



**SANITIZING COLONIAL INFECTION
AND REDEFINING SPANISH
IMPERIALISM IN MANUEL JOSÉ
QUINTANA'S *POESÍAS PATRIÓTICAS***

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Miguel Antonio Caro, in his comparison of the odes of Manuel José Quintana (1772-1857) and Andrés Bello (1781-1865) which celebrate Francisco Xavier Balmis's vaccination campaign to America in 1803, highlights the intriguing contrast that exists between the imperialist sentiment expressed by both poets: “¿No es curioso ver cómo de una misma ocasión toman pie el español [Quintana] para tirar tajos y reverses a las sombras de los conquistadores, y el americano [Bello] para extremar expresiones de gratitud por los beneficios recibidos” (24).¹ Caro, however, is not the only critic to hint at Quintana's seemingly anti-colonialist rhetoric. Raquel Rico Linage, in her analysis of “A la expedición española,” describes how Quintana “anuncia un futuro de paz e independencia” (235) for America, while José Manuel Pereiro-Otero sees the poem as an “explícito canto a la independencia hispanoamericana” (126). Admittedly, there is good textual evidence to support such a reading, since the poem ends with an explicit charge to Balmis to remain in America rather than return to Europe:

Balmis, no tornes;
no crece ya en Europa
el sagrado laurel con que adornes.
Quédate allá, donde sagrado asilo
tendrán la paz, la independencia hermosa;
quédate allá, donde por fin recibas
el premio augusto de tu acción gloriosa. (151-57)

¹ Quintana's ode to Balmis, “A la expedición española para propagar la vacuna en América bajo la dirección de don Francisco Balmis” (hereafter, “A la expedición española”), was written in 1806 and published in 1808 as part of his collection *Poesías patrióticas*. The collection comprises of 34 patriotic poems written between 1795 and 1808. All references are from Dérozier's edition of his poetry. Bello's poem entitled “A la vacuna” was written in 1804, but a complete version of it was not published until 1882.

On the surface it would seem that Quintana's political writings display a similar interest in and support for revolutionary politics.² Addressing Spanish Americans in his controversial proclamation of February 13th 1810 (*El Consejo de Regencia de España e Indias a los americanos españoles*), Quintana declares:

Desde este momento, Españoles americanos, os veis elevados a la dignidad de hombre libres; no sois ya los mismos de antes encorvados bajo un yugo mucho más duro mientras más distante estabais del centro del poder; mirados con indiferencia, vejados por la codicia, y destruidos por la ignorancia. Tened presente que, al pronunciar o al escribir el nombre del que ha de venir a representaros en el Congreso nacional, vuestros destinos ya no dependen, ni de los Ministros, ni de los virreyes, ni de los Gobernadores, están en vuestras manos. (qtd. in Dérozier, *Liberalismo* 586)³

Not surprisingly, such comments have led some to accuse Quintana of inciting insurrection in Spanish America. Marcelino Meléndez y Pelayo, for example, slams Quintana's remarks, describing them as "frases buenas en un libro del abate Raynal o en la oda *A la vacuna*, pero absurdas e impolíticas siempre en la de un Gobierno español, que así aceleraba y justificaba la emancipación de sus propias colonias" (7: 44-45).

Yet as early as 1814, Quintana had attempted to defend his comments, making clear his determination to protect the integrity of the Spanish empire: "Las proclamas todas que yo he escrito se me han encargado por el Gobierno, se han revisado por él antes de imprimirse, y se han publicado a su nombre. Cuantas he trabajado para la América nos respiran otros sentimientos, ni manifiestan otro objeto que mantener la unión de aquellos países con la Metrópoli, y sacar de ellos abundantes socorros para la guerra"

² Reyes Cano highlights the significance of 1808 in terms of Quintana's political career, "[P]ues a partir de ese momento reduce considerablemente su dedicación a la literatura y se involucra por propia iniciativa en una actividad política que no ha de abandonar prácticamente hasta su muerte" (17).

