



Autopsy of a Hoax

▪ Jesús F. SALGADO

AMOR NUÑO Y LA CNT

Crónicas de vida y muerte

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When it comes to history there is no such thing as established fact – in the end all it takes is some document to pop up and perspectives are altered – and for reasons we shall attempt to elaborate, the Spanish Civil War, that bottomless pit for researchers, remains a battleground that is forever fruitful in terms of interpretation. But that document still has to be authenticated and beyond challenge. In the case of interest to us – and out of which Jesús F Salgado has conjured up an outstanding piece of investigation – the use of a journalistic forgery, afforded legitimacy by a renowned representative of the corps of historians, was ultimately all it took to turn on its head a quite widely accepted view of the repressive practices of the stalino-socialo-republican bloc that was in effective charge of public order in a besieged Madrid where the libertarian forces were very far from enjoying a majority and tended to play a moderating role.

The whiff of calumny ...

In 2004, Jorge Martínez Reverte, journalist and all-purpose author¹, published *La batalla de Madrid* (Crítica). He peeled away the surface and the book was a guaranteed success. The full arsenal of the media ensured that this *opus* became a standard reference. For Reverte is a dab hand in that regard just as he knows his trade: rewriting history and apportioning blame. The object this time was to shift on to the anarchists (much of) the blame for the summary executions carried out in the besieged city between August and December 1936 and thereby downplay the part played by those who gave the orders (the mainly socialist government, to begin with; then, later the communist-influenced Defence Junta) and their stalinist henchmen. Reverte's chosen target was a little known CNT militant, Amor Nuño (1913-1940), secretary of the Madrid Local CNT Federation during the early months of the siege and he offers a stunning depiction of him as a bespoke killer whom he has turned, overnight, into the *deus ex machina* of the November and December 1936 removal of inmates from Madrid's prisons and their murder *en masse* in Paracuellos de Jarama, Torrejón de Ardoz and other locations near the capital. And the sole piece of evidence upon which the author of *La batalla de Madrid* bases this is some sort of a draft report.² The rest

¹ Born in 1946, Jorge M Reverte, a former communist, began his career in the new detective literature in the early years of the “democratic transition” and the catch-all Marxism of times that were ultimately so mediocre that they spawned nothing. After that, he glibly pursued his activities as a newspaper commentator and rough essayist, confident that, having a foot in each camp, his rise was assured. On the Spanish war, this individual has written a trilogy praised to the skies by his peers but also lauded by historians of some note; *La batalla del Ebro* (2003), *La batalla de Madrid* (2004) and *La caída de Barcelona* (2006). So he has been a winner on every score.

² As to this curious document, Jorge M Reverte has made do with stating (offering no further clue as to how it might be tracked down) that the document establishing Amor Nuño's culpability can be found in the archives of the CNT held at the Fundación Anselmo Lorenzo (Madrid), whose holdings contain ... a few hundred thousand other documents.

followed naturally: nobody ever conjures up a forgery unless he means to make use of it. And so the jobbing Reverte loads the scales against Nuño: not only is Nuño supposed to have concluded, for this very occasion, a secret agreement with the quasi-stalinist Unified Socialist Youth (JSU) led by Santiago Carrillo, but he is also alleged to have been expelled from the CNT – in December 1936 – for having collaborated with the Francoists and supposedly ultimately defected to the enemy for fear of reprisals. In a flash, delivered into the hands of his executioner, Amor Nuño – hitherto little known and then only from a few scattered witness accounts³ – is dressed up as a killer, a traitor and a coward. And this caught on, the way a spark ignites grass during a drought. Caught on because the whiff of calumny emerges triumphant unless there is a different voice to drown it out and, especially when relayed from the easy chairs of academia.

