

Dissonant Voices: Memory and Counter-Memory
in Manuel Vázquez Montalbán's
Autobiografía del general Franco

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The recent centenary of General Francisco Franco's birth was marked by a new avalanche of publications, documentaries, and public debates in Spain about his historical figure and the long period of Spanish history under his rule. These discourses ranged from the openly accusatory, to the moderately revisionist and the overtly hagiographic in spirit, and from the historical and biographical to the fictional and psychoanalytical in mode.¹ While there is a general agreement on the authoritarian nature of Franco's regime, there is no unanimous interpretation of the legacy of his 39 years in power. In fact, a troubling tendency toward revision and legitimization has begun to grow in recent years, perhaps as a reflection of Spanish society's gradual erasure of historical memory brought about by the political consensus—let us forget about the past, no apologies necessary—needed for the delicate transition from dictatorship to democracy, and, inevitably, the increasing numbers of younger Spaniards who had never experienced Franco's demise: the substitution of memory by a certain mythical nostalgia for a “simpler, kinder” era, the Franco years, supposedly devoid of contemporary problems such as drugs, crime, unemployment, or political corruption. In an attempt to capitalize on the general feeling of disillusionment under the newly established democratic regime, old Franco supporters created the slogan “Con Franco estábamos mejor” ‘We were better off with Franco’; in an ironic counter-move, Manuel Vázquez Montalbán, a well-known longtime dissident intellectual under Franco, created his own counter-slogan, summarizing with remarkable lucidity the memory of the unified project of resistance of the Spanish left, now divided and adrift: “*Contra Franco*

estábamos mejor” ‘We were better off *against* Franco’ (qtd. in Moret 26, emphasis added). For Montalbán, the recovery of historical memory, and in particular the collective counter-memory of those who fought against the Franco dictatorship, has never been more necessary than today, still in danger of being erased by historical amnesia.

Vázquez Montalbán published in 1992 his provocatively titled novel *Autobiografía del general Franco* (*Autobiography of General Franco*), coinciding with and yet, as might be suspected, not in celebration of Franco’s centennial, historiographic representation.² Eduardo Haro Tecglén described the novel as “an anti-Franco monument” because of the magnitude of its scope and its significance as a repository of collective memory. If the text as a monument of words constitutes a particular “site of memory,” as Pierre Nora has articulated, in the case of Montalbán’s novel it becomes a site of counter-memory, a massive memorial of resistance. In a parodical reversal of conventional epitaph inscriptions on tombstones, the advertisements for the novel in Spanish newspapers carried as its sole promotional pitch the statement: “Tus enemigos no te olvidan” ‘Your enemies will not forget you.’ The resistance to the erasure of collective memory appears to clash harshly with the very idea of ghosting Franco’s autobiography, no matter how fictional or ironic an enterprise it might be. Critically acclaimed as a literary *tour de force*, the novel reveals, in Tecglén’s words, the author’s “professional schizophrenia” resulting from the dramatic authorial split as Franco’s fictional ghostwriter and anti-Franco public persona, refracted internally in the split narrator of the text. This monumental construction of language and memories puts forth a metafictional examination of the conflicting relationship between history and fiction. Challenging traditional notions of authorship, referentiality, and self-referentiality, *Autobiografía del general Franco* obliges us to examine the dissonant discourses of historiography and memory and to ascertain the political function of writing as counter-discourse.

A paradoxical characteristic of postmodern fiction is, according to Linda Hutcheon, that in spite of being “intensively self-reflective and parodic, it also attempts to root itself in that which both reflexivity and parody appear to short-circuit: the historical world” (Hutcheon x). Her proposed model of “historiographic metafiction” encapsulates postmodern thought in its problematization of the notions of history and fiction as human

constructs by means of underlining “the concept of *process* at the heart of postmodernism” (xi). In *Autobiografía*, Montalbán foregrounds the essential ideological nature of all historiographic constructions, substituting a multiplicity of partial truths and subjective memories for the claims to historical objectivity guided by a single truth, while at the same time revealing the scaffolding apparatus of its own construction. Montalbán’s historiographic metafiction is constructed as a discursive process in constant formation and reformulation taking place before the reader. Throughout the novel we witness two parallel textual processes. On the one hand, we read the pseudo-autobiographical reconstruction of Franco’s life as commissioned by the publisher Ernesto Amescua from Marcial Pombo, an old anti-Francoist fighter and unsuccessful second-rate writer.³ Against the flow of this narrative another parallel counter-text aiming at relativization and contextualization is inserted by Pombo. This constant textual interruption is Pombo’s “talking back” to Franco, which creates the “noise” violently interrupting the flow of the monolithic official discourse and progressively seems to take charge of the narrative.

Montalbán’s novel offers a clear example of Bakhtin’s notion of dialogism, as the textual stratification in the novel of differentiated voices or various social speech types in opposition to the centripetal unitary force of monological discourse. For Bakhtin, the novel is the site of a struggle of social heteroglossia originated by centrifugal forces, and it is manifested in its double-voiced discourse. In Dominick La Capra’s rewording of Bakhtin’s original concept, the novel is an enactment of a “dialogical interplay of often dissonant ‘voices’ and ideological currents” (208). These “dissonant voices” in Montalbán’s novel are not only the voices of Franco and Pombo, clearly discordant throughout the entire text, but also the myriad of other individual voices resonating in the text, composing a polyphonic work with orchestrated intertextual borrowings. This multiplicity of voices offers an oppositional front defying the monopoly of absolute univocal forces that advocate the “True Word,” providing a countercurrent to the hegemony of what Bakhtin called the “one language of truth” (271).

