Antonio Muñoz Molina, one of Spain's most respected writers, published his first novel, Beatus Ille, in 1986. He started to write it in 1975, immediately after Franco's death, and it was eventually published in the mid-eighties, at a time when democracy was virtually consolidated and Spain had been admitted to the European Community and NATO. It is truly a novel of the period of transition to democracy. During those years the literary production in Spain had become highly diversified and there was an editorial boom in which Muñoz Molina's generation acquired a readership and, eventually, in his case, a great deal of commercial and critical success.

In this essay I will discuss the role of photography and the function of narrative photographs in Beatus Ille. I will examine the connection between photography's cognitive structure and the narrative strategies Muñoz Molina uses in this novel. I will also address how the display of photographs in certain spaces allows for a commentary on the use and abuse of tradition. The narrative capabilities of photographs, or rather, the viewer's construction of certain narratives through the observation of photographs will be included in order to illustrate the multiplicity of levels on which photography works in this novel.

Like many first works, Beatus Ille is an ambitious project with a complex plot. Attempting to escape political persecution during
the 1960s, a college student seeks refuge in his hometown, Mágima, a provincial Southern city. He hides in his uncle Manuel's house under the pretense of writing a dissertation on Jacinto Solana, a fictitious poet of the Generation of 1927 who had been a close friend of his uncle's and of his late wife, Mariana. Through the process of reconstructing Solana's life and work, the student becomes deeply immersed in the time of the poet's youth: 1930s and 1940s Spain.

In order to demonstrate how photography occupies a central role in this novel, it is necessary to begin by reducing photography to its bare minimum. I follow Schaeffer in saying that the specificity of the photographic medium lies in its indexical nature: photography is basically a mark, a trace of a photonic source that leaves an imprint on a chemically treated surface (Schaeffer 16-20).

The physical mark that lies in the genesis of a photograph has a metaphorical counterpart in the stigma bestowed upon those who spoke their mind during the Spanish Civil War or the years of Franco's dictatorship. Making one's dissenting political ideas public, or speaking about Spain's outlawed past carried a serious risk and was commonly referred to as «señalarse» (to make yourself a mark, to be stigmatized), which is—not coincidentally—a recurring motif in Beatus Ille. On several occasions in the novel, a character is warned about speaking and the resulting stigma. For instance, the fate of Solana's father is explained in the following terms:

A Justo Solana, el padre, lo fusilaron al terminar la guerra, y nadie sabe por qué. Algo haría, dice la gente, como tantos otros que entonces se señalaron, pero yo no sé qué pudo hacer, si no era hombre que se metiera en política y se pasó toda la guerra sin salir de su huerta (my emphasis, 60).

A politically uncommitted orchard farmer, Jacinto Solana was simply in the wrong place at the wrong time on the day he was murdered. Despite his lack of political involvement, some townspeople justified his death by saying that he provoked it because he had drawn attention to himself. Just as in photography the light leaves a mark on the paper surface, those who spoke were marked (stigmatized). The stigma motif has a material counterpart in photography and it also refers to the Biblical theme of sin and the fall from grace. In this particular form, it strongly relates to
Cain's stigma, acquired as a consequence of assassinating his brother Abel. This reference to fratricide is appropriate and relevant since it takes place in the context of a civil war, the modern-day reenactment of the original fratricidal struggle.

As Peter Brooks has observed, scars appear in Greek classical literature (Odyssey, Greek tragedies) as literal body markings that are also literary, that is, signs that, while serving to identify someone, function as language, since they can be read (21). There were similar forms of actual physical stigmatization during the Civil War, such as the shaving of women's heads to mark them as «reds.» Jacinto Solana's stigma is a ghostly rather than a physical marking: an indefinable aura of failure, of being on the wrong side of history. It signals a paranoid society in which choosing a victim temporarily releases someone from the fear of becoming one.

