

**Agustín Coletes Blanco y Alicia Laspra Rodríguez, *Romántico país: poesía inglesa del trienio liberal. Estudio crítico y corpus bilingüe anotado*. Salamanca: Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Salamanca, 2019. Pp. 480. €25.00. ISBN 9788413111643.**

**Robert Southey, *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Spain and Portugal*, ed. by Jonathan Gonzalez and Cristina Flores. London and New York: Routledge, 2021. Pp. 588. £110. ISBN 9780815356554.**

Recent years have seen a steady increase in Romantic-period research on textual and other representations of Spain and the Iberian/Hispanic worlds more generally. In literature, while confirming the central contributions of figures such as Matthew Lewis, Robert Southey, Walter Scott, Lord Byron, or Felicia Hemans, this body of work has also rediscovered a host of little known or undervalued cultural mediators, as well as throwing into relief a diverse panorama of innumerable, nameless limners and promoters of what we could call a Spanish or Iberian discourse. In the past, research on Anglo-Hispanic relations in the Romantic age was mostly concerned with military, political, and diplomatic histories of the Peninsular War. It was from about the 1990s onwards that Anglo-Hispanic relations started to be considered as more than marginal or occasional manifestations and sustained attention to be paid to their many forms of textual and visual inscription. The discourse of Spain in Romantic-era Britain began to gain visibility as a multi-layered and contradictory composite at the nexus of questions of otherness and notions of modernity. In the late eighteenth century, Spain was still largely envisaged from an Enlightenment perspective of dismissal and demonisation, visible in 1790s Gothic fiction, socio-political theory, and moral philosophy, and symptomatic of the continued impact of the ‘Black Legend’ of Spain (popularised by the journalist, historian, and sociologist Julián Juderías in the 1910s, this label gained significant currency among Anglo-Saxon critics and historians). But this negative outlook coexisted with a slowly emergent fascination with Spain, a Hispanophilia, that became widespread in the early decades of the nineteenth century. This development can be envisioned as a narrative that stems from the alternating relations in the 1790s and early 1800s, dictated by the repercussions of events in revolutionary France; the Peninsula War (1808-14), which partly changed and partly confirmed established views on Spain; the Restoration of the *ancien régime* and absolutism (1814-20); and the *liberal triennium* followed by another phase of absolutism (1823-33) that caused many liberal politicians and intellectuals to emigrate to France and Britain. This Eurocentric picture is, of course, complicated further by South America, which looms large over, and exerts pressure on, Anglo-Hispanic relations everywhere between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The two publications in this review are among the most recent products from this lively area of study and research, which is also part of a broader shift towards a re-mapping of the inter- and transnational coordinates of Britain’s Romantic-era culture.

One of the most obvious merits of Flores and Gonzalez’s edition of Southey’s *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Spain and Portugal* is that of making available, in a reliable text complemented by a rich paratext, a principal document of late-eighteenth-century Anglo-Hispanic and, specifically, Iberian discourse. Indeed, Southey’s vision was decisively Iberian, informed by a re-evaluation of the culture and history of Portugal; the cultural and political cohesion of medieval Iberia; the multiplicity of languages, cultures, and state systems of the federative Spanish crown; and the intertwined medieval and modern histories of the two Peninsular kingdoms. In addition, this edition of *Letters* returns to us a major work not only in pan-Iberian and Anglo-Hispanic discourse, but of Romantic-period literature more broadly. It enables us to rediscover how *Letters* both conformed to and innovated with established travel-

