

# Translating Multidirectional Memory into Fiction: Antonio Muñoz Molina's *Sefarad*<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** “I have invented very little in the stories and voices that weave through this book. Some of them I was told and have carried in my memory for a long time. Others I found in books.” These words—from the Author’s Note of Muñoz Molina’s *Sepharad*—could be said to be the starting point of my article. Muñoz Molina’s novel illustrates a good example of what Michael Rothberg defines as “multidirectional memory” since the memory of the Holocaust, the multiple exiles that have taken place in Europe, and the memory of postwar Spain coexist—like the tesserae of a mosaic—in the structure of this novel. In this sense, *Sepharad* can be seen as a landmark in recent Spanish literature, being the first novel that provides a juxtaposition of these formerly isolated memories in a fictional work. It is, therefore, the aim of this article to explore the manner in which Muñoz Molina manages to translate into fiction the shared European memory of the twentieth century, also paying attention to the narrative techniques used by this Spanish author.

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Cómo atreverse a la vana frivolidad de inventar, habiendo tantas vidas que merecieron ser contadas, cada una de ellas una novela, una malla de ramificaciones que conducen a otras novelas y otras vidas”.<sup>2</sup>

Antonio Muñoz Molina, *Sefarad* (2003, 720-721)

“*De te fabula*. The story is about you”.

Northrop Frye, *The Secular Scripture* (1976, 186)

One of the most revealing passages that the reader of Antonio Muñoz Molina’s *Sefarad* (first published in 2001) may encounter in this so-called “novela de novelas” occurs in the “Author’s Note,” which brings this novel to its end: “I have invented very little in the stories and voices that weave through this book. Some of them I was told and have carried in my memory for a long time. Others I found in books” (Muñoz Molina 2003, 383). This passage could be said to be the starting point of this essay since it helps explain the complex relationship which we find in this novel between memory and imagination, as well as between storytelling and memoir. *Sefarad* is described by Muñoz Molina as “un mapa de todos los exilios posibles” (a map of all possible exiles) (Valdivia 2013, 26), and in this sense the novel represents a manifold and heterogeneous approach to this theme. Similarly, this novel constitutes a landmark in Spanish literature, as it juxtaposes in a fictional work both the Spanish and European shared history of the twentieth century in an unprecedented manner (see Valdivia 2013; Hristova 2011; Baer 2011). As it could be claimed that *Sefarad* is founded on a multidirectional approach to memory (Valdivia 2013, 13), it is my purpose to explore the manner in which this approach is translated into fiction in this novel. Similarly, I would like to pay attention to those narrative techniques used by Muñoz Molina that enhance this multidirectional approach. In this sense, both *polyacroasis* (that is, the plural interpretation of discourses), as

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<sup>2</sup> All quotations in Spanish from *Sefarad* are from the 2013 edition (see References list) and referenced in parentheses as such in the text. All quotations in English are from the 2003 edition of Margaret Sayers Peden’s translation (see References list). The English translation will be offered throughout in footnotes, except where only short passages are cited in-text.

“How, when there are so many lives that deserve to be told, can one attempt to invent a novel for each, in a vast network of interlinking novels and lives?” (Muñoz Molina 2003, 365)

defined by Tomás Albaladejo (1998, 2011), and the empathetic turn of Muñoz Molina's novel, account for an effective translation of memory, as I will try to demonstrate.

### **Multidirectional Memory in *Sefarad***

Instead of the idea of collective memory as competitive memory (Rothberg 2009, 3), in *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* a new conceptual framework is proposed which “consider[s] memory as *multidirectional*: as subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing [...] as productive and not privative” (Rothberg 2009, 3). In other words, this model of competitive memory should be replaced by a dynamic multidirectional model that allows the interaction of different historical memories (Rothberg 2009, 2–3). In Rothberg's study, the work of the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs is considered crucial, since for him “all memories are simultaneously individual and collective” (Rothberg 2009, 14–15) so that an effective transmission of the past depends on the manner in which the interaction and juxtaposition of both individual and collective memory is understood.

In this sense, as Pablo Valdivia has stated in his edition of *Sefarad*, the structure of Muñoz Molina's novel could be said to represent a good illustration of what Michael Rothberg has defined as “multidirectional memory” (Valdivia 2013, 13). The memory of the Holocaust, the multiple exiles that have taken place in Europe, including the Spanish republican exile, and the memory of postwar Spain coexist in the structure of these seventeen intertwined chapters or “novelas” that shape *Sefarad*.

