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Paradise under Siege:
How the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Understood Spain, 1937 – 1939

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HIST 485: Senior Thesis
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April 5, 2020

On July 17, 1936, the Spanish military rebelled against the newly elected left-leaning Popular Front government, a coalition of liberals, socialists, and communists. The revolt caught the government off-guard; the rebellion swept across mainland Spain through provincial garrison revolts and, due to fact that the military led the uprising, it left the Republic with no soldiers, a destroyed command structure, and an environment of paranoia concerning which officers the government could trust.¹ The divide between the rebel-held areas and the government held areas were largely along ideological lines. Although no area was completely pro-military or pro-government, the military failed to gain control of areas where the Republic's reforms and political agenda were popular, particularly in urban areas and regions containing many landless peasants.² For the rebels, meanwhile, their territory consisted of areas already under military control (such as Spanish Morocco), rural regions with conservative and landholding majorities, and regions where people were hostile to the Republic's secularization program.³ Politically, Spain had been on a knife's edge since the election of the Popular Front, and it came to a head with this military uprising. The Spanish Civil War had begun.

The government and pro-Republic (i.e. "Republican")⁴ forces tried to hold off the military as much as they could, though how exactly to defeat the rebels was a point of contention. According to Charles J. Esdaile, the first strategy was to keep people at home, soldiers in their barracks, and limit the uprising to Morocco.⁵ That strategy, however, was a

¹ Helen Graham, *The Spanish Civil War: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 21.

² Graham, *The Spanish Civil War*, 22.

³ Graham, *The Spanish Civil War*, 23.

⁴ The term "Republican" will be used to denote the people, forces, and politics that sided with the government. The term "Nationalist" will be used to denote the people, forces, and politics that sided with the military coup.

⁵ Charles J. Esdaile, *The Spanish Civil War: A Military History* (London: Routledge, 2018), 38.

failure and did little to stop the uprising as on July 19, several more garrisons of mainland Spain followed the rebellion.⁶ Despite the massive efforts to have the rebellion sweep the nation, the coup was not perfect and saw great resistance from many people across Spain. One particular example that Esdaile notes is that, in Madrid, Valencia, and a few other areas, the Civil Guard there were so intimidated by the government and its supporters that they decided to hastily barricade themselves and wait for relief from other rebelling forces.⁷ The situation created a stand-still between the Republicans who, despite widespread support, lost a great portion of their soldiers, officers, and generals, and the Nationalists who lacked the support that the Republicans enjoyed but had greater military capability.

Eventually both sides would gather more organized support from other countries. The Nationalists received aid from Germany and Italy. On July 22, Franco successfully sent for Germany to aid in the struggle, and Italy tried to send planes to Spanish Morocco.⁸ Franco had Hitler's support in the form of "state-of-the-art fighters and bombers, flown by German pilots" and, from Italy, Mussolini sent "nearly 80,000 troops" over the totality of the war, and also sent tanks.⁹ The Republicans meanwhile enjoyed support largely from the Soviet Union, in the form of arms shipments, though other countries such as Mexico, Czechoslovakia, and even "fiercely Catholic Poland."¹⁰ Minimal (if any) aid came from France or Britain despite the military threat the rebellion presented to France due to a non-intervention pact agreed to by both countries.

⁶ Esdaile, *The Spanish Civil War*, 39.

⁷ Esdaile, *The Spanish Civil War*, 39.

⁸ Verle B. Johnston, *Legions of Babel: The International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1967), 27.

⁹ Adam Hochschild, *Spain in Our Hearts: Americans in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939* (London: Macmillan, 2016), xiii.

¹⁰ Esdaile, *The Spanish Civil War*, 40.

Along with Britain and France, Germany, Italy, and the Soviet Union signed the pact by August of 1936, though Germany and Italy, then later the Soviets, ignored the pact.¹¹ Despite the non-intervention pact, the Republicans also enjoyed help from various international volunteers who went to Spain to fight against the Nationalist threat. According to Johnston, the “concept of a crusade against fascism in Spain” came first from the many French, Germans, Italians, and Poles who organized by nationality and went to the Republicans to aid in their fight.¹² According to Cary Nelson, an American volunteer, the various foreign volunteers from over fifty countries around the world formed the International Brigades, a more organized group to coordinate the actions and movements of the various smaller volunteer groups.¹³ Their motivation was ideological, as Nelson explains. For them, the Spanish Civil War represented “democracy’s very solidarity and universality.”¹⁴ For the international volunteers, the Civil War was not simply about Spain, but about democracy and fighting against those who wished to destroy it for fascism.

Within the International Brigades were roughly 3,000 American volunteers who called themselves the “Abraham Lincoln Brigade”¹⁵ They were a small sample within the International Brigades that can be more easily examined due to breadth of existing English language scholarly literature and primary sources. According to Hochschild the civil war in Spain presented a moral crisis for the foreign volunteers, including the Americans. First, it opened many “what if”

¹¹ Esdaile, *The Spanish Civil War*, 40.

¹² Johnston, *Legions of Babel*, 28.

¹³ Cary Nelson, “Introduction: I dreamed I Sange ‘The Internationale’ to Adolf Hitler,” in *Madrid 1937: Letters of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade From the Spanish Civil War*, ed. Cary Nelson and Jefferson Hendricks (New York: Routledge, 1996), 1.

¹⁴ Nelson, “Introduction,” in *Madrid 1937*, ed. Nelson and Hendricks, 1-2.

¹⁵ Hochschild, *Spain in Our Hearts*, xviii.

questions, such as what if the Western democracies had intervened in Spain, or at least sold arms to compete with Germany and Italy? Second, it represented a need to defend against the spread of fascism, which had overtaken Italy in the 1920s and Germany earlier in the 1930s, as well as a fight for democracy.¹⁶ American volunteers and Republican sympathizers during the civil war were outraged at Franklin Roosevelt and American non-intervention, with one volunteer, Edwin Rolfe, denouncing the policy.¹⁷ Moreover, most of the American volunteers who went to Spain “considered themselves Communists.”¹⁸ This allegiance helps explain why they were so eager to fight for Republican Spain with its new Popular Front government and their support for intervention.

The political alignment also helps explain how the soldiers understood the civil war, Spain, and their experiences in it. Many letters and other writings from the volunteers have come forward since the end of the war, perhaps most famously from writers such as Ernest Hemingway or Langston Hughes. Many scholars have analyzed and researched the writings from the more prolific poets, but very little analysis has been done of the American volunteers’ letters, songs, and other media created by them and their fellow volunteers as literature.¹⁹ Analyzing the various media that came from the Abraham Lincoln Brigade volunteers and their comrades can lead to a better understanding of how they understood Spain, its people and culture, and the war – a perspective few have tackled. Specifically, analyzing the letters they wrote to their friends

¹⁶ Hochschild, *Spain in Our Hearts*, xvii.

¹⁷ James Fountain, “The Notion of Crusade in British and American Literary Responses to the Spanish Civil War” *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 7, no. 2 (June 2009): 139.

¹⁸ Hochschild, *Spain in Our Hearts*, xix.

¹⁹ Many works have used letters as part of historical analysis or as repositories for letters, such as Nelson and Hendricks’ *Madrid 1937*, but they do not conduct literary analysis of the letters.

and family back home provides a glimpse into not only the image of Spain the volunteers shared with their readers, but also a glimpse into their own understanding of Spain, because those letters reflect how the soldiers used their experiences and imagery of Spain to better comprehend what the country was.

