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A Poetic History of Spanish Wars

The Defeat of the Spanish Armada (1588)

The Peninsular War (1808-1814)

The Spanish-American War (1898)

The Spanish Civil War (1936-1939)

Matt Brown
College Scholars Final Project
May 1, 2001

De los sueños de Medina Sidonia

¡Llénense, Velas! de aliento divino
que nos lleva al sitio de esta cruzada;
de tiempos de paz marchita la Armada
que muera yo sin cumplir mi destino.

¡Disparen, Cañones! ya el Draque vino
abrumándonos como una tronada;
agua y cubierta por sangre manchada
me gritan, ¡Dios mío, fracaso supino!

Así sigue la batalla en la mente
cada noche, aunque ahora arrimado
bien a mi amor, susurros en la oreja

dicen ¡Traidor!, silban como serpiente
¡La Armada de existir ha cesado!
Nunca al mar vuelvo, ni el mar me deja.

Fill yourselves, O Sails, with divine breath to carry us to the site of this crusade;
peacetime has withered the Armada such that I may die without fulfilling my destiny.

Fire, O Cannons, Drake has already come, overwhelming us like a thunderstorm; the
waters and the deck, stained with blood, scream to me "My God, what absolute failure!"

And so continues the battle in my mind each and every night, although now lying close to
my beloved, whispers in my ear say "Traitor!," they hiss like a serpent: "The Armada has
ceased to exist!" to which I answer, "I will not return to the sea, nor will it ever leave
me!"

Gloss: The poem is a sonnet, the traditional poetic form during the Siglo de Oro, the end of which came about soon after the defeat of the Spanish Armada. The speaker is the Duke of Medina Sidonia, who was thrust into the generalship of the Armada by King Philip II only a week before its scheduled departure, and whose inexperience in naval warfare was one of many factors leading to the Armada's defeat.

The Spanish Armada (1588)

The attempted invasion of England by the Spanish Armada in 1588 was not only the largest endeavor of its kind in recorded history, it was also Spain's first significant attempt to put an end to a string of Anglo-Spanish skirmishes dating back more than twenty years. At this time, Spain held at least a small margin of military supremacy over every other contemporary maritime power. The extension of the Spanish Empire itself was even more impressive. King Philip II's rule reached from Spain as far west as Mexico and as far east as the Philippines. The immense size of Philip's kingdom required enormous amounts of gold to keep it running and provide for its defense. So much gold was required, in fact, that more was mined and transported from Peru annually than had existed in all of Medieval Europe. This alone contributed to many of the unfriendly encounters between the Spanish and the English, as the gold-laden galleons returning to Spain repeatedly proved too great a temptation for pirates and members of Queen Elizabeth I's Royal Navy. Financed by the queen herself, the majority of these raids were led by the legendary buccaneer Sir Francis Drake, known to many Spaniards as *El Draque*, who also looted or burned other Spanish ports around the globe. Drake's exploits off the Spanish coast alone in 1587 robbed the mustering Spanish Armada of necessary timber, gold, and other supplies, hindering shipbuilding and delaying the Spanish invasion of England until late spring of 1588.

These raids, however, only added fuel to a fire that already burned much deeper. Queen Elizabeth's refusal to make England a Catholic nation enraged both Pope Sixtus V and his Defender of the Catholic Faith, King Philip II, and they united against the queen, declaring her an illegitimate heir to the throne. According to the pope, Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots and Queen Elizabeth's Catholic half sister, was the legitimate heir. It just so happened that Mary had promised to bequeath the throne to Philip II if she was restored as the rightful heir. By 1587,

Queen Elizabeth almost certainly expected some drastic offensive attack, the last twenty years having subjected her to excommunication, numerous blundering assassins, and pesky Irish rebels financed by Spain and the Vatican. She chose to strike first. On March 23, 1587, a dispatch revealed to Philip II that, on February 8, Elizabeth had executed Mary Stuart. Within a week King Philip formed his plan to invade England. In his mind it was a crusade for the Catholic faith, and the pope supported him by bestowing plenary indulgence, absolution, and all other papal blessings upon those who joined the cause.

