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Review of: Noël Valis (ed), *Teaching Representations of the Spanish Civil War*

Robert H. Whealey  
Ohio University, [Whealey@loquesea.com](mailto:Whealey@loquesea.com)

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Valis, Noël (ed). *Teaching Representations of the Spanish Civil War*. New York: Modern Language Association of America Press, 2007. 598pp.

The text of the book includes seven parts: I: Representations of Historical Contexts, 52 pp., five authors; II: Rhetoric, Ideology and the War, 70 pp., six authors; III: Writing the War, 111 pp., ten authors; IV: The Arts and the War, 71 pp., six authors; V: Memory, Displacement and the War, 109 pp., nine authors; VI: Resources, including films, music, photos, posters, poetry, prose and secondary sources, 42 pp. in bibliographical style; VII: Course Syllabi, 37 pp., seven authors.

This outstanding multi-disciplinary collection of essays on the Spanish Civil War is written by 39 different authors: Nine historians, 22 Spanish language or literature scholars, and eight specialists in poetry, art, film, journalism, etc., thereby justifying the title *Representations*. The book aims at teaching today's students about the Spanish Civil War, primarily in English. Some individual authors are native Spanish speakers, and some understand the history through literature. Historians generally start their research with an ethical or moral hypothesis, but they soon discover just how complex were the motives and ideas of the people being studied. General Francisco Franco and his Republican Popular Front opponents were the major combatants. Yet foreigners--including Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, Chamberlain, Churchill and Roosevelt--intervened in Spain's civil war, seeking to further their own interests. The international impacts of Spain's tragedy, and its connection to World War II, have affected the future of Western democracy since 1945. The Spanish Civil War is of interest to the 21st century, because debate continues over the nature of democracy, liberalism, socialism, fascism, communism, Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and the distribution of land, labor and capital in Spain. Today's American and European problems also include Spain as part of the on-going European crisis of moral authority.

Noël Valis, Professor of the Spanish Language at Yale University and editor of this book, writes the Introduction, two chapters and a one page Conclusion. She evaluates Ernest Hemingway's novel and film, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940 & 1943). She also elaborates on Memory, "Civil War, Ghosts Entombed: Lessons of the Valley of the Fallen" (page 425), including three photos of the gigantic monument where Generalissimo Franco, victor of the Civil War, is buried. This basilica/mausoleum should be viewed skeptically. Valis writes objectively of its Christian symbolism, while pointing out that the nave is bigger than St. Peter's in Rome or St. Paul's in London. A reactionary in his own

mind, Franco ruled 1939 to 1975 much in the spirit of Philip II. Robespierre, Hitler, Stalin and Lenin tried to abolish the hold of the Christian religion, and some Muslims hope eventually to overcome Christianity. Can his impressive church/tomb somehow produce the last laugh for Franco? The Gallegan soldier did recover some of the *Cruzada* of Ferdinand and Isabella and the puritanism of Philip II. Few since the pharaohs have devoted so much energy to a tomb.

Spanish memory of Franco's fascist and reactionary interlude, 1936-1975 is behind many of the essays edited by Valis. The first essay is by Sandie Holguín. In "Navigating the Historical Labyrinth of the Spanish Civil War" she invokes the 1943 classic social history by Gerald Brenan, an Irish member of the Lost Generation, who was living in Spain when war broke out in July 1936. That book aided the British government in trying to keep Franco's Spain out of Hitler's hands.

Enric Ucelay-Da Cal, a Spanish professor of history at the University of Barcelona, writes "The Spanish Civil War as a National Conflict." He implies that "Spain" is an illusion, citing Carlist, Basque and Catalan denials and attraction to civil war from the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

David Herzberger, in "Representations of the Civil War in Historiography," comments on interpretations by Américo Castro and Claudio Sánchez Albornoz. Herzberger knows little about archives on the 1936-1939 era, but views Spanish history broadly, including Franco's concept of the Catholic Spain of Phillip II.

