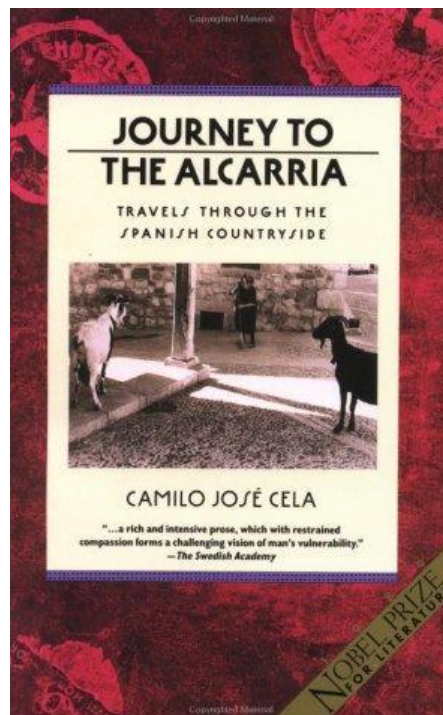




Journey to the Alcarria: Travels through the Spanish Countryside

Camilo José Cela , Frances M. López-Morillas (Translator) , Paul Ilie (introduction)

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Awarded the 1989 Nobel Prize for Literature, Camilo José Cela has long been recognized as one of the preeminent Spanish writers of the twentieth century. Journey to the Alcarria is the best known of his vagabundajes, Cela's term for his books of travels, sketchbooks of regions or provinces. The Alcarria is a territory in New Castile, northeast of Madrid, surrounding most of the Guadalajara province. The region is high, rocky, and dry, and is famous for its honey.

Cela himself is "the traveler," an urban intellectual wandering from village to village, through farms and along country roads, in search of the Spanish character. Cela relishes his encounters with the simple, honest people of the Spanish countryside—the blushing maid in the tavern, the small-town shopkeeper with airs of grandeur lonely for companionship, the old peasant with his donkey who freely shares his bread and blanket with the stranger. These vignettes are narrated in a fresh, clear prose that is wonderfully evocative. As the New York Times wrote, Cela is "an outspoken observer of human life who built his reputation on portraying what he observed in a direct colloquial style."

Journey to the Alcarria: Travels through the Spanish Countryside Details

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From Reader Review Journey to the Alcarria: Travels through the Spanish Countryside for online ebook

Gohar Khokhar says

Brief, Simple, informative and interesting.

Asinhar says

Un libro maravilloso cuyo interés, más que en el paisaje y en el detalle geográfico, radica en la filosofía del viajero y sus cavilaciones. No le doy 5 estrellas porque al final del libro la narración se centra más en las descripciones geográficas y menos en la proyección de la filosofía del autor.

Kris Kipling says

Cela prefaces *Journey to the Alcarria* with a letter to Gregorio Marañón, to whom he dedicates the book. He writes:

I didn't see anything strange during my journey, nothing really shocking - a crime, or a triple birth, or a man possessed by devils - and I'm glad of it now, because since I had planned to tell exactly what I saw (for this book isn't a novel, it's more like a geography), if I start off telling horror stories people would say I was exaggerating and nobody would believe me.

A fine, short travel book in which nothing much of note happens, recounted in a serene, perfectly crafted way. Traveling by foot and by donkey through this little-known region of Spain in the summer of 1946, the author provides a wealth of incident and detail. Written in the third person, the book tells us nothing about its traveler's history, his political views, or much else; the family that he mentions in the first chapter are not given names or personalities, they are left behind as Cela sets out and not mentioned again. This series of sketches never wears out his welcome, rambling on leisurely and concluding almost indifferently. Along the way he stops in some towns and thinks, as lonesome travelers are sometimes inclined, that he could live out his days there. Then he moves on. *Journey to the Alcarria* is quiet and unassuming, observant and beautiful.

Alejandro Saint-Barthélemy says

Uno de los mejores libros del siglo XX, al decir de Saramago.

