

**PRECURSORS OF LARRA'S 'EL CAFÉ'
IN EARLY *COSTUMBRISTA*
LITERATURE DURING THE REIGN
OF CARLOS IV (1788-1808)**

CIARAN HARTY
Queen's University Belfast

Introduction

In 1828 Romantic journalist Mariano José de Larra published *El Duende Satírico del Día*, a self-funded periodical containing five instalments in prose which appeared intermittently between

February and December of that year. The journal's opening *cuaderno* contains two articles: the first, entitled «El Duende y el librero», provides a short introduction to the series and to the second article, «El café», a satirical *costumbrista* sketch that presents a series of social types gathered in a Madrid coffee house under the Absolutism of Fernando VII. «El café» represented Larra's first contribution to *costumbrismo*, a type of literature in prose focused on the representation of life in the city that began to emerge in Madrid in the final decades of the eighteenth century and later became consolidated as a genre in the 1830s with Larra and his contemporary, Ramón de Mesonero Romanos. As José Escobar argued in his 1973 study *Los orígenes de la obra de Larra*, «El café» corresponded to a style of literature based on social observation that had started to appear in different European countries in the previous century. 'El género del artículo', Escobar contended, 'no podía sorprender a los lectores familiarizados con la literatura que había venido apareciendo en periódicos y revistas desde mediados del siglo anterior' (137). Highlighting the connections between «El café» and essays published by Addison and Steele in *The Spectator*, as well as articles penned by the French *mœurs* writer Étienne de Jouy, and *discursos* that appeared in the Spanish periodical press in the 1760s, Escobar's investigation pointed to the multiple sources that may have influenced Larra's first *artículo de costumbres*. However, it did not consider the connections between «El café» and early *costumbrista* literature published during the reign of Carlos IV. This article seeks to offer a novel insight into the antecedents of «El café», examining its connections with Alejandro Moya's two-volume *El café*, published in 1792 and 1794, and Eugenio de Tapia's 1807 *Viage de un curioso por Madrid*. It aims to demonstrate how these two texts possibly served as models for Larra's first *costumbrista* article by highlighting the similarities in the approaches taken by the narrators and also the connections between the themes addressed in certain episodes of the texts. But before examining the relationship between these two early

costumbrista works and «El café», it is necessary to situate them in an historical and literary framework.

Early *costumbrista* Literature During the Reign of Carlos IV (1788-1808)

Costumbrismo has typically been understood as an early nineteenth-century literary genre associated primarily with Larra and Mesonero Romanos in the context of 1830s Madrid. However, *costumbrista* literature began to emerge in the Spanish capital in the final decades of the eighteenth century and corresponded to the change that took place in the concept of imitation in the artistic aesthetic. Previously, nature had constituted the object of imitation in different artistic genres that focused on representing individuals in abstract situations, projecting the image of a society grounded in religious, moral values aligned with the traditional Catholic mentality. In the eighteenth century, a transformation occurred in the artistic aesthetic which abandoned nature and abstract contexts to make civil society the object of imitation, focusing on local, temporally-defined circumstances. Describing the theoretical elements of *costumbrismo*, Escobar asserted that this novel type of literature:

Corresponde, entre los siglos XVIII y XIX, a una nueva representación ideológica de la realidad que implica una concepción moderna de la literatura, entendida como forma mimética de lo local y circunstancial mediante la observación minuciosa de rasgos y detalles de ambiente y de comportamiento colectivo diferenciadores de una fisonomía social particularizada y en analogía con la verdad histórica. ("La mimesis" 262)

This new literary model was developed in different European countries from the first decades of the eighteenth century as authors made local circumstances their object of imitation and offered representations of civil society. This was seen in Britain with Addison's and Steele's *The Tatler* (1709-11) and *The Spectator* (1711-12), and also later in France with Louis Sébastien Mercier's 1781 *Tableau de Paris* and Étienne de Jouy's 1812 *L'Hérmitte de la Chaussée-D'Antin*, which demonstrates how this new theoretical model was transnational and adaptable to different social, cultural and historical contexts. Indeed, as Escobar observed, 'Según la concepción costumbrista de la literatura, los escritores son pintores de la sociedad distinta de cada país, descrita con la peculiaridad propia del momento histórico en que es observada' ("Literatura" 197).

In Spain, this novel type of literature appeared in an embryonic form in the 1760s in Spanish Spectator-style periodicals, which included *El Duende Especulativo sobre la Vida Civil* (1761), *El Pensador* (1762-63; 1767) and *El Censor* (1781-87). Collaborators with these newspapers published *discursos* in which they developed a new type of civil morality centred on the critical representation of the customs of different social types, satirising

controversial practices such as the *cortejo* game, luxury and the excessive ways of life of elaborate *petimetres* and *petimetas*. Frolidi highlights the novelty of the *costumbrista* prose developed in these periodicals, describing how ‘Se quiere modificar el concepto mismo de moral, no ligada a valores metafísicos y absolutos, sino como proyecciones de la conciencia interior del hombre que debe referirse a sí mismo y a lo que tiene a su alrededor’ (164). Indeed, in the introduction to the first instalment of *El Pensador*, the narrator informed readers that this reformist periodical aimed to focus specifically on the Spanish society of the 1760s: ‘Esta Obra se darà a luz todos los Lunes. Razon serà que antes de informarnos por la Gaceta de las Guerras, de las Alianzas y demás, en que se interessa la curiosidad, bolvamos los ojos, y nos informemos de lo que pasa entre nosotros, y en nuestros mismos interiores’ (I, 1762 10-11).¹ This new concept of imitation in which civil society served as the object of representation was also developed in late eighteenth-century theatrical and artistic works, which constituted other manifestations of *costumbrismo*. For instance, in the 1770s Goya’s *Cartones para tapices* and Juan de la Cruz Cano’s *Colección de trajes de España* portrayed popular types in their typical attire both in the context of Madrid and other Spanish provinces. Similarly, Ramón de la Cruz’s *sainetes* provided theatrical depictions of the ways of life of lower-class Madrid types set in the Spanish capital’s working-class *barrios* and its most characteristic urban spaces.

During the reign of Carlos IV a group of short *costumbrista*-style prose works began to appear in Madrid, all of which were focused on portraying life in the Spanish capital at the end of the Enlightenment period and offering moralising representations of the customs of *madrileños*. Works corresponding to this group included Clara Jara de Soto’s *El Instruido en la corte, y aventuras del estremeño* (1789); Eugenio Villalba’s *Visita de las ferias de Madrid* (1790); the anonymous *Mis vagatelas, ó las ferias de Madrid* (1791); the anonymous *El tiempo de ferias, ó Jacinto en Madrid* (1793); Desiderio Cerdonio’s *El Ropavejero literario, en las ferias de Madrid* (1796); Antonio de San Román’s *El alcarreño en Madrid* (1803); and Eugenio de Tapia’s *Viage de un curioso por Madrid* (1807). These texts were similar in style to the *discursos* published decades previously in the Spanish Spectator periodicals but they represented a new, urban type of *costumbrismo* which portrayed life in the Spanish capital and described the everyday scenes in its most emblematic old and new urban spaces, including the Plaza de la Cebada, the Plaza Mayor, the Puerta del Sol and the Paseo del Prado. This novel form of *costumbrismo*, characterised by its well-defined urban context, was associated more closely with the *artículos de costumbres* of Larra and Mesonero Romanos in the 1830s than the *discursos* published in periodicals like *El Pensador*, which

¹ I have opted to maintain the original orthography in all the sources quoted in this article.

were not always set in a specific urban context. The narrators of the works that correspond to this group of early *costumbrista* texts adopt a similar approach to 1830s *costumbrista* writers, strolling through the Spanish capital and offering short, fragmented descriptions of its everyday scenes. These episodes are typically situated in Madrid's different public spaces, including streets, squares, *paseos* and also coffee houses that, as we will examine in the pages that follow, represented popular social spaces for authors of early *costumbrista* texts in their quest to portray the new ways of life emerging in the late eighteenth-century Spanish capital.

Coffee Houses in Eighteenth-Century Madrid

In early modern Europe, the development of industries gave rise to frequent correspondence between merchants from different cities who sought information about practices in trade and commerce, as well as current political affairs. This novel type of communication represented an embryonic form of 'news', but as Habermas points out, the merchants involved in the exchange of economic and commercial knowledge 'were satisfied with a system that limited information to insiders; the urban and court chanceries preferred one that served only the needs of the administration' (16). The dissemination of information in these early forms of newsletters was therefore private in that it did not reach the wider circles of European societies; only a select number of individuals were kept informed about the latest occurrences in European commercial and economic activities. Other early types of newsheets such as royal pamphlets were also private in that they served exclusively as mediums for the publicity of court events, typically documenting ceremonies and speeches made by Monarchs.

