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Family Documents, Analogy and Reconciliation in the Works of Carme Riera

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Spanish Women Writers and Spain's Civil War

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and Roberta Johnson

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Introduction

Spanish Women Writers and Spain's Civil War

Roberta Johnson and Maryellen Bieder

The Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) pitted conservative forces including the army, the Church, the Falange (Fascist party), landowners, and industrial capitalists against the Republic, installed in 1931 and supported by intellectuals, the petite bourgeoisie, many campesinos (farm laborers), and the urban proletariat. The Civil War sparked international interest as it emblemized the increasing division of the West between traditional and revolutionary factions in the wake of the Russian Revolution. It provoked heated passions on both sides, and it soon became an international phenomenon when Germany's Hitler, siding with the Spanish conservative Nationalist forces, sent the Luftwaffe to strafe Guernica in the Basque Country and other locations; Mussolini sent ground troops. The Russians sent airplanes and matériel to support the Republican effort. The Spanish Civil War inspired a number of literary works that reflect the impact of the War on foreign and national writers, thus the label "the poet's war" (see Hugh D. Ford's *A Poets' War: British Poets and the Spanish Civil War*). Maryse Bertrand de Muñoz's *La Guerre civile espagnole et la littérature française* and Katharine Bail Hoskins's *Today the Struggle: Literature and Politics in England during the Spanish Civil War* chronicle French and English literary representations of the Spanish Civil War. Of the books that include Spanish authors, few mention Spanish women writers. The nearly 100 pages of Marilyn Rosenthal's *Poetry of the Spanish Civil War* that address poets from Spain and Latin America who took the War as a theme, mention no women poets. Nor do Frederick R. Benson's *Writers in Arms: The Literary Impact of the Spanish Civil War* or Carmen Moreno-Nuño's *Las huellas de la Guerra Civil: Mito y trauma en la narrativa de la España democrática* include any Spanish women writers.

Under the Second Spanish Republic (1931–1939) women gained absolute equality with men before the law; they were granted the vote and right to hold public office. Three prominent feminists held seats in Parliament—Clara Campoamor, who championed women's suffrage; and Victoria Kent and Margarita Nelken, who argued against women's having the vote for fear that, influenced by their husbands and the clergy, they would vote for conservative positions. *Mujeres Libres* [Free Women], an organization founded in Madrid and Barcelona shortly before the outbreak of the Civil War, did not identify with the notion of feminism per se. Although its agenda seems

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Kathryn Everly

In her 2013 memoir, *Temps d'innocència* [A time of innocence], Carme Riera describes her relationship to the Spanish Civil War as mediated through language: “Quan jo vaig néixer feia nou anys que s’havia acabat la guerra. La paraula ‘guerra’ tenia, però, un gruix quotidià” (47) [when I was born, the War had been over for nine years. The word “war” had, nevertheless, an everyday feel to it].¹ Therefore it seems fitting that it is through writing that Riera approached and came to understand the past and present repercussions of the Spanish Civil War. Her relationship to the past in her memoir is rooted in a photograph of her father she describes, and in the novel *La meitat de l'ànima* [Half the soul] from 2004 the protagonist delves into her family's past upon receiving unsigned letters. Language as the form and function of memory takes on various shapes in Riera's work including the language of the photographic composition and the one-sided perspective found in the epistolary form that often proves paradoxical. For Riera language does not always reveal information or enlighten the characters or readers of her work, but instead is a means to ensnare and seduce the reader into a complex literary world of meaning, subversion, and doubt.² In this study, the importance of the family album and personal history shade Riera's writing about the past, which becomes an unstable place where the truth and facts are mere creations and subject to change.

Carme Riera was born in Palma de Mallorca in 1948. She studied literature at the Universitat Autònoma in Barcelona where she now holds a position on the faculty. Her works span a wide range of genres and topics including feminism, gender studies, historical novels, academic writing, and theater. She first made waves in the publishing world in 1975 with her short story, “Te deix, amor, la mar com a penyora” [I leave you, my love, the sea as a token], that tells the story of a doomed love affair between a young university student and her professor. Not until the final words of the story do we readers realize that the relationship is between two women, undermining our socialized gender expectations. Riera's work often plays with preconceived notions of gender and genre as in her story “Estimat Tomás” [Dear Thomas] from the 1981 collection *Epitelis tendríssims* [Epithelia most tender] in which the recipient of seemingly erotic love letters describing a pink tongue, licking and petting, is revealed to be the young writer's beloved

