

ELOQUENT SILENCE: THE TRANSFORMATION OF SPAIN IN BRITISH BALLADRY BETWEEN THE PENINSULAR WAR AND THE CARLIST WARS

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Abstract

Among the ten items labelled “Peninsular War ballads” in the website Broadside Ballads Online of the Bodleian Libraries two evidently date from the First Carlist War, and show a different mood. The remaining eight items related to the 1807-1815 period are actually only five, as two of them are different editions of the same songs, and another is merely about the setting in the Horse Guards Parade, London, of a memorial to the lifting of the siege of Cádiz in 1812. While the five true Peninsular War ballads represent it as a patriotic enterprise on behalf of brave Spaniards fighting tyrannical invaders, the two set in the Carlist War portray a more individualized adventure of soldiers of fortune. This new approach after 1815 suggests a more limited popular understanding of Spanish politics. Spain is no longer a scenario for the defence of universal principles, but for the reckless adventure of particular men.

Keywords: Broadside ballads, popular culture, 19th-century literature, war poetry, British interventionism in Spain.

Resumen

De los diez documentos denominados “Baladas de la Guerra Peninsular” en el sitio web “Broadside Ballads Online” de las Bibliotecas Bodleianas, dos evidentemente datan de la Primera Guerra Carlista, y muestran un carácter distinto a los demás. Los ocho restantes referidos al periodo 1807-1815 en realidad son solo cinco, pues dos de ellas son ediciones diferentes de la misma canción, y otra se refiere a la erección en el Horse Guards Parade, Londres, del monumento conmemorativo al levantamiento del asedio de Cádiz en 1812. Mientras que las cinco baladas auténticas de la Guerra Peninsular la representan como una empresa patriótica a favor de los valientes españoles que combatían a los tiránicos invasores, las dos de la Guerra Carlista narran una aventura más individualista de soldados de fortuna. Este nuevo enfoque tras 1815 sugiere un entendimiento popular de la política española más limitado. España ya no es el escenario donde defender principios universales, sino donde intrépidos aventureros prueban su osadía.

Palabras clave: Baladas de pliego, cultura popular, literatura del siglo XIX, poesía de guerra, intervencionismo británico en España.

1. Introduction

In this article I examine a small corpus of Peninsular War ballads in the Bodleian libraries, which interestingly turns out to contain two ballads from a different Spanish war, the First Carlist War (1833-1839).¹ A comparison between the former, which are based on the 1807-1814 war, and the latter, reveals the change of attitude towards intervention in Spanish wars that took place after 1815, from an internationalist fight for political freedom to an adventure for individual glory, followed by a complete waning of interest in writing ballads about British interventionism in Spain.

In order to explain the sort of approach to events in the ballads I will discuss the characteristics of broadside balladry as an expression of popular sentiment, and also as a traditional form of poetry which calls for comparison between ballads about different wars and political causes, such as the Jacobite and the Carlist ones.² The essay concludes by establishing an analogy between Lord Alfred Tennyson's silence after his own brief Spanish intervention, and the absence of English ballad-making about Spain during Spanish king Ferdinand VII's reign,³ pointing, beyond that, to future English writing about the Spanish

¹ During the War of Independence liberalism became popularly associated with the French invaders in Spain. In spite of Ferdinand VII's conservative inclinations and his cancellation of the liberal Constitution of Cádiz, traditionalists tended to distrust him. This was especially due to a military rising in 1920, which forced him to accept a new liberal regime. However short-lived, as this liberal phase lasted for three years before a French army (the 'Hundred Thousand Sons of St Louis') was sent against it, King Ferdinand remained associated with liberalism, anticlericalism, political centralization and the assault on noble privilege among those traditionalist groups, particularly in the North and North East of Spain, who rallied to the cause of his brother and presumptive successor Don Carlos. Civil war broke out in 1833 when Ferdinand died and his widow María Cristina became Queen Regent on behalf of their daughter Isabella II. The Carlists invoked the old "Salic Law" forbidding females and those descended in the female line to succeed to the titles or offices in the royal family, and took arms against the *Cristinos* (or *Isabelinos*) for "God, Country and King."

