

## Literary Geographies of Contemporary Rural Depopulation

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### ABSTRACT

*The literary geography on the countryside has a remarkable tradition, as a source of study in the field of rural geography, since the nineteenth century. With the new cultural tendencies the use of written texts is revitalized, even as a source of research. In the present contribution, the theme of depopulation in rural Spain is addressed, through the systematic study of the narrative on this subject, mainly novels. There are different points of view in the novel about depopulation: the novel about the last inhabitant of a town; the novel about the depopulation as a new territorial context of the (new) rural inhabitants; the novel about rural depopulation in a town or territory with opposing points of view, the rural idyll and the anti rural idyll. Literary geography contributes to the socio-cultural continuity of depopulation. The literature on rural depopulation and its diverse interpretations can be conceptualized as a form of intervention into these politics.*

**Keywords:** *depopulation, idyll, literary geography, rural, place, Spain.*

### INTRODUCTION

The literary geography narrative about the countryside has a remarkable tradition, especially in the Anglo-Saxon area, since the 19th century and has been included in the framework of geographical research. The novels constitute a field of reference for the researcher in the (historical) reconstruction of the vision on rural areas (Short, 1991, Bunce, 1994).

The literary narrative on depopulation has a notable tradition in Spain since the mid-twentieth century, when the effects of the rural exodus towards the cities became evident. The work of important writers such as Cela or Delibes, attest to an interior Spain affected by the phenomenon of rural depopulation. These authors base their novels or short stories especially on the phenomenon of depopulation in Castile and Leon, in the context of a concern for the rural subject of social and landscape background. Delibes, with a work characterized by: the concern for nature, the countryside and the rural world located in works such as *The way El camino* (1950) (located in the post-war life of a village) or *Las Ratas* (1962) (which refers to the social and spatial marginality of a Castilian village) or *The Innocent Saints Los Santos Inocentes* (1981) (which expresses marginalization in an Extremadura pasture); hunting, its geographical context and man, in

works such as *The Hunting of the Red Partridge La caza de la perdiz roja* (1963), *The Book of Small Game El libro de la caza menor* (1966), *Diary of a Hunter Diario de un cazador* (1955); or clearly the rural exodus, through the memory of the emigrant for the place (lost) in *Stories of Old Castile Historias de Castilla la Vieja* (1964) and the protagonism of the experiences of the last inhabitant of the place, at the end of the rural exodus in *The contested vote of Mr. Cayo El disputado voto del señor Cayo* (1978).

Delibes in *Stories of Old Castile* expresses the feeling of rejection by the people and the rurality of the emigrant for a better life in the city - '... all my illusion at that time, was to be confused with the boys of the city and lack of a town that seemed to mark one, like cattle, to death ...' (Delibes, 1964: 284) -, the subsequent nostalgia and melancholy towards landscapes, rural life and the people, - including the new antipathy to the anonymity and artificiality of the city- and the return to rural origins in the epilogue of life. 'And I began to realize, then, that being a town was a gift from God and that being a city was a bit like being inclusive and that the tress and the nest of the stork and the black poplars and the stream and the soto were always the same, while the piles of brick and cement blocks and the stone mountains of the city changed every day and over the years there

was not a single witness of the birth of one ...' (Delibes, 1964: 285). 'When I arrived in town I noticed that only men had moved, but the essentials remained ...' (Delibes, 1964: 332).

Camilo José Cela addresses the issue of rural exodus and depopulation in some of his most classic works such as: *Jews, Moors and Christians* *Judíos, Moros y Cristianos* (1956) or *Journey to the Alcarria* *Viaje a la Alcarria* (1948). Two travel novels in rural areas affected by the rural exodus. In *New Journey to the Alcarria* *Nuevo Viaje a la Alcarria* (1986) it approaches a rural means already under the routine of the depopulation. In *Jews, Moors and Christians* Cela (1948: 48) defines 'depopulated, as the vagabond (the author) wants to understand, it is a voice that, more than by desert, wants to be a desert that, in times, was not ...'. It indicates when referring to certain emblematic towns of the province of Segovia: 'Turegano was more than what it is today. For this immense world of firm struggle and slow and ruthless agony that are the people of Castilla-La Vieja' (Cela, 1956: 118). Regarding Pedraza, it indicates 'Pedraza is a large and half empty town, a town that emptied without more or more (...). In Pedraza (...) there are seventy, eighty, maybe a hundred uninhabited houses. According to the census, Pedraza does not have many more. Pedraza, in times, was a town of fifteen thousand souls. Today it has less than two hundred, it does not reach one hundred and fifty' (Cela, 1956: 115). 'The vagabond (the author) feels very much within his heart these tiny, forgotten, isolated, dusty, gray peoples, who implore, without much enthusiasm, the miracle of heaven because they already learned ...' (Cela, 1956: 279).

These novels are the clearest references to the process of depopulation of rural Spain, during the Franco era, written in coincidence with the greater stage of rural exodus. They reveal, in a novel way, the harshness of the process of social change that took place in rural Spain between the years 1940 and 1970 (Hoggart & Paniagua, 2001), from geographical or individual perspectives.

