

Asociación
Proxecto
Benito
Losada



Berto Macei

LE CIRQUE NOIR



Berto Macei

Le cirque noir



32
autumn photographs
2014



DEPUTACIÓN DE LUGO
VICEPRESIDENCIA PRIMEIRA



Cultura e Turismo



XUNTA
DE GALICIA

DIFUSORA

II Premio Galicia de Fotografía Contemporánea

DIFUSORA
DE LETRAS, ARTES E IDEAS



Berto Macei

Le cirque noir

**JURY
OF II PREMIO
GALICIA
OF CONTEMPORARY
PHOTOGRAPHY**

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2014

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Berto Macei

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The II *Premio Galicia* of Contemporary Photography amounts to 16.000 euros provided by the First Vice presidency of the Lugo Council and by the General Secretary of the Culture of the Culture, Education and University Ordinance Office of the Government of Galicia. In this 2nd edition the *ex aequo* award was given to the Berto Macei and the Jose Romay projects.

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A COMMON LOOK

This second edition of the *Premio Galicia* of Contemporary Photography gives us two winners. Within the philosophy of the event, and also within the work of the very vital *Outono Fotográfico* of Ourense, from where it emerges as a natural expression, the confluence of Berto Macei and Jose Romay is especially pleasant and important because of their very different visions of photographic art and reality they portray.

Photography, from its static silence, shows us elements often unnoticed by the common look. It reveals, with the prospect of a creative look, intense meanings of everyday's life; new harmonic orders, new ways to communicate from the apparently stable, it insists in breaking molds from their stillness. Photography synthesized the common look and expands it to reach its true dimension of freedom.

This time, Berto Macei -winner in 2014 together with Jose Romay- became a recipient of the projection that provides the prize thanks to the magics of contrasts of blacks and whites, extracted from the world of color of the circus, from its explosive emotion and its nomadic and uncertain momentum. An essence that uncovers the details,

the intense cleanliness of the glow in the darkness, the roaming shadows that leave in each image the fingerprint of a human soul, whether they are people or objects that lie before the camera, with their emotions and above everything, with their uncertainties.

We augur a great path to this exceptional photographer and feel his power to break certainties, to reorganize what is logic and to discover universes through the ephemeral, the humble, the treasure that appears in the essence he allows to see to all those we are fond of this art. Image steps that open spaces; patience and joy to discover. The strength of a rectangle inhabited by the talent; the memory he leaves with influence on those that contemplated it.

From the Department of Culture and Education we are confident that each delivery of the *Premio Galicia* opens a door to new artistic approaches to photography lovers.

Xesús Vázquez Abad

Minister of Culture,

Education and University Organization

Government of Galicia

It is not easy to add words to the work of Berto Macei. Macei portrays impulses and through them he reveals us the gesture almost grotesque of the effort and the discoloured images against the light of the ordinary. In *Le Cirque Noir* he presents us the essential, shows the naked and colourless signifier, pushes us away from the children's imaginary to approach us to the physical and abstract roaming of the circus; to this path without beginning or end in which he highlights a mechanical and repeated search of emotions; repetitions that reach the inconsistency of a smile, and the pain. Macei does not speak of the mathematics of the pure movement at the critical moment, but of the gesture hidden and tired in the intermediate, of the serious gesture between act and act, of *the show must go on* carried on the back. Images taken with the pause discretion an infiltrator would need, an intruder collecting the B-side, the back

side of the circus. The viewer travels behind the camera, out of sight, for those places a detective of the 30s would have stopped: the tent in which he would interrogate the bearded lady, the corner in which to await the trapeze artists, or the caravan where someone murdered the elephant man. It is not strange to imagine this story, is that *Le Cirque Noir* is structured as a classic speech of the image in the twentieth century. The images of Macei become familiar, they activate the imagination to search the film to which they belong to, a classic that never appears, that does not come back to the memory because it is the first time we see this show; a show with which the author makes us hide in the shadows to spy on what happens in the back of the stage.

