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Abstract

Creative artists’ interest in Boabdil, the last Islamic ruler of Granada, has been intense. Writers have repeatedly rewritten his story and that of the fall of Granada to Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon. Yet the appeal of new versions does not fade; different eras re-interpret his story to suit their needs. This article examines three fictional representations of Boabdil, his role in the fall of Granada, and his interactions with his Christian adversaries to analyse how this figure and moment are reinterpreted in the late twentieth- and early twenty-first centuries. These novels—Antonio Gala’s *El manuscrito carmesí* [*The Crimson Manuscript*] (1990), Magdalena Lasala’s *Boabdil. Tragedia del último rey de Granda* [*Boabdil. Tragedy of the Last King of Granada*] (2004) and Antonio Soler’s *Boabdil, un hombre contra el destino* [*Boabdil, One Man against Destiny*] (2012)—appear some years apart but tell the same story in different contexts. I argue they constitute a narrative template that feeds into and reflects an evolving myth of Spanish national identity. These representations of Boabdil, Granada, the Muslim loss and the Christian victory are

compared in order to identify which narrative template or myth of Spanish national identity is being deployed in these novels, and to what end.

Keywords: historical fiction; narrative template; Boabdil; Spanish national identity; Islamic Spain

Boabdil and the Fall of Granada: Historical Novels as a Narrative Template for Modern Spain's National Identity

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The interest of creative artists in the historical figure of the last Islamic ruler of Granada, Muhammad XI, over the centuries since the surrender of the kingdom to Christian forces in 1492 has been intense. Muley Mohámed Ben Abul Abú Abd Allah, or Boabdil (the Christian corruption of his Arabic name) (Badri Guezza 2016, 263), ruled Granada twice, from 1482-83 and from 1487 until 2 January 1492 when the city kingdom was surrendered to Ferdinand and Isabella. Little is known of the man himself. According to Elizabeth Drayson, author of *The Moor's Last Stand. How Seven Centuries of Muslim Rule Came to an End*, Boabdil was a man whose 'true nature has proved elusive' and shrouded in mystery (2017, 2), a phenomenon that Jerome de Groot refers to as the insubstantiality of the past (2010, 182); the known historical facts leave tantalising gaps for creative artists to fill.

Artists and writers have repeatedly generated their own versions of his story and that of the fall of Granada to Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon. And yet the appeal of more versions across multiple genres and art forms seems not to wane (Drayson 2018, 305-307). For Drayson, the figure of Boabdil has become 'a reinventable image whose meaning has changed according to different societies and epochs, which have attuned the myth of Boabdil to their desires and standards' (2017, 161). Given this capacity for endless reinvention, Boabdil has become not only reinventable but overdetermined in the Spanish national imaginary. He has been variously described as a symbol of resistance to Christian fanaticism (Drayson 2017, 181), an archetypal figure of exile, a universal symbol of migration, the mythic figure of the 'Tragic Moor' and one of the losers of history (Civantos 2017, 190). Historians have referred to him as 'vacillating and collaborationist' (Carr 2010, 13), duplicitous and treacherous (Harvey 1990, 298); self-interested and uncaring of his

subjects (Catlos 2018, 390, 388); or a sacrificial lamb on the altar of History (Badri Guezza 2016, 252). This intensity of interest has arisen, I argue, because this figure falls into a moment of particular importance for the development of Spain's myths of national identity for, as his story is told and retold, so too is that of the fall of Granada, the last bastion of al-Andalus (Islamic Spain), that ended the Reconquest in 1492.

This article examines three fictional representations of Boabdil, his role in the fall of Granada, and his interactions with his Christian adversaries in order to analyse how this figure and this seminal moment in Spanish history are being interpreted in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries by historical novelists who are both 'filling in the gaps' in history and serving the needs of their own present. It is my contention that the evocative power of Boabdil is related to a general fascination with al-Andalus and the tricultural Middle Ages in Spanish historical fiction, which in turn interacts with ideas about Spanish national identity, a topic I have examined in previous work (Gilmour 'The Recuperation of Spain's Islamic Past' [2019]; Gilmour 'Historical Fiction in Spain. History, Memory, Mythscape' [2019]). These three novels—Antonio Gala's *El manuscrito carmesí* [*The Crimson Manuscript*] (1990), Magdalena Lasala's *Boabdil. Tragedia del último rey de Granada* [*Boabdil. Tragedy of the Last King of Granada*] and Antonio Soler's 2012 novel, *Boabdil, un hombre contra el destino* [*Boabdil, One Man against Destiny*—appear a number of years apart and, while still telling more or less the same story, also reflect different presentist contexts which affect their retellings of those events. I argue that these novels form part of a narrative template that both feeds into and reflects the evolving national mythscape of Spanish identity.

As Marik Tamm has put it, '[n]ational identity is, to a large extent, based on 'stories we live by'. More precisely, the identity is based on narrative templates, which give coherence to a nation's past' (2008, 502). Narrative templates are stories that a nation repeatedly tells and consumes coherently and consistently and, Tamm argues, constitute important elements of a nation's historical consciousness (2008, 502). My focus here constitutes a case study of this

concept of the narrative template and reveals how these novels support a particular version of modern Spanish post-Franco identity.