³ Quintana supported the mutiny of Aranjuez against the Napoleonic invasion of Spain in 1808. In his *Memoria sobre el proceso y prisión de D. Manuel Quintana en 1814*, Quintana, a "liberal progresista comprometido con la política de su tiempo" (Marta Palenque 26), makes clear his support for the pro-independence side in the Spanish War of Independence (1808-1814): "El partido, pues, yo tomé desde luego irrevocablemente fue el de contribuir con todos los medios que estuviesen a mi alcance para libertar a mi patria de la tiranía de Bonaparte y de toda especie de tiranía" (*Memoria* 55). In 1809, he was appointed secretary general of the Junta Central, and was author of the many addresses and proclamations issued by the Junta (after 1810 the Regency Council) between 1809 and 1812.

(qtd. in Dérozier 504). Moreover, as the revolution in Spain's American colonies had predated his proclamation, Quintana was keen to point out the absurdity of claims that his remarks had led to insurrection in Spain's American colonies: "Y para acabar de caracterizar la ridícula insensatez de este cargo, es de advertir, que estas proclamas llegaron a América cuando ya las provincias de Caracas y Buenos-Aires habían alzado el estandarte de la insurrección" (*Memoria* 78). None the less, in spite of Quintana's claims to the contrary, charges of anti-imperialism continued to haunt him, as Meléndez y Pelayo's comments make clear. In the twentieth century, Albert Dérozier also attempted to defend Quintana's much disputed remarks, describing them as "mal interpretadas" (Dérozier, *Liberalismo* 587); yet it was Raymond Carr who would do most to clarify the intended meaning of Quintana's 1810 proclamation and its apparent call for colonial autonomy. As Carr explains:

The solution of the Cadiz liberals for the colonial desire for self-government was the concession of full political rights to American citizens *within* [author's emphasis] a unified empire; the colonies were an integral part of metropolitan Spain and would be 'freed', with the same constitution that gave Spain herself freedom. The first step therefore was to grant representation to the colonies ... in the Cortes. ... America, like Spain itself, had been ruined by three centuries of theological intolerance and political despotism; if a unitary liberal constitution was the remedy in Spain, it must also be the remedy in America. (103)

What is clear from Carr's remarks is that Quintana, far from advocating the dissolution of the Spanish empire, was promoting a new national imperialism which sought equality, fraternity and liberty for all. Quintana's concern for the equal rights of Spanish Americans had more to do with obtaining the support of Spain's American colonies in the war against Napoleon than any explicit call for Spanish American independence. As Henry Kamen points out: "three hundred years after the foundation of the city of Santo Domingo in Hispaniola, the Spaniards needed the empire" (507).

Few, however, were to interpret Quintana's comments in this way. In 1833, Quintana's enthusiastic support for Bartolomé de las Casas (1484-1566), whom he champions in the third volume of his *Vidas de los españoles celebres* as "un dechado de celo, de humanidad y de virtudes" (473), would serve to aggravate rather than mitigate suggestions of Quintana's opposition to empire.⁴ Antonio Ferrer del Río, for instance, in the foreword to

⁴ In *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias* (1542), Las Casas, a strong supporter of the rights of indigenous peoples, vehemently criticized the atrocities committed by the Spanish in the New World.

Quintana's *Obras completas* in 1851, poignantly laments Quintana's support for Las Casas, noting how "de gran peso es para nosotros el parecer del señor Quintana" (vii). Quintana, it would seem, was all too aware of the criticism that his support for Las Casas would attract when, in the prefatory note to the same volume of *Vidas de los españoles célebres*, he remarks: "Se acusará al autor de poco afecto al honor de su país cuando tan francamente adopta los sentimientos y principios del protector de los indios, cuyos imprudentes escritos han sido la ocasión de tanto escándalo y suministrado tantas armas a los detractores de las glorias españolas" (369). Quintana no doubt had in mind French *philosophes*, amongst others, in his reference to "los detractores de las glorias españolas." In the eighteenth century, Las Casas's text became synonymous with enlightened debates over the legitimacy of empire and was the source of much of the European criticism of Spain's colonial record: "Se comprende que Las Casas haya quedado como el símbolo de la resistencia a las empresas de dominación colonial y que su nombre fuera frecuentemente citado por los filósofos del siglo XVIII e incluso por los revolucionarios" (Merle and Mesa 15). Arguably, the most prominent of these *filósofos* was Voltaire. In his *Essai sur les mœurs*, he openly acknowledged his debt to Las Casas: "Je crois le récit de Las Casas exagéré en plus d'un endroit ; mais supposé qu'il en dise dix fois trop, il rest de quoi être saisi d'horreur" (CXLV 1291).

