



## **The Canary in the Mind: Quintana, *Pelayo* (1805) and the Play of War**

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They saw it coming. Writers. The Revolution. Not in any prescient way nor with any real accuracy, and certainly not with any predictability (they were playwrights and poets, after all, not futurologists), but they sensed disquiet, heard the nearly inaudible harp strings of discord playing on the horizon, and picked up on what Bécquer would later so beautifully refer to as “los átomos del aire” (208). When the invasion finally came and the war broke out in 1808, that subtle disquiet turned into a maelstrom of noise, a chorus of voices singing out a harsh reality, mocking an untenable situation that they could not control—or rather, could only hope to control through the power of their words—and seeking to shape a better future. And then, as suddenly as their voices were heard, they were silenced again, consigned to the basement of history (or to the footnotes of unread scholarship).

As the clouds of revolution hovered north of the Pyrenees and then burst open to rain down on the Terror in 1793, Spanish dramaturgy grew increasingly militaristic, although the themes seemed not directly connected to contemporary historical events (McClelland, vol. 1: ch. 7, vol. 2: ch. 14). Connections would come later, when the first decade of the following century liberated authors to fuse angst, worry, anger, and prescriptive behavior into plays that more accurately voiced their concerns. The 1790s, stimulated perhaps by the series in the *Correo de los Ciegos de Madrid* on the lives of Great Monarchs such as Charles XII of Sweden, Peter the Great of Russia, Ivan IV of Russia, the Empress Maria Teresa of Austria, and Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden, witnessed an outpouring of interest in the bombastic and the militaristic heroes of the time. But the French invasion of Spanish territory in 1794 also stimulated them, and, as Richard Herr tells us, this “reawakened the national ardor” (313). The outbreak of the War of Independence unleashed a different war, a war of words that reverberated throughout the Hispanic world. The Revolution—the Revolutions—were staged, consciously and unconsciously, with great subtlety, and with a stunning lack of subtlety, in the last decade of the eighteenth and the first decades of the nineteenth centuries in Spain. What I will do in this paper first is look at the general outline of the response to the War of Independence and the years moving up to the French Invasion in 1808. Then, drawing on theories

elaborated by scholars of political theater, I will highlight some examples from Quintana's *Pelayo* of 1805 in order to see if any parallels can be established between his sense of the coming troubles and the role of theater surrounding the War of Independence.

Ana María Freire López, Emmanuel Larraz, María Mercedes Romero Peña, and Francisco Lafarga have brought to our attention the dozens of plays written during and just after the *Guerra de la Independencia* that mocked Napoleon, his brother José, and their chief marshals Murat, Dupont, Marmont and Suchet, while at the same time they exalted Spanish heroes and successes on the nearby battlefields—119 by Freire's count ("Motivo teatral"). The discourse of these plays reveals a great deal about the anxieties felt by those who lived the revolutions, catastrophes, wars, and conflicts of the time. On both sides—occupied Madrid and "free" rural Spain—theater was seen as an arm of combat and used as such "para la lucha política que tenía lugar fuera del campo de batalla" (Freire, "El teatro" 761). Some examples from those plays will set us up to look at other incursions in drama that suggest how the entire period can be seen as a giant stage, onto which players from various companies (countries) projected their desires, manipulated their stories, and competed for the *admiratio* of their publics.

Scholars have long known that history itself—and the writing of history—is a kind of staged event (Kroen). Kings often turned whole cities into spaces in which they "acted" their triumphant power. Theater spectacle just as frequently spilled out onto the streets, where, as Kroen tells us for the 1820s in France, "posters were hung, songs sung, and people congregated until the wee hours of the morning" demanding performances of Molière's *Tartuffe* (2). In Spain, the growing number of "espacios de sociabilidad"—cafés and *tertulias* (Álvarez Barrientos 133-135)—provided different fora in which mostly liberal ideas were "played out" for a public just getting used to connecting theater and politics. Such *triumfos* that staged performances of victory go back at least to Roman times, and became deeply embedded in the political consciousness of powerbrokers for centuries. In contrast, now, by the eighteenth century, such highly organized displays of power became decentralized as they fragmented into the rumblings in cafés, *tertulias* and newspaper articles. If previously the pueblos had been the consumers of revolutionary activity, they were now, in many ways, the protagonists. These cafés, *tertulias* and newspaper columns were spaces that, knowingly or not, fomented revolutionary ideas. And yet this was a time of fierce censorship; how does one read between lines not written in order to detect cracks in the wall of silence built by a government profoundly terrorized by events happening in the country to the north?

