

Cecil Gerahty's *The Road to Madrid*: An Anglo-Irish Falstaff in Spain's Theatre of War*

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Received: 28/11/2017. Accepted: 22/03/2018.

How to cite this article: Sell, Jonathan P. A. "Cecil Gerahty's *The Road to Madrid*: An Anglo-Irish Falstaff in Spain's Theatre of War." *ES Review. Spanish Journal of English Studies*, vol. 39, 2018, pp. 11–28.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24197/ersjes.39.2018.11-28>

Abstract: The main goal of this article is to make better known a largely neglected work on the Spanish Civil War, *The Road to Madrid*, and its author, Cecil Gerahty. The work, which combines war reportage with travelogue, is first situated in its publishing context and then its chief claims to historiographical notoriety are explained. There follows a survey of the biographical data available for Gerahty's life and a sketch of his character and personality based on the internal evidence of his book. After a general overview of *The Road to Madrid*'s contents and main characteristics, Gerahty's connoisseurial attitude to the conflict and his aestheticisation of trauma are examined, with a discussion of their possible causes and consequences.

Keywords: Cecil Gerahty; *The Road to Madrid*; Spanish Civil War; aesthetics; trauma.

Summary: Introduction: *The Road to Madrid* in context. Biographical notes. The connoisseur of war. "War is beautiful": Discussion and conclusions.

Resumen: El objetivo principal de este artículo es dar a conocer una obra casi olvidada sobre la Guerra Civil española, *The Road to Madrid*, y a su autor, Cecil Gerahty. Se explican las circunstancias de su publicación para luego analizarse sus principales aportaciones a la historiografía sobre la Guerra. A continuación, se repasan los datos biográficos disponibles para la vida de Gerahty y se realiza un bosquejo de su figura y carácter basado en el propio texto. Después de ofrecer una visión de conjunto de los contenidos y principales características de *The Road to Madrid*, se examinan las causas y las consecuencias de la actitud de Gerahty con respecto al conflicto y su visión esteticista del trauma.

Palabras clave: Cecil Gerahty; *The Road to Madrid*; Guerra Civil española; estética; trauma.

Sumario: Introducción: El contexto de *The Road to Madrid*. Apuntes biográficos. El *connoisseur* de la guerra. "La guerra es bella": Análisis y conclusiones.

*This article is the result of research conducted as part of the research project "The Impact of the Spanish Civil War on English Culture and Literature: The Forgotten Texts" (ref. FFI2013-47983-C3-1-P), financed by the Spanish Ministry of Economics and Competitiveness. The author's thanks are due to staff at the British Library and the Library of the Centre for Political and Constitutional Studies, Madrid.



1. INTRODUCTION: *THE ROAD TO MADRID* IN CONTEXT

Cecil Gerahty's *The Road to Madrid* is one of the 221 books and pamphlets on the Spanish Civil War published in England between 1936 and 1939 (García), most of them largely forgotten or only recorded in occasional footnotes in histories of the conflict. In what follows, I should like to rescue Gerahty's book from its current neglect. To do so, I shall first situate it in its publishing context and explain briefly its claims to historiographical notoriety. Then, I shall survey what little is known of Gerahty's life, consider what can be learnt of his personality, and provide a general overview of the work's main contents and characteristics. Finally, I shall show how Gerahty's work exhibits a connoisseurial view of the conflict and discuss its possible reasons and consequences.

Like all those other books and pamphlets, the publication of Gerahty's *The Road to Madrid* was part of the concerted efforts by publishers and print media sympathetic to either of the warring factions to influence public opinion. At a time when official British policy regarding the war was non-interventionist, feelings ran high among the population at large, and pro-republicans and pro-nationalists alike responded to what they perceived as dereliction of duty on the part of the government by forming lobbies and pressure groups and using all means possible to advocate the particular cause they espoused. Books and pamphlets purveying with propaganda and uncritical reportage but often sadly lacking in political awareness or literary quality rolled off the presses for consumption by a readership presumably avid for news and information about the war. The Duchess of Atholl's pro-Republican *Searchlight on Spain* (1938) sold 100,000 copies within a week of publication (Cazorla-Sánchez 90).¹ There were fewer readers of books favourable to the nationalist cause, which by late 1937 were outnumbered by pro-Republican titles in a proportion of approximately thirty-two to one.

