

PLATFORM

XAVIER DIEZ

Coming to terms with the past and the present

Last year saw the fiftieth anniversary of one of the bestselling novels of Spanish literature written in Catalonia pass almost unnoticed. *Los Cipreses crecen en Dios* by Josep Maria Gironella (1917-2003) was the first of an extensive trilogy about the time of the Second Republic, the Civil War and the Postwar era. The book describes, from a biased but interesting point of view, the social, political and ideological contradictions of a microcosm that attempts to reflect the complex reality of Spain which led to the rebellion of 1936 and the war that followed. While Gironella makes an intelligent effort at analysing the imaginary differences between the opposing social groups in conflict, when the moment arrives for him to really explain the causes and mechanisms that carry the characters to the final showdown, he fails to satisfactorily resolve the plot.

He includes unlikely scenes in which the masons conspire against the "natural order", he caricatures unconvincing communists or invents behind the scenes foreign meddling, although at times lucid, he ends up drifting into peurile Manichaeism. To sum up, he attributes the civil war to a judeo-masonic conspiracy. Such a naive formula for reading reality is in fact quite significant. In common with many conservative intellectuals signed up to Francoism, Gironella shares the inability of the victors to understand their own responsibilities or experience any feelings of guilt.

Nowadays, those that follow the political

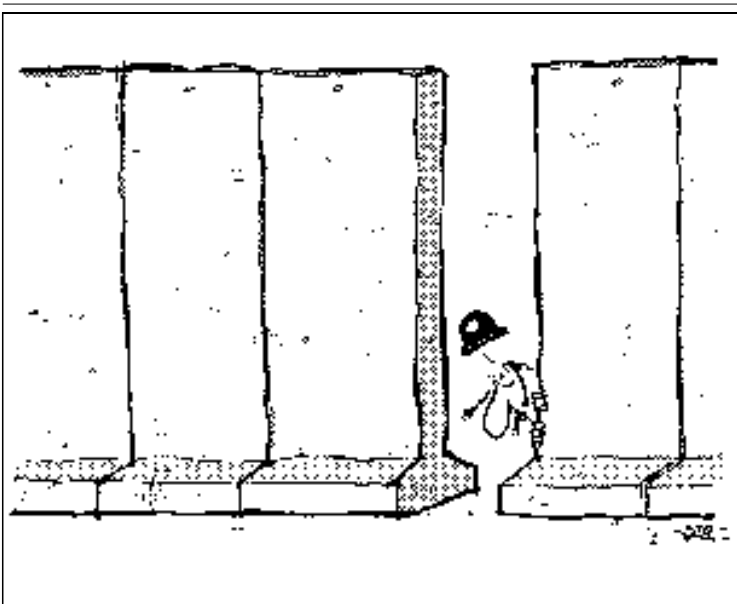


discourse of postfranco, rightwing think tanks, basically their traditional means of communication, can grasp similar sentiments to those expressed by Gironella, albeit without his literary qualities. Beliefs in social relations based on profound inequality and an almost feudal paternalism bring an inability to understand a country that is evolving outside of their mental schemes and their frustrated aspirations to restore a lost imperial order.

Consequently, the electoral defeat of 14 March or the popular demonstrations against Aznar have not been rationally assimilated. Rather, a type of collective mental alienation sees a conspiracy involving nationalists, journalists, dark anti-clerical forces or the treacherous France. Anyone who reads *ABC* or listens to COPE would believe that the country is under siege by conspirators bent on putting an end to an idealised Spain that no longer exists.

Intellectuals venting merciless criticisms of the recent royal marriage are a sickening reaffirmation of the class system by disguised as republicanism. Ordinary citizens have expressed with much more clarity a potent underlying feeling of francoism in a Spanish society that has proven incapable of assimilating the past and therefore unable to understand the present. Such rigid and contradictory rhetoric within a precarious social structure always ends up revealing the indestructible faith in the myths of a faded Spanish nationalism that stirs up irrational hatred of the adversary, or shows a profound inability to assume guilt for the civil war which in a way is still not over. Obviously the country cannot live with the right in this state. The threat of a return to the "essence of fatherland" is like a slab impeding progress as happened in the period 1996-2004, which deepened the divisions within a state where co-existence is difficult. What is needed is a catharsis to help Spanish conservatism distance itself from authoritarian, classist and intolerant temptations which have fed its thinking and political organisations. This has to begin with the withdrawal of the amnesty law of 1977 and the opening up of a judicial process which could bring penal those responsible for the violence and repression of the Franco regime to justice and help rid Spain of the symbolic elements that keep the dictatorship alive, and the necessary rehabilitation of the republican Spain. Only by coming to terms with the past is it possible to confront the future.

THE STING BY JAP



NUDE BEACH FOR NUDISTS

When the government designated Mar Bella as a nudist beach it demonstrated how Barcelona offers its inhabitants and visitors a diversity of facilities and attractions. The recent establishment of a chiringuito on Mar Bella has significantly changed the appearance and the tone of the beach, with more rubbish in the sand as well as noise pollution in the form of loud music. Second, by flying a gay pride flag above the chiringuito, the proprietors are announcing that this is a gay beach. It is not. It is a nudist beach. Third, there has been a clear increase in an unwanted sexual

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tone at the beach, the worst evidence of which is the increase in the number of questionable men simply hanging around the toilet facility. Since its establishment, the chiringuito has obviously become a gay meeting point. Many gay men, who clearly have no interest in nudity other than to stare at it now gather at the chiringuito. The beach which always had a very welcome gay element is now becoming overwhelmingly gay. Naturists enjoy simplicity. We prefer a beach without clothes, without rubbish, without loud music and without a chiringuito. Leave the nude beach to the nudists.

Mark MacCallum
Poblenou, Barcelona

ISOLATIONIST BRITAIN?

Oh dear, Stephen Burgen is so muddled in his political thinking. Firstly, those of us who voted for UKIP last month, voted to leave the European Union (not Europe). Secondly, how can he justifiably call Britain isolationist when it is one of the foremost international trading nations? Thirdly, if Britain ever leaves the EU, trade with the EU would continue much as it does now. Norway (not in the EU) has a much higher proportion of its trade with the EU than Britain has. Fourthly, France voted for the Maastricht treaty by the narrowest of margins.

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