Narrative templates combine to form national narratives or myths, which compete in what Duncan Bell calls the national mythscape of a nation and a society. This concept, which Bell developed as an alternative to the more problematic terms of collective or cultural memory, is defined as

the temporally and spatially extended discursive realm wherein the struggle for control of peoples [sic] memories and the formation of nationalist myths is debated, contested and subverted incessantly. The mythscape is the page upon which the multiple and often conflicting nationalist narratives are (re)written; it is the perpetually mutating repository for the representation of the past for the purposes of the present. (2003, 65)

In order to elucidate the nature of this particular narrative template of Boabdil and the fall of Granada as a story Spain 'lives by', I first need to articulate what I argue are the competing national narratives or 'myths' to which such a template might contribute. To flesh out this particular narrative template, I will examine four related aspects of these novels: the representation of Boabdil himself, the image of Granada as a civilisation and the way in which the fall of Granada and the Christian victory is understood in the novels. I should clarify that I am not asserting the accuracy of these fictional interpretations of Boabdil—the very nature of a national mythscape is constructed (as the word 'mythscape' implies) and does not necessarily constitute an objective, factual account of events; rather, it reflects how those events are perceived and interpreted in the service of a particular identity. My purpose is to compare these representations to examine how their versions of Boabdil connect to ideas of Spanish national identity in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. In short, what is the narrative template being deployed in these novels, in the service of which myths of national identity, and what are its implications?

This story of Boabdil and the Fall of Granada is of importance, I argue, because it is a keystone connecting two competing national myths that are still of great importance, with ongoing ramifications for ideas about Spanish national identity. These competing myths (or national narratives) could be labelled the myth of 'Christian Purity Triumphant' (CPT) and the myth of 'Spain of the Three Cultures' (STC) respectively. The first national narrative, essentially the story endorsed by official Spanish historiography since the completion of the Reconquest, is that Spanish Christians fought for 800 years to reclaim their territory from Muslim invaders and restore the true Catholic essence of Spain. Viewed through this lens, the Reconquest is, as nineteenth-century Spanish historian Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo put it, a triumph of the Spanish race, religion, language and customs (2011, 135). The ejection of all un-Spanish Others (Muslims and Jews) was essential to recover Spain's purity and historical destiny (Gilmour 'Recuperation' 2019, 277). This formulation of Spanishness can be traced through the centuries, becoming particularly dominant under the Franco regime, which deployed the iconography of the Catholic Monarchs, Christian crusade and religious and political unity and purity, to justify its monolithic, authoritarian rule.

The national narrative, or myth in Bell's terms, of 'Spain of the Three Cultures', on the other hand, views the Muslims and Jews of Spain's Middle Ages as forebears of modern Spaniards like the Christians. The tricultural Middle Ages are a prefiguration of the modern Western ideal of inter-religious harmony and tolerance; Spanish identity and culture are viewed as hybrid (not pure). The excision of Jewish and Muslim culture was in fact a rhetorical fiction to shore up a fragile new Christian identity (Fuchs 2009, 11). The distortion of Spain's history through ignorance and Christian fanaticism led, according to this narrative, to political absolutism and the decline of the nation. This view, while certainly not dominant in Spanish historiographical discourse (Gilmour, 'Transforming Legacies' 2017), was, according to Jesús Torrecilla, one of the founding myths of nineteenth-century Spanish Liberalism (2009, 216). Nineteenth-century progressives were proud of the brilliance of Islamic civilisation and 'were inclined to value positively the cultural pluralism of the Middle Ages' (Boyd 1997, 125). The identification of an alternative past from which they could claim ancestry enabled progressives to identify genuine Spanish traditions that could provide new directions for the nation (Boyd 1997, 128). This view reappeared in the 1950s in the work of

exiled philologist Américo Castro and the subsequent popularisation of his term *Convivencia*—loosely translated as ‘coexistence’ or ‘living together’—often popularly idealised as ‘a multicultural society where three religions coexisted in harmony’ (Torrecilla 2009, 216).

Both versions of Spain’s historical trajectory, STC or CPT, centre on the Middle Ages as the wellspring or founding moment of Spanishness (Cirjuano Marín et al. 1985, 21-23). The fall of Granada (and Boabdil’s part in it) is key because it represents a triumphal highpoint of the first national myth and the tragic collapse of the second. In both, Boabdil is a seminal figure and the surrender of Granada a vital turning point. The outcome of the events in both myths is the same. However, the interpretations of those events are diametrically opposed. In the CPT version, the Christians are moral victors, triumphing through their faith and by the grace of God, asserting their Christian Spanish purity over the treacherous Moorish invaders, embodied in their ruler, Boabdil. From this point, Spain rises to the heights of its world power: Ferdinand and Isabella are given the title of the Catholic Monarchs; Spain becomes the Defender of the Faith; it gains a global empire; and its identity is asserted as triumphantly pure, Catholic and imperial.

In the second myth, that of a tricultural Spain formed in diversity and tolerance, , the Christian rulers are either greedy, immoral and treacherous (Ferdinand) or destructive religious fanatics (Isabella). The Christians lust after the treasures of al-Andalus (and the Jews) but hide their cupidity beneath a rhetoric of religious purity. In this myth, Boabdil seeks to defend Granada’s tolerance and his people but is ultimately defeated by the Christian forces. After the fall of Granada, Spain progressively distances itself from its true essence, rejecting the *convivencia*, multiculturalism, civilisation and learning of al-Andalus. This view continues as a minor thread within Spanish historiography until the modern post-Franco era when it re-emerges strongly after 1992, when the ideal of al-Andalus resurfaces as part of

the 500th anniversary commemorations of 1492.¹ Thus, what one vision interprets as the launchpad of Spain's glory, the other views as the beginning of Spain's decadence and decline, but in both Boabdil is essential, positioned at the point where these two incompatible myths come into conflict. His figure is therefore of great interest in terms of the Spanish national identity that subsequently evolved.

