The Spanish Civil War in the Works of
Nancy Cunard, Martha Gellhorn, and
Sylvia Townsend Warner

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I, Maria Mercedes Aguirre Alastuey, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.
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Abstract:

This work explores the impact of the Spanish Civil War in Anglo-American literature, focusing on the work of three woman writers, Martha Gellhorn, Sylvia Townsend Warner and Nancy Cunard, who travelled to Spain during the war as reporters and volunteers. The war in Spain generated an extraordinary cultural response from its outbreak in 1936. Poets, novelists, filmmakers, painters, and photographers from all over the world were inspired by the conflict, which many saw as a fight between democracy and fascism. Cunard, Gellhorn, and Warner sided with the democratically-elected Republican government, and warned about the effects that the triumph of fascism in Spain could have in the rest of the world.

This dissertation studies several works that have been generally overlooked by scholarly criticism, such as Sylvia Townsend Warner’s After the Death of Don Juan, Martha Gellhorn’s articles for the American magazine Collier’s Weekly, and the poetry of Nancy Cunard, among other texts. It explores Cunard’s work as a poet and a publisher in the context of the theories of socialist internationalism that are at the core of the spirit of transnational solidarity that motivated many writers to travel to Spain. It then provides an analysis of Warner’s historical novel considering her vision of the war as motivated by class inequality and by conflicting notions of tradition and progress. Finally, it looks at the journalistic work of Martha Gellhorn and the evolution of the subgenre of reportage during the war in Spain. Their contributions to the literature of the Spanish war complement the works of authors traditionally considered as canonical such as Orwell, Hemingway, Auden and Spender, and provide new valuable perspectives that throw light on the different meanings of the conflict in the literature of the 1930s.
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Introduction

The cultural response generated by the Spanish Civil War was extraordinary. Despite its domestic nature, the war caught the imagination of artists of all nationalities, becoming a symbol of the growing connection between literature and politics in the decade of the 1930s, and serving as a catalyst for discussions about the social responsibility of the writer. Writers, poets, filmmakers, painters, and photographers from all continents were inspired by the conflict, in which many saw the ultimate fight between democracy and Fascism. The vast majority of writers and artists sided with the democratically-elected Republican government, warning about the effects that the triumph of Fascism in Spain could have in the rest of the world.

Because a large number of international writers and artists became involved in the war almost from its onset, the conflict soon acquired a ‘literary’ dimension. The war in Spain became an unavoidable topic of discussion, and one in which writers were obliged to state their position, as Nancy Cunard demanded in her well-known 1937 questionnaire *Authors Take Sides on the Spanish War*¹. But in addition to the unprecedented political implication of writers and artists in the conflict, the war itself soon became a literary subject, with many of the works now regarded as classics of the genre, such as George Orwell’s *Homage to Catalonia*² or W.H. Auden’s poem ‘Spain’³, appearing while the conflict was still on-going. Of the works published during the war years, Stephen Spender and John Lehmann’s anthology of Spanish Civil War poetry in English, *Poems for Spain* (1939), published by the Hogarth Press, can arguably be considered the most influential in establishing the parameters through which the literature of the Spanish conflict would be analysed for decades. Spender’s introduction examines the importance of poets and poetry in the Spanish civil war, and crucially establishes the connection between poets and the members of the International Brigades. In his introduction,

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¹ Nancy Cunard, ed., *Authors Take Sides* (London: *Left Review*, 1937). The booklet, containing the answers of 148 contributors, was sold separately from the magazine at a price of six pence.
³ W.H. Auden, ‘Spain’ (London: Faber and Faber, 1937)
Spender voices the belief of many of his contemporaries who felt that the only way they had to defend their democratic ideals was to take arms: “Where the issues are so clear and direct in a world which has accustomed us to confusion and obscurity, action itself may seem to be a kind of poetry to those who take part in it.” The writer of the Spanish Civil War, in the British imagination, often evokes images of young educated men of passionate political convictions who died prematurely fighting for an idealistic cause. In addition to well-known names like that of Auden, who had also volunteered in Spain, Spender and Lehmann’s anthology included the poems of John Cornford and Charles Donnelly, two poets who had been virtually unpublished before, and who died fighting for the Republic. The idea of the Spanish Civil War as a poet’s war has been an enduring one, and was continued by Hugh Ford’s influential critical analysis of the literature of the conflict, one of the first works in English to deal with the cultural legacy of the Spanish war.

It is undeniable that poets had a significant role in the Spanish war, and political poetry became a favourite vehicle to denounce the threat of Fascism and the situation of the working class, in which the figure of the worker often became a tragic hero. Many well-known poets of the time, such as Auden, Louis MacNeice, Cecil Day Lewis, Nancy Cunard and Spender himself, and in America Langston Hughes and Edwin Rolfe, were inspired by the conflict. In Spain, poets such as Rafael Alberti, Manuel Altolaguirre or the Chilean Pablo Neruda were at the forefront of strategies of resistance and cultural initiatives, and the death of the Andalusian poet Federico García Lorca, murdered by Francoist troops, was mourned internationally. However, as is well known, the war also inspired novels—including John Dos Passos’ Adventures of a Young Man (1939), Ernest Hemingway’s For Whom the Bell Tolls (1940), and Warner’s After the Death of Don Juan (1938)—, as well as short stories by authors such as Damon Runyon, Walter Duranty, Warner and Hemingway, among others. In addition, several authors wrote non-fiction based on the conflict. Apart from Orwell’s Homage to Catalonia, noteworthy personal accounts are Arthur Koestler’s Spanish Testament (1937), Elliot Paul’s Life and Death of a Spanish Town (1937), John Sommerfield’s...

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Volunteer in Spain (1937), and Virginia Cowles’ Looking for Trouble (1941). In
addition, the conflict also inspired journalistic reportage by writers such as Martha
Gellhorn for Collier’s Weekly, Ernest Hemingway for the North American
Newspaper Alliance (NANA), Herbert Matthews for the New York Times, and
articles by Warner, Cunard, Koestler, Spender and Orwell for several periodicals.

There is a vast list of critical works that study the literary impact of the Spanish
Civil War. The last comprehensive bibliography on the subject, Peter Monteath’s
The Spanish Civil War in Literature, Film and Art (1994), counted nearly a
thousand critical volumes on the international literature inspired by the Spanish
conflict, five filmographies, and 228 critical works on film, as well as more than
150 works devoted to analysing the plastic art about the war. In the past twenty
years that number has grown exponentially, and the past decade has seen the rise of
exciting new critical trends. Traditionally, works exploring the Anglo-American
literature on the war have focused on the canonical ‘Auden’ group, Orwell and
Hemingway, usually approaching their works by analysing them in relation to their
political ideology, to the detriment of other authors whose works offer different and
competing perspectives on how the war influenced literary creation. Works by
female poets and novelists were traditionally excluded from critical accounts of the
literature of the Spanish war until the past two decades. It is striking, for the
present-day researcher, how women writers consistently represented a good
proportion of the regular contributors of literary and political magazines, and yet
they were unfailingly overlooked in critical overviews of the decade. An example is
one of the earliest and most influential critical examinations of the literature of the
1930s, John Lehmann’s New Writing in Europe (1940), in which the literary
representations of the Spanish Civil War have a central role. While it discussed the
works of female writers such as Anna Seghers, Virginia Woolf, Warner, and
Margot Heinemann alongside male authors, Lehmann only included an essay by
Woolf in his three-pages long, all male list of recommended selected works from
the decade. What were the reasons for this exclusion? Janet Montefiore puts
forward a convincing argument, contending that, in a decade marked by the
relationship between literature and radical politics, women were left out due to the

6 Peter Monteath, The Spanish Civil War in Literature, Film and Art: An International
7 John Lehmann, New Writing in Europe (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1940)
‘lingering notion of women as private creatures living apart from the public sphere inhabited by male politicians and intellectuals’⁸. Critical studies of the writers of the 1930s have long corrected this assumption, throwing light on the roles women had in different political parties and committees, and the anti-fascist and anti-imperialist movements during the interwar period. This dissertation hopes to continue their work by exploring how Cunard, Warner and Gellhorn became involved with the cause of the Spanish Republic, and how the war influenced their works and political thought.

The process of reconstructing the role of women writers in the literature inspired by the Spanish war gradually began in the 1980s. In 1980 and 1986, respectively, Valentine Cunningham published two influential critical anthologies that collected a variety of works, many of them out of print and little-known: *The Penguin Book of Spanish Civil War Verse*⁹ and *Spanish Front: Writers on the Civil War*¹⁰. *Spanish Front*, which organised its texts into thematic categories such as ‘War Stories’ and ‘Looking Back’, included a separate category for female writers, ‘Women Writing Spain’, which collected the work of Sylvia Townsend Warner (whose poems had also appeared in Spender’s anthology), Simone Weil, Valentine Ackland, Rosamond Lehmann, and Virginia Woolf. In 1991, Jim Fyrth and Sally Alexander’s anthology *Women’s Voices from the Spanish Civil War*¹¹ collected a series of valuable and illuminating texts by witnesses of the war in Spain, publishing the eye-witness narratives of English-speaking woman writers, journalists, nurses and relief volunteers. During the 1990s, the study of the Anglo-American women writers in the Spanish Civil War grew parallel to the rise in scholarship that explored women’s literature in the 1930s¹². The turn of the century

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¹² Previously unpublished or little-known works by female poets on Spain were reprinted in anthologies of 1930s poetry, such as Jane Dowson’s *Women Poetry of the 1930s* (London: Routledge, 1996). Excellent critical commentary has been provided by Janet Montefiore’s *Men and Women Writers of the 1930s: The Dangerous Flow of History*
saw the appearance of new approaches in Spanish Civil War studies. In the field of history, Angela Jackson published the first historical examination of the participation of British women in the conflict. *British Women and the Spanish Civil War* (Routledge, 2004), which provides an illuminating comprehensive description of the social backgrounds and the motivations of the female volunteers who joined the fight. Despite growing interest in the area\(^\text{13}\), many aspects of the women’s literature of the Spanish Civil War remain unexplored, and much of this dissertation is based on unpublished sources and archival material. While almost all critical works have chosen to look at the literature of the conflict as a communal effort, analysing the works of large groups of writers in conjunction, new monographs such as Alex Vernon’s *Hemingway’s Second War* (2011)\(^\text{14}\) focus on the impact of the war in the oeuvre of a single author. While collective analyses of the literature of the Spanish war have been extremely successful at communicating the remarkable impact that the war had in writers and artists worldwide, such a methodology inevitably tends to simplify their motivations for writing and their narrative choices. My decision to focus on three authors, namely Nancy Cunard, Martha Gellhorn, and Sylvia Townsend Warner, responds to my intention to analyse how their works examine diverse different aspects that reveal the historical, social and emotional significance of the conflict, while still benefiting from the informative perspective of a comparative study.

The canon of texts that are considered to constitute war literature has progressively widened since the early 1980s, including diverse genres such as reportage, memoirs, letters and diaries, and poetry written by soldiers and combatants. In the case of the Spanish Civil War, such a broadening is almost unavoidable considering that most writers published in several media and genres: Warner, for instance, wrote poetry, a novel, short stories, and journalistic articles about the war, and her case is far from exceptional. Many poets and novelists

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\(^{13}\) Spanish scholars have also studied the subject. Aránzazu Usandizaga’s work *Escritoras al Frente: Intelectuales Extranjeras en la Guerra Civil* (San Sebastian: Nerea, 2007) provides a thorough international list of the women writers who wrote about Spain at war, but the scope of the book is too broad to treat the writers and their works in detail.

\(^{14}\) Alex Vernon, *Hemingway’s Second War* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2011)
worked as war correspondents or contributed articles to periodicals during the Spanish conflict, among them Nancy Cunard, Ernest Hemingway and Langston Hughes. By exploring the work of Martha Gellhorn, a professional reporter, alongside literary texts by Warner and Cunard, I intend to throw light on the close connections between journalism and literature during the 1930s.

Paradoxically, while a few critical anthologies on the Spanish Civil War have collected texts from writers of different nationalities\(^{15}\), there have been few comparative critical approaches that contrast the international literary representations of the conflict. In addition, there are almost no critical analyses of the works and initiatives resulting from the connections forged in the cultural and social activities organised around the conflict.\(^{16}\) My work hopes to contribute to this field by exploring the international literary and cultural networks that were crafted during the war and continued in the following decades.

My dissertation studies the impact of the Spanish Civil War in Anglo-American literature and culture by focusing on the work of three women—Martha Gellhorn, Sylvia Townsend Warner, and Nancy Cunard—who travelled to Spain during the war as reporters and volunteers. I explore works about the war that have been overlooked by academic criticism and that provide new perspectives on the subject, such as Sylvia Townsend Warner’s *After the Death of Don Juan*, Martha Gellhorn’s articles for the American magazine *Collier’s Weekly*, and the poetry of Nancy Cunard, among other texts. I also explore the wide range of literary and journalistic publications and writers’ collaborations that the war generated, covering books, magazines, and pamphlets, and literary translations. In addition, my work intends to provide new approaches for the analysis of the literature of the Spanish Civil War by focusing on several subjects that have not been previously explored, such as the influence of concrete historical episodes in the literature of the conflict, or the connections between literary works and innovations in the field of photo-reportage. I aim to throw light on the literary relationships between Spain and the English-speaking world during the interwar years.

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\(^{15}\) See for instance Niall Binn’s international anthology of texts *Voluntarios con gafas: Escritores extranjeros en la guerra civil* (Madrid: Mare Nostrum, 2009)  
\(^{16}\) While it only partially focuses on the war, a remarkable exception is Gayle Rogers’ *Modernism and the New Spain* (Oxford University Press, 2012), which is the first attempt of its kind to present a literary history of the cultural and intellectual exchanges between Spain and the English-speaking world during the interwar years.
speaking world during and after the war, examining the role of Cunard, Gellhorn and Warner as writers, publishers, reporters, and translators.

Unlike the often-labelled ‘Auden group’, Gellhorn, Cunard, and Warner did not constitute a literary group or a coterie; however, their professional and personal lives intersect in many points. Warner and Cunard became friends right after the end of the Spanish Civil War, when they were engaged with aid missions for the Spanish refugees among other political activities. Cunard, Warner, and Warner’s partner Valentine Ackland remained lifelong close friends. Gellhorn, who settled in England when she was not travelling around the world reporting on wars, became very close to Lady Diana Manners, one of Cunard’s closest friends during her youth and a protégée of her mother Lady Cunard, after the Second World War. Professionally, they contributed to similar publications: Warner and Gellhorn to the *New Yorker* and the *Spectator*, Warner and Cunard to *Left Review* and the *New Statesman and Nation*. Such connections also bear witness of the closeness of the American and British literary spheres during the period.

Chapter 1 provides a brief historical overview of the Spanish Civil War, and how the conflict began to haunt the collective imagination of many British and American writers. It explores the attraction of the cause of the Republic and the few writers who supported Franco’s uprising. It then considers a possible rereading of the literature of the war in Spain as travel writing, a classification complicated by the ideological motivation of many of the writers who travelled to Spain, but also by their own condition as temporary or permanent expatriates. In addition, I look at how the narration of the war in Spain was marked by technological advancement; on the one hand, by new warfare techniques designed for civilian annihilation, on the other, by new lighter photographic equipment that allowed the taking of pictures of subjects in movement and close-ups. Both innovations forever changed the narration of wars, a transformation that was most notably seen in magazines. Finally, this chapter argues that the ideals of international solidarity that prompted such an unprecedented number of writers to help the Spanish democracy had its origins in the pacifist movements that flourished during the interwar period.

Chapter 2 focuses on the British poet and publisher Nancy Cunard, today best known as the editor of the African-American literature anthology *Negro* (1934).
Cunard became involved with the cause of the Spanish Republic from the early stages of the Civil War as a poet and an activist, and worked as a correspondent first for the American news agency Associated Negro Press and later for the Manchester Guardian. The chapter argues that Cunard’s work as a publisher and a writer is partly prompted by socialist internationalism, a movement that developed after the end of the Great War and that permeated cultural life in Europe and the United States. It analyses Cunard’s innovative perspectives on the racial and colonial components of the Spanish conflict, and her literary relationship with the black authors who travelled to Spain, especially Langston Hughes and Nicolás Guillén. It also looks at her relationship with other non-Anglophone poets, such as Pablo Neruda, with whom she published several poetry projects with the aim of collecting funds for the Spanish Republic. The chapter explores how internationalism inspired the themes and formal aspects of Cunard’s poetry, including experimental multi-lingual poems. In addition, it studies Cunard’s life-long relationship with the international avant-garde movement, from her involvement in bringing to Britain Salvador Dalí and Luis Buñuel’s film L’Age d’Or (1930), to her efforts to translate and publish several works by exiled Spanish authors during the 1940s and 1950s.

Chapter 3 investigates the works of the British poet and novelist Sylvia Townsend Warner, who visited Spain during the war as a volunteer for the Red Cross and later as one of the British delegates for the Second International Congress of Writers for the Defence of Culture. The chapter centres on her 1938 novel After the Death of Don Juan, which uses the Don Juan/Don Giovanni myth as a point of departure for writing a political fable about the Spanish war set in the 18th century. In her novel, Warner presents the conflict in Spain as a class war, as opposed to a ‘civil war’, and responds to the image of the Spanish upper classes as a set of pious and benevolent philanthropists, a perception that was projected by certain sectors of the mainstream press in the initial stages of the war, and which is closely tied with the historical image of the country as a fallen empire. This section also discusses the historical and mythical sources that informed the writing of the novel, and establishes a comparison with the themes that Warner explored in her journalism, including the subjects of educational and agricultural reform. In addition, the chapter investigates the circle of British communist writers
surrounding Warner, paying particular attention to the communist literary magazine *Left Review*, whose regular contributors included Stephen Spender and George Bernard Shaw.

Finally, Chapter 4 studies the work of the American novelist and journalist Martha Gellhorn, who began her career as a war correspondent in Spain. Through an analysis of her articles for the American magazine *Collier’s Weekly*, I explore the new way of narrating armed conflict that the civil war inaugurated. The chapter argues that the birth and development of the subgenre of reportage is closely tied to the Spanish conflict. Reportage, free from the constraints of timeliness of war reports, became the ideal medium to communicate the everyday lives of people in the city ruined by bombs. In addition, the privileging by reportage of a subjective perspective was attractive for writers like Gellhorn who had travelled to Madrid to fight against the rise of Fascism. I study Gellhorn’s work in relation to the journalism and fiction written by the group of American writers who congregated in Spain and lived together in Madrid in the Hotel Florida: Ernest Hemingway—who years later would become Gellhorn’s husband—the reporters Herbert Matthews and Virginia Cowles, and the photojournalist Robert Capa. In addition, the chapter throws light on the personal and political relationship of Martha Gellhorn and Eleanor Roosevelt during and beyond the years of the war, by an analysis of their correspondence.

Perhaps because, as Frederick Benson contends, ‘the passions aroused by the conflict appear disproportionate to any military importance inherent in the struggle’¹⁷, the Spanish Civil War has often been perceived as an exceptional historical event that provoked an intense and passionate ideological response. The ‘exceptional’ character of the literature of this period is such that it is almost always studied independently, and hardly ever in relation to the First or Second World Wars, in spite of the fact that the most recurrent commonplace in the historiography of the conflict is its character as a ‘prelude’ of the Second World War. Similarly, and despite the fact that many works on the conflict could be classified as ‘travel memoirs’, the literature of the Spanish war has traditionally been left out of

analyses of travel narratives in the late modernist period\textsuperscript{18}. Because critical anthologies of prose and poetry of the Spanish Civil War outnumber the studies that explore the effect of the conflict in the life and career of individual writers, the literature of the conflict often appears decontextualized, giving the impression that it constituted a sudden outburst of radical thought, ‘a fever in the blood of the younger generation’, as Virginia Woolf defined it\textsuperscript{19}. My dissertation demonstrates that, far from being an isolated moment in the literature of the twentieth century, the ideas that drove so many writers to the conflict are connected to a discourse of international solidarity that existed well before and beyond the duration of the war, and continues in much of the Anglo-American literature of the twentieth-century.

My dissertation is not primarily preoccupied with a study of the gender dynamics of the Spanish war. However, in that it focuses on three women writers, my thesis necessarily involves questions of gender in several instances, and the fact of their gender plays a diversely important part in the work of all the writers I discuss. Nancy Cunard’s status as an aristocratic woman writer was a decisive factor in her meagre representation in the Modernist canon and in the condescension towards her passionate involvement in several social causes. While Cunard’s works rarely address questions of gender, some of her poetry about the Spanish conflict explores the role of women in the age of total war. Sylvia Townsend Warner’s gender and sexuality plays an essential role in the personal poetry she wrote with the Spanish war as a setting, and indeed in all her representations of Spanish society. The question is even more central in the case of Martha Gellhorn. As I will argue in Chapter 4, her position as a female war correspondent, in a profession that was traditionally based on notions of masculine bravado, meant that Gellhorn sometimes had to use alternative narrative strategies to portray the conflict in Spain.

\textsuperscript{18} While Paul Fussell’s Abroad (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980) incorporated the narratives about the civil war in his account of the evolution of travel writing in the 1930s, new monographs such as Modernist Travel Writing: Intellectuals Abroad (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2010), Alexandra Peat Travel and Modernist Literature: Sacred and Ethical Journeys (New York: Routledge, 2011), or the collection of essays edited by Giovanni Cianci, Caroline Patey and Sara Sullam Transits: The Nomadic Geographies of Anglo American Modernism (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010) do not mention the literary response to the conflict in their discussions.

My choice of three female authors also reflects the fact of women’s participation in the Spanish war. The most famous and charismatic speaker for the Spanish Popular Front was a woman, Dolores Uribarri, better known as ‘La Pasionaria’, ‘the great figurehead at the prow of the ship’, as Charlotte Haldane described her in a poem for *Left Review*20. The high involvement of women in the war as volunteers inside and outside Spain, and as writers and journalists commenting on the conflict, is closely related to the new type of ‘total war’ that began in Spain and directly targeted civilian population. New warfare techniques, and especially aerial bombardment, transported the combat from the battlefields to urban spaces. A well-known quotation by Capa reflected upon the new reality of war, which saw thousands of women and children joining the lists of war casualties: ‘Nowhere is there safety for anyone in this war. The women stay behind, but the death, the ingenious death from the skies finds them out’21. This blurring of the front lines meant an exponential increase of war ‘witnesses’, allowing women the possibility of reporting from conflict zones. It is telling that the first international casualty of the war was a woman, Gerda Taro, the German war photographer and the personal and professional partner of Robert Capa, who died on 26 July 193622. In Britain and America they were also at the centre of the relief efforts to help the Republic, where committees were established by women of different social classes united by a spirit of co-operation. The women who became involved with the cause of the Republic came from a variety of political backgrounds and participated in relief missions in different capacities, from radical protests to charitable initiatives. As Angela Jackson has discussed, a number of British feminist associations established contact with Spanish organisations with similar aims, such as the feminist Six Point Group, which sent several appeals to raise funds for Spanish feminists23. The campaigns

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22 Similarly, a month later, the English artist Felicia Browne became the first British volunteer to die in action as part of a communist militia.
also reached more moderate audiences. Woman To-Day, the journal of the Women’s World Committee Against War and Fascism, published several articles that explored the significance of the conflict from a gender perspective. The publication, which combined articles about housekeeping and childrearing with reports on current events, appealed for female solidarity, drawing connections between the Spanish women who had joined the militias and British women:

It seems incongruous, doesn’t it, to imagine ourselves together with Mrs. Smith across the way and Mrs. Green next door marching smilingly off with rifle on shoulder? […] And yet those girls and women whose faces confront us each day in the papers are the mothers and wives of Spanish workmen and peasants, which husbands and children and homes, not unlike our own […] if the fascist invader were on your doorstep and you stood with your children round your knee, how would you defend them?\(^{24}\)

Gellhorn, Cunard and Warner do not tend to engage explicitly with the question of gender in their writings about the Spanish war. In this regard their works do not constitute an exception to the rule; as Joannou has argued, most women writers of the left were primarily focused on denouncing the threat to democracy that fascism represented\(^{25}\). In their works, feminist discourse is relegated in favour of more general considerations of class and claims for social justice. The notable exception to this trend is Virginia Woolf’s Three Guineas (1938), which explored the interrelation between feminism and anti-fascism. This is not to say that Warner, Cunard and Gellhorn were unaware of the gender implications of fascist ideology, for instance in the retrograde ideal of woman as wife and mother that the movement propagated. The progressive policies implemented by the Spanish Republic, which included the female vote, undeniably contributed to their admiration for the government, especially when contrasted to the traditionalist gender roles promoted by Fascism. One of the interests that all three writers had in common was the question of female education, which had become one of the main objectives of the Republic in a country where female illiteracy rates were still high in the 1930s. Similarly, all


three writers noted the active participation of women in the conflict. The photographs of republican women dressed in the miliciana uniform, which featured in magazines worldwide, publicised the military role that women had particularly during the first months of the war. Such images contributed to increase the appeal of a conflict in which women appeared to be able to actively fight for a new world order. While Gellhorn, Warner, and Cunard were chiefly concerned with denouncing anti-fascism and class inequalities, their political consciousness also entailed a critical interest in the role of contemporary women in the face of world crisis.

In conclusion, my dissertation throws light on the importance of the contributions of Cunard, Warner, and Gellhorn to the literature and journalism of the Spanish Civil War. Since many of the cultural activities and literary projects that promoted the cause of anti-fascism were communal enterprises, I have chosen to study their works in relation to different networks of writers and artists with whom they were associated during the years of the war. In this way, my dissertation does not exclude more canonical figures of the period such as Hemingway, Orwell, Auden or Spender. However, by placing Cunard, Gellhorn and Warner at the centre of my analysis, this dissertation provides new perspectives that enrich our knowledge of this fascinating period of the literary history of the twentieth century.
Fig. 1. Dolores Uribarri, *La Pasionaria* (Centro de Estudios y Documentación de las Brigadas Internacionales, Universidad Castilla-La Mancha)

Fig. 2. Anarchist *milicianas* during the first months of the war. (Centro de Estudios y Documentación de las Brigadas Internacionales, Universidad Castilla-La Mancha)
Chapter 1

‘In Defence of Culture’:

Historical and Literary Contexts of the Spanish Civil War

The Spanish Civil War began on 17 July 1936, when Francisco Franco, a Spanish general stationed in Morocco, led a right-wing nationalist military coup against the democratically elected republican government. The coup was supported by a large sector of the Catholic Church, and by conservative groups in the population who were dissatisfied with the progressive politics implemented by the Republic. The decades preceding the war had been characterised by government instability and a tense social and political climate, and the country went through a failed First Republic, an authoritarian regime and a monarchy. The Second Spanish Republic was established in 1931, and had at the outset a clear modernising and reforming philosophy. However, the regime experienced escalating internal ideological disagreements among left-wing parties. The ideological fragmentation of the left led to conflicts between anarchists and socialists. In addition, in an eminently agrarian country, radical workers’ movements proliferated, and their clashes with political parties continued during the war. Different parties and unions formed their own militias that did not recognise any superior powers. The difficulty for an outsider in distinguishing between the numerous left-wing groups and their political and social objectives made Orwell state that Spain was ‘suffering from a plague of initials’ in his work *Homage to Catalonia* (1938). Comparatively, the right was a much more unified force, and although it was formed out of previously opposing factions such as the fascists and the monarchist traditionalist parties, these became unified by their militarisation under Franco’s command. Despite the fact that the coup was initially designed as a rapid, violent action to seize power, the conflict was transformed into a civil war that lasted three years. After the rebel faction won the war, the country was left devastated, with much of its industry and infrastructure

destroyed, and the subsequent decades witnessed cruel, repressive measures against republican sympathisers.

In Britain and the United States, the majority of mainstream media tended to describe the conflict as an internal affair, highlighting the peculiarities of Spanish politics and its endemic volatility, and implying that their countries had no business in a foreign war. A similar characterisation was used by pacifist groups as an argument against military intervention. Aldous Huxley, in his 1937 collection of essays *Ends and Means*, argued that some countries seemed inherently predisposed to internal struggles, and implicitly rejected the idea of a military intervention by explaining that ‘a country where, as in Spain, there is a tradition of civil strife, is far more liable to civil strife than one in which there exists a long habit of peaceful co-operation.’ For most left-wing writers and artists, however, the war exemplified the fight between democracy and fascism, between a legitimate claim for social rights and an authoritarian regime.

Hobsbawm’s description of the Spanish Civil War as being both ‘at the centre’ and ‘on the margin’ of the era of anti-fascism is particularly accurate. While Spain did not participate in the Second World War, developments in the country were watched attentively from abroad, and anti-fascist groups all over the world embraced the cause of the Republic.

In August 1936, twenty-seven countries, including the United Kingdom and France, signed a non-intervention agreement, through which they refused to provide any kind of military help or weaponry to any of the parties fighting in Spain. Although they had declared that they would adhere to the non-intervention policy, fascist German and Italian troops joined the battle alongside Franco’s soldiers, providing aviation equipment that was instrumental to the winning of the war. The republican side received the help of the Soviet Union—which had also claimed it was abstaining from intervening—in the form of arms.

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27 An editorial published in *The Times* argued that most of Spain ‘seems to be becoming an agglomeration of townships violently Marxist or violently Fascist, according to the interests of the neighbourhood or to the character of the dominating personalities. Their quarrel is not a British quarrel.’ ‘Collective Neutrality’, *The Times*, 10 August (1936): 11.
tanks and planes, without which the defence of Madrid would probably have failed.31 The Spanish Civil War, therefore, soon became internationalised and representative of a greater world conflict.

Several episodes and battles of the war gained worldwide attention. The bombing of the Basque city of Guernica in April 1937 by Hitler’s Condor Legion shocked the international community to such an extent that even the Francoist troops initially denied their part in the attack.32 As Patterson has stated, the significance of the conflict was that ‘it was the first time that a completely unmilitarised, undefended, ordinary civilian town in Europe had been subjected to this sort of devastating attack from the air.’33 After Picasso presented his painting Guernica at the International Paris Exhibition of 1937, the bombing gained an even greater international resonance. In England, the arrival of 4,000 Basque refugee children reminded the population of the horrors of the war. Virginia Woolf records in her diary their almost spectral march through Tavistock Square:

A long train of fugitives—like a caravan in a desert—came through the Square: Spaniards flying from Bilbao, which has fallen, I suppose. Somehow brought tears to my eyes, though no one seemed surprised. Children trudging along: […] a shuffling trudging procession, flying—impelled by machine guns in Spanish fields to trudge through Tavistock Square, along Gordon Square, then where?—clasping their enamel kettles. A strange spectacle.34

Another episode that caught the attention of the international press was the battle for and siege of the Alcázar of Toledo, a former royal palace, which received constant coverage for weeks and inspired several works of fiction, as will be detailed in later chapters. Surprisingly, considering the historical referent, few critics have attempted to analyse the influence of concrete episodes and battles on the themes and imagery of the literature of the war. As I will discuss in later chapters, specific military events, helped by their photographic exposure in print media, became sources of inspiration for many of the works about the conflict.

32 Ian Patterson, Guernica and Total War (London: Profile, 2007), p. 15.
33 Patterson, Guernica, p. 17.
Critical works on the foreign literature of the Spanish Civil War are unanimously concerned with answering one question: why did such a great number of writers and artists from all over the world become drawn to a foreign civil war and even risk their lives for it? While there are many factors that contributed to the appeal of the war—primarily its symbolic power as a fight against fascism—the writers who travelled to Spain as volunteers, and who helped in campaigns from their home country, came from diverse backgrounds and, while most sympathised with the left, held different political beliefs. The cause of the Republic spoke to many people who saw in the reformist attempts of the government the possibility of creating a fairer social order. As Paul Preston argues, the most attractive aspect of the Second Republic was its focus on social reform, particularly in cultural and educational areas, carried out in a period marked by disillusionment with the capitalist system and its possibilities. The widespread and prolonged economic depression that had affected the western world during the interwar period prompted many to look for the possibility of a new, more egalitarian political regime. Such ideas were also articulated in the literature of the period. In Britain and the United States, many authors began to explore social subjects in their writing, and particularly during the 1930s, several periodicals that blended political and literary interests became very popular. These publications, such as *Left Review* or *New Statesman and Nation*, became staunch supporters of the Spanish Republic during the war, and many of the civil war poems that would later be collected in diverse anthologies were first published in these magazines.

In addition, it is undeniable that fascism, with its ideology of anti-intellectualism, was not the most popular regime with writers, and that most Spanish poets had supported the Republic, or at any rate were against Franco. However, as the war progressed, several of the writers and reporters who travelled to Spain began to voice their disappointment with the left, as was the case with John Dos Passos, George Orwell and, to a lesser extent, Stephen Spender. For many writers, the disillusionment grew in parallel with their knowledge of Spain’s political panorama, and like Orwell in *Homage to Catalonia*, several authors arrived at the conclusion that their idealised initial description of the mission of

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the Spanish Republic had been filtered through a personal utopian dream rather than an informed perspective. Orwell’s criticism of communism in Spain in *Homage to Catalonia* meant that he initially struggled to find a publisher for his book, and once it was published it did not attract much critical attention. However, with the start of the Second World War, Orwell’s description of the fragmentation of the Spanish Left was increasingly appreciated as a particularly astute analysis of the political situation in Spain. Today, his narrative of disillusionment is often taken as a true history of the war in Spain, despite the warnings by historians of the civil war who point out the limitations of the essay, given that Orwell only spent a few months in Spain and that he could not read either Spanish or Catalan. It is however incomprehensible, in the light of the knowledge that we have today, that only Orwell—and a very small group of other solitary voices—wrote about the killings perpetrated by the left in Spain, including the murder of thousands of members of the clergy. Were they really ignorant of the number of deaths perpetrated by the Loyalists? While writing hostile descriptions of the Government’s forces would have been difficult while in Spain, due to the thorough censorship system implemented by the Republic, nothing restricted their freedom of speech once they were back in their own countries. And yet hardly anyone did, infected by the revolutionary spirit that had made them travel to a country that many of them had never visited before.

The first visitors to Spain in 1936 marvelled at the revolutionary atmosphere in the streets, describing the collectivisation and socialisation of the means of production and the confiscation of Church property during the first months of the conflict. This euphoric first stage of the war is vividly described at the beginning of Orwell’s *Homage to Catalonia*, in John Sommerfield’s *Volunteer for Liberty* (1937) and in the poetry that Sylvia Townsend Warner wrote during her stay in Barcelona in 1936. At the same time the International Brigades, military units formed by thousands of volunteers from all over the world who travelled to Spain to support the republican government, soon acquired a quasi-mythical status in

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Britain and the United States. ³⁸ Many writers and artists joined the Brigades, among them George Orwell, André Malraux, Stephen Spender, W. H. Auden and Arthur Koestler. Many other writers and artists, including a notable number of women, volunteered in other capacities, raising awareness and funds and helping on-site with aid missions, as was the case with Nancy Cunard, Sylvia Townsend Warner and Dorothy Parker.

Although pro-Franco supporters represented a minority, not every foreign writer supported the cause of the Spanish Republic. Closely before the outbreak of the war, Wyndham Lewis had satirised the British supporters of communism and the Spanish Republic in his novel *The Revenge for Love* (1937).³⁹ The South African poet Roy Campbell’s Francoist sympathies and his disagreement with Stephen Spender over the war in Spain are well known.⁴⁰ Roy Campbell’s long pro-Franco and anti-communist epic poem *The Flowering Rifle* (1939)⁴¹ was the most influential work in English supporting the nationalist side. After the end of the Second World War he published *Talking Bronco* (1946),⁴² a satire in which he mocked the figures and political beliefs of MacNeice, Spender, Day Lewis and Auden. It was in this work that he coined the denomination of the ‘MacSpaunday Group’ to refer to the group of poets:

Then joint MacSpaunday, with quadruple bun,
Commercially collectivised in one,
A Cerberus-Hyena, could not cease
His fierce belligerence (in times of peace!)
But plagiarised from Blimp, ten years before,

³⁸ Over 35,000 volunteer soldiers from more than fifty countries formed the International Brigades. Giving an estimate of the number of soldiers from each country is difficult, since there were no official records, and Spanish soldiers joined some battalions to replace casualties and those on leave. Richard Baxell reckons that the number of British volunteers was at least 2,300. Richard Baxell, *British Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War* (London: Routledge, 2012), p.9.
The most ferocious arguments of war.\textsuperscript{43}

Nancy Cunard’s well-known 1937 questionnaire ‘Authors Take Sides on the Spanish War’, published in \textit{Left Review}, provided a map of the ideological positions of many of the most prominent British writers and poets of the 1930s. The survey, which rejected any possibility of adopting a neutral or even uninterested position on the conflict, radically prompted writers to express their opinion ‘for or against the people of Spain’. The vast majority of writers, including Ford Madox Ford, W. H. Auden, Sylvia Townsend Warner, Valentine Ackland and 112 others, expressed their support for the Spanish Republic, but there were several dissenting voices, among them Evelyn Waugh, who declared himself pro-Franco, and Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot, who were classified as ‘neutral’.

Unsurprisingly, the earnestness and passionate beliefs expressed by the British and American supporters of the Republic sometimes invited mockery. Nancy Mitford, who once wrote, referring to Nancy Cunard and the Duchess of Atholl, that ‘women should never take up causes,’\textsuperscript{44} wrote a satirical portrayal of a Spanish Civil War volunteer in \textit{The Pursuit of Love} (1945), whose protagonist, Linda Radlett, described as volatile and aloof, travels to France to follow her lover, who has decided to help the cause of the Spanish refugees in Perpignan. Mitford reflected in her novel the experience of her own sister, Jessica Mitford, an adherent of communism who followed her future husband to Spain during the war. While satirical depictions of the sentiments that the foreign conflict elicited existed from the beginning of the war,\textsuperscript{45} such representations became more common in the decades of the 1940s and 1950s, when the idea of a ‘fair war’ had come to seem naive and implausible. Not even Hemingway, the best-established American writer of the Spanish war, escaped from this sceptical revision of the motivations that drove writers to the conflict. The 1952 film adaptation of Hemingway’s short story ‘Snows of Kilimanjaro’, directed by Henry King and

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{43} Campbell, ‘Talking Bronco’, in \textit{Talking Bronco}, p. 79. \\
\textsuperscript{45} As early as 1937, a cartoon published in the American magazine \textit{The New Yorker} portrays a couple of housemaids tending to the drinks at a party saying to another: ‘This is the round that starts them weeping for the Spanish Loyalists...’ \textit{The New Yorker}, 10 April (1937).
\end{flushright}
written by Casey Robinson, modifies Hemingway’s narration by attributing
details from the author’s life to the main character, Harry. In the film—unlike the
short story—Harry is a Spanish war veteran who travelled to the country not only
for humanitarian or ideological reasons, but to chase a lover who had left him for
a Spanish flamenco dancer. As I explore in the epilogue, it was from the 1960s
onwards—another decade of passionate political commitment and collective
movements—that the Spanish war was rediscovered and turned into a myth of
political idealism and international collaboration.

Fig. 3. Madrid, 1936. (Centro de Estudios y Documentación de las Brigadas
Internacionales, Universidad Castilla-La Mancha)
Fig. 4. Food collection organised by the Bedlinog United Front Committee for Spanish Aid (Wales) (Centro de Estudios y Documentación de las Brigadas Internacionales, Universidad Castilla-La Mancha)

Fig. 5. Communist fundraising event in London (Centro de Estudios y Documentación de las Brigadas Internacionales, Universidad Castilla-La Mancha)
A War Abroad: Writing the Spanish Earth

The English literature of the Spanish Civil War is in some ways an atypical kind of war writing. A fundamental difference sets it apart from the literature of the Great War and the works that a few years later would try to capture the terror of the Second World War: when writing about Spain, British and American authors were generally unencumbered by notions of patriotism or national allegiance. While many were able to identify themselves with the republican victims, they did not write out of a feeling of duty towards the wounded or the dead. When Auden claims ‘I am Spain’ in the most famous British poem of the civil war, the identification with the foreign country is obviously born from a feeling of international solidarity rather than one of national loyalty. A discourse close to socialist internationalism took over from nationalistic fervour: instead of describing soldiers defending the land against a foreign enemy, much of the literature of the conflict, such as Sylvia Townsend Warner’s articles and her novel After the Death of Don Juan (1938)—and even films, like the documentary by Joris Ivens and Ernest Hemingway, The Spanish Earth (1937)—focuses on the relationship between the land and the labourer. The use of the word ‘earth’ in the title of Ivens’s documentary, with its transnational and even planetary connotations, was related to the idea of international solidarity that was at the core of the film. As the following chapters of the thesis will show, the importance of the land—with a meaning that is closer to ‘soil’ than to ‘homeland’—in the literature of the Spanish Civil War is fundamental. The Spanish soil became a multi-symbolic term that represented not only the traditional communist imagery of the labourer claiming their land, but also ideas of Spain as a primitive and pre-industrial country that tied in with previous representations of the country in British and American literature.

Since its main focus is a foreign conflict, the literature about the Spanish war shares many features with travel narratives. Many of the works, whether chronicles, poems or fiction, combine a political theme with evocative descriptions of Spanish history, customs, character and landscape. As Paul Fussell has pointed out, during the 1930s the tone of travel books becomes progressively

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more political and war-focused, and travel narratives about Spain inevitably turn into narratives of war after the start of the conflict.\footnote{Paul Fussell, *Abroad: British Literary Travelling Between the Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 216.} The American writer Elliot Paul makes that transition the main subject of his book *Life and Death of a Spanish Town* (1937), in which he recounts the changes the war brings to a quiet village on Ibiza. Some of these war travel narratives, which almost unanimously support the Republic, were written from the perspective of a volunteer soldier, such as Sommerfield’s *Volunteer in Spain* (1937), Orwell’s *Homage to Catalonia* (1938) and Koestler’s *Spanish Testament* (1937), in which he recounted his experience as a prisoner of war in Spain. The memoirs of the American writers and reporters who travelled to the war, such as Herbert Matthews’s *Two Wars and More to Come* (1938), Virginia Cowles’s *Looking for Trouble* (1941) and Josephine Herbst’s *The Starched Blue Sky of Spain* (published posthumously in 1991), are also examples of the intersection between the genres of war and travel writing.

The exclusion of the literature of the civil war from scholarly analyses of travel writing in the twentieth century has meant that the majority of texts have not been analysed through the critical perspective usually employed to examine travel literature. That is, critical studies have generally ignored analyses of intercultural interaction or representation of the foreign ‘other’, often taking the depictions of Spain and its inhabitants at face value in their analyses. An exception to this general trend is Maria de Guzman’s book *Spain’s Long Shadow: The Black Legend, Off-Whiteness, and Anglo-American Empire* (2005), an illuminating history of the representations of the country in Anglo-American literature from the early modern period to post-modernism\footnote{Maria de Guzman. *Spain’s Long Shadow: The Black Legend, Off-Whiteness, and Anglo-American Empire* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).}. De Guzmán’s work convincingly links twentieth-century Anglo-American travel narratives about Spain with earlier frontier narratives of the American west, exploring their portrayal of Spanish rural landscapes and characters through primitivist images. One of the most interesting features of the literature of the Spanish war, and especially of travel memoirs such as *Homage to Catalonia*, is the coexistence of two discourses. On the one hand, one that regards Spain as a foreign land, in
which the authors are mindful of their position as foreign visitors or explorers, and which, consciously or unconsciously, sometimes makes use of national stereotypes and exotic themes. On the other hand, there is a discourse of international solidarity and empathy influenced by communist ideology that is woven around the figure of the worker, who is symbolic of humankind and therefore works as the ideological opposite to the ‘other’. Furthermore, looming over many of the texts there is also an idea of authenticity, of depicting the ‘real Spain’, a concept over which there is no consensus. Supporters of both sides claimed that they were defending the real, ‘essential’ Spain. For writers such as Warner, Cunard and Gellhorn, the ‘real’ Spain was embodied in the oppressed farmers and labourers whose rights were threatened by Franco’s coup, the Church hierarchy and foreign fascist forces. For others, however, Franco symbolised the opportunity to preserve the religious and traditional values that they saw as an essential component of Spanish national identity. One of the few British Franco supporters was the Hispanist and academic Edgar Allison Peers, who had previously published several essays on Spanish culture and civilisation, and a popular travel book, *Spain: A Companion to Spanish Travel* (1930). His 1938 work *Our Debt to Spain*, which was published in both Britain and the United States, opened by asserting that the Spanish Civil War was in fact ‘a war of religion’, and endorsed the nationalist rebellion on the grounds that Franco’s troops would restore Spanish tradition. His book unapologetically characterised the nationalist rebellion as a modern crusade:

One may predict without the slightest fear of eventual contradiction that in the bloodstained record of this ghastly Civil War will be found stories no less lovely in their heroism than those which already adorn the pages of Spanish history. And those stories assure us that, however far ahead, there will be a new period of greatness, which will mean the re-emergence of the real Spain.49

The characterisation of the literature of the Spanish Civil War as travel writing is further complicated by the fact that many of the writers who went to Spain already resided abroad, and therefore their experiences did not perfectly fit

into a home and away rhetoric. As is well known, after the end of the Great War a significant number of writers and artists chose to settle abroad, with a large group of British and American expatriates concentrating in Paris in the 1920s, attracted by the city’s artistic scene. As Helen Carr has put it, in the interwar period ‘a remarkable number of novelists and poets were travelling writers, whether or not they were in addition actually travel writers.’ Nancy Cunard’s case is emblematic: she left England in 1920 to move to Paris, and became part of an international group of artists that included Djuna Barnes, Louis Aragon, Tristan Tzara and Samuel Beckett. With the turn of the decade, Cunard, like many of her contemporaries, developed a strong international social consciousness, first devoting her efforts to raising awareness of the injustices committed against black people in America, and then embracing the cause of the Spanish Republic. Like Cunard, some of the British and American expatriates who lived in Paris became engaged with the Spanish conflict and travelled to the country as reporters and volunteers, as was the case with John Dos Passos, Martha Gellhorn, Ernest Hemingway and Malcolm Cowley. The Spanish Civil War seems to have inaugurated an era which saw the transformation of the figure of the expatriate writer into a committed ‘world citizen’. Interestingly, fictional portrayals of Spanish war volunteers often depict them as living a perpetually nomadic existence, jumping from country to country, and sometimes from conflict to conflict. Perhaps the most famous example is the character of the American expatriate Rick Blaine, portrayed by Humphrey Bogart in the well-known 1942 film Casablanca. As the story progresses, the audience learns of Blaine’s previous participation as a volunteer in the Spanish war, and also of his anti-fascist activism during the Italo-Abyssinian conflict.

The majority of writers who travelled to Spain envisioned themselves as reporters or volunteers as opposed to tourists, even if some of them stayed in the country for very few days and for the sole purpose of visiting the battlefronts in person. While some of them travelled to the country explicitly as foreign

correspondents— as was the case with Cunard and Herbert Matthews, who reported for the *Associated Negro Press* and the *New York Times* respectively— others became ‘accidental’ reporters when they wrote letters and articles to British and American magazines denouncing what they saw as an unfair situation. It is of course tempting to be cynical about the writers’ motivations for travelling to the war-ridden country, and to attribute their enthusiasm simply to the fact that the civil war had become the cause célèbre of the 1930s. A similar argument was used by writers whose sympathies leaned towards the fascist side, such as Ezra Pound, who characterised the war as ‘an emotional luxury to a gang of sap-headed dilettantes’.\(^5\) Some authors earnestly believed in the importance of their mission, while openly criticising others whose commitment they judged to be more superficial. Langston Hughes included a caustic passage in his autobiography about the people whom he pejoratively labelled ‘wartime tourists’, who came to see ‘what war was like’ without realising the dangers involved in an urban conflict.\(^6\) The personal motivations and degree of political commitment of the writers who travelled to Spain and/or volunteered to help the Republic necessarily varied from person to person. However, this does not invalidate the work that many men and women carried out to help raise awareness and material and financial help for the victims of the war. Their chronicles and reports, as well as their fiction and poetry, helped to disseminate knowledge of the perilous state of the Spanish Republic, and warned about the effects of fascism. As Spain began its forty-year dictatorship, and censorship of historical sources and versions of the war against Franco’s regime was implemented, foreign accounts of the conflict were often the only alternative testimony available.

**A Photographers’ War**

One of the reasons for the foreign media’s interest in the Spanish war was the horror and fascination of the new warfare techniques that brought the conflict into urban spaces. The Spanish Civil War saw the transformation of cities into

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battlegrounds. The annihilation of urban infrastructures and the terrorising of civilians, aided by new developments in bomber planes and air raids, were crucial war stratagems. The terror of air bombings, very often preceded by the morbid sound of an alarm, became a recurrent topic in poetry. Similarly, much of the reportage of the war describes the new landscapes created by the bombings in the cities: buildings cut open and craters in the ground. In Britain and the United States, the air raids happening in Spain only amplified the fears that a new world war was coming, an apprehension that was mounting as the fascists increased their power in Europe.\(^\text{54}\)

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\(^{54}\) Paul K. Saint-Amour, who has read canonical modernist novels such as Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway* as reflecting prophetic visions of a new total war, goes further and argues that the entirety of the interwar period was characterised by a collective ‘war anxiety’. In many ways, the war in Spain became the first concrete realisation of such terrors. Paul K. Saint-Amour, ‘Air War Prophecy and Interwar Modernism’, *Comparative Literature Studies*, vol. 42, no. 2 (2005): 130–61.
While the idea of the Spanish Civil War as the first ‘total war’ is widely disputed, it is undeniable that the killing of civilians, made real by recurrent images of dead women and children in the press, made a strong mark on public opinion. A new kind of war journalism, more focused on personal stories than on reporting military developments, brought attention to the human cost of the war. Developments in photographic equipment during the 1920s, which rendered cameras much lighter and easier to transport, meant that photographers could report from the front lines and get much closer to the action than before. For the first time, magazines and periodicals included photographs of ruined cities and casualties together with their war reports. The Spanish Civil War has been labelled the first ‘media war’, the first conflict to have been documented extensively for the public, and the importance of images in the literary responses to the war is patent. Unprecedented photographs of civilian victims also reinforced the efficacy of war reports. The shock at such killings is reflected in literary and journalistic productions of the time, in which descriptions of children murdered by bombs became a recurrent image. One example among many is Pablo Neruda’s poem ‘Explico Algunas Cosas’, in which children become the paradigm of the innocent war victim. Neruda’s poem portrayed the pro-Franco German air force as ‘bandits’, who came from the sky to kill children, and through the streets the blood of the children ran simply, like children’s blood.

55 There is no consensus on the definition of the term, and some historians name the American Civil War as the first ‘total war’. Jeremy Black has pointed out that the first instances of the term ‘total war’ appeared in the aftermath of the Great War, and it had ‘become commonplace’ by the end of World War II. The term has been defined differently according to several parameters, such as the nature of the goal of the conflict, its geographical scope, the warfare technology used, or the involvement of civilians. Jeremy Black, The Age of Total War: 1860–1945 (Westport: Praeger Security International, 2006), pp. 2–10.
59 Venían por el cielo a matar niños, y por las calles la sangre de los niños
Concurrently, there was a noticeable interest in the effect of war on children and in the figure of the child as a war victim. In 1938, Aldous Huxley wrote the introduction to a collection of drawings by Spanish children, *They Still Draw Pictures* (1938). The book was reprinted three times that year and profits were donated to the Quakers’ campaigns to aid Spain, a group with whose pacifist philosophy Huxley sympathised. In his analysis, the omnipresence of war scenes in the drawings is seen as a sign of contemporary political troubles. Huxley highlights the presence of warplanes as one the pictures’ main subjects, which to him are ‘the symbol of contemporary civilization’. But while the images of murdered children constituted a moving appeal for the ending of war, they were predictably exploited for political purposes. From the beginning of the conflict, photography became crucial to the dissemination of pro-republican propaganda. Photographs and films of air raids and civilian casualties were presented at almost every public event that aimed to raise awareness of the conflict, sometimes to great emotional effect, creating a striking audio-visual spectacle. Anti-fascist propaganda campaigns made use of photographs of children killed by air raids, aware of their power to elicit an emotional reaction. Republican poster art often depicted an image of a child or a mother with her child, either as a symbol of hope for the future or as innocent war victims.

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61 One of the best descriptions of such uses of war images for dramatic, spectacular effect is the report of Pablo Neruda’s address to the 1938 Chilean Congress of Writers for the Defence of Culture. The pamphlet, edited shortly after the congress, described the passionate reaction of the public: ‘We can’t contain ourselves! shouted the audience, faced with the evidence of fascist brutality parading before their very eyes, and the words of the poet went directly not to their ears, but to their hearts.’ (‘¡No nos podemos contener!’, gritaban los espectadores, ante la evidencia de la brutalidad fascista que desfilaba ante sus ojos, y las palabras del poeta iban directamente no a sus oídos sino a su corazón).

62 Dr Niall Binns’s analysis of the use of mother-child rhetoric in the propaganda of the Spanish Civil War is due to be published soon.
Perhaps the sole voice that questioned the use of such images was Virginia Woolf. In *Three Guineas*, Woolf’s pacifist manifesto, she continually refers to a set of photographs of destroyed houses and dead Spanish children distributed by the republican government in the hopes of encouraging a military intervention, which she had received in the post. Woolf argues that rather than being a reason to put a stop to wars, the images of war victims spark a violent and almost irrational reaction in the observer. The photographs, according to Woolf, did not constitute ‘an argument […] [but] simply a crude statement of fact addressed to the eye’. Her discussion might also be read as an objection to the aestheticisation of violence, an inevitable consequence of the development of war photojournalism and a topic of debate that has been inseparable from that reportage ever since. From her pacifist point of view, Woolf rejected the use of sentimental images to instigate a political and military reaction. Her disbelieving attitude regarding political reports also bears witness to contemporary awareness of the use of the media as means of political propaganda. *Three Guineas* constituted a radical rejection of the demand that writers should take sides over the world conflict and become part of the propaganda machinery, both of the Republic and of the anti-fascist movement in general. Woolf was one of the few proponents of anti-militarism who continued to maintain their ideological position after the outbreak of the war in Spain, a conflict that marked the end of the influence of the widespread pacifist movements that had proliferated in the western world after the Great War.

