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Responses to European Conflicts: Travelling Perceptions of Mairin Mitchell and Monica Maginnis at the beginning of the Spanish Civil War[1]

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Abstract. The convulsive European context of 1937 produced a variety of travel books related to the Spanish Civil War that were published simultaneously. Together with politically engaged works by authors such as Peadar O'Donnell, Kate O'Brien, or Arnold Lunn, two significant authors of Irish descent recorded retrospectively the prelude and beginning of the Spanish conflict, offering in their travelling accounts the perception of a Europe in crisis and their committed responses to international politics. This study explores the convergence of London-Irish journalist Mairin Mitchell's *Storm over Spain* (1937) and Irish-American Ursuline Sister Monica Maginnis' *And Then the Storm* (1937), and of their portraits of Spanish life before the Civil War started. The comparative analysis brings up two perceptions of the prelude within the European and international context, and proves the useful contribution of their travel books, as cultural and historical documents, in exposing features of the conflict. Mitchell and Maginnis, in their efforts to grasp Spain's imminent tragedy, prove the transformation of the genre and their divergent Catholic perspectives of a conflict in Europe.

Key Words. Travel writing, 1930s European conflicts, Spanish Civil War, Mairin Mitchell, Monica Maginnis.

Resumen. El convulso contexto europeo de 1937 dio lugar a la publicación simultánea de diversos libros de viajeros relacionados con la Guerra Civil Española. Junto a obras comprometidas políticamente como la de autores como Peadar O'Donnell, Kate O'Brien o Arnold Lunn, dos importantes autoras de ascendencia irlandesa registraron retrospectivamente el preludio y comienzo del conflicto español, ofreciendo en sus relatos de viaje la percepción de una Europa en crisis y su compromiso con la política internacional. Este estudio explora la convergencia de *Storm over Spain* (1937) de la periodista irlandesa-londinense Mairin Mitchell con *And Then the Storm* (1937) de la hermana ursulina irlandesa-estadounidense Monica

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Maginnis, y de sus retratos de la vida española antes del inicio de la Guerra Civil. El análisis comparativo pone de manifiesto dos percepciones del preludio en el contexto europeo e internacional y demuestra la útil contribución de sus libros de viajes como documentos culturales e históricos para exponer las características del conflicto. Mitchell y Maginnis, en su esfuerzo por comprender la inminente tragedia de España, demuestran la transformación del género y sus divergentes perspectivas católicas sobre este conflicto en Europa.

Palabras clave. Literatura de viajes, 1930s, conflictos europeos, Guerra Civil española, Mairin Mitchell, Monica Maginnis.

Introduction

Spain and the prelude to its Civil War (1936-1939) stood out as a focus of international interest from the 1920s onwards. The front page of the well-known *TIME* magazine repeatedly selected images that alluded to the upcoming conflict. Several key figures, appearing on the magazine's cover, marked the progressive succession of the inevitable steps towards the war and its consequences. The front pages showed these titles: "The Marquis de Estella" (General Miguel Primo de Rivera) in 1925, "Alfonso of Spain" (King Alphonse XIII) in 1928, "Spain's New President" (Alcalá Zamora) in 1931, "Francisco Franco Bahamonde" in 1937, "Spain Leftist General Pozas" (General Sebastián Pozas) in 1938, "Dictator Franco" in 1939, "Franco of Iberia" in 1943 and "Generalissimo Franco" in 1946.

The 24 August 1936 issue of the same magazine selected a significative portrait for the cover entitled "Generals Franco & Mola and President Azaña", the main figures of the conflict in its first year. The faces of these three men, composing a peculiar triangle with a Republican flag in the background, pointed at the evident confrontation between the official government and the rebellious military forces. By then, Europe and foreign observers had become aware of the relevant historical transition that was about to take place and that would mark the end of the monarchy and the final establishment of Franco's supremacy. Among them, international travellers of different conditions and ideologies served as witnesses and described with detail the beginning of the end of the elected government.

"Storms" and the Prelude to the Spanish Civil War

The difficult years before the Civil War saw the changes from Primo de Rivera's authoritarian dictatorship (September 1923 – January 1930) to the less repressive one of General Berenguer (February 1930), and briefly to that of Admiral Aznar (February 1931). Then on the 14th of April of 1931, the Second Republic was proclaimed, and subsequently the years of the so-called "Revolution" (1932-1935) led to February 1936, when the *Frente Popular* won the elections. Franco's coup d´état began on the 17th of July that same year.

Probst Solomon refers to pre-war Spain stating: "It is not a period much written about, and certainly not by foreigners" (2007: 190). However, the 1930s, were, in fact, much documented by international observers in all sorts of genres. Among them, it became a regular practice to use the image of an approaching storm to describe the inevitable disaster. With that trope, writers indulged in the observation of an early apparently tranquil period, describing the indifference of disengaged intellectuals, the turmoil of low social classes, and the feeling of uncertainty that was everywhere. As a metaphor, "storm" became one of the most useful motifs to explore the moments of initial confrontations in Spain.

