Memory and History:
The Autobiographies of Constancia de la Mora
and María Teresa León

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In the literature of the Spanish Civil War, two women writers stand out for both their autobiographical literature and their relative obscurity: María Teresa León (1903-1988), and her contemporary, Constancia de la Mora (1906-1950). León, whose accomplished writing career and important cultural and political contributions to the Spanish Republic have recently, although belatedly, been honored in Spain is still primarily known as the wife of the poet Rafael Alberti. Outside Spain, she remains virtually unknown. Her autobiographical Memoria de la melancolía, (Buenos Aires, 1970), which is considered the best of her books, is not available in English. Constancia de la Mora’s life and work is yet to be studied in Spain or elsewhere. Her In Place of Splendor: the Autobiography of a Spanish Woman (New York, 1939), which was a bestseller upon its initial publication in the United States, and was subsequently translated into Spanish, Italian, German, and Russian, is now out of print. To date, no account of de la Mora’s life and work from 1939 until her death in 1950 (in a car accident in Guatemala) has emerged.

Furthermore, de la Mora and León’s prominent roles in Spain in the 1930s and their writings in exile get little attention in histories of the Spanish Civil War. I will argue that their books provide indispensable perspectives on the war and go far beyond the autobiographical genre. As well as narrating personal experiences of the war and of exile, both portray a collective experience, and give an enduring literary form to a history that Franco’s Spain attempted to erase entirely. In Place of Splendor and Memoria de la melancolía give voice to those defeated alongside the Spanish government, as well as to their authors’ private testimony. They fill in gaps in the history of the war and the postwar period. Both aim to preserve a memory of the war that, as Gregorio Torres Nebreha says about León, both knew would be repressed and censored:

Memoria de la melancolía quiso ser [...] no sólo un libro de memorias, sino también y sobre todo un libro de testimonios, no sólo una crónica de sí, sino también

Moenia 10 (2004), 375-388
un memorándum de lo que fue un pueblo en éxodo para los que aguardaban en la tierra en la que se censuraba la memoria.1

What had been overturned by Franco, and how it had been lost, was a subject these women writers knew would be misrepresented as well as passed over in silence by the apologist historians of the Franco regime. As exiles, they saw foreign interest in Spain fading in 1939. They felt that Spain had been betrayed by its democratic allies: France, Britain and the United States. The unique perspectives of León and de la Mora are indispensable contributions to a personally nuanced and detailed history of the Spanish Civil War and its drastic and divisive effects on many people. The collective voice that enters both works, the “we” or “nosotros”, is a sign of the authors’ senses of their responsibility to speak for thousands of Spanish Republicans. In each work, the collective voice is interwoven with personal testimonial, and close-up portraits of participants in the war. Through the individuals they portray, and their authors’ self-portrayals, it is made clear that general categories like those of “intellectuals”, “Republicans”, “Republican women” “mothers”, “children”, “exiles”, and others often have been used for the sake of convenience are deceptive. León and de la Mora were closely involved in the war from start to finish. They were as aware as any Republican leaders of what was at stake during each stage of the war. Their narratives seek to persuade their readers to question common assumptions. These include whether the war was “civil” at all.

The early nineteen thirties was a time of unprecedented freedom for Spanish women. De la Mora and León were among those to take advantage of the opportunities created by a new Republican constitution. Divorce, civil marriage and the right to vote changed life in Spain. A new generation of women intellectuals, activists and politicians emerged: Both Memoria and In Place of Splendor describe the impact these changes had on their authors’ lives. Though the following passage is about León’s Memoria, it could also be applied to de la Mora’s work:

Este libro de memorias es algo más que un testimonio individualizado, sino que tiene plena validez como testimonio de una clase intelectual y burguesa de mujeres que apostaron por un feminismo militante y reindicativo en los años veinte y treinta de este siglo, de nuestra más reciente historia, con el exilio al hombre2.

