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TESTIMONIES IN ART & ACTION: IGNITING PACIFISM IN THE FACE OF TOTAL WAR



October 6 - December 11, 2015

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TESTIMONIES IN ART & ACTION: IGNITING PACIFISM IN THE FACE OF TOTAL WAR

An exhibition curated by J. Ashley Foster, Visiting Assistant Professor of Writing and Fellow in the Writing Program, Haverford College, and students from her “Peace Testimonies in Literature & Art” Writing Seminar in Spring and Fall 2015.

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INTRODUCTION

An ethical call resounded throughout the world when fascist forces repeatedly bombed civilians during the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939). The evolution of total war—where civilians become military targets—and the attempted “obliteration”¹ of entire civilian populations in Spain presented a challenge to the concerned global citizen: how does one respond ethically to the advent of total war? In answer to this ethical dilemma, a transnational network of pacifists comprised of modernist artists, authors, thinkers, volunteers, and activists galvanized bold, highly dynamic concepts of pacifism through their art and actions. Many of them came together and created support and relief networks that aided the civilians and refugees on the ground in Spain. Artists, authors, and activists such as Virginia Woolf, Pablo Picasso, Muriel Rukeyser, Langston Hughes, and Quaker volunteer workers, produced paintings, poetry, prose, and actions that contained powerful testimonies—a Quaker term that signifies the lived actions that manifest inner beliefs—of peace.

The digital humanities projects featured in this exhibition show that through their art and literature, each of these artists constructed a fierce, and at times highly divergent, “positive peace”² based on gender, racial, and economic equality and social justice. Likewise, the Society of Friends, a religious society with Protestant roots historically known for its pacifism, worked alongside and within modernist artistic networks and transnational communities to raise funds for and distribute food and goods on both sides of the fighting, embodying their peace testimonies in volunteer work that sought to relieve the effects of war on refugees and civilians. These pacifist stories are often written out of history and forgotten by many, but provide us with a model of essential non-military responses to the advent of total war. *Testimonies in Art & Action* recuperates these lost histories and reminds us that there is still a call to incorporate pacifist philosophies in politics and in the events that are unfolding daily into history.

Testimonies in Art & Action: Igniting Pacifism in the Face of Total War creates a historical juncture with our present moment, illuminating how philosophies of non-violence contained in art, literature, and action have been mobilized to stage a critical intervention in a progressively militarizing population. This exhibition juxtaposes primary source materials from the Quaker relief effort in Spain, much of which is from Haverford’s own Quaker & Special Collections, with student digital humanities projects that explore the peace testimonies embedded in the literature and art of the interwar period. In bringing together these multi-modal sources, this exhibition demonstrates the shared commitment to social justice and human rights that the pacifisms of the early twentieth century developed, particularly in the testimonial activism of the Society of Friends and public intellectuals. It aims to create a scholarly discussion focused on the themes of pacifism, activism, writing, and ethics; forms of resistance to total war; and social justice during the interwar period; and it demonstrates the interrelationship between “positive peace,” pacifism, and social justice.

From these thinkers and activists, we have learned the extreme repercussions of war on the lives of individuals, the need to teach our families and children to resist war, the need to support a politics that works towards equality, and the need to stay true to our values. Through their work, these authors, artists, and activists provide a vocabulary for peace, offering an alternative to the relentless war rhetoric of their era and our own. Their poetry, prose, art, and actions contain messages that can still help the people of the world stand up and advocate for peace today, as our contemporary moment continually witnesses outbreaks of total war.

TOTAL WAR IN SPAIN

In the 1930s, many progressive movements that promoted a concern for social justice and human rights, for racial and gender equality, and for world peace,³ were passionately working towards global freedom and elevation of “the rights of all.”⁴ In contrast, a rising fascist movement attempted to violently hurtle itself into the future by capitalizing on public nostalgia for a lost past, a golden age of empire and dominance. In Spain, the tensions of the era erupted on 17–18 July, 1936, when a group of generals, supported by the majority of the military, the Catholic Church, and the wealthy landowners, attempted to overthrow the democratically-elected, progressive Republican government. Eventually led by General Francisco Franco, the insurgents espoused a far-right, fascist political platform. The people of Spain formed workers’ militias and resisted the insurgent military, fending off the coup d’état long enough for international support, including Russian reinforcements and thousands of people from around the world, to arrive. These International Brigades were a global grassroots movement that volunteered on the front lines in Spain to fight fascism.



