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Tremendism as a Spanish cultural phenomenon : summary

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SUMMARY

Tremendism as a Spanish Cultural Phenomenon

In the 1940s a peculiar phenomenon appeared on the Spanish cultural scene, later to be given the name tremendism. Works of art carrying the seal of this new aesthetic caused a considerable stir in society, and there was no lack of stormy reaction (cf. Martínez Cachero, 1997: 113–115). There has been much academic debate and controversy around tremendism, which was manifested in the visual arts, in literature and especially in prose and poetry. Nonetheless, despite the fact that the theme has been tackled by literary critics, researchers and to a significant extent by writers themselves, it is obvious that there is no clear consensus that would provide a satisfactory response to the crucial issues linked to tremendism.

In the first phase, especially immediately after tremendism appeared as a new literary phenomenon, designations and definitions that were a direct product of their time and concrete historical, social and cultural circumstances were linked to it. It should be borne in mind that both artists and critics were under the influence of censorship, often subject to strong pressure from the ideological dictates of the Franco regime that had come to power at the end of the 1930s after the Spanish Civil War (Gracia, Ródenas, 2011: 22). A greater revival of interest in this topic took place only much later, especially in the 1990s, and that was in connection with the awarding of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1989 to the leading representative of tremendism, the writer Camilo José Cela. Here it is worth pointing out two circumstances. One is the generally accepted fact that the author's main works were written in his tremendist stage. We should remember that in his brief introduction at the Nobel Prize presentation ceremony, Knut Ahnlud (1990: 3) of the Swedish Royal Academy highlighted the novels from that period and then the fact that Cela was the only novelist among Spanish recipients of the Nobel Prize. The awarding of this prestigious prize led in the 1990s to the emergence of numerous studies and monographs on the author's work and also produced a revival of interest in tremendism in the early phase of Cela's literary career (cf. Sagaró Faci, 1990).

The origins of tremendism and especially its consolidation in Spanish post-war literature took place more than seventy years ago. This literary phenomenon is related to the mid-20th century, although its manifestations can be observed even later, especially in the nineties, when the tremendist aesthetic once again successfully took off and found a place in the works of a new generation. A quarter of a century has elapsed since then which is long enough to allow us to look back at it dispassionately. This necessary perspective is one of the key prerequisites making it possible to formulate new and impartial answers to several key questions. For the reasons given above we can still see the “tremendism case” as an open call to all lovers of Spanish literature. Although this phenomenon can be seen as one of the most distinctive and most controversial literary manifestations in modern writing, several significant works on literary history in their chapters dedicated to developments in the Spanish post-war scene have avoided or overlooked this term, thus denying its very right to exist (cf. Ynduráin, 1981).

In other cases, which are very frequent, there is an emphasis on links between works from the corpus of tremendism and other literary and intellectual currents, meaning that we can encounter tremendist narrative being described as a form of realism, although it is emphasised that it concerns a certain specific case *sui generis*, marked out by characteristic features (cf. Soldevila Durante, 1982: 107). Finally we come across another conception of tremendism, which while it also places this phenomenon in realism, naturally sees it as a separate and distinct form of literary expression. Its birth is placed in the forties and its effects are also seen in the following decades, nonetheless after a relatively short period it lost its drive before completely ceasing to exist (Pedraza Jiménez, Rodríguez Cáceres, 2000: 156–157).

In connection with this literary phenomenon several basic questions arise, that call for more precise definition and the pinning down of disputed terms. What is tremendism? How precisely should it be characterised? Is it a movement, a trend or a style? In particular it is worth asking the question as to whether its existence was really so ephemeral. It is possible to raise the legitimate question as to whether tremendism did not reappear in the nineties in the works of new authors from the upcoming Generation X.

