

Remembering the Spanish Civil War: Cinematic Motifs and the Narrative Recuperation of the Past in Dulce Chacón's *La voz dormida*, Javier Cercas' *Soldados de Salamina*, and Manuel Rivas' *O lapis do carpinteiro*

Introduction: The Recuperation of Historical Memory in Contemporary Spain

It might seem surprising to begin by stressing the contentious nature of historiography of the Spanish Civil War, a conflict which ended almost seven decades ago, yet in the summer of 2004 the recently elected socialist government of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero made an announcement which may serve as a short-hand means of stressing the continued emotiveness of the *contienda*. On 23 July Zapatero's cabinet, the Consejo de Ministros, agreed to create a commission to 'reparar la dignidad y restituir la memoria de las víctimas y represaliados que desde el inicio de la Guerra Civil y hasta la recuperación de las libertades sufrieron cárcel, represión o muerte por defender esas mismas libertades'.¹ An Interministerial Commission was subsequently set up on 10 September with the aim of rehabilitating 'jurídica y moralmente' the victims of the war and of the Francoist Regime which it brought to power. Its brief is inevitably wide, since it may be seen as a formal response to the demands of various associations pushing for the recuperation of historical memory in Spain today.² Some of these call specifically for the state-supervised opening of mass graves from the War years (a practice already on-going under the auspices of the Asociación para la Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica), and for a repeal of sentences, including death sentences, handed down to Republican prisoners and other persecuted individuals. But the new commission has been

¹ 'Una comisión para reparar la dignidad de las víctimas de la Guerra Civil', *El País*, 24 July 2005.

² Carlos E. Cue, 'El Gobierno rehabilitará "jurídica y moralmente" a las víctimas del franquismo', *El País*, 10 September 2004.

established in a climate in which historical and cultural memory are not just the latest academic fashion; the general backdrop to Zapatero's move also includes a debate on the removal of Francoist symbols and names from, as one *El País* reporter put it, the 'calles, plazas e iglesias de media España'.³ Indeed, the removal recently of the one remaining statue of Franco in Madrid caused considerable controversy, and had to be carried out under cover of darkness and with a certain subterfuge.⁴

Historians of the Civil War and Francoist era have, of course, long argued over the interpretation of those years in Spanish history, and in the literary and cultural sphere writers have also (with greater or lesser freedom and success) consistently stressed issues such as repression, subversion, liberty, memory, and the manipulation of history for ideological ends. In one sense, none of this is new, yet there does seem to have been in recent years an increase in popular interest in the War and its aftermath which happens to coincide with the perspective of the third generation since that time. It would seem that, following the so-called 'pacto de olvido', or agreed silence, of the Transition years, a new generation, aged roughly 18-40, has emerged with a keen interest in a time they have learnt about from history books (if they have studied it in any detail at all), or from family anecdotes. It is this contemporary desire to recuperate a traumatic past which I wish to consider here through an analysis of three recent novels by a young generation of writers. Those three novels are, in the order in which they are discussed below, Dulce Chacón's *La voz dormida* (2002), Javier Cercas' *Soldados de*

³ See Cue, 'El Gobierno rehabilitará "jurídica y moralmente" a las víctimas del franquismo'.

⁴ See 'Retirada la última estatua de Franco en Madrid', *El País*, 17 March 2005; Soledad Alcaide, 'Fomento aprovechó una confusa licencia de obras de reforma para desmontar la estatua de Franco', *El País*, 18 March 2005.

Salamina (2001), and Manuel Rivas' *O lapis do carpinteiro* (1998). The popular and critical success of these books suggests that they struck a chord with Spanish readers, and my analysis of them is intended to raise certain issues pertaining to the narrative recuperation of historical memory in contemporary Spain.⁵

A New Generation Remembers: Dulce Chacón, Javier Cercas, and Manuel Rivas

Dulce Chacón, Javier Cercas, and Manuel Rivas belong to a younger generation of writers who would have come to political awareness in the final years of the Franco regime and the period of the Transition to democracy. Their stake in the events of the Civil War and the early repression of the Nationalist Regime is therefore indirect, and their perspective is inevitably affected by this. Both Cercas and Chacón, who are from families of right-wing political affiliation,⁶ believe in the need to revisit the atrocities of the war and the Regime, feeling a moral imperative to pass on to a still younger generation the silenced stories of the vanquished. Cercas remarked in 2002, 'Ahora ya han pasado 27 años desde la muerte de Franco y [...] se pueden y se deben contar las historias escalofriantes de la represión franquista.' Chacón, rather

⁵ *Soldados de Salamina* sold 100,000 copies in the first ten months, according to a report in *El País*, Angel Harguindey, 'Muerte y resurrección de Sánchez Mazas', 3 May 2002. By June of 2003 it had sold 500,000 copies in Spain according to an interview with Cercas in the *Irish Times*, 'Loosing the War, Winning the Literature', 7 June 2003. Aside its popularity with general readers, Cercas' book won several literary prizes, including the Premio Salambó, the Premio de la Crítica de Chile, the Premi Ciutat de Barcelona, the Premio Ciudad de Cartagena, and the Premio Extremadura. Chacón's novel won the Premio del Gremio de Libreros de Madrid 2002. *O lapis do carpinteiro* sold all 7000 copies of the first Galician edition before its official release, according to Xosé Hermida, 'Manuel Rivas se acerca al mundo de los artesanos en su novela *O lapis do carpinteiro*', *El País*, 17 June 1998. The novel was awarded the first Amnesty International Literary Prize in 2001, by which time it had been translated into 16 languages (*El País*, 1 December 2001).

