

# Writing Against the Silence: Female Poets in Postwar Spain and West Germany

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*Abstract:* The article takes a comparative approach to the writing of female poets in postwar Spain and West Germany, focusing on the ways in which the semantics of silence and writing as an explicit *breaking* of the silence are reflected within their literary production. The selected writers are the Spanish poets Carmen Conde, Acacia Uceta, and Ángela Figuera, and the German poets Marie Luise Kaschnitz, Hilde Domin, and Nelly Sachs. These authors each had unique experiences in the war and postwar periods—marked by censorship, exile, and return, but also by (late) public recognition.

*Keywords:* silence, female poets, postwar Spain, Federal Republic of Germany, gender

## Introduction

Looking at Spain and West Germany in the late 1940s and early 1950s, we encounter two postwar societies profoundly marked by the aftermaths of, respectively, the Spanish Civil War and World War Two. Both countries experienced different sociopolitical situations. While the Spanish Civil War ended with the victory of the Francoist troops and the installation of a new authoritarian regime, West Germany was confronted with the total collapse of the National Socialist regime and took the first steps towards being a democracy, under the supervision of the British, French, and American forces. Despite these fundamental sociopolitical differences between Spain and West Germany, both postwar periods can be characterized as being dominated by the same fundamental challenge: forms of conviviality were to be reassessed on the individual and collective levels. This also affected gender relations, meaning that traditional gender

norms would be either contested or reinforced during the postwar years. At the same time, throughout this era, poetry took on a central role in expressing concerns accompanying changing social relations, because it was able to express the traumata of war and find new words to reflect upon the current situation.

In this article, I would like to take a comparative approach to the writing of female poets in postwar Spain and West Germany, focusing on the ways in which the semantics of silence on the one hand and, on the other, writing as an explicit *breaking* of the silence are reflected within their literary production. The semantic field of silence, in my opinion, is especially promising for this comparative analysis, because it has become a recurring metaphor for the challenge to find the right words after the horrors of war, Shoah, and exile (Kreuzer 2001). And, at the same time, it is historically frequently associated with the ideal of the taciturn woman (Wagner-Hasel 2006), as I will show in the following pages.

The selected writers are the Spanish poets Carmen Conde, Acacia Uceta, and Ángela Figuera and the German poets Marie Luise Kaschnitz, Hilde Domin, and Nelly Sachs. These authors each had unique experiences in the war and postwar periods—marked by censorship, exile, and return, but also by (late) public recognition. Further, both Carmen Conde and Hilde Domin engaged in creating and maintaining transnational ties between the Hispanic and German poetic worlds and are therefore special figures who shed some light on the transnational ties between writers in the European postwar period.

Beginning with some thoughts on the meaning of silence from a philosophical and linguistic perspective (1), I will then present the political and social context of women and poetry in postwar Spain and West Germany (2). The last part of this article (3) is dedicated to the analysis of poems written by the above-mentioned female poets in both languages.

## 1 Silence

Silence, the unspeakable, and the ineffable have been studied by philosophy since its origins and are well-known literary topoi.<sup>1</sup> Silence and the ineffable are always linked to a reflection on language and its limits. Hegel and Hölderlin, for example, see the ineffable in poetic language, its caesurae, and its rhythmic irregularities (Kreuzer 2001). One cannot speak of silence and the unspeakable without taking into account the caesura that the Shoah meant for the history of knowledge, having decisively influenced the debate on the question of whether language can be faithful in conveying the horrors of the lived experience and the human condition. In the context of the Shoah, the question of whether it is possible to convey the lived horror in words is referred to as the “topos of the unspeakable”. Different authors (e.g., Antelme, Semprún, Levi, Adorno, and Celan) have actively participated in this debate about the capacity and limits of the aesthetic text (Friedemann 2007; Siguan 2014).<sup>2</sup> Metaphor plays a significant role within this debate. According to the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, metaphor allows us to reach the language of the unconscious. According to Lacan, a metaphor occurs when one signifier takes over another’s place in the signifying chain (“chaîne signifiante”, Lacan 1966, 274). The

1 See Silvia Montiglio’s study *Silence in the Land of Logos* on the significance of silence as “a highly formalized behavior” (Montiglio 2000, 8) in the archaic and classical periods of ancient Greece. After stating that the notion of silence is “culturally specific” (Montiglio 2000, 3), the author analyzes silence within rhetoric, ritual, the epic, and tragedy. She shows that silence was collectively feared (Montiglio 2000, 289) and considered to be “abnormal” (Montiglio 2000, 6), with this changing through later interpretations of Odysseus’s silence as being smart and heroic (Montiglio 2000, 7). Montiglio highlights a gendered dimension in the evaluation of silence, distinguishing “two disquieting facets of a woman’s silence—either a self-destructive behavior or a subterranean plotting—[that] betray men’s anxiety vis-à-vis the realm of women’s action, which they hope to control precisely by the rule of silence” (Montiglio 2000, 291).

2 See Marisa Siguan’s article in this volume of *Dictatorships & Democracies*, in which she compares Jorge Semprún’s and Jean Améry’s experience of exile in relation to the postwar era. Also see Kim Teubner’s parallel reading of Theodor W. Adorno and Paul Celan (Teubner 2014). Taking Theodor W. Adorno’s polemic statement that it is barbaric to write poems after the horrors of Auschwitz as a starting point, the author analyzes Paul Celan’s poetry, which explicitly confronts the horrors of the Shoah by means of verse. Her conclusion is that both authors argued on different levels, which resulted in a certain misunderstanding: while Adorno’s thoughts were directed towards society, Celan opted for a personal perspective (Teubner 2014, 563, 566).

suppressed signifier remains latently present, and thus, deciphering metaphors allows us to reach the unconscious (Lipowatz 2004, 147). It is considered the perfect instrument to express what seems unspeakable and to approach traumatic experiences.

When talking about silence, it is important to differentiate its various forms:

[A] distinction must be made between imposed silence . . . and voluntary silence as well as those instances of silence resulting from a permanent or temporary inability to speak. In addition, one can be silent about something or someone, and one can fall silent, all with its various implications (the loss of the voice means the death of the poet; being silent about a person's deeds or actions lets them be forgotten) (Walde 2006).

