Alberto Lázaro
University of Alcalá, Spain

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The Re-Creation of the Spanish Civil War in Recent Irish Historical Fiction

ABSTRACT

The Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) captured worldwide interest, generating a wealth of literature across multiple genres. In Ireland, this conflict sparked fervent debate, reflecting the nation's own history of civil strife, with Irish volunteers joining both sides of the Spanish conflict. While conventional narratives often oversimplify the war as a clash of opposing ideologies, certain authors endeavour to offer nuanced portrayals that transcend binary interpretations. Drawing upon Kate McLoughlin's insights into war representation, as delineated in *Authoring War* (2011), and Laura Saxton's exploration of "accuracy" and "authenticity" in historical fiction, this article analyses three recent Irish historical novels – Dermot Bolger's *The Family on Paradise Pier* (2005), Maurice Leitch's *Gone to Earth* (2019), and Anamaría Crowe Serrano's *In the Dark* (2021) – to explore how they re-create the complexities of the Spanish Civil War, examining their thematic depth, historical accuracy and narrative authenticity.

Keywords: Spanish Civil War, Dermot Bolger, Maurice Leitch, Anamaría Crowe Serrano, historical fiction

Španska državljanska vojna v sodobnem irskem zgodovinskem romanu

IZVLEČEK

Španska državljanska vojna (1936–1939) je pritegnila svetovno zanimanje in spodbudila nastanek bogatega nabora literarnih del različnih žanrov. Na Irskem je ta konflikt sprožil vroče razprave, ki so odražale lastno zgodovino državljanskih sporov, saj so se irski prostovoljci pridružili obema stranema v španskem konfliktu. Medtem ko konvencionalne pripovedi vojno pogosto poenostavljeno obravnavajo kot spopad nasprotujočih si ideologij, se nekateri avtorji trudijo izpostaviti nianse, ki presegajo binarne interpretacije. Na podlagi razprave o upodabljanju vojne *Authoring War* (2011) Kate McLoughlin in raziskave Laure Saxton o »točnosti« in »avtentičnosti« v zgodovinskih romanih, ta članek analizira tri sodobne irske zgodovinske romane: *The Family on Paradise Pier* (2005) Dermota Bolgerja, *Gone to Earth* (2019) Maurica Leitcha in *In the Dark* (2021) Anamaríe Crowe Serrano. Namen članka je pokazati, kako ti romani na novo zarisujejo kompleksnost španske državljanske vojne, ter preučiti njihovo tematsko poglobljenost, zgodovinsko točnost in avtentičnost pripovedi.

Ključne besede: španska državljanska vojna, Dermot Bolger, Maurice Leitch, Anamaría Crowe Serrano, zgodovinski roman

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1 Introduction[1]

Since its outbreak in July 1936, the Spanish Civil War has captivated the attention of historians, journalists, novelists, poets and intellectuals worldwide. Recognizing its potential for world-historical significance, these diverse voices have produced a substantial body of literature on the subject. Anne Sebba, in her book *Battling for News: The Rise of the Woman Reporter* (1994), aptly described the Spanish Civil War as "the biggest world story" of its time (95). Originating as a military revolt against the Republican government of Spain, this conflict evolved into a brutal civil war with two distinct factions. On one side were the Nationalists, primarily composed of Falangists (Spanish fascists), monarchists, conservative elements, and significant portions of the military, while the Republicans, loyal to the government, comprised urban workers, agricultural labourers, and segments of the educated middle class with diverse political affiliations, including liberalism, socialism, communism, anarchism and nationalism. This conflict has often been portrayed as simply the confrontation between the two ancestral Spains[2] – clerical, absolutist and reactionary versus secular, constitutional and progressive. Nevertheless, some scholars and writers have moved beyond this reductionist interpretation and introduced the concept of the "third Spain", which encapsulates a significant portion of the populace who sought to distance themselves from the fervent militancy of either side. These were people of peace, from diverse social backgrounds and ideologies who, nevertheless, endured the war's devastating consequences.[3]

The Spanish Civil War also sparked a heated debate in Ireland, initially perceived as a dichotomy between a Christian crusade against international communism[4] and the defence of modern democracy against international fascism.[5] This debate echoed Ireland's tumultuous history, including the eleven-month civil war following the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921. Ireland found itself divided once more between supporters of Franco's rebellion and those sympathetic to the left-wing Spanish Republican government, with Irish volunteers joining both sides of the conflict. In late 1936, the so-called Irish Brigade sailed to Spain to fight alongside Franco's forces under the command of Eoin O'Duffy (1892–1944), the leader of a paramilitary organization known as the Blueshirts, which cultivated connections with international fascism.[6] Concurrently, left-wing volunteers, led by former IRA member Frank Ryan, enlisted in the communist-organized International Brigades to support the Republican

[1] The research leading to the publication of this essay was supported by funding from the Ministerio de Ciencia e Investigación under the 2022 programme of grants for research projects (Reference PID2022-140013NB-I00).