Since photography is central in Beatus Ille, it is not surprising that important events in the lives of the characters or in the recent history of Spain are introduced into the narration through descriptions of photographs. The wedding picture of Manuel and Mariana is central in this novel. The following is one of several descriptions of the same photo:

Alto y erguido en su uniforme de teniente, con el breve bigote rubio y el pelo fijado con brillantina, Manuel tenía en la foto la apariencia involuntaria de un héroe congelado por el asombro del flash, las pupilas fijas y perdidas. Mariana, en cambio, y eso no era por casualidad, supongo, sino el signo de sus caracteres diversos, miraba al espectador desde cualquier punto que se contemplara la fotografía. (29)

Another key photograph shows Manuel, Jacinto Solana and Mariana in Madrid celebrating the victory of the Popular Front in the elections of 1936. This picture depicts all three walking arm in arm, smiling, the woman in the middle, and it was taken only a few minutes after the future spouses met for the first time:

Sobre la repisa de la chimenea, en una foto que a pesar del cristal que la protegía iba tomando un tinte sepia, la misma muchacha caminaba entre dos hombres por una calle que indudablemente era de Madrid. Llevaba un abrigo con cuello de piel abierto sobre un vestido blanco y zapatos de tacón, pero de su rostro sólo podía precisarse con exactitud la
gran sonrisa que se burlaba del fotógrafo, porque tenía caída sobre la frente el ala del sombrero y un velo le ocultaba los ojos. El hombre que caminaba a su izquierda sostenía un cigarrillo y miraba al espectador con aire de ironía o recelo [...]. En el de la derecha, el más alto de los tres, y sin duda el mejor vestido, Minaya creyó reconocer a su tío. Manuel fue sorprendido por el disparo del fotógrafo cuando se volvía hacia Mariana, que inesperadamente se habia tornado de su brazo y lo estrechaba contra ella sin advertir el don que le concedía, atenta sólo a la pupila de la cámara [...]. (23)

The position of the woman between the two men foreshadows the love triangle that the three will eventually form, and Mariana’s gesture of holding Manuel’s hand indicates what her preference will be regarding marriage.

These two photos freeze two key moments in the lives of the couple. As John Berger observes in Another Way of Telling, there is an implied narrative in photographs (96). The two moments suggest a story and properly frame it. Echoing the traditional narrative of romance and marriage, they preserve for posterity the beginnings and the end of a love story. But unlike traditional narratives, their story does not fade away in postnuptial bliss; it takes a tragic turn when Mariana is assassinated the following morning, and Manuel lives unhappily ever after.

There is a third relevant picture, a portrait of Jacinto Solana (a fictitious character) standing next to two famous intellectuals (Rafael Alberti and José Bergamín) in Popular Militia uniforms during the Civil War:

*El Mono Azul*, Hoja Semanal de la Alianza de Estudiantes Antifascistas para la Defensa de la Cultura, Madrid, 1 de octubre de 1936, el rectángulo negro de una foto indescifrable: Rafael Alberti, José Bergamín y Jacinto Solana en las dependencias del Quinto Regimiento [...]. El nombre al pie de cada uno de ellos, Jacinto Solana, casi borrado entre las letras de los titulares, como su rostro en la fotografía, extrañado en el olvido, en un tiempo que no parecía que hubiese existido nunca. (19)

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1 The morning after her wedding, Mariana was killed while standing at the palomar, the dovecote in the house’s solarium. At the time, it was believed that a stray bullet accidentally ended Mariana’s life. The reader later learns that Mariana was actually murdered by Utrera, a sculptor friend of Manuel and his longtime house guest, while following orders from Manuel’s mother.
This picture captures a moment at the beginning of the Civil War when the possibility of an anti-fascist victory was still open, and Leftist intellectuals had a visible presence in Spanish society. What would come afterwards for those intellectuals was exile (e.g., for Rafael Alberti, Max Aub, Ramón Sender, Américo Castro, Pedro Salinas, Jorge Guillén, etc.) or death (e.g., for Federico García Lorca and Miguel Hernández). The placing of Jacinto Solana, a ficticious poet, next to two real-life intellectuals in the context of a photograph gives a sense of verisimilitude to the figure of Solana, blurring the borders between reality and fiction. As John Berger points out, «the camera can bestow authenticity upon any set of appearances, however false»² (96-7). This interspersing of fictitious personae with historical figures is also a playful wink to the reader and a salute to Max Aub, who used this technique profusely and successfully in Jusep Torres Campalans. Jusep Torres Campalans is the ficticious biography of a cubist painter, and Muñoz Molina has acknowledged on several occasions that it was a source of inspiration for Beatus Ille³.

