

# English Romanticism vs Spanish Romanticism. An overview

José Manuel Estévez Saá  
University of Seville  
Margarita Estévez Saá  
University of Santiago de Compostela

Through this paper we propose to develop a survey of the romantic influences and interchanges between England and Spain. With this aim in mind we will point out a series of English writers who have decisively influenced the Spanish literary production of the time and *viceversa*.

As we will show, the European romantic atmosphere in general and the English trend in particular constituted an unlimited source of influence and research for Spanish writers of the time. Although Spanish romanticism spread out once English romanticism was nearly over - some scholars propose 1832 as the definitive introduction of romanticism in Spain -, Spanish legends, surroundings and themes inspired English writers in their literary compositions.

Writers such as Young, Cowper, Gray,... and Meléndez Valdés; Young and José Cadalso; Thomson and Nicasio de Cienfuegos; Blanco White; Richardson and Valladares, Mor de Fuentes, Tójar,... among the (pre)romantics; and Scott and Trueba y Cossío, el duque de Rivas, Espronceda..., Byron and Ventura de la Vega, Núñez de Arce, Gómez de Avellaneda, etc., among other romantics, should be dealt with by taking into account their bi-directional echoes.

Despite the relevance of the links and interchanges between the two national movements, it is not easy to find pieces of research devoted their analysis in an objective, non-passionate way. There are two major works that from my point of view do expose the romantic relationship between the two countries in a documented and non-affected way: Esteban Pujals's *El Romanticismo Inglés: Orígenes, Repercusión Europea y Relaciones con la Literatura Española* (1969), and José María Gimeno's translation of Edgar Allison Peers' *Historia del Movimiento Romántico Español* (1973). Both books constitute unquestionable reference books for the Spanish scholars at the beginning the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Allison Peers develops a careful survey of the Spanish Romantic movement by paying attention to the whole history of the movement. A series of chapters are particularly engaged to point out not only the English influences, which enjoy singular and specific sections in the two volumes of the book, but also the French, German and Italian connections, among others. As for the book by Esteban Pujals, it continues to be regarded

as the highest exponent of intellectual depth as far as the mutual influences between the English and the Spanish romanticisms are concerned. It has deeply moved a wide sector of the Spanish intelligentsia and most of the scholars who have decided to devote their cultural anxieties to the study of romanticism cannot help but to recognise their debt to it. In his, Pujals not only establishes the links and the barriers between the two national cultural movements but also analyses and describes the works by the representatives of both countries in detail utilising formal and thematic terms.

Before dealing with the contact points between the English and the Spanish Romantic traditions, we should divide the mutual influences between the two countries in two waves, the pre-romantic and the romantic. The English pre-romantic echoes in Spain cohabited with neoclassic influences throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Esteban Pujals points out how the first emotional manifestations that can be felt in Spain correspond in general terms to the influences of the English pre-romantics Thomson, Young, Gray and Macpherson. The Spanish writers became familiar with them by means of direct readings, translations or romantic adaptations. Besides, it is well known that the Salamanca School poets spoke English. Perhaps the main figures of the Spanish Romantic avant-garde were Torrepalma, Cadalso, Jovellanos, Meléndez Valdés, Cienfuegos and Blanco. Yet, as Pujals mentions in his work, we should also emphasise the work of the sentimental novelists, scholars and critics concerned with romanticism (Pujals 39).

Alfonso Verdugo, count of Torrepalma (1706-1767), in his elegy "A la temprana muerte de una hermosura" and when neoclassicism was in its midst, already shows the melancholic tone of poetry that characterises the second half of the eighteenth century in Europe, and which reminds us of Young and Gray. Yet it is quite improbable that he had met these two poets (Pujals 41; McClelland 289).

On the contrary, it was probably José Cadalso (1741-1782) the first Spanish poet that consciously imitated Young, as he himself stated in the subtitle of his *Noches Lúgubres* where we can read: "Imitando el estilo de las que escribió en inglés el Doctor Young" (Cadalso 226). Pujals describes them as "tres diálogos (noches) en prosa lírica que nacieron en la brumosa atmósfera sentimental ocasionada por la muerte de su novia [la actriz María Ignacia Ibáñez]" (Pujals 41), and highlights his exaggerated language, the sentimental exaltation and the sepulchral and nocturnal scenery as features that have in Young a clear precedent. (Pujals 41). This soldier who died fighting at the siege of Gibraltar against the English army and whose death was lamented even by the enemy, had studied in England and spoke English.

