

# **Literary Journalism and the Spanish Civil War: New Approaches to its analysis**

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## **Abstract**

This paper offers a new perspective for analyzing literary journalism published during the Spanish Civil War. The investigations that have addressed these texts do not generally place much attention on a number of contextual factors that we believe are essential in understanding from a more comprehensive point of view the reasoning behind the way these authors composed their works. Some of the factors we will examine include the mythification of the war correspondent, the absent-mindedness of Latin American authors who participated in the conflict, the importance of propaganda and censorship during the Civil War, and the relevance of the *crónica* as the main journalistic genre in the Spanish language, along with the stylistic contributions that this category contributed to the written press. However, this research places special emphasis on analyzing the dramatization and fictionalization identified in some of these works, and how literary journalism should deal with these issues. All of these aspects end with a theoretical proposal of how to re-read the texts within the discipline of literary journalism.

## **Keywords**

Literary Journalism; History of Literary Journalism, *Crónica*; Spanish Civil War

### **Academic biostatement**

Antonio Cuartero is a postdoctoral research at the University of Malaga (Spain). He graduated in Journalism, and he has a master's degree in Journalistic Research and Communication. Previously, he worked as an intern with a scholarship in the Department of Journalism at the University of Malaga and in 2013 he received a predoctoral contract (FPU) from the Spanish Ministry of Education to work in this department. He is editor of *TSN. Revista de Estudios Internacionales*. His work mostly is focused on literary journalism, narrative journalism, “crónicas” and reportage. He received the 2019 Media Studies Grant from FIAT/IFTA. He is co-edited *Literary Journalism and Civil War* (2020)

*Without a doubt, the Spanish Civil War was a writers' war. No other conflict has aroused as much interest by writers and intellectuals around the world as this particular struggle; not even the Second World War generated as much fascination*

*Jean Lacouture<sup>1</sup>*

## **Introduction**

The fascination that Lacouture talks about is still present today, as anyone can witness by going through any novelty table in a bookshop. During the Spanish Civil War, this interest became clear through a huge, diverse group of writers, journalists and intellectuals who came to report on the conflict. Some of the most outstanding authors in the world of literature participated as correspondents, reporters, or adventurers, leaving a trail of works behind in which journalism and literature fully shared the same space, as in the case of *Por quién doblan las campanas (For Whom the Bell Tolls)* (1940) by Ernest Hemingway, or *Homenaje a Cataluña (Homage to Catalonia)* (1938) by George Orwell. At the same time, this situation implied the recognition of works that were highly influential in Spanish literary journalism, such as, *A sangre y fuego. Héroes, bestias y mártires de España (By fire and sword. Heroes, Beasts and Martyrs of Spain)*, (1937) by Manuel Chaves Nogales, which represented a turning point in the way of understanding and dealing with the conflict.

However, based on research that addresses literary journalism, especially with regard to the Spanish conflict, a series of features and premises have been accepted, which we believe are vitally important to emphasize in order to analyze the journalistic-literary works of the Civil War from a new perspective, as well as to offer a proposal for investigating these texts from this new point of view.

What do we mean by accepted features or premises when analyzing the journalistic-literary works on the Spanish Civil War? These characteristics can be defined as contextual factors of the conflict that are usually ignored, or 'side-lined', when analyzing these texts and their authors. Moreover, based on the proposal set forth herein, these factors are essential for improving the understanding of the motivations, approaches, use of sources, and construction of these texts.

One of the most obvious features is the romantic concept of the war correspondent, which has led to the development of an idealized concept based on the traditional characteristics of men that have lasted until the present time, a typical example of which can be found in the personalities of Hemingway and Orwell. Moreover, the war itself was also mythified as the final confrontation between fascism and democracy, which resulted in a direct appeal to young people who came in large numbers from all over the world to fight against fascism<sup>2</sup>. This feeling permeates many of the journalistic texts.

In turn, the journalistic context during the conflict is a key issue in making a proper interpretation of literary journalism of the time. This was a period in the Spanish media's history characterized by journalism of a deeply ideological nature accentuated by the propaganda and censorship machines employed by both sides. This also affected the entire spectrum of international correspondents and combatants who were beset by these limitations<sup>3</sup>.

