

Nobel Prize in Literature 1989



Camilo José Cela

The Nobel Prize in Literature 1989 was awarded to Camilo José Cela *"for a rich and intensive prose, which with restrained compassion forms a challenging vision of man's vulnerability"*.

This year's Nobel Prize for literature goes to the Spanish writer Camilo José Cela. With him is rewarded the leading figure in Spain's literary renewal during the postwar era.

The background of Cela's experience is the cruel Spanish civil war, which divided the country into two factions whose borders could cut right through ties of family and friendship. He himself was drawn into the fighting and was badly wounded.

Cela is a restless spirit. In him is united a marked fondness for experiment with a provocative attitude. At the same time he can be included in an old Spanish tradition of hilarious grotesqueness - which is often the other side of despair. Compassion for man's hopeless suffering is there, but tightly controlled.

The basic features of his attitude are evident already in the book which made his name - *The Family of Pascual Duarte* (1942). It is a powerful, in parts gruesome novel, which in spite of being censored and banned had an almost unparalleled impact. After *Don Quixote* it is probably the most read novel in Spanish literature.

We seldom meet any characters in his books which are drawn in any detail. Instead, often like [Mahfouz](#) in *Midaq Alley*, Cela captures the crowd, the buzzing. As in *The Hive* (1951). The effect is attained by means of a feverish montage, which is reflected in other authors.

A sensation was caused in 1969 by *San Camilo*, which tells of the week before the outbreak of the civil war. The decisive factor was that the mighty flow of words with its pictures of violence and sexual obsession within the small sphere seemed to reflect happenings on the national plane.

In *Oficio de Tinieblas 5* (Requiem of Darkness 5) 1973 and *Mazurca para dos muertos* (*Mazurca for Two Dead*) 1983 the experiments with form of language and content - in different ways - have been carried very far. The books are at once challenging and defiantly dark but also secretly enticing. The latter is a macabre but cheerfully obscene dance of death that is valid far beyond the depiction of Galician everyday life.

Especially noteworthy is what Cela has done as publisher of the literary magazine *Papeles de Son Armadans*. Many is the writer who has found an open forum here during years of hardship. In search of the Spain that Cela saw disappear in those years he roamed far and wide. Perhaps the most enjoyable of all the accounts of his travels - at the same time humorous masterpieces - are *Journey to the Alcarria* (1948) and *Del Mino al Bidasoa* (From Mino to Bidasoa) 1952.

Bio-biographical notice

Camilo José Cela y Trulock

Cela was born on 11 May 1916 in Galicia (northwest Spain) in a family with many members. Mostly, it belonged to the upper middle class but also had certain aristocratic roots. His father was a Spaniard, his mother of English birth but also with some Italian blood - Cela is said to count with pride both English pirates and Italian politicians among his ancestors. When he was nine, the family settled down for good in Madrid. After leaving school, he began medical studies but, with greater interest, attended literary lectures in the philosophical faculty. The studies were broken off, however, by the civil war. Owing to

pulmonary tuberculosis, he made his way to his native district, where the nationalists were in control, and he was enrolled as a private on their side but was exempted after having been badly wounded. After the war, he returned to Madrid to resume his studies, this time, in law, but came to devote more and more time to writing. In 1942, he published the novel that made his name - *La familia de Pascual Duarte*. Since then he has devoted himself entirely to literature. From 1954 to quite recently, he lived on Mallorca. In 1956 and until 1979, he published the quality magazine, *Papeles de Son Armadans* in which, during the Franco era, he could give space to the young opposition. He now lives in Guadalajara, a small town 55 km northeast of Madrid.

Cela's oeuvre probably comprises about 70 volumes and includes ten novels, all of more or less experimental nature, about twenty collections of stories, as well as a large number of accounts of his travels and collections of essays, and much else. After his first book, mentioned above, Cela's foremost works are the novels, *Pabellón de reposo*, a story about a sanatorium, (1943), *La colmena* - a Madrid cafe - which was first published in Buenos Aires in 1951 and was banned in Spain until 1963, *Mrs Caldwell habla con su hijo* (1953), *La catira*, with themes from Venezuela, (1955), *San Camilo* 1936, (1969), *Oficio de tinieblas 5 (Requiem of darkness* - a collage of 1194 numbered longer or shorter pieces), (1973), and *Mazurca para dos muertos (Mazurca for two dead)*, (1983). Among the accounts of his travels, special mention must be made of *Viaje a la Alcarria*, (1948), and *Del Miño al Bidasoa*, (1952). His collected works have been published in 17 volumes until now, 1962-1986.

Cela has been a member of the Spanish Academy since 1957, and he is honorary doctor at a large number of foreign universities. In 1984, he received el Premio Nacional de Literatura, and in 1987 his works were rewarded with el Premio Principe de Asturias de las Letras.

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