Mario Outeiro Iglesias

Deputy Delegate of Culture and Tourism
of the Council of Lugo



LE CIRQUE NOIR

«In my hall there is the portrait of the man full of medals
as there was no Napoleon; the memory of that number that
had a tragic end; group -as in a wedding- of that trapeze
and his wife to whom the ceiling failed in the most tragic
of the adventures, as when they felt tied to the bar of the
trapeze, they felt thrown into the abyss ...

[...]

As the pendulum of a clock that stops, that is going to
stop, remains the trapeze swinging in the night like the
pendulum of a clock of the circus ... »

Gómez de la Serna, R.

El Circo. (1917)



THE NIGHT OF THE HUNTER

Vítor Nieves

Coordinator

Of the *Premio Galicia* of Contemporary Photography

Curator of the exhibition

Black. The shadow invades the image, invades everything. Almost completely black. Everything is so dark that predicts what is imminent. The photographer gets intimidated because in this work he is more than the hunter who goes to the preserve. The camera shoots, but does not kill.

In *Le cirque noir* everything is shaken and put radically up to discussion. The surface, before frozen, of the truths and traditional values is destroyed and it becomes difficult to keep going, until one sees a calmness.

Berto Macei builds what resembles frames of the classical period from the *Film Noir*, freeing himself of the complexity of repeating a trite grammar from the forties and born after the depression of the 29th. The very nomenclature wrapping the images he presents us is clear, ally of each resource he uses in the visual language, each element he takes pictures of, or the singular way of evoking for those who see his photos, which faithfully recall the procedures of directors like John Huston, Fritz

Lang, Orson Wells, Robert Siodmak, or Charles Laughton.

As to the form, in this series of photographs, the author fully understands what James Monaco already said in *American Film Now*, meaning that the *Film Noir* is not a genre *per se*, but rather a visual style. Therefore, in his photos we can clearly see an aesthetic strongly influenced by the German Expressionism either by the light or its absence, either by the point of view.

But if we look at the background, also Macei leads us - as the movies - towards the French poetic realism with some sort of fatalism surrounding the characters he photographs or the ever-recurring heroes run-down. In each image he emphasizes the authenticity, as in the Italian neorealism. If *The lost*

weekend and *In a lonely place* they strove to portray ordinary people or people with ordinary lives, making use of non-professional extras, at *Le cirque noir* a conscious choice is made of a circus stripped of ostentation that walks in the soft-edged between show and decay.

Berto Mace works with the approval of the night, like many detectives from the movies he paraphrases. He goes hunting to fill his pockets with images, the way Ben Harper (Peter Graves) does with money in *The night of the hunter*. Then he returns back home to secretly hide what he collected and congratulates himself as Harper did. He also sets, same as Harper, a relationship with the «stolen» that lies between love and hate, depicted in the movie as the tattoos of Harry Powell (Robert Mitchum) who in the knuckles of his right hand lets see the word *love* and *hate* in the left. Macei's work represents this approach to the characters and isolates them at the same time interposing visual elements between them and the camera.

The contrast of portrayed in black and white a space that was dreamt *a priori* in saturated colours, redundant with the contrast result of the lighting and the finishing

touch of the images, presents us a documentary radically opposite to what was expected. This puts us on alert and generates some tension that pulls us away from the learned, and therefore, from the expected, and makes us do a nihilistic re-reading of a world we dream in another way.

Consciously, the same way the cinema did, Berto Macei narrates in a somehow iconoclastic way with characters we idealized as children pass to the territory of the ordinary, talking about their miseries beyond grandeur and capabilities they air publicly. Thus, the author deconstructs image by image the magical substance of the circus world to bring it closer to the atmosphere of the black cinema with all its ornaments and clichés. Resources such as aberrant framing, views points at ground level and even interposed curtains projecting shadows on the characters - a whole icon of *Film Noir* - reflect new premises to understand a world that despite being known, requires the new interpretation presented here.

When the night arrives, conventions fall, the atavistic constructions, and the voracity of the *chiaroscuro* advances towards a state in which everything can be hunted.




