² The Jacobite cause had ideological features in common with Carlism. The Jacobites supported "the Old Pretender" James III and his son Charles Edward Stuart (popularly known as "Bonnie Prince Charlie" in the songs) in their uprisings of 1715 and 1745 to regain the British throne for the male line of descendants of the House of Stuart. Like the Spanish Carlists of one century later, the Jacobites embodied the ideals of social traditionalism, political absolutism and religious conservatism, and they also had a strong regional component, as the Jacobites became associated with the cause of the Scottish (particularly Highland) identity, while Carlism had particular impact on the Basque Country and Catalonia. In popular memory and folklore both the Jacobites and the Carlists are often depicted either as gallant idealists fighting for a lost noble cause or as anachronistic, quixotic desperadoes.

³ Ferdinand VII, known by his supporters during the War of Independence as "the Desired" (*el Deseado*), ascended to the Spanish throne in 1808, only to be forced to abdicate by Napoleon, who established his own brother Joseph Bonaparte as king of Spain. However, within that same year the Council of Castile proclaimed Ferdinand king again, which was also acknowledged by the British government in January 1809. By the end of 1813 Napoleon also had to acknowledge his coronation, and allow him to return from his exile in France. The English ballads about the Spanish War date from before 1813, when Ferdinand's reign was in dispute, and after 1833, the year of his death.

Civil War. Thus it outlines a brief survey of British interventionism in modern Spanish wars. The theoretical frame adopted responds in general terms to Iris Zavala's semiology of silence (1987), which she initially defines as "desentrañar lo que dice y lo que no dice un texto, en tanto en cuanto todo discurso es ideológico" (Zavala 147),⁴ but it is extended to include what ballad texts did not say about King Ferdinand's Spain.

2. The Bodleian corpus of "Peninsular War ballads"

Street ballads are a curious blend of journalism and poetry. Often called "broadsides" (because of the broadsheets on which they were printed), they were a popular form of passing opinions and expressing public feelings since the later Middle Ages, and particularly after the advent of the printing press and before the popularization of newspapers, when a growing audience purchased them. Among the ten items labelled "Peninsular War ballads" in the website *Broadsides Online of the Bodleian Libraries*, two clearly date from a later war, and show a different mood. In one of these, "Henry's Departure to the Spanish War", the narrator overhears Henry's love "pretty Nancy" begging him "Pray do not throw yourself away my love you may get slain, / And your sweet life is dear to you beyond the queen of Spain."⁵ Henry, therefore, departs to fight for the queen of Spain, who must be Isabella II,⁶ supposedly against the Carlists. In the other, "My Master's Gun", the feisty "prentice boy" boasts that "General Evans came up to me, / Said he, 'Bob, show no quarter: / You're a valiant youth, I plainly see, / And you shall marry my daughter."⁷ Bob, therefore, joins Sir George de Lacy Evans's volunteers in the Siege of San Sebastian of 1836,⁸ which the

⁴ "Working out what a text says and does not say, inasmuch as every discourse is ideological" (my translation).

⁵ "Henry's Departure to the Spanish War", lines 7-10 in the extant broadside in the Bodleian Libraries. A subheading under its title specifies the printer and the workshop address in central London: "Pitts, Printer, Toy and Marble Warehouse 6, Great St. Andrew Street, Seven Dials." "Henry's Departure to the Spanish War" was printed together with a song called "Here's a Health Bonny Scotland, to Thee", to be sung to the air called "The King, God Bless Him", a patriotic drinking song reminiscent of some of the Jacobite songs, such as "The Three Healtths."

⁶ The troubled reign of Isabella II (1833-68), King Ferdinand's eldest daughter, was marked by political instability, civil wars and military rule. Her lack of political ability, her failure to implement a more progressive regime, and her amorous life, contributed to the decline of prestige of the Spanish monarchy, and culminated in her deposition by a military coup of moderate generals which ushered in the First Spanish Republic.

