

BELÉN GOPEGUI: THE PURSUIT OF SOLIDARITY IN POST-TRANSITION SPAIN

Hayley Rabanal



Monografías

HAYLEY RABANAL

BELÉN GOPEGUI

THE PURSUIT OF SOLIDARITY IN
POST-TRANSITION SPAIN

TAMESIS

© Hayley Rabanal 2011

All Rights Reserved. Except as permitted under current legislation no part of this work may be photocopied, stored in a retrieval system, published, performed in public, adapted, broadcast, transmitted, recorded or reproduced in any form or by any means, without the prior permission of the copyright owner

The right of Hayley Rabanal to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988

First published 2011 by Tamesis, Woodbridge

ISBN 978 1 85566 233 9

Tamesis is an imprint of Boydell & Brewer Ltd
PO Box 9, Woodbridge, Suffolk IP12 3DF, UK
and of Boydell & Brewer Inc.
668 Mt Hope Avenue, Rochester, NY 14620, USA
website: www.boydellandbrewer.com

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

The publisher has no responsibility for the continued existence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this book, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate

Papers used by Boydell & Brewer Ltd are natural, recyclable products made from wood grown in sustainable forests



Printed and bound in Great Britain by
CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY

Colección Tàmesis
SERIE A: MONOGRAFÍAS, 300

BELÉN GOPEGUI

**THE PURSUIT OF SOLIDARITY IN
POST-TRANSITION SPAIN**

Tamesis

Founding Editors

†J. E. Varey

†Alan Deyermond

General Editor

Stephen M. Hart

Series Editor of

Fuentes para la historia del teatro en España

Charles Davis

Advisory Board

Rolena Adorno

John Beverley

Efraín Kristal

Jo Labanyi

Alison Sinclair

Isabel Torres

Julian Weiss

A la memoria de mis abuelas,
Teresa Prieto Abad y Kathleen May Garraway

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book would never have reached completion if it hadn't been for the generosity and support of many people. I am indebted to Professor Anny Brooksbank Jones for her intellectual guidance and encouragement, and for introducing me to Gopegui's first novel, years before I had any idea I would end up writing a book about her. My heartfelt thanks to Professor Philip Deacon for his equally invaluable involvement, his endless enthusiasm, patience and good humour, and the many long conversations about the transition which made the experience of working on this project all the more enjoyable. I would also like to express gratitude to Professor Catherine Davies for her valuable advice and to an anonymous reviewer for several helpful suggestions. A special thank you to Dr Louise Johnson, Dr Anja Louis and Dr Carmen Ramos Villar, and to all the members of staff and postgraduates in the Department of Hispanic Studies at the University of Sheffield.

Muchísimas gracias to Bélen Gopegui for consenting to be interviewed by me, for her warm reception in Madrid and for responding to several email queries.

I am grateful to the Department of Hispanic Studies, the School of Modern Languages and Linguistics, the Herbert Hughes Fund and the Petrie Watson Exhibition at the University of Sheffield for contributing to the funding of several research trips which made possible key archival work. Thank you also to the staff at the Biblioteca Nacional de España for their friendly manner and patience in helping me to get to grips with the system and locate many vital materials

I wish to thank all those fortunate enough to have known very little of what this research was all about while it was in progress, but for nevertheless encouraging me in different forms along the way: Jo Wynn, Luisa and Luis Rabanal, and my parents Claire and Vicente Rabanal. Finally, shukran ktheer to Tariq Khwaileh, habibi, who unlike those just mentioned, did eventually become familiar with many of the issues related to this book when it was in the final stages, and yet never complained

ABBREVIATIONS

Novels by Gopegui

The full title of the novel is provided at first reference within each chapter. Thereafter, a short form is used as indicated below. Page numbers for quotations from the novels are preceded by the initial letter of each of the words of the title, as shown in brackets:

La escala de los mapas = *La escala* (LEDLM)

Tocarnos la cara = *Tocarnos* (TLC)

