

# Rosa Montero's *La carne*: Questioning the Culture of the Transition

*Olga Bezhanova*  
Southern Illinois University

**Abstract:** Rosa Montero's 2016 novel *La carne* represents a continuation of the artistic project that the writer began with her first novel *Crónica del desamor* (1979) and that voices profound concerns with the apolitical nature of the cultural establishment constituted during Spain's Transition to democracy (1975-82). The traumatic experience of the economic crisis that Spain began to experience in 2008 has demonstrated the problematic nature of the economic and political institutions created during the Transition. *La carne* points to the chasm between Spain's cultural elites that have interiorized the ideology of the Transition and those in Spain who are suffering because of the crisis.

**Keywords:** Transition – Rosa Montero – crisis – historical memory – Spain

**I**n 2012, a group of Spanish writers, thinkers and political activists published a collection of articles titled *CT o la Cultura de la Transición. Crítica a 35 años de cultura española*. The stated goal of the contributors to this volume was to offer a critical analysis of the apolitical nature of the cultural establishment created during Spain's Transition to democracy (Martínez 13-5). It is no coincidence that the book appeared in print at the height of an economic crisis that was bringing hundreds of thousands of Spaniards into the streets to protest austerity measures, foreclosures, and sky-rocketing unemployment rates. The questioning of the political and the economic legacy of the Transition had been taking place for years, and it intensified as a result of the devastation wrought by the crisis, which was the most serious one that global capitalism had experienced since the 1930s (Guillén 45). Carles Geli, a journalist who interviewed the book's coordinator Guillem Martínez for *El País* in May of 2012, referred to *CT o la Cultura de la Transición* as “ultimísimo hijo en formato de libro que ha generado el 15-M” (Geli n. pag.), connecting the volume to the political activism of the millions of Spaniards who were part of the country's protest movement of 2011-12. Attempts to conduct a critical analysis of the culture of the Transition have not been limited to the non-fiction genres. In her 2016 novel *La carne*, Rosa Montero offers a devastating critique of the Transition-era mindset as exemplified by the novel's protagonist Soledad Alegre. Born in 1956, Soledad reached maturity at the beginning of Spain's journey towards a stable representative democracy. The worldview that Soledad

formed during that time proves inadequate in the face of the current economic crisis. Soledad's self-absorption and refusal to see as worthy of interest or compassion the troubles of the younger generation of Spaniards who are suffering as a result of the crisis point to a generational rift that often separates those who welcomed the Transition in the 1970s from those who are questioning the manner in which it was conducted. Soledad's refusal to come to terms with her personal past as well as with the country's historical memory makes it impossible for her to form a realistic understanding of the roots of the current economic crisis and of her own crippling anxieties.

Montero began her literary career as a reporter for the newspaper *El País* at the height of the Transition. In her journalism, Montero aligned herself with the Transition-era belief in the importance of putting the past to rest in order to ensure a peaceful move towards a newly democratic society (García Álvarez 178). Montero's first novel *Crónica del desamor*, however, represented one of the first attempts to question the cultural establishment that was being constituted during the Transition. Published in 1979, the novel is imbued with "el sentimiento de derrota y desilusión" (Albarrán 42) experienced by young intellectuals who detested the oppressive environment of the closing years of the Franco dictatorship yet failed to find meaningful ways to live and work once Francoist strictures were gone. The characters of *Crónica* experience "paralizadora inercia. . . la perplejidad del contexto, el absurdo, la desidia" (*Crónica* 43) that are limiting, in ways that the repressive apparatus of the Franco regime did not manage to do, their capacity to be politically active. In one of the earliest discussions of the Transition novel genre, Santos Alonso referred to *Crónica del desamor* as "crónica de la transición, del papel de la burguesía progresista (o 'progre') que no acaba de asumir sus contradicciones después de su etapa antifranquista" (98). It was not clear yet at the time when the novel was written whether, at some point in the future, these contradictions could be resolved. In Montero's own words, *Crónica del desamor* is "una novela estrechamente pegada a una realidad generacional. Un retrato en directo de aquellos años ardientes de la Transición" (Sanz Villanueva 33). At the time when the novel was published, Montero did not yet have an opportunity to place herself at a critical distance from the transformations that were occurring in Spain. In 2016, thirty-seven years since *Crónica* appeared in print, Montero returned to a discussion of the problematic nature of the Transition-era mentality in her novel *La carne*.

Montero's 2016 novel offers a reevaluation of the mindset born during the Transition and a critique of the cultural establishment that arose from it. Given that Montero herself is in many ways a product of the Transition, *La carne* is a valiant attempt to provide an honest analysis of the ways in which her generation failed fully to dismantle the political and economic structures inherited from the dictatorship of Franco and, thus, contributed to the creation of the system of economic relations that could not withstand the pressures of the global economic crisis at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Montero ensures that readers do not miss the connection between

*Crónica del desamor* and *La carne*. Soledad's neighbor Ana shares not only her name but also several recognizable characteristics with the protagonist of Montero's first novel. Like the central character of *Crónica*, *La carne*'s Ana is a young single mother who is a journalist by profession. She is writing a book that she wants to title *El libro de las Anas*, which is the name that Ana of *Crónica del desamor* was planning to give to her own book. The connection between the two novels becomes even more pronounced when Soledad suggests that Ana should title her novel *Crónica del desamor* (231). The emphasis Montero places on linking *Crónica del desamor* and *La carne* makes it clear that the writer sees the two novels as part of a single novelistic project that addresses the disillusionment with the culture of the Transition. The hopelessness experienced by young intellectuals in *Crónica* has become, if anything, more acute in *La carne*. While the protagonist of Montero's first novel suffered as a result of the precarious nature of her employment as a journalist, in *La carne* Ana loses her job and it is clear that, given the staggering reductions in journalistic positions and media outlets in Spain since 2006 (Lorite García 217), the likelihood of her finding full-time employment is small.