⁷ Lines 31-34 in the extant print in the Bodleian Libraries. The ballad "My Master's Gun" consists of 6 stanzas of 8 lines each adding a refrain repeated at the end (except in the last stanza): "With my master's gun, / I fought my way to glory." It is printed together with a companion satirical piece entitled "Doctor Brown" in which another young man complains to the Doctor about the way his master makes him work hard and starves him.

⁸ Sir George De Lacy Evans was the first commander of the Auxiliary Legion which the British government sent to support Queen Isabella II and the Liberals against the Carlists in 1835-37. Most of the 9,600 soldiers forming the Legion were volunteers from British army line regiments, rather than regular troops. Supported by naval gunfire and Spanish forces, the

website wrongly dates in 1813, mistaking it for the Siege of Sebastian that took place in the latter year during the Peninsular War,⁹ for Evans was not in the siege of 1813, but in that of 1836, during the First Carlist War, supporting Queen Isabella. Thus although all the ballads in the small corpus refer to the war in Spain, not all of them are about the *same* war.

The remaining eight items in the Bodleian corpus of “Peninsular War ballads”, which are the ones actually related to the 1807-1815 period, are in fact only six, because two of them, “The old woman and the Spanish war” and “What d’ye think of the new Spanish war”, appear repeated in two different editions of the same songs. The number could be further reduced to five if we also excluded one called “The Big Bomb” which is about the setting (on 12 August 1816, in the Horse Guards Parade, London) of a memorial to the lifting of the siege of Cádiz on 24 August 1812.¹⁰ With its ironic claim that “My price is not very great, since my subject’s so heavy, I swear” (lines 6-7),¹¹ “The Big Bomb” marks a transition from those ballads in which, like in the two repeated ones mentioned above, the Spanish war was regarded as a grave heroic subject, towards a mock-heroic mood. Although it has none of the radical subtlety and scatological humour of William Hone’s “The Regent’s Bomb”, both deal with the same subject and coincide in suggesting that the Cadiz memorial made little heroic or political sense after 1815: as “The Big Bomb” says, “Who knows but the mighty big Bomb, / May serve just to frighten the Crows” (line 32), or at least, as its final stanza concludes, to make the ballad-seller’s pocket weightier with money (lines 43-44: “For tho’ I’ve great weight in my Bomb / My Pockets

Legion attacked the Carlist army besieging San Sebastian from nearby heights at Hernani on 5 May 1936. The succeeded in raising the siege, but it is estimated that the victory cost the Allies over 600 of the 5,000 men who took part in this battle.

⁹ The Siege of San Sebastian of 1813, a more complex and notorious episode than the Carlist siege of 1836 described above, took place from 7 July to 8 September, and the Allied Spanish, British and Portuguese forces were led by Arthur Wellesley, Marquess of Wellington, against the French garrison occupying the city under the command of General Louis Emmanuel Rey. It finally resulted in the ransacking and burning of San Sebastian by a riotous mob including British and Portuguese troops.

¹⁰ The naval base at Cádiz became Spain’s chief seat of power after the fall of Madrid to the French. The city was massively strengthened by the Duke of Albuquerque bolstering the garrison and then with the arrival of British and Portuguese reinforcements. The French Marshall Claude Victor besieged it with over 60,000 troops but failed to make much progress. The siege was finally lifted when the Duke of Wellington’s advance on Salamanca made the French fear that their besieging army could be caught between Cádiz and the enemy armies approaching from the North. The Siege of Cadiz Memorial, also known as the “Prince Regent’s Bomb”, is a French mortar mounted on a cast-iron Chinese dragon. It was presented to the Prince Regent by the Spanish Government to commemorate the raising of the siege, and can still be found in Horse Guards Parade in Westminster, London.