⁶ On Cercas, see 'Loosing the War, Winning the Literature'. Chacón has remarked that 'parte de mi familia ha sido siempre conservadora, monárquica, aristocrática. Y en la guerra sufrieron las atrocidades que cometieron los rojos' (José Andrés Rojo, 'Entrevista a Dulce Chacón: "He querido explorar el lado, oscuro, oculto y silenciado de la posguerra"', *El País*, 6 September 2002). This personal family experience was included in Chacón's earlier novel, *Cielos de barro*, but 'la otra verdad' is an aspect of the war that she also wanted to recuperate. Hence the tale of Republican suffering which informs *La voz dormida*.

more impassioned, declared, ‘Nosotros, la gente que estamos en los cuarenta o los cincuenta años de edad, somos los hijos del silencio de nuestros padres. [...] Tenemos que rescatar la historia silenciada, es una responsabilidad de nuestra generación. El conflicto entre las dos Españas no ha terminado. Terminará cuando pueda hablarse del conflicto.’⁷ Rivas adopts a slightly more personal approach, betraying a sense of guilt. ‘No viví aquella época,’ he says, ‘pero siento el dolor de una amputación.’ He thus regards his novel as not simply another one on the Civil War, but as a cathartic attempt to ‘luchar contra la desmemoria’, by which he means the wave of amnesia affecting sectors of Spanish political life since the Transition.⁸ This sense of a duty to remember is manifest in the novels of these writers in a series of strikingly common features, which include recourse to ‘true events’ and documented sources, the use of self-conscious narrative techniques, and an emphasis on one particular intersubjective relationship, namely the exchange of glances, or gazes, between victors and vanquished which becomes a metaphor for broader social and human interaction. I should like to look at the three writers in reverse order of publication date because the issues which their work raises in relation to the narrative recuperation of the past, especially through the prism of the *mirada*, are only slightly broached by Chacón, but are tackled in a more complex manner by Cercas and Rivas.

⁷ Both quotations are from Javier Valenzuela, ‘El despertar tras la amnesia’, *El País*, 2 November 2002.

⁸ Quoted in Miguel Ángel Villena, ‘Gutiérrez Aragón llevará al cine la última novela de Manuel Rivas’, *El País*, 15 October 1998.

Dulce Chacón's *La voz dormida*: A Realist Approach

Dulce Chacón's fifth novel, *La voz dormida*, is essentially a realist depiction of the experiences of Republican women incarcerated in Madrid's Ventas prison during and in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War. Drawing on acknowledged historical sources, some oral (and even personally gathered by the author), and some published, it seeks to recreate the repressive atmosphere of the time, emphasizing above all the fear and suffering of both the prisoners and their immediate families. As Chacón herself noted, although much of the novel deals with the years immediately after the Nationalist victory, and actually concludes in 1963, its main argument stresses the manner in which the new Regime sought to prolong the nightmare of the war into the so-called years of peace.

Chacón's express aim is to reveal the 'lado oscuro, oculto y silenciado de la posguerra' and to pay homage to those female victims of the war who were forced to maintain a traumatic silence as a result of the Regime's persecution of its opponents. Her novel, in simple terms, seeks to give them back a voice – hence its title. *La voz dormida* concentrates on the stories of Pepita, who waited 17 years for the release of her *maqui* fiancé before they could be married; Hortensia, whose execution for 'adhesión a la rebelión',⁹ by which is meant her support for Republican resistance to the Nationalist coup, is delayed until the child she is expecting is born; and Reme, who is accused of no more than sewing a Republican flag. Other figures populate the background, including the case of the *trece rosas* – thirteen women, six of

⁹ *La voz dormida*, 17th edn (Madrid: Alfaguara, 2004), p. 221.

them minors, who were convicted and executed by the Nationalists, also for ‘adhesión a la rebelión’, in 1939.¹⁰

Perusal of the extensive list of documentary sources at the end of *La voz dormida* reveals that in her novel Chacón attempts to tread a line closer to a documentary than an imaginative text. She thus punctuates her book with pseudo-official documents pertaining to the Nationalist declaration of victory (at the end of part one), the sentence of execution by firing squad against Hortensia (the end of part two), and the conditions of early release given to Pepita’s boyfriend Jaime (the end of part three). She also includes a letter actually written by one of the *trece rosas*, Julia Conesa, just prior to her execution (p. 199).¹¹ Indeed, Chacón’s novel can be regarded as a response to Conesa’s final letter, which ended with the plea to her mother, ‘Que mi nombre no se borre de la historia’. Along with Chacón’s extensive use of dialogue and generally paired-down language, this use of factual and pseudo-documentary evidence serves to create a sense of authenticity. By dramatizing the events recounted and seeking largely to conceal the activities of the novelist as creator of a fictional world, Chacón attempts to engineer a sense of empathy in the reader.

No novelist can, of course, accept such a naive aim, and Chacón is fully aware that there is ‘another truth’ about the war. She does make some references to leftist atrocities, for instance, recalling the massacre of Nationalist prisoners at the hands of Republicans at Paracuellos del Jarama (p. 107).¹² But such references are far outweighed by the emphasis on

¹⁰ On this episode, see Carlos Fonseca, *Trece rosas rojas: la historia más conmovedora de la guerra civil* (Madrid: Ediciones Temas de hoy, 2004).

¹¹ Originally quoted almost verbatim in Fonseca, pp. 293-96.

