Concha Espina, “The Red Plague” (1938)

Concha Espina (1869-1955) was a Spanish writer who sided with the Nationalists in the Spanish Civil War. In this newspaper article from November 1938 she describes the progressive ideas that inspired the Republicans as a “red plague” coming from Asia. From Alun Kenwood, ed. The Spanish Civil War: A Cultural and Historical Reader (Berg, 1993), pp. 116

The plague has always come from Asia like an inexorable, barbaric and physical punishment. It had frightening, repugnant characteristics, and brought with it the certainty of contagion and the sure danger of an unavoidable spread. [...] 

Such was the plague that devastated Europe the first few times, a medieval scourge that figures among the most terrible and notorious plagues in the world. [...] 

And one day the Asiatic plague is transmitted to the spirit and becomes intellectual matter, acquiring the same pathological characteristics as when it only sunk its sting into the clay of the flesh. But now it has a much greater evolutionary power, having a much more fertile prospect before it.

Then it emigrates, spreads, and becomes more cruel, if that’s possible, than it was in its first phase, and it is no longer called the black death but the red death. But it still comes from Russia with the same miasmatic symptoms, and now affects the soul the same way as the body.

With its double visage of virulence and terror, the red death has found its most propitious growth in the historic soil of Spain, hitherto clean of the corrupting seed and free of foreign slaveries.

Evil became endemic here through the very fertility of our valleys, and, with a face of infernal malevolence, claimed a harvest of victims without any known precedent.

And as consciences twitched in the sadism of hydrophobia – a frenzy of mauling and killing – the tons of rubbish in Barcelona and Madrid especially were composed of tumors full of pus, the morbid imprint of swelling. Rags in the wind, tattered buildings, debris and ashes stunk like a stormy, intestinal main.

Streets, squares, and avenues were tumors and carbuncles, like those whose rankness, according to science, can only be cured with boiling water and the sun.

That’s the truth, because in Spain that astral body rose with the morning resplendence, bringing with it the restoration of health. And wherever its golden light touched, the Russian plague disappeared, like a radiant exorcism of the devil.

The shining water of faith was boiling, crosses and towers were raised amid the heat of swords and rifles. Virile youth was a torrent of clarity and example.

In this way, in the midst of the struggle against the red death, majesty and delicacy established certain boundaries inside the Fatherland, which are also called trenches. From these one breathes in life as in the best years of urban culture, at the same time as morale is built up to the apex of heroism.


[Excerpt translated by Alun Kenwood.]