

Goya part 2: Thoughts on Society, Loss and Memorialisation in Post-Covid Madrid.

Going walking in Madrid at Christmas - it is freezing cold. It feels just as cold in my house as outside - the only option is to keep energy levels high. I wake at 7.30 and creep into the kitchen, shivering, to make a coffee. I go down from my fifth floor flat in the lift, I walk up the street. I stop at Lidl for a handful of groceries - pesto, lentils, milk and a bar of chocolate. Lidl is blaring out a mixture of Spanish Christmas Carols declaring 'Feliz Navidad!' and awful American pop music. I walk through La Latina down empty streets and down Calle Segovia to the river Manzanares. I walk north towards Moncloa and the Ciudad Universitaria. In July I swam there with someone who I loved like no one else before, although now we haven't spoken for months. Etched into my memory is the scorching summer day we arrived at the Olympic pool on a Vespa and sat on towels talking and cuddling and drying off. Nearby is where in 1936 Buenaventura Durruti was killed by a stray bullet defending Madrid from the fascist troops. Old stone columns in the area, which punctuate the river path, still bare the wounds of shrapnel from the battle. Durruti is credited with the line most representative of the strong anti-clerical strand of Spanish Republican thought: 'The only church that illuminates is one that burns'. Upon the arrival of Durruti's body in Barcelona, where the CNT/FAI had their headquarters, he was given a hero's burial which was attended by thousands. Durruti was a mechanic from Castilla y Leon and had been a bank robber in Argentina before becoming the icon of anarcho-syndicalism he is today. He was the first to suggest that nothing less than an army was needed by the Spanish Republican Government to combat Franco's incursion and he set about raising one. He marched with his column down from Aragon to defend Madrid, collectivising businesses and farms as he went.

During the quarantine I listened to and learned a number of songs from the Spanish Civil War. 'Coplas de la Defensa de Madrid', which encourages those fighting in the defense of the city from the fascists, seemed appropriate in a climate in which every single night people came out onto their balconies and applauded the public health service for the work it was doing to battle Covid. 'Madrid que bien resistes!', it belts out. 'Ay Carmela!' is sung from the point of view of a man convincing his wife of their moral obligation to fight in the fateful battle of the Ebro. Oftentimes over the last year I've been enthused by the fighting spirit of *Madrileños*, their intelligence; their solidarity and spirit of resistance. I was amazed by how people pulled together halfway through the quarantine to form self organised food banks. The one I worked in, a repurposed theatre, had, at its peak, over 200 volunteers. I used to share the duty of delivering baskets of food to those users who couldn't actually get to the theatre (invariably the old), on a bike. The theatre had two doorways, one of which was used by families who didn't have money for food - these were the service and hospitality workers and parents without proper documentation to legally live and work in the country- precarious waiters and waitresses who had lost their income because of the lockdown. We gave them baskets full of fresh vegetables and bread and toiletries to take back to their houses. The other door was used by the homeless who queued up to receive hot food there and then. I handed out bags of bread, soup, yoghurt and fruit to Spanish, Somalians, Senegalese, Russians and Afghans. LaCuBa (Lavapies Cuidando el Barrio), our organization, was formed when demand for a smaller organization, Dragones de Lavapies, originally a local football club, began to outstrip supply; it moved to the larger space of the Teatro del Barrio. It was formed initially by Miguel and Patri, both Andalucians, and Flaqui, from Buenos Aires. Later, LaCuBa incorporated Plaza Solidaria, a longstanding charity organization, before being forced to move out of the theatre into another space. It dissolved and eventually morphed into a smaller, tighter organisation called Vecinas de Lavapies. I will always remember the hilarious day we went to pick up 12 huge tubs of hard boiled eggs as a donation from a local bakery. On the way back to the theatre, one of the trolleys carrying them fell and hundreds of boiled eggs ran down the hill of Calle Salitre, with us running after them to pick them up. Later, when the Black Lives Matter protests broke the lockdown illegally, the feeling of solidarity, pride and shared values remained high.