In a sense, then, Gerahty's book was just one work of propaganda among many, typical of the derivative, self-replicating publications of the

¹ A full critical edition of Atholl's book complete with annotated translation into Spanish was published in 2016. Gerahty (195, 233) twice chooses the term "divines" to allude wryly to the visit of Spain made by Atholl, Ellen Wilkinson and Eleanor Rathbone in April 1937.

Anglo-Spanish coterie of fascists, monarchists or Catholics who campaigned vigorously for Franco's cause.² Amid this welter of sloganizing apologetics, *The Road to Madrid* is outstanding for only two very particular reasons. In the first place, his was the first work to reproduce the so-called "Ventura" papers, which, he says, he had found "in the Communist headquarters in La Línea near Gibraltar" (Gerahty 214) and which attested to the existence of a conspiracy which was to have come to fruition in the form of the nationwide mobilisation of syndicalists and anarchists. News of this plot had already transpired,³ but Gerahty provided the documentary evidence as well as the exact date, 25 July 1936, on which the uprising was due to take place. As Gerahty notes with relief, "Franco's move [the rebellion of 17 July 1936] was only just in time to prevent a general massacre of the 'persons of order'" (219). Secondly, Gerahty's was the first voice to cast doubt in print on the Guernica bombardment, chiefly because the bad weather would have prevented the Condor Legion from flying and that he heard no noise of bombs exploding from the village of Markina-Xemein, twenty-eight kilometres away, which he happened to be visiting (Gerahty 242). These are depressing claims to fame or notoriety indeed. The "Ventura" papers have been proven to be fakes, the communist plot never to have existed; in contrast, there is now no reasonable doubt regarding the very real aerial bombardment of Guernica by the Condor Legion.⁴

As for the "Ventura" papers, Gerahty was either the dupe of British pro-Francoists such as anti-Communist Catholic converts Henry Lunn and Arthur F. Loveday and Catholic publisher, Douglas Jerrold, all three of whom were involved in the "Ventura" papers confabulation and their dissemination; or he was one of the confabulators. The ultimate origin of the papers was most likely the Delegation of Press and Propaganda at Franco's Salamanca headquarters (Southworth, *Guernica! Guernica!* 70), although Loveday bragged it was his own idea (Keene 49–50, 85n22). Loveday and Jerrold were also involved in the *Dragon Rapide* mission,

² Buchanan remains the best account of reactions in Britain to the Spanish Civil War and of the various forms they took in different sectors of the population.

³ Australo-Italian Eleonora Tennant (*Spanish Journey* 30–31; *Viaje* 94 and note 49), who spent ten days in the National Zone in mid-October 1936, refers to the plot in *Spanish Journey*, published in late November or December of the same year.

⁴ For the definitive study, and Gerahty's role in the hoax, see Southworth (*Guernica! Guernica!!* 11–13). The origin of the Communist plot was quite probably the Department of Press and Propaganda.

which had flown Franco from semi-exile in the Canary Islands to Spanish Morocco, from where he would launch the rebellion (Preston 174–75; Day). So too was Luis Antonio Bolín, ABC’s London correspondent at the time, intermediary between the different parties in the project and, together with Loveday and Jerrold, member of the Anglo-Spanish “small committee,” founded in 1932 by monarchist exile Frederick-Ramón de Bertodano, 8th Marquis del Moral (García 36). To reward Bolín for his services, Franco appointed him head of his press office in Salamanca, and it was probably there that he came into contact with Gerahty, in his capacity as one of the *Daily Mail*’s special correspondents, possibly feeding him the bogus “Ventura” papers. In regard of the Guernica cover-up, which has been amply documented by Southworth (*Guernica! Guernica!*), it is quite likely too that Gerahty was working in connivance with Bolín.⁵ In his memoirs of the period, Bolín recalls how “sincere and honest” Gerahty (211), companion in fatigues on several fronts, had debunked the existence of the bombardment for the reasons stated above. There is no coincidence in the fact that the publishing house, Eyre & Spottiswoode, which would bring out Gerahty’s *The Road to Madrid* had already published Bolín’s *The Spanish Republic* in 1933; and it is not impossible that Bolín himself recommended Gerahty’s work to Eyre & Spottiswoode’s owner, the same Douglas Jerrold of the “Ventura” papers and one of the main propagators of the lies about Guernica. Whatever may have been the true circumstances and Gerahty’s precise role regarding both the “Ventura” papers and the Guernica cover-up, what clearly emerges is a picture of the close collaboration both in London and in Salamanca of a tight-knit group of well-to-do propagandists of the Nationalist Movement.

