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Mnemonic Migration in Max Aub: Reframing the Spanish Civil War as a Transnational Phenomenon

This paper explores the entanglements between the memory of the victims of Francoism and the memory of the victims of fascism in Europe through the lens of Max Aub's oeuvre. The Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) has been reframed in recent decades as a prelude to the Second World War, and has been described by various historians as the beginning of the stream of violence that spread across Europe in the middle of the twentieth century (Preston 2015). The violence that unfolded on Spanish soil has recently been contextualised through a transnational European lens rather than being considered the result of national political and social tensions. This transnational view of the Spanish Civil War has undoubtedly reframed the way it is being remembered, as metaphors, cultural frames, and mnemonic figures derived from transnational European memories of the violence of the twentieth century are increasingly being used to depict the victims of Francoism.

Spanish history in the twentieth century saw the havoc caused by the Civil War of 1936–1939, the merciless Francoist repression in 1939–1977 of the supporters of the Second Spanish Republic, and the lack of justice during the Spanish transition to democracy in 1977–1983, all of which have left lasting traces within Spanish soil, where around 114,000 unidentified victims, known as *subterrados*, are still waiting in common graves for their bodies to be recovered and for their memories to be restituted. Various studies have observed how the social movement that has been striving to recover these bodies since the 1990s has engaged with the transnational framework that is built on the memory of the Holocaust (Hristova 2016). This has foregrounded the debate about how far the Holocaust can be compared to other historical crimes and thus work as a kernel for the remembrance of those events. The formation of European memory at the end of the twentieth century has ultimately reinforced comparisons between the Holocaust and the Spanish Civil War.

The connections underlying the transnational memory of the Holocaust and other events have been theorised most powerfully through the concept of cosmopolitan memory of Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, and Michael Rothberg's idea of multidirectional memory. Levy and Sznaider (2006) argue that the transnational dimension of the memory of the Shoah highlights possible ways of transcending ethnic and local ties, even to the extent of depicting different stories of violence

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by resorting to the mnemonic frames that are embedded within the memory of the Holocaust. Through a process of decontextualisation, the memory of the victims of the Shoah becomes a universal symbol of human suffering that may play a role, through comparison, in the remembrance of those who have suffered state-sponsored violence elsewhere. Rothberg similarly claims that memories are not elaborated solely in a homogeneous and national space, but that on the contrary, it is within the global and interconnected public sphere that their contents and functions are modulated: "The content of a memory has no intrinsic meaning but takes on meaning precisely in relation to other memories in a network of associations" (2009, 5). These transnational frames for remembering the past are undoubtedly key in the Spanish context. Historians, journalists, and anthropologists within the social movement that seeks to recover historical memory in Spain have framed the victims of Francoism using figures and symbols from the universalised memory of the Holocaust. This has resulted in the memories of the crimes committed on Spanish soil intertwining with the memory of the Holocaust. These connections have then reinforced different historical comparisons, between the supporters of the Second Spanish Republic who ended up in Nazi concentration camps and the Jewish victims of Nazism, and between Hitler and Mussolini and their ally in Spain, the dictator Francisco Franco. Such analogies have strengthened the demands of the Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory in Spain.

These new transnational trends have led to political debates around the remembrance of this controversial past. The transnational narrative directly contests the hegemonic historical narratives that were popular during the 1970s and that underlie the Spanish transition and the Pact of Forgetting. The hegemonic narrative is that the Spanish Civil War was a tragedy, a collective madness for which all of Spanish society bears the responsibility, and from this perspective, there were no victors or vanquished, and no perpetrators or victims. All of Spanish society was equally to blame. The transnational narrative by contrast embeds the memory of the victims of Francoism, criminalises Franco as one of Hitler's allies, and places the blame for the crimes committed in the war squarely on his shoulders. In this way the transnational memory undermines the view of the war that held both parties equally to blame for the crimes.

These new transnational depictions of Spanish history draw from the social influence of different accounts of the past in contemporary literature and films, which need to be explored in detail. The perspective endorsed by this paper echoes not only the transnational perspective on the remembrance of the Spanish Civil War, but also what could be labelled as a turn to mediality in memory studies. As Erll and Rigney claim, "media provides frameworks for shaping both experiences and memory" (2009, 9). In this regard, the role of literature in shaping the collective memory cannot be emphasised enough: "literature proactively contributes

to the negotiation of cultural memory" (Neumann 2008, 335), even to the extent of providing the resources to contest a particular depiction of the past. This is why literature can be said to be filled by a "critical force that undermines hegemonic views of the past" (Rigney 2008, 348).