Thus, the different forms of silence each come with a specific context and certain implications—often, the reasons and consequences of silence refer to underlying power relations (“imposed”, “lets them be forgotten”). In order to decipher these power relations in the respective languages, which in our case would be German and Spanish, it is important to consider the lexical field which is made up of verbs and adjectives used to express different forms of silence: In German, the noun “Stille” describes a state of silence and the absence of sound—and as we can see right away, the German adjective “still” has a shared etymology with the English adjective “still” (DWDS 2024; Merriam Webster 2024). The verb “schweigen”, on the other hand, describes an act of not speaking, not uttering a word. Add a prefix and “verschweigen” means keeping quiet about something. The verb “verstummen” describes the process of falling silent, being incapable of speaking any longer. A person who is “stumm” is mute.

In Spanish, “el silencio” describes silence as the absence of sound, and it can be considered the equivalent to the German noun “Stille”. In her study of Lazarus figures as a metaphor for trauma in postwar societies, Ursula Hennigfeld has pointed out that a distinction has to be drawn between the verb forms “callar” and “callarse” (Hennigfeld 2022, 13). While the intransitive form, “callarse”, describes the act of not speaking, the transitive form of the verb, “callar algo”, describes the omission of information

by not speaking.<sup>3</sup> The last verb I want to mention here is “enmudecer”, which describes the process of falling silent, being incapable of speaking any longer—but it can also describe the forceful act of making another person go silent (RAE 2014).

In relation to the history of women, silence as a feminine virtue has its origins in antiquity with the ideal of the taciturn woman (Wagner-Hasel 2006), promoted, for example, by Aristotle in his *Politics*.<sup>4</sup> When early-modern humanists in different European countries discussed the relation between the sexes and the question of whether women should have access to books and education, one of the most transnationally circulated treaties was Juan Luis Vives’s *De institutione feminae christianae*, published in Latin in 1523 and translated with great success to Spanish, English, French, and German in the following years.<sup>5</sup> While Vives clearly argues for the education of young women, he simultaneously perpetuates the ideal of the subordinate, temperate, and silent Christian woman.<sup>6</sup> A later work in Early Modern Spain that greatly influenced the ideal of the quiet woman is the treatise *La Perfecta casada* (*The Perfect Wife*, 1583) by Fray Luis de León. In one passage, he states,

3 The *Diccionario panhispánico de dudas* explains, “Como intransitivo . . . significa ‘no hablar’ . . . Es transitivo cuando significa ‘omitir o no decir [algo]’” (RAE 2005).

4 Aristotle argues that the life of both women and men ought to be guided by virtues, explaining that women must follow different virtues than men. Citing Sophocles’s drama *Ajax*, Aristotle states, “Silence gives grace to woman” (Aristotle 1944, 1.1260a). Despite the ideal of the taciturn woman, there are also examples of women in antiquity who were publicly honored, and Roman author Cicero, for example, praises the ideal of the educated and rhetorically versed woman in his *Letters to Atticus* (Wagner-Hasel 2006).

5 Carlos Noreña gives a bibliographical list of all the translations published in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Noreña 1970, 304). The number of editions—Juan Justiano’s Spanish translation alone was reprinted in eight editions—show the immense popularity of Vives’s treaty.

6 Vives states: “[A]labo el silencio como más útil al vivir honesto y máxime adonde no es muy necesario el hablar, el cual nunca puede ser necesario a la doncella” [I praise silence as most helpful when it comes to living honestly and as a maxim for when it is not necessary to speak, which is never really necessary for the young lady] (Vives 1995, 55). For a comparison of the different views held by Erasmus of Rotterdam, Luther, and Vives on women, marriage, and education, see Christ von Wedel (2013). All translations from Spanish and German in this article are mine.

In all [married women] it is not only a pleasant condition, but a due virtue, to be silent and to speak little. For, just as nature made women to take care of the house while being enclosed in it, it obliged them to keep their mouths closed.<sup>7</sup>

What we see here is a naturalization of the marginalization of women, whose silence is described as a duty and obligation. It is an imposed silence. The image of the closed mouth is equated with the locked house, in which the woman is confined. Centuries later, this vision of women was reactualized by the Franco regime,<sup>8</sup> in accordance with its general interest in the cultural and moral legacy of the Golden Age—as long, that is, as it corresponded with conservative Catholic morality (Morcillo 2000, 38–40).<sup>9</sup>

## 2 Political and Social Context: Women and Poetry in Postwar Spain and Germany

### 2.1 Spain

On April 1, 1939, Francisco Franco published the last report of the Spanish Civil War, with the well-known title “La Guerra ha terminado” (The War is Over; Tuñón de Lara 2006, 577). For many people, however, what followed were months of hunger, poverty, and suppression.<sup>10</sup> The hegemony of the new nationalistic Catholic regime was installed in the country (Bernecker 2002, 177–178). With this, the freedoms that were previously granted to women in the Second Republic were curtailed. They were now restricted to

7 “[E]n todas [las casadas] es, no sólo condición agradable, sino virtud debida, el silencio y el hablar poco. Porque, así como la naturaleza . . . hizo a las mujeres para que encerradas guardasen la casa, así las obligó a que cerrasen la boca” (León 1987, 154).

8 In fact, Vives’s *La perfecta casada* was frequently given to young brides as a wedding gift during the Franco regime (Morcillo 2000, 38).

9 Referring to Henry Kamen’s *Imaging Spain: Historical Myth and National Identity*, Manfred Tietz shows that the myth of Spain as eternally and homogeneously Catholic became popular in the late-nineteenth century and has been perpetuated by Church representatives and scholars (including the German hispanists Ludwig Pfandl and Reinhold Schneider) until this very day. It was an especially vigorous discourse during the Spanish Civil War and the years of the Francoist regime (Tietz 2011, 126–127; Kamen 2008, 74–95).

10 For an insight into the effects of hunger on the postwar society, see the collective study edited by Miguel Ángel del Arco Blanco, *Los ‘años del hambre’. Historia y memoria de la posguerra franquista* (2020).

the domestic space, where they had to behave according to the patriarchal model of life, promoted by the discourses of the Sección Femenina (Women's Section).<sup>11</sup> This institution, which had already been active during the civil war, was assigned the education and organization of Spanish women. One of the instruments used by the Sección Femenina to transmit its ideas was journals, the first of these being *Y. Revista para la mujer* (*Y: Magazine for the Woman*), published monthly in Madrid between 1938 and 1946.<sup>12</sup> Its articles dealt with topics such as fashion, cooking, and married life. One column, for example, written by a certain Dr. Luque, who was most probably the gynecologist Francisco Luque y Beltrán, was directed at “futuras madres” (future mothers), giving alimentary, medical, and moral advice about raising ideal future mothers.<sup>13</sup> In general, all the content of *Y* offered an orientation in accordance with the model of life envisaged for women by the regime.<sup>14</sup> In 1943, an anonymous contributor asked,

11 In her article “Género y nación durante el franquismo”, Inmaculada Blasco Herranz shows that the discursive creation of femininity within the Francoist regime was indeed ambivalent. While on the one hand women were to be confined to the realm of the domestic, on the other hand they were seen as an important part of the Nationalist project (Blasco Herranz 2014). Inbal Ofer (2011) has similarly shown this combination of “modernist and conservative elements” in the ideal of the Falangist and national-syndicalist woman portrayed by the *Sección Femenina* (Ofer 2009, 583) in the journals *Medina* (1939–1946) and *Teresa* (1954–1977).