On the questions above we will try to take a position which will allow us to formulate clearer responses. We are convinced that tremendism is a distinctive and peculiar phenomenon that has left a clear imprint on Spanish literature. It does not concern only the works of the tremendist authors of the mid-20th century, among whom were not only Camilo José Cela, but traditionally also included Carmen Laforet, Ana María Matute and other key authors (Ayuso de Vicente *et al.*, 1990: 385). The unmistakable traces of tremendism can be recognised precisely in the narratives of those writers who appeared on the literary scene only in the nineties. It is worth noting that tremendism is a highly problematic and extremely changeable literary phenomenon, which is hard to grasp given its amoebic nature. Perhaps in this it is possible to find the reasons why the works of the tremendist authors have become the focus of a new wave of attention on the part of researchers only relatively recently. Our intention is to contribute to a revival of academic discussion in an effort to point to the fact that in its essentials, tremendism is a unique literary phenomenon which has had a broad impact on the works of Spanish authors, not only in post-war literature but also with the passage of time, half a century later.

Therefore, first and foremost, we dealt with the specific historical and socio-cultural context, which led in the cultural field to the favourable conditions that produced fertile soil for tremendism and thus its birth. The treacherousness and awkwardness of the extensive issues linked to tremendism are on display even when dealing with the definitions connected to this phenomenon. According to several classifications tremendism is considered to be a remarkable tendency (Sanz Villanueva, 1988: 82–83). Other researchers characterise it as a literary school (Aub, 1966: 532), and there are not a few who see it as a distinctive trend, or current or even literary movement (Pedraza Jiménez, Rodríguez Cáceres, 2000: 158).

The need to produce a precise definition, which tremendism certainly deserves, goes without question. Nonetheless at the same time it must be admitted that this is no easy task, since this phenomenon has a very wide scope. In the effort to achieve a more precise definition it has been shown to be essential to describe the foundations of tremendism, its philosophy, general aesthetic and the literary basis from which the creations of the tremendist authors grew.

Critics are united in the idea that when in 1942 the novel *The Family of Pascual Duarte* (*La familia de Pascual Duarte*) was published by the debutant author Camilo José Cela, a new aesthetic had appeared on the Spanish scene, the roots of which reached deep into the past to the picaresque novel (Sobejano, 1964: 213–225). In the context of post-war Spanish literature this novel represents an absolute break, both in terms of form, for example in the structure of the work, as well as in its content. This is particularly marked in the context of the representation of the selected themes and the choice of the heroes whose stories are captured in the novel. From this perspective tremendism became an attractive choice for a range of authors, whom the once and future aesthetic of the grotesque attracted and appealed to, and they were so inspired by Cela's style that they decided to follow the "example of Pascual Duarte" (cf. Sanz Villanueva, 1988: 83). Tremendism however at the same time manifests as a current, and so in diachronic terms we can follow its line, reappearing in various periods subject to minor changes, but with its core unchanged.

In the 1940s we can observe the explosive growth of tremendism, with dramatic societal events playing a significant role in its birth, heavily influenced by what was happening in Spain at that time. Nonetheless its rapid onset was replaced in the following decades by a certain decline. Despite this however it can be said that the flame of tremendism was not completely extinguished, since it was still strongly present in the works of certain authors, especially in the novels of its main representative – Camilo José Cela (cf. Pedraza Jiménez, Rodríguez Cáceres, 2000: 158).

Several features can be seen in the works of tremendist authors, having in common a concise expressive style which binds it together, as does the same perception of the world and a shared point of view, which is the starting point when creating a literary reflection of reality. Tremendism draws on the philosophy of pessimism, which is clear from the perception of life as a perilous journey full of obstacles. Individuals have the achievement of their aims made impossible, meaning that they cannot fulfil their expectations and aspirations (cf. Cela, 1992: 21). Determinism and fatalism play a highly significant role. The hero is dragged from one tragedy to another, where the first fatal error inevitably leads to the next, creating a whole chain of unfortunate events. Despite strong will and a determination to overcome fate he is unable to escape the clutches of destiny. The promise of change that

results from an extraordinary effort in the end falls apart in the face of further obstacles. The heroes are thus at the mercy of setbacks that always pull them back towards the path they had been trying to leave. However since this direction is irrevocably fixed and cannot be changed, the individual inevitably finds himself on paths that he did not want to follow. He is forced onto them because it is his destiny (cf. Cela, 1992: 104).

