

//THIS IS THEIR FIGHT:
JORIS IVENS'S *THE SPANISH EARTH* AND
THE ROMANTIC GAZE//

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PALABRAS CLAVE: Guerra Civil Española, *Tierra de España*, Ernest Hemingway, Joris Ivens, El Mono Azul, Alianza de Intelectuales Antifascistas, Propaganda, Cine.

RESUMEN: En 1937, el documental *Tierra de España* trató de dar a conocer la Guerra Civil Española al público internacional. Este ensayo analiza la representación de España que Joris Ivens (director) y Ernest Hemingway (guionista) proyectan con el fin de obtener apoyo político y económico para la causa republicana. Como trataré de demostrar en este artículo, su intento de creación de una cierta empatía transatlántica entre el público estadounidense y el pueblo español estaba basado en la perpetuación de la imagen de una España romántica que termina por erradicar la complejidad cultural peninsular.

KEYWORDS: Spanish Civil War, The Spanish Earth, Ernest Hemingway, Joris Ivens, El Mono Azul, Alianza de Intelectuales Antifascistas, Propaganda, Film.

ABSTRACT: In 1937, the film *The Spanish Earth* documented the Spanish Civil War for international audiences. This essay analyzes the ways in which Joris Ivens (director) and Ernest Hemingway (screenwriter) portrayed the Spanish conflict in order to obtain political and economic support for the Spanish Republican cause. As I try to prove in this paper, their attempt to create a certain transatlantic empathy between American audiences and the Spanish people relied on the perpetuation of a romanticized image of Spain that erases the cultural complexity of Spain.

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The Spanish Civil War, with its anticipation of the future tensions of World War II, served as a laboratory not only for modern warfare but also for war propaganda. After World War I and the Soviet Revolution, the Western world had already learned about the radical importance of propaganda in contemporary armed conflicts. Information and misinformation became a part of military tactics. As a result, the Spanish Civil War left us with an extensive number of cultural products that tried to communicate specific perspectives on the conflict from both sides of the trenches. From posters to films, including the exhibition of Picasso's *Guernica* in the Spanish pavilion at the international exhibition held in Paris, those loyal to the democratically elected Spanish government tried to get new recruits for their cause both at home and abroad. While most of these products were created locally in Spain either for local or foreign consumption, some others were produced by foreign artists and aimed at an international audience. From Ernest Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls* to André Malraux's *L'Espoir*, American and European authors internationalized the Spanish conflict through fiction and films in spite of the official policy of non-intervention signed by Western democracies. In this essay I focus on one specific instance of this internationalization: the film *The Spanish Earth*, a documentary directed by Joris Ivens that dabbles in the realm of fiction and that was the product of the collective effort of a group of intellectuals called the Contemporary Historians.

The Spanish Earth was designed as a propaganda artifact aimed at increasing the awareness of the Spanish Republican cause in the international community, but more precisely in the United States. Through this film we can try to understand how the Spanish conflict was sometimes transmitted and perceived across the Atlantic in an attempt to increase and materialize the actual support for the Republic. Filmed in Spain but destined mainly for American audiences, *The Spanish Earth* can help us to understand the way a foreign gaze perceived the Spanish Civil War and tried to render the conflict readable for international consumption. At that time, what were the chances of an American audience becoming emotionally involved in the Spanish Civil War? These transatlantic messages were forced to face the lack of knowledge and the indifference that the intended audience had for the 'other' community. The success of a film like *The Spanish Earth* as propaganda depended on answering the potential question raised by the most recalcitrant audiences: "Why should we worry about it?" This essay should help us to understand the viable answers to this question—the answers that allowed for a potential resolution of the utter initial indifference and the birth of a budding transatlantic empathy. As I will show in the following pages, *The Spanish Earth* relied on an epideictic rhetoric—praising the worthiness of the Spanish Republic and the blameworthiness of Franco and his allies—which curiously depends on stressing the otherness of Spain instead of on trying to close the gap between the multiple *selves* of international audiences and the *Other* represented on the screen.

Most of the cultural artifacts created in relation to the Spanish Civil War seem to involve either the perception or the construction of a tangible community—what Benedict Anderson called an imagined community. According to Anderson's usage of the term, an imagined community is precisely "*imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them or even hear of them, yet in the midst of each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson, 1991: 6). Curiously enough, when we try to analyze the sense of transnational community inherent in the making of *The Spanish Earth*, the term "*imagined*" acquires even greater validity. In the construction of its particular imagined community, Ivens's film is forced to create a series of links across the Atlantic that not only supersede national borderlines but also linguistic and cultural barriers. The ability of imagining this specific transnational community seemingly depends on the possibility of dissolving the inherent otherness and of creating a sense of communion between the communities involved—in this case the Spanish and that of the international target audiences of the film. As Anderson states in the case of nation building, transnational connections can also "always [be] conceived as a deep, horizontal