In the second half of the seventeenth century, this nascent form of news and publicity evolved from dealing solely with official court events to making European political matters accessible to the wider public sphere through periodicals that were typically read and discussed in new public institutions, particularly coffee houses. As Habermas notes, 'the "town" was the life center of civil society not only economically; in cultural-political contrast to the court, it designated especially an early public sphere in the world of letters whose institutions were the coffee houses, the *salons*, and the *Tischgesellschaften* (table societies)' (30). These new public spaces opened in London and Paris in the late seventeenth century and increased significantly in number in the decades that followed. According to Habermas, 'By the first decade of the eighteenth century London already had 3,000 of them [coffee houses], each with a core group of regulars' (32).

In comparison with other European capital cities, coffee houses appeared much later in Madrid. As Bonet Correa writes, 'El café como bebida exótica se tomaba en los salones de la nobleza o en las casas de personas distinguidas. [...] en un principio, el café en España fue una poción solo degustada por aristócratas y gentes refinadas en sus nobles

mansiones' (199). From the 1760s numerous coffee houses were established in Madrid, mainly in the centric Puerta del Sol and surrounding streets such as the Carrera de San Jerónimo and the calle de Alcalá. The anonymous 1815 guide to the Spanish capital, entitled *Paseo por Madrid, ó guía del forastero en la Corte*, stated that its main coffee houses were the Cafés de San Luis, de Lorenzini, de Levante, de la Cruz de Malta, and de la Fontana, all of which were situated in the streets encircling the Puerta del Sol (101-2). Coffee houses were also located in other areas of the *Villa y Corte*, as indicated by the notices for lost property published in various instalments of the daily newspaper *Diario de Madrid*. These included the Café de las Cuatro Naciones near Fuencarral street (25/7/1788 818), the Café de la Plazuela de Santo Domingo (14/7/1788 779), and the Café de la calle del Prado (17/11/1788 1187), which demonstrates the popularity of these new social spaces in late-Enlightenment Madrid.

Although they were to be found mainly in Madrid, coffee houses also appeared in other Spanish cities in the second half of the eighteenth century. As Pérez Samper writes, 'El café, como establecimiento, será un fenómeno burgués, característicamente urbano y serán las ciudades españolas más «burguesas», además de Madrid, Barcelona y Cádiz, aquellas en las que antes, y de manera más notable, proliferarán y tendrán éxito' (405). Whilst they were popular spaces among higher-class *madrileños*, cafés facilitated the mixing of social classes and were associated with the reading of periodicals, the open exchange of ideas, discussion on social and political issues and trade and culture in *tertulias* hosted and attended by men of letters, as well as entertainments such as cards and billiards. Another reason why people visited coffee houses was to smoke tobacco, a European custom that went hand-in-hand with drinking coffee in a relaxed, convivial setting. Cowan informs us that this practice had emerged at an earlier date in Britain, commenting that 'Along with its drinks, the coffeehouses offered a place to smoke tobacco, another exotic drug whose consumption was becoming increasingly popular over the course of the seventeenth century' (82). Indeed, the social qualities of tobacco were highlighted in the 1796 *Tratado de los usos, abusos, propiedades y virtudes del tabaco, café, té y chocolate*, which pointed to the widespread use of this substance among individuals from a range of social backgrounds: 'El uso del Tabaco en polvo es tan general en todos los Reynos de España (y lo mismo en otros), entre hombres y mugeres, religiosos, eclesiásticos, Príncipes y señores por el mucho bien que sienten con él' (80).

The presence of newspapers in coffee houses provided materials for discussion and debate and helped create new forms of public sociability that differed from the more formal relations and modes of conduct that had characterised social gatherings in private salons in the previous century. As Álvarez Barrientos writes, in coffee houses 'podía establecerse más claramente una relación de igualdad, desde el momento en que los asistentes pagaban su consumición, lo cual establecía la relación en otro

plano' ("Sociabilidad" 139). Examining the British context, Habermas writes that 'When Addison and Steele published the first issue of *The Tatler* in 1709, the coffee houses were already so numerous and the circles of their frequenters already so wide, that contact among these thousand fold circles could only be maintained through a journal' (42). Evidence of a similar demand for national and foreign periodicals in Madrid's cafés at the end of the eighteenth century can be found in the German traveller Frederick Augustus Fischer's 1802 *Travels in Spain*.² Despite offering an unfavourable view of the coffee houses in the *Villa y Corte*, portraying them as dirty and unhygienic spaces, Fischer observed that 'The best coffee is drunk at the Golden Fountain (La Fontana de Oro), where at least one gazette may be seen, called *El Diario de Madrid*, and those who are known there can also procure a sight of the *London Gazette*' (165). An announcement published in the *Diario de Madrid* in March 1789 also highlights the appetite of the late eighteenth-century Madrid public for periodicals and pieces of news. Informing readers about the opening of a new coffee house in the Spanish capital, the notice mentioned the range of journals that customers could peruse: 'En el nuevo café de Sto. Domingo, provisto de todas bebidas y licores, se hallan tambien varios papeles periodicos, y entre ellos el *Correo de Europa*, con otras cosas curiosas para la diversion, é instruccion de los concurrentes' (2/3/1789 243). This suggests that the availability of newspapers represented one of the main features that attracted *madrileños* to coffee houses and demonstrates also how reformers encouraged the reading of periodicals, viewing it as a worthwhile and productive activity. Indeed, in his 1792 *Memoria sobre las diversiones públicas*, the foremost *ilustrado* Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos called for the opening of more coffee houses in the Spanish capital, considering them to be ideal spaces for promoting useful forms of leisure:

Hace tambien gran falta en nuestras ciudades el establecimiento de cafés, ó casas públicas de conversacion y diversion cotidiana, que arreglados con buena policia, son un refugio para aquella porcion de gente ociosa que, como suele decirse, busca á todas horas donde matar el tiempo. [...] la lectura de papeles públicos y periódicos, las conversaciones instructivas y de interes general, no solo ofrecen un honesto entretenimiento á muchas personas de juicio y probidad en horas que son perdidas para el trabajo, sino que instruyen tambien á aquella porcion de jóvenes, que descuidados en sus familias, reciben su educacion fuera de casa, ó como se dice vulgarmente, en el mundo. (90-91)

Following the outbreak of revolutionary activity in neighbouring France in the early 1790s, the Madrid authorities took measures to regulate coffee houses in an effort to control public opinion and prevent the development of civil unrest similar to that occurring on the other side of the Pyrenees.

² Fischer's journey took place in 1797-98.

These interventions were enforced through the publication by Royal Decree on 28th April 1791 of the *Reglas que han de observarse en las fondas, cafés y demas casas públicas de esta clase en la Corte*. Notably, it stipulated: ‘No se establecerá casa ninguna de fonda, café, y demas de esta clase sin licencia de la Sala; y para obtenerla, han de ser primero visitadas por el Alcalde del quartel respectivo, ó de su orden’ (*Novísima recopilación*, libro III, título XIX, ley XXVI 165). It also stated: ‘No se permite juego ninguno de naypes, ni traviesas en los de trucos, bochas, chaquete ó villar; ni se leerán gazetas ni otros papeles públicos, ni se permitirá tampoco fumar’ (165-6). The implementation of these measures illustrates how the authorities feared that the open exchange of opinions and ideas, particularly in relation to events occurring in France, would lead to a total breakdown of public order. In fact, the British traveller Henry Swinburne, who visited the Spanish capital in the mid-1770s, had previously illustrated how the conversations between individuals who met together in coffee houses began to concern the Madrid authorities. ‘Freedom of speech on religious matters’, Swinburne observed, ‘had risen to such a height in the coffee-houses of Madrid, that at last it reached the ears of the king, who sent for the inquisitor general, whom he reproached with his supineness in a concern of so important a nature’ (379-380).

Thus far, it has been shown how the emergence of coffee houses in the Spanish capital during the second half of the eighteenth century gave rise to new forms of urban sociability and the development of an incipient public opinion. As we will explore in the following section, this image of cafés was reflected in numerous eighteenth-century periodical essays and works of literature penned by authors from different European countries in which coffee houses served as background for their representations of the customs of types during periods of social and cultural change.