In the framework of cultural trends of rural geography and the new literary geography (Brosseau, 2009), this contribution aims to analyze the main narrative contributions on depopulation since the beginning of democracy in Spain, as a basis for a systematic study of the literary geography of depopulation and its sociopolitical and cultural relevance, when a

depopulated Spain is already recognized (Bryant, Paniagua & Kizos, 2015).

### GEOGRAPHY, LITERATURE AND LOST PLACES OF DEPOPULATION

The literary geography has its beginning in the framework of regional geography, during the 1970s and 1980s. The geographical facts are part of fictionalized stories. With humanistic geography the literature reaches a central place for the geographical inquiry (Brosseau, 2009). It incorporates subjectivity, the human experience and agency, but the (real) experience, place and sense of place appear as a central concern. With humanistic geography, literature tries to contribute to the balance between geographical information and geographic imagination, by integrating mystical and subjective experiences. The radical geography carries out a certain criticism of the humanistic orientation by elitist and individualist, at the same time as it suggests incorporating the social and spatial conditions of existence (Brosseau, 2009). That is, it gives relevance to critical discourses, based on the materiality of social life.

The criticism of all these approaches and acceptance as a fact of study (and source) for geography, occurs with the so-called cultural turn. The texts are source and object, through the analysis of discourses and textuality, to understand how spaces, places and peoples are represented in literature. In short, relevance is given to textuality and the specific geographies that novels can generate. In this phase dominates the plurality of research directions, associated with (Brosseau, 2009): (a) the attention paid to discourse and textuality in geography, within the framework of an approach between literature and geography; (b) the literature is a product of authors conditioned by their position in the social structure. Literature is one of the many types of discourses involved in the cultural politics of identity and difference. Currently, this academic position has led to a change in orientation, which places the text as a key element in the construction and reconstruction of the place and space (Anderson, 2015, Anderson, 2018).

In rural geography the cultural turn has an important milestone in the book *Writing the rural. Five cultural geographies* (Cloke and Thrift, 1994) that suggests the poststructuralist deconstruction of different rural texts. It incorporates into the geographic research the lay discourses, but also integrates -and opposes- the academic discourses of the written and literary

discourses, with the aim of addressing the remarkable complexity and ambiguity of rurality and life in rural areas. It is about redefining the relationship between geography and literature in a postmodern rural environment. The deconstruction of the text and the analysis of discourses provide an important set of opportunities for the analysis of the texts (Forbes, 2000: 127). As in the tradition of geography itself, the incorporation of the literary narrative in rural studies broadens the range of trends, but does not suppress the precedents. The new cultural geography, which dominates since the beginning of this century is based on the rural politics of identity and difference, for that reason the usefulness of literature is to contrast the differences between narrative and academic in form(s) of presentation. The novels can discuss -or not- the positionality of rural academy. There are two classics of rural literary geography (Short, 1991): (a) the first is the refuge from modernity, associated with the concept of big house and a pro-countryside view. This perspective maintains a remarkable moral dimension in the description of how individuals move in a social setting; (b) the second is the ache of modernity, based on the change and conflict in the countryside. The rural nature is associated with the multiple voices of social change in the rural periphery (Short, 1991). In this line, Bunce (1994) suggests that literature is one of the main sources of inspiration for the idealization of the countryside. In particular, it uses the expression 'armchair countryside' to refer to the old rural order and 'communities in harmony with nature and the land as the nostalgic antithesis of urban life' (Bunce, 1994: 50). This vision of traditional rural communities is subject to a notable process of contemporary commodification (Bunce, 2003).

As suggest Williams (2016: 239): 'most novels are in some sense knowable communities. Is a part of traditional method than the novelist offers to show people and their relationships in essentially knowledge and communicable ways'. In any case the essential rural novels associated with a clear distinction of the countryside decline in the twentieth century in the British context. Rural and urban are categories associated with the pain of modernity from a century ago (Short, 1991). In this sense the literature of Spanish depopulation is an exceptional case of renovate rural novels associated with the different visions of ache of modernity and a nostalgic rural idyll.

### THE DECLINE OF THE SPANISH RURAL POPULATION: THE EMPIRICAL CONTEXT OF THE LITERARY GEOGRAPHY OF DEPOPULATION.

The current decline of the rural population in Spain began clearly in the middle of the 20th century. Until the decade of the 1940s there had only been a relative decline in the rural population with respect to the urban population, but not a decrease in real demographic numbers, from 12.5 million in 1900 to 13.3 million in 1940. From mid In the twentieth century there was a notable transfer of population from rural areas to urban areas, coinciding with a great economic expansion. It is possible to establish three major phases:

(1) Between 1950 and 1981 there was a large rural exodus to the cities, the result of the crisis of traditional agriculture and the emergence of the process of industrialization and urbanization in Spain. The losses of population have been very remarkable, thus between 1960 and 1965 the rural municipalities lost practically one hundred thousand inhabitants every year - equivalent to the annual disappearance of 50 municipalities of 2000 inhabitants-. The population flows were oriented on the one hand to the capitals of the province and, on the other, to the industrialized regions, the capital or the coastal areas. In 1960, 10.5 million people lived in rural areas, in 1981 they were 7.6 million according to data from the Spanish National Institute of Statistics (Table 1). In the period between 1950 and 1981 the province of Madrid increased 2,800,675 inhabitants and that of Barcelona 2,386,615, both in the period of just over 30 years doubled their populations.