... and the one-upmanship of an award-winning Briton

In Spain as elsewhere, the historian caste leans “leftwards”, but towards the “left” of its day, a left that is reasonable, liberal and bereft of any aspiration to change the world. Year upon year its mission is to legitimize the democratic transition under way by purging the history of the civil war of its revolutionary “excesses” which are written off as anachronistic eruptions of “Spanish lunacy” which must be banished from memory because the prosperity of commodifying modernity depends upon it. Hence the special treatment that Academia has, ever since, reserved for that local specialty, the anarchists: “objectively” and with neither embarrassment nor remorse, it places them in the war-monger camp. Just like the fascists and without even querying the blatant historical contradiction into which it is diving by so doing, when we know the telling role that the CNT played everywhere that it could in the resistance to the Catholic-Nationalist coup d’Etat in July 1936.⁴ So much so that it can reasonably be argued that, in its revolutionary “folly”, Iberian fascism would have gobbled down the Popular Front morsel as swiftly as [other fascists] had marched on Rome in October 1922 or dismantled the Weimar Republic in 1933. With the reasonable left paying a high price – infinite disgrace.

“When we turn to a history book”, Edward H Carr used to say, “our primary focus should be, not on the facts it contains, but on the author who recounts them”⁵ That lesson applies of course to Jorge M Reverte, but it applies all the more strongly to Paul Preston, the British hispanist who has won awards for his overall oeuvre, whose 2011 publication, *The Spanish Holocaust*, published almost simultaneously – albeit it slightly varying editions – in Spain⁶ and in Great Britain, not only lends credence to Reverte’s theses about the “death routine” ranging from “round-ups” (*sacas*) to “walkies” (*paseos*), that is supposed to have taken possession of Madrid’s anarchists, but goes on to add some distortion of the facts by broadening considerably the swathe of executions that Reverte credits to Nuño (the ones in November and December 1936) and also crediting him with the August 1936 attack on the Modelo prison in Madrid and the murders on 11 and 12 August 1936 of prisoners brought in from Jaén by train. The much-lauded Preston offers no more proof than the one-time detective novel-writer Reverte does. In this instance, he makes do with applying his simplistic ideological interpretive model to the Madrid siege – the Republic of the “moderate

³ Amor Nuño gets a very modest mention in the “memoirs” of better known libertarian militants and in the odd historical essay or study see Gregorio Gallego, *Madrid, corazón que se desangra*; Eduardo de Guzmán, *Nosotros los asesinos* and *La muerte de la esperanza*; José E Leiva *Memorias de un condenado a muerte*; Cipriano Mera, *Memorias de guerra, cárcel y exilio de un anacosindicalista*; José Peirats *La CNT en la revolución Española*; César M Lorenzo *Los anarquistas españoles y el poder* and the recent (2006) expanded French edition of this, *Le Mouvement anarchiste en Espagne : pouvoir et révolution sociale* and Miguel Iñiguez’s *Esbozo de una enciclopedia histórica del anarquismo español*.

⁴ On this topic, see Freddy Gomez “Guerre civile: les soubresauts d’une histoire sans fin” in *À contretemps* No 25, January 2007 and José Fergo “Mai 37 et l’Alma Mater: du néo-mandarínat stalinien libéral” in *À Contretemps* No 32, October 2008. On the more specific topic of the downright scandalous treatment of José Peirats by the academic Enric Ucelay da Cal, the reader is referred to “The Second Death of José Peirats” at www.christiebooks.com

⁵ Edward H Carr, *What is History?*

⁶ Paul Preston, *El holocausto español. Odio y exterminio en la Guerra Civil y despues* (Madrid, Debate, 2011).

socialists” would have fared much better without its “extremists” – and in his own way adopts as his own the principle laid down by that great expert on the Ancient World, Henri Marron, according to which “the historian in the pursuit of his work employs everything, shit included”.

