POLITICS, THE PRESS, AND PERSUASIVE AESTHETICS:
SHAPING THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR
IN AMERICAN PERIODICALS

A Dissertation in
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by
Gregory S. Baptista

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The dissertation of Gregory S. Baptista was reviewed and approved* by the following:

Mark S. Morrisson  
Associate Professor of English  
Graduate Director  
Dissertation Advisor  
Chair of Committee

Robin Schulze  
Professor of English  
Department Head

Sandra Spanier  
Professor of English and  
Women’s Studies

James L.W. West III  
Edwin Erle Sparks Professor of English

Philip Jenkins  
Edwin Erle Sparks Professor of the Humanities

*Signatures are on file in the Graduate School
ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the presentation of the Spanish Civil War in selected American periodicals. Understanding how war-related works functioned (aesthetically and rhetorically) requires a nuanced view of the circumstances of their production and an awareness of their immediate cultural context. I consider means of creation and publication to examine the complex ways in which the goals of truth-seeking and truth-shaping interacted—and were acted upon by the institutional dynamics of periodical production. By focusing on three specific periodicals that occupied different points along a line leading outward from the mainstream of American culture, I examine the ways in which certain pro-Loyalist writers and editors attempted to shape the truth of the Spanish war for American readers within the contexts and inherent restrictions of periodical publication. I argue that responses to the war in these publications are products of a range of cultural and institutional forces that go beyond the political affiliations or ideological stances of particular writers.
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DEDICATION

For Alan Rosen
Introduction

In the conclusion to a 1962 study of American responses to the Spanish Civil War, Allen Guttmann claims that aside from the Great Depression and the start of the Second World War, “no public event of the 1930’s mattered so much to so many Americans as did the Spanish Civil War” (201). There may be a measure of overstatement in this claim, but it reflects something of the romantic quality with which the Spanish war of 1936-1939 is often imbued by literary scholars and historians. Beginning as an attempted coup by right-wing Spanish generals in July 1936 and quickly becoming a world war in miniature with the active intervention of Italy, Germany, and the Soviet Union, the struggle roused great emotions in the U.S.—emotions that ran the gamut from horror to hope to disillusionment. To be sure, many Americans sympathized with General Franco’s Nationalist effort, often because they identified with its stated purpose of eradicating communism in Spain, or with its connection to the Catholic Church. But writers and intellectuals were much more likely to side with the government, and, consequently, pro-Loyalist perspectives dominate accounts of the war in American literary studies. Support for the Spanish Republican government, whose ostensibly democratic nature belied the complexity and fragmentation of its political makeup, became the cause célèbre of many American liberals, progressives, and radicals. The artists and public intellectuals among these camps raised their voices for the Republic and against international fascism in myriad ways, through poetry and fiction, reportage and editorials, rallies and fundraisers, paintings and political cartoons, photography and film. In particular, the varied participation and commentary of such American literary figures as Ernest Hemingway, John Dos Passos, Langston Hughes, Martha Gellhorn, Josephine Herbst, Lillian
Hellman, Malcolm Cowley, and Dorothy Parker have raised the war to near-mythic status in literary studies, casting it as a romantic and tragic moment in which art and ideology clasped hands in support of an ultimately lost cause.

As Frederick R. Benson has claimed, “the Spanish Civil War represented the intellectual as well as the emotional climax of the turbulent 1930s” (3). Indeed, the war was a crucial event in a decade that saw a definite shift in the artistic priorities of many American writers. Richard Ruland and Malcolm Bradbury write that “during the 1920s, American writers expressed their dissent from a materialist America by expatriation, by engaging in experimental aesthetic adventure, by exploring new forms and joining in the excitements of surrealism and the revolution of the word” (319). But by the next decade, with the nation devastated by the Great Depression, “the expatriates of the 1920s came back, or stepped out of Greenwich Village into the real wastelands of the 1930s, and were both dismayed and invigorated by the changed America they found” (319-20). While many scholars have challenged a simple picture of literary modernism in the first two decades of the twentieth century as purely aesthetic and completely disengaged politically, the shift into the 1930s does represent a change in the way many writers engaged with the world around them, a change through which art and politics became more overtly, more inextricably intertwined. And the Spanish war was perhaps the most dramatic issue around which politically engaged literature revolved.

Fusing political engagement with aesthetic concerns was for some American writers an established practice, as with Edwin Rolfe, who by the start of the war had built a reputation as one of America’s foremost young proletarian poets. For others, such as Hemingway, that fusion followed from a growing awareness of and interest in the socio-
political developments in Europe and Asia, particularly the rise of international fascism and the threats to democracy that it represented. And there was a personal dimension for some writers as well: both Hemingway and Dos Passos, for example, had previously spent much time in Spain and felt a close connection with the Spanish people. The threat to their idea of Spain posed by the Nationalist rebellion fired intense feelings for both men.

For pro-Loyalist writers, producing politically-oriented nonfiction and reportage or incorporating persuasive elements into their artistic products also grew out of a perceived necessity. That is, as the imbalance of arms and other war materials shifted to the Nationalists’ favor with increasing aid from Germany and Italy, the chances of a Republican victory correspondingly rested more and more on the possibility of intervention from Britain, France, or the United States. Despite the presence of arms and advisors from the Soviet Union, it became clear as the war dragged on that without arms and other support from one or more of the Western democracies, the Republic would fall.

However, interest in the war may have been strong and feelings intense for educated, politically aware Americans, but many Americans had considerably less interest or even awareness of it. Two-thirds of Americans polled in 1937 were indifferent to its outcome at the start of the war. Due to various factors including the Nationalists’ savage bombing of civilian populations, that number climbed to 46 percent favoring the Loyalists in December 1938, but as historian F. Jay Taylor points out, “the feeling for one side or the other in the Spanish conflict was purely ideological, . . . and does not suggest that Americans wanted the United States to intervene actively in Spain” (137).1 Americans by and large remained committed to isolationism throughout the period of the Spanish war; relatively few wanted to

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1 See also Guttmann 207-208 for a discussion of American public opinion on Spain.
run the risk of intervention in Spain leading to entanglement in a larger war, even if they sympathized with the Spanish government or its people.

Still, pro-Loyalists believed that if enough people could be made to see the situation as having a direct impact on American interests, public pressure might force an adjustment of the U.S. neutrality policy. Persuasion, therefore, was not just a matter of shaping people’s perceptions in a general way. The stakes were high, for the U.S. had the resources to make a significant difference in the war, even if it simply allowed American arms manufacturers to sell arms to the Republic. And the periodical press might well have made a difference in public opinion. Even with the rise of the new media of radio and motion pictures, print periodicals retained significant cultural influence, and the newer-format magazines such as *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *Life* wielded particular persuasive power. For example, Michael G. Carew has described how American commercial newsmagazines were co-opted by the Roosevelt administration between 1939-1941 to increase the public’s awareness of the threats posed by Germany, Italy, and Japan. Those magazines, he argues, played an important role in the transformation of American public opinion during that period from isolationism to interventionism. That shift came too late for the Spanish Republic, which fell to the Nationalists in April 1939. But until the final months when defeat was inevitable, pro-Loyalist American periodicals continued to press for their country’s involvement.

In addition to their employment of persuasive techniques, writers and intellectuals were also grappling with the realities of this violent conflict, whether it was experienced up close or from across the ocean. They also had to grapple in many cases with their own uncertainties about their rather sudden shift from pacifism (or at least a general aversion to

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2 Such an outcome may still have been unlikely, even if public opinion had favored it. The influence of both the British nonintervention policy and the Catholic lobby at home were crucial factors, and would have remained so despite widespread public support for a change in the Neutrality Act.
war) to some form of interventionism. Moreover, the Spanish war was not merely, as many tried to convey, a set piece in the brewing battle against fascism and liberal democracy: it was also a particularly Spanish conflict born out of the historical development and contemporary conditions of Spain itself. The Republican government was indeed “legally elected,” as its supporters stressed endlessly, but it was also based upon a coalition of center and left-leaning political parties that ranged from liberal democrats to anarchists. The political complexities were often difficult for American observers to understand, even for those who actually tried to do so. That situation became more difficult as the Spanish Communist Party, bolstered by the leverage of desperately needed military aid coming from the Soviet Union and following an agenda handed down by Stalin, increased not only its control over the government but also its control over the flow of information and, thus, the way the war was perceived beyond the country’s borders. Given these conditions, American writers faced significant challenges to arriving at some sense of truth about the war, and conveying that truth to their readers through the means of creation and publication available to them.

Arriving at truth was further complicated by the extent to which the meaning of truth itself had become destabilized. Michael Schudson’s study of the development of the ideal of objectivity in journalism, *Discovering the News*, is useful here. Schudson explains that before the 1830s, newspapers were expected to be partisan and to present information through the lens of their political party affiliation. As the nineteenth century went on, more informational and less partisan reporting grew in popularity through the influence of the Associated Press, which had to produce news content for hundreds of papers with various political affiliations, and, later, of the *New York Times*, which aimed a more informational
(as opposed to sensational) model of reporting at an upper-class readership (4-5). Schudson claims that at the turn of the twentieth century, nonpartisan and informational reporting relied on a naïve empiricism that viewed facts as “assertions about the world open to independent validation” and as clearly distinguishable from values. “This view,” Schudson writes, “was insensitive to the ways in which the ‘world’ is something people construct by the active play of their minds and by their acceptance of conventional—not necessarily ‘true’—ways of seeing and talking” (6). The experience of propaganda during World War I, public discussions of propaganda after the war, and the rise of the related field of public relations called that simple construction into question. During the same period, psychoanalysis, the social sciences, and philosophy were exploring in new ways the relationships between individuals and society. Thus Schudson argues that “from the 1920s on, the idea that human beings individually and collectively construct the reality they deal with has held a central position in social thought” (6). Consequently, the sanctity of facts themselves was called into question, a situation which led to anxieties among journalists and social scientists about how the news should be delivered. In the 1920s and 1930s, various responses were explored. One of these was “to openly acknowledge subjectivity as a factor in reporting,” as in the trend toward “interpretive reporting,” which allowed journalists move beyond simple facts, to express opinions in their reporting toward the goal of explaining for their readers the increasingly complex conditions in which news happened.3 (144-45).

Schudson focuses on journalism, but modernist writers had certainly responded to trends in philosophy, psychology, and the social sciences and had explored the subjective

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3 Another response was the development of the concept of “objectivity” itself, which attempted a kind of scientific approach to filtering information. “Objectivity, in this sense,” writes Schudson, “means that a person’s statements about the world can be trusted if they are submitted to established rules deemed legitimate by a professional community. Facts here are not aspects of the world, but consensually validated statements about it” (7).
nature of reality in their works—Virginia Woolf and William Faulkner come immediately to mind, but are by no means unique in this regard. The important point here is that by the 1930s many people recognized that truth incorporated a measure of subjectivity. While the extent of each reader’s awareness of these conditions no doubt varied greatly, and many readers probably thought nothing of them at all, a broad group of middle-class readers certainly responded to more subjective modes of reporting, both in newspapers and in magazines. For example, Schudson points out that *Time* magazine, which had grown into a great success by the 1930s, evidenced a “jaunty attitude toward facts” and openly admitted its blending of opinion with fact (149). The idea that truth is partly subjective resonates strongly with the field of writing on the Spanish Civil War: some measure of political or ideological commitment shaped nearly every observer’s understanding of the conflict and most of their representations of it (whether poetic, fictional, or journalistic), even when institutional forms of propaganda did not come directly into play.

So complex were the forces that complicated clear understandings of the war that they continue to affect present-day conceptions of it. Pinning down stable meanings remains an elusive goal, even with the passage of time and the production of an enormous body of historical study. Cary Nelson has recently argued that

everything about the Spanish Civil War retains a political and moral reversibility that is relatively unusual for a war fought seventy years ago. Whether in comparison with other modern wars this war differs in degree or kind may be debated, but it surely is a case particularly fraught with historical undecidability. Every fact about Spain is fundamentally unstable, and each fact’s relation to another is in significant ways undecided. Nor has the historical record been steadily corrected and clarified in the
intervening years. Most witnesses to the events of the war have had continuing interests to pursue in their evolving accounts, which is one reason there are no facts available to settle these debates, to resolve the story of the war and decide its moral force once and for all. A death is a “murder,” an “execution,” an “assassination,”” or a “casualty” depending on which value system we use. The body of a POUMist, an International Brigader, a Russian advisor, a German aviator, or a Spanish priest is never simply there for any informed observer: it is a destination for convictions and identities. (“Advocacy” 78).

Nelson concludes that “students of the Spanish Civil War must tolerate a great deal of uncertainty and cultivate a kind of negative capability about the terrain” (“Advocacy” 78).

Settling this kind of instability into one set of meanings is probably no more desirable than it is possible. However, one way of approaching an understanding of what the war meant and was made to mean to those who observed it is to examine the periodical press of the time. Writing about the war came in many forms: novels, nonfiction prose books, collections of poetry, pamphlets, and so on. But periodicals were particularly rooted in the moment. Though runs of most of the important periodicals survive to create a historical record, they were intended not primarily for posterity, but for the then-contemporary reader and situation. Periodicals were among the most immediate and most direct sites of interaction between American readers and the faraway war in Spain, and as such, they can provide views of how readers initially and repeatedly encountered the Spanish war. Furthermore, when periodicals addressed news or current events, they had a different relationship to the truth than did, say, a novel such as Hemingway’s For Whom the Bell Tolls or Stephen Spender and John Lehmann’s anthology Poems for Spain. This is not to suggest
that novels or poetry collections were limited only to emotional or humanistic or philosophical truths—on the contrary, such works would often, intentionally or not, enter the arena of persuasion. However, reader expectations were almost certainly quite different with periodicals that engaged with current events. Even if readers did recognize the subjective nature of truth, they at least looked to such periodicals—often those specific publications that shared their ideological predispositions—for meaningful interpretations upon which they could base their own opinions.

This dissertation explores means of creation and publication within the American periodical press and examines the complex ways in which the goals of truth-seeking and truth-shaping interacted—and were acted upon by the institutional dynamics of periodical production. By focusing on three specific periodicals that occupied different points along a line leading outward from the mainstream of American culture, I examine the ways in which certain pro-Loyalist writers and editors attempted to shape the truth of the Spanish war for American readers within the contexts and inherent restrictions of periodical publication. The three periodicals I examine are Ken: The Insider’s World, a left-leaning, politically-oriented offshoot of Esquire; The Nation, one of the most influential small-circulation journals of progressive opinion; and the Volunteer for Liberty, the newspaper of the English-speaking international volunteer soldiers in Spain. I argue that responses to the war in these publications are products of a range of cultural and institutional forces that go beyond the political affiliations or ideological stances of particular writers. Understanding how war-related works functioned (aesthetically and rhetorically) requires a nuanced view of the circumstances of their production and an awareness of their immediate cultural context.
I selected these three journals because of the range of variation in their formats, content, and intended audiences: I attempt to show that despite the general agreement of pro-Loyalist writers on the desired outcome of the war (i.e., a Nationalist defeat), the field of pro-Loyalist discourse within the periodical press was marked by complexity and variation. Through choices of emphasis and the representational strategies available to writers and editors, what (and how) pro-Loyalist writers tried to make the war mean for American audiences varied considerably. The war could be a part of a pattern not just of the fascists’ advances in Europe, but of their spread to the Western Hemisphere to represent a direct threat to American interests. The war could be presented primarily in those large-scale geopolitical terms or shaped, through poetry for example, into a site of personal loss and collective inspiration. The Loyalist war effort could be a simple struggle of democracy against fascism, or it could be a site for internal tensions rooted in Spanish political history. These meanings are neither mutually exclusive nor exhaustive, but they are some of the ways in which writers and editors interacted with truth of the Spanish Civil War through the American periodical press.

**Methodology**

In his 1994 study *Writing the Good Fight: Political Commitment in the International Literature of the Spanish Civil War*, Peter Monteath argues that much of the scholarship on the international literature of the Spanish Civil War is limited by assumptions about the relationship between politics and literature. He points to the common critical assertion that most literature from the war “is blatantly partisan and doctrinaire, and consequently of little aesthetic value; the ‘good’ literature of the war, Western scholarship argues, is not the literature of political commitment or engagement” (xix). Frederick R. Benson’s classic study
Writers in Arms: The Literary Impact of the Spanish Civil War (1967), illustrates this kind of approach. Benson values controlled emotion and the presentation of “humanistic ideals” over political engagement. He focuses his study on a selection of writers including Orwell, Koestler, and Hemingway because “each expressed the feeling that the whole man emerged during the Spanish struggle, and the intensification of each author’s social and political commitment was secondary to the appeal to the writer’s conscience as a man” (xxviii).

But such assumptions, Monteath claims, are inappropriate for evaluating the literature because of the very nature of the conflict. “Whether blatantly partisan or not,” he writes, “the overwhelming majority of works on the Spanish Civil War produced during the war are centrally concerned with the question of the literary expression of political commitment” (xx). Therefore, “to assume that aesthetic quality is inversely proportional to political engagement is to apply a standard which is invalid for the time” (xx). Monteath’s study stands alongside a few scholarly pieces from recent years that take a more inclusive stance toward war-related writing. This approach to considering war literature in terms of, rather than in spite of, its level of political commitment represents one premise upon which my work proceeds.

Monteath claims that scholarship on the war has also been limited by its focus on “a canon of its own, albeit a relatively broad one,” which he traces back to Stephen Spender (xvii). As early as 1949, Spender privileged authors who represented “a reviving liberalism” over the more intellectually stifling “Communist orthodoxy,” and many scholars have followed suit, thus canonizing authors like those Benson focuses on: Malraux, Regler,  

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4 See, for example, Kristine Byron, “Writing the Female Revolutionary Self: Dolores Ibárruri and the Spanish Civil War”; Giovanna Dell’Orto, “Memory and Imagination Are the Great Deterrents”: Martha Gellhorn at War as Correspondent and Literary Author”; Lolly Ockerstrom, “The Other Narratives: British and American Women Writers and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939”; and Patricia Grace King, “The Autobiographical Witness: American Women Writers and the Spanish Civil War.”
Orwell, Bernanos, Koestler, and Hemingway (xvii). Recent scholarship has begun broadening the canon that Monteath identifies. His own work gives considerable attention to writers on the political right, including fascist authors. While the major writers such as Hemingway and Orwell continue to receive scholarly attention, several items have appeared that consider, for example, women writers such as Martha Gellhorn, Josephine Herbst, Elizabeth Bishop, and the Communist propagandist Dolores Ibarruri.5

By focusing on specific periodicals as texts in themselves, my work views examples of Spanish Civil War literature through the lens of periodical culture, and includes some less well-known writers alongside some of those generally included in the traditional canon in order to construct detailed snapshots of the 1930s literary/journalistic landscape. I consider extensively works by Hemingway, but also works by less prominent figures such as John L. Spivak and a host of other working magazine writers; I also examine the editorial work of Arnold Gingrich, a significant figure in the history of the American mass market magazine culture, but one not commonly considered in connection with the Spanish war. I discuss the editorial and poetic work of Edwin Rolfe, a figure recovered in recent scholarship as a significant proletarian poet of the 1930s, and the poetry of Langston Hughes; but I also consider many lesser poets, some amateur soldier-poets for example, whose work contributed to the aesthetic and persuasive project of the Volunteer for Liberty. And I present the central role of two women, Freda Kirchwey and Anita Brenner, in shaping the presentation of the Spanish war in the Nation, an influential intellectual journal.

My work also intersects with the growing field of periodical studies. In the March 2006 issue of PMLA, Sean Latham and Robert Scholes explore “The Rise of Periodical Studies” by considering the reasons for the field’s increasing importance within English

5 See note 4 above.
studies and some possible directions it may take. Works within this field, they explain, “emphasize periodicals and investigate the ways in which modern literature and the arts are connected to the culture of commerce and advertising and to the social, political, and scientific issues of the time” (517). Because the field is still emerging, there is not yet a coherent or widely-accepted methodology or set of methodologies for the study of periodicals; Latham and Scholes, in fact, point to the development of “typological descriptions and scholarly methodologies” as an important next step for the field (519).

I take an approach to periodicals that draws from techniques used in recent studies which consider periodicals closely. For example, in Repression and Recovery: Modern American Poetry and the Politics of Cultural Memory, 1910-1945 (1989), Cary Nelson argues that periodicals can be viewed as texts in themselves, with their own kind of unity, despite the variety of materials that each issue may include. “The challenge,” he writes, “at least in some cases, is to read journals as if they were themselves coherent mixed genres, as if they were books like Cane or Spring & All that meld and juxtapose traditional genres” (219). Nelson also closely examines the visual elements of periodicals, including illustrations and advertisements, as a means of understanding the way literature functions in a periodical context. He writes, “the cumulative evidence of the illustrations in this book should demonstrate that the material presentation of texts can significantly increase the kinds of meaning they can be used to produce” (218). In The Public Face of Modernism: Little Magazines, Audiences, and Reception, 1905-1920 (2001), Mark S. Morrisson similarly examines modernist literary works in the context of their original magazine publications, considering “modernists’ engagements with social institutions and material practices” in order to complicate traditional historical narratives that cast modernists as aloof from mass
market culture (10). Morrisson too analyzes how visual elements, including cartoons and cover art, contribute to the periodical texts’ ways of making meaning, and he uses archival research to situate content within editorial intentions. Morrisson’s work embodies something of the “holistic approach” to periodical studies advocated in a 2005 article on the state of the field by Judith Yaross Lee, published in the journal *American Periodicals*. This approach involves examining “the published periodical as the result of a collaboration among editors, contributors, readers, and other stakeholders of a particular time and place,” and has potential value in that it can “validate the focus on the American national scene by recognizing the degree to which political and geographical conditions affect intellectual and artistic choices and editorial exigencies” (198). My dissertation follows the approach that Lee articulates: considering the collaborative nature of periodical publications and the political and geographical conditions at work in their production.

By viewing writings about Spain in the contexts of periodical publications, I consider what editorial theorists have called the “bibliographic codes” of texts. Drawing from the work of such theorists as Walter Benjamin and Jerome McGann, George Bornstein distinguishes the linguistic codes (the words of a given text) from the bibliographic codes (the material elements of a specific textual presentation). “Such bibliographic codes,” Bornstein writes, “might include cover design, page layout, or spacing, among other factors. They might also include the other contents of the book or periodical in which the work appears, as well as prefaces, notes, or dedications that affect the reception and interpretation of the work” (6). He connects the idea of the bibliographic code with what Benjamin has called the “aura” of a text, the sense of its “presence in time and space” (6). Bornstein argues that the aura “emerges in part from the material features of the text,” and that “removing that
aura removes the iconicity of the page, and thus important aspects of a text’s meaning” (7). Because they are inherently grounded in the historical event of the war itself, most writings about the Spanish Civil War tend not to become so fully separated from their historical/political contexts as do some of the sonnets that Bornstein examines in his study. But his inclusive analysis of the kinds of material features mentioned above—even, at times, as specific as paper stock and font design—allows for a quite subtle consideration of the bibliographic codes that affect the way readers understand a text. It is a method of analysis that I have employed frequently throughout this dissertation.

One practical result of my selection of periodicals and my employment of the methodologies described above is that I have focused heavily on rare and/or archival material. Two of the three publications I examine are not widely available. Ken exists only in bound library copies in relatively few academic or research libraries in the U.S. (fifty-five, according to the WorldCat database, though many of these are not complete runs). The Volunteer for Liberty exists in a reprint edition published in 1949 by the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade and held in about sixty research libraries, with original copies held in only twelve or thirteen institutions. The Nation is the only periodical examined here that is widely available in print, microfilm, and online digital archive, with runs of one format or another held in over 3,700 libraries worldwide. Both Ken and the Volunteer for Liberty have received little critical attention in the seventy-odd years since their publications. While references to these two periodicals appear here and there in scholarship on the period, and Hugh Merrill devotes to Ken part of a chapter in his history of Esquire, no one to date has examined them in the depth represented in this dissertation. The mere fact that the periodicals have been neglected does not, of course, imply an inherent value in examining
them. But as I will show, they offer useful views on the institutional dynamics of periodical publication and on the relationship of the Spanish Civil War to American culture.

This dissertation also relies heavily on archival material drawn from several academic research libraries in the United States. Each chapter makes use of unpublished letters which allow me to reconstruct important episodes in the production of the periodicals I examine. Chapters One and Two rely most prominently on letters from Arnold Gingrich, editor of Ken, to Ernest Hemingway now housed at the Bentley Historical Library at the University of Michigan. Letters from David Smart, publisher of Ken, to Hemingway held at the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library are also used, as are letters from journalist and critic of the press George Seldes to Gingrich, Hemingway, and other recipients housed at the Bentley Library and the Princeton University Library Manuscripts Division. Chapter Three makes extensive use of correspondence between the Nation editor Freda Kirchwey and journalist Louis Fischer now housed at the Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America at Harvard University, as well as correspondence between Kirchwey and Dwight Macdonald preserved at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University. Chapter Four incorporates correspondence to and from Edwin Rolfe, editor of the Volunteer for Liberty, held in the Spanish Civil War Collection at the Rare Book and Manuscript Library of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Organization

Chapters One and Two examine Ken: The Insider’s World, a short-lived consumer magazine designed to be a voice of progressivism within a predominantly conservative mainstream periodical market. The magazine was conceived and produced by David Smart and Arnold Gingrich, the men behind Esquire. Ken sought to be a bigger, more colorful, and
more commercially successful alternative to journals of opinion such as the Nation and the New Republic, whose influence was strong among committed liberals and progressives but whose ability to broadly influence American public opinion was nonetheless limited. Ken was remarkable because it was the only magazine of its kind in the late 1930s, but it folded after seventeen months owing to advertisers’ refusal to buy space and a boycott by the Catholic Church.

In Chapter One, I closely examine the development of the magazine, which was marked by sharp internal tensions among personnel and external pressures from advertisers. I also consider in detail the ways in which Gingrich, as editor, took full advantage of the representational strategies afforded by a large-format consumer magazine to craft compelling arguments about the Spanish Civil War and its potential consequences to American interests. Ultimately, I argue that the internal problems and commercial failures of Ken tell us much about the dynamics of periodical publishing in the late 1930s. Most notably, these failures illustrate the extent to which conservative forces inside and outside the publishing world could undermine the exercise of free market principles of consumer demand. The fact that Ken failed in its attempt, among other things, to shape public opinion in favor of the Spanish Republic illustrates some ways in which conservative domestic forces mediated against widespread public support for the Loyalists.

Chapter Two focuses specifically on Ernest Hemingway’s contributions to Ken. With the exception of the article/story “Old Man at the Bridge,” these have generally been dismissed by critics as propaganda or poor writing. I examine Hemingway’s contributions in detail and consider how they function in conversation with other items surrounding them in the pages of Ken. I argue that while they are indeed uneven in quality, some of these pieces
show Hemingway skillfully using the consumer magazine format to craft potentially powerful arguments about the Spanish war. I also explore the extent to which Ken revolved around performances of masculinity. I argue that Arnold Gingrich employed Hemingway’s hypermasculine public persona to help craft for the magazine a strongly masculine ethos that would bolster its claims to truthfulness. Yet the inability of Hemingway’s less successful pieces to actually get at the inside story of the war, and the inability of Gingrich and Smart to maintain their bold, defiant front in the face of the oppositional forces that ultimately killed the magazine, reveal the limits of the masculine stance by which Ken defined itself. The political complexities and the contradictory purposes of truth-telling and unqualified support for the Spanish Republic all mediated against an easily enacted masculinity. In other words, “being a man” and “telling it straight” clashed with political commitment to make maintaining the tough-guy stance of Ken a difficult if not impossible prospect, at least in the context of the Spanish Civil War.

Chapter Three turns to The Nation, one of the most prominent of the small-circulation journals of progressive opinion in the United States, and its presentation of the rancorous internal political divisions within Republican Spain. This chapter focuses on the interactions between the magazine’s head editor, Freda Kirchwey, and several of its contributors and correspondents, particularly the pro-Communist Louis Fischer and pro-anarchist Anita Brenner. I consider the ways in which the journal attempted to fulfill its stated function of being a forum for debate on progressive issues, but how that function was circumscribed by the concurrent devotion to the Republican cause espoused by the journal. I chart Kirchwey’s efforts to understand and convey a fair picture of the Republic’s internal politics and the way those efforts were frustrated by the conflicting interpretations of Fischer, Brenner, and other
contributors, and by the clash of the journal’s two purposes: truth-seeking and persuasion. I argue that by allowing some measure of debate on Spain, *The Nation* stood out from similar American publications and represented, in a way, the Spanish war’s inherent uncertainty. In this sense, the approach of *The Nation* was more appropriate to the Spanish situation than that of *Ken*. I also argue that the interplay between Kirchwey and the contributors illustrates several specific and significant limitations on an American periodical to articulate a clear and comprehensive view of what was happening in Spain.

Chapter Four examines the *Volunteer for Liberty*, the official newspaper of the English-speaking International Brigades in Spain. While this was not exclusively an American publication, it was produced for a force in which the famed American volunteers served, a unit most commonly known as the Abraham Lincoln Brigade; I also focus on the period of its run in which the paper was edited by the American poet Edwin Rolfe. Moreover, the paper was sent back to the volunteer soldiers’ home countries, including the U.S., where it circulated as part of the culture of general and specialized pro-Loyalist periodicals. Under Rolfe’s editorship, poetry was a frequent and notable feature of the paper; in this chapter, I analyze poems by Rolfe, Langston Hughes, the British poet Tom Wintringham, the Spanish poet Rafael Alberti, and several amateur or little-known soldier-poets. I examine specifically the ways in which the poetic content of the *Volunteer*, in conversation with other content, attempted to combine the persuasive objectives of the paper with the emotional needs of what was essentially a losing army. I argue that through his selection and presentation of poetry, Rolfe crafted an elegiac tone that underscored the more overtly propagandistic elements of the paper and tried to help members of the battered volunteer force attach positive meanings to their frequent, shattering encounters with death.
on the battlefield. The poetry in the Volunteer is both representative of pro-Loyalist poetry in general, and unique in the ways in which it shapes meanings for its specific primary audience through its appearance on the periodical page.

These chapters offer case studies of individual periodicals. As such, they cannot be extrapolated without qualification into general trends applicable to the American periodical press as a whole. They are representative in that the perspectives on Spain they present often follow general patterns of pro-Loyalist writing. The efforts in Ken to fit the war into a narrative about the spread of international fascism, for example, were similar to much pro-Loyalist discourse. The poetry printed in the Volunteer for Liberty incorporated many elements common to much civil war poetry. But it is what both of those publications did with those common elements that makes them unique, as the following chapters will show.

By honing in on specific examples, my exploration of periodical production offers insights into how American periodical culture could operate. For example, the market forces that led to the failure of Ken magazine to influence public opinion significantly were no doubt also at work in shaping the presentation of the Spanish war in the mainstream commercial magazine press, even if the editors of Life or Collier's or the Saturday Evening Post did not openly clash with those market forces as Gingrich and Smart did. The interplay among Freda Kirchwey, Louis Fischer, and Anita Brenner at the Nation illustrates limitations on the nature and accuracy of information coming out of Spain and challenges to a clear understanding of internal Spanish politics. These conditions of publication were surely similar to those at other liberal and progressive publications, even if the specific personalities involved and the way those conditions played out were different elsewhere. The efforts by contributors to the Volunteer for Liberty to use poetry to help shape a meaningful response to
a losing situation and rationalize a wavering commitment prefigure the elegiac function of poetry in the postwar years. Likewise, Rolfe’s efforts to incorporate those poems into a coherent pattern of meaning for a dual audience, though specific to his particular situation, suggest ways in which committed editors could make use of the persuasive opportunities afforded by periodical publication.

Looking at the Spanish Civil War as presented in these three periodicals also demonstrates several specific things that are not apparent from examining works in other forums. For example, my work on Ken emphasizes that the mass market magazine format offered generally untapped persuasive opportunities that could be potentially effective in shaping American public opinion. Forces inside and outside the periodical publishing world, however, could effectively foreclose those possibilities. My work on The Nation shows that while there may have been a level of cynicism and expediency among editors to downplay reports of internal tensions within the Republic, there were also genuine efforts by at least one stateside editor to probe deeper into the situation, though these were thwarted by a host of external factors (and, possibly, a measure of self-deception). Orwell used the word “conspiracy” to describe the stance of the British liberal press toward the issue; the same cannot accurately be said of the American liberal press, given the relative prominence of The Nation. And finally, my work on the Volunteer for Liberty suggests not only that poetry could function as part of persuasion and even propaganda, but that the relation between propaganda and the genuine humanistic purposes of poetry is complex. Even in an official military publication (in essence, a party publication) whose purpose is blatantly propagandistic, poetry can both contribute to that purpose but maintain its aesthetic
resonance, its attendance to its audience’s emotional needs, in a way that transcends the
cynicism of propaganda.
In the late 1930s, the American consumer magazine market was a largely conservative arena. In a country still mired in the Great Depression and a political climate divided sharply between capital and labor and their related viewpoints, successful magazines marketed to middle-class consumers such as *Time, Life, the Saturday Evening Post,* and *Collier’s* tended to state or imply support for capital whenever their content intersected with such questions. The main reason for this situation was that the people who produced these magazines, the editors and publishers, generally saw their own interests aligned with the business interests that defined much of conservative political thought.

This is not to say that more progressive perspectives did not make their way into the magazine press. In his book *The Cultural Front,* Michael Denning argues for the importance and lasting impact of what he calls the cultural front, the “extraordinary flowering of arts, entertainment, and thought based on the broad social movement that came to be known as the Popular Front,” which was born out of the American labor movement and opposition to international fascism (xvi). Denning argues that the Popular Front, despite its ultimate political failure and suppression in the anti-communist purges of the Cold War, transformed American culture in ways that outlived its existence as a social movement. It did so by its participation in and impact on the developing “cultural apparatus,” which consisted of “the culture industries of mass entertainment”—the production of print media, radio, film, and drama—“and the state culture institutions” established through the WPA (4). Essentially,
these industries were populated by culture workers who attempted to inject progressive ideas into the industries’ mass entertainment products. Their limited success in doing so created “a space—always compromised and always under siege—in which populist, laborist, and anti-fascist productions appeared,” though many of the more prominent leftist culture workers ultimately resigned out of frustration over the resistance they encountered from pro-capital superiors (84).¹

In 1937, however, two men at the top of a successful magazine enterprise decided to launch a publication that would put leftist viewpoints front-and-center. They were convinced that middle-class readers sympathetic to progressive ideas represented an untapped market that needed only the right publication to appeal to their political interests and consumer needs. The men were David Smart and Arnold Gingrich, publisher and editor, respectively, of the successful men’s fashion and culture magazine Esquire. The publication was to be called Ken: The Insider’s World. It was directly inspired, according to one account, by Smart’s and Gingrich’s shared sympathy for the Spanish Loyalists and frustration over the sham of “nonintervention” amongst the major European powers and the U.S.;² articles about Spain were a prominent feature in the magazine until Franco’s victory in early 1939.

Ken’s format combined articles of reporting and opinion with numerous cartoons and other drawings and a Life-like photo magazine section, and it promised to give readers the “inside story” on current political events.³ While a number of prominent figures within the

¹ The involvement of Archibald MacLeish, Ralph Ingersoll, and Dwight Macdonald with Henry Luce’s Time and Fortune represents a well-known example. In an article titled “The Popular Front in the American Century: Life Magazine, Margaret Bourke-White, and Consumer Realism, 1936-1941,” Chris Vials explores Life magazine as a site of such tension, and argues that despite its overt conservative editorial stance, Life employed an “innovative new aesthetics” that incorporated influences from the political left (77).
² See Gingrich Nothing 132. Note, however, my discussion below about the unreliability of Gingrich’s memoir.
³ Ken has received relatively little scholarly attention. Denning offers a paragraph-length overview (94), and Theodore Peterson offers a longer sketch in his Magazines in the Twentieth Century (278-80). The most
journalistic community were involved in Ken’s production at one point or another, its most famous contributor, then as well as now, was Ernest Hemingway. Hemingway supplied fourteen pieces to Ken during 1938 and early 1939, most of an overtly persuasive nature, and most arguing for the United States to intervene in the Spanish Civil War on behalf of the besieged Republican government. With its bold appearance, its coordinated use of vibrant text and visuals, Ken represents an unusual form of cultural front production and an entirely unique venue for arguments supporting the Loyalist cause in Spain.

Ken is significant because it stands as one of the few periodicals in the 1930s to bridge the gap between a version of Popular Front thinking and mass market circulation. Its development and demise offer a useful and fascinating perspective on the periodical publishing world of the immediate prewar period, and on the ways in which the Spanish Civil War intersected with American culture. Though it made a considerable splash when it appeared in April 1938, Ken was ultimately unsuccessful. The progressive, pro-labor stance which its creators originally envisioned alienated most of its potential advertisers even before the magazine began publication. Ken started life with a strong circulation but was ultimately brought down by conservative opposition, including a Catholic boycott reacting to anti-Catholic content in the magazine, which scared off most of its advertisers and threatened even to impact Esquire’s success.

In this chapter, I examine Ken’s origins and approach to international affairs, with particular focus on the magazine’s presentation of the Spanish Civil War. I demonstrate how market forces as well as personal differences among its creators and contributors shaped its development account of Ken occupies a portion of a chapter in Hugh Merrill’s Esky: The Early Years at Esquire. Ken is also mentioned in connection with Hemingway studies, as in Carlos Baker’s Ernest Hemingway: A Life Story, Robert O. Stephens’ Hemingway’s Nonfiction: The Public Voice, John Raeburn’s Fame Became of Him: Hemingway as Public Writer, and more recently, Stephen Koch’s The Breaking Point: Hemingway, Dos Passos, and the Murder of Jose Robles.
character prior to publication. In doing so, I view Ken as a site where the complexities and
tensions of attitudes on the political left were strikingly illustrated and directly influenced the
world of print culture. I then examine the ways in which Ken employed the Spanish Civil
War as part of the larger anti-fascist crusade. It is a commonplace in discussions of the
literature that the war was viewed by most intellectuals in an international context—by those
on the left, as an embodiment of German Nazi and Italian fascist aggression and a prelude to
world war. I argue, however, that through the representational strategies of its mass
circulation magazine format, Ken employed narratives and images of the Spanish war in
unique ways. By connecting Spain to such issues as fascist activities in the Western
Hemisphere, Ken used it to reinforce arguments about the direct and immediate threats of
international fascism to the safety and autonomy of the United States.4 In other words, Ken
attempted to make the Spanish Civil War mean something specific: that the enemy of
tomorrow is on our doorstep today.

In discussing the political character and ultimate demise of Ken, I show that its
commercial failures demonstrate the lack of commercial viability of the cultural front in
mainstream America, but that that situation did not derive solely or primarily from a lack of
consumer interest. Rather, conservative forces inside and outside the publishing world could
undermine the exercise of free market principles of consumer demand. That is, though the
initial reception of Ken suggests public demand for the magazine, continued opposition from
advertisers and the Catholic boycott combined to shut it down. Thus, conservative domestic
forces related to periodical publishing served to foreclose persuasive opportunities, and
therefore actively worked against widespread public support for the Loyalists.

4 I am borrowing the term “representational strategies” from Vials.
The Origins of Ken

In April 1938, journalist George Seldes, writing in The Nation, made the following assessment of what was then still a new magazine, Ken: The Insider’s World:

The history of Ken teaches many important lessons. It proves for our time and generation the sad truth learned by a dozen weeklies and monthlies in the great muckraking era of 1905 to 1917—that big business and advertising will either change a magazine’s policy from liberal to reactionary or try to ruin the magazine. . . . The impossibility of combining progress with profit, demonstrated before the war, is even clearer today, with the advertising agencies becoming the leaders in a class-conscious attack on progressive liberalism. ("Ken" 500)

Seldes, who had by 1938 a well-established reputation as a journalist adept at rooting out the operations of money interests and corruption in the press\(^5\), had worked on Ken during its gestational period. Here he identifies a central issue for considering Ken’s place as a magazine of the cultural front, namely, the incompatibility of a leftist journal of opinion with the largely conservative (and sometimes reactionary) forces of the consumer magazine market in the 1930s. In the rest of his article, Seldes offers his version of Ken’s development and his own departure from the magazine. The piece identifies a central issue in the story of Ken, but its author was a participant in the development of the magazine, and his account represents only one version of the story. I want to suggest at the outset that determining exactly what happened with Ken, particularly during its long, delay-ridden development stage, presents some difficulty because conflicting accounts from reasonably reliable sources

survive. Considering these sources, it seems clear that Ken was, in fact, plagued with a number of very real problems from its conception, advertising pressures chief among them. Yet there also existed problems stemming from contributors’ conflicting visions of what the magazine should be, and problems of conflicting personalities. In this section, I will attempt to pursue out the story of how Ken came to be, considering both published accounts and archival evidence.

The most comprehensive scholarly account of Ken magazine to date comprises part of a chapter in Hugh Merrill’s 1995 history of Esquire. Merrill offers a readable and detailed overview of the magazine’s conception and, more briefly, its publication life, and he successfully conveys that key issue which Seldes identifies. However, Merrill’s account suffers from following Seldes’ Nation article too closely. Merrill also relies almost solely on published sources and does not include in his discussion material held in the Esquire records and Arnold Gingrich papers at the University of Michigan; this material, particularly correspondence between Gingrich and Hemingway, sheds some additional light on the matter. Finally, Merrill does include, as counterbalance to Seldes’ version, excerpts from Gingrich’s 1971 memoir Nothing But People: The Early Days at Esquire, A Personal History, 1928-1958. Unfortunately, Merrill does not explain that the recollections about Ken that Gingrich included in the memoir are largely inaccurate, by Gingrich’s own published admission. The year after Nothing But People was published, George Seldes wrote to Gingrich, saying that he had just read parts of the book and enjoyed it, but that Gingrich’s recollections about the Ken affair were riddled with errors. “My first thought was: at 80 my memory must be failing, but its [sic] lucky I have all my notes and documentation for the

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6 Merrill does cite his sources, but there are points in his discussion at which a reader might fail to realize that Merrill is merely repeating, at times verbatim, Seldes’ article.
past 50 years, whereas you apparently haven’t,” Seldes writes, and then details the errors (Letter to Gingrich [1]). Gingrich replied graciously to Seldes, admitting that he must have remembered details incorrectly: “I swear, I sometimes feel that my memory, which is so sharp and vivid, must here and there have been crossed with somebody else’s, the way lines on a switchboard can get crossed, because I remember things so positively, that seem to turn out to be completely wrong.” Shortly thereafter, Gingrich (with Seldes’ permission) published an editorial in Esquire called “Memory Can Be a Damnable Liar,” in which he self-deprecatingly admits that he wrote his memoir “‘by ear,’ so to speak, unburdened by notes and unhampered by research,” and outlines several of the factual errors in Nothing But People that Seldes caught him in ("Memory" 6). The details of Gingrich’s memoir, therefore, should be handled with caution in any discussion of the Ken affair. More useful in understanding Gingrich’s role in Ken, and his interpretation of the magazine’s development stage, are a series of cables and letters from Gingrich written to Hemingway and a few other participants in 1938 and 1939; these survive in the Gingrich papers at Michigan. While these letters, especially those written to Hemingway, may have their own rhetorical purpose, as I will discuss, they are at least much closer in time to the events and most likely do not suffer from Gingrich’s inconsistent memory.

Ken’s first phase began early in 1937, when Gingrich and David Smart began discussing the formation of a new political magazine. Gingrich probably had the initial idea for Ken; the idea was developed in March 1937 during conversations among Gingrich,

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7 Incidentally, this editorial was published one month after a similar editorial about Gingrich’s failures of memory over editorial changes to the Esquire text of “The Snows of Kilimanjaro”—a fact Gingrich notes with chagrin. Despite the apparently poor choice of writing a memoir without doing much research, Gingrich is to be commended for both his gracious response to the venerable Seldes and for having the integrity to publicly admit some of his errors and inaccuracies.

8 Gingrich claims in a 1938 letter (see below) that he brought the idea to Smart and Allen, and Michael Denning presents Ken as Gingrich’s brainchild.
Smart, and journalist Jay Cooke Allen of the Chicago Tribune, whom Smart had hired as editor of the new magazine. 9 From the beginning, Ken was conceived as a Popular Front magazine for the mass market. Writing to Hemingway in January 1938, Gingrich recalls:

That idea, as I originally laid it out, was for a mass-circulation “Journal of Opinion” one point[?] left of center, to try to popularize the anti-war & anti-fascist viewpoint that is only “preached to the already converted”, the 40,000 people (probably the same 40,000 people) who read the Nation, the New Republic, & the New Masses. It was to try to dish up a liberal doctrine in a popular dosage. To give the Collier’s and Post type of audience a shot of something other, for a change, than the black reaction that seems inextricably bound up with all popular magazines. It was to be, if you like, a sort of United Front magazine against fascist-fostering reaction. (Letter to Hemingway 30 Jan. 2)

George Seldes recalls that Smart pitched the magazine in a similar manner to him, saying they wanted “something like a cross between The Nation and Life—liberal and lively, something for the millions, not highbrow like The Nation and the New Republic, but popular, full of illustrations, and just as liberal” ("Ken" 498).

For my purposes in this chapter, it is important to note that Gingrich also had a specific rhetorical purpose in creating this kind of magazine. He wanted a magazine that would connect with a broad enough segment of the American magazine-reading public to allow it to really influence public opinion—toward action where applicable. This consideration, in addition to whatever interests in profit he and Smart had, necessitated that Ken participate in the consumer magazine market as fully as the conservative periodicals of

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9 Both Seldes ("Ken" 497) and Gingrich (Letter to Hemingway 30 Jan. 2) locate initial discussions among Smart, Gingrich, and Allen in March 1937, though Nothing But People places those locations in the summer of 1937, probably inaccurately.
Henry Luce:

I have been strongly insistent all along that this magazine should carry ads and that it
cant be allowed to be a stoop-shouldered, squinting, over-cerebrated journal of
opinion. I feel that what’s needed (if we want to consider what possible good we can
do) is not another little magazine in between the New Masses and the New Republic,
but a big popular commercially successful magazine, big enough [i.e., in circulation]
to exert a real influence. (Letter to Hemingway 6 Feb. [2])

One major issue for which incitement to action would have been applicable was the
Spanish Civil War. How direct a role the war played in the conception of Ken is hard to
determine precisely. In Nothing But People, Gingrich remembers that the Spanish Civil War
was a key impetus to the talk about founding a political magazine. He writes that during the
summer of 1937, “we had fallen into the habit, every morning, of reading Jay Allen’s
dispatches from the Spanish Civil War in the Chicago Tribune when we were having our
morning coffee. . . . We were both moved by the plight of the Loyalists, outraged at the
cynical deliberations of the so-called “nonintervention” council meetings, . . . and both
completely convinced that the Germans and Italians were using this war simply as a trial run
for the war they were preparing in Europe” (Nothing 132). They later met Allen when he
was speaking at a mass meeting, Gingrich writes, and asked him to be involved with the new
magazine.

Gingrich’s account, like much of the Ken section of the memoir, is inaccurate: Smart
and Gingrich were already talking with Allen by March, not summer, and in any case, Allen

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10 Interestingly, Gingrich also comments about his opinions regarding the relationship between culture and the
masses, or at least the middle classes. “A good play in Provincetown or in a Greenwich Village garage doesn’t
mean a damn thing,” he tells Hemingway, “but a good play that is a smash on Broadway does. By that then, I
say that Esquire is a hell of a sight more valuable, culturally, than the Dial, for instance, ever was” (Letter to
Hemingway 6 Feb. [2])
was no longer writing for the Tribune by the summer of 1937 (his last dispatches from Spain were published in October 1936). However, if the details are wrong, the prominent place that the Spanish war holds in Gingrich’s memory reminds us that Spain was at the center of intellectuals’ thought in 1937, and it is likely that the concerns he outlines in his memoir did largely inform his impulse to produce a political magazine that could actually change people’s opinions. Tellingly, Meyer Levin, who worked on Ken, begins the section of his memoir that deals with Ken by invoking the Spanish Civil war. “It was in this year [1938],” he writes, “that Spain was nearing its last agony. Already, all the liberal circles revolved around committees and organizations to save Spain, and every week there were cause parties and collection meetings, and in every one of us there was the thought: the future is being decided in Spain, why am I not there?” (108). Levin recalls that he believed working on Ken would be his opportunity to do something to effect change in the Spanish situation and stand up to European fascism.

A key feature of the magazine was that it would offer readers the “inside story” behind current events, uncowed by the hidden pressures within the periodical marketplace that tended to censor and suppress news and political writing, whether to uphold ideals of decency, to protect big business interests, or to adhere to ideologies. Seldes recalls that “its function would be to tell the truth behind the news, to explore hitherto unexplored fields of American journalism, to defy the forces and men who are forever saying, ‘You can’t print that.’” ("Ken" 497) Clarifying to Hemingway that this aspect of the magazine predated Allen’s involvement, Gingrich writes that he got the idea for this aspect of the magazine in February 1937 after reading a piece submitted to Esquire that gave the real story behind the

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11 Levin uses pseudonyms for some people and publications, but not others. So for example, Ken is called Inside, Esquire is Paradise, and David Smart is Melvin Morris, while such figures as George Seldes, John Spivak and Ernest Hemingway are mentioned openly.
World War I myth of Sgt. York by telling about the “seventeen other guys” who helped him “single-handed” (sic) capture the three hundred Germans. “That gave us the urge to start this new magazine,” he tells Hemingway (Letter to Hemingway 30 Jan. 2).

Thus, central to Ken from its earliest conception was the idea that it would not merely present opinions, but also provide its readers access to the truth. This aspect of the magazine is best illustrated by an unsigned brochure probably written by Gingrich to drum up subscriptions prior to Ken’s publication. The brochure sets up a narrative around the metaphor of a journey along the “journalistic map” of the country. Ken, the narrative goes, will travel a road leading into the “sizeable area” of the map marked “Unexplored.” “It is along this lonely road, leading off at a tangent from the crowded highway now jammed by the multitudes of American magazines and newspapers, that KEN will soon set out for the first time on an expedition of discovery and exploration.” Such a journey is only possible in America, where we have freedom of the press, yet, “paradoxically enough, nowhere is so little effort made to get at ‘the inside story,’ to dig down to the vein of Truth that lies beneath the epidermis of Fact” (Ken [1]). Why, the brochure asks, if we have freedom of the press, can’t the naturally curious American reader have access to the inside story? The answer:

Well, yes, the press is free. But for whom? The publishers. And half of them are busy salaaming sacred cows, while the other half are grinding axes on the emery wheel of their own prejudices. Between them, they constitute a barrier separating the general public from the insider’s world. Behind them, they have left a big publishing job to be done.

We believe it is a magazine job. We believe that that magazine is KEN. (Ken [1]) These comments also suggest the sense in which the title word is to be read. Merrill
claims that Gingrich had in mind the use of “ken” meaning “understanding” (72). Gingrich himself implies, in a suspiciously dramatic story recounted in Nothing But People, that he was thinking of Keats’ meaning, from “On First Looking Into Chapman’s Homer,” of “range of vision” (Nothing 133). In any case, the senses of seeing (that which was hitherto unseen) and understanding are both contained within the title, and reflect the magazine’s purpose.

The development of Ken seemed to be underway by March 1937, when David Smart hired Jay Allen to edit the new magazine. But the period of Allen’s involvement would turn out to be a false start; by November, Allen and his staff had been fired. It is clear from Gingrich’s letters that Allen then proceeded to criticize Smart and Gingrich publicly, a move which enraged Gingrich. What charges Allen made is unclear, but they probably contributed to Seldes’ understanding of what happened in the early months of Ken’s development, and they seem to have contributed to Hemingway’s temporary cold feet about Ken. According to Seldes, Smart countered Allen’s criticisms by claiming that he had spent “forty or fifty thousand dollars on the Allen regime” and didn’t have “a damn story to show for it” ("Ken" 497).

Accounts differ as to exactly why Allen was fired. Seldes, who was brought on board after Allen’s termination, is particularly vitriolic toward Smart’s role in this part of the affair,

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12 Gingrich writes that on his way home from his and Smart’s first business meeting with Jay Allen, he had a vision: “In a high cloud formation, above the roof of the Drake Hotel, I saw something that evoked the words ‘a peak in Darien,’ and with them, in consequence, the rhyming line about ‘swam into my ken.’ ‘That’s it!’ I shouted . . .” (133).

13 In one cable to Hemingway, Gingrich explains that he had tried to write a letter bringing Hemingway up to date on the Ken affair, “BUT QUIT IN DISGUST OVER MY INABILITY TO KEEP CALMLY OBJECTIVE OR AT LEAST DECENTLY SPORTING IN RECOUNTING INCIDENTS INVOLVING ALLEN.” (Cable to Hemingway 30 Jan. 1.)

14 In his Nation essay, Seldes quotes letters that Allen received, suggesting that Allen had given him access to his correspondence. Gingrich’s cables and letters to Hemingway in January 1938 are clearly written in response, at least partly, to criticism from Allen that has reached Hemingway’s ears. I will discuss Hemingway’s reservations in Chapter Two.
as evidenced in letters her wrote to Hemingway and other contributors, but he was not around
to witness it. He writes that after receiving the go-ahead from Smart, “Allen engaged various
liberal journalists to write the ‘inside story’ of Europe,” and

went to work on a large scale, engaging editors, research workers, and assistants, and
ordering big investigations which took time and money. There was nothing picayune
about the Allen plans. Since Smart had conceived of Ken as a left-wing Fortune, the
staff prepared a 20,000-word feature on the fascist wars on democracy, to lead the
first issue. Then a conference was held; and the left-wing Fortune was scrapped in
favor of a left-wing Time. Again the staff prepared a dummy, concentrating on short
items instead of one big lead story; and again there was a dispute over the essential
nature of the magazine. ("Ken" 497)

Seldes further claims to have seen the story materials Allen and his people had prepared, and
labels them “all accurate and interesting pieces.” He then concludes that the break between
Smart and Allen was caused by “a desire to economize, not the style or character of the
magazine as worked out by Allen” ("Ken" 497). In other words, Allen was fired because he
spent too much money.

Gingrich’s account of the affair instead supports Smart’s interpretation: that Allen
frittered away thousands of dollars and produced nothing usable. This is the version of
events that Gingrich presents in the unreliable Nothing But People, but a 1938 letter to
Hemingway includes an extended description of his interactions with Allen that corresponds
quite closely to that later published version. Allen went to Europe in April to start work on
Ken. He and Gingrich kept in touch by mail, but due to Gingrich’s own travels didn’t meet
again until mid-August, by which point the magazine was to be well underway for a 1
November publication date. At that meeting, which turned into a twelve-hour talk session, Gingrich realized that both Allen’s and Smart’s conception of the magazine had somehow, over the past few months, morphed into something quite different from what Gingrich envisioned, due to Allen’s over-emphasis on exposing bias in the press and suppressed news. Gingrich left the meeting feeling that he had gotten the other two men back on track, but he had to meet with Allen again at the end of August in an attempt to redirect his efforts. At this meeting, they set Labor Day as a deadline for a section Allen was to write himself (Letter to Hemingway 30 Jan. [1]-3).

Around Labor Day the three men met in New York. “Jay said it was all done,” Gingrich recalls. “All ready. We asked to look at it and he showed us a mountain of folders with clippings and memoranda in each folder, but not a line of copy.” So publication was pushed back to 23 November. Gingrich describes this as an enormously stressful period:

Allen wrote more letters and memoranda than I ever knew anybody to write in a year in those two months[?]. But never any finished copy. Three times I flew down to New York to try to help him, and each time we talked eighteen hours at a stretch (until my god I could shriek that there couldn’t possibly be anything left to say, and he would just seem to be getting into stride to settle down for a good talk!) Well, the upshot was that by mid-november (I flew down twice in November as well as twice in September (guess it was five times in all) the thing was just a farce and all I was concerned with was an attempt to avoid an open break and to get him off the playing field and into the sidelines. (Letter to Hemingway 30 Jan. 4)

Gingrich’s conclusion is that Allen’s efforts were ultimately phony. As a result of these problems, Gingrich pushed back the publication date to the spring and tried to get Allen to
simply contribute pieces, but eventually Allen “up and left for Europe” and his relationship with Ken ended (4).

The level of detail Gingrich offers in this explanation to Hemingway, its proximity in
time to the events, and the level of frustration with Allen it conveys suggest that Gingrich,
whatever his personal biases, believed this version of the story. These factors alone suggest
that Seldes’ version, particularly as it is based on second-hand information, should not be accepted uncritically. Furthermore, while Seldes insists that Allen’s material was of superior quality, it is also clear that Gingrich and Seldes had very different ideas about what was good writing for a magazine like Ken. Seldes was brought in after Allen’s departure to produce the “news-behind-the-news” section—what Seldes calls the “press department”—that Allen had fumbled so badly, but Gingrich was soon disappointed with his performance as well:

Geo Seldes began grinding out copy like sausage meat. Jesus, the trouble with Jay was constipation & with Seldes the precise reverse. We couldn’t get so much as a line of finished copy out of Jay—the “dummy” he showed me on November 2 or 3 was pathetic . . . . On the other hand Seldes ground out crap like a pumping station. The stuff was terrible. He dished up the most stinking banalities with that air of excitement that a Frenchman can get into a discussion of the price of potatoes (Letter to Hemingway 30 Jan. 4).

Despite his low opinion of Seldes’ work, Gingrich didn’t fire him outright, he claims, but rather “‘promoted’ him out of the news-section to be a contributing editor” and eliminated the news section entirely. As of January 1938, that move had not improved circumstances, according to Gingrich: “The son of a bitch hasn’t contributed anything worth using as a pipe light so far but jesus [sic] I figured we couldn’t stand having a flock of these guys running
around telling everybody what bastards we are” (Letter to Hemingway 30 Jan. 5).

Seldes, however, had a very different take on why he was pushed out of the loop on Ken: he argues that his work was suppressed as a direct result of advertisers’ pressures. He recalls that Smart initially promised him he would have a free hand in writing the press department, which would focus on corruption in the press and suppressed news, as well as series of articles “on the American Legion and the money behind it, . . . . on Falsehood in War and Peace showing how it is possible to fool all the people all the time when government and press cooperate,” and other topics regarding big money interests and threats to the labor movement in the U.S. that were generally avoided in mainstream periodicals ("Ken" 498). The freedom to write his version of the inside story on these various issues, Seldes recalls, was quickly taken away when Smart found himself facing stronger corporate resistance than he had anticipated:

What happened is that the corporations refused to advertise in a magazine which announced itself liberal and pro-labor. The advertising agencies were the worse [sic]. One of them, . . . [which] I have reason to believe is J. Walter Thompson who handles the J P Morgan accounts, plainly informed Ken that it would not only not advertise but would withdraw its 8 colored plates from Esquire ‘if one word favorable to the labor unions or the labor movement ever appears in Ken’. (Letter to Hemingway [1])

Seldes claims that “the Smart boys,” now scared, held a banquet in New York for the advertising agencies and “promised to be good,” whereupon Seldes began receiving pressure to lay off topics potentially damaging to corporations being courted for Ken’s ad space

15 Seldes’ Nation article includes essentially the same version of events, and much of the same wording, that Seldes uses in this letter.
The elimination of the “news-behind-the-news” section followed due to similar concerns, not the quality of the work, in Seldes’ view. He also recalls one incident in which Smart forced him to abandon the exposé series on the American Legion, apparently forgetting it was Smart’s own idea. “‘Well, damn it,’” Seldes recalls Smart saying, “‘I’ve been trying to sign up the Prudential Life for three years; they keep saying Esquire isn’t their type. So I’m about to land them for Ken when you write a piece saying a bunch of bankers formed the Legion and control it, and Franklin D’Olier of the Prudential Life is one of this royal family. We haven’t a chance to get this ad if we run your Legion series’’” ("Ken" 499).

As a result of this kind of pressure, Seldes claims, Ken shifted its stance, as indicated in promotional materials and word-of-mouth, to position itself as anti-communist as well as anti-fascist and to downplay any connection with labor interests.

It is this interpretation that dominates existing accounts of Ken’s development stage. While Gingrich and Seldes disagreed about the kind of writing that Ken should print—a point that Seldes ignores—there are good reasons for believing Seldes’ claims about the influence of advertising pressure. For one thing, there is Seldes’ reputation as a writer committed to accuracy and journalistic ethics over the course of a long career of press criticism.16 Moreover, there is the apparent fact that Gingrich himself admitted to Seldes that advertisers exerted tremendous pressure on Smart at the banquet in New York. Seldes quotes Gingrich to this effect in his Nation article. In his 1972 letter to Gingrich, he says he still has

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16 For praise of Seldes, see William Dicke, “George Seldes Is Dead at 104; An Early, Fervent Press Critic,” New York Times 3 July 1995, and the documentary Tell the Truth and Run: George Seldes and the American Press. It should be noted for the sake of completeness, though, that at least one fellow Ken contributor, Paul de Kruif, thought Seldes was making too much of the whole affair in his efforts to publicize the policy shift and get other contributors to defect. De Kruif, who also left Ken in protest, responds to one of Seldes’ letters by asking, “What is there for me to say about KEN when I have already resigned from it many weeks ago? To be perfectly plain about it, I believe that your position on KEN was a good one, but it seems to me that you made unnecessarily much fuss about it” (Letter to Seldes 1.).
Gingrich’s letters, from which Seldes quotes the following: “‘The advertising men not only put me up against the wall, they pushed me through the wall’; and again, ‘The financial winds seem to be blowing the daylights out of that apparently fair-weather form of liberalism that was one of the major tenets of Ken as you and I first planned it’” (Letter to Gingrich [1]). Gingrich does not challenge these statements in his reply to Seldes.

Another indication that Ken’s editorial policy was changed in direct response to business pressures is the simple fact that so many of its contributors either backed out or threatened to do so once the anti-communist stance had been clearly articulated. Seldes resigned just after the start of publication in April 1938. Bacteriologist Paul de Kruif wrote to Seldes in April that “Gingrich got me into this thing on the idea that it was going to be more than liberal, really progressive,” but that he would remain with the magazine if Gingrich would eliminate any red-baiting content; he resigned from Ken a short time later ([1]). Hemingway became concerned about the apparent change in policy, and sent Gingrich a disclaimer to run in the first issue, clarifying his role as merely a contributor, not an editor. And following the publication of Ken’s first issue, which contained two cartoons of an anti-communist flavor, several of the less prominent contributors sent Smart a group letter on 26 April 1938 protesting the magazine as published. “The drastic departure from the original editorial policy of Ken,” they write, “as evidenced in the promotion prospectus and in the first issue, has resulted in misrepresenting and compromising the position of many of its writers, artists, and editors. . . . The original plan of Ken was to make it a liberal, pro-labor, anti-fascist magazine. This was clearly understood by all of us, and we entered into relations with the magazine on that basis.” Their main stated concern is with the “vicious Red-baiting cartoons” in the first issue, which lump “the Soviet Union, Loyalist Spain and all of China.
with the Fascist states” (Letter to Smart [1]).

This letter is a notable instance of cultural front writers and artists attempting to exert pressure back against the magazine marketplace, and, as with the resistance of the prominent contributors, it represents an early instance of Ken meeting with opposition from the left as well as the right. Unlike the pressure of the advertising agencies, however, this move appears to have been unsuccessful. While I have not located Smart’s reply, if he sent one, the magazine’s editorial policy maintained its anti-communist element throughout its publication run, though anti-fascism was always a much stronger and more prominent aspect of Ken’s content.

It seems clear that advertising pressure caused a shift in policy for Ken, or at least the way that policy was articulated. Why, then, in his correspondence to Hemingway in January and February 1938 explaining Ken’s development does Gingrich fail to mention being backed through the wall by the ad men? The omission is probably due in part to his immediate rhetorical purpose in writing that correspondence: namely, he is trying to convince Hemingway to continue to contribute to the magazine. Hemingway had heard rumors about a change in policy, and had become concerned about his name being attached to a publication that may engage in red-baiting. To that end, Gingrich is explicitly trying to convince Hemingway that there has been no real change in policy, that Ken as it nears publication is in fact essentially what Gingrich had in mind all along. In a cable on 30 January, Gingrich characterizes the magazine’s approach as “REALLY NOT SO MUCH A NEW OR CHANGED SETUP AS REALIZATION OF ORIGINAL SETUP, WHICH WAS MAGAZINE OF LIBERAL BIAS ATTEMPTING CLARIFICATION BROAD NEWS TRENDS, NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LINES, BETWEEN DEMOCRATIC
AND TOTALITARIAN ELEMENTS” (Cable to Hemingway 30 Jan. 3).

While Gingrich’s rhetorical purpose here may lead to some coloring of the story, perhaps some disingenuousness, his detailed recounting of events nonetheless indicates that part of the problem with Ken’s development phase involves confusion of purpose. Unless Gingrich is lying outright in his correspondence with Hemingway, misunderstanding over what exactly Ken was going to try to accomplish existed from the period of Jay Allen’s involvement, and David Smart himself was an integral part of that misunderstanding.

Defining the magazine precisely—at least to the extent that his collaborators could understand and agree with—seems to have presented difficulty for Gingrich all along. He begins his letter of 30 January 1938 with an expression of this difficulty, recalling that “from almost mid-August through mid-November I was trying almost daily to define it to Allen and then I finally figured the hell with defining it let’s realize it. Now that it’s just about realized I find it next to impossible to get back to the defining stage” (Letter to Hemingway 30 Jan. 1). The rest of his letter is an attempt to do just that by recounting his interactions with Smart, Allen, and Seldes over Ken. From his descriptions, it appears that Smart and Allen, at one time or another, wanted to place the focus of the magazine on domestic news and on exposing corruption in the press, which was not the focus Gingrich had envisioned. He recalls that he pitched the magazine to Smart and Allen as a mass market take on The Nation or the New Republic, which would entail articles of opinion on “broad news trends, national and international lines,” as quoted above. He asked Allen to produce a section of “‘behind-the-news’ clarification” along the lines of a political pamphlet called The Week being produced in Britain by Claud Cockburn. The Week was an internationally-known independent paper which printed news and news rumors that were suppressed or ignored in
the mainstream press. Gingrich asked for just a section of such material, of four to eight
pages, but Smart, according to Gingrich, got carried away with this aspect of the magazine:

Well, it’s one of Dave’s outstanding characteristics that he takes over any of my
measured enthusiasms and proceeds to run off with them at a breakneck pace. In
relation to things that I start he invariably becomes beaucoup plus royaliste que the
roi and he and Allen began jerking each other off, if I may say so, from the minute
their boat left and they kept talking each other into wider and wider visions of empire
and dreams of grandeur . . . and they worked on each other so extensively that by the
time I caught up with them on August sixteenth I no longer (honestly) knew what the
hell they were talking about. (Letter to Hemingway 30 Jan. 3)

During the twelve-hour discussion that ensued, Gingrich tried to steer them both back toward
the original idea of the magazine:

I tried to make them both see that their double shadow-boxing, in which they kept
knocking out [Time, Inc. publisher] Harry Luce every minute on the minute, however
enjoyable, was a bit irrelevant.