(2) Since the 1980s the exodus loses intensity, so between 1981 and 1991, only half a million inhabitants were lost in rural municipalities due to the initial social problems of urban unemployment and the repercussions of the demographic depletion of the previous period.

(3) Finally, in the last decades the balance of residential change between rural and urban areas is balanced. The rural population even increases between 1999 and 2003 from 6.4 million to 7.8 million (2% of the total population), according to data from the Spanish National Institute of Statistics. In the 2000-2005 period, a notable number of municipalities increased their population, specifically 3790, practically 50%. The increase in demographic numbers in rural areas is spatially generalized. However, the

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increase in rural populations is concentrated (above the 10%), above all, in the peri-urban areas, the coastal or inland tourist areas, areas of intensive agriculture and in inland districts of the interior. The demographic decline is now much more selective. In this stage, mobility between urban and rural areas and intra rural spatial mobility is very remarkable, as

consequence of new rural-agrarian family strategies and a seasonal behavior of the rural populations, in the context of an intense process of (de)agrarianization and tertiarization. But, on the contrary, the death rate has been explained since the beginning of the 21st century to the birth rate in rural areas.

**Table1.** Rural population by demographic size of the municipality, in %.

size	1960	1970	1981	1991	2001	2005
-2 thousand (rural)	34.5	25.6	20.1	18.0	16.4	15.3
2-10 thousand (less rural)	22.7	19.7	17.1	17.0	17.4	17.7
+ 10 thousand (urban)	42.8	54.7	62.8	65.0	66.2	67.0

*Source.* Spanish Ministry of Agriculture. 2005.

In spite of this decline of the rural population, 97 percent of the population entities -59,000- have a rural morphology and functionality. The abandonment and material deterioration of many of them is remarkable.

### METHODS

As argue Robinson (1998: 473), one aspect of postmodernist geography has been the emphasis upon the writing of geography, through the notion of landscape as text or the place as metaphor. The narrative usually is located between place as location and place as consciousness (Robinson, 1998: 474). In this way the metanarrative of depopulation need include local and particular histories, legends and mythologies associated with depopulated places.

In this contribution, a systematic review of the narrative has been carried out on the topic of depopulation, either as an object or as a context. The purpose of this check is to select some representative works for the in-depth examination of how to approach depopulation. In any case, they are recognized works in recent Spanish literature and with a certain social impact. Literature can enhance the social phenomenon of depopulation or, at least, its recognition. The multiplicity of readings suggests the social and political relevance of the rural depopulation issues. The novels are critical constructions of a specific reality, based on the interest and desires of an author. As Anderson (2015) indicates, the literary geographies can contribute to connect multiple and differentiated realities and places, through the transgression of territorial identities. The literary analysis suggests a reading of the landscape in the text, and discovers the authentic places of depopulation in the narratives. A novel is an emotional and spatial (close) encounter between

writer and reader (Anderson, 2015: 126). The novels with an argument about rural depopulation can collaborate in converting these empty spaces into new spaces of consumption for urban users. The novel is a new instrument in the spatial reconstruction and reconsideration of depopulated rural areas.

The phenomenon of rural depopulation can also be expressed in a plural and fluid way, as well as contribute to enhance its 'romantization' (Massey, 2005): (a) associated with a humanistic character, the last inhabitant of a place, in this case depopulation charges an individual (and emotional) vision in a limited place; (b) converted into a (new) territorial scenario, where the new depopulated rural life is reproduced in an area affected by rural depopulation; (c) or associated to a place or territory, the remembrance of the extinguished rural life in a town or a space of greater dimension. In this last case not only in its material dimension, but above all symbolic or cultural. In this sense, the literature on depopulation also includes a change in the literary geographies, 'from what a text represent to how relations between text, reader, writer and the world are made and remade through acts of writings and reading' (Anderson, 2018: 4). The intertextuality allows to refer the different texts to the cultural context in which they operate (Forbes, 2000). The narrative texts some constructed not just the unmediated experience, but in the light of other novels (Shurmer-Smith, 2002: 128). These three narrative perspectives of depopulation are addressed in six works: The disputed vote of Mr. Cayo de Delibes *El disputado voto del señor Cayo* (1978) and The yellow rain *La lluvia amarilla* of Llamazares (1988) on the last inhabitant; New trip to the Alcarria *Nuevo viaje a la Alcarria* de Cela (1986) and The happiness of the land *La*



*felicidad de la tierra* of Leguineche (1999) on depopulation as a new territorial context; Histories of Alcarama *Historias de Alcarama* by Abel Hernández (2008) and Pirineos, sad mountains *Pirineos, tristes montes* by Palleruelo (original 1990, 2011) about rural depopulation in a town or territory. These authors shared knowledge, hobbies and relationships among them, which evidenced publicly by citing each other in their works: on the one hand Cela, Leguineche and Delibes and on the other Llamazares, Hernández -whose book is prefaced by Llamazares- and Palleruelo. They are ideological networks, not in the classic sense of the term, but in the way of understanding and giving meaning to the rural depopulation and the space where this phenomenon is evident.