Although Quintana follows Bartolomé de las Casas and European Enlightenment thinkers in his criticisms of the excesses of European conquest, he does not adopt the more radical thought of *philosophes* such as Cornelius de Pauw (1739-1799), who claimed that the conquest of the New World was the most disastrous event in the history of mankind: "il est certain que la conquête du nouveau Monde, si fameuse et injuste, a été le plus grand des malheurs que l'humanité ait essuyé" (1: iv-v).⁵ On the contrary, Quintana celebrates the discovery of the New World in his *Poesías patrióticas*. His ode "Al mar," champions Columbus for his courage and determination and holds him up as the divine agent specially chosen to carry out Spain's unique religious mission: "Colón, arrebatado / de un celestial, busca atrevido / el nuevo mundo revelado a él solo" (124-26). A similarly flattering portrayal of Columbus's imperial endeavor is evident in "A España, después de la revolución de marzo": "Volábase a occidente, / y el

⁵ De Pauw's description of the conquest in such terms was based on the premise that America was the source of many of the fatal diseases such as syphilis which had swept across Europe. De Pauw's *Recherches philosophiques sur les Américains, ou, Mémoires intéressantes pour servir à l'histoire de l'espèce humaine* (1768-1770), considered by one critic as "probably the most scathing denunciation of America that was ever written" (Ward 179), was largely based on Buffon's theory of degeneracy in his *Histoire naturelle* (1749-1788).

vasto mar Atlántico sembrado / se hallaba de su gloria y su fortuna” (5-7). In the same poem Quintana also celebrates the unchallengeable superiority of Spain in the world: “Doquiera España: en el preciado seno / de América, en el Asia, en los confines / del África, allí España” (8-10).

Of course, it is of little surprise that, in a collection which sought to arrest Spain’s national decline by drawing on the heroic deeds of Spain’s forebears, Quintana should choose to champion Spain’s unique imperial status as a source of national pride and strength. Quintana wrote his *Poesías patrióticas* in urgent response to the political breakdown and social and economic turbulence of Spain at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries. In his “Advertencia de las poesías patrióticas de 1808,” he comments, “Inspirados estos versos por el amor a la gloria y a la libertad de la Patria, manifiestan ya la indignación de que un pueblo fuerte y generoso sufriese el yugo más infame que hubo nunca, ya la esperanza de sacudirle y de que tomásemos en el orden político y civil el lugar que por nuestro carácter y circunstancias locales nos ha asignado la naturaleza” (332).⁶ In the same prologue, he later expresses his hope that his *Poesías patrióticas* “podrán tal vez ser útiles para sostener y fomentar el entusiasmo de los buenos Españoles” (333). As a result, Pereiro-Otero’s suggestion of Quintana’s radical call for independence in his ode to Balmis is hard to square with the expressed patriotic imperative of the collection, as well as the descriptions of Quintana as “el poeta defensor por excelencia de la patria” (González Subías 181). Quintana firmly believed that recourse to Spain’s heroic tradition would regenerate a weak and moribund nation and reaffirm the national character in a time of crisis. In his account of “Guzmán el Bueno” in *Vidas de los españoles célebres* (1807), Quintana describes Spain’s heroic tradition as the very life-blood of a nation: “Es indudable que muchas veces su salud [of a nation] depende de este heroísimo o vanidad extraordinaria” (216).⁷

Though Quintana’s *Poesías patrióticas* is evidently propagandistic in nature, the collection is imbued with a progressive consciousness. Reyes Cano highlights Quintana’s “mentalidad ilustrada” (30), pointing out that “su formación esencial es un producto del enciclopedismo dieciochesco y procede muy especialmente de Francia” (11-12). Of particular note is the

⁶ In a letter to Lord Holland in 1824, Quintana describes the instability of Spain at the beginning of the nineteenth century in the following terms: “La España de Carlos V hace ya mucho tiempo que acabó; la de Fernando VI y Carlos III también es imposible que subsista; y estas oscilaciones de esclava a libre y de libre a esclava, estas revueltas, esta agitación no son otra cosa que las agonías y convulsiones de un Estado que fenece” (*Obras completas* 584).