Books published in 1937 dealt directly with the storm itself. Peadar O'Donnell, known as "stormy petrel" (McCabe 1994: 41), had used the motif to explain the Irish conflict in 1922-

1923 on the north coast of Ireland (*Storm: A Story of the Irish War*, 1925), and later he wrote his personal chronicle of the Spanish Civil War in *Salud! An Irishman in Spain* (1937). Likewise, and in that same year, Mitchell's and Maginnis' books, and other works like *Spanish Prelude* by Jenny Ballou, *Farewell Spain* by Kate O'Brien, or *Spain: The Unpopular Front* and *Spanish Rehearsal*: *An Eyewitness in Spain during the Civil War* by Arnold Lunn, captured the atmosphere of a country that was about to break into pieces. Others would focus on the war in specific places: *Hotel in Spain* (1937) by Nancy Johnstone recalled the upcoming danger felt in Tossa de Mar (Girona, Catalonia) and Paul Elliot's *The Life and Death of a Spanish Town* (1937) described the beginning of the war in Santa Eulalia, Ibiza. Gamel Woolsey's *Death's Other Kingdom: A Spanish Village in 1936*, published in 1939, gave account of other towns in the south of Spain.

Similar and poignant testimonies of the early moments before the war can also be found in writings by famous itinerant travellers. Walter Starkie's *Spanish Raggle-Taggle* describes the times as "our storm-tossed materialistic age" (1934: 108) and recalls abbot Luciano Serrano's words in the monastery of Silos: "Who knows what will happen in these troubled times? It is not the first time that the monks of Silos have left the cloisters with their bundles on their shoulders and scattered to their homes to await the passing of the storm" (313).

In turn, Laurie Lee's *As I Walked Out One Midsummer Morning* captured powerfully the early moments of fear and tension before the attack on Almuñecar by a destroyer: "[…] we expected to hear the sounds of war break out, but the morning passed in silence […]. That afternoon of waiting was the hottest I've known. Fear lay panting in the street like a dog" (1969: 171). Images of tense calm and roaring storms were also used by many other witnesses once the war started. Díaz-Nosty notes that Martha Gellhorn's war articles in Madrid from March 1937 reflect the emotional tension of her encounter with reality. He recalls that in *The Face of War* (1959) she describes tanks advancing into the city and compares them to six boats sailing in formation in a tranquil sea surrounded by an expectant silence. The bombardments were also described as a severe storm (2022: 247).

Similarly, Mitchell and Maginnis capture the tense approach of the war with images of tranquillity before an imminent storm. They register a whirlwind of events and opinions to depict the political and social turmoil before the conflict. Mitchell recalls staring at the sea with worry in Torremolinos next to Tinka Hérányi, her Romanian travelling companion:

> We went down the terraces of the fort late one night and stood on a rampart at the cliff's edge. A night of brilliant moonlight, and the land white as the fort. In place of the tossing crests there was a line of thin white, and the sea itself was a dark heaving swell, a swell that never broke. It was like some tropic sea. The whole scene was unreal, bordering on a nightmare. The stars were too large, the interstellar spaces terrifying.
> Tinka shivered, 'It's like a storm that won't break. I wish it would.'
> 'When it does, that storm will break over all Spain.' (1937: 33-34)

Maginnis also records daily disorders in Sevilla starting in 1933. She makes use of the trope when describing the impending conflict within an atmosphere of general conformity: "More bombs; anonymous letters told of prices set on people's heads; the storm muttered nearer and nearer. But life went on exactly as usual. There simply was more to gossip about: 'this lawlessness'" (1937: 124). Retrospectively, she is aware of the blindness of foreign eyes in those first moments, when traces of the tragic prelude were evident but ignored by many: "But the unrest bubbled and seethed everywhere in an inarticulate sort of way. The American consul laughed and said that was the ordinary thing" (1937: 120).

Both authors' accounts align them with an important group of creative writers that highlighted the international dimension of this conflict in Europe with books published in the

same year 1937. The work of the German anarchist and labour activist Augustin Souchy (*The May Days, Barcelona*, 1937) is another example, and his autobiography (*Beware! Anarchist!: A Life for Freedom*, 1992) also describes the early stage of the Civil War:

> The attack was expected to start during the night of July 18-19. Very few people were thinking of sleep that evening. I too could not remain within the walls of my apartment. At midnight and after the streets were empty and the city appeared to have fallen asleep. But the calm was deceptive. Shortly before 5 A.M. action began. (2018 [1992]: 89)

By October 1936 most international travellers and tourists had abandoned the Peninsula abruptly. The collapse of tourism would be immediate, as the research of Holguín (2005) and Vallejo Pousada (2019) reveals. They show new signs of what they describe as "battlefield tourism", groups of the displaced citizens, fugitives or refugees (2019: 113). Internationally motivated travellers, such as Maginnis and Mitchell, left earlier and wrote their impressions from home capturing the valuable images of the growing tension. Eagerly, they retrospectively registered testimonies in their *sui generis* travel books, a mixture of travelogue and memoirs with personal reflections as the war went on. Their works display important signs of change in the genre of travel literature and trace the slow movement towards the upheaval through a close observation of daily habits and lives that would be shattered forever.

A Political Activist and a Nun in the Prelude to the Spanish Civil War

In the early stages of the Spanish Civil War the works of Mitchell (1895-1986) and Maginnis (1869-1958) stand out as significative examples of foreign representations of the national drama. Their travel books, published in 1937, surprisingly coincide in fusing the "storm" image in their titles, and provide a vivid account of their experiences. With very different perspectives, the metaphor of the weather disturbance helps both to give a valuable insight to the initial chaos and the social and political turmoil that preceded the war.