La conquista del aire = *La conquista* (LCDA)

Lo real = *Lo real* (LR)

El lado frío de la almohada = *El lado frío* (ELFDLA)

El padre de Blancanieves = *El padre* (EPDB)

Deseo de ser punk = *Deseo* (DDSP)

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	ix
Abbreviations	x
Introduction	1
Situating Solidarity in Spain	1
Belén Gopegui	5
Critical Approaches to the Novels	12
Overview of Chapters	20
 1. <i>Tocarnos la cara</i>: Solidarity as Unachievable Ideal	 22
Defining Solidarity: Some Critical Perspectives	23
An Outline of <i>Tocarnos la cara</i>	28
Diminishing Solidarity: The First Decade of Socialist Government	31
<i>Tocarnos la cara</i>	40
Turning Theory into Practice	40
Failure as Productive	58
The <i>Probador</i> as a Means of Rethinking Solidarity	66
 2. <i>La conquista del aire</i>: Money as Obstacle to Solidarity	 78
An Outline of <i>La conquista del aire</i>	79
Money in Spanish Culture in the Mid-1990s	82
<i>La conquista del aire</i>	87
Solidarity in a Climate of Uncertainty	88
The Loan as a Source of Alienation	97
Having Versus Being	110
Determinism Versus the Dialectic	120
Postmaterialist Culture	125

3. From <i>La escala</i> to <i>Lo real</i>:	
Solidarity as Pathway to a Revolutionary Horizon	135
An Outline of <i>La escala de los mapas</i> and <i>Lo real</i>	137
Continuity with Francoism and Reassessment of the Transition	139
The Emergence of a Revolutionary Perspective	149
The Achievement of <i>Lo real</i>	167
Reconfiguring the Reader's Relationship with Literature	167
Constructing a Counter-Hegemonic Representation of the Transition	181
Creating an Oppositional Mentality Via a 'Rationality of Negation'	192
Conclusion	202
An Interview with Belén Gopegui	212
Writings by Belén Gopegui	222
Works Cited	231
Index	255

Introduction

Todos al suelo. Silencio sepulcral. No hay cámaras. Miles de velas encendidas, y se rompe el silencio con el grito lleno de orgullo: viva Madrid, y todos gritamos, viva, viva Madrid. Aznar escucha, el pueblo está en lucha, y las riadas humanas avanzan hacia el Congreso. En la radio sólo se oye música y resúmenes del partido del Real Madrid. Las voces ya cascadas por el paso de las horas, los pies doloridos, y no hay miedo, no hay policía, sólo el helicóptero rugiendo encima de nuestras cabezas, y una sensación de euforia al ver que somos tantos, que somos incontables. ([Anon.], 2004a: unnumbered)

Situating Solidarity in Spain

The term ‘solidarity’, broadly understood as the ‘unity resulting from common interests, feelings, or sympathies’, has indisputably left-wing connotations.¹ Although appeals to solidarity have become increasingly common today, the term arguably still evokes trade union action and mobilisation of the working classes. In turn, this association harks back to Marx and Engels’s concluding observation in the 1848 *Communist Manifesto* that ‘[t]he proletarians having nothing to lose but their chains’, and their consequent exhortation: ‘Working men [*sic*] of all countries, unite!’ (Engels and Marx, 1968: 62).² Indeed, solidarity, in this sense the recognition that ‘we are all in the same boat’, can be thought to emerge most powerfully when the need to confront fear, oppression or injustice is identified.

In Spain under Franco’s fascist dictatorship, oppositional solidarity was chiefly organised around the then clandestine Partido Comunista de España (PCE) (Morán, 1986). After the dictator’s death, solidarity with the common goal of democratisation took precedence over the political and ideological differences which had polarised the country during the 1930s and which

¹ Oxford English Dictionary (2000). Chapter 1 offers a detailed exploration of the term.

² It should perhaps be noted that the term also brings to mind the independent Polish trade union federation ‘Solidarity’, which encompassed a broad anti-communist movement during the 1980s.

