

Huesca was Granada

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Acín and his wife in a corner of their house

Huesca is not Granada, although both cities rest at the foot of some of the Peninsula's snowiest heights. Ramón Acín was not García Lorca, though both wrote and drew, sharing common endeavors and friends in the 20s and in the heady cultural days of the brief years of the Republic. Federico and Ramón coincided in another way too: they were both defenseless in their small towns, surrounded by mountains, when the proverbial dam broke on July 18, 1936.

While big cities and their people provided refuge for their friends and companions, Ramón and Federico lasted only a few weeks, just enough for the walls of the cemetery in Huesca, on August 6 (San Lorenzo not far away on the calendar) to resemble the stones of those of Fuente Grande, near Víznar, on August 19; the rifles were the same, García Lorca was Ramón Acín, and Huesca was Granada.



Yes, there are differences, and the biggest of them is that, among us, silence settled in more heavily, and we have not been able to reconstruct the history of the Aragonese capital in the days following the military uprising, thereby elevating rumors to the category of certainties, unlike the case of Granada, where light was shed (not long ago, by the way) by Ireland's Ian Gibson. Thus, this is an obligation that is all the more pressing as time goes by.

Because it is not enough to recover a name and a condemned and forgotten man, or to rescue a work of theirs, as, fortunately, has been done here, though half a century late. It is also necessary to explain the history behind them through that of the society in which they lived.

After Costa, whose tirades and lamentations echoed in the childhoods and early youths of Huscans born at the end of the 19th century, all those Upper Aragonese who would reach full maturity and national renown in the difficult 30s would choose the same party, the one that would drive the likes of Sender, Maurín, Alaiz and Samblancat into exile, and the one that would destine to the firing squad he who, less nomadic and urban than his peers, would always live in and from the city of Huesca.

This is a generational group giving rise to a series of centennial anniversaries at the end of the century, and one that shared common experiences, causes for rebellion, and solid roots in their original landscape; one that reached a national dimension in literature, with Sender and Chalamera de Cinca (1901); in politics, with Maurín and Bonansa (1896); in the press and journalism, with Alaiz Bellver de Cinca (1887), Samblancat, and Graus (1885); and in painting, drawing and sculpture, with Ramón Acín, Huesca, 1888.

They all knew each other, and they all felt compelled to write in the radical republican press of their time, later being exposed to and affected by the libertarian movement; for some this was a passage to somewhere else (Maurín, Sender), while for the others it was a link of an essentially intellectual nature, maintained through the pen or the paintbrush.

Sender transmuted the novelistic life of Maurín in the novelized character of Julio Bazán in *Crónica del Alba (Chronicle of Dawn)*, Samblancat spoke of everyone in his *Caravana Nazarena*, including Ramón Acín "with his sweet and sorrowful gypsy face," and of his death, precisely, drawing a parallel between his fate and that of the poet from Granada: "They went to look for Professor Acín — the García Lorca of Huesca: painter, sculptor, writer — twice at his home ... "

Felipe Alaiz would write of Ramón Acín:

"Aragon had an old city with an interior wall: Huesca. The capital of the province, in the strictest sense. A nest of bureaucrats, clergymen and military men. An office of caciques and schemers. Secondary school. Ramón Acín and I studied there in those distracted years."

Acín, Alaiz and Maurín coincided at the Escuela Normal de Huesca (teacher training school) and, during the years of the Great War, a time when everything changed, they would begin to write in the newspapers of Huesca. As of 1912 Acín drew for *El Diario de Huesca* (republican, then liberal), in the republican-leaning press of Zaragoza (*El Ideal de Aragón*, 1915), and in Lérida; while the most distinguished journalist of them all, Alaiz, began to collaborate on *El Sol*, the Madrid paper enthusiastically supported by Ortega y Gasset. Around this time (1913) the group —



"Ramón Acín with Gil Bel, Samblancat, Maurín and myself" said Alaiz — would publish a magazine in Huesca called *El Talión (Retaliation)*, a publication lost to oblivion but that must have been quite strident, not only in light of its title, but because it led to Maurín, at the age of just 17, facing his first trial for having published a scathing article against the monarchy in it.

In the same year, 1913, Ramón Acín visited Barcelona for the first time, on his way to Paris, and came into contact with Samblancat, with whom he published some issues of a weekly entitled *La Ira (Rage)* while also designing the cover of the *Diario de Huesca* on the day of San Lorenzo (St. Laurence).

La Ira and *Talión* were expressive labels denoting a radicalism that germinated during Acín's rebellious youth in Huesca and budded during his stays in Barcelona, Madrid and Granada, where he spent a few months as a guest of the regional government of Huesca (1915), and from whence he returned "*full of blue plates, bouquet fabrics, and candles.*"

Where would this rebellious and radical youth, sickened by clericalism and provincial underdevelopment, incensed with those responsible for the economic, political and cultural backwardness of this nation that nobody "regenerates," sensing winds of change in a Europe that was bleeding to death and from whose ruins all the avant-garde movements of the 20th century would sprout, find his way?

