

CENTENARY RESTAURANTS OF MADRID

Here's the fifth restaurant in our Centenary Restaurants series

BY KAREN BLYTHE

LOS GALAYOS



OPEN EVERYDAY FROM 12:00 NOON TO 12:00 MIDNIGHT
 CALLE MAYOR 1 CORNER CALLE BOTONERA 5, 28012 MADRID
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World War I was over. But hard on the heels of this man-made catastrophe was another calamity: the global economic depression. Spain didn't join the war but wasn't spared its economic aftermath battering the already battered Spanish economy, nor its (fascist) political offshoot.

Fortunately, in those calamitous times there was one bright and inspiring spot in the Spanish firmament, the Generation of '27 (*Generación del '27*) which was a literary movement with political undertones in gestation between 1923 and 1927. Personified by an influential group of poets the *Generación* was born in 1927 when it first met formally in Seville to commemorate the 300th death anniversary of baroque poet Luis de Góngora.

The Generation of '27 wasn't homogenous. But though there was no definitive literary style to it it was held together by a common purpose that, at first, aimed to bridge the gap between Spanish classical poetry and popular folklore. (Rafael Alberti said with a touch of irony: "[Somos] *vanguardistas de la tradición*.".) Soon, however, the Generation of '27 was

aiming to connect Spanish classical literary tradition with European avant-garde thereby converting itself into a movement for modernization in a country mired in conservatism when not shackled by powerful reactionary forces.

The Generation of '27 evolved from pure poetry ("*eliminar del poema toda ganga, todo elemento no poético*") to become influenced by Surrealism. Thus its frequent use of visionary images, free verses and the so-called "impure poetry".

Not that all of the Generation of '27 were poets. Some were surrealist painters (e.g., Salvador Dalí), bullfighters (e.g., Ignacio Sánchez Mejías), composers (e.g., Ernesto and Rodolfo Halffter), etc. Practically all of them were pluri-employed.

Not all were from Madrid, either. There were important nuclei in Seville, Catalonia, Malaga and Tenerife. Some weren't even Spaniards: Chilean poet Pablo Neruda, Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges, Franco-Spanish painter Francis Picabia... In spite of this the Generation of '27 was remarkably cohesive.

The surrealists were the majority,

including Nobel laureate Vicente Aleixandre; Luis Cernuda (*Los Placeres Prohibidos*) whose homosexuality was liberated by a Surrealism that aimed to revolutionize human experience and free people from false rationality and restrictive customs; Alberti (*Sobre los Angeles*); Lorca (*Llanto por Ignacio Sánchez Mejías*, *Sonetos del Amor Oscuro* and *Poeta en Nueva York*); Neruda (*Residencia en la Tierra*) and José María Hinojosa (*La Flor de California*).

Speaking restrictively the Generation of '27 would number just ten: Pedro Salinas (1891-1961); Jorge Guillén (1893-1984); Gerardo Diego (1896-1987); Federico García Lorca (1898-1936); Dámaso Alonso (1898-1990); Vicente Aleixandre (1898-1984); Emilio Prados (1899-1902); Luis Cernuda (1902-1963); Rafael Alberti (1902-1999); and Manuel Altolaguirre (1905-1959).

But many others were actively involved with this core. The Generation of '27, then, was a constellation of intellectual, literary and artistic luminaries, rather than a sharply demarcated group. The *Generación* first illuminated the foreboding Spanish skies in the 1920s and had not stopped since, even after it split.

On 29 April 1936 Luis Cernuda was feted to a banquet by his co-Generations at Los Galayos on the publication of his *La Realidad y el Deseo*. Among those present were Federico García Lorca, Pedro Salinas, Rafael Alberti, Pablo Neruda, Miguel Hernández, José Bergamín, Manuel Altolaguirre, María Teresa de León and Concha Méndes.

Lorca's eulogy at the dinner was impassioned: "*Yo vengo para saludar con reverencia y entusiasmo a mi capilla de poetas, quizás la mayor capilla poética de Europa y lanzar un vitor de fe en honor del gran poeta del misterio, delicadísimo poeta Luis Cernuda, para quien hay que hacer otra vez, desde el siglo XVII, la palabra divina.*"

But it was a most inauspicious time for the Generation of '27. And Lorca's words might as well be its epitaph. At the time of the banquet it was an open secret that the military was planning a coup d'état to bring down the Second Republic which was proclaimed in April 1931 after the Republicans won the municipal elections, driving



FIRST FORMAL MEETING OF THE GENERATION OF '27 IN THE ATENEO DE SEVILLA, DECEMBER 1927. FROM THE LEFT, RAFAEL ALBERTI, FEDERICO GARCÍA LORCA, JUAN CHABÁS, MAURICIO BACARISSE, JORGE GUILLEN, JOSÉ BERGAMÍN, DÁMASO ALONSO, GERARDO DIEGO AND LUIS CERNUDE

Alfonso XIII into exile. The Frente Popular, backed by the leftists, would lose to the conservatives in the elections of 1933 but would regain power in the February 1936 elections.

Sadly, what was going to be "merely" a coup d'état erupted into a raging Civil War on 17 July 1936 and would last until 1939, with one million dead. It was the horrific "dress rehearsal" for World War II, the total war that, for the first time in history, targeted the civilian population as an integral part of warfare strategy.

The picture taken at the banquet in Los Galayos would be the last of the Generation of '27. Lorca was executed by the Falange Española. Miguel Hernández, who wrote about his dreadful experience in jail, died incarcerated. Alberti, Bergamín, Cernuda, Salinas, Leon Felipe, Juan Ramón Jiménez, and others were forced into exile. Some remained in Spain and tried to simply ignore the new regime. Still a few others cohabited with the regime; Diego openly supported it.

The death of Lorca signalled the demise of the Generation of '27 although it wasn't the cause by far. The Generation of avant-gardes simply couldn't survive as a coherent group in the ruthlessly oppressive Franco regime. Individually, however, they continued to write. Francisco Ayala who died at age 103 (1906-2009) published his *Miradas Sobre el Presente* in 2006.

Los Galayos was founded in 1894 as Casa Rojo by the Rojo family. Don Miguel Grande took over the Rojos and re-christened it Los Galayos. From its humble beginnings as a taverna where tapas were the reigning dish, Los Galayos would gradually evolve into a landmark restaurant. It says much for the centenary Los Galayos that the likes of the Generation of '27 would choose it to celebrate its milestones, and King Alfonso XIII, who was anathema to the spirit of the Generation of '27, would be a habitué. There is no ideological divide at Los Galayos. Only good food and an ambience you'd love to bask in. A place where the diner becomes privy to Madrid history.

Los Galayos has a beautiful bar and three dining rooms: Salón Ávila, Salón Bodeguilla, and Salón Duque. For exquisite traditional Castilian cuisine it's the place to go. **CB**



GENERATION OF '27 AT LOS GALAYOS ON 29 APRIL 1936: THE CORE OF THE GENERATION OF '27 MET FOR THE LAST TIME, AT LOS GALAYOS