

Sarah Legget and Ross Woods, editors. *Memory and Trauma in the Postwar Novel: Revisiting the Past*. Lanham, Maryland: Bucknell University Press, 2013. 182 pp. ISBN 9781611485301.

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Even after eighty years, the Spanish civil war continues to be an object of memory. That is, the war is not merely an event remembered but is an historical moment *to be* remembered and one that, according to some, *must be* remembered. For some critics, Spain's 2007 Law of Historical Memory is the most obvious case in point. So too a host of novels and films produced around the years the law was debated, passed, and then unevenly —and not uncontroversially— implemented. The unexpected early success of some of these works —Javier Cercas' *Soldados de Salamina* comes to mind here— and then the almost comical proliferation of often intimidating magnum-opus-style works by Almudena Grandes, Antonio Muñoz Molina, and Manuel Rivas, among others, attest to the obsession with civil war memory at the time. This was, per culture watchers, the great moment of civil war “historical memory.”

Ironically in the celebration of the twenty-first-century culture of memory, many failed to remember what could be considered the original literature of civil war memory. That literature is the work of a generation of postwar Spanish writers, women and men who had actually lived the war and who, therefore, weren't just treating the war as an *object* of memory but as an actual lived and *personally* remembered experience. If the civil war is a topic in the twenty-first-century novel, it is the driving, traumatic force if not the very *raison d'être* of so many postwar novels. As such, should we not consider the narrative of Carmen Laforet, Camilo José Cela, Ana María Matute, Mercedes Salisachs, Arturo Barea, Ignacio Aldecoa, and company as the original works of historical memory? If we treat them thus, what might they remember, and what might they reveal about the processes of memory and trauma?

This is the project of Sarah Leggott and Ross Woods' book collection, *Memory and Trauma in the Postwar Spanish Novel*. In the collection, Leggott and Woods present ten essays plus an introduction that set out to answer these questions. The essays appear solicited with the instruction to select one or two postwar novels to be read in light of the same theories of historical memory being applied to twenty-first-century works. In

the essays that engage explicitly with contemporary theories, the writings of Dominick LaCapra, Jeffrey Alexander, and especially Cathy Caruth on memory and trauma receive almost exclusive attention. Perhaps because the essays here are simply trying to point out the possibilities of reading classic novels in a new light, there is no attempt to problematize this canon of memory theory. Caruth and company are applied wholesale, the authors of the essays trusting the value of their theories to provide new insights into older works.

If we are not therefore witness to a more complex intellectual grappling, we do nevertheless enjoy the fruits of an application that would seem obvious if it were not for the fact that it has been ignored until now. The results are useful rereadings of both postwar canon like Cela's *La familia de Pascual Duarte*, Laforet's *Nada*, and Matute's *Primera memoria*, as well as what for some readers might be introductions to the works of Mercedes Salisachs, Dolores Medio, María Zambrano, Arturo Barea, Ignacio Aldecoa, and Rosa Chacel. While we cannot give each of the essays the attention it deserves here, a handful of insights illustrate the collection's methods and value.

In the collection's first essay, co-editor Ross Woods invites us to reread *La familia de Pascual Duarte* removed from its historical context. He tries to imagine it as if published alongside Cercas's *Soldados de Salamina*, for example. He argues that the lack of historical context within the novel itself could produce distancing effects similar to those in some of the contemporary "novels of memory." These effects challenge readers to engage more actively with the text and ultimately with the questions of memory and trauma it presents. Francis Lough's essay on the second part of Matute's *Los mercaderes* trilogy, *La trampa*, follows a thread common to a number of the novels considered in this collection: the strategy of writing and/or retelling as a way to process traumatic memory (see essays by Walsh and Caballero Rodríguez for other examples). Lough shows that many of these novels are not read today as "novels of memory" because they, perhaps inevitably, present memory as a much more private affair. These writers did not enjoy the political or the psychological luxury of stepping back, taking stock, and then tying together a collective sense of past, present, and even future. Their writing, resulting from trauma and impinged upon by fear and censorship, is inescapably more private.

Christina Arkinstall's essay on Mercedes Salisach's *Los que se quedan*, Julia Van Luijk's on Ignacio Aldecoa's *El fulgor y la sangre*, and collection co-editor Sarah Leggott's on Dolores Medio's *Nosotros, los Rivero* will be of particular interest to those seeking remedy from the sometimes exasperating ideological certitude of some twenty-first-century "novels of memory." All three use theories of memory and trauma to reveal the ideological contradictions and internal conflicts experienced by both vanquished and victors in the postwar years. Arkinstall's look at Salisach's novel is especially interesting given that Salisach wrote from a Nationalist perspective and reproduced official regime rhetoric within her tale. Nevertheless, the memories reproduced within the novel

directly contradict those official discourses, including the regime-sanctioned imperative to forget and move forward.

Finally, a number of essays make the case first presented in the introduction that if these postwar novels are often not understood as works of civil-war memory, it is because, for the most part, the war was an off limits topic. Daniela Omlor's essay on Matute and Chacel, and Caballero Rodríguez's essay on Zambrano's memoir *Delirio y destino* stand out here. Both essays effectively employ theories of trauma—Caballero Rodríguez provides the collection's most thorough explication of these theories—to show how postwar authors grappled with trauma to such a degree that silences often prove more telling than the tale itself.

As noted earlier, on occasion one would wish for greater critical engagement with the theories of memory and trauma employed, especially because the body of theory the collection's authors employ is so uniform across the essays. While, to be sure, critique of the theories themselves was not the intent of the collection, the lack thereof occasionally creates an overly familiar pattern of repeated theories and resulting arguments. In essay after essay, for example, the authors observe that writing is a coping mechanism for dealing with the unspeakable trauma of the civil war: "Writing provides a method of facing up to trauma" (38); "The novel...enacts the recovery and articulation of memory" (72); "The return to the physical site of her past leads to the recovery and the working through of traumatic memories" (94); "The attempt to tell their stories...is their only means of recovering their agency" (138); "The process of writing itself provides a sense of purpose to the author, which in turn also contributes to the healing of trauma" (150). While the observations may each in their own right be accurate and prove, on careful examination, insightful, read as a collection, they feel predictable and leave the reader wanting more.

That being said, the collection's explicit purpose is to rediscover and reread these postwar novels as part of a corpus of "memory novels." In this, Leggott, Woods, and company have succeeded in their project. They have done so to the extent that readers will be hoping for at least a monograph or two stemming from this project. A first might simply answer the questions noted above. A single scholar applying the theories of memory to this same body of postwar novelists would be more likely to note differences in approach and perspective from one novel and author to the next. Such differences would in turn invoke an intellectually rich dialogue between novels and theory. In that, we might discover not only that those original novels can be themselves "novels of memory" but that their varied approaches problematize our readings of later works. A second monograph could tie the authors studied in this collection—not to mention a number of contemporaries conspicuously absent from the project—to the memory work of late-Franco authors and beyond, as studied as by David Herzberger among others, as well as to the outpouring of work on twenty-first-century civil war novels. The resulting panoramic view of the representation of memory and historical

memory in nearly eight decades of civil-war-inspired works would prove essential reading.

If we are serious about the recovery of the historical memory of the Spanish civil war, we cannot leave buried in the past the novels of what we might call “first memory,” to borrow a phrase from Matute. Hispanists must not only remember the past but must remember the memories of those who lived that past, including those memories resulting from traumas so profound as to prove elusive to all but the most patient critical readers. Thankfully, Leggott, Woods, and company have provided a first patient step in the right direction.