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Mairin Mitchell's and Walter Starkie's Divergent(?) Images of Pre-War Spain (1934-1936)

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Despite the neighbouring, though politically contentious, relationship between Ireland and Britain over centuries, Irish writers have cultivated a singular image of Spain that veers away from the British Romantic construct of the country in general and the Spanish conflict in particular, an image that has customarily been overlooked although the Spanish Civil War, its history, its aftermath and its international implications have always held a deep fascination for Irish writers. This article revolves around the image of Spain as portrayed by two Irish authors who travelled in Spain on the verge of the conflict and who held divergent political stances: Walter Starkie (1894-1976), who supported the nationalist cause, and Mairin Mitchell (1895-1986), who had a pro-left ideology. Through the exploration of Starkie's and Mitchell's travelogues, lectures, newspaper articles and personal letters, this article will examine the extent to which these two positions are at odds and the reasons behind these differences.

Keywords: Spanish Civil War; Walter Starkie, Mairin Mitchell; Hiberno-Spanish relations

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Las imágenes divergentes(?) de la España pre-Guerra Civil (1934-1936) de Mairin Mitchell y Walter Starkie

Pese a la relación de vecindad, aunque políticamente conflictiva, entre Irlanda e Inglaterra durante siglos, los escritores irlandeses han cultivado una imagen singular de España que se aleja de la construcción romántica del país en general y del conflicto español en particular, una imagen que habitualmente se ha pasado por alto aunque la Guerra Civil española, su

historia, sus secuelas y sus implicaciones internacionales siempre han ejercido una profunda fascinación sobre los escritores irlandeses. Este manuscrito gira en torno a la imagen de España retratada por dos autores irlandeses que viajaron a España al borde del conflicto y que mantuvieron posturas políticas divergentes: Walter Starkie (1894-1976), que apoyó la causa nacionalista, y Mairin Mitchell (1895-1986), de ideología izquierdista. A través de la exploración de los diarios de viaje, conferencias, artículos periodísticos y cartas personales de Starkie y Mitchell, este trabajo examinará hasta qué punto estas dos posturas están enfrentadas y las razones de estas diferencias.

Palabras clave: Guerra Civil española; Walter Starkie, Mairin Mitchell; relaciones España-Irlanda

The political crisis of 1936 in Spain was fuelled by the general destabilisation of the European configuration resulting from the actions of revisionist countries since Europe's equilibrium had become unstable after First World War which pivoted around a tripartite ideological conflict between liberalism, communism and fascism. Great Britain, despite adopting a sympathetic stance towards Franco's uprising, opted for non-interventionism in order to preserve its strategic interests, in particular, Gibraltar. When the Spanish military coup of July 1936 led to the overthrow of the Second Republic, most British travellers living in or visiting the country left or were invited to leave.[1] However, this did not result in a lack of interest in or a decrease in the number of publications about Spain. Quite the opposite: accounts from intellectuals, journalists and writers who dared to enter or even served in Spain during the conflict coalesced into a remarkable corpus of British narratives of encounter, which resulted in an Anglocentric view of the war (Treglown 2013, 1).

Despite the neighbouring, though politically contentious, relationship between Ireland and England over centuries, Irish writers have cultivated a singular image of Spain that veers away from the British Romantic construct of the country in general and the Spanish conflict in particular, an image that has customarily been overlooked even though "Irish writers have always been fascinated by the Spanish Civil War, its history, its aftermath, and its international implications" (Heinz 2012, 93). In other words, Ireland's concerns were different from those of other European countries in the inter-war years, which were about the rise of fascism, the threat of a new world war or an economic recession, because in Ireland, "the local ha[d] trumped the global" (Goldstone 2020, 12). Ireland's recent independence from England, which had brought in its wake the "Economic War"—the establishment of a novel form of nationalist government, the Irish Free State, with a conservative stance and the vindication of its

[1] British citizens Gerald Brenan and Robert Graves decided to go back to England as they sensed danger in staying in Spain due to the position taken by their native country on the conflict and their Protestant background (Mitchell 2004).

own identity—resulted in Irish rule developing tunnel vision apropos international politics, and the conflict in Spain was no exception. However, as events unfolded and the Spanish war began to be considered the prelude to a new world war, "there was no escaping the Spanish question in Ireland between July 1936 and the summer of 1937" (McLoughlin and O'Connor 2020, 5).

Extensive studies have been, and continue to be, conducted on the Irish government's and popular position regarding the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War (Bell 1969; Cullen 2021; McCreanor 2022; McGarry 2001, 2002; McLoughlin and O'Connor 2020; O'Brien 2017; Stradling 1999). This could be attributed to the kaleidoscopic standpoint in Ireland since choosing to support one side or the other was not easy considering the multiple contradictions within the country. The part of the population with an internationalist perspective supported the left-wing democratic Republican faction, and a large number of Irishmen joined the International Brigades, forming the Irish unit known as the Connolly Column, a significant fact considering that communism was weak in Ireland, and the communist party had barely 150 members and was confined organisationally to Dublin and Belfast (O'Connor 2004, 39). Others with more conservative Catholic views supported Franco's nationalist cause. These opposing views on the Spanish war were mirrored in the literary production of the 1930s. Authors like Charles Donnelly, Charles Ewart Milne, Peadar O'Donnell, Kate O'Brien and Thomas O'Brien provided testimony supporting the Republican cause after either serving in Spain or simply publicly supporting the Republicans after visiting (or not) the country. Similarly, writers like Eoin O'Duffy, Aodh de Blácam and Francis McCullagh considered the Spanish war a Catholic crusade to overcome the communist threat in both Spain and, by extension, Ireland since the Francoist conception of a united Spain aligned with the ideal Irish nation (Klaus 1991, 268).