Like in the other aspects of life, the best advices usually arrive late. I acknowledge that in my training as a photographer, first self-taught and then in the School of Art and Superior Design *Antonio Faílde* of Ourense, my hometown, I did not noticed as early as now I wish I had, in the answer the photographer Tina Barney (1945, New York) gave in an

interview when she was asked about the advice she would give to a photographer who begins: «I would invite him or her to take pencil and paper and reflect on his/her own life. About who he/she is. I would tell him/her not to ever think on grabbing a camera until he/she discovered that». Needless to say that, like many other, I did the opposite.

The photographer from New York proposed an internal reflection prior to the photographic act as a mean to understanding oneself. After all, this inside knowledge should project on the artistic creation a sort of artistic photographic existentialism. Here, the search, the way to meet oneself has even more weight and is more crucial to the development of the photographer than his own work. Undoubtedly determinant, because once reached the meeting, there is no return back and

TWO PATHS TO FIND ONESELF. (NO COMING BACK)

Berto Macei

all the later creation is subject to that. The advance is frontal, without oscillations.

The other way to find oneself is based more on impulses. Stripped of the previous inner reflection, the photographer moves on unbiased obeying the instinct that the subconscious commands in response to an inner need to catch the immediate, that surrounds us and is fortuitous or intentional (things we leave around us). This search, without any doubt, is more frantic. The images follow each other around us intuitively, but not because of that are impersonal. The times are reduced and the path is shortened. Salvador Dali referred to uncontrollable photography as «pure creation of the spirit that captures the more subtle and poetry, more agile and fast on the findings that the murky processes of the subconscious.»

In this path, against the capture of the reality, the expressionism predominates breaking the photographic routine of the pseudo-objective documentary, just as in the Renaissance the arrival of a circus broke the routine of work and the institutional order of villagers in favor of entertainment. Furthermore, as a result of this frenzy development in the path to meet ourselves, rest is necessary as one more stage. The trapped images need the calm that provokes an afterthought to the photographic act. Without this, the meeting is not possible and the «unknown journey to rebels imperatives of the self» as the writer Norman Mailer said, stops to have a meaning.

In this rest, faced to our pictures, the findings succeed excited. The answers hit us on the banks of the images. These split and expand their meaning towards our own life, in which we begin to understand the reasons why the subconscious and intuition caused us to take these images and not others, to understand what was what led us to move to these sites and no other in a kind of impersonal drift, or what made us use a context, a styling or a determined content to drive our feelings through the photographic art. Thus, reality extends and the limits

of photography spreads out. Transcends the mere enunciation of contents and its narrative structure is often complex (sometimes even it does not exist). Images induce the viewer to observed them for a time sufficient so they acquire new meanings, new connotations that enrich the picture with other possibilities. The author simply establishes a fine line of elucidation that who receives the images can perhaps identify. The advance this way is radial, and the knowledge and photographic experience, greater.

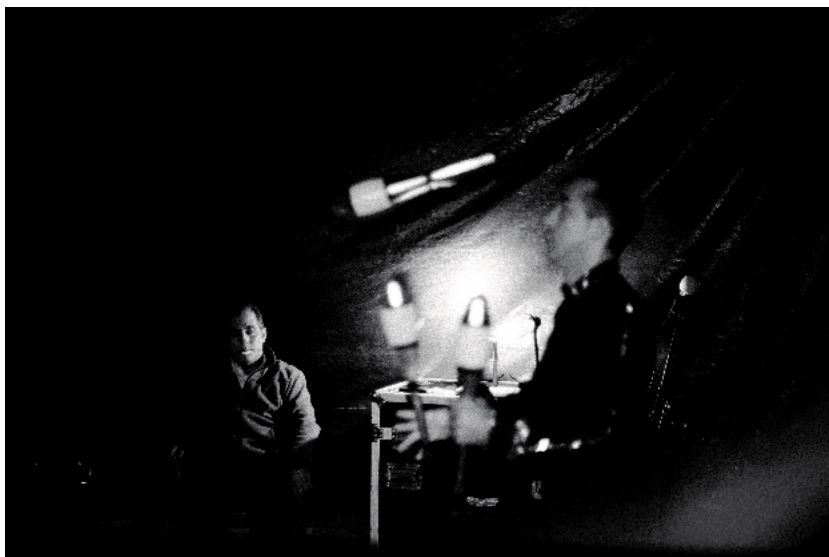
Le cirque noir fulfills this second way to meet oneself. Also with no turning back. It sends me back to the nomadic and libertarian origins of my human condition, although for the time being without anthropological longing, to an absence of moral ties and systemic impositions of an orphan childhood. And the contention arises. The reality becomes a circus show. From here, I keep looking.