León and de la Mora were born into the same generation, were from prestigious families and were brought up Catholic and conservative. This set them on a path that had a narrow and closed view of the future: marriage and children. Each began by conforming to these expectations, but soon saw that it was possible to break free from the fated pattern set by their mothers and grandmothers. By doing so, they defied their families and their backgrounds in an unprecedented way. De la Mora describes her

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excitement at her new freedom and how she felt surprisingly in sync, at last, with Spain:

I came back to Madrid in March, 1931, to begin a new life. And I found my country embarking on exactly the same high adventure [...] I knew almost nothing about the contemporary history of my country. This sounds strange, and yet I was no different from most Spanish women of my background [...] Overnight I became a citizen of Spain [...] For all Spain was in a ferment. The dictatorship had fallen. Great events hovered in the balance. History lay around every corner. And I was free and happy, and suddenly I wanted passionately to know about the world I lived in.³

Both women flouted convention and were divorced from their first husbands. Each re-married politically active and prominent left-wing men. And worst of all, from their families’ points of view, they became affiliated with the communist party. After the Republican defeat, they were forced to go into exile. By doing so, they were separated from their children for years. To the disgust of her family, de la Mora married Ignacio Hidalgo de Cisneros, who was also an aristocrat who had developed communist leanings. Later he was to become the beloved chief of the Republican air force. León also remarried. Her second husband was the poet Rafael Alberti. The two couples were part of the Republican elite and met with international political leaders such as Stalin and Eleanor Roosevelt; and were friends with artists and writers including Pablo Neruda, Pablo Picasso, André Malraux, Robert Capa and Gerda Taro.

Despite the revolution in women’s rights in Spain, those who actually acted on these new notions of equality and ignored conventional models were a very small minority. They were not to be widely accepted. The war in Spain polarized people radically and caused bitter divisions amongst families and between former friends. It is essential to keep in mind that it was not only the right wing that took a dim view of communist women. Even women friends who were sympathetic to the Republic found Leon and de la Mora’s activism extremist and reprehensible, and distanced themselves from them.

Amongst other women from the upper bourgeoisie, there were few other radicals. De la Mora’s enthusiastic and heartfelt political engagement alienated her during and after the war from friends she had assumed to be politically like-minded. This was the case with Zenobia Canprubi, another pioneering woman of the time who was the wife of poet Juan Ramón Jiménez. Zenobia had started a business selling traditional Spanish furniture and crafts in Madrid. When de la Mora separated from her first husband she went to work with Zenobia. According to Hidalgo de Cisneros, they were “intimas amigas. Connie había encontrado en ella comprensión y afecto en momentos difíciles de su vida” (CR, 325). However, in Canprubi’s Diario, it is clear that their friendship declined once de la Mora became politically engaged. Canprubi and Jiménez left Spain early in the war and though Zenobia kept in touch with de la

³ De la Mora, Constancia, In Place of Splendor. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1939, 125
Mora at first, their political differences dampened Camprubi’s feelings. In 1937, Camprubi wrote about her disapproval of extremism and revolutionary ideas:

Sin lugar a duda no nací para revolucionar. Prefiero sacar provecho de las circunstancias existentes mejorándolas en vez de virarlo todo al revés, corriendo el riesgo de que funcione o no el nuevo experimento. El problema es que soy escéptica en cuanto a todos estos rimbombantes programas políticos para redimir a la humanidad.

Toward the end of 1937, Camprubi spent an afternoon discussing “Connie M.” (Constancia de la Mora) and wrote that she still had affection for de la Mora. Yet, she was upset because of her “inconstancia conmigo y su estrechofanatismo en asuntos políticos.” At the beginning of 1938, she discovered that de la Mora had become a communist party member:

me encontré con Marinello y después de mucho hacerlo hablar me reveló que al fin Connie se había afiliado al partido comunista y era miembro activo [...] También había oído rumores de que a Ignacio le iban a quitar el mando. ¿Pero por qué Ignacio si él era socialista? A lo mejor cambió después de que me fui [...] Me siento absolutamente perdida en lo que se refiere a la política de España. Para mí es griego.