Likewise, Gaspar M. de Jovellanos (1744-1810), who had translated Book I of *Paradise Lost* by Milton, shows at least three English thematic influences: the special concern with nature, the

mystery of the nocturnal atmosphere and the melancholic meditations. We can think for instance of his compositions "A la noche", "Himno a la luna" and "A la luna". In addition, Esteban Jujals points out his "Epístola de Fabio a Anfriso" (1778-90) that deals with the topic of the retired way of life and his sentimental drama *El delincuente honrado* (1774) as two writings that should be understood as clearly pre-romantic.

Furthermore, the ode "El invierno es el tiempo de la meditación" by Juan Meléndez Valdés (1774-1817) is full of romantic elements; and in another ode, "La noche y la soledad", that seems to be inspired by Young's "Night Thoughts", he himself makes direct references to the English writer: "Y con Young silenciosos nos entremos / en blanda paz por estas soledades [...] / y la fúnebre cítara templemos / oh, Young, que tú tañías / cuando en las rocas de Albion llorabas" (B.A.E. v. LXIII 224; in Pujals 47). Another clear reference can be found in a letter to his friend Jovellanos the 12<sup>th</sup> of June 1779 where he confesses his debt with Young: "Yo quise seguir en algo el vuelo del inimitable Young y aquel aire original inglés" (Idem 46).

As for Nicasio A. de Cienfuegos (1764-1809), Pujals prefers to see Thomson as the direct influence of his "La primavera" where "la exuberante naturaleza vibra con emoción juvenil" (Pujals 47). Finally, among the precursors of the Spanish Romantic movement influenced by the English Romanticism we find José M. Blanco White (1775-1841). His father was Irish and when the French invaded Andalucía he went to England and died in Liverpool. He wrote both in English and in Spanish. In English it is worth mentioning his *Letters from Spain*, on customs and folklore typical of Andalucía, published in London in 1822, and the supplement for the article *Spain* (1826) in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. His sonnet "Night and Death" was considered by Coleridge as "el soneto más hermoso y de concepción más amplia escrito en lengua inglesa" (Bejarano 492; Pujals 50); and his "Una tormenta nocturna en alta mar", written in Spanish, is an allegoric composition with an autobiographical tone in which the poet shows "el temor ante el naufragio de su alma y señala una vuelta a su patria y religión" (Pujals 50).

Regarding the English influence in the first phases of Spanish Romanticism, we should not forget to mention the translation at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century of Richardson's *Pamela* into Spanish. This type of epistolary, sentimental and moralising novel will no doubt influence A. Valladares Sotomayor (*La Leandra. Novela original que comprende muchas*, 1997), J. Mor de Fuentes (*La Serafina*, 1798) and Francisco de Tójar (*La Filósofa por amor, o cartas de dos amantes apasionados y virtuosos*, 1799). In the novels by the three writers we see how the neoclassic prudence and decorum give place to passions and the impulses of the heart. Besides, between 1790 and 1805 it is important to mention two well-known essays on poetry:

*Instituciones poéticas* (1793) by Díez González, and *Principios de Retórica y Poética* (1805) by Sánchez Barbero. Both texts constitute an overcoming of neoclassic principles and define poetry as “el lenguaje del entusiasmo y la obra del genio, conceden a la imaginación especial importancia y otorgan un nuevo valor a la emoción” (Pujals 54).

In the same way, Jovellanos (1744-1810), in the opening speech of the Instituto Asturiano (6th January 1794), manifested his aversion towards the imitation of the classics, stating, as Alonso Cortés rewrites in a book on Zorrilla published in Valladolid in 1943, in a chapter devoted to Romanticism, that the writers of his age would never produce so great and wonderful words as the classics, precisely because “los antiguos crearon y nosotros imitamos; porque los antiguos estudiaron en la naturaleza y nosotros en ellos” (109). Esteban Pujals also includes the article by Juan N. Bohl de Faber “Reflexiones sobre la poesía”, published in Madrid the 12<sup>th</sup> of July 1805 in the magazine *Variedades de Ciencias, Literatura y Artes*, where he praised Shakespeare and exposed, for the first time in Spain, the basic principles of Romantic theories (Pujals 54). Bartolomé J Gallardo and Alberto Lista visited London and Oxford, studying and reviewing ancient Spanish books available at the British Museum and other Libraries. As for the translations, we should not forget Juan de Escóiquiz and Antonio Schwager’s translations of Young in 1789 and 1802, respectively. In 1801, Mor de Fuentes translated into Spanish *Las estaciones del año* by Thomson, and Pedro Montegón did the same with *Fingal* by Macpherson in 1804. José Luis Munárriz translated the *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles-Letters* by Hugh Blair and published them in four volumes between 1789 and 1801, and Juan de la Dehesa published in 1807 the translation of *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* by Edmund Burke; José Fernández Guerra translated in the same years the “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard” by Gray, etc.<sup>1</sup>