¹² See Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, 3rd edn (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1977), p. 477.

the suffering of Republican women and *maquis* at the hands of the Nationalists. There is to *La voz dormida*, as one reviewer has noted, an element of the ‘docudrama’ which acquires a epic tone at times.¹³ The insistence that Hortensia is a marked woman, condemned to death by fate before her death sentence is ever passed, sets her apart as a tragic heroine. The reader’s perspective in the present is thus incorporated into the text to give added weight to the tragedy of these women. These, for instance, are the opening words of the novel: ‘La mujer que iba a morir se llamaba Hortensia’ (p. 13). And at the end of the first chapter we read the following reprise: ‘La mujer que iba a morir no sabía que iba a morir.’ (p. 13) There are plenty of other occasions of this tendency to universalize the experience of the novel’s protagonists, but I want to focus here on the image of eyes and its significance in the novel.

At one point in *La voz dormida* don Fernando, a Republican sympathizer married into a Nationalist family, recalls those Republican atrocities committed at Paracuellos del Jarama as a ‘matanza’ or massacre (p. 107):

Él vio morir a los prisioneros. No se alejó de los guardianes que disparaban. No se alejó, hasta que terminó la matanza. Miró. Y es culpable. Miró. Y no dijo ¡Basta! ni una sola vez. [...] Miró como brotaba la sangre. Miró. Y le gustó mirar. (p. 107)

Now, one might well argue that this passage establishes a balance between Nationalist and Republican atrocities by stressing the shared culpability of both sides in the blood-letting, yet don Fernando is atypical of the book in that he is perhaps the only character who has any sense of his own guilt. Chacón reserves the quality of balanced perspective for this supporter of the Republican cause, and leaves the Nationalists as very much the evil party in the conflict. She

¹³ Vicente Araguas, ‘Coral’, *Revista de libros* 77, (2003), 48.

also chooses mostly to stress the importance of the gaze, or look, as one of death, almost in the Sartrean sense of the objectification of the 'other' through a hostile 'regard', or exchange of glances, rather than one of personal evaluation or even analytical distance, as occurs with the other two novels discussed below.

The importance of eyes is first mentioned in *La voz dormida* in the emotive context of the inability of relatives of Republicans shot by Nationalist firing squad to close the eyes of and bury their lost loved ones. One character, Doña Celia, recalls how 'ella no había podido darle sepultura [a su hija], ni le había cerrado los ojos, ni le había lavado la cara para limpiar la sangre antes de entregarla a la tierra' (p. 97). On two other occasions the gaze is presented as a look of death in the eyes of the Nationalists' victims. Of Elvira, one of the key Republican women held in Ventas prison we read, 'no se atrevió a mirar a los ojos a ninguna de las trece menores', for in their eyes was 'la mirada de la muerte' (p. 196). Even more emphatic is an exchange of glances between two *maquis*, one of whom threatens to abandon the guerilla struggle. As the *maquis*' leader aims his gun at the potential deserter and looks down its sight, 'dicen que su mirada negra traspasó a aquel muchacho' (p. 297). Here the gaze, whether Nationalist or, as in this case, Republican, when directed down the barrel of a gun, becomes death itself, a motif which echoes both Cercas' and Rivas' novels, as well as Carlos Saura's 1965 film, *La caza*. What Chacón does in *La voz dormida* is reveal the manner in which war draws out a destructive violence in man, a theme that Saura had earlier explored in a much more complex and self-conscious manner in his allegorical portrayal of war as a hunt.

La caza recounts the story of four hunters on a weekend trip to a hunting preserve which was the scene of a battle during the Civil War. Three of the men participated in the war on the victorious side; the fourth, Enrique, is much younger and represents a generation born at the time of or after those cataclysmic events but which had taken no part in them. As Marvin D'Lugo notes, censorship entailed the suppression from the film of direct references to the Spanish Civil War, yet Saura's numerous allusions to an unnamed war, allied to certain details – particularly the former screen persona of one of the actors, Alfredo Mayo, who played a Nationalist patriot in Sáenz de Heredia's *Raza* – mean that no mid century Spanish audience could miss the director's anti-Fracoist sentiments.¹⁴ Saura's self-conscious approach is reinforced by a scene in the film when the three older hunters express their feelings about hunting, not in an exchange of dialogue but through direct addresses to camera. They thus exchange a look with the spectator which is aggressive and disrupts the normal flow of the narrative.

As Enrique loads film into his camera, symbolically turning him into an observer somewhat distanced from the action, Saura shows the face of José reflected in a mirror in the lid of a portable drinks cabinet. He then presents the three to-camera statements on hunting, which climax with the idea that a man-hunt is the purest form of hunting: 'La mejor caza es la caza del hombre.' Next, following a series of shots that focus on the loading and preparing of guns for the rabbit hunt, Enrique admires Luis' rifle and looks down its sight, only to find the

¹⁴ In D'Lugo's words, 'the narrative space of *The Hunt* implies that the mise-en-scene of all contemporary action is necessarily the suppressed battlefield of the Civil War.' See Marvin D'Lugo, *The Films of Carlos Saura: The Practice of Seeing* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. 57-8.

gamekeeper, whose low social standing and limp suggest he is a former Republican soldier, in his line of fire. Enrique is thus drawn into the violence of the past through this gaze down the barrel of a gun, and his distanced stance as youthful observer is crucially compromised.¹⁵ In this lengthy sequence, Saura draws attention to the medium of cinema through the incorporation of a mirror, symbolizing the notion of the film as a simulacrum of reality; through the aggressive gazes of the older hunters, which draw the audience into the film and implicate them as protagonists; and through Enrique's framing of a victim of the past in the cross-hair of a telescopic sight. He is thus able to explore self-consciously the cinematic gaze as a means of interrogating the past.