This chapter focuses on the role of the oeuvre of Spanish writer Max Aub (1903–1972) in reframing the contemporary cultural memory of the Spanish Civil War within the transnational perspective. Aub produced numerous novels, theatre plays and essays that stand out not only for their stylistic quality, but also for the events they depict. His works took a ground-breaking approach to the memory of the Spanish Civil War and exile, as his transnational and Jewish background offered new avenues for reframing complex events in Spanish and European history. Aub was born in France to German and French Jewish parents, but grew up in Spain and then emigrated to Mexico to escape the Franco regime. His literature was first disseminated outside Spain and only later in Spain itself, and so it provides fertile ground for exploring through literature how memory travels. Aub's writings resulted from his efforts to recover and keep alive the memory of the supporters of the Second Spanish Republic, and the remembrance framed by his literature acts against the backdrop of various politics of memory that sought during both the dictatorship and the transition to erase the stories and rights of the victims of Francoism. Moreover, his work blurs the borders between the Spanish and the European aspects of the civil war, thus undermining the hegemonic views of the past. This means that analysing the travels of Aub's texts during and after his exile to Mexico offers a priceless opportunity to delve further into how memories of trauma, exile, and rootlessness travel through literature.

Transnationality, statelessness, and writing out of space

Aub's background deeply influenced his transnational perspective on the memories of the Spanish Civil War. His life was marked by his experience of exile. He was born in Paris and moved to Spain when he was eleven with his family after the outbreak of the First World War. He grew up in Valencia and his experience there formed his sense of belonging to Spain, which never faded even though he was the son of a German father and a French Jewish mother. During the 1930s, Aub became deeply involved in the Second Spanish Republic of 1931–1936, and so after the republic was defeated in the Spanish Civil War of 1936–1939, he had to escape from Spain to France. However, the return to his country of

birth turned out to be deeply disappointing (Malgat 2008). His position as an exile was entrenched by the waves of violence that engulfed Europe in the middle of the twentieth century from the Spanish Civil War to the Second World War. False reports accused him of being a communist agent in France and so he was imprisoned in the French concentration camp of Verget, and later in Djelfa, Algeria. These concentration camps were created to control the Spanish population that had arrived at the French borders at the end of the Spanish Civil War. This experience gave birth to a motif in Aub's poetic imagination as he lamented the absence of his fatherland because of the war and the spread of violence and fascism. After suffering the hardships of the Djelfa camp for a couple of months, Aub managed to escape to Mexico, reaching Veracruz and then Mexico City, where he spent most of the rest of his life. Exile thus became permanent for Aub, and it was only several decades later, in 1969, that he was allowed to return to Spain to visit a country that he could not recognise as his former home. His diary *The Blind Chicken* (*La Gallina Ciega*, 2015b [1971]) presents his experiences in Spain, which he summarises by saying: "I am a tourist in reverse. I came to see what no longer exists" (Aub, *La gallina ciega*, 39).[1] Aub was therefore an exile who could not return to his homeland as it did not exist anymore (Hirsch 2011). This life experience undoubtedly accounts for Aub's transnational perspective, which was also reinforced by his multilingualism. He was able to read and write in Spanish, French and German, though he wrote creatively only in the language he learned in Spain.

His experiences meant that Aub's writing is conditioned by permanent traumatic feelings of rootlessness and longing for a homeland he could never return to. Transnationality from his viewpoint was not a particular historical experience but rather his defining identity. Sebastiaan Faber notes that "Max Aub presents himself as the conscience of exile par excellence" (2002, 18). Moreover, the impossibility of returning to the Spain he had been raised in strengthened his attachment to it: "The attachment to Spain had been by choice and that choice was made for life" (Balibrea 2014, 64). Furthermore, his time in the Djelfa concentration camp brought to the fore the transnational dimension of his experience that he later presented in his literature, as his depiction of the trauma of living as an inmate under harsh conditions is similar to the stories that emerged from the various European camps. Aub's literature in this way testifies not only to the dreadful experience of the Spanish Civil War, but also to the tragedy that engulfed other European democracies during the 1930s and 1940s.