Robert Capa, *Loyalist Militiaman at the Moment of Death, Cerro Muriano, September 5, 1936 (Falling Soldier)*, 1936 (courtesy of Magnum Photos).



Attributed to Augusto. “¿Que Fais-Tu Pour Empêcher cela?”
Madrid: Ministerio de Propaganda, 1937. The text translates as, “What are you doing to prevent this?”

Germany and Italy, led by Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini, almost immediately supported the Francoists, providing air power and tanks to the insurgents. With Russia involved in defense of the Republic, Spain quickly became an international battleground where global tensions between the left and the right played out on Spanish soil. Ernest Hemingway famously described the struggle in Spain as “the dress rehearsal for the inevitable European war.”⁵ However, despite the transnational

nature of the conflict, Great Britain, France, and the United States maintained a policy of neutrality. The international, intellectual left protested the war in Spain, the rise of fascism, and the failure of three world powers to intervene, while the right supported the insurgents in Spain, who saw themselves as engaged in a modern “crusade,” saving civilization from the godlessness of an increasingly secular society.⁶

What started as a coup d'état erupted into a three-year total war that escalated into unprecedented violence.⁷ Various factions of the left, including anarchist, communist, socialist, democratic, and Republican parties, in a mass-movement of rage and collective paranoia, retaliated against centuries of oppression, starvation, and disenfranchisement by violently targeting priests and anyone suspected of being a collaborator in the coup.⁸ Franco's forces, with the help of Hitler and Mussolini, unleashed a sustained aerial attack against civilians that inspired world outrage. The repeated bombings of Madrid, the destruction of Guernica, and the attacks against Valencia and Almeria turned the cities into a battlefield.⁹ These aerial attacks, and the mounting civilian deaths, sounded an ethical call throughout the world, demanding that concerned citizens react and intervene. In spite of a progressively militarizing cultural climate, as *Testimonies in Art & Action* reveals, there were a number of people who responded to this ethical call through pacifist means, thus *Igniting Pacifism in the Face of Total War*.

THE QUAKER PEACE TESTIMONY AND THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

A transnational movement of pacifist activists that included the Quakers, artists, writers, public intellectuals, and relief workers organized to help the people under attack in Spain and to relieve the effects of war. At the heart of this movement was the Quaker peace testimony, a spiritual witness to the importance of every individual life. Historically, the peace

testimony is based on the Quaker belief in the Inner Light—that there is that of good, or that of God, in every person. Caroline Emelia Stephen, Virginia Woolf's Quaker mystic aunt, explains this principle in her book *Light Arising*, writing that “there is given to every human being a measure, or germ, of something of an illuminating nature—something of which the early Friends often spoke as ‘a seed of life’—a measure of that ‘light, life spirit and grace of Christ’ which they recognized as the gift of God to all men.” For the Quakers, that “seed of life,” or “measure of ‘light’,” exists in one as it exists in all; therefore, they uphold that it is a duty to preserve and encourage the light to flourish in everyone. According to Quaker thought, the preservation and fostering of the Light requires lived actions; Friends feel that they must enact and manifest in their daily life what they believe.¹⁰ Therefore, the Quakers responded to total war in Spain by distributing goods, food, and clothes for civilians on the ground regardless of political affiliation. In order to raise funds for this mission, the Friends worked with many international organizations, collaborating with a large network of concerned citizens that included many famous modernist artists and authors.



Illustration from *They Still Draw Pictures: A Collection of 60 Drawings Made by Spanish Children During the War*. New York: The Spanish Child Welfare Association of America, 1938.