In contrast, it is interesting to note de la Mora’s view of Camprubi. Though de la Mora knew that her friends had left Spain because Jiménez’s health was frail, she could not forgive Zenobia for having put her husband’s wellbeing before that of her country:

We had all been disappointed and hurt when my friend Zenobia and her poet husband, who at first had helped us run homes for children in Madrid, had suddenly packed their trunks and left Spain. We considered it something of a desertion. Spain needed her poets. Zenobia might have been useful. She was needed. And yet Zenobia and her husband, like many Spanish intellectuals who thought themselves too delicate and too sensitive to stand the horrors of war, had gone abroad.

María Teresa León was also perceived as an extremist even by those in her most immediate circle of friends. Before the outbreak of war, she and Alberti had travelled to the Soviet Union to see how things were done there, and her pro-Soviet enthusiasm disconcerted some of her friends. In his recent autobiography, Travesías, Jaime Salinas (the son of the poet Pedro Salinas) describes his childhood meeting with the Albertis in Madrid, after their return from the Soviet Union. In the following scene, the Albertis are visiting Salinas’ parents, and though both Alberti and Pedro Salinas were intellectuals and poets, there was a world of difference separating the two. This chasm was exemplified by their respective wives, María Teresa and Marga-

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5 Camprubi, Diario I (1937-1939), 111.
6 Camprubi, Diario I (1937-1939), 152.
7 De la Mora, 268.
rita. Jaime Salinas’ charmed impression of the Albertis is contradicted by his mother’s harsh criticism of María Teresa:

Al abrir la puerta me deslumbró la pareja más bella que jamás hubía visto. Eran Rafael Alberti y María Teresa, que acababan de regresar de su viaje a Rusia […] María Teresa me puso la mano sobre la cabeza, comentó lo guapo que estaba y siguió hablando con mi madre, contándole su viaje a la Unión Soviética; las visitas a las escuelas, los orfanatos, los campamentos de formación. La oía insistir: “Los niños rusos, mis niños rusos, qué guapos son mis niños rusos. Aquella noche, en la cena, oí a mi madre decirle a Tata Andrea: ‘María Teresa haría mejor ocupándose de sus verdaderos hijos y dejando de hablar de ‘sus niños rusos’’.”

Jaime’s mother, Margarita, thought that it was one thing to support the Republic, but another to visit a communist country and to leave your own children behind in Spain. She believed León had failed in her primary duty in her primary duty as a mother. A few years later, during the war, when de la Mora sent her own daughter to Russia —where she thought she would be safer— her family was equally critical. Despite talk about revolution in the lives of Spanish women, changes were slow to develop in people’s attitudes, and feminism and leftist ideals were a mixture most could not tolerate.

León and Alberti became close friends of de la Mora and Hidalgo de Cisneros and it was thanks to the Albertis that de la Mora refocused during the war from organizing children’s homes to working as the head of the Republican press office, which was the government’s international propaganda arm.

I felt my job with the children and the convalescents was nearly finished. The Albertis, Rafael and María Teresa, came to drive me to see Ignacio for New year’s, and they too thought I should be using the only special knowledge I really had—languages and foreign countries. We talked about it all the way to the Army encampment where the Albertis were to speak that night.9

At the press office, her English, her contacts, and her efficiency made her indispensable to foreign correspondents in Spain, and to the Republican government’s cause abroad. As journalist Elliot Paul wrote in the midst of the war “Today she is at the head of the Spanish Government press service, but whenever another kind of task has to be done neatly and quickly, any one of the cabinet ministers is likely to turn it over to Constancia and through all these harrowing months she has not failed them.”10

When, in the midst of the war, the writer Langston Hughes was desperate to get from Valencia to Barcelona, he asked de la Mora for help. His description underscores de la Mora’s reputation as the person all foreigners turned to in Spain: “Even Constancia de la Mora, the charming aristocrat in charge of the Government Press Bureau, to whom members of the foreign press appealed for everything, could be of no immedi-

