



## Martha Gellhorn's "Zoo in Madrid": Hope and Betrayal in the Spanish Civil War

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**Abstract.** Published in the late spring of 1937 as a literary journalism piece and included in Martha Gellhorn's second volume of short fiction, *Heart of Another* (1941), "Zoo in Madrid" poses engaging questions about the journalist's role as a war correspondent in the Spanish Civil War and her allegedly objective reportage method. In the following article, I propose to decode some of the elusive symbols of the story, built up on Hemingway's iceberg principle of writing, in connection with its propaganda message. My contention is that the zoo, a clear symbol of the total institution, operates as a microcosmic reflection of the city under siege. However, Gellhorn's portrayal of the animals' conditions in the zoo is one which, unlike her contemporaries' grim reports, enhances images of fertility and procreation immersed in an Edenic enclave that, however, fails to banish death and betrayal. In addition to a detailed revision of some of the pre-war, war and post-war reports of the Madrid zoo, I will endeavor to elucidate the biblical and literary allusions and echoes scattered in the story with a view to understanding the American journalist's ambivalent view of the Spanish conflict.

**Keywords:** zoo animals, Spanish Civil War, propaganda, war, Martha Gellhorn, literary journalism.

**Contents.** 1. Introduction. 2. *Casa de Fieras*: Animals and Wartime Trauma. 3. The Zoo: A Total Institution. 4. "Zoo in Madrid": Eros and Thanatos Reunited. 5. Conclusion.

**How to cite this article:** Aguilera-Linde, M. D. (2017) Martha Gellhorn's "Zoo in Madrid": Hope and Betrayal in the Spanish Civil War, in *Complutense Journal of English Studies* 25, 143-158.

*If Spain had not been sold out, truly this long  
and hideous killing could have been avoided.*

Martha Gellhorn

### 1. Introduction

On November 20 1975, the day Franco died, Martha Gellhorn returned for a brief spell to Spain and witnessed one of the silent demonstrations by more than 3000 people, before the towers of Carabanchel, the jail built by political prisoners immediately after the end of the Spanish Civil War, an enduring symbol of the Caudillo's overarching power in a country where any form of dissidence was swiftly suppressed. Moved by nostalgia for the days she spent as a war

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correspondent while Madrid was under siege, she hailed a cab to revisit the Zoo in the Retiro, unaware that in 1972 it had been moved to Casa de Campo, the old Royal hunting grounds then still outside Madrid. The first image of those past days, conjured up in her mind, was that of the old keeper who cared for the dying animals as he wept over them: “The people had no food, the animals were shot to spare them starvation, but he had saved some birds” (Gellhorn 1976: 47). However, the story she wrote about the zoo while the war was still raging is one in complete contrast to the mournful accounts of the animals’ sorry conditions published by her contemporaries.

Originally brought out in *Harper’s Bazaar* in 1937 (and not in *The New Yorker* as one of her biographers states),<sup>2</sup> “Zoo in Madrid” narrates the vicissitudes of the narrator and her companion (obviously Martha and Ernest)<sup>3</sup> on a quiet spring morning when there is no threat of bombardments and both feel the urge to escape from the terror of the non-stop air raids. In what follows I will attempt to provide an interpretation of the story in question by referring to some of the dilemmas posed by the silences and gaps in the narrative. Collected in Gellhorn’s second volume of short fiction, *The Heart of Another* (1941), the story closely adheres to many of Hemingway’s craft principles. In a letter to editor Max Perkins, written shortly after the publication of the volume, the journalist mentions Elizabeth Bowen’s stories that she describes as being “so empty and yet not empty” and full of words so “shiny” that when the reader believes to have been revealed “a big mystery”, “something very surprising and new”, (s)he discovers that nothing much has been told. “It is like a blind story teller somehow, crossed with a conspirator” (Gellhorn 2006: 119). Gellhorn’s writing method exemplifies this ability to reveal through concealing much of the story’s meaning. In addition to its pithy, staccato rhythm, the simplicity that characterizes both syntax and vocabulary, the strategically placed imagery and the seemingly inconclusive ending, all of them redolent of Hemingway, “Zoo in Madrid”, laden with a plethora of meanings which stubbornly remain elusive, embodies the iceberg principle to perfection.<sup>4</sup>

I shall start with a selection of some of the more conspicuous reports and writings about how the caged animals lived, suffered and in many cases met their end during the war. I will then proceed to analyze the zoo as a symbolic “total institution”, following Erving Goffman (1965). Finally, I will zoom in a bit to focus on the story itself, with a view to explaining its biblical and literary

<sup>2</sup> See Moorehead (2003: 146). Carl Rollyson mistakenly dates the composition of the story to October 1937 (2001: 82). The story is set in spring, and it had already been published in July of that year.

<sup>3</sup> Ernest Hemingway is called Rabb in this story (Gellhorn 1941: 127), surely a clipped version of “rabbit”, the nickname they used to call each other. Martha Gellhorn is also given this name, Rabbit, in Hemingway’s play *The Fifth Column* (1938). In “A Sense of Direction”, another story included in *The Heart of Another*, Hemingway is, however, called Fred Lawrence. Years later, after their divorce Hemingway becomes U.C. (“Unwanted Companion”) in *Travels with Myself and Another* (1978). “Bug” is the name Martha uses to address him in her letters.

