Spanish Spaces

Ann Davies

Published by Liverpool University Press

Davies, Ann.
Spanish Spaces: Landscape, Space and Place in Contemporary Spanish Culture.
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/72694.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/72694

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=2492883
CHAPTER TWO

Memory: landscapes of the past
in Guillermo del Toro’s Spanish films

This and the next chapter emphasise one of the key contemporary political and cultural issues in Spain today, that of the recuperation of memories of the Spanish Civil War and its aftermath. Spain’s transition from dictatorship to democracy in the late 70s and early 80s was assumed to be based on a pacto de olvido (pact of forgetting) that did not call to account those who played a leading role in the previous Franco regime. In particular, those on Franco’s side who committed atrocities against their opponents benefited from an implicit amnesty for their crimes. However, as democracy consolidated itself, more explicit moves were made to remember those who suffered as a result of being on the losing side in the War. In particular, relatives of soldiers and political prisoners who died during the War or its immediate aftermath began to call for the remains of these people to be located and given formal burial. This often entailed uncomfortable acknowledgement of those who were responsible for shooting and giving indiscriminate burial to political prisoners, and resistance began to build against the attempts to recuperate the bodies of family members. Then in 2007 the Zapatero government passed the Ley de memoria histórica that stipulated the cooperation of local and regional governments and councils with the efforts of relatives to track down buried victims, making available records and documents that some governing bodies had hitherto tried to keep hidden. Furthermore, it prohibited any form of memorialisation that lauded Franco, including the banning of Francoist rallies at the dictator’s grave at el Valle de los Caídos, although this has not stopped the controversy over the recuperation of memory.

Long before this, however, literature and film had contributed to recuperating not simply the memories but the lived experience of the losers under the Civil War, albeit allegorically through now classic Spanish films such as La caza (The Hunt; Carlos Saura, 1966) and El espíritu de la colmena (The Spirit of the Beehive; Víctor Erice, 1973). Films set during the War and the dictatorship continued to appear during the 80s and 90s, many of them literary adaptations: for example, Si te dicen que caí (If They Tell You That I Fell; Vicente
Aranda, 1989), *Tu nombre envenena mis sueños* (Your Name Poisons My Dreams; Pilar Miró, 1996), *La lengua de las mariposas* (Butterfly’s Tongue; José Luis Cuerda, 1999), *Libertarias* (Freedom Fighters; Vicente Aranda, 1996). Some later books and novels notably foregrounded the process of recuperation of memories of this earlier time, such as Javier Cercas’ novel *Soldados de Salamina* (Soldiers of Salamis, 2001) and its cinematic adaptation by David Trueba (2003). Academics have duly followed with analysis of such films in their Civil War context. More recently, however, they have also joined in the debate about the recuperation of memory, and examined the rationales and methodologies that have previously been used to conduct investigation into how Spain’s past is remembered culturally. Included in this is a critique of how academics, particularly in countries outside of Spain and thus at one remove from the political context in which recuperation is being carried out (or not), conduct their analysis of the relevant cinema and literature. Jo Labanyi notes her discomfort with textual analysis of representations of the war that pay little or no heed to public debate that impacts on production and reception (Labanyi 2008: 120). I agree that more nuancing is required concerning the intricate imbrications between text and context, although I am concerned at the opposite danger into which critics sometimes also fall, of seeing the text merely as a veneer for Spanish history to the extent that they do not ‘see’ the text itself, so eager are they to disinter the history beneath. However, recuperation does not simply go on at the national level: while the writings of academics are themselves part of this exercise, if a problematic one, other texts point to attempts to recall and negotiate this memory from beyond Spain. This is a ‘desire of association’ for Spain in which both locals and foreigners are caught up in Rose’s process of becoming. As we saw in the previous chapter, this call to care may arise from, and for, all manner of reasons: academic advancement is certainly one, but so, in the case of film, at least, is the desire to tell a story that resonates both within and across national borders while perhaps taking advantage of good co-production arrangements. In this chapter, I do not address Labanyi’s concerns directly: in what follows one of my underlying concerns in considering the desire for association with recuperating Civil War memories is quite simply the possibility of multiple standpoints whereby subjects might invoke Spain through a consideration of the landscape. This does entail consideration of potential international reception and interpretations as well as local ones, as well as the fact that the ‘author’ of the texts in question is not himself Spanish. But more particularly the chapter opens up to one of the widest considerations of how subjects – and audiences – might invoke Spain as a dream of presence, a country and its forgotten history that is forever in the process of becoming, a history in process of recall but which can never be fully remembered. And this process of invocation of a specific country’s history, through its geography,
does not end at Spain’s borders but overlaps with other processes of memory, that further facilitate various standpoints from which a subject might desire to invoke Spain as a term with historical resonance. These desires do not have to be benign: they include the possibilities of mis-remembering and distorting history, possibilities that will certainly have something to do with the texts in question.