German Shepherd. Riera won international acclaim for her brilliant historical novel *Dins el darrer blau* [In the Last Blue] that delves into the plight of the Jewish community living in secrecy on the island of Mallorca during the Spanish Inquisition. The novel won several literary prizes including the Spanish National Prize for Narrative in 1995. Riera's interest in the Spanish Civil War appears in 2003 with the publication of *La meitat de l'ànima*. The novel coincides with a larger trend in Spanish letters aimed to vindicate the Spanish leftist forces of the defeated Republic, including such notable publications as *Soldados de Salamina* [Soldiers of Salamis] (2001) by Javier Cercas and *La voz dormida* [The Sleeping Voice] by Dulce Chacón in 2002.³ However, Riera does not fall into political posturing nor does she intend to rectify national historical memory but rather she takes a personal approach to the War, recognizing that all history is at once national and personal and that language is indeed a slippery slope on which to ground historical fact. Her literary project is based on decoding language by revealing its tenuous meanings and by extension she sees history as a narrative, another story that has many sides and many angles worth exploring. In recognition of her outstanding and enduring contribution to Spanish literature and culture Riera was elected to the prestigious Real Academia Española [The Spanish Royal Academy] in 2012.⁴

Riera's connection to the Spanish Civil War begins with her family and extends to her identity as a writer grappling with personal and national memories. In her memoir she writes short chapters on a single theme—a person in her family, an outing with her father, a story or song from her youth—that all come together to form a larger picture of her childhood. These brief chapters are literary snapshots and give the reader the sensation of paging through a family photo album or reading diary entries. In this way, Riera presents her childhood as we remember our own, in fleeting moments, as faces that come and go, as seemingly random, unimportant moments that stick with us forever. In both her memoir and her novel about the Civil War, the urgent need to connect with the past through the memory of family members leads the author to seek out and establish similarities with her parents. This compulsive search to understand one's own identity in the present is rooted in how we relate to and reflect our parents' lives and stories. In her study from 2009, *Flesh of My Flesh*, Kaja Silverman talks about the individual's compulsive need to feel connected as a part of a whole. She questions what the concept of an entity or “whole” is—do we wish to belong to some concept of humanity, of history, of the universe? She uses analogy as a concrete way we relate to those around us as we find similarities between ourselves and others, yet at the same time as individuals we yearn for difference in order to distinguish ourselves as unique. Photography serves as an overarching analogy between the image and its referent, between the present and the past, between the individual and history.

In the chapter from *Temps d'innocència* titled “Invisibles, menjadors i clandestins” [Invisible, ravenous, and clandestine] Riera remembers her

father meeting periodically with some friends behind closed doors in his home office. She remembers vividly the large trays of delicious-looking treats delivered to the office and waiting until the secret guests had departed one by one to go in and see if they had left any sweets for her to eat. Every time she would be disappointed when the tray was left completely empty (67). She often wondered who these hungry, secretive men were hiding out in her house with her father and why he refused to talk about them. She confesses “Les respostes a les meves preguntes d’aquell temps tenen a veure amb una fotografia feta al menjador gran de Sa Marineta, més o manco pels mateixos anys d’aquelles reunions” (68) [the answers to my questions about that time have to do with a photograph taken in the Sa Marineta great dining room, more or less around the time of those meetings]. She describes the photograph in detail and observes how the curtains are drawn and the lights are on even though she can see rays of sunlight filtering in through the closed Persian blinds.

The photograph serves an important purpose in the memory of the young girl as it confirms the very existence of the mysterious group and places it firmly in a specific time and space. As Roland Barthes notes, “in photography the trauma is wholly dependent on the certainty that the scene ‘really’ happened; *the photographer had to be there* (the mythical definition of denotation)” (“Photographic Message” 30; italics in original). Nevertheless, the certainty of the secret meetings made “real” by the photographic image only produces more questions and more confusion for the writer. She wonders if they belonged to a secret society, if they were smugglers, did they form part of a Masonic lodge, were they conspirators (68)? She even wonders about their decision to be photographed, if they really wanted to remain secret: “Encara que el revelat pugui ser fet en privat o en un laboratori de molta confiança, és una prova ben clara que han estat plegats, reunits amb dissimulació, per motius al manco sospitosos. Què hi fan, si no, les cortines corregudes i els llums encesos? A què ve tot aquest sarau?” (68) [Even though the film could be developed privately or in a trustworthy lab, it is clear proof that they have gotten together, met for suspect motives. Because if that were not the case, the curtains would not be drawn and the lights turned on. Why so much dissimulation?]. The need for the young Riera to know what her father is up to and be a part of his clandestine world pushes her to wonder about the nature of the meetings. She wants to belong to the group, not only to get a chance to devour the tasty snacks, but in a more serious vein, in order to understand her father better. She feels neglected and ostracized from his world.