Aub's permanent experience of exile explains why rootlessness is the basis of his writing, which has given his literature an aporetic sense. While he was in exile

1 Throughout this chapter translations of Spanish material are my own.

in Mexico, Aub tried to describe, tell stories of, and keep contact with the homeland he longed for, but the persistent physical distance between him and Spain made it impossible for him to speak of and realistically describe the events that were unfolding in Spain at the time. He was thus forced to write about Spain from an unbridgeable distance, and this marked the style and structure of his writing. His oeuvre encompasses different literary genres, from poetry to short stories, and from novels to theatre plays. Despite the range of styles and genres that he employed, there is an underlying trend within Aub's writing that is the attempt to engage critically with Spanish history and culture despite his exile.

These endeavours are also intertwined with Aub's Jewish background, which is given prominence as it underlies his reframing of the past, and deeply conditions the transmission of his memories. Consequently, Jewishness not only permeates most of Aub's writing, but also explains why and how the memories in his writing travelled between Spain and America. Similarly, his Jewish background also explains the ways in which the memories displayed in his work travelled back to Spain and were read again, decades after he himself had passed away. In the later recovery of his works, this background has invited comparisons and analogies between the Holocaust and the Republican stories of exile, as is explored at the end of this chapter.

Since the transnational frame underlies the recovery of the memory of the Spanish victims of Francoism, Aub's texts have propelled this reframing of the memories of the Spanish twentieth century. That he was both Jewish and a Spanish exile accounts for the connection between the two stories of victimhood, those of the victims of Francoism and of the victims of Nazism, which is expressed by the depiction of events in his writing and by the display of memories in the travels of his works. These analogies exist in different texts by Aub. One is the tale *Raven's Manuscript* (*Manuscrito cuervo*, 1946), which offers an allegory of life in a concentration camp in the mid-twentieth century from the perspective of a raven as an external observer. From the raven's viewpoint, the hardships of the inmates striving for survival are deeply decontextualised. The reader never gets to know where the camp is located, and the events described could be taking place in a Nazi concentration camp in Europe or in a French concentration camp in Algeria. This blurs the differences between Spanish and Jewish stories of victimhood as the narrative focuses on the random violence the prisoners suffer only because of the place they came from: "Man, for his own sake is nothing [...] His value depends on the place he came from, on his language" (Aub 2011, 105). This may explain why, when Aub's work started to be republished again in Spain at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century, these works have reframed the remembrance of a traumatic and contested past in a groundbreakingly transnational way.

Literature as historical testimony?

These biographical and historical circumstances that he faced meant that Aub's writing in exile resulted from his stubborn effort to keep alive the memory of the supporters of the Second Spanish Republic in the decades that followed the end of the conflict, and so it can be considered a historical testimony. Aub suggests this possibility for some of his texts: "My *Campos* are not novels, but chronicles. And in that sense *Saint John, No, Diary of Djelfa* and so many other things are not, and do not want to be, anything but testimony" (1998, 236). Reframing Aub's literature as historical testimony does not, however, mean that Aub endorsed a realistic representation of history. Although he narrates the events he had witnessed in the Spanish Civil War and in the French concentration camps, their traumatic nature prevented him from depicting them realistically. He resorted instead to polyphonic narratives that employ multiple voices that fragment the plot and withhold any possibility of realistic representation. Despite his attempts to offer a lucid and critical testimony of the hardships suffered by the supporters of the Second Spanish Republic, Aub's experiences of trauma and exile are the reason why he cannot achieve this. His literature is "the expression of the impossibility of realist writing" (Faber 2002). Aub was thus caught between the push of bearing witness to the historical events he had lived through and the pull of their overwhelming nature, which escapes realist representation.

