

## **The “Siglo de Oro” - The Internalization of Spain**

The Siglo de Oro - or Golden Age - began with the marriage of Fernando of Aragón and Isabel of Castile and ends with the last of the Hapsburg dynasty, from the Austrian royal family, into which one of their three daughters had married. Although their union brought more unity to the country with a central and authoritarian government, provincial autonomy in many matters did not cease altogether. Both Fernando and Isabel were careful not to overstep these long held traditions for fear of enraging the nobility as they favoured the new bourgeoisie. The royal symbol of the yoke illustrated that both monarchs, although separate entities, pulled together to better Spain.

This time period, essentially spanning the two centuries from 1500 to 1700, was the most important period in Spanish history from a political, territorial, and cultural point of view. It is also the period in which the Spanish Empire was supported and subverted, according to some economists, by the gold and silver from America.

### **The Renaissance:**

The ideals of the Renaissance were embraced and fostered wholeheartedly by Spain. The rationalism of the Renaissance favoured scientific research and the modern need to know more about the world and the universe, as well as other inquiries in religion and economics. One ideal that may have sprung from the ideal of the Reconquest was to spread Christianity. For these, and other reasons, Spain was at the forefront of European expansion, or imperialism at this time. The so-called “discovery,” conquest, and colonization of the Americas as well as the circumnavigation of the globe were but two of the important events of this time. The Renaissance is also characterized by the interest in exploiting natural resources and by the increase in trade. This interest caused many Spaniards to study the geography of the Americas and to undertake new inventions that facilitated mining, metallurgy and navigation. The conquistadores saw themselves as modern recreations of ancient epic heroes.

The Spanish Catholic Church also reflected the intellectual and spiritual questioning of the Renaissance. Intellectual men and women participated in this spirit of inquiry called Humanism.

Artistically, there was a cultivation of classical forms but very soon this was followed by great innovation.

### **The Spanish Empire:**

The Catholic Monarchs organized their state by first reducing the powers of the Cortes; by creating a professional army that responded only to them and not to individual nobles; by recruiting bureaucrats from among the growing educated bourgeoisie; by actively participating in the appointment of high church officials; and, in general, by reforming the administration of the country. To do this a series of departments or ministries were created such as Justice, State,



A view of Granada in 1565 by George Braum. The victory over the last Muslim kingdom of Granada and the reign of Fernando and Isabel facilitated the beginnings of a modern state. At the bottom right, women are seen dancing a Moorish dance.

Finance etc. To a large degree all these changes were due to and supervised by Queen Isabel who was an expert administrator whereas her husband King Fernando was best suited to warfare and diplomacy.

When Isabel died, her heir to the crown of Castile was to be her daughter Juana and, after her, her husband Felipe I. He died young and Juana was tragically destined to spend her life in the castle-prison of Tordesillas because of her mental disorder. Her father, King Fernando, was therefore appointed regent until his grandson, Carlos of Ghent, became the ruler of both Castile and Aragón. At seventeen years of age, Carlos I, the first of the Spanish Hapsburg or Austrian monarchs, was crowned in 1516 and, in 1519 he also became Emperor of Austria, using the title Carlos V.

Both inheritance and conquest put a vast Empire under the control of the crown of Spain which stretched from the Danube in the east to the Philippine Islands in the Pacific Ocean. These lands were ruled by appointed viceroys who represented royal authority in distant lands



and responded to the different *consejos* (councils) such as the Consejo de Indias, Consejo de Italia etc. The viceroys had the power to make necessary changes in their governments. In this way, Spanish values were extended beyond the seas, throughout the Empire.

Carlos I was the creator of Spanish supremacy in Europe and in the known world. His politics were continued by his son Felipe II, who had to confront the Turkish presence in Europe on land and at sea at the battle of Lepanto in 1571, as well as the hostility of other European powers. His wars, especially against England with his “Invincible Armada” in 1588, ruined Spain’s economy. Felipe III, who left most of his governing to his favorite noble, the count of Lerma, signed peace treaties with some of Spain’s traditional enemies and the early years of the seventeenth century were peaceful. Felipe IV followed his father’s example and allowed the count-duke of Olivares run the country while he dedicated himself to a life of pleasure. The last Hapsburg, Carlos II, did not produce an heir and left the country to his Bourbon cousin.



A portrait of Carlos I of Spain by the Italian painter Titian. It hangs in the Prado Museum in Madrid.

These kings, like Fernando and Isabel, had to accept the traditional plurality of the Spanish political system because all attempts at centralization failed when confronted by the importance Spaniards attributed to their regional differences. To do this, the monarchy developed a system of *consejos* headed by appointed officials who responded to the sovereign but also led to corruption at the highest levels.

When Carlos I came to Spain, his noblemen of Austrian origin added to and, in some instances, supplanted the Spanish courtly nobles. Inflation, caused by American gold and silver, had increased the value of the large properties (*latifundios*), thereby increasing the economic power of the nobility as landowners and decreasing that of the bourgeoisie, as city dwellers. In the fifteenth century, 97 percent of the land mass in Spain belonged to 2 to 3 percent of the population. In the sixteenth century this only worsened. Inflation and the dramatic increase in prices decreased the competitiveness of Spanish goods that could be imported from outside at cheaper prices. Many Spanish manufactories and businesses went bankrupt and their bourgeois owners were either ruined or refused to invest. Members of the lower nobility, the *hidalgos*, who were the descendants of medieval fighting knights were prevented from working in crafts or trades that were traditional to Jews and Muslims because they would have lost their noble status. The working classes, usually agricultural workers or salaried craftsmen, were without jobs when investment ceased or when prices dropped so low as to make their work useless, were abandoned to the whims of trade and commerce. Taxes and rents, however, did not decrease. Many had to abandon their homes and families and hope to seek some form of employment in large urban cities such as Madrid or Seville. Madrid, for example, increased from a population of 14,000 in 1570 to 340,000 in 1660. Urban overpopulation was matched by rural depopulation. Spain's overall population decreased from 8.4 million people in 1594 to less than 6 million in 1723 whereas Germany and France at the time had populations of 20 million and 16 million respectively. Picaresque novels, such as *Lazarillo de Tormes*, severely criticized this economic situation and demonstrated how the country was being affected. A rebellion, known as the war of the *comuneros* (commons, referring to communities, not common people), against royal absolutism and the increased power of the nobility was defeated in 1521.

