

MASTER IN ADVANCED ENGLISH STUDIES: LANGUAGES AND
CULTURES IN CONTACT

UNIVERSIDAD DE VALLADOLID

Departamento de Filología Inglesa

2016-2017



Universidad de Valladolid

Final Master Thesis

BRITISH VOLUNTEERS IN THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR: JOHN SOMMERFIELD,
ESMOND ROMILLY AND FRANK PITCAIRN. A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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VALLADOLID 2017

The work presented in this MA thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original and my own work, except as acknowledged in the text. The work in this thesis has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university.

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Master in Advanced English Studies:
Languages and Cultures in Contact

To

Universidad de Valladolid

July 2017

Student's signature _____

Approved

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Abstract

This research paper examines the work of three British volunteers who fought in the Spanish Civil War for the Spanish Republic. The Spanish Civil War appealed to many writers and intellectuals from many parts of the world. Spain became the ground where they could fight against the rise of fascism on a global scale. The aim of this study is to shed light on the literary implications of the testimonies of John Sommerfield, Esmond Romilly and Frank Pitcairn. I compared the work they wrote about their experience in the Spanish Civil War. My purpose is to establish relationships among them from different perspectives such as the documentary evidence they provide, the contents, the structure, the imagery and the form.

Key Words

International Brigades, volunteers, Non-Intervention agreement, Fascism, Communist Party, personal testimony, ideological commitment.

Resumen

Este trabajo examina la obra de tres Brigadistas voluntarios que lucharon en la Guerra Civil Española para el gobierno republicano. La Guerra Civil Española atrajo a numerosos escritores e intelectuales de diversas partes del mundo. España se convirtió en el campo de batalla donde ellos podían luchar contra el auge del fascismo a escala global. El objetivo de este estudio es arrojar luz sobre las implicaciones literarias de los testimonios personales de John Sommerfield, Esmond Romilly y Frank Pitcairn. En el trabajo se comparan las tres obras que ellos escribieron sobre su experiencia directa en la Guerra Civil Española. El propósito del trabajo es establecer relaciones entre los autores desde diferentes perspectivas tales como la documentación que ellos proporcionan, los contenidos, la estructura, la imagería y la forma.

Palabras Clave

Brigadas Internacionales, voluntarios, acuerdo de No Intervención, fascismo, Partido Comunista, testimonio personal, compromiso ideológico.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my tutor Dr. Daniel Pastor for his support and understanding. I would like to thank my co-tutor Dr. José Manuel Barrio for making things easy and accessible. I would like to thank Dr. Jesús Benito for his prompt answers to my questions. Besides, I would like to thank the Library Assistants for their selfless help.

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British Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War: John Sommerfield, Esmond Romilly and Frank Pitcairn. A Comparative Study

1. Introduction

The reason I chose this topic is due to the interest it awoke in me the study of the subject “The literary Impact of the Spanish Civil War: Writers Take Sides” of the Master’s Programme in Advanced English Studies. I discovered that thousands of foreign people came to Spain to defend freedom and democracy against fascism, risking their lives in a faraway war. I decided to study the first written documents created by these British participants who based their work in their direct personal experiences. I selected three of them to delve deeper into the topic. Therefore, this research paper examines the experience of three British volunteers in the Spanish Civil War through their literary work: Frank Pitcairn, *Reporter in Spain* (1936), John Sommerfield, *Volunteer in Spain* (1937), and Esmond Romilly, *Boadilla* (1937). That being the case, the aim of this paper is to explore their personal testimony, analysing their views, motivations, goals, ideological principles and literary influences. I tried to establish similarities and differences among them. They share a series of features but at the same time they impose their own personal style to their work.

In the initial point this paper delves into the socio-political context followed by a presentation of the specific characteristics of the International Brigades volunteers, as well as the impact that the Spanish Civil War had on the western world and the reaction of writers and intellectuals. In the subsequent point, the paper sheds light over the authors’ lives and the analysis of their books based on their personal experiences in Spain, followed by the views they share on different topics such as the volunteers, the war against fascism, Spain, their enemies, their ideology, the military training and the weapons employed. Thus, helping to establish connections and divergences in their work to understand how far and how near they were from different perspectives such as historic facts, thematic content, imagery and form.

2. Socio-political context

There was a deep socio-economic crisis in the Western countries due in part to the havoc caused by the big depression of 1929 and the trauma caused by the First World War. Big rates of unemployment and poverty along with political and sociological conflicts made intellectuals turn their heads either to the right side looking upon German and Italian fascist ideology or to the left beholding Russian communism as the ultimate answer to the failed capitalism. This ideological dichotomy would crystallize in the Spanish Civil War, thus, explaining the reason why so many foreign volunteers would enlist to fight against the rebels turning the Spanish Civil War into a small scale representation of the European socio-political confrontations. Vicente Rojo states in the introduction of his book *Así Fue la Defensa de Madrid* (1967) “Y fue, también, una guerra que se revelaría con rango internacional porque en ella luchó España contra el mundo europeo y porque éste acudió a la liza española con sus armas, sus ideologías y sus intereses para debatir sus pugnas en suelo español” (21).

In the same way, R. Celada, Daniel Pastor and Manuel González in *Los Brigadistas de Habla Inglesa y La Guerra Civil Española* (2006), mention that Spain would be the first battle for the volunteers against fascism, since later on this fight against fascism would continue with the Second World War. “...Ellos estaban luchando en España la primera batalla de una larga guerra que se prolongaría después en Europa. El conflicto empezó a entenderse así por la mayor parte de los voluntarios de habla inglesa como un enfrentamiento entre el fascismo y la democracia...” (23).

In England there were constant demonstrations because of the high rates of unemployment and the labour conditions, as well as confrontations between the left wing supporters and Oswald Mosley's Blackshirts.

Neville Chamberlain who was the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, adopted the appeasement policy. It was a conciliatory policy to keep peace and avoid a world war with the Nazi Germany. This policy made England tolerate many violations of international treaties by Germany. England still had very fresh in its memory the tragedy of the First World War. This appeasement policy had terrible consequences for the Spanish Republican government. England along with France, Germany, Italy, the Soviet Union and other countries signed an agreement of Non-Intervention which forbade any help to the Spanish government and blocked the sale of weapons to the fighting sides. However, as it has been proved, Germany and Italy did not respect the agreement policy, providing the rebels with a great amount of weapons, bombers and arms which eventually contributed to win the war. In this regard, the alignment of the Spanish government with the Communist ideology was suspiciously considered by the British government. This assumption has been alleged as one of the reasons why the British opted for the Non-Intervention policy being afraid of the risk that it might cause to their economic interests in Spain if the communist would eventually win the war.

In the same way, France which was immersed in an unstable political situation, fearful of a German invasion and threatened by England chose not to collaborate with Spain. With respect to the USA, it was an anti-communist country immersed in a deep economic depression. Spain was not considered an important country for their investments and besides that it was very far. On the other hand, it must be highlighted the fact that the Catholic Church supported the rebels, what did not help to the Republicans to gain support from foreign countries.