The Armada's primary objective was to engage Queen Elizabeth's navy in the English Channel and hold them down while an army of troops, led by the Duke of Parma, crossed the Channel and convinced all loyal English Catholics to join them in reclaiming the throne. Spanish preparations, however, were hindered from the very beginning. Drake's blockading and raiding stunted Spanish supply lines, and it was difficult finding money and food for the vast number of soldiers waiting in the ports. Then, King Philip's first general, the Marquis of Santa Cruz, fell ill and died a week before the Armada's scheduled departure, and King Philip chose Don Alonzo Perez de Guzman, the seventh Duke of Medina Sidonia, to replace him. Though extremely wealthy (he owned half of Andalusia) Medina Sidonia was not an ambitious man, and preferred luxurious living on his estate with his wife to engaging in military exploits, especially those at sea, where he had no prior experience. Reluctantly, Medina Sidonia accepted command. His inexperience at sea against some of history's greatest naval officers, who also had the advantage of fighting in their home waters, would have a devastating effect on the Armada, essentially rendering the Spanish soldiers slow to act and distrustful of their leaders in the midst of battle. Finally, bad weather compounded matters, so that the initial February date of departure was postponed until late May.

After having already endured supply shortages, sick crews, and terrible storms that scattered the Spanish ships on several occasions, on July 31 the Armada finally began to exchange fire with Drake's fleet. Spanish soldiers outnumbered the English five to one, and pressed to engage the English hand-to-hand, but the longer-range English cannons held the Armada at bay and rendered the Spanish guns ineffective. The fighting continued in this manner for another week-and-a-half, with the more maneuverable English ships always keeping those of the Armada just within range. Drake also used his unsurpassed knowledge of the English Channel, particularly its currents and winds, to divide the Spanish forces and attack them one by one. Throughout the entire battle, Medina Sidonia wrote to urge the Duke of Parma to come immediately, but Parma was never able to fully assemble his forces. This left Medina Sidonia with no alternative but to try to salvage the remainder of the Armada and flee back to Spain. On August 12, 1588, Spanish forces fled north from the English navy, and circumnavigated Scotland and Ireland. The journey home, unfortunately, proved more dangerous than the actual battle. Food and water disappeared quickly, illness spread, and storms off the unfamiliar Irish coast scattered the fleet and sent many ships into the rocks. Those who desperately tried to bargain with the Irish for sustenance were summarily repelled, arrested, or robbed and executed.

It was the *San Martín*, Medina Sidonia's ship, which returned first, sailing into Santander on September 22. Of the 130 ships that had made up the Armada, only 70 returned. The dead numbered 9,000, and 1.4 billion reals had been wasted. Medina Sidonia, suffering from dysentery, typhoid, and bronchitis, left his men sick and dying on their respective ships and obtained King Philip's permission to take his enormous payment in silver and ducats and return home. He had already dictated a letter to the king's secretary saying that he would never again involve himself in seafaring, even if it cost him his head. Finally, utterly shamed, he journeyed

home under hails of insults and abuse. At Medina de Campo and Salamanca, children stoned his carriage.

The significance of the defeat of the Spanish Armada is an extremely controversial topic. Many say that the event marked the rebirth, not the extinction, of the Spanish navy, as the fleet was quickly rebuilt and more American gold than ever was brought back to Spain. Others contest that a mood of pessimism and despair subsequently fell upon Spain. These arguments are two sides of the same coin, for certainly melancholy and patriotism mingled in every loyal Spaniard's heart. While the Armada was rebuilding, King Philip had to issue an edict limiting mourning over the dead Spanish soldiers to thirty days and only to family members of the deceased to prevent the entire Spanish economy from coming to a halt. Spain's prosperity and worldwide power continued for years to come, and her fleets grew larger. But more gold and more ships only served to mask the truth that Spain did not wish to face; that Spain and its Armada were not invincible as once thought. The entire world had seen, even if only for a short time, the legendary power of King Philip II overcome by a much smaller English fleet. Although Spain had not yet lost her supremacy, she had passed the peak of her prestige.

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Canción del corso terrestre

De la Montaña vinimos
muy escondidos
y por sorpresa cogimos
a los franceses soldados;
muchos se caen, fusilados,
otros gritan, ¡Dios, bandidos!