Falacia de autoridad aparte, y como ya le he dado 4 estrellitas de cielo y he citado a otro Nobel elogiándolo, ahora viene lo malo: la ridícula fatuidad del viajero, cosa que molesta especialmente en un libro de descubrimiento de lugares y gentes, en un libro de apertura a experiencias como este..., por no decir que esos

aires de superioridad con respecto a minusválidos físicos o mentales hace parecer al viajero, enredadoras que son las paradojillas, tonto del culo.

Kalliope says

I downloaded this the night before setting off for a four-day trip to the province of Guadalajara. We had planned to spend three nights in the medieval town of Sigüenza but on our way there we would traverse the **Alcarria** region, renowned for its flora and fauna. Its honey is as legendary as its castles.

Camilo José Cela (1916-2002) undertook a walking journey through this Alcarria region in 1946. He spent around nine days visiting various small towns, sleeping in local inns and talking to those people he met during his wanderings. He noted down his observations and then produced his *Viaje a la Alcarria*.

I had only read his *La familia de Pascual Duarte*, and am not sure I have the courage to read his much harder *La colmena*. Cela had the ability to capture the misery and sordidness of the difficult years in Spain in the prolonged postwar (post civil war and post WW2) period. When he received the Nobel Prize in 1989, the jury awarded it in appreciation of his 'restrained compassion' and his 'provocative vision' of human suffering.

My experience in reading Cela's account of a visit about seventy years prior to mine was close to electrifying. It felt like a travel more in time than in space. Although his time was considerably earlier than mine, I could recognize, with dismay, the aspects or elements that have now considerably changed or disappeared. Even though I like reading books on history, Cela's testimony made me realize, more perversely than anything else I have read recently, the actual process of time passing. Scarily and acutely.

Cela feels for children. 'The traveler' (*el viajero*) often expresses the empathy he feels for several of the many children he meets, particularly those let loose or gone astray or suffering from poverty. He is, however, less kind with animals. But the traveler discloses very little and remains a somewhat detached observant. He remains mostly an onlooker and we do not even learn why has he set out on such a voyage or why has he chosen la Alcarria. There is one point, however, when the traveler identifies himself in passing. He includes his name, and the place where he was born, in one of the couplets, which he intersperses in his prose.

Dice llamarse **Camilo**
Y ser su pueblo **Padrón**

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I did not visit all his towns, but did stop in **Torija**, where they have now founded a small museum in a few of the rooms in the castle. There they keep the original manuscripts written in notebooks not too different from those I have used in school in my very early age.

We also spent some time in **Brihuega**, where we had an excellent lunch and where in spite of the rain managed to visit a couple of the Romanesque churches, a castle, and sections of the old wall. The old inn where Cela spent one night has now been converted into a more grand accommodation and restaurant. But that is not where we went.

When coming back to Madrid, after leaving behind the scarcely populated small towns and valleys I was engulfing myself back into an urban agglomeration, seeing the almost threatening large modern building on the outskirts of the big city, I again felt as if I were traversing the tunnel of time.

I will count the days until I can set off for the Alcarria again, and visit the cities further to the south, such as Cifuented and Pastrana. In the latter they now have a Tapestry Museum where they keep the 15century Flemish tapestries that Cela denounced for their having been transferred to Madrid. Pastrana owes their recovery to the writer.

Nicholas Avedon says

En este peculiar libro Cela escribe como dios, parco en palabras, pero claro y directo. Poco se puede decir de un libro que retrata una época viva de este país. Es cierto que la historia en si no existe, pero los personajes y las situaciones tienen una autenticidad impresionante. Es un retrato histórico literario. No le doy mejor puntuación porque no es un libro que haya disfrutado como lector, aunque como escritor lo he gozado muchísimo, Cela es un gran maestro.

Francisco says

Libro pretendidamente simple, y que va más allá de su simplicidad.