The convergence of these authors starts earlier if we focus on their family history. Both had Irish fathers. Brosnan, Sister Monica's biographer, states that the name Maginnis was originally MacGinnis "as Mary's birth certificate and baptismal record indicate" (1995: 2). Her father, Thomas Jefferson Maginnis, had been born in Ireland in County Meath in 1814. He spent his youth at the family farm near Somerset, Ohio, and moved later to Zanesville in 1861 as attorney and entrepreneur. Mary Ida Maginnis, who later became Sister Monica, was proud of what she termed "my Anglo-Saxon-Celtic blood" (1937: 22). Likewise, Mairin Mitchell inherited a genuine love for Ireland from her father, Thomas Houghton Mitchell. In spite of having been born in Darlington, England, Mitchell became a perfect example of a "London-Irish" (Membrive 2025: 143), an expression that acknowledges her peculiar upbringing and confirms her attraction to Irish issues.

Maginnis' studies were not as sophisticated as Mitchell's. She was born in Zanesville, Ohio and was educated first at the Ursuline Academy for Young Ladies and later at the Ursuline Congregation in St. Martin, Brown County, Ohio. In 1914 she received a BA from the Catholic University and in 1926 a PhD from the University of Notre Dame, noted for its Catholic ethos and Irish association. Her passion for knowledge and study made her stand out among her sisters. Eager to study abroad and to do research on Spain and Latin-American history, she focused on the discovery and conquest of America and read and wrote mainly on Bartolomé de las Casas, Francisco de Vitoria o Alonso de Maldonado, specifically on their role in questioning Philip II's ownership of Spanish America.

Brosnan states that "Spanish blood flowed through Mary's veins" (1995: 2). She did not hesitate to travel to Spain, where she stayed from 1933 to 1935, leaving before the outbreak of

the Civil War. Back in the States, she lectured extensively on the situation in Spain and completed her travel book, where she refers to "my halting Spanish" (1937: 13). She became fond of translating the language (as she did in the essay "Jesus Silent" by the bishop of Malaga (1915-1935) and Palencia (1935-1940), Manuel González García). She was back in Europe in 1939 and witnessed the Second World War, and in 1948 she visited the future Pope Paul VI in Rome.

Mairin Mitchell was an experienced writer, journalist, historian, political activist and translator. She was born in England, in Darlington, County Durham. Her education took place in a boarding school in Wales and at Bedford College in London. She was in Spain in 1936 from April to May, and she had visited the country earlier in the first half of the 1930s. She had proved her passion for the country in previous works: in articles such as "Catalonia and Her People" (*Irish Press*, 1934), "The Struggle in Spain" (*Ireland-To-day*, 1936), and in two chapters "Catalonia Calling" and "Scenes in Spain" from her semi-fictional diary, *Traveller in Time* (1935). As with Maginnis, she was also attracted to the history of Spain, especially to political and naval-historical figures, and published works such as *The Odyssey of Acurio Who Sailed with Magellan* (1956); *Elcano: The First Circumnavigator* (1958); *The Bridge of San Miguel* (1960); *Friar Andrés de Urdaneta, O.S.A., 1508-1568* (1964), and *Berengaria: Enigmatic Queen of England* (1986). She could translate Spanish well and edited the work of the Spanish priest, José L. Martín Descalzo (*A Priest Confesses*, 1962).

Before *Storm over Spain*, Mitchell had already written about conflicts in the country. In *Traveller in Time* (1935), a scene in the chapter "Catalonia Calling" includes a reference to a Catalonian soldier who has to go back to the Civil War in Morocco (the so-called Riff War, where the battle of Annual in July 1921 had taken place):

> In the lovely old street of Alcalá Zamora with its wooden arcades, the Irishman sees a soldier who is going back to Riff; his friends have come to see him off and as he is embraced by each man in turn; a mutual back-patting takes place. The ritual is quite lengthy as each shoulder requires, it seems, to be patted many times in return. (1935: 55)

Feelings of unease because of the imminent political conflict were not displayed in the earlier portraits of Spain in *Traveller in Time*. Those will come later in *Storm over Spain*. But the love for the country was a leitmotif in her writings. In 1935 she had evoked landscapes praising their colours and beauty: "The train rushes past ravines and gorges near Ripoll and great cascades that only the Asturias [sic] can rival, the fields are a riot of colour; scarlet, blue and purple, with poppies, scabious and vetch" (1935: 55). And in 1937, she praises Andalusian landscapes as she travels to the south to see Seville, Ronda, Cordoba, Malaga, Granada, and leaves from Gibraltar.

Witnessing the approaching turmoil of the war right before 1936, Maginnis and Mitchell converge in the need to recount their experiences and the atmosphere of the early stages of the war. Using the image of an imminent storm, their different perspectives of the same critical dramatic situation reveal two conceptions of the Spanish conflict in a changing Europe. Mitchell's militant pacifism, based on anarchist principles, tends to select images from both sides involved in the war. By contrast, Maginnis' perspective, entangled in her religious education and conservative upbringing, tinges her work with an open defence of the nationalist cause. Ultimately, both represent two different political positions that European countries and the US would have to choose between.