To better understand the letters, it is important to be familiar with some of the volunteers whose letters are known of and archived. Among the many volunteers who contributed to this body of literature, three stand out in the number of letters they wrote and the relevance to the topic at hand. Harry Fisher was a Jewish volunteer, born in 1911 in New York. According to the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archive, he was a Department Store Employee's Union member, seaman, bus boy, and farm worker before sailing to France in 1937. He later volunteered in the Second World War as a bomber pilot.²⁰ He was dedicated to anti-fascism and leftist causes, such as workers' rights, and his volunteerism was a continuation of that trend. Another volunteer was a Jamaican born African American, Canute (also spelled Kanute) Frankson, born in 1890. He was a skilled machinist from his experience as an auto industry employee, which was a rare skill to find in someone in Republican Spain during the war. He was also a member of the Communist Party from 1934 to 1939/40 when he died.²¹ His membership was likely due to American communism's opposition to racism which, according to historian Peter N. Carroll "emerged dramatically" as a plank on the ideological platform in the 30's.²² His understanding of Spain and how it reflected the possibilities of an end to racism in America is present in many of his

²⁰ "Harry Fisher," The Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives, accessed April 23, 2020, <https://albalb.org/volunteers/harry-fisher/>.

²¹ "Canute Frankson," The Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives, accessed April 23, 2020, <https://albalb.org/volunteers/canute-oliver-frankson/>.

²² Peter N. Carroll, *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), 38.

letters, and lends a unique perspective that is not often ignored in histories of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, or is otherwise only specifically examined in the context of other African American writers rather than in the context of other American volunteers. Last, there was Frederick Lutz, born in 1904 in Philadelphia, but listed his address on his passport as a New Jersey address. He was an electrician for the US Department of Agriculture before traveling to Spain and worked as a Commissar and was in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade general staff as a paymaster.²³ While an anti-fascist like Frankson and Fisher, he was not part of any communist party or union. There were thousands of other volunteers, including more notable people such as Milton Wolff and Edwin Rolfe, however, their notoriety made them and their stories before and during the Spanish Civil War more familiar among the literature. Their letters also largely do not relate to the focus of research here, and so require no introduction.

By examining the letters and other media of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, and the media they consumed, several trends appear. The American volunteers saw Spain as a utopia, which was exemplified by its people, particularly the peasants and rural poor in the countryside, and its scenic landscapes. They also saw Spain as a grand battleground of ideology, both between Nationalists and the Republicans and within the Republic. Finally, the Americans understood Spain as a complex combination of disaster and hope – not just for Spain, but for the entire world.

The utopian and romantic image of Spain was mostly constructed based on the volunteers' experiences with the Spanish people, in particular the rural peasants and average city-dwellers. It is important first to understand how frequently the people of Spain were

²³ "Fred George Lutz," The Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives, accessed April 23, 2020, <https://albalb.org/volunteers/fred-george-lutz/>.

discussed in the letters of the volunteers and in the writings of others, because in addition to lengthy descriptions of the beautiful Spanish countryside, American volunteers (and indeed other observers) were enthralled with the “average” Spanish man, woman, and child, and wrote about them at length. Ernest Arion, a friend of Harold Malofsky and an American volunteer, had nothing but praise for the people of the towns where he stayed. He mentioned in one letter how in one town, after the people grew familiar with the quartered soldiers, became “as warm and friendly” as the people in a previous town.²⁴ Similarly, American volunteer Harry Fisher wrote at length about the “friendly” nature of his interactions with the women and children of one town in which he quartered.²⁵ The volunteers wrote about their many experiences with the townspeople they lived with during their rest and transport periods. Similarly, other observers, such as journalists, also wrote at length about the people of Spain. Giovanna Dell’Orto, a scholar who wrote about Martha Gellhorn’s war correspondence in the civil war and the Second World War, noted how Gellhorn described herself as someone who wrote about how the “big picture affects the little people.”²⁶ Another scholar who examined journalists more broadly, David Deacon, also noted that among the journalists who wrote about the Spanish Republic and had sympathies for it, their sympathies were “unconditional” for the “ordinary people” of Spain.²⁷ The “ordinary” people within the Spanish Republic enthralled the foreign volunteers and journalists who

²⁴ Ernest Arion to Miriam Sigel, May 30, 1937, in *Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives, ALBA Digital Library* ed. New York Heritage, accessed March 22, 2020. <https://cdm16694.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15052coll1/search>.

²⁵ Harry Fisher to “Sal” and “Hy” Johnson, Louise, Hickey, “Nat,” Jack, “etc.,” June 19, 1937, in *Madrid 1937*, ed. Nelson and Hendricks, 105.

²⁶ Giovanna Dell’Orto, “‘Memory and Imagination are the Great Deterrents.’: Martha Gellhorn at War as Correspondent and Literary Author,” *Journal of American Culture* 27, no. 3 (September 2004): 309.

²⁷ David Deacon, “Elective and Experiential Affinities: British and American Foreign Correspondents and the Spanish Civil War,” *Journalism Studies* 9, no. 3 (June 2008): 399.

interacted with and observed them. They provided a personal view into the civil war for the volunteers and observers and were perhaps easier to understand and sympathize with than the political ideologies their side fought for. Much like the landscapes, natural scenery, and small villages of Spain, the ubiquity of descriptions and anecdotes of the people of Spain warrants an analysis of how the American volunteers viewed the Spanish people.

The American volunteers had a romantic view of the Spanish people, especially the rural peasants. They understood them to be hardworking, virtuous, and sometimes extremely brave. There were differences between how they wrote about city dwellers and rural peasants, but in general they were written about in positive terms. The rural peasants were largely seen as industrious and virtuous, but also timid and culturally conservative. An example of these views is in the famous civil war documentary by Ernest Hemingway and others, *The Spanish Earth* (1937). The film begins with a series of shots of the landscape and Spanish peasants. The narrator describes the faces of the peasants who work the dry soil as “hard and dry from the sun.”²⁸ The romantic imagery continued in letters from volunteers. Lee Royce, described the people of the town he quartered in as “extremely friendly” and that they made “strangers feel like old, intimate friends.”²⁹ These quotes are just two examples of the general praise the American volunteers and observers alike had for the rural people of Spain and of the romantic image they provide of them – the image of land laborers and farmers who gladly embraced. Scholars also found this theme in civil war media and literature. Scholars Alex Vernon, Almudena Cros, and Peter Davis noted that *The Spanish Earth* tried to portray the people and town of Fuentidueña as

²⁸ Joris Ivens, “The Spanish Earth,” directed by Joris Ivens, 1937, documentary video, 1:22, accessed March 23, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MT8q6VAyTi8>

²⁹ Lee Royce to “Hy” and “Sal,” July 4, 1937, in *Madrid 1937*, ed. Nelson and Hendricks, 108.

