

Fictional Portrayals of Spain's Transition to Democracy

Fictional Portrayals of Spain's Transition to Democracy:

Transitional Fantasies

By

Anne L. Walsh

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



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This book first published 2017

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-9574-1

ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-9574-3

Anáil na beatha an t-athrú

Change is the breath of life

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all, I would like to express gratitude to all of the writers whose work has been explored here. Without them, I would not be in the privileged position of enjoying many happy hours as reader and critic. I am forever grateful for such an opportunity.

Second, I thank my friends and colleagues in the School of Languages and Cultures, The University of Sydney, particularly in the Department of Spanish and Latin American Studies. Without their support, no writing could ever take place.

As ever, I thank my family. Special mention must go to my mother whose first-hand experience of advancing years has highlighted for me how important it is to share memories and time with those we love. Life is much too short. I thank her here for her constant encouragement and love.

A more formal thank you and acknowledgement must go to the Faculty of Arts and Social Science, The University of Sydney, for allowing me the time to complete this project. Also, I am forever grateful to my publishers, the team at Cambridge Scholars who, once again, have proven their professionalism and high standards.

To all of you, my thanks.

Anne L Walsh
The University of Sydney.

INTRODUCTION

Transition, by its very nature, is chaotic. It lies on the edges of two conflicting, or at least, confronting phenomena and is both feared and embraced as part of the human experience. All individuals undergo transition of some kind: from childhood to adulthood and on to old age; from unemployed to employed; from single to married; from happy to sad with all other emotions included. Transition is inherent in life, with each day moving to night, each season changing to the next in natural succession.

Similarly, all countries undergo transitions of varying degrees. It is the natural state of progress, whether political, social, cultural or economic and, ideally, occurs gradually with the foundations for the next stage firmly laid by the previous one. In the case of Spain, transition has been experienced in quite a dramatic way, the most renowned case being its move from Francisco Franco's dictatorship (1939-1975) to its present state of democracy and constitutional monarchy. Outsiders see this Transition as exemplary, occurring in a generally peaceful climate and with the main players of power focused firmly on the avoidance of civil war and on creating firm foundations for democracy. However, not all was as it seemed. The standard history is being challenged in a series of narratives that have recently appeared, where the stability of the Transition years (usually considered to be from 1975 to 1981) is coming under the spotlight in a way that only fiction can allow without fear of litigation.

The aim of this investigation is to look at how Spain's Transition appears in a selection of narratives and to explore its significance. There have been many critical analyses carried out on the role played by the re-imagining of the previous Civil War years and their aftermath and even more fictions which use that historical era as their setting. However, in the second decade of the twenty-first century, it is noticeable how interest seems to have shifted to a later historical era: comparisons are emerging between events that led to democracy in Spain and those that led to the recent Global Financial Crisis (GFC) and its aftermath, two very different time periods but with much in common. To explore the overlap, narratives have been chosen where the Transition years are used either as a setting or a theme, either overtly or covertly, for, sometimes, the stories told seem to have very little to do with Spain's experience of the 1970s and 1980s.

However, it will be seen that, even in those cases where the Transition is not specified, thematically there is a strong link with the notion of constant change, of the past influencing the future with that past being Spain's experiences of the twentieth century. Even when the narratives are specific tales of the twenty-first century, that past returns to haunt the characters in unpredictable ways.

The word "narrative" to describe the texts chosen is used consciously since what all of these texts under examination have in common is their aim of creating a coherent, credible, realistic story that will resonate with the Spanish-reading public. Some seem to do so through what might be termed pure fiction¹ while others rely mainly on fact though most blend both modes of storytelling. The argument is that the historical setting is not simply a backdrop for the main events but, rather, is crucial in its influence on character portrayal, theme and plot. Secondly, it is not coincidental that such a setting is being used more and more in recent times where, arguably, the interest in the civil war years (1936-1939) is beginning to wane. Due to the GFC and to Spain's particularly harsh experience of it, many see a parallel between the events of the late seventies and current events. Much centres on the recurrent theme in Spanish fiction of disillusionment. Even as the Francoist regime was coming to its end and the citizens of Spain faced an uncertain future, there was hope for those who were anti-regime that the future would have to be better than the immediate past, that Spain would take its rightful place in Europe and in the world after so many years of isolation. However, with the failure of governments to reap the expected rewards, and even to avoid the shadow of corruption, the illusion of a new dawn vanished and harsh realities had to be faced.

Similarly, Spain enjoyed unprecedented economic growth in the early years of the twenty-first century, leading to expectations that, at last, Spain's new golden age had come. That illusion also perished once the GFC took hold and, again, accusations of corruption, of lost opportunity and the inability to make tough, though necessary, decisions abound. While specific events between then (the Transition and post-Transition years) and now (the years of Crisis and, hopefully, post crisis) may differ,

¹ Of course, the use of the term "pure fiction" is open to challenge for such a type of narrative would be difficult to find. When Gérard Genette, for one, considered its existence, he phrased it as follows: "But has pure fiction ever existed? And a pure non-fiction? The answer in both cases is obviously negative" (15). Here, what is meant is simply a type of narrative where the author does not have to prove sources as a historian would. S/he is telling a story that acknowledges the significant role played by imagination.

the general consensus (if such is possible in regards to modern Spain) seems to be that Spain has once again proven the circular, inescapable nature of its history. That idea is supported by some obvious comparisons between the two eras such as the role of the king (Juan Carlos I in the first instance and Felipe VI in the second), the emphasis on political and economic corruption, the recuperation of memory, demands for increased autonomy in the regions (Euskadi in the twentieth century and Catalonia in the twenty-first); Spain's place within Europe (to join NATO, to stay in the EU), and so on.