comradeship” based on “fraternity” (Anderson, 1991: 7). I propose that Anderson’s perception of the concept of nationhood is homologous to the transatlantic imagined community created around the mystic halo of the Spanish Civil War. However, the case of the Republican cause’s aura is particularly interesting because it can also help us to put into question certain assumptions made by Anderson about the apparently exclusive power of nations. According to Anderson, “[d]ying for one’s country [...] assumes a moral grandeur which dying for the Labour Party, the American Medical Association, or perhaps even for Amnesty International cannot rival [...] Dying for the revolution also draws its grandeur from the degree to which it is felt to be something fundamentally pure” (Anderson, 1991: 144). Obviously enough, Anderson’s sarcastic remark seems to ignore the effort of the international commitment in the fight against fascism in the 1930s and 40s. It is certainly true that no national holidays commemorate the effort of the International Brigades that fought alongside the Spanish Republic. Nothing in the everyday life of individuals on either side of the Atlantic seems to remind us about their existence. We can easily argue, following another of Anderson’s arguments, that forgetting the International Brigades is one of the prerequisites in order to become a twenty-first-century Spaniard or a true American patriot in the age of global terror. However, it is evident that actually fighting and dying for the Republican cause was surrounded by “moral grandeur.” Fighting for the Spanish Republic was perceived as “something fundamentally pure” even for those who did not believe in the revolution but in the legitimacy of a democratically elected government threatened by fascism. Whether or not the “internationals” were fighting for “the imagined community of the socialist nation” or for a democratic world free of fascism, it seems clear that the power of the Republican cause was strong enough to die for (Anderson, 1991: 161).

As Anderson argues, the press was essential in providing “the technical means to ‘re-presenting’” the imagined community (Anderson, 1991: 25). The rise of print-capitalism allowed for “reproductibility and dissemination” of the ideals that structured the community and caused “rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways” (Anderson, 1991: 36-37). In the case of the Spanish Civil War, the press was only a part of the series of cultural artifacts that helped to create and perpetuate the aura of the Spanish Republican cause. Newspapers, magazines, films, documentaries, newsreels, songs, poems, novels, essays, paintings, and posters helped to communicate the Spanish struggle for democracy under the menace of fascism. By the 1930’s the press already had a long tradition as a means to create a sense of the working class community¹. But, after all, the press was only a medium among others. As Sergei Eisenstein’s *Bronenosets Potyomkin* (1925) and Leni Riefenstahl’s *Triumph des Willens* (1935) and *Olympia* (1938) proved film had already acquired an immense potential for the transmission of ideology by the late 1930s. Moving pictures allowed an even greater extent of “infinite reproductibility” than the press (Anderson, 1991: 182). However, it remains unexplained how certain culturally specific messages can be received and interpreted internationally. In the case of *The Spanish Earth*, the main goal was to awaken social interest about the conflict in international audiences and to capitalize upon this interest in a certain level of commitment and actual intervention. In order to understand how this film pursued this aim, it is necessary to take into account a series of concepts borrowed from social psychology.

Our further research on the construction of an international fraternity, should take into account the notion of *gemeinschaftsgefühl*, or *social interest*, developed by Alfred Adler.

¹ In Spain, the first newspaper affiliated with the labor movement was *El eco de la clase obrera*, published in Madrid in 1855. The second one appeared nine years later in Barcelona with the title *El obrero*. From then on, the number of labor newspapers and magazines in Spain increased exponentially until the 1930s. For a detailed account of the role of the press in the Spanish Civil War see Jordana Mendelson’s *Revistas y guerra*.

According to Kelly, the notion of social interest “refers to an innate potential of the human being to develop an identification with and feeling for other people” (Kelly, 1994: 434). Undoubtedly, *The Spanish Earth* strongly and optimistically relies on this “innate potential” of “identification.” For the Contemporary Historians collective, the role of this film was to arise a clear feeling of *empathy* towards the Spanish population and the cause of the Spanish Republic. Interestingly enough, the Contemporary Historians’ project did not try to dissolve the otherness of Spain and of Spaniards in the eyes of foreign audiences. Far from it, *The Spanish Earth* stressed a sense of ultimate otherness by portraying Spain as a prelapsarian society. *The Spanish Earth* emphasizes the image of a seemingly innocent and unspoiled rural Spain, which could be perceived as the ultimate other by the modern urban audiences of France, Britain and the United States.

