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Valentín de Llanos and Spanish Writing in Exile

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Editor Proof

5 With the collapse of the 1820–1823 liberal regime and the restoration of
6 absolute monarchy in Spain, many of the liberals who had supported the
7 constitutional government were forced into an exile that, in many cases,
8 lasted until the death of Ferdinand VII in 1833. The arrival of thousands
9 of Spanish refugees in London around 1823 coincided with a surge in
10 the number of publications with a Spanish theme, a rise towards which
11 some of these *émigrés* contributed with periodical articles, critical essays
12 and works of fiction. The 1823 liberal refugees included a high number
13 of politicians, writers, clerics and intellectuals, and although in many
14 cases their experience was largely one of misery and isolation, a number
15 of them had enough resources and connections to produce a considerable
16 written legacy.¹ The periodicals and printing presses set up by the
17 exiles, their literary and historical works in English and Spanish, translations
18 and involvement in the London book trade, all had an impact on a
19 society and culture that had a vested interest in Spain both as a strategic
20 area of political influence and as a *locus* for Romantic literary expression.

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21 The question that this essay tries to elucidate is how to locate an
22 exiled viewpoint which, while firmly inscribed in an English literary field
23 where the typification of Spain and its inhabitants was being subjected to
24 a series of complex exoticizing dynamics, was also attempting to codify
25 its own national customs and manners with an emphasis on defining a
26 new Spanish liberal national identity. In order to do this, we will focus
27 on an episode in the reception of Valentin de Llanos' *Don Esteban; or,*
28 *Memoirs of a Spaniard* (1825), a curious novel written by an exile which
29 became the subject of harsh criticism by one of the most prominent
30 of the Spanish exiles in London: Joseph Blanco White. The polemics
31 between Llanos and Blanco allows us to examine the way in which
32 national identity was being negotiated in reference to the recent political
33 past, as well as in the context of British Romantic imaginations of Spain.

34 The fall of the Spanish liberal regime in 1823 had increased the rivalry
35 amongst the two factions of an increasingly divided Spanish liberalism:
36 the *moderados*, who believed that the aims of the revolution had been
37 achieved when the king swore the constitutional oath in 1820 and now
38 wanted a balance of power between the monarch and the parliament,
39 and the radical *exaltados* who were pushing for increasing reforms and
40 would often rely on the role of secret revolutionary societies. The resto-
41 ration of absolutism also divided European public opinion, particularly
42 in Britain, where Whigs and Radicals showed concern about the fate of
43 the exiles and their revolutionary attempts at regaining power, while the
44 Tories generally regarded them with mistrust (Llorens 125). The events
45 of 1823 were the subject of parliamentary debates, pamphlets and a
46 wave of travelers' accounts where the description of Spain and its cul-
47 ture was framed by the events of 1820–1823, such as Giuseppe Pecchio's
48 *Anecdotes of the Spanish and Portuguese revolutions* (1823) or Michael
49 Quin's *A visit to Spain* (1823).

50 From a literary point of view, the arrival of the *émigrés* meant the
51 irruption of native Spanish authors in a literary market in which the
52 Spanish theme had been approached with a mixture of exoticism and
53 pragmatism. As Mónica Bolufer has recently showed, the exclusion of
54 Spain from the Grand Tour did not discourage a considerable number
55 of eighteenth-century travelers from visiting a country whose interest
56 lay precisely in its being off the beaten track. The case of Spain invited
57 travelers to reflect on the reasons for the rise and fall of empires (exces-
58 sive wealth, religious fanaticism, the absolutist erosion of liberties) at a
59 time when the image of the country was being molded into that of a



60 negative type of backward civilization. It was also during the eighteenth
61 century when the image of Spain became loaded with the connotations
62 of a mythical European borderland, though travelers such as William
63 Beckford had to confess their disappointment at finding a reality that was
64 much more complex and familiar than that of the Romantic clichés.

65 In any case, romance and history were often adjacent concepts, par-
66 ticularly when it came to a country whose history was seen as a reposi-
67 tory of fascinating topics for literature but also whose revolutionary
68 upheavals had profound implications for British government policy and
69 political culture (Davies 102–118; Murphy “Critics” 119–129). This
70 tension between strategic interests and the literary imagination was deci-
71 sive in the configuration of British Romantic notions of Spanishness in
72 the 1820s, when ideas about the exemplarity of Spanish constitution-
73 alism or how Spanish liberals negotiated the tortuous path of political
74 liberties were often infused with interpretations of the Spanish national
75 character in a chivalric key.

76 Exiled writers such as José María Blanco White and Valentín de
77 Llanos, writing in English for a British public, contributed to the
78 “Spanish theme” with a perspective authorized by their provenance and
79 personal experiences. Focusing on the reception of one of the novels by
80 Llanos and, in particular, the controversy that its publication sparked off
81 between the author and Blanco White, this chapter explores the way in
82 which the exiles negotiated their place within the voices that were shap-
83 ing the British Romantic image of Spain, a process which until then had
84 been led by a northern European interpretation of both its people and its
85 literary tradition.