<sup>4</sup> As a matter of fact, Gellhorn described her book as the most mature product she had ever written: “I think that there are grown-up things in this book, and so I am happy. I think it is getting on like an iceberg” (Gellhorn 2006: 120). Hemingway had first defined the principle of the iceberg in chapter 16 of *Death in the Afternoon* (1932). His best known definition of the theory of omission came years later, in a 1958 interview: “I always try to write on the principle of the iceberg. There is seven-eighths of it underwater for every parts that shows” (Plimpton 1960: 88).

overtones. My contention is that Gellhorn's piece traverses a wide array of contradictory ideological messages: the propagandistic effort to celebrate Madrid's resilient victory over the Fascist attacks cannot muffle disquieting signs of sacrifice and betrayal that adumbrate a wasteland with clear Eliotian echoes. Yet the hope that the animal menagerie, like a new Noah's Ark, might survive the final doom and become the starting point of a new civilization is never fully abandoned.

## 2. *Casa de Fieras: Animals and Wartime Trauma*

The Casa Real de Fieras del Retiro, to use its official name, the second oldest zoo in Europe (after the Vienna Zoo), was established by Carlos III in 1770.<sup>5</sup> Conceived as an animal menagerie enjoyed by the Spanish royal family in their hunting estate, it opened its gates to the public in 1868. With several "palaces" or pavilions, an artificial lake (the so-called "Estanque Grande"), gardens whose design echoed that of Versailles, and a central avenue ("Paseo de las Estatuas"), adorned with the statues of kings and queens and several fountains, the Zoo was described as looking

like a child's plaything. It is a little Noah's Ark, well-dressed and tidied up. It retains something of the careful detail and love for small things of the Japanese, as well as an Arabian sense of water decoration. (Insua 1922: 1. My translation)<sup>6</sup>

Closed during the Civil War, except on May 16, 1937 when it reopened for a day, the ending of the conflict decimated the animal population, reducing it to 25 creatures from 13 species, that were left only half alive (Bell 2001: 1379). The number was actually reduced to half after the war. In an interview published on July 23 1932, Cecilio Rodríguez, the director of Casa de Fieras, affirmed that the inventory included over 50 animals (Díaz Roncero 1932: 22). In 1917 there were, however, 98. The reason of this steep decline was that aging creatures died of natural causes and no money was invested on the purchase of new ones. In an article entitled "Paradojas de Madrid" ("Paradoxes of Madrid") and published one year before the outbreak of the war, Rafael Martínez García described the zoo as "an asylum for the old and the disabled": the lion was blind and almost toothless, the tiger seemed to need some crutches to walk, the camel suffered from asthma and the elephant complained of rheumatism (1935: 14-15).<sup>7</sup> In Gerardo Ribas's words, "[t]he question is extremely serious. It is death that depopulates our zoo.

<sup>5</sup> The celebrated Paris Menagerie, which was to have such a great influence on the rest of European zoos, was not created until 1793.

<sup>6</sup> "Parece cosa de juguete. Es un arca de Noé arregladita, ordenadita. Tiene algo de la minucia y la minuciosidad niponas, con un sentido árabe de la decoración hidráulica". All the translations from newspaper articles included hereafter are mine.

<sup>7</sup> "... asilo de inválidos, desdentados y viejos, donde los leones, en el ocaso de su vida, se tumban al sol". "Hay un león que anda muy mal de la vista, un elefante reumático, un camello venerable que padece asma, y centenares de gallinas y patos".

Even the polar bear, white as it is, is wearing black” (1935: 16).<sup>8</sup> It is no wonder, then, that in these frail conditions animals soon passed away during the Civil War.

Yet the creatures which perished during the confrontation were used as cases in point for they epitomized the cruelty of the warfare. Notorious were the cases of Poncho, the starving elephant which died as “a war casualty” in January 1938, as reported in *The Washington Post*; the polar bear, converted into a moving skeleton; the giraffe and the orangutan, sacrificed when they became too ill from malnourishment; and Pipo, the hippopotamus, which managed to survive the privations of the wartime rations. Gravitating towards the Loyalist cause as *The Washington Post* editors did, or moved by sympathy towards the Rebels’ fight as in the case of *ABC* (obviously after Franco’s victory and takeover of Madrid),<sup>9</sup> the press converted the zoo into a very transparent symbol on the one hand of the atrocities committed by the Rebels and on the other of the moral and political decadence of the Republic. In an op-ed, published in *ABC* after the end of the war, Fernando Gallego de Chaves y Calleja, Marquis of Quintanar, accused the recently overthrown regime of not only going against the whole history of mankind but “the history of animals, Natural History” itself:

Doctrinal dissidence has perhaps caused the death of the giraffe which could ‘see afar off’, and the elephant, despite its skin, could not bear the ups and downs of democracy. A similar lot befell the orangutan, ashamed of pursuing Azaña’s career, and the zebras . . . which were unable to survive the unbridled stupidity of the Second Republic. But where the regime left the most indelible mark of its utter lack of judgement was on the hippopotamus. Because of its horrid obesity, its wretched look filled with distrust and malice and its enormous mouth, the hippopotamus should have been treated with superstitious awe by the Republic. It has not been so, though, and the poor creature lost a kilo a day and delivered a ton of its weight into the folds of Popular Sovereignty’s cloak. Today the hippo is a kind of flabby sausage full of cracks which contemplates its visitors with glassy, evil eyes through which one can glimpse a half-repressed reproach, an accusation against a doctrine followed by men who have put an end to everything in Spain, even to these beasts which now retain the confused memory of a nightmare which now has, happily, come to an end. (1939: 8)<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> “La cuestión es seria. Nuestro Parque Zoológico lo deshabita la muerte. En la Casa de Fieras hasta el oso polar, tan blanco, está de luto”.

