

Say That We Saw Spain Die:  
British and American Women Writers and the Spanish Civil War

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Thesis submitted to the faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts  
In  
English

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April 23, 2008  
Blacksburg, VA

Keywords:  
Spanish Civil War, women, writers

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(ABSTRACT)

All of the writers who went to Spain during the Spanish Civil War had to cope with the differentness of Spain, with the fact that it was a foreign experience. How they handled that foreign experience, whether or not they found an entry point where they could cross the border between being an outsider to being an insider, why some writers were able to cross over and others halted: these are aspects of the outside/inside duality that this paper will bring to the surface in some of the writing of the period. The focus will be on the following women writers: Florence Farmborough, Helen Nicholson, Martha Gellhorn, Josephine Herbst, Frances Davis, Valentine Ackland and Sylvia Townsend Warner. This paper will argue that these women writers, although they came to Spain with different purposes – because they identified with Republican ideology, or to warn their home countries of the dangers of Red Spain, or to spur their home countries into action – shared a common struggle in attempting to become insiders to the war in Spain, and succeeded in varying and revealing degrees.

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## I. Say That We Saw Spain Die:

British and American Women Writers and the Spanish Civil War

Say that we saw Spain die. O splendid bull, how well  
you fought!

Lost from the first.

*-from "Say That We Saw Spain Die" by Edna St. Vincent Millay*

Facing off like the opponents they soon would become, the Nazi eagle and the hammer and sickle gleamed in the Paris sunlight. The Eiffel Tower rising between them, the two pavilions approached its height, the two symbols blazing forth two different ideologies that would alter the history of the twentieth century. In September 1937, Paris hosted the International Exhibition dedicated to Art and Technology in Modern Life. Examples of how architectural starkness can reflect an ideological stubbornness, the Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union pavilions were located close to each other, opposite one another across the park. Both were crowned with the symbols of their nations at the time: the Nazi party's eagle with wings spread stood at the top of the large pillar that topped its exhibition; and the workers, joined together holding the hammer and sickle formed gigantic statues at the top of the Soviet Union's exhibition (Martin 106). In their shadow and located between them, was the Spanish Republic's pavilion. Finished weeks into the exhibition on July 12, the Spanish pavilion was not included on maps of the sites (Martin 109). The only pavilion that the Spanish Republic displayed at a World's Fair, it did not rival Nazi Germany's and the Soviet Union's pavilions in architecture, but it may be the only one remembered today. The Spanish Republic's pavilion was the first building to display *Guernica* by Picasso, a prophetic vision of the total war that would soon rage across all of Europe. The pavilion, rather than showcasing technological advances the theme of the exhibition suggests, intended to raise consciousness of the war in Spain and to collect relief money from visitors. Instead, *Guernica* raised awareness of the annihilating violence the Spanish Civil War inflicted on the Spanish people and how the victims of the war were often defenseless women.

Today, *Guernica* is a famous example of cubist art, with the Basque women drawn in jagged lines and irregular shapes, holding the body of a dead baby or running wildly in panic. A pupil-shaped sun looks down from the upper region of the painting, illuminating the scene of destruction. At the center of the canvas, a bodiless woman floating into the scene through a

window holds a small lamp. This woman enters the scene as a foreigner, as one not affected except by its horror. She comes from the outside in, and in doing so, attempts to become an insider to what is happening in the war. She comes as a witness, bringing light into the darkness of war and revealing the terror and carnage of Guernica. The women who participated in the Spanish Civil War did so as witnesses and came from all over the world. Some women were writers, drawn to the war through their jobs as journalists; some, inspired by the ideological implications of the war, came to Spain as intellectual supporters of the war. Salvador Madriaga, in his foreword to Writers in Arms by Frederick Benson, clearly defines what was attractive about Spain and the war not only to these women, but to all the foreigners who went to Spain at that time:

So, for those noble, disinterested, idealistic, disillusioned intellectuals of the West, flame-like Spain became as a column of fire that led the Jews across the desert, a guiding light. A set of fundamental values was to arise from the Spanish ordeal. The world would no longer be absurd; and we should know not only where we are but where we are going. (xi)

Madriaga captures something of the complications of the outsider's role in this conflict. Bringing light and visibility to the war, its witnesses and foreign participants also brought with them certain expectations and dreams.

When public knowledge surfaced that Germany and Italy were contributing weapons, planes and troops to Franco's Nationalist army, there was great public protest that since those countries had obviously violated the non-intervention treaty, Great Britain should get involved and support the Republican side. Editor and Republican advocate Nancy Cunard distributed a survey to many British and Irish authors asking them to take "Sides on the Spanish Civil War." Many women writers responded and in doing so, made sure to distinguish the reasons why they expressed their particular opinions. Storm Jameson, a well-known novelist and critic at the time, stated in her response:

This hideous war, which is murdering Spain and may let war loose again over the whole of Europe, is the deliberate act of the two Fascist dictators, and avowed by them as such. It is an act they will not hesitate to repeat. Civilisation,<sup>1</sup> the civilisation of the mind and the heart, is threatened with utter ruin by this doctrine which exalts violence and uses incendiary bombs to fight ideas. (Cunningham 226-227)

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<sup>1</sup> All spellings from primary sources have been preserved.

Jameson envisions that Mussolini and Hitler would not simply stop with war in Spain. Here is the flame that drew intellectuals: they conceived of civilisation, of themselves as defending “civilisation of the mind and the heart,” bringing the light of day to all those forces standing against the world of ideas.

As these ideas were being defended, two separate, but simultaneous, wars were being waged in Spain during the civil war. One is the war fought by Spanish ‘insiders’; the second was fought on to the ‘outside,’ or the international stage. Stephen Spender was an English poet who participated in the writers’ congresses that were held in Republican Spain during the war. In his introduction to *Voices Against Tyranny*, Spender explains how:

The first of these [wars] was purely Spanish, a continuation of the age-old struggle of the great Spanish landowners – aristocrats and leaders of the church hierarchy – with the peasants and (of recent times) the industrial workers. [...] The second war was the projection into Spain, partly as a rehearsal for world war, of the international conflict in Europe between Fascists and anti-Fascists. (1)

This duality produces the insider-outsider effect of writing produced by the Spanish Civil War. The first war was “a continuation of the age-old struggle” in the Spanish class system. The only way to truly get inside of this war and be a part of it was to be Spanish, because it was an aspect of an “age-old” culture. The second war was a “projection into Spain,” thought of by outsiders, looking at the war and wondering how it would affect them on the outside. This second conflict had little to do with the fundamental problems that led to the war, but rather with the two ideologies battling it out. Attempting to bring an outsider’s fears and dreams to an insider’s war is what produced such charged responses as Jameson’s to Cunard’s questionnaire, convinced as she was that Spanish Civil War would change Western Europe forever.

Of course, as time has passed, one can look back and evaluate the Spanish Civil War in dual terms: as both a national and international conflict. In his poetry, Spender himself did not focus on this dichotomy. But the lack of explicit expression does not mean that awareness of an inside/outside perspective did not exist for foreign writers at the time of the war. Indeed, all of the writers had to cope with the differentness of Spain, with the fact that it was a foreign experience. How they handled that foreign experience, whether or not they found an entry point where they could cross the border between being an outsider to being an insider, why some writers were able to do cross over and others halted: these are aspects of the outside/inside duality that this paper will bring to the surface in some of the writing of the period. The focus

will be on women writers, for two main reasons. The first reason is the simple truth that the American and British women writers who participated, were involved in, or wrote about the Spanish Civil War have been overlooked by scholars.<sup>2</sup> The second reason is that war is a traditionally masculine and male populated sphere; women are always already outsiders in this environment, although how much of an outsider varies given the ideology of both sides in the war. This paper will argue that these women writers, although they came to Spain with different purposes – because they identified with Republican ideology, or to warn their home countries of the dangers of Red Spain, or to spur their home countries into action – shared a common struggle in attempting to become insiders to the war in Spain, and succeeded in varying and revealing degrees.

The paper will focus on three different categories of these women writers: American and British writers who wrote on behalf of the Nationalist side, American women journalists on both sides of the struggle and British women poets. Out of these three categories, the poets are the most successful in bridging the gap because they are the most efficient at using their imaginations to imagine the insider's position. Florence Farmborough and Helen Nicholson, the Nationalist writers, take advantage of the insider/outsider tension to appeal to their audience. They present themselves to their audience as American and British – like their readers – but also emphasize their insider position to Spain: they know what is really going on in the war because they are eyewitnesses. Farmborough and Nicholson present Franco as the more civilized – more English – of the two sides of the war. They speak as insiders to the outsiders, but in actuality they are still outsiders. The journalists are the most diverse with respect to how they negotiate the outside/inside duality. Frances Davis remained an outsider to the side that she found herself physically on, but became something of an insider to the Republican cause; like the poets, she is able to imagine herself as a Spanish Republican using images of her upbringing and home. Martha Gellhorn also uses familiar images, but her motivation is related more to presenting recognizable images of war to her readers, to make realize that the Spanish Civil War is not entirely foreign. While she herself feels that she became very much an insider to the war, the texture of her writing suggests that this is not entirely certain. Josephine Herbst, as we will see, gets so wrapped up in the real, in the details of her experiences and trying to make sense of them,

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<sup>2</sup> Although there has been a small resurgence in the works of Basque scholar Aránzazu Usandizaga, who in the past five years has published two volumes in Spanish about this particular category of writers.

that she cannot complete the process of bringing of the lamp of witness to this struggle – years later, she is still troubled about her position and reaction in the Spanish Civil War.

## II. Friends of Franco: The Other Women Writers of the Spanish Civil War

Naturally, I am a warm adherent of General Franco's, being, like all of us, a humanitarian. The destruction of so many beautiful objects, and the massacre of so many innocent persons, makes one pity profoundly the ignorant red masses – subsidized by Russia – in Spain.

Do you not agree?

*-Eleanor Smith, in the pamphlet Authors Take Sides on the Spanish War*

Intellectuals from all over the world came to Spain to raise awareness of the ideological implications of the Spanish Civil War, and to report back to their home countries their experiences in Spain. Much scholarship has been done on those foreign intellectuals and writers who sided with the Republicans. Among the most noted names in literary histories are Ernest Hemingway, George Orwell and John Dos Passos. Few English speaking intellectuals supported General Francisco Franco and the Nationalists. When literary histories before 1968 include an opposing side, the South African poet, Roy Campbell, is the writer most commonly mentioned. This is not to say that the Nationalists did not have a similar intellectual support as the Republicans. Indeed, the Nationalist side had intellectual support from non-English speaking fascist countries of the time, such as Italy and Germany.

Although often overlooked by scholars, there was also support for the Nationalist cause from English speakers within Spain itself. In 1968, Stanley Weintraub, a Spanish Civil War scholar, published his literary history entitled The Last Great Cause: The Intellectuals and The Spanish Civil War. Breaking away from previous literary histories such as Hugh Ford's A Poet's War: British Poets and the Spanish Civil War, Frederick Benson's Writers in Arms: The Literary Impact of the Spanish Civil War and Allen Guttman's The Wound in the Heart: America and the Spanish Civil War, Weintraub introduces some 'new faces' which previously had gone unnoticed. Weintraub's is the first of these literary histories to include women writers who wrote and published books during the Spanish Civil War, and the only one to include those who wrote on behalf of the Nationalist cause. It is in The Last Great Cause that I discovered Florence Farmborough, an English woman living in Spain, who gave radio addresses to her fellow countrymen from the National Broadcasting Station of Salamanca supporting the Nationalist side, and whose broadcasts were compiled in the collection Life and People in

National Spain; and American Helen Nicholson, Baroness de Zglinitzki, who wrote about her personal experiences of the war in the memoir Death in the Morning. Their books on Spain were published during the war, in an effort to raise awareness of “the true nature” of the situation in Spain. Although their aim is to report “the true nature” of the war in Spain to their countrymen, these authors rely on portraying the Republicans (often simply “Communists,” even though the Republican side was more complicated than simply that one political vein) as barbarians in order to present Franco as the only man who could civilize these Spanish savages. Speaking as long-time residents of Spain, both writers nonetheless go so far as stating that all Spaniards are incapable of civilizing action and thought, with Franco alone being able to bring them up to the level of European delicacy.