As has already been mentioned, post-war Spain provided an interplay of specific social and cultural circumstances that provided a highly favourable climate for such an approach to life (cf. Martínez Cachero, 1997: 111). A philosophy of life made up of anxiety and pessimism could be said to constitute one of the main pillars supporting tremendism. A sense of having lost out in life, is not only an individual issue but also a collective one. Failure and frustration are the foundations of a fatal concatenation of unfortunate events that systematically oppress and destroy the hero. It takes a jab at base, animal and primitive behaviour and the thinking of characters completely lacking in positive values.

The language of figures in works belonging to the tremendist corpus is extremely vivid and when dealing with characters from the fringes of society frequently even racy, earthy and rough. We can note that these figures are often to be found at the lowest levels of the social pyramid. Their language is in fact an effective tool for capturing the harsh nature of not only individuals but also an environment that has its own specific features. This is related to the fact that a picture of life in a society in deep crisis and immersed in a moral morass is offered in a somewhat deformed and distorted form, as if reflected in a concave mirror. This can be seen as a clear reference to the *esperpento* of Valle-Inclán, which consists of the transformations of classical standards as if in a concave mirror (cf. 2008: 169). In the 20th century we can see this of course in Valle-Inclán and later precisely in Camilo José Cela (*Kronik*, 1990: 45).

In a concave mirror we see deformed shapes, the distinctive features of which are characteristically distorted - not only caricatured but at the same time highlighted, standing out more and in their extravagance attracting greater attention. This approach is often reinforced in Cela's novel by contrast, where opposing each other stand contradictory concepts, to which are bound quite different phenomena, experiences and emotions. Against each other stand binary opposites such as tenderness and cruelty, sprightliness and bleakness, beauty and ugliness, and a further range of pairs that create constant anxiety and tension. We should remember that it is precisely ugliness that is a basic aesthetic category with which he works systematically and very cleverly. For example in *Pascual Duarte* we follow the fate of a man predestined to a tragic end. The accumulation of the descriptions of heinous crimes and facts that even only in their essence provoke revulsion, contributes to an intensification of the abjectness of the hero's actions. While following the hero's daunting fate, the unsightly aspects of his life are revealed leaving him naked in all his wretchedness, and so on the other hand reinforcing the perception of the complete hopelessness of the situation.

Ugliness together with violence are presented on two levels. The first of these is physical and comprises of events and deeds that are in their essence of a violent nature, such as for example murder. The second level is less obvious, since it is verbal and is manifested in the realm of the psychological where with their actions characters cause situations leading to moments that bind them to this dimension of ugliness and cruelty. At the same time as

these figures can be to a greater or lesser extent conscious of the consequences of their actions, for the most part they act under the pressure of external circumstances as in the case of the previously mentioned hero from Cela's novel. In such cases critics have not hesitated to talk of the "innocent criminal" or the "criminal-victim" (Blanco Aguinaga *et al.*, 1979: 106). It should be noted that in tremendist works both levels are very cleverly combined and mutually interwoven.