“a pastoral haven untouched by the war.”³⁰ Hemingway and Joris Ivens’ attempt to portray the Spanish people as industrious, hearty, and agricultural reveals that the rural and romantic imagery of the Spanish countryside and people went beyond the American volunteers and permeated the thoughts of even the non-combat observers. American literary observers, such as Langston Hughes, further perpetuated this image of the accepting and inviting Spaniard, though his perception encompasses all Spanish people rather than just the rural peasants. According to historian James Fountain, Hughes wrote extensively about his comparatively better treatment in Spain than in America due to his race. Fountain noted that, for Hughes, Spain was a place in which “black and white people could interact as equals” and spoke highly of Spain and his ability to interact with Spaniards in at least Republican held territory without fear of racial prejudice.³¹ His poem “Postcard From Spain” demonstrates Hughes’ optimism, as he wrote that “Folks over here don’t treat me/Like white folks used to” in America.³² Indeed, for many American volunteers and observers, the Spanish people, especially the rural peasants, were welcoming and hardworking, which played a key role in their understanding of Spain as a romantic utopia where the people were friendly, and the Americans could befriend a virtuous people.

The romantic image of the Spanish people also extended to the city dwellers of Spain, especially those in Madrid. Praise and positive descriptions of Spanish people in urban areas is perhaps even more ubiquitous among volunteers and observers than descriptions of the rural

³⁰ Alex Vernon, Almudena Cros, and Peter Davis, “*The Spanish Earth* and the Non-Fiction War Film,” *The Hemingway Review* 34, no. 1 (Fall 2014): 38.

³¹ James Fountain, “The Notion of Crusade in British and American Literary Responses to the Spanish Civil War,” *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 7, no. 2 (June 2009): 140.

³² Langston Hughes, “Postcard from Spain,” poem, 1938, quoted in Fountain, “The Notion of Crusade in British and American Literary Responses to the Spanish Civil War,” 140.

villagers or town dwellers due to Madrid's central location. Spanish city-dwellers were also highly praised by the volunteers and non-combat observers, though for different reasons. While the Spanish people of the rural areas were industrious and welcoming, the people of Madrid and other urban areas were tenacious and persevered through even the worst of the Nationalists' bombing and artillery fire. American volunteer Mildred Rackley wrote a letter home noting the feeling she felt seeing the people of Madrid. She noted that people were still in high spirits and remarked that their morale was "superb – invincible, triumphant" and that despite rations and fighting just outside the city "life goes on as if no war existed."³³ A letter from Harry Fisher provided a vivid, amusing, and inspiring anecdote as well. He noted that on one night people had been singing in the street for a while. Even as shelling began and pounded the city, instead of the people stopping and seeking shelter, their singing became "more spirited, louder."³⁴ The soldiers of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade were absolutely inspired by the people's tenacity and wrote extensively about it. It caught not only their attention but the attention and admiration of many journalists who were sent to Spain to write about the Civil War. According to David Deacon, the foreign journalists would "time and again" in their accounts praise the "bravery, hospitality, optimism, and stoicism of the ordinary people" they saw and met.³⁵ The Spaniards of Madrid and other urban centers played a role in the utopian and romantic image the volunteers had for Spain. For the volunteers, its people played the leading role in why Spain was worth fighting for, and why it was a paradise, at least according to the Republicans. Despite the destruction and war that they faced, the people of the small villages and towns remained productive and enthusiastic, and

³³ Mildred Rackley to "Bobbie," February 8, 1937, in *Madrid 1937*, ed. Nelson and Hendricks, 280.

³⁴ Harry Fisher to "Sal," "Hy," and Louise, June 29, 1937, in *Madrid 1937*, ed. Nelson and Hendricks, 284.

³⁵ Deacon, "Elective and Experiential Affinities," 398.

the people of the cities remained tenacious and optimistic – two desirable characteristics for headstrong and war-weary volunteers and for inspired and curious observers, journalists and poets alike.

The volunteers do not mention specific groups of people except for women. Women, particularly young women, are frequently featured in the letters they wrote and they focused on those women's sexuality. Fisher wrote about a gathering a small town the people had while the volunteers visited and mentioned how he was staring at the breasts of two young women who stopped to see the volunteers.³⁶ How welcome the staring was by the young women is a conversation beyond the scope of this analysis, but his anecdote reveals how Spanish women were viewed as sexually suggestive and sexually available among the American volunteers. A letter from Malofsky further exemplifies this pattern, in which he wrote on a tangent about the women he saw and refers to them as "babies." He fetishized the women, called them "exotic" and mentioned how he and the other volunteers were ordered to keep their "hands off!"³⁷ The sexualization of Spanish women was not kept to the volunteers' letters and the perception seeped into literary works as well. Literary scholar Emily R. Sharpe notes in her study of North American Jewish romance novels that the plots of most North American romance novels on the Spanish Civil War, center around a North American soldier falling in love with a foreign women only for that romance to end as a sacrifice to the international cause.³⁸ Even widely recognized

³⁶ Harry Fisher to "Sal" and "Hy" Johnson, Louise, Hickey, "Nat," Jack, "etc.," June 19, 1937, in *Madrid 1937*, ed. Nelson and Hendricks, 106.

³⁷ Harry Malofsky to Julius Blickstein, May 26, 1937, in *Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives, ALBA Digital Library* ed. New York Heritage, accessed March 21, 2020. <https://cdm16694.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15052coll1/search>.

³⁸ Emily R. Sharpe, "Traitors in Love: The Spanish Civil War Romance Novel in Jewish North America," *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 35, no. 2 (2016): 149.

authors like Ernest Hemingway portrayed women in a sexual perspective. According to literary scholar Lisa Jackson-Schebetta, his book *The Fifth Column* features Dorothy Bridges, the book's main female character. Jackson-Schebetta describes Madrid as "only a background" to Dorothy's "social games and sexual adventures" involving the main character Philip Rawlings.³⁹ In addition to the Spanish people seen generally as welcoming, hardy, industrious, and brave, the only group the volunteers describe with more detail are young women who are frequently described in a sexual manner. For the volunteers, these utopian people were not only platonic comrades but sexually-desirable women.

American volunteers also constructed their utopian understanding of Spain through their descriptions of the natural scenery, landscapes, and cities they saw during their service and time away from the front. The landscapes are described in better detail and quality than the cities, but both contribute to their romantic understanding of Spain. In general, the volunteers passionately admired the landscapes they saw while in the countryside. One vivid example came from a volunteer named Cecil Cole in January of 1938. He wrote about a village in the countryside which looked like it was "painted on a backdrop of some old world state setting," describing the scenery as "really stupendous" and that it would make for "a marvelous setting for a movie."⁴⁰ Another volunteer, Harry Malofsky, praises the Spanish landscape at length when describing his motivation for continuing to fight with the Republicans. He wrote that there were "too many beautiful landscapes," orange trees, fields of clay, and cities with "big great magnificent ancien

³⁹ Lisa Jackson-Schebetta, "Between the Language and Silence of War: Martha Gellhorn and the Female Characters of Hemingway's *The Fifth Column*," *Modern Drama* 53, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 59.

⁴⁰ Cecil Cole to "Jeff," January 1, 1938, in *Madrid 1937*, ed. Nelson and Hendricks, 124.

[sic] architecture” to give up to the Nationalists.⁴¹ These two quotes are just a few examples of awe the volunteers expressed for the scenery and landscapes of Spain. The ubiquity of these descriptions raises the question of why so much attention would be put on the natural scenery of Spain. Beyond simply just the desire to chronicle of natural beauty in an otherwise war-torn country, scholar Jane Hanley, who wrote about an Australian nurse who volunteered in the civil war, provides a reason for why the volunteers focused so heavily on the landscapes. She notes that part of the international image of Spain, as seen by foreigners who traveled there, was a country that lived in a “romantic pastoral fantasy” and was a “land of abundance.”⁴² Her analysis indicates that landscapes and scenery were as much a part of the volunteer experience as the war was. Because of the expectation that Spain was a “romantic pastoral fantasy,” foreigners who ventured to the countryside would look for, and indeed would find, scenes that fit their expectations.