What role, if any, has narrative, particularly that based on loose facts rather than hard ones, in such harsh times? Narrative that emphasises story rather than history fills a need within the human psyche. If it did not, we, humans, would not find stories so attractive and compelling. Storytelling and its consumption, in Spain perhaps more than any contemporary location, has seen its role as more than entertainment, though even entertainment has its value, of course. Due to Francoist censorship, a trend has grown whereby Spain's fiction particularly does not hesitate to make social comment, to voice society's concerns, to establish parameters of social behaviour, or to present examples of a desired social response to certain real events. Where historical accounts were limited by rules and regulations, fiction found a way to voice the unvoiceable. And so it continues to present times. Themes abound which reflect current preoccupations such as migration, racism, terrorism, violence, war, relationships, economic challenges, treatment of minority groups, exploitation, work environments, the need for solidarity and empathy and so on. Authors, whether consciously or not, are fulfilling a role as reflectors of social norms and, on some occasions, are using their texts with didactic purpose in an attempt, or with the effect, of shaping behaviours or, at the very least, portraying new responses to challenges. Social commentators would ignore the stories being told and being consumed by the general population in any country at their peril, and all the more so in today's Spain.

Another role fulfilled by certain stories is that of providing catharsis. Authors are using narrative to explain, illustrate, expose and reveal the burning issues of contemporary Spain. Unlike historical documents, narrative accounts, particularly those which contain elements of fiction, allow things to be said, accusations to be made, anger to be expressed without the fear of legal consequences. Once characters are sufficiently disguised, they can reflect actions and respond to social climates in a way that is recognizable to all who have lived through the crisis years. However, they cannot be said to portray real people, whether alive or

dead. As such they offer their authors certain protection. In a way, there is what Gonzalo Torrente Ballester once termed a contract or pact at play between authors and their public, though the terms of that pact are changeable, depending on the circumstances and the context.² Here, that contract includes each party knowing what is being expressed, and about whom, but without it needing to be stated unambiguously. Indeed, the very presence of ambiguity makes the game being played all the more enjoyable.

Thus, the second aim of this investigation is to explore the parallels made in narrative between the two time periods with a view to teasing out what is being said about Spain's current status. Much is, and has been, written about the presence of the past in Spain's contemporary fiction, about how the past as a theme is crucial and revealing, that the past is not a distant land, to be visited for entertainment but, rather, it is a time where knowledge about the present can be discovered. The past, and here in particular we talk about Spain's historic past, has been vital in shaping the identity of Spain's contemporary present. To that purpose, the role of the Transition and its portrayal will provide interesting, informative reflections for any who wish to understand the complicated, fascinating, challenging entity that is Spain of the twenty-first century.

To carry out this investigation, specific texts have been chosen. There is always a danger in making such a choice in that there are vast numbers of stories reaching publication, far too many to be included in any critical text. Also, subjectivity will be a factor and many readers may wonder why their own reading experiences are not included. An attempt has been made to consider all these things when choosing which texts to examine. For the first chapter, focus has been specifically on the moment of that first twentieth-century Transition, particularly the moment seen by many to mark its end: the events of the 23rd February 1981 when Lieutenant Colonel

² Torrente defined that pact for twentieth-century readers and authors as follows: "el novelista se limita a proponer que haga como que cree en lo que cuenta. La ficción propuesta engendra, pues, una segunda ficción, la del lector o auditor del cuento, que hace como si creyera mientras el cuento dura, pero que inmediatamente después deja de creer"; [novelists limit themselves to proposing that one behaves as if one believes in what they are telling. The proposed fiction engenders, then, a second fiction, that of the reader or the receiver of the story, who behaves as if he or she believed for as long as the story lasts, but who immediately afterwards, stops believing] (Torrente Ballester, 1982, 121). In a way, Torrente is talking about the suspension of disbelief whereby the reader enters the world created by the author and accepts that reality as long as there is "realidad suficiente" [sufficient reality] (122). [All translations of quotes are my own].

Tejero and others held the members of the Spanish parliament hostage. An obvious choice to look at these events was Javier Cercas's *Anatomía de un instante* (*The Anatomy of a Moment*) (2009)³ where the events of that long night are examined in detail. Likewise, the treatment of that historic moment in the popular television series, *Cuéntame cómo pasó* [Tell me how it happened] offers an interesting contrast between events remembered and events lived first-hand. A final offering in chapter one is a series of character portrayals, also televised, *Protagonistas de la Transición* [Protagonists of the Transition], that, like the two previously mentioned texts, uses a blend of historical documentation and fictional recreation to bring to life a dimension of characters that was unknown or forgotten among the general population of Spain, particularly among those born after the Transition years.