writing conventions. Also, with its three editions of 1797, 1799, and 1808, it bears visible traces of the transition from eighteenth-century to Romantic visions of Spain, bearing witness to the transformations in Spanish discourse in Britain at the turn of the century, and announcing Southey's major role in it. In their extensive introduction, Flores and Gonzalez help us recover this book's significance to Southey's biographical and authorial trajectory, as his journey to Portugal and Spain in 1795-6 disclosed to him new fields of knowledge, questions, and concerns, which became central in his post-Pantisocracy years and remained so in decades to come. Moreover, *Letters* marks a fundamental step in Southey's transformation into a (possibly *the*) major Romantic-period Iberian specialist. In this respect, as the editors rightly stress, his inclusion of a section on the poetry of Spain and Portugal (advertised on the frontispiece of the first edition) reflects his intention to offer something different and increase the saleability of the volume, as well as that of filling a gap in current knowledge of Iberian culture. Importantly, this section and the volume as a whole feature translations and re-elaborations of Spanish verse, which effectively pave the way for the translations he later published in the periodical press, as well as his own fictional recreations of Iberian themes – from *Madoc* to *Roderick* and *A Tale of Paraguay*.

At over 550 pages, this edition of *Letters* is a large and generous book. In a sizeable portion of these pages, Flores and Gonzalez give us multiple tools to navigate this expansive, multi-layered volume: a glossary, two chronologies, a map of Southey's journey, editorial notes resulting from a prodigious amount of source hunting, and an appendix listing variations and additions in the 1799 and 1808 versions. The editors do a great job of tracking and glossing references and allusions, and therefore of valorising the book's typically Southeyan intertextual density. Their work bears out how, here as in so many of his works, Southey's erudition seems to resolve itself into a mass of redundant details (in 1821 he confessed 'I have a dangerous love of detail'), yet, on closer inspection, his notes are far from marginal pieces of the mosaic that is his depiction of Spain and Portugal.

Much in *Letters* is in line with late-eighteenth-century travel writing. Southey's brief preface touches on several recognisable features: the journey will be minutely delineated so as to be useful to other travellers; and 'things', he says, are represented 'as they have appeared to me' (48), so that factual reliability is counterbalanced by a subjective perspective that also parries possible accusations of reading the country and its people incorrectly. At the same time, though, as the editors stress, *Letters* is original in various ways, and importantly anticipates Southey's later Spanish ventures because of the anecdotes and tales amounting to a myriad interpolated narratives (these recall the narratives embedded in the notes to *Roderick*), the combination of geographical and cultural dimensions (landscape, history, monuments, literature), and a pervasive sense of fascination with Iberia (though one conventionally mixed with critical remarks), which will evolve into a lifelong passion.

Travel accounts of Spain circulated widely in the late-eighteenth-century book market, many of which have been amply studied, especially by Spanish scholars. Flores and Gonzalez's edition gives us the opportunity to reappraise the peculiarity of Southey's contribution to this discourse through his distinctly encyclopaedic curiosity and attention to the palimpsestic nature of the country and its neighbour, and the relevance of this early Iberian foray for his later transformation into a major purveyor of Iberian-themed imaginative literature. They have effectively recovered for us an outstanding piece of late-eighteenth-century transcultural writing, one that is of interest not just to scholars of Southey or Anglo-Hispanic questions, but Romantic-period scholars more generally.

The other title under review here, *Romántico país: poesía inglesa del trienio liberal* ('Romantic country: English poetry of the liberal triennium'), takes us on a different journey to Spain – not a literal one, and one deeply conditioned by political-historical events. Edited by Agustín Coletes Blanco and Alicia Laspra Rodríguez, the book is a collection of English-

language poems reacting to events in Spain between 1820 and 1823. But this is too reductive a definition. In its nearly 500 pages, Coletes and Laspra include not only English originals and Spanish versions of these texts, but also a whole range of contextual materials, thus offering readers an immersive experience of Anglo-Spanish literary interrelations in the early 1820s. And though Spanish is the book's main language, it is not exclusively for readers of that language.