She confides in her grandmother who is startled by the child’s observations and makes her swear never to talk about the photograph or the clandestine meetings ever again. She must never utter a word or they could throw her father in jail simply for speaking out against Franco, if that is the case. The young Riera is frightened and at that moment realizes the power of language and silence that defines the Franco dictatorship. She explains: “Tancar-lo

perquè parla! És una exclamació no una pregunta. L’exclamació a què em condueix el descobriment que acabo de fer: la força de les paraules” (69) [Jail him for speaking! It is an exclamation, not a question. The exclamation to which the discovery I have just made leads me: the power of words]. This is a defining moment for the young girl in the memoir as she struggles with the image of her father as vulnerable and in danger, as someone she must protect instead of the reverse. It is also, perhaps, the moment of recognition of herself as a writer. She realizes at this moment that she has an immense power with her own use of language and that the secrets contained in the photograph can be questioned, denounced, and revealed through words. She makes a solemn vow to her grandmother to keep her silence and finishes the chapter with the following words:

Vaig complir la promesa, de fet l’he mantinguda fins avui: mon pare milità contra en Franco en la clandestinitat, amb un grup de mallorquins, en Fèlix Pons, el pare d’en Fèlix Pons Irazazábal, president que fou del Congrés de Diputats, en Javier Garau, n’Antoni Canals, en Joan Valenzuela i d’altres que no recordo. Aquests són alguns dels noms dels conspiradors que puc identificar a la fotografia, els invisibles que s’ho menjaven tot... (70)

[I kept my promise, in fact I have kept it until now: my father secretly conspired against Franco with a group of Mallorcans, Fèlix Pons, Fèlix Pons Irazazábal’s father, former president of the Congress of Deputies, Javier Garau, Antonio Canals, Juan Valenzuela, among others I don’t remember. Those are some of the names of the conspirators that I can identify in the photo, the invisible ones who ate everything...] ⁵

The power of words and naming reveal the identity of the strangers in the photograph and the memoir gains a new dimension: not only are we readers privy to Riera’s childhood development, but we also gain insight into the adult Riera and her relationship to her father. The ellipsis at the end of the chapter indicates the unending nature of memory and how the past is never closed off or final. She admits that writing the names of the men in the photograph in her memoir is the first time she has revealed their identities; their secret has been safe with her until the very moment we read the names on the page. Of course the threat of incarceration or any kind of legal discipline has long since dissipated but the way in which Riera builds the tension around the clandestine meetings and then suddenly reveals the identity of the men in writing reproduces the anxiety and suspicion of the postwar years. As we read the list of names of actual men Riera knew we are thrown back to the past, to a time when the political atmosphere of the postwar dictatorship created a silence and a tension that would have rendered that list of names a valuable tool for the Fascist government to squash the opposition with a jail sentence or possibly death. Within the

context and temporal distance of the memoir, the words lose some of this political and legal weight but forcefully remind us of the silence of post-war years and the secrecy that surrounded young Carme's memories of her father.

Riera's yearning to understand her father and be a part of his world extends to her novel *La meitat de l'ànima*. The protagonist seeks to forge a bond between her present state and her parents' nebulous past. Silverman describes the historical significance in Western thought of searching for that other part of ourselves that will make us whole. She points to mythology, religion, and philosophy as schools of thought that foster and repeatedly demonstrate through metaphor the individual's desire to form part of a whole. Many of these examples are predicated on the concept of the union between man and woman such as the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice (Silverman 46–58), or we can think about Aristophanes's speech from Plato's *Symposium* in which he defines the pursuit of wholeness that is the result of androgynous humans being split in half by Zeus in order to reduce their strength and increase the number of worshipers. The result is that humans spend their lives searching for their other half, yearning once again to be a part of a whole. Silverman questions this overreaching concept of wholeness and its gendered implications: "What is a woman? What is a man?... If there is a Whole, what is it, and why do we feel so estranged from it?" (7).⁶ Riera's novel and her memoir reposition the subject by desexualizing the nature of the whole and defining it as both historical and personal. She also conflates gender in her search for her "other half" by including both her mother and father in a Freudian nod to the Oedipal and Electra complexes.

Riera's writing in general has been characterized by a particular yearning to find a complementary half. Her short novella *Qüestió d'amor propi* is one long letter from Àngela asking an estranged friend for help in getting revenge on a former lover. Many of Riera's texts utilize and manipulate open and unfinished dialogue established by the epistolary mode as a way of suggesting conversation but eschewing conclusion in favor of open-endedness. This form of writing defies traditional structures of narrative development and closure, allowing Riera to work within a feminist discourse that goes against the grain. As Roberta Johnson observes,

Riera's women are lonely souls, crying out in the wilderness, but they are distanced and separated from someone else, and that someone else emerges as a principal character in the narration. The woman who speaks defines herself in terms of the other, so that the distance and separation are not male-oriented existential alienation (that has often been found in earlier Spanish first-person narratives by women), but a separation with an implicit connection, desire for connection or an absent connection that forms a bond, even if an incomplete one.