Although a number of Irish writers were in Spain in the 1930s, few studies have examined and analysed their publications (Mittermaier 2017; Goldstone 2020). This article, therefore, aims to contribute to existing knowledge in the field of Hiberno-Spanish cultural relations, particularly in respect to literary impact, contact between cultures and cultural influences between the two nations. It focuses on the image of Spain in the years preceding the Spanish Civil War as portrayed by two Irish authors of divergent political stances who were travelling in Spain just before the outbreak of the conflict: Walter Starkie (1894-1976), who supported the nationalist cause, and Mairin Mitchell (1895-1986), who had a pro-left ideology. By exploring the travelogues, lectures, newspaper articles and personal letters of both authors, this article will examine the extent to which the two positions are at odds and the reasons behind these differences in their approach to Spanish politics, religion, regionalism and the impending conflict and its consequences at the international level. Choosing travel books on Spain written by these two authors in the 1930s as its primary corpus for analysis, this paper draws heavily on the fact that travelogues were a very popular genre in the "Devil's Decade" besides being known for their fluidity and adaptability (Blanton

2002, 29) in that a travelogue oscillates between the objective and the subjective, the individual and the visited place and the roles of memory and witness. Furthermore, the impetus of the article is to carry out an act of literary salvage of overlooked Irish images of the calamitous and anticipatory events that took place in the 1930s in Spain, particularly with respect to Mitchell's works since they exemplify the gender-blindness of the literary voices of the time (Casey 2018).[2]

The Dubliner Walter Fitzwilliam Starkie was a prominent scholar, writer, translator and fiddle player born to an Anglo-Irish family.[3] Starkie grew up in Ireland in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, in the years when the Protestant Ascendancy had begun to lose their privileges owing to the rise of the nationalist Catholic middle class following the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922. The outcome was that this social group "found themselves swiftly becoming treated in the newspapers, in political speeches and polemical pamphlets as strangers in the[ir] own land" (Brown 1981, 107). Starkie decided to introduce himself to Catholicism, which he described as "all the greater, and I felt the agonising lack of breathing space which would have allowed me to adapt my existence to this new spirit that religion had given me" (1963, 52). Starkie considered himself an Irish citizen as he was born and raised in Dublin. However, a unique aspect of his identity is that while he sometimes referred to himself as Irish, at other times he used the inclusive pronoun "we" when referring to England (Starkie 1938, 14), and he had a British passport (1936, 129). Even those who knew him were unsure of whether to refer to him as Irish or British.[4] Thus, Starkie lived in a constant "pattern of binary structures" (Hurtley 2005, 55) that would affect his literature. After WWI, Starkie travelled to several countries including Romania, Greece and, in 1921, to Spain for the first time. Of his visits to Spain between 1924 and 1928, he noted that… "[S]ociety seemed to me to be divided into two irreconcilable groups" (*Irish Independent*, March 06, 1937, 11). Starkie travelled extensively around Spain and other countries until 1940 when he was appointed the first director of the British Council in Spain—a position he held until 1954—which represented British interests in the country.[5] He lived in Spain until he died in 1976. His education under

[2] Historian Maurice J. Casey (2018) claims that "to date, Mitchell has barely bothered a footnote."

[3] The Anglo-Irish population were descendants of the Protestant Ascendancy, which refers to the dominant (mostly) Protestant minority in Ireland formed by landowners who had the social, political and economic control of the state. Hurtley (2013, 20) states that although Starkie's parents professed Catholicism, "it [was] the lifestyle and values of the Anglo-Irish that constitute[d] a point of reference throughout his life."

[4] In a book written in tribute to Starkie, *Ensayos Hispano-Ingleses*, published in 1948, important figures of Spanish culture such as Pío Baroja, Ramón Menéndez Pidal and Antonio Espina who contributed to the volume as a way to cherish the friendship they established with him during Starkie's years in Spain, talk interchangeably about Starkie as British or Irish.

[5] After his appointment as director of the British Council in Spain in the summer of 1940, Starkie even had a meeting with Franco to underscore the valuable work carried out by the institution. Although Starkie supported Francoism after the Civil War and, in fact, realised that the Spanish government welcomed his appointment because "during Spain's hour of need [he] had from the start taken sides with the forces of law and order" (Walter Starkie to Lord Lloyd, September 17, 1940, tna, bw, 56/2), recently published research claims

the English tradition of his family and his multiple transnational experiences bestowed on him what he called "a sense of universality" (Starkie 1938, 11), a key feature of his image of Spain, which he rambled around, mostly in the thirties and are reflected in two travel diaries: *Spanish Raggle-Taggle: Adventures with a Fiddle in North Spain* (1934), and *Don Gypsy: Adventures with a Fiddle in Barbary, Andalusia and La Mancha* (1936).

