continue to be racially discriminated against because they are constantly perceived as the “foreigner,” and they often suffer from class discrimination, as the high levels of unemployment for residents of the *banlieues* suggest (531). The same is true in other multicultural democratic nations like Spain, where, in addition to an increased presence of immigrant populations, there are competing national affiliations that serve to further highlight the artificiality of the current political system’s (in)ability to represent all the interests of its people. If we look at the list of texts that have won the National Award, for instance, we immediately notice that only one prize-winning author was born outside of the Spanish territory—here, I am referring to Peruvian-born author Alfredo Bryce Echenique, who won the National Award for his novel *Reo de nocturnidad* (1997) in 1998. Thus, the prize is not very representative of the diverse immigrant population that lives in Spain nor does it equally represent each of the Autonomous Communities, as most of the authors of the Castilian texts that have won are based out of Madrid; though, as we saw in chapter 2, it does include works written in each of the minority languages of the state—seven in all. The prize is thus a practice that both expands and controls that which is considered “national.”

Although with the death of the dictator, Francisco Franco, and the signing of the 1978 Constitution, Spanish citizens of both the center and periphery have gained a definite degree of political autonomy in Spain, there is still clear resistance against a federalist conception of the state, and the national character of minority cultures is far from being unanimously accepted. Indeed, how can the Spanish government claim to represent the national interests of the *demos*, when many individual citizens profess loyalty to alternative conceptualizations of the nation that are not as democratically represented? Likewise, how can the Catalan, Basque and Galician

governments exercise their authorities to govern, when they have only partial sovereignty? Furthermore, in this age of globalization, how can either government be said to represent all the multiple interests of the people each represents?

These questions become particularly pertinent when we take into consideration the ongoing political protests and occupations of plazas in Spain, or “15-M” (15 of May) as it is often referred to in honor of the day the protests began, which could suggest a grave disconnect between the Spanish government and its people, a sentiment that resonates with concurrent revolutionary movements world wide—from those of the so-called “Arab Spring” to the more recent “Occupy Wall Street” protests in the United States. Instead of breaking down the idea of democracy, however, perhaps such unrest can be read as evidence of how democracy is being practiced in Spain and other modern nations today. After all, as Rancière and Balibar might agree, the true motor of democracy is always fueled by the public participation of citizens. As Étienne Balibar so eloquently puts it, democracy is never “something you *have*, that you can claim to possess (therefore “bring” or “confer”); it is only something that you collectively *create* or *recreate*” (526). Likewise, the values of “legal order, liberty, justice, equality and political pluralism” that the Constitution claims to uphold cannot be achieved in any absolute sense, but rather they are concepts that too must be actively practiced to exist. The truly unique thing about democratic societies is that, as a shared reality amongst free beings, they always have the infinite potential to be influenced by the active participation of citizens.

In this chapter, I will further explore the idea of active citizenship as a necessary component of democratic societies, by analyzing Carmen Martín Gaité’s *El cuarto de atrás* (1978) and Kirmen Uribe’s *Bilbao-New York-Bilbao* (2009). In my reading of each novel, I show how both works can be read as a contemplation of the individual artist/citizen’s role in the



creation and maintenance of Spain as a democratic political imaginary. As National Award-winning novels, both works and their authors have served to help the state in its aims to disseminate a particular image of Spain as a free, democratic and multicultural country. Yet both texts do so by promoting an active notion of citizenship, one that verifies that the reality of a given *demos* (or group of people) is never fully determined by the objectives of the state, or any other dominating force, but also by the creative practices and attitudes of its citizens.

In order to further develop these ideas I will look at each work separately. First, I will explore the role Carmen Martín Gaité's *El cuarto de atrás* (1975-1978) has played in the continuous formation of the idea of Spain as a democratic nation, where women's rights and freedom of expression are not only permitted but also rewarded. I pay particular attention to the ways in which notions of active citizenship are implicitly sustained, by the author herself and also in the pages of her prize-winning novel, as integral to democracy's success. In the following section, I will look at the reception and promotion of Kirmen Uribe's *Bilbao-New York-Bilbao* (2008) in order to gauge how the concept of citizenship is circulated and understood in Spain thirty years after the signing of the Spanish Constitution and the publication of *El cuarto de atrás*. Whereas Martín Gaité had also been a prominent writer during the Franco regime, Uribe (1970-) represents a different generation of writers who grew up in democratic Spain and who have always been free to write about whatever they want in their national language of choice. Indeed, as a self-identified "Basque" poet, now novelist who carries a Spanish passport, Uribe's autofictional novel circulates as proof of how different life is for Basque citizens in late Post-Franco Spain. Most notably, as I will show, by focusing on the many intersections between local and global culture, *Bilbao-New York-Bilbao* promotes a more fluid understanding of what it means to be Basque than some of the more extreme visions of national identity that circulate in

Spain today. As I will show, for the protagonist, being Basque does not mean that one must adhere to an idealized set of predetermined characteristics, but rather, Basque identity is portrayed as a fluid and ever-changing concept that must be actively created to exist.

#### 4.2 *From Dictatorship to Democracy: Carmen Martín Gaité and the Power of Art*

Carmen Martín Gaité's now famous novel *El cuarto de atrás* (1975-1978), is a first-person narrative told from the perspective of C., a fictional version of the author, who, throughout the text, is battling against insomnia on a stormy night in 1970s' Madrid. Starting in the second chapter, the protagonist is visited by a mysterious Man in Black, who serves as the protagonist's interlocutor for the remainder of the novel as she discusses the book she is trying to write about life before, during and after the Spanish Civil War. The tales she tells throughout the novel do not reveal a linear narrative of the protagonist's life; instead, the novel is constructed through a series of fragmented memories that the protagonist recalls through a process of free association. The novel even begins with an ellipsis, as if to indicate to the reader that C.'s story has no real beginning, and instead commences *in medias res* one particular night in the protagonist's life.

Throughout her conversation with the Man in Black, C. uses the title image of the back room as a metaphor of how much daily life has changed in Spain throughout the protagonist's life. Before the Civil War (1936-1939), the back room of C.'s parent's house is described as a private place of freedom, where the imagination of a young C. was allowed to flourish. It is the space where she invented her first stories, played with her friends, and felt free and happy. After the war, however, the back room little by little was taken over by the need to use the space for storage. As literary critic Stephanie Sieburth puts it, in the text "just as play and freedom give

way to simple survival in the space of the back room, so everything that the Republic represents is erased by the Franco regime” (200). For Sieburth, *El cuarto de atrás* is a firsthand, nontraditional account of the pre and postwar years. In her opinion, the novel does not offer much insight into the nature of democratic Spain because it was published at a time when “the future of Spain was still unclear.” Instead of capturing the essence of what life was like during the transition to democracy in Spain, Sieburth argues that the novel “resurrects the characteristics of the Republic [1931-1936] in order to make them available for use in the creation of a new system out of the fossilized apparatus of the Franco regime” (203). Although I agree with Sieburth that Martín Gaité’s novel is primarily about life before the arrival of democracy, in the following pages, I would like to suggest that *El cuarto de atrás* can also be read as a novel *sobre la Transición* (about the Transition) not only because as a National Award-winning novel it acts evidence that Spain had become a democratic country where freedom of expression was both encouraged and rewarded, but also because of the way the novel portrays the role of the artist/citizen in 1970s’ Spain.

To begin with, the words that close Martín Gaité’s now famous text “Madrid, noviembre de 1975-abril de 1978” (“Madrid, November 1975—April 1978”; 182; 215), connect the narration to an important moment in Spanish history when the country was at a political and cultural crossroads.<sup>75</sup> As many readers might recognize, November 1975 is the month the totalitarian dictator Francisco Franco (1892 -1975) passed away after having ruled the nation for nearly forty years, an occurrence which effectively started the dismantling of his regime, and set in motion the creation of a new political system. Slowly but surely, Spain started to create the framework for the transition to a participatory democracy, which by April of 1978 had already

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<sup>75</sup> All translations of Martín Gaité’s novel are taken from Helen Lane’s English version of the novel.

held its first free elections (1977) and evidence of change was all around. In April of 1978, for instance, Ana Rodríguez Ayuso was the first woman to be elected civil governor of one of Madrid's provinces, and even though she was referred to in the press as the first "mujer gobernador" ("woman [male] governor") instead of "gobernadora" ("female governor"; "La primera", 56), the term that is more commonly used today, such an event clearly symbolizes the types of transformations that were taking place between 1975 and 1978. Namely, Spain was becoming a democratic nation that was more inclusive of women than ever before. Martín Gaité's novel is thus a true novel *de la Transición* (of the Transition) because it began to take shape after Franco's death and was completed just as democracy legally came to Spain.

Moreover, it is likely that *El cuarto de atrás* was the first work of the democratic period to be institutionally sanctioned by the newly formed Spanish government, given that the current constitution was officially ratified in a referendum on December 6, 1978, legally making the country a constitutional monarchy, and on December 23 of the same year *El país* published an article announcing Carmen Martín Gaité had won the National Award ("Carmen Martín Gaité"). It was also the first National Award-winning novel to achieve critical acclaim both in Spain and abroad, which not only helped to launch Martín Gaité's career as an international writer, but also served to build the credibility of the National Award and the Ministry of Culture's authority to administer it.

In his description of literature published during the Transition to democracy, critic Javier Gómez-Montero has even gone as far as to argue that "entre los Premios Nacionales [de la transición] poco podría destacarse más que la emblemática novela *El cuarto de atrás*" ("of all the National Award [winning texts of the transition] very little stands out more than the emblematic novel *El cuarto de atrás*"; 10). As we saw in chapter 1, the first novel to win the prize in Post-

Franco Spain, José Luis Acquaroni's *Copa de sombras* (National Award, 1977) was, and continues to be, all but ignored by the critics. José Jurado Morales has postulated that perhaps Acquaroni has been somewhat overlooked because his works were often distributed by lesser-known publishers (45), and more significantly because "en algún momento de su vida estuviera próximo al franquismo" ("at one point in his life he was associated with Francoism"; 43). *El cuarto de atrás*, however, was well received in its time and has since become one of the most representative works of the Transition years (1978-1986), especially in North America where it continues to appear on reading lists and syllabi throughout academia (Kronik, "La recepción").<sup>76</sup>

Of course, to say that any single text or author could be representative of the Transition years is a gross overstatement from the start; as we saw in chapter 2, not only is there some debate as to exactly when the transition to democracy began and ended, but, as Gómez-Montero points out, it was not a homogenous process. Instead, the transition to democracy in Spain took place at different speeds and was consumed with diverse intensities throughout the country (15). Nonetheless, as the second recipient of the National Award, Martín Gaité's novel represents the Transition to democracy in a more literal sense because it serves as national evidence that a new political era had arrived in Spain. As Sobejano point out, due to its potentially polemical content, *El cuarto de atrás* is a novel that could only have appeared when it did historically as a response to the newly acquired freedom that came with the onset of democracy (191).

Whereas during the Francoist Regime, many texts were censored and writers were expected to be at the service of the state, in democratic Spain writers were suddenly free to write

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<sup>76</sup> John W. Kronik has even suggested that, if it were not for the publication of *El cuarto de atrás*, it is unlikely that Carmen Martín Gaité would have gained the fame that she did in the United States ("La recepción").

about whatever they pleased without fear of repercussion.<sup>77</sup> The censorship of literary texts, however, was not uniform throughout the Franco Regime. According to Michael Ugarte, there were at least four phases of censorship, the last of which was far more relaxed than the previous ones. Beginning with the 1966 *Ley de Prensa e Imprenta* (“Press and Print Law”) and ending with Franco’s death in 1975, in this last stage “censorship gradually disappeared, in great part through the determination of the writers, editors of journals, film directors and producers, actors, singers, students of Catalan, Galician, and Basque nationalists, and of common citizens to express themselves without restrictions and to distribute those expressions regardless of governmental interference.” These social actors, or *posibilistas* (ones who make possible) as Ugarte calls them, “contributed to a weakening (however gradual) of the régime’s system of cultural control” (613).

With the final abolition of censorship in 1977, there was an explosion of works of all sorts onto the cultural scene; “customs changed quickly, nudity was everywhere, and some popular films revealed the crisis of antiquated values.” By exercising uninhibited freedom of expression, such social actors helped to promote the idea that Spain had become a place where citizens were allowed to express their views openly, a fact that the publication and success of Martín Gaité’s National Award-winning novel certainly helped to authenticate. As Mainer notes, however, this newfound freedom of expression did not necessarily “mean the discovery of unpublished or marginalized works, but rather it revealed the possibility of treating previously

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<sup>77</sup> According to Janet Pérez, since writers could not openly broach topics like “marginalization, oppression, and the lack of freedom” under Franco, many resorted to “impassive, non-judgmental, ‘objective’ presentation[s] of empirical conditions” in order to avoid censorship (636). As she explains, “those who had something to communicate managed to do so at the time . . . in spite of censorial challenges” (642). Texts like Carmen Laforet’s *Nada* (1944), Carmen Martín Gaité’s *Entre visillos* (1957) and Camilo José Cela’s *Cinco horas con Mario* (1966) are three examples of works published before the democratic period that use realism to indirectly criticize the Franco Regime without explicitly condemning it.

ignored themes” (691). This is particularly evident in the so-called boom in women’s literature, of which Carmen Martín Gaité took part. Although her 1978 novel may seem somewhat tame in comparison with her female contemporaries—writers like Montserrat Roig, Esther Tusquets and Carme Riera were all dealing with more controversial themes in their texts, e.g. birth control, lesbianism, female eroticism, etc. (Tsuchiya 215)—*El cuarto de atrás*, nonetheless, was an important novel of the moment because of the way it depicts the postwar years and for the implicit comments it makes about civic activism during the Transition years, two ideas that were more widely circulated because of the public exposure the novel received when it won the National Award.