[2] The acclaimed Spanish poet Antonio Machado, in a much-quoted poem written decades before the war, in 1912, warned infant Spaniards that they were born into a divided country and that one of the "two Spains" would freeze their heart (2023, 115).

[3] For details about this idea of the third Spain, see the historian Paul Preston's series of short biographies titled *Las tres Españas del 36* (1998) and Alfonso Botti's *Historias de las "terceras Españas"* (2023). Similarly, the early collection of stories about the Spanish Civil War by the journalist Manuel Chaves Nogales, *A sangre y fuego* (1937), exemplifies the horrific experiences of victims who suffered from the cruelty of both sides of the conflict.

[4] For instance, the *Irish Independent*, which gave its political allegiance to the Fine Gael party, reacted to the persecution of the Spanish Church and saw the conflict as a clash between the atheistic Reds and the Church. This position was to become the dominant one in the Irish Free State (Bell 1969, 140).

[5] See, for instance, Peadar O'Donnell's chronicle *Salud! An Irishman in Spain* (1937).

[6] For details about this organization, see Maurice Manning's *The Blueshirts* (1971), Mike Cronin's *The Blueshirts and Irish Politics* (1997), and John Newsinger's article "Blackshirts, Blueshirts, and the Spanish Civil War" (2001).

cause.[7] Scholars like Sarah Heinz (2012) have examined the interest of twentieth-century Irish writers in the Spanish Civil War, and how their representation of the Spanish conflict mirrors violent struggles at home. Heinz highlights poets such as Somhairle Macalastair and Ewart Milne who sympathized with the Republicans and celebrated the fight in Spain, along with Charles Donnelly's disillusioned perspective in his poems and Neil Jordan's historical novel *Sunrise with Sea Monster* (1994), which "centres on the futility and destructiveness of armed conflict everywhere" (Heinz 2012, 93). In recent years, the Spanish Civil War has resurfaced as a thematic backdrop in Irish historical novels, including Dermot Bolger's *The Family on Paradise Pier* (2005), Maurice Leitch's *Gone to Earth* (2019) and Anamaría Crowe Serrano's *In the Dark* (2021).

These novels reflect meticulous research, with some even including prefaces and acknowledgements citing their bibliographical references, demonstrating a commitment to historical accuracy. This article will examine the representation of the Spanish Civil War in these three recent Irish novels by Bolger, Leitch and Crowe Serrano, exploring how they re-create this conflict and whether they perpetuate simplistic dualistic views of the two Spains or offer fresh perspectives. Are they faithful to historical accuracy, or do they misrepresent the past? What themes do they emphasize, and do they reflect the ideological struggles of Spain's war? Do they advocate for a particular side or political stance? To address these questions, we draw upon insights from Kate McLoughlin's *Authoring War* (2011), which analyses how authors grapple with representing violence and loss in wartime narratives, contending that war resists straightforward representation (2011, 6–7) due to its inherently authorial narratives (2011, 20), wherein rhetoric and ideology wield significant influence. Furthermore, we employ Laura Saxton's framework, distinguishing between "accuracy" and "authenticity" in historical fiction. Here accuracy pertains to the fidelity of a text's representation to available evidence, including the correctness of names, places, dates and events. On the other hand, authenticity refers to a subjective impression readers may derive from background details such as "the characters' milieu, dress, customs, and speech", which contribute to re-create a plausible image of the historical period in question (Saxton 2020, 132).

2 From Idealism to Disillusionment in Dermot Bolger's *The Family on Paradise Pier*

Dermot Bolger, a Dublin native from humble beginnings, has established himself as an esteemed editor, poet, playwright, and novelist. From 1979 to 1992, he spearheaded the Raven Arts Press, providing a platform for a generation of emerging Irish writers such as Patrick McCabe, Colm Tóibín, Sebastian Barry and Sara Berkeley. Bolger's early literary endeavours focused on articulating the experiences of marginalized Irish working-class characters,[8] while his later historical novels, based on real events, delve into various Irish existences within the context of the twentieth century. In *The Family on Paradise Pier*, Bolger recounts the fate of the Goold Verschoyles, a real Anglo-Irish family from a serene County Donegal village,

[7] Many studies have discussed the military involvement of Irish volunteers in the Spanish Civil War; see, for instance, Fearghal McGarry's *Irish Politics and the Spanish Civil War* (1999) and Robert Stradling's *The Irish and the Spanish Civil War (1936–39)* (1999).

[8] Michael Pierse describes Bolger as a working-class writer interested in the "voice of the voiceless" (2013, 51).

as they navigate personal and political upheavals from the early twentieth century through the turbulent times of the Irish War of Independence, the Spanish Civil War and World War II.[9] At its core lies Brendan Goold Verschoyle, a family member who, after embracing communism, departs for Spain at the age of 26 as a radio technician working for the Soviet contingent aligned with the Republican cause. Brendan's journey epitomizes the ideological fervour pervasive among some Irishmen during that era. However, disillusionment soon sets in as he navigates the political intrigues in Barcelona, leading to his incarceration in a Russian gulag as a suspected Trotskyite spy, while his family frantically searches for him.