**Pacifism and Internationalism**

The Spanish Civil War, together with the threat of fascist expansion, unsettled the anti-war sentiment that had originated after the end of the Great War and had flourished especially in the late 1920s and 1930s. In the period between the two world wars, pacifist and anti-war organisations greatly developed in Great Britain and the United States. In Britain, War Resisters’ International (WRI), founded in the Netherlands in 1921 and with sections in Great Britain, Germany

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64 Woolf, *Three Guineas*, p. 109
and Austria, was one of the most prominent anti-war organisations, and in 1923 the War Resisters League was founded in the United States. Unlike in other associations, WRI members were equally committed to war resistance and social justice. The American Fellowship of Reconciliation (an organisation also active in Britain), which had a Christian basis, also stood at the centre of pacifist activities. Pacifism was not a homogeneous philosophy, and there were diverse and often contradictory positions on how to prevent armed conflict. Aside from the proponents of absolute pacifism, there was a sector of war resisters who advocated non-violent ways of solving conflicts such as economic blockades, as well as a group of socialist ‘pacifists’ who believed in the legitimacy of defensive wars. The period also witnessed institutionalised efforts to maintain world peace, such as the creation of the League of Nations, which took place in 1919. While the organisation was evidently not successful in avoiding another world war, it is important to note that such a large intergovernmental organisation, and its diplomatic philosophy, had no precedents or previous institutional models to follow, and that it was a result of the spirit of international cooperation pervading the interwar period.

The first conflict that began to test the anti-war beliefs of many British and American citizens was the Italo-Abyssinian war, which began in October 1935. Sylvia Pankhurst, who had been a committed pacifist and a member of the executive committee of the Women’s International League, became involved in campaigns against Mussolini’s invasion of Ethiopia. Her response to the war was the publication of the journal *The New Times and Ethiopia News* from 1936 to 1956, in which she defended the right of self-determination of the people of Ethiopia, and which counted Nancy Cunard as a recurrent contributor. For many, the war in Spain became the most pressing example of the need for foreign military intervention in order to defend democracy. Fenner Brockway, who had

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been the chairman of the WRI until 1934, also broke with the idea of absolute pacifism over the conflict in Spain.\textsuperscript{69} Responding to some of his members’ requests to define the British International’s position with regards to the Spanish War, its then secretary, H. Runham Brown, expressed his sympathy with the situation of the republican government, but rejected any kind of intervention or supply of weapons. While Brown did advocate sending food and medical aid, he reminded members of Spain’s imperialist history, stating: ‘Had the Spanish Government immediately liberated Morocco, it would not have been easy for General Franco to recruit the Moors to fight against them today.’\textsuperscript{70} Despite the release of such statements, most pacifist organisations took a non-absolutist approach, and they were at the heart of the relief campaigns to send help to Spain. Writers such as Evelyn Waugh and Virginia Woolf, who were among the most famous proponents of pacifism, continued to defend their anti-war views, despite agreeing with the fairness of the claims of the Spanish Republic and helping with relief missions. For Woolf, the war soon became a painful subject when her nephew, Julian Bell, was killed in July 1937 at the battle of Brunete as he was volunteering as an ambulance driver with the International Brigades.\textsuperscript{71}

Other British and American writers who had previously sponsored pacifism, such as Sylvia Townsend Warner and Storm Jameson, or who had written about their disillusionment with war, such as Ernest Hemingway, came to believe that the military option was the only possible way to fight the expansion of fascism. Warner, who had been the secretary of the Dorset Peace Council,\textsuperscript{72} was able to reconcile her support for the republican troops in Spain with her anti-war ideas.\textsuperscript{73}

\textsuperscript{73} In fact, in 1937, and after having spent several weeks as a volunteer in Barcelona some months before, Warner signed an introductory note to Ronald Duncan’s pamphlet \textit{The Complete Pacifist}. Duncan advocated complete disarmament and the use of pacifist methods to resolve international tension, warning against the human catastrophe that a new world war would represent. In the pamphlet, Duncan attempted to dispel some myths associated with the bravery and honour of war: ‘The next war will not be fought by soldiers against soldiers, but by airmen against a defenceless civil population. What
Their support for the Republic lay in their belief that the war in Spain was an unambiguously fair war, a ‘good fight’, as the left-wing press characterised it. It convinced people of the possibility that war could have an honourable aim, and could be necessary to preserve democracy and protect the people. Moreover, many felt that the collapse of capitalism presented an opportunity to create a new, more socialist-leaning political regime.

But rather than seeing the Spanish Civil War as symbolising the end of a pacifist era, I believe that the foreign response to the conflict is better understood within the context of internationalist ideology and collective initiatives during the 1930s. It was precisely the internationalist philosophy that went together with pacifist ideology—particularly in associations such as the WRI—that was in great part responsible for the ideas of international solidarity and responsibility that drove so many people to help during the civil war. Socialist internationalism, which had the aim of promoting transnational cooperation and ultimately of overcoming class divisions, served as a counter-discourse not only to nationalism, but also to capitalism. While the liberal internationalism proposed by the League of Nations differed from the socialist internationalism embraced by some of the writers who travelled to Spain, the movements had several elements in common, among them a solid cultural agenda. Both institutions, for instance, tried to promote the use of Esperanto: the League proposed the global language for international discussions, and the WRI’s original name was Paco, which means peace in Esperanto.74

Mirroring organisations for international cooperation such as the League of Nations, several international associations of writers were born during the interwar period, such as the British-born PEN International (initially called the P.E.N. Club), founded in 1921, and the Association of Writers for the Defence of Culture, which was created in 1935. Likewise, the popularity of writers’ congresses increased significantly during the decade of the 1930s, and the subjects discussed at the meetings became progressively politicised. The year 1935 was particularly fruitful for writers’ meetings: the Conference of World Writers took

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74 Bennett, *Radical Pacifism*, p. 18.
place in Paris, London hosted the meeting of the Progressive Writers’ Association of India, and the first Congress of American Writers was organised in New York. Studies on cultural responses to the Spanish Civil War have often overlooked the role that writers’ associations played in the involvement of foreign writers and journalists in the conflict. These associations not only served their main purpose of amplifying writers’ political concerns, but also provided housing and advice for many of those writers when they travelled to the country, and connected them with other like-minded writers. In many ways, they became ‘embassies’ for the cultural elites. As will be discussed in later chapters, they encouraged relationships between writers, and important cultural collaborations and translations.

The Second International Congress of Writers in Defence of Culture and the Legacy of Socialist Realism

The Second International Congress of Writers is a particularly meaningful episode in the history of the literature of the Spanish Civil War. Its participants voiced many of the concerns at the heart of the literature of the 1930s: the social responsibility of writers, their power to provoke change in society, and the problems of representing reality truthfully. The congress, organised by the Association of Writers in Defence of Culture, took place in July 1937 with meetings in Valencia, Madrid, Barcelona and Paris. A partial list of the speakers who attended the meeting\(^{75}\) gives us an idea of the international scope of the event and its success in attracting renowned writers: the group included Anna Seghers, Louis Aragon, André Malraux, Julien Benda, Tristan Tzara, Rafael Alberti, Sylvia Townsend Warner, Stephen Spender, Octavio Paz, Alexei Tolstoy, Ilia Ehrenburg, Nicolás Guillén and Pablo Neruda. Travelling to Spain was not easy

\(^{75}\) Writing a comprehensive list of the delegates that attended the congress is not a straightforward task. Some writers and artists did not attend all sessions; others advertised their presence but then very probably had difficulties crossing the border; and others just sent speeches and letters to be read at the sessions, but newspapers counted them as present. Researchers have mostly relied on small left-wing newspapers and pamphlets for accounts of the congress, and often non-Spanish names are distorted beyond recognition. The most detailed account of the congress is Manuel Aznar Soler’s *Barcelona, 11 Juliol del 1937: Secon Congres International d’Escriptors per a Defensa de la Cultura* (Sevilla: Renacimiento, 2007).
for most of the attendees. Since countries such as France and Britain had signed a non-intervention agreement, entry was forbidden to British citizens. The British poets Sylvia Townsend Warner, Valentine Ackland and Stephen Spender, for instance, who were part of the British delegation to the congress, had their fake passports arranged by André Malraux.\(^7\) To the list of attendees it is also necessary to add the names of other writers that participated in the four meetings of the 1937 congress by signing manifestos or sending speeches or letters to be read, such as Bertolt Brecht. The participants warned against the growing threat of fascism in Europe and its worldwide repercussions. Questions about the function of the writer in society were addressed in speeches that conveyed an unequivocal sense of urgency but also the writers’ earnest belief in their own capacity to influence policy.

The holding of the congress in war-torn Spain was not coincidental. Although Madrid had already been selected to host the 1937 writers’ conference, the outbreak of the war had made the decision questionable. However, after a board meeting held in Paris in November 1936, the Spanish press reported that the association had decided to hold the congress in Spain as a demonstration of support for the Spanish Republic.\(^7\) The decision was not unexpected considering the attraction that the conflict in Spain had for many artists, with writers from all over the world coming to volunteer with the International Brigades or to witness the conflict for themselves. In addition, the death of the poet Federico García Lorca, murdered by Francoist troops, was mourned internationally, and contributed to a vision of the pro-Franco side as an enemy of culture.\(^7\) The decision to host the congress in a country undergoing a brutal war was therefore a conscious one, a ‘war act’, as a contemporary writer described it,\(^7\) an open


\(^{77}\) ‘Simpatía de los escritores internacionales hacia la República española’, *ABC*, 3 February (1937): 14.

\(^{78}\) The Union of Soviet Writers sent a letter of support to the participants in the 1937 congress in which they expressed their condolences for the death of the poet and portrayed fascism as the ‘destructor of historical and cultural values’. The letter was published in the principal pro-Republic newspapers. “Saludo de los escritores soviéticos”, *ABC*, 6 July (1937): 8.

\(^{79}\) “El Congreso convocado en España no podía alentar más que un propósito: el de que los […] [escritores] dijesen, aunque sólo fuera un momento: ¡presentes!, a los soldados de
demonstration of support for the Spanish Republic. Sparing no expense, the republican government seized the opportunity and welcomed the visitors enthusiastically, aware that their testimonies when they returned home would be invaluable (if in the end fruitless) for winning international support and, ideally, military intervention from other democratic nations. Indeed, it was the president of the Spanish Republic, Juan Negrín, at the opening of the congress in Valencia, who identified the war in his speech as ‘a fight for the freedom and independence of Humanity’.80 It is somewhat surprising to see that in contemporary accounts of the congress by foreign participants, there are virtually no negative interpretations of the meeting as an act of propaganda, and no consciousness of an agenda other than what they labelled ‘the fight for democracy’.

The popularity of congresses and meetings of writers with a political aim grew exponentially during the 1930s. These meetings had a clear antecedent in the well-known Soviet Writers’ Congress of 1934, which brought together the most celebrated Russian writers of the time and was presided over by the renowned author and activist Maxim Gorki. The nature and function of literature, and how to reconcile artistic expression and creative freedom with revolutionary ideals, had traditionally been a central concern for Marxist ideology.81 The Soviet Writers’ Congress of 1934 had among its aims to assess and appraise the evolution of Soviet literature, which was hailed as both the ‘youngest of all

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81 Lenin wrote several essays on the subject of literature, devoting some of them to a historised exploration of the work of Tolstoy and an analysis of its relevance (or lack of it) at the time of writing. See ‘L. N. Tolstoy and the Modern Labour Movement’ and ‘Tolstoy and the Proletarian Struggle’, in V. I. Lenin, Lenin on Literature and Art (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1967), pp. 49–54.
literatures’ and ‘the richest in ideas, the most advanced’. The congress sought to establish the basis for a new literary style to suit the new era that the Soviet Union symbolised, and the meeting helped to define the precepts of Marxist literary criticism. Its members enthusiastically discussed the advantages of ‘socialist realism’, which differed from the general literary trend of realism in its thematic focus, being preoccupied with chronicling the struggle of the proletariat:

Socialist Realism […] demands of the artist truthful, historically concrete representation of reality in its revolutionary development. At the same time, truthfulness and historical concreteness of artistic representation of reality must be combined with the task of ideological remolding and education of the working people in the spirit of socialism.

The new style embraced by the Soviet writers was manifestly devoted to propagating Marxist ideology. The definition of socialist realism, however, was not without its contradictions, since it had to depict as ‘historically concrete’ a triumph of the proletariat that was still being constructed. Aware of this discrepancy, Andrei Zhdanov, Stalin’s spokesman on cultural affairs, uttered a long speech championing ‘revolutionary romanticism’ as a component part of socialist realism. Zhdanov argued that socialist realism did not intend to represent an ‘objective reality, but to depict reality in its revolutionary development’; therefore romanticism, if generally associated with utopian visions of the future, could still be reworked and adapted to chronicle the triumph of the proletarian revolution.

Despite the general consensus that literature should be instilled with the writer’s commitment to socialism, in the speeches of certain speakers it is possible to perceive a tension between the need to express party politics and the more ‘artistic’ side of literary creation. In his speech on poetry and poetics, Nikolai Bukharin tried to reconcile both notions. A great part of Bukharin’s address is

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85 Zhdanov, ‘Soviet Literature’, p. 21
devoted to critiquing the myth of poetry as a transcendental art, rather than as crafted by a singular person and therefore susceptible to historical and social analysis. However, when establishing the guidelines for Soviet poetry the writer admits that ‘within poetic unity there co-exist intellectual, emotional and volitional elements, forming a single indivisible whole.’ The impossibility of having a purely political poetry, without a trace of the individual who wrote it, is summarised in Bukharin’s maxim. If, according to Marxist philosophy, literature is necessarily political and has to be considered like any other kind of production, poetry is also necessarily personal and idiosyncratic, even when it treats a political theme.

The central discussion held at the congress was, in essence, one of form versus content, and modernism was regarded as particularly suspect and as the natural opposite of ‘socialist realism’. Since the Soviet congress advocated simplicity in writing, with the aim of optimising the working classes’ understanding of texts, modernism’s experimental style was seen as implicitly bourgeois. It was at this meeting that Karl Radek presented his well-known assessment of James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, criticising the Irish writer’s meticulous style in representing quotidian experience:

It is perfectly clear that this [Joyce’s] method would prove utterly worthless if the author were to approach with his movie camera the great events of the class struggle, the titanic clashes of the modern world.

A capitalist magnate […] must not be spied on in the brothel or the bedroom, but must be portrayed on the great arena of world affairs.

Aside from affirming that writers should concentrate on greater themes than everyday events, Radek’s idea of the writer as a reporter of truth, as the person responsible for chronicling the history of a nation, seems especially relevant if we consider that the Spanish Civil War saw many well-known writers turn from novelists or poets into war reporters.

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Women had a secondary role in the Congress and in the Union of Soviet Writers in general. As Katharine Hodgson highlights, they only constituted the 3.7% of delegates, and only two Soviet women poets gave addresses, Agnia Barto and Vera Inber. The Spanish playwright Maria Teresa León also attended the meeting, although the extent of her participation is not clear. The speeches given at the Congress did not engage with feminist causes, focusing exclusively on the more global issue of class struggle. This was in consonance with the Soviet political discourse in the 1930s, which had ceased to include the idea of women’s emancipation in its general ambitions of social transformation. Likewise, in most of the writers’ congresses that were organised across Europe in the late 1930s inspired by the Soviet writers’ meeting, discussions of women’s issues are notably absent.

The influence of the Congress of Soviet Writers in the west was notable, and the notion of the writer as a crucial instrument for the advancement of society became a powerful one. Ralph Fox’s critical essay The Novel and the People, published posthumously in 1937—the author was killed while fighting in Spain in 1936—became one of the best-known works of Marxist literary criticism in Britain. Fox’s essay followed the ideas presented at the Soviet Congress, reiterating the notion that writers should cease to follow the subjective explorations of the Modernist novel in favour of a literature concerned with society as a whole, and how the greater economic forces affected the individual. While the participants in the Second International Congress of Writers in Defence of Culture in 1937 did not go so far as to designate a recommended literary form to express their political beliefs, they shared the enthusiasm of their Russian counterparts, as well as a strong conviction of the power of the intellectual elite to inspire and affect public opinion. The second half of the 1930s saw a proliferation of international writers’ meetings. However, the growing threat posed by fascism

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and the rise of totalitarian leaders in Europe meant that the focus of these meetings was not exclusively on promoting class equality. The main founding principle of the Association of Writers in Defence of Culture was the fight against fascism—described as the enemy of culture—as is recorded in their manifesto signed at the Paris conference in 1935:

Ce Bureau formé d’écrivains de diverses tendances philosophiques, littéraires et politiques, sera prêt à lutter sur son propre terrain, qui est la culture, contre la guerre, le fascisme, d’une façon générale, contre toute menace affectant la civilisation.  

After the fears of fascism’s imperial ambitions became a reality with Mussolini’s invasion of Ethiopia, and Franco began his nationalist revolution in Spain, the anti-fascist feeling became generalised. At the 1937 congress in Spain the speakers unanimously condemned fascism as the enemy of creative freedom, and warned about the consequences of the ideology’s expansion. But while they recognise the grim possibility of a new world war, the tone of the papers is generally uplifting, and shares the optimism and enthusiasm of the Russian congress, especially the underlying feeling that the speakers are contributing to the creation of a new social movement. In his speech, Ralph Bates summarised the general feeling of enthusiasm that pervaded the event:

The tragedy of Spain is not this war. I don’t see anything tragic in this event so full with hope and achievements. The tragedy of Spain relies on the fact that the ‘Black Legend’ was almost true. And the war has shown that it has been almost destroyed forever.  

92 ‘This Bureau consisting of writers of various philosophical, political, and literary tendencies will be ready to fight on its own ground, which is culture, against war, fascism, in general, against any threat affecting civilisation’.

93 Ralph Bates, ‘Nueva Cultura’, in Soler and Schneider (eds), *II Congreso*, pp. 43–4. The ‘Black Legend’ mentioned by Bates is an expression used to describe the historical characterisation of Spain as a backward, ignorant, intrinsically cruel and superstitious nation. This campaign of anti-Spanish (and anti-Catholic) propaganda became widespread in Protestant nations such as England and the Netherlands in the late sixteenth century and had a great influence in later portrayals of the country.
As at the Soviet Writers Congress of 1935, perhaps the most prominent subject of this congress was the social responsibility of the writer. As would be the case in Cunard’s pamphlet Authors Take Sides, speakers insisted upon the necessity of publicly denouncing injustice, and did not hesitate to present the war as an international cause. But if Nancy Cunard spoke about writers’ moral obligation to express their rejection of fascism, others asked writers to take action. At the Second Congress of American Writers—which took place almost simultaneously with that in Spain, and at which the conflict in Spain was the main subject of discussion—Ernest Hemingway elaborated on the idea of fascism as a regime incompatible with literature. In his speech, Hemingway anticipated the idea that he would develop years later in his anthology Men at War (1942): the notion that the problem of the writer was ‘to write truly’. This concept was clearly influenced by Marxist ideology. In The Novel and the People, Fox explored the idea of truth in relation to writing. For Fox, the writer’s task and its ultimate objective is to reflect the reality around them, and in this way ‘winning the knowledge of truth, of reality’\textsuperscript{94}. In addition, Fox claims, writers can only obtain that knowledge through ‘practical activity’, given that ‘truth is the expression of a man’s own intense investigation of an object’\textsuperscript{95}. For the writers of the 1930s the implication was clear; in order to be able to write about the events that threatened to destroy peace in Europe, one had to live them. The ‘truth’ Hemingway seeks has more to do with the necessity to write from personal experience than with a quest for verisimilitude and portraying events ‘realistically’. Referring to the many international writers and war reporters who travelled to Spain—and the ones who had sacrificed their lives for their political beliefs—Hemingway depicts the writer as a war hero:

If twelve [writers] go and only two come back, the truth they bring will be the truth and not the garbled hearsay that we pass as history. Whether the truth is worth some risk to come by, the writers must decide themselves. And there will always be new schisms and new fallings off and marvellous exotic doctrines and romantic lost leaders, for those who do not want to work at

\textsuperscript{94} Fox, The Novel and The People, p. 37.
\textsuperscript{95} Fox, The Novel and the People, p. 41.
what they profess to believe in, but only to discuss and to maintain positions, skilfully chosen positions with no risk involved in holding them.\textsuperscript{96}

In Hemingway’s earnest address about the social importance of the writer there seems to be no trace of ironic detachment. His speech reinforces the idea of the war writer as a martyr, which is at the centre of traditional interpretations of the literature of the Spanish Civil War. And while his writing philosophy seems inextricably attached to the famous ‘Hemingway persona’ of the masculine and brave reporter, his description is indicative of the new role the war writer was adopting as the protagonist of his or her own chronicles, a narrative change connected to the development of reportage during the Spanish Civil War.

The other main founding principle of the Association of Writers was to encourage collaboration between writers of all nations and to promote translations of literary works. The ideology of the association might be described as cultural internationalism, as Akira Iriye defines it, ‘a variety of activities undertaken to link countries and peoples through their ideas and persons, through scholarly cooperation, or through efforts at facilitating cross-cultural understanding’.\textsuperscript{97} Such ideas were put into practice in the association’s yearly meetings, and also through the creation of writers’ houses, which provided housing and help for international writers. In Madrid, the house of the ‘Alianza de Intelectuales’, run by a married couple, the poet Rafael Alberti and the playwright Maria Teresa León, became the refuge of Langston Hughes and Nicolás Guillén, whose budget did not allow them to join their colleagues in the more expensive hotels of Madrid. The structure of the congresses itself is a testimony of this belief in cultural internationalism.

While French was the language most of the speakers had in common, every effort was made to provide interpreters, who were often the writers themselves, taking turns. Sylvia Townsend Warner, for instance, who spoke at the meeting at Barcelona, gave her speech in French, and it was subsequently translated into


Catalan. Many meetings concluded with the communal singing of the ‘Internationale’ and the ‘Marseillaise’, testimony to the almost festive quality of the meetings. Aside from its political aims, the congress in Spain served to reinforce and establish professional relationships among writers and artists. Although it included international writers from its very first issue, Margot Heinemann pointed out that the congress in Spain also provided *Left Review* (and later, *New Writing*) with international contributors. Many of the relationships forged in the association’s meetings lasted well beyond the war years, and it was through the help of foreign writers and artists, who provided shelter or recommended them for work positions, that many republican exiles were able to settle abroad.

Examining the international political and ideological significance of the Spanish Civil War is essential to understand why the conflict engaged the emotions and loyalties of so many writers and artists all over the world. This chapter has attempted to provide a socio-historical and literary background to the war with the aim of contextualising the immense literary and journalistic response inspired by the conflict in Spain. The English literature of the Spanish war, which is naturally overwhelmingly political, was not only concerned with the grim possibility of the triumph of fascism in Europe, but also with the role of the writer in the face of the threat of a new world war. The poet and artist was regarded as a crucial instrument in the establishment of a fairer world order, a notion that not only owes much to the conception of the writer in Soviet ideology, but also constitutes the subject of much of the poetry of the conflict. Chapter 2, which focuses on the work of the writer and publisher Nancy Cunard, analyses the role of the poet as a literary subject in the poetry and political prose of the war, as well as how the philosophy of internationalism, and the promotion of international cultural exchange, constituted the ideological basis of much of the literary production about the Spanish war.

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98 Soler and Schneider, *II Congreso*, p. 392.
Chapter 2

Nancy Cunard and the Philosophy of Internationalism

The British writer and publisher Nancy Cunard (1896–1965), today perhaps best known as the editor of *Negro: An Anthology* (1934), had a central role among the foreign writers who mobilised to help the Spanish Republic when it was besieged by the forces of General Franco and his fascist allies. While criticism has traditionally undervalued her works and her role in many literary networks of the period\(^{100}\), Cunard was a salient figure of literary modernism as a publisher, journalist, activist, poet, and muse of many writers and artists. The work undertaken by critics such as Jane Marcus, Maroula Joannou, Janet Montefiore, and Maureen Moynagh on the women writers of the left in the 1930s has opened the way for a reconsideration of the role of Cunard as a fundamental figure in the radical literature of the twentieth century\(^{101}\). My research continues that task by examining how Cunard responded to the rise of fascism in Europe in her work as a poet and activist.

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Cunard’s work on the Spanish Civil War has not received much critical attention, despite the fact that the conflict inspired her poetry and journalism, and other literary activities during and after the war. While a few of her poems about the war have been reprinted in literary anthologies\(^\text{102}\), Moynagh’s edition of Cunard’s essays, for instance, does not contain a single one of Cunard’s articles on Spain. And yet the war became almost an obsession throughout her life, and she continued to revise her ‘Long Epic on Spain’ until her death; the work remained unfinished. Her archive at the Harry Ransom Center contains hundreds of pages related to her time in Spain, which bear witness to her crucial role as a cultural activist, connecting writers from all over the world to fight against the fascist siege of the Spanish Republic.

This chapter argues that socialist internationalism was an integral part of Cunard’s political thought, and that it greatly influenced her writing. Cunard’s conception of internationalism was in part based on the ideas of international solidarity that flourished after the Great War and which aspired to achieve a stable peace through international cooperation. But more precisely, the literary works and activities of Cunard and many of her contemporaries were inspired by the spirit of what Akira Iriye has labelled ‘cultural internationalism’, ‘the fostering of international cooperation through cultural activities across national boundaries’.\(^\text{103}\) This notion of internationalism, intimately related to the ideology of the left, was connected to ideas of transnational collaboration with the aim of achieving social justice, as well as the dissemination of culture among all social classes. The idea of the social responsibility of the artist or ‘intellectual’ lies at the heart of Cunard’s literary efforts, and is closely related to a trend of thought that saw writers as the worthiest representatives of their countries. Through this perspective, this chapter analyses not only Cunard’s literary work, but also her political and cultural initiatives, such as the well-known questionnaire ‘Authors


Take Sides on the Spanish War’ and the series of booklets she edited with the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda, *Les Poètes du Monde Défendent le Peuple Espagnol*.

This chapter begins by discussing the persistent public image of Nancy Cunard as a ‘rebellious heiress’, which has often obscured her literary and political achievements. It also provides a brief survey of the many fictional and biographical sources that focus on her, and which bear witness to her position at the centre of several international artistic and literary networks. Before examining her work on the Spanish Civil War, I look at Cunard’s ideological ‘turn to the left’ with the turn of the decade of the 1930s, and the origins of her commitment to the cause of the peoples of the African diaspora. The central part of my chapter analyses how the rhetoric of internationalism underpinned Cunard’s work as an editor and poet, and how her ideas of transnational solidarity were conveyed both thematically and stylistically. Finally, the last section of the chapter analyses Cunard’s innovative perspectives on the racial and colonial component of the war in Spain. I study how the Pan-Africanist discourse employed by writers of the African diaspora during the interwar period, which is at the heart of the anthology *Negro*, influenced Cunard’s vision of the conflict in Spain as an international war.

**Early Works and Biographical Sources**

Nancy Cunard was born on 10 March 1896 in Leicestershire, the daughter of Sir Bache Cunard, an English aristocrat and grandson of the founder of the Cunard line of steamships, and of a wealthy American woman and famous socialite, Maud Alice Burke. She enjoyed a privileged upbringing in her house at Nevill Holt, and moved with her mother to London in 1911. Nancy Cunard’s connections with the literary world began in her childhood years. Her mother, Lady Maud (who would later change her name to Lady Emerald Cunard),

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104 Anne Chisholm, *Nancy Cunard* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1979), pp. 3–12. Cunard has been the subject of two biographies. The first, *Nancy Cunard* by Anne Chisholm, is an informative account of Cunard’s life based on her papers that was published in 1979. The second, Lois Gordon’s *Nancy Cunard: Heiress, Muse, Political Idealist* (Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2007), is a critical biography that also engages with Cunard’s literary works. Aside from clarifying some imprecise aspects of Chisholm’s biography, it throws light on Cunard’s life and work during the decades of the 1950s and 1960s, which were left out of Chisholm’s account.

regarded herself as a patron of the arts, and literary guests such as Lady Diana Cooper, George Moore and Wyndham Lewis congregated at her house. Lady Cunard’s parties figured recurrently in the society pages of newspapers, and soon Nancy herself was referred to as ‘prominent among the “moderns” in Society’. George Moore, who became Lady Cunard’s lover when Nancy was a young girl and was a frequent visitor to the house, acted as Nancy’s literary mentor even after she moved to France in 1920.

Nancy Cunard began her literary career as a poet, and her first published poem appeared in the *Eton College Chronicle* in 1915. In the years before the Great War she became close to a group that labelled themselves the ‘Corrupt Coterie’, which included her friends Iris Tree and Lady Diana Manners, also frequent names in the society press. The group shared diverse artistic interests and were united by a predilection for unconventional behaviour. Critics have distilled the founding principle of the group as one of rebellion against the previous generation. As Diana Cooper would write in her autobiography: ‘Our pride was to be unafraid of words, unshocked by drink and unashamed of “decadence and gambling”’. The idea of rebellion against the previous generation, shared by many members of Cunard’s circle, is at the heart of most of her poetic work until the 1930s.

In 1916, her poems appeared in the anthology *Wheels*, a collection that Cunard probably co-edited with Edith Sitwell, and which carried poems by Wilfred Owen, Aldous Huxley and Wyndham Lewis, among others. Published by Blackwell, it showcased contemporary poetry and issued a new number (a ‘cycle’) yearly from 1916 to 1921. Cunard’s poem ‘Wheels’ provided the title to the series. Cunard’s involvement with the *Wheels* series ended after the first cycle. It

108 Letters from George Moore to Nancy Cunard, 1922–30. Box 17, Folder 3, Nancy Cunard Collection, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin, USA.
109 Chisholm, *Nancy Cunard*, p. 32.
110 While several critics have positioned Cunard as part as the ‘Corrupt Coterie’ (although Lois Gordon makes it clear that she was just friends with them), Diana Cooper leaves out Cunard’s name when she describes the coterie as ‘composed of the children of the Souls—the Grenfells, Listers, Asquiths, Horners, Trees, Charterises, Tennants and Herberths.’ Diana Cooper, *Autobiography* (Salisbury: Michael Russell Publishing, 1979), p. 82.
111 Cooper, *Autobiography*, p. 82.
is probable that she and Sitwell had a falling out, to the extent that in 1925, in a letter to Allanah Harper, Sitwell writes that Cunard ‘can hardly be regarded as a serious poet. Her work at its best is a parody of Mr. Eliot, and at its worst is without shape and without meaning.’ Following the idea of rebellion against the literary style of the previous generation, *Wheels* has been widely regarded as a modernist response to Marsh’s *Georgian Poetry* series of anthologies. In a letter to his brother Julian, Aldous Huxley, who published several poems in *Wheels*, summarised its objectives and mocked its ‘mild’ stylistic revolution:

> Their great object is to REBEL, which sounds quite charming; only one finds that the steps they are prepared to take, the lengths they will go are so small as to be hardly perceptible to the naked eye.

*Wheels* drew criticism even from the poet it regarded as a model, T. S. Eliot. The modernist style embraced by Cunard exasperated her literary mentor George Moore, who wrote to her in 1922 asking her to ‘remember that the advantages of rhyme and metre are that they supply the necessary resistance without which it is next door to impossible to write.’ Cunard’s first book of poems, *Outlaws*, which she subsidised, appeared in 1921. She had moved to Paris the year before, the country that she considered her home for most of her life. In 1923, she published *Sublunary*, in which she drew inspiration from her travels around France and northern Spain, and in 1925 she published the long poem *Parallax*,

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115 Eliot, in a review titled ‘The Lesson of Baudelaire’, published in *The Tyro* in 1921, argued that ‘the poets who consider themselves most opposed to Georgianism, and who know a little French, are mostly such as could imagine the Last Judgement only as a lavish display of Bengal lights, Roman candles, catherine-wheels, and inflammable fire-balloons.’ John Press (ed.), *A Map of Modern English Verse* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 161.

116 Letter from George Moore dated July 1922. Box 17, Folder 13, Nancy Cunard Collection, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin, USA.


partly inspired by T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*. The poem seems to foresee her future nomadic life and decades of passionate activism:

Think now of how friends grow old—
Their diverse brains, hearts, faces, modify;
Each candle wasting at both ends, the sly
Disguise of its treacherous flame…
Am I the same?
Or a vagrant, of other breed, gone further, lost—
I am most surely at the beginning yet.120

Like many other exiled British and American writers in continental Europe, Cunard decided to set up a publishing house, joining the list of expatriate small presses such as Robert McAlmon’s Contact Editions, William Bird’s Three Mountains Press and Alice B. Toklas’s Plain Editions. In 1928 she founded the Hours Press from her house in Réanville, Normandy, and began publishing with the intermittent help of Louis Aragon. Cunard would later state that her initial aim in starting the press had been to publish experimental poetry,121 possibly with a similar ethos to the *Wheels series*, but she ended up publishing a wide variety of works, more often than not by close friends such as George Moore (*Peronnik the Fool*), Louis Aragon (Cunard published his French translation of Lewis Carroll’s *The Hunting of the Snark*), and Ezra Pound (*A Draft of XXX Cantos*). Samuel Beckett’s first work, *Whoroscope*, was published by the press after he won a poetry competition set up by Cunard and Richard Aldington.122 Beckett collaborated with Cunard on several projects during the 1930s, including the collection of music and poetry *Henry Music*, to which he contributed a poem, and several translations from French for Cunard’s *Negro: An Anthology*. Cunard’s early connections to several international literary networks became crucial for her work, since much of her literary activity revolved around communal projects in which she often relied on the contributions of writer friends and acquaintances. In addition, considering the reduced circulation that some of her literary projects—

122 Cunard, *Hours*, p. 112.
both personal and communal—had, one could consider her works as written for a coterie of fellow writers. This is also true of Cunard’s cultural activism: most of the activities that she organised in favour of the Spanish Republic were addressed to writers and artists, as was the case with ‘Authors Take Sides’. Even the articles that Cunard wrote for the *Manchester Guardian* chronicling the exile of Spanish refugees in 1939 seem to have been written with that intended audience in mind. Cunard’s description of the bleak fate of the Spanish poets crossing the Pyrenees appears intentional, appealing to a certain kind of intellectual sensitivity and feeling of kinship.

Despite her prolific career, her reputation as a rebellious heiress became her defining characteristic, and still pervades current representations of her life and works. Her excessive drinking, her public fights with her mother, her affairs with famous writers such as Ezra Pound, Aldous Huxley and Louis Aragon, and especially her romantic relationship with Henry Crowder, a black American man, turned her life into gossip fodder. Particularly during the 1930s, her life was followed with interest by British and American tabloids. While she wrote lucidly until the end of her life, her later years, marked by mental illness, only consolidated that image. Sensationalised depictions of Cunard, which often ignore her work as a publisher, activist and poet, have been remarkably influential. In 1979, fourteen years after Cunard’s death, Jessica Mitford described her as a female Lord Byron:

> To me Nancy Cunard was a distant star; when I was a disconsolate, rebellious teenager in the thirties, she was constantly in the news in England. […] She was considered mad, bad, and dangerous to know, which made her all the more attractive to me.

Apart from depictions in tabloids, Cunard’s public image was also affected by the many representations made of her in art and fiction. Her striking appearance and personality inspired writers and artists of all nationalities. From as early as the 1920s, when she became close to the Paris Surrealist circle, Cunard

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123 Cunard’s biographer Lois Gordon contends that Cunard’s mental illness was probably alcoholism. Such was also the belief held by her good friends Sylvia Townsend Warner and Louis Aragon. Gordon, *Nancy Cunard*, p. 347.

became the muse of several artists and writers. While this dissertation is not concerned with the role of Cunard as a muse, it is still worth noting that the list of artistic and literary works inspired by her is long and outstanding. Cunard was the subject of portraits by Álvaro Guevara, Oscar Kokoschka, Ambrose McEvoy, Wyndham Lewis and Eugene McCown (who also illustrated the covers of her poetry book *Parallax* and other works by the French Surrealist group), as well as of two sculptures by Constantin Brancusi. She was photographed by Man Ray (who also provided photographs for the cover of her book *Henry Music*), Cecil Beaton, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Islay Lions and Curtis Moffat (the husband of her friend Iris Tree). One of the rare surviving texts in which Cunard addresses her role as a muse and model is her unpublished 1923 sonnet ‘In the Studio’, in which she reflects on the experience of posing for McCown in his studio in Paris. The sonnet contrasts the stillness of the model—here characterised as equally unalterable as the work of art itself—with the passing of time, through the traditional symbols of clocks and wilting flowers. In this way the poem is reminiscent of Eliot’s ‘Portrait of a Lady’, whose protagonist is pictured lonely and static in her apartment throughout winter, spring and autumn, in an ‘atmosphere of Juliet’s tomb’. The long periods of posing allow the subject of Cunard’s poem to ponder over the nature of painting and original creation. Looking at the painter, she imagines herself in his position:

Is it March, spring, winter, autumn, twilight, noon
Told in this distant sound of cuckoo clocks?
Sunday it is—five lilies in a swoon
Decay against your wall, aggressive flocks
Of alley-starlings aggravate a mood.
The rain drops pensively. ‘If one could paint,
Combine the abstract with a certain rude
Individual form; knot passion with restraint...
If one could use the murk that fills a brain
Undo old symbols and beget again

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Fresh meaning on dead emblem…’ So one lies
Here timeless, while the lilies’ withering skin
Attest the hours, and rain sweeps from the skies;
The bird sits on the chimney, looking in.126

The list of fictional characters inspired by Cunard, including works by Huxley, Waugh, Wyndham Lewis, Aragon and Hemingway, has been more disputed, unsurprisingly, since it is easy to see a likeness of Cunard in any female character who is attractive, rich and rebellious. Chisholm’s and Gordon’s biographies both provide lists of literary works that portray characters that share Cunard’s physical appearance and idiosyncrasies. Some of the attributions remain uncontested, such as Aldous Huxley’s portrayal of her as Myra Viveash in Antic Hay, or as the tall, slim and promiscuous Lucy Tantamout in Point Counter Point. Likewise, most critics agree that Cunard is the inspiration behind Louis Aragon’s Le Con d’Irène, Evelyn Waugh’s Virginia Troy in Unconditional Surrender and Baby Bucktrout in Wyndham Lewis’s The Roaring Queen. While some critics127 have seen a resemblance to Cunard in Lady Brett Ashley in Hemingway’s The Sun Also Rises, the consensus is that the character was inspired by another well-known British aristocrat, Lady Duff Twysden.

Approaching the life and work of Nancy Cunard is initially a rewarding task, thanks to the very large number of biographical sources available. There are almost as many descriptions of Nancy Cunard as there are people she met. Hugh Ford’s book Nancy Cunard: Brave Poet, Indomitable Rebel, published three years after her death, contains the narratives of dozens of writers and artists who knew Cunard personally. The book is a multi-voiced panegyric that collects the personal accounts of her many friends, including Langston Hughes, Storm Jameson, Pablo Casals, Norman Douglas and Louis Aragon. In addition, Cunard appears as a charismatic minor character in the autobiographies of Pablo Neruda,128 Luis

126 Nancy Cunard, ‘In the Studio’. Box 5, Folder 5, Nancy Cunard Collection, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin, USA.
128 Pablo Neruda, Confieso Que He Vivido (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1974).
Enrique Délano\textsuperscript{129} and William Carlos Williams,\textsuperscript{130} and the biographers of Iris Tree\textsuperscript{131} and Tristan Tzara\textsuperscript{132} also deal with her magnetic character. Henry Crowder, her American boyfriend of several years and one of the people that awoke her interest in African-American culture, wrote an account of their years together entitled \textit{As Wonderful as All That}.\textsuperscript{133} Most accounts present a picture of Cunard that matches the personality one might infer from reading her papers and letters: a woman who was passionate, politically committed, sometimes fickle, remarkably unprejudiced, and extremely generous with her money and her friendships, which often lasted a lifetime. A comparative analysis of these biographical accounts also allows us to see how much of the information circulating about her was based on rumour, from the falling out with her mother to the causes and circumstances of her death in 1965.

Despite many requests on the part of editors and friends, Cunard never wrote an autobiography, and repeatedly claimed that the only memoir she was interested in writing would be one about her experiences in Spain during the war.\textsuperscript{134} However, she did record her experiences as a publisher in \textit{These Were the Hours}, an account of her years with the Hours Press. She wrote two critically acclaimed memoirs, \textit{Grand Man}\textsuperscript{135} and \textit{G. M.}\textsuperscript{136}, about her friends Norman Douglas and George Moore, which contained her personal memories of her friendships with both men. In addition, her archive preserves hundreds of letters, notes and manuscripts from Cunard herself. Unfortunately for researchers of Cunard’s work during the 1920s and 1930s, most of the letters, notes and manuscripts from

\textsuperscript{129} Luis Enrique Délano, \textit{Memorias} (Santiago de Chile: RIL, 2004).
\textsuperscript{131} Daphne Fielding, \textit{The Rainbow Picnic: A Portrait of Iris Tree} (London: Eyre Methuen, 1974).
\textsuperscript{132} François Buot, \textit{Tristan Tzara: L’homme qui inventa la révolution Dada} (Paris: Grasset, 2002).
\textsuperscript{134} Nancy Cunard’s diary/personal notes, dated ‘St. Cézaire, 24 November 1956’. Box 28, Folder 7, Nancy Cunard Collection, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin, USA.
\textsuperscript{135} Nancy Cunard, \textit{GM: Memories of George Moore} (London: Rupert Hart Davis, 1956)
\textsuperscript{136} Nancy Cunard, \textit{Grand Man: Memories of Norman Douglas} (London: Secker & Warburg, 1954)
before 1945 were destroyed when local villagers ransacked her house in Réanville, Normandy.\footnote{Cunard, \textit{Hours}, p. 206.}

Cunard’s work is extensive and very varied, including several collections of poems, articles in more than twenty national and international periodicals, and two biographies. On the subject of race she edited the colossal \textit{Negro: An Anthology}, and she wrote the anti-colonial essay \textit{The White Man’s Duty} (1943) together with the Trinidad-born writer and activist George Padmore. Among her many manuscripts that remain unpublished there are a film script, a play, and notebooks with poems spanning four decades. This chapter focuses on Cunard’s literary and journalistic production during the years of the Spanish Civil War, although it relies on earlier literary and biographical sources to trace the origins of her social thought and her proximity to several literary coteries and cultural movements.

**Before the Spanish Civil War: The Beginning of an Internationalist Consciousness**

Cunard’s activism in matters of social justice and political life began in the early 1930s with her involvement with the cause of African-American civil rights, which would eventually lead to the publication of \textit{Negro: An Anthology}. She was not the only author to turn to subjects of social equality at the time. The worldwide financial crisis of 1929, which sank many western nations into economic depression, triggered the appearance of socially concerned and protest literature, and drove many writers close to communist ideology. For Cunard, interest in social causes was also connected to her personal friendships. She had moved to Paris in 1920, looking, like many other British and American writers, for a more encouraging intellectual atmosphere. In Paris she struck up a close friendship with Janet Flanner, writer of the ‘Letter from Paris’ for the \textit{New Yorker} from 1925.\footnote{The letters exchanged between Cunard and Janet Flanner and her partner Solita Solano, spanning four decades, are kept at the Library of Congress, USA.} However, although she met some of its members, including Hemingway, Cunard was never part of the group of American expatriates; nor did she restrict herself to British circles. Instead, she became very close to the French
Surrealists. In 1923 she met Tristan Tzara, and through him other members of the Surrealist group, including the writers André Breton and Louis Aragon and the artists Man Ray and Constantin Brancusi, for whom Cunard became a muse. Her connections with the group awakened her interest in other writers and literatures, and she began translating from and into French. In 1924, she translated Christopher Marlowe’s *Faust* into French for Tzara, the first literary translation of the many she would do throughout her career.\(^{139}\)

Many of the writers and artists associated with the Surrealist group became close to the philosophy of Marxism, and Breton, Aragon and Éluard joined the Communist Party in the late 1920s. In 1929, Breton published the *Second Manifesto of Surrealism*, in which he expressed the necessity for artists to join communal activities and placed Surrealism in the service of the Marxist revolution. While Cunard never joined the Communist Party, and described herself as an anarchist,\(^ {140}\) her works during the 1930s, particularly her anthology *Negro*—in which she declared that communism was the only regime that could bring racial equality—and her articles on Spain, are greatly influenced by socialist ideology. Partly through her relationship with the Surrealist group, Cunard began to conceive of art as a reaction to the oppressive forces in society. In December 1930 she was involved in the distribution of the film *L’Âge d’or*. This scandalous short film was a Surrealist project by Buñuel and Dalí, financed by the Vicomte Charles de Noailles. The film depicted a newly married couple trying to consummate their relationship, and implicitly criticised the Catholic Church. As Hammond recounts, it was shown in Studio 28, along with an exhibition of paintings by Dalí, Miró, Tanguy and Man Ray, and copies of the Surrealist Manifesto. The film attracted such a strong reaction from French conservative and anti-Semitic groups that, after a violent attack on the projection room where the film was being shown, the French authorities, who had previously given their approval, censored the film.\(^ {141}\) Cunard was temporarily given the only existing copy, which was in the custody of the owners of the Parisian bookshop and institution Librairie Espagnole, and arranged a screening in London on 2 January

\(^{139}\) Nancy Cunard, *L’histoire tragique du docteur Faust*. Box 5, Folder 1, Nancy Cunard Collection, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin, USA.

\(^{140}\) Chisholm, *Nancy Cunard*, p. 225.

1931. Yvonne Cloud (later Kapp) was commissioned by Cunard to write a four-page pamphlet explaining the controversy in France, which was distributed at the screening.\textsuperscript{142} This episode, the first of many ‘political acts’ in Cunard’s career, marked a shift in her literary and publishing work, which from then on would almost without exception be politically motivated.

Apart from her pursuits against censorship, the winter of 1931 was also the date of publication of Cunard’s first work on the subject of racial discrimination: \textit{Black Man and White Ladyship}, an essay which denounced the racism of British society in general and her mother in particular. Cunard’s interest in the cause of African-American civil rights and the cultures of the African diaspora developed during the 1920s and 1930s, coinciding with her relationship with the African-American jazz musician Henry Crowder, whom she met in Venice in 1928.\textsuperscript{143} Her interest also found an outward manifestation: it was around that time that she began to wear her signature stacked ivory bracelets, with which Man Ray and Cecil Beaton photographed her, and which she collected and treasured for the rest of her life. But Cunard’s interest in African culture was not only driven by her relationship with Crowder. It is unquestionable that African culture was a great influence on modernist literature and art, with Picasso being perhaps the most salient example, and it was a notable inspiration for Surrealist artists. The Surrealists looked at ‘primitive’ art as reflecting humans’ true nature, unconstrained by modern social rules.\textsuperscript{144} As Louise Tythacott explains, the primitive was seen as ‘the authentic antecedent—and antithesis—of European civilised society’.\textsuperscript{145} Cunard’s works on the subject of peoples of African origin, such as her anthology \textit{Negro} and her poems and articles about the racial dimension of the Spanish war, combine two trends of thought: a political

\textsuperscript{142} Yvonne Cloud (later Kapp), \textit{A Note on the Affair of the Surrealist Film L’Âge d’or} (printed by Nancy Cunard, 1931), and \textit{Time Will Tell} (London: Verso, 2003), p. 148.
\textsuperscript{143} Gordon, \textit{Nancy Cunard}, p. 149.
\textsuperscript{144} In the First Surrealist manifesto Breton lamented: ‘Under the pretence of civilization and progress, we have managed to banish from the mind everything that may rightly or wrongly be termed superstition, or fancy; forbidden is any kind of search for truth which is not in conformance with accepted practices.’ André Breton, ‘Manifesto of Surrealism’ (1924), in \textit{Manifestoes of Surrealism} (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1972), p. 10.
awareness of the struggle for civil rights and against racial discrimination, and a romantic view of African cultures as original and unpolluted.

In 1930 Cunard decided to travel with Henry Crowder to London, where their interracial relationship elicited much attention from the tabloid press. By this time, she had decided to lend her support to the cause of the Scottsboro boys, a group accused of raping two white women in Montgomery, Alabama, and whose trial was plagued by irregularities. Her method, which she also put into practice during her fundraising for the war in Spain, was to create informative pamphlets explaining the situation in Alabama and asking for funds, which she distributed through her long list of writer friends and acquaintances. She also hosted several fundraising parties for the cause, with music by black jazz musicians, events which were met with condescension and a certain sneering tone by the tabloid press. The *Daily Express*, which reported on the event, explained that ‘Miss Nancy Cunard, daughter of Lady Cunard, one of the leading hostesses in London, completely and successfully defied racial prejudice last night with one of the most spectacular and curious parties that can ever have been held in this country.’

Lady Cunard’s disapproval of her daughter’s romantic relationship with a black man prompted one of Nancy Cunard’s most famous publications. It was an eleven-page pamphlet with a bright red cover, entitled *Black Man and White Ladyship: An Anniversary*, in which she openly condemned Lady Cunard’s racist views, and which completely and permanently severed her relationship with her mother. The vitriolic essay was posted to a list of people, including many of her mother’s friends and acquaintances, days before Christmas 1931, and it included a form to donate funds to aid the Scottsboro boys. The ‘anniversary’ alluded to in the title refers to the time that had passed since Lady Cunard had learnt that her daughter had a black friend. As Nancy Cunard recounts, at a lunch party in Lady Cunard’s house, a friend of the family, Margot Asquith (Lady Oxford), entered the room saying: ‘Hello Maud, what is it now—drink, drugs or niggers?’ The pamphlet is divided into two sections. The first part, ‘White Ladyship’, is concerned with ridiculing Lady Cunard’s obsolete beliefs and bad taste in art. The

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second part, labelled ‘The Black Man’, marks a shift in tone, and begins with a short paragraph on the history of slavery and current information about black people being lynched by racist mobs in America. Cunard summarises in one paragraph the prevailing prejudices against black people in England:

You are told that they are coarse, lascivious, lazy, ignorant, undisciplined, unthrifty, undependable, drunkards, jealous, envious, violent, that their lips, noses and hair are ugly, that they have a physical odour […]. The nigger Christy Minstrel conception prevails—to be fair, mainly with the older generation—as does the Pip and Squeak Daily Mirror children’s page idea of the Bolshevik, all beard and bombs.148

While the essay has sometimes been dismissed as Cunard’s revenge on her mother, the document made several remarkable points about the perception of Africa and people of African origin in Britain. Among them was Cunard’s criticism of the assumption that a country has to have written historical records to be considered ‘civilised’. If her ultimate agenda in writing the incendiary essay was to attract as much attention as possible to the problem of racial discrimination, the strategy was a success. Six years later, when they were corresponding on the matter of the Spanish war, W. H. Auden wrote to tell her how much he had enjoyed Black Man and White Ladyship.149

Cunard published several works focusing on the culture of the African diaspora. In 1930 the Hours Press published a limited edition of Henry Music by Henry Crowder, a book that combined jazz music sheets written by Henry Crowder with a selection of poems by Cunard, Richard Aldington and Samuel Beckett, and photographs of Cunard and Crowder by Man Ray. In 1934 Cunard edited her most famous work, Negro: An Anthology, a colossal book with more than 800 pages in A4 format. The work constituted an encyclopaedia of the art and culture of the peoples of the African diaspora, and included political, literary and anthropological articles, as well as poems, music and art from an array of international black and white artists and writers. The opening sentence of Cunard’s ‘Foreword’ to Negro explained the book’s social motivation:

148 Cunard, Black Man, p. 9.
149 Letter to Nancy Cunard dated 1937. Box 21, Folder 3, Nancy Cunard Collection, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin, USA.
It was necessary to make this book—and I think in this manner, an Anthology of some 150 voices of both races—for the recording of the struggles and achievements, the persecutions and revolts against them, of the Negro people.

The contributors to the book had very different backgrounds, including established African-American theorists and literary figures such as Alain J. Locke, W. E. B. Du Bois and Langston Hughes, the French Surrealists, modernist and avant-garde writers such as Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams, political activists such as George Padmore, and African-Caribbean poets such as Nicolás Guillén. The anthology also included several anthropological essays by Zora Neale Hurston, including her seminal work ‘Characteristics of Negro Expression’. Cunard commissioned translations from French into English from relatives and friends, including Samuel Beckett, whose translations for Cunard’s anthology constitute ‘[his] most extensive publication, (more than 63,000 words)’. While the final result was uneven, perhaps because of the lack of a specific overarching narrative for the project, Cunard’s transnational and interdisciplinary approach to black culture was unprecedented. While the 1920s and 1930s saw the rise of the black literary anthology as a genre that often combined both literature and literary theory, Negro’s collection of international voices and types of artistic manifestation is unparalleled.

Because more scholarly attention has been devoted to Negro than to any of her other works, most of the criticism directed towards Cunard as a writer and editor has revolved around this anthology. In her deconstruction of Negro’s critical reception, Jane Marcus has argued that the anthology has been unfairly relegated in critical studies of African-American literature due to Cunard’s

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152 Before the publication of Negro, other notable anthologies of black literature had been Woodson’s *Negro Orators and the Orations* (1925); Alain Locke’s *The New Negro: An Interpretation* (1925); James Weldon Johnson’s *Book of American Negro Poetry* (1922) and *Book of American Negro Spirituals* (1925); R. J. Kerlin’s *Negro Poets and Their Poems* (1923, revised in 1935); V. F. Calverton’s *Anthology of American Negro Literature* (1929); Otelia Cromwell, Lorenzo D. Turner and Eva B. Dikes’s *Readings from Negro Authors* (1931); Vernon Loggins’s *The Negro Author: His Development in America* (1931).
'gender, her color, her class, her politics, and her several sexualities'. The combination of factors that Marcus points out certainly influenced the way others perceived, and still today perceive, her work. It is at the same time undeniable that it was Cunard’s social class and economic position—although she was much less wealthy than many assumed, due to the conflict with her mother—that allowed her to carry out many of her literary projects and publication enterprises. Her fame sometimes had unexpected outcomes, as was the case with Negro, which she was able to sponsor thanks to the £1,500 she had received in settlement of a lawsuit against several tabloids that had falsely reported that she had had numerous affairs with black men in Harlem. However, her wealth was not exceptional among modernist writers, and it appears that it is the combination of her fortune, aristocratic origin and gender that constitutes the obstacle to her work being read with the seriousness it deserves. Even John Lucas, in his otherwise illuminating introduction to Cunard’s poems, calls the writer a ‘poor little rich girl’ when discussing the meaning of her poems in the Wheels anthology.

It is unavoidable that an upper-class white English patron of African artists will be regarded as a problematic figure in contemporary criticism. And indeed there are certain aspects of Cunard’s passion for the subject of African culture that are troubling. Her relationship with Henry Crowder was an unequal one, and his race and dire economic situation made him dependent on Cunard while in Europe. While it seems undeniable that Cunard fell in love with him, she seems to have regarded him as her protégé as much as her lover. Convinced of his talent as a musician, in 1930 she published a collection of his songs in a book titled Henry Music. The cover, a photomontage by Man Ray, depicts Crowder in the top left corner with Cunard’s bracelet-covered arms surrounding his neck and shoulders. To the present-day observer the effect of this awkward grasp in combination with Crowder’s half-smile is undeniably disquieting. The inclusion of Crowder’s image among Cunard’s collection of African ivories and wooden statues appears

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154 Gordon, Nancy Cunard, p. 171.
to turn him into another fetishized object for consumption, or, as Carole Sweeney describes, ‘a metonymic fragment of an imaginary African aesthetic’.