Such a worrisome silence

At the root of the meticulous and stirring investigation that we are offered here by Jesús F Salgado, a scientist by training, an academic by profession and a libertarian at heart, there lies, naturally, a deep-seated sense of outrage at the tinkering with history now open to the petty know-it-all ignoramuses like Reverte, who is the very embodiment of arrogance and incompetence rolled into one – and the historians of “counter-revolutionary subordination”⁷ like Preston, whose connivance with the liberal socialist press, where those very same petty know-it-alls hold court is by now an open secret. Of course, to this fundamental and thoroughly justified indignation must be added another more heartfelt factor relating, in Jesús F Salgado’s case, to the recognition that, in these post-modern times when dissent has more to do with deconstructing than with instructing, the battle over history has assuredly ceased to be priority – let alone a necessity – in the libertarian camp. Hence the latter’s silence, as utter as it is stunning, in the face of Reverte’s calumnies and Preston’s refrains. As if the history of war-time anarchism no longer had anything to tell it about itself. Jesús F Salgado does not drone on about that silence. He makes do with noting in passing in his introduction to his book that “in libertarian circles, no one has dared to come to the defence of Amor Nuño against such a grievous charge.” Because everybody believed, fleetingly at any rate, in his guilt. At best, a distinction was drawn between him and the CNT. At worst, they simply turned the page. Without as much as trying to grasp what was afoot behind Reverte’s deconstruction and, more so, behind its incorporation as a methodological leap forward into Preston’s supposed historical science; a clear shifting of blame away from the bloc made up of the reasonable left (the socialists and republicans), institutionally wedded to the stalinists, on to the CNT-FAI (itself complicit with those self same stalinists) in the purging of “fascists” detained in Madrid’s prisons during phase one (August to December 1936) of the siege.

To Jesús F Salgado’s way of thinking, such a worrisome silence was inevitably tantamount to acquiescence. Whether due to passivity, or to the inability to grasp the two slanderers’ real intentions. So, for years, he probed the witchcraft trial mounted against Amor Nuño, delving into its causes, its effects and the insidious way in which, taking their lead from others, Reverte and Preston sought to revise history with no care for anything other than healing the reasonable left of its blemishes by shifting the blame, the whole blame on to the anarchist whipping boy, the “uncontrollables” who, as we all know, have long been taking the lash. In this particular instance, the aggravating circumstance was that our two examining judges are not content merely to overstep the boundaries of interpretation, which they are free to do, but have unhesitatingly and without moral restraint resorted to falsification and to the use of forgery.

In praise of method

At the end of 2005, at the International Institute for Social History in Amsterdam, in the CNT archives, Jesús F Salgado turned up the celebrated exhibit upon which Reverte built his history. It is, he writes, “a rough draft, amended, corrected and covered with insertions [...] a draft minute that was never carried nor even signed, by anyone.”(p 26) But there was worse to follow. Comparing this document – which in no way establishes that Amor Nuño, nor the wider CNT, had any part in the November-December 1936 – with the transcript that Reverte offers in *La batalla de Madrid*, Jesús F Salgado spotted a sizable anomaly: Reverte had edited out certain phrases,

⁷ This term was employed by Chomsky back in 1968 to characterize a school of history-writing on which Gabriel Jackson, author of *The Spanish Republic and the Civil War* (1965) was then one of the major figures. See Noam Chomsky “Objectivity and Liberal Scholarship”.

including ones that testify that, contrary to his argument and what he bases his accusations upon, the CNT National Committee had nothing to do with that meeting, which therefore could not have been, as the forger Reverte claims, to ratify an agreement reached between the CNT National Committee and the Public Order Council of the Madrid Defence Junta regarding the “immediate and wholly responsible execution of fascists and dangerous personnel” (Reverte). “The manipulation of the history was brazen”, Jesús F Salgado notes. What remained to be done, therefore was to follow the trail of this lie-machine, based upon common burglary, by mounting the most detailed investigation into the individual who had been its chief target: Amor Nuño.

Jesús F Salgado’s approach is laudable... Because he side-steps no hypothesis, and chases up every lead and does not operate on the basis of the conclusive embracing of elementary truths. Acknowledging, in matters of history, that he has a soft spot for the “moral relativism” championed by Tomás Ibáñez⁸, Jesús F Salgado is hell bent on a quest, even should he turn up anything that he, as a libertarian, would rather not believe. This is an important point to make because, as tackled by its author, a quest implies and requires that one is open and above board with one’s own camp and pushes as far as it will go a probe into the issue of the indiscriminate violence carried out, in the rearguard, and under cover of antifascist radicalism by certain anarchist militants – whether wayward or shrewd, of recent vintage or with a long record of activism – that the revolution overnight turned into policemen, gaolers and the lowest sort of henchmen.