The positionality of the author is directed for his own experience, values and interpretations of your background (Robinson, 1998: 474): (a) Miguel Delibes (1920-2010) *El disputado voto del señor Cayo* (1978) The disputed vote of Mr. Cayo. Journalist and writer, he was a big fan of hunting and the rural world, interests that guided many of his literary works; (b) Camilo José Cela (1916-2002) *Nuevo viaje a la Alcarria* (1986) New trip to the Alcarria, Nobel Prize for Literature in 1989, a great traveler, had an intense biography as a novelist, journalist and editor.

He was also senator in royal representation; (c) Abel Hernández (1937-): *Historias de Alcarama* (2008) Histories of Alcarama is a renowned journalist and political analyst of the Spanish transition from Franco regime to democracy, his interest in depopulation has biographical origins, being born in a very unpopulated area, where he sets his novels; (d) Julio Llamazares (1955-) *La lluvia amarilla* (1988) The yellow rain. Writer and journalist, born in a mountain town in the north of Spain, he develops his activity in Madrid, very linked to the literature on depopulation; (e) Manuel Leguineche (1941-2014) *La felicidad de la tierra* of Leguineche (1999) The happiness of the land, was a journalist and war correspondent, trained as journalist with Miguel Delibes, his interest in depopulation is due to his installation, in the last years of his life, in La Alcarria, a depopulated area; and, (f) Severino Palleruelo (1954-) *Pirineos, tristes montes* (1990) Pirineos, sad mountains. He is a writer and teacher in a local

school. His biography and career as novelist is linked to the central Pyrenees, where he was born.

In this way we intend to incorporate the fluid and hybrid forms of identification and the multiple points of views and voices of depopulation. The literature on depopulation is one of several social discourses involved in the politics of identity of depopulated rural areas. The novel is a new inclusion of new social experience (of depopulation) in a documentary sense. When writing about the rural world or about the depopulated rural world, not only does reality matter, but the position of the observer (writer) and how through it a part of the depopulated rural world is known (Williams, 2016). According to the 'knowable community' concept of Williams (2016), in the narrative, rural life is presented from different points of view that reflect parts of rural reality, according to the wishes of each author. These partial views involve analysis with a moral background of rural life in depopulated areas, which are remarkably selective. In this sense, the problem of depopulation is also a language problem. In each novel, depopulation is decoded in a different way, scale and order, through a persistent imaginary. The discourses in the texts suggest particular meanings of words. In human geography, the 'hermeneutics approaches emphasize the importance of language, not just in defining us as human, but also in constructing what we take for 'reality' (Hoggart, Lees & Davies, 2002: 28). In this way, on the one hand the authors decode the reality in the act of writing their novels and later the researcher decodes the written text of the novels to interpret a cultural reality. That is, there is a double filter: that of the author and that of the researcher. The novels about rural depopulation depend on the interpretation of the author's reality with the places and characters of depopulation and the interpretation of the novels by the researcher as a source of study depends on their own theoretical and argumentative constructions. The author chooses or reflects a part of the reality and the researcher collects or interprets a part of the selective reality shown by the author in his novel.

### SIX LITERARY NARRATIVES OF RURAL DEPOPULATION IN THE SPANISH DEMOCRACY

The theme of depopulation in the narrative during democracy has had notable continuity. It even opens, in a recent way, a certain style that combines essay with narration. It is possible to

highlight six works from the beginning of Spanish democracy, which are milestones in the Spanish novel about the phenomenon of depopulation

### The Last Inhabitant of the Town

Miguel Delibes (1978), *The disputed vote of Mr. Cayo* and Javier Llamazares (1988), *The yellow rain*, are two novels inspired by similar argument: the experiences of the last inhabitant of a town in the epilogue of the process of rural exodus. In the novel by Delibes, set in the North of Burgos, in the canyons of the Ebro River, the initial contempt of the city politicians is represented by the people who live in the villages, based on their ignorance of the rural environment. The politicians have an urban vision of the last inhabitant of the town, Mr. Cayo. In the context of a backward rural environment -joy, if this is the Hurdes! -The archetype of rural backwardness in Spain- (Delibes, 1978: 40) - which still maintains a traditional patriarchal society. Also, upon arrival in the town in the dialogue between politicians and the last inhabitant of Cortiguera, place where the novel is established, visions about depopulation are opposed, the children who left because of boredom, still having sustenance, especially in the decade of the 1960s and the vision of the urban politician of the lack of horizons in remote rural areas (Delibes, 1978). After the meeting with the last inhabitant of the town, something had changed in the mentality of the politicians: 'You have to look out at the people (...). There, it is where the truth of life lies' (Delibes, 1978: 159), along with a feeling of guilt for having let an ancestral rural culture dies. The uselessness of the political discourse of the city for the inhabitant of the Serrano peoples invades the narration: 'Leaders? And why does Mr. Cayo want to be directed? Designate (...), he does not need us' (Delibes, 1978: 175). To finish accepting that Mr. Cayo could live without the political candidate, but the politician could not live without him (Delibes, 1978: 177).