Due to the historical and symbolic importance of Boabdil's part in the fall of Granada, he has been the subject of two recent works which view him in a new light. One is Drayson's *The Moor's Last Stand*, in which her stated purpose is 'to bring Boabdil's story fully into the light of day' by using contemporary Christian and Arab sources for the first time. Her version of Boabdil's life is a history 'not of decline and defeat but of a courageous defence of religious and cultural identity and of a way of life' (2017, xviii). Within that framework, she also examines representations of Boabdil in popular culture and art. The other is Christina Civantos's *The Afterlife of Al-Andalus* (2017). Civantos examines the figure of Boabdil (and other historical Andalusian figures) from a cultural studies perspective to trace 'the transformation of mythologies about the past into new narratives' (2017, 7), and to uncover al-Andalus as 'a site of creativity, a story that can be re-created to imagine better, more tolerant futures' (2017, 53). Both these authors have referred briefly to the novels that I will examine here. However, I argue they warrant study in greater detail.

While interest in Boabdil dates from immediately after the Fall of Granada in the form of frontier ballads (Drayson 2018, 305-06), Civantos asserts that it is the Romantic vision of Boabdil and al-Andalus that has had the greatest impact on the writers of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. She summarises this view of Boabdil as 'the king of sadness: a romanticized, destiny-bound figure that typically embodies the weakness of the Other' (2017, 50).

¹ For a longer discussion of the resurfacing of al-Andalus and Spain's attitude towards its Islamic heritage, see Gilmour "Transforming Legacies: The Denial and Recovery of Spain's Islamic Past" (2017).

Both writers connect the story of Boabdil and the fall of Granada to the historical development of Spain's national identity, but in different ways. For Drayson, writing in another article, the ambiguity of Boabdil 'relates to past and present debates over both Spain's Islamic legacy and the legitimacy of Christian rule after 1492' (2018, 304); in short, to the clash of the two competing national myths. At stake, she argues, are questions about 'who has the right to live and rule in Spain' and 'what was lost as well as gained at that crucial moment in history' (2018, 315). Civantos also sees the repeated re-telling of the story of Boabdil and the fall of Granada as related to national identity. However, she links it to Spain's loss of status as a global power in the nineteenth century. Recalling and retelling the story of Granada and the end of the Reconquest, in her view, assuages Spain's anxiety over the loss of empire in 1898 by repeatedly savouring a moment of great victory for Christian Spain, and thus re-affirming a powerful national identity. Civantos attributes the fascination with the fall of Granada as part of a failed mourning process on a national psychic level (for the loss of Empire), conceptualised along the lines of Freud's 'Melancholia and Mourning'. Thus, in my terms, she sees Boabdil's story as functioning in terms of the CPT national narrative.

While agreeing with much of what these two authors identify in works about Boabdil, I wish to expand on and make explicit Drayson's link between modern Spanish national identity and the loss of al-Andalus. Furthermore, contesting Civantos, a more detailed analysis of these novels will show that the loss mourned in these novels is actually that of Spain's tricultural past rather than its power and global empire. They mourn the loss of an al-Andalus conceptualised in hindsight—and through rose-tinted glasses—as a harmonious place of ethno-religious *convivencia*; in short, as in the STC myth. The repeated depiction of the defeat of Boabdil and the end of al-Andalus is not just a narrative screen memory to cover up the loss of empire (although it may be that too); in the STC myth, it is the mourned object itself, a tolerant tradition overwhelmed by greedy fanatics and lost for centuries. Before analysing these three novels in more detail, it is important to first briefly outline the nature and context of these novels, for, as with all historical fiction, the needs of the present play an important part in what historical material is narrated and how (García Gual 2002, 139).

Published in 1990, Antonio Gala's novel, *The Crimson Manuscript*² has been the most lastingly successful of the three novels explored in this article in terms of sales, going into multiple editions, with a 20th anniversary edition published in 2010. The time of its writing—the late 1980s and early 1990s—was an ebullient time for Spain. The shackles of Francoism had been shaken off apparently without a backward glance. Spain was on track to become a full member of the European Community in 1992, the same year that Barcelona hosted the Olympic Games, and the World Expo was held in Seville. Furthermore, since 1981, an important commemorative programme had been planned for the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus's arrival in the Americas. Although predating the anniversary of the events of 1492, which led to much publicity and focus on Spain's Islamic (and Jewish) heritage and a desire to recover that legacy (without focussing overly on how it was lost), Gala's novel mined a *zeitgeist* that placed significant value on the rediscovery of Spain's Islamic past. In an interview from 1990, Antonio Gala, known for his positive valorisation of Islamic Spain, spoke of uncovering a darker side of 1492 and taking a more critical perspective in the midst of the celebratory tone of the commemorations. He argues that after the fall of Granada, 'Spain is literally left mutilated, cut off from the real culture that Islam had signified for Spain' and expresses unease that this is being glossed over (Martínez Moreno 1990, 1), a sentiment shared by other public intellectuals, like Juan Goytisolo and Eduardo Subirats.

The Crimson Manuscript is the longest of the three novels, at nearly 600 pages. It uses the established trope of the 'discovered manuscript', which is revealed in the introduction as the personal memoirs of Boabdil himself. It is rediscovered and lovingly translated, edited and published by an unnamed person (a figure the reader is encouraged to equate with Gala himself) for a modern reading public in the form that the reader has in their hands. Viewing Spain's Islamic past as a lost heritage to be rediscovered and reinterpreted for modern readers is very much consistent with the ideas about Spain's identity that arose as part of the STC myth post-1992 (Gilmour "Transforming Legacies" 2017, 226-27).

² Henceforth all titles will be given in English and all translations from Spanish are my own.