Chapter Two continues the process of looking at how the passage of time has changed certain perspectives. Again, many different texts could have been chosen and it was difficult to narrow down the choice. However, to attempt to crystallize the ideas, three authors who had been active writers during the earlier Transition and who continued their success of appealing to a broad readership into the twenty-first century are included here, namely, Manuel Vázquez Montalbán, Eduardo Mendoza and Rosa Montero. Two of these authors have created a protagonist that has appeared in multiple works and has been seen to react to various events over a long span of Spanish contemporary life: Pepe Carvalho in twenty three novels by Vázquez Montalbán and the un-named crazy detective in five novels by Mendoza. By looking at how these two characters change, or not, it will be seen how times have impact beyond what may first seem to be the thematic concerns of their creators. To do that, two texts from each series has been chosen. For Vázquez Montalbán's hero or antihero, Carvalho, the two novels are: *La soledad del manager* (*The Angst-Ridden Executive*), first published in 1977, the year censorship was formally removed in Spain, and *Milenio Carvalho* [The Carvalho Millennium], a two-part novel published in 2004. The older Carvalho's quest to travel the world will contrast with his first substantial appearance as the detective with a case to solve in his beloved Barcelona. The comparison will reveal crucial differences between both setting and its interpretation, not least of all the more global view incorporated in the millennium saga.

³ For translations of titles I will follow translation convention whereby published editions will be given in round brackets and italicised while non-published ones will be written with square brackets and in normal font.

Mendoza's anonymous hero, or again antihero, will also be analysed through two texts, the first of which is *El misterio de la cripta embrujada* (*The Mystery of the Enchanted Crypt*), published in 1978, two years after Carvalho's first text, again at the height of Spain's Transition. He continues to appear in several texts in the twenty-first century, but the one chosen for contrast here is *El enredo de la bolsa y la vida*, loosely translating as "the entanglement of money and life", published in 2012 while the GFC was still at its peak. Society, as portrayed through the eyes of this character, will prove to be in a very similar situation in both eras. However, the change in most evidence is in the character himself. As will be seen, everything has to do with perspective, interpretation and relationships.

Rosa Montero's protagonist/narrator, Lucía, in *La función delta* (*The Delta Function*), 1981, proves an interesting contrast with her science-fiction creation of more recent years. Lucía and Bruna Husky (appearing in *Lágrimas en la lluvia* (*Tears in Rain*) (2011) and *El peso del corazón* (*Weight of the Heart*) (2015) could not be more different on one level. Yet, they both live similar lives, even if separated by several hundred years. Lucía, seen as both the younger girl living through the Transition, sharing fictional space with both Carvalho and the Mendozan detective, and an older narrator looking back at the end of her life to her experiences then, provides her own contrast, showing what she has learnt as she aged, ending her years in a projected future, imagined by Montero. In comparison, Bruna too is living in a projected future, the year 2109 and the view of Madrid is not a very optimistic one. Yet, Bruna and Lucía learn different lessons and face their futures with very different attitudes.

The argument in this chapter is that, through very different stories, these three authors illustrate a development in their own recounting and creation of protagonists. They have adapted to changing times and, in turn, their characters have done likewise, to greater or lesser extents. We witness, in those pages, transition at work, not just from a political sense but also as a natural phenomenon, a sociological necessity perhaps, and the novels prove to be a fascinating document of change. All three writers may be classed as successful authors of popular stories that sell well. They provide entertainment for the masses through humour and their focus on the everyday activities of their characters. Yet, theirs is not an opium of distraction since they also focus on the profundities of life, the disillusionment and powerlessness of the individual in the face of adversity, the frustrations and disappointments, the fear as death approaches, the rage at a perceived lack of improvement. Their texts are not "lite" reading but delve into the challenges facing us all. Theirs is a

dark, ironic tone that emphasises the circular, inescapable, nature of history. Yet, as will be seen, their later works do reveal one significant change at least: the sense that hope is still a possibility and, because of that, the individual is now in more control than ever, more empowered than ever to influence outcomes, whether for good or bad.

Of course, these three authors are not alone in that. By choosing them, the argument is not to see their works as different but rather as representative of a certain trend. Ideally, what is said about them should spark a reaction whereby other authors come to a reader's mind. For the list of authors who qualify for this section, as being active both during and long after the Transition is almost endless, including in no particular order, Esther Tusquets, Montserrat Roig, Carme Riera, Cristina Fernández Cubas, Camilo José Cela, Gonzalo Torrente Ballester, Carmen Martín Gaité, Miguel Delibes, Ana María Matute, Juan Goytisolo, Luis Goytisolo, and so on. Some were more successful early in their career. Others took time to find success. In any case, to attempt to find a unifying thread between them all would be foolhardy and, yet, from the perspective of approximately forty years, there are certain key elements to be found running through the fiction of such enduring writers; the search for meaning, the fragmented nature of identity, the function of memory, the quest for a forgotten (silenced, disremembered) past, make their appearance repeatedly. Whether through dark humour or existential angst, such authors and their readers travel a path of self-discovery against a backdrop of political and social excitement and instability. The final choice rested particularly on the survival of these three authors into the twenty-first century with the question being to investigate if the change of millennium had any impact.

Chapter Three continues the quest to find traces of the Transition in fiction of the twenty-first century. This time, however, the focus is on writers who did not experience the Spanish Transition as published writers of fiction. Yet each of those chosen did live as young adults through that era.

The first case study is Gonzalo López Alba's debut novel, *Los años felices* [The Happy Years], published in November 2014. Though he was in his early twenties during the later years of the Transition, unlike the authors in Chapter two, he did not turn to fiction until recently. However, like Pérez-Reverte, the third author to be discussed here, he too was a journalist during the crucial years of Transition, starting in radio in Tenerife and soon moving to Madrid. Currently he is a political correspondent for several newspapers. The setting for his first novel reveals his interest in the changing political scene since we follow his

three protagonists through their lives, first as they adapt to being independent adults in Madrid of the early post-Franco years and, then, through their adult lives in various locations, each revealing the impact their earlier experiences have had on them.