The American volunteers understood Spain as a utopia in part through its picturesque landscapes, and furthermore, understood those landscapes and small towns as sanctuaries for the volunteers to return to in their time away from the front. The writings and other media by the American volunteers indicate they saw the natural scenery as places of comfort and relative safety. In addition to the examples above, which demonstrate the volunteers’ fondness for Spanish landscape, the fondness and peaceful imagery extended to smaller towns as well. American volunteer Frederick Lutz noted how in the small town he was

⁴¹ Harry Malofsky to Julius Blickstein, April 1, 1937, in *Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives, ALBA Digital Library* ed. New York Heritage, accessed March 21, 2020. <https://cdm16694.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15052coll1/search>.

⁴² Jane Hanley, “The Tourist Gaze in the Spanish Civil War: Agnes Hodgson Between Surgery and Spectacle,” *College Literature* 43, no. 1 (Winter 2016): 209.

in, he had a view of peaceful landscape and a peaceful, though bustling, small town scene with people going about their day.⁴³ He then explained how he and the other volunteers he traveled with provided entertainment for the townspeople, including providing a “fiesta to the kids.”⁴⁴ While these examples do not necessarily portray the volunteer’s love of the landscape, though he certainly made detailed accounts of his view from his living quarters, they do provide a sense that the sparsely populated areas and the landscapes were sanctuaries for the volunteers, where they could simply relax in their time away from the front. The relaxation contrasted with the lengthy and difficult effort they put in at the front. According to Carroll, the casualties from Jarama nearly overran the army medical system in place there. After the fighting began, within hours “bleeding men filled all beds in the hospital,” and blood was in so short supply that nurses “opened their own veins” to transfuse blood to the dying.⁴⁵ Hochschild provides some detail of the death and destruction at Jarama, stating “only 125 out of the battalion’s 400 riflemen had not been wounded or killed” due to the Nationalists outnumbering them and a “relentless pounding” of artillery.⁴⁶ It is no surprise, then, that when the soldiers were on leave to rest and recuperate, they focused on the people and places that distracted them from the losses they received so far. Jarama was a deadly battlefield, and the volunteers gladly accepted a chance to rest their bodies and minds by leaving for beautiful landscapes and welcoming people.

The more populated cities and towns of Spain, most notably Madrid, are also frequently described in the writings of the American volunteers; however, the descriptions of the cities

⁴³ Frederick Lutz to Shirley Gottlieb, June 16, 1937, in *Madrid 1937*, ed. Nelson and Hendricks, 103.

⁴⁴ Frederick Lutz to Shirley Gottlieb, June 16, 1937, in *Madrid 1937*, ed. Nelson and Hendricks, 105.

⁴⁵ Carroll, *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade*, 104.

⁴⁶ Hochschild, *Spain in Our Hearts*, 107.

differ from the descriptions of the landscape. Since Madrid was near the front lines of the war, it received its fair share of shelling from the Nationalist. One volunteer, Edwin Rolfe, noted that despite the beauty of the city its face was “badly scarred.”⁴⁷ Many other descriptions from these soldiers of Madrid maintain a sense of beauty, and do not merely linger on the destruction the city has faced. Milton Wolff, another American volunteer, noted that despite Madrid’s scars, the city was still beautiful and full of detail, noting the “black and gleaming” boulevards and the side streets “teaming with people.”⁴⁸ Wolff’s description does not explicitly speak of the city’s beautiful scenery, but it does represent yet another way in which the soldiers could not help but write about the landscape, in this case the city landscape, in great detail. Other scholars have also noted the frequency of which cityscapes were used in writings of other observers, such as journalists, though their descriptions were not nearly as flattering. Their descriptions of the city not only focused on descriptions of the landscape, but also included the emotional impact that living in a war-battered city incurred. According to Noël Valis, a scholar who wrote about how American women journalists wrote about the civil war, the destruction seen in Madrid took up a more central point in their literature than it did for the American volunteers. She noted that for some women journalists like Martha Gellhorn, a prolific war journalist who covered the civil war and the Second World War, the war was everywhere, and its destruction was everywhere. The walls of Hotel Florida, her residence in Madrid, “shook daily” due to the civilian bombing Gellhorn could not escape the bombing and other violent reminders that Spain was embroiled in war, and that sense of inescapability pervaded her works such as “Only the Shells Whine.”⁴⁹ The

⁴⁷ Edwin Rolfe to Mary Rolfe, July 26, 1937, in *Madrid 1937*, ed. Nelson and Hendricks, 287.

⁴⁸ Milton Wolff to Ann Lenore, August 14, 1937, in *Madrid 1937*, ed. Nelson and Hendricks, 282.

⁴⁹ Noël Valis, “‘From the Face of My Memory’: How American Women Journalists Covered the Spanish Civil War,” *Society* 54, no. 6 (December 2017): 551.

ubiquity of landscapes and cities to describe Spain in American volunteers' letters, and indeed the literature of other observers, demonstrates that, along with countryside landscapes, American volunteers and non-combatants, Spain was a country of places, and its cities and landscapes greatly moved them emotionally.

In the eyes of the volunteers, the paradise, however, was marred by the attempts of political enemies to destroy Spain, its people, and its democracy. While they understood Spain as a paradise, they also understood it as a paradise under siege by outside forces, most notably the Nationalists but also forces from within, such as "Trotskyites."⁵⁰ The language and imagery that the volunteers use in their letters also highlight the view of a country embroiled in revolution and on the brink of death – not just of Spain and its people, but also the people across Europe and the world. One volunteer, Lawrence Kleidman, was utterly swept into the fervor and drama of the war. He wrote that the people of Spain were "rolling towards their revolutionary destiny like one man."⁵¹ The view that the war was a revolution for the people combined with the view that the war was a fight for the very life of a democratic Spain and its people. Perhaps no volunteer wrote their perspective in this manner as vividly as Canute Frankson who wrote that, while talking with a group of children, they said they experienced horrific conditions. They lived under a "fear of air raids" and, unfortunately, had experience with "machine gun and rifle fire in street-fighting" when the war started.⁵² For the volunteers, the war was about life and death, revolution and a

⁵⁰ For simplicity's sake, I will use the term "Trotskyite(s)," not only because it is a single word to refer to a complex political ideology, but also because it is how the volunteers refer to them, and using two different words to refer to one group could lead to confusion.

⁵¹ Lee Royce to "Family," December 18, 1937, in *Madrid 1937*, ed. Nelson and Hendricks, 123. "Family" is in quotes here because it is unclear whether he means a biological family or a family in the sense of close friendship.