The gold brought from the Americas was used to pay the debts incurred by the costs of the kings' imperial adventures and the high standard of living of all courtly nobility. The Spanish royal treasury declared bankruptcy six times between 1557 and 1647. Much of the gold and silver was siphoned off by corrupt court officials. Often the money did not stay in Spain but was spent in Europe to pay for the imported goods that had replaced Spanish products, thereby strengthening European industry and its middle class at the expense of Spaniards.

### **Expulsion of Religious Minorities:**

The fourteenth-century crisis that had caused so much strife and civil war ended the medieval spirit of *convivencia* between the three religions of the Peninsula in the fifteenth century. The attempt to unify the nation politically led to a demand for religious unity as well. Religious minorities were forced to convert or leave the country. The Jewish population was given six months to leave in 1492 and the Muslims—and eventually even the *morisco* converts to Catholicism - were given until 1609 or 1613 to leave. Besides the deep human tragedy this action entailed, the exodus led to a serious depopulation in Aragón and in the south-eastern part of the

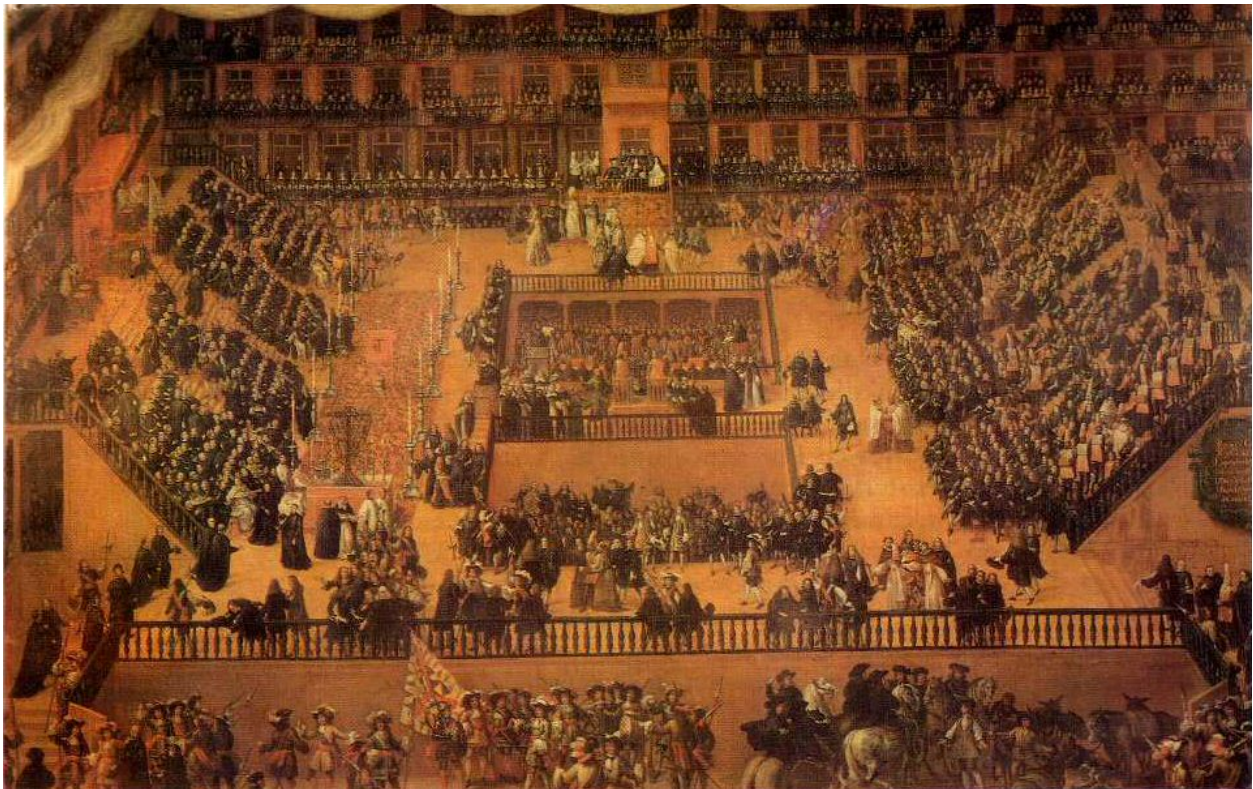


country and to the deterioration of the Peninsula's economy and trade. Spain would not recuperate until well into the twentieth century.

### **Spiritual Unrest:**

The spiritual unrest of the Renaissance provoked various tendencies or heterodox attitudes in Spain. One paralleled the Protestant Reformation in the rest of Europe that demanded changes in the Catholic church; another group, the *alumbrados* or *iluminados* (enlightened ones) rejected all formality and ritual and believed that the individual might seek God in personal meditation; yet another, the *erasmistas*, followers of Erasmus of Rotterdam, believed in individual worship based on individual understanding of the scriptures, independent of dogma or structures.

In Spain, church orthodoxy maintained its authority thanks in part to the presence of the Inquisition. Some Spaniards did contribute, however, to the Counter Reformation by, for example, the reformation of existing religious orders undertaken by Santa Teresa of Ávila and San Juan de la Cruz. Ignacio of Loyola's creation of the Jesuit order in 1540 would be important in the development of education in Spain and America.



This painting by Francisco de Ricci minutely illustrates how an auto da fe was celebrated in Madrid on 30 June, 1680, with Carlos II presiding. This exceptional historical if not artistic document was signed by the painter in 1683. It hangs in the Prado Museum in Madrid.

## **The Tribunal of the Inquisition:**

The Tribunal of the Holy Office of the Inquisition, *Santo Oficio de la Inquisición*, was begun to pursue Catholic heretics and false converts or Judaizers. Initially members of other religions were outside the powers of the Inquisition. In 1474 its power was ceded to the king. It became a complex and corrupt administrative body that served state repression and so-called “old Christians” (*cristianos viejos*) - as opposed to “new Christians” or converts (*cristianos nuevos*) - to preserve the Catholic faith and repress any form of dissent.

The Inquisition generated a nearly obsessive religiosity because everyone was afraid of failing in some religious observation and being accused, jailed, tried and even condemned to death to burn at the stake. This atmosphere of mistrust and fear was not conducive to intellectual and scientific inquiry. Nevertheless, most of Spain’s great advances did occur at this time.