¹¹ Lines of “The Big Bomb in the Park” cited from the extant copy in the Bodleian Libraries. This broadside includes a subheading stating its editor and place of publication (largely coinciding with those of “Henry’s Departure to the Spanish War”): “Printed and sold by J. Pitts, 14, Great St. Andrews Street, 7 Dials.” The song consists of 5 stanzas of 8 lines plus a conventional chorus (“Sing col & c.”).

they never were lighter”). While the five true Peninsular War ballads represent it as a patriotic enterprise on behalf of the brave Spaniards fighting tyrannical invaders, the two set in the First Carlist War portray a more individualised adventure of soldiers of fortune who try to prove their personal mettle and to win gold or glory fighting in a foreign land for no evident human ideal or political ideology. Spain is no longer the scenario where universal principles could be defended, but a setting for the reckless heroics of particular men. This new approach to Spanish conflicts after 1815 suggests a more limited popular understanding of Spanish politics.

3. The time of ballads: chronology and reception in the broadsides

The chronology of popular balladry is a complex issue, which calls for separate attention. Ballads, even topical ones about recognizable moments in history, can be considered faithful witnesses to contemporary historical events only to a limited extent. They are an *echo* of the event, rather than a record of it. Though five of the ballads in the corpus refer to the Napoleonic period, their extant printed versions are dated at later dates: “Corunna’s lang shore” in 1849-80; “What d’ye think of the new Spanish war” c. 1822; “What d’ye think of the new Spanish war” between 1801 and 1831; “Arise, arise, brave sons of Spain, arise” between 1812 and 1821; “The old woman and the Spanish war” is not assigned any date; and “The Big Bomb in the Park”, between 1802 and 1819, despite the fact that the Cadiz Memorial it depicts could not be earlier than 1812. Such chronological uncertainties should not be put down to carelessness on the part of the Bodleian website. It is inherent to the nature of this sort of popular poetry. Even if their allusion to topical issues may be very specific in some of these printed songs, their appeal to emotional response aspired to success and lasting memory, as with other sorts of creative literature, beyond the particular context wherein they originated. The dates suggest that the Peninsular War ballads remained popular in the 1814-1823 period. However, they were bound to that origin only until the public perception of Spanish issues evolved, and rendered the earlier emotions obsolete.

Broadside ballads, whose complete distinction from traditional popular ballads is now widely questioned (Atkinson 19-31), are a peculiar kind of poetry. The Poet’s Box,¹² the printers’ shop which produced the first of our items, “Corunna’s Lang Shore”, illustrates their context of production. An old newspaper article defines the purpose of this important but now largely forgotten literary institution, in ways that cast light on the character of this sort of literature. *The Glasgow Herald* 17 March 1926, reports that:

¹² The Poet’s Box, founded and owned by Matthew Leitch, was a publishing shop in operation between 1849 and 1911. It produced the largest extant collection of song-sheet broadsides in Britain, which is now kept in the Mitchell Library, Glasgow. See <<http://libcat.cs.glasgow.org/web/arena/poets-box>>.

Mr Harry Lumsden, LL.B. read a paper entitled ‘The Poet’s Box’ at a meeting of the Bibliographical Society of Glasgow (...). The lecturer said that all over Scotland, from fifty to a hundred years ago, publications in single sheets known as Broad-sides or Broad-sheets were hawked about the streets at a charge of a halfpenny or a penny. They consisted of short poems or songs, stories and anecdotes, recitations in prose and verse and topical verses, national and local, on political, sectarian, and social questions.

Before the days of the cheaper newspaper many men and women made a fair livelihood in this way. (...) Versifiers resorted to establishments like the Poet’s Box for publication of their effusions, which were readily purchased on the streets.

The Poet’s Box of Glasgow was only one of many similar establishments which published such leaflets.¹³

Thus the *Glasgow Herald* reporter, situating the decline of the broadside “towards the end of the nineteenth century” (in the same article and page), describes a past cultural context that in 1926 was still within living memory. Broadside ballads were the true precedent of the popular press. As such, their aim was as much to inform as to stir feelings and emotional reactions to current events. However, unlike the prosaic tabloid, the broadside was poetry, it used a poetic language purposefully, and it had an audience that could enjoy them as literature, not just as pieces of news. The best of them exhibit “the typical virtues of the tradition: good-natured humour, shrewd criticism of society, sturdy realism and powerful rhythm” (Sola Pinto and Rodway 14).