These tensions can be explored further by looking into Aub's *Blue Pages* (*Páginas azúles*), which comes in the final part of *The Field of Almond Trees* (*Campo de almendros*, 1965). This short text interrupts the narrative of the traumatic events surrounding the last supporters of the Second Spanish Republic at the end of the Spanish Civil War and introduces Aub's own considerations about whether or how to plot such historical experiences. As Daniel Aguirre-Oteiza outlines, *Blue Pages* is a "ten-page excursus of meta-literary reflection on the conditions of possibility for narrating the experiences of thousands of Republicans held in Francoist concentration camps" (Aguirre-Oteiza 2020, 135). This is how Aub expressed the difficulties of realistic representation:

> Twenty, thirty, forty thousand people crammed into the Port; plus thirty thousand in the city, not counting the thirty thousand who are arriving and will not arrive. Thirty thousand I can't talk about, thirty thousand who can't sleep, thirty thousand who know they are lost. Numbers are never exact. To give an idea of the reality, the author would need thousands of skulls, to squeeze out thousands of convoluted thoughts (if they emerge from the skulls), to explain the tortures, the hopes, the disappointments of those piled up in the harbour, asleep, awake, transient. He is not sure he wants to because he is too old to do it. He cannot. (Aub 2019, 420)

Nonetheless, the gap between the traumatic experiences and writing does not prevent such memories being represented in his works. His different novels comprising *The Magic Labyrinth* (*El laberinto mágico*, 1943–1968) stand out in particular for their new ways of combining fiction, testimony, and meta-fiction to provide new avenues for reframing and remembering the Spanish Civil War. The different ways of plotting the historical events in his Campos are polyphonic and self-reflexive. They are polyphonic because different testimonial voices pervade his narrative and interact with each other so chaotically that they prevent a common thread forming through the narrative. His writing techniques were self-reflexive insofar as the problems underlying the act of writing are brought up in the text, as his *Blue Pages* evidences. This is why Michael Ugarte framed Aub's writing as "ambivalent and fragmentary" (1989, 45). By endorsing a meta-discursive and self-reflexive perspective on the difficulties of transmitting the memory of those events to new generations in Spain, Aub's writing expresses a longing for this memory to survive and be displayed. In the last book of *The Magic Labyrinth*, *The Field of Almond Trees*, Claude Piquer, the father of a child who observes dumbfounded the exile of the last supporters of the Spanish Second Republic, is trying to move through Alicante's harbour and orders his son:

> Those that you see now, scattered, battered, furious, flattened, unshaven, unwashed, filthy, dirty, tired, biting, disgusting, broken, are, however, don't forget it son, don't ever forget it no matter what, they are the best of Spain, the only ones who, truly, have achieved, without anything, with their hands, against fascism, against the military, against the powerful, for justice alone; each one in their own way, in their own way, as they could, without caring about their comfort, their family, their money. Those you see, broken Spaniards, defeated, overcrowded, wounded, sleepy, half dead, still hoping to escape, are, don't forget, the best in the world. It is not beautiful. But it is the best thing in the world. (Aub 2019, 415)

Nonetheless, such an imperative to remember may not endure and transcend the borders of space and time, as Aub's narrator ponders: "Claudio Piqueras [...] speaks the truth. I would have wanted what he is saying to his son to remain indelibly engraved in his memory. He knows it is not possible and he is truly sorry for that" (Aub 2019, 416). Interestingly, these references to the difficulty or impossibility of displaying memories of war and exile have been highlighted by various readers of Aub as a new mnemonic device that points at the transmission of these memories (Buschmann 2022). Contemporary critiques of Aub's literature have outlined how referring to the drama of Spanish exile as a consequence of not being heard or understood by new generations in Spain has worked as a path for introducing readers to particular stories and memories of the exiled Spanish. Similarly, the impossibility of referentiality within Aub's writing led him to adopt different

representation techniques to make this impossibility explicit and thus provide new avenues for adventurous readers to follow to recover his memories.

The first technique can be defined as blurring the limits between fiction and historical accuracy (Rigney 2014). As Javier Zapatero asserts, "the lie of fiction can more effectively convey reality" (2014, 97). Within the different novels that make up *The Magic Labyrinth*, fictional characters interact with historical ones in a distinctive way that serves Aub's thematic purposes. In Aub's work, historical characters often interact with fictional ones in situations that may not be historically accurate. This interplay allows him to explore hypothetical scenarios, alternative stories, and the impact of personal relations on different historical events. Thus Aub writes from the "threshold between historical figures and fictional characters" (Aguirre-Oteiza 2020, 133) by subtly introducing autobiographical experiences through the perspectives of the characters. The introduction of such historical references may support the accuracy of Aub's novels, and by co-existing with these historical characters, the fictional ones may come to represent all the nameless subjects who have not been given a voice within the historical discourse, thus making Aub's literature even more powerful as a medium of different forgotten memories.