9 De la Mora, 280.
ate help to me. De la Mora was enormously admired by Americans during and after the war. Several of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Veterans named their daughters after her, and Milton Wolff, the final commander of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade describes her as an inspiration to Republican troops of all nationalities. He points out that she was one of the few Spaniards of the upper class to remain a loyalist. To this day, he considers *In Place of Splendor* one of the finest books on the war, and asks why it is no longer in print. De la Mora and León were two very different people and their autobiographical works reflect their personalities and when they were written. *In Place of Splendor* was written right at the end of the war. De la Mora wrote at least part of it in New York where she had been welcomed by the Communist elite and became the "darling of the New York progressives". She also met with Eleanor Roosevelt on several occasions. It was De La Mora’s first book, and one of the first books to be published about the war. She may have written it with the help of author Ruth McKenney, who put her in contact with the major publisher, Harcourt, Brace & Co. Photographer Tina Modotti and Manuel Fernández Colio (a Cuban Spanish war refugee) are said to have collaborated in revising the manuscript.

*In Place of Splendor* had its intended effect upon publication, which was to defend the cause of the Spanish Republic, and its author was a celebrity for a time in the United States. *In Place of Splendor* was an enormous success. It was on the *New York Times* recommended "Christmas Books" list in 1939, and de la Mora received more invitations to speak publicly than she was to accept. By 1940 the book was in its fifth printing.

The advertising campaign for *In Place of Splendor* pulled out all the stops and was surprisingly effective in selling a story from the losing side of the Spanish Civil War to the American public. De la Mora’s friends who had been in Spain all supported the book: Ernest Hemingway wrote “She was a legend, and this book shows why”; Leland Stowe said “Her story must inevitably be compared with the Grand Duchess Marie’s, but this blue-blood of Spain writes with far deeper perception. She is one of the noblest women I’ve ever met”; and the publisher’s caption in the advertisement emphasizes how de la Mora’s life reflected the turmoil in Spanish politics:

> This is a passionate, vivid, deeply moving story of a woman in war, a woman in love, whose courage took her to the utmost limits of sacrifice and endurance. Born into a great Spanish family, Constancia de la Mora has been a wealthy aristocrat of old Spain, a citizen of the Spanish democracy, and is now an exile from

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12 Author’s interview with Moe Fishman, Secretary of the Veterans of The Abraham Lincoln Brigades.
13 Author’s interview with Milton Wolff.
15 Hooks, 239.
Fascist Spain. Her life has paralleled Spanish history in exactly that order. Not only is hers the first story of modern warfare as seen and actively participated in by a woman—it is the first inside story of the old and new Spain by a Spanish woman. Her book has already assumed a high place among human documents of our world today.

However, a number of people de la Mora could not have been happy with her portrayal of them. She clearly indicted her entire family and social class, especially her own parents. In an important moment, she tells how she was mortified when she visited her family’s estate with an English school friend. The conditions and the ignorance in which her father’s peasants lived shocked her friend. Though de la Mora had grown up with this feudal way of life, seeing the peasants she knew well through the eyes of a foreign friend came as an embarrassing revelation:

I realized with a sudden wave of shame that Román and Higinia, the two leading savants of their village, had never heard that there were other countries in the world beside Spain, had never been taught that men spoke other languages than Spanish...And although I did not know quite why, I felt that my family and I were somehow responsible for this tragic ignorance.16

De la Mora also described her mother as the type of woman she did not want to be—someone obsessed with appearances and society, whose main occupation in life was to go from one spa to another. De la Mora never had much interest in her looks and rebelled against her mother’s lifestyle as soon as she could. De la Mora’s seriousness led her to reject her mother’s plans for her life: “My mother would have liked me to be soft, feminine, and subdued. She would think for days of some plan or of some dress that she wanted for me and I, in two abrupt sentences, would destroy all her schemes.”17 In a much more serious criticism, she reveals that her father was a financial supporter of the Francoist uprising. The following passage shows how the war, from its first day, drove de la Mora and her parents apart:

At home the little maid handed me a telegram from my parents in Paris—wanting to know if I were safe. I looked at it bitterly. For some time Ignacio and I had suspected that my father was playing an important role in the preparations for the military plot. His electric company had all kinds of connections with Nazi Germany and he had let enough indiscreet remarks fall to indicate that he played some sort of a role as a go-between in the Spanish-German plot. Of course it may have been only a coincidence that he had taken the family abroad just before the rebellion broke out [...] I knew that whether my father had played an active role in the rebellion or not, he had most certainly helped to finance it [...] I wired him that I was safe—and suggested postponing his return for a few days until the government had restored order in Spain. He replied that he was bringing my mother and brother back to our country place through Portugal. This was the last direct word I ever had from my parents.18

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16 De la Mora, 70.
17 De la Mora, 50.
18 León, 241.
De la Mora doesn’t return to the subject of this rift with her parents. In fact In Place of Splendor doesn’t dwell on her poor relationship with her family. The book is primarily a call to action directed towards the North American and British publics who she hoped would somehow come to Spain’s rescue. The narrative is craftily written in order to appeal to as wide an audience as possible. Her story is divided into four chapters and an epilogue that parallel Spanish history: “Childhood in Old Spain”, “Marriage: The Life of a Spanish Woman”, “Spanish Awakening”, “Widows of Heroes Rather than Wives of Cowards”, and “Epilogue: Viva la República!

She begins with a lengthy and detailed description of her life as a daughter and wife in a wealthy and powerful family before the Republic, and describes her rebellion against her class in the chapter called “Spanish Awakening”. The persuasive story of her transformation gives her tale the power of a political conversion narrative and it is for this season, and not because she wanted at the age of thirty-three to tell her life story, that she spends so many pages describing her background. She knew that her upbringing and seemingly glamorous life would seduce her readers, and that her subsequent rejection of this life, would make them sympathetic to her politics. The narrative of the war is coherent and fast-paced, with a liberal sprinkling of exclamation points throughout. In the following passage she describes the first success of the ill-equipped Republican air force against the Italians:

Our ill-trained, badly armed militiamen, fighting for the first time under a unified military command, had won the first victory of the war over the foreign invaders! Our patched-up Air force, with its comparatively few airplanes, its remodeled transports, its newly trained pilots, had routed the finest brigades of the Italian Army. Spain would never bow to foreign invaders!19

Her version of events is not simplistic, yet she is concise and clearly wants her perspective to be understood. She recapitulates complicated episodes in a few sentences: How did Madrid fall and the war end? “A group of Spanish cowards and traitors delivered Madrid—and after Madrid the rest of Republican Spain—tied hand and feet to Franco, Hitler, and Mussolini.”20

The narrative’s tone, especially towards the end, has an intense immediacy that reflects the influence of the journalistic style of the war correspondents she worked with in Spain. The book’s conclusion has a “hot off the press” quality that in 1939 must have made readers feel that they were reading something written just moments before. In the last pages, events are no longer described as being in the past but “now”, and “now” is contemporaneous with her writing: “The story I put down her [...]” and “Even as I write these words”21. In her book’s conclusion, she does not accept the war in Spain as being over and she urgently hopes that her story will help convince foreign governments to intervene and oust Franco:

19 De la Mora, 304.
20 De la Mora, 425.
21 De la Mora, 424-5.
And now, more than ever, I know that Spanish democracy is not dead—but still lives—and will always live. Franco had executed thousands. Even as I write these words, the firing squads are still shooting men and women who believe in democracy, at the rate of one every nine minutes, for twenty-four hours a day [...]. But twelve million Spaniards lived in democratic Spain for two and a half years while the foreign invaders bombed our children and slaughtered our people. Franco cannot shoot the twelve million [...]. They will remember [...]. I know that Spain will soon again be free. Nothing can prevent it—for the united people of Spain will make a democracy with their blood and courage.”

When de la Mora wrote in 1939, her exile was only beginning and she didn’t yet seem to fathom that she and other Republicans would be banished from Spain for so long. The urgency in her voice stemmed from the hope that democracy would be restored to Spain before Franco’s power became entrenched. She was not innocent about human beings or politics after her experiences in the war, but in 1939 she was young, energetic and not ready to surrender.