At other times, though, my historical imagination has led me to identify *Madrileños* with the opposite - with weakness, acquiescence and complicity. Perhaps the solidarity of the quarantine was nothing more than an illusion; a solidarity of fear. I imagine the fawning and the excuses of a defeated resistance, pleading for clemency with the victorious fascist troops, having abandoned their principals. The ease with which women might have deserted their condemned or dead husbands, say, amongst the rubble of a bombed out and exhausted city, for the chance of a life in the Spain of Franco that lay ahead. It is not just my imagination; in fact, its real talk. It is the side of Spain in which different towns compete to memorialize colonial figures like Christopher Columbus, Hernan Cortez or Pedro R del Castillo. It is the side of Madrid that permitted such an underfunded public health system that when the covid death toll started to mount, an ice rink in Hortaleza was converted into a morgue, as patients in hospitals lay on the floor in packed waiting rooms, hoping to be attended. It is the side of Spain that

made a good friend of mine fall in love with and marry a police officer. It is why Dali denied his relationship with Federico Garcia Lorca. Perhaps this is how both politics and interpersonal relationships work - sweetness and happy union on one hand; backstabbing and betrayal and abandonment on the other; everything to ensure survival. It is my own personal pain that I'm seeking to heal by writing this; as Gillian Rose pointed out, there is no democracy in any love relation: only mercy. And what's more, happy, lasting love can only exist in interaction with the power structures out there in the world. The insider, family values that still play such a role in Southern European culture stand in contrast to the values of autonomy and freedom of thought that seem somehow much more at home in northern European culture; when I say I'm an artist here, people look at me like I'm either stupid or *pijo*. I am neither.

On the way back, walking through Delicias, then Palos de Frontera and finally through to my own barrio of Lavapies, I am reminded yet again of my own ghosts that won't stop haunting me. Memories of the last two years are on every corner. They fester and I can't rest. I'm overwhelmed with melancholy on my walks - grief about the loss of some life or other that I could have lived. I catch myself in the act of moping for what could have been. I find that I want, as long as these thoughts occupy me, to make monuments out of them. I persist with them. Like a ridiculous lovesick Shakespearean prince, I stick doggedly to my dreams against reality.

Antigone, the protagonist of Sophocles' play, breaks the law to sit with her brother Polynices' body outside the city walls. She attempts to secure a burial for him after his death. Polynices and his brother Eteocles, the sons of Oedipus, had shared the rule until they quarrelled - Polynices left the kingdom and attacked Thebes with an army - both brothers were killed in battle. Creon, the King of Thebes, decrees that Polynices is not to be buried within the city walls or even mourned, on pain of death, due to his treachery. Antigone defies the king's order and is caught. Antigone is brought before Creon and admits that she knew of Creon's law - she defied Creon with courage, passion and determination. Creon orders Antigone buried alive. Although he has a change of heart, he finds she has hanged herself. In true tragedian fashion, Antigone's suicide in turn causes the destruction of the house of Creon - his son and wife both commit suicide, his son through his love for Antigone and his wife through her love for her son.

Lacan, in his seventh seminar on the Ethics of psychoanalysis, argues that it is more ethical for a subject to act in accordance with his subconscious desire than to act in accordance with the Big Other (what society, family, law and expected norms are telling him to do). The only thing one can be guilty of is having given ground relative to one's desire. Such a focus on the individual does not signify a foreclosure of the social - on the contrary. Lacan links this ethical position to the idea of the beautiful in his discussion of Antigone. Antigone for Lacan is an instance of a subject who does not relinquish her desire: She persists in it, however impossibly difficult the task may be. It is a desire to grieve; to memorialise. It implies the telling of the unofficial, other side of the story; the story of Polynices that was outlawed by Creon.

If I'm not thinking of the love who abandoned me when on my walks, an insider Madrileña who I feel let me in briefly to her world and then condemned me to a life of *outsideness*, I'm thinking of the burial of my own sister I participated in when I was 7. I need to move on! Nancy May was severely brain damaged when she was born and lived for 10 hours. I changed her nappy when she was alive, and carried her coffin at her funeral. She is buried at Nettlestead church in Suffolk. Nowadays my memory of it is distant and blurry. Both events were encapsulated by grief, both implied the loss of a potential life.

