Looking For Orwell and Finding Gaudí

by Samuel Hux (January 2016)

Passing through Barcelona years ago, during the waning time of the Franco regime, and knowing I would have twelve hours in my favorite of all cities, I decided that instead of merely revisiting I would make a special itinerary, a kind of historical visit to a moment I had read of more than once: revolutionary Barcelona, 3rd of May, 1937.

George Orwell, more famous for *1984*, may have written a better book in *Homage to Catalonia,* his memoir of several months' involvement in the Civil War as a volunteer for the defense of the short-lived Republic. While Orwell was recuperating from battle that spring of 1937, a mini-civil-war broke out in Catalonia expressing the labyrinthine politics joining and separating, in about equal measures, the left-wing members of the Republican coalition. The most powerful members, communists and socialists (in Catalonia, unlike the rest of Spain, they were officially united as—in Catalan—the *Partit Socialista Unificat de Catalunya:* PSUC), had no great trust in their anarchist colleagues, who returned the suspicions, and had even less sympathy for the militants of the POUM (*Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista),* with whom foreign volunteer Orwell was loosely associated, and which as an unofficially "Trotskyist" party obviously had little use for the communists hewing a Stalinist line and dominating the PSUC and much of the regional government through their access to rubles.

At any rate—cutting through a great deal of internecine complexity—the communists with the aid of the regional government's Assault Guards made war that May against their anarchist and POUMist "allies." Within days the POUM was no more, and the anarchists, too numerous and ubiquitous to be wiped out, were more distrustful of the Republic than before. Orwell returned to England, not without some difficulty, to write his great exposé of Stalinist duplicity and a moving celebration of Spanish character.

It was hard to imagine fighting on the gay and extroverted Ramblas, that

beautiful promenade with its kiosks, famed aviaries, and outdoor cafés. Nonetheless, I walked from its midpoint where Orwell had first heard gunfire that May 3rd toward the bottom, to assure myself that the Hotel Falcón, which had been in ’37 a POUM boarding house for militants across the street from the Comité Local, no longer existed. Still, I was a little disappointed at finding no trace of the Falcón even if decades after the event, although no surprise naturally at the absence of the Comité Local. My historical ardor cooled: a foolish venture. And what was I after, anyway? Bullet holes? Ghosts? An old figure lurking nearby like Coleridge’s ancient Mariner to fix me with a mad eye and “*Señor, señor. . . hay una historia. . .*”—someone as obsessed with the past as I often am?

I wandered about the harbor, once the queen of the Mediterranean and still a princess, from which Catalan adventurers once sailed to make Athens, even, a Catalan duchy for sixty-five years of the fourteenth century, and to dominate Sardinia, in a part of which Catalan is still spoken. Then I took a cab to Antonio Gaudí’s *El Templo Expiatorio de la Sagrada Familia,* knowing it would still be there in its unfinished state, the finest thing in Spain, fantastic creation of—I’m convinced—Spain’s finest modern artist, bar not Picasso; and several hours later was back in the center of the city, the Plaza de Cataluña (in those Franco days the Catalan “Plaça de Catalunya” was proscribed), at one corner of which the Ramblas begin.

I turned the corner and came upon the Hotel Continental, where Orwell stayed with his wife, and which he described as a kind of neutral ground in May 1937. Comfortable old place, generous leather chairs, expansive windows commanding the Ramblas, the charm of an establishment you feel must have been past its prime even during it, and the better for it.

One hundred yards down the Ramblas from the Continental, wrote Orwell, was the POUM Executive Building, next door to the Café Moka, and across the street from the Cinema Poliorama which was unmistakable, he said, because of a small observatory above it crowned with twin domes. I didn’t expect to find the letters P-O-U-M of course, but the Poliorama—on the roof of which Orwell had spent three days in armed stalemate with the Assault Guards holed-up across the promenade in the Moka—should be easy to find, if it still existed. And it did, still a moviehouse, twin domes visible above the trees of the Ramblas. And

across the street: a busy, remodeled café called Cafetería Moka. Where the POUM exec would have been, next door, the Banco Popular was now housed. I scanned to the right, a story above the Moka: Radio España de Barcelona. No mention of it by Orwell; but I felt a kind of embarrassed pleasure that the Poliorama and the Moka, like the Continental, still survived.