Echoing Byron's apostrophe to the country in *Childe Harold* 1. 35 ('Oh, lovely Spain! renown'd, romantic land!'), the title reprises what had become a clichéd image by the early 1820s, when Spain takes centre stage again in international affairs after the military *pronunciamiento* headed by General Rafael del Riego led to the institution of a constitutional monarchy based on the Cadiz charter of 1812. These developments galvanised Byron and Shelley, intrigued (and alarmed) Southey, and sent shockwaves across the newly restored regimes of the Continent. The poems collected and examined in this volume deal, explicitly or allusively, with this turn of events and its consequences: the French invasion, sanctioned by the Holy Alliance in 1823, to quash the liberal regime; its downfall and the ensuing waves of political emigration, mainly to France and Britain; and the onset of a reactionary repression that lasted until 1833 (the so-called *ominosa década*). On occasion, the poems also address (and interrogate) the position of Britain and its government's refusal to intervene in favour of Spain's liberal government.

The product of wide-ranging and painstaking research, Coletes and Laspra's book gathers a significant number of texts from periodicals and volumes, translated into Spanish by the editors themselves, and occasionally accompanied by illustrations. The poems are divided into chronological sections that follow the varying fortunes of the *liberal triennium*; and Coletes and Laspra's essays (in Spanish) offer substantial treatments of the historical, political, and literary contexts of this poetic burgeoning from comparative and intercultural perspectives. In particular, the opening 'Estudio crítico' is a detailed analysis of the *trienio* and its repercussions in Britain, which uncovers some fascinating connections and intersections between the two countries and cultural systems (as in a contemporary commentary linking events in Spain to Peterloo). The book is completed by an extensive bibliography of primary and critical materials, and two indices of first lines (in English and Spanish).

As for the poems, the editors/translators present and analyse them individually in the introduction to each section. Transcriptions and translations are accompanied by information on the original place and date of publication (and, where pertinent, of republication). This ample corpus confirms that periodicals were crucial outlets for verse in the 1820s, as well as bearing out their sustained engagements with foreign cultures and literatures. In the Iberian/Spanish case, this was already evident in poetic responses to the Peninsular War, to which the editors dedicated another ground-breaking anthology entitled *Libertad frente a tiranía: poesía inglesa de la Guerra de la Independencia (1808-1814)* and published in 2013. But their collection on the *trienio liberal* highlights a different panorama characterised by the proliferation of periodicals in the 1820s and their promotion of discourses of national culture in conjunction with an attention to foreign cultures. Thematically, the poems range from occasional circumstances and political commentary to examinations of abstract principles (liberty, most notably), historical figures, the lives of exiles, women's experience and point of view, and more. Obvious entries – Byron's *The Age of Bronze* and *Don Juan*, Percy Bysshe Shelley's 'Ode to Liberty', poems by Felicia Hemans, Thomas Campbell, and Edward Bulwer-Lytton – blend with countless texts by anonymous, pseudonymous, or little known authors. Unexpected discoveries turn up at every page, as with Charles Cochrane's song 'The Spanish Exiles', which he later re-used in his pseudonymous *Journal of a Tour Made by Señor Juan de Vega, the Spanish Minstrel of 1828-9, through Great Britain and Ireland, a Character Assumed by an English Gentleman* (1830). This short composition well exemplifies the tendency, shared

by British writers both in 1820-23 and during the Peninsular War, to write (about) Spain in ways that oscillate between an interest in its history and culture and a desire to reflect on Britain from jointly national and international perspectives. These ways of writing Spain produce forms of ventriloquism and manipulation, which, as in many of the texts included here, do not necessarily carry negative connotations. Rather, they are attempts at approaching and interpreting the other country, as well as making it present and relevant for readers by linking it to the British context. In consequence, one of the most important contributions of Coletes and Laspra's volume is that, besides expanding our knowledge of Romantic-era cultural relations between Britain and Spain, it opens up insights into the mechanisms orchestrating these relations and their textual inscriptions. Ultimately, their anthology converges with Flores and Gonzalez's edition of Southey's *Letters* in contributing to expanding and nuancing our knowledge of a cross-cultural conversation pervasive in the literature and culture of a Romantic period that is more or more clearly emerging as a network of inter- and transnational encounters and collisions.

*Diego Saglia*  
*University of Parma*