Bolger adeptly intertwines historical events with intimate familial dramas, offering readers a poignant depiction of one man's quest for meaning amid wartime chaos. Commencing in 1941 with Brendan's transport as a political prisoner to a Russian gulag, the narrative juxtaposes earlier idyllic family memories in Donegal Bay back in 1915 with the stark reality of Brendan's predicament, shaped by his political involvement and experiences in Spain. Despite his initial enthusiasm, Brendan's disillusionment with communist ideology becomes evident shortly after he arrives in Barcelona. Realizing he is being surveilled and manipulated by his own Russian comrades, Brendan is forced to spy on the foreign volunteers arriving in Spain to fight with the Republican forces: "For the past fortnight his movements had been watched, ever since he realised that he had not been brought to Spain for his radio skills but so that he could be used to spy upon new arrivals to the International Brigade" (2006, 320). Unwilling to comply, he quickly arouses the suspicion of his superiors and is arrested. Through Brendan's experiences in Spain and the impact of his absence on his family, Bolger masterfully explores the grim realities of the Spanish Civil War and its enduring repercussions. This war is not simply a clash between ideologies and political parties, but rather the experience of individuals, their loss and suffering. The emphasis on human suffering and other effects of the war takes precedence over ideological positioning. Brendan emerges as another casualty of the conflict – a figure who sacrifices everything for his ideals only to be betrayed by those he sought to assist, inflicting pain on those who love him. Once Brendan is caught in the spider's web of Stalin's terror, the reader knows that he will become one of those voices ignored by history. The author himself, in an interview, confirms this idea when he states that a character like this "never occurs in histories of the Irish left" (De Angelis 2017, 294).

Notably, Bolger's commitment to realism and accuracy in representing the Spanish Civil War is evident throughout *The Family on Paradise Pier*. The novel's appended section "P.S. Ideas, Interviews and Features …", sheds light on its genesis, rooted in the true-life story of Bolger's friend Sheila Fitzgerald (née Goold Verschoyle), known as Eva in the narrative. Bolger meticulously incorporates details from Sheila's recollections, and extracts from her notebooks and sketchbook, albeit with altered first names for characters. Brendan is based on Sheila's brother, Brian Goold Verschoyle who, despite his family's high-class status, aligned himself with the working class, embraced communism, trained as a radio operator in Moscow, volunteered for the Republican cause in Spain and ultimately "died in a gulag

[9] Carmen Zamorano Llena (2007) contends that in *The Family on Paradise Pier* Bolger redefines the construct of Irishness through the experiences of this Anglo-Irish family in an international context. *An Ark of Light* (2018) serves as a sequel, chronicling the family's journey from 1948 onwards.

prison camp" (Richards and Saba 2014). Bolger, in an interview, underscores his pursuit of capturing the "essential truth" of this real-life tale, supplementing Sheila's memories with insights gleaned from MI5 files (De Angelis 2017, 295). The narrative abounds with carefully chosen real dates, places and names, bolstering its historical accuracy. For instance, there are several references to historical figures such as Eoin O'Duffy, with his Irish volunteers training in Caceres, and Frank Ryan, alongside other Irish volunteers fighting with the International Brigades. Brendan encounters an Irish volunteer in Barcelona, Peadar Bourke, who is in the International Brigades and tells him that his brother also serves in Spain with "General O'Duffy's Irish fascism column" (2006, 323), underscoring the societal divisions prevalent in Ireland at the time.[10] This same Bourke, upon returning from Spain in November 1939, visits Eva to relay news of a family friend, Charlie, who had perished in the Battle of Jarama – a nod to Irish poet Charles Donnelly, a left-wing political activist killed in the 1937 battle.[11] The narrative also features André Marty, the French Secretary of Comintern and Political Commissar of the International Brigades, depicted unfavourably during his Barcelona visit: "With froth on his moustache" he would pressure Russian commissars to uncover "another anarcho-syndicalist spy to be executed during his stay" (2006, 321). Marty's reputation as a stringent disciplinarian, "convinced that 'Fascist-Trotskyist' spies were everywhere, and that it was his duty to exterminate them" (Beevor 2006, 181), finds resonance in Brendan's ordeal when accused of Trotskyist treachery by his own comrades.