As Farah Mendlesohn discusses in her book *Quaker Relief Work in the Spanish Civil War*, social justice had become an increasingly important element to the Quaker peace testimony, starting in the late nineteenth century and



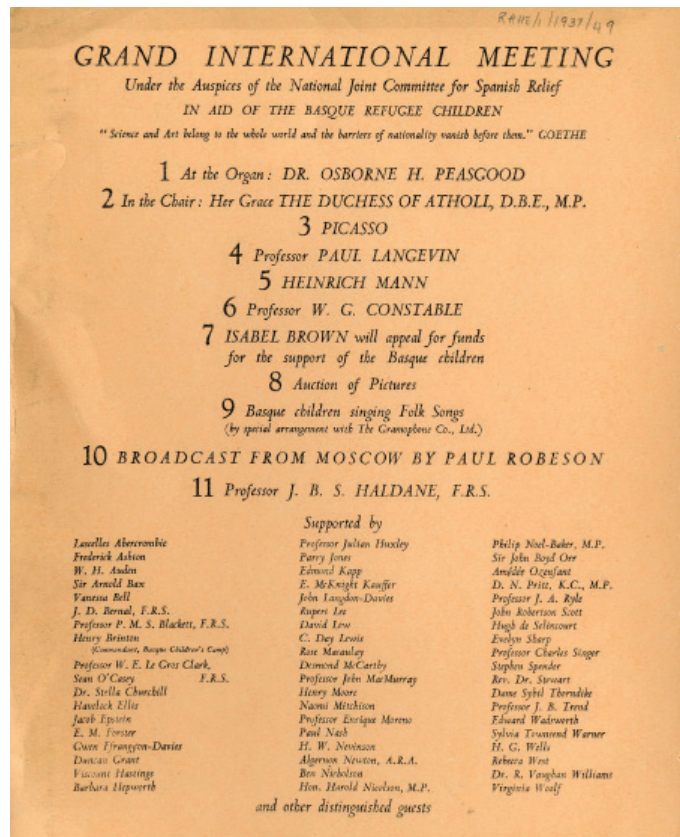
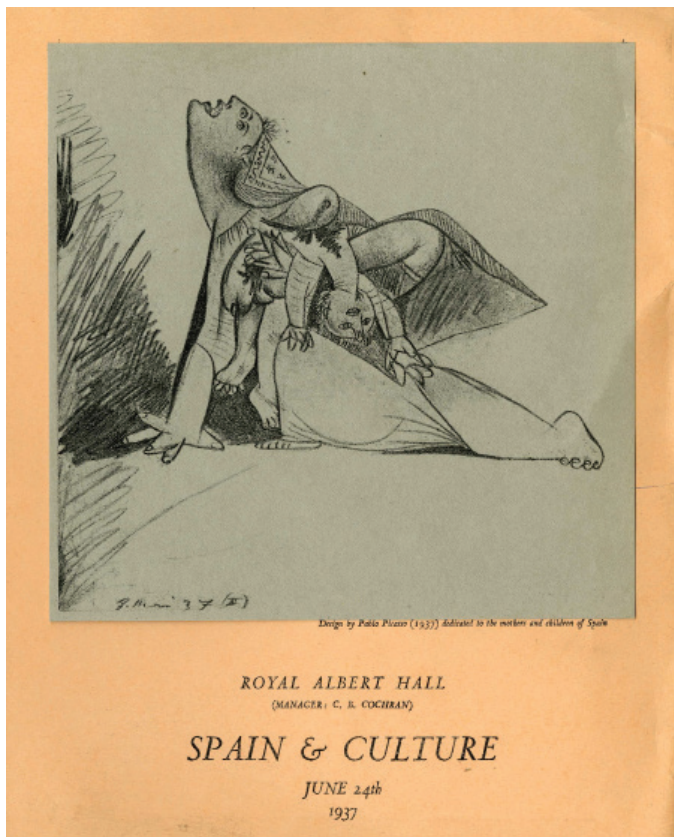
Spain's Children are Hungry. London: Friends Service Council, date unknown. This fundraising pamphlet includes a card to be returned with a donation.

through the modernist era. An integral part of pacifism merging with social justice is what the field of Peace Studies would now call “positive peace,” the belief that one must intentionally build peace. Quaker pacifists during the Spanish Civil War felt that they needed to actively create the conditions for peace, and they worked on the front lines in Spain to help preserve life and live as models for peacebuilding. The Quakers believed that educating children, distributing food and clothes, and assisting in the relief of hunger and suffering would create international goodwill and help to spread a pacifist message through a conflict-wrought, war-torn country. Alfred Jacob, the British Friends’ representative in Barcelona, wrote in a letter from Catalonia, “Our effort is simply to do the works