⁷ For further details of Quintana’s search for a new pantheon of national heroes see Alberto González Troyano.

humanitarian philanthropy and “enlightened” patriotism which underpin the collection. Rooted in the Enlightenment principles of reason, benevolence and utility, Quintana is keen to avoid the narrow and chauvinistic patriotism which might be presumed to exist in a collection titled “*Poesías patrióticas*”. He displays instead a reasonable and just love of country which is carried to action for the promotion of the public good. For Quintana, “no hay patria ... si no hay amor, armonía general y orden público” (Dérozier, *Poesías* 28).⁸

Quintana’s ode “A la expedición Española,” which celebrates Francisco Xavier Balmis’s pioneering vaccine expedition to America and Asia in 1803, is a poignant example of his “enlightened” patriotism and “espíritu enciclopedista” (Reyes Cano 36) hitherto described.⁹ Balmis’s ten-year campaign (1803-1813), now widely accepted as “the world’s first vaccination campaign” (Mark and Pigau-Pérez 84), sought to distribute Edward Jenner’s smallpox vaccine to Spain’s overseas territories.¹⁰ Quintana’s choice of Balmis as heroic subject in his poem exemplifies the new scientific spirit of the age and demonstrates his enlightened belief in public and useful service. As Reyes Cano illustrates: “el poema se sitúa dentro del idealismo filantrópico y humanitario dieciochescos. Vemos en él la exaltación de la ciencia y del científico y / la glorificación de un nuevo protagonista—el médico—merecedor de un canto poético. La vacuna, bien colectivo para la humanidad, es también digna de cantarse como un acontecimiento superior” (52-53).

While Quintana’s positive portrayal of Balmis in his ode successfully stirred pride in the Spanish nation, thus satisfying the patriotic imperative of the collection, “despierta legítimamente el orgullo racial” (Marañón vii), the poem, I argue, is much more than a simple celebration of Balmis’s

⁸ Quintana’s enlightened outlook is no doubt attributable to the unique access he had to many of Europe’s most enlightened thinkers. As a result of the licenses granted to his father in 1788 and 1790 by the Bishop of Jaén, Quintana was able to “familiarizarse con una multitud de obras prohibidas, religiosas, jurídicas, históricas, económicas o políticas: Pietro Giannone, Fénelon, Condillac, Turgot, Montesquieu, Marmontel, el Conde de Volney, Voltaire, Emmerich de Vattel, Robertson, Adam Smith, Lorenzo Valla, Joannes Althusius, Paulo Jovio, Calvete de Estrella, Bacon, Lord Bolinbroke, etc” (Dérozier, *Poesías* 18).

⁹ For more detailed accounts of Balmis’s expedition see the books by Gonzalo Díaz de Iraola and Susana María Ramírez Martín, as well as the articles by Michael Smith and José Luis Barona Vilar.

¹⁰ Smallpox was introduced into American territories as a result of European conquest and colonialism circa 1513. As American Indians had no immunity to the disease, mortality rates were high. For further details of the history of smallpox in America see Frank Fenner, John. Z. Bowers, and José Manuel Pereiro-Otero.

expedition. It is the purpose of this paper to demonstrate that the centrality of America in “A la expedición española” is indicative of Quintana’s participation in Enlightenment dispute over America and represents his attempt to deal poetically with questions over the validity of Spanish imperialism. Something of this “ruidosa polémica acerca de América” (Tietz 234) has already been seen in earlier references to de Pauw’s description of the discovery of the New World as the most disastrous event humanity has ever suffered. Other *philosophes* who questioned the relative merits of colonialism included Voltaire, who, in his *Essai sur les mœurs*, asserted that “[c]’est un grand problème de savoir si l’Europe a gagné en se portant en Amérique” (CXLIX 1297). Similarly, the Abbé Raynal (1713-1796) in volume 2, Book 6 of his *Histoire des Deux Indes* questions, “[b]ut would not greater advantages have arisen, if nations had continued in a state of tranquility, detached from each other, ignorant, and hospitable, than thus to have become corrupted with the most ferocious of all passions” (425).¹¹

