

Creative component

Levant

The bus was just arriving in Medina when I woke up. Everyone started packing and when the bus arrived at the station, they all left. I was now alone in this large countryside bus. It makes sense, Alcala de los Gazules is a small village but I still wondered how I had managed to end up here. I chose the cheapest way to travel and people who lived or worked in town probably preferred to travel comfortably by car, instead of this crappy box with wheels. The beginning of this journey was not very interesting, I slept soundly most of the trip here. I was hoping it would change, it was enough that they sent me to a town in the middle of nowhere. I was going to make sure it was not boring. After another 30 minutes, I finally saw the black bull statue at the entrance of the village, a little white town in the province of Cadiz. Gathering my things, I went to the front of the bus to get out as soon as possible.

‘Alcala’ shouted the driver.

Puzzled, I looked at him, took a quick glance at the back confirming I was the only one left.

‘Sorry, it’s a habit. We usually go to the beach after this stop. Hope we can do that again soon, my job is quite depressing without this part’.

I wondered for an instant only why they stopped the beach trips but decided to let it go.

‘Thank you’ I said while stepping out as soon as the wheels stopped.

The wind was strong, felt alive compared to the bus aeration on the whole trip here. It still felt like a punishment but this little town was pretty. All those houses coated in whitewash with a brick red rooftop terrace, the patterned paving on the main pedestrian street which was referred to as ‘el Paseo’ by people, and the church standing on top of the hill were all particularities of the Andalusian white villages. It was stunning.

Whitewashing was predominantly used during the pandemic plague waves in the 14th century and kept because of its protection against heat but it first appeared when Andalousia became the center of Al-Andalus.

History helped explain the culture and architecture in this region and why it was so different from where I was from. It also made clearer the separation Andalousia felt from Spain and the impact of nature in the way people lived.

The wonder soon disappeared when I started going towards my apartment and saw the people inhabiting this place. I suddenly felt out of place. Most of them were old, the others dressed with white polos and grey pants or flower dresses like they never visited Sevilla or Madrid. All eyes were on me, the stranger. I was a stranger but the fact that they knew that made me uncomfortable, it was like entering a church when the service already started.

I had chosen an apartment for rent that looked big enough, clean enough and without a roommate. That led me to have a little house 5 minutes from the town center facing east, sunrays coming from the windows in the morning. The patio where I installed the only plastic

chair table I could find in the house was filled with flowers and plants. The red-tiled roof highlighted the white walls. There were massive cacti, taking over the place, and as beautiful as they were, it was annoying me. They kept falling because of the wind and picking them up was no easy task.

The Levant is an easterly wind that blows in the western Mediterranean sea. The winds are well known for making the temperatures rise as the wind blows across the desert interior of the province. The Levanter winds can occur at any time in the year, but are most common from May to October.¹

Either way the house was mostly for sleeping, I was taking my coffee early and leaving to go to Los Arconocales Natural Park as I was supposed to come back to Madrid with a fully written thesis.

In this little town, everyone knew each other, the doors were always open after 4pm. Everyone could see Pepe taking a nap on his sofa in front of the last episode of a telenovela watched by his wife while cooking dinner. Children would go to school in the morning and meet their friends in the afternoon. Hanging at the park or going to the pool when they could. I was quite used to hot summers but it felt different here, it started earlier in the year and everyone adapted their way of living to the climate (they had to).

The first few weeks of my stay were filled with expeditions and adventure, when I was not in the forest exploring or taking notes, I talked to workers who were willing to give me information. A man in particular was very welcoming, he was in his thirties even though his work and the sun made him look like he was 50 years old. His group met every morning of their work days at the bar 'La Parada' for coffee. One day, I went too, hoping to follow them through their day and see the traditional way of debarking. When entering the bar, I noticed the smell of coffee mixed with strong alcohol and cigarette smoke filling the room. Black and white photographs of different town buildings were hanging on the walls, the bar looked old but was well kept.

'Mate, you came !' Juan had noticed me, giving a tap on the stool beside him. 'Come on, serve him the same, it's on me'

The waitress looked at me and made the coffee without saying anything.

'How are you finding Alcala ?'

'First time in the white villages'

'Ayy he's a bourgeois studying the hicks.' laughed Juan's colleague

'Leave it, you couldn't even finish high school.' replied Juan 'Come on, drink your coffee, we're leaving in 5.'

After a sip, I realized the coffee was mixed with whisky.

'You're gonna see the real deal today'

Few of them agreed.

'This job, do you get tired of it ?'

'Yeah but it puts food on the table and our kids can leave.'

'I would have loved to grow up around nature.' Now, I can study it.

¹ Wikipedia contributors. "Levant (Wind)." *Wikipedia*, 24 Sept. 2026, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Levant_(wind)#.