The memoirs are bracketed by additional papers written from Boabdil's exile in Fez. The first briefly describe his life at age 64 and are written before he rides out into a battle in which he believes he will perish. The first-person narrator introduces the memoirs that follow, addressed to his estranged sons, and goes on to discuss the nature of history—a constant preoccupation of the novel—which he asserts is told by the victors and which blames him for the defeat of Granada. His is not a story of kings, he says, but rather that of a witness to what happened in Granada, as if the fall of his kingdom were a process outside his control (19). These memoirs, he says, were written over the course of his life and revisited and redrafted repeatedly. They are designed to fill in the gaps of history as to his true nature: 'I have been slandered as the man who lost the Kingdom; however, no one has troubled to ascertain what I was really like, nor whether I fought with all my might' (21). In part, he seeks to refute the blame heaped upon him by history (of which he seems acutely aware). These pages are his testimonial and his defence in the face of accusations of treachery and weakness. Here, we see explicit metafictional echoes of historical fiction as a genre giving a voice and a place to those marginalised by traditional historiography (De Groot 2010, 148). The last page of the novel is written after the battle mentioned earlier—when death has again eluded him and he awaits the will of God.

Magdalena Lasala's representation of the events that led to the fall of Granada, *Boabdil, the Tragedy of the Last King of Granada*, is, as Civantos has pointed out, a romantic or 'traditionalist' one (2017, 182), and is described by Drayson as 'sympathetic if sentimental' (2017, 151). It was published in 2004 by the publishing house *Temas de hoy* [*Current Topics*] in a series called *Nombres de la historia* [*Names from History*], in which Spain's medieval history features strongly.³ Boabdil is certainly a well-known name from Spain's past, but viewing him as material within 'current topics' in 2004 can only be due to the perceived public interest in Spain's medieval past, specifically the coexistence of Muslims, Christians and Jews, and how that came to an end.

³ The *Nombres de la historia* series includes another Lasala novel on Abderramán III, and other authors' works on Isabella the Catholic and Alfonso X, all key figures in the rival national narratives I have identified.

As Civantos notes, Lasala's book was published in the same year as the al-Qaeda inspired Madrid terrorist attacks on March 11, in which nearly 200 people were killed in a series of train bomb attacks. One must assume that the novel was started well before this event and therefore it cannot be presumed to be a direct response to it (Civantos 2017, 182). Nevertheless, this was a time when Spain's relationship with the Islamic world came under intense scrutiny for a number of reasons: the increasing tensions stimulated by the Islamist terrorist attacks of 2001 in New York and the US-UK led war in Iraq from 2003 in which Spanish forces participated, as well as radical Islam's well-publicised pronouncements on reclaiming al-Andalus.⁴ *Boabdil, the Tragedy of the Last King of Granada* may well have responded to a need for more positive narratives of Muslims and Spain's Islamic past, an area that Lasala specialises in. Furthermore, the novel may well also have fulfilled a need to understand that past better triggered both by those terrorist attacks and the growing Islamic immigrant population in Spain in the 1990s and early 2000s.

Surprisingly, for a story that is supposedly about Boabdil, he is only one focus of the narrative, which starts in 1450; his birth occurs a third of the way through the novel. The novel is structured in sections, each named after one of the main characters from Boabdil's story: Aixa (his mother), Muley Hacén (his father), Isabel de Solís (his step-mother and Aixa's great rival), Al-Zagall (his uncle, once his mentor but later his bitter rival for the throne), Boabdil himself and Moraima (his wife). The final named section falls to Ferdinand, the victor. The epilogue has no name attributed to it, but it becomes clear that the voice is that of Nayât (Boabdil's nurse and mother-figure, presumably an imaginary character). To commemorate Boabdil's memory, she buries her document by the wall of the Alhambra—the 'glorious headstone' of Boabdil's 'true burial place' (353). Despite this structure, it is not a multi-voiced novel. Except for the epilogue, the omniscient third-person narrator explains different characters' motivations or events during the final struggle for Granada. The structure of the novel reflects the people of power and influence in Granada and, by

⁴ See Daniel Pipes's web blog post 'Dreaming of al-Andalus' for more on these for Al-Qaeda's statements referring to al-Andalus

extension, implies that the loss of Granada is a collective rather than an individual failure, and that again Boabdil may be more victim (or witness) than perpetrator.

In 2012 Antonio Soler's first historical novel, *Boabdil, One Man against Destiny*, was published. The author had previously worked on a film script on this topic with Antonio Banderas and, when the film project failed to eventuate, it was suggested that he use the material for a novel (Ojeda np). He states that the representation of Boabdil in the history books 'is a very clumsy and simple caricature' and that he was 'a very complex character, with far too many subtleties to be encapsulated in a couple of sentences in a high school [textbook]' (G. Montilla 2012, np).

Within Spain, around the time of writing the novel, a socially progressive Socialist government was in power; however, there was a significant economic crisis, on-going political corruption trials and growing demands for Catalan independence. An ad hoc coalition of citizens, the *Indignados* anti-austerity movement, began pushing back on certain government economic austerity measures, intended to resolve the economic crisis (Beas 2011, np). Six years had passed since the Madrid terror attack, but Islam was still a topic of public interest. In July 2010, Spain's government rejected the banning of the burqa, taking a more inclusive position than some of its European neighbours. Soler recalls in an interview that, at the time of writing (2010-11 presumably), he was watching the events of the Arab Spring unfold on television, events which he associated with the period he was writing about. In particular, he noted the global rise of 'fundamentalisms and extremisms' as a phenomenon that Boabdil would have recognised, although he was rather vague as to what he specifically has in mind ('Antonio Soler novela la amistad entre Boabdil y El Gran Capitán,' np). Furthermore, in another interview, he noted that Boabdil's epoch and the present share a concern with 'the formation of the Spanish state [...], something that is very much being questioned today' (national identity) and 'cases of extremisms and fundamentalisms of different kinds' (political polarisation) (G. Montilla 2012, np). In a third interview, he even linked Boabdil's era to the Spanish Civil War (1936-39) (Ojeda 2012, np).