For its part, Llamazares in his novel (1988), *The yellow rain*, manifests the feeling and intimates experiences of the last inhabitant of a small village in the Pyrenees -Ainielle-. It is a novel where emigration is expressed as a gradual and irreversible process, characterized by the abandonment of the place, the houses and the people themselves: 'between abandonment and forgetfulness, as if it was a real cemetery (...). No one, but some madman, may have

completely resisted only so much death, so much desolation for so many years' (Llamazares, 1988: 11). In the same way that emigration is a betrayal of the place, the house and the family, for those who stay. Death by emigration is opposed to the hope of the return of some child. Depopulation is a long process that tends to accelerate itself. From Ainielle the people leave to the plain, to the military service, to the foreigner, to the valley - county head.

The village, Ainielle, is surrounded by a nebulous exterior world delimited by hills, with which it connects through trails. The head of the municipality -Berbusa- and the county seat -Biescas-, are the main geographical references. The city never appears. 'I went down to Biescas. It was nighttime when I left Ainielle. The roads were muddy (...) I remember that there was still snow in the pass (...) when passing through Berbusa, I took a detour ...' (Llamazares, 1988: 147-48). In the place, the town is made up of houses, which acquire a lot of material and symbolic relevance. Each house represents the life of a family, of a lineage. The continuity of the line and the continuity of the house constitute a unit.

The process of depopulation, in its final stages, awakens a feeling of solidarity among the last inhabitants. The last inhabitant has to deploy a strategy of individual resistance that expresses his loneliness and that is extinguished with his death: 'Now before me, there was only the immense desolate landscape of death and the infinite autumn where men and trees live without blood and the yellow rain of oblivion' (Llamazares, 1988: 40). Loneliness is accompanied by deterioration and abandonment, wrapped in memory, memory and nostalgia for those who left. With the death of the last inhabitant the material place is extinguished: 'Ainielle is already just a cemetery abandoned forever and without remedy to its destiny' (Llamazares, 1988: 75). All that, for centuries, with enormous work, the neighbors of Ainielle will gather will stop little by little to other places, to other houses ...' (Llamazares, 1988: 127).

In both novels analyzed, individual behavior and personal experience as country peoples are studied; using people for convenience in some aspects of personal characteristics, but also in particular aspects of social and economic local relationship. Rural depopulation is not only a particularly dramatic event, but also crucial in everyday life. There is a marked separation

between the human intensity of the main character and the nonexistent social life of the people. The rural depopulation acquires a notable humanistic dimension, based on the experience of the last individual in a scenario already completely depopulated, where the key episodes of life are remembered. The complete loss of rural social life means the forgetting of the cultural material scenario and the return of nature. In short they express the end of traditional rural culture, built for many centuries by man and embodied in a cultural landscape adapted to the conditions of nature, which is consumed in a short time in an industrial and urban society.

### Rural depopulation in its new spatial context

On the other hand Cela (1986) in *New Journey to the Alcarria* –*Nuevo viaje a la Alcarria*– incorporates new subjects to the rural novel in depopulated areas: 'The dirt of underdevelopment is more suited to man than the detergent of progress, which sticks better to the last of machines and other devices, which (...) humiliate man' (Cela, 1986: 25). In his postmodern journey to the Alcarria (in a luxury car) Cela opens the agenda to the overflowing growth of the metropolis and the municipalities of influence: 'The passage of time is evident in the lots where the buildings of men are growing, destroying the thistles of the goats. Where Arroyo del Abroñigal went (...) today crosses the road that says M-30' (Cela, 1986: 25). In Azuqueca, the first town of Guadalajara, under the influence of the growth of Madrid, indicates: 'it is the farmhouse arrícense that has the greatest number of inhabitants: in 1946 it had less than a thousand and an hour exceeds ten thousand' (Cela, 1986: 30).

On the contrary, already in full Alcarria warns the harshness of depopulation: '... in the landscape there is no trace of man, nor a shepherd, nor a fisherman, nor a hunter, nor a Sunday sunbather; On the brown earth or among the grass with flowers of all colors, there is no cagarruta de peña, (...) and the traveler thinks for a moment if he will not be at the end of the world' (Cela, 1986: 138). Together with this landscape, he describes new repopulation phenomena: 'Six or seven French families now live in Cereceda. Between streams of the Solana and the Ompoldda river there are several empty villages or inhabited by new and different people (...). It also describes the new phenomenon of rural squatting in towns acquired by the State:

'Torrónteras is also from Icona, it is completely ruined (...); in Torrónteras now ecologists live, they say they are Austrians, who grow onions and organic tomatoes' (Cela, 1986: 143). It also recognizes the new seasonality of rural life: 'to these peoples, at times, the half saves the affection of their natives, who return to spend some days in the summer and always bring a friend' (Cela, 1986: 143). Also the problems to register the effective rural population: 'In Casasana there remain eighty inhabitants, some say that we are no more than fifty, that by the summer they increase, of course, when the traveler passes from the other time (the author), in the town there were four hundred souls' (Cela, 1986:173). Finally, it points out the phenomenon of the definitive return of those who left: 'Here what is scarce is the personnel, at the end of the war we were walking through the 35 inhabitants and then we were depopulating little by little, now it seems that they go back because many come back' (Cela, 1986: 220). Finally, Cela points to the consumption of rural space when referring to the new identity generated by tourist agencies in routes for urban users: 'the route of the marshes' or 'the route of the sea of Castile' or 'the coast of the honey' (Cela, 1986: 154 and 182).