As already mentioned, a societal climate marked by the aftermath of the war, general poverty, marasmus and moral decay, created the ideal conditions thanks to which tremendism could catch on and become established, even despite the numerous obstacles in the shape of a complicated and completely uncompromising censorship apparatus (cf. Álamo Felices, 2005: 5). The post-war generation's tremendist narrative stormed the literary scene and stirred its stagnant water. Particularly significant is the fact that it breaches the imaginary walls that surround taboos that are tightly connected to the darker side of human existence. The urgency with which the tremendist works touch on sensitive issues, as well as the openness with which they deal with their depiction, represent the main reasons why the works of these authors frequently encountered resistance from traditional-thinking critics. We can mention among these Federico Sopena (1951: 13), whose exalted appeal "Enough, for God's sake," ("Basta, por Dios"), expressing his disgust at the quantity of novels about monsters, prostitutes, perverts and perversion, was followed a few days later by José María García Escudero. His article borrowed the title, modified to "Enough, !" ("¡Basta, por Dios!"), escalating the urgency of the appeal with the use of the exclamation mark (García Escudero, 1951a: 13).

In post-war Spain's prudish society it was not acceptable to speak bluntly of the "repulsive and pervasive conduct of nefarious individuals" (cf. Martínez Cachero, 1997: 113). In the same way it was considered unacceptable to touch on the themes of "base instincts" or "filthy lust", which were linked to the depiction of sexuality and the erotic (Gracia, Ródenas, 2011: 23). For these reasons tremendist works immediately gained the label of "amoral", "noxious" a generally "unhealthy" literature, which naturally had a major problem with censorship, especially when carried out by censors from among church leaders. It should be added that in the censorship process works effectively passed through a double sieve (cf. Álamo Felices, 2005: 5-25).

Incidentally not even the novels of Camilo José Cela escaped the unwelcome intervention of censorship, despite the fact that he was himself a censor. As has already been mentioned, it was the works of this significant writer, who in the eyes of the critics contributed to the post-war resurgence of the novel (Sanz Villanueva, 1988: 82) that formed the core of the corpus of tremendist works. Despite the development that the author underwent during his literary career Cela's narrative carries the unmistakable seal of the tremendist aesthetic. The elements of tremendism are a unifying thread in all the works of this author, starting with the his debut in *The Family of Pascual Duarte* (*La familia de Pascual Duarte*, 1942) and *The Hive* (*La colmena*, 1951), which made a crucial contribution to the further development of the Spanish novel, through works such as *St. Camillus, 1936* (*San Camilo, 1936*, 1969), *Mazurka For Two Dead Men* (*Mazurca para dos muertos*, 1983) or *Christ versus Arizona* (*Cristo versus Arizona*, 1988), up to *The Murder of the Loser* (*El asesinato del perdedor*, 1994). In all the novels life is viewed through a prism which exaggerates the absurdity of

human existence. The individual is portrayed as an insignificant creation, degraded to the level of a worthless insect whose behaviour is governed only by the basest instincts.

There is no doubt that in the 1940s, in a time of a cultural void when Spain resembled a “cultural desert” (Fusi, 2015: 224), the authors of the newly emerging Generation of '36 were impressed by tremendism, which significantly influenced their work. In first place should be mentioned the debut work *Nothing (Nada)*, 1944) by the young authoress Carmen Laforet, who won the Spanish Premio Nadal literary prize for it. Andrea, the main heroine of the novel, differs in many aspects from Pascual Duarte. While in Cela's case the protagonist is a middle-aged man, a simple villager, whose fate is marked by a harsh life in the impoverished countryside, Laforet presents the figure of a young girl, cultured and literate. The tale develops from the moment that Andrea arrives in Barcelona to study at the local university and stays with relatives on Aribau street. As Carmen Martín Gaité noted, Andrea is conceived as the opposite to the kind of heroine that was mass produced by the authors of romantic novels (1988: 90). The heroine soon became the prototype of the emancipated young woman yearning for self-fulfilment, who differs enough from her peers that she is seen as a “weird girl” (Martín Gaité, 1994: 38).