The Coffee House as a European Literary Setting

Commenting on the possible precursors of Larra’s «El café», Escobar observed:

Puestos a buscar *fuentes* entre los escritos anteriores del mismo género literario, dentro y fuera de España, se podrían señalar muchas. Lo cual más que la dependencia del *Duende* respecto a un autor determinado, lo que manifiesta realmente es la pertenencia del artículo a un género de literatura. Las semejanzas señaladas no son específicas. Son relaciones de carácter general debidas a la aproximación de elementos convencionales repetidos en cierta literatura cultivada en periódicos y publicaciones semejantes. (*Los orígenes* 140)

The use of the coffee house as a setting in periodical essays that offered sketches of everyday life was seen first in various instalments of Addison’s and Steele’s *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*. To give an example, in the forty-

ninth issue of this second newspaper, published on 26th April 1711, the narrator stated: 'The coffee-house is the place of rendezvous to all that live near it, who are thus turned to relish calm and ordinary life' (85). Portraying the types who regularly visit one particular London coffee house, he describes how 'Eubulus presides over the middle hours of the day, when this assembly of men meet together. He enjoys a great fortune handsomely, without launching into expense; and exerts many noble and useful qualities, without appearing in any public employment' (85). Coffee houses were also utilised as literary settings in the works of French *moeurs* writers such as Louis Sébastien Mercier, who depicted the typical scenes in Parisian cafés during the final decades of the eighteenth century in his 1781 *Tableau de Paris*:

On compte six à sept cents cafés ; c'est le refuge ordinaire des oisifs, & l'asyle des indigents. [...] Dans le plus grand nombre des cafés, le bavardage est encore plus ennuyeux : il roule incessamment sur la gazette. La crédulité Parisienne n'a point de bornes en ce genre ; elle gobe tout ce qu'on lui présente ; & mille fois abusée, elle retourne au pamphlet ministériel. (I: 227-228)

Later, Étienne de Jouy represented the coffee houses of early nineteenth-century Paris in several articles included in his *L'Hermite de la Chaussée D'Antin*. In one instalment, entitled «Le Palais-Royale», *L'Hermite* visits the Café de Chartres and comments:

Je demande du thé; un gros homme, de la table voisine, qui dépeçait un poulet à la tartare, me regarde en pitié; les garçons ne se pressent point de me servir; l'humeur me prend: je sors, et vais au café *Lemblin*. Ce café, d'institution moderne, ne tardera pas à faire du bruit dans le monde, si l'on tient au projet d'en faire le centre de la faction musicale, ou plutôt anti-musicale, qui s'est proposé la noble tâche de décrier un établissement public dont la France s'honore. (II: 237)

In Spain, authors of certain *discursos* published in periodicals in the 1760s such as Juan Antonio Mercadal's *El Duende Especulativo sobre la Vida Civil* and José Clavijo y Fajardo's *El Pensador* described Madrid's coffee houses, characterising them as lively social spaces associated with the reading of periodicals, conversations about the latest pieces of news, and the development of public opinion. For instance, in the twelfth instalment of *El Duende Especulativo*, the narrator observed:

Me prometo el mas distinguido premio por la solicitud con que deseo promover, y afianzar el establecimiento de los Caffés, como la escuela mas adecuada para criar un sin numero de sujetos, que con el tiempo ilustrarán la Nacion con sus delicadas meditaciones sobre la Política. Como en estos parages, por ser públicos, concurre el que quiere, siempre

se podrá en ellos lograr mejor instruccion sobre el estado de las cosas, que en las demás Tertulias, donde todo es uniforme, y donde jamás se pesa el pro, y contra de las noticias. (XII: 286)

A similar image of Madrid's coffee houses was later painted in an essay published in 1786 in Rubín de Celis' *El Corresponsal del Censor* (1786-88), which, as Escobar previously indicated, can be connected with Larra's «El café» (*Los orígenes* 144-145). Entitled *Carta IV*, the narrator describes a series of types engaged in different conversations at tables in the coffee house, remarking:

No habia en el tal receptáculo de los que tienen poco que hacer, silla que no estuviese ocupada; me acerqué con este motivo á una mesa, y oí hablaban de las Comedias que se estaban representando; de las Tonadillas que se cantaban, y de la gracia y desemboltura con que *Filena* habia desempeñado su papel. Pasé á otra donde trataban del delicado y útil punto de Toreros y Toros. (49)

In the final two decades of the eighteenth century, coffee houses served as background in certain episodes of theatrical and *costumbrista*-style prose works that offered representations of new forms of relations between the Madrid public during this period of accelerated social and cultural change. This was seen in Leandro Fernández de Moratín's 1792 *La comedia nueva, o el café*, set 'en un café de Madrid, inmediato á un teatro' (*Obras dramáticas*, I n.p).³ One of the characters in the play, Don Pedro, a wealthy *hombre de bien*, responds to Don Antonio's accusation that he is an abrupt and overly serious individual by distinguishing himself from the superficial *petimetre* types seen regularly in Madrid's cafés, as we will examine later. 'No vengo a predicar al Café', he asserts, 'porque no vierto por la noche lo que leí por la mañana, porque no disputo, ni ostento erudicion ridícula, como tres ó quatro ó diez pedantes que vienen aquí a perder el día, y á excitar la admiracion de los tontos, y la risa de los hombres de juicio' (13). Similarly, in Antonio de San Román's 1803 *El alcarreño en Madrid*, a relatively unknown early *costumbrista* text, the narrator describes a popular Madrid coffee house at the end of the Enlightenment period, portraying it as a dynamic social space visited by Spaniards from different social classes. Passing through the streets of the Spanish capital with a *lugareño* from La Alcarria, the narrator enters 'el famoso café de la calle de Alcalá' (39) and describes:

³ In the 1796 Parma edition by Bodoni, 'La Scena es en un Café de Madrid' (n.p). Critics have identified this café with the Fonda de San Sebastián in the Plaza del Ángel immediate to the Teatro de la Cruz and in close proximity to the Teatro del Príncipe, where the play opened in 1792.

Lo extenso de aquel gran salon, la tumultuosa concurrencia, la variedad de objetos, el tropel de aturdidos mozos, el Babel de conversaciones y lenguages, la diversidad de extrañas y ridículas figuras, y la multitud de humanas chimeneas, que formaban una densa nube, los gritos y golpes de los acalorados, para quienes no bastarían veinte criados, no habiendo mas que seis ú ocho, y en fin el estorbarse todos, y no entenderse ninguno. (39)

The narrator's provincial counterpart, unfamiliar with these social spaces, describes how the dynamism of this Madrid café contrasts starkly with the tranquility of life in his provincial hometown, thereby reinforcing the association of coffee houses with urban contexts: 'Nunca fue mi ánimo', asserts the *alcarreño*, 'dexar mi patrio suelo; pero ya á vista de esta confusion, el que fue natural deseo, ya es verdadero amor á aquel sosiego, y total aborrecimiento á este tumulto' (40).

Finally, in an 1807 manuscript entitled *Los vicios de Madrid*, an author hiding behind the initials J.M.S. comments on the different types of conversations heard in La Fontana de Oro, located near the centric Puerta del Sol.⁴ In this text, a character named Perico guides his friend Antonio through the Spanish capital, stopping at its most notable urban spaces. Mistaking the coffee house for a factory, Perico informs his naïve counterpart:

No, aqui se toma café, té, licores, bebidas de todos generos, y comidas de todos precios. Entra todo el que quiere, y asi verás de diferentes naciones. [...] Los mas vienen a conversacion: unos hablan de geografia y ponen a Marsella en la China, otros tratan de gobierno sin que sepan gobernar su casa, otros de las mozas que han obsequiado sin que las conozcan, otros de bailes, cual de poesia, cual de teatros; ultimamente cada uno trata de lo que mata. Vamos adelante, que luego entraremos. (164)

All of these examples demonstrate how coffee houses served as popular urban settings in periodical essays and works of literature penned by authors from different European countries who aimed to provide sketches of everyday life in the society of their time. This illustrates how Larra's «El café» can be connected with a broad corpus of European literature dating back to the early eighteenth century, which, as previously mentioned, corresponded to the new literary model focused on social

⁴ The manuscript is entitled *Los vicios de Madrid. Dialogo entre Perico y Antonio. Por el subteniente del Real Cuerpo de Yngenieros. Dn. J.M.S, Año de 1807*. It was discovered and acquired by Raymond Foulché-Delbosc, who edited it with some suppressions in *Revue Hispanique* 13. 43 (1905): 163-228. Unfortunately, its editor did not provide any information about the provenance of the manuscript.

observation in which local, temporarily-defined circumstances constituted the object of imitation.

