

*The Op-Ed Novel: A Literary History of Post-Franco Spain.* By Bécquer Seguín. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 2024. 312 pp. £37.95. ISBN 9780674260108

Spain's leading novelists are a familiar fixture in the opinion columns of the country's newspapers. In recent decades, they have used the pages of the major dailies as a soapbox for voicing their position on current affairs and for settling scores in bitter spats with fellow novelists and other prominent figures in the public eye. The controversies ignited by novelists' opinion pieces have undoubtedly raised their profile and contributed to the sale of their books. But do those of us with an academic interest in their fiction need to sully ourselves by looking into all the mud-slinging of these writers' rough and tumble in the press? The answer, according to Bécquer Seguín, is an emphatic yes. *The Op-Ed Novel* charts a course through these polemics and shows, more importantly, how the stances adopted by Spanish novelists in their opinion columns have had a bearing on their fictional works. Against the tendency to read the novels and journalism of these writers independently of one another, Seguín illustrates how our understanding of the former is infinitely enriched by a familiarity with the latter. One chapter is dedicated to each of the main practitioners of this style of writing that harnesses opinion journalism and literary fiction, and which is dubbed the op-ed novel. Following introductory chapters covering the historical factors behind the prominence of novelists in the opinion pages of Spanish newspapers, notably *El País*, Seguín traces Antonio Muñoz Molina's passage from columnist in *Diario de Granada* to prizewinning author. An insistence on matching up the fiction with the views expressed by the real-life author allows Seguín to take Muñoz Molina to task for his underhanded political interventions in his novels, such as the veiled partisan critique of the historical memory movement in *Como la sombra que se va* (2014). In the next chapter, Seguín turns his attention to Javier Marías and to the role of Marías's column in *El País* in his rise to literary

stardom. The analysis focuses on how Marías used his literary works, such as *Tu rostro mañana* (2002–07), to weigh in on the political debates of the time and to pursue the denunciation of individuals who had collaborated with the Franco regime, an undertaking with which he had first caused a stir in his opinion column. Subsequent chapters consider the works of Javier Cercas, Almudena Grandes, and Fernando Aramburu. With his coinage of the ‘relato real’, Cercas makes for an illuminating study of how the attitudes of the opinion columnist bleed into the fictional world. Grandes’s novels of ideas make no attempt to hide the political leanings of their author, as Seguín demonstrates so deftly. Aramburu’s *Patria* (2016) is adduced as an example of what Seguín calls literary populism, which purports to represent the people and to offer journalistic balance in its treatment of complex political conflicts. Seguín finds the artistic solutions proposed by literary populism as specious as those of its political counterpart. *The Op-Ed Novel* is erudite in its diagnosis of the shortcomings of Spain’s novelist intellectual class and is essential reading for scholars with an interest in opinion journalism, the contemporary Spanish novel, and the reciprocal influences of these two arenas of public life.

Samuel O’Donoghue

Lancaster University

Address: Dr Samuel O’Donoghue | D10, County South | School of Global Affairs | Lancaster University | LA1 4YD

Email: [s.odonoghue1@lancaster.ac.uk](mailto:s.odonoghue1@lancaster.ac.uk)