

cia a la desgracia» (167). José Antonio Marina se suma al coro de voces que, provenientes de muy diversos lugares —inteligencia emocional, Sócrates, Budismo, etc.— nos dicen de distinta manera que la infelicidad está íntimamente unida a la «maldad», y que ésta, a su vez, está relacionada con la ignorancia. Una ignorancia profunda, ontológica, aquella que va mucho más allá de los hechos y los datos para entrar en la oscuridad abismal en la que la ausencia de lo bello, lo verdadero y lo bueno son una misma ausencia.

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CREACIÓN

Alberto Méndez. *Los girasoles ciegos*. Barcelona: Anagrama, 2004. 160 pp.

In recent years, there have appeared a number of novels that delve into Spain's collective memory in an attempt to recreate those moments of twentieth-century history that still necessitate retelling. Cercas's *Soldado de Salamina* is perhaps the most touted recent work that recalls the Civil War and its aftermath, and Isaac Rosa's *El vano ayer* is an ingenious novelistic evocation of the political problems in Madrid's Complutense University during the nineteen sixties. Jesús Ferrero's *Las trece rosas* constitutes an emotional rendering of a tragic execution that took place at the end of the war, and Alberto Méndez's *Los girasoles ciegos*, like Ferrero's work a depiction of the immediate aftermath of the war, presents us once again with a heart-rending piece of fiction that could just as well be fact. In fact, in Cervantine fashion, parts of it are written as if they were just that, factual, and this leads to the desired effect of making the suffering of the characters that much more genuine.

The text is divided into four practically independent stories. The first and third share a character, as do the second and fourth, and this adds cohesion to the work as a whole, giving it more of a novelistic aspect than if the four stories were entirely separate. The connections, in effect, underline the theme of suffering and fear that runs through the entire book. Each story is entitled a *derrota* belonging, respectively, to 1939, 1940, 1941, and 1942, and they depict in order, a nationalist captain who curiously surrenders to the Republic on April 1, 1939, just as Franco's troops are about to take the city of Madrid, a young poet and newborn baby, in hiding in the northern mountains, a Republican prisoner of war, waiting for his execution, and a family in which the father, wanted by the Franco police, is hidden in a closet in his apartment. This fourth story is narrated by three separate voices that create three separate perspectives that alternate more rapidly at the conclusion and thus rise to a feverish pitch that lends a symphonic effect to the entire text. At the same time, the reader

often cannot help but feel an ironic disconnect between the suffering described and the hauntingly poetic technique used to develop those descriptions.

The text will travel, thus, from the inner conflict of a *vencedor* who surrenders, a *rendido* but not a *traidor* as he declares, to the inner conflict of another *vencedor* whose actions lead to the tragedy that brings the text to a close. Whereas the first character acts in protest against a war waged in the name of usury and death as opposed to conquest, and serves to question the Nationalist revolt, the second character's thoughts and actions allow for a much clearer denunciation of the repression of the Regime that followed the Nationalist victory. The second and third stories, meanwhile, portray a personal suffering that is not always limited to those who lost the war. While the second story might be read as the centerpiece of the entire text, a father's attempt to save the life of his baby, just as he fought to save his country, in the third story the author allows for that same parental emotion on the part of a Nationalist colonel and his wife whose son was executed by the Republican troops. While their suffering is real, Méndez injects the story with an irony that, while it does not reduce the representation of a mother's pain, maintains the political perspective, that of the *vencidos*, that he defends clearly throughout the text.

Los girasoles ciegos is a beautifully crafted book that learns its lesson from Cervantes well. While one might fear that the mention of testimony and the transcription of journals might lead the reader away from theme and toward questions of style and structure, the literary conventions that Méndez uses in no way obstruct the authenticity of the suffering he chooses to portray. As the child in the fourth story says toward the end of the work, «Todo era real pero nada verdadero». This line, in essence, speaks for the entire work. This haunting work of fiction is in every sense an authentic representation of a tragic moment in Spanish history.

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Álvaro Pombo. *Una ventana al norte*. Barcelona: Anagrama, 2004. 315 pp.

La trayectoria narrativa de Álvaro Pombo (Santander, 1939) se inicia en 1977 con la publicación de *Relatos sobre la falta de sustancia*, libro con el que tendría su primer éxito editorial. A éste le seguirían toda una serie de novelas que han acaparado los premios literarios más importantes de las letras peninsulares. Entre ellas se encuentran textos como *El héroe de las mansardas de Mansard* (1983), *El metro de platino iridiado* (1991), *Donde las mujeres* (1996), *La cuadratura del círculo* (1999), o *El cielo raso* (2002) por citar algunos de los más relevantes. Sus dos últimas novelas hasta la fecha son *Una ventana al norte* (2004) y *Contra natura* (2006).