The medieval *convivencia* amongst the three faiths was complicated by the Reformation and intolerance to Protestants. At this time the Statutes of *limpieza de sangre* (“purity of blood” or lineage) were passed demanding that any individual seeking to emigrate, to obtain government work or entrance into the army, a university or a religious order prove that he had no Muslim or Jewish blood for five, later seven, generations. By 1632, this was reduced to two generations. For many Spaniards this was impossible to prove because, in many cases, there had in fact been a great deal of intermarriage and conversions but, in others, the documents simply did not exist. Ironically, the simple village people were often more familiar with their blood lines because people did not move frequently nor did others move there and everyone knew each other’s relatives. This proof of lineage existed until the nineteenth century as a prerequisite to enter military academies.

Despite these concerns, the religious problem was not resolved in Spain and, until recently, continued to be a social concern in some circles. Official Catholicism, that is Catholicism as the state religion in Spain, lasted until the late twentieth century.

## **The “Golden Age” of Culture:**

The diffusion of Humanism and the creation of the printing press, combined with the renewal to the curricula of the University of Salamanca and the creation of the University of Alcalá de Henares, marked the beginnings of the Siglo de Oro, of the Golden Age when Spaniards were at the forefront of arts and letters. Castilian, the language we know as Spanish, became the official language of state and of literature throughout the Spanish-speaking world. Supplanting Latin, it also became the diplomatic language used for international relations.

Important figures of Spanish humanism are Elio Antonio de Nebrija, the author of the *Arte de la lengua castellana o Gramática castellana* (*The Art of the Castilian Language or Castilian Grammar*) the first Romance language grammar text to be printed, and Luis Vives, his contemporary, who was an important pedagogue far ahead of his time. Many Spanish intellectuals were attracted to the new cultural ideals of the Renaissance. The philosopher Erasmus of Rotterdam was invited to participate in the writing of the Polyglot Bible and his rational hu-



manism greatly influenced Spanish philosophy. Alfonso de Valdés, a severe critic of the laxity of the priests of the Roman Catholic church, was instrumental in the reforms in the Spanish clergy, is one example of Erasmus' influence.

### The Sciences:

The main scientific institutions in Spain were the universities, the Casa de Contratación (where voyages were planned and contracts signed) in Seville, the Academy of Mathematics in Madrid, some hospitals and botanical gardens.

Astronomy and mathematics, which had flourished in the Middle Ages in Spain thanks to the Muslim and Jewish scientists, were studied because of their applications to cartography and navigation in the new atmosphere of discovery and imperialism. Pedro de Medina's *El arte de navegar* (*The Art of Navigation*), for example, was the main university text book used all over Europe at this time and Copernicus' work was an official part of the University of Salamanca's curriculum. Roget was among the pioneers in the development of the telescope.

The *Consejo de Indias* (Council of the Indies - as the Americas were then known) was



Libro de Calixto y Melibea y de la puta vieja Celestina (Seville 1502)

## EXAMEN DE INGENIOS PARA LAS SCIENCIAS.

EN EL QUAL EL LECTOR HALLA  
la manera de su ingenio, para escoger la sciencia en que  
mas á de aprouechar. Y la diferencia de habi-  
lidades que ay en los hom-  
bres de letras y artes que á cada uno  
responde en particular.

Compuesto por el Doctor Iuã Huarte de  
sant Iuan. Agora nueuamente enmendado  
por el mismo Autor, y añadidas  
muchas cosas curiosas, y  
prouechosas.

Dirigido á la C. R. M. del Rey don Pbelippe nuestro  
señor. Cuyo ingenio se declara, exe-  
mplificando las reglas y preceptos desta  
doctrina.

Con nuevo Preuilegio del Rey N. S.  
Impressó en Baçça. En casa de Iuã Baptista  
de Montoya. Año dc. 1594.

established in 1524 and with it came an ambitious geographical project. The cosmographer and chronicler Juan López de Velasco made up a complex list of questions that were to be answered by all those wanting to study certain aspects of the Indies. In 1574 he also wrote his highly ambitious, for its time, *Geografía y descripción universal de las Indias* (*Geography and Universal Description of the Indies*). Along with the brilliant cartographic studies of the Americas, engineering also advanced greatly as technical developments and especially military engineering studies were carried out.

The development of American mineral wealth and other natural resources was the cause of new methods of making amalgams and assaying metals. One of the first European books on the topic was by Juan de Arfe, *El Quilatador de la plata, oro y piedras* (*The Carat Weight of Silver, Gold and Precious Stones*).

Natural science was also promulgated by the discoveries in America and many texts were written at this time, such as the *Historia general y natural de las Indias* (*The General and Natural History of the Indies*) by Fernández de Oviedo and the *Historia medicinal de las cosas que se traen de nuestras Indias occidentales* (*Medicinal History of the Things Brought from our Western Indies*) by Nicolás Monardes.

Physiology also advanced in Spain: Miguel Servet, who discovered the circulation of blood, foreshadowed Harvey's studies on circulation. Juan Huarte de San Juan in his *Examen de ingenios para las ciencias* (*Examination of Genius for Sciences*) was the first to establish the brain as the organic centre of behaviour. Other advances in medicine and anatomy progressed, especially once the dissection of cadavers was allowed in 1488.

