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Blurred Boundaries: Iberian Representations of the Spanish Civil War

ABSTRACT

The Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) was a bloody conflict, in which Republicans unsuccessfully fought to defend their democratically-elected government against the Nationalists, right-wing rebels led by Francisco Franco. The polarization of rightist and leftist ideologies prefigured World War II: Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy aided Franco, while the International Brigades and the Soviet Union supported the Republic. In my dissertation, I reconceptualize the Spanish Civil War, which has been understood to have national and international significance, as an Iberian conflict of multicultural significance. To understand the war as Iberian, I work with an ample corpus of 20th- and 21st-century narratives and films from the Basque Country, Castile, Catalonia, Galicia, and Portugal that portray the time before, during, and/or after Spain's war.

With "blurred boundaries," I refer to how I remap the ways in which the war has traditionally been viewed. In doing so, I bring the question of region to the forefront of my analysis, privileging literary portrayals from traditionally peripheral areas and appreciating Castile's regionalism, which is often taken for granted as the heart of Spain. I focus on the affective experience of the war, examining the tensions that characters experience at both a personal and a larger, societal level, as they negotiate their regional and national identities. Another component of "blurred boundaries" is political ambivalence. While the war had a winning and a losing side, the political demarcations are not so clear cut in the texts I study. The strict divide between opposing, binary ideologies blurs, given that characters do not always adhere to or even explicitly identify with a particular ideology. I argue that, through the political ambiguities present in these texts, the authors and directors complicate the conflict, demonstrating how both sides lost the war and how that loss resonated at personal, regional, and national levels.