WITH CLARITY THE COLD INCREASES

Juan Curto

Associate Professor at the University of Lebrija
and director of Camara Oscura Art Gallery, Madrid

Representative of the jury
of the II *Premio Galicia* of Contemporary Photography

This phrase is said by Thomas Bernhard in his thanks speech -something he hated to do- when he collected the Literature Prize of the City of Bremen in Germany. This concept of philosophical scope does not make mediocre the career as a novelist, poet and playwright of this Austrian, famous for his temper and his foresight. Precisely, it is difficult to understand or jump to conclusions from the phrase without some “clarification”. Bernhard refers to the progress of science that every day gets a bigger clarity and, inevitably, a coldness every day also larger. Science reveals the mysteries, the arcanes, the archetypes and the myths -in the jungle-like psychoanalytic notion- but either way it does not provide us more security to be in the world, quite the contrary; it creates in us a lack of emotional heat, affectivity, and consolation.

Lets say that it does not “feed” the soul. This food so fundamental to the human being, as it is the thirst and knowledge, is provided to us by art. As stated by Benjamin, art has a strong cult essence and although in his famous essay *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit* (The piece of art at the time of its technical reproduction) he ensures that photography is scarce -it even lacks- of an aura and thus of cult character, I refuse to think of photography as an art. Not only because it becomes a merchandising in a strict sense - as Benjamin said- and so, purchasable, sellable, subject to the laws of the market, but because I align myself

with Roland Barthes and undoubtedly affirm that photography is an art, like the painting, the sculpture or any other means of artistic and visual expression. Once said this statement so luckily free -more than anything just in case someone still thinks it is not- really, what photography gives us, the photographic? Does it give us at least some «heat»?

Watching the work presented in this II *Premio Galicia* of Contemporary Photography I dare say that my temperature increased a few degrees yes, heat yes, but I would enjoy even more by burning the skin, at least a little bit. The work of the joint winners Berto Macei and Jose Romay are notably different. The own aesthetics goes from a more aesthetically black and white to color, more dirty and realistic. But we really need to go beyond that. Nowadays is one should not expect to be taken seriously as a photographer without a conceptual development prior to the field work. Is not that we are saying that now photography is «conceptual art», is not that, but before shooting one has to think why, how, when, and where to shoot. And all this needs to be written down in a project text: the project statement. The statement is the egg

and the photographs the chicken. There is no a more graphic way to explain it. The statement does not illustrate or explain; it gives clues. Clues that the author proposes so the viewer can do the reading and interpretation. Without it, as Jacques Rancière well says, there is no artwork, no photography. Us, components of the jury, play to be spectators «emancipated» and active, we wanted to understand and feel. And we were able with both Macei and Romay. The work on the circus of Macei does not stop on a simple document -that is the interesting and central- but it builds a parallel and demiurgic universe of the circus throwing away with all the visual codes of the great *film noir* of the 40s and 50s. If there is «theft» there has to be «murder», and lets say that in this case there is.

Meanwhile, Romay climbs the panopticon from which he sights things that are already known, but not well studied, and he immerses himself in an exercise of social and political criticism, and at the same time he shows his typology the way of the School of Dusseldorf. The author sweeps and transits, not exempt of humor, by that Galician architecture, so deeply *ugly*. An encyclopedia of urban nonsense

just on the border of the urban and the rural, in that *terrain vague*, that uncultivated land so perfectly defined by Ignasi Solà-Morales where we crash against half-buildings, bad constructed... damned constructions, obsolete, unproductive, and undefined. In short, interference from the hand of man in nature increasingly damaged and defeated, but that it threatens us to return back the blow. Is it just a matter of time.