The narrative structure of *La carne* also underscores the connection between this novel and *Crónica del desamor*. Through the use of indirect free style, both novels immerse the readers in the perspective of the female protagonist who shares notable similarities with Montero. Each novel ends with the protagonist experiencing a disappointment in her romantic life yet refusing to give in to despair. The sources from which *Crónica*'s Ana and *La carne*'s Soledad derive hope after the failure of their relationships with men, however, are markedly different. Ana plans to transform her failed affair into "un buen comienzo para ese libro que ahora está segura de escribir" (*Crónica* 273), asserting that her interests are not limited to the realm of sexual liaisons. In a poignant contrast to Ana's feminist awakening, in the last scene of *La carne* the readers encounter Soledad running after "las nalgas musculosas" of yet another attractive man (*La carne* 234). As the title of the novel hints, carnal love displaces any other form of engagement with other human beings from Soledad's field of vision. Invested with supreme importance and "overflowing with expectations beyond its capacity to deliver" (Bauman, *Liquid Love* 47), sexual fulfillment is expected by Soledad to fill the vacuum left by the absence of any other meaningful form of human contact. The protagonist of *La carne* is immersed in a painstaking management of her romantic entanglements and has little interest in anything that lies outside the sphere of her intimate life. This allows Soledad to ignore the existence of an economic crisis that is ravaging the country. Soledad's formative years as an artist and an intellectual coincided with the epoch in Spain's history when the country's intellectual classes moved away from active political engagement and, in the words of Teresa Vilarós, "se refugian en una estética introspectiva" (24). Soledad interiorized the lessons of the Transition very well, and today, as Spain experiences an economic collapse, her introspection is so intense that it prevents Soledad from empathizing with the victims of the crisis.

The only instance when Soledad becomes aware of the plight of those among her compatriots who are suffering because of the economic collapse is when her neighbor comes to her apartment to ask for help. Soledad is resentful that Ana's story of privation is interrupting her attempt to select an expensive designer dress to wear on a six-hundred-euro date with a male escort. After being forced reluctantly to recognize that her all-consuming concern with picking an outfit might be quite trivial in comparison to the hardship experienced by an unemployed single mother, Soledad finds a way to convince herself that the jobless Ana is more fortunate than the well-off Soledad. "Sé consciente de lo que posees," Soledad decides to tell Ana. "No te quejes, eres rica, eres tan rica en juventud y en futuro. Aprovecha porque un día te despertarás y serás vieja" (36). Soledad relies on the trope of *tempus fugit* to clear herself and her generation of any responsibility for creating the kind of society where young people like Ana are struggling to make ends meet. She refuses to accept the gravity of the economic woes experienced by many in Spain and insists that her romantic troubles are more painful than the struggles of the unemployed: "Moriría sin haber conocido el amor. Eso sí que era ser pobre, y no el hecho de no poder pagar un maldito recibo" (37). Soledad's refusal to accept that anything outside the realm of private romantic troubles can be of importance is fully in keeping with the spirit of the culture of the Transition, which, in the words of Amador Fernández-Savater, "es una cultura profundamente «despolitizadora», porque la política consiste precisamente en hacer preguntas sobre los modos de estar juntos" (37-8). For Soledad, the only togetherness that matters is that of a romantic couple, and the only valuable connection to another human being is the one established during a coitus.

In his biting analysis of the failure of Spain's leading intellectuals to respond to the global economic crisis, political scientist Ignacio Sánchez-Cuenca points to the failure of the representatives of the country's cultural establishment to exhibit any awareness of the issues that are of crucial importance to most Spaniards:

La llegada de la crisis en 2008 sirvió para hacer más visible la decadencia de las 'grandes firmas'. . . Cuando la crisis comienza a hacer estragos y aumentan la desigualdad y la injusticia social, apenas tienen nada que decir. No conectan con los problemas cotidianos de la crisis: los desahucios, la emigración de los jóvenes, la pobreza energética, los recortes sociales, la congelación de las ayudas a los bancos, las políticas de austeridad. (15-6)

Sánchez-Cuenca points out that the incapacity to address the crisis in a meaningful way is common to many of the intellectuals who made a name for themselves during the Transition. Their greatest failing, in the scholar's words, is a refusal to acknowledge that the Transition-era *status quo* is no longer viable (13). Soledad is very recognizable as precisely this kind of Transition-era intellectual who is out of step with the struggles of

those among her compatriots who lack her elite status as a purveyor of symbolic goods. She a character of importance in the cultural world of Madrid and makes use of her extensive network of contacts among the members of the cultural establishment to secure her privileged economic position. Soledad curates an art exhibit at the National Library of Spain that is funded with an inheritance left by a wealthy aristocratic family and is known for her history of successfully completing ambitious artistic projects (19). At no point does it occur to Soledad that the economic crisis that has an immense impact on the lives of many of her compatriots should find a reflection in her work. Soledad's vision of art is fully divorced from the concerns of anybody less economically secure than she is.