The most mainstream of recent films that hark back to the Civil War and its aftermath are two films by Mexican director Guillermo del Toro, *El espinazo del diablo* (The Devil’s Backbone, 2001) and *El laberinto del fauno* (Pan’s Labyrinth, 2006): while the former proved a cult art house success, the latter got wide international attention and was considered a shoo-in for the Oscar for best foreign film, though in the event it lost out to *Das Leben der Anderen* (The Lives of Others; Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, 2006). *El espinazo* is set during the time of the Spanish Civil War, but it is not ostensibly about the war, and the film aims in part at the horror genre. *El laberinto*, on the other hand, is set during the time of maquis resistance to Franco’s regime in the 1940s: it uses for one of its story threads a style of fantasy adventure that was proving popular in the wake of Peter Jackson’s adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings*, to the extent that it came as no huge surprise to find the director of *El laberinto* hired to direct the *Lord of the Rings* prequel *The Hobbit* (though del Toro has subsequently withdrawn from the project). What is more surprising, perhaps, is that *El espinazo* and *El laberinto*, with their specifically Spanish background, were directed by a Mexican. In terms of setting throughout his filmography, del Toro has proved transnational: while his first film *Cronos* (1992) was set in Mexico City, his English-language films – *Mimic* (1997), *Blade II* (2002), *Hellboy* (2004) and *Hellboy II: The Golden Army* (2008) – have ranged around in terms of location, moving from New York City to Europe to Ireland and so on. His two films set in Spain, however, seem in one sense rooted in time, demonstrating a historical fixity that contrasts sharply with all his films except perhaps *Hellboy* (where one sequence is set during the Second World War). Yet, for all their apparent fixity of time, place – landscape – is generic and unidentifiable.

The link between landscape and memory has become well established in cultural geography and beyond: as Don Mitchell notes, ‘the strongest focus of landscape research in the past few years [is] landscape as a concretization and maker of memory’ (Mitchell 2003: 790). Pierre Nora’s ‘lieux de mémoire’ project, a record in seven volumes, has become widely known (and widely used and critiqued: see Legg 2005): its purpose was to explore how different sites encapsulated memories – specifically, French memories of France and its history. Stephen Legg observes that for Nora modern media have now become the place where collective memory lies (ibid.: 484) and have ‘replaced the state in being able to define a national past’ (ibid.: 490). The move to media, of which
film would be one example, as a guardian and gatekeeper of memory is not a positive one in Nora’s terms, steeped as his project is in a nostalgic concept of the nation as a unitary entity which does not allow for alternative memories, counter memories and different conceptualisations of the nation. The devaluation of mass media as a vehicle for perpetuating memories tends to underscore the importance of bodily presence and experience of concrete sites of memory. Yet this neglects the possibility of being elsewhere and still remembering. Remembering implies a distance from events not dissimilar to the gap in Wylie’s geographies of love mentioned in the previous chapter, a theorisation derived in the first instance by Wylie from meanings to be extracted from memorial benches, personal memorials to individuals in which a collective can nonetheless come to share (Wylie 2009). Simon Schama likewise considers, as an act of love, the experience of landscape as a discovery of memory: he describes his project as ‘a way of rediscovering what we already have, but which somehow eludes our recognition and appreciation. Instead of being yet another explanation of what we have lost, it is an exploration of what we may yet find’ (Schama 1996: 14). It is also an explanation of how the past veneration of nature informs the present, though the memories that are commemorated, etched into the landscape, are not always pleasant ones, as Schama acknowledges (ibid.: 18): some of the memories invoked by his explorations are those of the Holocaust and atrocities of the Second World War. Schama emphasises individual agency in the construction of landscapes of memory, those who demonstrated a love – a call to care, indeed – for a particular landscape or environment and in so doing reinforced the intricate connection between landscape and memory. Schama’s book is itself a lyrical celebration of such a connection. It is Wylie, however, no less lyrical himself at times, who posits absence as an integral part of remembering (Wylie 2009: 278). If Nora and Schama come to stand, however reductively, for a body of scholarship insisting on the importance of the bodily or individual subject in the nexus between landscape and memory, which I do not have the space to explore further here, then Wylie will here stand for that body of cultural geography that writes of spectral geographies, the geographies of haunting (ibid.: 279). Jo Labanyi has drawn on hauntology when writing on the memories of the Spanish Civil War, and the need to restore the ghosts of the past to their rightful and proper place, ‘accepting the past as past’ and acknowledging a history ‘that allows one to live with its traces’ (Labanyi 2000: 66). Wylie himself still seems to require some sort of bodily presence in his geography of absence: he argues that ‘Landscape and place may commonly be matters of involvement and immersion’ and his entire argument is initially drawn from his personal experience (at Mullion Cove in Cornwall). Nonetheless, his argument that landscape and memory may be thought of ‘in terms of absence, distance, displacement and the non-coincidence of self and world’
Memory

(Wylie 2009: 279), as discussed in the previous chapter, allows us to conceive of cinematic landscapes of the Civil War as precisely this spectral geographical memory.

The play on presence and absence becomes vital in consideration of del Toro’s apparently generic landscapes. The landscape of *El espinazo* is basically a flat, arid plain on which sits the children’s home that is the centre of the film’s action (Fig. 1). Nothing else can be seen for miles; and the hardness of the landscape is accentuated by the hard sun that bakes the ground. The home is cut off from the outside world due to the long distance needed to travel to the nearest village; and it is indeed this remoteness and hardness of the land that mitigate the happy outcome of the final confrontation at the end of the film. After the boys of the home have defeated their enemy Jacinto (Eduardo Noriega) – the home’s caretaker and himself once an inmate of the home as a child – they are now alone, with no adult left to protect them. Our last shot of them is as they leave the home to set out to the village, making their way as best they can (some are wounded) into the dusty plain, the first faltering steps to what must be a long trek to the village. We are uncertain as to whether they will survive this journey. Even if they do, their fate as sons of Republicans will be uncertain in the village, where Dr Casares (Federico Luppi) earlier observed Republican prisoners being shot. On this reading, the landscape figures the hostility to the boys of a Spain fast being taken over by right-wing forces.