They were talking wildly, among other things, about their “coverage” of this
and that part of the world and departments of the news. And they kept referring
constantly to Ken as “a news magazine”, and I kept just as constantly interrupting,
like a lawyer making exceptions, reminding them that the basic premise was that it
was not a news magazine that it was not to have coverage, which is the function of
the news services and that while it might be, and would try to be, timely it need not
and in fact should not be topical. (3)

The consumer magazine arena offered various possibilities for a publication that would
engage with political issues, and different formats offered different market and audience possibilities, as well as different representational opportunities. A newsmagazine in the vein of *Time* could be very successful commercially, but the sheer perception of its news focus would predispose it to a certain readership. Circulation was likely be limited to several hundred thousand, as it was for *Time* throughout the 1930s, and was unlikely to break the one million mark. Moreover, the *Time* model offered a somewhat limited range of representational possibilities, for *Time* was considerably more text-oriented than other kinds of popular magazines; visuals were generally small photographs, maps or cartoons. And however entertaining *Time*’s irreverent style might have been, its format emphasized news over entertainment. Magazines of more general interest, however, had greater freedom in the kinds of content they could offer and how they could present it. *Life* relied heavily on photographs, while magazines such as *Collier’s* and the *Saturday Evening Post* mixed photographs with full-color and black-and-white illustrations; but in all of these magazines, visual content played a major role in the way ideas were conveyed to the reader. Also, those magazines carried a mix of content, much of it focused on pure entertainment (whether fictional or nonfictional) rather than news. And such magazines were more likely to have circulations over a million, and sometimes two million or more, as was the case with *Life*. Obviously, Ken would not have to follow any one magazine model exactly, but the decisions about whether it should be characterized as a newsmagazine or as something broader in scope had direct consequences for the kind of audience it could attract, and both its commercial and persuasive potential.

In any case, Allen was eventually fired, but his successor, George Seldes, may well have had a similar misunderstanding, or different understanding, of the magazine’s focus.
While Gingrich recalls planning a four- to eight-page news section with Allen, Seldes says the section, by the time he was involved, was to be more prominent: “The press department, which I was to edit, would constitute about a third of the magazine, or 30,000 words . . . . Once each month there would be an investigation of the press of a state metropolis. The emphasis was always to be on suppressed news” ("Ken" 498). Such an approach would have been consistent with Seldes’ personal interests, as his entire career would be devoted to such pursuits. But it was likely not consistent with Gingrich’s interests: as noted, he thought Seldes’ work was “awful,” and saw the final incarnation of Ken, without the news section, as a return to first principles.

How exactly the news section grew from eight pages to a third of the magazine, possibly against Gingrich’s intentions, is unclear, but Smart’s involvement may have played a role. As Gingrich saw it, Smart only complicated matters with Allen, getting them both fired up about a very different kind of magazine from what Gingrich envisioned. He may have acted similarly with Seldes, who himself writes most often of what Smart, not Gingrich, told him to do and what not to do. Seldes points to more than one “dispute over the essential nature of the magazine” ("Ken" 497), and it seems likely from Gingrich’s letters that Smart’s shifting interests may have confused matters between editors and contributors after Allen’s departure as it did during Allen’s involvement.

In addition to this confusion of purpose, there was also a clash of personalities between Seldes and Smart that led Seldes to lose respect for his one-time boss. Smart was a man of great energy and enthusiasm, but he appears to have rankled some of those who worked with him—even, at times, Gingrich himself. Seldes makes strong claims in private correspondence against Smart’s character. He sees Smart as an outright liar. He writes of
Smart’s frequent grand claims about what Ken would accomplish; one gets the sense from reading Seldes’ essay and letters that Smart’s initial enthusiasm and bluster made the ultimate moves toward moderation and appeasement of business interests all the more disappointing. “Smart has the coldest feet in America,” Seldes writes to Hemingway. “In addition to cold feet he is a dirty hypocrite. He still pretends we will run a liberal paper, exposing [sic] fraud and corruption, the press, politics, etc. Because that policy aroused tremendous interest and got about 300,000 advance circulation for the first issue.” Elsewhere in the same letter, Seldes is even harsher, calling Smart “a doublecrossing son of a bitch; . . . he acts like a gangster, is shifty and secretive, and seems suddenly scared for every cent he owns” (Letter to Hemingway 2-3). But Seldes’ attacks on Smart’s character, his ire over the publisher’s duplicity and concern for profits, do not extend to Gingrich, whom Seldes explicitly exonerates of perceived wrongdoing. Writing to Hemingway, Seldes prefaces one round of criticism of Smart with the assertion that “Gingrich is all right” (Letter to Hemingway 2). He begins a similar letter to Paul de Kruif, “I know you are a friend of Gingrichs [sic], and so am I, and I do not believe that he is in any way implicated in the dirty business of Ken” (Letter to de Kruif [1]). And years later, in 1972, Seldes still respects Gingrich enough to couch his criticisms of Nothing But People in friendly praise for the rest of Gingrich’s memoir.

The controversy over the political positioning of Ken, and the terminology used to discuss it, highlights ideological differences among intellectuals that are endemic to the magazine’s era. In America in the 1930s, the political left was certainly not a monolithic thing, nor was it clearly divided along ideological lines. The consequences of the Depression, the attractions and revulsions of the Soviet Union, and the threat of fascism
combined to simultaneously create both unusual alliances and vicious antagonisms among those who positioned themselves on the left. In her useful history of the American intellectual left in the 1930s, *The Long War*, Judy Kutulas charts on the one hand the complicated alliances among those intellectuals who supported the Popular Front—“a loose conglomeration of organizations shepherded by the American Communist Party . . . in order to help defeat fascism” (1)—and on the other the course of intellectuals, mostly centered around the resurrected *Partisan Review* in New York, who positioned themselves against the Popular Front through a staunch anti-Stalinist stance. The conflict between these two “warring camps” is central to the story Kutulas tells (2). So too are the goals and compromises and anxieties among those who commit, at one point or another and to one degree or another, to the Popular Front—a range of people that includes, in Kutulas’ formulation, liberals, progressives, and radicals. As she describes, the situation made for strange bedfellows:

Liberals and radicals usually occupy rather different political orbits. Reformers promote evolutionary change complimentary to American democratic traditions. Radicals desire more far-reaching and dramatic change, often imagining that revolution is the only way to strip away the old society and usher in a new one. These differences frequently describe an unbridgeable gap; liberals and radicals do not generally get along. In the 1930s, however, some did. (2) They did because “Front politics drew noncommunists into the Communists’ ‘movement culture’ so that they might share in the Communists’ larger vision without having to participate in the more problematic parts of vanguard party membership” (2). But as the

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17 Kutulas uses the term People’s Front. For the sake of consistency, I use Popular Front even when referring to her ideas.
decade of the 1930s wore on, Kutulas describes in detail, these tenuous alliances toward mutually-desirable ends began to unravel due to a host of factors, including the American Communist Party’s efforts to dominate Front organizations, many intellectuals’ resistance to such controlling moves, and, especially, the Moscow show trials and other disturbing events in the Soviet Union.

So there was a broad ideological spectrum along which leftist intellectuals united against fascism might see themselves. Likewise, how one person envisioned a magazine described (to use terms from the contributors’ protest letter) as simultaneously “liberal,” “progressive,” and “left-of-center” may well have differed from the way another would envision the same magazine. In his letters to Hemingway, Gingrich claims that he had conceived Ken as liberal, left of center, and a contribution to a united front against fascism, but he also argues that anti-communism is not inconsistent with that stance. While Gingrich may indeed be back-pedaling somewhat in his efforts to keep Hemingway on board for Ken, his explanation of his political beliefs is not inconsistent with the sometimes awkward positions in which many intellectuals found themselves in the 1930s.

“As I said to John Spivak,” Gingrich writes, “I guess what I want to be is a communist with money.” He continues, “On the other hand Paul de Kruif stoutly maintains that what I am is, up to the thirteenth drink, a lousy liberal, and, after that, an insufferable Trotskyist” (Letter to Hemingway 6 Feb. [1]). Funny as they are, these statements tellingly express something of the political tensions of the 1930s and the ambivalences they often spawned. Gingrich apparently agreed with some socialist aims because of sympathy for working men and social justice; some of the content in Ken suggests such sympathy and concern, as does his apparent support for the unionization efforts of Smart’s employees. But
America had been good to Gingrich, surprisingly so given the ongoing depression. He made his living primarily by producing a magazine, *Esquire*, that celebrated the life of leisure—a specifically capitalist formulation. Not surprisingly, then, he did not oppose capitalism itself nor support the idea of a fully collectivized society. Yet many of the people with whom he worked and socialized did. The pull of communism was strong in the 1930s, and the brief image, however comic, of a colleague tossing off the loosely derogative tag “liberal” and the more damning epithet “Trotskyist” effectively reminds us of the social pressures that one who worked an intellectual trade often encountered.\(^{18}\) In any case, despite the quip about wanting to be a moneyed communist, Gingrich is quite straightforward about his take on the Party:

> I do think that circumstances alter cases. I don’t necessarily feel that it follows, if Ken praises, as it should, the communists in Spain, that it must equally laud the communists in this country. Because Ken is avowedly anti-totalitarian it is against a seizure of this government by a dictatorship of either the left or the right. To that extent, Ken must be anti-communist to be consistent. But that doesn’t mean that, while not wanting to sell out or turn over to the commies here tomorrow we shouldn’t try our damnedest to enlist the communists here today in a united front against fascism. And we should, in that process, try to do everything we can to combat the red-scare, and to keep people from seeing red the minute communism is mentioned. (Letter to Hemingway 6 Feb. [1-2])

Such a view, that dictatorship by any name was to be opposed and that opposition to fascism did not require commitment to communism, was in fact a view legitimately held by many

\(^{18}\) Kutulas discusses the sense of guilt, in varying degrees of seriousness, felt by such intellectuals as Granville Hicks, Robert Cantwell, and William Carlos Williams, who hesitated to join the Communist Party for personal or practical reasons (34).
American liberals in the 1930s. As Kutulas points out, liberals had been making both of these points since the middle of the decade (80-81). However, Gingrich’s further comments indicate that he did not fully dismiss the potential of the Popular Front as a political force, so long as it stuck to a path that was amenable to democracy. The emphasis here on “gradual evolution” rather than “sudden revolution” places Gingrich squarely into Kutulas’ definition, quoted above, of liberals as opposed to radicals:

The hope for all of us lies in the workability of the Front Populaire in France. I think it will work, though in partial eclipse at the moment. And if it will work, why then I (or Ken) would consider it foolish to preach the same sermon of alarm against both communism and fascism. But so far the fascists have invariably proved that they cannot be trusted if by legal and peaceful penetration into a government they acquire a foothold. France is the only chance to prove that the communists can. That they are willing to see their hopes realized by gradual evolution instead of sudden revolution.

If that will work for France then it’s obviously what England needs right now, and the sooner the better, and what we need over here. (Letter to Hemingway 6 Feb. [2])

I do not mean to suggest that Smart and Gingrich did not back down to advertising pressures as they were accused of doing. It seems clear from early contributors’ reactions that the magazine was not originally presented as anti-communist; it seems equally clear that a pro-labor aspect of the editorial policy was first articulated and later toned down. But in an age where many of American intellectuals were wary of Stalin’s activities in Russia and the CP’s activities in the U.S., Gingrich, at least, may have legitimately seen no contradiction between “liberal” or “left of center”—or even “United Front magazine”—and opposition to Stalinist totalitarianism or to communist overthrow of democracy. Disagreement among
contributors and editors about what all those terms meant, how important pro-communism
and pro-labor were to fulfilling a leftist magazine’s goals, probably contributed to the Ken
controversy. So did differences of opinion about what the format of such a magazine should
look like and what kinds of stories it should cover. As noted, there were important
commercial implications regarding which magazine model Ken should follow. That
Gingrich seems to have been considerably less interested than was George Seldes in
exposing corruption in the press constitutes a difference of emphasis that does not
automatically suggest cynicism or complacency on Gingrich’s part. Making these claims
does not make the magazine any more progressive, but it does redeem Ken somewhat from
the good guy/bad guy implications of the narrative put forth by Seldes and, following him,
Hugh Merrill and others.

Rather than viewing Ken as a failed leftist effort, it might be more profitable to view
it as an enthusiastic contribution to what Alan Wald has called the anti-fascist crusade, with a
different set of failures and successes. From the beginning, anti-communism played a much
smaller role in the magazine than did anti-fascism. Gingrich predicted, accurately, that
despite any anti-communist content, Ken would stand a far greater chance of being seen as
left-wing rather than reactionary: writing to Hemingway, he asserts, “you can be pretty sure
that if there is any confusion in the public mind about Ken it will be on the side of
considering it a communist sheet, a bolshevik magazine, rather than an organ of the liberty
league” (Letter to Hemingway 6 Feb. [2]). The magazine did draw fire from the Communist
Party for its anti-Stalinism, a fact that Kutulas discusses and Gingrich repeatedly pointed to
in painting Ken as the underdog besieged from both sides of the political spectrum. But it
was the perception that Ken was left-wing that killed its advertising revenue and its
circulation, which were the crucial factors in its demise.

**Ken in Print**

**Layout**

In my introduction, I discuss scholars such as Cary Nelson and Mark S. Morrisson who in recent years have explored how the physical contexts of literary texts’ publication affect the way those texts make meaning, what George Bornstein has called the “politics of the page.” Other scholars have explored the function of mass-market magazines, the ways in which such magazines offer different reading experiences than other kinds of texts, and how those reading experiences make meaning. Sally Stein, for example, explores middle-class women’s magazines of the early twentieth century and the ways of reading they invite—and how those ways of reading further the consumerist goal. Stein argues that reading a magazine, unlike the average book, is not a linear process: “By sandwiching within its covers a variety of discrete texts, the magazine invites us to pick and choose, to move backward as well as forward, in a way that suggests that we not only will the process to continue by physically turning the pages, . . . but that we also ‘freely’ negotiate a ‘personal’ path through the magazine labyrinth” (145). Noting that the traditional critical practice of examining texts or other elements in isolation “flattens our conception of the way magazines came to be assembled and then received,” Stein claims that “these elements certainly are not apprehended in isolation; rather, images and texts, ads and editorial matter, are each designed to work off each other within the larger ensemble of the magazine” (146). Stein in particular concerns herself with the ways in which the juxtaposing of magazine elements works to create desire among readers for consumer products. Chris Vials further argues that the layout of *Life* “operates by a kind of radical simultaneity” that ultimately creates “a fetishized mode
of reading” in which ads that create desire for commodities work in conjunction with generally conservative, anti-Popular Front articles and photo essays to help prevent the reader from questioning the status quo of capitalist culture (89-90). Ken aimed for a mix of advertising and editorial content similar to other consumer magazines. In practice it carried considerably fewer ads (and fewer and fewer as it went along) than did Life. But Ken nonetheless offers a good example of the “magazine labyrinth” because of the interplay of several kinds of visual elements and text.

Ken was a large publication when it first appeared on 7 April 1938. In its initial every-two-weeks format, the magazine was 13 ¼” tall by 10” wide, printed on glossy stock. It was essentially the same physical size as the major general-interest consumer magazines such as Life and Collier’s. It ran 140 pages in the first issue; that was considerably longer than Life, which varied in length from seventy to eighty pages in 1938, and Collier’s, which was generally less than sixty pages long. However, the number of pages in Ken fell to 108 with the immediate drop-off of advertising in the second issue, and to eighty-eight pages in the 30 June 1938 issue and thereafter until the shift to a weekly format in April 1939. The original format included a large center section of mostly full-page and half-page black-and-white photographs. Clearly, Ken was meant to compete directly with magazines such as Life and Collier’s, which implies that it aimed for similar circulations. At 25¢ Ken was more expensive than both magazines: Life sold for 10¢ and Collier’s for 5¢. But then, Ken only appeared every other week, and Life and Collier’s were weeklies. Had Ken stayed at 140 pages, it would have been almost twice as long as many issues of Life and more than twice as long as Collier’s. As it was, when Ken dropped in length to about eighty-eight pages, it had lost advertising, not editorial content. So a given issue of Ken still carried considerably more

19 Collier’s was the same size, and Life was 1/4” taller.
editorial content than one of Life or Collier’s, a fact that Smart and Gingrich no doubt hoped would offset for consumers its hefty cover price.

In April 1939, Ken switched to a much smaller size in an attempt to cut paper costs. It continued to run about eighty-eight pages, eight of those now comprising a section of endpapers on a cheaper stock. In June 1939, the magazine dropped its price from 25¢ to 10¢. Its length fell to fifty-two pages, then further by stages to hover at forty pages. So while the number of pages per month had not, by the end of the magazine, dropped substantially from that of its original format (about 160 pages down from about 176), it offered a much less impressive appearance in its smaller format and was less visually vibrant, especially since the center photo section had also disappeared.

In the larger format that lasted the bulk of its run, Ken offered such regular features such as “Ken Particles,” a collection of news blurbs; “Trans-Atlantic Ken,” which offered commentary on British and European politics by Claud Cockburn, the British journalist whose paper The Week had partly inspired Ken; “Inside New York,” covering miscellaneous topics about New York City; and “The Ken Stop-Watch,” a sports section that, along with certain violent content and elements of editorial self-presentation that I explore in Chapter Two, suggests that Ken largely targeted a male readership. Main articles, some signed, some not, took up the most text space in the magazine. Articles were presented in their entirety, not broken up to be continued near the end of the magazine as was the practice in Esquire and the Saturday Evening Post.

Visual elements were everywhere. A full page of text would run four columns, and often the articles would be illustrated by either black-and-white or color cartoons that took up the space of the outside two columns on the page. Maps or photographs sometimes filled the
illustration space instead of cartoons. Full-page political cartoons and an occasional two-page spread appeared throughout the magazine as well. The middle section, as noted, was taken up by about thirty pages of black-and-white photographs with captions that linked each photo to a particular story elsewhere in the magazine.

A unique feature of the magazine was a new kind of layout that was designed to enhance the immediate impact of the textual material on the reader. Gingrich called it a “visio-graphic” layout, and he explains it in detail in a letter to Hemingway:

> [E]ach article is condensed as much as possible (all the extraneous stuff sweated out) and then in the lead, in [illegible] type, I write a summary that is really a distillation of everything the article says. Thus a guy can look through the issue and practically read it as he leafs it through. The cartoons are related to the subject matter of the various articles and appear alongside. The result is the fastest impact imaginable. A guy doesn’t have to dig down into and through all the small type before he knows what the article is all about. He can get it in a glance, in 150 words or so, and then he reads on into it for all the supporting detail to the main statements made in the lead.

It may sound like streamlining against mind-resistance and as if it’s a magazine for morons, but I assure you it isn’t. (Letter to Hemingway 30 Jan. 6)

On *Esquire* Gingrich was known for his editorial principle “he who edits best edits least,” but on *Ken* he seems to have used a more controlling hand. The different approach is perhaps indicative of his different goals with this magazine—political persuasion as well as purveying entertainment and culture. In the section quoted above, and elsewhere in the same letter, he indicates that he is doing a considerable amount of editing on contributors’ articles. More interestingly, Gingrich’s lead summaries gave him a hand in how the writers’ articles
were received by the reader. The lead summary became—in addition to titles, arrangement, and photo and artwork captions—a tool for editorial control over the way the reader understood the content, analogous to captions in that they directed the reader toward a particular meaning even before he had read the article.

Moreover, the lead, which Gingrich apparently wrote for most contributions, itself functioned almost like a visual element (note the label “visio-graphic”), hitting the reader with the thrust of the article in only slightly more time than it took to absorb the visual argument of, say, a cartoon. Thus the content of a Ken article, which was often persuasive in nature, was generally reinforced by the lead summary, frequently by sidebar cartoons and/or photographs, and sometimes by photographs placed at the center of the magazine as well. Add too the heavily visual advertisements and Ken became a surprisingly rich mixture of elements, an eclectic text in which multiple elements often seem consciously designed to work in concert for persuasive goals.

Contributors

Though many of Ken’s articles appear to have come from little-known writers, some of them one-time contributors only, the magazine did regularly print items from some significant figures in journalism and political writing. Hemingway was the most prominent of these, and his fourteen pieces were published between April 1938 and January 1939. George Seldes was a writer with clout in liberal and progressive circles, but he had cut himself loose before Ken saw print, and only a few of his pieces appeared (one under a pseudonym). Paul de Kruif, the bacteriologist and popular science writer (his book Microbe Hunters sold over a million copies), also departed early for essentially the same reasons as
Seldes; his writing appeared in the first three issues. 20

Raymond Gram Swing was Ken’s most consistent contributor, and the only one with signed articles appearing throughout the magazine’s entire run. 21 Swing had been a newspaper reporter in World War I, but was by 1938 an enormously popular radio news commentator. His evening Mutual network news broadcast, which had begun in 1936, at one point reached 37 million listeners in several countries ("Raymond Swing" 23). An outspoken opponent of fascism, Swing was known for his sober, soft-spoken radio presentation and was widely considered a keen analyst of current events; President Roosevelt often invited him to the White House for personal conversations ("Raymond Swing" 23). He also wrote for The Nation and published several books on war, fascism, and other topics, including Forerunners of American Fascism (1935), which addressed such right-wing figures as Father Coughlin and Huey Long. Swing contributed regular articles to Ken analyzing the foreign scene, domestic politics and social issues, and economics.

John L. Spivak, a prominent leftist journalist, contributed numerous pieces to Ken. Spivak wrote for several newspapers and magazines, including the Daily Worker and the New Masses, and specialized in exposing fascist activities in Europe, the U.S., and Latin America. Spivak may also have been a Soviet agent: though he apparently denied Party membership, Harvey Klehr, John Earl Haynes, and Fridrikh Igorevich Firsov have offered evidence that he may have been an undercover agent for the Comintern who worked to root out Trotskyist and Lovestonite elements within the Party. However, even Klehr, et al., admit that “proof is elusive” (125-28).

Other contributors included the prolific Jewish-American novelist Myer Levin, who

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20 See Krebs 38.
21 Swing married his second wife Betty Gram, an ardent feminist, in 1919 and willingly took her surname on principle of gender equality; he dropped it when they divorced in 1944 and thereafter went by Raymond Swing.
worked on Ken for a time, writing about tensions between Arabs and Jews in Palestine; Cecil B. Brown, who would later win awards for his journalism and would work as one of Edward R. Murrow’s team of reporters during World War II; Ladislas Farago, who had already written books on current events in the Middle East, and would go on to write several popular books about propaganda, espionage, and the Nazis, and would pen the screenplay to the film Tora! Tora! Tora! (1970); and modernist poet Arthur Davison Ficke, remembered for his participation in the notorious Spectra Hoax, who contributed not poetry, but several allegorical satires during Ken’s first year. Political cartoons were contributed by British cartoonist David Low, famous for his Colonel Blimp character and for satirizing Hitler and Mussolini; Hungarian drawing team Derso and Kelen (Alois Derso and Emery Kelen), whose work was published widely throughout Europe and in major American magazines; New York Daily News cartoonist C. D. Batchelor, who had won the Pulitzer Prize in 1936 for an antiwar cartoon; and the German exiles William Sharp and Eric Godal.

Anti-Fascism and Anti-Communism

Content in Ken was weighted toward international political topics, particularly the fascist threat as played out in the various crises in Europe and Asia that were frequently covered in the mainstream press: the Spanish Civil War, Hitler’s annexation of Austria and Czechoslovakia, and the Japanese invasion of China. The threat of fascism spreading in less well-publicized ways was also a topic of frequent interest, as in articles covering potential fascist revolts in Morocco, Mexico and South America, fascist intrigues in Panama, and the functioning of fascist propaganda in the U.S. and abroad. Domestic topics included safety standards in the American airline industry, the defeat of an anti-lynching bill in Congress, sensationalism in the popular press, illegal immigration from Mexico, and the state of the
country’s recovery from depression under the New Deal. There were also some offbeat or
downright quirky pieces, including an article that exposed a crooked grave-plot sales racket,
and another that reported on a nun in Bavaria who allegedly died and resurrected every
Friday.

Like many general interest mass-market magazines, then, Ken presented a mix of
varied content from its inception, ranging in this case from heavily political to pure
entertainment. Nonetheless its opposition to totalitarianism and other threats to liberty was
its most persistent theme, and remained so throughout its publication run. Gingrich affirmed
this focus in his editorial closing out the first issue. Beginning with commentary on the
situation in Europe (the Anschluss had occurred a month before), he claims that England,
with its government’s tacit approval of Hitler’s conquests against the wishes of its people, is
no longer a true democracy. Thus America is now the only “great English-speaking”
democracy and must take pains to stay that way. “And there, incidentally,” Gingrich writes,
“is Ken’s editorial policy. To show us the dangers that threaten this democracy. To remind
us of the liberties we now enjoy, that we may be on the alert to safeguard them against attack
from without or within” ("Within 7 Apr." 138) 22 Fascism as embodied by Germany, Italy,
and Japan was the greatest and most visible threat to American democracy as presented in
Ken, and the magazine’s articles frequently targeted these nations and their policies for harsh
criticism, highlighting in particular the fascists’ warmongering activities in Spain,
Czechoslovakia, Ethiopia, China, and elsewhere that many Americans feared would lead to
another world war.

Ken was undoubtedly opposed to war in general and its relevant articles generally

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22 The piece is unsigned, but because Gingrich was apparently the magazine’s only real editor, it is safe to
assume he wrote it.
operated from the assumption that another world war must be avoided. Gingrich did not initially state an editorial policy on how America should involve itself in a foreign war or the activities leading up to it, and the magazine tended to criticize the wrong actions more often than it detailed the right actions. That is, through regular harsh criticisms of the passive measures of various nations, especially Great Britain, toward appeasing or ignoring aggressor nations, the magazine implied support for active, perhaps aggressive measures of resistance to fascism to avoid a war. But rarely did articles offer specific actions that would curb German expansion without precipitating a war. Arguments against American isolationism were common in articles and visuals. In one cartoon, titled “United They Stand, Divided We Crawl” (Figure 1), the U.S. is presented as a man burying his head in the dirt beneath a flag labeled “Isolation,” while a tank labeled “Axis” and preceded by caricatures of Hitler, Mussolini, and Hirohito approaches (Low 84-85). Another cartoon, titled “Isolation” (Figure 2), is a more serious drawing of a weeping angel perched on a pedestal as soldiers charge into battle below ("Isolation" 75).

Given its frequent criticism, even ridicule, of isolationism, and the (sometimes vague) assertions that standing up to the fascist powers would put a stop to their conquests, the magazine tended to imply support for a policy of collective security among the Western democracies, the most obvious alternative to isolationism. In several of his pieces, for example, Raymond Gram Swing implied an argument for collective security, as in “The Weak Inherit the Earth” (July 14, 1938), in which he argues that the economically weaker fascist nations should never have been allowed to get as far as they have. He claims that Japan could have been stopped in Manchuria, Italy in Ethiopia, and Germany compelled to

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23 Hemingway’s take on Spain is an exception: he clearly argued that the U.S. should allow the Spanish Republic to purchase American munitions, which he felt would allow the government to win the war and undermine the fascist nations’ confidence.
Figure 1. Cartoon satirizing the Western democracies’ response to fascist aggression. (Artist: David Low)
Figure 2. Cartoon criticizing America’s isolationist stance.
withdraw troops from the Rhineland, all at relatively small cost and without the risk of a larger war. “Some show of solidarity between Britain and the United States,” he claims, “would have intimidated the fascists” ("Weak" 25). By January 1939, however—well after the September 1938 Munich Agreement and at the beginning of American rearmament—Swing did argue openly for the U.S. to institute a policy of collective security, a path still unpopular with a largely isolationist American populace. “The next stage will be that we begin to take a new line in enforcing international law,” he states; “. . . we are bound to begin recasting our ideas about the advantages to collective security and the desirability, for purely selfish reasons, of bearing some responsibilities for international law before brigands begin shooting before our own front door” ("Isolationism" 12). The following month, Gingrich admits in an editorial the near-inevitability that the job of stopping Hitler’s and Mussolini’s advances will ultimately fall to the U.S., and states that when dealing with their ilk, “the threat of force can only be answered by a superior show of force” ("Within 9 Feb." 6). This is the closest thing to an editorial statement in support of intervention that appeared in Ken.

Ken may have focused mostly on raising the cry of alarm against fascist aggression, but this it did with aplomb, month after month—enough to satisfy nearly any left-leaning reader or contributor. Its simultaneous opposition to communism, particularly to what was being called communism in Stalin’s Soviet Union, certainly did not satisfy equally. The letter from the magazine’s less prominent contributors protesting “Red-baiting” cartoons, for example, was responding to content in the first issue, specifically one cartoon by William Cotton, a two-page spread showing a map of the world titled “Carriers of the New Black Plague” (Figure 3). The map shows most of Europe and Asia and a few other nations painted black, which according to the key indicates “dictatorial control of the agencies of public
Figure 3. Cartoon satirizing dictators; one of the items to which several early Ken contributors objected. (Artist: William Cotton)
communication” (70-71). The contributors’ objection was to the “bracketing [of] the Soviet Union, Loyalist Spain and all of China with the Fascist states,” to which they attached the label of red-baiting, perhaps the strongest epithet among those on the left in the 1930s (Letter to Smart [1]). They might also have objected to the caricature of Stalin hovering over his homeland, along with another cartoon by Derso and Kelen (Figure 4) which caricatured Stalin along with Mussolini, Hitler, Franco, and others (Secretary of State Cordell Hull and British Foreign Minister Anthony Eden are also included) as circus performers (Derso 38-39). David Smart explains these cartoons in a letter to Hemingway as “protective coloring.” He cites John Spivak as believing that the cartoons were “not only excusable but even commendable” because “any magazine that tries to make anti-Fascism respectable and tries to win converts to it, must get past any prejudices that may exist to the effect that admitting that you are anti-Fascist is to stamp yourself as pro-Communist” ([1]). Using the term “protective coloring” makes the choice seem phony, but Smart’s explanation is nonetheless unapologetic about the assumption that the magazine should not be seen as pro-communist. As I have argued, such a stance was a legitimate one within the spectrum of the 1930s political left despite the resistance it generated among many readers and early contributors.

For much of its run, the anti-communist content in Ken generally focused on Stalin and his perceived status as a dictator; as in the cartoons just mentioned, he tended to be equated with Hitler and Mussolini. Sometimes the anti-communist content was harsh in its implications, as in an excessively violent piece describing modern torture methods whose visio-graphic lead included Stalin, along with Hitler, Mussolini, and Franco, as one of only four men who would be capable of listening if the article could be “wired for sound of the victims’ voices” (Rourke 93). But such content appeared only occasionally and was rare
Figure 4. Cartoon satirizing world leaders. (Artists: Derso and Kelen)
when compared with the ubiquitous anti-fascist content. Gingrich explained this disparity, apparently in response to criticism from the right, in a 5 May 1938 editorial. He labels communism a “menace” and equates it with fascism in the extent to which, as a system, it would affect individual freedoms and the American way of life. But, he argues, “the other menace [fascism] is much more insidious. The communists must at least be credited with having had the decency to declare war. They are open in their enmity of our system. But the fascist approach to our system is one of false friendship” ("Within" 5 May 106). Fascism appeals to a broader section of the populace (through its nationalist sentiments, for example), not just the “permanent poor” to whom communism consistently appeals. Gingrich argues that because of this breadth of appeal, democracy could give way to fascism “but we won’t know that until after it has happened” ("Within" 5 May 106). Later on in its short life, Ken took a few harsher swats at communism in the U.S. and the Americas, as in one editorial in which Gingrich roundly ridicules the Communist Party’s stance as defenders of democracy and their cooption of traditional American slogans and icons, and a later one in which he suggests dissolving the Party as a way of solidifying anti-fascist unity within the U.S. ("Within" 26 Jan. 6 and "Within" 9 Feb. 6). However, such anti-communist content remained far less common and less central than the anti-fascist content.

Nonetheless, Ken’s occasional anti-communism was enough to secure further opposition from American communists, some of whom publicly condemned the magazine for Red-baiting. Judy Kutulas discusses this opposition briefly, though she also notes that progressives (whom she positions politically between liberals and radicals) “seemed to keep frustratingly open minds about it”; she cites Hemingway’s refusal to break from the magazine despite pressure, and the refusal of the League of American Writers to follow the
urgings of its CP members and denounce Ken (137). Still, opposition appears to have come from various quarters, left and right, because before long, Gingrich began to cultivate the image of Ken as the embattled underdog, taking unfair criticisms from all sides. In a 16 June 1938 editorial, he writes that “Ken has . . . already been ticketed forever by variously assorted and opposed groups in ways that combine to make it the most bewilderingly paradoxical monstrosity.” He explains:

Ardent nationalists are convinced that it is in Moscow’s care and keep. But the communists have rather abstrusely diagnosed it as a first-aid to the advance of fascism by way of Trotsktism. Nothing, on yet another hand, can convince the rugged individualists that it is anything but a New Deal House organ. ("Within" 25 Aug. 4)

Throughout his life when mentioning Ken, Gingrich continued to note this opposition from opposing sides, as in his memoir and in a letter to a reader from 1963 in which he describes the magazine as “subject to boycotts and reprisals from every sort of pressure group, representing every segment of opinion” (Letter to Barr [1]). Attacks came from everywhere, but as with the contributors’ letter, the ones from the left were, by all counts, largely ineffective; the ones from the right eventually did their job, as I discuss below.

**The Spanish Civil War in Ken**

Spain, Anti-Fascism, and the Visio-Graphic as Argument

The Spanish Civil War was presented in Ken largely in terms of the general opposition to fascism and the machinations of the fascist states that could lead to another

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24 Kutulas is right about Hemingway’s resistance to pressure from further left, but wrong about another example she gives. She claims that George Seldes “ignored what the Communists had to say about Gingrich’s anticommunist reputation” and that he left the magazine “because of a clash over his editorial work.” Seldes’ letters to Hemingway and Paul de Kruif, however, establish that he was indeed angered over the red-baiting content.
world war. Such a presentation is squarely in line with the thesis of Allen Guttmann’s 1962 study of the American responses to the war: most Americans who supported the Spanish Republic saw it as a liberal democratic cause, not a radical one (3). Examining a wide range of contemporary sources, including many periodicals, Guttmann demonstrates that prevailing arguments in favor of the Republic, even from many sources far to the political left, emphasized the fact that the Republic was a legal, democratically elected government besieged by a military revolution.25 As the extent of German and Italian military involvement (in flagrant violation of the non-intervention treaty both nations had signed) became clear, many observers further began to view the war as an essentially international conflict, a dress rehearsal for the coming world war. Consequently, supporters of the Republic often argued that if the Western democracies would make a stand against the fascist powers in Spain, they might undermine the fascists’ confidence and stave off a larger conflict. Pro-Loyalist commentators also tended to emphasize the perceived brutality of the Spanish Nationalists and their German and Italian allies, often expressing outrage toward such tactics as the bombing of civilian centers to instill terror in the populace—a manifestation of modern total war that reached its extreme in the notorious bombing of Guernica in April 1937.

With its overall anti-fascist stance and intent to appeal to a broad middle-class male

25 The focus of Communists and fellow travelers on the democratic nature of the Republic was due largely to the Comintern’s Popular Front strategy, which called on Communist parties around the world to temporarily ally themselves with bourgeois-democratic elements in an effort to defeat international fascism. As Guttmann points out, such a strategy, along with the CPUSA’s central slogan of “Communism as Twentieth-Century Americanism,” meant that American Communists tended to draw on American democratic tropes and symbols—1776, the Declaration of Independence, Jefferson and Lincoln, and so on—rather than those of class warfare and proletarian revolution. Emphasis on the Spanish Republic as a democracy tended to ignore the complexities of the Spanish situation, such as the presence in the Popular Front government of avowed revolutionaries who had publicly advocated violence in the event of the coalition’s electoral defeat, the actual social revolution in large parts of Spain that had accompanied anarchists’ early resistance to the military uprising, and the increasing Soviet control of the government through political manipulation and terror tactics.
readership, Ken tended to present these kinds of arguments about Spain explicitly or implicitly. Hemingway’s contributions are the magazine’s most prominent arguments about Spain, and I discuss those at length in Chapter Two. But it is useful to point here to his first piece, “The Time Now, the Place Spain,” which appeared in the first issue of Ken. It might be said that this article set the tone for subsequent presentations of Spain. Gingrich’s visi-

graphic lead announces its thesis: “The way to avoid the world war is to end it where it has begun, in Spain, by smashing world fascism’s weakest link, the beatable Italian military machine” ("Time" 36). The claim that Spain’s civil war is inexorably linked to the impending world war is made explicitly here through Gingrich’s rhetorical use of a literal contradiction: the world war has already begun in Spain (i.e., the civil war is already an international conflict), but the world war (in which all of Europe will be engulfed) can be avoided. Hemingway makes the point himself in greater detail in the body of the essay, arguing that a world war can be avoided “if Hitler loses confidence in his allies” ("Time" 37).

Beating the Italians in Spain would do just that, and could be accomplished, he writes, by simply letting the Spanish Republic buy weapons and war materials from the U.S.

Several other authors and illustrators in Ken developed a coherent argument about the meaning for Americans of the war in Spain. For example, an article in the 5 May 1938 issue by journalist Guy Hickok called “Blindman’s Buff With Bullets,” which examines the effects of improved anti-aircraft weapons on bombing accuracy, uses a fictionalized account of an Italian pilot’s bombing run in Spain to satirize pro-Nationalist rhetoric and emphasize fascist brutality. The second section of the piece begins with the set-up, “You are one of Mussolini’s bomber pilots helping General Franco save civilization in Spain.” The bomber flies high over Barcelona, “where the wicked Reds are destroying the civilization you are
trying to save” (17). Heavy bombing of civilian centers in Barcelona resulting in heavy civilian casualties had been going on since December 1937 and had been widely reported in the mainstream press; Herbert Matthews, for example, had written several dispatches for the New York Times in late 1937 and 1938 describing the ferocity of the Nationalists’ attacks and the carnage in Barcelona, with particular focus on the children killed. Hickok plays off of the general awareness of these events by having his gleefully vicious pilot think, as he watches black smoke clouds rise over the bombed city, “Good enough for the Reds! Children? They would only grow up to be more Reds” (17). Here Hickok emphasizes the hypocrisy of claims that the Nationalists are rescuing civilization from Communists bent on violent social revolution, as they are in fact engaging in savagery with (we are to imagine) a callous, inhuman joy.

A letter from a Ken reader printed in the 16 June 1938 issue represents several of the common arguments about Spain, presented with the kind of emotional flair Gingrich liked to employ. The early issues of the magazine did not include a regular correspondence section, but Gingrich occasionally printed a reader’s letter, apparently selected for its rhetorical value, under the heading “In the Ken of the People.” The 16 June issue’s letter, placed in the emphatic last-page position, was from a grieving woman named Agnes Detro whose son had died fighting with the International Brigades in Spain.26 It is useful to quote a lengthy portion of this letter:

My black Negro mammy, Cherry, cautioned me when I was a small girl always to believe in God and the United States Government all my life and I would never have cause to be afraid or ashamed.

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26 Her son, Philip Detro, briefly commanded the American Lincoln-Washington Battalion (which had been formed from the survivors of the initially separate Lincoln and Washington Battalions).
America, the land of the free, and the home of the brave. My land, my country, of which I have learned to be afraid and ashamed.

I fully believe that had I not been afraid, hundreds of thousands of Spain’s mothers and children, soldiers and civilians would be alive today.

I fully believe that had I not been afraid, thousands of volunteers, thinking men and women, one of whom was my only son, who flocked into Spain from all over this world, to help the loyal people of Spain keep the Spanish Government a democracy, would be alive today.

Yet, I was afraid. Why? I was afraid to write to my President, my Senators, my Congressmen, imploring them in the name of humanity and for the sake of every one’s right to freedom and life, to lift the embargo of arms against Spain. . . .

On June 30, 1937, my son wrote me: “Do you know what the other side, across from us are using? Remington munitions. Straight out of the States. What a war! Killed by our own national industries.”

I wondered where my little-girl faith in God and the Government of the United States had gone, and whether France imprisoned or fined that other thinking volunteer, Lafayette, because he helped our country to freedom. . . .

For shame! No shame can be greater than mine. I, the mother of an American who was not afraid, nor ashamed to give his all that others might live and be free.

(106)

The casual racism of the reference to the black mammy aside, this letter packs several common arguments into its pathos-laden package, and it is not surprising that Gingrich would have selected it for print. Detro links the Spanish Republic, as a democracy, with the
principal American ideals: God, country, freedom. The Republic is on the side of humanity and life, a formulation which links the Nationalists, by implication, with inhumanity and death. Her son and all of the volunteers in the International Brigades are of a piece with Lafayette, great defender of American ideals both here and in his native France.

Significantly, the United States’ neutrality legislation is cast as a direct betrayal of all those American ideals. The loss of faith in American ideals is skillfully played out through parallel structures (e.g., “I fully believe”), the relentless repetition of the key words “afraid” and “ashamed,” and the underlying tone of grief over the crushing loss of one’s child—a disillusionment made more disturbing by the claim of personal responsibility. All Americans who have remained passive regarding Spain, the reader possibly included, are implicated in the betrayal through a failure to act, a point that compliments the magazine’s active, militant anti-war stance as outlined by Gingrich. That such a failure is presented in terms of moral cowardice, and contrasted with the bravery of the volunteer warrior, further compliment Ken’s performance of masculinity, which I discuss in Chapter Two.

In his visio-graphic lead, Gingrich also highlights the central, sad irony of the piece: even while the U.S. Government refuses to reverse its neutrality policy to allow the Republic to openly buy weapons, the woman’s “only son was killed fighting for democracy in Spain by a ‘Made in USA’ shell” (Detro 106). The claim depends upon a bit of dramatic license; that is, the son’s letter as quoted by Detro does not specify that shells are among the American munitions the man faced, nor does it specify that he was killed by a shell at all. What it does do is reiterate accusations in the popular press that some American companies were in fact supplying arms to either side despite the neutrality legislation.27 It also connects

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27 See Taylor 180-81 and Beevor 138. Taylor claims that some American arms may have made their way to the Loyalists, but calls it “doubtful” that American arms went to Franco. Beevor, however, more recently reports
with the longstanding belief among many Americans that the U.S. munitions industry was largely responsible for our involvement in World War I, and the corresponding suspicion of munitions companies in the late 1930s.\textsuperscript{28}

The dramatic license taken in the visio-graphic lead to Agnes Detro’s letter is one example of Gingrich’s use of the visio-graphic format to shape readers’ initial perceptions of articles. Often the lead quite accurately summarized an article’s content, sometimes drawing language directly from the text of the piece. Occasionally, though, Gingrich used the lead to claim something that the article itself did not claim, or to highlight something that played a minor role in the text. An example of this tactic in a Spanish war item is an article in the 5 May 1938 issue titled “A Cargo of Innocence,” which tells of a British destroyer evacuating thirty-five Spanish refugee children from Spain. Stories about children as victims of the war, about relief efforts and so on, were common, particularly in the leftist press, and often highlighted the tragic nature of war and played off readers’ heightened sympathies toward children. The Ken story about refugees is instead a light-hearted, even comic story about a British crew who must tackle the unexpected and unfamiliar task of caring for a little brood of children. Gingrich seems unwilling to miss a chance to vilify the Spanish fascists, however: “The homely humanity of British sailors in caring for Spanish refugee orphan children,” the lead begins, “touching by contrast to the bestial fury of those who orphaned them, affords one of the very few pleasant stories to come out of the Spanish holocaust” (Kirk 13). The article does describe the war as an “orgy of hate . . . represented by a pillar of fire by night and a pillar of smoke by day” (Kirk 13), but offers no criticism of either side in

\textsuperscript{28} These kinds of arguments don’t address the inherent contradiction that allowing the Spanish Republic to purchase American arms would of necessity involve the same American arms manufacturers. One assumes that the differing motive—national interest as opposed to profit—would make some difference.
the conflict, and makes no mention of who orphaned the children or how. However, in the context of *Ken*, a Spanish war story cannot be entirely neutral: a reader would assume that the children are refugees from Republican Spain, and the assumption would be confirmed for a careful reader by the reference to the Basque sailors who carry the refugees to the destroyer. Yet the article itself is not presented such as to emphasize the horrors of war; rather it is a human-interest story whose purpose seems to lean more toward entertainment. Therefore, Gingrich’s reference to the “bestial fury” of those who orphaned the children (whom, again, the reader would assume to be fascists) and to the “Spanish holocaust” inject into the story—and indeed, impact the reader even before he has read the story—an aspect of pro-Loyalist argumentation that is all but absent from the text. Moreover, “A Cargo of Innocence” is the cover story for the 5 May issue, and is represented by one of artist Wesley Neff’s full-color cover paintings (Figure 5). The image shows a Spanish boy with a single tear rolling down his cheek. Attached to one of his shirt buttons is a tag giving his name and age (Rodrigo Pérez, 10) and transit route from Bilbao, Spain, to Southampton, England. The specificity of Bilbao as the boy’s origin further establishes him as an orphan from Republican Spain. More importantly, his presentation as a figure of tragedy sets a tone that may be consistent with readers’ expectations for a story about Spanish orphans, but one that simply isn’t reflective of the article’s tone. Clearly, Gingrich has made a series of editorial choices designed to make the text of the article mean something more than it would mean by itself.

A similar move is made with an article by Thomas Rourketitled “Memoranda for a Dictator,” which appears in the same issue. This piece offers a detailed and fantastically violent description of modern torture methods employed by an unnamed “Generalissimo”

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29 Rourke was a writer of novels and magazine fiction, as well as nonfiction books on Juan Vicente Gómez and Simón Bolívar.
Figure 5. A cover illustration that imposes a tragic tone on a lighthearted story.
(Artist: Wesley Neff)
who is clearly a dictator maintaining his rule through the most brutal terror methods imaginable. That the piece takes place in a Spanish-speaking country is obvious; otherwise, there are no specific references that allow the reader to place the events in a particular country, save for one reference to “the Cuartel [i.e., barracks] at Guanta” (93). As Guanta is a city in Venezuela, we can assume that the story takes place there and that the Generalissimo in question is General Juan Vicente Gómez, who ruled the country from 1908 to 1935 and was known both for enriching and modernizing Venezuela through the export of oil, and for the brutal tactics of his secret police in suppressing domestic opposition. But the reference to Guanta could easily be overlooked, and the text of the piece seems designed to imply a wide applicability—this could be any country in which a strong-man uses terror to control a people.30 Indeed, such applicability is precisely the meaning that the visio-graphic lead tells the reader to draw from the story. Gingrich explicitly links the torture methods employed in the unnamed dictatorship to the other prominent dictatorships in Europe. “Men for this work [i.e., torture],” Gingrich writes, “are very important in a dictatorship and they are not easy to find in any country. In fact, if these notes could be wired for sound of the victims’ voices, it would be hard to find more than four men, Stalin, Mussolini, Hitler, and of course Franco, who could read them through” (93). Despite his lesser political importance beside the other three dictators, Franco is given a prominent place here with the emphatic last position and the phrase “of course,” which by implication includes the reader in shared knowledge—that is, we all know that Franco is sufficiently inhuman as to be capable of such atrocities. Moreover, because the unnamed country is clearly Spanish-speaking, because

30 One wonders if the story originally contained more specific references to Venezuela that were removed editorially; if so, the mention of Guanta, which is otherwise inconsistent, may simply have been overlooked by the editor. Because no pre-publication versions of this piece appear to survive, it is impossible to do more than speculate on this point.
Spain is the Spanish-speaking country in which atrocities (as readers well know) are being carried out at the time of the magazine’s publication, and because of the lead’s sly assumption of Franco’s brutality, it would be unsurprising if a reader assumed that the Generalissimo in question was in fact Franco himself. The text of Rourke’s article, focused as it is on the specific torture methods, draws no conclusions about the role of torture in dictatorships outside of the specific regime discussed; thus, the visio-graphic lead fully carries the rhetorical thrust that transforms the piece from merely a display of horror into an argument about specific political figures and their systems of rule.

**Hemispheric Threats**

As noted, the implications of the Spanish Civil War for the spread of fascism in Europe and the impending Second World War were, for Western liberals and radicals, the primary issue in contemporary debate surrounding the war. That issue has therefore been heavily discussed in subsequent scholarship. But in *Ken*, the Spanish war was more particularly linked both explicitly and implicitly to threats of fascism in the Western hemisphere; these threats took the forms of potential fascist coups d’état in North and South American nations, fascist propaganda efforts in the Americas, and fascist activities in the United States themselves.

Because of the interplay of visuals and text and the discontinuous reading practices that *Ken* called for—the magazine labyrinth Sally Stein discusses—various articles and visuals in a given issue would have impacted the way readers understood other items, even items not physically close to each other in an issue. This is one way that items about Spain

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31 The same issue of *Ken*, it should be noted, includes not only the reference to the “bestial fury” of Franco’s forces mentioned above, but also the important essay (discussed in Chapter Two) in which Hemingway juxtaposes a photograph of dead Spanish children with one of Catholic Church officials giving the fascist salute while standing among Nationalist officers.
might have interacted and contributed to readers’ understanding of other topics. For example, articles about fascist propaganda or spying or the threat of totalitarianism in the Western Hemisphere and the U.S. were common in Ken; at least twenty-three such articles appeared in the first six months alone, so many that the magazine often conveys an overly wary, almost paranoid tone. These included articles about spy activity around the Panama Canal, the international Nazi propaganda industry, potential dictatorships in Mexico and Cuba, and the nefarious plans of Nazi bunds in the U.S. Occasional illustrations addressed the same topics, such as a cartoon satirizing the proclaimed “Americanism” of Nazi bunds and cartoons and maps illustrating fascist activities in South America.

A few of these items appear in the 16 June 1938 issue, and it will serve as an example of how various elements not explicitly connected may be seen to reinforce and add meaning to each other. One was the letter from Agnes Detro discussed above. Another was a piece by Hemingway called “H. M.’s Loyal State Department,” which rails against the U.S. State Department for promoting America’s neutrality policy toward Spain. Hemingway here attributes this policy to the desire of fascists in the department to aid the British in their policy of non-intervention toward Spain. The article is little more than a rant and stands as one of Hemingway’s least successful Ken pieces. Aside from the relentless overuse of the term “fascists,” Hemingway spends most of his space on bitterly humorous (and almost nonsensical) suggestions about how American diplomats might be honored with British titles for their service to the crown ("H. M.'s" 36). His ultimate point, which he admits is essentially a non-sequitur, is that the Spanish Loyalists continue to wage war against fascist aggression despite the machinations of State Department officials. Poor writing aside, the article incorporates themes that recur throughout Hemingway’s contributions to Ken.
specifically, his disgust with British non-intervention and appeasement policies, frustration with the U.S.’s similar neutrality policy, and the implication that Spain has been betrayed by those policies. A sense of the tragedy inherent in Spain’s betrayal is conveyed far more powerfully, though, by the illustration to Hemingway’s piece, a color pencil drawing by artist Whitford Carter titled “Victory” (Figure 6). Here Spain is depicted as a dead woman tied to a giant fasces, the namesake symbol of Italian fascism, and stabbed through the chest with a knife bearing the Swastika (36). There is nothing comic about this heavily shaded cartoon, with the horrific, realistically drawn image of violence set before a bleak background of a battered building and a dead tree. The impression of a public execution implies an audience and therefore suggests a critique of those who have looked on without intervention; that critique becomes specific in the context of Hemingway’s piece which runs alongside the drawing. The victory in the title belongs to the fascists, and the price of that victory, the sacrifice of the Western democracies’ policies toward fascism, is what Carter emphasizes.

Hemingway repeatedly labels State Department officials fascists, but does not focus on the resultant implications to U.S. security; though some of his pieces in Ken make stronger claims about the implications of the Spanish war for America’s future involvement in a European war, he is more concerned in this particular piece with Spain’s betrayal. The other piece on Spain in the June 16 issue, Agnes Detro’s letter, also makes strong claims about betrayal of Spain by American neutrality policies. Here too the suggestion of American collusion with the fascists appears in the discussion of American-made munitions used by the Nationalists. But her focus is on the betrayal of principles rather than the direct threat of international fascism to the U.S.

If we consider these articles not as isolated arguments but in the context of the entire
Turns out that old Spanish war that everyone has forgotten. This correspondent rather hates to bring it up again. Especially after the fiasco in the U.S. State Department have done their level, crossed, Roman, British, fighting, dispatching, efficient best to end it by deepening the Spanish government the right to buy arms to defend itself against the German and Italian aggression. But if this magazine is to bring any sort of an insider's view it must keep on returning to a consideration of the Spanish war even though it bores you.

Meanwhile, this correspondent wishes to congratulate the fascists in the U.S. State Department. They could not have done a better nor a quicker job if Mr. Chamberlain's wishes had not even been to be decoded. The most beautiful and singular thing is that an American fascist does it for nothing. He will go against all the natural interest of his country in order to be considered a gentleman. And you will find them doing the dirty work of a very temporary British policy, based on England's not yet being armed, their tentacles out with a grudging for a pat on the head, for a "Well played, Sir. Oh, well played." If the fascists in the U.S. State Department could only be given old school tar, or even the right to wear the dress of more obvious British infantry regiments, they might be willing to settle for that honor. For the old school tie is permanent and really the highest honor Britain can give and it might save America much trouble in the future and enable some of her representatives to distinguish better between America's interests and Britain's if a bill were introduced in Congress providing for a certain number of honorary old Etonians, Carthusians and King's Collegians to be created each year in the State Department. These old school tithe would have all the privileges of those who had attended British public schools and none of the drawbacks. Each old school tithe could be provided with an escort of Marines in case they should wander into the Mediterranean Hall by mistake on St. Patrick's Day and some number of retainers could be provided with instructions to address the tithe as Your Lordship or Your Grace, always provided that by accepting these honors the American diplomat would agree to, in consideration of these privileges, represent American rather than British interests for a certain amount of time to be determined by whoever drew up the bill.

This length of time should be in no case be made one year and all considerations should be given to the possible advance in rank of the American diplomat if he were actually in the British service. There should be provisions made for this advancement in rank so that no U.S. State Department member should ever be deprived of attaining the rank of Lord High of Succotash to which he might have legitimately aspir'd had he not been embarrassed by American nationality. Certainly the Governor of Kentucky would not object to making them colonels as well, and a colonel is quite something in any second rate pension in Rome.

These decorations, however, should only be awarded for service in the face of the enemy, that is, for services when their actions directly contradicted American interests in said British policy. Of course if there were so many of these decorations given that they became cheapened what could be instituted. But they should all have good, sound, valid, British insinu'd.

What has this to do with the war in Spain? Nothing, except that the war is going on in spite of the fiasco of the State Department. It will go on in spite of Chamberlain and in spite of Mussolini; and it will go on in no matter what the French do. There will be war in Spain a year from now because men are fighting there who will do rather than surrender their country to the Italians and the Germans. In the last six weeks you have watched their broken by aircraft and artillery, not them retreat, reform and hold. You have seen it all. It is time now for Spain. They must stop this war and in his voice there was a note of panic. Because even the little Italian, in so far as his fighting past, is a weapon they can destroy a people.

Figure 6. Gruesome drawing placed to intensify the charge of betrayal in Hemingway’s article. Gingrich’s visio-graphic lead appears between the title and by-line of the story.
magazine, however, we see them functioning as part of a larger narrative, one which also highlights immediate threats to the United States. For one thing, the theme of treachery runs through several items not directly related to Spain. A piece titled “Eyes on Chiang Kai-Shek” alleges that the Chinese Nationalist leader’s military setbacks were due to espionage that had continually landed his plans in the hands of the Japanese since the start of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937. The article is illustrated by a small photograph of Chiang (Figure 7) with bowed head and tortured expression, bearing the caption “Hemmed by traitors, Chiang weeps—and shoots” (Brann 11). This photo, it should be noted, mirrors the small drawing accompanying Agnes Detro’s letter (Figure 8): there, a woman is shown praying with folded hands, in profile like Chiang (facing the opposite direction), her head at a similar angle, and her expression similarly pained. In the Chiang article there is some consideration of and implied justification for the government’s resultant “spy complex”—the arresting and jailing of hundreds on even the hint of suspicion—but the author, Iris Brann, devotes most of the piece to providing evidence of the traitors in Chiang’s government who have allegedly allowed Japan, which is regularly grouped with the fascist powers in the pages of Ken, to achieve military successes in China. “Eyes on Chiang Kai-Shek” is immediately followed by an unsigned piece titled “Czechoslovakia is Next,” which details undercover Gestapo activity in Czechoslovakia, German plans for invasion, and Czech preparations for defense. The main emphasis in the piece is on the treachery of foreign spies and of the pro-Nazi Czech politician Konrad Henlein, and it is illustrated by photographs of Gestapo agents’ passports, Henlein’s propaganda posters, and other items relating to foreign espionage and propaganda activity (“Czechoslovakia” 12-15). The point, of course, is that Czechoslovakia will soon be attacked by Germany, and that attack will be aided by these forces inside the
EYES ON CHIANG KAI-SHEK

Before the war was hours old, Chiang’s most secret plans were known to the Japs. Again and again Jap actions showed foreknowledge of Chiang’s movements and stratagems, as discussed and decided with his most trusted leaders. This explains many mysterious incidents, and makes China’s apparent “spy complex” fully understandable.

BY IRIS BRANN

IN THE KEN OF THE PEOPLE

Her black mammy told her always to believe in God and the U. S. Government. But her only son was killed fighting for democracy in Spain by a “Made in USA” shell. She is ashamed, for herself, for her country, for democracy.

Figure 7. Photograph of Chiang Kai-Shek accompanying story.

Figure 8. Drawing of grieving mother accompanying a reader’s letter.
country; thus, the past treachery against Chiang is mirrored in the future treachery against
Czechoslovakia.\footnote{Ironically the author does not predict that the real betrayal of Czechoslovakia will take a form much closer to the betrayal (as Ken would have it) of Spain: with the European democracies at the Munich conference sacrificing the country to the ephemeral hope of peace.}

This kind of intrigue, while localized within one nation in each of the China and Czechoslovakia articles, reaches further in two other pieces from the 16 June issue. “Spies by Invitation Only” by magazine writer Creighton Peet examines the espionage activities of mostly high-class agents who operate under the cover of legitimate roles such as attachés, military observers, and international students within foreign countries (96-98).\footnote{Peet wrote for the New Yorker and also wrote several books for juvenile readers.} While Peet is concerned with the general pattern of such activity conducted by many nations, he includes discussion of Japanese and German agents within the U.S. And while the threat to the U.S. is not the main thrust of the article, the editorial placement of a cartoon by an artist named Corsair titled “The Finger Man” emphasizes that threat (Figure 9). Uncle Sam is shown in the distance, facing away, while an international spy directs a man with a machine gun toward him, with the clear implication that Uncle Sam will soon be shot in the back ("Finger" 96). Another article in the issue, “Foreign Allegiance First” by Hiram Motherwell, paints an even more sinister picture of fascist activities in the U.S.\footnote{Motherwell wrote political articles, book reviews, and theatre criticism for various magazines including Harper’s and Stage. He also wrote several books on topics as diverse as American Imperialism, European politics, and modern theatre, and he translated Mussolini’s historical novel The Cardinal’s Mistress into English.} Motherwell asserts that Germany and Italy, through their consular offices in the U.S., put pressure on natives of their countries who are also American citizens to actively support Nazism and fascism, with threats of deportation and reprisals against relatives in their homeland as punishment for refusal (24-27). Such support includes, Motherwell claims, pledging allegiance to Hitler or Mussolini, involvement with American fascist groups such as the German-American Bund, and various
Figure 9. Cartoon highlighting the direct threat to the U.S. from international spies, which is discussed in the adjoining article. (Artist: Corsair)
propaganda and surveillance activities. Elsewhere in the issue, another cartoon by Corsair, this one a full-page color drawing, again develops the theme of foreign espionage on American soil. “Letting Him Have No Rest” (Figure 10) depicts Uncle Sam in bed, sleeping fitfully because he is besieged by a swarm of tiny Nazi and Japanese fairy-like flying men who rifle through secret documents in the nightstand drawers and paint Swastikas all over Uncle Sam’s American-flag bedspread ("Letting” 56).

The specific consequences of the kinds of intrigue described in “Spies by Invitation Only” and “Foreign Allegiance First” (and presented humorously in the cartoons) can easily be imagined but are left unsaid in the text of the articles themselves. But those consequences are implied more strongly for the reader who takes in the articles and visuals about China, Czechoslovakia, and Spain elsewhere in the issue. And if the violent images evoked by a murdered Spain or a soon-to-be overrun Czechoslovakia do not sufficiently convey the gravity of the threat, the 16 June Ken also offers items that tell the reader just what there is to fear about fascist regimes. An inset box within “Foreign Allegiance First,” titled “Nazi Sadism,” reprints an excerpt from the autobiography of a Nazi “gangster” who became, significantly, German General Consul in San Francisco:

[“]Beat her with horse-whips, then let her go,” I said abruptly.

Two men grasp her, she tries to bite. A slap in the face makes her obey. In the courtyard she is laid over the whippletree and horsewhips are applied to her until white spots no longer remain on her backside.

“She won’t spit at a brigadier again. Now she will have to lie on her stomach for three weeks,” says Top Sergeant Hermann. (Motherwell 27)

This is a concise, highly dramatic representation of Nazi brutality, as Ken would have it,
Figure 10. Cartoon developing the theme of foreign espionage on American soil. (Artist: Corsair)
placed to intensify the threat only implied by the article detailing machinations of German and Italian consulates in the U.S.

A more diffuse but similarly effective piece is the issue’s cover story, “Tomorrow the World is Ours” by Cecil B. Brown. Before seeing any other content, the reader would have encountered Wesley Neff’s full-color cover painting for this piece (Figure 11): the imposing face of a blond, blue eyed German wearing a Swastika pin and giving the outstretched-arm salute. The article paints a bleak picture of life in Germany where, as Gingrich’s summary proclaims, “there is no laughter. . . . There are only smiles of disdain, contempt, conceit and strain” (9). Brown focuses largely on the emotionally, intellectually, and economically repressive atmosphere he has seen in Germany, which is relieved only by the prevailing nationalism and pride in Germany’s restored glory—restored, of course, through the Third Reich’s aggressive militarism. But the article’s title and its closing paragraphs serve to remind the reader of the German regime’s expansionist goals, and suggest that what he sees in Germany is what he will see at home if those goals are ever fulfilled.

Spain betrayed. China betrayed. Czechoslovakia soon to be betrayed. Spies in Europe, spies in the U.S., fascist manipulation of American citizens, and the looming threat of cultural suppression and sadism as the end result of fascist domination. Through the workings of the magazine labyrinth, the idea of Spain’s betrayal by the democracies, figured powerfully by the image of Carter’s drawing “Victory,” becomes of a piece with these other incidences of international treachery and, ultimately, the threat of treachery in the United States. Taken together, the details of the individual circumstances of each country or situation seems less important than the context of the larger narrative that develops from this eclectic text: the fascists operate by the most underhanded and nefarious means, and, most
Figure 11. Cover illustration emphasizing German militarism. (Artist: Wesley Neff)
importantly, they are gunning for us Americans, however protected we may feel by vast oceans. Spain is one potential casualty in this vast conspiracy, but through Hemingway’s article and Detro’s letter, it represents both the threat of defeat and the hope of continued resistance to the international fascist onslaught.

The 16 June issue serves as one example of how elements within a single issue of Ken operated in the service of the magazine’s larger persuasive goals. The incorporation of varied content—visio-graphic summaries, cartoons, photographs, the imposing cover painting—meant that these interlocking arguments were reaching the mainstream middle-class reader with potentially much greater force than might have been achieved by the more text-oriented intellectual journals such as the New Republic and The Nation. And while advertisements were fewer than Gingrich and Smart would have liked, they too added to this mix. The ads are there for a practical reason, of course: they are (or should be) the major source of profits for the magazine. But they also drive home the idea that the American middle-class way of life is at stake. Just as Gingrich wanted to be a communist with money, Ken does not advocate a restructuring of American society beyond the evolutionary democratic socialism of the New Deal. Instead it proclaims its position as one which seeks to uphold and defend American ideals and institutions from totalitarian threats across the political spectrum. It is, among other things, the America man’s right to drive midrange cars, wear attractive ties and well-fitting pants, and drink good whiskey that is at stake, and it is in this sense that the advertisements might be seen to further the magazine’s implicit and explicit arguments.

In addition to using multiple elements to shape arguments about Spain, Gingrich at times uses the war in Spain as a kind of trope to intensify arguments about the direct threats
of international fascism to the safety and security of the United States. Mexico was of particular concern in the earliest issues of Ken. The first issue explores the country’s complicated political situation in a lengthy unsigned article titled “Rumbling Out of Mexico” that focuses heavily on the threat posed to Lázaro Cárdenas’ leftist government by renegade General Saturnino Cedillo. The visio-graphic lead labels Cedillo “the Hitler of North America,” and the unsigned article describes him as “definitely a fascist” who controls one of the largest states in Mexico and is known for violent political tactics ("Rumbling" 102). Cedillo has gained tentative support from small business men frustrated by what the author casts as Cárdenas’ well-intentioned but overzealous efforts at social and agrarian reform. The General represents a real threat to Cárdenas because he commands an army of 15,000 men that the writer labels both “the last private Army in Mexico” and “the first Fascist Army in North America” ("Rumbling" 108). The immediate implications of the latter label are made clear in the lead, which ends with the assertion that if two other influential generals each throw their support behind Cárdenas and Cedillo respectively, “they would make Mexico another Spain on our doorstep” ("Rumbling" 102). That is, they would create a situation in which military power roughly balances between sides, leading to a violent and potentially lengthy civil war. But Spain, of course, also connotes the worst of fascist barbarism and, especially, direct intervention of foreign powers in local affairs—a situation that the reader is expected to view as intolerable in a nation bordering the U.S.

Remember, this issue of Ken also includes Hemingway’s first piece, mentioned above, discussing Italian intervention in Spain. And the specific connection between Mexico and Spain is highlighted elsewhere in the same issue. The two countries are also connected in a piece of dystopian fiction titled “When It’s Happened Over Here,” in which author
Edward Hunter imagines a not-too-distant future in which the U.S. wages war against a much-increased number of fascist European nations and fascist elements within the country. Here Spain, which has fallen to Franco, has served as the model for the fascist takeover in various countries, including our own, and is now sending volunteers to Mexico to help fascism there too. Thus Spain becomes an active player in the exporting of fascism to the Western hemisphere.

Connections between Spain and the Americas were similarly made in a piece on Mexico in the second issue. “The Secret Fuse Under Mexico” was a long piece, unsigned but apparently written by John L. Spivak, that offered a quite specific and well documented exposé of fascist nations’ involvement in Mexico and worked as a follow-up piece to the first issue’s “Rumbling Out of Mexico.” Here discussion of Spain is brief in the article but placed for maximum effect, emphasized in the lead and at the end of the article’s text. The lead highlights key points of the article, including German military aid to Cedillo and Nazi propaganda efforts and spy activity in Mexico, and ends with the claim that

Franco’s influence with Hitler was sought to overthrow the Cardenas government. But whether the government is cowed like Austria’s or attacked like Spain’s, the ground beneath its feet is so intricately mined that a flash from Berlin or Rome or Tokyo could touch off the inferno. What are they waiting for? ("Secret" 15)

The article is one of the more effective of the exposé type presented in Ken because it offers specific names (and even some home addresses) of fascist operatives in Mexico and

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35 In his memoir, A Man in His Time, Spivak recounts in great detail his investigations for this article, which he claims was instrumental in forcing Cedillo’s hand toward a revolt that was quickly suppressed by Cardenas’ government forces.
discusses specific documents as evidence of fascist activities.36

The visuals also support the text in a particularly effective way. Many Ken articles are illustrated with cartoons along the outside vertical half of one or more pages; this piece fills those slots with photographs of documents (translated into English) and characters mentioned in the text, and a map of Mexico showing arms caches, smuggling routes, and landing spots of foreign munitions shipments. In the closing paragraphs, after five pages detailing threatening activities, Spivak claims that at one point “Mexican fascists decided to send a special messenger to Francisco Franco in Spain (Nov. 30, 1937) with the request that Franco intercede to get money from Hitler to help overthrow Cardenas, since the Nazi minister was too scared to co-operate” ("Secret" 19). A photograph of the messenger’s letter of introduction is reproduced with the article. The messenger, whom the author identifies by name, apparently never reached his destination, but the implications are clear: Mexican fascists indeed want to recreate the “current spectacle in Spain” in the United States’ back yard, and they have tried to get the architect of the Spanish spectacle to help do it.