Like the "grandes firmas" discussed by Sánchez-Cuenca, Soledad resists the need to change and is fanatical in her efforts to erase the evidence of time's passage from her aging face and body. She tries to "combatir el deterioro" of her 60-year-old body with expensive creams and potions (77), yet her preoccupation with appearances prevents Soledad from realizing that it is her worldview, rather than her appearance, that is out of step with reality. Soledad senses that she is losing her privileged place in the world of cultural production but fails to understand why this is occurring: "Había empezado a sospechar que se estaba quedando atrás, que el mundo avanzaba y la iba marginando, que la maquinaria profesional estaba a punto de escupirla como un hueso roído, un residuo inservible" (103). Soledad's oft-reiterated terror of aging points to a yet unspoken realization that members of Spain's cultural establishment can no longer afford to live a life of apolitical self-absorption like Soledad has done throughout her career. In his introduction to *CT o la Cultura de la Transición*, journalist Guillem Martínez points out that the most salient characteristic shared by the intellectuals who identify with the Transition is their indifference to subjects that have not been sanctioned by the state apparatus as worthy of concern: "Hablo de la muerte de la problemática y de una cultura cuyos intelectuales están absolutamente comprometidos, contra lo problemático y con el Estado, de manera que en la cultura solo optan por los temas que el Estado propone" (Martínez 18). The protagonist of *La carne* is a perfect example of this manner of being. The soaring unemployment and mass evictions do not merit any attention on Soledad's part since they constitute undeniable evidence of the problematic nature of Spain's economy. Instead, she prefers to concentrate her artistic endeavors on exploring personal foibles of individual artists whom she refuses to place in any historical or political context.

As Santos Sanz Villanueva points out, works of art created during the Transition were often characterized by a disengagement from the political and social concerns of the rapidly changing country:

Se impusieron fantaseamientos, escapismos, discursos formalistas. Nuestros libros, nuestras novelas, hablaban de escritores y de sus problemas como tales, se recreaban en plantear cuestiones técnicas de la

escritura, se llenaban de un culturalismo a veces asfixiante. . . Todo menos decir lo que pasaba en la calle, menos contar los conflictos políticos y sociales que convulsionaban al país, menos reflejar la deteriorada situación económica. (Sanz Villanueva 18)

The artistic vision that informs Soledad's work is just as escapist as that which Sanz Villanueva associates with the Transition. She is preparing an exhibit titled "Escritores malditos" that is to feature manuscripts by authors Soledad sees as misfits and outcasts. It flatters Soledad's sense of self-importance to spot similarities between herself and these authors and reimagine her comfortable bourgeois existence as an exercise in non-conformism. Soledad purges every trace of political engagement from the life stories of the writers she has chosen to feature in the exhibit and reduces every conflict in their lives to gossipy complexities of interpersonal relationships. One of the most salient examples of this approach is Soledad's account of the life of María Lejárraga, a noted Spanish feminist and political activist of the 1920s and 1930s. In the words of Shirley Mangini, Lejárraga "was secretary of the Spanish branch of the International Alliance for Suffrage for Women and in 1930 became the first president of the Women's Alliance for Civic Education. She was elected to Parliament in 1933 as a Socialist representative for Granada. . . When the civil war broke out, she was sent to Switzerland as commercial attaché of the Republican government" (36). There remains no trace of any of this in Soledad's narrative of Lejárraga's life. Soledad dedicates no space at the exhibit to Lejárraga's political activities and concentrates, instead, on the jealousy she imagines Lejárraga to have experienced towards Catalina Bárcena, her husband's mistress. Seen through the lens of her romantic failures, Lejárraga is transformed from one of the most inspiring feminist figures of the Second Republic into an "esposa desdeñada" (116) engaged in "un tenaz ejercicio de autodestrucción" (117). With this retelling of Lejárraga's life, Soledad remakes the feminist politician in her own image, given that the story of Lejárraga's supposed self-destruction as a result of a thwarted love interest is strikingly similar to Soledad's youthful experience of unrequited love (198-201).

A significant part of Soledad's creative efforts consists of rewriting crucial historic events in a way that denies their political thrust. In the narratives that Soledad prepares for her exhibit, the Spanish Civil War, for instance, appears as nothing but a background to the romantic entanglements and the private mishaps of the writers Soledad chooses to include in the exhibit. The war is emptied of any trace of political content, and the ideological concerns of its participants are silenced. One example of this approach is Soledad's account of the life and death of poet Pedro Luis de Gálvez (21). According to Soledad, Gálvez "murió por sus fanfarronadas" (67), as if the writer's quirky personality were to blame for his execution at the hands of the victors of the Civil War. This vision of Gálvez's death erases the reality of postwar Madrid where thousands of people were executed for having supported the Republican cause. Soledad