Thus, *Sefarad* constitutes a landmark in recent Spanish literature since, before this novel was published in 2001, the juxtaposition of the Spanish and European shared memory of the Holocaust and its aftermath, along with the memory of the Spanish republican exile, its Civil War, and its postwar period has never been staged in a fictional work (Valdivia 2013, 14; see also Hristova 2011). As a result of this, Muñoz Molina's novel also constitutes an attempt to connect the Spanish and European shared culture so as to fill the voids of our shared history<sup>3</sup> (Baer

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<sup>3</sup> As Pablo Valdivia has suggested in his edition of *Sefarad*, in the article “Escuchando a Canetti,” published in the Spanish newspaper *El País* in 1997, we can clearly appreciate Muñoz

2011; Valdivia 2013). In order to illuminate those cultural links, the Spanish author creates a complex and ambitious fictional artifact haunted by voices rather than characters in the traditional sense (Valdivia 2013). Actually, *voices* (“voces”) is the word Muñoz Molina uses in the “Author’s Note” to refer to the characters who *weave through the book*. Some of these voices are fictional and others belong to real people who bore witness to their atrocious experiences, and they all constitute an “imagined community of voices” (Herzberger 2004, 85; Valdivia 2013, 15). Hence, in *Sefarad* we read the testimonies and listen to the voices of Victor Klemperer, Margarete Buber-Neumann, Primo Levi, Francisco Ayala, Evgenia Ginzburg, José Luis Pinillos, Franz Kafka, or Milena Jesenska, to name but a few. Marije Hristova (2011) has referred to these characters as “iconic characters” or “iconic writers”—that is, historical figures appearing in the novel who in turn have bequeathed to us their “iconic testimonies.”

According to Baer, the weak connection between Spain and the memory of the Holocaust is not historical but cultural (Baer 2011, 114). In this sense, this cultural disjointedness is also suggested in the “Author’s Note,” when Muñoz Molina reveals that many of the testimonies and memoirs of victims of totalitarian regimes that led him to write *Sefarad* were not translated into Spanish by the time he was writing and published his novel. This is the case of Margarete Buber Neumann’s *Als Gefangene bei Stalin und Hitler. Eine Welt im Dunkel* ([1947] 1997), Victor Klemperer’s “*Ich will Zeugnis ablegen bis zum letzten.*” *Tagebücher 1933–1945* (1995), Jean Améry’s *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne: Bewältigungsversuche eines Überwältigten* (1997), and Evgenia Semyonovna Ginzburg’s *Journey into the Whirlwind* (1967), whose memoirs the author could only read in their French and English translations. In fact, it was Antonio Muñoz Molina himself who inserted in the novel his own translation of passages taken from the memoirs we have

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Molina’s reflections on what he considers a certain lack of interest in Spain regarding the international discussions on the Holocaust memory: “Me llama la atención lo poco que se ha escrito en nuestro país sobre el Holocausto, y el eco tan débil o simplemente nulo que tienen entre nosotros los grandes debates internacionales sobre ese acontecimiento que, junto a la tecnología de la guerra total y el terror de las tiranías estalinistas, ha definido este siglo [. . .] se diría que a nosotros tales cosas no nos afectan, como si España fuera ajena a la historia judía de los últimos cinco siglos, o como si nuestro país no hubiera padecido durante casi cuarenta años una dictadura que debió su triunfo, en gran parte, a la ayuda del mismo régimen que provocó el Holocausto y arrasó Europa entera” (Muñoz Molina 2007, 377–380).

previously mentioned. Thus, in *Sefarad* the creative writer and the translator meet, as will be analyzed in the last section.

In *Sefarad*, the author introduces a variety of testimonies and memories that had been previously overshadowed by other memories, to the extent that they were unknown for many Spanish readers, an aspect which suggests a parallelism between Rothberg's multidirectional memory model and Muñoz Molina's novel (Valdivia 2013, 13). In this sense, *Sefarad* can be contemplated as a mosaic made of many tesserae, every one of which is part of an imagined community of voices. Needless to say, every tessera is required to understand the whole picture.

In "Münzenberg," one of the seventeen chapters that make up *Sefarad*, Muñoz Molina's "basic narrator" (Hristova 2011) reveals his plans to write a novel, which, quite startlingly, seems to be inspired by the same approach to fiction that Rothberg proposes for history (Valdivia 2013):

He intuido, a lo largo de dos o tres años, la tentación y la posibilidad de una novela, he imaginado situaciones y lugares, como fotografías sueltas o como esos fotogramas de películas que ponían antes, armados en grandes carteleras, a las entradas de los cines [. . .] Cada uno cobraba una valiosa cualidad de misterio, se yuxtaponía sin orden a los otros, se iluminaban entre sí en conexiones plurales e instantáneas, que yo podía deshacer o modificar a mi antojo, y en las que ninguna imagen anulaba a las otras o alcanzaba una primacía segura sobre ellas, o perdía en beneficio del conjunto su singularidad irreductible. (Muñoz Molina 2013, 383)<sup>4</sup>

This passage is highly revealing since we are told that the narrator's plan for writing his novel consists of juxtaposing snapshots in order to create a pattern where no image *nullifies* or overshadows the others, since each of these images is unique and necessary to produce a true and coherent mosaic. This is what we find precisely in *Sefarad*; different testimonies and memoirs from victims of any political regime or from any kind of exile, each of which are equally significant in a clear multidirectional approach to memory (Valdivia 2013).