It was during the first decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that the Romantic movement acquired a wider dimension. The colour and influence of Spanish legends and folklore were more present in the writings of many foreign writers who saw Spanish literature as a source of inspiration. We can think, for instance, of names such as Schlegel and Tieck in Germany, Percy, Southey, Scott, Byron, Savage Landor, Irving and Longfellow as representatives of the literature written in English, and Chateaubriand, Gautier, Musset, Mérimée in French. As for the relationship between England and Spain, Edgar Allison Peers points out the friendship established in Malta between John Hookham Frere, who had been government representative and minister in Spain and Portugal, and Ángel de Saavedra, also known as ‘el duque de Rivas’. He mentions different efforts to familiarise the English audience with Spanish literary masterpieces, such as translations, biographies, chronicles, historical novels, etc., all of

<sup>1</sup> For a further list and analysis of the translations that have more deeply influenced the Spanish Pre-romantic movement see Pujals 53-58.

them provided by both English writers and by Spanish intellectuals exiled in England, as well as travel books written by English authors that show interesting though many times fantastic and rather imaginative impressions on the life and literature of Spain (Peers 177-178).

Pujals makes a list of the most relevant writings and themes that were produced by the great romantics. William Wordsworth (1770-1850) has various sonnets on the Spanish Independence War. Robert Southey (1774-1843) travelled through Portugal and Spain, and he was very much concerned with our literature and history. Among his writings we find his long poem *Roderick, The Last of the Goths*, published in 1814, and inspired on the *Crónica de Don Rodrigo* by Pedro del Corral. Likewise, he wrote various poems on both countries collected in *Letters from Spain and Portugal* (1797), and during the years of the war he sang the most salient heroic events. He also reviewed ancient versions of the *Amadis of Gaul* (1803) and *Palmerin of England* (1807), translated the *Chronicle of the Cid* (1808), and versified the legend *Garci-Ferrandez* (1809). In 1807, he also published *Letters from England by Don Manuel Espriella*, which consists of a series of letters supposedly sent by a young Spaniard from England in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century; and between 1822 and 1832 he published the three volumes that conform the *History of the Peninsular War*. Esteban Pujals rewrites some of his better known praises of *El Poema del Cid*: "sobre toda comparación el poema más hermoso escrito en lengua española" and "puede decirse sin temor que de todos los poemas que se han compuesto después de *La Iliada*, *El Cid* es el más homérico en su espíritu" (Pujals 75). He was a very good friend of Blanco White, and in 1814 (March 29<sup>th</sup>) he became honorific member of the Real Academia Española de la Lengua (*Actas de la Real Academia Española* 113).

Walter Scott (1771-1832) also showed a clear interest in Spain and wrote *The Vision of Don Roderick*, published in 1811 and in some aspects inspired by Miguel de Lunas's original version of the text. With the economic benefits of his depiction of the siege of Spain by the moors, the greatness and decadence of the Empire, the usurpation of the crown by Napoleon and the arrival of the British army to fight hand in hand with the Spanish soldiers, he tried to relieve the devastating effects caused by the Napoleonic war in Portugal. Spain also inspired him in his novels. As we can read in the *Historia de la Literatura Española* (1926) by Fitzmaurize-Kelly, he recognised, as also did William Hazlitt (1778-1830), that the novels by Cervantes "le habían inspirado desde un principio el deseo de sobresalir en este género literario" (229).

Lord Byron (1788-1824) visited Spain in 1809. Two of his greatest epic poems remind us of his stay in the Peninsula: *Childe Harold* (1812-1818) and *Don Juan* (1819-1823). *Childe Harold* narrates in its first part the voyage of Harold to Lisbon and his trip through Spain.

*Don Juan*, notably inspired by Tirso de Molina's *El Burlador de Sevilla*, describes the adventures and love affairs of a young man from Seville, called don Juan. The action takes place in different places throughout Europe, Asia and the East Countries. Furthermore, Byron quoted Cervantes very often, and he even tried to imitate Quevedo in "The Vision of Judgement" (1822).