At a time when the Spanish government was in the process of trying to brand itself as a free and democratic nation, *El cuarto de atrás* was an ideal recipient of the National Award. What better way to prove that democratic Spain was no longer Francoist Spain than to sponsor a literary award whose jury freely chose to recognize a text like *El cuarto de atrás*, a text that, as many critics have noted, so clearly condemns the Franco regime? It probably would not have been enough for the central government to simply sign the Spanish Constitution, formally declaring that Spain had become a “democratic state by law” (Spanish). Instead, the state had the burden of proof; it needed citizens to begin to embody the changes it advocated. This is because, as Hannah Arendt has shown, “political institutions, no matter how well or how badly designed, depend for continued existence upon acting men” (153). Although, it would be difficult to say with certainty exactly why the Ministry of Culture decided to choose Martín Gaité’s text, it is clear that her text not only circulated as evidence of a new period in Spanish history, thus contributing to the state’s intellectual project to re-brand its national culture, but as many critics have pointed out, it has also continued to inform the way the nation’s past is talked about and

understood, especially with regards to the way women experienced daily life in Francoist Spain (Hertzberger; Palerm; Reinstädler; Sieburth; amongst others).<sup>78</sup>

The way the text describes the role and message of the *Sección Femenina* (women's auxiliary)—the governmental branch in charge of educating women in Francoist Spain—for instance, carries a tone of disdain that forcefully symbolizes the way the Francoist institution is perceived by many from today's perspective:

Bajo el machaconeo de aquella propaganda ñoña y optimista de los años cuarenta, se perfiló mi desconfianza hacia los seres decididos y seguros, crecieron mis ansias de libertad. . . . También me puse en guardia contra la idea del noviazgo como premio a mis posibles virtudes prácticas (85)

As a consequence of the brainwashing of that mawkish and optimistic propaganda of the forties, my mistrust of resolute and self-assured individuals became more marked than ever, my eagerness for freedom grew. . . . I also put myself on my guard against the idea of getting myself a fiancé as a reward for my possible practical virtues. (92)

In this passage, the protagonist's open rejection of marriage and the manner with which she disparages the propaganda of the moment represents a direct condemnation of the Regime's values, something that could only have appeared publically after the dictator's demise. In Francoist Spain, women were supposed to be at the service of the state in their roles as wives and mothers. Thus, a text that openly criticizes both the *Sección Femenina* and the institution of marriage would have been deemed unsuitable for the nation, and, as a result, would have most certainly been banned. In democratic Spain, conversely, works like *El cuarto de atrás* that

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<sup>78</sup> Just as it is difficult to say any single text could represent the Transition, it would likewise be challenging to affirm that any text could be representative of the female perspective. On the contrary, as scholar Akiko Tsuchiya has shown, “the privileging of a stable category of “woman”—and, by extension, any essentialist notion of women's writing—must be questioned in light of the diversity of voices and visions characterizing women of different cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and class origins, as well as sexualities, within Spain” (215). For its own part, Martín Gaité's text has come to symbolize what life was like for women (perhaps of a certain class) during the Franco regime.



openly criticized the Regime were not only accepted, but also rewarded with National Awards, and thus played an essential role in the shaping of the new Post-Franco era.

In this respect, it is important to keep in mind that just one year before *El cuarto de atrás* was published, the interim Transition government passed the 1977 Law of Amnesty, effectively exonerating all Spanish citizens from crimes committed as part of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) or the subsequent Franco Regime (1939-1975). Joan Ramon Resina has even gone as far as to call the newly formed government's institutionalized response to the nation's past an "induced amnesia" that promoted a "pact of silence," whose aim it was to sever all ties with Francoist Spain (88). In such an evasive political climate, *El cuarto de atrás* thus served as an important "public record of one character's emblematic effort to then publicly work through a traumatic and difficult past during a time (the Spanish Transition) when people seem to have opted to forget rather than remember" (Palerm 120). While the state was taking a more hands-off approach, literature alongside other cultural forms of expression was beginning to forge a space where dialogues about the past could continue to take place. In the conclusion to her article, Palerm even suggests that Martín Gaité's text might best be thought of as a public call to make such discussions more visible:

Written in the private space of the protagonist's home, the novel breaks out into the public realm through the printed page, offering the private experiences of a woman in Francoist Spain to a community of readers, writers and interpreters. In short, her private experiences, transformed into a novel form, achieve publicness and perhaps even encourage a public «working through of the past.» (129)<sup>79</sup>

By including such an explicit condemnation of the Franco regime's values, Martín Gaité's text can be viewed as an exercise of the rights that were bestowed on her with the onset of democracy.

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<sup>79</sup> Literary critic Stephen Luis Vilaseca echoes this idea in his analysis of *El cuarto de atrás*. For Vilaseca, there is a constant movement from intimate spaces to "transferential spaces" in the novel with which the protagonist's private experiences are made public (183).

Not only does her novel explicitly criticize the values promoted by the Franco Regime, but it has also continued to serve as a catalyst for debates over the nation's sordid past in a country where these conversations have most often been discouraged. In this way, novels like *El cuarto de atrás* become a necessary complement to the state, because they offer the *demos* an opportunity to experience and judge an alternative conceptualization of the nation's past, present and future actions. Such public debate over National Award-winning novels, also allows the Spanish state to use the prize as a means of supporting its citizens' view of things, without actually addressing any of the concerns they raise.

Whether or not National Award-winning texts are capable of inciting change depends greatly on the ways in which they are received. According to French philosopher Jacques Rancière, in democratic societies it is necessary for citizens to have the freedom and space to contest dominant values, given that democracy necessarily involves a perpetual "challenging of governments' claims to embody the sole principle of public life" (Rancière, *Hatred* 62). By using the National Award as a space to forge debates regarding Spain's recent past could take place—a past that was heavily dominated by the dictator's restrictive views of public life—this is exactly what Martín Gaité's novel has done. One only need look at the long list of scholarly articles written on *El cuarto de atrás* that came out soon after she won the National Award to see that it is most often read as a public condemnation of the Franco regime.

What's more, there are even passages in the novel that urge the reader to continue to use his/her newfound freedoms to ensure that such conversations remain in public view in democratic Spain. The way the novel describes the dictator's funeral, for instance, depicts the tight hold he had on the nation, while simultaneously showing what Franco's passing meant for

Spain: the birth of a public sphere where Spanish citizens could congregate and share ideas independent of the state:

Franco es el primer gobernante que yo he sentido que era unigénito, indiscutible y omnipresente, que había conseguido infiltrarse en todas las casas, escuelas, cines y cafés . . . parecía que la enfermedad y la muerte jamás podrían alcanzarlo. Así que cuando murió me pasó lo que a mucha gente, que no me lo creía . . . me acordé de que habían dicho que iban a televisar el entierro. Yo no tengo televisión ni la veo casi nunca, pero ese día hice una excepción y bajé con mi hija y una amiga suya a un bar que hay debajo de casa. . . Aquella mañana estaba abarrotado, y me daba cuenta, mientras miraba las imágenes del cortejo que se dirigía al Valle de los Caídos, que a cada momento aumentaba el rumor de las conversaciones y el afluir de gente. (Martín Gaité 115-116)

Franco was the first real ruler in my life that I was ever aware of as such, because from the beginning it was clear that he was the one and only, that his power was indisputable and omnipresent, that he had managed to insinuate himself into all the houses, schools, movie theaters, and cafés. . . it seemed as though sickness and death could never touch him. So when he died, my reaction was the same as that of many other people, I couldn't believe it. . . I remembered that they had said that they were going to televise the funeral. I don't have a television set and hardly ever watch anything on TV, but that day I made an exception and went with my daughter and a girlfriend of hers to a bar downstairs. . . It was full of people, and I noticed, as I was watching the images of the funeral procession making its way toward the Valley of the Fallen, that the noise of all the conversations kept getting louder and louder and more and more people kept pouring in. (132-33)

In this passage, which appears at the end of the chapter “El escondite inglés,” (in English, the game ‘Red Light’), we can observe two key things.<sup>80</sup> First, the narrator reminds the reader of what life was like before democracy arrived to Spain. Simply put, Franco was everywhere, and there was no end in sight to his fascist policies. Second, it is significant that C. had to go to a public bar to witness the dictator’s funeral. Much like a game of ‘Red Light,’ the loss of the dictatorial gaze seemingly paved the way for people to gather freely and for “noise of all the

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<sup>80</sup> ‘Red Light,’ also called ‘Red Light, Green Light,’ is a children’s game in which one person—the leader—yells “green light” and turns his/her back on the other players, and then turns around again suddenly yelling “red light.” When the leader yells “red light” and is facing the group, the players are supposed to freeze. If anybody moves, the leader can send him/her back to start. In essence, the kids can only move if the leader’s back is turned.

conversations” to take place again without fear of repercussions, an idea that the Spanish state may have been trying to promote when the Ministry of Culture decided to issue Martín Gaité the National Award.

Throughout much of the novel, the advantages of being a citizen in democratic Spain are highlighted in numerous ways, some of which complement the state’s reasons for issuing it the National Award, others of which question the state’s ability to fully control the way reality is lived and understood. At the beginning of the novel, for instance, the protagonist is suffering from insomnia and, while slipping in and out of consciousness she contemplates how much life has changed for women in twentieth-century Spain through a description of objects. First, she describes her 1978 apartment, where there are books of all sorts strewn about on the floor and the protagonist has no idea what her sheets are made of. As the protagonist’s mind drifts, she remembers how important it was to know how to differentiate between fabrics during the Franco Regime: “era de rigor saber diferenciar un shantung de un piqué, de un moaré o de una organza, no reconocer las telas por sus nombres era tan escandaloso como equivocar el apellido de los vecinos” (“it was essential to know how to tell a shantung from a piqué, a moiré, or an organdy [all three refer to specific kinds of silk]. Not to be able to recognize fabrics from their names was a scandalous as to call neighbors by the wrong names”; 14; 5). Thinking about the importance of cloth in Post-War Spain then causes her to remember how important such details were for her mother, who never purchased anything without first consulting her friends or her husband. She imagines her mother saying, “He visto una tela muy bonita para el cuarto de las niñas” (“I saw some very pretty material for the girls’ room”), and then goes on to specify that

la idea de aquel cuarto la tomó mi madre de la revista *Lecturas* y ella misma confeccionó las cortinas y, haciendo juego, las colchas con su volante y las fundas para cubrir las almohadas con una especie de cinturón que se les abrochaba por el centro, y luego los almohadones – de otras telas pero entonando también – que, al

lanzarse sobre la cama en un estudiado desorden, remataban la transformación diurna de aquel decorado. (14)

[her] mother copied the idea of how to decorate that room from the magazine *Lecturas* and sewed the curtains herself, with matching flounced bedspreads and pillow covers with a sort of sash that fastened around the middle of them, and then the cushions—of different material but in the same color—which—on being thrown on the couch in a studied disorder, completed the daily transformation of that décor. (5)

Whereas C. reads books in her 1970s apartment, her mother read magazines on how to decorate her children's bedroom. C.'s mother thus represents the ideal woman in Francoist Spain, one who knows how to sew and who spends her time caring for her children, not to mention that she is portrayed as having first consulted her husband, the male figure of the household. C., by contrast, represents a different generation: one who, after having lived under Franco, was finally free in the democratic period to consume whatever texts she pleased without necessarily having to discuss her choices with a man.

If the difference between her mother's life and her own seems great, the way the text describes C.'s daughter represents a whole new era for women. Indeed, while C. watches Franco's funeral in the bar, feeling a sense of disbelief and relief at the same time, her daughter and her daughter's friend "se tomaban una cerveza en la barra . . . con sus pantalones vaqueros" ("were having a beer at the counter . . . in their blue jeans"). Noting these generational differences—the fact that the girls were wearing jeans instead of skirts or dresses—C. thinks to herself: "me parecía imposible explicarles . . . cómo había sido ese bloque de tiempo, lo pensaba desde el punto de vista del escondite inglés" ("it seemed impossible to me to explain to them . . . what this block of time had been like. I was thinking of it from the point of view of the game of Red Light"; 119-120; 137-38). Once again, the image of the game "Red Light" is used to evoke the paralyzing affect Franco's gaze had on the nation, without which, Spanish citizens, especially

women, were finally free to move around again. Not only was C. finally able to write openly about the past once Franco died, but her daughter is described as not being capable of understanding the hold that the dictator had on the nation since she grew up in a freer society than her mother. Moreover, at the end of the novel, we learn that while C. has been conversing with the Man in Black, her daughter has been out all night with her friends wearing jeans and a man's jacket (175). Just as C. represents an evolution in woman's freedom in comparison with her mother, C.'s daughter symbolizes a new generation of Spanish women.