There are respects in which Chacón attempts to add a similar element of self-consciousness to her novel. The notion of bearing witness is reflected not only in the manner in which the book is a response to Julia Conesa's plea to ensure her name is not wiped from history, but also in the way in which one of the condemned women, Hortensia, records her feelings in a blue notebook for her unborn child. The directness of the testimonial aim is in some sense undercut by this mirroring of Conesa's views in Hortensia's actions. Nevertheless, in comparison with *La caza* and the two novels which I shall consider below, Chacón's questioning of narrative as an appropriate and unproblematic medium for the recuperation of history is very limited. Saura's film is a felicitous, if not deliberate, echo in both Cercas' and Rivas' books, for they each incorporate the image of the look or gaze in order to emphasize the perspective from which one may – literally – view events of the past. In this sense, there is a

¹⁵ For more on Enrique's role in the film, see D'Lugo, pp. 60-6.

strongly cinematic quality to the novels which, beyond explaining their rapid adaption to the silver screen,¹⁶ may offer a new idiom for addressing the recuperation of the historical past in contemporary Spanish narrative. Both novelists, in an Aristotelian vein, also tackle the issue of poetic truth in contrast to historical truth, thus adding an important layer of complexity to their approach to the past which is not explicitly spelled out in the work of Chacón.

Javier Cercas' *Soldados de Salamina: Relatos Reales* and the Symbolic Gaze

In *Soldados de Salamina* Cercas broaches the issue of writing about the past by proposing the category of *relatos reales* as a means of recuperating history through oral and written narrative. This term is not easy to translate. It might be rendered as a 'true account', understood as a direct retelling or testimony of events, but the apparent simplicity of the phrase is undermined by the term's antecedents in Cercas' own work. The term *relatos reales* in fact echoes the title of an anthology of Cercas' contributions to a regular column in the Catalan edition of *El País*, published in 2000. These are *relatos reales* 'no porque hablen de la realeza [...] sino porque se ciñen a la realidad'.¹⁷ Indeed, Cercas confesses that the notion of a *relato real* is a contradiction in terms (p. 16): 'en rigor, un relato real es apenas concebible, porque todo relato, lo quiera o no, comporta un grado variable de invención.' Nevertheless, a distinction must be made between fiction and journalistic, or documentary, writing, since 'todo relato parte de la realidad, pero establece una relación distinta entre lo real y lo inventado: en el relato ficticio domina esto último; en el real, lo primero' (p. 17). Hence, he suggests, we are

¹⁶ *O lapis do carpinteiro* was adapted by Antón Reixa in 2001 and *Soldados de Salamina* by David Trueba in 2003.

¹⁷ Javier Cercas, *Relatos reales* (Barcelona: El Acantilado, 2000), p. 16.

dealing with degrees of a spectrum between pure fiction and pure realism, neither of which in themselves, of course, exist.

This is fundamentally important to *Soldados de Salamina*, first because it is a work in which true, if contentious, events from Spain's recent past are apparently narrated with historical distance; second, because the issue of authorial identity is raised by the use of Cercas' own name for the protagonist of the book, thus drawing him in some sense into the fictional world; and, third, because, for the alert reader, Cercas plays subtly with the borderline between fiction and reality in a way which in fact invites that reader to question the veracity of the narrative. It is noticeable that the blurb on the back cover of *Soldados* labels it a *relato real* and not a novel, a word, indeed, which seems to be studiously avoided. Instead, *Soldados* offers its own definition of the *relato real*.

Soldados de Salamina begins with its protagonist, Javier Cercas, a journalist, recounting how a reclusive novelist by the name of Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio told him the story of a true episode involving his father, the Falangist Rafael Sánchez Mazas, during the Civil War. Sánchez Mazas escaped from Republican clutches amidst the confusion of a summary execution of prisoners in the final days of the war, and took refuge in a local forest where he was found by a young Republican soldier who then spared his life for no apparent reason and left him in the undergrowth. Having written up the anecdote in a newspaper column, Cercas (the protagonist) is contacted by a historian named Miquel Aguirre who claims to know more details of these events and Sánchez Mazas' later protection by a group of locals, known as 'los amigos del bosque'. In conversation, Cercas remarks to Aguirre that 'es una historia muy

novelesca’, to which Aguirre replies, ‘Todas las guerras están llenas de historias novelescas’.¹⁸

There then follows this exchange between Cercas and Aguirre (p. 37):

— Esto no es una novela, sino una historia real.

— También lo era el artículo —dijo Aguirre—. ¿Te dije que me gustó mucho? Me gustó porque era como un relato concentrado, sólo que con personajes y situaciones reales... Como un relato real.

This seems to return us to the discussion in the prologue to Cercas’ collection of *Relatos reales*. Furthermore, the events recounted in *Soldados de Salamina* have a direct and verifiable connection to reality. Reporting on the publication of *Soldados de Salamina* in 2001, Jordi Busquets stressed the authentic nature of the tale which Cercas had chosen as the basis of his novel.¹⁹ Not only is it true that Rafael Sánchez Mazas, founder-member of the Falange and close friend of its first leader, José Antonio Primo de Rivera, miraculously survived a Republican firing squad at Santa María del Collell, in the Gerona region of Cataluña, at the end of the Civil War, as the remains of the Republican army fled to the French border, but he was apparently aided by three local deserters from those same Republican troops who become known as ‘los amigos del bosque’. Moreover, after writing up the story in the ‘La Crónica’ section of the Catalan edition of *El País*, Javier Cercas (the writer) is contacted by the historian Miquel Aguirre with further details of these three individuals and he follows this up with a visit to the survivors.