As defined by Eisenberg, empathy is “an emotional reaction to another’s emotional state or condition that is consistent with the other’s state or condition” (Eisenberg, 1994: 247). Under the menace of fascism, most of the cultural products from the Republican side put forth an effort to make empathy surface in global audiences and, eventually, to turn this empathy in any kind of pro-social behavior. The reception process of this kind of cultural production relied on the total implication of the receiver in the cause transmitted by the sender of the message. In this case, no aesthetic distance is desired. The receiver is forced to take a stance in front of the message. According to social psychology, in these cases, the receiver shifts towards “perspective taking,” which is a cognitive process, rather than an emotional one, that leads to the “comprehension of another’s internal psychological processes such as their thoughts and feelings” (Eisenberg, 1994: 247). Perspective taking would then move the subject to activate a specific prosocial behavior (Eisenberg, 1994: 250).

Ivens’s film calls the audience into perspective taking and tries to activate a prosocial behavior. However, as I argue, *The Spanish Earth* does not aim at the erasure of the difference between Spanish culture and those of the target audiences of the film, as one might have expected. Conversely, the film wisely plays the well-known and quite convenient wildcard of Spanish otherness cultivated by the romantic European imagination of the nineteenth century. The film emphasized a series of binary oppositions that perpetuate the tensions between the clichés of a romantic Spain and the contemporary realities of Western democracies: rural/urban, primitive/modern, agrarian/industrial, communal/capitalist, etc. All of them helped to consolidate the unique situation of a Spain at war when compared to the well-being of most of the population of Western democracies. *The Spanish Earth* appeals to the audience through a humane plea, a plea for help, not only to prevent this society from falling in the hands of fascism but also a cry for a civilizing hand that can bring this seemingly anachronistic society into the twentieth century while preserving part of its innate innocence. In this case, the imagined community shared by the Spaniards depicted in the film and by the international audiences is not based on class, gender, race, language, culture or political affiliation, but on sheer humanity. The plea of *The Spanish Earth* calls for humanity, in one of its apparently purest and most innocent forms, to be saved from fascism.

By July 1935, the threat caused by the advance of fascism in Europe encouraged a series of liberal intellectuals to meet in Paris in a congress that tried to counteract this menace. According to the first issue of the Spanish magazine *El Mono Azul*, “de esa gran asamblea salió la necesidad inmediata, inaplazable, de combatir al fascismo en todas sus formas” (Alianza de Intelectuales Antifascistas, 1975: 1). In that conference, André Gide, Thomas Mann, André Malraux, Romain Rolland, Aldous Huxley, and Waldo Franc, among others, created a new International Committee (Alianza de Intelectuales Antifascistas, 1975: 1). The new antifascist league born in July 1935 became the seminal ensemble that gave birth to an international movement that called for intellectuals to stop the advance of fascism. This way, the local Spanish struggle was perceived as the most important battle in

the international democratic war against fascism, which would become, months after the end of the Spanish conflict, World War II. Thus, from the very beginning of the Spanish Civil War, the Spanish *Alianza de Intelectuales Antifascistas*, which emerged from the Paris meeting, tried to cultivate a series of transnational connections which linked the Spanish liberals with their international comrades. Through its magazine, *El Mono Azul*, the Alliance of Antifascist Intellectuals publicized any foreign interest in the Spanish war as a way to prove that international solidarity was a fact that disregarded the restrictions imposed on the Republic by the non-intervention agreement signed by Western democracies. A good example of this particular policy is an article describing the visit of two eminent international visitors in March 1937. Under the almost cryptic title of “Salud América: John Dos Passos y John Hemmingway en España,” [sic] we discover the picture of a famous John and a famous Ernest—whose real surname was spelled with a single ‘m’—posing with a young Rafael Alberti and María Teresa León, members of the *Alianza de Intelectuales Antifascistas* and editors of *El Mono Azul*. The article reads:

Si la opinión popular de Estados Unidos y los centros políticos manifiestan ahora su simpatía por la España popular, mucho de ello lo debemos a John Dos Passos y a Hemmingway [sic], cuyo prestigio en América es enorme. Toda la leyenda de la “España roja” ha quedado deshecha gracias a su labor persistente. Toda la América que trabaja y piensa: obreros, intelectuales, estudiantes, está con nosotros. (D., 1975: 110)

As we can guess from the article, while the names of the VIPs do not seem to be that important for the journalist, the real message tries to reaffirm the international connection of the Spanish Republican cause with the people of the United States. The reporter implies that while the government of the United States remained faithful to the non-intervention policy, most of its population was sympathetic to the loyalist Spain. Unfortunately, that was not totally true and Dos Passos and Hemingway were in Spain trying to change that standpoint.