(153; emphasis in original)

In this sense, Silverman's search for the "whole" becomes a distinctly feminist pursuit of articulating female desire in Riera's writing, and the resulting bond, or lack thereof, becomes much less important than the voicing of female experience and desire. In the novel, *La meitat de l'ànima*, the wholeness and completeness the protagonist insists on locating in recovered memory evaporates before her eyes leaving an apparently unfinished, unsatisfying literary project. However, as we will see, the wholeness that she finds emerges from the act of writing and producing a text that reconstructs a particular, open-ended version of her family's past.

La meitat traces the urgent crescendo of the protagonist's search for information about her mother, Cecilia Balaguer (also known as Celia Ballester) and her biological father. Referred to in the text only as C, the first-person narrator is a well-established writer who tells us a mysterious man left a blue file for her while she was busy signing books at the annual San Jordi book fair in Barcelona.⁷ Assuming this file contained a mediocre manuscript or some other unimportant request, she never opened it and lost track of it for months. When she finds it much later in a stack of papers next to her desk she opens it up to find several letters written in her mother's hand and five photographs of her mother as well. The letters suggest that her mother was deeply in love with a man other than C's father, and the content of the letters alludes to the fact that perhaps this man is really C's biological father. From this point on the novel becomes an obsessive investigation into her mother's past, her father's political affiliations, the unnamed lover's involvement in their lives, and ultimately the desperate need to find the man who left the folder because he surely has the answers. Her work becomes that of a detective, searching for clues and piecing together information similar to a police investigation. She only knows this stranger as Lluís G., the name on his business card that she promptly tore up and threw away, an act she deeply regrets throughout the novel. Her powers of deduction lead her to believe that the love letters were written to French existentialist writer Albert Camus, thus cleverly confusing fiction and history in a metatextual nod to the reader that forces us to question what is "real" and what is imagined.

However, the narrative undermines our expectations of the investigative genre, and every step, every interview with someone from the past, every trip to an archive produces more confusion, more frustration, and less clarity. After C overcomes a deep depression brought on by her failure to solve the mystery she is able to pursue the case, but as the novel comes to a close, the disparate versions of the past reach a chaotic culmination. The last few pages reveal information that her mother may have been a double agent working for the Spanish Fascists and her death may not have been an accident but perhaps a suicide or a murder. C considers approaching the Camus family for a paternity test but decides she would look completely insane without any proof other than the unsigned letters. The story ends with a desperate plea to the readers to help her find the mysterious man who gave her the file so that she can resolve this uncertainty, find out who she really is, and

feel whole. The entire text revolves around the idea of analogy, of making a comparison of two things that are alike in some way in order to establish meaning. The novel repeatedly questions what these two things are, what is that other part of us that will make us feel whole.

Sandra Schumm notes the strong analogy in the novel between the narrator, C, and the memory of her mother. Schumm eloquently points out in her article the analogy between C's present state and her past ideas and fabrications about her mother that ultimately form the backbone of the narrative structure of *La meitat de l'ànima*. Her mother's life is not really the issue in her search for self-knowledge, but rather it is the relationship in the present that C tries to build with the past that is troubling, uncertain, and ultimately impossible. Schumm affirms that the ghostly mother in the novel, or more precisely, the absence of the mother figure that creates the need to reconstruct her past life, reflects the erasure of women from public life in postwar Spain ("Reparation" 139). Nevertheless, C's yearning to decipher the mysteries surrounding her mother's past is a signal that if she can understand her mother she will understand herself, and she will regain the part of herself that is lost and become whole.⁸

On the other hand, Isabel Cuñado points to the relative absence of the mother in the novel as a sign that the question of paternity really spurs on the narrative as the question of origin is thrown into doubt with the mysterious letters. Cuñado states that her goal is to analyze "la dimensión alegórica de la figura paterna y, más concretamente, sugerir que constituye un espacio mítico donde se cruzan las memorias personal, familiar e histórica" (21) [the allegorical dimension of the father figure and, more concretely, to suggest that it constitutes a mythic space where personal, family, and historical memories cross]. Cuñado points to the politicized nature of the two father figures in the novel—her mother's husband was a Nationalist sympathizer, and Albert Camus, her mother's supposed lover, represents the liberal Left. Cuñado concludes that C's interest in knowing the truth about Camus and whether or not he really was her biological father echoes her preference to be associated with Spain's Republican, antifascist past (24). Schumm and Cuñado both emphasize the parents and hypothetical parentage as the source of present-day trauma in the novel. However, the search for the other half of C's soul begins with writing, just as Riera writing down the names of her father's friends in the photograph in her memoir has a trans-historical power, the letters and diary in *La meitat* move her through history and allow her to invent a past she can never fully know or understand.

