Introduction

A Life of Commitment

Manuel Sacristán Luzón was born in Madrid, on 5 September 1925, the first of three children in a middle-class family. In November 1936, a few months after the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, the family moved to Valencia, where it remained until February 1937. This was followed by a stay of similar duration in the Italian town of Rivarigoso, before the family settled in Nice, where it would remain until August 1939 (the Civil War having ended just a few months earlier, with the victory of Franco’s quasi-fascist forces). From Nice, the Sacristán family returned to Spain and settled in Barcelona, which would remain Manuel Sacristán’s permanent home for the rest of his life.

After completing his secondary schooling in Barcelona, Sacristán began studying law at the University of Barcelona in 1944. In his third year at university, however, he switched to philosophy, though he would later complete his law degree as well. While a student at the university, Sacristán left the Spanish Falange’s youth organisation, which he had joined in 1940. (His father had for a time served as the administrator for the youth organisation). His rupture with the Falange, an organisation originally established as a fascist movement, was apparently prompted in large part by the Falangists’ proclivity for violence and, in particular, their brutal treatment of catalanista students (those students who defended the Catalan cultural identity). In 1949, renal tuberculosis required Sacristán to undergo a nephrectomy, after which he

---

1 In Spain and other Spanish-speaking countries, one’s full name includes the first surname of both of one’s parents (each of whom likewise has two last names), with the father’s surname usually appearing first. However, in most contexts one only uses the first surname, although both last names are sometimes used when the first surname is unusually common. Hence, the author of the texts translated in the present volume is generally referred to as Manuel Sacristán, and this is how I shall be referring to him hereafter.


3 Sempere and Capella both date Sacristán’s break with Falangism to 1945–6; Sempere 1987, p. 6; Capella 2004, p. 29, n. 16; yet Fernández Buey contends that it may have occurred as late as 1947; Fernández Buey 2003, p. 31.

4 Fernández Buey 2003, p. 31.
would live with only one kidney. That same year Sacristán was instrumental in the creation of Laye, a cultural journal that attracted some of Barcelona’s best writers, and one to which Sacristán would himself contribute numerous articles and book reviews before it ceased publication five years later.

In 1954, Sacristán won a merit-based scholarship to undertake postgraduate study in formal logic at the Institut für mathematische Logik und Grundlagenforschung in Münster. The nearly two years that Sacristán spent in Germany proved decisive for his future intellectual and political development. To begin with, Sacristán’s stay in Germany enabled him to master the German language – from which he would later translate many works into Spanish – and deepen his familiarity with German culture, for which he felt a strong affinity. In addition, Sacristán’s training in Münster would make him one of the very few Spanish philosophers competent in symbolic logic, a branch of philosophy hardly studied in Spain at the time. (The training in the philosophy of science that he received at the Institut also set him apart from most other Spanish philosophers in the late 1950s). Finally, and most importantly, it was during his time in Germany that Sacristán first familiarised himself with the works of Marx and Engels, and came into contact with German communist workers and, through them, the Spanish Communist Party, whose leadership kept its headquarters in Paris at that time. In short, it was in Germany that Sacristán embraced Marxism and first established contact with the organised labour movement, to which he would remain committed for the rest of his life.

Despite being offered a position at the Institut in Münster upon completing his programme of study, Sacristán chose to return to Spain, where, in 1956, he immediately began teaching classes in philosophy and logic as a non-permanent faculty member at the University of Barcelona. By this time (late 1956) Sacristán was a member of the Spanish Communist Party (PCE). He also belonged to the Central Committee of the Unified Socialist Party of Catalonia (PSUC), a national-regional Communist party formed independently of the Spanish Communist Party but closely affiliated with it. This rapid ascent within Spain’s main Communist organisations – both of them illegal.

---

5 Fernández Buey and Capella, Sacristán’s two most prominent disciples, both stress that this experience would have a profound impact on Sacristán’s attitude toward existence; Fernández Buey 2003, p. 32; Capella 2004, p. 33.

6 See Sacristán 2004c, pp. 99–100, for Sacristán’s own description of his Germanophilia in regard to literature, philosophy, music, and culture generally.

7 One of the people Sacristán met in Münster was Ulrike Meinhof, some of whose work he would translate and analyse two decades later, after Meinhof’s death; see Sacristán 1985b.