

The Quest for Truth in Spain : Lights and Shadows of Hemingway's "Spanish" Works

Jorge García Arroyo

Keywords: Truth, bullfighting, duende, Spain, Spanish culture

Introduction

Hemingway always had a clear objective as a writer, and that was to tell things as they were, that is, to seek the truth in his stories. Of course this was no exception in his Spanish-themed works. Already in *Death in the Afternoon* he writes about it: "(...) but the real thing, the sequence of motion and fact which made the emotion and which would be as valid in a year or in ten years or, with luck if you stated it purely enough, always, was beyond me and I was working very hard to try to get it (4)." Hemingway, in works such as *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and *the Sun also Rises*, carried out a quest for the truth of the Spanish reality in order to satiate the passion he felt for the country. Therefore the question here is whether or not Hemingway succeeded in such an undertaking. Of course, this is directly related to how the Spaniards see Hemingway's stories about Spain. There are several studies about the reception of Hemingway's works in Spain, among which the works of Douglas LaPrade and Lisa Ann Twomey stand out, but none of them manages to reach a conclusion as to whether Hemingway succeeded in telling the truth about Spain. So, through the analysis of reviews and comments on Hemingway's works by Spanish authors, critics and even journalists over the years, I will try to clarify whether Hemingway was able to describe the truth about Spanish reality.

1. Hemingway, "el amigo de España": His Works in Spain During the First Stage (1924-1931)

Despite the adoration that Hemingway professed for Spain, the process of publishing his works in the Iberian country was not comparable to that devotion. Most of them obtained a Spanish edition several years after their original publication, as is the case of the short story "The Killers" which was published in 1932 in Spain (five years after its original appearance in the pages of the *Scribner's Magazine*). This story was published as part of an anthology of American authors, including Hemingway's friend John Dos Passos. According to Douglas LaPrade, the book's preface was written by Julián Gómez García, also known as Julián Gorkin (55, 56). Since 1922 Gorkin had been a revolutionary journalist in the pay of the Comintern, and in 1929 he broke his engagements with Moscow to reconvert himself into an anti-leninist marxist writer and activist. Therefore, the inclusion of Hemingway and Dos Passos in this anthology might have to do with the fact that in Spain, or at least in communist circles, they had an idea of Hemingway's and Dos Passos' anti-fascist stance. In fact, the year of publication of the anthology coincides with the

failed insurrection of General Sanjurjo against the government of the Spanish Republic. Sanjurjo was exiled to Portugal after the failed coup, but from there he became the moral authority for many fascist conspiracies against the legitimate government that would take place over the few next years and that would lead to the uprising of General Mola and General Franco in July 1936, which in turn would be the trigger for the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. Gorkin, aware of this convulsive political environment of Republican Spain, could have chosen Hemingway and Dos Passos as young references of realist literature to vindicate their commitment to depict the “truth” of not only Spain but also of the “brutal” world of the time threatened by fascism and other forms of tyranny. This is evidenced by the following commentary on Hemingway’s short story, made by Gorkin in the book’s preface:

Ernest Hemingway has not yet, to my knowledge, been translated into Spanish. Yet he is one of the most powerful young novelists—he is now thirty-four—in America today [...] his novels and short stories are so realistic and “true” that they are commonly described as harsh and even cynical [...] [his novel, *The Sun Also Rises*] is raw, but full of observation and truth. In his short stories and novels, he outlines other harsh and cruel topics. “Our time is brutal”, Hemingway justifies himself (XVII-XVIII).