And then, by the sheerest accident, a casting of eyes skyward, I saw what I had not seen in thirty minutes of standing there and would not have seen otherwise: several stories above the Moka, nowhere near where they should have been, incongruously wired makeshift to the grillwork of a balcony, the dull steel letters F-A-L-C-O-N. It's in the wrong place! The old POUM boarding house was far, far from here, opposite the Comité Local. Had I misread Orwell? No. I was sure of that and later checked. Had his memory of such distance failed him? That was unlikely. I walked to the Moka and asked an attendant if the Falcón were a hotel. Yes. But I asked no more; I really did not know how to explain what I was after: not a room, but the past. And it was not a time yet when you could ask a total stranger if he remembered the Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista. Bluntly: I was afraid to.

I took a seat in the Moka, and thought. . . . The name of an establishment which no longer exists appears as the name of another: nothing rare. But: the name of an old, long-outlawed party's boarding house from decades ago appears on the building next to where that party's executive offices used to be, across from where some of that party's militants held off attackers, and above where the attackers were themselves holed-up. *So?* The size of my excitement was absurd, all out of proportion to the historical significance (none really) of this antiquarian irony. But. . . . what was it doing there? Sheer coincidence? The private joke, or personal solace, of some citizen harboring old political sympathies in Franco's Spain? Not really likely. Coincidence more likely.

Well, it didn't matter—while in a way it did. Whatever the why, the sequence of events said something, even if nothing was intended. In surprising ways little disappears in Spain—"an everlasting animal stretching into the future and the past, and, like all living things, having the power to change out of recognition and yet remain the same." That's really Orwell on England, but I take a liberty. One builds houses of the crumbled walls of ruins; I began this essay in one such. On the floors of a peasant's *casita* may be tiles from an auction at a

decaying *palacio.* And almost four decades after a moment, the moment could be reimagined, if one wished, with the scenes of that moment condensed in space, as if italicized for the historical memory. This is, of course, part illusion—but all truth.

Elsewhere in Barcelona, or everywhere, there is Antonio Gaudí. What is *La Sagrada Familia?* The mind and eye will never seize it for good. An immense unfinished cathedral dominated by its transept, a complex of five towers which continue to transform themselves as they grow skyward, as if solid on earth and more fantastically curious and mercurial, almost playful, the higher they reach; the outer four towers taller by a third than the central one, but dominated by it: there the features of the whole condensed and exaggerated by its controlled confusion of reddish stone, green mosaic, comic-nightmare gargoyles, holy protagonists, cones suggesting mushrooms, and crucifix. It is the only unfinished building I have ever seen that is totally satisfying the way it is—the combination of bulging stone and ethereal suggestibility, heavy stasis and flight at once. Finish it and it will seem no more fixed and complete than it does now—or no less. One can be thankful it was not destroyed during the Civil War by Mussolini's bombers, which raided Barcelona regularly from the vacation island of Mallorca.

Someone has said of Gaudí's houses, like the beautiful Casa Milá and Casa Batlló in Barcelona, that they look contemporary instead of turn-of-twentieth-century art nouveau. But I would find it difficult, did I not know, to say *when* they were made. They bulge and twist like the tortured grilles of their balconies. There is such an indifference to the more prosaic form-as-function, a kind of profound baroque except that the expansive decorativeness lies in the shape itself instead of being only attached to it. Suggestions of a much deeper kind of functionalism: the conception of an artist who knew that the function of a building is not only to house, but to grace, the occupants. *La Sagrada Familia* itself could be gothic, could be modern: the work of a modern genius in love with the past, or a medieval builder with a curious sense of humor. That it shares with all his work: the houses; the fantastic playground in Barcelona, the Park Güell, with its mosaic walls, gingerbread cottages, stone mushrooms thirty feet high, arcades shaped like long air-pockets under breaking tidal waves; the immense crown of thorns, almost suggesting a mobile, above the altar in the cathedral in Palma de Mallorca.

Many visits to *La Sagrada Familia* have not tired me of it. I climb the dark spiral stairways, losing sense of direction as I pass the deep-set windows—a view of buildings in the distance, then sky, then the façade of the adjoining tower, then the green mosaic growing beneath the cross—and unsettled in a way only partially related to sharp heights. Up one tower, grasping parapets to cross to the next, repeating the movement clear across the five as if describing a drunken, spiraling graph. Then several minutes standing before the whole, muttering, inappropriately, "Goddamn, goddamn"—as I did my first visit there at any rate.