John Dos Passos had arrived in Spain, months before the article of *El Mono Azul* was published, with the young Dutch filmmaker, Joris Ivens. Ivens and Dos Passos were part of a group called the Contemporary Historians along with Hemingway, Archibald MacLeish, Lillian Hellman, Dashiell Hammet, and Dorothy Parker, among others. These artists and intellectuals were involved in a project that tried to change the American public’s perception of the Spanish conflict. The image of the Republic was radically damaged by Francoist propaganda, which depicted the legitimate government of Spain as a threat to Western civilization. The Contemporary Historians had a film about the Spanish conflict in mind, one that would try to counteract this image. Joris Ivens, in charge of the project, was “committed to ‘social cinema’ and sympathetic to the Communist cause” and his Spanish project clearly shows his allegiance to the Spanish Republic (Michalczyck, 1992: 42). The film’s script follows the life of the neighbors of a village identified as Fuentedueña, a small village 25 miles southeast of Madrid known today as Fuentidueña de Tajo, in their everyday tasks, partially unaltered by war, until the proximity of the front makes the village prey of Francoist German Junkers. The small town of Fuentedueña is presented as a microcosm of the epic struggle of the Spanish Republic (Waugh, 1983: 22). After its premiere, *The Spanish Earth* became the “definitive model for the ‘international solidarity’ genre [and for] the more utopian genre in which the revolutionary construction of each new socialist society [...] is celebrated and offered as inspiration for those still struggling under capitalism” (Waugh, 1982: 31).

The project of the Contemporary Historians changed drastically from its original plan to the final product. The first script of *The Spanish Earth*, written by Ivens, Hellman, and MacLeish, was abandoned. Instead, they relied on Ernest Hemingway for the writing

of the definitive text (Waugh, 1983: 22)². The important role of Hemingway in the production of the film caused some critics to perceive *The Spanish Earth* as almost exclusively Hemingway's craft³. However, as Davison shows in "The Publication of Hemingway's *The Spanish Earth*," Hemingway himself tried to clarify the plurality of voices involved in the composition of the script after the text was published in book form in 1938.

As Michalczyck recognizes, *The Spanish Earth* was "designed for propagandistic purposes to convince Western democracies, such as France, England, Canada, and the United States, to put aside their non-aggression policies and break the embargo with regard to Spain." (Michalczyk, 1992: 40-41). Following the tenets that Leo Hurwitz had designed for radical film directors, Ivens wanted to grant "mass access [of his work] through commercial or theatrical distribution" offering, at the same time, a "more profound political analysis" (Waugh, 1982: 32-33). Even though the film was presented in Barcelona one year after the American premiere, it was designed for audiences in the United States and this Spanish premiere can be considered merely symbolic. As we know thanks to Cabeza and Gómez's quantitative analysis of the reception of *The Spanish Earth*, the film was a commercial failure in Madrid's theaters. Unfortunately, there is no qualitative data available in order to analyze the specific response of Spanish audiences to Ivens's film. As we will see later on, there are some cultural inconsistencies in Ivens's representation of Spain that may have shocked local audiences. Regarding the commercial impact of the film in the United States, Cabeza and Gómez's research also confirms the failure of *Spanish Earth* in the American box office. The conflicting figures range from the 1,900 theaters according to the film's advertising, to 300 according to some critics, and to sparse theaters according to *Variety* (Cabeza and Gómez, 2010: 163).

As we have already mentioned, the actual goal of the film was to raise sympathy for the loyalist cause and to turn it into any kind of proactive response. While the film was mainly used for fundraising, the Contemporary Historians collective even tried to change the actual position of the government of the United States regarding non-intervention. As Michalczyck points out, "the film was [...] shown [...] at the White House for President and Mrs. Roosevelt and others on 8 July 1937" (Michalczyk, 1992: 43). As we could have predicted, President Roosevelt "diplomatically noted his respect for the work but declined to offer any American assistance on behalf of the Republic" (Michalczyk, 1992: 43). In spite of the presidential reticence to support the Spanish Republic, *The Spanish Earth* seems to have been rather successful at fundraising. According to Waugh, the film raised enough money in its commercial circuit to buy eighteen ambulances for the Madrid front (Waugh, 1983: 29). Despite the critical attention devoted to the actual outcome of *The Spanish Earth*, none of the critics of the film has paid any attention to another potential effect of films like Ivens's: the likely enrollment of a small percentage of the audience in the International Brigades.

The process involved in the reception of this work ranged from perspective taking to the attempt of generating any kind of prosocial behavior. Unfortunately for the fate of the Spanish Republic, while president Roosevelt may have empathized with the sufferings of the villagers of Fuentidueña, he never shifted towards a prosocial behavior in the case of *The Spanish Earth*. Others were. While some provided funds for the Republic, some other few may have joined the International Brigades. Regardless Ivens's sympathy for the Communist Party, the message from the Contemporary Historians was far from being

² It is interesting to remark that Hemingway also ended up being the voice narrating the events in Ivens's film. Originally, the soundtrack was recorded by a young Orson Welles. Curiously enough, at that time, Welles' voice was not considered to be powerful enough to transmit the epic nature of the villagers of Fuentidueña de Tajo and a new and more persuasive soundtrack was recorded using the author's voice.