Although the story included in the anthology, “The Killers”, is not about Spain, it is considered as a crude, real and full of cynicism description of the time of violence that devastated the US in the 1920s, specially in cities like Chicago, where Hemingway lived as a young man. Therefore, this story is definitely a representation of the brutality of the world that Gorkin and Hemingway refer to in the commentary. But of even more interest is Gorkin’s assessment of Hemingway’s works in general, describing them as “so realistic and true”, and of the *Sun Also Rises* in particular, labelling it as “full of observation and truth.” Therefore, for Julián Gorkin, Hemingway’s works sought the truth of the world, and what is more, he admits that *The Sun Also Rises*, Hemingway’s first novel centered on Spain, also manages to reach the truth. This is a fact to be taken into account because in one of the first contacts of an Ernest Hemingway’s work on Spain with a Spanish critic, not only does it come out unscathed, but it is also praised for the way this novel is “full of truth.” And all this without *The Sun Also Rises* having been officially published in Spain. One could think that this benevolent image of Hemingway and his works could simply be limited to the leftist circle to which Gorkin belonged, since they could ideologically sympathize with the American author, but the truth is that when, in the same year of 1932 Hemingway published his first great treatise on bullfighting, *Death in the Afternoon*, the Spanish critics, specially the bullfighting ones, spoke good things about the new book by the American author, as can be observed in the following quote by *Uno al Sesgo*, pen-name of Tomás Orts-Ramos, one of the most important corrido critics in the time:

[Hemingway] is really someone to take into account, and *Death in the Afternoon* is a miracle of art [in which] the writer manages, intermingling the technique of bullfighting with the description of the spectacle, to make a treatise on bullfighting, a history of the *corridos*, an examination of the great bullfighting figures past and present, a complete study of the brave bull, in such an entertaining way, with such a discreet use of the anecdotal, that the pages turn, the reading goes on, and the one who reads, given over to the pleasure of reading nothing else, does not find out that he is "finding out" how and why they fight, what the bullfighters are, what the bulls are [...] others before Hemingway have tried it, none with such perfect knowledge, nor with such absolute assimilation and understanding of bullfighting (3-4).

Uno al Sesgo also praises Hemingway's writing technique and although there had been other American authors such as Waldo Frank and Richard Ford who had already written about bullfighting, for Orts-Ramos Hemingway is the first to do so with a "perfect knowledge and absolute understanding of bullfighting." This, therefore, could be understood as Hemingway being the only one who transmits the truth of bullfighting to his readers.

Despite Hemingway was not yet known by the general public it could be concluded that during Hemingway's first stage in Spain, his work managed to have a good image in the Iberian country. Also, aside from this good image, the Spanish critics of the time confirmed that Hemingway sought and conveyed the truth about Spain in his books.

2. Hemingway the Traitor: His Works in Spain During the Second Stage (1937-1946)

Hemingway stayed in Spain for several months in 1937 and 1938 for his work as a correspondent in the Spanish civil war. In this period of time he was sympathetic to the Republican side, and supported it unconditionally, so much that he firmly believed that the Republic would win the war. But it did not, and in 1939, with the war over, General Franco imposed a fascist regime in Spain. Censorship of works that could go against the fascist government was common in the new Spain, and of course all this affected the reception of Hemingway's works in the Iberian country.

Hemingway was considered an element opposed to Franco's fascist regime, so of course the image of the author and his work had worsened considerably in comparison to the previous stage at least in the eyes of the Spanish government, as shown in this review of *The Sun also Rises*, which the Navarrese journalist Ángel María Pascual wrote for the newspaper *Arriba España* (a newspaper sympathetic to Franco's government) on June 28th 1946:

One of those tourists that used to come at that time (summer 1925) on the blue buses from Biarritz, has decided to record his impressions in a thick book, written on the table of a café,

smelling the gasoline of village buses, in a city already vanished to history. Hemingway enjoys prestige in American literature. But getting it there must be very easy because *Fiesta* exudes unimaginable idiocy. When he wants to present an ironic dialogue, the reader can only yawn [...] the only serious thing in this setting is Pamplona, with its main square, its night walk and its cathedral, where the protagonist, finally must kneel. Despite Hemingway's recklessness, our city, and the mountains of Navarre are, in general, well described. The only surprise is a forest of cork oaks that the author saw in the Erro pass, and the windows of our cathedral, so Spanish to us, with diluted shadows under the glare of the higher and smaller windows. Hemingway also sees mountains with brown shadows everywhere. Could it be his glasses? If the novelist had reached Mendigorria, he would have seen black mountains like those in the fantasies of his countryman Edgar Allan Poe (LaPrade 64).