Boabdil, One Man against Destiny presents Boabdil as a lone figure, overwhelmed by the enormity of an unwelcome destiny. Written in a third-person narrative voice, it is divided into 18 chapters (all with titles reflecting the events of the story) and a coda. The narration commences in 1481, when the Sultan Muley Hacén (Boabdil's father), rejecting his status as a Christian vassal, retakes the town of Zahara from the Christians. The opening scene in the city of Granada depicts a brutal fight between a bull and a pack of dogs, witnessed by one of Boabdil's advisors, possibly intended as a metaphor for the conflict between the Christians (the dogs) and Granada (the bull). Alternatively, the scene could be read as symbolising the murderous internal political troubles of Granada, with Boabdil as the bull, being attacked by rival Granadan factions.

Civantos describes the novel as a kind of 'bromance' as it focuses on the ill-fated friendship between Boabdil and Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba, a member of the Christian court (2017, 183). Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba (1453-1515) was an emissary sent by Isabella and Ferdinand to negotiate the surrender of Granada and became one of the most prestigious generals of their reign ('El Gran Capitán Fernández de Córdoba Gonzalo' np). Contradicting its title, then, the novel is not focussed solely on Boabdil's destiny; three chapters centre exclusively on Gonzalo and the majority feature Boabdil's interactions with Gonzalo and/or other members of the Christian court. The real battle in the novel, as these two figures expressly state, is not between Christians and Muslims but rather between those who want peaceful *convivencia* and 'the eternal masters [or 'owners'] of the truth' (the fanatics), a group including both Isabella of Castile and the Muslim clerics in Granada. The novel depicts reasonable people on both sides being overwhelmed by the rising tide of religious fanaticism and the enormity of the unfolding events. The main players in the drama are not described in detail; rather, the focus is on the events, the cruelty of war, its impact on the common people, the sounds and movements of battle and, in particular, the impact of artillery and gun powder, new elements deployed by the Christians.

Soler's narrator is much less emotionally involved with the figure of Boabdil and is less inclined to probe his thoughts than the other two authors. For Civantos, Soler's novel is less

Orientalist and less melodramatic in style than Lasala's (2017, 183). There is a sense of mutual respect between Gonzalo and Boabdil, as there could have been between the religious groups, had the characters' reasonable views prevailed. The novel ends, like Lasala's, with the image of Boabdil's grave, '[s]urrounded by rocky dry terrain, and lashed by a wind that by day whips up sand and dust and by night moans like a lament' (318).

Regarding the general tone of the three novels, Lasala's is much more Orientalist, sentimental and overwrought; her emotive style is heavily charged with superlatives and an abundance of adjectives like 'indescribable', 'immeasurable' and 'infinite'. Soler's narrative is more prosaic, less melodramatic and less interested in the materiality of al-Andalus, while Gala's is self-reflexive, philosophical and literary in tone. *The Crimson Manuscript* has greater literary ambitions (which it achieves with greater success, although not always to positive critical reviews) and deploys greater narrative sophistication, adding nuance, complexity and hybridity to its representation of Boabdil (Civantos 2017, 186-87). Nevertheless, as we will see, the three novels share many traits, which point to these versions of Boabdil and the fall of Granada as constituting a narrative template.

The Figure of Boabdil

Boabdil is much the same kind of figure in the three novels, as might be expected. In all three, Boabdil is portrayed as a loving and devoted husband (although in Gala's novel he is also shown in homosexual relationships). Other traits of the character across the three novels include an education focussed on philosophy, languages and literature. Boabdil across all three novels also evinces a fascination with comparative culture in general, and a love of gardens. The emphasis on Boabdil's education in turn reflects differing attitudes towards scholarship in the Islamic and Christian cultures. Boabdil knows the Christians well due to the periods he spent in the Christian court as a young boy and later as a captive (Lasala 2004, 181); he speaks Castilian and Latin and comes to understand Aragonese. Both Lasala and Gala's Boabdils express interest in the connections between Christian and Andalusí culture and the other cultures that preceded them—both present Spanish culture as a patchwork or a hybrid, made up of many influences (Gala 1990, 64, 236-37; Lasala

2004, 182). Gala's Boabdil states that the division between Christians and Muslims is merely 'a state of mind' (Gala 1990, 137).

Boabdil is represented as a personification of the hybridity characteristic of Granadan society, rather than the purity so rigorously pursued by the Christian monarchs. Perhaps due to his familiarity with the Christians, he is depicted in all three novels as clear-sighted regarding the ultimate destiny of his world, observing that resistance to the change around him is useless: 'Time, life and fate cannot be halted' (Lasala 2004, 184); and 'his beloved Granada's days were numbered' (Lasala 2004, 203). This sense of resignation leads to him being depicted by all three writers as sad, lonely and depressed—the 'king of sadness' as Civantos puts it. In Lasala, for example, he is described as exuding 'an inexpressible feeling of appalling loss, an infinite nostalgia for that which he felt was already gone; in his eyes were all the losses in the world' (Lasala 2004, 261).

All three novels depict Boabdil as a pacifist, reluctant to believe people would kill each other over religion or power (Gala 1990, 189). Rather than only protecting his own interests, he wishes to spare his people the tribulations of war and the approaching defeat (Gala 1990, 310; Lasala 2004, 243, 300). He also seeks to protect their way of life as much as possible (Soler 2012, 265). Lasala's Boabdil, like all the Andalusí characters in her novel, is powerless to change Granada's destiny. He is described as an 'impotent witness' to a process set in motion long before his birth (Lasala 2004, 261-62; Gala 1990, 19) and as a figure with little agency (Lasala 2004, 193, 249 and 306; Soler 2012, 259; Gala 1990, 27, 386). Given the facts of the situation and his lack of agency, there is no other ending possible and therefore Boabdil and Granada *are* doomed, which leads all the writers, to a greater or lesser extent, to develop the well-known theme of Boabdil as cursed.

