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## Guided by Physicians: Pío Baroja's Intersection Between Literature and Medicine in El árbol de la ciencia

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Guided by Physicians:

Pío Baroja's Intersection Between Literature and Medicine in *El árbol de la ciencia*

Senior Project Submitted to  
The Division of Languages and Literature  
of Bard College

by  
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## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: A Brief History of Spain.....	5
Chapter 2: Those Who Taught Me.....	25
Chapter 3: Those Who Try to Help.....	34
What is the Role of a Physician?.....	60

## **Introduction**

The physician resides in a field in which the subject matter and its observer are one and the same. They must treat and diagnose others around them while subjecting themselves to the same vulnerabilities as their patients. On top of everything they must make all of their decisions and judgments with the knowledge that someone else's life hangs in the balance. It is for this very reason I have great admiration and respect for physicians. The world in which they inhabit seems to lie at the intersection of life sciences and the social sciences. The training of physicians deals not only with physical qualities both biological and chemical, but also with the institutions that are present and integrated around them. Morals and biochemical interactions each have their place within the job, one severely lacking without the other. It is not, for example, considered praise worthy when a physician turns a blind eye to those in need; on the contrary the profession seems to require some sense of duty for those who are sick. The intersections of these worlds give physicians unique perspectives on life that I hope to one day understand.

A physician, philosopher, or sociologist would be nowhere without the use of the sciences to explain how humans function as a basic level. But beyond that limit, at the center lies the importance of language. I have come to appreciate how much language plays a role in our society through my studies in Spanish. It is thanks to language that we are able to understand larger concepts within science and society. For without language we would be unable to express that which we have seen and felt. In particular, my studies of Spanish have helped me realize that the use of language is so variable that there is a seemingly endless number of ways to interpret reality. I mean this in a literal and metaphorical sense; there are literally thousands of different ways to communicate simple and understood ideas within the scientific community such as an the physical symptoms of a particular patient, and there are infinitely many more ways to

communicate the physical sensations that one experiences when they are happy or sad. Language in many ways is like science. Without language all higher studies and understandings seem lost. It is because of language's crucial role in humanity that an author's protagonist and their journey or a poet's mystical imagery can enthrall the reader. Language creates so much opportunity to explore the seemingly inexplicable.

Furthermore, studying a language that one has not grown up speaking opens new pathways to personal and public enlightenment. Through my everyday studies of Spanish and the creation of this project I often encounter phrases and words that cannot be literally translated, but instead must be understood. This mechanism has allowed me to read texts such as Pío Baroja's *El Árbol de la Ciencia* with the knowledge that besides my own understanding of each moment there are countless other messages I have to work to find. In many ways this process is a double-edged sword; forcing me to use my skills of critical analysis while also employing the other parts of my brain where Spanish can be located. It is an extremely difficult task, but one that I believe can give readers, such as myself, greater insight into many worlds of writing.

This project serves to dissect and understand how these two passions of mine interact. What new insights can be granted for a reader when the author is a physician? When a physician combines their study of science and humanity with the versatile nature of language and writing, a new perspective is formed. The spectrum of written works by physicians ranges from the purely practical application of their work as doctors to the creation of new territories within the written arts. Physicians have been documenting their diagnosis and treatment of patients since the beginning of the profession and have been able to expand on this quality of their work by spilling over into the world of fiction. This combination serves the function of scientific theory and of literary studies; it hypothesizes, it creates, it correlates, it transforms, it places emphasis on a



subject whose parts are understood individually and collectively at the same time. Physician authors can provide insight into various aspects of human life in a way that transcends both artistic and scientific methods of analysis. They can in effect combine the two methods to expand their readers understanding of a symptom and its treatment.

I was very fortunate to have found the works of Pío Baroja thanks to some well-phrased Google searches, and a basic knowledge of the literature I was interested in studying. I would truly be lost without Baroja's work and for that I am forever indebted to the man. What I hope readers will understand from this project and from this novel is that firstly there are not always straightforward answers to the trials and tribulations that life presents. Baroja seemed to create this novel and his character without the intention of spelling out for his reader what it is that must be done. In fact, he may not have intended any reader to have such a desire. Secondly, this story is a struggle, and any reader will see that struggle as clear as day and truly wonder how to overcome it. For all those who suffer from illness and for all those who suffer from societal restraints, this book serves as a possible escape, opening up a new world of improvement and greater quality of life. As a physician, Baroja has the obligation to help others. While literature such as this novel may not be the preferred method of all for salvation from some greater threat, it does present one possibility for a better future. This project will be—or at least I hope it will be—a first attempt at addressing a diseased and suffering people; a project that I hope to continue as I embark towards my own journey to become a physician.

## Chapter One: A Brief History of Spain

In 1911 when Pío Baroja wrote his novel *El Árbol de la Ciencia*, Spain was experiencing a great amount of political flux. It is through his writing that Baroja was to depict the state of flux around him by employing both characters and places representative of the actual citizens and cities of Spain. This novel then captures a snapshot of Spain within the late 19<sup>th</sup> century that provides context to the larger questions that Baroja and his fellow writers were posing. Some have described the nation and her peoples as a decadent culture, while others claim her to be a collection of selfish citizens and communities. Baroja invokes images of diseased filled brothels, heavenly settings of nature, and a colorful cast of citizens both young and old. Above all else Spain is a great nation that has played an important part in the development of the modern world.

Amongst the many descriptions of Spanish society, historian Gerald Brenan captures a quality of Spain and her peoples that can be seen from any era. In his book *The Spanish Labyrinth: An Account of the Social and Political Background of the Civil War* he claims, “the Spanish national vice had always been over-confidence and optimism” (2). This nation—much like other European monarchies—once ruled proudly over colonies, held its royal family in high esteem, and was considered an ally and enemy to many other powerful nations. Spain’s influence over the American colonies was huge and made her one of the wealthiest empires in Europe, importing goods that made her a key trade partner. In addition to her political and economic influence, Spain had extremely strong ties to the Church thanks to the Catholic monarchs and along with the control over the American colonies was one of the most influential nations in expanding the Church’s power. It is still frequently recounted how Spain shaped the entirety of Latin America through colonization and the Inquisition. Spain was and in many ways still is a central nation in the ever-expanding modern world.

Unfortunately all great nations have their respective declines scattered throughout epochs and Spain experienced a downward trend both economically and politically in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century that would leave a deep scar in her history. What Brennan tackles in his analysis is the period that many Spaniards remember all too well, the Spanish Civil War. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, Spain started to experience both military and political losses that shook the great empire to its very foundation. Whether it was in the early 1800's with the Napoleonic wars or later that century with El desastre del 98 (The Disaster of 98), Spain bit by bit lost her grip on the modern world and found herself in economic decline. These events along with radical political instability lead to a society entering the 20<sup>th</sup> century with many concerns as to the future of their great nation. When looking back it is at this point in the history of Spain that symptoms of a suffering nation begin to surface. The function and maintenance of all the organs within Spain began to disintegrate; the Army, government, Church, and even the social classes. These dying structures that supported the current Spain gave way and in their absence produced conflict preventing any mass organization. Artists and politicians alike saw a decline in the nations general attitude and began on a journey to somehow *treat* this unfortunate ailment.

When Brennan spoke of the national sense of optimism he was talking about a desire for improvement. In his preface, Brennan describes this desire as “a craving for a richer and deeper social life” that on the surface may appear as decadence, but for the nation means a need for self-improvement. Spaniards search for ways to better their lives, whether that means cooperation or not. The Spain that Brennan seeks to understand is made up of somewhat selfish communities and individuals, and only when these groups come together under a common goal is there great prosperity for all. The collaboration of Spaniards leads to success but the constant “bickering” leads to the divides in Spanish society that Brennan sees as a basic character trait of the nation.

This trait, however, explains the egoistic attitude taken by all of Spain's different municipalities that prevents any organization under a single banner. Divides between ideologies of countrymen are not inherently violent, they allow Spain to exist with the unique attitude that it has. The various characters that Baroja describes speak to the diverse ideologies present within Spain begot from these municipalities. If those divides however are wielded as weapons against fellow citizens, they can easily topple any government. Whether a western civilization or an impoverished country, no civilization is immune to the reconstruction that civil wars can cause. This is still seen today in countries both rich and poor; the cooperation of citizens is a fundamental component to any functioning nation while the contrary can lead to destruction and misery. Often when in the face of corruption or instability, citizens will fight against their own governments and seek some change to improve their wellbeing. Spain is no exception.

This nation existed as a monarchy for several hundred years before any significant reform came to its institutions. The union of Fernando II de Aragón to Isabel I de Castilla marked what many historians consider to be the beginning of the Spanish nation. This began Spain's many years of success and expansion as a global power. The leadership of the monarchy along with the influence of the Church supported Spain's peoples and even resulted in great economic prosperity. The country was then torn by decades of war in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It wasn't until the creation of The First Spanish Republic (La Primera República Española) that Spain's monarchy was doomed to fail. The 19<sup>th</sup> century had its fair share of revolutions and reforms for the government of Spain, but as the century came to its close the people of Spain had a change of direction. In 1873 a republic was founded and Spain attempted to rule over its "bickering" collective democratically. Unfortunately, the republic was abolished only one year later and The Bourbon Restoration (La Restauración borbónica) began. This period from roughly 1874-1931

was a strange transition for the people of Spain. A democracy was established just before and it failed completely, so Spain resigned herself to be ruled over by a monarch once again. This is not the social and political advancement that Spaniards looked for, this was the exact opposite. The republic demonstrated some possibility of democracy between these bickering islands, but power was tossed around so constantly between political parties and without any focus on bipartisan work that any sense of democracy seemed to be greatly lacking. Stability was needed for this great nation and the restoration that took place after seemed to provide that, but it was not the lasting stability that Spaniards had hoped for.

In spite of the fact that the monarchy had been reestablished, many politicians and leaders felt that change was needed and it could be done through government reform. One man by the name of Don Antonio Cánovas del Castillo embarked on a mission to save Spain from herself. With a monarch in place the only problem was making sure there was structure established in order to avoid the prior toppling. Cánovas sought to create a new system that included the justice of democracy with the control of a monarchy. From this desire came a government with elected officials, legal processes, a constitution, and the continued power of the royal family. Countries have survived with far less structure before this, but no amount of structure can truly contain a citizen's desire to have a higher quality of life. The general trend of Spaniards was to avoid politics entirely making it difficult to begin reform in the first place. Every reform that was made encountered problems. Corruption began to influence the so-called "voting" process thanks to the power of the upper class. Gangs essentially ruled smaller communities even with new laws and systems in place as deterrents. To avoid giving one political party too much power the two parties (Partido Liberal and Partido Conservador) operated on a regularly changing system unrelated to popular vote, but considering the parties were unwilling to work collectively this

simply did not help Spain. The rich held on to their power and the poor suffered greatly. For so long the Church was designed to be a safe haven for the poor, but corruption soon found its way into the very binding of the holy book and the rich were soon using the Church's resources for themselves. Where reform was sought, disarray took its place.

Every quality of the new monarchy pointed to failure. While Spaniards were struggling to create a new system of government and deal with their "rollercoaster" politics they received another blow when the last of Spain's colonies were lost in El desastre del 98. Earlier in the 19<sup>th</sup> century many of the Spanish colonies in the Americas gained independence. This meant no more free resources from the New World and thus an economic decline ensued. The Spanish-American war (La guerra hispano-estadounidense) had a huge impact on the economy of Spain when in 1898 Spain lost the last colonies in Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines. The optimistic nature of Spaniards meant that in the years during the war the general belief was that victory was inevitable. When the colonies were lost the defeat hit both the people of Spain and the government very hard as an unforeseen possibility that was too damaging to accept.