"To a Skylark" (1822) by Percy B. Shelley (1792-1822) was broadly read in Spain. Shelly himself mentioned in the last stage of his life his admiration for Calderón, as it becomes obvious if we pay attention to his poetic translations of various scenes that belong to *El Mágico Prodigioso* and *El Cisma de Inglaterra*.

Spanish folklore, popular culture and the Peninsular War caught the attention of Walter Savage Landor (1775-1864), who fought on the side of Spain against Napoleon; John Gibson Lockhart (1794-1854), who published his *Ancient Spanish Ballads* in 1823; George H. Borrow (1803-1881), who wrote *The Zincaly, or An Account of the Gipsies in Spain* (1841) and *The Bible in Spain* (1843) after two long stays in Spain; among others.

As for the impact of Spain on the United States we have to mention Washington Irving (1783-1859), with his *History of the Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus* (1828), *A Chronicle of the Conquest of Granada* (1829) and *The Alhambra* (1832); H. W. Longfellow (1807-1882), lecturer in Spanish Literature at Harvard University, who published a translation in English of *Las Coplas de Manrique* (1833), and a poetic drama, *The Spanish Student* (1843), based on Cervantes' *La Gitanilla* (1613), among other writings with a Spanish tone; James Fennimore Cooper (1789-1851), who wrote *Mercedes of Castile* (1840), dealing with the first voyage of Colon; William H. Prescott (1796-1859), with works such as *History of Ferdinand and Isabella* (1838), *History of the Conquest of Peru* (1847) or *History of the Reign of Philip the Second* (1855-1858), and disciple of the Scottish writer W. Robertson, the author of the book *The History of the Reign of the Emperor Charles the Fifth* (1857) in which Prescott added an appendix to its second edition; and finally George Ticknor (1791-1871), Professor of Spanish Literature at Harvard University, who wrote the *History of Spanish Literature* (1849) in three volumes.

As we have tried to point out in this outline of the mutual influences and contact points that exist between English and Spanish romanticisms, the bi-directional echoes between the two national cultural movements should never be overlooked when analysing the Romantic Movement in an international context.

### Bibliography

Arnaldo Alcubilla, Javier. *El Movimiento romántico*. Madrid: Grupo 16, 1989.

- Bejarano, Méndez. *Vida y obras de Don José María Blanco y Crespo*. Madrid, 1921.
- Cadalso, J. *Cartas Marruecas* (LXVII). Madrid: Clásicos Castellanos, 1935.
- Flitter, Derek. *Spanish Romantic literary theory and criticism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- Furst, Lilian R., ed. *European romanticism: self-definition: an anthology*. London: Methuen, 1980.
- Jacobson, Margaret D. *The Origins of Spanish romanticism: a selective annotated bibliography*. Society of Spanish and Spanish-American Studies, 1985.
- Kirkpatrick, Susan. *Las Románticas : women writers and subjectivity in Spain, 1835-1850*. Berkeley: University of California Press, cop. 1989.
- Losada, Elena. "El Héroe y la naturaleza, dos temas del romanticismo trágico en la elegía a Sir John Moore de Rosalía de Castro". En: *Estudios dedicados a Ricardo Carvalho Calero V.2*, José Luís Rodríguez ed. Santiago: Universidade de Santiago de Compostela, 2000.
- McClelland, I. L. *The Origins of the Romantic Movement in Spain*. Liverpool, 1937.
- Montoro, Antonio. *El Romanticismo literario europeo: 66 nombres, biografía, antología, crítica*. Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 1959.
- Navas Ruiz, Ricardo. *El Romanticismo español*. Madrid: Cátedra, 1990.
- Pacheco Paniagua, Juan Antonio y Carmelo Vera Saura, eds. *Romanticismo europeo: historia, poética e influencias*. Sevilla: Universidad de Sevilla, 1998.
- Peers, E. Allison. *Historia del Movimiento Romántico Español*. Madrid: Gredos, 1954.
- Pujals, Esteban. *El Romanticismo Inglés: Orígenes, repercusión y relaciones con la Literatura Española*. Santander: Universidad Internacional Menéndez Pelayo, 1969.
- Romero de Solís, Diego y Juan Bosco Díaz-Urmeneta Muñoz, eds. *La Memoria romántica*. Sevilla: Universidad de Sevilla, Secretaría de Publicaciones, 1997.
- Sebold, Russell P. *Trayectoria del romanticismo español: desde la Ilustración hasta Bécquer*. Barcelona: Crítica, 1983.
- Tieghem, Paul van. *El Romanticismo en la literatura europea*. México: Unión Tipográfica Editorial Hispano Americana, 1958.