The second text chosen is again by Javier Cercas and, again, was published in November 2014. As we have already seen, Javier Cercas has revealed a keen interest in the Transition, with the publication of his lengthy tome, *Anatomía de un instante*, on that very subject. This final text, *El impostor* (*The Impostor*), is also concerned with Spain's historical past but uses as its focus the life story of Enric Marco, an exposed impostor who claimed falsely to be a survivor of the Mauthausen concentration camp as well as an anti-Francoist activist. Again, Cercas is using known events, those surrounding the revelations of Marco's lies, as a basis for an exploration on how society could be so credulous, how a liar can embed his lies in truth and how the lines between fact and fiction, memory and history, truth and falsehood are very easily blurred. The chaos of the Transition years were ideal for allowing those who would reinvent themselves to do so. Indeed, it is claimed in *El impostor* that everyone in Spain did so to some extent at least. This story, then, explores not just the presence of the Transition as a setting but the idea that transition exists in many arenas, that it is the normal phenomenon of any society and that those who cling to fundamentalist beliefs in the certainty of any binary opposites are on very shaky ground indeed.

The final story is one by Arturo Pérez-Reverte, one of Spain's most successful writers, who also came relatively late to fiction, with his first book, *El húsar* [The Hussar], appearing in 1986, though written in 1983. During the Transition, he, as a young adult, was working as a press reporter with *Pueblo*,⁴ and in November 1975, a key date for Spain, he was

⁴ See Arturo Pérez-Reverte, Penguin Random House Author's page, biography. His memories of that time are published in an article in *El País Semanal*: "Eché los dientes profesionales al principio de los setenta, dando tumbos entre lugares revueltos y un periódico de los de antes; cuando no existían gabinetes de comunicación, correo electrónico ni ruedas de prensa sin preguntas. En aquel periódico, los reporteros buscaban noticias como lobos hambrientos, y se rompían los cuernos por firmar en primera página, [...]. Y que a pesar de eso—o tal vez por eso—eran los mejores periodistas del mundo." [I cut my professional teeth at the start of the seventies, bumping around between unsettled locations and a newspaper of the old school; when communications offices, email, press conferences without questions didn't exist. At that newspaper, the reporters would look for news like hungry wolves, and they'd work their butts off to get a front page [...]. And despite all of that, or perhaps because of it, they were the best journalists in the world]. Arturo Pérez-Reverte *El Semanal*, 30 May 2009.

covering the Green March in Morocco.⁵ His latest novel, *El Falcó* [Falco] (2016), is set in the thirties and forties in Europe. However, the text chosen to be discussed here is *El francotirador paciente* [The Patient Sniper], published in late 2013, a story based around the world of the Graffiti artist and, seemingly, worlds away from Transitional Spain. Again, the choice of these three texts does not intend to exclude others which might have been ideal candidates for exploration. Instead, it seeks to spark thought and illustrate, through using three texts that all appeared within twelve months of each other (November 2013–November 2014) that certain themes are finding a voice and an echo among the reading public, for all three were successful in their own right. Each offers a twenty-first century perspective on the past, on how that past can return to haunt the present in unpredictable ways and each offers a warning of sorts that we all must be conscious that the present will very soon become a past that also may haunt the future.

Transition, then, will be examined from several different perspectives: as a historical event, as a life experience, as a natural phenomenon, as crucial to character development and identity formation and transformation. Its presence in both pure and blended fiction points to the blurred lines that themselves point out how transition is an ideal postmodern theme where there is very little room for binary opposites or dichotomies so unfavoured by many in critical theory of the late twentieth century. However, a final argument here is that we can also find evidence of a transition from postmodern paralysis to individual empowerment within the narratives of twentieth and twenty-first century Spain.

⁵ A photograph of Pérez-Reverte that was on the front page of the *ABC* in 1975 was rediscovered years later and republished in *El Español*: http://www.elespanol.com/social/20170303/197980307_0.html [accessed 30 April 2017].

CHAPTER ONE

PROTAGONISTS OF TRANSITION

The aim of this chapter is not to provide a detailed historical analysis of the Transition years. Instead, it is to look at how the Transition has been revisited in texts that have been created with the general population in mind. As has been explained earlier, three in particular will be considered, two televised through Radio Televisión Española (RTVE), one of the main (state-sponsored) Spanish television channels, and one written account of the moment when the Transition seemed most at risk. The first is the popular TV series, *Cuéntame cómo pasó* [Tell me how it happened], specifically two episodes of series 14 (235 and 236), broadcast in 2013, that deal specifically with the events of the 23rd February 1981 (23F), the day of the attempted coup when members of the government were held hostage at gunpoint.¹

The second text is a compendium of four DVDs that arose from another series, *Protagonistas de la Transición* [Protagonists of the Transition], which comprises four two-part stories based on the activities of four men, key players in the events leading up to Spain's democratic state: Admiral Carrero Blanco; Archbishop Vicente Tarancón; King Juan Carlos I and Adolfo Suárez, the first elected Prime Minister of Spain's new democracy. The fact that these four men are real people would lead to a presumption that what is being offered is a historical exploration of the facts. That is, indeed, the case. However, what is of most interest is that the facts are packaged in fiction. We see all four in ways that are impossible to verify: within family settings, with close friends, behind closed doors, for instance. In each case, the aim is clear: to humanise historical characters and to explain to those who have only limited knowledge of each what motivated the man behind the image. The obvious question to ask is why? Why should it matter to those living in twenty-first century Spain what four men did in the 1970s? If it were a historical

