

November 2012

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Recommended Citation

Moreno-Nuño, Carmen (2012) "Gómez López-Quiñones, Antonio. La guerra persistente: Memoria, violencia y utopía: representaciones contemporáneas de la Guerra Civil española," *Dissidences*: Vol. 4 : Iss. 7 , Article 11.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.bowdoin.edu/dissidences/vol4/iss7/11>

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Keywords / Palabras clave

Spain, España, Civil War, Violencia política, Memoria, Utopía

DISSIDENCES

Hispanic Journal of Theory and Criticism

Gómez López-Quñones, Antonio

La guerra persistente: Memoria, violencia y utopía. Representaciones contemporáneas de la Guerra Civil española
Madrid: Verbuert Iberoamericana, 2006.

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Although the literary representation of the Spanish civil war has always been a privileged topic of literary history (it is claimed to be the most important literary topic in contemporary Spanish literature), there are still few works of literary criticism that study the representation of the Spanish War during democracy. Moreover, critical treatment has lacked generally a comprehensive or global understanding of the topic, focusing as it has on a treatment of the theme that is intrinsically literary rather than seeking to bridge literary and social concerns in

the broader spectrum of cultural production. *La guerra persistente* by Antonio Gómez López-Quiñones seeks to address these shortcomings highlighting the pervasiveness and endurance of a memory (the civil war) in the Spanish contemporary collective consciousness in narratives and movies published and released since the nineties. *La guerra persistente* shows how literature and cinema have become in democratic Spain both the mirror and agent of a society's long repressed historical memory.

It is only since the nineties that Spanish society as a whole has begun to process the consequences of this tragic legacy in a truly open and meaningful way. In fact, the recuperation of the historical memory of the Spanish civil war and the postwar years has become a key sociopolitical issue in Spain in the last years. The desire to forget the traumatic national past has yielded to the desire to remember that now defines a broader and more active segment of the Spanish society. The tireless work of the Asociación para la recuperación de la memoria histórica since 2000, the opening of mass graves throughout the national landscape, the passing of the Law for Historical Memory (Ley de Memoria Histórica), and the first court case against Francoism, by judge Baltasar Garzón, are the pinnacles of the new relationship that Spain has developed with its past. Immersed in this sociopolitical arena, cultural products have become a leading force for the recuperation of historical memory, representing the long-time silenced stories of the defeated with the aim of both breaking a historical silence and bringing a lost dignity to the victims.

La guerra persistente is pertinent, timely, and important given the extraordinary concern in Spain today for the nation's historical memory as it relates to the Civil War. Gómez López-Quiñones has sought to enter this debate, a controversial one to be sure, with political responsibility, methodological seriousness, and intellectual rigor. *La guerra persistente* studies the representation of the Spanish civil war in sixteen novels and movies, in a truly

interdisciplinary study that conceives literature and film as cultural products and not as isolated disciplines. Focusing on the textual nature of these novels and movies, Gómez López-Quiñones has explored the cultural discourses on the civil war that permeate these texts. Texts by canonical (Javier Marías, Javier Cercas) and non-canonical authors are seamlessly combined to offer a wider and more accurate spectrum of current literary discourses. The ambitious array of movies and novels does not diminish the quality of the textual analysis; on the contrary, textual analyses are nuanced, carefully reflected, and thoroughly researched. The author is a fine reader of theory and an excellent reader of cultural texts. In fact, his textual analyses of *Soldados de Salamina* and *Tu rostro mañana. Fiebre y lanza* are among the best published to date.

La guerra persistente is divided thematically into three parts, and the importance of the three themes is convincingly argued. In the first part, Gómez López-Quiñones focuses on the representation of History, the past being the slippery object of an unending inquiry, as necessary as it is incomplete. The author avoids the pitfalls of a reductionist approach by not focusing only on the otherwise pertinent concept of historiographical metafiction. In part two, Gómez López-Quiñones explores the representation of violence as a socio-historical response by an agent subject. Since the representation of violence has been well researched with regard to the literature of the Spanish civil war (Gareth Thomas's *The Novel of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1975)*), then this chapter recognizes the persistence of continuing traits with the work of authors such as Benet or Cela, while proposing at the same time a new interpretive hermeneutic for the most current Spanish literature and cinema. In part three of his study, Gómez López-Quiñones takes up on the utopian representation of the Second Republic, and the political dangers of utopias. The author reduces the risk of dispersion that inevitably accompanies to a thematically tripartite study,

grouping together the three key topics since the Introduction: “La Guerra Civil sirve, por lo tanto, como un testimonio del imaginario nacional que presenta no pocos atractivos morales y éticos, aunque el acceso a dichas claves morales y éticas implique problemas epistemológicos (p. 32).” The introduction and conclusion that frame each part work as a well-thought comparative analysis among the texts.

My reservations regarding *La guerra persistente* are minor and secondary, yet bear mentioning nonetheless. Although the author’s treatment of the relatively weak political impact of these texts may be accurate, his emphasis on the popularity of the topic of the Spanish civil war as a commodity generated by a cultural industry tends to minimize the important social changes a third postwar generation of Spaniards has experienced. In the Introduction, where he contextualizes, the author digresses at times (Pío Moa, “papeles de Salamanca”) while omitting historical events that are extremely relevant to his study, such as the work of the Asociación para la Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica or the opening of mass graves.

These reservations notwithstanding, the methodological rigor, hermeneutic imaginativeness, and analytical depth that characterize Gómez López-Quñones’s work are worthy of the highest praise. *La guerra persistente* is important not only for its analyses of turn-of-the-century textual representations of Spain’s civil war, but also for the seminal contribution it offers in the area of historical memory in contemporary fiction and film.