Debido a
esta guerra
nuestra tierra
está en juego,
no importa
si yo muero
si mi fuero
reina luego.

From the Montaña we came, very well hidden, and took the French soldiers by surprise;
many of them fall, shot dead, others scream "Oh, God! Bandits!"

Because of this war our land is at risk, I do not care if I die as long as my code of law
reigns after I am gone.

Gloss: The poem is modeled after the "Canción del pirata" by Juan de Espronceda (1808-1842) and depicts elements of Romantic poetry in its break from traditional forms, such as the sonnet, and its portrayal of an "anti-hero." The latter, the poetic persona in the poem, is a member of the guerrilla armies from the northern region of Navarre known as the Montaña. The Spanish guerrillas, collectively known as the "corso terrestre" (land pirates), are credited with inventing guerrilla warfare as it is known today.

The Peninsular War (1808-1814)

Throughout the eighteenth century, Spain and France found themselves closely tied to one another by the blood relations between their respective Bourbon monarchs and their mutual enmity toward Britain. The Peace of Utrecht in 1715 had created a “Family Pact” between the Spanish and French Bourbons that lasted until the French Revolution of 1789, after which Spain, Portugal, and England allied against the revolutionary ideologies that had spread throughout France. The entrance of French troops into Spain forcibly reunited the two countries in 1795, and Napoleon heavily utilized his control over Spain by enlisting the Spanish navy and 15,000 infantry in contributing to his Continental System, an embargo on trade with England.

Spain remained submissive to Napoleon’s control until 1806, when the Spanish prime minister, Manuel Godoy, tried to mobilize the Spanish army against Napoleon, who was then preoccupied with his invasion of Prussia. However, Napoleon quickly defeated the Prussians and returned to Paris fully aware of Spain’s plan of betrayal. A full-scale occupation of Spain was now imminent, but Napoleon moved in slowly, under a guise of friendship, attempting to avoid a bloody confrontation. In 1807, the Treaty of Fontainebleau gave Napoleon permission to march 30,000 French troops across Spain in a campaign against Portugal. By February 1808, however, Portugal had been defeated and now 100,000 French troops occupied strategic points throughout Spain under the pretense of defending against an English retaliation to the invasion of Portugal. Napoleon expected (and received) little opposition from the submissive Spanish government and army, but he neglected to account for the fierce nationalism of the Spanish people. This mistake cost Napoleon dearly, and was a major factor contributing to his eventual downfall.

The people of Spain rose up almost immediately; not directly against the French but against their own king, Charles IV, and Godoy, whose inaction had only inflamed Spanish

discontent with the government. On March 18, an angry crowd stormed the palace at Aranjuez and forced Charles IV to abdicate his throne to Prince Ferdinand. The prince reigned as Ferdinand VII for almost two months before Napoleon forced him to return the throne to Charles IV, who in turn abdicated to Napoleon, giving him authority to place his own brother, Joseph Bonaparte, on the Spanish throne. Ferdinand VII's abdication and Joseph's ascent to the throne sparked revolts across the country. By the end of May, angry mobs in the highly populated regions of Spain had ousted their government officials and set up *juntas*, provisional governments meant to combat the French and any who even appeared to support them. Each local *junta* sent representatives to the temporary national government, known as the Central Junta, but also retained a great deal of autonomy, and each underwent the task of piecing together an army from the scattered Spanish regular forces and from new recruits.

The decentralized nature of the revolutionary Spanish government served them well in combating the French, for it was impossible to locate and put down so many scattered pockets of resistance, and even when one local *junta* was defeated it did not deter the others from continuing their own insurgence. The effectiveness of the *juntas*, combined with British forces advancing eastward through Portugal, forced Joseph, his officials, and many of his troops to flee north from Madrid into the Basque provinces and Navarre on July 30, 1808. If overlooking the tenacity of the Spanish people was the first mistake by the French, the second was their relocation point. The decision to occupy Navarre ultimately entangled the bulk of Napoleon's forces in a lengthy and devastating struggle against arguably the most tenacious of all Spanish insurgents, the guerrilla armies of northern Spain, who had until now remained relatively subdued.