So much for the historiographical import of Gerahty’s *The Road to Madrid*. What, then, of its qualities as documentary reportage or witness to events of the war? The first point to be made is that Gerahty was not a professional journalist, but a private individual who happened to be in the Spanish theatre of war and who voluntarily telegraphed reports of what he saw to the British press, in Gerahty’s case the pro-Nationalist *Daily Mail*. The newspaper’s owner, Lord Rothermere, was on close terms with Adolph Hitler and a leading figure in British right-wing circles; one of his special correspondents in Spain, G. Ward Price, was also an acquaintance of the *Führer*, who regarded him as his pet journalist

⁵ Southworth (*Conspiracy* 105) mentions Gerahty.

(Wilson). Other special correspondents in Spain included William Mundy, based in Madrid, and Oliver Baldwin, son of Conservative prime minister Stanley Baldwin and based in Barcelona.⁶ As the special correspondents filed their reports anonymously, unlike the *Daily Mail's* Spain correspondent, Harold Cardozo, it is impossible to identify with certainty Gerahty's own contributions. In any case, despite Bolín's eulogies, Gerahty's *The Road to Spain* is less valuable as a piece of extended journalism than as the sketch of certain aspects of the National Zone that were beyond the reach of most reporters. For Gerahty seems to have had personal or social connections which "enabled him to observe more freely than most other foreigners" (Jackson 267).

2. BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Quite what those connections were is impossible to establish as is any detailed account of Gerahty's own life. He was born into a family with origins in Tyrone, Northern Ireland.⁷ His father, George Marsh Gerahty, had moved to south-east England before the birth of Cecil in 1888, in Hampton Wick, Middlesex. Cecil was the oldest of four children born to the marriage of his father with Laura Fagg. He also had an older stepsister, Caroline Helen E. Gerahty, and stepbrother, Esmond George E. Gerahty, after whom Gerahty named his own son, Esmond, dedicatee of *The Road to Madrid*.⁸ When describing a *picador's* performance with his "pole," Gerahty (221) reminisces about punting on the Thames, which may hint that he was an Oxford graduate; otherwise, all we know of his education is that at the age of sixteen or seventeen he "exchanged English for Spanish with a boy from Almería" (195), whom, thirty-two years later, he meets again over dinner in Algeciras. From 31 August 1915, Gerahty served in the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve, with the rank of lieutenant (*British Military Lists* 1362, 1711, 1184), and in 1919 he was mentioned in despatches for his services in action against enemy

⁶ Baldwin had flirted with Oswald Mosley's fledgling fascist movement (Wilson 158n37) before swinging radically to the left. See also Walker.

⁷ Most likely a Roman Catholic family given the surname and Gerahty's snide comment on the Ulster Protestant mission in Jerez which "had taken a prominent part in burning churches before the revolution . . . shout[ing] such encouraging cries as 'Burn the Idols!'" (130).

⁸ Caroline and Esmond were children Gerahty's father brought to his marriage with Laura Fagg; the identity of their mother is unknown ("Families of North-East Essex").

submarines off Gibraltar (“Honours for Services in Action with Enemy Submarines”; “Gerahty, Cecil Echlin”). This implies that Gerahty was married at the time and had therefore not been conscripted for active service; it is not impossible either that Gerahty already had some connections with the region on both sides of the Straits of Gibraltar. He tells us that in 1920 he was in Tangier, where a French firm commissioned him to buy a motor patrol launch that was to be sold at auction in Gibraltar (202); we know too that from 1924 he sailed from the UK to Tangier on eleven occasions, and to Gibraltar once, in 1937 (“Passenger Lists Leaving UK 1890–1960”). Furthermore, *The Road to Madrid* is replete with references to high-level acquaintances in Morocco and the province of Cádiz. Internal evidence indicates that Gerahty visited Spain on at least three occasions during the first two years of the Civil War, although he never provides dates for any of his activities; but there is no evidence in the book that he had any involvement as a combatant, *pace* Insausti (10). As well as filing reports from Spain for the *Daily Mail*, he was in England on 23 August 1937 to broadcast a talk on “My friends, the Moors” for BBC radio (“My Friends the Moors”), and on 25 March 1938 to broadcast another, again for the BBC, about his visit to the front-line at Oviedo (Deacon 154–55). His death at the age of forty-nine, recorded in the Pancras District of London in June 1938 (“Gerahty, Cecil E.”), cheated him of ever seeing the Nationalist forces reach the end of the road to Madrid and enter the capital on 29 March 1939. The same year also saw the posthumous publication of *The Spanish Arena*, which Gerahty co-authored with William Foss; a lengthy work with its eyes set almost as much on the Fleet Street “Fiction Factory” (Foss and Gerahty 429) as events in Spain, it boasted a foreword by the Duke of Alba and Berwick, Franco’s agent in London.