In the basement beneath the transept—what should be the nave was a storage yard of construction material—was a large model of Gaudí's impossible conception. It could never have been completed in his lifetime: even if he had not been run down by trolley car in 1926, a senseless and tragic death cutting short forty-three years of work on his magnum opus which saw him at the end literally move on to the grounds so as not to lose a minute. In another basement to the rear there was an exhibition in photograph and miniature of this and other buildings. Moving from one to the next I knew I would have to see the originals. And then, partially because they were all around me in reproduction, partly because I was inside one, but mostly because of the accumulated tension of two hours of feasting on Gaudí, I was overtaxed and emotionally exhausted, stifling tears. This unpredictable sadness, not depression, was something I would have to think about a long time.

There is something inescapably "literary" about Spain. As there is about many places, no doubt, but there's this difference: Spain seems less a *subject* of art than itself an enormous collective *artist,* shaping its experience in a moving form. The bull fight, that five-act drama—which I would like to be the first not to talk about, although I love it very much—is a clear instance of this. (Well. . . I *will* talk about it, but only to note Salvador de Madariaga's remark to those who sentimentally object to it: "the bull has a far better chance of killing his opponent than a salmon.") *El fútbol* (soccer to us) may now surpass *la corrida* as the national sport, and *baloncesto* (basketball) grows ever more popular. But they are exceptionally balletic games, and the more slowly deliberate American football will never thrive Spanishly.

For all the ultra-montane Catholicism in its history, it is only incidentally a religious moralism that comes to mind when one thinks of Spain: more

fundamentally it's a recognition of something essentially aesthetic—from subtle grace to neurotic *machismo.* Aesthetic—as is even *honor,* which is, finally, an insistence that one's life be a recognizable shape and form instead of a mere anarchic series of acts. But there is a cost that goes with this essential aestheticism, for the uses we make of art are complex and often subtly destructive. "What is a poet?" asked Søren Kierkegaard. "An unhappy man who conceals anguish in his heart, but whose lips are so fashioned that when sighs pass over them they sound like beautiful music. . . . And people flock about the poet and say to him: do sing again; which means, would that new sufferings tormented your soul, and: would that your lips stayed fashioned as before, for your cries would only terrify us, but your music is delightful."

Spain has long been a kind of poet to the western world: "your music is delightful." By which we mean no song, book, painting, building in particular—for the average educated westerner probably knows more about English, American, French, German, Italian, Greek culture than Spanish—but the perceived ambiance of the nation itself. And when we complain of changes in Spain—authentic flamenco is hard to find, there are Chinese restaurants in Madrid, etc.—we often mean, though perish the conscious thought, "would that new sufferings," or the old ones really, "tormented your soul." But if we sometimes patronize Spain, like rich burghers at an opera some composer bled for them, it is just as true to say that we respond to a truth about the country. It *is* a kind of Kierkegaardian poet. It is not simply that we have assigned to Spain a romantic function that we insist be fulfilled. For Spain has over the centuries insisted on its difference, claimed profounder depths of joy and anguish—*la leyenda negra*—like a kind of Russia of the west, often assuming a moral and aesthetic superiority to the rest of Europe similar to what a poet might assume toward an audience.

There is a kind of arrogance to this, to put it at its worst; and a kind of glorious self-assurance, to give it its due. Such self-assurance, or respect for one's depths, means ultimately a recognition that there isn't enough time or human energy to complete the manifestations of one's visions, an understanding that *visions*, different from *projects,* are too large for that, and a consequent guiltless acceptance of their formal incompleteness. Just the sort of thing that's horrible and vicious when translated into politics: the glorification of the process, the movement, the unreachable ideal, at the expense of the social

result. (And Spain, with its history of macho-political posturing, not just from fascists, has suffered a great deal of it—as have other nations, incidentally, where the culture, not just the language, is deeply Spanish.) But as an aesthetic faith. . . .

I interrupt to recall a remark of José Ortega Gasset in his *Meditations on Quixote.* Something about the incompleteness of Spanish culture, he says, ancient as it is. "Every Spanish genius has started all over again from chaos as if nothing had existed before. It is undeniable that this is the reason for the rough, original, and harsh character of our great artists and men of action." "Our great men are characterized by an Adam psychology." Spanish culture is "a paradoxical form of culture: wild culture, culture without a yesterday, without progression, without security; a culture in perpetual struggle with elementary forces, disputing every day the possession of the land which it occupies; in short, a frontier culture."