The accusation by the Barcelona Russian communist commissars that Brendan was linked to the "Trotskyite of the POUM scum" certainly highlights the differences between the various Spanish left-wing parties fighting on the same side. This confrontation between the Communist Party, followers of Stalin's policies, and the POUM (Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista), with Trotskyist ideas, reflects the complex political landscape of the Spanish Civil War.[12] However, despite the nine references to the POUM in chapters 20, 25, 27 and 30, many important details remain unsaid. The political situation in Catalonia during the war was far more complex than depicted in Bolger's narrative. This "war within a war", vividly portrayed in George Orwell's eyewitness account *Homage to Catalonia* (1938) and Ken Loach's film *Land and Freedom* (1995), involved the control of the government both in Catalonia and Madrid. The communists backed the more moderate elements of the Republican government, supporting a bourgeois democratic Spain against the anarchists and the Trotskyites of the POUM, whose influence was dominant in Catalonia. They favoured maintaining the social revolution that occurred shortly after the failure of the military rebellion in Barcelona (Esenwein 2005, 186). In fact, during the so-called "May Days" of 1937, both Republican factions engaged in street battles in Barcelona, resulting in the outlawing of the POUM and the execution of some of its leaders by their own comrades. While these gaps in the narrative might affect readers' understanding of Brendan's arrest, the inclusion of excessive detail could potentially obscure the narrative. As observed by McLoughlin in

[10] Christopher Bland's novel *Ashes in the Wind* (2004), an epic story interweaving the destinies of two Irish families, one Catholic and the other Anglo-Irish Protestant, also features a similar situation with the two protagonist friends fighting on opposing sides in Spain.

[11] Further insights into Charles Donnelly's life can be found in the biographical note included in Bradley's anthology of *Contemporary Irish Poetry* (1980, 140).

[12] According to communist propaganda, the POUM collaborated with Franco's fascist allies (Bolger 2006, 409).

her "Introduction" to the *Cambridge Companion to War Writing*, "[…] omissions are both inevitable and intriguing" (2009, 1).

Even though *The Family on Paradise Pier* is not a biography and Bolger is not writing a history book, but a work of fiction, in the section "P.S." where Bolger explains the origin of the novel, he acknowledges that "Fiction can never tell the full truth, yet perhaps it can tell altered but equally important truths" (2006, 4). In essence, the author aims to achieve a certain authenticity as understood by Saxton (2011, 129). The verisimilitude of the plot, characters and atmosphere fosters a sense of credibility, reinforcing the air of truth. Readers accept Brendan's biographical events, along with his motives and emotions. An omniscient narrator draws the reader closer to the character, enhancing the narrative's truthfulness. For instance, Brendan's feelings during his arrest by Russian agents in Barcelona vividly come to life: "And he knew that his ribs were broken and three or four more kicks would hopefully edge him towards the mercy of oblivion" (2006, 336). Furthermore, precise background period details also contribute to creating a plausible image of the moment. For example, a waiter in a café on the Ramblas in Barcelona is described as wearing a brown boiler suit with an anarchist neckerchief (2006, 316), capturing the revolutionary atmosphere of Catalonia during the early months of the war, when militias took power and confiscated land, factories, transport and even shops and cafés. In fact, the café on the Ramblas "was now a collective enterprise since the owners fled" (316).[13] The cumulative effect of seemingly accurate period details, coupled with a depiction of the war highlighting the laws and excessive violence on both sides that exacerbate the suffering of individuals, whether or not they participate in the conflict, enhances the novel's authenticity.

3 The Haunting Past in Maurice Leitch's *Gone to Earth*

Born into a working-class Protestant family in County Antrim, Northern Ireland, Maurice Leitch entered the world of writing after spending six years teaching in a rural primary school. Subsequently, he joined the BBC in Belfast as a radio producer and writer, publishing his debut novel, *The Liberty Lad*, in 1965, just before the onset of the Troubles. However, the narrative already reflected the prevailing social and moral challenges of the era. Departing Belfast for London in 1970, Leitch continued his career with BBC radio while simultaneously pursuing his passion for writing, penning novels, short stories, and scripts for radio and television. His acclaimed works include *Poor Lazarus* (1969), a compelling tale of a Protestant outsider navigating a predominantly Catholic community, which earned him the Guardian Fiction Prize, and his novel *Silver's City* (1981), set against the backdrop of the Troubles. Following his passing in 2023 at the age of 90, an obituary in *The Irish Times* hailed Leitch as an "acclaimed Northern Irish novelist" and, echoing sentiments expressed by the Belfast writer Robert McLiam Wilson, celebrated him as a "glorious, inconvenient voice" (Doyle 2023).[14] Leitch's final novel, *Gone to Earth* (2019), intricately weaves a narrative that follows the mystery surrounding the figure of Diego, a former left-wing Republican fighter in the Spanish Civil War. Presumed dead by Franco's regime, Diego lives in hiding, "in constant fear

[13] George Orwell vividly captures a similar revolutionary fervour in the opening chapter of *Homage to Catalonia* (1938).

[14] The same comments were included in the obituaries published in other British newspapers, such as *The Telegraph* (2023) and *The Sun* (Farrell 2023).

of discovery" (2019, 26), alongside his wife Adriana in Torremolinos, a quaint fishing village on the southern coast of Spain in the mid-1950s.