In the second issue, “The Secret Fuse Under Mexico” was immediately preceded an article by Carelton Beals titled “Fascism’s New World Thrust,” which explored the possibility of fascist-supported revolts in Latin America, referencing Spain as an example of the consequences of such developments. Thus the reader would have encountered two long articles exploring fascist schemes in North and South America—too close to home for comfort—and using the current war in Spain as an unsettling figure for the real, violent dangers those schemes represent. Should the reader have wondered about those dangers, about what horrors that fascist revolt and foreign intervention brought about in Spain, he

36 Such specificity is by no means consistent in Ken pieces. Many of them function from rumor and vague accusations.
need only have turned to page 68, where Hemingway provided an unforgettable view of those horrors. In “Dying, Well or Badly,” Hemingway describes several dead Italian soldiers on the Guadalajara battlefield and keys his text to six shockingly explicit photographs of those dead men, presented on the following three pages. Three of them died well in Hemingway’s estimation, killed with bullet wounds that left their bodies intact. The other three soldiers were torn apart by tank shells or airplane bombs and died badly. One is shown lying without feet, the jagged ends of severed legs peeking out from under a blanket covering the lower body. The next soldier is perhaps the most impressive. His head has been largely blown away, leaving part of the nose, the mouth, and one eye; the close-up photograph gives enough detail to clearly show the stubble on his chin and neck and a moustache on what remains of his upper lip. The viewer cannot avoid an unsettling sense that what remains of the soldier’s face conveys a look of shock at his sudden, unimaginably violent death. The last soldier lay among a pile of earth and rubble; the top half of his head is missing entirely, leaving the bottom portion, with nose and mouth undisturbed, topped by ragged folds of flesh. I examine this article in more detail in Chapter Two, but here I will concern myself with the fact that those pictures bring powerfully to life, through the connecting thread of the Spanish Civil War, the threats inherent in the types of fascist plans discussed in the articles on Mexico and Latin America. Hemingway himself makes the point directly in his closing lines. Noting that many Americans have grown tired of hearing about the war in Spain because they don’t have to face it every day, he suggests that “perhaps these pictures will make it seem a little more real. Because those pictures are what you will look like if we let the next war come” ("Dying" 68).

As noted, the 16 June issue offers connections between Spain and fascist propaganda.
activities in the Americas, unstated connections which take shape when we consider the
discontinuous reading practices appropriate to the magazine and the “radical simultaneity” of
elements, to use Chris Vials’ term, that they create. But Spain at times figures more directly
into discussions of fascist propaganda in the Western Hemisphere, both through inclusion in
specific articles and emphasis through layout. A piece by Henry C. Wolfe titled “The Nazi
Propaganda Industry” examines the various methods that he Nazis use to promote their views
and accumulate support around the globe. The piece is heavy with implications, but the
visio-graphic lead foregrounds the connection between Nazi propaganda activities and Nazi
military aggression, even more than does the article itself. The summary begins, “Armament
is the first industry, propaganda the second. But the propagandizers prepare the way for the
soldiers” (82). Spain appears in this long article only briefly: Wolfe discusses motion
pictures financed by the German government and produced by German film companies for
Spanish-speaking audiences; these films are then exported to Spain as well as South and
Central American countries. But this is, not surprisingly, one of the examples Gingrich picks
to emphasize in the lead; he highlights the connection between Spain and the Western
Hemisphere by noting that “movies are made in Spanish, exported to Franco and to South
America” (82). Such a reference might still seem minor, except for the choice to illustrate
the article’s first page with a cartoon by Corsair titled “Last Stand in Spain” (Figure 12). The
cartoon, which is the only illustration to the piece, takes up the outside vertical half of the
page, the usual space for cartoons illustrating articles. It depicts a group of indistinctly-
drawn people amidst a battlefield about to be crushed by a giant tank bearing caricatured
heads of Mussolini and Hitler, while a swarm of airplanes fills the sky overhead ("Last
Stand" 82). The cartoon seems an odd choice to illustrate an article in which Spain plays
Figure 12. A cartoon and adjacent visio-graphic lead that connect fascist propaganda efforts with the impending Republican defeat in Spain. (Artist: Corsair)
only a tangential part, but not so odd if we consider that Gingrich probably sought to heighten the impact of the article. The three elements on the article’s first page which strike the reader most clearly are the cartoon, largest of the elements and first in the American reader’s natural right-to-left progression; the title, in bold and all caps: THE NAZI PROPAGANDA INDUSTRY; and the visio-graphic summary, in bold. The cartoon, with its emphasis on the unequal power relationship between sides (the fascist tank takes up about half the picture) and the tone of doom suggested by the title, evokes the tragedy of Spain through an image of the Spanish battlefield and frames it as a case of international fascist aggression, while the summary foregrounds the Nazi military threat and links that threat through Spain to the American backyard.

In this case, proximity adds meaning. That is, while Corsair’s cartoon appearing elsewhere in the issue—several pages away from the propaganda piece, for example—would create a connection between the somewhat disconnected ideas due to the way readers take in a magazine like Ken, the impact of that connection becomes greater, more persuasive, when the elements are physically close and are absorbed by the reader almost simultaneously.

My final consideration of Ken’s use of varied elements and strategic placement involves a seven-page stretch in one issue, in which three Spain-related visuals impact the meaning of the two ostensibly unrelated articles that surround them. In the 2 June 1938 issue, an unsigned article titled “Inside the Austrian Collapse” offered a behind-the-scenes look at the February 1938 meeting between Hitler and Austrian Chancellor Kurt Schuschnigg in Berchtesgaden, in which Hitler detailed his demands in preparation for the Anschluss ("Inside" 26-28). The three-page piece is illustrated by three cartoons. The first is a bleak drawing by Corsair showing the ghosts of two World War I soldiers hovering over the
multiple crosses of a battlefield cemetery while Nazi troops march into the foreground (Figure 13); the caption reads “Do you remember what we saved Europe for?” (Cartoon 5 May 27). This is the most obviously relevant of the three cartoons because in Ken the Anschluss represents Hitler’s ongoing plans to conquer Europe and the disturbing probability of another European war. The cartoon introduces the images of war and death and powerfully reinforces the scope of the implications in the article itself, which, while definitely anti-Nazi, remains focused on the Berchtesgaden meeting.

The second cartoon, a brightly-colored drawing by Al Hirschfield titled “Spain, 1938” (Figure 14), is an ostensibly more comic rendering in which cheerful bulls watch men fighting and killing each other in the bullring below them (28). The third illustration, which follows the end of the Austria article on the page facing “Spain, 1938,” is a full-page map of Africa with the caption “The pre-war colonies . . . . which Herr Hitler declares must be returned to the Reich . . . . . . . or else!” (Figure 15). This drawing is packed with comic elements, including a caricatured Hitler’s head as the sun shining over the continent, Ethiopian natives forced to drink castor oil as they absorb “Roman culture,” and the League of Nations depicted as an “ailing lady who feels far too weak to complain” (Yardley 29).

Neither of these two cartoons relates directly to the Austria piece, but they expand its meaning. However comic the Spain cartoon, it introduces the image of violence in Spain, figured specifically as bestial violence. That is, the humor of the cartoon derives from the role reversal, in which the people act like the animals they are traditionally seen to dominate. There is no mention of fascism here, but connected with the Austria article and in the context of Ken, Spain is again linked implicitly with the threatening progress of world fascism—as elsewhere, it becomes a figure of the chaos and violence the fascists have wrought. And of
Figure 13. Cartoon using the memory of the Great War to criticize the spread of fascism across Europe.

Figure 14. Cartoon satirizing the Spanish war.
Figure 15. Comic map of European colonies in Africa. (Artists: Richard and Peggy Yardley)
course, the facing page takes the implications of the Austrian collapse one step further, suggesting that yet another continent may fall under the heels of the fascist boots. In a sense, then, the three cartoons link the Austrian tragedy with a progression from past, to present, to future. The first cartoon reminds the reader of the past wasteful death of the First World War, the second highlights the current inhumanity of the ongoing war in Spain, and the third points to the future conquest of another continent entire.

A visual reference to Spain appears again on the page immediately following the Africa map in a full-page color caricature of General Franco as a wind-up doll being played with by Hitler and Mussolini (Figure 16). The title “El Caudillo the All but Human Doll” is followed by a caption that develops the theme of the cartoon, emphasizing the two dictators’ influence over the general and attributing Franco with “an almost monkey-like skill in simulating the antics of a man.” But a few lines later, the caption corrects itself: “Remembering the butchery in the bullring at Badajoz and the bombing of the innocents at Barcelona, we withdraw the comparison to a monkey, . . . Just because monkeys can’t sue for libel is no excuse for comparing them to Franco” (Berman 30). With its clear imagery and extended caption, this cartoon stands alone as an indictment of Franco as a puppet of the fascist leaders (with jabs at Chamberlain and the Catholic Church thrown in for good measure). Yet it is positioned opposite another article on a mostly unrelated topic, the tenuous rule of Fulgencio Batista in Cuba, titled “The Little Colonel Goes Bye-Bye”. This piece, also unsigned, focuses on the likelihood of a public revolt against Batista, but makes mention of his political leanings toward fascism. The author notes Batista’s recent signing of trade agreements with Germany and Italy, and that he has expressed his support for Franco by suppressing groups sympathetic to the Loyalists. “Batista has definitely aligned himself
Figure 16. Cartoon caricaturing General Franco as a puppet of Hitler and Mussolini. (Artist: Sam Berman)
with fascism,” the author claims, “and it is too late now for him to back down. There is only one answer: he must go” ("Little Colonel" 32). The implications of a pro-fascist dictator so close to home perhaps need little elucidation, but Gingrich uses the visio-graphic lead to emphasize one implication: “Cuba makes a fine base for Italian, German, Japanese attack on South America” ("Little Colonel" 31).

Another cartoon illustrates the second page of the Cuba article with the image of two vultures labeled England and Italy perched on a tree branch above a slain bull (Figure 17); the title “Accord” emphasizes the collusion between the British and Italians that has resulted in the sacrifice of Spain (Page 32). Placed here, next to the section of text describing Batista’s pro-Franco sympathies, the cartoon works within the larger pattern of text and visuals established with the article on Cuba piece and, just before it, the piece on Austria. Though Batista’s actual ties to Germany and Italy are far less established than those of Nationalist Spain, Batista gets equated with Franco the puppet dictator. The author repeatedly calls Batista “the little colonel” on a page facing a little Franco caricatured as the plaything of Hitler and Mussolini ("Little Colonel" 31). And on the following page, the tragedy that Spain represents—the death of a nation as the end result of the collusion of more powerful nations—heightens the intensity of the Franco-Batista connection. And these varied elements work in conjunction with the previous items on Austria, Africa, and Spain to create a remarkable seven-page stretch. That is, we move from Europe to Africa to Cuba in our own backyard—with the image of Spain introduced at several points along the way—to emphasize through words and pictures the simultaneously worldwide and very local threat of fascist expansion.
Figure 17. Cartoon depicting Spain as a slaughtered bull. (Artist: Grover Page)
The Consumer Magazine Context

Such editorial efforts to exploit the possibilities of a mainstream magazine format to shape and make broader use of pro-Loyalist arguments are unique among American periodicals. Widely-read general-interest magazines such as Collier’s, the Saturday Evening Post, and Esquire blended various types of entertainment—fiction, nonfiction, fashion, satire, etc.—and only occasionally dealt with politics and foreign affairs. These magazines, like much of the American press, at times presented articles sympathetic to the Spanish Republic. For example, Collier’s coverage of the war consisted of several articles by Martha Gellhorn, who supported the Republic unequivocally, and whose articles tended to detail the tragic costs of Franco’s brutality among the civilian population of Loyalist Spain. Yet in the context of magazines primarily devoted to entertainment and leisure, even powerful pieces such as these have the feel of human-interest articles rather than aspects of editorially-shaped political statements.

The major newsmagazines were a different story. As Allen Guttmann points out, Time and Newsweek followed a pattern that was quite common for American news sources: they initially favored the Nationalists largely out of fear of the Loyalist “Reds,” but reacted with outrage to Franco’s bombing of civilians, particularly the destruction of Guernica in May 1937, and gradually assumed pro-Loyalist positions (60-61). Time was particularly tenuous in this support. It initially used the terms “Red” and “White” to distinguish the two sides in the war, then switched to “Leftist” and “Rightist,” which they used until December 1938—rather late in the war—when they switched again to the more common terms “Loyalist” and “Rebel” or “Insurgent.” While Leftist and Rightist were not as loaded in favor of the Nationalists as Red and White (Red being a vicious epithet among American
centrists and conservatives for all things radical), they nonetheless represented a choice to equalize the sides rather than suggest the legitimacy of the Loyalist government, which most pro-Loyalists stressed vociferously.38 By the end of the war, though, even Time was directing its ever-present sarcasm toward the Nationalists, and highlighting the fascist threat by emphasizing the extent of Nazi and Italian involvement in Franco’s military campaigns and ultimate victory.

Nonetheless, Time and Newsweek had quite different formats and ostensible purposes than Ken: as devoted newsmagazines, they focused on reporting (albeit “interpretive reporting”) rather than overtly expressing opinions, however much their editorial slants might have accomplished the latter, and their use of visuals were usually limited to small photographs plus an occasional map or cartoon. Thus, they did not make the same kinds of arguments for intervention as, for example, Hemingway did in Ken; they did not strive for the emotional appeal of, say, the Agnes Detro letter; and though Newsweek did often provide a separate interpretation of a news story’s significance, neither of the two magazines had anything quite like Ken’s visio-graphic lead that allowed for editorial shaping.

Life magazine, the publication to which Ken might be compared most usefully, had many of the same format features, including physical size, numerous photographs, and advertisements for middle-class consumer products. Advertising content was heavier in Life—was, do doubt, what Smart and Gingrich wished it could be in Ken—but the magazines sought the same types of products and even carried some of the same ads. Such generous ad content in Life, as Vials and Kozol have pointed out, certainly created a sense of

38 By comparison, Hemingway, admittedly pro-Loyalist even in his NANA dispatches, tended to use the terms Government and Fascist; Herbert L. Matthews of the New York Times, himself pro-Loyalist, tended to use Loyalist and Rebel or Insurgent.
the American middle-class way of life that helped define for the reader what was at stake in whatever political or international issues the magazine covered, as they did in the pages of *Ken*. *Life* did not overtly present itself as a magazine of opinion, but critics have long understood that *Life*’s practice of juxtaposing photograph, caption, text, and advertisement could create arguments that were all the more powerful and compelling because they were based on the supposed factualness of the photograph; thus, shaping of public opinion was a goal for the editors of *Life* as well.\(^{39}\) And while *Life* was not devoted solely to domestic politics and international affairs, both topics found regular attention in its pages.

Unlike *Ken*, however, *Life* was not interested in arguing for the importance of American support for the Spanish Republic, or in connecting Spain to closer and more direct threats to the U.S. Guttmann argues that *Life* followed a pattern similar to that of much of the American mainstream press: it initially inclined toward support of the rebels and expressed discomfort over Soviet influence and the revolutionary aspects of the government, but eventually shifted to a pro-Loyalist policy, largely in response to the excesses of Franco’s bombing campaigns. More recently, Aden Hayes has argued rather that the magazine, while not unequivocally pro-Franco, nonetheless tended to present the Nationalists more favorably than the Loyalists due largely to the perception of greater order and discipline among the Nationalists and, later, to the desire to view Franco as a leader whom the western democracies could deal with practically. While *Life* was suspicious of fascism even in its early days, and occasionally ran photo essays on threatening Nazi bunds in the U.S., by the end of the war, as Hayes points out, the magazine was trying to distance Franco from the

\(^{39}\) There were also notable differences in format. Photographs were more central to *Life* and determined the nature of its content much more than they did in *Ken*, where they were usually segregated into the center photo section. The photo essay was the main format feature of *Life* and had enormous persuasive potential. On the other hand, *Life* did not employ political cartoons as *Ken* did, and those cartoons themselves had considerable persuasive potential.
fascist powers (68-70). Michael G. Carew explains that Life, along with other major newsmagazines, was courted in various ways by the Roosevelt administration to help build public support for its foreign policies, and consequently became increasingly belligerent toward the fascist powers and supportive of American intervention in the period between 1939 and the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. But such anti-fascism was at best in a transitional stage while the Spanish war was underway. Considering these factors, we can view Life’s coverage of Spain as a mixed bag, and not a consistent effort to present the Spanish war as a rallying point for opposition to the advance of international fascism.

On the other hand, influential but small-circulation progressive journals of opinion such as The Nation and the New Republic consistently and unequivocally favored the Spanish Republic, and with such strong interest that they regularly devoted a higher portion of their print space to the Spanish war than did Ken. However, their formats were far more heavily text-driven, with few visuals. They relied largely on subscriptions and/or the support of wealthy benefactors for their survival, and carried a small selection of ads which offered almost no middle-class consumer products, except for books. Many (though not all) of their political views corresponded with those of Ken. Because articles dealing with such issues as America’s immediate security, the Cedillo revolt in Mexico, and Nazi propaganda activities in the U.S., appeared within the same covers as articles about Spain, those pieces would have informed each other and contributed to the two journals’ similar claims about the threat of international fascism. But while The Nation and the New Republic certainly presented many compelling pro-Loyalist and anti-fascist arguments, they had a more limited range of representational possibilities at their disposal. As with any magazine, readers might not have read through a given issue sequentially, and may have skimmed back and forth among

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40 See Gary for a discussion of Life’s presentation of American fascists.
articles. However, with textual items generally presented in full, augmented by few visual elements of any kind, the journals probably did not encourage reading practices that were as fragmented as many consumer magazines. In other words, a reader of the *New Republic* could not have skimmed through an issue reading only the short lead summaries and none of the articles; she could not have flipped to the center after reading an article to view the related pictures; there would be no color drawings and cartoons to catch her eye or cause a laugh or a shiver. Moreover, these journals tended to stress rational discourse and intellectual debate over impact; as journals of opinion, persuasion was often the goal, but the routes to that goal were often more cerebral and less visceral. The format of the *New Masses* was similar to that of *The Nation* and the *New Republic* in size and layout, though with a more generous helping of black-and-white political cartoons and reproductions of leftist artwork. Spain was covered with great frequency and the fascist threat proclaimed regularly, but the journal’s close relationship with the Communist Party and small circulation put it in a different league from *Ken* altogether.

**The Demise of Ken**

In its overall character and approach to domestic issues, *Ken* was not as progressive as its original contributors had hoped it would be, but it was still more liberal, at least, than the other mass market magazines of its day. *Ken* was generally sympathetic to Roosevelt and the New Deal, and showed some concern for labor issues and Americans struggling through the Great Depression. It did not consistently attack capital, but some articles were critical of American business, and it tended to avoid the kind of praise of the leaders of industry that one could find in *Life* and elsewhere. That positioning was enough to keep *Ken* on the bad side of the advertising community, regardless of whatever adjustments had been made during
the development phase. Gingrich attempted to walk the line between the magazine’s generally liberal intentions and its own existence as a consumer publication tied to generally conservative advertisers by casting Ken as both pro-capital and pro-labor. One way he did this was by framing the conflicts between business and labor as unfortunate and destructive to both sides. This approach was occasionally reflected in cartoons, such as one in the first issue titled “The Ultimate Winners” (Figure 18), which depicts labor and capital as men wrestling, while drooling vultures labeled Communism and Fascism look on. Gingrich also tried to express Ken’s support for both capital and labor in an August 25, 1938, editorial, wherein he argues that “Peter the businessman” and “Paul the laborer” both need each other equally, though they both tend to forget the fact. It is this symbiotic relationship that Gingrich emphasizes. “Ken, as a business enterprise,” he writes, “and as a blood brother to both Peter and Paul, feels a keen sense of responsibility to each of them” (“Within” 25 Aug. 4) The piece was almost certainly calculated to appease those businesses that were pulling their ads from Ken, but the awkwardness of this position is almost palpable if we keep in mind the intensity of labor conflicts in the 1930s.

In any case, such efforts were unsuccessful in attracting advertisers back to the magazine. The magazine started with a healthy stack of ads filling fifty-three of the first issue’s 140 pages. But as advertisers became concerned with Ken’s left-of-center positioning, that heavy ad content fell off immediately, dropping to 18.5 pages in the second issue, climbing a little in the third issue but generally declining over the rest of Ken’s run; the final issue carried less than three pages of ads. The advertisers’ resistance was compounded, according to Gingrich, by the effects of the Recession of 1937, which had also caused a massive drop in Esquire’s circulation in the first half of 1938 (Nothing 140-41).
Figure 18. Cartoon reflecting Gingrich’s professed stance of sympathy for both capital and labor.
Moreover, Smart and Gingrich found themselves facing a widespread Catholic boycott in response to two articles in Ken’s third issue. Ken’s pro-Loyalist position on Spain no doubt rankled the Franco supporters among the Church hierarchy, but the specific offending article was “The Cardinal Picks a Winner” which was, in fact, supremely insulting to the Church—whether fairly or unfairly.  

Smart and Gingrich must have anticipated some fallout, but the intensity of the opposition that followed appears to have surprised them. The Church began an extensive boycott and other measures that Gingrich later credited with killing Ken’s circulation and threatening to do the same to Smart’s other publications:

Each week, all over the country, parish priests would not dismiss their flocks without telling them, instead of going straight on home, to stop by their neighborhood drugstore and tell the druggist that they and their family would not buy another thing from him unless and until he took off his sales rack not only any copies of Ken there, but also any copies of either Esquire [sic] or Coronet.  

By midsummer of 1939 there were fifteen hundred cities or towns where, for all practical purposes, the three magazines might just as well have ceased to exist.

(Nothing 148)

Hemingway’s piece was not the only problem with the third issue. Gingrich also ran an article titled “Los Angeles Sporting Girl,” in which a prostitute named Pearl Thompson matter-of-factly discussed the ins and outs of her profession. “The piece itself,” as Gingrich recalls, “was about as titillating as the average article in Nation’s Business or Business Week,” but it was enough to bring protests from various groups charging indecency (Nothing 145). As far as the Catholic Church was concerned, it seems likely that the prostitute article

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41 I discuss both Hemingway’s article and Smart’s and Gingrich’s response to the boycott in more detail in Chapter Two.
was a convenient excuse for launching an anti-

Ken campaign: that was what the Ken staff believed, in any case. Gingrich’s unreliable memoir places the responsibility squarely on the Hemingway piece; Meyer Levin makes the same assessment in his own memoir. “The counter-attack began at once,” he recalls of the response to the 5 May issue. “Undoubtedly it was an action that had been planned for some time; but the Sporting Girl [sic] issue was the perfect invitation for the attack” (126). Levin claims that an immediate move to tone down the magazine’s content “in the hopeful illusion that the sex material was really the source of offense” was to no avail (127). A contemporary account by David Smart offers the same assessment. In a letter dated May 12, 1938, Smart tells Hemingway that “we were barred from the [mail] by the squawk of the Catholics who got to [Postmaster General] Jim Farley. Ordinarily, I’m quite sure they would have been powerless to pick on your piece and especially the photographs accompanying it.” But there was the “Sporting Girl” piece, which “didn’t seem so hot” when they bought it, “but when it hit the newsstands seemed to turn into dynamite” (Letter to Hemingway 12 May [1]). Smart claims that Farley cited complaints about that item in deciding to bar Ken from the mail.

A good picture of the extent of Catholic opposition to Ken is given in a hastily-written letter from Gingrich to Hemingway early on during the Church’s counterattack and before Farley barred the issue from the mail.43 Gingrich reports that he has received a tip that the Catholics are trying to get Ken “tossed out of the mails.” He continues:

42 Smart’s letter actually says “barred from the newsstands” in this instance, but this wording is probably an error. Later in the same paragraph, he refers to the issue hitting the newsstands and to Farley barring Ken from the mail. As Postmaster General, Farley had no power to keep a magazine off the newsstands, as noted in a New York Times article about the incident: “The postal ruling is not applicable to news stand sales, such sales being within the jurisdiction of local authorities” (“Mails” 21).

43 The letter is undated, but must have been written before 4 May 1938, when Farley banned Ken. The date of “mid-June” in the finding aid for the JFK Library’s Hemingway Collection appears to be an erroneous conjecture.
This is all just part of a vast & insidious Campaign they’re waging against us. The pressure is terrific—you don’t realize it’s working on you til you wake up dead.

The Catholics have been working on us in three ways financially—by boycott threats, scaring newsdealers out of handling Esq & Ken they have knocked our circulation in the head—by organized letter & [illegible] campaign they have been scaring advertisers into canceling their ads (Ken has lost virtually all its ads and Esq is down over 50%) and third, believe it or not, they have been knocking our stock down, in face of an upsurring general movement of the market, by getting blocks of it put on sale at less than the lowest bids. (Letter to Hemingway [mid-June] [1-2])

The result of the various pressures from business interests and the Church was that Ken was a commercial failure. Smart attempted in April 1939 to save the magazine by shifting to weekly publication and a smaller format, and by reducing the price to ten cents. But the move was unsuccessful, and the magazine folded in August 1939. While it is impossible to say how successful the magazine would have been in the absence of those conservative pressures, the circulation that it managed to attain at the start of its run was big enough to suggest staying power. The first issue sold about 500,000 copies—a very strong start—and circulation leveled out for a time at 250,000 per issue, which was respectable if not stellar.\(^{44}\) That circulation dwindled over time, but it is reasonable to assume that with good advertising revenue and in the absence of active opposition (and a recession), the magazine might have found a following, as Esquire had done. If, because of its political emphasis, Ken may not have been likely to reach the two million-plus circulation of Life, it might have survived at its quarter-million level or thrived and to achieve higher circulations,

\(^{44}\) Theodore Peterson labels as “promising” the initial 250,000 circulation of Coronet, another Esquire publication that appeared around the same time as Ken (264).
especially if it had been financially secure enough to experiment with content until it found a balance that maximized its readership.\textsuperscript{45}

**Conclusion**

*Ken* cannot be considered a successful enterprise, either in a general commercial sense or in its efforts to significantly shape public opinion regarding the Spanish Civil War and other issues of the day. But examining it closely reveals several important points about how the periodical press functioned in relation to American culture. For one thing, the fragmentations within the American left, a well-noted feature of the 1930s, directly impeded the development of a politically liberal or progressive mass market magazine. The personnel developing *Ken* could not seem to agree on what the magazine should look like and how it should function, and could not agree later on what in fact would constitute a liberal magazine. Moreover, the cultural front proved to not be commercially viable even when presented in a saleable package that included many of the same kinds of features that made for commercial success in other publications. This was apparently due not to a lack of consumer interest, but because conservative forces wielded enough power to, first, affect the format of *Ken* and, ultimately, kill it financially.

These factors come to bear on the relationship between American culture and the Spanish Civil War. The general interest consumer magazine format afforded a range of potentially effective persuasive opportunities through its ability to blend various kinds of textual and visual information. Despite its troubles, *Ken* skillfully made use of the magazine format to produce various arguments about the Spanish Civil War that were unlike those

\textsuperscript{45} *Esquire* had a circulation of 650,000 at the end of 1937, while *Time* was at 780,000 in 1939 (Peterson 264, Vials 74). Both of these were successful publications, and the latter was entirely news-focused. Such numbers do not seem fantastical for *Ken* under the right conditions. But they may not have been necessary in any case: *Fortune* survived, with its niche audience and solid advertising, at 130,000 copies per issue (Vials 74).
appearing in other magazines or other media. Gingrich later admitted that he and Smart had “backed the wrong horse” when they developed Ken, but that may not have been because the idea was flawed. Here was a publication that could have been an influential participant in the antifascist crusade of the American left prior to World War II, as Smart and Gingrich had envisioned. While it is impossible to speculate on how such a magazine, even if successful, might have affected the official relationship of the U.S. to the Spanish war, the story of Ken nonetheless shows that domestic political and commercial forces combined to restrict the free play of American readers’ market choices, and to foreclose the persuasive possibilities that the consumer magazine afforded.
Chapter Two

Hemingway, Gingrich, and Ken: “Militant Pacifism” and the Limits of Masculine Rhetoric

Shortly after the initial discussions in March 1937 in which Ken as a publishing venture was proposed, Arnold Gingrich called Hemingway in Spain to secure his involvement. There is no indication that Hemingway hesitated at this early stage to offer his talents to the proposed left-leaning, mass-circulation, antifascist magazine. That Hemingway was brought on board early is not surprising. Not only was he an enormously popular American writer; he had also long been associated with Ken’s parent publication, Esquire. His “letters” on sporting and travel and other topics printed in that magazine had done much to shape his larger-than-life persona for American readers. Considering also Hemingway’s well-known support for the Spanish Republic, it is almost inconceivable that Smart and Gingrich would not want to have the Hemingway name on their list of contributors for what promised to be a major publishing event. Despite some disagreements about his role in the magazine and level of identification with its political stance, Hemingway contributed for the better part of Ken’s first year in print, lending his celebrity cachet to the magazine’s efforts toward commercial success and cultural relevance.

As it turned out, Hemingway proved to be important both to Ken’s self-presentation and to its demise. In this chapter, I examine Hemingway’s contributions to Ken in detail to show how those writings—and Hemingway’s literary celebrity—contributed to the magazine’s commercial and rhetorical project in important ways. In Ken, I argue, Arnold Gingrich attempted to craft a strongly masculine ethos through a paradoxically war-centered and violent antiwar stance as a way of claiming ownership over the truth regarding political
issues such as the Spanish war. Gingrich employed Hemingway’s hypermasculine public persona in this project of truth-shaping. Hemingway’s contributions, though uneven in quality, represent a sometimes successful attempt in turn to use the magazine’s unique format to craft powerful arguments about the war. But at the same time, Hemingway failed to accomplish in some of his contributions what Ken explicitly set out to do: present the inside story. And the tough-guy stance of Gingrich and Smart revealed itself to be mere performance as they attempted to conciliate the forces opposing them from within and without the publishing industry. Thus, we can view the masculine stance of authority performed in Ken as an inappropriate approach to the political complexities of the Spanish Civil War, and the contradictory purposes of truth-telling and unqualified support for the Spanish Republic that the magazine espoused.

**Hemingway and Ken**

Hemingway’s relationship with David Smart and Arnold Gingrich began with the initial publication of *Esquire* in 1933. Gingrich had been corresponding with Hemingway about book collecting, and secured him for *Esquire*’s debut with a deal to pay him twice what other contributors were paid. Over the next several years, Hemingway regularly submitted to the magazine his “letters,” nonfiction essays on sporting, travel, and occasionally politics; *Esquire* also ran several short stories including, most famously, “The Snows of Kilimanjaro” in 1936. Hemingway’s presentation in *Esquire*, as embodied especially in the boisterously masculine letters, would largely define his public persona during the mid-1930s, for better or worse. For many of Hemingway’s admirers and critics alike, both at the time and up to the present, the *Esquire* nonfiction was one prominent example of his shift away from serious art to the cultivation of his public persona through the writing of self-promoting light journalism,
with correspondingly disappointing consequences for his art.

By many accounts, the war in Spain would have a rejuvenating effect on Hemingway, both because of the level of emotional commitment it inspired, and the fact that it would lead him to write that flawed masterpiece, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. When the war broke out, however, he was finishing *To Have and Have Not*, and though he was itching to get to Spain in the fall of 1936,¹ he did not arrive there until March 1937, under contract from the North American Newspaper Alliance (NANA), a news syndicate. He was simultaneously working on the pro-Loyalist film *The Spanish Earth*, a project that also involved such literary heavy-hitters as John Dos Passos, Lillian Hellman, and Archibald MacLeish.² Hemingway returned to the U.S. in mid-May, but he would make three additional trips to Spain during the war: from August to December 1937, from April to May 1938, and during November 1938.

Meanwhile Smart and Gingrich, along with former Chicago Tribune reporter Jay Allen, apparently began planning *Ken* in March of 1937. According to his recollection in a 1965 letter to a reader, Gingrich first discussed *Ken* with Hemingway by telephone while the latter was in Spain (Letter to Sister 3). Hemingway had departed the U.S. in late February; he returned in mid-May, stopping first in New York. He probably also met with Gingrich and possibly Smart either during that first stopover in New York, or during a second trip to the city in June.³

What level of involvement Hemingway initially contracted for is slightly unclear. He was to contribute articles regularly, for which he would be paid $100 per week. He would ultimately write fourteen, all but the last published during 1938. He also agreed to work as

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¹ See his letter to Maxwell Perkins, December 15, 1936 (Hemingway Letters 455-56).
² The film project was secretly organized and funded by the Comintern; Stephen Koch discusses the connection to the Soviet propaganda machine at length in *Double Lives* and *The Breaking Point*.
³ A 1938 cable from Gingrich refers to a discussion about *Ken* occurring the previous June (Cable to Hemingway 10 Jan. [2]).
an editor, though he may not have been asked to do so initially. Ken’s publicity materials during its development period listed an editorial staff of several prominent writers and artists, including (at various times) Jay Allen, George Seldes, and Raymond Gram Swing; Hemingway was added to this list at some point, probably during the summer of 1937. Gingrich claimed, both in his memoir and in correspondence, that he and Smart had not intended for Hemingway to be an editor, but that Hemingway had asked to be one when he saw all the other writers who were being publicized as such: “he wanted to know why the hell he couldn’t be an editor too” (Nothing 145).

Many of the early contributors removed themselves from Ken just before or shortly after its first issue due to their objection to anti-communist content. Hemingway was likewise swayed by the supposed “red baiting” content, of which he began to hear complaints as Ken approached its long-delayed launch, and by January 1938 he apparently began to rethink his relationship to the magazine. With the Spanish war raging, Hemingway feared, like many pro-Loyalists, that attacks on the Communists would undermine anti-fascist unity and consequently the Republican cause. Gingrich went to great lengths in correspondence to smooth over matters with Hemingway, trying in particular to convince Hemingway that Ken as it would appear in April was not a watered-down version, but essentially the realization of what he and Smart had originally envisioned.

How convinced Hemingway was by Gingrich’s efforts at persuasion is unclear, but he decided to continue writing for Ken. However, he asked to be removed from the list of

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4 A 1938 letter from David Smart indicates their agreement about Hemingway’s editorial position from the previous summer (Letter to Hemingway 10 Mar. 1).
5 In a 1965 letter to a reader, Gingrich characterized the request in a slightly different way, saying that when he saw the list, “he was quite hurt that I hadn’t made him an editor, so I promptly did” (Letter to Sister 3). In yet another letter, to Robert O. Stephens in 1966, Gingrich recalls Hemingway “was miffed because I hadn’t made him an editor, so I made him one” (Letter to Stephens).
editors and insisted on having a statement printed in the first issue to clarify his independence from Ken’s editorial stance. The statement, which Hemingway cabled to Gingrich on 26 February 1938, appeared as follows in a box accompanying “The Time Now, the Place Spain” in Ken’s first issue:

Ernest Hemingway has been in Spain since KEN was first projected. Although contracted and announced as an editor he has taken no part in the editing of the magazine nor in the formation of its policies. If he sees eye to eye with us on KEN we would like to have him as an editor. If not, he will remain as a contributor until he is fired or quits. ("Time" 37).

In correspondence with Hemingway, Gingrich said he thought the idea of the author distancing himself from the magazine in print was a “swell” idea (Cable to Hemingway 5 Feb [1]). But years later, in 1965, he recalled the affair with some bitterness: he wrote to a reader that Hemingway “made me run a weaseling note of explanation with his first article in Ken, quite unfairly, too, because he had been listed as editor only as his own request, something that would not have been at all easy to deduce from the rather harsh tone of the disclaimer he exacted from me” (Letter to Sister 3).

The remainder of Hemingway’s association with Ken was apparently less dramatic, aside from an occasional worried-sounding cable from Gingrich as a deadline neared. Hemingway sent in an article for each of the first thirteen issues of Ken. In a useful chronology of Hemingway’s life and works, Gerald B. Nelson and Glory Jones claim that all of Hemingway’s Ken pieces had been written by June 1938, though they continued to be published into September, with one final piece appearing in January 1939 (113).6

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6 Carlos Baker supports this timeline in general, though Nelson and Jones may be incorrect about the final article, “The Next Outbreak of Peace,” published in the January 12, 1939, number. Hemingway mailed that to
Hemingway may have cited his intention to work on a new novel (For Whom the Bell Tolls) as a reason for ceasing his regular contributions to Ken: in a cable on 29 June 1938, Gingrich writes, “THINK NOVEL BEST IF YOU CAN AFFORD TO WORK ON IT” (Cable to Hemingway 29 June). Gingrich and Smart both regularly praised Hemingway’s contributions, and there do not appear to have been any residual hard feelings over the initial disagreements about Ken. And though his relationship with Ken may have lasted only a few months, he played, as it turns out, an important role in the magazine, for both good and ill.

**Masculinity and Violent Spectacle**

Hemingway and the Editorial Stance of Ken

Ken was simultaneously a commercial venture and an effort to present liberal political arguments to a wide middle-class readership. In order to establish the magazine as a forum for the kinds of arguments he wanted to promote, especially where issues like the Spanish Civil War were concerned, Arnold Gingrich shaped an editorial stance that would seek to persuade—would, in essence, lay claim to the truth—through the use of a self-consciously masculine tone of authority. That tone would be reinforced by the interweaving of textual and graphic elements to create a dramatic presentation, a kind of violent spectacle, designed to shock the reader into understanding the dangers of world fascism.

The self-consciously masculine stance of Ken is formulated overtly in Gingrich’s pre-publication subscription brochure, in which he presents the magazine’s “insider” role in terms of a journey into uncharted territory. The brochure offers a two-page overview of the magazine’s purpose, followed by several pages devoted to its proposed “editors,” complete with pencil drawings of each editor. These include Hemingway, George Seldes, Paul de...
Kruif, John Spivak, Raymond Gram Swing, and several others. There is a showy, salesman’s flair in the exuberant tone heralding Ken’s impending arrival, and in the simple fact that the many editors never really acted as editors. For the most part, they were just contributors, and most of them (probably unbeknownst to Gingrich at the time of writing) would leave the staff before or shortly after Ken hit newsstands. Most striking, though, is how Gingrich casts the purpose of the magazine in terms of heroic, traditionally masculine virtues, and in particular how he uses Hemingway’s well-known overtly masculine public persona to express the character of the magazine, in addition to the more obvious purpose of generating reader excitement.

In the two-page overview, Gingrich establishes from the first that Ken will push into the “Great Inside,” the uncharted territory on “the map of American journalism” (Ken [1]). Presenting the idea, reflected in Ken’s subtitle, of the magazine offering the inside story on world affairs is of course a move to establish a sense of authority over such matters. As political affairs in particular can so often give rise to wild, unsupported or uniformed opinion, such a rhetorical move attempts to add automatic validity to the magazine’s content. The insider stance in a simple way exploits one trope of masculinity: Peter Schwenger, discussing aspects of masculine literary style in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, notes that “[o]f course, authority is the traditional prerogative of the male” (6). But Gingrich goes further in making use of masculine tropes by casting Ken’s metaphorical journey as a dangerous one requiring courage and fearlessness—also traditionally masculine traits. In America, he writes, the way into the Great Inside is “open to anyone with the courage to take it.” Ken will have “the courage to chart its course right down into the middle of that great Sargasso Sea of unpublished newsprint” where resides “the part that couldn’t be told” (Ken [2]).
Unlike other magazines, helmed by editors shackled to special interests or their own narrow-minded prejudices, Ken will not fail to tell what formerly could not be told, nor will it bow down to pressure from those who fear the truths it dares to uncover: “From whatever Denmark there arises the aroma of something rotten, KEN will not hesitate to peer and pry and proclaim” (Ken [2]). And Gingrich adapts as Ken’s motto, which would later appear on the magazine’s masthead that of famed American journalist and editor Charles Anderson Dana, “What the good Lord lets happen, I am not ashamed to print” (Ken [2]). Significantly, Gingrich silently emends “ashamed” to “afraid,” injecting a clearer note of fearlessness into the motto. Surely, Gingrich’s rhetoric is overdone throughout this near-manifesto, but the unabashed bombast reads like tough-guy bragging and reinforces the engagement with tropes of traditional masculinity.

The next two pages of the brochure further develop the self-consciously masculine stance by appropriating the public persona of Ernest Hemingway. He is, not surprisingly, the first of the would-be editors to be discussed. A pencil drawing of Hemingway, beefy-looking, with narrowed eyes and prominent forehead scar, peers out from the left-hand page of the open booklet, while explanatory text fills the right-hand page. The sales value of face recognition is an obvious aspect of this presentation—it is particularly high where Hemingway is concerned. As John Raeburn has noted, Hemingway had begun by 1930 to cultivate his public persona so consciously that he eventually became as famous and recognizable as movie stars and prominent politicians. But the drawing and biographical description of Hemingway, beyond merely name- and face-dropping, also ties in to the nature of Ken itself, as Gingrich states explicitly: “One means of approach . . . to an understanding of the concept of KEN is by way of introducing its editors” (Ken [4]). Recounting
Hemingway’s service in the First World War, Gingrich casts his well-known anti-war sentiments, famously expressed in *A Farewell to Arms*, in terms of a new active opposition to war and fascism born out of his involvement in the Spanish Civil War. Along the way, Gingrich evokes images of Hemingway’s legendary masculinity as a way of characterizing Ken’s anti-war position as tough and manly.

According to Raeburn, though Hemingway’s literary status had been secured among intellectuals in the late 1920s, by the mid-1930s he was largely thought of among the larger American public in terms of the intensely masculine persona he had worked to cultivate in much of his non-fictional writing, such as the *Esquire* letters, and in his interactions with the popular press. Loren Glass highlights the pervasiveness of that persona by noting that Hemingway’s “worldwide public image as ‘Papa,’ the indestructible U.S. sportsman and aficionado, became a veritable paradigm of masculinity in the American cultural imaginary” (139). “The public Hemingway, as developed in the 1930s, was rugged, virile, and self-confident,” Raeburn writes; “He seemed to be in absolute control of himself, capable of the appropriate response in any situation” (35). Raeburn lays out nine specific roles Hemingway crafts for himself in his nonfiction writing. These include the role of the sportsman, evidenced in the interest in bullfight, deep-sea fishing, and big-game hunting; of “the manly man, tough and virile,” through which Hemingway flaunted “his hard-boiled view of life and death” and displayed “perhaps an inordinate fascination with courage” (39); of the “stoic and battle-scarred veteran” who had seen firsthand the violence and death of war (42); and, as Robert O. Stephens also points out, of the insider or expert, which includes being the possessor of behind-the-scenes information (Stephens 43-61). That Hemingway cultivated a public persona around these types of roles has become a commonplace in Hemingway
criticism. It is striking, though, how well the Hemingway persona fits with Ken as envisioned by Gingrich, and how well Gingrich exploits that persona to both define and promote the magazine.

In his biographical description of Hemingway in the Ken subscription brochure, Gingrich overtly makes use of these roles Hemingway cultivated. In mentioning Hemingway’s “exploits of individual courage in his life as a sportsman” (Ken [4]), for example, Gingrich highlights the related roles of sportsman and manly man. He similarly references the roles of manly man and battle-scarred veteran by discussing Hemingway’s participation in the First World War and recent reporting on “the Spanish front,” in which Hemingway has “devoted the greater part of the past year to the renewal of his first-hand knowledge of war” (Ken [4]).

Most interesting, though, is the way Gingrich uses the Hemingway image to root Ken’s antiwar position in traditional tropes of masculinity. He begins by pointing to the “legendary fame” that Hemingway attained following the publication of A Farewell to Arms in 1929, a book widely known for its anti-war sentiments. He characterizes Hemingway as “a violent opponent to war,” a nearly oxymoronic formulation that begins to set up Ken’s position. With his public support for the Spanish Republic, Gingrich continues, Hemingway “has been enrolled in the active forces combating militarism and dictatorship” (Ken [4]). The use of the term “active” in describing Hemingway’s opposition to fascism is as important here as the “violent” opposition he offers to war. The formulation is quickly developed further: “As far back as two years ago, Hemingway foresaw the necessity of a virile and militant pacifism, as opposed to a passive and hand-wringing deploiring of the horrors of approaching war” (Ken [4], emphasis added). Hemingway stands for an active,
masculine pacifism that does things, makes things happen, not one that merely watches and worries; it mirrors the active purpose of the magazine that Gingrich explained in private correspondence—to exert real influence rather than merely discuss for the benefit of like-thinking readers. Quoting Hemingway’s assertion from an earlier Esquire letter that “the only way to combat the murder that is war is to show the dirty combinations that make it,” Gingrich explicitly reconnects Hemingway’s militant pacifism and masculine values with the editorial intentions of Ken:

Implicit in [the quotation from Hemingway’s Esquire letter] is a publishing policy that calls for high courage. It is obviously an insider’s job. And it is obviously no job for pussyfooters. To show up the dirty combinations that lead to the making of wars may involve the uncovering of dirt in high places. The scent may lead into the habitats of sacred cows, into regions where hosts of editorial angels have long feared to tread.

It calls, in a word, for guts. Hemingway’s got ’em, as everybody knows. He will give them to KEN. (Ken [4])

The tough guy, the insider—Hemingway already personifies what Ken as a magazine hopes to be. The masculine value of “high courage” is here clearly set against the feminized, derogatory image of “pussyfooters,” a characterization that is implicitly applied to the unnamed other magazines in the market that have failed to offer the inside scoop. The wording of the last paragraph shifts from the complex, multi-clause sentences that precede it into a terse style of concise sentences that imitates the speech of some imagined tough guy (with the abbreviated “’em” and the vernacular substitution of “guts” for courage), and perhaps even tries to briefly mimic Hemingway’s characteristic writing style itself.
Gingrich’s conception of an active, virile, militant anti-war editorial stance apparently called for more than the type of rational (if polemical) discussion that filled liberal journals such as The Nation and the New Republic, and Ken’s mass-magazine format would indeed allow for something different. Ken would be a big magazine initially, roughly the size of Life. Its very size, coupled with full-color cover art, many full- and half-page photographs, and many full-color drawings and cartoons, created a visual spectacle upon first glance, as did the more prominent photomagazines Life and Look. But to cultivate a “violent” opposition to war moreover involved for Gingrich the employment, especially in the magazine’s early issues, of a violent and militaristic spectacle designed to counteract the violence and militarism of international fascism. Gingrich’s correspondence with Hemingway prior to Ken’s initial publication shows that such a formulation was fully conscious and intentional. In one cable, Gingrich defines the magazine as “CALCULATED MAKE WIDE CIRCLE ORDINARY AMERICAN CITIZENS REALIZE IMMINENT AND ACTUAL DANGER FASCISM. BY DRAMATIC PRESENTATION AND EXPOSURE BACKSTAGE FINEIGLING” (Cable to Hemingway 30 Jan.). In another cable, he makes clear that the “dramatic presentation” may involve representations of violence as persuasive tools: defining the magazine here as a “BIG LEAGUE POPULARIZATION OF MILITANT ANTIFASCISM,” he says it “WARRANTS MOST VIOLENT INSIDE MATERIAL YOU POSSESS PROJECTING NECESSITY ACTION INSTEAD WORDS” (Cable to Hemingway 10 Jan. (2)). Elsewhere Gingrich goes into greater detail about the kind of writing he wants from Hemingway:

HAVE URGENT EXTREME NEED STONG EDITORIAL GIVING VIVID PROJECTION TO AVERAGE AMERICAN READER WHAT FASCISM WILL
MEAN IF ALLOWED TO DEVELOPE [sic] OVER HERE SHOULD BE STRONGEST LIKE PASSAGE PREDICTING WAR EXPERIENCE AVERAGE MAN IN NOTES ON NEXT WAR \(^7\) AND LIKE YOUR SPEECH WRITERS CONGRESS LAST JUNE STRESSING NEED UNITED ACTION EVERY FREEDOM LOVING ELEMENT CHERISH AND SAFEGUARD EVERY BULWARK DEMOCRACY ALSO GRAPHIC EXAMPLE HOW INSIDIOUS BEGINNINGS FASCISM ARE . . . WONDERFUL OPPORTUNITY WAR THEM OUT THEIR APATHY SHOCK THEM OUT THEIR COMPLACENCY SO PURGE THEM DO PURGE THEM IN CLASSIC ARISTOTELIAN MANNER THROUGH PITY AND FEAR . . . (Cable to Hemingway 10 Jan. (2))

The thick cablese is difficult to read in places, but the message is clear: Gingrich wants pathos-heavy rhetoric that will strongly impact the reader. Of course, a dramatic presentation and the use of emotionally-charged rhetoric in itself would seem to lean away from a conventionally masculine mode. That is, early twentieth-century conceptions of masculinity tended to emphasize emotional restraint, so a masculine mode should emphasize the rational over the emotional in persuasive forms. But on the other hand, engagement with the violence of war and violent death in general had traditionally been perceived as residing within the purview of the male. Gingrich’s cables and the content of the magazine once it hit newsstands indicate an intention to highlight the dramatic aspects generally associated with the masculine realm of war: violence, death, and militarism. The language in the third cable quoted above is telling: the phrase “war them out their apathy” may include a transcription error (does he mean “warn them”?), but as it stands its use of “war” as a verb is particularly

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\(^7\) Gingrich is referring to Hemingway’s “Notes on the Next War: A Serious Topical Letter” in the September 1935 *Esquire*. 

appropriate to the way Gingrich initially wants the magazine to function, that is, to use a
certain quotient of violence depicted and implied to further its masculinized antiwar stance.

**Militant Pacifism in Print**

When it finally went to press, *Ken* framed its opposition to war within a mode of
presentation that seemed obsessed with the idea of war itself, and which likewise seemed to
revel in the presentation of violence. While there were many articles and visuals that dealt
with neither war, violence, nor death, a striking amount of the content of the first several
issues was devoted to past wars, present wars, impending war, potential violent revolts,
spying by the enemies of possible future wars, military technology, torture, and, in general,
death as represented in text about wars and in visuals that depict bodies, graveyards, and
death’s heads.

A strain of militarism ran through the early issues of *Ken*, suggesting that a
masculinized pacifism involves an awareness of and interest in the instruments of war, even
if it is hoped that their use is to be avoided. Several articles were concerned with military
technology, mostly in terms of the likelihood of a major war in Europe. One example of this
type of article appeared in *Ken*’s first issue: “Something New in Death” describes a new type
of attack speedboat supposedly under development in several nations friendly and unfriendly.
Gingrich’s lead summary announces, “Gay regattas are grim proving grounds for the
deadliest new instrument of organized disaster, the torpedo-bearing speedboat. Mines and
machine guns can’t stop it, big guns can’t hit it, and at eighty miles an hour the pilot hasn’t
time to say his prayers” (Knapp 130). This dramatic, or melodramatic, tone continues
throughout the article as the author, Dillard Knapp, describes the speedboat in action in a
hypothetical attack on a troop-carrying convoy ship. “The boat streaks through the night at
sixty miles an hour,” Knapp writes, “requiring a draft of only about one inch, so mines mean nothing. As it approaches the convoy, it is discovered, but what of it? Too late!” The speedboat pilot pulls in close to its target, Knapp reports, and lets loose its explosive payload: “A deafening blast! One convoy and 2,000 soldiers less!” (131). Later, in describing this type of speedboat’s potential use as a suicide weapon by the Chinese against Japanese ships, Knapp intensifies the drama and violence of his piece with gruesome detail. The Chinese pilot approaches his target, his torpedo fastened to the nose of his boat, speeding through ineffectual defensive fire:

[T]he Chinaman has only a matter of seconds to live, anyway, so he may just as well rise up in full view, thumb his nose at the enemy, and shout: “A pleasant trip to Hell for all of us, gentlemen! A few seconds later his torso hurtles through the air in one direction, his head in another, a frozen smile of triumph molded on a dead face. (131)

The stylized description of the Chinese boat pilot blown to pieces is tame in comparison to some of the other violent visual and textual imagery that appears in Ken, but the article is indicative of the magazine’s brand of militant pacifism. The piece is designed to promote concern over the international military buildup that indicates a coming catastrophic conflict: it ends with indications that the U.S. government, in addition to those of Italy, Germany, China, and France, is developing such speedboats, and that these boats “stand, motors idling,” awaiting the next great war (131). At the same time, the exuberance and drama of the presentation seems calculated to appeal to the male reader’s perceived interest in the excitement of war, operating similarly to, say, a war film.8

Occasionally the magazine ran articles that examined violent situations in great and

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8 For other examples of this type of military tech article, see Hickock, “Blindman’s Buff With Bullets”; “Underhanded Underground Japan”; “Hooded Treason in France”; Thane, “Thousand Mile Gun”; and Porter, “The Army’s Closest Secret.”
disturbing detail. “Memoranda for a Dictator,” an article describing modern torture methods in an unnamed Spanish-speaking country (actually Venezuela), opens with the following memorable paragraph:

The first man was dead after 200 blows but his sentence was a thousand and he got them all. After 50 his back was clean of flesh from the neck down, the clavicles, the scapula, the spine and ribs and hip bones showing white through the blobs of red jelly. The shreds that flew from the swinging club spattered about the concrete floor till it was slimy. (Rourke 93)

The author, Thomas Rourke, goes on to explain in graphic detail other types of barbaric torture, including a technique called the cuelga, which involved hanging the male victim from the testicles or the female victim by a meat hook through the breasts. In a similar vein of sickeningly specific description, “The Sack of Nanking” offered an account of one of the worst mass atrocities of the century: the 1937 rape and murder of hundreds of thousands of Chinese civilians and POWs by conquering Japanese forces. The visio-graphic lead virtually screams its opening lines: “Fifty-thousand blood-crazed beasts in Japanese uniform roamed China’s fallen capital for four weeks in a mad saturnalia of butchery, rape and pillage without parallel in modern history” (Maloney 12). The lead sets up the piece as an eyewitness account from an American observer, and closes with the image of “roped bundles of humanity saturated with gasoline and ignited for a Nipponese holiday” (Maloney 12). The article itself spares little in telling the horrific details of the Japanese massacre.9

More common than such disturbing articles, though, were photographs and drawings that presented violence and death, particularly war-related violence and death, in stark

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9 Sadly, the article’s descriptions were not in the least exaggerated; the horrors of the Nanking massacre are almost impossible to overstate.
terms. An article by Meyer Levin about Arab terrorism against Jews in Palestine is accompanied by a close-up photograph of a dead man’s face, with a bloody gaping hole in the skull where one eye used to be (Figure 19). A photo page in another issue, illustrating an article about the lack of gentlemanly honor in modern warfare, indicates the power of juxtaposition: a picture of an unidentifiable machine gunner firing his weapon is placed directly above a close up of two girls, crouched as if terrified with heads in hands (Figure 20). The caption reads “Cause and Effect.” Given their rather vague relationship to the article itself, these two photos are almost certainly unrelated to each other in origin, but become a visual argument when placed together and captioned to represent the tragedy of innocent civilians targeted in war.

Figure 19. Photograph of a dead man shot through the face, an apparent Jewish victim of Arab violence.

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10 I will discuss Hemingway’s photographs of dead soldiers and bombed children below.
Figure 20. Disconnected images of violence juxtaposed for visual impact.
At least as prominent as the photographs, and perhaps more so, were the cartoons that sometimes illustrated articles directly, but often presented self-contained arguments that reinforced prevailing anti-fascist themes. Many of these were purely comic, such as the prominent full-page and two-page caricatures of world leaders drawn by Derso and Kelen. Others straddled the line between the funny and the serious, such as a black-and-white drawing by William Sharp that depicts a paunchy Nazi executioner; the soldier gives the raised-arm salute, while a freshly severed head lay on the ground next to his ax (Figure 21). The humor comes from the goofiness of the Nazi drone and the adjacent poem by British humorist Sagittarius, while the seriousness derives from the expression of wide-eyed shock on the face of the disembodied head and the pool of blood in which the soldier stands (Sharp).

Many drawings went in for bleak irony. A drawing captioned “Victory” (Figure 22) depicts Spain as a woman tied to a giant fasces\textsuperscript{11} and stabbed through the heart, a bleak landscape with leafless tree and gutted house in the background (Carter). Another drawing (Figure 23) shows a man impaled and held aloft on several Japanese soldiers’ bayonets before a sign reading “PROTEST against slaughter of noncombatants” (Ellis). In a less realistic but similarly disturbing vein is “The Final Purge” (Figure 24), in which a monstrous Hun soldier labeled “War,” holding a blood-drenched sword, wades waist-deep in a pool of blood labeled “Civilization” (Essy). One of the visual highlights of the first issue is a pair of paintings by German expatriate artist and regular Esquire contributor George Grosz titled “April Showers Bring May Flowers” (Figure 25). Here the showers are the brightly-colored blossoms of explosions from an aerial bombardment, and the flowers are the grave crosses

\textsuperscript{11} The fasces is the Roman power symbol from which the word fascism is derived.
Figure 21. Cartoon blending comic and violent elements. (Artist: William Sharp)
Figure 22. Drawing representing Spain as an executed woman. (Artist: Whitford Carter)

Figure 23. Drawing of a war protester impaled by Japanese soldiers’ bayonets. (Artist: Fred Ellis)
Figure 24. Cartoon figuring War as a monster rising from a pool of blood. (Artist: E. Essy)
Figure 25. Pair of drawings emphasizing the fires of battle and the resulting graveyard. (Artist: George Grosz)
that fill a field, stretching endlessly in the distance (Grosz).\textsuperscript{12}

The violence in these articles and images is not presented randomly or without purpose: they are linked through Ken’s persistent anti-fascist argument. The torture article, as I have discussed elsewhere, actually describes practices common under an already-dead Venezuelan dictator, but the article is shaped to suggest a similar penchant for inhuman violence in the characters of Hitler, Mussolini, and Franco. Likewise, the utter barbarity of the Japanese regime (as Ken would have it) which is implied in the Nanking article reinforces the magazine’s frequent articles and images warning of the direct military threat of Japan. And most of the images of death and warfare are clearly framed to convince the reader of the danger of war and consequent violent death if fascist expansion goes unchecked. So it would be unfair to cast these as items of gratuitous sensationalism. However, the seeming ubiquity of such violent displays in the early issues of Ken suggests a fetishistic quality to the violence, warfare, and militarism, a near-obsession with the very thing the magazine opposes. Even as the magazine makes clear its revulsion to war and its attendant inhumanities, there functions in its pages a simultaneous attraction to the things of war that implies their value in both marketing to and persuading the male magazine reader.

Perhaps no single page illustrates this revulsion/attraction dynamic than a simple but striking full-page advertisement for Ken (Figure 28), no doubt placed to fill ad space that could not be sold. Enormous bold, all-caps text proclaims “\textbf{IF BABY-KILLING}” over a paragraph that continues in smaller type, “strikes you as a fine idea, or if you believe that personal liberty is just a phrase, then KEN is not for you” (Ken Magazine Ad); the ad then continues with a pitch for the reader to subscribe. The ad virtually slaps the reader in the face with a horrific idea, blatantly exploiting its pathetic quality, then uses it to argue its opposite—all as

\textsuperscript{12} See Figures 26 and 27 for other cartoons that use the graveyard motif.
Figure 26. Drawing of a young soldier standing knee-deep in a grave.

Figure 27. Drawing of a mourning mother in a graveyard.
IF BABY-KILLING

strikes you as a fine idea, or if you believe that personal liberty is just a phrase, then KEN is not for you. But if you feel that civilization is long overdue for a comeback, you will think twice before you shrug aside the responsibility of allying yourself with the force for human decency that KEN, in the name of common sense, now is and will be.
a means of selling the magazine itself.

These are the key elements of the magazine context in which Hemingway’s articles appeared. Before considering those articles in detail, I will examine the larger cultural context within which Ken as an enterprise sought to function.

American Masculinity and the Hegemony of Vision

There are a number of reasons why it might have seemed appropriate or necessary to David Smart and Arnold Gingrich to cast Ken’s brand of pacifism in a self-consciously masculine light. On one level, they were simply targeting the primarily male audience they had already been addressing for years with Esquire, which from the first had explicitly presented itself as a magazine for men. Esquire had grown out of Apparel Arts, an earlier trade quarterly for men’s fashions; Smart and Gingrich had added to fashion-related articles and advertisements the magazine’s now-famed literary content—fiction and nonfiction contributions by popular authors of the day—as a way of expanding its appeal to middle-class men (Merrill 31-32). So for Esquire, the decision to craft an overtly masculine ethos, to have the magazine “take on an easy natural masculine character—to endow it, as it were, with a baritone voice” (Untitled Editorial 4), followed naturally from the desire to sell advertising to that specific audience. But in doing so, Smart and Gingrich were offering up a version of masculinity to an American middle-class culture for which the very concept of masculinity had become destabilized.

Masculinity, it must be noted, can not be assumed a static or monolithic concept, no more in the 1930s than today. Gender critics have well established the distinction between sexual difference, which is biologically determined, and gender identity, which is now commonly viewed as socially and culturally determined. Following one illuminating thread
regarding the social construction of gender, Thomas Strychacz in *Hemingway’s Theaters of Masculinity* has explored in detail the ways in which Hemingway’s work emphasizes the rhetorical nature of masculinity—the idea that masculinity, rather than being a reflection of stable, transhistorical codes, is generated through acts of performance staged before various audiences. He argues that

Hemingway’s constant urge toward self-dramatization can be taken as an important and powerful trope for the way his male protagonists emerge into manhood before an evaluating audience. Hemingway’s male characters are constituted as men through their public relationship with an audience rather than through achieving autonomy; and by performance rather than by a process of internal transformation. (8)

In his chapter on *Death in the Afternoon*, Strychacz explores the relationship of this view of masculinity to Hemingway’s articulation of his own supposedly masculine aesthetic in his first bullfighting book. Strychacz explains that *Afternoon* “relates the bullfighter’s performance to the writer’s work in ways that seem to afford the writer a particularly courageous and manly role,” and that Hemingway consequently “directs our attention to his own crafting of the ‘real thing,’ with its emphasis on truth, purity, and actual experience” (125-26). But to Strychacz this articulation of the ‘real thing’—“in short, everything that is usually taken as a straightforward description of his aesthetic and as a heartfelt guide to full manhood—must be read as profoundly rhetorical. Meanings in *Afternoon* are a series of possibilities staged in full recognition of their effect as arguments on an audience” (126). In a statement that points to his book’s overarching thesis, Strychacz claims that the bullfight’s “articulation of manhood-as-performance . . . leads to a critique of the very codes of masculinity it has always been held to exemplify” (149). I will return to Strychacz’s work
later, but here I want to apply his ideas to the representations of masculinity employed in *Esquire* and *Ken*. Strychacz’s postulation that masculinity comes into being through performance is particularly useful to my discussion because Gingrich is essentially performing masculinity through his editorial shaping of these magazines for the purposes of making money (selling advertising in *Esquire* and *Ken*) and of shaping readers’ political views (in *Ken*). Gender performance then becomes a function of both marketing and political persuasion.

If the presentation of masculinity can be seen as rhetorical, it is therefore dependent on cultural context, and the context of the 1930s was one in which codes of manliness were being challenged on multiple fronts. The rugged, tough-guy ideal of manliness that had seen its apotheosis in the strenuous life of Theodore Roosevelt in the first decade of the twentieth century had given way to feelings of uncertainty among many American men after the First World War. As Michael S. Kimmel observes, the war had ostensibly given young American men the chance to regain a sense of manhood that many had seen as threatened by the feminizing influences of overcivilization. But the reality of the war, its unanticipated horrors, meant that “military glory had proven elusive to the typical G. I. Joe, and cases of ‘paralysis, convulsions, paraplegias, tics and tremors of the battle-weary (and battle-shy) soldiers’ flooded the psychiatric literature after the war” (127). While there was an optimism about the country’s success in the 1920s, that optimism collapsed along with the stock market and the ensuing Great Depression. American men were accustomed to valuing their manhood in terms of their work and the degree to which they were or were not financially successful, a tendency peculiar to American culture. According to Joe L. Dubbert, “a British visitor, Shaw Desmond . . . [observed in 1932 that] American males saw their personalities
reflected in their bank balance, and when the balance dwindled, they were often overcome by remorse and self-doubt. Because European culture did not tend to associate business success with masculinity, European males were not as susceptible to ravaged egos during economic difficulties” (210). With the severe unemployment brought on by the Depression, Kimmel claims, “the workplace could no longer be considered a reliable arena for the demonstration and proof of one’s manhood,” a condition which damaged men’s self-esteem and altered relations of authority between husbands and wives at home (128). Thus the economic challenges of the Depression precipitated what Dubbert calls “an acute masculinity-identity crisis” for American men (209).13

At the same time, men’s fears of an increasingly feminized American culture were fueled by shifting power relations between men and women as the latter moved more and more out of the domestic sphere and into the public sphere, a change personified in the figure of the Progressive-Era New Woman. Though much of the progress made by women in the years prior to World War I was in fact stifled after the men returned from war, men continued to perceive their social dominance at risk throughout the 1930s. Dubbert points to a 1936 polemic by popular writer John Erskine as a useful example of such fears. Erskine, he writes,

lamented the passing of male influence and the physical as well as emotional dislocation many men experienced with the rise of the new woman. Worst of all, the new woman had so completely effeminized culture and religion that Erskine

13 A perfect example of this identity crisis, an article titled “The Case of Any Man,” appears in Ken itself. The piece details the indignities, the self-loathing and powerlessness, of being unable to find work. “You want to work, and you can’t find anything,” the narrator muses. “What’s wrong with you? You know that’s what your wife is wondering too. Other men support their families. Your wife’s different toward you. You aren’t the head of the family anymore. Everything’s different” (Young 30). But applying for relief—though better than nothing—is nearly as degrading, because, as the narrator says, “any man with guts” should be able to find a job on his own (31).
angusted at the prospect of one day having to compete with the people of the East and their vigorous male-oriented religion. According to Erskine, American women were having a disastrous effect on the nation’s politics by criticizing some of its cherished beliefs. (213)

Through its process of redistributing wealth to the needy, the New Deal represented, to Erskine, “rampant feminine sentimentalism,” which was “the very antithesis of the masculine idea of progress in America and was contrary to natural law.” Erskine feared that societies like Japan that had not yielded to effeminization and remained “aggressive and powerful,” would eventually “overtake the more passive nations of Western civilization” (214)

Anxieties about the supposed effeminization of American culture also took the form of increased homophobia. “The late 1920s and 1930s witnessed a ‘pansy craze’, ” Kimmel reports, “as new fears of gay men were raised.” Such a climate “decisively eroded the casual acceptance of the gay male subculture in American cities” and forced gay men, now feared and deplored instead of mildly ridiculed, into the proverbial closet (135).

With Esquire, Smart and Gingrich were explicitly connecting with male frustrations about changing power relations and the perceived effeminization of culture. In his editorial at the beginning of that magazine’s first issue, Gingrich claims that the male reader has been all but forgotten in the tendency of mass-market magazines to cater to the needs of the female reader. “This has reached a point, in some of the more extreme instances,” he writes, “where the male reader, in looking through what purports to be a general magazine, is made to feel like an intruder upon gynaecic mysteries” (Untitled Editorial 4). Gingrich clearly wants to cast the male reader as the underdog and to make him feel insulted by such a trend, for he adds that when magazines include features aimed at men, it is “somewhat after the manner in
which scraps are tossed to the patient dog beneath the table” (Untitled Editorial 4).