The Help of a Traditional Format: Travel Books to Narrate the War

Phillip Dodd, in his book *The Art of Travel: Essays on Travel Writing* (1982), devotes an interesting chapter to travel writing in the 1930s. He focuses on literary authors who, not finding a comfortable or adequate place in their own country, travelled around or departed to Europe. The critic states that during this period the genre of the travel book appeared to be "the most appropriate form for writers restless with inherited beliefs, and eager to 'explore' and 'discover' new allegiances" (128). He observes the evolution of the genre from previous traditions:

> The stance of the 1930s traveller suggests that he enjoyed neither the culturally bestowed conviction of superiority of the late eighteenth-century traveller, nor the Edwardian traveller's confident exploitation of place as a source of renewal for himself and his reader. Indeed, what distinguishes 1930s travel books is not any particular stance but the variety and complexity of stance. It was the mid-thirties, 1934-7, that produced the substantial crop of travel books, including Evelyn Waugh's *Ninety-Two Days*, J.B. Priestley's *English Journey*, Edwin Muir's *Scottish Journey*, Graham Greene's *Journey Without Maps*, George Orwell's *The Road to Wigan Pier*, Robert Byron's *The Road to Oxiana*, and W.H. Auden and Louis MacNiece's *Letters from Iceland*. (1982: 128)

Dodd sees in these male travelling accounts a unique relation between author and place in terms of intimacy or of identification with the new place. They reveal the standpoint of the author and their tendency to formulate ideas. His arguments lead to the conclusion that the genre was being transformed. Likewise, Mitchell and Maginnis' writings about Spain's turmoil before 1936 indicate another turn in the concept of the travel genre, adding elements of war. They were also restless and eager to leave their home country to explore the intense and critical situation that had made Spain a central focus of interest in Europe.

Kate O'Brien stated in *Farewell Spain* that there would not be more sentimental travellers (1987 [1937]: 3). She saw the Spanish conflict as a sign of Europe in crisis: "this war is only one ulcer on an ulcered world" (6). Mitchell and Maginnis contributed to the change of tone of travellers' books. In fact, the difference between them and previous women travellers of the 1920s is obvious: the earlier tradition of "women on wheels" had also left literary accounts that portrayed Spain as a country of contrasts. Edith Wharton, Katharine Lee Bates, or Gertrude Whitney Vanderbilt had motored through Spain from 1920 to 1925, with time to travel leisurely, showing their interest in culture, monuments and landscapes. Their interesting travel books, diaries and memoirs, however, had a different motivation and reflected the perspectives of New Women in a rapidly changing world. Even if they hinted at troubles in the social and political arena, their works did not yet envision the dangerous elements of an approaching war, as Maginnis and Mitchell did.

Both authors were able to observe the incremental inevitability of the war, and the travel genre allowed them to articulate it. Roberson (2009) describes a useful theoretical frame that helps us to understand their contributions. She defines two important factors in travelling accounts: the geographical/physical movement and the ideological mobility that the traveller experiences (2009: 225). The physical and mental mobility of these two intellectuals from Britain and the United States produced different results. They confronted new experiences with Catholic minds but asserted different processes of self-definition in the reflections they offer as the chapters progress. The reader learns about both travellers' concerns through their personal and political commitments, which are exposed as they interpret the signs of the approaching conflict. Likewise, to analyse their contribution, Jackson's definition of women writers of the Spanish Civil War as "constructors of the past" (2014: 45) acknowledges the narration of a biased conflict seen through personal perspectives, conceived from previous ideas. As the critic explains: "Women were drawn within its orbit, not only because it was the 'cause' of the day, but because for each of them, the conflict was a reflection of their varied concerns" (45).

Moreover, Díaz Nosty's updated compendium of women participants in the war proves that Mitchell and Maginnis were not the only ones. Under the broad concept of "journalists", the researcher provides an enormous list of nurses, workers, writers, and travellers that stand out for their testimonies on the war. Among them, he includes Mitchell, highlighting her reading of Spain in war from a pacifist position (2022: 492-494).

The choice of the travel genre by the writers under study allows them to record quotidian life as it was altered at the onset of the war. Images of Spanish affective life (hidden, refrained, expressed or represented feelings) could be translated to readers in the UK or the States by recounting their travelling experiences and adding accounts they took from the nationalistic press (Maginnis) or the London anarchist press (Mitchell). This allows us to confront the perspective of an Ursuline nun, busily doing research in the Archives of the Indies or Simancas, with that of a modern writer and activist who delves into the political and economic and social causes in the years of the impending fierce struggle.

Thus, the travel genre is adapted to Maginnis and Mitchell's needs. Although the underlying structure of the traditional travel book is maintained, rational analysis and emotional responses to the drama surpass the goal of a mere touristic guidebook. Maginnis makes systematic reference to Spain's past glory and the contrast with its present or refers naively to plain stereotypes (*botijo* or *brasero*). Mitchell explores the passionate Spanish national character as she outlines "the chronicles of horrors" and tries to understand the "fierceness and intensity which partly explains many of the atrocities committed in the Civil War" (1937: 64). Events such as strikes, assassinations, speeches, and protests are noted as the silent advance of the war is portrayed. The travel book becomes ultimately a crafted manifesto based on personal perceptions and constructed with the quotidian details of an upcoming drama and its consequences.