Although guerrilla armies existed throughout Spain at different times during the Peninsular War, the greatest of these armies operated in the north, with the largest and most

effective army existing in Navarre under the command of Francisco Espoz y Mina. Mina himself was a native of the northern region of Navarre known as the Montaña, a rural and very close-knit society hemmed in by the Pyrenees and France to the north and, to the south, the Cantabrian Mountains and the more affluent Navarrese region called the Ribera. The people of the Montaña were very unique in both their motives and methods in the war, and most likely played one of the most important and understated roles in driving the French from Spain.

The people of the Montaña were unique in that they did not fight solely for king and country. Although very nationalistic in their support for Prince Ferdinand to return to the throne and to end the French occupation of Spain, their primary interests lay in maintaining claims to their land and insuring the security of their *fuero*. *Fueros* were ancient regional constitutions that originated in the Middle Ages as pacts between the king and the people for military service and contributions to driving the Muslims from Spain. In the nineteenth century, only four “foral provinces” remained—Navarre, Álava, Guipúzcoa, and Vizcaya. The specific rights and privileges bestowed upon Navarre included a regional congress, control over taxation, exemption from military service except in defense of Navarre, and most importantly, a separate customs border that practically sustained the Navarrese economy through the sale of raw materials to France. These privileges, coupled with the fact that the majority of Montañeros owned their own land—a very unique privilege since feudalism still prevailed in most of Spain—clearly explains why the Montañeros put up such a fight, especially when one considers that Napoleon’s intention was not only to occupy Spain, but to annex Navarre into France, a move that would have devastated the Navarrese economy.

It was the methods used by the guerrilla armies that caused the greater damage to the French forces during Napoleon’s occupation. At the outset of the war, guerrilla warfare was virtually unknown to either the Spanish regular forces or the French. Instead of facing the bulk

of enemy forces head on, the guerrillas succeeded more in frustrating and demoralizing the French by maintaining a constant threat of attack and by ambushing smaller enemy detachments. Because of the novelty of guerrilla warfare, the local governments ridiculed the guerrillas as nothing more than bandits (which, in some cases, proved true), and it was not until April 1809 that the Central Junta began to support and encourage guerrilla warfare, calling for all able-bodied males in occupied territory to join the *curso terrestre*, or "land pirates." The numbers in each *curso* varied greatly, from as few as 10 early in the war and growing to as many as 5,000. With their superior knowledge of the rough terrain and their family and neighborly ties to the local villagers, the *corsos* developed intricate intelligence networks to track and anticipate French movements, and would amass superior numbers at a predetermined point and ambush French soldiers as they passed by along the roads. In the open field, the guerrillas had no chance of surviving a French onslaught. Instead, they kept to narrow, wooded passes and deep gorges, firing on the French from their hiding places, engaging in hand-to-hand combat, and fleeing back into the mountains if the battle began to shift in favor of the French.

The French, never having experienced warfare of this kind, found no way to combat it. Napoleon was forced to expend hundreds of thousands of troops simply on occupying the guerrilla territory of northern Spain. This severely dwindled his numerical advantage against the much smaller British, Portuguese, and Spanish forces moving eastward to drive the French out of Iberia, and resulted in the loss of 300,000 French soldiers and an enormous amount of money and supplies. When the regular forces finally advanced as far as Navarre and Ferdinand VII returned to the throne, the guerrilla armies were summarily disbanded with little recognition for what they had helped to accomplish. At the same time, the guerrillas were not after fame or fortune. They took up arms in order to protect and defend their families, lands, and way of life.

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Oración en el año del desastre

Se ha puesto el sol en España,
la esperanza se ha marchado,
por eso hay que rezar
que Dios nos lleve al pasado;

Llévenos a esos siglos
de oro, fuerza, y favor,
cuando teníamos el mundo
en la palma de la mano;

Porque ya perdimos todo
Y el país está deshonrado,
como corona sin joyas
como la rosa sin pétalos.

The sun has set on Spain, all hope has gone; for this reason we must pray that God will return us to the past;

Take us back to those centuries of gold, strength, and favor, when we held the world in the palm of our hand;

Because already we have lost everything and Spain is utterly dishonored, like a crown without jewels, like a rose without petals.