of peace in the midst of war, affirming the rights of human personality which war denies. It is all that lovers of peace can do at a time like this.”¹¹ For Jacob, and many Quakers, the only response to total war was to try to alleviate its effects in any way possible. At the end of the war another Quaker, John Rich (Haverford ‘24), who coordinated relief in Spain for the American Friends Service Committee, wrote in his diary: “I am glad to have been involved in this Spanish War and to have contributed something to its pacification. If I died today I at least could say I’ve done something worthwhile,”¹² showing the importance that Quakers attributed to relief work in Spain. The relief workers addressed not only the physical, but also the psychological needs of the people, particularly children, by enlisting them in a network of care that reminded them that, ultimately, they were still human.¹³

PEACE TESTIMONIES IN LITERATURE & ART

In Virginia Woolf’s reading scrapbooks, compiled for her extensive pacifist project that includes the peace pamphlet *Three Guineas*, there is pasted a typed-out excerpt called “War and Writers” that addresses the interconnection between writing and political activism, between literature and the production of society. Writers, this passage asserts, have a major responsibility to society because they can shape the consciousness of the people. Therefore, it is the writer’s job, “War and Writers” argues, to “spread the spirit of peace.”¹⁴ Thinking across the humanities, this exhibition, based on the “Peace Testimonies in Literature & Art” Writing Seminar, undertakes a study of the way in which writers, activists, and artists have utilized literature, art, and acts to “spread the spirit of peace.” Additionally, many artists, including Virginia Woolf and Pablo Picasso, actively raised money for Spanish relief.¹⁵ Aldous Huxley penned the introduction to the 1938 American Quaker fundraising initiative, *They Still Draw Pictures*, a copy of which is included in this exhibition.



Front and back of programme for the event “Spain & Culture,” 24 June 1937. Images courtesy of Royal Albert Hall Archives, London.

Here we investigate the relationship between belief and daily conduct, and trace the way in which art, literature, and deeds perform and promote pacifist philosophies.

The digital humanities projects featured in this exhibition, created by students in the Spring and Fall 2015 “Peace Testimonies” seminars, explore the ways in which writers and artists responded to the conflict in Spain, using their writing and art as a way of spreading peace. This course is structured around pacifist documentary projects that each have many layers of composition and compilation. For example, *Three Guineas*, which Jane Marcus has called a “major documentary project” and an “interactive”¹⁶ text, was compiled based upon

three reading notebooks Woolf kept that included letters, newspaper articles, and typed-out excerpts. Muriel Rukeyser’s poem “Mediterranean” is part of a much larger series of writings on Spain, which include the experimental novel *Savage Coast*, news articles, and prosaic-philosophical meditations. Pablo Picasso’s great mural *Guernica* has been documented by his partner, the surrealist photographer Dora Maar, allowing us to study the various stages of creation. Langston Hughes’s Spanish Civil War dispatches are in conversation with his poetry, creating an intricate dialogue of his time in Spain, encounter with total war, and anti-fascist beliefs.

Students of the “Peace Testimonies” seminars have

created scholarly annotations embedded in the texts themselves by taking the supplementary materials, for example the stages or studies from *Guernica*, or Virginia Woolf's scrapbooks, and have digitally annotated the final products with a close-reading analysis of how these supplementary materials enhance or illuminate an understanding of the text. The students have hyperlinked their annotations, creating an intricate web of conceptual and historical connections between the texts, demonstrating and inventing a method for reading intertextually in the digital age. Through the intertextual analysis of Muriel Rukeyser's poetics, Virginia Woolf's writings, Pablo Picasso's paintings, Langston Hughes's Spanish Civil War dispatches and poetry, and the Quaker relief effort in Spain, this exhibition uncovers lost histories of pacifist thought and examines how artists, writers, and activists worked together to imagine and create a world without war.