Several critics have argued that *Negro* is greatly influenced by Modernist primitivism, highlighting Cunard’s romanticising of African art, customs and spirituality. Michael North’s study of Zora Neale Hurston’s contributions to *Negro* is perhaps the most critical exploration of Cunard’s anthology. North has argued that *Negro*, in combining articles about racial discrimination and lynching with essays on African-American art and jazz performers, ‘reinstates and reinforces the old dichotomy that James Weldon Johnson had complained against back in 1922, the dichotomy confining dialect to “two full stops, humor and pathos”’. North’s criticism is in part accurate: Cunard’s (and several other contributors’) effusive descriptions of black music and art, and her equally passionate defence of civil rights and denunciation of racial discrimination, are at times neither reflective nor restrained. But his vision of the anthology as solely showcasing those two extremes is reductive considering its multiplicity of voices and themes, as well as the fact that Cunard never attempted to restrict or manage her contributors’ themes or political viewpoints. Even less fair is his criticism of Cunard’s belief that communism was the solution to the race problem, which he finds ‘infuriating’: ‘that Stalin’s Soviet Union could have been held up in 1934 as a model for the treatment of minorities is simply beyond irony.’ North admits that he writes with the benefit of hindsight, but it is undeniable that many African-American writers, including Langston Hughes, held similar radical beliefs at the time of the publication of *Negro*. Moreover, as Moynagh contends, one of the ways in which the work can be evaluated is as a valuable text documenting black Marxism. Although an argument could be made that Cunard’s unreserved fondness for almost every manifestation of the art and literature of the African diaspora, as expressed in her editorial essays, is depersonalising, her enthusiastic

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156 Carole Sweeney, *From Fetish to Subject*, p. 77.
159 North, *Dialect of Modernism*, p. 192.
161 Moynagh, ‘Introduction’, *Nancy Cunard: Essays on Race and Empire*, p. 15
tone is also characteristic of the internationalist philosophy behind the project. While her approach to the subject is sometimes questionable, a discussion of Cunard’s motivations in editing the book has to take into account her lifelong activism for civil rights and against racial discrimination in Europe and the Americas\(^\text{162}\). The sincerity of Cunard’s literary and activist work, and her continuing efforts to stop social injustice, cannot be doubted.

Three years after the publication of *Negro*, Cunard became involved with what she saw as the definitive conflict between democracy and fascism: the war in Spain. She spent the next three years campaigning to raise funds and awareness, writing articles in British and American periodicals, and arranging and editing several small publications. Cunard travelled to Spain in 1936, 1937 and 1939 as a reporter for various publications, and in the winter of 1939 she established herself at the French-Spanish frontier in order to record the exile of hundreds of thousands of republican supporters for the *Manchester Guardian*. Cunard’s work on the subject of the Spanish Civil War is founded on the same principles that lie at the core of *Negro*: an international approach to the subject matter, and a focus on oppressive political and social conditions.

**Nancy Cunard’s Internationalism**

Before I begin the analysis of Cunard’s work on the Spanish war, it is necessary to clarify the terminology used in this chapter. I have used the term ‘internationalism’ to define the philosophy that underlies much of Cunard’s political poetry, prose and activism with regard to the civil war. Despite their different etymological roots, concepts such as transnationalism, internationalism and cosmopolitanism have been used both interchangeably and with opposing meanings in contemporary historical and literary criticism. The past two decades have seen a rise in studies of cosmopolitanism in many fields, from literature to history, political science and anthropology. Critical analyses of modernist literature and writers as ‘cosmopolitan’ have been particularly popular in recent years, with works such as Jessica Berman’s *Modernist Fiction, Cosmopolitanism*,

\(^{162}\) For an analysis of Cunard’s involvement with the cause of racial justice in Britain during the 1940s see Maroula Joannou ‘Nancy Cunard’s English Journey’, *Feminist Review*, 78 (2004): 141-63.
and the Politics of Community (2001) and Rebecca Walkowitz’s Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism Beyond the Nation (2006), among others, exploring the phenomenon in English literature.

The characterisation of modernism as cosmopolitan is of course not new. Inextricably tied to the concept of cosmopolitanism, the idea of the ‘citizen of the world’ has traditionally proven fruitful for critical analyses of modernist literature, where it has been employed especially in relation to the figure of the expatriate or travelling writer, almost a literary type in itself. But modernist writers have been described as cosmopolitan not only because they themselves were cosmopolitan and travelled or resided abroad, but also because of the international influences in their work. The importance of cultural exchange for modernist literature is well known. As Ramazani has explained, the work of canonical figures of modernism such as Eliot and Pound cannot be understood without analysing how their ‘polyglot’ and ‘transcultural’ style ‘interweaves Euroclassicism and a Chinese ideogram, cockney gossip and Sanskrit parable, Confucius and Thomas Jefferson, the thunderous God of the Hebrew Bible and a Brahmin creator God’. In an era marked by the creation of new nationalities and nations, many Modernist writers reflected on the notion of ‘national literature’, but also on the common roots of European literatures. Many of the pacifist writers of the interwar period linked the idea of ‘world peace’ to the one of ‘world literature’, a conceptual connection that was again employed at the end of the Second World War, among others, by Eliot. However, the definition of ‘cosmopolitanism’ that is normally applied to canonical works of modernism does not seem to be adequate to characterise the

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164 Eliot’s lecture ‘What is a Classic?’, which was delivered before the Virgil Society on the 16th of October, 1944, is a conciliatory effort to connect the European literary traditions back to their Latin roots:

The blood-stream of European literature is Latin and Greek—not as two systems of circulation, but one, for it is through Rome that our parentage in Greece must be traced. What common measure of excellence have we in literature, among our several languages, which is not the classical measure? What mutual intelligibility can we hope to preserve, except in our common heritage of thought and feeling in those two languages, for the understanding of which, no European people is in any position of advantage over any other? No modern language could aspire to the universality of Latin…

political poetry written about the Spanish war. In the works of Cunard, Spender, Day-Lewis and other writers associated with the ideology of the left the importance of transnational interaction goes beyond literary concerns. Much of the political literature and journalism about the civil war is imbued with a belief in international cooperation with the aim of achieving social justice. While the foreign lands and civilisations reinterpreted and imagined by Modernist poetry were often invocations of the past, the political literature that looked at the conflict in Spain, the rise of fascism in Germany or the invasion of Ethiopia was necessarily grounded in the present. This is not to say that Cunard’s works on the Spanish war are strictly factual or devoid of any exoticist aesthetics or romantic depictions of foreign people and their customs. However, her works are mostly written from a social perspective greatly influenced by socialist ideology. The idea of internationalism is a good starting point for analysing not only Cunard’s poetry on the war, but also the vast amount of activity aiming to promote cultural exchange and cooperation organised by Cunard and others during the years of the conflict.

While they are sometimes used interchangeably, the ideas of cosmopolitanism and internationalism have traditionally had different and sometimes opposite meanings. The term ‘internationalism’—often written with a capital I—is historically tied to socialist ideology, and is evocative of the Second International’s anthem ‘The Internationale’. In the first half of the twentieth century it was not uncommon to see ‘cosmopolitanism’ used to describe free trade among nations (often also called ‘liberal internationalism’), and ‘internationalism’ used to define an idea of social equality. This distinction is not new. As early as 1848, in the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels established a difference between proletarian cosmopolitanism and economic, liberal bourgeois cosmopolitanism. In the interwar period, ideas of nationalism and

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165 As Delanty and Inglis explain, Marx and Engels’s redefinition of the word ‘cosmopolitan’ invests it with a ‘meaning that is more economic than political and is suggestive of more recent notions of globalization. However, Marx and Engels also clearly had a cosmopolitan conception of the working class as a universal class. On the one side is the cosmopolitanism of global capitalism and on the other the cosmopolitanism of proletarian revolution.’ Gerard Delanty and David Inglis, ‘Introduction: An Overview of the Field of Cosmopolitan Studies’, in Gerard Delanty and David Inglis (eds), *Cosmopolitanism: Critical Concepts in the Social Sciences* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2001), p. 6.
internationalism were at the centre of both political and literary discussions. In a letter to Ford Madox Ford published in the first issue of the *Transatlantic Review*, T. S. Eliot, discussing the relevance of the ‘transatlantic’ founding principles of the magazine (which understood the literature produced on both sides of the Atlantic as ‘English literature’), identified internationalism with socialism and cosmopolitanism with capitalism:

> The present age, a singularly stupid one, is the age of a mistaken nationalism and of an equally mistaken and artificial internationalism. I am all for empires, especially the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and I deplore the outburst of artificial nationalities, constituted like artificial genealogies for millionaires, all over the world […]. Let us not have an indiscriminate mongrel mixture of socialist internationals, or of capitalist cosmopolitans, but a harmony of different functions.  

As was outlined in the Introduction, after the end of the Great War, plans for international cooperation and exchange with the aim of perpetuating peace became widespread. Institutionally they materialised in the creation of the League of Nations, and culturally in many associations and publications that promoted international understanding. However, by the mid-1930s, when Britain and America still had not recovered from the 1929 economic crisis, many people were disillusioned with the small effect that campaigns executed by the League of Nations had had on the living conditions of the working class. As Sluga explains, a considerable sector of interwar internationalists across Europe, who had initially supported the League but had grown disappointed with its achievements, began to look at communist internationalism as a solution. This internationalist philosophy, which progressively gained popularity as an alternative to the growing nationalism across Europe during the mid-1930s, was in many ways a socially oriented evolution of the cosmopolitan ideas that had become popular

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after the end of the Great War. The war in Spain became for many the opportunity to enact such principles.\(^{168}\)

Recent scholarly criticism has continued to explore the nuances of the idea of cosmopolitanism, differentiating between writers who use international themes or are inspired by foreign traditions, and writers whose works are characterised by a ‘critical cosmopolitanism’. For Walkowitz, the works of modernist writers such as Conrad, Joyce and Woolf use different narrative strategies with the aim of thinking beyond the nation but also comparing, distinguishing, and judging among different versions of transnational thought; testing moral and political norms […] and valuing informal as well as transient models of community.\(^{169}\)

However, unlike the ‘critical cosmopolitanism’ defined by Walkowitz, which manifests itself primarily in narrative strategies (she identifies the tactics of ‘naturalness’, ‘triviality’, ‘evasion’, ‘mix-ups’, ‘treason’ and ‘vertigo’\(^{170}\)), the internationalist ideology embraced by many of the authors who wrote about the Spanish war is thematically explicit. Anti-fascism, social equality and cooperation between nations were the central subjects of many of the works that dealt with the war, and the open discussion of such themes was seen as central to their mission of educating readers about the dangers of totalitarianism.

As was explained earlier, the idea of internationalism promoted by Cunard was largely a cultural one, and resided in the belief that encouraging cultural relations between countries would help to maintain world order. While it

\(^{168}\) Such idea is at the heart of Herbert Matthews’ *Education of a Correspondent* (1946). Looking back at the civil war, Matthews stresses how the anti-fascist movement in Spain contributed to the creation of a sense of global community more than the League of Nations ever could:

[Spain] gave meaning to life; it gave courage and faith in humanity; it taught us what internationalism means, as no League of Nations or Dumbarton Oaks will ever do. There one learned that men could be brothers, that nations and frontiers, religions and races were but outer trappings, and that nothing counted, nothing was worth fighting for, but the ideal of liberty.


\(^{170}\) Walkowitz, *Cosmopolitan Style*, p. 4.
encouraged exchanges between writers and artists, it also had the pedagogical aim of spreading knowledge across all social groups and promoting the cause of literacy. During the interwar period, collaborative projects and associations of writers, many in support of a political or social goal, proliferated in Europe and the Americas. Many countries founded their own national writers’ associations, such as the PEN club in England, which soon extended to more than twenty countries. In Spain, Rafael Alberti, José Bergamín and Maria Teresa León founded the Alianza de Intelectuales, which was both a centre for cultural events and a residence for foreign writers and journalists who could not afford to pay for accommodation while in Spain. The Alianza also published its own magazine of political literature, entitled *El Mono Azul* (‘the blue overalls’). In France, Louis Aragon coordinated several Maisons de la Culture, cultural associations connected to the trade unions°, which had the aim of propagating culture and promoting popular art.

The literary events and publications that were organised to support the republican government during the war years provided the basis for intercultural contact in the shape of literary collaborations and translations. The contact between writers from different nationalities, and the idea that the poet was at the forefront of the people’s fight, helped to create a new theme in the literature of the conflict: the Spanish republican poet, often described as a hero of the people. Spender’s ‘To a Spanish Poet’, dedicated to Manuel Altolaguirre, follows this idea. The tragic figure of Lorca, whose participation in politics was never heavily pronounced but who was killed at the beginning of the war, inspired a series of eulogies from poets all over the world. Stephen Spender’s collection *Poems for Spain* contains poems inspired by the death of Lorca by Geoffrey Parsons, Jacob Bronowski and Leopoldo Urrutia. Miguel Hernández, the self-taught shepherd poet who died in prison in 1937, became a symbol of the proletarian writer, and his previously unpublished works were translated into several languages.

In addition, the civil war represented a fruitful period for Spanish and English poetry translation, especially in the area of popular literature. The number

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of poets and writers involved in tasks of translation, particularly from French, English, German and Spanish, is remarkable. While, as Steven Yao has argued, the practice of translation is crucial for modernist literature’s ‘program of cultural renewal’, for a group of poets that identified with the ideology of the left, translation became a necessary and urgent task. The translations that were produced in the cultural environment surrounding the conflict privileged socially focused contemporary poetry that aimed to warn against the dangers of fascism and denounce social inequality. Translations of contemporary protest poetry became especially ubiquitous in the literary magazines of the left. Nancy Cunard translated Pablo Neruda’s poems ‘Almeria’ and ‘To the Mothers of the Dead Militia’ for *Left Review*—one of the earliest, and possibly the earliest of all, translations of Neruda into English—as well as several poems by the francophone Haitian poet Jacques Roumain. The few letters relating to the duration and immediate aftermath of the war that are preserved in Cunard’s archive are testimony to the dynamic exchange of manuscripts for translation among the poets that were involved in the defence of Spain. Cunard had her own work translated from French into Spanish by the Spanish Surrealist poet and Nobel Prize winner Vicente Aleixandre and by Jose Amaral, an American academic best known as the Spanish translator of Ezra Pound. But Cunard was not the only example; British writers such as Stephen Spender and Sylvia Townsend Warner were also convinced of the importance of promoting and propagating the work of like-minded international authors. Spender’s translations of poems by Bertolt Brecht and Miguel Hernandez appeared in John Lehmann’s journal *New Writing*. Warner and Spender also decided to translate into English a series of ‘romances’—orally transmitted ballads, the popularity of which soared during the war—some of which were published in Spender’s anthology *Poems for Spain*. Such ballads, which were read on the front lines and also transmitted through radio reports, the press and pamphlets, in fact became veritable means of mass communication. The inclusion of these popular, revolutionary and often anonymous ballads in the collection is indicative of the conception of literature as the voice of the people that many poets embraced during the years of the war.

The practice of translation also served to further other social aims. Translation had become a crucial tool for internationalist movements such as Pan-Africanism, which promoted cultural contact among the peoples of the African diaspora and attempted to provide an international definition of black identity and experience. This idea was at the heart of Nancy Cunard’s *Negro*, which gathered together English translations of works by black writers from Africa and African communities around the world. Such beliefs became strengthened during the Spanish war, when fascism’s white-supremacist ideology was emphatically rejected during many of the writers’ meetings and congresses held in support of the Republic. It was in Madrid’s Alianza de Intelectuales, the house of the international association of writers, that Langston Hughes and the Spanish poet Rafael Alberti began the translation of Federico García Lorca’s play *Blood Wedding*, as Hughes recounts in his autobiography. Indeed, Hughes’s translation project marked the beginning of a long relationship between African-American poets and Lorca’s works, with authors such as Amiri Baraka and Bob Kaufman continuing the mission of translating and sometimes rewriting his poetry.

Many authors in this period became translators from languages in which they were not fluent—as was usually the case with Spanish—with varying levels of success. In general, most writers gave priority to adapting the poems to English rhythmic patterns, to the detriment of a faithful reproduction of the meaning of the lines. This editorial decision was in accord with modernist views on the practice of translation. Yao has argued that during the modernist period, formal knowledge of the language was not seen as a requirement for the practice of translation. Similar views are endorsed by Ezra Pound in his essay ‘How to Read’, in which he promotes the practice and reading of translations as a means of literary inspiration. Pound contends:

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177 Steven G. Yao, *Translation*, p. 10.
One does not need to learn a whole language in order to understand some one or some dozen poems. It is often enough to understand thoroughly the poem, and every one of the few dozen or few hundred words that compose it.\textsuperscript{178}

This is certainly reflected in the ease that many of his contemporaries appear to feel about translating. Cunard’s translations of Pablo Neruda’s poems for \textit{Left Review}, if in general quite successful in conveying the spirit of the poems, take liberties with the original texts, especially with regard to word choice. Considering the frantic rhythm of creating, sharing, translating and publishing that characterised the literary production that emerged from the Spanish war, it could also be argued that the importance and urgency of their mission overtook any anxiety over their own linguistic skills. In any case, these examples help to throw light on the significant cultural exchanges that the activities surrounding support for the Spanish Republic fostered.

\textbf{Collective Publications and the Writer as Ambassador: ‘Authors Take Sides on the Spanish War’ and \textit{Les Poètes du Monde Défendent le Peuple Espagnol}}

One of the ideas propagated in many of the periodicals of the left during the second half of the 1930s was the earnest belief in the power of writers to influence political decisions. Unity among the world’s ‘intellectuals’—a term widely applied to writers and artists—was seen as crucial for the defeat of fascism and the defence of democratic ideals around the world. Mirroring the structure of organisations such as the League of Nations, there was a worldwide proliferation of international associations and meetings of writers at which authors acted as delegates for their respective countries. The idea of writers and their works as the best representatives of their countries had been circulating since before the 1930s. As early as 1923, Ford Madox Ford circulated a prospectus for the \textit{Transatlantic Review} in which he claimed that one of the aims of the publication was to introduce ‘a more genial note’ in the discourse of international politics, given that ‘the best ambassadors, the only nonsecret diplomatists between nations are the

\textsuperscript{178} Ezra Pound, \textit{How to Read} (place unspecified: Desmond Harmsworth, 1931), pp. 48–9.
books and the arts of nations." By the 1930s, writers were increasingly expected to express their political views with regard to the rise of fascism in Europe and the threat of a new world war. Most of Cunard’s activist work in aid of the causes of civil rights in America, the Spanish Republic, or a few years later the plight of Occupied France, was addressed to an international community of artists and writers.

Nancy Cunard’s best-known attempt to mobilise public opinion for the cause of the Spanish Republic was the questionnaire ‘Authors Take Sides on the Spanish War’, the answers to which were published in *Left Review* as a special booklet in 1937. ‘Authors Take Sides’ has since become one of the most quoted documents in assessments of the political sympathies of many of the most popular British writers of the 1930s. Cunard circulated the call for contributors in June 1937, attempting to enlist the opinions of the best-known writers of the time. The call asked British writers (and writers living in Britain), whom she described as ‘amongst the most sensitive instruments of a nation’, to state their position regarding the Spanish conflict in less than six lines. Cunard’s appeal highlighted the urgency of the choice:

This is the question we are asking you: Are you for, or against, the legal Government and the People of Republican Spain? Are you for, or against, Franco and Fascism? For it is impossible any longer to take no side.

The wording of the question indicated that in Cunard’s mind, only an anti-fascist answer was possible. The expectation that writers would align with left-leaning and anti-fascist causes was so prevalent that little space was given to dissenting opinions. Valentine Cunningham points out a similar example in John Lehmann’s *New Writing*, in which he advertised that the magazine was ‘independent of any

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180 Call for contributors to ‘Authors Take Sides Against the Spanish War. Box 21, Folder 3, Nancy Cunard Collection, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin, USA.
political party’ but did ‘not intend to open its pages to writers of reactionary or Fascist sentiments’.  

The pamphlet was clearly inspired by similar Modernist little publications; the introduction to the questionnaire resembled a manifesto, and the restriction of six-lines per answer turned the booklet of writers’ replies into a collage of political opinions. The call for contribut ors was signed by an impressively large number of international writers, many of them friends and acquaintances of Cunard: George Bernard Shaw, W. H. Auden, T. S. Eliot, Samuel Beckett, Rebecca West, Brian Howard, Stephen Spender and Sylvia Townsend Warner, among many others. The 148 answers were classified as follows: ‘For the Republic, against Franco and Fascism: 127, Neutral: 16. Pro-Franco and Pro-Fascism: 5.’ Not everyone surveyed contributed an answer. George Orwell, who had already returned from his disillusioning experience as a volunteer soldier in Catalonia, declined to participate. Others questioned the obligation to take sides, and the rigid dichotomy that Cunard established between being ‘for or against democracy, for or against the Spanish republic, or for or against the people’. T. S. Eliot replied that he felt ‘convinced that it is best that at least a few men of letters should remain isolated, and take no part in these collective activities’. He had stated his position more clearly months before in his editorial for The Criterion, in which he rebelled against the pressure to state his position regarding the war in Spain:

So long as we are not compelled in our own interest to take sides, I do not see why we should do so on insufficient knowledge [of Spain]; and even any eventual partisanship should be held with reservations, humility and misgivings.

Eliot’s argument was a judicious one, considering the lack of familiarity of most of the volunteers who travelled to Spain with the internal politics and history of...
the conflict. This was, however, not a big enough deterrent for the many people who answered in favour of the Republic. The number of pro-Republic responses was proof of the anti-fascist sentiment among the international community of writers. The answers differed in length and style: from Huxley’s lengthy response advocating pacifism, to Beckett’s famously concise contribution, ‘¡UPHEREPUBLIC!’—which continues to divide critics, who are undecided whether to interpret it as passionate, ironic, or perhaps both. Several critics have read in Beckett’s answer both his unambiguous support for the Spanish Republic and an ironic comment showing his disappointment with the Irish republican movement, whose party, Fianna Fáil, used ‘Up the Republic’ as a rallying slogan.\(^{184}\)

Finally, Cunard’s call for contributors also introduced a crucial topic in the international perception of the conflict: its post-colonial and racial significance. For Cunard, the rise of fascism meant not only ‘social injustice and cultural death’, but also the perpetuation of colonialism in an age in which the popularity of anti-colonial movements was rising steadily: ‘revived, Imperial Rome, abetted by international treachery has conquered her place in the Abyssinian sun. The dark millions in the colonies are unavenged.’ Cunard refers to Mussolini’s invasion of Ethiopia, which had drawn criticism from democratic nations in Europe and America. Her passionate call portrayed the civil war as an opportunity not only to stop the advance of fascism, but also to rectify the situation in colonial Africa. The Trinidadian writer George Padmore was one of the few who picked up Cunard’s reference to imperialism in his reply to the survey, in which he stressed:

The sympathy of Africans and other colonial peoples naturally goes out to the toiling masses of Spain and their heroic struggle against Fascist-barbarism, for they have not forgotten Abyssinia.

sent out a similar survey to American writers. The call copied parts of Cunard’s statement, and reiterated the view of writers as ‘the most sensitive instruments of the national life’. It included the opinions of Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, Langston Hughes, Theodore Dreiser and more than 100 others. Perhaps unsurprisingly considering that there were many points in common with regard to the public’s emotional engagement with and perception of both conflicts, the format was also resurrected in 1967 to canvass opinion on the Vietnam War. The questionnaire was also revived during the Falklands War in 1928. Both editions openly acknowledged Cunard’s pamphlet as their source of inspiration, and reprinted part of her 1937 call for contributors.

The second project with which Cunard attempted to involve writers in the cause of the civil war was the little magazine (in practice, almost a pamphlet) that she co-edited with Pablo Neruda, *Les Poètes du Monde Défendent le Peuple Espagnol*. Cunard very probably met Neruda in Madrid as part of the international colony of writers and artists that gathered in the city in 1937, and they immediately struck up a friendship. Neruda had begun his appointment as the Chilean consul in Madrid in November 1935, when he replaced his fellow poet Gabriela Mistral. His residence, the Casa de las Flores, was a popular gathering place for the foreign writers and artists who had travelled to see the battlefields. Cunard and Neruda printed the magazine issues, six in total, on her old press at her house in Réanville—the same press that she had used to publish her books for her company the Hours Press. The aim of the magazines, which were sold in Paris and London, was to raise funds for republican war victims. The cover bore a small legend in French which stated the purpose of the publication and used the

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189 The first issue was published entirely in Spanish. The other issues’ covers were in French, and the poems were published in the authors’ original languages, apart from Cunard’s ‘Para Hacerse Amar’, which was written in French and translated into Spanish by Vicente Aleixandre. The magazine therefore contained poems in Spanish, French, English and German.
slogan that had become a war cry in Madrid, where people fiercely resisted the entrance of Franco’s troops, ‘¡No pasarán!’:


(Madrid will be the tomb of International Fascism. Intellectuals! Fight the murderers of Federico Garcia Lorca from your own countries. We ask for money, healthcare equipment, provisions and clothes for the people of Republican Spain. They shall not pass!)

There is very little information available about the circumstances surrounding the publication of the six issues of the magazine, such as how the contributors were chosen and how many more issues were planned. Cunard’s papers and letters before the Second World War, as stated above, were destroyed when her house in Réanville was plundered in 1945. Likewise, Pablo Neruda’s writings do not offer reliable information about their collaboration. As Rafael Osuna points out, Neruda’s autobiography Confieso que he vivido (published posthumously in 1974) is full of factual inaccuracies about his friendship and literary association with Cunard, and about his stay in Spain in general, in part because of the instability of his life during the volatile years of the war. Similarly, scholarly analyses of Les Poètes du Monde often contain mistakes and oversights, especially with regards to the number and names of the poets who contributed their work, mainly because the original pamphlets are very rare and no library holds a complete collection. The publication in 2002 of a facsimile edition of the complete run of the magazine has been invaluable in providing a full picture of Neruda and Cunard’s project.

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191 In 2002, a facsimile edition of the six issues of Les Poètes du Monde was published in Spain: Los poetas del mundo defienden al pueblo español (Sevilla: Renacimiento, 2002). This edition has a very peculiar addendum, a separate booklet penned by the well-known Spanish novelist Ramón Sénér describing his acquaintanceship with Nancy Cunard, which he wrote soon after her death. Like most posthumous recollections of Cunard, it
The first issue of *Les Poètes du Monde* contained previously unpublished poems by Neruda and Cunard; the second, by Tristan Tzara and Vicente Aleixandre; the third, by Federico García Lorca and Langston Hughes; the fourth, by Rafael Alberti, Pierre Robin and Cedric Dover; the fifth, by Raúl González Tuñón and W. H. Auden; and the sixth and last by Nicolás Guillén, Robin Wilson, Hans Gebser, Brian Howard and Randall Swingler. Cunard and Neruda’s project is a fascinating document for a comparative approach to the literature of the war. While united by an overarching theme, the poems are stylistically quite different, with metrical forms that go from sonnet to free verse and even Cunard’s somewhat unsophisticated avant-garde inspired acrostic:

\[
\begin{align*}
F &\rightarrow A \rightarrow S \rightarrow C \rightarrow I \rightarrow S \rightarrow M \rightarrow O \\
F &\quad \text{FEDERACION} \\
A &\quad \text{A SESINA AL} \\
S &\quad \text{SERVICIO DEL} \\
C &\quad \text{C RIMEN} \\
I &\quad \text{I INTERNACIONAL} \\
S &\quad \text{S ECCION} \\
M &\quad \text{M UERTE A LOS} \\
O &\quad \text{OBREROS ESPAÑOLES} \\
\end{align*}
\]

¡Pueblo, en pie—No pasarán!¹⁹²

Most of the works included in *Les Poètes du Monde* are war poems. The only exception to the war theme is a sonnet by Federico García Lorca, ‘Soneto a Carmela Cóndon Agradeciéndole Unas Muñecas’, which appears in tribute to the poet, whose death immediately became an emblem of fascism’s hatred of culture and anti-intellectualism. Among the themes explored in many of the other compositions is that characteristic of the poetry of the Spanish conflict and the contains plenty of factual inaccuracies. The most curious, if unlikely, assertion Sénder makes is his claim that Cunard confessed undying love for Aldous Huxley, with whom she had a relationship in the 1920s.

Second World War: the horror of the new total, urban kind of war in which civilians were directly targeted. Other pieces introduced communist themes, such as the heroic figure of the worker, as in Langston Hughes’s ‘Song of Spain’, or anticlericalism, as in Cunard’s ‘Para Hacerse Amar’. Most conveyed a belief that the survival of the Republic would bring with it a utopian regime based on class equality, justice and the appreciation of culture. Only a few poems escape either the catastrophic or the exalted revolutionary tone. One of them is ‘Chant de Guerre Civil’ by Tristan Tzara, which the poet finishes with a sobering conclusion, admitting that it is not the same to write about war as to participate in it:

\[
\begin{align*}
c\text{’est moi qui ai écrit ce poème} \\
dans la solitude de ma chambre \\
tandis qu’à ceux pour qui je pleure \\
la mort est douce ils y demeurent
\end{align*}
\]

The fifth issue of *Les Poètes du Monde* contained W. H. Auden’s poem ‘Spain’, arguably the most famous British poem of the Spanish Civil War, albeit one that its author continued to revise and even grew to detest. ‘Spain’ inspired many other poems about the civil war, among them Cunard’s ‘Yes, It is Spain’, the title of which mirrors a line of Auden’s poem. Phrases such as ‘Madrid is the heart’, ‘Poets exploding like bombs’ and ‘to-day the struggle’ have been used in, and have given titles to, countless essays about the civil war. But undeniably the most discussed lines of Auden’s poem are those in which he seems to endorse the idea of justifiable killings:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{To-day the deliberate increase in the chances of death} \\
\text{The conscious acceptance of guilt in the necessary murder.}
\end{align*}
\]

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193 It is me who has written this poem
in the solitude of my room
while those for whom I cry
death is sweet in it they remain

In his well-known response to the poem, George Orwell accused Auden of not knowing what violence was really like, and attacked what he saw as Auden’s ‘yearning for bloodshed in the far distance’. Orwell’s comments have been used to argue that what attracted foreign writers to Spain was not the spirit of anti-fascism but their fascination with violence, although this absolutist notion has long been discredited. What pervades Auden’s poem is a sense of conscious but inevitable submission to the revolutionary spirit of the supporters of the Republic:

What's your proposal?
To build the just city? I will.
I agree. Or is it the suicide pact, the romantic Death? Very well, I accept, for
I am your choice, your decision. Yes, I am Spain.

This expression of compliance and obedience contrasts with the passionate exhortations and political certainty that characterise most of the poetry of the Spanish war, and yet Auden’s lines appear sincere. The fragment is suggestive of the power of the collective perception of the war in Spain as the cause to embrace in the late 1930s. The poet’s inability to understand what is asked of him, whether ‘to build the just city’ or ‘the romantic death’, voices Auden’s uncertainty about the role of the writer in a foreign war.

**Cunard’s Poetry of the Spanish War**

Nancy Cunard’s poetry of the 1930s and 1940s was almost invariably politically inspired, and was often written with the aim of raising awareness, and sometimes collecting funds, for various political causes. Her poetry on the subject

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196 The argument was posited by George Watson in his book *Politics and Literature in Modern Britain* (London: Macmillan, 1977). Watson argued that intellectuals publicly advocated and justified violence, and purposely ignored negative information about the Stalinist regime.
of the Spanish Civil War was written in different stages. During the war, she published several poems in periodicals such as the literary magazine *Life and Letters Today* and the markedly left-wing and anti-fascist weekly *New Statesman and Nation*, as well as lesser-known publications devoted to the cause of the Spanish Republic, such as the little magazines edited by Charles Duff, *Voice of Spain* and *Spanish Newsletter*. After the end of the Second World War she returned to the Spanish theme, writing a series of poems that she published in a volume titled *Nous Gens d’Espagne* (1949). Written entirely in French, *Nous Gens d’Espagne* is an elegy for the idealistic dreams symbolised by republican Spain, as well as a reminder to her readers that, despite the collapse of fascist regimes in Europe, Spain still banished its political exiles. In addition, she continued writing poems on the subject during the 1950s and 1960s, often during long visits to the country, most of which remain unpublished. As her biographer Lois Gordon stresses, her experience in Spain continued to influence her writing until the end of her life,197 and she continued working on a ‘Long Epic on Spain’ until her final days in 1965.

Some of Cunard’s poems on Spain have been reprinted in anthologies such as Cunningham’s *The Penguin Book of Spanish Civil War Verse* and Jane Dowson’s *Women’s Poetry of the 1930s*. In 2005, John Lucas edited a selection of Cunard’s poems, entitled *Poems of Nancy Cunard from the Bodleian Library*. Lucas published the selection that Cunard had sent in 1943 to Edward Thompson, Ernest Benn’s poetry editor, after Thompson had convinced her to publish a collection of her poetry. Unfortunately, Thompson died the following year, and the project was never realised. Among the poems that Cunard herself selected as her best were several poems on the war in Spain and its aftermath, as well as several on colonial themes.

Cunard’s poetry from the 1930s is prominently political, expressing her demands for social and racial equality. While criticism has sometimes dismissed the poetry of the 1930s as propaganda and a mere carrier of political slogans—reinforcing the traditional divide between politics and aesthetics—I believe that Cunard’s poetry deserves a more careful reading. It is also noteworthy that the

writers of the left were not unaware of the critical implications of writing political literature. As early as 1940, John Lehmann had to defend his choice of writers for his review of the literature of the 1930s in his influential critical essay *New Writing in Europe*. While recognising the importance of Marxist ideas in the poetry of Auden, Spender and Day-Lewis, Lehmann highlights the problems of being considered a communist poet:

The moment you try and stick the label on, you will see they are something less than that (no strict party propagandist would think it at all safe to recommend their work), and something more interesting as well,—something much more representative of the complex thinking and feeling that has permeated western civilisation since 1918.198

Lehmann was responding here to the derogatory vision of the poetry of the Spanish war (and, more generally, that of the writers of the left), as transmitting the ideology of a specific party. This is a crucial question, because there is indeed a difference, which is sometimes overlooked, between the idea of ‘party literature’, as espoused by Soviet realism, and a socially-committed literature that voiced the feeling of impending crisis that pervaded the end of the 1930s. In the case of Cunard’s poetry, behind the support for the Spanish cause there lay a deep desire for social change, and the idea that a fairer future could be achieved by using literature to analyse current events critically. Cunard held this philosophy beyond the years of the Spanish war. The call for poems for her 1944 edited volume *Poems for France* (1944)—the title replicated Spender’s anthology *Poems for Spain*—throws light on Cunard’s poetic preferences:

I am making a collection of Poems written on France since September 1939 [...]. That is to say, written only since the beginning of the war. Hence poems—published or unpublished—that describe or reflect the events of

France since then. The aim of this Anthology is to be as factual as possible, not symbolic or ‘general’.\footnote{Box 7, Folder 8, Nancy Cunard Collection, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin, USA.}

Cunard’s conscious decision to select ‘factual’ poems arises from her belief that literature was the best way not only to chronicle but also to understand the volatile era through which Europe was passing. Cunard’s preference is always for a concrete poetry of the present. The title, *Poems for France*, again alludes to the idea of international solidarity through which Cunard conceived most of her work as a poet and publisher.

There have been few attempts to theorise the political poetry of the interwar period, and although the categories are by no means opposed, many find that the value of the poetry of the Spanish war is historical rather than literary. The best-known essay on the poetry of the conflict, Valentine Cunningham’s informative and comprehensive ‘Introduction’ to *The Penguin Book of Spanish Civil War Verse* (1980), is in great part a historical discussion of the participation of English poets in the war. Cunningham’s introduction, on which much of the later criticism of the literature of the war has been modelled, mainly regards the poems as evidence of British involvement in the conflict. Robert Shulman’s *The Power of Political Art* (2000), which looks at the work of the American literary left of the 1930s, attempts to provide new parameters within which to reconsider the political poetry of the interwar period. Rather than to examine 1930s poetry as a historical document, Shulman argues that it should be regarded as ‘another avant-garde, politically left, frequently nonmodernist, and grounded in the traditions of realism-naturalism’.\footnote{Robert Shulman, *The Power of Political Art: The 1930s Literary Left Reconsidered* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), p. 7.} As I will develop further below, I believe that one way to approach Cunard’s poetry about Spain is to see it in the context of the ideology of cultural internationalism, which influences both the themes and the rhetoric of her poetry.

Nancy Cunard’s poetry about Spain clearly sides with the Spanish Republic. Her poems often portray the war in the Manichean terms traditional to the literature of the Spanish war, depicting the Republic as the government of the
people, and Franco as an evil, invasive force who does not hesitate to bomb his fellow Spaniards. Her poetry, like that of many other poets of the Spanish war, is not politically analytical. As with the majority of English writers who write about Spain, she is often more interested in seeing the war as a symbolic fight against fascism than as a conflict that reflects that country’s specific and volatile history. Because Cunard saw fascism as the opposite of culture, she believed that it was the duty of all writers to defend the cause of the Republic. In none of her other works did she reflect her belief in the social responsibility of writers so powerfully as in her poetry of the civil war.

Many of Cunard’s poems explore one of the recurring themes of the war poetry of the twentieth century: the terror caused by warplanes that target civilian populations. Several of her poems represent the two ideological factions involved in the war in a vertical way: the honest workers below, and above them the bombers sent to support Franco’s troops. The division is clear in ‘To Eat To-Day’, which describes the interactions of a group of Italian pilots and finishes with a look at the ground below, emphasising the connection between the people and the soil, and implicitly opposing it to warfare technology:

On the simple earth
Five mouths less to feed to-night in Barcelona.
On the simple earth
Men trampling and raving on an edge of fear\(^\text{201}\)

The possibility of being bombed from above, ‘the modern version of the sky falling on one’s head’\(^\text{202}\) in the words of Ian Patterson, seems to have rendered the poet speechless, unable to describe the new warfare techniques. Cunard’s ‘To Eat To-Day’ paints the planes as almost unimaginable entities:

They come without siren-song or any ushering
Over the usual street of man’s middle day;
Come unbelievably, abstract, beyond human vision,
Codicils, dashes along the great maniac speech—

\(^{201}\) Nancy Cunard, ‘To Eat To-Day’, in \textit{Poems from the Bodleian}, p. 47.
\(^{202}\) Ian Patterson, \textit{Guernica and Total War} (London: Profile Books, 2007), p. 3.
‘Helmeted Nuremberg nothing’, said the people of Barcelona,

The people of Spain—‘ya sabemos, we have suffered all’. 203

In her description of the eeriness of daytime air raids, Cunard indulges in some poetic licence, since many other sources recount the ghoulish sound of the sirens warning of enemy bombings on the streets of Madrid and Barcelona. The bombings are here portrayed as some sort of side effect, an addendum to the ‘great maniac speech’ of a ruthless authority in Nuremberg. The vulnerability of the people in the face of an almost god-like authoritarian ruler is similarly conveyed in another war poem, W. H. Auden’s ‘Epitaph on a Tyrant’:

Perfection, of a kind, was what he was after,
And the poetry he invented was easy to understand:
He knew human folly like the back of his hand,
And was greatly interested in armies and fleets;
When he laughed, respectable senators burst with laughter,
And, when he cried, the little children died in the streets.

Aside from describing the new form of total war that the conflict in Spain inaugurated, Cunard’s poetry also looks at the conflict that had marked her youth: the Great War. This is particularly remarkable because there is a noticeable lack of allusions to the Great War in the literature of the civil war. Several critics have stressed that many of the 1930s poets shared a sense of frustration because they had been too young to fight in the Great War, which is one of the reasons given to explain the enthusiasm with which many embraced the war in Spain. In ‘Yes, It is Spain’, 204 Cunard—who turned eighteen in 1914 and therefore would have been of military age—reflects that she would have been conscripted had she been a man:

18, 18, 18—if a man, yes, I’d have been shifted over into it then,
Into the great-to-do, the last one, the Grande Guerre.

203 Cunard, ‘To Eat To-Day’.
With some cross-eyed crossroad finger pointing at me
‘On!’ on to some bottomless pit for the long waiting and wondering

Cunard’s reference to her gender is exceptional in her writing about the Spanish war, in which she very rarely mentions her position as a woman. The lines briefly illustrate the change in war dynamics introduced in the late 1930s, when war ceased to be fought in the trenches, and the battlefield was extended to urban territory. Cunard establishes an implicit contrast between the ‘long waiting and wondering’ of the Great War and the opportunity to take action that this war presents for women, beyond more traditional roles such as hospital work.

Cunard’s poems stress the idea of the social responsibility of the poet in the face of a world crisis. In ‘Yes, It is Spain’, she invokes a global community of writers and artists (and even characters such as Faust) to inspire undecided contemporary authors to join the republican cause:

Daddy Hogarth, and Faust, Shakespeare, Chaucer and Marlowe
Goya, Heine and Daumier, and the long-exiled giant, Hugo,
Dante—what do you think they’d say to you, artist in hesitations?
Shall I call on these our dead for their answer? ‘Go,
Learn from the day’s ruins and tombs’ they say, ‘our trust’s in the people
Who fought against iron, Church and Bank, with naked fist, fight not in vain—
Every man to his battle, child; this is yours, understand it,
In that desert where blood replaces water—Yes, it is Spain.’

Cunard’s grouping of such diverse names speaking with a single voice—a voice infused with communist rhetoric—is very much connected to the preference for a collective rather than an individual sensibility that characterises much of the political poetry of the 1930s. The appeal to an international community of writers is not uncommon in the poetry about Spain. With a more intimate tone, Pablo Neruda’s war poem ‘Explico unas cosas’ (‘I Explain a Few Things’) finds

205 Cunard, ‘Yes, It is Spain’, in Poems from the Bodleian, p. 46.
consolation in the idea of a community of poets when reminiscing about his home in Madrid, destroyed by the air raids. His poem addresses fellow revolutionary writers, the Argentinian poet Raúl González Tuñón, the Spanish poet Rafael Alberti, and the omnipresent Lorca:

Raúl, do you remember?
Do you remember Rafael?
Federico, do you remember
under the earth,
do you remember my house with its balconies where
the June light drowned flowers in your mouth?206

Cunard’s ideals of international solidarity are also reflected in her poem ‘Madrid 1936’ from her unfinished ‘Long Epic on Spain’, a long narrative of the war from its outbreak to the exile of republican supporters to Latin America. The poem contains the now familiar direct plea for help:

Look at their pictures, peoples, observe the virtuosity
Of death, the pock-signer, the master in fanciful sameness—
Behold this singular leprosy,
This hither-and-yon of destruction that needs no one wound;
The children’s mouths are open in death,
Is it suspense? No, a finality.
What is the answer to come?
PEOPLES, WHAT IS YOUR ANSWER?

[…] over the snow fly the worlds of all Europe now…
Words from the Pacific Americas, words of Antillean temper,
Coming together, comrades—words from Finland to Abyssinia;
The scale fills in, the octave is complete.

206 ‘Raúl, te acuerdas? / Te acuerdas, Rafael? / Federico, te acuerdas / debajo de la tierra /
They are all here
For Paco, with Paco the espadrilled, once the hod-carrier,
Now Spain’s Red Army man.
Words of men, deeds of men—men here and coming,
Grain cast out of the great seed-bag of man’s heart,
Ready seed sown, fallen, moving, risen and proven.
This is the International, Paco—this too is a finality.207

The first reference to the ‘pictures’ is very probably a reference to the photographs of murdered children that were distributed in 1936 by the republican Ministry of Propaganda with the aim of obtaining international support, and which also served as the starting point for Virginia Woolf’s essay Three Guineas.208 The disturbing close-up of a dead boy with his mouth slightly open is recognisable in Cunard’s poem, which mirrors the republican government’s strategy to appeal to the emotions of its intended audience. The poem then alludes to the international response to the war—reaching beyond the confines of Europe, rushing to help the Spanish peasant soldier with rope shoes. The man’s name, Paco, is also the word ‘peace’ in Esperanto: the international volunteers and friends of the Republic come not only to help Spain, but also for the greater cause of world peace.

Perhaps the most obvious feature of what one could name an ‘internationalist’ aesthetics is the inclusion of words and sentences from different languages in a single poem. Such aesthetics were clearly influenced by the idea of Esperanto, the international language created in the late nineteenth-century, which had found a renewed popularity during the interwar period209. The inclusion of foreign words and concepts is of course one of the most common rhetorical features of modernist literature. Two canonical works of modernism, T. S. Eliot’s The Waste Land and Ezra Pound’s The Cantos, weave words from different

207 Nancy Cunard, ‘Madrid 1936’, Poems from the Bodleian, p. 54.
languages, from classical Latin to contemporary Italian and French, into English verses. In the case of Cunard’s poetry, however, different languages are often used to stress the universality of the war in Spain. Cunard spent several years working on a ‘Sonnet in Five Languages’, with lines written in Italian, French, German, Spanish and English, an idea that she continued to redraft until she distributed a final version in 1964, one year before her death. The sonnet, entitled ‘The Internationals’ (a reference to the multilingual International Brigades), was meant, according to Cunard’s notes, as a coda to an unpublished sonnet sequence on the Spanish war and the republican exiles that she wrote in 1958. Cunard distributed it together with some explanatory notes and partial translations of every line. Interestingly, the translations of the poems are preceded by a note from Cunard in which she also states that the poem is deliberately intricate so as to conceal its meaning, apparently because she feared political repercussions: the poem is written ‘so obliquely on purpose because, at any moment, some plain-clothes man may bear down on you to demand just what, and why, you are writing at all’. The sonnet foresees a day that will bring the eventual triumph of the Spanish Republic, almost thirty years later. While Cunard alternates lines in different languages, the poem has a single voice:

Adesso è altra sosta, ma dove su Dante?
If the fire burn low, it is the same I see;
Por mudo que vas tiras por adelante
Et tout ce qui fut avant peut renaître ici.

Noch gibt es einigen Moorsoldaten die
Are ready to spring to their appointed place,

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210 Nancy Cunard, ‘Sonnet in Five Languages’. Box 8, Folder 10, Nancy Cunard Collection, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin, USA. The sonnet, without its notes, was collected in Valentine Cunningham’s *Spanish Civil War Verse*, p. 303.

211 Nancy Cunard, ‘Sonnet in Five Languages’. Box 8, Folder 10, Nancy Cunard Collection. Was Cunard paranoid, or were her fears justified? As Smith points out, Cunard had been followed during the early 1930s by British intelligence detectives that investigated her relationship with the African American civil rights movement (155). The MI5 files held on her, unfortunately, have not been released and may have been destroyed. James Smith, *British Writers and MI5 Surveillance, 1930-1960*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), xi.
E quanti altri, vicini e lontani...
Se no se dice, consabido és.

So mischt man Sprächen mit Hoffnung wohin man geht,
I treni misti vanno molto lontano;
May our suns and moons coincide in the rising spate,
Per quien me dirá la fecha de este año?
Courage persiste si le cœur conserve ses as.
Y cuando te toca el turno, ah! Cuanto cosecharás!212

Its first lines refer to the quiet (‘mudo’) but still living resistance of Spanish exiles, characterised as a ‘fire burn[ing] low’. The author wonders who will be the Dante that will chronicle the return of the exiles to Spain, when at the time of writing the idea of the Spanish war as a ‘cause’ had long been deemed obsolete. The image that runs through the poem is that of a dormant spirit of the Republic which will one day triumph, an eventual triumphal return which Cunard expresses in biblical terms in the last line: ‘when your time comes, how much shall you harvest!’ The poem invokes the international anti-fascist movements of the 1930s. Cunard explains that the eleventh line, ‘May our suns and moons coincide in the rising spate,’ expresses the hope that ‘British feelings’ will ‘coincide’ with the general feeling of hope brought about by the possible return of democracy to

212 At this time comes another pause (in history), but where is its Dante to chronicle it? If the fire burn low, it is the same I see; Muted are thou (Spain), but strivest ever forward, And all that happened before might well come here again. Some of the ‘Moor-Soldiers’ still live. Are ready to spring to their appointed place, As would any other man, from far and near; If such be not spoken of, yet well known it is. Upsurge of tongues comes ever, mixed with hope, wherever one goes, The mixed trains go very far; May our suns and moons coincide in the rising spate, Though who can tell me the date of the year wherein such might be? Courage endures if the heart clings to its aces. And when your time comes, ah! How much shall thou harvest! (Translation adapted from Cunard’s own ‘Explanatory Notes to The Sonnet in 5 Languages Line by Line’) Box 8, Folder 10, Nancy Cunard Collection, Harry Ransom Center.
Spain. In the fifth line, Cunard refers to the still living ‘Moorsoldaten’, the German political prisoners who opposed the Third Reich and were kept in forced-labour concentration camps from the early 1930s. The name is also evocative of ‘Die Moorsoldaten’, the protest song composed by the German prisoners in 1934, which became a universal symbol of resistance during the Second World War and was translated into several languages. The reference also fits in with 1958, the year of the writing of the poem, considering the popularity of protest songs in the early 1960s, when many of the poems and song lyrics of the 1930s were rediscovered and revisited.213

Cunard was also interested in countries as the subject of her poetry. Indeed, a great number of her publications from the Spanish war onwards were inspired by or dedicated to nations. During the Second World War, she wrote several poems inspired by the countries that participated in the conflict, some of which were initially published in various periodicals.214 The poems, entitled ‘Spain’, ‘France’, ‘Germany’, ‘Italy’, ‘England’, ‘U.S.S.R.’ and ‘U.S.A.’, were planned as part of a series that was going to be named ‘Passport to Freedom’, and were written between 1941 and 1943. While the project was never published, the publishers’ advertisement for subscriptions for the book has been preserved.215 The advertisement also announced that ‘Passport to Freedom: 7 Poems for 7 Countries’ would contain ‘7 photomontages and cover’ by John Heartfield, a German political artist and a specialist in photomontage. There are completed drafts only of ‘Italy’, ‘France’ and ‘Germany’, and the poems differ stylistically in metre, point of view and content. ‘Italy’ is a sequence of three sonnets, elegiac in

213 Although it is outside the scope of my dissertation, the revival of protest poetry and song in the 1960s, especially in the United States, prompted a new interest in the Spanish Civil War and the anti-fascist movement. The war became a favourite topic for American folk singers. In 1960, the political songwriter Peter Seeger issued a record of Spanish Civil War songs in which he also included ‘The Peat Bog Soldiers’, the English version of ‘Die Moorsoldaten’.

214 ‘France’, dedicated to Louis Aragon, was published in New Statesman and Nation on 17 January 1942. The first two sonnets (of three) of the ‘Italy’ sequence were published in New Statesman on 25 April 1942. ‘Germany’ was published in Life and Letters Today in June 1943. There are complete drafts of ‘Spain’, ‘U.S.S.R.’ and sketches of the poems for Great Britain and the USA in Cunard’s archives.

215 Nancy Cunard, ‘Passport to Freedom’. Box 7, Folder 6, Nancy Cunard Collection, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin, USA.
tone, which portrays the Italian people as victims of the fascist ruling party. Revolutionary rhetoric and violent imagery dominate the first sonnet:

[… ] Soldiers, peasants, men
Stifled, with raging hearts, that wait the day
To hurl their satrap from the outraged scene.
They will not spare when answer rings to: When?
This blood comes first—then all their flowers of May.216

The last sonnet of the ‘Italy’ series was likely conceived as an answer to W. H. Auden’s ‘Spain’, which used a parallel structure beginning with the word ‘Tomorrow’ to present several images of a hopeful outcome for the Spanish Republic after the war. Five years later, after the demise of the Spanish republican government and the rise of fascism, Cunard enumerates the anti-fascist casualties of the second world war, such as the Rosselli brothers, political activists killed in 1937, and the socialist politician Giacomo Matteotti, murdered in 1924 by fascists sympathisers:

Tomorrow is Matteotti, and all those dead
Tomorrow: the great Rosellis, and all the slain
Tomorrow: my Giacomelli—you that were Spain
Too, fought you not for her? Ay, in one bed
Our wills for her together one moment lay,
With the black night’s rifles for their mating song.

‘France’, written in free verse, describes Occupied France as a country absorbed in hate through a series of bodily metaphors. France is personified and described as a pregnant woman, a body invaded by the German occupation:

France is married to grief, bears grief’s blood, is grief’s cold widow;
The name of her peace is Death. This after the breaking of the pulses,
The heart staggered, the brain convulsed, the nerve paralysed.
Somewhere in it all remained the empty zero hour—
Hate enters the zero hour; good. This womb shall bear life again.

[...] 
Hate like a little familiar animal has the freedom of the house,
The freedom of road and city. There is hate in a sou,
Hate in a crumb, in the grinding of tram wheels,
[...] 
Hate climbing the curve of the circle—
Look look how the womb fills—like a moon approaching the full.217

The poem is reminiscent of Yeats’ revolutionary trope of political rebirth through blood, which recurs in his poetry and is central in his play Cathleen ni Houlihan (1902). Cunard’s portrayal of France as breeding hate, almost about to erupt, provoked numerous responses, which ranged from the praising to the very critical, some of which were published as letters to the editor in the New Statesman. One reader criticised the belligerent tone of Cunard’s poem, describing it as

an uncontrolled orgy of hatred calculated to arouse all the very qualities
which will effectively sabotage any attempt to attain [...] a just, calm, and reasonable reconstruction of the new world.218

The New Statesman printed Cunard’s long reply a week later, in which she reminded the letter writer of the destruction, executions and sabotage committed by the Germans in France, and accused him of being ‘divorced from reality’. In the conclusion of her letter she reiterates her anti-fascist ideals, emphasising that an eventual peace will only come with the disappearance of fascism:

Frenchmen will be able to participate in the ‘new world brotherhood’
(provided we get it). But that will never come from ‘appeasement.’ It will come only from an end of Fascism, of their own traitors, and of the men of Vichy and their partisans in other countries.219

While ‘Passport to Freedom’ was never published in book form, another of her projects was successfully carried through. The book (in the shape of a

portfolio) *Salvo for Russia*\(^2\) combined poems by Cunard, Cecily Mackworth, James Law Forsyth and J. F. Hendry, and etchings and engravings by John Banting, Oscar Kokoschka, Ithell Colquhoun and John Buckland Wright. The call for subscriptions also advertised an unpublished poem by Dylan Thomas, although the contribution never materialised. One hundred issues were published, with the aim of raising money in aid of the Comfort Funds for Women and Children of Soviet Russia. The book constitutes yet another example of Cunard’s idea of literature at the service of international solidarity.

