

“On Guard with the Junipers”:

Ewart Milne and Irish Literary Dissent  
in the Spanish Civil War

by

Anna Kathryn Kendrick  
[anna.kendrick@gmail.com](mailto:anna.kendrick@gmail.com)

Presented to the  
Committee on Degrees in History and Literature  
Harvard College  
Cambridge, Massachusetts

February 27, 2009

## Abstract

In my senior thesis, “On Guard with the Junipers: Ewart Milne and Irish Literary Dissent in the Spanish Civil War,” I examine the work of little-known poet Ewart Milne (1903-1987). Drawn primarily from his 1940 collection, *Letter from Ireland*, written after his experience as a medical courier in Spain, these works bridge a divided, isolated Ireland with wider European anti-fascist currents through World War II, Ewart Milne’s writing offers a critical entry into the intellectual protests that surrounded Irish public life in the years surrounding the Spanish Civil War.<sup>1</sup> As a contributor to the short-lived journal *Ireland Today*, Milne became part of a circle of disaffected artists whose protests and causes encompassed all areas of Irish affairs: agrarian reforms, Gaelicization, the Catholic church, and developing cultural organizations. But most pressingly, the journal mingled these domestic cultural commitments with uncompromising engagement in European politics. Left-leaning, opposed to the institutionalization of religion in public life, and open to British, Spanish, and other international literary influences, *Ireland Today* assembled Ireland’s most prominent intellectuals, poets, and essayists in a broad project of national renewal. This magazine seems to have acted as a conscious counterpoint to Ireland’s prevailing moral conservatism, which was manifest in literary censorship, clerical and popular support for Franco, and the widespread flight of left-leaning activists and artists—such as Ewart Milne—from Ireland’s shores. This chapter, “Channel Spray: Ewart Milne’s Ambivalent Poetics of War,” examines how Milne’s fellow poets in Britain and Ireland influenced his stance on Spain, and how his own work came to reflect these conflicting models of war poetry.

---

<sup>1</sup> Though Milne published twenty poetry collections and *Drums Without End* (1985), a collection of sketches on his time in Spain, no biographies or literary studies of his work exist, to my knowledge, beyond the glosses published in the anthologies of 20<sup>th</sup> century Irish writing and Spanish Civil War verse (see bibliography), and a brief study in H. Gustav Klaus’ “The Sore Frailty of This Lasting Cause” (1991). In all cases, Milne is mentioned directly in relation to his fellow poet, Charles Donnelly, killed in Spain in 1937. Nevertheless, Milne continued his work unperturbed, as his short story collection attests: “Luckily for the general reader, Ewart has not been over dismayed by this lack of attention, but goes on writing year in year out.” See Milne, *Drums Without End* (Portree: Aquila Publishing Company, 1985).

## Introduction

Ewart Milne left Dublin for London in 1936 at a moment when the nation was attempting to cement national unity, twelve years after the close of Ireland's own civil war. The nation remained rent, however, by debates over religion, nationalism, and international policy—divisions which came to a head over the nation's stance on the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). The conflict coincided with the adoption of a new Irish constitution in 1937, in which the post-independence Irish Free State became known as Éire; a liberal democracy was officially established; and the primacy of the Catholic Church was enshrined.<sup>2</sup> In the year leading up to this legislation, the tensions and upheaval that had characterized politics in 1930's Ireland—torn between a rising fascist movement, a reactive left, and moderate governing party Fianna Fáil—became expressed through fierce debates on modernism, intellectualism, and censorship. Using the Spanish conflict as a model, these debates argued both for the defense of artistic liberty and against the national degradation to which intellectualism and immorality would allegedly lead.

*Ireland Today* was one of many Irish periodicals that dug into the Spanish war with full awareness of its echoes of the country's own recent, and bloody, division. A staff editorial in the magazine from January 1937 accurately summarized the military mobilization in Ireland while claiming an unmistakable import for the war in Ireland:

The vast majority of these [Irish volunteers] have taken the rebel side—the coup d'état side. About two hundred are fighting for the central Government, and the alignment is much the same as in the "Civil War" here of 1922-23, for the latter are almost all ex-Republican volunteers. Thus with a striking similarity of motive and personnel, the civil war is being re-enacted in the Casa del Campo. It is deplorable—and short of Government intervention seems unavoidable—for the first contact and casualties of the two opposing groups are bound to have bitter repercussions at home.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> In the words of the 1937 constitution, the Roman Catholic Church was granted "a special position... as the guardian of the faith professed by the great majority of the citizens." Although minority rights were protected, the institutionalization of the church was reflected in laws reflecting Catholic social teachings, such as the prohibition of divorce (Foster, 544).

<sup>3</sup> Editorial, *Ireland Today*, January 1937.

*Ireland Today*'s clear-headed recognition of the domestic stakes of Spanish intervention suggests that despite the years since the Irish Civil War (1922-24), the 1930's remained a tentative period in which simmering tensions between the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and General Eoin O'Duffy's fascist Blueshirts posed serious threats to the order and stability that Eamon De Valera was attempting to impose.<sup>4</sup>

With Ireland's prevailing political climate overwhelmingly dominated by institutionalized Catholicism, the uprising in Spain had been indelibly marked as a religious "crusade" by press and church.<sup>5</sup> Eoin O'Duffy (1892-1944) readily enlisted around six thousand willing volunteers to fight for Franco in the first months of war. In 1934, Blueshirt frenzy had reached its apex in Ireland with an estimated 60,000 members; violent confrontations between these would-be Fascists and former IRA members, socialists, and other leftist activists were frequent. While Blueshirt momentum had slowed by 1936, O'Duffy led 660 men to Spain, more than four times the number of volunteers mustered to defend the Spanish Republic.<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile, in Dublin's crumbling, impoverished and disease-ridden tenements, where the mortality rate was higher than the slums of Calcutta, socialist and labor groups that supported the Spanish Republic found firmer footing.<sup>7</sup> Organizations like the militant IRA and Saor Éire, which the Church associated with revolution and Communism, worked to cement urban working class support for

---

<sup>4</sup> The idea of *order* as a contrast to popular anarchy runs through De Valera's speeches and interviews in this period, roughly 1932-1936, as he attempted to put these lingering animosities to rest, incorporating Irish republicans and nationalists into a productive accord. In a speech at Ennis on August 27<sup>th</sup>, 1933, De Valera had called for an end to these riots and raids, stating that: "I have only one thing to fear as far as our country is concerned and that is that this attempt to bring back the bitterness of the Civil War will give rise to disturbances. You have only to look at the cross-Channel [British] press to realize what gloating there is in certain quarters over the prospect of trouble here... If you do not accept the discipline of the elected government, then you will have disturbances and if you are going to have disturbances, you are going to lose order to an internal dictator..." (Papers of Eamon de Valera, University College Dublin Archives).

<sup>5</sup> H. Gustav Klaus, "The Sore Frailty of This Lasting Cause: Some Celtic Versions of Spanish Civil War Poetry," *Irish University Review* 21 (1991), 277.

<sup>6</sup> John Newsinger, "Blackshirts, Blueshirts, and the Spanish Civil War," *The Historical Journal* 44, no. 3 (2001), 839.