Mairin Marian Mitchell (née Houghton Mitchell) was an English author, translator and journalist. Despite having never lived permanently in Ireland, she considered herself Irish as her father was Irish-born. Understanding the writer Mairin Mitchell is a challenging task as there is scant documentation available.[6] Furthermore, owing to her diversified literary career and the fact that she did not "play a major role in any canonical Irish historical event" (Casey 2018), her categorisation in the Irish literature of the 1930s is somewhat questionable. She has been variously identified as "Catholic, liberal, republican and a pacifist" (McLoughlin and O'Connor 2020, 49) and as a person "of Irish descent from a Quaker and Catholic background" (Goldstone 2020, 23). Notwithstanding her rooted Irishness (McLoughlin and O'Connor 2020, 49), when Ireland's regression to conservatism in the 1930s was accompanied by the government's intention to confine women to the domestic sphere once again, Mitchell, as a young female writer eager to display her cosmopolitan spirit, established herself in London. Mitchell was referred to as London-Irish in various press publications, and for a while, she was the London correspondent for *The Irish Press* in which she wrote a section ("People and Places") devoted to her travels around Europe. She also collaborated with *The Irish Bulletin*, *Irish Democrat*, *Ireland To-Day* and *The Nation*. London was a preferred destination for many Irish people who wished to escape Ireland's ever-increasing insularity, parochialism and near-sightedness and while this group of London-Irish people was concerned about the events in their home country, at the same time, they engaged in politics, literature and world affairs. In fact, they became "part of a global literary and cultural movement composed of writers, artists, musicians and journalists" (Goldstone 2020, 3). This cosmopolitan group resolved to lead a life more attuned to the ways and customs of modernist artists and writers whose deep political beliefs lay in supporting anti-fascist and progressive causes and who used their writing as a "form of public action" (Nelson 2013, 5).

Despite their differences, both Mitchell and Starkie considered themselves "wanderer[s]" (Mitchell May 14, 1936; Starkie 1963, 169). Mitchell claimed to have

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that, at the same time, he seems to have masterminded an educational and cultural programme for the British Council in Madrid aimed at countering the strongly institutionalised and well-funded Nazi German and Fascist Italian propaganda in Spain in the 1940s (de Arcos 2021, Part 1, 527-55; Part 2, 707-38). Beyond the "cultural diplomacy," as de Arcos puts it, Starkie is supposed to have even helped escapees fleeing from Nazi persecution in Madrid (de Arcos Part 2, 709).

[6] For the purpose of this research, her extensive correspondence with Hanna Sheehy Skeffington and Desmond Ryan between 1932 and 1946 in which they engage in Irish and international political issues, including the conflict in Spain, has been examined as there is no other documentation available on the author. These documents have not received any attention before.

"nomadic tastes" (December 16, 1935), which led to her becoming fluent in many languages such as Russian and Hungarian and being able to read German, Dutch, French, Swedish and Spanish.[7] Starkie's bohemian character and enthusiasm for travelling to unknown places flourished during his sojourns in Spain, where he shed his "disguise" as an academic and allowed his hidden "vagabond second self" (Starkie 1934, 3) to surface: his alter ego known as *Don Gualterio*. Thus, it is no coincidence that the focus of this paper is Starkie and Mitchell: they were both Catholic, both had a penchant for Spain, both visited the country when it was on the brink of the Spanish Civil War and, both sketched an image of the country from a differentiating perspective: that of the liminal space of two hyphenated authors, a London-Irish female writer with leftist ideals and an Anglo-Irish writer with nationalist beliefs.

In 1932-1934, Mitchell visited Spain, mostly on short trips to Catalonia and the Basque Country. Her impressions were captured in several articles published in the *Irish Press* (October 18, 1932; April 01, 1933; October 17, 1934) and, especially, in her book *Traveller in Time* (1935), which was described as "a piece of nationalist propaganda" (Mittermaier 2017, 44) because of its constant references regarding the contribution of Ireland to European culture. Spain made a deep impression on Mitchell, and her link with the country, particularly the Basque Country, was long-lasting. Although she does mention in some of her letters her limited knowledge of Spanish, she translated some books into English in the 1970s, thus evidencing her efforts to bring Spanish and, in particular, Basque, culture to the English-speaking community. By mid-March 1936 (barely two months before the outbreak of the war), Mitchell announced to Sheehy-Skeffington that she was travelling to Spain at Easter with a Hungarian woman (Tinka Hérányi) who had no Spanish and "dislike[d] the idea of organised tours" (March 14, 1936), and the literary result of Mitchell's wanderings on this trip was *Storm over Spain*. Mitchell states her twofold aim for travelling to Spain in the opening page of the travelogue: "We were both really going because Spain was rocking with the first tremors of an earthquake that was soon to scar her land from Tarifa to Tolosa. I had another reason for going to Spain again: I wanted to follow up Irish tracks here" (Mitchell 1936, 16). The writer and her companion visited Córdoba, Seville, Granada, Ronda, Málaga, Torremolinos, Algeciras and Gibraltar, mostly because Tinka was only interested in visiting the southern region of the country.

In contrast, Starkie's *Spanish Raggle-Taggle: Adventures with a Fiddle in North Spain* (1934) focuses on the North of the Iberian Peninsula and collects his first impressions of the country. He started the journey in August 1934 in Biarritz in France as the starting point for touring the Basque Country and then Burgos, and ended the trip in Madrid in October of the same year, staying in the educational institution "Residencia de Estudiantes." In *Raggle-Taggle*, Starkie also states his purpose in Spain: to travel as

[7] Apart from her travels to different European countries before the outbreak of WWII, she worked as a stenographer in a Canadian boat and visited fifteen countries (Mitchell December 16, 1935).

a wanderer with his fiddle because "perhaps in the discordant rhythms of Spain I shall discover harmony" (1934, 12). His second travelogue, *Don Gypsy: Adventures with a Fiddle in Barbary, Andalusia and La Mancha* (1936), recounts his trip to Andalusia, beginning on March 17, 1935. He travelled by boat from Tangier in Morocco to Cádiz, then on to Málaga, Seville, Granada, Córdoba and Jaén, finishing the trip in Argamasilla de Alba (Castilla La Mancha) months later the same year. The journey starts with the image of a ship (a very common symbol in travel books from this period), evocative of freedom, reinforcing Starkie's need for escape from suffocating Ireland. His purpose this time was to embrace a gypsy existence: "What shall I do to escape from this world of strongholds? Become a pariah, a nomad" (Starkie 1936, 101).