The fascination with countries as subjects for poetry dominated Cunard’s literary production during the Second World War. Such a thematic approach diverged from the poetry she had devoted to the Spanish war, which favoured universal themes of war devastation and the suffering of civilian victims over a portrait of the nation. The world war necessarily altered the discourse of international solidarity that had been the foundation of her poetry about Spain. The anti-fascist ideas that had prompted her involvement in the Spanish conflict became more concrete when France fell in 1940 and she was unable to return to her house in Normandy. An unpublished 1941 poem titled ‘The Black-Out Blues’ summarised the feeling of sadness and helplessness at the expansion of fascism in Europe that isolated her from the countries she loved. Cunard’s experimentation with the blues form complicates the traditional masculine themes with a female point of view:

*I’ve got those black-out blues,*

*I’ve got those BLACK-OUT blues…*

*I say that’s the wind come hittin’ me*

*And you say, well that’s hardly news*

[…]

*Got a girl sweet-lovin’*

*Lays on the bed*

*Half the time achin’…*

\(^2\) Nancy Cunard (ed.) *Salvo for Russia* (London?: 1942).
Mist in my head

Miles in my muscles
Rain in my shoes
This black-out’s forever
Permanent news.

London’s a mighty
Misery-song,
Mouthful of NO
Blue as day’s long

Take myself to Russia
If only I can,
Swing a stroke with Ivan
’Gainst the Nazi man.

Goin’ to Iberia
Soon as I may,
Aim to be with Paco
Dawn of his comin’ day.

Back to that France of mine
If only I could,
Want to meet Fernand
Corner of wood,
Want to clear Germans
Outa the straw,
Want to cut Gabriel
Clear from their law.

I’ve got those black-out blues
Got those damn BLACK-OUT blues;
Deep-diggin’ in my jeans for a cent of patience…
And you tell me: that’s hardly news.\textsuperscript{221}

Cunard’s poem describes the tense and powerless waiting of civilians during wartime, which seems doubly excruciating for someone used to being in perpetual motion. It is also evidence of Cunard’s remarkable versatility with a variety of poetic modes and genres. The poem replicates the African-American vernacular, and the customary masculine tropes of the blues genre. The dissonance between the jeans-wearing protagonist and her own figure, forever clad in a tweed suit, is particularly striking. The poem experiments with voice: while it makes use of images more traditionally related to male subjects: ‘Miles in my muscles/rain in my shoes’, the strategy hardly disguises Cunard’s own voice. The line ‘got a girl sweet-lovin’ appears ambiguous; the ‘girl’ could also be read as the subject of the poem. Every country listed is associated with a man, and the poem remains vague as to whether they are comrades or lovers.

Cunard’s poetry, particularly her collection ‘Passport for Freedom’, reflected a mood that was widespread during the early 1940s. The portrayal of foreign nations as enemies or allies typical of war discourse unsurprisingly influenced the work of writers of the period, and encouraged discussions about the essence and principles that defined different nationalities. The prevalence of such ideas can

\textsuperscript{221} Nancy Cunard. ‘Black Out Blues’. Box 1, Folder 9, Nancy Cunard Collection, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin, USA.
also be detected in George Orwell’s *The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius* (1941), an essay on the necessity and rewards of patriotism, and its relationship with revolutionary ideas. Orwell begins his work by considering the defining characteristics of a nation, and how particular national qualities appear intrinsic to certain peoples. Particular historical episodes, he contends, are the direct result of a nation’s character:

One must admit that the divisions between nation and nation are founded on real differences of outlook. Till recently it was thought proper to pretend that all human beings are very much alike, but in fact anyone able to use his eyes knows that the average of human behaviour differs enormously from country to country. Things that could happen in one country could not happen in another. Hitler’s June Purge, for instance, could not have happened in England.\(^{222}\)

His discussion strongly criticises interwar pacifist theories and ideas of a ‘world community’ as hypocritical and artificial. But his essay was more specifically directed to his fellow writers and ‘intellectuals’ (a term that Orwell only used derisively) who had first embraced pacifism, then armed war resistance in Spain following what he thought were naïve ideas of world-citizenship. His scornful description of the writers of the English left accuses them of harming their country by refusing to acknowledge their debts to their homeland:

During the past twenty years the negative, fainéant outlook which has been fashionable among English left-wingers, the sniggering of the intellectuals at patriotism and physical courage, the persistent effort to chip away English morale and spread a hedonistic, what-do-I-get-out-of-it attitude to life, has done nothing but harm. It would have been harmful even if we had been living in the squashy League of Nations universe that these people imagined. In an age of Führers and bombing planes it was a disaster.\(^{223}\)

The patriotism that Orwell describes in *The Lion and the Unicorn* is grounded on ideas of masculinity, with an emphasis on ‘physical courage’. As opposed to the authentic English patriot, the writers of the left are described as cowardly at best

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\(^{223}\) Orwell, *The Lion and the Unicorn*, p. 115.
and unmanly at worst\textsuperscript{224}. Orwell accuses them of propagating the belief ‘that the English are no longer a martial race.’\textsuperscript{225} The ‘League of Nations universe’ and the internationalist philosophy it embodies are seen as incompatible with national loyalty in times of war. This notion was not shared by Cunard, who continued to endorse the power of cultural initiatives to fight social injustice and racism on a global scale. However, the revolutionary enthusiasm that permeated her works on Spain is absent in her poetry of the first half of the 1940s. Through her poetic study of the nations who participated in the Second World War Cunard explored the consequences of the changing map of Europe, and the politics of a conflict that threatened to put an end to her itinerant existence.

**Cunard’s Colonial Analysis of the War**

Cunard’s idea of internationalism was not restricted to endorsing solidarity and cultural exchange among European nations; anti-colonialism and the fight for civil rights remained a crucial aspect of her literary work and activism. Her idea of social equality meant justice for people oppressed by an exploitative economic system, but also for those whose rights were curtailed by the legacy of colonialism. Her poetry therefore frames the war in Spain not only within a contemporary international political context, but also within the larger European history of imperialism.

While during the last years of the 1930s Cunard devoted her efforts almost exclusively to the cause of the Spanish Republic, her interest in the peoples and cultures of the African diaspora did not wane. Indeed, while her best-known work as a reporter is her dispatches from the French-Spanish frontier for the *Manchester Guardian* in 1939, her first contributions as a correspondent from Spain were for the Associated Negro Press news agency in 1936, with which she had previously worked to report on the Scottsboro case. She covered the stories of

\textsuperscript{224} Orwell had already used similar attacks against the writers of the British left, whom he had labelled a group of ‘fashionable pansies’ in a 1937 letter to Nancy Cunard, when she approached him to contribute to *Authors Take Sides*. Letter to Nancy Cunard dated 3-6 August 1937, collected in *Orwell in Spain*, ed. by Peter Davison (London: Penguin, 2001), pp. 249-50.


\textsuperscript{225} Orwell, *The Lion and the Unicorn*, p. 117.
the 100 African-American volunteer soldiers and nurses who had travelled to Spain as part of the Abraham Lincoln Battalion of the International Brigades.\textsuperscript{226} As her correspondence with Claude A. Barnett, director of the Associated Negro Press, shows, her work was mainly voluntary, and she was only reimbursed for postage expenses.\textsuperscript{227}

The Spanish Civil War was followed with interest by activists against racial discrimination, who saw in the conflict the hope of the defeat of fascism and its white-supremacist ideology. The significance of the war in Spain for the cause of racial equality was also inextricably related to fascism’s colonial ambitions, which had materialised a year before in the Italo-Abyssinian war. Mussolini’s invasion of Ethiopia, which started in October 1935, elicited international condemnation and became the most urgent cause for the anti-colonial movement. This feeling was augmented by the great influence of Pan-Africanist philosophy—the idea of international solidarity among the peoples of the African diaspora—on art movements such as the Harlem Renaissance and the political discourse that ran parallel to it. The rise in popularity of Pan-Africanism in Europe and the Americas during the interwar period provoked passionate responses of outrage and solidarity with the Ethiopian people, and made the conflict in Spain relevant and representative of the dangers of fascism. In Britain, Sylvia Pankhurst began the \textit{New Times and Ethiopia News} in 1936, an anti-fascist weekly newspaper that chronicled the events of the war, which was published until 1956. Cunard became a frequent contributor to Pankhurst’s publication, writing about Ethiopia and Spain, and even publishing a series of articles on a trip she made with the British novelist and travel writer Norman Douglas to Tunisia in 1938.

The Spanish government’s ideological proximity to communism and its idealistic plans for social reform made the cause of the Republic very appealing for activists for civil rights and social justice. Communism’s egalitarian rhetoric had attracted many black writers and activists. The American poets Langston

\textsuperscript{226}Karin L. Stanford, \textit{If We Must Die: African American Voices on War and Peace} (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), p. 142.
\textsuperscript{227}Letter from Claude A. Barnett to Nancy Cunard dated 12 October 1936. Box 11, Folder 3, Nancy Cunard Collection, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin, USA.
Hughes and Claude McKay travelled to the Soviet Union during the early 1930s and saw in the Soviet regime a colour-blind utopia. Cunard herself had strongly emphasised the connection between racial equality and communism in her introduction to *Negro*, in which she affirmed:

> It is Communism alone which throws down the barriers of race as finally as it wipes out class distinctions. The Communist world-order is the solution of the race problem for the Negro.\(^{228}\)

While by the end of the 1930s several voices were beginning to raise the alarm about the abuses and political repression committed by the Stalinist regime, for many writers the idea of social egalitarianism promoted by communist ideology remained the only way to ensure racial equality. During the Congress of Writers of 1937, for instance, the address of the Cuban poet and activist Nicolás Guillén denounced fascism’s theories of racial superiority, and compared the situation of black people in Cuba to that of the workers of Spain.\(^{229}\) Months later, Langston Hughes, who spoke at the session of the Congress held in Paris, made a similar point:

> The Fascists know that we long to be rid of hatred and oppression […]. We represent the end of race. And the Fascists know that when there is no more race, there will be no more capitalism, and no more war […] because the workers of the world will have triumphed.\(^{230}\)

The importance of the war in Spain therefore extended beyond the implications of the civil conflict, and had a central symbolic significance for the cause of racial equality. Black poets such as Langston Hughes, the Cuban Nicolás Guillén and the Haitian Jacques Roumain, all of whom had contributed to Cunard’s *Negro* anthology, wrote poems inspired by the war. Their poetry was filtered through what Lorenzo Thomas identifies as an ‘afro-centric’

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\(^{228}\) Cunard, *Negro*, p. iii.


perspective” concerned with the subject of black identity and black international communities in a politically unstable world. Cunard’s vision of the war as a battleground not only for workers’ rights but also for the cause of anti-colonialism and civil rights was one of the driving forces behind her pro-Republic publications. As has been explained above, the invitation to the survey ‘Authors Take Sides’ warned about the threat posed by fascism’s colonial ambitions, and asked people to ‘avenge’ the victims of Mussolini’s invasion. A similar ideology was at the centre of Les Poètes du Monde Défendent le Peuple Espagnol. Cunard and Neruda’s editorial decision to include poems by Hughes and Guillén, authors well known for their Pan-Africanist philosophy and their exploration of African influences in the themes and formal aspects of their poetry, was almost a political statement. The inclusion of Nicolás Guillén’s ‘España’ in the sixth issue, a poem reflecting the intersections of racial and class exploitation while acknowledging Spain’s own colonial past, was especially significant.

A factor that further complicated the racial politics of the war was the presence of African soldiers on General Franco’s side. Following the uprising of the summer of 1936, Franco’s rebel troops had been reinforced by 50,000 mercenary soldiers from the Spanish Protectorate in Morocco. Franco’s Catholic-traditionalist uprising, which used the Christian reconquest of Muslim Spain as part of its rhetoric, was directing Muslim troops against its fellow Spaniards. For instance, one of the short stories that the British novelist Sylvia Townsend Warner based on the war in Spain, ‘With the Nationalists’, written from the perspective of an English businessman, mentions an archbishop presenting Franco’s Moorish troops with Sacred Heart medals. The complex racial politics of the conflict inspired Cunard’s poem ‘Para Hacerse Amar’, originally written in French with the title ‘Pour Se Faire Aimer’, which was first

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published in the first issue of *Les Poètes du Monde*. The poem describes the injustices committed by Franco against his own people, but also depicts the general bribery of the Moroccan soldiers with false promises of new mosques all throughout Spain, a rumour that had extended into the republican areas of Spain. Cunard’s vision of the Muslim troops as another group of victims of the manipulations of the fascists drew attention to the colonial problem behind the war, and stressed the lack of agency of the Moroccan soldiers. 

Cunard’s portrayal is particularly insightful because the characterisation of the Moroccan soldiers as victims of colonialism was not obvious. While many of the black writers who travelled to Spain during the war portray an image of Spain that echoes that of the Paris of the 1920s as a place devoid of racial discrimination, other accounts suggest that the figure of the Muslim soldier was used as an emblem of the cruelty and brutality of Franco’s regime. Republican propaganda posters used the image of the ‘Moor’, whose ‘otherness’ was presented in terms of both ethnicity and religion, in order to incite fear, and stories about pillage and rape were widely circulated. Similar characterisations appeared in contemporary poetry, in which one-dimensional representations of the factions in the conflict often made use of the figure of the Muslim soldier. In Hugh MacDiarmid’s poem ‘An English War Poet’, the combatants of the war are divided into earnest fighters who believe in the cause for which they are fighting and ‘doped conscripts, foreign mercenaries, professional soldiers, / and Moors and worse than Moors’. Pablo Neruda’s poem ‘To the Mothers of the Dead Militia’, which first appeared in *Left Review* translated by Cunard, urges the mothers of fallen republican soldiers to forgive their sons’ killers, and to look ‘beyond your curse on the hyenas / out of Africa, blood-parched, baying their foul cries’. For the black writers who travelled to Spain to fight fascism’s imperial ambitions as a sign of solidarity with the African peoples, seeing African soldiers fighting alongside Franco was a distressing experience. Langston Hughes’s poem ‘Letter

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from Spain’, written from the perspective of a volunteer black American soldier, provides another rare example of the characterisation of Moroccan soldiers beyond their role as mercenaries:

We captured a wounded Moor today.
He was just as dark as me.
I said, Boy, what you been doin’ here
Fightin’ against the free?

[…] And as he lay there dying
In a village we had taken,
I looked across to Africa
And seed foundations shakin’.238

The fragment encapsulates the anguish that many black volunteers who saw themselves as fighting against fascism’s imperialist ambitions experienced when they encountered Franco’s Moroccan troops. In the poem, Johnny is overcome by a feeling of racial solidarity, and almost simultaneously by the sad realisation that they are both victims of colonialism.

Cunard’s interest in the lives of the African troops recruited by Franco intensified as the conflict developed. During February and March 1939, and in between her stays at the French-Spanish frontier, Cunard travelled to Morocco and Algeria to further investigate the circumstances surrounding their recruitment. Her articles for the Guardian describe the widespread poverty of the population, and emphasise that many people were recruited with false offers of work:

Invariably the recruiting had been made under the heading of ‘agricultural work’; the men who accepted had never set hand to a spade but had immediately been put into Moroccan regiments and sent to Spain. At present

the Arabs in Spanish Morocco are almost starving and various kinds of food are rationed.\textsuperscript{239}

Cunard’s ‘Long Epic on Spain’, a narrative poem on the war on which she worked intermittently until the end of her life, reflects her vision of the colonial implications of the war in Spain. Rather than beginning with some laudatory description of the Republic, the poem meaningfully opens with the departure of the Moroccan soldiers to mainland Spain:

It begins in Morocco, under the long-depressed Crescent,

With a voice in the night: Turn out! Manoeuvres!

And the Moors took

The usual dawn-roads and then—it all got different.\textsuperscript{240}

Cunard’s exploration of the colonial politics behind the war in Spain set her poetry apart from other literary accounts. Her vision of the civil war as a battleground where class, race and empire intersected anticipated later historical analyses that have explored the global significance of the conflict. As has been developed throughout this chapter, Cunard’s internationalist perspective saw the civil war as a worldwide concern, one that forced writers to take action. Her works are addressed to an audience of fellow writers, who become in Cunard’s discourse the true ambassadors for peace, the only promising option when politics have failed the people of Europe. Her contribution to the literature of the Spanish Civil War is twofold. In her role as an editor, she produced several fascinating publications that showcased the connection between literature and politics at the end of the 1930s, but also the transnational collaborations prompted by the war in Spain, which enriched the political debates with discussions on the questions of race and anti-imperialism. As a writer, her poetry was able to reflect the complex relationship between the expatriate writer and the changing world map in the interwar period and during and beyond the Second World War. Cunard’s focus on

\textsuperscript{239} Nancy Cunard, ‘Oran and the Struggle in Spain’, \textit{Manchester Guardian}, 3 March (1939).

\textsuperscript{240} Nancy Cunard, ‘Sequences from a Long Epic on Spain’, in \textit{Poems from the Bodleian}, p. 53.
countries as the subject of her poetry was not only a way to explore contrasting political ideologies, but also questions of national belonging and exile.

Cunard’s commitment to the cause of the Spanish Republic did not stop at the end of the conflict. In 1939, she travelled to Chile with one of the last waves of republican exiles to South America, reporting on their new lives and their hopes to return to their home country. When she returned to England during the war, she coordinated the distribution of food and clothes to a number of Spanish exiles in France with her friend and fellow writer Sylvia Townsend Warner. For the rest of her life she was involved in helping the refugees—most of them fellow writers—both by keeping their stories alive in the British press, and by promoting their literary works. Her book *Nous Gens d’Espagne*, published at the end of the Second World War, reminded readers that fascism had not been entirely defeated in Europe. An unpublished draft of a book on the history of Spanish literature remains in her archive, but she did manage to publish a long article on the subject, with translations of contemporary Spanish poetry, in *Arena*, the literary magazine edited by John Davenport, Jack Lindsay and Randall Swingler.\(^{241}\) In addition, Pereiro Otero has chronicled her efforts to bring a play by the avant-garde playwright Ramón del Valle Inclán to the stage at the Watergate Theatre in London. Cunard corresponded with her Spanish friends for many years—her archive in Texas has letters from Maria Teresa León, Ramón Sender, Neruda, Vicente Aleixandre and Joan Miró until 1957—and she worked on her ‘Long Epic on Spain’, much of which was written between Majorca and Valencia, until the end of her life.

Cunard continued her nomadic lifestyle until the last years of her life, when her mental health began to falter. She suffered a breakdown in 1960, and was institutionalised for several months in the Holloway Sanatorium at Virginia Water. Despite visits from old friends and acquaintances, her stay was, according to her biographer, a time filled with loneliness and uncertainty.\(^{242}\) Cunard continued writing throughout her stay at the institution. A sonnet sequence with the title ‘I, Scarlet Broad’ contains two poems she wrote while in ‘art therapy’. They describe posing for a portrait sketched by another patient, Geoffrey Horam,

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as she had done four decades before for some of the best artists of Europe. Cunard’s poem tellingly asks the painter to paint a true likeness of her:

    Horam, aid me, and make my portrait true:
    I am Truth’s votary, clad in suspense,
    I dedicate to fact, in every sense—
    Speak out, clear colours—I am allied to you!  

    Weeks after she was discharged, a recent poem by Cunard was published in the French literary magazine *Les Lettres Françaises*, the editor of which at the time was Louis Aragon. It was accompanied by an introduction that summarised Cunard’s work for Spain, France and the people of the African diaspora, and finished on an emotional note in which one can see the hand of her lifelong friend:

    It is necessary that they know in England that Nancy Cunard is not, as she believes, ‘as alone in the world as a newborn’, that in France, among the Spaniards, in Italy, in the whole of South America (didn’t she, at the time of the Hours Press, in Réanville, publish the Chilean poet Guevarra, of whom Pablo Neruda was telling us recently that we are only just discovering him?), in all the black world, in the United States, in Africa, there are men and women who have not forgotten her.  

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243 Nancy Cunard. ‘I, Scarlet Broad’. Dated June 28, 1960. Box 8, Folder 4, Nancy Cunard Collection, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin, USA.
244 ‘Il faut qu’on sache, en Angleterre, que Nancy Cunard n’est pas, comme elle croit, “aussi seule au monde que le nouveau-né”. qu’en France, parmi les Espagnols, en Italie, dans tout l’Amérique du Sud (n’a-t-elle point, au temps de The hours Presse [sic], à Réanville, imprimé le poète chilien Guevarra [sic], dont Pablo Neruda nous disait ces jours-ci qu’ajourd’hui on le découvre?), dans tout le monde noir, aux États-Unis, en Afrique, il y a des hommes et des femmes qui ne l’ont pas oubliée.’ ‘Nancy Cunard: Pour La Vie?’ *Les Lettres Françaises*, 26 July (1960).
Chapter 3

Battles of the Past:

History and Myth in Sylvia Townsend Warner’s

Representations of Spain

Sylvia Townsend Warner, together with her partner the poet Valentine Ackland, arrived in war-torn Barcelona on 26 September 1936. They had come to help with the relief operations that were being organised by the Communist Party of Great Britain, and were driven by a desire to experience personally a conflict that had been widely reported in the British press. From the beginning of the war, they had sided with the Spanish Republic, whose progressive policies they fervently defended. While they only stayed for three weeks\(^{245}\), that first stay was the beginning of Warner’s involvement over many years with the cause of the Spanish left, and her experience in the country became the inspiration for newspaper articles, short stories, poems and her novel *After the Death of Don Juan* (1938). This chapter begins by considering Warner’s and Ackland’s motivations to travel to Spain and the personal significance of their stay in the country, paying particular attention to the love poems Warner wrote to Valentine Ackland with the war as a setting. It then explores the common tropes and themes that recur in Warner’s poetry and journalism on the war, looking especially at Warner’s use of the land as a fundamental motif. Finally, it considers *After the Death of Don Juan* as the most developed expression of Warner’s views about Spain. To this end, I analyse her specific adaptation of the Don Juan myth as a framework and point of departure for a representation of the Spanish Civil War as a class conflict, and for the discussion of what Warner sees as the ideological

\(^{245}\) Warner and Ackland visited Spain during the war on two occasions. According to Valentine Ackland’s diary, they first arrived in Barcelona on September 26\(^{th}\) 1936, and stayed until October 14\(^{th}\). Both women returned to the country on July 3\(^{rd}\) 1937 as part of the British delegation for the International Writers’ Congress for the Defence of Culture, and travelled south to Valencia and Madrid. They returned to England on July 13\(^{th}\).

debate behind it: a tension between conflicting notions of progress, tradition and national identity.

From Dorset to Barcelona

Sylvia Townsend Warner was born in Harrow on the Hill in 1893. Her father, George Townsend Warner, was the head of the Modern Side of Harrow School and a scholar who published several historical studies. Warner lived in Harrow until the death of her father in 1916, and soon afterwards she moved to London. Early in her career she researched early modern music, and became one of the editors of Tudor Church Music, published by Oxford University Press. With the assistance of her friend David Garnett, she sent her first collection of poems, entitled The Espalier, to Chatto & Windus, and it was published in 1925.

While remarkably varied in themes and style, the collection foreshadows some of the recurrent themes in Warner’s work, such as the use of landscape as a motif and her preference for rural settings. Her first novel, Lolly Willowes, was published the following year and it was received enthusiastically, both in Britain and in the United States, where it became the first selection of the Book of the Month Club. Her American readership increased a decade later with her periodic contributions of short stories to the magazine The New Yorker. While she continued to be better known for her fiction, Warner went on writing poetry and journalism, and also wrote a biography of the novelist T. H. White.

Warner’s personal life was marked by her relationship with the poet Valentine Ackland, whom she first met in 1927. In 1931, they moved in together to a house in Chaldon, Dorset, and lived in the region for most of their lives. Together they published a collection of poems in 1934, Whether a Dove or Seagull. The book was partly conceived as an experiment in the importance of authorship: the poems were intercalated anonymously, and only a key at the back

\[246\] See for instance Landmarks in English Industrial History (London: Blackie and Son Limited, 1899) and A Brief Survey of British History (London: Blackie and Son, c.1912)


\[248\] Sylvia Townsend Warner, Lolly Willowes (London: Chatto & Windus, 1926)

\[249\] Harman, Biography, p. 66.

\[250\] Sylvia Townsend Warner and Valentine Ackland, Whether a Dove or Seagull (London: Chatto & Windus, 1934)
revealed the author of each piece (the key was not included in the American edition of the book). Warner continued writing poetry regularly until her death; however, she did not publish another collection until her collaboration with the artist Reynolds Stone in 1957.\textsuperscript{251} Both writers were prolific in their personal correspondence, and sent hundreds of love letters to each other.\textsuperscript{252} In 1949, Ackland dedicated an autobiographical, confessional work to Warner, entitled \textit{For Sylvia: An Honest Account}, which was published posthumously in 1985.

Warner’s interest in politics, especially regarding the issue of social inequality, was a constant in her life. She joined the British Communist Party in 1935, although her involvement as an activist decreased after the Second World War. Although the couple shared a middle-class background (as indeed was the case of many Communist Party members), Claire Harman has argued that Warner’s lifelong partner Valentine Ackland was instrumental in introducing the novelist to communism.\textsuperscript{253} But while Warner’s political commitment became more intense during the 1930, her radical sympathies had begun much earlier. ‘I Bring Her a Flower’, in her 1925 collection \textit{The Espalier}, is dedicated to the Marxist philosopher Rosa Luxemburg:

\begin{quote}
Sweet Faith
Such looks of quiet hath
That those on whom she’s smiled
Lie down to sleep as easy as a child.

No night,
However dark, can fright
Them, no, nor day
To come, however bleak and fell, dismay.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{251} Warner wrote poems to match Stone’s collection of wood engravings, in a project that was entitled \textit{Boxwood} (London: Monotype Corporation, 1957).
\textsuperscript{252} Susanna Pinney, whom Warner commissioned to edit the letters she exchanged with Ackland, explains that the original bulk amounted to 400,000 words, of which only one third has been published. ‘Editor’s Note’, in Susanna Pinney (ed.), \textit{I’ll Stand by You: The Letters of Sylvia Townsend Warner and Valentine Ackland} (London: Pimlico, 1998), p. vii.
\textsuperscript{253} Harman, \textit{Biography}, p. 140.
But sound
Sleep they in prison-bound
As when as liberty
And if they wake, they wake in charity;

Like her,
Who rousing at the jar
Of weary foot in the rain
Pitied the wakeful sentry for his pain.

Like her: Rosa Luxemburg

The poem pays tribute to the compassion and resilience of the Marxist activist, who was murdered in 1919. Warner was probably inspired by the letters Luxemburg wrote while imprisoned in Breslau, and which were translated into English in 1923. Many of the references in Warner’s poem can be traced to one of the letters that Luxemburg wrote to Sophie Liebknecht in December 1917. In her letter, the activist mentions hearing the sound of the prison guard’s heavy boots and dry cough outside her cell, and later describes her good spirits despite her desperate situation and the darkness of the room where she is kept:

My heart beats with an immensurable and incomprehensible inner joy, just as if I were moving in the brilliant sunshine across flowery mead. And in the darkness I smile at life, as if I were the possessor of charm which would enable me to transform all that is evil and tragic into serenity and happiness [...] This deep darkness of night is soft and beautiful as velvet, if only one looks at it in the right way

Warner’s interest in the figure of the Polish activist increased with her own involvement in politics in the 1930s. In 1937 she wrote a profile on Luxemburg

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255 Letter from Rosa Luxemburg to Sophie Liebknecht dated ‘Breslau, Mid December, 1917’.
for a series titled ‘Women of Yesterday’ that was published in Woman To-Day, the magazine of the British Section of the Women’s World Committee Against War and Fascism. In her essay Warner outlines Luxemburg’s achievements as a philosopher, including her intellectual approach to the problems of socialism and her prediction of the failure of capitalism.  

Like many other British writers and artists, Warner sided with the Republican Government when the Spanish Civil War broke out in 1936. Her interest in the conflict was connected to her increasing involvement with the Dorset branch of the British Communist Party, which from the onset of the conflict expressed its support for the republican government and promptly began organising committees to send supplies and financial help to the territories besieged by Franco’s troops. Some of its members even travelled to Spain to join the battlefields. These included Ackland’s and Warner’s personal friend, the poet Tom Wintringham, who commanded the British battalion of the International Brigades and who suffered serious injuries in February 1937 at the Battle of Jarama in Spain. Winsrthingham was also the founder and editor of the political literary journal Left Review, to which Warner and Ackland contributed articles, poems and book reviews. Starting in 1935, Ackland wrote a series of socialist-inspired articles exposing the poor living conditions of British rural workers, entitled ‘Country Dealings’. Warner soon began to contribute poetry and articles to the periodical, publishing her first poem, ‘In This Midwinter’, in 1935. After their first visit to Barcelona in 1936, the political content of their articles became substantially more radicalised.

Warner and Ackland arrived in Port Bou, Spain, on 26 September 1936, after three failed attempts to cross the frontier. They were travelling as volunteers to

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257 Several historians have pointed out that he also had an important role in the formation of the British Battalion and recruiting of volunteers. (See Richard Baxell’s British Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War: The British Battalion in the International Brigades, 1936-1939 (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 67). Wintringham wrote a memoir of his time in Spain titled English Captain (London: Faber and Faber, 1939).
258 The non-intervention agreement that had been signed by several democratic nations, including Great Britain, prevented British citizens from visiting Spain legally. Valentine Ackland recorded in her diary their struggle to cross to the Spanish border in the brief
carry office work for the Spanish Medical Aid Committee, organised by the Popular Front. They stayed for three weeks, but the role that they ended up performing for the committee is uncertain. In his biography of Tom Wintringham, Hugh Purcell recounts that on their arrival Warner and Ackland were dissatisfied with the lack of organisation of the British Communist Party delegation in Spain, and wrote a report to Harry Pollitt, the General Secretary of the Party, complaining about the situation and claiming that Wintringham was not a capable leader. Interestingly, considering that there is no mention of this in Warner’s literature or journalism, Purcell reports that in their letter to Pollitt they perceived their fellow British Communist Party members in Barcelona to be ‘cliquey, isolated, and racist’. During this first visit they stayed mainly in Barcelona, where they were able to check at first hand the effects of the relentless bombings on the cityscape, the scarcity of food, and the enthusiasm of the workers’ militia and International Brigades. In mid-November of the same year, Ackland was summoned to London to help to deliver goods to Spain by driving a lorry through France and the Pyrenees. However, she fell ill with colitis, and much to the relief of Warner—who, worried about her safety, had begged her to reconsider—she decided to stay in England. Both women returned to Spain from 3 to 13 July 1937 to attend the International Congress of Writers for the Defence of Democracy, as part of what Warner would later describe as ‘a depressingly puny and undistinguished British Delegation’, albeit one formed by

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Mulford argues that the Medical Aid Committee had not in fact authorised them to come, but once they were in Barcelona they were issued passes that qualified them as members of the aid services. While Warner carried out administrative duties, it is probable that Ackland was commissioned to drive ambulances. Wendy Mulford, This Narrow Place: Sylvia Townsend Warner and Valentine Ackland: Life, Letters, and Politics, 1930–1951 (London: Pandora, 1988), pp. 88–9.


members who were ‘whole-heartedly engaged’. The congress, which took place in Madrid, Barcelona and Valencia, was organised by the republican ministry of propaganda, and also included the British poet Stephen Spender, who became very critical of the event (and of Warner, whom he derisively called a ‘lady communist’) in his 1951 memoir *World Within World*. After returning from this visit, Warner began writing *After the Death of Don Juan*, a fictionalised account of the social conflict she saw as underlying the Spanish war.

Apart from being an opportunity to get to know the conflict at first hand and to put into practice their support for anti-fascist causes, the couple’s visits to Spain were also significant from a personal perspective. Despite being aware of the dangers inherent in a war that deliberately targeted civilians, they almost immediately became infected with the enthusiasm and fortitude of the pro-Republic inhabitants of Barcelona fighting the fascist troops. Most eyewitness accounts of the first of the war in the city coincide in describing the exhilarating atmosphere that pervaded the city. George Orwell’s sketch of revolutionary Barcelona in 1936 in *Homage to Catalonia* helps the present-day reader understand how arresting this first impression of the Catalan capital was for British writers:

> Down the Ramblas, the wide central artery of the town where crowds of people streamed constantly to and fro, the loudspeakers were bellowing revolutionary songs all day and far into the night. […] Yet so far as one could judge, the people were contented and hopeful. […] Above all, there was a belief in the revolution and the future, a feeling of having suddenly emerged into an era of equality and freedom.264

A few weeks after they returned to England, Warner wrote to Elizabeth Wade White, stating that Barcelona was ‘the nearest thing I shall ever see to the early days of the USSR… the very first days, when everything was proceeding on the impulse of that first leap into life’.265 Wandering around the city in ruins, and

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experiencing the trepidation of air raids, was as frightening as it was exciting. The trip was fascinating and absorbing, enabling them to meet a great number of writers and artists from diverse nationalities and backgrounds.

The Spanish Civil War has been named ‘the crucial event in the history of the young men of the Left in England in the 1930s’ 266 and it was no less crucial for young women. Almost from the beginning of the conflict in the summer of 1936, Ackland had been intent upon travelling to Spain. Warner would later write in her annotations to their collected letters that Ackland was set on going to Spain—where the republican militias initially included women—‘if possible as a combatant’. 267 Ackland’s desire to join the war seems to have stemmed as much from her desire to follow her political beliefs, and to altruistically help a population in need, as it did from a need for personal fulfilment. In one of Ackland’s letters it is easy to deduce Warner’s preoccupation with her partner’s reckless desire for adventure, which she seems to have read as a symptom of Ackland’s distressed feelings. 268 In a letter she wrote to Sylvia two days later, in which Ackland expresses her hopes of joining the Red Cross in Spain, one can recognise the mixed motivations behind her desire to travel to the war-ridden country:

A discussion with Ruth [Ackland’s mother] […] makes me persuaded beyond doubt that we should go. Not you, because you have a definite value, but for people of our class and of my sort of indecisive qualifications, the more the better. 269

Warner later asserted that their stay in Spain had had a great effect upon Ackland, who had been suffering from depression that summer. 270 Attending the Congress

268 Ackland explained in a letter to Warner that what she was feeling was ‘not exactly a wanton-ness […] It is not a compulsion either, in the superstitious sense of your fears. It is something I dare not define, because if I do I may well exaggerate it into a noble and disinterested reason, which certainly is not.’ Letter from Valentine Ackland to Sylvia Townsend Warner dated 2 September 1936. I’ll Stand by You, Pinney (ed.), p. 146.
269 Letter from Valentine Ackland dated 4 September 1936. I’ll Stand by You, p. 149.
270 In a letter to Sylvia Townsend Warner dated 14 July 1936, Ackland recounted her intermittent ‘black mood’, which she partly attributed to other people’s reactions to her
and meeting other writers and artists from all over the world seemed to ease Ackland’s feelings of inadequacy. Decades later, Warner wrote how ‘after the years at Chaldon and the rather parochial outlook of our Party visitors she revived among these new acquaintances. The Valentine of letter 64 was cancelled, Madrid replaced her in herself.’

The articles that Warner wrote for political magazines such as *Left Review* on Spain are characterised by an acute awareness of the pressing necessity of finding solutions to stop the advance of Fascism. Warner characterises herself as an observer of the social conflicts behind the war in Spain, and warns about the consequences that Franco’s victory could have for democracy in Europe. It is only by looking at Warner’s personal papers that we can gain a complementary perspective on how their stay in revolutionary Spain, and the possibility to meet an international group of like-minded writers, had a restorative effect on the couple. The idealism and enthusiasm that characterised the first years of the war was contagious, and, a year later, the Writers Congress’s vindication of the role of the writer as able to affect policy inspired many to continue writing in times of political uncertainty.

‘Abroad Among our Kind’: Warner’s Spanish Love Poems

The personal significance of Warner and Ackland’s stay in Spain has received very little critical attention. While in Spain, Sylvia Townsend Warner wrote a series of love poems, untitled and numbered one to six, inspired by their stay in Barcelona in 1936. They were written in a small booklet that is preserved in the Sylvia Townsend Warner Archive in Dorchester, and they were not included in Harman’s 2008 *New Collected Poems*. The poems are dedicated to poetry and a slight jealousy of Warner’s professional success. *I’ll Stand by You*, Pinney (ed.), p. 144.


272 The booklet is included in the file marked: ‘H (R) 5/6 – Poems by Sylvia Townsend Warner (Spain)’. Sylvia Townsend Warner Archive, Dorset County Museum, Dorchester, UK. The complete text of the poems is included as an appendix.

273 Five out of the six poems have never been published. The exception is ‘Port Bou’, which was collected in Harman’s edition of Warner’s *New Collected Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2008), p. 258.
Valentine Ackland, and give the impression that, while their trip was prompted by their ethical and political commitment, it also represented a liberating experience for their relationship. The poems are significant not only in presenting a previously unknown, more light-hearted vision of their stay in Spain, but also because their combination of romantic and political themes is unprecedented in the English poetry of the Spanish Civil War. Love and war are the two interlocked themes of the poems: their altruistic love for the victims of fascism is seen as an extension of Warner and Ackland’s romantic love. Their feeling of empathy with the people of Spain is expressed as having been catalysed by their love for each other, and the object of the speaker’s affection is both her lover and the citizens that have joined the militia. This is evident in the first poem, which is both intimate and ceremonial:

You pull the stranded air
And through our house the unbowed
The marching Catalan tune goes by.

[...]

Embraced with all my power
Of love, not only you
I clasp, not only you I greet.

Their heartsblood signals through,
Your hastened heartbeat, erect
In you their stature comforts mine.

We march as they direct
For freedom, while the unbowed,
The marching Catalan hymn goes by.

The poem’s emotive description of the heroic militia marching, and the enthusiasm of the poet and her partner when contemplating the scene, is reminiscent of Warner’s historical novel *Summer Will Show*, set during the French Revolution of 1848, and which was published in 1936. The novel tells the story of
Sophia, an Englishwoman who travels to Paris after the tragic death of her children. Sophia falls in love with her husband’s former mistress, a charismatic Jewish woman named Minna. Their passionate love relationship develops parallel to Sophia’s progressive involvement in the revolution. The connection did not escape Warner, who wrote to Oliver Warner, a reader for Chatto & Windus, requesting that the publishing firm announce her journey to Spain to support the Spanish Republic, stating among other reasons that ‘it should be a good advt for the book.’

The second poem in the collection, a sonnet, is built upon a similar idea of love being extended from the personal realm into a universal love for humanity:

We did not go there with hearts unexercised
In love, and falling in love, and the minds’ marriage—
Love for each other was the chiefest part of our baggage,
Love for our kind, too. But more than we surmised

Befell us even before we had passed the Pyrenees.
On our journey’s threshold we loved the never-again
Militia boy who would champion us into Spain,
And Tioli with his good brown face and his bare knees.

Emrich we loved, Fideli at the Colon,
Veteran Ramona, the Persecutor of Fascists,
The petrol-lights’ man, the man at the tobacconists,
Pallach sleeping with one eye, Serafin and Asuncion.

These stretched our hearts. We should be vilely their debtor
If we do not love further henceforth, and hate better.

The sonnet is written as a keepsake, recalling the people they crossed paths with while travelling to Barcelona, from their housekeeper Asunción to the miliciana Ramona, both of whom would later become recurrent characters in Warner’s

journalistic articles and fiction. The final couplet, with its feminine rhyme ‘debtor/better’, alters the nostalgic tone of the poem and gives it a different character. It does not only invoke the feeling of kinship they felt in Spain, but also the cause that united them, fighting against the fascist enemy.

The poems that follow in the notebook that Warner dedicated to Ackland are especially significant because they often refer to the city of Barcelona—bombed daily but resisting the siege of the fascist troops—as a space that grants them the possibility of living their relationship openly. Peter Swaab has pointed out the existing ‘interconnections between [Warner’s] radicalism in sexuality, gender, and politics’; and such interactions constitute the ideological basis of Warner’s love poems from Spain. Infected with the idealistic enthusiasm that motivated the Republican militias and international volunteers at the beginning of the war, she characterises the revolutionary atmosphere of the city—where there was a conscious effort to break class divisions, to confiscate and redistribute the riches of the Church and destroy its most sinister symbols, and where (at least initially) women took an active role in the defence of city and fought as part of the workers’ militias—as a space of social tolerance and sexual freedom:

In that new city we felt at home,
We were at ease in that air;
Hatless and hand-in-hand, like children allowed
Out by themselves, we walked amid the kind crowd.

We could look people openly in the face.
There was no need to glance
First at the clothes, surmising if we might dare
Then look higher into the countenance of such wear.

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276 It is useful to remember that the reaction against pro-Franco ideology was also a response to its forceful imposition of conservative morals, and that at the beginning of the war the most famous Spanish poet alive at the time, Federico García Lorca, was murdered because of his being a republican and a homosexual man. The murder was reported widely in the British press (the motivation behind the crime was reported to be strictly political).
They gave us back good as we gave.
No longer was our own
Freedom an exile, there was no need to glove
Glance, we could look at our fellows openly with love.

These other cities cannot unteach
The gait, the guise we learned
Walking by ruined churches where now the clear
Daylight runs and where the sparrows will build next year.

The poet is here characterised as an exile who finds a second home in a foreign nation. The bizarre-looking urban landscape, constantly transformed by the incessant air raids, is unexpectedly portrayed as a welcoming space. The relaxed air of the city, and the possibility of doing away with sartorial markers of social class, to walk ‘hatless and hand-in-hand’, becomes in Warner’s poem a promise of social change. The description of a female couple holding hands is striking, and reinforces the connection between political revolution and sexual freedom. Warner’s description of the irrelevance of smart clothes as symbolising the relaxed atmosphere that reigned in Barcelona was not only a poetic strategy, but also historically accurate. In *Homage to Catalonia*, Orwell also recorded his surprise at witnessing busy avenues filled with people dressed in a ‘proletarian uniform’ of sorts, attempting to enact the egalitarian message propagated by the militias:

> It was the aspect of the crowds that was the queerest thing of all. In outward appearance it was a town in which the wealthy classes had practically ceased to exist. Except for a small number of women and foreigners there were no ‘well-dressed’ people at all. Practically everyone wore rough working class clothes, or blue overalls […]. All this was queer and moving.277

In Warner’s poem, even the images of destruction are filtered through the ‘queer and moving’ idealism to which Orwell refers in this passage. The churches—a

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preferred target for almost all the groups of the left—are ruined, but the effect is
that now ‘the clear daylight runs’ through them. While Warner’s anticlericalism
and iconoclastic beliefs mean that she would probably never have mourned the
demolition of a church, the macabre images of destruction of religious art that
appear in some of her works inspired by the Spanish war are here substituted by a
sense of hope and continuity. The prediction of the sparrows coming back to nest
within the ruins of the church speaks of a natural order that has been restored.

The fourth poem leaves the crowded streets of the city to present an intimate
scenario: the poet and her partner in bed. The humorously provocative tone is
again related to Warner’s personal aversion to Catholic doctrine, riches and
rituals, presenting her and Ackland as a somewhat subversive married couple:

When we had snapped the holy tapers, and thrown away
The silken, the embroidered, the elegant scapulars,
With drowsy bodies and easy minds we lay
In the matrimonial bed, smooth field of former wars.

The greed and distaste had striven, there the cadet hopes
Flowering in all flesh had been regimented for gain,
There lust had trudged in treadmill, supervised by the pope’s

But in that bed with lean bodies and laughing minds we lay.
If they return whom we usurped, though they call in exorcist
Hire [?] holy smoke and water, pin image and palm-spray,
It seems to me that their next child may well prove a communist.

The poem has some of the childlike delight in transgressing a rule: there is a sense
of the illicit when exploring someone else’s bedroom. The matrimonial bed,
symbol of Catholicism, where ‘lust had trudged in treadmill,’ is now occupied by
a couple with ‘laughing minds’. The symbolism is of course also a political and
secular one—once the seed of religious scepticism and social justice has been
planted, no exorcisms can remove it. The rhyme of exorcist and communist in the last stanza ties the words together, suggesting that the communists may in fact be the ones in charge of eradicating harmful practices and beliefs. Interestingly, the idea for the poem was probably born after an episode that Warner also recounts in one of her short stories for *The New Yorker*, ‘A Castle in Spain’\(^\text{278}\). The former cook of the mansion in Barcelona where Warner, Ackland and other foreign writers were staying—which the previous occupants had vacated for fear of repercussions—comes back one day demanding the return of her old bed. The woman, depicted as a strict, staunch Catholic, finally abandons her objective after meeting resistance from the inhabitants of the house. Whatever the inspiration, the poem remains one of the most striking written by Warner, and is unique in the literature of the Spanish Civil War in its combination of revolutionary spirit, eroticism, anticlericalism, and unusual humour.

The sixth\(^\text{279}\) and last poem in the little collection that Warner gifted to Ackland reiterates the idea of the revolutionary city as particularly welcoming of their relationship. It also questions the concept of nationality as the primary identity. The poet and her partner, visitors in a foreign country, are here defined not by their Englishness but by their relationship, and by their belonging to the international community of politically involved writers and artists they met in Spain, who are now their ‘kind’. They have been denied passports and official permits to travel freely, but their love legitimises their presence in the country. Openness about their relationship—‘my hand on your arm plainer than badge on sleeve’—seems to be all that is needed to be included in this foreign utopian society.

Love long the ply of the body, the purpose of mind,
Had seemed our own affair;
But carrying it abroad among our kind
Was our surest permit, our best passport there.

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\(^{279}\) The fifth poem in this collection, which was later entitled ‘Port Bou’, is of a very different nature. Political and propagandistic in tone, it solicits international help for the besieged Republic. Since it fits better with other political poems that Warner wrote about Spain, it will be analysed in the next section of this chapter.
My hand on your arm plainer than badge on sleeve
Credentialled and nationed you
As coming from love’s country with love’s leave,
Experienced and compassionate, intrepid and heart-true.

While Ackland and Warner’s visit was primarily motivated by their political beliefs, these poems offer a new dimension of the personal significance of their stay in Spain. The idea of war-ridden Spain as a space of romantic love and sexual tolerance was not carried over, however, into Warner’s other literary and journalistic works. The articles Warner wrote about the Spanish Civil War are strictly politically focused, and the same can be said of the socialist-inspired poems she published on the subject in journals such as Left Review. While there are instances of non-heterosexual relationships in After the Death of Don Juan (the characters of Don Ignacio and Don Ottavio are widely believed to be having an affair by the villagers, although the narrator never confirms it), the novel stands out for its lack of romantic relationships. The marriage between Doña Ana and Don Ottavio is a sham, and the love that she feels for Don Juan is more obsessive than romantic. In the peasants’ sphere, Celestina rejects any amorous advances because she is determined to join a convent to protect both her wealth and her freedom. The peasants’ revolt does not become the background for a love story, remaining the main plot throughout the novel, and no connection is made between revolutionary politics and eroticism. In sum, After the Death of Don Juan does not share the optimism of the love poems Warner dedicated to Ackland, perhaps because by 1938 the idealistic dreams of social equality that the Spanish war had inspired were already long forgotten.

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As was the case with Nancy Cunard, Sylvia Townsend Warner’s relationship with Spain did not stop with the end of the war. After her return from her second visit to that country in 1937, several writers, including Amabel Williams-Ellis, Cecil Day Lewis, Mulk Raj Anand, Rose Macaulay and Montagu Slater, met to create a pro-democracy committee to help the besieged Republic, of which

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Warner became the secretary. For the years following, she continued to remain engaged with exiled republicans, and even if her connection with the Communist Party diminished with the years, she remembered her time in Spain and the international aid movement very fondly. During the 1940s, and through her friend Nancy Cunard, she helped Spanish exiles in France to communicate with their families. The Sylvia Townsend Warner Archive contains dozens of letters exchanged with exiles, in which, overcoming language difficulties, Sylvia discusses literature and more practical matters such as the shipping of supplies and clothes. Particularly moving is her late-1940s correspondence with Balbino Planas, a republican exile living in France escaping from political repression whose family still resided in Spain. Since he did not want to endanger his family by communicating with them directly, Planas would send Warner a letter and enclose another enveloped letter for his family, which she would then send from England. She generously sent several gifts to Planas’s family, including soap and food. She also maintained correspondence with the poet Jose Miguel Romá, an acquaintance of Nancy Cunard, who was also exiled in France. Romá kept her updated with news of exiled republican artists in France, and also sent her poems, asking for her professional opinion. With Romá she also discussed literature; one exchange for instance contains a discussion about his plans for a BBC adaptation of a work by the seventeenth-century writer Calderón de la Barca. Steven Clark, a friend of Warner whom she had met in Barcelona, translated Romá’s letters (and the odd poem) from Spanish into English. A third correspondent was Sebastián Hidalgo, to whose family she sent clothing and food. Their candid letters to Warner are testimony to her generosity and attentiveness, as well as to her engagement with the cause of the Spanish Republic beyond the end of the conflict.

**Political Poetry and Journalism**

Although she is better known for her works of fiction, Sylvia Townsend Warner started her literary career with the publication of a poetry collection *The Espalier* in 1925. For Claire Harman, Warner’s poetry ‘formed a bridge between

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281 The letters are contained in a folder marked ‘F (right) /2’. Sylvia Townsend Warner Archive, Dorset County Museum, Dorchester, UK.
her early career as a musicologist and a composer […] and every branch of her prolific composition’. Harman also highlights that before she began to write her own poetry, Warner had already experimented with setting poems by Whitman and Hardy to music.282 She was a prolific—if mostly private—poet for the rest of her life. Her Spanish Civil War poems—‘Benicasim’, ‘El Heroe’, ‘Waiting at Cerbère’, ‘Journey to Barcelona’, and ‘Port Bou’—form part of the extensive poetic response to the Spanish Civil War in Britain, and were published in periodicals and collections intended to raise awareness of the cause of Spain.

The titles of the individual works, most of them bearing place names, allow us to read them almost as a travel journal, following Warner’s steps through the country. The use of geographical titles for poems was common among writers who travelled to Spain283, reinforcing their dual role as poets and as ‘reporters’ of the events that were taking place in the country, and stressing their commitment to ideals beyond pen and paper. These titles also indicate Warner’s preference for a poetics of landscape, where the surrounding space and atmosphere take primacy over characterisation and action. In the majority of Warner’s writing about Spain, be it poetry, fiction or journalism, the action is located in rural settings, and peasants are often the protagonists of her stories.

Warner’s interest in landscape also had a more tangible, pragmatic side: during the decade of the 1930s she was particularly interested in the living conditions of rural workers (an interest shared by Ackland) and the benefits of agricultural developments, which recurrently appeared as subjects of her work. In addition, the rural landscape and the cultivation of the soil had become a fruitful semantic field for political and social metaphors during the interwar period in Britain and the United States. The cultivation and ownership of the land is one of the crucial themes of After the Death of Don Juan, in which the labourers are eagerly awaiting a new irrigation scheme from their landlord Don Saturno. It is also the metaphor at the centre of her poem ‘Journey to Barcelona’. The poem describes the coming of a storm that will restore water to empty riverbanks

affected by a drought. The ending of the poem is a passionate plea, and almost a ritual invocation:

Faithful to that earth the clouds are gathered again.
If the profile unknown
were cloud, it will be stone
before long. Rain from the red cloud, come to Spain!284

Apart from this more symbolic use of the land as a socialist metaphor, landscape also plays a less conventional role in her poems about the civil war. In Warner’s poetry, the natural setting is used as a means to convey the disquieting atmosphere of the war-ridden country, an alternative metaphor to the images of bombarded cities that had become common in the literature of the conflict. The environment that she describes in her poetry is eerie and threatening, and similar unsettling descriptions appear later in her short stories and in After the Death of Don Juan. Landscape is the main focus of ‘Waiting at Cerbère’, which describes the frontier between France and Spain, the usual crossing point for foreign volunteers and an obligatory exit route for Spanish exiles. From Cerbère, the poem offers a view of Port Bou, a town that was the scene of several battles at the beginning of the war, a ‘white village of the dead’.285 Warner writes a vertical description of the village, which is placed on a hillside: below it lie the beach and its tide, which rises and falls urgently ‘like a quickened breath’; above is the road that leads to the French frontier, the bittersweet escape from a country which was progressively falling under fascist control.