Franco had persisted in exploiting for nearly four decades through 'the deliberate and dogged maintenance of the Civil War division of Spaniards into the victorious and the defeated' (Preston, 1986: 3). The fact that his regime's claim to legitimacy was founded on the idea of victory over 'anti-Spain' accounted for his determination to keep alive the memory of the Civil War and perpetuate the rifts in Spanish society (Carr and Fusi, 1981: 19).

By contrast, the success of the democratic transition which followed Franco's death depended in large part upon the willingness of the political class and of Spanish citizens in general to bury, at least temporarily, past conflicts and relinquish any desires for retribution. The political elite's commitment not to instrumentalise the past for political reasons has been described as a tacit 'pacto de olvido' or 'pacto de silencio', the general spirit of which was given official expression in the *Ley de Amnistía* of 15 October 1977.³ That the majority of Spaniards were in favour of national reconciliation and establishing democracy was borne out by the overwhelmingly positive response to the December 1976 referendum on the *Ley para la Reforma Política*, which paved the way for the dismantling of Francoist institutions, and the exceptionally high levels of participation in the first democratic elections for forty years which took place on 15 June 1977.⁴ It can be argued that this mass, inclusive expression of solidarity with the collective project of democratisation redefined solidarity for Spaniards in a way that still resonates with force today.

References to solidarity in Spain's more recent history were witnessed in the aftermath of the Madrid train bombings on 11 March 2004. The King's televised speech on the evening of the tragedy alluded to the communal spirit displayed by Spaniards during the transition and implicitly appealed to them to draw upon this historical experience:

El desaliento no está hecho para los españoles. Somos un gran país, que ha demostrado con creces su capacidad para superar retos y dificultades. Un país que bien sabe que, frente a la sinrazón y la barbarie, sólo cabe la unidad, la firmeza y la serenidad. (Juan Carlos I, 2004: unnumbered)⁵

His words were all the more poignant given that this was the first time since the abortive military coup of 1981 that he had directly addressed the Spanish

³ See Cazorla-Sánchez (2008: 233); Cenarro (2008: 208); Gálvez Biesca (2006: 26); Graham (2004: 322, 324); Mathieson (2007: 11); Moradiellos (2008: 223).

⁴ 77.4% of the population voted in the referendum: 94.2% approved the reform; 2.6% voted against and 22.6% abstained (Carr and Fusi, 1981: 225). Turnout for the June elections was 79.24% (227).

⁵ The PSOE (Partido Socialista Obrero Español) leader, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, also mentioned the transition in his speech on the day of the attacks and similarly dwelt on Spain's collective resilience and capacity for overcoming adversity (2004: unnumbered).

public following an event of national importance (Rodríguez, 2004: 117). Subsequently, the transition was explicitly invoked via a reference to the 1978 Constitution in the slogan for the official rally on Friday 12 March, convened by the then leader of the ruling right-wing Partido Popular (PP), José María Aznar, which read 'Con las víctimas, con la Constitución y por la derrota del terrorismo' (EFE, 2004b: unnumbered).⁶ Recalling the demonstration, writer and journalist Maruja Torres likened it to being at the centre of a war zone and commented on how the experience awakened memories of the transition:

la masa de gente y el dolor en sus rostros me recordó otra forma de guerra, la que condujo a la democratización de España: las últimas víctimas, las que lograron que la gente se echase a la calle y que el Partido Comunista fuera legalizado, también tenían el nombre Atocha escrito con sangre en su frente. (2004: 22–23)⁷

The violence unleashed on Madrid on 11 March generated multiple movements of solidarity across Spain. The first images of these to emerge in the aftermath of the bombings depicted the long queues of volunteers responding to the emergency services' call to donate blood. Successive manifestations of solidarity over the course of the following days, culminating in a much larger than expected turnout at the general elections on Sunday 14 March, can be thought to describe a progression by which immediate shock and emotion eventually crystallised into concrete political intentions.⁸