Manuel Leguineche (1999), in *La felicidad de la tierra* -The happiness of the earth-, tries to continue the trail of *Viaje a la Alcarria* (1948) and *Nuevo Viaje a la Alcarria* (1986) de Cela. They are novels written in areas affected by notable processes of depopulation, but depopulation is not the argument, but life or its interpretation through a vital trip in a rural area. It is the interpretation of space in the eyes of a vagabond traveler who travels from place to place. Express the pleasure of knowing the place and its people in a calm way. The happiness of the earth tells the views of La Alcarria of the author from the biographical moment of his installation in the field from Madrid. The installation in a farm 'El Tejar de la Mata' in the municipality of Cañizar in Alcarria, leads the author to evoke a new world of sensations and visions from the rural world at the end of the 20th century. Moving to the rural world is related to the eccentricity of people who are willing to settle in a house in the middle of the countryside, where to enjoy the small corners of the landscape and feel the silence. 'One of the reasons that push the man from the city to the countryside is the search for silence' (Leguineche, 1999: 24). The city is noise and the countryside suggests inner peace.

To live in the countryside, you must 'take the step'. In the town you are interested in the next, your little world, and the little things. 'It is a world that surrounds me, in which people live with the essentials without needing to fall into the superfluous. This is true for houses, for cars, for the way of dressing or eating. You do not see big expenses. I praise the sobriety, the moderation, the temperance' (Leguineche, 2008: 329). The tavern is where the life of the town of Cañizar takes place, where the vulgarities of the vulgar are spoken. 'The stages of the tavern, the repeated liturgy, contribute to the mineralization of life in the village. This is what there is, one day after another' (Leguineche, 2008: 419). In winter the tavern is emptied and everything is filled with melancholy. Each station has its rhythm for Leguineche, - summer, winter, autumn - in the town.

Now, 'in the villages they are enough and they are left with what they have' (Leguineche, 1999: 81). Cañizar is a town opens to the stranger, where their houses have all the comforts, but the same iconographies as always. In a country of bull and pig where nothing is wasted. That is why it is possible to doubt that the city constitutes freedom and the village lack of privacy for the intruder.

The progress of agriculture becomes palpable in 'The happiness of the earth'. With the savings, more land is bought, given the increase in the size of the farms, which facilitates greater profitability. But, the profitability is conditioned by the subsidies of the European agrarian policy. The subsidies do, in the opinion of the farmers, that prices do not raise and, in the end, work well done is not remunerated. 'What I hear say in the towns of Castile is that, they do not want to live on subsidies but on their work' (Leguineche, 2008: 397).

The tractors exemplify the change in agriculture with all the comforts, in a rural environment now depopulated of peasants: 'They talk about the modern tractors, their comforts, the importance of the possession of the land. The farmers complain about almost everything, that the prices are very low, that it does not compensate them for so much work, but as soon as the possibility of buying some land arises they buy it' (Leguineche, 2008: 173). Also the proliferation of hostess clubs expresses the prosperity of agriculture. The pastors -the office considered the lowest-, do not get extinct either

because of urban unemployment and lamb prices.

Through different characters from the villages, Leguineche recounts the depopulation, the emigration during the 70s to situate yourself in the city before returning to the town. Cañizar is a town without children, without baptisms and with singles. The return to the town occurs on weekends and occasionally in winter. It is also the place for retirement in old age. The rural exodus and the current progress in the towns suppose, in addition, a way of entrance to the spirit of the city in the people of the field. Something materially expressed in the alteration and standardization of rural housing: 'The rural exodus is due, at least in part, in addition to the search for opportunities, the comfort that can be found in large cities. (...) And I'm going with the paradox: the progress that has improved peoples so much has made people more complicated and dependent' (Leguineche, 2008: 256).

In short, 'The happiness of the earth', is a postmodern novel about a global world, where unpopulated rurality is located. In the 'that the rural landscape changes at a rate and scale unknown from the Black Plague of the Middle Ages. Never had less people worked in the field since the Middle Ages. The villages have remained deserted (...). Agriculture has long ceased to be a choral exercise (...) to become solitary. The peasant has been left alone. (...) The rural culture disintegrates' (Leguineche, 2008: 412-413).

The inhabitants of the depopulated places, in these novels, settle down on a socially selective landscape fruit of the process of rural depopulation. Depopulation is described as a new social landscape. A new social landscape recomposed and restructured after a notable process of rural change. The new landscape is contrasted with the traditional landscape and its old social figures. The new dimension of the farmer and the difference between the atmosphere of the town and the city are key elements in the identity of this new landscape. It is a postmodern vision of depopulated rural spaces, based on difference - with respect to the traditional rural world -, the new identity of empty spaces with respect to the world of the city and the installation of new comers.