### **Literature:**

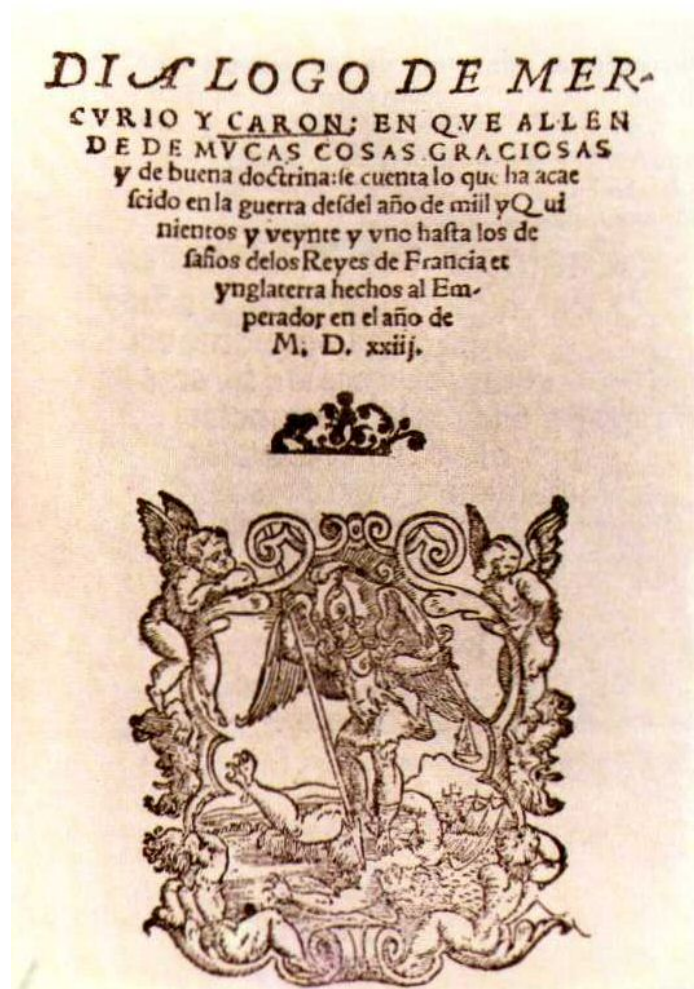
#### ***La Celestina: Between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, Between Drama and Prose.***

The book known as *La Celestina* was the most important literary text published in the time of the Catholic Monarchs. Its author, Fernando de Rojas, created the figure of Celestina, a go-between, witch, and former prostitute, who brings two young people, Calixto and Melibea, together. The characters are motivated by lust, ambition and greed which eventually leads them to their death, by murder, accident and suicide. The work takes place in Salamanca and provides an interesting view of an urban environment at the crossroads of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. The text is *sui generis*, that is neither drama nor prose. Perhaps it is a novel or play meant to be read out loud by a group of friends, as the author states in the Prologue.

#### **The Ballads: The Survival of Medieval Epic Poetry:**

The *romancero*, or collections of ballads, are unique to Spanish literature. Dating back to the fourteenth century or maybe earlier, ballads are narrative poems that recreate or retell some of the stories already seen in epic poetry or create new, highly fictitious characters and situations that are loosely based on history. Always anonymous, these poems use a simple but agile meter that lends itself well to music.





Thanks to appeal of the stories, the ballads have survived all over the world wherever Spaniards have emigrated, including North Africa - in the case of Judeo-Spanish *sefardí* ballads - and to the Americas. In some instances, the original ancient medieval epic poems have been lost but their memory survives in the *romances*. In the Renaissance - and much later in the nineteenth century - these poems were published in chap books, or *pliegos sueltos*, and later in collections. In the ballad *Abenamar*, *Abenamar* we note the mixing of religions and races in medieval Spain and the effects of memory:

Tell me what these castles are,  
shining grandly in the sun!  
That, my lord, is the Alhambra,  
this the Moorish Mosque apart,  
and the rest the Alixares,  
wrought and carved with wondrous art.  
For the Moor who did the labour  
had a hundred crowns a day;  
and each day he shirked the labour  
had a hundred crowns to pay

**Drama:**

Secular or festive theatre, as opposed to religious or liturgical drama, appeared in the late fifteenth century. Authors such Juan del Encina and Lope de Rueda introduced Renaissance drama in the early part of the sixteenth century. Juan del Encina also wrote music and created a school of popular music in which traditional styles were maintained throughout the Renaissance. Religious music also reached great heights as polyphony was developed. It was at this time that the guitar came into use. Both dramatists were precursors to the great classical Spanish drama that will appear a little later. Rueda was the first to introduce the use of prose as well as poetry for dramatic reasons in his texts. Both tended to focus on amorous themes with complicated plots and endings. Their long plays were often interrupted by one act plays that had little or nothing to do with the main action. These one act plays would eventually be turned into a genre of their own called the *entremés*.

### **Poetry:**

By the beginning of the sixteenth century, Spanish poets had fully accepted the influence of Italian poetry that presented new themes, such as mythology, platonic love and scenes of nature. They also followed Italian metrics. This new style had been introduced to the Peninsula by the Catalan poet Bosco and was soon widely used by great poets such as Garcilaso de la Vega in whose work nature is nearly humanized:

O fate, that in my sorrows aims the blow,  
how deep I felt thy merciless decree!  
Thou didst cut down with harmful hands the tree,  
on earth the fruits and flowers didst scattered throw.  
Low lies my love in little space; and low  
the hope I had is fallen all. I see  
to careless ashes turned those dreams of thee,  
deaf to my mournful words and cries of woe.  
(*Soneto*, Garcilaso de la Vega)

This Italianate style was also followed and innovated upon by the Seville and Salamanca schools of poetry, and by poets such as Fernando de Herrera and Fray Luis de León. The latter wrote elegant prose as well as poetry which reveals the influence of the Latin poet, Horace. Again, we see the sights of the Alhambra palace:

How peaceful is the life  
of one who breaks away from worldly sound  
and follows, free of strife,  
the hidden path: the ground  
of those few wise men who were in the world!  
The powers of great aloof  
rulers does not comfort his chest with spite,  
nor does the golden roof  
made by skilled Moors excite  
his praise, those jasper columns held upright  
(*La vida retirada*, Fray Luis de Leon)

### **Aestheticism and Mysticism:**

An anonymous portrait of Santa Teresa de Jesús which now hangs in the Spanish Royal Academy in Madrid.



The desire for ecclesiastical reform in the Renaissance did more than create heresy. It also caused an intensification of faith and religious practices within the Catholic church. Along with the *iluminados* and *alumbrados*, Erasmists and other reformers, the presence of religious mystics and aesthetes was felt by the mid-sixteenth century. These Spaniards would bring great changes to the church and to literature.

Fray Luis de Granada tried to discover the path to perfection through the precise and suggestive use of language in his *Guía de pecadores* (*Guide for Sinners*).

Santa Teresa de Jesús, also known as Santa Teresa de Ávila, and whose secular name was Teresa de Cepeda, 1515-1582), was the reformer of her order, the Carmelites. She was also the author of books of poetry in which her verse is traditional, spontaneous and familiar due to



the use of many diminutives and even vulgarisms but her message is religious and mystic. In both her poetry and her prose, besides referring to her personal religious experiences, she tried to illustrate a way to better spiritual life and to reach God.