Take, for instance, the likes of Felipe Sandoval, Manuel Rascón, Benigno Mancebo, Manuel Ramos, whose dirty deeds were plentiful but bereft of any direct organizational connection to the CNT, since the four anarchist purgers named deployed their talents solely under the auspices of the CPIP(Provincial Public Investigation Committee), a state agency set up in August 1936 in Madrid by the Interior Ministry (headed by the socialist Ángel Galarza) and the General Security Directorate or DGS (headed by Manuel Muñoz, a member of Izquierda Republicana). This detail is all the less trivial in that from August until early November 1936 the CPIP – which had a three month lifespan, but what three months those were! – handled the essentials of the business of cracking down on “fascists” in a Madrid under siege (arrests, verdicts, detentions, purges, summary executions) and included representatives from every party and organization of the institutional left – plus the CNT and the FAI – and took its orders solely from the Popular Front government (which at that point had no anarchist ministers) which paid its officials. On laboring the point that the repression was lawful and state-ordained, Jesús F Salgado redefines the terms: it was as people on the pay-roll of a state agency that the aforementioned purgers were operating. At the instigation of their superiors, who were not anarchists (far from it) and under their aegis. Not that they were the only ones. Every party and organization represented on the CPIP had its quota of goons, all of them operating in the name of the loftier antifascist interests of the Republic and its government. QED. Jesús F Salgado has outdone himself here.

As for the “uncontrollables” who are a different kettle of fish and who continue to feed the anti-anarchist nightmares of the historians of “counter-revolutionary subordination”, they – Jesús F Salgado tells us – had, as far as Madrid was concerned, had no connection with the organized libertarian movement, but did have dealings, more consistent than discreet, with the General Security Directorate (DGS) – the Atadell Brigade, the Terry Brigade, the ‘Dawn Brigade’, the ‘Lynxes of the Republic’ –, with the Madrid Socialist Agrupación in the Calle Fuencarral or with the PSOE’s motorized brigade and, even more so, with sundry Stalinist operational centres such as the one in the Calle San Bernardo. By comparison with these strictly controlled “uncontrollable” – as Preston knows, but then he can always come up with some excuse for them when the orders

⁸ Tomás Ibáñez *Contra la dominación. Variaciones sobre la salvaje exigencia de libertad que brota del relativismo y de las consonancias entre Castoriadis, Foucault, Rorty y Serres* (Barcelona, 2005, Gedisa). On Tomás Ibáñez see the dossier in *À Contretemps* No 24, September 2006, notably Patricia Amigot’s article “Une sauvage exigence de liberté” and Freddy Gomez “De l’hétérodoxie comme méthode” and *À Contretemps* No 39, January 2011 which is wholly given over to him.

emanated from a socialist – the few criminal anarchist uncontrollable, these “merciless killers” working on their own behalf and the identities of some of whom – like Antonio Ariño, Antonio Rodríguez or Victoriano Buitrago – are known to us, well. Plainly, they were redundant, Jesús F Salgado states, but they were far outnumbered by the first group mentioned. No harm to the accusatory historians who point to crime only when it suits their ideological assumptions.

The framing of Amor Nuño ...

So why did Reverte knowingly opt to besmirch the honour of Amor Nuño by grafting on to the reality of his career as a serious, responsible and, in human terms, really quite humane militant – a career that Jesús F Salgado’s tracks in detail with supporting evidence – the image of a monstrous alter ego that exists only in Reverte’s imagination? That question is posed all the more starkly by the fact that Reverte’s armoury is inevitably reminiscent of the practices of rewriting biography that we, in our naivety, had thought were a thing of the past; the sort of thing that flourished, notably, back in the days when Stalinism was in its prime, when circumstances and circumstances alone determined the truth of the day. What in heaven’s name could impel someone to indulge in such a travesty? What need is being served? As far as the compulsive writer Reverte is concerned, history is not so much a discipline as something reminiscent of a fist fight of the suspicions in which there are no blows barred, no matter how low the blow, as long as they strike out at somebody one is out to fell or compromise. Out of sheer antipathy or unalloyed political hatred. The same antipathy (or hatred) evident in a remark made by Preston to a journalist from *El País*: “Reading books in which the anarchists are portrayed as well-meaning exasperates me.”⁹ Exasperates him to the extent of his rehearsing in his malicious book the lying allegations – and primarily, in historical terms, grotesque allegations – of some media-savvy lame-brain, thereby bestowing some gravitas upon them. For the “Amor Nuño” that Reverte has concocted for himself and whom Preston has pressed into service never existed, nor was there any inkling of him. Based upon a shared repugnance, he is merely a figment of the imagination designed to provide, at long last, the archetypal “case” of the twisted (Reverte) or “mentally deranged” (Preston) anarchist, its very negativity bearing witness to the necessarily crime-spawning character of any libertarian revolution.