goes to great lengths to avoid mentioning the words “Franco” or “Nationalists” in her account of Gálvez’s death or anywhere else in the texts she prepares for the exhibit. It is as if some impersonal, unnamed forces that were entirely divorced from any of the political realities of the 1940 Spain had conspired to take the writer’s life: “Al acabar la Guerra le hicieron un juicio sumarísimo. . . Fue fusilado en la cárcel de Porlier en abril de 1940” (67). The imprisonment of Gálvez’s female relatives and of his small grandson that lasted for several years and was part of the dictatorship’s policy of persecuting Republican families (Campo Cacho, n. pag.) are absent from Soledad’s narrative because it would be impossible for her to find an apolitical explanation of their persecution by Francoist authorities. Soledad’s exhibit is one of countless artistic endeavors – novels, television series, films, etc. - that “expressly commercialize the memory [of the Civil War] with sentimental and even melodramatic stories” (Sánchez 13). Offering a sentimentalized vision of the Second Republic, the Civil War and the post-war era empties them of any subversive potential (Gómez López-Quiñones 15). This approach to the painful events in Spain’s history turns them into appropriate subjects for the “culture of amnesia in which the memory of the civil war and the Franco regime became effectively taboo” instituted during the Transition (Ferrán 23).

At the end of her analysis of Gálvez’s life, Soledad reaches the conclusion that the psychological traumas inflicted on the writer by his father many years earlier were to blame for Gálvez’s execution by the victorious Francoist forces after the war. Efforts to displace the Spanish Civil War from the realm of politics to that of individual psychology has a long history in Spain. The vision of the Civil War as a bout of madness that overcame Spaniards for no reason other than their supposedly shared psychological deviations was promoted by the Franco dictatorship in the 1960s and later informed the conciliatory efforts of the Transition era (Richards 135). Soledad relies on one of the foundational myths of the Transition when she integrates into her exhibit a vision of Pedro Luis de Gálvez as a product of a traumatic childhood, rather than a victim of a repressive regime. The refusal to discuss the political nature of the conflicts that culminated in a civil war in 1936 has as its goal the preservation of the system of economic relations that was constituted during the dictatorship of Franco and was consolidated during the Transition: “La Cultura de la Transición es, fundamentalmente, una cultura apromblemática, para la que meramente nombrar el conflicto social o político es un acto performativo de consecuencias terribles: el conflicto se vuelve real. Siendo así, la Cultura de la Transición se nutre, más que compite, con la ideología económica” (López 77). As somebody who enjoys economic well-being derived from her belonging to the country’s cultural establishment, Soledad has every reason to promote an apolitical vision of Spain’s history in her artistic work. She manages to preserve her relatively easy financial circumstances even in the midst of the crisis and would gain nothing from an analysis of the reasons why the kind of artistic endeavors that enjoy economic success in Spain tend to flee from any but the most superficial engagements with politics and history.

María Lejárraga and Pedro Luis de Gálvez, however, are not placed at the center of Soledad's exhibit. The role of "la joya de la exposición, el cráter narrativo, la perla" (161) is reserved for a writer called Josefina Aznárez whose name is evocative of José María Aznar, the president of the first government formed by Partido Popular after thirteen years of PSOE-led administrations. There is no hint in Soledad's detailed narrative of Aznárez's life that, unlike all of the other writers included in the exhibit, she never existed. Soledad's careless approach to the biographies of the writers featured in her exhibit has culminated in an invented life that fully serves Soledad's purpose of presenting history as driven by quirky individuals in the grip of their psychological tics and romantic entanglements. A fully invented story of this non-existent writer allows Soledad to exploit the fashionable topics of gender bending, cross-dressing, and colonialism, reducing the conflicts experienced by the fictional Aznárez to manifestations of her mental illness (157). Historical reality is integrated into the narrative of Aznárez's life in the form of the explosion of the steamer Cabo Machichaco that occurred in Santander in 1893. Although the exact number of casualties is unknown, it is presumed that hundreds of people lost their lives in the explosion, and the tragedy of Cabo Machichaco made news throughout Spain (Yáñez 71). In the words of Carmen Gil de Arriba, "el calibre de *la catástrofe* (como comúnmente se la denomina) supuso una conmoción generalizada, descrita como un hecho dantesco que trascendió a toda la prensa española y despertó en la población actitudes y comportamientos referidos con carácter épico" (175-6). For Soledad, however, the explosion of Cabo Machichaco is simply a convenient way of disposing of a character whose improbable story cannot be satisfactorily resolved in any other way. Like the Civil War, the explosion is extracted from its historical and political context and mined for its sensationalist potential. The appearance, in this context, of somebody whose name is evocative of José María Aznar brings to mind another extraordinarily traumatic explosion of a means of transportation that shook Spain over a hundred years later. In 2004, Aznar attempted to blame the Atocha train bombings on the Basque separatists of ETA, personally contacting the media to communicate this false information (Encarnación 67-8). This cynical manipulation of public opinion constituted one of the most shameful episodes of Spain's post-Transition politics, and an allusion to it in the text of the novel underscores the text's questioning of the kind of political system that was constituted as a result of the Transition.