The technological advances in the press contributed as well to the interest attracted to the war. People could follow in detail the horror of war and the suffering inflicted on the civilians. Journalists from many countries came to report about the development of the war.

The outcome of the Spanish Civil War was inevitable as a consequence of the socio-political riots and disorder caused by factors such as: the proletariat working conditions, the

class struggle, the polarization of the political scene, the corrupt and disloyal military leadership, the power of Catholic Church, the nationalist issue in Catalonia and the Basque Country, the outdated economical structures of the State, the international economic depression generated in 1929, and the growth of communism and fascism in Europe.

Franco along with General Mola, Sanjurjo and other military leaders had been secretly preparing a coup d'état which finally started in Melilla according to Hugh Thomas in *La Guerra Civil Española* (1976). The Republican government reacted with delay to the military revolt, what gave an advantage to the rebels.

According to Robert Colodny in his book *El Asedio de Madrid* (1936-1937), Madrid became the focus of the Spanish Civil War for six months. The national character of the war adopted an international one due to the participation of the International Brigades. There were two goals to defeat, the rebels and fascism. The Spanish government obtained an unconditional support from the European and American left wing parties.

Madrid turned into a symbol of resistance thanks to the volunteers. However, they paid a very high price. According to the book *Los Brigadistas de Habla Inglesa y La Guerra Civil Española* (2006), at least 30% of the volunteers died in the defence of Madrid. There was a strong reaction in light of the civilian population suffering and the high number of casualties among the volunteers. The technological advances in the media spread the news faster than ever.

Vicente Rojo states that it is obvious the important contribution of the International Brigades in the defence of Madrid. However, he declares that the role they played in was not essential neither in the stopping of the initial attack nor in the resolution of the battle. He adds that the International Brigades were just a piece within the forces system.

3. Volunteers Against Fascism

The main reason why the volunteers came to Spain was to fight against fascism. There are cases of people who enrolled as volunteers because they were unemployed and were trying to escape from difficult personal situations. Others were just looking for adventure. However, for most of them, the main motivation was the defeat of fascism. Esmond Romilly stated in *Boadilla*: “The commissar was a German. He asked us our name, age, occupation of our parents, whether they knew we were in Spain, what political party we belonged to, and, last: ‘Why have you come to Spain?’ this was an easy one, the poster on the barracks wall proclaimed the answer: ‘To smash fascism’ ” (60).

John Sommerfield, a communist of deep political convictions, participated in the Spanish Civil War along with his comrades as a natural consequence of his political commitment and ideas. The fight becomes, as he states himself in his work, as their main goal. “...our dear objective” (19). This objective was the defeat of fascism. The volunteers came to fight the battle against fascism. They were quite ignorant of the Spanish reality. They did not live all the political and social strains prior to the war. However, they had a wider perspective and were not influenced by the fratricidal hate as Niall Binns states in *La llamada de España: Escritores Extranjeros en la Guerra Civil* (2004): “...las limitaciones y prejuicios del militante extranjero (intelectual o voluntario) son compensados, a veces, por la perspectiva mayor que aporta, la capacidad de ver desde dentro y fuera a la vez, el no estar...obnubilado por los odios del horror fratricida” (18).

It is officially admitted that the number of foreign volunteers who arrived in Spain to fight against the fascist revolt is around 35,000 men versus 200,000 volunteers who joined the rebel side according to the research made by Antonio Celada, Daniel Pastor and Manuel González published in their book about the English speaking brigadists:

...Se ha tendido a redondear el número total hasta cerca de 40,000 pero últimamente se ha aceptado como bastante más probable una cifra que ronda los 35,000...A pesar de la espectacularidad de las cifras de voluntarios que vinieron a apoyar la causa republicana, no obstante, no llega ni con mucho a la altísima suma de extranjeros que vinieron a ayudar al ejército nacional, cuya media rondaría los 200,000, principalmente italianos, marroquíes y alemanes (17).

Most of the volunteers were unemployed workmen. Their social status belonged mainly to the working class. John Sommerfield describes the volunteers at the beginning of his book *Volunteer in Spain*. He mentions their geographic origins, "...you could hear them all down the corridor babbling excitedly in French and German and Polish and Italian." (16), their social status, "Michel sat quietly: his threadbare clothes and horribly worn shoes told a story of long unemployment..." (16), their education, "...fascinated by his slang..." (16), and the reason why they enrolled in the Spanish Civil War, "I am a Belgian, I am an aviator, I am going to Spain to fight for_____ and everyone said shut up" (16).

The volunteers came mainly from the USA, Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy, the Soviet Union and Latin America. France was the country which contributed with a bigger contingent, organized by the Communist Party. They were around 10,000 volunteers. By contrast, the Communist Party in England got to recruit around 2,000 volunteers.

Many volunteers came from English speaking countries, mostly from Great Britain, United States and Canada. The American volunteers would arrive at the beginning of 1937. According to Victor Hurtado en *Las Brigadas Internacionales* (2013). The Americans along with the Germans would amount to 7% and the British would amount to something less than 6% of the volunteers. The social status and the political profile of these volunteers were similar to the rest. Most of them belonged to the working class or were unemployed. Besides, they were mostly members of the Communist Party or activists in defence of the proletariat. A

peculiar feature of this contingent was the mix of professionals such as journalists, correspondents, nurses, drivers, and a minority of intellectuals and writers. David Boyd Haycock in *I am Spain* (2012) writes. "...the British volunteers were...a mixed mob –ex-servicemen, hunger-marchers, political enthusiasts, and honest toughs..." (125,126).

One of the features of the British contingent of volunteers to which John Sommerfield, Esmond Romilly and Frank Pitcairn belonged was the great amount of intellectuals, students, and university graduates found in their ranks. They belonged to the middle or upper classes. They studied in elitist schools and received military instruction. Esmond Romilly is an example of those intellectuals coming from an upper class who attended a public school where military instruction was offered. However, Esmond decided not to learn because he declared himself a pacifist: "During my summer holiday I had considered going to Spain. My main objection was still the same –fear that I should be no use, that if any volunteers were needed they would be those who had military experience. I did not even know how to load a rifle. At Wellington College, I had been a pacifist, and had refused to join the O.T.C." (27).

However, most of the volunteers didn't have any military experience since they belonged to the working class. Around 80% of volunteers belonged to the working class in spite of the number of writers who formed part of the contingent as Niall Binns states:

El hecho de que grandes nombres de las letras británicas como Orwell, Caudwell, Fox o Cornford tuvieran un protagonismo especial no quiere decir que la mayor parte de los voluntarios de aquel país fueran escritores o intelectuales; más bien todo lo contrario, en realidad alrededor del 80% pertenecía a la clase trabajadora (24).