I live, yet no true life I know,  
and, living thus expectantly,  
I die because I do not die.  
Since this new death-in-life I've known  
estrang'd from self my life has been,  
for now I live life unseen:  
The Lord has claim'ed me as His own.  
My heart I gave Him for His throne,  
whereon He wrote indelibly:  
"I die because I do not die"  
(*Aspiración de vida eterna*, Santa Teresa de Jesús)

The most outstanding literary figure in Spanish mysticism was San Juan de la Cruz (1542-1591), a poet whose style was refined and cultured and who found inspiration in the Bible and in Spanish literary tradition. His lyrics are reasoned, his symbolism is very personal and the tone of his verse is intimate and affectionate. All make San Juan de la Cruz one of Spanish Siglo de Oro's most important authors. Besides his poetry, he also wrote prose commentaries in which he combines literary and philosophical values to express his mystic doctrine.

Upon an obscure night  
fevered with love in love's anxiety  
(O hapless-happy plight!)  
I went, none seeing me,  
forth from my house where all things be.  
By night, secure from sight,  
and by the secret stair, disguisedly,  
(O hapless-happy plight!)  
By night and privily,  
forth from my house where all things quiet be.  
Blest night of wandering,  
in secret, where by none might I be spied  
nor I see anything;  
without a light or guide,  
save that which in my heart burnt in my side.  
That light did lead me on,  
more surely than the shining of noontide,  
where well I knew that one  
did for my coming bide;  
where he abode, might none but He abide  
(*Canciones*, San Juan de la Cruz)

### **The Picaresque Novel:**



A portrait of Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra by Juan de Jauregui. It now hangs in the Spanish Royal Academy in Madrid.

The cultured and didactic prose of Spanish humanists coexisted with creative prose fiction that had its roots in medieval sentimental, Moorish, pastoral and chivalric novels. This genre will eventually produce the greatest novel ever written, *Don Quijote*.

The novels of chivalry portrayed the adventures of a hero who suffers trials and tribulations all for the platonic love of his lady. Tirant lo Blanch and Amadís de Gaula (Amadis of Gaul) are but two examples of such knights. The new and very Spanish genre that imitates and satirizes these novels are the picaresque novels that became very popular in the Baroque period. The first such novel, *Lazarillo de Tormes* written by an unknown author in 1554, tells the story of a poor young boy who has to live by his wits on the streets of Spain. He is not a valiant hero but a marginalized street person who does what he must to survive.

Picaresque novels, written in a clear, precise and popular language, can well be used as historical documents because of how they describe the miserable ways in which Spanish people were forced to live because of the economic and social crises in which the country found itself. In the novels we see not only how the poor survived, but also how the impoverished nobility struggled to maintain the outwardly appearance of class that was so important to them.

### **Miguel de Cervantes:**

Miguel de Cervantes y Saavedra (1547-1616) was a classical styled poet as well as a playwright but the novel was the genre in which his art and imaginative ability is best seen. He wrote short stories (*Las novelas ejemplares* - Exemplary Novels), a pastoral novel, *La Galatea*, a Byzantine novel, *Persiles y Segismunda*, but his most important creation is *El ingenioso hidalgo Don Quijote de la Mancha* (*The Ingenious Knight Don Quijote of La Mancha*). This two part novel is one of Spain's greatest contributions to world literature and is, perhaps, the best novel ever written and against which most other novels are judged.

*Don Quijote* tells the story of an aged knight who has spent his life, and most of his income, buying and reading novels of chivalry. He develops a form of madness, some might say idealism, in which he comes to believe, despite the fact that he lives in quite different historical circumstances, that he is one such knight and that he is called to set out into the world, abandoning his quiet home and relatives, in order to set wrongs right, save maidens, free prisoners, fight dragons etc. Although his reasoning and behaviour are bewildering, funny and sad, they reflect a high sense of moral duty and an interesting view of life. The language used by Cervantes in the novel is one of the best expressions of classical Spanish which is both very cultured yet popular. The two main characters, Don Quijote and Sancho Panza, each speak as expected, thereby revealing much about the circumstances in which Spain, and many Spaniards like the old useless knight and his impoverished peasant companion, found themselves at this time. Sancho describes a knight-errant to a serving wench: “[...] a knight-errant is a thing which in two words, you see well cudgeled, and after becomes an emperor. Today he is the most unfortunate creature of the world, and the most needy; and tomorrow he will have or three crowns of kingdoms to bestow upon his squire.”



Part of the *plateresco* façade of the University of Salamanca. The medallion at its centre bears the portraits of the Catholic Monarchs and is surrounded by an inscription in Greek that proclaims the alliance of the monarchy and the University.



### **Sovereignty and Human Rights:**

The attempt to justify the conquest of America gave rise to the advanced political and theological discussion in sixteenth-century Spain by Francisco de Vitoria and Francisco Suárez. Together they formulated the concept of the equality of all subjects under the law and they established the basis for a concept of human rights that would eventually lead to the idea of international law. For the first time in Europe, they discussed the concept of national sovereignty and the illegality of all wars.

These two theologians gave the Spanish monarchy the legal instruments by which it might organize the Empire. In Europe at this time political thought was restricted to the principles developed by Machiavelli, which dictated that the needs of the state could set aside any and all ethical standards or considerations, or by Bodino, who defined a sovereign as he who recognizes no superior power. The Spanish political thinkers, nevertheless, considered that the law was paramount, superseding the will of rulers. Father Mariana even allowed that tyrants might legally be killed by their subjects:

Philosophers as well as theologians agree that if a prince should take power by force of arms, without any right and outside the law, without the consent of the people, any subject of the country may dethrone him, remove him from government and even take his



A general view of the Royal Monastery of San Lorenzo of El Escorial. Seen from above, the buildings are set out in the shape of a grill. San Lorenzo, to whom the building is dedicated, was a martyr who died on such a grill.

life; as a public enemy who has caused all matter of evil to the nation and rightfully being called a tyrant because of his character, he cannot only be dethroned but the same amount of violence may be used against him as he used to achieve that power which belongs only to the society that he is oppressing and enslaving. (*Del rey y de la institución real - On the King and the Institution of Royalty*— by Padre Mariana.)