For both authors, their second travelogues mark a continuity with their previous books rather than a closure since both author's first two works verge on political and historical commentaries laced with direct or oblique personal observations of the places visited, and both draw parallels with Ireland. Mitchell and Starkie were well aware of the image of Spain created by British and French Romantic authors who preceded them, such as Richard Ford and Théophile Gautier, and both refer to these two fellow travellers to in their travelogues. In the case of Mitchell, Mario Praz's *Peninsula Pentagonale*: *Unromantic Spain* (1926)[8] would have definitely fuelled her impulse to travel the country in 1934. Although Mitchell and Starkie have sometimes been typified as Romantic writers of the twentieth century (for example, Hurtley 2013, 114 on Starkie),[9] and Mittermaier even considers that Mitchell's descriptions of people and places create "a hetero-image of Spain which lacks originality and again confirms the observation of imagologists that travel writers tend to repeat and perpetuate the stereotypes of their predecessors" (Mittermaier 2017, 166), their travelogues not only ascertain the frail social situation of a country before a war that quickly acquired international dimensions, but also theorise about and delve into the causes of the poverty they see on the streets and the high rate of illiteracy. They both provide distinctive first-hand accounts, sprinkling their descriptions of apparent and temporary calm with a concerned and well-informed analysis of the bellicose situation in Spain despite their differing political tendencies. In their abhorrence of being categorised as "tourists" because of the severance it creates between the visitor and the visited place, Mitchell's and Starkie's interaction with the Spanish population is constant. They were both interested in engaging with people

[8] Praz tried to debunk the romanticised image of Spain promoted by authors such as Théophile Gautier, Prosper Merimée, Victor Hugo and Washington Irving. The picturesque Spanish representation was deleterious as tourists who arrived in the country with a distorted image were left disenchanted. In a letter to Hanna Seehy-Skeffington written on March 13, 1936, Mitchell would later remark that "no book ever made [her] want to go to Spain more than this one."

[9] In a letter dated March 7, 1936, to Seehy-Skeffington, right before travelling to Spain, Mitchell showed her anger after Irish editor and writer Leslie Daiken referred to *Traveller in Time* (1934) as vulgar and romantic literature and claimed: "I'm far from being a romanticist." In fact, in an *Irish Press* review (May 27, 1936, 5) of *Storm over Spain*, it is said that the very names of Spanish cities are "redolent of romance." Mitchell even compares his trip to Spain to Starkie's for both travelling in "somewhat picaresque fashion" (1937, 71).

from different social strata and political affiliations to fathom the fraught climate that preceded the national conflict, a position that aligns with O'Connor's claim that the conflict in Spain was perceived in Ireland not simply as a clash of global ideologies, but as a struggle of people like themselves (2004, 48). Thus, one may assume that these writers subverted this image by abandoning the slant of cultural superiority and avoiding chauvinism, key elements characterising the distinct literary configuration of 1930s Spain.

Mairin Mitchell's approach to Irish and international politics seemed ambiguous in the 1930s, and it evolved in parallel with the unfolding of major historical events. She was an active member of the Gaelic League of London[10] but was never sympathetic towards Sinn Féin since she did not want to be known for being "mixed up in politics" (May 19, 1937), but only "militant politics" (May 26, 1937, emphasis in the original).[11] Some years before travelling to Spain, Mitchell attended the meetings of the Freedom Group (although she was not a member) and was recognised to "have come under the spell of the Russian writers" and her three greatest book treasures were "Lafcadio Hearn's *Gleanings from Buddha Fields*, Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*, and Connolly's *Labour in Irish History*, with their respective spiritual, psychological and material values" (NAME OF AUTHOR 1937, 132-33). Mitchell's letters and writings reveal that she seems to have moved away from communism, which she favoured in the 1920s, to pacifism when she learned about the progression to an aggressive form of Russian communism because she rejected any manifestation of violence (Armendáriz 2022).[12] In a letter to Desmond Ryan,[13] she admitted to preferring Trotsky "to some of the Stalinists and [I] certainly admire his big brains. But I've never really been quite reconciled to the idea of physical force and some of T's followers now do seem to be pretty thorough terrorists" (September 30, 1936). In the 1930s, she began to call herself a pacifist and found it hard to explain "why [she was] not a communist" anymore (May 28, 1934 Her political stance can be discerned as left-inclined in many passages of *Storm*, although

[10] In fact, the main motivation behind the Gaelic League in London was the promotion of Irish culture and language, and it gave the Irish in London "a rallying point that infused them with a sense of Irishness and allowed them to gather regularly at Irish-themed events. It was a support for those who were homesick and displaced and this function was very different to the role of the Gaelic League in Ireland" (MacDiarmada 2020, 42). The Irish in London were part of other lively political and cultural circles that quickly mobilised for republican Spain.

[11] She devoted two articles in the *Irish Press* in 1934 to the London-Irish community, describing the actions carried out by the organisation to promote Irish identity abroad. Incidentally, Mitchell was taken to court in England for being a "Sinn Féiner" (June 01, 1935); she ultimately won the suit against her.

[12] According to Armendáriz, her rejection of violence could also have been motivated by the death of her brother in Cairo in 1918 during WWI.