But Gingrich also had to redefine the relationship of fashion to masculinity in order to make Esquire’s focus on fashion acceptable to the male reader in what had become a homophobic climate. As Hugh Merrill notes, in the early 1930s “women worried about style; men didn’t. And if a man worried about style it made him appear more effeminate and brought his masculine sexuality into question. . . . No man wanted to be seen as less masculine than another, for fear he would be labeled a sissy” (32). Gingrich makes the claim for such a redefinition explicit in his first Esquire editorial: he claims that while Esquire hopes to become a “fashion guide for men, . . . it never intends to become, by any possible stretch of the imagination, a primer for fops.” He adds that “we feel that men have long ceased to believe that there is anything effeminate or essentially unbusinesslike about devoting a little care and thought and study to the selection of clothes” (Untitled Editorial 4).

Gingrich made fashion-consciousness acceptable for men through an editorial method that he would later compare to a three-ring circus: “Gingrich’s three rings were fashion, off-beat masculine writing, and sex” (Merrill 32). The metaphor of the circus is apt because Esquire was in essence performing its construction of a fashion-friendly masculinity before its targeted audience of male readers.

Fashion was not a concern for Esquire’s offshoot political magazine, but Gingrich similarly used masculinity to help define and sell Ken’s editorial stance for the American male reader. It is not that Gingrich had to convince his readership to oppose war. On the contrary, most Americans in the 1930s opposed any intervention in European conflicts that might lead to involvement in a war. “Hatred of war” was the major component of many Americans’ isolationism and commitment to neutrality, according to historian F. Jay Taylor.
“When the Spanish Civil War began [in 1936],” Taylor writes, the United States were “perhaps more isolationist than at any time since the First World War.” That fact was largely due to the widespread perception that the U.S. had been duped into the bloody and tragic world war—a war for which both sides, not just the Germans, were responsible—by “a combination of British propaganda and the American economic stake in an Allied victory” (40-41). Most Americans were determined not to let such a thing happen again.

Many of those who supported American neutrality likely were not pacifists in a philosophical sense. Isolationism, the desire to keep America out of foreign military entanglements (at best only one, limited form of pacifism) was the predominant thinking among most Americans in the late 1930s, not subscription to any specific brand of philosophical pacifism such as those espoused by the Quakers or the Catholic Worker Movement. The term pacifism, however, was used to mean different things by different writers in published discourse of the period. Socialist Norman Thomas, in a 1937 Nation article outlining the pacifist’s dilemma, writes that

among the enemies of both war and fascism are two groups which at first sight seem more consistent than the rest of us. There are on the one hand those pacifists who hold that the great commandment can be summed up in this: “Thou shalt take no part in any kind of war.” On the other hand there are those advocates of collective security who proclaim a holy crusade of democratic nations against fascist aggressors. . . . For neither group have we invented an accurate name. To the first I shall apply the word “pacifist,” pausing only to remind my readers that there are pacifists and pacifists. (66)

Thomas’ two general categories do not convey a complete sense of the various positions that
may be labeled pacifist due to their shared desire to avoid war, but his attempt to define highlights the instability of the term. Gingrich’s invocation of a “virile and militant pacifism” is of course a contradiction, but it takes advantage of that definitional instability. In any case, Gingrich is more interested in rhetoric than precision. Ken’s anti-war stance suggests a compromise between the male reader’s possible desire to secure or reclaim a threatened masculinity and his desire to avoid war. Gingrich sets up an opposition in the Ken subscription brochure: passive pacifism (represented by isolationism or strict neutrality) is weak, effeminate; active pacifism (represented by some form of collective security) is tough and manly—but it is still pacifism.

By establishing this opposition, Gingrich is tapping into a sentiment in some discussions about pacifism that equates aversion to war with weakness and, by statement or implication, effeminacy. One expression of such a sentiment is a 1935 American Mercury article by W. F. Kernan titled “A Soldier Looks at Pacifism.” Kernan argues that a pacifist peace, which he terms “a peace based solely on the fear of war,” presents “a dangerous invitational weakness to any nation that is not afraid of war” (188). He writes of the approaching world war, already predictable, that “the dragon’s teeth of weakness and fear, which pacifism has been so industriously sowing, are now beginning to sprout.” Moreover, Kernan implicitly identifies the war aversion with effeminacy on several occasions. He quotes the nineteenth-century British businessman and essayist Walter Bagehot as having said “the sands of history are strewn with the wrecks of nations that sought a little progressiveness at the expense of a lot of hard manliness” (188). Elsewhere, he tells the story of a pacifist deserter who, during his court-martial, must explain how he would react to the hypothetical attempt of a “ruffian” to rape his sister. The deserter is made to appear a
buffoon with his imagined ineffectual efforts to divert the ruffian without violence. The
court-martial example carries gendered implications throughout, from assumptions about
man’s role as protector of the female to Kernan’s labeling of the deserter as a “moral
emasculate” (190).

A more rhetorically extreme effort than Kernan’s to connect pacifism with
effeminacy occurs in Stewart H. Holbrook’s 1937 article “The Vanishing American Male,”
also published in the American Mercury. Lamenting an American society in which the once-
superior male now prostrates himself to the “dominant female,” Holbrook at one point argues
that “the rise of pacifism has played a deep if subtle part in the emasculation process” (271).
He lauds the “martial spirit,” now being “decayed” by pacifism: “Since history began, the
profession of arms has been invariably the first manly pursuit; and no people on earth ever
embraced war with such enthusiasm as did the early Americans. Their love of combat and
ferocity in battle were known the world over. . . . But by 1917, the martial spirit . . . was faint
and spotty (271). Holbrook’s bitter, bombastic elegy for the hairy-chested he-man now
seems so hyperbolic that it may be hard for a present-day reader to take seriously, and its
glorification of war would have been out of touch with most Americans’ views in the 1930s.
But the piece points to men’s perception of threatened masculinity and indicates that the
Teddy Roosevelt ideal, which included war as one expression of the strenuous life, still held
mythic resonance for some readers.

It should be noted that while such an extreme elevation of the “martial spirit” and
Corresponding demonizing of pacifism, fueled by suggestions of weakness or effeminacy,
may not have held a central place in American culture in the 1930s, they did hold a central
place in fascist and Nazi ideology, the political worldview against which Ken most explicitly
defined itself. Militarism and a belief in the regenerative properties of war were crucial aspects of German Nazi and Italian fascist efforts to shape strong nationalisms within societies reeling from the emasculating effects of the First World War.\textsuperscript{14} As Leo Braudy points out, “from the 1920s to the 1950s . . . a battle raged between competing views of Western manhood, the most organized being the Nazi and fascist efforts to restore what was conceived of as the old warrior purity. Central to their programs was the extreme lengths to which they went to identify their states as warrior societies in which military masculinity was the necessary form of identity” (425). Braudy continues:

Both Hitler and Mussolini agreed that only a state premised on making perpetual war could be the context for a reborn masculinity. War would defeat poverty, restore productiveness, stamp out malaria—the list was endless. Pacifists and anyone else who questioned either a particular war or the idea of war were outside the pale. (426)

In Fascist Spectacle: The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini’s Italy, Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi describes the role of masculinity and a corresponding rhetoric of strength within Mussolini’s anti-democratic vision:

Within that vision fascism dominated not only “the masses” but also liberalism and democracy, for they were both weak, peaceful, irresolute—that is, they embodied female characters. On the other hand, by rejecting women’s feebleness, fascism defined itself, in opposition, as manly, and in this guise affirmed its rule as necessary for guiding the nation and the “masses.” To the old liberal system, Mussolini presented the alternative of a new, “very strong,” and “virile” fascist state. Fascism was aggressive, intrepid, and courageous . . . . Anything fascist became “virile” in

\textsuperscript{14} Leo Braudy notes that while Italy had been on the side of the victorious Allies in World War I, it had “received few of the spoils and was more noted for its defeats than for any marked military successes” (424).
Falasca-Zamponi explores the ways in which Italian fascism used violence as a rhetorical device within its “aesthetic-totalitarian project,” fictionalizing, for example, the role of violence in its own rise to power and mythologizing fascists’ martyrdom to political violence and war (28-31).

Ken’s editorial stance toward war simultaneously evokes and opposes critiques of pacifism both within American public discourses and within international fascist and Nazi ideology, where they were more exuberantly presented. Particularly striking are the resonances between Mussolini’s rhetoric, as described by Falasca-Zamponi above, and Gingrich’s attempt to formulate an antiwar stance as courageous, militant, and virile. In Ken, fascism’s formulations are reversed insofar as those tropes of masculinity relate to war. Much like his effort to perform a fashion-conscious but securely heterosexual masculinity in Esquire, Gingrich tries through his editorial fashioning of Ken to perform a pacifism that appeals to the male reader’s aversion to war while connecting with an earlier, now-threatened ideal of manliness. That Hemingway was a key element in that effort seems particularly appropriate, even inevitable, for Hemingway scholars have long noted the ways in which Hemingway both enacts and critiques the Teddy Roosevelt ideal of manhood. As Suzanne Clark explains, for example, “at the same time as Hemingway took the Roosevelt hero as his theme and the discourse of natural history as an important paradigm,” his writing often unsettled those presentations, and his major works constituted “a modernist, expatriate revolt against much of the optimism about progress, American frontiers and the effects of the ‘strenuous life’ that Teddy Roosevelt had advocated, particularly against the cheerful entry into heroic militarism” (68). While Clark and other critics often concern themselves with the
subtle ways in which the works enact such critiques, the same pattern was quite present in the public Hemingway persona, within which the manly sporting adventures of the *Esquire* letters and other nonfiction contrasted with the more sensitive pacifist sentiments of *A Farewell to Arms*.  

Ken’s self-presentation also takes advantage of the predominance of vision as a paradigm for understanding in Western culture. As Martin Jay explains, “whether in terms of actual observation with the two eyes, . . . or in those of internal mental speculation, vision has been accorded a special role in Western epistemology since the Greeks,” and that role became ever more prominent with the Enlightenment (176). The hegemony of vision—or the “empire of the gaze” in Jay’s terminology—has been understood as a function of power; David Michael Levin, for example, claims that “the character of the vision which predominates in the ocularcentrism of late modernity is so decisively possessed, driven, by the will to power” (205). Several twentieth-century critics, Michel Foucault among them, have strongly criticized the dominant role of the controlling, totalizing, disciplinary gaze in Western culture. Jay notes that

> the link between privileging vision and the traditional humanist subject, capable of rational enlightenment, has been opened to widespread attack. The illusions of imagistic representation and the allegedly disinterested scientific gaze have been subjected to hostile scrutiny. The mystifications of the social imagery and the spectacle of late capitalist culture have been the target of fierce criticism. (178)

Thomas Strychacz indicates that “these critiques of the privileged but potentially despotic gaze are firmly anchored to a larger critique of masculine vision and authority” (106). He

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15 Remember that Gingrich himself makes this contrast explicit in the Ken subscription brochure.
16 I am referring here to the original sources, but largely following Strychacz’s discussion of the hegemony of vision in his section on the relationship between vision and power in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (105-107).
points to Levin’s argument that “the vision which dominates our ocular culture is haunted by the specters of patriarchal rule: the rule of the masculine is both cause and effect of an ocularcentrism which privileges the autonomy-drive of vision and rewards its aggressiveness, its hunger for control” (D. M. Levin 205). Strychacz also discusses the work of Andrea Nye, who examines Luce Irigaray’s study of the Platonic roots of “masculine scopic power” in *Speculum of the Other Woman*:

> For Nye, the hidden (and terrifying) burden of Plato’s *Republic* is the alliance it forges, at the genesis of Western metaphysics, between vision and military science. Plato’s soldier-philosopher weds a fantasy of privileged cognition (the all-seeing consciousness) to the gaze of the male military master. . . . Henceforth, according to Nye, a (masculine) metaphysics of presence is mediated by military and imperial power, just as Western military might is rooted in the urge of political, psychic, and aesthetic economies to subject everything to the disciplinary and imperial eye. (106)

The very name Ken was chosen to suggest the controlling power of vision. As I discuss in Chapter One, it carries the dual meanings of “understanding” or “knowledge” and “range of vision,” which implicitly link visual perception to mental perception, and the claim to insider’s knowledge implies that such vision creates authority and allows for command of the truth. The magazine’s heavy emphasis on visual content—we rarely find a page without a cartoon, photograph, or advertisement—fulfills the name’s suggestion of vision. Through the use of photographs in particular, Ken links political arguments to the power of the camera’s eye—the illusion that the photograph accurately represents reality. Ken’s strain of militarism, its fascination with the acts and things of war, enacts the alliance Nye critiques, prefigured by Plato and carried down to late modernity, between vision and military science.
Here too Ken treads a path curiously parallel to that of the fascism against which it positions itself. In discussing For Whom the Bell Tolls, Strychacz observes that the novel’s “fascination with the will to power expressed in the supervisory gaze” (he discusses Robert Jordan as “a prototypical master of the disciplinary gaze” who supervises men in acts of killing) shares an affinity with a “fascist masculinity” (in which the controlling gaze is linked to a fetish of militarism and violence) even as it openly opposes fascism (107-09). While Strychacz argues that For Whom the Bell Tolls ultimately undermines such a connection through the destabilizing effects of masculine performance in what he terms “cave theater,” we can see something similar to that uncomfortable relationship between fascism and militant antifascism in Ken’s self-presentation. That is, an apparent fascination with violence and militarism is linked to an ideal of authoritarian vision, but that ideal is framed as a way of opposing the fascism that openly embodies such violence and militarism. To borrow Strychacz’s phrasing for one way of reading For Whom the Bell Tolls, Ken’s “affinities with a fascist masculinity, in short, are mandated and justified by the supreme moral imperative of fighting fascism” (108-09).

**Warring Them Out Their Apathy: Hemingway’s Persuasive Successes**

Ken’s editorial stance of “militant pacifism,” with its mixture of masculine authority (expressed through the paradigm of vision) and violence directed against fascist violence, found perhaps no stronger expression than in Hemingway’s earliest contributions to the magazine. Relatively little scholarly criticism has been written about Hemingway’s contributions to Ken, with the exception of the story “The Old Man at the Bridge.” When they are considered, Hemingway’s Ken contributions tend to receive fairly low ratings from scholars due to their overtly argumentative approach and political focus, among other factors;
the term “propaganda” is frequently applied, often in a negative sense and often without any precise sense of what the term means.

Without question, all of the articles Hemingway wrote for Ken (except the one piece about a boxing match) were politically engaged, but that in itself does not make them failures. To a large degree, critical judgments on the Ken pieces are dependent upon the old equation privileging the apolitical over the political; as Peter Monteath has convincingly argued, evaluating Spanish Civil War literature by such an equation simply will not do. Instead, one way of usefully discussing the quality of Hemingway’s Ken pieces is to consider how well they accomplish what they seem designed to do, and one way of determining that is to consider them in the context of the magazine’s stated intentions. I argue that some of Hemingway’s pieces—especially the first four—are quite successful in terms of his own persuasive goals and those of Ken magazine itself. That is, Hemingway appears to have clearly understood the nature of the magazine and, in the best of his pieces, made full use of its persuasive potential. On the other hand, some of the Ken pieces do show Hemingway at his worst, but they can be evaluated as such for specific reasons. The unsuccessful pieces fail for one of two reasons, or both: they either undermine their effectiveness through vague, unsupported claims, at times presented in a ranting tone; or they embody a failure of Hemingway’s insider stance by completely missing the reality of what was, in fact, happening in Spain.

Mama’s Boys

Hemingway’s first contribution to Ken was titled “The Time Now, the Place Spain,” and filled two pages, along with one cartoon and Hemingway’s disclaimer, in the first issue on April 7, 1938. Its argument set the tone for most of what he would write for the
magazine. John Raeburn states succinctly that “in nearly all his articles for *Ken* [Hemingway] sounded a consistent refrain: the democratic nations must support the Spanish Republic if another world war is to be delayed or prevented; defeating the Fascists in Spain was the only way to give Hitler and Mussolini pause in their plans for conquest” (88). This is precisely the thesis of Hemingway’s first piece, and this argument was commonly furthered by pro-Loyalist writers. What interests me here is how Hemingway goes about making that argument. He casts the Italians fighting in Spain as “the weak link in the fascists’ chain” ("Time" 36), and he does so by emphasizing their unsuitability for war in terms heavy with implications of cowardice and effeminacy. He begins the article by describing how the Italians enjoy bombing Barcelona, an easy target, then transitions into an anecdote about one of Mussolini’s sons being recalled from such bombing missions and sent home because the Italians realized the boy actually faced danger from Republican forces.17 “He has probably been decorated by now,” Hemingway observes wryly. “For the Italians decorate as easily as they panic; and they can panic with the specialists; with the very, very best” ("Time" 36). From there, he launches into a largely sarcastic and occasionally funny discussion of how Italians like to wage war but are not, for the most part, cut out for doing so. Unlike German militarism, which is “the expression of a people that history has shown to be suited to be soldiers,” Hemingway claims, “Italian militarism is the romantic thinking of men who were not brave and who want to be; of men who were not in the war, and would like to have been; of a race of patriots who like to imagine themselves as soldiers, and are not good at it” ("Time" 36). He is thus branding the Italians both cowards and phonies. The phoniness takes the form of bravery affected only in conditions of obvious military

17 Hemingway probably meant Mussolini’s son Bruno. According to a 1941 *Time* magazine article on Bruno’s death in a test-flight accident, Bruno was recalled “from the Balearics during the Spanish war, because the Reds seemed to be gunning for the boy” (“Bruno's”).
superiority and little danger of defeat—conditions that “approximate those of assassination”; and the cowardice takes the form of conduct reprehensible for men in battle:

In this last year I have watched them run too far at Guadalajara; have seen too many Fiat pursuit planes hang up in the sun afraid to dive because that dive might lead to death; have seen too many prisoners lie and crawl to save their hides (where good soldiers simply would have kept their mouths shut), later to change their stories and become so very brave and patriotic when they knew their hides were safe; and seen too much of that great, spouting, roaring murder that Italians love to do (see little Mussolini’s book) when they think nobody will come amurdering back; to believe that fascism has strengthened their characters very much. ("Time" 36)

The writing here builds a nice rhythm through parallel phrases, and suggests authority through the implication of direct experience (“I have watched/seen”), a technique essential to Hemingway’s war reporting.18

These indictments of cowardice themselves carry implications of failed masculinity, but Hemingway further adds a more blatant suggestion of effeminacy to his assessment. He writes that Italians are

the ones who are afraid to die and still want to be soldiers (you can be afraid to die and not want to be a soldier and still be a good one); and they still cry and moan for “Mama mia” when they’re hit. An officer still has to put them so they almost touch each other. He can’t scatter them very widely, because if he does they won’t be there

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18 See, for example, Watson, who argues that Hemingway’s emphasis on his proximity to combat in some of the NANA dispatches “was not meant to dramatize his own courage, but rather to authenticate his observations about combat” (“Dispatches” 23). That Hemingway did not actually “see” the Italians run at Guadalajara—he arrived at the battlefield a few days after the battle was over—suggests that rhetorical performance was more important than accuracy in the Ken pieces. Of course, he may have meant the term loosely, as if he saw the Italian retreat from the rear the way a general might, but how he saw the Guadalajara retreat is not distinguished from the way he would have literally seen Fiats in the sky, for example.
when he comes back. They need a feeling of fraternal contact, and I guess they really need **Mama mia** too. You can’t take them too far from **Mama mia** and have them fight on strange hillsides the way the French fought over a thousand strange hills they did not know under Napoleon. ("Time" 36)

Thus in addition to being cowards, Italian soldiers are mama’s boys, a label that implies a distinct lack of manliness. Hemingway here skillfully (if unfairly) plays off the Italian use of “mamma mia” to express surprise or shock, spinning criticism from a literal interpretation of the term. And he employs repetition for effect, managing to use **Mama mia** three times in a span of five sentences.

That Hemingway is making a specific choice to emphasize the cowardice and effeminacy of the Italian soldiers for **Ken** becomes clear when we compare the article with his presentation of Italians in the NANA dispatches, in which he allows more room for acknowledgements of bravery to balance criticisms. Hemingway’s first mention of Italian troops in combat comes in his 22 March 1937 dispatch covering the Loyalist victory at Guadalajara.19 In a careful survey of the battlefield, he notes the various refuse of battle—abandoned weapons, ammunition, and vehicles—and describes some of the dead soldiers whose bodies still fester in the sun. He claims that Franco has learned he can’t depend on Italian troops. “Not because Italians are cowardly,” Hemingway claims, “but because Italians defending the line of the Piave and Mount Grappa against invasion are one thing and Italians sent to fight in Spain when they expected garrison duty in Ethiopia are another”

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19 On 8 March 1937, Nationalist forces, primarily divisions of the Italian CTV (Corps of Volunteer Troops, who were not volunteers at all), began an offensive in the Guadalajara province as part of a pincer attack to the east of Madrid designed to take the city. The Government forces’ repulse of the attack, which culminated in the Battle of Brihuega and the Italians’ retreat on 18 March, became the only publicized major Republican victory of the war. Though the battle was a propaganda boon for the Loyalists and their supporters, it may have ultimately worked against them, for Mussolini was furious over the Italian failure and consequently increased his military commitment to the Nationalists. See Beevor 216-22.
(Watson "Dispatches" 19). Thereafter, Hemingway quotes a Government officer who describes the battle, which began with Italian troops meeting fierce resistance when they had expected none. "‘Once their surprise was over,’” the officer reports, “‘the Italians fought well the first two days, but when they faced very stubborn resistance by Spanish troops and ground strafing and bombing by Government planes, their morale broke and they ran when our troops attacked.’” ("Dispatches" 20).

Hemingway reworks this material into his discussion of the Italians at Guadalajara in the Ken piece. Following a funny comparison of the velocity of Italian retreats versus that of the Portuguese in World War I, he writes: “This does not mean that Italian troops cannot fight. They fought well for two days at Guadalajara. But it was an eight-day battle. And on the tenth day we could not find them on our maps of that district and had to go into Madrid for new maps” ("Time" 36). He follows this with a discussion of the dead (the “best ones . . . by the way they lay . . . showed the merit of their dying”) and the scattered refuse of the battlefield, similar to the NANA dispatch. There is no mention here of the six days of fierce resistance and bombardment from the air, followed by a Government counterattack, which the Government officer notes in the NANA dispatch. The emphasis in the Ken version is on the impossibility of finding the Italian force, and the pictures of cowardice that the Government troops found instead: "We found many prisoners hidden in caves, barns, straw-stacks and sometimes just cowering in ditches. But we could not find the Italian army on that map. They had pulled out. And no one could find them for a long time after that’” ("Time" 36).

In another dispatch, dated 18/19 April, Hemingway even personally identifies with

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20 Hemingway makes similar observations in his 26 March dispatch, noting that the Italians at Guadalajara died "not as cowards, but defending skillfully constructed machine gun and automatic rifle positions where the tanks found them and where they still lie" (Watson "Dispatches" 22).
the Italian soldiers. Near the start of this dispatch, which recounts a visit to a wounded American volunteer, Hemingway recalls again his recent tour of the battlefield: “The Italian dead up on the Guadalajara weren’t you although Italian dead, because of where you’d spent your boyhood, always seemed, still, like Our Dead” ("Dispatches" 30). Here he highlights his personal and humanistic connection with the Italian military, not the cultural difference through which he evaluates them as cowards and phonies in Ken. While he does make some negative assessments about the Italian soldiers at other points in the NANA dispatches, Hemingway shifts the balance of those assessments in the Ken piece to play up the tough-guy masculine stance that Ken has modeled itself after and has invited him to make full use of.

I do not mean to suggest that Hemingway’s employment of heavily masculinized tropes is unique to Ken pieces such as this one. Rather, my point is to suggest, first, the extent to which Gingrich has shaped Ken so as to correspond with—and therefore take advantage of—the public persona Hemingway had made famous, and second, the extent to which Hemingway appears to have understood what Gingrich was looking for and what the magazine’s format would allow him to do argumentatively. The exuberance with which Hemingway evokes tropes of cowardice and effeminacy in this piece, contrasted with the more reserved approach of the NANA dispatches that cover the same topic, indicates that understanding.

Picturing the Dead

Hemingway displayed his understanding of Ken’s purpose and potential similarly in his second and third contributions to the magazine. In these pieces, he offered exactly what Gingrich asked for: the “most violent inside material” he possessed. Both articles incorporate graphically violent photographs to produce striking arguments in favor of the
Spanish Republic. “Dying, Well or Badly” appeared in the 21 April 1938, issue, and offered an argument basically similar to “The Time Now, the Place Spain,” namely, that the way to stop the advance of the fascists and another world war is to stop them in Spain. Rather than focusing on the weaknesses of the enemy, however, he focuses on the horrific realities of death in battle. Hemingway links his text to six photographs, which he apparently took himself, of dead Italian soldiers on the Guadalajara battlefield. The first three pictures are striking but relatively tame, showing bodies of men that, while gruesome because they are dead, are nonetheless intact. These men died well, in Hemingway’s estimation. He incorporates the photos by directly addressing the reader in the second paragraph, thereby directing the experience of the visual argument. “So now,” he writes, “before you read any further in this, look across the page and you will see two pictures of Italian soldiers who died well in battle” (“Dying” 68). He then describes how those two men and the man in the third photo died, all of them hit by bullets. “There was nothing very odd nor very extraordinary about any of those wounds,” he claims, and adds, injecting a reminder of his insider status, “in this last year one has seen many people that one knew die in the same way” (“Dying” 68).

But then Hemingway draws a distinction that is impossible to miss in the photographs: the other three soldiers died badly. They were all hit by explosives, Hemingway explains, two by a tank shell and one by a light bomb from an airplane. The first lay stretched out, his naked lower body covered by a blanket out of which protrude the jagged ends of legs without feet. The photo of the second soldier (Figure 29, top) is the most gruesome: it is a close-up of the remains of the soldier’s head. Not much is left. There are half of the mouth, the bottom portion of the nose, and one eye staring blankly at the viewer. The rest of the head has been torn away; what remains resembles part of a rubber mask more
than a human face because the head has been emptied of its contents. But as I have
mentioned elsewhere, the soldier’s face conveys an unsettling impression of shock at his
sudden, violent end. The last photo (Figure 29, bottom) offers another close-up of a partial
head, this one intact until halfway up the face, just below the eyes, at which point the head is
simply gone, leaving only strips of gory flesh like the remains of a popped balloon.
Hemingway notes specifically of the second soldier, “He is rather impressive to those who
are not accustomed to a battle-field.” And with another nod to the authority of his
experience, he adds, “But in your time you’ve seen good friends look as bad or worse”
("Dying" 68). The photographs, striking in themselves, are particularly impressive due to
their size on the page. Ken was a physically large magazine at 13 ¼ inches tall by ten inches
wide; at two photographs to a page, each corpse picture is about 6 ½ inches by ten inches, a
size which allows for a high level of detail, particularly in the close-ups. In the photo of the
second soldier who died badly, for example, we can distinguish stubble on the face and chin
and the thickness of the skin around the edges of the shattered face. These are memorable
images.

“Dying, Well or Badly” is in its general subject reminiscent of Hemingway’s earlier
piece “A Natural History of the Dead,” in which he describes, in a voice that parodies
naturalist writers, the horrific realities of dead soldiers and female munitions plant workers in
Italy during the First World War. But the difference between the two is essentially the
difference between Hemingway’s other writings of the Great War and those of the Spanish
war. That is, “A Natural History of the Dead” deals largely with the meaninglessness of
human death in war, and in particular the incompatibility of religious faith with the
experience of the battlefield. “Dying, Well or Badly,” like For Whom the Bell Tolls and
Figure 29. Images of mutilated soldiers’ bodies, accompanying Hemingway’s “Dying, Well or Badly.”
other Spanish war pieces, ultimately attaches purpose to death in war through belief in the cause of the Spanish Republic and its perceived role in the larger opposition to fascism.

Hemingway in fact uses death as represented in the photographs of the corpses to mean at least three different things. After discussing the bodies in his pictures, he recalls having found on one of the soldiers (the second of those who died badly) a letter from the man’s wife: “She wrote how badly things were going in the village, how pleased she was to get his pay allotment; but that she cried every night because he was not there. She also told how many times she prayed each day to keep him safe and that she had never ceased to thank St. Joseph for sending her such a good husband” ("Dying" 68). This description humanizes the Italian soldier and implies the wastefulness of war and the personal sadness it breeds in those who cared for the dead. More importantly, it also emphasizes that the soldier does not belong there in Spain. The reference to the village suggests that Italy has its own internal problems that should preclude such military adventures. There is a touch, too, of Hemingway’s World War I take on death in war: the wife’s fervent prayers and Christian faith and the soldier’s apparent good character do not keep the soldier from dying in a particularly gruesome way. His death is meaningless, as Hemingway’s final comment implies through its matter-of-factness and lack of ameliorative sentiment. “These are photographs of what happens to the men sent to die in a fascist invasion of a democratic country; a country with a republican form of government” ("Dying" 68). “Sent to die” is an important distinction because it places responsibility not on the soldiers but on Italy’s leadership, and highlights the fact (initially disputed by the Italians and supporters of Franco) that the Italian soldiers were regular forces sent under orders, not volunteers.
But the deaths of the soldiers and partisans of the Republic, by contrast, are quite different—not physically, but in what they mean to Spain and the world. “The men who are defending that country,” Hemingway writes, “against the Moors, the Italians and the Germans, die in the same way. They die in as strange ways, in as ugly ways, as do the invaders” (“Dying” 68). The difference is that their death represents a noble sacrifice for a greater good. Again, he addresses the reader: “But they die knowing why they die; they die fighting for you now; knowing that unless they beat the fascists now you will have to fight them later” (“Dying” 68). He follows with a defense of the International Brigades, whose volunteers were often accused in the right-leaning press of being mercenaries. Arguing that they were in fact not well paid, he asserts that they were neither “soldiers of fortune” nor “adventurers”; they were “just very clear thinkers” because they understood early on the dangers of fascism (“Dying” 68). So while Hemingway acknowledges the physical realities of death on both sides, he dissociates the soldiers of the Republic and the International Brigades from the photographs which are so central to the article because death among those soldiers carries more meaning than a rotting corpse can convey.

Death takes on a third meaning at the conclusion of the piece, for which Hemingway refers back to the pictures of shattered bodies. The article opens with Hemingway’s disgusted suggestion that Americans at home—who do not have to face the war daily—are tired of the war and do not want to hear about it any more. “War is not a word that frightens people any longer,” he writes. “They are getting used to it now” (“Dying” 68). Language alone has lost its power to convey the intensity of war. In a sense, this idea reflects Ken’s approach to persuasion, which favors a mix of visual and textual argument over textual argument alone. Hemingway returns to the reader’s apathy in his closing, and provides his
ostensible reason for writing the piece. “Perhaps these pictures will make it [the war] seem a little more real,” he writes. “Because those pictures are what you will look like if we let the next war come” (“Dying” 68). Violent death now becomes a threat, not just an observation of far-away horror and tragedy, and Hemingway has provided the visual evidence to fill the gap that language has left.  

By addressing the perception that Americans have lost interest in the Spanish war, and countering with extreme visual depictions of violence, Hemingway seems to be responding directly and with notable indulgence to Gingrich’s request that he provide a wake-up call to the “average American reader,” to “war them out [of] their apathy” and “shock them out [of] their complacency . . . in classic Aristotelian manner through pity and fear.” Hemingway’s piece does so with verve, the dead Italian soldiers and the wife’s letter providing the pity, and the transformation of the images into a projection of what awaits the reader providing the fear.

While Hemingway does not offer a detailed description of the bodies in his Ken article, choosing instead to let the pictures do the work, he had previously done so in one of his NANA dispatches. In his first report on the Guadalajara battlefield, Hemingway uses language to try to give a picture of the dead Italians:

Hot weather makes all dead look alike, but these Italian dead lay with waxy grey faces in the cold rain looking very small and pitiful. They did not look like men, but where a shell burst had caught three, like curiously broken toys. One doll had lost its feet and lay with no expression on its waxy stubbled face. Another doll had lost half of its head. The third doll was simply broken as a bar of chocolate breaks in your pocket. (Watson "Dispatches" 19)

21 As dramatic as his claim sounds, Hemingway was hardly being fanciful: one must wonder how many of the more than 400,000 American service people who died violently in the Second World War might have seen these images and contemplated their meaning.
At least two of these men were probably the same soldiers as in the Ken photos. What I want to emphasize in the comparison of these items, aside from the obvious absence of photographs in the NANA piece, is the way in which Hemingway takes the scene that he first conveyed textually, and by manipulating its elements differently, attaches new meanings to the now visual representation of the same scene, meanings mostly absent from the news report. The dispatch conveys a sense of the horrific violence that war can inflict on the human body (as do the Ken photos), but it does so partly by dehumanizing the soldiers: they become dolls rather than men in Hemingway’s choice of wording. Thus, the passage can be interpreted as making a statement against the general inhumanity of war. Of course, Hemingway’s pro-Loyalist slant is often detectable in his reporting, so in the context of his dispatches one could easily read into the passage a suggestion of blame toward the fascists for causing the war that dehumanizes so terribly. But in Ken, Hemingway works instead to humanize the one soldier (through his discussion of the wife’s letter) as a way of casting him and his companions as victims of their government’s deplorable military adventure, thereby leveling blame far more directly. And as I have argued, Hemingway further uses the photographs to spin multiple meanings of the death in war that the soldiers embody.

A similarly close correspondence with Gingrich’s editorial goals, and the related assertion that a visual argument can persuade in ways that words cannot, inform Hemingway’s third Ken piece, a bitterly sarcastic indictment of the Catholic Church’s support for the Nationalists titled “The Cardinal Picks a Winner.”22 This article is accompanied by two photographs on the page opposite the article text (Figure 30). The first, positioned at the top of the page, shows the bodies of ten or eleven children lying in a row.

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22 In an early draft, Hemingway titled the piece “Suffer Little Children to Come Unto Me” but changed to the final title before cabling the story to Gingrich. One wonders why he changed this brilliant title.
and covered in blood; the row stretches away from the camera, implying that it continues on for an unspecified distance. The caption reads “What Franco Wouldn’t Do.” The second picture, immediately below the first, depicts several Spanish Church officials and several Spanish Nationalist army officers; the clergymen are giving the fascist raised-arm salute while the army officers are giving the more traditional military angled salute to the brims of their caps. This picture is captioned “Salute of the Churchmen.”23 As with “Dying, Well or Badly,” Hemingway constructs his argument around the photos. He explains the circumstances surrounding the first picture in his opening paragraph. “In the bombing of Barcelona on Saint Patrick’s Day,” he writes, “there were 118 children killed along with 245 women and 512 men. That makes a total of 875 dead” (“Cardinal” 38). Again, as he directs the reader to the picture itself, he suggests the insufficiency of language (or in this case, numbers) to convey reality fully:

If you haven’t yet looked at the picture you can make an experiment and see how little such figures mean. They don’t mean much, do they? You don’t get much of a sensation from reading them, and then, people have forgotten about that war now anyway.

All right, now look at the picture. Then remember that the picture shows only a few of the 118 children that the fascists’ planes killed. We won’t have any pictures of the men and women. Perhaps it is all right to kill men and women and maybe their politics were wrong too. The prosecution for murder, if there was any prosecution for

23 Hemingway apparently took the photo of the children, and he airmailed it to Gingrich from Spain, presumably from Barcelona sometime after his arrival there on 1 April. The second photo had appeared on the front page of a newspaper called News of Spain, which was published weekly by the Spanish Information Bureau, a New York-based pro-Loyalist group. Hemingway included directions on how to obtain the photo when he cabled Gingrich the article.
THE CARDINAL PICKS A WINNER

Cardinal Hayes doesn’t believe
Franco would murder children.

The Cardinal himself wouldn’t.

But other churchmen say nothing,
raising rigid right arms. Meaning
might makes right.

BY ERNEST HEMINGWAY

I was up the two flights and a
quarter when I walked in. I
woke up at the children’s
fright in the burning of Barcelona
on July 17th. By then there were
118 children killed along with 243
women and 159 men. That meant a
lot of people upset.

If you haven’t yet looked at the
pictures you’ve seen an experiment
and not a little fake news. They
don’t mean much, hey? You don’t get much of a sensation from
looking at them, and this people here
are not used to looking at pictures.

All right, now look at the pictures.
Remember that the picture shows
only a few of the 251 children
killed, and there were at least 50
women and 60 men. Hemingway it is
certainly too right to
kill men and women and murder those
people more than twice. The papers
certainly have nothing. If there was any
resemblance the pictures at least
showed the children and the man
drowning in the river. The people
are not used to looking at children.

Now look at the other pictures. I
remember the many drawings of this
cathedral, very early in the morning. It is a very
beautiful cathedral and the last time
I saw it was burned and it looked
very bad. I knew it was burned and it looked
very bad, but it was not burned and it looked
very bad. I don’t know why I think it is
not burned and it looked very bad.

Now look at the other pictures. I
remember the many drawings of this
cathedral, very early in the morning. It is a very
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NOWlook at the other pictures. I
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beautiful cathedral and the last time
I saw it was burned and it looked
very bad. I knew it was burned and it looked
very bad, but it was not burned and it looked
very bad. I don’t know why I think it is
not burned and it looked very bad.
this kind of murder, and there is not, rests on the case of the 118 dead children. Take as good a look at them as you can stand. ("Cardinal" 38)

This opening section is quite sophisticated. Hemingway knows that public outrage will be greater in response to children’s deaths, but his wry comment about the politics of adults justifying their killing carries with it the suggestion of the opposite, that their deaths are, in fact, a case of murder as well. Contained within that formulation is a vague indictment of the American reader’s dismissive attitude toward the deaths of nameless, faceless men and women in a far-off country. Also, while he emphasizes the meaninglessness of empty figures, Hemingway manages to provide the number of dead children three times here and once more later in the piece, a move that increases impact when coupled with the visual representation of those deaths.

Hemingway follows this discussion of the first picture with a newspaper clipping from the Paris edition of the New York Herald Tribune, which quotes the Archbishop of New York Patrick Cardinal Hayes expressing support for Franco. According to the clipping as reprinted in Hemingway’s piece, Hayes responded to reports of the recent Barcelona bombings (which had been widely publicized and condemned from many quarters) by saying he “didn’t know the facts, but didn’t believe that ‘Franco would do such a thing.’”

Hemingway deals with this statement by sarcastically playing semantics: the Cardinal was right that Franco didn’t drop the bombs, he said, “because he doesn’t fly and is a general”; nor did the Cardinal himself. But of course, someone ordered those bombings, and if the order didn’t come from Franco, Hemingway claims, it must have come from someone under him or over him; if it came from over him, “it must have come from his German or Italian advisors” ("Cardinal" 38).
In a somewhat jarring transition, Hemingway then addresses the second photo, placing the scene at a specific cathedral in Spain based on his recognition of the background architecture.\(^{24}\) He notes that the Spanish officers, the most prominent of whom he identifies as General Aranda and General Davila, are giving what he recognizes as the salute of “the old regular Spanish army.” “What I don’t recognize,” he says [wryly], “is the salute that is being given by the Bishop of Lugo, the Archbishop of Santiago, the Canon of Santiago, and the Bishop of Madrid.” With mock disbelief, he offers a possibility: “Is that the fascist salute that they are giving? Is that the salute of the Nazis and the Italian fascists? . . . If they are giving the fascist salute I refuse to believe it” (“Cardinal” 38). Clearly, Hemingway implies that the Catholic Church is in collusion with the fascist nations—more so, in a sense, than even the Spanish army officers, who maintain their own traditional salute. The article, which starts with the question of responsibility, shifts the meaning of the term from direct responsibility (who flew the plane/who ordered the bombing run) to a broader sense of responsibility through support for the fascist worldview. But he anchors that broader kind of responsibility in its real, physical consequences: “Maybe there isn’t any moral to these pictures. But the children of Barcelona are dead as you can see from the picture and millions of other people will die long before it is their time to die because of the policy of might makes right that that strange outstretched arm salute stands for” (“Cardinal” 38).

As in “Dying, Well or Badly,” Hemingway uses the power of photographs to achieve the kinds of emotional effects Gingrich had asked for—to generate pity and outrage, in this case. Both pieces work because most readers were likely to assume that photographs

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\(^{24}\) In the printed version, the cathedral is unnamed. The earlier of two surviving cable typescripts in the Hemingway Collection at the John F. Kennedy Library identifies it as the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela. The later draft contains the wording of the published text. Hemingway apparently removed the specific reference for an unknown reason before cabling the piece to Gingrich.
represented strict reality. As Wendy Kozol notes in discussing photographic realism in *Life* magazine, “photography was an especially effective vehicle for news coverage because, through its realistic codes and mechanical apparatus, it presumed to depict the real world” (5). Hemingway references that assumption in the earlier piece when he suggests that the pictures of battlefield dead might make the war “seem a little more real” to his readers ("Dying" 68). And in the later article, he states as evidence “the children of Barcelona are dead as you can see from the picture” ("Cardinal" 38). But of course, a photograph is rarely, if ever, as objective as it would seem. Alan Trachtenberg notes, in discussing photography of the Farm Security Administration during the 1930s, that documentary photography “begs the question of fabrication in definitions of reality”:

> Even the slightest adjustment in point of view, in lighting, in the type of film used, can produce a “reality” in a different register. Then there is the inescapable subjectivity of the photographer, differences in the vision, the quality of the eye, the instinctive sense of where to place the camera—all of which bear on what individual pictures give us to understand by “the real.” (17)

If we consider also the publication situation, including captions, juxtapositions with other images, and of course textual directives toward interpretation such as those Hemingway gives, photographs can hardly be seen as neutral visions of reality. But it is a testament to the strength of that belief in the photograph’s representational stability that Hemingway can call attention to the possibility of fabrication for the very purpose of erasing that possibility in the reader’s mind. In “The Cardinal Picks a Winner,” he follows his first mock statement of disbelief over the clergymen’s salutes with the suggestion that “maybe the photograph is faked.” Then, after referencing the first photo as obvious proof that the children have died in
Barcelona, he concludes the article with the claim, “I don’t believe the people shown making it [the fascist salute] in the photograph can really be making it. I would rather prefer to think that the photograph is faked” (“Cardinal” 38). Photographic fakery may indeed be a possibility, but we are not invited to take the suggestion seriously because it is delivered as sardonically as is the uncertainty over the nature of the salute itself—“Is that the fascist salute that they are giving?” Of course it’s the fascist salute, and of course the picture isn’t faked. By speculating that what one can clearly see with his own eyes must be faked simply because that image contradicts one’s worldview, what one wants to believe, Hemingway is further satirizing the attitude of Cardinal Hayes, who refuses to believe that Franco would conduct bombing campaigns against civilian centers despite ample evidence to the contrary from multiple sources. In keeping with Ken’s ocular emphasis, vision is central to countering Hayes’ argument.25

Hemingway’s efforts to integrate photographs into his arguments and actually exploit their persuasive potential suggest a thoughtful awareness of what the magazine’s format could allow him to do. And while Hemingway, as William Braasch Watson has observed, was itching to get back to writing serious fiction around the time of his third wartime trip to Spain in April 1938, and though he was ambivalent about Ken’s political positioning, he appears nonetheless to have been enthusiastic about his early Ken pieces. In two cables to Gingrich written as he completed and then mailed “The Time Now, the Place Spain” to Ken in late February/early March, Hemingway calls the piece “very strong” and says he thinks

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25 Hemingway’s use of photographs in conjunction with texts not only reflects Gingrich’s editorial intentions. It also represents some of the most effective uses of photographs in the magazine because the photos are so integral to the pieces and because they are in fact directly connected to the subject matter. Whereas Life carried photographers on its staff, Ken apparently purchased most of its photographs from photo services such as Wide World, International, Globe, Acme, and Pix (Merrill 79). Consequently, the relationship between photos and texts was sometimes loose or impressionistic, and only rarely did such articles draw the reader’s attention to a particular photograph or incorporate a photo and its specific meaning into the text’s argument itself as Hemingway does.
Gingrich will like it (Cable to Gingrich 3 Mar., Cable to Gingrich 28 Feb.). In mid-March, upon mailing “Dying, Well or Badly,” he describes the pictures he is sending along with the article text and says they make a “terrific thing” (Cable to Gingrich 13 Mar.). In a note to Gingrich on the two second surviving cable typescript of “The Cardinal Picks a Winner,” Hemingway likewise labels the picture of the dead children in Barcelona “terrific” (“Cardinal” TS [3]). Both Gingrich and Smart appear to have agreed with these assessments. In a letter dated April 5, 1938, Smart tells Hemingway that he’s done “a swell job,” that his pieces have been well received, and adds that “the pictures accompanying your third cabled piece [“The Cardinal Picks a Winner”] were immense and will be a high point definitely of that issue (Letter to Hemingway 5 Apr.). In a May 12 letter, he writes, “I think your stuff in KEN has hit harder than anything you’ve ever published, at least based on the tremendous influx of fan mail we get” (Letter to Hemingway 12 May). In a cable dated April 18, Gingrich likewise praises the effectiveness of Hemingway’s pieces: “FEEL THAT THESE SHORT PUNCHES HAVE DONE MORE GOOD FOR LOYALIST CAUSI [sic] THAN VOLUMES ORDINARY REPORT ING [sic] JUDGING BY TERRIFIC RESPONSE RECEIVED” (Cable to Hemingway 18 Apr.). While there may be some feather-stroking for Ken’s most popular contributor here, these communications suggest that Hemingway was indeed providing just what the magazine called for.

Fiction as Argument

Hemingway’s fourth contribution to Ken, “The Old Man at the Bridge,” is his only work of fiction to appear in the magazine, and as such, has received more critical attention than any of the other pieces. Critics have generally regarded it as a fine story: if not among

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26 We might excuse this glib assessment of such a horrific picture by remembering what Hemingway was trying to accomplish in Ken and elsewhere—convincing the U.S. government to let the Republic buy arms and end that kind of bloodletting.
the author’s best, then at least remarkably powerful and memorable considering its brevity.  
In the story, an unnamed first-person narrator is scouting for Republican forces while civilian refugees stream across a pontoon bridge over the Ebro River. The narrator converses with an old man who falls down to sit in the dust. The man, too tired to go on and facing potential death from the advancing Nationalist troops, seems unconcerned about his own fate and worries only about the animals—two goats, a cat, and four pairs of pigeons—that he was forced to leave behind. The narrator’s concerned but distracted efforts to get the old man to move along are to no avail, and the story ends with the narrator musing on the unseen but approaching fascist troops: “It was a gray overcast day with a low ceiling so their planes were not up. That and the fact that the cats know how to look after themselves was all the good luck that old man would ever have” ("Old Man" 36). 

The story was based on a real encounter that Hemingway had with a Spanish peasant near the Amposta bridge over the Ebro River on Easter Sunday, 17 April 1938. William Braasch Watson has done a thorough job of detailing how Hemingway crafted the story from the same kinds of field notes from which he developed his NANA dispatches. Watson also analyzes the story, which he considers a “minor masterpiece,” as an example of Hemingway’s desire to draw a distinction between his journalism and his fiction, with a clear preference for the latter. Watson writes that “in seeing how differently . . . [Hemingway] used his field notes to write his dispatches on the one hand and this short story on the other, we can begin to appreciate why Hemingway insisted . . . that his fiction was not to be confused with his journalism” (Watson "Old Man" 157). Watson convincingly establishes from Hemingway’s correspondence that the author consistently viewed “The Old Man at the Bridge” as a short story rather than a nonfictional dispatch. However, the story’s
presentation in Ken does anything but make clear its status as a work of fiction. In fact, as it
appeared in Ken, the story might well have been taken for journalism by its contemporary
readers.

The main reason that the Ken reader might not have understood “The Old Man” as a
short story is that the magazine provided no markers for its classification as such. Esquire,
Collier’s, and other popular magazines of the day that regularly carried fiction grouped their
content under such headings as “Articles,” “Fiction,” “Satire,” and “Sports” in the tables of
contents. Ken, on the other hand, grouped its content into “Text,” “Color and Graphic”
drawings), and “Illustrative” (photographs); all of the articles were listed under “Text.”

Moreover, works of fiction were rare in the magazine. The first four issues contained only
five pieces that were indisputably fictional: four of these were Arthur Davison Ficke’s animal
fables, and the fifth, titled “When It’s Happened Over Here,” imagined a dystopian future of
fascist world domination. While these five items are by their nature fictional as opposed to
factual, they are clearly meant to function as political arguments, in contrast to fiction’s less
overtly political function as art and/or entertainment in publications such as Esquire or
Collier’s.

At the same time, we find a few pieces in Ken that blur the boundary between fiction
and journalism. One unsigned article titled “Off the Hauptmann Record” purports to reveal
the truth behind a suppressed news story that might have led to a stay of execution for Bruno
Richard Hauptmann, the convicted kidnapper and killer of the Lindbergh Baby. The piece is
clearly meant to be read as journalism, but it has the shape and some features of a short story,
including an unidentified third-person narrator who at times offers flashes of the main
character’s interior thoughts. Despite its function as a piece of journalism—indeed, its value
lay in reader’s assumption that it is telling a suppressed truth—this piece appears to have been fictionalized for effect.27

“The Old Man at the Bridge” is similar in that the factual is shaped into something like a short story, perhaps with a measure of dramatic license—but always with the assumption of real as opposed to invented events. In one sense, that is precisely what the story is: Watson has shown how Hemingway has reshaped the actual event of meeting the old man, recounted in one form in Hemingway’s field notes, into the fictional work. Hemingway establishes his focus on the meeting between the narrator and the old man by removing many of the observations in his notes and using the retreat as a backdrop against which to contrast “the immobility of the old man” (Watson "Old Man" 159). By contrast, “Hemingway uses,” according to Watson, “every image and idea he had jotted down about the old man in his notes, altering some of them slightly in order to clarify and dramatize the old man’s predicament” (Watson "Old Man" 160). In this sense, while it has a different feel from most of the Ken pieces which precede and surrounded it, the story does not stand out as more obviously fictional than some other articles in the magazine.

A reader of Ken in 1938 would not have known anything about the composition history of the story; he would merely have been confronted with what looked like a stylized piece of reportage.28 It is presented on the page no differently than any of the other journalism and persuasive essays in the magazine. As is common, the left (outside) half of the page carries an illustration: a photo of what appears to be a dead soldier buried in rubble (Figure 31, left). The photo is indistinct, almost impressionistic, as the hint of the soldier’s

27 Other examples of genre-blurring pieces include “Ordnance Worker’s Notebook” and “Ford’s Most Expensive Favor.”

28 Indeed, some critics over the years have read “The Old Man at the Bridge” as a work of journalism despite its later inclusion among the short stories, citing it as an example of his experiments with genre-blurring along with such pieces as “A Natural History of the Dead,” “One Reader Writes,” and “Homage to Switzerland.”
Figure 31: Two-page spread of Hemingway's "The Old Man at the Bridge."
face seems to blend seamlessly into the dirt and debris surrounding it. The visual-graphics lead reads, “This is the way a world ends, for the helpless ones too young or old to know what the shooting is about” (Hemingway "Old Man" 36). The lead is shorter than usual, but it does not suggest that the article is a work of fiction, and like almost all of the leads, it directs the reader toward the meaning that Gingrich wants him to take away from the piece. On the facing page appears a full-page photo of a Japanese boy dressed as a soldier and carrying a rifle in what appears to be a propaganda poster (Figure 31, right); this page is the beginning of the photo section of the issue. Moreover, the text itself offers little suggestion that the story is fiction. The first-person narrator is not identified, but the reader was likely aware that Hemingway had been in Spain as a correspondent, whether or not the reader had read his previous Ken pieces. The reader may well have assumed that the “I” was Hemingway himself in the role of reporter. The incorporation of dialogue was not unusual in either Hemingway’s or other reporters’ nonfiction writings, and the narrator is limited to his first-person knowledge. Really, the only hint that the narrator is not Hemingway the reporter is his statement of purpose in being at the bridge: “It was my business to cross the bridge, explore the bridgehead beyond, and find out to what point the enemy had advanced” ("Old Man" 36). A careful reader might have wondered why Hemingway, as a journalist, would have had such an apparently military task.

Determining whether “The Old Man at the Bridge” works as fiction or journalism in its original presentation is not an end in itself. Rather, the difficulty of classification highlights the fact that in Ken, a magazine devoted to very real, current, and politically-charged events, the story takes on meanings that it does not have when presented in a different format, meanings that few scholars have considered. Critics have tended to focus
on the old man’s dignity and the sympathy that his situation evokes. Some critics have interpreted the story in terms of a generalized anti-war theme, only marginally grounded in the Spanish war. Edmund Wilson, for example, writes that it is “a story which takes its place among the war prints of Callot and Goya, artists whose union of elegance with sharpness has already been recalled by Hemingway in his earlier battle pieces: a story which might have been written about almost any war” (qtd. in Muste 162).29 Other commentators read the story as a kind of encapsulation of the entire Spanish situation. Carlos Baker exemplifies this strain when he writes, in reference to the old man whom Hemingway met in real life, that “one displaced person in the spring of 1938 helped to dramatize to Hemingway the artist the predicament of the Spanish people” (238).30

Alfred Kazin stands out from this pattern with a reading that allows a measure of political meaning. He writes of the story that “it was a record of the better things Hemingway had learned in Spain, an intimation of a Hemingway who had found the thwarted ideal clear and radiant again through the martyrdom of the Spanish masses” (262-63). But John M. Muste, in his wide-ranging study of Spanish Civil War literature, argues that the story will not support such an “ideological interpretation” (163). And Stephen Cooper goes so far as to claim that “although the old man was driven from his home by the shelling that accompanied the Fascist advance, the story is basically apolitical” (88).

29 Stephen Cooper similarly argues that “the confusion and suffering of this simple old man seem to exemplify the sufferings of ordinary people in all wars” (Cooper 88). J. Bakker asserts that “though the story’s background is the Spanish Civil War, its ambiance is not that of Hemingway’s big novel about this war [For Whom the Bell Tolls], but reaches back to the earlier war-writing of A Farewell to Arms. And like that novel, the story dramatizes the senselessness of war to the ordinary, a-political man, without sentimentalizing the issues” (152).
30 Further examples include Arthur Waldhorn’s observation, “Broken, luckless, alone, the old man symbolizes what has happened to the people of Spain” (169); and Leo Gurko’s claim that the story focuses on “a small incident in the war that somehow managed to embrace the whole tragedy” (Gurko 43).
It is understandable to view the political dimension of “The Old Man” as submerged or absent, or to read the story as conveying a kind of universal anti-war theme. It is hard, in fact, to read it otherwise the way we most often encounter it: in The First Forty-Nine Stories or The Complete Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway, where it is called “Old Man at the Bridge.” There it is couched between “The Snows of Kilimanjaro” and “Up in Michigan” and surrounded by a body of other stories that are generally apolitical. The text itself downplays the political context, especially for readers unfamiliar with the Spanish war. We know, of course, that it takes place in Spain because of the place names: San Carlos, Barcelona, the Ebro Delta (though even this last is de-localized by its description as an “African looking country”). The single identification of the approaching enemy as “the Fascists” comes only at the end of the story, almost as an afterthought. The central character describes himself as “without politics,” an important point that critics almost always emphasize. And though the change is small, the dropping of the definite article in the title might seem to reduce specificity and encourage a tendency to read the story as a broad statement about war in general.

Yet in Ken, the “The Old Man at the Bridge” is undeniably political and rooted in a specific historical moment. One critic, Phyllis Frus, has made this point directly in a recent study of journalistic narrative: she claims that the story does carry political meanings in its Ken presentation, but that “when it was reprinted as fiction, the story lost its politics, except the universalizing politics of humanism” (86). The claim, though, is based on a general sense of Ken’s anti-fascist stance and that of Hemingway’s more political nonfiction of the period, and Frus does not consider in detail how the magazine itself contributes to the production of such meanings. Moreover, Frus makes some questionable claims about the political context
and the function of the story within the magazine. For one thing, she claims that
“Hemingway knew that most of Ken’s readers would share his politics; they did not need to
be spelled out” (86). This claim is accurate only in a very general way: it is reasonable to
assume that most Ken readers would tend toward liberal attitudes and would probably be
inclined to distrust, if not despise, fascism. But the entire political purpose of Ken, as I have
noted elsewhere, was to move beyond the usual circle of committed and informed liberals
and progressives (that same 40,000 who read The Nation and the New Republic) to a much
broader base of readers, and moreover, to ring the bell of alarm about the real and pressing
dangers of international fascism for a mainstream and generally isolationist American
readership inclined to see the fascist threat as Europe’s problem. And regarding the Spanish
war in particular, Hemingway himself makes clear in other articles his belief that his
readership has largely forgotten about the war and needs to be reminded of both its ongoing
horror and its political significance. Thus he is not, in fact, preaching to the choir, as Frus
suggests.

Frus also claims that “the response of those who read ‘The Old Man at the Bridge’ in
Ken was probably not very different from that of readers who encounter it among the
colleced fiction” (83). Now, she is here discussing the story’s generic confusion between
fiction and journalism and placing “The Old Man” in the category of the human interest
story. Nonetheless, this claim in itself seems to contradict her later assertion that political
meaning drops out of the story when it is presented in a different context. In other words,
how can we assume that readers would interpret the story in essentially the same way
regardless of context when it is “political” in one context but not in the other? It is perhaps
ture, as Frus claims, that “we cannot know how the first readers of “The Old Man” in Ken
may have interpreted [Hemingway’s contributions]” (85)—that is, we cannot know for certain. But we can make some reasoned claims about how the story functioned as a political statement by examining its presentation in the 19 May 1938 issue of Ken.

To begin with, just the two-page spread before us as we read “The Old Man” carries political meanings absent from its presentation in a story collection (Figure 31). To its left is the picture of the partially-buried body, which grounds the story in a physical reality and connects the piece with the Spanish war images that could be found elsewhere in the popular press. To its right is the picture of the Japanese boy-soldier, bearing the caption, “YOUNG JAPAN has its martial spirit trained with eyes on U.S. rather than China.” The combination of photo and text here encapsulates the most persistent theme in Ken: international fascism, with its warmongering values antithetical to peace and democracy, threatens not just far-away nations, but the United States itself. In Chapter One, I discussed the idea of the “magazine labyrinth,” how ostensibly unconnected elements within a magazine interact with each other in mutually reinforcing ways to create an overarching theme or argument. Our understanding of “The Old Man at the Bridge” is affected by its juxtaposition against the image of Japanese (fascist) aggression. The same can be said of the other content in the issue: because of the discontinuous ways in which readers take in a magazine such as Ken, the other items affect the way we read the story in only a slightly less immediate way as the YOUNG JAPAN photo page.

The 19 May issue contains several items that highlight the fascist threat in typical Ken fashion. The cover story, “Underhanded Underground Japan,” details secret, illegal Japanese submarine bases, aircraft hangers, and other military fortifications in the Mandated Islands and foregrounds their direct threat to the U.S.: with these fortifications, the lead
claims, “Japan has brought her naval front 3,000 miles closer to us and taken an advantage
easily equal, in war time, to the sinking of 25% of our Pacific fleet” ("Underhanded" 13).
“England Behind the Falseface” casts negotiations between England and the fascist powers
as double-crossing that threatens stability in Europe and indicates that England itself may be
on the road to fascism; Mussolini’s involvement in Spain is discussed alongside Germany’s
“invasion” of Austria and other issues. “The Dust Bowl of Freedom” offers a bleak picture
of the freedom-starved way of life in Nazi Germany (Brown). This piece deals partly with the
indoctrination of youth and highlights one scene of a seven-year-old boy betraying his
grandfather for politically questionable comments made inside their home; this focus on the
manipulation of children resonates with the YOUNG JAPAN photo page. An advertisement
for Ken itself positions the magazine in opposition to the worst kind of violence: it uses
enormous boldface text to proclaim, “IF BABY-KILLING strikes you as a fine idea . . . then
KEN is not for you” (Ken Magazine 97). A drawing captioned “Mother’s Day—Non-
Aryan” depicts a cloaked, apparently grieving woman standing amid grave crosses. Several
cartoons caricature Mussolini, Hitler, and the Japanese, and an ad for World Peaceways
offers a drawing of a family portrait in which all of the people’s faces are obscured by gas
masks ("Family" 107). And on the last page, Gingrich prints a letter from a reader who
praises the stance Ken has taken so far. At the conclusion of the letter, the writer describes
how he and a group of fellow workers looked over the just-published second issue of Ken,
the one containing Hemingway’s “Dying, Well or Badly”:

I wish I could describe our feelings as we looked on the pictures of those bodies in
Spain . . . for myself, I was so deeply moved that I could think of only one thing . . .
that I wanted to cling desperately to any line of thought, any ideal, any shred of
fellow-feeling in all of us, that will prevent such horrifying desecration of our lives. Last night I could not rid my mind of the picture of those shattered bodies. Is it too much to hope that every one of us, as individuals, will ponder the message of those pictures? ("In the Ken" 106, ellipses in original; emphasis added)

Shameless self-promotion aside, this letter nicely ties together the anti-fascist, antiwar themes of the issue by re-emphasizing the implications of the Spanish war that Hemingway had made so explicit in the earlier issue.

In this context, even the single mention of the fascists advancing toward the Ebro in “The Old Man at the Bridge” does more than establish a fictional setting: it places the story in a very real and (in 1938) ongoing war. Certainly, we can read the old man, sitting motionless in the dust at story’s end, in classic Hemingway terms, as an exemplar of the code of grace under pressure. And we can read the advance of the enemy as crucial to establishing a sense of impending doom against which the old man’s grace is measured, and through which the tragedy of war is conveyed. But in Ken, the old man also represents the peaceful innocent, the ideal, we might say, of humanity itself, and the advance of the fascists toward the Ebro embodies the relentless drive of fascism to crush that humanity. He may indeed represent, as Kazin suggests, the “martyrdom” of the Spanish people, but that martyrdom is not yet fully a past event, its happening not to be lamented but prevented. And as I argue in Chapter One the potential destruction of the Spanish Republic is frequently connected in Ken, in various explicit and implicit ways, with the possible destruction of the American republic. So the fascists advancing toward the Ebro also represent a direct challenge to the American way of life and the American desire for peace. The photograph and caption on the facing page remind the reader of the international implications and the direct threat to the
U.S. through the caption and the image of an aggressive culture so inhumane as to conscript its children into military service. That the story takes place on Easter Sunday, as noted in the final lines, ironically reinforces the contrast between peace and aggression. There will be no resurrection on this day.

The story does, of course, retain its meanings as a work of literary art; in keeping with what we think of as anti-war writing, it powerfully illustrates the cost of war, whether in Spain in 1938 or at any other time and place. But in *Ken*, the political meaning, nearly absent in other publication formats, is present, even primary. “War” in the abstract is not the evil; the evil is the Spanish Civil War, launched by Spanish reactionaries and sustained by German and Italian fascists. No less than Hemingway’s earlier *Ken* pieces—the more visceral and more overtly polemical “Dying, Well or Badly,” for example—“The Old Man at the Bridge” functions as a political argument against that war and its perpetrators, against the larger war it might lead to, and against the Western powers’ failure to intervene on the side of the Republic. It is admittedly a simplified politics, a “fascism and war vs. humanity” politics, and devoid of the Marxist implications that Kazin’s comments suggest—but then, so much of the American (and European) writing about the Spanish war cast the conflict in similarly black and white terms, downplaying political complexity in favor of generating reader support. The further possibility that the story was factual, or factually-based, rather than imaginatively constructed would only have intensified its persuasive impact for a reader inclined to be appalled by the tragic cost of war.

In terms of its argumentative approach, “The Old Man at the Bridge” seems the polar opposite of the earlier *Ken* pieces, particularly “Dying, Well or Badly” and “The Cardinal Picks a Winner,” and not just because it is less overtly persuasive. In those pieces the
violence is very much on stage and impossible to ignore. In “The Old Man at the Bridge,”
the violence is, as Muste has observed, “always out of sight.” But it is all the more effective
for being off-stage, for it is “a constant menace, and the entire motivating force of the action”
(162). In this sense, the story fits in well with what Gingrich had asked for, despite its
functioning by implication rather than direct argument. If it is understated in its presentation,
the story nonetheless evokes the pity Gingrich was after as effectively as either of the earlier
pieces. And Gingrich himself praised the story for its success as an argument. In the cable
that he sent upon receiving Hemingway’s story draft, Gingrich writes, “MARVELOUS
PIECE FEEL THAT THESE SHORT PUNCHES HAVE DONE MORE GOOD FOR
LOYALIST CAUSI [sic] THAN VOLUMES ORDINARY REPORT ING [sic] JUDGING
BY TERRIFIC RESPONSE RECEIVED” (Cable to Hemingway 18 Apr.). Watson uses this
cable to establish that Hemingway’s awareness that he had written a powerful story was
confirmed by others. Fair enough. It is important to note, however, that Gingrich appears to
make no distinction between the function of the story and that of the earlier articles. The
adjective “marvelous” refers to the story itself, and can imply quality based on any number of
criteria for judgment. But thereafter Gingrich judges in particular its persuasive success:
“these short punches”—presumably all four of Hemingway’s contributions to date—“have
done more good for Loyalist cause than volumes ordinary reporting.” Gingrich’s response to
“The Old Man at the Bridge” makes clear that while Hemingway may have viewed the story
as a work of fiction, and therefore a work of art, it also functioned in Ken as a political
argument. I suspect Hemingway was quite conscious of this function as well, given the
awareness of the magazine’s purpose and potential that is suggested in his previous
contributions.
I have argued that his first four contributions to *Ken* show Hemingway skillfully making use of the magazine’s persuasive potential, and that they are successful when evaluated by the criteria of what they were designed to accomplish. They are successful, that is, in fulfilling the political aims that Gingrich had outlined in his correspondence with the author. But one of the articles was in a sense too successful—too shocking and too direct in its criticism of the powerful forces lined up against the Spanish Republic. Before *Ken* was barely out of the gate, its star contributor had helped put the magazine in a situation that would force it to temper the boldness of its presentation.

**The Catholic Boycott and the Failure of *Ken’s* Masculine Stance**

If Hemingway was important to *Ken* because of his established popularity, he was also inadvertently central in securing for the magazine its single most damaging opponent, the Catholic Church. As Gingrich recalls in *Nothing But People*, “he who had refused to be listed as an editor . . . nevertheless exerted more editorial swing, in a catastrophic direction, than all the editors put together” (*Nothing* 147). As I discuss in Chapter One, the Church responded to the appearance of “The Cardinal Picks a Winner” with a boycott and other types of pressure aimed at bringing down not just *Ken*, but also the other *Esquire* publications. The various responses of Gingrich and Smart to this opposition relate directly to the masculine stance cultivated in the magazine.

In his letter explaining to Hemingway the Catholic response to “The Cardinal Picks a Winner,” Gingrich leads off with, “We’ve put in a damn jittery twenty four hours” (Letter to Hemingway [mid-June] [1-2]). He goes on to describe the Church’s tactics, conveying throughout the sense that neither he nor Smart anticipated such a vibrant and coordinated response. But what is important here is how Gingrich directs Hemingway in the face of this
campaign, and the way he chooses to frame that directive. “So in anything about Spain,” he writes, “(if anything about Spain), avoid the Catholic angle—take the treachery angle or the economic angle or any goddamn angle except the direct religion one” (Letter to Hemingway [mid-June] [2]). From this point on, criticism of the Catholic Church is off limits. We should recall here, as we examine this action of self-censorship, that Gingrich is discussing the magazine that was to “have the courage to chart its course right down the middle of that great Sargasso Sea of unpublished newsprint . . . [toward] ‘the part that couldn’t be told’”; the magazine that would “not hesitate to peer and pry and complain”; the magazine whose motto was “‘What the good Lord lets happen, I am not afraid to print.”