The novel also strongly resonates with the theme of confrontation between two opposing attitudes to life, connected with generational conflict. While Andrea thirsts for knowledge in the broadest sense of the word and has the desire for freedom and independence typical of the younger generation, the figure of aunt Angustias represents the ultraconservative attitudes associated with the promotion of the traditional values of a patriarchal society in which a woman has a fixed place and clear role for which education is not needed. For this reason she requires discipline, obedience and submissiveness from her niece (cf. Laforet, 2001: 22–23). No wonder that the name Angustias in Spanish suggests anxiety.

Another marked difference between *Nothing* and *The Family of Pascual Duarte* is the way in which violence is depicted. While in Cela's novel we encounter violence in all its formed, as defined by Žižek (2009), and its depiction is explicit, in the work by Carmen Laforet we can only guess as it is latent. Despite these apparent differences, both titles share essentially the same philosophy of life, which is reflected in the fact that their heroes, despite all the differences that divide them, perceive human existence very much in the same way. Therefore the same desolation, despair and scepticism about life is also typical of both works.

Another representative of tremendism is Darío Fernández-Flórez with the novel *Lola: A Dark Mirror (Lola, espejo oscuro)*, 1950). This very successful title was followed much later, at the very end of the Franco period, by other parts with the same heroine, who had won considerable reader interest. These were the novels *New Tales and Mischievous Stories of Lola, Dark Mirror (Nuevos lances y picardías de Lola, espejo oscuro)*, 1971) and *The Murder of Lola, Dark Mirror (Asesinato de Lola, espejo oscuro)*, 1973), while the last in the series *The Secret Memoirs of Lola, Dark Mirror (Memorias secretas de Lola, espejo oscuro)*, 1978) came out only three years after Franco's death. It should be noted that the author was a supporter of Francoism and in that position participated in the creation of many propaganda texts. Worth a mention is *The Breviary of Songs of My Cid (Breviario de Mio Cid)*, 1941), a committed and highly individual interpretation off the heroic *Song of My Cid*, in which the ideal of the medieval hero is identified with the policy at that time of the Francoist state. Fernández-Flórez does not hesitate to present Franco as a follower and successor to Cid (1942: 16).

Fernández-Flórez's most significant work is the first novel from the series mentioned above. Here there is a very singular use of narrative techniques referring to the old picaresque tradition (cf. Martínez Cachero, 1997: 127), which also links the novel with Cela's debut. We can mention that among other things the same device of a discovered manuscript is used that can be found in the novel *The Family of Pascual Duarte*. Even in this case some critics speak of a resurrection of the picaresque tradition, with some works deemed exemplary demonstrations of the neopicaresque novel (Baquero Goyanes, 1955: 88). This title is worthy of particular attention mainly due to the way in which it works with the category of the implied author. Also worth mentioning is that to evoke the illusion of credibility one of the characters is conceived as a peculiar stylisation of the author. The core of the novel's story is then made up of the memoirs of the heroine, Lola, a young prostitute who recounts the events of her life through the prism of the aesthetics of tremendism. It takes place in the forties, which places it in the beginnings of Franco's Spain, meaning that for its readers when it first came out it was dealing with their present.

The influence of tremendism on the post-war literary scene was not restricted only to the mentioned titles. Its footprints, more or less deep, can be seen also in the works of other authors and especially women authors. In this connection we should mention four novels: *Five Shadows* (*Cinco sombras*, 1946) by Eulalia Galvarriato, *Juan Risco* (1948) by Rosa María Cajal, *The Abels* (*Los Abel*, 1948) by Ana María Matute and *Nina* (1949) by Susana March. It is these writers that contributed significantly to the resurgence of Spanish narrative prose in that period. Their works were highly praised by reviewers already at the time of publication. What is more two of the authors named were awarded the prestigious Premio Nadal literary prize. First Eulalia Galvarriato in 1946 for the novel mentioned above and then Ana María Matute, but not for *The Abels*. Although the book was shortlisted, she did not then win the prize. She won it only thirteen years later for *First Memory* (cfr. Blanco Aguinaga, *et al.*, 1979: 194). Aside from the indisputable quality of these literary works, it should be stressed that these writers constitute the first significant and even relatively large generation of women who were very active in literary events in Spain. It should however be noted that women in what was then a macho society found it very difficult to get anywhere (cf. Soldevila Durante, 1982: 74–76).