Censorship explains the heavy use of anonymous sources by both Spanish and international authors. Furthermore, there was another key issue regarding the latter, which is the fact that most of them did not know the language. Nowadays, the language barrier is not a problem thanks to the work of fixers<sup>4</sup>, but during the war, many of these authors

came to Spain copying and reflecting the clichés shaped by the travel literature of the 19th century that portrayed Spain as a regressive, brutish, fanatical society<sup>5</sup>.

The relevance of the *crónica* as the predominant journalistic genre in the Spanish language used to narrate the conflict must also be mentioned. “The *crónicas* of the Civil War were one of the most widely read sections of the newspapers in the years following the start of the conflict on July 17, 1936.”<sup>6</sup> It was the main genre for Spanish reporters and all of the international correspondents from Spanish-speaking countries from the American continent. Regarding this situation, we feel it is essential to point out a number of effects that have hardly been addressed. The Ibero-American literary journalists who came to Spain to report on the war introduced numerous literary and stylistic contributions through the *crónica*, which years later would be compared to those of the New Journalism.

All of these factors converge on one of the most important issues we want to highlight, which is the dramatization and fictionalization that can be found in some texts. If we start from the ideas shaped by the work of the most relevant researchers on the issue of literary journalism<sup>7</sup>, with the perception of it being “journalism as literature”<sup>8</sup> without denying its true principles, approaching some of these works under this same premise is questionable<sup>9</sup>. This explains the proposal we have offered in this chapter on the new perspectives for addressing these issues.

## **Literature review**

Academic research on literary journalism during the Spanish Civil War was focused on the life stories of various correspondents, and specifically on the analysis of certain works from the period. Thus, we can find numerous examples that emphasize the most well

known authors. One of these is Ernest Hemingway<sup>10</sup>, who is possibly one of the most intensely studied authors within literary journalism and literature of the period. Other examples of international correspondents who succumbed to the study of life and the production of works are Martha Gellhorn<sup>11</sup> and George Orwell<sup>12</sup>, to highlight the most relevant figures.

Likewise, within the Spanish context, numerous texts have gathered the experiences of journalists who covered the conflict. Perhaps the most well known of all is Manuel Chaves Nogales<sup>13</sup>, possibly one of the most important figures in Spanish literary journalism on the Civil War. Others who gained attention were José Luis Salado<sup>14</sup>, and Alfredo Muñoz<sup>15</sup>, with his diaries. Within this approach, the works of some Latin American authors have also been analyzed, such as Argentinean Fernando Ortiz Echagüe<sup>16</sup>, or Uruguayan writer Luis Alfredo Sciutto<sup>17</sup>.

European authors such as Mario Neves<sup>18</sup>, Henry Buckley<sup>19</sup>, and Saint Exupery<sup>20</sup> have also been analyzed. Outside the framework of research on specific works and authors, a further area of focus of academic investigation on literary journalism and the Spanish Civil War is the activity of several groups of reporters. Thus, we have found investigations that deal with the experience of war correspondents, such as the role played by the Florida hotel as a focal point of foreign correspondents<sup>21</sup>, as well as the presence of Soviet reporters<sup>22</sup>.

However, one of the least discussed areas of research on literary journalism during this period lies in two issues that we consider of vital importance. On the one hand, the influence gained by the *crónica* as a genre in reflecting the Civil War must be highlighted. This journalistic genre of a strictly Spanish nature has been reborn over the last decade, mainly in the Latin American context, and has become the quintessential genre of Spanish-language literary journalism today<sup>23</sup>. On the other hand, with regard to the

importance of the *crónica*, the stylistic innovations introduced during the Civil War played an important role in the subsequent development of journalism in general, and literary journalism in particular.

## **Discussion**

The starting point of this section arises from the idea of offering a new perspective for approaching the journalistic-literary works of the Spanish Civil War, as well as providing a new proposal for its analysis. This research offers a theoretical approach to literary journalism that reported on the Spanish Civil War<sup>24</sup>.