Just as the world took its first few steps into the 20<sup>th</sup> century Spain was feeling the sting of so many defeats that the optimistic attitudes of the Spanish people began to suffer as the pressures of pessimism began closing in. The future of Spain was now in great jeopardy as this wave of pessimism spread through the nation like a virus. As Brennan describes the "Political feeling had never been lower, and though there was general relief that the form of government had been settled, no one felt any hope or enthusiasm as to the future" (3). Luckily for humanity when such events occur and all seems lost we have a secret weapon, artists. It is through these individuals and the movements and works which they embody that society is given a chance to look at ourselves and question. Thanks to our poets, painters, writers, and all other expressive

minds society can view an alternative perspective of their surroundings. Not all art is meant to defy the norms of the current regime, but they are greatly influential on public opinion and more often than naught they stimulate new ideology. Through the creation of new ideas comes natural reform. Reform is often associated with a criticism of the old but it just as easily can be defined by the desire for improvement. It is at Spain's lowest point that Pío Baroja and his colleagues questioned how their great nation would emerge from this struggle and by what means she would do so.

The beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century marks a crucial turning point for many western civilizations. I believe that this time period in Spain can give future generations further insight on the matters of culture and politics in a nation facing severe pessimism. How was this once powerful nation going to bounce back from a decline such as the pre civil war era? It is thanks to Baroja's medical mind that the physician's method of observing symptoms, diagnosing problems, and applying treatment is made available to the reader. Thus Spain's problems can be understood through the organization that a physician describes like that of a human who is sick. One needs to read his texts to begin to find how to save a people and a nation such as this.

### **Pío Baroja**

Baroja and his fellow Spaniards at this moment in time provided for themselves an open stage where they could present to the people of Spain a new lens to observe the current events unfolding around them. As every work of artists has to be understood in its context, every artist has a history through which they developed their unique perspective. Baroja was born in 1872 in Basque country and is one of the members of La generación del 98. This literary movement was comprised of writers, poets, and journalists who grew up in the time of Spain's instability after

the first republic was established. Baroja was the son of a famous journalist, Serafin Baroja, and from a young age exhibited a love for writing. His father owned a local paper and this allowed him to explore writing as a journalist from a very early age. Baroja was able to learn the importance of writing, while also witnessing his father's position in a politically charged community.

Baroja is known for writing through an autobiographical lens; all of his most famous works of literature are in some way reflective of his own life. Now this can be said for many authors, poets, and artists in general, but it is important to note where the autobiographical style of writing is used and how it is implemented. There are plenty of texts that are influenced by the events of the author's life but are not necessarily adapted from their experience. In the case of Baroja his writing uses his own opinions and emotions to create his story, while adopting specific events of his life to create a narrative for his character to navigate. Baroja uses profound events such as the death of his younger brother to influence his character's life, and Baroja does not shy away from using his own journey through Spain to dictate the development of his protagonist. As Francisco Fuster García states in his paper *Baroja como materia de sus libros: para una lectura de El árbol de la ciencia (1911) en clave autobiográfica*, “En efecto, el personaje protagonista o secundario de la novela barojiana ha sido el vehículo fundamental mediante el cual el autor ha ido filtrándonos sus opiniones y sus emociones” (172). However, it is important to note that Fuster García describes Baroja's characters as “vehicles” through which the author “filters” his opinions. That is to say that Baroja uses characters to express his ideas but not as tools to replicate himself. This method provides the reader with an opinion of current events that can be seen through the eyes of the protagonist, a character who is infused with the ideas of Baroja. As an artist in a lost Spain, Baroja contributed a great deal to the reform and new



wave of philosophy that was needed in his country. At the time that Baroja was beginning to step into his role as an artist he had the freedom to explore Spain as an observer.

Baroja took the opportunity as an artist to explore new realms of literature and of writing, and so his writing complexities were characteristic of his particular touch. While autobiographical approach to writing can be understood, his writing can be hard to define mostly due to the fact that he as a person is hard to define. Some have found him hard to describe because Baroja himself thought “que todo lo individual se presenta siempre mixto, con absurdos de perspectiva y contradicciones pintorescas” making an individual such as Baroja impossible to describe clearly (Balseiro, 197). If people are inherently “mixed” and contradictory then how are they supposed to express themselves clearly? The most accurate depiction of the man comes straight from his own mouth; “En literatura, realista con algo romántico; en filosofía, agnóstico; en política, individualista y liberal, es decir, apolítico. Así era a los veinte años, así soy pasado los setenta.” According to Baroja, he is in many ways indefinable. This presents a challenge when reading his work as autobiographical. However, although Baroja would define himself through this contradictory and intangible terminology he also considered works of fiction to be an extension of the writer. In his article, Balseiro quotes Baroja’s description of how authors write their stories; “¿Quiénes son los novelistas actuales que han podido crear tipos que lleven una vida independiente de su autor? ¿Quiénes son los que han pintado sombras que no son la proyección de sí mismos? Yo no conozco a ninguno” (173). While Baroja questions those who write with the influence of their own character, he attempts to create a protagonist that represents something greater than just a “projection” of himself. Other scholars, such as César Barja in his book *Libros y Autores Contemporáneos*, have remarked on “la esencial coincidencia entre el héroe principal de la obra” and Baroja’s own beliefs (359). Instead of letting a character be the

fictional representation of the author, Baroja creates a unique individual who can carry out his own ideals and morals without being an exact replica of the author. This character will journey through Spain to answer some of the questions Baroja had about how life in his country would continue, and what was his role in it.

Scattered throughout the novel are moments that Baroja borrowed from his own life to create a life for his main character. Many of these moments are tied to medicine and make this novel about the perspective of a physician. While Baroja was still a young man, he perused a career in medicine and actually received his medical degree. Before writing became his true passion he studied to be a doctor. This career did not last very long but it did inspire much of his writing. Throughout many of his written works he references medical experience he gained while studying and practicing medicine. For example, there is a scene at the end of the novel that describes the process of labor in great detail. However, it is the way that Baroja uses his work in literature in conjunction with his work as a physician that makes the scene powerful. Beyond an era from which he borrowed experiences, the time in which Baroja practiced was a time where he studied. It is in this period of study that Baroja was forced to address his role as a physician, likely asking himself what it meant to truly help people. Physicians practice good science and use their skills to identify problems and determine solutions. Baroja uses his skills as a physician to tell a story of Spain, one in which many symptoms are present and few solutions appear. But a story is nothing without its characters, and Baroja's character in *El Árbol de la Ciencia* plays a very important role as the centerpiece of all his experiences.

Baroja is not the first author to create a protagonist with the intention of exploring a society through said protagonist. The picaresque novel (La novela picaresca) has its roots deeply ingrained in Spanish society. The birth of the genre dates back to 1554 with *Lazarillo de Tormes*,

an anonymously published book that was eventually blacklisted by the Church due to its unwholesome depiction of the institution. In *The Cambridge Companion to the Spanish Novel from 1600 to the Present*, Anthony J. Close describes the definition of the picaresque novel in his chapter “The Legacy of Don Quijote and the Picaresque Novel” as being produced by this work, “that is, the autobiography of a disreputable drifter, who tells of his ignominious parentage and upbringing, his employment as servant...and his efforts to scramble up the social ladder to some kind of security and respectability” (Turner, 16). This forerunner will forever influence Spanish literature and the many works associated with it. It is important to note that the methods by which authors have since used the picaresque genre vary. While Baroja can be seen as a successor to the author of *Lazarillo*, each work produced since takes a different approach to the novel. However, it is because of the picaresque genre that authors such as Baroja take a particularly brutal view of life and translate that view into their own realism. The most famous work influenced by *Lazarillo* is *Don Quijote* by Miguel de Cervantes. This story of an errand knight trying to revitalize the world of errantry is not told from the perspective of the main character. Yet it portrays life in the grim fashion that *Lazarillo* did. This famous work was able to put into question the world that a reader sees in a story, but also how that makes one reconsider the world around them. Through el pícaro (the protagonist of a picaresque novel) a society’s various levels of class can be explored in a comedic or satirical manner. For example, in both *Lazarillo* and the famous *Don Quijote*, the reader is exposed to corrupt officials such as priests who claim to be pious but are in fact just as selfish as the sinners they condemn. In both stories, the characters introduced to the protagonist represent a larger group of members of society and as their exterior personas are removed the truth becomes apparent. Not only does this allow for a more honest depiction of the components of a society, but it also serves as a lesson of

truth; that the world is an isolating place individuals must navigate carefully. It is through this satirical exploration of societal figures that an author such as Cervantes is able to probe the reader and force them to question what is directly in front of them. La picaresca broke from the traditional fantastic exploration that novels detailed and told a more realistic story, a story that the common people could relate to. What Don Quijote and Lazarillo were able to do was show the reader that the romantic idea of a protagonist conquering their fears and valiantly fighting for what is right does not have to be the only way to tell a story; on the contrary it represents only one vantage point to the crazed experiences the two protagonists have. Similar to how Baroja uses his protagonist, this method of writing is often a wake up call to those who embark on the journey. When Close discusses the picaresque novel, he points out that novelists like Baroja “when harking back to the old picaresque models, recreate them in accord with contemporary concerns” (18). According to Roberta Johnson in her chapter titled “From the Generation of 1898 to the vanguard”, Baroja and his colleagues were struggling with how modern life affects the individual and society, they found “in the novel a means to express their anxieties” (Turner, 156).

In 1911 Baroja wrote one of his most famous novels, *El Árbol de la Ciencia*. The story takes place in Spain just before and shortly after El desastre del 98. It was at this moment in time that Baroja saw uncertainty in Spain’s future. Baroja was able to use his novel, populated with “personajes de diversa condición social y de abundantísimos episodios de distinto carácter”, to explore how his protagonist’s “acquaintances provide an endless kaleidoscope of adventures and characters, all unified by their relation to his or her unfolding destiny” (Balseiro 218; Turner 18). Baroja was able to do so through his own Don Quijote, whom he named Andrés Hurtado. Baroja uses the countryside of Spain, the metropolitan area, the hospitals, the Church, and other places,

institutions, and people to detail the Spain he experienced as a writer and as a citizen. He borrows from his own life to infuse Andrés with all the uncertainties that he experienced. But above all he infuses this story with the story of a physician. The story that Baroja tells is a case study of Spain, searching through the twists and turns of the city streets in an attempt to find answers. Andrés will be the centerpiece of this journey; Baroja will influence this character with his own anxieties and ideas that will clash with the author's outlook of Spain's seemingly grim future.

### **Andrés Hurtado**

Baroja believed that when viewing a writer's work "el acento es todo en el escritor" and this accent defines the very foundation of the character's nature within a novel (Balseiro, 219). Although Baroja did not write the story of Andrés with the intention of replicating the events of his own life, both writer and character are connected by the accent that Baroja uses; the very emotions that he infuses within his writing and the apparent struggles a physician faces in life with a particular outlook. The characters of Baroja's novels are projections of his own ideas and feelings, ones that guide the reader through his own ideology and perspective. In order to understand the history of Spain and the experiences of Baroja, one must first be introduced to the main character of *El Árbol de la Ciencia*.