In contrast, León writes, at the end of the 1960s, with hindsight. She knew that Franco, who has been in power for thirty years, was not likely to be removed easily. Yet, she was also confident that democracy would return to Spain, and hoped that her version of the war and of exile would have a place in a Spain of the future. Because Memoria was written thirty years later than In Place of Splendor, it concentrates primarily on the conditions of exile and memory. León’s narrative pace is much slower than de la Mora’s, yet there is an urgency of a different kind that permeates her work. As she was recording her recollections of her own life and of the forgotten people of her country, she was battling the beginnings of Alzheimer’s disease that would soon erase all her memories.

Memoria de la melancolía is a personal, poetic and introspective work that doesn’t follow a conventional chronology. León moves between first and third person, and mixes prose, poetry, songs, letters and conversations. Throughout, it is a reflection on writing, remembering and loss. Though an active communist, León considered herself a femme de lettres, and during the war she used writing and theater to promote and aid the defense of the government. She was the secretary of the Alianza de Intelectuales, organized the Teatro de Arte y Propaganda and the Teatro de la guerrilla, and edited the magazine Octubre published by the Asociación de Escritores y Artistas Antifascistas. She was also a key figure in the enormous project of rescuing and crating the more than twenty thousand paintings from the Museo del Prado that were removed to protect them from bombardment.

Memoria de la melancolía (Buenos Aires, 1970) is an imaginative reordering of a fragmented life. Time and memory are poignantly and central themes after such a long exile. But León also celebrates the heroic ideals of the Republic and the bravery and resourcefulness of those who defended it. To those who fought for Spain and had long since been forgotten, she offers an encyclopedic requiem. Through the pages of

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22 De la Mora, 426.
her Memoria she names and mourns the dead, and completes their shattered or ignored histories. She cries out against the brutal repression of postwar Spain.

Memoria is also full of intimate memories and celebrates León’s youth and her discovery of personal, political and artistic freedom. León’s second marriage to Alberti was as notorious as de la Mora’s to Hidalgo de Cisneros. She quotes a gossip page from a newspaper of the time that, making reference to the couple’s romantic flight to Ibiza, asked “¿Quién es la George Sand que ha raptado a Chopin-Alberti? ¿Otra vez idilio en Valdemosa?” But León was not affected by gossip and never doubted her decision: “Qué más daba, si estaba todo decidido!” She remembers telling her grandmother about her love affair and about her new independent life. León was prepared for the worst possible reaction, but grandmother didn’t reject her as she had feared:


As tensions mounted after the revolts in Asturias in 1934, the radical Albertis were forced to leave Spain for a period. When the Republic was proclaimed, they returned to Madrid and started a new life, surrounded by other intellectuals who were enthusiastic about the modern Spain they were building. It was the happiest period of her life. Like de la Mora, León was thrilled to see power change hands in Spain and anxious to see an end to the ignorance and oppression that the working classes and peasants had been subjected to for centuries:

Comenzaban los años españoles más claros del siglo XX. Era la toma de poder de los intelectuales. La gente que había decidido “mejor que no sepan leer”, estaba muda. Los privilegiados iban a ser otros. Comenzaron a movilizarse “Las Misiones Pedagógicas” donde tanto trabajó Alejandro Casona, y “La Barraca”, dirigida por Federico.25

This period came to a brutal end with the outbreak of the war. Many of the Albertis’ friends were arrested and executed, and their own lives would never be the same:

Habíamos tomado el primer contacto con la vida que durante tres años sería la nuestra. Franco ponía en nuestros labios y en los de todos los españoles un “carmara”, reservado antes para los que estaban unidos por los mismos compromisos políticos.26

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23 León, 203.
24 León, 203.
25 León, 196.
26 León, 280.
León was tireless during the war and her involvement almost always combined political engagement with her literary talent and her concern for the preservation of artistic freedom. In collaboration with the Alianza de Intelectuales she helped publish Mono Azul, where the romances, that would later be collected in the Romancero de la Guerra Civil, first appeared. She travelled around Spain with the Guerrillas del Teatro, which she had created to put on short plays representing scenes from the war. She wrote, directed, and acted in other plays, such as the Cantata that was staged in Valencia and Madrid in honor of the International Brigades. She participated in the II Congreso Internacional de Escritores Antifascistas and her signature was on the decree to evacuate the first paintings rescued from the Museo del Prado: “Durante la guerra, María Teresa fue junto a La Pasionaria, una de las dos mujeres más importantes de la España aquella.” A famously talented and powerful speaker, she rallied crowds at the most crucial moments:

María Teresa era una formidable oradora. Si la llamaban para que fuera a despedir a una brigada que iba a combatir al frente, el motivo más fútil le bastaba para enardecer a aquellos hombres que acaso iban a morir por la noche [...] No olvidaré nunca el día en que despidió en un pueblo de Valencia, allá por el año 1938, a los componentes de la Brigada Internacional [...] yo vi como uno de aquellos voluntarios, que era comandante y le faltaba un brazo, se abrazaba a su mujer, con la extremidad que le quedaba, mientras lloraba como no he visto llorar nunca a un hombre. Sin pudor y profundamente emocionado por las palabras de María Teresa.28

In Memoria, León imagines a new Spain rebuilding a democracy. She speaks to those in Spain to remind them that the regime cannot last forever, and that when it ends they will have to contend with the return of those in exile:

No sé si se dan cuenta los que quedaron por allá, o nacieron después, de quiénes somos los desterrados de España. Nosotros somos ellos, lo que ellos serán cuando se restablezca la verdad de la libertad. Nosotros somos la aurora que están esperando. Un día se asombrarán de que lleguemos, de que regresemos con nuestras ideas altas como palmas para el domingo de los ramos alegres. Nosotros, los del paraíso perdido [...] Nada tenemos que ver nosotros con las imágenes que nos muestran de España ni el cuento nuevo que nos cuentan. Podéis quedarnos con todo lo que pusisteis encima [...] Nuestro paraíso, el que defendimos, está debajo de las apariencias actuales. También es el vuestro. ¿No sentís, jóvenes sin éxodo y sin llanto, que tenemos que partir de las ruinas, de las casas volcadas y los campos ardiendo para levantar nuestra ciudad fraternal de la nueva ley? (MM, 98)

Though León expresses optimism about the possibilities of Spain returning to democracy one day, Memoria is filled with immense sadness that their struggle and exile has been forgotten. For León, oblivion is a further form of de’cat. How can Spain, under Franco, continue while some of its most talented citizens are still in exile

28 Ontañón, 58.
or dead? How can people who defended their country with such bravery be forgotten? How can the Spaniards in Spain pretend they never existed, and that they are not equally Spanish?

¿Y los otros? ¿Cómo se llamaban? ¿No sería una recuperación honrosa el que alguien hiciera el recuento de estos hombres que sostuvieron el honor militar, mientras otros lo traicionaban? [...] ¿Hasta dónde puede llegar el odio? ¿Qué límites tiene?

Throughout Memoria, León emphasizes the importance of recording memory: “Contad vuestras angustias del destierro...Éramos la España del vestido roto y la cabeza alta. Nos rascaábamos tres años de hambre y buscábamos una tabla para sobrevivir el naufragio. Contad cada uno el hallazgo de vuestra tabla y el naufragio.” In Place of Splendor, though a call to action, is by definition—by virtue of its existence—also a call to remember and to write the history of the defeated.

Memoria and In Place of Splendor, which make such important cases for memory and history, have been neglected. In particular, Constanza de la Mora’s extraordinary story has been ignored, and one wonders if she had not written In Place of Splendor, would anybody at all remember her role in the Spanish Civil War? In 1939, Elliot Paul wrote a piece that praised de la Mora’s work, but that also anticipated the fact that she could be forgotten:

“Constanza will attend to that.” [...] In Madrid, Valencia or Barcelona, wherever the Spanish Government has made its headquarters since the war began, that phrase has been a watchword [...] this piece is about Constanza and her own legend [...] She was one who was prepared, like few others, to face the present war, for she knew too well the selfishness and fanaticism of the former ruling class and cast her lot with the people long before the firing began [...] One hears more about Fusiómara because Dolores’ work keeps her constantly in the public eye. The opposite is true of Constanza and the work she does. Outside of Spain it has seldom been mentioned. Even when the whole heroic story of the fight for democracy can be told, much of Constanza’s contribution will be overlooked.29