Maryellen Bieder has written of Riera that the "fascination with the intersection between writing and the author's cultural formation lies at the heart of her fiction" ("Cultural Capital" 55). In the analysis of the works in this essay, we have seen how language becomes the ultimate recourse not only for rendering the past somewhat "real" in the present but also for establishing some kind of connection between the present subject and past events. What really happens in the novel is not the discovery of C's mother's

past; we never find out if her death was an accident or a suicide and we never find out who is C's biological father. Instead, the novel foregrounds the protagonist's struggle with unreliable language, starting with the letters and extending to the interviews she conducts with several of her mother's friends and the nurse who cared for her ailing grandfather in Paris. These women all contradict each other by telling opposite versions of the past and thus debunking any notion of the veracity of eyewitness testimony. Not only is written language circumspect but so is oral tradition; storytelling and first-person testimony prove unreliable.

For example, C seeks out two of her mother's oldest friends in a desperate attempt to uncover information about her mother's activities and personality. Esther Brugada confirms that Cecilia "era una persona íntegra, d'una gran moralitat....Teníem una mateixa il·lusió: la prosperitat de la Pàtria" (70) [was an honest person of great morality....We had the same dream: the prosperity of the Homeland]. Esther refers to the Franco regime and the Nationalist cause that required a sense of familial duty and religious fervor from women during the postwar years. C admits that this version of her mother has nothing to do with her memories of her and, in fact, contradicts her mother's lackadaisical attitude towards attending Catholic mass on a regular basis (71). However, even more disconcerting is the version her mother's other friend, Rosa Montalbán, offers that leads C to conclude: "Casades com estaven amb persones que l'havien guanyada, no tenien altre remei que simular que pertanyien al règim. Havien hagut de fer l'esforç d'adaptar-se a la nova situació i això les unia" (74) [Married to people who had won, they didn't have any option other than to pretend they belonged to the regime. They had to make the effort to adapt to the new situation, and this united them]. Rosa's testimony places C's mother, Cecilia, on the opposite end of the spectrum; she was not a loyalist to the Franco regime, but rather had to fake her allegiance in order to maintain her marriage and family. Riera inserts in this dichotomy a political nod to the losing Republican side of the Civil War. Rosa discusses at some length the injustices suffered by the victims of the dictatorship as well as the failure of the transitional government to compensate the victims or to bring to justice the perpetrators (82). Rosa opines that the transitional government is "edificat sobre la negació de la memòria... El nostre és un país d'amnèsics" (82) [built on the negation of memory... Ours is a country of amnesiacs].

Just as C cannot get a clear picture of what her mother was like and what her true beliefs were, Spain's own historical memory is confused and blurred by the willful omission of facts and the lack of legislation that would bring some form of justice or at least compensation to the victims of the Civil War. The analogy between national and personal lack of memory is crucial to Riera's vision of the Civil War in her works; she writes from a personal perspective but is clearly conscious of how the War, the dictatorship, and the transition to democracy are very much a part of the current

Spanish social fabric. The lack of both personal and national memory creates chaos and confusion that literally weakens C physically as evidenced in her depression. The same can be said for the nation state that suffers and does not prosper culturally under the cloud of forgetting imposed by the socialist government's "Pacto de silencio" [Pact of silence].⁹ The analogy between the individual and the state originates with the analogy between mother and daughter. As Silverman notes, "analogy is the correspondence of two or more things *with* each other, and it structures every aspect of Being" (40; emphasis in original). Thus we are able to read the past but more importantly to understand how the past lives in the present. The idea of analogy as stated by Silverman surfaces in the novel as the relationship between C and her mother, as the connection between the past and the present, as well as the dependence between the text and the reader.

At the point in the novel where C becomes disheartened, discouraged, and takes refuge in her home in Barcelona we sense a shift in the tone and language. No longer is the search for information about Cecilia Balaguer an honest quest for facts that corroborate the letters, but an act of survival for C. She confesses she needs to relax and "deixar de donar voltes a l'obsessió de saber per què s'havia suïcidat la meua mare, qui era jo, qui em creia esser o que m'havia cregut esser fins aleshores" (108) [stop going over the obsession to know why my mother had committed suicide, who I was, who I thought I was, or what I had believed myself to be until now]. The analogy here becomes clear as her mother's identity melts into her own, not because of who Cecilia was or what she did but primarily because of the doubt surrounding her past and her death. The uncertainty of history is all C has to make sense of her own life and through this analogy between herself and her mother, or, more precisely, the present and the past, she struggles to reconcile the two. But the text provides answers by establishing a clear analogy between the writer and the reader that moves C toward reconciliation through her ability to articulate her fears in writing.