One Country, Two Perspectives

Paratextual elements, the structure of both books, and the selection of topics are the keys to understanding the personal use these authors made of the travel book. Mitchell overtly justifies pacifist ideas, and Maginnis retrospectively recalls the times to defend openly the result of the revolt. Both diligently map out a clear frame to make public their testimonies as they recall their advances into the country. The similarity in the structure of both books is stunning, but their perspectives and attitudes when observing are radically different. Maginnis' accounts expose the conviction that the nationalist cause is the best solution for Spain, while Mitchell's knowledge of the complexity of political and economic affairs questions the validity of the war and reflects on the painful results.

The beginnings and the ends of both books hint at their careful organization to make the reader understand their adventures and reflections. The 231 pages of Maginnis' book are structured into 14 chapters ("Don't Go to Spain!", "Seville at Half Mast", "Pepita", "The Archives of the Indies", "Over the River", "In Walks Isabel", "I Dwell in Marble Halls", "Revolution", "My Castle in Spain", "Old, Old Things", "The Touch of Romance", "Down to Palos", "The Search for the Viceroy", and "You Can't Kill a Rose!"). In the foreword, she describes the conflict of the Civil War only in economic terms, and introduces her role as a student with biased religious interests:

> In 1932 I was sent to Spain to study a difficult phase of sixteenth-century Spanish American history; and now when I attempt to write some account of my prodigies of intellectual valor at Spanish study centers, what is my surprise to find mirrored in it the sweep of the great economic movement in Spain up to the very threshold of the war – at which point I came home. […]

> I am only a student. […] of all the books, God, and God's people are my first choice! (1937: v)

At the end of the book her discourse openly praises the upheaval. She describes external political menaces and the image of war as an obligatory crusade:

> The movement it was my privilege to observe, with its aim at social redress, its program so practically outlined, was well and successfully launched – but it was just one hour late! Marxism had already fastened upon the laborer and the unemployed. When the smoke rolls away it will be hard to reinvigorate the charred stump. However, there is always possibility that the faith, as in the reconquest from the Moors, may rise stronger than ever. If you want to strengthen anything just try thwarting it. (1937: 230)

Hers is a fixed perspective. She had openly declared earlier in the book her surprise at other views, especially those of her compatriots:

> I never could quite get the viewpoint of the Americans I met in Spain concerning the struggle going on there. Their chance remarks seemed to imply sympathy with the Revolution. [...] Could they not see that there was [sic] question of the triumph of the Reds? Could it be, I queried, that they conceived the Spanish Republic as one like our own, as promising a like prosperity? To my mind there was not the slightest similarity between the Spanish ideal and ours, either of democracy or republicanism, or their conception of reform and ours; for their complications spring out of feudalism. (1937: 116)

Maginnis, like Mitchell, feels the need to register the social groups she encounters. She has the strong sustained support of the conservative class and is being well taken care of during her time in Spain. She meets established, privileged families and has excellent contacts: religious communities (the Dominican Sister Bertrand, the Catalan Dominicans in Madrid, the Mary Immaculate Congregation in Seville, or the Irish nuns in Madrid); diplomats (the American and Spanish Ambassadors and the American consul); aristocracy and high-class personalities, whom she calls "my highborn Spanish friends" (1937: 21): Doña María de Cárdenas y Rodríguez de Rivas and her sisters Fernanda, Doña Carolina Ximénez Enciso, and even the Duke of Alba. She also mentions intellectuals, scholars and relevant staff from universities and archives.

Her discourse relies on anecdotes and emotional impressions rather than serious reflections. Stereotypical illustrations open each chapter following the traditional practice of travel books on Spain. She enjoys revisiting an enjoyable time, with poems, bilingual *sevillanas*, letters, short notes, and even with the epitaph she writes for Hernando Colón. She naively catalogues information about the political system and parties in Spain, surprised at their variety. She admits that she needs advice and she gets the explanation from "my military tutor" (1937: 117), Doña Carolina's nephew, an infantry officer. She comments on it with irony: "Seventeen parties in all, he described, representing as many shades of opinion. No wonder they speak of Spanish individualism" (1937: 117). Her simple reaction arises from the comparison she proudly makes with the United States' safe political system "Having been brought behind the good old two-horse team of Republican and Democrats in the United States, it was with some pluckering of the brow that I confronted this formidable political array" (1937: 118). Contrary to Mitchell, Maginnis' lack of knowledge of the political situation in Europe does not provide her with a complete vision of the Spanish conflict.

She recalls having received warnings at home about the state of danger in Spain before entering the country: "Oh, don't go to Spain'" they said to me in Paris. "Don't go! They don't want sisters down there. They are communists" (1937: 1). She seeks help from the Catholic Spanish ambassador in Washington, Don Juan de Cárdenas, in terms that confirm her overgeneralised ideas about Spain: "I came to ask for help. I understand the customs of Spanish women are quite different from those in this country; and besides, there is political unrest over there. Will you kindly give me letters to some ladies in Spain who will chaperone me and assist me in my work?" (1937: 2). She also gets the support of the American ambassador in Spain: ("Mr Loughlin established for me a center of psychological security in Spain which gave me confidence in face of the protests in Paris" (1937:3). Thus, at the beginning, she describes Spain naively, perceiving only a vague sense of danger: "My ideas of the Spanish unrest were hazy. All the way along into Spain I used to look curiously through the trains and the stations to see if I could spot a communist" (1937: 3). Her Catholic faith and practice give her a solid sense of security. It seems she ignores the real danger, and even enjoys describing moments of uncertainty, as earlier nineteenth-century travellers had done wishing to confront bandits:

> On that day I saw those young men lift from the racks of the train their heavy suitcases, filled, I suspected, with ammunition. They were not Spaniards, and from that intuition which is a woman's most useful weapon I guessed that they knew I read their secret. They were of the Internationales [sic]. A sister on the street often stands for the whole Catholic Church from the Pope down; she can read in the faces that confront her the exact mental attitude of the persons behind them. These four young men on the train, fresh, good-looking young fellows, were my enemies but I was not theirs. They avoided my eyes. In my heart I was praying for them as is my custom for my fellow passengers in the train. (1937: 3)

Her means allow her to travel in "the rápido for Madrid" with the rich class: "I found the first class full of very nice people. Spanish ladies love to chatter English and really speak it very well. I always envy the European's aptitude for languages; we are so wooden, we Americans" (1937: 4). Maginnis's privileged position will give her a partial view of the real situation. She tinges her bucolic and utopic descriptions with some hints of concern for the economic situation, as when she describes beautiful wheat fields next to the river Pisuerga:

> But turning again to the river, the wheat fields smile up at you, pure gold. Never, you think, never was such wheat as the Spanish wheat. It must have come from Aladdin's own lamp. Never such pure creamy flour, never such delicious bread. Down there in the flats, men women and children are reaping. They look happy, absorbed there in their one common interest under the beautiful Spanish skies, with color and rich odors of earth and harvest. Yet this place, just as every other, is torn with deep economic upheaval that is racking Spain. They are demanding a still better living, a larger share. (1937: 142)

Maginnis, like Mitchell, is aware of new, changing times in Spain. She claims that her gaze is that of someone with "sophisticated modern eyes" (1937: 18) but admits her limitations at the reality she encounters: "Spain is inscrutable" (1937: 17). Her view of social unrest comes mainly from the effects she sees in high social classes ("the aristocrats were dismissing their servants one by one" (1937: 33). At times, she is confronted with real need and becomes aware of the desperation of Spaniards from the lower classes: "When I saw how the little starved beggar at the Dominican church door jumped when I drew a 'pan de Vienna' [sic] from my

pocket the first morning, I realized what bread meant" (35). She also recalls first-hand experiences:

> One day I was hungry – I was often hungry in Spain; I went into a shop and got some little biscuits to stay me until I could reach home which was at some distance of cobble-stoned ways. Coming out, I ran into a blind man led by a little girl, a thin waif of pale humanity, the picture of starvation. The morsel I had just drawn out to slip into my mouth I dropped instantly into the child's thin hand. Like a flash it was in her mouth and gone. She did not have time to raise her eyes; it was the flash of naked instinct. She never knew where she got that bite. I was gone. That day for the first time in my life I saw real hunger. (1937: 36)

She witnessed poorly implemented social measures and examples of substandard housing: "Some American friends once drove me out into the country. 'You must see Villa Lata,' said they. 'What is that?' 'Oh, it is a tin city. It is where all the beggars and communists congregate.' The hovels they live in are made of scraps of tin roofing or piping that have been picked up in streets of ash barrels" (1937: 36). She recalls her own reaction: "'Don't go in! Oh, don't go in!' I cried. I could not bear to ride into those streets in the automobile of the rich" (1937: 37).

Both authors' travel books take a different turn in this period. Tragic episodes are not silenced. But Maginnis often sees only those on one side: the one she knew well. She adopts the discourse of heroism and justifies the *Alzamiento* as she praises the dead heroes as fighters in a crusade. Her account justifies the need to keep Catholic faith intact:

> I kept thinking, as I looked around me at the Spanish priests my friend Miss B so discredited, this is the body of men who Christianized the New World. With each conquistador went at least half a dozen; in five hundred years hundreds, thousands, labored and struggled, fought and won, in those Indian wilds. That there is any Christianity today from Tierra de Fuego to San Francisco is due to this Spanish priesthood. They do not look heroic under those black sombreros. Nevertheless, during the October revolution, upwards of forty of these men were actually tortured and killed, by order from Moscow, at the hands of the ignorant poor they had tried to serve, simply because they were priests. They met it heroically. (108)

Maginnis emphasises the way in which religion is being erased. Her portrait of the practice of religion is carefully drawn and predominantly features privileged circles. She describes worship in private chapels of big mansions and gives specific details of individual practices: "In every Spanish lady's bedroom – man's too, for that matter – you will find holy water, the rosary, the Madonna, the crucifix" (1937: 45). She also gives account of religious organizations such as *Acción Católica*, charity events, masses, priests' speeches and laundries of the *Servicio Doméstico*. The attacks against religion are arguments to defend a "national salvation", led by the Church and a Christian government:

> I saw only too much. My heart ached for this noble Spanish race, so full of good disposition, so hopelessly entangled in inefficiency […]. Then, perhaps, inspired by the Church, directed and guided by Christian government, and not without many a crisis, many a ferment, they may hope to work out their national salvation. (1937: 40)

Maginnis' view of Spain provides a very interesting portrait of the dynamics of Spanish religious activities, its supporters, its rites and followers, all seen through the eyes of an American Ursuline. The slow advance of the tension and the effects of political and social unrest

on privileged classes are interestingly covered. Simultaneously, the author uses the travel book as a tool for propaganda.