Like the torment of Antigone, and in parallel with other conflicts in Europe and the Middle East in the wake of fascism, Spain is locked into a crisis of memorialisation. It is worth reckoning with the fact that where Hitler was defeated 13 years into his tenure as dictator, Franco's reign lasted for 44 years and his politics and policies were never officially repudiated. Spain's riven, yet well-disguised socio-cultural landscape is best summed up by the quarrel between Miguel de Unamuno and General Millán Astray at a festival for the 'Day of Spanishness' on October 12th 1936. Unamuno, the ageing rector of the University of Salamanca, is supposed to have stood up at the University, after Millán Astray, the military general, had made an after dinner speech praising death and heralding the fascist victory, and delivered the following retort:

'It has been said of Catalans and Basques that they are the anti Spain. Fine, but by the same rationale they could say the same of you. And here is the Catalan Bishop, trying to teach you the Christian doctrine that you don't want to know. And me, a Basque, who has spent my life teaching you the Spanish language which you still don't know.... It has been said that it is an international war in defence of Christian civilisation. But this, our war, is only an uncivil war... Millán Astray is a cripple. He is a war invalid... Unfortunately, there are all too many cripples in Spain now. Soon there will be more. It is painful that Millán Astray should dictate the pattern of mass

psychology... He would wish to create Spain anew - a negative creation - in his own image and likeness. And for that reason he wishes to see Spain crippled... You will win because you possess more than enough brute force, but you will not convince, because to convince means to persuade. I consider it futile to beg you to think of Spain.'

After the speech, which shocked the crowd of officers and generals; considering it reckless to kill Unamuno, the army immediately placed him under house arrest - he died two months later.

Skirmishes over memorialisation of are constantly being intimated. Franco's recent exhumation and reburial in the Mingorrubio- El Pardo cemetery represented a step in the direction of removing the officialisation of Francoist doctrine. But the anonymous, unidentified bodies of the prisoners of war who built the Valley of The Fallen still lie there untouched. His reburial was a polite, respectable affair, attended by family members and guarded by the police. And neoliberalism, a tendency that coincides precisely with Spain's transition to democracy, still enables some to succeed, believing that they are solely responsible for their victory over need, and others to rely on food banks, bitterly disempowered and disoriented; often blaming themselves. I worked for 18 months in a school in a village outside Madrid before I realised that every day I was driving past the battleground of the Jarama. During the defeat of the International Brigades at Jarama in 1937, the Irish poet Charles Donnelly is supposed to have remarked 'even the olive trees are bleeding', before being shot. He was buried near the battlefield in an unmarked grave.

The skyline of Madrid is recognizable on the one hand by the red, multi-story social housing projects of Vallecas and Usera and on the other by buildings designed by the class-privileged children of fascist functionaries who became celebrity architects in the 60s, 70s and 80s. The whole architectural heritage is overshadowed by the ruthless granite-faced authority of buildings from Spain's golden age, like the Escorial and the Alcázar de Toledo, and finally by the Valley of the Fallen itself. Its huge Christian cross, the largest cross in the world, wide enough to drive a lorry along, sits in the mountains watching over Madrid like a sentinel. Whilst the Movida Madrileña in the 1980s, after Franco's death, represented an unprecedented release of creative energy and expression, it also saw unprecedented levels of heroin addiction and alcoholism, permitted by the authorities in order to cow the young population. The transition to democracy is celebrated and constitutes the base upon which dialogue and discussion can take place. But the pact of forgetting, its shadow, also looms large. For historical justice to be done, what is needed is a radical archaeology of Spain - the bodies in the expanse of its vast, nationwide burial ground need to be named and talked about.

On another walk, I journey down past 'The Embrace', a monument to the Anton Martín Martyrs- four lawyers and a trade unionist linked to the Communist Party of Spain who were shot by a far-right gunman in a 1977 attack in the wake of Franco's death. Despite my agreeing with its right to exist, it seems almost tokenistic or sad to me, given the absolute impotence of labour and union power today. Past the Royal Palace and the Templo DeBod, a Nubian shrine gifted to Spain by UNESCO, as a sign of gratitude for the help provided by Spain in saving the Abu Simbel temples. At the bottom of Parque del Oeste, in which it is situated, I arrive at a sort of wasteland. I cross an old, rusty bridge covered in graffiti across a train track that looks like it is unused. I walk past the concrete monument to the martyrs of the 3rd of May 1808 - the martyrs who were painted by Goya - Spanish patriots who resisted the Napoleonic insurrection and were shot by firing squad.