Secondly, the traumatic nature of the events that Aub aims to grasp is reflected in a particular temporality that underlies a significant part of his work. Michael Ugarte states that Aub's writing reveals "the impossibility of recovering and ordering the past from the place and time of exile" (1989, 284). Since traumatic experiences are defined as provoking a "crisis of temporality" in which the unsettling past continues to haunt the present, Aub's literature does not fit in with the linear temporality of historical events. On the contrary indeed, the relation between the present and the past within Aub's writing is not only continuous but also dialectical. Aub's tendency to play with temporality when narrating historical events is clear from the way he resorts to different uchronias[2] of twentieth-century Spanish history, such as in *The True Story of the Day in which Francisco Franco Dies* (*La verdadera historia de la muerte de Francisco Franco*, 1960), in which Aub speculates about what would have happened if historical events had unfolded differently. Uchronias undoubtedly reframe and disturb linear and homogeneous temporality as they present events that are different from the historical ones, which highlights the extent to which history could have happened differently. Although such historical scenarios are presented as uchronias, the realistic accuracy with which they are depicted stimulates the imagination and retrospectively reinforces the idea

2 Ucrhonias are fictional reconstructions in the past that are based upon events that could have happened but did not.

that changes within history could have been possible. Mari Paz Balibrea (2008, 207) argues that Aub writes from a different temporality, which gives him different strategies for putting the actual reality before the critical gaze. By disrupting linear temporality and resorting to uchronias, Aub "presents reality as susceptible to being reframed by man" (Aznar Soler 2003, 49).

The transnational Spanish Civil War in Max Aub

Both Aub's transnational background and his use of critical and non-realistic writing techniques paved the way for him to reframe and display the memory of the Spanish Civil War in a transnational way. When he deals with memories of historical events that unfolded during the 1930s and 1940s, Aub's "border-crossing, cross-historical, plurivocal, and multilingual writing" (Aguirre-Oteiza 2020, 145) brings to the fore the entanglements between Spanish and European twentieth-century history.

The European dimension of his writing, if it is considered a mnemonic medium, is evidenced primarily in his early writings on concentration camps. By bearing witness to the traumatic experiences he suffered in Vernet and Djelfa, Aub undoubtedly engages with a transnational and universal topic. The debate on similarities and analogies between Nazi and French concentration camps is far-reaching (Naharro-Calderón 2006) in contemporary literature and sheds light on the extent to which Aub's *Djelfa Diary*, like the literature on the Holocaust concentration camps,[3] is intended to express the impossibility of describing the level of dehumanisation and systematic violence that he went through. Although Aub did not consciously establish analogies between the experience he suffered and the hardships of the Jewish inmates in Nazi concentration camps, his writing nevertheless invites such comparisons. José María Naharro-Calderón (2017) brings to the fore the similarities between Aub's representation of Djelfa and Vernet on the one hand, and the depictions of Nazi concentration camps in the Holocaust literature on the other, by suggesting that the common ground between them is the space in which random and senseless violence has become the basic rule of daily life. The internment of undesirable groups, the forced labour, the harsh conditions, and other similar things, were common features of both the Nazi and French concentration camps after all. In Aub's *Raven's Manuscript* mentioned above, the raven as the external observer narrates what it witnessed in a concentration camp by documenting the senseless logic underlying life in those circumstances:

3 For the impossibility of representing Holocaust trauma, see Langer 1991.

"The inmates were brought here by an administration. This administration has disappeared, but the men are still here. Another one happened to that administration, which brings more inmates. As the former cannot claim the administration that brought them here, because it no longer exists, they have no one to turn to request their freedom, and here they will continue until death" (Aub 2011, 83).

Different parts of Aub's work intertwine the remembrance of the victims of Francoism and that of the victims of Nazism by connecting them strongly to how the story unfolds. This is particularly clear in theatre plays such as *For Some Time Now* (*De algún tiempo a esta parte*, 1949), *The Kidnapping of Europe (El rapto de Europa*, 1946), *Dying To Close One's Eyes (Morir por cerrar los ojos,* 2007 [1944]), and *Saint John* (*San Juan*, 1942), in ways that are discussed below.