The way *El cuarto de atrás* is written also signifies a new era in Spanish literature. Much as the invention of photography in the late nineteenth century forever altered the plastic arts by permitting "la peinture occidentale de se débarrasser définitivement de l'obsession réaliste et de retrouver son autonomie esthétique" ("occidental painting to get rid of its realist obsession and to find its own authentic aesthetic"; Bazin 17), the arrival of democracy liberated artists, prompting them to continue to expand the content of the works and to experiment with more creative forms of expression. While many were writing memoirs of their experiences during the immediate postwar years in an effort to denounce the cruelties of the Franco Regime, Martín Gaité's account plays with various literary genres to communicate a similar message in a more creative way. Chapter five—"Una maleta de doble fondo" ("A False-Bottomed Valise"), for instance, reads like a romance novel (*una novela rosa*), whereas other parts of the novel are well researched and mimic the detail and authority of an historical account of life in postwar Spain. Above all, however, *El cuarto de atrás* is a fantastic novel (*una novela fantástica*), in which intrigue and ambiguity reign. As the Man in Black plainly states, "la ambigüedad es la clave de la literatura de misterio . . . no saber si aquello que se ha visto es verdad o mentira, no saberlo nunca" ("ambiguity is the key to fantastic literature . . . not knowing whether what one has seen

is true or false, never finding out”; 49; 47). How does the manuscript mysteriously end up under the Man in Black’s hat at the end of the novel? Is the Man in Black real, or is he just some sort of muse invented by C.’s imagination? Is the novel autobiographical or is it fictional in nature?

The novel does not attempt to answer these questions definitively. Instead, it invites the reader to come up with his/her own interpretation, by forcing him/her to participate in decoding all of the signs that are present in it (Andreu 148). As Hertzberger has argued: “the importance of Martín Gaité’s perspective on time and history under Franco lies less with what she denounces than with the alternative conception of history that *she offers in its place*” (72, emphasis added). As Hertzberger has shown, Martín Gaité’s novel is about “the transformative power of individual memory to undermine the inertial monologism and fixed continuity of the past and to show instead how history is necessarily malleable” (Hertzberger 72). Along these same lines, following the theories of Maurice Halbwachs, Janett Reinstädler recently has argued that *El cuarto de atrás* might best be thought of as a “productive” recreation of history because it does not attempt to place definitive meaning on past events but rather the novel shows that history is something that must be “(re)constructed” if it is to exist (132).

The real-life Carmen Martín Gaité was, of course, already a well-established writer and literary expert by the time democracy arrived in Spain, but she was not as well known outside of the country. Whereas during the Franco Regime, women writers “faced an uphill struggle to find a voice within the constraints of external and internal censorship, including what [Janet Pérez] has called an unofficial ‘gender censorship’” (Tsuchiya 214), with the publication of *El cuarto de atrás* and the reception of the National Award, however, Carmen Martín Gaité was suddenly everywhere and able to discuss whatever she wanted openly. In some ways, winning the National Award was like receiving a cultural passport that had the power to transport Martín Gaité to the

international literary scene. After winning the prize, she participated in talks about the state of literature in Spain, such as the value of the novel (“Debate”), the relationship between the sexes and literature (“Sobre”), or whether or not being a “best seller” was a good or bad thing (“Jóvenes”). She was also invited to participate in a conference on postwar literature in 1979 at Yale University organized by Manuel Durán in collaboration with General Consulate of Spain. She was a perfect speaker for the event too because she had witnessed the hardships of the Civil War (1936-1939) and subsequent postwar years (1939-1975) firsthand, and she had just published *El cuarto de atrás*, much of which is about life in postwar Spain.<sup>81</sup>

As a result of her participation in the conference and her growing fame as an important National Award-winning Spanish writer, Martín Gaité was appointed Visiting Professor of Spanish Literature at Barnard College during the Fall semester of 1980, out of which three years later came one of the first studies of Carmen Martín Gaité’s literary production as a whole, *From Fiction to Metafiction: Essays in Honor of Carmen Martín Gaité* (Servodidio and Welles 10). As John Kronik has pointed out, it was an important book for Martín Gaité’s career because the collective volume contained essays by several prominent North American scholars of the time, such as Joan Lipman Brown, Manuel Durán, Ruth El Saffar, Carlos Feal, Kathleen Glenn, Ricardo Gullón, Linda Gould Levine, Elizabeth Ordóñez, Julian Palley, Gonzalo Sobejano, Robert Spires and Michael Thomas, thus making Carmen Martín Gaité a household name in North American academia (“Recepción”). Although the volume contains studies of all of her major works, *El cuarto de atrás* is by far the text that receives the most critical attention. In the

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<sup>81</sup> Juan Benet (1927-1993) was the other Spanish author invited to participate in the conference. Benet, of course, was also a well-known writer in Spain when the democratic period began. He is the author of *Volverás a Región* (“You shall return to Region,” 1967), *Herrumbrosas lanzas* (“Rusty Lances,” 1983) and *La construcción de la torre de Babel* (“The Construction of the Tower of Babel,” 1991).



volume, Linda Gould Levine explains that it is a “rare and special gift” to read Carmen Martín Gaité’s novel because it “not only reveals those secret spheres of woman’s existence previously absent from literary texts, but even more significantly, confronts us perhaps for the first time in Spanish literature with a portrait of the artist as woman” (162). As is now well known, in the history of Spanish literature, there have been many texts that contemplate writing as a process. With the exception of Gómez de Avellaneda’s *Diario de amor* (published posthumously by Alberto Ghirardo in 1928), however, these accounts have traditionally been male (Gould Levine 161). The life of the female creator, she argues, has rarely been on public display in Spanish literature.

Instead of treating Martín Gaité’s novel as an inside look into the world of writing from the female perspective, however, there has been a tendency amongst critics to treat Martín Gaité’s novel as a “testimony” of the postwar years, especially since the text is autobiographical in nature. Some, perhaps inadvertently, have even referred to the protagonist as “Carmen Martín Gaité” instead of “C.” as she is called in the text due to their numerous similarities (Bergmann 96, Colmeiro 154, Lindström Leo 208, Sobejano 190, amongst others). Even the author went around verifying the veracity of the novel when it first came out. When asked to summarize the novel after winning the National Award, for instance, she replied:

Es una mezcla de relato de memorias en los años cuarenta y de novela fantástica. La base argumental es fantástica – un hombre desconocido, vestido de negro *me visita de noche y me hace* una especie de entrevista imaginaria-, pero lo que yo cuento, en mi conversación con este personaje, *es totalmente real y lo hago en primera persona y con mi nombre verdadero*. Es un libro *muy documentado* en el que, hasta cierto punto, hago *un estudio sociológico* de las costumbres – la hora a la que había que estar en casa, las modistas, los cafés – de aquella época, que creo *ya es historia*. (“Carmen,” emphasis added)

[The novel] is a mixture of tales of memories in the 1940s and a fantastic novel. The base of the argument is fantastic – an unknown man, dressed in black, *visits me at night* and conducts a type of imaginary interview with me – , but what I talk

about, in my conversation with this character, *is totally real and I do it in first person with my real name*. It is a very-well researched book in which, to a certain extent, I undertake a sociological study of customs – what time one had to be at home, the dressmakers, the cafes – of that time that I think is already history.

In this quote not only does Carmen Martín Gaité confirm her own authority to discuss life in postwar Spain by affirming through her use of the first person that at least some of the work's contents are based on the author's actual experiences and the rest is "well researched." In addition, she directly proclaims that the descriptions of life in 1940s' Spain are "already history," thus playing an active role in the distancing of her present-day tale from the nation's sordid past.

Even though, as both Sieburth and Hertzberger have shown, Martín Gaité's novel makes every attempt to avoid being like other tales that impose ordered meaning on the nature of past events; ironically, in its circulation as a National Award-winning novel, *El cuarto de atrás* has most certainly contributed to many discussions about the nature of life before, during and after the Franco Regime.<sup>82</sup> Moreover, by focusing on the protagonist's everyday encounters with creative practices—such as magazines, movies and literature (both "high" and "low"; Sieburth)—the novel also reveals the power such genres can have over an individual, and by extension, over society as a whole. Instead of viewing art as a purposeless means of expression, as most National Award-winning novels tend to do, Martín Gaité's novel examines the cultural consequences of art and its potential social "use."

In her analysis of the references to mass culture in Martín Gaité's novel, Stephanie Sieburth has shown that the multiple allusions to magazines, popular novels and movies from the 1940s serve to recreate (or reproduce) what daily life was like in Francoist Spain "as a full

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<sup>82</sup> Likewise, Carmen Martín Gaité continues to be regarded as an important Spanish writer. The well-known Spanish literary magazine, *Ínsula*, recently even dedicated an entire issue to analyzing the author's legacy as a Spanish writer, scholar, translator and journalist, who spent a large part of her career bringing the female perspective to public view (Chirbes).

experience with all its original nuances of feeling” in order to break the spell that Francoism cast on the nation for nearly forty years (190). In doing so, I would argue that Martín Gaité’s novel is also about the potential power such works can have on the spectator regardless of his/her particular sociopolitical context. There is one part of the novel, for example, where C. discusses the influence that American film stars had on her and comments that Franco’s daughter, Carmencita, was most likely influenced by the same movies (59). By comparing herself to Carmencita, whom it is safe to assume represents the opposite end of the political spectrum from C., the novel suggests that generationally speaking, C., like all other women who grew up during the postwar years, is an “hija de Franco” (“daughter of Franco”; Colmeiro 154), as C. herself confirms: “hemos sido víctimas de las mismas modas y costumbres, hemos leído las mismas revistas y visto el mismo cine . . . nuestros sueños seguro que han sido semejantes” (“we’ve been the victims of the same manners and mores, we’ve read the same magazines and seen the same movies . . . our dreams have surely been much the same”; 119; 137). Thus, not only do the references to the mass cultural genres of the 1940s “help to create this bridge between [C.’s] own experience and that of other Spaniards who remember the war,” as Sieburth has argued (211), they also serve to emphasize the great responsibility artists have in bringing their works to public view. For many contemporary readers, myself included, Carmen Martín Gaité’s text might be the closest thing they have access to that resembles a first-hand account of what life was like before democracy arrived to Spain, a duty the protagonist takes very seriously, perhaps explaining why the text does not attempt to impose meaning on the truths it reveals.

According to political theorist Linda M. G. Zerilli, when citizens make judgments instead of passively receiving information, “we affirm our freedom and discover the nature and limits of what we hold in common” (183). For her, this is the true lesson of Hannah Arendt’s concept of

freedom and political judgment; the limit of freedom is inaction. If citizens fail to take an active role in the production of their shared reality, they are no longer free. For freedom to exist, then, it not only needs “mere liberation” but also “the company of other men who [are] in the same state, and it [needs] a common public space . . . into which each of the free men [and women] could insert himself by word and deed” (148). According to this logic, works like *El cuarto de atrás* can be said to play an important role in the maintenance of freedom in democratic Spain by serving as an open and creative space, where individual readers may continue to discuss and judge the value of Martín Gaité’s work, and, by extension, the complicated nature of the nation’s past “not as a cognitive commitment to a set of rationally agreed upon precepts (as they are encoded in, say, a constitution – though it *can* be experienced as that too) but as pleasure, as shared sensibility” (Zerilli 183). For the individual protagonist (and possibly for the real Martín Gaité as well), writing about her experience of the past at a time when the Spanish state was in a hurry to build a new image of the country had a therapeutic effect; it is a type of “writing rather than talking cure” (Bush 161). And, as one of the most studied texts of the Transition years and one of the most highly praised National Award-winning novels, *El cuarto de atrás* has continued to circulate as proof of literature’s ability to influence the way reality is understood, by serving as one of the many vehicles through which ‘myths’ about the postwar and Transition years have been produced.

In his writings, Balibar points out that although “citizenship and democracy are not the same, they are in a dialectical relationship” (525). By taking care not to impose meaning on the past, *El cuarto de atrás* promotes a particular understanding of citizenship in democratic Spain, one that must constantly be altered through careful discussion and active participation. As one of many cultural products that capture the immediate benefits that democracy brought to

Spain, the right to speak openly, Carmen Martín Gaité's novel will continue to justify why democracy was a necessary step away from Francoist Spain. In addition, her novel will endure as evidence as to why the Spanish past remains an obstacle for social cohesion in the country. Even ten years after her death (and more than thirty years since the publication of *El cuarto de atrás*), the issue of how to deal with the Spanish past is one that is still discussed in Spain today. Recently, there has even been a public debate over whether to unearth the dictator's body from its final resting place in the *Valle de los caídos* (The Valley of the Fallen), a monumental basilica that was primarily constructed through the forced labor of Republican prisoners (Hedgecoe). Although such a move is unlikely to happen, the fact that it continues to be discussed is evidence of the need in Spain to continue to debate how the past should be presented and commemorated. In this way, as a National Award-winning novel, *El cuarto de atrás* can be read as an exercise of the early democratic citizen's newfound right to participate in the parceling out of public opinion, and in so doing helped to actualize the idea that Spain had become a free and democratic nation.

