

SEBASTIAAN FABER, *Memory Battles of the Spanish Civil War: History, Fiction, Photography*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press. 2018. xii + 241 pp.; 21 black-and-white illustrations.

In *Memory Battles of the Spanish Civil War*, Sebastiaan Faber offers an impassioned discussion of the memory debates that have marked—and at times inflamed—Spanish civic, cultural and intellectual discourses over the course of the past two decades. The book discusses photography from the time of the war, historiography on the war since the period of the transition to democracy, and literature and documentary in so far as they have engaged with the topics of memory with which he is interested.

Chapter 1, 'Memory As Montage', is perhaps the most intriguing of the book, examining the circulation of famous war images, their manipulation and transformation in war photography and propaganda. Here, Faber provides a richly illustrated argument about the role of creativity and photomontage in conveying not documentary truth but a deeper human truth. Nevertheless, in an era of 'fake news', this minimization of the importance of verification is a little curious. It is not entirely clear that today 'we instinctively understand that the truth claim of a poster' (24) does not necessarily derive from verifiable evidence. There are

boundless examples of the manipulation of visual materials to particular ends that might lead us to be more cautious than Faber seems to wish when he remarks of photomontage: 'if the result was surprisingly powerful, it was because montage managed to combine the referential and the symbolic; day-to-day reality and allegory; prose and poetry' (25). There is no reason to assume that such combinations are always put to justified and reasonable, as opposed to nefarious, ends. While Faber argues in Chapter 2 that concerns for the manipulation of images may be 'very much a product of our time' (55), the matter remains problematic since much of the later part of his book deals precisely with memory issues in Spain today.

Faber usefully collects, in further chapters in his volume, interviews with five leading historians of Spain (Gabriel Jackson, Paul Preston, Helen Graham, Ángel Viñas and Pablo Sánchez León) as well as with social anthropologist Francisco Ferrándiz and civic campaigner Emilio Silva. The latter have both been closely associated with recent efforts to exhume Civil War mass graves. Faber also brings together pieces on novelists who have tackled Civil War themes. However, this is more than an academic monograph aimed at fellow scholars, for Faber delivers a broadside to those who discuss Civil War memory from the ivory towers of academia in obscure publications, using obscurantist language and making claims that he argues are unjustified.

One of the historians with whom Faber takes greatest issue is Santos Juliá, whose position is presented as that of an elitist expert, and whose interpretation of the transition to democracy Faber disagrees with (in a spirit of openness, let me note that I, too, am the subject of a brief critique). However, Faber never quite defines the non-specialist audience with whom he believes academics like Juliá (after all, a regular newspaper columnist) should engage. Nor does he appreciate—I would suggest—that, if it is indeed the case that Juliá and his generation reject contemporary memory as a moralizing of the past, this may derive from the strongly moralizing historiography of the Franco Regime against which they wrote. While I, like Faber, might not share Juliá's view, I do not view it as evidence of 'inattention' (66) to issues of morality. Quite the opposite: when historiographic claims have been bolstered by a dictatorship's unchallengeable—because resting on a repressive apparatus—moral position, the rejection of such moralizing becomes, ironically, a moral choice in itself. We may thus be confronted with precisely the shifting generational perspectives that are a notable part of the 'historicizing work' of memory that Faber calls for (56).

Faber's suggestion that academics should attend to non-academic audiences is entirely laudable (though, in the peculiar context of UK academia, with the pressures of REF-related public engagement impact, this is hardly novel). Nevertheless, there are oddities in Faber's argument, not least the fact that this volume is published by a university press and written in English. It is therefore unlikely to reach a wide (or, indeed, a general Spanish) audience. Many of the pieces were previously published in variety of venues, some of them Spanish, but none of them of truly broad and popular dissemination. At base, Faber's objection, perhaps in keeping with the times, seems to be aimed at experts who speak only to other experts and do not fully engage in any 'accounting for one's assumptions' (208). This in turn leads us to Faber's curious opening admission to having 'happily hitched a ride on the memory bandwagon' (3) after finishing his doctorate. Perhaps the book was written as a personal response to the modishness of memory, and it certainly makes clear its call for scholars to 'question the very institutional foundations of our practice' (3). Ultimately, however, Faber does not offer a coherent vision of how that might be done.

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