Diego's mysterious narrative arc serves as a backdrop for exploring the internal conflicts of other characters grappling with the ghosts of their pasts and their hidden truths. Adriana, Diego's wife, bears the burden of being married to a former "rojo" (red), as termed by the Nationalists during the war, constantly living in fear of reprisals from Franco's authoritarian regime. Another character entangled in the couple's trials is Johnnie Ray, an American singer struggling with alcohol addiction, who travels to Spain in the hope of revitalizing his fading career while concealing his homosexuality. Yet, at the core of the tale lies Eugene Furlong, an Irish expatriate hailing from Leitrim, residing in Torremolinos. He finds himself stranded abroad after serving with O'Duffy's Irish Brigade during the Spanish Civil War. Described as "[j]ust another foreigner escaping from a past which was his business and no-one else's" (2019, 34), Eugene embodies the struggle of individuals haunted by their past choices. While the narrative scathingly critiques Franco's post-war regime, characterized by pervasive fear and repression, it also incorporates numerous flashbacks, transporting readers back to the tumultuous years of the civil war, offering a nuanced portrayal of its multifaceted nature. Leitch deftly captures the brutality perpetrated by both sides: Eugene grapples with the "terrible things he's witnessed and been party to" (2019, 127) when fighting alongside the Nationalists, whereas Diego recalls the anarchists' ruthless destruction of a local church and the murder of Father Gregorio, the priest, as he attempted to intervene, underscoring the savagery unleashed during the conflict (2019, 24–26). Intriguingly, one of the leaders of this assault emerges as a prominent supporter of Franco's post-war regime. Moreover, the narrative includes references to the international dimension, with German aircraft dropping bombs and British ships dumping Spanish refugees on the coast of Valencia (2019, 139), underscoring the global ramifications of the war. Throughout, the narrative poignantly portrays the enduring suffering of its victims, irrespective of their direct involvement in the conflict, resonating with the plight of the "third Spain", whose memories continue to haunt them long after the war's end.

In terms of historical accuracy, *Gone to Earth* meticulously incorporates real names of people, places, and events related to the Spanish Civil War. At the outset, the novel features a revealing epigraph with words attributed to the Nationalist General Gonzalo Queipo de Llano: "Even if they hide beneath the earth, I shall dig them out; and even if they are already dead, I shall kill them again." Queipo de Llano, a leader of the military uprising in Seville, was renowned for his radio propaganda broadcasts from Radio Sevilla. In fact, the quote is lifted from an actual broadcast over Seville radio on 25 July 1936 (Browne 2014, 106). This epigraph serves to underscore the central plot of Diego's evasion from old adversaries, as well as one of the main themes of the narrative: the brutality and repression of the war effort. Besides the expected references to real figures such as O'Duffy, Franco and the Spanish bullfighter Manolete, it is notable that one of the characters, the American singer Johnnie Ray, is a fictional depiction of a popular American crooner from the 1950s. Even a song mentioned by one of the hotel waiters, "The Little White Cloud That Cried", was a real hit by Ray,

released in 1951.[15] Similarly, various authentic places populate the novel, including Caceres, where Eugene was stationed with his Irish Brigade, Teruel and Madrid, where Diego fought the Nationalists, and Galway, where the bishop presented the members of the Irish Brigade with religious medals before their departure for Spain (2019, 76). The meticulous attention to detail is further evident in the reference to the Plaza de Felix Saenz in Malaga – a real square that remains accessible today – where Eugene visits a tailor. Although the volume does not explicitly mention the author's research, insights from Leitch's publisher, Turnpike Books, reveal that the author was drawing upon his many visits to Spain over decades and a "real-life story he once heard" to construct a vivid portrayal of the conflict (Doyle 2019). Stories like Diego's of Republican supporters who lived in hiding to avoid Franco's repression have been circulating in Spain for decades. In fact, in 1977, the book *Los topos* was published by Jesús Torbado and Manuel Leguineche, two journalists who collected many testimonies of this kind.[16] There is also a 2011 documentary titled *30 años de oscuridad* (*30 Years of Darkness*), directed by Manuel H. Martín, whose protagonist, curiously enough, is a former mayor of a town in Malaga, like Diego. This documentary was shown at the Cervantes Institute in Dublin in 2014.

Alongside the verisimilitude of the mystery plot, Leitch's meticulous attention to detail when describing characters and evoking Franco's Spain or its wartime past further adds to the novel's sense of authenticity, immersing readers in the sights, sounds, and emotions of Spain's history. In *Gone to Earth*, we are introduced to the little closed community of Torremolinos, with its own social norms, where the memories of the Spanish war are still vivid for most residents. With the introduction of a diverse array of minor yet believable characters such as the bullying police officer, Adriana's nosy neighbour and the former anarchist turned influential Franco supporter, the narrative establishes an authentic atmosphere that portrays the bleak picture of life in provincial Spain. Similarly, the novel's intense descriptions of wartime scenes evoke a sense of realism that resonates with readers. For example, Diego's detailed depiction of the atmosphere in Republican Madrid during the early stages of the conflict paints a vivid picture:

> […] the streets choked with people waving flags, yelling competing slogans of the Left, while the front itself was barely a score of kilometres away with their own side going out to engage with the enemy in the city's double-decker buses and taxis as though travelling to a picnic, then returning at night to eat and sleep with their families. (2019, 139)[17]

Furthermore, through a narrator who often presents characters' thoughts and feelings using the technique of free indirect style, readers can delve into their minds and closely follow their differing views on their past experiences and how they grappled with the upheaval of war, from various ideological standpoints and moral dilemmas. This adds depth and authenticity to the narrative, portraying the complexity of war. At times, the novel presents how the same

[15] The song can still be found and listened to on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gX82VcjJvew.