86 Diego Saglia has recently addressed some of the issues behind the
87 idea of an essentially romantic Spain “that existed abroad only as an
88 image, [...] a Spain whose major contribution to European Romanticism
89 was that of being a passive mirror, and [...] a Spanish Romanticism
90 that evolved apart from this image, its only relation with the “abroad”
91 being that the latter filled it with submissively received models”
92 (“Romanticism” 131). Rather than an intersection of influences and
93 origins, what Saglia highlights is how the “historicizable use of the dis-
94 course of Spanish difference” was received, adapted and confronted by
95 the generation of Spaniards who negotiated aspects of Romantic ideol-
96 ogy in response to local circumstances as well in full awareness of the
97 image being projected outside its borders. This has profound impli-
98 cations for the position in which the exiles of 1823 found themselves.



99 The *émigrés* did not only embody Romantic Spain and the literary con-
100 structions of the Spanish character, but in some cases became active
101 participants in the literary field, writing fiction and critical essays on
102 “Romantic Spanishness” for the English reader.

103 Valentín de Llanos Gutiérrez had been exiled from Spain since the first
104 absolutist restoration in 1814. He had met Fanny Keats during his travels
105 in Italy, where the pair got married and eventually settled in London in
106 1823. He achieved a certain notoriety thanks to his two Spanish-themed
107 novels *Don Esteban; or, Memoirs of a Spaniard* (1825) and *Sandoval; or,*
108 *the Free-Mason* (1826).² Both novels are set during the Napoleonic Wars
109 and liberal revolutions in the Peninsula, and the portrayal of the conflict
110 is deeply influenced by *exaltado* or radical liberalism, with a strong anti-
111 clerical bent. In his historical exegesis of the Peninsular War, Llanos high-
112 lights the positive role of the guerrillas, the damages inflicted upon the
113 Spanish nation by the alliance of the monarchy and the clergy, and the
114 patriotic spirit of the peasantry. *Don Esteban* became a significant work in
115 the output produced by the Spanish exiles in Britain and was the subject
116 of a considerable number of reviews in the press due to the polarized
117 views that its positive depiction of radical liberalism originated among the
118 periodicals respectively controlled by Tories and Whigs.

119 The plot of the novel centers itself on the love between Esteban and
120 Isabella and its obstacles due to the apparent plebeian origins of the
121 former and the outbreak of the Peninsular War. After a series of mili-
122 tary exploits with the guerrillas, Esteban reunites himself with his fam-
123 ily at the end of the war and is imprisoned by the Inquisition owing
124 to some letters sent to Isabella in which he criticized the King and the
125 Inquisition. After escaping from the Tribunal’s dungeons, Esteban joins
126 the Royal Guards and witnesses several historical events such as the
127 Battle of Vitoria, the proceedings of the Cortes in Cadiz, the Absolutist
128 restoration and exile of the liberals. The novel ends around the time of
129 the 1820 liberal revolution, with the marriage of Esteban and Isabella.

130 The Peninsular War had been an important turning point in the liter-
131 ary representations of Spain in Britain. Wellington’s peninsular campaign
132 excited considerable interest among English readership, thanks to histori-
133 cal works such as the *History of the War in the Peninsula and the South*
134 *of France* (1828–1840) by Colonel William Francis Patrick Napier or
135 the monumental *History of the Peninsular War* (1823–1832) by Robert
136 Southey. Brian Dendle considered *Don Esteban* as the first example of
137 the novel of the Peninsular War which would be later followed by the



138 anonymous *Ned Clinton; or the Commissary* (1825), George Robert
139 Gleig's *The Subaltern* (1825), *Salvador, The Guerrilla*, by the exile
140 Telesforo de Trueba y Cossio (1834) and others. These works, accord-
141 ing to Dendle, would be presented as memoirs based on personal obser-
142 vation, thus prioritizing the description of the war and its horrors over
143 other aspects of the plot (64).

144 In *Don Esteban*, the first-person narrative is often interrupted by
145 lengthy descriptions of Spanish customs, manners, characters and loca-
146 tions, but also by historical episodes which are more or less integrated
147 into the fictional plot. Esteban's joining of the Royal Guards, for
148 instance, allows the author to dedicate a full chapter to the description of
149 palace life under Ferdinand and to draw a sketch of his character which
150 culminates in a diatribe against the monarch and the "scandalous abuse"
151 of power by his ministers (3: 1834). In this fashion, Llanos was contribut-
152 ing to the image of Ferdinand as a wicked king promoted by exiled writ-
153 ers who, like Ivaró Álvaro Flórez Estrada, began to openly question the
154 role of the king in the events of the Peninsular War and the 1820–1823
155 liberal triennium (Simal 829).