From the students' scholarly annotations, it becomes clear that the thinkers featured here have a shared value in forging an activist pacifism that cannot be divorced from either social justice or human rights concerns. Virginia Woolf combined socialism and feminism into a radical global pacifism that we have read in conversation with Langston Hughes's internationalist images of peace based on social justice and racial equality, Muriel Rukeyser's passionate, kinetic poetics that convey a longing for peace, and Pablo Picasso's work publicly promoting peace and freedom. As pacifists, these artists and writers actively denounced the continuation of warfare. They deliberately used their art to display the suffering of civilians, many times transcending partisan ideologies, to promote the cause of pacifism. However, there is also a shared anti-fascist sentiment that these artists expressed after seeing the brutality of total war. Despite their differences, all of these artists believed that peace could be born from the free spread of ideas through art. By hyperlinking the modernist, pacifist documentary projects of Hughes,

Rukeyser, Woolf, and Picasso, the students explore the intertextual threads of the works put forth, illustrating that each of these projects responded to and engaged with the cultural conversations of their time. This exhibition reveals the powerful Peace Testimonies embedded in the poetry, prose, paintings, and actions of the Spanish Civil War era and shows how artists, activists, and authors sought to create a world in which peace is possible.

—*J. Ashley Foster, in collaboration with the students of the "Peace Testimonies in Literature & Art" Spring 2015 Writing Seminar*

ENDNOTES

1. Ian Patterson in *Guernica and Total War* identifies "total war" as "the belief that the most effective way of winning wars was by the obliteration, or the threat of obliteration, of the civilian population of the enemy's towns and cities by means of an annihilating attack from the air" (2). Though this is our working definition of total war, it is important to note that Paul Saint-Amour, in his recently published *Tense Future*, complicates any simple rendering of the concept "total war." He shows that the construct "total war" serves a narrative that historically privileges unequal distributions of global power, and that much of "total war" discourse relies on a concept of state or center where certain bodies are 'counted' as victims of total war and others do not. See especially Chapter 1, "On the Partiality of Total War."
2. Tracing the discipline of Peace Studies, Jean Mills juxtaposes 'positive peace' with 'negative peace' in *Virginia Woolf, Jane Ellen Harrison, and the Spirit of Modernist Classicism*. She explains, "negative peace refers to the absence of direct violence, and places an emphasis on approaches for conflict management, such as peace-keeping, whereas, peace-building is an example of positive peace. By the mid-1990s, Peace Studies curricula in the West had shifted 'from research and teaching about negative peace, the cessation of violence, to positive peace,

- the conditions that eliminate the causes of violence’ (Harris, Fisk and Rank)” (135–136).
3. There were a plethora of societies and organizations working towards social justice and world peace. A sampling includes, for example, the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, War Resisters’ International, the International Peace Campaign, the Rassemblement Universel pour la Paix, the Spanish feminist movement Mujeres Libres, the Indian National Congress, and the League of Nations Union.
 4. See *Three Guineas*, where Virginia Woolf quotes Josephine Butler, 121.
 5. Quoted in *Conscience and Conflict* by Simon Martin, 11.
 6. See Helen Graham, *The War and its Shadow*, 32.
 7. For further information on the history of the Spanish Civil War, see Paul Preston, *The Spanish Civil War: Reaction, Revolution, and Revenge* and Helen Graham, *The Spanish Civil War: A Very Short Introduction*. For more on the Spanish Civil War as a total war, see Paul Preston, *The Spanish Holocaust*.
 8. See Helen Graham, *The War and its Shadow*, 37.
 9. Jessica Berman, in *Modernist Commitments*, describes total war as “where commonplace distinctions between the home front and battlefield disintegrate and where the patterns of everyday life in the besieged areas become completely disrupted” (187).
 10. For further reading on the testimonies, see the website Quakers in Britain: Faith and Action.
 11. Alfred Jacob to Miss Judith Corcoran, 8 December, 1936. The Library of the Religious Society of Friends at Friends House, London. FSC/R/SP/1/1 Barcelona: letters and reports 1936–1937.
 12. Diary 1 June, 1939. John Rich Papers. MC. 880, Box 1, Folder 4. Quaker & Special Collections, Haverford College.
 13. Discussions of the Quaker testimony for peace in Spain, the network of care it sought to create, and the interplay between the Society of Friends, modernist artistic networks, and transnational pacifisms, are expanded and further explored in J. Ashley Foster’s forthcoming article “Recovering Pacifisms Past: Modernist Networks, the Society of Friends, and the Peace Movement of the Spanish Civil War,” to be published in the collected volume *Quakers in Literature* in April, 2016.
 14. From *War and Writers* in the *Three Guineas Reading Notebooks*, Monks House Papers/B. 16f. Vol 2 (Sussex), 28.
 15. See the *Spain & Culture* event programme, where concerned citizens attended an event at Royal Albert Hall on June 24, 1937 to raise money for Spanish relief, particularly the Basque refugee children. Listed on this programme as supporters for the cause, the cover image of which Picasso donated to the event, are Vanessa Bell, Leonard and Virginia Woolf, Stephen Spender, W.H. Auden, C. Day Lewis, E.M. Forster, and Duncan Grant. Paul Robeson sang at the event, as Martin notes (51).
 16. Introduction, xlv. Marcus also taught Rukeyser’s Spain writings as a documentary project in the Fall of 2008 at The Graduate Center, CUNY.