For many Enlightenment thinkers, especially the *philosophes*, it was not difficult to square accounts of Spanish colonial barbarity with the anti-Spanish bias endemic to eighteenth-century attitudes towards Spain. According to Manuel Moreno Alonso: “[e]l pasado colonial español fue criticado con dureza, sin contemplaciones, y casi sin matices” (2) by Enlightenment thinkers.¹² Montesquieu (1689-1755), for example, is particularly vitriolic in his assessment of the Spanish in his *Lettres persanes*. Describing the Spanish as “barbares” in Lettre LXXI, he claims that Spain “en découvrant les Indes, n’avoit pensé qu’à découvrir aux hommes quel était le dernier période de la cruauté” (Lettre CXXI, 239), while in Lettre LXXVIII, he satirizes the unthinking superiority of the Spanish: “dans les Indes [...] ils considèrent qu’ils ont le sublime mérite d’être comme ils dissent, *homme de chair blanché*” (168). However, it was Masson de Morvielliers’ inflammatory questions regarding Spain’s contribution to Europe which were to prove particularly offensive to Spain. In his entry

¹¹ Raynal’s *Histoire philosophiques et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes* (hereafter, *Histoire des Deux Indes*) was first published in 1770, expanded in 1774, and significantly revised for a third edition in 1780. A posthumous edition was made in 1820. The work was widely reprinted with forty-nine editions being produced between 1770 and 1843. Although it was banned in Spain by the Inquisition in 1779, the Duque de Almodóvar published a free version of it in 1784-1790, under the anagram of Eduardo Malo de Luque.

¹² It is important to note that within Spain similar questions were asked about the legitimacy of conquest. Juan Pablo Forner questioned, “¿Qué ventajas ha logrado el Nuevo Mundo con nuestra dominación y nosotros con dominarle; y qué alteraciones produjo esta grande empresa en los estados de Europa y en nuestro enlace con ellos?” (*Discurso* 168).

“Espagne”, in the *Encyclopédie méthodique* in 1782, he asked: “Mais que doit-on à l’Espagne? Et depuis deux siècles, depuis quatre, depuis dix, qu’a-t-elle fait pour l’Europe? Elle ressemble aujourd’hui à ces colonies foibles et malheureuses, qui ont besoin sans cesse du bras protecteur de la métropole” (1:564). Spanish sensitivity could not withstand such calumnious remarks which were met in Spain by “una violentísima reacción y unas furibundas réplicas” (Gies 307). The urgent need to defend Spain against European criticism prompted a large response among Spanish intellectuals who grappled to find the most effective way to defend the nation. Recent scholarship, in an attempt to formulate their response, has arranged it around the dialectical axis of “apologista” and “antiapologista”.¹³

In “A la expedición española,” Quintana follows the tradition of the “antiapologistas” and foregrounds critical questions regarding the legitimacy of Spanish colonialism.¹⁴ This is achieved by means of the poem’s structure, which takes the form of a dialogue between America and Quintana. The interplay that this sets up between the Old World and the New provides the space necessary for a more candid and “enlightened” debate of the uncomfortable questions surrounding Spain’s New World conquest.

The poem begins with the speaker’s apostrophe to America as “¡Virgen del mundo, América inocente!” (1). The personification of America as a feminine figure whose youthfulness and innocence are celebrated as her supreme virtues is reinforced by subsequent references to her natural bounty: “Tú, que el preciado seno / al cielo ostentas de abundancia lleno” (2-3) and to her beauty: “Tú, que a fuer de más tierna y más hermosa / entre

¹³ María-Dolores Albiac refers to the “conocida guerra de apologistas y antiapologistas” (251), while Antonio Mestre sees the Spanish response as characterized by a “dualidad apología-crítica” (24). A defining feature of the work of Spain’s “apologistas” was their recourse to the heroic mode of imperial myth. Hernán Cortés and the heroes of the American annals were an important rhetorical focus in several of their works. Operating mainly within the terms set by official discourse, the “apologistas” projected a sublime and coherent vision of heroic military conquest which did little to counter Enlightenment criticism of Spanish colonialism or to expiate Spain’s colonial guilt. The “antiapologistas”, however, cognizant of the limitations of such a defense, attempted to counter the chauvinistic poetics of the “apologistas” by interrogating the more controversial aspects of Spanish colonialism rather than suppressing them. These were the men “lleno de crítica, imparcialidad y juicio” (*Carta LIX*, 142) which Cadalso called for in his *Cartas marruecas*.