So who was Amor Nuño? By the end of the lengthy study he has devoted to him, Jesús F Salgado is in a position not only to dismantle, one after another, the scandalous allegations made against him by Reverte and Preston (we shall come back to this), but also to offer an outline portrait of an anarcho-syndicalist militant who genuinely believed, as some other did, that any process of revolutionary breakthrough that succeeds has to immediately set its boundaries, boundaries imposed by the human condition; repudiation of indiscriminate violence and summary executions. This man, dragged through the mud with that special delight coppers take in humiliating their adversaries, was not at all the rampant purger as which he has been presented. Not in the least. He was, instead, a militant of the Madrid CNT¹, recognised and respected on account of his organizational gifts by his comrades from the Transport Union, which he joined in 1934, the date when the Asturian-born Nuño settled in Madrid where he remained until his arrest by Francoists in May 1939. His pre-war experience of anarcho-syndicalism was the same as that of a number of CNT militants in those days of promise: battles, successes, defeats, solidarity, affinity, and the notion that a revolution without precedent was imminent. Come it did and it

⁹ Paul Preston, interviewed by Juan Cruz in *El País Semanal*, 17 July 2011. Note, by the way, that in a long and astute review of *The Spanish Holocaust*, published on-line (in Spanish) on the RdL (Revista de libros) site, the Scottish-born historian Julian Ruiz who is of Spanish extraction stresses that “Preston resorts to vague terms such as ‘sadists’ when he is almost always describing anarchists. His antipathies towards the anarchist movement (the CNT-FAI) are plainly on display in *The Spanish Holocaust*”. See <http://revistadelibros.com/discusion/historia-militante-y-guerra-civil-el-holocausto-espanolde-paul-preston>

brought lots of complications. The main one undeniably had to do with the circumstances and, more so, the logical muddle that surfaces in the revolutionary mind when the habit of envisioning the revolution as an offensive operation – an assault upon the established order – is all of a sudden and of necessity mixed up with the realities of an antifascist war, the outcome of which necessarily implies revolutionaries putting their aspirations to radical alteration of the established order on the back boiler whilst they defend a Republic they do not carry close to their hearts. That war, a civil but also a social war was experienced by Amor Nuño on the spot in Madrid, a city where the CNT was far from being the dominant force; he experienced it as secretary of the Local Federation of CNT Unions and – in that capacity, as counsellor for War Industries on the Defence Junta – and as secretary of the Transport Union and – in that capacity, counsellor for Transport on the Delegate Defence Junta. In the end, at the suggestion of his union, he finished the war as company commissar on the Centre front.

Arrested by the Falange on 29 March 1939, he was removed to the camp in Alicante and thence to one in Albatera. Released on 17 April, he was then rearrested in Madrid on 15 May and on 5 June was hauled in front of a council of war which condemned him to death. In Porlier prison on 5 August he made a plea for clemency to Franco in accordance with procedure. Clemency never came, especially as Amor Nuño refused to comply with the judges' invitation to "collaborate".¹⁰ On 17 July 1940 he was shot along with twenty other comrades, mown down in front of the walls of Madrid's eastern cemetery. He was twenty seven years old.

... now the real issue: Reverte-Preston

The chief merit of this book – one of the best in the plentiful publishing repertoire available on this subject – centres on the very detailed historical lesson that Jesús F Salgado teaches the Reverte-Preston double act and their flagrant dabbling in sharp practice. For dabbling in history on the basis of a ready-made platform in *El País*, like Reverte, or to show off one's certificates as a prize-winning historian, like Preston, does not afford a risk-free licence to heap insults upon a dead man without any need to prove the ghastly accusations levelled at him. Sifting through these, one by one and on the basis of probing research and impressive archival efforts, Jesús F Salgado does the work of an historian: separating the facts from the assumptions; comparing and contrasting testimony; exposing the fictitious or ideological strand in the hypotheses advanced, on the basis of no evidence at all, by Reverte and Preston; he exposes the crass untruths which are so glaring as to expose, for the knowing reader, the core intentions of their authors; he stress-tests all of the underpinnings of this story, discarding all but the ones that pass muster; like an expert in double-talk, he exposes the documentation bandied about, the concoctions, the retouched photographs, the forgotten episodes, the lies mode up to look like truths. In short he sets himself a task that is the only one that matters – or should matter – to an historian: "Questing after the facts behind the words, the reality beneath the memories, the truth under the falsehood and the fantasy."¹¹