⁵² Canute Frankson to "Dearest" and "Sal," July 4, 1937, in *Madrid 1937*, ed. Nelson and Hendricks, 108.

threat to that revolution, and about what the world might face as a result of the war. Scholar Emily Sharpe examined the works of Langston Hughes and John A. Williams and notes that for these authors the war was, in part, not just an attempt to save Spain from fascism but a “struggle to end European fascism.”⁵³ According to Paul Preston, even for non-combatants the war meant more than just fighting for Spain. He quotes a long excerpt from a 1966 letter that journalist Josephine Herbst where she said she came to the realization upon leaving Barcelona that World War II was inevitable after the defeat of the Spanish Republic, writing in part that she “couldn’t connect with anything or feel that it [the war] meant anything” and that, from her perspective in Toulouse after leaving Spain “though the war had not yet ended, [she] knew it would end and with defeat” and that another war was inevitable.⁵⁴

The volunteers saw Spain, and by extension Europe and the world, as under threat, specifically from political opponents such as fascists and Trotskyites. A letter from volunteer Frederick Lutz described the hiatus of the Lincoln Battalion as temporary rest and that it will return to “free this country [Spain] and its most likeable people” from the “cruel and murderous grasp of the fascist bandits of Italy and Germany.”⁵⁵ A perhaps unexpected enemy, as alluded to above, were Trotskyites. American volunteer Lee Royce made his disdain for Trotskyites in a letter to friends back home. He wrote that while most people in most cities and towns welcomed the International Brigades, there was an “element that agitates” against them. He claims that

⁵³ Emily R. Sharpe, “Tracing Morocco: Post Colonialism and Spanish Civil War Literature,” *Ariel* 49, no. 2/3 (Spring 2018): 91.

⁵⁴ Josephine Herbst to Mary and Neal Daniels, February 17, 1966, quoted in Paul Preston, “Censorship and Commitment: Foreign Correspondents in the Spanish Civil War,” *International Journal of Iberian Studies* 20, no. 3 (2007): 240.

⁵⁵ Frederick Lutz to Shirley Gottlieb, June 16, 1937, in *Madrid 1937*, ed. Nelson and Hendricks, 104.

these people were mostly “Trotskyites and Fascist sympathizers” who claimed the volunteers had come to “eat off the Spanish people.”⁵⁶ The pairing of the Nationalists and the Trotskyites, while odd, indicates the animosity felt by the American volunteers against both groups. The comparison turns the seemingly allied ideology of Trotskyite Communism into a threat similar to the fascist Nationalists. It is not difficult to see the Nationalists as an “evil” force in the Spanish Civil War. According to Deacon, journalists, who were ostensibly politically neutral in regard to their reporting, were nonetheless “deeply shocked” by Nationalist leaders’ anti-poor rhetoric and violent and “savage” actions they condoned.⁵⁷ It is perhaps more difficult to see the Trotskyites as villains, although few people outside the Popular Front were sympathetic to the “fringe” or “extremist” elements of the coalition. Communist party newspapers mostly adhered to party lines of denouncing the Trotskyites, which is expected, but the liberal and left-wing journalists generally depicted the “radical components” of the Popular Front as “impotent, misguided, lawless and deceitful” and welcomed the Communist influence as “more effective” against the Nationalists and even “more democratic” than the “fringe” counterparts, such as the anarchists.⁵⁸ These “radical” groups within the Popular Front had few friends in the war, though it would be unfair to say they had no support. In the realm of international literature and culture, they enjoyed some good will from fellow anti-fascists. Historian Peter Monteath notes that in the 1937 Writer’s Congress, a series of meetings meant to establish a unified literary culture, despite the criticisms barraged at anarchists and the *Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista* (POUM) by mainstream and Stalinist communists, these groups had “widespread support or at least

⁵⁶ Lee Royce to “Hy” and “Sal,” July 4, 1937, in *Madrid 1937*, ed. Nelson and Hendricks, 108.

⁵⁷ Deacon, “Elective and Experiential Affinities,” 398.

⁵⁸ Deacon, “Elective and Experiential Affinities,” 399.

sympathy among the non-communist Left” factions of the Writer’s Congress.⁵⁹ Even among the American volunteers there were a handful who hoped for unity among the anti-fascist groups. Fisher wrote that, behind the barricades of Madrid, “political differences would disappear” and that “Democrat, Socialist, and Communist” would fight together.⁶⁰ It is worth noting, however, that even in this letter supporting the idea of political unity, anarchists and Trotskyites are not named. Despite the good will that some of the volunteers and that most of the writers and other literary figures felt towards the POUM and anarchists, groups seen as Trotskyist found very little sympathy among the American volunteer.

Some of their despair, however, also came from the political conflicts that engulfed Spain in this time. Spain was, as previously examined, a political battleground, and as such was unforgiving and frustrating. Though there was hope and faith in the Popular Front and its ability to defeat Franco, some of the politics in Spain hindered cooperative efforts and disillusioned even some former ideologues. Sometimes the tone of the volunteers went violent. Malofsky wrote a letter home with a frustrated tone concerning the Anarchist portion of the Popular Front. He said, as a result of a conflict between some communist socialist trade unions and the Anarchists, which resulted in the Anarchists disarming the trade union, that the Anarchists were the “worst type of enemy the people of Spain or any where can have.”⁶¹ A letter by Sennett describes his concern about the unity between the C.N.T. (the *Confederación Nacional Trabajo*)

⁵⁹ Peter Monteath, *Writing the Good Fight: Political Commitment in the International Literature of the Spanish Civil War* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1994), 71.

⁶⁰ Harry Fisher to “Kids,” November 30, 1937, in *Madrid 1937*, ed. Nelson and Hendricks, 119. Although written to “Kids” he also wrote it to “Hy,” given they are specifically named in the letter.

⁶¹ Harry Malofsky to Miriam Sigel, May 2, 1937, in *Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives, ALBA Digital Library* ed. New York Heritage, accessed March 21, 2020. <https://cdm16694.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15052coll1/search>.

and the U.G.T. (the *Unión General de Trabajadores*) and the trade union movement in general. Sennett believed that the animosity the groups had for each other was due to differences that existed “not amongst the membership, but the leadership” and used the C.N.T. and the U.G.T. as examples.⁶² The disunity between the political groups tempered the hopes the volunteers had for a victory against the fascists. Their hope remained, but without cooperation the volunteers knew that the war would be difficult, and the politics of the Popular Front would disillusion them. The writers of the war certainly understood the disappointment that the politics could and did bring for them. Fountain argues that writer John Dos Passos’s purpose in Spain changed due to the disunity and distrust that the political world brought. His friend, Jose Robles, was executed by communists because they thought he was a fascist spy. After that tragedy, Fountain says that Dos Passos’s “crusade in Spain” shifted in focus away from the war and toward clearing Robles’s name. His friendship with Hemingway was also strained by his efforts to determine what was true about Robles, and he became disillusioned. There was a “deep uncertainty and mistrust” not just concerning Hemingway, but also of communism.⁶³ The war also disillusioned Hemingway, his politics, and his perspective on the war. Literary scholar Allen Josephs examined Hemingway’s *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and the experiences in Spain behind the novel. According to Josephs, the more Hemingway wrote *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, the further away from the actual truth he wrote about. He made up people and stories. He moved away from the real war which had “so disappointed him.”⁶⁴ The American volunteers and the literary observers of the war could not help but be disappointed (to varying degrees) by the politics that went on

⁶² William Sennett to “Darling Gussie,” June 9, 1937, in *Madrid 1937*, ed. Nelson and Hendricks, 300.

⁶³ Fountain, “The Notion of Crusade in British and American Literary Responses to the Spanish Civil War,” 141 – 2.

⁶⁴ Allen Josephs, *For Whom the Bell Tolls: Ernest Hemingway’s Undiscovered Country* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1994), 32.

during the war and the disunity the system created. The disillusionment to the politics of the Popular Front played a role in the complex and mixed feelings the volunteers had about Spain.