Contrastingly, Mitchell's book is written in 247 pages and structured in 13 chapters ("'The Land for the People'", "Torremolinos, and the Gypsies of Málaga", "The Soul of Spain", "The Fair of Seville", "Ronda", "From the Albaícin [sic] to the Alhambra", "The Anarchists", "The Rock", "The Extraordinary Town of Almargen", "Córdoba", "The Army and the Guardia Civil", "The Basques" and "War and Peace"). Mitchell did not include a foreword, but significantly she dedicated the book to William Patrick Ryan (with his Irish name: Liam P. O'Riain), a nationalist who, along with Peadar O'Donnell, "was one of the few members of the Irish intelligentsia who publicly declared the illegitimacy of Franco's uprising against a democratically elected government" (Asensio and Fernández 2023: 271). She also selects an opening quote from the versatile Peter Kropotkin, geographer, naturalist, and economic theoretician, that summarises her credo, the eagerness to celebrate life and the praise for a humanitarian, fair future: "The beautiful, the sublime, the spirit of life itself, are on the side of those who strive for light, for humanity, for justice" (1937: 5).

Mitchell recalls her first understanding of the war in terms of social issues: "In travelling through Andalucía during the chief strike period of 1936 two months before Civil War began, it was possible to gain some appreciation of those forces of social conflict which were the background to the struggle" (1937: 13). She narrates the confusion that was felt all around: "at that time events marched too rapidly, political passions were so inflamed as to obscure clear thinking, the elements that were thrown up too bewildering to the foreigner, unless he happened to be a strict party man" (1937: 13).

Moreover, the long last chapter ("War and Peace") is an extensive discussion on the reality and consequences of the Civil War in Europe with many references to Ireland, and presents her point of view and her travel companion's as those of "two average women":

> And the "two averages" from their travels in Spain also knew that the worst of the conditions under the weak Republican Government of Spain between February and July 1936, were better than the conditions of Spain after the war started by those who rose up, whether to put an end to the existing weakness of that Government, or from genuine religious motives, or for base selfish ends. (1937: 245)

Like Maginnis, Mitchell achieves an emphatic ending with an extensive reflection in the final chapter, presenting the Spanish Civil War as "a terrible warning to the rest of the world" (1937: 245). Her intention to make her book a universal reflection on the futility of war was already hinted at in the paratext of the 1937 edition. The quote from the dust jacket explicitly announced the book as a novelty ("An Irish writer gives a picture of the Civil War in Spain from an entirely new angle"). Moreover, George Orwell's famous quote describing Mitchell as a "Catholic of anarchist orientation" in his review in *Time and Tide* (1937) pointed at her religious credo and her rejection of taking sides. Her solid knowledge of the political situation, her systematic questioning of the truth of the published testimonies, and the awareness of the loss of human values in the war are obvious.

Moreover, the judicious selection of quotes with which Mitchell opens each chapter supports her goal of making her experiences understood as rigorous reflections, and points at her unflinching defence of peace and understanding. Chapter III, "The Soul of Spain", opens with Terence MacSwiney's quote, "Our enemies are brothers from whom we are estranged" (1937: 48), and points at the danger of the fight for both sides in the war, a leitmotif in the book. It is, undoubtedly, the best example of Mitchell's pacifism.

Her fondness for literary quotes complements her knowledge of intellectual, cultural, political and economic issues related to Spain and Europe. She is a sign of the rich cultural

projection of Ireland at the time (Armie, Asensio and Membrive 2025). She combines all sorts of sources: newspapers, the Papal Encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, the *Institutionalize Vaticana* or *Mundo Obrero*, among others. At the end of the book, she offers a list of useful bibliographical references in three categories "General", "Political" and "Musical" (1937: 249-255).

Mitchell describes herself as traveller without official support, aligned with the less-favoured sectors of society. She pictures herself and Tinka as brave women, eager to participate in demonstrations, such as the one on May 1st: "It was too much to expect any Irishwoman to remain indoors, let alone a Hungarian whose family had a long line of rebels to their credit" (1937: 37). They meet an amazing range of characters in all sorts of places: at "small, inexpensive pensions" in Granada (1937: 116), in the famous Café Chinitas (Málaga) with dancers, or in the Albaicín with gypsies, where "we felt among friends" (1937:108). Mitchell systematically qualifies her peers as socially marked individuals and points out their working-class condition, as in the case of Luis, the socialist shoemaker (1937:187) or the mechanic of Eibar (1937: 203). She eschews class consciousness in her choice of lodgings: the Hotel Anglo-Hispano in Algeciras, or the Grand Hotel and a fisherman's hut in Gibraltar, among others. The value of her narrative relies on her desire to sympathise with common, ordinary people. She describes social classes in Spain in contrast with those in other European countries (especially Ireland) and her book brings to light a serious concern for the Spanish population, with whom she continually interacts.

In general, Mitchell's personal observations and account of events reveal her as a committed activist and journalist with a clear intention of defending pacifist ideas. Data and observations are provided with concerned political knowledge. Asensio and Fernández have listed the many acquaintances and contacts she had as a member of the Gaelic League in London, her mentors, intellectuals, anarchists of the London Freedom group and the Bloomsbury group (2023: 263). She embodies the European awareness of the struggle and disharmony in Spain. At the beginning of the book, she recalls the advice she received before her departure in April 1936, expressed in more realistic terms than that received by Maginnis: "'Go now', said our friend, who is a journalist. 'In a few months something is going to happen that will keep you out of Spain for a long time'" (1937: 11). Mitchell wants to show her awareness of the difficult situation in Spain and she adds her personal motivation: "Spain was rocking with the first tremors of an earthquake that was soon to scar her land from Tarifa to Tolosa. I had another reason for going to Spain again: I wanted to follow up Irish tracks there" (1937: 11).