### **Classicism in the Arts:**

Art in the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance was in a transitional stage from Gothic to classical. A native artistic form called *plateresco* (or silver-like) appeared at the time of the Catholic Monarchs. It is characterized by its rich decoration of flat surfaces. This architectural decoration is due to the engravings that are reminiscent of the Mosque of Córdoba and the Alhambra in Granada. Some outstanding examples of this style are the doorway of the Cathedral and the façade of the University in Salamanca as well as the church of San Marcos in León and many palaces in the historic centre of Cáceres, which is one of the most beautiful urban areas in Spain.



The rational distribution of space and decorative sobriety, such as that seen in the Alcázar of Toledo and the University of Alcalá de Henares, mark the change to classicism. The palace of Carlos V in the Alhambra in Granada is another example in which the imitation of Florentine models can also be seen as this ruler sought to impose a firm European style on the Andalusian monument. The same can be said of the cathedral of Granada, built by Diego de Siloé, where the demands of this new style have the vaulted ceilings of the naves resting on very thick pillars formed by Corinthian columns. The same model is followed in the cathedral of Jaén, which is one of the most beautiful in the region, and the church of El Salvador in Úbeda.



*El entierro del conde de Orgaz* by El Greco is in the Church of Santo Tomás in Toledo. This painting measuring 4.8 meters by 3.6 meters was painted between 1586 and 1588. Here the artist anticipated the Baroque style in the upper central portion of the painting that is all movement and spirituality.

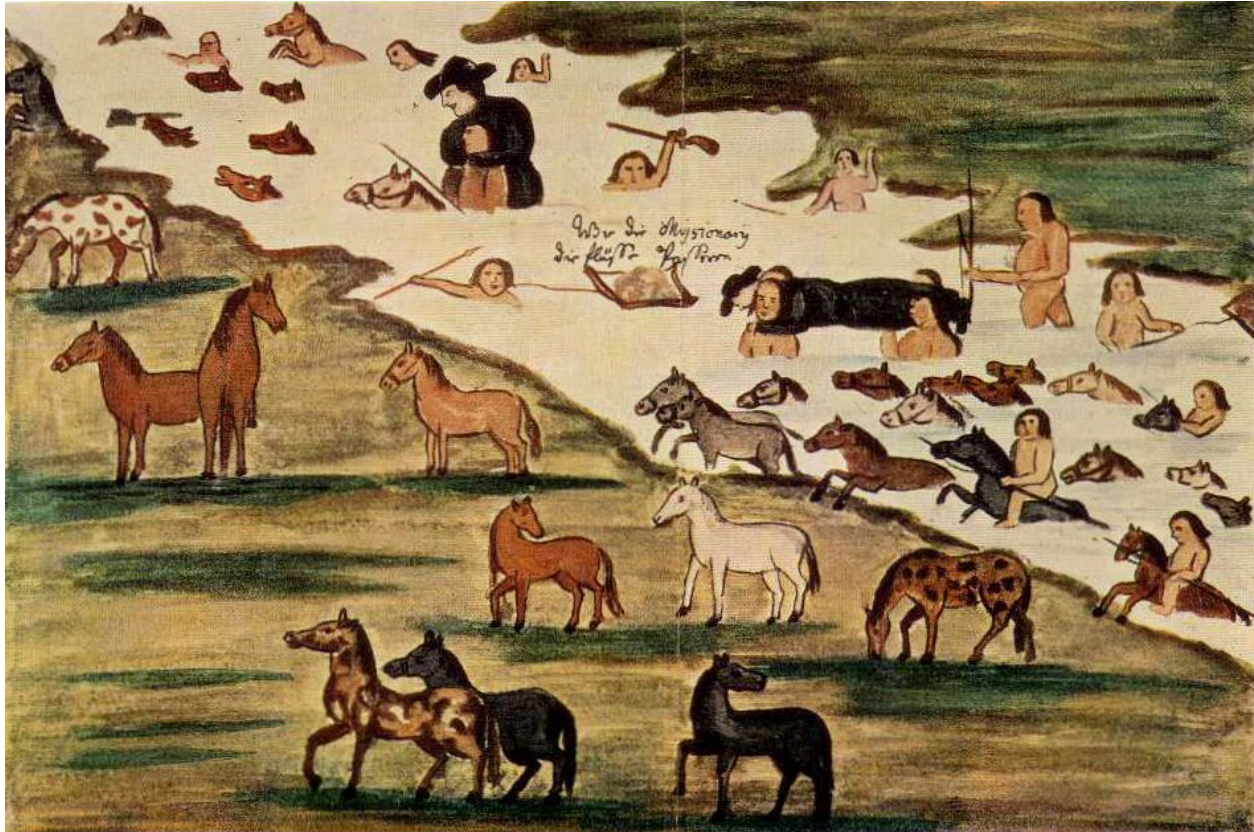


Between 1563 and 1584, Felipe II, the ruler of the largest empire in the world at the time, built the palace of El Escorial outside Madrid. This sober, classical style building was a palace, monastery, royal mausoleum, library, church and educational centre. Because of its sheer size and the perfection of its forms, and because it was the king's preferred residence, El Escorial came to be seen as a monument to this important period in Spanish history.

In the Siglo de Oro, Spanish sculptors created magnificent *retablos* (altar pieces) made of carved wood that was painted, often with much gold leaf. Greco-Roman architectural styles can be seen in these structures. Diego de Siloé used this style in the Escalera Dorada (Golden Staircase) in the cathedral of Burgos. The greatest sculptor and painter of *retablos*, as well as other works, was Alonso de Berruguete. In his works emotions, tensions and movement overcome classical serenity. His work can best be seen in the choir stalls of the cathedral of Toledo as well as the many *retablos* in the National Museum of Sculpture in Valladolid.

Gothic style was maintained longer in painting than in the other plastic arts but, by the end of the fifteenth century, some Spanish painters were leaning towards new Renaissance techniques. Bartolomé Bermejo used oil and gold leaf in his paintings, such as *Santo Domingo de Silos entronizado como abad* (*St. Dominick of Silos Enthroned as Abbott*) now in the Prado Museum. *The Auto da fe presidido por Santo Domingo de Silos* (*Auto da Fe Presided Over by St. Dominick of Silos*) also in the Prado Museum, by Pedro de Berruguete is another Renaissance example in which the artist's interest in naturalism and light are apparent. Pictorial classicism triumphs in the work of Juan de Juanes with his soft tones and Luis de Morales where the spirituality of the figures is paramount.

