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NAAC ACCREDITED 'A' GRADE



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## JORIS IVENS' S THE SPANISH EARTH

In 1937, the film *The Spanish Earth* documented the Spanish Civil War for international audiences. This essay analyses the ways in which Joris Ivens (director) and Ernest Hemingway (screenwriter) portrayed the Spanish conflict in order to obtain political and economic support for the Spanish Republican cause.

*The Spanish Earth* was designed as a propaganda artifact aimed at increasing the awareness of the Spanish Republican cause in the international community, but more precisely in the United States

This documentary tells of the struggles during the Spanish Civil War. It deals with the war at different levels: from the political level, at the ground military level focusing on battles in Madrid and the road from Madrid to Valencia, and at the support level. With the latter, a key project was building an irrigation system for an agricultural field near Fuentedueña so that food could be grown to feed the soldiers.

The film opens in the village of Fuentidueña de Tajo (called "Fuentedueña" in the movie), showing the villagers trying to scratch a living from the dry soil and explaining the importance of bringing water to irrigate the fields so more crops can be produced and embattled Madrid can be fed. A map shows the position of the village on the Madrid-Valencia road, which must be kept open at all costs so the capital can be defended. The scene moves to Madrid, with another map showing the front line running west of the city, with a rebel salient in the Ciudad Universitaria, which the loyalists are shown attacking.

The city is the village inverted; while the earth of Fuentedueña is simply upturned, the streets of Madrid look as if they have been maniacally plowed. The blood that stains the streets contrasts painfully with the water that courses through the soil. Ivens planned the documentary as a dialectic, alternating between village and city until the synthesis is reached. Thus rhythm changes with location; anonymous peasants are juxtaposed with historical figures like La Pasionaria and Manuel Azaña, president of the Republic.

At the end of the film, the loyalists have driven off the rebel attack on the bridge over the Jarama, keeping the road open, and the water is shown flowing to the fields: the irrigation has succeeded.