Andrés Hurtado must be viewed as a reflection of Baroja's anxieties and fears, but not as a young Baroja. In his attempts to describe the symptoms of Spain, Baroja created a physician who would never cease to draw attention to that which is harmful. Andrés is therefore the true historian and the true physician for a suffering Spain and a lost Spanish people. Andrés Hurtado is generally a very sad person; "Se sentía aislado de la familia, sin madre" a loss that left him

isolated from his other family members “y la soledad le hizo reconcentrado y triste. No le gustaba ir a los paseos donde hubiera gente, como a su hermano Pedro; prefería meterse en su cuarto y leer novelas” (Baroja, 46). This sadness and isolation turns him towards reading and studying, the beginning of what will be a never-ending quest to find some relief from a loss; some way to fill whatever void was in his heart. Baroja describes the sensation that Andrés experiences all the time as “solo y abandonado” both within his household and throughout his life (42). His contempt for his father pushes him to the furthest room in their house, where he “se encontraba a su gusto, solo” studying and reading with all the silence he desires (49). His isolation eventually creates a character that is able to frequently criticize those around him. From the very first moments of the novel to the very end, Andrés criticizes his fellow Spaniards—and every other human being for that matter. Although maybe less so, not even the ones closest to him are exempt from this criticism. Whether he is commenting on institutions, individuals, or human kind as a whole, Andrés finds some way to draw attention to the defects of whatever he sees before him. This gives the reader the very realistic impression that Andrés is an extremely antisocial character—a precursor to Holden Caulfield of sorts or an immature and yet more senile Don Quijote. Not necessarily the kind-hearted hero that others may seek in a novel; some grand personification of survival against all odds. That is simply not Andrés. He understands that he has a function as a member of his family, his community, and as a physician, but he prefers to remove himself from frequent interactions. From his isolation, Andrés is meant to be headstrong and blunt, and this bluntness gives the reader a unique perspective of Spain.

Now as a physician it is hard to remove oneself from social interactions; the job description literally entails the care of others through diagnosis, a process only possible by learning from an individual person what it is that ails them, but more importantly by observing

them. It is apparent that Andrés notices the physical qualities of all those he interacts with, often describing the very colorful impressions he gets from others when he looks at their faces; for example he is unusually focused on another person's eyes or nose. He is a perceptive and quizzical individual whose main focus is every other person around him. Through his reserved personality appears a desire to understand those around him without submitting himself to social interactions. His training as a physician—likely reflective of the experiences of Baroja—instilled within him a need to analyze before defining something new. People, according to Andrés, are strange and confusing creatures who do not necessarily follow a rhythmic logic. To understand them he must try to define the quality and character of each individual aspect that a person presents, a seemingly impossible task.

The reader does not get the impression that Andrés actively hates people—although sometimes that is easier said than done—no, the reader simply knows Andrés as someone who can become easily irritated by social structures and individuals. His role as a physician implies that, although he may be irritated by what he sees around him whether in Madrid or Alcolea del Campo, he cares for people, for *his* people. Andrés sees what all trained physicians see, a problem needing to be solved.

Andrés may be apathetic at times, or even misanthropic, still above all else he is a man of reason and of science. When he encounters something he does not understand he attempts to define some clarity. When he is faced with a person or place that is sick he wants to cure them of whatever disease is present. These are not the qualities of someone who is vengeful against society; these are the qualities of someone who wants to help. It seems as though Baroja has infused this character with some contradictions (as we are all subject to) for it is beneath his seemingly antisocial behavior that this savior appears. His care for others is only furthered by his

love of life. Even though he *is* a depressing character, and even though he *does* comment of the disgust he feels around certain individuals, he also loves certain people and is deeply impacted by the beauty of nature. Although Andrés is human and wishes to help people, he cannot understand the behavior of those he wishes to treat; seemingly missing some very important quality to life.

Andrés is a student, from the very beginning of the book till the end he is learning. The very first moment of this novel describes a scene of students waiting for their studies to begin, and Andrés is there waiting and watching. He is focused on those who are in the same boat as him; the students that will one day become physicians. He uses his observations to understand the world he is about to enter. As the novel continues he extends his learning to new places and to new teachers, at all times asking bigger questions and exploring what lays beneath the surface. When he starts to serve as a physician he comes across contradictory behavior and conservative ideology. He tries to understand the people who embody these qualities in order to serve his community as a physician. His quizzical attitude makes one wonder why it is he dislikes people so much and yet wishes to help them? To make it his profession no less!

Yet a question arises; if Andrés has a desire to help, what is preventing him from doing so? It is not as if he is blind to the problems, he sees dysfunction and regularly condemns it (albeit to himself). He even at times thinks of solutions. What is stopping Andrés from fixing the problems he sees before him? This is a man who has the instinct of criticizing all of the problems he sees around him, yet his so-called attempts to solve any of these problems result in very little.

Perhaps there is some inherit quality within Andrés that can explain why *he* is the way he is; maybe the world is confusing because Andrés is the foreigner in a strange land. Baroja designed this character with a crucial detail. Andrés Hurtado has a reputation grounded in his



very name. For starters, Andrés is a Spanish equivalent to many other names (i.e. Andrew, Andreas, Andrea, etc.) that all come from the ancient Greek *ánthrōpos*, meaning human (“ἄνθρωπος”). Andrés is no different from anyone else; he is a “typical” example of a human, or more specifically he *is* the “typical” human. However, this example of a human is not as average as he may seem. Hurtado is not just a family name; it is a conjugation of the verb “hurtar.” In English the verb translates “to steal” or “to rob”, but Hurtado is in the form of the past participle (“Hurtar”). With this information reading the name of Baroja’s protagonist, Andrés Hurtado, can be interpreted as “robbed man.”

Why name a protagonist in such a way? Perhaps it is due to the fact that he has lost something. Or to be more accurate, something was taken from him. Baroja has robbed Andrés of an essential quality to his own humanity. Without this humanity Baroja turns Andrés into some “other” that is unable to connect with the people around him. What are the implications of this? Andrés functions (so to speak) as a human and he leads a marvelously normal life; is he really missing something? Close describes the characters in the picaresque novels as “shipwrecked survivors” searching for a “life-raft” (Turner, 16). Andrés is certainly struggling and as the reader follows, this great effort to stay afloat forces one to hope for the shipwrecked survivor to find his way home. If he were missing the ability to be social, as it appears he is, he could simply force himself into social situations and hope for the best; in some ways he does force himself to be social. But if Andrés has indeed been robbed of his humanity, forever unable to truly feel like one of many, he will instead forever be an outsider unable to understand the actions of others. It does seem like Andrés lacks a quality of humanity that others clearly have. For example, his experience in his dissection class is that others have a disdain for death, an enthusiasm for “la brutalidad quirúrgica”, and contempt for sensibility (Baroja, 54). Yet Andrés feels none of this,

but he *is* bothered by how dead bodies are disposed of; describing the coroner and the mortuary like the pits full of dead bodies at the end of bloody and brutal conquests led by the Romans. When he sees this scene he doesn't portray a certain emotion, instead he experiences life in an atypical fashion. Like the heroes of his favorite novels he instead ponders the scene and questions both life and death (55). Andrés questions his own reality in an attempt to understand life and death, but he imitates "los héroes" because he cannot compel himself to think of life and death like others do. In order to understand how others would feel when confronted with death, he has to imitate. This divide between Andrés and his fellow students makes it seem as though he cares for individuals solely as physical beings because he is unable to resonate with them. His only moment of empathy is with a body that has no consciousness and is therefore less-than human. The contradictions that Baroja has infused within Andrés make him out to be a savior of life, but only in the sense that he wishes to heal bodies, not the very people who inhabit them.

If Andrés is missing something then maybe his goal as a character is to find it, to find that missing piece of the puzzle that will make him feel whole. It is unclear what it is that Andrés is lacking but there lies the genius in Baroja's construction of this character. In assuming that Andrés is lacking something, specifically because it has been taken from him, the reader must face the series of events with the knowledge that Andrés' life is an incomplete one. In addition, Andrés himself must journey to find what is the missing part of his life. When a quality or aspect of a person is removed there is a void created—much like the feeling of loss that Andrés still maintains after the death of his mother. The void that is created can be maintained or it can be filled—partially or completely. Andrés has a great desire to combat this void, but his end would suggest that he is unable to satisfy himself no matter what he chooses to do with his hollow

identity. His desperation to complete his seemingly empty life is so strong it plagues him until his end.

In order to understand how he can have a satisfactory life, Andrés seeks answers in the lives of others. It is Andrés' exploration of the members of Spanish society that exposes the reader to possible ways in which Andrés can in fact live a full life. He encounters places and people that make him question why? His medical mind forces him to question the underlying causes for the behavior that he sees; this behavior is representative of a people and a society that is in need of help. Andrés travels around Spain and finds mostly frustration and confusion; the people that he meets make no sense! The people of Alcolea del Campo are backwards, the citizens of Madrid's lower class live like trash but enjoy every minute of it, and those with power and wealth are corrupt and rotten. What knowledge can this society bestow onto Andrés in his quest to find what it is that makes people tick? Andrés cannot make himself whole if those that he attempts to understand, in order to help himself, are quite literally impossible to understand. His desire to understand some greater quality of his patients moves him away from understanding what it is about himself that is lacking.

*El Árbol de la Ciencia* follows Andrés from his first moments as a medical student to the last moments of his life. Using a form of the picaresque style, Baroja exposes the reader to the problems facing Spain. Andrés encounters an expansive assortment of unique and quirky characters that each represents a figure of Spanish society. Like the picaresque works, these characters are used as a platform for social and political commentary. It is characters such as Andrés' father Don Pedro that introduce the ideology of an older generation from Catalonia, while characters such as the ones from Alcolea del Campo that expose a defeated and subdued side of La Mancha. The individuals that Andrés meets each teach him some lesson about the

people of Spain. More and more as the story goes on Andrés is upset and frustrated by the behavior of his fellow citizens, and it is not just the people that bother him but the larger organizations as well. Baroja uses institutions to force Andrés to question the integrity of his nation and the structure it upholds. Much like his pícaro predecessors, Andrés encounters the influence of the Church and finds it to be riddled with contradictions. Andrés' experience in communities within Madrid and in more rural communities speaks to the corrupt nature of politics at the time. Above all else Andrés finds a general trend within Spanish society of an overwhelming wave of pessimism. With every moment of his life there is more and more evidence that Spain is in a moral decline, suffering from a lack of direction and motivation that may eventually lead to its complete failure. So Andrés seeks to find what can be done in regards to this downward trend. Lacking an essential quality of life such as his own humanity, Andrés will try to cure this society but will ultimately fail. Without the ability to understand not only the individual patients but also the larger structure of society as a whole, Andrés is unable to connect how aiding both could lead to improvement.

What I wish someone had told me before reading this novel is that there is not an inherent need for a resolution. As it will become clear, Andrés rarely finds the answers he is looking for. However, he does learn more and more about Spain and her peoples throughout his experience as a physician. It appears that Baroja very easily defined a role of a doctor exploring this broken society by giving Andrés the ability to see the problems at hand, likely an extrapolation of Baroja's own experiences, but not giving him the ability to find a suitable treatment. Baroja is able to use his medium of fiction to duplicate the world around him and detail the problems that only a physician author can see, perhaps hoping that it will inspire others to solve his medical case of Spain.

## Chapter 2: Those Who Taught Me

It is important to recognize other physician authors outside of the realm of fiction to understand how Baroja's writing can impact his readers. The first full-length medical text I have ever read is a book titled *Better: a surgeon's notes on performance* by Atul Gawande. This work details the complex systems that doctors face everyday in providing healthcare. The systems include but are not limited to, the justice system, communities with few medical resources, capital punishment, sanitation, and many others. It is through this book I learned that medicine is not just diagnosis and treatment, it is about adapting to care for one of the most complex structures known to humankind: the body. More often than not the adaptations that doctors must make create new practices within medicine. Gawande explores the work of his colleagues from various parts of the world and in varying practices, through which the expansive web of medicine is depicted as much greater than what most may assume. He is able to paint a vivid image of what physicians look like and how they are a diverse group of individuals who all tackle similar problems. As the title of the book may imply, the stories of these individuals is about their struggle to better themselves and the structure that they are in fact a part of. Gawande sees the world of a physician and that of their patients as interconnected, so much so that the physicians have a responsibility to improve themselves so that their patient may reap the benefit. But above all Gawande's book is about determining an underlying problem and finding a solution; when physicians find themselves up against a seemingly unbeatable foe, they persevere.