As Lisa Ann Twomey points out, this review does not make a deep and critical analysis of the novel itself, it simply criticizes Hemingway's lack of knowledge about certain aspects of Navarre and Pamplona, which in this case Pascual is right, although we could say that these are minutiae that would not represent the true Spanish feeling about Hemingway (Twomey 49). In addition, Pascual writes for a newspaper related to Franco, so any criticism of Hemingway responds to what the Spanish government thought of the American author. What is most interesting about this review is that possible parallelism that Pascual makes with Poe because that could include Hemingway in the list of American writers, such as Poe himself or Herman Melville, who built an imaginary of Spain in their works based on the Black Legend. The fact that Hemingway also made use of negative stereotypes about Spain can be seen in the following passage from *For Whom the Bell Tolls* in which Robert Jordan makes a revealing reflection on Spanish people and their "killing sacrament" and relates it to Holy Tribunal of the Inquisition, a theme par excellence used by the enemies of Spain in the Black Legend:

We do it coldly but they do not, nor ever have. It is their extra sacrament. Their old one that they had before the new religion came from the far end of the Mediterranean, the one they have never abandoned but only suppressed and hidden to bring it out again in wars and inquisitions. They are the people of the Auto de Fé; the act of faith. Killing is something one must do, but ours are different from theirs (286-87).

Robert Jordan makes this reflection in reference to the state of excitement felt by Agustín, one of the Spanish guerrillas with whom Jordan works, at having been on the verge of killing several enemies. For Jordan Americans feel nothing when they kill, they do it coldly, but for the Spaniards the act of killing is something almost sacred, which is so much theirs that it was not implanted by Christianity and they bring

it up in important events such as wars and the trials of the Inquisition. As for the wars, Hemingway could be referring to the cruel atrocities that, according to the enemies of Spain, the Tercios of Flanders and other historical Spanish military units committed during the conflicts in which they were engaged, the so-called furia española, Spanish fury. And of course he relates all this sacredness of killing with the Inquisition that, as I pointed out before, was the most recurrent issue used by Spain's enemies to undermine its image and make it look like a country of religious zealots. So it can be possible that Hemingway also had his vision of Spain a little bit biased by the Black legend. On the other hand, it is also certain that by calling it a sacrament, at the same time he gives it a mystic halo that might well have to do with the awareness of the Spanish regarding death as something natural, as a positive sign. This acceptance of death by Spanish people was defined as duende (mysterious and ineffable charm) by poet Federico García Lorca, and according to David F. Ritcher, the duende is present in Hemingway's Spanish works (113-126). Therefore, in this reflection put in Jordan's mouth, Hemingway hints at his predilection for the duende (that is where his passion for bullfight and Spain comes from), which according with Lorca makes Spaniards a people of death and open to death, and the American author mixes it with some overtones of the negative ideas about Spain that were perhaps instilled in him by his predecessors in the difficult task of describing Spain and how this country feels. In light of this comment done by Jordan, it might be that Hemingway had the real image of Spain a little distorted. At the moment he writes *For Whom the Bell Tolls* Spain is already a fascist regime and because he might feel resentment for it, he lets himself be influenced by negative topical ideas of the past that no longer represented the Spain he knew in 20s and the 30s. Despite the fact that Catholicism was still an important pillar of Spanish society, in 1931 and thanks to the support of president Manuel Azaña, Spain was declared a secular state, in addition to approving a decree that secularized education. Other aspect that had nothing to do with a fanatical religious country was the legalization of divorce in 1932.

On the other hand, the theme of the duende and death belongs to the mythical and romantic Spain that Hemingway met through the environment of bullfighting and flamenco, where the duende "dwells". And therefore it could be possible that Ángel María Pascual was subtly and ironically hinting to all this when relating Poe to Hemingway in his review of *The Sun Also Rises*.