In terms of the texts that can be connected with «El café», certain scholars have highlighted the relationship between Larra's article and works authored by British and French writers. Caravaca, for instance, drew parallels between the themes addressed in «El café» and Addison's «Coffee-house politicians», declaring that 'Larra ha hecho suyas las palabras de Addison' (9). For his part, Escobar asserted: 'No podía faltar Jouy entre las fuentes posibles: y siendo el tema la descripción de un café, la tarea se hace mucho más fácil, pues hay dónde escoger en los artículos del periodista francés' (*Los orígenes* 140). As previously mentioned, Jouy described the coffee houses of the French capital in several essays included in his *L'Hermite de la Chaussée D'Antin*. Almost a century ago, Courtney Tarr suggested that the article entitled «Les Restaurateurs», may have provided Larra with a model. The American scholar posited: 'In this article [«El café»] Larra is apparently inspired, but only in a general way, by Jouy's "Les Restaurateurs", in which the *Hermite* describes the frequenters of a restaurant and reports snatches of their conversation. Instead of a literary discussion, there is a dispute over the merits of a certain actress. The types depicted - even the military gallants - are different in the two articles' (37). Along with the previously mentioned articles which appeared in Spanish periodicals in the second half of the eighteenth century, Escobar included certain essays published by Addison and Steele in *The Spectator* in his list of possible precursors of «El café»; however, like Tarr, he argued that 'Son rasgos genealógicos: la curiosidad que empuja al observador a escuchar conversaciones ajenas (los cafés eran un lugar socorrido para ello) y el gusto de referir en boca de «news mongers», «nouvellistes», «novelistas», noticieros -o como quiera llamárseles- relaciones disparatadas de acontecimientos internacionales' (*Los orígenes* 141). Thus, in these works by British, French and Spanish writers that can be connected with «El café», the influence is of a general nature and can be seen in the structure of the articles, the intention of the narrators and, occasionally, the themes they address through the conversations between different social types seated at tables in the coffee house. As we will see later, the types depicted by Larra are different and correspond to the Madrid society of the late 1820s.

Whilst Courtney Tarr, Caravaca and Escobar provided detailed examinations of the literary antecedents of «El café», their studies did not consider the connections between Larra's first *artículo de costumbres* and early *costumbrista* prose works published during the reign of Carlos IV. In the pages that follow, I will argue that Alejandro Moya's *El café* and Eugenio de Tapia's *Viage de un curioso por Madrid* also possibly provided Larra with models for his article. To demonstrate why these two texts should be considered precursors of «El café», I will focus on examining the parallels between the structure adopted by the narrators and the themes addressed in certain episodes of the texts.

Antecedents of Larra's «El café» in early *costumbrismo*

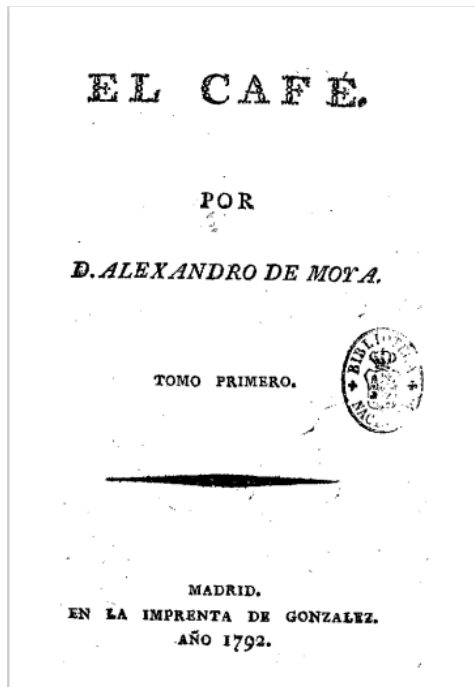
Published in two volumes in 1792 and 1794, Alejandro Moya's *El café* can be connected with Larra's article of the same name by examining the *costumbrista* approach adopted by the narrators in the opening paragraphs of their texts. They both enter a café in the Spanish capital and portray different social types seated at tables around them, describing a range of conversations that do not correspond to one continuous dialogue. This is seen in the introduction to Moya's *El café*, entitled *Idea de esta obra*, where he states that 'Es una pintura de quanto sucede en un Café: estas casas presentan el quadro mas agradable y variado que puede imaginarse' (3). Outlining the structure of his text, he comments:

Me reprehenderán tal vez de que en la mayor parte de los diálogos la conversacion no tiene objeto determinado, y pasa continuamente de uno á otro sin fixarse en ninguno, formando los vuelos mas rapidos, y haciendo las mas atrevidas transiciones: pero ademas de que esto contribuye mucho á mantener siempre divertidos á los lectores, ¿no es la pintura mas fiel de todas las conversaciones? Yo he querido imitarlas exâctamente, y no hacer un diálogo todo diferente de los que comunmente se forman en la sociedad. (I: 7-8)

Thus, seeking to portray the conversations that are typically heard in coffee houses in the *Villa y Corte*, 'imitarlas exâctamente', as he puts it, to provide a 'pintura fiel', Moya's narrator presents himself as a curious observer of social life and adopts the fundamental qualities of the *costumbrista* writer, claiming to offer readers an accurate representation of the new forms of sociability in Madrid's cafés in the early 1790s. In Álvarez Barrientos' words, 'Lo que desde luego es un acierto y puede indicar el olfato del autor para entender por dónde discurrían las nuevas formas de relación, e incluso su sentir favorable, es que situara el marco narrativo en un café y no en otros espacios' ("Miscelánea" 5). Moya puts this approach into practice by commenting on the types who usually visit coffee houses in the Spanish capital during these final years of the eighteenth century, describing how:

Se ven reunidas gentes de diferentes Naciones y Provincias, personas de distintas clases y condiciones. Y se observan los genios mas particulares, y los mas extraños caracteres. [...] Allá un petimetre Frances salta, brinca, bayla, canta, silva, recita, juega, habla sin cesar, responde á dos ó tres, y está en todas las conversaciones mientras toma una taza de café... En la mesa de enfrente se disputa furiosamente, en aquella se habla sin cesar, en la de más allá reina el silencio más profundo [...]. Un pisaverde todo ocupado de su brillante trage y primoroso peynado, se mira al espejo con mas gusto que Narciso [...]. En una mesa se habla de historia, en otra de física, aquí se forman planes disparates, y allí proyectos ridiculos. (I: 4-5)

Moya therefore opens his text by presenting the coffee house as a lively space of public sociability visited by different social types who engage in conversations on a range of unconnected topics, as he describes in more detail in the fifteen *mesas* which make up the two volumes of *El café*.⁵ For instance, the three individuals in the first *mesa* discuss Egyptian customs, whereas those in the second one comment on the old custom of duels; differently, in the fifth *mesa* Don Roque and Don Jacinto talk about the Holy Roman Emperor Joseph II, whilst the group in the sixth *mesa* discuss the lack of verisimilitude in novels. Moya thus provides a series of totally unrelated conversations and illustrates how the coffee house allows for the free exchange of ideas and opinions, as well as the development of new relationships. This is highlighted in the third *mesa* as Don Agustín addresses his friends and states:



Ya saben Vmds. [...] las leyes de nuestra tertulia, cada uno es libre de contar aquello que puede agradar por su novedad, su gracia ó su chiste. Todas las materias, todos los asuntos son de nuestro resorte. Basta que sea agradable para que pueda referirle... No es menester fixarnos sobre

⁵ The first volume is divided into 11 *mesas*, whereas the second only has 4.

una materia: al contrario, se debe pasar continuamente de una á otra.... (I: 49)

In this sense, Moya illustrates the role played by coffee houses in creating new forms of public sociability that represented a departure from the relations associated with spaces like *Academias* and private salons where conversations had been more strictly regulated and required participants to adhere to specific, formal behaviours. As Álvarez Barrientos puts it, Moya 'muestra cómo cambiaban las maneras de conducta adaptándose a las distintas circunstancias del aquí y ahora, y cómo en ciertos espacios nuevos no era necesario guardar las formas' ("Miscelánea" 12).