³ Coleman's article is a good example of this perception.

openly political. The need to arouse interest in the Republican cause in the United States could not have benefited if the film had been identified as a propagandist pamphlet. Thus, both Hemingway's script and Ivens's film focused on the human effect rather than on the political message.

The Spanish Earth narrates the human impact of the Francoist siege on Madrid, the longest lasting campaign of the Spanish Civil War. From November 1936 until the end of the war on April 1, 1939, the Spanish capital was besieged and recurrently bombed. The local resistance of the city became an international symbol of the Spanish Republic's resistance against fascism. The slogan "No pasarán"—adapted from the French "Ils ne passeront pas" that had been used in World War I in the battle of Verdun and popularized in Spain by Dolores Ibárruri, "La Pasionaria", became the symbol of the Madrilenians' resistance. But Madrid was not the focal point of the film. The Contemporary Historians decided to shift the focus from the urban setting of the battle of Madrid to a purely rural and tangential military objective on the road to Madrid: the village of Fuentedueña, a rural setting that seems to ignore the tribulations of urban modernity, that becomes the epitome of Spain.

The Spanish Earth opens with a wide panoramic of the Castilian plains that surround Fuentedueña. From this seemingly aerial perspective—most likely taken from the belfry of the local church—we witness the desert-like quality of the Spanish earth. As the narration confirms, from this barren land, the villagers of Fuentedueña struggle to earn their daily bread. Hemingway's voice stresses the harshness of our first visual apprehension by framing the image with his commentary, "This Spanish earth is dry and hard, and the faces and hands that work that land are hard and dry from the sun. This worthless land with water would yield much. For fifty years we wanted to irrigate but they held us back. Now we will bring water to it to raise food for the defendants of Madrid" (*The Spanish Earth* min. 1). At the start, the narration impersonates the collective voice of the 1500 villagers of Fuentedueña. "We wanted", "we will" utters Hemingway. Thus, the author tries to efface his foreign gaze and to adopt the legitimate voice of the local perspective on the conflict. The representation of the other is initially presented as self-portrait. For this local collective subjectivity, water, earth and food are posed as the central issue at stake in the conflict. Politics are left aside. Mere survival is at stake. Progressively, the narrator's voice will abandon the impersonation of the Spanish villagers and embrace the third person narrative that would share the perspective of international audiences. The voice of Hemingway becomes then the ideal mediator between international audiences and Spanish otherness. In the opening scene, the villagers' goal is simply to "work the land for the common good" (*The Spanish Earth* min. 2). While the narration anchors the visual introduction, the audience witnesses three local sharecroppers heading to their plots riding donkeys. For an American audience—which by 1937 would already be familiarized with the Model B tractor introduced by John Deere in 1935—the images of this pre-motorized, pre-modern, traditional agricultural practice would surely start to emphasize the otherness of Spain, rooted in the romantic narratives of British and French travelers. During the nineteenth century a never-ending list of European and American travelers like de Amicis, Andersen, Cook, Cruzy de Marillac, Davillier and Doré visited Spain looking for an exoticism that was rarely found in Europe. For them, Spain supplied the possibility of finding an oriental other without having to leave the continent. Through their travel narratives, these authors helped to consolidate the exotic image of Spain that was certainly at work in the 1930s and that the team of Contemporary Historians decided to mobilize in order to awake the empathy of the audience of the film.

As Hemingway reminds the audience, the productivity of the village is barely enough to feed its inhabitants but the aim of the Fuentedueñans is to irrigate the fields and increase production in order to supply the besieged city of Madrid. In strategic terms,

however, the importance of Fuentedueña arises from being located on the road that connects Madrid with Valencia. For, as the narrator tells us, “to win the war, the rebel troops must cut this road” (*The Spanish Earth* 5:20). The first scenes of the film testify to the hard toil of the men of Fuentedueña as they dig the ditch that will help to irrigate their fields with water from the Tagus river. As they dig, the soundtrack that accompanied their work abruptly stops and we hear the sound of the cannons of the approaching fascist troops. For the first time, the audience can feel the presence of war. Apparently unaware of war, the roar of the fascist weapons falls upon the everyday life of Fuentedueña and foreshadows the rapid advance of the frontlines towards this peaceful village. Only then, for the first time, does the focus of the camera shift to the Republican frontline.

Once in the front, the narrator introduces the audience to “the true face of men going into action”, and states that, “men cannot act before the camera in the presence of death” (*The Spanish Earth* min. 8). Curiously enough, Hemingway’s narration seems to contradict one of the tenets of Joris Ivens’s approach to documentaries by venturing into storytelling and fictionalization, what Thomas Waugh called “documentary personalization” (Waugh, 2011: 61). While in this case we can understand the verb *to act* as simply to take action, we could also understand it as their difficulty of playing a fictional role in the film, of venturing into Ivens’s desired documentary personalization. Apparently contrary to Ivens’s approach, Hemingway’s text points out that what the documentary is doing is to show “the true face” of the Spanish Civil War without any actorial mediation. Contrarily, the statement itself also confirms that documentary personalization through the performance of the rest of “actors” in *The Spanish Earth* is actually part of the filmmaker’s project, especially in the level of staging of some of the scenes filmed in Fuentedueña and even some of those filmed at the frontlines in the University City of Madrid.