In spite of being well-aware of the dangers implicit in a careless handling of historical truth, Soledad avoids a more thoughtful engagement with history, and especially with the subject of the Civil War, because, in the worldview she formed during the Transition, there is nothing to be gained from discussing in too much depth the political antagonisms that resulted in the armed civil conflict in 1936. After Franco's death, the fear that the existing political tensions could result in an explosion of violence motivated privileging a search for consensus over any other consideration: "The principal political constraints and strategies of the Spanish transition gave priority to the



search for wide sociopolitical consensus and, consequently, avoidance of polarizing initiatives in all spheres... The assumptions underpinning the Spanish transition discouraged radical and transformative endeavors” (Fishman and Lizardo 224). Today, when transformative approaches are needed more than ever in order to face the consequences of the global economic crisis, Soledad invests the cultural capital she has accumulated throughout her career in the Spanish art world into a project that will disturb no hierarchies and will not result in any questioning of the country’s political and economic structures. It is fitting that Soledad’s project should be financed with a fortune bequeathed by a duke, given that she lacks any interest in what Moreno-Caballud terms “cultures of anyone” that have arisen in response to the crisis and that possess an “ability not only to suggest answers to specific political and social problems, but also to question the authoritarian, competitive cultural lenses that condition our way of understanding those very problems, and to replace them with other, more democratic filters” (Moreno-Caballud, *Cultures* 13). Instead of exploring approaches to cultural production that would be more democratic in nature, Soledad refuses to accept the possibility of collaborating with others on her project and creates an environment of intense competitiveness around it (167-9).

The desire to win at all costs characterizes Soledad’s approach not only to her work but to every aspect of her life. In his critique of Transition mentality, film director Guillermo Zapata points to the centrality to the culture of Transition of strategies aimed at assigning the enemy role to a group defined as “the Other”: “La lógica que opera en la CT desde su origen es una lógica que determina fronteras y asigna el papel de «el otro». Las posiciones fijas, las filas prietas. Podríamos llamar a esa política, política del enemigo. Un enemigo que me da sentido, que me define y que me permite afirmar una serie de lugares comunes” (146-7). This way of organizing reality is the one practiced by Soledad. At every stage of her life, she selects an antagonist and defines herself in opposition to this imagined enemy. Usually, Soledad’s Other is represented by the women she finds more successful in some aspect of their lives: her neighbor Ana, who in spite of being unemployed has hopes of becoming a writer, the character named Rosa Montero, who has already achieved success in the writing profession that is so coveted by Soledad, or Marita Kemp, an architect, who makes Soledad feel deficient by unintentionally reminding her of her childlessness. However, Soledad does not need to be personally acquainted with the individuals she positions as her Other. When she sees a poster announcing a roundtable of three young female novelists, Soledad experiences profound resentment: “Y de pronto una nube negra se abatió sobre Soledad y las odió, ah, cómo las odió, y cómo envidió su juventud, su belleza y su talento. . . El rencor rugió de nuevo dentro de su pecho como un tigre” (233). As a representative of the cultural establishment, Soledad is used to being one of the “portadores de la voz del monopolio de la palabra y la construcción de sentido” (Zapata 144). She feels threatened by the possibility that representatives of the younger generation might see as outdated the artistic product that she creates and be more receptive to a different kind

of cultural goods. Soledad has fully interiorized the neoliberal belief that “the enterprising individual. . . must be keenly competitive in every aspect of life, not only in manifestly economic matters” (McGuigan 24). As a result, a possibility of collaborating with other artists seems deeply threatening to her. The profound sense of alienation from her colleagues, and especially from younger artists, precludes any possibility of Soledad acting as a mentor and serving as a conduit into the artistic world for representatives of a new generation of artists.

Soledad's most important antagonist is her twin sister Dolores who suffers from schizophrenia. The fear that she, too, might develop symptoms of mental illness haunts Soledad since adolescence (100-1). Soledad does not reveal to anybody the profound impact that her family history – an abusive mother, an absent father, and a mentally ill sister – has had on her. Soledad laments her incapacity to “limpiarse la memoria” (223) in order to ensure that unpleasant remembrances disappear from her mind and believes that she is doomed to be haunted by secret fears of her own monstrosity (225). Joan Ramon Resina points out that the culture of amnesia would not exist if it were not for the daily efforts of many Spaniards to edit their memories of the past: “El campo de batalla de la conciencia del pasado no es tanto el campo de la historiografía como las experiencias cotidianas que conforman la memoria colectiva e incluso la reforman o llegan a suprimir” (31). Soledad's daily battle against the inconvenient memory of her origins mimics the process by which many Spaniards purged the recollections of their experiences during the Civil War and the dictatorship of Franco. In keeping with the spirit of the Transition, Soledad excises any remembrance of the dictatorship from the narrative of her childhood and early youth. Neither does she talk about the Transition, and the readers are left with the task of intuiting the impact that the political journey undertaken by Spain since the death of the dictator has had on forming Soledad's worldview. The story that Soledad constructs about her own life is as apolitical and divorced from the events of history as the narratives that she prepares for her exhibit.

After Franco's death, the urgent task of reconstituting the country's political sphere in the image of other representative democracies in the West often took precedence over the need to work on recovering Spain's historical memory: “En la transición existió una voluntad de supeditación de la historia a la lógica del pragmatismo político que defiende lo innecesario y contraproducente que puede ser recordar episodios ‘desagradables; sobre la guerra civil y la dictadura de Franco’” (Duch Plana 172). As a result of the efforts to subject history to considerations of political expediency, Spain achieved integration into the community of neoliberal Western democracies and, until recently, the process by which this integration occurred and that is known as the Transition was celebrated in and outside the country. Moreover, the suppression of the unwelcome aspects of historical memory has been praised as one of the reasons for the relative ease with which Spain seemed to have abandoned its Francoist past (Golob 127). In order to consolidate its status as a full-fledged European nation, Spain had to repudiate the narrative of its innate difference from other Western

European countries that has dominated the attempts to construct Spain's national identity since the eighteenth century.