Gingrich obviously knows that he is undermining the principles on which the publishing venture has been predicated, and he also knows that he is writing to the man whose supposed characteristics of manliness he has used to shape the magazine’s editorial self-presentation. He therefore rounds out his letter with several disclaimers designed to shape Hemingway’s understanding of his response to the boycott:

Now don’t think I’m spooked and don’t feel that any retreat we may make right now is a panic. But we will have to avoid any open and overt offense to them for a while if we are to survive. . . .

We’re not lying down or giving up or saying uncle or yelling Mama mia—and Christ knows we need you in there every inning now as never before—but to stay above water until we can make some shore on which to fight, we’ve got to lay off them completely for the next few months.

For god’s sake Ernest don’t breathe a word of this to anybody, because we can’t afford to buck them now, and anything said may provoke further action.
This is scribbled off in extreme haste but no heat, just calm acceptance of the strategic necessities of a tight squeeze. (Letter to Hemingway [mid-June] [2])

Gingrich’s assertions that he is not “spooked” or panicking, that his haste contains “no heat,” run counter to the letter’s almost palpably stressful tone and his own opening description of “a damn jittery twenty-four hours”; his claim to “calm acceptance” is hard to swallow. More importantly, in keeping with Ken’s policy of virile and militant pacifism, Gingrich employs military metaphors to try to convince Hemingway that he is not giving up, and therefore not betraying the codes of manliness that Hemingway supposedly adheres to. Ken may be making a “retreat”—a valid military maneuver—but not a panic; it is an action necessitated by the larger goals of the campaign, the “strategic necessities” of an undesirable temporary situation; it is an action designed to let Gingrich and Smart find “some shore on which to fight,” presumably after their strategic position has improved. And Gingrich offers a remarkable list of multiple names for the same perceived cowardliness: “We’re not lying down or giving up or saying uncle or yelling Mama mia.” While the first three are general terms, the last, “yelling Mama mia,” is quite specific: we will recall that it was one of Hemingway’s arguments in his efforts to establish the cowardice and effeminacy of the Italians in Spain in “The Time Now, the Place Spain.” Even the use of the term “panic” as another way of describing what Gingrich is not doing carries an echo of that article, for the Italians’ great inherent ability to panic marvelously (as opposed to making orderly retreats) was another sign of their weakness. Gingrich seems considerably worried (possibly with good reason) that his action will be seen in the same damning terms as the kind of actions Hemingway had specifically derided in the pages of Ken.
Gingrich is here failing to enact the ideal of manly courage that he has used to sell and define the magazine to its potential readership, a situation which emphasizes the rhetoricity of that masculine stance. But simultaneously, through his attempts to frame his actions in terms of strength and farsightedness rather than weakness, he is trying to perform for a different audience—Hemingway himself rather than the magazine reader—that very masculinity which is showing its lack of substance in the text of the same letter. Gingrich’s rather transparent attempt to maintain his manly dignity in the midst of this humbling act reminds us that there is more at stake regarding masculinity here than just magazine salesmanship. Those ideals of manliness obviously inform behaviors and expectations between these two men, and we can infer potential consequences, to personal respect, friendship, or business relations, of either man’s failure to live up to the ideals.

Performances of manliness were not exclusive to Arnold Gingrich during this affair. David Smart also attempted to spin Ken’s weaknesses into strengths for Hemingway’s perception. Smart wrote an enthusiastic letter to Hemingway on 5 April 1938, just after Ken’s successful first issue had appeared; after praising Hemingway’s first contribution, Smart notes that he has already “received about 25 letters from wops threatening me with all sorts of tortures but as you say, they’re front runners and cowards so I haven’t lost any sleep about it” (Letter to Hemingway 5 Apr. [1]). Perhaps Smart had not yet become very concerned over opposition to Ken (though some advertisers had almost certainly dropped out by this point), but it is nonetheless interesting to see him apparently referencing Hemingway’s tough talk to play up his own lack of fear. By 12 May, after the third issue had been barred from the newsstands, Smart spins a similar picture of fearlessness despite the more substantial challenge of the Catholic boycott, even to the point of labeling the entire
flap a victory. Citing the value of publicity and sales resulting from the controversy, Smart claims that “all in all, I think we came out ahead, for we’ve surely gotten some terrific blasts both on your piece and the “Los Angeles Sporting Girl” (Letter to Hemingway 12 May [1]). The flap was well-timed to re-inject some reader interest at a natural point where circulation drops off for a new magazine, Smart writes, and “even though there was a lot of adverse criticism and some advertisers yanked their ads, I feel definitely sure that if we had to do it over again we’d do it the same way” (Letter to Hemingway 12 May [2]). Such confidence in the situation and the correctness of previous decisions might seem convincing from Hemingway’s perspective, except for Gingrich’s “damn jittery” letter, which Smart apparently didn’t know Gingrich had sent to Hemingway. Smart has chosen to omit several important details of the Church’s anti-Ken campaign, avoiding any sense of the broader threat that those details represent and the genuine worry they caused in the Smart/Gingrich camp.

Meyer Levin recalls a trip to New York that Smart took to try to straighten out Ken’s problems, probably by meeting with the advertising agencies and possibly with some representative of the Catholic opposition; Levin does not offer a date, but it may have been the trip Smart mentions he is about to embark upon in a 18 July letter to Hemingway. According to Levin, Smart told him that “I’ve had my lesson, and if I have to crawl on my knees to those people from here to New York to save my business, I’m going to do it” (127). The accuracy of Levin’s account, especially the wording of Smart’s statement, cannot be assured, though it does bear a resemblance to George Seldes’ recollections of Smart’s responses to the advertising people during Ken’s development phase. But Smart’s surviving

31 In the same letter, Smart writes, “I don’t know whether you’ve had a chance to see Arnold, but if you have, he’s probably told you all about this” ([1]). Indeed he had done so in writing, though with a far less convincing attempt at a tone of calm control.
correspondence with Hemingway makes no mention of his apparent willingness to do whatever he must to save his publications. By November, Smart was still trying to give Hemingway the impression that things were under control. Smart notes that after the recent Munich crisis, which he feels validated Ken’s repeated warnings about the European situation, “KEN has definitely and finally made an impression on its readers and the public in general.” He is less boisterous about the advertisers, if only slightly:

Nevertheless, it’s a long fight back to the good graces of the advertisers. There’s no group as touchy. If Campbell’s Soup gets one squawk from a crank letter writer, they’re quick to cancel the advertising; but they could receive a thousand letters of thanks, and that would count zero. (Letter to Hemingway 7 Nov.)

Naturally, it is a fight back into the advertisers’ good graces, not a crawl. His discussion here of the advertisers may be rather more genuine than many of his spins to Hemingway, but it comes in the context of a desperate move to save the failing magazine: the plan to shift from fortnightly to weekly publication the following year. Smart mentions in the same letter that this “big gamble” is in the works: “If we hit with this,” he writes, “and don’t lose too much of our present quarter of a million [circulation], I think we’ll have the beginning of a damned powerful force” (Letter to Hemingway 7 Nov.). Once again, he foregrounds the idea of strength, if only potential strength, and characteristically avoids any sense of desperation or potential failure.

Smart explains to Hemingway that the shift to a weekly would also involve a reduction in the magazine’s physical size and therefore a substantial reduction in paper costs, which may have been the central reason for the move. Yet there was also a measure of audacity in the decision to increase the frequency of a plummeting publication. That, in any
case, is how Gingrich frames in his memoir the coffee-shop conversation in which Smart proposed the move. Smart asked, Gingrich recalls, “the awesome question, what would I think of changing Ken to a weekly?”

I told him it brought two responses immediately to mind. One was the case of the French general who asked, when his left was crumbling and his right was disorganized and there was nothing left to his rear, “What do I do? I attack!” I told it, of course, with the usual analogy technique, putting Coronet on the left, Esquire [sic] on the right and Verve to the rear. Toujours de l’audace.

“I like that one. So what do I do? I attack. What’s the other one?”

I said the other was a sentence from Havelock Ellis . . . to the effect that, of all man’s mottoes, the most ignoble was “Safety First.”

“Good. I like that one still better. . . .” (Nothing 146-47)32

As always, the specifics of Gingrich’s memoir must be taken with a measure of caution. But the prevalence of the military metaphor and tough-guy mottoes in his memory of the event suggest that these men performed their masculinities for each other as a matter of course, that such performances were limited neither to magazine salesmanship nor efforts to keep Hemingway from bowing out of the enterprise.

Beneath these performances, however, was at least some measure of buckling to the opposition that, as I have argued, undermines the magazine’s stance of courage and manliness. How exactly Smart’s and Gingrich’s conciliatory stance toward the Church affected the magazine itself is difficult to determine with accuracy. Meyer Levin recalls that Smart, after the meeting in New York, announced a change in the magazine’s policies as a

32 The shift to weekly publication became an unmitigated disaster as circulation plummeted. Smart and Gingrich then tried cutting the 25¢ cover price to 10¢, but the magazine never recovered its circulation or its advertisers.
result of the pressure: “There was gong to be no more about Spain. That was on the negative side. On the positive side we were going to get some first-class articles on religion, on the Vatican library, things of that kind” (127-28). He claims that Smart also had a list of contributors’ names to whom the ad people objected as “Jewish reds,” and who would no longer appear by name in the Esquire publications; Levin of course was one of them, and cites this type of external pressure as integral to his being forced out of his employment with Smart. And the sexual content of the magazines, the cheesecake visuals and the like, was also toned down, though only temporarily. Levin recalls that “month by month sex crept back,” but charges that “the bargain on policy” which Smart made with the advertising people “had been kept. Inside [i.e., Ken] was about as militant as the Saturday Evening Post” (144).33

While there is no reason to challenge Levin’s claim about the suppression of “Jewish reds,” he does overstate the extent to which Ken was altered after Catholic pressure came to bear on it. We have seen, for example, that Gingrich was still willing to allow pro-Loyalist material on Spain so long as it avoided direct assault on the Church. Spain was not, in fact, off limits, though Hemingway did lay off the Church as directed. As for the overall militancy of the magazine, the more egregiously violent material became less prevalent after the first few issues. That is, as the magazine went on, it became less saturated with drawings of grave crosses and death’s heads and the like, such that the overall tone was less enthusiastically violent, less fetishistic, if you will, about the violence and death that the magazine used to frame its opposition to war. But while the balance between political topics and lighter, entertaining topics seems to have shifted somewhat toward the latter (with, indeed, a more generous helping of cheesecake over time), the political focus and staunch

33 Levin changes the name of Ken to Inside.
anti-fascism remained prominent throughout the magazine’s run, as it continued to campaign energetically against the worldwide fascist threat.

But if the magazine’s decline in militancy is difficult to quantify, we can point to certain conciliatory gestures that were doubtless calculated to appease the opposition, and would seem to undermine the proclamation of manly courage embodied in the Charles Anderson Dana motto that Gingrich appropriated. About two months after the prostitution piece appeared in print, *Ken* presented a letter from the Council of Churches of Buffalo and Erie County (a Protestant and Catholic organization) protesting the article on the grounds of indecency, accompanied by a groveling apology from Gingrich. The visio-graphic lead announces the letter as “an example of fairness on the part of organized forces of decency” and labels the apology as “an admission of error.” In the apology, Gingrich explains that certain “moralizing paragraphs” present in the original manuscript had been deleted by editors who thought them extraneous; this had been a mistake, he writes, as was the failure to provide an editorial note that would frame the article as “a document of sufficient social significance to warrant publication in *Ken*.” He promises, in effect, not to do it again, and tells the letter writer that he hopes “future issues of *Ken* will measure up to your original expectations and that you will see in them a development of the publishers’ idea of safeguarding our present American liberties and democratic ideals.” To these humbled offerings, Gingrich adds, “May we express appreciation of the friendly spirit of open-minded inquiry with which you register what is certainly a justified complaint?” ("Within” 14 July 4). One can only imagine how Hemingway (or at least the hypermasculine Hemingway of popular imagination) might have sneered at this rolling-over.
Two months later, Ken makes what can be seen as a second conciliatory gesture, this time nodding more directly toward the Catholic Church itself. In an article titled “The Vatican Fights Back,” Irving Wallace attempts to cast the Pope and the Vatican as staunch and heroic opponents of fascism. The lead proclaims, “The smallest independent state in the world . . . is today fighting a two-fisted fight against the twin menaces of dictatorship and intolerance, armed with the knowledge that over 300 million people will back its every word” (64). The article itself cheers those manly Christian soldiers onward with similar, almost comical excess—the narrative is occasionally punctuated by dramatic one-sentence paragraphs such as “The Vatican reacted quickly” and “The Vatican in action!”—while also defending the Church against charges of sympathy with the fascists, and characterizing the Pope as “progressive” (he shaves with an American safety razor, after all) (64-66). A cartoon in which a humanitarian quote from Pope Pius shines as a light over a dark scene of fascist brutality appropriately visualizes the article’s accolades. Representing as it does a complete reversal of the perspective represented in Hemingway’s “The Cardinal Picks a Winner” with its far more convincing use of visual argument, the article feels like nothing so much as servile, if ultimately ineffectual, flattery.

As for Hemingway’s contributions to Ken, his best work had been printed by “The Old Man at the Bridge” in the fourth issue, at least if judged on the criteria of hard-hitting argument that Gingrich initially requested. I turn now to Hemingway’s other articles, which vary in quality but at their worst represent a near-complete failure of the insider stance, and of the implied masculine controlling gaze, on which Hemingway’s and Ken’s persuasive authority rested.

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34 Wallace would later become a best-selling author and screenwriter.
Missing the Inside Story: Hemingway’s Later Pieces

Hemingway honored Gingrich’s request and wrote no more about the Catholics in Spain. There is no evidence that Gingrich asked him to tone down his articles in any other way, but Hemingway essentially did so nonetheless. Most of the following ten articles were more analytical and less violent, less laden with pathos or the use of gendered evaluations, than his first four contributions. In this sense—that is, in the extent to which the articles fulfilled the magazine’s original purpose as outlined by Gingrich—the remaining pieces can be judged less successful. For the most part, they are correspondingly less memorable.

In “A Program for U.S. Realism,” Hemingway satirizes Neville Chamberlain’s characterization of appeasement as “realism” by suggesting that, in the event of a European war, the U.S. should make a profit by remaining neutral and selling to both sides. The piece is effective in criticizing the cynicism of Chamberlain’s brand of realism, though it suffers somewhat by confusing the question of neutrality. That is, the thick layer of sarcasm over the text indicates that Hemingway almost certainly did not intend for his suggestion to be taken seriously, but we are left uncertain as to how the country should proceed in the coming war, especially since he had advocated neutrality (without the arms-selling aspect) both recently and often.35 The bitterly humorous tone of this piece drives a few of the other articles, such as “United We Fall Upon Ken,” in which Hemingway vents his disgust over his belief that the publication of Ken has stirred practically more controversy in his own country than the Spanish war itself; and “Call for Greatness,” in which he urges President Roosevelt to break free of Chamberlain’s lead regarding neutrality and appeasement.

Robert O. Stephens has observed that Hemingway’s Ken pieces “sometimes had an

35 In two issues prior to this article, Hemingway states flatly that “there is no reason on earth why the United States should go to war” (“Call” 23). Robert O. Stephens surprisingly takes the arms-selling suggestion at face value, apparently missing or ignoring Hemingway’s sarcasm (Stephens 197).
almost hysterical overtone as he made plainer and simpler, sometimes overly simple, the
dangers of Fascism inside and outside the country” (24). These assessments are accurate for
a few, most notably an unconvincing rant titled “H. M.’s Loyal State Department.” Here
Hemingway rails against the “fascists in the U.S. State Department” for doing “their level,
crooked, Roman, British-aping, disgusting, efficient best to end [the Spanish war] by denying
the Spanish government the right to buy arms to defend itself against the German and Italian
aggression” ("H. M.’s" 36). Whatever force this argument might have is undermined by the
rhetorical excesses of such passages, and the overuse of “fascist” as an epithet, with which
Hemingway labels the unspecified State Department officials no less than four times in a
two-column piece. Used in this way, with no evidence presented to establish the actual
political beliefs of the State Department officials nor any consideration of possible motives
other than fascist sympathies, the “fascist” label is merely name-calling. This piece offers
poor argumentative writing whether or not it is read in the context of Ken.

But where Hemingway really fell short of his and the magazine’s persuasive potential
is in the way he missed, perhaps willingly, the real inside story of the Spanish Civil War: the
machinations of Stalinist agents and their Spanish allies to violently crush all anti-Stalinist
and revolutionary elements within the Republic and secure their own control over the
government. This story has been told in great detail in many histories, but it was largely
downplayed in the pro-Loyalist press at the time, often for fear of damaging anti-fascist unity
and undermining any chance that the Western democracies might intervene. For example,
Kingsley Martin, editor of the British New Statesman and Nation, famously rejected a piece
from George Orwell, then an occasional contributor, because it exposed the Stalinists’
schemes. Orwell had himself been embroiled in the May events in Barcelona because of his
action with a militia of the POUM, an anti-Stalinist Marxist group liquidated by the Communists; his experiences are covered in the magnificent Homage to Catalonia, which sold poorly when published in 1938. Two of Hemingway’s Ken pieces in particular weigh in on the issue of the Communists’ power plays and the question of whether a state of political terror, similar to the concurrent terror in the Soviet Union, existed in Spain at the time.

Hemingway’s unwillingness or inability to recognize the extent of the Communists’ ruthlessness and paranoia has been noted in several studies and biographies in relation to Hemingway’s friendship with John Dos Passos. That friendship ended in a dispute over the mysterious disappearance of Dos Passos’ Spanish friend Jose Robles, who had, unbeknownst to Dos Passos at first, been murdered on trumped-up spying charges. Hemingway initially tried to discourage Dos Passos from pursuing his inquiries about Robles for fear of causing an uncomfortable situation for the American correspondents. Later, at a public function, Hemingway callously broke the news to Dos Passos that Robles had in fact been shot, but that there had been a fair trial and adequate proof of his guilt, the latter being lies that Hemingway appears to have believed for quite some time. This situation led to the final rift in Hemingway’s and Dos Passos’ relationship.

Hemingway’s Ken article “Treachery at Aragon” has been identified as a thinly-veiled jab at Dos Passos designed to make the other writer look foolish in his refusal to believe that Robles could have possibly been a traitor. The article begins and ends with the inflammatory assertion that the Nationalist breakthrough on the Aragon front in March 1938, which allowed Franco to split the Republican zone in two, was made possible by traitors coordinated by the Gestapo. Sandwiched in between is a discussion of Dos Passos, here an unnamed American writer friend of Hemingway, who is presented as too naïve to believe
that a good friend has been shot as a spy and traitor after a fair trial, as Hemingway confidently asserts. “The man was his friend so he could not possibly have committed an act of treachery,” Hemingway writes. “This is as good an example as any of the good hearted naïveté of a typical American liberal attitude” ("Treachery" 26). Dos Passos’ assertions that he could guarantee the character of his friend are quickly dismissed in favor of Hemingway’s superior inside knowledge.

James Mellow calls “Treachery at Aragon” “the low ebb of Hemingway’s coverage of the Spanish Civil War” (512). What is distasteful about this article is how Hemingway condescendingly presents Dos Passos as an innocent and a fool for questioning the official stories, even when the latter had good reason for believing he was getting the run-around. What is damning about the article as an argument based on supposedly inside knowledge is the fact that it is dead wrong. Certainly it is wrong in the details of the Robles case, as Hemingway’s biographers have shown. Antony Beevor notes that one divisional commander, the Polish Communist who went by the name General Walter, blamed the utter rout of Republican forces on the Aragon front on “the immense and intensive activity and work of defeatist elements and agents of the fifth column within republican units,” but Beevor dismisses the explanation. Republican commanders commonly made similar baseless claims after defeats to deflect responsibility, and in any case, the Aragon defeat in fact resulted from a number of genuine military factors, including a massive preparatory artillery bombardment, Nationalist air superiority, and the Republican generals’ belief that the attack was just a feint (324-25). Hemingway was likely repeating a story floating around army circles; what makes us wince is the arrogance of irreproachable authority with which he uncritically repeats it.
The other relevant piece, “Fresh Air on an Inside Story,” is less blatantly wrong, prima facie, but nonetheless fails in much the same way that “Treachery in Aragon” does. In this darkly comic narrative, which takes place in April 1937, an unnamed British journalist (F. A. Voight of the Manchester Guardian) is convinced that there is a political terror in Madrid despite having seen no evidence of it. He gives a female American journalist (Martha Gellhorn) an uncensored draft of a news story about the imagined terror to mail home, telling her the story had already been approved by the censor. Knowing that the woman could be shot for treason if she gets caught with the story, Hemingway saves the day by intercepting it and discrediting the man; he also shows restraint, incidentally, by choosing not to “sock” the bespectacled Voight. Once again, Hemingway’s superior knowledge and commitment to Truth dominate the article. On the rare occasion that critics have addressed this piece, they have pointed to it as an example of Hemingway’s great concern for truthfulness in reporting and disgust for those who would knowingly lie for their own purposes, in this case, to produce a more sensational story. This is clearly the most immediate point of the article. But it also argues for the absence of a political terror in Madrid and thus weighs in on the question of the Communists’ activities. In the pages of the insider’s magazine, it argues that there is in essence no inside story in Republican Spain. Those that claim otherwise do so because that truth about the political situation is “too dull” for their liking ("Fresh Air" 28).

I do not charge that Hemingway lied outright in the article. He may not have seen evidence of a political terror in Madrid, and he almost certainly did not fabricate the confrontation with Voight, however he may have shaped the details for self-promotion and
comic effect. Yet even if we assume the accuracy of the event, Hemingway’s piece foregrounds the absence of terror in Madrid in April of “last year,” suggesting by implication (that is, Hemingway makes no distinction to the contrary) the absence of terror in Republican Spain at the present, thereby potentially misleading readers’ understanding of the situation in Spain. Questions about terror in Republican Spain involved both the charges of pro-Nationalists, who played up stories of “Red atrocities” including mass executions, the murder of priests and nuns, and the burning of churches; and the charges of anti-Stalinist supporters of the Republic, a minority, who more or less accurately grasped the extent and significance of Communist machinations. Hemingway almost certainly had the former in mind when he denied any terror, yet both were in fact relevant. This is the context within which Hemingway’s article appeared, if somewhat late in the game, and his arguments against the existence of terror are positioned squarely in favor of the official line. Hemingway writes that he countered Voight’s baseless accusations by telling him

that there were half a dozen of us newspaper men who were living and working in Madrid whose business it was, if there was a terror, to discover it and report it. That I had friends in Seguridad [i.e., Security?] that I had known from the old days and could trust, and that I knew that three people had been shot for espionage that month. I had been invited to witness an execution but had been away at the front and had waited four weeks for there to be another. ("Fresh Air" 28)

Here are the characteristic claims to insider knowledge, channeled through the friends “from the old days.” That executions are so infrequent indicates, at best, that they are instances of

36 Martha Gellhorn personally recounted the story to historian Phillip Knightley (214). Voight, for his part, responded to the article with a letter to Hemingway dated 22 January 1939, in which he writes simply, “Dear Mr. Hemingway, My attention has been called to your article in “Ken” (Sept. 22nd.). Allow me to tell you that you are a dirty little rat. Yours truly, F. A. Voight” (Voight).
genuine treachery dealt with judiciously, or at worst, that wartime excesses are being kept to a minimum. Hemingway further reiterates the common claim that atrocities, too widespread in the chaotic early days of the war to be denied, had been reeled in as the forces of order had gradually gained control: “People had been shot during the early days of the rebellion by the so-called “uncontrollables” but . . . for months Madrid had been as safe and well policed and free from any terror as any capital in Europe” ("Fresh Air" 28). He repeats the assertion about the end of all terror, when he recalls going to a restaurant and telling the story about Voight “to a number of hard-working, non-political, straight-shooting correspondents who risked their lives daily working in Madrid and who had been denying there was a terror in Madrid ever since the government had taken control of the situation and stopped all terror” ("Fresh Air" 28). The correspondents are, significantly, non-political, for we are to believe that truth is not a matter of politics; it is, on the other hand, a matter of bravery, for the fact that these men risked their lives daily implies strength of character.

If we read in this article the implied argument that similar tales of a terror were sensationalized lies of the sort Voight tried to tell, then Hemingway was simply wrong. Terror in Madrid specifically in April 1937 may have been less obvious than elsewhere in Spain, but there was in fact a political terror within the Republican zone for much of the war. It was a fact documented by a few observers at the time and by many historians in the decades since. Orwell, for example, wrote in the New English Weekly in July 1937 that “For

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37 This is not to say that such conditions were completely absent. Antony Beevor writes that “During the spring of 1937 the communist police and the anarchist militia confronted each other in Madrid in an increasingly bitter struggle. . . . Melchor Rodriguez [the anarcho-syndicalist delegate in charge of prisons] revealed that Jose Cazorla, the communist in charge of public order, had organized secret prisons holding socialists, anarchists and republicans, many of whom had been freed by popular tribunals, to torture or execute them as spies or traitors.” Prime Minister Largo Caballero nominally re-established control over the police in Madrid, but “there was little he could do to rein in the actions of the NKVD,” the Soviet secret police organization that took over the Republic’s secret police in late autumn of 1936 and was “known in the Soviet Union as ‘the unsheathed sword of the revolution.’” (260)
some time past a reign of terror—forcible suppression of political parties, a stifling censorship of the Press, ceaseless espionage and mass-imprisonment without trial—has been in progress” (216). His observations correspond with the major historical accounts that have followed; these bear out the existence of the conditions he describes, which were particularly acute in Barcelona where the Communists had fought with anarchists and the POUM during what would be called the May events. Historian Burnett Bolloten writes,

In the weeks and months following the May events, the story of Catalonia—the former power center of the CNT-FAI [anarcho-syndicalist trade union] and POUM—was one of arbitrary arrests, of detentions in clandestine jails, of tortures, kidnappings, and assassinations, as well as of the destruction of agricultural collectives. The spontaneous, undirected terror of the CNT and FAI during the height of the Revolution had now given way to the more sophisticated, centrally directed, and, hence, more fearful terror of the Communists. (498)

Varied histories, including those of Bolloten, Thomas, and Beevor, detail the extent of Soviet control over Republican security forces and the concurrent intimidation, manipulation, and violence. “The Spanish Republic was infected by the grotesque Stalinist paranoia of the NKVD,” Beevor writes; that paranoia led to almost comically absurd fabrications about fascist plots within the Republican government and military (260). In August 1937 the Republican security forces were re-organized as the SIM [Military Investigation Service], a group that even the balanced Hugh Thomas calls “loathsome.” Thomas notes that the SIM came into its own in Barcelona in the spring of 1938:

Designed to find spies, it also sought “defeatists,” defined as those guilty of

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38 There was, to be fair, some extent of genuine enemy espionage within the Republican zone, but far less than the Communists claimed.
profiteering, food-hoarding, or robbery. Summary trials before the special tribunals (tribunales de guardia) followed these charges. The SIM apparently also undertook a brief private murder campaign of vengeance against some of the PSUC’s [Spanish Communist Party] critics in Barcelona, particularly anarchists. Forty people had been “taken for a ride” before the government intervened to end this development. The special prisons of the SIM in Barcelona, especially that in the convent of San Juan, nevertheless remained full of strange tortures which might have been devised by the ghost of Edgar Allan Poe. A spherical room painted in black, with a single light at the top, gave a feeling of vertigo. Some cells were so small that one could not sit down. Such tortures were applied indiscriminately to nationalist and republican (or anarchist and POUM) prisoners, particularly the latter. (808)

Such examples could be piled up endlessly. 39 To be fair, certain elements of the Republican government attempted to curb the excesses of the Soviet-controlled security forces, though for much of the war were limited by Spain’s dependence on Soviet military aid. Beevor writes that “the attempt to export the show-trial mentality to Spain ignored the fact that, however authoritarian [Prime Minister] Negrín’s government might be, it was not totalitarian. As a result, the sealed maze of distorting mirrors that had replaced reality in the Soviet Union was not duplicated in Spain” (309). Still, the level of Communist control and the existence of political terror, downplayed as it generally was in the liberal press of England and the U.S., remained the inside story of the Spanish Civil War. Ken’s star reporter in Spain, whose desire to claim insider status is nothing short of legendary, not only missed that story completely, but in fact contributed through his Ken articles to the chorus of voices that would obscure it.

39 See also Bolloten, Chapter 56, “Communist Ascendancy in the Security Services” and Beevor 304-309.
Rather than trying to show Hemingway as politically naïve as others have done, I want to consider larger implications. What is at stake here in terms of Ken itself is the effort to shape the Truth through written (and visual) argument and the factors that contribute to that effort. More specifically, Hemingway’s failure to report accurately on the nature of Communist activities suggests the limits of the masculine controlling gaze within a complex political situation. Ken’s persuasive authority is predicated on the idea that the inside man has access to the inside story—in other words, the truth. But how does the inside man get the inside story? Partly he does so through experience, by being involved in or witnessing events himself. Partly—and this is most relevant in the case of a political terror that its perpetrators wish to conceal from foreign correspondents—the inside man gets the story by having access to knowledgeable and reliable sources, and being able to accurately judge those sources.

Experience is limited by the fact that one man has access only to a finite range of experiences that are circumscribed by time and place. Orwell himself offers this point as a cautionary note to the reader who would wish to view his Homage to Catalonia as the Truth. Hemingway was on the ground in Spain, but his role as a foreign correspondent, despite the unusual perks of his celebrity status, nonetheless limited him to certain kinds of experiences. Moreover, the Communists were probably all the more concerned that a writer of such status see things as they wanted them to be seen. It was the production of the film The Spanish Earth, a project secretly funded and controlled by the Comintern (unbeknownst to Hemingway and many of its celebrity participants), that had in part brought Hemingway to Spain; it is safe to assume that the Communists would try to keep some measure of control over what he learned there. So Hemingway’s experiences differed greatly from those of Orwell, for example, who fought with a POUM militia, or even Dos Passos, a less prominent
celebrity whose movement away from the Communist Party was already underway in 1937 and whose arrival in Spain was almost immediately clouded by intense worry over a personal friend.

The question of reliable sources is even trickier, and the ability to evaluate those sources dependent on one’s personal and ideological positioning. In the Robles affair, Hemingway’s principal sources were Pepe Quintanilla, head of the Republic’s Department of Justice, and the American writer Josephine Herbst. Quintanilla, a well-placed man presumably “in the know,” offered Hemingway a host of lies about Robles, saying that Robles had indeed been arrested but would be given a fair trial and released if found innocent. Herbst later told Hemingway an unnamed contact of her own had confirmed that Robles had been shot (which he had) because he was a spy (which he was not).  

Hemingway’s beliefs about how the war should be fought—the need for discipline (which the Communists provided), the need for unity against the fascists, and the need for a military victory before social revolution—prejudiced him against the political elements that the Communists were liquidating; for example, he criticizes the POUM’s role in the war both in print and in correspondence. Quintanilla was a kind of exemplar of Communist discipline, and therefore an appealing figure for Hemingway, while Herbst was an old friend. Hemingway could not have known that Herbst was herself a Soviet agent rather than the independent correspondent she appeared; she was in Spain as part of the Comintern’s propaganda activities, and thus privy to information that even the most well-connected foreign correspondent could not normally gather.  

Hemingway’s trust in Herbst’s character may have functioned similarly to Dos Passos’ trust in Robles’ character, except the former

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41 Koch insists on the disingenuousness of Herbst’s published recollections about her motives in the Hemingway/Dos Passos affair.
was unknowingly misplaced, a fact that highlights the difficulty of evaluating sources of information. How accurate were Hemingway’s friends “from the old days” in Seguridad whom he cites on the question of the terror, we can only speculate.

All of this is further complicated by the question of whether there is such a thing as an objective truth that exists independently of the individual’s perspective. Orwell believed so, but it was the Spanish war and its many propagandistic manipulations that made him fear that others would stop believing in objective truth. In an article on Hemingway’s journalism, Elizabeth Dewberry argues that Hemingway was himself interested in this question and explored it through his experimentation with genre, which led him to an awareness of “the inevitable fictionality of any ostensibly objective stance” (19). “Throughout his work,” she claims, “Hemingway reveals a fluid but persistent skepticism regarding the assumption on which both journalism and literary realism have traditionally based their claims to ‘truth’—that reality can be accurately represented” (16). Such explorations were not a component of Hemingway’s writing for Ken, a point Dewberry also makes:

If history and reality are constructs of the imagination, this work [in Ken] implies, then the important question is whose imagination will construct it. As he has done elsewhere, Hemingway disregards traditional boundaries between genres, but here, rather than puzzling or struggling over the concept of truth or history as a construct, he attempts to construct truth and history, both in his nonfiction and in the world. (31)

Indeed, Hemingway’s imagination was constructing his version of the truth, but that imagination was informed and limited by the various factors I have discussed.

Hemingway had observed in letters that “the most essential gift for a good writer is a

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42 It may be useful to note that, as Koch points out, even Dos Passos appears not to have questioned Herbst’s honesty or loyalty (he too was her friend), nor to have suspected her level involvement in the affair.
built-in, shock-proof, shit detector. This is the writer’s radar and all great writers have had it” (qtd. in Dewberry 23). At the very least, Hemingway’s shit-detector seems to have failed him in his analysis of the Communists’ activities in Spain. It would be more satisfying, in retrospect, if Hemingway had from the beginning seen through the Communists’ smoke screens—the fabricated charges of treachery at the Aragon Front, the easy lies from the likes of Quintanilla, the surface illusion of unity in Republican Spain—and if he had heroically sounded the alarm in the service of Truth and despite the potential costs. He did not do these things, but neither was he a fool. We know from his harshly critical picture of the excesses of Communist discipline and manipulation in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* that he was not, ultimately, blind to the darker side of Soviet involvement in Spain. We also know he firmly believed that “there is only one thing to do when you have a war and that is win it” (*Letters* 476).43 To what extent he consciously suppressed his own doubts about Communist machinations, like many liberals and progressives in that period, may never be known, but it is noteworthy that Hemingway saved his published indictments of the Communists until after the war was over, after the Cause could not be damaged by dissent.

And too, *Ken* itself was at cross-purposes regarding Spain. As an insider’s magazine, it was ostensibly devoted to getting at the truth of the war, to showing “the dirty combinations” that made it, and those combinations were at least as dirty on the Republican side as on the Nationalist side. But *Ken* was also a liberal, openly pro-Loyalist publication that presented the Spanish war as a crucial battleground within the larger march of fascist aggression. Showing the dirty combinations among the Communists in Spain could hardly have helped a cause that was on its way to being lost already—which of course was precisely

43 Hemingway made this statement several times in print and correspondence. The present quote is taken from a letter to Pauline Pfeiffer’s mother (Feb. 6, 1939); he uses slightly different wording in “Treachery in Aragon” and in a letter to Ivan Kashkin (Mar. 23, 1939), also published in *Selected Letters*. 
the realization that made so many liberals hold their tongues about Spain while the war raged on.

   My point here is not to excuse Hemingway’s missteps, especially where they derive from malice or pig-headedness or willful ignorance—any or all of these may have operated in the Dos Passos affair and the writing of the two relevant Ken pieces. Rather, I am suggesting that the very claim to insider status on which Ken based its persuasive authority is a tenuous claim at best, subject to the limits of experience, of ideological predilections, of widely variable personality traits of a given observer, all further undermined by a political situation in which conflicting loyalties and subterfuge are the order of the day, and by an editorial stance with contradictory purposes. Partly what we can draw from these observations is the simple lesson that seeing the truth, if there is such a thing, and seeing it clearly, can be quite difficult indeed; this lesson fueled the anxieties about propaganda and the press that Orwell brought home with him from Spain. (It has been charged that even the anti-Stalinist progressives, whose analyses penetrated Communist lies, were so obsessed with their opposition to Stalin that they underestimated the threat posed by Hitler.44) These limitations become failures, however, when presented in the authoritative masculine voice of a Ken or a Hemingway, a voice of certitude that boasts loudly of its own rightness but can nonetheless be spectacularly wrong.

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44 See Cowley 277-78, and the Introduction to Kutulas. In a more specific example, Orwell in July 1937 makes the following claim that appears to overstate the importance of the May events: “Meanwhile the war against Franco continues, but, except for the poor devils in the front-line trenches, nobody in Government Spain thinks of it as the real war. The real struggle is between revolution and counter-revolution . . .” (216). Such an assessment no doubt depended largely on Orwell’s concern for the social revolution, and would have been countered by an observer with a different set of priorities.
Conclusion: The Limits of Rhetorical Masculinity

Some modern critics have pointed to the ways in which Hemingway’s fiction contains critiques of traditional formulations of masculinity even as it enacts such formulations. I have noted Suzanne Clark’s arguments about Hemingway’s simultaneous embodiment of and challenge to the Teddy Roosevelt ideal of manliness. Similarly, Thomas Strychacz’s discussion of *For Whom the Bell Tolls* argues that through the character of Robert Jordan, the novel enacts the paradigm of the masculine controlling gaze, but that the actual power of that gaze is undermined by the kinds of unpredictable performances that take place among the band of partisans—what Strychacz calls “cave-theater.” Because of his military knowledge and experience and the supposed lack of discipline and sophistication among the partisans, “Jordan enters the cave for the first time,” Strychacz says, “consciously resolved to master its ambiguous visual spaces by playing the simultaneous roles of performer and magisterial spectator” (119). But Jordan’s attempts to control are upset by various unpredictable events and by the various performances of masculinity from the likes of Pablo and Pilar—in particular Pablo’s dramatic, heroic return after an emasculating act of cowardice. “As long as the many performances undertaken by the characters of this novel keep alive an irrevocable element of freeplay,” Strychacz argues, “no one character attains a complete and controlling perspective” (120). He concludes that “Hemingway’s work resists the argument that the masculine gaze can be reduced to the horizon of the general’s eye.”

Cave-theater itself is not relevant to Ken, but the employment of the masculine controlling gaze is. To continue with Strychacz’s thread, if Ken enacts Western culture’s tendency toward ocularcentrism by using the implicit power of vision to reinforce its claims on the truth, and if we accept that Hemingway quite clearly grasped what Ken was trying to
achieve, then we must view him as a willing participant in that project. Just as the Ken pieces show Hemingway avoiding the skepticism about the nature of truth that Dewberry discusses, they also show him employing masculinity and the implied power of the male gaze in an uncritical way as part of his and the magazine’s rhetorical project. The choice of that stance need not be viewed as a failing or a contradiction: Hemingway’s purpose in the Ken pieces was to convince his readers of a set of opinions about the military and political situation involving Spain, England, the U.S., and the fascist powers. Exploring subtleties about masculinity and the nature of truth would unnecessarily complicate matters. Call it propaganda or persuasion, Hemingway’s approach in Ken is analogous to his belief that once you have a war, the thing to do is win it. We might say that in Ken, Hemingway subordinates the critique to the Cause.

Yet the Ken episode is more complex than such a reading suggests and implies a critique, certainly unintentional, of traditional codes of masculinity through the very rhetoricity of the masculine insider’s stance as presented in the magazine. We know that Ken was a money-making venture, and can infer that the self-presentation of a masculine stance was a strategy for marketing the product to a particular audience, the middle-class male reader. But if we view Ken as, simultaneously, a legitimate attempt to broadly influence public opinion, then its overtly masculine stance of authority and courage becomes more than just a sales pitch. Ken uses that stance as a way of claiming ownership over the truth. The persuasiveness of its political arguments relies on the reader’s perception of the insider status of its contributors and editors, the sense in which they fulfill the promise of authoritative vision implied in the magazine’s title. “Seeing” properly and accurately representing what has been seen are crucial to that control over the truth. At the same time, the magazine must
be financially successful enough to reach that broad audience, or its purpose is weakened—it cannot become the “powerful force,” the shaper of beliefs, that Smart predicts. What, then, would the man who embodies those transhistorical ideals of pure manhood do in Smart’s and Gingrich’s situation? Had Gingrich and Smart stuck to their guns and refused to back down in any way to the pressures from the Church or the advertisers, they might have demonstrated more courage, but to what end? Even with their compromises, Ken ultimately failed, so it is difficult to see how a thoroughly uncompromising path would have allowed the magazine to succeed. And without market success its desire to be a persuasive force was nullified.

When Gingrich told Hemingway to lay off the Catholics in Spain, he was limiting the kinds of truths Hemingway could tell. Because Ken’s success was tied to the consumer market, and subject to governmental powers such as Farley’s Post Office, the ability of Smart and Gingrich to resist these various forces was itself limited. That means that how Ken shaped the truth of the Spanish Civil War was controlled to some degree by these market forces, and that fact severely undermined the ethos of courage and authority that Ken’s persuasiveness rested on. Likewise, let us assume for the sake of argument that Hemingway understood more about the Communists’ power plays in the Republic than his writings during the war let on, and that he downplayed, to whatever degree, those realities in hopes of maintaining antifascist unity. His position as a pro-Loyalist reporter in Spain would therefore have mediated against any clear enactment of courage and authority where the political complexities of the Spanish Republic were concerned. What would it mean to “be a man” in such a position? Exposing the machinations of the Soviets within the republic, as Dos Passos and Orwell tried to do, might have come closer to something like the truth, but it might also have threatened the Cause. Threatening the Cause might have undermined any
chance of the U.S. reversing its neutrality policy and put Hemingway’s Spanish friends and International Brigaders in greater danger. Is an ideal such as “truth” worth more than the fight against fascism and the lives of one’s comrades?

As I discuss in the introduction to this dissertation, many intellectuals by the 1920s recognized that truth could no longer be seen as a stable concept, dependent merely on facts that functioned as independently verifiable aspects of the world. Ken’s stance of masculine authority, in seeking to control the truth, seems to be assuming a meaning of the term that had already been called into question. Thus, just as that stance is an attempt to recover an older conception of masculinity at a time when American culture was destabilizing that concept, so to is the effort to control the truth through the masculine gaze a kind of throwback to an earlier, more stable understanding of what truth means. The point is not that arguments constructed as they are in Ken might not be convincing to a readership—on the contrary, I have shown that many pieces, including some of Hemingway’s, had great persuasive potential. And considering the great popularity of Hemingway’s hypermasculine public persona, it is clear that many readers responded positively to the conception of masculinity that it presented. But the approach is merely inappropriate insofar as it relates to truth in the context of the Spanish Civil War. And since authority for Ken seems predicated on the idea of mastery over the truth, that inappropriateness can be viewed as a failure. In other words, Ken did not fail commercially because of its masculine stance; rather, because of the political and cultural context in which it sought to function, the masculine stance failed to attain truth as it boasted it could.

The story of Ken is in some sense the story of multiple performances of masculinity, in the magazine’s self-promotional aspects, in the interactions among the major players, and
in Hemingway’s contributions. While none of the major players set out to critique the traditional codes of masculinity which they appropriate for their persuasive purposes, the variety of those performances and their published results emphasize the apparent impossibility of maintaining such a masculinity in the face of both market forces and the complex realities of the Spanish Civil War. Though Ken is not without successes, Hemingway’s better pieces included, the magazine’s failures show the inability of the masculinized gaze, within the complicated political and business landscape of the late 1930s, to achieve mastery of the truth—a “complete and controlling perspective.”
In an article titled “Looking Back on the Spanish War,” George Orwell explored what he identified as the Spanish Civil War’s most disturbing implication: the threat it represented to truth itself. The deluge of lies—often unfathomable in their total lack of relationship to the facts—that he encountered during the war and after, gave Orwell “the feeling that the very concept of objective truth is fading out of the world” (“Looking” 353). They raised the frightening possibility that a totalitarian government could control information so completely as to be able to rewrite history, substituting facts with whatever suited its purposes, thereby obliterating the truth entirely. It is of course this fear that a ruling clique could convince its population that, say, “two and two are five” that would define the nightmare world of 1984 (354).

As is characteristic of Orwell, he takes pains in his essay to avoid sounding merely alarmist. “I am willing to believe that history is for the most part inaccurate and biased,” he explains,

but what is peculiar to our own age is the abandonment of the idea that history could be truthfully written. In the past people deliberately lied, or they unconsciously coloured what they wrote, or they struggled after the truth, well knowing that they must make many mistakes; but in each case they believed that “the facts” existed and were more or less discoverable. (353)

His belief that objective truth does exist regardless of the prevailing cynicism is one “safeguard” against the kind of world he imagines in 1984. “The other,” he writes, “is that so
long as some parts of the earth remain unconquered, the liberal tradition can be kept alive” (354).

As readers of Orwell’s writings on Spain know well, the kinds of egregious deceptions that so horrified him during the Spanish war were not confined to the Nationalist press, though they certainly abounded there. On the contrary, it was Orwell’s direct experience of the internal divisions on the Republican side about which he wrote most pointedly in Homage to Catalonia and essays published in various British periodicals. From our current perspective, Orwell is doubtless the most prominent figure out of the small group of British and American observers who attempted to awaken left intellectuals to the bitter realities of the political struggles within the Loyalist camp. These realities included the efforts of the Spanish Communists, directed by Soviet agents, to gain control of the Republican government and eliminate all opposition through nefarious means ranging from relentless propaganda to secret (and illegal) imprisonment, torture, and sometimes murder of anti-Communist Loyalists. They also included the larger, related question of whether the social revolution which had been pushed so far by anarchists and Marxist parties in Catalonia should be prioritized or suppressed in favor of increased centralized government control with the aim of first winning the war with Franco, as the Communists, socialists, and republicans argued. Much of Homage to Catalonia is of course devoted to Orwell’s experiences during the May 1937 fighting in Barcelona between anarchists and the POUM (with whose militia Orwell was serving) on the one hand and the Communists and government forces on the other, as well as Orwell’s narrow escape from arrest during the subsequent purge of the POUM.
These and subsequent events constituted the dirty little secret of the outwardly noble Spanish cause that many Loyalist sympathizers in England and the U.S. were either unaware of or did not fully understand. In a 1937 essay titled “Spilling the Spanish Beans,” Orwell first discussed the internal conflicts, with emphasis on his belief that the Communists in Spain had become an anti-revolutionary force and had instituted “a reign of terror” to further their own agenda (“Spilling” 216). Here he comments that “in England, in spite of the intense interest the Spanish war has aroused, there are very few people who have even heard of the enormous struggle that is going on behind the Government lines” (222). How the liberal press chose to present the war was a direct cause of this crucial misunderstanding: “Of course, this is no accident. There has been a quite deliberate conspiracy (I could give detailed instances) to prevent the Spanish situation from being understood. People who ought to know better have lent themselves to the deception on the ground that if you tell the truth about Spain it will be used as Fascist propaganda” (222). One such instance Orwell might have given to support this claim was Kingsley Martin’s now-famous refusal to publish this very essay in The New Statesman and Nation for fear of undermining antifascist unity; the same consideration would lead Orwell’s previous publisher, Victor Gollancz, to refuse to publish Homage to Catalonia (see Orwell Homage 28). As late as the 1943 essay, Orwell could still advise his reader to “believe nothing, or next to nothing, of what you read about internal affairs on the Government side. It is all, from whatever source, party propaganda—that is to say, lies” (“Looking” 351).

Orwell’s contention that few in Britain understood what was happening within the Spanish Republic is generally applicable to the U.S. as well. In the magazine press, these issues were often covered superficially if at all. Those magazines that did attempt to
seriously examine the civil war within the civil war were mostly small-circulation publications of partisan intent, such as V. F. Calverton’s radical Modern Monthly, which published writings by anarchist sympathizers Bertram Wolfe and Anita Brenner, and the Socialist Call, which presented Liston Oak’s exposés of the Communists’ activities. But liberal and progressive American readers without affiliation to specific parties or radical movements would more likely have received their analysis of Spain through one of the left-leaning weekly journals of opinion such as The New Republic or The Nation, or the perhaps the New Masses, which maintained an ostensible independence from the Communist Party even though it generally adhered to the party line. The first two publications had circulations that were small in comparison to the successful commercial magazines. For example, The Nation reached a ten-year high of just over 40,000 readers in 1937; the total circulation of Reader’s Digest for the same year was 2,988,000 (“Nation Circulation”; Peterson [1956] 217). However, due to their solid, well-established reputations among liberal and progressive readers, particularly of the intellectual set, The Nation and the New Republic commanded a greater influence than their circulations alone would imply.¹ The New Masses had a roughly similar circulation (36,500 in 1933²), and if it was closer to being a party organ than the other two journals, it maintained a significant influence in intellectual circles in the mid-1930s.³

¹ Theodore Peterson offers the following anecdote on the (for some) perplexing level of influence of the intellectual journals: “Frank P. Walsh once called the Nation the greatest mystery in American journalism. An article he had written about the railroads was published in the Nation in the days when its circulation was about 27,000. A series of his on the same subject was syndicated among the Hearst newspapers, which then had a total circulation of about ten million. Soon after the Nation appeared, Walsh received telephone calls from senators, lobbyists, persons of importance. But never, he later recalled, had he ever met a person who mentioned his articles syndicated by Hearst” ([1956] 364).
² As reported in Peterson [1956] 371.
³ We must keep in mind that the influence of the Communist Party among independent liberals and progressives in America was much greater in this period than that of other entities such as Socialists, Anarchists, and anti-Stalinist Marxists, due largely to their skillful and effective organization of leftists through many front
The Nation, the New Republic, and the New Masses covered the Spanish war heavily, with some kind of content related to it in practically every issue while the war raged. All were staunchly pro-Loyalist along the standard lines: they interpreted the war as a conflict between democracy and international fascism, and decried the involvement of Italy and Germany as foreign invasion; they harshly criticized the phony non-intervention policy of England and France and the corresponding U.S. neutrality policy; they praised the courage and resilience of the Republican forces and leadership in the face of dwindling hope and the Western democracies’ abandonment. Their coverage included a range of mostly nonfiction writing, including editorial commentary and analysis, polemics from notable intellectuals, first-hand reportage of varying kinds, and (occasionally in the New Republic and the New Masses) poetry. But if the three journals shared the same general approach to the war, they differed in their response to the internal politics of Loyalist Spain—a significant difference, given the prominence of the issues raised by Orwell and others in later analyses of the conflict.

In essence, the New Republic largely ignored the internal conflict. The struggles between Communist and anti-Communist elements were downplayed to the point where a reader might hardly recognize that those struggles carried any significance at all. The New Masses downplayed internal divisions as well and maintained unquestioned support for the Poplar Front and the central government (especially after it was reorganized under Juan Negrín in May 1937). But the magazine responded to the May events in Barcelona more

organizations devoted to various social and intellectual causes. As Allen Guttmann notes in making a slightly different point, “Three hundred people met in Union Square [in July 1937] to hear Liston Oak expose the Stalinist role in Spain; 20,000 met in Madison Square Garden [in the same month] to help Earl Browder and Norman Thomas celebrate the preservation of Bourgeois democracy” (165) This balance would shift over the course of the war, but many intellectuals would not reject the CP fully until the Nazi-Soviet Pact of August 1939.
forcefully, by casting them as an insidious putsch caused solely by the “fascists, Trotskyists, and ‘uncontrollables’” who opposed the central government (Hawthorne 9). In both cases, the New Masses unswervingly followed the Communist line that represented one side of the internal struggle.

The Nation, however, struck a notably different pose from the other two magazines. While any implications of the internal political conflicts within Republican Spain were clearly subordinated to the journal’s larger program of supporting the Loyalist cause, The Nation did allow some disturbingly critical notes to be sounded, due to the sometimes contentious interplay between its editors and contributors. Under the editorship of Freda Kirchwey, the magazine attempted to combine truth seeking with truth shaping. That is, Kirchwey attempted to obtain and present a clear and unbiased view of the situation in Spain, but also to temper its pro-Loyalist persuasive purposes with a measure of dissention and debate. That measure of debate may appear limited in scope because it fails to probe as deeply into the more sinister aspects of Republican internal politics as some contemporary readers and contributors would have liked, but it remains a uniquely balanced approach in contrast to other important American magazines. In a sense, the presentation of the Spanish war in The Nation represents the approach to truth that Orwell feared was being eclipsed by the modern cynicism: the editors indeed “struggled after the truth, well knowing that they must make many mistakes,” and seemed also to believe “that ‘the facts’ existed and were more or less discoverable.” But at the same time, the question of how to present those facts and whose interpretations (i.e., whose versions of the truth) should be privileged, rather than falling neatly into a pattern dictated by either a party line or the broader but similarly prescriptive pro-Loyalist line, was in fact a matter of genuine concern for Kirchwey.
Consequently, Kirchwey’s efforts to intelligently forge The Nation’s editorial stance, as reflected in the magazine’s content and in unpublished correspondence to and from Kirchwey, illustrate the forces arrayed against a clear understanding of the Spanish situation and its truthful presentation in an American publication.

**Editorial and Financial Considerations of The Nation**

In his classic study *Magazines in the Twentieth Century*, Theodore Peterson calls The Nation “the elder statesman among the journals of opinion in the twentieth century” ([1956] 365). The Nation was started in 1865, just after the end of the Civil War, by abolitionists Joseph H. Richards and E. L. Godkin, and established itself as a voice of nineteenth-century liberalism. In 1881, the paper was purchased by the New York Evening Post, which was owned by former newspaperman, now railroad baron Henry Villard. It appeared as a weekly edition of the Post until Henry Villard’s son Oswald Garrison Villard took it over as owner and editor. As Peterson notes, Villard served the magazine well during his tenure at the helm: “He served it without salary, spent substantial sums of his own money on it, and raised funds for it among friends who recognize its value as an organ of liberalism.” Under Villard’s ownership, the magazine developed a strong interest in foreign affairs in addition to its concern for domestic issues and cultural components.

As with most publications of its type, The Nation suffered perennial financial difficulties. When Villard sold the magazine to banker and philanthropist Maurice Wertheim in 1935, it was operating well in the red: its deficit of $13,596.11 for 1935 almost tripled to $32,185.74 the following year (“Nation, Inc. Deficits”). The journal carried some

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4 Peterson describes Godkin’s editorship: “His Nation decried railroad barons, Tammany, currency inflation, and the Populists. It took capital's side against labor, attacked trade unionism, and opposed the eight-hour working day. It was a strong advocate of civil service reform.”

5 Villard remained as a regular columnist for several years.
advertising, but unlike the mass market periodicals such as Collier's, The Saturday Evening Post, and Life, whose profits came almost entirely from advertising revenue, The Nation still followed the nineteenth-century model in which circulation represented the heaviest proportion of income. For example, advertising income represented just under 19% of total income in 1937 (“Nation, Inc. Balance”). Thus, its appearance and policies were not generally affected by the needs or concerns of advertisers, a fact that helped the editors maintain independence from the currents of mainstream public taste.

This is not to say that the appearance and functioning of The Nation was unaffected by financial matters. The magazine underwent considerable restructuring in mid-1936 in an effort to economize and rein in the spiraling budget deficit. According to an internal memo from June 1936, the changes were to include “a reduction of personnel in the editorial and business departments”—in the former, associate editor Maxwell S. Stewart was dismissed—“salary reductions, substantial savings in manufacturing costs, and a decrease in the cost of contributions” (“Memorandum”). The magazine was also reduced in size by four pages. As the memo notes, this last change was the only one planned “which directly affects the appearance and content of The Nation,” but it was also “the only one that the editors seriously regret, both because of the sacrifice of editorial material it entails and because it implies a recession from standards already achieved.” The shortage of funds also affected the kinds of contributors the journal could attract. Though I cannot identify any specific instances in which desired contributions or contributors had to be passed up for lack of purchasing power, a letter circulated within the offices of The Nation evaluating the New

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6 According to a balance sheet in The Nation’s records, the income breakdown for 1937 was as follows: subscriptions, $118,329.82; newsstands, $29,611.07; advertising, $34,845.37; miscellaneous, $2,301.07.
Republic as a competitor highlights the other magazine’s greater financial resources.7 “The New Republic has a further advantage over The Nation,” the author writes, “in that its financial resources enable it to purchase almost any desired contribution without disturbing its equilibrium or robbing some other department, and to publish special supplements whenever it sees fit” (M. L. S. 2) Again, I can only speculate on specifics, but it is perhaps notable that several of Ernest Hemingway’s NANA dispatches during the Spanish war appeared in The New Republic, not The Nation. In any case, the restructuring was successful in pulling the magazine out of its serious slump, and its personnel considered it financially self-supporting by 1937.8

When Wertheim purchased The Nation in 1935, he set up a nonprofit organization named the Civic Aid Foundation as the nominal owner. Though Wertheim was committed to having the magazine maintain its independence, his views on issues such as the New Deal began to diverge from the editors’. According to Freda Kirchwey’s biographer, Sara Alpern, his resulting efforts to hire and fire journalists and editorial staff as a way of shaping editorial policy met with strong resistance from Kirchwey, who was the de facto chief editor (110-11). Consequently, the Civic Aid Foundation formally turned over complete control of that policy to the editorial board in October 1936. At that time, the editorial board consisted of Kirchwey; Max Lerner, whom Wertheim had originally hired to balance the board’s leanings (though as it turned out, Lerner generally agreed with Kirchwey’s views); and Joseph Wood Krutch, who was responsible for the book reviews and art and dramatic criticism sections.

But the heavily divisive conditions of 1930s politics continued to take their toll on The

7 Since its inception, the New Republic had been subsidized by the American banker Willard D. Straight; his widow continued to do so after his death in 1918, and in 1935 set up a trust fund that supported the magazine until 1953 (Peterson 371-72).
8 Actually, there was a budget deficit in 1937, but of only $656.57. The following year would see a similarly small deficit of $622.40 (“Nation Magazine”).
The Nation’s organization, and by mid-1937, both Wertheim and Villard (who still contributed a column), had published articles in the magazine opposing its own editorial stance on such issues as Roosevelt’s Supreme Court packing scheme. Krutch had for some time disagreed with the other editors regarding Stalin and the Soviet Union, and had resigned as an editor by June 1937. The Nation’s staff had for some time, according to Alpern, generally felt that the editorial board was cumbersome, and Wertheim came to agree. In mid-1937 Wertheim decided to sell the journal to Kirchwey. He claimed in a statement published in the 12 June 1937 issue that “it has become increasingly clear that group control is not effective and that absentee ownership creates an anomalous situation.” Wertheim also noted Kirchwey’s sixteen years of association with The Nation and praised her as “one of the truest liberals in the country, and the person who could best preserve the magazine’s “independent character and direction” (“The Nation is Sold” 666). Kirchwey maintained ownership of The Nation until 1943, when she transferred it to the nonprofit Nation Associates, Inc.

Though it was commonly considered a “journal of opinion,” The Nation from its inception functioned as both an organ of opinion and a forum for differences in opinion within a general spectrum of liberal views. The third issue declared that the journal would “not be the organ of any party, sect, or body.” “It will, on the contrary,” claimed its founders, “make an earnest effort to bring to the discussion of political and social questions a really critical spirit, and to wage war upon the vices of violence, exaggeration, and misrepresentation by which so much of the political writing of this day is marred” (qtd. in Peterson 367). Despite an atmosphere dominated by heavily divisive partisan politics, The Nation in the mid- to late 1930s wanted to be seen as maintaining this balance between opinion and dialogue, and this avoidance of any specific party line. True, Freda Kirchwey

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9 See “‘The Nation’ is Sold.”
believed *The Nation* had a kind of crusading function, as her biographer points out, and even went so far in a speech in 1939 to refer to it as a “propaganda journal” that was devoted to “fighting with words” (qtd. in Alpern 99). But the journal also emphasized critical inquiry and independent thought within the general lines of its overall progressive stance—especially in considering how to go about achieving the goals it advocated. For example, an advertisement in the magazine soliciting subscriptions framed *The Nation*’s readers as being united in ties “social, mental, even philosophical,” but stressed, “Not that we think alike—far from it. In viewpoint, yes. But in opinion, no.” “Challenging and provocative,” the ad copy states, the magazine “arouses lively controversy.” The advertisement goes on: “For *The Nation* takes nothing for granted, questions all supposedly fixed points, explores and examines all of those areas of activity in the life of the world which want constant interpretation and a critical analysis of the forces and personalities which move behind the headlines” (“In a Common”).

The editors of *The Nation* saw the different parts of the magazine as furthering the differing aspects of its function, a point they made in print in the issue of 4 July 1936. Pointing to two items in that issue (an article by Leon Trotsky and a symposium of conflicting responses to a previous article), the editors took the opportunity to make a “fresh declaration of editorial policy”: “We say again that the opinions expressed in signed articles and reviews are not necessarily the opinions of the editors. We take full responsibility only for what appears in the editorial columns. The demands we make upon our signed contributions are only that they shall be fresh, authoritative, important” (“Shape”). Freda Kirchwey clarified this policy privately the following year in a letter to Louis Fischer, one of *The Nation*’s most important foreign correspondents. Responding to certain criticisms of
The Nation that Fischer had offered in a previous letter, Kirchwey explains to Fischer that the magazine should follow “a clear and consistent course in its editorial pages and . . . [allow] a wide range of disagreement and protest in its correspondence columns. The signed articles, I believe, should be uncensored by the editors as far as opinion is concerned but should be ordered from persons who are fairly close to the editorial attitude” (Letter to Fischer 9 Sept. 1937, [1]). She does not mention the book review section here, but by 1933, that section was under the direction of Joseph Wood Krutch, who differed openly from Kirchwey at least as far as the Soviet Union and related questions were concerned. In The Nation of the mid- to late-1930s, short editorials came first in the section The Shape of Things, followed by longer unsigned editorials, followed by the signed articles; the regular columns Issues and Men by Oswald Garrison Villard and Broun’s Page by Heywood Broun came next; then followed the Books and the Arts section; and the magazine closed with the correspondence pages. What Kirchwey establishes in her letter to Fischer is a pattern by which opinions radiate outward, as it were, away from the straight editorial stance, as a reader moves through the magazine from front to back.

Kirchwey is also quite clear about what this policy means for The Nation’s coverage of the Spanish war: she explicitly refuses to allow the magazine to “adhere to a rigid line” on the Spanish issue. “Within the general formula of supporting Loyalist Spain and fighting fascism in Europe and elsewhere,” she tells Fischer, “there is surely ample room for debate as to policies and varying interpretations of events. To say otherwise is to say that The Nation ought to be a party organ” (Letter to Fischer 9 Sept. 1937, [1]). Though she does not

10 That particular letter does not survive in Kirchwey’s papers, but I will return to the correspondence between Kirchwey and Fischer below.

11 In an unpublished dissertation titled How the Division Within the Liberal Community Was Reflected in the Nation, 1930-1950, Laurie Ellen Rozakis explores Granville Hicks’ charges that the book review section had essentially seceded from the rest of the magazine around 1934.
mention any other publications for comparison, she might well have pointed to the New Masses, which despite its ostensible independence was by the mid-1930s, was essentially just that—a Communist party organ. That The Nation should serve a markedly different function is essential to the magazine’s identity, Kirchwey suggests: “The whole value of its function is to be analytical and critical and free to present varying views without any inhibitions resulting from partisan control or even rigid ideological limits” ([1]).

These statements of editorial policy toward Spain are as explicit as we are likely to get from any publication, but Kirchwey further clarifies the role of the editors’ own judgment in deciding which opinions (and contributors) fall within an acceptable range of debate for the journal’s pages, and where those opinions should be placed in relation to The Nation’s own viewpoint, that is, along the outwardly radiating spectrum from editorial pages to correspondence pages. “This doesn’t mean, however,” Kirchwey continues, “that we should print articles giving every conceivable conflicting position. It means that we must use our judgment and approach the many conflicting problems with as much realism and intelligence as our staff can command” ([1]). As an example of how this policy functions in practice, Kirchwey discusses a recent piece that was submitted as a signed article by Jessie Wallace Hughan, whom she describes as “an old-time Socialist and non-resistant pacifist” ([1]). As the magazine had by now charted a clear course toward collective security where events in Europe were concerned, the editors thought Hughan’s opinions were not, in fact, close enough to the “editorial attitude” to be presented in a signed article. According to Kirchwey, Hughan “was very indignant that we were unwilling to print such views in our article pages,” but Kirchwey defends that decision nonetheless: “I think we were right to reject it as an article but that we were almost obligated to print it as a letter” ([1]).
The Nation was not the only magazine that chose to print conflicting views on a topic of concern; the New Republic likewise printed debate forums on such issues as pacifism and collective security from time to time. And as Kirchwey herself notes to Fischer, “letter columns are almost traditionally repositories for disagreements and kicks” (Letter to Fischer 9 Sept. 1937, [1]). Indeed, letter columns in such journals had long served such a function, and in doing so, it might be argued, bolstered their own credibility by creating the appearance of open-mindedness.

But there are kicks and there are kicks. The Hughan piece is instructive because it represents the extent of The Nation’s willingness to print opposing, though still liberal, views. The article is presented as a letter under the title “Pacifists Face the Dilemma,” but it does not appear to have been significantly altered from what Hughan submitted as an article. Without the original manuscript, we cannot be sure, but Kirchwey’s letter to Fischer implies that the piece was printed in full, and as published it runs to almost 1,200 words—longer than some signed articles. And Hughan offers some opinions that are striking to read in a pro-Loyalist publication. While Hughan sympathizes deeply with the Loyalist cause in theory, she openly rejects the idea that such sympathy requires a corresponding support of military action. She concedes that the Loyalist military action is “ethically justifiable if war ever is justifiable,” but counters that “pacifists repudiate war, not merely because it is unethical but because it is futile” (82). She reasons that modern military machinery has “destroyed all possibility of successful defense by force of arms,” and argues that “such inventions as the long-range gun and bombing plane have put permanently behind us the time when strong lines of soldiers could say with assurance, ‘They Shall Not Pass!’” (82). This statement openly rejects the power of the rallying cry of Madrid’s defenders (“¡No Pasaran!” in
Spanish), a phrase that had been elevated to near-sacred status among Loyalists and their supporters since the city’s dramatic resistance to Franco’s siege the previous fall. Despite her support for the Spanish people themselves, then, Hughan asks provocatively, “Is there some new magic in the rightness of the Spanish cause to make this particular conflict an exception as regards futility?” (82). Moreover, she makes claims that run counter, at least in part, to such core beliefs of most pro-Loyalists as the democratic legitimacy, unity, and general goodness and restraint of the Republic. “Our romantic sympathy with the Spanish people should not blind us to the extreme closeness of the vote which brought the popular front into power,” she notes at one point, “the absence of a common working philosophy among its groups, and the failure of the enlightened industrial proletariat to reckon with peasant and military reaction” (82). Elsewhere, in asserting that a negotiated settlement between the warring sides is the best possible outcome, she suggests that while a Nationalist victory would be “obviously disastrous,” “even a victory of the Loyalists could not fail to be followed by such drastic retaliations upon clerical and political reactionaries as to prepare the way for new rebellions, and a regime of rigid suppression, punctuated by ‘Moscow trials,’ would be the most probable sequel to armed victory on the part of the republic” (82).

Because it seriously critiques many basic premises of the Loyalist cause, Hughan’s piece functions at a considerably higher level than the short letter of complaint or disagreement that more commonly represented the “kicks” printed in the correspondence pages of similar publications. And it was only one of many, as I will argue below. In order to establish context, though, I will first show that the New Republic rarely published anything of such detail and substance in its letter columns, at least where the topic of Spain
was concerned; and that the New Masses, in its adherence to the Communist party line, presented a single, simplified picture of the Spanish situation.