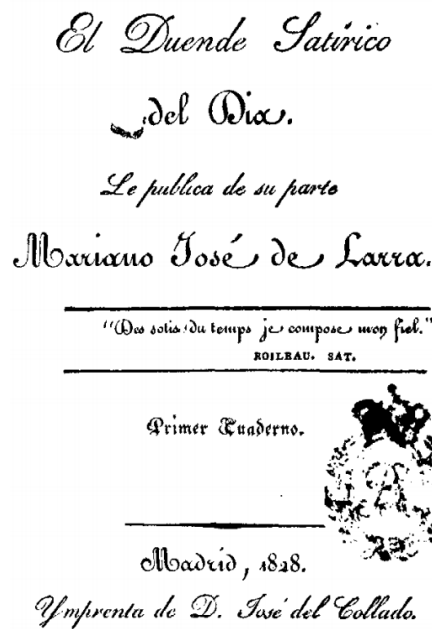
Moya's representation of the café can be connected with the coffee house portrayed by Larra decades later in the second article of *El Duende Satírico del Día*. In «El café», Larra adopts a similar approach to that utilised previously by Moya as he begins by presenting himself as a curious observer of social life and announcing his *costumbrista* intention, explaining that his inquisitiveness 'me obliga mas de cuatro veces al día á meterme en rincones escusados por escuchar caprichos ajenos' (9). He subsequently points to the utility of public spaces, specifically coffee houses, for satisfying such curiosity and providing him with materials for his *artículos de costumbres*:

Este deséo, pues, de saberlo todo me metió no hace dos dias en cierto café de esta Corte, donde suelen acojerse á matar el tiempo y el fastidio dos ó tres abogados que no podrian hablar sin sus anteojos puestos, un médico que no podria curar sin su baston en la mano, cuatro chimeneas ambulantes que no podrian vivir si hubieran nacido antes del descubrimiento del tabaco, tan enlazada está su existencia con la nicociana, y varios de estos que apodan en el dia con el tontisimo y chavacano nombre de Lechuginos, alias, Botarates, que no acertarian á alternar en sociedad si los desnudasen de dos ó tres cajas de joyas que llevan [...]. (10)

Like Moya, Larra introduces «El café» by portraying the typical scenes in Madrid's coffee houses and describing the behaviours and appearances of individuals who visit these social spaces. The *Duende Satírico* does however adapt this approach to the circumstances of late 1820s Madrid, as indicated by the terms he utilises to refer to some of the types he sees regularly in the coffee house. Whereas Moya describes the vanity of elaborate *petimetres* and *pisaverdes* who frequent the café for leisure purposes, Larra comments on the affectations of *lechuginos*—early nineteenth-century types who represented continuations of the effeminate *petimetres*, *pisaverdes* and *currutacos*, characterised by their idleness and preoccupation with frivolous activities including the excessive refinement of appearances.

The *Duende Satírico's* *costumbrista* perspective is further highlighted as he describes how he entered the coffee house and, sitting alone at a table, 'subí mi capa hasta los ojos, bajé el ala de mi sombrero y en esta conformidad me

puse en estado de atrapar al vuelo cuanta necedad iba á salir de aquel bullicioso concurso' (11). Larra's narrator thus maintains a physical distance from the types seated at adjacent tables and carries out the detached observation characteristic of the *costumbrista* writer, listening to the conversations between different types rather than participating in them. In this form of passive observation, as Cuvardic García writes, 'La mirada atenta y curiosa del escritor [costumbrista] contrasta con la actitud de los ciudadanos cuyo comportamiento registra, quienes ignoran ser objeto de su observación: carecen de la actitud reflexiva que el periodista adopta sobre las prácticas cotidianas de la sociabilidad pública' (276-277).



Following the general overview of the types in the coffee house, Larra's narrator adopts a similar perspective to that utilised previously by Moya, presenting a series of episodes that capture the different conversations between individuals seated at the tables in the café. Whereas Moya separates these dialogues into longer chapters called *mesas*, Larra provides an uninterrupted narration and shifts his attention more quickly from one table to the next. This difference can be attributed to the fact that Moya's *El café* is a longer work as it was published in book format, comprising 191 pages in the first volume and 176 in the second; Larra's article is only 28 pages in length as it appeared in a periodical—a medium designed for shorter, more concise pieces which were to be read more rapidly. Notwithstanding these disparities in the length and arrangement of the texts, a parallel can be

established between some of the themes addressed in Larra's article and those dealt with by Moya in the different *mesas* of *El café*.

First, a general connection can be made between the narrators' representations of idle *ociosos* who visit Madrid's cafés. As he describes the types seated at tables in the coffee house, the *Duende Satírico* focuses his attention on an individual who 'estaba [...] indolentemente tirado sobre su silla, meneando muy de prisa una pierna sin saber por qué, sin fijar la vista particularmente en nada, como hombre que no se considera al nivel de las cosas que ocupan á los demás, con un cierto aire de vanidad é indiferencia hácia todo' (29-30). Irritating the other customers around him with his pretentious actions, Larra's narrator describes how this idle type sits and smokes 'un enorme cigarro, que se quemaba á manera de tizon, en medio de repetidas humaradas, que mas parecian salir de un horno de tejas que de boca de un hombre racional' (30). A similar type is portrayed in the fourth *mesa* of Moya's text as the narrator introduces Dorimón, labelling him as a '*petimetre afectado y ridiculo, [que] ha entrado en el Café, sus maneras demasiado recargadas, su ayre de satisfacion, su trage, llama la atencion del inmenso concurso. Camina saltando y baylando, canta entre dientes una cancion*' (I 81).⁶ The two characters Robles and the Marqués de la Zarza are frustrated with Dorimón as he interrupts their *tertulia* with his exaggerated and pretentious movements. 'Este dije de tocador', Robles complains, 'parece haber entrado solo para incomodar y hacer daño, despues de haber fastidiado á todo el mundo ha venido aquí á interrumpir nuestra gustosa lectura. No puedo sufrir semejante casta de hombres llenos de presuncion y vanidad' (I 82). Whilst the types depicted by Moya's and Larra's narrators are not identical, they find common ground in that they are characterised by their vanity and visit the café to waste time and abstain from useful work, engaging in inconsequential activities. In this sense, both authors demonstrate that although certain *ilustrados*, namely Jovellanos in his previously mentioned *Memoria sobre los espectáculos públicos*, had envisaged coffee houses to serve as spaces promoting productive forms of leisure —drinking coffee, forming new social relations, reading periodicals, discussing literary works, having conversations in a relaxed environment in the form of *tertulias*— this represented an idealised situation that was difficult to turn into a reality. In other words, coffee houses were conceived as spaces of *ocio*, understood from an enlightened perspective, but by describing the preposterous behaviour of certain types in these social spaces both Moya and Larra illustrate that they were equally associated with *ociosidad* —'El vicio de

⁶ Italics in original.

perder o gastar el tiempo inútilmente’, as defined in the *Diccionario de la Lengua Castellana* (593).⁷

A more specific thematic connection can be seen between the two texts by comparing the opening scene of Larra’s article with a discussion that takes place between the social types in one of Moya’s *mesas*. The *Duende Satírico* introduces a group of individuals who are discussing a report published in the *Gaceta de Madrid* relating to the defeat of the Turkish-Egyptian naval force in a battle occurring in the Levant during the Greek War of Independence.⁸ He describes how:

Quién decía que la cosa estaba hecha; “esto ya se acabó; de esta vez, los turcos salen de Europa, como si fueran chiquillos que se llevan á la escuela; quien opinaba que las altas Potencias se mirarian en ello, y que la gran dificultad no estaba en desalojar á los turcos de su territorio, como se habia creido hasta ahora, sino en la reparticion de la Turquía entre los aliados [...]; y por último hubo un jóven exmilitar de los de estos dias, que crée que tiene grandes conocimientos en la Estrategia, y que puede dar voto en materias de guerra por haber tenido varios desafíos á primera sangre, y haberle favorecido en no sé que encrucijada con un profundo arañazo en una mano, no sé si Marte ó Venus; el cual dijo, que todo era cosa de los ingleses, que era mui mala gente, y que lo que querian, hacia mucho tiempo, era apoderarse de Constantinopla para hacer del Serrallo una bolsa de comercio, porque decía que el edificio era bastante cómodo, y luego hacerse fuertes por mar. (11-12)

In this episode the narrator portrays the coffee house as a centre of discussion and debate, demonstrating how a group of leisured *noticistas* assuredly put forward their views on geopolitical events happening in the Levant of which they evidently have no knowledge. The *Duende Satírico* illustrates how the development of the periodical press and the open exchange of ideas in coffee houses has given rise to the development of public opinion and new, superficial readers who attempt to appear as informed men of letters.