¹ Interestingly, a special issue of the *Journal of Romance Studies* has been published (in 2017) specifically on this momentous date, concentrating on the role of the media: See Frauke Bode (ed.).

analysis, then the academic worth would be obvious but these stories were created for popular television and, from what is said in the advertising blurb on each DVD on how they were created, it is clear no expense was spared. The focus is not on historical fact, moreover, but, rather on the “behind the scenes”, in an attempt to fill in blanks about real lives, to show these four powerful men in a positive light. There is a sense that they are being rescued from oblivion, from being discarded, but also a sense that they have each been very much misunderstood.

The third text, *Anatomía de un instante* (2009) (*Anatomy of a Moment*), by Javier Cercas, again bases itself on the well-known historical moment, the attempted *coup d'état* of the 23F. Anyone with any connection to Spain will have heard rumour and innuendo about what led to the coup, who were the leaders, what role the King had to play, and so on. This text delves deeply and in astonishing detail into the video that was recorded live and which made this attempted coup unique in history, at least up until that time, in that a live record of the action is available to all who want to see (though only the audio recording was made available to the general population on the night of the event). The text slows down the events and examines each player from the perspective of both what is known historically and what could be surmised. In other words, it provides the history of what might have been, what could have been, what possibly was, rather than limiting itself to what actually was. In sum, it adds the essential ingredient of fiction, namely imagination, to historical fact. The three texts chosen may be termed “factions” or borderline fictions, which are defined by Jeremy Hawthorn as works that are “on the borderline between fact and fiction, concerned primarily with a real event or persons, but using imagined detail to increase readability and verisimilitude” (64).

To answer the question posed earlier, namely, why such stories are now being told, the chapter will explore first what is being told. In other words, we will look at what new information is offered in these texts and how that information is packaged in narrative form. In that way, it will become evident that this century is seeking answers in a somewhat different way to before, most notably from the idea of seeking to create empathy between the most unlikely individuals. Again, to what purpose or with what effect is of the greatest interest.

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, the historical context of the three texts explored here is the years of the Transition. Even those that focus specifically on events of the 23rd February 1981 explore what happened before and after that date. Many historical analyses consider the Transition from dictatorship to democracy to date from the death of Francisco Franco on the 22nd November 1975, shortly followed by the

proclamation of Juan Carlos as King, up to the 23rd February 1981 when King Juan Carlos made his televised statement in support of democracy.² It is true that Spain's move into a new system of governance seemed to become more stable as the 80s progressed, though many would argue that it is still fragile. Anecdotally, many Spaniards when questioned still consider challenges to government outside of the ballot as dangerous, given that democracy is so young. The events leading up to the most significant challenge, that of the 23F, are still fresh in many memories, compounded by events that seem to echo each other. Most notable is the parallel seen between the proclamation of two kings, King Juan Carlos on the 22nd November 1975 and his son, Felipe VI on 19th June 2014, a parallel purposely highlighted by the latter in his first speech. Media coverage in June 2014 was given to publishing the speeches made by both in parallel, underlining the similarities and differences between them.³ Likewise, due to the Global Financial Crisis (GFC), Spain's role in Europe and the world was (and is) again of national interest, just as it was in the 70s and 80s, when the burning issue was whether to join NATO or not and whether application to join the European Economic Community would be approved.⁴ It is not surprising, then, that in areas of entertainment, similar issues arise, as in the case of the television series of *Protagonistas de la Transición*⁵ which looks at the lives of four main players in the establishment of democracy from different perspectives.

² There are many who have different dates. For example, voicing one popular opinion, Carlos Asís Campos states: "la Transición a la democracia en España es el periodo que va del 22 de noviembre de 1975, con la subida al trono del rey Juan Carlos I, a la aprobación por referéndum de la Constitución, el 6 de diciembre de 1978" [The transition to democracy in Spain is the period from the 22nd November 1975 with the coronation of King Juan Carlos I to the approval by referendum of the Constitution, on the 6th December 1978]. There are even those who consider that the Transition is still ongoing.

³ Articles on the proclamation of Felipe were naturally interested in highlighting the common ground with several using parallel images, see particularly RTVE's "La Transición real", and ABC's "Semejanzas entre Don Juan Carlos I y Don Felipe". Here, similarities are examined under: La estabilidad como objetivo; Un índice alto de popularidad; El respaldo del parlamento; Dos monarcas ilustrados; Reyes olímpicos; Grandes embajadores internacionales [Stability as an objective; A high index of popularity; Parliamentary Support; Two Enlightened Monarchs; Olympic Kings; Great International Ambassadors].

⁴ Spain applied to join the EEC in 1977 but only became a member in 1986. It joined NATO in 1982 and the Eurozone on 1st January 1999.