According to this scenario, the parallel between Cercas the writer and Cercas the protagonist would seem to be uncannily close. And *Soldados de Salamina* does not only

¹⁸ *Soldados de Salamina*, 27th edn (Barcelona: Tusquets, 2001), p.35.

¹⁹ ‘Un relato real: Javier Cercas recrea en *Soldados de Salamina* el fusilamiento de Sánchez Mazas al final de la guerra civil’, *El País*, 2 April 2001. Xavier Moret recounts the same version of events in ‘Los amigos del bosque’, *El País*, 5 September 2002.

incorporate events from Cercas' own journalistic career, it even includes the very text of his first chronicle on Sánchez Mazas as an embedded text.²⁰ Thus, Cercas' book seems to tend towards the realistic end of the fiction-documentary spectrum. Furthermore, Sánchez Mazas, Aguirre and Cercas are not the only characters to echo real-life people in this book. The Chilean novelist Roberto Bolaño makes an appearance as a friend and literary mentor of Cercas the protagonist in *Soldados*. And the incorporation of a reproduction of Sánchez Mazas' journal from the time (p. 59), its transcription in the text (pp. 58, 60), and oral accounts of events by the 'amigos del bosque' all constitute quasi-documentary evidence which bolsters the sense of authenticity of the narrative.

The implications of these overlaps between fiction and life are not inconsequential. They reinforce a sense of authenticity in the account of Sánchez Mazas' war experiences in *Soldados de Salamina*; they lead the reader – or perhaps seduce him? – into identifying Cercas the writer with his protagonist; and, they offer a seemingly distanced, even impartial, view of certain events and key ideological movements in the Spanish Civil War. Nevertheless, of course, literary critics and commentators are careful of assuming that a book can simply be read autobiographically. Indeed, Cercas himself reminded us that all writing can be seen as a kind of posture rather than a direct expression of self in the preface to *Relatos reales* in talking of the writer's work as both a revelation and a mask – that is, simultaneously the construction

²⁰ *Soldados de Salamina*, pp. 24-26. The only difference between the original essay and the later embedded version is the opening. The former begins, 'Acaban de cumplirse sesenta años [...]' (*Relatos reales*, p. 153), whilst the latter opens, 'Se cumplen sesenta años [...]' (*Soldados*, p. 24).

and the concealment of identity.²¹ And this aspect of writing is not ignored in *Soldados de Salamina*, though it would seem that it has been less fully noted by readers than it might have been. Perhaps that is why in July of 2002, a year after the book's publication, Cercas felt compelled to disabuse his readers of certain misunderstandings and asked them to distrust the protagonist/narrator of his novel, as he was by then calling it, because 'no tiene nada de "relato real"', como insiste el Cercas narrador'.²² 'Yo buscaba la verdad literaria, no la del periodismo,' he went on. 'La literaria es una verdad moral, universal, que manipula la realidad. El libro es la historia de una mirada. Me obsesionó tanto que no pude no escribirlo.'

Cercas' reference in the above quotation to the *mirada*, or look, is the key to unlocking the fine balance between fiction and reality which the author weaves in *Soldados de Salamina*. The central moment in Sánchez Mazas' escape is symbolized in a look – that of the Republican soldier staring at the Falangist before he decides to spare him. It is a look which becomes mythical in its universality, and it is no coincidence that it is described at what is quite literally, in terms of page numbers, the centre of the novel (p. 104):

El soldado le está mirando; Sánchez Mazas también pero sus ojos deteriorados no entienden lo que ven: bajo el pelo empapado y la ancha frente y las cejas pobladas de gotas, la mirada del soldado no expresa compasión ni odio, ni siquiera desdén, sino una especie de secreta o insoldable alegría, algo que linda con la crueldad y se resiste a la razón pero tampoco es instinto, algo que vive en ella con la misma ciega obstinación con que la sangre persiste en sus conductos y la tierra en su órbita inamovible y todos los seres en su terca condición de seres, algo que elude a

²¹ In the preface to *Relatos reales* Cercas labels the pieces 'un puñado de crónicas' in which 'se habla ante todo del yo'. But this first person voice is not necessarily Cercas himself, since, he warns us, 'escribir consiste, entre otras cosas, en fabricarse una identidad, un rostro que al mismo tiempo es y no es el nuestro, igual que una máscara' (p. 7). And he goes on (pp. 7-8), 'De hecho, máscara es lo que *persona* significa en latín y, como se dice en una de estas crónicas [...], la máscara es lo que nos oculta, pero sobre todo lo que nos revela.'

²² 'Me gustaría que se leyera como una novela de aventuras,' he is also quoted as saying in Rafael Méndez, 'Cercas pide que se desconfie del narrador de *Soldados de Salamina*', *El País*, 3 July 2002.

las palabras como el agua del arroyo elude a la piedra, porque las palabras sólo están hechas para decirse a sí mismas, para decir lo decible, es decir todo excepto lo que nos gobierna o hace vivir o concierne o somos o es este soldado anónimo y derrotado que ahora mira a ese hombre cuyo cuerpo casi se confunde con la tierra y el agua marrón de la hoya, y que grita con fuerza al aire sin dejar de mirarlo:

—¡Aquí no hay nadie!

Luego da media vuelta y se va.

It is also no coincidence that much is made in the book of Sánchez Mazas being very short-sighted – intended perhaps to stress his misguided political sympathies.

What I wish to consider here, however, is another aspect of the notion of the look, and one which is more fully reinforced by the cinema medium than the literary one, namely the perspective, or point of view, from which events are narrated. It is in this respect that the rather mythical view of heroism which Cercas proposes in this central scene in *Soldados de Salamina* is crucially questioned. And this is the point which Cercas felt readers needed to consider more when he called for them to distrust his protagonist/narrator.