¹⁴ It is important to note that attempts to marshal nationalistic zeal through pride expressed in Spain’s heroic past is a recurring feature of “antiapologista” writers also.

las zonas de la madre tierra” (5-6).¹⁵ It is in the context of America’s arcadian perfection and promise that questions are raised over the abuses America has suffered at the hands of Europe. Quintana makes no attempts to silence questions of colonial barbarity, nor does he try to diminish the suffering and destruction inflicted on America as a result. His condemnation of such “delitos” (24) is unequivocal. This is visible in the graphic and nightmarish imagery that he uses to evoke the horror of conquest. It is with “sangre” that America’s “dolientes gritos” are indelibly recorded: “están escritos en el eterno libro de la vida / esos dolientes gritos / que tu labio afligido al cielo envía” (18-21).

Yet Quintana’s acknowledgement of European wrongdoing is not the transparent, unmitigated condemnation of European violence that it first appears. His recourse to gender in the opening stanza by means of America’s female personification immediately suggests feminine weakness and America’s lack of resistance to Europe’s conquest of her territories. The suggestion here is that the conquest was an act of seduction, a willing surrender to a more powerful body, rather than a violent clash. His use of the more impersonal third person, “te destrozaron” (17), is indicative of the degree of reticence that underpins his criticism. While he admits the repeated complaints made against Spain’s colonial record: “Claman allí contra la patria mía / y vedan estampar gloria y ventura / en el campo fatal” (22-24), Spain is never explicitly cited as its perpetrator. In this way, Quintana avoids direct confrontation with the issue of the violence and legitimacy of Spain’s New World conquest. In fact, the pathos elicited by Europe’s violent treatment of a pre-Columbian America, far from heightening European guilt and corruption is artfully abated by the lachrymose display of the speaker and his genuine display of remorse:

oyéme: si hubo vez en que mis ojos,
 los fastos de tu historia recorriendo,
 no se hichasen de lágrimas; si pudo
 mi corazón sin compasión, sin ira
 tus lástimas oír. (10-14)

Quintana may open the poem by citing America as the undisputed victim of European colonialism, but by means of ironic reversal she is shrewdly supplanted by Spain who is instead cast as the victim of America’s laments. The speaker protests against the injustices of America’s complaints, pointing out that Spain is no longer the triumphant nation she once was. Nevertheless, the complaints against her are unrelenting: “¿No cesarán

¹⁵ For further details on the personification of America during this period see the article by E. McClung Fleming.

jamás? / ¿No son bastantes tres siglos infelices / de amarga expiación?" (25-27). The rhetorical defense used by the "apologistas", which justified Spain's conquest of America as a spiritual and civilizing mission, is revived by Quintana who integrates this threadbare and defensive motif into his poem by masquerading it as a nostalgic lament for what Spain has long ceased to be:

no somos, no, los que a la faz del mundo
las alas de la audacia se vistieron
y por el ponto Atlántico volaron;
aquéllos que al silencio en que yacías,
sangrienta, encadenada, te arrancaron. (28-30)

America, who until this point has been a silent witness to the speaker's grievances, then addresses them directly by first acknowledging that Spain is no longer the great colonial power she once was. America, however, questions why this should be thought justification enough for withdrawing her complaints against Spain: "Los mismos ya no sois, pero ¿mi llanto / por eso ha de cesar?" (33-34). By allowing America to openly voice her criticism of Spanish violence, "el rigor de mis duros vencedores, su atroz codicia, su inclemente saña / crimen" (36-37), Quintana uses the poem to condemn flatly the disruption and disorder of Spanish colonialism, yet he is also careful to mitigate Spanish guilt. America herself, somewhat conciliatory, admits that it is "del tiempo y no de España" (37) and reveals her preparedness to forgive Spain's abuses: "Yo olvidaría el rigor de mis duros vencedores" (34). Quintana's superb achievement is to admit Spain's culpability in her violent conquest of the New World while simultaneously erasing it without recourse to the torturously defensive and chauvinistic rhetoric indicative of Spain's "apologistas."