In his book Gawande describes the three requirements he believes are paramount for success in medicine: diligence, to do right, and ingenuity. These requirements mirror the famous Hippocratic oath, which medical institutions around the world have adopted and adapted many times over in order to hold physicians accountable to their own word. To do no harm, to use

strong judgment, to seek help from mentors and colleagues, to do no injustice, etc. A physician is someone whose profession deals with the human subject. The maintaining of human life (however science will allow) is their goal. It is a harsh and sometimes unforgiving job with expectations that some will never be able to fulfill. Yet it is still considered a noble occupation that many (including myself) strive for. Gawande tells stories of great innovation in the face of inadequate systems, like that of Warren Warwick who was able to transform the way hospitals treat those with cystic fibrosis by attending to the needs of patients above the needs of hospitals. Warwick is a great example of someone who saw a problem within an institution and chose to combat it with new techniques. Being a physician, from the perspective of Gawande, requires a great deal of willpower among other qualities. It is only through one's own determination that an entire profession can be improved. Andrés exhibits some of the qualities that Gawande describes as essential. His desire to improve the wellbeing of all Spaniards is paramount in his constant questioning of citizens and their quality of life, but his attempts are severely lacking. Still these two physicians share in their desire to help those who need it, it is simply the harsh reality of pessimism that Andrés cannot seem to overcome. His interest in changing institutions such as medicine is stopped short by the corruption of politics and the Church. While his apparent lacking seems to prevent him from determining what it is that the people of Spain, as well as himself, truly need. Whereas Gawande and his colleagues seem to constantly reach for greater heights, Andrés seems to be unable to make that great leap.

Gawande showed me that the world of medicine is harsh but also rewarding. The possibility for innovation and excellence are just as extensive as the chance of failure. It is the line between the two, achievement and failure, which make the world of physicians so fascinating to me. Even beyond that fascination is the very nature of the job. Physicians deal with

the lives of their own kind, and this is inherently difficult. While the practice itself is nothing more than an expansion of the basic sciences into a new field, it is still challenging. Diligence, doing right, and ingenuity may be easier said than done when the medium through which one can achieve these goals is the life of another. The struggle that Andrés faces may stem from this very quality of the profession. I hope to one day understand just how these requirements can be achieved, and hopefully when I do I will also understand how the mind of a physician works.

It was for this reason that Pío Baroja interested me. As a physician turned writer—although it is difficult to say which role came first—Baroja had a unique position of writing with a scientific influence that not many others can replicate. His experience as a physician largely influenced his character Andrés Hurtado. The many experiences that Andrés has in his quest for answers to life's big questions are all focused on medicine. This starts at the beginning of Andrés' journey in medical school and with the death of his brother, and continues throughout his career as a physician and eventually to the end of the novel. As Andrés becomes more and more ingrained into the medical world, his questions penetrate every aspect of society: government and religious institutions, morals and ideology of a people, his own philosophy, and the philosophy of others. Baroja uses his experiences as a physician to detail the world he saw around him. But more than just a descriptive story of Spain, *El Árbol de la Ciencia* is a work of fiction written by a physician, and as Baroja said this means that the story will in some way be defined by the physician writing it. Baroja has the same instincts that Gawande has. They are both trained to see what is on the surface and what lies just beneath it in order to discover the true nature of a problem. Unfortunately, Andrés is unable to apply this training in the same way. His inability to see more than just a body that is sick will prevent him from the improvement he seeks. Baroja and Gawande do an excellent job of telling stories dealing with doctors, but it is

Baroja that uses the vehicle of fiction to expose the mind of a physician and the questions that he must face.

In order for Andrés to actually confront the suffering and begin on a journey of improvement, he must learn what it means to suffer. For this Andrés turns towards the works of those who seek to understand the human condition: the philosophers. It is through the works of Arthur Schopenhauer and Immanuel Kant that Andrés tries to understand the true nature of reality and of the pessimism that has infected Spain. Within Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation*, Andrés becomes acquainted with the idea that the world as we know it is an illusion, a projection within our minds. Life is merely the connection between our senses and our self.

From this belief Andrés arrives at the pessimism of Schopenhauer which is deeply rooted in his understanding of reality. Firstly, understanding that the world is representation it becomes clear to Andrés, and Schopenhauer, that attaining happiness is an illusory goal. Schopenhauer describes the will to live as a directionless force always pushing humans to survive; it is the very desire for satisfaction that forces us to survive, "The fundamental theme of all the many different acts of will is the satisfaction of the needs inseparable from the body's existence in health; they have their expression in it, and can be reduced to the maintenance of the individual and the propagation of the species" (Schopenhauer 1: 327). This instinct of survival is obvious whenever someone gets hungry or has sexual desires; it is the very component of our humanity that makes us one of many living things on this earth. However, it is the desire for happiness that makes humans unique in that the will to live needs more; "its desires are unlimited, its claims inexhaustible, and every satisfied desire gives birth to a new one. No possible satisfaction in the world could suffice to still its craving, set a final goal to its demands, and fill the bottomless pit



of its heart” (2: 573). Happiness is truly impossible because the will to live cannot be satisfied, and happiness is the satisfaction obtained through life.

Happiness then becomes a painful cycle of life, always striving, always reaching for the satisfaction of some goal or some eternal state of painless life. It is because of this endless cycle that Schopenhauer sees the world “always negative only, and never positive” because of the lasting pain that we experience throughout life that cannot be soothed (1: 319). For every time one tries to satisfy their desires or seek to destroy their suffering, they “are only in the same position as...before this suffering or desire appeared.” Suffering is simply an inherent part of life, and Andrés as a trained physician will seek to do what Gawande has already taught, to improve and make things better. However, Andrés carries the teachings of Schopenhauer with him and will eventually learn that his desires—as Schopenhauer says—cannot be satiated.

In order to improve the lives of the suffering citizens of Spain, Andrés tries to understand what it is that causes their suffering. Physicians such as Oliver Sacks are able to write with an inherent empathy for their patients that not only makes the works easy to read, but also clearly connects the doctor to the patient. Another personal favorite medical text of mine is a novel titled *Awakenings* by Sacks. The book is more of a report than a novel because it chronologically catalogs the events that occurred when Sacks treated a multitude of patients with a new drug L-DOPA. These patients were all victims of encephalitis lethargica—also known as “sleeping sickness”—sometime in their life and had thus lost something in their battle against the disease. What patients lost varied, but they all experienced symptoms similar to Parkinson’s disease after the disease afflicted them. The way in which Sacks describes the mental and physical state of his patients can at times be difficult to read; many of these individuals were unable to move most of

their body sometimes contorted in the most unnatural looking position while others had rapid and almost self-destructive movement that was uncontrollable and hindered everyday behavior.

Sacks describes how he administered this new drug and his observations when the drug began to “awake” some of his patients. The stories range from the bizarre to the unbelievable. Some patients experienced relief while others were met with even worse conditions than before. What Sacks did in this book is detail what all doctors see. He was faced with symptoms and a treatment and followed the effects of said treatment to hopefully come across a solution to his patient’s problem. The book is fascinating because of the way Sacks writes and because of the nature of the material but this story is not new. As a matter of fact, doctors have documented their technique ever since the beginning of the profession. What makes the story truly special is the way in which Sacks was able to observe not just the symptoms of his patients but the rare human experience they were given after being stricken with disease for so many years and then remarkably given a new chance of life. Many of his patients had been unable to communicate in a functional manner for decades; after being “awoken” they embodied a certain liberty that is incomprehensible to those of us who have lived healthy lives.

*Awakenings* and *El Árbol de la Ciencia* share in their content a description of lost persons. Whereas Sacks documents the conscious but trapped individuals stricken with sleeping sickness and their eventual recapturing of freedom, Baroja describes a doctor who is unable to serve his function and a society that functions even in the face of failure. The two stories are vastly different, but they share the perspective of a physician. When Andrés encounters the hostility of his patients and his experience as a doctor, his role as a physician is put into question. Sacks makes it easy for the reader to understand that he was an observer and in many ways an experimenter. Baroja on the other hand gives Andrés and the reader access to the problems that

afflict the people of Spain, but he does not provide a treatment or an observation of what may occur.

Andrés must use tools he developed as a physician to develop his own way to “awaken” the people of Spain. Sacks is able to witness both sides of humanity in *Awakenings* but Andrés is only able to see the impaired world. What Andrés is missing is the very nature of the disease and its relation to his people. Sacks on the other hand is able to layout the relationship that allowed him to understand and describe the suffering of his patients; “Diseases have a character of their own, but they also partake of our character; we have a character of our own, but we also partake of the world’s character: character is monadic or microcosmic, worlds within worlds within worlds, worlds which express worlds. The disease-the man-the world go together, and cannot be considered separately as things-in-themselves” (Sacks, 206). As Andrés goes on his journey, exploring the ways in which Spain and his fellow Spaniards are sick, he is unable to connect the strange behavior and broken state of those he sees around him. If he were able to see the “awakened” state that Sacks witnessed Andrés may have been able to effectively “cure” Spain. Even being unable to fix the grander problems around him, Andrés still applied himself in the best way possible and tried to fulfill his role as a physician.

Still the way in which Andrés differs from Sacks is far greater than their descriptions of their patients. In *Awakenings* Sacks embodies a beautifully humane and understanding demeanor that truly inspired me. Sacks was able to connect to these patients who had essentially lived in a vegetative state for decades. His recounting of this particular treatment was remarkable because of his ability to understand those who were mute. When compared to a physician like Andrés, Sacks is top of his class. The humanity that Andrés is lacking—or perhaps has been robbed of—means that he cannot uncover the dual world of both disease and host that Sacks is able to

address so clearly. Andrés can attempt to understand the individual subject or the problems that are presented within society, but he is missing the bigger picture; that is how the individual and the collective are related. While his desire to help others may be strong enough to guide his profession, he lacks the humanity that Sacks is brimming with. What is most interesting about Andrés' lack of humanity is his ability to see it in others. There are few moments where Andrés exhibits very humane qualities. So much to the point that in the end of the novel he has absorbed the suffering of all of his fellow citizens; somehow through his journey the void that Andrés experiences may be filled by a greater empathy than even Sacks. Whether or not he is able to break through his own faults and acquire his missing humanity is a deciding factor in the life of Andrés. But above all of his qualities, Andrés will never stop looking for what it is that prevents people from living life to their fullest.

It is thanks to Gawande, Sacks, Kant, Schopenhauer, and many others that this story becomes that of a physician who is struggling. What becomes more and more clear as the novel progresses is that Andrés does not have and will not necessarily find the answers that he desires. Through his desires to better himself and his society, through his passion to cure his patients, through his understanding of the never-ending suffering that is accompanied with life, through all of these qualities and more Andrés must battle the pessimism that Spain exhibits. For he will not only use what he has learned as a doctor to try and save Spain, but he will use all of his teachings in philosophy and his growth as a person.

### Chapter 3: Those Who Try to Help

There is plenty that a physician is supposed to do, but there is a clear-cut difference between that and what a physician can *try* and do. Someone like Gawande and his colleagues can *try* to revolutionize medicine. Others, like Baroja, can instead *try* and enlighten the masses. Regardless of the goal, physician authors have a power to communicate to their readers that not many others can reproduce. For Andrés, the insight that a doctor's training provides can illuminate the downright awful state of Spain's disease in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Andrés grapples with the intense struggle he sees within society, and often finds that a solution to this struggle is seemingly impossible. But regardless of what is possible or what is impossible, Andrés fights till the very end to determine what it means to live a full life and how he can help others achieve this goal.

In the initial chapters of the book Andrés is training to serve as a physician, while later in the book he takes a number of different jobs applying his skills to help others. His training begins with his schooling that involves the traditional studying and test taking but also some work in hospitals. Eventually he continues towards his apprenticeship in Alcolea del Campo and his job in Madrid as a physician of hygiene; the experiences he has here are more in line with that of a graduate trying to find a job than a practicing student. These are the necessary steps he must take in order to become a licensed doctor, but more importantly for him to grow as a young adult and learn about his purpose. Each place of medicine he goes to adds to his background in the practice. Although this is the career path he chose to follow, Andrés has some difficulty in practicing medicine no matter what stage he is in. There are times where he feels unable to effectively help his patients, whether individuals or communities. Often when he is faced with

difficult situations he puts into question all the meaning behind providing medical care for others.