In the initial stages, solidarity appeared to perform a chiefly cathartic function. The mass public protests which formed spontaneously in Madrid and other major Spanish cities on the evening of the attacks denounced a then still anonymous terrorism and expressed grief for its victims. By Saturday, however, mounting indignation at the government's apparent withholding and manipulation of information relating to the authorship of the bombings – in particular, the dogged insistence on ETA's responsibility, which was patently at odds with speculation in the international press –

⁶ However, for Pepe Rodríguez, the reference was provocative because Aznar's government would have realised that it was likely to arouse suspicion among nationalist parties and their supporters, precisely 'en un momento en el que lo sensato era olvidar diferencias y actuar unidos' (2004: 61). He also points out that, according to a report by the Consejo Provisional de Informativos de TVE, *Televisión Española* failed to accord due importance to demonstrations of solidarity in the Basque country and Catalonia 'y prácticamente ocultó las declaraciones de sus dirigentes' (55).

⁷ The reference is to the massacre in Atocha of five people, four of whom were communist labour lawyers, by an ultra right-wing terror squad on 24 January 1977 (Preston, 1986: 107).

⁸ There were 2.5 million more voters than in the 2000 elections, an 8.5% increase (Balfour, 2005a: 1).

radically altered the nature of the demonstrations.⁹ Convened this time by text messages and emails, Spaniards now united with new aims in mind:¹⁰ the protests outside the PP's Madrid headquarters in calle Génova, which began to garner support in the afternoon, voiced anger at the consequences of the PP's involvement in the Iraq War, to which 90% of the population had been opposed, and demanded that the government share the police investigation's findings before the election (Barreiro, 2004: unnumbered).¹¹ In the months preceding the attacks, Manuel Vázquez Montalbán also cited this compelling figure of 90% in his critical evaluation of Aznar and his administration, *La aznaridad* (2003: 324). In it, he also condemns the PP's reactions to the bombings in Casablanca in May 2003, which for him showed the government already attempting to cover up the violent repercussions of the decision to go to war:

Una de las explosiones provocadas en Casablanca se cebó en carnes españolas y en pleno fregado electoral el gobierno rechazaba inmediatamente cualquier posible relación con la complicidad Aznar y Bush para la conquista de Iraq. (340)

After the Madrid bombings, Pepe Rodríguez describes the collective street action on the eve of the election, which Vázquez Montalbán's mordant account seems to presage, as akin to a spontaneous '*movimiento social de resistencia al Gobierno del PP*' (2004: 177, original emphasis). He was also not alone in observing that the situation recalled the experience of living under the dictatorship when reliable information about what was occurring inside Spain had to be sought abroad (155; J.V., 2004: unnumbered). While the mainstream Spanish media were conspicuously silent on this subject, Spaniards themselves were receiving – and forwarding – the ever more conclusive news being reported abroad via mobile telephones and the Internet as the marches gathered momentum, making their way to the Puerta del Sol where demonstrations continued well into the night.

The PP's subsequent defeat in the general election by the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE) appeared to testify to the political success of this

⁹ Santos Juliá brands the PP government's reaction 'a catastrophic succession of errors' and links these to their 'overwhelming need to find a culprit outside of the Islamic world' following Aznar's fateful alliance with George Bush and Tony Blair at the Azores summit in March 2003 (2006: 156).

¹⁰ Some of the text messages circulated read: 'Intoxicación informativa. en [sic] todo el mundo se habla de Al Qaeda. Pásalo'; 'Rajoy dice en TV que concentración es ilegal. Todos a la calle. Pásalo' (Mora and Quiñones, 2004: 67, 68).