The paintings of El Greco are difficult to categorize. Born on the Greek island of Crete, Domenico Theotocopoulos (1541-1614) studied the painting of religious icons in his native land before studying with the great Italian Renaissance masters in Venice and Rome and eventually making his way to Spain. El Greco (the Greek) and the city of Toledo are inseparable because it was there that he found a social and religious climate suited to his aesthetic and imaginative spirit. El Greco's use of colours is Venetian in origin but the subject matters of his paintings are very Spanish. The use of light was an important consideration for him, as was the way he depicted the saintly figures that are both mystical and muscular. He organizes his space in multiple narrative layers through which his figures move in a sort of undulating fashion. His most famous paintings are *El Expolio* (*The Disrobing*), *La asunción de la Virgen* (*The Assumption of Virgin Mary*), *El entierro del conde de Orgaz* (*The Burial of the Count of Orgaz*). In this last painting we see the burial of the Count, surrounded by public figures of Toledo at the time it was painted, including perhaps El Greco and his son. The painting tells of a legend in which the Count was so good that, when he died, two saints came to fetch his body and take him directly to heaven. This ascension can be seen in the multiple levels and diaphanous white clouds that direct our eyes to the upper figure of Christ and other religious representations. Hell and Purgatory are also seen at the right and left respectively.



A strange engraving that depicts the moment in which two missionaries cross a river on the backs of two native people rather than on horseback. Missionaries and conquistadores were not detained by any obstacle.

## America:

On the third day of August, 1492, three small ships, called caravels, left the port of Palos under the command of Cristóbal Colón (Christopher Columbus). Columbus had traveled widely and also, thanks to his father-in-law, he knew of Portuguese maps that charted the relatively unknown waters off Africa. He spent many years seeking permission and funding from the crowns of Spain and Portugal for his voyages and eventually his persistence paid off when Queen Isabel granted him the funds he needed to outfit his ships. On the twelfth of October he and his men disembarked on the island of Guanahani, near the American continent. Columbus always believed that they had reached his goal: the Indies. The “discovery” was recorded in a chronicle:

On the following day that was the eleventh of October of the year 1492, Rodrigo de Triana called out; “Land, land” and, at the sound of this sweet word we all ran up to see if this was true; and, as we saw it, we began to sing the Te Deum laudamus on bended knee and crying with joy [...] The land that they first saw was Guanahani, one of the Lucay islands, that are between Florida and Cuba, and on which they alighted and took possession of the Indies and the New World, that Christopher Columbus discovered for the Catholic Monarchs. (*Historia general de la Indias* by López de Gómara.)

The endeavour that became the conquest of America belonged solely to the crown of Spain that provided the funding and necessary legal structures. The enthusiasm behind this enterprise can be attributed to many factors: the need to find an alternative route to the East because the traditional way was blocked by the Turks; the scientific curiosity seen in Spain and all over the Renaissance world at this time; the need to channel the warrior spirit of the crusades that the conquest of Granada had brought to an end; the religious ideals of the Reconquest that were now expressed in a desire to convert other “infidels.” In but a few years a large part of the New World became part of the Crown of Spain and, soon thereafter, expeditions to the southern seas were undertaken.

### **The Laws of the Indies:**

Spaniards insistently sought explanations that would justify their conquest and colonization of the Americas. Some people, like Father Bartolomé de Las Casas, who was the most ardent defender of native peoples, wondered about the legality of the enterprise and, for him, only evangelization legitimated the foreign presence on American soil. His thesis was shared by the legislators who forbade enslaving the native peoples and granted them protection under Spanish law, called the *Leyes de Indias* (Laws of the Indies). Some historians, basing themselves on this fact, have argued that Spanish America was never a colony in the legal sense. Las Casas and Fray Ginés de Sepúlveda debated the issue. In his *Apología*, Las Casas wrote:

Christ wanted his Gospel to be preached sweetly and softly and with gentleness so that the pagans might be attracted to the truth, not with the intervention of soldiers but with holy examples, with Christian customs and the word of God.

The Casa de Contratación (Contract Centre) in Seville was a scientific centre but it also held mercantile tribunals, and, with the *Consejo de Indias*, these metropolitan institutions oversaw the governance of the Indies which was divided into the vice-reigns of New Spain (Mexico) and Peru. So as to assure the proper functioning of local institutions, various systems of control were devised such as the *Juicios de residencia* (Residence trials) to which all government officials were subject, including the viceroy when his appointment was over; another body was the *Capítulos de Agravio* (Complaint Books) that allowed any citizen to appeal any action of the government that affected their rights; yet another was the *Régimen de visitas* (Register of Visits) by which any authority could be subject to a visit without prior notice by other governmental authorities. The ideal behind these many organizations was to control the activities of Spaniards and to better life for the native peoples under their control.

Economic activities in the new colonies included mining and exclusive commerce with Castile. Trade was only extended to the rest of Spain in 1778. Buildings in the New World illustrated the same transition from Gothic to Renaissance architectural styles that was seen in Spain. Most cathedrals were begun in this style but, by the time they were completed, many had taken on Baroque attributes.





The catechism of Fray Pedro de Gante, now in the Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid, is an example of how the imagination was used by missionaries to teach the Gospels.

### Native society and culture:

Spaniards quickly mixed with native peoples such that *mestizaje* (mixed blood) was a dominant characteristic in Spanish America and radically distinguished it from other colonial civilizations, except Brazil. By the end of the sixteenth century only a tiny minority of the population was wholly European and society was less divided along lines of colour. Given that feudalism had not existed in Spanish America, other class distinctions that existed in the homeland were not as apparent. *Mestizaje* increased with the passage of time and came to include the black slaves brought from Africa. One famous example was the marriage of Martín García Oñez de Loyola, the nephew of St. Ignatius of Loyola, to the Inca princess Beatriz Clara Coya, daughter of the penultimate Inca ruler, Sayri Tupac. Another example of racial and cultural *mestizaje* was the Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, the product of another marriage between a Spaniard and an Inca princess. He became one of the outstanding literary figures at the beginning of the seventeenth century in Spain as his books told the story of his people and how they were conquered.