In the beginning of his journey to become a doctor, Andrés has to attend a medical school. His time in the school is not one that he is particularly fond of; his interactions with professors and students alike are usually capped with resentment and he much prefers to read alone than to study with others. While studying to become a physician Andrés encounters professors who he believes are misguided or teach incorrect information. His professor José de Letamendi discusses a theory of the mathematical simplicity of the universe that Andrés finds so unintelligent he dismisses it entirely. When he goes to discuss his professor's theories with his friends and fellow students he finds that the theories are entertained but only as a joke; one of the fellow students uses Letamendi's theories to describe sex for example (Baroja, 69). However, Andrés is surprised to learn that Letamendi's formulas are considered an important part of education for the future generation of doctors, and yet the students themselves clearly do not respect the work. The work of Letamendi is meant to tie together all elements of life from the chaotic to the ordered; the energy of the individual and of the cosmos can be connected solely through the basic functions of mathematics (68). What Baroja tries to make clear in Andrés' schooling is that there is no perfect formula for life. On the contrary, the problem with Spaniards is that everyone has a series of "fórmulas prácticas de la vida" that are simplified, pragmatic, and synthetic (34). While Letamendi is searching for some over arching equation to life, Spaniards have their formulas for life and they are preventing the growth and improvement of their nation. What Andrés realizes is that new ideology is needed if any improvement is to be made; this is why he turns to the works of Schopenhauer and Kant, because he believes there is hope elsewhere outside of Spain. Even though that new ideology is available elsewhere, it would

seem that all of Spain is against its adoption. In Madrid he sees a people “sin curiosidad, sin deseo de cambio” only surviving by holding on to a conservative ideology (38). For the people of Spain this is not a problem, and their method of maintaining their lifestyle is through the mantra “Todo lo español es lo mejor” (39). The problem that Andrés encounters now is the fact that his fellow students are not responding to change, they are sticking with the life that they know, and they are suffering because of it. Even the education provided to the future generation is based on similar thinking; that there is some perfect solution to life that every individual can follow. Unfortunately, Andrés is witnessing the harsh reality that no change ever came from those who did not dare to push, and that these general answers do not tackle the problems at hand.

The students that he interacts with have little to no respect for their superiors, and Andrés sees this everywhere within his schooling. Andrés finds that the students of his school are childish and unwilling to be educated. He witnesses a detrimental quality within the students of Spain, and by extension himself. The institution he attends is perpetuating a romantic idea “...le hace creerse más hombre, que su vida ha de cambiar” (33). If students enter into schooling with the mindset that their lives will change solely because of their participation in a structured institution such as a university, then they are destined to fail. Andrés sees this in the very language and references that students make. In one of his classes a student says the name of a famous torero during a role call as a joke. Bullfighting (*las corridas de toros*) is a long-standing form of entertainment in Spain, and Baroja’s mention of this famous fighter—especially in the context of a joke—relates to the fixed characteristics of society at the time. *Los toros* are mentioned a few times in the novel, most often used as a reference to the “glory days” of Spain. This popular sport is a classic example of Spanish extravagance penetrating the many layers of

social class and structure. But when a student makes this reference Andrés sees both disrespect for education and a stagnation of ideas and culture. The student is maintaining the idea of the “glory days” to combat his education as a future member of society. A cycle is present here that will prevent any improvement of individuals within a society and thus the structure of society.

The people around him are stuck to their ways. Baroja is depicting a society that functions on the outside but when examined closer an extreme dysfunction is present. Normally societies look to future generations to improve their quality of life, but the evidence suggests that the future generation of Spain is suffering from reluctance to improve; an immobility has taken place within society, one that cannot be solved with practical methods. At this moment in time a great political change was occurring that was forcing Spain to rethink what the future had in store. Yet according to Baroja, many Spaniards were holding on to the romantic idea of Spain, one that did not need change and improvement. While the older generation, like Letamendi, seek to understand some overarching quality to humanity that may solve the problems of modern day Spain, the younger generations believe that by maintaining their current life style their lives will somehow change. The struggle for Andrés is apparent in his disdain for both sides, as he sees a people without any apparent desire for improvement.

Also during his time as a student Andrés visits a hospital where many medical students learn from attending physicians. This is a place that Andrés truly detests. His first experience there is meeting the physicians at the hospital; the very people that Andrés hopes to replace as a member of the future generation—the very same that appears to be inadequate for the job. These physicians care little for their patients and do not represent the idealized picture of a doctor. While witnessing all of the pain and suffering that is present within the walls of the hospital, Andrés finds that doctors only care for themselves, the antithesis of the job description. While



even Gawande admits that physicians themselves are “given to our own concerns” he also admits that a physicians life is “bound” to their patients and thus have a responsibility to them (Gawande, 9). In one particular moment within the hospital, a patient who keeps a cat indoors as a method of comfort is forcibly separated from the animal and the doctor announces that it will be killed (Baroja, 79). Andrés is impacted by this moment because he sees a complete neglect of the feelings of others. While the doctor had a legitimate point about keeping the hospital clean and disease free, he completely ignored the feelings and emotional state of his patient. This is what frustrates Andrés the most, the lack of empathy that this physician exhibits. He finds himself questioning the role of a physician who may “care” for the greater health of the patients in the hospital but clearly ignores the individual needs of patients. As an institution, medicine represents an integral part of any society and as such is subject to the same contradictions that all other institutions are subject to. The Spain that Baroja is depicting at this moment is one in which the rights and quality of life of individuals are suffering while attempts are being made to maintain the country as a whole. As Brennan notes, the attempts at maintaining the post-republic Spain sought to apply broad solutions to what could have been solved by appealing to the individuals: the citizens themselves (4). Andrés seeks answers in the lives of others because of the humanity that he lacks. Yet when confronted with mistreatment he is able to define a lack of empathy that others have. His response is initially violence, wanting to kick the doctor in “las tipas” because Andrés sees him as a miserable idiot (Baroja, 80). However, Andrés is held back by “las influencias que obraban en su espíritu” which include the teachings of Schopenhauer and the humor of his friends. Even in a moment where Andrés recognizes a less than humane treatment of individuals, his spirit forces him to remain silent. It is not the quality of his own spirit either, it is the words of others that make up his very character. Whatever it is that Andrés

is lacking, just finding it in others and their teachings is not enough to create action; it in fact prevents him from doing so.

Eventually he becomes so frustrated that he storms out of the hospital and in doing so stumbles upon a rally, after which he is inspired to create some real change in this medical system which does not truly care for the needs of the patients. However, his friend Julio exposes him to a sad truth when the realization occurs to him that only a politician can make a change in that system. Unless Andrés becomes a politician—“*hazte político*”—there is nothing he can do in regards to the mistreatment of patients (81). Andrés immediately rejects the idea because he has no desire to enter the world of politics; his calling is in medicine. Even if the system is broken he still wants to be a part of it. Again Andrés is faced with a real set of problems. He sees a lack of empathy within the medical community and this cannot be maintained for the sake of the patients. However, he also comes to term with the harsh reality that the system he is a part of will not allow change unless it is done through the correct political process. Spain’s need for individuals’ greater care is seemingly impossible unless it is done so through a political route, a method that Baroja and Andrés clearly wish to avoid or at least to repudiate. For both the art of politics is one of “*granjería*” (81). But Andrés does not want to negotiate with politics in order to give care to his patients. The citizens of Spain “*no debía tener confianza en ella*” making it impossible for politics to benefit anyone (81). Again the idea surfaces that change is needed but that there is some quality of the citizens of Spain that prevents them from enacting said change. Here is where Andrés is stopped short, for he does not understand how citizens will resign themselves to live in these conditions when change could be made with political reform.

Andrés does encounter a potential solution to the issue at hand within the hospitals but it is a rather bleak one. Within the hospital is a gentleman named Hermano Juan who exclusively

treats very contagious patients. As the name would imply, Hermano Juan is a man of the Church. Andrés for a brief moment believes that Hermano Juan may be the solution to the lack of empathy exhibited by the other physicians. However, Andrés soon discovers that Hermano Juan does not represent a viable solution to his problem. Hermano Juan is so isolated and removed from the outside world that he has become “un monstruo” who has regressed from society completely (86-87). This is because Hermano Juan has devoted his very existence to the care of others and yet lives life through such grand contradictions he has lost his grip on humanity.

Philosophers at the time of this novel were denouncing the role of the Church in society claiming that it did more harm than help. Andrés references many of these scholars including Friedrich Nietzsche who believed that the Church caused the deterioration of life; pushing humans away from the natural course of life and towards what is essentially a lie. In his work *The Antichrist*, Nietzsche addresses the paradoxical and dangerous nature of the Church. Amongst his many criticisms, Nietzsche addresses the sympathy that Christianity uses as a tool; “Sympathy stands in antithesis to the tonic passions which elevate the energy of the feeling of life: it operates depressively. One loses force by sympathizing” (80). Although religion has guided a healer like Hermano Juan, it has completely destroyed his identity. His very first words within the novel are “¡Pobrecitos! ¡Pobrecitos!” beckoning Andrés and his friends to feel understood or sympathized with (Baroja, 86). The contradiction that has pulled at opposing sides of Hermano Juan lies in how Nietzsche identified priests. While someone like Hermano Juan is meant to be a guide and help those in need, but Nietzsche describes priests as a “poisoner of life” (82). The dual nature of Hermano Juan’s life has destroyed whatever humanity he had. He is a prime example of how the Church teaches a false truth, which destroys the very nature of human beings.

The role of the Church comes up again after this moment and from this point on it becomes a fundamental contradiction within Spanish society that Andrés dislikes. His frustration likely stems from the fact that the Church no longer aided the people of Spain, but instead was used as an economic resource by the government and upper class. The role of religion as a healer was beginning to fade in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Even when it could have been implemented to help the people Spain, Andrés only experiences its failure. Nietzsche believed that the Church caused a great moral degradation of the lives of Christians, claiming in his work that it was “inimical to life” (19). Baroja reflects those sentiments but he does so through the lens of the priests. The Church—and religion as a whole—is often associated with healing and saving those who suffer. However, when Andrés interacts with Hermano Juan he does not understand how this institution is supposed to solve anything. While it is true that Hermano Juan cares for the lives of others, he has essentially lost his humanity.

The image of Christianity that Baroja is grappling with upholds priests as healers, quite literally. In Spanish the word for priests “el cura” is one that can also mean “cure” or “treatment” (“Cura”). Hermano Juan in many ways embodies both qualities of the word, but Baroja does not stop there. Hermano Juan also embodies the teachings of Nietzsche. The isolated and removed nature of Hermano Juan disgusts Andrés in the same way that Nietzsche was disgusted. The great contradiction that is Christianity is embodied within Hermano Juan and Andrés deeply fears what it can do to others.

It would seem as though Madrid is in need of care. All around Andrés are signs and symptoms of a suffering society, one that is unable to progress through political or philosophical means. How is Spain supposed to improve if the body, which comprises the very nation, is unable to accept improvement? The future generation does not seem eager to make a change

within the world. The role of religion as a healer has been maintained but at the cost of humanity. Andrés leaves Madrid with all of these questions in mind and seeks out answers in communities less absorbed in the metropolitan struggle of day-to-day life.

### **Alcolea del Campo**

When Andrés leaves his university he embarks on a journey to Alcolea del Campo. In this small town he encounters yet another setting of medicine that frustrates him. While in Alcolea del Campo he encounters a conservative physician, a frozen in time and corrupt community, and a complete rejection of modern ideas. All of these factors pertain to his job as a physician.

