

Madrid's Liber (23rd) Book Fair. Oct 12-15, 2005

October 7

After a long wait for the inexpensive bus that no longer runs, I find myself looking at the taxi's meter run higher and higher.... in Euros! It's rush hour and Madrid traffic will be just as heavy as that of any other European capital. I try to make conversation with the driver but he seems upset since I insisted (with little success) on getting a price estimate for the ride before I boarded the taxi.

I am only in Madrid for a night and will forgo a visit to the Casa del Libro which is right in front of my hotel. Founded in 1923 as part of Espasa-Calpe, it is now belongs to the Planeta publishing conglomerate. Instead, I head over to Berkana, Madrid's oldest and largest lesbian/gay bookshop.

As I walk through the streets of the Chueca neighborhood (the chic gay enclave that has even made it to the pages of the *New York Times* travel section) I try to remember my student days of 25 years ago when the counterculture movement or "movida" hit Spain's capital around the streets of the neighboring Malasaña district. At the time I probably ran into many of the characters that came to life in Almodóvar movies. On my last trip here in 2004 I did see one of the "chicas de Almodóvar" Rosy de Palma, as tall as ever and with her big nose still intact.

At Berkana one of the sales clerks recognizes me and apologizes for finding just one of the 30 or so titles I had inquired about before my arrival. They were all "descatalogados" or out of print. But I will have plenty of other books to compile a list of non fiction "must have" gay/lesbian titles that fellow SALALMISTA Tatiana de la Tierra and I will be preparing to distribute to the US librarians and dealers attending LIBER 2005 (the 23rd annual book fair that alternates between Madrid and Barcelona).

I would normally see 1-2 movies a day but this time jet lag has caught up with me and I only make plans for dinner with Lawrence Schimel, a New York writer/editor based in Madrid. He has suggested some important titles to be included in our list. A few days later he will also allow Tatiana and me the use his of computer and even correct my typos.

After dinner (already too late for me) I retire to bed since I have an early train to catch the following morning. I am going to Valencia to visit some friends.

I wake up at 4am and cannot sleep so I start to look over the dailies I've picked up earlier in the day and watch reruns of the "telediaros." All carry news of the massive influx of illegal immigrants into Melilla, the Spanish colony in North Africa. For a country that exported immigrants to France and Germany up until the 1960s, Spain now finds itself as the destination of Subsaharan and

North African immigrants in search of a better life. At times the rhetoric against these newcomers is reminiscent of that heard in California.

October 8

As I go through security similar to that of airports at the Atocha train station, I am reminded that this was the target of a terrorist attack only 18 months ago. Spain's March 11, became the "once eme" or "11 M" which at last count already listed almost 30 book titles in OCLC.

A young fellow sits next to me, unaware of any one else but his walkman. He is of the age that would probably listen to Rapper Nach, the Spanish rap singer who has taken the country by storm. Lucky for me the train's sound system plays Mozart or Beethoven notes that will lull me to sleep before we even leave the border of the Comunidad de Madrid, one of the many regional/autonomous governments in post-Franco Spain. This same pluralistic fabric is now being put to the test as Catalonia tries to negotiate its statute. The opening paragraph of that document being debated in Parliament carries the phrase "Cataluña es una nación" and "nación" is mentioned many more times than "España."

Valencia is Spain's 3rd largest city (after Madrid and Barcelona). Its native son, architect Santiago Calatrava has just completed a massive performing arts complex with an official opening ceremony presided by Queen Sofia later in the day. Locals echo the press's lavish praise on Calatrava whom they consider to be as important as architects Norman Foster or Frank Gehry.

I am met at the station by a friend from the Konrad Haebler Club, a bibliophilic society which has been publishing very handsomely illustrated and award-winning facsimile editions of incunabulae held in Spanish libraries. The Club is named in honor of Habler (1857-1943), a German Hispanist and bibliophile whose works on the history of early Spanish printing are still considered standard reference sources.

After a long rest on the train I am ready to walk all over the city I visited many years ago and of which I remember so little. I receive a special tour of the Academia de San Carlos from its librarian (who reminds me that she was enjoying the sun but came in just for the day). I thank her profusely and compliment her on great "bronceado," adding that I, too, hope to take in some of that Mediterranean sun before I depart. Unlike many "funcionarios" who have earned a life-time job through "oposiciones" she appears to enjoy her job and knows her collection well. She amuses us with anecdotes about the many treasures housed in the Academia, not only manuscripts but also paintings ranging from the Middle Ages to those of Greco, Velazquez and Picasso.