12 The magazine, initiated by Pilar Primo de Rivera, was first published in San Sebastián and entitled *Y. Revista para la mujer nacional sindicalista*. The title was then changed to *Y. Revista para la mujer* in attempt to broaden the number of readers. After the victory of the Nationalist troops in 1939, the magazine was published in Madrid. Compared to the weekly magazine *Medina*, with its simple black-and-white layout, *Y. Revista para la mujer* had a costlier design. Each volume contained approximately fifty pages, some of them in color, plus various illustrations and an artistic typography (Biblioteca Nacional de España 2022).

13 In the first issue, Luque makes reference to Hitler and the importance given to mothers within the German National Socialist society. He postulates that also for Spain, the highest goal is to create “una madre fuerte que dará la alegría de muchos hijos sanos” (a strong mother who will give the joy of many healthy children) (1938, no. 1, p. 17). Other Francoist intellectuals similarly promoted the submission of women under men, such as José María Pemán in his *De doce cualidades de la mujer* (1947).

14 As the first issue of the journal states: “Comaradas: ya tenemos nuestra revista, la revista de las mujeres nacionalsindicalistas, en la que encontramos todo lo que nos hace falta, nuestras normas de conducta, basadas en el espíritu de la nueva España, las orientaciones que debemos seguir, los ejemplos que tenemos que imitar y, mezclado con el aliento espiritual, encontramos también en nuestra revista el rincón de los niños, las páginas de las labores, la moda, la cocina, todo en fin lo que nosotras necesitamos.” (1938, No. 1, p. 44). (Comrades: we now have our magazine, the magazine of the national-syndicalist women, where we find everything we need, our norms of conduct, based on the spirit of the new Spain, the orientations we must follow, the examples we ought to imitate and,

“What is the perfect wife like?”<sup>15</sup> Here we can see the strong resemblance between this title and the aforementioned treatise *La perfecta casada*. The intertextual connection is not purely coincidental. It highlights a thematic parallelism: as the humanist had done centuries before, the Falangist magazine points out *silence* as one of the central virtues of the married woman: “The perfect wife speaks very little and always in a very low voice.”<sup>16</sup> It is important to keep this discursive context in mind, considering that Spanish female postwar poets wrote and went on stage in a social context in which the authorities wanted to limit women to the domestic space, where they would be secluded, made invisible, and silenced.<sup>17</sup>

The Spanish literary field was strongly affected by the civil war: many intellectuals took a stand in the conflict and openly expressed their adherence to one or the other side.<sup>18</sup> At the end of the war, a great number of the Spanish intellectuals who had been part of the literary scene in Spain were either deceased or in exile.<sup>19</sup> Those who remained in Spain suffered restrictions imposed by the new regime on their literary activity, and many of the intellectuals were forced into self-censorship (Ridell 1995, 3).<sup>20</sup> From the 1940s onwards, publishers had to solicit permission from

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mixed with the spiritual inspiration, we also find the kids’ section in our magazine, pages on chores, fashion, cooking, anything, in short, that we women need).

15 “¿Cómo es la esposa perfecta?” (1943, No. 61, p. 54).

16 “La esposa perfecta habla poco y siempre en voz muy baja” (1943, No. 61, p. 54).

17 Various studies have been published regarding the Franco regime’s repression of women—for example, Vinyes (2002), Egido (2017), Egido and Montes (2018). This topic has also been reflected upon in other genres, on example being the novel *La voz dormida* by Dulce Chacón (2002). Note that the novel’s title refers to the semantic field of silence.

18 Regarding the role of intellectuals in the Spanish Civil War, see Andrés Trapiello’s emblematic study *Las armas las letras* (1994), as well as Marichal (2006) and Reig Tapia (2007). The Spanish Civil War, which can be considered a war of European dimensions (Collado Seidel 2010, 10), also moved numerous writers, intellectuals, and journalists from abroad to write about the conflict and join the International Brigades. See Uzandizaga (2007) on foreign female writers in the Spanish Civil War.

19 Many intellectuals had already left Spain at the beginning of the civil war (Zaragoza Pelayo 2013, 92). See Balcells and Pérez Bowie (2001) and Chihaiia et al. (2023) for insights on the cultural exile.

20 In 2004, J. Gracia publishes a detailed study of intellectuals in postwar Spain; it contains insights not only on the pro-Francoist or collaborative intellectuals but also on those who did not collaborate with the regime but either remained in the country or returned after a short period in exile—for example, Azorín, Baroja, Marañón, and Ortega (Gracia 2004, 107). Gracia speaks of a growing “resistencia silenciosa” (Gracia 2004, 37) (silent resistance) among younger intellectuals such as Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio and Carmen Martín Gaité.

the Censorship Office (Censura de Publicaciones) of the Ministry for Education Propaganda Department (Dirección General de Propaganda del Ministerio de Educación) when they wanted to publish a book (Montejo Gurruchaga 2000, 169). Nevertheless, there was always a certain—clandestine—presence of works published outside Spain, in countries such as Mexico and France, and Spanish literature was in contact with that of other countries (Ridell 1995, 5).

With his influential study *Censura y creación literaria en España (1939–1976)*, Manuel Abellán was the first to summarize this censorship and its effects on the Spanish literary field in Francoist Spain. He notes that the work of the censors, called “lectores” (readers), was not fixed by objective criteria or specific rules of implementation, which led to a number of inconsistencies and contradictions (Abellán 1980, 87).<sup>21</sup> Thus, the evaluation of works depended very much on the censor’s point of view. The censorship files for the works written by Ángela Figuera show what was most rejected by the censors, who advised deletions: poems that depicted women in a way that did not correspond to the passive and subordinate role foreseen for them by the regime (Montejo Gurruchaga 2000, 170).<sup>22</sup>

In the case of women poets, in addition to the disadvantages of being dependent on the regime’s censorship, they faced a literary field dominated by men who did not always see their female colleagues as equals. In 2020, Begoña Pozo-Sánchez and Carles Padilla-Carmona from the Universitat de València coined the term “criptoginia” (“cryptogony”) to describe the invisibilization of women within different cultural and societal realms,

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21 One thing which all censorship reports had in common from the beginning was that the censors had to follow a structure by answering the following questions: “1) ¿Ataca al dogma?, 2) ¿a la moral?, 3) ¿a la Iglesia o a sus ministros?, 4) ¿al régimen y a sus instituciones?, 5) ¿a las personas que colaboran o han colaborado con el régimen?, 6) los pasajes censurables ¿califican el contenido total de la obra?, y 7) informe y otras observaciones”, (cited from Abellán 1980, 19). (1) Does it attack the dogma? 2) morals? 3) the church and its ministers? 4) the regime and its institutions? 5) the people who collaborate or have collaborated with the regime?, 6) Do the censurable passages affect the total content of the book?, 7) Report and other observations).