#### Florence Farmborough

Farmborough’s Life and People in National Spain came out in 1938 and had influence during the war. It was not Salamanca (the radio station) or Franco who singled her out to come forward and give English radio talks; Farmborough went to Salamanca and requested the opportunity (Farmborough 1-2). She writes that she “came forward because I felt it to be my duty, realizing that I knew many things about National Spain which could not easily be known to people outside this country, and which, I was convinced, would be of considerable interest to the majority of her countrymen” (2). Farmborough further clarifies her purpose in collecting her talks for publication. The dedication of the book reads, “I dedicate these pages with pride and humility to Generalissimo Franco, the great Spanish soldier and patriot, whose faith, nobility and courage have made him and his brave armies invincible in the Crusade against the Common Foe of Civilisation” (v). The portrayal of Franco as possessing “faith, nobility and courage” and also as battling a “Crusade” against “the Common Foe of Civilisation” are common themes and motifs throughout the book. Farmborough presents Franco as the only ‘decent’ or ‘civilized’ side in the war; the Republican side – a phrase she never uses – is addressed as “Red Hordes.” Essentially, Farmborough only sees what she wants to see inside Spain, and presents what she wants to in her radio broadcasts. She interprets Spain for her English listeners, but her interpretation is skewed.

The introduction begins with the phrase, “I am an Englishwoman,” following with “Therefore it is not a foreigner writing, although I write in a foreign land; it is an Englishwoman who, knowing her country well, is devoted to it and has its welfare ever at heart” (Farmborough

1). The dynamic of the insider/outsider is very clear here: although I am on the outside, speaking from a foreign soil, and I am getting an insider view of what it is like here, I am still like you, my home land. She balances being an insider and an outsider – without actually being either – very well. Farmborough appeals directly to her readers who, at the time, are almost assuredly British. In the suggestion that she “has [her country’s] welfare ever at heart,” she implies that, through her publication, she is somehow conferring upon the reader knowledge of how England is endangered by the Spanish Civil War.

Farmborough had been living in Valencia for ten years before the war started in 1936. She believes that it was the “Red Agents of Soviet Russia” that influenced the Spaniards into more leftist tendencies, an influence she may be able to see more clearly “even than the Spaniards themselves,” believing that “this overwhelming tragedy of Spain has been the direct and inevitable result of Russian plotting and propaganda” (Farmborough 2-3). Farmborough goes on to describe the Russian communist that has infiltrated Spain: “He is certainly a being like the rest of us, but one who dedicates his energy and intelligence to the destruction of everything that the average man and woman would regard, and do regard, as most sacred in their lives (3). The war began, according to Farmborough, because:

On the 18<sup>th</sup> of July, 1936, General Franco – born leader of men – unsheathed his sword to right the many wrongs that hundreds of thousands of his countrymen were suffering at the hands of their own kith and kin, who, pitifully misguided and ignorant, had allowed themselves to be duped by the astute agents of Russia. (4-5)

Farmborough emphasizes the greatness of Franco, “born leader of men” – a man she later describes “a military genius so valiant, so truly patriotic” (Farmborough 12), one who “acts with all the rapidity and vigour of Spanish genius” (Farmborough 19), “this Giant of Spain” (Farmborough 20); dedicating an entire chapter to his praises entitled “Franco, Leader of National Spain.” Farmborough contrasts Franco to the Republican Spaniards, who are “pitifully misguided and ignorant,” and “duped” in their political leanings by covert Russian agents.

These covert Russian agents are a concern of Farmborough’s, as she continues later on in the chapter “The Aspirations of National Spain”:

Spain is a nation of arms; a nation waging a mighty War of Reconstruction with enemies both *without* and *within*. Without, the enemies are the Bolshevik Spaniards, aided by the Red Hordes from Russia and the International Brigades of

Communists, all under subjection to and controlled by Soviet Russia. Within, the enemies are the ancient iniquities of injustice, inequality and disunion. (43)

Here is the intimation of Spender's two wars: an international war of political intrigue with the covert Bolshevik spies that turn up in For Whom The Bell Tolls, and the civil war based on old political unrest. The problem raised is how does Franco plan to solve these "ancient iniquities of injustice, inequality and disunion"?

Throughout her collection of talks, the dynamic is one in which the Republicans – most often simply "Reds" in her descriptions – are uneducated, or simply too far under the spell of Soviet Russia to see Franco's ultimate interest in the country's well-being, and Franco is an intelligent and civilizing force that will organize and protect Spain. Throughout Life and People of National Spain, Farmborough attempts to educate her fellow Englishmen on how National Spain is by far superior to "Red Spain," and indeed, opens the chapter "The National Crusade of Spain" (referencing Franco's July uprising and the start of the civil war) with a direct address to her country:

It is a distressing fact that there are thousands of people in England, intelligent, straightforward, peace-loving, God-fearing people whose ideas of the Civil War in Spain, of its cause and its objective, are entirely erroneous. [...] they think and speak of the Nationalists as rebels or insurgents, and of the great Caudillo, Generalissimo Franco, as the Rebel Leader; and "rebel," as all the world knows, is an unsavoury word, with an unsavoury meaning which, to the average mind, vividly portrays one who revolts against lawful authority or constitutional government. [...] I want to banish all ideas about "insurgents," "rebel chiefs," "revolts against lawful governments," etc., by telling them in a simple, sincere manner the why and wherefore of the Revolutionary Movement of the Spanish Nationalists, and this I am anxious to do that the English world, which is so sound at the core, may have many of its illusions swept away and may see and know National Spain in her true colours. (56-57)

Here, in her direct address to England, notice how she is attempting to influence its thinking about the Nationalists, who were, in fact, revolting against the lawfully elected government. She does not explain why all ideas about the Nationalists as "rebels" or "insurgents" should be banished. Her readers are simply to take her word for it, because, as an insider, she can simply and sincerely sweep away England's "illusions." And her words about "error" are interesting, for she goes on to declare that the reason that the Reds became Red in the first place was their ignorance, a result of their State's lack of education. For the benefit of England, Farmborough paints the Republicans as unlearned: "It was the illiteracy of Spain which drew Lenin's lustful

eyes towards the country; he felt convinced that he could count on the masses, that they would be an easy prey for him, seeing that in their blindness he could lead them where he willed” (Farmborough 146). Farmborough contrasts those mistakes by printing Franco’s education decree that will fix what ignorance the Republican government may have created, and “have a strong a lasting effect on the intellectual development of the present and future generations of Spaniards” (147). Farmborough portrays Franco as the “Giant of Spain” who will unify the nation and, indeed, is the only one who can control the Reds.

The perception of Franco seems to be the nexus of Farmborough’s argument: a portrayal in one of all civilized, Western values. A last description of Franco makes him entirely English:

This Giant of Spain, aware of his strength, has risked his country’s *All* for his country! So the noble work of Salvation goes one. Fearless and resolute the great captain has never swerved from his high purpose and, fighting against fearful odds, has won from the Red Hordes the great part of their ill-gotten territory. His triumphant march continues and will continue to its triumphant end. Generalissimo Franco is the St. George of Spain, nay more, he is the Defender of the Christian Faith, the Champion of the Cause of Justice and Peace in Europe. (Farmborough 20)

Helen Nicholson, Baronnes of Zglinitzki

Stanely Weintraub highlights Nicholson’s contribution: “The fact that Miss Nicholson was one of the most significant novelists writing in the English language [...] from the Franco side is indicative of how unevenly the Civil War split intellectual activists in England and America” (171-172). A minor American fiction writer, Nicholson’s memoir, Death in the Morning, describes her experiences in Andalucia just before and during the Spanish Civil War. Her memoir was published in early 1937. Aside from Death in the Morning, Nicholson also wrote a novel supporting the Nationalist cause, entitled The Painted Bed and published in 1938. The memoir begins when Nicholson arrived in Granada in April 1936, after nearly a two year absence from the country. Nicholson’s daughter, Asta, married a Spaniard named Alfonso (no last name is given), who was head of the English department at the University of Granada. She describes her daughter and son-in-law living in a house on the Alhambra hill, only a hundred yards from the Hotel Washington Irving (Nicholson 10). Nicholson reflects on the unrest growing in the country when in June “a farmer in the country near Granada was murdered by two of his farm-hands; [...] In those days it was quite a simple matter to murder anyone you wished to, provided you were of the left wing, and your victim a member of the right (14-15).” Here, Nicholson attributes both injustice and violence to the left, and in the next few pages, the

reader can see that Nicholson believes, at some level, all Spaniards to be violent and brutal. She discusses an anecdote with her British friend, Mrs. Adams, who tells her about:

[...] of a man in Seville – a foreigner – whose head had been cut off by the mob. “And they played football with it,” she went on. “When the people asked why they had done it, they said it was because they hadn’t liked his face.”

“How very Spanish!” I remarked.

“But how cruel!” she exclaimed.

“Yes, of course, but they are like that.” [...] I knew that Spaniards are capable of the unthinking brutality and cruelty of children. (Nicholson 16-17, 19)

Understanding that Spaniards are the ones capable of “unthinking brutality and cruelty,” the British and American friends label kicking a foreigner’s beheaded face about “very Spanish.” Bringing the reader into their confidences, she offers to share her insider’s view of the situation.

In contrast to Farmborough, Nicholson, once the war starts, puts all the violent acts in other people’s mouths. She herself rarely gives her own opinion on the Republicans or their actions, aside from being stressed that the Alhambra is being bombed, and therefore so is her own house. In a similar vein, in the entire memoir Nicholson never mentions Franco or the Nationalist cause as such. Indeed, it appears as if the only side in the war is the Republican side. Chapter Five, taking place sometime in August, is filled with stories from refugees of what the Republicans did to their villages:

Their stories of Communist atrocities made one’s blood run cold. From the nearby village of Alhama we heard that the priest who married Asta and Alfonso, a kindly, gentle and lovable old man to whom they were very much attached, had been burnt alive. At Guadix, a town perhaps sixty kilometers away, the Reds seized a young Catholic girl of seventeen, tied on of her legs to the iron bars of a window and the other to a motor lorry, and drove the lorry away. [...] In a town near us called Loja large sums of Russian money were found, including 50,000 rouble notes, which most certainly did not grow on the trees there. It was of course no news to us that the Communists were being financed by Russia, but we were startled at finding proof of it so near home. (Nicholson 72-74)

Many more stories like the above can be found in Nicholson’s memoir. By putting such stories into the mouths of the fleeing peasants, of Spaniards that she meets in Andalusia and Gibraltar as she escapes, Nicholson maintains a certain level of credibility in her memoir, in that she is not inventing atrocities to stir the English into action.

To stir the English into action is precisely her goal, however. Nicholson writes how she meets an elderly Spanish gentleman from Málaga. He tells her that ““There was my doctor, who

was also my friend. Because he was Catholic, the Communists went to his house and gouged out his eyes... They left him there, alone and blind, to die, señora” (Nicholson 142). He notices that she is reading the English newspapers available in Gibraltar, and he says:

“Some of the English papers”, said my companion, “don’t seem to understand our cause very well.”

“So I’ve noticed,” I answered. [...] “I wish they could talk to you, and hear what you have told me.”

He shook his head hopelessly. “I am only an old man, señora. But you are going to England, I hear. Why don’t you tell them?”

“I will try to,” I promised him. (Nicholson 143)

The entire book enacts the promise that Nicholson made to that elderly Spanish gentleman. Although the memoir follows her own personal experiences, Nicholson diminishes her hardships in comparison to what the Spanish people suffered at the hands of their own fellow Communist countrymen. Despite the fact that Nicholson barbarizes the Spanish at the beginning of the memoir, her obvious care for them during the war and after she returns to Great Britain demonstrates how she changes from hearing their stories; this is exactly the change that she wishes to bring about in her English-speaking audience.

### III. To See the Life of My Time, Which was War:

#### American Women Journalists and the Spanish Civil War

Between the Apocalyptic vision and Armageddon lay the almost unbridgeable gap of human experience. Experience is not transferable, whatever the eloquence, there was no way of hurrying mankind to embrace its fate. Journalism was no therapeutic care for lethargy.