In her analysis of freedom, however, political theorist Hannah Arendt has argued that works of art do not typically represent acts of freedom because "it is not the free creative process which finally appears and matters for the world, but the work of art itself, the end product of the process." Unlike the performing arts, which for Arendt have a "strong affinity with politics" in the sense that both require a "space of appearances where they could act" (154), the creative arts are seen as final products that primarily circulate as "product[s] of making" (153). Although I agree with Arendt that when a work of art circulates, the creative process is rarely on display, for a work to circulate as a conveyer of meaning in any sense, like art and politics, it too requires a space of appearances in which its significance may be acted out. After all, art cannot even appear

as a “product of making” unless it is socially understood as such.<sup>83</sup>

In effect, the continued public consumption and discussion of any work of art creates a “space of appearances” that potentially has the power to alter the way reality is understood. This is especially evident when a work is said to be representative of a particular time in national history, as is the case of *El cuarto de atrás*, which, when looked at from today’s perspective, can be thought of as a creative practice that has actively participated in the formation of the democratic age. Not only is it a novel that allows each generation of readers to reflect openly about the Franco Regime, as Palerm and others have shown, thus contributing to the discourse on how the past is understood, but also, as a widely circulated novel from/about the transition years, *El cuarto de atrás* has played an active role in distancing democratic Spain from Francoist Spain by questioning the dictator’s view that women are best suited to be wives and mothers through a reversal of gender roles—for instance, in *El cuarto de atrás* the writer is a woman and the muse is male (Gould Levine 162).<sup>84</sup> Finally, in its very existence as a widely studied National Award-winning novel, *El cuarto de atrás* proves that art is a potentially powerful act of freedom in post-Franco Spain. If, as Janett Reinstädler has argued, the Transition years to democracy might best

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<sup>83</sup> And when the work of art is about the production of art, or literature as is the case with *El cuarto de atrás*, it becomes especially difficult to sustain Arendt’s claim that the creative process is not on display.

<sup>84</sup> In addition, literary critic Ingrid Linström Leo has argued that Martín Gaité’s novel inverts power relations, much like a Bakhtinian carnivalesque, through her use of humor and parody: “el modelo de la mujer española en la posguerra viene parodiado aquí con retórica propia de la época. La mujer sana, alegre, valiente y trabajadora había de guiar a sus compatriotas hacia un futuro ideal. Y esto se debía realizar en un ambiente de represión y de miedo, pasando hambre y padeciendo de enfermedades y otras dificultades” (“the model of the Spanish woman in the Post-War [period] appears parodied here with the rhetoric of the time. The healthy, happy, strong, hard-working woman was supposed to guide her compatriots towards an ideal future. And this, one was supposed to realize in a repressive and terrifying environment, hungry and suffering from sicknesses and other difficulties”; 213).

be thought of as a “tiempo a ser recordado y (re) construido cada vez de nuevo” (“time to be remembered and (re) constructed each time over and over again from the beginning”; 120), then it is likely that Martín Gaité’s novel will continue to inform how the transition to, and importance of democracy is understood, especially when we consider the frequency with which it is taught and discussed in academic circles today. It is a novel that generates new truths about history each time it is read, an act that ultimately reveals the power the individual citizen/author has to use the space of the National Award in Narrative Literature to inspire discussions without political repercussions in post-Franco democratic Spain.

#### *4.3 Transcending Borders: Bilbao-New York-Bilbao and the Limits of Labels*

With the way I have described Carmen Martín Gaité’s novel, it may seem as if the implementation of democracy in Spain was a smooth and simple process with a happy ending. Although it is true that with the signing of the 1978 Constitution, Spanish citizens definitively gained a certain degree of freedom, for many citizens of the Spanish state, however, this tale of triumph simultaneously signaled defeat. In the Basque country, for instance, only 33% of the Basque population approved the signing of the Spanish Constitution, the cultural consequences of which can still be felt today. According to anthropologist Joseba Zulaika, essentially the “nationalist position is that the Spanish Constitution lacks legitimacy on the basis of that percentage” (131). All who live in the Basque Country, of course, does not share this view. As is often the case in state-less nations, there is a wide spectrum of perspectives on whether achieving independent statehood should be a final goal. Already in this dissertation we have seen two cases of Basque citizens whose public image is pro-Basque, yet not necessarily “anti-Spanish”—Bernardo Atxaga and Unai Elorriaga, both of whom are active promoters of Basque culture who

also write and promote the Castilian translations of their works. For the remainder of the chapter, I would like to consider the case of Kirmen Uribe, who in 2009 was the third Basque writer to win the National Award for his first and only novel, *Bilbao-New York-Bilbao* (2008). Written from the perspective of a young writer who grew up in the democratic period, Uribe's prize-winning novel clearly embodies the trials and triumphs of democracy in contemporary Spain.

Whereas when Carmen Martín Gaité's novel was written, freedom of expression was an emerging concept in Spain, published exactly thirty years later, Uribe's autofictional novel represents the experience of a different generation. To begin with, although both *El cuarto de atrás* and *Bilbao-New York-Bilbao* won the National Award in Narrative Literature, of the two only Martín Gaité's novel actually circulates as a "Spanish" text both in Spain and abroad.<sup>85</sup> Uribe's novel, by contrast, is most commonly referred to as a "Basque" text, given that Uribe has worked the majority of his life to promote Basque culture and literature around the globe. Although Uribe is most frequently thought of as a poet, in addition to *Bilbao-New York-Bilbao*, he has also authored several children's books in Euskera in an effort to reach audiences at a younger age. In addition, he frequently visits local high schools in the Basque Country to talk to students, and he has participated in various literary events both in Spain and abroad in an effort to promote Basque literature and culture on a global stage.

Despite the fact that Uribe's entire career is largely tied to his Basque identity, legally speaking, Uribe is a citizen of the Spanish state. This affiliation was made even more visible when the artist accepted the National Award in 2009, an honor that would bring with it the

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<sup>85</sup> Moreover, as I mentioned in chapter 2, because *El cuarto de atrás* is one of two novels written by a woman to have won the National Award—the other was Carme Riera's *Dins el darrer blau* (*Blue Horizons of No Return*, National Award 1995) originally written in Catalan—Carmen Martín Gaité's novel is the only Castilian text written by a woman to have won the National Award in democratic Spain.



opportunity (if not obligation) to participate in many state-sponsored events in connection with the prize. Nonetheless, few critics (if any) would consider *Bilbao-New York-Bilbao* to be a “Spanish text.” On the contrary, in all of the Spanish and English language newspaper articles and academic papers I have read about Uribe, his novel is consistently (if not exclusively) referred to as “Basque,” or some mention is made of the fact that Uribe only writes in Basque (“Kirmen Uribe, Premio”; “Kirmen Uribe: Quería”; Rodríguez Marcos). Even the author consistently affirms his “Basqueness” when he gives interviews by always referring to himself as a “Basque writer” (“Entre”). In this way, the promotion of Uribe’s novel can be said to embody several fundamental changes that thirty years of democracy had brought to Spain, including the citizen/writer’s ability to navigate different waters and manipulate his/her affiliation with the state.

Nonetheless, as a text whose Castilian translation has far outsold the original Basque version, Uribe’s novel is also caught up in several competing systems of signification. Is the novel still Basque when it is read in Castilian? Is it Spanish when read in the original? One of the problems with translation, as I showed in chapter 2, is that it often implies an “individualistic conceptualization of authorship” (Venuti, *Translator’s* 6). That is, whether or not the author of the original is the same as the translation, the translation often circulates as if it were an exact copy of the original, and when the translation is more widely read than the original, the translation will often displace the original in the public sphere, standing for it as if it were the same text (7). This fact is quite obvious within the space of the National Award, given that, as I mentioned in chapter 2, when minority text win the prize the majority of the jurors read the Castilian translation instead of the original. This is especially true when Basque authors win the

National Award since very few Spanish citizens outside of the Basque Country have the ability to read Basque.

Following Venuti's call to "demystify the illusion of transparency," I would like to make it clear that I am not a speaker of Basque nor am I a specialist in Basque literature. Thus, my analysis of *Bilbao-New York-Bilbao* is based on the Castilian version written by Ana Arregi.<sup>86</sup> Although it is true that studying Arregi's translation poses certain limitations for me as a scholar (for instance, some may argue that by studying the translation I am contributing to the displacement of the original), for the practice of issuing National Awards in multilingual democratic Spain, however, translation is essential. Indeed, without translation, many readers would never have access to certain texts, and the Ministry of Culture would have a much more difficult time finding jurors that could read in all languages of the state. Nonetheless, because translations are cultural reconstructions just as much as they are linguistic interpretations, they also "perform a work of domestication," that has the power to neutralize or erase cultural tensions that are present in the original (Venuti, *Scandals* 5). In this way, translations can be said to wield "enormous power in constructing representations of foreign cultures" (67). And when a novel is about cultural identity, as is the case with *Bilbao-New York-Bilbao*, it is even more likely that the text will influence the way, in this case, Basque culture is understood.

As much as translations have the power to domesticate literary texts, they also have the ability to deterritorialize and alter dominant views of culture both foreign and domestic. As Sakai has argued,

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<sup>86</sup> Interestingly, Uribe's novel is the only minority text that has won the National Award to include the translator's name on the title page; the other texts that have been translated into Castilian only mention the translator on the copyright page.

From the outset, we have to guard against the static view of translation in which difference is substantialized; we should not yield to the reification of translation that denies translation its potentiality to deterritorialize. Therefore it is important to introduce difference in and of language in such a way that we can comprehend translation not in terms of the communication model of equivalence and exchange but as a political labor to create continuity at the elusive point of discontinuity in the social. (26)

In his first well-known study, Venuti makes a similar claim when he says, “to recognize the translator’s invisibility is at once to critique the current situation and to hope for a future more hospitable to the differences that the translator must negotiate” (277).

In an effort to avoid displacing the original with the Castilian translation, I have tried to make my analysis of Uribe’s novel as transparent as possible. First, with the help of my colleague and friend, Itxaso Rodríguez, I have included all quotations in the original Basque version. Second, I also include my own English translations of Uribe’s novel, which are based on the Castilian version, but, with Rodríguez’s help, I have also included footnotes that describe any linguistic or cultural variations that exist between the published versions. Finally, rather than seeing translation exclusively as a tool of domestication, I tend to agree with Casanova, whose critical text, incidentally, also circulated primarily in translation, that “translation is one of the principal means by which texts circulate in the literary world.” All texts, she argues, “need mediation and intermediaries in order to make their way in the world republic of letters” (xiii). To focus exclusively on the domesticating effects of translation, therefore, is to deny translated words the ability to insert ideas into the dominant culture. Furthermore, to exclusively emphasize the domesticating effects of translation is to continue to privilege a particular view of literature as something that necessarily must be national or related to nationalism in some way, a move that serves to perpetuate the view that minority literatures are ‘inferior’ to majority ones because they do not possess as extensive a history. Instead, since literary critics are regarded as “creators

of literary value” (Casanova 22), I would like to consider the liberating effects of translation, by analyzing the types of cultural ideas the Castilian version of Uribe’s novel reveals.<sup>87</sup>

As the title suggests, Uribe’s novel takes place on a transatlantic flight from Bilbao to New York; it is told from the perspective of a fictional version of Kirmen Uribe as he contemplates the novel he is trying to write about the last three generations of his family.<sup>88</sup> Instead of being a linear record of events, Uribe’s novel consists of fragmented memories, and includes a wide variety of intertextual references, from poems and songs to emails and Wikipedia entries. For this reason, I find it useful to think of *Bilbao-New York-Bilbao* as an autofictional *novel of memories*, given that much of what the protagonist knows about the past is based on the memories of others, including written and oral forms of transmitted knowledge. Indeed, if, as Hertzberger has pointed out, in novels of memory “the limits of knowledge correspond to the limits of memory” (120-21), in *Bilbao-New York-Bilbao* this takes on a whole new meaning, given that the novel highlights the ways in which the protagonist’s individual perspective is influenced by a variety of subjective viewpoints. As the fictional Uribe confirms:

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<sup>87</sup> Rather than speaking of multiple texts, in this chapter I will refer to Uribe’s novel in the singular, given that the signifier, “the text” has the potential to point to all that circulates in relation to a given work, including all interpretations and adaptations of it. What’s more, as I mentioned in chapter 2, as a National Award-winning text, *Bilbao-New York-Bilbao* automatically points to at least two literary works—the Basque and the Castilian versions—given that both texts were read by the jury that chose it.