22 The censor who read Figuera’s book of poems *Mujer de barro* described it as being of “low literary quality” and put the prominence of its “shameless eroticism” down to the fact that the author was a woman (Montejo Gurruchaga 2000, 170). Nevertheless, Figuera’s later book *El grito inútil* (1952), with an evident critical content, was admitted by the responsible censor without any objections (Montejo Gurruchaga 2000, 171).

most commonly those associated with social prestige (Pozo-Sánchez and Padilla-Carmona 2021, 177). We can easily apply this term to the literary field in Spain during the second half of the twentieth century. The majority of anthologies, especially influential ones in their time and in literary historiography, only name a few female poets. Francisco Ribes's *Antología consultada de la joven poesía española* (1952) does not mention a single woman, and José María Castellet's *Veinte años de poesía española* (1960) only includes three female poets: María Beneyto, Gloria Fuertes, and Ángela Figuera (Paz Moreno 2014, 124). While these anthologies give the impression that women writers were an exception, thus contributing to the collective oblivion of female poets, there are other more balanced collections, such as César González-Ruano's *Antología de poetas españoles contemporáneos en la lengua castellana* (1946), which includes eighteen women, and anthologies that exclusively contain poetry written by women, such as the *Poesía femenina española viviente* (1954), edited by Carmen Conde (Paz Moreno 2014, 123–124.).

The self-organization of women that we see in Conde's anthology was also present in the field of public readings. In spring of 1951, Gloria Fuertes, María Dolores de Pablo, and Adelaida Las Santas decided to found a literary *tertulia* for female poets, calling it Versos con faldas (Verses With Skirts).<sup>23</sup> In 1983, Gloria Fuertes recalled,

We decided to end the “if you read me, then I'll read you” of the *tertulias* organized by the men, poets who partly ignored us and invited us only very few times to read our poems, which even in those days were already as good as or even better than their poems. . . . We decided to end . . . this injustice and we seriously organized readings, so that the audience could hear our poetic voice (Fuertes in Las Santas 1983, 9).<sup>24</sup>

23 Adelaida Las Santas fictionalized her experiences in the form of a novel, which was published in 1959 under the title *Poetas de café*. In 1983, she published a collection of poems, documents, and testimonies from the active years of Versos con faldas. In 2019, Fran Garcera and Marta Porpetta put together a new anthology, including biographical information on and poems by all of the participants in the *tertulia*. This was published in Madrid and has sparked general interest in the literary activities of female poets in postwar Spain (Garcera and Porpetta 2019).

24 “[D]ecidimos acabar con el “si me lees te leo” de las tertulias organizadas por los señores, poetas que medio nos ignoraban e invitaban muy pocas veces para que pudiéramos leer nuestros poemas,

The objective of the founders of *Versos con faldas* was to be heard, leaving the domestic realm so that the audience would know their poems. Not being included in the literary activities celebrated by the male poets, defined by Gloria Fuertes as an “injustice”, demonstrates the double marginalization experienced by female poets in postwar Spain. The terms “hear” and “poetic voice” belong to the sematic field of the auditive and underline the intents of the poets not only to write, but to make themselves be publicly heard.<sup>25</sup>

The large number of public readings of male and female poets shows that the fifties began with prolific poetic activity. However, the regime reacted ambivalently. It banned coffee-house recitals, but at the same time it tried to control cultural activities by giving them an official framework.<sup>26</sup>

What was the situation in postwar Germany?

## 2.2 Germany

On May 8, 1945, Germany surrendered unconditionally, and the Second World War officially came to an end—at least in Europe—with a death

que aun entonces, eran tan buenos o mejor que los de ellos . . . , decidimos acabar . . . con aquella injusticia y organizamos en serio y en serie, Recitales, para que fuera el público quien oyera nuestra voz poética.” (Fuertes in *Las Santas* 1983, 9).

<sup>25</sup> It is noteworthy that the *tertulias* celebrated by *Versos con faldas* could not have taken place without the support of different male poets and journalists, who offered their name and protection to the group. The public evening readings always took place under the patronage of one of these men, and always in closed venues—instead of coffee houses or bars, where other *tertulias* such as *Adelfos* and *Versos a medianoche* took place. The meetings of *Versos con faldas* during its first year, 1951, took place in the basement of the *Agrupación Artístico-Literaria del Teatro Gallego*, near the *Puerta del Sol* in Madrid, and received significant coverage in the local press. Some of the participants would later receive great recognition: Ángela Figuera, who would win the Mexican *Premio Nueva España* in 1958; Carmen Conde, who in 1967 would become the first woman to receive the Spanish National Poetry Prize; and Gloria Fuertes, who is nowadays renowned for her children’s poetry (Garcerá 2019, 33).

<sup>26</sup> In 1952, poet Eduardo Alonso and some of his colleagues published a manifesto in the newspaper *ABC*, proclaiming the celebration of a “*Fiesta de la Poesía*” (poetry party) on March 21. It was a total success. Nevertheless, as the festivities began, the regime banned all coffeehouse recitals, which forced many *tertulias* to move to the so-called *Casas Regionales* (Regional Houses). Not much time went by until, a few years later, in 1955, the Francoist regime appropriated the *Fiesta de la Poesía*, giving it an official character. This meant that even though the regime controlled and regulated the cultural events, many poets were able to continue circulating their poetry (Fuenteálamo 2022, 38–39). In 1999, at its thirtieth General Conference, UNESCO declared March 21 World Poetry Day, which has been celebrated on that day ever since (UNESCO 2024).