Niall Binns quoting Upton Sinclair's novel *No pasaran!* (1937) reinforces the idea of the great amount of writers and intellectual among the volunteers "probablemente la brigada más literaria de la historia de las guerras" (31). The large amount of intellectuals, poets and

writers taking part as volunteers in the Spanish Civil War, especially those English speakers, has added a romantic note to their fight and commitment. As Byron did, they embarked themselves to fight oppression, searching for freedom and democracy. The Spanish Civil War is perceived by the volunteers as a conflict between two opposed factions: the fascists and the communists. The fascists helped by Germany and Italy and the communists by the Soviet Union. This corresponds with the ideological struggle taking place in Europe, especially in England and France in the previous years before the Spanish Civil War. In fact, it was considered, by many, as a small scale World War. The volunteers ignored the complex Spanish political situation before the war.

The International Brigades were created by the Komintern responding to the enthusiasm and willingness of thousands of young people all over the world to fight fascism. Many of these volunteers had a past record of political activism. They defended the democracy following the communist ideology.

The International Brigades were created with the help of the Communist parties from different countries which took charge of the recruitment and transportation of the volunteers to Spain. According to Mirta Nuñez Díaz-Balart a committee of leaders from the Komintern would meet with representatives of the Spanish republican government to set them in motion. Among the participants are cited Luigi Longo, Stefan Wisniewski, and Pierre Rebière. To this group would join later André Marty who was the leader of the French Communist party. According to Hugh Thomas it was Stalin who appointed Marty to organize the International Brigades following the model of the Red International Brigades which were very successful in the Russian Revolution. The Brigades were made up of battalions. Each Brigade contained around three or four battalions. The criteria followed to form the battalions were based on origin and language as well as the names chosen to identify them. The headquarters were located in Albacete

In the same way that Germany and Italy did with the rebels, the Soviet Union would also avoid following the Non-Intervention agreement. Hugh Thomas states that Stalin would help the republicans with shipments of food and weapons as well as military advisers to help in the organization of a Popular Army and the creation of the International Brigades.

The International Brigades were an army made up mostly of Communist Party members, working class supporters, unemployed, and activists who belonged to the working class. They enlisted to support the democracy in Spain and fight fascism. They came from all over the world. There were, at least, people from 53 different nationalities. This variety of origins caused many troubles to leaders and organizers. There were difficulties of communication and organization. French was adopted as the lingua franca in spite of the fact that many brigadists didn't speak French. Another source of conflict was the lack of equipment available, especially modern and efficient guns, along with the disparity in the instruction, since there were many ways to perform it according to the style and the provenance of the comrades.

The English speaking battalions were made up by the following: The Lincoln Battalion, which encompassed the American volunteers, the British Battalion, where John Cornford and Ralph Fox fought and died, the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion, which was composed of Canadian volunteers, and the Connolly Column which was made up of Irish volunteers.

The Spanish Civil War was a great shock for the international community generating a great amount of literary works, articles and essays in different languages. According to the book *Los Brigadistas de Habla Inglesa y la Guerra Civil Española* (2006), during 1936, many works started to be published regarding the Spanish Civil War and the number of publications could surpass nowadays up to 35,000 titles. The presence of volunteers from the International Brigades would raise an enormous interest. Many of them were poets, novelists and journalists who wrote about their experiences during the conflict, giving birth to literary works based on autobiographical testimonies which would become valuable historical documents. Many

intellectuals believed that apart from fighting with the arms they could also contribute to the war effort with their writing. Niall Binns in his book *Voluntarios con Gafas* (2009) quote the lines read by Ludwig Renn during the congress of antifascists writers: “no hemos dejado la pluma por ser de la opinión de que no vale la pena escribir; al contrario, por nuestra causa no sólo tiene que luchar el fusil, sino también la palabra...os rogamos luchad con la pluma y con la palabra como cada uno pueda mejor; pero luchad” (20).

The works by John Sommerfield, Esmond Romilly and Frank Pitcairn belong to this category of literary works. They provide an added value because of the amount of historical information and details they render, especially about the first moments of the war, the formation of the International Brigades and the defence of Madrid.

4. Frank Pitcairn

Frank Pitcairn used many pen-names in his life. His real name was Claud Cockburn. He was born in China because his father was a diplomatic there. He also lived in Budapest. He attended the elitist Berkhamsted School. He graduated at Oxford University. He worked for *The Times* newspaper becoming a journalist. He was a foreign correspondent in Berlin and New York. He created his own newspaper, *The Week*, which was closed down by the government because he was against the British Non-Intervention policy.

He collaborated with the communist newspaper *Daily Worker* and it sent him to Spain as a war correspondent. Frank Pitcairn had already been to Spain previously as a correspondent to inform about a general strike during the Second Republic. He informed of the miners revolts in Asturias and the violent repression carried out by the army.

When Frank Pitcairn came to Spain to report about the Spanish Civil War, he decided to enrol as a volunteer to fight fascism.

He wrote *Reporter in Spain* out of his experience in the Spanish Civil War. This is a book made up of articles, interviews, and autobiographical experiences. The reason why Frank Pitcairn writes the book is to denounce the British Non-Intervention policy and the support of Germany and Italy to Franco.

The book is in part made up of articles that Frank had already written and published for the *Daily Worker*, the newspaper which pertained to the Communist Party, along with chronicles of episodes taken from personal experiences, direct observation and interviews during his stay in the Spanish Civil War. According to Alberto Lázaro, the book could be finished very quickly by October 1936 due to the inclusion of these articles. Out of the 22 articles which form the book, five articles and part of other three had already been published in different newspapers. At the beginning of the book he introduced some chapters about the social and political unrest in Spain before the war. At the end he completed the book with a description of his experience at the front war of Guadarrama. In this way, he achieved to give unity and coherence to the book.

The original book was published in October of 1936 in London by Lawrence & Wishart. The book was structured in twenty two chapters without titles. The chapters are numbered using Roman symbols and they are preceded by an introduction written by Ralph Bates who presents the war as a fight between the rich and the poor, the exploited workers and the powerful land owners. The fight was unfair since the owners were supported by the army, the church and foreign states such as Germany and Italy.

Frank Pitcairn presents in *Reporter in Spain* a totally unequal fight between the rebels led by Franco and the republicans. He tried to counteract with his writings the fascist propaganda of the rebels. Similarly, as he does with the Non-Intervention agreement, he criticizes the Spanish army for having betrayed to the democratic government with some exceptions like General Riquelme. In the same way, he attacks the Church for supporting the

fascists. He tries to reinforce the idea that the military men rose up not only against the Spanish Republican government but against the Spanish people. Thus, they are presented as enemies of the Spanish people who want to put an end to democracy and progress.