<sup>7</sup> Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (New York: Vintage, 1996), 219.

the Spanish Republic against the largely rural, Catholic, and conservative volunteers for Franco.<sup>8</sup> Historian David Fitzpatrick argues that workers' organizations like Saor Éire and its predecessors attempted to “mesh republican and socialist grievances,” much like the central government in Spain. Yet radical stances occupied an eroded, unpopular status in Irish political discourse under the centrist, conciliatory governance of De Valera.<sup>9</sup>

In the face of a deadly serious opposition between Catholicism and Communism, a coalition of these leftist activists joined to fight for workers' rights through the new Republican Congress—the political arm of the constituency that would subsequently form *Ireland Today*.<sup>10</sup> Internal disunity among the members of the Republican Congress led to a rift among leftist republicans—encompassing socialists, Communists, trade unionists, labor organizers, and the left wing of the IRA—in their fragile alliance, leaving only its more literary-minded affiliates to attempt inroads into Irish public life.<sup>11</sup> Frustrated with Ireland's political inertia and stifling conservatism, contributor and poet Ewart Milne's continual distancing from the military technicalities and nationalistic jargon of war allowed him to take on the roles of both disillusioned, dissenting Anglo-Irish expatriate and nostalgic Irish poet—one with a sharp vision for the land he still called home.

When Milne joined the staff as a contributor from London and Spain, he added a voice that, while furthering *Ireland Today*'s constructive examinations of Irish cultural affairs, was tinged with the ambivalence of a developing writer shaped by conflicting Anglo-Irish identities.

---

<sup>8</sup> Joseph O'Connor, *Even the Olives Are Bleeding: The Life and Times of Charles Donnelly* (Dublin: New Island Books, 1992). 22.

<sup>9</sup> David Fitzpatrick, *The Two Irelands, 1912-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 201.

<sup>10</sup> Frank Shovlin, *The Irish Literary Periodical, 1923-1958* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), 69.

<sup>11</sup> Fearghal McGarry, *Irish Politics and the Spanish Civil War* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1999). As I use the terms, socialist refers to a general socio-economic vision of collective and shared wealth, while Communist refers specifically to the political party, either international (Comintern) or of Ireland (CPI). Both manifestations were present in Ireland and Spain, working in cautious tandem under the auspices of the Republican Congress in Ireland and the Popular Front, the Republican government in Spain.

Milne writes about his decision to volunteer at the Spanish Medical Aid Committee in London in the voice of a man engaged with world affairs but deeply dissatisfied by Ireland's *status quo*:

My own father, who was English but lived in Ireland all his adult life, thoroughly disapproved of my own uncompromising support of the Spanish Republican Government cause... It was in consequence of this that I left for London in the summer of 1936, and this, I suppose you could say, made my first real exile-departure from Ireland, although of course I had followed Liam O'Flaherty in doing my "four years before the mast", and Ulyssean voyage over most of the world, previously.<sup>12</sup>

As Milne remembers, this voyage to London was just one of his many "exile-departures" that included these restless years in the Merchant Navy, his political awakening in London and Spain, a frustrating return to Ireland in the 1940's, and his eventual retirement in Bedfordshire, England. Despite Milne's prolific production throughout these years, he toiled largely in obscurity. His 1986 collection *Drums Without End* accurately claims that "neither the British or the Irish literary 'establishment' really [gave] him his due," yet there remains something acutely honest, and historically vital, in the picture Milne draws of Ireland's tense interwar years.

Although Milne wrote almost all of his work abroad, Irish politician and writer Conor Cruise O'Brien wrote that Milne "speaks to us, to the class of 1917 and thereabouts, more directly than any Irish poet of his generation has spoken."<sup>13</sup> It is this idea of Milne's *generation*, however, that is central to my thesis; he himself referred to his fellow Irish poets of the 1930's as "a lost generation" whose work was eclipsed by the literary eminence of W.B. Yeats and subsumed by World War II.<sup>14</sup> Yet their importance, as seen through Milne and *Ireland Today*, lies in their confrontation—both political and literary—with narrow expressions of nationalism and Catholic-inspired moral teachings which would come to dominate the evolving nation in post-Spain years.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Ewart Milne to Joseph G. Donnelly, March 17<sup>th</sup>, 1969. In possession of the Donnelly family.

<sup>13</sup> Ewart Milne, *Drums without End* (Portree: Aquila Publishing Company, 1985).

<sup>14</sup> Gerald Dawe and Nicholas Allen, *The Proper Word: Collected Criticism : Ireland, Poetry and Politics* (Omaha, Neb.: Creighton University Press, 2007), 160.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, 160.

## I. Channel Spray: Ewart Milne's Ambivalent Poetics of War

"My friend, while such as this dead boy are speaking  
We shall not walk again those high passages of history."  
Ewart Milne, "Variation on the Grand Tour"<sup>16</sup>

With his short stories in *Ireland Today* and his 1940 volume *Letter from Ireland*, Ewart Milne became one of many British and Irish writers leaving testament to their intensely conflicted experiences in Spain. Milne's stories and poems, however, were tinged with highly critical views of home. While his colleagues at *Ireland Today* were promoting unpopular arguments for a democratic, republican Spain within the conservative Dublin press, the celebrated poets of what Samuel Hynes famously termed the "Auden Generation" in London were writing poetry in a politically motivated vein which Milne would both emulate and critique.<sup>17</sup> While aligned with these writers' anti-fascism, Milne consciously attempted to distinguish himself from what he saw as the propagandist or romanticized poetry of war coming from Britain.<sup>18</sup> With Milne landing in London in 1936, his critical stance betrays the ambivalences of his "exile-departure:" an *Ireland Today* correspondent frustrated with the state of his nation, anxious to absorb the literary innovation around him, and searching in Spain for the spark of idealism and open engagement that he and his colleagues found so lacking in Ireland.<sup>19</sup> While such British poetic innovations, coupled with acute foreign engagement, provided a model for his own 'Lost Generation,' Milne

---

<sup>16</sup> Ewart Milne, *Listen Mangan: Poems* (Dublin: The Sign of the Three Candles, 1941), 12.

<sup>17</sup> Samuel Lynn Hynes, *The Auden Generation: Literature and Politics in England in the 1930s* (London: Bodley Head, 1976).

<sup>18</sup> Such language is clearly at work in a survey organized in 1937, *Authors Take Sides on the Spanish War*, which posed the question of international allegiance to British and Irish writers. Despite the survey's unabashed ideological bent, which wrote of "murder and destruction by Fascism" in Italy and "social injustice and cultural death" in Germany, it pulled together an impressive and diverse roster of writers. One overwhelming refrain echoes again and again: that Franco represented the end of intellectual freedom. Among this group of largely British writers was a prominent contingent of Irishmen—Sean O'Casey, Cecil Day-Lewis, Samuel Beckett, among others—arguing that fascism and military dictatorship in Spain represented a threat to artistic freedom all across Europe. For specific responses, see Valentine Cunningham, *Spanish Front: Writers on the Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

<sup>19</sup> Ewart Milne to Joseph G. Donnelly, Esq., March 17<sup>th</sup>, 1969. In possession of the Donnelly family.

would instead use his experiences in Spain to make cogent criticisms of Ireland's political and intellectual dissension.

Just as influential to Milne's attitude toward Ireland, however, was W.B. Yeats, who walked his own conflicted path to political repudiation through World War I, post-Irish Civil War divisions, and the stirrings of Communism and Fascism in Europe. Most intimately, however, Milne's growing discomfort with war jargon, whether in Ireland or Spain, was rooted in personal loss: his close friend Charles Donnelly had been killed in 1937, leaving poems rigid and unforgiving on the mental experience of war. Milne's writing pays clear tribute to Donnelly, in much the same way that so many leftist writers eulogized the poet Federico García Lorca after his death in 1936. By examining Milne's treatment of each of these artists and the competing pulls they exerted on his work, one finds a reflection of his developing critique of Irish and European politics and an acute awareness of his conflicted position as an Anglo-Irish poet.