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And a big thank you to students Christina Bowen, Adetomiwa Famodu, Ann-Victoria Isaac, Sophie McGlynn, Marcelo Jauregui-Volpe, and Ian Wheeler for dedicating their summer hours to help with this exhibition.

A note to the reader and viewer:

In line with the feminist pedagogical ethos espoused by Virginia Woolf, Jane Marcus, and many others, all writing for this exhibition has been of a collaborative nature. Though attributed to the author whose voice has set the tone of the item, teams of student editors in cooperation with class members, J. Ashley Foster, and the Libraries staff have reviewed, fact-checked, and edited all the language and content of the exhibition.

Student Curators:

Spring 2015 Section 1:

Madison Arnold-Scerbo Alexandra
Belfi Miranda Bucky, Rosie Cohen,
William Edwards, Adetomiwa
Famodu, Joshua Hilscher, Emily
Kingsley,
Molly Lausten, Sophie McGlynn,
Jiaming (Rosalind) Xu, Benjamin
Yellin

Spring 2015 Section 2:

Christina Bowen, Charlotte Colantti,
Mairéad Ferry, Ann-Victoria Isaac ,
Marcelo Jauregui-Volpe, Callie
Kennedy, Devin Louis,
Richard Phillips ,Praxedes Quintana,
Chelsea Richardson, Caroline
Steliotes, Ian Wheeler

Fall 2015 Section 1:

Allie Corcoran, Syndey Dorman,
Micaela Gold, Tommy Ie, Sharim
Jones, Olivia Legaspi, Tomas
Alejandro Manuel Ebro Matias,
Kevin “The Rock” Mendansky,
Georgia Meyer, Riddhi Panchal,
Teruha Stergios, and Hanae Togami.

Fall 2015 Section 2:

Paul Brucia Breitenfeld, Emily
Dombrovskaya, Kaitlyn Guild, Batia
Katz, Hannah Krapes, Yutong Li,
Ethan Lyne, Lynnet Odhiambo,
Justin Otter, Katie Safter, and Lena
Yeakey.

ART AS A WAY OF SPREADING IDEAS: GUERNICA BY PICASSO

The Bull: Metamorphosis and Symbolism

Situated in the top left corner of *Guernica*, the large black and white bull serves as a symbol of the Nationalists.

Picasso's drafts show that the bull changed immensely. It started with cartoon-like innocence (Figure 1). Then, the bull's facial expression became more aggressive and threatening (Figure 2). Two more drafts show a dramatic change in that the bull's face became very human-like (Figures 3-4). Finally, in a later draft the bull has a less human but more menacing face (Figure 5). By the final product, the bull's face ended up being beastly, strong, and intimidating. This change is indicative of the careful planning that Picasso went through in order to portray each aspect of the painting in a certain way. The final result of the menacing appearance reinforces the interpretation as the bull being representative of Nationalist Spain.

In addition to being powerful and dangerous beasts, bulls are also iconic creatures of Spain. In the painting the bull appears healthy and looking away from the scene. This connects the bull with the way that the Nationalists attempted to cover up their involvement in the civilian atrocities of the Spanish Civil War. One interpretation outlined by Vincente Marrero states that “the bull signifies the cruelty and brutality which overshadow our time” (qtd. in Gottlieb 106). The contrast between the seemingly healthy bull and the death and devastation of the other figures clearly indicates a sympathetic feeling towards the victims and animosity towards the Nationalists. In conclusion, interpreting the bull as the Nationalists helps to show that *Guernica* is by nature a pacifist painting and therefore helps further the quest for peace.



Poster created for a pop-up exhibition in Magill Library in April 2015.

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