Mary Vincent, in "The Spanish Civil War as a Religious Conflict," writes the most objective account of religion in Spain, 1931 to 1939, that I have ever read. She writes first about Catholicism as seen by Franco's Catholic Church. Then she deals with Catholicism as seen by Spanish Republican anti-clericals. Finally, she weaves the two views together in her well-balanced essay. She also provides striking statistics: the killing of some 6,830 Catholic priests and other religious (including 280 women) (56). In 2001, the Pope beatified 230, "the greatest single number of beatifications in the church's history" (59).

Vincent's essay makes Michael Richards' "Doctrine and Politics in National Spain," somewhat unnecessary. Richards evokes Franco's political and religious propaganda and educational program as established in April 1939. It reads now rather like an antiquarian anachronism, although it would have been valuable to the entourage of President Eisenhower, who visited Francisco Franco in 1953.

Adrian Shubert wrote “Between Documents and Propaganda: Teaching the [film] *Spanish Earth*”, released in the US in 1937. Shubert’s essay could be very valuable to graduate students making a new film. He explains how Ernest Hemingway and his liberal friends composed “Spanish Earth” from historic newsreels, selecting scenes to favor the Republican, Popular Front cause.

Adelaida López de Martínez essay discusses four Spanish novels published between 1942 and 1978, two of them written by women. One novel is pro-franquista, and the second pro-Popular Front. Perhaps inevitably the author puts concern about gender equality ahead of the socialist ideal of class equality.

Part III “Writing the War” includes the battles of July 1936 to March 1939 and also “the war in literature” written since 1939.

Denis Boak’s “The French Literary Response to the War” is to my mind the most original, and therefore the most important essay in the entire book. To a diplomatic historian, French relations with Spain were a prime concern for geographical and historical reasons. Spain narrowly elected a Popular Front in February 1936; by May France did likewise. After Franco’s victory, France faced fascist states on three fronts, and fell quickly to the Germans in 1940. André Malraux commanded a volunteer air squadron for the Spanish Republic in 1936 and published his long, panoramic novel *Man’s Hope* late in 1937. He was a greater novelist of the Spanish Civil War than Ernest Hemingway, who had more often visited and written about Spain. Malraux used Spain’s nationality and class troubles to illustrate his theories about 20<sup>th</sup> century wars and revolution. His novel, structured in episodic dialogues, can be a hard read. Hemingway, in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940), shows his commitment by the title taken from John Donne. This could be the closest point to a moral position or philosophy which Hemingway ever made. Malraux was dealing with the existential implications of Christianity, nationalism and socialism. The French psychological defeat of 1914-1918 could never be forgotten by any French writer, including Malraux. His observations about the nature of war are often missed in the US today, namely, that fighting in any war is traditionally an intensely male, asexual activity. Many in France feared Hitler, Mussolini and Franco, in contemplation of a coming general European struggle, although some French were more frightened of their Communist Party. Fear of General Franco was a weak afterthought. Generalized anxiety provided the sub-rosa theme behind French hopes and fears from 1936 to 1940. Orwell, Hemingway and Malraux suffered disillusionment with the Spanish Popular Front as the war unfolded. Orwell and Malraux gave up on the survival of Spain's democracy by 1937. Hemingway in 1940 saw renewed hope in the Second Republic’s heroic resistance, by the new alliance of the Roosevelt administration and British Prime Minister Churchill. A great paradox among French intellectuals

is that in the 1920s, they took little interest in Spanish affairs. During 1936-1939, however, the Revolution and Civil War in Spain led French citizens into a great burst of political passion on both sides of the barricades. Boak perceives that for Malraux, the reality of war against fascism, whether for communism or for democracy in Spain, could somehow weaken French society at home in the long run. Later Malraux would join the authoritarian and conservative General Charles de Gaulle.

George Esenwein's "Seeing the Spanish Civil War through Foreign Eyes" shows that both Franco's and Stalin's propaganda lines, 1936-1939, ultimately were not believed by later generations of Spaniards. The "Christian" campaign of Franco and "The Fight for Democracy" of Stalin's propaganda machine failed to convince the 1970s generation. Esenwein provides a brief summary of more than twenty foreign (mostly British) writers. Esenwein gives George Orwell his due importance in 1937, when he left Spain and published *Homage to Catalonia*. But he blurs Orwell's significance as a thinker by picturing the English political novelist as only an "anti-communist" or "cold-war" writer (155). This reviewer has examined some ten works by Orwell. An individualist *par-excellence*, Orwell evolved from 1933 to 1941, and from being a Trotskyist soldier in Spain to supporting Great Britain's war effort. Orwell discovered the concept of totalitarianism, recognizing that Stalin had certain characteristics similar to those of Hitler. However, Orwell did not think that Stalin was worse than or identical to the *Führer*. As an observer of international relations, war and peace and revolutions, Orwell realized in 1943-1944 that the USSR would become the new enemy of democracy. *Homage to Catalonia* had rejected capitalism as well as communism. In *Nineteen Eighty-four* (1949), "Big Brother" was a composite of Franco, Stalin, Hitler and some imaginary American movie idol. Orwell never visited the US, and viewed American journalists and advertisers almost like the journalists who wrote for Joseph Goebbels or *Pravda*. Esenwein ignores the fact that George Orwell was a fan of the pacifist Independent Labour Party and voted Labour in July 1945 against the "wind-baggers," the "appeasers," and even Churchill's imperialistic Tories.

Robert S. Coale wrote "The Abraham Lincoln Brigade Volunteers: Historical Contexts and Writings." He cites recent Soviet accounts that the International Brigaders totaled 35,000, of which 2,800 came from the United States (162). Among those volunteers 30% were Jewish (164). During the Hitler-Stalin Pact (August 1939-June 1941) most ALB veterans, like their sympathizers, followed the Soviet propaganda line. In 1941 to 1945 when Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt allied against Hitler, some ALB veterans joined the U.S. military, although some were suspect as 'pre-mature anti-fascists.' After the war in 1946, Truman gave a weak signal that he might join with Stalin to overthrow Franco's

government. The Pentagon and dedicated anti-communist partisans opposed this. By the time of Eisenhower's election, the Korean War, the cold war and McCarthyism painted the veterans of the ALB as red subversives. However, the American blunders in the Vietnamese War 1961-1975 would help bring back a renewed interest in a "popular front" or National Liberation Front. Coale includes in his lengthy bibliography 20 memoirs by ALBrigaders who wrote accounts between 1939 and the 1960s. Coale rejects the claim that a clever Stalin manipulated naive Brigaders to fight for "communism" (161). However, he does show that research in Moscow since 1991 proves that some Americans were duped.

Peter Monteath writes the "German Literary Responses to the War." Monteath's sympathies are with the German leftist writers who sympathized with the International Brigaders, including Bertolt Brecht. Brecht, the best-known Communist playwright, fled Nazi Germany, doing screenwriting in Hollywood during the Popular Front era. The post-World War II passionate hunt for Communists forced Brecht back to East Germany. The liberal literary establishment in West Germany and the US, despite the climate of political and ideological anti-communism, still occasionally performed his plays, recognizing his moral message. Arthur Koestler's *Spanish Testament* (1937) ranks as a top memoir of the war in Spain. Koestler was a Hungarian Jewish Communist who worked in Berlin, becoming a Comintern agent and fleeing to Britain in 1933. As a reporter for the liberal London daily *News Chronicle*, he was captured in Sevilla in 1936 and jailed by the Nationalists. He daily feared being shot as a Red, but the Foreign Office secured his release. Koestler felt betrayed by the Comintern, and the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of August 1939 and the partition of Poland were the last straws for him. His real experience in a Franco jail led to his imaginary account of Stalin's Great Purge trials from August 1936 into 1938. Why did major Politburo and Soviet generals confess falsely to terrorism and collaboration with fascism? *Darkness at Noon* (1941) became a best seller and inspired Orwell, among others. Koestler published when Stalin's propaganda line was in transition--between the eras of the Popular Front, the Second Imperialist War and then the National Liberation Fronts. Modern readers will still find Koestler's anti-totalitarian novel thought-provoking. Gustav Regler wrote about his experiences in the International Brigade in *The Great Crusade* (1940). In *The Owl of Minerva* Regler presents the best literary justification for why young men--democrats, Jews, socialists, Communists and even Christians--fought for the Spanish Republic despite its flaws. Regler says, in effect, that no one can afford to ignore the problems of those confronted by dictators, tyrants and police states. Monteath also cites three pro-Nazi military writers published between 1937 and 1940. Although saying little specific to the Spanish crisis, they illustrate the

effectiveness of bombs and machine guns. Led by professional World War I pilots, the Legion Condor scored easy victories while fighting obsolete machines and Soviet fliers plagued by Stalin's "Byzantine" politics.