*Frances Davis, A Fearful Innocence*

In between the two world wars, a generation of women journalists came of age in the Spanish Civil War, gaining the credentials and experience necessary to gain them access to the front lines in World War II. For these women journalists, the Spanish Civil War not only tested their skills as writers, but their abilities to relate to the “insider’s” war being fought in Spain. Some of these journalists, such as Josephine Herbst and Martha Gellhorn, had experience in Germany before the war and witnessed the rise of the Third Reich. In many ways, their motivation in coming to Spain was a reaction to what they saw happening in Germany. Another journalist, Frances Davis, happened to be in Paris when the war in Spain broke out and hurried across the border. In her haste, Davis ended up in Nationalist territory and reporting for a conservative London newspaper, very dangerous considering her own liberal American background.

All three of these women struggled with how to enter into the war in Spain, given that they had to maintain an outsider position in order to report their stories. All three feel very passionately about their beliefs in the Spanish Republic and socialism, but finding a way into the “insider” war was very difficult, and the three writers accomplish this with varying degrees of success and techniques.

#### Martha Gellhorn

Martha Gellhorn’s collection of essays, *The Face of War*, devotes the opening chapter to the war in Spain. This collection was originally published as a whole in 1959, although of course the individual essays were originally published sooner and elsewhere. The collection was revised in 1986, and Gellhorn wrote a new introduction to accompany the edition. In *The Face of War*, Gellhorn includes a section with three essays from her time in Spain, all of them fixed on her experiences of besieged Madrid. In this chapter, there is a small introductory essay that prefaces these three pieces, an essay that details some of Gellhorn’s original intentions and

reflects back on her experiences in the Spanish Civil War. During the war, these three pieces were featured in *Collier's*, a magazine that has since ceased publication. This was Gellhorn's first assignment, although the manner in which the assignment came to be is quite accidental. Gellhorn describes how:

In New York a friendly and spirited man, then an editor for *Collier's*, had given me a letter. The letter said, to whom it might concern, that the bearer, Martha Gellhorn, was a special correspondent for *Collier's* in Spain. This was intended to help me with any authorities who wondered what I was doing in Spain, or why I was trying to get there; otherwise it meant nothing. (15)

At the time, Gellhorn thought the letter could merely be used as a sort of passport into Spain, or a piece of paper to show to authorities questioning her motives. In the end, the letter allowed her to secure the necessary papers for safe conduct into Republican Spain, and then to Madrid (Baker 304).

Gellhorn had quite a bit of publishing experience before heading off to Spain in March 1937. At the age of twenty, Gellhorn left Bryn Mawr, her mother's alma mater, and joined the writing staff at the *New Republic* in New York (Sorel 22). This proving "too academic" and reminiscent of the company she had left at Bryn Mawr, she left the *New Republic* and took a job at the *Albany Times Union*, covering the morgue (Sorel 22). Two years later, in 1930, Gellhorn traded on a favorable article on the Holland America Line for a one-way ticket to Europe, settling in Paris's Left Bank and reporting for *Vogue* and UP (Sorel 22). In 1936, she published a volume of her essays as a field investigator with the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, a position she earned with the backing of Eleanor Roosevelt, a long-time friend of her mother's (Sorel 23). She had finished the series of essays while living in the Roosevelt White House (Sorel 23). The volume was entitled *The Trouble I've Seen*, and was received with rave reviews (Sorel 23). By the time the volume was published, Gellhorn was in Germany checking the background material for a new novel.

In the introduction to the essays on the Spanish Civil War, Gellhorn describes her time in Germany:

In the summer of 1936, I was checking background material for a novel, in the Weltkriegsbibliothek of Stuttgart. The Nazi newspapers began to speak of fighting in Spain. They did not talk of war; the impression I got was of a bloodthirsty rabble, attacking the forces of decency and order. This Spanish rabble, which was the duly elected Republic of Spain, was always referred to as "Red Swine-dogs." The Nazi papers had one solid value: Whatever they were against, you could be for. (13)

Like Josephine Herbst, Gellhorn had spent some time of her youth in Germany; on this visit – years later and as a successful novelist – she spent her time researching. While she worked, Gellhorn witnessed the rise of National Socialism, and read the Third Reich’s take on the Spanish Civil War, a take that Gellhorn was solidly against. The rhetoric in the German papers was notably quite against the Republic, as Gellhorn recalls that the elected Republican government was referred to as “Red Swine-dogs.” Here, there is the international war of ideologies detailed by Spender, with fascist Nazi papers portraying Spanish socialism as a “attacking the forces of decency and order.” Gellhorn would, of course, have been adverse to this type of rhetoric, having spent her youth in Paris, and studied with young Parisian students, becoming a pacifist during her time there (14). After her time in Germany researching, Gellhorn returned to the States, finished her novel, shoved it in a drawer and was off to Spain (14). The climate of the world had changed since her days in Paris: “I had stopped being a pacifist and became an anti-fascist” (14). In Stephen Spender’s terms, she saw Spain from an outsider’s, an internationalist’s, point of view.

During this time in the States finishing her novel, Gellhorn, her mother and one of her brothers took a trip to Key West (Sorel 24). While in Key West, the group ran into Hemingway, who invited the group to his home. Carlos Baker, in his biography of Hemingway entitled, *Ernest Hemingway: A Life*, describes the meeting in more detail:

One day in December Ernest was sitting in Sloppy Joe’s place, nursing a drink and talking with Joe Russell, when a trio of tourists wandered in. [...] The friendship with the Gellhorns ripened quickly. Ernest showed them around the island and invited them to meet Pauline. After her brother’s return to school and her mother’s departure for St. Louis, Martha stayed on a while in Key West. (298)

While frequenting local restaurants and bars together, or simply sitting at his house, the Spanish Civil War, then six months old, was a frequent topic of conversation between Gellhorn and Hemingway (Baker 298, Sorel 24). Gellhorn was determined to go, as was Hemingway, who had signed a contract with the North American Newspaper Alliance, and planned to go in February, 1937 (Sorel 24). Gellhorn left Key West in January, followed closely by Hemingway (Baker 299). Obtaining proper credentials was difficult for Gellhorn, although she was able to obtain them, and set off to Spain two months after leaving Key West, in March 1937 (Sorel 24).

Gellhorn's attitude toward the Spanish Civil War was one of solidarity and seems to have grown out of her time in Germany. She states in the memoir, "I had no connection with a newspaper or magazine, and I believed that all one did about a war was go to it, as a gesture of solidarity, and get killed, or survive if lucky until the war was over" (15). Such a comment makes the reader wonder at Gellhorn's expectations in going to Spain. According to the introduction of these essays, she simply wanted to demonstrate solidarity. To return to Picasso's *Guernica*, we might say that she wanted to bring the lamp of anti-fascism from outside in. Baker, in his biography of Hemingway, describes Gellhorn as seeing herself "as more politically aware as well as more fiercely anti-Fascist than [Hemingway] was. Nor was she, strictly speaking, a war correspondent, though she carried a 'fake letter' supplied by Kyle Crichton of *Collier's* magazine" (304). What seems strange but revelatory is that she was able to verbalize no purpose save standing as a witness in solidarity with the Republic. Gellhorn explains that she "had no idea you could be what I became, an unscathed tourist of wars" (15-16). Even the expression "an unscathed tourist of wars" denotes her own inexperience at the time, her naïve expectation of what being present in Spain would entail. In his biography of Gellhorn, *Beautiful Exile: The Life of Martha Gellhorn*, Carl Rollyson describes the solidifying of Gellhorn's political beliefs and her perception of Americans at the start of the Spanish Civil War:

Gellhorn had a feel for day-to-day existence in Germany and she realized Americans did not have the faintest notion of what the Nazi takeover meant, not just for politics and international affairs, but for learning and art. [...] It often frustrated Gellhorn that Americans did not grasp how easily groups like the Nazis were able to destroy democratic values. (65)

Rollyson writes in reference to a piece that Hemingway convinced Maxwell Perkins to buy for *Scribner's Magazine*, entitled "Exile," and which appeared in the September 1937 issue (64). Here as well, Gellhorn was able to see the impact fascism was having across the globe, and attempted to shine a light on that impact with a story about a German refugee. One assumes that her ambitions in Spain were roughly similar.

In her introduction, Gellhorn thanks *Collier's* for the manner in which the magazine treated the pieces she began to publish, "Thanks to *Collier's*, I had the chance to see the life of my time, which was war. They never cut or altered anything I wrote" (16). Gellhorn describes how, once in Spain, she followed other journalists, taking advantage of their access to funds to gain her own access to the front, bringing along nothing of value save her eyes:

I tagged along behind the war correspondents, experienced men who had serious work to do. Since the authorities gave them transport and military passes (transport was far harder to come by than permission to see everything; it was an open, intimate war) I went with them to the fronts in and around Madrid. (16)

Gellhorn's description of the Spanish Civil War as "an open, intimate war" is a curious one, to say the least. There is also the gender dynamic that Gellhorn notes and perhaps creates in her introduction when she says that she "tagged along behind [...] experienced men who had serious work to do." It may be that Gellhorn intends to emphasize her inexperienced status, her aimlessness in going to Spain, for the "experienced" war correspondents had "serious work to do." In this interim period of tagging along with the male war correspondents, Gellhorn "did nothing except learn a little Spanish and a little about war, and visit the wounded, trying to amuse or distract them" (16). Gellhorn carried on like this for some time, explaining how "one day, weeks after I had come to Madrid, a journalist friend observed that I ought to write, it was the only way I could serve the *Causa*, as the Spaniards solemnly and we lovingly called the war in the Spanish Republic" (16). Nancy Sorel theorizes that this "journalist friend" is Hemingway, who inspired her after they had a fight and he left her company, in a way, allowing her to write again (37). Gellhorn's reaction to her journalist friend's suggestion is one of almost incredulity and a feeling of being somewhat daunted by the task:

After all, I was a writer, was I not? But how could I write about war, what did I know, and for whom would I write? What made a story, to begin with? Didn't something gigantic and conclusive have to happen before one could write an article? My journalist friend suggested that I write about Madrid. Why would that interest anyone? I asked. It was daily life. He pointed out that it was not everybody's daily life. (16)

Writing about the day to day existence of life in Madrid, a similar topic to her assignment in Germany, became a way for an outsider, in solidarity with a cause, to begin to move inside.

Near the close of the introduction of these essays, Gellhorn addresses the *Causa* and how she identified with the cause of Republican Spain:

I have praised the *Causa* of the Republic of Spain on the slightest provocation for twenty years, and I am tired of explaining that the Spanish Republic was neither a collection of blood-slathering Reds nor a cat's-paw of Russia. Long ago I also 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 on 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 neither. (17)

Fighting against a misconception of Republican Spain as vulgar brutes in the pocket of Communist Russia, Red animals that mass-murdered nuns and priests, wanting to abolish the Church during their government, Gellhorn praises those who fought for its cause as anti-fascist heroes. There “were no rewards in Spain,” as Gellhorn explains, and truly there were not: International Brigadiers were given little pay. What she saw in Spain was Spender’s second war: “brave, disinterested” men, “fighting for us all.”

Indeed, the sacrifices of those in the International Brigades and Republican Spain who fought so hard to save their democracy went unrewarded. Gellhorn makes the point of saying:

I felt then (and still do) that the Western democracies had two commanding obligations: they must save their honor by assisting a young, attacked fellow democracy, and they must save their skin, by fighting Hitler and Mussolini, at once, in Spain, instead of waiting until later, when the cost in human suffering would be unimaginably great. Arguments were useless during the Spanish War and ever after; the carefully fostered prejudice against the Republic of Spain remains impervious to time and facts. (17)

One can hear her frustration, years after the fact, of still shining a light on a situation which was ignored. Essentially, Gellhorn hypothesizes that if the United States, Great Britain, and other “Western democracies” had entered the war, such terrible events like the Holocaust and the bombing of Hiroshima would have been avoided. Gellhorn appeals to what should have been the Western democracies’ principles and interests in defending the legally elected government of Republican Spain. The stage could have been set differently; the players could have had different amounts of power. Despite witnessing the consequences of Hitler and Mussolini’s continued rise that resulted in World War II, Gellhorn suggests that the Spanish Civil War and the Republican government of Spain are not critically viewed or its causes fairly evaluated. Because of the Republican army’s ties to Russia, even when Gellhorn was writing the introduction in the Cold War, the prejudice against the Republican government still existed. Non-intervention is a difficult thing to counter when faced with a “carefully fostered prejudice.”