**Conflicting Views in the New Republic and the New Masses**

The *New Republic* offered little serious discussion of Spain’s internal politics, in its letter columns or otherwise. The internal divisions are considered with any depth on only a few occasions, and only one significant response to the dominant pro-government line appears. The result is that the major questions fueling internal Spanish debate in 1936 and 1937, in particular the question of pushing forward the revolution or first winning the war, are not framed in the *New Republic* as having much importance.

A few pieces in the first two months of the war had a tone vaguely sympathetic to the idea of social revolution. But by late August 1936, the existence of social revolution was being downplayed in the magazine. A short piece cabled from an unnamed “reliable special correspondent” in Spain proclaimed that “it can be stated authoritatively that no proletarian revolution is taking place,” and that “all parties, including the anarchists, are solidly supporting the government” (“Cable”). A contributor called Observer, in an article the following month, notes that there has been some government takeover of industries, but only for “war purposes”; and the writer stresses that as long as the Communists remain “as influential in the regime as the hostile propaganda indicates, revolutionary action will be moderate” (91). The writer labels any possible moves beyond this moderate situation as “extreme or undisciplined action” likely to be undertaken by the Anarcho-Syndicalists (92).

It is not until December 1936 that the situation in Catalonia is given any substantive attention, and then, in an article by M. E. Ravage, the early revolutionary fervor is characterized as disunity and indiscipline, and the already-visible move toward a more
republican situation in line with the central government and the Popular Front ideology is lauded as sure progress. In comparing his impressions of Barcelona at the time of writing with those of his visit six weeks before, Ravage labels the shift from the fragmented, factionalized state of the city then to the comparative calm and unity now “a second revolution, but a silent and bloodless one” (172). His take on the results of that shift is sunny: “The talents from all the parties and groups are pooling their efforts and their capacities to defeat the counter-revolution and to help in the birth of the new society”; and he claims that cooperation between previously antagonistic groups is the result of a “sober realism” setting in among all, “a dawning of the evident enough truth that not alone the social revolution but the political freedom of Catalonia itself stood or fell with Spain as a whole” (172-73).

When Ravage’s assertion (based on “well informed opinion hereabouts”) that “the danger of inter-proletarian strife is definitely exorcised” showed itself to be spectacularly wrong the following May, the New Republic came down clearly on the side of the pro-government forces and, therefore, the Communists (173). An untitled editorial in the 19 May 1937 issue acknowledged that the disagreement between pro- and anti-revolutionary forces had led to the Barcelona fighting, along with “many minor irritations on both sides”—an understated way of describing the increasingly bitter and sometimes violent clashes that had characterized the preceding months. But the fighting itself is labeled an “Anarchist revolt” in which “the Anarchists came out in the streets with tanks and machine guns, and several hundred people were killed before they went home again” (“The Week” 30). H. N. Brailsford’s article “Impressions of Spain,” which appeared on 9 June 1937 is slightly more balanced in that it gives more consideration to the internecine strife that produced the
violence, and casts the Anarchists as a principled group with both failings and virtues. Yet the Barcelona fighting is still presented as the Anarchists’ own work, their defeat is cast as a victory for order, and the extent to which the Communists exploit the situation to topple the government of Largo Caballero goes unmentioned.

With these opinions and analyses, be they relatively few, all leaning in greater or lesser degree against the pro-revolutionary Loyalist elements, the New Republic printed only one openly dissenting voice through the summer of 1937. This appeared in the section of the magazine titled “From the New Republic Mail Bag,” which printed short summaries of correspondence received from readers. The June 30 issue included a note that “I. Persons, of Minneapolis, Minnesota, thinks that Mr. Brailsford’s articles on Spain in our issues of June 9 and 16 show too much sympathy with the official Communist Party point of view and do not give proper weight to the Trotskyist and Anarchist factions” (“From the New Republic” 226). This blurb presents a divergent view, to be sure; but as it is printed, without any of Persons’ own language or any claims establishing the legitimacy of the Trotskyist and Anarchist points of view, it is little more than a nod that establishes the existence of opposing views—and does not approach the level of debate that I will outline in The Nation.

The pattern that appears in the New Republic’s coverage of the war is one in which internal political divisions are downplayed and the pro-government line but lightly challenged. Later in 1937, one significant exception12 to this pattern played out in the publication of two articles by the pro-Communist writer Ralph Bates and a lengthy letter of response from the American Trotskyist Felix Morrow. Bates, a British novelist who had

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12 The only other major exception to the pattern was John Dos Passos’s lengthy letter regarding his late friend Jose Robles, which appeared in July 1939—several months after the war’s end. In response to dismissive comments of Robles that Malcolm Cowley had made in his review of Dos Passos’ Adventures of a Young Man, Dos Passos told a relatively comprehensive version of his efforts to find out about Robles’ death (see Chapter Two of my dissertation for more on Robles, Dos Passos, and Ernest Hemingway).
already written extensively on the Spanish war and had been the founding editor of the International Brigades’ *Volunteer for Liberty*, contributed a two-part article in October 1937 on the creation of the unified Republican army. These are laudatory pieces that offer standard pro-government claims about the military advantages of the shift from the militia system of the war’s early days to a centralized command. Bates sets up his articles as a response to criticisms by dissident elements within the Loyalist camp that “the regular army [is] just another professional bourgeois army” and that the government itself is counter-revolutionary; these criticisms, Bates writes, have become “almost fashionable in certain circles” back here in New York (286). Naturally, he dismisses these claims outright and uses his articles to prove the opposite, while asserting throughout the inefficiency of the militia system.

In its 10 November 1937 issue, the *New Republic* printed in its correspondence pages a response to Bates from the American Trotskyist Felix Morrow. His letter runs to over a thousand words and presents some of the major arguments of anti-Stalinist supporters of the Loyalists as a way of rebutting Bates’ claims and assumptions. Morrow claims, for example, that “the bourgeois-Stalinist bloc are leading Spain to a catastrophe,” and he characterizes the May events as “the crushing of the workers in Catalonia” (18-19). He asks the kinds of probing questions that are elsewhere absent in the *New Republic*’s coverage of the civil war: “Why are thousands of POUM and CNT workers—and UGT members too—in the jails, the very men who crushed the Fascist rising in Catalonia . . .? Why was Andres Nin murdered? . . . And hundreds of others I could name, done to death by the Stalinists?” (19). Morrow also accuses the *New Republic* of failing in its liberal principles by operating as a Stalinist organ in disguise:
One of the asserted values of liberalism is to give both sides of the case, at the least to state the position of your opponent. This you have never done, on Spain, since the civil war began. On the contrary, you have systematically published material hostile to the CNT and POUM, without ever once permitting a defender to state their case. . . . [Y]ou have not been merely partisan; you have adopted the intellectually dishonest methods of Stalinism in aiding and abetting it against the social revolution in Spain. . . . [And] every honest person must deny you the right to work for Stalinism under the guise of being a liberal organ. Nail the skull and crossbones to your masthead, so that honest people shall know whom you really speak for. (19)

Morrow’s letter itself receives a rebuttal from Ralph Bates, as well as an editorial elsewhere in the issue that challenges what the editors feel is Morrow’s inappropriate analogy to the Russian Revolution and argues that the New Republic views itself as “progressive,” not “liberal” (“Spain is Not” 5). My first point here is that an alternative view on internal Spanish politics is presented in Morrow’s letter with a certain amount of depth and development, even if it is challenged by Bates and the editors. This exchange is in fact quite similar to the way in which The Nation allows a measure of debate on Spain to appear in its pages, as I will demonstrate. But my second point is that this exchange is the only one of its kind to appear in the New Republic while the Spanish Civil War was underway. Thus the pattern of minimal consideration of internal Spanish politics that I have discussed comprised the dominant note of the New Republic’s presentation of the Spanish war.

On the other hand, the New Masses’ presentation of the internal divisions was entirely one-sided and can be dealt with more quickly. The Communist line—establish centralized government control, win the war before proceeding with the revolution, and
uphold alliances with bourgeois elements to do both—was the only perspective granted a hearing in its pages. So when the tensions in Barcelona erupted into a small civil war within the Republic in May 1937, the New Masses left no room for doubt as to who was responsible for the political disunity that had turned so violent. The Trotskyists alone were to blame—and it should be remembered that the term “Trotskyist” was a clear pejorative in a publication like the New Masses, a term that evoked a sense of the persistent and thoroughly evil treachery which Leon Trotsky embodied to the Communists. In discussing the background of the tensions in Catalonia, for example, an unsigned editorial from May 1937 explains that “many Anarchists refused to accept a single command, war discipline, submergence of all differences for the duration of the war,” but adds that “the best and most of the Anarchists have gladly embraced these people’s-front objectives” (“Barcelona” 9). Despite the factual accuracy of some of this information, the slant is striking: there is no room for the interpretation that anyone could possibly hold a legitimately different ideological perspective on the revolution or the Popular Front, and the Anarchists who have chosen to cooperate with the Popular Front government (in violation of their own ideological principles, incidentally) are vaguely labeled “the best.” The author goes on to state unequivocally that the fighting occurred because “the Trotskyists [i.e., the POUM] sought to take advantage of this differentiation within the ranks of the Anarchists to stage a putsch whereby power would be theirs. Their intrigues were made easier by the fact that the Anarchist movement is a strange conglomeration of idealists, gangster elements known as ‘uncontrollables,’ and job-holding labor bureaucrats of the Syndicalist unions” (4). Naturally, as the Communists were always the heroes in New Masses discourse, there is no mention here of the Communists’ own concurrent “intrigues” to oust Prime Minister
Francisco Largo Caballero and create a situation in which “power would be theirs,” nor of their own “gangster” tactics that had contributed to the rising tensions in Catalonia\(^{13}\) (4). And the author goes further to claim collusion with the fascists—completely without evidence, of course: “the attempt at a coup,” the author writes, was “inspired by the Trotskyists in an unholy alliance with the ‘uncontrollables’ and ‘fifth column’ fascists” (4). It is indicative of the import of the term “Trotskyist” amongst pro-Communists that the leap to “fascist” can be made so easily and without explanation.\(^{14}\)

This early editorial response to the May fighting is not an isolated case in the *New Masses*. A signed article by James Hawthorne in the 22 June issue repeats the general argument that the POUM had orchestrated a putsch in alliance with extreme Anarchist elements, and extends the claims of their collusion with the fascists. Hawthorne makes much of the Anarchists’ hoarding of weapons and of the legality of the Catalan government, which the Anarchists and the POUM were flaunting in their opposition to centralized control. He does this to legitimize the role of the police in starting the fighting, which had certainly been reported in the press.\(^{15}\) “When the police attempted to occupy certain public buildings, the illegally armed bodies could cynically pretend that this was a provocation and attempt to

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\(^{13}\) Tensions between the Communists and the government of Largo Caballero, who was deeply suspicious of them, had been growing for months, and the Communists had been simply awaiting the right opportunity to force him from power. Hugh Thomas writes that “during March—when the Russian military advisors and senior communist officials were at their most influential, following the victory of Guadalajara—the Comintern’s directors of the Spanish communist party evidently resolved to destroy Largo Caballero once and for all” (649-50). Thomas goes on to discuss “an astonishing meeting of the Spanish communist party executive” in which Largo Caballero’s removal was discussed and planned, and Negrín’s name was floated as the best choice for the next prime minister (650-51). The May events provided the opportunity the Communists were waiting for.

\(^{14}\) Indeed, the fusion of the two terms (diametrically opposed in reality) into “Trotsky-fascist” would create perhaps the Communists’ most colorful epithet of the period.

\(^{15}\) The fighting was sparked by a police attempt to seize an Anarchist-controlled building, but it was in essence the inevitable explosion of mounting violence and antipathy between Communists (allied with the Valencia government) and revolutionary Anarchist and Marxist workers who believed they had earned the right to self-determination through their successful resistance to the military uprising the previous July. See my discussion below of the outbreak of the fighting and the question of responsibility.
justify their putsch on that ground!” (7). The sneer implied by Hawthorne’s exclamation point again allows no room for questioning his overly simple version of an extremely complicated situation. Here is more Communist hypocrisy in the implication that one side, the Communists’ side, clearly represented law and order, when in fact partisans on both sides had since January been confiscating and hoarding weapons, building fortifications, and committing killings and other acts of violence. Elsewhere, Hawthorne claims that “the rising was clearly fascist-inspired,” though he provides no evidence for the claim (7). The closest thing to evidence he offers, in fact, is a kind of logical fallacy. In discussing the provocative actions of the POUM and their allies in the radical Anarchist group the Friends of Durruti, Hawthorne points to the tanks, artillery and heavy and light weapons which the dissidents had hoarded and brought out once the fighting began. “That these arms had been stolen from the front and reserved for an attempt against the government was obvious,” he writes. “To the proletariat of Catalonia, to honest Anarchists themselves, this aspect of the matter was disturbing. Could this be the work of anyone but fascists?” (7). The argumentative weakness of the rhetorical question here underscores my assessment of the New Masses in relation to internal Spanish politics. Of course it could be the work of someone other than fascists, but the New Masses would brook no questioning of its point of view. Like so much of the Communist propaganda of the period, the magazine simply stated its case on Spain, regardless of facts or uncertainties, and used its assumption of its own correctness as support for its claims.

A Measure of Debate on Spain’s Internal Politics

The Nation stands apart from the New Republic and the New Masses because it puts on the table the political and ideological issues that divided and threatened to fragment the
Republic in the first year or so of the civil war. Two signed articles in 15 August 1936 issue of The Nation together frame two significant points about the workings of this presentation: first, how the more circumscribed space for disagreement among signed articles functioned and, second, how the editorial direction that described that space changed with the shifting circumstances of the war itself. In “Catalonia in Revolution,” Maxwell S. Stewart, formerly an associate editor, describes the social and political situation in Barcelona with a focus on the extent of the social revolution there. It was in Catalonia where the revolution progressed farthest, with red flags everywhere, collectivized shops and cafés, and a marked lack of class distinctions in dress and manner and modes of address (everyone was “comrade”)\(^{16}\); where anarcho-syndicalist trade unions and anti-Stalinist Marxist parties held their greatest sway; and where, as readers of Orwell’s Homage to Catalonia know well, the later suppression of the revolution could most strongly be seen by comparison.\(^{17}\) While Stewart by no means condemns the present state of a city in the hands of its workers, he casts a wary eye on the possibility of revolution pushed too far too quickly. His first two paragraphs set up the theme of a happy situation concealing ominous undertones. “A stranger dropping into Barcelona today,” he begins the article, “might jump to the conclusion that the city was celebrating a great national holiday” (173). But in his next paragraph he undermines his description of an exuberant population: “The illusion of carefree merrymaking is quickly dispelled when one observes knots of men on practically every corner with rifles strapped to their shoulders. . . . Cars and trucks filled with armed men and plastered over with the insignia of the powerful trade unions—the Confederación Nacional de Trabajadores and the Unión General de Trabajadores—drive noisily through the streets at high speed, their red

\(^{16}\) See Orwell 32.

\(^{17}\) Orwell’s contrasting descriptions of revolutionary Barcelona in December 1936 and bourgeois Barcelona in May 1937 are two of the most memorable sections of his memoir.
flags flying proudly” (173). His claim that the workers’ committee wields the real power in the city despite the nominal control of a moderate left Republican civil government is accurate, as is his discussion of the strength of the anarcho-syndicalist trade union, the C.N.T/F.A.I, and the POUM. But his piece downplays the likelihood of the revolution progressing forward and implies that such a situation would be undesirable. “It is true that if one judges by externals,” Stewart writes, “the situation has all the earmarks of a proletarian revolution. Actually, however, the probability of an uprising is remote. Spain is having its February, not its October revolution, and Catalonia must be considered in relation to the country as a whole” (173). This surprising assertion that the Catalan revolution is in merely a preliminary, bourgeois-democratic stage is followed by equally surprising claimsthat proletarian control is surface-level at best, and that some consensus exists on the inadvisability of further revolutionary action: 18

18 The claim is surprising because there is no doubt that social revolution progressed quite far in the early months of the war, particularly in Catalonia where the Anarchists were essentially in control. The revolution was not complete in anarchist terms (i.e., the state was never dissolved entirely), but it involved a significant social and economic restructuring, if only temporarily. Burnett Bolloten writes,

Proof of the extent and depth of the Revolution is not lacking, even from Communist sources . . . . Mikhail Koltzov, leading Soviet journalist and Stalin's personal agent in Spain, stated quite early in the war that, according to a rough estimate, approximately eighteen thousand industrial and commercial enterprises were taken over by the workers' unions and by the state, twenty-five hundred of them located in Madrid and three thousand in Barcelona. Landed properties were seized, some were collectivized, others divided among the peasants, and notarial archives as well as registers of property were burned in countless towns and villages . . . . Hundreds of seizures made by the agricultural workers' unions affiliated with the UGT and CNT were subsequently registered with the Institute of Agrarian Reform, an agency of the ministry of agriculture, which issued frequent reports listing confiscated properties. . . . Railways, streetcars and buses, taxicabs and shipping, electric light and power companies, gasworks and waterworks, engineering and automobile assembly plants, mines and cement works, textile mills and paper factories, electrical and chemical concerns, glass bottle factories and perfumeries, food-processing plants and breweries, as well as a host of other enterprises, were confiscated or controlled by workmen's committees, either term possessing for the owners almost equal significance in practice. . . . Motion-picture theaters and legitimate theaters, newspapers and printing shops, department stores and hotels, deluxe restaurants and bars were likewise sequestered or controlled, as were the headquarters of business and professional associations and thousands of dwellings owned by the upper classes. (54-55)

Moreover, the centrality of the revolutionary question in the conflicts within Republican Spain belies the idea that there was some kind of consensus on pausing at a moderate stage of revolution, especially in the heady early weeks, which were marked by workers’ jubilance over their sudden self-governance.
The power is in the hands of the workers, but the basic structure of capitalism remains unchanged. And the leaders of all radical parties appear to agree that the moment is most inopportune for a drive toward fundamental change. The anarchists of F.A.I. and C.N.T. are violently opposed to capitalism but lack a positive program. The Communists and Socialists, relatively weak in Catalonia, are committed to comparatively mild reforms, hoping thereby to obtain the broadest possible support against the powerful reaction. Even the radical P.O.U.M., which is rapidly gaining strength in Catalonia, recognizes that much further preparation is necessary before there can be a successful proletarian revolution in Spain. (173)

While Stewart’s assertions about the Communists and Socialists are generally correct, he seriously underestimates (or consciously understates) the commitment to social revolution on the part of the POUM and at least the more radical sections of the anarchists. The desire on their parts to push the revolution forward before all else, and the resistance to that program from Communists and Republicans, would build tensions over the next several months that would culminate in the violent events of May 1937.

Stewart’s analysis is shaped by his implied support for the Popular Front coalition and corresponding suspicion for the organizations which hesitate to participate in its moderate bourgeois-democratic program. Noting that the central government (still located in Madrid) “must adopt positive reform policies if it is to avoid serious difficulties in Catalonia,” Stewart has already cast the anarchists and the POUM, neither of whom are at this point part of the Popular Front, as the perpetrators of such future difficulties19 (174). Those groups have, he writes, “a tradition of intransigence, and both are heavily armed,”

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19 Both the Anarchists and the POUM joined the Catalan government, the **Generalidad**, in September 1936.
though he believes they can be mollified by moderate reforms directed by the Madrid government (174).

In Stewart’s analysis, the revolution, as it has progressed and seems likely to progress, is presented as a collection of moderate reforms rather than radically transformative social change. “For the moment, therefore,” he writes, “radicals of all shades are concentrating their efforts upon a limited program of reform” (173). As examples, he enumerates such changes as a new forty-hour work week, wage increases, and the confiscation and redistribution of church property and the estates of large landowners. It is on this point, on how an observer could variously cast the social reorganization underway in Republican Spain through emphasis and language choices, that one of the sharpest contrasts can be seen with the article that immediately follows Stewart’s, “Who’s Who in Spain” by Anita Brenner. For Brenner, what Stewart calls a “limited program of reform” is evidence of a much more significant social transformation that functions as the very heart of Loyalist Spain’s resistance to the reactionary military rebellion.

Anita Brenner, a Mexican-born American journalist and historian, had been writing occasionally for The Nation since 1924; many of her contributions before and after the Spanish war focused on Mexican politics and culture. In the case of Spain, her sympathies lay clearly with the anarchists, and therefore also with their allies of the moment, the POUM; and she would become one of the most vocal American commentators to support the cause of social revolution in Spain in opposition to centralized government control and the repression of the Communists and their allies. Her article in the 15 August 1936 issue was a run-down of the various political parties, unions, and leading figures on both sides of the Spanish conflict, and as such, offered a brief but thorough picture of a political situation that was
(then as now) potentially confusing for American readers unfamiliar with internal Spanish affairs. She states up front, in fact, that her impetus for writing is to counter the “opaque screen of ignorance, misunderstanding, and downright lying” behind which the American press hides the true nature of the Spanish conflict—that the civil war is above all else a function of class war—and the misrepresentation of the fighting Spanish workers, organized in their various factions but all dedicated and driven, as “a great, formless, dangerous mob” in the pages of such publications as *Time* and the Hearst papers (174).

Brenner’s assertion that the Spanish war is, among other things, “a major battle in the revolutionary march of the world” sends her article off in a markedly different direction than Maxwell Stewart’s piece (174). Whereas support for the Popular Front program is a given for Stewart, Brenner states directly that “the Popular Front in Spain is scarcely more than a political fiction” (175). Instead, she argues that both the immediate and future power in the entire country (not just Catalonia) lies in the hands of the revolutionary workers, and casts as impediments to Loyalist Spain’s success the factions that would limit the progress of the revolution, such as Manuel Azaña’s republicans. She clearly supports those groups who “do not endorse the Popular Front pact as their own program, and embrace the idea that a workers’ revolution, now, is the only genuine defense against fascism” (176). The POUM is of course one of the groups that has taken this approach. Rather than being, as Stewart presents it, a potentially dangerous and intransigent group that has thus far contented itself with mild reforms, the POUM is for Brenner an important force whom she equates with the Bolsheviks in Russia in 1917:

Its program, workers’ front as against Popular Front, is what is crystallizing in the committees of defense. In Catalonia it has become a dominant voice because while
active in the defense, it has put forward certain demands at the same time—wages, hours, etc.—and got them. It is also the moving force behind the nationalization of banks and plants and has now pushed the situation to such a point that the Catalan government is hardly more than a rubber-stamp for the workers’ committee, where this group gives most of the cues. (176)

In Brenner’s wording, the program for social change put forth by the POUM appears to constitute a victory for revolutionary progress, not a series of moderate reforms. And while Stewart does admit the reality of workers’ control in Catalonia, the character of that control and its implications differs significantly from Brenner’s interpretation. For Brenner, the situation in Catalonia represents what she sees as a broader reality:

The relation between the workers’ committee of Catalonia and the Catalan government is the most clear-cut illustration of something that is happening everywhere else in Spain. It is sharpest in Barcelona because there it is conscious and militant and deliberate, but it is a fact everywhere, even where the labor leaders labor hardest to keep the workers’ committees coupled to the republicans. The fact is simply this: Spain is being defended by worker and peasant committees “sanctioned” by a republican front. (176-77)

Brenner is able to conclude that “these workers’ and peasants’ committees are at the center of the Spanish resistance to fascism. They are responsible and disciplined. They know their own strength” (177).

These articles offer strikingly different interpretations of essentially the same situation—on one hand, the threat of a revolutionary crisis held in check by the Popular Front government and a consensus of moderation; on the other, a revolution progressing gloriously
toward a true workers’ state and only nominally unified by the Popular Front, yet threatened by elements within that coalition that would try to check its progress. The appearance of these two articles simultaneously within the signed article section illustrates what “ample room for debate as to policies and varying interpretations of events” could look like where Spain was concerned. The Nation was certainly not dictating a “rigid line,” at least early in the war.

The timing of these articles is important. The very appearance of Brenner’s piece as a signed article indicates where The Nation stood editorially in the fall of 1936. That is, Brenner’s emphasis on the importance of social revolution above all else in opposition to Stewart’s views highlights the central point of disagreement among political factions on the Republican side—disagreement that would lead to violence in Catalonia and sinister acts of repression by the Communists and their allies. In the first few months of the war, Brenner’s opinions were not so far from the editorial line to preclude their appearance in the article section. But that would change, for as the war progressed, The Nation would follow the same general trend that was common among pro-Loyalist observers, moving toward a view that winning the war militarily was the primary concern and that political unity and central government control were necessary conditions for that victory. In his memoir Men and Politics, Louis Fischer describes this trend: Referring to a critical letter he wrote in 1936 to Spanish Prime Minister Francisco Largo Caballero in which he placed the social revolution at the center of his concerns about Largo Caballero’s leadership, he recalls that “six months later I could not have written that, for the Spanish conflict had commenced to place its chief emphasis on the war. Social change receded into the background; it became a by-product rather than a primary goal” (Men 377). In keeping with this rather rapid shift in priorities,
“Who’s Who in Spain” was the last signed article about Spain that Brenner would be able to publish in The Nation. But what is significant about coverage of the Spanish conflict in The Nation is the extent to which that shift away from social revolution and toward centralized control—and the conflicts that surrounded it—were in fact dealt with in its pages, even though they were moved away from the official editorial stance and, hence, toward the back of the magazine.20

Two months after the appearance of “Who’s Who in Spain,” Brenner contributed to the Books and Arts section a scathingly critical review of the pro-Loyalist book Spain in Revolt: A History of the Civil War in Spain in 1936 and a Study of its Social, Political, and Economic Causes by historians Harry Gannes and Theodore Repard. The review would spark the first of several debates about Spain in The Nation’s correspondence pages in which Brenner and other anti-Stalinist observers would participate. Claiming that the authors are writing “not to reveal, but to conceal,” Brenner interprets their book as part of a dangerous trend among pro-Communist writers, a “case of tailoring history to the party line” in which the authors blatantly manipulate facts to arrive at the conclusions they want: namely, that “fascism as an international or national development is to be stopped by a ‘Popular Front’ combination” (“Let’s” 453-54). She charges Gannes and Repard with misrepresenting the Spanish situation to “prove that what Spain needs and wants is the bourgeois-democratic pro-capitalist revolution made in America in 1776,” to which end they erroneously suggest, among other things, “that capitalism is undeveloped and would be a progressive force, that

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20 That shift was a general trend, not a sudden or absolute policy decision. For example, “Barcelona: An Anarchist State,” a signed article by Louis F. Gittler appearing as late as December 12, 1936, offers a balanced assessment of the situation in Barcelona by way of covering the celebrations of the Russian Revolution’s nineteenth anniversary. Gittler highlights the political divisions—including the Anarchists’ commitment to “complete revolution”—underlying the celebrations’ show of Popular Front unity. In doing so, he acknowledges that the Anarchists are the most powerful of the various factions (they “[wield] the big stick of influence”) and is generally sympathetic to them, even lauding their commitment to freedom. (701)
the peasants are benighted and divided from the workers, and that the workers themselves have never heard of jumping from republican revolution into proletarian rule, and merely want what Kerensky wanted in Russia in 1917” (454). These points, as Brenner interprets them, resonate with Maxwell Stewart’s assertion that Spain in 1936 is having its February revolution, not its October revolution, and Brenner counters with her belief that the social and economic facts of Spain undermine the authors’ claims. Here again is the central theme of the debate about internal Spanish politics: what place should proletarian revolution have in the defense of Loyalist Spain?

The Nation printed the authors’ reply in the 7 November issue’s letters pages. In it, Gannes and Repard take offense to Brenner’s accusation of dishonesty, which they say “exceeds the measure of common decency.” They fire back that “Miss Brenner is an extraordinary person to fling about such charges [of authorial bias], considering her record,” which, they observe, is shaped by her “fury” against the Popular Front (559). They counter by undermining Brenner’s claims in ‘Who’s Who in Spain” labeling the Popular Front a “political fiction,” citing the development that Brenner’s “personal hero,” the POUM’s Andres Nin, has since taken a ministry post in the government (559). “Inasmuch as the Anarcho-Syndicalists are in the new Catalan government,” the authors charge, “this ‘political fiction’ is supported by every left group in Spain with the sole exception of the diehard Trotskyites who support Miss Brenner’s position” (559). This move to isolate Brenner’s point of view is strong, and the authors’ position does prefigure the direction that The Nation will take editorially by the following year.

Yet the editors give Brenner a chance to respond; her rebuttal follows Gannes’ and Repard’s letter. She roughly sticks to her original evaluation of the book, charging the
authors with “sloppiness, ignorance and bad faith” for which, she says, she has space for only a few examples (“Spanish People’s” 559). These include frequent misspellings (sloppiness), a misinterpretation of prewar Spanish capitalism as feudalism (ignorance), and mischaracterizations of the anarchists, anarcho-syndicalists, and the POUM (bad faith). Regarding this last category of shortcomings in particular, Brenner reiterates her belief that “any book that distorts, conceals. If the authors want to say they did so involuntarily, they then plead guilty merely to sloppiness and ignorance, which is their privilege. But that still does not make them historians worth trusting” (560). The intensity of these writers’ charges and counter-charges reminds us of how deeply these matters of internal Spanish politics were felt by contemporary observers. If the Spanish war in general carried enormous weight for most liberals and progressives as a battle against fascism, the opportunity for Spain’s complete transformation into a workers’ state carried similar import for a smaller, but at least as dedicated, group of revolutionary partisans such as Brenner. And in this early interchange of letters on the question of Popular Front or revolution, neither viewpoint is prioritized by overt editorial sanction.

As I have suggested, though, The Nation would eventually develop an editorial position in favor of centralized government control and postponement of the revolution. Louis Fischer, the journal’s principal correspondent in Spain, would play a significant role in shaping that position, both through his frequent signed articles and his role as a source of some of Kirchwey’s understandings of events. Several of the dissenting letters in correspondence pages of The Nation responded directly to Fischer’s reporting and the extent to which the frequency of his contributions constructed a particular picture of the Spanish situation.
Fischer had contributed regularly to The Nation since 1924. He had built a reputation as one of the best-known Western journalists to cover the Soviet Union, where he lived for several years. He started out as a staunch supporter of the Soviet social system but became disillusioned with the failures and excesses of Stalinism, though he mostly kept his qualms to himself until the Nazi-Soviet pact in 1939 from which so many fellow travelers famously recoiled in horror. Fischer would publicly resign from The Nation in 1945 over disagreement with the editors’ continued support for the Soviet Union, but during the Spanish war he was thoroughly pro-Loyalist, and he saw early on the advantages of centralized government control and a single, unified army. To this end, his articles, like Maxwell Stewart’s “Catalonia in Revolution,” were generally dismissive or hostile toward those Loyalist elements that bucked the Communists and the Republican government and pushed for proletarian revolution. And, with the exception of a few hints of ominous possibilities, Fischer’s pieces ignored the terror tactics that the Communists and Soviet agents directed against their enemies.

Fischer also did more than just write about Spain. He enlisted in the International Brigade just after Franco’s siege on Madrid began in November 1937; he claimed in fact to be the first American to enlist with the force of international volunteers (Men 386). According to his memoir Men and Politics, Fischer “wished to contribute work as well as words,” a sentiment that sent thousands of internationals pouring into Spain in 1936 and 1937 (386). He informed no one outside Spain of his enlistment, and for some weeks during which he had stopped sending dispatches to The Nation and otherwise cut contact with the States, some colleagues and family feared for his safety (Men 388). Fischer was appointed quartermaster for the brigade, in which capacity he served for about three months until
falling into the disfavor with the power-mad and paranoid French Communist leader of the Brigade, André Marty. Later in the war, he continued to help by purchasing arms for the Republic in Paris. Whatever private concerns Fischer had about the Soviets and about their actions and motivations in Spain, he remained dedicated to the Republic throughout the war.

For Fischer, that dedication meant that the war had to be won first, and that any internal divisions which threatened unity of purpose were dangerous in the extreme. Two articles written in late June and early July 1937, in the wake of the May events in Barcelona, illustrate Fischer’s interpretation of internal Spanish politics. For example, in the earlier piece he presents the transformation of the Loyalist military forces from a collection of militias organized by individual parties and unions (a source of great pride for pro-revolutionary elements) to a single army under unified command (directed primarily by the Communists) as an unquestionably positive development, referring derisively to the former state of affairs. The “green milicianos who ran whenever the Moors appeared” have become “stubborn warriors,” he writes, and their “new regular army uniform is symbolic of the passing of the early amateurish improvisation and chaotic if colorful eclecticism” of the militias (“Loyalist Spain Gathers” 7).

Moreover, Fischer condemns the very idea of internal political divisions outright, allowing no room for the suggestion that dissident elements might have legitimate social goals or legitimate reasons for distrusting the central authority represented by the new government under Juan Negrín that the Communists have just maneuvered into power. “Neither the danger of foreign attack,” he claims, “nor the obvious necessity of straining every muscle to win the civil war has deterred the Spanish Loyalists from engaging in the

21 Marty’s wildly suspicious nature and tendency to imprison and execute Loyalists on groundless charges is legendary, and he was famously skewered by Hemingway’s characterization in For Whom the Bell Tolls.
22 See Thomas 670-71, n. 2.
expensive game of party politics which is forcing some able persons into inactivity and even obstruction” (8). He leaves no doubt, though, as to where the chief responsibility for this division lay: with the anarchists and the allies of recently ousted former prime minister Francisco Largo Caballero. “At present the Caballero-led Left Socialists, . . . and the Anarchists are in active opposition,” Fischer writes. “This means they carry on whispering campaigns and sometimes intrigues against the Negrín regime” (8). He describes the new alliance of the Left Socialists, the CNT, and the anarchists, which is based on their mutual opposition to Negrín’s new government, as an “uneasy and unnatural fellowship” which “sows seeds of discord when unity is most needed to defeat fascism”; and the anarchists in particular, under Negrín’s efforts to reign them in, are desperate enough to consider joining the cabinet, “but simultaneously they are instructing their followers to sabotage Negrín’s work” (8).

The shorter dispatch published two weeks later, “Loyalist Spain Takes the Offensive,” recapitulates the same kinds of interpretations. A quote from a member of Negrín’s new cabinet that begins the article subordinates internal divisions to the military situation: “If we win military victories, our internal politics will cease to be a problem for us” (62). This claim is shortly followed by Fischer’s statement that “every Spanish Loyalist believes that the present government was put into office primarily to win the war. This is what the people expect of it . . . .” (62). This phrasing clearly prioritizes the Communist-influenced direction of the Negrín government; and though he does later note that some opposition to the government persists in Catalonia, he does not explore the ideological commitment to social revolution so deeply held by a generous portion of Catalan anarchists.
and Marxists—many of whom were, by this point, disappearing into secret prisons or their graves as part of the Communists’ purges.

While Fischer is clearly a partisan of the Republic, his writings do not similarly mark him as an unabashed partisan of the Communists within it, as some critics would claim. For example, in these two articles Fischer is actually quite generous in his portrayal of Largo Caballero (whom the Communists have ousted), praising at one point his “fundamental honesty” despite criticisms of his tenure as Prime Minister, and elsewhere noting his genuine efforts to bring a quick end to the Barcelona fighting by appealing to the anarchists to stand down (“Loyalist Spain Gathers” 8). Fischer’s jabs against the anarchists and other dissident elements have little of the vitriol and paranoid excess that characterized much of the Communist propaganda. Charges of treachery are limited to an occasional offhand reference, as to Largo Caballero’s “retention of a high officer whose inability or treachery explains and is partially responsible for the surrender of Toledo and Malaga,” or to an assertion that “Franco has many friends” among Catalan separatists (“Loyalist Spain Gathers” 8; “Loyalist Spain Takes” 62). This type of comment, however brief, does have the potential to shape reader perception and should not be ignored; the latter comment, in fact, drew a pointed rebuttal in a letter from a reader.23 Still, these charges are understated in comparison with the Communists’ frequent labeling of the POUM and other dissident elements as “Trotky-fascists,” and their repeated charges of such groups’ outright alliance with Franco. Fischer is not parroting the Communist Party line despite his agreement with the Communists’

23 The reader, Joan del Pla, writes of Fischer’s comments, “This I cannot pass without a few words of dissent, for, if not corrected, it is likely to produce some confusion in your readers’ minds” (140). She explains that both Franco’s political goals and his ideology are repellent to Catalan ideals, adding that “I doubt whether it would be possible to find a single sane Catalan willing to call this traitor his friend” (140). In a reply to Del Pla that the editors apparently chose not to print, Fischer wrote that, unfortunately, more than one such Catalan had in fact been found. “But perhaps the emphasis is on ‘sane,’” he adds. “Perhaps pro-Francoism is a form of insanity” (Letter to Kirchwey 17 Aug. 1937).
approach to running the war in Spain. He even hints at the sinister potential of Communist power, as I will consider further.

Of course, Fischer is not the official voice of The Nation. The appearance of his articles among the signed articles indicates only that they should be roughly close to the magazine’s editorial position, but they were in fact very close to it. For example, an editorial titled “Uprising in Catalonia,” which appeared on 15 May 1937 and commented on the May events of the previous week, took a position toward the Catalan revolutionary groups that was nearly identical to that which Fischer would thereafter articulate. “Last week Anarchist irreconcilables supported by the P.O.U.M.,” the editorial claims, “staged a little civil war within the Spanish civil war by attacking the Loyalist government” (“Uprising” 552). While confusing reports and competing propaganda made a determination of responsibility for the fighting in Barcelona difficult in the moment—disagreement on the issue persists even to this day—the claim that the anarchists and P.O.U.M. “attacked” the government is patently false; it is also particularly misleading, presented as it is before the context of months of rising tensions is even mentioned. As Hugh Thomas notes, tensions between the pro-revolution partisans and the allies of the government had been building since January: “There had been many murders in both Barcelona and Madrid, with anarchists killing communists and vice-versa, squabbles over control on committees, and in industries, sudden attempts by communists at intimidation” (651). Both sides were secretly gathering arms and fortifying buildings before the fighting erupted (653). The spark that lit the tinderbox was the attempt by the Barcelona police chief, Eusebio Rodríguez Salas, and three truckloads of assault guards to seize the Telefonica building, which was firmly under anarchist control. The anarchists opened fire in response; barricades began going up almost immediately all over
the city, and the fighting soon spread. If there was an “attack” by one side or another, it was from the government’s side—but in essence the fighting was all but inevitable by May, regardless of who fired the first shots. The editorial does briefly discuss the context of rising tensions later in the piece, but it maintains the sense that blame rests squarely with the dissidents. The anarchists are labeled “intransigent,” and they and the POUM are given responsibility for “creat[ing] the utmost tension because of their efforts to force collectivization” and because of their alleged seizures of government arms shipments. In forcing a confrontation in Barcelona, the editorial argues, “the dissidents could not have done a better job in Franco’s behalf had Hitler and Mussolini paid them” (“Uprising” 552). These interpretations are clearly in line with Fischer’s stance, as is their closing claim that “all degrees and forms of social control must be made subordinate to the successful defense of the republic. What good are farm collectives if Franco wins?” (552). It is clear, moreover, that Fischer himself contributed significantly to the shaping of that editorial position. In responding to a long rebuttal to this piece by pro-anarchist Bertram Wolfe (to which I will return), the editors state that the editorial “was based in large part on first-hand information in Mr. Fischer possession,” and further explain that “The Nation has steadily depended on Mr. Fischer’s personal experience and continuing contact with developments in Spain to supplement the material available in the press” (Editors 658).

In keeping with her editorial policy, however, Freda Kirchwey was willing to let The Nation and its reporter in Spain take some well-argued and at times lengthy kicks in its correspondence pages. As early as December 1936, Brenner and others criticized the journal, taking issue specifically with certain claims, assumptions, and language choices in Fischer’s articles. In a letter published 26 December 1936, Brenner and four other signatories
challenged Fischer’s claim in a previous article that an “Anarchist column” fled in the face of a small force of Moors during the battle for Madrid, and his implication that their cowardice was responsible for a significant Nationalist success during the battle. The authors suggest that Fischer may have taken his information from Communist propaganda rather than observation, and offer several counter-arguments upholding the honor of the Anarchist fighters. One point they make is that in the same Nation issue as Fischer’s piece, correspondent Louis F. Gittler made a contradictory claim about certain heroic successes of Anarchist troops at Madrid. They conclude with the following statement: “We protest against Mr. Fischer’s biased reporting as harmful to the workers’ unity in this crucial moment for the freedom of Spain and the world” (Nomad 771).

After the explosion of tensions among Loyalist elements the following May, more dissenting notes were sounded in the letter columns of The Nation. In its issue of 5 June 1937 the magazine ran a letter by Bertram D. Wolfe, co-founder of the anti-Stalinist Communist Party (Opposition) in the U.S. In this letter, which ran to over 1,200 words, Wolfe countered what he saw as several inaccurate statements in the editorial “Uprising in Catalonia,” which I have discussed above. For example, he argues that the fighting in Barcelona was not the result of an Anarchist attack on the Loyalist government, as the editorial claimed, but that instead, government forces attempted to disarm security patrols legitimately controlled by the Anarcho-Syndicalist C.N.T. Wolfe writes that “the C. N. T. had entered the Catalonian collaboration government on the express condition that the patrols were not to be disarmed. Hence the move was in the nature of a coup d’état and did not even have constitutional warrant” (657). He counters the editorial’s claims that the Catalan revolutionaries had been stealing weapons from Valencia that were intended for the front,
presenting an accusation circulating in the Syndicalist press that the Valencia government was in fact withholding tanks and airplanes from the Aragon front in order to facilitate a later purge of the workers’ militias.

Wolfe also challenges the editorial’s rhetorical choices where the POUM is concerned, for, he writes, that group does not contain a “Trotskyist wing” as the editorial claims. “A few of its members are former Trotskyists who long ago broke with and were expelled by Trotsky,” Wolfe writes. “He has attacked the P.O.U.M. The latter in turn has expelled all avowed Trotskyists . . . .” (657). Acknowledging also the implications of that overused term, Wolfe argues that The Nation has an obligation “to avoid confusing the issue by prejudice-arousing shibboleths like ‘Trotskyist’” (657). Moreover, Wolfe attempts to sympathetically articulate the ideological stance of the dissident elements: “It is the view of the Syndicalists, Anarchists, and P.O.U.M. that since the bourgeois republic in Spain has twice given birth to fascist uprisings, it should not be restored again” (657). Countering the common conception that utter disorganization is the only alternative to the government’s efforts to unify the army under Valencia’s control, Wolfe argues for a unified army organized out of the existing workers’ militias that could avoid being “a blind instrument of its middle-class officers” (657). He makes other points as well, and he ties them all in with the vision of those various dissident parties: “Not always clear about how to realize their aim, they are trying to get, and believe they are moving toward, a worker’s front as against a people’s front and a workers’ government as against a bourgeois government and socialism as against capitalism” (657).

The Nation follows Wolfe’s letter with a brief rebuttal of its own, then a reply by Fischer which runs almost as long as Wolfe’s letter. Fischer challenges the factual accuracy
some of Wolfe’s statements, criticizes the Anarchists’ push toward collectivization, argues that the POUM is Trotskyist in essence if not in fact, and reiterates the view that internal dissentions “play into Franco’s hands” (“Struggle” 659). All together, this exchange fills up two full pages and part of one additional column, all in the smaller type of the magazine’s correspondence pages—over two-thirds of the section for that issue. The opinions expressed are not just gripes or personal barbs; rather, they are detailed arguments supported by reasons and evidence. Which of the participants are right in their views is not important for my purposes; what matters is that the Letters to the Editors section here functions as a legitimate forum for debate, and that Wolfe’s dissenting views are given a considerable amount of space, which allows Wolfe to maintain a reasonable level of credibility. More than just a rhetorical device to imply that the magazine considers alternate viewpoints, the correspondence pages in offer solid evidence of the magazine’s genuine openness to disagreement.

And these are not the only such examples. The same debate continued in the issue of 3 July with Anita Brenner’s response to both published replies to Wolfe’s letter. As in earlier writings, Brenner pinpoints what for the dissident Loyalists is the central question: “The issue is nothing less than the Spanish revolution itself” (“Spanish Anarchists” 26). She reiterates her suggestion from the previous December that Fischer is getting his information largely from the Communist press, and challenges what she feels is Fischer’s distortion of the Anarchists’ and the POUM’s conduct in the war and their collectivization efforts. Much of her letter consists of quotations from various news sources, which she offers as an implicitly factual counterpoint to Fischer’s interpretations of events. “If,” she writes, “The Nation is unwilling to publish any but Mr. Fischer’s version and interpretation of the profoundly
important struggle which links the Barcelona events (May 4-9), the political crisis and fall of Caballero, and the terrifying repressions now going on, let its readers reconstruct the gist of the story from the following documents, taking notice of their significant dates” (26). The quotations that follow are taken from publications as diverse as the New York Herald Tribune and Largo Caballero’s organ Adelante, and are chosen to establish that the Barcelona fighting was a planned suppression of dissident elements, that the Republican government is incorrigibly bourgeois, and that the Communists have started to employ fascist-style terror methods. On the first point, for example, Brenner offers an excerpt from Pravda dated 17 December 1936: “As for Catalonia the purging of Trotskyist and Anarcho-Syndicalist elements has begun; this work will be conducted with the same energy with which it has been conducted in the U.S.S.R.” (26). The cold purpose of this statement is noteworthy, and it overflows with sinister tones. But as Brenner suggests, what matters here in particular is the date: that the Communists had been plotting to purge their opponents in Catalonia as early as December 1936 undermines popular claims that the May fighting was simply a revolt by dissident elements. It is interesting that Brenner does not state these conclusions explicitly but does, as she suggests, allow the reader to reach them on her own. Such a rhetorical move to employ varied sources may have been calculated to counter the kind of first-person reporting and personal interpretation of a correspondent like Fischer.

In this letter Brenner also sounds the alarm over the Communists’ terror methods by mentioning the news that has begun to circulate of “the arrests, murders, and disappearances” of prominent figures within the dissident groups. “They are all,” she writes, “(those who are still alive), being held while ‘Moscow trials’ accusing them of espionage, aid to fascism, etc., are prepared against them, in the manner now become classic—and this does not omit
torture” (27). As the historical record shows, Brenner was absolutely right in these claims, though many of the political prisoners would ultimately be freed by legitimate government tribunals. More importantly, the charge is made explicitly here, the potentially damaging charge that many pro-Loyalists would wish to suppress.

Brenner repeats this charge in more detail in a letter published 21 August 1937. She writes that “with the entire political life of Loyalist Spain . . . in critical deadlock over the persecution of Left Labor elements . . . being carried out under the direction of the Communist Party, which blackmails unwilling Republicans into this activity by holding over them the threat of withdrawing Soviet aid, it is time for The Nation to break its silence on this story” (206). Brenner packs a lot of information into the two-column letter, including discussion of the secret prisons and the activities of a “special Stalinist cheka which frequently acts independently of the government police” (206). Those activities extend to both torture and murder, Brenner argues, the former designed to extract confessions, the latter frequently employed when the former fail to achieve their purpose. She names several notable figures who have met their deaths in these purges, including the Italian Anarchist writer Camilo Berneri, Andres Nin, and Bob Smillie (grandson of a famous British miners’ leader of the same name); she mentions several others who are awaiting trial, including the internationally known Spanish journalist J. M. Escuder. She argues that charges of treason against political prisoners are widely disbelieved throughout Loyalist Spain. She cites several sources for this information: reports by Liston Oak and Sam Baron published in the Socialist Call; public protests of the Catalan president Luis Companys and his party, and Largo Callero’s Socialists; and the reports of Fenner Brockway, general secretary of the

24 Escuder was eventually released, partly due to the efforts of Brenner and other internationals to obtain his freedom. See Glusker 171.
British Independent Labour Party, who led a delegation to Spain to investigate charges of foul play, and whose findings were published in the *New York Times*. The accuracy of her claims is quite striking, but again, my point here is to emphasize the level of detail and potential persuasiveness in Brenner’s letter, even if her call for *The Nation* to probe more deeply into the Communist crack-down and political terror went unheeded. In other words, by printing Brenner’s letter, apparently in its entirety, *The Nation* was in a sense breaking its silence on the story.

Yet Brenner’s call did go unheeded, ultimately. *The Nation* did not investigate the charges of political terror much further, focusing instead on the conduct of the war itself from late 1937 to Franco’s victory in early 1939. As they had done in print, the supporters of the dissident elements, along with American anti-Stalinists, called Kirchwey to task in unpublished correspondence for this perceived omission. Brenner apparently took the matter personally: in one letter Kirchwey tells Fischer that “Anita Brenner does not even speak to me any more, having despaired of getting space for what she believes to be the true facts about Spain” (Letter to Fischer 22 Nov. 1937, [1]). In December 1937, Dwight Macdonald of the anti-Stalinist *Partisan Review* wrote Kirchwey a letter strongly criticizing *The Nation*’s editorial stance on Spain and the Soviet Union. That *The Nation* had been failing to provide the truth about both topics was Macdonald’s central claim. “I’ve long had—and I still have—the idea that the NATION exists to tell the truth about social issues,” Macdonald begins his letter. “But I’m beginning to wonder whether this belief may not be mistaken” ([1]). He questions what he views as Louis Fischer’s “monopoly” on Spain and Russia in the magazine. He offers Anita Brenner as a counterpoint, but implies that Brenner’s work has

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25 Apparently this rift did not last, as she later contributed several articles on Mexico and art criticism to *The Nation* and corresponded cordially with Kirchwey about her contributions in the 1940s.
been suppressed due to its deviation from the editorial line: “When the Spanish War broke out,” he writes, “she was allowed to write for you a long article on it. But as soon as the Stalinists began to crack down on the anarchists and socialists, Brenner was no longer welcome—except in your letter column” ([1]). And he adds provocatively, “Was it, perhaps, that her views on the Spanish conflict would be not only interesting to your readers, but also persuasive?” ([1]).

Other such critical correspondence came later in the war and after its conclusion from the novelist James T. Farrell and a former member of the Abraham Lincoln Battalion named William G. Ryan. In a letter published in the issue of 30 September 1939, Farrell fires off a list of charges related to (as he sees it) The Nation’s pro-Stalinist policy, including the magazine’s tendency to reject “the criticisms and revelations of the anti-Stalinists concerning the conduct of the Stalinist movement in Spain,” and its refusal to acknowledge the widely-reported murder of Andres Nin (359). Farrell calls on The Nation to reopen, in the wake of the recently-signed Nazi-Soviet pact, questions related to the Moscow trials and the Spanish war. The editors respond briefly in print, but as they do not take up his offer of re-examining those past issues, Farrell sends another letter (not published) in which he expands upon his previous criticisms in more detail. Similarly, Ryan, who left his service with the American volunteers in Spain highly disillusioned with the Communists’ conduct of the International Brigades, wrote two letters to The Nation (December 1938 and October 1939) attempting to counter the positive images of Loyalist Spain predominant in the liberal press. These unpublished letters are a mixed bag that includes dubious offerings, such as his claims that there had never been an effective arms embargo of Loyalist Spain and that there was no arms shortage at all, as well as more substantive criticisms of the Communists’ firing squads and
secret prisons, and their overall authoritarian (and therefore anti-democratic) methods of control. In his second letter especially, Ryan hammers *The Nation* for contributing to the conspiracy of silence and misinformation that he sees in operation within the liberal community.

Ironically, while those who opposed Stalin or supported the dissident elements in Spain saw *The Nation* become a mouthpiece for the Communists, others criticized the journal for precisely the opposite reason. Indeed, Fischer himself questions Kirchwey on whether *The Nation* had gone too far in giving voice to Brenner and other dissidents. A letter from Kirchwey to Fischer, dated 9 September 1937, produced Kirchwey’s explanations of editorial policy that I have quoted above. I have not seen Fischer’s original letter in this case, but it is clear that he expressed perturbation over the extent to which the magazine had printed opinions that deviated from his views on the Spanish situation and on how the war should be run. Similarly, in October 1937, he writes Kirchwey the following brief letter:

An American foreign correspondent now in New York whose work I know you appreciate and who is devoted to Spain writes me as follows:

“The Nation, as you know, has been turned into a veritable hive of Trotzkyites, Miss Anita Brenner’s criteria seeming to prevail.”

He adds that the Nation has gone sour on Spain. How true is all this?26 (Letter to Kirchwey 17 Oct. 1937)

That anyone could, with any seriousness, accuse *The Nation* of favoring Anita Brenner’s viewpoint in late 1937 suggests that the correspondence pages, de-emphasized and

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26 Kirchwey replied with an exasperated letter on 22 November 1937; she attributed the delay to the fact that Fischer’s letter “both discouraged and angered me—so I gave myself time to cool down” (Letter to Fischer 22 Nov. 1937). I discuss parts of this letter elsewhere in this chapter.
isolated from the editorial line as they were, did not go unnoticed, however insulted Brenner (and Macdonald on her behalf) might have felt at being relegated to the back of the magazine. Perhaps some readers did not understand the relationships among its different sections. But the likelihood is that the amount of space dissident opinions were allowed gave those opinions a certain weight. It was this limited but legitimate consideration of alternate views on the internal Spanish situation that distinguished The Nation from the other major left-leaning American weeklies.

In contrast to the dearth of information on internal Spanish politics in the New Republic and the consistently pro-Communist position of the New Masses, The Nation clearly showed itself more willing than either of those contemporaries to rock the Republic’s boat. Certainly, no one could have accused either the New Republic or the New Masses of becoming a hive of Trotskyists. I have discussed the length and level of detail in letters by Wolfe and Brenner. We might also consider as a comparative example Anita Brenner’s long article in the September 1937 issue of V. F. Calverton’s Modern Monthly that attempted a comprehensive description of the Spanish war from the revolutionary partisan’s perspective, and which exposed the activities of the Communists in Spain and attempted the terrorist methods of the Soviet chekas. Dwight Macdonald wrote to Kirchwey that this article was “the most intelligent and most thoroughly documented exposition of the war in Spain that I have yet read,” and he suggested that The Nation’s readers would be interested in similar articles ([1]). Yet Brenner did manage to make some of the same points in her early signed articles and, later, in the letters that The Nation published, even if she was allowed less room for development and detail.27 Rhetorically speaking, letters in the back of the journal were

27 Brenner’s article was republished as the pamphlet Class War in Spain. It takes up most of the Modern Monthly issue of September 1937, and therefore covers much more ground than her articles and letters in The
not the same as signed articles in the front. But because the letters were well-written arguments from writers who appeared knowledgeable about Spanish politics, they might have been enough to inject some doubt into the picture of Spain that a Nation reader was forming.

**Editorial Judgment in The Nation’s Presentation of the Spanish War**

Emphasis is important, however, and Kirchwey knew this. It was apparently the question of emphasis that drove her decision to distance Brenner’s viewpoint from the magazine’s. That is, Kirchwey did not, in print or in correspondence, argue that Brenner, Wolfe, and Macdonald were entirely wrong about the internal situation in Spain or that their concerns about the Communists were unfounded. What she did argue, in essence, was that truth itself was largely a matter of emphasis. In defending her magazine’s position to Dwight Macdonald against his charges of Stalinism, for example, Kirchwey challenges the implied emphasis in the question with which Macdonald challenged her: “Are the policies of the Stalin regime building socialism or are they destroying it [in Spain and Russia]?” She replies,

> when you assert that that is “the” question you open a whole field of argument. It is certainly an important one. But whether international fascism is being successfully resisted in Spain is another question; and whether the inter-party struggle in Loyalist Spain is correctly described merely as a “cracking down” by the Stalinists is another; . . . and there are many more. You seem to me to simplify a complicated set

**Nation.** But it argues similar points, such as the centrality of the social revolution and the counter-revolutionary character of the Communists and the republican government; the role of Stalinist plotting in the Barcelona fighting—for which she quotes in bold type the same excerpt from Pravda that I reprint above; and the activities of Stalinist chekas in the imprisonment, torture, and murder of their political enemies—for which she points to some of the same evidence, such as the results of Fenner Brockway’s investigations and the specific cases of Andres Nin and others.
of issues far too much by boiling them down to the question you ask at the start.

(Letter to Macdonald [1])

She defends her choices about Anita Brenner, more specifically, by claiming that “I personally think that her honest concern over the attacks on Anarchists and other persons, many of whom she knows, has driven her to an unrealistic emphasis on that aspect of the struggle.” And she adds, “after all, there’s a war in Spain, too” (2). She similarly challenges Macdonald’s characterization of Louis Fischer as a partisan of the “Stalinist regime” in Spain. Rather, she claims, Fischer is a “critical partisan,” which means that

he might differ with you on the importance of acts of oppression or terror, committed by Communists and Anarchists and others, in relation to the whole struggle in Spain. But he would not approve any actions which interfere with the effective conduct of the war nor would he support any party organization as against the government as a whole. He believes that the Italo-German invasion plus Franco’s fascist rebellion is the one major fact to be centered on and that the party struggle and even the terror must be dealt with as difficult but subsidiary problems. ([1])

The editor’s need to carefully judge the biases as well as the accuracy of contributors applied to both sides, or at least Kirchwey claimed. In a letter to Fischer, defending The Nation against his charge of Trotskyism, she maintains that the journal has attempted to follow its own editorial position, which emphasizes winning the war, but takes into consideration other factors: “We have tried to steer an honest and unbiased course, . . . supporting the government in the struggle against Franco, defending its need for establishing centralized control within Spain—including, however, control over illegal actions by Communists as well as the activities of Anarchists and other dissidents” (Letter to Fischer 22
Nov. 1937, [1]). But not all expressions regarding such illegal actions, she claims, hold equal validity. Referring again to Brenner’s writings, she tells Macdonald,

I want to admit to you without any shame . . . that we will not accept articles that play up out of all proportion and with seeming bias the outrages that have been committed behind the lines—by Communists or anyone else. Neither the whole truth nor the Loyalist cause is served by centering attention primarily on them. It would be equally unjustified to deny that they exist or to pretend they don’t matter; and we have done neither. (Letter to Macdonald 2).

I have tried to show that Kirchwey’s claim that The Nation had denied neither the existence nor the importance of such outrages was roughly correct, even within the magazine’s general pro-government stance and the issues of placement I have discussed. Moreover, Kirchwey’s language here is particularly interesting because she does not merely claim that the Loyalist cause would be ill served by an inappropriate emphasis on the Communists’ methods—the point which was probably the major reason for many Loyalist partisans’ tendency to turn a blind eye to them. She goes further to argue that the truth itself would likewise be distorted by such an emphasis.

Such a claim may partly result from some measure of self-deception, but it at least seems to follow from the devotion to independent critical judgment that the magazine’s editors espoused. Kirchwey had told Fischer that in making decisions about what to print and where in the magazine to print it, “we must use our judgment and approach the many

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28 Orwell, in any case, thought this was the main reason for the general tendency toward silence on such matters. As quoted above, he wrote that “People who ought to know better have lent themselves to the deception on the ground that if you tell the truth about Spain it will be used as Fascist propaganda.” Along the same lines, Kingsley Martin, editor of the New Statesman and Nation, claims in his autobiography that he was being a “realist” when he rejected Orwell’s articles: “I knew and liked Orwell and would in the ordinary way have published anything he offered. . . . [But] nearly all the papers were full of attacks on Negrín, the humane and liberal Prime Minister, and I objected to adding my venom for much the same reasons as I should have hesitated about doing propaganda for Goebbels in the war against Germany” (215-216).
conflicting problems with as much realism and intelligence as our staff can command” (Letter to Fischer 9 Sept. 1937, [1]). That means one has to make choices—choices about whom to believe, whose information and interpretations to place the most faith in. In some cases, that kind of decision was no doubt easy. For example, William G. Ryan, who wrote two critical letters that I have discussed, might have been dismissed without much soul searching, given the obvious bitterness against the International Brigades which laced his letters.29 In the case of Brenner, with whom Kirchwey had a previous relationship and with whose concerns she could sympathize, the decision was probably harder to make—but it still had to be made.

Kirchwey apparently made the choice to put more faith in Fischer’s interpretations over Brenner’s because Fischer was in fact The Nation’s chief correspondent in Spain; because his position (win the war first) was a legitimate one that made good logical sense; and because she believed that Brenner’s staunch partisanship had caused her to overemphasize a secondary aspect of the situation. Macdonald had complained that Fischer had been granted a monopoly on articles about Spain. Kirchwey explains in reply that “since he went to Spain he has been our regular correspondent there; and as long as that is so, he will inevitably have a near-monopoly. When he is not there we use other known good correspondents” (Letter to Macdonald [1]). The Nation’s general pro-government stance was further bolstered in part by much agreement among those contributors: Kirchwey asks, “Is it accident or bias that makes most of them take a position very similar to Fischer’s?” ([1]) Of course, Macdonald (whose own reply does not address specific points in her letter) would

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29 Ryan writes that he has contributed to “numerous nationally circulated and reputable magazines” before and after his tenure as a soldier in Spain. One of these was the overtly pro-Franco Catholic magazine The Sign to which he contributed “American Communist’s Adventure in Spain,” a kind of tabloid exposé on the International Brigades.
have said that it was, in fact, bias that produced that near-consensus, and he may have been right. But as I have suggested, Kirchwey felt that Brenner operated with a greater, more blinding bias, based on her legitimate concern for the dissident groups: “It is hard for me to believe that Anita Brenner is either in a better position to know the facts or that she is less partisan [than Fischer],” she tells Macdonald ([1]-2).

Whom does one believe? It was perhaps the major question facing Kirchwey and the other Nation editors as they tried to sort through the hall of mirrors that was Loyalist Spain’s internal situation. As I mentioned in my previous chapter, the reporter on the ground in Spain got at the truth through personal observation or experience, and by having access to good sources and being able to judge those sources. The editors of a stateside journal were at least one step further removed, and entirely lacked the benefit of direct experience. Therefore, the accuracy or fairness of a magazine’s presentation rested primarily on the editors’ access to good sources (that is, good correspondents) and their ability to judge those sources. If the realities of Spain presented significant challenges to even the “inside man,” as Hemingway liked to view himself, how much greater were those challenges for the editors of The Nation, thousands of miles away?

It appears that Kirchwey was trying to employ some measure of legitimate, rational judgment in deciding whom to believe. That is, while she followed Fischer’s lead first and foremost, Kirchwey was genuinely attempting to sort out what was happening in Spain, to get at the truth. Yet she was facing a host of limitations. One limitation was a lack of trustworthy correspondents in Spain, which may have derived partly from the financial limitations I described earlier in this chapter. In a letter to Fischer dated 30 April 1937, in which she tries to dissuade Fischer from contributing a piece on Spain to the New Republic
at the request of Malcolm Cowley, Kirchwey tells Fischer that “an article summarizing the military and political developments since the war began would, of course, be just the sort of thing we want,” and adds, “the fact is that we have been terribly bereft of material on Spain ever since you arrived in this country [the U.S.]”30 (Letter to Fischer 30 April 1937). The latter statement implies that Fischer’s influence on the magazine’s editorial stance derives partly from his being one of the few trustworthy correspondents regularly offering contributions about Spain, at least in the spring of 1937. Censorship was another limitation. In one letter from August 1937, Fischer discusses at length the “strict censorship,” due to an impending offensive, that limited what he could write in one of the dispatches he cabled from Madrid.31 He notes that “no correspondent was allowed to send anything but terse official communiques. The telephone service with abroad was suspended. No private messages could be sent” (Letter to Kirchwey 5 Aug. 1937).

In several ways, Fischer himself served as a limitation on Kirchwey’s efforts to judge accurately. For one thing, Fischer also appears to have been generally uncommunicative about where he was and what he would contribute to The Nation. For example, Kirchwey begins one letter (28 July 1937) by explaining that she is writing to him in Moscow and hoping to catch him before he moves on. “I wish you had told me more about your plans,” she writes. “You are really an exasperating guy. You mention talk with [Republican President] Azana [sic] and don’t say anything even in private about what came out of it and you leave your own plans so vague that nobody knows where to address a letter to you” (Letter to Fischer 28 July 1937). On a few occasions in the surviving correspondence,

30 Fischer had returned to the U.S. in early 1937 to embark on a public lecture tour about the Spanish war. The Nation hosted a dinner for him and Andre Malraux at which both men spoke. Cowley was apparently trying to persuade Fischer to let the New Republic print his speech from that evening. Fischer instead expanded the speech into a pamphlet, which was published by The Nation in May 1937 (see Fischer Men 413).
31 "Loyalist Spain Takes the Offensive."
Kirchwey presses Fischer to keep the editors informed of his plans. In one instance, she notes that “we have been rather doubtful about what sorts of material to get from Spain because we haven’t known when or whether you would be going back” (Letter to Fischer 22 Nov. 1937, 2). Mentioning some contact with occasional contributors Lawrence A. Fernsworth and Leigh White, Kirchwey assures Fischer that “neither of these authors will be allowed to conflict with you if only we may know what we can expect from you. Do write a line to tell us of your plans” (2).

A more serious limitation was Fischer’s reluctance to delve as deeply into internal politics as Kirchwey would have liked, and the resistance with which he met Kirchwey’s efforts to prod him into more thorough investigations. On several occasions, Kirchwey pressed Fischer to give more specific information and more analysis about the Communist Party, including its role in the government and its relationship to dissident elements. On 14 July 1937, Kirchwey wrote to Fischer (who was by then in Paris after a trip to Spain) regarding two dispatches he had cabled from Madrid, “Loyalist Spain Gathers its Strength” and “Loyalist Spain Takes the Offensive.” These two pieces, which I have discussed in some detail, outline the development of the unified Loyalist army and offer some observations on internal political strife. Both generally followed the pro-government line, though, as I have noted, with less venom against dissident elements than was common in similar writings elsewhere, and with a balanced assessment of the recently-deposed (and anti-Stalinist) prime minister, Largo Caballero. “Your articles were interesting,” Kirchwey tells Fischer, “but they left me with a feeling of great uncertainty and a wish that I might discuss the whole inner situation with you face to face.” She adds that “your second dispatch in particular was terribly provocative” (Letter to Fischer 14 July 1937). Here she is almost certainly referring
to Fischer’s rather surprising admission that the Communist Party’s recent political offensive against Largo Caballero has caused even its “best friends” to be “worried.” Those allies believe that the party’s policies are “wise, sober, and best for the new Spanish nation now emerging, yet its new-found ambition to dominate has unhealthy possibilities” (“Loyalist Spain Takes” 62). It is not much, not when compared with the more direct and specific charges of Anita Brenner and others, but it was enough to make Kirchwey’s ears perk up. “I am hoping most earnestly,” she writes, “that after you have left Spain and have no need to submit your copy for censorship, you will write a full and very frank analysis of the political situation both inside the government and between the government and its left opposition. The Nation has not yet told all of the pertinent facts about that struggle and I think it should do so” (Letter to Fischer 14 July 1937). She even suggests that Fischer might feel restrained in his ability to report fully by his “close personal relations” with Juan Negrín, the new prime minister. “If such a situation exists,” she asks, “could you suggest a person as detached and trustworthy as, say, [H. N.] Brailsford who might go into the thing fully without doing any harm”32 (Letter to Fischer 14 July 1937). Kirchwey again presses Fischer for more information as she closes this letter: “I hope you will write me and tell me how you are feeling, how your family is, and perhaps a little more personally—if not for publication—how things look to you in Spain” (Letter to Fischer 14 July 1937). Considering the occasion and audience for this letter (i.e., she was not yet defending herself against charges of editorial bias), it is safe to assume that Kirchwey’s desire to understand the situation thoroughly herself and convey a clearer picture to her readers was genuine.