The function of analogy in the novel works on two distinct levels: one is C's search for that part of her that will make her feel whole and the other is a textual search for what Umberto Eco has called the "model reader" (qtd. in Everly 50). This reader understands the code of the text and interprets the meaning according to how the author generated it (Everly 51). This contract with the reader is part of what sets Riera's novel apart from the other historical novels about the Spanish Civil War. The analogy between the text and the reader's interpretation of it forms two parts of a whole. In this way, the text itself searches for its other half, its ideal other half found in the model reader. Several important studies focus on the interplay between textual veracity and the reader's capabilities to decipher the irony of twisted meaning in Riera's work (Stewart, Glenn "Ghostly Presences") and offer insight into the crucial role that language plays in creating a textual reality that competes with and at times contradicts the readers' "reality." Montserrat

Jofre Aparicio and Neus Samblancat Miranda confirm that the textual contract with the reader is part of what the narrator seeks:

Esta suma de conjeturas razonables, con la consiguiente implicación personal, conducen a la narradora a romper con su silencio, a desvelar su yo más íntimo, a través de la escritura de un texto que ha apelado y apela en su intrigante búsqueda de identidad a la complicidad y la memoria de su otra mitad: el público lector. (183)

[This sum of reasonable assumptions, with the resulting personal implications, leads the narrator to break her silence, to reveal her inner self through writing a text that in its intriguing search for identity has appealed and appeals to the complicity and the memory of her other half: the reading public.]

However, I would add that in addition to C's searching for her other half, it is the text itself that is not complete without the reading. Riera explains the connection between text and reader in her essay on the epistolary genre, "Grandeza y miseria de la epístola" [Grandeur and misery of the epistle]:

el texto literario y la carta tienen en común, en primer lugar, el hecho de que constituyen una comunicación indirecta y aplazada.... En segundo lugar ambas van a la búsqueda de un destinatario conocido, en el caso de la carta, y desconocido, casi siempre, en el de la literatura, con el objeto de captar su atención y, si es posible, atraerle y aún persuadirle. (147-48)

[the literary text and the letter have in common, in the first place, the fact that they both constitute an indirect and delayed communication.... Secondly, both search for a known recipient, in the case of the letter, and an unknown recipient, almost always, in the case of literature, with the objective of capturing his or her attention and if possible attracting and even persuading him or her.]

This narrative technique is combined in *La meitat* as the letters from C's mother play with the notion of a specific recipient, while C searches for an interlocutor and the text itself "searches" for the model reader.

C's fruitless quest for information about her mother's and father's political activities leads her to plead desperately for information about the letter bearer, Lluís G., who ultimately is the key to understanding the authenticity and origin of the letters. Thus the title of the novel becomes problematized as does the neat analogy to Plato's idea of every human searching for the other half of her soul: C's search, in effect, is not really for the past "truth" about her mother or father but rather a search *in the present* for the information (from Lluís G.) and the interlocutor (the reader)

who will legitimize her efforts in writing the text. Therefore, the literary text stands alone, regardless of the conclusions C can make based on the contradictory information she has gathered; the text as code and signifier (language) is what succeeds in finding its other half. The other piece in the puzzle is the role of the photographs in both the novel and the memoir that present yet another level of interpretation. The photographs are “read” visually and add another important element of symbolic language to the text.

Roland Barthes questions the role photography plays in interpreting our individual and collective relationship to the past: “I am the reference of every photograph, and this is what generated my astonishment in addressing myself to the fundamental question: why is it that I am alive *here and now*?” (*Camera Lucida* 84; emphasis in original). This sentiment could be taken directly from Riera’s memoir and novel; her interest in the past and particularly the lasting effects of the Spanish Civil War pertain to her, or to her protagonist C’s life in the present. The photographs literally embody the idea of time travel as Riera contemplates her father’s friends in the photograph we have analyzed here from the memoir and as C looks at the photographs of her mother in *La meitat*.

Toward the end of the novel, C finds some photographs of her mother during wartime. The difference between the unsigned letters and the photographs is immediately striking because the photograph is dated and the people are identified on the back. Therefore, the photo functions as testimony to a particular place and time and also as witness to the relationship between the people who appear in it. C informs the reader that the photo was taken in 1940 at Isle-Adam (173) and describes in detail what she discovers: “Per primera vegada veia la cara de la pobra tia Anna, que era bastant més alta i encara més maca que la meva mare. I, a banda, també per primera vegada, entre les persones retratades hi trobava gent coneguda. Pau Romeva havia estat diputat de la Generalitat republicana, i Jordi Riba era fill del poeta Carles Riba (173) [For the first time I saw my poor Aunt Anna’s face. She was much taller and prettier than my mother. And also for the first time, among the people photographed, I found people I knew. Pau Romeva had been a diplomat in Catalonia’s autonomous Republican government, and Jordi Riba was the poet Carles Riba’s son]. The description of the photograph in the novel takes us back to the first photograph I analyzed from the memoir. Riera lists names of people and their relationships in order to establish a personal connection with the ambiguous past.