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<sup>4</sup> "For two or three years I have flirted with the idea of writing a novel, imagined situations and places, like snapshots, or like those posters displayed on large billboards at the entrance to a movie theatre. [. . .] Each became a mystery, illuminating the others, creating multiple links that I could break or modify at my whim, patterns in which no image nullified the others or gained precedence or lost its uniqueness within the whole" (Muñoz Molina 2003, 140).

Thus, one of the essential questions that are raised while reading *Sefarad* is how appropriate literature may be as a vehicle for bearing witness to history (Gilmour 2011, 840). The main narrator of *Sefarad* does not evade this issue, something which is reflected on many occasions throughout the novel. This is the case of the chapter “Narva,” in which the narrator meets a friend of his for lunch, the Spanish psychologist José Luis Pinillos. Pinillos enlisted in the Blue Division, the Spanish Army that served in the German Army during the Second World War. The testimony that the Spanish psychologist bequeaths to the narrator is that of his dramatic experience in the Estonian city of Narva. There, Pinillos met a Jewish woman who asks him to bear witness to the extermination of the Jewish population. At a certain point of the narration, the Spanish psychologist admits that “[y]o no sabía nada entonces, pero lo peor de todo era que me negaba a saber, que no veía lo que estaba delante de mis ojos” (Muñoz Molina 2013, 630) (“I didn’t know anything then, but worst of all was my refusal to know, what was before my eyes” (Muñoz Molina 2003, 307)), attracted as he was by what German civilization represented during his student years: “no quiero ocultarlo, ni quiero disculparme, creía que Alemania era la civilización, y Rusia la barbarie” (Muñoz Molina 2013, 630) (“I don’t want to hide anything or try to excuse myself, I thought that Germany was civilization and Russia barbarism” (Muñoz Molina 2003, 307)). After that meeting, he would never see the Jewish woman again and the experience of that meeting haunted him for many decades, until the very day the narrator and the Spanish psychologist met for lunch.

This chapter contains essential reflections on the role of literature as a vehicle for transmitting the memory of the past. Moreover, the very mechanisms of storytelling are unveiled in a remarkable manner. After hearing Pinillos’s testimony, and particularly what meeting the Jewish woman meant for him, the basic narrator has an epiphanic revelation, which is reflected in the following passage:

Él, que no quiso ni pudo olvidarla en más de medio siglo, me la ha legado ahora, de su memoria la ha trasladado a mi imaginación, pero yo no quiero inventarle ni un origen ni un nombre, tal vez ni siquiera tengo derecho: no es un fantasma, ni un personaje de ficción, es alguien que pertenecía a la vida

real tanto como yo, que tuvo un destino tan único como el mío aunque inimaginablemente más atroz, una biografía que no puede ser suplantada por la sombra bella y mentirosa de la literatura [. . .] (Muñoz Molina 2013, 637)<sup>5</sup>

As the previous passage reflects, Muñoz Molina is aware of the risks involved in transmitting and translating memory into fiction. He is aware, in other words, of the limits of literature and invention (Gilmour 2011, 840),<sup>6</sup> which is probably why Muñoz Molina declares in his “Author’s Note” that there is very little invention “in the stories and voices that weave through [*Sefarad*]” (Muñoz Molina 2003, 383).

On the other hand, *Sefarad* never stops questioning the legitimacy of literature to approach memory. Perhaps, José Luis Pinillos’s testimony faithfully illustrates the author’s approach to memory:

[. . .] si yo estoy vivo tengo la obligación de hablar por ellos, tengo que contar lo que les hicieron, no puedo quedarme sin hacer nada y dejar que les olviden, y que se pierda del todo lo poco que va quedando de ellos. No quedará nada cuando se haya extinguido mi generación, nadie que se acuerde, a no ser que alguno de vosotros repitáis lo que os hemos contado. (Muñoz Molina 2013, 644)<sup>7</sup>

At the very end of this passage, the Spanish psychologist appeals to the narrator and asks him to narrate what he has just told him (an idea that is lost in the English translation we offer below). In this sense, it is relevant to refer to Cristina Demaria’s study *Semiotica e Memoria. Analisi del post-conflitto*. In this study, Demaria refers to the necessity of exploring what Lotman defined as the process of translating experience into the text (“processi di traduzione dell’esperienza in testo”) when we transmit the past, paying special attention to the interaction

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<sup>5</sup> “He who has not been able to forget her for more than half a century has bequeathed her to me now, transferring the memory of her to my imagination, but I won’t give her an origin or a name, I haven’t the authority, she isn’t a ghost or a fictional character but someone who was as real as I am, who had a destiny as unique as mine although far more cruel, a biography that can neither be supplanted by the beautiful lie of literature” (Muñoz Molina 2003, 312).