[16] There is an English version of this book titled *The Forgotten Men* (1981).

[17] As a curiosity, the reference to the double-decker buses in 1930s Madrid is accurate; they were known as "londineses" (Londoners) because, like those in London, they were made by the British firm Leyland Motors.

event or experience can be perceived differently by two different characters. This contrast is evident in a conversation between two volunteers of the Irish Brigade, Eugene Furlong and Jack Early: "While Furlong recalled horrors like seeing the roaming dogs on abandoned farms on human corpses, Early joked about shooting them for sniping practice […]" (2019, 82). Such instances offer an honest re-creation of the war's multifaceted nature. Collectively, these elements paint a grim picture of a country coming to terms with the violence of civil war and a repressive, fictional Spain, which, as noted by the novel's publisher, James Doyle, had much "in common with the Antrim mill villages of Leitch's early novels" (2019). Similarly, according to the academic David Clark, certain aspects of Leitch's *Gone to Earth* draw "inevitable comparisons with the political situation in Northern Ireland" (2022, 277).

The use of the free indirect style also enables the author to re-create the speech of the characters as if using a first-person narrator. With skilful precision, Leitch captures the idiomatic use of the characters' language both in dialogues and when conveying their thoughts, particularly the Americanisms of Johnnie and the unique slang of Eugene. For instance, Eugene describes his old Irish Brigade as "Summer soldiers, we used to call them. Fired off a coupla rounds, then back home for a feed and a furlough like it was a bank holiday weekend" (2019, 115). However, challenges arise when Leitch attempts to infuse his narrative with a foreign flavour and introduce words and phrases in Spanish. Handling foreign languages in novels is no easy task, and Leitch endeavours to ensure that his English-speaking readers do not become lost by utilizing common techniques such as repeating the words in English or providing appropriate context. Nevertheless, the text contains some spelling and grammatical errors when incorporating Spanish terms in dialogues and descriptions, including those featuring Spanish characters. For example, in the opening paragraph, the word *alpargatos* is used to describe a type of rope-soled shoe that Adriana is wearing, when the correct word would be in the feminine form, *alpartagas* (2019, 1). Subsequently, we encounter *pueblovina* (2019, 59) instead of *pueblerina*, *surprisa* (1919, 165) instead of *sorpresa*, *mucho famosa* (2019, 169) instead of *muy famosa*, and some other errors. While such inaccuracies and oversights may go unnoticed by an English-speaking reader, for a Spanish reader the presence of typos or incorrect usage of vocabulary and grammar can feel jarring and detract from the narrative's authenticity. The issue will undoubtedly be resolved when a good Spanish translation is published.

4 Uncovering the Suffering of War Victims in Anamaría Crowe Serrano's *In the Dark*

Anamaría Crowe Serrano, an Irish writer and translator, was born in Dublin to an Irish father and a Spanish mother.[18] She is widely recognized for her collections of experimental and witty poetry, including *on Words and up Words* (2016) and *Crunch* (2018). After her success in poetry, Crowe Serrano ventured into the world of fiction with the comic novel *The Big E* (2019), which features an extravagant finance journalist going through a mid-life crisis. However, her latest novel, titled *In the Dark*, takes a stark departure from comedy. In this work, Crowe Serrano delves into the shadows of history, using the tumultuous backdrop of the Spanish

[18] Information about the author's life was retrieved from her official website. See Anamaría Crowe Serrano's website for more details: https://anamariacs1.wixsite.com/amcs.

Civil War. Set during the siege of the Republican-held city of Teruel, in northeast Spain, in the winter of 1937–1938, *In the Dark* follows the lives of two sisters, María and Julita. Despite their personal and political differences, they both strive to survive the dangers and hardships of the war, as well as cope with the loss of loved ones. The novel also incorporates an element of mystery when a member of their family deserts from his military duties, seeks refuge in the house where María and Julita live, and hides in a small space under the stairs. María is the only one who knows about the man hiding there, and endeavours to keep it a secret. This intriguing part of the plot is reminiscent of the suspense created by Leitch in *Gone to the Earth* when Adriana hides her husband Diego from the Francoists in one room of their home.