¹¹ The accusations were reflected in the chants outside the PP headquarters: 'El pueblo no cree las mentiras del PP'; 'Aznar culpable, eres responsable'; 'Faltan 200 por vuestra culpa'; 'No a la guerra' (Rodríguez, 2004: 175).

later solidarity movement: the mass mobilisation of what the then Izquierda Unida (IU) leader, Gaspar Llamazares, referred to as 'la izquierda crítica'. In his speech reflecting on the results of the 14 March elections he celebrates 'que se haya abierto una etapa de izquierdas' and claims the defeat of the PP and the victory of the left 'como propia, como propia en la calle, como propia en las instituciones' (2004: unnumbered). Similarly, writing in *El País*, Belén Barreiro interpreted the outcome as Spanish citizens' collective will to 'manifestar en las urnas solidaridad con las víctimas y apoyo a la democracia' (2004: unnumbered). Indeed, for many on the left, the return to power of the PSOE after eight years in opposition, marked the restitution of Spain's rightful identity as a solidary country and, ultimately, the triumph of democracy, as film director Pedro Almodóvar confirmed:

El secuestro y la manipulación de la información a la que ya nos tenían acostumbrados, esa oscuridad, no es democracia. A pesar del precio altísimo, estoy muy contento de volver a ver un país solidario y libre, porque nos lo habían quitado. Ya podemos volver a ser nosotros mismos. (Hermoso, 2004: unnumbered)

As will be argued in this study, the work of the contemporary Spanish novelist Belén Gopegui consistently engages with this discourse of solidarity. It is her exploration of the concept of solidarity, and its interrelationship with the contemporary historical contexts in which her first four novels were written and set, which forms the basis of the present enquiry.

Belén Gopegui

In November 2002, *El Mundo Libro* published the answers to two questions it had put to a group of twelve writers, among them Belén Gopegui. Participants were asked to choose a city and, on a later occasion, to relate a childhood memory associated with it. Gopegui's first answer was Madrid; her second, though far briefer than that supplied by the rest of the group, was no less revealing: 'Nunca cuento recuerdos personales' (Labari, 2002a and 2002b: unnumbered). The author's reluctance in this regard was by then well known. Yet her first reply can be seen as equally significant, for Gopegui's choice of the city in which she was born (in 1963), and has always lived, is consonant with the commitment to her historical time and place which characterises her work. At the time of writing, she is the author of seven novels, three short stories, a play and three screenplays. (The decision to focus on her first four novels is explained below.)

While this study is not concerned with the links between the author's biography and her narrative fiction, some details are pertinent to the thematic and critical focus of what follows, as is Gopegui's reticence about disclosing

personal information.¹² In one early interview, she explains that it stems from a desire to prevent readers from equating her with the narrator and interpreting her novels in the light of her personal history rather than engaging with their content: ‘yo noto que se pone todo el acento en las causas biográficas y no se pone el acento en la función que cumple lo que uno hace’ (Brooksbank Jones, 1995–96: 135). Her comments tend to reflect – and reject – the prevailing literary climate of the time, in which young writers born in the 1960s and 1970s were widely held to be characterised by their claim to individualism (Marina, 1995). Exceptionally in this interview she also offers an insight into the reasons for her emphasis on the social function of the novel, which would increasingly come to define her as an author. She explains how circumstances within her own family awakened her social conscience from an early age and led to her decision to read law at university, ‘por vocación de justicia y de querer cambiar el mundo’ (135). Although in subsequent interviews she never returns to this subject, the intellectual impact on her is alluded to a decade later in ‘Rompiendo algo’, a speech delivered at a public meeting on ‘Resistencia e imperialismo en América Latina’.¹³ She frames her intervention as the story of a young male writer of Marxist texts whose brother died as the result of ‘una minusvalía psíquica fruto de la avaricia de la medicina privada española’, and who eventually goes on to demonstrate public support for the Cuban Revolution (2005o: unnumbered). Gopegui’s early perception of the state’s failure to protect its citizens as a result of prioritising profit over the collective good has undoubtedly had a bearing on the preoccupation with solidarity in her work.¹⁴ Returning to ‘Rompiendo algo’, it is only in the concluding lines that she reveals what the audience will have already realised, that she is the subject in question:

es posible que uno de los personajes de esta historia no sea un hijo sino una hija, es posible que no escriba libros de marxismo sino novelas una de la cuales habla de Cuba, y es posible que esté aquí ahora hablándoles

¹² The author’s shyness is also almost certainly a factor in this: asked for some anecdotes about his interaction with writers, Jorge Herralde, editor of Anagrama – which has published all her novels – declared that ‘[e]n cuanto a la tímida Belén Gopegui la anécdota espectacular es oír su voz. Con dedicación se consigue’ (Rodríguez, 2002: unnumbered).