156 One of the central themes in *Don Esteban* is the appraisal of the role
157 played by each of the military powers involved. According to Salvador
158 García Castañeda, the novels of the Peninsular War written by exiled
159 Spaniards in London attempted to portray the role of the Spanish army
160 and the guerrillas as decisive in the defeat of Napoleon, thus challenging
161 the predominant image, transmitted by Napier's account, of the brave
162 but barbaric and undisciplined character of the Spanish combatants. The
163 defence of the guerrillas and the pronounced anti-monarchism and anti-
164 clericalism of the novel situate it within the *exaltado* or radical wing of
165 Spanish liberalism, and it could be read, as Salvador García Castañeda has
166 suggested, as a propagandistic work (54–56).

167 A personal recollection of Spanish reality, *Don Esteban* also partici-
168 pated in the broader European Romantic interpretation of the Spanish
169 character as one marked by innate honor and heroism. According to
170 Llanos, the armies that occupied Spain in 1808 misunderstood the
171 Spanish character, as they failed to realize that it was essentially differ-
172 ent to that of the other, conquered, European nations: "their national
173 character, their pride and hatred of foreign intruders, their constancy
174 and perseverance under repeated misfortunes; such were the great points
175 which Napoleon, in his calculations, disregarded, and which were the
176 cause of his final overthrow" (1: 149).



177 However, both *Don Esteban* and Llanos' later novel *Sandoval* also
178 aimed to portray Spanish life and in particular those mannerisms and
179 customs which defined national identity. In the Introduction, Llanos
180 presents himself as a romantic exile whose life story is interwoven with
181 the convoluted events of recent Iberian history. But he is also a curious
182 observer who “takes the reader into the interior of private houses, and
183 shows him what is worthy of notice there; introduces to the tertulias,
184 balls, assemblies, and public places; leads him to the romerías, convents,
185 nunneries and palaces; gives him an insight into the national and pri-
186 vate character of the Spaniards and shews them *as they really are*, not as
187 they very often appear to the prejudices eyes of a foreigner” (1: 149).
188 Ubiquitous and perceptive, the narrator of *Don Esteban* adopts the guise
189 of the cultural observer typical of travel writing but also that of the
190 urban spectator of the Eighteenth-century satirical tradition, who peers
191 inside the houses of the city in order to present us with “pictures” of
192 its dwellers. This form of moral observation and cultural generalization
193 was already a well-established feature in travel literature and other gen-
194 res concerned with exotic or liminal cultures, including works of a very
195 similar conception such as Thomas Hope's *Anastasius; or, Memoirs of a*
196 *Greek*, published by John Murray in 1819, which also hovers between
197 the extremes of pure literary fiction and rigorous historical depiction.³

198 This interest in describing national and local culture was also to be
199 found in some Spanish periodicals that were slowly moving towards
200 the representation of customs and manners or *costumbres*. In Spain, the
201 genre of *cuadro de costumbres* (sketches of customs and manners) had
202 its apogee around the 1830s and 1840s, coinciding with the European
203 vogue for urban sketches and the panoramic collections that portrayed
204 city life in world capitals from the Americas to Moscow (Lauster). In
205 London, Spanish exiles such as Joaquín de Mora wrote articles about
206 Spanish customs which were later reprinted in pioneering *costumbrista*
207 publications in Spain (Muñoz Sempere “Mora”). Perhaps more impor-
208 tantly, the genre had been undergoing a transformation since the begin-
209 ning of the century. The satire of customs, particularly that which was
210 found in periodical publications, was becoming increasingly concerned
211 with the historical and geographical specificity of national customs or
212 mores. The critic José Escobar used the term *mí mesis costumbrista* in
213 reference to the form taken by the Spanish sketches, which continued
214 the earlier essayistic tradition of the moral philosopher in the guise of
215 the urban observer, but now with a marked emphasis on how the moral



216 types described were determined by their social class, profession, poli-
217 tics or national identity (Escobar). Moral philosophy becomes “histori-
218 cized” and the starting point for satire is not universal vices and errors
219 but rather the present in its historical specificity.

220 These apparently contradictory dynamics—the creation of exotic
221 images of Spain for British consumption and the *costumbrista* construc-
222 tion of archetypal identities—share that “impulse to classify nature and
223 man into types” that Edward Said associates with modern Orientalist
224 discursive structures (119). The process of typification that underscores
225 much of Llanos’ portrayal of local Spanish reality in *Don Esteban* con-
226 stitutes an explanation of the Spanish ethos to an English audience, a
227 repository of examples that illustrated Spanish “characters” such as the
228 revolutionary hero, the guerrilla, the fanatic monk or the bullfighter.
229 Moreover, as a Spaniard himself, he was also undertaking a process of
230 self-definition: for Llanos and other exiles Spanish themes and characters
231 were not exotic fragments from a nation on the fringes of Europe, but
232 rather a personal recollection of national identity.