Finally, it is necessary to mention the last circle of themes linked to the examined issues which arose quite suddenly and unexpectedly, but however to which we still attach great importance. On close examination of the novels of authors from Generation X a range of features emerge referring to the tremendist works of the post-war years. First is an emphasis on the aesthetics of ugliness and viewing life from a standpoint of pessimism, which in the late nineties replaced the euphoria associated with the eighties. Again disenchantment, disillusionment and despair begin to dominate, affecting not only the choice of topics but also that of appropriate narrative techniques (cf. Martín, 1997: X).

Again the dark side of human existence is portrayed the bleakest colours, giving the advantage to base instincts, shattering all lofty ethical and moral values. The crisis of society linked to a one-sided orientation toward purely utilitarian values, whether material or experiential, generally reflecting a shift from traditional values, especially spiritual ones, which have not been replaced by a suitable alternative. This moral vacuum plays a role in the destruction of human relationships and also results in the disintegration of the tradi-

tional model of the family. Symptomatic of this is the growing significance of violence and an obsession with sex downgraded to simple animal instinct within a desperate hunt for fulfilment out of an unsatisfactory life.

In the search for new ideas, which often resembles an indefinite groping, heroes are often tempted to seek out dangerous activities and experiments associated with drugs. Addictive and narcotic substances are not perceived merely as a means to satisfy certain needs out of hedonistic motivation, but as noted by Gill Lipovetsky, they are at the same time a certain form of “self-medication” to allow the individual to escape from the difficulties arising from the need to be himself (2010: 240–241).

Here it should be emphasised that despite their different historical context, the social crisis of the 1990s had some aspects very similar to those of the post-war period. It is therefore not surprisingly, that there will also be similarities in the typical image of this crisis in literature. Note that these are most emphatically reflected in the pessimism or nihilism pervading the works of authors such as Ray Loriga, José Ángel Mañas or Lucía Etxebarria, who entered the literary field in the mid-nineties. On closer examination we can observe a whole range of other similarities linking the literature of both the mentioned periods. This fact, on the other hand, can be considered a partial manifestation of a re-awakening of tremendism, announcing its return, renewed and again coming to the surface. Among the literary productions of tremendist writers of the post-war period and those of selected authors from Generation X there are also some parallels in their reception, especially when it comes to the initial pronounced and uncompromising opposition from some critics. Therefore the works of the newly emerging literary generation encountered similar difficulties to those experienced by the tremendist authors of the Generation of '36, as they also had to undertake a complex and lengthy journey before finding their legitimate place in the literary scene. As in the case of the tremendist novels the narrative of Generation X portrays the thorny issues of the day, also based on the traditions of realism. Some critics rather describe it as so-called “dirty realism”, but however many researchers disagree with this (Henseler, Pope, 2007: xvii). At the same time it should also be noted that some authors themselves categorically reject such a classification (Mañas, 1998: 43).

In examining the works of that generation that began to take shape in the nineties, we can see how each author tries to find the path that best suits his artistic intent. One option is to aim for innovation, as Camilo José Cela did in his time. At the end of the millennium this was the path chosen especially by two authors of the new generation, namely José Ángel Mañas and Ray Loriga. The works of both authors are characterised by the imaginative use of various innovative techniques and processes, while simultaneously noticeably influenced by the pop culture and urban subculture of the nineties. Some researchers however feel that this is often highlighted with the aim of belittling and discrediting the literary output of Generation X (cf. Henseler, 2011: 5–6).