When we view photographs, we link individual images and construct a narrative (a story) around them. Just as the two previously discussed photographs, when considered together, somehow tell Mariana and Manuel's love story, this photo, juxtaposed to the picture taken on the day of the Popular Front victory, tells Solana's tragic story. Jacinto Solana was a childhood friend of Manuel. An intellectual of humble social origins, Solana had clearer poetic aspirations and Leftist leanings than his friend. In love with the same woman, Mariana, Manuel married her but she was killed the day following their nuptials. The Civil War put an end to Solana's intellectual pursuits in Madrid, and he joined the Popular Militia. Imprisoned after the war because of his communist affil-

² John Berger is discussing here the use of photography in publicity, which he calls «a global system of misinformation.» He adds: «The role of photography in this system is revealing. The lie is constructed before the camera. A 'tableau' of objects and figures is assembled. This 'tableau' uses a language of symbols (often inherited, as I have pointed out elsewhere, from the iconography of oil painting), an implied narrative and, frequently, some kind of performance by models with a sexual content. This 'tableau' is then photographed» (my emphasis, 96).

³ Muñoz Molina remarks in an interview: «Sin Josep Torres Campalans, sin esa novela de Max Aub, yo no hubiera escrito Beatus Ille, mi primer libro. Sin esa invención magnífica de un pintor vanguardista inexistente en la realidad, un libro que por ejemplo en la biblioteca de Harvard está en arte y no en literatura, yo no hubiera escrito la historia de un escritor de la generación del 27» (Pereda 9).
iation, Solana was released after eight years and supposedly killed by Francoist rural police (Guardia Civil) shortly after. In the Popular Front picture, Solana’s future still looked full of promise, but, in hindsight, we know that it was to be mutilated by the war.

These two key moments in the life of Jacinto Solana are both full of potential, but this potential was wasted when the Republic lost the Civil War. The two pictures impact us because, as Roland Barthes wrote in Camera Lucida, they have a punctum, an intensity that stems from our knowledge of the future failure and death contained in them. When Manuel shows his nephew Minaya for the first time the picture that captures the trio formed by Mariana, Solana and himself celebrating the victory of the Popular Front in the elections of February 1936, the narrator makes the reader aware of this punctum Barthes describes by pointing to the future tragic destinies of the three smiling youths as already inscribed or contained in the photograph:

[...] Tomó de la repisa de la chimenea la foto que les hicie-
ron el mismo día que se supo la victoria del Frente Popular
en las elecciones de febrero y se la tendió a Minaya. Mira-
os, pudo decir, sonriendo a la proximidad de la guerra y la
muerte, contemplando con los ojos abiertos el sucio porvenir
que nos estaba reservado, la vergüenza, el entusiasmo inútil,
el milagro de una mano que por primera vez se posaba en
mi brazo. (32)

The characters’ lack of awareness of the impending Civil War, of the untimely death of Mariana, of Solana’s death or disappearance takes a tragic, almost pathetic dimension here. Their smiling faces and the hope in their hearts captured in the photograph are somehow tinged with failure because of our knowledge of the characters’ future destruction. There is also a movement from the individual to the collective subtly contained in this description in the expression «el sucio porvenir que nos estaba reservado, la
vergüenza, el entusiasmo inútil» in the sense that this «dirty future» that was in store for them was, in fact, experienced by a good sector of the Spanish population, by those who opposed the authoritarian regime that resulted from the war. The pessimism and sense of future tragedy contained in the photograph is enhanced by the narrator’s choice of words: the unexpected adjective «sucio» next to «porvenir», the sense of futility of this tragedy further enhanced by the presence of the adjective «inútil» juxta-
posed to the positive noun «enthusiasm,» and, in fact, annulling it. Muñoz Molina describes this sense of failure very effectively in *Beatus Ille*.