toll of at least forty-five million Europeans (Schütz 2013, 13). Research has shown that the so-called “zero hour”,<sup>27</sup> however, is more of a myth, because in fact on many levels the power relations from the National Socialist society continued in effect,<sup>28</sup> now paired with the new discursive strategy of insisting on a mental and intellectual renewal (“geistige Erneuerung”).<sup>29</sup> Following this spirit, the West German postwar cultural sector flourished, with radio stations and political-cultural journals being founded under the control of the British, French, and American occupation, which lasted until 1949 (Schütz 2013, 56–83; Von der Brelie-Lewien and Laurien 1983, 408). One of the most popular prewar magazines dedicated to women had been *Blatt der Hausfrau* (*Journal of the Housewife*). It became *Brigitte* from the early fifties (Lott-Almstadt 1986, 168–169). Its articles focused on entertainment, cooking, housework, and fashion. At first, it may seem that the image of women represented by the magazine had changed after the war to that of a modern woman, the embodiment of which in Germany was the “Trümmerfrauen” (rubble women), who worked hard cleaning up the destroyed urban spaces.<sup>30</sup> The reality, of course, was not that simple. When we compare the language of *Brigitte* with that employed by the Nazis, it becomes clear that the magazine—even though it sometimes referred to the past in negative terms—actually perpetuated a rigid patriarchal view of women. Now that men had returned to society and their families having been absent during the war, the old power relations

27 According to Helmut Peitsch, the three metaphorical definitions of the postwar literature in West Germany as “Nullpunkt” (zero hour), “Kahlschlag” (demolition), and “Trümmerliteratur” [rubble literature] were actually used in the early sixties to characterize the immediate postwar period in an attempt to distance oneself from that time period (Peitsch 2009, 11–14).

28 Studies on the continuities between the National Socialist elites in postwar Germany and the Adenauer era include Friedrich (1994), Frei (2001, 2002) and Fischer et al. (2015).

29 As Alfred Andersch, a member of Group 47, put it: “[A]us dem Zwang einer völlig neuartigen Situation heraus, steht die junge Generation vor einer tabula rasa, vor der Notwendigkeit, in einem originalen Schöpfungsakt eine Erneuerung des deutschen geistigen Lebens zu vollbringen” (cited from Peitsch 2009, 12–13) (Under the pressure of a completely new situation, the young generation is faced with a tabula rasa, with the necessity to accomplish a renewal of German intellectual life in an original act of creation). With the concept of the tabula rasa, Andersch suggests that the past had been erased, and he ascribes the role of renewal to the young authors. This fits in well with the self-perception of Group 47 as a modern group writing against the spirit of “restoration” as it was critically ascribed to the Adenauer era (1949–1963) (Schütz 2013, 91–92).

30 On the “Trümmerfrauen” as myth and *lieu de mémoire*, see Treber (2014).

were seen as a sign of stability and wellbeing.<sup>31</sup> The magazine is a good reflection of the societal expectations confronting young women in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) of the early fifties; these we can read in a letter published in 1953 (no. 25), in which its author asks, “What sort of women do men dream of?” and then describes the ideal woman as follows: “She is brave and hardworking, but not too much; she is reserved and yet confident; . . . she has brains without letting it show too much”.<sup>32</sup> The clue lies in the adjective “tüchtig” (hardworking), which can be found in the Nazis’ propagandistic handbooks, such as Curt Rosten’s *ABC of National Socialism* (Rosten 1933, 200).<sup>33</sup> Motherhood is similarly still mentioned as a central virtue and purpose for women. Rosten stated, “The woman has another task to fulfill for the man: she must also be his mother”;<sup>34</sup> twenty years later, *Brigitte* stated, “She has a little bit of everything: a bit of a mother who means comfort to her big boy”.<sup>35</sup> This brief comparison of the women’s magazines in Spain and Germany shows that similar, clearly patriarchal views of women and feminine virtues dominated in these countries’ postwar eras.

Given this briefly summarized context, it is not surprising that female writers in the FRG’s literary field were frequently confronted with

31 The return to the old patriarchal power relations can also be seen on the level of policies. Although the German Constitution of 1949 stated, “Männer und Frauen sind gleichberechtigt” (Men and women have equal rights), many of the laws contained in the German Civil Code clearly did not agree with this equality: for example, if women wanted to work, they had to obtain permission from their husband, and the so-called double-income law led to the dismissal of numerous female politicians and teachers, who had become actively involved in politics and education in the postwar years, for the mere reason that they were married (Faerber-Husemann 2004).

32 “Wie die Männer sich ihre Frauen erträumen? . . . Sie ist tapfer und tüchtig, nur nicht zu viel; sie ist zurückhaltend und doch sicher . . . ; sie hat Köpfchen, ohne es sich allzusehr merken zu lassen” (cited from Lott-Almstadt 1986, 192).

33 Leonie Wagner (2010) analyzes the National Socialist conceptions of women, and especially, the relevance of motherhood in the dominant NS ideology (Wagner 2010, 69–86). There is an extensive bibliography on women in the NS regime; while there was a tendency towards a dichotomic view on women either as victims or perpetrators, newer studies shed light on the daily life and grey zones within society. See, for example, Heinsohn et al. (2023), or the differentiated overview given by Herkommer (2005) in her metastudy.

34 “Noch eine Aufgabe hat die Frau für den Mann zu erfüllen: sie muss ihm zugleich Mutter sein” (Rosten 1933, 195).

35 “Sie hat von allem etwas: von der Mutter, die ihrem großen Jungen Geborgenheit bedeutet” (cited from Lott-Almstadt 1986, 192).

patriarchal comments and judgements. The famous Group 47, whose members included the authors Hans Werner Richter, Günter Grass, and Alfred Andersch, all of whom participated in the war as German soldiers, also invited female authors to read their works (Seifert 2024, 14). The Austrian author Ingeborg Bachmann was awarded Group 47's prize in 1953, and in the following years, she published a great number of successful poems, articles, and radio plays (Seifert 2024, 84). She was the first woman to be on the cover of *Der Spiegel*, an important magazine, in 1954 (Seifert 2024, 98–100). Nevertheless, the attention paid to her and other female writers generally highlighted their appearance rather than the aesthetic value of their work, as Nicole Seifert shows in her recent study of female authors' participation in Group 47 (Seifert 2024, 100, 271).<sup>36</sup> The literary field in the early FRG was clearly dominated by men.

I would now like to focus on some female poets from Spain and West Germany, and on the way in which they wrote about—or against—silence.