<sup>88</sup> As a separate point, I find it interesting that the title of Uribe’s novel is in English in all of its translations except Portuguese, in which it is called *O dois amigos* (The Two Friends). It is noteworthy because the first known literary work written in Basque—the book of poems *Linguae Vasconum Primitiae* (1545) by Bernard Etxepare—also carried a foreign title in the lingua franca of its own historical moment. Perhaps Uribe’s decision to leave the title in English was meant as a reference to Etxepare’s text. As for the Portuguese translation, I could only speculate as to why the editors chose to change the title, but perhaps it had something to do with the fact that it was published by Planeta, a large publishing company, who thought the novel might sell better in Portugal with the new title.

Bitxia da nola egiten duen lan oroimenak, nola geure erara gogoratzeko dugun, garai batean ustez errealitatea izan zena fikzio bilakatuz. Familietan horrela funtzionatzen du behinik behin. Gure aurrekoak gogoratzeko haien istorioak kontatzen dira, eta anekdota horiengatik dakigu pertsona hori nolakoa izan zen. (52)

Es curioso cómo trabaja la memoria, cómo recordamos a nuestra manera, convirtiendo en ficción lo que en otro tiempo fue realidad. Por lo menos así sucede en las familias. Se inventan historias no sólo para ilustrar o educar, también para compartir creencias, para legar tradiciones o para acordarse de los antepasados. Gracias a esas narraciones recordamos a quienes nos precedieron y nos hacemos una idea de cómo fueron. (46)

It is curious how memory works, how we remember in our own way, converting into fiction that which in another time was reality. At least that's how it works in families. Stories are invented to enlighten or educate, also to share beliefs, to bequeath traditions or to remember ancestors. Thanks to these narrations we remember who preceded us and we begin to have an idea of how they were.<sup>89</sup>

Analogously, Uribe's novel includes multiple overlapping stories that serve to illustrate how much life has changed for Basques since the beginning of the twentieth century. Similar to a game of pass the message, though, many of the tales Uribe includes are ones that have been passed from one generation to the next, and thus do not always reflect an accurate portrayal of the past. Instead, as the quote above suggests, rather than convey a sense of authenticity, stories serve to illustrate key cultural values for each new generation.

In effect, even though much of *Bilbao-New York-Bilbao* is about the protagonist's family in particular, the many historical tidbits and anecdotes the novel interweaves also serve a larger purpose to educate the contemporary reader about Basque culture in general. Towards the end of

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<sup>89</sup> I would like to thank Itxaso Rodríguez for helping me include the quotations in the original Basque version and for noting the linguistic and cultural changes that exist in the different versions. In this particular passage, Rodríguez felt the translator's choice to use the word "invented" was a little strong. "In the Basque Country stories," she said, "are not invented; they are told." She also mentioned that the original does not mention that stories "enlighten or entertain." If she had translated the last two sentences from Basque into English, she would have written, "Stories are told so that we can remember our ancestors, and because of (thanks to) those anecdotes, we know how that person was" (Rodríguez).

the novel, the narrator even makes this goal explicit:

EUSKALDUNOK beti pentsatu izan dugu literature tradizio txikia dela gurea. Eta egia da, euskaraz argitaratutako liburuak zenbatzen hasten bagara, ez direla gehiegi. Gure literaturak ez du eraginik izan kanpoan, ez dugu sekula erreferentea izango den literatura lanik sortu, ahozko tradizio aberatsa izan arren.

...

Baina okerrena hori ezkutuan izatea da. Beharrezkoa dugu gure etxe aurretik pasatzen diren horiek sartzera gonbidatu eta etxean zerbait eskaintzea, zerbait hori ezer gutxi baldin bada ere.

Dugun tradizioa dugu eta horretxekin egin behar dugu aurrera; hori bai, ahalik eta jende gehien erakarriz bertara. Etxea egurasteko modurik onena leihoak zabaltzea baita. (223-25)

Los vascos siempre hemos pensado que la nuestra es una tradición literaria menor. Y es verdad, si comenzamos por contar el número de libros publicados en Euskera, que no son demasiados. Nuestra literatura apenas ha ejercido influencia en otras literaturas, y no hemos creado obra capaz de convertirse en referente universal, a pesar de gozar una rica y antiquísima tradición oral.

...

Pero lo peor que podemos hacer es mantenerla oculta. Al contrario, es necesario que invitemos a entrar a quienes nos visiten y les ofrezcamos cuanto tengamos en casa, aunque lo que ofrezcamos sea poco, y les parezca pobre.

Tenemos la tradición que tenemos y con ella debemos avanzar; eso sí, tratando de atraer al mayor número de lectores. Porque la mejor forma de airear la casa es abrir las ventanas. (194-96)

We Basques have always thought that ours is a minor literary tradition. And it is true, if we start by counting the number of books published in Euskera, which aren't very many. Our literature has barely influenced other literatures, and we haven't created a work that will serve as a universal reference, despite the fact that we enjoy a rich and extremely old oral tradition.<sup>90</sup>

...

But the worst thing we could do, is keep it hidden. On the contrary, it is necessary that we are inviting those that visit us to come in and we offer them everything we have at home, even if what we offer them may seem of little worth.

We have the tradition we have and with it we should go forward; that's it, trying to attract the largest number of readers.<sup>91</sup> Because the best way to air out the house is to open the windows.

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<sup>90</sup> In the original version, the text says that Basque literature has “not influenced” other literatures, not even barely (Rodríguez).

<sup>91</sup> In the Basque version the text says “people” (“jende”) instead of “readers,” and the Basque tradition is only described as “rich” (“aberatsa”) not “old” (Rodríguez).

By including references to several Basque artists, and discussing the history of Basque culture through tales he heard from his family members while growing up, this is exactly what Uribe's text does. It opens a window into what it means to be Basque in contemporary Spain.

Specifically, the novel emphasizes the importance of actively participating in the creation and maintenance of what it means to be Basque, rather than strictly adhering to preconceived notions of Basqueness. Whether the novel is read in Castilian, Catalan, Gallego, or most recently in its Japanese or Portuguese translations, it promotes a productive view of Basqueness that places great value on the fact that Basques have a separate and unique cultural identity that must be actively protected, but also ideally "universalized." And, as a National Award-winning novel, Uribe's text also works to change how the national literary and political landscapes are perceived, while simultaneously making his own views of Basque identity and culture visible on a local as well as global stage.

This tension between wanting to speak to the local culture, where there are a relatively small number of readers and publishing houses, and the desire to reach a broader, perhaps global, audience is one that is underscored by all minority writers in Spain. In an interview with Carment Rigalt in 1996, for instance, well-known Basque writer Bernardo Atxaga explains that when he first started writing in Basque he did not want to consider himself to be a "nationalist writer"—Basque or otherwise. Instead, he preferred to think of himself as a writer of literature, in the more general sense. After much reflection, however, he realized that "writing in the Basque language entails rooting oneself in a kind of work for "nationalism," a word that recalls but is not the same as "nationalism"" (Kortazar 141). In order to further clarify his position, Atxaga employed the metaphor of the cork and anchor to exemplify the way minority writers are anchored in their own national identity, yet because their works also circulate in translation (if

they are to be financially successful, that is), such literary texts also serve as “corks” that carry works from one culture to another, or as Kortazar puts it “from Asteasu [Atxaga’s hometown] to Athens” (141). As a porous rather than solid material, however, the metaphor of the cork will not ensure that minority writers will last in globalized waters. As Atxaga made clear at the 2008 Reno Conference when he said:

I write in Basque, but my work is not grounded in considerations of this nature. They do not work for me as a writer, nor do I believe that they can work for others. Or even less for society. These considerations are of a material that resembles cork rather than an anchor; they are incapable of preventing a language from being swept away by what we call the “flow of history.” (51)

According to this perspective, focusing on the “Basque question” will not assure the Basque culture a permanent place in the world; instead, as this quote shows, Atxaga argues that literature is most politically effective when citizens of the Basque Country see their cultural icons celebrated as “good writers” on par with other writers on the global stage.

This is because, as Atxaga goes on to point out, every system of national identification “requires proof, signs that it truly exists; proof and signs of its greatness as well” (56). For this reason, Atxaga argues that literature (and art in general) are, by nature, political, because they always have the potential to serve as weapons “in the fight waged by different nations to be themselves and to be “great”; they work at the service of identity. Or to put it more precisely, they work at the service of a political ideology that is almost always concerned with questions of identity” (58). Although the political component of literary works written in minority languages may be somewhat inevitable, Atxaga specifies that he prefers “an anchor more literary than political for the simple reason that [he] believe[s] it to be more secure” (60). For Atxaga the future of the Basque literary institution will be bright, as long as Basque artists/citizens continue to be productive and thrive. If so, he argues “writing in Euskera will be like traveling by



aerodynamic cork across sidereal space. And there will be no author happier than the Basque author” (62), an optimistic perspective I would argue *Bilbao-New York-Bilbao* shares, Uribe’s career embodies, and the National Award aims to support.

When we look at way the world of Basque letters has evolved since the beginning of the democratic period, we can definitely observe a change in the way the “Basque” writer is perceived on the national stage. For instance, when Atxaga won the National Award in Narrative Literature in 1989, he often spent many interviews justifying his decision to write in Basque. In 2002, however, when Basque writer Unai Elorriaga won the award for his novel *SPrako tranvia* (2001) things had changed a bit. In an interview he gave in 2008, the majority of the questions asked of Elorriaga had more to do with his particular literary style rather than his decision to write in Basque. In fact, the only question of a slightly linguistic nature was whether he thought it was possible for Basque writers to be successful without translating their novels into Castilian. Although the question is still somewhat paternalistic, given that it carries with it the assumption that all Basque writers would ideally prefer not to publish in Castilian due to some “anti-Spanish” stance—a position that assumes Basque writers do not feel Spanish too—the evolution away from the need to understand why a writer would want to write in a minority language in the first place definitely represents an ideological transformation with regards to the way Basque Culture is perceived on the National stage. At the very least, it seems that in the in the twenty-first century the choice to write in a minority language has become somewhat of a “normal” thing.

Interestingly, in his response to the question as to whether a Basque writer could be successful without publishing in Castilian, Elorriaga inverts the interviewer’s perspective by highlighting the advantages of writing in Basque rather than focusing on the perceived disadvantages implied by the question. Namely, Elorriaga makes the case that Basque writers

actually have an advantage over other writers because “cuando el escritor no mira al mercado (ni el mercado le mira a él), cosa que cada vez ocurre menos, siente una libertad prácticamente absoluta. . . . Y de ahí, pienso, nace la literatura de calidad” (“when a writer doesn’t look at the market (and the market doesn’t look at him), something that happens less and less, s/he feels a sense of absolute freedom. . . . And from there, I think, literature of quality is born”;116). Similar to Atxaga, then, the quality of literature is more important to Elorriaga than any potential political agenda that some may have when choosing to publish in Basque. In addition, the author’s emphasis on the importance of freedom in writing also serves to highlight the importance of living in a democratic society, where artists are not only free to create art in their national language of choice, but also they are publicly rewarded for it within the space of the National Award.

Similarly, as the third Basque novelist to win the National Award, Kirmen Uribe’s *Bilbao-New York-Bilbao* represents yet another “sign” of the solidification of Basque Culture on a national and international stage. To begin with, in an interview the author has on his website, Uribe openly acknowledges the level of influence and importance authors like Atxaga had on him as he first started publishing in Basque. He specifically mentions that for his generation, Basque Culture has become so widespread that he is no longer asked about his decision to write in Basque—after all, in the first few months alone the novel sold 8,000 copies in Basque, which according to Jon Kortazar is an impressive figure for any novel published in Spain, but particularly for a community of readers, which includes about 250,000 people (qtd in Rodríguez Marcos). Instead, when interviewed, Uribe commented “ya las preguntas son más sobre literatura—qué leo, por ejemplo—y no tanto sobre cuestiones sociolingüísticas” (“now the questions are more about literature – what I read, for example – and not so much about

sociolinguistic questions”; (Uribe; “Capital cultura”). As is the case with Elorriaga, who also grew up in the democratic period, Uribe can be said to form part of a new generation of Basque writers, who live in a seemingly different age than their predecessors. Whereas when Atxaga was first writing the Basque literary institution was only just reemerging after being nearly extinguished by the Franco Regime for forty years, by the time Elorriaga and Uribe began publishing, the world of Basque letters was much more developed; not only were more writers choosing to publish in Basque, but also, for perhaps the first time in history, Basque citizens were able to read translations of “world literature” in Basque.

This newfound right to fully embrace one’s “Basqueness,” of course, also served to further distinguish Basque culture from the rest of the world. In fact, starting from an analysis of the Basque words *ez* (no) and *bai* (yes), anthropologist Joseba Zulaika claims that Basque identity has most often been defined through negation. This is particularly true in the case of extremist sentiments of nationality, which are commonly based on this type of binary thinking—the Basque citizen is Basque *not* Spanish, local *not* global, particular *not* universal, etc. Uribe’s *Bilbao-New York-Bilbao*, on the other hand, depicts a much more contemporary and nuanced view of Basque culture, one that does not pit Basqueness against Spanishness. Instead, the novel focuses on the many intersections that exist between local and global culture, and in so doing, *underplays* the level of influence and authority the Spanish state has on the life of a twenty-first century writer who considers himself to be Basque (and not necessarily Spanish).

