

Gabilondo, at the presentation of the Ramón Rubial Awards: “Literature is the celebration of memory and memory is a great social and political agreement”

The Minister of Education, Ángel Gabilondo, affirmed today that “literature is the celebration of memory and this is a great social and political agreement, which is what we are trying to achieve in this country” and he encouraged citizens “to deepen in literature, memory and thinking, because only this way can we have the possibility do raise our welfare levels”. The Minister of Education also added that “together with literature, there is only one thing able to raise human spirit, that is ideological convictions, those Ramón Rubial had.”

Gabilondo made these statements at the presentation this evening at the Fernán Nuñez Palace in Madrid, of the II edition of the “Ramón Rubial” Literary Awards, which aim at recovering the stories of Spanish emigration. The event was presented by Pedro Blanco, journalist at Cadena SER. On this occasion, the panel of judges, (*deleted was*) made up by the writer Juan Cruz, the journalist and writer Mari Pau Domínguez and the journalists Félix Santos and Montserrat Domínguez, has rewarded the novel “Estuvimos cantando”, an autobiography on emigration from Galicia to Buenos Aires. The author, María García Campelo, who is from the Galician town of Cambre (La Coruña), settled in Argentina in 1951 and came back for the first time in 1998. The second prize went to the short story “La novena ola”, which also is about Galician emigration, but in this case, to France.

The author, Dolores Soler-Espiauba Conesa, is a specialist of emigration in literature and has authored several short stories.

The winning novel, “Estuvimos cantando”, tells the story of a little girl living in Galicia during the period after the Civil War, enduring poverty and fighting for survival with fear and forced silence. From the hardship and day to day harsh reality of a traditional Spanish family, the little girl’s naivety and innocence emerge as she wonders why and gets only resignation as an answer.

And finally, she is faced with the unbearable situation of moral, social and economic oppression, emigration to Argentina, and the sadness of parting from her friends, her village, her land and environment for ever. The eternal condemnation of homesickness and yearning.

The author, María García Campelo, said she was “moved” by the work done by Spanish people to change the country. The winner of the contest affirmed that in Argentina, “I did well, but I always have something somewhere else and that somewhere is my place”. Campelo pointed out the difficulty of getting acclimatized and said that in the 1980s, she was obliged to adopt Argentine citizenship by legally renouncing the Spanish one, which she is now trying to recover.

Regarding her book she said that “at the beginning I thought it would be only for me, but a friend encouraged me”, and she concluded by thanking IDEAS Foundation for the organization of the contest.

Regarding “La novena ola”, the runner up novel, it reconstructs Fabienne’s summer first trip to the small Galician hamlet where her grandparents, who were exiled during the Spanish Civil War and have lived in Toulouse since, are from. Since childhood, she has heard her grandparents talk about traditions, landscapes and legends of the idealized Galicia and has mythicized that region, so different from Cartesian France. Upon her arrival, there was a festival in the hamlet, and Fabienne went up to the shrine where someone tells her, during the pilgrimage, about the tradition of the nine waves bath which, for generations, has guaranteed sterile women pregnancy if they manage to bath in the nine waves after midnight.

Dolores Soler-Espiauba Conesa, the author of the short story, thanked IDEAS Foundation for its effort to collect this type of story and commented on the figure of Ramón Rubial and encouraged the audience to value, above all, the human nature of migratory movements.

As for the Executive vice president of IDEAS Foundation, Jesús Caldera, he noted that Spain has historically been a country of emigrants and reminded that remittances sent by Spaniards together with the emergence of tourism, was the mainstay that offset the commercial balance of Spain during the 60s and 70s, apart from its undeniable contribution to the progressive opening-up of Franco’s Regime and, in short, to the Transition to Democracy. Before Caldera, Jimena Sanclemente, Director of the Ramón Rubial Institute, noted the quantity and the quality of the works submitted, and confirmed that IDEAS Foundation pledges to continue organizing this literary contest.

Sanclemente noted that the contest represents, in short, a way to disseminate values like solidarity, the defense of humanism, universal promotion of human rights, commitment with freedom and the fight against any type of repression which has inspired Ramón Rubial and Carmen García Bloise to create a platform that supports citizens who live and work away from their homeland, under undesired circumstances.