### **Milne and the Modernist Appeal**

With his flight from Ireland, Milne found himself confronted with a group as politically engaged as his *Ireland Today* colleagues: the left-leaning British poets and intellectuals whose modernist work dominated the landscape of post-World War I poetry. Not all fellow writers were won over, however, including some among Milne's *Ireland Today* circle. Frequent contributor and poet Donagh MacDonagh<sup>20</sup> published a review of a new anthology, *The Years' Poetry, 1937*, which criticized this new brand of British poetry for lacking a certain robust authenticity:

---

<sup>20</sup> Donagh MacDonagh (1912-1968) was the son of Thomas MacDonagh, one of the Irish martyrs killed in the political executions following the 1916 Easter Uprising. Donagh was educated at University College, Dublin, where he was a prolific contributor to the student magazine, *Cothrom Féinne*, along with classmate Charles Donnelly, in the years leading up to the Spanish Civil War. Ewart Milne makes reference to MacDonagh's and Donnelly's Dublin friendship in an unpublished letter written to Charles' brother Joseph G. Donnelly in 1969: "P.P.S. I believe your brother stayed with Donagh MacDonagh now Judge MacDonagh at one time, before coming to London. He never spoke of it to me, though." See Ewart Milne to Joseph G. Donnelly, Esq., March 17<sup>th</sup>, 1969, in possession of the Donnelly family.



The English blood this year runs thin and cold... with the exception of Lorca's grand "Faithless Wife," this year's crop of lyrics seems too effete. There is plenty of talk about Bombers and Spain and War, but the writers leave our withers unwrung, and I cannot escape the suspicion that this is due to the fact that their horror and indignation are largely conscientious and not informed by any real emotion. They all adopt the pose of Spender, who assures us that he has an appointment with a bullet, but has failed to keep it. Perhaps it is only Irish poets like Charlie Donnelly who actually take gun in hand and prove that they have as much blood inside them as will write an Epitaph.<sup>21</sup>

While his university classmate and *Ireland Today* colleague Charles Donnelly stands as MacDonagh's example of a successful war poet, MacDonagh is harsh, as Milne could be, in his critique of those whose work claimed to understand Spain, putting forward instead an Irish model of authentic military struggle.<sup>22</sup> MacDonagh notes in particular Stephen Spender (1909-1905), the British poet and socialist advocate, who later called the Spanish Civil War a "poets' war."<sup>23</sup> The death of Lorca, as well as those of British writers such as Ralph Fox, Julian Bell, John Cornford, Christopher Caudwell, and the Irishman Charles Donnelly, served to reinforce the idea that religious, nationalist militarism and artistic freedom were bitterly opposed.<sup>24</sup> But like Donnelly, who began to question the martyr-like sacrifices of wartime deaths, Milne's measured retreat from nationalistic militarism marks him apart from many poets who brashly mythologized and glorified the struggle.

---

<sup>21</sup> Donagh MacDonagh, *Ireland Today*, 3, no. 1 (1938): 81.

<sup>22</sup> See MacDonagh's elegy, "Charles Donnelly, Dead in Spain 1937". Upon Donnelly's death, MacDonagh imagined the intellectual loss to Ireland of this quiet, intensely intelligent young writer: "Of what a quality is courage made/ That he who gently walked our city streets/ Talking of poetry or philosophy,/ Spinoza, Keats,/ Should lie like any martyred soldier.../Somewhere his death is charted/A signature affixed to his brief history." See Donagh MacDonagh, *Veterans and Other Poems*, The Cuala Press, Dublin, 1941.

<sup>23</sup> Stephen Spender, in *The God That Failed*, ed. Richard Howard Stafford Crossman and David Engerman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 244.

<sup>24</sup> A memorial plaque to these five writers now hangs at the Residencia de Estudiantes, Madrid, a residence hall and cultural center that was instrumental in fostering Spanish artists and intellectuals in pre-Civil War years. Today, the blue-and-white-tiled memorial stands in a quiet, whitewashed hallway overlooking gardens dedicated to Juan Ramón Jiménez, major poet of the Generation of 1898 and mentor to Lorca's generation of poets at the Residencia. It reads: "*En memoria de los escritores británicos que ofrecieron su vida en nombre de la democracia española* [In memory of the British writers who offered their lives in the name of Spanish democracy]/ Julian Bell, John Cornford, Charles Donnelly, Ralph Fox, Christopher St. John Sprigg (Christopher Caudwell)/ "Swear that our dead fought not in vain"/1936-1939". Though Milne's friend Charles Donnelly, an Irishman whose approach to Irish politics was just as intense as his poetry, might have objected to being called a "British" writer, the plaque is evidence to the bond established by British and Spanish writers in anti-Francoist cultural protests. Nevertheless, the plaque seems almost forgotten at the Residencia; during my visit, it took the earnest investigations of several staff members and close to an hour to locate the hallway where it had been placed.

Milne well understood that these poets of 1930's Britain, whom I will refer to collectively as the Auden Generation, held an unparalleled role in informing modernist poetry and creating a public literary image of the Spanish Civil War; yet in his attempts to resist such adulation, Milne betrays his preoccupation with finding models for his authentic, politically-engaged, relevant literary generation. Milne pokes fun at the illustrious literary monolith his work follows in "Comment on the Word":

When shall we hear read this  
Great illumination again?  
Which since Shakespeare of course  
And -----, and -----, ad infinitum,  
Has never been known?  
Except (of course)  
In Mr. Grigson's foursome  
Eliot, Pound, Yeats and Auden.<sup>25</sup>

Milne's simultaneous skepticism and awe of that formidable "foursome," tinged perhaps with the cynical envy of the less successful, is just one of the critical voices that have spoken up regarding the reception and memory of British poetry through the 1930's. Milne, as a writer whose literary style and approach to politics was equally dominated by the overwhelming influences of W.B. Yeats and this circle of British poets in London, might well have appreciated the contemporary work done by Adrian Caesar to chip away at this literary monolith. In regard to Samuel Hynes' term, the "Auden Generation," Caesar argues that literary historians engage in a constant process of mythologizing each decade by associating it with certain names, ideas, and words, such that these "truths" become unquestionably accepted in their perpetuation of a consistent and unified vision of the period. Caesar points to the wider context of class tensions, political involvement, and "lived experience" as hints that a canonical understanding of 1930's poetry, while historically convenient, is sorely lacking intellectually.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> Ewart Milne, *Letter from Ireland* (Dublin: Gayfield Press, 1940), 58.

<sup>26</sup> Adrian Caesar, *Dividing Lines: Poetry, Class, and Ideology in the 1930s* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), 2-3.