And by the time he is finished, nothing is left standing of the innuendo, the anathema, the concoctions, the broad brush approach and the defamations amassed – approaching from two different angles but complementing each other in their shared malicious intent – by Reverte and Preston. So much so that, after reading Jesús F Salgado's book, nothing is left of their infamy except the niggling sensation of this being a fraud quite widely peddled by a political and media machine in which ignoramus critics have no *raison d'être* left other than their mediocre status as peddlers of a few supposed authorities in the prevailing "wisdom". Thus the same folk who raved about *La batalla de Madrid* and *The Spanish Holocaust* have not been able to spare the time to pore over *Amor Nuño y la CNT*, an exemplary opus of counter-investigation from which it emerges,

¹⁰ As Jesús F Salgado rightly points out this attitude – an attitude also espoused by Joan Peiro who, placed in the same circumstances, opted for death over betrayal – speaks to the worth of the man, who is always judged on the evidence. Unless one's name is Reverte.

¹¹ Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Les Juifs, la mémoire et le présent* (La Découverte 1991, Tome 1, p. 11)

with evidence to support this (and there is evidence in extreme profusion) that the charges levelled by Reverte and echoed by Preston regarding the role supposedly played by Amor Nuño – and, beyond him, the Madrid CNT as an organization – in the unleashing of the violent crackdown that gripped the republican camp during the siege of Madrid between August and December 1936 – do not have a leg to stand on.

To be more specific:

- 1) That Amor Nuño had no hand, directly or indirectly, in the detention and murder on 11 and 12 August 1936 of some 200 prisoners transferred from Jaén to Alcalá de Henares. This butchery, which Preston credits to “anarchist uncontrollable” – and, more precisely, to members of the Ateneo libertario de Vallecas – was actually ordained and organized, with at least the passive connivance of the republic’s government, by the local PSOE and PCE leaders, and carried out by socialist and communist militants who actually wore their red insignia during the massacre.
- 2) That Amor Nuño was not in any way involved, intimately or remotely, in the 22 and 23 August attack upon the Modelo prison and in the ensuing executions. Instead, he strove to lobby the government and judicial authorities to have it stopped. As for the anarchists who were involved in it, notably some FAI members, they acted more as peace-makers than as purgers, as a number of testimonials made by “fascist” prisoners but systematically ignored by Reverte and Preston attest.
- 3) That Amor Nuño had no hand, act or part in the “*paseos*” and summary executions in November and December (in Paracuellos and Torrejón de Ardoz). Besides, there is not a single document from any quarter to suggest that he did. Nor was he a participant in the by now celebrated 8 November 1936 meeting at which the killings were supposedly decided upon and which Reverte has made the corner-stone of his allegations.
- 4) That Amor Nuño discreetly used his position in order to protect, shield and save the lives “suspects” from the opposing camp who, as he saw it, had done no wrong other than their being priests, nuns or related to Nationalist servicemen. The only condition he required of them was that they engage in no activity against the Republic. A number of his “protégés” gave testimony on his behalf, albeit unsuccessfully, when, in 1940 he was hauled in front of a council of war by the winning side.
- 5) That Amor Nuño was not expelled from the CNT in December 1936, that he was never a deserter, that he never at any time collaborated with the enemy as Reverte suggests. After stepping down from the Defence Junta on 27 December 1936, he devoted himself wholly to his trade union (Transport Union) activities, having become the union’s secretary. On 1 March 1937 he was given the task of representing the National Transport Industry Federation. There was no let-up in his activity up until 5 March 1939, by which point it was plain to all that the war was lost.