<sup>9</sup> I am using here the terms Loyalists and Rebs to refer, respectively, to the Republican Government forces, democratically elected, and to those supporting Franco’s military rebellion. Both terms were amply used by the American press during the conflict and, obviously, Martha Gellhorn makes use of them in her dispatches and letters. For a full account of the role played by the American Press in the propagandistic representation of the Spanish Civil War, see Peter N. Carroll and James D. Fernandez’s *Facing Fascism* (2007: 35-37). *Journal-American* explained the conflict as a struggle between Franco’s rebels and the Republican Reds. *The New York Times* chose to label the opposing sides as Insurgents or Rebels vs. Loyalists or Government forces. *The Post* alluded to the confrontation as a fight between Loyalists and Fascists.

<sup>10</sup> “Disentimientos doctrinales, tal vez, causaron la muerte a la jirafa ‘que veía lejos’ y el elefante, a pesar de su piel, no pudo resistir los tejemanejes democráticos. Otro tanto sucedió al orangután, avergonzado de seguir la carrera política de Azaña, y a las cebras (...), que no pudieron sobrevivir al cerril desenfreno de la Segunda. Pero donde el régimen dejó una más evidente prueba viva de su falta de sincéresis, fué [sic] en el hipopótamo. El hipopótamo, por su gordura repulsiva, por su mirada aviesa, inyectada de desconfianza y de maldad, por sus tragaderas imponentes, debió ser considerado con respeto supersticioso por los republicanos. No fué [sic]

Clearly, the zoo attracted unprecedented attention from all sides for completely different reasons and political agendas, whether from those who strongly supported the “Causa” and attacked the Fascist uprising, or from those who clearly embraced the Insurgents’ rebellion against the “nest of Reds” ruling the Republic (e.g. Randolph Hearst’s conservative *Journal-American*), or even from some others who adopted an ambivalent position, such as *The New York Times*, a journal “owned by Jews and edited by Catholics for Protestants” (Talese 1969: 58) that had to satisfy a medley of political credos. In all instances, animals were viewed as victims of the oppressors, whether they be Franco’s Nazi-sponsored planes bombarding the civil population, or the depraved Republican butchers, blinded by rage and unbridled cruelty. Rumors were widespread and taken at face value in Nationalist Spain that the Madrid and Barcelona Zoos had become abattoirs where the beasts were sacrificed to stave off the starvation of a privileged few—blood sausages and buffalo meat from the zoo were the staple diet in Madrid, according to American correspondent Henry T. Gorrell (2009: 57)—or chambers of torture where Catholic dissidents, nuns and priests were daily thrown.<sup>11</sup> In none of these was the Zoo presented as a locus for hope and rebirth, as was the case in Gellhorn’s story, as I will argue in this article.

That the zoo had some potential to trigger a campaign against the enemy was soon realized by war correspondents. Egon Erwin Kisch, author of nine dispatches from the Spanish Civil War, most of them dealing with the International Brigades, saw that nothing could better serve the propaganda of the Republic and stir American opinion to action than the pain suffered by animals which “at the howling of the approaching bombs crawled whimpering like children to the farthest corners of their cages” (qtd. in Bevan 1994: 75). Birds imitating the whine of shells inevitably had to be sacrificed because of the undesirable situations they created both for armies and civilians. Langston Hugues, a guest member of the *Alianza de Intelectuales Antifascistas*, organized by Rafael Alberti and his wife Maria Teresa León, located a stone’s throw from the Retiro, perceived, in the roars of the emaciated lions, the cries of the suffering civil population: “I always wondered what they fed these animals. Some said they fed them on the skinny horses that dropped dead of starvation” (2003: 372). The Great Dane, left behind at the American Embassy in the care of the Spanish people, who fed him with the very little they were able to provide, also emerged as a symbol of the terror and uncertainty of those abandoned to their lot in the horrors of war and the agony

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así, y el pobre hipopótamo perdió durante la guerra a razón de un kilo diario, o sea, que se dejó en los vuelos del manto de la Soberanía Nacional casi una tonelada de grasa. Hoy, el hipopótamo es una especie de embutido fofo y agrietado y dirige a sus visitantes una mirada vidriosa y de través, en la que se lee un reproche mal contenido, una acusación contra unas doctrinas y unos hombres que supieron acabar en España hasta con las fieras y que hoy ya, felizmente, son tan sólo el recuerdo confuso de una pesadilla” (8).

<sup>11</sup> See Virginia Cowles’ account of the Nationalists’ stories about Madrid when she reached Salamanca. One affirmed that “bodies were piled up by the curbs and left to rot in the gutters”. Another heard that the Reds fed the zoo animals with prisoners. “I told him the Zoo had been empty for months, and his manner froze” (1941: 71). See also Hugo García (2009) for an account of how testimonies concerning the Red Terror multiplied immediately after the outbreak of the war, and how these were constructed through literary fabrication and controlled by the press of the New State.

endured by the “madrileños”. The dog became painfully gaunt and always looked “at visitors with big sad eyes” (2003: 372).