Even though he won the National Award, a gesture that implicitly attaches the author and his/her prize-winning text to the Spanish state, each time Uribe speaks publicly about his work, he always takes the opportunity to use the platform of the prize to discuss his views of Basque culture. Thus, as I mentioned above, *Bilbao-New York-Bilbao* is not a novel that lends itself to

practices of complete domestication that tend to accompany the translation and circulation of minority texts within the dominate culture, even though it primarily circulates in its Castilian translation and it won the National Award. Furthermore, given the great success the novel has enjoyed, we could arguably conclude that the National Award may actually have played an active role in the promotion of Basque culture by providing the artist a platform from which to resist complete cultural and political domestication. Of course, it could likewise be argued that because Uribe's text is not overtly "anti-Spanish," it was a perfect Basque text to represent the space of the National Award, given that Uribe's view of Basqueness is not incompatible with the Ministry of Culture's preferred image of Spain as a multicultural yet cohesive nation state.

Interestingly, in *Bilbao-New York-Bilbao*, except for the multiple references to the oppressive nature of the Franco Regime (1936-1975), there are very few references to the Spanish state. The protagonist is said to come from Ondarroa (not Spain), and, as we saw before, he specifically mentions that one of the goals of the novel is to offer the global reader a window into the world of Basque culture (not Spanish). Moreover, the fact that the title of Uribe's novel mentions "New York" and not "Madrid," is also suggestive of a twenty-first century minority writer's desire to transcend a specific literary territory. As Basque writer Iban Zaldúa recently said in his essay "Eight Crucial Decisions (A Basque Writer is Obligated to Face)," the decision to write in Basque is only the first step, the Basque writer must then also decide "whether to make a stopover in Spanish or take a direct flight to another language" (99). In many ways, Uribe's novel seems to be a metaphor of his response to this dilemma. Not only does the protagonist literally fly over the Spanish state in the pages of *Bilbao-New York-Bilbao*, but also the real Uribe's choice to not translate his own novel into Castilian (even though he surely would have been capable of doing so), is also suggestive of a particular political view. In fact, the

translations of *Bilbao-New York* in Catalan (now in its second edition), Galician, and Spanish (currently in its third edition) were all released simultaneously, in an effort to put all cultures of Spain on equal footing.<sup>92</sup>

The minority writer's ability to manipulate his/her relationship with the Spanish state, however, has its limits. Although writers like Uribe are free to represent themselves however they please, the reality is that the Basque Country currently forms part of the Spanish state and independence does not seem imminent. As well-known scholars William A. Douglass and Pedro Ibarra Güell have argued, "the nation-building process is arguably far easier than its state-building counterpart. In some respects, the former regards dreams translated into aspiration, while the latter addresses harsh realities and quotidian disappointments. In short, it is far easier to imagine an independent Euskadi than to make it" (154). In fact, the only place where Basque nationality seems to be possible is outside of the concrete borders of the nation-state, contained within the realm of art. It is not coincidental that Uribe's novel takes place in the air, a space that transcends the nation; it is there that Uribe's account of Basqueness can exist without taking into consideration these "harsh realities and quotidian disappointments." Indeed, within the pages of Uribe's novel, Basque culture is portrayed as a distinct form of identification that has its own independent connections with the global community. That is to say, it portrays a world in which the "Spanish" question is not of primary concern (a reality that is best achieved in the world of art).<sup>93</sup> Likewise, as a National Award-winning novel, Uribe's text also works to contain matters related to Basque culture within the literary realm; the author may have 'real world' concerns,

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<sup>92</sup> According the author's website, the novel has also been published in Portuguese, and translations of it will soon appear in Japanese.

<sup>93</sup> I would like to thank L. Elena Delgado for pointing this out to me.

but when discussed in relation to National Award, such issues tend to be recast and neutralized in aesthetic terms, given the prize's reputation as a reliable judge of literary talent.

Although the novel is a pleasure to read, I would argue that its primary aim is social rather than aesthetic. In other words, whereas in the previous chapter I analyzed two National Award-winning novels that portray literature as a “purposeless” means of artistic expression, in Uribe's novel, literature and story telling, in general, are seen as important means of transmitting cultural and political ideas. In particular, *Bilbao-New York-Bilbao* is a novel that contemplates the last hundred years of Basque history in a very optimistic, or even *costumbrista* way, so as to set himself apart from more conservative views of Basque culture, a move that has been criticized in some circles (“*Bilboa*”). This does not mean, however, that it shies away from controversial topics. On the contrary, the narrator deals with many polemical issues throughout the text, such as Basque terrorism or the many brutalities that his family endured during the Franco Regime (his grandmother, for instance, is said to have always carried a hatchet with her everywhere she went during the war, given that women were often victims of rape on both sides of the political divide). He also includes references to his Francoist grandfather in order to challenge the dominant idea in the Basque country that the Basques were only innocent victims during the Spanish Civil War. As the narrator explains:

Podría haber hablado de Hipólito [su otro abuelo republicano] y callar la historia de Liborio. Pero el personaje de Liborio me atraía mucho más a la hora de escribir la novela. Un personaje contradictorio que me creaba multitud de interrogantes. ¿Por qué optó por el alzamiento [de Franco] un hombre de Ondarrea que casi no hablaba castellano? ¿Por qué se posicionó a favor de Franco cuando su propio hermano, Domingo, optó por defender la República? ¿Qué fue realmente lo que hizo que tomara esa decisión?

Nunca lo sabré.

De todas maneras, sentía la necesidad de contar la historia del abuelo Liborio, de no seguir obviando una realidad tantas veces silenciada. La guerra civil fue también una guerra entre vascos. (142)

I could have talked about Hipólito [his other Republican grandfather] and keep quiet the story about Liborio. But the character of Liborio attracted me much more when it came time to write the book. A contradictory character that inspired a multitude of questions. Why would a man from Ondarroa who barely spoke Castilian opt [to be part of the Francoist] uprising? Why would he position himself in favor of Franco when his own brother, Domingo, opted to defend the Republic? What really made him make this decision?

I will never know.

In any case, I felt the need to tell the story of [my] grandfather Liborio, [so as to] no longer continue to avoid a reality that is often silenced. The Civil War was also a war between Basques.<sup>94</sup>

This passage is indicative of the author's position throughout the novel, one that does not condone either side's violence, and where the contradictions inherent in all identities, both collective and personal, are confronted. Throughout much of the text, the narrator is conscious of his desire to communicate the many trials and contradictions that have faced the Basques since his grandfather's time in an effort to transmit a more complete version of events that might serve present-day citizens to form a more "productive" agenda for the nation's future. By "productive," I mean that the novel presents an alternative version of Basqueness that is both positive and proactive. The novel is not overly critical of the way the Basques have attempted to promote their cultural values; instead, it simply offers a new way of looking at the Basque situation, and shows many concrete ways Basque citizens might go about bringing their culture to the world in a more pacific way, rather than through destructive approaches, like the ones employed by the terrorist organization ETA (*Euskadi Ta Askatasuna*; "Basque Homeland and Freedom"), whose many attacks on prominent Spanish figures (and sometimes innocent bystanders) do not seem to be the most effective response to the situation.

In fact, in Uribe's novel there are very few references to ETA, or "the Thing" as Basque

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<sup>94</sup> In her reading of Uribe's text, Rodríguez was unable to locate this particular passage, so I decided to leave out the Basque, given that I was unable to verify whether or not it is absent from the original. If it were absent, however, it would be interesting to contemplate what might have prompted the translator to add it to the Castilian version.

writer Iban Zaldúa has called it (96). The only direct allusions to ETA are brief, and do not present the organization in the most favorable light. Moreover, instead of focusing on ETA's political position, the novel concentrates on the violence the group has caused through a random series of images and references to the attack that took place in Ondarroa in 2008:

2008. Irailak 21. Larunbat gaua. Goizeko lau eta erdiak. *Ondarroa*. Amesgaiztoa izan dut. . . . Zarata handi batek esnatu nau. *Etxeak kraska egin du*. Gure gelako pertsiának salto egin du. Leherketa handi bat izan da. Nereari begiratu diot. Ondo dago. “Non dago Unai?” *galdetzen diot*. Ordu horretan zen etxera etortzekoa kaletik. “Non dago Unai?”. (216, emphasis added)<sup>95</sup>

21 de septiembre de 2008. Sábado noche. Cuatro y media de la mañana. He tenido una pesadilla. . . . Un estruendo me ha despertado. La persiana de nuestra habitación ha saltado en pedazos a causa de una explosión. He mirado a Nerea [su novia]. Está bien. ¿Dónde está Unai [su hijastro]? Tenía que volver a esa hora. ¿Dónde está Unai? (189-90)

September 21, 2008. Saturday night. Four thirty in the morning. I have had a nightmare. . . . A thunderous roar has woken me. The blinds in our room has shattered into pieces. It was a large explosion. I look at Nerea [his girlfriend]. She is fine. Where is Unai [his stepson]? He was supposed to return at this hour. Where is Unai?

In the following references to the attack, we learn that Unai was, in fact, safe; yet, we also learn that others are hurt—“Bada gu baino okerrago denik ere” (“hay quien está mucho peor que nosotros”; “there are those much worse off than us”; 217; 191). Though the references to ETA do not directly condemn the organization's actions, the emphasis on the danger and terror of such attacks, paints ETA's goal to achieve Basque independence at any cost as a destructive, rather than productive solution to the “Basque situation.”

One of the richest examples of the novel's desire to move away from such destructive notions of Basqueness is the inclusion of an Aurelio Arteta painting—“Erromerian 1” (“In the

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<sup>95</sup> In the Castilian version the specific reference to Ondarroa, the sentence, “Etxeak kraska egin du” (“the house has cracked”), and the tag line “galdetzen diot” (“I ask her”) are absent in the Castilian translation (Rodríguez).



Pilgrimage”; 1917-1918).<sup>96</sup> And when I say the novel includes the painting, I mean that it both discusses it frequently and that it literally contains an eighteen-inch by eight-inch color print of it at the beginning of the text that the reader may tear out and keep. The painting is of an “Erromeria” (a lively festival that typically forms part of a pilgrimage), on a sunny day in the Basque country. In the middle of it, there are people playing instruments; on the left, a couple is dancing under a tree, and on the far right there are two coquettish women beckoning for someone who remains out of view (perhaps the spectator) to follow them.

Because the mural has many levels of significance throughout the novel, and Arteta’s life is described in some detail, “Erromerian 1” can be interpreted as an important *mise en abyme* that reiterates many of the novel’s main themes. The first time the painting is mentioned, for instance, it is introduced as an object of personal value. The narrator is on the airplane and is thinking about what first motivated him to go to the museum of Bilbao to learn more about Arteta and his painting. He imagines himself standing in front of the mural—the vivid colors, the movement, the tone—and he juxtaposes this experience with the story he heard growing up of his mother being taken to the same museum as a child just hours before her grandfather passed away (13-14; 13). As the text explains, Uribe’s grandfather did not want his daughter to associate that particular day with his death alone, so just before he died, he took her to the Bilbao museum in an effort to replace sadness with beauty. Although the novel does not specify that Arteta’s painting was the one Uribe’s grandfather took his mother to see at the museum, it is possible to

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<sup>96</sup> According to the novel, Aurelio Arteta (1879-1940) was an important Basque painter who lived at the beginning of the twentieth century. His most famous works can be seen in the Bank of Bilbao in Madrid and throughout many museums in the Basque Country. For its own part, “En la romería” first appeared as a mural on the wall of his good friend, Basque architect Ricardo Bastida’s summer home. When the house was destroyed in the 1960s to make room for an apartment building, the mural was transferred to the Bilbao museum, where it can still be seen today.

imagine it was, especially since the text later confirms that one of the women in the painting was in fact Uribe's grandmother (227-28; 198). By showing the active role his grandfather played in sharing Basque art with his mother, the narrator of *Bilbao-New York-Bilbao* likewise takes on the role of a guide for the reader, who will also get to know Arteta's painting more intimately upon reading Uribe's novel. What's more, the real Uribe has likewise taken an active role in the promotion of Basque Culture, a task that was greatly aided by the increased attention he received when he won the National Award in 2009.