233 The Spanish liberal exile took place in the years when modern
234 Spanish nationalism was still taking shape, between the first manifesta-
235 tions of national self-consciousness and political emancipation during
236 the Napoleonic Wars and the mid-century political projects of nation-
237 building. The 1820s and 1830s saw the emergence of several histori-
238 cal, legalistic and political interpretations of Spain: these versions of
239 Spanishness were not as established as they would be towards the end of
240 the century, but there was already a sense of national belonging and an
241 attempt to come up with an interpretation of national history in order
242 to legitimise the new political structures and modern, liberal citizenship
243 (Junco). The interpretation of recent history, of the motivation of pop-
244 ular upheavals and of the success or failure of the constitutional experi-
245 ments, was at the heart of the political projects of the *liberales*, but also
246 an important point of contention among themselves. In this context,
247 Llanos’ portrayal of Spanishness and the political convulsions of the
248 recent years soon became part of debate among exiled Spaniards about
249 the Spanish character and the ideology conveyed by these representations.

250 *Don Esteban* was primarily aimed at an English audience, and, out-
251 side of those within the Spanish exile community who could read
252 English, it was hardly known in Spain before the twentieth century.
253 The reception of the novel in London, including the reactions by other
254 Spanish exiles, allow us a glimpse into some of the issues at stake in



255 the representation of the recent Spanish past. Some of these issues had
256 been openly discussed in some of the Spanish-language periodicals of
257 the exile, and with the polemics unleashed by *Don Esteban* they were
258 now being played out to a wider audience in articles and pamphlets
259 written in English: such was the case of the role played out by radical
260 liberalism and secret societies in the downfall of the 1820–1823 liberal
261 regime, an issue that had polarized exiled publications such as the radi-
262 cal *El Español Constitucional* (1818–1820, 1824–1825) and the moder-
263 ate *Ocios de Españoles Emigrados* (1824–1827). Some other questions,
264 however, transcended the assessment of the recent past and the ideolog-
265 ical divisions between *émigrés* and touched upon issues more explicitly
266 related to the Romantic construction of the Spanish character and its
267 historical or immanent character.

268 The early reviews of *Don Esteban* were generally positive. According
269 to the *New Monthly Magazine*, the novel informed the reader “of the
270 present state of society and manners in a highly interesting and but lit-
271 tle known country; for that the actual state of manners in Spain, close
272 at hand as it is, is but little known to the rest of Europe, is no less true
273 than extraordinary” (13: 514). Apart from the depiction of the atroc-
274 ities of the Peninsular War, an issue that keeps surfacing in the reviews
275 is that of the reliability of the novel’s allegedly factual section. The *New*
276 *Monthly Magazine* reviewer questioned politely the veracity of some of
277 the most extraordinary passages, such as those where the degeneracy of
278 Ferdinand VII is depicted, while the *Literary Gazette* gave full credence
279 to the assurances by the author that “the History is real; and written too
280 by an able delineator” (429: 226–227). *The Examiner*, one of the papers
281 that had been more interested in the fate of the Spanish liberal exiles,
282 showed a deeper appreciation for the novel and its mixture of different
283 elements and styles and commended the novel precisely for its mix of
284 novel, history and observation of customs and manners. The *Examiner*
285 also underlined the curious generic mix of a novel that—

286 ...conveys much important information, amuses with many agreeable
287 narratives, and displays great strength of principle and sympathy with his
288 afflicted countrymen. As the Memoirs relate to all the great movements
289 in the Peninsula, from its invasion by the French to the total extinction
290 of every thing liberal under the infatuated and treacherous Ferdinand, it
291 may be said to exhibit an epitome of the history of modern Spain, both
292 military and political: it at the same time abounds with personal adventure,



293 containing evidently a body of true history, accompanied with many strik-
294 ing incidents, which give it sometimes the air of a romance. In descriptions
295 of the country and people of Spain, as well as of its customs and man-
296 ners, it greatly excels... In a word, the aim of Esteban has been, to retrace
297 the history of his own life, to furnish just notions of the living manners of
298 Spain, and to lay before English readers an unvarnished history of facts,
299 with a scrupulous regard to truth. (2 May 1825)

300 Reviewers generally perceived *Don Esteban's* mixture of a fictional nar-
301 rative and contemporary historical facts as a positive novelty. This assess-
302 ment was also applied to Llanos' second novel *Sandoval*, which is set
303 after the restoration of Ferdinand VII and features a protagonist more
304 involved with the revolutionary activities of the secret societies as well
305 as more adventures involving the Spanish Inquisition. According to the
306 *Examiner*, *Sandoval* was "an attempt at a very difficult species of compo-
307 sition, that would combine the freshness and agreeableness of novel writ-
308 ing with the details of chronological arrangement and the seriousness of
309 historical truth" and one that "must be received as history; and may be
310 read as faithful history of those six busy years" (7 May 1826).