<sup>6</sup> Concerning the issue of how legitimate it is for fiction to transmit memories of traumatic experiences, Gilmour has observed that “the dilemma of how to keep memories of these experiences alive and to transmit them to future generations has become a pressing question in contemporary cultural studies, in particular in relation to the Holocaust” (Gilmour 2011, 839).

<sup>7</sup> “[. . .] because I’m alive I have the obligation to speak for them, say what was done, so that the little that remains of them in people’s memories will not be lost for all time” (Muñoz Molina 2003, 317).

between individual and collective memory (Demaria 2006, 37).<sup>8</sup> Hence, I would affirm that the inclusion of the iconic characters' testimonies in *Sefarad* accounts for this sort of translation of experience into the text.

The issue of the legitimacy of literature as a vehicle for the transmission of memory and traumatic knowledge is an essential feature in Muñoz Molina's *Sefarad*, which, I feel, is effectively carried out (Gilmour 2011, 840). On the other hand, it should not be overlooked that the transmission of memory may function—as we consider it does in *Sefarad*—as “a spur to unexpected acts of empathy and solidarity” (Rothberg 2009, 19).

### **Empathetic polyacrosis as a narrative principle in *Sefarad***

One of the most remarkable aspects of Muñoz Molina's *Sefarad* is the importance of storytelling as a principle that articulates the novel (Herzberger 2004, 85; Valdivia 2013). As Herzberger has pointed out *Sefarad* “is a novel of multiple narrators, characters, and plots that turns inward to celebrate the construction of its stories.” (Herzberger 2004, 85). It is important to highlight how significant storytelling, listening, and reading are in the construction of this novel. In this sense, the inclusion of the iconic characters' testimonies in a novel where storytelling and listening is vital accounts for what Herzberger defines as “a hybridized narrative rooted in imagination and reference” (Herzberger 2004, 86). A fruitful tension that contributes to trigger an empathetic response from the reader (Herzberger 2004, 86).

On the other hand, one of the most remarkable achievements of *Sefarad* is its “basic narrator”—that is, the oscillating narrative voice underlying the seventeen chapters or “novelas” (Hristova 2011; Gilmour 2011; Valdivia 2012, 591–592). Actually, this basic narrator constantly changes the grammatical person from “yo” to “tú,” “él,” “vosotros,” or “ellos” (Valdivia 2012, 591–592; see also Gilmour 2011). Thus, orality and storytelling are essential features for this basic narrator to

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<sup>8</sup> Cristina Demaria affirms in her study that “[l]a trasmissione del significato del passato, la trama in cui si intrecciano alcuni eventi che divengono così rilevanti, può cioè trovarsi a dipendere dal modo in cui, di volta in volta, memoria individuale e memoria collettiva interagiscono. È necessario dunque indagare più a fondo quelli che Lotman definisce come processi di traduzione dell'esperienza in testo, l'interazione e anche il conflitto fra una memoria individuale e una collettiva, culturale e sociale” (Demaria 2006, 37).



develop his narrative possibilities. Characters, be they iconic or fictional, tell each other stories and transmit their testimonies to those who are willing to listen, to the extent that the manner in which their identities may be perceived depends *to a great extent* on those stories (Herzberger 2004; Gilmour 2011; Hristova 2011; Valdivia 2012; Valdivia 2013).

Hence, both orality and storytelling allow us to establish a connection with the rhetorical concept of *polyacroasis* (Valdivia 2012, 593–594). The term *polyacroasis* (*polyakróasis*)—that is, a plural hearing, plural interpretation of an oral discourse—has been proposed by Tomás Albaladejo “to refer to the characteristic consisting of the differences between the hearers of rhetorical discourse” (Albaladejo 1998, 156). Thus, polyacroasis contributes to illuminate and elucidate the mechanisms of the plural reception of discourses taking place in a given rhetorical event (Albaladejo 1998). As this reception is not only restricted to oratorical events, Albaladejo has also proposed this concept to analyze literary works, especially those at the very core of which literary communication lies (Albaladejo 2009, 2). Polyacroasis therefore contributes to elucidate the strong link between literature and orality (Albaladejo 2009, 3–4).