¹³ For example, Gopegui declines to answer questions relating to her upbringing and education in her 1999 interview with Eva Legido Quigley. Nevertheless, the latter’s 2006 dictionary entry on the author includes some of these biographical details.

¹⁴ She has hinted at this herself in interviews (Azancot, 2007; Holgueras, 2005; Maira, 2004). And in her sixth novel, *El padre de Blancanieves* (2007), one of the protagonists, Goyo, becomes active on the radical left in response to circumstances similar to those described in ‘Rompiendo algo’. The subject of illness and how it is managed by the state recurs in ‘Literatura y Misión Milagro’ (2006d) and ‘La finalidad del conocimiento científico y literario en relación al caso de la biotecnología cubana’ (2007b), and also features in her fourth novel, *Lo real* (see Ch. 3: pp.185–186).

a ustedes aunque, para contar aquello de lo que trata esta historia, quién pueda ser el hijo es lo menos importante. (*ibid.*)

As these comments suggest, this displacement of her identity further underlines her determination not to permit the particularities of her biography to deflect attention from what she considers are the more pressing issues of collective interest raised in her novels. In this sense, her reluctance to discuss her personal life is also a way of creating a powerful narrative about her aims. Yet this reluctance is almost certainly due also to the disappointment she experienced when faced with the critical reception of her first novel, whose social implications were virtually entirely overlooked. It is worth providing some detail here, given that the public reaction had a decisive impact on the author's intellectual and creative trajectory, and is thus key to understanding the development of her narrative.

Gopegui's arrival on the Spanish literary scene occurred at the height of the 'boom' in young Spanish writers born in the 1960s and 1970s whose heterogeneous output had come to be labelled, not uncontentiously, as the 'nueva narrativa' (Langa Pizarro, 2000: 58). Having abandoned the idea of pursuing law as a career before leaving university, and after working as a reviewer for various literary and cultural magazines, Gopegui published her critically acclaimed first novel, *La escala de los mapas*, with Anagrama in 1993. Carmen Martín Gaité, who had acted as a mentor to Gopegui and recommended the manuscript to Anagrama, applauded its '[f]uerza arrebatadora' and 'la originalidad de sus estrategias narrativas, en consonancia con el ritmo de su prosa'.¹⁵ Similarly high praise came from Rafael Conte, who enthused over the author's '[p]rosa sencilla y brillante, repleta de metáforas inesperadas, limpia y compleja a la vez' (1993: 11). While not a runaway bestseller, the novel nevertheless went through three editions in as many months (Clemente, 1994). It was also awarded two prizes: the 'Premio Tigre Juan' in 1993 and the 'Premio Iberoamericano de Primeras Novelas "Santiago del Nuevo Extremo"' in 1994.

But viewed in isolation, there was little about her first novel – essentially the story of a doomed romance – to indicate the direction that her work would later take. Reviews of *La escala* engaged principally with the novel's meta-literary dimension, its introspective, intimate quality and the explora-

¹⁵ Martín Gaité's remarks are quoted on the dust-jacket of the novel, as are Conte's. Gopegui has paid tribute to Martín Gaité in several articles which express an affinity with her approach to literature, notably her emphasis on the writer's responsibility: 'El valor del narrador' (1997b); 'El sí de cada no' (2000a); 'Un caballo al pie de la ventana' (2003g). In her prologue to Martín Gaité's posthumous, unfinished novel, *Los parentescos*, 'El redondel de luz' (2001e), she highlights the author's belief in the transformative potential inherent in literature and in the solidary bonds formed with others.