The American volunteers saw Spain as under threat by the Nationalists, Trotskyites, and to a lesser extent the anarchists; however, understanding why they thought of those groups as threats is important for understanding why they wrote about these groups. Part of why they saw Spain as under existential threat was the sheer destruction it faced during the war. This point was already examined, though there is one letter from an American volunteer that helps illustrate their sense of urgency and tension. A letter from Fisher described the scene he saw when the Nationalists began bombing a small village – a target not usually sought after, and so no one was accustomed to the attack like the people in Madrid were. He wrote that women and children were “sobbing hysterically” by the time the bombing was over and saw the incident as showing clearly the means by which the Nationalists operated – “Terrorizing women and children.”⁶⁵ The terror to children was made clear to Frankson, as mentioned before, but is worth returning to. A young Galician girl told him why she was an orphan – after an all clear signal was given to people in an air raid shelter that the young girl and her family were in, she heard machine gun fire and quickly ran back into the shelter. She saw her parents and neighbors “lying in pools of blood.”⁶⁶ The American volunteers saw the war, in part, as sheer suffering and death, especially of innocent women and children. Valis’s analysis of Gellhorn yields the same conclusion. For Gellhorn war and destruction was everywhere, and it was unavoidable.⁶⁷ The soldiers not only thought Spain was under attack due to the reasons previously examined (the brutality of the Nationalists and the

⁶⁵ Harry Fisher to “Sal,” “Hy,” and Louise, October 3, 1937, in *Madrid 1937*, ed. Nelson and Hendricks, 114 – 5.

⁶⁶ Frankson to “Dearest,” April 13, 1938, in *Madrid 1937*, ed. Nelson and Hendricks, 130.

⁶⁷ Valis, “From the Face of My Memory,” 551.

perceived treachery of Trotskyites), but because Franco and the fascists were targeting the very people and places the volunteers used to understand Spain during their time away from the front. The hard-working though innocent villager and the beautiful scenery the village was situated in was under direct threat – and so, for the volunteers, their entire concept of Spain was under threat.

How they understood the threat that the Nationalists posed is a complex matter that involves ideology, experiences, and information and ideas the volunteers were exposed to by other Americans or other foreign volunteers from the International Brigades. The volunteers were exposed to posters created and put up by the Republican government or its coalition partners (e.g. Anarchists) Some of the posters almost perfectly reflect the sentiment the volunteers expressed in their letters. The letter by Fisher that described the fascists as terrorizing women and children, expresses the same ideas as one poster created by the Anarchists that read “We charge the rebels as assassins! Innocent children and women die. Free men, repudiate all those who support Fascism in the rearguard.”⁶⁸ Another sentiment that American volunteers shared with the Republic and its allied governments is the relationship between fascism and the support it received from the military, commercial interests, and the Church. A poster dated between November 31, 1936 and April 1937 depicts a large skeletal figure dressed in imposing military regalia with a cape. The cape’s tail is carried by three fat figures: a general or some military man, a banker or other commercial man, and a priest.⁶⁹ The sentiment that militarism,

⁶⁸ Confederación Regional del Trabajo de Levante, “Acusamos de asesino a los facciosos!” (image). “Spanish Civil War Posters,” University of California San Diego Digital Collections, accessed April 1, 2020, <https://library.ucsd.edu/dc/object/bb5188576r>.

⁶⁹ Pedero for the Delegación de Propaganda y Prensa, “El generalísimo” (image). “Spanish Civil War Posters,” University of California San Diego Digital Collections, accessed April 1, 2020, <https://library.ucsd.edu/dc/object/bb77483253>.

capitalism, and religion supported this great evil echoed in the letters of the American volunteers. In a letter by Malofsky, one in which he describes the “beautiful landscapes” that were cultivated by “hard working peasants for centuries,” he built up to the fact that the country was too good and too full of these good things to fall prey to the “hands of a dictator, a banker, and a fat priest.”⁷⁰ Whether the volunteers saw those posters is unknown but also irrelevant. The sentiments the Americans expressed were shared and reinforced by Republican and Anarchist propaganda. The Nationalists were clear ideological enemies to the American volunteers, but the sheer death and destruction they represented reinforced the idea that these enemies wanted to destroy democracy, and the supporters of the Nationalists, the military, clerical, and commercial interests, further solidified the notion that the Nationalists only wanted what was worst for Spain.

The volunteers saw Trotskyites and other fringe groups as their enemies because Trotskyites and other fringe groups utterly lacked support for the Popular Front. The letter by Fisher to “Kids” demonstrates that the volunteers supported the coalition and hoped the “political differences would disappear” and everyone would fight together.⁷¹ and the letter by Lee Royce to “Hy” and “Sal” gives an indication that the volunteers saw the Trotskyites as working against the volunteers and, by extension, the Republic and the Popular Front through lying and being an “element that agitates” the people of Spain against foreign volunteers.⁷² This sentiment of support for the government was reinforced by multiple sources, including propaganda posters by

⁷⁰ Harry Malofsky to Julius Blickstein, April 1, 1937, in *Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives, ALBA Digital Library* ed. New York Heritage, accessed March 21, 2020. <https://cdm16694.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15052coll1/search>.

⁷¹ Harry Fisher to “Kids,” November 30, 1937, in *Madrid 1937*, ed. Nelson and Hendricks, 119. Although written to “Kids” he also wrote it to “Hy,” given they are specifically named in the letter.

⁷² Lee Royce to “Hy” and “Sal,” July 4, 1937, in *Madrid 1937*, ed. Nelson and Hendricks, 108.

the Republican government. A poster created some time before November 6, 1936 called for “Unconditional support for the Popular Front government!”⁷³ Support for the coalition government was strong in the American volunteers, and the unwillingness of the Trotskyites to cooperate presented an annoyance to the Americans and other members of the Popular Front. According to Monteath the Trotskyites were a “thorn in the side” to the Stalinists of the Writer’s Congress in 1937 because the idea of Popular Front solidarity was not one they shared with others in the Congress – Trotsky himself “denounced the Popular Front” as a “doomed alliance” with “enemies of social revolution.”⁷⁴ With the volunteer’s support for the coalition strong and unwavering and the Trotskyite’s disdain for the coalition in a similar status, the two groups could not work together effectively. For the Americans the Popular Front was too valuable and support for it was too strong to cooperate with a group that wanted it dismantled. The American volunteers, then, felt it necessary to villainize the Trotskyites in their letters.

The source of the American volunteers’ commitment to the Popular Front was strong. As already noted, they understood Spain, Europe, and the world to be under threat from fascism. Max Parker, a veteran of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, sang “Song of the American Consul,” a song he remembered from his travels to Spain with other Americans, which mocks the American consul to France for trying to stop them from entering and fighting for Spain. One line from the song says that the Americans laughed at the consul’s word of caution because they knew he was “only straining his tonsils.”⁷⁵ This support for the Popular Front comes in part from American

⁷³ Garay for the Ministerio de Instrucción de Pública y Bellas Artes, “Apoyo incondicional al gobierno de frene popular” (image). “Spanish Civil War Posters,” University of California San Diego Digital Collections, accessed April 1, 2020, <https://library.ucsd.edu/dc/object/bb4813148x>.

⁷⁴ Monteath, *Writing the Good Fight*, 70.