There are a number of reasons why de la Mora’s memory and work have become more obscured than that of other Spanish Republicans. The first brings us back to gender, for if after the war all Republicans were violently repressed in Spain, no group was attacked as vehemently as the raías. Left-wing women were persecuted and incarcerated with the intent not only of punishing them, but also to separate them from their children. It is easy to see how de la Mora’s conservative family would want to have no association with this black sheep in the Franco’s Spain. Especially because she joined the communist party and then told the world about her “conversion” in a best-selling book. Without relatives willing to promote an interest in her life and work, her name has been forgotten by most.

Today, the legacy of their male counterparts vastly overshadows that of Republican women in Spain. María Teresa León is still identified as "la mujer de Alber-ti". While the memory of de la Mora is faint, Hidalgo de Cisneros has been kept in the spotlight by his family. Like de la Mora, he was the communist exception in a right-wing family, yet his nephew (also named Ignacio Hidalgo de Cisneros) has recently republished his uncle's 1964 autobiography, Cambio de rumbo, and brought his remains from Bucharest to bury him in the family mausoleum in Spain. In the nephew's epilogue to the new edition of Cambio de Rumbo, he explains that the affection he had for his uncle helped him overlook the political differences between them. But this affection does not extend to his uncle's wife, de la Mora. There is only one line about her in the epilogue, describing Hidalgo de Cisneros's trip to see her in Mexico at the end of World War II (he had spent the duration of that war in Europe): "Terminada la guerra en 1945, se fue a México, donde residía Connie bien situada por el éxito de su libro In Place of Splendor [...] de la que no tuvo descendencia y se divorció poco después."^30 Constancia is dismissed in this epilogue and her importance in her husband's life is reduced to one sentence. She and her husband's social and political transgressions in the eyes of their families and the supporters of Franco were the same, she was no more radical than he was. Yet while she is remembered as a pariah—when she is remembered at all—Hidalgo de Cisneros is, according to this recent epilogue, "un hombre honesto que le tocó vivir un periodo de los más conflictivos de nuestra Historia."^31

Constancia de la Mora died just a few days short of her forty-third birthday. She didn't have time to publish the two book projects she had embarked on after In Place of Splendor. These might have rekindled the celebrity she had achieved in 1939. Between 1939 and her death she lived in Mexico and became a Mexican citizen. She didn't travel abroad often. Her short-lived celebrity had been created in the United States, and as time passed, America turned a benign eye on Franco's Spain and the struggles of the war were forgotten by all but a few American leftists.

In the complicated effort that is underway in Spain today to recover Republican history, which was repressed during the periods of the Franco regime and the transition to democracy, Memoria de la melancolía and In Place of Splendor should be central readings. Aside from being great examples of autobiography, they are also, I believe, indispensable to Spain's past. Neither María Teresa León nor Constancia de la Mora would have considered herself a historian, but "historical crisis is often the strongest stimulant for historical writing."^32 The work of both authors is as valuable for the collective history of Spain as it is from the literary point of view. Santiago Ontañón points out that Memoria is key to anyone interested in the real history of the

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31 Hidalgo de Cisneros Alonso, 571.
Spanish Civil War, and not the stories reported in the papers. The same can be applied to In Place of Splendor:

Yo aconsejaría a quien sobre libros y libros quiera conocer la raíz auténtica de unas páginas de la Historia de España que sólo tuvieron años y años una versión partidista abrazada a un cúmulo de silencios y falsedades y que quiera conocer a fondo dónde estaba aquel grupo de poetas, pintores, músicos, seres que brillaron con tanta fuerza en la Literatura y en el Arte por aquellos años 20, que lean Memoria de la Melancolia. Allí está la lucha por la libertad del mundo, el destierro, España desangrándose, lo que nunca dijeron los periódicos...33