Wondering about the reasons for his own fascination with certain photographs, Barthes distinguishes between what he calls the *studium*, that is, «a field of cultural interest», and the *punctum*, which Barthes calls «another stigmatum», different from «detail»: «This new *punctum*, which is no longer of form but of intensity, is Time, the lacerating emphasis of the *noeme*, 'that-has-been', its pure representation» (96). Barthes goes on to discuss an 1865 picture of Louis Payne, who was photographed in his cell while awaiting execution for attempting to assassinate the U.S. Secretary of State W. H. Seward. In this photograph by Alexander Gardner, Barthes identifies the *punctum* as: «he is going to die». To him, this picture tells the viewer «death in the future», which accounts for the intensity and the poignancy of this particular photograph (96). The fact that Barthes refers to the *punctum* also as «stigmatum» in the previous passages reinforces my point on political stigmatization in *Beatus Ille*, manifesting another instance in which photography and history connect at multiple levels in this novel.

Barthes later acknowledges that his reaction to this photograph stems mostly from the fact that he is contemplating «a catastrophe that has already occurred» (96).

The reader of *Beatus Ille* reacts in a similar manner to the descriptions of those photographs that had failure and death already inscribed in them despite the youth and optimism of the subjects. The reader already knows how the Republic and the Civil War ended and is aware of the difficult fates that await Manuel and his Leftist friends. It is no coincidence then that failure and anachronism are two major themes in *Beatus Ille*.

Manuel and Mariana’s attempt to retreat to a private world—a personal paradise—failed. Their romance ended in wedding, but their future life together was ruined when Mariana’s life was cut short the day after their nuptials. If weddings are usually endings in romance narratives, they are beginnings in real life. Manuel and Mariana’s romance did not have a happy ending. Furthermore, the reader is eventually made aware of a love affair that occurred between Mariana and Solana on the eve of her wedding. Consequently, the private paradise that Manuel had tried to cre-
ate for himself is ultimately ruined, not only by death, but also by deception and betrayal. Likewise, Solana's search for a collective Utopia ended with his imprisonment and presumed death eight years later. The three photographs mentioned (Popular Front picture, wedding photo, and militia photograph) deconstruct traditional romance narratives while casting a nostalgic look on the failure of the Leftist narrative of social revolution.

In *Beatus Ille*, the display of photographs and objects from Manuel's youth (his pre-Civil War past) throughout the house in a specific order allows for some reflections on the use and abuse of tradition. The reader is told that Manuel «tenía catalogados no sólo todos sus recuerdos, sino también las fotografías de Mariana y de Jacinto Solana, y las había distribuido por la casa según un orden privado y muy estricto, lo cual le permitía convertir su paso por las habitaciones en una reiterada conmemoración» (25). By placing the photographs in strategic locations around the house, Manuel constructs what Lisa Yoneyama, in her study of urban renewal in Hiroshima, calls «a memoryscape», a space in which the careful selection and placement of fragments of the past, or icons that remind one of it, facilitate the process of remembering for those who visit it (Boyarin 99-135). Each photograph had a specific place in this itinerary of commemoration for Manuel. For example, the Popular Front picture «en el catalogo de Manuel tenía escrito un invisible número uno, porque fue la primera que se hizo con Mariana, y también la imagen más antigua que guardaba de ella» (26). Photographs here become icons that aid in the process of remembering. However, by becoming as much objects of devotion as images of the past, and by the reiteration of the act of contemplation, these photographs acquire an air of timelessness, and that is why the events in them seem never to have existed:

Con los años dejó de ser un solo rostro y una sola mujer para convertirse en lo que tal vez había sido siempre su destino, no interrumpido, sino culminado con la muerte: un catálogo de miradas y de recuerdos fijados a veces por una fotografía o un dibujo, perfiles de monedas incesantemente perdidas y recobradas y gastadas por la codicia del odio o de la remembración, monedas de ceniza. (137)

This private pilgrimage that Manuel instituted for himself can be better understood in the light of what Eric Hobsbawm calls «an
invented tradition,» that is, «a set of practices [...] which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historical past» (1). In Manuel's case, this set of practices was intended to be a visit to the past of a personal nature and an appropriation of that past. Everything connected to his relationship with Mariana was lovingly preserved: from the photograph that documented their first encounter, to their wedding picture and their wedding chamber:

En el dormitorio que compartió con Mariana una sola noche guardaba su vestido de novia y los zapatos blancos y el ramo de flores artificiales que ella llevó el día de la boda. (24)

It is easy to make a connection between this desire to appropriate a personal past and the theme of the appropriation of the Spanish past during Francoism, something this novel attempts to counteract. Manuel voids the long period of his personal history after Mariana's death, therefore preserving the period prior to the Civil War, that is, the Second Spanish Republic. Francoism, in contrast, erased the very past the individual Manuel tries to preserve (the Spanish democratic, Republican and Leftist tradition) while privileging and appropriating other, more distant periods of the Spanish past, like the fifteenth-century monarchy of Isabella and Ferdinand, for example, precisely the kind of suitable past that Hobsbawm stresses in his study on invented traditions.⁴

The photographs described in Beatus Ille inscribe many of the characteristics theorists ascribe to this medium. These photographs include details that escape the intention of the photographer but are somehow captured in them. For example, the description of the wedding picture indicates that Mariana was looking at the poet Solana instead of the camera: «al cabo de unos pasos iba a llegar al gabinete donde estaban esperando desde mucho antes de que él naciesen los ojos de Mariana, para mirarlo a él exactamente como miraron a Solana y al mundo en 1937» (43). This detail

⁴ In postwar Spain, the fascist victory in the Civil War was commemorated with the proliferation of «monuments to the Fallen.» These objects materialized the de facto division of all Spaniards into winners and losers, since the «fallen» those monuments commemorated were only the casualties of the Fascist forces. In Beatus Ille, Utrera was the sculptor of several of those monuments.
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gives insight into their intimacy that is not explicitly presented to
the reader until much later outside of the context of the photo-
graph. By revealing that the bride was looking intently at the
groom’s best friend during the shooting of her wedding photos, it
suggests that Solana, Manuel and Mariana were part of a love
triangle. Much later in the novel, the reader is given an account
of this photo session that clarifies what had been suggested
before:

[...] así el instante en que encontraron mis ojos la mirada de
Mariana, después de todo un día en que nos eludimos como
dos cómplices que no quieren ser vinculados a un crimen,
perduró gracias al azar y al fogonazo del magnesio más fir-
me que la memoria [...]. (216)

In addition to the existence of these narrative photographs,
photography seeps through all the layers of Beatus Ille. Maryse
Bertrand de Muñoz noticed that the past takes more novelistic
space and importance than the present in Beatus Ille. I will go a
step further: the past in Beatus Ille not only takes more novelistic
space and importance than the present, but it also has as much
clarity and definition. What takes place here in the area of tem-
porality reminds me of what Béla Balázs wrote about «depthless-
ness» in his now classic study on film. He claims that on the
stage «the living, speaking human being has a far greater signif-
icance than dumb objects. They are not on the same plane and
their intensity is different» (58), while «the photograph draws the
background, as it were, toward the foreground and tends to equal-
ize both on a single continuous plane» (134).

I have already discussed how main events in Beatus Ille are
presented through descriptions of photographs. This produces the
effect of drawing these events into the foreground (the present
time of the novel) and, just as the photographic image equalizes
background and foreground, it places those events on the same
plane with the present. This suggests why past events are often
narrated with the same clarity as present ones. It could be argued
that background and foreground are not on the same plane in a
photograph, only on the same surface, but Balázs’s formulations
on film and photography seem to aptly describe the narrative

5 Although he was referring to film and not photography, these specific remarks
can be applied to both.
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structure of this novel to the point that past and present act in Beatus Ille as the background and foreground of a photograph.