⁷⁵ Max Parker, “Song of the American Consul,” recorded 1982, track 6 on *Al Tocar Diana “At Break of Dawn”*: *Songs From a Franco Prison*, Folkways Records, vinyl LP.

communists who, according to historian Eric Smith, brought “some of the most active organizers” when it came to aid for Spanish republicans.⁷⁶ From the outset of the civil war, American communists were committed to the Popular Front in Spain.

Americans were also exposed to support for the Popular Front from international sources, such as other volunteers and the Comintern, the international organization of communist parties. Fisher described his interactions with English volunteers. According to Fisher, the English volunteer took a liking to Americans and said that he loved “every one of [those] damn Yankees.”⁷⁷ Similarly another song that Parker sang in the album was one made by Irish volunteers that voiced pride in the International Brigade, which include the lyrics “proudly we take our stand, we are members of the International Brigade.”⁷⁸ With the contact the Americans had with non-American volunteers, it is not surprising they would influence each other. The international community had a powerful role in the ideology and political strategies of different national communist parties. Smith notes that after a failed strategy of relying on the masses to resist once the Nazis took power in Europe, the Comintern “approved the strategy” of forming a popular front as a means to stop its spread in Europe.⁷⁹ This shift in strategy resulted in the Spanish Popular Front which the American volunteers held great respect and support for. Historian Fraser Raeburn also notes how support for the Spanish Republic was strong among

⁷⁶ Eric Smith, “The Communist Party, Cooptation, and Spanish Republican Aid,” *American Communist History* 8, no. 2 (2009): 140.

⁷⁷ Harry Fisher to “Sal” and “Hy” Johnson, Louise, Hickey, “Nat,” Jack, “etc.,” June 19, 1937, in *Madrid 1937*, ed. Nelson and Hendricks, 106.

⁷⁸ Max Parker, “Connolly Column Song,” recorded 1982, track 23 on *Al Tocar Diana “At Break of Dawn”*: *Songs From a Franco Prison*, Folkways Records, vinyl LP.

⁷⁹ Smith, “The Communist Party, Cooptation, and Spanish Republican Aid,” 140.

Scottish volunteers and progressive movements.⁸⁰ While the support was not unanimous among the left-wing Scottish movements, they demonstrated unity and “high spirits,” especially when the war began; “joint platforms” between major left-wing parties demonstrated their support for the Republic, as different left-wing parties would make similar platforms, all of which included support for the Republic and the Popular Front.⁸¹ The joint-platforms also represent the power the Comintern had in its shift in political strategy, because while these platforms were not exactly popular fronts, they were similar to them but on a smaller scale as different ideologies and their candidates would work together to support international leftist politics. The sympathy and support the Popular Front and the Spanish Republic enjoyed strong support from the American and non-American volunteers. The support the Americans brought with them for the coalition was reinforced by the other volunteers just as it was reinforced by the propaganda of the Republic.

The combination of the utopian Spain with its people and beauty and the threat Spain was under from its military and ideological enemies created an oxymoronic perspective for the volunteers and indeed for other observers in Spain. The war brought tragedy, destruction, and death for many volunteers and Spanish people, yet, the volunteers had great optimism and hope for Spain even as the volunteers left and the threats seemed more dangerous and serious. Even the venture out of Spain back home was itself a brutal trial for the Americans and the Spanish refugees. One volunteer named Sandor Voros described his experience in France waiting to

⁸⁰ Raeburn does not say that the support was explicitly for the Popular Front, though given how the Popular front formed the Spanish Republic during the 1936 election and during the war, it is fair to say that support for the Republic was also support for the Popular Front, even if the support one faction had for it did not necessarily extend to all other factions equally.

⁸¹ Fraser Raeburn, “‘Fae Nae Hair Te Grey Hair They Answered the Call’: International Brigade Volunteers from the West Central Belt of Scotland in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-9,: *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies* 35, no. 1 (2015): 110.

return home in horrific terms. He wrote that the French government was treating him and the other feeling volunteers and Spanish refugees “like prisoners” and that they lacked basic necessities such as “shoes, underwear, shirts, socks, towels, soap” and other essentials.⁸²

American volunteer nurse Ave Bruzzichesi wrote in even greater detail of the conditions the fleeing population faced in France. Many of the Spanish leaders in Barcelona began deserting the front and the city, stealing government cars to reach Port Bou, Cerbere, and Perthus. The generals had ripped the insignias from their uniform, which lead Bruzzichesi to lament that “You can imagine how some of the soldiers felt at seeing their leaders in this state.”⁸³ Despair and hopelessness was widespread. According to Hochschild, American and Canadian volunteers spoke of “wild” rumors that “Madrid had fallen,” that Vienna was bombed by the Nazis, and escape routes to France “were blocked.”⁸⁴ These rumors were not true, but they speak to the genuine fear that the soldiers felt for Spain and about taking refuge in France. Everyone was concerned for the lives of the people and the wellbeing of Spain.

Yet, despite the fear the volunteers truly felt, most of them still held on to hope and to the idea that Spain was not lost – that Spain had a chance of winning and flourishing democracy and peace. American volunteer Fred Keller wrote to a friend that despite needing to leave Spain due to an injury, he and other like-minded people would “lobby against non-intervention and make a few speeches.”⁸⁵ Another volunteer, Canute Frankson, spoke in hopeful terms about the outcome of the war, despite leaving Spain. He wrote that he had “confidence in the ultimate victory” for

⁸² Sandor Voros to “Honey”, December 5, 1938, in *Madrid 1937*, ed. Nelson and Hendricks, 477.

⁸³ Ave Bruzzichesi to Dr. Eloesser, January 29, 1940, in *Madrid 1937*, ed. Nelson and Hendricks, 468.

⁸⁴ Hochschild, *Spain in Our Hearts*, 293.

⁸⁵ Fred Keller to Herbert Matthews, May 15, 1938, in *Madrid 1937*, ed. Nelson and Hendricks, 461.

the Spanish Republic, and that they and he have never “lost hope in the final victory.”⁸⁶ The American volunteers were extremely hopeful about the victory against fascism. Most American volunteers did not desert the International Brigades and despite the fact that fear was “nearly universal” among the members of the Lincoln Brigade “an overwhelming sense of responsibility prevailed.”⁸⁷ The volunteers believed they had to stay and fight – and given the optimism for the country’s future prevalent among the American volunteers, those soldiers who stayed fought not only out of a sense of duty but a sense of hope that they could still win in Spain and save it from fascism. Non-military observers, such as Gellhorn also saw hope in Spain and the Spanish people. Dell’Orto notes in her analysis of Gellhorn’s literary and journalistic works that she would focus her writings not necessarily on the horrors of war but on the “extraordinary resilience” of the people confronting those horrors.⁸⁸ One such example that Dell’Orto quotes in the article when Gellhorn wrote from her hotel in Madrid that “you can hear the machine guns in University City,” and that “food is scarce,” yet “You have seen no panic, no hysteria, no hate talk.” The people of Madrid had “the kind of faith which makes courage and a fine future.”⁸⁹ She was inspired by the people in Spain during the civil war and across Europe during the Second World War. She saw hope in Spain that the people would carry on the struggle and fight against fascism.

The volunteers’ complicated feelings also extended to Europe and the rest of the world. Their mix of despair and hope influenced how understood the potential result of the war. There

⁸⁶ Canute Frankson to Dr. Frances Vanzant, August 23, 1938, in *Madrid 1937*, ed. Nelson and Hendricks, 475.