Traditionally, knowledge and culture had been disseminated in the form of translated and other printed works penned by educated intellectuals in institutions such as *Academias* and *tertulias* held in private salons. However, as discussed earlier in this article, the development of the periodical press in the second half of eighteenth-century Madrid offered the public a new,

⁷ For a study on the concepts of *ocio* and *ociosidad* in eighteenth-century Spain, see Fajen, Robert, and Andreas Gelz, editors. *Ocio y ociosidad en el siglo XVIII español e italiano*. Vittorio Klostermann, 2017.

⁸ The event was reported in the *Gaceta de Madrid* on Tuesday 22nd November 1827, p. 573.

more accessible medium that provided materials for conversation and debate in public spaces such as coffee houses, streets and squares, which became sites of public opinion. As Habermas puts it, "The coffee house not merely made access to the relevant circles less formal and easier; it embraced the wider strata of the middle class, including craftsmen and shopkeepers" (33). Referring to the context of eighteenth-century Madrid, Álvarez Barrientos illustrates how the reading of newspapers in coffee houses helped bring about a change in the way in which knowledge was distributed: 'Los periódicos, como los cafés, facilitaban la conversación pero sobre todo sacaban a la literatura de sus circuitos habituales de circulación, por los asuntos que proponían, por su propio formato y el público al que se dirigían' (*Los hombres de letras* 129-30). Traditional men of letters voiced their opposition to this cultural transformation as the publication of knowledge and information through new channels of communication, including periodicals and newssheets, allowed semi-educated types to freely put forward their opinions on reported matters in an act of vanity to try and impress others and emulate the social prestige of established *hombres de letras*. As Álvarez Barrientos adds:

La apariencia sustituía a la verdad de los méritos y en el mundo de las letras se planteaba también este problema de la autenticidad de las conductas, oponiendo ser (sabio) a parecerlo, a enmascararse con el aspecto o la puesta en escena, de modo que se fuera lo que se parecía ser. Aquellos que se tenían por auténticos denunciaron a los otros y su empleo de máscaras, de elementos externos que señalaban su competencia literaria, pero este aparentar saber y su escenografía se inscribían en un cambio mayor de las conductas y de los modos de relación. (*Los hombres de letras* 60)

This new generation of superficial readers and writers was satirised notably by Cadalso in his 1772 *Los eruditos a la violeta*, and also in other works penned by traditional men of letters who referred to these types using alternative pejorative terms such as *violetos*, *beaux esprits*, *gacetistas*, *novelistas*, *noticistas*, *semisabios*, *charlatanes* and, to a lesser extent, *petimetres*, *pisaverdes* and *chisgaravises*.

Prior to examining the connection between this opening episode of Larra's article and the tenth *mesa* of Moya's *El café*, it is important to note that the theme addressed in this scene had previously appeared in certain *discursos* published in the Spanish Spectator periodicals in the 1760s, notably *El Duende Especulativo sobre la Vida Civil*. This can be seen in the tenth instalment of Mercadal's periodical which appeared on 27th July 1761. The *Duende Especulativo* highlights the role played by periodicals in providing news-obsessed *novelistas* with information about events occurring both in Spain and other European countries:

Las Gacetas, assi extrangeras, como del Reyno, serviràn para llamar à los hambrientos de noticias, y fijar aquellos que desean instruirse del Estado de los Exercitos, y de las revoluciones que acaecen en los Ministerios, y Pueblos; de la salud, y enfermedades de los Potentados: en una palabra, de la paz, y de la guerra. (X: 222)

Furthermore, the *Duende Especulativo* comments on the type of unimportant information that concerns Madrid's *gacetistas*, describing how 'Con impaciencia se aguarda la confirmacion de una Batalla, la pérdida de una Esquadra, el Sitio, y Toma de una Plaza, y una Relacion mas por menor de lo que se publicò antes, à fin de resolver ellos mismos, las medidas que deban tomar las Cortes, y de adivinar las consecuencias, que deben tener las cosas' (X 225-226). A connection can thus be seen between the types depicted in this *discurso* and in the first conversation in Larra's «El café», as the narrators describe the superficial qualities of *noticistas* who visit Madrid's main sites of public opinion to satisfy their thirst for news about foreign wars that are of no actual relevance to Spain, putting forward their views despite having no knowledge of such issues.

The relationship between this episode of Larra's article and Moya's *El café* can be seen in the tenth *mesa* in which Don Gerónimo, one of the characters seated at the table in the coffee house, directs his friend Don Génaro's attention to a student at a neighbouring table. He describes how 'sobre todo habla y en todo decide, me aseguró positivamente el otro dia que el célebre Conquistador del mundo, el Grande Alexandro, habia muerto de una borrachera, y luego me formó un diario el mas exâcto é individual de la enfermedad de este heroe, qual pudiera de los Monarcas de este tiempo' (157). Frustrated by individuals like this student who offer opinions of matters on which they are not informed, Don Génaro exclaims:

Oh quanto me enfadan estas gentes que sobre todo disertan, que tratan con la mayor pesadez aun de los asuntos mas pequeños, y no lo dexan hasta haber apurado bien la materia y la paciencia de los que les escuchan. Quanto mas agrada un hombre que en quatro palabras refiere qualquier suceso, y habla con un estilo florido y ligero aun de la materias mas largas y extendidas, que varia continuamente de asunto, vuelve al que habia tratado antes, emprende otro de nuevo y siempre tiene atento y divertido á su auditorio. (I: 160-161)

This theme is addressed again in the fourth *mesa* of the second volume of *El café*, as the Conde de la Selva complains about types who frequent Madrid's coffee houses and make inaccurate statements about topics on which they have only a superficial understanding:

Estoy de mal humor porque no sé en que pasar la noche. Me he venido al Café, y no hallo cosa que me agrade. He oido dos ó tres conversaciones que me han fastidiado. Todos son disparates y

desatinos, hablar de lo que no se entiende. Hallé uno que contaba cosas de América, sin haber estado nunca en ella: cada palabra era una mentira. En otra parte un charlatan disputaba con otro sobre las ciencias; los dos eran unos grandísimos ignorantes. En mi vida hé oído número igual de desatinos, sin embargo eran los oráculos de una multitud de gente que los escuchaba con asombro. (II: 128)

Although Moya and Larra portray types who pretend to be knowledgeable on completely different matters –Moya's *noticistas* express opinions about topics such as Alexander the Great, sciences and America whereas Larra's *gacetistas* discuss overseas political events– the intention of the narrators is the same: to present the coffee house as a social space associated with idle talk and gossip, demonstrating how the circulation of information through periodicals and newsheets has allowed superficial *violeto* types to offer their opinions on a range of matters of which they have no knowledge.

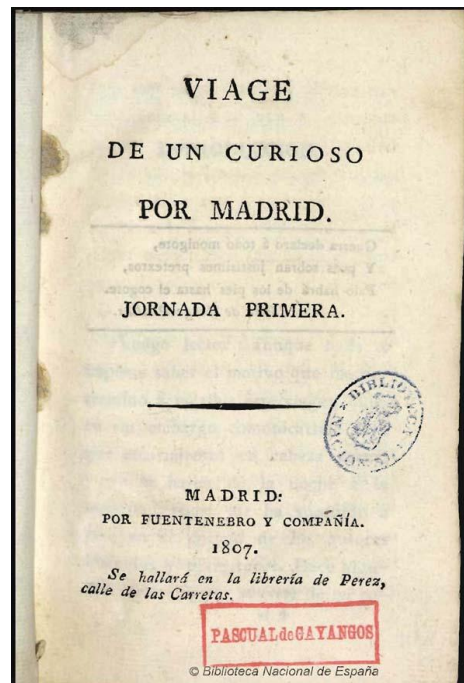
The precursors of this scene of Larra's «El café» can also be found outside of the space of the coffee house in the first episode of Eugenio de Tapia's 1807 *Viage de un curioso por Madrid*.⁹ In the opening pages of the text Tapia's narrator approaches the Puerta del Sol and discreetly observes a group of types gathered in this central square: 'Púseme en acecho á la Puerta de una tienda, y no tardé en descubrir un peloton de noticistas apiñados al rededor de cierto chisgaravis que leia una papeleta en tono enfático' (9). He describes how the *chisgaravis*, a type defined in the *Diccionario de Autoridades* as 'El entremetido, bullicioso, que pronta è inconsideradamente se mete en cosas que no entiende, sin fondo ni comprehension para ellas' (II 1729), reads aloud a news report about the political situation in Russia. A group of *noticistas* who congregate around the *chisgaravis* begin to argue about the accuracy of the newsletter as one of them states assuredly:

No se cansen Vmds. [...], que segun me informaron despues era un opositor á prebendas, esas noticias son falsas. Yo he tenido carta de Alicante en que me dice un sujeto de mucho crédito que se han embarcado ya en el mar Caspio doscientos mil musulmanes con destino á la Valaquia, en donde piensan desembarcar una noche. Otra esquadra turca va caminando por el Golfo Pérsico para bloquear á la Siberia, y entonces veremos lo que hace el Gabinete de San Petersburgo. (9-10)

⁹ Certain episodes of Tapia's text can also be connected with a number of Mesonero Romanos' *artículos de costumbres*. However, this is beyond the scope of this article which is focused solely on examining the antecedents of Larra's «El café». For a study on the parallels between *Viage de un curioso por Madrid* and Mesonero's articles, see Porter.