⁵ *Protagonistas de la transición* (Divisared, 2009-2014). Episodes are as follows: *El asesinato de Carrero Blanco* (Dir. Miguel Bardem Aguado, 2012) [The

Protagonistas de la Transición (2009-2012)

Interest in the events of the Transition years is reflected by the different types of texts made available to the general population and, of course, the willingness of that population to engage with the content of those texts. *Protagonistas de la Transición* is a mini-series made available on DVD in 2014 which profiles the different political figures mentioned above, though the episodes were first broadcast in different years spanning 2009-2012. One of the questions to ask about this series is, of course, why was it made in the first place and why it was packaged for resale in 2014? One answer has to be that it could not have been made at any other time. To show these events in the way they are shown could not have occurred before the twenty-first century. There simply would not have been any appetite to depict the events with the perspective used. The narratives provided are historically accurate, based on real events though, as stated at the start of each part, the action, dialogues and characters are only inspired by those events. In other words, the main thrust of the series is not historic

Assassination of Carrero Blanco]; *Tarancón. El quinto mandamiento* [Tarancón. The Fifth Commandment] (Dir. Antonio Hernández, 2011); *23F El día más difícil del rey* [23 F The King's Most Difficult Day] (Dir. Silvia Quer, 2009); *Adolfo Suárez, El presidente* [Adolfo Suárez, Prime Minister] (Dir. Sergio Cabrera, 2010). Though packaged together, it is clear that this marketing strategy is somewhat of an afterthought as each episode is by a different director, broadcast under different circumstances and for different publics ranging from "Nrm de 16 años" [16+]; 'para todos los públicos' [Universal]; "NRM de 7 años" [7+]; "NRM de 13 años" [13+] respectively. Grouping them together, however, changes the impact and creates a sense of cohesion and coherence that may have been lacking when first broadcast on RTVE. However, despite the differences, there is an overarching message contained in all four narratives which is the aim of this analysis to disclose. Furthermore, according to RTVE: "RTVE.es recupera una serie de Televisión Española de 13 capítulos que retrata la evolución política en nuestro país desde el asesinato en diciembre de 1973 del almirante Luis Carrero Blanco, presidente del Gobierno, hasta las elecciones democráticas de junio de 1977 en las que se impuso la Unión de Centro Democrático (UCD) de Adolfo Suárez". [RTVE.es is recovering a 13-chapter series by Televisión Española which portrays the political evolution in our country from the assassination in December 1973 of Admiral Luis Carrero Blanco, the Government Prime Minister, to the democratic elections held in June 1977 when the Unión de Centro Democrático (UCD), a political party of the Democratic Centre, won a majority]. See RTVE "El asalto de Tejero al congreso". While an initial series of the same title was transmitted between July and October 1995, the four mini-series under examination here were first televised from 2009 to 2012, just at the height of the GFC, and are sold together as a unit.

accuracy but, rather, offering interpretation: not (just) what did happen but what might have happened and why. The known events remain the same but there is a clear attempt to provide motivations, to depict all players in as fully-rounded a way as possible, and, it must be said, in as sympathetic a light as possible. This series does not condemn as the “baddies” even those who plotted to assassinate or kidnap, or exalt those who saved Spanish democracy as the “goodies” of the story. Instead, each of the protagonists is portrayed with all the complications, confusions and challenges of normal human beings, with the effect of arousing certain sympathy where, perhaps, before there was none. We see all the doubts, hesitations, challenges, relationships, mistakes that the characters *may* have experienced. I emphasise the word “may” as most of these “behind-the-scenes” portrayals are offered as possibilities not fact. Each episode is preceded by a few lines which declare that, while based on historic data, and while character and plot are based on fact, the dialogues and some actions are the fruit of the authors’ interpretation and creative licence, or words to that effect. It brings us back to the fine line between fact and fiction, imagination and interpretation and what is credible and what is true.

All four stories follow similar patterns in presenting a known personage to a public who will, at least, have knowledge of the bare facts of his life. All are shown as deeply connected with their families, with, for example, Cardinal Tarancón presented as growing up in a warm family environment with people who, though not always understanding him, support him fully. All episodes blend in real TV footage so that, though the protagonist is, obviously, played by an actor, the real person is present on screen, if only for a short period. The usual effect of presenting real clips is, therefore, present here too, namely to offer credibility and a taste of reality. However, I would argue there is a secondary effect: the contrast between the outer persona and the family man becomes sharpened. Much, though not all, real footage is in black and white, creating a distance for twenty-first century audiences: the historic setting of the outer man is removed from everyday life. Yet, and perhaps for that very reason, the inner sanctum is all the more interesting, shot in colour and through soft-focus lenses so that curiosity is satisfied and distance is bridged. For example, the opening scenes of *23F El día más difícil del rey* [23F The King’s most Difficult Day] show the royal family at breakfast having toast and marmalade and orange juice. Immediately any pretensions and preconceptions that this episode is about the significance of the Royal family as being more important than any other are exploded. It is because they are normal that they arouse sympathy: their day, like that of all other

Spanish families, is about to be ruined: they, like any other family, are to face uncertainty, confusion, danger, lack of information, dread for what the future will hold. Ultimately, they, like all the others, will realise how fragile their way of life is and how quickly normality can disappear. That is also what happens in the Carrero Blanco household on the day of his assassination, to Tarancón's family when he has to flee Madrid and to Adolfo Suárez's when he is facing the guardia civil guns on the 23F. All are different days but the message in each instance is the same one: all families have a basis of similarity; all humans suffer, react, defend themselves, betray, think, and love in a recognizable way.