After addressing the wrongs committed against America in the past, attention shifts to the sufferings endured by America in the present. A struggling nation, America, in pain and agony, makes an urgent plea to Spain to help her fight the physical disease which currently afflicts her. America's vivid and protracted descriptions of her suffering, which harrowingly depict her drowning in her own pain, show that no attempts have been made to whitewash American suffering: "¿Cuándo, ¡ay, Dios! los dolorosos males / podré olvidar que aún misera me ahogan?" (38-39). Graphic similes, comparing America's illness to a serpent wreathing itself in the paradisiacal tree, convey the savage and venomous nature of this "peste fatal" (smallpox) which has been brought by Europe aboard her "funestas naves" (43).

Once again, the poem's frank and labored indictment of colonialism is not without its own self-serving purpose. By setting out the almost unquantifiable nature of America's suffering, of which there is little hope of any remedy, America's cries to Europe are in the end made in vain, "yo,

expirante, yerma, a tanta plaga / demando auxilio, y le demando en vano” (55-56), Quintana exploits America’s new sense of vulnerability by heralding Spain as the savior from this devouring “peste fatal.” As a result, the elaborate accounts of American suffering are explicitly crafted so that rather than condemn Spain for her part in bringing smallpox to the New World, they serve only to heighten American gratitude to Spain for the relief she provides through the sanitary mission of Francisco Xavier Balmis. Spain is thus transformed from perpetrator to deliverer of American suffering. She is no longer the source of corruption for America but of liberation and new life. Balmis will plant “el árbol de la vida” (94) and cleanse America of disease: “siente / purificar sus venas / el destinado bálsamo” (131-33).

Quintana’s exemplary portrayal of Balmis’s heroic actions is integral to his attempts to find a new, more persuasive imperial hero.¹⁶ In doing so, he answers Forner’s calls to “hallar objetos dignos de elogio en la edad presente, como los hallamos en gran número en las pasadas” (*Oración apologetica* 51). By choosing Balmis, a modern, “enlightened” hero more suited to the cultural climate of the time, it is clear that Quintana was aware of the incongruity that surrounded attempts to celebrate the Christian militarism of Spain’s traditional heroes while simultaneously expressing anxieties over Spain’s colonial violence. Evidently, Quintana recognized that were he to celebrate a figure like Hernán Cortés, Cortés would, without significant tailoring, be stranded in a poem such as “A la expedición española”. The choice of Balmis represents Quintana’s attempt to reconfigure the Spanish heroic tradition at the turn of the nineteenth century. Yet although Quintana celebrates a new kind of hero in “A la expedición española,” he is still cast in the image of Spain’s traditional military heroes: “se tiene la misma impresión de sobrehumana energía que cuando oímos relatar las hazañas de los descubridores y conquistadores” (*Marañón* vii). Balmis, for example, is depicted as an “enlightened”

¹⁶ Quintana also celebrates the heroism of Jenner in the course of the poem:

A tan inmenso dón agradecida,
la Europa toda en ecos de alabanza
con el nombre de Jenner se recrea;
y ya en su exaltación eleva altares
donde, a par de sus genios tutelares,
siglos y siglos adorar le vea. (73-78)

Nevertheless, in keeping with the poem’s patriotic spirit, he is keen to illustrate that Balmis’s heroism outstrips that of Jenner due to the perilous nature of the former’s expedition, “El dón de la invención es de fortuna. / Gócele allá un inglés; España ostente / su corazón espléndido y sublime, / y dé a su majestad mayor decoro, / llevando este tesoro / donde con más violencia el mal oprime” (84-87).

conquistador whose "ardor" is "generoso" (134) as opposed to militaristic. Like the conquistadores, the integrity of his mission is reinforced. Quintana talks of its 'noble intento' (124) and of the "corazón espléndido y sublime" (85) of the Spanish. As in Spain's original New World conquest, Balmis's expedition is the result of divine providence: the vaccine is described as "depósito sagrado" (102) and Balmis is the instrument chosen to carry out this philanthropic mission: "Yo volaré, que un Numen me lo manda, / yo volaré" (91-92). Although non-militaristic in nature, Balmis's actions when compared to the military exploits of the conquistadores are equally as triumphant: "vengan triunfando las soberbias flotas" (110) and glorious: "nadie sin tesón y ardua porfía / pudo arrancar las palmas de la gloria" (128-29).