Travelers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century shaped an image of Spain as an exotic, uncultured, barbaric country, and this image pervaded the gaze of many correspondents who came to Spain. However, these topics were not propagated exclusively by foreign correspondents and reporters<sup>25</sup>. Furthermore, the lack of knowledge of the Spanish language by the vast majority of international correspondents who came to Spain also contributed to this situation. For example, despite the fact that Hemingway did speak Spanish, he was one of the journalists who was most influential in shaping the folkloric image of Spain<sup>26</sup>. However, it is fair to point out the role of Jay Allen, who was one of the most knowledgeable foreign correspondents. In fact, he was familiar with the country, having covered the 1934 revolution in Asturias, and he had perfect command of the Spanish language as well.<sup>27</sup>

If the language factor was an initial obstacle to providing accurate information by these reporters, added to the stereotypes and topics that persisted, the romanticism and mythification of the war correspondent increases the critical distance we have to adopt in order to analyze these examples from a more comprehensive perspective. This

mythification of the war correspondent<sup>28</sup> began to develop partly due to the texts and character that Ernest Hemingway<sup>29</sup> built for himself, and later through the experiences of other journalists in various conflicts such as World War II or Vietnam. There is no doubt that films have also played a crucial role in the creation of this myth. Current authors such as Göb and García Mingo and others authors<sup>30</sup> have studied the legend of the war correspondent in their investigations, and this myth has been strongly criticized from a professional point of view due to its effect on the news professional.

The Spanish journalistic context during the Civil War is undoubtedly another of the essential factors in understanding many of the journalistic-literary works in depth, both those written in Spanish and other languages as well. During the first third of the 20th century, the Spanish press experienced substantial growth through numerous newspapers belonging to small companies, which usually lasted only a short time<sup>31</sup>. This offered a great opportunity for many writers, journalists and intellectuals of the time to have multiple channels for publishing their works, and the enormous appetite for information by the population fomented this boom, in spite of the fact that the rate of illiteracy among the Spanish population was quite high at the time.

Furthermore, the role of censorship and propaganda during the Civil War played a decisive role in understanding journalism (from a general perspective), but also the literary journalism of those years. Moreover, this is not a national issue, as all of the actors involved in the Spanish Civil War suffered these consequences on both sides, which forces us to analyze the reception of the message rather than the veracity of the message itself, as pointed out by Figueres: “Let no one be misled: with the *crónicas* of the war, we do not know what happened, nor why it happened. We do know, however, what we call in communication, the reception effect”<sup>32</sup>. This explains why on numerous occasions we find in these writings a huge number of anonymous sources saying, “A friend has told

me that...,” or “an acquaintance claims that...” This tactic was used as a way of avoiding censorship.

Sapag specifically identifies journalists as the ones to blame for the low quality of journalism at that time, which is reflected in literary journalism. “In the First World War, correspondents surrendered to the propaganda machines established by the opposing sides, but in the Spanish Civil War, the failure was attributable to the journalists themselves”<sup>33</sup>. The experience of the First World War was available and offered lessons to be learned, yet they did not know how to take advantage of it, and fell into the practice of using the censorship and propaganda systems of Franco and the Republicans, even though their techniques were not even close to what had been carried out during the First World War.

This led to the entrenchment of journalism on both sides, which resulted in a deeply ideological press that characterized the entire Spanish conflict. This can be seen in the scarce number of texts to be found that offer a more comprehensive, critical view of both sides. One of the most obvious cases is that of Hemingway. Knightley and other authors<sup>34</sup> have harshly criticized his role in the conflict, pointing out the shortcomings of his reporting and the enormously propagandistic nature of his writings. They conclude that this author used the Spanish Civil War with the aim of consolidating his career as a writer rather than providing accurate information<sup>35</sup>.

Despite the fact that the personage of Hemingway has become nearly an icon of the war, the role of Latin American journalists and their work has been completely neglected, and in this study, we want to point out the importance of delving deeper into this issue. Although few investigations have been carried out<sup>36</sup> on the subject, there are countless examples of Latin American reporters who came to Spain offering invaluable insight, and this has allowed us to unravel their own vision of the events.<sup>37</sup> In this case, issues such

as language were not a problem for these reporters, but they were as equally affected by censorship as their international counterparts. The analysis of these works undoubtedly offer a unique perspective on the Civil War, as well as on the journalistic and literary tools used to give an account of the conflict, and especially way in which these reporters used the *crónica* as the main genre.