Likewise, a narrative technique shared by all of these episodes is their attempt to offer varying perspectives on historical events. The reality of the context never wavers but the layers accumulate. The central characters interact with colleagues, friends, family members and enemies. We hear from their mouths why they do what they do but also we see the reactions of different individuals. So, though there is no suspense in *El asesinato de Carrero Blanco* in that, from the start, we know he will not avoid his fate, the main focus is on the ETA group that are behind the assassination. Their reasons for carrying out the deed vary from a wish to cast a fatal blow at a figurehead of the regime to a desire to climb the ranks of ETA. The audience get to know each individual, Goyen, Arriaga, Guerrika, Berta, and so on. We see how ETA plan the explosion, how they prepare physically and mentally but we also are given information that undermines their preparation. The doubt about the possibility of involvement of the American CIA is planted early. Why do the explosives not work as planned? Were the members of the Etarra group set up? The episode ends as it began with a car exploding but, ironically not the one in which Carrero Blanco was killed. This time it is an ETA member who is killed, by whom is only suggested but the notion of poetic justice is clear: he who lives by the sword, dies by the sword and none can avoid their destiny.

These episodes are not a documentary. They focus on known characteristics, such as Carrero Blanco's doodling, his enjoyment of origami; Adolfo Suárez's dress sense, Juan Carlos's tennis playing, Tarancón's revolutionary conservatism. All these personality traits help to build an impression of reality, an impression of creating three-dimensional real characters. The mistakes each man makes are portrayed but without a tone of condemnation. The known facts are presented without any interruption by a narrator with a particular political agenda, itself, perhaps, an agenda. The absence of voiceovers, with no obvious attempt to manipulate the audience, allows the freedom to sympathise with one side or the other. Indeed, at end of each episode, there is a certain confusion in

that sympathy. For example, at the end of *El asesinato de Carrero Blanco* it is hard not to sympathise with ETA's Arriaga while also feeling the horror experienced by the family of Carrero Blanco. Added to that is the sophisticated filming, use of settings and camera angles, which both bring the audience closer to events and keep them at a distance. Though we do get an idea of the motivations, we do not get anything but a realistic insight. There are no interior monologues or first-person narratives to open up the thinking processes of any of the characters. Realism is never stretched beyond limits, even if it is unrealistic to consider private conversations (such as those between the king and queen Sofia) as anything but imagined. Perhaps they might have been overheard but that is not how they are presented. We are flies on the walls of the palace, privileged audiences without a guiding narrator beyond the lens of the camera. Yet, to borrow Torrente Ballester's term once more, "sufficient reality" is created so that such privilege is not questioned but rather enjoyed somewhat in the vein of reality television: we know what we are watching is not unscripted but we suspend our disbelief for as long as we watch.

Cuéntame cómo pasó (2013)

The similarities between *Protagonistas de la Transición* and our second text are clear. Again, the focus is on a television series though this time one that has been broadcast for sixteen years with well over 300 episodes. The project that is *Cuéntame cómo pasó*⁶ started as an attempt to inform a generation of Spaniards about the past of their country that had not been available to them in palatable form for many years. It revolves around the Alcántara family and their friends who "vive día a día la transformación de la España franquista en una democracia moderna" [are experiencing, day by day, the transformation of Francoist Spain into a modern democracy], according to the official website at RTVE.⁷ The first episode was broadcast in April 2001 and covered the events of 1968-1969 through the eyes of eight-year-old Carlos Alcántara. The series has continued and, to date, 18 seasons have investigated the years 1968-1985. It has been

⁶ *Cuéntame cómo pasó*, Dir. Agustín Crespi, Antonio Cano, Moisés Ramos, Óscar Aibar (Grupo Ganga/TVE, 2001+). The first episode of season 18, screened in 2017, had a 14.7% share of viewer audience, representing 2,489,000 spectators, a drop of 2.7 points from the previous season though still a significant share given that it has survived for sixteen years. See Xabier Migelez.

⁷ See: <http://www.rtve.es/television/cuentame/la-serie> [accessed 30 April 2017].

watched by millions of spectators both in Spain and abroad.⁸ The series has a wide appeal, with newspapers commenting regularly on the events portrayed. The catchphrase “Todos somos Alcántara” [We are all Alcántaras], gives the essence of that appeal in that it reflects the feeling that the series gives voice to the normal citizens of Spain, those who witnessed and experienced the events occurring in Spain from 1968 onwards and those who did not. Jean-François Lyotard’s *petites histoires* find resounding voice in each of the 300+ episodes within the title.

The main players in the story are, as said, the Alcántara family, comprised of Herminia, the grandmother, Mercedes and Antonio, the parents, Inés, Toni, Carlos and María, the children and Miguel, the uncle, all at different stages of life and all seen to react in differing ways to the various challenges of living in Spain in the second half of the twentieth century. The way the narrative focuses on historic events, interspersing fictional aspects with real footage from NO-DO, or *Noticiarios y Documentales* [News and Documentaries], the documentary archives created during the Franco regime, heightens the credibility of the series and broadens its appeal. The difference between this representation of Spain in transition and the previously examined series of *Protagonistas de la Transición* is clearly the focus: it is not investigating the actions of the influential players, the historical characters but, rather, it emphasises the feelings, frustrations, preoccupations of everyday citizens, the ones who had little or no power to shape events but had to react to, or survive them in any way they could.