These words, while not this application, should ring familiar to Americans, for long before Frederick Jackson Turner's thesis about "the significance of the frontier in American history" our cultural mythology had pre-empted such a notion, and American literary criticism has done much to refine it since. But perhaps we have much less claim to having been "Adams" taming a frontier than have Spaniards, or no more at least. For while we did found a new nation in a new world and had our violent symbolic *rite de passage* with the Revolution, we yet were "British" to the core when we did both, the Revolution itself our insistence on our rights as "free born Englishmen." We inherited an elaborate culture to transform to our needs, and we were always a part of Europe, no matter the distance, even when we least thought we were. The Spaniards, although situated physically in the old world, also had their violent birth as a nation, not by revolution exactly, but by three acts of expulsion. And with those expulsions of Islamic Moors, Jews, and Christianized Moors, they hurled themselves backwards for centuries, and then made themselves even more parochial by fighting the intellectual currents from faithless Europe.

Ortega's words contain exaggeration: I have not the least doubt about that. But that comes, I think, from his partially polemical intention: to convince his compatriots that their insistence on Spain's difference, their claims to profounder depths of joy and anguish, were leading Spain nowhere, and that it was time to learn to think instead of merely to feel. I don't think Ortega would

disagree, polemical purposes set aside, that it's the "perpetual struggle with elementary forces" that gives Spanish culture its fragmentary quality, its acceptance of a kind of incompleteness.

. . . As an aesthetic faith, I was saying, it is a moving commitment to visions a human being has no realistic, realizable right to possess.

My sadness, surrounded by Gaudí, was a sort of exaltation, perhaps, but mostly, I think, gratitude: a sense that this delightful music, while surely a celebration of Gaudí's god and holy family and possible world of shapes and colors and rhythms, was just as surely a matter of the artist fashioning his lips in such a way that the sighs passing through them were transformed. I cannot believe that this dithyramb in stone was conceived in simple delight alone: the transformation of forms and shapes singly oppressive is too insistent. And the vision it embodies (to suggest a completeness not there) demands some moratorium on architectural classification, suggesting what the Spanish poet Dionisio Ridruejo called in a poem on Gaudí the attempt "*a copiar lo imposible.*" *La Sagrada Familia* is a prayer and celebration too extensive for one or several generations; like Spain's past it is always there. Incomplete, unresolved, occupying the brief present passage into the future.

AN AFTERWORD

These thoughts, although edited, were composed some time ago as a part of a project not quite abandoned but certainly set aside. Revisiting them, I find I am still moved, but now saddened. Saddened because I suspect or fear that the Spain that so moved me may no longer exist: "the passage into the future" with which I ended may not be the passage I expected, and the future a kind of betrayal.

This is in part because the principle scene of the memories, Barcelona, is the capital of the region of Catalonia, and the Catalans seem head-strongly dead-set on severing their historic connection with Spain. I pray their dreams of secession suffer the fate of the Scottish Nationalists: lucky failure.

But the sadness is also in part (and the larger part) because the Spain which inspired my thoughts—and my love—is on its way to vanishing, or perhaps already has, leaving only images attached to very little contemporary reality. What was so attractive about Spain—let us face the fact—was its conservative to

reactionary bondage to the past (to put it a way most people would probably find offensive or politically incorrect) or (cleaning my thoughts to make them less offensive if not quite acceptable) what was so attractive was its resistance to the superficialities of the trendy present. But the fact is that Spain since the death of Franco and the triumph of democracy has become the *trendiest* nation in Europe.

A kind of loosening up after the suppression of the Franco decades was more or less to be expected. But, in fact, something more than loosening up was occurring; a cultural revolution was taking place, or more specifically a *desmadre sexual.* The noun is difficult to translate, with absolutely no help from dictionaries. John Hooper, a prominent critic of contemporary Spain, suggests a meaning somewhere between *binge* and *debauch.* Spain was becoming one of the hippest nations in Europe, and who would have predicted that? I intend no sociological essay to defend that judgment. I don't need one: isn't it fairly common knowledge by now? Have you been to contemporary Spain? If not geographically, perhaps you have cinematically. Let the movies be a kind of short-hand.