In *El laberinto* we have a landscape that offers at first glance a total and lush contrast: a verdant forest where the trees are so tall that the sky above is barely visible, rarely appearing in shot (as opposed to the skyline of *El espinazo* that dwarfs the orphanage). On the one hand, the thick forest can be perceived as

![Figure 1](Image.png)
claustrophobic, giving a sense of being trapped, that certainly chimes with the difficult situations of the three female characters Ofelia (Ivana Baquero), Carmen (Ariadna Gil) and Mercedes (Maribel Verdú), oppressed by the control of Vidal (Sergi López) and unable to escape it. On the other hand, the trees also protect, allowing the maquis to carry out their operations of resistance and eventually defeat the fascist forces led by Vidal. It is furthermore a landscape of enchantment as far as the protagonist Ofelia is concerned, not least with the labyrinth of the film’s title, as well as the underground cave beneath the large tree. But it shares with the landscape of El espinazo a sense of isolation, a lack of access to the outside world. Historical events both do and do not impinge on the landscapes of del Toro’s Spanish films. In both films events play out in micro-cosm the historical events of the Spanish Civil War and afterwards, although del Toro does play around with our notion of who the eventual victors are, a point to which I will return. Yet both landscapes serve to cut the characters off from the wider Spanish context.

The isolation and lack of specificity about these landscapes serve to de-nationalise and internationalise them, which coincides with Antonio Lázaro-Reboll’s discussion of El espinazo in terms of transnational reception. According to Lázaro-Reboll, the original setting for this film was to be Mexico, and only later did the setting shift to Spain and the Civil War (Lázaro-Reboll 2007: 42), implying that although later the Civil War setting might prove to be a better fit than anything envisaged in Mexico, the bare bones of the story would adapt to contexts beyond the national specificity of the director (and writer) himself. The fuzziness of the film’s locations matches that of del Toro himself. Lázaro-Reboll comments: ‘del Toro’s cinema not only refuses to be categorized as national cinema, but is also refused the status of national cinema by the Academia Mexicana and by the critical establishment, on the grounds that it does not respond to certain perceptions of Mexicanness’ (ibid.: 44). Isabel Santaolalla takes a slightly different approach in positing El espinazo as ‘una reescritura desde una perspectiva distanciada e internacional, pero esencialmente hispanoamericana, del gran conflicto que enfrentó a los españoles, colocando al fantasma postcolonial en el centro de la historia, concediéndole un papel activo y exigiendo que éste sea recordado y reconocido’ (a rewriting, from a distanced and international perspective, but essentially Hispano-American, of the great conflict which Spaniards faced, placing the ghost of postcolonialism in the centre of the story, giving it an active role and insisting that it be remembered and acknowledged; Santaolalla 2005: 225). The Hispanic American ghost takes the form of Argentinian actor Federico Luppi as Casares, who becomes ‘un observador forastero’ (an outside observer; ibid.: 223) of the specifically Spanish events. Casares literally becomes a ghost, tacitly assisting the boys in their conquest of Jacinto and, as we discover at the end
of the film, recounting events, since the beginning and the end are framed by what proves to be his voice musing on what it means to be a ghost. Spain’s colonial past was itself a factor in the Civil War: Franco was attempting at least to recover the glory of Spain’s imperial past of which Latin America was its jewel in the crown; while the last efforts to hold on to colonial possessions in Latin America and North Africa provoked class conflict and ideological rifts to open wider in Spain, and these in turn fuelled the move towards civil war. A similar position to a lesser extent might be argued for El laberinto given that Luppi plays a cameo role as the king who reigns over the lost kingdom which Ofelia is trying to re-enter through her magical quest: the king does indeed welcome her back to her rightful place as princess of his kingdom, but it is at the cost of her life in the ‘real’ Spain. Luppi gives the opening voice-over that talks of the magic kingdom, and the closing dialogue in which he speaks of the way in which the Spanish landscape still carries the memory of Ofelia. Not only does the king frame events as Casares does, but he rules over a kingdom that appears connected in some way to Spain but also separate from it, a structure that could if we wished be calqued on to the relationship between Spain and Latin America (and we should not forget the fact that many who opposed Franco were forced to go into exile, often to Latin America, their lives in Spain abandoned for new lives in new lands – lives often less enchanted than Ofelia’s, it must be acknowledged). As Casares stands guard over the territory of the children’s home (to an accompaniment of Carlos Gardel’s tangos), so the king rules over the ‘lost’ kingdom.

