



María Eugenia Perojo Arronte /  
Cristina Flores Moreno (eds.)

# British Periodicals and Spanish Literature

Mapping the Romantic Canon

With the main goal of contributing to a wider understanding of the presence of Spanish literature and culture in British Romanticism, this book focuses on the instrumental role played by the British periodical press in the Anglo-Spanish literary and cultural exchange in the first half of the nineteenth century. All the chapters bear witness to the contrasting and varied perception of everything Spanish, the different strategies of exploration, appropriation and rewriting of its cultural and literary tradition. Besides, they all reveal the intricate web of cultural, political and religious factors tinging the discourse of British Romantic literary critics and authors on the Spanish cultural capital.

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## British Periodicals and Spanish Literature

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Cristina Flores Moreno

## Chapter 6 Lope de Vega Reviewed in the British Romantic Periodical Press (1790s–1820s): Building the Spanish National Character\*

**Abstract** This chapter delves into the reception of the Spanish Golden Age author Lope de Vega in the British Romantic periodical press. With the exception of some publications exploring Lope's presence in works by Robert Southey and Mary Shelley, there is a conspicuous lack of scholarly work on his literary afterlife in Romantic Great Britain, while no study has yet provided a comprehensive view of his presence in the literary reviews published in periodicals during the Romantic period. The survey of the main British periodicals of this period reveals a number of reviews of the "Phoenix of Spain" published in *The Annual Review*, *The Monthly Magazine*, *The Edinburgh Review*, *The Quarterly Review*, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* and *The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal*. In them, reviewers comment on a good number of works by the prolific Spanish author, with a clear preference for his poetic production. Interestingly, these comments often touch on cultural, political and religious issues beyond the literary quality of the work reviewed. Their analysis thus offers not only an overview of Lope's reception in Romantic Britain but also allows us to explore the intricacies of Anglo-Spanish cultural exchange and the construction of a certain idea of *Spanishness*, the latter of which was not independent of the reviewers' and journals' ideological stances or developments on the political scene.

**Keywords:** British Romanticism, periodical press, Lope de Vega, canon, national identity.

At the end of the eighteenth century, little was known in Great Britain about Lope de Vega apart from his prolific body of work, generally exaggerated. Only two of Lope's plays were available in English translation: *El peregrino en su patria* (1604), rendered in two different anonymous translations, *The Pilgrime of Castele* (1621) and *The Pilgrim; or the Stranger in His Own Country* (1738), notorious for the liberties taken with the integrity of the original (Chamosa 150); and *Castelvines y Montaneses* (1647), translated as *Romeo and Juliet. A Comedy* (1770), which seems to have received a certain degree of attention given its similarity to

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Shakespeare's well-known play.<sup>1</sup> Due to this conspicuous absence of Lope's texts in English, British readers of his works necessarily had to do so either in the original Spanish or, perhaps most frequently, through secondary sources. In the first group, eighteenth-century authors such as Edward Clarke, George Glas and Sir John Talbot Dillon contributed to the creation of English opinions on Spanish letters in general and Lope in particular through their travel narratives, as has been brilliantly shown by Comellas and Sánchez Jiménez. Their sojourns in Spain provided these authors with the opportunity to learn the language and gain access to Spanish texts. They read not only Lope's *oeuvre* but also some critical and biographical pieces that presented the Spanish playwright as one of the best, and almost at the same level of excellence as the English Bard. As a case in point, Clarke announced that "Lopez [*sic*] de Vega Carpio [...] comes nearest to our Shakespeare" (65); and Dillon underlined "the surprising genius of Lope de Vega, the contemporary, and in a manner rival, of our immortal Shakespeare" (v).

The reception of Lope gained momentum at the turn of the nineteenth century, thanks mainly to the influential works by Robert Southey and Henry Richard Vassal Fox, Third Lord Holland, two of the most prominent Hispanists of the Romantic period,<sup>2</sup> who paved the way for the growth of Lope's popularity in the context of the then emergent Romantic Movement. Southey's *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Spain and Portugal* (1797), which recounts his four-month visit to the Iberian Peninsula in 1795–6, follows in the tradition of travelogues written by British travellers in Spain but stands out for the close attention devoted to Spanish (and Portuguese) literature. His work, meaningfully subtitled *With some Account of Spanish and Portugeze Poetry*, includes "An Essay on Spanish and Portuguese Poetry" and "Analysis of *La Hermosura de Angelica*. An Heroic Poem by Lope de Felix de Vega Carpio," the latter interspersed with translations of long passages of Lope's poem.<sup>3</sup> Southey's narrative, along with Holland's *Some Account of the Life and Writings of Lope Felix de Vega Carpio* (1806), engendered interest

