

Agustín Coletes Blanco and Alicia Laspra Rodríguez. *Romántico país: poesía inglesa del Trienio Liberal*. Colección Aquilafuente 277. Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca, 2019. Pp. 480. €25. ISBN: 9788413111643.



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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24197/ersjes.42.2021.311-317>

The reigns of the Spanish King Fernando VII and the British George IV, arguably the most contemptible kings of their respective country histories, almost coincided chronologically. Both monarchs, with their inborn aptitude for felony, conveniently called each other “brother” in their correspondence. Although both were well endowed with political inability, the Spanish Bourbon king, an absolutist, inept and treacherous monarch and a staunch and bellicose anti-constitutionalist, was responsible for giving rise to a bloody and civil-war-like rebellion and subsequent repression on the good-willing Spanish liberals, which led Spain towards yet one more of its frequent periods of political, social and economic ruin in the nineteenth century. On the other hand, the Hanoverian George IV’s apathy for governmental actions that may have interrupted his die-hard, pleasure-seeking lifestyle contributed to the stability of the constitutional monarchy in Britain, precisely as a result of his lack of meddling in *res publica* endeavours.

Byron and Shelley and other politically-committed liberal or radical British poets and ideologists saw Fernando VII’s despotic reign as a Mediterranean “Peterloo.” Furthermore, they did their best to encourage ideological and propagandistic support for a much-needed liberal rebellion in the dark, superstitious Papist, Inquisition-chained and reactionary Spain under the heavy thumb of the turncoat king Fernando, *el Rey Felón*. Despite swearing loyalty to the liberal and ground-breaking 1812 Cadiz Constitution for his own selfish political survival, Fernando VII ended up allowing a French army, the *Cien Mil Hijos de San Luis* (led by the gentlemanly Duke of Angoulême), to invade Spain with his (disguised) royal acquiescence. Angoulême’s mission was to impose absolutism per force on the country and thus favour Fernando VII’s ambition. British liberals and radicals supported their Spanish coreligionists against their aspiring absolutist king, a mere puppet of the Vienna Congress party of Ancient-Regime European leaders who eased the way to maintaining a despotic *status quo* in his realm. Indeed, in 1823 Fernando VII, the previously acclaimed *Rey Deseado*, declared null

and void all the acts and measures passed in the “Liberal Triennium” of his reign, thus confirming his political treachery on his own oaths and royal dignity.

Coletes and Laspra’s recent book covers the abundant verse production written by those British authors who openly admired and exalted the Spanish Liberal (i.e. Constitutional) Triennium (1820–1823). These two scholars, specialised in nineteenth-century Anglo-Spanish relations and English literature on the Peninsular War (1807–1814)—one must remember their earlier *Libertad frente a Tiranía: Poesía Inglesa de la Guerra de la Independencia (1808–1814)* (2013) and “Proyecto POETRY’15” (www.unioviado.es/poetry15/)—have now dedicated their expertise to analysing the abundant ideological and propagandistic output of the British authors that flooded their country’s periodicals throughout the 1820–1823 period. This book is in fact one of the five volumes (published by the University of Salamanca in 2019) produced by a team of recognised academics for the international research project “POETRY’15,” led by Professor Coletes Blanco and financed by the Spanish Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities, and the University of Oviedo. The other four volumes deal, respectively, with the German, French, Italian and Portuguese poetic output written about Spain in the Liberal Triennium.

Romántico país: poesía inglesa del Trienio Liberal is divided into two sections. The first, “Estudio crítico,” explains the historical context of the period, which albeit short in terms of years is intense in ideological and literary output and in the amount of passion conveyed by the British poets at the time. Coletes and Laspra begin this first section by describing the historical and cultural highlights of the period. These include the account of the pre-Peterloo atmosphere in Britain in 1819; the analysis of the European, British and Spanish political circumstances of the crucial year of 1820; the description of the beginnings of the “Liberal Triennium” in Spain and its impact in George IV’s Britain; the narration of Wellington’s far from innocent manoeuvres to meddle as an intermediary between the two sides of the Spanish rebellion; the explanation of the European powers’ political response to the Spanish revolution; the analysis of Spain’s and Britain’s roles in the international (disconcerting) concert in 1821–1822; the Verona Congress and the Madrid talks for a solution (1822); the 1823 French military invasion of Spain and the subsequent collapse of Spanish liberalism (according to British sources, that is); and the description of Rafael de Riego’s shameful execution and the subsequent exile of numerous liberal Spaniards to England.

Coletes and Laspra have also employed an appropriately abundant critical apparatus of bibliographical primary sources such as contemporary letters and eye-witness accounts provided by the main historical protagonists (Duke of Wellington, Viscount Sidmouth, Viscount Castlereagh, Lord Robert Somerset, Rafael de Riego, Evaristo San Miguel, George Canning, etc.), but also a number of British and Spanish law acts; personal diaries; annual registers; war despatches; British, Spanish and French newspapers and journals, as well as printed illustrations, engravings and caricatures (mainly Robert Cruikshank's). Their work also demonstrates their thorough familiarity with the main British, French and Spanish secondary sources on the period, all of which are amply quoted and referenced.