Finally, allow me to raise a point in relation to which Jesús F Salgado’s study represents a distinct step forward in historiography. It appears from the statistics that it brings to light – derived from systematically sifting through the complaints and denunciations placed on record in the wake of the Francoist victory by “victims” of “Red barbarism” – that out of a total of 4,103 instances of executions or disappearances carried out in Madrid prior to 7 November 1936, in one third of these the plaintiffs (generally family members or friends of the “victims”) were unable to identify the perpetrators, in another third, responsibility belonged directly to the General Security Directorate (DGS) or state police and, in the case of the final third, to groups linked to political or trade union organisations identified as such: 70.97% of cases were attributable to the Marxist left (PSOE, UGT, PCE and JSU) and 27.95% to anarchists (CNT, FAI, FIJL and the *ateneos libertarios*). These figures speak volumes and should annihilate Reverte’s and Preston’s fantasies about Madrid anarchist activism in respect of the purges, though we doubt that. As we have broad doubts about their readiness to make judgments based only upon evidence. Were that the case, they might have

felt compelled to note that, immediately upon his being appointed delegate-general for prisons in the province of Madrid on 4 December 1936 by the very anarchist Juan García Oliver, incoming minister of Justice in the previous month's reshuffled government of the Republic, the libertarian Melchor Rodríguez was authorized to put paid to any application from any quarter to have custody of prisoners transferred and enforced it relentlessly up until March 1937.¹²



Administered by certain historians or chroniclers these days, the past is sometimes peppered with anathemas in need of retraction. The true needs to be sifted from the false and, if need be, in order to make up for the traducing of those who were the targets of suspicion and insult and tossed into the abyss of deliberate innuendo, and eventually lost the only thing that mattered to them: other people's respect, other people who thought – and, in a way, still think, albeit fleetingly – that it is possible to be (or to have been) an anarchist without murderous thought. This is the demanding but tremendously useful mission that Jesús F Salgado has set himself by standing up to the power of the lie: unravelling the strands of it and thereby reinstating the honorable past of one war-time Madrid anarcho-syndicalist militant, Amor Nuño, killed by fascists in 1940 and whom the sharp practice of two leading lights of history and reportage have striven to reduce to a sinister caricature.

If, as Walter Benjamin had it, History with a capital H often resembles “an apologia for power”, recounted by the victors, “historical reality”, including the “counter-history” of the vanquished is also a human creation in which ideology still has its usually major part to play, even if glossed over by some purported objectivity. Each in his own register and in his own way, Reverte and Preston uphold the old antifascist myth of a just way led astray by uncouth revolutionaries – anarchists and a few others – whose radicalism supposedly played right into the hands of democracy's fascist opponents. That refrain is as old as the historiography of the war in Spain. It was whispered by the old Anglo-Saxon school in the 1960s, trumpeted by the euro-communist stable in the 1970s, eulogized by the opinion-makers of the “democratic transition” media, bill and cooed over by the new social-liberal clucking hens of Academia and chanted by the post-modern theorists of the death of the subject. With the same smug arrogance and forgetting that, if Bourdieu is to be believed “intellectuals always agree on leaving their own game and their own gambits out of the reckoning”¹³, Reverte and Preston have finally taken their places in that amiable company. By stooping a little lower, nothing more.

Outstanding from start to finish, this is amply proven once and for all by Jesús F Salgado and, as far as we are aware, no one has stepped up to contradict him. That, if true, means nothing since he has received the “deaf ear”¹⁴ treatment from the media, the treatment that muffles criticism to the point where it becomes inaudible. So we can put money on it that Reverte and Preston will carry on receiving their fees, even if it is now at the risk of hearing the old insult or sneer from the far end of some editorial office or the stalls of some well-lit lecture theatre.

Freddy Gomez

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[Translated by Paul Sharkey]

<http://www.acontretemps.org/spip.php?article576>

¹² On which basis Preston ventures to insinuate, echoing an old Stalinist refrain, that the exemplary Melchor Rodríguez – nick-named “The Red Angel” – must have been in cahoots with the “Fifth Column”? So, be they purgers or peace-makers, anarchists are always going to be curs as far this oh-so-British historian is concerned.

¹³ Pierre Bourdieu *Questions de sociologie* (1984)

¹⁴ To use the expression favoured by the very honorable Pierre Vidal-Naquet.