Leandro Fernández de Moratín and his cohorts resisted the increasing militarization of Spanish playwriting in the 1780s and 1790s, resistance provoked—they claimed (although they, too, had clear ideological agendas)—by a concern for aesthetics. The plays were bad, they insisted, and provided lousy models for modern playwrights and theatergoers. Emilio Cotarelo turns absolutely apoplectic when discussing the works that the actors insisted on putting on (contrary to the orders of Santos Díez González and the guardians of "good taste"):

Y para atraer al público la *Mesa censoria* no vaciló en poner en escena aquellas comedias que más halagaban los instintos brutales del populacho

y su paladar grosero, y volvieron las comedias de magia, las de batallas y cañonazos y hambres, pestes y matanzas; las de apariciones y falsos milagros; los *Federicos*, las *Catalinas* y demás engendros de la desdichada musa de los Comella, Zavala, Moncín, etc. (89)

Yet we might ask: Was their panic and hysteria based solely on aesthetic concerns, or did it also tap into a deep-seated fear of what Comella, Zavala y Zamora, Moncín and that “etc.” were prefiguring? Revolution had erupted to the north. The French, whose Republic was “an outrage to religion and royalty” in the eyes of many Spanish observers (Herr 315), had already set foot in Spain and had bombarded the northern territories with propaganda. If Matthew Buckley is correct in suggesting that the French Revolution played a role in the creation of modern drama (1), then the same “various discontinuities” that he detects in French dramaturgy can also be detected in the Spanish. Indeed, he makes an important point that we will do well to keep in mind as we look at the Spanish examples. Buckley writes:

Indeed, recent scholarship by social and cultural historians of this period suggests a more reciprocal relationship between the drama and socio-political practice. Far from holding the drama in a state of dislocated suspension, the political cultures of Revolutionary Europe, and Revolutionary France in particular, turned to it as a uniquely powerful language of social and political expression within a radically theatrical context of public action. And this appropriative phenomenon should not surprise us. The political culture of the French Revolution faced an immediate need for some shared language in which to convey revolutionary political ideas, yet France was a nation lacking a widely shared language or tradition of political dissent. [. . .] dramatic narratives offered an expeditious armature, a lingua franca in which many leaders had been trained and in which the complexities of political idea and intent could be captured in a single gesture, an inflection, a word. (4)

This is not to suggest that the Revolution became the subject of plays; after all, the topic was generally avoided and then even banned shortly after the French Revolution ended.

New genres arose out of the silence of post-Revolutionary France. One of them, as we know, was melodrama; another would be Spanish political satire. For Peter Brooks, the French Revolution represented “the final liquidation of the Sacred. . . . the shattering of the myth of Christendom, the dissolution of an organically and hierarchically cohesive society, and [hence] the invalidation of literary forms—tragedy, comedy of manners—that depended on such a society” (14), which gave rise to the Manichean dichotomies of melodrama, whose terrorized heroines nonetheless usually enjoyed a happy ending. French melodramas, where innocent damsels were threatened, kidnapped, raped by foreigners, powerful politicians, or the clergy, were quickly translated for the Spanish stage. René Andioc and Mirelle Coulon document performances of plays by René Charles Guilbert de Pixérécourt—some translated by none other than Gaspar Zavala y Zamora. Pixérécourt was a constant presence on the Spanish stage in the years leading up to 1808. For example (see Andioc and Coulon for details):