The book narrates a series of life events experienced by Frank Pitcairn since the very moment he arrives in Spain, days before the Spanish Civil War, until he returns to England. He included political events such as the murder of José del Castillo y José Calvo Sotelo, the urban guerrilla warfare in the streets of Barcelona, the fascists tactics to create disorder, the fight in the war front of Guadarrama and Aragón, the problems arose at the creation of a Popular army, his encounter with General Riquelme, the trips he made into the war fronts etc. Frank Pitcairn gives an account of these events previous to the rebel revolt in the first chapter of *Reporter in Spain*. He considered the murder of Castillo as a fascist tactic to create riots in order to destabilize the government of Frente Popular and accused the fascists of spreading fake information to generate disorder. According to the Introduction of the Spanish edition of *Reporter in Spain* (2012), Alberto Lázaro states that Frank Pitcairn was in Barcelona at the outbreak of the war to cover the Popular Olympic Games for the *Daily Worker* although Frank Pitcairn declared in his autobiography that he was there on vacation.

Pitcairn as a correspondent described many events of the first moments of the Spanish Civil War. His task as a war correspondent was narrated in *Reporter in Spain*. He depicted the first attacks by the rebels in Barcelona: "...the people of Sans, the south-westerly working class suburb of Barcelona, were fighting for the streets and the station with the troops who at dawn had suddenly advanced on them from the barracks up the hill." (12).

Besides, he gave an account of the revolution that was taking place in the countryside, where workers and members of a cooperative were taking control of the basic food products. He reported as a witness how an air raid attacked the Durruti Column on its way to Zaragoza. He wrote about the strong bond between workers and Unions. He refuted fake information in

English papers about the Church and denounced the presence of foreign weapons in the rebel army provided by Germany and Italy.

Likewise Sommerfield and Romilly, Pitcairn uses the first person to narrate the events. He analyses and interprets them in a very personal manner. He employs the dialogue as a technique to present the information in a more direct and fresh way. His style is quick and dynamic, typical of the journalistic genre. It may not be ignored he worked as a journalist and correspondent. He also uses the irony and the satire to show the hypocrisy and contradictions of politicians: "...in the meantime reflect on the curious workings of a world in which the democratic people permit their front line fighters to lie under rocks armed with old rifles, while allowing the bitterest enemies of democracy the latest weapons of modern warfare" (36).

Besides, he employs satirical portraits or caricatures to ridicule important figures like the Fascist Air Force Colonel he met in France at the Station of Cerbère in chapter I. Another remarkable feature in his work is the use of humoristic stories or anecdotes.

Alberto Lázaro summarizes skilfully Frank Pitcairn's style in his introduction to the Spanish edition:

Es una prosa fluida, ágil y dinámica, que refleja la inmediatez y fugacidad características del género periodístico...Es un maestro de la anécdota, a partir de la cual es capaz de presentar de manera efectiva una idea o un comentario sobre los acontecimientos que describe. Asimismo, recurre con frecuencia a la ironía, la caricatura, la exageración y lo grotesco, rasgos todos ellos propios de la sátira (34).

On the other hand, according to Alberto Lázaro, as Frank Pitcairn recognized himself in his autobiography, his stories were written following a reverse process, starting from a point of view or specific perspective from which the events were built and not the other way round.

Frank Pitcairn was very committed politically speaking. He belonged to the Communist Party. For this reason, his work was considered by some historians as propaganda. Alberto Lázaro states that he was considered a radical journalist because of his aggressive and enthusiastic style and he also mentions that his prose was defined as ‘salvaje’ and ‘periodismo de guerrilla’. Therefore, his writing was very subjective and combative. For this reason, his articles are considered to be pamphlets. He portrays the main characters of the war following a simplistic perspective: The volunteers are presented as brave comrades who are willing to die for their ideas, whereas the rebels are described as coward betrayers. He believed that he had to counterbalance the fascist propaganda. That explains his aggressiveness and partiality, conferring him a radical status. One of his aims was to show the worst view of the enemy so that he could gain the British public opinion. That is why he employs typical features of the satire such as oversimplification and exaggeration.

Finally, as Alberto Lázaro mentions, although part of the material written by Frank Pitcairn has as origin previously published articles in the format of news, when it becomes a journalistic report, he introduces a personal interpretation, as well as a critical spirit and a creative expression. The division between the journalistic genre and literature is hard to distinguish. The journalistic reports are characterized by historic accuracy. However, they may contain a high amount of interpretation and stylistic features typical of literature.

5. John Sommerfield

Sommerfield was born in London in 1908. He left school at the age of 16. He joined the Communist Party becoming a left-wing activist. He collaborated with *Daily Worker*, the official newspaper of the Communist Party. He published one of his most important novels *May Day* where he exposes the proletarian fight.

In 1936 he enrolled in the International Brigades to fight fascism in the Spanish Civil War. He fought in the war front of Ciudad Universitaria in the defence of Madrid. He wrote *Volunteer in Spain* as a testimony of that experience in the war. He also served in the Royal Air Force during the Second World War as an aircraft support mechanic in Burma and India. At his return to England, he continued his career as a writer, publishing many novels as well as contributing to communist and progressive periodicals and literary journals.

The first edition of the book was published in London in 1937 by Lawrence & Wishart Ltd. John Sommerfield states in the final note of the book, that he wrote it just to describe a series of events including the activities of the machine gun company belonging to Marty Battalion and provide his view of the first months of the International Column, its organization, the weapons they had, the instruction received, the leaders, etc. "I have attempted to do nothing more than, by a series of fairly typical incidents, to give a picture of the activities of number four section in the machine-gun company of the Marty Battalion, and my own feelings about it, during the first months of the International Column's existence" (157).

This series of incidents: "a series of fairly typical incidents" (157). As he calls them, in my opinion surpass a typical recount of an incident. It offers an ample variety of topics and goes beyond a mere description of war daily routine, in spite of John Sommerfield's purpose of writing about the ordinary routine: "I have tried to write of the ordinary routine of our war rather than of heroism." (158).

His work offers a highly valuable testimony of that specific war context both from a sociological and historical point of view as Professor Daniel Pastor states in the introduction to the Spanish edition of *Volunteer in Spain* (2012), Sommerfield "Intenta concienciar el drama español como una confrontación entre la democracia y el fascismo" (30), contrarily to what the author declares: "I have not attempted to make any serious factual contribution to the history and politics of the Spanish Civil War" (158). However, he was a committed activist, who

denounced the injustice of the oppressed by the oppressor in this case the democracy by fascism. In the following quoted lines written by Sommerfield, he makes an exposure of different socio-political issues he is concerned about. In the first quoted line, he reveals a sense of morality and a political ideology based on justice, portrayed by factory workers and Polish miners: “factory workers, miners from Poland” (22). In the next quoted line he shows a concern about freedom of expression and freedom of association: “exiles, and political refugees...and the crowds at meetings” (22). In the next one, he denounces human rights violation: “men who had escaped from the concentration camps” (22). Finally, in the following line it can be interpreted a concern about the right to work and the right to strike and protest: “labour exchange queues... and of the picket lines” (22).