In both the above-mentioned authors of particular interest is their work with stylised extremely vivid language, utilising a broad range of voices and colloquial registers. Noteworthy is the quirky stylisation of speech into written form, which further strengthens the strong role ascribed to dialogues and dramatic scenes, which applies most of all to Mañas' novels. All these elements contribute to the great dynamism of the storytelling. In Loriga's case this effect is magnified by the fragmentation of the text and its clip-like nature refer-

ring to filmmaking techniques, mainly in television culture. Thanks to this the narrative rhythm, based on a rapid succession of alternating scenes, is extremely fast-paced, which is sometimes slowed and “braked” by contemplative or reflective insertions. Here it is necessary to recall the importance in the works of these authors of intertextuality, as well as numerous references and allusions to pop culture, rock and punk. In this context, we recall Mañas’ belief in the article the form of which is strongly reminiscent of a manifesto (1998: 40–43).

Another path taken by the works of the authors from Generation X is oriented in a traditional direction. Regarding the implementation of an innovative approach, it should be noted that in this case the authors are much more restrained and reticent. This route has been chosen in the first place by Lucía Etxebarria, who for her novel *Beatrice and the Heavenly Bodies* (*Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes*, 1998) opted for retrospectives, just as Carmen Laforet did in her debut. In this case we also meet the narrator in the first person. But this is not the only thing that binds the two novels together. Lucía Etxebarria in the 90s created the prototype of the extravagant and rebellious heroine, a “weird girl”, at the end of the century. The author systematically opens up current issues that touch on questions of identity, but most of all on the position of women in contemporary society (cf. Etxebarria, 2000a: 37–40).

One of the questions Lucía Etxebarria puts in her prose with regularity and insistent urgency concerns the depiction of a female sexuality and eroticism that are trying to break free from the established patterns which in her opinion strongly reflect whether it is the work of a male or female author (Etxebarria, 2000: 111–112). For the heroine of the novel *Beatrice and the Heavenly Bodies* the discovery of her own identity, and by extension, sexuality, is overlaid with a double space. Indeed the figure reveals the inner landscape of her body, which is then reflected in a remarkable way into external space, subjecting it to rigorous examination. The city, and in particular urban public space, becomes a vital environment that allows the heroine to discover and develop her own individuality.

Equally remarkable is how other authors, namely Mañas and Loriga, treat the category of space. In their novels, known as “urban chronicles” (cf. Urioste, 2004: on-line), they work with the peculiar poetics of urban space. The city is understood as a canvas on which an image of the society from the end of the century can be captured. Special attention is paid to Madrid’s gilded youth whose lifestyle reflects the deep changes Spanish society has undergone. The protagonists often are individuals suffering from Peter Pan syndrome, so-called *kidults* or *adulescents* – although adults, their behaviour is rather reminiscent of a teenage youths. In the novel situations are depicted corresponding to certain tendencies that have long been evident in postmodern Western society (Lipovetsky, 2010: 66–67).

The heroes of Mañas’ and Loriga’s prose are irresponsible and even criminally frivolous, shutting themselves off in their own virtual worlds, isolated from their surroundings, and are thus condemned to solitude and abandonment. They are constantly dissatisfied and self-centred, but are essentially however unhappy, disoriented and unanchored. They are excluded from a society in which they neither want nor are able to function. Even in this matter it reflects a generational conflict in which the characters deliberately cut through personal ties they perceive as a restrictive burden. This is particularly evident in the relationship with parents. Consequently the heroes refuse to respect the space in which they

move, as well as the time and place in which they live, or rather survive. And so they choose between two approaches. On the one hand there is passive escapism, fleeing from reality to virtual worlds. On the other hand there is an aggressively controlled area, which is trying to impose its own will and rules. At the same time they are looking for appropriate ways to discharge negative energy (cf. Mañas, 1998: 191).