### The Rural Depopulation of a Town or Territory

Abel Hernández (2008), *Histories of Alcarama*. A novel written from the perspective of the rural



idyll of the lost traditional life in their depopulated hometown. Severino Palleruelo (original 1990, 2011), Pyrenees, sad mountains. A novel that relates, from the social and environmental realism, the anti rural idyll and the traditional rural life in the Aragonese Pyrenees. In both cases, the authors had a biographical commitment to the depopulated areas, which they interpret in different ways.

Histories of Alcarama is a novel that opens a narrative series located in the Sierra de Alcarama -in Soria-, one of the most unpopulated areas of Europe. It is located in the town of Sarnago, the author's hometown, depopulated in the process of reoccupation. The book appears in the form of letters that the author addresses to his daughter, to remind him of a world he did not know: 'The center of this story will be Sarnago, the town where I was born, now abandoned, at the foot of the Sierra de Alcarama, in the highlands of Soria, where Castile loses its name and becomes a ruin, victim of abandonment and fatality. This region is the largest demographic desert in Europe with two inhabitants per square kilometer, less than in the Sahara '(Hernández, 2008: 17)'.

The author describes a world and a closed community, with few exchanges with the outside, the essentials for daily life: 'The world was limited to Sarnago and the dozen surrounding villages. Many neighbors had never left these mountains, nor had they had the chance to cross the horizon that covered the view. They knew the towns of the region and their inhabitants, and that was enough for them. The mountains separated and the roads joined (...). This limited human circle, these towns and these roads are an outstanding part of the sentimental memory of my childhood '(Hernández, 2008: 172).' They were times (...) in which human beings were still governed by the sun during the day and by the stars if you were surprised by the night in the open field or in the bush'(Hernández, 2008: 113)'. In the village the conditions of life were tight, all were skinny, with tight faces and everyone ate from the same pot (Hernández, 2008). Thus, 'in these hard and silent towns of the highlands the parties served as a collective catharsis ...' (Hernández, 2008: 180)'. 'The party broke the weary rhythm of the town. It was a jolt, a rematch of long boredom and even a collective catharsis'(Hernández, 2008: 138)'. In contrast, 'in the town, Holy Week was a time of silence

(...), a silence that overwhelmed and altered the daily routine' (Hernández, 2008: 123).

The exodus coincided with the massive reforestation, many villagers' sold their land, locked the door of their house, shook off the dust of the sandals and left far away (Hernández, 2008: 202). In the totally abandoned towns, remember that 'silence, instead of giving peace, restless, as happens with the silence of the dead' (Hernández, 2008: 186). 'There remains the essential beauty of the ruins, which enclose the invisible soul of the abandoned peoples '(Hernández, 2008: 208)'. The subsequent 'dispersion of the dead is as sad as that of the living '(Hernández, 2008: 211)'. All the villagers felt united in the middle of the diaspora, which facilitated the creation of an association of former settlers.

The Sarnago houses have no name and have been closed for a long time, 'it's scary to open the faded door tied with string '(Hernández, 2008: 25)'. The town was divided into the neighborhood above and the neighborhood below; their houses were made of stone and had several doors. They were built on a slate and have been abandoned for more than thirty years. The human beings and the animals coexisted with naturalness, since the sheepfold and the kitchen were the only two hot rooms of the house.

Life was linked to the seasons of the year. The springs were brief, 'just a parenthesis between the long white beards of winter and the golden crackle of the spikes '(Hernández, 2008: 98)'. In winter, the snow equaled the landscape and the town became 'a white shroud' and 'a nativity scene' for Christmas. All human beings and animals were kept in the houses, where family life was organized (Hernández, 2008: 71). The spring appeared with the April rains, the fields increased and the fields changed their brown layer, for the cheerful green mantle (Hernández, 2008: 102). The autumn was short and we had to take advantage of the good weather for the planting. The sowing was done by hand. In the fall it was also hunted and the inhabitants of the town were divided between hunters-owners of shotgun-and not hunters. With the slaughter opened a few days of happiness (Hernández, 2008: 80).

The disappearance of the last neighbor, is associated with public action: 'in the foothills of

the Alcarama, an official initiative accelerated the disbanding: reforestation forced human depopulation '(Hernández, 2008: 215)'.

Severino Palleruelo in the Pyrenees, sad mountains (original 1990, 2011), portrays lost scenes of traditional rural life in the Aragonese Pyrenees, from the perspective of anti rural idyll. The rural depopulation in the Pyrenees is built on stereotypes of a past life: the teacher, the owners of the trade, the priest, the bachelor, in the social context of a gray rural life, which serves as a scenario of loneliness: 'it seems that the loneliness, desertification, ruins and the absence of future harden the hearts - already very hard - of the mountaineers and make them aggressive, bilious and resentful ... '(Palleruelo, 1990: 23).' When a town is extinguished and only two neighbors remain '... first they abandon themselves and lose almost all their old habits of hygiene, of relationship and of work ...' (Palleruelo, 1990: 23) (...) 'Disgrace and despair, yes they are very big, they do not make men in solidarity, they make vermin ...'(Palleruelo, 1990: 24).' The meeting between the teacher and the guide to the town show the meeting between the outside, urban world and the closed, rural and mountain world. Where the teacher is interested in their rural destination and the local asks about the city. The same happens with the family who owns the store, where the heiress despises vulgar villagers and is interested in distinguished foreigners, to finally recognize that 'there -the city- was nobody, it was one more (...) nobody knew anything about she or her family '(Palleruelo, 1990: 51).'