Reception theory, as it has been applied to the English traditional ballads (Atkinson 8-13), helps to explain the “implied audience” (and the reader’s “consistency-building”), the “gaps of indeterminacy” of ballad texts (the “unwritten” parts of texts), the constraints in the possible range of meaning as a result of the interpretive framework embodied in the concept of traditional referentiality (the “horizon of expectations”), and the generation of meaning by metonymy from formulaic phrases and traditional themes or motifs. For example, “Henry’s Departure to the Spanish War” contains a great deal of traditional motifs, beginning with the narrator’s conventional introduction à la *chanson d’aventure*, as the result of overhearing an amorous dialogue or lover’s complaint. The dramatic dialogue of the departing soldier is also traditional, and so is the young man’s boast that he will either lose his life or win gold and reputation for his lover’s “friends” (or her family) to find him more acceptable on his return. The fact that he is going to fight for the queen of Spain only adds romantic flavour. Something similar happens in “My Master’s Gun”, where

¹³ *The Glasgow Herald* 17 March 1926. Page 12 in the electronic edition: <https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=2507&dat=19260317&id=m5hAAAAAIBAJ&sjid=QKUMAAAAAIBAJ&pg=5104,2270903&hl=es>.

emphasis is laid on the traditional young man's desire to escape a boring apprenticeship and win fame "in songs and magazines too."¹⁴ Proving a thematic continuity between the Napoleonic war and the Carlist one, and a comic contempt for political logic, he dreams of becoming "the British Bonapartey" for the Spaniards. The active creation of meaning on the part of the audience implies that Peninsular War ballads were not just about the Peninsular War of the Napoleonic period, but potentially about almost any Spanish war in the popular imagination: any foreign war where brave Brits volunteered to fight for a great cause, for glory, or simply to win their fortune.

Many British readers heard about such war adventures for the first time in the nineteenth century milieu through the Peninsular War ballads. The Spanish fight for Liberty continued later, though not against the "Tyrant" from France, but against the tyrannical King Ferdinand, whose name, however, is never mentioned in any of the ballads. The general public in Britain, at least the popular audience of street ballads, would not know or particularly care who the king of Spain was, since there were no regular British armies fighting there after 1814. Yet the call of the Spanish adventure remained for longer in the broadsides that continued to be re-printed.

4. The Jacobites and the Carlists: a tale of two hapless rebellions

A possible antecedent for the Spanish war ballad was the eighteenth-century Jacobite ballad, which remained very popular in the nineteenth century. The last stanza of "Corunna's Lang Shore" ("And when we were parted it was with great pain / But we still having small hopes for to meet each again; / Our hopes are all over, and I'll ne'er see you more, / So I leave you, my Peggy, on Corunna's lang shore")¹⁵ is reminiscent of the chorus of a particular Jacobite ballad, "The Bonnie Banks o' Loch Lomond" in its melancholy farewell to the loved one and its nostalgic evocation of place ("O ye'll tak' the high road and I'll tak' the low road, / An' I'll be in Scotland afore ye; / But me and my true love will never meet again / On the bonnie, bonnie banks O' Loch Lomond").¹⁶

"Corunna's Lang Shore" is a tragic farewell letter from a dying soldier to his sweetheart, "Pretty Peggy". The only reference to time and place is in the title itself, "Corunna's Lang Shore", repeated in the first and last line, and to a battle that was fought there (line 3). It may be based on Sir John Moore's death at the

¹⁴ Line 52 in the extant copy from the Bodelian collection. See footnote 6 above.

¹⁵ Lines 17-20. This is the last of the five stanzas of four lines in the extant print of "Corunna's Lang Shore" in the Bodleian Libraries. The title is followed by two subheadings, one advertising that the song could only be had in the Poet's Box, followed by the shop's address, and another stating the name of the air to which the song should be sung: "The best of friends must part."