As for Gerahty’s character and personality, *The Road to Madrid* affords a number of details which together enable a rough sketch to be attempted. A supporter of the rebels, it goes without saying that his politics are well towards the right. But less than being ideologically driven or doctrinaire, his beliefs and conceptions derive from a set of ethical standards that are closely bound up with a particular sense of being English that was widespread across large swathes of the population. It is a sense of Englishness that is deeply rooted in a pastoral nostalgia for an agrarian feudalism, transmuted into an Englishman’s fondness for pottering about in the garden; it is, so to speak, a quintessentially English conservatism which predates democratic

institutions, party politics or the creation of the Conservative Party. Valentine Cunningham explains what he identifies as right-wing twenties and thirties ruralism as a “lament . . . that *Modernismus*, mechanized modernity, the world of the anti-conservative modernizers, had taken over” (180); yet he also argues convincingly that such “pastoral mindedness . . . was a dominant strain of modern leftist thinking” (177). This atavistic, trans-ideological conservatism was embodied in the horticulturally constituted body politic of Shakespeare’s Falstaff and which, like the nation’s mythopoeic self-image of John Bull, cuts across all but the most extreme forms of class and ideological difference. And it is, one suspects, with some pleasure that Gerahty quotes the following passage from a talk given for English listeners on Radio Sevilla on the invitation of General Queipo de Llano:

A dreadful weed has been sown by aliens in [Spain’s] gardens, and these weeds have got to be eradicated.

Weeding is always a slow and arduous process, and badly done results in as much harm as good. In England, the landowner who permits weeds to seed to the detriment of his neighbours is held financially responsible for his neglect. Spain is weeding her garden: please God her neighbours will understand and thank her. (61)

By means of this metaphor, whose topic domain is hopelessly inapposite to most of Spain, Gerahty’s ancestral conservatism acknowledges hierarchies in its mention of “the landowner,” but also recognizes a mutual responsibility applying to all classes for which all may be answerable. It is a conservatism, too, which morphs easily into first, self-satisfaction and then, bigotry. In conversation with a Spaniard, Gerahty captures this perfectly:

One of the Spaniards then asserted that the Red menace was far more advanced in England than the average Briton realized, to which I countered that I thought our great strength lay in the general honesty of purpose of the whole British people together, together with an innate sense of superiority to all and any other peoples. (58)

Even though Gerahty invoked God in the previous quotation, he seems to wear his religion lightly, as do legions of Englishmen who profess the faith but never set foot in church; and his ancestral conservatism is, meanwhile, capacious enough to embrace the need for

state intervention in social policies. Thus, for example, he indicts the Spanish church and state for insufficient educational provision, a state of affairs palliated by the foundations of private philanthropists (130–32).

Three of the pillars of Gerahty's conservatism are, then, a lingering feudalism, a sense of a national commonality, and a relaxed Christianity. A fourth is a deeply-felt monarchism which, when upset by news of Edward VIII's imminent abdication. After listening to a report of the parliamentary debate of the issue on a radio lent to him at Ávila by courtesy of General Mola, Gerahty reports, "The effect of this was to make me feel terribly lonely and badly in need of a fellow-countryman to talk to" (154). No such effect was registered earlier in the same day when, on the Guadarrama front, he notices the scalp of a republican soldier, tossed by the wind onto the top of a big boulder in such a way that "it looked as if the hair were growing out of the stone" (151). Meanwhile, symptoms of conservatism's slide into bigotry emerge elsewhere when, for example, at a celebration of the Immaculate Conception in Carabanchel, his head is turned by "four or five requeté ladies looking particularly charming, as the cold wind was making their cheeks match their bonnets" (165); or when, more grotesquely, he reports the remarks of an Italian soldier recently arrived from the Abyssinian campaign, and whose "frankness" he finds "attractive and sincere," to the effect that it was "most disconcerting to be up against Europeans rather than blacks" (227).