The *crónica* is precisely the place to find one of the most interesting aspects of literary journalism from this period. International correspondents utilized news journalism and reporting as the predominant genres in their writing. However, for Spanish and Latin American journalists, the *crónica* was the essential tool for reporting what was happening. Why did they use the *crónica* as their preferred genre? The key lies in the structure of the *crónica* itself; this is a hybrid genre between fact and opinion that makes use of the first person, with an enormous capacity to adapt to any medium or format. This is why it is the quintessential genre of Spanish-language literary journalism.<sup>38</sup>

We consider the research by Figueres to be of particular importance, since he is one of the few researchers to have analyzed the *crónicas* of the Spanish Civil War. Moreover, he points out the virtue of the *crónicas* in avoiding censorship due to the characteristics mentioned above. “The only loophole for creative freedom in news reporting lies in the *crónicas*, even if they were totally controlled by censors”<sup>39</sup>. In his research, Figueres also states that some of the *crónicas* he analyzed regarding the Spanish Civil War were very well crafted, whereas others were loaded with clichés that “do not stand the test of time.”<sup>40</sup>

The role of the *crónica*, as well as its stylistic and narrative contributions to journalism and literature, is an exciting field in which there is still much to be discovered. A clue to this situation was offered by the publication in Spanish of *The New Journalism (El Nuevo Periodismo)* by Wolfe, and the subsequent reaction by many scholars and readers upon learning that these same characteristics were present in texts on the Civil War<sup>41</sup>. The

Spanish conflict brought about a change in the way journalists processed information and selected news, and in some ways, this was the beginning of many innovative techniques that were later reflected in the New Journalism. Today, this is still an important source for analyzing the way in which these journalistic novelties were embedded in the daily operations of journalistic writing.

The advent of the translation of texts written by the new North American journalists helped Spanish literary journalism begin to address its past. The works of Wolfe, Capote and others awakened interest in analyzing the remaining Spanish journalistic legacy from this perspective, noting that the techniques they used had already been put into practice much earlier, and that the Civil War was one of the most fertile domains for this analysis. This idea is in line with the hypothesis of a number of authors who believe that since the 1970s, France has ceased to be the focal point for journalism in Spain and has been replaced by American journalism<sup>42</sup>.

Perhaps one of the authors of literary journalism in the Spanish language who we can point to as having perpetuated one of the most worrisome features of literary journalism about the Spanish Civil War is Manuel Chaves Nogales. Nogales was one of the most important figures of literary journalism during the conflict. Furthermore, he was completely unknown as an author until the work of Cintas and Trapiello<sup>43</sup> brought to light the quality of his work just a few years ago. However, strangely enough, as in the case of Hemmingway in the past, the figure of Chaves Nogales is undergoing a process of mythification within Spanish journalism. The pro-republican approach he adopted during the Civil War differs from the ideological vision of his contemporaries, and offers a more comprehensive and critical perspective that shows the view of both sides in his texts from a more integrated point of view. However, as we have pointed out in previous studies<sup>44</sup>, many paragraphs in these works, especially in *A sangre y fuego*, were fictionalized and

dramatized. Therefore, similar to only a small handful of other writers, this author represents the features we want to highlight in this study. His work is considered one of the best models of literary journalism of the time, and is highly useful in pointing out the way that the tools of New Journalism were utilized in an earlier period. Nevertheless, Nogales was a journalist who fictionalized and dramatized, and this is not the first time that this had happened. As pointed out by more recent authors, such as Sánchez Zapatero<sup>45</sup>, this dramatization has been found in other journalistic works by Nogales. This is consistent with the research by Figueres concerning the *crónicas* of the Spanish Civil War and the position we should take regarding these reports.

In summary, a question remains. Can we still consider these kinds of works to be examples of literary journalism? Our proposal is to widen the scope of literary journalism to include the different expressions that can be found throughout history in the relationship between journalism and literature. We might consider some of the works listed here to be either pro or pre-literary journalism, or a kind of prelude to what we believe this discipline to be. Furthermore, this idea must be contextualized, bearing in mind that literary journalism has different readings depending on the journalistic principles from which it is examined, as pointed out by Bak<sup>46</sup>, when perceiving literary journalism as an international discipline.

## **Conclusion**

Observing the past is essential in order for literary journalism to continue to grow and develop as a discipline. The ideas and questions expressed in this paper are intended to provide a more complete vision of how to approach these works produced during the Spanish Civil War.