The film follows the advance of the frontline and shows how it surrounds the city of Madrid. At this point, for the first time, the defense of Madrid becomes the focal point of the film. We witness the everyday life of the *Brigada Mixta*, the company commanded by Lister that participated in the defense of Madrid. We see how they prepare the trenches and barricades, how they engage in military instruction, and how they spend their spare time reading newspapers and waiting for battle. From there we move to the University City and witness the Republican troops commanded by Martínez Aragón directing a counterattack against the fascist troops entrenched in the *casa de Velázquez* and the university hospital. This particular event is instrumental in summarizing the Spanish conflict as a war between the Spanish people and the institutionalized military, “they are professional soldiers fighting against the people in arms; trying to impose the will of the military on the will of the people” (*The Spanish Earth* min. 21).

Here, in the midst of battle, under the constant rattling of machine guns, the camera stops on a young soldier writing a letter. The young man is introduced as Julián, a villager of Fuentedueña who is writing his father in order to announce his arrival in the village taking advantage of a short leave. The presence of Julián at the frontline in Madrid becomes the link between the rural and apparently untouched Fuentedueña and the actual war. Thus, Fuentedueñans are also presented as real agents in the defense of the legitimate government of the Spanish Republic threatened by the fascist rebels. In order to stress the transition from the battlefield to the microcosm of Fuentedueña, the soundtrack of the film gradually superimposes traditional music to the previously pervasive sound of the machine guns. This time it is the music that wins over the rattling of the guns, which provides the audience with a reminder of the idealized image of rural Spain that the film tries to convey through Fuentedueña.

Before following Julián on his short trip to his hometown, the film approaches the inner life of Madrid. We walk into the city to observe the barricaded streets and the everyday toils of Madrilenians to secure their daily rations in a besieged and regularly bombed city. The resistance of the Madrilenians is presented as a statement of their human

dignity. Anticipating a potential question of the audience, Hemingway voices the plea of the Madrilenians, “Why do they stay? They stay because this is their city. These are their homes. Here is their work. This is their fight, the fight to be allowed to live as human beings” (*The Spanish Earth* min. 36). The bombing of Madrid and the images of the innocent civilians and children killed regularly in the streets are used not only as a testimony of the indiscriminate fascist violence on the civilian population but also as a reminder of the threat an eventual bombardment would pose on the fragile microcosm of Fuentedueña. After a short interlude in Valencia, where we listen to a speech of Manuel Azaña, the president of the Republic; the cameras bring us back to Fuentedueña and to their plans of irrigation. Through a carefully staged scene in which Julián descends from a truck and walks through the deserted streets of Fuentedueña, the prodigal son reaches to his mother’s arms.

But the apparent joy of the moment will not last long. As the images of the bombings of Madrid are announced, the planes of the rebels appear in the horizon as the impending shadow of death, “Before death came when you were old or sick. But now it comes to all this village; high in the sky and shining silver, it comes to all who have no place to run, no place to hide” (*The Spanish Earth* min. 37). And the bombs strike Fuentedueña. Both the images and the narration of the film carefully stress the German agency of the bombings of Madrid and Fuentedueña. This way the film emphasized the concrete participation of Germany and Italy in the Spanish conflict. Local Spanish fascism is underscored in order to present the Spanish population as the prey of a proxy invasion by the emerging fascist powers of Europe. On the one hand, by proving the internationalization of the conflict, the film called for an implication of the Western democracies in the war. On the other, by underscoring the agency of local fascism, the representation of the Spanish people could remain unstained and could go on being perceived as the romantic exotic devoid of agency in the conflict. Thus, it is the Spanish people who need to be saved not from an inner political feud but from an international aggression. The utter innocence of the Spanish people and their cause remain untainted until the closing statement of the film: “The men who never fought before, who were not trained in arms, who only wanted work and food, fight on” (*The Spanish Earth* min. 51).

The soundtrack of *The Spanish Earth* adds dramatic effect to the images shot by Ivens and commented on by Hemingway. During the entire film, a series of traditional Spanish music accompanies the images. As we have seen, this constant musical background is only dramatically interrupted by the dreadful sound of fascist canons and airplanes, which stresses the effect of intrusion of evil in the innocent and joyful atmosphere created by the soundtrack. We should note that this apparently natural intrusion of roaring cannons in the soundtrack of the film is not only a reflection of the actual events but also a decision made while editing the film. We need to keep in mind that by 1937 the technical restrictions of filming a documentary on location did not allow for the simultaneous synced recording of images and sound. The soundtrack of the film had to be added in the process of editing and Irving Reis was in charge of this stage of production at Film Art Studios. The intrusion of the cannons in the first scenes in which the Fuentedueñans are working on the irrigation seems to respond to this particular search for a dramatic effect at the mixing tables.