We could perhaps argue that the involvement of both Luppi and del Toro himself in these texts suggests a dislocated desire for association, a call to care that acknowledges both the association of Spain with Latin America and the distance and dislocation of it (to say nothing of its difficulties: the association of Latin America with its former colonial master has not always, or ever, been an equal one). Describing the relationship as ‘love’ or ‘care’ might seem strange given Spain as oppressor, but a desire for association is more neutral: it invokes Spain as constantly becoming, acknowledging its colonial past and post-colonial present but with links to its former colony in constant associative flux. However, other desires of association can also be posited. If, as Lázaro-Reboll suggests, del Toro himself presents us with an indeterminacy as to his status as specifically Mexican director, then both his films arguably share in an indeterminacy of Spanishness. Annabel Martín cites Pedro Almodóvar as an example of a productive dialogue between global and local as he converts Hollywood melodrama to local specificities (Martín 2005: 42): perhaps we can argue these films the other way around to say that del Toro converts local specificities to a globalised form. Certainly these films coincide with a crisis of confidence in the production of specifically Spanish cinema, as Román Gubern posits: ‘lo que
domina es un tipo de cine apátrida, que más que inspirarse en la realidad del país, se inspira en los modelos que llegan de Hollywood, París o Londres. Son sobre todo modelos de género’ (what we mostly get is a sort of deracinated cinema which takes its inspiration from models coming from Hollywood, Paris or London, rather than from the reality of Spain. They are genre templates before anything else: quoted in Steiner 2007: 312). Gubern’s opposition of Spanish cinema and patria – the notion of Spain as fatherland, which also had its part to play in Civil War ideology – is intriguing for us here: the implication is that by resorting to horror and fantasy, both well-established international genres, del Toro is somehow deracinating the specifically Spanish historical backdrop to these films. It is also intriguing, however, that genre cinema is, according to Gubern, antithetical to national cinema. This is a position with which I would not agree at all: it is not only, as I will argue in this and other chapters, that Spanish traces can still be found in an apparently de-nationalised landscape, but that it leaves untouched the question of what a specifically Spanish film actually consists of. Gubern’s comments reflect a wider tendency among Spanish critics to disparage Spanish attempts at genre cinema. On the other hand, it could be argued that genre – and genre here would appear to be horror, fantasy, film noir, thrillers and the like (as opposed to comedy and cine social, which are more easily recognised as specifically Spanish) – opens Spain and its history to an outside gaze more than most film formats. This is a call to care that invokes Spain to those outside Spain as well as inside: although this invocation may recall those of Lerner and Flanders in the previous chapter, in that genre entertainment rather than the history of a specific country might lie at the root of this desire for association, the memory of Spain’s past is invoked nonetheless. Such a move, in which genre takes precedence over memory, is perceived negatively by some critics. Ulrich Winter, for instance, comments

Es importante señalar … que la reciente fase reconciliadora coincide con una creciente mercantilización de la literatura y de la conmemoración en general. Los límites entre reconciliación y nostalgia, entre estética, política de la memoria y estrategia de marketing se desdibujan a medida que la conmemoración se convierte en un fenómeno de interés general. (Winter 2006: 12)

It is important to point out … that the recent phase of reconciliation coincides with an increasing commercialisation of literature and of commemoration in general. The limits between reconciliation and nostalgia, between aesthetics, the politics of memory and marketing strategies become blurred to the extent that commemoration becomes a phenomenon of general interest.

Winter goes on to quote the popular Spanish television series Cuéntame cómo pasó (Tell Me How it Happened) as an example of the banal recuperation of memory (including the consumption of Coca-Cola). Naomi Greene also points to the dangers of the recuperation of memory via cinema:
just as cinema lends itself to the expression of dreams, so, too, is it a powerful medium for the transmission of historical and political myths that, frequently, soften or obscure the most brutal or unpalatable of historical truths even as they give rise to compelling visions of the national past. (Greene 1999: 6)

Greene’s comments add a useful note of caution that will become very pertinent when it comes to considering the ending of *El laberinto*, which I shall do below. However, claims to the banality or simplification of recuperated history through the demands of cinematic genre cannot gloss over the need of both history and memory for narrative, as Labanyi observes: ‘The study of the past can never, however scrupulous it is in its use of documentary sources, get beyond narrative constructions of the past to reach a realm of pure factuality’ (Labanyi 2008: 121). Collective memory, she argues, is not an actual act of remembering, but the construction of social frameworks and narrative structures which both facilitate and guide individual acts of remembrance (ibid.). These frameworks and structures are highly likely to include elements from elsewhere in any case: with the use of genre cinema elements of narrative structure are inevitably shared across national boundaries but that is not in their disfavour necessarily. It increases the scope of structures to incorporate different forms of memory and different ways of perceiving and recounting it: and while banality and simplification are risks, they are not overcome simply by eschewing commercial media forms such as del Toro’s films. The generic landscapes of our two films here may coincide with the internationalisation of Spanish film through genre, but they also demonstrate how memories tied to specific places can still be invoked even when the place of the film is not in itself specific. Indeed, the landscapes of *El espinazo* and *El laberinto* offer an imbrication between personal and genre-specific histories derived from horror and fantasy and a wider historical background within which Spanish history takes place. Personal memories and stories are, after all, never *just* about national history.

But even if the international and thus deracinated stance posited by Lázaro-Reboll and Santaolalla risks us understanding the Civil War at one remove (thus a distance in place as well as time), that history is nonetheless specific and local as well as global, and as such it resonates with meaning. Here I find the ideas of Stuart Hall helpful. In an interview with Kuan-Sing Chen, Hall remarks that globalization must never be read as a simple process of cultural homogenization; it is always an articulation of the local, of the specific, and the global. Therefore, there will always be specificities – of voices, of positioning, of identity, of cultural traditions, of histories, and these are the conditions of enunciation which enable us to speak. We speak with distinctive voices; but we speak within the logic of a cultural-global, which opens a conversation between us, which would not have been possible otherwise. (Chen 1996: 407)
Hall is talking here of the history of cultural studies, and in his interview he returns time and again to the idea of translation, the use and reinterpretation of cultural studies in local terms. He understands translation in this sense as ‘a continuous process of re-articulation and re-contextualization, without any notion of a primary origin’ (Chen 1996: 393). Now, the question of a primary origin has its difficulties here, because arguably there is one (a specific historical event and its aftermath, occurring in a specific place, as opposed to a set of theoretical concepts): nonetheless, Hall’s ideas suggest to me a way of understanding the process of re-presenting stories deriving from the Civil War at a distance while still allowing for local interpretations and recuperations. A similar idea comes from Jeff Menne in his article on contemporary Mexican cinema: drawing on Appadurai, Menne argues that ‘The national … might serve as the arrayed resources of heterogeneity, or the archives for imagination’ (Menne 2007: 87). While Menne only mentions del Toro in passing in his article, and while Spanish history may not be exactly what Menne had in mind, nonetheless memories of the Civil War and afterwards can become a resource on to which other meanings may be grafted. Thus genre may talk to us in globalised terms but carry within it local voices and identities – and memories; or, alternatively, local histories offer meanings and narrative structures beyond the locality. There are traces of specifically Spanish memories as a version of Spanish history plays itself out across the landscape – and yet this history has itself been re-internationalised to speak to a global as well as a local audience.