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- 1 The full title of the translation reads: *Romeo and Juliet. A Comedy. Written originally in Spanish by that celebrated dramatic poet, Lopez de Vega, contemporary with Shakespear, and built upon the same story on which that greatest Dramatic Poet of the English Nation has founded his well-known Tragedy.*
  - 2 For Southey's translations of Spanish texts, see: Chamosa González and Guzmán González; Saglia, "Robert Southey's *Chronicle*;" Zarandona, "Robert Southey" and "*The Amadis of Gaul*."
  - 3 For the identification of the Spanish and Portuguese literary texts included in *Letters*, as well as a detailed study of Southey's analysis and fragmentary translation of Lope's *La hermosura de Angélica*, see Flores and González.

in the Spanish author among their contemporaries. Holland, whose house and private library became the cultural centre of London Hispanophilia,<sup>4</sup> felt a deep fascination for Lope. His reading of Lope's works, which can be traced back to the 1790s (Bowers 164), eventually materialized in the pages of *Some Account* in 1806, and its revised edition in 1817. There, he provided a biography and a selection of texts along with his own translation. Many of Lope's texts are referred to in *Some Account*,<sup>5</sup> and some are discussed in greater detail and are even partially translated, as in the case of *Arte nuevo de hacer comedias en este tiempo* (9–10), *Arcadia* (17–23), *La hermosura de Angélica* (31–8, 41), *Écloga a Claudio* (45–6), *El duque de Viseo* (119–24) and *La Estrella de Sevilla* (132–76). Thanks to the translations, albeit fragmentary, of Lope in Southey's and Holland's volumes, the catalogue of his works in English increased in number and displayed examples of a wider variety of genres. In fact, apart from the rendering of *El padre engañado*, from a French version, probably by Thomas Holcroft published in *The Theatrical Recorder* (1805) (29–41), there would be no further translations of Lope's works before Fanny Kemble's *The Star of Seville* (1837).

Holland's *Some Account* would prove to be the most influential text on Lope in Britain throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. As Southey claimed in his review of the first edition: "concerning Lope de Vega, it will now no longer be excusable for Englishmen to be ignorant" (Review of *Some Account* 397). No wonder, then, that when Mary Shelley undertook the task of writing the Spanish author's biography for her *Lives of the Most Eminent Literary and Scientific Men of Italy, Spain and Portugal* (1834–9), published in 1837, she drew mostly upon Holland's treatise (Vargo xxxi–xxxii). Shelley, like Southey and Holland before her, presented an ambiguous attitude towards the Spanish author, due to her liberal ideology, her romantic aesthetics and her anti-Catholic prejudices (Sánchez

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4 See Bowers for an introduction to Holland House as a literary coterie; and Moreno Alonso, with Saglia's "Holland House," for Lord Holland's connections with relevant Spanish political figures.

5 The list of Lope's works mentioned and briefly discussed in *Some Account* is long: *Laurel de Apolo*, *Arte nuevo de hacer comedias en este tiempo*, *La hermosura de Angélica*, *La Dragonteia*, *Rimas humanas y divinas del licenciado Tomé de Burguillos*, *Écloga a Claudio*, *Jerusalén conquistada*, *El peregrino en su patria*, *Pastores de Belén*, *Triunfo de la fe*, *Las fortunas de Diana*, *La Circe*, *La Filomena*, *Soliloquios amorosos de un alma a Dios*, *Corona trágica*, *La Andrómeda*, *La Gatomaquia*, *El duque de Viseo*, *Roma abrasada*, *El marido más firme*, *La Estrella de Sevilla* (and Trigueros's reworking *Sancho Ortiz de las Roelas*), *La dama melindrosa*, *El acero de Madrid*, *La esclava de su galán* and *La bella malmaridada*.