Luís C. says

Alcarria is a natural region of New Castile with unclear boundaries. Uncrowded, it is picturesque and rugged, well watered and fertile in the valleys. The steppe and maquis occupy a good part of its soil with a varied and abundant aromatic flora that produces an excellent honey. Camilo José Cela, the author of The Family of

Pascual Duarte and The Hive, undisputed master of the Spanish novel of the twentieth century, spent a few days in Alcarria, and he liked it. *"People seemed good to me,"* he says. *"They speak a magnificent Castilian, with a perfect accent and, without really knowing what I came to do at home, they treated me well, gave me food, if not abundantly, at least amicably "*. During his comings and goings through the Alcarria, Camilo José Cela recorded in a notebook all that he saw: these notes formed the canvas of this book that was written while walking and *"to the good franquette"*. It is an escape book written with happiness by someone who has *"taken the key of the fields"*, and this is one of the most rigorous, most important contemporary Spanish writers.

????? says

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Igor says

This is a great book to read when feeling absolutely drained.

Laia Bárber says

Viaje a la Alcarria
Camilo José Cela

Laia Bárber

“Quizá mi libro más sencillo, más inmediato y directo, sea *Viaje a la Alcarria*”, escribió Camilo José Cela (1916-2002) en el prólogo a la versión que eligió como definitiva de las cuatro que existen, la de Ediciones Destino. Este bellissimo relato de viajes es la recomendación literaria del blog Caprichos de Autor en su vigésima tercera edición.

Viaje a la Alcarria

Cela nació en La Coruña, pero se mudó de niño con sus padres a Madrid. Antes de terminar la preparatoria enfermó y estuvo internado dos años. Empezó la carrera de medicina que dejó por el derecho y que también abandonó por la literatura. En el año 1954 se fue a vivir a Mallorca donde residió gran parte de su vida. Durante la transición a la democracia ocupó un escaño en el senado, en el 57, el asiento Q en la Real Academia de la Lengua. Ganó el Premio Nobel en el 89. Una de sus novelas, *Cristo versus Arizona* (1988), se sitúa precisamente en nuestra frontera con Estados Unidos.

La literatura de viajes es un género con ciertos amarres que el viajero de Cela en *Viaje a la Alcarria* respeta durante los diez días que recorre la región en la provincia de Guadalajara en España. El viajero es un hombre de familia, joven, flaco pero fuerte, nos anuncia el narrador mientras lo presenta dormitando en un chez-longue en la víspera del viaje. Desde la omnisciencia nos asegura que (cito) “Los viajeros casados cuando se echan a andar, tienen siempre, a última hora, una persona que les calienta el desayuno, les da conversación mientras se afeitan a la estremecida luz eléctrica de la mañana”. (fin de la cita) Nuestro viajero que también es padre, a diferencia de aquellos con quienes cruza camino, no fue bautizado por su creador, son solamente los poemas de su autoría que Cela intercala a lo largo del recorrido, su carta de presentación e identidad.

El viaje se inicia en un día preciso de 1946. Si viajar es salir de uno mismo y dejar la querencia para llenarse de lo desconocido, en la mochila el viajero lleva mucho espacio libre. La novela podría reducirse a dos motivaciones, la de la libertad y la pobreza. Libertad de la que goza el viajero durante la expedición, pues, además de medios (cito) “tiene su filosofía de andar, piensa que siempre, todo lo que surge, es lo mejor que

puede acontecer” (fin de la cita). Y pobreza la de los habitantes de la región que anda. El argumento, se enriquece de las descripciones del paisaje, la comida y las gentes como corresponde al género. En aquel vergel rural saqueado por la voracidad de las guerras, el protagonista se viste de miseria, fealdad y sufrimiento. La adversidad nos la muestra Cela sin sentimentalismos, como si describiera un sendero tortuoso o una bifurcación que desemboca, sin remedio, a la trágica cotidianidad de un abismo. A ratos es una elegía y, a ratos, un pastoral. Para afectos al género, Cela escribió varios libros más de viajes: Del Miño a Bidasoa (1952), Judíos, moros y cristianos (1956) y Viaje al Pirineo de Lérida (1965).