Not only had the dictatorship of Franco relied, for purposes both ideological and economic, on the successful tourist campaign slogan "Spain is different" promoted by its Propaganda and Tourism Ministry in the 1960s (Hart 188), but the dictatorship itself constituted clear evidence of Spain's difference from other European countries. After the dictator's death, softening the image of the dictatorship was one of the ways of making Spain look as less of an exception within the European context: "Un repaso a los textos publicados en la España del posfranquismo evidencia una voluntad de construcción de un pasado histórico, dedicado no sólo a no mostrar ninguna de sus lacras sino, más agresivamente, a reconformar este pasado de acuerdo a criterios aceptables desde y para la nueva comunidad europea en la que la España de la posdictadura se está insertando" (Vilarós 240). Without any explicit declarations to this effect, Spain's historians, writers and public intellectuals responded to the generalized consensus as to the desirability of the country identifying more closely with Europe by modifying the ways in which they studied and portrayed the dictatorship. In order to ensure a speedy and peaceful integration into the family of the neoliberal democracies of Europe, the leftist parties of Spain unquestioningly ceded ground to their political antagonists: "Corporatist structures grew out of the Moncloa Pact of 1977 because the Left (with the exception of the Basque Country) had long made itself ready for a tame transition out of the Franco regime. The Right came out of that regime politically weakened but socially and ideologically on top" (Martínez-Alier and Roca 84). A questioning of the Francoist past might have led to a discussion about the urgency with which neoliberal economic precepts were accepted during the Transition, and neither the Left nor the Right welcomed that possibility.

Critics of the Transition-era approach to memory point out that there is a direct connection between the political culture that was created in the process of the construction of Spain's democracy and the economic and political crises that the country is experiencing today. The cynicism that characterized the erasure of the claims for justice on the part of those who lost the Civil War finds its reflection in the corruption that pervades Spanish politics:

La falsa equiparación de los dos bandos de la guerra civil se convirtió así en una coartada para fomentar el relativismo moral. . . A esto siguió además la pronta transformación del secretismo y la opacidad en norma de conducta de los políticos que... crearía el marco ideal para reforzar su supeditación-identificación con el bloque dominante y para facilitar los fenómenos de corrupción cada vez más extendidos. (Pastor Verdú 303)

The global economic crisis of the beginning of the twenty-first century has been especially hard for Spain to overcome because its political institutions have been

weakened by wide-spread corruption that has penetrated every level of the country's political establishment. The political system that was constituted during the Transition was not sufficiently cleansed of the practices that had currency in the decades of the dictatorship. The continuity of the political strategies that have been bequeathed by Francoism to the democratic Spain has impacted the functioning of both leading political parties in Spain: "Al igual que en el franquismo, el ejercicio del poder en la democracia se distinguió por el hiperliderazgo, la jerarquización del mando, el dirigismo y por la aversión a la transparencia y a la rendición de cuentas. Los partidos políticos. . . reprodujeron el intrusismo del Movimiento Nacional franquista" (Burns Marañón 10). In 2015-16, the loss of confidence that either Partido Popular or PSOE could shed their predilection for secrecy and corruption in order to heal the country of the damage done by the global economic crisis resulted in the deepest parliamentary crisis that democratic Spain has known.

*La carne* condemns the incapacity of Spain's cultural elite to renounce its complicity with the political establishment that never fully freed itself of the legacy of Francoism. Through the use of metafictional narrative devices, Montero ensures that her readers do not mistake a narrative that privileges Soledad's perspective with an endorsement of this character's *Weltanschauung*. The closing section of the book titled "Una petición y agradecimientos" begins with Montero's explanation of "la tensión narrativa de esta novela" (235) which, according to the writer, radiates from the dangerous side of her protagonist, who is a "madura y reconocida comisaria de arte" only on the surface (235). In reality, Soledad is damaged by the past she refuses to acknowledge and, as a result, is prone to act in destructive ways. The writer, thus, finds it necessary to reinforce the vision of Soledad as a malicious presence at the core of the novel. This is not the only instance when Montero attempts to distance herself from her character. After Soledad decides that her position of privilege in Madrid's cultural milieu might be threatened by a younger generation of functionaries, she contacts a journalist called Rosa Montero in order to glean from her new information that she needs for her exhibit. The journalist shares not only her name but details of her personal and professional life with the author of *La carne* (178-80). The dislike that Soledad feels towards Montero even before meeting her in person intensifies during the two women's encounter. Soledad resents Montero's success as a writer and envies her the freedom from the constraints of convention that manifests itself in the writer's comportment and attire (176). During her conversation with Soledad, Rosa Montero explains that her imagination makes possible the creation of literary characters who are entirely different from herself (180). This dialogue serves as a way of reminding the readers of the distance that exists between Soledad Alegre and the writer who imagined her. The character and the author belong to the same generation and are both part of Spain's cultural establishment. If it were not for the narrative strategies that draw attention to the gulf between the writer and her creation, the readers might mistakenly attribute Soledad's worldview to Montero.