Landscape is also central in ‘Benicasim’, named after the seaside town that had become a rest home for convalescent wounded republican soldiers.286 ‘Here for a little we pause,’ it begins, ending the first line abruptly with a full stop,

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286 Warner’s explanatory note to the poem, Spanish Civil War Verse, Cunningham (ed.), p. 150.
inviting the reader to contemplate the vista while simultaneously introducing the
idea of paralysis, which is a central theme in the poem:

Here for a little we pause.
The air is heavy with sun and salt and colour.
On palm and lemon-tree, on cactus and oleander
A dust of dust and salt and pollen lies.
And the bright villas
Sit in a row like perched macaws
And rigid and immediate yonder
The mountains rise. […]

The scenery is later described as a ‘bright painted landscape of Acheron’, the
‘river of sorrow’ of the Greek Underworld, emphasising the macabre contrast
between the sunny coast with its white houses and colourful flowers and the
misery of the people affected by the war, who are presented as the living dead.
The beach turned into a hospital is a disquieting place of rest, a ‘narrow place’
that is made not only for the ‘return to life’ but also for the ‘release from living’.
Natural elements are described as either cruelly impassive, such as the almost
unnatural ‘tideless sea’, or possessed by a deathlike severity:

….Turn
(Turn not!) sight inland:
There, rigid as death and unforgiving, stand
The mountains—and close at hand.287

Gill Davies has pointed out that the idea of place, and especially the way
place ‘determines and reflects consciousness’,288 is a recurring fixation in Sylvia

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288 Gill Davies, ‘The Corners That Held Her: The Importance of Place in Sylvia Townsend Warner’s Writing’, in Gill Davies, John Simons and David Malcolm (eds),
Townsend Warner’s writing. In ‘Benicasim’ the beach setting seems to fatally surround the war victims, who appear alienated, disconnected from their environment, strange figures in their ‘bleached pyjamas’ and ‘rope soled shoes’. The threatening presence of the mountains is a common motif in Warner’s writing about Spain, usually conveying notions of claustrophobia and anxiety. They also appear in a report she wrote for New Statesman, ‘Harvest in 1937’, in which the looming presence of the sierra of Madrid seems to symbolise the workers’ oppression:

At intervals along the enormous horizon mountains appear. The plain is a general sunburned tawny colour, the rock of the mountains is painted by distance to a lovely colour like lavender. But in spite of the tender colour given to them by depth of air, these mountains have an inimical aspect, they seem to have the watchfulness of tyrants, not of guardians, as they overlook this landscape of poor corn and scattered reapers.289

The domineering mountains are resonant of the Pyrenees, which isolate the Iberian Peninsula from the rest of Europe, echoing the way that democratic Europe was denying help to the republican government. Such characterisations of scenery as unnerving and threatening also served to convey the experience of arriving in a foreign country in the unstable setting of war. ‘Journey to Barcelona’ and ‘Port Bou’ are among the poems that Warner wrote while in transit across the French frontier. ‘Journey to Barcelona’ describes an early-morning train ride towards the city at war. The speaker and her companions enter a world that seems mysterious and hazy, debating ‘if it were mountain we saw or cloud’, and passing ‘dwellings like hempen shrouds’. Its imagery, built on notions of bareness and sterility, is often reminiscent of Eliot’s The Waste Land:

Pale is that country like a country of bone
Dry is the river-bed
Darkness is overhead.290

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The journey across the frontier also inspired Stephen Spender’s poem ‘View from a Train’, collected in his book *The Still Centre* (1939). Spender’s description of the arid land bears many similarities to Warner’s poem:

> The face of the landscape is a mask  
> of bone and iron lines where time  
> has ploughed its character.²⁹¹

Different from the rest of Warner’s poems about Spain, ‘Port Bou’ is not a descriptive poem about the coastal town, but a sensory poem: the whole composition describes a smell that mutates from the literal to the symbolic:

> Through these ruined walls  
> the unflawed sea.  
> And to the smell of sunned  
> earth and of salt  
> sea is added a third  
> smell that cries: Halt!  
> I am what will be  
> familiar to you  
> by this journey’s end.  
> I am, stale, the smell  
> of the fire that quenched  
> the fire on this hearth, that wrenched  
> this wound in the ground  
> […]  
> I cordial the heart  
> I refresh the brain  
> I strengthen the resolved fury  
> of those who fight for Spain.²⁹²

‘El Heroe’, a poem that was not published during the war, is perhaps the most Marxist-inspired of Warner’s compositions. More conventional than the rest of her poems, it constitutes an exaltation of the ‘noble worker’, narrating a man’s death at the hands of the rebel Francoist forces. The poem explores the idea of the anonymity of the soldier, a convention of war writing, which is highlighted in the initial and ending lines:

Nobody knew his name
Pen nor paper will tell it.

The figure of the worker, which stands as an obvious symbol of the proletariat, is a tragic hero, attacked for wearing the clothes of a working man:

His blue overalls
were like a taunt sent ringing
out of the eyes of the rebels.293

After she returned from the war, Warner contributed to Stephen Spender’s anthology Poems for Spain (1939), the first collection to bring together works on the subject of the Spanish conflict. It included poems by Auden, Spender himself, and two young volunteers killed in the war, Charles Donnelly and John Cornford, among others. Aiming to promote Spanish poets living in Britain, it also included translations into English of works by the left-leaning poets Manuel Altolaguirre and Miguel Hernández. Warner submitted what are perhaps her most original poems on Spain, ‘Benicasim’ and ‘Waiting at Cerbère’, and provided a translation into English of a Spanish poem by Leopoldo de Luis Urrutia, ‘Romancero a la muerte de Federico García Lorca’. Urrutia’s poem is an elegy for the Andalusian poet, written in the style of one of Lorca’s most famous works, Llanto por Ignacio Sánchez Mejias (‘Lament for the Death of Ignacio Sánchez Mejias’). In 1980, Valentine Cunningham published Warner’s translations of other war poems—none of them from particularly well-known poets, even in the Spanish-speaking world—in the Penguin Book of Spanish Civil War Verse: Julio D. Guillen’s ‘La Peña’, Felix Paredes’s ‘Encarnacion Jimenez’ and Jose Herrera Petere’s ‘El dia

que no vendrá’. These poems belong to the genre of the Spanish romances, octosyllabic compositions in a realist style which had enjoyed great popularity in the years before and during the civil war.294

Warner’s articles about the Spanish Civil War vary significantly in tone and content, from the politically engaged to the humorous, bearing witness to the diversity of the publications to which she contributed during the conflict: The Fight, Left Review, Woman To-Day, Time and Tide, New Statesman, Life and Letters Today, New Masses and The New Yorker295. Her collaboration with Left Review, a publication devoted to Marxist political and cultural criticism, is particularly significant. Left Review ran from October 1935 to May 1938, and its founding editors were Montagu Slater, Amabel Williams-Ellis and Tom Wintringham (Edgell Rickword took over from January 1936). The journal was founded by the British section of the Writers’ International, a movement resolved to fight for democratic ideals and against fascism’s anti-intellectualism, and which already had sections in the United States—led by Theodore Dreiser and John Dos Passos—and France, with André Gide and Louis Aragon as its most renowned members. The British section, which was founded at an inaugural London conference in February 1934, had its headquarters in Collet’s bookshop at 66 Charing Cross Road. The association, whose manifesto was published in the first issue of Left Review, aimed to recruit writers who met three criteria:

a) who see in the development of Fascism the terrorist dictatorship of dying capitalism and a menace to all the best achievements of human culture[…];

294 One of the best-known romanceros was Federico García Lorca’s Romancero Gitano (translated as Gypsy Ballads), which was published in 1928. During the war, the romances were often written in the pauses between fights, and were written by both renowned and amateur poets. The popularity of these war romances was such that they began to be published in the centre pages of Rafael Alberti’s leftist journal El Mono Azul. Years after the end of the war, and while in exile in Latin America, Alberti published a collection of these war romances: Romancero General de la Guerra (1944).

b) [...] members of the working class [who] desire to express in their work [...] the struggle of their class;
c) who will use their pens [...] against imperialist war and in defence of the Soviet Union.296

The Writers’ International saw a relationship between the economic and political situation of Great Britain, and what it called ‘the decadence of the past twenty years of English literature’: ‘It is the collapse of a culture, accompanying the collapse of an economic system.’297 The publication encouraged its readers to take action and defend their socialist beliefs, and the concept repeated in many of its pages is the conviction that the time that they were living through was ‘an age of change’. 298 The contributors to the journal did not hide the fact that they were not members of the working classes. Stephen Spender picks up on this tension in an article published in the February issue of 1935:

It is no use telling me that I am a bourgeois-intellectual, that I know nothing, or next to nothing, of the proletariat, etc. [...] The point is that if I desire social justice I am not primarily concerned with myself, I am concerned with bringing into being a world quite external to my own interests.299

The journal explicitly asked readers to take action, and stressed the role of writers in raising awareness about the situation of the working classes. The editors were serious in their commitment to ‘making history’: the journal has a pedagogical tone at times, giving practical instructions to writers on how to influence public opinion and reach a wider audience. In the very first issue of Left Review, an article by Amabel Williams-Ellis, entitled ‘Not So Easy’, explored the difficulties of finding a new language to communicate political ideals innovatively and successfully, and described the mission of the socially aware writer: ‘We seek to move our readers, to make them see what we see.’300 To this end, the journal established a writing competition for authors who were

299 Spender, Still, p. 146.
dissatisfied with their writing abilities, asking them to rewrite a passage from William-Ellis’s novel *To Tell the Truth* (1933)—which recounts the eviction of a family with young children—experimenting with different points of view.

*Left Review* was published monthly and included a wide array of genres: journalism, letters, short stories, poems, questionnaires and political illustrations, apart from the literary exercise mentioned above. It had a marked internationalist spirit, and almost every issue included translations from non-British authors. The first issue, published in 1934, opened with a translation by Nancy Cunard of the poem ‘Waltz’ by Louis Aragon301. Even in 1934, the prospect of another armed conflict seemed dangerously close, or as the editors put it, ‘oppressively near’ 302. The issue asked writers to express their opposition to a possible world war, and printed a satirical sonnet by Siegfried Sassoon titled ‘The Writing on the Wall’303, and a reprint of a 1916 pacifist article by Stefan Zweig, ‘The Tower of Babel’304. It also published a short, ironic letter to the editor in which George Bernard Shaw discussed the utility of writers’ opinions in matters of international politics:

I am strongly in favour of all the Powers making the very deadliest preparation they can afford for the next war. However, it does not matter a brass farthing whether I approve or not, as they will do that in any case. If they do it thoroughly, they will be afraid to fire a shot or to drop a bomb. Poison gas is a game they all can play at.305

The rise of fascism was a primary concern throughout the history of the journal, and the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in July 1936 marked a highpoint in the discussion of the social function of art. The October issue of that year already focused on the Spanish conflict, and the inclusion of reportage and a short story about the war306 gives an idea of how fast the particulars of the conflict were turned into fiction.

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306 The issue, published in October 1936, included the report ‘Compañero Sagasta Burns a Church’ by Ralph Bates, and the short story ‘Militia Man’ by Robert Westerby.
From 1935 onwards Warner and Ackland regularly contributed to the publication. As well as submitting several poems, from the March 1935 issue onwards Ackland began a series of articles about living conditions in rural areas, ‘Country Dealings’. Warner’s first contribution to the publication was a poem entitled ‘In This Midwinter’ (January 1935), followed by ‘Red Front’ (April 1935) and ‘Some Make This Answer’ (February 1936). Her first prose article was a report on Spain written after her first visit to the country. It was entitled ‘Barcelona’, and it was published in December 1936. The article describes the new landscape of the city after the first months of the war: the deserted mansions of the Catalan bourgeoisie who had fled the country, and the ‘queer’, ‘gutted’ churches which had been emptied of all images and valuables, but which are described as a constant presence overlooking the fighting in the streets: ‘on such wares as these the empty sockets of the church windows stare down.’

The article is highly critical of the Catholic Church, emphasising its accumulation of riches—she describes how a tapestry hung on a church wall was found to be lined with banknotes— and also the terrible fear that the institution seems to prompt in people. The report also recounts the case of a Catholic boarding school for young women, applicants to which were asked to donate an outrageously expensive trousseau (an echo of this event can be seen in *After the Death of Don Juan*, in which we see Catalina scrupulously saving money to pay for her entry into a convent).

The iconoclastic activities of the communist and anarchist groups in Spain had garnered great attention in the British press. The subject, and the images it evoked, seemed to exert a fascination over readers, and anecdotes about church burnings figured regularly in international reports about the state of the war. In *Left Review* the theme had already appeared in Ralph Bates’s ‘Compañero Sagasta Burns a Church’, the first report published about the war in the journal. Interestingly, most writers sympathising with the republican cause—the very cause that labelled fascism a regime against culture—do not appear to have been troubled by the destruction of religious sculptures and paintings. The Republican government had highly publicised that they had taken measures to preserve works of art against possible damage caused by the war, and several writers and

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correspondents in Spain wrote articles confirming this fact\(^ {308} \). However, the
burning of images of saints, and sometimes of whole churches did not appear to
hurt the artistic sensibilities of many communist sympathisers. Bates wrote a
dispassionate and darkly humorous account of the burning of sculptures of saints
in a church in Barcelona, which included some gratuitous chauvinist remarks:

> A little technical commission (to which I was elected) stood at one side of
> the door, passing judgment on the saints as they were carried out.
> Compañero Sagasta relies on my judgment.
> …‘This one, compañero?’
> ‘Absolutely nauseating, pitch her on the fire.’ (Why do female saints appear
to suffer from permanent disorders of the kind proper to their sex?)\(^ {309} \)

Any questions about what should be considered art worth preserving are soon
cleared up by the appearance of a candelabra rescued from the church that is about
to be thrown away. The value of the candelabra lies in the fact that not only it is
an antique, but it was masterfully crafted by a manual worker:

> ‘Eh, bring that here.
> ‘It’s only iron.’
> ‘Only iron! Christ Jesus, it’s pure Catalan work of the fifteenth century; look:
> no rivets, no clips, everything is welded and drawn under the hammer.’

In ‘Barcelona’, Warner insists on the idea that the destruction of religious art does
not come from an impulsive hate or anticlerical fanaticism; rather, she describes

\(^ {308} \) Stephen Spender wrote an amusing article on the subject for *The Spectator*, in which
he narrates his visit to a church where the treasures from the palaces and mansions of
Madrid have been collected and carefully stored:

> The domed, gloomy, vast interior of the church, with its congregation of royal
> coaches, rood screens, crucifixes, candelabras, tapestries, ceramics, was like a
> meeting of all the centuries in a solemn fancy-dress ball, not of people but of
> objects. Our little party from the Congress walked round, feeling as out of place
> as a member of the audience on a stage set. We made M. Julien Benda sit in a
> royal coach, which suited him well, M. Egon Kisch looked handsome in an
> eighteenth-century wig, but apart from these courageous isolated attempts we did
> not succeed in adapting ourselves to our surroundings


\(^ {309} \) Ralph Bates, ‘Compañero Sagasta Burns a Church’, *Left Review* 2, October (1936):
681–8.
the removal of a religious plaque as a methodical, rational action. Despite her clarification, the vocabulary of ‘decontamination’ that she uses to describe the process in her article is somewhat disquieting, and even reminiscent of Fascism’s own practice of purging ‘degenerate’ works of art:

Seriously, without a vestige of either rage or contempt, they smashed it to bits. Their expressions were exactly those of two conscientious decontaminating officers dealing with a bag of infected linen which had been discovered in a house that was supposed to be free of infection.310

The role of religion as a divisive force in the Spanish war is not represented as a theological fight between believers and non-believers, but between the Spanish people and the Church hierarchy. In Barcelona in 1936, in a battle between Franco’s rebel troops and the republican People’s Front, machine guns were fired from inside the churches. An article published in the Manchester Guardian on 31 December 1936 refers to a report written by the Scottish MP John McGovern about the conflict between the Spanish Catholic Church and the pro-Republic side, which states that the reason for the burning of the churches was not anticlericalism but the fact that the churches were used as fascist combat centres.311 In the pro-republican British literature on the war, and very often in Warner’s work, churches are presented as spaces of horror and violence rather than of sanctuary, and religious images and symbols as possessing sinister connotations.

Warner’s aversion to the Catholic Church and its abusive behaviour is also the theme of a short story published in Life and Letters Today in the summer of 1937, ‘The Drought Breaks’, which narrates the story of Rafaela Perez, a woman whose husband has been murdered by Francoist troops for belonging to a trade union. After the death of her husband, a Catholic institution forcibly takes Rafaela’s children. The members of the clergy are once again depicted as money-obsessed and avaricious, demanding a hefty sum for the children’s keeping. The

story ends with a reconsecration ceremony for a church against whose walls a fascist firing squad had killed some of the villagers:

Inside the church everything was smart and fresh, there was a smell of incense and of flowers and of varnish from the new confessional. Outside was the stain of blood and the smell of blood. The religious people came clustering and buzzing back as fast as bluebottles, as though they, too, came whenever there was a smell of blood.\textsuperscript{312}

The story constitutes one of the crudest portraits of the Spanish Church in Warner’s writing, depicting the institution as lacking in human compassion and thriving on people’s pain. Many of the attitudes and behaviours she describes would later form the basis for the most villainous character in her novel \textit{After the Death of Don Juan}, the sacristan Don Gil.

While Warner did not tend to focus on the gender implications of the Spanish conflict, her articles and short stories often depict female characters, usually based on the interactions she had with Spanish women when she visited the country. Her articles reflect the military role that women had in the early months of the conflict. A recurrent character in her writings is the \textit{miliciana} Ramona, who is also named in one of the poems she dedicated to Valentine Ackland. She is the protagonist of Warner’s 1936 dispatch ‘A Girl of the Spanish People’ for \textit{Woman To-Day}. Warner describes how, soon after the conflict started, Ramona had left her job as shop girl where she was abused by the owner and decided to join the Republican brigades. Warner also uses Ramona’s story to clarify the erroneous information about the reasons behind the withdrawal of women from the popular militias that was circulating in British newspapers:

This unwomaning of the Workers’ Militia was given great prominence in the capitalist newspapers of Europe, and attributed by them to one of two causes: that the milicianas ran away, or that they had venereal diseases. The actual

reason was different [...] men, seeing their women fellow-soldiers fall dead, or lie writhing, lost their heads.313

Another recurrent female character is that of Asunción, based on the cook who was in charge of housekeeping at the villa in Barcelona where Warner, Ackland, Stephen Clark and several other English volunteers stayed in 1936. Asunción figures in two of the stories: ‘A Castle in Spain’, for the New Yorker, and ‘Catalonia in Civil War’, for New Masses. Warner is particularly skilful at describing the transformation of civilians into combatants for the cause of social justice. In ‘Catalonia in Civil War’, Warner describes visiting the office of the Anarchist committee ‘Society for the Persecution of Fascists’, where Asunción, the cook, admires a piece of embroidery that had been left unfinished by its Fascist owner. Asunción is presented both as a motherly, kind figure, and a pitiless, committed fighter, aspects that for Warner are not irreconcilable, as she describes in a striking paragraph:

I found the persecutor and our cook Asuncion [...] standing side by side before the petit-point, mutually respecting the industry and deploiring the idleness which breeds such industry [...] These natural gestures of kindness and humanity never lose their validity. Nor did I lose sight for a moment of the fact that both the persecutor and the cook would (and probably had) kill fascists as one kills cockroaches. That, too, would have been a natural gesture, and the ability to kill and the ability to remain kind flower together from the same root of conviction and experience.314

While this is the only mention of Asunción in Warner’s article, the role of women in the civil war was clearly perceived as one of the most remarkable aspects of the conflict. Warner’s report was published alongside a drawing titled ‘New Women of Spain’ by the American printmaker Elizabeth Olds, which juxtaposes a group of young women, holding rifles and ready to join the battle, with their older,

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313 Warner, ‘A Girl of the Spanish People’, Woman To-Day, December (1936): 6. The article appears anonymously in the periodical; however, the similarities between this piece and another that Warner published in The Fight in 1937, ‘I Saw Spain’ (the texts are almost identical), point to her authorship. As was stated earlier in the chapter, Warner contributed several articles to Woman To-Day during 1937.

traditional and veiled counterparts, who contemplate the scene with a bewildered look. The *milicianas* are depicted as a symbol of modernity, opposing the model of women endorsed by fascist ideology.

Warner’s dispatches were primarily concerned with pointing out the causes of the dissatisfaction that motivated working-class political movements in Spain: social inequality, illiteracy and failures in agricultural development. Like most other foreign writers who reported on the war, she presents the republican troops as enthusiastic, unskilled, and greatly disadvantaged in the face of the equipment and foreign help enjoyed by Francoist troops. Not once does she report any atrocities committed by republican troops. This was not a calculated, propagandist portrayal; if we consider the journals and letters she wrote while in Spain, one can see how they stemmed from her sincere belief in the goodwill of the groups fighting against Franco.

While her portrayal of Spanish people is normally devoid of any concessions to national stereotypes—avoiding romantic folkloric descriptions in favour of a deeper (if perhaps no less artificial) concept of ‘Old Spain’—her description of the ‘Spanish people’ shares the idealism of some of her contemporaries. An example of this is the report she wrote after attending the Second International Writers’ Congress in Madrid in summer 1937, which she and Valentine Ackland attended as part of the British delegation. In it, she discusses the widespread illiteracy of the working classes, not without pointing out that the cause of this situation was socio-political rather than intrinsic to the people:

The Spaniard has a natural appreciation for culture; this shows itself in a hundred manifestations, in the decoration of a wayside inn, in the turning of a phrase, the lingual consciousness of those who use dialect (a cook in Barcelona said to me, ‘This is our Catalan word. In Castile you must say manzana’), in the common people’s appreciation, passionate and passionately critical, of points of style in such things as the singer’s coloratura or the gestures of the bullring. Even such affairs as the
arrangements of wares on market stalls are stylised: a novel juxtaposition of fruits will call out interested comment and discussion.\textsuperscript{315}

Warner positions herself—and the rest of the foreign writers and volunteers who came to Spain—as a true defender of Spanish culture. The threat that fascism’s ideology of anti-intellectualism and conservatism represented to culture, and what she saw as the ‘natural’ disposition of the Spanish working class towards learning, are the reasons she uses to legitimise the mission of international writers in the country. In the same article she describes the warm welcome the international delegations of writers were given in Valencia and Madrid: ‘We learned to hear ourselves spoken of as \textit{los intelectuales} without dreading words usually so dubious in good intent, without feeling the usual embarrassment and defiant shrinking’. \textsuperscript{316}

Rural landscapes and agricultural reform figure in several of Warner’s articles, and constitute the main theme of ‘Harvest in 1937’ (published in \textit{New Statesman} on 31 July 1937) and ‘Soldiers and Sickles’ (published in \textit{The Countryman} in October 1937). As Joannou has shown, during the 1930s Warner was involved in initiatives that aimed to democratise the English countryside, drawing attention to the situation of agricultural workers.\textsuperscript{317} Warner shared this concern with Valentine Ackland, who in 1936 published \textit{Country Conditions}, a book describing the worsening of labourers’ working and living conditions, in which she made informed comparisons between the standards of living of farm workers in fascist Italy and Germany and communist Russia. In ‘Harvest in 1937’,

\textsuperscript{316} Warner, ‘Soldier’. Not everyone appears to have felt the same way: decades later, in \textit{World Within World}, Stephen Spender talked about his feeling of inadequacy at the treatment writers received in light of the situation of the country, where besieged cities were suffering a prolonged scarcity of food, petrol and other resources: ‘This circus of intellectuals, treated like princes or ministers, carried for hundreds of miles through beautiful scenery and war-torn towns, to the sound of cheering voices, amid broken hearts, riding in Rolls-Royces, banqueted, fêted, sung and danced to, photographed and drawn, had something grotesque about it.’ Spender, \textit{World}, p. 241.
Warner narrates a country scene that she sees in passing while travelling towards Madrid to attend the Congress of Writers. The report has a triumphal tone, describing how peasants are working on land of their own for the first time that year and will share its profits equally. The article is not merely a vindication of the improvement of the living conditions of rural workers; it is also one of her most poetic dispatches from Spain. The piece includes several descriptions of the labourers’ toil which are filled with admiration:

As the reaper stoops, grasping the locks of corn, and swings the sickle with a movement made elegant by centuries of hereditary use, and casts the swathe behind him, and stoops and grasps and swings the sickle again, it is as though one watched a series of caresses. And along with him his shadow, small under the midday sun, repeats the movement in a contracted perspective.318

While Warner’s dispatches from Spain often aestheticise the work of labourers, taking pleasure in describing the changing colours of the fields and the synchronised movements of the reapers, they do not idealise their living conditions. The article moves from lyrical descriptions of the harvest to reminding the reader of the hardships that such labour entails: she explains, for instance, that ‘to tread on corn-stubble is like treading on metal filings; that along with the sweet scent of corn flies the teasing, tickling corn dust.’319 Nonetheless, she seems to share the conviction that the ‘real Spain’ is that of the rural working classes, emphasising the connection between the person and the land, an idea that she will develop further in After the Death of Don Juan. It is important, however, to distinguish this notion from the idea of rural utopia promoted by fascist ideology, which considered the ‘noble labourer’, content with a modest life in the countryside and far from the revolutionary ideas they saw as emanating from an urban environment, as embodying the Spanish national spirit.320 Although

320 As Luis Mariano González explains; ‘Like its contemporary European counterparts in Germany and Italy, Spanish Fascism resorted to a nostalgic longing for the rural way of life in order to suppress the fear provoked in certain sectors of the Spanish society by the rapid changes of Modernity [...]. However, in the Francoist ideological universe, this obsession with ways of life distant from the social patterns imposed by big cities after the
Warner’s rhetoric may sometimes get dangerously close to such theories, her vision of rural work does not confine the worker to a purportedly blissful life, unaware of political thought and developments. On the contrary, her notion is based on the worker’s awareness of the symbolic importance of working the soil, beyond its immediately productive aspects. Moreover, as she states in several articles published during the 1930s, Warner sees social and technical progress as essential for rural life.

‘Soldiers and Sickles’ also explores Spanish agriculture and promotes the social benefits of mechanisation. The article describes how a group of republican soldiers, who were formerly farmers, cannot help but stop their tasks briefly and tend to the crops, even when away from home and on a war mission. Warner again draws a link between the physical land and the homeland, describing the soldiers ‘watching the corn as patriots’, aware of the importance of securing the crops given the scarcity of food in republican areas, where roads were blocked by Francoist troops. The article turns hopeful and evocative, envisaging a future of modern equipment that will free the rural labourer and modernise the landscape of the country more generally. The description of the rural sunset is unconventionally punctuated with descriptions of electrical equipment:

When the Spanish government can beat its swords into plough shares there will be deep ploughing here, the internal combustion engine will take the place of the mule and the donkey, science will reinforce the patient traditional skill of the campesino [peasant] […] And afterwards, as though it were a promise of what should be, I saw, stepping down a hillside in the

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industrial revolution functions not only as a nostalgic revision of the past, but also as a future aspiration on which, at least rhetorically, the dictatorship insisted upon until its end.’


The idea of rural workers as ‘uncontaminated’ by any political or philosophical thought is by no means restricted to fascist ideology. In his report on the Spanish war for Left Review, Ralph Bates recounts his conversation with a couple of Spanish peasants, whom he describes as ‘illiterate men, therefore having unadulterated imaginations, authentic Spaniards’. Bates, ‘Compañero Sagasta’, p. 683.
early golden dusk, a rank of pylons, ghostly silver, their delicate geometrical beauty most perfectly assorted to the austere landscape of Castile.

Almost two years after the publication of this article, Warner published another piece that explored her personal relationship with rural life and agrarian work, entitled ‘The Way I Have Come’, in The Countryman. The article relates her growing relationship with rural life, of which she is careful to avoid any pastoral representation, stating early in the essay, almost as a disclaimer, that the countryside is home to practices ‘thought as rare vestigial occurrences’\textsuperscript{321}, such as open incest or brutality. However, her love for the rural landscape, and especially for the cultivation of the land, is passionately expressed. As in her writings about Spain, here the ground is for her the most meaningful element of the rural environment:

I have realised that the essential thing in gardens is the soil, and that the soil from which these people grow, the conditions which deform their lives, are more than Britain and the decay of British agriculture. One must look farther. I am glad to think that many of them do look farther, and have come to know that the defeat of those peasants in Spain, defending their olive and orange co-operatives, is their loss, and that the new tractors swinging over the U.S.S.R. collective farms are their gain.\textsuperscript{322}

The land, normally so inextricably associated with notions of nationalism, is here transformed into the ‘soil’, which seems imbued with connotations of simplicity and inclusiveness. It is still related to the idea of motherland in the most literal sense of the word, ‘the soil from which these people grow’. For Warner, the soil is a metaphor that works on two levels: a symbolic one, stressing the primal connection between the person and the land, and a tangible one, allowing her to talk about agrarian reform and the improvement of workers’ conditions. Using the soil as a theme allows her to discuss and promote internationalism and the need

for global collaboration for the common good by taking her own patch of cultivated land as a starting point.

Warner also contributed to publications that catered to a wider audience than the politically oriented *Left Review*. In March 1936, the American magazine *The New Yorker* published her short story ‘My Mother Won the War’, the first of dozens of contributions that were published throughout almost forty years. Apart from widening her readership, her collaboration with the magazine gave her financial stability. In *The New Yorker* she published the lightest in tone of all of her Spanish Civil War reports, ‘A Castle in Spain’. Its setting is purely domestic, recounting the house politics of the abandoned palace in Barcelona where Warner and other volunteers of English Aid to Loyal Spain are staying. The palace, along with similar buildings in the prosperous neighbourhood—described by the author as ‘Hampstead in a fever dream’—has been deserted by the exiled Catalan bourgeoisie. Rather than constituting a unified narrative, the story is built from a collection of comic episodes. It focuses especially on the relationship between the British inhabitants of the palace and the Spanish domestic servants, specifically the cook, Asuncion. Absurd situations emanating from cultural differences and a lack of knowledge of the Spanish language add humour to the story. There are also moments of self-parody, exposing a certain self-consciousness at the peculiar situation of being a communist writer in a foreign civil war, living in a small palace with two maids and a cook. When the old Spanish house cook returns to the palace and demands to stay, the British inhabitants judge this to be one commodity too much: ‘the thought of another cook […was], from the social aspect, ostentatious, and unsuited to our intention of living, as William had put it, “as much as like proletarians as possible”.’ Unlike her politically oriented short stories, ‘A Castle in Spain’ is peppered with the farcical and ironic comments that are often characteristic of *The New Yorker*.

Two further short stories on the subject of the civil war, ‘A Red Carnation’ and ‘With the Nationalists’, were published in the collection *A Garland of Straw* (1943). Interestingly, both stories approach the subject of the Spanish war from the perspective of foreign men who sympathise with the Francoist faction: an

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English businessman, and a soldier of the fascist German troops. Unlike the foreign volunteers who came of their own accord to help the Republic and defend their democratic ideals, the pro-Franco characters in Warner’s stories seem devoid of any agency, and appear lost in the mechanics of the conflict, sometimes both metaphorically and literally.

As Barbara Brothers has suggested, ‘With the Nationalists’ is a markedly ironic text that criticises the British policy of non-intervention[^324], which denied military help to Spain but facilitated access for business and tradespeople.[^325] It follows the visit to Spain of Mr Semple, the owner of a British shipping company that is being affected by the war in Spain, and who seeks to make an international deal to improve his business. He represents the other side of the war, the people who can turn the conflict into an occasion for profit:

At a time of national emergency Mr Semple could match himself to the greatness of the hour, ride in a Daimler, dine at the Ritz [….] since in times of national emergency Mr Semple’s importance made him a charge upon the public funds.[^326]

His easy access to Spain, considering that entry was forbidden to British citizens due to the Neutrality Act, contrasts with the risks that pro-republican volunteers, including Warner and Ackland, had to take in order to enter the country. Semple crosses the Spanish frontier through Portugal, after having spent some days ‘sightseeing with one of the British Non-Intervention Observers’, a sympathiser of Portugal’s president Salazar who is depicted as driving a luxury car. He travels together with a German businessman, Herr Beinlein, who is also looking for business opportunities in the war. The dialogue is dark and caustic, but with some concessions to humour:

[^325]: This issue greatly angered Warner, who like other writers and artists had had considerable difficulties crossing the frontier to enter Spain. She wrote to Oliver Warner: ‘remember how our Foreign Office does not accept culture as a legitimate reason for travelling to Spain. If you are an accredited journalist, yes. If you go on a humanitarian errand, yes. If you go for business reason, YES! […] But if you go for cultural reasons, NO.’ Letter to Oliver Warner dated 27-VII-1937, *Letters*, Maxwell (ed.), p. 48.
At intervals Herr Beinlein pointed out some deplorable aspects of the Spanish landscape, its aridity and brutish lack of charm; and deplored the absence of forests: but otherwise the conversation was non-political.\footnote{Warner, ‘With the Nationalists’, \textit{A Garland of Straw}, p. 112.}

The two men arrive at a hotel in the city, where they meet several other foreign businessmen, mostly English, Italian and German. The profusion of foreign names in such a very short story, as well as the obscurity of some of the dialogue, which does not have clear referents, creates a confusion in the reader that echoes that of Mr Semple, who finds it difficult to conduct business in such a heterogeneous atmosphere. When he finally decides to speak he addresses two Italian men, Fusco and Bottesini, as if they were Spanish; they feel offended, and end up angrily leaving the hotel. To add to the perplexity of Mr Semple—and the reader—the story closes when his English colleague tries to console him, promising him an entertaining evening in which the archbishop will present Franco’s Moorish troops with medals of the Sacred Heart.

‘A Red Carnation’ is probably the most striking of all of Warner’s pieces about the Spanish war, and was collected both in \textit{A Garland of Straw} and later in \textit{Selected Stories} (1989). It is the dark, almost unclassifiable tale of a German soldier, Kurt, who departs for Spain to fight alongside Franco’s troops. Kurt considers himself in possession of a special sensibility, and has come to the country looking for what he calls ‘classic Spain’. He daydreams about visiting the Spain he holds in his imagination: ‘the orange trees, the bullfights, those girls who made cigarettes. He would walk about holding a red carnation between his teeth.’\footnote{Warner, ‘A Red Carnation’, \textit{A Garland of Straw}, p. 190.} Authenticity and avoidance of national clichés were concerns for Warner, who would later further develop her theories about the ‘real’ Spain in \textit{After the Death of Don Juan}. Warner’s parody of the folkloric vision of Spain in the story attests to her awareness of the peril of falling into such conventions. Kurt’s romanticised vision clashes with his mission in the country: ‘Spain? What was Spain? A battlefield merely, a preliminary battlefield.’\footnote{Warner, ‘A Red Carnation’, \textit{A Garland of Straw}, p. 191.} A disquieting atmosphere pervades the short story, which surprises the reader with unexpected turns. The first casualty in ‘A Red Carnation’ is caused not by the war, but by the
suicide of one of the German soldiers before a mission. The character is briefly introduced when the protagonist bumps into him in the stairs. Only a few paragraphs later, the reader learns that he has cut his throat.

The use of religion and religious rituals to intimidate and control the population is slowly revealed to be the theme that provides the backbone of the story. Interestingly, Warner separates religion from the ideology of fascism and depicts it as something inherent to Spanish society: the German soldier declares himself an atheist, and claims that ‘advanced nations know that religion is all bunkum.’

Kurt’s romantic daydreams of ‘classic Spain’ run parallel to the narrator’s description of the city at night, which has a supernatural quality, depicted as being enveloped by ‘a pinkish haze… like vapours from a stage cauldron’. On the ground, tramlines ‘made an endless hallucinating path’. The scenery is far from the streets of Seville he had in his mind: here there are no women standing on balconies and throwing carnations to passers-by. In the morning, a steam train takes the soldiers into the countryside, and once they get off, the rural landscape is again imbued with Warner’s familiar bare, bleak descriptions, and dominated by the omnipresent mountains:

The violence of the sun was like a blow. The landscape extended pale and lifeless, as though the light had stunned it. A line of stony mountains lay along the horizon; they were wrinkled [….] impossible to say if they were near or far.

When Kurt eventually visits a Spanish town, the images of ‘romantic villas’ and creepers of ‘magenta blossoms colliding with a burst of scarlet geraniums’ are intertwined with his recurrent encounters with the less visually appealing cripples and beggars. In a theme that would later be explored in After the Death of Don Juan, the German soldier is aware of the damaging influence of the Catholic church on the country, but at the same time he is conscious that it is a constitutive part of the identity of the traditional Spain he so eagerly seeks: ‘Religion had kept

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Spain a backward country, yet there was something quite touching in this old-world piety, this old-world charity.  

The villagers’ hostile feelings towards the Church are shown progressively throughout the story, becoming darker and less subtle as it draws to an end. When German soldiers enter a station café they are faced with menacing pro-republican patriotic posters ‘showing a hairy red hand throttling a young lady with well-developed naked breasts between which a black cross dangled primly’. Walking by himself along the streets, looking for a prim square that would fulfil his expectations of a Spanish town, he mistakes a church for a prison, ‘a prison of the Inquisition’. While walking towards it, he notices a strong smell: not the encouraging, symbolic smell that Warner had portrayed in her poem ‘Port Bou’, but a sinister odour that:

expressed a stony antiquity, a poverty beyond food or clothing, an immaterial sickness, a cold-blooded excrement, the excrement of fishes, perhaps, a decay, not of a corpse but of a ghost.  

Walking on, and still overwhelmed by the smell, he finds a group of women and children waiting by a church with a nationalist poster on its door. The combination of the smell of misery and the fearful but despising attitude of the people at the sight of a fascist soldier seems to have a transformative effect on Kurt, who suddenly sees himself as a second Saviour ready to sacrifice his life for the people of Spain. The dramatic end of the story follows Kurt’s realisation of his role in Spain, not as the protagonist of one of his fantasies about the country, but as a minor part of the mechanism of war. Warner’s last lines turn him from a foreign invader into a casualty of war:

And I am dying on their behalf, he thought dolefully. Till now it had never occurred to him that in coming to Spain to fight he might also have come to Spain to die. But from then till the hour of his death the conviction never left him.

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**After the Death of Don Juan**

Sylvia Townsend Warner started drafting *After the Death of Don Juan* (1938) in 1937, after her last trip to Spain and while the civil war was still ongoing and its outcome uncertain; however, the tragic ending of the novel foretold the demise of the Spanish Republic, and a 1939 advertisement for the novel even called the work ‘prophetic’. Warner had already published the historical novel *Summer Will Show* (1936), which told the story of an upper-class English woman who travels to Paris during the revolution of 1848. She continued to explore the genre in *The Corner That Held Them* (1948), which narrates the lives of a group of nuns in a medieval convent, and in *The Flint Anchor* (1954), about the life of a Norfolk merchant in the nineteenth century. However, *After the Death of Don Juan* is an unusual work, both in the corpus of fiction on the Spanish war and in Warner’s oeuvre.

In order to approach the narration of the conflict Warner uses a myth of Spanish origin (but a universal type), that of Don Juan, which she reinvents to describe the social conflict underlying the civil war. As Mary Jacobs points out, Warner used different formal terms when referring to her work; in a 1945 letter she labelled *After the Death of Don Juan* ‘a parable, if you like the word, or an allegory or what you will of the political chemistry of the Spanish war’, and in a 1975 interview she described it as a ‘political fable’. While the narrative of class struggle at the core of *After the Death of Don Juan* is clearly meant to represent the circumstances that lead to the civil war, the novel does not fit neatly into any of these categories. It lacks the clear didactic or moral lesson commonly identified with the tradition of the fable and the parable, and while the characters in the novel are representative of the different social groups behind the conflict in Spain, they are more complex and rounded than traditional allegorical characters.

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Most scholars, including Jacobs and Wendy Mulford have identified the novel as a fable in their critical studies. The term seems especially suitable if we consider the novel in the context of Warner’s work, since she used the form in her collection of short stories The Cat’s Cradle-Book (1940), and in her short story ‘The Bear’ (published in New Masses in 1940) both of which explore political themes and have animals as protagonists. While Warner’s novel does not include a clear moral, the fable seems to be an appropriate form for her exploration of the dangers of fascism and aggressive capitalism.

Warner’s choice of the legend of Don Juan as a narrative framework to depict a war that was taking place at the time of writing is a striking one. Using a well-known myth, rather than attempting to characterise a land she did not know sufficiently, was perhaps a more cautious way to approach the narration of a foreign country’s war. In any case, Warner’s novel transcends the particulars of the Spanish Civil War to present a satirical and—towards the end of the story—tragic portrayal of class conflict and social inequality. After the Death of Don Juan is set in eighteenth-century Spain, but reflects the reality of the civil war that went on from 1936 to 1939. The novel portrays a country torn between tradition and progress, trapped in an indefinite past, and bound by a rigid class structure. It explores themes that were already recurrent in her poetry and journalistic writing: rural spaces and agricultural development, national identity, and the power of the Catholic Church. This remainder of this chapter will explore the main themes and character relations in the novel. It will also look at the historical foundations of the work, and will analyse contemporary events that might have inspired Warner. Finally, it will consider After the Death of Don Juan as part of the Don Juan tradition, which started with Tirso de Molina’s play El Burlador de Sevilla y Convidado de Piedra in 1630.

After the Death of Don Juan is the first recreation of the myth of Don Juan in the form of a novel. The story recounts the aftermath of the death of the libertine, who was condemned to Hell for seducing several women, among them the wealthy Doña Ana, and for killing her father, the commander. Ana, who still harbours feelings for Don Juan, convinces her fiancé Don Ottavio to travel to Don

340 Other prose recreations of the myth were Prosper Mérimée’s Les âmes du purgatoire (1834) and E. T. A. Hoffmann’s Don Juan (1813).
Juan’s decaying family castle to break the news of his death to his father, Don Saturno. With them travels a chaplain, Don Isidro; Doña Ana’s lady-in-waiting, Doña Pilar; and Don Juan’s servant, Leporello. When they arrive at the village where Don Saturno lives, Tenorio Viejo, they find that he is a man of liberal ideals and has been trying to educate the peasantry. Doña Ana, who has a premonition that Don Juan is not dead, insists on extending their stay, to the dismay of Don Saturno, who cannot stand the social pretensions of his guests. From this point on, the story of the castle’s inhabitants is interpolated with that of the villagers of Tenorio Viejo, who, now that they are educated about their rights, feel dissatisfied with their living conditions. In the meantime, Doña Ana’s obsession with Don Juan continues to grow, and much to the fascination of the villagers, she decides to keep a night vigil, praying for Don Juan’s soul in the local church. In the last third of the book Don Juan reappears, and it is revealed that the story of his descent into Hell was another ploy that he had crafted with the help of his servant Leporello. Don Juan has come back to claim his father’s money, and to prevent Don Saturno from spending his inheritance on improving his workers’ living conditions. The villagers, aware that the return of Don Juan as the heir and future lord of the castle means that their situation will continue, decide to organise a revolt, and attack the castle. At the end, Ramón, the leader of the peasants, dies, and Don Juan manages to survive, dodging death once again.

As Jan Montefiore has suggested, the characters in *After the Death of Don Juan* can be read as corresponding to different socio-political strata, with the story offering an interpretation of the class forces at play in the Spanish Civil War. Doña Ana and her husband Don Ottavio stand for the outdated nobility; Don Saturno is a representative of the wealthy, educated bourgeoisie that propelled the establishment of the Spanish Republic in 1934; and his son Don Juan is progressively identified with anti-intellectualism and fascism’s totalitarian ideology. The clergy is represented by several characters, none of them portrayed in a very positive light, from the village priest, Don Tomás, inoffensive but oblivious of the needs of his parishioners, to the Machiavellian sacristan Don Gil. The peasants, headed by Ramón and Diego, appear primarily to be worried about

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their living and working conditions. While the characters are more complex and rounded than straightforward allegories, the novel tends to rely more on ideas than on characterisation, unlike Warner’s previous historical novel, *Summer Will Show*.

As with the plays that explore the Don Juan legend, which are largely formed of action-based events, the title character in Warner’s novel is the least defined. Don Juan may be described as inherently evil, but we do not know much about his personality or the events that may have influenced his present behaviour. It is perhaps not surprising, when we consider the recurrence in Warner’s journalism of the destructive effect of the Catholic Church in Spain, that Don Gil rivals Don Juan as the vilest character in the story. As in Mozart and Da Ponte’s *Don Giovanni*, the title character in *After the Death of Don Juan* is mostly motivated by greed: his obsession is to make as great a profit as possible from his father’s lands, even if it means stripping the workers of their rights and going back to an almost feudal system. Don Gil, on the other hand, is a sadistic and manipulative character who has progressively gained control over the inhabitants of the village. He plays matchmaker at his own convenience, influences public opinion, and is against education for the peasantry as well as any other reforms that might endanger his authority over them. Warner sees the Church hierarchy as one of the main forces that have contributed to the perpetuation of an unfair social order in Spain. Don Gil’s decision to join the priesthood is triggered by a particularly unsettling epiphany, which Warner skilfully describes using one of her perturbing similes: ‘A hierarchy of bullying opened before him, fear run through the social order as blood flows through the man; and behind the social order was God, the source and support of all fear, God like a heart eternally pumping fear into the universe’.

Don Gil is aware that changes have already started to take place in the society of Tenorio Viejo, and feels nostalgic for the old days when ‘half the

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342 In *Don Giovanni*, the libertine is not only unable to contain his growing desire for women, but is also presented as a glutton. His transgressions seem to be characterised by excess, and this point is emphasised in the opera, in which Leporello reads a list of his conquests in the aria ‘Madamina, il catalogo è questo’.

people of Tenorio Viejo would have been on their knees round about the church. His thirst for power seems to emanate from an upbringing within the strict hierarchy of the Church. During his youth as a student in a choir school, Don Gil began to feel attracted to power and eagerly studied its mechanics, a learning process that Warner describes in terms of sadistic pleasure: ‘With a melancholy calf-love he abased himself before the choirmaster, learning by heart every inflection of the oppressor; the veins in the bloodshot eye and the veins on the hand that gripped the rod…’ Apparently fascinated by her rich dresses and refined manners, Don Gil becomes infatuated with Doña Ana and her show of devoutness, and treasures the memory of the night when he was responsible for guarding the gates of the church where she kept her vigil:

He loved the sense of power; and his being was still disorganized by that love-night he had spent sitting outside the church-door with the lady inside and the key across his knees. No cage-bird with its eyes put out had ever sung so delicious a strain as her silence had sung to him. She was young, she was rich, she was noble, she was beautiful, she was proud; she was in an agony of mind; and all night she had been his.

Don Gil’s sick obsession with Doña Anna is emphasised by the use of violent metaphors. In this passage, he compares her to a ‘bird with its eyes put out’, making a reference to vinkensport, a bird-call competition in which a common practice was to blind birds with hot pins to improve their concentration and increase the quality of their singing. Fellow Dorset writer Thomas Hardy—one of Warner’s literary influences—wrote a poem, ‘The Blinded Bird’, criticising the practice. The innocent, suffering bird and the compassionate tone of the speaker of Hardy’s poem, however, have little to do with Warner’s mocking portrayal of Ana, whose characterisation as an animal in heat is recurrent throughout the novel.

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346 Warner, *Don Juan*, p. 156.
Doña Ana and Don Ottavio are representatives of a class that the author portrays as already ridiculously obsolete in the eighteenth century. Firmly opposed to any kind of modernisation or social change, they are suspicious of Don Saturno’s efforts to teach the peasants to read and write. One of the themes that *After the Death of Don Juan* shares with most recreations of the legend is the criticism of social hypocrisy. Doña Ana’s piety is all pretence: while she is supposed to be keeping a vigil and praying for the soul of Don Juan, locking herself up in the church is an excuse to dream in private of the libertine’s return. The murmur of her constant praying is comically compared to a cat’s ‘sexual cry’. The couple’s entourage, Doña Pilar and Don Isidro, bear traces of the dramatic origins of the myth. They often appear or leave the scene as a pair, and provide asides and comic relief.

The novel is also critical of the liberal bourgeoisie, whose ideas of social progress never seem to materialise. While our initial impression of Don Saturno is of a compassionate man overwhelmed by the consequences of the actions of his son, his image changes throughout the novel. His inconsistent behaviour is seen in his relationship with the village schoolmaster, Don Francisco, whom he seduces with his ideas of universal education, but whom he finally ostracises. The schoolmaster, intimidated by the owner of the castle, provides one of the most striking descriptions of the old man:

[The mirror] showed him the approach of Don Saturno, minute and trim skating like a spider over the polished floor. In the village, many nicknamed him Old Sorcerer. It was true enough, he could bewitch when he pleased.

Don Saturno’s elaborate rhetoric becomes a weapon in his negotiation with the less educated peasants, and ultimately makes them suspicious about his true intentions.

348 Warner, *Don Juan*, p. 81.
349 In another gesture to the dramatic origins of the Don Juan myth, towards the end of the story Warner describes four characters in a room: Don Saturno, Doña Pilar, Don Juan and Doña Ana. Juan and Ana leave the room through a back door, leaving the other two talking. After a brief conversation, Don Saturno and Doña Pilar also leave the room (and conclude the ‘scene’ or section) with Saturno directing her, ‘We go out by the other door.’
350 Warner, *Don Juan*, p. 140.
Warner was convinced that the war in Spain was as much a class conflict as a political one, and refused to acknowledge the label of civil war, writing in her diaries: ‘[The] war in Spain is not a Spanish Civil War (what the Govt and BBC have taught us to call it). It is an international war, and it is a class war. It is a conflict between a ruling caste, and the people.’\(^{351}\) Her interpretation of the myth of Don Juan is consistent with this notion, framing the story in a feudal setting, with a decaying castle surrounded by discontented peasants who work the land of the estate. The final confrontation between the inhabitants of the castle and the peasants is foreshadowed from the beginning of the novel, which is punctuated by scenes that reveal class tension. As they are travelling towards the castle, Doña Ana, Don Ottavio and their entourage are prevented from continuing by a group of shepherds who are crossing the road with their herd. While Ottavio’s cowardice and lack of knowledge of the rural environment brings humour to the episode, and the confrontation is easily resolved, the incident introduces a threatening tone that pervades the whole story.

They had reined up before a group of raw-boned men who, gesticulating with cudgels and carabines, barred the way. Don Ottavio jumped out, drawing his sword. The other riders came galloping up, the train of coaches halted. An ambuscade!

[…] ‘Let us pass! Get out of the way, or we will ride you down!’

‘Try it, then. It will be the worse for you!’

[…] ‘A more wretched troop of half-licked bandits I have never set eyes on. Off with you to your holes. Troop!’

‘We aren’t bandits,’ said the man, ‘we are swineherds. But for all that you can’t pass.’\(^{352}\)

*After the Death of Don Juan* is markedly influenced by Marxist ideology, and its main theme is one of class struggle. In the novel, class conflict is

\(^{351}\) Quoted in Harman, *Biography*, p. 172.

\(^{352}\) Warner, *Don Juan*, pp. 21–2.
consistently expressed in economic terms, all revolving around the central theme of Don Saturno’s irrigation scheme and its benefits. The peasants are hoping to eventually obtain a share of the land; Don Juan, on the other hand, fears that his father will squander his inheritance by investing the profits from the land in agricultural developments. Although he is in possession of a castle, Warner makes Don Saturno not a nobleman, but a landowner, as he regretfully admits early in the story: ‘We are only a casa agraviada since the Crown of Spain, which we have been glad to serve, sometimes even with honourable mention, has not remembered to enoble us.’

One of the most interesting female characters in the novel is Celestina. Being the daughter of the miller makes her a desirable prospective wife for most of the village. She has other interests in mind, however. Having been taught arithmetic by the schoolmaster Don Francisco, her main interest is the obsessive counting and saving of money, with the aim of amassing a dowry in order to live a quiet and contented life as an upper-tier member of a convent. Perceived as cold and eccentric by her fellow villagers (a trait that she has in common with earlier Warner’s heroines, including Rebecca Random from Opus 7 and the protagonist of Lolly Willowes), she is not exactly a traditional feminist hero looking for a better life away from an imposed marriage. Her dream of joining the convent is fuelled not by devoutness or a wish to spend her life in godly contemplation, but by a more earthly compulsion:

She did not want to marry, in her bedroom she had already all the husband she wanted, tied in a handkerchief and hidden under the boards. To live quietly and gather money: that was the life she wanted, and the life she had in mind. […] there no robbers would come, and no suitors, and no beggars; and there would be no scrubbing and no trudging, for lay-sisters would see to that; but an easy life, and the esteem of the world and the approval of heaven, and money forever amassing and never to lose.

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353 Warner, Don Juan. p. 35. The term ‘casa agraviada’ as Warner employs it is not a common term in Spanish. The only example of its use in an English text that I have been able to find appears in The Private Correspondence of Sir Benjamin Keene, a collection of letters of the English ambassador in Spain from 1729 to 1739 and 1748 to 1757, which was published in 1933, and which could well have been one of the sources Warner consulted when writing After the Death of Don Juan.
The spark that ignites the conflict with the peasants has to do with the exploitation of the land. The labourers have demanded a new system of irrigation to mitigate the effect on the soil of the continuous droughts. The irrigation project is symbolic of the workers’ aspirations: they believe that once Don Saturno agrees to finance the work and the land becomes more profitable, that will be their opportunity to ask him to grant them a share of the profits. Their hopes are not unfounded, since Don Saturno has been educating them in the hope that they will be able to change their situation, as he explains to an outraged Anna and Ottavio:

Discontent, a noble discontent, must be the end of education. At first, my people were delighted with this strange new experience. [...] Then they took to ciphering and casting accounts, and imagined themselves half-way to being bankers. Finding themselves to be still on earth, and no richer than before, they now leave schooling to children. But in time the arts of reading and writing will force them to realize the wretchedness of their state, and then to resent, and then, perhaps, to amend it.354

Although Don Juan does not return to the castle until the end of the novel, the mysterious circumstances of his death and the threat of his arrival loom over the entire story. When he finally returns, he firmly opposes his father’s plans, rejecting any communal ownership of the land or the means of production. His reappearance instigates a revolt by the workers, who realise that the return of the heir means the frustration of all their plans. The villagers, led by Diego and Ramón, attempt a siege of the castle, but are defeated by military troops summoned by Don Ottavio, and the novel ends with Ramon’s tragic death.

**Battles of the Present and Visions of the Past in After the Death of Don Juan**

The writing of *After the Death of Don Juan*, a novel that is inspired by a contemporary war but is set two centuries earlier, involved significant historical and literary research. The work displays Warner’s knowledge of the tradition of the myth of Don Juan, and also of Spanish history, literature and art of the eighteenth century. It references several crises during the reign of Charles III and the social reforms he attempted to institutionalise. It depicts a stark difference

354 Warner, Don Juan, p. 54.
between urban and rural areas, and portrays a country in a state of decay and still holding onto a past of grandeur. Don Saturno’s soliloquies, hyperbolic as they are in trying to connect the history of literature and art with the Spanish character, show Warner’s attempt to explore the concepts and texts that have influenced Spanish cultural identity, and her preoccupation with ideas of tradition and heritage.

Reprising Mozart and Da Ponte’s eighteenth-century reinterpretation of the myth of Don Juan allowed Sylvia Townsend Warner to present her allegory of Spain as a feudal society, stressing class difference and the exploitation of the peasants as the main source of conflict. The novel moves from a satire on the upper classes to an impassioned description of the injustices committed upon the workers, and its dramatic ending sees the failure of the rebellion by the villagers, whose leader is shot to death. The poignant ending of the novel represents a significant deviation from the framework of the Don Juan legend, a divergence that began with the setting of the story in a rural village rather than in the city of Seville.

But the fact that the novel was written at the time of the war also means that contemporary events became sources of inspiration for the story. I want to suggest that *After the Death of Don Juan* was inspired by a particular battle of the civil war that was covered extensively in the international press: the siege of the Alcázar of Toledo. The battle of the Alcázar—then a military academy—took place from 27 July to 21 September 1936, when hundreds of nationalist military men and several pro-Franco families and members of the clergy occupied the fortress. Franco’s troops were aware of the strategic and symbolic value of the fortress, which had its origins as a Roman palace, had then become an Arab fortress, and was later turned into a royal residence in the eleventh century after Spain’s reconquest of the territories occupied by the Arabs. The republican Workers’ Militia tried to win back the fortress in an exhausting battle that went on for months. The event was widely reported in the British press. *The Times* and the *Manchester Guardian*, for instance, provided thorough and regular coverage of the incident, publishing dozens of articles following the development of the siege and its aftermath, including photographic reportage. The circumstances surrounding the siege must have seemed intensely anachronistic in the 1930s, and
the battle contributed to the persistent image of Spain as a backward country.\textsuperscript{355} The notoriety of the event also inspired the writing of two books which were published in the months following the end of the battle: H. R. Knickerbocker’s \textit{The Siege of the Alcázar} (first published in Philadelphia in 1936, then in London in 1937), and Major Geoffrey McNeill-Moss’s \textit{The Epic of the Alcázar} (London, 1936). Both works are sympathetic to the rebel side and celebrate the victory of Franco’s army. \textit{The Epic of the Alcázar} was greatly praised in \textit{The Times Literary Supplement}, with a reviewer stating that ‘The tale that he tells is one of the greatest heroism.’\textsuperscript{356} The siege was also the theme of a play by the American writer Michael Blankfort, \textit{The Brave and the Blind} (1937)\textsuperscript{357}, and juvenile fiction such as Percy F. Westerman’s \textit{Under Fire in Spain} (1937)\textsuperscript{358}, all sympathetic to the nationalist side.