En la captura de la pérdida de humanidad, el tono y la óptica del narrador evoca a dos potentes plumas. Una mexicana, la de Rubén Marín Enciso en su libro Los otros días. Apuntes de un médico de pueblo. Marín como Cela en Viaje a la Alcarria, obsequia relatos sobrecogedores. Su elección de cierto hecho o de un simple gesto, conmueven desde la sensibilidad del que todo lo ve y, en resonancia, sincroniza el lenguaje. El otro escritor a quien la profundidad de la mirada de Cela me remite, es a Tolstói en Guerra y paz cuando inmisericorde nos pasea por los campos de batalla donde la soldadesca rusa y francesa paga por su envergadura militar con la privación de las necesidades e instintos básicos. Los tres son mordaces sin exhibirse, puros en el retrato naturalista y sagaz la textura de su discurso cuando nos llevan a la tierra de nadie de la existencia. Para los tres, el dolor es una facultad. En Cela, no faltan, sin embargo, la ternura, la luz y el abejorro que provoca la sonrisa del hambriento.

El castellano de Cela es escuela de florituras que nunca empalagan, culto y rural cuando amerita. Su viajero permanece como una hoja en blanco afincada a la línea de en medio que ni se tensa ni vibra. (cito) “Caminó por donde quiso y, por donde no quiso pasar, dio la vuelta”. (fin de la cita) Entre parajes sin itinerario, el viajero es golondrina.

Crt says

La verdad que Cela, cuando escribe bien, escribe como los ángeles (no le tendremos en cuenta veleidades incomprensibles como La cruz de San Andrés). Pero lo suyo es la prosa, las poesías intercaladas las podría haber escrito yo :P (bueno, casi.... ;P)

tJacksonrichards says

“Perhaps there is to be found in Pastrana the key to something which happens in Spain more frequently than is necessary. Past splendor overwhelms and in the end exhausts the people's will; and without force of will, as can be seen in so many cases, by being exclusively occupied with the contemplation of the glories of the

past, they leave current problems unsolved. When the belly is empty and the mind filled with golden memories, the golden memories continually retreat and at last, though no one goes so far as to admit it, there is even doubt whether they ever existed and there is nothing left of them but a benevolent and useless cultural residue."

Cela's account concerns the rural Spanish countryside tho it's clearly addressed to - and has obvious and important implications for - an educated, modernized urban readership. So I'll take it as a sort of provincial cousin to novels in the 'flaneur' tradition (see this great LARB essay:

<https://lareviewofbooks.org/essay/imp...>) Fans of WG Sebald, Ben Lerner etc take heed: an insightful, penetrating travelogue that rolls out in flawless, graceful prose. Hypnotic passages, like Sebald, where the figures and landscapes fuse into single forms radiant with the trauma of history. And while it's told in third person, Cela states in the preface that he's aiming for a kind of literary realism akin to 'geography' based precisely on his time in the Alcarria, so we're getting a similar ontological conviction to that of Lerner's.

"At about eight-thirty or nine the friends make a halt, already in sight of Moranchel. Moranchel is on the left of the Cifuentes road, at some two hundred paces from the highway. It is a gloomy, dark town that seems to have no business being surrounded by green fields. The old man sits down in the ditch and the traveler lies on his back and looks up at some little clouds, graceful as doves, which are floating in the sky. A stork flies past, not very high, with a snake in its beak. Some partridge fly up from a bed of thyme. An adolescent goatherd and a member of his flock are sinning one of the oldest of sins in the shade of a hawthorn tree blooming with tiny sweet-smelling flowers, white as orange blossoms."

I've deducted a star partly for my own obvious lack of cultural and temporal proximity to this thing; maybe accounting for my bias toward the general style; maybe Journey hits a little harder for a Spanish readership. Regardless, a highly recommended flaneur experience.

"Inwardly - nobody knows why - the passengers on one train always envy slightly the passengers on another train; it is something that's true but a little difficult to explain. Maybe it's because, even though they don't realize it very clearly, a third-class passenger would always be glad to change places with another, even if the other were third-class too."

Manuel Garcia says

Realmente excepcional. HE de confesar que CEla siempre ha despertado en mí cierta reticencia, y no me he acercado nunca a él, pero después de leer este libro, que no puedo calificar sino como realmente espléndido y CON SABOR, creo que voy a leer más cosas suyas.