In this sense, *Sefarad* constitutes a rhetorical event where the characters or *voices* that dwell in the novel narrate to each other *the novel they take with them*.<sup>9</sup> Yet the reader is also appealed to and turned into another character of the novel by means of empathy, to the extent that readers may experience what Northrop Frye affirmed the final message of the genre of *romance* was—that is, “*de te fabula: the story is about you*” (Frye 1976, 186). In this sense, the use in the novel of the rhetorical figure of apostrophe reinforces the sense of empathy the novel conveys, since the reader’s attention is drawn in a very effective manner (Valdivia 2013):

Y tú qué harías si supieras que en cualquier momento pueden venir a buscarte, que tal vez ya figura tu nombre en una lista mecanografiada de

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<sup>9</sup> In *Sefarad*, there are multiple references to Benito Pérez Galdós’s *Fortunata y Jacinta*. Muñoz Molina introduces in *Sefarad* a famous quotation taken from that novel, “Doquiera que el hombre va lleva consigo su novela,” which Margaret Sayers Peden translated into English as “Wherever a man goes, he takes his novel with him” (Muñoz Molina 2003, 44).

presos o de muertos futuros, de sospechosos, de traidores. (Muñoz Molina 2013, 243)<sup>10</sup>

Clearly, the use of apostrophe triggers an empathetic response from the reader, who may experience a total identification with the voices that dwell in *Sefarad* (Gilmour 2011, 851). In addition to this, empathy is similarly stimulated by manipulating the voice of the basic narrator (Gilmour 2011, 851; Valdivia 2012). What Gilmour has described as “a constant oscillation between the third person, *él* or *ella*, and the first person, *yo*,” (Gilmour 2011, 852; Valdivia 2012; Valdivia 2013, 258) creates a web of empathetic connections among the main narrator, the gallery of multiple voices that weave through the book, and an empathetic reader. As we have seen before, Muñoz Molina tells us in the “Author’s note” that both the testimonies he listened to and stored for a long time in his memory and the books he read were vital while plotting and writing *Sefarad*: the rest was invention. However, it could be affirmed that the part of the novel that stems from invention completes full circle this web of empathetic links (Gilmour 2011). In other words, as Gilmour has pointed out, the use of an empathetic imagination accounts for the manner in which Muñoz Molina, via his basic narrator, translates into fiction other people’s memories (Gilmour 2011, 847). This basic narrator has been referred to by Valdivia as a “yo fluido,” a sort of flowing manifold narrator whose nature is clearly explained in the following passage taken from the chapter “Dime tu nombre”:

Nunca soy más yo mismo que cuando guardo silencio y escucho, cuando dejo a un lado mi fatigosa identidad y mi propia memoria para concentrarme del todo en el acto de escuchar, de ser plenamente habitado por las experiencias y recuerdos de otros. (Muñoz Molina 2013, 680)<sup>11</sup>

This multiple oscillation among different grammatical persons is accompanied by the use of direct speech, as we can appreciate when Muñoz Molina provides his own translation into

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<sup>10</sup> “And you, what would you do if you knew that at any moment they could come for you, that your name may already be on a typed list of prisoners or future dead, or suspects, or traitors?” (Muñoz Molina 2003, 45).

<sup>11</sup> “I am never more myself than when I am silent and listening, when I set aside my tedious identity and tedious memory to concentrate totally on the act of listening, on the experiences of another” (Muñoz Molina 2003, 340).

Spanish of the iconic characters' testimonies he has read in books. In the following passage we can appreciate a clear example of this flowing oscillating narrator:

*Evgenia, te están tendiendo una trampa, y es preciso que escapes mientras puedas, antes de que te partan el cuello. Pero cómo voy yo, una comunista, a esconderme de mi Partido, lo que tengo que hacer es demostrarle al Partido que soy inocente. Hablan en voz baja, procurando que los niños no escuchen nada, temiendo que el teléfono, aunque está colgado, sirva para que les espíen las conversaciones. (Muñoz Molina 2013, 258)<sup>12</sup>*

The quotation that appears in italics is an excerpt, translated into Spanish by the author himself, and taken from Evgenia Ginzburg's *Journey into the Whirlwind*, a memoir that had not yet been translated into Spanish when *Sefarad* was being written. Then, after that passage, without using quotation marks, the first person is used and we are told what the "basic narrator" imagines Evgenia Ginzburg might have said in the very moment she learnt she was under threat. In other words, the basic narrator haunts Ginzburg's mind and empathetically imagines how Ginzburg might have reacted. Finally, in the last sentence, the basic narrator shifts to the third person plural (Valdivia 2013, 258). Needless to say, this masterly use of narrative technique requires an empathetic imagination on the author's part (Gilmour 2011; Valdivia 2013, 258).