Jiménez 21). In their texts, these three British authors engaged in a dialogue among themselves and with other early tentative accounts of Spanish literature, thus taking an active part in the forging of the then emerging historiography of that literary tradition. In this process, the role of the periodical press should not be passed over for, as Parker has argued, “They produce[d] the official discourse on literature, through reviews and running commentary through their pages” (27). Reviews and articles in the press also participated in that dialogue and helped shape the image of a literary tradition, an author or a work, actively contributing to the creation of literary history and canons. And yet, only Saglia has discussed the important part played by one specific journal, *The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal*, in the diffusion of Spanish material and Spanish-inspired literature over a span of five years (1820–5) (“Hispanism”).

It is also worth noting that the birth of literary history in the early nineteenth century was closely connected to the notion of national identity, which originated in the Romantic period. Johann Gottfried von Herder’s concept of *Volksgeist*, or national character, was crucial in the configuration of modern literary history, as Pérez Isasi notes, “not only because it establishes its object [...] but because it also affects the way in which texts, authors, genres and periods are read and assessed” (185). This is particularly interesting in the case of Spanish literary history, since the earliest accounts were provided by foreign authors, such as Voltaire, August Wilhelm Schlegel, Simonde de Sismondi or Friedrich Bouterwek, as well as foreign travellers and reviewers, who attempted a delineation of the genuine features of Spanishness by contrast with their own national identity. Therefore, to write about Spanish literature in the first decades of the nineteenth century was not only an aesthetic choice, it was also an ideological position that confronted the foreign, or Other, and the autochthonous (Rodríguez Cuadros 258). In this context, different and sometimes even antithetical constructions of Spain arose. It is agreed that the image of Spain was “largely the creation of Romanticism” (Saglia and Haywood 1), an “invention” (Howarth).

Johnston, in his study of the English translations of Lope’s texts, alludes to the national character of his works, which he describes as the “model of Spanish ethnicity” (301), as the main reason for the lack of interest in the Spanish author in England before the eighteenth century. Lope was closely associated with national aspirations, and his drama was encoded as a “‘national’ theatre whose frame of reference could only be understood through the framework of local history” (301). This association was not only a serious obstacle to the foreign reception of Lope’s works, as Johnston rightly suggests, but it also determined how they were interpreted and assessed, as is attested by the reviews published in British periodicals during the Romantic period. This chapter traces the presence of Lope

de Vega in the major British magazines and journals of the Romantic period so as to draw a picture of the images projected of the Spanish playwright and his works, which prove not to be entirely separate from a certain ideologically biased construct of the Spanish national character.

A survey of the main British magazines and journals of the Romantic period reveals the presence of the “Spanish Phoenix,” as Lope was known, in a number of articles and reviews published in *The Annual Review*, *The Monthly Magazine*, *The Edinburgh Review*, *The Quarterly Review*, *The Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* and *The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal*. Some are long discussions on Lope, while others make only a passing reference. Among the latter is an article that refers to Lope as “that prodigy of nature” (Munden 121), and a review in which little is said about Lope beyond the general statement that he “never attains to the highest degree of excellence, and never sinks to mediocrity” (Hare-Naylor 141). The rest, however, comment on a good number of works by the prolific Spaniard, with a clear preference for his non-dramatic production, since allusions to his epic poems (*La hermosura de Angélica*, *La Dragontea*, *Isidro* and *Jerusalén conquistada*) and shorter poetry (*Rimas Humanas y Divinas del Licenciado Tomé de Burquillos* and *Rimas sacras*) abound. References are also made to Lope’s pastoral fiction (*La Arcadia*, *La Dorotea*) but, as regards his dramatic production, only *La Estrella de Sevilla* (at that time unquestionably attributed to Lope) and the revised version by Cándido María Trigueros, entitled *Sancho Ortiz de las Roelas* (sometimes wrongly attributed to Lope), and some interludes are also reviewed.

In December 1796, Robert Southey wrote a sketch demolishing the Spanish author. Back home after his journey through the Iberian Peninsula, during which he was engaged in reading, writing commentary on, and abridging some of Lope’s works, he published an article entirely devoted to the Phoenix in the liberal *The Monthly Magazine*. “On the Poetry of Spain and Portugal,” which is surely a blueprint for the “Essay on Spanish and Portuguese Poetry” he later included in *Letters* (1797), is part of a series of ten articles on Spanish and Portuguese poetry published between 1796 and 1798 in *The Monthly Magazine* (Curry, “Southey’s Contributions” 215).<sup>6</sup> In the first piece of the series, Southey states: “We have, indeed, often heard of Lope de Vega,” “but with [his] merit the English reader is utterly unacquainted” (“On the Poetry of Spain and Portugal

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6 See Curry’s “Reviews, Editions, and Translations” for a brief introduction to Southey’s task as a reviewer, with a focus on his work for the *Quarterly Review* and the *Annual Review*, and “Southey’s Contributions” for a list of Southey’s articles in *The Monthly Magazine* and *The Athenaeum*.