The dialogical nature of the text transforms the originally proposed unauthorized autobiography of Franco—admittedly fictional—into two divergent but mutually complementary autobiographies. The narrator’s split—with Pombo’s final reference to the finished novel as the collaborative work of a dual consciousness—

clearly manifests this double discourse, while the novel's ubiquitous signs of metafictionality open the door to self-questioning. In a typical postmodern gesture, the text openly reveals the process of its construction while at the same time it mobilizes the process of its own deconstruction by revealing its own fissures. As we shall see, it is by means of these narrative strategies that Montalbán is able to set against the official history written with a single monolithic voice the repressed history rewritten by multiple individual and collective memories.⁴

As historiographic metafiction, the novel simultaneously underlines and undermines, uses and abuses, the basic conventions of traditional autobiographical practices in its exploration of the relationship of the text to the self and to history. As a fictional autobiography narrated by a ghostwriter, the novel foregrounds the discrepancies between the narrating self and the narrated self, while simulating autobiographical textuality in the conventional form of a first-person narrative account of one's life. The autobiographical pact proposed by Lejeune, based on the merging identities of author, narrator, and character postulated in the act of writing, is here exposed as a textual strategy, a mere discursive construction concealing the ideological process of self-legitimization in self-inscription. The shifting "I," alternatively referring to Franco and Pombo (and obliquely to Montalbán), or to the numerous testimonies interpolated, an "I" at once multiform and self-effacing, reveals a strong skepticism about the possibility of truth in self-representation and of writing an "authentic" autobiography, and ultimately, of its differentiation from fiction. The novel appears to reflect the post-structuralist concept of the autobiographical self as a construction based, as Paul de Man has argued, in the literary trope of prosopopeia, the representation of an imaginary or absent speaking self.⁵ The novel as monumental epitaph is founded on an operation of rhetorical substitution of memories and language for what is no longer there.

At the same time, *Autobiografía* questions the ontological status of fiction and autobiographical writing in its examination of the relationship between history and writing, empirical reality and textual reality. Both autobiography and historiographic metafiction share a common and central preoccupation with this question, for they fundamentally rely on the correspondence of the sign with an extra-textual reality (the writing "I," the world outside) and they both boast an extreme degree of textual self-reflexivity. Montalbán's

novel problematizes the issue of referentiality to the external historical reality as well as the issue of its own discursive practice. The claim to external referentiality is implicitly questioned by the overt abuse of the generic autobiographical convention of self-referentiality. Fiction's referentiality, however, is neither naïvely taken for granted, as in social realist fiction, nor is it totally negated as a pure linguistic construction, as in much neo-formalist and post-structuralist theory. The novel is definitely engaged in the historical, but it challenges traditional notions of historiographic writing by recognizing and exploiting the fictional constructions that constitute historical discourse. As Hutcheon has argued, historiographic metafiction can be "intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages" (5). The back cover of the novel precisely affirms that historical figures in Montalbán's novel "become fictional characters without leaving History," thus blurring categorical distinctions between historiography and fiction while exposing their mutual complicity.

The novel is specifically framed by an introduction and an epilogue written by Pombo within the contemporary historical context of post-Franco Spain in 1992, explicitly acknowledging its not-so-coincidental publication with the centenary of the dictator's birth. The main function of these two sections of the novel is to lay the socio-economic, historical, and cultural coordinates in which the novel-within-the-novel was written. This metafictional framing device raises the question of the novel's link to historical reality while it foregrounds the self-reflexivity of its own construction, thus simultaneously asserting and questioning its historical referentiality. It is in this double sense that I refer to the novel as a "historiographic metafiction." Michael Riffaterre argues that the use of overt mechanisms of fictionality in novels serves to emphasize their own truth value as fictions, and that since the truth of fiction resides in the rhetorical power of verisimilitude, "truth is nothing but a linguistic perception" (13). I contend with Linda Hutcheon that the use of these strategies calls the reader's attention to the complexities of the relationship of fiction to historical reality, subject to internal textual contingencies as well as external circumstances. While historiographic metafiction foregrounds its own fictionality, it does not simply deny (or reaffirm) the direct links to the external field of reference; it openly makes use of them while questioning them, ever aware of the mediations in the process. Montalbán's work invites us to unmask "truth," to 'suspect truth'

and its relative existence, as Vargas Llosa said (1019). The novel suggests that truth itself is a contested territory in the domain of discourse and proposes that the truth of fiction lies in its continuous process of questioning.