The manner in which polyacrosis functions in this novel can not be explained if we are unaware of that web of empathetic connections—or "malla de ramificaciones"—among the different voices, the reader's response, and the empathetic imagination deployed by Muñoz Molina. Therefore, a new question should now be raised. Is empathy an effective vehicle for both transmitting and translating memories? Does the author's empathetic involvement in retelling and translating testimonies account for a successful transmission of memory?

According to Rothberg, remembrance and imagination can be seen as both material and fundamentally human forces that

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<sup>12</sup> "Eugenia, they're setting a trap for you, and you must run away while you can, before they have your head. But why would I, a Communist, hide from my Party? I must show the Party that I'm innocent. They speak in low voices, trying not to let the children hear, afraid that the telephone, even though the receiver's down, will allow someone to listen" (Muñoz Molina 2003, 53).

“should not lead to assumptions of memory’s insubstantiality” (Rothberg 2009, 19). It is possible that, as *Sefarad* reflects, translating multidirectional memory into fiction acquires a more significant and enriched dimension when empathetic imagination is present.

### **Translating the Other culturally in *Sefarad***

The role of translation in postconflict cultures is an aspect that has been taken into consideration in Nergaard’s “Translating the Other: Journalism in Post Conflict Cultures” (Demaria and Wright, 2006). In this article, Nergaard analyzes examples where one culture translates another (Nergaard 2006, 189). In this sense, Nergaard proposes an understanding of translation “as the process through which concepts and discourses in one culture are interpreted and transformed in order to be introduced into another” (Nergaard 2006, 189). Translation is also referred to as “one of the privileged spaces where cultures meet [. . .] in terms of *alterity* and *difference*” (Nergaard 2006, 189). Translation thus allows us to represent the Other, a complex process that Nergaard calls *cultural translation* (Nergaard 2006, 191). In this epigraph I would like to explore the presence of *cultural translation* in Muñoz Molina’s novel, and to what extent fiction may contribute to an effective translation of the Other and, as a result of that, can contribute to create and shape knowledge.

When the so-called basic narrator declares that he is never more himself than when he sets aside his identity to concentrate on the experiences of another (Muñoz Molina 2013, 680), he is suggesting that “he is never more fully himself than when experiencing both self and other” (Gilmour 2011, 849.) In this sense, it seems that the very idea of representing and translating the Other appears to be one of the engines of *Sefarad*, being the other and the translation of his or her experiences one of the key motifs that articulate the novel.

We have previously referred to the manner in which Muñoz Molina translates into fiction the iconic characters’ testimonies. In some occasions the author himself translates passages into Spanish, which lend verisimilitude to the novel. In other occasions, the iconic characters are haunted by the oscillating narrator (“yo fluido,” as proposed by Valdivia) who imagines empathetically what these “iconic characters and

writers” might have thought or said (Valdivia 2013). This exploration of the characters’ thoughts appearing in *Sefarad*, via an oscillating narrator, constitutes an example of what could be defined as an empathetic cultural translation.

The most significant instance of this representation of the Other in *Sefarad* appears in the chapter “Eres.” In this chapter, Muñoz Molina appeals empathetically to the reader by means of the use of apostrophe. Thus, the chapter triggers in the reader a sense of identification between him or her and the Other (Valdivia 2013, 601). In this sense in *Sefarad* “the possibility of becoming ‘the other’ is a recurrent theme” (Hristova-Dijkstra and Adema 2010, 74), something that is illustrated when the reader is asked the following question: “Y tú qué harías si supieras que en cualquier momento pueden venir a buscarte, que tal vez ya figura tu nombre en una lista mecanografiada de presos o de muertos futuros, de sospechosos, de traidores”(Muñoz Molina 2013, 243) (“what would you do if you knew that at any moment they could come for you, that your name may already be on a typed list of prisoners or future dead, or suspects, or traitors?” [Muñoz Molina 2003, 45]).

In the following passage from the chapter mentioned above, we encounter a representative example of the manner in which the virtual identification between reader (Self) and the Other is triggered:

Eres quien mira su normalidad perdida desde el otro lado del cristal que te separa de ella, quien entre las rendijas de las tablas de un vagón de deportados mira las últimas casas de la ciudad que creyó suya y a la que nunca volverá.  
(Muñoz Molina 2013, 619)<sup>13</sup>

The effect these words have on the reader is that of fostering a total identification with the Other, to the extent that we come to recognize how “the ‘totally other’ constitutes one’s identity” (Hristova-Dijkstra and Adema 2010, 74).

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<sup>13</sup> As Margaret Sayers Peden’s 2003 translation into English of the 2001 Spanish edition of *Sefarad* is being used throughout this article, and as this translation omits many passages from the original 2001 Spanish edition, including the passage I have just cited, no English translation is being provided in this instance.