What emerges more remarkably from *The Road to Madrid* is its author's unflagging Epicureanism, which brings Falstaff to mind once again: in Tetuán he is quite capable of handling two breakfasts in one morning (118), while he finds, so he tells us, "a bottle and a half of [Tío Pepe or Pando] a very reasonable daily allowance when I am in Andalusia" (62). The problem is that Gerahty is not always in Andalusia and that even when roughing it out on the front with missiles whistling overhead or billeted in ramshackle outhouses with nothing but the cold for company, he continuously evinces an insouciant hedonism which verges on the maniacal; certainly, his constant efforts to secure his own creature comforts suggests an ironclad egocentrism which is impervious to the calamities and suffering that surround him. In a bitterly cold Irún, "a tot of rum seemed indispensable"; its non-existence was made good by "a large tray of fresh cakes, still hot, lying on the pavement" (35). Before leaving Seville to see the Moors in action at Córdoba, he stops off "at Gayanco's for an ice or two"; the establishment is, he tells us "famous

for cold and creamy things, the quality of which seemed unaffected by the war” (42–43). At Fuente de Cantos, Toledo, an Irish officer “introduced [Gerahty, a fellow journalist and a civil guard officer] to a barrel of very old wine which was extremely strong” (72–73); at Oropesa, Gerahty treats the “Marquis of N.” to “some bottles of sherry and some cigarettes” (89); in Torrehermosa, Cáceres, he discovers “a quite reasonable wine” and thinks it “tragic” to see the “crops uncut and the grapes going to waste” (111). Elsewhere, this ersatz Egon Ronay finds to his satisfaction that “the fine art of lunch” survives intact at the Nationalist’s field headquarters at Carabanchel (168). For his part, the lieutenant-colonel who welcomes him on the Guadarrama front treats him to a slap-up feed, consisting of “*hors d’oeuvre*, followed by *arroz valenciana* (sic) (Valencia rice), tomato omelette, steak and potatoes, *crème caramel*, and cheese. This was washed down with a local wine which, though rather sweet, was not syrupy, and I found it altogether agreeable” (151). That local wine then serves as the excuse for a wine-buff’s merry excursus on the virtues of wines grown at altitude (151–52). Gormandising on this scale and with such relish sits grotesquely with the disturbing image of the wind-tossed scalp still growing out of its rock a few lines higher up the page. The grotesque becomes obscene when, at Toledo, Gerahty observes how, after driving along the corpse-strewn road out of Santa Olalla, Toledo, “the dreadful smell . . . crop[ped] up at meals for days afterwards” (75).⁹

And so it goes on: he turns his nose up at watered wine in Talavera (158) and suspiciously cheap vermouth in Toledo (160); back in Gibraltar, “Good food and wine had been plentiful, and life seemed good” (201); Jerez inspires him to deliver a paean on its most famous product (210) and obliges him to confess that “My last dreams there are always that I have inherited a share in a sherry business, or bought the local pub” (224). It is worth noting that his wine connoisseurship, more than his conservatism, is also class and politically-signed: he has a dim view of “inferior country wine” (30), while he charges *aguardiente*, “which burned like petrol” (59) with being one of the main causes of republican atrocities. If to this obsession with food and drink is added a

⁹ Elsewhere, he notes “something peculiar” about the smell of “Banana skins, olive-stones, remains of ham, and eggshells” that is to be found in Red-occupied churches and their houses, before concluding that “I should never be near a real Anarchist again without my nostrils warning me of his presence” (103).

penchant for “wallowing” in the mud-baths of Montemayor, Cáceres (“most agreeable” 125) or “up to his chin” in the hot bath of the Gran Hotel, Salamanca (138), the picture emerges of a sensualist who is not going to let the hardship and violence of war put the dampers on his hedonism.¹⁰ Driving along the Costa del Sol he passes cottages with “shell-holes right through them” impervious to any human suffering those holes might imply, he simply “bowled merrily along” (202). Perhaps most chillingly, and playing now the part of Bardolph instead of Falstaff, Gerahty is not averse to collecting mementoes. If not quite a looter, on visiting the Republican headquarters in Guareña, whose “floor was swimming with blood” he is “afraid” that “in my nervousness . . . I must have slipped an old Cordoba silver cigar-case into my hip-pocket, as I found it there some time later” (102, 104). More damningly, he also pockets a “large meat chopper”—now on his desktop as he writes—which was, he surmises, the weapon used to murder the “old lady of seventy-six, her head half chopped off and her poor broken arms lying unnaturally,” whose cadaver had met him on entering the building (104, 102).