In the Dark delves into the harrowing experiences of war victims against the backdrop of a long, terrible conflict. With a predominant focus on the plight of women, the narrative exposes the myriad challenges endured by these marginalized characters during wartime. Issues such as food scarcity, exposure to harsh weather conditions, the constant threat of violence, fear of being denounced by neighbours with a different ideology and the anguish of separation from loved ones permeate the lives of these female figures, offering a poignant portrayal of their struggles. Through the contrasting perspectives and constant clashes of the two protagonists, María and Julita, the novel also navigates the complex ideological landscape of the conflict. Julita, a staunch communist, espouses unwavering loyalty to the Republican cause, celebrating the heroism of those who defend democratic ideals and a better life against fascist aggression. In contrast, María, whose husband fights for the Nationalists, harbours deep scepticism towards the Republicans, viewing them as "a disorganised bunch of hooligans who have done nothing but cause mayhem and murder for the past five years. […] They are puppets of that fellow in Russia" (2019, 73). This ideological dichotomy mirrors the broader societal divisions that characterized Spain during the civil war. However, amid their ideological differences, both María and Julita demonstrate acts of compassion and solidarity by offering refuge to vulnerable individuals displaced by the conflict, embodying a sense of resilience and humanity in the face of adversity. The novel also portrays the horrifying realities of war through a diverse cast of minor characters who suffer its consequences: Julita's and María's children; Fina, a woman who used to be a dancer in Paris and cares for her elderly father; señora Rojas, an old lady who prays fervently but is displaced from her home without being aware of the reality around her; and Encarna, a kindly old woman who is captured by militiamen, taken to Valencia and executed without understanding her crime. Additionally, what makes everything even bleaker is that much of the suffering of these victims has Christmas as a backdrop – Christmas Day, New Year's Eve and the Epiphany, much celebrated in Spain. This narrative intricately weaves together personal struggles with larger socio-political dynamics, shedding light on the enduring impact of war on individuals and communities alike.

The accuracy of historical details in *In the Dark* is paramount to its portrayal of the Spanish Civil War's backdrop. At its core lies the Battle of Teruel, a pivotal and gruesome engagement that unfolded amid the bitter cold of winter from December 1937 to February 1938.[19] Crowe

[19] Details about The Battle of Teruel are recorded in many history books; see, for instance, Charles Esdaile's *The Spanish Civil War: A Military History* (2019, 254–61).

Serrano meticulously intertwines factual events and figures into the narrative, grounding the story in historical authenticity. Notably, real names permeate the text, including prominent historical figures such as Miguel Primo de Rivera, whose dictatorship prompts Fina's migration to Paris in pursuit of a dancing career; Manuel Azaña, the incumbent President of Spain at the outbreak of the war; and Indalecio Prieto, the Minister of Defence who extends condolences to Julita for her husband's death on the frontline. Moreover, tangible locations, such as the Plaza del Torico and the Torre de San Martín in Teruel, lend credence to the narrative's setting, imbuing it with a sense of place and time. The incorporation of clippings from authentic newspapers of the era further enhances the novel's historical veracity, providing readers with glimpses of the war's unfolding events. Crowe Serrano's commitment to historical accuracy is evident in her meticulous research process, which involved studying the works of esteemed historians like Anthony Beevor, Paul Preston, and Nigel Townson, alongside perusing Republican periodicals of the time such as *La Vanguardia*.[20] In the novel's acknowledgments, the author credits her sources of inspiration, including the above-mentioned documentary *30 años de oscuridad*, which she watched at the Instituto Cervantes in Dublin, as well as her research at the Military Archives in Ávila and the National Historical Archive on the Spanish Civil War in Salamanca. Through these rigorous efforts, Crowe Serrano not only crafts a compelling narrative but also underscores the novel's fidelity to historical accuracy.

Continuing with our exploration of authenticity, the narrative achieves a high degree of realism through its narrative voice, character development and the language used. Firstly, an essential element contributing to the sense of authenticity in *In the Dark* is the narrative technique Crowe Serrano employs. While the novel features an omniscient narrator, there are instances where readers are privy to the characters' inner thoughts, reminiscent of stream-of-consciousness novels like James Joyce's *Ulysses* and those of other twentieth-century modernist writers. Departing from the conventional realist narrative, *In the Dark* endeavours to recreate reality by presenting experiences in an allusive and fragmented manner, rich with motifs, symbols, and allusions. By delving into the inner world and consciousness of the characters, the novel seeks to derive meaning from their subjective perspectives. For instance, the following interior monologue from the deserter vividly illustrates his view of the disillusionment and suffering experienced by some International Brigade volunteers:

> fodder these boys who thought they knew something of Spain – fair and freckled – passion and ideals flaming in rebellious hair—from so many places…
>
> America – England – Ireland – Czechoslovakia – Germany – France – Russia – Poland – Yugoslavia – Italy
>
> their skin – blistered under the sun only to burn for real inside the tanks
>
> boys betrayed by ideals – by the Republic and its commanders […] (2019, 35)

Furthermore, the absence of traditional heroes and villains in the narrative contributes significantly to its authenticity. Unlike conventional war narratives, *In the Dark* does not feature heroic characters fighting for their country or ideals. The true heroes emerge as those

[20] See the author's comments about how and why she wrote her novel in the article "Reconciling the Darkness: Historical Novel Shines a Torchlight on Spanish Civil War".