Almost forty years have passed since the publication of Montero's first novel that criticized the representatives of the cultural establishment of the Transition as "seres desmemoriados que viven en el momento presente y que no están interesados en enfrentarse al pasado reciente del país o al suyo propio" (Escudero Rodríguez 21). *Crónica del desamor* became one of the foundational works of the Transition novel genre, yet the author's proximity to the events she was describing could not fail to have an impact on the text she created. As Hans-Jörg Neuschäfer points out, *Crónica* was written "sin distancia histórica, como quien dice emitido 'en directo'" (111). Since then, the writer and her readers have had an opportunity to look at the culture of the Transition from a distance of more than three decades and question many of the certainties that were a product of that transformational era. There can be no doubt that the Transition was a time of momentous import in Spain's history, and its achievements are not to be dismissed as lacking in value. In the words of journalist Burns Marañón, it is crucial to contrast the Transition with what came before it and not only with what followed:

Los protagonistas de la Transición. . . consiguieron construir el mejor edificio constitucional de cuantos fueron levantados por próceres españoles en los últimos doscientos años. Su principal mérito fue haber absorbido las lecciones que imparten los fracasados intentos anteriores de crear una concordia. Sólo con eso bastaba y sobraba. La Constitución de 1978 merece respeto. (12)

Neither *Crónica del desamor* nor *La carne* offer a wholesale condemnation of the Transition. They do, however, make it clear that this era in Spain's history should not be sacralized or accepted uncritically.

As Guillem Martínez pointed out in a 2014 interview, since the rise of the 15-M protest movement in May of 2011 it has become easier to look at the cultural production that arose from the Transition with a critical eye: "Antes las críticas a la cultura oficial, propagandística, eran tildadas de *freakies*, mientras que ahora son percibidas como descripciones válidas" (Constenla and Bono n. pag.). The political stalemate of the 2015-16 which created the worst parliamentary crisis that the democratic Spain has known rendered obsolete many of the concepts that were crucial during the Transition. The rise of *Podemos* as a new political force on the Left created hope that an honest discussion of the past will finally become possible: "The keywords during the years of transition. . . were 'consensus' and 'reconciliation/' However, this political consensus no longer exists, since the left leaning parties and all the others that were historically opposed to the dictatorship now want to review the past and to correct the deficiencies of the transition" (Tamarit Sumalla 2). Historian Óscar Martín García is not alone in believing that "the political era that followed the passing of the Constitution in 1978 appears to be coming to an end" (101). How the new era in Spain's history will look depends on the Spaniards' willingness to question the ideas and

the institutions bequeathed to them by the Transition. Montero's *La carne* makes a convincing case in favor of relinquishing that part of the Transition's legacy which stands in the way of refashioning Spain's political, economic and cultural institutions according to the demands of the rapidly changing times.

#### WORKS CITED

- Albarrán, Claudia. "Rosa Montero: cronista de la desilusión." *Actas del XIV Congreso de la Asociación Internacional de Hispanistas*. Vol. III. Newark: Juan de la Cuesta, 2004. 37-42.
- Alonso, Santos. *La novela en la Transición (1976-1981)*. Madrid: Libros Dante, 1983.
- Bauman, Zygmunt. *Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds*. Cambridge/Malden: Polity Press, 2003.
- Burns Marañón, Tom. *De la fruta madura a la manzana podrida: el laberinto de la Transición española*. Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg, 2015.
- Campos Cacho, Sergio. "Pedro Luis de Gálvez, capitán de milicias." *Revista de Libros. Segunda Época*. Fundación Amigos Revista de Libros. 1 September 2014. Web. 15 March 2017.
- Constenla, Tereixa and Ferrán Bono. "La Transición: entre el altar y la pira." *El País*. 5 December 2014. Web. 25 February 2017.
- Duch Plana, Montserrat. *¿Una ecología de las memorias colectivas? La transición española a la democracia revisitada*. Lleida: Milenio Publicaciones, 2014.
- Encarnación, Omar G. *Spanish Politics: Democracy After Dictatorship*. Cambridge / Malden: Polity Press, 2008.
- Escudero Rodríguez, Javier. *La narrativa de Rosa Montero: hacia una ética de la esperanza*. Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 2005.
- Fernández-Savater, Amador. "Emborronar la CT (del «No a la guerra» al 15-M)." *CT o la Cultura de la Transición. Crítica a 35 años de cultura española*. Ed. Guillem Martínez. Barcelona: Random House Mondadori, 2012. 37-51.
- Ferrán, Ofelia. *Working through Memory: Writing and Remembrance in Contemporary Spanish Narrative*. Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 2007.
- Fishman, Robert M. and Omar Lizardo. "How Macro-Historical Change Shapes Cultural Taste: Legacies of Democratization in Spain and Portugal." *American Sociological Review* 78.2 (2013): 213-39.
- García Álvarez, María Felicidad. "El lector intratextual en las columnas de Rosa Montero." *El columnismo de escritores españoles (1975-2005)*. Eds. Alexis Grohmann and Maarten Steenmeijer. Madrid: Verbum, 2006. 175-97.
- Gelí, Carles. "La explosión (editorial) del 15-M." *El País* 14 May 2012. Web. 25 February 2017.