El tono en el que está escrito el libro es desenfadado, lúcido, y además hace un retrto de una época que, desgraciadamente no está tan alejada como querría, desde el punto de vista de cómo es el alma de este mi país.

Lo siguiente que queda es recorrer este camino, en coche y a pié, para seguir los pasos de este viajero tan peculiar.

Sawsan says

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Caroline says

Very quiet book of observations and descriptions during a trek through the Spanish countryside in the mid-1940s. Leaves the reader to draw his own conclusions; the author simply takes each road and peasant or traveling salesman as he finds them. Interesting to read along with Laurie Lee's Spanish walk between the wars; this is a people closed in and reserved but not unkind.

Xan says

Nunca me ha gustado Cela, siempre me pareció un hombre demasiado pagado de si mismo, pomposo y grandilocuente, encerrado a gusto en su circunstancia. Tan solo salvo sus primeras obras de la quema. El viaje a la Alcarria era una lectura pendiente desde que leí un fragmento a los diez años, en un libro de texto de literatura de mis hermanos mayores. Creo que lo he leído en el momento justo, he disfrutado el viaje a un tiempo pasado de caminos polvorientos, mulas y mendigos, posadas sin camas ni comida, gente encerrada en su pueblos desde el nacimiento hasta la muerte salvo causa de guerra o hambre, un país de zurrón y alpargata.

Tambien he descubierto al Cela más humano, socarrón y coñero, que sale al campo a disfrutar descubriendo palabras y parajes, que trata a todos por igual.

El viaje es un retrato de un país y una época que subsiste bajo el barniz de la modernidad. Puede que ahora las carreteras sean de asfalto, que los mendigos se muevan en autobús y que todos presuman de teléfono móvil en los más recónditos pueblos de la montaña (eso si, sin cobertura). Pero los motes, los prejuicios sobre los de los pueblos vecinos, el aplastante peso de los oropeles pasados que ahoga la idea de cambiar las cosas, de reivindicar lo propio frente a los razonamientos de los que mandan en la distancia...Eso sigue aquí, sesenta y pico años despues.

Peter Charles says

My favorite travelogue, period. Charming, wise, eloquent.

Dree says

This short book is a travelogue/memoir of a walking trip through the Alcarria region of Spain in the 1940s. It is interesting, but knowing little of the area or really of Spain in general, I couldn't really relate to it. The parts I found most interesting revolved around old buildings and current uses, and food. And the walking--I would love to take a trip like this, though Cela picked an area without many walkers. People were often trying to guess what he was doing there (traveling salesman?).

It did remind me of the tiny town in Italy my great-grandparents came from--the cemetery, church, old houses restored or rundown, old abandoned mill, etc. I would absolutley love to read something like this from there.

If you like/know rural Spain you might find this very interesting.

Pip says

This travelogue really appealed to me. There was something about the way that the author, referring to himself in the third person as the traveller., observed the countryside and the people in it in great detail, but without judgement. He wrote about a walking tour he took in 1946, only 6 years after the end of the Spanish Civil War, in an area north-east of Madrid. He met all kinds of people along the way and shared his food, drink and tobacco with fellow travellers, tramps and beggars. He made a rule to stay only one night in each place, not planning his itinerary in advance, but deciding each day which direction to take. It is the way I like to explore a region, too, although I have never done so on foot. His observations were like a snapshot of the time and place. As an old photograph, taken on a picnic somewhere, perhaps, unwittingly reveals so much of the customs, dress and attitude of the times, so his observations give the reader a vivid picture of what the Spanish countryside and the people who inhabited it were like at that time. I would love to retrace his steps and see how different it is now.

"The way one emphatically does not go is by cutting across to Casasana. From Pareja to Casasana there is no highway, not even a local road, and one has to climb the steep slope by a goat track which at times is almost obliterated. It goes without saying, naturally, that the traveller goes via Casasana."

There was also something endearing in the way that some people he met, when finding out he was from Madrid, asked him if he knew someone of their acquaintance there. Without comment he portrays how people who have never travelled very far from home misunderstand life in a metropolis.
