

# Hispanic Urban Studies

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Diana Q. Palardy

The Dystopian  
Imagination  
in Contemporary  
Spanish Literature  
and Film

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*I would like to dedicate this book to Joe, Quentin, and Evan Palardy.*

## PREFACE

I first became interested in Spanish dystopias when I read Miguel Delibes' 1969 masterpiece *Parábola del naufrago* (Parable of the Shipwrecked Man), which was published in English translation under the title *The Hedge* in 1983. Although written in a style that is abstruse (likely in order to make it past the censors during the Franco dictatorship) and at times almost painful to read, this work is a classic that is steeped in allegory, somewhat like a cross between *Animal Farm* (1945) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), with traces of Joycean verbal play, Ionescan absurdity, and Sartrean existentialism. The protagonist is a submissive worker at a large corporation headed by a "benevolent" tyrant who sends him off to a cabin to take a forced vacation for having asked questions about the meaning of his work. After he plants some seeds given to him by his boss, an indestructible hedge begins to grow around the cabin at an abnormally fast pace, eventually entrapping him, invading his orifices, and leaving him so passive that, in the end, he is transformed into a sheep. The aspects of the novel that I found most fascinating were the use of dark humor, the layered and complex language that has to be deciphered like a code, the spatial constructions that take on such a dominant role that they transform into antagonists, and the imaginative allegories that aptly convey the oppressiveness and anxieties of the time. This novel sparked my interest in searching for other allegorical dystopias with spatial constructions that effectively capture the zeitgeist in which they were produced.

What surprised me when I first started researching Spanish dystopias in 2006 was how few of them there were at the time and how little scholarship had been done on the subject. After the 2008 financial crisis and the

15-M Movement, the number of Spanish dystopias increased dramatically and I developed an interest in more contemporary works. The challenge then became to decide which ones to include in my research. For this present investigation, I have chosen to focus specifically on works produced from the end of the twentieth century until the present. Of particular interest to me are Spanish dystopian texts and films in which the urban landscapes reflect anxieties about Spain's recent socioeconomic and cultural problems. I address works that deal either directly or indirectly with the buildup to or the fallout from the economic crisis, especially ones that capture the essence of problems related to globalization, consumerism, immigration, housing speculation, poverty, and/or resistance movements. Since there are so many dystopias from which to choose and many of them are quite recent, I have decided to concentrate on works that have received considerable critical attention, whether it be in the form of awards, academic articles, book/film reviews, blogs, or newspaper articles. I have also adopted an urban cultural studies approach to analyzing these dystopias because *topos*, meaning "place" in Greek, is integral to the concept of dystopia, and urban issues are at the core of all of these works. This investigation is oriented toward scholars and undergraduate and graduate students in utopian and dystopian studies, urban cultural studies, science fiction studies, and contemporary Spanish literature and film; however, it is my hope that it will be of interest to a wider audience. Ultimately, my intention is to open the door to the dystopian imagination in Spain and to explore the tensions between fictional representations of dystopia and the underlying sociopolitical problems that drive them.

Youngstown, OH

Diana Q. Palardy

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