### 3 Writing against the Silence: Female Poets in the Postwar Years

#### 1.1 Spain: Carmen Conde, Acacia Uceta, Ángela Figuera

Carmen Conde is one of the most well-known Spanish female poets from the twentieth century. She received the Premio Nacional de Poesía (National Poetry Prize) in 1967, and in 1978 she was the first woman ever to be elected to the Real Academia Española (Royal Spanish Academy) (RAE 2019). She had been writing poetry even before the civil war, publishing her first book of poems in 1929. At the end of the civil war, Conde used the semantic fields of voice and silence in her poetry.<sup>37</sup> An untitled poem

<sup>36</sup> Seifert's study sheds light on female authors such as Ruth Lehmann, Ingrid Bachér, Ilse Schneider-Lengyel, Helga M. Novak, Barbara König, Gabriele Wohmann, and Gisela Elsner, who are by far less known than the male participants of Group 47 (Seifert 2024, 13). Among the female authors of Group 47, Ilse Aichinger and Ingeborg Bachmann are prominent examples, due to their success. According to Seifert, the marginal role of women within Group 47 can also be explained by the latent conflict between the male war revenants, who saw themselves as the legitimate renewers of the literary scene, and the aesthetically truly transgressive writings of the women (Seifert 2024, 271).

<sup>37</sup> Even though Conde, who had supported the Republican cause, remained in Spain after the civil war and was able to successfully work in the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas (National

that she wrote in 1939 but was not published until 1960 in Buenos Aires opens with the lines, “The victims will not speak: / silence has begun marching”.<sup>38</sup> The form of the verb “to speak” in the future underlines that the dead will not return and that it will never be possible to express what they experienced. “Silence”, a key term, is personified, because it “has begun marching”. The verb “march” alludes to a parade of soldiers: here it is a parade of the dead, of a society that does not speak about the horrors experienced in war. The poem, however, by describing this situation, speaks about war and death, thus breaking the silence. In the last lines of this short poem, the lyrical “I” asks,

Why is it man who kills? Say it,  
dead one, you, who were a man  
capable of killing him.  
Speak.<sup>39</sup>

The verses express the dismay felt by many after the war, disillusioned by the human condition because humans are capable of killing their equals. It is striking that the term “man” was chosen here. Although it is used as a generic masculine, it contrasts with “victims”, a clearly feminine word in Spanish, which is mentioned in the first verse. While most of the soldiers in the civil war were men, there were also women in the trenches. At the end of the poem, the lyrical “I” addresses the dead man with the imperatives “say it” and “speak” and also addresses the readers, demanding that they raise their voices. The poem is not explicitly about a female poetic voice; rather, it reflects on silence in the face of the horrors of war. While

Research Council) during the Franco regime, the impact of censorship can be discerned by looking at her literary production in the postwar years: she published some of her books under different pseudonyms. Moreover, she decided to publish her books *Mientras los hombres mueren* (1952) (*While the Men Die*) and *En un mundo de fugitivos* (1960) (*In a World of Fugitives*) in Milan and Buenos Aires, respectively. While the first book contained poems dedicated to the dead children of the civil war, the second clearly denounced the sociopolitical circumstances of the postwar years (Abellán 1980, 70).

<sup>38</sup> “Las víctimas no hablarán: | se ha puesto el silencio en marcha” (Conde 2007, 465).

<sup>39</sup> “¿Por qué es el hombre el que mata? Dilo, / muerto que fuiste un hombre / capaz de matarle. / Habla.” (Conde 2007, 466).

it breaks with the binary view of victims and oppressors, it is dominated by a strong disillusionment.

However, Carmen Conde's poems, plus the communication between the poets, helped them to gain new hope. We can appreciate this in a poem by Acacia Uceta, a founding member of Versos con faldas.<sup>40</sup> In one of her poems published in *Al sur de las estrellas* (1976), entitled "Letter to Carmen Conde" (Carta a Carmen Conde), she addresses her colleague in these terms:

Today I am responding to a message that you wrote  
to all the women in History  
offering your voice, almost your scream,  
to their broken and humiliated throats.  
Because you were lifting this defeat  
passionately with your word  
from so much submission and so much crying  
repeated by all of us  
in the horrible cup of silence.  
With your free song  
butterflies set themselves free,  
which had neither known the sun nor hope.<sup>41</sup>

This poem demonstrates that for the poets, reading each other could be a source of encouragement. By characterizing the poem as a "letter" of response, the lyrical "I" enters into dialogue with Conde. She also includes the women of past centuries. Raising her voice not only seems important to her for the moment, but also alludes to a responsibility to the women

<sup>40</sup> Acacia Uceta Malo (Madrid 1925–2002) started writing poetry and participating in different coffee house recitals in the postwar years. She published her first book of poetry, *El corro de las horas*, in 1961, and was awarded various stipends and prizes (Garcerá 2019, 306). Her collected poems were posthumously published in 2014.

<sup>41</sup> "Hoy contesto a un mensaje que escribiste / a todas las mujeres de la Historia / ofreciendo tu voz, casi tu grito, / a sus gargantas rotas y humilladas. / Porque tú fuiste alzando con tu verbo / apasionadamente esta derrota / de tanta sumisión y tanto llanto / por todas repetido / en la terrible copa del silencio. / Con tu libre canción se han liberado / mariposas que nunca / conocieron el sol ni la esperanza" (Uceta 2014, 33).

of past centuries who could neither speak nor write freely. The desolate situation in which these women and the female lyrical “I” find themselves is described with negative adjectives. Against “silence” and “submission”, however, Conde’s poetry—characterized with the climax, “scream”—opposes hope. The poem advances towards the heights of the sun with the flight of butterflies. The metaphor of this insect born in a process of metamorphosis is significant because it underlines the transforming power of poetry in times of suffering.<sup>42</sup> And in the case of Conde, this dialogue gains transnational value. In 1954, the poet traveled to Germany, where she read at the universities of Heidelberg and Bonn and engaged in dialogues with the writer Gertrud von Le Fort and translators such as Gisela Pape, who also translated poems by the Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral, winner of the Nobel Prize in 1945.<sup>43</sup>

In the postwar period, Ángela Figuera began to publish her poems, which express a critical view of society and focus on the feminine point of view.<sup>44</sup> In 1952, her collection of poems *El grito inútil* (*The Useless Scream*) was published. The title can be interpreted metapoetically: the adjective “useless” alludes to the question of the value of poetry in postwar times and, more generally, in times of human suffering. A feeling of disappointment dominates. The dedication of the book, “To those who do not want to listen”,<sup>45</sup> however, gives it a subversive nuance: the scream, although useless, is heard publicly and all those who do not want to listen are forced to hear it. The scream is the metaphor for critical poetry written by a woman. In this case, it is about “raising one’s voice more than usual” (this is how the

42 Within the Spanish poetry of the *siglos de oro*, the butterfly attracted by the flame was a recurring metaphor (cf. Trueblood 1974, 829). In Uceta’s case, however, the butterflies do not succumb to the flames of love. Rather, they take the shape of formerly imprisoned (“nunca conocieron el sol ni la esperanza”) souls who are set free by poetry (“liberado”).