Madrid is truly a baroque city - a place of skulls. Its *contrareforma* buildings convey the sense of a Baroque loss of innocence and of unashamed, unrestrained Catholic artifice. The Situationist slogan 'beneath the paving stones, the beach', could apply to it. The feeling of appearances being merely cosmetic, the artifice, the

implication of corruption or rot - somewhere underneath it all lies the pure harmonious truth. Madrid reflects Mexico City in being truly *churrigueresco*. But perhaps nowadays a newer, more Americanised quality to the city is called forth. The consequences of papering over the cracks might be worse than we think. Madrid could be like New York - Lavapies like Brooklyn and Chamberí like Manhattan, where recently, a man fell right through the pavement into a rat infested sewer. Perhaps, rather than anything pure, beneath it all there only lies more shit, like a fresh hell. The transition to democracy might be more like an *interregnum* than a festival of plenty, in which the new is unable to be born.

Madrid is a city of functionaries. Its sad professionals pass by the windows of bars with their heads down. The two-facedness of Wall Street, the preparedness to muck in or abandon ship at one's whim, finds its suitor in the city. The values of Madrileños seem opposite to those of sacrifice and risk that Dolores Ibarurri praised in her farewell speech to the International Brigades in 1938 - they are values of deliberate cultural rootedness, obstinacy, insiderness; determination to stick within traditions and law. But where in London and New York I was always rushing around like a mad man, oblivious to anything going on around me, here I, and everyone else, are able to live relatively well. I go walking, I have a coffee, I stop and have a caña and some tapas. The sun never lets up. I can walk slowly down a street without it seeming ridiculous.

The pristine way young couples dress, the long flowing hair of the women; the well oiled beards of the men. Old ladies with gold earrings and puffa jackets taking their dogs for a walk. The sheer elegance of the way people hold themselves. The dexterous bluffs and double bluffs; sleights of hand; the intrigue and the restraint of courting... all of them are leftovers of a beautiful, precious bygone age. Where in London and New York things are so frantic, here people go walking at such a leisurely pace. The sense of time is completely different. The young couples that pass by are like the living dead, promenading night after night like an endless underworld procession.



Passing past the monument to the 3rd of May 1808, I arrive at the back of the church of San Antonio de la Florida. This is the church where Goya is buried. The interior walls are painted by him in fresco. The fresco depicts one of the miracles of St. Anthony of Padua who raised a dead man so that he could declare that he had

not been killed by the saint's father, Martín de Bullones, as evidence suggested, but by another who had tried to place the blame on him. In raising the dead man, the saint proved that Martín de Bullones was indeed innocent of the crime. The scene is painted into the central cupola of the church, which also has a Greek cross floor plan. Goya inverts tradition by depicting the population of the town where the miracle takes place, including young men and women, locals and even beggars in the part of the building usually reserved for heavenly beings - angels, Jesus, Mary etc. On surrounding walls, below the cupola, angels are painted in shallow space against a backdrop of shimmering, fine cloth. The saint is shown standing on a rock, set above the other figures in the painting in order to highlight his importance. He is represented as a humble friar, while his head is framed by a saintly halo. The dead body being brought back to life is shown as a ghostly figure, a character which would become a frequent feature of Goya's later work. Stylistically the fresco represents a precise mid-point in Goya's oeuvre- it has elements of the documentary of quotidian life, games and customs characteristic of the Tapestry Cartoons, but the loose and gestural, yet delicate, paint handling also conjures more sinister figures in the shadows, impossible to make out, mysterious, angular, almost like much later German expressionist woodcuts. They anticipate his later Black Paintings.



A crowd gathers around the saint and the undead behind the simple balustrade that lines the cupola, where the witnesses to the miracle lean as if over a theatre balcony. Tiepolo had used a similar device in his paintings for the Labia Palace in Venice and the Villa Cordellina in Montecchio. One interesting group is that of the three young women whispering to each other. One of the girls, who gazes devoutly at the saint, is dressed in a beautiful white veil with touches of ochre. It seems crazy that a tradition developed around the celebration of Saint Anthony of Padua in Madrid in which young engaged women would come to ask for permission to marry from the saint.