These references to the technology of photography are not gratuitous. Juan Rodríguez notes that in Beatus Ille focalization is achieved through Minaya’s conscience, on the grounds that «it is his recollections and his gradual knowledge of the story that guide the novel» (140). Curiously enough, this conscience through which the reader is filtering the story is described at one point as narrowing down to the point of disappearing, with the character becoming an eye without a brain, a camera in the same terms that Balázs had described it:

Desde que llegó a Mágina, la conciencia de Minaya había ido adelgazándose [...] para no ser más que una pupila y una secreta cámara fotográfica. (my emphasis, 93-4)

This transformation makes even more sense because in different passages in the novel there is an identification, a confusion between Minaya and the poet Solana. For instance, while speaking to Minaya, Utrera the sculptor seems to recognize Solana’s voice and gaze:

[...] tras aquella voz (de Minaya) le hablaba la de Jacinto Solana, muerto y regresado, alojado al fondo de las pupilas de Minaya como detrás de un espejo que le permitiera verlo todo y permanecer oculto. (my emphasis, 250)

In this instance, the pupils of the dead poet can be seen in the back of Minaya’s eyes. Solana is, then, the gaze behind the photographic camera Minaya has become.

To further support the importance of photography, I would like to explore the privileging of the visual in this novel. Photography is given a seminal standing, almost in Biblical terms. When news of Mariana’s existence came to disturb the quiet of the manorial house, her image preceded her name: «Vino primero la fotografía, cuenta Medina» (my emphasis, 138). This is followed by an account of how Manuel proceeded to open his wallet and show his friend Mariana’s photograph «as a valuable secret document»;

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6 Balázs equates retinal image and photographic image. He affirms that retinal image is flat, two-dimensional; therefore our perception of the third dimension, like our perception of spatial permanence and continuity, is a creation of the brain. To him, camera vision would be the equivalent of eyesight without a brain.
then, and only then, he told him her name: «Se llama Mariana» (138). As Utrera recalls: «Vinieron, pues, como emisarios secretos, la fotografía y el nombre, y sólo un año más tarde vino la misma Mariana acompañando como una enfermera atenta y silenciosa a Manuel [...]» (139). In Beatus Ille, as in Genesis, in the beginning there was light. I am thinking here of the photograph as a trace made by light, either directly emanated or reflected from an object onto a chemically treated surface.

We have seen how Muñoz Molina uses certain presumably defining features of photography, what we could call photography's cognitive structure, as generators of this novel's narrative strategies: many narrative strategies in this novel result from a transposition of the characteristics of photography or the workings of the camera as they have been described by theorists, and, also, from how we experience photographs as viewers.

What is achieved by giving photography a privileged role in Beatus Ille? On the one hand, it offers a glimpse of what Fredric Jameson calls «the technological sublime,» which occurs when «beyond all thematics or content the work seems somehow to tap the network of the reproductive process» (37). On the other, Muñoz Molina enacts in the text what I consider two important social experiences of Francoism: silence and immobility (inmovilismo) by incorporating narrative strategies extracted from the photographic medium. The fact that both silence and immobility are symbolically contained in photographs makes photography the perfect instrument to convey those experiences. In ancient Greek tragedies, silence was included in the performance as a tableau, a frozen version of events that happened offstage:

In the tragedies of ancient Athens, tableaux were popular: the fastidious dramatists placed their tragic scenes offstage, and the bloody events were described by a messenger or some

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7 What I call a «culture of silence» during Francoism includes a wide range of experiences, social and institutional practices: silence as a mode of behaving collectively and individually as well (self-censorship), institutional silence in the suppression of free speech (censorship), the deliberate and systematic erasure of political enemies (blacklisting), and the emergence of a peculiar mode of communicating in spite of and because of censorship. (the whole country was reading between the lines). «Inmovilismo» is a term used to describe a political project during Francoism that articulates the containment of change as well as the measures designed to carry out this policy.
other supernumerary; but the «managers» put the actors on a cart they rolled in, the ekkyklema, so that the populace could see a frozen version of the horrible events. (my emphasis; Hollis vii)

In this sense, photographs in Beatus Ille can be understood as moments of silence, like the tableaux of Greek tragedies. Photography freezes life, time, and motion, providing a fitting metaphor for the image Muñoz Molina tries to convey about what Francoism did to Spain: the thwarting of the dynamic intellectual and democratic traditions of the 1930s.

WORKS CITED