⁸⁷ Carroll, *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade*, 188.

⁸⁸ Dell’Orto, “Memory and Imagination are Great Deterrents,” 306.

⁸⁹ Martha Gellhorn, quoted in “Memory and Imagination are Great Deterrents,” 308.

was some loss of hope among the volunteers for peace. American volunteer William Sennett describes his feelings concerning the possibility of war after the Munich Conference. He wrote that what was “really disturbing” was the “possibility of the outbreak of war.”⁹⁰ For him it was a betrayal of democracy by the United Kingdom and France by bringing the countries together in a “four power pact” that was a “collaboration with fascism.”⁹¹ Sennett’s sentiment that the democracies of the world could have done something to help Spain was widespread among the volunteers and those sympathetic to the Spanish Republic. Much of the American literature concerning the civil war expressed frustration about the government’s “lack of commitment” towards protecting democracy.⁹² The bleak situation certainly tempered some of the hope they had for Spain – that hope was still there, but the war against the fascists seemed precarious and the possibility for a fascist war across Europe loomed over the heads of the volunteers and those who wrote about the war. Their hope was bright, but they believed the world would become much darker.

At the same time, however, the civil war provided hope for the volunteers that the rest of the world could be made for the better and reduce suffering. Black volunteers clearly saw the war and resistance against fascism in Spain as a fight against racism and colonialism. Frankson wrote to a friend from France about his optimism about ending the unjust suffering of black Americans in the US. He wrote that while lives would be lost in a struggle against oppressors, those people “shall not always rule” and that “eventually, we will not have only this liberal social

⁹⁰ William Sennett to “Dearest,” October 1, 1938, in *Madrid 1937*, ed. Nelson and Hendricks, 477.

⁹¹ William Sennett to “Dearest,” October 1, 1938, in *Madrid 1937*, ed. Nelson and Hendricks, 478.

⁹² Fountain, “The Notion of Crusade in British and American Literary Responses to the Spanish Civil War,” 145.

regime, but a regime free from exploitation and the oppression of this noble race of ours.”⁹³

Though the fact he had not experienced racism in Paris was his immediate inspiration when he wrote the letter, some of that courage and hope came from Spain and its struggle against fascism.

He wrote in another letter, for instance, that he was inspired by the Spanish people and their “incredible resistance” and their “willingness to sacrifice.”⁹⁴ Frankson saw Spain as an example of what could be possible in terms of ending racial injustice with sacrifice and determination.

Other African American writers had that same dream that Spain could ignite people in America and spread hope for ending racism and injustice. Authors Langston Hughes and John A.

Williams, for example, saw the Spanish Civil War as a struggle not only against European fascism but also as one to establish a “radical society, and maintain a nascent democracy” and against “colonization and the slave trade.”⁹⁵ The global fight against fascism was not only an

idea brought to the war by the Americans themselves, but was also an idea reinforced by the other volunteers of the International Brigades. German volunteers, according to historian Josie

McLellan, could not help but see the conflict in Spain as a fight against Hitler. The volunteers

hoped that by ending fascism abroad, they could “mark the beginning of the end for German fascism too.”⁹⁶ The American volunteers saw Spain as an indicator for the future – if fascism

could be stopped here, it could be stopped anywhere. Their feelings about another war in Europe

did temper some of their hopes. In another letter by Frankson, only a month after his letter to his

“Dear,” he noted that in France, especially after the Munich Conference, there was a “real

⁹³ Canute Frankson to “Dear,” June 23, 1938, in *Madrid 1937*, ed. Nelson and Hendricks, 474.

⁹⁴ Canute Frankson to “Dear,” May 10, 1938, in *Madrid 1937*, ed. Nelson and Hendricks, 133.

⁹⁵ Sharpe, “Tracing Morocco,” 91.

⁹⁶ Josie McLellan, “‘I wanted to be a Little Lenin’: Ideology and the German International Brigade Volunteers,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 41, no. 2 (2006): 291.

genuine war-scare” and that there was “every reason to believe that” unless the democratic powers of Europe and the world worked to stop it.⁹⁷ Despite those fears, the volunteers had hope that the world could be changed for the better.

Despite the despair the Americans felt towards the politics that went on while they fought, they still held onto hope, and that hope permeated into their personal lives as well. They believed the war helped them on a personal level. American volunteer Evan Shipman, wrote in a letter to Hemingway that his experience as a soldier for the Republic gave him a new perspective on life. When he went, he wrote, he was “in a bad state in many ways, both discouraged and confounded,” by the time he journeyed home, though, he was a different man, and said that “after such a long time, I feel a real eagerness for work. Again I have confidence in myself.”⁹⁸ Even for Hemingway, Spain was a symbol of hope for his literary career. Fountain argues that the war was, for Hemingway “partially one of artistic endeavour” – to be inspired by the war to write a much needed “new novel.”⁹⁹ The war gave him personal hope that he could engage in meaningful artistic discourse with a new story to write with the civil war as a backdrop. He was not, however, merely after money or a selfish need to express his art. Josephs notes that Hemingway saw Spain as “sacred ground” due to his relationship with Spain.¹⁰⁰ Spain brought hope for the volunteers’ and literary observers’ personal lives – that Spain could change not only the world but themselves individually and give them something they needed. For the volunteers it was the confidence and life lessons they thought they needed, and for Hemingway it was the experiences and backdrop he thought he needed to continue his literary career and write another

⁹⁷ Canute Frankson to Dr. Frances Vanzant, August 23, 1938, in *Madrid 1937*, ed. Nelson and Hendricks, 475.

⁹⁸ Evan Shipman to Ernest Hemingway, June 21, 1938, in *Madrid 1937*, ed. Nelson and Hendricks, 465.

⁹⁹ Fountain, “The Notion of Crusade in British and American Literary Responses to the Spanish Civil War,” 135.

¹⁰⁰ Josephs, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, 24.

book. If the Republic could defeat the Nationalists, fascists worldwide could be shocked into inaction after such a victory, and the volunteers themselves could be changed into better people.

The volunteers' understanding of Spain was shaped by its people, landscape, the war and political situation, and the volunteers' own dreams and uncertainties. The people and landscape of Spain seemed to them to be a utopia and paradise – beautiful landscapes and heartwarming, hardworking, and brave people who welcomed them when they rested away from the front. War was hell, but the paradise that Republican Spain had to offer was the sanctuary they needed to recover. The American volunteers used the utopian landscapes and the people to understand Spain on a fundamental level. For them, Spain did not include the fascists or other factions that supported the Nationalists, and the war was just a distraction from what Spain truly was. Moreover, Spain was under existential threat, not just from the fascists but enemies who seemingly sowed disunity, distrust, and worked against the Popular Front. The war represented the subversive activities that fascists, Trotskyites, and other anti-Popular Front groups were willing to take to destroy democracy and unity. The perspective of the American volunteers on this matter was only emboldened and strengthened by the propaganda the Republic created, and by the ideas that others of the International Brigades shared with the American volunteers. That understanding of Spain – a utopia under real threat – led to mixed feelings about Spain concerning its future and the future of the world. Spain was a symbol of hope and disillusionment, especially by the end of the war when a Nationalist victory became more possible. The volunteers still clung to hope for a Republican and global victory, but the destruction and suffering the people faced and the political disunity that only exacerbated problems led to the volunteers balancing those feelings of hope and disappointment.

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