An aspect of *Soldados de Salamina* which must be explored fully is its first-person narrative perspective and the confessional nature of its opening lines (p. 17):

Fue en el verano de 1994, hace ahora más de seis años, cuando oí hablar por primera vez del fusilamiento de Rafael Sánchez Mazas. Tres cosas acababan de ocurrirme por entonces: la primera es que mi padre había muerto; la segunda es que mi mujer me había abandonado; la tercera es que yo había abandonado mi carrera de escritor.²³

Thus, the novel's protagonist/narrator begins by stressing a crisis point in his life which coincided with his first hearing the story of Sánchez Mazas from his son Sánchez Ferlosio. We then move directly into Sánchez Ferlosio's account, though prefaced with the words

²³ Two reviews which stress this aspect are Mario Vargas Llosa's 'El sueño de los héroes', *El País*, 5 September 2001, and Xón de Ros, 'Two Meetings With Death', *Times Literary Supplement*, 14 December 2001.

‘Recuerdo que Ferlosio contó [...]’ (p. 19). For two reasons, one thematic and one formal, the reader ought to be wary of this narrator: this is an unstable time in his life since he has lost two close companions, and he claims directly to recall and record words spoken to him five years earlier – words which are only a second-hand version of events told to a son by his father long after the original episode. But Cercas’ text flows seamlessly along and it is easy to miss these points. The film adaptation stresses the issue in a different manner, one appropriate to the medium, but also one which may actually be more effective.

Trueba’s adaptation of *Soldados de Salamina* opens with a camera shot of a mirror, and then pans across the objects in a room, before settling on the protagonist, now called Lola Cercas, for the director has changed the gender of the lead character. As Lola sits at her computer, lost for words, she holds down a single key, producing rows of the capital letter ‘A’. It represents a cry of desperation, but noticeably a written one which the spectator views on a screen. The interplay between Cercas’ written text and Trueba’s film adaptation is thus symbolized in this silent cry for help – as is, of course, Lola’s own state of personal anxiety. Amongst the various objects which we are shown in Lola’s room are books, reinforcing again the textual presentation of reality and raising the issue of the perspective from which scenes and events are viewed and then depicted. This focus on the gaze, or *mirada*, is the most significant ethical contribution which Cercas’ novel and its film adaptation make to contemporary debates on the Civil War, for perspective is, of course, the key issue behind the current debate about the recuperation of the past in Spain. It is significant that Cercas chooses a journalist as his protagonist, making him a kind of postmodern voyeur, not of the sexual kind

but of the investigative kind – a curious onlooker in search of information and engaged at the same time in a personal quest for self-understanding. Thus the Javier Cercas of the novel represents an embodied, individual gaze upon the past which is open to bias but remains human and qualified by its own frailties. A similar view is offered by Rivas, who quite explicitly adopts the idea that life is less a dream, or a play, than a film in *O lapis do carpinteiro*, with which I shall conclude this brief survey of the recuperation of historical memory in contemporary Spanish narrative.

Manuel Rivas' *O lapis do carpinteiro*: A Filmic Gaze on the Past

Like Chacón, Rivas draws on explicitly listed sources in *O lapis do carpinteiro*, preceding his novel with a list of acknowledgements and highlighting certain historical studies of the Civil War in Galicia. His book is loosely based on the eventful life of one Doctor Francisco Comesaña, though its factual basis is less obvious than Chacón's and may amount to no more than a background fidelity to events, situations and conditions regulating the treatment of prisoners during and just after the war. Ironically, however, Rivas has noted elsewhere that the one episode of the novel's action which is closely based on fact – the opportunity to consummate his marriage permitted the doctor by two Francoist soldiers during his transfer from one prison to another following the end of the war – is frequently cited as implausible.²⁴ Rivas, like Cercas, is alive to the problem of the representation of life in literature, opting in *O lapis* for a broadly Aristotelian poetic truth which he had earlier related both to Cervantes and

²⁴ See Villena, 'Gutiérrez Aragón llevará al cine la última novela de Manuel Rivas'.

directly to our contemporary visual and cinematic culture. ‘Las raíces del relato, de la inventiva donde se mezclan la imaginación y la realidad vienen de Cervantes pero no tienen arraigo en España como en otras culturas anglosajonas,’ he argued in relation to his collection of tales, *¿Qué me quieres, amor?* ‘En Galicia se ha conservado, sin embargo, sobre todo en la narración oral [...]. Por otra parte, los medios de comunicación audiovisuales han introducido sistemas de perfección de la realidad nuevos y el cuento se adapta bien a ellos.’²⁵ This emphasis on the visual is evident not just in Rivas’ short stories but also in *O lapis* in two respects: the parallel which is drawn between life and the cinema – the ‘película do mundo’ (p. 26) – and the stress placed constantly on the *mirada* or gaze as a symbolic aspect of the narrative. The opening four chapters of the novel, on which I shall concentrate here, are especially revealing in this regard.

Like Cercas, Rivas adopts the device of an investigative journalist to kick-start his story. The novel opens with the reporter, Carlos Sousa, arriving to interview doctor Daniel Da Barca, loosely based, as noted earlier, on the real-life Comesaña. Da Barca, a former exile from the Franco regime who survived several death sentences before fleeing to exile in Mexico, is a TB sufferer nearing the end of his life. A heroic figure ‘doutro tempo’,²⁶ he contrasts with the burned out, cynical Sousa who ‘aborrecía a política [...] aborrecía o xornalismo’ and for whom ‘o mundo era unha esterqueira’ (p. 10). Stress in this initial meeting is upon Da Barca’s eyes, which turn the interviewer into the interviewee, as if he, and not the doctor, were the

²⁵ ‘Xosé Manuel Pereiro, ‘Manuel Rivas: “La imaginación y la inventiva funcionan mejor que la Galicia real”’, *El País*, 12 November 1996.