On the other hand, the “International” is the anthem which represents the ideas for which they fought and it became the symbol of union among the volunteers in spite of their variety of geographical origin and background. “Here were factory workers, miners from Poland, men who had escaped from the concentration camps, exiles, and political refugees, the men of cities, of the electrically lit nights, of the loud street corners, of the labour exchange queues and the crowds at meetings and of the picket lines, the men whose song was the ‘International’ ” (22). Besides, Frank Pitcairn was aware of the need to document the historic moment.

Volunteer in Spain contributes to complement and enrich the knowledge and perception of the International Brigade at the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. It provides a features’ account of the soldiers who composed the International Brigades. It describes the soldiers’ nationalities, the brigades’ sections, the soldiers’ war experience, their origins, formation, ideology, the difficulties and shortages. In the same way, Sommerfield documents the war events and the military development in the defence of Madrid, especially that of the front line

in Ciudad Universitaria and Casa de Campo. He depicts the positions in the war front line, the weapons employed, the war tactics, the change of guards, and the logistics.

Volunteer in Spain transcends the documentary account. It turns into a statement against war. There are plenty of passages where the author narrates the horror of war. He uses long descriptions about different types of injuries, mutilations, and ways of dying in the battlefield. He also complains of the tiredness, the weather, and hunger. This war repulsion is clearly stated in the final note of the book: "I have always hated war, and seen no virtue in it whatever..." (157). In the same way, it is remarkable his condemn about the use of technology at the service of the evil. Sommerfield indirectly raises the issue about the divergence between the technological and scientific advance of humankind and its conscience. "...a conflict that must decide in this century whether the enormous new powers that science has given to the human race are to be used for the organization of decay or for life, for a mechanized barbarism or a new advance of the human spirit." (159).

Another point he highlights is the importance of achieving a real military democracy in organising the International Brigades. He complains of the lack of responsibility shown by some volunteers who were not used to obedience and subordination. This incident highlights the idealist view of Sommerfield who suggests that democracy should reach the military body. "People had to understand that the election of leaders wasn't just a method of putting responsibility on someone's shoulders, but that it must work both ways, democracy meaning a reciprocal responsibility. And of course plenty of people didn't have this sense of responsibility." (36).

The book is a homage to all the people who fight to defend their ideas. He highlights the courage, the patience, the discipline, the strength and the moral of the combatants. John Sommerfield dedicates the book to his comrade and friend John Cornford who died in the war front line.

The book is organized in three parts very well differentiated regarding extension and importance. Each part contains sub sections. The first part is devoted to the journey towards Spain, the first contact with his comrades and the welcoming received in the places they go across. In the second part of the book describes the hardness of the trip to Madrid, the events and feelings that happened when they stopped in Vallecas and the victorious entry in Madrid. In the final part the author makes a detailed description of aspects involved in war such as weapons, injuries, weather inclemency, the tiredness, the fight, the dead etc. Finally, he narrates the war front line in Ciudad Universitaria.

Sommerfield, uses the first person at the time of writing. He narrates the autobiographical events focusing in his experience as a volunteer in the Spanish Civil War. He expresses his views, depicts situations and people. He makes rich descriptions with respect to war elements. He makes use of an apparent journalistic objectivity. However, it is charged with a strong emotional effectiveness.

Sommerfield uses an informal tone, using short simple sentences. He sometimes employs dialogues with slang providing information about the social status of the speaker. He transcribes the words as they are spoken. This is an innovative technique already employed by Hemingway. Sommerfield mentions *Farewell to Arms* making a direct reference to the novelist. It is evident the influence of Hemingway on Sommerfield. “ ‘D’you think we’re really going to the wars?’ I asked John. ‘The Front I mean.’ ‘Dunno,’ said John.” (69).

John Sommerfield inserts poetic passages, especially those devoted to descriptions of places. “...that told of flying telegraph poles and departing landscapes, of the endless movement of shattered calm that spread outwards like a wake into sleeping country-sides, trembling upon the windows of farmhouses and across shivering grass...” (18). Besides, Sommerfield uses a cinematographic technique, following Hemingway steps. He sets an action

in a scene using the present tense and with a scarcity of verbs. “Scene—The new barracks, a large earthen square surrounded by three stories” (34).

On the other hand, he makes a recurrent use of repetition such as complete sentences and words in order to reinforce emotions and feelings. He also uses loan words. It may be stated that John Sommerfield employs a modern technique, with a noticeable cinematographic and journalistic influence. He uses a fresh, direct language with a fluent and dynamic style. To sum up it may be considered that everything aims to denounce the situation. It is an attempt to make English people aware that the Spanish Civil War was affecting to all working people in the same way. Thus, condemning the Non-Intervention Agreement which was having terrible consequences on the republican government.

6. Esmond Romilly

Esmond Romilly was the nephew of Winston Churchill, however he would never boasted about that, not even in the war where he could have obtained some benefits. He attended the prestigious Wellington College where he had the opportunity of getting military training, however he rejected to enrol in the Officer Training Corps. He declared himself as a pacifist. He edited a left wing newspaper along with his brother, who would become also a volunteer in the Spanish Civil War.

Esmond Romilly was a troublesome teenager. He escaped from home and stayed for three months in a reformatory school. He started to work in a Communist library. However, he never belonged to the Communist Party, although he was aligned with the ideology. Antonio R. Celada mentions it in the introduction to *Boadilla* (2011): “Esmond nunca había mostrado interés por la militancia en el Partido Comunista británico...Ni siquiera cuando regresa de España y admite que fueron los comunistas los que salvaron Madrid se plantea ingresar en sus filas...Se conformó con no ir más allá de la militancia en el Partido Laborista.” (41).

Esmond fought in the Spanish Civil War as a volunteer in the Thaelmann Battalion. He experienced the hardest time at the war front line of Boadilla as he narrates in the book he wrote with the same name. He became ill and was sent home. He would return to Spain as a journalist. He got married to Jessica Mitford in 1937. When he went back to England he started to work in a publicity agency. In 1939 the couple settled down in the United States. At the outbreak of the Second World War Esmond got enrolled in the Canadian Air Force. He died when his plane fell on the North Sea in 1941. He was only 23 years old.

The first edition of *Boadilla* was published in 1937 in London by Hamish Hamilton. Esmond Romilly states in the prologue of the book that he wrote it to narrate the experiences lived by the 18 men who encompassed the Thaelmann Battalion in the Spanish Civil War. He says that he tried to show a real image of the daily routines and the relationship among the soldiers. He claims that his book is not political. “This is not a political book, and it is not intended as propaganda... This book is the story of the eighteen men who were my companions in the Thälmann Battalion.” (9). However, it is inevitable in a book of this kind that the author did not show his ideology and political views as he does for example in the following passage:

When I said I was a member of the Labour Party, he was delighted and treated me with extra consideration to emphasize the Front Populaire spirit... I was soon drawn into argument with a number of the French Communists –they asked how the Labour Party’s socialist principles were compatible with their acceptance of ‘non-intervention’. That of course, I could not tell them (32).