The *chisgaravís* retorts: ‘Nada importa eso [...]. Piensa Vmd. que los Rusos se duermen en las pajas? A fe que ya está cruzando en el mar Glacial una esquadra suya, y dará buena cuenta de la del mar Caspio; y eso de bloquear á la Siberia no es tan facil habiendo pasado el Ingles los Dardanelos’ (10-11). Tapia’s narrator describes how tensions develop between the *noticistas*, remarking humorously that:

“No hay tal cosa.” “Sí hay.” “Vmd. miente.” “Vmd. es un ignorante” fueron las únicas y corteses expresiones que pude percibir despues entre la confusa algarabía de los gazetistas. Maravillado yo de que en la cabeza humana cupiese tanta geografía, tantos y tan exquisitos conocimientos del derecho público de las naciones, dixé rebentando de gozo. ¡Dichosa edad la nuestra en que por todas partes hormiguan los profundos políticos! (11)



In this opening scene, the Puerta del Sol is portrayed as the centre of news and rumours in the late eighteenth-century Spanish capital where superficial *noticistas* assemble and express their opinions on the accuracy of reports about overseas geopolitical events.¹⁰ Although Tapia presents these

¹⁰ In the second half of eighteenth-century Madrid the Puerta del Sol and its surrounding streets, particularly the area around the Gradas de San Felipe at the start of the calle Mayor, were renowned as *mentideros*, or gossip mills, where pieces

gacetistas in the Puerta del Sol rather than a coffee house, a clear thematic relationship can be established with the first conversation in Larra's «El café»: both episodes demonstrate the tensions between traditional men of letters and the new public reader brought about by the development of public opinion in Madrid's different spaces of sociability, presenting groups of newsmongers who pretend to be knowledgeable on foreign wars reported in the press. The geographical proximity of the political events discussed by the *noticistas* in both texts suggests that Larra may have read Tapia's *Viage de un curioso* and used this opening episode as a model for his first *artículo de costumbres*, adapting it to the space of the coffee house and to the social and political circumstances of Madrid under Fernando VII in the late 1820s.¹¹ This hypothesis can be reinforced if we consider that in his subsequent article entitled «Correspondencia de El Duende», published in

of news reported in the press were discussed and debated. As Kany observed, 'It seems to have been considered the height of fashion to read newspapers, to be well informed of all their contents, and to discuss the news in the Puerta del Sol, at *tertulias*, and elsewhere' (77). This perception of the Puerta del Sol was reflected in various *costumbrista* articles published in the Spanish Spectator press, most notably the twelfth instalment of *El Duende Especulativo*, entitled *Novelistas de Moda, Gaceteros de Madrid*, which appeared in May 1761. The narrator writes that 'desde mi Casa, hasta la Puerta del Sol adquiero todas las noticias que me son precisas para poder hablar con seguridad, y firmeza de lo que passa en los Exercitos, en las Armadas, y en los Gabinetes de todos los Principes de Europa. Conozco à punto fixo, y con la sola inspeccion de los instrumentos del cuerpo de mi Maquina, los Sitios, las Batallas, los Encuentros, las Marchas, y los Acompañamientos de los Exercitos: las salidas, y entradas de las Armadas: en una palabra, todo quanto passa entre los Pueblos, que se hacen la Guerra' (XII: 279).

¹¹ Although we cannot say for certain that Larra knew Eugenio de Tapia personally, it is clear that he was aware of some of his works. As Bernaldo de Quirós Mateo points out in his biography of Tapia, 'En 1832, su teatro obtuvo la aprobación de críticos tan notables como Larra y Bretón de los Herreros, y mereció una reseña muy elogiosa de otro de los más importantes críticos de su tiempo, Agustín Durán' (14). Furthermore, Tapia was known to Mesonero Romanos who attended the *Parnasillo* tertulia in the Café del Príncipe in the early 1830s with Larra and Bretón de los Herreros. Porter asserted that Mesonero Romanos had undoubtedly read Tapia's *Viage de un curioso*, writing that this 1807 text 'together with Tapia's *La bruja, el duende y la Inquisición, La historia de la civilización española* and the Juan del Valle biography of Tapia, occurs in the list of Mesonero's library,' p. 154, as stated in the *Catálogo de los libros que forman la biblioteca de D. Ramón de Mesonero Romanos*, included in the *Catálogo de los libros de la Biblioteca Municipal a su instalación*. Madrid, 1877. Considering that Mesonero was familiar with *Viage de un curioso*, as well as the fact that he was in the same intellectual circle as Larra, it is possible that Larra may have read Tapia's 1807 *costumbrista* text and utilised certain elements of it as a model for «El café».

the second *cuaderno* of *El Duende Satírico del Día*, Larra further satirises the superficial *gacetistas* who visit Madrid's coffee houses:

Hablad un poco de las novedades que se notan en los cafés cuando se entra en ellos (como en el de Venecia) y se ven las mesas cubiertas de palurdos que tambien toman su café como unas personas: ¡oh siglo de las luces! ¿cuándo se veía antes un lugareño tomando café? efecto de la ilustración; allí arreglan la Europa, toman la gaceta, hacen como que leen, hablan alto, y dando porrazos para adquirirse la importancia que nadie les da, mandan á menudo a los mozos, y si os acercais los vereis decir cada uno: “si yo fuera ministro, si yo fuera Rei otra cosa andaría, habia de hacer y de acontecer” [...]. (38)

Like Tapia, Larra humorously illustrates how the circulation of information through periodicals and newssheets has given rise to superficial *noticistas* who visit Madrid's public spaces, in this case cafés, and pretend to be knowledgeable on reported matters to impress those around them.

Notwithstanding this clear thematic parallel, it is important to consider that *El Duende Satírico del Día* was published in 1828 in a more oppressive social and political climate in Spain compared with the period in which these early *costumbrista* precursors of «El café» appeared. Whereas *El café* and *Viage de un curioso* emerged during the reign of Carlos IV prior to the start of the Spanish War of Independence and the ensuing period of social and political upheaval, *El Duende Satírico del Día* was published in the late 1820s in the context of intense censorship under the Absolutism of Fernando VII. In this sense, whilst Larra's two articles address the same theme as that discussed in these early *costumbrista* texts and present the café as a space associated with the development of public opinion, it is also plausible to suggest that Larra is making a political criticism. One could argue that by depicting a group of types who visit a coffee house and discuss inconsequential topics relating to overseas political events that have been reported in the *Gaceta de Madrid*, Larra is also criticising the lack of freedom of press during the Ominous Decade and illustrates how this has resulted in the state-sponsored *Gaceta* providing readers only with information on matters that are totally irrelevant to Spain. Larra thus shows how in comparison with recent periods such as the *Trienio Liberal* (1820-23), which readers will still have present, the suppression of the periodical press has had an adverse impact on public opinion and on the function of coffee houses as spaces of public sociability associated with useful forms of leisure, including discussion and debate on political and social issues, trade and culture.