This article has demonstrated the way in which literary journalism used its sources, the approaches they adopted, and the way they reported on the Civil War, which can be partly explained by certain contextual features such as censorship, propaganda, mythification of the conflict, and the entrenched position this situation created among the press on both sides. All of these factors partly explain how and why many of the great works of literary journalism were created. Therefore, it is of vital importance to bear these compositions in mind for the purpose of carrying out a more comprehensive analysis. Hemmingway cannot be understood without considering the propaganda he developed for the Republican side and the groundwork he laid for the figure of the war correspondent.

One question that has continued to reappear throughout this study is the following: Is Chaves Nogales the only reference for literary journalism in the Spanish language of that time? Obviously not. The list of Spanish writers and journalists who covered the conflict is extensive, and there is still much to be studied. Nevertheless, Latin American journalists and correspondents have quite a lot to say about the issue, and we believe this is an area of great interest in which to delve more deeply. This is especially true because of the cultural, linguistic and journalistic connections they can provide. In addition, the more we focus on Latin American texts and correspondents, the more we realize the importance of the *crónica* as a vehicle for literary journalism in the Spanish language of that period. The contributions made by the genre in avoiding censorship are also of great importance in understanding the stylistic and narrative innovations that would later be emulated.

The central concept of this study is the fictionalization and dramatization that can be observed in some works. Some of these authors crossed the red line that literary journalism must not overstep, and they did so quite openly, which forces us to reconsider a broader and more critical view of the discipline. After having outlined the thesis herein,

the final question addressed by this paper is whether we can still refer to these works and authors as being representative of literary journalism. Our proposed answer to this question arises from the perception of broadening the spectrum of the concept of literary journalism and providing a vision of its history that reflects the growth and development of the discipline, as well as its various contradictions throughout different periods, which is the reason that we have chosen to incorporate names such as ‘literary pre-journalism’ to define such cases.

We are aware that a possible refutation of this thesis might result from the subjectivity of the journalist. This is one of the key characteristics of literary journalism, and one of the tools used by its protagonists to develop many of the great works in this discipline. It may be the case that many of the arguments presented here can be answered through the subjective viewpoint that each author decides to adopt in their text. In our opinion, however, this subjectivity does not alter the dramatization or fictionalization, or the censorial context of this historical period, but is undoubtedly a path of great interest along which to move forward.

Ultimately, this paper is the result of certain questions we have posed during the development of various investigations into literary journalism and the role it played during the Spanish Civil War. The answers we have put forward lay the foundations for new questions and further reflection that we hope will serve as an invitation for continued research in this area of knowledge.

## Notes section

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<sup>1</sup> Lacouture, *interview*.

<sup>2</sup> Cardona, “*El ejército popular*” (“The People’s Army,”) 37.

<sup>3</sup> Beyond Spanish journalism, other countries such as Portugal imposed strong censorship during the conflict. Pena, “*Periodismo, guerra*” (Journalism, war), 564.

<sup>4</sup> The unknown, phantom work carried out nowadays by ‘fixers’ in global journalism is analyzed in depth by Plaut and Klein in, “Fixing,” 1697.