[13] *Storm* was dedicated to socialist Irish writer and journalist William Patrick Ryan, which provides a hint regarding the tone adopted by Mitchell in the sections of the travel book devoted to the Spanish conflict. From her epistolary exchange with Ryan's son Desmond in 1936-1937, immediately after publishing *Storm*, it can be ascertained that she had her own doubts about his ideological stance towards the Spanish struggle and which, according to her, seemed one-sided, right-leaning and over-simplifying the rebellion to a mere division of society into left and right (March 02, 1937).

her rejection of communism and move to pacifism before her trip is also evident in that, as she herself notes, she tried to "take a pacifist point of view in the end" and "to be fair" (September 26, 1936). However, considering how Ireland's loyalties were divided in the Spanish conflict, Mitchell decided not to openly show her pro-left leanings in her writing as it would only "inflame the pro-right people more, and that wasn't the way to win sympathy for the left" (September 29, 1936). Mitchell also justifies the Irish interest in the Spanish conflict, citing the military character of the war and the mutual military cooperation of the countries in the past. Thus, in *Storm*, Mitchell delves deeper into the whys and wherefores of both sides and, above all, tries to project some level of impartiality, for "no one writing objectively would deny that indefensible excesses were committed on both sides" (1937, 57), although, as already mentioned, her affinity for leftist principles can be perceived in most of her comments.

Chapter 7 in *Storm over Spain* serves as an example of Mitchell's political inclination as it works as an impasse in her wanderings around the south of the country, and the entire section is devoted to the anarchists.[14] After expounding her conviction that the popular tendency was for herd-thinking and that "there were masses of people who were ceasing to think as individuals [...] even to question their gods, they were deifying their dictators. The servile State was supreme" (1937, 123), she considers that the anarchists in Spain "conducted their revolution in a manner as sternly ascetic as the Irish Volunteers in their fighting against the British Crown Forces in 1921" (1937, 146). Her historical journey, based on an array of sources and conversations,[15] describes Spanish anarchism as more Bakuninist rather than Tolstoyan and discusses the evolution of the two anarchist organisations. She considers the FAI as the moral side of the anarchist movement in Spain and the CNT, which initially considered the government of the Republic to be an oppressor but later came to see it as an ally after the rise of fascism. She then finds parallels between the anarchists in Spain, taking the example of a small Spanish village, Fraga, and the Quakers, for both groups rejected violence and strict forms of organisation and believed that the community was the origin of all values. Her conclusion is that in an age when "a definite impulse for submission to the State made possible the growths of fascism and communism, the anarchists for their denial of this devaluation of man, had paid the supreme penalty" (Mitchell 1937, 155).

Categorising Walter Starkie's political affiliation is also challenging. According to Lino Novás Calvo, Starkie felt "irretrievably attracted to [...] the Republic" (cited in Morillas Ventura 1997, 185). However, evidence reveals that during the 1920s, Starkie's sympathies lay with fascism—and that he had a deep appreciation of Mussolini—and

[14] George Orwell, in his review of Mitchell's *Storm*, said that "her book is valuable for a number of reasons, but especially because, unlike almost all English writers on Spain, she gives a fair deal to the Spanish Anarchists" (Orwell 1937, 296).

[15] Mitchell even attended a speech given by Dolores Ibárruri while in Málaga.

he was against De Valera's political stance on the issue of Ethiopia (Keane 2015).[16] Fascist ideology permeated so deeply into his beliefs that he even wrote an article for the International Centre for Fascist Studies (CINEF) in 1928 in which he wondered whether Ireland in the near future would also end up adopting this form of government, as there was "a spiritual awakening among a people that had endured years of anguish, and it is quite possible that Ireland may come to assimilate a great deal of fascist political doctrine, properly understood" (Starkie 1928, 234).

From his dual position as Anglo-Irish, Starkie considered Irish politics immature. He expected Spain would follow a similar path since, to him, fascism "combat[ed] every form of Naturalism and the selfish individualism and Agnosticism which have formed the basis of political theory in modern times" (1928, 234). During the Spanish Civil War, he published several articles in *The Irish Independent* emphasising Ireland's historical links to Spain as the alleged reason for supporting the nationalist side, although he also preferred Ireland's non-intervention (March 05, 1937, 10). Overall, Starkie's two travelogues on 1930s Spain show that despite realising that as a foreigner "[he] was expected to hold the balance" (1934, 254) and only gather impressions from people with opposing views, he maintained his adherence to fascism.

Most conversations Starkie has with Spaniards he encounters in the two travelogues are directed towards obliquely vindicating the emerging fascism in Europe and its impending incursion into Spanish politics in order to make the reader reflect on the consequences of the policies implemented by the government of the Republic. *Don Gualterio* assumes the role of the true witness of what the Spanish population, regardless of social class, believes is happening: that the revolution proclaimed by the Republic was just an illusion. Even though he tries to express sympathy with both of the warring sides despite his fascist nationalist tendencies, Starkie's works on Spain evoke "the paternalistic discourse of colonialism contained in popular 19th-century boys' adventure stories" (Hurtley 2013, 34). Through an encounter with a shepherd in Darro, while out walking with a group of friends, he reveals that the country was in a turmoil and that people needed a new leader, "'un pastor de veras,' a real shepherd with a shout out of him that could be heard a mile off and a stick, which would prevent us from straggling like stray goats" (Starkie 1936, 355). Similarly, Starkie mentions a conversation with a businessman called Miguel in Málaga who claims to have "enough money to buy [him] self a royal banquet every day of the week but [he]'s not allowed to eat and so [he]'s just as hungry as [he] was in the past" (Starkie 1936, 396). This statement from Miguel reflected Starkie's opinions, which went contrary to capitalist and Marxist principles and instead adopted oblique propaganda on behalf of the nationalist uprising that was to come. While in the Alhambra in Granada, Starkie emphasises the population's distress and realises that the positive outcomes of the Republic affected only a few:

[16] Keane's work provides an extended description of Starkie's confrontation with De Valera regarding Mussolini's annexation of Ethiopia.