Nor was there entirely positive criticism from authors who supported the Republic. The most famous example is the article that Arturo Barea, one of the most eminent Spanish writers in exile of the time, wrote about *For Whom the Bell Tolls* for the English magazine *Horizon* in 1941. Barea initially praises Hemingway, pointing out that the novel is "written with an excellent technique of realism (Myers 323)." However, he accuses Hemingway of not making a veridic description of the Spain at war, because by "[R]eading *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, you will indeed come to understand some aspects of the Spanish character and life, but you will misunderstand more, and more important ones at that (Myers 326)." And he argues that the reason for this is that Hemingway only knows "his Spain" well. Barea explains that Pilar and

Pablo, belonging to the world of bullfighting and she being a gypsy and he a gipsyified man, could never have been the leaders of a guerrilla group composed of Castilian peasants in the Segovia mountains of the Sierra de Guadarrama (Myers 328). And this might be true because the gypsies during the conflict never took part in any of the factions, they saw the war as a problem of the payos (non-gypsy people). Also, with the beginning of hostilities most of them were expelled from their villages by both forces, Republicans and fascists, so this made it even more difficult for them to participate directly in the war. Pilar is an archetype of a woman of dubious morality in bullfighting circles that Hemingway could certainly have met during his stays in the country in the 1920s, and Pablo, a horse dealer for bullfights, is an even more common character in bullfighting Spain (Myers 329). Therefore it might be that Hemingway chose these characters, of great importance in the novel, based on models he knew from the Spain of the bull, but they could never have become guerrilla leaders in real life.

Barea also states that what is described in the famous tenth chapter of the novel, in which, through Pilar's flashback, it is told how Pablo orchestrated a systematic and planned massacre of all the fascists in his village as it were a capea, is a serious inconsistency regarding Spanish behavior: "Nobody except of course the few with diseased brains who must have existed, thought, or could have thought, of organizing a slaughter like a fiesta and of putting on festive clothes to get drunk on blood." (Myers 329). Barea might be right because there were no systematic and planned slaughterings directed by mere peasants during the war. Also, at the beginning of the conflict this kind of massacres were carried out mostly by the fascists. It is known that Hemingway with this chapter intended to show that in the Spanish Civil War both sides committed atrocities to denounce the senselessness of any war. However, in this case he was also unable to stick to the truth as was his intention when he began writing the novel. Instead, he built a narrative that was distant from the reality of the war, transforming it into the reality of, as Barea notes, "his Spain."

In this way Hemingway equated the atrocities of the fascists with those of the republicans, but disregarding the truth in the description of both, creating a vision of Spain that was only true for him.

3. Hemingway Strikes Back: A New Love Story Begins (1953-1959)

In 1948 *The Sun also Rises* was finally published in Spain. According to Douglas Laprade, this was a sign of certain openness in Spain and a relaxation of its censorship regarding the United States, a country that Franco's government saw as the main provider of aid to rebuild the country, devastated by the Civil War (47). In addition to this, the enormous success of *The Old Man and the Sea* published in 1952 in the US and the fact that Hemingway won the Pulitzer and the Nobel prize in 1954 gave way to Spanish critics and publishers to become much more centered in the work of the American author (Twomey 51,58). Therefore, from 1953 articles on Hemingway and his work began to appear in the Spanish press much more frequently. Also his works began to be published more regularly, for example, in 1954 *The Old Man and the Sea* was published in installments in the newspaper *Alcázar* (Twomey 75).

On the other hand, reviews and criticism of Hemingway's work were beginning to really evaluate the content of his writings, regardless of which side he was on the Civil War. In 1952 in an article on the American novel of the first half of the 20th century, the prestigious philologist and literary historian Francisco Ynduráin pointed out that "with Hemingway we are witnessing a decisive change in the stylistic aspect, which is perhaps the contribution of more consequences in modern literature, since its influence has been great both in America and Europe (68)". Despite acknowledging Hemingway as a great writer, Ynduráin does not believe that Hemingway describes the truth of Spain either, as it is clear from the following statement:

Out of the bullfights, Hemingway has not seen, has not been interested in almost anything else, except for the people and the landscape. Do not expect him to talk to you about our history, our art, thought or literature. His experience is voluntarily limited (67).

This is one more indication that even in 1952, for the Spanish critics, Hemingway had created his own portrait of the country based on the vision he had of "his Spain", as Barea pointed out years before.