This capacity for detaching himself from the full horror of what he sees may have been forged in part by his own experiences of armed conflict, although as a naval reservist it is not likely that those were particularly numerous. But it may also be explained in terms of his tendency towards self-dramatization, his obvious enjoyment of taking on roles. This is apparent in his repeated references to his “brother journalists,” the effect of which is to insert himself into a professional sodality to which, as an amateur correspondent, he does not properly belong; it is visible too when, “trusting more to my pseudo-Spanish uniform and the Spanish appearance I had *cultivated*” (100; my emphasis), he joins the nationalist troops entering Guareña, Badajoz. More seriously, all his attempts to play the newshound sniffing out the truth—a rhetorical ploy, perhaps, to enhance the credibility of the “Ventura” papers and the non-event at Guernica—are severely undermined by an early episode in which he colludes with French journalists in photographing “a well-staged [Red] attack on a cottage”:

¹⁰ Gerahty (92) baulks at the unlaundered bed-clothes of a Talavera pension and goes off in search of lodging elsewhere; much more practical, Eleonora Tennant (99), who must have passed through Talavera at almost the same time as Gerahty, liberally sprays the sheets of quite possibly the same establishment with insecticide.

My part in the proceedings was to explain [as a speaker of Spanish] to the corpses how to lie and thank them gracefully for keeping still, and hand out cigarettes. I do not think that the cinema-man noticed it, but one of the corpses “yawned” heavily while he was winding. (29)

Little more can be learnt of Gerahty from *The Road to Madrid*, although I shall return to some aspects of his character later.

3. THE CONNOISSEUR OF WAR

What then of the book itself? As for its contents, on Thursday 24 June, the *Daily Mail* published a brief review, praising the book as “valuable and timely” and summarizing it as follows:

[Gerahty] gives the most vivid descriptions of conditions in the front line before Madrid, on the eve of the relief of Toledo, and on the Guadarrama. Even more instructive are his pictures of the life in the territory administered by General Franco.

He has talked freely with General Franco, his officers and men, prisoners of war, and men and women of every class. (“Books To-Day,” *Daily Mail*, 24 June 1937, 20)

Oddly, the reviewer makes no hay of Gerahty’s reproduction of the “Ventura” papers or denial of the Guernica bombardment, but for the rest, his succinct overview of *The Road to Madrid* is accurate enough. Gerahty reports on the front-line before Madrid, the taking of which by the rebels is the book’s unaccomplished telos. On his way to the capital from Gibraltar, in November 1936, he spends a night in the Cisnes Hotel, “whose decorations which had been displayed in anticipation of the rapid relief of Madrid were drooping miserably” (129): the inadvertent pathetic fallacy of those forlorn adornments is in retrospect ominous of what would be the lengthy and painful siege of the city. Gerahty is also just outside Toledo on the eve of its liberation. There, an acquaintance of his introduces him to Colonel Carlos Asensio Cabanillas and he has close encounters with Russian bombers and gets caught up in gun-fire. Unusually, however, he has no time for the sort of epic panegyrics of the heroic defence of the city that sold like hot-cakes in Europe’s bookstores; nor does he enter the city itself on the pretext that to do so would delay

his cabling news of its fall (91–92). On his way to the Guadarrama Front, Gerahty stays the night in Ávila, where he shares a room in the hotel “now called the ‘Roma,’ having lately been the ‘Paris,’ a change that has been made nearly everywhere in White Spain owing to the unpopularity of the French” (148). It is small details like this which make Gerahty’s book worth rescuing from oblivion.