As Lázaro-Reboll observes that ‘Plot, story and characterization contribute to a transnational comprehension of the historical background for audiences, and lend themselves to a universal symbolic reading’ (Lázaro-Reboll 2007: 42), so both *El espinazo*, about which Lázaro-Reboll is writing, and its successor *El laberinto* can offer a localised and globalised potential to recuperate memory. Both forms, I would further argue, are not neatly distinct, and this I will explore in my discussion below of how both films use their landscapes. Lázaro-Reboll comments that ‘Through the creative strategies deployed in his first “Spanish” film, the Mexican director consciously politicizes his intervention in modern Spanish culture engaging with memories and cultural fragments that have been erased from official homogenic discourses on contemporary democratic Spain’ (ibid.: 50). Thus, far from the simple position of distance that *El espinazo* and its companion film purportedly offer, they aid reflecting and refraction of those memories back at a Spanish audience, who in turn reinterpret those memories through frameworks that originated outside, in terms of genre films (and indeed through landscape motifs that infer both Spanish and international cultural texts). And we should not forget that the Spanish audience is in turn multifaceted and will include younger generations who did not experience the conflict directly but who may draw on interpretative frameworks that come
from outside, because these, rather than a more direct understanding of their own history, may be the most obvious frameworks for interpretation, precisely since much of this history has been suppressed for so long.

When Labanyi, then, talks of her wariness as regards critical interpretations that pay no heed to public debate, as quoted above, her concern, justified as it is, leaves out the question of international reception and the internationalisation of memory that simply cannot always fully take into account the debate in the country of origin. There is an undoubted risk in del Toro’s fictionalisation of historical memory, which maps perhaps a little too easily on to memories of the Second World War in which the fascists were defeated. It can allow for a sense of resolution that jars with the tense debate still ongoing within Spain about how to remember this period in their history. There is also a risk in that such internationalisation softens local traumas and thus does them a disservice (as Greene warns us above): it seems uncomfortable to think that one person’s tragic memories serve as raw material for another’s fantasy entertainment. But, quite apart from the fact that these are also Spanish films for Spanish consumption, del Toro reminds audiences further afield that Spain has something to remember. Outside audiences, too, participate in the act of recuperating memory. Del Toro does not act in a patronising manner to rescue memories that the Spanish themselves have struggled to recover: like the Latin American ghost of Casares he reminds us that Spanish memories, though a matter for the Spanish in the first instance, are also a concern for others. But the question arises as to how the Spanish conflict is remembered abroad, and the possibility of conflation with the Second World War, a possibility that El laberinto touches on in particular: while both films remind the world outside Spain that a civil war took place, the outcomes of both films in which the Right appears vanquished suggest a historical outcome that exactly reflects the outcome of the Second World War, in which the fascist Axis powers were also defeated. Del Toro’s endings skate over the fact that in Spain the exact opposite occurred, and that the consequences were bloody reprisals and repression. But, as Hayden White observes, ‘what is at issue here is not the facts of the matter regarding such events but the different possible meanings that such facts can be construed as bearing’ (White 1996: 21), and these possible meanings pivot around Rose’s call to care, a desire to see a Spain rescued from fascism that can be felt from both within and without Spain. It is a dream of presence of Spain, a Spain with a remembered history but which people wish to remember otherwise – to rewrite, as it were. As Labanyi notes, ‘memory is always constructed from the vantage point of the present. To reject memory as an unreliable witness to the past is to miss the point, for what memory reveals is present-day attitudes to the past’ (Labanyi 2008: 12). And included in the recuperation of history and memory is the desire to rewrite them.
All these ‘translations’, to go back to Stuart Hall’s term, are available within these two films; and who is to say what is the original? Is the original the history belonging to the Spanish, or does the original belong with del Toro and Mexico? Casares’ ghost suggests the indeterminacy of origin in more ways than one. These translations, I will now go on to argue, imprint themselves on the landscapes that del Toro uses as setting for both his films, the plain of El espinazo and the wood of El laberinto; translations that suggest a trace of Spanish specificities but also wider interpretative frameworks. The plain reminds us of a desert in a Western, the wood an unidentified forest that could come just as much from the above-mentioned Lord of the Rings as from a Spanish film. In some ways these landscapes function as stock settings that globally have resonance beyond Spain, and here we encounter again the international dimension encompassed by del Toro, and the filmic references that speak to film traditions well beyond Spain – the horror story, fantasy, the Western (as recognised by Santaolalla (2005: 224) in her reference to John Ford’s The Searchers of 1956), the Second World War movie. As already noted above, in addition, the empty plain of El espinazo and the woodland of El laberinto are both apparently disconnected from the rest of Spain: these are spaces devoid of Spanish specificity. Any possible connections to places elsewhere seem fragile, uncertain and vulnerable: while it is clearly quite a trek to get from the orphanage of El espinazo to the nearest village, in El laberinto the train line that appears to be the only link to the outside world is blown up by the maquis, thus isolating Vidal and his troops. Their isolation and thus lack of context add to our sense of these spaces as generic spaces rather than landscapes that evoke Spain. The sense of the forest in El laberinto as an unspecified space beyond the realm of ordinary human experience can be considered in the light of Gaston Bachelard’s ideas on the woodland from his The Poetics of Space (Bachelard 1994). His theorisation marks out the wood as beyond specificity both historical and geographical: ‘We do not have to be long in the woods to experience the always rather anxious impression of “going deeper and deeper” into a limitless world. Soon, if we do not know where we are going, we no longer know where we are’ (Bachelard 1994: 185). And ‘who knows the temporal dimensions of the forest? History is not enough ... forests reign in the past’ (ibid.: 188). The fact that we never see beyond the wood itself in El laberinto reinforces this idea not exactly of Bachelard’s limitless world but certainly the notion that the wood is the world: anything outside it is hearsay and indeed fantasy. When Ofelia climbs out of the car into the wood, her first action is to stare up at the trees, whose tops we cannot at this point see (suggesting the limitlessness that Bachelard touches on above), a ‘contemplation [that] produces an attitude that is so special, an inner state that is so unlike any other, that the daydream transports the dreamer outside the immediate world to a world that bears the mark of infinity’ (ibid.: 183). And thus Ofelia transports herself outside
her own painful immediacy – caused by the events of the Civil War that mean that she and her mother must entrust themselves to a hated Fascist – to her own fantasy realm where eventually she will reign alongside her parents, a realm beyond anything we ourselves can recognise except as the stuff of fairytales, nationally non-specific. El laberinto emphasises the woodland as enchantment, but it does not only function at Ofelia’s level of the fairy story. The adults map a different story/history on to it, and one that itself is a fantasy, where the right people win, as it were – which did not happen in reality. As Bachelard says, history is not enough; as T. S. Eliot put it in his Four Quartets, ‘What might have been and what has been | Point to one end, which is always present’: thus the wood of a contemporary fantasy includes not only an awareness of how things were but also how they ought to have been or might have been.