‘You’ll not be so happy in 3 weeks when you can’t even go outside while the sun is up’

‘And the critter is only becoming stronger, we’re in for a party’ intervened another guy who was not even in the group but seemed to be at the bar from opening to closing everyday. Everyone started laughing at this comment and I smiled, even though I did not understand a word he said.

‘They’re rough but they are actually quite nice when you know them’ the waitress slid a glass of water towards me, smiling.

‘Stop always trying to fuck the newest guy in town Maria, come on we’ll be late’

‘There is a party in the park in two weeks if you want to come.’ Said another worker, more withdrawn from what I observed, looking at me intensively.

‘Watch out for the lamp post, I’m not picking you up this time’

Breakfast was done, in the van they started chatting among themselves on the way to the woods. After a few hours of seeing them work, I started taking notes and wandering around. The cork oak trees were standing tall, leaving sunrays shine through the leaves. Kites and vultures flying around the Picacho but no trace of deer yet.

It felt like I was gone for a few minutes but, when I started to go back, the camp was gone, the workers, not here and the trees still had their bark on. This did not feel right, I could not have gone this far. As I walked towards the road, going down from the hillside, the sun started to disappear, shadows were growing, the psithurism of the wind flowing through the leaves. My legs started accelerating to find the road before dark when I felt in my pocket the compass left here for my environmental studies. My geography professor gave it to me in my first year of uni as a welcome gift for my entry into the academic society. It was a vintage gold-plated pocket compass, very light and easy to read. That was before looking at it, with hope of finally finding my way and seeing the compass needle turn frantically in every direction, stopping at time towards the east, and turning again. I stood there looking at it in case it would stop but it never did. When I took the decision to begin the search again, my eyes drifted to the side and stopped at the metal barrier on the side of the road. It appeared out of nowhere but just the view of it made me happy. Now, I just had to wait for a car to pass and stop to give me a lift.

The next few days felt like time had no consequence, it passed quickly but I was trapped in them, body feeling unresponsive. A mechanism was installed, I was going to the forest, returning home, eating, sleeping. One day, I had a very bad night of sleep, the house trapped the heat from the day, so at night, the walls were still hot. The wind also made it hard, hard, it was blowing hard from late afternoon to sunrise. I had abandoned picking up the cactus. After a good Garcia Millan gazpacho and a coffee, I started to feel better and decided to go to the concert at the park that night. A little party and talking to people my age should be good. I had to rearrange my notes on my computer before tonight and the sun was still on my side of the terrace so I had to take advantage of it before it was too hot outside. The plastic chair was still cool from the night. The notes I’ve been taking seemed scrambled, my eyes had difficulty reading my writings, the paper, almost too thin to be handled, disintegrating. Hands tingling, sun making colors pop on a dazzling light. A flash appeared, a study around 19th century environmental laws in Spain.

September 1879 - Levant Act - Andalusian Criminal Procedure

Acquittal on ground of insanity.

The special verdict required by Levant Act 1879 shall be that the accused is not guilty by reason of insanity. Applicable from may to october if Levant at the time of the crime.

After work, I took a nap on the sofa, door open, lucky to be in a dead end as I hoped no one saw me. I woke up suddenly, damped from my sweat. My body still felt detached, like I was watching myself. I showered before feeling ready to attack the night. The convenience store was on the other end of the park so instead of crossing it, I took a little detour, through the narrow streets of paved grey sidewalk. I had to buy a beer before going. The cashier handed me a Mahou. All conversations had stopped when I entered. Sighing, I walked away chugging it. The town square was crowded, everyone was there, children were playing in the children's park while everyone started their drinks, waiting for the music to start. A bar was installed in a corner, I went there standing at the counter, tapping my fingers on the coaster. All I was seeing were eyes stopping when looking at me, confused, wondering, others amused and smiling at me, inviting me into their group. I knew a few people but I did not make any friends in the weeks I've been here. It was not easy to make relations in a new city, particularly in one so small. They all had their habits and I was not yet a part of that, if even I could be.

My head was pounding, a hot flash got through my entire body and disappeared when

‘I thought you left’

The waitress from La Parada was here, serving me a glass of rum and coke.

‘They told me you left in the middle of the work day and that they didn't see you in the woods for the next weeks’

‘That's weird, I have been there a few times since then. You work here now ?’

‘No I just needed the extra hours. Plus I couldn't go to the beach.’

‘I went to the beach on Tuesday but it was a bad day I think. Too much wind’

‘Yeah this month is not a good time for beach days.’

‘Because of the Levant right ?’

The music started, loud and saturated. No hate for the city but they should really get some better subwoofer. The soundwaves filled the park. We couldn't hear each other anymore and she had to keep working. I stood at a good distance from the stage, seeing people go on with their lives. People were happy, the band, Breed 77 was kind of a big deal. Flamenco mixed with metal. They were playing ‘Viento de Levante’ when people started to sing along. A gust of wind blew the sand in the air, it looked like it was levitating for a moment.

