lives of their protagonists. The Frozen Heart, for example, opens with the funeral of the protagonist’s wealthy and beloved father — a father who, as Álvaro, the hero, soon discovers, built his fortune on the victims of Francoist repression. Álvaro’s dilemma is personal (How do you redefine your relationship to a dead father once you realize that he was evil?), but it is collective too. His quandary reflects that of an entire generation of Spaniards who have been hesitant to criticize the Franco period because it might force them to morally revise their own family history — not to mention its wealth and social status.

The novel resolves this moral dilemma through a double resolution. First, Álvaro falls in love with a descendant of the same Republican family whose possessions his father pillaged. Second, digging into his family’s past, he discovers that his father’s mother was a relatively prominent Republican who died in a Francoist prison. Yet despite the relative simplicity of this resolution — and its hint of melodrama — the novel does important political work. In the end, Grandes not only invites her readers to relate to the collective past in an affective rather than aseptic way; she also shows that it’s possible to do this beyond the framework of genealogy. The affective relation to the past that her work models is not limited to the virtuous — but apolitical — love we feel for our mothers, fathers, grandmothers, and grandfathers. Rather, it’s an affective relationship that, by going beyond filial lines, can turn into a civic or political commitment.

For Grandes, writing historical fiction was an act of taking sides. For many Spaniards, reading her work was also. As a best-selling novelist deeply committed to the cause of historical memory, Grandes made it possible for her thousands of readers to establish an affiliative bond with chapters from their collective past absent from secondary history education, and which academic historians had long declared too toxic for public access. That remains her legacy for today. ▲

Sebastiaan Faber is chair of ALBA’s Board of Governors and teaches at Oberlin College. A version of this obituary appeared in CTXT: Contexto y Acción and Jacobin.
the bodies of loved ones. Ferocious debates among academics, journalists, and many others about crimes that took place over the last 80 years are now playing out in talk shows, books, film and television debates. Laws dedicated to historical memory have been passed in 2007 and again in 2020. Official markers and monuments of the regime are slowly being removed. No longer being saved for later, history is everywhere being yanked up from ground. What makes Spain different is not that this reckoning is taking place but figuring out why it took so long to occur and deciding what happens now.

Faber offers a lucid answer to these questions. First, he provides introductory chapters that lay out the ways that Spain has uniquely unearthed and dealt with the past. He begins with the exhumation of Franco’s remains in 2019 from the Valley of the Fallen to their reinertment in the family’s plot. It is a good moment to begin with as this transfer seemed to fall so flat. Greatly anticipated and symbolically important, still, many found much to criticize in the way the event was covered, discussed, and justified. There was too much focus on Franco and too little on his victims. Some naturally saw the event as a chance to ruminate not so much on the Spanish past but on the Spanish present. Yes, the transition to democracy was now over. The important question became what comes next? In a small but telling detail, Faber points out a concerning note in the fact that so many members of the Spanish far right party, Vox, today are so young, born well after Franco’s death. What fantasy do they imagine when they wear signs (as they do) that say, “Make Spain Great Again”? After laying out his themes in the introductory chapters, Faber revisits them through more than a dozen interviews with key figures who have written about Spain’s memory debates or who have worked at the center of them. The portrait that emerges is the many ways the past is used in contemporary Spain. Faber talks to Catalans who view the memory fights through the lens of recent state action to suppress regional independence movements. Some university professors see the educational system as the primary site of contest about the past and its meanings. Journalists focus on the role of the media in understanding the memory movement. Others fixate on the role the judiciary has played in letting perpetrators go or holding only some to account. Some want reparations and truth commissions. Others provide interesting views of the need for, or impossibility of, a national museum dedicated to the Spanish Civil War, like the museums on the Mall in Washington, D.C., or the Memorial to Europe’s Murdered Jews in the heart of Berlin. Some describe the need to remove monuments and change street names as essential tools to fix Spain’s democracy. Others view these efforts as empty gestures. Still others demand more of the moral outrage that would stem from putting on trial those who committed crimes of murder, corruption, expropriation, during the war and the regime—for which they were offered amnesty or immunity en masse in 1977. By presenting different people talking about the same topic, Faber’s book reveals a rather erudite and complex debate about the use of the past in Spain. The book has the feel of a respectful, well-informed and informative debate in Hyde Park corner.

There is one last theme that emerges in these pages that is perhaps the most essential and disheartening. Many of Faber’s interlocutors decry the parlous state of historical awareness in Spain about the Civil War, the Franco Regime and even the Transition. Some of the problem is educational. There is a shocking dearth of time spent on the Civil War or Franco in Spanish primary and secondary education. Faber also tells a revealing story about Spanish demographics: the population of Spain increasingly has the same relationship to the events of the Spanish Civil War or the Franco Regime or even of the early years of the Transition that they have to the Inquisition. They were all historical events, over long before much of the population was even born. Over 40% of the current Spanish population was born after the ratification of the 1978 Constitution. Unmitigated moral outrage is hard to maintain if historical actors are disappearing and if the population is not even aware of their crimes. This too is not just a Spanish phenomenon and concern; Judt’s postwar period is ostensibly over.

The conversation with Emilio Silva that concludes the book touches on all these themes and brings Faber’s argument and framing of the work to its sobering finale. Silva, who co-founded the Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory, has led the movement to dig up the bones of Republican soldiers and other victims of Francoist forces. He is the obvious person to begin and end this book. His work has always attacked that core divide in the roots of burials: to make disappear or to save for later. The problem for Silva is not that there is too much talk about the past. There is still too much reluctance to have a real reckoning. And this reluctance is born of the habits formed in Spain’s Transition and its pact of silence. Silence begets ignorance and ignorance plus time is the enemy of reconciliation. Teaching history is the only way forward: “If we think of Spain as a tree whose roots reach in the soil, it’s clear that we are not drinking from the Second Republic or other progressive periods. The subsoil that feeds is still drenched in Francoism.”

Joshua Goode is the book review editor for The Volunteer and an Associate Professor of History and Cultural Studies at Claremont Graduate University. He is the author recently of “Spain’s Neutral Holocaust, or The Wonderful, Horrible Life of Otto Skorzeny: Spanish Confrontations with Genocide in Francoist and Post-Franco Spain” in Sara Brenneis and Gina Hermann, eds., Memories of the Holocaust: Spain and World War Two (2020).