With respect to Gerahty’s methods for gathering information, as the reviewer observes, he is ready to talk to anybody and, thanks to his connections, has access to top civilian and military officials. One has the impression that the Nationalist Zone from Tangier to Burgos is a small world where all are acquainted and on amicable terms. Apart from “brother journalists” and the sherry producers of Jerez, Gerahty is “friend” of Colonel “Paxot” (sic) of Málaga¹¹ (25); had met Franco before the war when a colonel in Morocco (26); was familiar with “Captain A.” before meeting him again in the press office at Burgos (29); makes the acquaintance of Generals Varela, with whom he later shares “a wine of honour,” and Queipo de Llano (53, 165, 60), whom he later asks for an autograph (134); knows a Lloyd’s agent, the “Marquis of N.,” is a “friend” of Major Armada (64, 65, 119); bumps into the daughter of an old French friend (119); is saved from arrest by his “friend” “Captain B.” (139); comes across Millán-Astray after many years without seeing him (140); knows “Senor Serat” (sic),¹² former Spanish Minister in Morocco, now “Foreign Minister to the Burgos Government” (141); and joins General Eoin O’Duffy, leader of the Irish Brigade, for a drink in a Salamanca hotel (175–76). In and around Toledo he also meets Fr. Alberto Risco, author of *La epopeya del Alcázar de Toledo* (1937) [The Epic of the Alcazar at Toledo] and Rodolphe Timmermans, the Dutch journalist responsible for *Heroes of the Alcazar* (1937) (156, 173); Gerahty’s comparative reluctance to expatiate on the heroic defence of the city, as noted above, is worth restating here.

Gerahty’s ample circle of friends and acquaintances enables him to gather information and visit places, be they field headquarters or the rebellion’s Salamanca nerve-centre, which were beyond the reach of many others who, as journalists or in a private capacity, visited Spain to find out what was really going on. However, what most strikes the reader of *The Road to Madrid* is Gerahty’s markedly aesthetic approach to war

¹¹ Francisco Patxot Madoz.

¹² Francisco Serrat y Bonastre.

reportage, a stylistic feature which calls for some analysis. Gerahty is, it seems, as much a connoisseur of war as of good food and wine. In his scheme of things, military events of all sorts and even open conflict constitute a “show” (165, 227). A changing of the guard, tank manoeuvres or a troop review are “pretty” to watch or picturesque (233, 243, 164); an exchange of gun-fire between the fronts at Robledo, Madrid, is “a pretty little action” (149). In contrast, Gerahty is left unmoved by bullfighting, which he dismisses as “a bad show” (223). Not only aesthetic, military operations can also be edifying: witnessing “friendly bombers at work” on Red lines in Madrid is both “a pleasure” and “very interesting” (169–70), while Gerahty regrets having to leave the Bilbao front as “the whole scheme of military operations [was] very interesting and the country picturesque” (245). In fact, Gerahty seems almost to believe that warfare is a performance staged for his benefit and, like a child robbed of a Christmas pantomime, he finds the poor weather conditions around Durango “very disappointing” as “I had *hoped* to see [the grounded planes] bombing” the town (242; my emphasis).

Not content to report the delectation and edification available to the war connoisseur, Gerahty aestheticises his own accounts of particular actions. Fancying himself as an artist, he half-figures himself as a “Corot” or a “Turner” of prose (96, 209), complementing his fondness for photography with colourful, graphic descriptions. “Crimson-faced” in the heat, he lavishes the full spectrum of his palette on the following description of Meknes in the Atlas Mountains:

After half an hour the minarets [sic] of Meknes can be seen standing clear-cut against the sky, a champagne quality becomes noticeable in the atmosphere, and the orange plantations and vine-yards begin to look richer and happier. The soil gets redder and redder . . . till on the rich Meknes plateau it assumes a full colour ranging from a purplish chocolate to orange. (192)

In similar vein, and more to our point, bombed-out villas in La Caleta, Málaga, “with empty and blackened windows . . . as with sightless eyes . . . gazed on the shimmering Mediterranean” (205). In Guareña he visits the parish church: “The scene in the church was very picturesque. Some fifty horses were stabled inside with their nosebags on, while on the floor were soldiers who had dropped asleep before they had had time to settle into any comfortable position” (101). But the

soldiers are not sleeping, for Gerahty now reveals the secret key to interpreting the “picturesque” tableau he has just treated the reader to: “The church was absolutely wrecked, no pictures or statuary unbroken” and, it goes without saying, the soldiers prostrate on the ground were dead. Yet no matter, for “a shaft of sunlight streamed through the doorway and lit up the horses, making a very *attractive* sight” (101; my emphasis). “Unpleasant,” in contrast, are the “objects [that] have drifted on to [Saint Jean de Luz’s] beaches, bound together hand and foot;” fortunately, once “properly buried,” these corpses have brought about “no worse result than a slight slump in the fish market” (247). In this one sentence Gerahty manages to combine his connoisseurship (“unpleasant”), his detachment (“objects”) and his predominant Epicureanism (“no worse result . . . fish market”).