The presence of C’s Aunt Anna in the photograph is significant because it confirms her existence; C’s mother never talked about her sister, because she was forcefully taken away by Nazi police in Paris and died in a concentration camp. C learns of her Aunt’s horrible fate in one of the letters written by her mother that she finds in the blue folder. The letter reveals the details of Anna’s death; C’s mother claims that their father had to decide which of the two girls would live, and he chose Cecilia (33).¹⁰ C explains that she

never knew about this tragic episode in her mother’s life, and she emphasizes the mystery and silence surrounding her Aunt. Her mother always referred to her sister as “la meva pobra germana” [my poor sister] (34), and C claims: “Tampoc en vaig veure cap retrat, un aspect que ara em crida l’atenció” (34) [I never saw a photograph of her either, something that now grabs my attention]. Why does the lack of photographic evidence of her Aunt cause suspicion? Language in the novel is untrustworthy; it can have double meanings or no meaning at all. At one point, C begins to doubt the truthfulness of her mother’s letters thinking that perhaps Cecilia invented the letters to throw someone off her trail. However, when C sees Anna among other people she recognizes in the photo a wave of nostalgia and relief washes over her as she eagerly names the people in the photo, and we readers also take stock of the concrete information the photo provides.¹¹ Susan Sontag writes that “each family constructs a portrait chronicle of itself—a portable kit of images that bears witness to its connectedness” (8), echoing Silverman’s idea of analogy as a way to relate to others in the world around us now and those in earlier times.

In *Temps d’innocència* Riera lovingly describes a photograph that her father took of her and her brother standing in front of a fountain on la Rambla de Palma. The short chapter titled “La mà del pare” [Father’s hand] evokes all of the power that the photograph carries although she says “La fotografia no té cap valor per si mateixa” (18) [The photograph has no value in itself] but for her it evokes the memory of walking with her father on la Rambla and the sensation of holding her father’s hand where there was no danger, no fear, no scolding, no school. In this case it is not even the image in the photo but a feeling it provokes in the viewer that creates a connection to the past. This connection stems from a particular memory for Riera and she tells us the secret code of the photograph so that we may understand her relationship to it and to the past. Again Silverman is helpful in understanding the way analogy works here: “The analogy that comes into existence when a photograph locates one of its relatives is historical in nature; it links the past to the present. It remains in a state of latency, though, until we recognize it” (179). Thus the photograph exhibits an encoded language that is akin to the letters in the novel; the content does not reveal a truth but rather suggests a feeling, an emotion, not available to every viewer. This problematizes the testimonial quality of photography because, as Sontag suggests, “photographs are as much an interpretation of the world as painting and drawings are” (7). Looking back on the photograph of Riera’s father’s friends that she swore never to name, the photo of C’s Aunt Anna from the novel, and the photo of Riera by the fountain we realize that Sontag’s claim is true. The images are only a flash of the past, a constructed, stylized moment that leaves out as much as it reveals. Only with additional information, such as the identity of the figures and the place, time, and year that indicate a political circumstance, do the photos acquire layers of meaning.

As a way of concluding, which is a difficult task when the texts themselves are so inconclusive, we can affirm that through writing the subject is able to reconcile herself with a dubious past. As Bieder eloquently points out about C's quest: "By tracking her mother's steps, the narrator has made clear, to her readers if not to herself, that identity is as much performance and perception as it is fact" ("Carme Riera" 175). What differentiates Riera's works from other texts about the Spanish Civil War is her focus on the present and on her personal relationship to past events, and also, perhaps more significantly, Riera emphasizes the power of language that creates an enduring bond between text and reader. Through the family album, the personal letters, and the photographs that create a performance of the past, the subject is able to reconcile her position in the present and, as Silverman remarks, realize that the past "shows us not who we are, or who we will be, but rather who we are in the process of becoming" (179). This process functions as an integral element in Riera's works. Not only do the ghosts of the Civil War loom large in her texts, but also the writing subject grapples with meaning and memory and ultimately does not recover truth or fact, instigating a change in how notions of history are perceived, recorded, and transmitted.

Notes

1. All English translations are my own.
2. See Glenn "Las cartas de amor" on verbal seduction in Riera's writing.
3. Ana Luengo confirms that the War emerged as a particularly spirited literary topic at the end of the 1990s when "la Guerra Civil comenzaba a considerarse como un tema literario de importancia que había que animar a divulgarse, así como a los lectores y lectoras a encararse con él" (11) [the Civil War began to be considered an important literary topic that it was necessary to popularize, just as readers needed to confront it]. Luengo includes in her study *El jinete polaco* [The Polish rider] (1991) by Antonio Muñoz Molina, *Cambio de bandera* [A change of flag] (1991) by Félix de Azúa, *La hija del caníbal* [The cannibal's daughter] (1997) by Rosa Montero, *Cielos de barro* [Skies of mud] (2000) by Dulce Chacón, *La caída de Madrid* [The fall of Madrid] (2000) by Rafael Chirbes, and *Soldados de Salamina*. See also studies by Amago and Jerez-Farrán, Bercerra, Ferrán, and López-Quñones.
4. Other important works by Riera include: *Una primavera per a Domenico Guarini* [A springtime for Domenico Guarini] (1981) awarded the Prudenci Bertrana Prize, *Qüestió d'amor propi* [A Matter of Self-esteem and Other Stories] (1987), *Joc de miralls* [Mirror Images] (1989) awarded the Ramon Llull Prize, and *Cap al cel obert* [Toward the open sky] (2000). The Autonomous Government of Catalonia awarded Riera the Cross of Saint George in 2000.
5. The Castilian version curiously leaves out the final sentence about the invisible men who ate everything and instead ends with "los conspiradores que puedo identificar en la fotografía..." (*Tiempo de inocencia* 81) [the conspirators that I can identify in the photograph]. This change in language robs the Castilian version of the subtle humor and ironic twist at the end as we imagine the tense