Milne's skepticism of this "great illumination" seems rooted in a tension between these Oxbridge intellectuals and the workers with whom he identifies politically, who included the working class constituents of the Spanish Republican government just as immediately as the socialist and labor activists of Dublin's Republican Congress. As Milne suggests in "Comment on the Word"—an ironic jab at this foursome's god-like status in the literary world—the British critic and poet Geoffrey Grigson was central to the consolidation of their reputations through the poetry review *New Verse*. Widely hailed as the most important poetry magazine of the time, Grigson's publication both depended on and promoted the work of many of these poets active in the Spanish defense: Auden; Cecil Day Lewis; Stephen Spender; Louis MacNeice; and Julian Bell, Virginia Woolf's nephew who was subsequently killed in Spain.<sup>27</sup> As a student at Cambridge in 1933, Bell published a letter that suggests the presence of a consolidated intellectual elite with a developing sense of self-conscious political engagement:

By the end of 1933, we have arrived at a situation in which almost the only subject of discussion is contemporary politics, and in which a very large majority of the more intelligent undergraduates are Communists or almost Communists. As far as an interest in literature continues it has very largely changed its character and become an ally of Communism under the influence of Mr. Auden's Oxford group. Indeed, it might, with some plausibility be argued that Communism in England is at present largely a literary phenomenon—an attempt of a second post-war generation to escape from the Waste Land.<sup>28</sup>

Among the notable elements of Bell's passage is his reference to "Mr. Auden's Oxford group," which accords this group an established literary status—one connected with the most elite of institutions—yet attributes it with the promulgation of leftist politics in Britain. Bell begins to shape this group into a guiding force for a literary generation writing from a nation with a stagnant economy, political upheaval, and as Bell suggests, an Eliot-like sense of post-war rupture and displacement. While the *Ireland Today* circle was attempting to develop a politically relevant Irish voice in the midst of social dissension, these writers were ostensibly taking on the

---

<sup>27</sup> Caesar, *Dividing Lines*, 107.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, 24.

same task—but from a privileged vantage with which Milne seems fundamentally uncomfortable.<sup>29</sup>

Bell’s sense of skepticism toward “Mr. Auden’s Oxford group,” is echoed in Milne’s introduction to *Drums Without End*, suggesting his dissatisfaction with the undisputed crowning of these writers. In Milne’s spare time from volunteering with the Spanish Medical Aid Committee in London, he worked as a commissioned staff writer for *Ireland Today*. One day, while out soliciting ads, Milne recalls that he

called in at Faber’s and talked to Frank Morley, who very kindly gave me an ad but said they wouldn’t publish my poetry even if I was the last poet on earth, or words to that effect, pointing with a smile to a few doors away, where the great T.S. Eliot was sitting at his desk. It seemed obvious what he meant: that T.S. didn’t share the admiration I had for him.”<sup>30</sup>

With a similar tone of envy, adulation, and cynicism, Milne remembers encountering Auden, too, in the flurried London world of the Spanish Medical Aid Committee offices. One morning, while sorting checks and cash from the post, “a young man rushed in, obviously in a great hurry. He was tall and broad-shouldered, and said his name was Auden. No, he didn’t want to leave us any money, but would like to deliver a manuscript...I looked at it, and saw it was called *Spain, a Poem* by W.H. Auden.” Though the title meant nothing to Milne, this poem was soon distributed to raise funds for the defense of the Republic. In Auden’s seminal work, one can see how deeply this British literary community was implicated in a war that meant much more for pre-World War II Britain than simply regime change in Spain.

Auden’s “Spain” quickly became a classic of Spanish Civil War verse, with memorable lines about Spain’s arid landscape “soldered so crudely to inventive Europe,” strewn with “young poets exploding like bombs.” The poem evokes the harsh cruelty of the struggle, as well

---

<sup>29</sup> Dawe, *The Proper Word*, 162.

<sup>30</sup> Milne, *Drums Without End*, 10.

as the passion it drew from idealistic intellectuals and artists across Europe.<sup>31</sup> Yet Milne brings out his familiar skepticism here, recalling: “I went back to my job of counting the money, feeling like the king in the nursery-rhyme, and thought no more of it. I think it was auctioned later on; but when I read it, I didn’t think all that of it.”<sup>32</sup> Milne’s casual dismissal may sound simply like the envy of an aspiring poet, but one must recall that this was the same poem Auden renounced years later for its overtones of propaganda and a sense of political urgency that he subsequently came to regret. Milne’s reaction is a precise illustration of the ambivalence with which Milne treated British poetry of war; even as it became the dominant example for his own, Milne would attempt to retain a critical distance from propagandizing work.

The criticism which MacDonagh had made of Spender and his fellow British poets in *Ireland Today*, that their “horror and indignation are largely conscientious and not informed by any real emotion,” was echoed in similar terms about Auden by his fellow Englishman George Orwell.<sup>33</sup> Having spent time in Catalonia and Aragon fighting with the anti-Stalinist communist party POUM, an experience that he remembers in *Homage to Catalonia*, Orwell seems to have felt justified in expressing a certain indignation at the lightness with which Auden treated war death.<sup>34</sup> Auden’s use of the phrase “necessary murder,” Orwell wrote, “could only be written by a person to whom murder is at most a word. Personally I would not speak so lightly of murder...”<sup>35</sup> Orwell’s criticism of Auden’s sweeping language is more than a criticism of the poet’s lack of experience in seriously fighting for a political cause; it is also an indictment of the entire British left’s attitude toward the war, just as MacDonagh saw it in *Ireland Today*. “Mr.

---

<sup>31</sup> W.H. Auden, “Spain,” in Stephen Spender, ed., *Poems for Spain* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1939).

<sup>32</sup> Milne, *Drums Without End*, 71.

<sup>33</sup> Donagh MacDonagh, *Ireland Today*, 3, no. 1 (1938): 81.

<sup>34</sup> POUM (*Partido Obrero de Unificación Obrero*, or Worker’s Party of Marxist Unification), formed in 1935 by Andreu Nin and Joaquín Maurín. For firsthand accounts of the front, see George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1938).

<sup>35</sup> Valentine Cunningham, *The Penguin Book of Spanish Civil War Verse*, Penguin Poets (Harmondsworth; New York: Penguin Books, 1980). 71.

Auden's brand of amoralism is only possible if you are the kind of person who is always somewhere else when the trigger is pulled. So much of left-wing thought is a kind of playing with fire by people who don't even know that fire is hot,"<sup>36</sup> Orwell wrote, in a bitter rebuke of many who would have counted him as either comrade or colleague.

Auden later emended this line, among others, before removing the poem entirely from subsequent collections, but other critics lodged similar complaints against the work, writing of its "slippery evasiveness," its intellectual "aloofness," or its "schoolboy-revolutionary attitudes" that failed to understand the human realities about which it opined.<sup>37</sup> Such accusations echo the claim made by Frederick Benson in his examination of the literary effects of the Spanish Civil War: that the writers who plunged into the defense of the Republic saw it not as a Spanish conflict, but as a key stage in the struggle between competing European political and religious ideologies. Benson claims that these writers employed "familiar terms, which each believed he understood, to clarify complex problems which actually very few fully comprehended."<sup>38</sup> Auden's use of the phrase "necessary murder," then, could well fall under Benson's interpretation of "naïveté and... hypocrisy" running through literature of the war.<sup>39</sup>

In Milne's "Salutation for Some Poets," meanwhile, the poet turns his own critical attention to this alleged brand of patriotic, overzealous war poetry fuelled by the war. This seems a sort of meta-critical look at the same poetic task in which he was fundamentally invested: "It was a good game and exciting while it lasted./ It was exciting to write about bombers like bees over the valley," more exciting "than even the Lake Isle of Innisfree in the old days." Alluding to Yeats's

---

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*, 71.

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*, 70.

<sup>38</sup> In an interesting post-Civil War, cross-generational link, Benson's study includes a foreword by Salvador de Madariaga, the exiled Spanish writer and diplomat whose phrase, "mental anarchy," the conservative Patrick J. Gannon had ironically co-opted in his *Irish Monthly* defense of censorship in 1937.

<sup>39</sup> Frederick R. Benson, *Writers in Arms: the Literary Impact of the Spanish Civil War* (New York: New York University Press, 1967), 5.

famous poem of the same name, Milne consciously creates what he considers a new class of poetry, removed from either a purely Irish context or the wider propagandizing poetry of war. Most relevantly, Milne wrestles here with the question of whom these poets are actually addressing: are they poets of the elite and the intellectuals, those who read English poets like “Tennyson and Shakespeare,” he asks? Are they poets praising the Republic from the safety of wood paneled libraries at Oxford and Cambridge? No, he answers: this class of poets among which he numbers himself is working for a goal the elite and ivory-towered cannot understand.