*Sefarad* has been described by its author as a “mapa de todos los exilios posibles” (a map of possible exiles) (Valdivia 2013, 26). In this sense, it could be affirmed that the theme of exile constitutes a subtext in *Sefarad* since it is the place where the narrator and the reader empathize imaginatively with the Other (Gilmour 2011, 854):

Aún despojándote de todo queda algo que permanece siempre, que está en ti desde que tienes memoria [. . .] el núcleo o la médula de lo que eres [. . .]: eres el sentimiento del desarraigo y de la extrañeza, de no estar del todo en ninguna parte [. . .] (Muñoz Molina 2013, 609)<sup>14</sup>

In the Introduction to *Translation and Power* (2002) Maria Tymoczko and Edwin Gentzler assert that translators “as much as creative writers and politicians, participate in the powerful acts that create knowledge and shape culture” (Tymoczko and Gentzler 2002, xxi). In this sense, in *Sefarad* both the translator and the creative writer meet. The fact that some of the books containing the iconic characters’ testimonies were not translated into Spanish implied an obvious lack of knowledge of vital testimonies that has shaped postwar Europe. Thus, the Spanish author’s decision to insert and translate passages from the previously mentioned testimonies accounts for a strong desire to create knowledge both as a creative writer and as a translator.

If we take into consideration, for instance, the passages taken from Victor Klemperer’s *I will Bear Witness. 1933–1941. A Diary of the Nazi Years* (1999), we can appreciate a clear illustration of Muñoz Molina’s masterly use of historical reference and empathetic imagination. In “Quien espera,” a gallery of “iconic characters” weaves through this chapter, which includes Victor Klemperer himself, Margarete Buber-Neumann, Eugenia Ginzburg, Jean Améry, and even fictional characters such as Josef K. from Kafka’s *Der Prozess*. In the following passage we can appreciate the narrative technique deployed by the author:

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<sup>14</sup> “Something persists that has been inside you for as long as you can remember [. . .] it is the marrow of what you are [. . .] You are uprootedness and foreignness, not being completely in any one place [. . .]” (Muñoz Molina 2003, 295).

El jueves 30 de marzo de 1933 el profesor Victor Klemperer, de Dresde, anota en su diario que ha visto en el escaparate de una tienda de juguetes un balón de goma infantil con una gran esvástica. *Ya no puedo librarme de la sensación de disgusto y vergüenza. Y nadie se mueve; todo el mundo tiembla, se esconde.* (Muñoz Molina 2013, 247)<sup>15</sup>

The journal entry corresponds to March 30, 1933. In fact, the sentence that we encounter at the end of that journal entry—that is, “In a toy shop a children’s ball with the swastika” (Klemperer 1999, 10)—occurs unexpectedly, as a juxtaposed image with no apparent connection with the rest of the paragraph.<sup>16</sup> Thus, Muñoz Molina is clearly retelling what he has read in the diary, after which he introduces in italics his own translation of a passage extracted from the English translation of Klemperer’s diaries. Hence, Muñoz Molina sets a boundary between real testimonies and literary recreation. Yet, it should be noticed that the passage in italics does not correspond to the same day Klemperer saw the child’s ball with the swastika (that is, March 30) but to May 17 of the same year. This narrative device—which we can appreciate in other iconic testimonies throughout the novel—has significant implications from the point of view of translation, since it reveals a concept of translation that Tymoczko and Gentzler have described as “not simply an act of faithful reproduction but, rather, a deliberate and conscious act of selection [and] assemblage” (Tymoczko and Gentzler 2002, xxi). In other words, Muñoz Molina’s choice constitutes a conscious act of juxtaposing his own empathetic retelling of the journal with real testimonies extracted from it (that is, “*I can no longer get rid of the feeling of disgust and shame. And no one stirs; everyone trembles, keeps out of sight*” (Klemperer 1999, 7) (“Ich kann das Gefühl des

<sup>15</sup> “On Thursday, March 30, 1933, Professor Victor Klemperer, of Dresden, notes in his diary that in a toy-shop window he saw a child’s balloon with a large swastika. *I can no longer rid myself of the disgust and shame. Yet no one makes a move; everyone trembles, hides*” (Muñoz Molina 2003, 47).

<sup>16</sup> We provide in this footnote the English translation of Victor Klemperer’s diaries and the original German: “Yesterday a wretched statement in the *Dresdener Neueste Nachrichten*—‘on your own account.’ They are 92.5 percent founded on Aryan capital, Herr Wollf, owner of the remaining 7.5 percent, has resigned as chief editor, one Jewish editor has been given leave of absence (poor Fent!), the other ten are Aryans. Terrible!—In a toy shop a children’s ball with the swastika.” (Klemperer 1999, 10); „Gestern jämmerliche Erklärung der *Dresdener NN* in eigener Sache’. Sie seien zu 92,5 Prozent auf arisches Kapital gestützt, Herr Wollf, Besitzer der übrigen 7,5 Prozent, lege Chefredaktion nieder, ein jüdischer Redakteur sei beurlaubt (armer Fent!), die andern zehn seien Arier. Entsetzlich! – In einem Spielzeugladen ein Kinderball mit Hakenkreuz” (Klemperer, 1995: 15–16).