As of 1953, Hemingway would visit Spain again and his tours and stays in the country would be covered by the Spanish press and media as never before, generally giving a positive image of the writer. Of course the author's most controversial works in relation to Francoist Spain, such as *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, were subject to censorship and published years later, but it is certain that Hemingway's image in Spain had considerably improved compared to the 1940s as revealed by a 1956 interview with Hemingway that was published in the newspaper *Arriba* in which he talks about that work and even about the civil war, but making it clear that he is only interested in literature. This interview is also significant because when the interviewer, Rodrigo Royo, praises Hemingway's style and tells him that he had taught everyone to write, the American writer replies by saying, "What you say could be true if Quevedo and Galdós had not existed before me (...) And if I had met Galdós before I would not have written *For Whom the Bell Tolls* because it would not have been necessary" (*Arriba* October 5th 1956). Apart from the good image that is given of Hemingway in this interview in which it is perceived that the Spanish people do not hold a grudge for his participation in the civil war, Hemingway names two of the greatest Spanish writers in history, so the readers can appreciate that the American author was not only interested in bullfighting but also in Spanish culture, and in this way, as Royo concludes in the interview, "Hemingway definitely understands Spain and the Spanish" (*Arriba* October 5th 1956).

In short, in this period Hemingway managed to have a much friendlier image than the one he had a decade before, and in addition his works were taken seriously by both the press and by literary critics. Furthermore, it seemed that the Spanish people were finally beginning to accept that Hemingway understood them, as we can see in the interview.

In 1960 his image would deteriorate again, at least in bullfighting circles, due to his impartial judgment of the “mano a mano” (competition) between bullfighters Antonio Ordóñez and Luis Miguel Dominguín, which was the main subject of *The Dangerous Summer*, published in installments in *Life Magazine* that year.

4. The longed recognition of Hemingway in Spain (1961-present)

Not even three weeks had passed since Hemingway’s death when the *Saturday Review* published a series of articles on Hemingway written by intellectuals from various countries, collected under the title “The World Weighs a Writer’s Influence.” In it, the Spanish philosopher exiled in England, Salvador de Madariaga, praises Hemingway’s style and works and also states that in order to write his works on Spain, “Hemingway was inside [Spain], living her life” (18). For Madariaga, Hemingway was also the sole American writer who had understood bullfighting “not as a sport, but as a spectacle, something unifying many arts”, and hence, he “may well have been the non-Spaniard who of all time has come closest to the core of this strange form of Spanish life” (18). Madariaga, unlike Barea, does not mention “Hemingway’s Spain”, and finally grants him the honor of understanding the country and its inhabitants.

In light of all this, it can be said that after Ernest Hemingway’s death it seems that his image in Spain was recovering. In 1968, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* was finally published in Spain, the very same year that Hemingway’s close friend, the journalist and writer José Luis Castillo-Puche published his tribute to the American author in the form of a large essay titled *Hemingway entre la vida y la muerte*. Of course, Castillo-Puche did not agree with the critics that had despised *For Whom the Bell Tolls* since in his opinion this novel can only be given birth by someone who feels an enormous love for Spain, who, therefore, displayed in that land a romantic epic pursuit of an ideal, that is to save the Republic from fascist hands (66). Despite acknowledging Hemingway’s mastery as a writer in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, Castillo-Puche admits that many times in the novel Hemingway delves into “his truth of Spain” in his longing to deepen in the tragic truth of this country. For example, Castillo-Puche, like Barea did, comments that in the geographical area where Hemingway locates the action of the novel, those episodes of sadistic and planned violence carried out by republican peasants never occurred as they appear in the celebrated chapter ten (170). Therefore, in accordance to this reflection, Castillo-Puche brings up the subject of Hemingway’s Spain and his knowledge of the country through only bullfighting again (chapter ten is a macabre corrida). And of course these inaccuracies, as we saw before, are true. However, Castillo-Puche does not give too much importance to these errors because he thinks *For Whom the Bell Tolls* was not a fictional expression of some episodes but an attempt at almost mystical communion with Spanish reality (166). Therefore from Castillo-Puche’s point of view this is the greatness of this novel and also what reveals the true reality of Spain (166-67).

With the publication of Castillo-Puche’s book, Hemingway’s fame in Spain was consolidated and the

issue of his supposed ignorance of the reality of Spain was settled.