All three writers refer to him as 'El Zogoibi' or 'El Desventurado' [The Cursed or Unfortunate One]. Lasala goes further, stating that several of his forebears also believed themselves to be cursed and were haunted by prophetic dreams about the end of their dynasty. In a

(fictional) melodramatic scene, the curse is accidentally revealed to the court on Boabdil's birthday. Aixa had planned for an astrologer to announce a falsified (positive) horoscope; the astrologer, however, falls into a fit and reveals the terrible truth of Boabdil's astral chart (143-147). Gala's Boabdil, on the other hand, says that his time of birth is unknown so he cannot have been cursed astrologically, while still referring to himself in precisely those terms. In Soler's novel, Boabdil's curse is described as 'this silent blight that rots the air around me' (2012, 259). The words 'curse', 'destiny' and 'fate' dominate all three novels and, in Soler's, even the narrative voice takes on a prophetic tone, often alluding portentously to the characters' futures.

Common to all three is the idea that Boabdil is not free, as he carries the weight of Granada upon his shoulders (Lasala 2004, 198; Soler 2012, 41). Condemned to a state of existential crisis, he cannot live his 'true life' because of his position (Gala 1990, 192; Lasala 2004, 193; Soler 2012, 41). Thus, these Boabdils appear to conform to Civantos's definition—'a romanticized, destiny-bound figure', embodying 'the weakness of the Other' (2017, 150). However, according to these authors, Boabdil is *not* Other nor is he weak. Rather, given their narrative focus, Boabdil is Self, not Other. He is identified and empathised with in his untenable position. Although he is *in* a position of weakness, he demonstrates strength, as Gonzalo tells him (Gala 1990, 467-68), and so will inevitably be misunderstood by history, for the loser is always bad and the winner good (Gala 1990, 466-67).

While the depictions are very similar, there are some noteworthy differences. In Gala's novel, Boabdil does not describe himself physically. It is Lasala who luxuriates most in Boabdil's physical description. Aged five, he has innate elegance and indescribable beauty (180); he is 'beautiful and delicate of features', with 'deep eyes' (134). Later, he is described as having 'a tranquil delicacy' and a 'static elegance' (138). This emphasis on her protagonist's beauty is common in Lasala's novels, an idealised projection of the sensuous beauty of elite Andalusí material culture onto the characters who live within it. Despite his delicacy, Boabdil is also an agile horseman, adept in the fighting skills required of Muslim knights (139).

In Lasala's novel, Boabdil is described as modern by one supporter due to his cross-cultural awareness, a result of his education in both Muslim and Christian courts: '[Y]ou have a wider vision of worldly matters, you are no ignorant defender of the old structures that stop your kingdom from advancing. You are a prince of modernity Boabdil!' (225). Unfortunately, this modernity does not equate to triumph in the narrative present of 1492. Boabdil is a displaced figure: a modern individual in a fifteenth-century situation with no opportunity for individual action.

In Soler's novel, there is also very little physical description of Boabdil—in fact, there is more of other characters—but there are references to his '[s]oft voice' and 'harmonious gestures' (16). He is 'distant, courtly, inaccessible' (156), 'ethereal, almost affected' (142), somehow alienated from others (63) but dignified (127). He is hard to read, and one Christian noble finds him duplicitous, or slippery, describing him as half man and half eel (143).

Soler's Boabdil appears as a character caught between two rival worldviews (or myths). Gonzalo observes that the equilibrium between their peoples has been irretrievably broken and that Boabdil is situated at that precise point 'where the cross arm of the scales would break in two' (250). Soler's Boabdil is as overwhelmed by the rushing river of destiny: 'a light olive branch carried along by a fast-flowing river in flood, swelled to fury by a storm' (96). The biblical reference to an olive branch (symbol of peace) being swept away is not casual. Towards the end of the novel, a further parallel is drawn between Boabdil and Christ, a sacrificial lamb. Gonzalo, staring at an image of Christ on the cross, feels that he has betrayed Boabdil (Soler 2012, 269). The final image of Boabdil, at the end of the novel, as he leaves Granada with his family, is of 'a ghost, a spirit fleeing from his own body, from his own curse' (313). He is losing substance and fading into historical oblivion.

In these novels, Boabdil is being written back into 'history,' or at least the 'historical imagination,' in a sympathetic manner. Rather than a demonised or denigrated figure, he is portrayed as a self-reflexive and clear-sighted individual in an impossible situation. Many of

the historical assertions made about him over the centuries—cowardice, self-interest, incompetence, or treachery towards his own people—are rebutted. With his education and cultural sensibility, Boabdil understands very well the Christian motivation and therefore realises that al-Andalus is doomed. However, we can observe a progression between Gala's intensely philosophical Boabdil, narrated from the inside, Lasala's intense, more emotional portrayal (from the outside) and Soler's significantly less substantial (but still sympathetic) figure, reflecting changing attitudes.

View of Granada and its civilisation

All three novels share a sense of tragic inevitability regarding the fall of Granada, emphasised in references to curses, apocalyptic dreams, sunrises, sunsets and falling autumn leaves. The inevitability of the historical framework within which the novels are situated leaves little option however they transform that into a prophetic doom. Of the three, Gala's Granada is most overtly linked to a modern Andalusian identity by a constant, anachronistic blurring of the boundaries between al-Andalus and Andalusia (the modern region of southern Spain). This blurring of boundaries has enraged some for its historical inaccuracy and overt identity politics (Fanjul 2000, 107-08). Nevertheless, it serves to create a clear (if fictional) connection between the Muslim Middle Ages and modern Spain, reclaiming the STC myth in the service of a unique Andalusian identity.