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32 Fischer would scoff at the idea that Brailsford, whose pieces for the New Republic I have discussed, was more unbiased than himself. “Incidentally,” Fischer wrote in an August 5 letter to Kirchwey, “I never knew that Brailsford was detached. He would be the first to repel such an insinuation. The bias may be much nearer home.”
That censorship was not the only cause for what Kirchwey considered a too-reserved analysis is confirmed in her next letter to Fischer, on 28 July, written before he had replied to the previous letter. She notes here that she has received his subsequent dispatch, which was mailed from Paris. Though this piece, “Franco Cannot Win,” was unhampered by Spanish censorship, it still caused Kirchwey to reiterate her previous concerns. “It is interesting and far more full and analytical than the one which preceded it,” she says, and she is right: in the article, Fischer goes into more detail on aspects of the political divisions, and offers a bit more support for his hint of a dark side to Communist control (Letter to Fischer 28 July 1937). For example, he praises Negrín’s ability to “put an end to the obnoxious Anarchist terror,” but notes that the Anarchists “should be courted as well as squeezed” because they remain “a revolutionary movement of considerable though exaggerated strength which can make a contribution to the new Spain” (“Franco” 149). On the other hand, he suggests that the Communists’ aggressive campaign to fuse their party with the Socialists’ “would mean an enlarged organization under Communist domination . . . .” But, he adds, “a Communist political monopoly or the monopoly of any party would threaten the democracy which exists today in Spain and which can and should be maintained” (149).

Again, these claims are surprisingly frank given Fischer’s background and allegiances, yet Kirchwey still feels they are insufficiently developed. “Even so,” she writes, following on her commendation of the article, “I find your treatment of the internal political situation a bit ambiguous.” She continues,

You fail to state clearly [sic] just how you think the government should deal with the various Left elements and what you think the role of the Communist Party should be. As I said before, I can understand reasons for caution. Perhaps a partial analysis is
better than none, but I should certainly like to have the whole problem analyzed fully
and frankly in The Nation as soon as possible. (Letter to Fischer 28 July 1937)

But Fischer resisted Kirchwey’s efforts to get him to probe deeper into the
implications of the Communists’ activities and other internal matters. He responded with
anger to Kirchwey’s suggestions that he elaborate on and clarify hints that he had included in
his dispatches. On 5 August 1937, he wrote a letter that seethed with indignation over
Kirchwey’s friendly, if gently critical, letter of 14 July, which he calls “the most insulting”
letter he had ever received from her. He goes on to describe the strict censorship that had
affected his ability to write openly, then asserts the accuracy, completeness, and originality of
the two dispatches from Madrid and the subsequent article sent from Paris (described above).
“What I said about the internal political situation was new and sensational,” he argues, and
adds, “if you didn’t appreciate it there doesn’t seem much use going to a lot of trouble to get
and forward such information to you” (Letter to Kirchwey 5 Aug. 1937). Fischer’s threat that
he might stop contributing entirely may have carried some weight if The Nation was still
lacking trustworthy correspondents in Spain, as Kirchwey had stated in April. In any case,
he continues,

I was hampered by censorship and by no other circumstance, as you suggest. The
proof is in the article I sent from Paris wherein I elaborated a few points touched upon
in the Madrid despatch [sic]. Nobody has analysed [sic] this complicated situation as
I have. And I did it on the basis of authentic data

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Considering my connections, despatch [sic] number two and the article were

33 By “authentic data,” he apparently means his personal connections with the likes of Negrín, Prieto and Azaña.
singly free from bias. When you see a more truthful and unprejudiced and authoritative treatment of the internal political situation let me have it.

As I have noted, Fischer’s articles were indeed surprisingly critical of the Communists considering his position, but only in a veiled way. The simple fact that he chose not to offer any detail about the Communists’ nefarious methods (imprisonment, torture, murder, blatantly false propaganda and character assassination) that no doubt lay behind his intimations of danger make his claims to thorough analysis and objectivity seem dubious. His defensive tone adds another dimension of resistance to Kirchwey’s efforts to get at the heart of matters.

After receiving Kirchwey’s letter of 28 July, in which she discussed the Paris article and again prodded him to push his analysis further, Fischer responded with a shorter but similarly bitter letter. Here he rejects Kirchwey’s assumptions about what his role as a correspondent should be: “If my article from Paris is deficient in the material you say it lacks,” he claims, “then I am a good journalist.” “It is not my business,” he explains, “to say ‘how . . the government should deal with the various Left elements and what (I) think the role of the Communist party should be’. [sic] That would be neither news nor analysis. It would be my bias. What I advocate is not much to the point in interpreting the internal political situation” (Letter to Kirchwey 17 Aug. 1937). Fair enough, on the face of it—though Fischer’s move here to invoke some implied code of journalistic ethics is questionable, considering that his level of personal involvement with the Loyalist government (he has already served with the International Brigades and may have begun working as an arms buyer for the government) has undermined any pretense to objectivity, so far as traditional journalistic ethics are concerned. More substantively, Fischer responds to
the thrust of Kirchwey’s complaints by arguing that “My treatment is not ‘ambiguous’. [sic]
It is incomplete because there can be no final summary of a phenomenon which is unfinished
and which changes daily” (Letter to Kirchwey 17 Aug. 1937). His defense here sidesteps the
kinds of criticisms that anti-Stalinist readers might have made—indeed did make in the pages
of The Nation itself, in some cases.

Writing in August in response to Fischer’s first angry reply (she had not yet received
his second), Kirchwey tries to smooth Fischer’s ruffled feathers, but reiterates her criticisms
nonetheless. “The fact is,” she writes, “your articles did raise questions that were not
explicitly answered. And not only in my mind, or I should ascribe them to mental confusion
and fog” (Letter to Fischer 17 Aug. 1937, [1]). She assures Fischer that she and the other
editors did not doubt the “truth or authority” of his reports, but that “what we wanted—and
what we still want—was completeness as well” ([1]). In the same letter, she pins down some
of her reasons for concern:

The American press has been full of stories of repression but none have been
illuminating. . . . So far no confirmation of Nin’s death has come through. Obviously
the situation is thoroughly nasty and complex, and full of ominous probabilities for
the future. The reason I want a full unbiased interpretation is that none has so far
been offered by anyone. So instead of reacting indignantly, you should appreciate
our genuine desire and need for the kind of analysis you can give if you will—or feel
you should. ([1])

A Nation editorial published August 14 had mentioned reports of Andres Nin’s death, but
had dismissed them as apparently unfounded. Clearly, Kirchwey had not herself fully
dismissed the possibility that Nin had been murdered, and again pressed Fischer to probe deeper. Fischer did not do so.34

Fischer did provide an article, published 30 October, called “Internal Politics in Spain,” that was devoted to an update on the situation (despite the author’s claim that “the republic’s main preoccupation is not internal politics. It is the foreign situation” [“Internal” 472]). Here Fischer again makes a few observations that indicate some worry over the Communist Party’s drive to power, but claims that they have recently backed down in the face of strong leadership by Negrín and his Minister of War, Indalecio Prieto; he notes too that “the Communist policy of internal peace has already brought a partial truce in the war of editorials and polemics between Communists and Anarchists” (472). Supporters of the dissident elements would no doubt have seen this rosy picture of cooperative Communists, albeit tinged with a note of suspicion, as completely obscuring the Communists’ continued methods of manipulation and terror, and their still-firm hold on the government.35 Once again, while Fischer was not merely parroting the Communist Party line, neither does his report provide the “full unbiased interpretation” that Kirchwey asked for. Whether Kirchwey felt satisfied with this article cannot be established from the sources I have examined. But later, on 22 November, in a letter hot with indignation over Fischer’s charge of Trotskyism, she once again urged him for more. “Parenthetically,” she writes, as if taking a breath in the

34 Or at least he did not do so in print or available correspondence, and the topic was not thereafter addressed in the magazine in any detail. As late as his October 30, 1939 letter to Kirchwey, James T. Farrell took The Nation to task for not acknowledging that Nin had been murdered, reminding her that the New York Times, whose reporting the journal had at times accepted as authoritative, had “stated flatly” that Nin was murdered. (The avoidance of the Nin question does seem odd. But to be fair, the question of the Times’ authority is more complicated than Farrell suggests; for example, many liberals condemned the Times’ William P. Carney’s reporting from the Nationalist zone even as they praised Herbert Matthews’ coverage of the Loyalists.)

35 The issue of Communist influence in the government remained an increasingly divisive one until a group of Republican Army officers ousted Negrín in March 1939, just weeks before the end of the war. Likewise, while the open fighting of the May events was past, Soviet-controlled security forces were still ramping up their terror methods: as recently as August 1937, the Republic’s security services had been combined into the SIM (Servicio de Investigacion Militar), which, directed by the NKVD, would become notorious for its methods of imprisonment, torture, and murder of political enemies (see Beevor 304-309).
middle of her fierce rebuttal, “I wish you would send us a piece on the present status of the Spanish government; on the connection, if any, between that situation and the reduction of Russian aid to Spain” (Letter to Fischer 22 Nov. 1937, [1]). None of Fischer’s subsequent contributions treats that second issue at all. His articles in 1938 focus mostly on the overall conduct of the war and contain many laudatory claims about the Spanish people’s spirit and determination to fight on despite the worsening situation. Fischer writes often about the desperate need for financial and military assistance from the Western democracies, but does not address questions of reduced Soviet aid or sinister influence in the government. Internal divisions are mentioned only occasionally, and tend to emphasize the increased cooperation among factions, particularly the Anarchists. Other contributors to the journal also followed this general pattern.

The Nation never really explored the issues of internal strife in its editorial and article pages in as much depth as Kirchwey apparently wanted. Internal questions faded into the background of the journal’s presentation by early 1938, whether because the magazine could never secure an adequate analysis from a source that Kirchwey deemed trustworthy enough; or because the war itself continued to turn against the Republic, and Franco’s shockingly intensified bombing of civilian centers simply eclipsed the murkier crimes of the Stalinist terror; or because concern for public opinion outside Spain became more crucial as the question of intervention by the democracies grew more desperate; or some combination of these and other factors. What I think is important in Kirchwey’s letters, though, is the evidence they provide for her desire (at least in 1936 and 1937) to not ignore those aspects of the internal situation that cast a sinister light on the Republic and the Stalinist elements within it. The relationship of her letters to the magazine’s print content illustrates the
resulting editorial conundrum: Kirchwey and her editors were forced to make editorial decisions based on incomplete information and, for good or ill, their best judgments about the level of impartiality of their contributors.

And it seems likely that Kirchwey could not judge Fischer’s level of impartiality accurately because she did not fully understand the extent of his biases. That is, Fischer had apparently not fully revealed to The Nation’s editors his level of involvement with the Loyalist government. Based on the sources I have been able to locate, I cannot with certainty determine how much Kirchwey knew of Fischer’s involvement with the Loyalist cause and his consequent lack of objectivity. It is clear from Kirchwey’s letters that she knew he had a personal relationship, even a friendship, with Juan Negrín. As I have noted, he certainly did not inform his editors at The Nation of his initial enlistment with the International Brigades, though I cannot say with certainty that he did not do so later on. Likewise, I do not know whether he told Kirchwey of his secret work of purchasing arms for the Republic in Paris, but given the particular delicacy of this activity and his pattern of uncommunicativeness regarding more mundane issues, I am inclined to think he did not. In his book on war correspondents in the nineteenth through twenty-first centuries, historian Phillip Knightley presents Fischer as “the clearest case of complete commitment and almost total abandonment of objectivity” among correspondents in the civil war (210). To be fair, Knightley’s conclusions about Spanish war reporting are debatable: while he does not ignore the fact that personal commitment was an important aspect of the way this particular war was reported, he ultimately condemns “reporting with [the] heart as well as [the] mind”\(^{36}\) in favor of an attempt to seek objectivity (234). Yet the way he chooses to use Fischer in his chapter on the

\(^{36}\) This was Herbert Matthews’ phrase.
Spanish war does indicate the extent to which Fischer’s particular level of involvement stands out even within a war defined by personal commitment.

Whatever Kirchwey did or did not know of Fischer’s involvement with the Spanish Loyalists, she was aware of the possibility that his level of personal involvement, at least where Negrín was concerned, might act as an impediment to his willingness or ability to produce unbiased articles. Moreover, in the light of this direct personal service in the employ of the Republic—which far surpasses the questionable or marginal objectivity of other well-known American correspondents such as Ernest Hemingway, Martha Gellhorn, and Herbert Matthews of the New York Times—Fischer’s claims that his articles were “singularly free from bias,” and “truthful and unprejudiced and authoritative” appear disingenuous. At the risk of speculating too freely, I have to wonder whether Kirchwey would have made the same judgments about Fischer’s and Brenner’s relative levels of bias had she been fully aware of Fischer’s activities in Spain.

**Conclusion**

In the end, despite her apparent doubts, and possibly due to what she did not know, Kirchwey trusted Louis Fischer (and the perspective he championed) over Anita Brenner (and the perspective she championed), seeing a distorting partisanship in the latter but not in the former. In retrospect, given Fischer’s dubious objectivity and possible omissions about his alliances, she might have made the wrong choice. She may likewise have been wrong, along with so many other Loyalist supporters, about the need to privilege Communist-inspired views of the internal situation. In other words, the question “What good are farm collectives if Franco wins?” could be reversed to read “What good is beating Franco if Spain is left in the hands of a Soviet-style dictatorship?”
Though the benefit of time and historical study may make us wish that liberal publications like *The Nation* had probed more deeply into the darker aspects of the Republic—in the interest of truth—there is still a lack of consensus on the matters I have been considering. As I discuss in my introduction, several recent books have offered varying, at times revisionist interpretations on the role of the Communists in Spain; these include Stanley G. Payne’s *The Spanish Civil War, the Soviet Union, and Communism: Spain Betrayed*, edited by Ronald Radosh, Mary R. Habeck, and Grigory Sevostianov; and two diametrically opposed studies of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, Peter Carroll’s pro-Communist *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade* and Cecil D. Eby’s anti-Communist *Comrades and Commissars*. Certainly, the exposure of a greater range of “facts” seems desirable, even for a contemporary publication lacking the benefit of time and historical study; so we can legitimately recognize a dearth of detailed investigations of, say, Communist terror methods in *The Nation*’s editorial and article pages, even if we should be more circumspect about judging how the magazine chose to interpret the facts it did have access to. And yet, if “truth” had been better served by more of those kinds of investigations in the liberal press, it is difficult to imagine any way in which the Republican cause would have benefited in the moment.

I raise a similar point in Chapter Two, in relation to *Ken* magazine’s portrayal of the war. *The Nation* and *Ken* seem to bear little relation to each other as publications, at least on the surface. However, *The Nation* was one of the key journals of opinion whose progressive stance Arnold Gingrich and David Smart wanted to recast into a consumer magazine mold when they envisioned *Ken* in 1937. Thus *The Nation* is ideologically similar to *Ken* in its

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37 The opening of the Soviet archives after the end of the Cold War seems to have sparked more debate about the Soviet Union’s role in Spain rather than settling the matter.
drum beating against fascism, its advocacy of collective security as the means of controlling fascism, and its vigorous support for the Spanish Republic. And if it did not deal with the kinds of commercial challenges that Ken faced, still The Nation was in much the same boat when it came to the question of how to shape the truth of the Spanish Civil War. That is, Kirchwey and her editors faced a range of obstacles to understanding that, while somewhat different, were of a piece with those that Ken buried under its “insider” rhetoric—obstacles that had to do with the validity and accuracy of sources, the personalities and allegiances of individual correspondents, and a remarkably complex and obfuscatory political situation.

These kinds of obstacles have maintained some of their force in the seventy years since the war’s end. As Cary Nelson has written, the Spanish war “is a case of particularly fraught historical undecidability.” “Every fact about Spain,” he asserts, “is fundamentally unstable, and each fact’s relation to another is in significant ways undecided” (“Advocacy” 78). If even the benefit of decades of hindsight, countless personal testimonies, and mounds of documentary evidence fails to stabilize the truth, it would perhaps be unfair to expect too much from any publication of the day. What matters, I believe, is the approach a given editor or editorial board took to navigate such a situation. Unlike Ken, which generally stated its case while boasting loudly of its authority, The Nation combined a persuasive function with a dialogic function. At least during the period of mid-1936 to late 1937, when Spain’s internal strife built to a crescendo and then receded into the background for all but the staunchest anti-Stalinists, The Nation allowed a measure of debate on those divisive internal conflicts. We might view it, in retrospect, as creating an impression that truth is not a single or static principle, but rather a range of possible realities along a spectrum of progressive thinking. Devoid of the “inside man” rhetoric that Ken cultivated, which worked to stabilize
uncertainty, The Nation enacted something akin to the historical undecidability that Nelson applies to our current-day perspective. This is not to say that the editors consciously cultivated some kind of postmodernist simultaneity, but rather that undecidability was a consequence of struggling after the truth, to return to Orwell’s phrase. It could be said that The Nation came closer to the essence of the Spanish war’s inherent uncertainty than other publications, from the New Republic and the New Masses on one end to Ken on the other.

I will conclude with the further suggestion that The Nation did not fail in the way that Ken did. As I argue in Chapter Two, Ken’s approach to the war ultimately failed, at least where the truth was concerned, because it conveyed what it did not know and what it got wrong in a masculinized voice that attempted to lock down a complex and debatable situation into a single meaning through assertions of its own unquestionable authority—in a sense, to control the truth. Because The Nation’s ethos was not tied to control of the truth, but rather to its struggling after the truth, we can legitimately interpret the magazine’s approach to the war as more successful. That is, it embodied and upheld the liberal tradition whose demise George Orwell was at that very historical moment beginning to fear.
Chapter Four

“Elegy for Our Dead”: The Volunteer For Liberty and the Aesthetics of a Losing Army

One of the most enduring images of the Spanish Civil War involves the tens of thousands of volunteers from more than fifty nations who poured into Spain to fight for the beleaguered Republic. The International Brigades, the Comintern-run military command into which the foreign volunteers were organized, made their most dramatic effort in the defense of Madrid during November 1936, when Franco’s quick victory seemed to many observers inevitable. The internationals remained in the battle lines for most of the war, building a legend of antifascist unity and ideological commitment that retains its romantic quality for many people to this day.1

The American contribution to this multi-national effort has come to be known as the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. In reality, that title was a distortion from the American press of the actual Abraham Lincoln Battalion, which was only one of three mostly American battalions organized in early 1937.2 But the name stuck and was later adopted by the American veterans themselves, men who have been vilified by their detractors (especially during the anti-Communist hysteria of the 1950s) as traitorous Reds, and lauded by their supporters as “premature antifascists.” The latter label carries an element of truth despite one’s political orientation, for the volunteers in Spain were in fact the first Americans to

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1 Estimates of total numbers of international volunteers vary. Hugh Thomas estimates approximately 32,000.  
2 Cecil Eby, characteristically assuming the worst, argues that this distortion was a conscious lie by American Communist publicists designed to make the American force seem bigger than it was (xii). Peter Carroll, characteristically assuming the best, argues that the distortion was more likely a matter of ignorance of military terminology, and claims that the Daily Worker in fact used the terms interchangeably (94). The differing perspectives of these historians is discussed below in the conclusion to this chapter.
engage German Nazi and Italian fascist forces in combat, though they were doing so under a military command whose hierarchy did ultimately stretch back to Moscow.

Though the actual military significance of the International Brigades has been questioned by some historians, there can be no doubt that they played an important role in the morale of the Spanish Republicans during the defense of Madrid and served as a perpetually valuable topic of Loyalist propaganda for much of the war. Consequently, the liberal and progressive press in the U.S. made much of their contributions to the Republican war effort. The Nation, for example, carried several pieces about the internationals, including two laudatory articles by Louis Fischer, and Ken ran one by Leland Stowe, the Pulitzer prize-winning journalist of the New York Herald-Tribune. The New Masses and the Daily Worker not infrequently praised the commitment, bravery, and sacrifice of the international volunteers.

Yet the most interesting contemporary periodical representation of the English-speaking volunteers’ experience was their own weekly newspaper, the Volunteer for Liberty. The paper offered a mix of content aimed at, and in many cases produced by, soldiers in the American and British battalions of the International Brigades, though always overseen by the brigade commissariat. The content was heavy on propaganda, and included war-related news and analysis as well as labor news from the U.S. and Britain, and cartoons and other humorous items.

The Volunteer had four different editors over the course of its run. The one who served longest in this role was the American poet Edwin Rolfe, who took over from the British novelist Ralph Bates in late July 1937. Rolfe went to Spain to serve as a combat

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soldier and spent some time training with the Lincolns, but was ordered to head up the Volunteer when Bates departed for a speaking tour of the U.S. The paper Rolfe produced largely followed the format Bates had established, but Rolfe began to incorporate poetry on a regular basis. The poems he presented in the paper, many from soldiers in the American and British battalions, varied in purpose and tone. Yet I argue that many of them fit into a striking pattern by focusing heavily on the deaths of soldiers in the International Brigades. In conjunction with other content in the Volunteer, these poems created an elegiac tone that underscored the more overtly propagandistic elements of the paper. That tone worked to help members of the battered volunteer force—which was essentially a losing army from the start—to attach positive meanings to the battlefield death and personal loss that they faced regularly. In that sense, the elegiac material attended to the soldiers’ emotional needs, though it also worked in conjunction with the persuasive purpose of the magazine by encouraging the soldiers to translate loss into inspiration, to keep on fighting.

Certainly, a great deal of Spanish Civil War poetry deals with death, whether civilian deaths from aerial bombardments; that of Spanish poet Federico García Lorca, whose murder was raised to mythic status in scores of poems; or the deaths of soldiers on the battlefield. In his 1966 study of Spanish Civil War literature, John Muste identifies ways in which many writers tried to employ ideology “as a means of ordering violence,” and in a sense, that is what the poems I will consider are trying to do (30). I argue, though, that the elegiac material I discuss in this chapter is at once representative of Spanish war literature and unique. It is representative because it embodies themes and approaches common to much of the literature of the war. It is unique because it represents an editor’s attempt, in collaboration with soldier-poet contributors, to express something of the truth of the war
experience for a largely unsuccessful army. By truth here I do not mean adherence to facts, but rather a kind of emotional truth about the soldiers’ continued encounter with death and defeat. There is an immediacy in the Volunteer about the sense of loss and the need to translate that loss into hope that differs from other venues for civil war literature. The paper represents the poetry of the war, in conjunction with other elements within the periodical, put to a specific use in a specific situation, and therefore shows one of the ways in which political poetry could function in the complex arena of the Spanish Civil War.

A Wartime Publication

The Volunteer for Liberty first appeared on 24 May 1937 and ran until 7 November 1938, producing sixty-three issues in all. The paper was initially published from Madrid, though owing to changing circumstances in the progress of the war, it moved to Barcelona in January 1938. The paper was supposed to appear weekly, and it usually did under Ralph Bates’ and Edwin Rolfe’s editorships, but it often failed to appear on schedule as 1938 wore on and the Republic began to face increasingly severe setbacks. Its most common length was eight pages, which usually carried four columns of text around whatever visuals or insert boxes appeared on the page. Some issues were longer, some shorter, and a few special supplements ran only two pages. Most of the content was black and white, but several covers had elements colored in red, and a few covers were full-color (Figure 32). Nearly every page was augmented by visuals of some kind, which included photographs, humorous cartoons, maps and other drawings, and reproductions of poster art and other types of artwork.
Throughout the run of the Volunteer, its staff faced considerable material challenges to production that made meeting weekly deadlines extremely difficult. In an August 1937 letter to his wife Mary, Rolfe explains some of the hurdles of his new job:

The tempo is necessarily fast and furious, and it takes a long time to get things done. In getting the paper together, for example, I can’t just hand in any old copy. I have to remember that the printers know no English, and that the linotypists work letter by letter – as a result, each correction of copy must be neatly printed, not written. Then, to add to the work, correcting proofs means that I have to use different symbols than those used in America, and that all directions must be written in Spanish. Which is also a job. (Letter to Mary 10 Aug. 1937, 2)

And there were other problems, as indicates the introduction to the reprint of the Volunteer, published by the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade:

[The paper] was first published on a coated stock, but by September of 1937 it had to print on any kind of paper that could be found. Its press runs were delayed by incessant interruptions of power . . . . Its photographers in the lines found it almost impossible to get film, and when film was available the chemicals used for developing and engraving were frequently unobtainable. Contact with the Brigade was difficult to maintain; mails were delayed for weeks, couriers never reached the rear, frontline correspondents who were at the same time soldiers in the line were killed. (Veterans [1])

Rolfe also had some difficulty getting the kinds of publications from the U.S. that helped keep him informed on related developments back home. Mail service in and out of Spain was generally unreliable due to wartime conditions. At one point, he estimates in a
letter to his wife that their mutual correspondence was reaching each of them in about three weeks. And he appears to have relied on her to send him news and magazine sources: in several letters, he asks her to contact friends at the offices of the New Masses, Daily Worker, and New Republic to request that they regularly send him issues, and he asks her also to send newspaper clippings on Spanish, U.S., and international news items. In one letter, Rolfe complains that he has “not yet (Aug. 24th) received a single bit of reading matter from home – no magazines, no clippings, no nothin’ [sic],” and he suggests that Mary send those in small packages, as those have a better chance of getting through to him (Letter to Mary 24 Aug. 1937).

For all of these difficulties, the paper did get produced, if sporadically. News from the U.S. and Britain was common; this usually focused on the labor movement, on popular support for the Spanish Republic on the home front, and on the Western democracies’ policies toward the war. Many articles covered developments in the war, including analyses of battles and the growth of a centralized army; presented views on topics such as agrarian and educational reforms within the Republican zone; discussed social, industrial, and agrarian progress in the Soviet Union; analyzed repression in Germany and Italy; and, occasionally, excoriated the POUM and other political opponents (deemed Trotskyist traitors) among the Loyalists. The content generally emphasized the moral rightness of the Republican cause and the Popular Front, the strength of the Republican military effort and inevitability of success, and/or the moral depravity and ideological backwardness of the Nationalists, who were almost always referred to simply as fascists. Poetry appeared regularly, starting with Rolfe’s arrival; in addition to the elegiac and memorial verse which is
the focus of this chapter, some poems offered rousing praise for the soldiers of the Republic, while others were merely humorous doggerel.

In keeping with the great support for the Loyalist effort among Western intellectuals, the *Volunteer* occasionally presented contributions from notable literary figures. Langston Hughes, who will be further discussed below, contributed both poetry and prose. In a prose piece titled “No Axe to Grind,” Dorothy Parker conveyed her respect for the Spanish people and the Republican government garnered from her recent visit to Madrid and Valencia. German novelist Heinrich Mann offered a piece comparing present-day fascist dictators with dictators of the past. In the reprinted text of a radio address, American leftist writer Anna Louise Strong discussed the contributions of the American volunteers. Leland Stowe offered his impressions of Madrid and its resilient people after nearly a year of siege. Messages of support and encouragement came from such figures as the Russian novelist Aleksey Tolstoy, the German writer and Nobel laureate Thomas Mann, the German author Ernst Toller, and the American Socialist leader Norman Thomas. Spanish military and political figures contributed as well. Luigi Gallo, Inspector-General of the International Brigades, frequently published instructive and inspirational pieces.⁴ Pieces by such figures as Andre Marty, the paranoid French Communist leader of the International Brigades, and the Spanish orator La Pasionara (Dolores Ibarruri) appeared in the *Volunteer*, as did addresses from the Republic’s president, Manuel Azaña, and Prime Minister, Juan Negrín.

The primary audience for the *Volunteer for Liberty* was the soldiers in the English-speaking battalions, which comprised most of the XV International Brigade. These included men from the U.S., Great Britain, Ireland, Canada, and Australia. It is in terms of this

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⁴ Gallo would gain fame years later (under the name Luigi Longo) as a leader of Italian partisans in Italy during the Second World War.
audience primarily that I will consider how the paper functioned. Yet the Volunteer also had a secondary audience: sympathetic readers in the volunteers’ home countries, especially Britain and the U.S. Unfortunately, Rolfe’s archived papers do not include a full subscription list. But shortly after starting his work on the Volunteer, Rolfe wrote to his wife that he had put her on its subscription list; she will receive five copies of each issue, he tells her, a couple of which she should save, while the rest “should be distributed where they will do most good” (Letter to Mary 26 July 1937, [1]). Mary is active with the Communist Party, so such distribution would probably include friends and acquaintances in the leftist community, as well as participants in fundraisers for Spain and the Party’s various front organizations. Rolfe sent copies to the New York Public Library as well, and Langston Hughes asked Rolfe to send copies to several recipients, including the writer and Harlem Renaissance patron Carl Van Vechten, the Harlem Branch Library of the New York Public Library, and the library of Hughes’ alma mater, Lincoln University in Pennsylvania. In one instance, Rolfe sent Mary a package containing the copy in typescript for an issue of the Volunteer along with the finished project, and suggested that “it could be used somehow—auction, raffle, etc.—to raise dough for Spain” (Letter to Mary 6 Aug. 1937).

Some volunteers sent their copies home to their friends and families. A volunteer named Frank Lister, for example, sometimes scrawled personal letters in the margins of the copies he sent home to his parents. In one instance, Lister writes to his father while convalescing after being wounded. There is an element of apologia for what was apparently an abrupt decision to go to Spain, and as part of that, Lister paints a picture of the international character of the brigades:

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5 Lister’s real name was Francis Feingersh.
[F]ighting shoulder to shoulder with germans [sic] from concentration camps, an Italian officer just back from fighting in Etheopia [sic], Austrians who came on foot, walking 3 months, sneaking through borders, some carrying machine guns on their backs, I could write for hours on my personal observations, in the Inter. Brigade! I just want to give you an idea of how many nationalities are represented here. Approximately 53, all together, united anti-fascist fighters; . . . This is what Marx wrote and dreamed about[.] (Lister Volunteer 12 July 1937, 4-6)

These comments fill the margins of a newspaper whose printed content celebrates the same ideals; the front-page story, for example, is titled “Towards United Action.” Thus we see a volunteer using the brigade newspaper as a vehicle for his thoughts on his ideological commitment, thoughts that reflect his personal experience but mirror the ideas presented in the paper. In the top right corner of the front page, Lister writes “Help Spain! We need your Solederity [sic]” (1). It is a plea that pinpoints the use to which Rolfe hoped the Volunteer would be put on the home front. Lister is just one example, but it is likely that other soldiers used their copies in similar ways. And because volunteers’ families did not always share the political beliefs of the volunteers, the newspaper may in some cases have circulated among audiences not already sympathetic to the Loyalist cause. Thus, while the Volunteer appears to have been primarily designed for the benefit of its soldier readership, its persuasive purpose extended beyond the International Brigades. Consequently, the paper was part of the left-wing culture of general and specialized periodicals that made arguments in favor of the Spanish republic.
Poetry in Conversation: The Elegiac Tone

Editorial Context

In the 16 August 1937 issue, Rolfe introduced a new department, Letters From Home, which printed letters received by brigade soldiers from friends and relatives in their home countries. The introductory blurb to the first appearance of this department notes that its “continued life depends on our readers” and invites readers to send in their letters for possible publication. The new department complements the regular appearance of news items from the soldiers’ home countries. The letters offer voices of actual loved ones on the home front who discuss outside views on Spain, relate first-hand experience of strikes and other labor activity, and express concern for and pride in the soldiers to whom the letters are addressed. The Letters From Home department adds a personal dimension to the news about labor developments and other big-picture issues already appearing in the paper.

The addition of the Letters From Home department was one of several changes that took place following Rolfe’s assumption of editorial duties in late-July 1937. Though the overall look of the paper remained the same, these changes represented an increased emphasis on the personal within the collective. As mentioned, poetry began to appear regularly. So too did memorial notices and articles on specific fallen brigade members. These items, through their direct engagement with the deaths of fellow soldiers and their tendency to highlight specific dead individuals, addressed and attempted to deal with, aesthetically and politically, the sense of extreme personal loss (and resulting demoralization) that the volunteer soldiers were experiencing.

This is not to suggest that the paper’s direction was solely the result of Rolfe’s personal interests. As this dissertation attempts to explore, the look and content of any
periodical is the result of various forces that are dependent on its publishing context. In the case of the Volunteer for Liberty, several key elements that shaped its presentation can be identified. I have already discussed the physical challenges the paper faced in lack of materials, danger to correspondents, and the language barrier. Other key elements include the editor’s particular interests and aesthetic temper, but also the editor’s perception of the readers’ interests and needs, and the policies and concerns laid out by the brigade’s Communist hierarchy (presumably the commissariat at the battalion and brigade levels). The brigade commissariat certainly would have approved the content of any official publication; the Communists were particularly careful about adherence to the party line, and brooked little unorthodoxy. A notice in the 6 September 1937 issue of the Volunteer suggests that the choice to regularly memorialize dead soldiers was part of a larger impulse of the commissariat of the English-speaking battalions. The box calls for readers to send photographs of fallen soldiers as part of a postcard series to be issued “in memory and honor of our dead comrades,” and it specifies that the project is under consideration by the English, American and Canadian commissariat and the Volunteer for Liberty (“Wanted” 6). Moreover, praise of individuals killed in the fight against fascism in Spain and elsewhere was part of a trend in Communist propaganda and the discourse of fellow-travelers; the Communists not infrequently made martyrs of their dead.

And they certainly had plenty of dead to pick from among the English-speaking internationals. The English-speaking battalions composed a relatively small fighting force

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6 As Carroll explains, within the Spanish Republican Army (and the International Brigades) existed “a political structure known as the commissariat, which exactly paralleled the military organization. At each level of command—division, brigade, battalion, company, section—a political commissar shared authority with a military officer.” They had considerable power and could take command from the military officers (95-96). According to Carroll, the commissars “served primarily as morale officers” (96). Eby instead phrases their purpose as “political indoctrination” (8).
unified by the common language, and they faced enormous losses and very few clear successes on the battlefield. The British and American battalions were formed in February 1937 as part of the XV International Brigade and served until Prime Minister Juan Negrín ordered the withdrawal of all internationals in September 1938. There was one British battalion and three American battalions: the famed Abraham Lincoln, the George Washington, and the Mackenzie-Papineau (named after a Canadian Communist, but composed mostly of Americans). The survivors of the three American battalions were later reorganized into the Lincoln-Washington Battalion after their numbers had severely dwindled. Many, but not all, of the volunteers were Communists, but few came with any previous military experience. Training was brief, weapons were often out-of-date, and ammunition was scarce. Though they often showed great determination and even heroism under fire, the volunteers suffered on the battlefield from poor coordination and inexperience among their leaders, and from the Spanish Republic’s general lack of aircraft, tanks, and other war material. They fought in several campaigns, beginning with battles around Madrid and ending around the Ebro River as the Republican lines collapsed northward toward Barcelona; but they rarely participated in clear victories. Defeat was common, and at best, they had to resign themselves to small successes—holding the line or delaying enemy advancements. And even that came always at great cost. Historian Peter Carroll offers in The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade a concise picture of what the volunteers experienced:

The slaughter of the unprepared American soldiers began in the Jarama Valley near Madrid in February 1937, leaving long lists of maimed and dead; the toll leaped at Brunete on the Madrid front the following July and rose again that summer at Quinto,
Belchite, and Fuentes de Ebro in the Aragon region. In the winter of 1938, Americans fell at Teruel, the “North Pole” of Spain. And then in March commenced the frantic retreats across the Spanish plains, burdened with tremendous losses. A surprise recrossing of the Ebro River during the second summer, in July 1938, brought brief moments of victory, but these, too, were soon dulled in an agony of bullets and bombs. These military epics inspired numerous cases of individual courage, for which the Lincolns became justly famous. But even their heroism could not mask the grim backdrop of staggering human loss. (91)

Such frankness is surprising from Carroll, whose account of the American battalions is extremely sympathetic not just to the volunteers but to the Communist leadership as well. In other words, even as pro-Communist a writer as Carroll cannot spin the American volunteers’ experience as anything but a near-continual slaughter. And the British Battalion’s experience was as bad or worse. On their first engagement on 12 February 1937, during the Battle of the Jarama, the British lost all but two hundred and twenty-five of their six-hundred-man battalion (Thomas 592).

For all this—the Communist hierarchy’s influence and the horrific experiences of the primary readership of the Volunteer—Rolfe’s own interests and aesthetic temperament clearly influenced the direction of the paper considerably. As a poet, he was no doubt inclined to view poetry as important in itself. More significantly, Rolfe had for years been using poetry as a means of political expression and argument, so he clearly understood that poetry had great potential power to move and persuade people. “Early on in Rolfe’s career, and through the 1930s,” writes Michael Thurston, “his poems reflect his belief in the ability of lyric poems on political topics simultaneously to work as closed, independent entities and
to intervene in concrete political struggles” (50). Rolfe began publishing proletarian poetry in the Daily Worker as early as 1927 (the year he turned eighteen), and continued to publish poetry, journalism, and fiction in the Daily Worker, the New Masses, Poetry, and elsewhere. Before the end of the decade he was making a name for himself among the cultural Left in New York (Nelson and Hendricks 9). His first volume of poetry, To My Contemporaries (1936), received many positive reviews, and he was often singled out as being one of the best of his generation of young radical poets (Nelson and Hendricks 4). Along with his commitment to political poetry went Rolfe’s involvement with the Communist Party. He joined the Young Communist League in 1925 at the age of fifteen (Nelson “Lyric” 5). He left the party for about two years, partly out of frustration with some of its functionaries and with its demands for orthodoxy, and studied at the University of Wisconsin. But he continued to identify with working class movements, and rejoined the party in 1931 when he returned to New York and resubmerged himself in the Leftist cultural scene, now building steam as the Depression got underway (Nelson and Hendricks 10-12).

“The coming together of individual commitment and collective action,” Stan Smith has recently written, “lies at the ideological core of [Spanish] Civil War poetry” (246). Indeed, well before the war, Rolfe had, in committing himself to the Communist party and to revolutionary social change, committed to a vision of collective action, which required subordination of the self to some degree. That absorption into the collective could be a draw to some intellectuals, as Louis MacNeice noted: “The strongest appeal of the Communist party was that it demanded sacrifice; you had to sink your ego” (qtd. in Smith, Stan 250). Rolfe’s first poem in To My Contemporaries, in fact, addressed the very question of the sinking of the individual into the collective: “To welcome multitudes—the miracle of deeds /
performed in unison—the mind / must first renounce the fiction of the self.” Yet Rolfe seeks to achieve in his own poetry a balance in which the individual becomes an integral part of the larger collective but is not lost within it. As Nelson writes, “Rolfe’s poems are . . . in their own way strikingly personal”:

For history to him was never the object of a disinterested gaze but rather the substance of his daily life: the context of his memories, the ground of current struggle, and the basis—when hope was possible—of any actions aimed toward the future. His life, then, is intricately woven into these poems; indeed he based many poems on his and his friends’ personal experiences. . . . It is perhaps only in black poetry since the Harlem Renaissance and in feminist poetry since the sixties that one finds so consistent a claim that the personal is political. (“Lyric” 12)

While living in Madrid, Rolfe experienced the full impact of modern war as he went about his editorial duties, as the city was relentlessly bombarded. Civilian casualties were common, and Rolfe was deeply affected by them. Illustrating Rolfe’s response to the carnage in Madrid, Cary Nelson points to a section of Rolfe’s poem “City of Anguish,” begun on August 3, shortly after his assignment to the Volunteer:

The headless body stands strangely, totters for a second, falls. The girl speeds screaming through wreckage; her hair is wilder than torture.

The solitary foot, deep-arched, is perfect on the cobbles, naked, strong, ridged with strong veins, upright, complete . . .

The city weeps. The city shudders, weeping. (qtd. in Nelson and Hendricks 28)
Though at the beginning of his time in Spain Rolfe saw no action with his fellow volunteers, he had originally enlisted in the Lincoln Battalion as an infantryman and spent a month training for that role. During this time he formed close bonds with his fellow soldiers-in-training, bonds he would carry with him to his desk job at the Volunteer. As Rolfe wrote in frequent letters to his wife, he was proud of his ability to keep up with the rigorous training, so different from his experiences back home. He initially turned down an offer from his superiors to helm the Volunteer. In a letter to Mary, he explains his reasoning:

My decision was to remain with the battalion – not because I’m a hero, or particularly brave. You know I’m not. But, first of all, men are important for this military, and most of us who have come have done so just for that. It is not only my duty now, but my desire, to remain where I am. Secondly, I will never be able to write worth a damn about this entire world-shaking conflict until I have myself been through the actual business of war. (Letter to Mary 12 July 1937, 4)

But Rolfe had to relent a week later when the offer became an order (Nelson Guide 26). It was an assignment he felt uncomfortable about from the start, having committed himself to facing combat with his new comrades. Of the editor’s post, he tells Mary,

I do not yet know how I am going to like it, because I had grown to like my new trade [i.e., soldiering], and my fellow-workmen, too well to drop it all and leave them just as we were on the verge of becoming a first-class, practising, concern. It was not the new trade that I liked, I assure you, darling; it was the feeling of complete adequacy, of self-assurance in a field which we have traditionally condemned. It was the use to

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7 The story of Rolfe’s training and transfer to the Volunteer is told in his letters to Mary, now housed at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. But see also Cary Nelson’s and Jefferson Hendricks’ Edwin Rolfe: A Biographical Essay and Guide to the Rolfe Archive and his “Lyric Politics: The Poetry of Edwin Rolfe,” whose accounts I draw from here as well.
which the trade was being put, and the pride I had in working side by side with so many painstaking fellow-workers, each one imbued with the same passion, the long-extended, well-thought-out action which followed the original impulse to come here. There is no better thing than to be with people you can trust and rely upon as much as, often even more, than one can rely upon one’s self. Complete comradeship and common confidence in fellow-men and fellow-leaders is what makes a group such as we had here. Now I am, for a time, gone from it.8 (Letter to Mary 21 July 1937, 2)

Rolfe would return to that other trade in April 1938 when he took advantage of a call for all available men to join the front following a series of military defeats and frantic Republican withdrawals that would become known as the Great Retreats.9 In the meantime, despite his ambivalence about rear-echelon work, he threw himself into editing the Volunteer and took pride in doing that job well. Dismissing the irritant of intermittent shelling in Madrid, he writes to Mary that “work is the cure-all here—and it’s impossible to loaf even if I wanted to—which I emphatically do not and must not. Since I am not on the firing line my most fervent desire is to do my work so well that it will really count, really be of help. And I am sure I’m doing this”10 (Letter to Mary 13 Aug. 1937).

But he had bonded closely enough with the men of the battalion that news of particular soldiers’ deaths, when it came, hit hard. Nelson and Hendricks are again useful here; they write that in addition to the slaughter of civilians in Madrid, Rolfe must deal with another kind of death, not so visible as the bodies he sees in the streets, but because of that distance perhaps still more painful—the deaths of his

8 Nelson and Hendricks quote part of this letter in Edwin Rolfe, 24-25.
10 Nelson and Hendricks also quote part of this letter in Edwin Rolfe, 25.
comrades in the battalion. Sometimes he simply sits down to record the names of the
dead and wounded in his diary. A September 13 entry opens with the following lines:

Steve Nelson OK.
Sidney Shostuck dead—shot between eyes by sniper’s bullet while bringing a
tank in.
Danny Hutner also dead.
Bill here today and told me. (28)

About these losses, Rolfe writes to Mary that “the news . . . sort of hit me in the solar plexus,
and deeper and higher for a few days” (qtd. in Nelson and Hendricks 28). Because of his
experience training with the Lincolns, Rolfe felt and identified with the fighting soldier and
the sense of loss at comrades’ deaths in ways that an editor without that experience might
not. These were not just boys he had met in the course of his job, but boys he had served
with, if only briefly and under the controlled conditions of the training camp, and with whom
he still had occasional contact. As he explains in the same letter to Mary, those shared
experiences, with all their attendant intensity, were enough to make a difference:

[Under certain conditions fairly deep friendships develop rapidly; it need not be
more than the same bit of dirt parapet falling into the trench and getting into one’s
soup; or a few cigarettes [sic] shared; or a bit of hot water offered from one’s canteen
when you’re thirsty; or a hand of a wounded comrade held for a few minutes when
he’s in a hospital and hasn’t seen another American to talk to for days; or a two-hour
conversation on guard duty in the middle of the night, when there’s no one else to talk
to, and you suddenly discover how much there is in common between you. These,
and some other things, mostly not as tangible, become real friendships—not only
when one is under fire, but under all circumstances when one is in a military unit, far
from home, expecting that sooner or later one will face bullets and shells and their
shrapnel; and it is easily to be understood that under such conditions one’s awareness grows, just as one’s character loses the dull roundnesses acquired in un-dangerous life—and men are seen in sharp relief, like mountain ridges on a plaster-cast map. (Letter to Mary 13 Sept. 1937, 2-3)

Writing about Rolfe’s poetic reaction to his experience in Spain, Michael Thurston argues that early in the war, Rolfe works to capture the war and the men fighting it so as to provoke awareness of the conflict, its necessity, and its costs. By the end of his first year in Spain, though, Rolfe’s poetry takes on an elegiac tone that signals a change in his poetic agenda. No longer do the poems seem calls for action. Rather, they become attempts to memorialize both the people and the ideals Rolfe associates with Spain. (56)

While the purpose of this chapter is not to explore Rolfe’s larger poetic agenda, I argue that the development of the Volunteer for Liberty mirrors the shift Thurston discusses, if only in part. That is, the combination of certain contributions in the paper does create an elegiac tone that works to memorialize the battalions’ dead soldiers, though the act of doing so retains a call to action as well. Remembering the dead becomes part of the paper’s effort to keep up the morale and fighting spirit of the living, even if at times the frequency of such remembrance threatens to undermine that persuasive purpose. In overseeing this approach, Rolfe is responding to the needs and interests of the battle-shattered volunteers and the interests of the commissariat, as well as to his own experience of Spain and his belief in the persuasive power of aesthetics.
Memorials in Poetry and Prose

A look at a two-page spread (pages 2 and 3) of Rolfe’s first issue, dated 9 August 1937, reveals much about the direction the paper would take under his editorship (Figure 33). Most of page 2 is taken up by the continuation of the front-page story titled “After the Sierra—What?” The piece examines the recent Battle of Brunete, in which a major Republican offensive just west of Madrid had been swiftly beaten back by a Nationalist counterattack, achieving only minimal gain of ground at the cost of 25,000 casualties and heavy losses in armor and aircraft. The International Brigades had suffered heavy casualties themselves, including the death of the commander of the Americans’ Lincoln Battalion. The article does precisely what we might expect of an analysis in a military publication of a costly and largely unsuccessful operation: it puts a positive spin on a bleak situation. The writer emphasizes the costliness of the battle to Nationalist forces, claims a lack of manpower amongst those forces, and lauds the great reserves of the Loyalist army, all wrapped up in such propagandistic phrasing as the claim that “the Spanish people with the aid and solidarity of 180,000,000 Soviet citizens and of the workers and democrats of the whole world, has drawn the moral of the Sierra campaign and will know how to counter the new aggression” (G. M. 2). On the facing page is an article titled “Exchanged Loyal Aviators Describe Tortures in the Fascist Prisons,” which attempts to vilify and dehumanize the Nationalists by describing the treatment of Loyalist fliers, though it is heavier on generalities about “atrocious cruelty” than on specifics (“Exchanged” 3).

The two other items on these pages, however, stand out both visually and thematically, and sound a quite different note from the predictable propaganda of the articles. The first, on page 2, is a photograph of a battlefield grave beneath an olive tree. On the grave
THE VOLUNTEER FOR LIBERTY

EXCHANGED LOYAL AVIATORS DESCRIBE TORTURE IN THE FASCIST PRISONS

REMEMBER THIS

Figure 33. Two-page spread from Edwin Rolfe’s first issue of the Volunteer
rests a helmet, and posted above it on the tree is a sign that reads “TO OUR FALLEN COMRADES
/ OUR VICTORY IS YOUR VENGEANCE / JUNE 1937.” Boxed prominently on the facing page is a
poem titled “Remember This,” attributed to William P. Smith, Jr., Lincoln Battalion:

I’ve heard you sobbing in the night
And know your tears are not for fright
But for the dead. Those Comrades lost
Who through this day have fought beside you all this way
Beneath the sun’s half blinding heat,
Until they fell upon this wheat, beside these olive trees.
In all this hell sound and thirst,
The whining steel and blinding burst of bomb and shell;
They still came on.
With blistered feet and shoulders bent,
With vagrant thoughts that often went to home and peace
And we must weep. For Oliver and Jack we could not keep,
Nor can we get them back.
I cannot say that they’ve been torn
To some far place and there reborn to live again;
But mark you this – they still live on – as men.
For we must take the strength they leave
And to the goal they set must cleave
With ever greater unity –
“All men shall now be FREE”.

I hear you sobbing in the night,
But in the day remember this
That we are they.

Much could be said of this poem by an otherwise unknown American volunteer
soldier. This is the first of many poems to appear in the Volunteer, and it represents the
voice of the soldier-poet (sometimes a professional poet, sometimes not), who is one type of
contributor to the enormous corpus of poetry to come out of the Spanish Civil War. By
traditional standards of aesthetic judgment, “Remember This” is neither the best nor the
worst of the poetry published in the Volunteer. If the poem is somewhat weak in imagery, it
nonetheless employs some metrical and phonetic effects successfully. For example, the easy
flow of the opening couplet, in strict iambic tetrameter, stops short abruptly with the third
line’s strong caesura, “But for the dead,” which metrically mirrors the suddenness and unpredictability of battlefield death itself. The abrupt stop is employed to dramatic effect several more times in short lines and half-lines (e.g., “They still came on,” “And we must weep”), as is an unsettling imperfect foot in line seven, “In all this hell sound and thirst.” The conventionality of the first two lines, with clean end rhyme as well as strict meter, also sets up a contrast with several lines to follow. These shift into an irregular progression that varies between no rhyme and occasional internal rhyme; and among tetrameter, hexameter, and one heptameter line. The irregularity of meter reinforces the sense of the chaos of battle that the lines’ content explores. But this chaos recedes around line fifteen (“To some far place . . .”), as the poem shifts into its consolation, its claim that the brigade’s surviving soldiers draw strength from the example and the sacrifice of the fallen. Both meter and rhyme follow this return to order: lines fifteen to twenty are three rhyming couplets, and they establish a metrical movement of descending line length (in number of feet): six, five, four, four, three, three.

These observations suggest that while the poem may be an amateur effort, it is not an incompetent one. More important for the focus of this chapter, however, is the poem’s theme. “Remember This” takes the form of the traditional elegy. That is, it represents “a journey to grief and back,” tackling the emotional impact of loss from the death of one or more persons, and offering “a means of making death somehow acceptable” (Kennedy 16, 19). The incorporation of tears for the dead and the fact that those tears are shed at night repeat common elegiac elements. The final consolation gestures toward modern elegy in its rejection of the idea of literal immortality for the dead: “I cannot say that they’ve been torn /

11 Such scholars as Jahan Ramazani have distinguished the traditional elegy from the modern elegy; rather than achieve consolation, modern elegists “have tended to attack convention and often leave their readers and themselves inconsolable” (Kennedy 6).
To some far place and there reborn to live again.” But a different kind of immortality is proposed—“they still live on” in the strength and the actions of the surviving men—and true to the genre, the poem concludes by deriving meaning from death through the redoubled sense of unity and the claim that the poet attaches to their sacrifice: “All men shall now be FREE.”

In the context of an international army organized by the Communist Party to defend an ostensibly democratic government against a fascist-supported military rebellion, the work of an elegy, however broadly humanistic in genre, takes on political import. That is, the poem seeks not only to help the surviving soldiers feel better about their loss (and to feel the sense of community that comes from identifying with emotions expressed in a work of art), but also to reinvigorate or strengthen those soldiers’ desire and ability to continue fighting for that cause. As Michael Thurston has argued, the fact that a poem has a political purpose as well as an aesthetic purpose does not undermine its status as an aesthetic object, nor does the one purpose negate the other.\(^{13}\) On the contrary, the two aspects work together in political poetry (19). “Remember This” embodies this dual action particularly well because its two purposes naturally blend with each other. The act of contemplation and the related aesthetic end of the elegy—achieving consolation or finding meaning in death—are barely separable in this case from the political purpose of finding meaning in death and inspiring further

\(^{12}\) Given the tone of the poem, the ominous double meaning in the concluding suggestion that “we are they” (i.e., that the soldier-reader may be destined for the same fate as the fallen) is probably unintentional.

\(^{13}\) In recent decades, many scholars have challenged prevailing twentieth-century notions of aesthetic value. In the field of political poetry of the 1930s, Cary Nelson has pioneered the reevaluation of literature neglected because of scholars’ tendency to ignore works with political aims, or which fail to meet New Critical criteria of judgment. Following on this approach, Thurston redefines successful political poetry against “New Critical canons or protocols, which demand the irony and intricacy that give rise to elaborate close readings.” Instead, “a successful poem . . . is one that deploys poetic conventions—figurative language; heightened attention to the materiality of language through rhyme, assonance, consonance, and alliteration; and meter and rhythm—to link its political significance to an inviting, pleasurable, and compelling verbal texture that grants readers an opportunity to reflect on, in an affectively fraught textual environment, the poem’s thematic burden” (37).
action. And the emotional effect inherent in both purposes is intensified by the photograph of the soldier’s grave on the preceding page.

Together, the poem and the photograph exemplify the elegiac tone that, in contrast to the spin control of items like “After the Sierra,” uses a different approach to fulfill the paper’s persuasive function. The tear-filled and highly personalized loss of the poem, reinforced visually by the implied single soldier buried just under a pile of rocks, would seem to counteract the article’s sunny, big-picture view of the recent engagements. But their political purpose is much the same: helping an army shattered recently by death and horror on the battlefield—shattered similarly several times in the previous six months—to cope with personal loss and military defeat, and to continue fighting.

By the fourth issue that Rolfe worked on, memorializing the dead became a matter of editorial policy. Page 3 of the 30 August issue is dominated by a large box with a thick border that contains the names of eight American, Canadian, and English officers and commissars, under the heading “In Memory of our fallen leaders.” In smaller type below these names appears a note proclaiming that “Articles on the life and death of these and other fallen members of the International Brigades will appear in future issues of ‘The Volunteer for Liberty’” (“In Memory” 3). In several cases, the promised memorials took the form of a simple black-bordered box including a photograph and basic information about the volunteer in question. The box for a black volunteer named Milton Herndon starts with the heading “In Memoriam” over his picture, and follows it with:
MILTON HERNDON

Machine Gun Section
Commander
in the

Mackenzie-Papineau
Battalion

Killed in Action
At Fuentes de Ebro
OCTOBER - 1937

Other and longer memorial blurbs or full-length articles focused on one or more soldiers in
greater or lesser depth. The 25 October 1937 issue included, for example, a piece titled “The
Deaths of Comrades Fry and Whalley,” who were the commander and political commissar,
respectively, of the British Battalion. The language is straightforward: “The British Battalion
has again suffered the loss of some of its finest comrades in the death of Harold Fry,
Battalion Commander and Eric Whalley, Battalion Political Commissar. Both Comrades
were killed on October 13th, leading the Battalion in action at Fuentes de Ebro. In the same
action we also lost another very good comrade, Sergeant Robinson (A. D. 4).” The brief
article goes on to offer a run-down of the two men’s backgrounds with the battalion,
including their time as prisoners of the Nationalists, and of their history of political activism
prior to the Spanish war.

These memorial pieces point to one of the striking aspects of the paper’s direct
engagement with death—the emphasis on specific individuals. As I have suggested, there
was a tendency both within the Communist Party and throughout the larger pro-Loyalist
community to make martyrs of the fallen. More often than not these were figures who were
either already well known or were raised to mythic status by their use in the pro-Loyalist
press. In the first category was Federico García Lorca, the internationally-known Spanish
poet and playwright who was murdered by Nationalists in August of 1936. García Lorca became a powerful symbol among pro-Loyalists for the danger that fascism represented to art and the artist, and he was memorialized in countless articles and poems throughout the war and for decades afterward. In the second category was John Cornford, a young and promising British Communist poet who was killed while fighting in the International Brigades. Considerably less familiar prior to his death, he was frequently referenced in pro-Loyalist discourse as a figure of lost potential and an example of personal sacrifice to the cause of Spain. But the memorials in the Volunteer often invoked the memories of fighters from the International Brigades or the Spanish Army whose names in most cases did not typically appear in publications for wider audiences, before or after their deaths. They were the names and faces of the primary readership’s own friends and leaders, the ones whose loss many readers were likely to have already mourned.

While the memorial placards and articles emphasized the individual dead in their own ways, so too did some of the poems in the Volunteer. “Remember This” makes a passing reference to “Oliver and Jack,” whom, the poet says, “we could not keep.” To the reader in America or England, these would have been unfamiliar names of otherwise nameless soldiers. But the reader in the Lincoln battalion (and possibly in other English-speaking units) would have recognized them as Captain Oliver Law, the African-American commander of the Lincolns, and Jack Shirai, a well-liked Japanese-American who was for a time a cook for the battalion. Both men had been killed during an ill-fated charge up a set of hills called Mosquito Ridge, near the town of Villanueva de la Cañada, during the Battle of Brunete. The use of these men’s names particularize the poem, and though its emotional thrust could resonate with any soldier of the Republic, it remains at the same time fixed in the
period of late-July 1937—when the Lincolns were licking their wounds from a battle that lasted nearly twenty days and took an enormous toll on the battalion (the American battalions had lost 300 men, about half their complement\textsuperscript{14}). Moreover, it appears in the \textit{Volunteer} on 9 August, barely two weeks after the end of the engagement, when the wounds were still fresh for the surviving Lincolns. The poem represents an immediate response to a specific situation, a response that addresses a potentially strong sense of loss in its intended reader.

If Oliver and Jack constitute a passing reference in “Remember This,” real individuals at times function as the subjects of full poems. One example is “José Colom – People’s Captain” by Shaemas O’Sheel, an Irish-American poet and critic, translated from the Spanish original by Manuel Altolaguirre, an important Spanish poet of the period\textsuperscript{15}. Colom was a Republican pilot who appears (from the description in the poem) to have crashed his plane into enemy forces after being shot down. The poem employs the kind of sloganeering that critics have traditionally dismissed as bad poetry, but which such scholars as Cary Nelson and Michael Thurston have more recently validated as a legitimate feature of political poetry. O’Sheel uses a ballad stanza in long measure (that is, quatrains of iambic tetrameter rather than the alternating tetrameter and trimeter of the more traditional ballad stanza). The effect of the generally regular meter is a buoyant rhythm that compliments the central motif of flight. The employment of a ballad form fits well with the aim of telling a

\textsuperscript{14} See Carroll 142.

\textsuperscript{15} O’Sheel’s work appeared in such magazines and newspapers as the \textit{New York Times}, the \textit{New York Times Book Review} and \textit{Harper’s}, and he published four books of poetry, the first in 1911. Though he lived in America his entire life, O’Sheel (who changed his name from James Shields to emphasize his Irish heritage) was active in the Irish independence movement through Irish-American organizations; he was also sympathetic to communism, at least at some point in his life. See “Shaemas O’Sheel, ‘Irish’ Poet, Dies,” \textit{New York Times}, 4 April 1954: 87. Manuel Altolaguirre was a member of the Generation of ’27, which also included the poets Federico García Lorca and Rafael Alberti; he was also a printer and editor who published the work of those and other contemporaries. During the war, Altolaguirre befriended the English poet Stephen Spender, who translated several of Altolaguirre’s poems and helped him escape from Spain after the Spaniard had suffered a nervous breakdown.
story using a central heroic figure, but also suggests folk associations that reinforce the poem’s emphasis on Colom’s relationship to the People. The poem begins, “Under your wings the winds are strong, / And a song of scorn for the tyrant’s chain / You hear at your ear in the motor’s roar— / “For the Land, the People, for Spain, for Spain!” (1-4). The speaker then imagines Colom’s aerial view as an eye through which to view both the tragedy and the fighting spirit of Spain:

O People’s Captain, lone in the sky,
Your eye is wet as you look below—
Scorner of fears, you gaze through tears
On the hills you love and the land you know. [. . .]
See! Treason’s hand has ravaged the land,
The rivers are red with the people’s blood: [. . .]

But turn, Jose, to the rising sun,
Unbowed behold us for whom you fly:
In vale and village, from town and tillage,
The People must with banners high.
The People, the People!—their vow is spoken.
Spain is not broken nor bowed in fear— (5-8, 11-12, 17-22)

But death is here as well, amidst the rousing spirit of populist resistance, and in the final stanzas the opening image is reversed, and the heroic pilot is brought violently back to the earth—though heroism defines his end as well: “Under your wings the winds have failed. / Hailed by death you were swift to go. / Your plane, yourself, were your only weapons, / We saw you crash as you dashed the foe” (25-28).

“José Colom” is closer to the ballad than the elegy, both metrically and thematically. The tears shed are Colom’s, and they are shed for the betrayal of Spain, not for his own death. And the speaker explicitly rejects weeping for the loss of his subject character: “No sad nor solemn dirge is mine: / Your name and fame I fling as a flame / To summon the brave to the firing-line!” (30-32). Anger at the enemy dominates more than mourning. Yet if
the speaker eschews the self-indulgence of the elegy’s emotional engagement with death, the end result of the poem is much the same as “Remember This.” It turns the death of a particular real person, who has both remained an individual (capable of specific heroic action) and been fused in the crucible of the poem with the People themselves, into the inspiration to keep fighting in the face of loss:

By the light of your deeds we dig our trenches,  
And swear the vengeance that is your due—  
When the Moor is dead and the Goth’s forgotten,  
When the Roman’s fled and the traitor’s rotten,  
The People, the People, will sing of you! (33-37)

Multiple elements within a single issue of the Volunteer sometimes worked together to reinforce the sense of loss and the message that the editor apparently wanted the reader to take from that experience. “Jack Shirai,” a poem signed by a Ludwig D., memorialized a popular and well-liked Japanese-American cook who voluntarily joined a front-line unit and was killed at the Battle of Brunete. It is a clumsy poem that shows something less than a skillful use of language or imagery in its efforts to make Shirai embody the commitment and sacrifice of the international volunteers. But there is a sense of sincerity throughout, as in references to Shirai’s likeability, his “smiling eyes” and “laughing heart” (Ludwig D. 3). One feels this is the work of a soldier who has lost a personal friend, and who wishes to both keep alive his memory and reaffirm that his loss had meaning.

In any case, “Jack Shirai” is centered on a page otherwise taken up by an article titled “Death of a Spanish Poet,” which offers a purportedly eyewitness account of the murder of Federico García Lorca by Nationalist Civil Guards (Figure 34). “It was so monstrous, so criminal, that I can never rub it out of my memory,” the observer is quoted as saying (3). He goes on to tell of how a group of Civil Guards tricked Lorca into capture; drove him out to
DEATH OF A SPANISH POET

EYE-WITNESS TELLS OF MURDER OF GARCIA LORCA

"That day I was on guard. I stopped aside to let pass a very young looking man being led by the Civil Guards. He was pale, but walked steadily."

The Spanish lad recounted his story, at first reluctantly, and then in a fluent, straightforward manner. A few months

ago he escaped from fascist territory and came to our lines on the Granada front. He told how Federico Garcia Lorca, the famous Spanish poet, met his death during the first months of the war, at the hands of the fascists.

"When I saw him," he continued somberly, "I understood the tragedy that enveloped him. Over his head hung the pall of death for having written his famous romance of the 'Civil Guards.'"

"Did you know Garcia Lorca?" he was asked.

"No, I had read him a great deal, however. I knew his works and his life. I also know of his death—the manner in which his life was ended. I shall never forget it. It was so monstrous, so criminal, that I can never rub it out of my memory!"

The lad unfolded his story: "Garcia Lorca was located in a French hospital, so I was told. By means of treachery he was induced to come out. When he did so, he was seized. He was not tried by any kind of tribunal. (For that matter, neither was anybody else held by the fascists.) The night of that very same day he was pulled out of the jail where the Civil Guard had him incarcerated. Among a squad of guards he was shoved into an automobile. I am sorry to say that I figured among this blood-thirsty group."

"The line of autos, like a sinister convoy, pulled out onto the Padul road. We were driven 18 kilometers from Granada. It was 8 o'clock at night when we finally got out of the autos. The automobiles headlights were focused directly on the man who was marching to his death. The silhouette of Garcia Lorca cut an unresentful figure in the darkness of the night. The Civil placed themselves behind the headlights, from where they could not be seen."

"Garcia Lorca walked firmly with magnificient calm. Suddenly in the middle of the road, he halted. He turned swiftly and faced us, causing the incoherent lieutenant, Medina, who was commanding the Civil, to gaze in astonishment."

LORCA SPEAKS

"Garcia Lorca spoke. He did not speak firmly, nor did he plead for his life. His powerful words were in defense of the thing he always loved: Liberty. He exhorted the cause of the people, and condemned the barbarity of fascism."

"Those fiery words, produced a tremendous disturbance among the Civil Guards. For me it was like a penetrating light in my brain. The poet continued talking... but his words were cut short. Lt. Medina exploded with blasphemy words and fired his pistol at the poet. Then he set the Civil Guards against him."

CLUBBED WITH REPELS

"The spectacle was terrible. They threw themselves upon him and struck him mercilessly with the butts of their rifles. Some of us remained stationary, too horrified to do anything. Garcia Lorca ran and was followed by a rain of bullets. A hundred yards away he knelt over. As the murderers approached him with intentions of finishing him, he raised (Continued on page 4).

Figure 34. Page layout showing memorial elements
the countryside during the night; and, in a fury after a defiant speech by the poet, clubbed
him with rifles and shot him in the back several times as he ran away. A drawing of the poet
appears in the far-left column, while a photograph of Shirai tops the far-right column. The
placement of the poem for Shirai within a physical space circumscribed by the article for
García Lorca and the mirrored visuals serves to equalize the two figures. The friendly and
brave Japanese-American cook-turned-infantryman becomes a martyr for the Cause in much
the same way as the already-legendary Spanish poet. Such a message might have functioned
as an ego boost to the soldier readership; that is, the sacrifice of simple proletarian soldiers
can be measured on equal terms with that of a great and enduring artist. Moreover, the page
in its entirety seems calculated to stoke the reader’s anger, which can serve to energize the
soldier’s will to fight. García Lorca was (so the story goes) brutally murdered by a gang of
fascist thugs, a “blood-thirsty group” who represent a world view dedicated to destroying
personal and artistic liberty (3). Similarly, Jack Shirai, whose death hits closer to home for
the American soldiers, was not a victim of war in the abstract; rather he was another casualty
(so the poem goes) of the “Fascist wolf [who] had come out to murder” (18).