But, at the end the question is: being valid jobs, valuable from a critical and photographic point of view, which place does it have in the art market? As a gallery owner I should have an unequivocal and sure answer, but I dare less and less to be conclusive when it comes to assessing a work for its commercialization. The method of trial and error turns out to be the most realistic and effective one. It is obvious that the collectors are open to quality, and it is equally true that there are some parameters to be taken into account as the conceptualization or the aesthetic component. That makes some photographers more "commercial" than others, but I do not want at all to use this word in a derogatory sense. At the end of the day what any artistic

photographer wants is to get to live of selling his/her work, does this makes him/her a commercial artist? Of course not, even if some agents of the art world still considered unworthy or impure that an artist sells well his/her work. Even artists have to eat, is not it?



Silvia Mella

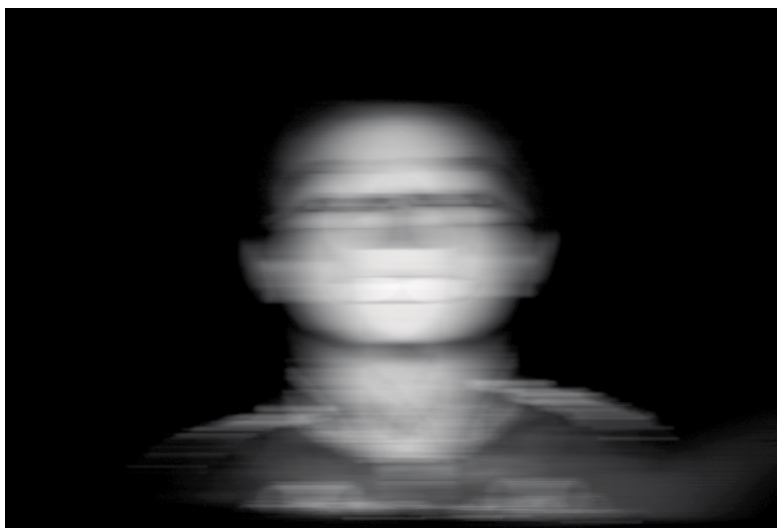
Photographer and journalist

Auras of penetrating light fix the scene from the undefined shadows of the characters that scratch the air with the smell of cigars, crossing the smoke worthy of the entire spectacle and crude light from the blinding spotlights that fill a scenario that is not fake, as far as I know.

Reality seems to be painted with the ochre of illusion, both inside and outside the camera. In the images, blacks take the whites for a dance, and together they carry the rhythm of greys that define the millionth part of the things that happen on the territory of the eye that sees everything, the eye that blurs the look and mixes darkness and music lines that can not be heard in the photographs but that seem to growl behind the curtains, and with their whispers they say: the black cinema has a soul, has its own life, possesses emotionally the spectator and also features a dancing bar with a purely ornamental background, damp talks with taste of bar and a stage corrupted by the performance of fatal women and really bad bads that stink of whiskey beyond their hat. Paths of fatalism and dark stories of criminals in a difficult social context. Cynicism outside the law. The *noir* invades the space and boasts about tenebrae in a Baroque and strangely familiar environment. The shots that are about to get out like to interrupt the saxophone in a desperate assault against the double morality of a world in low key. Gangsters or clowns? Bads without compassion or full color comics? Life is likely to be seen subjectively, of seeing into it a timeless drama of entertainment splashed by small touches of humanity, a circus show under the watchful eyes of the people; life is a show that never ends.