[1]" 451). To reverse this situation, he aimed to give "some account of the best Spanish and Portuguese poets, to analyse the plans of their most esteemed works, and translate such specimens as [...] may give some idea of the genius, taste, and manner of authors" (451). Southey acknowledges as his main sources Dillon's *Letters from an English Traveller in Spain in 1778 on the Origin and Progress of Poetry in that Kingdom* (1781), which in turn draws upon *Fama posthuma a la vida y muerte del doctor Frey Lope Felix de Vega Carpio* (1636) by Juan Pérez de Montalbán, and Miguel de Cervantes's prologue to *Ocho comedias y ocho entremeses nuevos* (1615), along with William Hayley's *An Essay on Epic Poetry* (1782). Both Dillon and Hayley take a Neoclassicist approach in their assessment of Lope's work, but they do this without diminishing his merits. Thus Dillon laments that the Spanish author "violated all the laws of drama, and introduced innumerable defects on the stage" (203), but nevertheless recognizes the "genius" of Lope, who "as another Shakespeare [...] acquired universal admiration" (243). Their opinion of the Spanish author's works is essentially built upon aesthetic tenets, without the interference of any other ideological considerations, whether religious, political or national (Comellas and Sánchez Jiménez 269).

Southey's analysis of Spanish letters in his articles for *The Monthly Magazine* is, in contrast, rather ideologically biased. Having suggested that "poetical genius is certainly a barometer that rises or falls according to the state of the political atmosphere" ("On the Poetry of Spain and Portugal [1]" 452), he argues that the state of contemporary politics greatly hindered the genius of Lope. Southey first places the Spanish author in his historical background, alluding to the Black Legend and the decline of Spain:

The decline of the empire quickly succeeded, and Lope de Vega lived to witness the defeat of that Armada [...] Spain has never recovered herself since the ruinous reign of Philip the Second. Not content with oppressing the Spaniards by the inquisition, he made them the instrument of oppression abroad; there indeed he failed; but though the liberty of Holland was established, the glory of Spain was destroyed. (452)

In these political circumstances, he continues:

He who entertains liberal sentiments, if he be obliged to submit his productions to the scrutiny of the inquisition, will write with timidity; and it may safely be asserted, that he who writes timidly, cannot write well. To look for the bold sublimity of genius where men are thus depressed, were as rational as to chain a race-horse, and expect him to win the race. (452)

In what at first may seem a rather contradictory line of argument, Southey assumes Lope's "liberal sentiments," only to assert that the Spaniard's alleged lack of poetic abilities is the result of his detrimental professional and personal

connections with the Inquisition and the Duke of Alba, whom he wrongly identifies as the third Duke of Alba,<sup>7</sup> the infamous politician and soldier, and a central figure in the Spanish Black Legend. These connections, in Southey's view, held Lope back from greatness:

[W]hen a young man, he wrote eclogues, and a comedy, in praise of the Grand Inquisidor; and a pastoral, in honour of the duke of Alva. From these symptoms, one who knew the human heart might have prophesied, that the young poet never would attain to excellence. ("On the Poetry of Spain and Portugal [2]" 860)

Southey believed that "the characteristic traits of every age [...] may be read in their poetry" (*Letters* 132) and, consequently, did not dissociate the historical and political background from literary production in his assessment of Lope. Even though the Phoenix may have embraced hidden "liberal sentiments," he also suffered from the symptoms of contemporary Spanish political and religious maladies, and, as a consequence, in Southey's view, he was irremediably doomed to be "never sublime, seldom pathetic, and seldom natural; rarely above mediocrity in any of his writing" (860). Southey underlines the "intolerable dullness" of Lope's *Arcadia*, describes *Jerusalén conquistada* as "infinitely inferior to the works of Tasso, which it attempted to rival;" claims his *Dragontea* to be "very bad," the *Rimas de Tomé de Burguillos* to be "a species of poetry so despicable" and bluntly states of Lope's sonnets that "none of them are perfect as wholes." Ultimately, he concludes that "the impartial judgment of foreigners cannot rank his productions above mediocrity" (860, 861). Southey purposefully places himself in a position that he assumes confers objectivity to his appraisal. He acknowledges, however, that he views Lope's literary production from a national standpoint. His is an ethnocentric approach to the study of Lope, based on "difference" and the implied superiority of his own national identity which, far from bestowing impartiality to his viewpoint, highly conditions Southey's evaluation of Lope's production. With this brief sketch, which differs little from his opinion in *Letters*, Southey established the paradigm through which the Spanish author's works would generally be read subsequently. Lope is encoded as the epitome of a particular ideological construct of Spain, of which despotism, Inquisition, religious bigotry and superstition are the main constituent parts. The playwright is depicted as embodying the Black Legend that still lingered in the British cultural imaginary of Spanishness, and which Southey most probably saw mirrored