311 The question of authenticity became crucial in the later dispute
312 between Blanco White and Llanos, and its implications are evident: a
313 factual, semi-autobiographical text on Spain where reality seems extraor-
314 dinary would increase its appeal to the reader, while an excess of extraor-
315 dinary events and hyperbole would have the opposite effect, turning
316 the account into yet another Spanish tale. Although the doubts as to
317 the genre of the text seem to concern the novel's expressive style (its
318 "high colouring and pathos"), the author of the *Examiner* review goes
319 on to compare the reading of *Don Esteban* with that of the Countess
320 D'Aulnoy's *Lady's Travels in Spain*, a seventeenth-century travel
321 account of Spain known for its exaggerations and apocryphal status
322 (15 September 1822). Yet, the novel's focus on recent history and its
323 accumulation of factual details and personal observation of historic fig-
324 ures made it hard to classify in generic terms. It was set in too recent a
325 time to be a historical novel in the style of Walter Scott, but it was not a
326 Gothic tale either, nor a historical work or account of exotic lands (since
327 it deals with "near" history).

328 In a similar vein, the *Literary Chronicle* considered the novel's rep-
329 resentation of Spanish customs interesting, but also manifested a slight
330 suspicion, not necessarily about the credibility of the authors, but rather



331 about him being a Spanish exile rather than an English author. Later,
332 this became one of the main issues of contention between Llanos and
333 Blanco White, and it illustrates the importance of the Spanish authorship
334 of the novel in securing its popular appeal. According to this reviewer, it
335 was striking that a foreigner “should display so intimate an acquaintance
336 with our literature, as to head each chapter with some apposite quotation
337 and that, too, not unfrequently from works with which even the English
338 reader is not generally acquainted” (23 April 1825).

339 Though most of the early reviews were positive, *Don Esteban* (1825)
340 received a much less appreciative response from the *Tory Quarterly*
341 *Review*, a periodical that devoted an inordinate amount of space to the
342 novels by Llanos, presumably in order to mount an attack on the radi-
343 calism that had led to the 1820–1823 liberal triennium in Spain. The
344 author of the review was Joseph Blanco White, another exiled Spaniard
345 and one of the most important intellectuals of his generation. A Sevillian
346 priest and liberal journalist during the post-1808 Peninsular upheav-
347 als, Blanco had emigrated to Britain in 1810 where he had converted
348 to Anglicanism. In 1822 he had published his *Letters from Spain*,
349 under the pseudonym Leucadio Doblado a semi-autobiographical nar-
350 rative which had been a commercial success and was often referred to
351 as a definitive account of Spanish customs. Though advertised by some
352 publications as an “excellent supplement and companion” to Doblado’s
353 *Letters* (*Kaleidoscope* 23 April 1825), *Don Esteban* in effect encroached
354 upon a portion of the literary market already cornered by Blanco White’s
355 *Letters from Spain*. These works, in spite of some episodes where they
356 show a significant resemblance which did not pass unnoticed to Blanco,
357 had conflicting views of the Spanish society and politics. Llanos showed
358 sympathy towards *exaltado* liberalism, while Blanco was closer to the
359 more anglophile, moderate “historical” constitutionalism. In turn, they
360 conveyed opposite assessments of the 1820–1823 revolutionary period
361 and the reasons for the return of absolutist despotism, a rather divisive
362 issue within the Spanish exiled community in London (Llorens 1974
363 195–198).

364 Blanco began his review of *Don Esteban* challenging its claim to
365 authenticity: he denied that the author could be a Spaniard, but rather
366 a second-rate English novelist, probably aided by a Spanish collabora-
367 tor. Beyond the ideological issues at stake, Blanco had reasons to doubt
368 the way in which *Don Esteban* had been presented to the public: the
369 novel had been printed and published by Henry Colburn, a notorious



370 publisher who had previously worked with Blanco on his *Letters of Spain*.
371 Accused of sensationalism and exploitation, Colburn is known in English
372 publishing history, though perhaps unjustly, as an opportunist who
373 flooded the market with works of little literary merit, often employing
374 unscrupulous promotional strategies. These tactics included the adver-
375 tisement of *The Vampire* by Polidori as if it were a prose work by Byron,
376 or the withdrawal of copies of Catherine Gore's *Diary of a Désennuyée*
377 (1836) from bookstores claiming that it was immoral and pernicious to
378 the public, only to put it back on sale later on, thus turning it into a
379 best-seller. His favorite subterfuge was to make his writers publish anon-
380 ymously or under a pseudonym, in a way that the speculations about the
381 authorship of the book—and, more often than not, the public arguments
382 over it—would excite the curiosity of the reader (Sutherland).

383 The complex interplay of pseudonyms and found manuscripts
384 deployed in Blanco's *Letters from Spain*, and which he abandoned after
385 the first edition, fitted perfectly the marketing strategies of the Colburn
386 house, as did the anonymous publication of *Don Esteban* and the specu-
387 lations over its authorship mentioned above. Blanco was familiar with the
388 way in which Colburn worked, and he started the review of the follow-
389 ing novel by Llanos, *Sandoval*, by dismissing as “tricks of puffing” its
390 claims to have been written by a Spaniard (“Sandoval” 488).