43 Conde’s correspondence with her German network can be consulted in the archives of the “Patronato Carmen Conde—Antonio Oliver” in Cartagena.

44 Bilbao-born Ángela Figuera Aymerich (1902–1984) published her first book of poems in 1948. Because censorship sometimes made the process of publishing her works difficult (Montejo Gurruchaga 2000), some of her socially critical works were printed abroad—for example, *Belleza cruel* (1958), which was published in Mexico and received the *Nueva España* poetry prize. See Arkinstall’s (1997) analysis of the way in which Figuera employs the theme of motherhood and the Virgin Mary in order to criticize the underlying patriarchal system in the Franco era.

45 “A los que no quieren escuchar” (Figuera 1986)

*Real Academia Española* defines the verb “gritar”, to scream/shout). It is a question, then, of leaving the usual, the generally accepted, and thus, leaving silence. The question of the legitimization of female authorship, in this case, is overlooked: poetry that is not legitimized in the debate, poetry that is branded as useless, does not ask for permission, does not seek reasons, but simply raises its voice and in this way is self-legitimized. However, as we have seen above, Figuera had to ask for authorization to publish her works, and the changes required by the censors often eliminated precisely this female self-determination.

The concept of silence also played a role in Figuera’s poetry. In her poem “Silencio”, published within *El grito inútil*, the poet again employs the adjective “useless”.<sup>46</sup> The key is found at the end of the poem:

It would be better to keep silent. To license the  
metaphor.

To enter the ruins splattered with tears  
And begin to lay, with humble patience,

One brick on top of another.<sup>47</sup>

The verb “licenciar” is a term that is also used in the military field. Figuera transposes this word to the realm of literature, advocating giving permission and total freedom to metaphor. And what follows is precisely a metaphor: the ruins as a metaphor for the destroyed country and destroyed literature are rebuilt verse by verse, brick by brick, by the poets. In this case, it is not explicitly a female voice, but that of all poets. The mention of “metaphor” has a metapoetic function that refers to Figuera’s poetry and that of other poets who find in metaphor a way to pass censorship without abandoning their critical thinking.

In Germany, during the early postwar years, the situation was a bit different: censorship was still mostly focused on banning National

<sup>46</sup> The third stanza of the poem begins with the line: “Ser poeta es inútil en un mundo acosado” (Being a poet is useless in a hounded world) (Figuera 1986, 150).

<sup>47</sup> “Mejor fuera callarse. Licenciar la metáfora. / Adentrarse en las ruinas salpicadas de llanto / y empezar a poner con humilde paciencia / un ladrillo sobre otro.” (Figuera 1986, 150).

Socialist propaganda and encouraging democratic voices (Peitsch 2009, 57–58). I would like to present three German female poets with different trajectories who all profoundly marked the postwar poetry.

## 1.2 Germany: Marie Luise Kaschnitz, Hilde Domin, Nelly Sachs

Marie Luise Kaschnitz was never forced to leave Germany during the Third Reich, and she lived in Frankfurt with her husband during the war.<sup>48</sup> Her book of poems *Totentanz und Gedichte zur Zeit* (1947) is marked by the horrors of war, as the dominant motifs show: death, war, destruction, hunger, and homelessness. A few years later, in *Zukunftsmusik* (1950), the tone of her voice is more optimistic. The voices of the dead, however, are still present and are the center of the poem “What Do the Dead Know” (“Was Wissen die Toten”). The poem begins with a repeated use of the verb “schweigen” (twice, Kaschnitz 1950, 13)—the dead remain silent (“Aber alles bleibt still” [everything remains silent]). But after the lyrical “I” addresses them in the second-person singular, and after the rest of society returns to their daily chores, only the poets remain and listen.<sup>49</sup> What follows are five stanzas in which the dead storm the stage and scream (“schreien”, used three times). What they describe is so horrible that the poets have to take the blame: “What sort of Dead did you, poets, let loose. . . Silence them”.<sup>50</sup> Poetry brings the dead back to life. Here, the employed vocabulary is actually that of “giving birth”: the verb “entbinden” can mean “let loose”, but at the same time it describes the process of giving birth. Poetry enables the dead to speak—but the things they say are so gruesome that they disturb the rest of society. This poem can be understood as criticism of the postwar society, which might have been mourning its dead, but it did not actually want to know anything about them. Poets are

48 Marie Luise Kaschnitz (1901–1974) started publishing her poems in 1928. During the Third Reich, she was awarded the poetry prize of the women’s cultural magazine *Die Dame* and wrote poems which are characterized as being close to the literature of an “inner emigration” (Braun 2020b, 1–2). It is not until after the war, in 1947, that she published her debut book of poetry and was strongly associated with the “Trümmerliteratur” (Braun 2020b, 2). In 1955, she was awarded the renowned Büchner Prize (Braun 2020b, 1).

49 “Nur die Dichter verweilen noch immer” (Kaschnitz 1950, 14).

50 “Was für Tote habt Ihr, Dichter, entbunden. . . Bringt sie zum Schweigen” (Kaschnitz 1950, 15).

the only ones capable of listening and giving the stage to the dead, and thus they occupy a liminal position. When one reads Kaschnitz's postwar poetry books, it is interesting to note how she uses the word "Dichter", the generic masculine form of poets, and includes her own lyrical "I" in this group. We do not hear an explicit feminine voice speaking. What we do hear is an uncomfortable dialogue with society and a sound archive that includes the screams and ear-splitting noises of the past, the silence of the present caused by the unwillingness to look back, and the longing for a harmonious "Zukunftsmusik" (music from/for the future).<sup>51</sup>

Hilde Domin, born in Cologne under the name Hilde Löwenstein, was of Jewish descent. She spent the 1930s and 1940s in exile in Italy, France, Great Britain, and the Dominican Republic with her husband, the art historian Erwin Walter Palm (Braun 2020a, 1). She started writing poems late in her life, and most of them were published between 1959 and 1970 (Braun 2020a, 1). When reflecting on language, Domin's poems are marked by the experience of "exile", as the homonymous poem reads:

The dying mouth  
struggles  
for the correctly pronounced  
word  
in a foreign language.<sup>52</sup>

In these verses, the mouth functions as a *pars pro toto* for the exile, who is on the verge of dying: be it of hunger, be it because of the proximity of war and annihilation. Living in exile, however, forces this mouth to return to the elementary level of language, fighting for communication with the other society, language, and people. While the adjective "foreign" stands for the feeling of otherness, it is precisely poetry and language which manage to create similarity and unison. This is what we can see in a poem dedicated to the Chilean author Pablo Neruda:

<sup>51</sup> "O wie mich dürstet nach Zukunftsmusik!" (Kaschnitz 1950, 9).