For Milne, it seemed then that socialism must be the key; yet he finds even this ideological ideal lacking: “Were we not bringing about a revolution/At any rate in poetry: were we not writing for the workers?” he asks. Yet Milne is twice abandoned: the workers don’t understand, he says, nor do they care to. “Has it dawned on us yet the workers/ Untroubled do not read our books and in our poetry are uninterested?/ Has it dawned on us yet the game has ended, or is ending?” Milne feels the artist, at least the socially-conscious artist, is trapped between affecting change in verse or action, while fighting at all times for people unconcerned with the central object of the artist. It is here that Milne gets to the heart of his Irish critique. In moments when the “old order” brings out “every tribal prejudice that would suppress the mind in its glancing,” we have a vivid echo of the civil war he once knew in Ireland: the banishment of intellectual expression to fall back on animalistic, inhuman infighting. This is a universalized vision beyond the “rape” of Spain, where his class of socially driven artists and intellectuals are just as threatened as the workers they intend to defend.

### **The Lake Isle in the Old Days**

“The modern Irish artist cannot throw over modern thought. Neither can he [...] throw over Ireland. In his consciousness, the two must fuse.”

Charles Donnelly, “Literature in Ireland”<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup> Donnelly, “Literature in Ireland”, *Comhthrom Feinne* 5, no. 4 (1933): 65.

Milne's pull between intellectuals and workers, artists and soldiers, is reinforced by his ambivalent relationship with the writing and politics of two Irish figures: W.B. Yeats, the figure most representative of both cultural freedom and the old guard of literature in Ireland, and his close friend and fellow *Ireland Today* writer, Charles Donnelly. While Milne found himself drawn into the poetic and political activism of the Auden group in London, his poetry is riddled with direct references to Yeats, who died just at the close of the Spanish Civil War in 1939. Donnelly, on the other hand, was killed in battle in early 1937—a fact that Milne discovered only after having followed him to Spain. While Donnelly and Yeats fell on opposite political lines in the years leading up to the Spanish Civil War, in the end, both lent Milne aspects of his skeptical, detached attitude toward war and gave him lasting models for the relationship of the politically-engaged artist to the nation.

While Auden, Spender, Orwell, and a host of other British writers fervently supported the Spanish Republic, Yeats was a writer who—despite having toyed with supporting Ireland's Fascist leader O'Duffy—renounced active involvement in politics by the beginning of the war. Yeats had written a series of marching songs for O'Duffy's army, with lines hinting at totalitarianism:

What's equality?—Muck in the yard:  
Historic Nations grow  
From above to below.<sup>41</sup>

However, Yeats had withdrawn his cautious support by the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936. Increasingly distancing himself from politics, he wrote in a letter from this period that “Communist, Fascist, nationalist, clerical, anti-clerical are all responsible according to the number of victims.”<sup>42</sup> Yeats refused to endorse either church or political parties, perhaps understanding that these transitory causes, shifting allegiances, and failed leaders lacked the high, absolute reality he

---

<sup>41</sup> Richard Ellmann, *Yeats, the Man and the Masks* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1948).

<sup>42</sup> Ellmann, 278.



expressed through refrains of beauty, love, and the mystical.<sup>43</sup> “Do not try to make a politician of me, even in Ireland I shall never I think be that again—as my sense of reality deepens, & I think it does with age, my horror at the cruelty of governments grows greater... Communist, Fascist, nationalist, clerical, anti-clerical are all responsible according to the number of victims. I have not been silent, I have used the only vehicle I possess—verse...” he wrote.<sup>44</sup> While Yeats steered clear of Spanish politics in these last years of his life, his influence as an exemplar of politically-conscious Irish art becomes clear in the work of Donnelly and, later, Milne.

As the young political activist and aspiring poet Charles Donnelly was beginning a journalism career at University College Dublin, his literary and political impulses came together in a 1932 editorial responding to a student’s assertion that W.B. Yeats was both un-Christian and unintelligent.<sup>45</sup> Yeats was seen even then as Ireland’s greatest literary light, and Donnelly defends him with all the force and righteousness a young artist can muster:

It would be singularly disappointing for Mr. Yeats, above all poets, to hear this view expressed by a thoughtful and clever young writer of the new generation; Mr. Yeats, above all persons, who

---

<sup>43</sup> For a brief period, Yeats held out hope that O’Duffy might develop the leadership to carry what Yeats saw as a struggling, divided Ireland. That hope is memorialized in the poem “Parnell’s Funeral” (1935), which contemplates the failures of Irish government since the downfall of statesman Charles Stuart Parnell (1846-1891) in the 1880’s:<sup>43</sup>

[...] Had De Valera eaten Parnell's heart  
No loose-lipped demagogue had won the day.  
No civil rancour torn the land apart.  
[...] Or lacking that, government in such hands.  
O'Higgins<sup>43</sup> its sole statesman had not died.  
Had even O'Duffy - but I name no more...<sup>43</sup>

Invoking the potential of successive Irish leaders, Yeats finds each one falling short. Like the division occasioned by Parnell in the 1880’s, which became iconic as a missed opportunity for Ireland to move forward with Home Rule from Britain, Yeats sees Ireland’s sectarian violence as a result of these failures. He questions the ways revolution and civil war might have been avoided: if the voices of the militant had been silenced; if diplomacy, statemanship, and compromise had won the day. Against this history, O’Duffy stands out as one more failed hope: “had even O’Duffy—” he thinks, then cuts himself off. The flaws Yeats ultimately recognized in O’Duffy seem to echo this stream of failures he finds in Irish politics.

<sup>44</sup> Ellmann, 276-278.

<sup>45</sup> At University College Dublin, Donnelly fell in among a group of writers and artists with whom he argued his points on political philosophy and Irish history passionately, cogently, and prolifically. Donnelly’s closest friends were flatmate Niall Sheridan and Donagh MacDonagh, but many in their circle made names for themselves in Ireland: the poets Denis Devlin, Brian Coffey, Mervyn Wall, and Niall Montgomery; writers Flann O’Brien and Mary Lavin, suggesting the level of intensity, purpose, and intellectual stimulation in this Irish university circle. See Joseph O’Connor, *Even the Olives Are Bleeding: The Life and Times of Charles Donnelly* (Dublin: New Island Books, 1992), 29.

battled so long against the penny-a-line Christianity of the Irish Grub-Street, and the bigotry and intolerance of zealotism.

Art is free; and where there is no freedom there can be no Art, because in its freedom lies its value and essence.<sup>46</sup>

Referring to a “new generation” of artists, Donnelly signals more than a mere passing of the torch from the Irish Literary Revival of the early twentieth century to young poets in the Irish Free State of the 1930’s. He suggests, rather, a divide among artists driven by diverging religious and political engagement. Donnelly’s vision of an Irish vanguard literature was uncompromising, and could well have been a guiding philosophy for Milne and the writers of *Ireland Today* in their attempt to create a politically relevant voice for Ireland.<sup>47</sup> Donnelly recognized a fundamental shift in the possibilities of Irish art, away from strict nationalist and moralist tracts towards a more world-informed, self-aware, and hard-edged kind of literature: “The modern young Irishman... is unlike previous generations in being in touch with extra-Irish *contemporary* thought,” he wrote in 1933.<sup>48</sup> Donnelly’s concern, even at university, was artistic freedom and relevance, just as it would be for his and Milne’s future colleagues at *Ireland Today*.