As Gellhorn finishes the introduction, she leaves the reader with an idea that will feature prominently in these essays:

What was new and prophetic about the war in Spain was the life of the civilians who stayed at home and had war brought to them. I have selected three reports on this

twentieth-century war in the city. The people of the Republic of Spain were the first to suffer the relentless totality of modern war. (16-17)

Still shining a lamp of witness, Gellhorn links these three essays to the “relentless totality of modern war” suggesting that, in recording war being brought to civilians in Madrid, she had witnessed the first stirrings of “modern war” still affecting us today. This explains why Gellhorn so insistently relates her experiences of the war through the familiar imagery of home, family, and cityscapes. For an American audience, the concept of ‘Madrid being bombed,’ ‘Gran Via,’ ‘Casa de Campo,’ and ‘Spain in civil war’ may have been too abstract to fully comprehend as a total war that was affecting citizens like themselves, just trying to get by in life. Familiar imagery like homes, but destroyed, makes the war seem more real to her audience. In short, Gellhorn creates an impressive ‘inside’ for herself and her audience through these familiar images.

Gellhorn twists these familiar images into something eerie and disconcerting. One of the key examples of this occurs in the first essay: “It was a little like walking in the country, over gutted country roads, and the street barricades made it all seem very strange, and the houses were like scenery in a war movie; it seemed impossible that houses could really be like that” (23). Quite literally, Gellhorn sets the ‘scene’ for the reader. The basic image is easy to identify with and picture in one’s head: a gutted street, with houses on either side. But here is where the image begins to twist; the street is gutted like a country road, but from shells; the houses are houses, but bombed out like in a war movie, in such a way that “it seemed impossible that houses could really be like that.” The reader starts with something familiar – walking in the country – and ends somewhere different and almost inconceivable, as Gellhorn shines a steady light on the image.

Gellhorn continues in this essay to relate to the reader, especially when she switches to the second person, “you.” With this change in perspective, the essay causes the reader to be placed in the situation in Madrid, to experience it the way the Spanish and Gellhorn have:

No one lived here anymore because there was nothing left to live in, and besides the trenches were only two blocks away, and there was another front, in the Casa del Campo, down to the left. Stray bullets droned over the streets, and a stray is just as dangerous as any other kind of bullet if it hits you. You walked past the street barricades, past the ruined houses and the only sound you heard was a machine gun hammering in University City, and a bird. (23)

Ordinary noises like the sound of a bird chirping are juxtaposed with the sound of a “machine gun hammering” in University City, once a separated neighborhood from Madrid, located about two and a half miles to the northwest of Gran Via. The idea that a war could be taking place in an urban neighborhood, mere blocks away from where people used to live, is something incomprehensible for Americans who have never experienced modern war this way. Gellhorn, a still-unscathed “tourist of war,” presents the living situation as matter-of-fact; of course one would not live here, there is “nothing left to live in” and the trenches are within throwing distance. The presence of stray bullets makes it apparent that death could happen at any moment, even for those uninvolved directly in combat. Or perhaps there is no way to be uninvolved; everyone is involved in combat because the trenches and fighting are so close. The second person ‘you’ makes it seem as if the reader is experiencing this situation directly, from inside the war.

Passages using the second person perspective are intermingled with passages involving family life and relations in war-time Madrid. In the passage before the one above, Gellhorn describes an intimate scene between an old woman and a boy, supposedly a grandmother and her grandson:

An old woman, with a shawl over her shoulders, holding a terrified thin little boy by the hand, runs out into the square. You know what she is thinking: she is thinking she must get the child home, you are always safer in your own place, with the things you know. Somehow you do not believe you can get killed when you are sitting in your own parlor, you never think that. She is in the middle of the square when the next [shell] comes. A small piece of twisted steel, hot and very sharp, sprays off from the shell; it takes the little boy in the throat. The old woman stands there, holding the hand of the dead child, looking at him stupidly, not saying anything, and men run out toward her to carry the child. At their left, at the side of the square, is a huge brilliant sign which says: GET OUT OF MADRID. (22-23)

This moment of brutal, unexpected death takes the reader by surprise. This is a scene which would become universal in Europe after the civil war ended; in a way, it is a preview of the total war that World War II would inflict on the European countryside. There is universality in this scene, for all towns have squares, and old women, and young boys; nothing really marks it as exceptionally Spanish except the last phrase. The details are sparse, but rich. The first image of the woman who has a shawl, holding the hand of a “terrified thin little boy,” conveys everything the reader needs to know about the old woman and the boy. Visually, it is very clear. Gellhorn places the reader in the old woman’s mind. The relationship is one that anyone can identify with

– instead of grandmother and grandson, this relationship is analogous to a father and daughter, or husband and wife – really any relationship where one person tries to protect the more frightened other person. By imagining for the reader the desperate thoughts that the grandmother is thinking as she runs across the square, trying to get home where it is nominally safe, Gellhorn creates a new reality. In this moment, the reader is Spanish and is experiencing this event in her mind. The safety of the reader’s home is brought into question here, as “somehow you do not believe you can get killed when you are sitting in your own parlor, you never think that.” In the world Gellhorn has seen, the inside is not safe anymore, but then, neither is the outside.

Gellhorn takes a tragic event she witnessed, internalized it, made sense of it, and then communicated it outward again so that others might go through the same process. Yes, she is mediating the scene, but for a reader who has never experienced such an event, Gellhorn provides something that she can understand and interpret, something very real. The terrible irony that Gellhorn throws in at the end impresses upon the reader the true waste of war: that even as the old woman and her grandson are dashing across the square to safety, even as her grandson’s throat is cut open by flying shrapnel, behind them is the sign warning them of the danger of war: GET OUT OF MADRID. The contrast between this scene of innocent life senselessly taken and the blatant warning is clear, but perhaps something else is as well. By refusing to leave Madrid, the grandmother – and by analogy, Gellhorn and the reader – took a stand in solidarity with the Republic. As Josephine Herbst said with respect to her motives in going to Spain, sometimes security is not the most important thing in mind, and there are worse things than death.

#### Josephine Herbst

“Was it possible that I was going in order to live out that early nightmare when as a little girl I read what even Iowa newspapers had carried about the Chicago Iroquois Theatre fire? The element that had been the stampede: the fact that grown men had trampled women and children in their effort to escape. My mother had been horrified by that fact, and almost only that fact: ‘better to sit quietly in your seat and perish than to have to live the rest of your life with such a memory.’ For years I could never go to a theater without a secret rehearsal of how I hoped to behave. Nobly, of course. But could anyone be sure?” mulls Josephine Herbst in her memoir, “The Starched Blue Sky of Spain” (134). The final collection was published in 1990, and examines the questions that Josephine Herbst confronted in Spain during the civil war. As with

her childhood questions about attending the theater, much of the memoir focuses on unresolvable questions about her own behavior. Refusing to simply view the inside war through an outsider's eyes, Herbst unfolds her own failure. Despite its wealth of detail, the memoir demonstrates Herbst's continuing struggle to enter into the Spanish Civil War: how to internalize her experiences and communicate them to others, and make sense of her role there.

Herbst had made her name as a journalist before the war; also, she had gone to Germany in 1922 and lived cheaply as a "dollar princess" (133). Herbst was deeply troubled by how Germany was being transformed by Hitler's rise to power. As Herbst considers her next course of action after Germany, she spoke to Maxwell Perkins, her editor, five days before sailing for Spain. Herbst remembers this conversation in her memoir, noting especially Perkins' reaction of incomprehensibility, "What's the matter with all of you? Hemingway's gone off, Dos Passos is there, Martha Gellhorn's going. Don't you know that Madrid is going to be bombed out? It won't do you any good to go around with the Stars and Stripes pinned on your chests or on your heads. They won't see or care" (132). Perkins's main concern here is for the authors' well-being, but the role of incomprehension sounded here runs through the memoir.

Herbst was in a unique situation among the journalists in Madrid. She had a name for herself, but was not affiliated with a newspaper in the States. She paid her own way, and had no true writing demands on her schedule because she was not really reporting the day-to-day events of the civil war. Herbst spent a good deal of her time in Madrid waiting for the bureaucratic machine to work. She describes how:

I had been assured at the press bureau that I would get to go places, but for days I was suspended, wondering, where? [...] If I had been a regular correspondent, I would have obliged to show something for each day. But I was on a special kind of assignment, which meant I would write about other subjects than those covered by the news accounts. (139)

Herbst's position as a writer was different from the other correspondents in Spain, and this position can be seen in her writing about Spain years later. Essentially, Herbst was not given and did not create for herself a filter through which to view the war. If, for example, she had daily demands and articles to write, then Herbst may have had to view the war in such a way as to meet those demands. The fact that her position allowed her to write what she wanted proved to be both a gain and a detriment. Because she could write what she wanted, she felt she had to note everything. In taking in more and more without being able to order it in her own terms,

Herbst remained a pained outsider, inside the war but not able to fully experience and make sense of it.

Her essay, “The Starched Blue Sky of Spain,” was published in 1960 in *The Noble Savage*, a small American publication that had a run of a couple years. Years after the war, Herbst expresses reluctance in writing about Spain, remembering the American public’s reaction in the 1930s to the Spanish Civil War. The opening lines express this reluctance:

Apart from a few news accounts, a few descriptive articles, I have never written anything about Spain. It had got locked up inside of me. There was one thing you couldn’t do when you came back from Spain. You couldn’t begin to talk in terms of contradictions. Everyone I knew wanted the authoritative answer. (131)

The sentence, “It had got locked up inside of me,” exemplifies the silence that Herbst and some other writers felt at the American reception of the Spanish Civil War. The subtleties and complications of the ideologies at war in Spain were lost on a foreign audience who had not actually witnessed the war. What had got locked up inside of Herbst was all that she had seen. When faced with a demand for “the authoritative answer,” Herbst found herself still sorting through “contradictions.” With no direct outlet for what she had seen, she remains outside of the war, outside of her experiences.

Herbst was traumatized – although perhaps traumatized is too modern of a word to describe her feelings – by the American public’s demand for answers. The “one thing you couldn’t do when you came back from Spain” was really explore your perspective on the war, especially if it was more nuanced than a “for or against” answer. The American reaction was limited and limiting:

What was wanted was black or white. I wasn’t even useful for speechmaking, as I might make a slip and refer to a church where horses were munching on hay on the high altar. Religionists might be offended. And by the time I had returned to America the situation had moved to the big courtship phase. To win, everybody had to be wooed. But everybody can’t win; and didn’t. (131)

Herbst explains that “what was wanted was black or white.” She could not express herself for fear that something would offend a certain group of Americans; she could not “even [be] useful for speechmaking.” Because of the shift in politics that was happening on her return, Herbst sealed her experiences within her, not truly expressing them or sharing them until writing this memoir. I think the key word in this passage is “useful.” Herbst felt focused on service and

sacrifice. She believed in honor, in sacrificing oneself so that others may live. She wanted to go to Spain as a manifestation of her beliefs, so that she might serve to raise awareness of and encourage intervention in the civil war. The fact that she had witnessed the Spanish Civil War but could not aid those still fighting in Spain through accounting for her experiences must have been very debilitating to her.

Long after the war had ended, Herbst wrote her memoirs to an unnamed audience, but one that she is very much aware of. This awareness may stem from the Cold War, from the prejudice against Americans with Communist associations, although when she wrote, Herbst had no political affiliations with the party, especially in the 1950s when she was in her sixties. One can see this cautious awareness of her readers in the opening pages, when she warns:

Don't expect an analysis of events. I couldn't do it then, I can't now. I have my opinions, but what I can only call my convictions go to deeper levels, where opinions hardly count. What's more, those convictions have to do with me, as an individual, and apply to more than events. (133)

Even thirty years later, Herbst anticipates the American reaction of wanting to have an “analysis” rather than a personal expression, stemming from the fear of political ramifications. American wanted “opinions,” but she had been affected as an “individual,” at the level of “convictions,” “where opinions hardly count.” Because these convictions stem from within her, and are almost below the level of words, they would seem to have no implication to others, and have little to do with the public response to the events of the Spanish Civil War.