Throughout the novel, but particularly in its first and last sections, Montalbán problematizes the notion of "author" central to the modern conception of subjectivity and the literary enterprise. Contrary to the traditional notion of authorship as originator and constructor, the locus where authority ultimately resides, the author is revealed as just another social construction subject to a complex network of inter-related cultural, economic, and socio-historical conditions. There are numerous explicit textual references to the process by which the fictional book-within-the-book originated and was developed to its conclusion, which, given the novel's self-reflective and doubled-voiced structure, inevitably reverberate in the reader to the process of the actual writing of the novel. We learn that Franco's fictional autobiography was initially commissioned by the publisher Ernesto Amescua, the son of Julio Amescua, Pombo's old friend and comrade in the university resistance movement against Franco's regime in the 1950s and 1960s. The young publisher provides the author not only with the idea and the motivation, but also with the basic plot line, even suggesting the point of view and the tone the narration should follow (20). As in the classic Hollywood film industry, where producers exercised total control over the final results of the films, the publisher here retains the economic and artistic control of the work from beginning to end. He engineers his product with all the efficacy of an advertising executive, addressing it to its likely audience, that younger generation of Spaniards who have not experienced Franco's regime, and reveals his marketing strategy of beginning a new collection entitled "A los hombres del año dos mil," "To the Men of the Year Two Thousand" (20), though not apparently directed to a specifically male audience.⁶ He plans its presentation at the forthcoming Book Fair and studies the profitable prospects of the book's implementation in Spain's educational system. He schedules its timely publication, close to the centennial of Franco's birth for high marketability, but not so close as to merit an opportunist label. Pombo in exchange gets an advance of two million pesetas, another three at the book's completion, and the promise of a first edition of 20,000 copies. Inevitably, the text originally conceived as a legacy for future generations ends up, in Pombo's words,

“manipulado como una mercancía urgente” ‘manipulated like urgent merchandise’ (647). By openly displaying the constrictions and limitations of Pombo’s writing practice, Montalbán acknowledges the consumer market realities of supply and demand to which most forms of cultural production, including intellectual production, are subject in Spain’s late capitalist society. In the midst of these contingencies, the author’s position is completely decentralized and its authority openly questioned. This display also forces us to question the assumption of the central and originating role of the author by suggesting that it is language and society who are writing through the author, and not the other way around. The author is composed by his texts, within a complex network of publishers, editors, mediators, readers, and institutional practices (school reading, book fairs, legal contracts, etc.), undermining the notion of an autonomous subjectivity or the “genius” of the creative imagination.

It must be admitted that Pombo, for all the apparent similarities shared with Montalbán, which would make him emerge as a fictional authorial alter ego, is not an accomplished writer granted the privileges of fame and fortune.⁷ Pombo’s efforts as a novelist have repeatedly proven unsuccessful. For years he has been hired labor, a hack writer in the past, a ghost writer now. He has, in his own words, “cierto crédito como divulgador, especialmente en trabajos de reducción de libros de historia para jóvenes y niños” ‘a certain reputation as digest writer, especially abridging history books for young readers and children’ (15). His work is basically a rehashing job, to rewrite the already told, only in an abridged and simplified manner. As a writer also experienced in authoring biographies of bygone stars and athletes like Raquel Meyer and Lili Alvarez, it could be said that his specialty is retelling other people’s stories and other people’s lives. Here again Bakhtin’s reflections on the activity of appropriation and transmission of second-hand languages are particularly appropriate. As he argued, “retelling a text in one’s own words is to a certain extent a double-voiced narration of another’s words” (341); it is clear that Pombo’s professional expertise in double-voiced discourse can be put to good use in mimicking Franco’s voice in his novel. The writer’s work of retelling the already told “in one’s own words” relativizes the traditional ideas of originality, genius, and authority typically associated with the concept of authorship. If the author in the novel is perhaps not quite dead, as Roland Barthes claimed, his presence is

reduced to a name, a function of discourse, as Michel Foucault expressed in his response to Barthes. For Foucault, the author's function is "to characterize the existence, circulation, and operation of certain discourses within a society" (124); it regulates as much as it is regulated by discourse. The "author" in Montalbán's novel is literally reduced in the end to a name, which readers can trust will deliver according to their expectations, like consumers loyal to their favorite commercial brands. In Pombo's case, the "author" has a consolidated position and a definite market appeal, although a debased one. To Pombo's final question of whether he could publish his novel (now savagely cut by his publisher) under a pseudonym, Amescua answers negatively: "Ni hablar. Yo no te pago esa burrada para que aparezca con la firma de un desconocido. Tú tienes un nombre en el mundo escolar. Tú tienes un público juvenil" 'No way. I am not paying you big bucks to have your work signed by an unknown writer. You have a name in the textbook market. You have a young reading public' (653). This public-oriented business perspective upon the concept of authorship brings to mind the reader-conscious concept of "career author" as the sum in one name of all the different authors implied by all his texts (Booth 270; Chatman 87-89) and the horizon of expectations raised in the reader by the author's name. His authority, nevertheless, is limited to the function of his name. He has certain expectations to fulfill and is ruled by the norms of discourse. In as much as his name oversees and regulates market conditions, his authority is undermined by the same rules his name helps to sanction. In Montalbán's novel the author's name is finally reduced to a brand name in the consumer market of novelistic commodities, both a product for and of society. Pombo is clearly aware of being immersed in the system of discursive practices which he cannot avoid. As Linda Hutcheon has said: "Postmodern culture uses and abuses the conventions of discourse. It knows it cannot escape implication in the economic (late capitalist) and ideological (liberal humanist) dominants of its time. There is no outside. All it can do is question from within" (xiii). In characteristic postmodern fashion, the novel offers a self-reflexive critique of the author, a speech act of confession, as there is no place outside from where to speak, but while the real author is not immune to its implications, he is twice removed from them.