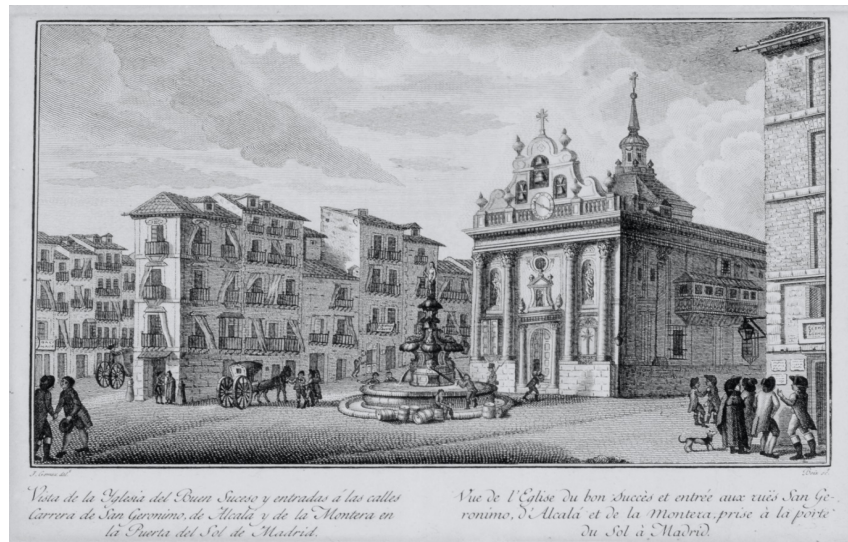


Figure 1. Esteban Boix y Viscompta and José Gómez de Navia, *Vista de la Iglesia del Buen Suceso* (ca. 1790). Museo de Historia, Madrid. A group of *noticistas* can be seen in the bottom-right corner of the print.

Aside from the theme of *noticistas*, a connection can be established between Tapia's text and Larra's «El café» by examining the narrators' representations of corrupt types. First, as Tapia's narrator moves away from the *gacetistas* in the Puerta del Sol, he walks around the nearby streets and comments on the deceitful actions of the types he observes. Heading towards the calle del Carmen, he focuses his attention on two *petimetras* leaving a shop with their servant who is carrying a vast number of products, suggesting that the *petimetras* have spent inordinate sums of money on fashionable goods. However, the shop owner emerges and bellows: '¡Fuerte cosa es que han de venir siempre á comprar sin un quarto; pues como están los tiempos tan buenos para fiar.... – Pero á bien que yo me desquitaré cargádoles en cuenta el duplo del valor' (19). The shopkeeper's outburst illustrates how the two *petimetras* visit his store regularly to satisfy their desire for novel products but repeatedly claim that they have not brought enough money with them to pay for their items and thus purchase them on credit, assuring him that they will give him the money that he is owed when they next visit his shop. Despite having sufficient resources to pay for their products the *petimetras* immorally take advantage of the shopkeeper's trust and never settle their bills, showing a total disregard for his livelihood. In Larra's «El café» the *Duende Satírico* presents a type who behaves in a similar manner. He depicts a well-dressed individual who, as one of the waiters informs him, 'viene á tomar todos los dias café, ponch, ron en abundancia, almuerzos, jamon, aceitunas, que convida á varios, habla mucho de dinero,

y siempre me dice al salir con una cara mui amistosa y al mismo tiempo de imperio, “mañana le pediré á Vd. la cuenta, ó pasado mañana te daré lo que te debo” (32-33). Although the types are different - Larra portrays an entitled *señorito* in a coffee house whereas Tapia describes two spendthrift *petimetras* in one of Madrid’s eminently commercial streets - the connection can be seen in the manner in which both narrators seek to criticise individuals from wealthy backgrounds who can afford to spend their money on commodities and leisure activities but exploit people who provide them with a service by never paying their bills.

In addition to the thematic parallels that can be seen between episodes of «El café» and *Viage de un curioso*, there is also an interesting resemblance in the structure adopted by the narrators, notwithstanding the fact that they carry out their observations in different public spaces. In «El café», the *Duende Satírico* offers short, fragmented descriptions of the types seated at the tables around him in the coffee house, shifting his attention quickly from one group of individuals to the next without allowing for the development of a continuous narrative. This is achieved through the use of expressions which interrupt the narration, such as: ‘quise echar un vistazo antes de marcharme por varias mesas’ (29); ‘otro estaba mas allá afectando estar solo con mucho placer’ (29-30); ‘Apartéme de él’ (30); ‘en otra mesa reparé en otra clase de tonto’ (30); ‘Púseme á mirar en seguida con bastante atención á otro mozalbete’ (32); and ‘al pasar por un pasillo me quedaba todavía que observar’ (34). Tapia utilises a similar approach in the opening pages of *Viage de un curioso* as, like Larra, he presents short, fragmented scenes in quick succession, but in the context of the streets surrounding the Puerta del Sol rather than a coffee house. This is seen through his narrators’ use of phrases that include: ‘Para empezar metódicamente mis observaciones me encaminé á la Puerta del Sol’ (9); ‘Púseme en acecho á la puerta de una tienda’ (8); ‘Pasando desde aquel sitio al lado opuesto’ (13); ‘Distraido con la consideracion de la pasada escena fuí sin saber cómo á meterme entre la turbamulta’ (15); ‘Paréme un rato á oír la sustancia’ (17); ‘Fuime de allí mas que de paso, y para observar con mayor descanso arrimé el hombro á la esquina de la calle del Carmen’ (17-18); and ‘Volviendo la vista al otro lado observé dos mugeres’ (19). Both Tapia’s and Larra’s narrators therefore utilise similar *costumbrista* phraseology which reveals their condition as curious observers of the Spanish capital’s urban social reality. They embody an attitude that Peñas Ruiz has labelled the *mirada costumbrista*, ‘un tipo característico de aproximación y aprehensión estética de la realidad, en la que el escritor [...] toma como centro de interés los usos y costumbres específicos, el carácter y comportamiento de la sociedad o colectividad en general, o de sus integrantes en particular, es decir, del individuo considerado de forma aislada’ (33). The *mirada costumbrista* requires a form of detached observation, and the language used by both Tapia’s and Larra’s narrators demonstrates how they maintain a physical distance when observing different social types. Whereas the *Duende Satírico* conceals

himself in a corner of the coffee house, covering his face with his hat and coat - 'subí mi capa hasta los ojos, bajé el ala de mi sombrero' (11) - Tapia's narrator makes his observations from discreet positions such as street corners and shop entrances. By utilising these approaches both narrators detach themselves physically from the types who are the object of their attentive gazes. They therefore make a conscious effort to go unnoticed and adopt the main qualities of the *costumbrista* writer as they describe the everyday scenes in Madrid's different spaces of public sociability.

Conclusions

This article has provided an insight into the antecedents of Larra's «El café», pointing to its connections not only with texts penned by Spanish authors from the previous century, but also with the works of writers from different European countries such as Addison and Steele, Mercier and Jouy, who had previously utilised the space of the café as background in certain episodes of their texts. This has demonstrated how the coffee house constituted a popular literary setting among authors who provided representations of the customs and habits of types during present-day periods of accelerated social and cultural change. By situating his first *costumbrista* effort in the space of the café, Larra presented himself as a successor of this modern type of European literature, adapting its conventions to the circumstances of late 1820s Madrid under the oppressive Absolutist regime of Fernando VII, during which he launched his journalistic career.

Notwithstanding the range of works which may be considered precursors of Larra's first *artículo de costumbres*, this piece has focused specifically on establishing parallels between «El café» and two early Spanish *costumbrista* texts published during the reign of Carlos IV. It has shown how in «El café», Larra adopts a similar *costumbrista* approach to that utilised earlier by Tapia in his *Viage de un curioso por Madrid* and Moya in *El café*, as illustrated through his narrator's detached observation of types in the coffee house and the short, fragmented scenes that make up the contents of the second instalment of *El Duende Satírico del Día*. Furthermore, this article has established parallels between the themes addressed in «El café» and those discussed in certain episodes included in Moya's and Tapia's works. These comparisons have shown how Larra, in his first *artículo de costumbres*, inherited the enlightened perspective of his *costumbrista* predecessors. He writes from a moralising standpoint and utilises satire to criticise social vices such as vanity, idleness and the affectations of superficial *noticistas* who, in search of the latest pieces of news, visited coffee houses and other sites of public opinion such as the Puerta del Sol and participated in the false display of knowledge. Finally, although it was beyond the scope of this article, the relationship that has been highlighted between Larra's «El café», Moya's *El café* and Tapia's *Viage de un curioso* has pointed to the interest that these texts, along with others corresponded to the group of early *costumbrista*

works that appeared during the reign of Carlos IV, offer for examining the development of *costumbrismo* decades prior to its consolidation as a literary genre with Larra and Mesonero Romanos in early nineteenth-century Madrid.

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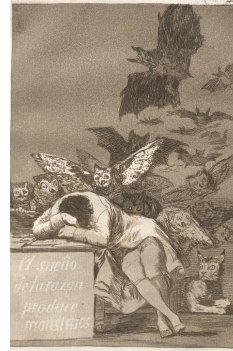
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Francisco de Goya, *El sueño de la razón produce monstruos* (*The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters*), plate 43 of *Los Caprichos*, 1795. Courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington.