



## For Love of Spain

***Anglo-American Hispanists and the Spanish Civil War. Hispanophilia, Commitment, and Discipline.*** By Sebastiaan Faber. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

By Noël Valis

A clearly written and solidly documented book, *Anglo-American Hispanists and the Spanish Civil War* is of interest to both Hispanists and non-Hispanists. In a well-articulated, largely even-handed argument, Faber pursues a double goal: outlining, through the institutional history and individual case studies, the complicated relation between Anglo-American Hispanists and the Spanish Civil War, and explaining the role that relation played in the development of Hispanism in the English-speaking world. While the first goal will probably attract readers of *The Volunteer* more than the second, both parts of his argument are noteworthy for illustrating yet another ramification of the Spanish Civil War, the effect it had on literary critics and historians whose main focus of study was Spain. Thus, this book is as much about Hispanism as it is about the Hispanist relationship to the civil war. It is also about how hard it is at times to separate professionalized Hispanism from Hispanophilia, the love for things

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Spanish that first spilled over in the books of enthusiastic amateurs.

Faber argues that within the academic community, politics and scholarship tended to be compartmentalized in the 1930s and 40s. When the war erupted in July 1936, Hispanists were torn between an ideal of scholarly objectivity and moral-political convictions, intensified by the love that initially inspired them to dedicate their professional lives to Spain, its literature, culture and history.

Faber concentrates first on the institutional reaction of such organs as the American Association of Teachers of Spanish (Portuguese was added later), as seen in the pages of its journal, *Hispania*, though I missed seeing the same attention paid to the institutional case of historians. How did teachers of Spanish literature react to the war? They were pretty much divided within the organization, but remained by and large silent in public. In contrast, British Hispanists were more vocal.

The extent to which Hispanists spoke up depended in part on whether they were affiliated with an institution of higher learning. A freelance historian like Herbert Southworth dove head first into the political-ideological fray in books such as the groundbreaking *Guernica! Guernica! A Study of Journalism, Diplomacy, Propaganda, and History* (1977). The Anglo-Irish Gerald Brenan also went his own way with the classic *Spanish Labyrinth* (1943), which mostly steered clear of national and cultural stereotyping, focusing instead

on the historical, economic, political, and religious factors that shaped modern Spain.

Faber explores the affective and intellectual lives of four Hispanists to demonstrate the tensions between scholarly pursuit and political commitment: Herbert Southworth, Paul Patrick Rogers, E. Allison Peers, and Gerald Brenan. Their complicated life trajectories and relation to Spain make for stimulating reading. Southworth and Rogers leaned leftward, while Brenan was more moderate and Peers was a deeply religious (Church of England) conservative.

Both Brenan and Peers shifted ideologically after the war. As Faber notes, Peers, the premier Hispanist of British academia, was “never a fully-blown Francoist,” though many considered him one, and he became increasingly disillusioned with the Franco regime’s repressive policies and support of the Nazis. Brenan’s position towards Franco became more ambiguous after he returned to Spain in 1953.

Southworth remained constant to his political views and his devotion to Spain and the Republic.

Rogers, a professor of Spanish at Oberlin College, who wrote a diary of his short visit to Spain during the war and stumped for the Republic, grew silent in the aftermath of the Cold War era. We know he was trailed by the FBI between 1943 and the late 1960s, his travels to Mexico arousing suspicions. His later trajectory also points to the growing trend towards Pan Americanism and the study of Latin America within U.S. Hispanism.

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# Border Crossings

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(because of its contact with OSS), and thus its surviving veteran fighters were seen as suspect. While this was at some level about tangible fears born of a sense of political vulnerability, there is also something else here, an echo of social Darwinism; a fear of change/difference/complexity. Things which challenged the stability of the official state, by the challenge posed to social uniformity/homogeneity, all of which was expressed as a fear of contamination. As a crucial element of this we must also note the anti-semitism which inhabited much of the onslaught against communist exiles and Brigade veterans during the purges and trials—Jews being seen in the official Soviet optic as the epitome of untrustworthy, heterodox communists (i.e. untrustworthy because heterodox).

Thus state agendas sought to exclude/silence/pathologize the self-same progressive, questioning dynamic that inhabited the International Brigaders—the very thing that had taken them to Spain. As the German writer and former Brigade commander, Ludwig Renn, commented in utter perplexity in the DDR in 1952: It seems that “everything connected with [Spain] is cancelled. Supposedly this is happening because there were too many traitors there. I don’t understand such points of view.”

McCarthyism itself was not as deadly as the east European trials—though it did certainly cause deaths, including some suicides. But state repression always takes its form according to local political culture. And there are many ways of “killing” people without physically executing them or putting them in gulags. That is to say, you can kill someone’s spirit

without physically liquidating them, by making them totally unemployable, or else unemployable in anything remotely approaching what they feel called to do by virtue of their talents. Reducing people to poverty, making life unliveable, getting them thrown out of their homes and thus indirectly breaking up their families and their personal relationships, all of which did follow, as we know only too well, from McCarthyism’s legal repressive practices.

Mexico, while it in some ways provided a refuge (though not a haven) for persecuted American radicals, also posed many fundamental existential problems, especially for the cultural workers who loomed large among this particular exile. The writer Howard Fast, son of a Russian migrant, and who himself served a prison term in 1947 as part of the Lincoln vets’ Spanish refugee relief committee that refused to reveal to the Un-American Activities Committee the names and addresses of its donors and supporters, wrote luminously about the significance of the Lincolns’ leave-taking of Spain in his exquisite short story “Departures,” which captures that central feeling that so many vets the world over shared—namely that feeling of being burned by Spain, or transfigured, but never being the same, for sure, and not being able to fit again, anywhere, ever—another kind of exile, to add to the territorial and political.

In Fast’s superb autobiography, *Being Red* (1990), he relates his encounter with his friend the screenwriter Albert Maltz, one of the Hollywood Ten (the film workers indicted for contempt during the late 1940s witch-hunt in Hollywood). Fast meets him in

Mexico where, in spite of deep feelings of cultural alienation, Maltz has resolved to remain, so terrified is he of the potential effects of the draconian Communist Control Act of 1954. “I have no roots here,” he tells Fast. “Our lives are our language.” But Maltz has been so seared by his experience of prison that he just can’t risk it again: “I have to live, I have to find love. I have books that I must write.”

Spain haunted Maltz and Fast, as it haunted them all, because it was a site of possibility, of becoming. And that’s why it haunts us still. For all the bleakness of its aftermath, it stands as a reminder of the possibility of becoming; of a “journey without maps”; of the great Spanish poet Antonio Machado’s reminder that the road does not exist, we make it by walking, by crossing borders—that doing so hurts, but that it’s also necessary. ▣

Helen Graham’s most recent book is *A Very Short Introduction to the Spanish Civil War* (2005).

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## Faber

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Faber is acutely aware that the four individuals presented here, their outspokenness and willingness to take a public stand, are not necessarily representative of the larger community of Anglo-American Hispanists, if the silence he perceives as especially indicative of U.S. Hispanism overall is indeed the case. But their enduring passion for Spain is shared among the greater community of Hispanists.

This is an excellent study that is in itself Faber’s own labor of love. ▣