In the same spirit as *Volunteer in Spain*, *Boadilla* is an account of personal experiences from the Spanish Civil War. Esmond Romilly narrates episodes of the daily routine like the one at their training period and its hardships, the interaction among the volunteers, the problems with instruction and discipline, the political speeches, the military expeditions, the fight with the enemy etc. One relevant feature of the book is the quality of analysis and reflections that

the author makes about the events, showing a deep maturity and introspection as he does for example when he reflects about pacifism and war: “You hear people say they are against war because they think killing is wrong...The time you are a real pacifist is the time you know real sickening fear. That was as near as any of us got to being pacifists;” (218).

Another remarkable aspect is the documentary value of the work. It provides details of historical value, especially for historians, such as information regarding the formation of the first battalions, their composition, their conflicts and organization, the war front in Boadilla and Ciudad Universitaria.

On the other hand, the book is written as a homage to his fallen comrades, a tribute to the International Brigade in the same way as John Sommerfield did in *Volunteer in Spain*. The book is a mix of description and personal interpretation. In the first chapters as Antonio R. Celada states he feels himself protagonist of the story. However, his voice disappears progressively and becomes a mere narrator of what he observes. He was the youngest of the three writers. However, it is surprising the maturity of his analysis even though he does not understand the real meaning of what it is happening. He is honest with the defects and fears of men. He does not try to idealize the war, but he depicts the idealism of men, their altruist and generous dedication to fight fascism, putting their lives at risk. He also shows the powerful bond against fascism of all those men who came from different backgrounds to fight it. He reflects also the frustration and disappointment produced by the war.

The book is organized in fourteen chapters. They evolve from the first chapter where he provides a brief overview of his life in London and the motivation that pushed him to get enlisted as a volunteer, to the final chapter where he narrates the actions and life events in the war front line of Boadilla. Each chapter narrates an episode of his experiences. In chapter two he describes the journey to Spain and the arrival in Albacete. In chapter three he depicts some of the men from the battalion. He makes a thorough portrait of them. He supplies information

regarding their physical features, origins, motivations, behaviours, characters and ideology, employing irony and a good sense of humour. Thus, making the reader aware of their heterogeneity. In chapter four he is still in Albacete and mentions a Speech given by Marty, his encounter with General Kleber and the trip to what he believes to be Chinchón. In chapters five and six he narrates their first encounter with the war front at Cerro de los Angeles as well as the hardships of the journey carrying the heavy and obsolete equipment. From chapter seven to eleven Esmond writes about the arrival in Madrid and the fierce fights at the war front line in Ciudad Universitaria. Chapter twelve is an oasis in their daily struggle. They visited the 'Playa de Madrid' where they rested and enjoyed the place. They also had a day leave and visited Madrid, after the leave they set off towards El Pardo. Finally, chapters thirteen and fourteen are about the experience at the war front of Boadilla. Esmond reflects on the idea of pacifism and war. He depicts the fight at the front line and his return to England.

Likewise Sommerfield, Esmond Romilly uses the first person at the time of writing. He narrates autobiographical events during his stay in Spain as a volunteer in the Spanish Civil War. As Antonio R. Celada states "Se trata de una narración autobiográfica con pretensiones de documento" (55).

Romilly is more interested in the interactions of people and their reactions than the Spanish Civil War itself. He makes a lot of descriptions about the personality and nature of the volunteers and the people he comes across. At the same time he reflects on the characters as well as in different topics such as pacifism, war, politics, etc. He tries to be objective writing in a documentary or journalistic style. It outstands the maturity of his reflections filled with irony and humour. It surprises also the deep insight he shows in his analysis considering his short age. His prose is simple and quick, almost telegraphic. The scenes described look unconnected. In some passages, he employs the stream of conscience technique, a kind of interior monologue.

He writes in a very simple and fluent prose. He uses a cinematographic style describing short scenes which put together provide a general overview of the situation. He employs long descriptions of different topics intertwined with his personal views and reflections.

Esmond Romilly is less poetic than Sommerfield. On very rare occasions he uses any metaphor or poetic features and when he uses them, they are very simple: “We saw the twinkling lights of the villages on the Catalonian coast – the Mar Caspio was hugging the shore...a blaze of light like the Blackpool fun-fair.” (33).

A dramatic and pessimistic tone pervades the book. Romilly realizes that they have been betrayed. A few reasons surface, such as the Non-Intervention agreement, the assignment of them to the first row of the war without the proper training and equipment, in addition to the intrinsic hardships and horror connected to war. There was a big controversy about the fact of being sent to fight in the front line since many volunteers accused the Republic government of using them as cannon fodder.

Another interesting concept reflected in the book is according to Antonio R. Celada the contradiction between being a soldier and a volunteer. As Sommerfield states the volunteers wanted to fight but within a democratic army with no rank order. However, Esmond Romilly believed in a strong faith and discipline to reach the goals and to survive.

The figure of the hero is treated in a modern sense in the same way as in *Volunteer in Spain* by John Sommerfield following mainly the influence of Hemingway. He did not feel as a hero. He writes “I felt far from heroic” (97). He had the chance to fight as a soldier for the first time in el Cerro de los Àngeles. This experience made him feel frustrated and fearful. He tries to convey these feelings to the reader and he states that he was not aware of the danger. This episode brings to light one more time the lack of preparation and training of the volunteers.

He describes in some battles, as those around the Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, the anguish and anxiety produced by the fire, the bombs and the stink of the corpses. However, as

Antonio R. Celada mentions Esmond is more interested in the movements and personal relationships than in the tragedy or the pain itself. He focuses more on the human aspects than in the military or political ones. Likewise John Sommerfield, Esmond describes accurately the problems of logistics, the cold at night, the battles, the horror in the trench and the human tragedy. In spite of the violence, Esmond is a naïve idealist. He is not aware of the real danger. It is only at the end after the Boadilla battle when he understands the tragedy he is going through. The volunteers fought without training and they were supplied with scarce and obsolete arms. The possibility of success, in spite of their idealism, was very limited. Esmond is able to convey the fear to death in a very effective way. At the end of the book he realizes that the only way to combat fascism is fighting. That is why after his experience in the Spanish Civil War he decided to fight in the Second World War.

7. Common features and differences

The study of these three brigadists exhibit many common features, not only the obvious ones, like being young volunteers at the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War fighting against fascism. They belonged to the middle class. They were educated British writers politically committed who felt the imperative need to change the world. They believed that Spain represented the place where fascism had to be stopped through the use of arms. As Frederick R. Benson states in *Writers in Arms. The Literary Impact of the Spanish Civil War*. (1967) "...The Republican cause was widely felt to be the cause of social justice, those who responded to it believed they were the defenders of Western civilization itself." (65)

On the other hand, many writers believed that the real fight had to be done with arms. They felt that the only way to stop the machinery of fascism should be done fighting in the battlefield. Besides, it was the authentic way to prove the real commitment with the ideals of democracy and freedom as Stanley Weintraub affirms in *The Last Great Cause*. (1968) "For

some authors, writing was an insufficient commitment to the fight against Fascism: the final test was action -to expose the body to danger and discomfort and to offer it, if necessary, in sacrifice. Only then would the ideals about which one wrote be put to the ultimate test of sincerity.” (13).