In his reading of the mural, the narrator informs the reader that it is a representation of "Muralean bi mundu ageri dira, biak elkarrekin" ("dos mundos, y los dos están unidos"; "two worlds, and the two are united"; 15; 14). On the left side of the painting we see a portrayal of the rural world. The men and women participating in the festival are playing traditional instruments and are wearing traditional clothes; the women's skirts go down to their ankles and they are wearing scarfs on their heads. On the right side of the painting, by contrast, we see the urban world depicted. The two young women are not fully participating in the festivities, the skirts they have on are a little shorter (their knees are even somewhat exposed), and they are adorned with bright necklaces. Rather than being a painting that laments the changing of customs, however, the narrator goes on to say, that the painting portrays "Nabari-nabaria da *Art-déco*aren eragina, 20ko hamarkadako baikortasun hori darie pinturari" ("muy clara la influencia del Art Decó; irradia el optimismo de los años veinte"; "very clearly the influence of Art Deco; it radiates the optimism of the 1920s"; 15; 14). Likewise, Uribe's text is about the coexistence of two worlds: his own time and that of his grandparents, whose traditions, the novel shows, are slowly disappearing. In his depiction of both times, however, the fictional Uribe remains quite optimistic in regard to his own moment in history, one that is connected to and influenced by

past generations, yet not exclusively tied to them. Much as the rural figures represent an older way of life that is on the verge of vanishing, for the present-day viewer of the painting, the two urban women likewise represent a past moment in time that precedes the present-day viewer/reader. In effect, the two female figures in the painting appear to be gesturing for the viewer to follow them in the procession of time and history in their own manner.

This is particularly evident when we consider the way the narrator idealizes Aurelio Arteta in the novel as a “true artist” because he was more interested in being with his family making art than in earning money (18; 16-17). In fact, after the town Gernika was bombed by the Nazis in 1937, the Republican government in Spain asked Arteta if he would commemorate the tragedy in a painting. As the narrator puts it, it would have been “Bere bizitzako lana izango zen hura” (“la oportunidad de su vida”; “the opportunity of his life”; 17; 16). Instead of accepting the offer, however, the artist decided to follow his family to Mexico so as to escape the horrors of war. “Gero, enkargua Pablo Picassori iritsi zitzaion. Eta ondotik datorrena guztiok ezagutzen dugu. Artetaren karreran jauzi handia izango zen Gernikari buruzko koadroa egitea, baina ezezkoa eman zion” (“Al final, el encargo recayó en Pablo Picasso. Lo que vino después es de todos conocido. Pintar el cuadro sobre Gernika hubiera sido un salto definitivo en la carrera de Arteta, pero no lo aceptó”; “In the end, the commission went to Pablo Picasso. What came thereafter is now well known. Painting a work about Gernika would have been a definitive step in Arteta’s career, but he didn’t accept it”; 17; 14). Picasso’s image of the bombardment had a positive impact for his career as an internationally known artist. Arteta, on the other hand, had only limited success outside of the Basque Country.

What’s more, because Picasso’s painting graphically depicts the horrors of the Spanish Civil War, it quickly became a symbolic painting for Basque nationalists during and after the

Franco regime, which helped inspire anti-Francoist movements, especially in the Basque country. For many, *Guernica* represented “the legacy of totalitarian violence” (Conversi 230). Not only did it aptly capture the Franco regime’s acceptance of violence as a means of political control, but the painting, as was also the case for many Spanish citizens, was forced to leave Spain and was exiled abroad until 1981.<sup>97</sup> As Gils Van Hensbergen has argued, *Guernica* was viewed as an important symbol after Franco, whose return to Spain in the early eighties the central government hoped might symbolize “a reconciliation of all Spaniards in peace and democracy” (qtd in Van Hensbergen 300). Of course, the fact that it hangs in Madrid and not the Basque Country was also quite controversial, and there are still some who would like to see it moved. This is because for citizens of the Basque Country, Picasso’s painting was a reminder of just how cruel the Spanish government could be. In fact, many would later use the bombardment of Gernika as justification for pro-Basque movements against the Spanish state during the democratic period. To mention Picasso’s *Guernica* in a novel that includes an Arteta poster, therefore, has added meaning for the Basque community.

In the words of Robert Clark, the painting *Guernica* “is without doubt the most powerful and driving symbol in the entire Basque political culture. For an American, it would be Pearl Harbor, the Alamo and Bunker Hill all combined in a single searing metaphor” (234). The legacy

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<sup>97</sup> Picasso’s painting was displayed for the first time at the Paris International Exposition, which took place from May 25-November 25 of that same year the bombing occurred (1937), which means that Picasso must have created his now-famous masterpiece within weeks of the horrific tragedy it commemorates. Given its subversive message, after the exposition, Picasso decided to send his masterpiece to New York instead of Spain, where it was housed in the Museum of Modern Art. By being in such a prominent museum, Picasso’s painting is said to have “shocked international public opinion.” It was, after all a depiction of “history’s first aerial bombardment of a civilian population” (Conversi 77). In 1981 Picasso’s painting was returned to Spain and eventually displayed in the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia (National Museum Reina Sofia Center of Art), where it still hangs today as evidence of the cruelties of war.

of the event remained vivid in the minds of Basque nationalists for many generations, an idea the narrator of *Bilbao-New York-Bilbao* also confirms:

Gogoan dut txikitan geuk ere “Guernica” koadroaren kopia bat genuela egongelan eskegita. Euskal Herriko etxe guztietan egongo zen orduan “Guernica”ren bat. Berniza jarri zioten gaintik gurasoek eta ematen zuen koadroa benetakoa zela. Gomutan dut nik uste nuela benetako “Guernica” gure etxean zegoela eta lagunentzian ikusten nituenak gure etxearen kopiak baino ez zirela. (182-183)

Recuerdo que de pequeños nosotros también teníamos una copia del *Guernica* colgada en la salas. Entonces en todas las casas del País Vasco había algún *Guernica*. Mis padres lo barnizaron y parecía que el cuadro era de verdad. Me acuerdo de que yo pensaba que el verdadero *Guernica* estaba en nuestra casa y los que veía en las casas de mis amigos no eran más que copias del nuestro. (160)

I remember that as kids, we all had a copy of *Guernica* hanging on the wall in the living room. At that time every house in the Basque Country had some *Guernica* or other. My parents had ours varnished, so it seemed like a real painting. I remember that I thought the real *Guernica* was in our house and the ones I saw in my friends' houses were nothing more than copies of ours.

In his recent essay Italian philosopher Roberto Esposito explains that throughout the history of man, communities have most often been created and maintained through violence (1). Although this can take many shapes, most often violence has taken on “the fluid form of contamination,” the idea that contact with other “diseased” cultures will somehow ruin the integrity of the home culture (7). In this way, it seems quite fitting that Picasso’s painting has come to be such an important symbol for Basques for it has the potential to serve as a justification for anti-Spanish sentiments.

Uribe’s novel, on the other hand, takes a different approach to the representation of the Basque community by promoting a more “productive” perspective of what it means to be Basque in a global world. As Esposito posits at the end of his essay, instead of functioning through violence and death, “[the world] must make itself the custodian and the producer of life” (21). By incorporating a nuanced description of Basque culture throughout the novel, instead of a

“destructive” one that might attempt to occlude the inherent contradictions and antagonisms within the Basque community itself, Uribe’s novel makes itself a “producer of life.” In particular, his inclusion of Arteta’s painting, which can literally be torn out of the book and put on the reader’s wall, urges the reader to replace the destructive notions of violence represented by Picasso’s *Guernica*, with a more positive and, perhaps more palatable perspective, a supplication that was magnified by the exposure the artist received when he won the National Award.<sup>98</sup>

In their recent book, scholar/activists Grace Lee Boggs and Scott Kurashige argue that the present-day is a pivotal moment in the history of mankind. Using the situation in Detroit, Michigan as their main topic of analysis, the two critics underscore the need to reconstruct society from the “ground up.” In a world of increasing joblessness, homelessness, global warming and economic instability, they argue that there is an urgent need for a Revolution. Not a revolution that attempts to seize power *from* the state, but one that creates change by promoting “a new concept of citizenship” (78). As Kurashige explains in the introduction to their book:

This [means] creating models of work, education, art and community that would transform those rebels filled with righteous anger into productive change agents who understood that self-transformation and structural transformation must go hand in hand. As Gandhi said and King concurred, you must be the change you wish to see in the world. (15)

Along these same lines, I read Uribe’s novel as a similar call to action, one that promotes Basque culture, not by defending some abstract notion of it, but one that actively produces and encourages its constant (re)configuration. By including Arteta’s painting as such an important intertextual reference, the novel suggests that for Basque culture to thrive, its citizens must

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<sup>98</sup> Uribe’s novel, of course, was written well before ETA’s most recent ceasefire, which occurred in January of 2011. Only time will tell, though, if a more pacifist age in extremist Basque politics has commenced, or if such ideas will only remain up in the realm of good intentions (or perhaps up in the air in a fictional world on a flight to New York).

actively care for it in a more productive way, one that takes into account the increasingly globalized nature of our shared world rather than adhering to preconceived notions of identity that are rooted in frozen understandings of the past.

The novel's closing image of a Senegalese girl speaking in Euskera while playing in the sand with another little girl (230-31; 201), for instance, clearly symbolizes the complicated nature of identity in the world today, and the impossibility of thinking about national identities in a closed off manner. Instead, the narrator urges the reader to understand that Basque culture is influenced and shaped by actual people and not by rigid ideologies or utopian notions of what it "should be." A good example of this realist view can be seen towards the end of the novel when the narrator discusses his relationship with his stepson, Unai. Although Unai, who was thirteen when he first met Uribe, was a little hesitant to establish a relationship with his mom's new boyfriend, eventually Uribe and Unai became friends who bond over many things, especially soccer. Whereas Uribe is a diehard fan of the Basque soccer club, Athletic, Unai prefers the British team, the Chelsea Football Club. In fact, each time Uribe observes Unai playing soccer on his PlayStation, he is always playing with the Brits. When Unai explains that he never chooses Athletic "because they always lose," Uribe tells him that when he was Unai's age he would have always chosen Athletic no matter what. A few sentences later, the narrator comments:

Gaur ere Unairen gelara sartu eta playean jolasten aurkitu dut. "Berri on bat dut zuretzat" esan dit irribarre eginda. "Athleticekin ari naiz jolasten eta Champions Leaguea irabazteko zorian gaude!". Nik ezin nion pozari eutsi. Azkenean ere bide zuzena hartu du mutikoak, pentsatu dut neure kolkorako. Baina halako batean, konturatu naiz Athleticeko jokalaria bat beltza zela. "Nor da hori ba?" galdetu diot, "ez dut ezagutzen". "Hori, Drogba da, Chelseako aurrelaria. Fixatu egin dut Athleticerako" erantzun dit berak. "Eta baita ere Torres eta Mesi. Munduko talderik onena da orain Athletic".

Argi dago, mutil honekin ez dut zer eginik. (189)

Hace poco entré en el cuarto de Unai y lo encontré jugando con la *play*. “Tengo una buena noticia para ti,” me anunció con una sonrisa. “Estoy jugando con el Athletic y estamos a punto de ganar la Champions League.” Yo no cabía en mí de alegría. Al final el chaval ha elegido el camino correcto, pensé con orgullo. Pero de repente me di cuenta de que un jugador del Athletic era negro. “Oye, ¿quién es ése?”, le pregunté, “no lo conozco.” “Ese es Drogba, delantero del Chelsea. Lo he fichado para el Athletic,” me contestó tan campante. “Y también a Torres y a Messi. Ahora el Athletic es el mejor equipo del mundo.”

Esta claro, no tengo nada que hacer con este chaval. (166)

A little while ago I entered Unai’s room and I found him playing with the PlayStation. “I have good news for you,” he announced with a smile. “I am playing with Athletic and we are about to win the Champions League.” I could hardly contain my excitement. In the end the kid had chosen the correct path, I thought with pride. But suddenly I realized that one of Athletic’s players was black. “Hey, who is that?”, I asked, “I don’t know him.” “That’s Drogba, the forward from Chelsea. I put him on Atheltic,” he answered without batting an eye. “And also Torres and Messi. Now Athletic is the best team in the world.

Clearly, there’s nothing that can be done for the kid.<sup>99</sup>

As this, and many other examples in the text show, being Basque in the twenty-first century means learning to negotiate with the globalized nature of our modern world, and it means continuing to ask questions that are difficult to answer: is the Senegalese girl Basque because she speaks the language? Does playing with a “Basque” team made up of international players make the team any less “Basque”?<sup>100</sup> The novel does not attempt to address these questions, but rather,

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<sup>99</sup> I based my English translation on the Castilian version, which is told in the past, whereas, according to Rodríguez, in the original version, the passage is told in the historical present (i.e. “I *enter* Unai’s room and I *find* him playing with the PlayStation. “I have good news for you”, he *announces* with a smile. . .”).

<sup>100</sup> In this respect, it is important to keep in mind that the soccer club Athletic is notorious for only contracting “Basque” players; that is, since the club first began nearly hundred years ago, only one black athlete—Jonás Ramalho, who joined the team in November of 2011, three years after the publication of Uribe’s novel—has played for the team (Beato). When the club first began, there was a brief period in which English players were brought to play for Athletic, which was followed by a ten-year period in which the club only accepted players from Vizcaya. Since then, the team has primarily included Basque players, though it has been known to contract non-Basque players as well, such as Luis de la Fuente (from La Rioja region) and Catalan player Enric Saborit. In 2011, for the first time in the 113 years of the club’s history, not a single player from Vizcaya tried out for the team (Hernández).



by including such provocative images, it urges the reader to see the complicated nature of identity in the twenty-first century, especially for minority writers who often live in and between cultures.