I am a stranger and they know it. The wind makes birds fly lower, their dance is quiet, strange for the human eye. They too, know I am not from here, I look at them to study, I look at people to study, maybe that is why they think I am strange. The moon does rise in the east. Looking at the world through an academic eye, seeing cultural significance in everything people do or say. That is when I saw their eyes, all looking towards me, the music stopping while they were still playing and singing. Everyone had their back turned, the children were not playing anymore, the ball got to the ground in a big racket.

I opened my eyes slowly, feeling like they were going to fall if opened too quickly. The first blurry thing I saw was red, almost dark brownish. I could feel the uncomfortable stillness, my clothes weighing down on my body. I regained all my mental capacities while getting up and wished I had not. I was numb from sleeping on this metal bench. My clothes were stained with blood, mine or others I could not know, body aching but no sharp pain. The sun will rise and I'll see more clearly. Lightly. I could not remember how I got to this place, behind the gymnasium. I took a minute to gather myself. No sound, no wind, no sun. A quiet flow through the pavement.

According to common superstition, saying the wind's name will summon its rage.

What did I do...

June 17

They knew nature better than I ever will. Still, I am the one writing.

Reflective essay

The short story 'Levant' is based on real-life stories from south of Spain and cultural myths and beliefs. I wanted to write about madness while playing with an unreliable character. The wind of Levant is believed to have a very real impact on people's minds because of the atmospheric changes happening from Poniente wind to Levant wind.² Playing around these scientific facts and cultural myths was my chance to write this unreliable narrator. I also wanted my character to be a stranger, unfamiliar with the culture but also in a very different socioeconomic class. The end point was to write about how studies are done and by who. He is a white privileged man from the capital of the country studying the poorer region of Spain, he is arrogant and attached to facts. Meanwhile, people from the region are used to natural elements around them, their work or the lack of money for education. This is shown with descriptions and interactions with nature.

I think the genre that would describe it most accurately is psychological thriller as I am using both psychological fiction with the development of my main character and thriller / horror with mysteries and paranoia. I also tried to make the reader confused by what is happening and not completely understand by leaving narrative gaps.

It also uses writing techniques from the modernist movement such as interior monologues and symbolism. For some parts, I also used expressionist and surrealist inspirations with themes like alienation or madness or the unconscious.

The first part of my short story gives context, the narrator discovers the village through an academic view. I wanted every description to be very factual, down to earth to create an impression of the narrator as someone who takes only facts and dismisses the rest. He takes information to study them. I inserted little citations of books, wikipedia pages or anything he could have seen and that would reappear in his head in those moments, in descriptive passages. It serves as a way to enter in the narrator's mind but also interrupts the narration which adds tension and realism.

With dialogue, my thoughts were to create characters who live in this village and understand it to create contrast. I tried to add cryptic elements and characterization through dialogue inspired by *Hills Like White Elephants* by Ernest Hemingway.³ At one point, someone mentions 'the critter' to talk about the Levant wind, the narrator and the reader both do not understand this comment. Dialogue is not really my favorite thing to do so at first it was full of info dump but we talked about it in class and I tried to rectify it by making it more cryptic without losing characterization.

The cactus and the compass have both strong symbolic value in the short story. At first, the cactus keeps falling and the narrator picks it up but towards the end, we learn he does not do

² Gallego, Sergio. "Características Del Viento De Levante Y Poniente En España." *Meteorología En Red*, 14 Mar. 2025, www.meteorologiaenred.com/el-viento-de-levante-y-de-poniente.html.

³ Hemingway, Ernest. *Hills Like White Elephants: Short Story*. 1927.

it anymore. The cactus then reflects the mental health of the main character in front of the same natural element, the wind. As for the compass, the symbolic is already there, his moral compass is shifting as he goes crazier. This process is used in modernist short stories such as *The Daughters of the Late Colonel* by Katherine Mansfield⁴ with the Buddha.

Surrealism uses the unconscious to create irrational work and thought processes. The unconscious in the short story is written with different writing techniques, longer sentences, repetition, different tense sometimes. It is also the gaps in the story, the narrator leaves big narrative holes. The unconscious is not factual, it leaves emotions and sensations written down. I tried to make the unconscious first appearance in the woods and give it more and more place throughout the story. This change was quite difficult to make and I believe it could be more progressive and noticeable.

Towards the end, it is more or less a stream of consciousness, from going crazy at the concert to the next morning. Sentences are mixed, thoughts that should not be here interrupt the plot, etc. The final line is a journal entry, inspired by gothic fiction literature like *Dracula* by Bram Stoker or *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley. It also gives the reader a hint on how to interpret this story even though each person can and will interpret as they want. It was important for me to address socioeconomic and cultural issues in the academic field.

⁴ Mansfield, Katherine. *The Daughters of the Late Colonel: Short Story*, 1920.

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