391 The marketing tactics deployed by Colburn were not the only reason
392 adduced by Blanco in order to challenge the claims of *Don Esteban* to
393 Spanish authorship. In his review, Blanco declares that “the national fea-
394 tures are certainly there; but so distorted, so like a portrait attempted
395 by an unskillful painter, half from recollection, half from description,
396 that we confess we are at a loss to conjecture the whole truth as to the
397 stock and parentage of this work”. Besides the spelling of words such as
398 *Calatayud* or *gaditanos*, and the wrong transcription of Spanish verse,
399 the most striking defect of *Don Esteban* was, according to Blanco, the
400 distorted portrayal of manners and customs, which, mixed with isolated
401 examples of what appeared to be insider's knowledge, led him to assert
402 that the novel was the work of an Englishman advised by a Spaniard.
403 A good example he cites is the picturesque description of a *romería*, a
404 popular celebration involving a pilgrimage to a religious shrine, in which
405 Spaniards from all classes and sexes mingled together. These “noisy
406 and in general grossly offensive meetings” are portrayed by Llanos as a
407 “kind of Arcadian festival” (“Don Esteban” 208). The romantic por-
408 trayal of the peasantry and urban populace is one of the aspects of the



409 novel that Blanco considers more discordant with reality; such is the case
410 of the *Manolas*—a stereotype akin to that of the *maja*—from Madrid,
411 who according to White are endowed with elegant features in the novel
412 whereas in reality they are “the coarsest, lowest and most disgusting of
413 the Spanish females” (208).

414 In *Don Esteban*, the *romería* is characterized by outbursts of poetic
415 improvisation: Llanos asserts that Spanish is a language naturally suited
416 to poetry, only equaled by Italian, and therefore popular gatherings and
417 festivities usually feature extempore performances of perfectly rhym-
418 ing poems as well as prolonged poetic disputes among the participants.
419 Blanco considered this episode from *Don Esteban* the best example of the
420 novel’s reprehensible tendency to depict customs and manners through
421 stereotyped, a priori prejudices. “The only mode of accounting”, Blanco
422 acerbically noted, “for such outrageous misstatements is to suppose the
423 union of an undue portion of national vanity with an utter ignorance of
424 the peculiar difficulties which the Spanish language opposes to ready ver-
425 sification, and of the advantages possessed by the Italian” (208).

426 This point about the relation between the Spanish language and the
427 “poetic” nature of Spaniards became one of the most contested issues
428 in the polemic between Llanos and Blanco, and it echoes contempo-
429 rary Romantic ideas about Spain. In 1824, John Bowring had published
430 his *Ancient Poetry and Romances of Spain*, where he described Spanish
431 poetry as intrinsically linked to the Spanish national character, in such
432 a way that even present-day customs, thoughts and emotions could
433 be seen as emanations of the medieval *romancero*, and its frontier bal-
434 lads in particular. The Muslim influence and the chivalric spirit of the
435 Christians had blended into a poetic language which had permanently
436 shaped the Spanish mind. These ideas had already been popularized by
437 A. W. Schlegel in his Vienna lectures on literary history (*Vorlesungen*
438 *über dramatische Kunst und Literatur, 1809–1811*), where he defended
439 Spanish literature against French classicist prejudices as the expression
440 of a national spirit of honor, heroism and faith, as well as the prod-
441 uct of a language which had kept its Gothic and Oriental overtones
442 (Schlegel 498). The episode of the *romería* in *Don Esteban* would be
443 thus indebted to the Schlegelian conception of Spain as a country where
444 poetry is interwoven into the daily life of its inhabitants and in popular
445 events and festivities.⁴

446 Blanco continues his review with a historical survey of the origins of
447 the Spanish tendency towards exaggerated national vanity. For Blanco,



448 the representation of Spanish heroism in *Don Esteban* did not prove the
449 existence of a singular, transhistorical Spanish character, but rather the
450 relapse of the author into the greatest “national defect”, namely, “that
451 spirit of rodomontade, that absolute inability to draw any object in its
452 natural dimensions, to which the Spaniards seem to be more subject in
453 these their days of national wretchedness than even at the period of their
454 dazzling and transient glory” (“Don Esteban” 217). Accordingly, he
455 saw the narrative voice of *Don Esteban* as distorted by pride and boasting
456 and thus as incapable of identifying the features of Spanish identity that
457 might have been contributed to the downfall of the nation and the cycle
458 of occupation, war and civil upheaval unleashed in 1808. Blanco shows a
459 very different conception of the Spanish character, one defined by historical
460 dynamism: the fall into decadence suffered by Spanish Empire in the
461 seventeenth century left, according to Blanco, a lasting legacy of pride,
462 bragging and misrepresentation.

463 The quixotic sense of grandeur of the Spaniards and their uncompromising
464 nature extended to the present, both in the Spanish policy of
465 intransigent domination towards its colonies and in the proclamation of
466 a Constitution: extreme measures which, according to Blanco, led to the
467 American emancipatory movements and, in the Peninsula, managed to
468 “leave their country entirely in the grasp of despotism, which they had
469 goaded into madness” (213). “Conscious of their own powers,” Blanco
470 continues, “endowed generally with vivid and powerful imaginations,
471 and, from the highest to the lowest, familiar at all periods of life with
472 fragments of their ancient history magnified by romance and tradition;
473 no people on earth were ever more reluctant to acknowledge their own
474 insignificance” (211). If Llanos adopts some Romantic motifs in his representation
475 of the Spanish character, Blanco sees it as a victim of its own
476 self-image, unable to examine its own present without the persistent
477 shadow of its imperial past.