Well, at first, in republicanism, which was where Costa had ended up, but the breakneck pace at which historical events unfolded was destined to render passé "elders" who recalled a visit by Castelar at their gathering at the casino, and besides, Lerroux was shady. Perhaps in socialism, converted into a national force (1917), the only effective one to change the political regime and precipitate the advent of the republic. But in Huesca there were no socialists, and in 1918 the UGT had but one section and 20 members, in the whole province, the same number as it did two years later at its 14th national congress. Moreover, people from Huesca went to Lérida and Barcelona, and there were not many in those places either.

In those final years of the war something new was growing: the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo, National Confederation of Labor (CNT), which was mainly a trade union, but also a diverse hodgepodge comprised of moderate trade unionists, pacifists, libertarian sympathizers, and also anarchists, even ardent activists, but mainly workers in trades and industries who chose, out of the two, this trade union card. This was the path taken by our men; for example Maurín, the most political of all, who "leapt from his somewhat Marcellinist and Hugoesque republicanism to the confederal organization," a rather unusual Maurín, who, from age 25 to 35, would occupy the Secretariat of the National Committee of the CNT (1922); and briefly serve as Secretary of the Central Committee of the PCE (Spanish Communist Party) during the years of the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera, and that of the Bloc Obrer i Camperol (Workers and Peasants' Bloc), which he founded in the early 30's; and that of the POUM (Partit Obrer d'Unificació Marxista, or Workers' Party of Marxist Unification) in 1936.

When at the end of the Great War the group began its diaspora through a politically turbulent and culturally restless Spain, Ramón Acín settled down in Huesca with a position as a Drawing teacher at the Escuela Normal de Huesca, and in his marriage to Conchita Monrás. There he would write and draw in the libertarian press of Zaragoza and Barcelona (*Solidaridad Obrera*, or



Worker Solidarity) and even published, in 1919 and 1920, a since-vanished magazine in Huesca, *Floreal*, some of whose drawings and "Florecicas" (Little Flowers) are known to have appeared in other libertarian newspapers with greater circulations.

Acín also continued to work with *El Diario de Huesca*, the *Heraldo de Aragón*, and regionalist publications like *El Ideal de Aragón*. At the end of 1919 the CNT held its congress at the Teatro de la Comedia (theater) in Madrid, where Acín, together with Lorenzo Avellanas, led the delegation of the workers from the Upper Aragon: construction workers from Barbastro and Graus, single trade unionists from Binéfar and Monzón..., almost a thousand who were implementing and expanding the confederal organization throughout the regions of Huesca.

If one knows how the CNT works, it might seem surprising that an "intellectual" should represent a trade union, an apparently exceptional outcome at a congress thronged with hard-working workers from worksites, factories and the different trades. Ramón Acín, worker and trade union leader? No, he was no more, or less, than a citizen respected and beloved by a group of organized workers who, lacking their own leadership, placed their trust in a well-known teacher and a regular in the libertarian press, with contacts in Madrid.

Acín was, actually, not the only case of an intellectual linked to organizations in the workers' movement during the interwar period, in Spain, Europe, and Huesca. In fact, it was the norm, from certain perspectives, from Besteiro and Fernando de los Ríos, to Alberti and Miguel Hernández, to Picasso, and Acín's fellow Huescan Ramon J. Sender. Contemplating this role of mediation with society carried out in an eminently rural Huesca, with some trades organized in the four county seats, one appreciates the syndicalist and libertarian positions that really existed.

It is curious that, at the same time, Acín continued drawing his humorous works of social satire in the *Heraldo de Aragón* (1922), and that during the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera, with the persecuted CNT driven into the catacombs, he continued collaborating with *El Diario de Huesca* and designing the covers of the San Lorenzo festival programs, sat on the Board of the Goya Centennial, organizing activities with the mayor (that of the dictatorship of 1928!); introduced a talk by his friend Gómez de la Serna at the Teatro Odeón, and attended to Calvo Alfaró's requests to promote the radical regionalism of *El Ebro*.

Our man, more of an artist than a politician, a Drawing teacher, and close to the world of the trades because of his work, was a promoter of the cultural life of Huesca, respected by the established local and regional press, by the regionalists... and by the workers, who were those he felt closest to because, after all, if one had to get a card, it was the CNT's.

Aesthetic avant-gardism did not distance Ramón Acín from a political commitment to the social reality of his time and place, which he followed to its ultimate consequences, as he was in charge of mobilizing Huesca at the time of the failed republican *pronunciamiento* by Capitán Galán, also a friend of his, in Jaca in December of 1930, as a result of which he went into a brief exile in Paris, until the Republic arrived on April 14, when, in Huesca, a group there gathered under his balcony on the Costanilla de las Cortes.

He was, once again, delegate of Huesca's unions at the CNT's congress held in 1931 in Madrid, taking advantage of the circumstance to exhibit at El Ateneo (cultural center), and to lend Buñuel financial assistance for films after Acín had a stroke of luck, winning the lottery. Again he



would return to Huesca, staying home on July 18, with Catalonia next door. The group of young rebels from Huesca was driven into exile: Samblancat died in Mexico (1963), Felipe Alaiz in Paris (1959), Joaquín Maurín in New York (1973) and Sender, in San Diego (1982). In August of 1936, for Ramón Acín and Conchita Monrás, Huesca was Granada.□