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7 Southey assumed that Lope's patron was Fernando Álvarez de Toledo y Pimentel, third Duke of Alba (1507–82), while he actually worked for Antonio Álvarez de Toledo y Beaumont, fifth Duke of Alba (1568–1635). See Southey (*Letters* 403 n. 178).

in contemporary Spain, under the rule of the absolutist monarch Charles IV (r. 1788–1808), an ally of France against the British.

The publication of Lord Holland's *Some Account* (1806) and its 1817 revised second edition, which was expanded to include a study of the Spanish dramatist Guillén de Castro y Bellví, fostered debate about Lope in the pages of the main literary periodicals. *Some Account* was reviewed by Francis Jeffrey in *The Edinburgh Review* (1806) and twice by Southey, first in *Annual Review* (1807) and, a decade later, on the occasion of the second edition, in the *Quarterly Review* (1818).

Francis Jeffrey, editor and major contributor to *The Edinburgh Review*, agreed elsewhere with Southey that Spanish superstition and tyranny, the Inquisition and arbitrary governments had “in a great degree prevented those of the Spaniards in the career of letters and philosophy. But for this, the Spanish genius would probably have gone far” (Review of *De la Littérature considérée* 41). Accordingly, in his 1806 review of Holland's *Some Account*, Jeffrey pictures Lope as a “slave of jealousy, bigotry, and envy; [who] died at last a victim of the most degrading and miserable superstition” (227), which explain the numerous formal defects in his literary production, and he underlines the multitude of unnatural and improbable incidents that populate Lope's works: “his tragedies are stuffed full of inconsistencies and absurdities; and his comedies, of plots and intrigues,” and the “chief merit of his dramatic pieces is [...] that unlimited power of invention by which the author was enabled to crowd into most of his tragedies as much plot as would serve for at least four plays on any other theatre” (233). Jeffrey, a Whig, offers an assessment of Lope's drama noticeably coloured by his own political and religious prejudices.

As for Southey, in his review of the first edition of Holland's book, he stops to discuss Lope's *La Dragontea*, *El Isidro* and the play *La Estrella de Sevilla*, of which Holland had provided long summaries accompanied by quotations and translations of some excerpts. As noted above, the list of Lope's works mentioned and commented on in *Some Account* is certainly long and the short selection made by Southey is significant, since through the analysis of this particular corpus he finds the opportunity to reinforce his portrayal of Lope's production as the embodiment of Spanish popery and despotism. The epic poem *La Dragontea* is an account of Francis Drake's last expedition and death, which Lope presents as a successful Spanish Catholic crusade against English Anglicanism. And this is precisely what Southey emphasizes: “Lope had little reason to love Sir Francis Drake, and for Elizabeth he entertained a right catholick abhorrence, it is amusing to read the invectives in which the Spanish poets vented their hatred against her.” And he concludes: “it is a dull poem” (401). In *El Isidro*, Southey sees



best represented one of the aspects of Catholicism that he despised the most, the veneration of saints and miracles: “The *Isidro* is a wearying collection of miraculous stories” (401). In *La Estrella de Sevilla* it is the despotism and corruption of the Spanish monarchy: “such a story could excite no sympathy in our country. [An English audience] would revolt at it [...] as something too monstrous, and too shocking to be believed. In Spain this was not felt; assassins were employed by their princes” (410). Southey transfers his criticism of the play to the audience on account of their reaction and, by doing so, extends his evaluation to all Spaniards and to their institutions. He also contrasts Spanish and English audiences in order to argue for the moral superiority of the latter.