Aub's plays and novels show the Second Spanish Republic as founded upon the European ideals of modernity and enlightenment. They show that Spanish society had striven to eliminate the burden of reactive and conservative social and political forces that had for decades hindered the foundation of a liberal and modern democracy in Spain. Through this European lens, the conflict in which the Second Spanish Republic became involved could be understood as a struggle for core European cultural values. Similarly, the forces that stopped such a project being fulfilled in Spain were the same as the ones that threatened the foundation of European democracies. This analogy is expressed throughout Aub's work, and for instance the main character in *From Some Time Now* (2018 [1949]), claims in a monologue set in Austria after the annexation that: "It seems that there, in Spain, the Republic was a bit like ours and that they [the fascists] wanted to take power, like here; but Germany is far away and they could not prevent the people from opposing it" (Aub 2018, 53).

This transnational perspective explains why Aub was so critical of other European democracies that abandoned the Spanish Republic. In his view, signing the non-intervention pact meant that France and the United Kingdom reinforced the anti-democratic political forces that finally engulfed Spain and then the other democracies as well. Spain is depicted in this regard as the first victim of what Aub defines as the kidnapping of Europe (*El rapto de Europa,* 1946), which finally affected the entire continent. This perspective is present in one of his most famous plays, *Dying To Close One's Eyes.* In this play, the dialogue between the characters gives rise to comparisons between the suffering of the French after the Nazi invasion and the Spanish Civil War.

> Luisa: If it wasn't for you, I would be at home in Neuilly, with my dogs, and not here, lost, abandoned on a road. It's because of you that we have a war. All that infectious filth of Spaniards [...] María: That's enough, madam. If you're afraid, it's not my fault. Do you hear the bombings? They are the same ones who bombed Barcelona. (Aub 2007, 190)

Another common feature in the stories of both the Nazi and Francoist victims that Aub employs in his work, and one that is directly bound to his experience, is exile and homelessness. This diasporic background is admittedly reinforced through his Jewish origins, which accounts for "the Spanish and Jewish feeling of having no future" (Muñoz Molina 1999, 82) that he feels becoming embedded in his writing.

When they try to flee into exile, the victims of Francoism are depicted as homeless. In *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age* Daniel Levy and Nathan Sznaider (2006) suggest it is precisely the diasporic and extra-national condition of Jewish history that accounts for the memory of their suffering being tied to the cosmopolitan memory that may encompass historical cases other than Jewish ones. Aub explores this feature of Jewish history in his play *San Juan. San Juan* tells the tragic story of a boat loaded with a large group of Jews trying to escape antisemitism in the 1930s. The reader does not know where they come from or where they are. They are desperately wandering across the Mediterranean trying to find a safe harbour and a new home, but they are rejected from every place they try to land outside Germany. Their tragic destiny is initially framed within the long story of the Jewish Diaspora, with San Juan representing yet another episode within it. This is how Esthers, one of the characters in the play, presents their situation: "More than fifteen hundred pogroms. Pillage, rape, and death. I hoped the whole world was going to rise up and avenge us. But nothing happens. Only silence. Snow on the ruins. And oblivion" (Aub 2006, 221). Saint John goes beyond this Jewish and victim-centred frame though, precisely because this story of victimhood suddenly turns into a narrative of the resistance of different members of the group. By describing the suffering of the exiles who found no haven, the story presents those countries that did not allow the boat to land as responsible for the situation. The story of Saint John thus turns into a political denunciation of the countries that did not join the struggle against fascism and fight to protect its victims. By echoing the tragedy of the Jews in Europe, this play therefore also becomes a strong criticism of the non-intervention pact of the Spanish Civil War. The story seems in this way to encompass other narratives of suffering, such as that of the Spanish victims of Francoism.

These examples of Aub's work depict how different stories of victimisation are intertwined, thus bringing to the fore the transnational and European perspectives, which Aub uses to recuperate the memory of the Spanish Civil War and his exile. In order to grasp the transnational and European grounding of the memory of Spanish twentieth-century history as it is displayed and reframed by Aub though, it is necessary to investigate how such "mediated memory" of the war and exile has been retroactively reshaped. As Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney point out, "there is no mediation without remediation" (2009, 4). Remediation, a "form of diachronic intermediality", is key to understanding the extent to which Aub's

literature has contributed to reshaping contemporary memory of the Spanish Civil War.