¹⁶ Lines 5-8. This is the chorus of the standard original version of "The Bonnie Banks o' Loch Lomond", No. 9598 in the Roud Folk Song Index. It was first published in *The Vocal Melodies of Scotland*, Volume 4. 1841. Ed. Finlay Dun and John Thomson. Edinburgh: Paterson & Roy.

Battle of Corunna (1809), amidst the Peninsular War. On the other hand “The Bonnie Banks o’ Loch Lomond” is an anonymous song first published in 1841, but there is also a broadside of it from Dundee, probably produced in the Poet’s Box, of unknown date. The “Loch Lomond” song is traditionally attributed to a Jacobite prisoner after the 1745 Rising, writing it in the prison of Carlisle where he languished awaiting his fate, nearly a century before the ballad was ever found in print. The legendary origin of the piece, another illustration of the problems of chronology I discussed above, bespeaks the traditional nature of balladry, its transmission beyond the event on which it was based initially and its somewhat conventional or formulaic nature. Ballads about different wars could influence and resemble each other, which is what makes their differences most significant.

The Jacobite song, as defined by Donaldson (1988), tends towards the sentimental. It longs for a king that is defeated and will never return, in sharp contrast to the Peninsular War’s political struggle for the return of a “desired” king, Ferdinand VII, known in Spanish historiography as “el Deseado” who, however, would prove a tyrant on his return. Disenchantment is a worse source of inspiration than nostalgia for spirited ballads. The Carlist wars, quite similar to the Jacobite campaigns in several ways (they were also fought by people from the traditionalist culture of the “highlands” of the Basque Country defending an absolutist monarchy), might have proved more inspiring, but the initial romantic flame was fading. The Carlists, like the Jacobites, fought for an *ancien régime* which matched the ideology of King Ferdinand as opposed to the Liberalism which inspired the Peninsular War ballads. As “What d’ye think of the New Spanish War” said: “And what to d’ye think of the bold Spaniards then / I think for their liberty they’ll all fight like men.”¹⁷ If anything, Carlism sounded like a doomed, anachronistic, quixotic venture, like Jacobitism in Walter Scott’s novels, such as *Waverley* (1814), *Rob Roy* (1817) or *Redgauntlet* (1824), only even more so, over a century later, and in a foreign country. Hence in the two English Carlist War ballads the heroes do not fight on the Carlist side, but on the Liberal side against the Carlists.

The mood of Peninsular War ballads, catering for a different public, contrasts with that of English novels of the Peninsular War, generally “based either on direct observation or on careful historical research” (Dendle 64), some of them written by British army officers who served during the campaigns,

¹⁷ Lines 15-16. “What d’ye think of the New Spanish War” consists of seven stanzas of four lines preceded by two lines which seem to be offered as a chorus. The printer’s shop is given at the end of the sheet: “Bishop, Brinter [sic], 10, Parker street, Drury Lane, London.” The piece preceding it in the Bodleian Libraries is a comic song called “What a Shocking Bad Hat” with the tune called “The Silly Old Man.” The latter piece, however, has a different printer: “T. Birt, 39, Great St. Andrew Street, Seven Dials, London.” While “What d’ye think of the New Spanish War” celebrates the cause of Liberty, its tone is light-hearted and frolicking, like its chorus: “And they’re all for clipping clip, clip, clipping / And they’re all for clipping [sic] the Liberty of S___n.”

which “offer a realistic, at times caustic view of their experiences, very different from the ‘Romantic’ approach of many foreigners to nineteenth-century Spain” (Dendle 50). The ballads are in the latter “Romantic” mood. Meanwhile realistic Peninsular War novels continued to be published and read by more “educated” readers: it is partly a similar case to the difference existing between the readership of “quality papers” and “popular tabloids” which would emerge in the twentieth century. The Carlist Wars scarcely produced any literary response in Britain, which provides added value to the uniqueness of the two Carlist War ballads. The reign of King Ferdinand elicited even less literary production in Britain. Only silence.