This attitude towards Lope and Spain differs notably from that which Southey would display a decade later. By the time he embarked on a review of the second edition of *Some Account* in 1817, he had amassed a much greater knowledge of Lope’s *oeuvre*, which had inspired some of his own literary outputs, as Gonzalez has shown. In this sense, it is worth noting the influence of Lope in Southey’s *Roderick, The Last of the Goths* (1814), based upon the Spaniard’s tragedy *El último godo*, which recounts the Spanish resistance against the Moorish invasion. With this poem, Southey aimed to show his disapproval of the Peninsular War (1808–14), in which the forces of Spanish resistance and the British were allied against the French invasion of the Iberian Peninsula.<sup>8</sup> His wholehearted support of the Spanish and Portuguese cause is clearest in a series of articles he published in the *Edinburgh Annual Register*, where he provides a “non-Anglocentric account of the conflict” (Packer and Pratt 40). Moreover, he felt strong sympathies for the Spanish liberal movement that led to the ratification of the first Spanish Constitution in 1812 and effected some political reforms that moved Spain forward. He had also recently been appointed an honorary member of both the Spanish Royal Academy (1814) and the Spanish Royal Academy of History (1815). His long-felt wavering between fascination and repulsion for the Other fell more heavily on the side of fascination at this moment, as the limits between himself and the Spanish Other had started to fade away:

The account of Lope de Vega in the last Quarterly is mine [...] I have read widely in Spanish poetry; and might in historical and literary recollections call myself half a Spaniard, if, being half a Portuguese also, this would leave any room for the English part of my intellectual being. (*Collected Letters* no. 3119)

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8 See Sánchez’s “Southey, Spain, and Romantic Apostasy” for an analysis of *Roderick* in the light of the Peninsular War.

Southey's attitude towards all things Spanish had changed notably and, consequently, Lope is portrayed in a more sympathetic light in his review of the revised *Some Account of the Lives*. There, Southey revisits *La hermosura de Angélica*, *La Dragontea* and *Jerusalén conquistada*, and while he maintains his negative view of *La hermosura de Angélica* as unworthy of analysis, "without regularity, order, purport or interest of any kind" (22), his opinion of the other works has evolved. He shows his disagreement with Holland's censure of *Arcadia*, which is here said to be a poem that, although bearing a "meagre" fable, deserves to be praised for in its style there "is often felicity as well as force," and "Human feelings also are delineated with truth as well as passion" (16). As regards the poem on Francis Drake, *La Dragontea*, Southey shows some understanding of the reasons that moved Lope to write it, that is, to show "the valour of the Spaniards, and the miserable end to which the enemies of the church came" (25), given "that national hatred which Drake had well deserved of the Spaniards" (28). Finally, while he reasserts *Jerusalén conquistada*'s lack of unity, branding it a "failure [...] and a total one," he concludes that "there is more vigour of thought in it, and more felicity of expression than in any other of his long poems" (30). He closes the article with the expression of his desire to "leave upon the reader an impression more favourable to the poet" (46).

Coinciding with the Liberal Triennium (1820–3), a period of constitutional monarchy, the *New Monthly Magazine*, whose political orientation under the influence of the Holland House Circle had become a liberal one, played an important role in the diffusion of Spanish literature (Saglia, "Hispanism"). As Sweet posits, the *New Monthly*'s politics mirrored those of the reform era itself; it supported constitutional and institutional reform, and its rallying point was Spain's Constitution of 1812, reinstated by Spanish liberals between 1820 and 1823 (Sweet 148, 151). In this context, an anonymous D published an article titled "On the Interludes of the Early Spanish Theatre" (1822), which is in fact a review of some of Lope's interludes: *Entremés de los huevos* (1612), *Entremés noveno de la cuna* (1609), *Entremés del sacristán Soguijo* (1613), *Entremés de los Romances* (1612) and *Entremés famoso del hospital de los podridos* (1617). The author underlines Lope's "brilliant imagination" and his "genius" (549, 550), and the discussion centres on the character of the sacristan as an example of the "hypocrisy and libertinism" (551) of the Catholic Church, which is the object of ridicule in most of these interludes. Finally, the author concludes, in these plays "we may judge of the frank and unrestrained joyousness of the old Spanish character, before bigotry and the Inquisition had rendered hypocrisy a duty, and thrown a deep and sombre tint over the manners of the people" (549–50). In these interludes, the "old Spanish character" is recovered. The author addresses here a different and more positive

construction of the notion of Spanishness, of which Lope's works are also said to be representative. The interludes allow a glimpse of the Spanish past, before the Black Legend and the Inquisition, when chivalry was the main feature of the Spanish character. Nevertheless, they also address the present, that of a liberal Spain, where the 1812 Constitution has been restored and the Inquisition abolished.