Gloss: The poem is a romance, a popular style of poetry patterned after the rhythm of popular speech. The voice is the collective voice of the Spanish people after losing the Spanish-American War, lamenting the loss of Spain's few remaining overseas territories and praying that God might allow them to return to the days when Spain held a vast and wealthy empire.

The Spanish-American War (1898)

By the latter half of the nineteenth century, the once vast Spanish Empire—on which the sun supposedly never set—had been confined to the Iberian Peninsula, Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Philippines, and a few small territories in the Pacific Ocean and North Africa. The most recent and most devastating loss to Spain had come early in the nineteenth century when its Latin American colonies revolted and successfully broke away. The ensuing humiliation from this defeat had caused Spain to hold all the more tightly to the few overseas possessions it still maintained. It was this desperate attitude toward retaining any semblance of the once great empire that sparked fierce retaliation toward Cuban revolutionaries in the late 1800's and ultimately led to the outbreak of the Spanish-American War.

For as long as Cuba had existed under Spanish rule, Spaniards had affectionately deemed it the 'ever-faithful isle' because of its constant loyalty to the mother country. For this reason and because it was the largest and richest island in the West Indies, Cuba held great significance for the Spanish. However, increased immigration into Cuba from Spain and subsequent decreased representation for Cuban natives in the government promised to bring an end to Cuban loyalty. The first evidence of this came in 1868 when blacks, mulattos, and many natural-born citizens of Cuba rose up against the high taxation of local sugar and tobacco industries and against the general withholding of privileges afforded only to the *peninsulares*, Spanish-born emigrants to Cuba. This marked the beginning of the Ten Years' War, a war that ended in a nominal victory for the Spanish and only seems to have set the stage for future attempts to achieve the rapidly growing movement for Cuban independence known as '*Cuba libre*' (Free Cuba).

By March 1895, Spain had 20,000 troops stationed in Cuba and was sending thousands more to control a rebel force much stronger and more organized than that of the Ten Years' War. Under the initial organization of the acclaimed poet and revolutionary José Martí and the military

leadership and experience of Antonio Maceo and Máximo Gómez, the Cuban insurgents resorted to guerrilla warfare tactics not practiced by regular armies and engaged the Spanish in a bloody three-year struggle for control of the island. During this time Spain employed around 200,000 troops to suppress an estimated 30,000 Cuban rebels. The numbers are misleading, however, for at any given time at least half of the Spanish troops were scattered about the island on defensive duty, protecting *trochas*—large ditches filled with mines and obstacles to divide and contain the insurgents—as well as forts, towns, and communication lines. Another quarter of the troops were too sick to fight, battling tropical diseases and malnutrition. Of the 50,000 healthy troops that remained, many were inexperienced conscripts around sixteen or seventeen year old (Smith 22).

The Cuban guerrilla tactics and miserable living conditions of the Spanish troops drew the war out by effectively destroying Spanish morale and keeping Spain always on the defensive. The unexpected length of the Spanish-Cuban conflict also drained Spain economically, almost to the point of bankruptcy. Therefore, in 1897, a new Spanish government headed by Liberal Party leader Práxedes Mateo Sagasta began a new policy, recalling Spanish Captain General Valeriano Weyler and essentially trying to bribe the Cubans with the promise of their own separate House of Representatives (Smith 25). The Cuban rebels, however, would agree to nothing less than complete Cuban autonomy, and continued their attacks on Spanish garrisons all over the island. Indeed, by January 1898, it looked as if the insurgents would soon win their independence outright and end the Spanish-Cuban War, but a strange series of events within the next few months landed Spain in an even greater conflict as the United States became involved.

On February 15, 1898, the U.S. warship *Maine* suddenly exploded while in Havana harbor insuring the safety of American citizens and property in Cuba. Two hundred and sixty-six U.S. soldiers were killed (Smith 40). The United States held an independent investigation, not allowing Spanish authorities to view the wreckage, and though the U.S. report was unable to

determine who was responsible, U.S. citizens and Congress clearly viewed Spain as the culprit. The American press, chiefly Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World* and William Randolph Hearst's *New York Journal*, had already turned American public opinion against Spain by printing their 'yellow' daily newspapers full of embellished stories leaked to them from the Cuban provisional government, known as the Cuban *junta*, telling of atrocities committed by Spanish soldiers (Wilkerson 8).