Although *The Spanish Earth*’s soundtrack would seem totally coherent to an international audience, it would have been quite interesting to ask for the opinion of the audiences that saw the film in Barcelona in 1938 or, even better, to ask the villagers of Fuentedueña what they thought about the music that accompanied their daily existence in front of the cameras. It is quite likely that for the Fuentedueñans of the 1930s most of the music that was used in this soundtrack sounded completely strange, as they had never heard a Catalan *sardana*. While this cultural glitch may seem irrelevant—particularly for international audiences in the 1930s—I think it is quite important to note the cultural and

political implications of some of these inconsistencies if analyzed from a Spanish perspective.

While *The Spanish Earth* recurrently uses Catalan music—up to ten different *sardanes* are used in this soundtrack—it is quite relevant to be aware that the first *sardana* used in the film which appears in the second scene accompanying the energetic work of the bakers of Fuentedueña is no other than “La Santa Espina.” Composed by Enric Morera and with lyrics by the Catalan poet Àngel Guimerà, “La Santa Espina” was not only a popular folkloric song but also a real national anthem for Catalan people. From the very first verses, Guimerà’s lyrics stressed Catalan identity: “Som i serem gent catalana / tant si es vol com si no es vol” [We are and we will be Catalan people / Whether they want it or not] (Guimerà, 1907: n.p.). The lyrics of “La Santa Espina” emphasize Catalan resistance to cultural and political assimilation to a centralizing Spanish political model that understands Spain merely as Castile and therefore seeks the elimination of linguistic, cultural and political differences of territories like the Basque Country, Catalonia or Galicia. The political message of “La Santa Espina” was so obvious that in 1927 the Spanish dictatorship of General Primo de Rivera prohibited the public performance and broadcasting of the song due to its political implications. Even when *The Spanish Earth* used the instrumental version of Morera’s *sardana*—without Guimerà’s lyrics—seeing the Castilians of Fuentedueña rise up early in the morning and starting their everyday tasks to this melody would have been terribly shocking for anybody familiar with the political charge of the of the apparently futile and joyful tune.

The musical choice that accompanies the central scenes on the siege of Madrid would be even more shocking for those members of the audience familiar with the intricacies of the diverse cultures of the Iberian Peninsula. While the camera follows the desperate attempts of Madrilenians to secure their daily bread in a bombed city, the music that accompanies their predicament is none other than the instrumental version of “Els Segadors,” today the official Catalan national anthem. Based on a poem from the oral tradition dated back to the seventeenth century, the violent lyrics of this anthem refer to the War of the Reapers—*els segadors* in Catalan language—in which the people of Catalonia revolted against the Spanish monarchy of Philip IV and that ultimately became a war of secession of Catalonia from the Spanish State. While “Els Segadors” did not become the official Catalan anthem until 1993, by 1937 it was already established as the unofficial anthem of Catalonia. The lyrics of “Els Segadors” stress Catalan identity against an aggression by an unnamed army only referred to as “aquesta gent”—“these people.” In the original poem “these people” were clearly identified with the Castilian troops of Philip IV. This way, the poem reified an unsolvable dichotomy between Catalonia and Castile that is still at the core of Catalan and Spanish politics today. The surprising use of this song in these particular scenes can make us understand the connections between the War of the Reapers—in which the Catalan people fought against the professional military of the Spanish monarchy—and the Spanish Civil War—in which the organized military machine of Franco fought against the popular militias of the Republic. Beyond the national and nationalistic differences that will always pervade in a Spanish or Catalan reading of this particular feature, the choice of this song could even be perceived as a universal anthem that calls the people to arms against the overwhelming power of organized military machineries.

Nevertheless, we will have to concede that the cultural and political implications of this soundtrack would not have been readable by the intended audiences of the film. The soundtrack, arranged by Marc Blitzstein and Virgil Thomson, decontextualized the original songs and thus tried to erase their particular cultural and political messages, turning them into simple props in order to achieve an emotional effect in the target audiences. For us today, it remains a mystery how Blitzstein and Thomson selected the musical background

for the film but what seems clear is that they acquired most of the records they finally used in the film in the Catalan capital, Barcelona.