- Gil de Arriba, Carmen. Ciudad e imagen. *Un estudio geográfico sobre las representaciones sociales del espacio urbano de Santander*. Santander: Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Cantabria, 2002.
- Golob, Stephanie R. "Volver: The Return of/to Transitional Justice Politics in Spain." *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies* 9.2 (July 2008): 127-41.
- Gómez López-Quiñones, Antonio. *La guerra persistente. Memoria, violencia y utopía: representaciones contemporáneas de la Guerra Civil española*. Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2006.
- Guillén, Arturo. "Europe: A Crisis Within a Crisis." *International Journal of Political Economy* 41.3 (Fall 2012): 41-68.
- Hart, Patricia. "Toppling the Xenolith: The Reconquest of Spain from the 'Tourist Invader' in Iberian Film since World War II." *Spain Is (Still) Different: Tourism and Discourse in Spanish Identity*. Eds. Eugenia Afinoguénova and Jaume Martí-Olivella. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008. 187-218.
- López, Isidro. "Consensonomics: la ideología económica en la CT." *CT o la Cultura de la Transición. Crítica a 35 años de cultura española*. Ed. Guillem Martínez. Barcelona: Random House Mondadori, 2012. 77-88.
- Lorite García, Nicolás. "How the Media Affect Intercultural Relationships in Times of Change." *Discourses on Immigration in Times of Economic Crisis: A Critical Perspective*. Ed. María Martínez Lirola. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2013. 216-37.
- Mangini González, Shirley. *Memories of Resistance: Women's Voices from the Spanish Civil War*. New Haven & London: Yale UP, 1995.
- Martín García, Óscar J. "A Country on a Tightrope: The Economic Crisis and the End of an Era in Spanish Politics." *Insight Turkey* 15.3 (Summer 2013): 95-105.
- Martínez, Guillem. "El concepto CT." *CT o la Cultura de la Transición. Crítica a 35 años de cultura española*. Ed. Guillem Martínez. Barcelona: Random House Mondadori, 2012. 13-23.
- Martínez-Alier, J. and Jordi Roca. "Spain after Franco: From Corporatist Ideology to Corporatist Reality." *International Journal of Political Economy* 17.4 (Winter 1987/1988): 56-87.
- McGuigan, Jim. *Neoliberal Culture*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.
- Montero, Rosa. *Crónica del desamor*. 22nd ed. Madrid: Debate, 1995. [1979]
- . *La carne*. Barcelona: Alfaguara, 2016.
- Moreno-Caballud, Luis. *Cultures of Anyone: Studies on Cultural Democratization in the Spanish Neoliberal Crisis*. Trans. Linda Grabner. Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2015.
- Neuschäfer, Hans-Jörg. "1979: La Transición como crisis de orientación (en la perspectiva de Rosa Montero y de Antonio Muñoz Molina)." *Memoria literaria de la Transición española*. Ed. Javier Gómez-Montero. Madrid / Frankfurt am Main: Iberoamericana / Vervuert, 2007. 110-8.

- Pastor Verdú, Jaime. "Un balance crítico de la Transición política española." *La Transición española: nuevos enfoques para un viejo debate*. Eds. Marie-Claude Chaput and Julio Pérez Serrano. Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 2015. 295-304.
- Resina, Joan Ramon. "Faltos de memoria: la reclamación del pasado desde la Transición española a la democracia." *Memoria literaria de la Transición española*. Ed. Javier Gómez-Montero. Madrid / Frankfurt am Main: Iberoamericana / Vervuert, 2007. 17-50.
- Richards, Michael. "Grand Narratives, Collective Memory, and Social History: Public Uses of the Past in Postwar Spain." *Unearthing Franco's Legacy: Mass Graves and the Recovery of Historical Memory in Spain*. Eds. Carlos Jerez-Ferrán and Samuel Amago. Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 2010. 121-45.
- Sánchez, Francisco J. "From Neo-Francoist Memory to Political Feeling in Narratives of Unearthing: Sánchez Dragó's *Muertes Paralelas* (2006) and Andrés Trapiello's *Ayer no más* (2012)." *Romance Quarterly* 62.1 (2014): 13-27.
- Sánchez-Cuenca, Ignacio. *La desfachatez intelectual: escritores e intelectuales ante la política*. Madrid: Catarata, 2016.
- Sanz Villanueva, Santos. "Relatos del postfranquismo: un apunte y diez fichas." *El relato de la Transición / La Transición como relato*. Eds. José Calvo Carilla et al. Zaragoza: Prensas de la Universidad de Zaragoza, 2013. 13-41.
- Tamarit Sumalla, Josep M. *Historical Memory and Criminal Justice in Spain: A Case of Late Transitional Justice*. Cambridge: Intersentia, 2013.
- Vilarós, Teresa. *El mono del desencanto. Una crítica cultural de la transición española (1973-1993)*. Madrid: Siglo XXI, 1998.
- Yáñez, Estrella A. "Naviera Ybarra. Surcando desde Sevilla tres siglos de la historia." *ABC Sevilla*. Diario ABC, S.L. June 19, 2005. 70-1. February 18, 2017.
- Zapata, Guillermo. "La CT como marco: un caso de éxito no CT: el 15-M. O de cómo puede suceder un éxito no previsto en una cultura, como la CT, que controla los accesos al éxito y al fracaso." *CT o la Cultura de la Transición. Crítica a 35 años de cultura española*. Ed. Guillem Martínez. Barcelona: Random House Mondadori, 2012. 141-50.