Interestingly, Herbst's emphasis on the individuality of her response had much in common with those she was observing. Stephen Spender, in the introduction he wrote for a 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition of writing from the Spanish Civil War entitled *Voices Against Tyranny*, explains that “Although the Spanish people, in resisting the generals' rising, led by Franco, were supporting their elected government, in doing so, they were also acting as individuals [...] It was as individuals that the Spanish soldiers, sailors, citizens, and peasants in half of Spain refused to surrender to Franco” (4). As a concept, individuality is a central feature in the essay-memoir. From Herbst's point of view, it is the driving force for those participating in the war and it is, in fact, the main characteristic of the generation of the thirties. She talks about the Spanish war and its participants:

The thirties had come in like a hurricane. An entire young generation had been swept up in a violent protest against the realities of events. But the answers were numbing.

The slogans were pieces of twine throttling something that was struggling. Phrases like “the toiling masses” did not answer terrible questions. There were always people, real people, each of them an individual spirit with its own peculiar past. The Spanish war was doubtless the last war in which individuals were to enter fully with their individual might. But what a welter of conflicting views this implies! The soldier is fighting not only against an enemy but also *for* some beyond. (135)

Both Spanish soldiers and citizens, fighting the inside war, and foreign participants and observers, fighting the outside war, shared the same sense of “violent protest.” They knew what they were reacting to, but, as “real people, each of them with an individual spirit with its own peculiar past,” each of them also had to “answer” certain “terrible questions” on their own. What would follow? What do I believe in? Those questions were clearly individual and their answers clearly conflicted. They could not be throttled with slogans like pieces of twine. The very spirit that drove people to this conflict also placed the responsibility for understanding it and making sense out of it in individual hands.

Many years after the fact, Herbst still struggles to precisely express her feelings in going to Spain:

Why do you write a book? Why do you fall in love? Because. It is the one conclusive answer that comes from the bottom of the well. Later you may dress it up with reasons; some of them may very well apply. But *because* is the soundest answer you can give to an imperative. I didn’t even want to go to Spain. I had to. Because. (132)

Herbst expresses the need to go to Spain as an almost instinctual drive. This drive is greater than Herbst herself, like falling in love or writing a book. Both these actions require the individual to go outside herself and reach for “some beyond”: another individual or a potential audience. Explanations for such instinctual drives are faint and are only heard by those who are listening, much like the “answer that comes from the bottom of the well” (132). Herbst knows that such fundamental human instincts are not what people expect when they ask her to explain why she decided to go to Spain. Dressing the instincts up with reasons does not change the instincts themselves; it only makes them more presentable for others. She supports this by saying she “didn’t even want to go to Spain.” The call was different from “wants,” Herbst *had* to go.

Despite her eagerness and willingness to go to Spain, Herbst was not prepared for the war, which she illustrates in her essay. Herbst “had a sprinkling of Spanish, not Castilian but Mexican. Spain was Cervantes and Goya. It took a kind of crust to go to Spain” (133). She

elaborates on her lack of preparation, but suggests that she brought along something of deeper significance – her own capacity to feel:

I don't know anything really about Spain except what came through me and my skin. I believe that my own deeper feelings about myself and the way those feelings attached themselves to the fact of Spain applied to many more than myself. In a certain sense I hoped to find in Spain an antidote to the poison I found in Germany when, in 1935, I went back to a country familiar to me to write a series of articles for the *New York Post* and to try to discover if there was any actual underground movement. (135)

Herbst takes care to limit the scope of her essay, setting the limits of her understanding as that which “came through me and my skin.” At the same time, she alludes to her hope that in taking Spain in she might eventually produce a response that “applied to many more than myself.” This is the source of the memoir’s great tension. Having spent time in Germany, and witnessed the rise of the Third Reich, Herbst “hoped to find in Spain an antidote to the poison I found in Germany,” a sentiment not uncommon in the Germans and Italians who joined the International Brigade.

The soldiers of the International Brigade feature prominently in the essay-memoir. Herbst writes how, in the company of the soldiers at the front “along the line of trenches where soldiers were manning machine guns or lying beside rifles, [she] felt buoyant and, for the first time since [she] came to Madrid, not afraid” (143). It is doubtful that Herbst feels unafraid as a result of the soldiers’ competency and protection, for she also records how many had not held a rifle before arriving at the front (141). Rather she felt “buoyant” because she was in the company of other individuals; in the grip of forces none of them could control or explain. We see this in the details the soldiers share of their lives, for example, the explanation that, “You always kept a bullet for yourself if it was the Moors. That was better than to let them get you and cut you up alive. All this was said quietly” (145). Aside from the brutality, this might not catch the attention of a mid-century reader; however, to an American or British reader *during* the Spanish Civil War, the threat of the Moroccan soldiers had a peculiar and deeply-personal resonance.

The Moors were the North African soldiers that Franco had “forced” into fighting for the Nationalist side, having so recently fought *against* Spain. As part of the Nationalist army, these soldiers were typically used in hand-to-hand situations where they used their scimitars to fight, for the Nationalists did not trust them with guns for fear of mutiny. Thus, the soldiers’ fears of

being caught in the trenches with the North African soldiers were a real possibility. Isabel de Palencia, a Spaniard who visited the Edinburgh Labour Party in October 1936, appealed to the British in a speech before their leadership:

We are suffering the most terrible, the most cruel attack that any civilised nation could suffer, at the hands of the Moorish troops which have been brought over. The Catholics know that it took eight centuries for Spain to free the country from the Moors – from the infidels – and now they are bringing those infidels back into the country to kill us. (qtd. in Buchanan 12).

Tom Buchanan, in his book *The Impact of the Spanish Civil War on Britain*, describes this speech as “probably the single most important element in the discrediting of non-intervention within the labour movement” (12). (Of course, the most concrete discrediting of non-intervention was the bombing of Guernica in April 1937.) It could be argued that “Moorish savagery and attacks on women” were exaggerated in order to build popular sympathy in Britain for Republican Spain (Buchanan 11). Buchanan includes a quote from Labour MP John Dobbie who, back from a visit to Spain, said, “How are the Moors paid? When they take a town or village they are allowed two hours to loot and murder. [...] they are being let loose among the white women of Spain” (*Daily Herald*, 24 November 1936, qtd. in Buchanan 11-12). The historical record indicates that 60,000-70,000 Moroccan soldiers served in Spain during the Spanish Civil War, and that while in service in Morocco, it was common for these soldiers to be rewarded with rape and looting, and that Spanish officers allowed this practice on ‘Red’ villages (Buchanan 10). Of course, atrocities were committed on both sides of the war, but the African soldiers had a particular impact on the readers back home because of Britain’s history, and Herbst must have internalized some of these fears in her response to the soldiers she observed. She would have felt this threat, in all its unresolvable complexity, through her own “skin.”

Herbst mostly visited the trenches near the Madrid front, by the Guadarrama, the Jarama and the village of Murata. The soldiers’ fears stayed with Herbst after she left their company. Thinking of the Spanish soldiers she had visited, Herbst describes how “At the Florida, I could lie still, remembering some of their observations, which often had delicate poetic insights” (149). I believe that it is the camaraderie between the soldiers that put Herbst so at ease, for in the Hotel Florida she often felt uncomfortable. This discomfort could have a variety of sources, such as the very frequent shelling of Gran Vía, the company of so many male journalists, and the uncomfortable privileges that Hemingway enjoys. Herbst directly addresses this discomfort:

The Hotel Florida was nothing at all after the front. The atmosphere at the restaurant on Gran Vía was not exactly effete, and yet it now struck me as tiresomely superficial. There were little cliques, and it did not console me that characters who had paid no attention to me were now inclined to gather me to their bosoms because of what they considered my feat in establishing myself at Murata. [...] I longed for my room in Murata and its cold stone floor, where chill shot up your leg like a toothache if you put your bare foot down. (148)

Herbst compares what she felt, through her own skin, the presence of the soldiers, in sharing in their difficulties at the front and identifying with the cause they are fighting for, to the tiresome superficiality of the Hotel Florida. There is a hint of disdain in the difference between how the “little cliques” treated her before and after her experiences in Murata. Herbst notices the change in her fellows, a change brought on by “what they considered [her] feat in establishing [her]self at Murata.” To Herbst, establishing herself with the soldiers was not actually a feat at all. Her companions would know this if they visited the front themselves. It was a response of one individual to another, and another.

Herbst’s description of Murata is not one of exceptional difficulty. She mentions that the soldiers were a bit startled to have a visitor in the trenches: “To have a newcomer, not a soldier but a woman, suddenly pounce down into the dugout was a refinement of warfare they hadn’t expected” (143). But as was noted above, the soldiers adapted to having a woman in their midst and began to open up to Herbst about their lives on the Spanish front. At the same time, Herbst acknowledges that such openers had certain limits:

If I sometimes felt that the scene where I stood or sat was a stage set due to vanish the next moment, it was because the players, with their sunburned faces, were the actors of the moment, who were concealing some of their real life in their role as soldiers. But none of them was trying to live up to any heroic image of the soldier; their modesty was one of their most engaging traits. (145)

Some of the soldiers knew that Herbst had published articles about Cuba, and so recognized her name from the articles (141). Knowing that she was a journalist and an outsider, the soldiers conceal “some of their real life in their role as soldiers.” But if in some senses the soldiers were presenting themselves as actors, at the same time they presented themselves as individuals, free of superficial or labels: “none of them was trying to live up to any heroic image of the soldier.”

Perhaps Herbst points out this refusal of the heroic image as a precaution to readers who had read other reports of the International Brigadier. At the time of the Spanish Civil War, this image of the heroic soldier was being advertised in the left intellectual circles of Great Britain

and the United States to incite more young men to volunteer for the International Brigades and to encourage more donations. At the front, however, the perception of the home countries by the soldiers was more than negative. Herbst relates how the soldiers perceived support in their home countries:

And it seemed at the front that too little was done by the homebodies in America, France, and England, who might have gone out on prolonged strikes to protest the infamous non-intervention pact or might even have dipped down more substantially into their own pockets. (146)

The “infamous non-intervention pact” alludes to America and Great Britain’s refusal to send government aid to Republican Spain even after it was publically evident that Germany’s *Luftwaffe* played a significant role in the bombing of Guernica and Italian troops were fighting on the ground in the general fighting of the war.<sup>3</sup> The non-intervention pact was signed early in the war, and was a source of frustration and anger for British and American Republican supporters. Herbst mentions the non-intervention pact earlier in the essay, as well. She states how, “If the pen was even mightier than the sword in a time of crisis, it didn’t seem to me that the typewriter held a ghost of a chance against the new weapons. I didn’t believe that I could write anything deathless or even sway to any appreciable extent the rigidities that had made for the fantastic nonintervention pact” (133). In a sense, Herbst and the soldiers shared much the same response to the “rigidities” of the outside world’s expectations: they refused to participate in mass thinking: the soldiers by discarding the image of hero and the writer by giving up the drive to write “deathless” or immortal prose. In any event, Herbst’s description of Hemingway’s access and attitude to food gives insight to the situation of the soldiers and other journalists in the Hotel Florida.

Herbst offers a powerful image for her insider/outsider position in this description her perception of the Hotel Florida, as she writes:

As I think of the Hotel Florida now, I can see it only as a misty sort of unreality. I never seemed to be there, even when I was actually there. Something inside seemed to be suspended outside, waiting. Or listening. Or hovering around, in places where I had managed to be or in places that I heard of and to which I hoped to go. There was a disembodiment about my own entity, which didn’t even disturb me. I soon got used to it. There was a distinct core inside me, around which the disembodied elements might cluster around that magnet, sometimes swarming and buzzing. (137)

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<sup>3</sup> By 1937, the Nazi armed forces had developed the strategy of the soon-to-be infamous *blitzkrieg* and were looking to try out their strategy on a target: such a target presented itself in Guernica (Martin 30).