In 1821, an anonymous review published in the *Quarterly Review*, tentatively attributed to Henry Hart Milman or Robert Southey, brought to the fore Ángel Anaya's anthology of Spanish drama *El teatro español, ó colección de dramas escogidos de Lope de Vega, Calderón de la Barca, Moreto, Roxas, Solís, Moratin y otros célebres escritores* (1817–21). The collection featured *Sancho Ortiz de las Roelas*, *La moza de cántaro*, *El mejor alcalde, el rey* and *Por la puente, Juana*. The reviewer asserts: "The 'Estrella di [*sic*] Sevilla' is far superior to all the works by Lope which have fallen in our hands; indeed the arrangement of the plot is excellent" (5). Trigueros's recasting of *La Estrella de Sevilla*, *Sancho Ortiz de las Roelas*, is the object of analysis of Mary Margaret Busk's review published in *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1825. Busk was a frequent contributor to *Blackwood's*, *The Foreign Quarterly* and *The Athenaeum*, where she discussed almost every continental literature (Curran 10). Busk, who in her review wrongly attributes *Sancho Ortiz de las Roelas* to Lope and identifies both plays as one and the same, has been said to qualify "the ideas from the Continent that her work imported into England, more for the purpose of affirming England's superior standing in the world, and explaining European literatures against their English counterparts" (Johnston, *Victorian Women* 78). This is unquestionably the purpose behind her review of *Sancho Ortiz de las Roelas*, which she considered "illustrative of the [Spanish] national character" (681). A summary of the plot and a translation of select passages are followed by a political interpretation of the play. The review concludes with a harsh attack on Spanish despotism, which well serves the purpose of proving, by contrast, the superiority of the English nation:

[W]e will detain our readers no longer than whilst we point out the whimsical anomaly arising from the poet's endeavour to represent such an equal administration of justice, even in opposition to the royal will or interest, as we enjoy in this free and happy land, as compatible with the licence of arbitrary power [...] it is far from our purpose, in making this remark, to attempt convincing the contented slaves of an *absolute king* of the superior blessings of a limited and constitutional monarchy, such as ours. We value liberty too highly to cram it like a nauseous potion down the throat of any *Despotomaniac* patient, or even to bestow it as an alms upon a heartless and helpless mendicant. We merely meant to indulge an inclination which we sometimes could not bridle if we would, and oftener would not if we could – the inclination to enforce upon the hearts and minds of our readers the inestimable advantages enjoyed by them as Britons. (690)

As Southey had done in his review of *Some Account*, Busk transfers her criticism from the play on to the audience's reaction to it. Nonetheless, while Southey criticizes the acquiescence of Lope's contemporary audience, Busk finds a way to turn her review of *Sancho Ortiz de las Roelas* into a stern attack on Spanish contemporary politics. It makes a rather straightforward allusion to the recent return of King Ferdinand VII to absolute power in Spain, which brought the Liberal Triennium to an end. Once more, in a curious interplay between past and present, the past is used to address contemporary politics which, in turn, underpins the image projected of Lope's work for the British readership.

In the first decades of the nineteenth century, when an author's "identification with the spirit of the nation was the key that guaranteed their inclusion in the literary canon" (Pérez Isasi 178), Lope de Vega – "once the pride and glory of Spaniards" (Holland, *Some Account* 188) – was granted an important place in the Spanish literary canon. In the reception of Lope's work in the British Romantic press, the opinions formed were far from based strictly upon aesthetic tenets. As shown above, Lope was generally decoded as the embodiment of a despotic and Catholic Spain, usually with the purpose of showing British superiority by contrast. Nonetheless, the more or (most frequently) less favourable appraisal of his work was linked to a certain extent to the changing political landscape and the reviewers' and journals' ideological stances. Hence, the analysis of Lope in the British press allows us a glimpse into the intricate mechanisms underpinning the construction of literary history and national character, and the pivotal role of the periodical press in this process.

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