Asserting the al-Andalus past behind modern Andalusia, Gala's novel casts forward to its modern re-emergence. Granada is 'where the glory of Islam shone like the brightest ornament of the world' (Gala 438). It is also described somewhat mystically as not just a kingdom, but a way of life: '[A] way of having been, a way of being, a way of coming into being' (438). The knowledge and science of al-Andalus are emphasised repeatedly in the novel—'the pride of our religion, the wisdom of our people and the gracefulness of our art' (438)—as well as its treasures and its luxury (121).

Gala's Boabdil reflects a great deal on the nature of al-Andalus: its hybridity—an 'eternal fusion of opposites' (236-37)—and lack of racial purity, a stark contrast with the Christian discourse that came later. Al-Andalus and its inhabitants are part of Spain, just as essential to it as the Christians, with Boabdil stating: 'We are all Spaniards' (227). He believes that, with the Muslim defeat, the true history of Spain will be rewritten: 'Not only will Paradise change owners, but the time during which it was ours will be written out of history. Eight centuries will disappear in two blinks of an eye. ... [E]ven our names will sound foreign and will be erased' (471). The Muslims of Granada and their culture will be erased from their rightful place in the history of Spain (471). Here, written with the benefit of hindsight but presented as prophecy, Boabdil predicts not just the defeat but how the national narrative will be rewritten, to assert the CPT myth. For Boabdil (a la Gala), Granada is a symbol of diversity and an integral part of Spain; its disappearance will distort and mutilate Spain and its history (Gala 470). What will also be lost is a spirit of *convivencia* that can only be present when difference exists (332, 523). Well aware that the purity the Christians long for is mythical, Boabdil refers to the question of blood lines, stating that the people of al-Andalus are Spanish, and of less mixed ancestry than the Christian monarchs themselves: 'In Spain, there are no purebreeds except our horses' (558).

For Lasala, Granada is a site of seductive luxury and sensual pleasure, and the Alhambra in particular is described in those terms (22, 29, 30-31). The word 'voluptuous' is used frequently—for example, 'the voluptuous beauty of the route' (27)—to describe the kingdom. The appeal of Granada, Boabadil reflects, lies in 'its natural beauty, its fertile plains, the voluptuousness of its waters, the beauty of its women and the marvellous artistic expression of its buildings' (207). Granada, 'marvellous and exquisite, crucible of elegance, of beauty and of pleasure' (329), is a place that its inhabitants would rather die than surrender to the Christians.

As in Gala's version, Granada is both a centre of learning (Lasala 205, 120) and 'tolerant and hybrid', unlike the stricter Islamic kingdoms of North Africa (128). This tolerance is attributed to the ethnically mixed population: 'a mixture [...] of Arabs and Syrians, of Berbers

[...] from the lands of North Africa, of the old muladí families who converted to Islam [...], of Jews, Persians and others [...], Mozarabic Christians and original Hispanic descendants of the Goths who accepted Islamic rule' (205). It is Granada's tolerant hybridity that has allowed for the development of such an advanced material culture (205). However, under increasingly political stress, Granada has been pushed into betraying its own essence, becoming both more intolerant and, as a result, more vulnerable to the forces aligned against it: '[T]he shadow of the rejection of others, [...] spread like a mournful mantle over Granada, threatening and sad, distorting the essence of the city, making it even more vulnerable to everything that was already pulling the city away from its true condition' (205). Lasala suggests that Granada's qualities are changing; they are fragile, under attack and may not survive the assault. She portrays Granada as doomed—'a world that was collapsing' (184)—or unreal— 'an already impossible dream' (236)—or a remnant from a bygone age (278) or even a mirage (169), references that seem to imply that al-Andalus is already becoming a myth. Lasala's Granada cannot withstand the onslaught of a bold new era (the Christian triumph), but this transformation is not depicted as a change for the better.

In Soler's novel, there is little description of the beauties of al-Andalus and its culture, or of Granada itself. His is a more pessimistic vision in which Granada, site of interminable power struggles (13), seems more abstract. In his conversations with Boabdil, al-Andalus is again portrayed as a site of learning as Gonzalo acknowledges Christian Europe's cultural and scientific debt to the Islam of Spain (165). It is Soler's Boabdil himself who questions the view of Granada as a place of peace and tolerance, questioning the STC myth despairingly:

I wonder if that old story, the legend of a peaceful Granada, full of wise men who worked in harmony, poets writing exquisite verses, mathematicians and philosophers meditating on the universe, ever existed or whether it was just [...] an aspiration that was never fulfilled and that was so often spoken of [...] because the continual blood-letting that we have lived in made us sigh for it. (2012, 162-63)

He yearns for those values but fears that they do not exist. The dearth of description in this novel could reflect the already mythical nature of al-Andalus and its culture, referred to as 'lost' long before the end of the novel (156). The conquest of Granada is presented as the

end of an era, a fading of the light and the dawn of a new day, but is still ambivalent, with little to celebrate in the Christian victory. Soler's Boabdil recognises the significance of the loss of the *convivencia* on which both he and Gonzalo had staked their hopes for peace.

As I have shown, the narrative presented in these novels is not one of a great triumph to be savoured by the victors, but rather one of loss. The defeat of Granada and what it stands for will be a loss for both Christians and Muslims: the loss of *convivencia*, of hybridity, multiculturalism, and of reason. There will be a rewriting of history; the STC version of Spain's past—the Granadan reality in the novels—will be replaced by the CPT myth and these fictional Boabdils know this. Islamic Spain will be relegated to a footnote. The fall of Granada may be inevitable in light of the forces of fanatical purity and unreason aligned against them, but none of these novels give the impression that the change is for the better.