Thomas Deveny writes on "The Spanish Civil War in Films from the Franco Period." He describes an important film, *Raza*, made from a play written by General Franco himself (as Jaime de Andrade) in 1940, produced in 1941, later version 1950 (270). The story is rather prosaic, featuring a 20<sup>th</sup> century Galician family, with flashbacks to the time of the 1805 Battle of Trafalgar. The power of the Catholic religion is stressed. In 1940 when Franco's play appeared--after the fall of France--the threat of Spain re-taking Gibraltar from the beleaguered Britons loomed large. Although Franco was officially neutral as between Britain and Germany, ideologically he hoped that Hitler would stamp out Bolshevism.

For another interpretation of *Raza*, see Joshua Goode's new book, *Impurity of Blood: Defining Race in Spain, 1870-1930* (2009). He claims that Franco celebrated a fusion of the peoples and ethnic groups that had invaded Iberia since the time of the Roman Empire. Although Franco sent the Blue Division to aid Hitler in 1941-1945 against the Soviet Union, the Spanish Chief of State indirectly warned that he might be prepared to make peace with the Americans and British.

Geoffrey B. Pingree's "The Documentary Dilemma and the Spanish Civil War" (305) discusses civil war film documentaries used as propaganda. He quotes George Orwell on the purpose of art to "push the world in a certain direction, to alter other people's idea of the kind of society that they should strive after" (314).

Curtis Wasson, in "Photography and the Spanish Civil War" (317), analyzes perceptively the photo of a Franco victory parade in the spring of 1939 (326). The Falange Party Caudillo delivers and receives the fascist salute. However, Generalissimo Franco later played down the Blue Shirts and the Red Berets of the Falange and Carlist unified party proclaimed in April 1937.

Jordana Mendelson in "Learning from Guernica" (328) reproduces Ad Reinhart on how to look at the mural, from a 1947 New York City *PM* newspaper (328). A dozen elements of the famous painting are clearly identified. Pablo Picasso, who left Spain for Paris long before World War I, by the 1930s belonged to the French Communist Party. Picasso finished "Guernica" in May 1937, just after the Luftwaffe bombed that historic Basque village on 26 April 1937. The painting was displayed in the Spanish [Republican] pavilion at the Paris World's Fair in the summer of 1937; the pavilion photo is also reproduced and explicated

in Mendelson's essay. Franco kept the fact of the bombing censored in Spain until his death in 1975. Joseph Goebbels kept the Guernica story out of the Nazi press, simply by quoting the right-wing French press agency Havas's denial of bombing. "Guernica" was on display in the New York Museum of Modern Art for almost forty years. As stipulated in Picasso's will, the painting went to Spain in 1981 and is displayed in Madrid to signal the return of democracy to Spain. The Basque language and nationalism, repressed under Franco, has revived, sometimes violently.

Sebastian Faber authored "The Exile's Dilemma: Writing the Civil War from Elsewhere" (341). Born in the Netherlands and educated in London, Faber may even wish he had been born thirty-five years earlier so he could have fought in the International Brigades. In his essay Faber tells how sympathizers with the cause of the Spanish Republic began writing, many of them in Mexico, about their lost cause. Martyrs, like the poet Federico García Lorca, have also had their works republished and explicated.

The Valis edited book closes with very useful Parts VI (Resources) and VII (Course Syllabi). These should help meet the special needs of high school teachers and college teachers of Spanish 101 who want to bring the Spanish Civil War to life for today's students.

Robert H. Whealey  
Ohio University