"'What a farce it all is,' 'We created the Republic and blotted out a thousand years of history. Then, our leaders, who call themselves Socialists, sabotage the whole machine.' [...] 'It was a revolution of school-teachers and *profesorones*—fellows who dressed in frock-coats and were all out for their own advancement'" (Starkie 1936, 301).

In Sepúlveda, Mariano, the communist, defended the conflict by saying: "The true Revolution has yet to come to Spain. Already there is a band of young men in Spain ready to devote their lives to the ideals of communism" (Starkie 1934, 394). Starkie then describes the argument between Doña Leocadia, an ultra-Catholic, and her niece, who supports the Republic. Worth noting too are his imaginary conversations with Marquis Don Gonzalo, a monarchical Catholic who, from his exile was awaiting a revolution in the country, and Miguel de Unamuno, the noted Spanish writer, because to Starkie, "both men might be taken as symbols of that continued state of tension in Spain, or state of agony as Unamuno would have called it" (1934, 29-30). Starkie's assertion is that the only true communism he has ever known was an excerpt from *The Quijote* and wonders "what the future would have in store for Spaniards of Mariano's type. How long would it take for the theories of Lenin to conquer the *jota* and all the traditions it symbolised" (Starkie 1934, 397).

Because of their liminal and sometimes unfathomable political viewpoints, both Mitchell and Starkie were suspected of being spies for the British intelligence agency (Armendáriz 2022; Preston 2006), although no archival evidence is available to prove this. Starkie's and Mitchell's travelogues reflect their divergent political tendencies and interpret the situation in 1930s Spain through the prism of Irish history. Likewise, their gaze on conflicted Spain also reflects the view of most Irish visitors who wrote about the conflict: "Spain was an extension of Ireland, a second front" (O'Connor 2004, 46). Both authors' position as observers who tried to avoid making direct personal comment in their travelogues on the tense political situation of the country in the 1930s was not, however, a barrier to them expressing their inclinations and hopes on the development of the Republic and later armed conflict.

Since both Mitchell and Starkie travelled in Spain on the brink of the war, it is no surprise that their travelogues focus on the elements that affected and promoted the social and political tensions that would subsequently result in the war. The debate over the causes that triggered the armed conflict in Spain remains open even today, as there is still an "unbalanced historiography" (Payne 2011, IV) owing to the lack of publications, especially during the period of dictatorship that emerged after the war. Factors such as an underdeveloped economy—which increasingly marked class differences—together with society showing a marked division between right and left led to increasing social anxiety. The "Ley de Reforma Agraria" from 1932 was one of the most ambitious projects of the Second Republic because it aimed at resolving deep-rooted problems related to social inequality, especially for millions of workers who lived in miserable conditions. It included the expropriation of certain areas the land, to be delivered in small batches to labourers. The reform, though, did not accomplish all its goals and resulted in a less defined division.

Inspired by the most frequent notices on walls in the street that she and Tinka saw in Andalucía, Mitchell devotes *Storm*'s first chapter, 'The Land for the People', to what she considers the causes of the Spanish Civil War: feudalism, rural unemployment and unbalanced land distribution, and she collects an array of expert voices as well as precise data and statistics to reflect the complexity of the circumstances:

> Then came the big men who said to the small farmers, 'If you support the workers in their demands for higher wages, you will not be able to meet your lease obligations, and then your land will have to be sold'. Then we heard communists and socialists who said, 'Look at our bill for substantial reduction in leasehold charges; support us on the United Front and you will not need to fear for your rents and dues.' (1937, 21)

The failure of the Spanish Republic was that, despite its achievements in the cultural field, the country could not put an end to the vestige of feudalism that remained in Spain and create a class of republican peasants.[17] In the Spanish countryside, the sense of effective power never became republican; it remained the same as during the monarchy: the landowner and his caciques, the priest and the head of the Civil Guard post. Mitchell parallels Spain with Ireland: "It might not be an overstatement to say that 'Up the Republic' in Ireland meant at bottom what 'el Reparto' or 'divide the land' did in Spain" (1937, 16), and she identifies the contradiction that "Irishmen who had fought in Ireland for 'the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland', fought in Spain for those who had announced that they would cancel those agrarian reforms which were seeking to give 'equal rights' to the peasants" (1937, 214). Mitchell's profound knowledge of the historical and social facts that led Spain to the situation it found itself in in the 1930s is also scattered throughout *Storm* and she uses it to distance herself from "the average tourist" (1937, 68). Mitchell fathoms the ultimate cause of the Spanish conflict as being the declining economic situation of the time, which failed to vindicate the conditions of the working class, whose standard of living was much lower than that of those in other European countries: "The battle cry 'For Spain and St. James' was raised with sincerity by numbers of Spaniards supporting Franco, but with many of the feudal landlords the background was bread" (1937, 22). The future configuration that Mitchell foresees for land distribution in Spain is not very accurate, as she imagines it as an "internal colonisation" which encourages workers to take care of the land, but it is collectively owned.