Before his death in 2002 the great novelist Camilo José Cela—*La Familia de Pascual Duarte, La Colmena* (The Hive), *Mrs. Caldwell hable con su hijo*, and others—was the monumental cultural presence of post-Franco Spain (as he was of Francoist Spain). His successor as Spain's most distinguished literary artist is the film director Pedro Almodóvar. Ingmar Bergman aside, has a film-maker ever been the preeminent artist in a given culture? For all his brilliance, Almodóvar is no Bergman, neither in artistry nor artistic disposition: he is no tragedian. He is however a thoroughly compelling *auteur* (the Parisian with-it word for director is well advised).

Among his twenty-odd films, *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown (Mujeres al borde de un ataque de "Nervios"),* 1988, is a mad-cap joy, a manic farce one would have to be humorless to submit to criticism. With *Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down! (Átame*), 1990, Almodóvar was really finding his world, the offbeat romance of a porn star and a veteran of the psychiatric ward. In tone, it was preparation for *All About My Mother (Todo sobre mi madre*), 1999, a surprisingly charming film about a pregnant nun, transvestites, lesbians, you-name-it, as woman seeks the father of her dead son and finds him inhabiting the transsexual demi-monde—which the film doesn't seem to make very "demi." In my judgment Almodóvar's greatest

film was made in 2002 (the year of Cela's death, a fact of symbolic insignificance I know), *Talk to Her (Habla con ella).* Some remarks:

Three men are in love with two women in dual plots (neither sub-) which one knows will intertwine and join in time. A journalist falls in love with his interview subject, a female *matador* (or should we say *matadora*?) who is temporarily estranged from her lover, a rival bullfighter. In the other strand a puppy-like male nurse is quite clearly devoted to his comatose charge, a young dancer, assures the dancer's father who is disturbed by the nurse's access to his daughter (he bathes her) that he prefers men. The journalist and the nurse become fast friends when the *matadora* is gored into a coma and is treated at the same hospital as the dancer. The nurse advises the journalist to do as he does: Talk to her. The drama is extraordinarily moving—something like a quantum leap for Almodóvar, it seems to me. But the journalist is made to realize that his relationship with the *matadora* was but temporary, and he yields his place talking-to-her to her previous lover. In time, she dies. In time, the dancer recovers. And in time, we know, as the film is reaching its end, that the journalist and the dancer will become lovers—with the male nurse now in prison. . . and now dead. And why is *that*? Before answering, let me assure any reader who has not seen the film that the nurse's end and the journalist's grief are as close to tragedy as Almodóvar ever gets, and the effect is cathartic in Aristotelian terms as we grieve as heavily as the journalist does. The nurse is in prison, where he commits suicide, because before the dancer comes out of her coma she is impregnated by the nurse and bears his child. Yes, that's right. Although we do not witness it on screen, the nurse makes love, penetrates—or should we not say *rapes*?—his comatose patient. Oddly enough (or is it?) there is in the film's point-of-view no moral outrage *at all* at this outrageous situation; there is in fact not the least moral condemnation of the act (except by the law, of course), not a quiver. And so skilled is Almodóvar's direction that the viewer feels no outrage, only compassion for. . . the rapist! I ask in all critical seriousness: how hip can a work of art get? *Auteur! Auteur!*

It is not hard to think what some old Spaniards I knew in reactionary Spain would think of Almodóvar's film. Nor do I much wonder what Almodóvar would think of my old friends. No more than I judge he would think of the retrograde, likeable-unlikeable, complicated, compelling, and thoroughly noble patriarch in José Luis Garci's 1998 film *El Abuelo (The Grandfather*), based on a Benito Pérez

Galdós novel. It is hard to reconcile the fact that Galdós's nineteenth century Spain and Almodóvar's are the same real estate.

I make no pretense of objectivity. So I feel free to confess that Almodóvar has become my convenient metaphor for cool and with-it contemporary Spain. And, nursing my subjectivity, I feel free to say I am confident Almodóvar could not easily imagine my old friend Miguel Morell. I am going back now thirty years or more. Miguel was. . . I suppose one could say he was a facilitator: he put people in touch with people, as he put me in touch with a landowner with excessive land when I wanted to buy a piece of property. I cannot remember if I first met Miguel when I rented his *casa* one summer or through a friend who lived an expatriate existence in Miguel's *pueblo*. We (my lady and I) were close friends of Sylven, an early-retired Swedish psychoanalyst, and her husband Mischa, a Latvian-Jewish-Swedish retired publisher-journalist, who lived in Spain as freelance translators, primarily English to Swedish. They are both dead now, she because she could not outrun disease, he because he could not live without her. Nor could Miguel live without her—but in a totally different sense.