The similarities between the battle of the Alcázar and the besieged castle at the end of \textit{After the Death of Don Juan} are remarkable. As in Warner’s novel, the fascist sympathisers who locked themselves up in the Alcázar were mostly representatives of the upper classes and the military. The summoning of Don Tomás, the village priest, to the castle at the end of the story echoes a similar event at the Alcázar, when the inhabitants of the fortress asked for a priest to baptise the children born inside and to act as a mediator between them and the besiegers, an incident that was reported in the British press. Even more emblematically, the republican troops that surrounded the Alcázar were named the Workers’ Militia, but were simply referred to as ‘the workers’ in the accounts that \textit{The Times} gave of the event.\textsuperscript{359} Finally, the ending of \textit{After the Death of Don Juan} also evokes the conclusion of the siege of the Alcázar, which ended when Franco’s troops defeated those of the Republic and freed the inhabitants of the fortress.

The occupation of the Alcázar because of its historical meaning and symbolic power also has particular nationalist undertones. It not only echoed a

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\item[355] Brian Shelmerdine, \textit{British Representations of the Spanish Civil War} (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).
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past time of class privilege—a manifest rejection of the ideals of equality propagated by the Spanish Republic—but it also evoked a past national grandeur in which military achievement and religion were closely related. The recovery of the Alcázar for the nationalist faction echoed the Christian reconquest of the Arab palace in the Middle Ages, and its powerful symbolism was exploited politically. The victory of the Alcázar was greatly celebrated by fascist groups, becoming almost ubiquitous in nationalist discourse and in what Miriam Basilio has called Franco’s ‘mythic retelling of history’.  

The siege of the Alcázar may have also have inspired one of the main themes of Warner’s novel: the tension between tradition and reform, and a crisis of national identity that had grown in parallel with the political and social crisis. After the Death of Don Juan is set in the ‘seventh decade of the eighteenth century’, the century that definitively confirmed Spain’s loss of international supremacy and its position as a peripheral empire. Warner’s work depicts the Spanish countryside in a matching state of decay: buildings are described as ‘derelict’; Don Saturno’s castle is crumbling, a mere shadow of its former self; and the earth is scattered with tired olive trees that cannot be replaced because of the lack of funds. Fashion is used in the novel to reflect a country whose prestige was waning. Spanish style is no longer popular for the upper classes, and to the horror of her duenna Doña Pilar, Doña Ana and her husband Don Ottavio ask her to sew garments with French-style embroidery. After the Death of Don Juan also includes the story of how—with a decree that even caused a mutiny in Madrid—the progressive King Charles III had recently tried to ban the traditional Spanish male attire of a long, hooded cape and wide-brimmed hat, an

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361 The mutiny, which took place in Madrid in 1766, was referred to as the Motín de Esquilache, after the minister who inspired it, Leopoldo de Gregorio, Marquis of Esquilache, who was of Italian origin and had served Charles III during his reign in Naples. Esquilache intended to forbid long capes and wide-brimmed hats, reasoning that they helped to protect the anonymity of criminals. While the people of Madrid reacted against what they thought was an imposition of foreign fashion, the main cause behind the many riots was the widespread discontent with a previous trade reform sanctioned by Esquilache, which had caused a steep increase in the price of bread. J. A. Gallego, El Motín de Esquilache, América y Europa (Madrid: Fundación Mapfre Tavera, 2003), p. 61.
issue that Don Saturno mentions at the beginning of the novel: ‘that Madrid affair about the cloaks and hats? And there I understand your feelings, in fact I share them. One clings to the traditional aspects of Spain,’ \(^{362}\) Change is seen as a threatening possibility: it is not only class privilege that is at stake, but also national identity. Interestingly, at the end of the story the sacristan Don Gil is depicted wearing a long, hooded cloak, his attire conferring him with moral and personal attributes and identifying him with reactionary sectors, again emphasising the similarities of this novel with the dramatic genre.

While Don Saturno is sharply aware of the contemporary need for social and territorial reform in Spain, he is also presented as obsessed with inheritance and lineage, and above all with Spanish history and the nature of the Spanish character—with what Chris Hopkins has described as ‘a real “eternal” Spain which can never be satisfactorily recreated in the present’. \(^{363}\) Throughout the novel, Don Saturno discourses on the subject of Spanish identity, a notion that for him is not attached to nationality, since he traces it as far back as Aristophanes and also recognises it in Molière. His desire to educate the peasantry and provide for their future is connected to his belief that they represent the essence of Spanishness:

> The Spain that he loved, pungent and austere, the Spain he studied in his library […] it was here in these five men talking about water; it would remain, long after his insipid and expensive puppets had gone back to their town-house. \(^{364}\)

Here Don Saturno seems to speak for Warner herself, who, as has been shown above, often wrote about what she saw as the Spanish peasants’ ‘intrinsic’ appreciation of culture. However, his appreciation of the peasants’ natural talents is merely an abstract idea that he has no intention of putting into practice, and observing the discussion of the peasants only reminds him of his lack of an heir.

Warner seems to have been both repelled and fascinated by the customs of the Spanish upper classes, even in the twentieth century. In ‘Barcelona’, her first

\(^{362}\) Warner, *Don Juan*, p. 46.


article on the Spanish war in *Left Review*, published in December 1936, she focuses her attention on the luxury villas of the north of the city, expressing shock at the open display of valuable possessions:

> the Spanish aristocracy is in a primitive stage of capitalism, it preserves the medieval brag of possessions, it locks up its money in gold and jewels and keeps the gold and jewels for display.\(^{365}\)

The emphasis on the ostentatious nature of the upper classes highlights their need to establish their social status by referring to an archaic idea of nobility. But it is with the character of Don Ottavio that Warner seems to allude most directly to the idea of nobility as a kind of costumed, theatrical performance. Don Ottavio, who at the end of the novel has decided to come back to Tenorio Viejo to avenge Doña Ana and kill Don Juan, forgets his duty of honour when he sees the perilous situation of the besieged castle, and is possessed by a sort of class kinship that makes him join Don Juan and fight in the castle. The ambiguity of the meaning of the word ‘nobility’ seems intentional here:

> Don Ottavio felt the blood rushing to his face. His eyes dazzled, his heart pounded. [...] An emotion of nobility swept over him, like a drunk man he became aware of himself as a separate being, a figure to be at once admired and pitied.

This ‘emotion of nobility’ seems to parody the sentimental representations of the inhabitants of the Alcázar of Toledo, who remained locked up for three months defending their fortress without water or provisions. For Don Ottavio it is also a moment of self-consciousness, a reminder of his status as a nobleman, a figure that becomes in his mind both mythical and tragic. As in the battle of the Alcázar, which was from the beginning narrated in ‘epic’ terms, with the fortress’s occupiers described as ‘heroes’ in newspaper reports,\(^{366}\) there is a dramatic, theatrical quality to the depiction of this scene, and especially to the description of Don Ottavio, whose character seems to come alive only when he sees the

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\(^{366}\) In an article announcing the end of the battle, *The Times* described the siege as ‘notable for the courage and persistence of the defence even in the history of a race whose courage has never been in question’. ‘Grim End at Toledo’, *The Times*, 19 September (1936): 12.
opportunity to perform the role of an outdated nobleman fighting for his birthright.

But, in addition, Warner’s novel, and especially the characters of Don Ottavio and Doña Ana, can also be read as a satire on what she saw as the misrepresentation of the political motivations behind the Spanish war by the British media. Depictions of the upper classes as the real victims of the violent ‘reds’ were prevalent in the British press, particularly at the beginning of the war. The Daily Mirror, for instance, followed the story of Mr G. W. Gripe Hutchison, who transported persecuted nobles in his Yatch from Cádiz to England during the first months of the war, but was eventually captured by the communists. Hutchison was characterised as a twentieth-century ‘Scarlet Pimpernel’, saving innocent people from the bloodthirsty Republicans. In a pamphlet published in 1937, the British novelist Rebecca West also wrote about the pro-Franco bias in the British press, complaining about the representation of the upper classes:

I read the newspapers [...] in which it is assumed that the rebel forces in Spain are a white-souled band of patriots, rather like cavaliers in old-fashioned novels for school-girls, who are fighting for the preservation of law and order against blood-thirsty barbarians.

West’s analysis of these romanticised, novelistic representations of the nationalist forces help us to understand Warner’s narrative choices in After the Death of Don Juan. The historical and literary settings of the novel take on a new meaning if we consider the work as a satire on depictions of nationalist groups as a set of old-fashioned benevolent aristocrats.

In After the Death of Don Juan Warner describes a society in which tradition thwarts social progress. Mozart and Da Ponte’s eighteenth-century revision of the myth of Don Juan provided the perfect starting point from which to explore the loss of national identity in a time of crisis, with the parallels between the two historical periods emerging naturally as part of the story, rather than being forced into an overt allegory. Warner was probably inspired by the circumstances of the

battle of the Alcázar and its anachronistic aura to give a searching depiction of Spain’s complex and often idealised relationship with its own past.

**After the Death of Don Juan and the Don Giovanni Myth**

Warner’s novel is a distinctive addition to the long list of literary works that have explored the legend of Don Juan since the seventeenth century. The Don Juan (or Don Giovanni) myth seems to have lent itself particularly well to repeated recreation across the centuries; it has often been argued that the character of Don Juan is almost devoid of personality, a libertine character that can be moulded into an ingenious trickster to enthrall audiences, or a promiscuous sinner with whom to exemplify a moral lesson. Perhaps significantly, in the first scene of Tirso de Molina’s play *El burlador de Sevilla o el convidado de piedra (The Trickster of Seville and the Stone Guest)* (c. 1630), Don Juan tells the woman he is chasing that he is ‘un hombre sin nombre’, ‘a man without a name’. Tirso’s title alludes to the slippery nature of the title character. The name ‘burlador’ derives from the verb ‘burlar’, which has two possible meanings: one, ‘to outwit’ or ‘to cheat’; the other, ‘to dodge’ or ‘to evade’. Translations of Tirso’s work into English chose to follow the first meaning, alluding to the playful and deceiving nature of the character. A 1923 translation published in New York was titled *The Love-Rogue: A Poetic Drama in Three Acts*; the now canonical translation by the South African poet Roy Campbell was published posthumously under the title *The Trickster of Seville and the Stone Guest* (1959).

First published in 1630, Tirso de Molina’s play is the first printed recreation of the story of Don Juan, although the story had probably been in circulation previously. In Tirso’s version, set in the fourteenth century, Don Juan is presented as a reckless womaniser who only looks for physical pleasure, regardless of the consequences, and who lives on the feeling of anticipation that the next conquest promises. While he is often cautioned about the consequences of his actions, Don Juan is dismissive, replying that the day when he will have to answer for his sins

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is still far away. Among many other conquests from all social backgrounds, Don Juan seduces Doña Ana, a noblewoman and daughter of the military commander Don Gonzalo. Don Gonzalo decides to fight Don Juan, but he is no match for the libertine, who kills him almost instantly; the commander swears he will hunt him forever. Days later, Don Juan mockingly invites the statue marking the grave of the commander to dinner with him. To his surprise, the ghost of the statue accepts his invitation. He dines with Don Juan, inviting him in return to come to visit him at his grave. Once Don Juan is at the grave, he feels an imminent danger and tries to repent his sins, but the statue denies him the privilege and sends him to Hell.

While the premise of the story remained more or less unaltered—a reckless libertine is ultimately punished for his crimes—the myth evolved with the centuries, inspiring works such as Molière’s *Dom Juan ou le Festin de pierre* (1665), Mozart’s opera *Don Giovanni* with a libretto by Lorenzo Da Ponte (1787), Byron’s satire *Don Juan* (1821), Zorrilla’s *Don Juan Tenorio* (1844) and Bernard Shaw’s *Man and Superman* (1903), among many others. The history of the myth of Don Juan in the twentieth century became closely linked to the Spanish Civil War. The play was a favourite with exiled authors, and old and new recreations of the myth were performed in countries that had traditionally hosted left-wing Spanish refugees, such as Mexico and France. The myth seemed to retain its appeal for the followers of both ideologies, and the South African poet Roy Campbell—one of the few writers who supported the Francoist side during the conflict—wrote the second translation of Tirso’s *The Trickster of Seville* into English in 1959 a few years after the end of the war.

Warner’s novel explicitly alludes to the long tradition of representations of the libertine’s story; even the children in the novel sing songs about a mythical Don Juan. The myth of Don Juan seems to contain a paradox: despite the fact that the libertine has been condemned to spend eternity in Hell to pay for his sins, he always comes back from the dead in the many recreations of the legend. Laura Lonsdale has pointed out that Don Juan’s immortality has become ‘a celebratory motif of twentieth-century incarnations of the character’. Warner’s novel seems

to follow this metafictional notion, reviving Don Juan and denying the possibility of an ending with a moral lesson in which the criminal pays for his sins. The traditional supernatural ending, with the statue of the commander sending Don Juan to the pits of Hell, is shown here to be a lie, a trick that the libertine has employed to escape. Warner was inevitably aware of the long history of the myth of Don Juan. Indeed, the narrative becomes self-reflexive when Don Saturno explains to his visitors the myth of Don Juan as a family legacy:

This legend of the wicked Don Juan is one of our family traditions, only till now it has always attached itself to the seventh Don Juan not the twelfth. In fact, the story has passed into literature. Molière wrote a play on the theme, an uneven work, but not without merit.372

As evidenced by her letters to her friend and fellow writer Nancy Cunard, Sylvia Townsend Warner conceived of her novel as a fable forming part of the Don Juan tradition.373 In addition to being acquainted with the versions by Molière and Mozart and Da Ponte, Warner may have read Tirso de Molina’s seventeenth-century play in Spanish, since it was available in the London Library, of which she was a frequent user. While she was not proficient in the language, she seems to have approached foreign-language texts as a scholar, and she also translated several Spanish war romances into English.374 In any case, she seems to have been aware of the existence of the Spanish versions of the myth, since she borrowed Don Juan’s surname, Tenorio, to name the village in her novel—a name that appears only in Tirso’s original play and in José Zorrilla’s nineteenth-century version Don Juan Tenorio.

In terms of plot, Warner seems to have been influenced by Mozart’s Don Giovanni—which is seen by many as the most prominent recreation of the myth of Don Juan to date—picking up the story from Mozart and Da Ponte’s ending. The opera premiered in Prague in 1787, and Warner places her story ‘in the

372 Warner, Don Juan, p. 35.
373 In a letter to Nancy Cunard she describes her novel as ‘a parable (…) or an allegory, or what you will, of the political chemistry of the Spanish War, with the Don Juan—more of Molière than of Mozart—developing as the Fascist on the piece’. Warner, Letter to Nancy Cunard dated 28-VIII-1945, Letters, Maxwell (ed.), p. 51, n. 1.
374 Some of her translations of Spanish war poems are collected in Cunningham (ed.), Penguin Book of Spanish Civil War Verse, pp. 279-80, 289.
seventh decade of the eighteenth century’. In addition, she maintains some of the character names used by Da Ponte, such as Don Juan’s servant Leporello and Doña Ana’s fiancé Don Ottavio, which did not appear in earlier versions. Warner, however, thought of her protagonist as being closer to Molière’s creation than to Mozart’s, although the connections between After the Death of Don Juan and Dom Juan ou le Festin de pierre are not so apparent. I believe that one of the features that connects Warner’s novel with the work of the French playwright is the somewhat diminished importance of the theme of seduction in Molière’s play. As José Manuel Losada has highlighted, Molière’s Dom Juan is not so much characterised by his role as a seducer as by his overt disdain for legal and moral rules; he is an atheist libertine.\textsuperscript{375} The importance of seduction and sensuality as a driving force in Mozart and Da Ponte’s Don Giovanni is much greater. In Warner’s novel, seducing women is a secondary preoccupation for Don Juan, whose main aim in the book is gaining control over his father’s wealth. Secondly, Mozart’s Don Giovanni does not include the role of the libertine’s father, which does appear in Molière’s play. The ideological and generational conflict between father and son, which has a secondary importance in Molière’s Dom Juan, becomes crucial in Warner’s novel.

Although introducing important changes in the form and content of the Don Juan tradition, the novel follows many of the conventions associated with the play. Like Molière’s tragicomedy and Mozart and Da Ponte’s drama giocoso, After the Death of Don Juan mixes elements of tragedy and comedy. Doña Ana, who is repeatedly described as ‘slow-witted’, the cowardly Don Ottavio, and Don Isidro and Doña Pilar are the main comic characters of the novel, while scenes of absurd humour are often built around the character of the bookish and often rambling Don Saturno. The tone of the novel changes progressively and strikingly throughout the story, and by the time Don Juan returns in the last third of the book, the story is no longer a satire on the beliefs of the upper classes, but a tragic narration of social injustice.

One of the recurrent themes in most versions of the Don Juan legend is the criticism of the moral hypocrisy of the upper classes, starting with the title

\textsuperscript{375} José Manuel Losada, ‘El Dom Juan de Molière y el Don Giovanni de Mozart’, Littérature, langages et art (Huelva: Universidad de Huelva, 2006), p. 4.
character, who abuses his class privilege in order to seduce women from all social strata. While it is true that the libertine’s reckless behaviour is seen as exceptional rather than typical, in Tirso’s and Molière’s plays, and in Mozart and Da Ponte’s opera, nobles and landowners are depicted as hypocrites who profess their religion in public, but who are as immoral as Don Juan in their private lives. Ian Watt argues that the play presents Don Juan as a ‘depraved product’ of the ‘sterile falsities of the court’, looking to establish his fame as a libertine, a fame opposed to that proposed by the codes of courtly love. It is only the peasants (and, depending on the version, Don Juan’s servant Leporello) who seem to have moral standards. Warner’s After the Death of Don Juan follows this convention: in general, the villagers of Tenorio Viejo are cast in a much better light than Don Saturno, his son or the guests at the castle. However, her novel is focused on criticising social structures rather than behaviours, and while at the beginning it may resemble a comedy of manners, by the end of the story the focus is exclusively on class conflict. In this sense, After the Death of Don Juan represents a change in the tradition: the focus of the story changes from the ‘ghost’ of Don Juan to the villagers.

Warner’s Don Juan himself also represents a deviation from the tradition. The works of Tirso de Molina and Molière, perhaps unintentionally, evoked a certain sympathy and even admiration for the reckless and ingenious libertine, despite his selfish and vile behaviour. Don Juan was implicitly seen as rebelling against social mores in the case of Tirso’s play, or more explicitly against religious belief in the case of Molière’s atheist protagonist. Crucially, Warner’s

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377 While Warner’s novel is much more explicit in its political content, several critics have explored instances of class tension in Mozart’s Don Giovanni. Jonathan Miller has noted the lack of class referents in the opera, an ambiguity that is only resolved by the use of titles such as ‘Don’ or ‘Commendatore’. Critics have also highlighted the political implications of the composition that marks the climax of the first act of the opera, ‘Viva la liberta!’, especially considering that the opera premiered ten years before the French Revolution. Political interpretations proposed by Anthony Arblaster and others are based on the use of the particular words ‘Viva la liberta’, and the emphasis given to them (they are repeated a dozen times). As part of the plot of the story, they refer to Don Juan’s open invitation to anybody to visit his house, sardonically mocking the people who are pursuing him in search of revenge. Jonathan Miller, The Don Giovanni Book: Myths of Seduction and Betrayal (London and Boston: Faber & Faber, 1990), p. x; Anthony Arblaster, Viva la Libertat: Politics in Opera (London: Verso, 1992), p. 30.
Don Juan swiftly goes from being a libertine to becoming an oppressor, a tyrant. A figure that had been representative of anarchism and transgression is now used as an emblem of fascism in the author’s complex Spanish Civil War allegory. If Mozart and Da Ponte had already presented Don Giovanni at his most cruel, problematising the audience’s wish to see Don Juan as an appealing anti-hero, Warner’s Don Juan has no redeeming qualities, not even the cunning and shrewd intelligence of the trickster. Don Juan ceases to be the protagonist of his own story: in *After the Death of Don Juan*, the peasants, both as a collective and as embodied in the main characters of Ramón and Diego, naturally emerge as the central characters of the novel.378

While Don Juan’s antics and comedic scenes may have distracted the audience from the intended moral message, Tirso de Molina, who was a Mercedarian monk, wrote the original Don Juan play with the aim of warning people of the consequences of their sins. Tirso’s libertine believes in God, but he is also convinced that there will be time enough to repent his sins in the future. When at the end of the play the commander announces his punishment, Juan asks for forgiveness, but it is all in vain. Molière’s Don Juan is openly atheist, refusing to repent even when he is given the chance to do so at the end of the play; however, the moral of the play remains the same, and he is finally dragged to Hell, meeting the same fate as his predecessor. In *After the Death of Don Juan* the conflict between man and God is not of primary importance. After Don Juan reappears in Tenorio Viejo as living proof of the failure of eternal justice, the preoccupation of the novel is more worldly than moral, focusing on how the despotic actions of the castle’s heir will affect the peasants. The plot of the novel is in keeping with Warner’s opinion regarding the interpretation of the myth. As she wrote in a letter to Nancy Cunard, she believed that the essence of the libertine character was not his opposition to God but his ‘flouting of the dead’.

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378 The declining importance of Don Juan, whom even the peasants identify as only a symbol of their problems, and the change from the individual to the collective, might perhaps also be interpreted as responding to fascism’s cult of personality.

379 In a letter to Nancy Cunard discussing the similarities between Don Juan and Faust, Warner writes: ‘I think Don J. is possibly even the older, because of his flouting of the dead (when he rescued the comedians it was under the title of Festin de Pierre or Stone Guest, it was that aspect that made him enthralling). And to flout the dead is an older more primitive offence than to flout God and law. There could perfectly be a Chinese Don Juan, but a Chinese Faust would not go so well.’ Letter dated 5-II-1951, ‘Letters to
mocking the statue of the commander and inviting him to dinner. Warner’s Don Juan goes one step further, feigning his own death and changing from human to legend, managing to make people doubt whether he is a man or a ghost. His main transgression is ignoring the will of his father, rejecting Don Saturno’s ideas about progress and duty towards his workers. The end of the novel does not count on divine justice to solve the problems that human justice does not address. Ironically, the last mention of Don Juan in the novel describes him shooting at the peasants from the stone steps of the village church.

In *After the Death of Don Juan* Warner writes a fable of the Spanish Civil War, placing class inequality at the root of the conflict. Continuing Mozart and Da Ponte’s recreation of the myth allowed her to emphasise the anachronistic character of the war, depicting Spain as a pre-industrial society and highlighting the power and dominance of landowners and clergy, as if nothing had changed since the eighteenth century. *After the Death of Don Juan* attributes Spain’s endemic industrial and social backwardness to the nation’s obsession with recreating its past as a world power, and to the obsolete values deriving from that notion. As in the vast majority of her works about Spain, the land figures prominently as a metaphor and a theme, and is symbolic of the workers’ aspirations: the promise of an agricultural reform that never finally materialises foreshadows the tragic destiny of the peasants’ leader. Warner’s novel, written one year before the end of the conflict, foretold the demise of the Republic and its dreams of social change.

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Nancy Cunard’. Sylvia Townsend Warner Archive, Dorset County Museum, Dorchester, UK.
Chapter 4

Martha Gellhorn, *Collier’s Weekly* and the Evolution of Reportage

Martha Gellhorn arrived in Spain in March 1937, crossing the French-Spanish frontier by train. When she reached Madrid, she found the entire city under a blackout, prepared for another night of fascist bombings.\(^{380}\) Like many other American writers and journalists, she intended to offer moral support to the Spanish Republic, which was under siege by General Franco and his fascist army. Although she had no previous experience as a war reporter, she soon began sending dispatches to the American magazine *Collier’s Weekly*, for which she would later cover the Second World War. Gellhorn became greatly involved with the cause of the Spanish Republic, and throughout the duration of the war she advocated American participation in the Spanish Civil War in support of democracy.

This chapter focuses on Gellhorn’s work as a correspondent during the Spanish Civil War. It studies her contribution to the field of war reporting, exploring her development of the subgenre of reportage. Gellhorn’s articles, which focused on people’s stories rather than military events, are essential texts in the journalism of the civil war. Her narration of the conflict through the use of literary devices and techniques situates her work as a natural precursor of the literary journalism of the 1960s. This chapter also contends that the period was crucial for the development and mythologising of the war reporter, constructed as a brave, reckless and intrepid figure. Through an analysis of Gellhorn’s articles for *Collier’s Weekly*, her correspondence with literary and political figures, the diaries preserved at her archive at Boston University, and her fiction, I intend to throw light on her role in the Spanish conflict as a writer and activist.

Gellhorn’s professional and political involvement with the war in Spain cannot be understood without taking into account her relationship with two well-known figures of the period. The first was Eleanor Roosevelt, who was Gellhorn’s

frequent correspondent for nearly thirty years. Their letters during and after the civil war demonstrate how much Gellhorn influenced Eleanor Roosevelt’s opinions about Spain, and how she acted as an intermediary between Roosevelt and several members of and sympathisers with the republican government. The second is, inevitably, Ernest Hemingway, with whom Gellhorn travelled to Spain, and whom she married in 1940. Their tumultuous relationship was marked by professional competition—they ended up employed as foreign correspondents for the same publication—and they divorced in 1945. This chapter will look at their time together in Spain, and will explore the influence of Hemingway’s work on Gellhorn’s early prose.

Like her good friend the war photographer Robert Capa, Gellhorn began her career with the war in Spain, and the conflict marked her forever. Apart from her correspondent work for magazines such as Collier’s, The New Yorker and New York Times Magazine, Gellhorn was also the author of several novels, a collection of novellas, several short stories, non-fiction works, and even a play that she co-authored with her fellow correspondent Virginia Cowles. Her literary output, eminently autobiographical, is marked by her description of how war affects civilian populations.

While she was only twelve years younger than Nancy Cunard, and fifteen younger than Sylvia Townsend Warner, Gellhorn gives the impression of belonging to an altogether different generation. She was college educated and from a progressive family, and her interests and writing style seem remarkably contemporary to the present-day reader. Even today, she remains an extremely attractive and charismatic figure. Her relationship with Hemingway, already celebrated at the time—photographs of her wedding, taken by Robert Capa, were published in Life magazine—has become part of popular culture. In the past three years, an HBO TV movie381 and two books, Naomi Wood’s Mrs Hemingway382 and the historical study by Amanda Veill, Hotel Florida,383 have explored the relationship, with uneven results. Gellhorn’s works have received much less critical attention. While she figures in virtually every book on American

381 Hemingway and Gellhorn, Philip Kaufman (2012).
journalism, very few scholars have engaged with the formal aspects of her work. Kate McLoughlin’s 2007 critical study is the only book-length work that explores Gellhorn’s work. McLoughlin’s valuable book, which provides an illuminating discussion of many aspects of Gellhorn’s war reporting, does not pay much attention to the impact of the Spanish Civil War on her work. This chapter therefore aims to fill that gap, demonstrating Gellhorn’s crucial role in the development of war reportage, and in American activism in aid of the Spanish Republic.

**Early Works**

Martha Gellhorn was born in St Louis in 1908, the daughter of George Gellhorn, a gynaecologist, and Edna Gellhorn, an early suffragette and the vice-president of the National League of Women Voters. After graduating from high school, Gellhorn joined Bryn Mawr College, but dropped out while in her second year. Almost immediately afterwards, she started working for the American publications *New Republic* and the *Albany Times Union* as a proofreader and junior reporter for the second half of 1929. Perhaps inspired by the expatriate stories that had been made popular by, among others, Ernest Hemingway, whom she deeply admired, she decided to move to France in 1930. A few months after her arrival in Paris, she met the writer and philosopher Bertrand de Jouvenel, who was notorious for having had a romantic relationship with his stepmother, the famous novelist Colette, when he was only sixteen years old. Gellhorn started a relationship with Jouvenel, who was married at the time, and together they spent long periods in several European countries, travelling to Spain, Italy and Germany. It was probably through Jouvenel, who had previously written about pacifism and the League of Nations, that Gellhorn began to be interested in that organisation. In 1930 she travelled to Geneva as a correspondent for the *St Louis*.

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Post Dispatch, writing on the League's women representatives. After the end of the relationship, in 1934, Gellhorn decided to return to America.

That year, Gellhorn published a semi-autobiographical novel about a group of girls in college, What Mad Pursuit. The book did not receive much critical attention, and was reviewed by the New York Times as 'palpable juvenilia'. Gellhorn would later refuse to acknowledge her first attempt at writing a novel, and successfully prevented the appearance of subsequent editions: her opera prima is nowadays very difficult to find. What Mad Pursuit is initially set on an American university campus. The protagonist is Charis Day, a native of Salt Lake City. Like Gellhorn, Charis quits college halfway through and decides to work at a newspaper office. The novel is an engaging read, half-humorous and half-melancholy, and reflects several of the preoccupations of the time, including an aversion to social injustice. Early in the novel, Charis mentions a case of seven black boys falsely accused of raping two women, which is reminiscent of the Scottsboro case. The novel also reveals the author’s awareness of her own condition as young, white, middle-class defender of the rights of the working class, women and people of colour. In the novel Charis is often teased because of her passionate hatred of injustice, her constant embracing of ‘causes’ implicitly depicting her as erratic: ‘Judith could never get used to Charis’ impersonal angers [...] “You’ll be preaching revolution from a soap-box some day.”’ Gellhorn opened What Mad Pursuit with two remarkably prophetic quotations. One was from Thomas Wolfe’s Look Homeward, Angel—‘The hunger that haunts and hurts Americans and makes them exiles at home and strangers whenever they go…’—which seemed to foretell Gellhorn’s future nomadic life. The other was taken from Ernest Hemingway’s A Farewell to Arms: ‘Nothing Ever Happens to the Brave.’

In 1936, Gellhorn published The Trouble I’ve Seen, a collection of four realist novellas, which took its title from the well-known African-American spiritual ‘Nobody Knows the Trouble I’ve Seen’. The collection represented a

389 Moorehead, Gellhorn, p. 97.
391 Gellhorn, Mad Pursuit, p. 8.
major change from her previous book in both subject matter and tone. It reflected her experience working as a reporter for the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), when her main task was to investigate the distribution and reach of social help. She travelled across North and South Carolina and New England, interviewing people and obtaining first-hand accounts of the ravages of the economic crisis. The novellas, entitled ‘Mrs Maddison’, ‘Joe and Pete’, ‘Jim’ and ‘Ruby’, are intimate portraits of the lives of people affected by the Great Depression. Among the themes treated in these novellas are family conflict and domestic violence prompted by poverty and unemployment, the internal politics behind a strike by factory workers, and child prostitution. With a straightforward style that tends to privilege dialogue over narration, Gellhorn describes the tricks people employ to try to extend their meagre allowance, the recycled clothes, the lack of coal for heating and the constant hunger. She intercalates these episodes with others that describe the new bonds formed between people in order to survive, a community shaped by necessity. One of the most memorable parts of the novella ‘Mrs Maddison’ describes how the title character cleans and decorates the walls of the derelict, abandoned cabin to which she has been forced to move:

From Mrs Cahill and Mrs Cahill’s friends she got old magazines; and she tore out the advertisements and pasted them all over the ripped and filthy newspaper of the walls. She did this with an eye to colour, not caring much what the advertisement was about, just so it looked bright and fresh. There was, above her bed, an intimate advertisement about articles of personal hygiene to women, and she hesitated a long time about a Listerine advertisement […] because the woman’s face looked so anxious. Campbell’s soup was vaunted on her walls, chic red-coated people smoked cigarettes, and a handsome man in a polo coat drove a Packard…

Although the book does not have revolutionary overtones, *The Trouble I’ve Seen* shares socialist realism’s vision of economic forces as determining people’s ultimate happiness and dignity. Her style is also indebted to the American tradition of naturalist short fiction, and her use of dialect in some of the stories is particularly reminiscent of the work of Stephen Crane. The book elicited positive

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reviews, and reached a wider audience than *What Mad Pursuit*. It was translated into French as *Détresse Américaine* in 1938\(^{393}\). In an article for *The Spectator*, Graham Greene commended Gellhorn for the lack of sentimentality in her narration, praising her ‘unfeminine style’.\(^{394}\)

The book opens with a flattering preface by H. G. Wells, who had become a good friend of Gellhorn.\(^{395}\) Wells’s preface bears witness to how the Depression had pervaded the national spirit in the United States. Despite the specificity of Gellhorn’s stories and their American setting, Wells’s allusion to the global dimensions of the crisis suggests a sense of connectedness to a world going through hard times:

> In the past few years we have seen whole communities swept from sufficiency and contentment and hopefulness into the direst perplexity and want. This has happened round and about the world. Comfort and security have waned and vanished. [...] Parallels to these stories could be found in the industrial regions of South Wales and England, in France, Germany, Petrograd, the Volga, the river valleys of China, Bombay, Calcutta. With local variations of accent and color the mill of change grinds on and challenges us to solve a universal riddle.\(^{396}\)

The idea of a worldwide Depression—and the hope that a new, more egalitarian world order was being crafted—was a recurrent one in the 1930s, and formed the basis of the philosophy behind the campaigns of international solidarity promoted after the outbreak of the war in Spain. As will be discussed later in this chapter, Gellhorn’s socially focused writing, as seen in *The Trouble I’ve Seen*, greatly influenced her early journalistic style. Throughout her career, her interest in

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\(^{393}\) Martha Gellhorn, *Détresse Americaine*, trans. by Denise Geneix (Paris: Sorlot Fernand, 1938)

\(^{394}\) Graham Greene, ‘Short Stories’ (Review of Martha Gellhorn’s *The Trouble I’ve Seen*), *The Spectator*, 22 May (1936): 950

\(^{395}\) The intimate tone of the letters between Wells and Gellhorn led to considerable speculation that they had a romantic relationship. Responding to these rumours, Gellhorn wrote in 1965: ‘The letters give the impression that a great passion was about to flower or be nurtured [...] it is one of the purest examples of the imagination of a writer.’ Box 1, Folder 1, Martha Gellhorn Papers, Howard Gotlieb Center, Boston University, USA.

people’s stories characterised her style and remained a constant feature of her analysis of events.

The gestation of *The Trouble I’ve Seen* also prompted the friendship between Gellhorn and Eleanor Roosevelt. The women first met at the White House in November 1934. Gellhorn had been working as a reporter for FERA, an organisation directed by Henry Hopkins, a close advisor to Franklin Roosevelt and the man in charge of the New Deal relief programmes. The chief reporter of FERA was Lorena Hickok, an intimate friend of Eleanor Roosevelt, although she and Gellhorn did not work together. One of the objectives of FERA was to investigate the efficiency of the relief programmes and draw a picture of the social situation of working-class America. As a reporter for the association, Gellhorn travelled across the country talking to families and hearing their troubles and concerns. The experience of working for FERA left a mark on Gellhorn, who wrote passionate and angry reports about the miserable living conditions of working-class people in different states across the country.\(^{397}\) Maybe because of her father’s career as a gynaecologist, she was very concerned with the health problems arising from the Depression, ranging from the lack of hygiene caused by poor housing conditions to the effects of malnourishment on children, and the rise of venereal diseases due to the spread of amateur prostitution. Many of these afflictions were later reflected in *The Trouble I’ve Seen*.

Gellhorn wanted to write an exposé of the problems with the distribution of social help that she had witnessed while at work. She later recounted how Hopkins suggested that she should meet Eleanor Roosevelt, and that he acted as an intermediary so that Gellhorn could talk to her about her ideas for the book.\(^{398}\) Her description of that first dinner at the White House—written decades afterwards—is quite comical:

Mrs Roosevelt, being somewhat deaf, had a high sharp voice when talking loudly. She rose at the far end of the table and shouted, ‘Franklin, talk to that girl. She says all the unemployed have pellagra and syphilis.’ This silenced

\(^{397}\) *The View from the Ground*, a 1989 collection of Gellhorn’s peacetime reporting, contains a reproduction of three letters that Gellhorn sent to Harry Hopkins in 1934 recounting her experience investigating the distribution and reach of social help. Martha Gellhorn, *The View from the Ground* (London: Granta Books, 1990), pp. 10–34.

\(^{398}\) Gellhorn, *View*, p. 74.
the table for an instant, followed by an explosion of laughter; I was ready to get up and go. The President hid his amusement, listened to the little I was willing to say—not much, suffocated by anger—and asked me to come and see him again.399

The two women soon became friends, and were frequent correspondents. Through Eleanor Roosevelt, Gellhorn gained access to some of the hundreds of thousands of letters that Americans affected by the economic crisis had sent to both Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt asking for jobs and financial help, which Gellhorn used as documentation to write *The Trouble I’ve Seen*. Gellhorn kept copies of approximately 100 of these letters addressed to Harry Hopkins and the Roosevelts, which are included in her papers in the Howard Gotlieb Research Center. In a note she sent along with the letters, she explained that she had kept the most revealing and emotional of those she had read, and had labelled them ‘valuable historical letters’ and ‘important to save’.400

While they saw each other occasionally, their relationship was mostly epistolary, thanks to Gellhorn’s frequent travels abroad to cover wars. Their correspondence, which spans several decades, reflects their close relationship, with Eleanor Roosevelt addressing Gellhorn as ‘Marty’ (Gellhorn always kept the respectful ‘Mrs Roosevelt’). Both women discussed everything from personal matters to international political conflicts, with Gellhorn writing from wherever she was living or working as a reporter: Florida, Missouri, Spain, Cuba, France, Italy and Mexico, among other destinations. They often read each other’s manuscripts, with Roosevelt writing to Gellhorn that her comments were ‘a great help’ and ‘some of the best suggestions I have ever had’.401 Gellhorn was also one of the first people to whom Roosevelt read the first volume of her memoir *This Is My Story* before its publication in 1937. Roosevelt often praised Gellhorn’s books

399 Gellhorn, *View*, p. 75.
400 Note written in 1965 to go with a set of copies of letters written to the Roosevelts. Box 1, Folder 3, Martha Gellhorn Papers, Howard Gotlieb Center, Boston University, USA.
401 Letter from Eleanor Roosevelt to Martha Gellhorn dated 7 November 1936. ‘Letters 1936–1962’, Box 1, Folder 2, Martha Gellhorn Papers, Howard Gotlieb Center, Boston University, USA.
in her daily syndicated newspaper column ‘My Day’. In a review of Gellhorn’s *The Trouble I’ve Seen*, she also provided an amusing description of Gellhorn and her capacity to represent the dramas of the economic depression despite her social background—one that Gellhorn might not have taken too well:

I can not tell you how Martha Gellhorn, young, pretty, college graduate, good home, more or less Junior League background, with a touch of exquisite Paris clothes and ‘esprit’ thrown in, can write as she does. She has an understanding of many people and many situations in this country of ours, but she can make them live for us.

With Gellhorn twenty-four years Roosevelt’s junior, their relationship oscillated between a mother-daughter bond and a friendship on equal terms. At times, Roosevelt seemed to live vicariously through her young journalist friend, always excited to hear her stories from conflict zones. Often, however, she adopted the role of the worried parent, urging Gellhorn to be cautious and return to America when fieldwork became too dangerous. The tone of their letters became increasingly political from 1936, coinciding with Hitler’s rise to power and growing fears of the coming of a new world war. The beginning of the Spanish Civil War only accentuated those fears. The anxiety regarding the international political situation is palpable in Gellhorn’s letters to Roosevelt:

If the madman Hitler really sends two divisions to Spain my bet is that the war is nearer than even the pessimists thought. It is horrible to think of Germany just this side of food riots and that maniac—no longer apparently even caring about history or facts, stopped by nothing, and protected by terror—being able to lead a perfectly good nation into something which will finish them up nicely. If there is a war, then all the things most of us do won’t matter any more.

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402 *The Trouble I’ve Seen*, for instance, figured in Eleanor Roosevelt’s ‘My Day’ columns on 6 July 1936, 5 August 1936 and 16 September 1936.
Gellhorn’s aversion to Hitler, following her experience of Nazi ideology when she had visited Germany, augured the horrors she would describe years later when she travelled to Dachau in one of her more memorable articles for *Collier’s Weekly*.405 Some days after writing this letter, on 13 January, she told Roosevelt that she wanted ‘to be in Spain desperately, because that’s the Balkans of 1912. And if you’re part of a big thing you feel safe; it’s only waiting and looking from the outside that makes one nervous and lost.’406 Roosevelt, probably knowing Gellhorn’s stubborn character well, replied with the worried tone of a mother: ‘Good luck to you, and, for heaven’s sake, if you go to Spain, don’t kill yourself, either physically or emotionally.’407

Like many other American writers of her generation, Gellhorn became drawn to a conflict that was often portrayed as the ultimate battle against fascism. After her experience in Germany in the early 1930s, where she was able to experience the spread of Nazi ideology and its dangers, Gellhorn became a devout defender of the Spanish republican government. Her budding friendship with Hemingway, who was already deeply involved in awareness campaigns to help the Republic, only increased her desire to go to Spain. After her first long stay in Madrid, she persistently tried to use her friendship with Roosevelt to provide help for the besieged Spanish government. Her efforts were in vain. The United States had adopted a position of non-intervention regarding the Spanish conflict, officially declaring an arms embargo preventing the sale of weapons to any of the parties in Spain. Soledad Fox argues that although Franklin Roosevelt was sympathetic to the cause of the Spanish government, he feared losing the anti-communist vote—since the Spanish Republic was associated with communist ideology—as well as the support of Catholic groups, who were in favour of Franco’s mission to restore the power of Catholicism in Spain.408 Moreover, while some sectors of the American left promoted intervention, the general opinion seemed to be that the

407 Letter from Eleanor Roosevelt to Martha Gellhorn dated 1 March 1937. Box 1, Folder 2, Martha Gellhorn Papers, Howard Gotlieb Center, Boston University, USA.
Spanish Civil War was a domestic conflict in which the US should not engage, especially since the economic consequences of a new world war might be catastrophic. Despite the lack of support from the government, several organisations and committees were created to help the Republic, raising funds for medical help and increasing awareness about the Spanish conflict.

By 1937, as on the other side of the Atlantic, the Spanish Civil War had already become a cause célèbre in American intellectual circles, making Spain the ‘place to be’ for writers who considered themselves socially committed. The social consequences of the Great Depression and the disenchantment with capitalism, as well as the fear provoked by the expansion of fascism, had contributed to an increasing acceptance of socialist ideals. As a result, a generation of young Americans had become highly politicised. In 1936, volunteer soldiers, doctors and nurses of very diverse social and educational backgrounds who wanted to help the Republic formed the Abraham Lincoln Battalion. Many of them were members of Communist Party youth movements. Critics estimate that, like Gellhorn herself, almost half of the volunteers were of Jewish origin. As Robert Rosenstone puts it, the volunteers ‘saw themselves as fighting a kind of leftist holy war in Spain’.

Several factors probably contributed to Gellhorn’s decision to move to Spain during the civil war. She was motivated by the same idealistic reasons that had made hundreds of young American volunteers join the International Brigades in 1937. In the prologue to her collection of war articles, The Face of War, she admitted that at the moment of her arrival in Spain she did not know much about the country or the causes that had brought about the civil war. As she would state years later, it was the Nazi denigration of the leftist republican government that had made her sympathise with their cause: ‘My own reason to go to Spain was...

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411 Rosenstone, Crusade, p. xi.
simple, the Nazi newspapers [...]. Any people the Nazis vilified had to be noble and their cause just, and I was on their side forever.\textsuperscript{412}

Despite Gellhorn’s famous complaint that she did not want to be a ‘footnote in somebody else’s life’, it is impossible not to mention Ernest Hemingway, to whom she was married from 1940 to 1945, and with whom she lived while they were in Spain. They met while Gellhorn was vacationing with her family in December 1936 in Key West, where Hemingway had a house.\textsuperscript{413} They became friends very soon after that first meeting, and agreed that they would travel to Spain to support the besieged republican government. As she was an up-and-coming journalist and had lived in Europe for several years, it is not surprising that Gellhorn was a great follower of Hemingway, the hero of American expatriates. From the beginning of her career, reviewers highlighted his influence on her work. The \textit{New York Times} had described \textit{What Mad Pursuit} as masculine and ‘brash’, stating that ‘Hemingway still [had] much to answer for.’\textsuperscript{414} Gellhorn confided in Eleanor Roosevelt when she met Hemingway for the first time in Key West, expressing her admiration for the writer: ‘I see Hemingway, who knows more about writing dialogue (I think) than anyone writing in English at this time. He’s an odd bird, very lovable and full of fire and a marvellous story teller.’\textsuperscript{415}

Hemingway had a long personal and literary relationship with Spain. His books \textit{The Sun Also Rises} (1926), \textit{Death in the Afternoon} (1932) and later \textit{The Dangerous Summer} (published posthumously in 1985) explored Spanish folklore and bullfighting. The civil war also became a source of inspiration for Hemingway, who wrote the play \textit{The Fifth Column} (1938), several short stories, and his novel \textit{For Whom the Bell Tolls} (1940), as well as some non-fiction articles, reflecting his experience in Spain. He was actively involved with pro-republican activism, organising fundraising and awareness campaigns. In 1937, shortly before Gellhorn’s arrival in the country, he travelled to Spain as a reporter for the North American Newspaper Alliance. It is difficult to determine whether

\textsuperscript{413} Moorehead, \textit{Gellhorn}, p. 125.
\textsuperscript{414} ‘Three Modern Girls’, p. 7.
the possibility of working alongside Hemingway helped Gellhorn to decide to move to Spain, but he was a writer she deeply admired, and his passionate support for the Republic probably contributed to her esteem for him.

**Reporting from Spain**

The war in Spain was covered by dozens of journalists from all over the world, and all major American newspapers sent correspondents to report on the developments of the conflict. Herbert Matthews, the celebrated *New York Times* journalist, reported from Spain throughout the duration of the conflict, and referred to his time there as his most important formative experience.\(^{416}\) Matthews, Hemingway and Gellhorn frequently spent time together, both in the field and in their leisure time. In addition, a considerable number of American writers travelled to Madrid and Barcelona to visit the front lines and to write first-hand accounts of the conflict. Visiting war-torn Spain became a requisite trip for any ‘engaged’ writer. Days after arriving in Spain, Gellhorn, always sharp-tongued, wrote in a letter that ‘one [couldn’t] walk in Madrid for fear of tripping over Great Writers, also debris.’\(^{417}\)

The majority of American writers and correspondents, including Gellhorn, Hemingway and Matthews, stayed in the Hotel Florida.\(^{418}\) Located in the centre of Madrid, the hotel was repeatedly bombed by rebel air forces. Their living conditions were far from ideal: as many writers reported, because Francoist forces had besieged the city, blocking its roads and preventing the entry of trucks with provisions, food was scarce, and there was hardly any wood for heating. During the months Gellhorn lived in Madrid in 1937, other residents in the hotel were the novelist John Dos Passos, then at the height of his popularity, having published


\(^{418}\) Amanda Vaill’s recent book *Hotel Florida: Truth, Love, and Death in the Spanish Civil War*, a combination of biography and cultural history, takes the Spanish hotel as a point of departure. Vaill’s work reconstructs the history of the war by examining the relationships of several of its protagonists, including Hemingway and Gellhorn, and the photographers Robert Capa and Gerda Taro.
the last volume of his *U.S.A.* trilogy; the writer and journalist Josephine Herbst, a freelance whose work was regularly published in *Nation* and *Woman’s Day*; Virginia Cowles, writing for Hearst publications, with whom years later Gellhorn would co-write a comedy about war reporters, *Love Goes to Press* (1946); the *New York Post*’s George Seldes and his wife Helen; the French writer Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, reporting for *Paris Soir*; and Sefton (Tom) Delmer from London’s *Daily Express*. Delmer’s and Hemingway’s rooms were popular meeting places for the group. The Dutch filmmaker Joris Ivens, director of the documentary *The Spanish Earth*, was also a guest at the hotel.

In Madrid, Gellhorn also met the Hungarian photographer Robert Capa, with whom she maintained a close friendship until his death in 1954. Many of the people she met in Spain became lifelong friends and colleagues whom she also met while on duty in several other wars. Like the British volunteers, most American writers depicted their time in Spain as thrilling, noting the enthusiastic atmosphere and the idealism of the people around them. Gellhorn’s diary notes during her first week in Spain show her excitement at being surrounded by the hectic atmosphere of war correspondents at work:

> The Americans and English involved in this war, in propaganda capacities. Speaking of ‘we’ the Loyalists. Living in these glacial, uncomfortable hotels or apartments, working, eating in restaurants, living on nothing, looking like hell, and very happy and intense and busy and friendly.

Gellhorn saw her role as an emissary of the truth about Spain to the American public as crucial, since she felt that the final outcome of the war depended on international involvement in the conflict. She resented the people that had travelled to Spain as ‘sightseers’ looking to visit the most fashionable war zone of the time, rather than coming on a mission to report the constant attacks on the republican government, and she often became irritated at some of the American guests in the Hotel Florida. Vastly different from her measured and compassionate articles, Gellhorn’s personal letters and diaries are sharp and

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420 Diary entry dated 23 March. Box 1, Folder 7, Martha Gellhorn Papers, Howard Gotlieb Center, Boston University, USA.
caustic. They often include harsh comments about these ‘war tourists’ who fled the city when there were bombing threats, including Josephine Herbst and the Hollywood actor Errol Flynn:

At lunch there was no more room at the table, due to influx of shits now that all is quiet. Herbst and two Seldes and a nice handsome dumb named Errol Flynn who looks like white fire on the screen, but is only very average off.  

Reporters greatly benefited from the community formed at the Hotel Florida. Many of them worked in groups and travelled to the front together, so as to make the most of the limited availability of petrol. For Gellhorn, who had never experienced a war, the first weeks of living among correspondents constituted an extremely useful learning experience. She remained in touch with several of the correspondents and photographers she met in Madrid, especially Cowles and Capa, whom she saw from conflict to conflict.

Correspondents filed their articles and reports every evening at the republican government’s press office, which was located in the Telefónica building on the central Gran Via, within walking distance of the Hotel Florida. The building, which still stands, was considered a military objective and was repeatedly bombed during the war. As Virginia Cowles recounts, most stories were communicated by telephone to London and Paris, and then subsequently cabled to other destinations. Newspaper reporters would file news daily, while magazine writers worked for several days on ‘feature articles’. Due to the insufficiency of phone lines, there were long queues to transmit the stories. The work of correspondents was subjected to republican censorship, which aimed to prevent the publication of sensitive information that could be used by the Fascist

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421 Diary entry dated 3 April. Box 1, Folder 7, Martha Gellhorn Papers, Howard Gotlieb Center, Boston University, USA. Gellhorn’s opinion of Josephine Herbst may have been prompted by the fact that Herbst did not seem to be in Spain in any professional capacity, since she did not represent any American publications or work as a freelance. Koch has argued that Herbst’s trip to Spain was sponsored by the Soviet propaganda apparatus, her mission being to ‘handle’ or ‘manipulate’ John Dos Passos’s response to his discovery that his Spanish friend José Robles had been kidnapped and murdered by the Soviet secret services.


422 Virginia Cowles, *Looking for Trouble* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1941), p. 24. Cowles’s book describing her experiences as a war reporter was such a success that it was reprinted in June, July and October of that same year, even amid wartime paper shortage.
side. In addition, the censors were instructed to preserve the image the Republic wanted to present to the western democracies in Europe and America. Writers could not mention the arrival and formation of the International Brigades, or the military support from Russia, as such stories would have contradicted the Republic’s official version of a defenceless government fighting against foreign Fascist powers. Every article had to be approved by the censorship office—each page was individually checked and stamped—and a censor listened to the phone conversations to make sure that nobody was attempting to transmit unchecked material. In her 1941 memoir, Cowles provides one of the most detailed descriptions of the reporters’ experiences of republican censorship:

There were frequent attempts ‘to beat the censor’ by employing American slang expressions, but this came to an end when a Canadian girl joined the staff. (...) Buildings and streets which suffered bombardments could not be identified. It was only in the realm of the human interest story that the journalists had free hand. They could describe bombardments to their hearts’ content. It was dramatic to sit in the darkened room at night and listen to versions of the day’s news being sent over the wires in German, French, Spanish and English to be relayed to the most remote corners of the earth.  

Despite the control that the censors had over their writing, there are no records of foreign journalists complaining about severe restrictions or censorship of material. It is possible to attribute this to the fact that many of these journalists aligned ideologically with the cause of the Republic. And it would be tempting to accept the version of the Republican censor Constancia de la Mora—who later became a good friend of Gellhorn—that the government tried to be as scrupulous as possible in their respect of journalists’ freedom of expression, if we did not have the contrasting account of Arturo Barea. Barea was a militiaman who, thanks to his knowledge of English and French, was recruited to work at the censorship office. His autobiography, *The Forging of a Rebel* (1941), written while in exile in London, details the thorough task of the censors who, with the help of dictionaries, looked for double meanings and obscure expressions that could hide

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alternative versions of the conflict. As Barea explains, the censors had a strict and clear task: ‘we had to cut out everything that did not indicate a victory of the Republican government’. His description of the foreign reporters working in Madrid is at its most interesting when he describes his ambivalent feelings towards them and their mission in the country:

While I slashed their reports according to orders, I admired the personal courage of the correspondents, although I resented their detachment. (…) What to us was life and death, meant nothing but a story to them. Sometimes, when the Anarchist of the Workers’ Control in the hall downstairs told me again that all those foreign journalists were Fascists and traitors, I felt a twinge of sympathy.

Were Gellhorn’s articles modified or influenced by the Republican censorship? The only surviving document that bears the stamp of the censors’ office is the fragment of a radio report that she broadcasted telephonically in April 1937, which shows no amendments or modifications. It is possible that the fact that she wrote reportage rather than news articles, as Virginia Cowles pointed out, allowed her the possibility to write freely. It is important, in any case, to keep in mind that journalists in Spain were restricted by an institution that strove to protect its reputation abroad, and which had the aims of ensuring the sympathy of other democratic nations.