She remembers herself as never quite “there,” when she was away from the front, at the Hotel Florida. She “never seemed to be there.” Although she was “inside” the Hotel; part of her was “suspended outside, waiting, or listening.” That is, part of her was still back at the front, “hovering around.” Herbst was “disembodied,” in two places at once. Her “core,” although “distinct,” was at the same time engaged with the world of the front – its elements “cluster[ing] around,” “swarming and buzzing.” *This* is what she was never able to formulate and put into words, that the outside world never understood. At the level of “conviction,” she was in two places at once – safe and in comfort, and exposed and vulnerable. Years later, she writes, “If I didn’t write, if I didn’t speak, it wasn’t that I felt ignorant. But it may have seemed to me that what I had brought back was too appallingly diffuse” (Herbst 131). But if what Herbst felt was diffuse, her essay-memoir is a testament to the awareness Herbst possessed while in Spain: an awareness that gleamed honest in refusing propaganda’s demands.

#### Frances Davis

Frances Davis grew up in Merrimack Valley, in northern Massachusetts. Her youth was unusual. She was raised on what modern-day scholars would call a commune, although she and the people that lived there or visited called their utopia ‘the Farm.’ In the opening chapter to her memoir, *A Fearful Innocence*, published in 1981, Davis explains her unusual upbringing more extensively, “But ‘family’ as the Farm used it meant everyone who came. A shrinkable, extensible, entirely flexible family made up of whoever happened to be living there, for weekends, for months, for years, or forever” (8). The Farm was founded on the principles of utopia common in New England communities in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. There were many frequenters of the Farm, most notably the journalist Walter Lippmann, who would have influence over Davis’s chosen profession.

Davis was in Paris when the Spanish Civil War broke out. She had gone to Paris to report on a tentative basis for various newspapers, selling stories to editors as she wrote them. Davis’s perception of journalism was clearly influenced by her time at the Farm:

Whatever the cost or the circumstance – punching out the story with two fingers at a typewriter perched on a rock amid the debris of the latest disaster (often enough at risk of their lives), imbedding the evidence of their eyes in enough officialese to get the piece past the censor – this was their job: to inform, to make possible Walter Lippmann’s “educated citizenry.” (130)

The job of a journalist was to make possible the ‘educated citizenry’ needed in a democracy, to see clearly “amid the debris of the latest disaster” and be able to inform despite the strictness of the censor. With such a formation, Davis went to Spain prepared to see the worst, to absorb it, and pluck out the necessary elements to transfer back home.

When the Spanish Civil War broke out, Davis was in Paris, barely getting by in a cheap pension. She had become acquainted with many of the eager young journalists with their own bylines, but had not had much success herself. Davis was sitting in a popular ex-pat hang-out, the café de Flore, on the Rue de St. Germain, when as she describes a striking announcement:

Before the thread of the world’s destiny was well spun out, there came the day in mid-July of 1936 when for me knowledge turned into action; it began with newsmen dropping into the Flore, drinks ordered, chaff exchanged. Whose office was it that called to whisper, “Frontiers of Spain closed!”? Within minutes the café emptied of the press. Blown by the wind, comprehending nothing, I pelted down the Rue St. Benoit to the pension. Passport! Money! So little money left! When is the next train for Spain? (131)

The important thing was to get to Spain, which was quite difficult considering that all the borders were closed. One had the option of getting a *salvo conducto*, or safe passage form, from the Nationalist army; however, a *salvo conducto* was only available in Pamplona, and one needed a *salvo conducto* to get there (Davis 134). Once one’s passport was stamped by one side, an examination by the other side could lead to an accusation of spy or traitor. Often, such accusations led to immediate execution, as the order of command was still being sorted out on the Republican side. Caught on the wrong side with the wrong papers, one could be shot on sight. In other words, there was no switching sides (Davis 139).

At the border in the town of Hendaye, Davis felt a bit at a loss as to what to do next. In the memoir, she reflects, “I had made a wild dash from Paris and here I was in a quiet room, above the quiet town. Somewhere near is Spain. There is a war in Spain. The thing to do is to get up and go find it” (132). As she walked outside of the hotel, Davis saw journalists she knew from Paris discussing how to cross the border. It was her idea to make ‘fake passes’ or dazblers, on the hope that the *salvo conducto* concept was so new that none of the subordinate officers between Hendaye and Pamplona had actually seen the passes (Davis 135). This idea earned her a seat in the car across to Spain, in the company of several male journalists and their journalist/guide, Cardozo, the Major:

“We” turned out to be a company of six in the big car that the military-looking man, Cardozo, had hired. He was called “Major” by his paper – Northcliffe’s arch-reactionary *London Daily Mail*. They all paid their way, but me. Ed Taylor of the *Chicago Tribune*, a paper as reactionary for the United States as the *Mail* was for England; Bertrand of Jouvenel – the elegant sockless one – of the *Paris Soir*; John Elliott of the conservative Republican *New York Herald Tribune*. [...] The Major ran the show. It was evident that he was not sure how far he would carry me, but the “dazzler” idea had won me at least the try at Pamplona. (135)

As Davis notes, the group of men she is traveling with work for conservative, “reactionary” papers. Of all the journalists, Cardozo is the one who works for what Davis describes as an “arch-reactionary” paper. Throughout the chapter dedicated to her experiences in Spain, Cardozo stands out as the only one of the male journalists who really treated Davis as inferior and incapable of handling herself in the war. Part of this may be that she was not considered a ‘real’ war correspondent until her stories were picked up by the *London Daily Mail*. In essence, journalists who reported for progressive papers reported the war from the Republican side; journalists who reported for conservative papers reported from the Nationalist side. At first, Davis reported for neither, although it is clear her personal convictions and upbringing were progressive.

It seems that Davis landed on the Nationalist side purely by coincidence: that she ended up in Hendaye, saw some people she knew, and headed over the border, with little understanding of the repercussions this might have on her conception of self. She realizes her happenstance misfortune: “I had been deposited [in Nationalist territory] by the meanderings of a mountain road; by having come to Spain on a train to Hendaye instead of Perpignan” (139). This produces her peculiar version of the insider/outsider tension I have been examining. Davis expresses the tension between where she is and who she is, in this contradiction: “What was I, heir to that distant vision of a better world, doing in the country of the Generals? [...] Would the cheers that greeted the unexpected appearance of a girl at their war turn ugly with suspicion if they knew my real background?” (139). Out of the three women journalists I examine, Davis is the only one to spend any time explaining the causes and politics of the war. She explains that:

On February 16, 1936, the Popular Front – a coalition of Left political parties: Centrist Republicans, Socialists, Syndicalists, Communists – won a victory in the elections, decisively defeating the Conservative Republicans, Clericals and Monarchists. [...] The Generals had decreed that they were called the ‘Patriots.’ To Madrid they were the ‘Rebels’ – those Generals whose mission was to wipe out decadent democracy in Spain. [...] The ‘Loyalists,’ more logically, were the armies that stayed faithful to the

elected republican government of Madrid; the Major called them, as later we were told to, the ‘Reds’; and it is true that Russians did fight this Civil War in Spain. (138-139)

Davis includes more history, going back to the rise of the Second Republic and the exile of Alfonso XII, but this was not a history she was aware of at the time. As she realizes the problems that reporting on the Nationalist side entails, her perspective changes. Because she identifies with the Republican side of the war, she is better able to critically assess how things are on the Nationalist side.

When she crossed the frontier, Davis found that very few of the journalists could tell her anything about Spanish history, and, like others, she was informed by John Elliott, the reporter for the *New York Herald Tribune* (140). Essentially ignorant of what the different sides represented, Davis was quite shocked by the militant Catholicism characteristic of the Nationalist troops. This first example, drawn from her first encounter with the troops, illustrates Davis’s growing ability to critically assess the Nationalist side:

We sped past groups of young exultant soldiers with newly issued arms. “Arriba España!” they cried. “Arriba España!” we called in answer. This exchange with strangers moved and excited de Jouvenel and me. We were caught up in a surge of brotherhood. But I began to realize that sewn to the tunics of these young troops were medallions of Christ crowned, with thorns, weeping bloody tears. I shivered. I had never seen faith and blood as one before; innocent that I was, bred in the pallid religion of humanity. (139)

At first, Davis welcomed this call-and-response exchange with the soldiers. Similar to what she felt when she encountered the male journalists in Hendaye, Davis is grateful for a sense of belonging, of brotherhood. She feels as if she is part of something bigger, an echo of her communal upbringing in New England. In fact, Davis references her upbringing at the end of this passage with her remark about being “bred in the pallid [or bloodless] religion of humanity.” When she focuses on the soldiers’ medallions, with the crucifix on them, she is repulsed. She shivers at the medallions, and thinks of home. This is a familiar move for Davis: to turn from an experience in Spain which jolts her in some way, and then reference back home on the Farm.

Another example of this kind of thought process happens when Davis is chatting with her fellow journalists in Nationalist territory and they are shot at from a field near them:

I saw the waving grain, this Spanish cornfield and at the Farm the fields of corn, Kit and his cohorts planting and hilling, myself with a basket to be filled for lunch, going in and out the rows, tugging down the tassels to test the ears, the long green fronds rustling to my passing. [...] And I saw an inherited vision – the waves of grain of

Polly's Russia, the sea that hid the conspirators reading Tolstoy; and Polly, on her belly like a small fish, listening absorbed to forbidden prophecies of brotherhood. [...] The man out there, secret in the cornfield, was vulnerable. He and I were one. I was no longer an observer at somebody else's war, on somebody else's planet, I, too, was flesh and blood. I, too, could be shattered by a bullet. (136)

Once again, blood comes into play, but now it is an image of community. Davis sees the moving grain of the cornfield in Spain, and it acts as a jumping off point for her imagination. She starts where she is, physically, and then moves in her mind to her companions on the Farm, then to "an inherited vision" of Russian cornfields, and *back* to the Spanish grain and the "vulnerable" Spanish soldier. It is almost as if Davis starts in the present, and then travels in her mind across Europe to another leftist vision: Russia. This movement implies a kind unfolding of the origins of her heritage on the Farm. Davis's ability to move through these different locations, seeing their similarities and how she is a part of all of them, is remarkable. Davis uses her imagination to logic out how she is connected to the Spanish Republican soldier shooting at them from the fields. His fight becomes her fight; they are one in a "secret" cause that they both believe in. She literally takes her outside experiences and internalizes them, makes them part of her own "flesh and blood." Unlike Gellhorn, Davis does not do this because she needs a distant reader to identify with the situation in Spain. Instead, Davis does this to understand the situation herself. She relates the unfamiliar to the familiar, in order to fully grasp it. Because Davis is on the wrong side of the war – if luck were kind, she would be reporting on the Republican side, for a progressive newspaper – she remains an outsider to the Spanish surrounding her, but she is free to identify with the Republican cause in her mind. In doing so, she becomes an insider in her sympathies.

A moment where her sympathies become quite clear is when her fellow male journalists ask her to carry their stories back across the frontier to France, where she could call London, New York and Paris and read their stories for submission. She folds the stories up and stuffs them inside her girdle (Davis 146). As she describes herself doing this, Davis comments how "[n]ot much longer, even in this war, would such naïve tactics be employed" (146). As the car she is in lurches around a mountain bend and a guard begins to approach them, she recognizes the flag and whispers to the driver not to show their papers to the guard. On rounding the bend, Davis describes seeing "[t]he red, yellow, and purple flag of the betrayed Republic fluttered above the barrier. We had crossed lines" (146). Not only does the red, yellow and purple flag

signify for Davis the Spanish Republic – as it would any foreign journalist – but it signifies “the betrayed Republic.” Silently through her inner language, Davis expresses an empathy with the side other than the one she is reporting for.