In the narrative of the authors of Generation X we will encounter characters whose attitudes reflect the end-of-century lack of values and spiritual crisis: even though we live in greater prosperity than our ancestors, we are still not satisfied (cf. Eriksen, 2010: 55–56). A prime example is the heroes of the novel *Stories from the Kronen* (Historias del Kronen, 1994), coming from well-off families, who are thus not obliged to earn a living. The material security and prosperity in which they live are in direct contrast to the wretchedness of the atrophied or non-existent spiritual dimension of their lives and the emptiness that absorbs them. This is also the case with Mañas' protagonist Carlos, an apathetic and even abulic young man, without interest, plans or ambitions. This aimlessness is reflected in the inability to find a fixed point, which he could catch and which it would be possible to build a life.

As regards their view of the world, all the authors of Generation X have a sceptical view of life. They hold a negative, nihilistic attitude towards human beings, with strong pessimistic undertones, which is so characteristic of tremendism. In line with the ideas of Erich Fromm it can be observed that some characters resort to violence, in which they see a chance to compensate for their own weakness, and in addition to their tendency to destructiveness, clearly stems from a lack of productive activities (cf. 2013: 27–29). However, the violence depicted in the novels of Generation X is not an end in itself, since it is not a mere reproduction of their expression. On the contrary, the authors in their works portray an alarming state of a society standing on the threshold of a new millennium, to provide the stimulus to trigger the necessary mechanisms allowing a much-needed catharsis to occur.

Equally significant is the theme of generational conflict between parents and children. This issue is also bound to the fundamental question of the crisis of values and the collapse of the traditional family. These heroes ostentatiously demonstrate their contempt for the authority, order and values that their parents appreciate and honour. Although they declare their opposition explicitly and with great vigour, they are not able to do anything, because they do not have the defiant spirit of true rebels (cf. Mañas, 1998: 67). They reject the existing order, but cannot find (and do not even seek) an alternative. However, they are also well aware that their lack of goals inhibits them, consequently increasing their sense of frustration and discomfort. In a certain sense they become victims of their time. It is a lost generation, more lost than any other before. Perhaps the most lost of all.

It can be stated that the heroes of the authors of Generation X are disoriented young people who are trying to find their own identity. They perceive the world as a hostile place from which they want to flee. Indeed escape for them is a panacea. This involves escape in the literal sense, as can be seen in the characters drawn by Loriga and Etxebarria who are fleeing from problems elsewhere. Alternatively they close themselves off in virtual worlds like the characters from *Stories from the Kronen* who seek refuge in the illusory world of

admired figures from film and literature. Or with the help of drugs they move into parallel worlds to escape what for them is a debilitating and unbearable reality.

At the same time it can be noted that the importance of foreign literary influences on Spanish prose works at the end of the century is denied by the authors themselves (Girela, 2014: on-line). One of the main roots nourishing the realism of Generation X has a purely Spanish, and purely tremendism origin. The novels of Spanish authors provide an image of society standing on the threshold of the new millennium, plagued by an identity crisis and the collapse of the system of values. Its perspective on human beings is thoroughly negative. The individual tottering on the edge of the chasm paradoxically closes his eyes rather than trying to avoid the threat of a fall. The anticipation of possible destruction it leaves them indifferent. Or it can go to the other extreme, where in their way risk and threat become attractive. They provide a certain excitement, the promise of escape from monotony and grinding boredom. Such a bleak vision of the world naturally gives little reason for satisfaction. On the other hand, solace can be found in the fact that every chasm, no matter how deep, has its bottom. The way out can turn into a process of liberating release, a cathartic cure that brings a germ of hope for the future revival and regeneration.

Finally, it should be noted that the broad issue of tremendism, which has again become the centre of attention, opens up questions that require an answer, at least in broad outline. And that is what we have tried to do. As already mentioned, the aim of this work is to contribute to the debate that is still developing around tremendism. However, it should be noted that given the depth and complex nature of the issues, we are fully aware that some uncertainties remain and the failure to find exhaustive answers to all the questions. These remain a major challenge for further research work.