Remediation: *Sefarad* and Max Aub in twenty-first-century Spain

Despite the amount that Aub wrote on the Spanish Civil War, it was only at the turn of the twenty-first century that his legacy started to regain its place in the public sphere. Mexican publishing houses including Fondo de Cultura Económica and UNAM published some of his novels and tales during his exile in Mexico, but despite their value as historical evidence of the Spanish Civil War, his writings did not reach a wider audience in the local cultural space of Mexico. The majority of his readers were from the community of Spanish exiles in Mexico, and so Aub's oeuvre provided a mnemonic space for Spanish exiles to remember their own experiences during the war. Another group of readers of Aub was the Mexican Jewish community, which was fascinated by the relationship of Aub's writing to the Jewish story. This explains why the Mexican Jewish community read and contacted the Spanish writer even though Aub's literature did not reach larger audiences in Mexico. According to Raúl Cardiel Reyes, "his close relations with the Mexican Jewish community were known" (1973, 97). This affinity is also evidenced by the antisemitic reception of his writing in Mexico. As José-Ramón López-Garcia outlines, "Aub's Jewish status was brought up in antisemitic attacks by some members of Mexican culture, but also, in many other cases, that origin contributed to the favourable reception of Aub as a manifestation of his cosmopolitanism and belonging to a prestigious tradition of cultural internationalism" (2013, 63). The reception of his works in Spain during the dictatorship and the transition to democracy was even more disappointing. The publication and distribution of his works was limited and subject to censorship, and even in the 1970s after the censorship was lifted, the distribution and publication of his novels proceeded very slowly, and he was not able to witness it as he passed away in 1973. Aub (*La gallina ciega*, 48) himself said that the difficulties of publishing and reaching a larger audience in Spain weighed heavily on him, though during the 1960s and 1970s, he managed to publish some of his most important texts in Spain. The different novels in *The Magic Labyrinth* series were published by Alfaguara in 1978 for instance, though the books did not reach the audience Aub would have expected. Only after the movement for the recovery of historical memory emerged in the 2000s has Aub's oeuvre gained popularity as a testimony of Francoism. The different novels of *The Magic Labyrinth* started to spark readers' interest and to be reedited again, this time by the publish-

ing house Cuaderno del Vigía. The resurgence of Aub's works should therefore be considered as part of the process of the recovery of memory in contemporary Spain. The transnational turn, which has supported the rehabilitation of the victims of Francoism and exile in Spain, aligns with Aub's perspective and reinforces it, as his writing on French concentration camps facilitates comparisons between the victims of Francoism and the victims of Nazism. This transnational background has consequently determined how Aub's literature is framed and read, thus opening the door to new avenues for its mnemonic migration. Given this, it may be worth outlining some insights into the recovery and reframing of Aub's literature in contemporary Spain.

Aguirre-Oteiza notes that the recovery of Aub's work in contemporary Spain "has been largely informed by Antonio Muñoz Molina's worthy effort as a public intellectual to bring to light neglected or forgotten testimonial accounts by Spanish Republican writers who became exiles as a result of the war" (2020, 163). This means that Aub's relevance for Muñoz Molina, who is one of the most important Spanish writers in contemporary literature, cannot be emphasised enough. Antonio Muñoz Molina is a contemporary Spanish writer known for his exploration of memory, identity and history. He frequently refers to Aub's particular way of addressing the memory of the Spanish Civil War in his work. In his official speech when he became a member of the Spanish Royal Academy in 1996 (*Discurso de ingreso en la Real Academia Española de 1996*, 2004), Muñoz Molina revised and restaged Aub's work *The Spanish Theatre Brought to Light in the Darkness of Our Times (El teatro Española sacado a la luz de las tinieblas de nuestro tiempo*, 1942). Aub's fictional text is a creation in which he speculates about what would have happened if the civil war had not taken place and his literary production had been rewarded by the Spanish Royal Academy. Muñoz Molina's speech on Aub's work highlights the transnational nature of Aub's writings and biography in exile, as he argues that Aub's literature can be reframed as testimony of the "European Civil War" during the twentieth century. Aub witnessed "the great night of Europe [...] crossed by long sinister trains, convoys of goods or cattle wagons with their windows closed, advancing very slowly towards winter moors covered with snow or mud, delimited by barbed wire fences and watch towers" (2001, 49). Muñoz Molina reframes Aub's biography and literature to bring to light the entanglements and equivalences between Spanish and European stories of victimhood and exile.