478 The review continues with a synopsis of the novel where Blanco
479 mocks the hyperbolic actions described, the near-fantastic elements
480 of the plot and the ornate language used to describe Esteban’s love
481 towards Isabella. Blanco finishes, however, with a serious tone of warning
482 towards the author and the “assurances of reality” that he prefixes to
483 his novel, since these constitute “not only an offence in literature, but in
484 morals” (217).

485 As Vicente Llorens pointed out, Blanco’s review of *Don Esteban* is
486 marked by the Tory strategy of opposition to continental revolutionary



487 liberalism that characterized the *Quarterly Review* (*Liberales* 264).
488 However, Blanco, who became increasingly critical of the conservatives and
489 the Anglican establishment after his change of mind over the question of
490 Catholic Emancipation in 1829, was also concerned about the way in which
491 Spanish manners and customs were being represented, and in particular with
492 the Romantic image of Spain, or the portrayal of the Spanish character on
493 the borders between literature and life, between reality and fiction.

494 Blanco's own *Letters from Spain* opened with an apology about their fic-
495 tional contents and reassured the reader that "the sketches of Spanish man-
496 ners, customs and opinions, by means of which the author has endeavored
497 to portray the moral state of his country" were not "exaggerated by fancy,
498 and colored with a view to that effect" (vi). Though showing great appre-
499 ciation of accounts such as Joseph Townsend's *A Journey through Spain*
500 (1791), Blanco questioned the reliability of the image of Spain usually
501 conveyed by travel narratives, as well as, with hindsight, his own impres-
502 sions of Britain at the time of his arrival in 1810, in ways that re-echo José
503 Cadalso's attacks on the superficiality of travelers' impressions of Spain in
504 his *Cartas Marruecas* (1789). His skepticism of supra-historical constants
505 or national essences, leads him to examine manners and customs as inextric-
506 ably linked to politics and institutions such as the Church:

507 You must excuse, however, my declining to give you a sketch of the
508 national character of the Spaniards. I have always considered such descrip-
509 tions as absolutely unmeaning—a mere assemblage of antitheses, where
510 good and bad qualities are contrasted for effect, and with little foundation
511 in nature. No man's powers of observation can be, at once, so accurate
512 and extensive, so minute and generalizing, as to be capable of embody-
513 ing the peculiar features of millions into an abstract being, which shall
514 contain traces of them all. Yet this is what most travelers attempt after a
515 few weeks residence—what we are accustomed to expect from the time
516 that a Geographical Grammar is first put into our hands. I shall not, there-
517 fore, attempt either abstraction or classification, but endeavor to collect as
518 many facts as may enable others to perceive the general tendency of the
519 civil and religious state of my country, and to judge of its influence on the
520 improvement or degradation of this portion of mankind, independently of
521 the endless modifications which arise from the circumstances, external and
522 internal, of every individual (26–27).

523 *Letter from Spain* starts precisely from the identification of a series
524 of social factors that shaped the national character in its contemporary



525 form. Where Llanos documented a set of innate characteristics that the
526 fight of the *liberales* against tyranny reawakened, Blanco shows an acute
527 awareness of the role of institutions and historical developments in the
528 configuration of national identity and also emphasizes, in his largely
529 autobiographical introduction, how his own perspective conditions his
530 view of the Spanish reality.

531 The review was answered by Llanos in a pamphlet printed by
532 Colburn, in which he defended himself from the inaccuracies and exag-
533 gerations identified by Blanco and accused him of insulting the Spanish
534 national character. For Llanos, “the Spaniard had always been the
535 same” (*Letter from a Spaniard* 23) an asseveration which he grounded
536 upon the observations of historians since Roman times. Spanish brav-
537 ery and heroism had remained immutable since Roman times and had
538 only been reawakened with the anti-Napoleonic uprising of 2 May
539 1808.⁵ Blanco, on the contrary, argues that Spanish vanity originated in
540 Habsburg Spain. It was because of the peculiar historical circumstances
541 of that era that the Spaniards became arrogant and unable to come to
542 terms with their national insignificance. In a similar line, an article in
543 *Ocios de Españoles Emigrados*, a Spanish-language periodical published by
544 the exiled community in London, took the *Quarterly Review* article on
545 Llanos’ “memoirs” as an attack on the Spanish character, which was pre-
546 sented as stubborn and demagogical, as well as responsible for the down-
547 fall of the liberal regime and the restoration of absolutism. The *Ocios*
548 rejected this diagnosis and insisted that Spain had shown its true nature
549 in the glorious display of national independence against Napoleon (5. 24
550 (1826): 217).⁶