Since the series is vast and ongoing, and to look in depth at each season and every episode would lead to a shift of emphasis, the aim here is to examine just two episodes, 235 and 236, entitled “Larga noche de transistores y teléfonos” [Long Night of Transistors and Telephones] and “El hombre de la casa” [Man of the House], respectively, both of which revolve around the attempted coup d’état of 23 February 1981, also the topic to be considered in *Anatomía de un instante* in the next section of this chapter. However, where Cercas directs attention to the 34.24 minutes of video footage available of the events within the Spanish parliament building, *El palacio de las Cortes*, in Madrid. These two episodes look at events not documented specifically: the reactions of those on the outside.

Episode 235 starts with Mercedes and Antonio in Venice on their first holiday abroad since they were married. The scene painted is a happy one,

⁸ Again, according to the same webpage, it is available through the international channel of TVE and through RTVE.es platform, with the US, Argentina, Mexico and Puerto Rico mentioned as being areas with most spectators. The series has also been adapted in Italy and Portugal.

verging on the idyllic except that Antonio is on edge for fear they will miss their plane home. Any spectator watching will know that that is the least of his worries for the date is the 23 February 1981, a key date in Spain's recent history. Other locations are shown too within Spain where people are going about their usual business, trying to make a living although this is the time of "la segunda crisis del petróleo" [the second oil crisis], a time when businesses are closing though there are also opportunities to get rich. The emotive word "crisis" must, surely, resonate with the 2013 spectator for Spain is deeply marked by the GFC at this time of viewing and talk of "la crisis" is everywhere. The irony continues in that those people whose everyday lives are interrupted by news that the civil guard have stormed the *Palacio de las Cortes* see in that action an echo of the 18 July 1936, the date ingrained in all their minds as the date of the commencement of the Spanish Civil War, sparked also by a coup d'état.

The Alcántara family are scattered in various locations and the episode is marked by their attempts to communicate with each other. Mercedes and Antonio return home to find that Toni, their journalist son, is within the *Palacio* building where he was broadcasting for radio the voting on Calvo Sotelo's investiture. The broadcast was interrupted when the civil guard took control of the room and the last thing to be heard was gunfire. No-one outside of the building had any idea if the gunfire was directed at the ministers, causing multiple deaths. That lack of knowledge is the main ingredient of suspense for the episode: trying to find out, phoning every number possible, talking with anyone who might have more of an idea and, in every case, failing totally to gain any clarity.

The stress on the family is increased by the absence of Inés who is touring with her theatre group and finds herself in the midst of events in Valencia. As history informs us, Valencia was under the military control of General Milans del Bosch, later sentenced to 30 years for his part in the coup. Tanks and military are in the streets of Valencia and Inés's experience reflects the fear and powerlessness felt by many young people who were old enough to have taken part in the student unrest of 1968 but too young to have first-hand memories of 1936. Inés has "antecedentes", a criminal record, due to which she had had to leave Spain during Francoism and had only returned in 1978. She is now involved in a play that attacks conservative Spain, with scenes that criticise fascist tactics of interrogation. She is in danger if the coup succeeds and her panic when telephoning her parents is palpable, leading them to take a foolhardy trip to Valencia to bring their daughter's passport to her and money to finance her second exile, should the need occur.

Foolhardiness is one of the aspects that mark much of the activities undertaken by the ordinary Spaniard that night, as portrayed in this episode. Antonio's attempts, along with his business partners and friends, to hide communist flags, Ramón's resurrection of his old uniform of a "vieja camisa", or "old shirt", referring to the fascist uniform he used to wear, while also trying to rid himself of his prized collection of German pornographic magazines, the idea to dig up "Minerva" the old printing press so as to distribute anti-coup propaganda all serve to illustrate the confusion and terror felt on that long night. It is interesting how each character of the older generation, at least, reverts to his or her past: the old patterns of suspicion and fear are quick to re-emerge.

Spain is on the "borde del precipicio", the edge of the precipice, and no-one knows which way to jump. As Ramón points out, there is no-one on the streets demonstrating on behalf of democracy. Why not? The answer has to be fear: fear of the future; fear of a return to the past; fear that democracy is too fragile; fear that Spain is, indeed, "diferente" [different], as the tourist campaign of the sixties proclaimed; fear that any action taken will be "used in evidence". It is the paralysing fear that caused the whole country to hold its breath and wait.

The next episode, *El hombre de la casa*, sees the series' narrator, Carlos Alcántara, now twenty-one years old, take over as the man of the house as his parents rush to Valencia with Inés's passport. The events of the night of the 23rd and early hours of the 24th February continue and it is clear that, though the streets of Madrid and Valencia remain relatively quiet, the general population are not inactive. That is, perhaps, the key element that this series contributes to the memory of the past; it allows glimpses behind the accepted historical accounts and greatly contradicts opinion (voiced in *Anatomía de un instante*) that people were not in favour of democracy, or the flavour of democracy that was on offer at that particular time. The episode is clearly based on individual memories, intimate family memories of how that night was spent. The Alcántaras, in that sense, may be seen as symbolic even if it pushes the limits of credibility to believe that all that happens to them that night was happening equally to other families. However, nothing that is told in this episode is, in itself, incredible. Once a certain symbolic or representational level to the action is accepted, then deeper, more generalized meanings can be gleaned from the personal story portrayed.

As stated already, the Alcántara family is comprised of several generations and each has experienced the past in various ways: the grandmother, Herminia, has first-hand recollection of the horrors of war, as have the parents, Antonio and Mercedes who have negotiated