October 9

It's a regional holiday and I will witness a "mascletà" or firework-like display for which Valencia is well known. My hosts insist that I must experience it, adding that it could be quite noisy. It was! I much preferred the fireworks from the previous night.

After a much deserved "paella" lunch I will pay a visit to the main office of Vincent García Editores (<http://www.vgesa.com/vgesa00i.html>) to see some of their facsimile editions. Of particular importance to Latin American collections is the *Atlas de Historia Natural* (OCLC 24160361, 55282333) commissioned by King Phillip II in the 1560s. One of the few originals in existence is held by the University of Valencia Library.

October 10

Before returning to Madrid, I take a tour of the University of Valencia's historical building and visit some antiquarian bookstores. Like many a patron familiar to us all, I vaguely remember the title, publisher (and color) of a book on the history of the book in Spain. I have given up until we reach the last bookshop where the owner knows the title of the book (*Historia ilustrada del libro español*, OCLC: 30712166). He also claims to have an original of *El Cid* at home. I am not sure if such was the case, but he was certainly knowledgeable about books. When I mentioned I needed to catch a train he suggests that I visit the Madrid Antiquarian Book Fair, which happens to be taking place just a few blocks from my hotel.

Back in Madrid: Rain in the plain, a much welcome weather as the country has endured one of its worst droughts in recent time. It will encourage me to stay in and review my notes for the presentation to Spanish publishers on the US academic market the following day.

October 11

The Spanish Foreign Trade Office and the "Gremio de Editores" have partnered to provide a series of workshops to publishers on how to export Spanish books. They are sponsoring today's seminar on the United States library market. I am scheduled to share the morning session with colleagues from public and school libraries but some of them have missed their plane connections and I end up with more time than expected to talk about the academic market (that of libraries and researchers).

I was able to go into the MLA website and show an interactive map of where Spanish is taught/spoken in the United States. When one of the publishers wanted to know of his books were in US libraries (they were not) we accessed OCLC to see what a record for a Spanish book looked like. Among many things, they finally understood why we buy their books via dealers and not directly from publishers. Of course, I could not miss the opportunity to mention SALALM.

After the presentation, we were treated to lunch at a hotel which we found out later was being picketed for unfair labor practices. While I did not see him, Antonio Banderas (a former "chico Almodovar") was walking out as we were taking our seats.

That evening LIBER was being inaugurated by the Queen of Spain, but I decided to visit the antiquarian book fair along the Paseo del Prado, in search of my book, which I did not find.

After my unsuccessful book hunt, I decided to visit the Antonio Machado bookstore, where customer service has not been particularly friendly in previous visits. I am surprised this time when I ask about my elusive book, I am lead to the shelf that has one of the volumes (up to now I thought it was only one). Happy that I had my book, I looked at the newspaper schedule for movies but I have missed the ones I find of interest.

Following a brief stop at the Telefónica Building to check e-mail. I opt for a visit to the Círculo de Bellas Artes exhibit on the renowned Italian filmmaker and poet Passolini. It's the 30th anniversary of his tragic death. As a student in Madrid I remember a "Semana Santa" where I saw two of his films, *The Canterbury Tales* and *The Decameron*, not the typical movies for a Holy Week, but it was all an act of youthful defiance.

There are two other exhibits: "Grabado Argentino Contemporáneo" and "Cabaret París-Berlín, años 30." I have received enough visual stimulation for one evening and head out hoping to catch the Catalan language bookstore right across the street. It's closed already but just next door to the arts complex is another branch of the Antonio Machado bookstore. It used to be part of the Crisol chain (at a given time owned by the Grupo Prisa, which also owns *El País*).

I see some titles of interest to us all: *Serrat, canción a canción* (biography of the noted Spanish singer); *Espíritus rebeldes, el heavy metal en España*; as well as the *Memorias de Sarita Montiel* (the diva of Spain's 1950s and 1960s cinema). I also discover a new scholarly journal already on its 3rd issue: *Eñe*. And before I leave, I see them there, at one of the bottom shelves, the other two missing volumes of my treasure hunt!