Muñoz Molina's transnational and universalised reframing of Aub's literature is taken to the extreme by the main trope Muñoz Molina resorts to when depicting the experience of the exile: *Sefarad.* In his book under the Sephardic name of the Iberian Peninsula, Muñoz Molina introduces a partially fictionalised set of testimonies from twentieth-century European exiles. *Sefarad* is a metaphor for destruc-

tion, expulsion and loss that encompasses a heterogeneous set of narratives and stories, including that of exile after the Spanish Civil War. By moving beyond the rootlessness experienced by the Jewish people, such a metaphor may include everyone who has suffered state-sponsored violence. According to Aguirre-Oteiza, "Muñoz Molina master metaphor of destruction, expulsion or loss, is therefore a trope that universalised the experience of victimhood" (2020, 164). I would argue that Muñoz Molina's reframing of Aub's literature through universal victimhood may be criticised, since a universal victim figure may cause the past to become decontextualised and the specific features of individual stories of suffering blurred.

Aub's literature bears witness not only to his traumatic experiences in the Spanish Civil War and his subsequent exile, including the time spent in the French concentration camps, but also to the collapse of the entire European society during the 1930s and the 1940s. As Muñoz Molina's explains:

> Reading [*Dying To Close One's Eyes*] gave me, at seventeen, an overwhelming notion of the apocalypses of this century, and added to the raw perception of anguish for which one is so gifted at that age a very precise awareness of the historical future in which the vagaries of human lives are inscribed. (2004, 32)

Conclusion

The contribution of Aub's literature to shaping the cultural memory of the Spanish Civil War comes from diverse synchronic and diachronic processes that are entangled in the travel of his works. The current social and cultural influence that textual depictions of Spanish twentieth-century history have had however, has paved the way for new figures and symbols to emerge that mark recent turns within the collective remembrance of past events in contemporary Spain. It is no coincidence that the new editions of Aub's previously out-of-print books coincide with the emergence of the Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory in Spain. Similarly, the transnational framework, which has reshaped memories of the Spanish Civil War, aligns perfectly with Aub's perspective in his various works, from *Dying To Close One's Eyes* to *Saint John.* From his account of the tragic story of the last supporters of the Second Spanish Republic trying to escape from the Francoist troops in Alicante's harbour to his tale about a group of Jews who spend their last hour in a drifting boat because no nation would offer them refuge, Aub's concern with the fate of the many victims of war and exile has created bridges between Spanish and European history and memory of the mid-twentieth century. As a result, the transnational elements that underlie Aub's work are best analysed by highlighting the role played by literature in configuring collective memory or by

considering how literature "mediated acts of remembrance that 'performs' connections between people" (Rigney 2008, 369). Moreover, the dynamics of cultural memory encompass not only how the events of the past are framed by different texts and symbols, but also how those memories are retrospectively mediated. As Erll and Rigney (2009) indicate, the configurations of cultural memory depend on how mnemonic mediations are mediated. By bringing these theoretical insights into the historical case of the Spanish Civil War, it is possible to outline the extent to which the reframing of Aub's works in contemporary Spain has come to reinforce the transnational perspective in remembering the war and the subsequent exile. Muñoz Molina's critical framework for understanding and reshaping Aub's contribution within the collective memory in contemporary Spain has proven to be useful in this regard for addressing the extent to which the mediation and remediation of memories in Aub's work in exile have shed light onto the connection between Spanish and European twentieth-century events and memories. Aub's literature travelled to Mexico during the twentieth century, where it brought and displayed the memories of the war, even though his books were read mostly by other Spanish exiles. Decades later, those memories travelled back to Spain because his works were being published again, thus providing new frameworks for remembering Spanish twentieth-century history. In the context of the contemporary Spanish battles for memory, Aub's work has consequently paved the way for a transnational narrative of the history of the Second Spanish Republic that aims to dignify the memory of those who perished fighting against fascism in Spain.

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