While his superior Don Juan Sánchez is away, a family comes to Andrés with a medical emergency. When Andrés decides to perform a risky but lifesaving procedure the sick child of the family is saved. Any physician might expect praise from their superiors in a situation such as this one, but Andrés encounters hostility. When his superior returns, Andrés is condemned for his actions and is actively attacked. Instead of being proud of his colleague for performing a risky but necessary surgery, doctor Sánchez complains that Andrés recommended the family see another doctor for further care which “no va en beneficio de usted ni en beneficio mío” (Baroja, 200). As Andrés remarks afterward, this is a backwards and unsophisticated reaction. It would go without saying that saving someone’s life is a great feat that all physicians should praise and respect, yet the close-minded Sánchez is offended by Andrés. Andrés did what he thought was right because there was no alternative to save the child’s life, yet where Andrés saw a patient in need doctor Sánchez only sees his clients leaving. What could be more beneficial to a physician’s career than saving a life? Barja describes Baroja as an author who “no busca en ella

la gloria por sí, ni el dinero” and clearly Baroja himself felt that assuming an occupation for the sake of some greater benefit to oneself was immoral (300). Even Gawande and Sacks believed that they were vehicles for treatment and were not meant to be the center of praise.

This is only one small instance where the economic benefit of one outweighs the livelihood of others. Sánchez is clearly only motivated by the conservation of his reputation and subsequently his income. Yet Andrés was acting accordingly to what he knows a doctor should do, treat patients especially in life-threatening situations. Where Andrés applied his scientific mind for good, Baroja introduced a greedy and self-centered individual. This is exactly the type of community that Brennan spoke of when he described Spain as a collection of bickering communities. Sánchez is more interested in his own wellbeing than any others. As a doctor this is downright ridiculous and Baroja does his best to emphasize that, but unfortunately this is also a reality that must be understood by Andrés and the reader.

As Baroja has already demonstrated within Madrid, the sickness of Spain was not just within individuals but also within larger communities and institutions. Andrés learns that this community is governed by two groups of “bandidos” alternating power in a political system of “caciquismo.” This system is a balance of power between los Mochuelos, the conservative group, and los Ratones, the liberal group. When Brennan discusses this system that was in place he speaks of behavior that was “outrageous and violent” and overall extremely corrupt (8). He points out that this corrupt nature of government in places like Andalusia is the reason most Spaniards avoided politics entirely. Baroja further glorifies the role of politics in Spain by using images of prey and predator. “The Owls” and “The Rats” are constantly fighting over power, a battle that is seemingly without end. This invokes images of a conversation that Andrés has with his uncle Iturrioz in regards to the nature of human beings. The political battles that occur in

Alcolea del Campo are no different than the day-to-day struggle of survival. The phrase “dog eat dog world” comes to mind when Baroja depicts politics like a struggle to survive. Iturrioz claims that life is a constant battle, a cruel hunt “en que nos vamos devorando los unos a los otros” and that all living creatures are a part of this fight (Baroja, 125). This is so ingrained into society that even human made structures such as politics are absorbed by the constant struggle for life and are converted into an actual battleground. The immobile nature of Spain resurfaces when Andrés tries to address this ridiculous political environment, and becomes clear to Andrés that this is an inherent quality to life. Although, Andrés still does not understand how it is that this struggle is so barbaric.

Andrés already has made his opinions of politics clear when Julio recommends he becomes a politician to change the systems around him. Yet while he is in Alcolea del Campo he cannot avoid the bizarre nature of government and is often face-to-face with immobile citizens backed by a broken political system. As one of the few acting physicians in this community, Andrés attends a meeting with local political officials to discuss how hygiene can be improved and thus improve everyday life. He is convinced that nothing matters because nothing will come of political talk in a community without structure. After asking one official why they do not protest, the official responds by focusing on the issues of hygiene and saying that something must be done, but a frustrated Andrés retorts “¡Qué van ustedes a hacer!” finding it impossible to convince this community otherwise (206). Andrés quickly learns that this community is very comfortable with their dysfunction, and they wish to hold on to old “reliable” institutions than to risk adopting new ones. The standstill that Andrés became familiar with in Madrid is even more obvious in communities like Alcolea del Campo. The inherent disinterest in radical change that could better support the country as a whole is pushed aside. Ironically Andrés can see a clear

path towards some kind of improvement to the lives of Spaniards, yet it is completely blocked by the Spaniards themselves. Andrés is desperately looking for some improvement to the lives of Spaniards. Contrary to what Schopenhauer has told him, he constantly seeks greater satisfaction. But as Schopenhauer said, this quest may end in failure, as desire is never truly satiated.

Amongst the political corruption, there is also a great contradiction of religious beliefs within Alcolea del Campo that Andrés relates to the deeper pessimism of Spain. The Church represents an institution that conducts the very ebb and flow of time within Alcolea del Campo. In acknowledging the Church's role, Nietzsche accepts that if we as a people were to break out of this system "we have no longer anything determined in our grasp" (42). Nietzsche discusses other methods in which we can understand the world around us but in focusing on the Church and the value of morals, the need for an organized system to uphold certain ascetics seems necessary. Andrés struggles with the same realization. The Church seems so much more than *just* another institution, it represents a way of life that is so ingrained into society the very thought of breaking from its confines does not exist. When Andrés first starts working within the town he notices how important the routine of going to Sunday mass is, considering that women rarely leave their homes except for "los domingos a misa" but, he also recognizes a lackluster attitude within the people of Alcolea del Campo (Baroja, 203). The Church no longer represents a morally righteous group; it is a clock, keeping the everyday people on a track to manage their lives.

While the citizens are kept on track by the regular Sunday mass, the local casino entertains them. This casino, which Baroja named La Fraternidad, promotes drinking and gambling as the go-to pastime. La Fraternidad is a casino but the name and the fact that only men use this facility invoke images of the Church, La Fraternidad literally meaning a friary. La



Fraternidad houses some interesting characters that, as every character Baroja creates, depicts a quality of Spain that Andrés has struggles with. Characters such as Don Blas Carreño display a deep irony that Andrés sees within the Church. Don Blas happens to be the head figure of this place and is full of contradictions, living “en plena arbitrariedad” (213). He believes some people deserve nothing from life and simultaneously believes others deserve everything to be offered to them. It would appear that this town has lost their religious beliefs, and yet still holds onto this system to maintain order. Andrés struggles with this realization as he does not understand how an institution that is supposed to guide morals in fact does nothing of the kind, and yet the people still follow it.

Towards the end of his time in Alcolea del Campo a mysterious event occurs. La Mujer de Tío Garrota is found on the street in front of her home with a bleeding wound on her head. Many of the local residents gather to watch as Andrés attempts to treat her. The question that remains constant throughout the event is how this woman acquired the wound to her head. Many suspect that it was Tío Garrota who attempted to kill her; this assumption is based on the fact that she is only able to say “Garro” when asked anything. Andrés—being a modern man and well educated—believes that this woman has aphasia due to her injury. This coupled with his previous work demonstrates an ability to diagnose a problem and attempt to solve it; qualities a physician should have. The people of Alcolea del Campo believe Andrés in part but are immediately convinced otherwise by his superior doctor Sánchez. Even though everything that Andrés says is pure fact of science, and that he can prove it, his opinion as a physician is not respected. The backwards nature of the town overpowers his knowledge as a trained medical professional. The town people and the leaders are more concerned with the events of the accident than they are with the actual health of the woman. This situation frustrates him extremely

because the possible murder of a woman essentially turns into a freak accident; his opinion in the matter has no sway whatsoever. Even with his training and expertise he cannot convince an entire town of how the proven facts of science are applied in his field.

This community is a very corrupt and conservative community. During the time that Andrés spends there most of his observations focus on the fact that the people of Alcolea del Campo live as if they were frozen in the previous century; most of the community does not have regular access to water so bathing proves to be extremely difficult (193). This is coupled with other observations that this community is extremely conservative in their ideology. Yet on top of all of these observations he sees so much contradiction. He is particularly frustrated when one day he finds pornography in a store and simply does not understand how such a conservative community can be so backwards (217). Andrés tries many times to break this community out of its constricted path but he fails. He tries to address the corrupt nature of politics head on, telling the elected officials of Alcolea del Campo that nothing will get done without real political revolution, but they are too concerned about their small community than with larger politics. Even his famous treatment of La Mujer de Tío Garrota is not enough to convince the community of his modern techniques. Andrés accepts defeat before leaving this community and declares that he cannot help them.

Baroja took many experiences from his own life and used them to craft the story of Andrés. As editor Inman Fox notes in the first chapter of this section, many of the experiences that Baroja had as a physician in Cestona are fictionalized and introduced into Alcolea del Campo (183). While it cannot be said how much of the real world was applied to the creation of Alcolea del Campo it is clear that Baroja wanted to make it transparently obvious to his readers the extent of Spain's problem. Many of the institutions designed to protect citizens and benefit

them were failing. On top of that it seems as though the more Spain tried to dig itself out of this whole the deeper they fell. For Andrés this town has only demonstrated to him what he already knew about people, they are complex and confusing.

### **Returning to Madrid**

At this point in the novel Baroja introduces El desastre de 98. As a physician, Baroja was able to give Andrés the tools necessary to understand the problems that Spain was facing. While the rest of Spain was living life as they always had, through the “espíritu romántico” that inhabited their daily lives, there was an underlying problem; Spain had become desensitized to the change it so desperately needed (38). El desastre del 98 is a pivotal event in the history of Spain and within this novel it is only mentioned over the course of two pages. When Andrés returns from Alcolea del Campo he finds that Madrid is flush with patriotic sentiments; every street corner is full of newspapers describing what the victory will do for Spain, while every person sings patriotic songs. After the eventual defeat Andrés is surprised to see that all of Spain simply resorts to its everyday behavior, as if nothing had happened. Everyone goes to the theatre or to see “los toros” and all ideas and conversation of war vanish; “humo de paja” (237). Much like the students disrupting the professors in medical school, Baroja uses this image of “los toros” to describe the golden days of Spain, when citizens could afford to be extravagant. Andrés sees one of the most devastating losses of his generation get brushed off. The people and institutions that Andrés was exposed to demonstrated just how lost they were. Even in the face of devastation there is no outcry for change there is only a silent acceptance. Again Andrés faces a deep sense of confusion as he does not understand how a society can deal with loss in such a way.

When Andrés returns to Madrid he takes up a job as a doctor of hygiene. In his own words Andrés finds this job the worst of all as his antisocial instinct “se iba aumentando, se iba convirtiendo en odio contra el rico, sin tener simpatía por el pobre” (254). It is interesting that when Andrés returns to Madrid, the epicenter for politics, he begins to feel hate for the lower class. It would seem as though the city itself is beginning to influence the character of Andrés. In this new job Andrés works for the public and attempts to provide care to prostitutes who essentially have nothing. This is an extremely noble aspect of the physician’s role in the world, providing care for those with very little. However, this job frustrates him deeply as many of the prostitutes he encounters do not actually want medical treatment. He encounters so much aversion towards medicine and towards change that he is sometimes pushed to outbursts of anger. In communities without proper medical care, such as the homes of prostitutes and the lower class of Spain, the inclusion of a doctor may seem as a blessing to those who are less fortunate. However true that may be Andrés is confronted by the alternative. Through his work he encounters terrible living conditions and yet the people who are subscribed to them do not want the help that Andrés offers. When Andrés discusses his work with Lulú—his eventual wife—and his uncle Iturriz, he addresses the real problems that the lower class is facing. In one particular moment Andrés explains that when he goes to visit a brothel in an attempt to treat the prostitutes, they are all gone. The aversion towards authority is so great that the prostitutes will literally run to another brothel for refuge (254). Andrés finds that the prostitutes have been changed because of the position that authority has in their lives. Two prostitutes who are taken into custody only respond to Andrés with smiles when he asks why they are not angry at the police officers (255). The system that has maintained these prostitutes has changed their very nature towards subservience.