They shared the same illusions and wrote about their experience. They have a literary common ground: their works are autobiographical. They quite accurately document with their testimony the traumatic experience of war. They strongly denounce the horror of war. However, they considered a moral obligation to participate in the Spanish Civil War to fight fascism in order to defend freedom and democracy. They denounced as well the Non-Intervention agreement and the breach of it by Germany and Italy.

They have the same view about their army comrades. The three authors highlight the generosity, courage and commitment of their comrades in arms and show sorrow and empathy about their agony and adversities. Sommerfield projects an image of dignity and integrity. He feels proud of them to be his comrades. He depicts them as beautiful ancient Greek heroes and melancholic Picasso's harlequins. “I looked at all of them in turn, and somehow in each different sleeping countenance was a certain dignity, a beauty, something that they had in common...” (18). They are depicted as noble heroes committed with the defence of the democracy who left everything behind devoting their lives to fight fascism. For his part Esmond Romilly in chapter three of *Boadilla* titled “The Warriors” provide portraits of his comrades where he shows the admiration he feels about them.

Another element they have in common are the descriptions and experiences narrated about war. They are heart-breaking. They write about the hardships of war such as the long hours of sleep deprivation, the time spent on guards, the physical tiredness, the lack of food, the weather inclemency, always on the alert, the obsolete heavy and scarce equipment, the nocturnal marches through the woods, the climbing of mountains, the military training in

ravines and brooks, the digging of trenches, the transporting of material, the enemy gun shootings, the hand-grenades, the shells, the air raids, the snipers, the Moroccan attacks, the hand to hand fights, the injured comrades, the dead comrades, the fear, the impotence, the pain etc.

The second chapter of the third part of *Volunteer in Spain* by John Sommerfield is titled “Natural History of the War” which is subdivided in sections as meaningful as “The fighting in the night”, “The wounded”, “The shells”, “The dead” etc. In these sections Sommerfield, without saving thorny elements and using plenty of details, he describes the situations, the features, the effects, the experiences, the suffering, and the disasters which each of these elements produce. Esmond Romilly narrates a very similar panorama of war horrors in his book. He states: “it was like an inferno” (110). John Sommerfield also gives account of the lack of organization, the obsolescence of the equipment and the lack of training for the weapons. Most of the volunteers did not have any military training. This fact had an impact in the number of casualties. Only a few volunteers had participated in the First World War as it was the case of Tom Wintringham who took part in the Royal Flying Corps and later in the Royal Air Force. Those who participated became trainers and advisers within the International Brigade. Regarding the British volunteers, only those who attended prestigious colleges and enrolled in the Officer Training Corps had military training. None of the three authors had any military training. Esmond Romilly had the chance at Wellington College to enrol in the Officer Training Corps but he rejected it. The volunteers were trained at the headquarters of the International Brigades in Albacete. Esmond Romilly and John Sommerfield provide in their work an account of the training issues that the volunteers faced regarding the use of arms. The equipment was heavy and obsolete. Some of the guns were from the nineteenth century. Most of the weapons were Russian coming from the military shipment sent by Stalin. Romilly complains all the time about the struggle they had carrying the heavy guns and weapons and

the inappropriate equipment. The machine guns needed up to three men to work. He states in *Boadilla*: “ ‘I expect they’ll as like find half these rifles are dud by the time the day’s over’ said Bill...After a lot of clinking and arguing and cursing I heard the rat-tattat of our light machine-gun. We were all a bit surprised it worked” (89, 91). Frank Pitcairn in *Reporter in Spain* states the superiority of the rebel regarding arms: “We all knew that the rebels had already a serious advantage in the matter of heavy artillery and of ammunition...” (16).

They also perceive the role of the hero in the same way. The victorious hero role is strongly criticised. In war there is no winner or loser. Everyone is defeated. In this horrifying environment words such as victorious, heroic, brave etc, loose the traditional meaning they used to have in classical literary works like the *Iliad* or *War and Peace*. On the contrary, following the path started by Stephen Crane and Hemingway to whom Sommerfield refers quoting a few lines from his novel *Farewell to Arms*, the traditional positive meaning of these words turn into something shameful and repulsive. “I don’t know about the history-book stuff: when you are in a war the orators’ phrases and the newspaper words don’t mean a thing: expressions like “brave,” “victorious,” “gallant,” become nauseous and shameful.” (81). Esmond Romilly shows also a detachment from the heroic act. He states in *Boadilla* “I felt far from heroic” (97).

On the other hand, there was the moral issue. The involvement in the war implies the use of weapons and the killing of humans, however this point doesn’t create a moral problem for some volunteers as it is the case of John Sommerfield, who considers ethical to kill the enemy with his own hands. “...out of the little round black hole in the end could come, we imagined, death, impelled by our own hands. It was decidedly good for the morale. And it turned out, the morale certainly needed a bit of reinforcing.” (13). Regarding Romilly, although he considered himself a pacifist it does not seem to generate a moral issue for him to kill in the battlefield: “You hear people say they are against war because they think killing is wrong. I

have never been moved by the sight of our planes raining bombs on enemy troops or by the thought that I have perhaps scored a direct hit on a moor.” (218).

Another feature they partake is the simplistic perception they have about the combatants in the Spanish Civil War: the fascists and the communists. For the volunteers the enemy was fascism. However, It may be distinguished between two types of enemies according to the views reflected in the works of Sommerfield, Romilly and Pitcairn: the first type of enemy would be composed by those people who directly fought in the war front such as the disloyal troops of the Spanish Army, the foreign soldiers sent from Germany and Italy, the moors from the North of Morocco sent by the rebel Spanish generals who controlled the area, the men recruited in the rebel zone and foreign volunteers like many Portuguese.

The second type of enemy would be those who initiated, encouraged and supported the armed uprising made up of high rank military men, landowners, the rich middle class, and the Church. Sommerfield narrates an interesting event which happened in the village of Roda with respect to the uprising carried out by the priest, the landowners and the rich middle class of the village to whom he calls “oppressors” (43). Sommerfield wonders, in an ironic tone, who has been the rebels “And who had they been? —the priest, of course, the rich farmer’s son, the great landowner’s jackals, the grocers’ assistants, and the local bank clerk,” (43).

In the same way Ralph Bates in the introduction to *Reporter in Spain* by Frank Pitcairn reinforces clearly this particular view of the enemy: “the disloyal illiterate generals... the bankers, the political time-servers, the decaying aristocracy, the bishops” (2).

On the other hand, John Sommerfield, Esmond Romilly and Frank Pitcairn mention continuously the fierceness and cruelty of the moors in the battlefield. They describe also the impotence felt in the presence of the air raids by the Italian and German bombers.