While Yeats shared little in common politically with either Donnelly or Milne, what Donnelly venerated above all was Yeats’ continual battle against the provincialism of Ireland. In defending Yeats against the lowness of “Irish Grub-Street,” Donnelly was cognizant of the shadow hanging over Irish artistic freedom, constrained traditionally by religious conservatism and codified in the 1929 Censorship of Publications Act. Yeats had staunchly and publicly defended more than one play against riots over indecency and assaults on Irish morality and nationalism as a

---

<sup>46</sup> Charles Donnelly, “Gifford Redidivus”, in *Comhthrom Féinne* (1932): 159.

<sup>47</sup> Indeed, there may have been literally a direct link to *Ireland Today*. Donnelly’s 1933 examination of literature in Ireland was published in *Comhthrom Féinne*, on which he worked in close collaboration with his classmate Donagh MacDonagh—the future *Ireland Today* writer whose critical view of British poetry was examined at the opening of this chapter.

<sup>48</sup> Donnelly, “Literature in Ireland,” *Comhthrom Féinne*, Vol. 5 No. 4 (1933): 65.

founder of Dublin's Abbey Theater.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, Yeats' protestations against censorship and Irish cultural conservatism seem to ultimately outweigh his forays into extremist politics, at least for these young poets.

While Milne, with his socialist views and involvement in Spain, was undoubtedly a more actively involved political figure, his poems echo the same retreat from dogmatism that appears in Yeats' later writings. While Milne's collections are filled with direct references to Yeats, one passage stands out in the more subtle, perhaps unconscious ode to Yeats' ultimate focus on time, freedom, and experience above any political domineering. In his "Thinking of Artolas," Milne reflects on the "passion" that leads men into war, which he can only muster up analytically. Instead, he finds his emotion in the birds he watches in a Madrid square: "But sadly I knew the whispered starlings/ Wintering would rise from the Plaza Catalunya/ Before I returned."<sup>50</sup> In his quiet exhaustion, yet with a detached sense of peace in the natural movements of the world, Milne seems to channel the same wistfulness Yeats that exhibits in his "The Wild Swans at Coole":

Passion and conquest, wander where they will,  
Attend upon them still...  
Among what rushes will they build,  
By what lake's edge or pool  
Delight men's eyes when I awake some day  
To find they have flown away?<sup>51</sup>

But despite these frequent echoes of Yeats, Milne seems by no means an unquestioning devotee. Or if he was, he was also a rebellious and troubled student of this school of Irish poetry, with its overtones of measured romanticism that stand in contrast to newly emerging, more starkly modern verse from poets in Britain and mentors like Donnelly.

---

<sup>49</sup> Upon the breakout of riots at Sean O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars* in 1926 over reputed offense to nationalist memory, Yeats famously made reference to the 1907 riots protesting J.M. Synge's *Playboy of the Western World*: "You have disgraced yourself again. Is this to be the recurring celebration of the arrival of Irish genius?" he allegedly cried to the packed and rowdy theater.

<sup>50</sup> Milne, *Letter to Ireland*, 27-29.

<sup>51</sup> W. B. Yeats and Richard J. Finneran, *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*, (New York: Scribner Paperback Poetry, 1996), 131.

Milne could be fiercely sarcastic in his references to Ireland, and as well as to Yeats' overwhelmingly commanding presence in it. In a poem published in 1941, Milne wrote of Ireland: "And if it has any beeloud glades I'm sick of them also," in a conscious rejection of Yeats' dream-like vision of that individual, pastoral oasis of Innisfree as any kind of postwar reality.<sup>52</sup> Milne's increasingly dark portrayal of Ireland beside a continent careening into war suggests a rupture with the country that is not only political but poetic, a shift which I will examine more closely in Chapter 3. In Milne's approach to changing landscapes and passing time, his work seems to echo more faithfully the frustrations of Eliot's "Waste Land" than Julian Bell evoked in his 1933 student letter at Cambridge, than the nostalgic, cogent musings of Yeats' "The Wild Swans at Coole."

Lastly, Milne's work is fundamentally charged with the repercussions of his friend Charles Donnelly's death at Jarama, as it examines the personal and political implications for Ireland of the Spanish Civil War. Milne and Donnelly, two budding poets fleeing Ireland, crossed paths in London in the fall of 1936. Milne, a decade older than twenty-two year old Donnelly, had left the merchant navy to lend his services to Britain's Spanish Medical Aid Committee, where he fell in with a host of other activists in leftist literary circles.<sup>53</sup> Milne recalls this unsettled London period in an unpublished letter written to Joseph Donnelly, Charlie's brother, in 1969:

You would understand that there had been a great upsurge of support for the Republican cause in that summer, and the Spanish Medical Aid had appealed for ambulances, and medical supplies of all kinds to send out. We were practically snowed under, and I, with two secretaries, was given the job of sorting and sending out the material, including the ambulances. I was then sent out as Courier, with many ambulances and supplies of all sorts, to take to Madrid, over France and over the Pyrenees.

As I say, in the latter part of 1936, this young man, a small slender figure with a big head and large blue eyes, came quietly into our offices, and asked Peggy (the typist) quietly if he could help with our work...<sup>54</sup>

---

<sup>52</sup> Milne, *Listen Mangan*, 8.

<sup>53</sup> Jim Jump, ed., *Poems from Spain* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2006), 117.

<sup>54</sup> Ewart Milne to Joseph G. Donnelly, March 17<sup>th</sup> 1969. In possession of the Donnelly family.

In Milne's understanding of Donnelly's poetics of war, he was well aware of Donnelly's discomfort with nationalistic, self-aggrandizing, and overly romanticized poetry of war. Donnelly wrote in one of his last letters that he strove for a "completely detached tone," though not a neutral one: revolutionary activity and military study were central to his writing in Dublin and London. The intellectual sharpness that he brought to journalism and military analysis comes through in the precise, restrained balance of his verse.<sup>55</sup>

As Milne recalls, Donnelly was well aware of the political effect of his measured coolness. Before leaving for Spain, he allegedly lost his temper at Milne's suggestion of "the romantic guff about 'Workers Arise'" prevalent in the leftist press. The mere comparison of his own work to propagandist or sentimentalized verse was too much for Donnelly: "For God's sake, you don't think I'm going out to Spain like a lot of those romantic fools, do you, Milne? You ought to know I'm going to study the military position... I've told you often enough'. I agreed he had indeed, and we went back to our poetry," Milne recalls in a letter to Donnelly's brother.<sup>56</sup> Milne continually expresses the feeling that his utility lay in observing, helping, recording, and critiquing. Rather than treating Donnelly's military intensity as an anomalous trait for an Irish artist, however, Milne sees it as an integral part of Donnelly's role as a member of this new generation of politically involved, socially conscious artists in Ireland:

You see, I wanted to join the Brigade in a way instead of just helping by organizing medical supplies... but I was *not* completely convinced, either about my own feelings, or as to whether these great-hearted and great-souled young Irish Republicans *should* join in with this, so to say, extra-territorial cause. I think I wanted someone or something to finally convince me, or failing that, a friend to join with. And in your brother Charlie Donnelly I felt I had that understanding friend—though younger than myself in years, he was, like so many Irish poets, old in wisdom.<sup>57</sup>

While Milne exposes a certain ambivalence toward the wisdom of organized Irish military intervention in Spain, a doubt which is expressed in his poetry only in his detachment from the

---

<sup>55</sup> Klaus, "The Sore Frailty of This Lasting Cause," 278.