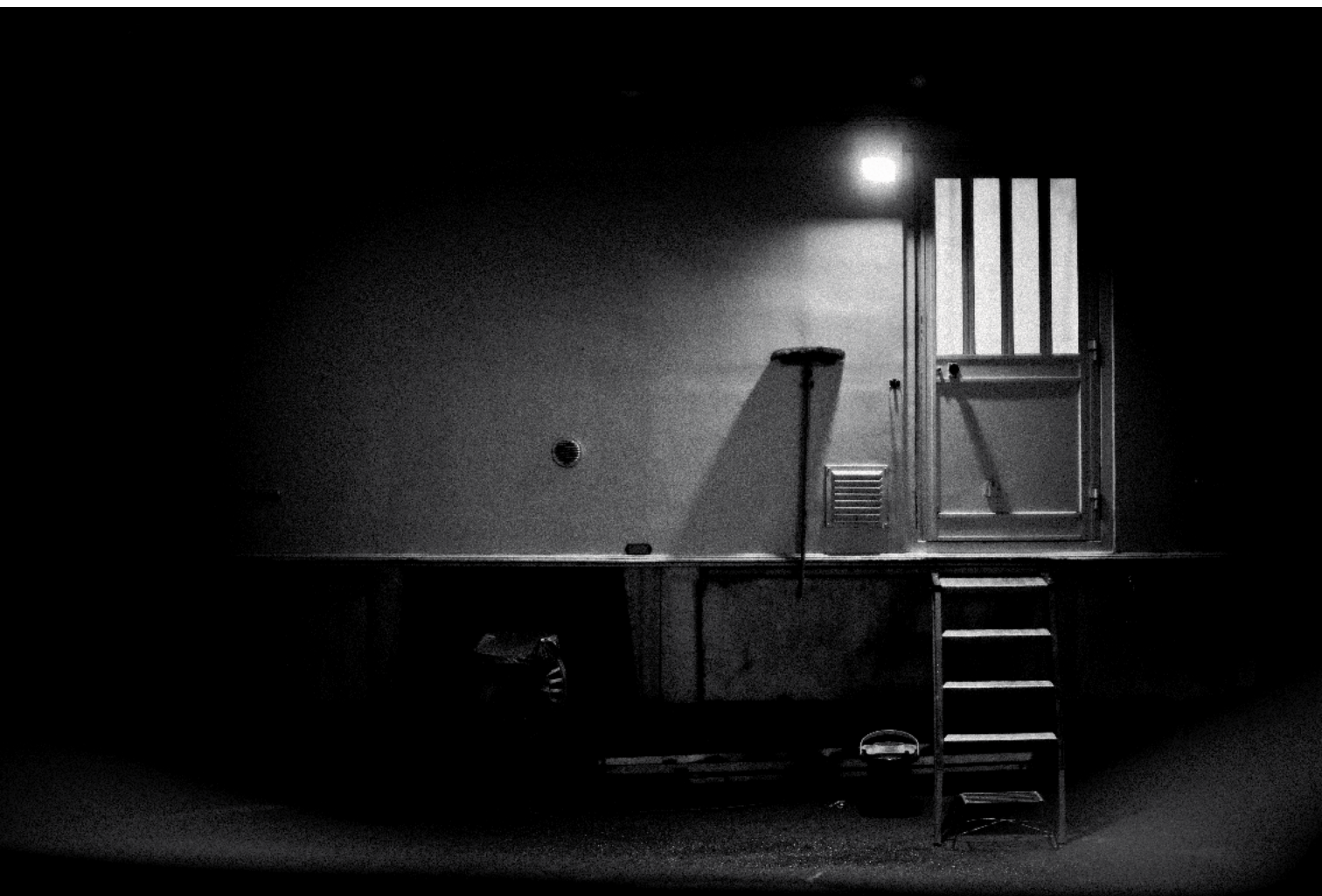






















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It is number two of the collection
of photography books of the
Festival *Outono Fotográfico* and is dedicated
to the colleagues of Benito Losada
in the *Casa da Xuventude* of Ourense
which along him as the director,
year after year made it possible
the celebration of the Festival:
to **Juan de Sás** [dead on 2012],
to **Elba Álvarez**, to **Rosa González** and to **Luz Rodríguez**.