Unresolved contradictions are indeed a central feature of the novel. The narrative tension in the novel is derived from the basic dialectic strategy of double voicing or double authoring. The nar-

rator performs the dual role of professional narrator, as a ventriloquist who imitates the voice of Franco, erasing his own marks of narration in the process, and as a personal narrator reinscribing the marks of narration previously erased. Both discourses are structurally and ideologically split in the novel, a separation visually reinforced by the use of italics for Franco's text. The long monolithic self-aggrandizing discourse of Franco's fictional autobiography, although already subject to internal dialogization, is in addition systematically interrupted by the counter-hegemonic voice of Pombo's own imbedded discourse, which effectively accomplishes the textual deconstruction of Franco's discourse.

The split narrator alternates between two contradictory positions. On the one hand, he is following Ernesto Amescua's command to impersonate the dictator: "Métete en la piel de Franco y excúlpate ante la historia" 'Put yourself in Franco's shoes and exonerate yourself before history' (20). On the other hand, he is unable to silence his own oppositional voice and erase his own counter-memory. Underneath the narrative strategy lies a conscious effort on the part of the narrator as well as the author not to fall into the trap of grotesque caricaturization or vulgar pamphleteering. Marcial Pombo acknowledges this challenge at the beginning of his writing project in an internal dialogue:

Nunca me movió la ambición de mando. Podrías empezar con esta frase, aunque serías acusado de sarcasmo entorpecedor desde la primera línea. No. No puedes dar pie a que se diga que Franco es tu víctima, no puedes convertirlo en mártir de tu escritura. Sería su victoria después de muerto.

I was never driven by the ambition to lead. You could start with this sentence, although you would be accused of hampering sarcasm from the first line. No. You cannot give them a reason to say that Franco is your victim, you cannot turn him into a martyr of your own writing. That would be his victory after death. (22)

Instead of following the easy line of overt satire, Pombo pursues his enterprise with the appearance of historical objectivity, as his publisher recommended to him in the beginning: "Tú has de tratarlo con la misma falsa objetividad con la que Franco se trataría a sí mismo" 'You should treat him with the same false objectivity

as Franco would treat himself" (20). His work is an exercise in self-restraint, of apparent equanimity and moderation, in which all trace of irony is practically absent. As Franco's narrative mediator, Pombo—masked with an apparently neutral voice—exercises the hidden power of controlling his antagonist's discourse. The narrative strategy of erasing the marks of enunciation serves to create the illusion of impartial objectivity. In the end, of course, it is obvious that no such objectivity is possible or even desirable. Not even Franco's monolithic discourse is immune to dialogization; his fictional voice is an example of what Bakhtin calls a "double accented or double styled hybrid construction," (304) characterized by the concealed mixing of two antagonistic voices in a single speaker with the external appearance of "pseudo-objective motivation" (305). This "pseudo-objective motivation" is precisely what drives Pombo in writing Franco's self-portrait. For instance, we can hear Pombo's voice speaking through Franco's discourse when he repeatedly uses in different occasions the initially rejected sentence "Nunca me movió la ambición de mando" 'I was never driven by the ambition to lead' (89, 397, 540, 582), though he had admitted previously that its tone was too overtly sarcastic. Even the publisher acknowledges in the end the narrator's mediation, accepting it as a "defect"—but also as a necessary condition—of the text's conception:

Quando Franco habla, se explica, aunque está cohibido por ti, por tu vigilancia . . . sí, sí, no te sorprendas, ese defecto se produce constantemente, Franco habla presionado por ti, incluso si no tuviéramos en cuenta tus interrupciones constantes, a eso iremos luego, Franco seguro que hubiera dicho cosas diferentes sin tu *pressing*. Pero bueno, este riesgo yo lo asumía y pensaba que iba a fortalecer la musculatura de la obra, sabiendo que eras lo suficientemente inteligente como para no caer en la parodia.

When Franco speaks, he explains himself, although he is inhibited by you, by your vigilance . . . yes, yes, don't be surprised, that defect occurs constantly, Franco speaks pressed by you, even if we didn't take into account your constant interruptions, we'll talk about that later, Franco would certainly have said different things without your *pressing*. But I was aware of that risk and I thought it would strengthen the muscles of the

work, knowing that you were intelligent enough not to fall into parody. (650)

In contrast, no such false objectivity is employed in Pombo's own counter-memory. While the narrator in Franco's text uses the generic convention of addressing the readers of future generations, a different rhetorical device is employed in Pombo's forthright interventions; he addresses not the reader but Franco directly as his interlocutor with the distance-signaling "Usted" form and the apostrophe "General," clearly delineating two antithetical positions. As he states: "No quiero regalarle la baza de una total falta de ecuanimidad aunque tampoco tengo por qué regalarle el menor intento de ser imposiblemente objetivo" 'I do not want to grant you a total lack of equanimity although I do not have to grant you the smallest effort of being impossibly objective neither' (248). Pombo openly manifests his disagreement with Franco's narration, basing it on his personal memory of lived experiences, thus re-opening the door to the confessional mode of autobiographical writing. Throughout the novel we learn through his own words of his father's imprisonment by Franco, his consequent purge and later life of inner exile, as well as Pombo's own experiences as an anti-Franco resistance fighter in the post-Civil War period of demonstrations, agitation, persecution, incarceration, and torture. They are the repressed memories of the defeated.