As theorist Kwame Anthony Appiah explains: “[In today’s world] you can’t be partial to some tiny group and live out your moral life there; it’s simply not morally permissible. But you cannot abandon your local group either, because that would take you too far away from your humanity. So what we have to do is to learn how to do both” (113). Appiah’s idea is one that the Uribe’s text shares: not only does Uribe choose to write in a minority language, which is fluently spoken by less than 600,000 people, but his work also circulates in translation in many languages, which functions as a window into his small community. Moreover, the themes that organize his work, such as memory, forgiveness and the power of art to capture and transcend violence and exclusive forms of identity, are indeed universal.

To reach the world, however, literary texts must continue to circulate and be read. Only then can literature be said to act as a window into another world. As I have shown, both Uribe’s and Martín Gaité’s prize-winning novels offer the reader a glimpse into another time, a time that is both connected to and distanced from the present, and each does so without imposing meaning of the many stories they narrate. Instead, both novels invite the reader to actively participate in creation of each text’s meaning. As Uribe explained in an essay he wrote shortly after *Bilbao-New York-Bilbao* won the National Award: “Yo creo en un lector inteligente, culto, que participa en la lectura de la novela, un lector que va rellenando los espacios en blanco que va dejando el autor. Un lector que va creando su propia novela a partir de lo que está leyendo” (“I believe in an intelligent, educated reader who participates in the novel s/he is reading, a reader who goes about filling in the blanks the author leaves”; “Esto” 12). As this quote shows, it is not the writer’s

actions and opinions that influence society; it is his or her connection to the reader that actually has the potential to incite change. And when a socially engaged novel wins the National Award, its potential to influence public opinion expands with the increased attention the prize brings.

This view of literature, as a powerful force that has the potential to shape the way reality is perceived, as I have shown, is one that both *El cuarto de atrás* and *Bilbao-New York-Bilbao* uphold. Yet, each does so in a creative way that embodies yet transcends its historical moment. Whereas *El cuarto de atrás* portrays writing as a solitary process that takes place in a closed apartment where her dialogue with the Man in Black may only be a dream; written thirty years later, Uribe's novel, conversely, depicts art as an accumulation of experiences, interactions and cultural connections that take place in waking life.

Artistic freedom, however, is not seen in either text as something that is available to just anyone. On the contrary, both *El cuarto de atrás* and *Bilbao-New York-Bilbao* portray the art world as a space that includes *and* excludes, regardless of when each was published. On the one hand, the fact that C. even has a back room in postwar Spain, or that the fictional Uribe can afford to take a plane from Bilbao to New York are indicative of both protagonist/writers' privileged socioeconomic positions, neither of which would be very representative of the *demos* in Spain or in the Basque country, where high levels of unemployment and housing shortages have continued to prevent many citizens from having the means to actively participate in the formation of society as Martín Gaité and Uribe might advocate. On the other hand, neither author was simply handed his/her fame on a silver platter; quite the reverse, as a woman who started writing under Franco and a Basque writer in the democratic period respectively, both authors have had to fight hard to stand out amongst writers from the dominant culture.

As a result of their hard work and dedication to the craft of writing, both authors have enjoyed great success in Spain and abroad, which has afforded each the luxury of devoting time to their passions, both literary and social. As the fictional Uribe says at one point in the novel, to be successful, “IDAZLEAK behar du babesa” (“El escritor necesita apoyo”; “a writer needs support”; 51; 45) and in today’s world s/he “ez dela soilik norbere komunitateko kideentzat idazten orain. Mundua txikiagoa da” (“Ahora no se escribía únicamente para la misma comunidad. Ahora el mundo era más pequeño”; “is no longer writing exclusively for the members of his/her own community. Now the world is much smaller”; 118; 101). In this light, the conferring of the National Award can be viewed as one of the many practices that helps turn the art of writing into a viable money-generating profession that offers the artist/citizen the opportunity to reflect upon the world in which s/he lives. It is an imperfect process that also attempts to control the way literature and the nation are perceived, but when individual citizens exercise their right to freedom of expression with social purposes in mind, as Kirmen Uribe and Carmen Martín Gaité have done, literature has the power to help shape the way the reality of a democratic nation is understood, as a construction of the people’s views that is always a work in progress.

## CONCLUSION



Profession?

Governmental Credibility.

-Forges (*El país*, 20 June 2012)

As I hope to have demonstrated in the previous chapters, the National Award in Narrative Literature is an important cultural practice that serves several diverse, yet conflicting, functions. On the one hand, as my analysis of the rules that have governed the prize suggests, the National Award works to subsume literary texts as “national.” As I showed in my analysis of Zamora Vicente’s *Mesa, sobremesa* and Muñoz Molina’s *El invierno en Lisboa*, however, the prize also serves to promote a particular image of literature, as a “purposeless” “high art” that has the potential to exist separately from the state. On the other hand, the National Award also grants artist/citizens the opportunity to share ideas with their fellow citizens on the national stage, as my analysis of Martín Gaité’s and Uribe’s prize-winning novels demonstrated; yet it also imposes meaning on them, by classifying them as “National Award-winning.” Finally, as the epigraph

suggests, the National Award in Narrative Literature is a practice that contributes to the idea of literature as a respectable and serious profession, but, as a label that appears with nearly all texts that receive it, it also turns artist/texts into walking advertisements of the prize, and, by extension, of the Spanish government's sovereign right and credibility to govern the country and to administer its National Awards.

Of course, the texts that I have examined closely in this dissertation—Alonso Zamora Vicente's *Mesa, sobremesa*, Antonio Muñoz Molina's *El invierno en Lisboa*, Carmen Martín Gaité's *El cuarto de atrás* and Kirmen Uribe's *Bilbao-New York Bilbao*—represent but a small fraction of the total number of texts that were published in the democratic period. Nonetheless, as we have seen, studying these particular prize-winning novels allows us to further contemplate the ways in which the concepts of the nation, literature and democracy have been created and maintained since the dictator Francisco Franco's death in 1975. As scholar James English has noted, literary prizes are caught up in many systems of meaning and exchange, and, as such, “[they] are the single best instrument for negotiating transactions between cultural and economic, cultural and social or cultural and political capital—which is to say that they are our most effective institutional agents of *capital intraconversion*” (10). The ability of the National Award to add value to any text in the democratic period relies on the fact that concepts of “the nation,” “literature” and “democracy” exist *a priori*. The National Award would not have the same impact, for instance, if “literature” were not viewed as a practice worthy of praise. Likewise, the prize could not be said to have helped implement democratic principals, if the Spanish Constitution had never been signed.

The very worthiness of the prize and its ability to support particular ideas of the nation, of literature and of democracy, thus, depends on various forms of reciprocity: the idea of Spain as a

multicultural yet cohesive nation only exists because law makers and citizens continue to act out its legitimacy publicly. The idea of literature as a high art worthy of praise endures because writers, critics and readers continue to appreciate its relevance, and democracy only truly happens when citizens take an active role in its perpetual (re)formation. In this way, the National Award in Narrative Literature becomes a powerful metaphor of how these reciprocal relationships have played out in democratic Spain.

Despite the government's attempts to dissociate itself from the former Franco regime, whose obsession with the idea of national culture is now well known, the very existence of National Awards reminds us that national culture is still very much a province of the state in democratic Spain. By creating opportunities and incentives for writers to embody the National Award, and, by extension, the nation, the Ministry of Culture is able to appropriate its citizens' labor for its own benefit. As we have seen, however, the conferring of National Awards is not a practice whose social significance is completely determined by the state. Although it may help the Spanish government in its efforts to promote a particular image of the nation, other values the award promotes, such as the virtues of literature or the importance of active citizenship, are values that have the potential to transcend the political and cultural boundaries of the nation-state. Thus, if the National Award in Narrative Literature is thought of as a tool that only benefits the state, we have inadvertently stripped literature of its ability to communicate alternative views of reality to a potentially limitless readership that is not necessarily nationally bound. That is, whether literature is understood as a space of its own, as I showed in chapter 3, or as a tool to inspire utopian ideas, as I argued in chapter 4, works of literature are cultural products that can never fully be tied to the nation-state even if they carry the label "National Award-winning." Furthermore, as my analysis of *Mesa, sobremesa* showed, winning the prize does not always

ensure a text will be positively received or that it will continue to form part of the Spanish literary canon. Instead, the worthiness of a given text is determined by something internal to the text itself: its “literariness.”

That which defines the boundaries of a text’s literariness, however, depends, in part, on how literature is perceived. If literature is thought of as a “purposeless means of expression,” then a text’s worth will depend on its formal characteristics. If literature is valued for its potential social use, however, then a text’s merit will hinge on its public reception and influence. As a state-sponsored prize, it is likely that the National Award was primarily designed with the former idea of literature in mind, given that if literature is merely thought of as an aesthetic practice that creates distinct worlds, the prize’s political dimensions are more easily obscured. Conversely, the more socially engaged novels that have won the National Award, such as *El cuarto de atrás* and *Bilbao-New York-Bilbao*, often work to undermine the central state’s authority to govern all aspects of life, even though they are simultaneously cast as examples of the state’s tolerance and acceptance of diverse cultural views. As I showed, Martín Gaité’s novel implicitly criticizes the transition government for its attempts to erase the sordid nature of the nation’s past, yet it was also the first novel to receive the National Award once the Spanish Constitution was signed, which allowed the Ministry of Culture to support Martín Gaité’s novel without actually addressing any of the issues the novel raises. Similarly, Kirmen Uribe’s text can be read as a socially engaged novel that aims to bring Basque culture to public view on its own terms, and yet, as a National Award-winning novel, it is also marketed as an example of Spain’s multicultural nature. In addition, the novel is most often read in its Castilian translation, which has the potential to neutralize Uribe’s more social intentions.

In his 2000 article on the sociopolitical status of minority cultures in Spain, Michael Keating has argued that the increased presence of competing nationalist affiliations in Spain is part of a “three-directional erosion of the state from above, from below and laterally in the face of the market” (30). As part of the European Union, he notes that the minority cultures have gained a certain amount of independence from the Spanish state. This is not to say that they are recognized as separate nation states, but their languages and cultures have a semi-official status, such that citizens of the Basque, Galician and Catalan nations may write to representatives of the European Union in their native languages, but these languages do not have the same status as the “official” languages of the European Union (Generalitat 22). Likewise, the presence of the European Union as a second “sphere of authority” also contributes to a slow decline in the Spanish state’s influence in the lives of everyday citizens, but especially in the minority nations, where multiple voices of authority “coexist with multiple systems of action” (Keating 31). Thus, even though minority writers may be citizens of the Spanish state, their public images are by no means contained within this label. Instead, through the medium of translation, minority writers have gained a certain amount of freedom in Europeanized Spain to negotiate how this relationship to the Spanish state is perceived.

And herein lies the paradox: how can a prize help to strengthen the cohesiveness of the central state if some of its citizens profess loyalty to other conceptualizations of the nation? Likewise, how can the prize serve the discipline of literature if literature is not something that can completely be determined from the outside? Finally, how can the prize contribute to the idea of democracy if it is undemocratically selected by an elite group of jurors? In looking over the texts that have won the National Award, we see that there are no simple answers to these questions. Instead, it might be possible to find a different response in each of the novels that have



won the National Award in the democratic period. Nonetheless, studying the history of the award as well as the reception of key texts reminds us what is at stake in the field of Spanish literary studies today; namely, the question of how to treat minority literatures and cultures: should texts written in minority languages be considered as “Spanish,” and, if so, should they be more visibly studied by scholars of Spanish literature? And, if they are studied, should departments of literature promote the study of all the official languages in Spain, or will Castilian continue to be the dominant literary language of the political territory?

These are difficult questions to answer without definitive solutions that are likely to be debated for years. In looking over the list of National Award-winning novels, however, we see that, for the Ministry of Culture, the answers to these questions are simple. From their perspective, yes; minority cultures are definitely part of Spain, and, yes; it is perfectly appropriate to study them in translation (after all, that is how the jury of National Awards reads them). It is an imperfect system full of social and political hierarchies that promote freedom of expression and individual rights while simultaneously attempting to control them. Yet, as I hope to have demonstrated in this dissertation, the issuing of the National Award in Narrative Literature also carries several important functions: it helps to embody, and therefore actualize, the idea that democratic Spain is a multicultural, yet cohesive state, it is one of the many practices that help to turn the written word into literary works of art, and it is a custom that mimics the civic reciprocity inherent to all democratic societies, in that it organizes and oversees the administration of life, yet it allows writers/citizens a certain amount of liberty to embody the prize as they see fit. As such, the National Award in Narrative Literature has played a major role in turning literary and social concerns into cultural and economic profit. It is a conflicting practice that supports the idea of literature as a serious and respected profession, but, as the

epigraph reminds us, it also serves a means of legitimizing the state's credibility to interpolate literary works as "national." The future image of democratic Spain and of Spanish literature, therefore, depends on the ways in which Spanish citizens publicly represent them, and it relies on critics and citizens worldwide to continue to reinterpret what these categories include, a task that is likely to always be a 'work in progress.'

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