“ “Lead me, my lords, and let me return to my ancient freedom”, shouts Sancho Panza, taking the haler of his donkey. Many times, during our exile of nearly thirty years, we have listened to these words of Sancho, so desolately Spanish. They are a modest truth but the Spanish people have been asking for these modest truths for a long time now because they have a hard historical truth around them, that they want to get rid of. “Our ancient freedom.” What was our ancient freedom like? In opening the notebook that is published today in Italy, and in finding you gathered together – some of the posters that covered the walls during the war in Spain, we saw the Freedom stand in front of us and look at us. Those times are always in our memory, the times when we freely chose our path, fought freely, died freely. On the walls of Spain, “do not pass”, written with coal or chalk was gradually replaced by the multiplication of posters full of appeals and warnings. A pencil, a pen and a brush were a weapon. The militas of culture, the intellectual speakers were born. Each seat was good to give us the security that we were militating in the ranks of the fighters. We knocked on the painters doors, such as Rodriguez Luna, Perez Mateos, Miguel Prieto, Julian Castedo, Dario Carmona, Car Reno Fersal, Yepes, Ramon Puyol, Jose Carnicero, Isaia Diaz and the great Alberto Sanchez and Jose Renau, then Director of the Fine Arts and Pedrero and others we can no longer remember. A new tension spread among those who did not want to disappear, swallowed up by international fascism. Consciences lit up. It was our youth who started the business and enlisted in the service of a cause that had to be the right of today – thirty years later, those days are still a sacred memory. It is possible that this happens because the Spanish problem is still open, since it did not take sides when other European countries broke their ties with totalitarianism, after a horrible wear, another war that the world cannot forget. Or rather, that the world must not forget. Many books have been published on what happened in the Iberian peninsula, but perhaps this will be the first book thay will show the naïve face that the walls of our cities put on every day to leave their mark in our eyes. These posters almost gave us the impression that their colours fought and cheered us up and did not abandon us, even for a moment. It was a new, concise and urgent language they were developing. As El Mono Azul received daily romances in which the episodes of the war were told – romance is most Spanish metric form, the one that from the middle ages, tells the people what is happening to the mural poster took its place in Spanish life. We were facing a bitter hour. We wanted to throw ourselves off a precipice. A group of generals tried to colonize us and take away the freedom democratically won by the people in the elections of February 1936. We had responded by uniting as the Spaniards had rarely been united. The European democrats looked at the peninsula in terror. What was that? A powder keg against Nazi-fascism? No, better to leave Spain. All reflections were useless. They thought they were saved. There is a fear that spreads faster than light or blood. Hitler and Mussoloni had to have good laughs behind Chamberlain, Leon Blum, Lord Halifax…

Those were years lived with all my soul. We felt that the eyes of the world followed our movements. We had become, by the work and grace of betrayal, the nerve center of Europe. Today we read this all in books, then we lived it. Nobody stayed home. The students of the school of fine arts, for example, were instructed to write words like these on the walls: “Books are your weapons of tomorrow, help keep them.” We still see them climbing the stairs. Their youth did not rest. They opened windows from where they made fun of the enemy, while in others the call came from the strong and precise password. It was just as you see it from this book: a warning, a teaching, a cry. Then they left on the walls of Madrid, the image of our children murdered by the bombings. Pablo Picasso gave us his “Franco’s dream and lie.” Some designers were able to say better than with a speech what we all thought of those in front of us. The fact Is that everything served to give courage to those who were depressed or to refresh the memory of the forgetful, while Spain’s beating heart was beating with fever and had decided not to give up. Perhaps for this reason, when during the most painfully difficult hours of Madrid’s defence, we represented La Numancia by Miguel de Cervantes, the audience saw his destiny in that people who refused to surrender and preferred to die rather than live in chains, and looked with an imposing seriousness, with the hand in the hand of the fiancée, or on the mother’s shoulder. Outside the bombing continued. It was our destiny. We accepted it. Three years! Three years without sleep! Three years on our feet, to defend ourselves! What happened after, when the last night arrived and all those who could pass through their doors went out to scrape posters and give birth to their thoughts? What could they do more than what those men they all abandoned did? Never have such sad bells rang in the world as those that were heard when Europe handed Madrid over to the enemy. What did our fighters think when they saw pass before their eyes, as they retreat, that THEY SHALL NOT PASS! Who graced our walls? Perhaps they felt the same things we felt: we felt betrayed by the European democracies, which thus gave them the green light to Nazism, violence, extermination. We saw the last poster in a street in Madrid, just as we were leaving the alliance of intellectuals forever in that house in via marques de urquijo 7 that none of us who have lived there will forget. In that house we had discovered the simplicity and sweetness of feeling like companions; we said goodbye to the hours we had spent there when, raising our eyes, we found a poster of the Artistic Treasury Protection committee which kept repeating “workers of today, respect the work of your brother yesterday.” We do not need to insist on the immensity of the despair we felt in leaving behind a life in which we had placed all our hopes. Because the Spanish war was not just two armies facing each other, no. It was the “no pasaran” (do not pass) shouted to ignorance, poverty and illiteracy. There are photographs, those in which painters are seen using their knowledge to invent these posters. In others there are the trucks that evacuate the Prado Museum towards Valenza, after the bombing in November 1936. In others, there is evidence of the way in which the council took care of the thousands and thousands of objects that the people of Madrid went to deliver, objects from abandoned buildings, bombed out houses, churches..in others you can see the “Guerillas del Teatro” bringing the salt of joy to the trenches of the fighters. In others..in others the dead children, the mothers who warn crying, the fighter who calls dead without abandoning the gun.. you will tell us: these are the same images of all wars? No. In the Spanish war, we weren’t just fighting to win militarily: we wanted to do much more: save a people from centuries of backwardness, carry them forward, starting from the first letters of the alphabet, which were ignored by 70% of the Spanish population. No, there was not only military heroism at the front, the one to which the best men in the world contributed, in the international brigades; there was the silent front where the high moral and cultural task that belonged to them was entrusted to men and women. It was our dream out loud. For this reason, even if perhaps we should shut up and stop talking about our war, we do not remain silent. We continue to talk about it as if it were yesterday, since the Spanish destiny we dreamed of then did not come true, instead, the non-history has come. Silence, the denial of the future shouted to the people in repression, candles. Anguish, suffering. Sometimes young people from Spain reach us. It is amazing to hear him say that he cares about what happened then. They want to know our truth. Perhaps this is why they talk, ask, investigate and look at us. We are not just a memory. The Spanish generations accustomed to articles of faith, to repressive laws, to authoritarianism, to hearing that their parents had been shouted from the highest platform that hatreds and passions, that the divisions of a war could not be repaired, “according to the liberal style, with their monstrous amnesties, but with redemption from punishment through work, with repentance through penance>>>, After words like these, how could one speak of peace? What is true in everything that happened before us? Could it be true that the hour is not over? We didn’t propose it to them, but it is certain that we are their hope. The students today raise red flags as red or black as ours were red or black, they sing our hymns and their protest screams angrily as the protest of our young people then. On the walls of the universities there are still posters with the words from before:

It is necessary to be blind, as

If we had glass dust in our eyes,

Quicklime, boiling sand,

Not to see the light that beats on our acts,

That illuminates our language from within,

Our daily word. It is necessary to want to die without a trail of glory and joy,

Without participation in future hymns, without remembrance in men who will remember the dark past of the earth. It is necessary to wish already in life to be passed,

Bloody obstacle, dead thing,

Arid oblivion.

Yes, poetry is still needed, it goes its own way, because nothing has died in Spain and all hopes can flourish every day.

With their new watchwords. This is why our young people today take refuge behind the languages of our manifold Spain – Catalan, Basque and Galician or they give each other their arm to walk together with discontented priests or they bite their hands from anxiety and then to raise from by closing his fist. They are tired of the paternalistic joke – they want to be the ones to decide their life, they are horrified by the existence that made them accept between the bullfight and the football, and taking the halter of their donkey we hear them shout as Sancho shouts: Let me road, and let me go back to my ancient freedom. In that freedom we will meet, with all the flags unfurled.

Rafael Alberti-Maria Teresa Leon.”

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