Related to the topic of the bachelor is addressing the lack of women in rural communities 'already turned fifty and lives alone. His mother died last year '(Palleruelo, 1990: 82),'leaving his son alone (...) and without any lady who wanted it (...) the loss of his mother was a very hard blow. It was completely abandoned'(Palleruelo, 1990: 94).' Regarding the priest, he states that he 'knows a clean and presumptuous old man (priest) who will not forget as long as he lives the two years he spent in a dark village in the Pyrenees' (Palleruelo, 1990: 116). But, in addition to these rural stereotypes on a gray background and sad of the desertification of rural life, Palleruelo describes a whole series of binary relationships among which stand out: dispersed habitat and village, mountain and plain, tradition and progress and state and community. 'There have hardly been people who lived in isolated houses in the mountains and

loners like the Basque farmhouses (...) raised in such a hostile environment, nobody was surprised that the trio was extremely dour ...' (Palleruelo, 1990: 100-101). In relation to the mountain-level binomial expresses 'a few years after having definitively changed the Pyrenean mountains by the Monegrino deserts, things started to go wrong' (Palleruelo, 1990: 192). Or regarding the relationship between the State and the rural community, it suggests a remarkable distance: 'we lived outside the State. Nobody thought that we could turn to the Administration to demand something. The men met on Board...' (Palleruelo, 1990: 212).

In these novels special emphasis is placed on the moral and emotional dimension of the behavior of various individuals in a rural community, in the absence of a complete reference to the social landscape. The selected individuals articulate their personal experience, in a framework of moral discrimination and emotional crisis. In parallel it is recognized, to the recognition of a set of individual lives in a common context. In the words of Williams (2016: 259): 'A selected society in a selected point of view'. This social selectivity expresses the social position of the observer (and author), in the form of a comfortable rural idyll or rejection of the new social reality. Representing places and spaces suggests some author(s) positional ideologies, in whose context the place acquires personalities and reputations. Both novels suggest a balance between the anti rural idyll and the rural idyll, as two lenses to observe the rural depopulation in a specific place. In one case it expresses the difficulties, the isolation and the poverty of daily life in the traditional mountain society through the most outstanding and outstanding personalities of the life of a town, in the other the longing for rural life, of its rhythm and its characteristic atmosphere, of its most outstanding material elements and also of its social values.

## CONCLUSION

The narrative about depopulation is a recurring theme in the rural novel. Its authors combine their commitment to their land, their specialization in the geographical area and their personal trajectory. In any case, there are specialized authors, novelists of an extensive work and authors of a single work.

The spatial vision is driven by rural nostalgia and evocation, with a positive or negative

dimension, but with a moral emphasis on conduct. The rural depopulation itself has an anti-idyllic or anti-pastoral vision, but the evocation or memory in some cases grant a vision of idyll to a rural life that has already disappeared, as in *Histories of Alcarama*. In this novel, the experience of depopulated rural place the human-nature relationship reached their most harmonious expression. Various characteristics of the pastoral myth appear, such as the simplicity of rural life, the idealized countryside and the moral purity, together with other characteristics of the anti-pastoral associated with the reality of the process of rural modernization and its experience for the marginal populations (Short, 1991). In some cases, the rural community, the social image and the space appear associated with the commitment to one's own land, where reality is linked to symbolism. The community would be in the world in and the State would be the world out. Implicitly to this approach it's found a critique of the State as a catalyst for the processes of depopulation and disintegration of the traditional rural life and community. The novels can be tools of change, resistance and reaction. As explain Hones (2011) a novel is a spatial event that connects writer, text and reader in the literary spaces of rural depopulation.

The intimate's places of depopulation are the family house, the street and the village, but also the rural routes or the cemeteries. Depopulation is described in specific rural places and sites. Where people -farmers or undifferentiated peasants- are registered, as undifferentiated or traditional stereotyped figures: the teacher, the owner of the trade, the higher farmer... Thus, versions of the depopulated country life, country literature and cultural history are constructed. Rural depopulation is a natural disorder with nature. The loss of population is a loss of historical cultural order of nature. Depopulation would not only be a function of objects, but also of subjects.

Literature contributes to the cultural persistence of rural depopulation. The author's feeling is transferred to multiple and differentiated (urban) readers. The literature on rural depopulation and its different interpretations can be conceptualized as a form of cultural intervention into these politics (Brosseau, 2009: 217), based on the social political agency of the authors and

may promote new identity questions and resist symbolic and culturally dominant point of view involved an ideological positionality.

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