- political meeting run by a group of men eating up every last crumb of the delicate pastries.
6. Silverman's fascinating analysis of Orpheus and Eurydice points to various interpretations of the myth that posit Eurydice in an Eve-like role as she is the cause of the man's "fall"; it is her beauty and Orpheus's love of her that *make* him look back as they are ascending from Hades, lose her, and suffer the consequences.
 7. The protagonist who appears as C in the novel and the mysterious man are both parallels to Carmen Martín Gaité's novel *El cuarto de atrás* [The Back Room] from 1978. Both novels expose the difficulty faced by women writers to express a "truth" and both depend on a stranger for information and inspiration. However, both novels point to the triumph of women's writing when each protagonist produces a text in her own voice. In Riera's novel, the protagonist's name, C, also echoes her mother's name, Cecilia. See Mario Santana for a more extensive analysis.
 8. See Schumm's *Mother and Myth in Spanish Novels* for an intriguing study of the erasure and literary reconstruction of the mother figure in postwar Spanish literature.
 9. The Pact of silence included legalizing the Far-Left political parties in Spain after the dictatorship. In 1977 the Communist Party (PCE) abandoned ties to Soviet ideologies as did the Socialist Party (PSOE), thus erasing their theoretical history and the figures that were so influential in bringing Marxism, Leninism, etc. to Spain, such as Dolores Ibárruri, *La Pasionaria*. See Vilarós (8–10).
 10. Riera makes the connection to William Styron's *Sophie's Choice* explicit in the text but she refers to the film version she saw on the flight home from the United States (38). The Nazis inflicted this kind of trauma on their prisoners to observe the psychological repercussions in what they considered lesser races or disturbed individuals, such as unpatriotic Leftists.
 11. Carles Riba (1853–1959), whose son C mentions as one of the people in the photo, was a celebrated Catalan poet who went into exile in France because of his involvement with the Spanish Republic. By including the son of an historical figure in the photo of C's grandfather, mother, and aunt, the text again alludes to the porous nature of fact and fiction pointing to the fluidity of personal and historical memory.

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14 Dead Woman Walking

"Historical Memory," Trauma, and Adaptation in Dulce Chacón's *La voz dormida*

Michael Ugarte

The past lives in you as memories, but memories in themselves are not the problem.... It is only when memories, that is to say, thoughts about the past take you over completely that they turn into a burden, turn problematic, and become part of your sense of self.

—(Eckhart Tolle, *A New Earth* 140, writing on "the pain-body")

Does Eckhart Tolle's popular writing about "pain body" have anything to do with the "historical memory" of the Spanish Civil War? I contend that it does, despite the self-help language with which Tolle describes how the past becomes part of identity and curtails achieving an ego-free consciousness. Like much self-help (or inspirational) writing, the notion of "pain body"—for Tolle an individual's obsession with what he-she sees as past wrongs—is too simple for those of us struggling with the vestiges of the Franco insurgency of 1936. At the same time there is a certain validity to the notion of "collective pain body" (Tolle 141). In this essay I explore the notion of trauma (another term for "pain body" of sorts) in Dulce Chacón's stirring Spanish Civil War novel *La voz dormida* [translated into English as *The Sleeping Voice*] in conjunction with its film adaptation directed by Benito Zambrano.

I shield my words "historical memory" with quotation marks because it is a term or an idea that many have employed in various contexts and significations. While there are many acceptations of the term, for the purposes of this essay I am comfortable with Geoffrey Cubitt's understanding of what he prefers to call "social memory" as "the processes by which knowledge and awareness of the past are generated and maintained in human society." For Cubitt history is "part of social memory" since it functions "as an intellectual discipline geared to the production and extension of such a knowledge and such an awareness" (*History and Memory* 25). The question, then, is how do they overlap; where does history begin and memory end? While Cubitt, a historian, does not directly answer this question, he does offer a compelling way through which to inspect history in conjunction with social memory. Surprisingly for a historian, he says they are both discourses: "The broader conceptual contexts within which the twin vocabularies of history and memory take on meaning is, of course, that of discourse on the relationship between past and present" (27).¹