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- <sup>5</sup> Preston, "El contexto europeo" (The European context), 15.
- <sup>6</sup> Figueres, "Periodismo De Guerra" (War Journalism), 280.
- <sup>7</sup> Sims, "The art of literary Journalism," 18-19, Hartsock; *A history of American literary Journalism* 3-6, o Chillón *La palabra facticia* (*The factitious word*), 40.
- <sup>8</sup> IALJS, "About us."
- <sup>9</sup> We would like to emphasize the extreme difficulty in addressing all of the journalistic-literary works of the period in this one study. As we make this statement, we are thinking specifically of authors such as Hemmingway and Chaves Nogales. On the other end of the spectrum, there are people such as Mario Neves or Martha Gellhorn, in whom these aspects are more carefully screened, but can equally lead to new ways of approaching their works.
- <sup>10</sup> Watson, "Hemingway's Spanish," 4; Sanders, *Ernest Hemingway's*, 136-137; Whiting, "Ernest Hemingway: Stretching," 103-104; Lapadre, *Censura y recepción de Hemingway*, 11-13.
- <sup>11</sup> Dell'Orto, "Memory and Imagination," 305 and García Pastor "Martha Gellhorn," 206-209.
- <sup>12</sup> Kerrane y Yagoda, "The Spike," 245.
- <sup>13</sup> Bellido y Cintas, *El periodista comprometido* (*The committed journalist*), 13-14.
- <sup>14</sup> Ríos Carratalá, "El singular caso" (The singular case), 236-237.
- <sup>15</sup> Muñiz, *Días de horca y cuchillo* (*Days of gallows and knives*), 9-14. This article does not reflect the enormous journalistic production of Spanish authors in the press, which is quite extensive and includes writers such as Josep Pla, Luis Cernuda, Rafael Alberti, Antonio Machado, Juan Ramón Jiménez, Francisco Ayala, Arturo Barea, and many others.
- <sup>16</sup> Salas González, *Fernando Ortiz Echagüe*.
- <sup>17</sup> Binns, "Aventura y aprendizaje" (Adventures and learning), 46-47.
- <sup>18</sup> Sanz Hernando "Diário de Lisboa," 64-66.
- <sup>19</sup> Buckley, *The Life and Death*.
- <sup>20</sup> Morata, "Participación y pensamiento" (Participation and thinking), 298.
- <sup>21</sup> Vaill, *Hotel Florida*, xxiv.
- <sup>22</sup> Piquero Cuadros, *La Guerra civil española* (*The Spanish Civil War*).
- <sup>23</sup> García Galindo y Cuartero, "La crónica," 13-14.
- <sup>24</sup> It is not our intention here to produce a list of authors and their works due to a lack of space.
- <sup>25</sup> Spanish journalists were not exempt from this tendency either, as they also reiterated numerous national clichés.
- <sup>26</sup> Gear's book on the life of Orson Welles is very interesting. Through an unpublished story line entitled *Crazy Weather*, it gives the American filmmaker's vision of Hemingway in which he criticizes the author's ignorance and cultural appropriation of Spanish culture. Gear, "At the End of the street" 271.
- <sup>27</sup> García Santa Cecilia, "Corresponsales" (Correspondents)
- <sup>28</sup> Martín Jiménez, "La crónica," 14.
- <sup>29</sup> Hernán Zin points out the damage inflicted on the profession by the mythification of the war reporter that originated with Hemingway. Zin, interview.
- <sup>30</sup> Göb, "Deconstructing the Heroic Myth," 66; García Mingo "A la sombra del mito" (In the shadow of the myth), 202-203; Ehrlich and Saltzman *Heroes and scoundrels*, 121-122.
- <sup>31</sup> Pizarroso Quintero, "Periodismo" (Journalism), 46.
- <sup>32</sup> Figueres, "Periodismo de guerra," 281.
- <sup>33</sup> Sapag, "Historia y actualidad" (History and present), 21-22
- <sup>34</sup> Knightley, "The first casualty," 213.
- <sup>35</sup> Shaber, "Hemingway's Literary," 421; Watson, "Hemingway's Spanish," 5.
- <sup>36</sup> For example, the compilation of crónicas by Chilean journalist Bobby Deglané proves to be very interesting. Binns, "Jesus Cano Reyes," 503.
- <sup>37</sup> Cano Reyes points to a long list of writers and journalists who should be examined in more depth. Cano Reyes, "Palabras entre las bombas" (Words among bombs), 178. Another list can be found in Binns, "Aventuras y aprendizaje," 48.
- <sup>38</sup> For more information, please see the author's own works related to the crónica: García Galindo and Cuartero, "La crónica," 14; and Palau Sampio's "Las identidades de la crónica" (The identities of the crónica), 208.
- <sup>39</sup> Figueres, "Periodismo de guerra," 283
- <sup>40</sup> Ídem, 281.
- <sup>41</sup> Cordero Áviles, "Periodismo y periodistas" (Journalism and Journalists), 968.
- <sup>42</sup> Guillamet, "Por una historia" (For a History), 64.

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<sup>43</sup> Trapiello, *Las armas* (The weapon), 9; Cintas "Obra periodística" (Journalistic Work), CLXXXIII.

<sup>44</sup> Cuartero, "El periodismo narrativo" (Narrative Journalism), 42-48.

<sup>45</sup> Sánchez Zapatero, "Una historia de violencia" (A history of violence), 77.

<sup>46</sup> Bak, "Introduction," 1-20.

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## **Acknowledgement**

This research is supported by the University of Malaga (Contratos Postdoctorales- Plan Propio de Investigación de la Universidad de Málaga)