Ekels und der Scham nicht mehr loswerden. Und niemand rührt sich; alles zittert, verkriecht sich.” [Klemperer 1995, 12]).

In “Quien espera” we encounter a web of testimonies or voices that are intertwined throughout this chapter, including Buber-Neumann’s, Ginzburg’s, and Klemperer’s. In the last paragraph of this chapter the testimonies of both Klemperer and Buber-Neumann come together. In a masterly juxtaposition of voices and testimonies, the oscillating narrator concludes this chapter in the following manner:

Llegaron una mañana muy temprano, del 19 de Julio, y al comprobar que esta vez sí que venían de verdad por ella [Margarete] no sintió pánico, sino más bien alivio [. . .]. El 12 de julio el profesor Klemperer recuerda en su diario a algunos amigos que se marcharon de Alemania, que han encontrado trabajo en Estados Unidos o en Inglaterra. Pero cómo irse sin nada, él, un viejo, y su mujer una enferma [. . .]. *Nosotros nos hemos quedado aquí, en la vergüenza y la penuria, como enterrados vivos, enterrados hasta el cuello, esperando día tras día las últimas paletadas.* (Muñoz Molina 2013, 267)<sup>17</sup>

The responsibility that translation may have in creating knowledge has been previously mentioned. I agree with Tymoczko and Gentzler when they affirm that “translation [. . .] actively participates in the construction of knowledge [. . .] and that the act of translation is itself very much involved in the creation of [it]” (Tymoczko and Gentzler 2002, xxi). Leaving aside the enormous literary value of a novel like *Sefarad*, I would affirm that this novel is also an example of how a fictional work can participate in that construction of knowledge through an empathetic imagination.

## Conclusion

Throughout this article I have tried to analyze the manner in which Muñoz Molina juxtaposes in *Sefarad* the shared European and Spanish memory of the twentieth century via a multidirectional memory approach to fiction. In this sense, I would affirm that Michael Rothberg’s approach helps explain the narrative mechanisms underlying *Sefarad*. In other words, Rothberg’s

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<sup>17</sup> “They came one morning very early, on July 19, and when she realized that they had finally come for her, [Margarete] felt only a kind of relief [. . .]. On July 12, Professor Klemperer refers in his diary to some friends who left Germany and found work in the United States or England. But how do you leave when you don’t have anything? He, an old man with a sick wife [. . .]. *We have stayed here, in shame and penury, as if buried alive, buried up to our necks, waiting day after day for the last spadefuls of dirt*” (Muñoz Molina 2003, 60).



dynamic multidirectional model accounts effectively for the interaction of different historical memories which we can appreciate in *Sefarad* (Rothberg 2009, 3).

Muñoz Molina thus *translates* into fiction previously isolated memories and presents *a map of all possible exiles* in an unprecedented manner in recent Spanish literature. In this sense, I would state that one of Muñoz Molina's greatest achievements is the manner in which he carries out a translation of experience into a fictional text. There are multiple instances of that translation of experiences into *Sefarad*, such as the iconic characters' testimonies. In addition to this, I would like to point out that empathetic polyacroasis contributes to a great extent to this effective translation of experience. Thus, I believe that the presence of polyacroasis in *Sefarad* enhances that empathetic translation and transmission of memory, since it allows both a plural interpretation and a powerful interaction among the different "voices" that dwell in the novel, and it also increases the readers' empathetic response. In my opinion, translating multidirectional memory into fiction becomes more effective when empathetic polyacroasis takes place. Needless to say, this "hybridized narrative rooted in imagination and reference" (Herzberger 2004, 86) clearly contributes and participates in the construction of knowledge.

Finally, I would like to conclude this essay with an excerpt from Antonio Muñoz Molina's *Sefarad* that, to a great extent, may function as a concise summary of the argument I have presented:

No eres una sola persona y no tienes una sola historia, y ni tu cara ni tu oficio ni las demás circunstancias de tu vida pasada o presente permanecen invariables. El pasado se mueve y los espejos son imprevisibles. (Muñoz Molina 2013, 596)<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> "You are not an isolated person and do not have an isolated story, and neither your face nor your profession nor the other circumstances of your past or present life are cast in stone. The past shifts and reforms, and mirrors are unpredictable" (Muñoz Molina 2003, 288).

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