When treating prostitutes, Andrés encounters one person who refuses care and lashes back; “Bueno. Haz lo que quieras; por mí puedes envenenar medio mundo; me tiene sin cuidado” (255). Andrés has not yet provided care for this individual so he could not know for sure that they were sick. However, it is both his assumption that they are sick and the supposed results of that disease that come out when Andrés responds in anger. He tells the prostitute to infect the entire world for all he cares! In spite of the fact that he is approaching this issue as a medical one, Andrés is more concerned with the deeper social problems that the prostitute is exhibiting. The continued degradation of Spanish society is deeply engrained into the citizens; in seeing this danger Andrés does not even care if the rest of the world follows suit. What Andrés sees as the medical problem is a social one. What is it exactly that he allows the prostitute to infect the world with? His lack of understanding towards this human being makes it impossible for him to see the nature of her disease even though he describes it as such.

In his attempts to change or fix this system he encounters even more difficulties with his “treatment” of the lower class health care system. The brothels that Andrés visits are often supported by churches, a connection that he finds appalling; “¡Qué labor más católica, más conservadora podía haber que dirigir una casa de prostitución!” (255). The problems that Andrés encounters on a daily basis could all be fixed with a change of social stigma around medicine and authority. They could also be fixed if Andrés was simply allowed to treat patients. Yet the Church, which is supposed to be an institution that supports the poor and protects them, is serving the degeneration of the quality of life. Again Andrés is presented with a problem and understands how it can be fixed but the existing system prevents him from doing so. Furthermore the existing system that he must compete with is such a contradiction! Instead of relying on institutions to provide better health care, the prostitutes rely on the corrupt nature of religion to

escape some other authority. Andrés accepts—with great resignation—that there is an inherent characteristic of humans that sometimes cannot be cured. As he and Iturrioz discussed before, the disease that has infected the prostitutes has changed their very identity and ideology to the point where they cannot break from their own predicament; “...hacía la prostituta, y le daba el espíritu de la prostitución” (255). As Sacks pointed out, the disease and the person are interconnected. Andrés only partially understands this when he sees the life of the prostitutes. He understands that the nature of their lives has forced them into submission to the point where they will not accept any alternative even if it improves their lives, but he cannot treat this illness solely as a physician because of this change in their nature. When he tells the prostitute to infect the whole world, he does not understand how the disease and society are interconnected.

His time as a doctor of hygiene shows Andrés a dark side to reality that he wishes to correct but finds no solution. Andrés repeatedly addresses the disparity between the rich and the poor throughout the novel, but these moments in Madrid as a doctor of hygiene convinces him that “...en Madrid la evolución progresiva de la gente rica que iba hermosteándose...mientras el pueblo evolucionaba a la inversa...” resulting in the horrific conditions of health that he is trying to treat (256). Andrés is witnessing a political degradation within Spain that is harming the citizens. As seen before, the Church is not making an impact on this decline and it would appear that the effect is so great it has impaired those afflicted to the point where they cannot see an alternative. Furthermore, Andrés describes the issue as an evolutionary one. He is applying his medical mind to social issues in order to understand them. Without his understanding of humanity, Andrés must turn to science to understand why these prostitutes are the way they are.

Whether it is communities or individuals, Andrés cannot tackle the problems that ail Spain. It seems as though every institution is broken and the citizens comprising said institution

are incapable to fixing it. While Andrés may be able to see the problems in front of him, he cannot help the diseased people of Spain. Baroja makes his journey almost impossible at every turn. It is a story of hardship and struggle that Andrés will eventually lose so that hopefully others can win.

### **The Life of Andrés**

In his final moments within the novel Andrés comes face to face with the harsh reality that many physicians experience at some point in their lives—not everyone can be saved. While it is true Andrés has seen this before, and much of his other experiences as a physician speak more to the inability of medicine than the romantic idea of medicine, his final moments in the novel are more personal than any other patient. Shortly after finally finding love, Andrés learns that his wife Lulú is pregnant. Soon Lulú dies after giving birth and the child does not survive. Andrés is very torn by this event for obvious reasons, but even before his wife was in labor he was troubled by the very idea of having a child. These last moments of the novel present Andrés with the opportunity to diagnosis himself and attempt to cure his depression and pessimism. When Lulú addresses Andrés' disinterest in children he asks himself “¿Como decir a aquella mujer que él se consideraba como un producto envenenado y podrido, que no debía tener descendencia?” confronting his own problems and describing himself in the same way he has described sick prostitutes (287). In declaring his own issues and his own reservations it becomes clear that Andrés feels he is just as lost as some of his patients. His progression as a character has come a long way at this point. It is in this moment, when contemplating his future and his legacy, that Andrés sees his is just as lacking as the citizens of Spain. He describes himself as “lost” and “infected.” Being aware of a life threatening quality does not mean it will be cured, Baroja's

picture of Spain was suffering and he seemed powerless to do anything about it. Even more so Baroja believed that this problem would extend beyond him, affecting his descendants. The fear that Andrés has of supporting a future generation is a reflection of the fear that Baroja experienced; the fear that Andrés himself is poisoned and cannot be cured so he should instead end before he can continue to contaminate the rest of the world.

The endless suffering that Andrés has seen within his society turns towards a depreciation of life around him; mimicking the thoughts of Schopenhauer that life “es estúpida, sin emociones, sin accidentes...” and “cruel, canalla, infame, la vida sin finalidad, sin objeto, sin principios y sin moral” (159, 169). For Schopenhauer the solution to these problems was a removal of will, living through life without desire and thus without suffering. In addition, Schopenhauer and Andrés believe the answer lies in the sciences. Andrés is convinced “...fuera de la verdad matemática y de la verdad empírica que se va adquiriendo lentamente, la ciencia no dice mucho. Hay que tener la probidad de reconocerlo..., y esperar” (172). Unfortunately, Schopenhauer has already said that the future does not necessarily hold the solution to whatever suffering Andrés is experiencing, and so he will eventually regret the possibility of waiting for something greater to save him and his people. For if there is some salvation in the calculated nature of the sciences, Andrés does not find it when he needs it most.

In spite of the fact that Andrés can diagnosis his own fear, his medical expertise ceases to provide help when Lulú eventually dies. The moment is crushing for both Andrés and the reader as it speaks to a very deep and visceral tragedy that life presents at even the happiest moments. Andrés must witness this experience from a far and watch while a doctor attempts to treat Lulú and save the child. Not only can Andrés do nothing but also even if he were in a position to treat his wife and unborn child it appears as though even he would fail; the science that he has spent



the entire novel studying seems to only go so far. What is so important in the final moments of Lulú's life is the nature of the scene. Baroja describes the process of labor in great detail and uses the doctor to convey the medical information to both Andrés and the reader. For example, the doctor uses forceps to retrieve the child during labor, a process used occasionally when both mother and child are in need of aid (289). Just as Andrés attempts to provide some additional aid to a struggling society, not even this additional support can be used to save the future generation. While in other settings the suffering that Andrés saw was brushed off, this moment is far more personal. It would seem that the unborn child of Andrés was dead long before Lulú went into labor as the umbilical cord was "comprimido" (290). Even before the descent of Andrés was born they were doomed! The irony that Baroja presents by using the fact that the very cord of life that provided them with energy and nutrients was compressed and unable to function is a brutal blow to Andrés and whatever hope he may have had in these final moments. In the act of providing the opportunity for life, the umbilical cord killed the very child it was sustaining. Although the child was the one who suffered, Lulú cannot sustain her own life after the loss of her child. Both mother and child suffer and die together as they are unable to live without one another.

Andrés experiences first hand how the medical system fails even when it is needed the most and he is completely powerless to change that. This is another reality that physicians must accept with some resilience. A common practice amongst physicians is to not provide care for their family. It is hard to imagine the difficulty when a situation such as this presents itself. To be unable to help the ones we love is a tragedy, but even more so when an individual is trained to care for human beings and cannot do anything for those they care for. Even with all of his

training and all of his experience as a doctor, Andrés cannot save the only person who he genuinely cares for.

The harshest moment of tragedy arrives immediately after the death of Lulú when Andrés—in his solitude and despair—takes his own life. Physician suicide is unfortunately not uncommon. Studies have shown that physicians are twice as likely as non-physicians to commit suicide. Andrés experiences the truth of this statistic in the most direct way possible, but it is the method he chooses that speaks to his occupation even more so. Andrés chooses to poison himself with aconite in his dark depression. This product is only available to him because of its medical uses. As a physician he is trained to understand the human body and how it functions, and it is with this knowledge that he ends his own life. In his final moments Andrés encounters the most difficult wave of depression and pessimism he has ever experienced. It is in the face of the most horrific symptoms of his existence that Andrés finds only one treatment; to “survive” the painful loss of his wife and child he chooses to commit suicide. According to Nietzsche, the physician should have a role in a voluntary death of those who wish to “die proudly when it is no longer possible to live proudly” (56). The physician will then assume the role of maintaining the highest value of life by allowing people to break from “natural death.” Although “natural death” is the natural course of the body, Nietzsche argues that a physician can do much more by giving a patient the right to choose their time; an “unnatural death” or as Nietzsche bluntly states “suicide.” This choice gives people an entitlement to life. This goes against nearly all traditional teachings of medicine, but it does speak to Andrés and his suicide. In his final moments he truly feels lost, having an out-of-body experience while using morphine to aid in his sleep. What does he have left in his life? Andrés feels that his life has come to its end and in the way that Nietzsche says, while we cannot choose to be born we can choose when to die. However,

Nietzsche would not believe that the sickness Andrés encounters is worthy of an “unnatural death” as it is caused by depression. Nietzsche states that pessimism “proves itself by the self-refutation” of men and is in fact a direct expression of “infirmity” (57). But Andrés does not express this weakness; he instead tends towards Schopenhauer’s ideology that the reality he lives in is inherently pessimistic. With the future generation dead before him due to the complete failure of science, Andrés sees nothing for his own future.

Baroja uses the medical world to commit this suicide, alluding to what Schopenhauer and Andrés both believed in, the triumph of science and the inescapable pessimism of reality. However, in this final moment the only triumph that appears is the overwhelming pessimism that Andrés has experienced since the very beginning of the novel. In this particular moment he turns towards the beliefs of Schopenhauer that the seemingly endless cycle of suffering cannot be overcome. While most of humanity looks towards the future for salvation and for hope, Andrés only sees the negative. When Schopenhauer describes happiness he discusses the incurable satisfaction that desire creates, specifically how it is a temporal nature of that satisfaction. When the craving for hunger is met with sustenance there is a moment of satisfaction that all living creatures desire. In spite of the fact that this desire is now satisfied, the suffering begins again. The cycle puts emphasis on what will be eventually obtained through will, but the fact of life is that there is no satisfaction obtained and so the future appears rather bleak. Schopenhauer depicts this present and future suffering like that of “alms thrown to a beggar, which relieves him today so that his misery may be prolonged till tomorrow” (Schopenhauer 1:196). Andrés maybe had some relief from sleep, but his suffering will not stop, and it is with this knowledge that he makes the decision to remove the possibility of suffering entirely.

In the end Andrés is completely and utterly defeated by his inability to help Spain and those around him, in particular his wife. In the last few moments of the novel Baroja completes this work with a brief scene between Iturrioz, a doctor, and an unknown individual. The three are the ones who discover that Andrés is dead and have a few last words to say. The last two sentences in particular are quite powerful deliveries of Baroja's final say;

—Ha muerto sin dolor —murmuró Iturrioz—. Este muchacho no tenía fuerza para vivir. Era un epicúreo, un aristócrata, aunque él no lo creía.

—Pero había en él algo de precursor —murmuró el otro médico. (Baroja, 292)

On top of Andrés' fear of having children, Baroja's fear for the future, and both of their inability to solve the problems of Spain there is this final moment where Baroja questions his own character.