Some of these spaces, in addition, function as transnational spaces: the people who occupy them are not automatically to be taken as Spanish. In El espinaço the Spanish inhabitants of the orphanage are never seen to get to the far-off village: only the Argentinian Casares is seen to occupy that space. While there, he catches sight of one of the Republican soldiers who deposited Carlos at the orphanage, but, immediately he sees him, that soldier is placed against a wall and shot. Also shot are foreigners fighting for the Republic; Canadians and a Chinese soldier (while a bystander wonders about the presence of a Chinese soldier in Spain), suggesting the village as a transnational space. If the events within the children’s home are a microcosm of events within Spain as a whole, as the sons of Republicans do battle with their oppressor, then the landscape emphasises how remote events are from the rest of the world, but also that some foreigners get caught up in those remote events. Likewise, in El laberinto, foreigners do not intrude into the wood, but we are aware of their presence and their relation to events. While the maquis hide out in the woods they read of the progress of the Second World War: the maquis struggle was partly carried out in the hope of an Allied victory which the participants believed would sweep Franco from power (they were sadly mistaken). Vidal, on the other hand, is reminiscent of a Nazi officer from many a film set in the Second World War, dressed in field grey: this reference dissipates the historical and geographical specificity of the conflict in the film, but it also reminds us that the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War were connected events, particularly with the participation of Hitler’s German forces on Franco’s side during the former.

Nonetheless, the landscape for all this still carries traces of Spanish specificity. John Berger has remarked:

_Landscapes can be deceptive._

_Sometimes a landscape seems to be less a setting for the life of its inhabitants than a curtain behind which their struggles, achievements and accidents take place. For those who, with the inhabitants, are behind the curtains, landmarks are no longer geographic but also biographical and personal._ (Berger, quoted in Cosgrove 1998: 271: italics in original)
The notion of the curtain might imply the idea of the surface behind which the ‘real’ Spain can be found, an idea which I questioned in the previous chapter. Nonetheless, the concept of landscape as part of personal experience reminds us of Wylie’s discussion of landscape writing. We could argue from what I suggested above that the landscape does in fact act like a screen to hide the very specificity of del Toro’s stories, but I would claim that simultaneously the landscape becomes intricately bound up with the personal narratives of these films, which do not make sense without it. D’Lugo remarks on the previous use of the wood to speak to Spanish specificity, as in the case of *Furtivos* (Poachers; José Luis Borau, 1975), in which the wood ‘is a deceptive space of covert violence and transgression, thus providing another politically charged spatial metaphor for Spanish society’ (D’Lugo 2010: 124), and *El corazón del bosque* (Heart of the Forest; Manuel Gutiérrez Aragón, 1979), in which the wood contains ‘harsh memories of fratricidal struggle, but which [is], as well, endowed with the allure of magic’ (D’Lugo 2010: 125). Similarly, while the landscape of *El laberinto* can be interpreted in generic terms as fantasy woodland, it can also be interpreted in biographical and personal – and thus also historical – terms. Ofelia’s use of the wood and the labyrinth within it as the basis for her quest suggests the limitless possibilities indicated by Bachelard, but this includes the rewriting of history itself, in which the hero(ine), banished from home, is recognised once more, just as those apparently excluded from Spanish history are beginning once more to find their place there. Note that it is not just a question of recuperating collective memory but also a question of Ofelia recuperating the memory of what she once was. The possibility of erasing individual memories is also raised, as for instance when Ofelia partly fails in her second quest, disobeying the faun’s orders and allowing two of his fairy messengers to get eaten: when the faun finds out, he says furiously that her disobedience means that her memory will be erased from her original kingdom. (In a similar manner, when Vidal asks Mercedes to tell his son at what time he died, she responds that she will ensure the son has no memory of him.)