However, Pombo's interferences are much more than an individual's response. They give voice to an array of other oppositional testimonies contradicting, correcting, and underlining the discrepancies in Franco's text. This multiplicity of individual memories creates an intertextual collective collage composed of different subjectivities, each struggling to insert its own story, its relative truth. Intertextuality is thus used in the novel as a powerful form of collective resistance.⁸ Pombo undertakes an exhaustive investigation and cross-examination of hundreds of sources, in which no stone is left unturned. A composite figure is constructed out of the individual pieces, biographies, histories, and personal testimonies supplied not only by Franco's political adversaries but also by his family members, appointed politicians, as well as the numerous hagiographers, historians, and even psychologists.⁹ The parable of Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon*, the dialectical principle at work in many of Montalbán's other works, also applies here; the multiplicity of narrative accounts and points of view is the postmodern attempt to problematize the representation of historical discourse since

diversity of particular truths which can only find its synthesis in the reader.

These dissonant voices make up the "noise" that interferes with Franco's narrative, effectively creating a counter-narrative. From the standpoint of Communication Theory, an angle suggested by the text in the epigraph and developed throughout the novel, noise obstructs the communication between the receiver (the reader) and the sender of the message (in this case, Pombo in his role as Franco's autobiographer). The epigraph reproduces the entry for "noise" in a Communication handbook which describes the theoretical physics of noise as produced by the "agitación espontánea de átomos o electrones que constituyen el soporte material del canal de comunicación" 'spontaneous agitation of atoms and electrons which make up the material support of the channel of communication' (5). Unveiling the polysemy of technical language, Montalbán uses noise as a ubiquitous trope of dissonance throughout the novel, functioning as a metaphor for the disrupting disturbances mobilized by resistance and counter-memory. The concept of noise, according to the entry quoted, "está ligado al grado de desorden relativo del universo" 'is linked to the degree of relative disorder of the universe,' in contrast to the "grado del orden impuesto por la señal" 'degree of order imposed by the signal' (5). Noises are elements of disorder which constitute unsettling interferences within the discursive system. Technological advancement has developed ways of controlling and reducing these noises by artificially reaching extremely low temperatures approximating to "ese límite imaginado por físicos bajo el nombre de *cero absoluto*" 'that limit imagined by physicists under the name of *absolute zero*' (5). As Foucault has shown in his critique of the development of natural and social sciences, there is an intimate relationship of knowledge and power in the production of discourse (*Power/Knowledge*). In other words, the sanctioning power of authoritative knowledge is imparted through discourse. It is in the name of objective reasoning and order that discourse is able to regulate subjectivity and non-conformity. The noise controlling function of ideology corresponds to that same "absolute zero" degree of objectivity imagined by historiography, as we shall see later. Much more explicitly, Amescua explains to Pombo his theory of noises in rather patronizing terms:

Un ruido es todo aquel fenómeno que al producirse una comunicación no pertenece al mensaje intencionalmente emitido. No le corresponde un mensaje: que Franco explique a

las generaciones del futuro quién fue y por qué fue lo que fue y eso está explicado y muy bien, pero constantemente ese mensaje aparece obstaculizado por tus ruidos.

A noise is any phenomenon which in a given communication does not belong to the message intentionally sent. . . . I suggested a message to you: let Franco explain to the future generations who he was and why he was what he was and all that is explained very well, but that message is constantly hindered by your noises. (650-51)

Pombo's strategy is to expose Franco's objective contradictions, the multiple fissures in his discourse, by revealing the dissonances between the said and done, the discrepancies between the written and the rewritten. This is achieved by the juxtaposition of contradictory voices and texts, many of them originated by Franco's collaborators or by the dictator himself, who has had to radically modify his opinions and interpretations according to the changing political and economic situation at home and abroad.

The noises produced by these dissonant voices are a severe disturbance. They present an oppositional front, constituting a form of resistance against hegemonic discourse. Since these noises possess an inherently subversive, destabilizing quality, they must be suppressed at all costs. Unlike the case of Bakhtin's naive single-voiced author who chooses to "purge his work of speech diversity" and "mistakes social overtones, which create the timbres of words, for irritating noises that it is his task to eliminate" (327, emphasis added), the process of noise elimination occurs in Montalbán's novel with full awareness on the part of the narrator of its ideological implications. The purpose of this cleansing operation is, as David Herzberger has noted in a different context, "to arrest dissonance in the discourse of history" (34). The book publisher, as an institutional part of the "communications Ideological State Apparatus" in Althusser's theory of ideology, finally exercises its disciplinary power and decides to eliminate all the noises in Pombo's novel, both the personal and the collective, the subjective and the objective. The effect produced is the erasure of the marks of historical memory, as Amescua himself announces: "Estos ruidos pertenecen a una visión crítica de la Historia que cada vez tendrá menos sentido, que pertenece a la memoria de los que convivieron con Franco, ni siquiera es estrictamente tu memoria" 'These noises belong to a

critical vision of History that will have less and less meaning, and this belongs to the memory of those who lived with Franco, and strictly speaking it is not even your memory' (651). The text once conceived as a depository of collective counter-memory becomes in the end an empty memorial, as the manuscript is symbolically mutilated before Pombo's very eyes: "La carpeta se deshinchaba en el centro de la mesa, como si de ella escaparan todas las ánimas del antifranquismo para dejar al general consigo mismo, un *Franco par lui même* a la manera de la literatura divulgadora francesa de los años cincuenta" 'The folder was shrinking in the middle of the desk, as if all the anti-Franco souls were escaping from it to leave the general alone with himself, a *Franco par lui même* in the tradition of French educational literature of the fifties' (652). Faced with the impossibility of salvaging his own counter-memory, after all noises have been canceled out, Pombo finally acknowledges his moral defeat, silently accepting the check handed by the publisher, the fierce reduction of the manuscript rewarded with the paycheck increase of one million pesetas. With a bitter note of cynicism and self-parody, aware of the futility of his enterprise reduced to empty rhetoric, Pombo mocks his intellectual exercise by acknowledging that money can indeed speak louder than noises:

habría mucho que hablar sobre la teoría del ruido, porque mientras mis labios trataban de oponer algún ruido al mensaje del cheque, mis dedos lo habían doblado casi sin que yo me diera cuenta y me lo había metido en el bolsillo desde donde enviaba señales, mensajes por lo tanto, de seguridad.