551 In August 1826 the *Westminster Review* published under “Spanish
552 novels” a review article of the two novels by Llanos and his pamphlet
553 defending *Don Esteban*. The authorship of this review was attrib-
554 uted by Llorens to Antonio Alcalá Galiano, a Spanish exile who, dur-
555 ing the 1820–1823 revolutionary triennium, had been known as one
556 of the most prominent radicals in the revolutionary clubs of Madrid,
557 although he would later turn his allegiance towards the *moderados* and
558 become Minister of Navy in 1836. Galiano offers a reasonably positive
559 appraisal of the novel and defends the generic amalgam which “com-
560 bines the writers of travels and of memoirs” and which can be seen as an
561 attempt to do with Spain what Madame de Staël had done with Italy in
562 her novel *Corinne, or, Italy* (1807), if perhaps not with the same success
563 (279). After reviewing the travel books that had been written on Spain



564 (and accusing Blanco's *Letters* of harboring "angry feelings" against
565 the religion and country that he abandoned when he converted to
566 Anglicanism), Galiano proceeds to extricate what elements are fictional
567 and which come from direct observation in the novel, praising the latter
568 as either accurate and well-drawn or as improbable, such as the case of
569 the hero's escape from the prisons of the Inquisition.

570 Galiano uses his review to defend the Spanish authorship of *Don*
571 *Esteban* since he knows "as a fact, that Don Esteban is written by a native
572 Spaniard, having, indeed, made a long residence in this country, and not
573 belonging to those individuals who have been lately driven away from
574 their homeland, though united to them by kindred feeling and similar
575 opinions" (282). Similarly, he takes upon himself the defence of Llanos,
576 both in points of Spanish language and spelling and in accusations such
577 as that on excessive national pride. As Galiano points out, this accusation
578 is a curious one given that according to Blanco himself the author could
579 not have been a true Spaniard.

580 Galiano's article becomes a defence against Blanco's criticism of
581 aspects of Spanish liberalism—something he had done before in his
582 Spanish-language periodical *El Español* (1810–1812), where he criticized
583 the policies of the Courts of Cádiz—such as the unicameral legislature
584 adopted by the liberals in 1810 and 1820, the attacks on the person of
585 the king, the concomitance with popular revolutionary elements, etc. If
586 his opinion of Llanos' novels is not uncompromisingly positive, his political
587 stance leads him to prioritize the propagandistic value of the novel
588 over Blanco's caveats about verisimilitude: "The moral effect of those
589 works must be at any rate good [even] if they portray tyranny of a some-
590 what blacker dye than its true ones" (303).

591 The romance of recent history, the "blacker dye" with which Llanos
592 adorns the patriotism of the Spanish peasants or the tortures of the by
593 then rather rickety Spanish Inquisition of the 1810s and 1820s, had a
594 distinctive political value for the community of exiles, as well as liter-
595 ary currency in the somewhat crowded market of books about Spain.
596 Blanco's reading of *Don Esteban* was fueled by the interests of British
597 party politics, but it also voices a critique of the Romantic conception
598 of Spanish difference and the literature that reinforced transcenden-
599 tal conceptions of Spanish identity. In what Guillermo Díaz-Plaja called
600 the "round trip" of Spanish themes between the Peninsula and north-
601 ern Europe, a journey from which familiar themes return to Spain in
602 exotic forms, a Romantic mirror forged outside its borders (226), exiles



603 such as Blanco and Llanos claimed for themselves a preeminent role in
604 a Romantic configuration of images of the Spanish character which was
605 often intersected by the interpretation of recent political upheavals.

606 NOTES

- 607 1. The most complete survey of the history of this emigration is still Llorens
608 *Liberales*. See also Muñoz and Alonso and Durán and Gavino.
609 2. In the case of *Don Esteban*, the novel was the subject of extensive reviews
610 in *The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal*, 13 (1825): 513–520;
611 *The Literary Gazette* 429 (1825): 226–227; *The Literary Chronicle* 6
612 (1825): 258–261; *The Kaleidoscope* 5 (1825): 365–365; *London Magazine*
613 *and Review* 2 (1825): 221–224; *Quarterly Review* 33 (1825): 205–217;
614 *Westminster Review*, 6 (1826): 278–303. It was also translated into
615 German in 1827 by Ludwig von Alvensleben (under his “Gustav Sellen”
616 pen-name).
617 3. Although the similarities are superficial, *Anastasis* established, like Don
618 Esteban, a distinction between the fictional devices present in the text and
619 the observation of national features, which should be considered as strictly
620 true independently from its fictional frame, therefore presenting the book
621 to the reader as a “quasi-novel” (Kelly 214).
622 4. For the spread and influence of Schlegel’s ideas in early nineteenth-century
623 Spain see Flitter 5–22.
624 5. This idea was also central to the characterization of Spanishness in British
625 Romantic culture: Saglia reminds us of how the likes of Coleridge saw in
626 the Spanish resistance to Napoleon an opportunity to reflect upon the
627 validity of transhistorical principles such as those of patriotism and national
628 unity (*Poetic* 65).
629 6. The article continues in the following issue, 379–387.

UNCORRECTED PROOF