<sup>56</sup> Joseph Donnelly, *Charlie Donnelly: The Life and Poems* (Dublin: Dedalus, 1987), 45.

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.*

passions of war, Milne's attempts to reconcile wider European-wide involvement with Ireland's cultural and political legacies are clearly beginning to take shape.

Shadowed by Donnelly's keen fascination with the workings of war, one of his most frequently anthologized works, "Poem," dates from these last weeks with Milne in London. The poem is haunting in its calm awareness of war's lack of glory and battle's violent isolation, but most notably, strangely prescient in its assertion that war merely feeds the machine of propaganda and martyrdom that he knew from recent Irish history:

Your flag is public over granite. Gulls fly above it.  
Whatever the issue of the battle is, your memory  
Is public, for them to pull awry with crooked hands,  
Moist eyes. And village reputations will be built on  
Inaccurate reports of your campaign. You're name for orators,  
Figure stone-struck beneath damp Dublin sky [...]

Name, subject of all-considered words, praise and blame  
Irrelevant, the public talk which sounds the same on hollow  
Tongue as true, you'll be with Parnell and with Pearse.<sup>58</sup>  
Name aldermen will raise a cheer with, teacher make reference  
Oblique in class, and boys and women spin gum of sentiment  
On qualities attributed in error.<sup>59</sup>

Milne seemed to have clung to this passage above all others that they shared, reprising it decades later in a letter to Donnelly's brother. The younger poet always "kept part of himself to himself," Milne writes, so as not to become "reclassified, as it were" by an ideologically motivated death.<sup>60</sup> Presenting the idea that any political death becomes twisted beyond all recognition, Donnelly brings us from the image of man full of fury and untested convictions, finger tensed on the trigger "ready for spring," to a frozen, dead figure "stone-struck" beneath the heavy Dublin sky. All of

---

<sup>58</sup> Like the deaths of Charles Parnell (1846-1891), Ireland's late nineteenth century advocate of Home Rule whose downfall was a divisive moment in Irish politics, or Patrick Pearse (1879-1916), whose bloody rhetoric as a nationalist and IRA leader was infamous in the Easter Uprising of 1916, Donnelly suggests that politically-entangled deaths bring only martyrdom and notoriety. His use of apostrophe to address not the reader but an unspecified, absent figure as "you" extends the possibility of martyrdom to all who fight, as Parnell and Pearse became legendary for the future political significance their deaths took on in Ireland.

<sup>59</sup> Ewart Milne to Joseph G. Donnelly, March 17<sup>th</sup> 1969. In possession of the Donnelly family.

<sup>60</sup> *ibid.*

this coiled energy is subsumed by a name and date in granite, he suggests, just as a man's individual call to battle and internal suffering are misrepresented by political rhetoric.

Despite their shared antipathy for martyrdom, Milne's "Song of the Night Market" toys with the possibility of remembering Donnelly in the same way that the murdered Spanish poet Lorca had been memorialized by anti-fascist writers in Spain, Britain, and around the world:

Through the silent squares  
The guitar tinkles loud  
    Do you remember Carlos, Maria? [...]  
    Dust is his death, Maria:  
    His poet's blood rusts  
    The spades of the labourers,  
    Bending their backs  
    In the fields of olive.  
    Do you remember Carlos, Maria,  
    Now the grandees are back in the castles?  
The guitar tinkles loud  
Through the silent squares.<sup>61</sup>

Both poets died by gunfire in olive fields: Lorca, in a political execution in the hills above Granada; Donnelly, by enemy fire on the scrub-covered hills of Jarama, just east of Madrid. Donnelly's death on the battlefield of Jarama on February 27, 1937 came to speak most loudly in the verses and memorials dedicated to him, and his life has, in a sense, become remembered by five words: a comrade reported having stumbled upon Donnelly crouched amidst the gunfire, squeezing a handful of olives: "Even the olives are bleeding," Donnelly is said to have muttered.<sup>62</sup> Fitting, perhaps, that a poet should have such last words remembered, words, which have been incorporated into poems and songs of tribute; yet the Donnelly of IRA activism, the Donnelly of military study and socialist convictions, and the Donnelly who was more than an Irish incarnation of murdered Spanish poet Federico Garcia Lorca, might object.<sup>63</sup>

---

<sup>61</sup> Jump, *Poems from Spain*, 78.

<sup>62</sup> Perhaps most iconically, popular singer Christy Moore (1945--) reprises Donnelly's famous last words in his song "Viva La Quinta Brigada" (1984): "Even the olives were bleeding/ As the battle for Madrid it thundered on/ Truth and love against the force of evil/ Brotherhood against the fascist clan."

<sup>63</sup> O'Connor, *Even the Olives Are Bleeding*, 105.

Milne, nevertheless, makes an explicit comparison between Lorca and Donnelly in this poem, as well as in a 1969 letter to Donnelly's family. It is clear that Milne's enthusiasm for the defense of the Spanish Republic in London had, if not lessened, then shifted: while his loyalties are still clear, he speaks as one who recognized the changing momentum in Spain and mourned his dead with a sense of resigned lament. Milne had arrived in Madrid not long after Donnelly's departure from London, only to discover that the poet had been killed:

There is a grave somewhere outside Madrid or at Jarama where your great-hearted brother lies, no doubt, but then, do people know now where even Federico Garcia Lorca lies? I don't know. When General Franco won—and on my second trip it was obvious to me, even in that early 1937, that the Republic was too divided to win—it was not the Republican graves that were kept in honor.<sup>64</sup>

Milne's evocation of his fellow poet and mentor, however, makes a more subtle link to the cause of artistic freedom and antifascism than the shared symbolism of wasted creativity and battered ideals in Spain. Milne's stylistic echoes of Lorca, along with this image a music breaking the ominous silence of an emptied town square, can perhaps be best seen in a poem such as Lorca's "Ballad of the Little Square," with its melancholic air and simple chorus: "In the still night/ the children sing/ Clear stream, Calm fountain!"<sup>65</sup> In this poem, by hispanicizing Donnelly's name—"Charles" becomes "Carlos"—and echoing the short lines, song-like rhythm, and simple refrains that Lorca used so evocatively in his own work, Milne seems consciously to construct a Spanish anti-martyr from this Irish working class casualty. Lorca was among the Spanish modernists whose work had run parallel to the poetic innovations taking place across Europe, including among the new generation of post-war poets in Britain. One of these writers, the Spanish Republic activist Stephen Spender, soon became a prolific translator of Lorca, Manuel Altolaguirre, and other Spanish poets of the scattered—exiled, killed, or imprisoned—Generation of '27. Spender broadened the reach of this poetry, making it accessible to readers

---

<sup>64</sup> Ewart Milne to Joseph G. Donnelly, March 17<sup>th</sup>, 1969. In possession of the Donnelly family.

<sup>65</sup> Federico García Lorca, *Selected Poems* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 23.



not only in Britain but, as glowing reviews of Lorca volumes in *Ireland Today* would attest, to Irish readers like Milne.<sup>66</sup>

These international influences seem to have appealed to Milne's sense of himself as not simply an Irish poet in a traditional, nationalist sense, but as an Anglo-Irish poet, a sailor, a courier in Spain, and a man sympathetic to humanitarian, socialist causes across Europe. Between these disparate models of the artist, from the pontificating of writers among the so-called Auden Generation to the conflicting attitudes of Yeats and Donnelly toward the Irish artist as a political figure, one finds Milne setting a course for himself between these competing British and Irish influences, in order to establish himself as a critic of Ireland's political and cultural future. But while Milne and Donnelly went to Spain to defend their developing political convictions, their literary colleagues in Dublin on the staff of *Ireland Today*—as I will argue in the following chapter—were engaged in a similarly fierce battle for the magazine's survival amidst Dublin's climate of inward-looking Catholic nationalism and black-and-white moral conservatism.