It is hard to ignore the parallels that exist between Quintana's description of Balmis's New World expedition and the patriotic and heroic myth of Spain's conquest of America. Both are presented as divinely ordained, the moral integrity and heroism of each are unshakeable and the motives in each case are paternalistic, seeking nothing less than the betterment of America. As a result, Quintana, unable to reconcile the reality of the violence and exploitation of the sixteenth-century conquest with the enlightenment orthodoxies of equality, liberty and tolerance, turns to Balmis's unimpeachable expedition which he transposes onto Spain's original American conquest, reinventing it as a peaceful and benevolent reconquest of the New World, and removing it totally from the violence and self-interest which had marred Spain's first imperial endeavors. By doing so, Quintana is able to transcend the ideological contradictions between the discourses of salvation and the deeds of destruction which, no matter how well camouflaged, consistently jeopardized attempts to uphold the legitimacy of Spain's American conquest. This Quintana achieves not by ignoring the contentious questions raised by Spain's New World conquest but by confronting them. Quintana acknowledges, albeit somewhat reluctantly, Spain's guilt in the course of his poem and then offers Balmis's sanitary and disinterested expedition as atonement for Spain's wrongdoing. It is a subtle portrayal of good Spanish colonialism and justifies Spain's continued intervention in the New World. That this is so is confirmed by the portrait projected of America at the end of the poem, whereby the image of idyllic perfection celebrated in the opening apostrophe to America and which is sullied in proceeding verses, is restored by the final stanza. America is "purified" (132) by Balmis's arrival and becomes the uncontested location of a new social hope, to the extent that the speaker urges Balmis not to return to an ignorant and corrupt Europe but to remain in America (154-57).

It is highly questionable whether Quintana's radical charge to Balmis to stay in America is really indicative of Quintana's desire for American independence, as Pereiro-Otero suggests. It is much more likely that the

America he refers to in the final section of the poem (as it is throughout) is a mythical and ideological America which Quintana exploits as a means of expressing his frustration and despair with a benighted Spain and Europe. In the lines which precede his charge to Balmis, Quintana bitterly laments the loss of Enlightenment values in a war-torn Spain:

aquella luz altísima y divina,
que en días más felices
la razón, la virtud aquí encendieron!
luz que se extingue ya. (148-51)

“Quédate allá” is a displaced call for Spain’s urgent political and economic rebirth rather than an endorsement of colonial independence. Quintana sees in America the ideals of liberty and equality which he hopes might one day be cultivated in Spain. Indeed Quintana’s stress on the virtues of Balmis’s corrective and scientific mission is an implicit justification of the Spanish imperial system. Quintana may criticize Spain’s colonial violence but nowhere does he discredit completely the notion of empire. Through his celebration of Balmis, Quintana defends the legitimacy of the Spanish empire, rights the wrongs of Spain’s imperial past and redefines her imperial role for the future.

In “A la expedición española,” Quintana engages, albeit tacitly, with Enlightenment disputes over whether the conquest of America was justified, and whether it was worth it. Although there is no categorical answer to either question in the course of the poem, it seems plausible to suggest that Quintana’s extended portrait of colonial excesses at the beginning of the poem unwittingly destabilizes the presentation of good Spanish colonialism which follows. In doing so, Quintana reflects the inherently ambivalent nature of European colonialism, an ambivalence which he also draws attention to in *Vidas de los españoles celebres*: “diré que donde quiera que encuentro, sea en lo pasado, sea en lo presente, agresores y agraviados, opresores y oprimidos, por ningún respeto de utilidad posterior, ni aun de miramiento nacional, puedo inclinarme a los primeros ni dejar de simpatizar con los segundos” (369). Ultimately, however, it is difficult for the reader, as it is for America in the course of the poem, not to be seduced by Quintana’s benevolent imperial vision of humanitarian and civilizing ideals.

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