As time passes, Davis identifies more and more clearly with the “betrayed” Republican cause. This identification and ‘insider-ness’ to the other side shines through in her description of her interaction with Nationalist soldiers. Davis had been there for six months when she addresses this interaction:

There was never-ending fear of the guards at the roadblocks. It was true they called me ‘amiga.’ I was now an accustomed phenomenon. But they were Spaniards, Spaniards at war, and I was there on sufferance. Who could tell at what word, by what small unconscious action, I would become the enemy? I greeted them with ‘Arriba España!’ and yet I knew that crying ‘Up Spain!’ was a commitment to their cause and was already becoming anathema to me. I was not their friend, ally, comrade-at-arms; I was the enemy. (149)

This example demonstrates two fundamental issues that were brought out for Davis in her time with the Nationalist side. First, unlike on the Republican side where women were readily accepted into the militia, women on the Nationalist side were to be very much away from the war in the home, taking care of the children, and a woman wandering about the front alone was not to be tolerated. Davis explained how she had become “an accustomed phenomenon” after being escorted by the Major and other male journalists and her stories being picked up by the *Mail*. But she knows she can never be considered equal, as demonstrated in her last declaration: “I was not their friend, ally, comrade-at-arms,” all phrases which would have described her on the Republican side. Second, what she felt in her growing fear at roadblocks was an inner sense that she “was the enemy,” with her true loyalty elsewhere. Staying on, calling out the Nationalist salute several times a day, made her feel her hatred for their cause. Of course, she could not switch sides to the one that better represented her own values because of the Nationalist stamps in her passport – she would have been considered a spy and probably shot for her efforts.

As the winter continued, circumstances worsened for Davis. She was shot in the knee and was moved to Nationalist headquarters in Burgos. The plan was to allow her to recover in Burgos, and then take her to Paris once she could walk more or less properly, because it was necessary to cross the front on foot. While in Nationalist territory, she occupied herself with reporting the war. Injured, there was very little for her to focus on, except her now raging discontent with Nationalist ideology. She had to attend a journalists’ meeting with the press

chief, along with some of her colleagues who happened to be in Burgos. She describes the press chief, Aguilera, as “of an old Spanish family of landowners,” essentially, the most conservative of the conservative Nationalist side, its values utterly opposed to how Davis was raised on the Farm (158). Davis relates the speech he made before the journalists:

‘You know what’s wrong with Spain? Modern plumbing. In healthier times – I mean, spiritually healthier, y’understand – plague, pestilence could be counted on to thin down the Spanish masses; hold them down to manageable proportions. Now, with modern sewage systems, they multiply too fast. The masses are no better than animals, y’understand? You can’t expect them not to become infected with the virus of “liberty” and “independence.” [...] Y’understand what I mean by the regeneration of Spain? It is our program to exterminate one-third of the male population. That will purge the country. Sound economically, too. No more unemployment in Spain. [...] The masses aren’t fit to reason! Rights! Does a pig have rights? We’ve got to kill, kill...y’understand?’ (158)

For the most part, Aguilera’s views fall very much to the extreme of the conservative line. Aguilera takes Marxist concepts like “the masses” and translates them into the language of animals. When Spain was “spiritually healthier” – an issue that Davis lingers on when she first sees Nationalist soldiers – there was a proper order and sorting of the class system: when Spain was Catholic, the poor would die like they were supposed to, explains Aguilera. There was not the problem of unemployment because there were not the ‘surplus’ of men (the emphasis is on men because women are not allowed to work for wages in Nationalist Spain) needing jobs. But now, the masses are animals multiplying too fast and catching such devastating infections as the desires for “liberty” and “independence.” Aguilera’s metaphor of the Spanish masses being pigs, “no better than animals” is particularly disconcerting. Modern readers hear in this eerie opinion an echo of what would be the Holocaust, which already on the move in Germany.

Aguilera’s speech is one of the only times where Davis represents a Spaniard expressing his beliefs about the war and its causes, but once again her deepest response is internal, an identification with the Republican cause which she is sure must be visible to all those around her. Davis’s response to Aguilera’s speech is internal, and emphasizes how opposed she felt to the ideology with which she was surrounded:

I am terrified to look up at the press chief for fear he might see through the orifices of my eyes into my head. If he could see into me he would shoot me too. ‘Masses,’ the word repeats itself in my head. ‘Are not the masses people? “If you prick us, do we not bleed?” [...] Philip who organized unions, Polly who was jailed as a striker. All

the people who came to the Farm and to the Hill, who lived and worked for the masses? Dear God, what am I doing here!' (158-159)

Davis has fully made the transition into identifying with the Republican side. In essence, she is a Republican; she comes from people who are Republican. If Aguilera knew her true beliefs, he would shoot her where she sat. Using her imagination and drawing from on her upbringing, Davis has internalized the experiences and thoughts of an 'insider' Republican.

IV. The Neglected Sister:  
Valentine Ackland and Sylvia Townsend Warner  
British Women Poets

Here is home-country, who fights our war.  
Street-meeting speaker to us:  
‘...came for Games,  
you stay for victory; foreign? your job is:  
go tell your countries what you saw in Spain.’  
-from “*Mediterranean*” by Muriel Rukeyser

Valentine Ackland and Sylvia Townsend Warner were lovers and poets, committed to the cause of democracy throughout the 1930s. The poetry of both is anthologized in the collection Women’s Poetry from the 1930s: A Critical Anthology by Jane Dowson. Dowson includes an introduction for each of the entries on these British women poets, and the introductions for Ackland and Warner are particularly intertwined. In 1935, both writers joined the Communist Party and attended the Congress of Writers in Paris, having subscribed to magazines like the *Daily Worker* and the *Left Review* since the beginning of the decade (Dowson 30). They went to Spain together during the civil war, joining the Red Cross volunteers (Dowson 150). Of the poets, Ackland wished to be a poet for the masses, and one gets the sense that although Warner might be the more remembered of the two, out of sensitivity, she held herself back a great deal and helped Ackland to become published herself (Dowson 152). Saying that Warner is the more remembered of the pair, however, is not saying much.

While Warner “clearly should have belonged to the canonised poetry of the thirties,” she and Ackland represent what has happened to many of the women poets who wrote during the Spanish Civil War: history erases them. Their impact is forgotten; they are remembered in a footnote. For example, in 1966, John Muste published a literary history of the Spanish Civil War entitled Say that We Saw Spain Die, neglecting to mention anywhere in the scholarly apparatus that the title for the book is the title from a poem by Edna St. Vincent Millay. Thankfully, the mid-90s saw a one-handed revival in Barbara Brothers’ beginning to champion Warner’s cause in academic journals, but there has yet to be someone for Valentine Ackland. After Ackland’s

death, Warner did her best to fulfill Ackland's dream of being a published poet. In the conclusion for Ackland's introduction, Dowson writes how after "Valentine Ackland's death, Sylvia Townsend Warner began to work on a collected edition of the poems but found her own grief too overwhelming to be able to write an introduction or to complete the work" (31).

#### Valentine Ackland

##### Instructions from England (1936)

Note nothing of why or how, enquire  
no deeper than you need  
into what set these veins on fire,  
note simply that they bleed.

Spain fought before and fights again,  
better no question why;  
note churches burned and popes in pain  
but not the men who die.

From *The Penguin Book of Spanish Civil War Verse* ed. Valentine Cunningham, 1980

One of the first significant collections of women's writing from the Spanish Civil War is Valentine Cunningham's *Spanish Front: Writers on the Civil War*, which contains a chapter of selected and excerpted British women writing. Although most of the selections are in prose, the chapter does include several poems, including, "Instructions from England" by Valentine Ackland. Dowson explains, in the introduction to Ackland's poetry, how the poem's "satirical tone indicates [Ackland's] endeavour to find a successful and contemporary aesthetic for a political cause, characteristically, she felt caught between two impulses, the traditional and the new" (30). Dowson also includes a direct quote from Ackland, "I am still uncertain how to write poetry as it has to be written [...] we need something really *hard*. Not noisy and bombastic [...] but definite and deliberately reasonable, [...] well-devised and musical" (Mulford 207 qtd. in Dowson 30-31). The adjectives "noisy and bombastic" tell us what was expected. In "Instructions from England (1936)," Ackland expresses through satire the notion of a poet going

to Spain from England and being told what to see. This kind of censorship infuriates the speaker, and so the poem is a mocking deliverance of the instructions she was given back to England, marking the start of the war.

The tension between the traditional and contemporary forms is clear. The poem is short: two stanzas, a mere eight lines, ABAB CDCD, a rhyme. This enhances the satire by increasing the formality of the poem. The emphasis on the opening word “note” underlines the instruction aspect of the poem, and indicates exactly what the speaker wants the reader to notice. The speaker does not want the reader at all to question why the war began in Spain or why people are dying fighting it: simply that they are dying. The speaker wants the reader to see the religious iconography, buildings and figureheads that are being destroyed: but not the ordinary men who are soldiers and why. This emphasis on what to see and not see, on what to note and not note, is a version of the familiar dilemma of the outsider overwhelmed with their outsidersness. Here, Ackland satirizes outsidersness as the state she has been “instructed” by England to stay within.

The speaker of the poem, aware that England signed a non-intervention treaty and refused to step into the war, turns back to England and derides the nation for its overall perception of the war in Spain. England will note only what it wants to note, despite evidence to the contrary. Despite the passion of its native sons which “set these veins on fire” (3) to volunteer in the International Brigades, as a country England remains cool and distant both mentally and emotionally from the war. In the first stanza, the speaker underscores the fact that English men and women are dying for the Spanish cause – the first foreign casualty of the Spanish Civil War was an artist named Felicia Browne, who fought in the militia and was shot trying to blow up a Nationalist train. Her sketch book was recovered from the scene and sent to Tom Wintringham, a *Daily Worker* journalist, who remarked that it should be sold by the Artists’ International Association to raise money for Spain<sup>4</sup> (Buchanan 80). Browne’s obituary was published by the Artists’ International Association as a sign of appreciation. Despite the obvious knowledge that English men and women dying in Spain, and despite the even more obvious knowledge that other European countries had broken the non-interventionist pact, England remains apart. In an effort to demonstrate the need for British military strength, the International Brigades withdrew their forces from the Republican side later in the war, but to no avail. England perceives the war

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<sup>4</sup> According to the *Artists’ News-Sheet* of November 1936, pg. 2, 170 drawings were sold at an exhibition of her drawings in October 1936, raising £150 for Spanish Medical Aid (Buchanan 220).

in Spain as just another war in Spain with no need for of foreign intervention, an internal struggle: “Spain fought before and fights again, / better no question why,” (5-6). Ackland’s speaker, of course, derides this apathetic attitude. After all, this war will have international repercussions, but England does not see it. The speaker, with her jibes and stinging tone, desperately attempts to make England take note, but with little impact.

Sylvia Townsend Warner

Waiting at Cerbère

And on the hillside  
That is the colour of peasant’s bread  
Is the rectangular  
White village of the dead.

No one stirs in those streets.  
Out of those dark doorways no one comes.  
At the tavern of the Black Cross  
Only the cicada strums.

And below, where the headland  
Strips into rock, the white mane  
Of foam like a quickened breath  
Rises and falls again;

And above, the road  
Zigzagging tier on tier  
Above the terraced vineyards,  
Goes on to the frontier.

*Poems for Spain, 1939. ed. Stephen Spender and John Lehmann*

The title of the poem ‘Waiting at Cerbère’ refers to the French-Catalan town of Cerbère, which hovers very near the French border with Spain. Historically, the town has been one of the major passageways into Spain, Port Bou and Hendaye being two other major border-towns figured in the Spanish Civil War.<sup>5</sup> Cerbère is a border town not only physically but imaginatively: in ancient Greek mythology, the guard dog at the River Styx in Hades was named Cerberus. The similarity in pronunciation between the town’s name of Cerbère and the dog Cerberus is evident. Just as Cerberus guarded the passageway to Hades, Cerbère sits on one of the main passageways that exiting refugees and entering foreigners would use to travel from France to the Spanish Civil War. In referencing Cerberus, Warner implies that Spain during the Spanish Civil War is equivalent to Hades. The French town also locates the poem’s speaker outside of the war, where one can see what is going on in Spain, but without the opportunity to interfere. The poem’s title emphasizes lingering at the border, “waiting” both at the border and at the metaphorical cusp of an event. Within this waiting position, the war almost stops for the outsider.

The ABCB rhyme scheme of the poem emphasizes the familiarity and yet unfamiliarity of the scene viewed from Cerbère. The first stanza begins *in medias res*, “And on the hillside / That is the colour of peasant’s bread / Is the rectangular / White village of the dead” (1-4). Beginning the poem with “And” emphasizes the in-betweenness of Cerbère’s location; like Cerbère acting as a bridge between France and Spain, peace and war, the “And” acts as a temporary stepping-in point for the reader. A location at some distance is established in the words that follow: “on the hillside / that is the colour of peasant’s bread.” Here, one feels as if the speaker has been describing a town to someone entirely unfamiliar with it, and the reader happens to walk in the middle of the conversation. A sort of intimacy is established. Peasant’s bread is round, in the way the hillside is round, and they are the same colour – the dark, grainy color of peasant’s bread.

The contrast in colors between dark and light plays out throughout the poem, but especially in the first stanza. The poem’s perspective zooms from out to in and back out again, almost as tenuously as Cerbère’s location on the frontier. The speaker moves toward the hillside, describing how here there is “the rectangular / White village of the dead.” The white of

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<sup>5</sup> Warner wrote another poem during this period entitled “Port Bou,” not examined in the scope of this project. The British writer Stephen Spender wrote a poem on a similar border city, but in Spain, entitled “Port Bou.” It was published as “Port Bou – Firing Practice” in the Autumn 1938 edition of *New Writing*.

the dead is striking, as its background is the dark hillside colored like peasant's bread. With this contrast comes the association of the "white village of the dead" being almost a holy, sacred white when contrasted with the dark background. Of course, the contrast would make the village easy to spot in the distance.

By way of her imagination, the speaker continues to move closer to the village, referencing some intimate spaces in the village. The speaker creates a space for herself within the village, describing its darkness. The stanza begins, "No one stirs in those streets" (5). There is an implicit comparison between Cerbère, a peaceful town where the streets would be referred to as 'these' streets, and the streets of the village in Spain. "Those streets" harbour "those dark doorways no one" emerges from (6). The speaker lets the reader know that she has entered the town completely with the line, "At the tavern of the Black Cross / Only the cicada strums" (7-8). The speaker is close enough to the deserted village to hear a cicada. This stanza repeats dark as a description twice, and the tavern is called "the Black Cross." This imagery is as dark as the hillside itself, emphasizing that the land, that the war, is without hope. The isolation of the village is clear in the last line of that stanza, where only an insect sings a funeral song for the dead.

The speaker moves away from the village in the third stanza. She writes, "And below, where the headland / Strips into rock, the white mane / Of foam like a quickened breath / Rises and falls again;" (9-12). The imagery once again contrasts white on black, with the "white mane / Of foam" from the ocean's waves falling against the rock of the headland. The headland, or promontory, denotes another transitory border space: that of the land disappearing into the sea. At the promontory, below the village, the reader can see the violence of the waves crashing upon the rocks. From where she is standing, the speaker can do nothing but imagine and witness this violence. The waves rise and fall "like a quickened breath," like a person experiencing fear or physical activity. Eventually, the waves will wear away at the rock and consume it; perhaps this stands as an alternative to the dead village of the stanza before it. The speaker suggests that although the village has witnessed these atrocities, and the enemy is as unyielding as a black cross, with time the "quickened breath" of the people will wear away at the solid rock and overtake it.

The last stanza begins much like the third in that it contrasts the location of the village with the location of something else. It begins, "And above, the road / Zigzagging tier on tier /

Above the terraced vineyards, / Goes on to the frontier” (13-16). Aside from the cicada, no life has been mentioned in the poem, and the life in the vineyards will fall to neglect. The speaker moves away from the village, away from the ocean below it, back to Cerbère, as she follows the road that “goes on to the frontier.” The feeling at the end of the poem is one of isolation, but of a different sort than that which permeates the village. Separated by civilization – “the terraced vineyards” – the speaker can see the war, but is outside of it and cannot intervene. While the war is sketched as a black and white environment, the transition back to peaceful land is ragged, with the road “zigzagging tier on tier.” The poem’s imagination of the landscape from Spain to Cerbère can be read as a road-map from the war to peace. There is violence and hard contrast – essentially the war itself – below the village in the ocean. As one moves up, there is a commemoration of the dead, and then a jagged, many-leveled road to peace. The rest of the world will be there, in that borderland, waiting at Cerbère.

#### Benicasim

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.

And it seems to me we have come  
into the bright-painted landscape of Acheron.

For along the strand

in bleached cotton pyjamas, on rope-soled tread,  
wander the risen-from-the-dead,  
the wounded, the maimed, the halt.

Or they lay bare their hazarded flesh to the salt  
air, the recaptured sun,

or bathe in the tideless sea, or sit fingering the sand.

But narrow is this place, narrow is this space  
of garlanded sun and leisure and colour, of return  
to life and release from living. Turn  
(Turn not!) sight inland:  
there, rigid as death and unforgiving, stand  
the mountains – and close at hand.

From *Left Review*, March 1938

*Original footnote:* At Benicasim on the east coast of Spain is the Rest Home for the convalescent wounded of the Spanish People's Army, and the Villa dedicated to Ralph Fox, supported by the Spanish Medical Aid.

Like “Waiting at Cerbère,” the title of Warner’s poem “Benicasim” situates the reader in a specific location with inside/outside implications. As the footnote indicates, Benicasim was the location of the rest home for Republican wounded. The manner in which the speaker describes Benicasim and the soldiers there indicates a certain external perspective. As if she were giving a tour of Spain, the poem begins with “Here for a little we pause” (1). The pause itself echoes the purpose of the rest home: a moment to gather attention and strength. A beginning such as this, especially with the inclusion of the pronoun “we,” draws the reader in. The reader desires to know why we are pausing here, what is special about this location. The title and the subsequent line almost function together: “Benicasim: Here for a little we pause.” The connection between reader, speaker and location is clear, even if the importance of the location is not evident yet.

The fact that Benicasim is by the sea is evident in the next couple lines of the stanza, “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” (2-4). The landscape is dry, for it is capable of growing cactus, but not barren, as there are palm and lemon trees – plants that also suggest a tropical environment. The oleander, native to the Mediterranean, is one of the main clues to the reader

that we are in Spain. Also in these lines, the speaker establishes an inclination for triple repetition that she will return to throughout the poem, with “sun and salt and colour” and “dust and salt and pollen.” This triple repetition creates in some lines an iambic meter, whose rhythm generates an accumulation which piles on images as the reader reads through the poem. Here, also, the speaker reveals a bit of why we have paused at this particular place: the phrase, “dust of dust” is reminiscent of the “ashes to ashes, dust to dust” phrase from the *Book of Common Prayer*, commonly read at funerals. The phrase from the *Book of Common Prayer* is based on Genesis 3:19, which reads: “[...] till you return to the ground, / for out of it you were taken; / for you are dust, / and to dust you shall return.” The speaker’s echo of this phrase hints that the location is a place where death is present.

The speaker moves from the ocean up the beach, presenting next, “And the bright villas / sit in a row like perched macaws, / and rigid and immediate yonder / the mountains rise” (5-8). The bright villas, with their roofs, contrast their roof-lines with the mountains behind them. As a simile for the villas, the reference to macaws does not seem out of place, given the semi-tropic location of the poem. The hint of death included in the first stanza is made explicit in the beginning of the second. The middle stanza begins, “And it seems to me we have come / into bright-painted landscape of Acheron” (9-10). Although the Acheron is a physical river in Greece, in Greek mythology, Acheron was a river god and also thought to be a branch of the river Styx. There is a great similarity between the name Charon, the boatman who ferried the dead across the Styx, and the name Acheron. In pausing here, the speaker suggests that we have come to a place in-between life and death, the territory surrounding the rivers Acheron and Styx. This land is “brightly-painted,” as the tents along the beach are as varied-colored as macaws.

Next to the tents, the speaker describes people along the beach: “For along the strand / in bleached cotton pyjamas, on rope-soled tread, / wander the risen-from-the-dead, / the wounded, the maimed, the halt” (11-14). The shoes worn by soldiers fighting in the civil war – when not wearing boots – were espadrilles, a kind of sandal made out of rope material. This type of shoe was common among Spanish peasants, and was cheap and efficient to make. This is the first concrete hint that signals the speaker is talking about soldiers recovering from the war. Those readers who had seen photos of soldiers from the Spanish Civil War might recognize the “rope-soled” sandal. The “bleached cotton pyjamas” indicate that something is not quite right with this scene, as people do not normally wear pajamas to the beach. Of course, the speaker refers to the

Republican soldiers who were wounded and are recovering at the rest home at Benicasim. Here on the shores of Acheron, the in-between space of death and life provides a home for these wounded soldiers, the “risen-from-the-dead.” This transitory state between life and death is reinforced by the allusion to Lazarus, for it suggests that these recovering soldiers may have been called forth, as Lazarus was, from the realm of death. And here they walk, the “risen-from-the-dead.” The notion of the walking once-dead is reiterated with the following line, “the wounded, the maimed, the halt.” According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word “halt” denotes a limp. All of the soldiers bear in their bodies the mark of their passage out of death.

The speaker goes on to describe the actions the recovering soldiers take while on the beach: “Or they lay bare their hazarded flesh to the salt / air, the recaptured sun, / or bathe in the tideless sea, or sit fingering the sand” (15-17). All of these activities are typical for the beach. What makes these activities stand out is the description of the activities; the speaker’s description implies a sort of listlessness, a strange eeriness. Sunbathing is not an uncommon activity at the beach, but the description of people laying “bare their hazarded flesh to the salt / air” does sound a bit odd. Exposing a body which has already been risked is meant to strike the reader as contradictory. The speaker implies that the flesh does not matter – for these wounded, “their hazarded flesh” can be exposed, and as it has already been damaged, not much more can be done to it. The recovering men are not so much safe in this space, as already broken. The speaker emphasizes the timelessness of this beach through phrases like “tideless sea.” A tideless sea is essentially unaffected time, by lunar cycles and shifts of the planet, which is to say that on the shores of this metaphoric Acheron, there is no beginning and ending because it is a timeless space between life and death. The wounded are in this interim space, bathing in this timeless sea, “fingering the sand.” With this action, there is an emphasis on physicality that would, of course, be missing in the spiritual world of the dead. Almost as if to regain that their hazarded flesh as their own, they must lay it bare to the air, bathe or sit filtering the sand through their fingertips.

In the last stanza, the speaker moves away from the scene, to the “bigger picture.” And here we see poetry’s particular attraction to the outsider’s position. As with “Cerbère,” Warner finds her imagination engaged by the presence of a deed, foreign world – a world pressing up against this space of waiting and demanding to be engaged with. The speaker describes the limitations of the rest home in the opening verses of the stanza, “But narrow is this place, narrow

is this space / of garlanded sun and leisure and colour, of return / to life and release from living” (18-20). While she imaginatively moved closer to the wounded in the middle stanza, the speaker definitely positions herself as an outsider here. The overt rhyme of place and space jars the reader after the last prose-like verse of the second stanza. The repetition of “narrow is this place, narrow is this space” also makes the reader aware that this is a poem; in itself, it is a limited space with a limited ability to work a transformation. The triple noun phrase of the “garlanded sun and leisure and colour” works not only to return us to the first stanza, but also adds to the garish portrayal of a bright-colored death hospital and shore. The speaker emphasizes the tenuous hold that the wounded have on life in their “return / to life and release from living.” Many soldiers, returned to life, will be released from living, leaving the shores of Acheron and crossing the river into Hades, into death. Only a few, many will gain their strength back and completely return to life. The border between these is as indefinite as where sea ends and land begins.

The last lines of the poem protest the fate that awaits these wounded men should they recover from their injuries and return to the land of the living. The speaker interjects her own conflicted recommendations or instructions, stating, “Turn / (Turn not!) sight inland: / there, rigid as such a state and unforgiving, stand / the mountains – and close at hand” (20-23). To face the sea, to turn not, is to remain in a half-alive state; and while the speaker does not exactly present death as preferable, she does offer it to the wounded soldiers. For she knows that for the wounded to turn inland also means facing the “rigid as death and unforgiving” mountains. The mountains are the challenges of life, and at this moment, the mountains are the war in Spain, whose front approaches closer and closer to the hospital every day. As she is outside of this space, the speaker sees and suffers both options equally, and thus she can recommend both as viable. Pause, she says to her readers, feel the choice these men will soon have to make.

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