Literature flourished in the Americas. Its best examples are the early chronicles such as the *Diario (Diary)* by Columbus; the *Historia general y natural de las Indias (General and Natural History of the Indies)* by Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo; the *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias* and other works of father de Las Casas; Hernán Cortés' *Cartas de relación de la conquista de Méjico (Letters that Relate the Conquest of Mexico)*; López de Gómara's *Historia general de las Indias*; the *Historia verdadera de la conquista de Nueva España (The True History of the Conquest of New Spain)* by Bernal Díaz del Castillo. The *Crónica del Perú (Chronicle of Peru)* by Pedro Cieza de León is an example:

The city of San Francisco del Quito is the doorway to the north of the interior of the province of the kingdom of Peru. The longitude of this province from West to East is nearly seventy leagues and a latitude of twenty-five or thirty leagues. It is situated on ancient buildings that the Inga [sic] Guaynacapa and his father the great Topainga had built at the end of their reigns and which we have illustrated. These royal and principle palaces are called Quito[...] Crónica del Perú.

Spanish culture was easily spread throughout the Americas thanks to the printing press and to the schools and universities established by the church to care for the education of native peoples and to preserve their native languages. Although many dictionaries were composed in most native languages, unfortunately the manuscripts of Mexican codices were destroyed by overzealous missionaries who hoped to eradicate native religions by destroying their texts. The same happened to the many pyramids and other buildings that were destroyed or used for the construction of cathedrals and government buildings.

The “Golden Century” was a special and splendid time for Spain and Spanish culture but every member of sixteenth and seventeenth century Spanish society did not live a “golden” time.

### **Chronology:**

- 1492: Perhaps the most important year in Spanish history: the war with Granada ends the Muslim presence in Spain; Spanish Jews are expelled; American conquest begins; Nebrija published his *Gramática castellana*.
- 1494: Treaty of Tordesillas in which Spain and Portugal divide the world in areas of influence.
- 1496: The Canary Islands become part of Spain.
- 1498: Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros, confessor to Queen Isabel and Archbishop of Toledo, founds the University of Alcalá de Henares.
- 1499: First publication of *La Celestina* by Fernando de Rojas.
- 1504: Death of Queen Isabel; King Fernando is named regent because of Juana's illness.
- 1510: Casa de Contratación founded in Seville.
- 1511: First pharmacology book in Spanish published in Barcelona.
- 1500 and 1512: laws forbidding slavery of native peoples in America are passed.
- 1512: King Fernando becomes King of Navarre ( as well as King of Aragón and regent of Castile).
- 1513: Nuñez de Balboa sees the Pacific Ocean.

- 1514-1517: Publication of the *Biblia Poliglota Complutense* (Polyglot Bible) in Alcalá de Henares.
- 1516: Death of King Fernando. Carlos I is named his heir.
- 1516-1519: Carlos I becomes King of Spain in 1516 and Emperor of Germany in 1519 (named as Carlos V) by inheriting the crowns of Castile, Aragón, Navarre, Cataluña, the Balearic and Canary Islands, Sardinia, Naples, Sicily, Flanders, Luxemburg, Franche Conté and the Artois region in France, the Low Lands, some possessions in Africa and those parts of America in Spanish control.
- 1519-1522: Spaniards circumnavigate the globe.
- 1521: Hernán Cortés adds Mexico to Spain.
- 1524: Creation of the *Consejo de Indias*.
- 1528: Francisco de Vitoria published his “rereading” of *De potestate civile*.
- 1530-1540: Most of Spanish America added to Spain.
- 1536: The printing press is used in Mexico.
- 1537: The *Compañía de Jesús* (the Jesuit Order) is founded.
- 1538: Foundation of the University of Santo Domingo, the first American university.
- 1539: Francisco de Vitoria published his “rereading” of *De Indis Sive Iure Belli* (*On the Right of War in the Indies*).
- 1542: Villalobos reaches the Philippine Islands. The prohibition on enslaving native peoples in America is withdrawn.
- 1551: Foundation of the Universities of Mexico and Lima, Peru.
- 1552: Bartolomé de Las Casas published *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias* (*Very Brief Relation of the Destruction of the Indies*).
- 1554: Publication of *Lazarillo de Tormes*.
- 1566: Carlos I abdicates. Felipe II becomes King of Spain. Separatist movements in the Low Lands begin.
- 1568: *Moriscos* (converted Muslims in southern Spain) rebel against having to leave Spain.
- 1568 - 1572: Publication of the *Biblia poliglota de Amberes* (*Polyglot Bible of Amberes*) with the support of Felipe II and the Spanish humanist scholar Benito Arias Montano.
- 1571: Spanish victory over the Turks in the sea battle of Lepanto. A second *morisco* uprising.
- 1575: Juan Huarte de San Juan published *Examen de ingenios para las ciencias*.
- 1577: Santa Teresa de Jesús published *Las Moradas*.
- 1580: Felipe II inherits the crown of Portugal.
- 1584: The monastery of San Lorenzo de El Escorial is finished.
- 1588: The “invincible” Armada is vanquished by Britain. El Greco painted *El entierro del conde de Orgaz*.
- 1597: Francisco Suárez published *Disputationes Metaphysicae* (*Metaphysical Discussions*).
- 1598: Felipe II dies. Felipe III becomes King of Spain and Portugal.
- 1605: Miguel de Cervantes y Saavedra published the first part of *Don Quijote*.
- 1609: Peace treaty with the United Provinces (of the Low Lands). Final expulsion decree of the *moriscos*.
- 1612: Francisco Suárez published *De legibus* (*On Laws*).
- 1615: Cervantes published the second part of *Don Quijote*.
- 1616: Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra and the Inca Garcilaso de la Vega die.



### Themes for Discussion:

1. In your opinion, what role did the Inquisition play? Can this institution's actions be justified given the historical context in which it existed? Explain, taking into account the historical, social and religious situation of the time.
2. Briefly analyze Siglo de Oro literature. Include information on poetry, drama and the novel which explains their salient characteristics.
3. Compare and contrast the picaresque novel and the novel of chivalry. Explain how the characters in each type of novel reflect the society of the times.
4. Explain how the economic and social organization in Spain in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries affected the development of the economy and culture in Spain. How did they, in turn, affect Spanish American society?
5. What were the main characteristics of the Spanish conquest of the Americas? Try to explain what motivated some Spaniards to undertake these arduous trips; what were the positive and negative effects from the point of view of the Spaniards and from the native peoples?

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