The ardent sympathy of the American people for the plight of the Cubans fighting for freedom combined nicely with the *Maine* incident to provide Congress with a reason to intervene. In reality, the United States government had a great invested interest in the Cuban economy, especially in its shipping and sugar industries, and it did not trust the Cubans to respect American property and investments as it fought for independence. Likewise, having Spain relinquish its authority over Cuba would facilitate more American control over the island. For this reason, Cuban autonomists endeavored to keep the U.S. neutral, as they did not wish to pass from one master to another. Yet by April 21, 1898, the United States and Spain were at war.

The following seven months that encompassed the Spanish-American War were devastating to the Spanish. The American military strategy was based primarily on exerting military and economic pressure on Spain, two areas in which the Spanish were already severely weakened. The U.S. achieved their objectives by placing troops and blockades in and around Spain's most valuable overseas possessions: Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippine Islands. The first significant fighting took place on May 1 in a very one-sided naval battle at Manila Bay in the Philippines, in which U.S. Admiral George Dewey routed the severely outmatched Spanish navy. With the American navy firmly in place blocking supply lines to Manila, Spain had little recourse to mount a counter-attack, and Dewey simply waited patiently for orders to take control of Manila. By first attacking the Philippines, the U.S. forced Spain to divert ships and supplies

away from Cuba, spreading the Spanish navy thin and allowing the larger and better-armed American ships to win naval battles virtually without a fight.

The story was all too similar on July 3 in Santiago Bay, just a few miles from Santiago de Cuba, as Spanish Admiral Pascual Cervera, hemmed in by the U.S. naval blockade in the Caribbean, made a desperate attempt to run the blockade and was summarily turned back under a hail of gunfire that nearly sank all six of his ships. The Spanish defeat gave the U.S. full command of the seas and demoralized the now isolated Spanish troops in Cuba, all but securing an American victory in the war. Only two days before, under heavy fire from well-defended Spanish fortifications, the Americans had massed superior numbers and overtaken the hamlet of El Caney and the San Juan Heights, two strategic positions for mounting an attack on the city of Santiago de Cuba, the second largest city on the island. Although the city was not as strategically vital to winning the war as was the Cuban capitol of Havana and the battle promised to be a bloody one, the Americans determined not to withdraw. Fortunately, neither the Spanish within the city nor the Americans surrounding it desired any more unnecessary casualties, and therefore negotiations for the capitulation of Santiago de Cuba were finalized on July 17, 1898.

After the U.S. took over Santiago de Cuba, Spanish Prime Minister Sagasta sent a message through Jules Cambon, a French ambassador to the U.S., that Spain wished to negotiate peace terms. Sagasta hoped to move quickly to avoid losing any more Spanish territory, but a delay in the French government's approval Cambon's mediation slowed the peace process so that, by the time hostilities were officially ended on August 12, 1898, the Americans had already taken control of the Philippines and Puerto Rico. Negotiations for a peace treaty to officially end the war lasted until December 10, at which point Spain agreed to 'relinquish' its sovereignty over Cuba and to cede Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines to the United States. In return for the Philippines, the U.S. agreed to pay Spain \$20 million. Time was allowed for the governments of

both sides to ratify the treaty, and arguments that arose at this time delayed its final signing until April 11, 1899.

After the Spanish-American War, Spain began the process of trying to recover from the great humiliation it had suffered from the dissolution of its empire. Spaniards referred to 1898 as the year of '*el desastre*' (the disaster), in which a final blow had been struck to a nation that had been in decline for centuries. Many Spaniards sought to remedy this national decline by focusing on internal reforms, which began with securing the resignation of Prime Minister Sagasta. Ironically, the year of *el desastre* proved beneficial for Spain in that it relieved the economic and military burden created by the seemingly endless war with Cuban rebels and allowed the Spanish to focus their energies on rebuilding a strong and stable government.

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Sufriendo en el infierno

España está ardiendo con la guerra
que se está propagando por cada provincia, cada alma;
que consume campo y edificio, hijo e hija, en un infierno
de muerte y devastación.