References to Irish politics and land recur throughout her book, as Asensio and Fernández have noted (2023). She describes a simultaneously rich and poor country with tremendous differences and enlightens her account with literary and political references. The reader gets details from the events in October 1934 and her analysis of the nationalistic spirit in Catalonia and the Basque country. Additionally, Mitchell selects scenes that move her feelings. Like Maginnis, she sees hunger and how it affects children: "a hungry, little waif, who putting a fist to his open mouth, said 'hambre' and opened his hand for a copper" (1937: 68). In her opinion, political parties do not offer clear solutions. She points at relevant protagonists: "Largo Caballero was being hailed as the strong man of Spain" (1937: 87), and she is sceptical and, at times, ironic: "Everywhere in Triana we saw 'Popular Frente de la Izquierda' painted on walls, and the new sign of man's salvation, the hammer and the sickle" (1937: 69).

Mitchell wants to register the horror that affects both sides of the war. She does not hesitate to offer an account of losses on each side, and builds solid arguments with pacifist intentions:

> Neither the horror of Bloody Badajoz, when legionaries of the Right executed over 1,500 men of the Left, nor the worst atrocities of the Left in Málaga (largely the result

> of panic following air raids by the Right) shook one with more despair at the senseless savagery, the ghastly futility of war. (1937: 45)

Mitchell's religion shows a practical, social side. She is well aware of the benefits of religion for congregations or people that live according to their rules. She praises, for example, chapels in Seville, "such islands of healing out of a world torn with tumult" (1937: 73) and respects people's rites: "To take away from sorrowing people the one comfort they know, is no minor tragedy of modern revolutions" (1937: 60). Like Maginnis, she documents the measures taken to erase the traces of religion, pointing at signs of change: "in Algeciras, a church has turned into a 'Casa del Pueblo'", and "in place of the Stations of the Cross [there] were pictures of Lenin and Stalin" (1937: 158). She even describes with humour scenes where nuns do not take change submissively: "Tinka and I saw a man pick up a little nun and throw her on the ground. What did she do but up and slap his face. No turning the other cheek" (1937: 158).

In general, her main concern is to communicate her ideas about pacifism. The Spanish conflict is described within the European context, aware of other political conflicts like the Irish Rising or the menace of fascism in Italy and Germany:

> There cannot be any "victory" for any country taking part in a modern war. War in this century means a defeat for all peoples who engage in it. And there can never be a war to end war unless it is one in which the human race is wiped out. (1937: 219)

This very modern perspective of the London-Irish activist Mitchell stands in contrast to the Irish-American Maginnis, who offers an overgeneralised, partial and outmoded conclusion in her book: "The present struggle is one of religion: Christianity crossing swords with communism come out of the east just as of old it crossed scimitars with the Mohammedans" (1937: 215). Maginnis' partial understanding of the Spanish conflict makes her interpret events at times from a relatively narrow perspective. Her place in a secure, conservative social class, gives a partial view of the situation. In turn, Mitchell, conscious of critical situations in the European milieu and having experienced Ireland's conflictive situation, looks at Spain trying to avoid Manichean explanations and providing both sides of the conflict with a serious reflection on the need for peace. These two travel books offer contrasting perspectives, marking the definitive end of the romantic tradition in travel literature with the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War.

Conclusion: The Spain They Found

All in all, both Maginnis and Mitchell constructed the past retrospectively summarising their experiences in Spain, interpreting the drama as they saw it. To a certain extent, they subscribe to Kate O'Brien's reflection in *Farewell Spain*: "For some of us there has been Spain. First, the Spain we imagined – a place we cannot remember now – and afterwards the Spain we found" (1937: 17). In their travel books, they interpreted the country according to their education, ideology and their own particular concerns.

The interest in contrasting both perspectives lies in the two different versions provided of the same country. Maginnis recounts her activities and impressions from a secure position, naively. She primarily focuses on her professional research for important details of history of the conquest of America, specifically on the figure of a Viceroy of the 16th century. Her discourse seems to be rooted in an archaic understanding of an old Spain. With her, we trace reality in bits and pieces of drama that she encounters on her way to the Archive of the Indies or in Simancas. Her naive understanding makes her perceive Spain as a dualistic world where communists are the main menace. She ends the book expressing the sincere hope and belief that

Catholic Spain will rise as a result of the upheaval. Mitchell, by contrast, is writing as a political activist and her discussions are full of well-studied references to the situation. She is well versed in Spanish history, Irish conflicts, and European context. The painful state of confrontation in Spain is seen as an irremediable event that should be a warning to the rest of Europe in crisis.

They indirectly examine Spain's role in Europe through the lens of their travelling anecdotes and help to bridge historical understanding of the Spanish situation from an international and personal perspective. Their work should be considered and respected for its contribution to the field of modern European history. These foreign travellers selected specific images to recreate the new era in Spain. Their voices with Irish inflection and influenced by a Catholic upbringing share the desire to write travel books as educational projects with their own peculiar gaze and interpretation of the conflict. The storm they saw over Spain was also the prelude of a bigger one that would take place later in Europe in World War II.

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