there is much to be said about noise theory, because while my lips were trying to oppose some noise to the message of the check, my fingers had already folded it almost without my noticing and I had put it in my pocket from where it was sending signals, therefore messages, of security. (653)

The double text-within-the-text strategy permits Montalbán to expose with jarring effect and piercing irony the dangers, pitfalls, and limitations of the intellectual in society. The novel as a whole, however, does not succumb or surrender to these external pressures, since the "silenced" noises are already fully inscribed in the ear and memory of the reader, without undermining the dissonant voices of counter-memory. Pombo's defeat does not grant Franco a new

victory after death, as the narrator pessimistically thinks, but in fact enables Montalbán's novel to succeed as an "anti-Franco monument."

The point-counterpoint narrative strategy employed by the narrator is encapsulated in Pombo's address to his fictional antagonist: "permítame que irrumpa . . . en este largo viaje autobiográfico que compartimos" 'Let me interrupt . . . this long autobiographical journey we are sharing' (64). He retrospectively refers to the text as "nuestra autobiografía" 'our autobiography' and "nuestro trabajo" 'our work' (647), acknowledging that it goes beyond the customary individual account of one's life, (even in the shape of collaborative ghost-writing) to become a collective self-portrait of historical proportions. The narrator's split ultimately reveals the impossibility and undesirability of historicist objectivity and the need for a multisubjective revision of history. Underneath this strategy lies a profound critique of traditional historical discourse, challenging the institutionalized system of historical representation and interpretation. In a typical postmodern fashion, Montalbán simultaneously installs and destabilizes the conventional conceptualization of historiography by means of using and questioning the strategies of historiographic representation and the metafictional unveiling of the discursive mechanisms of narration at work.

The discordant coexistence of contradictory versions of history leads to the questioning of mediation and agency in the process of historiographic construction and calls the reader's attention to the act of interpretation and almost inevitable manipulation of the historical record. Confronted with a multiplicity of individual versions and truth-claims, we are continually reminded as readers to question the mediator's position and ideological underpinnings. The multiple layers in the narration emphasize the constructed nature of historical and fictional discourse. History differs from "reality" in that its discourse necessarily superimposes an explanation upon "the bare reality" of facts; like fiction, history operates by means of a selective eye with narrative mechanisms of order and control. In an instance of metafictional self-reflection upon his work, Pombo concedes a basic difference between "facts," which simply are events devoid of causality or explanation, and "acts," the interpretative result of those events. For Pombo, historical discourse is always based on acts of interpretation. In his recapitulation, he concedes that "no era lo exhaustivo de los hechos el empeño, sino lo exhaustivo del sentido de los actos. Los hechos no tienen sentido.

Los actos sí" 'the intention was not the exhaustiveness of the events but the exhaustiveness of the meaning of the acts. Events have no meaning. Acts do' (647).

The forgery of history, its falsification, is a recurrent preoccupation throughout the novel. All sides openly criticize it, but none is immune to its effects. Franco himself recognizes the forgery of history, but, not surprisingly, he attributes it to the work of his political enemies, which he identifies as the traditional enemies of his concept of Spain. Thus, he refers to "aquellos biógrafos miserables que han tratado de falsificar el sentido de mi vida porque en el fondo querían falsificar el de España" 'those miserable biographers who have tried to falsify the meaning of my life because at heart they wanted to falsify Spain's' (45). Franco purports to convince the reader that is the traditional "enemies of Spain" (including leftists, separatists, Freemasons, and Jews in Franco's definition) are to blame for the divergence from the official history in their historical interpretation of facts.

Franco's discourse is constructed from the hegemonic position of absolute control of power and history. This unilateral monopolizing control of the historical record is questioned by Pombo, who, in an effort to set the record straight, to tell the other side of the story, must reveal the fissures in Franco's discourse and expose the flaws of his falsifying narrative, while inscribing his own counter-discourse. After all his efforts, however, Pombo finally discovers, to his dismay, that the other side of the story, his story and that of many others like him, will never be told. What is most frightening to him is the realization that the control of the historical record, in the name of historical objectivity, erases subjective memory. As the back cover of the novel states: "El dictador habla desde la Historia, el escritor teme que la Historia sea tan objetiva con la crueldad de una época que se olvide de sus víctimas y lo reduzca todo a quince líneas de Diccionario Ilustrado" 'The dictator speaks from History, the writer fears that History will be so objective with the cruelty of those times that it will forget its victims and will reduce everything to fifteen lines in an Illustrated Dictionary.' This erasure from History is precisely what Ernesto Amescua, the intermediary and ultimate mediator, predicts will happen. With his censoring of "noises" he is a silent accomplice to the forgery of history.