who selflessly endeavour to aid others in the face of adversity. Figures such as Dr García and Dr Mercedes Maestres exemplify this altruism, risking their own safety to help their patients or to deliver vital medical supplies to the besieged city of Teruel, "oblivious to the dangers, freezing temperatures, hunger, tiredness" (2019, 144). While some soldiers, like the communist Ernesto and the fascist Hunchback, embody the extremes of the conflict with their rudeness and cruelty, respectively, they represent only a fraction of the populace. Most characters in *In the Dark* epitomize the suffering and resilience of the "third Spain", enduring the intolerance and brutality of war without succumbing to extremism. Finally, the author's bilingual and bicultural background allows for the correct introduction of the usual Spanish phrases and terms, as well as many cultural details – such as the twelve grapes eaten on each strike of the clock at midnight on New Year's Eve or the "roscón de reyes" to celebrate the arrival of the Three Wise Men on Twelfth Day – which lends verisimilitude to the story, even for a Spanish reader.

5 Conclusion

In exploring these three Irish historical novels – *The Family on Paradise Pier* by Dermot Bolger, *Gone to Earth* by Maurice Leitch and *In the Dark* by Anamaría Crowe Serrano – a tapestry of the Spanish Civil War emerges, revealing the multifaceted nature of this conflict and its enduring impact on individuals and communities. Despite their differing narrative approaches and focal points, these novels skilfully capture the essence of the era and the complexity of the conflict. While many details remain untold, readers do not receive a simplified version of the war; rather, they are presented with a nuanced portrayal that transcends a mere clash between two opposing ideologies on politics, religion or class. The authors also introduce an international dimension, referring to the problematic intervention of Soviet Russia, as seen in Bolger's depiction of Brendan's experiences, and the complexities of Irish participation in the war through Eugene's perspective in Leitch's novel. Within this re-creation of the war's complexities, these authors refrain from clearly advocating for a particular side. Instead, they focus on the extreme brutality of war and on the suffering endured by those involved. All three novels delve into the human experience of war, portraying the personal struggles, sacrifices, and resilience of individuals caught in the turmoil. Whether actively participating in the war, like Brendan in *The Family on Paradise Pier*, Eugene in *Gone to Earth* or the deserter in *In the Dark*, or as relatives and ordinary people, they all become victims of the excessive violence employed by both sides. By engaging with these literary works, readers are invited to confront the complexities of history, recognizing it as more than a mere confrontation between two ancestral Spains, but rather the struggles of individuals seemingly part of a "third Spain", offering timeless reflections on the universal themes of love, loss, and resilience.

Another commonality in these novels is their commitment to historical accuracy and narrative authenticity. They all meticulously incorporate real events, figures, chronologies and locations into their narratives. Bolger's *The Family on Paradise Pier* grounds his story in a real Anglo-Irish family, drawing material from one of its member's recollections and notebooks. Similarly, Leitch's *Gone to Earth* intricately weaves factual elements from Spanish and Irish histories into the story, painting a vivid portrait of the Spanish Civil War. Crowe Serrano's *In the Dark* also demonstrates a rigorous research process, integrating real events and newspaper articles to

evoke the historical backdrop of the conflict. This fidelity to historical detail not only enhances the credibility of the narratives, but also provides readers with a deeper understanding of the period. Furthermore, the novels ensure authenticity through well-developed plots, characters and atmospheres, enriched with background period details. By navigating the complexities of ideology through deeply developed characters, these authors avoid the traditional dichotomies between stereotyped good and bad characters, heroes and villains, which would otherwise reduce reality to a caricature and contribute to a simplistic view of the war. Whether it is Bolger's portrayal of Brendan's journey from idealism to disillusionment, Leitch's exploration of the haunting pasts of his characters, or Crowe Serrano's depiction of the harrowing experiences of women during wartime, the protagonists of each novel offer poignant insights into the complexities of the human condition. Although Leitch's use of the Spanish language is imperfect, all three narratives handle cultural details with precision, contributing to the novels' authenticity and creating a vivid portrayal of the historical period.

While this analysis has focused on novels as primary sources, several other literary works offer intriguing perspectives on the intersection of Irish and Spanish history during the Spanish Civil War. For instance, Colm Tóibín's short story "The Summer of '38" (2013) provides a brief yet poignant glimpse into the experiences of a young woman who falls in love with a soldier fighting alongside Franco's troops. Although short stories have not been included here, Tóibín's work merits further exploration for its themes of loyalty, sacrifice, love and memory. In a different genre, Tim Fanning's *The Salamanca Diaries: Father McCabe and the Spanish Civil War* (2019) presents a unique firsthand account of the war through the diaries of an Irish priest in the Irish College in Salamanca, offering valuable insights into the lived experiences of individuals involved in the conflict. Furthermore, works like Christopher Bland's *Ashes in the Wind* (2014) and James Lawless's *Peeling Oranges* (2007) briefly touch upon the Spanish Civil War in the context of broader narratives, highlighting the enduring connection between Spain and Ireland. Exploring these and other texts could provide a deeper understanding of the multifaceted relationship between the two countries and offer new avenues for research into the representation of historical events in literature.

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