The woodland acts not simply as a venue for recuperation on more than one level, however, but is actively involved in the process. Ofelia’s quest starts when she plucks stones from the forest paths and inserts them into the eye sockets of a nearby statue: as she does this the wood seems to come alive, through the motif of the insect that will be her initial guide. When she encounters the faun, he tells her that he is the woods and the mountain, thus the landscape personified and animated. Ofelia later tells Mercedes that the faun smells of earth, reinforcing this link between the faun and the land. Likewise, Ofelia’s first quest is to find the key hidden inside a large toad that lives under the roots of the tree, which entails her burrowing under the tree and becoming coated with mud in the process. The quest’s movements in and out of the fabric of the
landscape, in parallel with the second quest wherein Ofelia moves through the fabric of the house, suggest the imbrication of the recovery of memory in the landscape itself, a process not unlike the real excavations of the bodies of Civil War victims currently under way, as well as the use of landscape markers to identify burial sites.

Mercedes Camino (2009: 48) reminds us of the strong identification of the maquis with the landscape through which they move. The woodland of El laberinto bears traces of the maquis as they carry out their struggle: Vidal’s soldiers find antibiotics and a lottery ticket they left behind. As Vidal and his soldiers walk away from the scene the maquis rise up from where they were hidden, very close by in the undergrowth (Fig. 2). Del Toro in this way makes explicit the notion of Berger’s deceptive landscape acting as a curtain: the generic landscape nonetheless contains people that can be perceived not only in general terms (a resistance against fascism) but also in terms of a specific time and place (the resistance against Franco in the 1940s). Their traces are ones that can be read by those who wish to read them in historical terms. But the landscape also indicates the divisions in Spain: the trees and the house structures (floors, ceilings, Ofelia’s bath) are used as screen wipes that not only aid the switch between different levels of narrative, Ofelia’s fantasy quest and the maquis struggle, but also between Vidal’s fascist troops and Ofelia as a focal point of resistance against Vidal. The notion is also apparent in the motif of Ofelia’s new green dress, which Carmen makes for her so as to make her presentable at a polite dinner party and thus in turn acceptable to her stepfather. But Ofelia goes walking in it through the forest: she removes it and leaves it on a tree branch in order to go underground and perform her quest of removing the key from
the toad. The dress gets blown on to the ground and covered in earth while she is away: meanwhile, underground, her new shoes get covered in mud. The landscape thus renders Ofelia unacceptable to Vidal: it actively contributes to the opposition between the two characters.

If *El laberinto* offers a landscape from which we can read traces of Spanish history if we are so minded, then *El espinazo* does likewise. Just as the film can be perceived both as an allegory of the deep social rifts in Spain that led to the bloodshed of the War, and as a horror film *tout court*, so can the landscape be read in terms of Spanish memory as well as a more generic Wild West plain. There is less emphasis on landscape in *El espinazo* since we do not have the lush greens and foliage of the forest, but, as mentioned above, there are long shots of the plain that serve precisely to isolate the orphanage and its inhabitants, almost like the last pocket of resistance before the cultural desert of Francoism. Antonio Gómez López-Quiñones argues that

> la violencia de la Guerra Civil presenta un aspecto tan extendido espacial y temporalmente que parece difícilmente representable en una novela o en un film. Ante esta imposibilidad, queda una sola opción: reducir el tamaño de dicha violencia, concretizarla y arrancarla del espacio de lo sublime. (Gómez López-Quiñones 2006: 193)

the violence of the Civil War offers such a broad perspective in terms of space and time that it seems difficult to represent in a novel or film. In the face of this impossibility only one option remains: to reduce such violence in size, make it specific, and drag it out of the sphere of the sublime.
And he goes on to suggest that *Espinazo* uses this strategy. Certainly the use of the ghost story and the isolated and contained location of the home serve in part as a microcosm of the wider events of the Spanish Civil War. However, the plain in itself suggests the sublime, being without end, overwhelming, its sheer vastness making it almost impossible for little boys to cross (hence Carmen’s advice to Carlos that running away is not to be recommended). In this sense the landscape is not so much a microcosm as an endless vastness in which the fates of the boys are frozen at the end: as Casares watches them struggle away towards the horizon their unknown fates merge into the wider memories – and the wider disappearances – of the Civil War. D’Lugo comments on the use of the plain in *El espíritu de la colmena* as a setting that isolates its inhabitants, an example of ‘protagonists immobilized in confining spaces [that] help to create a symbolic space of action that appears as the result of the ominous effects of the unseen dictatorship’ (D’Lugo 2010: 124). The plain of *El espinazo*, like that of *El espíritu de la colmena*, threatens to overwhelm the children in its vastness that hides terrors and monsters, although the monsters of *El espinazo*, Santi and Jacinto, are not ‘out there’, as the child imagines in *El espíritu*, but within. Nonetheless, just as the plain of *El espíritu* carries its own traces of the War, with the man on the run hiding out in a ramshackle hut, so the movements of the War are reflected in the movement of children and adults across the landscape. Just as Ofelia arrives by car through the wood, so our first glimpse of Carlos is as he is, unknown to him, driven to his new home across the plain. And the blood that issues from Santi’s head is repeated on the landscape after the explosion at the home: as Jacinto stands on the plain looking back at the home, a plume of smoke arises that reminds us of Santi’s plumes of blood. In this way, personal history (Santi’s death) is linked to political violence (the threat to the children’s home from outside forces with which Jacinto will ally himself).