En definitiva, Franco es el que hizo la Historia y vosotros la sufristeis. Mala suerte. Eso es todo. Dentro de cien años vuestras sensaciones de odio, impotencia, fracaso, miedo no estarán en parte alguna y Franco al menos será siempre, para siempre una voz de diccionario enciclopédico, unas líneas en los manuales o en los vídeos o en los disquets, en cualquier soporte de memoria seleccionado para el futuro. Y en esas pocas líneas no cabrá vuestro sufrimiento, vuestra rabia, vuestro resentimiento.

In the end, Franco is the one who made History and you suffered it. Bad luck. That is all. A hundred years from now your feelings of hatred, helplessness, defeat, and fear will not exist anywhere and Franco at least will always be an entry in an encyclopedic dictionary, a few lines in the hand-books, videos or disks, in whatever form of memory support chosen for the future. And in those few lines there will not be room for your suffering, your rage, your resentment. (652)

To the struggle against Franco, both in his life and his text, Pombo must now add the struggle against the publisher's mediation for his own inclusion in the novel, his only chance of recuperating a part of his memory. As Pombo states his ethical position: "Los historiadores del futuro, incluso los del presente, no habrán tenido la vivencia de la crueldad, la desfachatez, la mediocridad del franquismo" (sic) 'historians of the future, even of the present, will not have had the experience of the cruelty, shamelessness, and mediocrity of Francoism' (651). To Ernesto Amescua, however, the purpose of history is a different one; its only interest must be the events devoid of moral implications brought in by interpretation: "La Historia sólo puede tener un sentido fáctico, lo que está hecho, hecho está y sólo interesa resaltar lo curioso de su causalidad, no la moral de su causalidad" 'History can only have factual meaning, what is done is done, and the only interest is in highlighting the peculiar of its causality, not the moral of its causality' (652). In Pombo's view, Amescua's factual approach resembles the anesthetizing and sanitizing ideology of objective historiography:

En el comportamiento de Ernesto advertí el mismo espíritu que el de esa pandilla de historiadores objetivos, que están reescribiendo su historia, general, llenándolo de sí pero no y de no pero sí, en busca de la asepsia histórica, del desodorante de la historia que evite el olor de la sangre y la carroña.

In Ernesto's conduct I sensed the same turn of mind of that gang of objective historians, who are rewriting your history, general, filling it with ifs and buts and maybes, in search of historical asepsis, of a deodorant for history which will spare the smell of blood and rotting flesh. (652)

Pombo, and indeed Montalbán, reserves his sharpest criticism for the "neutral" historiographers unwilling to recognize their own complicity and inscription within the historical discourse they write. His criticism reveals the ideological implications in the writing of history. For Pombo, the cleansing of the historical record is another form of falsifying history because it erases a great part of unwanted history. This impossible absolute zero degree of historical objectivity would preclude subjective memory and collective suffering from being a part of the historical record.¹⁰

Confronted with the reality of his defeat, Pombo pessimistically acknowledges historiography's inability to register the noises of resistance: "la Historia es biplana y en ella no caben los ruidos, sean gemidos o gritos de rabia y terror" 'History is two dimensional and there is no room in it for noises, be it groans or screams of rage and terror' (663). Resisting this historical and narrative ending, he finally delegates to the reader the responsibility for the last judgment: "Al fin y al cabo yo no era responsable exclusivo del juicio de la Historia, yo no era la conciencia exclusiva del mundo. ¿Por qué debía asumir la empresa de resucitar a sus víctimas, general?" 'After all I was not exclusively responsible for the judgment of History, I was not the exclusive consciousness of the world. Why should I take on the enterprise of bringing your victims back to life, general?' (653). There remains for him at least the partial consolation that even without his direct opposing voice and the critical "noises," there is enough proof in Franco's own discourse "para autocondenarse al infierno de la memoria del futuro" 'to damn himself to the hell of future memory' (653). The tightly knit narrative structure of the novel, with its introduction and epilogue and its alternating discourses, conceals its resistance to narrative closure. The novel makes a point of contradicting Franco's famous last words: "Yo lo dejo todo atado y bien atado" 'I leave everything tied up and tightly tied up' (644) by undoing every single knot of Franco's narrative. In the end, the narrative tension is apparently resolved but the dissonance produced by the unresolved chord of

The overtly oppositional character of the text, running against official historiography and reinscribing a long forgotten counter-memory, allows us to consider this unauthorized autobiography a form of narrative of resistance.¹¹ The notion of resistance literature in Barbara Harlow's study of Third World counter-hegemonic writing is based on its clear and unambiguous political function: "immediately and directly involved in a struggle against ascendant or dominant forms of ideological and cultural production" (28-29). While Harlow's notion of resistance literature as counter-hegemonic political discourse is applicable to certain forms of First World politically engaged literature, her confident belief in the transformative power of literary discourse as counter-hegemonic practice should be questioned in light of the particular privileged situation of literary discourse in Western cultures. The political function of literature, its supposed subversiveness, is more often taken for granted in critical discourse than empirically demonstrated. Montalbán is aware of this in his critique of authorship and historiographical representation, but his outlook is not inimical to the notion of resistance. Lennard Davis has criticized the anesthetizing effect of "progressive" novels, which are capable of generating a formal gesture of progressive thinking and rhetoric but are unable to turn it into action. Davis points out that in Western societies the transformative power of the novel, the bourgeois literary form par excellence, in the society at large outside the sphere of the "already convinced" is very relative. In fact, Davis claims, it most often causes the opposite effect: feeding society's defenses resisting change and re-introducing conformity and passivity. In spite of this radical ideological critique, it can be argued that fiction (like other forms of writing—particularly journalism, autobiographies, theatre, film, etc.) even if it cannot "immediately and directly" change the external reality, can certainly help create a demand or a favorable atmosphere for change. Montalbán's novel is situated somewhere in between the well-intentioned optimism of Harlow's *Resistance Literature*, with its revolutionary rhetoric reminiscent of the 1960s, and the pessimistic outlook of Davis' *Resisting Novels*, with its 1980s ideological skepticism. The text makes us aware of the limitations of literary discourse to bring about change in the real world, but also of the possibility it presents, perhaps our only chance, to create a counter-narrative correcting dominant official discourses. As David Herzberger has argued, post-war Spanish fiction has served the important political function of correcting the official