The significance of this work representing mid-career Goya is that he is accepting a commission from the church and almost certainly felt ambivalent about it. The ambivalence comes across, albeit very subtly, in the painting. On the one hand, the cupola endorses the emancipatory myth of Christianity in the Augustinian sense. Justice is done by the saint, who comes to the town to rectify the wrong of society having falsely accused the man whom he raises from the dead. The town is a society of sinners, therefore, and complicit in the lynching of this innocent man; just as Christianity emerged as a church of sinners constantly repenting, rather than of people who had already attained moral perfection. So long as they confess, it doesn't matter if Christianity's members are in the first instance immoral or judgemental, diseased, poor or rich, or sinful - they will be allowed into the fold - therein lies the mass appeal and mass institutionalize-ability. Christianity, from the early church to around the time of Goya, in which the Inquisition still held sway in Spain whilst secularism reared its head in northern Europe, offered this promise - so long as you believe in God, you are inside - inside society; inside heaven. If you're out, you're as good as dead; going to hell. It doesn't fucking matter, so long as you're inside society! The balustrade creates a distance, perhaps a defamiliarization for the viewer. It is a challenge to get down with the gospel; to get inside.

But Goya, who is distanced enough to see social mechanisms at work, also paints the image in the act of transmission. He can see things hypothetically from the outside, too. The town's inhabitants precede scenes like the pilgrimage to San Isidro and the Witches Sabbath - images which condemn religious superstition and blind conformism. The cupola is simultaneously a picture of the cruelty of herd society; of mass conformism. It is a picture of its bright fashions, its customs, its stupidity, its secretive whispering between members, its delicate gestures.

The inside/outside dynamic still exists today in Spain. Strangers are incomprehensible - their only options are to assimilate or to exist excluded. Spain hasn't comprehended cultural pluralism to anywhere near the extent that the UK has. But neoliberalism has mutated the structure of this insider/outsider dynamic from one of Christian/non Christian to one of Spanish/not Spanish or even worse, one of rich/poor. One's mental health is one's own responsibility - if its broken, you pay for it yourself. Self-help culture and meritocracy; the idea the people can succeed on their own based on the refinement of their personal skills, predominate. People live increasingly in networks chosen by themselves, in which they tend to agree with one another, rather than in communities which have a more substantial structure and range of voices. With Catholicism there was some sense of responsibility for the poor, some idea about the shepherd and the flock that enabled people of all classes to have a semblance of dignity. Even in educational theory, with thinkers like Paulo Freire, the idea of dialogue or of a mutual process of *humanisation* has its roots in Liberation Theology and ideas about redemption and forgiveness. But the sense of pragmatism has won out; of actions needing to reflect how things *are* rather than how they *should be*. The window in the collective imagination in which a world without capitalism can be envisaged has practically vanished. A moral underclass discourse exists here now, in which if one has failed, it is because one hasn't done enough, one isn't clever enough or because one hasn't behaved in the correct way - little attention is paid to the material conditions which constitute inequality. It is clear who is inside and who is out.

As such, the meaning of condemnation and forgiveness have changed. We already know that, in capitalism, the arena of romantic love is nothing more than a marketplace. Where once to condemn meant to banish due to having broken a concrete moral law, nowadays condemnation is valid simply through having inconvenienced someone on an individual level - it entails simply letting someone go. Where forgiveness meant to actively bring someone back into the fold; into the community, nowadays to forgive is to absolve the other person of individual responsibility, without the added responsibility of reintegration. It too, is to let someone disappear back into the tumultuous crowd. The two are indistinguishable. The poor and the rich; the Spanish and the non-Spanish, float along in their echo chambers, in parallel, excluded from one another, enjoying the comforts each can respectively afford.

Things could be worse. I spent an absolutely magical, carefree 2 years in Madrid before 2020 that will stay with me forever. A friend of mine's parents are both dying of cancer in the US whilst he is stuck in this labyrinthine post-covid city. Their medical bill is unimaginable and inhumane. When I go back to teaching in January, taking the metro every day to Las Tablas, in the north, with my mask on, I'll do my job thoroughly whilst longing for the familiarity of home. I'll forget this traumatic time slowly, without really meaning to, like everything else in life.