Santaolalla observes that: ‘son especialmente significativas aquellas tomas en las que la cámara capta la tensión entre el interior y el exterior, recogiendo, desde el interior, el mundo “salvaje” del exterior’ (those takes in which the camera captures the tension between inside and outside, gathering up, inside, the ‘wild’ world outside, are particularly significant; Santaolalla 2005: 224). On this reading the tensions of inside and outside bleed into each other, part of that tension being precisely the sense of entrapment within the house (particularly on the part of Jacinto) that comes about precisely because of the unfriendly terrain of the outside. Although the busyness of the children’s home, and Carmen’s fear that they cannot house or cope with another child (on the occasion that Carlos arrives), contrasts with the emptiness and stillness of the plain outside, the tension occurs because of the close proximity of the two, both literally and figuratively, as well as because of their distinctiveness. Yet there is, too, a sense of opposition between the home and the plain that surrounds it, as
the film proceeds to its climactic events. As the occupants pack to leave the home, fearing the threat of fascist power that may come to them from outside, and endanger them, Conchita (Irene Visedo), suspecting something is wrong, steps outside the house and looks around the plain, now a landscape with a very real menace within it (Fig. 3). That threat for her will prove all too real, since not only does her excursion into the landscape herald the return of Jacinto after he has been thrown out, but later the landscape will frame in extreme long shot her death at his hands. She falls to the ground and disappears into the landscape. Similarly, Casares watches out for Jacinto and his colleagues to return, on guard facing the window through which we see the plain stretch itself out. It is as if Casares is directly confronting the landscape. The strong sense of opposition of inside and out embody the fate of many of those linked to the Left as the Civil War ran its course: trapped with nowhere to go, and awaiting an uncertain fate. The plain itself comes to embody the threat of political violence. We do not have to read it that way, as I have said elsewhere (Davies 2006), but the trace is there if we wish to invoke it, and thus Spanish history – and Spain itself – is invoked in so doing.

If we wish – such a phrase reminds us of the role of the subject in invoking the call to care and thus bringing Spain into a process of being. In del Toro’s films the wood and the plain are, on one level, mere setting in that they are the place where something happens, and the wood and the plain serve narrative purpose in isolating the inhabitants of each so that no outside rescue is possible. But del Toro also draws our attention to the landscape as landscape, moving backwards and forwards between a narrative mode and a spectacular mode wherein we are encouraged to perceive the landscape as a thing in itself. As Martin Lefebvre argues (drawing in turn on Sergei Eisenstein), only thus can it convey emotion (Lefebvre 2006a: xii), and thus we can see through it a form of Rose’s call to care: there is something more to these landscapes, they are in excess of mere setting, and in excess of its narrative function as the space in which events occur. On the other hand, Lefebvre also argues that ‘in mainstream cinema, natural or exterior spaces tend to function as setting rather than landscape in the vast majority of cases. It is the place where something happens, where something takes place and unfolds’. Thus, ‘the contemplation of filmic spectacle depends on an “autonomising gaze”. It is this gaze which enables the notion of filmic landscape in narrative fiction (and event-based documentary) film; it makes possible the transition from setting to landscape’ (Lefebvre 2006b: 24, italics in original). The contrast of landscape between the two films is also in itself redolent of an underlying fascination with landscape (and we may remember in del Toro’s Hellboy II: The Golden Army how the standing stones in Ireland literally take on life). Even in films as deeply plotted as these two are, we can exercise what Lefebvre thinks of as a cultural habit of being able to perceive a landscape even where the artistic
genre is not automatically asking for this; we can always adopt a ‘landscape gaze’ (ibid.: 48). How we do this, however, will depend on the sort of Spain we wish to invoke: indeed, wish to see.

Labanyi writes that many Spanish texts dealing with the Civil War and its aftermath display ‘a traumatic crisis of memory related to a geographical displacement or “loss of place”’ (Labanyi 2000: 67): for her, the way to resolve this crisis is to learn to live with the spectral traces of ghosts (ibid.: 80), and thus they ‘find their place’ again. But different people will live with these ghosts in different ways. Labanyi evokes elsewhere in her essay Walter Benjamin’s cultural historian, whose role is not simply to reconstruct the past but to reassemble it, ‘to create new meanings through the dialectical confrontation of fragments that are normally separate’ (ibid.: 70) – someone who ‘defamiliarizes the maps made by official surveyors (whose function is to put everything in its “proper place”) in order to create an alternative, fantasmagorical topography that can recover, not just things, but the dreams and desires attached to them which did not find realization as “fact”: that is, popular history’ (ibid.).

When watching del Toro’s two Spanish films we can invoke these ghosts in new ways that do not necessarily insist on their Spanish specificity, but within which, as with Lerner’s and Flanders’ invocations of the previous chapter, Spain itself is conjured up as a ghostly presence. We can, however, if we wish, give more emphasis to this phantasmagorical landscape as specifically Spanish. Lefebvre comments that ‘possession is not a required trait for representing space as a landscape, insofar as we understand it in aesthetic terms; whereas it is required when space is represented as “territory”’ (Lefebvre 2006b: 53). I would prefer Rose’s ‘desire for belonging’ rather than Lefebvre’s ‘possession’, which allows a potentially more benign role for the subject; but Lefebvre’s comments remind us of the importance of that subject in invoking Spain as the object of a call to care. Nonetheless, whether the subject sees these landscapes as landscape or as territory, Spain and the ghosts of her past are invoked And these invocations can be translated, and resonate with those who are not themselves Spanish – as they clearly have done for the Mexican del Toro. For these people Spain may never be more than de Saint-Exupéry’s fairytale land, or a place of ghost stories – but, for all that, the ghosts of the Spanish past trace themselves across the Spanish terrain for us to make what story or history of them that we will.