²⁶ Manuel Rivas, *O lapis do carpinteiro*, 12th edn (Vigo: Xerais, 2000), p. 11.

patient in need of cure.²⁷ Clearly the story of Da Barca's life, which we are then given through the memories of Herbal, one of his former jailers from the war days, is meant as a kind of fictional cure for the depoliticized and apathetic youth of today who, Rivas seems to suggest, are content with our contemporary dungheap.

Throughout the opening chapter, the only one in which Sousa in fact makes an appearance, Da Barca is associated symbolically with light, his gaze having the 'resplendor de vidreiras no luscofusco' (p. 14). He is a self-possessed figure, initially depicted with a book in his lap as if taking possession of its contents: 'Sentado nunha cadeira de bimbio, [...] coa man pousada no libro aberto como quen apreixa e medita nunha páxina brillante, o doutor Da Barca miraba cara ao xardín, envolto nunha aura de luz de inverno.' (p. 9) The sense in which Da Barca claims ownership of the written word here – and perhaps it is appropriate to say the past too – is significant, for in *O lapis* Rivas weaves a text in which the past is recuperated in a self-conscious manner, the reader being simultaneously aware of both the story and the manner of its telling. Thus, Da Barca's optimistic comment to Sousa on the interconnectedness of all life is symbolic in metafictional terms as well as a view of life. 'Todos soltamos un fío, como os vermes da seda,' he says. 'Roemos e disputamos as follas da moreira, pero ese fío, de se cruzar con outros, de se entrelazar, pode facer un fermoso tecido, un pano inesquecible.' (p. 13) Rivas' novel, made up of the warp and weave of Herbal's memories, constitutes just such a tapestry in which certain objects, most notably the carpenter's pencil of the novel's title, will

²⁷ We read, 'Tivo a sospeita de que o doutor analizaba coas lanternas dos ollos o significado das súas olleiras, daquelas prematuras bolsas nas pálpebras, coma se el fose un doente' (pp. 10- 11), and 'era unha situación estraña, a do entrevistador entrevistado' (p. 12).

draw together past and present, bringing the long-forgotten back to life – quite literally, in that copies of the novel were sold with a carpenter’s pencil.

O lapis do carpinteiro moves between the past and present. Herbal, now a kind of bouncer in a café and still in possession of a carpenter’s pencil which he took from a prisoner after a summary execution during the Civil War, recounts to María da Visitação his memories of the war and of Da Barca. Sitting drawing on paper napkins with the very same pencil, he watches the café’s customers, ‘filmando cada movemento, esculcando os tipos que tiñan, como el dicía, cara de prata e lingua de navalla.’ (pp. 17-18) This direct, almost flaunted, cinema reference clearly marks out a filmic idiom for Rivas, and in the page-long third chapter of the novel he echoes (though perhaps not deliberately) Saura’s *La caza*, in which the game keeper is the only figure who kills for food in his efforts to eake out a meagre living on the ill-kept hunting preserve where he works. Rivas has Herbal recall how his uncle, when out hunting, would first of all apologize to his prey before shooting it. This becomes a psychological escape-valve for Herbal himself when he is later forced to shoot the painter from whom he takes the pencil. ‘Síntoo moito, meu,’ his uncle would say. Herbal goes on to describe the painter’s death:

Entre o meu tío o trampeiro e a presa había o intre dunha mirada. El dicía cos ollos, e eu oín ese murmurio, que non tiña máis remedio. Iso foi o que eu sentín diante do pintor. Eu fixen moitas barbaridades, pero cando estiven diante do pintor murmurei por dentro que o sentía moito, que preferiría non facelo, e non sei o que el pensou cando a súa mirada se atravesou coa miña, un lampexo húmedo na noite, pero quero crer que el entendeu, que adiviñou que o facía para aforrarlle tormentos. Sen máis, sen tomar outra distancia, apoieille a pistola na tempa e rebenteille a cabeza. E logo acordoume o lapis. O lapis que levaba na orella. Este lapis. (p. 21)

Slightly further on, in order perhaps to reinforce the cinema reference, Herbal recalls that the painter had always treated him with respect, as one might ‘o acomodador dun cine’ (p. 24) – a

rather forced comparison which stands out in the run of the narrative. The association between the figure of Herbal and the cinema lends itself to various interpretations. His gaze on the past is presented as akin to that of both a novelist's in his book and a director's in his film. But the metaphor of life as a film, a variation on that old notion of life as a play, or the world as a book, means that the book that we readers hold in our hands aspires to become in some sense a fusion of two genres, a kind of verbal film of the past as much as a historical novel.

Conclusion: A New Relationship with the Past

Noticeably, both Cercas and Rivas emphasize a *mirada* or gaze which is intersubjective and mutually supportive rather destructive, whereas Chacón concentrates on an oppositional perspective. One might go so far as to suggest that Cercas and Rivas seem to appeal more to Merleau Ponty's idea of a mutually supportive gaze than the Sartrean look of annihilation. And Cercas and Rivas also both intensify to a greater extent than Chacón the self-conscious aspect of their narratives through implicit discussions of the relationship between literature and reality, and by incorporating a frame narrative involving a journalist who is investigating the past but finds himself under scrutiny at the same time.