Significantly enough, the Civil War was equated on both sides with the alleged primitivism of uncontrolled animal impulses. What triggers the madness of warfare and dispossesses humankind of what is specifically human about him, forcing it to return to “the zero degree of [its] own nature” (Foucault 1971: 69), is the awakening of its dormant animality which only the restoration of civilization can appease. Brutality, primitivism, savagery, lack of reason and inflated passion, in short everything that defines madness, become the driving force of war. “In crime as in war, men revert in given circumstances to primitive conditions, often mistakenly described as animal-like” (Hediger 1968: 3). Thus, it is hardly surprising that, in a letter to Ángel Ossorio dated June 28, 1939, Manuel Azaña described the recent events of the history of Spain as “an offense, a rebellion against intelligence, the unleashing of *zoological* and uncivil primitivism” (1981: 427, emphasis added).<sup>12</sup> That animals were very frequently used as visually simple yet powerful propaganda symbol can be easily seen in the press during these years. A giant-sized orangutan, perched on two Junkers bound for Madrid, with the Swastika on his armbands, was the creature chosen for the cartoon published in *Pravda*, and later reproduced by *ABC* on February 3 1937. On the contrary, a friendly Russian polar bear shaking hands with his Spanish counterpart, and congratulating him on dignifying the species, is the theme of Bagaria’s cartoon in *La Vanguardia*. In both cases the animal impersonates a political doctrine which is seen as either inimical to the Republic and therefore primitive and savage, or else beneficial to the welfare of the Spanish working class and *ergo* friendly and humane.

Yet animals, particularly those domesticated or caged, can also be presented as emblems of fragility and complete subservience to man’s power. Elena Fortún, in a moving essay published in *Crónica*, refers to the cats and the dogs of Madrid as “evacuees without ration cards” (“los evacuados sin cartilla”) (1937:13), the most helpless victims of the tragedy, imprisoned in abandoned houses they were unable to leave and facing inevitable death by starvation. Fortún suggests issuing ration books (a small quantity of bread crumbs, rice and meat or fish bones to be allotted to each animal per day) to the increasing population of these survivors that flood the streets (the rise of birth-rates offsetting the decline in numbers), absurdly feeding on oranges and lettuces and becoming skinnier by the day. Undoubtedly one of the most memorable stories that equates the fragile condition of animals and man before the unpredictable horrors of the Spanish Civil War is Hemingway’s “Old Man at the Bridge”, published in 1938. The protagonist, forced to evacuate his hometown before the advance of Franco’s troops in the aftermath of the Battle of the Ebro, and who must trudge his way along with thousands of refugees towards Barcelona, where he knows nobody, can only think of the animals he has left behind: a cat, two goats and four couples of pigeons. “I was only taking care of animals” (Hemingway 1938: 36), he repeats incessantly, lamenting the fact that he was forced by the advancing artillery to abandon them. “Will they be able to come

<sup>12</sup> “. . . un insulto, una rebelión contra la inteligencia, un tal desate de lo zoológico y del primitivismo incivil”.

through it all right?” is the final question that resonates through the story. Like caged animals in a zoo, the animals enclosed in the pen will unavoidably become victims of the wartime destruction. Their sacrifice, like that of the old man, who feels reluctant to keep moving ahead in his flight from the Rebel retaliation, is a foregone conclusion.

Zoos, however, pose an interesting question regarding the European history of wars and colonialism. Designed as “dreams of European urban elites”, a perfect idyll embedded in an industrialized cityscape (Rothfels 2008: 31, 34), they epitomize, as Randy Malamud puts it, a long history of imperial inequity that rests upon “a one-way power-based relationship between viewer and subject” that leads to an endless exploitation of “animal and nature on a principle of non-reciprocity” (Malamud 2007: 230). In the following section I will take a closer view to this intrinsic feature of the zoo as an object of constant surveillance for it will help me to define the dynamics of voyeurism implicit in Gellhorn’s story.

### 3. The Zoo: A Total Institution

The history of modern zoos is intrinsically connected with wars and colonial expansion. European imperialism undertook a systematic assault not only on the native populations but also on the plants and animals that were collected and/or captured, and exported to the metropolis. Sending back choice animal specimens to Europe epitomized the domination of savage lands and their control through the rationalistic lens of science. In Harriet Ritvo’s words, captive animals became “emblems of human mastery over the natural world” (1987: 206), and the irrefutable proof that the white man had logically conquered heretofore inaccessible territories. As a showcase of imperial power, the zoo not only revalidates an anthropocentric mindset with man as ruler and the animals displaced to the margins, at his service. In John Berger’s words, it also marks the destruction of nature, the extinction of animal species, and thus becomes “an epitaph to a relationship which was as old as man” (1980: 21). “[T]hat look between animals and man” (1980: 28) is irremediably lost.