---

<sup>66</sup> Edward Sheehy, the *Ireland Times* book reviewer, had praised Lorca's "Lament for the Death of A Bullfighter, and Other Poems" in August 1937, just as Donagh MacDonagh called Lorca's "grand Faithless Wife" one of the few bright spots in the world poetry scene of 1936. See Edward Sheehy, *Ireland Today*, Aug 1937, p. 88-89, and Donagh MacDonagh, *Ireland Today*, January 1938 p. 81. For examples of Spender's work in bringing Spanish verse to a wider audience, see Federico García Lorca and New Directions Publishing Corp., *The Selected Poems of Federico García Lorca* (New York: New Directions, 1961). Spender's transcultural work, which extended to German, Russian, and other politically suppressed poets, is honored today with the annual *The Times* Stephen Spender Prize for translation in Great Britain.

## Bibliography

### PRIMARY SOURCES:

*Comhthrom Féinne*, University College, Dublin.

- Donnelly, Charles. "Literature in Ireland." *Comhthrom Féinne* 5, no. 4 (1933): 65.  
"Ireland To-Day: A New Irish Periodical," *Comhthrom Féinne* 15, no. 3 (1936): 56.  
Sheridan, Niall. "Literary Antecedents." *Comhthrom Féinne* 9, no. 3 (1935): 62.

García Lorca, Federico. *Selected Poems*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.  
———. *The Selected Poems of Federico García Lorca*. New York: New Directions, 1961.

*Ireland Today*, Dublin, Ireland.

- O'Faolain, Sean. "The Dangers of Censorship." *Ireland Today* 1, no. 6 (1936): 57-63.  
———. "Comment on the Foregoing." *Ireland Today*, 1, no. 5 (Oct. 1936): 32.  
Tierney, Michael. "Ireland in the European Chaos." *Ireland Today* 2, no. 4 (1937): 13.  
Ross, Laurence J. "Facing the Issues in Ireland." *Ireland Today* 2, no. 1 (1937): 19-27.  
Sheehy, Edward. "Book Section: A Survey of Attitudes." *Ireland Today* 2, no. 1 (1937): 77-90.

*Irish Monthly*, Dublin, Ireland.

- De Blacam, Aodh. "Can Ireland Help Spain?" *The Irish Monthly* (1936): 645-51.  
Gannon, Patrick J. "Literature and Censorship." *Irish Monthly* (1937): 434-47.

Joyce, James, and Jeri Johnson. *Dubliners*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

- Milne, Ewart. *Drums without End*. Portree: Aquila Publishing Company, 1985.  
———. *Letter from Ireland*. Dublin: Gayfield Press, 1940.  
———. *Listen Mangan: Poems*. Dublin: The Sign of the Three Candles, 1941.

Orwell, George. *Homage to Catalonia*. London: Secker and Warburg, 1938.

Papers of Eamon de Valera (1882-1975), University College, Dublin Archive. Belfield, Ireland.

Private correspondence of Ewart Milne and Joseph P. Donnelly, in possession of the Donnelly family, Dublin.

- Spender, Stephen. In *The God That Failed*, edited by Richard Howard Stafford Crossman and David Engerman, 229-44. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001.  
———, ed. *Poems for Spain*. London: The Hogarth Press, 1939.

Yeats, W. B., and Richard J. Finneran. *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*. Rev. 2nd , 1st Scribner paperback poetry ed. New York: Scribner Paperback Poetry, 1996.

#### SECONDARY SOURCES:

Princess Grace Irish Library (Monaco), "Aodh De Blacam." [www.pgil-eirdata.org](http://www.pgil-eirdata.org) (accessed Dec. 5, 2008).

Bell, J. Bowyer. "Ireland and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939." *Studia Hibernica* 9 (1969).

Benson, Frederick R. *Writers in Arms: the Literary Impact of the Spanish Civil War*. New York: New York University Press, 1967.

Bonaccorso, Richard. *Sean O'Faolain's Irish Vision*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1987.

Brown, Terence. *Ireland : A Social and Cultural History, 1922-2002*. 2nd ed. London: Harper Perennial, 2004.

Caesar, Adrian. *Dividing Lines: Poetry, Class, and Ideology in the 1930s*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991.

Cullingford, Elizabeth. *Yeats, Ireland and Fascism*. London: Macmillan, 1981.

Cunningham, Valentine. *Spanish Front: Writers on the Civil War*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986.

———. *British Writers of the Thirties*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.

———. *The Penguin Book of Spanish Civil War Verse*. New York: Penguin Books, 1980.

Cronin, Mike, and John Regan. *Ireland: The Politics of Independence, 1922-49*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000.

Dawe, Gerald, and Nicholas Allen. *The Proper Word: Collected Criticism: Ireland, Poetry and Politics*. Omaha, Neb.: Creighton University Press, 2007.

Ellmann, Richard. *Yeats, the Man and the Masks*. New York: Macmillan Co., 1948.

Fitzpatrick, David. *The Two Irelands, 1912-1939*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Foster, R. F. *Modern Ireland, 1600-1972*. New York: Viking Penguin, 1988.

Gloversmith, Frank. *Class, Culture, and Social Change: A New View of the 1930's*. Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980.

Goldring, Maurice. *Pleasant the Scholar's Life: Irish Intellectuals and the Construction of the Nation State*. London: Serif, 1993.

- Hoar, Adrian. *In Green and Red: The Lives of Frank Ryan*. Dingle: Brandon, 2004.
- Hopkins, James K. *Into the Heart of the Fire: The British in the Spanish Civil War*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998.
- Howes, Marjorie Elizabeth. *Yeats's Nations: Gender, Class, and Irishness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Hynes, Samuel Lynn. *The Auden Generation: Literature and Politics in England in the 1930s*. London: Bodley Head, 1976.
- Jump, Jim, ed. *Poems from Spain*. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2006.
- Kenwood, Alun. *The Spanish Civil War: A Cultural and Historical Reader*. Providence: Berg, 1993.
- Kiberd, Declan. *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation*. New York: Vintage, 1996.
- Klaus, H. Gustav. "The Sore Frailty of This Lasting Cause: Some Celtic Versions of Spanish Civil War Poetry." *Irish University Review* 21, (1991).
- . "Irish Newspapers and the Spanish Civil War." *Irish Historical Studies* 33 (2002).
- Marshik, Celia. *British Modernism and Censorship*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- McGarry, Fearghal. "Irish Newspapers and the Spanish Civil War." *Irish Historical Studies* 33 (2002).
- . *Irish Politics and the Spanish Civil War*. Cork: Cork University Press, 1999.
- Newsinger, John. "Blackshirts, Blueshirts, and the Spanish Civil War." *The Historical Journal* 44, no. 3, (2001).
- O'Canainn, Aodh. "Eilis Ryan in Her Own Words." *Saothar* 21 (1996).
- O'Connor, Joseph. *Even the Olives Are Bleeding: The Life and Times of Charles Donnelly*. Dublin: New Island Books, 1992.
- Pierce, David. *Irish Writing in the Twentieth Century: A Reader*. Cork, Ireland: Cork University Press, 2000.
- Shovlin, Frank. *The Irish Literary Periodical, 1923-1958*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003.
- Stradling, Robert. *The Irish and the Spanish Civil War 1936-1939*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999.