

**POLITICAL REVOLUTION AND LITERARY
EXPERIMENT IN THE SPANISH
ROMANTIC PERIOD (1830-1850)**

Andrew Ginger

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PREFACE

by Lee Fontanella, Worcester Polytechnic Institute

Midpoint in my graduate studies, I was precisely a century distant from the deposition of Isabel II. I seemed then to have been light years from that historical event, which marked many decades of political unrest, philosophical indecision, and experimentation (uncertainty?) in the realization of a literary aesthetic for Spain. I try to put things in perspective by reminding myself that I am now the same historical distance away from the Generation of '98 as I was then from the September Revolution, yet somehow 1868-1968 seems a longer time than 1898-1998. Why? It must have something to do with a more adult understanding of history, but I suspect that there may have been another reason: the complexities and vacillation that characterized the earlier period.

The word among graduates in the mid-1960s was that Spain's nineteenth century was only for the undaunted. It was too jumbled, indecipherable both as a phenomenon and part by part. Although I had been attracted by Medievalism, I chewed away at the chunk of Spain's history that we warned each other was so forbidding. I did not realize it at the outset, naturally, but in so doing I was savouring the gamut of problems that a scholar such as Andrew Ginger tackles today: a discriminating view of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Spain's political history, philosophical ideology, and resultant literary aesthetics. I was fortunate. My rich platter had been set by Professors Edmund King ("What is Spanish Romanticism?"), Vicente Lloréns (*Liberales y románticos*), and Enrique Tierno Galván (*Tradición y modernismo*).

Andrew Ginger recollects as useful the now three-quarter-century old vision of the Hispanist, E. Allison Peers. In spite of hesitation on the part of

some to credit Peers heavily, Andrew Ginger is not the first to revive his work. Peer's work continues to appeal so, because it attempts to look in some depth at literary criticism, which Derek Flitter in our time has again done. Ginger's book is grounded in Flitter's approach, although the attempt is now to demonstrate the influence of the tenets of Spain's Progressive Liberal Party on the significant literary movements of Spain's Romantic Period. Of course, Ginger plucks and leaves what he must of the work of Hispanists just prior to Flitter (to name only a few: Sebold, Silver, Shaw). However, the real meat of this book, its most innovative note, is the fact that it rests so solidly on the fine discrimination of evidence from the historical period in question. The parade of names and definitive ideas marches before us, in an effort to characterize the historiography of Eclecticism as propounded by the comparably conservative (Moderate) group: Martínez de la Rosa, Toribio Nuñez, poets and essayists of the Salamanca school, Donoso Cortés (founded on Cousin), Pastor Díaz, the Conde de Toreno - most of whom typically hoped for a fusion of principles in dialectical struggle, a reintegration in the manner of a Guizot-like historiography. In the face of the Moderate position, on which so much Hispanism has rested in an attempt to define the period, Ginger proposes that a clearer understanding of the ideas of the Progressive Liberal left (too under-discussed) will afford us the perspective that we critics need, in order to best comprehend the Romantic literary phenomenon. Thus, Joaquín María López, Valdespino, Cayetano Cortés, Fabra Soldevila, Covert-Spring, and Baralt, in opposition to an Eclectic balance of multiple principles, search for a new, guiding principle (sometimes in the manner of Quinet). It is as if the 'Spirit of the Century' - the title of the monumental work by Martínez de la Rosa - were being sought not by the Moderate position, oddly enough, rather by Progressives. For them, that Spirit would ideally be expressed in the form of a philosophical system that could rival the Moderates' account of the *mal du*

siècle. The existence of a radical Progressive position could not be detected in literature simply as unqualified metaphysical anguish, and so certain presuppositions about Spanish Romantic literature are abandoned.

Andrew Ginger does not aggrandize Progressive Liberal thought to the point of depicting it as tremendously innovative, much less as unique (related as it was to the post-Guizot, less Moderate depictions of historical dialectics). However, he does view it as the key to a re-evaluation of Spanish Romantic debate. This may have been precisely what was missing when I was a graduate student, in order to piece together the teachings of my own accomplished Professors, thus to reach a greater comprehension of how historical, philosophical, and aesthetic phenomena came to make a definable product. In order to establish the tie to literature, specifically, he backs up to Böhl von Faber (A. W. Schlegel) versus Mora (that is, *la querella calderoniana*), then focuses on Durán, Quintana, and, to some extent, Alcalá Galiano. His underscoring of a literary aesthetic that rested on a given natural order of things versus national (Spanish) peculiarities (genius) guides us straightaway into the discussion of Moderate literary critics - pre-eminently, Gil y Carrasco - as opposed to comparably Progressive ones.

It has always been my opinion that Espronceda, although his *Estudiante de Salamanca* has always been much touted, has not enjoyed exhaustive attention for his magnificent *Diablo mundo*. And it is certainly true that Alvarez and that extraordinary innovator and politician, Ros de Olano, both cultivators of *Diablo mundo*, have not gotten the attention they merit, at least insofar as their work related to Espronceda. Herein they do. This (and the innovation of Ildefonso Ovejas) is, primarily, what the book builds up to: a literature of dazzling images and flexibility in all respects.

In the process of defining the legacy of Liberal interpretation of Spain's history and literary aesthetics, we get not only a refinement of a quarter

century of critical views of Hispanic Romanticism - in effect, a re-opened debate about Spanish Romanticism - but, best of all, a revival of names that have rested too long and, in many cases, far too deeply hidden for the good of Hispanism.