

ANGEL LOUREIRO



Angel Loureiro, professor of Spanish and Portuguese, is a native of Galicia, in the north of Spain—a region near Portugal, still rural and quite isolated when he was born. Yet, the region can be seen as cosmopolitan in its own way, immersed as it has been for ages in a rich universe of crossed languages: Galician, Spanish, and the always close Portuguese. Angel's youth was still the time of the long dictatorship of Francisco Franco, when the career of engineer, which the young Galician first considered embracing, was a natural path for social and professional assertion. That may well explain why in 1969 Angel received his bachelor's in engineering from Gijón's Escuela de Ingenieros Técnicos.

However, the spirit of the time was opening itself to other, more refreshing winds. The democratic and libertarian strands of the 1970s would awaken in Angel his natural calling as a humanist. This is when he renounced the engineering career, just to land in the effervescent Barcelona of the 1970s, where the Spanish counterculture was taking its first steps, and where the behavioral and aesthetic changes that would mark the end of the dictatorships in the Iberian Peninsula took place. It was in this open climate, when new forms of politics and existence were being experienced and conceived, that Angel received his master's in philosophy at the University of Barcelona in 1979.

Right after that, Angel came to the United States, where he earned a master's in Spanish from the University of Georgia in 1983, and a Ph.D. in Spanish from the University of Pennsylvania in 1985. He began his academic career in 1985 as an assistant professor of Spanish at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, where he would be promoted to associate professor in 1989 and to professor in 1991. That university would leave profound marks in his life, for there he met his wife Ilia, and there he wrote his first book, *Mentira y seducción: La trilogía fantástica de Torrente Ballester*, published in Spain in 1990, a narratological interpretation of the novels of Gonzalo Torrente Ballester. Ballester was a Spanish writer who was first associated with the Franco regime and who progressively distanced himself from the

dictatorship, until he moved to the United States, fleeing censorship in his country. Still in Amherst, Angel wrote his most important book, *Replacing the Subject: The Ethics of Autobiography in Modern Spain*, published in 2000, and recently translated into Spanish and published in Spain in 2016. The original publication of this book in 1990 made it clear that his was one of the brightest voices of the generation of Peninsularists who had been trained in Barcelona in the 1970s.

In *Replacing the Subject*, Angel plunges into the autobiographical writings of, among others, José Blanco White, María Teresa León, Juan Goytisolo, and Jorge Semprún. In reaction to Paul de Man's take on the genre of autobiography, the questions raised in the book point to the modification and the politicization of the past. To rebuild it with the imagination is a political act already, conditioned by what Emmanuel Levinas—another fundamental reference to the critic—considered the constitution of the self, which he saw as a necessary and unavoidable response to what other people address and direct upon us. Therefore, self-knowledge wouldn't be the mere result of cognitive action; quite differently, it would be part of an ethical imperative that makes us respond to the Other, and which is shaped by our wandering condition. Exile, politics, memory, writing, images, ethical dilemmas—everything comes together in a book that is also a way to understand how people position themselves when human values and the very existence of the community are under threat. One could say that *Replacing the Subject* is also a way to understand Spain's difficult and constant negotiation with its authoritarian roots, as much as it is about the horizons that necessarily open up with the emergence of new democratic drives. In sum, it is a scholarly work about specific writers, but it is also about the writer of the book, that is, about Angel's own democratic bet on rethinking memory and regaining the ethical horizon that the almost century-long dictatorship in Spain had stolen from his generation. In that sense, writing is an ethical task, as much as writing one's own life is a deep political investigation of the evolving power of memory.

After his time in western Massachusetts, Angel moved to Princeton in 2001. Yet he would often return to the Berkshires, among other reasons for his love of classical music, and to be back, whenever possible, at Tanglewood, the summer home of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Additionally, one might say that the love of the most beautiful landscapes in Massachusetts—and perhaps in his native

Galicia as well—would be taken with him and would find an ultimate expression in one of Angel’s beloved hobbies: gardening. The other hobby—almost a field of expertise—is wine tasting. The owner of a substantial wine collection, he plans to travel extensively with special focus on visits to wine regions and wineries, to keep learning about the complex world of wine and its producers.

At Princeton, Angel arrived precisely when the old Department of Romance Languages was being split between Spanish and Portuguese, on the one side, and French and Italian, on the other. He was almost immediately appointed the first chair of the then-called Department of Spanish and Portuguese Languages and Cultures, which he led for seven years with an incredible dose of commitment and enthusiasm. As chair, Angel took care of treating the wounds of a separation that had been traumatic, at the same time that he employed all his forces to collectively build a new department in which the balance between the various fields were ideal, in which the two main languages—Spanish and Portuguese—were equally important, and in which assistant professors could have a real voice. The culture of academic citizenship that still characterizes the Department of Spanish and Portuguese would be unthinkable without the leadership at once delicate and firm of Angel.

Angel passed successfully through the most difficult of tasks when he was appointed chair of a newly created department after no more than two months as a Princeton faculty member. When seen from today’s perspective, everything back then seems daunting: from hiring the staff and building everything from scratch to the learning curve of someone who had just arrived and who was being immediately asked to comply with such an important institutional mission. As Angel recently said: “The excellent initial staff that I hired that summer managed to get computers, fax machines, printers, chairs...we didn’t have a clip! We didn’t have a single piece of paper!” Of course, the most challenging task was still ahead: to hire new faculty and project what would be the future of Spanish and Portuguese at Princeton.

Even as he was passionately immersed in administrative work, Angel never left his scholarly life aside. Memory and the dead; the fugacity of writing; cinema and post-dictatorship; irony and the ruins of the community; history and images; affections and the remains of the imperial dream: all of them come together in a long series of articles and book chapters, edited books, as well as in the large

number of colloquia, conferences, and talks that Angel organized. In fact, since he joined the Princeton faculty in 2001, Angel has brought to campus a great number of scholars and public intellectuals. He takes great pride in having advised an impressive number of senior theses, and having worked always closely with students.

Angel is currently co-editing with his colleague Rachel Price, associate professor of Spanish and Portuguese, a book on the roots, practices, and future of populism, which gathers the presentations delivered at a conference they organized in April 2017, together with reactions to the presentations that were later requested to experts on populism from various fields and countries in Latin America, Europe, and the United States.

Last, but not least, for quite some time Angel has kept a secret that seems to be finally coming out. His passion of literature and memory may explain why he has been writing fiction prolifically. He has a couple of novels in his drawers, and hopefully they will see the light soon. As Angel himself recently said, it's about closing one chapter and opening a new one. Life goes on, especially after retirement.

Angel leaves Princeton with emeritus status. He plans to share his time between Madrid and the Princeton area, and between fiction and scholarly writing. At the end, we learn that writing and displacement can indisputably be the two sides of a good life.