Collier’s Weekly

Although Martha Gellhorn had already acquired considerable experience as a reporter despite her youth, it was in Spain that she began the war correspondent career that would ultimately make her famous. While she was not working for any magazine at the time of travelling to Spain, Gellhorn found herself surrounded by war correspondents, and started following them on their trips to the battlefront and their visits to injured soldiers in hospitals. During these first weeks in Madrid she wrote intensively: in the first instance in brief notes in a pocket notebook, in

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427 ‘Papers of Martha Gellhorn’. Box 1 Folder 7. Howard Gotlieb Centre, Boston University, USA.
which she carefully recorded events and encounters with people, her first impressions of the cities at war, and sketches of personal profiles of the political protagonists of the war. As the materials held in her archive show, these notes were then developed into full handwritten ‘diary entries’, which were subsequently edited and typed. Fragments of many of these first writings later made their way into Gellhorn’s reports for *Collier’s Weekly*.

In *The Face of War*, Gellhorn recounts that a journalist friend—probably either Herbert Matthews or Hemingway—suggested that she help the republican cause by writing articles to expose the perilous situation of the democratic government. Before she left for Spain, in order to facilitate her trip and avoid questions at the frontier, an editor of the American magazine *Collier’s Weekly* had given Gellhorn, as a personal favour, a letter stating that she was a foreign correspondent for that publication.428 Gellhorn decided to send her reports about Madrid at war to the magazine, and her first article, ‘Only the Shells Whine’, was published on 17 July 1937. Her experience in Spain shaped her career, convincing her of the importance of the role of the reporter in denouncing the situation of people in need. She was always very grateful to *Collier’s* for making her a correspondent and, above all, for giving her the freedom to treat any topic without censorship.429

*Collier’s Weekly*, founded by Peter Fenelon Collier, was published between 1888 and 1957. The magazine experienced several changes of format and content over the decades,430 but in the mid-1930s it regularly followed the same pattern: several short stories, a fiction serial, a short story, articles on current events, and an editorial piece. In the years of the Spanish Civil War, *Collier’s* editor was William Ludlow Chenery, who was in charge of the magazine between 1925 and 1943. According to Alan and Barbara Nourie, the target audience of *Collier’s* was ‘the middle class American—the broad cross section of men and women who

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429 As she states in the introduction to *The Face of War* ‘[thanks to Collier’s] for eight years, I could go where I wanted, when I wanted, and write what I saw’. *The Face of War*, p. 16.
came from widely different economic and educational backgrounds.\textsuperscript{431} In 1937, the magazine had reached a very substantial circulation of 2,500,000\textsuperscript{432}. \textit{Collier’s} was not a magazine primarily devoted to political analysis. As Tom Pent ergast points out, during the 1930s ‘people turned to magazines like \textit{Collier’s} for entertainment, not for scary reminders of the difficulty of their situation.’\textsuperscript{433} This is not to say that the magazine refused to treat political issues, which figured recurrently in the editorials and in many of the articles. Special attention was given to the political developments in Europe, and particularly to the rise of totalitarianism. The publication also employed famous contributors to comment on political issues, such as H. G. Wells and Winston Churchill, who wrote for the paper on international politics from 1930 to 1938.

\textit{Collier’s} had not paid much attention to the early stages of the Spanish Civil War, but from the last months of 1936 onwards the conflict figured recurrently in the publication, both in the opinion pages and as the setting and theme of several short stories. Although the editorials openly criticised the imperialist politics of Hitler and Mussolini,\textsuperscript{434} the magazine held a strong anti-interventionist stance regarding any American participation in the Spanish conflict. In 1937, the editorial for the new-year issue pondered the dangers of fascism and communism, and clearly stated \textit{Collier’s} position regarding American participation in foreign conflicts in general and the Spanish Civil War in particular:

A European war is the darkest cloud on the world’s horizon. The civil war in Spain is assuredly no business of ours. Except for those who, by blood ties or otherwise, have personal interests in Spain, Americans generally merely deplore the tragedy of a fratricidal war. Few Americans have any desire to intervene or participate in any way.\textsuperscript{435}

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{432}] Mott, \textit{History of American Magazines}, vol. IV, p. 473
\item[\textsuperscript{434}] ‘Other People’s Lands’, \textit{Collier’s Weekly}, 31 October (1936): 66.
\end{itemize}
The editorials and articles published in *Collier’s* between 1936 and 1939 stressed the idea of the war in Spain as an isolated conflict alien to the United States, and whose politics were almost impossible to understand:

Reports on the war in Spain have been confusing. This was no fault of the reporters. The grim business is shot through with contradictions; observers on the spot find impossible alliances and irrational enmities.436

*Collier’s* position suggests a palpable anxiety that the civil war might unleash a confrontation of international proportions. In a decade marked by the Great Depression, the fears about the economic effects that another world war would have were evident. The official stance of the magazine clashed, however, with the articles sent by individual foreign correspondents and writers, from Gellhorn to André Malraux, who almost unanimously called for the help of America in support of the Spanish Republic. In the spring of 1937, an article on the war by W. B. Courtney entitled ‘Rehearsal in Spain’ envisaged the international effects that the foreign conflict would have, and warned about the consequences of ignoring the attacks by fascist forces against a legitimately chosen government. The article also reminded readers of the techniques of civilian annihilation displayed in the war, noting that they had more features in common with ‘terrorism’ than with political strategy.437

Interestingly, the first two pieces of any kind that *Collier’s* published on the subject of the Spanish Civil War were two fictional short stories, and both of them were advertised on the mastheads of their respective issues. Like Warner’s novel *After the Death of Don Juan*, both were inspired by the battle of the Alcázar of Toledo. The first of these was ‘Situation Wanted’, written by Damon Runyon and published on 21 November 1936, which narrated the story a gangster who goes to Spain during the war. The second, ‘The Witch of the Alcazar’ by Walter Duranty, appeared only two weeks later, in the 5 December issue. The fiction on the theme of the civil war that was published in *Collier’s* reinforced the magazine’s official position on the war. The conflict is repeatedly portrayed as disorganised, and the

ideology of each faction as vague and confusing. The stories reject the usual Manichean characterisation of the Francoist and republican sides as polar opposites symbolising democracy and fascism. Instead, they emphasise the unique character of the war, and avoid acknowledging foreign participation in the conflict. The short stories describe Spain as a country that has escaped modernity, emphasising folklore elements and often portraying it as a cultural other.

Damon Runyon was well known for his stories of hustlers and gangsters in the Prohibition era. ‘Situation Wanted’ tells the story of Asleep, a hired killer from Broadway, who is given that name because his eyes are permanently half-closed. After spending some years in prison, during which time Prohibition is repealed, Asleep finds it hard to secure a job in the United States. He comes across a piece about the Spanish Civil War in the newspaper and decides to go to Spain, believing that he will have higher chances of being hired as a killer. The character seems to be completely ignorant of what is going on in the Spanish Civil War, and interprets the conflict through the gangster world to which he is confined:

I can see that it is a war between two different mobs living in this Spain, each of which wishes to control the situation. It reminds me of Chicago the time Big Moey sends me out to Al [Capone].

While trying to cross the border from the French side, Asleep meets Manuel, a Spanish man known on Broadway for being a heavyweight fighter. Manuel becomes his ‘manager’, and assures Asleep that he can get him ‘killing jobs’ in Spain. He takes him to a city where the fascist rebels have occupied a fortification on a hill (which contemporary readers would have undoubtedly related to the Alcázar of Toledo), of which a small battalion of loyalists is trying to regain control. Asleep negotiates a position as a killer with both factions, but in the end he helps the group that appears to represent the rebel side, after a nobleman offers him some land in Florida. The narrative emphasises the chaos of the combat and Asleep’s confusion for humorous purposes, but it also helps to depict the Spanish Civil War as an unstructured war without clearly defined ideologies. The Spanish

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character in the story, Manuel, cannot even recall who is fighting against whom, and once the conflict is over, he is unable to tell the flags of the two sides apart:

I ask Manuel to kindly identify this flag for me so I will always remember which side of the war in this Spain it is that I assist.

But Manuel says his eyesight is bad […] and from this distance he cannot tell whose flag it is, and in fact, Manuel says, he does not give a Spanish cussword.\textsuperscript{439}

At a time when many American intellectuals were campaigning to help the Spanish government and often travelling there themselves, Runyon tells the story of a gangster going to the war as a mercenary. Daniel R. Schwarz has seen in ‘Situation Wanted’ Runyon’s criticism of the international volunteers that got involved in the Spanish Civil War, arguing that the author ‘implies that some of those who went to Spain for reasons of political idealism may be social debris and unemployed sociopaths’\textsuperscript{440} An alternative reading of the story is also possible, and it is easy to see Runyon as satirising the reports on the Spanish war that mocked the volunteers who joined the International Brigades and that tried to belittle the help they provided and their real motivation for joining the conflict.

Two weeks after ‘Situation Wanted’ appeared, the magazine published ‘The Witch of the Alcazar’, a story by the British journalist Walter Duranty set in Francoist Toledo\textsuperscript{441}. Duranty, who won the Pulitzer Prize in 1932 and was a reporter for the \textit{New York Times}, gained notoriety for his Stalinist sympathies, which greatly influenced his work and eventually discredited him as a journalist\textsuperscript{442}. He worked as a reporter on the Spanish Civil War for the \textit{New York Times} from September 1936 onwards, often criticising the lack of unity between the left parties in Spain. ‘The Witch of the Alcazar’ was marketed as a supernatural story, a subgenre that had always had a place in \textit{Collier’s}, the

\textsuperscript{439} Runyon, ‘Situation Wanted’, p. 49.
magazine in which Henry James had famously published *The Turn of the Screw* in serial form in 1898. The magazine’s blurb for the story invoked past legendary tales of the ‘profane and ghastly rites’ of Spanish ‘witches’, and even mentioned the Spanish Inquisition. The story describes the experience of a rebel soldier who tries to get into the Alcázar of Toledo, which at that time was occupied by rebels and surrounded by troops of loyalists trying to retake it for the government. The soldier meets a mysterious woman (shown in the illustrations for the story as wearing the uniform of the loyalist militia women), who tells him that she is a nurse and offers to heal his wounds. The woman turns out to be a witch, and he is only saved from death by the final arrival of the rebel forces that liberate the inhabitants of the castle from the loyalist siege.

Runyon and Duranty’s stories bear witness to the impact of the battle of the Alcázar in Toledo on the American reading public. The siege of the castle became the perfect setting for an anachronistic vision of the war in Spain that obscured the ideological fight between communism and fascism by choosing to highlight an episode that had feudal overtones. Neither story is interested in what later became the standard representation of the Francoist and republican sides as polar opposites representing fascism and democracy. Instead, in these early responses, all factions are alike, and Spain is described as a country immersed in its own atavistic conflicts, unrelated to America’s concerns. In this context, Gellhorn’s reports on the Spanish Civil War represented a breakthrough, and went against *Collier’s* non-interventionist editorial line. Her articles were written with an empathetic tone that actively looked for a connection with the American public, and implicitly invoked the necessity of American military intervention in Spain.

**Gellhorn and the Rise of Reportage**

As has been explained above, when Martha Gellhorn started writing for *Collier’s Weekly* in the summer of 1937, the publication had already treated the subject of the Spanish Civil War both in fiction and in reports and editorials. However, Gellhorn’s articles, which were written over the course of several stays in Spain during 1937 and 1938, represented a radical change in style and content

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from what the magazine had published before. Her articles focused on the
quotidian existence of a city at war, emphasising people’s experiences over
military narratives or updates on developments on the battlefront. They were
drastically different from the war reports that Collier’s had published up to that
date, which had tended to follow a factual style and revolved around the ‘who-
what-where-when-how’ journalistic mantra. Gellhorn’s markedly subjective point
of view and literary style immersed Collier’s readers in the atmosphere of the
war-torn city, bringing the experience of war into people’s homes.

The Spanish Civil War inaugurated a new way of narrating armed conflict in
visual and written media. The new urban war strategies multiplied the number
of civilian victims, and the settings and protagonists of war stories developed
accordingly. Simultaneously, reportage, a journalistic genre that allowed writers
greater freedom to explore topics in depth without the time constraints of
newswriting, became increasingly popular from the second half of the 1930s.
Reportage is characterised by the combination of the description of current events
with rhetorical devices and narrative strategies typical of literary texts, and has
had a determining influence on the way war is narrated in the written media.
During the period, its publication was mainly restricted to magazines. One of the
fundamental characteristics of the genre is the expression of a subjective
perspective: to varying degrees, the person of the reporter is always present in the
text, whose personal experience informs the article. The genre perfectly fitted the
ethos of much of the journalism written about Spain, which was preoccupied with
reflecting the horrifying consequences of the new kind of ‘total war’ on civilians.
Reportage and photo-reportage during the 1930s had a preference for people’s
stories. Robert Capa’s best-known photograph is an action shot of the death of a
republican soldier⁴⁴⁴; likewise, Gellhorn concentrates on providing sketches of
individuals, from the citizens of Madrid and their everyday lives among ruined

⁴⁴⁴ Capa’s The Falling Soldier continues to be the subject of controversy. Researchers and
historians of the Civil War have challenged the veracity of the photograph, taken in 1936.
While Capa’s biographer Richard Whelan defends the picture’s authenticity, a 2009 study
suggested that it was in fact staged, arguing that the background did not correspond to the
battle site where Capa had claimed to take it.
José Manuel Susperregui, Sombras de la fotografía (Bilbao: Universidad del País Vasco,
2009)
buildings, to the American soldiers that had travelled to Spain to support the republican government. Her articles avoid the typical personification of countries in traditional war reports, avoiding generalisations and focusing on humble but meaningful stories.

From as early as 1940, critics identified the rise of reportage as one of the most salient features of the writing of the 1930s, and highlighted how the literature of the Spanish war perfected the combination of fact and fiction. While the origins and early development of reportage have received very little critical attention, some scholars have tried to explain why the genre became popularised during the interwar period. John Hartsock attributes the emergence of literary reportage in the 1930s to the new social reality that materialised after the Great Depression:

In times of social transformation and crisis an objectified rhetoric proves even more inadequate. Instead, a greater need emerges for a rhetoric that helps one understand other subjectivities, particularly subjectivities at the heart of such transformations and crisis.

At the heart of Hartsock’s argument is the idea that reportage is an ideal form to voice the concerns of the oppressed classes, a thesis that Gellhorn’s combination of fact and fiction in *The Trouble I’ve Seen* supports. Gellhorn’s articles for *Collier’s* subtly dissect the misfortune of families who had lost everything in the war, showing the same eye for detail with which she narrated the hardships endured by the unemployed in America. Just as the financial crisis meant an abrupt change in lifestyle for the American population, so Gellhorn reports the war in Spain as a shock that dramatically changed the lives of the inhabitants of Madrid.

Gellhorn’s preferred setting for her articles was the domestic realm, and she used the symbolic power of ruined houses and the wreckage of everyday items to

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446 Critical studies that analyse the formal aspects of reportage tend to focus on the 1960s onwards, exploring the origins and influence of the style known as New Journalism. This includes one of the few books on the subject, James Marcus’s *Second Read: Writers Look Back at Classic Works of Reportage* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).
convey the destructive power of air raids. During her stay in Madrid, she joined a team of architects and engineers who had been commissioned by the republican government to perform emergency repairs to houses damaged by bombing. In one of her articles for Collier’s, Gellhorn describes entering a building that had completely lost its front wall. A family were still living in their apartment, their wall-less living room looking down five floors into the street:

Upstairs the family […] were standing in their living room getting used to what had happened. The front wall was gone. The china was broken, and the chairs.

The wife said to me ‘What a shame for the sewing machine; it will never work again.’ The husband picked a thin, dead canary off the sideboard, showed it to me sadly, shrugged and said nothing.448

Unlike a fact-based style of reporting, Gellhorn’s main interest is to convey the atmosphere of the city at war. Particularly at the beginning of her career as a reporter, political analysis was almost non-existent in her articles, which focused on how the war affected soldiers and civilians. While it could be argued that this was a deliberate narrative choice on Gellhorn’s part—or perhaps an effective way to reach Collier’s audience, which was not particularly interested in foreign politics—it is likely that the approach also accorded with Gellhorn’s lack of knowledge of the country’s political situation. In fact, throughout her stays in Spain, her reports progressively included more comments on the causes and consequences of the conflict, and in many ways the readers of Collier’s became witnesses of her learning process. It is also true that magazines (and the radio) increasingly demanded feature articles, and Gellhorn records in her diary that for a radio broadcast she was asked to report on ‘human interest not war stor[ies]’449.

One of the most evident differences when comparing reportage to traditional war reports is their length. Gellhorn’s articles for Collier’s were much longer than the usual report, and were often divided in several evocative sections or ‘sketches’. The straightforward style of war reports during the First World War had been greatly influenced by the generalised use of the telegraph in the

448 Martha Gellhorn, ‘City at War’, Collier’s Weekly, 2 April (1938), 19.
449 Martha Gellhorn. Entry dated April 10, 1937. Box 1 Folder 7. ‘Papers of Martha Gellhorn’. Howard Gotlieb Centre, Boston University, USA.
newspaper industry. The use of the telegraph to transmit reports forced journalists to write in short, concise sentences. Media studies critics such as Martin Conboy have stressed the crucial impact of the telegraph on the style of newswriting, an influence that lasted even after the telegraph had been replaced by newer developments in communications technology. Feature articles of the kind Gellhorn wrote for Collier’s were often transmitted by telephone or post, since they were not subjected to the strict time constraints of newspaper reports. Stylistically, Gellhorn’s reportage differed from traditional war reports in many fundamental respects. In contrast to the uniform tone of traditional war journalism, with its use of simple declarative statements, Gellhorn’s texts use a variety of syntactical constructions, verb tenses, rhetorical devices and points of view. The fragment below belongs to her first article sent from Spain, which focused on the effects of the bombings on the city and its inhabitants:

All over Madrid, for fifteen days now, people had been waiting. You waited for the shelling to start, and for it to end, and for it to start again. It came from three directions, at any time, without warning and without purpose. Looking out the door, I saw people standing in doorways all around the square, just standing there patiently, and then suddenly a shell landed, and there was a fountain of granite cobblestones flying up into the air, and the silver lyddite smoke floated off softly.

A little Spaniard with a lavender shirt, a ready-made bow tie and bright brown eyes was standing in the door watching this with interest. There was also no reason for the shells to stay out of the hotel. They could land inside that door as well as anywhere else. Another shell hit, halfway across the street, and a window broke gently and airily, making a lovely tinkling musical sound.

I was watching the people in the other doorways, as best I could, watching those immensely quiet, stretched faces. You had a feeling you had been waiting here forever, and yesterday you felt the same way. The little Spaniard said to me, ‘You don’t like it?’

‘No.’

Nothing,’ he said. ‘It is nothing. It will pass. In any case, you can only die once.’

Gellhorn’s articles share many features with fiction, including the portrayal of idiosyncratic characters through epigrammatic vignettes. Unusually, her description of the shelling is devoid of the violent imagery the act evokes. The booming sound is here replaced by the ‘lovely tinkling musical sound’ of breaking glass. Such descriptions, together with her predilection for describing eccentric interactions with the people she met while in Spain, imbue her descriptions of the war with a strange atmosphere, in which the reporter is both a foreign observer and a full participant in the action.

Gellhorn often adopts a metonymic approach to narration, beginning with a representative anecdote and then zooming out to provide a general description of the situation of the war in Spain. The opening of ‘Men Without Medals’, an article published in Collier’s Weekly on 15 January 1938 which deals with the American volunteers in Spain, could be that of a short story:

The little soldier with pink cheeks and spectacles and a Brooklyn accent took a hand grenade from his belt and said, ‘Wanna see how it works?’

I said ‘No, pal. I believe you.’

This way of starting a narrative contrasts with the traditional journalistic ‘inverted pyramid’ structure, according to which the first paragraph of an article has to summarise all essential information. The inclusion of the war correspondent as a character also represented a difference from traditional war reporting. Instead of the traditional way of including only the answers to questions asked in an indirect style, Gellhorn’s articles reproduce full dialogues and her own contributions to the conversation. Her use of the expression ‘pal’ to refer to the soldier is indicative of the transformation of reporters into characters and war protagonists, almost at the same level as soldiers.

Collier’s readers did not have to rely only on Gellhorn’s accounts of the war, since striking photographs of war-torn Madrid illustrated her articles. Collier’s already had a record of excellent visual coverage of foreign events, which had greatly increased magazine sales. During the Spanish-American War, Collier’s hired the British photographer Jimmy Hare, considered one of the forerunners of contemporary photo-reporting. Hare’s moving photographs of the Cubans held in concentration camps by the Spanish were in many ways ahead of his time. However, the visual coverage of the Spanish Civil War was unprecedented. As Susan Sontag has explained: ‘[I]t was the first war to be witnessed (‘covered’) in the modern sense: by a corps of professional photographers at the lines of military engagement (...) whose work was immediately seen in newspapers and magazines in Spain and abroad.’ New developments in visual and written media helped to narrate the Spanish ‘total war’: improvements in photographic equipment meant lighter cameras that were easier to carry and were able to capture movement. Inseparable from the development of written reportage, the period encompassing the mid-1930s and early 1940s witnessed the evolution of photo-reportage. The success of photo-journalism was immediate, and contemporary sources hailed its expressive capacity to express the effect of war on civilians. Written and photographic reportage began to be conceived of as an indissoluble union. The popularisation of war photography in magazines contributed to the rising fame of photoreporters such as Robert Capa and Henri Cartier-Bresson, whose names were often given primacy over those of their journalist colleagues on the covers of periodicals.

454 Several of Hare’s photographs are included in his biography by Cecil Carnes Jimmy Hare, News Photographer: Half a Century With a Camera (New York: MacMillan, 1940).
456 One of the earliest texts considering the cultural importance of photo-reportage was the 1944 photoessay Fotocronache di Munari by the Italian artist Bruno Munari. In it, Munari characterises photo-reportage as the contemporary means of artistic expression, stating: ‘The urgency of modern publishing has transformed the caveman’s chisel into a camera’ (‘L’urgenza editoriale moderna ha trasformato lo scalpello dell’uomo delle caverne in macchina fotografica’). Bruno Munari, Fotocronache di Munari (Corraini: Mantova, 1997), p. 4.
Collier’s typically published its articles on Spain alongside hand-drawn illustrations. Gellhorn’s features were the first to include photographs illustrating the events narrated in the dispatches. The images perfectly complemented the themes that Gellhorn treated in her articles, and tended to show civilians coping with the new realities imposed by the conflict. One of her articles, ‘City at War’, was published along with a photograph of a group of women and children taking shelter from the bombs in an underground station.457 Such images of civilians affected by war had no precedent in the American or European press, and they indubitably helped to raise the public’s interest in the foreign war.

Gellhorn was primarily interested in reporting individual stories that aimed to connect the American reader with the suffering of the victims of war, bridging cultural and geographical gaps. As she states in the preface of one of her collections of war reporting, Gellhorn contended that

War happens to people, one by one […] Unless they are immediate victims, the majority of mankind behaves as if war was an act of God which could not be prevented; or they behave as if war elsewhere was none of their business.458

Gellhorn’s approach to war reporting involved exploring individual stories. In her chronicles from Spain she describes her encounters with volunteer soldiers, and also with architects, janitors, waiters and housewives, creating a collage of war experiences beyond the battlefront. Her journalism conveys a sense of intimacy and domesticity, managing to find a new language able to depict how war had invaded urban space. Gellhorn tries to capture the voices of the victims of the war in her reports, even if, as she later admitted, she hardly knew any Spanish.459 It is precisely in the description of individuals that her style becomes particularly literary. The characterisation of some of the people she meets often has a tale-like quality:

457 Gellhorn, ‘City at War’, pp. 19, 59–60. The photographs were credited to the American agency Black Star, which frequently worked with Collier’s.
458 Gellhorn, Face of War, p. xiii.
459 At the beginning of her stay in Spain, Gellhorn often managed to find people who could speak French—a language she spoke well—or even soldiers who knew English and were able to translate for her. By her second visit she seemed to be able to understand general conversation in Spanish.
An old woman had been standing by the door. She came in now. She took my arm and pulled at me to come closer to hear her. She said, very softly, as if she were telling me a secret, ‘Look at that, look at that, do you see, that is my home, that’s where I live, there, what do you see there.’ She looked at me as if I should deny it, with wide, puzzled, frightened eyes. I did not know what to say. ‘I cannot understand,’ she said slowly, hoping I would understand and explain; after all I was a foreigner, I was younger than she, I had probably been to school, surely I could explain.\footnote{Gellhorn, ‘City at War’, p. 35.}

Gellhorn’s reports masterfully convey the eeriness of the everyday experience of war. After weeks of repeated bombings, the attacks had become part of everyday life on the streets of Madrid. Taking temporary shelter when the raids were particularly heavy, citizens resumed their lives promptly when they judged that the bomber planes had stopped for the day. In ‘Only the Shells Whine’, the trail of death and destruction left by the bombs adds a surreal dimension to quotidian experience:

In a café which was hit in the morning, where three men were killed sitting at a table reading their morning papers and drinking coffee, the clients came back in the afternoon. You went to Chicote’s bar at the end of the day, walking up the street which was No Man’s Land, where you could hear the shells whistling even when there was silence, and the bar was crowded as always. On the way you had passed a dead horse and a very dead mule, chopped with shell fragments, and you had passed crisscrossing trails of human blood on the pavement\footnote{Martha Gellhorn, ‘Only the Shells Whine’, Collier’s Weekly, 17 July (1937): 13.}.

The repetition of the pronoun ‘You’ as the subject of her sentences conveyed an idea of daily routine even in times of war, and also helped to connect the reader at home with the peculiar existence in a bombarded city. Since she had first travelled to Spain motivated by her anti-fascist beliefs, it is not surprising that Gellhorn’s main agenda in writing the articles was to raise awareness of the situation in Spain. Gellhorn, who intensively campaigned for American military
intervention in Spain to support the Republic, tried to appeal to *Collier’s* readers by drawing connections between Spain and America, narrowing the gap between the two nations. In an article entitled ‘Men Without Medals’ she likens the atmosphere of a bomb-free night in Madrid to an outdoor concert at ‘the stadium in New York with all the stars’ or in ‘that place in a park in St. Louis’. For similar reasons, she paid particular attention to the stories of the American volunteers of the International Brigades who formed the Abraham Lincoln Battalion. In the same article, Gellhorn reminded the readers of *Collier’s* of the American volunteers that were fighting for their political ideals in another country’s civil war:

> It was a strange thing, walking through that olive grove, bending your head against the dusty wind, and seeing the faces from Mississippi and Ohio and New York and California, and hearing the voices that you’d hear at a baseball game, in the subway, on any campus, in any hamburger joint, anywhere in America.  

At a crucial time when the implications of America’s non-interventionist policy were being discussed, she made sure to write about an event that showcased the gratitude of the republicans for the help of the American volunteers of the International Brigades. In September 1938, the republican government decided to withdraw the Brigades in an attempt to convince General Franco to do the same with the German and Italian fascist forces. Gellhorn recounted how

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*462 During the years of the war, Gellhorn became interested in the personal stories of the members of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, their origins and their motivations for joining the battalion. Among the various documents that formed her personal archive on the Spanish Civil War, she kept a copy of a touching letter that a volunteer of the International Brigades named Joseph had sent to his parents, explaining that he was going to drop out of Swarthmore College and join the International Brigades:*

> When even the women are fighting for Democracy, I’d feel too much of a dirty dog if I stayed over here indifferently. I know it sounds absurd to quit suddenly this way in my Senior year, but I’m so excited and upset about the war that I probably wouldn’t be able to graduate anyway. Besides, a lot of good a diploma would do in the Fascist era—and Spain seems to me a crucial test. Therefore I might as well go over there and help the right side win.

Undated Letter. Box 1, Folder 7, Martha Gellhorn Papers, Howard Gotlieb Center, Boston University, USA.

*463 Gellhorn, ‘Men Without Medals’, (1938): 10*
people came onto the streets of Barcelona to bid an emotional farewell to the volunteers:

The Internationals had left the lines and were waiting to go home [...]. There was a parade for them, down the Diagonal, and women threw flowers and wept, and all the Spanish people thanked them somehow, sometimes only by the way they watched the parade passing.464

The Gellhorn papers held at the Howard Gotlieb Center hold some of her drafts and notebooks from her stays in Spain. Especially during the first months in the country, Gellhorn wrote extensive notes on everything she observed, intermingling personal recollections and perceptions with factual data on government policies or demographics. Even her diary entries, which noted down events that presumably had happened on the very day, are imbued with the same evocative tone that characterises her articles. Her notebooks are especially interesting, not only because they allow us to follow her writing process for her articles, but also because they show the subjects and approaches she excluded.465

Gellhorn wrote several pages on the situation of women in Spain, although this subject is only mentioned in passing in her journalism. Like Sylvia Townsend Warner, she was particularly interested in the improvements in female education that the Republic had introduced years earlier, and in how the war had interrupted formal schooling. From the beginning of her stay in the country, Gellhorn noticed the significant political role of women in the Spanish Republic. Her notes taken during her first days in Madrid include a list of women in charge of different missions in the war, from Dolores Uribarri, the communist politician known as ‘la Pasionaria’, to the Minister of Health Federica Montseny, one of the first female ministers in Western Europe. Her manuscripts also reveal that she researched and listed the different occupations of women in Spain at the time, noting the different jobs that they performed and their corresponding salaries. Gellhorn also elaborated detailed documents describing the different levels of schooling for

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465 The very few letters from and to Gellhorn kept as part of the ‘Crowell-Collier Publishing Company Records, 1931-1955’ collection at the New York Public Library do not indicate that her editors censored any information or approaches.
women and the subjects they were taught. Her drafts reveal that she had planned to write various long profiles of the people involved in the war, which were possibly rejected by Collier’s, and also intended to write a book about the civil war, which she started right after she left Spain but was unable to finish.

Gellhorn also kept several small personal journals as travel logs, in which she wrote short paragraphs giving her impressions of the people she met and the places she visited in Spain. These sources show Gellhorn at her most critical and biting about the people around her while in Madrid, especially with regard to Spanish women. She detested the women that had been recruited to tend to the injured soldiers as nurses, whom she did not find intelligent enough, and some of the girls who frequented the American reporters’ favourite bar, Chicote, whom she deemed frivolous. ‘It is going to take a long time to make Spanish women into human beings. They are a kind of ignorant infuriating monkey at the moment, scratching themselves and twittering,’ she wrote in the entry for 4 April. Did the entry perhaps reflect her irritation at her own (or their) inability to communicate effectively in another language? She was herself aware of the apparent discrepancy between her ability to identify with and write about communities of people in need, and her intolerance of individuals. In one of her short stories she included herself as a character whom another character describes in these terms: ‘she loved humanity […] but people made her nervous.’ In any case, several of her journal entries show that her stay in Spain was not always pleasant or productive. She realised that being in a war involved a great deal of waiting for the action to begin, and she often occupied her time visiting hospitals and typing and proofing Hemingway’s articles. Some days the lack of activity made her sad and frustrated, feelings that appeared to reach a height in November 1937:

I do nothing here, eat, sleep, grow fat, spend money, loaf, and am like any woman at Cannes in season. And so home to Scrooby [Hemingway] and the

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466 Box 1, Folder 7, Martha Gellhorn Papers, Howard Gotlieb Center, Boston University, USA.
467 Journal entry dated 4 April 1937. Box 1, Folder 7, Martha Gellhorn Papers, Howard Gotlieb Center, Boston University, USA.
mail and the book reviews and cooking dinner and Herbert coming, and then two American comrades from the 15th, for whom I have to write this. Stupid day: grey, cold, nothing. Stupid day, stupid woman. I am wasting everything and now I am twenty nine.469

Gellhorn’s personal notes show another side of the lives and everyday occupations of war reporters in Spain, a vision that complements the heroic stories of reporters as defenders of democracy that are typical of the journalism of the civil war. As has been shown, however, her dissatisfaction did not contaminate her articles for Collier’s, in which the cause of the Spanish Republic and the bravery of the citizens overcoming the destruction of war in their everyday lives are narrated without a trace of cynicism.

Anticipating New Journalism: Gellhorn’s ‘Reportorial Fiction’

After the end of the war in Spain Gellhorn went back to writing fiction. As with her first novel, What Mad Pursuit, which was largely autobiographical, her subsequent works were based on her own experience as a reporter and keen observer of the people around her. Gellhorn took notes of almost everything that might be of inspiration for future work, usually with the cold detachment of an external observer. Looking at her notes and drafts, her biographer, Caroline Moorehead, has claimed that ‘what stands out is how little Martha imagined, how much on the contrary she reported, then used as fiction.’470 Gellhorn continued using the amalgamation of literary and journalistic genres that would become her trademark throughout her career. In 1940 she published A Stricken Field, a novel narrating the story of an inexperienced female war reporter covering the war in Czechoslovakia, where Gellhorn had travelled to report for Collier’s at the end of 1938, and which also partly reflected her experience as a reporter in Spain. The use of narrative devices common to fiction in newspaper writing, or of report material in fiction, was not new. Willa Cather, Theodore Dreiser, Stephen Crane and John Steinbeck (and Kipling, a generation earlier) are examples of writers who based their fiction on actual events, or experimented with various genres of

469 Journal entry dated 9 November 1937. Box 1, Folder 7, Martha Gellhorn Papers, Howard Gotlieb Center, Boston University, USA.
470 Moorehead, Gellhorn, p. 459.
non-fiction. 471 Ernest Hemingway and George Orwell wrote autobiographical, fact-based travel narratives, the latter famously writing *Homage to Catalonia* (1938), a long essay that combined his analysis of Spanish communist and anarchist parties and trade unions with his own experience as a militiaman in the civil war. However, Gellhorn’s novel went a step further. In the style of the American literary journalism that would become popular in the 1960s, she wrote not a fact-based novel, but an eyewitness account with the stylistic features of a novel.

Gellhorn’s novel proved difficult to classify, and contemporary reviewers appeared put off by the hybrid quality of her writing. The *New York Times* critic Charles Poore felt the need to come up with a term to describe *A Stricken Field*, which he labelled a ‘reportorial novel’. 472 Other critics seemed irritated by the autobiographical component of her supposedly fictional work. By 1940, Gellhorn’s reports on the wars in Spain and Czechoslovakia had made her very popular, and her fame grew exponentially with her wedding to Hemingway, which was photographed by Capa for *Life* magazine. This made the biographical details present in the novel instantly recognisable for readers. Reviewer Edith E. Walton found the similarities between Gellhorn and the main character of the novel problematic: ‘The story is told […] from the viewpoint of an American, Mary Douglas, who so obviously stands for the author that a disguise seems superfluous.’ 473 The combination of fact and fiction was also not well received. In the same review, Walton states:

Largely because it wavers so on the borderline of fiction and non-fiction, ‘A Stricken Field’ is a hard book to appraise. Considered as a novel it is something of a failure—lacking as it does most of the elements that give a novel pith and point—yet its material is so poignant and so well handled that one cannot dismiss it lightly. […] Why she did not tell this story in the first person, and as a record of her own experience, I really cannot imagine.

Peter Monteath has argued that during the interwar period it is possible to identify a general reluctance to recognise reportage as a legitimate literary form.\textsuperscript{474} Monteath suggests that this reluctance can partially be attributed to a ‘bourgeois distrust’ of a genre that was becoming the favourite medium for denouncing class inequality. While he stresses that authors of all classes wrote reportage during the period, his argument is a valid one; reportage (including photo-reportage) has traditionally been a favourite genre for exposing social injustice. As Kate McLoughlin has pointed out, in the First American Writers’ Congress of 1935, Joseph North, the editor of \textit{New Masses}, claimed that reportage was ‘one of the most important [genres] of the revolutionary movement’.\textsuperscript{475} The popularity of the form, and of literary journalism in general, peaked in the second half of the 1930s and greatly diminished after the Second World War. Kathy R. Forde argues that during the early stages of the Cold War, ‘predicated as it was on a monolithic anti-communist, pro-capitalist ideology, American politics and the cultural elites […] needed the authoritative, soothing voice of the traditional report.’\textsuperscript{476} Literary journalism resurfaced in the 1960s, another decade of social and intellectual turmoil, with the style of news writing that began to be known as New Journalism and is often associated with writers such as Tom Wolfe and Norman Mailer. I believe that Gellhorn’s journalistic writing can be seen as a precursor to New Journalism’s openly acknowledged subjectivity and its use of storytelling techniques in newswriting. Interestingly, in the 1960s, when non-fiction was hailed as the genre that would replace the novel, its detractors used remarkably similar arguments to those used to criticise Gellhorn’s style. Widely considered the most famous antagonistic article about New Journalism, Dwight Macdonald’s ‘Parajournalism’ in the \textit{New York Review of Books} criticised Tom Wolfe’s journalistic narratives, calling them ‘a bastard form […] having it both ways, exploiting the factual authority of journalism and the atmospheric license of fiction’.\textsuperscript{477}

\textsuperscript{475} McLoughlin, Gellhorn, p. 25.
Gellhorn’s main contribution to journalism was to create a style able to reproduce the psychological atmosphere of the new ‘total war’ that started in Spain in 1936. Her articles for *Collier's Weekly* focus on the effect the war had on people’s lives, putting war rhetoric on a mundane footing and avoiding the military narratives of conventional war journalism. Her exploration of a subjective mode of newswriting, and the inclusion of literary techniques and tropes in her articles, makes her work a natural predecessor of the New Journalism of the 1960s. To this day her articles on the Spanish Civil War remain one of the best sources for understanding the complexity and human impact of the conflict.

**Campaigning for Intervention**

In her articles for *Collier’s*, and also in the pieces she wrote for *The New Yorker* and in her lectures and interviews until the end of the war, Gellhorn attempted to convey the perilous situation of democracy in Spain. But despite her firm belief in the necessity of letting the world know about the events that were taking place in Europe, Gellhorn often felt that all attempts were in vain when trying to make people understand the horrors of war. When she returned to the United States after her first trip to Spain, she signed a contract to give several lectures across America on her experience as a war reporter. She found the task tiring and meaningless, and complained about the inane questions she was constantly asked about Spain and her work. She was not able to finish the lecture tour and ended up breaking the contract.\(^{478}\) Gellhorn’s correspondence with Eleanor Roosevelt shows her increasing concern about the difficulty of expressing the horrors of a foreign armed conflict to an audience that did not seem to grasp the urgency of the situation in Spain.

For the duration of the war and years afterwards, Gellhorn intensively campaigned to obtain international political and military help for the Republic. For this purpose, she contacted any friends and acquaintances that she felt might

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\(^{478}\) Letter from Martha Gellhorn to Eleanor Roosevelt dated February 1 1938. Moorehead (ed.), *Letters*, p. 57. Her diaries from Spain reflect that she had agreed to give the lectures in October 1937, and also record how Hemingway did not approve of the job. Diary entry for October 15, 1937. Box 1 Folder 7. Martha Gellhorn Papers, Howard Gotlieb Center, Boston University, USA.
help to raise awareness about the plight of the Spanish government and its sympathisers in order to contribute to a change in the American government’s policy of non-intervention. Naturally, her friend Eleanor Roosevelt became the main target of her efforts to save the Republic. The letters between Gellhorn and Roosevelt, which up to that date had been more personal than political, changed in tone when the former began her involvement with the cause of the republican government. While Eleanor Roosevelt would later state that her sympathies had always lain with the republican government, in her letters to Gellhorn she appears more pragmatic and conscious of the difficulties that such an intervention would entail. Gellhorn emphasised the suffering of the inhabitants of the cities besieged by Franco’s troops, describing first-hand accounts of the perilous situation of the republican supporters. Once she tried to convince Roosevelt to allow into America a group of 500 young Basque children who had been evacuated from their villages:

I happen to know (so it hurts more and makes me guiltier) what those children come from, and it seems to me amazing that only America should offer no sanctuary for them. […] It seems to me that it’s two things, an injustice and a sort of backing down on what America likes to think it stands for: kindness to the weak. What do you think about it?

Roosevelt’s reply was written in the measured tone she usually adopted when trying to calm Gellhorn’s impulsiveness:

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479 In the second volume of her autobiography, Roosevelt states: ‘While I often felt strongly on various subjects, Franklin frequently refrained from supporting causes in which he believed, because of political realities. There were times when this annoyed me very much. In the case of the Spanish Civil War, for instance, we had to remain neutral, though Franklin wanted the democratic government to be successful. But he also knew he could not get Congress to go along with him. To justify his action, or lack of action, he explained to me, when I complained, that the League of Nations had asked us to remain neutral. By trying to convince me that our course was correct he was simply trying to salve his own conscience, because he himself was uncertain. It was one of the many times when I felt akin to a hairshirt.’ Eleanor Roosevelt, *The Autobiography of Eleanor Roosevelt* [1961] (New York: Da Capo Press, 1992), p. 191.

480 Many of these Basque children were eventually given shelter in Britain, others in France, Belgium and the Soviet Union. For a detailed study of the history of the displaced people of the Basque country, see Luis Monferrer Catalán, *Odisea en Albión: Los Republicanos Españoles Exiliados en Gran Bretaña* (Madrid: Ediciones de la Torre, 2007).

It is against all modern ideas of what is good for children to uproot them and bring them to this country, where they are definitely cut from all that they know and that would make them feel secure because of familiarity […]. Emotionally it is very easy to say that we should receive the children in this country, but it requires a little more than emotion sometimes to do the wise thing.482

This answer, however, did not discourage Gellhorn, who continued to raise the topic during her meetings with Eleanor Roosevelt in the summer of 1937. While the taking in of the Basque children never happened, Eleanor Roosevelt became involved in other aid activities, including organising a benefit with the aim of collecting funds for milk for Spanish children.483

While there is no scholarly agreement as to whether Eleanor Roosevelt influenced her husband’s political decisions, there is no doubt of the influence that she had on the American public. During the second half of the 1930s, she was at the apex of her popularity, having published the first instalment of her autobiography, serialised in the Ladies’ Home Journal during 1937, to great success. It was also during this time that she started going on lecture tours,484 as well as giving weekly press conferences. Eleanor Roosevelt also wrote a daily newspaper column, entitled ‘My Day’, which appeared six days a week from 1936 to 1962. ‘My Day’ was more of a diary than a traditional journalistic opinion column. In it, she narrated her daily doings, from the books she was reading to the receptions she hosted at the White House.

Roosevelt assiduously followed the Spanish Civil War in her newspaper column. During the first months of the war, she often commented on the tragic loss of life and the future of exiled children, without ever questioning the political position of the United States. However, as she became progressively closer to the cause of the Spanish Republic through Gellhorn’s letters and reports, her articles ceased to be ‘neutral’. Her views about the war, which were often criticised by

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482 Letter from Eleanor Roosevelt to Martha Gellhorn dated 14 June 1937. Box 1, Folder 2, Martha Gellhorn Papers, Howard Gotlieb Center, Boston University, USA.
Catholic groups—\(^{485}\) who supported Franco’s efforts to stop the Republic’s secular policies—contrasted with her husband’s strict policy of non-intervention. However, given that Roosevelt herself admitted that her columns sometimes served as ‘a trial balloon’ to test the reaction that an idea or policy would elicit from the public,\(^ {486}\) the negative response to her articles from certain anti-communist and Catholic groups might have been a deciding factor in Franklin Roosevelt’s decisions.

Eleanor Roosevelt had long been committed to anti-war activism, supporting the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom and defending America’s entry into the League of Nations. Throughout 1937 she struggled to reconcile her pacifist philosophy with her no less cherished ideal of international solidarity. In an article she wrote as early as July 1937, she attempted to redefine the duties of ‘the pacifist’, and implicitly showed her disagreement with her husband’s isolationist policy:

I wonder how many of you have read Dorothy Thompson’s ‘The Dilemma of a Pacifist’ […] I think you will find it interesting, and by and large she has reached much the same conclusion as I have, namely, that an attitude of letting the rest of the world stew in their own juice, is rather a dangerous one, that perhaps in our own interest we may have to take the initiative and have sufficient interest in other people’s affairs to really want to help them remain at peace.

There seems no question to me that being a pacifist means that you do not seek a fight, that you use every means in your power to prevent a fight, and this includes giving all the assistance you possibly can short of military assistance to other nations who honestly are trying to keep out of war.\(^ {487}\)

Gellhorn managed to convince the Roosevelts to host a private screening at the White House of *The Spanish Earth*, a political documentary directed by the Dutch filmmaker Joris Ivens and written by Ernest Hemingway. The documentary

\(^{485}\) Letter from Eleanor Roosevelt to Martha Gellhorn dated June 14, 1937. Box 1, Folder 2. Martha Gellhorn Papers, Howard Gotlieb Centre. Boston University, USA.
had originally been narrated by Orson Welles, but his voice was replaced by Hemingway’s during post-production. The project had been conceived by the pro-republican group Contemporary Historians, headed by Dos Passos, Lillian Hellman and Archibald MacLeish. Dos Passos, who had already collaborated in the production of *Spain—A Fight for Freedom*, a short propaganda documentary for the Spanish Republic, withdrew from the project after an argument with Hemingway. Apart from raising awareness in America about the plight of the Spanish Republic, the aim of the propaganda film was to persuade Franklin Roosevelt to change his policy of non-intervention. Despite its socialist undertones, the film was moderate in its political message, and avoided presenting the conflict as a battle between the left and the right. Likewise, the film did not mention the American volunteer soldiers of the International Brigades—with whom Gellhorn and Hemingway had regular contact while in Spain—arguably in order to avoid overemphasising the role of the foreign troops helping the Republic, and probably also for fear that the connections of some of the brigade members with certain Communist youth groups might be damaging to the distribution of the documentary.

The film portrayed the life of the workers of Fuentidueña del Tajo, a rural village on the road between Madrid and Valencia which had not been taken over by Franco’s troops but was frequently bombarded. The scenes in Fuentidueña were combined with others showing the everyday life of the citizens of the besieged capital, displaying dilapidated buildings that had been hit by bombs, and people racing down busy streets trying to take shelter from the air raids. The documentary’s linking narrative is the building of an aqueduct that will bring

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488 Welles later explained in an interview that he had a fight with Hemingway when he was called to read the script of Ivens’ film. When Welles complained that the lines Hemingway had written were too long and dull, the writer irately answered “You—effeminate boys of the theatre, what do you know about real war?” According to his version, they both ended up fighting, each brandishing a chair, in front of the rolling images of the war in Spain.


490 Hemingway and Dos Passos fought over the former’s justification of the death of José Robles, who was tortured and killed by the Russian secret services while working for the Republic. For a detailed analysis of the friendship between Hemingway, Dos Passos, and José Robles, see Stephen Koch, *Murder of José Robles*. 
water to the desiccated countryside, and scenes of the workers’ toil are interwoven with images more characteristic of war, such as bomber planes and militia parades. Interestingly, *The Spanish Earth*’s agricultural motif is reminiscent of Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal propaganda documentary *The Plow that Broke the Plains*, directed by Pare Lorentz and produced one year before Ivens’s film. While the use of the soil as a metaphor was characteristic of the politically and socially engaged rhetoric of the 1930s, it seems plausible that the choice of a similar aesthetic was intentional.

The documentary was filmed at different locations in Spain during the first half of 1937. It is difficult to assess the role that Gellhorn played in the project. She accompanied Ivens and Hemingway to some of the filming sessions in the dry rural landscape of Fuentidueña, of which she noted, in true Gellhorn style, that it was ‘only picturesque because it is not Bearcreek Kansas’, but it is not known whether she had a say on the script or the production of the film. Alex Vernon states that Gellhorn met Ivens in New York in May to assist him with the post-production of the film. In a letter to Eleanor Roosevelt, Gellhorn recounts that she had been helping Ivens with the sound recording for the documentary:

> We made the sound of incoming shells with a football bladder and an air hose and fingernails snapping against a screen, all tremendously magnified and it sounds so like a shell that we were scared out of our wits.\(^{492}\)

The first public screening took place in New York on 4 June 1937, as part of the second American Writers’ Congress, to considerable success.\(^{493}\) Gellhorn, confident that the film would have an effect on Franklin Roosevelt’s feelings and his military policy towards Spain, managed to talk Eleanor Roosevelt into arranging a private screening of the film at the White House. After several changes of date, the screening took place on 6 July 1937, with Ivens, Gellhorn and Hemingway present. Both Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt praised the film, but according to Gellhorn, Franklin seemed resigned to the fate of the European

\(^{491}\) Diary entry dated 18 April 1937. Martha Gellhorn Papers, Howard Gotlieb Center, Boston University, USA.

\(^{492}\) Vernon, *Hemingway’s Second War*, p. 90.

\(^{493}\) Vernon, *Hemingway’s Second War*, p. 90.

\(^{494}\) Letter from Eleanor Roosevelt to Martha Gellhorn, dated June 14, 1937. Box 1, Folder 2. Martha Gellhorn Papers. Howard Gotlieb Center. Boston University, USA.
country, stating: ‘Spain is a vicarious sacrifice for all of us.’ It is indeed surprising that Eleanor Roosevelt, who had commented on the Spanish war regularly in her ‘My Day’ columns, only mentioned the film in passing in her daily article, and described its content very vaguely, without naming the conflict in question:

After dinner the two men showed us a film which they had made. The interesting thing in this case is the fact that the picture was not made for personal gain. The profits, if any come, are going into the purchase of ambulances to help the sick and dying in a part of the world which is at present wartorn.

While Eleanor Roosevelt may not have wanted to openly contradict her husband in her column, her conversations with Gellhorn probably contributed to the development of her own thoughts on America’s foreign relations, which were quite opposite to her husband’s policy of non-interventionism. In 1938, Eleanor Roosevelt published her first essay on international politics, This Troubled World, in which she reasserted her commitment to pacifism. In the book she discussed the ineffectiveness of previous peace plans, but continued to advocate dialogue between nations and effective negotiation. However, as Allida Black has pointed out, her pacifist philosophy ‘did not mean an unswerving allegiance to fascism, or isolationism, or acquiescence to the Fascist offensive.’ In The Troubled World Roosevelt rejected the idea of unilateral disarmament promoted by the League of Nations, and she advised countries to be prepared to defend democracy.

Through her friendship with Martha Gellhorn, Roosevelt became progressively involved with the cause of republican Spain, and continued to be so for several decades. In 1938 Gellhorn introduced her to Constancia de la Mora, who had been the chief of republican censorship working with foreign reporters in Madrid, and who had travelled to the United States to seek support for the Spanish government. De la Mora visited the White House several times, and Soledad Fox has argued that she became the unofficial ambassador of the Spanish government.

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in America. Although by 1939 it was starting to become obvious that Franco would win the war, Gellhorn did not abandon her campaign, and she continued to write to Roosevelt about the future of the war refugees and exiled intellectuals. In her column ‘My Day’, Roosevelt once included an almost direct quote from a letter from Gellhorn—one dated 5 February 1939, about the president of the Spanish Republic, Juan Negrín:

Negrín is a really great man [...] and it’s so strange and moving to think of that man who surely never wanted to be prime minister of anything being pushed by events and history into a position which he has heroically filled, doing better all the time, all the time being finer against all odds.

Gellhorn’s words were paraphrased in Roosevelt’s column on 25 February 1939, recounting her trip to see the play *Abe Lincoln in Illinois*. Interestingly, in her article Roosevelt compares the mandate of President Lincoln to that of Negrín:

I was reminded of a sentence in a letter the other day—quite a remarkable description of the Spanish Premier, Mr. Negrín. My correspondent said: ‘What a strange world it is, when a man who certainly never wanted to be premier of anything, who was gay and carefree and loved the cheerful things in life, had this responsibility forced upon him and has had to carry through so magnificently.’

Eleanor Roosevelt’s involvement with Gellhorn, Hemingway and the Spanish refugees, as well as her own liberal philosophy, made her a suspected communist sympathiser. Her FBI files record her relationship with both writers, and also with several Spanish republican politicians, among them the communist leader Dolores Uribarri, ‘la Pasionaria’. In 1942, an FBI document stated that Gellhorn, who was living with Hemingway in Cuba at the time, had been a guest of Mrs Roosevelt’s in Washington with the purpose of transmitting information from the Cuban ambassador to the Roosevelts. Eleanor Roosevelt continued

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501 Letter from R. G. Leddy addressed to the Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation dated Havana, 9 October 1942, in the FBI file for Ernest Hemingway. *FBI*
objecting to Spain’s fascist government after the end of the Second World War, openly opposing the re-establishment of diplomatic relations with Francoist Spain.\textsuperscript{502}

Martha Gellhorn and Eleanor Roosevelt’s relationship became more distant with time, but they remained in touch until the latter’s death in 1962. In 1989, Gellhorn wrote the preface to a collection of Roosevelt’s ‘My Day’ articles, in which she celebrated her social commitment and generous personality. While Roosevelt’s increasing interest in politics in the second half of the 1930s can in part be attributed to the fears of the spread of fascism and the coming of a world war, her relationship with Gellhorn deeply enriched her notion of international solidarity, and Gellhorn’s letters left a powerful mark on her. Their relationship is a small but important piece of any understanding of relations between the United States and Spain during the second half of the 1930s.

‘Going to Spain With the Boys’: On Being a Woman War Reporter

The influence of the subgenre of reportage on journalism in the interwar period is inseparable from the rise in popularity of war reporters. The appeal of reportage resided in the fact that it enabled the public to read about aspects of the war beyond military and geographical developments. The correspondent was able to write about his or her own experiences of war from a subjective point of view, narrating adventures and hazards on the battlefield in the first person, and this helped to transform the war reporter into a mythical figure. What people looked for from war correspondents was not a detailed and insightful analysis of the causes and consequences of conflict—which most newspapers and magazines covered in their editorials—but the capacity to bring the thrills of war into their living rooms. Barbara Korte has argued that war reporters have a double role, since ‘they act in their specific professional field and, at the same time, deliver the

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\textsuperscript{502} ‘Their argument [Senator Taft and Senator McCarran’s] is that if we have representatives in Moscow, we should have them in Spain […]. That two of our senators should think it wise to accept a man who openly backed Hitler and Mussolini, and who accepted their help in getting control of the Spanish government, seems to me strange beyond words.’ Eleanor Roosevelt, ‘My Day’, 16 May 1949.
The popularity of war correspondents has historically been linked to the presence of the ‘correspondent character’ in their dispatches. William Howard Russell (1820–1907), who is widely considered to be the founding figure of modern war reporting, became famous for his idiosyncratic dispatches that narrated the everyday lives of soldiers. Russell, who had no military training and very little experience as a correspondent, covered the Crimean War and the American Civil War for The Times. He famously travelled with the soldiers and lived with them on the battlefront. His vivid and empathetic descriptions of life on the front lines managed to convey the soldiers’ everyday challenges, connecting the public at home with the events of the war. The rigid censorship that characterised the Great War, when journalists were banned from the front, however, practically ended the possibility of the reporter soldier. The Spanish Civil War witnessed a rise in the popularity of war reporters, a trend that continued during the next world war. Ernie Pyle, who became the emblematic Second World War correspondent, became well known precisely for his personal accounts of the front line. During the late 1930s and early 1940s, magazines based much of their marketing strategy around the fame of their reporters, whose names usually appeared prominently on the mastheads of periodicals.