- La Celina o el mudo incógnito*, performed in Madrid in  
 1803 (November 4, November 15, November 23)  
 1804 (January 15, January 17, July 8, July 16)  
 1807 (November 12)  
 1808 (April 30)
- El hombre de las tres caras o el proscrito de Venecia*  
 1802 (July 1)  
 1807 (May 12)  
 1808 (January 7)
- Las minas de Polonia*  
 1805 (November 4)  
 1807 (November 21)
- El molino de Kében y aventuras de Tekeli*  
 1805 (December 25)  
 1808 (April 28)
- La mujer de dos maridos* (trans. by Rodríguez de Arellano)  
 1804 (November 4)  
 1805 (October 17)  
 1807 (October 4)

Other French melodramatists—Chénier, Duval, Ducis, Martainville, Lemerrier, Hadot—found outlets on Spanish stages, either in a trickle in the first two decades of the nineteenth century (Chénier’s *El duque de Pentievre*, translated by Rodríguez de Arellano, was performed in 1803, 1806, and, significantly, on May 2, 1808), or in a veritable deluge after 1820, as Shields has documented so carefully. Spanish dramaturgy also grew increasingly melodramatic, hinting at the Good vs. Evil nature of the contemporary world, capturing this dualist perspective in overly-dyspeptic verse and wildly hyperbolic emotion.

Beyond this, the rise of melodrama marks a significant shift in world-view, a growing realization—or fear—that the struggle of Good vs. Evil played itself out daily in the streets, in government offices, and in the parlors of the aristocracy. Most people, of course, could not read, so theater took on a level of importance far beyond what one might expect. All sides in the ideological wars sought to curry favor, increase influence and “orientar la opinión” as they framed it in their day (Larraz, “Teatro de propaganda” 105). This is precisely what must have so frightened Moratín and his followers, those aesthetes who hung so tenaciously onto the old, claiming, though, to be defending the new. The recuperation of tragedy and classical comedy was a way to shore up against the dissolving universe, the collapse of values (social, political, aesthetic) that the Revolution north of the Pyrenees loudly declaimed. This has enabled Paul Friedland to detect “a general merging of the theatrical and political stages” in France; a merging “fundamentally related to a revolution in the theory and practice of theater” (2-3). Hence it is easy to agree with Buckley’s assertion that “drama itself has come to be understood not only as a literary object but also as a social discourse responding to the rapidly changing cultural and political milieu of the Revolutionary era” (4).

That “rapidly changing cultural and political milieu” described the Spain of 1808 as well, and playwrights responded quickly to the change. Not three days went by following the June 22, 1808 victory at Bailén before a *Melodrama en un acto que en celebridad de la victoria conseguida por las armas españolas en la Andalucía* was staged in Cádiz. The war brought popular, mass theater back to the center. Zavala y Zamora entered the fray in September of 1808 with *Los patriotas de Aragón*, merely three weeks following the news of the retreat of French troops from Zaragoza. In this play he evokes Numancia as the site for his call to a crusade against the perfidious French. And then we think of this same author’s *La sombra de Pelayo*, which openly attacked Godoy in October of 1808, in an allegory in which Spain, Loyalty, Valor, and of course the “shadow of Pelayo” fought against Despotism, Ambition, Greed, Pride, Lasciviousness, Cruelty and French Intrigue. An engraving from the period sums up the allegorical action:

España representada bajo la forma de una Plazafuerte, sobre la que vela el genio del Patriotismo, el qual mientras esgrime la espada contra las huestes del tirano, recuerda las desgracias de un Rey querido, cuya imagen sostenida por un Ángel, anima el entusiasmo nacional. Bonaparte amenazado por la constancia española, se precipita y deja caer la máscara de su hipocresía, al mismo tiempo que el Aguila rapante, geroglífico de la canalla francesa, dirigiéndose a robar la Corona y el Cetro de los dos mundos; es despedazada por el León, símbolo del esfuerzo castellano. (repr. in Larraz, *La Guerre d'Indépendance* 55)

Not surprisingly, the figure of Pelayo is one of the touchstones in the ritualistic laying out of the anxieties of revolution during this period. Projected onto this historical figure are all sorts of characteristics that Spaniards saw as either usurped or threatened by the French, or necessary to the creation of a self-identity that conformed, at least in part, to what they hoped they would become. The War unleashed a barrage of political and patriotic plays, although their performances were constantly interrupted as the theaters closed down during more turbulent moments. What we have in Spain is the birth of patriotic theater, unprecedented before 1808. As Freire notes, “se produce con gran rapidez el fenómeno de que los autores que usualmente suministraban las obras a los teatros corran a atender una temática exigida por el público” (“La Guerra de la Independencia” 145). Plays with titles such as *El fin de Napoladrón* (1808), *La alianza española con la nación inglesa* (1808), *La muerte de Murat* (1808), *Las cuatro columnas del trono español* (1809), *Desenfado patriótico* (1810), *Las agonías del mariscal Marmont* (1812), *El apuro de los Afrancesados* (1812), *El sí patriótico* (1812), *El dos de mayo* (1813), and *La constitución vindicada* (1813), confirm the existence of a rich and varied, if not necessarily aesthetically pleasing, strand of intense political rhetoric pouring out through the proscenium arches of Spain’s theaters (Lafarga, “Teatro político”).

In these plays, France—and in particular, the figure of Napoleon—is cast as a “monstruo,” the “emperador de los Diablos,” a “perro,” “ladrón,” “tirano,” “niño,” “corso majadero,” “embustero,” “gran bellaco,” “horror del mundo entero,” and “trapacero” (among many other sobriquets; for the figure of Napoleon on the French stage, see Howarth). Francisco de Paula Martí provides an instructive case study in dramaturgy that was moved by patriotism inspired by the events swirling around him

following the outbreak of the War (qtd. in Larraz, *Teatro de propaganda* 105). He had to wait until 1813 to stage his *El dos de mayo de 1808 en Madrid y muerte heroica de Daoiz y Velarde*, a stirring invitation to his fellow countrymen to “libertar la Nación del yugo ignominioso que se le pretende imponer” (qtd. in Larraz, *Teatro de propaganda* 105). He was, he claimed, an eye-witness to the events recounted in his tragedy (“yo, yo mismo presencié la horrorosa escena” qtd. in Larraz, *Théâtre et politique* 319), making it what Larraz has called a “teatro-documento contemporáneo” (qtd. in Andioc, “El dos de mayo” 125). Andioc even wonders if Goya had seen the play, since it coincides in detail and concept with several of his paintings (we remember, too, that Goya often found inspiration in contemporary plays) (151). Martí did not limit himself to praising his heroic countrymen; he also satirized the turn-coat *afrancesados* in *El mayor chasco de los francesados o el gran noticia de la Rusia* that same year (1814), heaping scorn on the opportunists:

A excepción de unos pocos (muy pocos), la mayor parte de los que siguen el partido francés son gente oscura, viciosa y de lo más despreciable de la sociedad. Estos que nunca pudieron esperar de ningún gobierno, por malo que fuese, hacer ningún papel, hallaron oportunidad de elevarse sobre su esfera luego que llegó el rey Pepe, pues como los buenos españoles rehusaron tomar ninguno de los muchos empleos que había vacantes, y que iban rogando con ellos, los pícaros aprovecharon la ocasión . . . (1: 13; qtd. in Larraz, “Teatro de propaganda” 111)

As we know, this was hardly a universal position. Yet other dramatists, rather than recounting the past, postulated the future by, for example, projecting Napoleon’s death. *La muerte de Bonaparte* (1808), José Ribera y Castelar’s “melodrama” (in the Italian sense of the word, that is, drama with music), reinvents the French emperor as an angst-ridden, nearly Romantic man who reflects on his situation, successes, and triumphs, but then concludes that they are all the result of deception and treachery. He doesn’t need to have others denounce him: he calls himself “usurpador vil,” “asesino,” “ladrón detestable,” “sangriento,” “embustero,” “irreligioso,” “falso enemigo,” and finally—and all of this within four verses!—“tirano horrendo.” The author defends Fernando VII, suggesting that he was tricked by the Emperor:

mirándome con aire de desprecio,  
con tono firme y voz magestuosa,  
sin rezelar mi enojo y sentimiento:  
“¿cómo quieres, me dixo, que te ceda,  
gran Napoleón, unos derechos,  
que la naturaleza me concede?  
Nací rey en España, y nunca puedo,  
privando de mi vista a mis vasallos,  
permitir los domine un extranjero . . .”. (14)

And in an act that anticipates the fate of Rivas’ don Álvaro, Napoleon jumps to his death shouting, “Abre tus puertas, pavoroso Abismo . . .” (30).

This projection of Napoleon's death is something that Manuel José Quintana (perhaps) was contemplating as early as 1805 in his play *Pelayo*, written during what Ivy McClelland calls the "Third Reform Movement" (1: 217).

A few quotes from *Pelayo* will allow us to look at these plays not as binaries (history vs. present) but rather as kaleidoscopes of shifting surfaces that will point us, unexpectedly, not toward the future but toward the past. Geography and national identity should locate the words in a time continuum for us; think about the main players and the time period involved (but caution, there is deceit below—the source will become clear further on):

. . . hoy mismo  
de las murallas de **Madrid** me ausento,  
donde tanta flaqueza y tanto oprobio  
mis indignados ojos están viendo.  
El **francés** triunfa, los **españoles** doblan  
a la dura cadena el dócil cuello,  
sin que uno solo a murmurar se atreva  
de opresión tan odiosa. No: aunque en medio  
de esta vil muchedumbre apareciese  
del gran **Fernando** el deseado aliento;  
en vano a libertad los llamaría,  
ya nadie le entendiera. (1.1.1-12; emphasis added)

Here we have a clear example of the rejection of the French, of a call to arms to an oppressed nation in distress, of an appeal to a "desired" king charged with reinfusing his countrymen with "libertad." As we have seen, such examples were legion in the post-1808 period. The play continues:

Fiero, incansable,  
los llanos de **Bailén** le vieron  
casi arrancar él solo la victoria,  
que vendió la perfidia al **lugareño**.  
Él atajó el raudal a la fortuna  
del soberbio **Murat**, cuando en **Arapiles**  
del victorioso ejército sostuvo  
la terrible pujanza un año entero.  
De igual valor fue **Vitoria** testigo . . . (1.1.15-23; emphasis added)

These plays contain overtly patriotic themes that were generated after the eruption of hostilities and the French invasion of 1808; let us now turn back a few years to look at plays that suggest the prescience mentioned above. That is, what if we look at this in reverse, and consider theater as an event that somehow writes history rather than the other way around? Quintana's underappreciated play *Pelayo* will be instructive, for it serves as much more than a mere historical drama and call to arms to Spaniards. It becomes a suggestion of things to come, a frighteningly insightful take on what Spain would suffer: the canary, not in the mine, but in the mind.

Quintana's play was eagerly anticipated, and already viewed as an important theatrical event when it debuted on January 19, 1805. Yet it was also seen as a social and political event, for it suggested the patriotic energy that would be needed to fuel the war against the French in three year's time. As Cotarelo tells it,

Llegó a poco el día del suceso teatral de más importancia en este año; tal fue el estreno de la tragedia de Quintana, el *Pelayo*, la tarde del 19 de enero de 1805. Hoy la crítica no celebra sin grandes reservas esta obra que, con todo, es superior a las que sobre el mismo asunto compusieron D. Nicolás de Moratín y Jovellanos, **pero el público que la oyó entonces no escatimó el aplauso a aquellos varoniles acentos de patriotismo e independencia que tres años después se vio eran los de casi todos los españoles**. La obra se representó con lujo, estrenando decoraciones nuevas, pintadas por D. José Ribelles, y con tonadilla y sainete: **todo a la española**. (209; emphasis added)

These were times, as McClelland reminds us, of “political nervousness” (1: 261). We know, too, that Quintana, as *Censor de Teatros* in 1807 and 1808, approved the performance of Zavala's *La sombra de Pelayo*, when it was first staged in 1807.

I shall begin with two quotes from *Pelayo* that should underscore those “varoniles acentos de patriotismo e independencia” highlighted by Cotarelo. These words have been seen above, slightly altered:

. . . hoy mismo  
de las murallas de **Gijón** me ausento,  
donde tanta flaqueza y tanto oprobio  
mis indignados ojos están viendo.  
El **moro** triunfa, los **cristianos** doblan  
a la dura cadena el dócil cuello,  
sin que uno solo a murmurar se atreva  
de opresión tan odiosa. No: aunque en medio  
de esta vil muchedumbre apareciese  
del gran **Pelayo** el aliento;  
en vano a libertad los llamaría,  
ya nadie le entendiera.  
[. . .]

Fiero, incansable,  
los llanos de **Bética** le vieron  
casi arrancar él solo la victoria,  
que vendió la perfidia al **agareno**.  
Él atajó el raudal a la fortuna  
del soberbio **Tarif**, cuando en **Toledo**  
del victorioso ejército sostuvo  
la terrible pujanza un año entero.  
De igual valor fue **Mérida** testigo . . . (1.1.1-23; emphasis added)



A simple slight of hand, the replacing of some proper nouns with others, moves us from Quintana's present to the past. Quintana creates a swirling eddy of shifting allegiances, forcing his listener to connect the world outside the theater with the one being created within the sacred walls of Thespis. What had—or could have—referred to the resistance during the War becomes, when re-read, not the past but the future. Ever since the French Revolution, fault lines had developed between those who viewed the culture from the north to be a glowing beacon to be followed and those who saw it as a malevolent black light leading the contemporary world astray. Does Hormesinda's sacrilegious marriage to Munuza hide Quintana's critique of those who too easily threw Spain over?

Sus ojos

ya sepultados en eterno sueño  
 no verán el escándalo, la afrenta  
 de su sangre, el sacrílego himeneo  
 que hoy se va a celebrar.  
 [. . .]  
 Mal pudieran las débiles mujeres  
 resistir al halago lisonjero  
 del moro vencedor, cuando sus armas  
 domaron ya los varoniles pechos. (1.1.29-40)

Quintana, one of the individuals who helped usher in what Dérozier has called “el nacimiento del liberalismo en España,” begs us to revisit his play. He had done such things before, after all, in his patriotic poems. As he wrote in “A Juan de Padilla” as early as 1797:

¡Patria! nombre feliz, numen divino  
 [. . .]  
 ¡Perdona, madre España! La flaqueza  
 De tus cobardes hijos pudo sola  
 Así enlutar tu sin igual belleza!  
 ¿Quién fue de ellos jamás? ¡Ah! vanamente  
 Discurre mi deseo  
 Por tus fastos sangrientos y el contino  
 Revolver de los tiempos; vanamente  
 Busco honor y virtud: fue tu destino  
 Dar nacimiento un día  
 A un odioso tropel de hombres feroces,  
 Colosos para el mal; todos te hollaron,  
 Todos ajaron tu feliz decoro;  
 ¡Y sus nombres aún viven! Y su frente  
 Pudo orlar impudente  
 La vil posteridad con lauros de oro! (lines 16, 32-46)

Similar concepts were repeated in “A España, después de la Revolución de marzo” ten years later. And we know, from Dérozier, that Quintana underwent important ideological

and emotional changes between 1802 and 1808, changes reflected in the various editions of his poems (*Quintana* 175-185).

Hence, verses leap out of his *Pelayo* that take on new meaning or suggested shadings when read from both the past (its historical context) and from the future (the coming Napoleonic invasion):

¡Abominable amor!, ¡unión impía!,  
que Dios va a castigar; y ya estoy viendo  
a esa desventurada, a quien seducen  
los engaños del moro . . .

Las inquietas ondas  
que baten las murallas de este pueblo,  
no son más de temer en su inconstancia  
que su alma impetuosa. (1.1.63-74)

Are we being invited to read these words into the future?

Ella se acabará, que no está lejos,  
¡y plegue al Cielo que me engañe!, el día  
en que soltado a su insolencia el freno,  
del tirano engañoso que ahora alabas  
la rabia al fin confesarás gimiendo.  
Yo tiemblo su frenética arrogancia. (1.1.76-81)

In this reading, Spain is lost, torn between two options. Hormesinda (as Spain), in a trance and confused by what is swirling on around her, cries, “¿En dónde, ¡oh cielos!, / en dónde estoy?” (2.8-10). Do we hear a reference to Napoleon in Audalla’s statement that:

Cercado siempre de armas y soldados,  
entregado a las bélicas fatigas  
sé pelear y no amar: sé hacer esclavos,  
nunca servir. Que nuestra ley divina  
por siempre triunfe, y que ante el gran Profeta  
el universo incline su rodilla;  
tales son mi ambición y mis deseos. (2.2.91-97)

Did Quintana’s audience hear similar references? It would be pure speculation to suggest that they did, but it would not be idle speculation, as audiences were finely attuned to the turbulent political times, as Dérozier and Andioc, among many others, have demonstrated. In the play, Hormesinda has agreed, literally, to get into bed with Munuza so that Gijón will be spared. But will it? Is appeasement the solution? As Audalla brags, “Ellos tal vez castigarán un día / bondad tan temaria” (2.2.136-137), rendering false Munuza’s claim that “¡Cristianos, sois perdidos!” (2.4.183). Pelayo rejoins:

Dios pudo un día  
 separar su favor de aqueste pueblo,  
 y abandonarle a su terrible ira.  
 De los grados contempla el poderío.  
 La suerte en un momento le derriba:  
 la suerte puede hacer que en un momento  
 caiga también vuestra soberbia altiva. (2.4.184-190)

Pelayo is the Spain that resists foreign aggression; Hormesinda is the Spain that gives herself over to tyranny. Quintana converts the story into a story of fratricidal anger, brewing civil war, “us” against “them.” As one of the characters says, “La hora se acerca en fin: y por ventura / el momento feliz también se acerca / de empezar otra lid más peligrosa, / pero de más honor que la primera” (3.1.31-34).

I will not belabor this point, but McClelland recognizes Quintana’s work as a “relatively mature means of dramatizing contemporary ideology” (1: 260). Quintana was hardly the only representative of this “canary in the mind” syndrome. Unknown and unremembered works such as *Los ayes de la viudez o la viuda de un marino, muerto en el combate naval de 21 de octubre de 1805* (1806) also sought to draw attention to the plight of oppressed peoples, superstition and tyranny. The War of Independence was in itself a sort of drama. It was a failed drama, to be sure—depending, that is, on which side of the curtain one looked at the play—that set the stage for other dramas of consequence that then have been written in and out of literary history. The *Cortes de Cádiz*, the Carlist Wars, the *Regencia*, etc., all have become fodder for literary and political history. The boundaries of these histories become renegotiated, redefined, moved, and dissolved with time. As Buckley puts it, “drama was not simply one aspect of French Revolutionary history but one of its primary ‘scripts,’ not merely the outer trappings of its players but a shaping force in their conduct and course of action” (6-7). Quintana’s *Pelayo*, then, when seen in this light, becomes an important “script” in the struggle for appropriation, both of theatrical language and of political language, drama and politics fused together into one speech act with multiple voices. His play, and others, participated in the Revolutionary Act, both post-French Revolution and pre-Spanish Revolution (the uprising of 1808), by creating a “range of symbolic practices” (Worrall 132) that tumbled out from the streets, the cafés, and the theaters.

François Furet interpreted the French Revolution as a primarily linguistic event; language was substituted for power. Are we able to see the Spanish Revolution in a similar light, in which the stage becomes a linguistic space and words become slippery, often vague and with ever-changing meanings? Is Quintana’s “tyrant” the same as Pixérécourt’s? Is his “patria” the same as Moratín’s? Pedro Álvarez de Miranda has important things to say about the concepts “nacional,” “nacionalidad,” “patria,” “patriotismo” and “amor a la patria” in the early years of the eighteenth century, but we do not have good statistics yet on how these concepts morphed over the years, particularly as political change swept away the old before the new was fully formed (211-263; Gies, “La nación a escena” and “Historia patria”). Political discourse, which began at the margins of theater with Comella, Zavala, etc.,—playwrights whom McClelland cleverly called the “scribbling riffraff” (1: 223)—quickly became centered once the French troops arrived and the War

had begun in earnest (Freire). Capmany saw it clearly in 1808 when he asked, “¿Qué le importaría a un Rey tener vasallos si no tuviese nación? A esta la forma no el número de los individuos, sino la unidad de las voluntades, de las leyes, de las costumbres y del idioma que les encierra y mantiene de generación en generación” (qtd. in Álvarez de Miranda 211). But Quintana had “spoken” this out before the invasion, and what Calvo Asensio hyperventilatingly wrote in 1875 could easily have been penned by Quintana; we hear the drums of war pounding in the background as martial music swells:

la Edad Media . . . , como feudal castillo bajo cuyos cimientos revienta la cargada mina, y el siglo más grande de la historia, el siglo XIX, viene a la vida con la santa misión de redimir todas las esclavitudes y unir por la fraternidad universal todas las razas. La revolución una vez llevada a cabo en Francia, necesitaba luz, aire, espacio, nuevos horizontes; la tribuna francesa desde donde había el genio moderno lanzado la palabra de vida, era estrecho pedestal para sostener al gigante . . . la nueva, poderosa idea armó el brazo de Napoleón, y como huracán deshecho cayó sobre la vieja Europa, arrollando a su paso ruinosas instituciones y envolviendo en polvorienta nube rancios privilegios y tiranía nefandas. El día de la libertad brilló fulgente y hermoso, y los oprimidos rompieron sus cadenas, y las modernas generaciones se prosternaron comovidas ante el hollado altar de la conciencia. (12-13)

Literature as pamphlet; theater as a mechanism to “mantener viva en los corazones españoles la llama de la libertad y el odio a la dominación extranjera” (Calvo 33). We return to Quintana’s poem “A Juan de Padilla” and read these stirring lines which could easily have been mouthed by Pelayo (or, for that matter, by any of the protagonists of the plays post-1808):

Castellanos, alzáos; la inmensa huella  
 Corrió de tres edades  
 Por mi sangre infeliz; corrió, y aun ella  
 Hierve reciente y a venganza os llama.  
 ¿Queréis por dicha conllevar la pena  
 Del siglo vil a quien mi muerte infama?  
 ¿Seguir besando la fatal cadena?  
 ¿Vuestro mal merecer? Volved los ojos,  
 Volved atrás, y contempladme cuando  
 Yo di a la tierra el admirable ejemplo  
 De la virtud con la opresión luchando.  
 Entonces los clamores  
 De la tremente patria en vano oísteis,  
 Negándoos a su voz, y fascinados  
 Tras la execrable esclavitud corrísteis,  
 Forjando ¡oh indignación! los torpes lazos  
 Que oprobio han sido a tan robustos brazos. (lines 160-176)

Some years later, in “A España, después de la Revolución de marzo,” he penned what John Polt has called a “preludio y vaticinio” to the *Guerra de la Independencia* (380).

It is not my intent to read Quintana’s *Pelayo* anachronistically, nor to drag out of it false allegories or analogies, nor even to smooth away the myriad contradictions and ambiguities that mark the play and the period. Conflict trumped consensus, to be sure. Yet I think we can learn something by reconsidering this play, and others, along the lines I am suggesting. Quintana echoes the anxiety Spaniards felt as they saw the world they knew collapse in France and elsewhere. We can read Quintana not only as a retrospective consideration of Spanish history, but also as a veiled prophetic act.

Erika Fischer-Lichte, in her book on *Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual*, reminds us that “Revolutionary times are liminal times—times in which society undergoes substantial changes and decisive transformations. The old order is abolished; a new one not yet established. A multitude of possibilities seem to emerge; contradictions can coexist in peace; anything might happen” (97). What happened in Spain was not particularly welcomed; Quintana perceived it, and as he wrote in his 1805 play: “No hay ya España, no hay patria [. . .] La hora se acerca en fin: y por ventura /el momento feliz también se acerca / de empezar otra lid más peligrosa . . .” (1.5.53; 3.1.31-33). He recognizes what Dérozier has called “la fusion même de l’Histoire et de la Littérature” (“Napoleón” 28). The stage had been set; the Revolution—the Revolutions—were about to commence.

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