4. “WAR IS BEAUTIFUL”: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The question remains of whether Gerahty’s attitude and stance towards, and treatment of, war reportage are peculiar to himself or symptomatic of a more widespread, cultural response towards armed conflict. It is commonplace to affirm that after the First World War, people never again regarded armed conflict in the same light. No longer merely an upgraded version of young, male heroics on the playing fields of England, modern warfare massacred its troops like cattle and no longer lent itself to the sort of patriotic representations laced with hot-blooded derring-do which were more appropriate to the ripping yarns of adolescent male fiction. In this light, *The Road to Madrid* begins to look like a throwback to an earlier age, its moral disengagement consonant with a conception of warfare as manly *divertissement*. Yet I would suggest that Gerahty’s stance is not unique to him. Florence Farmborough, who, as volunteer Red Cross nurse on the Russian front of the First World War, had seen the full horrors of war and had written them up in her diary (*Nurse*). Nevertheless, when later acting as Franco’s English broadcaster for *Radio Nacional*, her Sunday evening talks displayed a similar imperviousness to the human cost of the war as that detected in Gerahty. Farmborough (*Life*) mentions the odd victim of Red atrocities, but on the whole, the young heroes of Franco’s crusade are quite happy in their trenches, warmly wrapped up in the woollen gloves and scarves knitted for them by the uniformed heroines in the rear-

guard.¹³ Of course, what Farmborough and Gerahty have in common is their support for the nationalist cause, a support which, as noted earlier, enjoyed far less prominence among the English media and publishers than its pro-Republican counterpart. That in itself may account for the necessary silencing of the darker side of the conflict and its human cost. But equally important is the fact that both Farmborough and Gerahty were writing from National Spain, with all that implies for direct and indirect censorship. Farmborough's broadcasts were read by her master before being broadcast, and Gerahty must have been conscious that his manuscript would also be subject to careful scrutiny once delivered to his publishers. In this regard, it is worth pointing out that many pro-Franco publications in England were financed directly by the Burgos government (Edwards 67).

However, where Farmborough and Gerahty differ is in the latter's deliberate aestheticisation of pain and suffering in what might be interpreted as a subterfuge to either distract from or, perhaps, to palliate trauma. Much as in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, Marcus' intolerably prolix and notoriously ineffectual ekphrasis of Lavinia's violated and mutilated body has been taken as either a flight from or, alternatively, therapy for trauma, so Gerahty's painterly descriptions and bluff detachment may be attempts to draw the sting of suffering, to banish from consciousness the signs of man's inhumanity to man.¹⁴ Alternatively, Gerahty's martial connoisseurship may have roots in the withdrawal from collective or social concerns to the private realm of self-realization that Walter Pater prescribed for the artist (Pittock 20) and which, under the *fin-de-siècle* gloss of the "naughty nineties," had been cheapened into the hedonist project of, to co-opt Pater's own words, "giv[ing] nothing but the best quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments' sake" (qtd. in Pittock 16). Gerahty was not alone in his morally dubious, connoisseurial insouciance; others, too, bore its symptoms, not least W. H. Auden whose notorious description of the Republican "bombed baby" poster he saw in Valencia in 1937 bespeaks a wider tendency to respond sensitively less to the victims of warfare than to the artistic representations of them.¹⁵ It is even possible

¹³ A full critical edition of Farmborough's *Life and People in National Spain* complete with annotated translation into Spanish was published in 2017.

¹⁴ On trauma in *Titus Andronicus*, see, for example, Willis.

¹⁵ Auden wrote: "Altogether it is a great time for the poster artist and there are some very good ones . . . In photomontage a bombed baby lies couchant upon a field of

to read Gerahty and others' responses to and representations of war in the light of Walter Benjamin's analysis (19–20), in his epilogue to "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" of the Fascist aestheticisation of warfare, most chillingly encapsulated in the Futurist Marinetti's claim that "war is beautiful." Aesthetics may thus literally anaesthetise against trauma or, more generally and banally, become a decadent way of life, or, more insidiously, help prosecute Fascist political agendas; so too may a daily bottle and a half of Tío Pepe. "You pays your money, you takes your choice." Gerahty, perhaps, opted for all three.

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aeroplanes" (qtd. in Mellor 25). Mellor (24–30) collects other similarly disturbing responses to bomb victims.

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