Walking back to the hotel I crossed the crowded Gran Via street towards the Plaza de Chueca where punk rockers and muscle boys enjoy the pleasant evening in that very Spanish pastime of people watching. As I go by, I might have looked to them as the oddest character in the neighborhood carrying three bags of books. I kept hoping to find a taxi, but it never came and I kept getting closer and closer to the hotel anyway.

October 12

It's a national holiday (*Día de la Hispanidad*) and a military parade will take place right next to our hotel but our group of librarians will miss it as we were bused over to the Book Fair. The locale was the target of a Basque terrorist attack in February of this year the day before the famous art fair ARCO was to open. This morning security was very tight and since our bus arrived very early, we had to wait for about 20 minutes until calls were made to several higher ups who attested to our bona fide book hunting intentions.

As we introduced ourselves to Spanish publishers, being the sole representative of the academic sector, I explained briefly the materials that would be of interest to a college and research library: no self-help books, no translations, yes to NGO from "prensas universitarias," publications etc.

For the next 3 days I walked around the Fair and collected catalogs, especially those of Government agencies whose materials remain as fugitive as ever since they are not usually carried by commercial distributors. Although no books are sold at the fair (something very frustrating), I managed to buy one by mistake (*Imaginarios y fotografía en México 1839-1970*) and the young woman almost lost her job, she told me the following day. I suggested she tell her boss that I had given so much free publicity among my library/vendor colleagues that sales would certainly compensate for her error.

In addition to Tatiana de la Tierra (who gave a reading at the Berkana bookshop) other SALALMISTAS were at LIBER: vendors Oscar Puvill, Klaus Vervuert had stands while Luis Retta from Uruguay had taken a break from his vacation to visit the fair. I could not let the opportunity go without publicizing SALALM. I met with representatives from ARCE (Asociación de Revistas Culturales de España) who are very interested in attending our 2006 conference.

October 14

On my last day at LIBER I attended the launching of the *America Reads Spanish* (<http://www.americareadsspanish.org/>), the project jointly sponsored by Spain's Foreign Trade Office and the Spanish Publishers Association. The panel included representatives from the bookstore chains *Borders* and *Barnes & Noble*. In the audience were librarians and dealers from the United States as well as publishers from Spain, all contributing ideas on how best to market books in Spanish to the more than 40 million people of Latino heritage in the United States. One of those ideas is to have Antonio Banderas as part of their publicity campaign, similar to what ALA has done with its READ/LEA posters using entertainment and sports celebrities.

It was not raining anymore so the day lent itself for a trip to the "Madrid antiguo" section of the City, where Klaus Vervuert's *Librería Iberoamericana* is located. It was not too far from the Reina Sofia Museum so I rushed over

before the 2pm lunch closing hour to get a copies of exhibition catalogs on Latin American Art from the last few years. I am relieved I will not have to carry them on the plane and exceed baggage regulations. Klaus has agreed to ship them and I suggested "burro aereo" rate.

Walking back to the hotel, I made a stop to check e-mail and have a cup of coffee at a cafeteria I have frequented often. On my last trip here, I came in on a crowded Sunday afternoon when everyone's attention focused on the television broadcast of the classic soccer match between *Real Madrid* and *Barcelona*. I made the mistake of asking who was playing when the place exploded in applause after the home team scored a goal. The barman looked at me as if I were from another planet. I could have been, I was carrying two bags full of books.

While reading the paper, I found out that just a few blocks away, the night before, a prisoner on leave had held up a *Kentucky Friend Chicken* for several hours. It would have been on the way to the movie I had wanted to see but decided to stay in weed out the non-culture sections of the three dailies I have been collecting for the last few days. I hope to have enough reading material to endure the transatlantic flight back home.

October 15

Tatiana de la Tierra and I will end up at the very back of the plane, sharing some of what we have collected in the past week in Spain:

*an issue of *Quimera* (# 258) with a cover story of US-Mexico Border literature

**el ajo* (#3) which appears to be a continuation of *Ajoblanco* (OCLC 26458122) the popular culture journal that ceased in the mid 1990s.

**Tiempos salvajes* (# 4) a progressive journal with an interesting article on "los últimos fusilamientos de Franco" and a surprisingly frank ad for a clinic performing legal abortions.

Cuadernos para el diálogo (#4, ISSN: 0011-2534) with a lead story on Venezuela's "revolution."