Miguel, years before we met any of them, fell head-over-heels (nothing less old-fashioned will do!) for this beautiful, tall, blond *sueca,* single at the time, for whom he facilitated certain habitations. I do not know if they were ever lovers, and I rather doubt it, but such was his passion for Sylven that he never again co-habited with his wife, although divorce of course was out of the question. With the passage of time, and with the coming of Mischa, Miguel became (much to the amusement and disapproval of the villagers) quite simply and complexly Sylven's adoring friend and Mischa's associate in passion. Mischa's take on all this was stoic (Miguel was part of the landscape) and also amusedly affectionate. Sylven's attitude *could* be mistaken for cynical—she accepted Miguel's worship and his labor—but such a judgment would be ungenerous and cynical itself. Miguel had become a part of her emotional landscape; and, truth to tell, had she dismissed him from access to her life "for his own sake," that would have been cruel beyond justice.

I mentioned "labor." It was common at the time for foreigners in Spain to buy a small often unfinished *casa* and make improvements and expansions while they lived there. Miguel became Sylven's and Mischa's unlicensed architect, overseer, plasterer, gardener, tinkerer, what-not. My lady and I would have *tapas* and drinks with Sylven and Mischa on their patio; Sylven would call Miguel to come

and join us. He might answer he had yet some tasks to complete before going home. Or he might join us, convivial but formal in manners, at ease as a natural and legitimate one of the five, edgy and impatient only when the conversation slipped out of the common Spanish to the English he did not speak, at which point he would angrily insist we be civilized!

I lost contact with Miguel over the years (another story all together) and do not know if he survived Sylven. And I think I might be relieved in a complicated sort of hope for mercy to know that he did not, like Mischa, live to see her die.

Do I *have* to sum up; do I *have* to make my point? Isn't it clear how little Miguel's world has to do with Almodóvar's? And it cannot be clear only to me that the moral universe Miguel Morell inhabited is by far the nobler one. There was, it seems, no instant gratification: there was no gratification at all in the commonly understood sense of that word. But there was the constant gratification of integrity, a life with a shape at once aesthetic and ethical. . . realized. . . coherent.

And speaking of matadors, as I was indeed—an earlier memory, of my second visit to Spain. I am sitting in a bar with two friends when we are joined by an off-duty waiter from an establishment up the street now closed. Pepe is about thirty, movie-star handsome in a craggy way. He has worked for fifteen hours and will drink for one: a normal day. My Spanish is uncertain, schoolboy variety, nothing to write home to my teachers about. My verbal awkwardness becomes a part of the conversation, even enlivens it. I don't know, for instance, the word *guía,* so for "guide" I say (here translated) "the man who walks in front of the tourists who don't know where they are going"; or for *pecas* (freckles) I say "imperfections of the exterior body" (*las imperfecciones del cuerpo exterior*)—all to the delight of my friends. Apropos of I don't remember what—maybe just practicing Spanish—I say of Pepe, "*Tiene la cara de un torero*"—he has the face of a bullfighter. Which was true. Pause. And then ensues a fantastic recital.

Pepe does not speak directly to me, but to my friends whom he knows much better. With sweeping glance from my friends toward me, movements slow-motion but speech unfaltering, he speaks as if through them to me:

The American is a romantic, he says, in Spanish of course as he knows no English. I only wish that I were a torero, a matador, what young Spanish boy has not had that dream?—but such is not, I am sorry to say, the circumstance. My work is hard, my days are long, there is no fulfillment in them. There is little money to be made for most of the year. Which necessitates driving oneself during the richer summer months. But for what, really? Merely to survive?

This is merely the gist of it. The sentiments are not remarkable, but the physical gestures and the verbal style are nothing less than transfixing. His chest swells as he speaks; he has us—me especially—and he knows it. I do not mean to suggest self-conscious posturing: what I am saying—his gestures pronounce—is worthy of your attention, it is my due. Although not "rehearsed," the performance *is* theatrical. But the theatricality signifies a spontaneous formality in the soul. I seldom speak of trials—his tone, rhythm, sweep of hand, seem to say—but leave unspoken, probably unthought: This moment requires a form, musically, gesturally, rhetorically in concert elaborate, which is to say in effect precise. How else could one speak of truths?

Pepe concludes, as if the logic is unassailable, "Yo no tengo ninguna mujer. Mi cama está fria." I have no woman. My bed is cold.

Does anyone in Spain talk that way anymore?

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