<sup>52</sup> "Der sterbende Mund / müht sich / um das richtig gesprochene / Wort / einer fremden Sprache" (Domin 1987, 244).

Your simple  
 your true words  
 just like mine,  
 my simple words,  
 have a human aroma.<sup>53</sup>

The lyrical “I” and the words of the other are brought together and represent the synesthetic essence of being human. Domin’s clear language and intelligible images create a transnational dialogue, which is, however, not explicitly female. After returning to Germany in 1954, she continued living in Spain for longer periods. Before publishing her first book of poetry in Germany in 1959, she published some of her poems (actually written in Spanish) in Spain in the magazine *Caracola*, encouraged by Vicente Aleixandre (Pau 2010, 57–58). She served as an intermediary between the German and Spanish literary worlds, translating poets such as Sachs, Bachmann, and Paul Celan into Spanish—and translating Spanish poetry and prose into German (Pau 2010, 125). She became an important intellectual voice in later postwar Germany (Braun 2020a, 3).<sup>54</sup> Her work, however, did not always actually receive the recognition it deserved. *Rose aus Asche* (Palm 1958), a compilation of Spanish and Spanish-American poems, does not explicitly acknowledge Domin, even though she worked on the translations with her husband Erwin Walter Palm during their years in exile.

Nelly Sachs, a Berlin-born Jewish poet who left Germany at the last possible moment in 1940 for Sweden, where she lived until the end of her life, probably has the greatest international renown of the poets mentioned in this article, due to her having received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1966 (Radtke 2020, 1). Nevertheless, her poetry did not receive a lot of

53 “Deine einfachen / deine unverfälschten Worte / ganz wie meine / einfachen Worte / riechen nach Mensch” (Domin 1987, 267).

54 One of her important publications is the anthology *Nachkrieg und Unfrieden* (1970), in which she discusses the current societal role of poetry and advocates for poetry as a declaration of freedom: “[J]edes Gedicht ist ein Aufruf gegen Verfügbarkeit, gegen Mitfunktionieren” (Domin 1970, 166) (Each poem is an appeal against being available, against obeying). Domin influenced the reception of Hispanic literature in Germany, publishing a selection of Spanish short stories, *Spanien erzählt* (Domin 1963), that contains texts from authors such as Ana María Matute, Max Aub, and Miguel de Unamuno.

attention in West Germany until the late fifties and sixties (Erdle 2020, 4), which is paradigmatic of the difficult relation between the early FRG and exiled Jewish poets. Her books *In den Wohnungen des Todes* (*In the Habitations of Death*, 1946) and *Sternverdunkelung* (*Eclipse of the Stars*, 1949) were published in East Berlin. While poets such as Bachmann, Kaschnitz, and Domin were interested in her work and Enzensberger published some of her poems, there was never an official greeting or discussion of her work within Group 47 (Seifert 2024, 210).

What stands out about *In den Wohnungen des Todes* is its variety of voices. We hear the voice of a dead child (“Ein totes Kind spricht”, Sachs 1961, 13) and in the section “Choirs after Midnight” (Chöre nach Mitternacht) we hear the dead, the wanderers, and the unborn children speak, or, as is the case with the orphans, accuse the world (“O Welt / wir klagen dich an!”, Sachs 1961, 54–55). According to Elaine Martin’s study on the “poetics of silence” in Sachs’s poetry, the poems are dominated by the dilemma to find the appropriate words—in a language destroyed by the Nazis—to describe the never-before-seen horrors of the Shoah (Martin 2011, 183–184).<sup>55</sup> The lyrical “I” frequently reminds humanity that it has not listened properly: “It has been for a long while that we forgot how to listen”.<sup>56</sup> The poems make references to Israel and to religious figures such as Job, metaphorically connecting suffering, its overcoming, and redemption (Erdle 2020, 2). While murdered children frequently appear in Sachs’s postwar poetry, the voice of the poetical “us” seems to belong to mothers (appearing five times; Sachs 1961, 118–119), who in this case are explicitly *not* the ones responsible for birthing future soldiers, as they are in the ideology of the National Socialist regime. In Sachs’s poem, the mothers are those who utter the melody of peace (“Friedensmelodie”, Sachs 1961, 119).

55 “[T]he suffering evades language and thus language necessarily betrays the experience of the victims. Simultaneously, however, as her poems gravitate towards silence, the poetic voice attempts to extricate itself from this dilemma, to defend itself against the threat of disintegration and to preserve the value of words with full knowledge of their impotence” (Martin 2011, 184).

56 “Lange haben wir das Lauschen verlernt” (Sachs 1961, 18–19).

## 4 Conclusion

The semantics of silence within postwar poetry in Spain and Germany can stand for the silence of the dead and the exiled. The poetological debates of the time show the relevance of the so-called “topos of the unspeakable” for postwar societies deeply impacted by the consequences of war and the Shoah. In the German poems, the silence of the postwar society, avoidant of speaking about the past, is present, and the lyrical “I” seems to anticipate the dangers of this collectively evasive behavior. Poetry breaks the silence about the horrors of the war. Surrounded by the echoes of the war, the poems long for a harmonious music of the future, which metaphorically represents the balance between the members of society or the nations.

Within Spanish poetry, the lyrical “I” breaks the silence of women held forcefully in the domestic realm by patriarchy. Some poems seem to work through the history of inequality, evoking a joint transhistorical female voice. In the German early postwar poems, explicitly female poetic voices are not highlighted. Nevertheless, by using the masculine expression “Dichter” for themselves, poets like Kaschnitz take a stand. And this is also what we see within the literary fields in both countries: women were writing, they were reading in public, and they were being published. In cases such as Carmen Conde in Germany and Hilde Domin in Spain, they also established transnational dialogues.

In both countries, aesthetically noteworthy women writers were highly productive. Yet recognition of them and their inclusion in anthologies and within literary history have often not taken place. This amounts to a systematic silencing of women and their intellectual contribution to postwar European literature—perpetuated even by their closest collaborators and partners. It is only by explicitly taking a look at the poetry written by women that we can appreciate the full range of literary discourse and the transnational ties between Germany and Spain during these countries’ postwar periods.

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