La cerilla del miedo se encendió en el pedernal de la represión.

La ira crece
por dentro hasta que consuma el miedo;
yo he sentido el quemar en las entrañas,
conozco muy bien la hiel que surge al fondo de la garganta,
que nos hace creer en la capacidad para matar.

Por eso, nos matamos.
Por eso, se envían a los obreros a la Plaza de Toros para afrontar las ametralladoras.
Por eso, las bombas aplastan a las mujeres en el mercado.
Por eso, el hambre devora a los niños.

¿Quién nos traerá el agua?

Spain is ablaze with war that is spreading through every province, every soul; that consumes
field and building, son and daughter, in an inferno of death and devastation.

The match of fear was struck upon the flint of repression.

The anger grows inside until it consumes the fear; I have felt the burning in my guts, I know very
well the bile that rises in the back of the throat, that makes one believe in his capacity to kill.

For that reason, we kill each other
For that reason, laborers are sent to the bull ring to face the machine guns.
For that reason, bombs crush women in the marketplace.
For that reason, hunger devours our children.

Who will bring us water?

Gloss: The poem is written in free verse. The speaker is a Spaniard lamenting the atrocities of the Spanish Civil War (1936-39) that took the lives of over one million people, devastated Spain both physically and economically, and divided politically until the 1980's.

The Spanish Civil War (1936-1939)

Although Spain experienced a series of civil wars during the nineteenth century, the devastation wrought upon the country and population by the civil war of the 1930's surpassed them all. Conflict had begun as early as 1931, when King Alfonso XIII abdicated the throne and the newly formed Second Republic took control of the government. Although the Second Republic intended to reform the Spanish government, it was unable to effect much change because of disunity among the various liberal factions and the constant struggle against right-wing conservatives who wished to bring Spain back under traditional rule.

In 1931, left wing political parties dominated the Spanish parliament, known as the *Cortes*, and issued reforms separating Church and State and reducing the control of *latifundistas*, wealthy landowners who leased farmland to peasants yet denied them the opportunity to own the land outright. The *Cortes* based its liberal reform on the belief that Spain could return to greatness by decentralizing the government and imitating the relative autonomy afforded by *fueros*, ancient constitutions negotiated between the monarchy and its provinces (Browne 10). By 1933, however, most of the liberal reforms had been reversed or simply ignored as conservative influence grew and the many diverse political parties in the *Cortes* struggled to keep their particular interests at the forefront. A violent conflict erupted soon after when President Alcalá Zamora gave control of the *Cortes* to the Catholic Party (CEDA), the strongest of the right wing political parties, resulting in revolts in Asturias and Catalonia that left countless left-wing supporters dead, tortured, or exiled, and 40,000 arrested (Browne 18). The revolts clearly voiced the popular support for the Republic and all but insured a civil war.

In the election of February 1936, the liberal party known as the Popular Front narrowly won a majority in the *Cortes*, leaving Spain clearly divided and on very unstable political ground. The newly elected government sought a return to the reforms of 1931-33, and began by ousting President Zamora in favor of his Prime Minister, Manuel Azaña. Azaña was both anti-

clerical and an active participant in reducing the size and power of the Spanish army, two characteristics that set him in direct opposition with the two strongest nationalist factions: the Church and the military. Seeking to ease the threat of a military rebellion against the Republic, Azaña dispersed throughout Spain a number of high-ranking career officers, including Generals Emilio Mola and Francisco Franco. The generals secretly corresponded, however, and devised a plan for a military rebellion. On July 17, 1936, a premature rebellion broke out in Melilla, a Spanish territory on the northern coast of Morocco. Franco immediately flew to Tetuán, Morocco to take command of the rebelling military forces, and by the next day the rebellion spread northward into Spain.