The second section of the book ("Corpus bilingüe anotado") includes a corpus of sixty-nine English poems—no small feat for only three years of literary production—of varying length and poetic quality, with subgenres ranging from the epic, heroic and panegyric to the sarcastic, humorous, narrative and even lyrical. A number of them were written by first-rate poets and intellectuals of the second generation of the Romantic period, such as Lord Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Felicia Hemans, Edward Bulwer-Lytton, Thomas Moore, Lord Holland (until now previously unknown as a poet), and probably Leigh Hunt and John Gibson Lockhart; and others by other (mostly unidentified) minor poets and by well-known journalists of the time, such as Thomas J. Wooler. Many other poems, either anonymous or under pseudonyms, such as "Don Juan Asmodeus" (presumably Thomas J. Wooler) or "Hafiz" (i.e., Thomas Stott), have been gathered in Coletes and Laspra's book for the first time. Byron is nevertheless the great protagonist of the collected corpus, not only in terms of the literary quality of his contributions (*Don Juan; The Age of Bronze*), but also regarding his spiritual commitment to Spain's liberal cause. It is no accident that the subtitle chosen by the authors for the book is "Romantic Land," the very expression Byron used in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* to refer to his admired Spain. The authors of the book also rightly boast about their intensive and thorough search of items, many found only in hidden and intricate corners of many a British whig and radical—and the odd tory—journal, as well as in contemporary broadsheets, pamphlets and books of the time; no easy task.

The corpus of British verse produced between 1820 and 1823 has all been faithfully rendered into Spanish translations and amply annotated and commented by Coletes and Laspra themselves with useful information for their interpretation. Most of them have been translated into Spanish for the first time, a fact which provides extra value to this collection. Out of these,

those that were originally rhyming poems in English have been given a rhymed translation (as is the case of parodic poems like Moore's fables) and those that were not originally rhyming (odes mainly) have been translated likewise. They include appropriate chronological context regarding cultural, geographical and historical references and allusions, formal aspects, the language employed, the identities of the authors, etc. But most importantly, in the analysis of such an abundant English literary production on Spanish affairs in the 1820–1823 period, Coletes and Laspra have perceived three well-defined phases. The historical evolution of the events taking place both in Spain and in Britain (and to a lesser extent in France) have certainly determined the nature of the recurrent clichés, images and themes employed by the different poets in each of the three stages of Anglo-Spanish relations perceived within the three years under scrutiny.

The early stage of the British verse written during the Spanish Liberal Triennium, consisting of fifteen poems, has been aptly named "España, relámpago de las naciones" after Shelley's "the lightning of the nations," line 2 from his "Ode to Liberty" (1820). These poems contain an exalted appeal of Britain's liberals and radicals to their countrymen to rid themselves of their country's (monarchic) despotism, highlighting how the Spaniards were courageously trying to do just that through Riego's revolt against King Fernando VII, the "embroider of petticoats," as a satirical English poem on the monarch's alleged pastime mockingly portrays him. They clamour for the spirit of Waterloo and the passionate message of John Bowring's translated version of the Anthem of Riego. Moreover, they contain the persistent theme of the pleasant and desirable prospect of an ideal country of never-ending peace, liberty and love, alluding to Spain once it breaks free from its chains of oppression and constitutionalism is finally allowed in.

The second stage in the evolution of the poetry corpus grouped under the title "Crónicas de una invasión anunciada" includes a larger batch of twenty-six poems written between April 1822 and early 1823, of higher literary quality than those of the previous stage, increasingly longer and with more identified authorships. The liberal revolutions in Piedmont and Naples have by now been crushed by the European conservative authorities and a reactionary counter-revolution against the rampant liberal and constitutional Spain can be felt in the air and perceived between the lines of the English poems. They make fun of the Verona representatives, the French army, Angoulême, and openly criticize the British non-intervention policy in Spanish Peninsular affairs. Whig and radical poets now aim their darts at condemning the comfortable attitude of the British authorities who stay

impartial and refrain from offering any aid to the liberal struggle in Spain for the sake of sacred neutrality. Did not the British government do the same in the Spanish Civil War?

The third and last stage of the British poetic production for constitutional Spain, titled “*Todo se ha perdido ¿menos el honor?*,” includes another twenty-eight poems published in 1823. The French army was by then advancing without finding any real local obstruction. With Angoulême’s entry into Madrid and Cádiz, the Spanish revolution had finally reached its sad end. The satirical English poetic output was now addressed to the cowardly Spanish Bourbon and gave laudatory accounts of brave and gallant Spanish liberals who then had to face exile. Spanish heroic characters (El Cid, Pelayo, Viriato, Quixote, Riego) were amply used by the British versifiers to encourage Spanish valour, alas, to no avail. This is the beginning of the Fernando VII’s “Ominous Decade” of his reign, i.e., absolutism and repression at their finest.

Partial studies on several specific poems inserted in Coletes and Laspra’s book have been carried out before by a number of hispanists, v.g. Saglia, Beatty, Beaton, Kenyon-Jones, Coletes Blanco, Gamble, La Parra, Laspra Rodríguez, Sweet, etc.. Nevertheless, Coletes and Laspra’s new book is one of the few, if not the only one so far, to have thoroughly analysed and classified the whole corpus of English propagandistic poetry published by British Romantic poets in the specific context of the Spanish liberal revolution of 1820–1823 against the ominous tyrant and the reestablishment of absolutism at the hands of the French army. The quality of the poems found by these two Spanish scholars naturally varies from being literary specimens of the highest level, such as the poems written by Byron, Shelley, Hemans, etc., to being mediocre and uninspired verses with the sole aim of attracting British whig sympathy and of provoking the collapse of the despotic institutions in Britain, with a complete disregard for arousing pure aesthetic pleasure. A well-deserved laudatory round of applause should also be given to the publisher for providing such a polished edition.

The story of how the idealistic Romantic poets wrote about the realization of a liberal communion in the world through the Spanish and other European revolutions is invigorating, but a sad one. However, there is now reason for joy for many a scholar: apart from philologists and literary critics who specialize in Anglo-Spanish relations in the nineteenth century, the other beneficiaries of Coletes and Laspra’s newly published book and translated corpus of poems are Spanish and British historians, as they will have full access to early nineteenth-century documents that have up to now been hidden on remote British library shelves and forlorn newspapers and journals.

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