The myth of the war reporter is predicated on qualities of boldness, audacity and ingenuity, as well as a certain disregard for rules and safety precautions. During the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War, such ideals were taken as a principle of artistic expression. Following Robert Capa’s famous maxim, ‘If your pictures aren’t good enough, you aren’t close enough,’ nearness to the action became the watchword of the profession. The idea of the reporter was therefore surrounded by a discourse of heroism and sacrifice that was propagated by the journalists themselves and the periodicals for which they wrote. Herbert Matthews opened his book The Education of a Correspondent with a quotation: ‘A man may as well die young, having

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died for a purpose, than live a whole life without one.\textsuperscript{506} And indeed many of them died: Robert Capa was killed while reporting on the First Indochina War in 1954, and his partner and fellow photographer Gerda Taro had died almost twenty years earlier in an accident in Spain involving a tank during the early months of the war. Gellhorn’s novella ‘Till Death Do Us Part’, written after Capa’s death, is based on their friendship, which began in Spain and continued when they met in different countries around the world\textsuperscript{507}. In her story, Capa is already portrayed as a legendary character that paid the ultimate price for the best picture. The novella also extolled the task of the war reporter, who had to be in the right place and the precise time, since he had no time to amend mistakes and correct his perspective:

A writer can have what emotions he wishes or cannot avoid, at the time of getting his material; later he can sit down for a while and bring order out of what he saw and remembers. But for the photographer there is no time; there is only that one instant; he cannot afford any emotions for himself. Of course Bara [Capa] was a brave man, of the best kind there is, the kind that sees and feels and imagines and understands, and issues to himself the command: be still\textsuperscript{508}.

But the idea of the war reporter was also based on the traditional masculine qualities that writers such as Hemingway famously exploited in their chronicles. As a female reporter, Gellhorn had to deal not only with the restrictions that were often imposed on women at the battlefront, but also with the pervading masculine image of the reporter. While she very rarely alluded to her gender in her articles, she had to find a voice that allowed her to exist as a woman while still writing the kind of reports that audiences demanded. The war in Spain was, in this respect, a favourable environment for female reporters. The generalised disorganisation that characterised the war in Spain, as most reporters noted, also meant that both male and female writers could travel to and from the front lines with almost no restrictions. Gellhorn sometimes complained about the lack of accreditation for

\textsuperscript{506} Matthews, \textit{Education}, n. p.
reporters in her personal notes, although this does not seem to have constituted a great impediment. Virginia Cowles noted that in Spain one could get by with any authorisation, even if it was forged or out of date, since many of the sentries guarding the front were illiterate.

Gellhorn’s diary notes while in Spain do not suggest that she encountered specific difficulties related to her gender when interviewing soldiers or doing research for her reports. Such issues are also absent from the chronicles of the American reporters Virginia Cowles and Josephine Herbst. While accessing the battlefronts was arguably harder for women than for men, Gellhorn’s notes show that correspondents often visited the front lines in pairs or groups. It is also probable that her friendship with Hemingway—who was an experienced reporter, knew Spanish, and had friends and contacts in Madrid—was useful for a newcomer to the profession like Gellhorn. It is significant, however, that her articles are often set in spaces that were more accessible to women, such as hospitals (‘City at War’) or public places such as shops and urban squares (‘Only the Shells Whine’).

This is not to say that Gellhorn did not encounter problems as a woman reporter throughout her career. When in 1944 she travelled to England to report on developments in the Second World War for Collier’s, she found that female war correspondents were denied the opportunity to cover the war. Gellhorn wrote a letter to a Colonel Lawrence complaining about the unfair treatment of women war reporters, who were only allowed to get as close to the front lines as nurses were. The letter is an interesting testimony to the historical difficulties of women war reporters to access the frontlines:

As you know, General Eisenhower stated that men and women correspondents would be treated alike, and would be afforded equal opportunities to fulfil their assignments. This was later qualified to mean

509 Martha Gellhorn Papers, Howard Gotlieb Center, Boston University, USA.
510 Cowles, Looking, p. 25.
511 See for instance the diary entries dated 28-29 March 1937. Box 1, Folder 7, Martha Gellhorn Papers, Howard Gotlieb Center, Boston University, USA.
that, when American women, military personnel (in this case Army nurses) went to France, women correspondents would also be allowed to cross. […]

I have, too frequently, received the impression that women war correspondents are an irritating nuisance who, very tiresomely, kept asking to be allowed to do their job. I wish to point out that none of us would have our jobs unless we knew how to do them, and this curious condescending treatment is as ridiculous as it is undignified.\(^{513}\)

Throughout her long career, Gellhorn had to reconcile her gender with the masculine discourse traditionally associated with the figure of the war correspondent. When she decided to go to Spain, she wrote to the wife of the foreign reporter Joseph Barnes: ‘Me, I am going to Spain with the boys. I don’t know who the boys are, but I am going with them.’\(^{514}\) A certain tension between her gender and the traditionally masculine discourses of war is often to be perceived in her writing. This is particularly noticeable when she narrates her interactions with soldiers at the front. While war reporters traditionally presented themselves as fellow combatants, consciously employing a vocabulary of brotherhood and camaraderie, this was distinctly more difficult for a woman journalist. Gellhorn usually solved this by toning down the presence of the reporter as a character in her essays. Indeed, the ‘reporter character’ in her articles is usually markedly genderless. While Gellhorn did not claim a specific feminist style gender, it is interesting to see that Collier’s Weekly chose to market her work as defined by the femaleness of its author. By 1940 she was one of the most famous names writing for the publication—her marriage to Hemingway the same year contributing to her celebrity status—and she became the poster correspondent for that year’s advertising campaign. The exceptionality of her role as a female war correspondent actually became a selling point. Since her writing style and glamorous appearance did not lend themselves to a marketing campaign solely based on the figure of a tough action reporter, Collier’s advertised their

\(^{513}\) Letter dated 24 June 1944. Box 1, Folder 9, Martha Gellhorn Papers, Howard Gotlieb Center, Boston University, USA.  
The only work in which Gellhorn explicitly dealt with the implications of being a woman war reporter was Love Goes to Press (1946), the play she co-wrote with her friend and fellow correspondent Virginia Cowles right after the end of the Second World War. Love Goes to Press was clearly influenced by the screwball comedy films of the 1930s, with its emphasis on the ‘war of the sexes’, mistaken identities and zany heroines. The two main characters, Jane and Annabelle, are modelled on Gellhorn and Cowles themselves. Like them, the protagonists are young women reporters who met during the Spanish Civil War, and who are now covering the Second World War in Italy. Neither Jane nor Annabelle take themselves, or their colleagues, too seriously. After several romantic conflicts, the friends end up leaving the country together to report on another war, breaking off their relationships with their male counterparts in the play. Despite the fact that at the heart of Love Goes to Press there are serious points about the prejudiced treatment of women journalists at war, the tone of the play is generally light and with fast paced humorous interactions. The dialogues are dotted with ironic comments describing their position as female reporters, perceived as a hindrance to the armed forces:

JANE. (reciting): What if you got wounded Miss Jones? All the forces on land, sea and air would stop fighting the war and take care of you. Not good for the war effort.

ANNABELLE: And considering the number of times we couldn’t even get out of a car when a shelling started because the men pinned us down with their elbows while they stepped over us.516

Kate McLoughlin has described Love Goes to Press as a ‘dramatisation of the gendering of the access to war’, in which the issue at stake between the male and

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After Collier’s hired Hemingway, he became the new face of the publication. Its new advertisement depicted him with a full beard, surrounded by young admirers, with the slogan ‘Ride the Invasion Fleet with Hemingway’. New York Times, 14 July (1944): 28.

female characters is ‘laying claim to information’. Sandra Spanier champions a biographical interpretation of the play, relating it to the competition between Gellhorn and Hemingway for a scoop on the world war after Hemingway started working for Collier’s and thereby relegated Gellhorn to ‘second place on [her] magazine’. It is indeed difficult to avoid reading the play as a caricature of Gellhorn and Hemingway’s relationship considering that it premiered a year after their divorce, especially since the character of Annabelle tends to utter lines that seem to bear a meaning beyond comedy: ‘I’m going on with this war. I’m not going to let any worthless man ruin my job.’ Love Goes to Press was a success in Britain but a dismal failure in the United States, where critics deemed its comic tone disrespectful and inappropriate for the subject of war. Perhaps due to this reason Gellhorn labelled the play ‘a joke’ in the introduction to the 1994 reprint of the play.

Hemingway’s Influence and the Question of Truth in War Reporting

The subject of Hemingway’s influence on her work followed Gellhorn throughout her life, and the comparisons began even before she met the writer. Like many writers of her generation, Gellhorn admired his succinct style and read many of his works. Her admiration grew when she first met him and they talked about literature. Gellhorn wrote her impressions in a letter to Eleanor Roosevelt: ‘he does know the craft beautifully and has a swell feeling for words and is very very careful about them, working slowly and never using anything he does not think is accurate.’ As was mentioned earlier in this chapter, reviewers rapidly spotted Hemingway’s influence on Gellhorn’s first novel, What Mad Pursuit. The comparisons with Hemingway’s writing style increased greatly after their marriage, which was widely reported in the American press. While some of the criticism fairly alluded to the understandable similarities between their narrative

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517 McLoughlin, Gellhorn, p. 162.
519 Gellhorn and Cowles, Love Goes to Press, p. 74.
styles, Hemingway’s impact on Gellhorn’s works was often exaggerated. Such is the case with Gellhorn’s novel *Liana* (1944), a feminist work that explores the consequences of colonialism, which received this confusing review:

Martha Gellhorn, who is Mrs. Ernest Hemingway, has written a novel, ‘Liana,’ which might be called a feminine version of ‘For Whom the Bell Tolls.’ It is not a story of fighting, for the entire action takes place on a blockaded Vichy French Caribbean island, but it is about a young man who cannot make a separate peace for himself in a world that is almost universally at war. It is also about a lonely middle-aged man who can’t buy anything he really wants with the money he makes so easily. Most of all, however, it is about the young mulatto girl, Liana, who can’t hold her lover when France rises to fight again after the Anglo-American landing in North Africa. Unlike the dream girl with the cropped head in ‘For Whom the Bell Tolls,’ Liana is not a warrior’s woman; she cannot go to the battle, nor can she wait for the battle to be over. She must make her own idea of the best of it when men go about their patriotic business, even if that ‘best’ is a rather useless suicide.523

While Gellhorn and Hemingway’s novels have some aspects in common, having war as a background and featuring an eventually tragic love story, the novels’ plots, characterization and points of view are too dissimilar to warrant a comparison solely on the basis of their literary relationship. It is evident, however, that Hemingway’s style, with his concise descriptions, meaningful use of silence and raw dialogue, influenced Gellhorn’s fiction and journalism (as well as the works of many other writers of the period). In his early reports for the *Toronto Star Weekly*, Hemingway was one of the first journalists to depart from a factual, stripped-down kind of reporting in favour of a more literary prose. While they never had a close relationship after their divorce, Gellhorn admitted her debt to Hemingway at the end of her career:

He was a genius, that uneasy word, not so much in what he wrote (speaking like an uncertified critic) as in how he wrote; he liberated our written

language. All writers, after him, owe Hemingway a debt for their freedom whether the debt is acknowledged or not.\textsuperscript{524}

The influence of Hemingway can also be perceived in the way that Gellhorn chooses to present herself as an interpellated observer of the events she is describing. In her articles describing the events at the battlefront, she sometimes portrays herself as ‘one of the boys’, a fellow soldier, in a way very reminiscent of Hemingway. In ‘Men Without Medals’, which was published in \textit{Collier’s Weekly} in 1938, Gellhorn narrates the stories of several American volunteer soldiers who had decided to fight in Spain. Her identification with the militiamen is emphasised in the repeated use of the first person plural pronoun: ‘We were sitting in a stream bed, out of the dust. There were twelve of us, and we all had dust in our eyebrows and our teeth, and our hands and clothes were gritty with it.’\textsuperscript{525} Hemingway’s dispatches for the North American Newspaper Alliance are characterised by the depiction of the reporter as an active participant in the action, who even becomes a mentor of the young and inexperienced volunteer soldiers:

\begin{quote}
We had stayed there a little while, but it was in a hollow and you couldn’t see well. We climbed a ridge to see and were machine-gunned. […] The soldier I was lying next to was having trouble with his rifle. It jammed after every shot and I showed him how to knock the bolt open with a rock.\textsuperscript{526}
\end{quote}

But it is in the representation of the figure of the reporter that we find one the most fundamental differences between the two writers. Hemingway’s successful career as a journalist was built on the persona of the brave, masculine adventurer. By the mid-1930s he was already the most popular American writer alive, and newspapers in Spain widely reported his presence in the country.\textsuperscript{527} The ‘Hemingway character’ pervades all of his dispatches, conditioning both the

\textsuperscript{525} Gellhorn, ‘Men Without Medals’, (1938); 12.
content and the tone of the stories. His performance of masculine bravado sometimes reaches amusing proportions. In one of his articles from Spain, he passionately described his confrontation with another American reporter, whom he accused of propagating an exaggerated account of the violence perpetrated by the communists in Madrid:

Now he was a correspondent for a truly great newspaper and I had a lot of respect for it so I did not sock him. Besides if one should ever take a poke at a guy like that it would only furnish evidence that there was a terror. Also the meeting was in the room of an American woman journalist and I think, but cannot be positive on this, that he was wearing glasses.  

In 1937, between their stays in Spain, Hemingway and Gellhorn attended the Second Congress of American Writers, which took place in New York’s Carnegie Hall on 4–6 June. With many of the attending writers travelling back and forth from Spain, or organising aid committees from their own countries, the civil war was a recurrent topic at the gathering. The call for the congress, which was signed by a number of American writers and journalists including Hemingway and Walter Duranty, acknowledged the conflict in Spain and enumerated the horrors of fascism. It especially focused on the anti-intellectualism that pervaded fascist ideology, which was seen as the true enemy of culture. The call stated that Spain was ‘the first real battlefield in a civil and international conflict’, and

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528 Ernest Hemingway, ‘Fresh Air on an Inside Story’, in By Line, p. 254. The article was originally published in Ken magazine on 22 September 1938.
529 Time Magazine published a review of the Writers’ Congress, with pictures of Hemingway, MacLeish, Duranty and a crowded Carnegie Hall. The review also reported on the screening of The Spanish Earth, and insisted that the event seemed to be more political than literary: ‘Some 360 U.S. novelists, poets, critics and journalists, and several times as many onlookers, […] assembled in Manhattan’s Carnegie Hall for the second National Congress of American Writers, to discuss the current problems of their professional lives. It was confirmed not only by evidence of their creative torments, but because they discovered that before they could get down to talking about writing they had to get straight about where they stood on fascism, democracy, the menace of war, the civil war in Spain and a host of other social and political problems whose relation to art constituted the main theme of their discussions.’ ‘Books: Creator’s Congress’, Time, 21 June (1937): 79–80.
explained that the aim of the meeting was that ‘all writers might be made aware of the issues now confronting themselves and the world’. 531

Gellhorn’s address to the congress, which was entitled ‘Writers Fighting in Spain’, is especially interesting for the discussion of gender in war reporting. While the core of her speech reiterated the anti-fascist principles that characterised a great number of the addresses, her concluding paragraph is particularly revealing. When discussing the social responsibility of the writer, Gellhorn makes use of the rhetoric of the ‘man of action’, and by implicitly applying it to herself, redefines it:

A writer must also be a man of action now. Action takes time, and time is what we all need most. But a man who has given a year of his life, without heroics or boastfulness, to the war in Spain, or who, in the same way, has given a year of his life to steel strikes, or to the unemployed, or to the problems of racial prejudice, has not lost or wasted time. He is a man who knows where he belonged. If you should survive such action, what you have to say about it afterwards is the truth, is necessary and real, and it will last. 532

Like several of the papers presented at the congress, Gellhorn’s speech goes back to the idea of truth in writing, discussing the requisites for being a writer in a time of social turmoil. But the speech—given just weeks after she came back from Spain—is also a statement of her right to be a war correspondent. In her address, she virtually establishes her own rules on what constitutes being ‘a man of action’, such as having ‘given a year of his life […] to the war in Spain’ or ‘a year of his life to steel strikes, or to the unemployed’. Gellhorn, who had travelled across the United States interviewing families affected by the unemployment brought about by the Great Depression, refers here to her own experience. While the sexist phrase ‘man of action’ is allowed to stay unchanged in her speech, rather than justifying or defending her position as a woman war reporter, she claims it as her prerogative.

The idea of truth in writing was particularly absorbing for Ernest Hemingway. Hemingway’s obsession throughout his career was representing

realism faithfully. He resented the transitory quality of journalism, and how factual writing was condemned to be forgotten. His works of literary journalism, *Death in the Afternoon* (1932)⁵³³ and *Green Hills of Africa* (1935), were attempts to write a factual narrative that would stand the test of time. In the prologue to *Green Hills of Africa*, Hemingway stated that he had ‘attempted an absolutely true book to see whether the shape of a country and the pattern of a month’s action can, if truly presented, compete with a work of the imagination’.⁵³⁴ The idea of representing reality accurately was central to Hemingway’s address to the congress, ‘The Writer and the War’, which identified communicating the essence of an idea as the principal aim of literature:

A writer’s problem does not change. He himself changes, but his problem remains the same. It is always how to write truly and having found what is true, to project it in such a way that it becomes a part of the experience of the person who reads it.⁵³⁵

Hemingway’s concern for accuracy is twofold: he refers to the importance of choosing precise words to represent reality, but also to portraying it honestly. His view of the reporter as a medium to communicate true information to the reader was problematic at a time when the figure of the reporter was becoming increasingly notorious. The ‘illusion of objectivity’ appears impossible to maintain after the disappearance of the bystander reporter. This is especially true in the case of the Spanish Civil War, a foreign conflict with which most Americans were not familiar. The American public’s interest in the war in Spain, and the avid demand for stories from the front, can be attributed to a great extent to the famous writers that were involved in it. In some cases, it is evident that the war provided not so much a subject in itself but a convenient setting for the exploration of literary and political themes. In addition, the Spanish war, which was often represented as an allegorical battle between fascism and democracy, and which elicited passionate reactions among correspondents and writers, lent itself well to narration in more subjective terms. While Hemingway remained

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convinced of his role as an emissary of the true events that were happening in Europe, any reporter’s dispatches were necessarily mediated by their narrative approach, political position and writing persona. In the case of Hemingway, despite his quest for veracity, this is particularly obvious. His reports on Spain are a constant succession of explosions and air raids, rushed escapes and poignant conversations with soldiers.

In contrast, Gellhorn’s approach to writing is openly subjective. For her, taking sides, and especially appealing to the reader’s emotions, is a requisite for good reportage. Her feelings and political opinions mediate her descriptions of places and people, and the topics she chooses to report. Her reports always depict life in cities besieged by Francoist forces, and as a narrator she aligns herself with the inhabitants of mainly pro-republican Madrid. The voice of the reporter in Gellhorn’s articles is significantly more contained, and tends to look at the consequences of armed conflicts rather than at the particulars of the conflict itself. As she stated in the prologue to The Face of War, she believed that there was ‘a single plot in war; action is based on hunger, homelessness, fear, pain, and death’. 536

Gellhorn’s dismissal of the role of objectivity in war reporting 537 was linked to the journalistic genre she chose to narrate her experience in Spain. The belief that reportage could convey a true, if not necessarily objective, description of events is very typical of the period. After the end of the civil war, many writers and journalists, including Herbert Matthews, were accused of having painted an idealised and triumphant version of the Spanish republican government in their articles. Matthews defended his approach in his memoir The Education of a Correspondent, in which he complained of ‘the same old error which readers and editors will always make […] I)n condemning “bias” one rejects the only factors which really matter—honesty, understanding, and thoroughness.’ 538 The defence of subjectivity that writers such as Matthews and Gellhorn endorsed, and the application of those principles to their writing, partly contributed to the creation of the myth of the Spanish Civil War as an exception, a fair war, a ‘good fight’.

537 Caroline Moorehead, quotes Gellhorn’s statement that she did not care about ‘that objectivity shit’. Moorehead, Gellhorn, p. 6.
538 Matthews, Education, p. 69.
The subjective approach that many war reporters of the 1930s adopted in their work increased the public perception of war reporters as heroic, which credited them with a special sensitivity that could bring the reality of war into their living rooms. The myth of the daring and compassionate war reporter of the Spanish and Second World Wars endured well beyond the conflicts. In his obituary of Robert Capa, the American novelist John Steinbeck, who had worked and travelled with him in 1947, wrote a description of the photojournalist that again alludes to the special capacity of the reporter to invest news with compassion and an understanding of human suffering:

It does seem to me that Capa has proved beyond all doubt that the camera need not be a cold mechanical device. Like the pen, it is as good as the man who uses it. It can be the extension of mind and heart. […] Capa knew […] that you cannot photograph war because it is largely an emotion. But he did photograph that emotion, by shooting beside it.540

Looking Back on the War: The Spirit of Los Rojos

Gellhorn’s connection with the Spanish war did not cease when the conflict ended in 1939. The war became a recurrent theme in her works, and she constantly reminisced about her time as a reporter in Spain. As for many other writers, the defeat of the republican government, and especially the political ideals it represented for the American left, was a huge disappointment for her. ‘[It feels] like having a death in the family,’ she wrote to Eleanor Roosevelt in 1939.541 Although she had been toying with the idea since 1937, Gellhorn did not manage to write a novel based on her experience in Spain, and only a brief sketch of the

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book remains as testimony to her efforts. By June 1940 she seemed to have given up, and wrote to Hortense Flexner:

Someday, when I am surer of myself [...] I shall try to put down on paper what it means to have lost the war in Spain. [...] I haven’t the faith of a flea left and am acquiring the detachment which Wordsworth, the old bastard, preached: due to the indifference resulting from having lost what I cared about. [...] But there come days when it seems to be utterly unbearable to have lost that land, those bald, always moving, forever hills, the claw sharp mountains, the green plains that go down to Aranjuez where they grow strawberries and asparagus. I don’t know, maybe that is not a book but a poem. A lament.

Instead, later that year she published A Stricken Field, a novel set in Czechoslovakia at the outbreak of the Second World War, in which she was finally able to find a frame for her fictional study of the human consequences of war. She also continued to be in touch with several of the writers and reporters she had met in Spain, such as Herbert Matthews and Dorothy Parker; with the Lincoln Brigades member and scriptwriter Alvah Bessie, who was a link to her days as an activist; and with Spanish republican exiles, such as the republican chief of censorship Constancia de la Mora. In 1945, when she was stationed in Paris reporting on the World War for Collier’s, she published an article about the Spanish refugee families held in concentration camps in France. Gellhorn wrote admiringly about their resilience, ending her report on a hopeful note:

[...] after six years of repression inside Spain and six years of horror in exile, these people remain intact in spirit. They are armed with a transcendent faith; they have never won, and yet they have never accepted defeat. [...] You can sit in a basement restaurant in Toulouse and listen to men, who have

542 Circa 1951-2 Gellhorn again attempted to write a novel about the civil war. The unfinished draft of the novel revolves around the character of Marian Ramsay, loosely based on Gellhorn, whose French boyfriend Etienne de Varenges (which borrows many features from Bertrand de Jouvenel), a journalist, has enlisted in the International Brigades. Against the advice of her boyfriend, Marian decides to join him and takes a night-train to Spain ‘with a knapsack’ and ‘no papers’.

Box 1, Folder 17. Martha Gellhorn Papers, Howard Gotlieb Center, Boston University, USA

uncomplainingly lost every safety and comfort in life, talking of their republic; and you can believe quite simply that, since they are what they are, there will be a republic across the mountains and that they will live to return to it. ⁵⁴⁴

During the months she lived in Cuernavaca, Mexico, between 1948 and 1949 she became close to a group of Spanish communist exiles. She got back in touch with de la Mora, who also lived in Cuernavaca, and she was one of the few mourners at de la Mora’s funeral after she died in a traffic accident. ⁵⁴⁵ Meeting Robert Capa in different locations while they were both at work always reminded her of the time they had spent in Spain, ⁵⁴⁶ and in 1958, after the death of the photographer, she wrote the novella ‘Till Death Do Us Part’, based on their friendship, in which she recalled the moments they shared in Madrid.

With time, her experience in Spain inevitably became glamorised in her mind, progressively becoming for her both a symbol of her coming-of-age in the field of war reporting, and also an idealised, abstract conflict symbolic of a time when one was still able to choose sides clearly, when people could fight for a just cause. In the introduction to her first collection of war articles, *The Face of War* (1959), she presents a picture of her arrival in Spain that follows the stereotype of the intrepid reporter, stating that she arrived in the country carrying only ‘a knapsack and 50 dollars’. ⁵⁴⁷ This version contrasts with the testimonies of other reporters and writers, such as Lillian Hellman, who unanimously remember her sophisticated appearance and practical but chic clothes, even on her visits to the battlefronts of Madrid. ⁵⁴⁸ Her growing exasperation at being considered a naive protégée of Hemingway ⁵⁴⁹—a version propagated by Carl Rollyson, author of a sensationalist biography on Gellhorn ⁵⁵⁰—also led her to rewrite her decision to

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⁵⁴⁵ Gellhorn also wrote a long, sober but deeply felt eulogy to de la Mora, which may not have been published but is kept with her papers on Spain at the Howard Gotlieb Center.
⁵⁴⁹ Gellhorn, Moorehead (ed.), *Letters*, p. 487.
travel to the civil war as an exclusively personal choice motivated by her political beliefs, avoiding any references to her ex-husband.

The 1960s was a fruitful decade for the publication of memoirs by writers and journalists who had travelled to Spain during the war, and Gellhorn did not hide her irritation at those who dressed up their role in the Spanish Civil War in their autobiographies. Never one to remain silent, she entered a polemic with the American playwright Lillian Hellman regarding the latter’s memoir *An Unfinished Woman* (1969), which Gellhorn deemed full of inaccuracies and mistakes. In 1989, she published an incensed article in the *Paris Review* in which, showing discrepancies in dates and places, she methodically contested most of the account that Hellman had written of her own stay in Spain, of Gellhorn herself and of Ernest Hemingway. She also rejected the version that Hellman had given of her participation in the war, claiming that Hellman had not been in Madrid during the worst days of the air raids.  

Gellhorn’s frustration with revisionist accounts of the Spanish war and the reporters that had worked on it grew steadily over the years. In 1975, she wrote a letter to Alfred Gellhorn complaining about Philip Knightley’s well-known book *The First Casualty*, which explored the history and cultural impact of the war reporter:  

Fellow named Knightley who has never been near a war has written a book about war correspondents (says none of them did much; naming at length only me for praise in Vietnam, can you beat it?).  

She was particularly infuriated by Knightley’s assertion that Capa’s photograph ‘The Falling Soldier’ had been carefully staged. Gellhorn agreed to appear on television to discuss the book, although she was not satisfied with her participation, which she characterised as a ‘boring muddle’.  

She returned to Madrid on the day Francisco Franco died, 20 November 1975, which ended a dictatorship that had lasted thirty-six years. In February

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553 Gellhorn, Moorehead (ed.), *Letters*, p. 420.
1976, she published ‘When Franco Died’ in *New York Magazine*[^554]. She had chosen to stay at the luxurious Palace Hotel, which she had visited thirty years before when it had been turned into an emergency army hospital, its sitting rooms turned into surgeries. Rather than a portrayal of the uncertain first days after the death of Franco, the article is a vehicle for Gellhorn’s recollections of her time in Spain during the 1930s. One of her first descriptions is of the TV room at the Palace Hotel, where a group of well-dressed Franco sympathisers are mourning the death of the dictator while watching the broadcast of the funeral ‘in the same room where soldiers of the Spanish Republic had pieces of steel cut from their bodies, had their legs and arms amputated’.[^555] Feeling overwhelmed by the hassle and confusion that predominated in people’s interactions after the death of the dictator, Gellhorn recounts that she ‘withdrew on a nostalgia trip, asking a grey-haired taxi driver to take me to the Retiro park where the zoo used to be’. Her conversation with the taxi driver, who had fought on the side of the Republic and had witnessed the bombardment of the area during the war, is described as an exchange between two war veterans: ‘He turned with a big warm smile and shook hands. He had been here too. […] We had a good old-soldier’s chat; I checked everything against his better memory.’[^556]

The focus of Gellhorn’s article moves intermittently from nostalgic remembrance to political vindication, echoing the calls for an amnesty for the political prisoners who were still in jail for opposing Franco’s regime, and hoping that the European Economic Community would not accept Spain’s membership unless the prisoners were freed. Thirty years may have passed, but Gellhorn still resented the lack of help from the United States to establish a permanent democracy in Spain:

> Nobody in Spain who longs for our ordinary freedoms expects any support, moral or political, from the government of the United States. On the contrary. That’s sad and shameful, but that’s how it is.[^557]

[^555]: Gellhorn, *View*, p. 338.
[^556]: Gellhorn, *View*, p. 347.
[^557]: Gellhorn, *View*, p. 343.
The article ends with Gellhorn travelling to Garabitas Hill, the scene of many battles during the war, to enjoy a panoramic view of the city at dusk. Although by 1975 the political idealism of the 1930s seemed almost impossible to conceive, for Gellhorn the meaning of the Spanish Civil War remained untouched. Her conclusion to the article shows the same radical passion, and the same idealism, with which she had viewed the war when she travelled to Spain in her twenties: ‘If defeat in a long, appalling war and 36 years of Franco couldn’t crush the spirit of Los Rojos, nothing can. When the losers are indomitable, someday, somehow they must win.’

Martha Gellhorn’s last documented visit to Spain took place in 1991, when she was aged 81. The Spanish novelist Juan Benet, whom she had met in the United States while they were both attending a seminar at Michigan State University, had invited her to visit Madrid. Gellhorn, Benet, and the novelists Vicente Molina Foix and Javier Marias met for dinner at a restaurant in the centre of Madrid. Molina recounts Gellhorn’s elated surprise when she heard that Chicote, the bar where American correspondents used to meet during the war and which Hemingway used as a setting for his play *The Fifth Column*, was still open, and that she insisted on going. They stayed, talking and drinking, until three in the morning.

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558 Gellhorn, *View*, p. 349.
Epilogue: The Afterlives of the Spanish Civil War

By the beginning of 1939, the downfall of the Republican government had started to become evident. Before the conflict was declared officially over, hundreds of thousands had fled to France crossing the Pyrenees on foot, many of them never to return. The news of Franco’s victory was distressing for the foreign volunteers who had fought against fascism in Spain; the letters and diaries of Cunard, Warner and Gellhorn bear witness of how deeply they felt the defeat. There was however not much time to mourn the end of the Republic, as a greater, more threatening war began as the other ended. The same writers who had passionately defended the idea of a ‘fair war’ in Spain generally lived the Second World War in a much more sober way. W.H. Auden left Britain shortly before the outbreak of the war and settled in the United States, a decision that was met with immediate disapproval by some of his contemporaries. The grim reality of war extinguished the enthusiasm that had pervaded the writing of the left since 1936. As Linda Shires has argued, 1939 brought with it an ‘overwhelming sense of an ending’\(^561\), and a sense of failure slowly replaced the hopeful revolutionary ideas.

Correspondingly, the emotions that the war in Spain had elicited were soon regarded as hyperbolic and naïve, especially as the atrocities perpetrated by the Communist regime came to light. Looking back at their involvement in the war, writers such as Orwell, Auden, Spender and Dos Passos came to regret their initial fervent support of the Republican forces. Many others, however, including Cunard, Gellhorn, Warner, Hemingway and Matthews, remained convinced of the importance of the war in the fight against the expansion of fascism in Europe. In her introduction to *The Face of War*, written in 1959, Gellhorn complained about the “carefully fostered prejudice against the Republic of Spain” in America at the time of writing, and reinstated the same feeling she tried to communicate in her articles for *Collier’s* during the 1930s:

Long ago I gave up repeating that the men who fought and those who died for the Republic, whatever their nationality and whether they were Communists, anarchists, Socialists, poets, plumbers, middle-class professional men, or the one Abyssinian prince, were brave and disinterested, as there were no rewards in Spain. They were fighting for us all, against the combined force of European fascism. They deserved our thanks and our respect and got nothing.562

As has been noted in previous chapters, the involvement of Warner, Cunard and Gellhorn with the cause of the Republic, and particularly with exiled writers and artists, continued after the war. This was exceptional rather than typical. The documents held at their respective archives show the many ways in which the three women worked to keep the memory of the refugees alive, contributing to diverse relief campaigns and providing connections to English-speaking periodicals and publishers. Their stories are part of a wider history of Republican writers in Europe and America during the decades ensuing the conflict. Although some fascinating studies have been published in recent years563, there is still much to be said about the relationship of English-speaking writers and Spanish refugees after the civil war.

After 1939, the victorious side controlled the memory of the civil war. Franco’s retelling of history constructed it as a Christian crusade against Communism and for the unity of Spain, and alternative accounts, including artistic representations, were strictly censored. Abroad, however, both Spanish exiles and foreign writers and artists continued to reinterpret the meanings of the conflict in fiction, film, and art. The forty-year long dictatorship that followed the war, by which Spain became politically isolated from other democratic countries in Europe, contributed to the persistence of the tragic image of the overthrown Republic. The conflict had been narrated in quasi-mythical terms from its onset. Nowhere is this more evident than in the treatment of the International Brigades,

563 Two notable works are Luis Monferrer Catalán’s Odisea en Albion: Los republicanos españoles exiliados en Gran Bretaña, 1936-1977 (Madrid: Ediciones de la Torre, 2007) and José Manuel Pereiro Otero’s Vanguardia, exilio y traducción en las posguerras europeas: Nancy Cunard y Ramón del Valle Inclán (Madrid: Editorial Verbum, 2010).
which almost immediately were the subject of laudatory poems and songs. By the time the Second World War finished, the war had already been transformed into a hazy revolutionary dream in the public imagination, as if it belonged to a much more distant past. It came to designate a time of naïve political idealism that, after the horrifying images of civilian casualties in the last years of World War II, was no longer conceivable. Throughout the first half of the 1940s the symbolism of the Spanish war in Anglophone literature was no longer based on uplifting ideas of social justice and heroism, but instead turned markedly melancholic. An example is Tennessee Williams’ memory play *The Glass Menagerie* (1944), which narrates Tom Wingfield’s reminiscences of his family during the 1930s—‘that quaint period’, as he describes it. In Williams’s play the war symbolises a lost opportunity of personal fulfilment for the protagonist. Amateur poet Tom, perpetually dissatisfied, sees the conflict as a real revolution beyond the social protests in America:

> In Spain there was revolution. Here there was only shouting and confusion. In Spain there was Guernica. Here there were disturbances of labour, sometimes pretty violent, in otherwise peaceful cities such as Chicago, Cleveland, Saint Louis. . .

Tom’s discontent and frustration, which gradually mounts throughout the play, is later made more evident as he sits down to read the evening paper, with an ‘enormous headline’ which states ‘Franco Triumphs.’

Several Hollywood films portrayed a civil war veteran character during the 1940s. As Bernard F. Dick has argued, the participation in the civil war was often used as an effective means of characterisation, a mention of Spain sufficing to ‘establish a character as a left-winger’. A well-known example is Michael Curtiz’s *Casablanca* (1942), whose protagonist, the American expatriate Rick Blaine, has come back from fighting in the International Brigades. Richard Wallace’s *The Fallen Sparrow* (1943), which starred John Garfield and Maureen

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566 Williams, *The Glass Menagerie*, p. 89.
O’Hara, recounted the story of an American civil war veteran back in America recovering from his stay at an internment camp in Spain. In Orson Welles’ *The Lady from Shanghai* (1947), starring the director himself and Rita Hayworth, Welles’ character, ‘black Irish’ Michael O’Hara, has to confront his past after having killed a Franco-supporter while in Spain with the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. In 1943, Sam Wood’s film adaptation of Hemingway’s novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls* became the first mainstream film set in the Spanish war. The film, much like the novel, which was written after the Republic’s defeat, is elegiac in tone. Wood’s film, however, provided a more hopeful ending. Unlike Hemingway’s work, which mercilessly leaves its protagonist to die in agony, the film left the final fate of Robert Jordan open to the imagination of the audience.

The popularity of the conflict waned with the beginning of the Cold War, which was predicated on a discourse of anti-communism. The volunteer soldier of the Spanish Civil War lost the heroic undertones that had previously characterised the representations of the International Brigades. Nancy Mitford parodied the involvement of foreigners in the war in her description of the aloof and passionate Linda travelling to help the Spanish refugees following her lover in her novel *The Pursuit of Love* (1945)\(^{568}\). A similar story was presented in the adaptation of Hemingway’s short story ‘The Snows of Kilimanjaro’\(^{569}\), a film of the same title directed by Henry King in 1952. King’s film turns Hemingway’s protagonist into a civil war veteran who travelled to the frontlines to find a Spanish lover who had abandoned him. Interpreting the role of the war in Faulkner’s 1959 *The Mansion* (the last part of his ‘Trilogy of the Snopes Family’) is more complicated. The novel, set in the period between the late 1930s and the 1940s, describes the story of Linda Snopes, a card-carrying communist back in America after volunteering in Spain, where her husband Khol has been killed. After the Second World War is over, and the New South becomes increasingly prosperous, she finds herself desperate to find a social cause to occupy her time. Linda is portrayed pathetically, unable to move forward and trapped in a past of fervent support for political causes. Faulkner’s narrator summarised the difficulties that lay ahead for the Americans who had volunteered in Spain:

She mentioned it [Spain] now and then, not as if it had ever happened but as if their side hadn’t been licked. Some of them like Khol had been killed and a lot of the others had had the bejesus blown out of the eardrums and arms and legs like her, and the rest of them were scattered (and in no time now would begin to be proscribed and investigated by the F.B.I., not to mention harried and harassed by amateurs, but we hadn’t quite reached that yet).\(^{570}\)

A similar story of political persecution constitutes the plot of Alvah Bessie’s *The Un-Americans* (1957)\(^ {571}\). Bessie, a screenwriter and translator, had volunteered with the International Brigades and wrote about his experience in his 1939 memoir *Men in Battle*\(^ {572}\). One of the ‘Hollywood Ten’, in 1947 he was blacklisted and barred from work for refusing to discuss his relationship with the American Communist Party. His novel is greatly inspired by his own experience with the House Committee on Un-American Activities, which closely investigated Americans who had participated in the war in Spain. The novel opens with the transcript of a hearing held by the Committee in which the protagonist, Francis Lang, is questioned about a play he wrote on the subject of the civil war. Flashback episodes of his time in Spain as a foreign correspondent are intercalated with his experience in America ten years later.

In the early 1960s the interest in the war in Spain revived, and the first comprehensive scholarly histories of the conflict appeared during the first half of the decade\(^ {573}\). At a time of social upheaval and political vindications, from the cause of Civil Rights to the opposition to the war in Vietnam, the civil war—specifically the protest literature it had inspired—was claimed as a model. The Spanish war had considerable impact in the American folk music tradition, which recovered old soldier songs and romances from the 1930s and incorporated them into their repertoire. In 1961, Peter Seeger’s *Songs of the Lincoln Battalion*, which

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\(^{571}\) Alvah Bessie, *The Un-Americans* (London: John Calder, 1957)


\(^{573}\) The most notable work was Hugh Thomas’s seminal book *The Spanish Civil War* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1961), which still remains one of the most influential histories of the conflict.
he had recorded in 1943, were reissued in 1960 in a record titled *Songs of the Lincoln and International Brigades*. The record also included the *Six Songs for Democracy* recorded by the German singer Ernst Busch while he was volunteering in Spain, and which played from loudspeakers daily in revolutionary Madrid and Barcelona.

Across the Atlantic, the ghost of the civil war reappeared in several popular novels of the period. It became a tragic setting in Muriel Spark’s *The Prime of Miss Jane Brodie* (1961), in which teacher Jane Brodie, a Mussolini sympathiser, encourages one of her students to go to Spain and fight against Franco, where she dies soon after arriving. This episode marks the beginning of the downfall of model teacher Miss Brodie, who is fired for encouraging her class of students to endorse Fascism. Iris Murdoch’s novel *The Red and the Green* (1965), which focuses on the Irish Easter Rising in 1916, includes an epilogue set in 1939 in which two characters discuss the future legacy of the Spanish Civil War, thus placing the Irish Rising within a genealogy of popular revolutions.

After the death of Franco in 1975 and the arrival of democracy in Spain, interpretations of the civil war in literature and film proliferated in the country and abroad. In 1995 Ken Loach released what many still consider the best English-speaking cinematic recreation of the conflict, *Land and Freedom*, which tells the story of a British volunteer in Aragon. The Spanish war, and the people who became involved in it, continue to exert a powerful fascination to this day, and recent works have reinterpreted it as the setting for political thrillers, romances and historical novels, among other genres.

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574 The songs, along with a brief history of their composition, recording and preservation, have been collected in Manuel Requena Gallego’s *Canciones de las Brigadas Internacionales* (Sevilla: Renacimiento, 2007).
577 Some recent works contemporary fiction based on the Spanish Civil War are C. J. Samson’s *Winter in Madrid* (Leicester: Howes, 2006), set during the immediate aftermath of the war; Naomi Wood’s *Mrs Hemingway* (Basingstoke: Pan Macmillan, 2014), which fictionalises the time Hemingway and Gellhorn spent in Spain, and Lydia Syson’s young adult romance about a volunteer nurse in Spain, titled *A World Between Us* (London: Hot Key, 2012).
As the sheer number of works of fiction, nonfiction and poetry inspired in the conflict testify, the impact of the Spanish Civil War in the English literature of the 1930s was extraordinary. The conflict prompted writers to reflect upon their role and responsibilities in society, a question that was at the centre of intellectual debates during the period. The necessity to ‘take sides’ that many writers defended responded to their belief that it was essential to publicly denounce the dangers of fascism, portrayed as the enemy of culture. Furthermore, it was related to the idea that writers and intellectuals were particularly qualified to lead society towards a new, more egalitarian regime. After political initiatives such as the League of Nations had failed to establish peace, many writers and artists were convinced of their role as cultural ambassadors to promote international cooperation. Such ideas naturally influenced their perception of the role and importance of literature and, as I have argued in this study, the focus and subjects of the literary works themselves.

The wave of cultural activism spurred by the war in Spain prompted the formation of a network of revolutionary authors, characterising the end of the 1930s as one of the most fruitful decades for international contact and collaborations between writers. War-ridden Madrid and Barcelona became meeting points for writers concerned with social causes such as anti-fascism, anti-racism and workers’ rights. But in addition to the international response it inspired, the war also became a site for discussions on ideas of cosmopolitanism and world citizenship. While critical studies have often overlooked its influence, it is impossible to overstate the importance that the idea of international solidarity had in the literature of the civil war, which is present, often explicitly, in almost every work on the subject. The notion, which had its roots in the pacifist theories that originated at the end of the Great War and became increasingly socially-focused throughout the interwar period, is at the heart of the representations of the foreign war in Anglophone poetry, fiction, and reportage. Understanding the origin and pervasiveness of this concept is key to nuance the common perception of the literature the Spanish Civil War as an isolated upsurge of radical thought solely motivated by the communist leanings of its authors. Hemingway chose to title his Spanish Civil War novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls* after a well-known
quotation from John Donne’s *Devotions* (its current popularity is attributed precisely to its use in Hemingway’s novel), which also serves as a preface for the work:

No man is an *Iland*, intire or it selfe; every man is a peece of the
*Continet*, a part of the maine; if a Clod bee washed away by the *Sea*,
*Europe* is the lesse, as well as if a *Promontorie* were, as well as if a
*Mannor* of thy *friends* or of thine owne were; any mans *death* diminishes
*me*, because I am involved in Mankind; And therefore never send to know
for whom the *bell* tolls; It tolls for thee.⁵⁷⁸

Donne’s quotation echoes the sacrificial death of Hemingway’s protagonist, Robert Jordan, at the end of the novel. At the same time, it reflected the belief in human togetherness that had driven many writers to risk their lives in a foreign war. While it is perhaps difficult for the modern reader to regard such a sentiment without suspicion, this notion is greatly responsible for the change in the presentation of foreign culture, landscape and people that differentiates the English literature of the Spanish conflict from earlier instances of travel literature. It is therefore necessary to look at the cultural response of the war as belonging to a wider dialogue about notions of national belonging and world citizenship rather than solely exploring the particulars of a conflict between communism and fascism.

In this dissertation I hope to have demonstrated the importance of the contributions of Nancy Cunard, Martha Gellhorn, and Sylvia Townsend Warner to the literature of the Spanish Civil War. Their works constitute some of the earliest examples of war writing by women in the era of ‘total war’ in Europe, narrating how conflict modified the quotidian existence of people and transformed the urban landscape. While critical studies of the literature of the war have been traditionally dominated by the works of the ‘Auden group’, Hemingway, and Orwell, the work of these three women writers not only complements those perspectives but also provides new approaches for understanding the cultural

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⁵⁷⁸ John Donne, fragment from ‘Meditation XVII’, *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions* [1624], quoted in Ernest Hemingway, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1940), n.p.
meaning of the conflict. Focusing on the works of Gellhorn, Warner and Cunard has allowed me to explore diverse cultural modes and literary genres. Analysing the poetry and publishing projects of Nancy Cunard allows us to trace the ideas that are at the centre of the anti-fascist activism in Spain back to the theories of socialist internationalism that became popular during the interwar period. In addition, her poetry and articles for the Manchester Guardian establish an ideological connection between the social activism that grew around war in Spain and the anti-Imperialist movement in the 1930s. Warner’s After the Death of Don Juan, the most prominent British novel about the Spanish war, reflects the author’s interpretation of the conflict as a class war and prompts the question of how specific historical events and literary and cultural traditions influenced the perception of Spain in Britain. Warner’s poetry explores the realities of combat through landscape symbolism, taking the reader on a journey through the geography of the war-torn country. The love poems she wrote to Valentine Ackland in 1936 with the civil war as setting are unique in the literature of the conflict. Finally, Gellhorn’s dispatches for Collier’s Weekly allow us to reconsider the emergence of the sub-genre of reportage in the late 1930s as a formal vehicle to communicate the subjective experience of war. Her career as a war reporter throws light on the growing standing of the figure of the foreign correspondent in periodicals during the 1930s and 40s, and the ways in which female reporters might coordinate their narrative choices with the rhetoric of the ‘man of action’.

As can be inferred by the amount of unpublished material referenced in this dissertation, work remains to be done to recover the legacy of lesser-known writers of the interwar period. Perhaps the most obvious and necessary project would be to edit the correspondence to and from Nancy Cunard. Considering the hundreds of letters to and from Cunard that are kept at the Harry Ransom Research Center in Austin, and especially the variety and literary reputation of her correspondents—among whom are Eliot, Pound, Warner, Aragon, and many others—, it is inexplicable that they remain unpublished. I hope that this dissertation contributes to a reassessment of the role of women writers in the war in Spain, as well as to widening the critical perspectives used to analyse the cultural significance of the conflict. The writings on the conflict of Warner, Cunard, and Gellhorn reflect their need to make sense of a fast-changing world in
which the rules of war were being rewritten. Their works further our knowledge of the cultural impact of the Spanish Civil War, and why it caught the imagination of writers and artists worldwide.

Fig. 7. Monument to *La Pasionaria* in Glasgow, by Arthur Dooley, unveiled in 1979.
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‘Nancy Cunard Collection’, Harry Ransom Research Center. University of Texas at Austin (USA)
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New Statesman and Nation
New Times & Ethiopia News
Spanish Newsletter
The Spectator
The Times
Time and Tide
The Transatlantic Review
Voice of Spain
Woman To-Day

United States:
Baltimore Afro-American
Collier’s Weekly
The Crisis
New Masses
The New Yorker
New York Magazine
The New York Times
The Volunteer for Liberty

Spain:
ABC
Hora de España
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Appendix 1

Sylvia Townsend Warner’s five poems for Valentine Ackland, written in 1936 during their stay in Barcelona (Previously unpublished)\(^{579}\)

(Sylvia Townsend Warner Archive, ‘H (R) 5/6’, Dorset County Museum, Dorchester)

1.

You pull the stranded air
And through our house the unbowed
The marching Catalan tune goes by.

Perish do they, the roused,
The good, the resolute?
Speed may be summed by any fixed

Measure, this tune compute
How many miles an hour
The bombers from Majorca fly.

Embraced with all my power
Of love, not only you
I clasp, not only you I greet—

Their heartsblood signals through
Your hastened heartbeat, erect
In you their stature comforts mine.

We march as they direct
For freedom, while the unbowed,
The marching Catalan hymn goes by.

2.

We did not go there with hearts unexercised
In love—and falling in love, and the minds marriage—
Love for each other was the chiefest part of our baggage,
Love for our kind, too. But more than we surmised

Befell us even before we had passed the Pyrenees.
On our journey’s threshold we loved the never-again
Militia boy who would champion us into Spain,
And Tioli with his good brown face and his bare knees.

Emmrich we loved, Fideli at the Colon,
Veteran Ramona, the Persecutor of Fascists,
The petrol-lights’ man, the man at the tobacconists
Pallach sleeping with one eye, Serafin and Asuncion.

These stretched our hearts. We should be vilely their debtor
If we do not love further henceforth, and hate better.

3.

In that new city we felt at home,
We were at ease in that air;
Hatless and hand-in-hand, like children allowed
Out by themselves, we walked amid the kind crowd.
We could look people openly in the face.
There was no need to glance
First at the clothes, surmising if we might dare
Then look higher into the countenance of such wear.

They gave us back good as we gave.
No longer was our own
Freedom an exile, there was no need to glove
Glance, we could look at our fellows openly with love.

These other cities cannot unteach
The gait, the guise we learned
Walking by ruined churches where now the clear
Daylight runs and where the sparrows will build next year.

4.

When we had snapped the holy tapers, and thrown away,
The silken, the embroidered, the elegant scapulars,
With drowsy bodies and easy minds we lay
In the matrimonial bed, smooth field of former wars.

The greed and distaste had striven, there the cadet hopes
Flowering in all flesh had been regimented for gain,
There lust had trudged in treadmill, supervised by the pope’s
Encyclical on Christian Marriage, Edition for Spain

But in that bed with lean bodies and laughing minds we lay.
If they return whom we usurped, though they call in exorcist
Hire [?] holy smoke and water, pin image and palm-spray,
It seems to me that their next child may well prove a communist.
6.

Love long the ply of the body, the purpose of mind,
Had seemed our own affair;
But carrying it abroad among our kind
Was our surest permit, our best passport there.
My hand on your arm plainer than badge on sleeve
Credentialled and nationed you
As coming from love’s country with love’s leave,
Experienced and compassionate, intrepid and heart-true.
Appendix 2:
Brief Timeline of Historical and Cultural Events

1933
30 January. Adolf Hitler is named Chancellor in Germany
10 May. Nazi Book Burnings

1934
Miners’ strike and revolutionary uprising in Asturias (Spain)

Congress of Soviet Writers
Nancy Cunard, *Negro: An Anthology*

1935
First Congress of the Association of Writers for the Defence of Culture (Paris)
Federico García Lorca, *Llanto por Ignacio Sánchez Mejías* (*Lament for Ignacio Sánchez Mejías*)

1936
January. Popular Front wins the national elections in Spain
17 July. Military coup d’état, beginning of the Civil War
21 July-27 September. Siege of the Alcazar of Toledo
August. First International Brigades volunteers arrive in Spain

19 August. Federico García Lorca is executed by the Nationalist Forces.
Martha Gellhorn, *The Trouble I’ve Seen*
Sylvia Townsend Warner, *Summer Will Show*
Roy Campbell, *Flowering Rifle*
September-November. Sylvia Townsend Warner, *Poems to Valentine Ackland*
Evelyn Waugh, *Waugh in Abyssinia*
Aldous Huxley, *Eyeless in Gaza*

1937

26 April. Bombing of Guernica

Wyndham Lewis, *The Revenge for Love*

W. H. Auden, *Spain*

Martha Gellhorn becomes *Collier’s Weekly’s* correspondent in Spain

Nancy Cunard publishes the answers to the questionnaire *Authors Take Sides (Left Review)*

Nancy Cunard and Pablo Neruda, *Les Poètes Du Monde Défendent le Peuple Espagnol*

4-18 July. Second Congress of Writers for the Defence of Culture (Valencia, Madrid, Barcelona, Paris)

July. First screenings of Joris Ivens’s *The Spanish Earth*

July. Picasso exhibits his painting ‘Guernica’ at the Paris International Exhibition

John Sommerfield, *Volunteer in Spain*

1938

October. Withdrawal of the International Brigades

Sylvia Townsend Warner, *After the Death of Don Juan*

George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*

Aldous Huxley, *They Still Draw Pictures*

Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas*

Herbert Mathews, *Two Wars and More to Come*

Evelyn Waugh, *Scoop*

1939

1 April. Defeat of the Republican troops and end of the civil war.

1 September. Second World War breaks out in Europe

Cunard reports on the Spanish exiles for the *Manchester Guardian*
John Dos Passos, *Adventures of a Young Man*
Stephen Spender and John Lehmann, *Poems for Spain*
Last issue of *The Criterion*
Christopher Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin*
Christopher Isherwood and W.H. Auden, *Journey to a War*
John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*

1940

14 June. German army enters Paris

Martha Gellhorn, *A Stricken Field*
Ernest Hemingway, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*
Sylvia Townsend Warner, *The Cat’s Cradle-Book*

1941

April 6. Germany invades Yugoslavia and Greece
December. U.S. enters Second World War after the attack on Pearl Harbor

Death of Virginia Woolf
Virginia Cowles, *Looking for Trouble*
Rebecca West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*

1942

Albert Camus, *L’Étranger*
Stefan Zweig, *The World of Yesterday*
Evelyn Waugh, *Put Out More Flags*

1943

31 January. German surrender at Stalingrad
10 July. Mussolini’s Italian fascist government overthrown

Sylvia Townsend Warner, *A Garland of Straw and Other Stories*
Nancy Cunard and George Padmore, *The White Man’s Duty*
1944
4 June. Rome captured by Allies.
6 June. Allied invasion of Normandy
25 August. Allies liberation of Paris

Rafael Alberti, *Romancero General de la Guerra.*
Nancy Cunard, *Poems for France*

1945
End of Second World War

George Orwell, *Animal Farm*
Nancy Cunard begins writing *Nous Gens d’Espagne*