In spite of President Roosevelt's reception of the film, the actual immediate public reception of the film can be best understood if we take into consideration that *The Spanish Earth* "was praised [...] not only in leftist periodicals but in the liberal media as well" (Waugh, 1983: 32). A good example of this reception is the film review that appeared in *The New York Times* after the premiere. After seeing Ivens's movie, it was clear to the film critic that the "Spanish people [were] fighting, not for broad principles of Muscovite Marxism, but for the right to the productivity of a land denied to them through years of absentee landlordship" (qtd. in Waugh, 1983: 29). As we can see, *The New York Times* film critic focuses on one of the main causes of the fight between the two Spains—the unfair and pseudo-feudal distribution of the land. He emphasizes that the fight for the land is not due to a subordination of the Spanish cause to the will of Stalin. Just like the Contemporary Historians collective tried to convey, for this critic the political implications of the Spanish conflict are limited to the incomplete modernization of rural Spain. Certainly, years before the Cold War, the menace of a Bolshevik revolution was present in the mind of the American public opinion. Apparently, no empathy was possible if the Spanish Republic was identified with socialist, communist or anarchist ideals. Thus, in *The Spanish Earth*, political ideology had to be subordinated to the universal human struggle for survival.

The success of *The Spanish Earth* in subordinating the ideological charge of the Spanish Civil War to the picturesque image of Spain created by nineteenth-century romantic travelers was such that the literary critics that analyzed Hemingway's intervention in the film insisted on the "absence of political references" in *The Spanish Earth* (Coleman 66). Arthur Coleman's reading of the film in his article "Hemingway's *The Spanish Earth*," published in 1982, can help us to understand how unproblematic the film may have appeared to the eyes of a large part of the audience. For Coleman, the film showed how "the efforts of the Spanish people to preserve their land, their culture, to save it from modernization and neutralization by advanced technology and radical philosophies, were being defeated or betrayed" (Coleman, 1982: 67). Surely due to the idyllic representation of Fuentedueñas, the critic falls prey to the romantic vision of Spain as a pre-modern paradise endangered by material progress and the ideological clashes of the twentieth century. In Coleman's eyes, "the final effect is a sentimental film which transcends all commitments to a political cause--attempting as it purposely does to depict the passing of a way of life and an age, [...] the cultural erosion of a fundamentally agricultural and romantically primitive society, along with its traditions and folkways" (Coleman, 1982: 67). The anthropological gaze of the critic seems to limit the scope of *The Spanish Earth* as a mere report of "the incipient disintegration of a primitively-oriented culture" (Coleman, 1982: 66). As inaccurate as this perception may be, we must remember that even this reading of the film guaranteed a kind of engagement of the audience with the Spanish people. Devoid of ideological agency, the Spanish population can be perceived as an inoffensive pawn in the game of chess played between democracy and fascism. Also in this case, the empathy of the audience is guaranteed.

There is no doubt that Ivens's film was not a vehicle to preach to the choir. As Waugh reminds us, Ivens—as most socialist, communist, and anarchist artists and intellectuals—was forced to seek "allies among 'unpoliticized' classes and groups" (Waugh, 1982: 32). Thus, the project of Contemporary Historians decidedly played the card of the exotic and romanticized vision of Spain that would fulfill the most topical profiles of the horizon of expectations of mainstream American audiences. Spain, thus, not only had to be represented but also reconstructed and rearranged according to the expectations of American audiences about their imagined romanticized Spain. We must not forget that "Ivens' political purpose is to make the viewer come to his or her own conclusions and

become committed” (Michalczyck, 1992: 45). In order to do so, Ivens’ camera should work in two different directions. In the first place, *The Spanish Earth* had to retain the message of the possibility of finding a better future for humanity through Marxist ideals. In addition, Ivens’s portrayal had to be able to perpetuate, to a certain extent, the romantic vision of Spain as a prelapsarian universe with no political agency that was threatened by mainly foreign fascism. Consequently, Spain must be digested by the camera and recomposed by Hemingway’s narration in a fashion that is both appealing and innocuous for American audiences.

As Waugh suggests, “Ivens’ primary question was not whether he had shown the ‘truth’ but whether ‘the truth has been made convincing enough to make people want to change or emulate the situation shown to them on the screen’” (Waugh 1983: 23). The need of awakening social interest across the Atlantic dominates the representation of this Spanish earth. In his need to control the process of perspective taking that would eventually lead to prosocial behavior, Ivens puts “a human face on war that ideally could move the viewer from ignorance or disinterest to sympathy and commitment” (Michalczyck, 1992: 42). As we have seen in these last pages, the case of *The Spanish Earth* can help us understand the necessary processes at stake in the transmission of the aura of the Spanish Republican cause across the Atlantic. The construction of an imagined community across the ocean had to be negotiated constantly according to the restrictions imposed by the expectations and anxieties of the target audiences. The voice coming from across the ocean had to be filtered by a recognizable voice speaking in an understandable language even when the original message is partially changed or even lost. The voices across the Atlantic seem to engage in a game of ventriloquism in which authors lose their names and nations become the product of the imagination of others.

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