Thanks to all this, numerous Spanish writers would take Hemingway as reference when writing their works. For example, Luis Goytisolo, considered one of the most important Spanish writers of the mid-twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, admitted to being influenced by Hemingway in his works. Furthermore, according to Lisa Ann Twomey, Goytisolo not only recognized Hemingway's influence on his narrative but also on that of his generation, authors of the stature of Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio and Carmen Martín Gaité who describe in their works the harsh reality of the Spanish postwar period (193). Therefore it is clear that Hemingway was finally acclaimed in Spain, and the Spanish authors themselves trusted the truth of Spain that he described in his books to build their own narratives.

Conclusion

Ernest Hemingway was personally, emotionally and artistically connected to the Spanish land and its people since he first visited the country in the 1920s. For the Spaniards, at first, Hemingway was a complete stranger, they only knew him in bullfighting circles and described him as a great American aficionado who understood and wrote well about bullfighting. In the forties, the censorship of the fascist regime made Hemingway become a kind of an enemy of the state, receiving negative reviews in pro-Franco newspapers and by Spanish authors in exile about the veracity of his vision of Spain. In the 1950s and 1960s, the aperture of Franco's regime and the fact that Hemingway was awarded with the Nobel Prize gave him a much more affable image and his works finally obtained the recognition they deserved in Spain. Hemingway thoroughly experienced the folkloric Spain of bullfighting and felt like his the sufferings and longings of the common people (he was hardly ever accompanied with intellectuals and writers) which led him to configure in his mind a Spain full of spirituality towards death (*duende*), a process that Spaniards are said to see as a matter of course, to which he added traces of romantic heroism typical of his conception of the world and some topics of the Black Legend, to offer a final image in his works that was slightly distorted from the reality of the country. This is Hemingway's truth about Spain, and since 1968 Spanish critics and writers accepted it.

Notes

¹ All quotations from Spanish authors and critics (except Angel María Pascual's) are my own translations.

² Poe's work had been known in Spain since the second half of the 19th century thanks to Baudelaire's translations, and even more so thanks to the revival that, above all, his poetry experienced in the 1920s thanks to the poet Antonio Machado, for which is not surprising that Pascual alludes to Poe in his article.

Works Cited

- Barea, Arturo. "Not Spain but Hemingway." *Horizon* 3 (May 1941). *Ernest Hemingway*. Ed. Jeffery Myers. New York: Routledge, 2009.
- Castillo-Puche, José Luis. *Hemingway Entre la Vida y la Muerte*. Barcelona: Ediciones Destino, 1968.
- Gorkin, Julián. "Prefacio". *10 Novelistas Americanos*. Madrid: Editorial Zeus, 1932.
- Hemingway, Ernest. *Death in the Afternoon*. New York: Scribner, 2004.
- . *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1940.
- Laprade, Douglas Edward. *Censura y Recepción de Hemingway en España*. Valencia: Publicacions de la Universitat de València, 2005.
- . *Hemingway & Franco*. Valencia: Universitat de València, 2007.
- Madariaga, Salvador de. "The World Weighs a Writer's Influence." *Sunday Review* Vol. 44 30 (1961): 18.
- Pascual, Ángel María. "Reseña de Fiesta Primera Parte". *Arriba España*: June 28, 1946. Douglas E. LaPrade. *Hemingway & Franco*. Valencia: Publicacions de la Universitat de València, 2007.
- Orts-Ramos, Tomás [Uno al Sesgo]. "Un Rato a Bibliografía II". *La Fiesta Brava* No. 314 (April 1933): 3-4.
- Ritcher, David F. "At Five in the Afternoon. Toward a Poetics of Duende in Bataille and Hemingway." *Hemingway's Spain. Imagining the Spanish World*. Ed. Carl P. Eby and Mark Cirino. Kent (OH): The Kent State UP. 2016.
- Roldán, Miguel Ángel. "Ernest Hemingway: Su Visión sobre la Guerra Civil Española." *Ab Initio* No. 9 (2014): 131-152.
- Royo, Rodrigo. "Las Pequeñas Confesiones de Hemingway." *Arriba* (October 5th 1956).
- Twomey, Lisa Ann. *Hemingway en la Crítica y en la Ficción de la España de Posguerra*. Valencia: Publicacions de la Universitat de València, 2012.
- Ynduráin, Francisco. "La Novela Norteamericana en los Últimos Treinta Años." *Arbor* Vol. 22 77-80 (1962): 67.