

A tide of experience for the generation of "non-writers"

New group of young authors is starting to make waves

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One day last June, while Agustín Fernández Mallo and other up-and-coming young writers were attending a seminar in Seville and heatedly discussing the ins and outs of "the application of new technologies in literature," a journalist got up from her chair and said: "Now look... you guys can digress all you like, but someone like myself will come along, stick a label on you and you'll damn well have to put up with it."

Two weeks later, the journalist's prophecy came true.

The label "generation Nocilla" (a chocolate spread popular with children) may have certain echoes of Proust's memory-awakening Madeleine in *Remembrance of Things Past*, but it was actually derived from a song by the rock band Siniestro Total which inspired novelist and poet Fernández Mallo to pen *Nocilla dream*, the first part of a trilogy entitled "the Nocilla project."

What happened subsequently — and curiously the main character in Fernández Mallo's tale refers to the "strange case, more than a phenomenon" of contemporary Spanish fiction — is that *Nocilla dream* sold an impressive 11,000 copies.

Published by the very small publishing house Candaya, Fernández Mallo's startling collection of fragments and blurred events which actively seeks to subvert established literary convention was an instant success.

The book's title would then provide a catchy label for a group of writers — all born between 1960 and 1976 — who sought artistic freedom and to put some distance between themselves and their predecessors. The Nocilla generation boasts the likes of Jorge Carrión, Vicente Luis Mora, Eloy Fernández Porta and Juan Francisco Ferré.

Thanks to the seductive literary qualities of *Nocilla dream*, which is very much a product of its time, Fernández Mallo made

a recent trip from his Majorca home to Madrid to be presented as the new star of the Alfaguara publishing house. The author explains how, in his extra-literary life on the Balearic isle, he works 50 hours a week as a physicist designing radiotherapy treatments to cure cancer.

The second volume of the trilogy, *Nocilla experience*, (the final installment, *Nocilla lab*, is already complete too) has cata-

less horizontal group," says the writer, who was born in the Galician city of A Coruña in 1967.

His second novel has many of the same characteristics as the first. *Nocilla experience* constitutes what has been described as "zapping literature" — zapping is the term Spaniards use for flicking from TV channel to TV channel.

The latter consists of characters who come and go, often at random; the appropriation of texts from other sources in the name of the "noble art of recycling;" descriptions of never-visited places ("I don't like traveling if it doesn't have a purpose") which serve as emotional metaphors; and stories which begin in quite a normal fashion but end in a more obscure way.

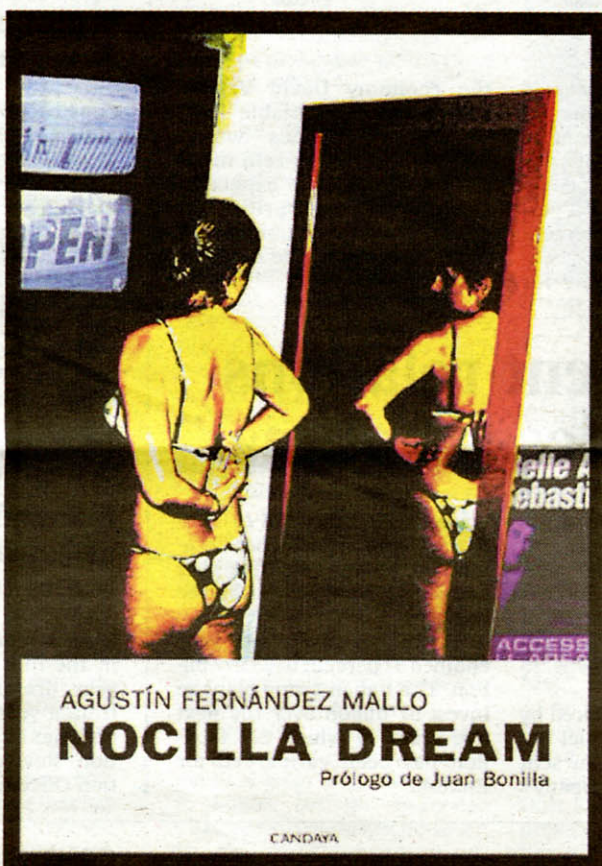
"I don't have some Freudian complex about endings," explains the writer. "I've been accused of being facile for leaving my stories open-ended. It's a technique I use as a poetic halo. 'Your novel is experimental' they tell me. It's what comes out. Being experimental mean producing a great long novel. Perhaps it comes to me out of poetry. There's a thread

which comes from my status as a poet. And forgive me if I sound pretentious."

And from his true vocation as a poet, a new publication has hit the bookshelves: *Carne de Pixel* (DVD) which earned Fernández Mallo the City of Burgos Prize. This collection of verse presents his "post-poetic poetry" — the concept with which he made waves in poetic circles at the beginning of the noughties — and an apology for his own scientific background as a vehicle for lyricism.

And in *Carne de Pixel* the author keeps one foot in the poetic camp, separate from the novel, as "the spectator of a strange film." For that same reason, he lives in Majorca, far from the hubbub of the publishing world, and sticks with his job at the hospital.

"The life of a non-writer suits me. Going to work, shopping, watching TV... In all that there's a tide of experience in which something appears and I write about it."



The first part of Fernández Mello's *Nocilla* trilogy.

The "Nocilla" label has echoes of Proust but actually comes from a rock band

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pulted Fernández Mallo from a small publisher to a much larger one. Tellingly, the writer compares this meteoric leap to "when [Spanish indie rock band] Los Planetas were signed in the 1990s by the multinational RCA."

"I wouldn't have called the group 'Nocilla' out of choice," explains Fernández Mallo. "We share more or less the same tastes because we live in the same world. Call it generation, or better, a network, a more or



Agustín Fernández Mello, in Madrid. / SAMUEL SÁNCHEZ

Mutant pen pushers

EL PAÍS, Madrid

There is no shortage of labels for the diffuse group of Spanish writers who seek to subvert what they describe as the "stiff, 19th-century writing" of the last 20 years. The so-called "Nocilla" writers have also been described as exponents of "after-pop literature," and even "the mutant generation."

In his essay *Afterpop*, Eloy Fernández Porta applies literary tools to compare the ethical and aesthetic differences, for example, between *The Simpsons* and *Family Guy*.

"There's a network of relationships between many of us," says the essayist who was recently snapped up by publishers Alfaguara. "We have common ideas and experiences and independent publishers. We realized that it was not enough to publish books. We needed to create the right receptiveness."

In keeping with this thirst for literary change, Julio Ortega and Juan Francisco Ferré have edited a new anthology entitled

Mutantes. Narrativa española de última generación (Mutants. New-generation Spanish narrative). Its 20 or so new-wave authors include Fernández Porta, Fernández Mallo, Vicente Luis Mora and Jorge Carrión. Ferré also contributes a text of his own in which he defines the new wave of pen pushers: "a generation and a half of writers trained in images and the media, and in globalization, and in the overheating of information and the global cooling of the structures governing human relationships."

According to Vicente Luis Mora, who runs the Cervantes Institute (the standard bearer of Spanish language and culture) in Albuquerque, New Mexico, the blog is an important phenomenon shared by "mutants." In his essay entitled *En la luz nueva* (In the new light), Mora brings together texts posted on his blog. What's more he's happy with the label "mutants" which he considers more literary than its rather low-brow chocolate-spread alternative.