A two-page spread in the 6 December 1937 issue offers another example of poetry
and prose reinforcing each other. The left-hand page is dominated by an article on the recent
battlefield death of Buenaventura Durruti, a leader within the anarchist organization, the
F.A.I. The right-hand page is filled by a poem and an article on the death of Hans Beimler, a
German Communist who had been killed a year before on the Madrid front. The articles are
predictable. They give background on the two figures, both of whom were members of the
proletariat: Durruti was a Barcelona worker, while Beimler was a poor metal worker and
soldier in the Great War. The articles extol their virtues as fighters and anti-fascists, and fit
their contributions into the big picture of the Spanish war: “To the roll of honour of the brave
Spanish fighters and the volunteers in the International Brigades who have fallen in the
struggle against the fascist rebels and against fascist intervention there was added the name
of Durruti,” proclaims the first article (“Buenaventura” 4). The poem, written by the Spanish
poet and playwright Rafael Alberti, is titled “Hans Beimler, Defender of Madrid.” Though
employing free verse rather than the ballad stanza, this poem resembles “José Colom –
People’s Captain” in its tone and overt use of slogans. Most prominent is the repeated
rallying cry “Red Front!” which begins each verse paragraph, as exemplified in the two
opening paragraphs:

Red Front! – said the hero.
And Hans Beimler fell to the earth.
The Spaniards heard it;
his German comrades heard it,
the French and the Italians,
Madrid heard it; the air heard it;
trembling, the bullet born
to kill him, heard it.
Red Front! – and on loyal
Castilian soil fell
One who came from very far
To spill his blood here. (1-12)

Much as the pilot’s aerial viewpoint buoys the ballad of Colom as it soars over the
countryside, so does Beimler’s cry “Red Front!” speed across Europe: it “rings, whistles, /
crossing like a bullet, crackling / through sea, sky and land, / through heavens – every place”
(19-22). It passes through tyrannical Germany (“the executioner who lifts / his dry-blooded
ax” [15-16]), through Madrid, through the fields of Spain, and on through Catalonia. It
finally becomes the cry of the crowd of mourners carrying Beimler’s body through Paris and
finally to Moscow, where Beimler is buried alongside Lenin.16

16 In reality, Beimler was buried in Barcelona.
Rounding out this memorial spread is an article in the center columns about a public tribute meeting for Beimler held at the International Brigades Commissariat headquarters in Madrid. The article is a straight news story that reports on the proceedings, including a listing of several Republican luminaries who attended. The piece concludes by describing the presentation given by Rafael Alberti, who “recited three of his poems, the first entitled ‘To the International Brigades’, the second called ‘Hans Beimler’ (which is translated and printed above), and the third was the ‘Defense of Madrid’. After a storm of applause, he recited another dedicated to the fallen youth of the war” (“Military” 5). This paragraph may be an instance of straightforward reporting, but it suggests through the implied topics of Alberti’s poetic selections—i.e., not just Beimler but also the internationals and the defenders of Madrid in general—that Beimler’s heroism is to be seen as representative of, not unique from, the service of the International Brigades. The article also insures the reader that the heroes of the International Brigades are celebrated as such outside their tightly-knit group, recognized by Republican Spain at large. Reminders of the level of appreciation afforded the International Brigades by the Spanish and international Loyalist community are common in the Volunteer; here, the memorial for an individual soldier functions as a conduit for such a reminder. Taken a whole, these two pages present a message, mutually reinforced by the multiple elements, about the volunteer’s death in battle: the fallen soldier is to be celebrated as indispensable to the Cause, both within and without the International Brigades, and both immediately (Durruti) and after years have passed (Beimler). The simple international volunteer soldier is exalted, by implication, alongside these named heroes.
Varied Responses to Death

I have discussed several instances of direct engagement with volunteer soldiers who were killed in the line of duty. Other items in the Volunteer face death in more complicated ways. At times, the fact of death seems almost impossible to contain, as if the circumstances of the volunteers’ experience will force it even upon poems that are not openly elegiac or memorial in nature. “Written During an Airplane Attack” (20 September 1937), composed by an American volunteer named Daniel Hutner, does not deal directly with death at all, though it does explore the battlefield experience and its ever-present threat of death. It is an amateur effort, written in blank verse with distinct tercets; these generally have two lines of tetrameter followed by a short, usually dimeter line, though this pattern varies slightly at times. The speaker, one of a group of soldiers in the field, consciously eschews thoughts of death: “Blood has flowed here, has wet this earth / On which we lie; and blood will flow again – / But our thoughts are not of this” (7-9). Instead, the men’s thoughts are on the more practical concerns of war: oiling weapons and digging foxholes in which to seek cover. But when enemy airplanes appear, the men must press themselves into these holes they have dug, these possible graves: “We seize upon the earth / We have prepared – become part of it – / Become earth …” (13-15). As the planes drop their bombs, tearing the ground into smoke and shrapnel, the image of burial is reinforced: “Intenser – bombs – cries of pain from mules and men, / All covered by earth and dust” (23-24). But this burial is only temporary, for when the planes leave the men have survived, at least collectively, and they rise from their would-be graves in the last two lines: “We tear ourselves from the earth, / Become men again” (26-27).
Though it lacks the political sloganeering of Alberti’s “Hans Beimler” and the like, Hutner’s poem similarly strikes a triumphant tone of endurance, here specifically in the face of mechanized horror and personal terror. The death implied in the symbolic burial is thwarted by the soldiers’ resurrection. But then the symbolic resurrection is undermined by reality, for Hutner’s author line at the end of the poem is followed by the note, “American Volunteer Killed In Action – September, 1937.” Thus, the poetic message of endurance blends into the literal message of loss through the reality of a soldier’s death that, according to its date, has occurred quite recently (within the last three weeks).

Rolfe’s comments on this poem are useful for my discussion. In a letter to Mary dated 13 September, he describes his personal reaction to learning of the deaths of two comrades, one of them almost certainly Danny Hutner. He also briefly describes his relationship with each man. Of Hutner, Rolfe recalls that he

nursed [Hutner] in a way for two weeks after the Madrid offensive was over. When he left I forwarded some letters to him from home, and a few days later got a reply, thanking me for sending the letters and enclosing, rather timidly, a poem he had written; a poor poem, but the feeling was there to one who knew him, if not to the casual, distant reader. I’m going to print it soon if I can. (Letter to Mary 13 Sept. 1937, 2)

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17 This statement involves an educated speculation. Rolfe’s diary entry for the day mentions that he has learned of the deaths of two comrades, Sidney Shostuck and Danny Hutner. In his letter to Mary on the same day, Rolfe discusses, but does not name, two comrades whose deaths he has heard about that day. Because the details he gives of the first man’s death (shot through the head by a sniper) correspond with the mention of Shostuck in his diary entry, it is safe to conclude that the second man discussed is Hutner.
Hutner’s poem appeared in the next issue of the Volunteer, which Rolfe, in the same letter, mentions he would begin planning that night. Rolfe’s judgment of the poem indicates that he held certain aesthetic standards, but (not surprisingly) that those standards were not the sole factor in deciding what material to publish. His comment about wanting to publish the poem, brief as it is, suggests that he didn’t want to do so simply out of pity for Hutner, as might be expected in such a situation. Rather, Rolfe focuses on the “feeling” in the poem, and the extent to which that feeling would be recognized by the reader—specifically, the reader who knew Hutner personally. Clearly Rolfe’s main concern is with the paper’s primary audience (the soldiers) rather than the other, secondary audiences in America and England. More important is Rolfe’s emphasis on the personal connection, the human connection, that can be made for the reader by invoking the name of a fallen fellow soldier in connection with art—even art that can be judged “poor.”

A surviving response from another soldier suggests that Rolfe calculated correctly about the feeling with which Hutner’s friends might connect. The American volunteer Frank Lister occasionally sent copies of the Volunteer for Liberty to his parents back in the U.S. with notes handwritten in the margins. On the page carrying “Written During an Airplane Attack” (Figure 35), Lister draws an arrow pointing to Hutner’s name from the following message:

Dearest Mom & Dad—

A deep loss was felt, by the comrades here, when we received word that “Dan” (as he was called) was gone. I remember the last time, was when he dressed my leg on the field, I never saw him again after that. I was in the same room in

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18 Here too, Rolfe does not name the poem in his letter. But following on the conclusion that he is there discussing Hutner, coupled with the fact that Hutner’s poem appears in the issue that Rolfe began planning that same night, it is equally safe to conclude that “Written During an Airplane Attack” is the poem in question.
THE NYON CONFERENCE A STEP FORWARD

In spite of the efforts made by Germany and Italy to impose a stoppage in the last months, the Nyon negotiations have been held up, and has been a series of decisions which will be of great importance. In the last months, more than in the past, there has been a crisis in the Mediterranean, and the only way to find a solution is to bring the nations together. The agreement was signed by the five powers present at the Conference, namely, Britain, France, Russia, Greece, Turkey, the US, Italy, and Yugoslavia.

NO 'PRIVATE LANE'

The agreement is a first and important step against the acts of piracy by the Fascist powers. The Mediterranean area is a free area, and any attempts to create a 'private lane' will be counteracted and prohibited.

ADVANCE FOR PEACE

As 'Ironside' says: 'The Conference was called to save the Western Mediterranean, and the only way to achieve peace is to come to an agreement with the Fascist powers, and to agree on a common policy.'

The submarine blockade will end as soon as the powers are ready to agree on a common policy. The submarine will be allowed in the territorial waters of the contracting powers, and the blockade will be lifted at the first sign of any agreement.
Madrid with his brother, who had a broken leg— Two fine young fellows— No
matter how long the war lasts—one can’t become hardened to losing comrades—

Love, Francis (Lister Volunteer 20 Sept. 1937, 6)

Though Lister’s note doesn’t discuss Hutner’s poem, it does indicate the strength of that connection between men who served together in Spain. Almost sixty years later, that connection continued to resonate for Lister. On a Post-It note dated May 1994 and attached to Lister’s copy of that Volunteer issue, he has written and underlined in magic marker the recollection that “Hutner was a big powerful guy, very alive _ _ _ _ .” And he adds, “Just thought of him again, missed.” Lister’s feelings of loss, which his brief notes attempt to express, would certainly have affected his experience of the poem, as it would have for other readers who knew and felt similarly about Hutner. For them, Hutner’s poem could not have been seen as mere propaganda from the Brigade leadership, for the real, human presence of its author could hardly be separated from the poem’s content.

Two of the three poems by T. H. (Tom) Wintringham that appear in the Volunteer do not memorialize, either directly or through the announcement of the poet’s death, but they do address the soldier’s relationship to death. A poet who, in his own words, “had no time for poems” owing to heavy Communist Party involvement, Wintringham had edited the Left Review in England, and had come to fight in Spain even before the International Brigades were formed (Weintraub 41). He later commanded the British Battalion during the Jarama Valley action that decimated the unit. He was also one of the few volunteers who had served in the Great War, and thus one of the few who had experienced war firsthand before Spain. Both of his contributions appeared in November 1937, but were both written in September 1936. “Barcelona Nerves” offers a soldier’s perspective from a tense period before battle,
when the soldier makes his way toward the war and attempts to prepare mentally for it. The speaker is a volunteer newly arrived in Spain (many internationals passed through Barcelona after crossing the French border). The opening lines describe the transition from civilian to military life, from peace to war:

Neither fool nor children any longer,
Those ways, traits, gone and away
That once made life a luck-game, death a stranger,
We’re going on. (1-4)

But Barcelona is pervaded by fear of bombers and possible attack, and the speaker reflects on the source of that fear—a memory of some of war’s horrors:

[. . .] the mind remembers
What it’s all for . . .

Death means the girl’s corpse warm-alive when buried;
Death means the retching brothels, where on black
Death-tide, death-fear, an army of boys is carried
To a pox-wreck. (7-12)

What is important here is that these images of death’s identity in war are not, it would seem, born of direct experience in Spain. The speaker’s group of volunteers is heading into the country from abroad, and Barcelona itself had not yet been bombed by the Nationalists in September of 1936,19 though there was persistent fear of air raids. Rather, the images are the speaker’s recollections from the Great War, which he had clearly served in, as indicated by the later line, “Twenty years ago I knew war’s face” (18). Significantly, the death images are not the conventional ones of soldiers on the battlefield; instead, they are more sordid, perhaps more ugly: the civilian corpse, the filthy whorehouses that corrupt sexuality and breed disease. This is far from the glorious, heroic verse that had accompanied British soldiers’ march to war in 1914, and it reflects something of the ambiguity with which many

19 That would not happen until the following spring.
intellectuals, pacifists not long before, fought in or supported the Spanish war in the name of protecting ideals and preventing a larger war. In other words, the war that these men are about to partake in is truly an ugly thing. Yet the poem offers an alternative to this debased encounter with death in the next stanza: “And life’s a matter of beating this, of breaking / By own hardness, and a held hand, out / From fury, frustration, fear [. . .]” (13-15). Through a purity of purpose, which involves both the “hardness” necessary for fighting and the compassion represented by “a held hand,” the speaker rejects the sordid death that war proffers in favor of something cleaner. “Neither fools nor children,” the poem concludes, “we who are joining / [. . .] We’ll make what wrecks these others into our gaining, / Into our choice” (17, 19-20). The poem functions as a kind of prescription for the incoming volunteers, outlining with poetic vagueness an appropriate mindset and suggesting that personal conduct and sense of purpose can affect the soldier’s relationship with war and death. It also fits the volunteers into a historical continuity by evoking the memory of the previous war. The resulting contrast, though avoiding ideological sloganeering in favor of a more general humanistic statement, emphasizes the difference that the Spanish war can be made to embody.

Wintringham’s second contribution, “Grañen,” takes the familiar approach of equating Fascism with death and the Loyalist position with life: “Too many people are in love with death,” the speaker begins (1). What stands out here is the setting of a British hospital which Wintringham uses to explore this contrast. The poet hones in on the image of a flashlight that the surgeon uses in attempting to save wounded soldiers. That light becomes the light of the cause that shines within the darkness of the enemy’s onslaught:

    Our enemies can praise death and adore death;
    For us endurance, the sun; and now in this night
The electric torch, feeble, waning, but close-set,
Follows the surgeon’s fingers. We are allied with
This light. (11-15)

It is a powerful image; Stanley Weintraub calls it Wintringham’s “most poetically moving statement of his philosophy” (43). It would perhaps be all the more powerful an image to the soldier-reader because, though metaphorical, it carries within it the more literal sense of the wounded soldier, teetering on the edge of death, trying to keep himself physically among the living.

In a recent consideration of some Spanish Civil War poetry, Stan Smith reads both of these poems by Wintringham in terms of what he calls the sinking of the ego into the collective, which he argues was a key feature of ideologically committed verse of the war. While he claims that the choice offered at the end of “Barcelona Nerves” “resurrects the submerged ego as a historical agent,” he emphasizes more heavily the submergence itself, pointing for example to the lack of first-person singular in the poems and the missing “our” in the line (from “Barcelona Nerves”), “By own hardness, and a held hand” (252). To some degree, Smith’s interpretation echoes that made by John Muste in his earlier study of civil war literature. Muste uses a stanza from each of these two poems to show Wintringham’s reliance on ideology. The poems are ideological because they claim that there is ultimate meaning in the destruction of this war, and that meaning overrides the personal loss. “The cause is more important than the personal wound or the private fear,” Muste writes; “it is worth the sacrifice it exacts” (85).

I agree that the poems attempt to negotiate the tension between the personal and collective that pervades leftist political poetry of the 1930s, but it is important to consider
that collective in context.\textsuperscript{20} For one thing, the “we” in both poems does not represent the
community of the radical left or of pro-Loyalists or of anti-fascists; it is the much smaller
community of volunteer soldiers serving the Republic—a brotherhood of men who serve
together and face death together. The experiences of pre-battle fear or post-battle surgery—
the latter all too common for the frequently-wounded British and American
internationals\textsuperscript{21}—are central to that brotherhood’s consciousness of the war. The Cause is
more important than the personal fear or the private wound—that is the nature of war itself, a
situation in which soldiers are expected to be lost even in the best-planned and best-executed
operations. What is significant is that Wintringham’s poems recognize and validate the fear
and the wound, and offer a choice (which can only be a personal choice, ultimately) to
overcome that fear on the one hand or, on the other, to seek out the light in the face of death’s
darkness.

Moreover, there is a stronger personal strain in “Barcelona Nerves” in particular than
Smith suggests. Though the poem does avoid the first-person singular “I,” the central
recollection which drives the poem is a personal one. The phrase “fear / In the torn minds”
(plural) is followed by the singular “the mind remembers / What it’s all for . . . ,” which is
followed by the stanza of death images. The speaker’s (essentially, Wintringham’s) ability to
recall these things about war is unique, for most of the volunteers are too young to have
fought in the earlier conflict. The final choice of the poem is drawn directly from these
personal experiences.

\textsuperscript{20} Both Smith and Muste are using the texts from the 1939 collection, \textit{Poems for Spain}, not the original \textit{Volunteer} texts. The content in both is substantively the same (with some minor changes), but the page
presentation and implied audience are not.

\textsuperscript{21} Carroll notes that by the end of the war, nearly one-third of the American volunteers had been killed and
“nearly every military survivor had been wounded at least once” (204).
This measure of the personal in the collective is reinforced also by the poem’s presentation on the page. It is centered at the top of the page and surrounded by the Letters from Home section. The first half of the page contains a letter to a volunteer from the secretary of a British workers’ organization; it discusses the Cause in a broad sense and serves to remind readers why they are fighting and that their efforts are recognized on the home front. This letter emphasizes the collective. The second half of the page, however, operates on a far more personal level by presenting four letters written to a British volunteer by his nine-year-old son, Peter. They offer various observations (the weather, the abdication of the King, the boy’s sports activities) and jump about in almost a stream-of-consciousness style. An introductory blurb calls attention to the character of the letters: “When you read these notes, try to imagine the lop-sided, uncertain scrawl of a child, with all the curious misspellings, and the comical halts” (“Letters” 7). Indeed, the letters are marked by the touching simplicity of the boy’s emotion. One starts, “Dear Dad. I am very sorry you have got wounded right [sic] through the calf [sic] of your left leg.” From which immediately follows Peter’s effort to cheer up his father: “Well here is some more good news to tell you that I can ride my bike” (7). Elsewhere, he notes without preamble, “Mom said you are very brave to go” (7). On this page, then, is a poem in which Wintringham, a British volunteer—who himself has been wounded and who has a young son back in Britain— tackles his very personal anxieties about war and death, placed next to letters from a young boy to his father, another British volunteer who has been wounded. The collective element may be present, as in the first letter on the page, but the emphasis falls most heavily on the personal commitment and the personal sacrifice of the volunteer readership.
Internationalism and Racial Unity: Poems by Langston Hughes and Edwin Rolfe

In addition to direct engagement with death through elegy or memorializing, poems in the Volunteer also address broader themes common in Spanish Civil War poetry that at times interact with the memorial elements. Perhaps the most obvious and ubiquitous of these themes is internationalism. The ethos of the International Brigades was founded on the idea of antifascist unity that transcended national boundaries, and much of the content of the Volunteer either directly addressed or suggested the theme of international unity. The very inclusion of labor news from home suggested the interconnection of workers’ movements in Britain and the U.S. with the war in Spain. Several articles proclaimed support for the Republic from the people of various nations. Imperialism, an international extension of class-based repression, was decried from time to time, as in a front-page article connecting Britain’s participation in the non-intervention farce with her own imperialist interests in the Mediterranean region, Africa, and the Far East. Other articles commented on the struggle of the Chinese people against Japanese invasion, and equated that struggle with the events in Spain. Likewise, several pieces condemned the recent Italian conquest of Ethiopia and commented on its aftermath.

This last type of article also addressed the related theme of racial equality. Fighting racial discrimination was a key element of the Communist platform, especially in the U.S., and the International Brigades reflected that agenda. Over eighty African-Americans served with the Lincoln and Washington battalions (Carroll 18). Many saw doing so as a chance to engage Mussolini’s troops in revenge for the Ethiopian campaign—a perspective nicely summed up in a line of dialogue from a short story by a black volunteer: “This ain’t Ethiopia,

but it’ll do.” 23 As Carroll notes, “[Communist] party leaders took pains to recruit capable blacks and encouraged their advancement through the ranks” (133).

Some of the items already discussed furthered these themes of internationalism and racial equality. The subject of “Jack Shirai,” for example, embodied internationalism: born in Japan, Shirai had made a living in the U.S., but traveled to Spain to “[help] the Spanish people in their fight / For human rights” (22-23). The poem takes pains to emphasize the international people’s unity that Shirai represents. “The village farmers,” we are told, “talked often / Of the Japanese who had come so far for them” (34-35), and he will be remembered not only by his own battalion but also by the “Japanese proletariat” (49). In a different way, the poem “Jose Colom—People’s Captain” by Shaem O’Sheel functions as a statement of internationalism. Based on an original poem by a Spanish poet about a Spanish pilot, it has been translated into an English ballad stanza by an American poet who, active in the Irish independence movement, had changed his name to emphasize his Irish heritage. O’Sheel’s appropriation of a Spaniard’s paean to heroism and resistance mirrors the international volunteers’ appropriation of the Spanish cause as their own. Even the passing reference to “Oliver and Jack” in “Remember This” is well chosen for its multi-racial and international implications, for, as noted, Oliver was Oliver Law, the African-American commander of the Lincolns, and Jack was the Japanese-American Jack Shirai.

The contributions of Langston Hughes to the Volunteer at times engage with both of these themes, though the theme of racial equality is most prominent in his work. Hughes traveled to Spain in July 1937 as a correspondent for two African-American newspapers, the Baltimore Afro-American and the Cleveland Call and Post (Thurston 115). During his six-

23 The phrase is from O. H. Hunter, “700 Calendar Days,” Heart of Spain, ed. Alvah Bessie, New York: Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, 1952, 299. It was also used as the title of an essay by Robin D. G. Kelley.
month stay in Spain, he lived in Madrid and toured war zones, often interviewing black Americans serving in the International Brigades. He developed a friendship with Edwin Rolfe, whom he often socialized with and accompanied on Rolfe’s brigade duties. From his experience in Spain, Hughes produced numerous articles and poems for American consumption that explored the interrelatedness of racial discrimination at home and fascism abroad, and connected the Spanish cause with African-Americans’ quest for racial equality. His address to the Second International Writers’ Congress in Paris in July 1937, which was first published in the Volunteer (and later in the Crisis and the Negro Worker), makes these claims explicitly. He argues that American blacks “are the people who have long known in actual practice the meaning of the word fascism—for the American attitude towards us has always been one of economic and social discrimination” (“Too Much” 3). After listing the various forms that discrimination has taken, Hughes names the world leaders—Hitler, Mussolini, and Franco included, who spread their similar mindset across the globe. “We Negroes of America are tired,” he proclaims, of a world divided superficially on the basis of race and color—but in reality on the basis of poverty and power—the rich over the poor, no matter what their color. We Negroes of America are tired of a world in which it is possible for any one group of people to say to another, “You have no right to happiness, or freedom, or the joy of life”. We are tired of a world where forever we work for someone else and the profits are not ours. We are tired of a world where, when we raise our voices against oppression, we are immediately jailed, intimidated, beaten, sometimes lynched. (3) Finally, Hughes envisions a world in which the distinction of race is overcome in favor of a workers’ world, united in brotherhood and free of capitalism and war.
Hughes contributed five poems and three articles to the *Volunteer*. He was one of the most prominent literary figures whose work appeared in the paper, and was certainly the best-known non-Spanish poet to contribute his verse. The presentation of Hughes’ poem “Roar, China!” indicates his prominence. The poem takes up nearly an entire page in the 6 September 1937 issue, with its title in huge letters at the top, the author’s name in large type just below, and a photograph of Hughes. The poem itself embraces both the international and racial themes of the *Volunteer*. Hughes exuberantly casts the Chinese as a peaceful people conquered and exploited by both the West and the East, but a people capable of great fury in resistance to these foreign invaders: “Roar, China! / Roar, old lion of the East! / . . . Tired at last of being bothered. / Since when did you ever steal anything / From anybody” (1-2, 4-6). Hughes does not explicitly connect the Japanese with the fascist forces of Europe, nor is Spain mentioned at all, but the poem’s very appearance in the *Volunteer* suggests that the Chinese people’s struggle is of a piece with the Spaniards’. Moreover, the poem repeatedly gestures toward similarities between the Chinese people’s oppression and that of blacks in the U.S. by including “Jim Crow Y.M.C.A’s” among a list of indignities forced upon the Chinese (22). Later in the poem, Hughes offers images of beating and forced subservience that recall both the past disgraces of slavery and the present abusive treatment of blacks common in the American South.

“Roar, China!” establishes the context of Hughes’ engagement with the major themes under consideration, but his work also intersects with this chapter’s central focus, the elegiac tone of the *Volunteer*. The contribution that does this most interestingly is the poem titled “October 16th,” which appeared in a special number celebrating the anniversary of the International Brigades. The poem is a memorial for John Brown, the white abolitionist
whose failed attempt to start a slave rebellion on 16 October 1859, helped spark the fire that led to the American Civil War. “Perhaps today, / You will remember John Brown,” the poem begins (1-2). Thereafter, in free verse of mostly short lines (i.e., two to three feet, with exceptions), it recounts how Brown “took his gun, / Took twenty-one companions, / White and black, / Went to shoot your way to freedom” (4-7). Brown’s assault on the Harper’s Ferry armory was, we are told, a multi-racial effort requiring the use of arms and designed to secure the freedom of a people—an action that mirrors the international defense of the Spanish Republic. Hughes establishes a lineage of a struggle for freedom inspired by Brown:

Now that you are
Many years free,
And the echo of the Civil War
Has passed away,
And Brown himself
Has long been tried at law,
Hung by the neck,
And buried in the ground—
Since Harper’s Ferry
Is alive with ghosts today,
Immortal raiders
Come again to town—

Perhaps you will recall
John Brown. (16-30)

Hughes’ word choice of “recall” in the last line, altered from the “remember” of the opening line, allows for the alternate meaning of “to call back” or “summon to return.” Brown becomes not just a martyr, but also a Christ figure: having died “for your sake” and been buried, he is now poised to be resurrected (in spirit).

Were we to read this poem in a different venue—say, a collection of Hughes’ poetry—we might interpret it as a statement of resistance, a call to action of a sort, perhaps
calling on African-Americans to take inspiration from Brown’s action as they take their own stand against racial injustice. Perhaps this is how the poem would have been read when it was originally published in 1931 in the African-American journal, Opportunity. But in the Volunteer for Liberty, the poem becomes a call to action of a different sort. Given the publication, the primary audience becomes the black volunteers of the American battalions. The poem serves as an admonition for the fighters of the current civil war to take inspiration from that instigator of a civil war long past in the service of the same goal, freedom—and in a literal, armed fight against the forces of oppression.

Moreover, in the poem, John Brown remains a fairly remote figure, a folk hero, a symbol essentially, lacking much sense of flesh-and-blood reality. But the page presentation of Hughes’ poem offers a more human analogue: Oliver Law, the fallen commander of the Lincoln Battalion (Figure 36). The In Memoriam box for Law is positioned immediately to the right of “October 16th”; it identifies him as the Lincolns’ commander at Brunete and notes the date of his death. The box suggests that Hughes’ call to action is being fulfilled. We have here a memorial to a black man whose has sacrificed himself in an armed campaign for the freedom of a white people (the Spanish), placed next to a poem memorializing the white man who sacrificed himself in an armed campaign for the freedom of a black people. The ghost has been recalled, it might be said.

Hughes’ poem “Letter From Spain, Addressed to Alabama” also illustrates how works that present broader themes can gather meaning by interacting with the elegiac material in the Volunteer. This poem is written in the form of a letter from an African-American volunteer to his brother in the U.S. Its inside address and date are “Lincoln Battalion / International Brigades / November Something, 1937.” It employs a ballad stanza,
NEWS BRIEFS

MOSCOW. For the next year the Soviet Government has put aside 1,250,000 rubles for the construction of a system of railways in the Ukrainian region.

* 

BERLIN. We get news that Hitler has accepted Mussolini's invitation to repay the latter's recent visit by going to Fascist Spain.

* 

MARSEILLE. The attempt to ship 200 tons of sulphur to fascist Spain failed. The vessel (Marquesa Grande) was turned away.

* 

MOSCOW. More than 1,000 Asturian children between the ages of 35 and 16 have arrived here this week on board the two Soviet ships, "Cooperation" and "Dobrudjanka." The voyage along the Spanish coast was perilously made under direct rebel fire.

In the Marcha Canal, the "Cooperation" encountered an Italian ship. When the young voyagers recognized the Italian flag, they let loose a prolonged volley ofcondemnation to the fascist ship.

THE VOLUNTEER FOR LIBERTY

OCTOBER 16th

Perhaps today
You will remember John Brown.

John Brown
Who took his gun,
Took twenty-one companions
While and Black.
Went to shoot your way to freedom
Where two rivers meet
And the hills of the North
And the hills of the South
Look down at one another —
And died
For your sake.

Now that you are
Many years free,
And the echo of the Civil War
Has passed away,
And Brown himself
Has long been tried at law,
Hung by the neck,
And buried in the ground —
Since Harpers Ferry
Is alive with ghosts today,
Immortal raiders
Come again to town —

Perhaps
You will remember
John Brown.

RALPH FOX BATTALION

Another indication of the international solidarity among the different national volunteers in Spain, not only with the Spanish people, but with each other, exists in the form of a complete battalion of the 14th International (Franco-Belgian) Brigade. This is the Ralph Fox (12th) Battalion, so named as far back as last April, in honor of the noted English novelist and writer whose death has shocked the world.

"The battalion was named Ralph Fox at a time when there were still a number of British volunteers in each company," says Commissary Doyen of the 14th Brigade. "These men were afterward transferred to the 15th Brigade, but we felt that it would be most fitting to retain the name of this man who won our love and our admiration in the early days of the war."

LETTERS FROM HOME

(continued from page 31)

keep on spreading them around...
The steel situation is now quiet, but the auto workers have held their convention. They have grown in little more than a year from 35,000 to 350,000; and we will see the day soon, I believe, when they will get old Henry Ford also lined up...

Your collective letters are fine. Keep them up. Keep sending me mail and make your letters informative to the fullest extent, of course. Together with everything else you want to write, for we can surely use these letters to get additional and stronger support for Loyalist Spain and for the International Brigades...

D. N.

VIOLENCE IN THE PHILIPS. This present war of the moving threats of the war against freedom, guardian of the nation's food supply...

ISHANAA Areas,打架 - 因为, K. Mathiva.
in quatrains usually alternating between tetrameter and trimeter lines, with some stanzas of four trimeter lines. The ballad form, along with the mild dialect Hughes uses to suggest a Southern black man’s speech, creates a folksy, personal feel. The speaker describes his encounter with a wounded Moroccan prisoner from Franco’s colonial forces:

   We captured a wounded Moor today.
   He was just as dark as me.
   I said, Boy, what you been doin’ here
   Fightin’ against the free? (2-5)

The Moor cannot speak English, but an interpreter allows him to tell his story. He was conscripted for service, powerless to heed his own misgivings, “a feelin’ / This whole thing wasn’t right” (14-15). Johnny’s bewilderment over the Moor’s service makes more sense as he achieves what Michael Thurston calls “a sophisticated understanding of the interplay between racial politics and the war” (129):

   Cause if a free Spain wins this war,
   The colonies, too, are free—
   Then something wonderfull’ll happen
   To them Moors as dark as me.

   I said, I guess that’s why old England
   And I reckon Italy, too,
   Is afraid to let a workers’ Spain
   Be too good to me and you—

   Cause they got slaves in Africa—
   And they don’t want’ [sic] em to be free. (22-31)

Finally Johnny attempts, by taking the Moor’s hand, to break through the barriers to international and racial unity that the fascists and imperialists have built, but, he says, “the wounded Moor was dyin’ / And he didn’t understand” (36-37).

The focus on the Moroccan soldier addresses one of the uncomfortable aspects of the war for some pro-Loyalists. That is, one of the common arguments against Franco’s war
effort was the hypocrisy of his using Moorish (i.e., Muslim) troops on what he claimed to be a holy crusade to reclaim Spain for God and Church from the hands of godless Communists. This type of discourse demonized the Moors as a foreign other, as evidence of the impurity of Franco’s cause. Yet such discourse directed at subjugated black Africans contradicted the anti-racist ethos of the Communist Party and the International Brigades’ celebration of diversity. Hughes’ poem fashions an approach to this problem that encourages sympathy for the Moor by connecting his situation with broader patterns of racism and imperialism. As Thurston argues, “Johnny draws together the colonial powers, Franco, and, implicitly, the United States as practitioners of slavery. . . . Johnny is rhetorically equated with the Moor—twice he writes that they are the same color—so he . . . shares the experience of enslavement” (129). Cary Nelson offers a cogent interpretation of how Johnny’s insight relates to this theme:

When the speaker looks across to Africa, makes the appropriate connections between his Spanish experience and global racial and financial relationships, the moment of recognition makes it possible to envision the existing structures of power undone, to “seed foundations shakin’.” “Seed,” an improper usage quite proper to dialect, is actually a pun: it is a moment of sight and insight that is also the fertile seed of radical change. The proffered handshake is an offer of alliance politics, a simple gesture of solidarity dependent on nothing less than a different understanding of the world. Yet the difficulty of reaching such understanding, the power national cultures have to impede such knowledge, is apparent in the Moor’s failure to recognize the speaker’s offer. (“International Context” 19)
While the topics of racism and imperialism are clearly paramount, the poem also functions by establishing crucial contrasts between Hughes’ subject enemy soldier and the internationals, simply through its appearance in the *Volunteer*. For one thing, the appearance of the poem in a volunteer soldier’s newspaper emphasizes the contrast between volunteers and conscripts. Loyalist propaganda frequently emphasized Republican soldiers’ high morale and eagerness to fight for their vision of Spain, and attempted to show a lack of those qualities in enemy soldiers, often claiming heavy desertions from the enemy ranks, for example.\(^{24}\) Hughes’ picture of a Moor forced to wage war (“They nabbed him in his land / And made him join the fascist army” [9-10]), ignorant of its reasons (“He said he didn’t know / The folks he had to fight” [16-17]), yet instinctively repulsed by it (“He said he had a feelin’ / This whole thing wasn’t right” [14-15]) reinforces for the reader the widespread image of an enemy who lacks individual commitment and will to fight. And it highlights, by contrast, the commitment and ideological consciousness of the internationals, who are convinced that “the whole thing” is right.

And here too is another encounter with death, though in this case the death of an enemy rather than an ally. That death is not celebrated as a victory over the enemy because the poem seeks to humanize the Moor, to separate him from the fascists and cast him as a victim of their policies of imperialist exploitation. In this sense, the pattern in the *Volunteer* of elegizing the International Brigade soldiers contributes to the effect of this poem. That pattern has established an interpretation of the volunteer’s death that gives it meaning and value. Foreign volunteers, as established in this chapter, have furthered the cause of the international struggle against fascism, racism, and the exploitation of the working class, and their deaths are presented in verse and/or memorial pieces to inspire the surviving soldiers to

\(^{24}\) Both sides engaged in this type of propaganda.
continue fighting. The Moor’s death in “Letter From Spain” contains none of that meaning; he simply dies. He is characteristically confused at the point of death: “the wounded Moor was dyin’ / and he didn’t understand” (36-37). And he is nameless. The speaker has a name (Johnny), and so do the numerous soldiers whose deaths have been memorialized in the pages of the Volunteer. Those fallen men came to Spain willingly and they knew what they were fighting for—the work of political commissars and publications like the Volunteer insured the latter. The contrast here increases the sympathy that the reader is encouraged to feel for the Moor; it also reinforces that reader’s sense of purpose and encourages a measure of comfort in the thought of his own death. The volunteer for the Republic knows he will not meet his death amidst confusion about what he fights for, nor will he feel exploited, nor will he die nameless and forgotten.

A reader familiar with the Volunteer would have encountered in previous issues the theme of the meaning and value of volunteers’ deaths, but the pages on which “Letter From Spain” appears themselves establish the theme clearly. The poem is centered on the right-hand page; the rest of the two-page spread is comprised of an article called “Irish Volunteers in Spain.” Taking up a little less than half of the left-hand page is a photograph of a group of twelve smiling Irish volunteers from the Lincoln battalion, dating back to February of 1937. The caption notes that “A number of these Irish comrades are now dead” (C. Q. 2). The article itself attempts to briefly chronicle the various contributions of Irish volunteers and celebrate their contributions, but it is run through with the specter of terrible losses. Interspersed throughout the loose history are the names of many individual soldiers of note. Sixteen of those soldiers named have been killed in battle—about as many as the living soldiers named in the piece. In some cases they are simply identified: “Tommy Patton of
Mayo and Bill Barry, late of Melbourne and formerly of Dublin, fell in action at Boadilla del Monte, early in December” (2). The mention of one Bill Davis notes, tellingly, that his “clenched fist shot up in salute as a machine-gun riddled him at the storming of Villanueva de la Cañada” (3). For other men, more extensive background information is given about their pre-war political and revolutionary work, their reputations, and the circumstances of their deaths. These mini-biographies tend to convey the subjects’ courage and commitment, as in the following example:

Peter Daly, I.R.A. veteran from Wexford, wounded in the Anglo-Irish war, wounded at Jarama in February, wounded again at Cordoba in April, rose from the ranks, promoted for bravery in the field, until he attained the rank of Battalion Commander. He was the ideal working-class officer whose comradeship with his men did not lessen his command over them. He fell at the head of his Battalion at the storming of Purburell Hill, on the Aragon Front, on August 26. (3)

These textual snapshots of individual soldiers are encased within an article that rehearses familiar motifs of pro-Loyalist discourse: the evil of fascism and its international implications. “They came,” the writer explains, “primarily to fight fascism, enemy not merely of the people of Spain but of liberty and progress the world over” (2). The article concludes by returning to a reference to General Eoin O’Duffy, a self-important Irish revolutionary and fascist who organized a force of six hundred Irishmen to fight for Franco; the force saw action in only one engagement, in which they suffered only light casualties, and thereafter returned to Ireland. In contrast, “The Irish in the International Brigades remain—for they fight for the same cause for which they fought at home, for the overthrow
of the enemy which is attempting to enslave not only the people of Spain but the whole
human race” (3).

In itself, this article suggests again the extent to which the internationals’ staggering
losses, the potentially overwhelming encounters with death, force themselves upon any effort
at self-presentation. The piece is a kind of microcosm of the Volunteer itself, as I see the
paper functioning. But it is also the most immediate context in which Hughes’ “Letter From
Spain” would have been read. The dead men who inhabit this article are given names and
faces and histories, and their deaths are given significance as part of a larger cause; alongside
their stories is placed Hughes’ story of a nameless soldier lacking even an understanding of
the war that has killed him, much less any ideological commitment. In conjunction with its
surrounding content, then, Hughes’ poem places the Moor’s death—forced and
meaningless—in sharp relief to the deaths of the real volunteer soldiers who have met their
fate willingly, and in doing so reinforces for the reader the value of the internationals’
sacrifice.

Internationalism also figures prominently in “Elegy for Our Dead,” Edwin Rolfe’s
only poem published in the Volunteer. This is perhaps the most satisfying poem to appear in
the paper, by traditional measures of judgment, because it lacks overt sloganeering—indeed,
is almost devoid of politics—and is lyrically rich. Still, it seeks the same goals as the elegiac
items discussed above: it addresses the death of comrades and offers consolation through a
vision of a better world. It also functions partly through conversation with one strand of the
poetic legacy of the First World War.

The poem begins with a vision of peace in a natural setting: “There is a place where,
wisdom won, right recorded, / men move beautifully, striding across fields / whose wheat,
wind-marcelled, wanders unguarded, / in unprotected places” (1-4). These are the fields of Spain, and Rolfe blurs the distinctions of space and time, for this “place” is really a time, a future in which peace and freedom have returned to Spain. But after seven lines of description, the speaker reveals that beneath these olive fields and vineyards, bursting with life, are “graves / where lie, nurturing all these fields, my friends in death” (7-8). Rolfe introduces the theme of internationalism in the second stanza as his speaker contemplates the memories of far-flung places that rest with the fallen men: their passage through the Pyrenees from France into Spain, the “Atlantic salt, spraying / the live, squinting eyelids, even now, of companions—,” the “towns of America, towers and mills . . . —all men’s dominions” (13-16). That the idea of multiple nationalities is important to the poem gets confirmed in the final stanza. The speaker asserts that

Honor in this lies: that theirs is no special strange plot of alien earth. Men of all lands here lie side by side, at peace now after the crucial torture of combat, bullet and bayonet gone, fear conquered forever. (17-21)

The ideas and approach here fit well with the overall stance of the Volunteer. It is the international commitment that the speaker honors most strongly, the idea that the men have died for a vision of not just a better world, but a unified world as well. Much like the conclusions of “Remember This” and other poems discussed above, “Elegy for Our Dead” ends with an assertion of immortality through remembrance and inspiration among the living: “their rewards / not sought for self, live in new faces, smiling, / remembering what they did here. Deeds were their final words” (22-24).

As Cary Nelson has observed, Rolfe noted in his diary that “the poem was not meant to be, but turned out to be, . . . [partly] an answer to Rupert Brooke’s ‘corner that is forever
England’” (“Lyric” 28). Indeed, the opening lines of the final stanza directly reverse the spirit of triumphant English nationalism that Brooke so famously expressed. But the poem also responds to John McCrae’s “In Flanders Fields,” possibly the best-known poem of the Great War. It is not so much an answer to McCrae’s poem as a reworking of it. Rolfe follows its overall structure but infuses that approach with images and themes specific to the Spanish war. In doing so, Rolfe appropriates the emotional weight of McCrae’s iconic expression of loss for Rolfe’s own memorial purposes, thus fitting the bravery and sacrifice of the International Brigades into a broader tradition of bravery and sacrifice while maintaining the distinctiveness of the specific war in which they fought.

A specific reference to McCrae’s poem appears in the second stanza, which considers what lay at rest with the fallen men: “With them, deep in coolness, are memories of France and / the exact fields of Belgium: midnight marches in snows—” (9-10). The fields of Belgium are almost certainly Flanders Fields, for those are the most famous “fields” in Belgium, and most likely represent a cultural memory of the Great War (rather than a literal memory held by the fallen men). The reference is confirmed by the structural correlation between “Elegy for Our Dead” and “In Flanders Fields.” The two poems consist of three stanzas, each of which functions in roughly similar ways in both poems. The first stanza of “In Flanders Fields” presents a pastoral scene that highlights the endurance of the living earth despite war fought upon it and corpses buried beneath it:

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.
“Elegy for Our Dead” also opens with the pastoral imagery of living fields, beneath which lie the dead. In this case, the scene is not of the present but of the future, and thus not one of war but of peace. And the imagery is not that of Belgian fields but of Spanish ones:

There is a place where, wisdom won, right recorded, men move beautifully, striding across fields whose wheat, wind-marcelled, wanders unguarded in unprotected places; where earth, revived, folds all growing things closely to itself; the groves of bursting olives, the vineyards ripe and heavy with glowing grapes, the oranges like million suns; and graves where lie, nurturing all these fields, my friends in death. (1-8)

It is here that Rolfe’s poem is most representative of Spanish Civil War literature in general. Olive trees are perhaps the most often-used single image in the corpus of war literature. The idea of the bodies of men nurturing growing fields, become seeds rather than corpses, appears in other authors’ works as well. Referencing the image as Rolfe used it in another poem, Nelson points to analogues in art by Alfonso Rodríguez Castelao, poems by Rafael Alberti and Langston Hughes, and Ernest Hemingway’s famous prose elegy “On the American Dead in Spain” (“Lyric” 15). The stanza also suggests the equation of the Loyalists with the natural world (the relationship of the people with the land is ubiquitous in pro-Loyalist works) and with life in general, as contrasted with the equation of the fascists with mechanization, destruction, and death. The latter half of the equation is absent in the poem but would likely function for a reader familiar with other Loyalist literature.

The second stanza of “In Flanders Fields” allows the dead to speak of their lives so recently cut short:

We are the dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved, and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.
The second stanza of “Elegy for Our Dead” likewise focuses on the dead in life, as with the memory of the volunteers’ passage into Spain: “the single-file caravan high in the Pyrenees: the land / of Spain unfolded before them, dazzling the young Balboas” (11-12). As noted, Rolfe places his emphasis on the international character of these men, which is essential to the poem’s ultimate meaning.

The final stanzas of both poems direct the reader’s response to the dead, commenting on the meaning of the sacrifice. McCrae locates meaning solely in the living soldiers’ continued willingness to fight on in the name of the dead:

> Take up our quarrel with the foe:  
> To you from failing hands we throw  
> The torch; be yours to hold it high.  
> If ye break faith with us who die  
> We shall not sleep, though poppies grow  
> In Flanders fields.

In a sense, this stanza functions quite similarly to many of the poems and memorial items in the Volunteer for Liberty: it transforms the death into inspiration for the living to fight on. Paul Fussell has (with disgust) labeled this stanza “a propaganda argument . . . against a negotiated peace,” and he sees this conclusion as “grievously out of contact with the symbolism of the first part” (250). Rolfe’s conclusion is more subtle, which is ironic, considering how frequently other poets in the Volunteer draw an overtly propagandistic message from their engagement with their comrades’ death. Again, Rolfe emphasizes the international character of the volunteers’ commitment and offers his answer to Rupert Brooke. His conclusion does not base the value of the volunteers’ sacrifice on the actions of the living—those actions have already achieved their meaning in the doing. Their actions do inspire the living, but Rolfe chooses to let the form of that inspiration be suggested rather than exhorted: “their rewards . . . live in new faces, smiling, / remembering what they did
here” (22-24). The soldier-reader might well choose to let the poem inspire him to continue fighting, but without an open call to battle, and with its positive tone, the conclusion flows organically from the image of future peace and natural life with which the poem opens. As the volunteers’ bodies nurture the Spanish fields in the first stanza, so have their deeds nurtured the birth of that better future, both in themselves and through their power to inspire others. Through this sophisticated engagement with the tropes of Spanish Civil War literature, the elegiac tradition (channeled through the poetic inheritance of the Great War), and the broader international ethos of the Volunteer for Liberty, Rolfe’s “Elegy for Our Dead” can be taken as a kind of ideal example of how he, as editor, made the paper function.

**Later Editors and Reception**

In April 1938, the Republican army in the Aragon region, in the northeast of Spain, was in the midst of a rout. Nationalist forces were completing a major offensive that would drive to the Mediterranean Sea and cut the Republican zone in two. The XV International Brigade was conducting a series of massive withdrawals that would become known as the Great Retreats, fighting delaying actions when possible but ultimately pulling back northward to stop only after crossing the Ebro River, and suffering the inevitable heavy casualties along the way. Amidst this panicky situation, when a Nationalist victory seemed imminent, the Republican government issued a call for all available personnel to head for the front lines. Edwin Rolfe had been growing more uneasy about his position at the Volunteer, as he felt he had achieved in that role all he could and longed to see action with his fellow soldiers. So while the call for troops did not apply to him, Rolfe heeded the government’s call and joined his comrades at the front. Thereafter, he would participate in some of the Lincoln Battalion’s final engagements, though he would also return at times to

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25 That victory, as it turns out, would not come for another ten months.
writing work. At various point in his last months in Spain, Rolfe would serve as a frontline correspondent for the Volunteer and assist with putting together a special issue, and he would take the job of correspondent for the New Masses and Daily Worker back home. Though the internationals were withdrawn from the front in September, Rolfe stayed until December 1938, sending articles back to the U.S. and helping to organize the Americans’ departure from Spain.26

When Rolfe left the Volunteer, his position as editor was taken up by John Tisa, an American volunteer who had been working with Rolfe on the paper for several months. In September, the job was taken over by Sandor Voros, a Hungarian-American commissar who was the brigade’s historian, and who later left the Communist Party disillusioned and wrote a negative account of his experiences. The character of the paper was already changing before Rolfe’s departure: As the British and American battalions became depleted of their men in successive engagements, their ranks were replaced by Spanish soldiers. After the Lincolns’ actions during the Battle of the Ebro in July and August 1938, for example, there were fewer than 100 Americans in the battalion (Carroll 199). Consequently, the Volunteer had begun to publish some articles in Spanish to reflect the integrated nature of the brigades. Its later issues were essentially bilingual publications.

Around the time of Rolfe’s departure in April 1938, the Volunteer also began publishing special supplements, often two-page broadsides that exhorted their readers to resist to the end, to hold their ground at all costs. The almost hysterical tone of these issues reflects the sense of desperation throughout the Republic in this period of serious defeats. The situation stabilized somewhat during the summer, and hopes would rise around a new Republican offensive (the Battle of the Ebro); but that too, like all major Republican

26 See Nelson, Guide, 35-40, for more details on Rolfe’s activities during this period.
offensives, proved a failure. Prime Minister Juan Negrín, in a move calculated to arouse international sympathy, announced in September 1938 the complete withdrawal of all foreign volunteers from Spain. During the final months, under Tisa’s and Voros’ editorship, the Volunteer would continue to publish memorial articles for the dead, and some poetry would appear also. But the tone of the poetry was only occasionally elegiac, and the paper rarely displayed the interworking of memorial poetry and prose notable during Rolfe’s editorship. The final issue, commemorating the contributions of the various international units, appeared on 7 November 1938.

It is difficult to say with any certainty how the paper was received among either of its audiences; there is evidence of conflicting responses among the soldiers in particular. A published collection of American soldiers’ letters, Madrid 1937: Letters of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade From the Spanish Civil War, includes only a few passing references to the Volunteer, none very illuminating. Alvah Bessie, an author and screenwriter (later one of the Hollywood Ten) who fought with the Lincolns from spring to fall of 1938, worked for a time as a frontline correspondent for the Volunteer, but his assessment was quite negative:

The men were fed up with the Volunteer; it published too much ‘horse-shit’ about how-to-win-the-war and we-must-keep-our-morale-up, and our glorious-aviation and our-glorious-XVth Brigade and our traditions and the machinations of the fascist powers. The men knew all about that stuff. They wanted to read about themselves, their exploits, human-interest stories about ‘Gabby’ Klein, the clown of the Battalion (who had cast-iron guts in the bargain), about the time Captain Goddard talked a fascist company into surrender, about Captain Wolff, who had been cited for

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27 A careful examination of all surviving correspondence from English-speaking International Brigades volunteers could perhaps shed light on the question, but such an examination is beyond the scope of this study.
promotion to major for his work in the offensive, about the humorous incidents and the queer things that were said, the gripes and gags, the jokes and the guys who really did the stuff. They were the men who should have written the paper; but either they were in action, fighting; or they were in reserve, resting, and they had neither the time, the inclination nor the talent. (302)

Bessie’s assessment of the men’s reaction to the paper may be accurate, but it should be remembered that he was not even in Spain until February 1938, and did not see action until 31 March (he became friendly with Rolfe after his arrival with the Lincolns). Therefore, he could not offer a sense of how its readers responded to the Volunteer during most of Rolfe’s editorship. Moreover, Bessie probably thought more highly of some of the poetic contributions, at least; he wrote political poetry himself, and in 1952 he edited The Heart of Spain, an anthology of fiction, nonfiction, and poetry that included at least two poems first published in the Volunteer and many other works of a similar nature.

Sandor Voros also derides the Volunteer in his memoir, American Commissar. Writing of a period prior to his own involvement with the paper, Voros recalls, “Ed Rolfe . . . gets hysterical in Barcelona and sends us truckloads of two-page special editions, one after the other, giving us not news nor information, which we crave, but deluging us, à la Pasionaria, with shrill feminine screams of exhortation fathered by desperate fear” (qtd in Weintraub 241). This assessment comments only on the special issues, admittedly hysterical in tone, that Rolfe produced during the panicky Great Retreats in March 1938, and does not give any sense of the prior seven months of his editorship. Historian Cecil D. Eby, in his detailed but cynical account of the American volunteers, follows Voros’ lead in focusing on the two-page broadsides. He also calls Rolfe a “poetaster,” a label that the scholarship of
Cary Nelson and Michael Thurston should effectively dispel; and he scoffs at two examples of military how-to articles in “Rolfe’s news sheet,” failing to note that Rolfe was no longer editor when those articles appeared (in May and June 1938).28

On the other hand, mention of the Volunteer in some surviving correspondence suggests more positive reviews. On two occasions, Rolfe mentions to his wife with satisfaction that the paper is popular with the men.29 On another occasion, former editor Ralph Bates, now back in the States, had met Mary and complimented Rolfe’s work on the Volunteer. Rolfe writes back,

It’s good to know that he thinks I’m OK; but I get greater satisfaction these days from other things, and from other men. . . . To hear comrades from the American battalions say they look forward to the next issue of the Volunteer (which is rare, because men in war are concerned with more elemental and basic things—but it does happen occasionally)—that too is a measure of praise that warms me more than anything else can. (Letter to Mary 1 Nov. 1937).

The fact that Rolfe comes across as modest and often self-deprecatory in his letters suggests that these accounts of others’ praise should be taken as genuine rather than self-aggrandizing.

In particular, the special anniversary number (14 October 1937) celebrating the first year of the International Brigades drew praise. Langston Hughes, back in Madrid after visiting troops in the village of Quinto (which had been recaptured from the Nationalists in September), jotted Rolfe a note saying that “all the fellows liked the anniversary issue of the

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28 Weintraub, in his study of the literary aspect of the war, draws directly from Bessie’s and Voros’ accounts when discussing the Volunteer.
29 The first of these letters is dated 8 November 1937; the other is undated but was probably written in February 1938.
Volunteer very much.” Dr. Irving Busch, commander of the American hospitals, wrote the following letter to the Volunteer staff:

Congratulations on the splendid special anniversary number.

Everybody at Villa Paz was tremendously impressed with the make-up and the contents.

Many copies are being sent home by the patients and personnel who feel that the “Volunteer” is one of the finest publications in Spain.

Compliments from the U.S. on the paper in general came from Ralph Bates, as mentioned, and from the poet Muriel Rukeyser. Malcolm Cowley also wrote that he thought Rolfe had been doing “quite a good job with the Volunteer for Liberty” (Letter to Rolfe).

These various readers’ comments are helpful, but with a lack of convincing evidence in either direction, evaluating the Volunteer for Liberty under Rolfe’s editorship in terms of its reception is a limited approach. It is perhaps more fruitful to consider the paper in terms of the type of publication it was, what it seems to have tried to accomplish, and the means it employed to do so.

Conclusion

To some extent, the surviving contradictory responses to the Volunteer mirror the lack of consensus about the very nature of the International Brigades and the experience of the men who served with them. Many of the English-speaking volunteers became disillusioned with the brigade leadership, especially the political commissariat. Some men deserted, and many tried to desert after particularly grueling battles (or slaughters) such as Jarama and Brunete, only to be led back to the lines at gunpoint. Some of the disillusioned veterans aired their complaints publicly after they returned to the U.S. in periodical articles.
and in testimony before the House Un-American Activities Committee. Yet many others, including Edwin Rolfe, remained steadfastly committed to the Spanish cause even after facing battlefield defeats personally; these veterans tended to downplay or ignore whatever doubts they had about the brigade leadership and the Communist Party. Many of them participated for decades in the stateside Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Battalion (VALB), which has served as the “official” voice of the one-time volunteers and has worked to protect the group’s reputation from the criticism of the disillusioned and—especially during the Cold War—charges of un-Americanism.

Even with decades of hindsight and reams of documentary evidence, scholars cannot reach a consensus about the volunteers’ experience. Reading the two most recent accounts of the American volunteers, for example, is an exercise in frustration because they paint such strikingly different pictures of the American volunteer effort. Cecil D. Eby’s Comrades and Commissars: The Lincoln Battalion in the Spanish Civil War, a reworking of his earlier Between the Bullet and the Lie: American Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War, is highly readable and well documented, but takes an overwhelmingly cynical view of the Americans’ service in Spain, emphasizing the ineptitude of the brigade leadership, and the extent and pointlessness of American losses. Elements of political commitment are generally sneered at; Eby chooses his details to make the American Communist Party look silly and the Communists in Spain look sinister. One gets the sense from reading Eby’s work that the American volunteers were mere dupes for a ruthless and self-serving Communist bureaucracy. On the other hand, Peter Carroll’s The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade: Americans in the Spanish Civil War paints a heroic picture of the American volunteers, emphasizing their political commitment in laudatory terms. Carroll generally
acts as an apologist for the brigade and the Communist Party, working to discredit the negative accounts of disillusioned volunteers whenever possible. Both authors are working from essentially the same body of historical information, and neither could be accused of outright misinformation; but their accounts are so obviously slanted based on the authors’ preconceptions of their subject that any reader seeking a clear picture should not, perhaps, read the one book without also reading the other.\footnote{Since most published histories of the American volunteers are sympathetic to them and to the Communists, Eby’s book, for all its bias, is particularly useful as a counterbalance.}

In any case, should one wish to start from a position similar to Eby’s, it would be easy to read the Volunteer for Liberty simply as a propaganda organ, produced by the International Brigades’ Communist command and having as little genuine relationship to the experiences of the soldiers reading it as so much Communist propaganda had to fact—which is to say, virtually none. Its poetic content could be interpreted as merely the employment of an emotionally effective means by which to convince men, already duped into fighting for the benefit of the Moscow-controlled Comintern’s sinister ends, to continue in their role as cannon fodder. Its tendency to memorialize could likewise be viewed as nothing more than another example of Communist martyr-making, produced cynically to convince volunteer soldiers and readers in the Western democracies to keep giving whatever they had to give.

Unquestionably the Volunteer was a propaganda organ, both in the sense that we use the term today—the employment of lies and manipulation for persuasion—and in the sense that a Communist reader of the 1930s would have used it—as a legitimate and necessary means of creating appropriate ideological awareness among workers of both friendly and enemy origin, and a way to counter the (misleading) propaganda of the enemy. Even the common volunteer soldier, who, with a few exceptions, already had a considerably high level
of ideological awareness, would have recognized that the paper was functioning in the second sense. If some readers did get frustrated with such material, especially as the war dragged on and disillusionment set in, they nonetheless had become familiar with such ideologically-charged persuasive discourse long before they journeyed to Spain; for most volunteers, their involvement with radical groups in the U.S. would have been filled with that kind of discourse.

But there was plenty of manipulation of fact, and even outright lying, in the Volunteer's content as well. Rolfe’s first issue, discussed above, includes one of many examples of almost ludicrous Communist spin-control, its lead article being just a small instance in a much larger effort to conceal the disaster of the Battle of Brunete. As historian Antony Beevor writes, “Flying in the face of reality, the communists declared to the world at large that Brunete had been a victory. In the XV International Brigade, commissars told their men that it ‘had totally vindicated the active war policy of the Negrín government . . . .’” Such blatant distortions represent what Beevor calls “the communists’ obsession with propaganda” (285). Even more egregious are the numerous articles appearing in the Volunteer that rail against Trotskyists and report on arrests of Trotsky-fascist traitors in Barcelona and elsewhere. These types of articles are also part of the larger impulse toward paranoia and political opportunism being handed down from Moscow, and they are repulsive to read from a modern perspective—a perspective, to be fair, that is informed by an understanding of Stalinist crimes that few English-speaking volunteers would have had access to.

Propaganda is largely the point of a soldiers’ newspaper, however. Building morale and reminding the soldiers why they fight are the common purposes of such publications, and
manipulation of reality to a greater or lesser extent comes with that particular territory. One useful analogue to the Volunteer is the Stars and Stripes, the official newspaper of the American Expeditionary Force during World War I and immediately after. It is useful because it was also produced by the military command, and therefore represents only viewpoints and interpretations sanctioned by that command. That the command in question is the U.S. Army, not the Communist-run International Brigades, means that the paper differed dramatically from the Volunteer in terms of political orientation. However, much of the content functioned in similar ways. There was news from home on politics and the prohibition debate and other topics. There were cartoons and other humorous items. There were articles on proper conduct and the need for censorship of correspondence. And there was poetry—a lot of it, mostly amateur verse written by soldiers that ranged from the silly to the sentimental. “When The Stars and Stripes began publication,” one commentator notes, “American forces were dispersed throughout the Western Front, often mixed at the unit level with British, French, and Italian forces. The newspaper's mission was to provide these scattered troops with a sense of unity and an understanding of their part in the overall war effort” (Serial). It also emphasized the level of support from the home front and reiterated, over and over and in various ways, the essential rightness and purity of the American cause. The front page of one issue, for example, boasts a large pencil sketch of a mother comforting two young children; above the drawing is the title “What We’re Fighting For,” and below it a poem that begins, “This is what we’re fighting for / That the girl on mother’s knee / May not know the scourge of war, / Shock on land and shock on sea” (1-4). Much of the content cast the AEF’s mission as a righteous crusade, often with frankly religious overtones: one cartoon
depicts two Germans gesturing toward the crucified Christ, with one saying, “Oh, look, Papa! Another of those Allies!” (Baldridge 8).

The other side of this equation was the effort to dehumanize and vilify the enemy. Cartoons did this frequently, as did atrocity stories with headlines and subheadings such as “Huns Starve and Ridicule U.S. Captives” and “Hun’s Brutal Policy Matter of Record / . . . Camera Proves Facts / Slaughter of Innocents Shown in Mass of Incontrovertible Evidence / Boy of 14 a Flaming Torch / Youth Set on Fire While Helpless Mother Looks On When Attempt to Hang Him Fails.” It has become a commonplace that the Allies’ reports of German atrocities during the Great War were often either fabricated or heavily exaggerated—to the point that they largely contributed to the negative connotation that the word “propaganda” currently carries. By comparison, the propagandistic elements of the Stars and Stripes hardly seem less blatant or less manipulative, from our detached perspective, than those of the Volunteer.

As far as the American cause was concerned, though, the tone of the paper was almost entirely positive. Victories were proclaimed loudly, losses downplayed. In reviewing the paper, the New York Times noted that “Its spirit is noticeably more cheerful than that of most newspapers. It gives the impression that the Expeditionary Force is a lighthearted organization” (“No Gloom” 12). Indeed, with a few exceptions, one could read the paper and hardly realize that any Americans were getting killed, were watching their friends get killed, were struggling with battlefield fear and shell shock. All of this was calculated to shape the perceptions not just of the soldiers reading the paper, but that of their families back home as well. Like the Volunteer, the Stars and Stripes had a secondary audience: the paper frequently carried ads encouraging its readers to mail the paper to the States in lieu of or in
addition to their personal letters, in a clear effort to export its rosy picture of the war situation back to the home front.

If the lighthearted feel of the *Stars and Stripes* derives from its function as a propaganda organ, it also reflects something of the circumstances of the AEF. As Afred E. Cornebise notes in an introduction to his collection of doughboy verse, the Americans came late in the war and rather quickly saw the tide turn in their favor. “By the summer [of 1918],” Cornbise writes, “the Germans were in retreat. . . . Though the American troops fought some sharp engagements, in certain instances sustaining heavy casualties, they were largely spared the long, dreary, grinding punishment of trench warfare” (xii). A persistently positive tone could be maintained more easily in the face of victories and progress.

The international volunteer’s experience in Spain was quite different than that of the American doughboy’s in the Great War, and the thread of loss and sorrow woven through the more upbeat prose in the *Volunteer* reflects a need to acknowledge something of the truth of that experience, if in a controlled way. Politics aside, the experience of soldiers in war is ultimately an experience of brotherhood. The material that creates the elegiac tone in the *Volunteer* expresses that human aspect as it functions within a historically specific context: the highly politicized, deeply idealistic, but ultimately failed war effort of the Spanish Republic.

Cary Nelson has noted that “in the aftermath of the war, . . . exile, elegy, and loss took over Spanish Civil War discourse,” and poets took on the task of “keep[ing] the memory alive,” of “maintain[ing] witness through the years” (“International Context” 35). The *Volunteer for Liberty* was ahead of that trend. Because they were facing loss so personally while the war was raging, Rolfe and the contributors to the *Volunteer* had found a need for
elegizing well before the Spanish cause had been lost. Though the larger hope of victory had not died, their poems and memorial items were already working during the war to do what postwar poetry would do in the decades to follow—keeping the memory alive and shaping its meaning.

It is on this note that the original Volunteer for Liberty came to its end, its final number appearing just after several dramatic and, for many of the departing volunteers, emotional farewell ceremonies. The wartime Volunteer concluded with a final long issue (twenty pages) filled mostly with articles lauding the achievements of the international volunteers and working to establish their legacy. The penultimate page of text was devoted to T. H. Wintringham’s long poem “Monument.” Poised on the very end point of the war for the volunteers, where the war itself transitioned from experience to memory, it serves as a testament to the place that poetry could hold for these fighting men. The opening verse paragraph signals an emphasis on memorial for the international volunteers:

WHEN FROM THE deep sky
And digging in the harsh earth,
When by words hard as bullets,
Thoughts simple as death,
You have won victory,
People of Spain,
You will remember the free men who fought beside you,
enduring and dying with you, the strangers
Whose breath was your breath. (1-9)

The speaker envisions a great monument for this sacrifice, constructed with materials—

“Metal and earth”—from places all over Spain. The poem is full of specific place names that resonate with memory for the soldier-reader:

Bring to the tower, to its building,
From New Castille,

31 A much different stateside version, produced by the VALB and eventually renamed simply the Volunteer, would continue sporadically to the present day.
From Madrid, the indomitable breast-work,
Earth of a flower-bed in the Casa del Campo,
Shell-splinters from University City,
Shell-casing from the Telephonica,
Bring from Old Castille, Santander, Segovia,
Sandbags of earth dug out of our parapets
And a false coin stamped in Burgos by a traitor. (28-36)

Images of death abound in the physical contributions to the monument. There is earth in
which “Your blood and ours was mingled, . . . earth to which your sons and strangers / Gave
up the same breath” (25-27); earth “from the bullring / Where they shot the prisoners in
Badajoz” (43-44); earth “from Durruti’s grave” (64); and metal from “The barrel of a very
old rifle found in the hills / Beside a skeleton” (70-71). And for all this, the final note rings
triumphant:

Take then these metals, under the deep sky
Melt them together; take these pieces of earth
And mix them; add your bullets,
And memories of death:
You have won victory,
People of Spain,
And the tower into which your earth is built, and
Your blood and ours, shall state Spain’s
Unity, happiness, strength; it shall face the breath
Of the east, of the dawn, of the futures when there
will be no more strangers….. (75-85)

John Muste notes of this poem (in 1966) that “there is an almost painfully obvious
irony in the fact that Generalissimo Franco has created such a monument to honor the war
dead” (85). Indeed, the tragedy of Spain, and the greater tragedy of the twentieth century, is
that such an idealistic vision of “Unity, happiness, strength . . . when there / will be no more
strangers” was not only illusory, but seems an almost absurd hope in wake of the Second
World War, with its destruction of tens of millions of human beings, and the Cold War, with
its real threat of total human annihilation. But the point is not about that kind of truth, that is,
whether the vision became reality. The point is the vision. We can perhaps only imagine the psychological need that the volunteer soldier might have had, upon leaving a land he had come so far and sacrificed so much to defend, to believe that his loss had value, that it would represent something important even in the face of the imminent collapse of the Cause. We can imagine, at least, that that need must have been strong, and it is on this ground that such poetry and the related memorial content in the Volunteer must be understood.

Muste argues that “the difficulty with poems like ‘Monument’ is not so much that the victory they forecast never came, but that they do not convince us that their victory would have been all they said, or that it would indeed have justified the sacrifices” (86). But we, the future arbiters of aesthetic value, are not the ones who were supposed to be convinced by such poetry. What mattered was that poems like “Monument” and the other memorial content in the Volunteer for Liberty could have helped to shape the volunteer soldier’s chaotic experience of war and shattering experience of death into some kind of coherent pattern of meaning.
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VITA

Gregory S. Baptista

EDUCATION

Ph.D., English, The Pennsylvania State University, December 2009
Specialties: American Modernism; the Spanish Civil War; the intersection of
literature and politics in the 1930s; periodical culture; Ernest Hemingway; F.
Scott Fitzgerald; archival research.


B.A., English, Summa Cum Laude, University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, June 1996.

PUBLICATIONS

“Between Worlds: Gargoyle (1921-22); This Quarter (1925-32); Tambour (1929-30).”

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Masculine Rhetoric.” The 13th Biennial International Hemingway Society
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Spain Prior to the Civil War.” Theory vs. Theory Mini-Conference, The
Pennsylvania State University, December 2005.

AWARDS

The Milton B. Dolinger Graduate Fellowship in the World War II Era, College of the
Liberal Arts, PSU, Fall 2007-Spring 2008.


College of the Liberal Arts Dissertation Support Award, Research Grant, PSU, Spring
2007.

Philip Young Endowment in American Literature, Research Grant, Department of