Starkie also reflects on the Spanish agrarian reform as being the main reason for the conflict in *Raggle-Taggle*. Through a happenstance meeting with the shepherd Moreno in Covarrubias, Starkie exposes the dissatisfaction there is with the reform

[17] *Ireland To-Day* devoted a full issue in September 1936 to the Spanish conflict. Mitchell wrote a special report for it on the Spanish agrarian issue titled "The Struggle in Spain" in which she comments on the industry and workers' conditions.

after its implementation, and he romanticises Spain's return to past interventionist and protectionist policies through Moreno's words:

> The revolution has been all words and foam. When the Devil has nought to, do he frighten the flies away with his tail? [sic] The *Señoritos* from Madrid tells us there has been a revolution and that we are as free as the birds in the air. But I ask you, Señor, is anybody in this world free?" [...] "Come now, Moreno, what about the agrarian reform?" "Who cares a curse about the agrarian reform except the politicians? Why, here in Castile, we all have our piece of land, and what we want is to be left alone to work it". (1934, 301)

These examples serve to mirror Ireland's sceptical vision of the Spain of the Second Republic, a stance that also affected the Irish view of religion in Spain because of its alleged estrangement from inward-looking institutionalised Catholicism and its intention to strip away much of the power historically vested in the Spanish Church. Thus, religion and, in particular, Catholicism played a key role in the prism through which Ireland viewed the Spanish conflict since "popular and political opinion about Spain in the years leading up to 1936 tended to be dominated by two major themes. The first was the importance of Catholicism as the unifying bond between both countries" (McGarry 2008, 213). The image of "red Spain" refers not only to communism but also to a rampant anti-clericalism. It was promoted by some Irish newspapers during these years, and resonated with a large portion of Irish society that tended to see the Spanish tensions and the upcoming conflict as a warning to Ireland, since the Spanish situation was occasionally perceived as a simplified struggle between atheism and Catholicism.

Mitchell speculates about the validity Spain being regarded as a religious country, for in the Spaniard, "there has so often been a conflict between religion and reason, a difficulty in reconciling faith with free-thinking" (1937, 85). Beyond that, Mitchell frequently questions the paradoxical standpoint of the Irish and the British press on the Spanish conflict in relation to the issue of Catholicism, and accuses them of being both biased and lurid. The Irish press was mostly pro-Franco; hence, Mitchell frequently collaborated with *Ireland To-Day* since it was "the only mainstream periodical open to writers who were anti-Franco, and while it protested its neutrality, there were limits to Catholic tolerance" (1937, 12).[18] In trying to portray her objectivity, in *Storm,* Mitchell provides a thorough analysis of the wealth of the Spanish clergy in 1936 and demonstrates how this was exaggerated by the British press. Then, she points out how the Spanish Republic made several donations to the Church and, at the same time, how the pro-left press forgot to mention the many workers who also fought for the right and that English left-wing papers showed a general tendency to denounce all the fighters of the right as "savage oppressors whose

[18] In fact, according to the editor Owen Skeffington (*Ireland To-day*, September 01, 1936, 3), the main purpose was "to secure expressions of opinion from six or seven sources, about equally divided in loyalty to one side or the other."

sole aim was the restoration of their former class privileges" (1937, 59). Mitchell does not believe that all communists in Spain are antireligious; she also justifies the outrageous church burnings that attracted "a good deal of attention in Ireland, a country which, in times of religious persecution at home, had sent priests to Spain where those men had not only found hospitality but in many cases had themselves established seminaries and churches" (49). She bases her argumentation on facts and testimonies gathered during her wanderings: "[T]he point was, that the clergy, in so few cases, disbursed among the poor the money thus acquired" (52).

Starkie's approach to the question of religion in Spain also deserves attention as his Catholic faith opened to him the doors of many scholars in Spain in the 1930s and 1940s who "would make him a welcome person to the newly established regime" (Hurtley 2010, 6). Starkie believed that Spain's "whole history was bound up in the Catholic Church, and it was perfectly ludicrous to think that such a people with three thousand years of history behind them would change over to Bolshevism" (*Irish Independent* 1937, March 05, 10). He was not that candid in his travel writing, though: *Raggle-Taggle* and *Don Gypsy* included encounters with Catholics and atheists in order to suggest that religious concerns were also a contributing element to the increasing polarisation of the population in the years and months preceding the outbreak of the war. He relates a conversation he has with a friend called Mariano, a communist, who claims, after Marx, that religion is the opium of the masses (Starkie 1934, 393) and, by way of contrast, talks to Gabriel Ureña, a staunch defender of Catholicism and the monarchy who hopes that atheists would soon be punished. Ureña's son Pepe, however, is used to represent progress and the New Spain of the Second Republic (Starkie 1934, 229-30). Overall, even though his writings convey a somewhat narrow perspective, he still integrates views from diverse creeds: "Don Victoriano believes that there is no hope for the world until a spiritual alliance is made among the different peoples […] Today every country is threatened from within by the 5th column of international communism, which is the writing on the wall. Destruction lies ahead if we do not heed the warning a[nd] gird our loins for the war against the Anti-Christ" (Starkie 1934, 302).

The issue of regionalism in Spain has traditionally been a point of focus for Irish visitors because it mirrored their struggle for independence. Mitchell believed that "to imagine even a divided Spain settled by fascist or communist dictatorship was well-nigh unthinkable to anyone who knew Spain" (1937, 202). The situation in the Basque Country was the focus of Mitchell's *Storm*, as she devotes a full chapter to the Basques, recalls the day the government conceded autonomy status to the territory months before the outbreak of the war and how Franco's intentions to unify the country diluted their hopes. According to Mitchell, Spanish regionalism has racial and geographical origins (1937, 136), and Ireland understood the Basque claim for independence because it "ha[d] always been split" (1937, 123). Simultaneously, she finds parallels between Ireland's separation from Britain and the fragmentation of the Spanish republican forces right before the war. In fact, *Storm*

has been described as conveying "an image of Ireland as a nation blissfully united by its fervent Catholicism, anti-imperialism, and Anglophobia and only partially and temporarily divided over the issues at stake in Spain" (Mittermaier 2017, 171-72). While Mitchell does endorse and eulogise the recent Irish independence and identity in her parallels to Spain—probably owing to her possible idealisation of a place she never lived in permanently and an image formed from a distance, as she had never experienced Irishness at home—she remarks not only on the incongruences of the Irish government's stance on the Spanish conflict but also on its position regarding the Abyssinian crisis, the rise of fascism in Ireland and Spanish regionalism: "How can Ireland vote against Abyssinia [… while] at the same time backing in Spain the party that's going to bring Catalans, Basques and Galicians under a harder head than ever Britain brought Ireland?" (September 30, 1936). This idea aligns with the Irish writing and literary coteries of the 1930s because, as was the case with Mitchell, Irish writing revealed a dualism in the image of a romantic nationalist Ireland versus an evocation of European modernism and cosmopolitanism (Brady 2021, 16-17).