Firstly Baroja uses Iturrioz to claim that even though he did not know it, Andrés was a lover of life and a member of the aristocracy. Iturrioz is often the counter to Andrés and his belief. Within *El Árbol de la Ciencia* there are a total of seven sections. The fourth section—the dividing line of the text—happens to be constructed similar to that of dialectic. Andrés and his uncle Iturrioz spend the section discussing different qualities of life and sharing their agreements and disagreements freely. It is in this section that Iturrioz describes how he believes salvation can be found for Spain within a new type of human, one that would have “toda tendencia a la humildad... a la tristeza” and be positioned above the suffering that has plagued humanity. This is reflective of Nietzsche's “Übermensch” description (179). Iturrioz as an intellectual and a vehicle for Nietzsche is claiming a truth about Andrés that does not seem to fit his character. For if Andrés truly loved life, would he not hold on to it? And if Andrés was truly a part of the system, why would he not cooperate with it?

Baroja gives the final words of this novel to “another doctor”, some outsider that has been brought in because of their expertise in the field of medicine. On top of that, the final prognosis of the scene is that within Andrés there is a “precursor” to something. Even though Andrés and Baroja feared the future there is this final moment where the reader is given the opportunity to hope. Although the Spain that Baroja was living in faced great pessimism, there was in his mind something that would lead to a greater future. But that hope is so small and intangible it hardly seems like it exists. Not only is the hope mentioned by an unknown character, giving it no real weight, it is also delivered as a “murmur”, a whisper, just barely more than a silent thought. On top of that it is not a stated fact, it is only the proposition of “something” being there. Baroja unfortunately does not satisfy the unknown of what will be, but that is exactly the method of Schopenhauer that he is able to demonstrate so well.

With all the suffering that Andrés has had to struggle through, Baroja does not leave the readers with a clear answer as to what will become of Spain and Andrés’ legacy. There is however a possibility that Andrés will be remembered as a saintly figure, and that Baroja himself wished for Spain to remember those who give themselves for the betterment of society. Schopenhauer was able to see the terrible fate of saints, and perhaps Baroja saw the same in Andrés;

“Such a human being recognizing in all beings his own true and innermost self, must also regard the endless sufferings of all that lives as his own, and thus take upon himself the pain of the whole world...He knows the whole, comprehends its inner nature, and finds it involved in a constant passing away, a vain striving [nichtigen Streben], an inward conflict, and a continual suffering...Now how could he, with such knowledge of the world, affirm this very life through constant acts of will, and precisely in this way bind

himself more and more firmly to it, press himself to it more and more closely?"

(Schopenhauer, 1: 379).

Andrés has spent the entirety of the novel looking for something to fill the void within him. In his attempts to understand himself he sought answers in others, taking the “pain of the whole world” through his observations. It is only through his observations and treatment of others that he sees the “continual suffering” Schopenhauer describes. What Schopenhauer questions though is the impossibility of this kind of person to maintain their life. As the other doctor counters Iturrioz’s description of Andrés as an epicurean with his first word “Pero”, Baroja emphasizes what Schopenhauer believed was true about those saintly figures; their affirming of life brings them closer to death. The reality of Andrés’ life is that it was always doomed to end this way. His desire to end the suffering of his fellow Spaniards through his medical training was never going to succeed. Instead he found himself confronted by the constant reminder of how harsh life is. It is only in the end, when faced with the most personal act of suffering, that Andrés was able to see his purpose was beyond that of providing medical care to those around him; Andrés was perhaps meant to be the martyr of Spain.

## **What is the Role of a Physician?**

During the time that Pío Baroja trained as a physician he likely encountered the works of Hippocrates, whom to this day is considered the father of modern medicine. It was Hippocrates that first proposed illness and disease were caused naturally and were therefore not dependent on religious beliefs or superstition. From ancient civilization to now the profession of medicine has been considered a staple of any functioning society. However, the role of physicians and their position within a society changes with each generation. While there are many common elements that have been preserved across cultures and eras, many questions that Hippocrates asked still remain today. Who is a physician? What are the duties of the physician? How are these duties acted upon? Andrés Hurtado encounters this last question most frequently through his own journey to become a physician. Unfortunately he is just as frequently defeated by the notion that, even those who want to help and cure others of whatever ails them are faced with patients who turn away a helping hand. Furthermore, Andrés encounters strife in his own journey to help others when he is unable to help himself. In spite of the fact that Andrés desires to fulfill the role of a healer within his broken society, Baroja makes it clear that sometimes that is easier said than done.

In the original Hippocratic oath, the physician vows that they “will use regiments for the benefit of the ill in accordance with my ability and my judgment” (Miles, xiii). What role does ones ability or judgment have when those who are receiving care refuse it? Or even more so than that, who is to say that ones ability and judgment are correct in any given situation? Pushing even further, what role does a physician have when they attempt to heal an entire society of a social as well as biological disease? The leaders of Spain likely felt that they were using their

best judgment when attempting to save their peoples; is the judgment of Baroja and Andrés any better?

Andrés finds no opportunity to ignore these questions while working as a physician. Furthermore, Andrés must face the larger issue of understanding what it means to suffer. For the most part, the people of Spain do not seem to be suffering in their day-to-day lives, but are instead suffering from their ignorance and pessimism which Andrés attempts to break through. During his time as a student, apprentice, and practicing physician he constantly faces a society and its citizens that seem to reject his help; his opinion and his knowledge as a physician are ignored or discarded by his colleagues or his fellow Spaniards. In each moment of conflict that Andrés encounters he becomes more and more frustrated with those around him. Take for example his reaction when a prostitute refuses medical treatment; “Bueno. Haz lo que quieras; por mí puedes envenenar medio mundo; me tiene sin cuidado.” Andrés insults a patient who refuses his care and denies his duties as a physician. Not a particularly appropriate response for a doctor to promote the spread of disease. In the mind of Andrés—and as the reader may experience as well—this “patient” is resigning herself to be diseased even when the opportunity for care is present and available. This prostitute is trying to live her life and yet chooses to risk living with a disease instead of receiving medical care. How is Andrés supposed to respond to this situation? According to him there is nothing he can do, the suffering that this character is experiencing is somehow beyond his aid, but that denies his supposed responsibilities as a physician. Andrés has an obligation—and in this particular case his actual job is to care for these people—to care for those who are sick. This is the exact moment in which his studying and training as a doctor has prepared him for. What does a physician do when their patient refuses medical care but is very obviously suffering? According to Andrés this has more to do with the



nature of the impoverished then his role as a physician; his treatment of each individual will not solve this problem because it is an inherent problem within society. He identifies “Los síntomas de la derrota” of the lower class as a real social and biological decline while the upper class continue to prosper and grow more powerful (Baroja, 256). Yet his very use of the word “symptoms” would imply a medical exploration of this defeat. Even when he is denied the opportunity to treat people he still acts as a physician; exploring the problems he can see and the problems he cannot see in order to identify the real cause. Whether this problem is social or biological he still sees a disease. His moment of obligation as a physician seems to end abruptly with his resignation. Andrés somehow feels, as a physician, he is incapable of helping this society and this particular patient. However, as a physician his role must involve the care of others according to his judgment and so a question arises as to how Andrés is equipped to help Spain and his patients if his judgment tends towards this negation of his occupation.

There is no medical text that says the decisions doctor’s make are always easy, but countless texts since the inception of the profession declare that doctors have the obligation to provide care when it is needed. The obligation that physicians have to their patients is one of the principle foundations of the role. In the case of Andrés and his job as a doctor of hygiene this obligation seems to be lacking, or at the very least the patient is unwilling to receive care making the obligation mute. Andrés is forced to witness the illness of the individuals and of the larger society, but remains unable to respond in the way in which he wants. Only the very last moments of the novel do we see Andrés serve his community in the only way he can, through his own death.

In the final moments of the novel, Baroja presents the reader with an alternative view to the life of Andrés. The seemingly antisocial and depressing character that began this journey

through Spain is dead and what remains depends on the point of view. Iturriz describes Andrés as “un epicúreo, un aristócrata” just before the other doctor describes him as a precursor. These final characteristics (epicurean, aristocrat, and precursor) are Baroja’s final words on this epic journey through Spain, and so are the last summations of the life of Andrés. Furthermore, it is Iturriz, someone Andrés considered to be a great intellectual and a mentor, and the unknown doctor who declare these attributes. While the intellectual sees a young man living life to the fullest and playing his part within government, the doctor sees the beginning of something new. Perhaps what Andrés was missing is what this doctor had. This other character was able to see that the sufferings of Andrés and of his people were tragic, but they may have only been the beginning. Only after these events and only after the sacrifice of Andrés will it become clear where the foundation he laid was headed. Baroja’s martyr is perhaps what a true physician is meant to do. Since the beginning Andrés has been lacking something that could not be replaced, and so through his journey he was able to literally assume the position of others in order to fully comprehend their suffering. This is what physicians are able to do better than any others; by understanding the science of a suffering body Andrés was able to truly understand the suffering of a nation and her peoples. And it is through all of this suffering that Andrés assumes onto his own life that he takes the saintly alternative to life and chooses to no longer continue living. Andrés is perhaps the most aware individual within the entire novel, for he truly understands that his role as a healer is one in which he must endure the harshest moments and realizations of reality.

This text speaks to many question of how physicians are responsible for their patients and for their communities. It also speaks to the larger philosophical and sociological questions that intellectuals were conjuring at the time this book was written. Above all else it describes an

extremely painful struggle that one character must face in the harsh reality of life. Andrés was not equipped to survive this struggle, but he tried his best to find what it was that would make him happy, and what would make the people of Spain happy. On that journey he discovered that there was perhaps an alternative way to view life and answer that question. Instead of looking for what would make him whole, and by extension what the people of Spain needed, he could have looked toward some other fulfillment. Perhaps what the “other” doctor was alluding to was the possibility that Andrés’ desire to pursue a satisfactory life could eventually lead to one. There was *something* within Andrés that could inform the future generations as to how they can avoid an end like his. The challenge is learning from Andrés and his struggle. It is not as simple as picking an apple off a tree and being endowed with knowledge (both good and evil); it is instead a question of waiting for something greater even in the darkest moments.

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First Draft of Title Page

Spatula:

How do *you* flip an egg?

Senior Project submitted to  
The Division of Languages and Literature  
of Bard College

by

Emmett Koltun Dienstag

Annandale-On-Hudson

May 2018

A note to myself and any others who come this far...

There is a lot about this project that I wish I could expand more on. But unfortunately I have learned that a year is not as much time as one might think. Everything I wanted to include in this project did not necessarily make it to the final cut. Not because it was not relevant, but because it was not written. That is to say there was a lot that I simply did not include. I am unsure whether or not that was because I didn't want to or I simply did not have the skills to do so. Regardless of the reason I want you, the reader, to consider this work unfinished. This is reflective of who I was up to April 29<sup>th</sup>, 2018. This is not meant to represent me hereafter. And because of that I would consider this work (frankly) to be a garbled mess. The time I spent at Bard was one I will remember fondly, but only in part. Amidst the moments of happiness and festivities were scattered a great deal of personal struggle, both physical and emotional. So this project tends towards these sentiments, and not towards the level of academic work that I wanted it to be. In part I blame Bard itself, but I cannot put my own shortcomings and internal conflicts onto this institution.

I do not know what I have learned from this project. I do not think it will become clear to me anytime soon. But I hope that whoever is reading this understands that I am learning. This entire 60ish pages details my attempts at gathering and maintain information. So whoever you are at this exact moment of reading, know that even when I was in a place of strong academic character, I do not understand my purpose as a student. This was not easy and I doubt it will ever be. So relax. Feeling incomplete and unsure of anything in the present is just a part of the process. In fact it is a necessity. If you feel incomplete then it means you are preparing something great. So while you should read this project with the mentality that it is lacking something, don't worry. Whatever *it* is will be found.