Finally, a third enemy would be the modern war machinery used by the fascists formed by the German and Italian bombers, weapons, armoured warfare, machine guns, and shells.

The German used the Spanish war to evaluate new technologies using it as a training field for their weapons.

Regarding Spain, in their first contact with the country they convey an idealised and romantic view of the country. John Sommerfield for example writes: “We were in the south where the great palms grew, the land of grapes and olives, of the shuttered Windows, the siestas and the secret afternoons, with things always a little strange and romantic for us northerners.” (24,25).

Sommerfield is impressed by the events, by people actions and interactions such as the excitement shown in political demonstrations and speeches where people play and sing the International anthem carrying banners with slogans and fly the flags. There is a memorable passage in John Sommerfield’s book where he states his understanding of the fight and suffering undergone by the Spanish people through centuries, thus, explaining the excitement and hope they transmitted:

Those fervent handclasps, those voices ringing with vitality, communicated to us something more than enthusiasm, something really distilled from their blood and soil, with the tremendous strength of hopes and dreams that had survived generations of toil and want and suffering to burst forth now from the confines of centuries, overcoming ignorance and superstition and old lying loyalties. It was then we began really to understand something of the struggle in which we had come to help (29).

During his ship voyage to Spain John Sommerfield listens to one of the sailor singing flamenco. He links the singing with a grievance cry which cannot be other than the grievance inflicted to the Spanish people as a consequence of the fascist revolt and the war. “Somewhere one of the sailors was singing a flamenco, his voice low but pitched to the true flamenco note that sounds as if the Singer was wailing of some great wrong.” (21).

Regarding religion, John Sommerfield criticized the Catholic Church using the church of the village of La Roda as a metaphor. He describes it as menacing, arrogant and of huge proportions in comparison to the humble, insignificant and surrounding buildings over which it projects a big shadow.

Like a fortress alien and dominating, stood the church, leaning its enormous shadow across... the church its centre, pushing upwards from a clustering obscurity of insignificant and poverty-stricken buildings, its beauty arrogant and menacing,...the gloomy shape of musty air enclosed by those three-foot-thick walls behind which lurked an ancient vengeful silence (42).

The author states, in a metaphorical way, the great power and influence of the Catholic Church in Spain. He renders a negative image. According to his view, the Church was outdated and had lost contact with the working class. It supported the fascist mutiny and defended the rich middle class instead of the needed and impoverished working class.

In the same way Frank Pitcairn in *Reporter in Spain*, reinforces this view of the Spanish Church:

He knew well enough from first hand experience what the church and the rich reactionaries were like...The Church, he had said, the largest landowner in Spain, had begun converting real state into cash on a huge scale, and was using the cash in an extraordinary bribery campaign, sending priests round with largesse for corner boys and criminals exactly as the waiter now described (7).

Frank Pitcairn tries to counterbalance the negative perception the British had of the republicans with respect to the burning of the churches and the cruelty against the priests. He makes an effort to show the respect that the republican government had on the Church. In chapter XI he explains how a nun convent which had been turned into a women prison was respected by the republicans, both the building and the occupants.

A few days later Sister Veronica came back to see the church and, filled with amazement, wrote a letter of thanks and admiration. I found the letter lying with other papers on the table used as an office table by the militia commander. He did not regard it as a very important document, being unaware of the kind of lies that are being told about the People's Militia abroad. After examining the church I went through the convent, which has been turned into a women's prison (21).

The three authors partake as well literary influences and style. They employ realistic descriptions using simple and direct prose and include dialogues to convey action. John Sommerfield and Esmond Romilly share a distinct feature. They combine lyric and intimate reflections with realistic accounts. Frank Pitcairn conditioned by his role as a communist war correspondent is more prosaic and employs the irony and the caricature.

They share also some literary debts. It may be remarked that the features of war literature had already been established by classic authors like Ernest Hemingway to whom John Sommerfield mentions in *Volunteer in Spain*. The influence of Hemingway is clearly noticeable in the three authors by adopting his cinematographic style, the simple and concise use of prose in a journalistic way and the introduction of dialogues to convey action. A precedent classic who was a pioneer in describing the horrors of war in a modern sense was Stephen Crane by employing a lyrical and realistic point of view. He provided a deep psychological portrait of a soldier who fought during the American Civil War in his famous novel *The Red Badge of Courage*. This intimate and realistic style is also present in the work of *Volunteer in Spain* as well as in *Boadilla*. Another war writer was Henri Barbusse who made a heart-breaking description of war in his novel *Fire* using autobiographical material from his participation in the First World War. Barbusse employed dialogues among the soldiers to structure his novel in a very realistic tone in the same way that *Boadilla* by Esmond Romilly was built.

Regarding the differences among these three authors, they arise from the way in which they approach their work and the goal they pursue.

Frank Pitcairn is a communist who does not hesitate to manipulate the facts and bend the truth. He had a very short military experience but he was very active serving the Communist Party which he considered to be a saviour. He wrote propaganda to achieve his goals.

John Sommerfield on his part believes firmly in the social mission of literature and the role it has in raising awareness. He was also a communist. He was convinced of the need to fight with arms to end the secular oppression of the country. Not for nothing he was a professional writer and his work contains many examples of literary creation rather than a recounting of events.

Finally, Esmond Romilly is a young idealist and adventurer who terrified by the war experience writes one of the most direct testimonies about war.

8. Conclusion

It is remarkable the inner journey of personal growth these three authors experience as well as the generosity and altruism they displayed by serving in the Civil War as volunteers. Their works emerge as a statement of commitment to a moral and an ideology. They are an example of solidarity to the betrayed Spanish people, becoming a strong model for the coming generations. Although they show some differences the common features they share are more substantial and powerful.

The three of them felt the need to change the world fighting against fascism with arms. Although they come at different times and get enlisted in different battalions, the three of them were infused with the same romantic ideals and share the same illusion and purpose. They provide the first written testimonies in English about the Spanish Civil War. They showed a great enthusiasm and euphoria for the victory which they believed to be close but they seemed

to be disappointed at the end. The three of them review their ideological motivations at the same time that they show the historic and political circumstances of Spain.

*Si hay hombres que contienen un alma sin fronteras,
una esparcida frente de mundiales cabellos,
cubierta de horizontes, barcos y cordilleras,
con arena y con nieve, tú eres uno de aquellos.
Las patrias te llamaron con todas sus banderas,
que tú aliento llenara de movimientos bellos.
Quisiste apaciguar la sed de las panteras,
y flameaste henchido contra sus atropellos.
Con un sabor a todos los soles y los mares,
España te recoge por que en ella realices
tu majestad de árbol que abarca un continente.
A través de tus huesos irán los olivares
desplegando en la tierra sus más férreas raíces,
abrazando a los hombres universal, fielmente”.*

Miguel Hernández

“Al soldado internacional caído en España“. 1938

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