Starkie's approach to the Spanish question of regionalism was the contrary of Mitchell's. He believed not only that regional autonomy generated tension and selfishness in Ireland (Starkie 1929, 69) but also that Ireland needed to work hard towards unification since "up to a certain point the condition of the country resembles that of Spain which Victor Hugo called 'Les Espagnes'" (Starkie 1928, 224). His strong partisan feeling towards Spanish unification does not go unnoticed in his travelogues. He regarded Castile as "a central plateau held in equilibrium by tensions pulling North, South, East and West" (Starkie 1934, 348). In the same vein, the Puerta del Sol in Madrid represented "the navel of the Spanish world" and "a spiritual junction" for the country (Starkie 1934, 414). However, as in every other political issue, Starkie also included the opinions of those supportive of regional independence, especially the Basque Country, through recounting tales of his attendance at political assemblies on his way through the Basque Country and on to Madrid, comparing them to the political gatherings in Dublin between unionists and Republicans.

Mitchell's corollary of her analysis of the Spanish conflict and her pacifist ideals was the hope for reconciliation in Spain and Ireland too, for:

> Irish people, with whom the family is a strong social factor, could sense the suffering of the Spanish people, children lost to parents, and husbands to wives. Beyond Right and Left, beyond all 'isms,' Irishmen could suffer in spirit with Spain. And they could hope that the time would come when among Irish people themselves who had fought on the blood-soaked soil of Spain, Bandera would be reconciled with Brigade, brother with brother. (1937, 64)

Mitchell's experimental text *Traveller in Time* (1935) proposed and visualised a future Ireland of 1942 through her European trips, with a particular focus on Spain. *Storm* followed the

same route as the writer; despite her foreseeing the triumph of anarchism in Spain in some parts, she also anticipates a disgrace looming over Europe, considering the Civil War to be "a European war that was being fought out in Spain" (Mitchell 1937, 195), especially due to the rise of fascism on the continent. Mitchell evidenced her discomfort with the non-action policy of England and Ireland, beyond the voluntary activity carried out by small groups, and considered Churchill a hypocrite (August 11, 1936).

Starkie, even if he openly supported the nationalist side, spending the Christmas of 1937 in their trenches in Madrid as a special correspondent to the *Irish Independent*,[19] also believed in the possibility for reconciliation. He considered it possible that the political barriers that existed between both sides could be abandoned, as well as that European countries could be motivated to look beyond their frontiers in order to reconcile international tension and try to avoid a world confrontation. He was not very optimistic, though: "There will be no peace in Europe until people of different countries develop a tremendous sense of their nationalism, and until each country lets every other country have its nationality" (*Irish Independent* February 19, 1938, 12).

In this article, the image of 1930s Spain as represented by Irish writers Mairin Mitchell and Walter Starkie has been analysed. Mitchell's writings reveal her as an internationalist, cosmopolitan and pacifist who supported Republican Spain and fair land distribution in the country as a means to avoid armed conflict. She also defended the work of anarchists and the self-determination of the Basque Country, and expected Spain to vanquish the impending form of fascism emerging in the country, and that the Catholic Church could be reconciled with both sides. Starkie's texts present him as a fascist-scholar-vagabond who championed Franco's nationalist forces and the role of the Catholic Church, assailed land reform and rejected regionalism. Despite the obliqueness and constant parallels with Ireland in their kaleidoscopic and divergent opinions on the political situation in Spain before the outbreak of the Civil War, its causes, Spanish regionalism and religion, these two Irish authors both conveyed a sociocultural study on Spain based on their previous theoretical knowledge and their personal experiences. They also contributed to the formation of idiosyncratic textual dynamics of Irish travellers in Spain. While these Irish writers did not meet, they both visited Spain in the same period, had a common Catholic upbringing, devoted their literary career to the same genre: travel writing. Above all, they engaged discursively with the social situation of Spain through an approach not found in most British writers in terms of plasticity because Spain served as a mirror on which Irish hopes and fears were mapped (Heinz 2012, 93) to the extent that by reading their works it is possible to chart the evolution of the ideological milieu of the country in the 1930s.

[19] He published thirteen articles while in the nationalist trenches in 1938.

Both Starkie and Mitchell developed an engagement with Spain that was attuned to a distinctive Irish image of the country, one which can also be noted in other authors from the same generation, such as Kate O'Brien, Maura Laverty and Peadar O'Donnell, or in works of Irish authors who would write about the country in the decades that followed, for instance, Pearse Hutchinson and Aidan Higgins. Thus, it may be asserted that this group might have generated their own dynamics, and their texts on Spain, when read as a unit, might create a similar discourse with similar moves and strong and homogenised group assumptions in relation to their image of Spain. All of them, through their comparisons with Ireland and its peoples, and as with other Irish writers and intellectuals of the 1930s, regarded Spain as a "political and emotional 'homeland'" (Vogelzang, cited by Goldstone 2020, 142), regardless of their beliefs.

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