Image of the Christians

The representation of the triumphant Christians in the novels is also largely similar. In *The Crimson Manuscript*, rather than moral victors, the Christians conform to all the negative stereotypes put forward by the Muslim chroniclers of the time. They are smelly, unwashed, have bad taste (Gala 1990, 142-43, 202) and are suspicious of scholarship (202). They are very puritanical, especially the frighteningly austere Isabella (Gala 284; Lasala 230-31). In all three novels, the Christian betrayals and broken promises of the capitulations are seen as predictable and made explicit. There is no virtue in their victory and, in Gala's novel, the Catholic monarchs are even described as 'torturers' and 'criminals' (1990, 603).

Gala's Boabdil sees the Christians as the mirror image of his own people (256), despite the loud Christian assertions of their difference and their purity in the face of Granada's hybridity. Boabdil wonders how the Christians will manage without their mirror image, the Other against whom they have formed their own identity (470-71). He attributes their envy and fear of Muslims to self-hatred (Gala 204-05); furthermore, he predicts that the Christians will struggle to eliminate everything they have absorbed over hundreds of years of contact with

al-Andalus (504), a reference to the fact that, by the fifteenth century, many Islamic elements were so ingrained in Spanish Christian culture that they were not recognised as Islamic (Fuchs 2009, 22).

In Lasala's novel, the Christians are largely motivated by greed and seduced by fantasies of Granadan treasures (209), as in Soler's novel. Her Boabdil is clear about the nature of the Christian ambitions: '[T]hey contemplate the beauty of Granada with uncontainable envy, obsessed with possessing its treasures' (213). Although the Christian kingdoms had been tolerant in the past, by 1492 they have become much less so (Lasala 241; Soler 86). The religious fanatics prefer uniformity to diversity and the elimination of religious differences is essential to that uniformity (Lasala 279). By the end of Soler's novel, the vengeful desire of the Christians to exterminate the Muslims, driven by 'blind faith in their power' (Soler 2012, 122) is evident: 'They were about to strangle even the last death rattle of that people that still dared to defy them' (287-288).

The myth that the Christians yearned for over 800 years to recover the territories stolen by the Muslim invader is acknowledged in these novels but dismissed as a cover for their greed (Lasala 213; Gala 336-38). For Lasala, the end of Granada is due to a change of epoch. Ferdinand embodies Castile and Aragon's 'modernity', with his modern techniques of warfare and weapons (287). There is a revolution afoot in the world, and the dream is ending for Granada, as is made clear in the image of physical abjection in the last pages of the novel: 'Like a vomiting attack caused by twisted entrails, everything had come together to wake them from their stubborn dream' (346). The passage goes on to state that the 'Discovery' of the New World leads to new situations, new powers, new ways of thinking that put the individual at the centre of the universe, and a rebirth (346)—a clear reference here to the beginning of the Renaissance. However, this ending—a violent vomiting, ejecting the Muslims from the Iberian body forcibly and viscerally—is not a happy one.

Conclusions

These novels reveal the strength of modern Spain's cultural investment in the idea of al-Andalus. The repeated portrayal of the sensuality, beauty and aesthetic appeal of Granada's advanced material culture, as well as its multiculturalism and tolerance, present in these (and other) historical novels, is a sign of desire; desire for an object whose loss is mourned. In all three novels, a great loss is suffered; the price of the Christian victory is not just the elimination of the Muslims but also the damage the Christians unwittingly do to themselves and the nation they are building. These novels are telling the same story, that of the STC myth, which views the fall of Granada as the tragic loss of positive, inherently Spanish values. Gala's novel is the most overt in tracing a direct line of inheritance between al-Andalus and the modern Spain, however it is present in the other two as well. Soler's novel ends with the observation that, although a new era is dawning, the past will linger: '[I]n its heart the tremor of the past persists. As always happens' (315).

None of these texts 'savour' the Christian victory over Granada, as Civantos asserts; rather, they mourn the fate of Boabdil and the loss of Granada, the embodiment of the values of the myth of Spain of the Three Cultures. What is valued is a lost autochthonous tradition of tolerance and diversity, one diametrically opposed to Catholic monoculturalism and insistence on an impossible purity that characterised the centuries that followed. Importantly, it also rejects the values of the more recent Franco dictatorship (1939-1975) and its ideology of National Catholicism, which drew parallels between the Catholic Monarchs' Reconquest and its own military uprising, depicting the Spanish Civil War as a similar crusade of faith.

These same STC values—tolerance, multiculturalism, peaceful coexistence, mutual understanding, etc—are those resurrected and espoused by post-dictatorship Spain as the nation sought a new identity for itself. By reclaiming the narrative template we have identified in these three novels, writers of historical fiction participate in that construction of a new national identity by undermining the CPT myth and proposing a different view of Boabdil and the Fall of Granada.

As we have seen, these authors use many of the same ideas to tell this story and to construct this template. However, they also show signs of evolution. Over the 22 years between Gala's version of this narrative template and the third, we see a fading in the intensity of emotional investment or, perhaps, in the capacity to believe in this myth. Gala asserts the existence of the Spain of the Three Cultures to the end and predicts its resurgence, while Lasala also asserts the values of al-Andalus but shows their fragility. Soler's Boabdil, however, asks in despair if those values ever existed. Written at a time of greater unease and global tension between the Islamic world and the Christian or secular West, Soler's novel seemingly reflects a fading of certainty in this national narrative of a tricultural Spanish past, while at the same time expressing the desire that it be true. Perhaps in the years to come, there will be more iterations of Boabdil with new versions of this narrative template arising in the contested mythscape of Spanish identity to accommodate the tensions and needs of another new era.

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