Zoos educate (i.e. they show how far the Empire has reached) by pinpointing a particular animal’s provenance on a map (in exotic, faraway lands with impossible names); they classify animals’ diversity into clear-cut, scientifically-oriented taxonomies, thereby dispelling the mysterious aura of nature; and finally they replace the chaos and darkness of wilderness with the visibility of the neatly ordered cages that reproduce the dynamics of interaction in a museum. As Berger points out, visitors to a zoo “proceed from cage to cage, not unlike visitors in an art gallery” (1980: 23). Obviously enough, the physical containment which animals suffer (either in the form of cages in traditional zoos or behind the moats of more contemporary, “upgraded” versions) becomes the symbolic index of their subjugation. Michel Foucault (1971: 65-84) was the first to note that the fear of uncontrolled animality in modern societies led to the creation of enclosed spaces marked by walls, fences, gates and cage bars designed with a view to controlling, though surveillance, those who jeopardized the laws of rationality and order. Historically, madness was viewed as sharing the same ontological status as animality: whereas the beast was locked up in the cage of the menagerie, the

mad(wo)man was confined in the individual cell of the asylum. In the two cases their visibility permits total control of their unpredictable wildness. Bentham's *Panopticon* (1787) countenances a system whereby power operates through monitoring: all prisoners can be easily watched at all times. In short, prisons, concentration camps, hospitals, army barracks, boarding schools, mental asylums and zoos themselves are based upon the principle of control through vigilance.

It was in 1957 that Erving Goffman defined a "total institution", or a totalitarian social system, as a social group fulfilling the following features:

- a) "All aspects of life are conducted in the same place and under the same authority" which watches over each of the movements of the members (1965: 314).
- b) Members' daily activities are "carried out in the immediate company of a large batch of others" (314).
- c) The resident's individualism is severely undercut (clothes, food, actions...) and his/her dignity disregarded. (S)he is reduced to being a cog in the machine of a system.
- d) One's life is subjected to a regimented pattern of life with a tight schedule from which it is not possible to escape.
- e) Imposed from above, there is a series of rules designed to accomplish "the official aims of the institution" (1965: 314). Deviation from these rules will result in severe punitive measures.

Needless to say, zoos display a large number of features that define the total institution. Concurrently, it is not farfetched to assume that the living conditions in Madrid, a besieged city which suffered both the Rebel bombing raids from November 1936 to March 1937 and the "Red terror", also reproduced the features of a total institution as listed above. In the first place, the civil population had to adjust to a series of wartime regulations which regimented their food (by means of ration-books and long queues), their timetables, clothes and activities (furlough, seeking shelter during the air-raids, obligation to extinguish all lights during air raids and blackouts...). Telltale bourgeois signs, such as hats, neckties, jewelry and horn-rimmed spectacles, were either discarded or replaced by caps and berets, blue overalls (the "mono azul"), light canvas sandals ("alpargatas") and wire-rimmed glasses.<sup>14</sup> Not surprisingly, "El Mono Azul" was the name given to the emblematic magazine of the Republic. Surveillance of the population's actions was systematically implemented, and any sign (for example, wearing a personal

<sup>13</sup> "The siege of Madrid began on the night of the 7th of November 1936, and ended two years, four months and three weeks later with the Spanish war itself" (Barea 1946:160).

<sup>14</sup> José Ernesto Díaz Noriega, the amateur cinema-maker whose footage is used in *Perro Negro* (2005), the extraordinary documentary directed by Hungarian Peter Forgács, narrates how he was advised to hide his own glasses and wear wire ones if he did not want to be arrested. Wearing a tie was considered to be even more suspicious. Those who still dared to wear one were shot to death right away. Noriega was imprisoned as a political suspect in the abattoir of San Martín de Valdeiglesias converted into a jail. He managed to smuggle his camera into prison.



Christian symbol or the red and yellow colors of a suitcase)<sup>15</sup> which could be taken to show that the person in question was against the Second Republic was automatically decoded as a subversive act resulting into imprisonment or execution. Consequently, I might go as far as to say that the Madrid Zoo is a “total institution” located in a city which has also been converted into a huge totalitarian system monitored from within (by those who are the new vigilantes of the regime) and from without (by the Fascists’ aerial bombardment and land artillery). This Chinese-box structure endows Gellhorn’s story with a kaleidoscopic nature which enables us to discover, in addition to the tribulations and agony experienced by ordinary people in the capital in 1937, the American war correspondent’s ideological position in relation to her role as an external observer of the Spanish conflict.

Kate McLoughlin (2007) has analyzed in detail the strategies that Martha Gellhorn employs to construct the correspondent-persona of her reports: the truth is a code based upon the first-person account, the verbatim transcription of the protagonists’ lines and dialogues, the overloaded sensory information (aural, visual and olfactory perceptions), and the so-called normality trope: war is made comprehensible through constant, familiar comparisons with the prosaic actions that people cannot help performing during a war or with leisure activities (such as visiting a zoo) one carries out in times of peace. Proximity becomes now a synonym of truth and, as Baker points out, the reporter’s allegedly objective task simply consists of embracing “the kinetographic fallacy” (Baker 1972: 64), i.e. the belief that one’s writing is at its most authentic when one describes “what takes place in observed action” (Underwood 2003: 126). In fact, what Gellhorn calls her ‘true writing’ is nothing but a stylistic code: any pretension of objectivity and neutrality is ruled out as soon as she positions herself on the side of the Republic. And yet the choice of the zoo as the central locus makes the story replete with symbolic overtones that may prove more faithful to the reality lived in the city than what appears at first glance. Significantly, the story’s title is “Zoo in Madrid” and not “Madrid Zoo” as one might have initially expected. The postmodifying prepositional phrase “in Madrid” makes the reader ponder not only over the conditions of the city but also over how these could affect the zoo to the extent that both places seem to merge into each other.<sup>16</sup> The zoo is obviously transformed by the war. However, Gellhorn’s main goal is to show that the zoo, with its specific ontological status, is the best metaphor to describe life in the besieged, war-torn capital of Spain.

#### 4. “Zoo in Madrid”: Eros and Thanatos Reunited

<sup>15</sup> American correspondent Virginia Cowley arrived in Valencia in 1937 carrying a suitcase embellished with red and yellow stripes (the colors of the pre-Republic Spanish flag) and she was immediately interrogated by the authorities (Cowles 1941: 6).

<sup>16</sup> I am indebted to my colleague Ana Díaz Negrillo for the semantics underlying the postmodifying prepositional phrase “in Madrid” of the short story’s title in opposition to the premodifying noun, “Madrid Zoo”.

John M. Kinder holds that the zoos are “windows dressing the narratives of wartime destruction” simply because they share a common genealogy (2013: 45). There is no European zoo history that does not contain a chapter on the trials faced by caged animals in times of military conflict. Kinder also suggests that zoo animals have a three-fold relation to war which makes them symbols of the effects of its destructive power and of the virtues of individual and collective activity to counteract the threat from the enemy:

- a) Animals are not only casualties from hardship and disease imposed by warfare but also of “organized campaigns to eliminate dangerous or ‘unproductive’ elements in wartime society” (2013: 47). How to continue the costly diet of an elephant or a hippo when civilians have almost next to nothing to eat?
- b) They are presented as role models of “civic virtue”, silently enduring the tortures of war but also contributing to the war effort.
- c) Their cultural significance helps to “mediate war time trauma” (2013: 48).

Kinder’s ideas may serve as an excellent introduction to Gellhorn’s story for they help us understand the role fulfilled by the zoo animals she describes. However, point (i) has been glossed over, or conveniently silenced, in her war narration. Far from the image of emaciated animals enduring the effects of malnutrition and death from starvation or of animals tormented by the trauma of the constant nightly air raids, Gellhorn provides the reader with images of fertility and procreation immersed in an ambivalent milieu characterized by a commingling of the forces of life and death: the rabbit’s offspring (a litter of microscopic creatures), the baby llama and the peaceful-looking hippopotamus along with the “great superb” yak complete the menagerie of the story. It is true that the Botanical Gardens and the small Noah’s Ark, carefully preserved in this peaceful enclave protected from the terrors of the city, may initially give the impression of being a pastoral retreat, a recreation of Eden. Its gates lead to an undefiled garden where only love and life can be admitted, and no news of death and destruction is ever heard. The protagonists are escaping momentarily from the daily routine of the whining shells and the debris of the city:

We were sick of the war. We had no right to be since we were not the men in the trenches . . . The guns near Carabanchel were taking the day off and we wanted to have a good time, something not exciting or important or grave or memorable but just fun. (Gellhorn 1941: 123)

Walking through the Prado, they come across the Parque de Madrid that has remained locked since the war broke out. Yet through the bars it is possible to glimpse “the new green trees and . . . banks of shiny small green leaves with little blue flowers scattered through them” (Gellhorn 1941: 123). Far away lies the sound of the bombs, the blind soldiers in the hospital or the one-armed man at the first-aid post near Jarama. “We are North American journalists and we have been visiting all the fronts and now we would like to see what is beautiful in Spain” (1941: 124). When they are finally admitted by the guards, this Arcadia, with its

horse-chestnuts in bloom, laurels and lilacs and smell of wet grass, is revealed in all its splendor. The guard shows them a tree with purple blossoms, and all that can be heard is the soft sound of their footsteps on the sand, the chirping of birds, but no gunshots at all. Theodore Adorno argues that the bourgeoisie zoo does nothing but spell out the hope that the animal creation can defy the Biblical Flood (or any other juggernaut) and “bring forth a better species” (2005: 74). Gellhorn’s menagerie which the lovers behold crystallizes the deep-rooted conviction that the Spanish Republic and Europe will be saved from the grips of Fascism.

Yet soon enough the feeling of having the gates of Heaven open up before them is brought to a halt by a series of disquieting props. The statues of medieval knights, kings and noblemen in armor, seem “foolish” (1941: 124) (there is nothing heroic about them any more); a fountain has been hit by a shell, and all that is left of the gazebo is a double semicircle of ruined pillars:

Between the conch-shells and the King there is a heavy double semicircle of granite pillars but these are messed up now because a shell hit here too. It seems that in December, right behind the two lions and a nymph, there was a gun position and the Fascists sent a shell back to it in greeting. (1941: 125)

The lake has been partially drained because it reflected the moon and showed the Junkers where the center of the city was. The larger fish died, with only the smaller ones stubbornly remaining at the bottom. Tree tops and even whole trees had been culled for the war, for firewood is essential for the hospitals. Presently the protagonists are led to the zoo, a “very sweet”, “intimate”, “tidily kept” (1941: 126) menagerie that looks, nevertheless, “absurd” (1941: 125). The captive animals have been given house-like cages resembling not their natural habitat but the architecture of the colonies from which they were violently torn, a reminder of the superiority of European man: the Hindu temple (for the elephants), the thatched African hut (for monkeys) and the tiled Oriental house (for peacocks and pigeons). In short, the paradisiacal gardens of El Retiro with its little zoo cannot obliterate or even dim the reality of war. In this fashion, the zoo reproduces a miniature copy of the city of Madrid, a panopticon tower from which one can never escape. The animals are confined, shelled, tormented, starved and shot as are the defenseless citizens of the capital during three years of civil conflict. As the drained lake demonstrates, mere visibility is a deadly snare, and there is no way of counteracting the dynamics of observation in a world defined by enclosure.

Yet, despite the fact that the lovers’ leisurely escape from reality cannot ignore the signs of agony (the zoo proves to be a total institution on a small, “intimate” scale, 125), Gellhorn endeavors to fan the hope that life can still survive amidst the horrors of war. In the long run, life (Eros, the principle of pleasure and creation, as Freud defines it)<sup>17</sup> will triumph over the madness of death drive (Thanatos). The

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<sup>17</sup> Freud defined the death drive(s), or Thanatos, as one of inevitable components of the human mind struggling against the life drive, or Eros, in his 1920 essay *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Whereas Eros promotes unity, sexuality, procreation and creativity, Thanatos aims to destroy and annihilate. The tension between these two drives brings about a permanent condition of duality and strife, which characterizes the quintessential nature of the human psyche.

sanctuary that Gellhorn recreates through a deceitfully simple description of the landscape is, however, charged with cataphoric elements that anticipate the two lovers' banishment from it. Interestingly, the "delicate" tree of love they contemplate upon entering this paradise is no other but the judas-tree. Bedecked with a myriad of beautiful pink blossoms which soon give way to ugly, flat, hanging pods, the *cercis siliquastrum* evokes the idea of betrayal and the death-drive implicit in the treacherous apostle's suicide.<sup>18</sup>

The inclusion of the tree in Gellhorn's story is not accidental at all. The earliest occurrence of the symbol can be traced to T. S. Eliot's 1920 poem "Gerontion": "In depraved May, dogwood and chestnut, flowering Judas" (Eliot 2011: 41). According to Christian legend the dogwood is the tree from which the Holy Cross was made. In the little old man's eyes, spring has stopped bringing life and hope. The paligenetic cycle (the death of winter being replaced by the green regeneration of the coming season) has been suddenly brought to a standstill. Christ, the fertility God, is now sacrificed in vain. The garden of the sensual with its tree of love vanishes. In its place only remains a wasteland with the Hanged Man, an image of betrayal, perpetually looming in the offing.<sup>19</sup> Not in vain, the opening story of Gellhorn's *Heart of Another*, "Luigi's Home", includes another symbolic Hanged God, Luigi, the Italian gardener who takes care of the vines, a Christ-like figure who commits suicide by hanging himself from the railing at the end of the story. His death, however, does not bring any message of resurrection or salvation. Much on the contrary, the protagonist, an American lady who has been an eyewitness to some of horrors of the Spanish Civil War ("she lived still with the war she had seen in the cold blind streets of Madrid", 1941: 2), abandons the long-neglected, decayed country house she has purchased in Corsica (an emblem of the dilapidated western civilization) for she proves unable to make it livable again. Now the house with the endless rows of vines growing like "twisted fountains" (1941: 32) belongs to Luigi alone, a destitute figure who stands for the atrocities perpetrated in war-torn Europe and the impossibility of renewal. "Hanging there with his head sideways, he seemed even smaller than she had remembered: small, brown and shabby" (1941: 33).

In "Zoo in Madrid", however, the tree "with purple blossoms" is appropriately called "the tree of love" for this is the popular name currently used in Spain.<sup>20</sup> Even in the midst of a wasteland, one can catch glimpses of a new spring that puts an end, albeit temporarily, to winter. "Is there really a war going on, or what is this?" (1941: 126), the narrator wonders. Shortly afterwards, as she walks from one

<sup>18</sup> The pods that hang from the tree evoke the image of Judas hanging himself although the name may be a corrupt version of the original French name, "tree of Judah". The tree is also known as redbud tree.

<sup>19</sup> Although Eliot hesitated to publish "Gerontion" as a prelude to "The Waste Land" and asked Pound's advice on using the poem as a preface to his more ambitious work, the title was eventually published separately in 1920 (Lehman 2016:70). T.S. Eliot and Martha Gellhorn were both from St. Louis, Missouri. Even more interesting but unfortunately out of the scope of this paper is the relationship between Gellhorn's use of symbols and Katherine Ann Porter's "Flowering Judas", the 1930 story dealing with Laura and her self-delusion in revolutionary Mexico. The story of nun-like Laura and fat, sentimental revolutionary Braggioni bears many striking resemblances with Martha, the young, inexperienced apprentice and Hemingway, the self-indulgent defender of the Republican cause.

<sup>20</sup> The *cercis siliquastrum* is called "árbol del amor" and "ciclamar" probably because of its heart-shaped leaves. Other names are "árbol de Judas", "árbol de Judea" and "arjorán".

cage to the next, one of the guards gives the journalist “two camellias, one white and one red” 1941: 126). The allusion to the flower has obviously been taken from Alexandre Dumas’ novel. Marguerite Gautier, the courtesan, is called “the lady of the camellias” because she wears a red blossom when she is menstruating and therefore unavailable for sex, and a white one when she can receive her lovers. Putting these biblical and literary allusions together in the context of Gellhorn’s biography, it is interesting to pose some questions about how she perceived her extramarital affair with Hemingway at this early stage. Did she see herself as a new Eve seducing Adam and tempting him to taste the forbidden fruit? Was she burdened with a certain kind of guilt for precipitating their banishment from paradise though her liaison with him? Pauline, Ernest’s second wife, had soon realized that the young writer’s constant visits to their house in Key West threatened the stability of their married life: Martha herself admitted having become “a fixture, like a Kudu head” in their home (Gellhorn 2006: 47). Could the correspondent be suggesting she too fitted this role of courtesan after having been involved first with Bertrand de Jouvenel, a married man, and now with Hemingway, another woman’s husband? Is Ernest the proxy figure for Armand Duval, capable of putting an end to her role as a *femme fatale* and taking her to live, as in the French novel, in the pastoral tranquility of the countryside?

Whatever the answer to this conundrum may be, the tree problematizes Gellhorn’s attitude to the Spanish conflict. If the flowering Judas is a symbol of betrayal and death without rebirth, the Arcadia seems doomed from the start. Intriguingly, however, the writer insists on embracing life, love and creation over the ubiquitous destructive power of war:

So we stood and enjoyed the lake and the air and the new green trees and the guard was very pleased that we had come all the way from North American to appreciate this fine Spanish park [...] A large rhododendron bush blooms in the midst of this and dozens of smooth white pigeons make a steady soft noise which is very far from war. (125)

## 5. Conclusion

Intended as a war dispatch that was rejected by the editors of *Collier’s*, “Zoo in Madrid” shows Gellhorn’s reportage method: one defined by the pursuit of an ideal of objectivity which did not preclude the masking of truths and the literary fabrication. Gellhorn never stopped blending “fact and fiction all her life” (Moorehead 2003: 113) in an attempt to demonstrate that only fictional invention could, paradoxically, reveal more about truth than the factual aspirations of the objective method. In Caroline Moorehead’s words, “choosing not to write the truth in order to promote a greater truth” (2003: 150) became Gellhorn’s motto. The greater truth in this case was the defense of the Republic, “La Causa”, against the looming victory of Fascism in Europe. The Spanish Civil War is “the Balkans of 1912”, Spain is fighting a battle against a world “whose bible is Mein Kampf”, the journalist observes (Gellhorn 2006: 60).

Fredric Jameson (2009) has defined war as a collective phenomenon which cannot be represented and yet constantly generates narratives which oscillate

between rational abstraction (an attempt to comprehend the wartime trauma) and sensorial stimulation (the spate of feelings associated with the horrors of the immediate moment). In this regard, Gellhorn's zoo stirs up confused and contradictory feelings. Whereas the spatial confinement of animals mirrors the modern attempts to classify and organize the population in a controlled way, thereby epitomizing the state-based biopower which dominated a large part of Europe at the moment, the animal menagerie, reminiscent of a new Noah's Ark surviving the cataclysm, also harbors the hope that Spain may be the "vaccination which could save the rest of mankind" (Gellhorn 2006: 125) against the maladies of the Western world, thereby providing a new start for a better civilization.

In this essay I have also shown that the condition of the animals in the Madrid Zoo was already precarious in the early 1930s before the outbreak of the war. Most of the creatures alive in 1936 were age-old and suffered from all kinds of ailments and diseases. Set against the backdrop of an intense propaganda campaign deployed on both sides of the conflict, Gellhorn's story significantly omits any reference to the agonizing condition of the animals that she describes years later in her 1974 article when she recollects her first visit in 1937, and focuses her attention instead on images of breeding and begetting. Obviously, Gellhorn was fully aware of the potential of the zoo as an instrument of propaganda: it served to illustrate the citizens' trials and tribulations to withstand and endure the war. The animals trapped in cages, tortured by the constant night air-raids and subjected to undernourishment, become emblems of the civilians' traumatic experiences during the long years of civil conflict. Yet the war correspondent shies away from the grim picture one might expect to find in a dispatch about the zoo exposed to the ravages of modern warfare. Rather than describe the effects of the violence and privations on the surviving animals, she chooses to celebrate fertility and life. In addition to a clearly optimistic message that Madrid will overcome the Fascist attacks and that new life will be spawned out of the crucible of war, Gellhorn's story builds up an Edenic enclave where a hope for the dignity of men (despite the rulers' efforts to smear it out) can still be kept intact and become the seed of a new future.

However, paradoxically, this fabricated Eden cannot fend off the intrusion of disturbing signs of sacrifice. The judas-tree which the lovers encounter upon crossing its gates foreshadows deception, betrayal and death. Not only is Pauline betrayed by Hemingway and her new lover. Republican Spain, left to her sorry fate by the US Neutrality Act and assailed by Hitler and Mussolini, has become the new sacrificial victim. If, as the journalist rightly puts it, the future of Europe "is bound up in the outcome of the [Spanish] war" (2006: 54), Gellhorn's zoo becomes a window for the myriad atrocities and horrors lying in wait for millions of civilians in the following years.

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