There are a number of conclusions which might be drawn from this. Chacón's approach, laudable as it is in attempting to bear witness to the past, recalls the earlier efforts of certain late twentieth-century Spanish novelists to the question of Francoist Spain, and ultimately falls into the same trap as they did. That is to say, in an attempt to subvert the values of the regime, Juan Goytisolo, to take but one example, arguably ends up reversing the defining parameters

of Spanish national identity instead of questioning the process of identity formation itself. His view of the regime could be reduced to an aggressive, Sartrean *regard* intent on destroying what it sees before it.²⁸ Likewise, Chacón's *mirada* is primarily one-way and destructive. It succumbs to the weakness of a confrontational perspective by reinforcing the very paradigm it seeks to undermine. For instance, Chacón explicitly subscribes to the notion of 'las dos Españas', retaining even in that way of reading Spanish history an oppositional intellectual frame which is reductive.

Cercas and Rivas, on the other hand, seek a different relationship with the enemies of the past. Rather than simply vilifying the victors of the war, they problematize the issue of the gaze in order to move away from an oppositional view and see events in a more nuanced fashion. In this sense, they move towards the representation of what Richard Kearney, starting from an Aristotelian basis in poetic versus historical truth, has termed a 'shareable world', an intersubjective view in which the business of story-telling becomes a fundamental part of the process of identity formation on a personal and a collective level. But such a move is easier said than done. Kearney's suggestion, in *On Stories*, that so long as we problematize our view of history, we can go on writing history, is deceptively and enticingly simple. Yet, doing precisely that proved to be a major problem for Juan Goytisolo and that mid twentieth-century generation of Spanish novelists who attacked the brute reality of living under a Regime where the 'official' discourse of history was both set (quite literally) in stone in such monuments as the Valle de los Caídos, celebrating the Nationalist victory, and yet constantly changing in a

²⁸ For a more detailed evaluation of this, see my *Juan Goytisolo: The Author as Dissident* (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2005), chapter 3.

pragmatic fashion when different inflections were required for particular purposes. Kearney's exact suggestion is that we should 'keep our mythological memories in critical dialogue with history'.²⁹ But there was in Francoist Spain, as Paloma Aguilar has argued, both an 'origin-based legitimacy', predicated upon the Civil War as a Crusade, and a 'performance-based legitimacy', derived from the economic and, to a limited extent, social progress which occurred from the mid 1950s on.³⁰ These were neither mutually exclusive nor mutually affirming views of the past; they existed as contradictions which may help to explain the Regime's longevity through ideological flexibility. To counter this, writers and artists found themselves having, first, to define the opposition before they could begin to question and oppose it.

The new generation of novelists which Chacón, Cercas, and Rivas represent thus finds itself building on extremely uncertain ground at the same time as it seeks to problematize the act of gazing back. Storytelling, as Kearney concludes is decisively 'never neutral' (p. 155). He surely makes a valid point when he asks, 'Could we ever really enjoy the battle between Luke Skywalker and Darth Vader if we did not see the former as an agent of justice and the latter as a force of destruction?' (p. 155) The problem is that recent Spanish history is not science fiction. The very real difficulty we face in discussing it concerns the adoption moral judgements of good and evil when such categories are not only not clear cut, but in fact historically shifting. In this context, Cercas' and Rivas' creation of anxious, thoughtful, and

²⁹ Richard Kearney, *On Stories* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 90.

³⁰ Paloma Aguilar, *Memory and Amnesia: The Role of the Spanish Civil War in the Transition to Democracy*, trans. Mark Oakley (New York: Berghahan, 2002), pp. 35-40.

even at times soul-searching protagonists through whose eyes we may approximate to Spain's recent past is an important innovation in the nation's contemporary recuperation of a traumatic history.

List of publications to date:

- No. 1.** *The American Dream in Spanish Poetry: Some Early Twentieth-Century Visions of the United States*, **Dr Terence McMullan**, Queen's University Belfast, February 2000.
- No. 2.** *Autobiography and Intertextuality in Carajicomedia by Juan Goytisolo*, **Dr Stanley Black**, University of Ulster, November 2000.
- No. 3.** *Radical Propensities and Juxtapositions: Defamiliarization and Difficulty in Borges and Beckett*, **Dr Ciaran Cosgrove**, Trinity College Dublin, February 2002.
- No. 4.** *Voices From Lusophone Borderlands: The Angolan Identities Of António Agostinho Neto, Jorge Arrimar And José Eduardo Agualusa*, **Dr David Brookshaw**, University of Bristol, March 2002.
- No. 5.** *National Identity – a Revisitation of the Portuguese Debate*, **Professor Onésimo Teotónio Almeida**, Brown University, Rhode Island, USA. October 2002.
- No. 6.** *Translation for the Stage: Product and Process*, **Professor David Johnston**, Queen's University of Belfast, November 2002.
- No. 7.** *Sujeto femenino en contextos de modernidad tardía*, **Professor Francisca López**, Bates College, USA, March 2003.
- No. 8.** *Antonio Machado And The Royal Art: Fact And Fiction*, **Dr Philip Johnston**, University College Dublin, October 2003.
- No. 9.** *The Censors' Confusion: (Mis)Interpretations of the Works of Alfonso Sastre*, **Dr Catherine O' Leary**, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, February 2004.
- No. 10.** *East Timorese Poems of the Revolution and Beyond: The Poetry of Francisco Borja da Costa and Celso de Oliveira*, **Mr Anthony Soares**, Queen's University Belfast, March 2004.
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- No. 13.** *Remembering the Spanish Civil War*, **Dr Alison Ribeiro de Menezes**, University College Dublin, April 2005.