5. Poetic interventionism in Spanish wars: Tennyson and after

In order to understand the spirit of the two Carlist War ballads, it is necessary to place them in a wider context, including the subsequent British views on fighting Spanish wars. British interventionism in Spain acquired a different, more refined taste after the failed Liberal Triennium, in the “Ominous Decade” (1822-33), when Alfred Tennyson, the future Poet Laureate, had a small part as a member of his Cambridge club, the Apostles, in a conspiracy of General Torrijos and the Spanish exiles in 1830.¹⁸ Tennyson was 21 when he went on an expedition across the Pyrenees to carry dispatches to Torrijos and the insurgents who were in Gibraltar.

When comparing this adventure with that of the intellectuals who intervened in the 1936 Spanish Civil War, Graham Greene argued that Tennyson must have felt lucky that his Cambridge term prevented him from travelling to Gibraltar, since Torrijos and his supporters were captured and executed while trying to reach Malaga soon afterwards. As Greene observed, the poet did not write about the subject: “Tennyson’s silence was unbroken. He may have reflected that only a Cambridge term had stood between him and the firing party on Malaga esplanade” (Greene 69). Many years later Tennyson published “The Revenge. A Ballad of the Fleet” (1870), about the Elizabethan Anglo-Spanish

¹⁸ José María de Torrijos y Uriarte was a Liberal army officer. His distinguished participation in the Peninsular War made him a Brigadier General when he was only 23. He opposed Ferdinand VII’s restoration of absolutism, and participated in a failed *pronunciamiento* (military uprising) which led to his imprisonment (1817-1820). Released during the Liberal Triennium, however, the new restoration of Ferdinand’s absolutism in 1823 forced him into exile. After five months in France he felt his actions were strongly invigilated so he moved into England, where he spent six years organizing plans for the next *pronunciamiento* against the Spanish king. The Spanish exiles, led by Torrijos and aided by a few Romantic Englishmen such as Tennyson, and particularly an Irish officer of the British army called Robert Boyd who had previously been fighting for the liberty of Greece, spent a whole year in Gibraltar stirring an insurrection from the periphery towards the centre. But all the attempts failed and they eventually fell into a trap. Torrijos, Boyd and other fellow plotters were executed by firing squad on a beach in Malaga. The shooting is depicted dramatically in a celebrated Romantic painting of 1888 by Antonio Gisbert Pérez.

War, which included an allusion “to these inquisition dogs and the devildoms of Spain”,¹⁹ perhaps also referring to the image of Spain that Ferdinand VII had brought back.

However inconclusive and silenced, the young poet’s adventure would find an echo in the popular imagination, though deprived of the Liberal ideas which motivated him as well as the Peninsular War ballads: in the Carlist War ballads, politics and the ideal of liberty are secondary to the Hemingway-like urge to test one’s manhood in yet another Spanish war. Like Tennyson, ballad-makers kept quiet about Spanish politics after the first Carlist War had turned intervention in Spanish wars into a dubious cause. Rather than a fight for political ideals, it had become a reckless youthful adventure in the popular mind.

6. Conclusion: the eloquence of silence

The lack of ballads about the 1814-1823 period is indeed an eloquent silence. A silence suggesting that Spain had ceased to be an inspiration for great political causes. Zavala referred to the censorship established during the period as “the semiology of silence” (Zavala 147-48). The internal silence of censorship found a correlation in the silence about Spain in the English popular ballads. British ballad-mongers and their popular audience were no longer motivated by Spanish politics, because the subject, particularly during the Ominous Decade, had become too complicated for the simple emotional expression characterizing broadside ballads. It was also the silence of a Spain that turned inside herself, as if meditating on her own contradictions and tensions, and did not show a face that could be easily depicted from outside. Those contradictions would implode in the following century, making this country, once more, the subject of Spanish Civil War poets and writers like W.H. Auden and George Orwell. Once again the crucible of political principles, human rights, and ideas of Europe. Some would see the Spanish War poets as champions of a great cause, like heroes of Peninsular War ballads; others would regard them as juvenile adventurers, like Graham Greene saw them and Tennyson, and like the heroes of the two Carlist War ballads. Between those two extremes lay the uninspiring, yet eloquent, gap of Ferdinand VII’s reign.

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