By September 1936 the Nationalist forces controlled the majority of western and northern Spain and had established a government of their own. On October 1, 1936, the Nationalist government appointed Franco as its commander in chief. Franco's initial strategy was to attack and secure Madrid, but his first attempt in November, which employed 8,000 men, failed due to the Republican obsession with retaining control of the capital and its enormous defenses, including at least 23,000 men (both Spanish and International Brigades) and Russian military equipment. Franco made a second attempt to take Madrid in February 1937 by attacking the Madrid-Valencia highway to cut Madrid's supply line, but Nationalist forces were held up at both Jarama and Guadalajara by Republican Loyalists and Internationals. After these setbacks, Franco diverted his attention away from the capital in favor of capturing the more industrial, and therefore more strategic, territories of Asturias and the Basque country of Northern Spain (Knight 56).

The Nationalist campaigns in the Basque country began in March 1937 and essentially took the Spanish Civil War to a new level of psychological and military warfare that foreshadowed similar practices during World War II. Both the Loyalists and the Nationalists used terror as a weapon and deterrent from the beginning of the war. For example, during the

paseos, the Loyalists passed nightly through Republican-held cities, stopping at the houses of suspected Nationalist sympathizers to arrest them and take them to a nearby wall to be executed. The Nationalists similarly rounded up workers, teachers, artists, and musicians—any freethinking individuals with remotely anti-Church or nontraditional views—and had them executed.

The difference between Loyalist and Nationalist terrorist tactics was that, while the Loyalist usage of terror waned as the war went on, the Nationalists continued to practice such deplorable acts throughout the conflict. Nowhere was this more evident than in the Basque campaigns, which included the annihilation of the market town of Guernica and many of its inhabitants by German bombers. The display of such superior Nationalist weaponry psychologically defeated Republicans in the north, so that major cities like Bilbao and Santander capitulated without a fight. The Nationalists showed little mercy even after surrender. They executed many Republicans (even Catholic priests who had overtly supported the Republic), revoked Basque autonomy, and suppressed the Basque language and culture.

From the Basque country Franco moved south in an effort to renew his attack on Madrid, but the Republicans diverted his attention by recapturing the city of Teruel in January of 1938. Against the advice of his military advisors, Franco mounted a massive aerial and artillery counterattack on the small town, and by February 22 had thoroughly wiped out Republican resistance (Browne 58). This proved to be the turning point of the war. The momentum created by the victory at Teruel allowed Franco to push through to the Mediterranean and effectively cut off Catalonia from Madrid. On December 23, 1938, Franco began the invasion of Catalonia, which fell within a month and suffered the same fate as the Basque Provinces in terms of autonomy, language, and culture. At this point, the acting Prime Minister of the Republic, Juan Negrín, began negotiating with Franco for a surrender that would insure the safety of defeated Republican officials. Meanwhile, Republican Colonel Segismundo Casado asked Franco for a

similar guarantee in exchange for overthrowing Negrín and taking control of Madrid. Franco accepted Casado's offer, and on March 5, 1939, the coup was carried out. Casado took control of Madrid a week later and began negotiations for an honorable surrender, but Franco would accept nothing less than unconditional capitulation. On March 26, after negotiations had dragged on longer than Franco expected, he ordered an attack on Madrid. A formal surrender was reached two days later, and by April 1 Franco controlled all of Spain.

As Franco began his lengthy reign as dictator of Spain, the country lay in utter ruins. Over one million people, Spanish and foreign, had died in the war, and the economic devastation was immeasurable. In addition, the onset of World War II meant that no other nations had available resources to aid in reconstruction. In fact, due to the popular opposition of Fascism among the Allies in the Second World War and Germany's crippled state in the 1940's, no aid was given to Spain until 1950, when the United States began directing its attention to the suppression of Communism across the globe and loaned \$62 million to Spain. The European nations gradually followed suit, as European auto manufacturers built factories in Spain and tourists began to discover the delights of Spanish beaches, climate, and wine. But the inflow of revenue into the country, while assisting economic growth, could do little to alleviate the suppression of culture and freedom of thought that was a trademark of the Franco era. Franco's initial policy for returning to traditional rule was *limpieza*, cleaning up, which involved executing all those who opposed his authority. Such fear-instilling policies, as well as strict censorship laws that governed all forms of expression, were thinly disguised beneath the veil of religion to mask the blatant injustice that was occurring (Browne 54). In doing so, Franco effectively stunted the economic, political, and cultural growth of Spain for decades, and kept the country divided along fascist and democratic lines until the 1980's.

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