interpretation of Spanish history. By offering an oppositional view and divergent interpretation of the monolithic historical truth, Montalbán's novel can reconstitute some sense of historical right and share with the reader some part of a collective counter-memory, therefore challenging the unwritten law of historical oblivion.

Autobiografía del general Franco is a prime example of the historiographic metafiction mode; through its narrative use of split subjectivity, it illustrates the multiple layers of intricacy between the historical and the literary, showing the inevitable relationship of discourse to power. The text continually questions the fundamental notions of truth, authority, and originality, problematizing the oppositional force of memory against hegemonic discourse; in turn, it undermines the concept of history as a univocal, reductive, and, in the end, partial truth. The novel criticizes historiographical pseudo-objectivity and advocates the encounter of partial, subjective versions of truth in a dialectical conflictive process that reveals the complexity as well as the relativity of historical truth. Montalbán's exercise in counter-memory reminds us that, as Paolo Portoghesi has stated, "it is the loss of memory, not the cult of memory, that will make us prisoners of the past" (111).

Notes

1. Some of these included Javier Tussell, *Franco en la guerra civil, una biografía política*; Enrique González Duro, *Franco, una biografía psicológica*; Stanley G. Payne, *Franco, el perfil de la historia*; Fernando Vizcaíno Casas; 1975/*El año en que Franco murió en la cama*; and Angel Palomino, *Caudillo*.

2. Montalbán has already devoted several books to the chronicle of the Franco regime, such as *Los demonios familiares del franquismo*, *Diccionario del franquismo*, and *Cómo liquidaron el franquismo en dieciseis meses y un día*.

3. In a rhetorical move not without added irony, the military dictator and constructor of historical fictions is called Franco ("frank"), while his powerless victim and defeated opposer unsuccessfully reconstructing historical truth is called Marcial ("military").

4. A similar case is brilliantly argued by Alda Blanco in relation to María Teresa León's autobiography of resistance *Memoria de la melancolía*.

5. For a comprehensive and up-to-date review of contemporary critical theory on autobiography, see the special issue of *Suplementos Anthropos* 29 (1991) edited by Angel Loureiro. Of great interest are also his special issues of *Anthropos* 125 (1991) and *Journal of Interdisciplinary Literary Studies* 5.1 (1993) devoted to Hispanic autobiographical practices.

6. All the translations from Vázquez Montalbán's novel are my own. The novel is not yet available in an English translation.

7. There is a great deal of self-parody and ironic distancing at the same time in this portrait. Vázquez Montalbán's process of authoring the novel admittedly followed a course similar to Pombo's; he was invited by Spain's publisher giant, Planeta's José M. Lara, to write a fictional autobiography of Franco provisionally titled *Yo, Franco*, which would start a new collection based on great historical figures. In his case, however, Montalbán encountered no objections from the publisher to his "deviation" from the original idea. While Montalbán has disclaimed the autobiographical interpretation of his novel, pointing for example to the differences in age and birthplace that separate him from Pombo (Moret 26), there are many obviously intentional parallels between author and character pointing to the contrary. In a characteristically paradoxical postmodern manner, the novel appears to establish links of identification between the fictional character and the extra-textual author only to undermine them immediately after, challenging any direct autobiographical correspondence and making us question the uncritical assumption of autoreferentiality.

8. For the use of *testimonio* as a form of collective autobiography giving voice to repressed histories, see John Beverly's seminal essay. A similar argument is presented by Christina Dupláa in her analysis of Monserrat Roig's fictional and non-fictional narrative works.

9. The accumulation of testimonies in the novel is simply overwhelming, as if evidence presented to a jury at a trial. These testimonies, however, are not presented as the ultimate truth they are not taken at face value, but made to speak to each other in an intertextual dialogue of dissonant voices. They include long fragments, paragraphs, and single sentences quoted from biographical, historical, and testimonial texts written by virtually every member of Franco's "family," both literally and symbolically. In a manner similar to defense witnesses cross-examined and utilized by the prosecution in juridical proceedings, even the testimonies of Franco's closest relatives and allies eventually turn against him in the novel.

10. The same criticism of sanitized historiography is shared by Michael Ugarte in a recent review of Paul Preston's *Franco: A Biography*, where he praises Montalbán's novel for his audacity.

11. For the use of autobiographical writing as a resistance, see the essays by James Fernández and Patricia Greene in the special issue "Resisting Autobiography" of *Journal of Interdisciplinary Literary Studies* 5.1 (1993).

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