

Oriental Traditions in Spanish Romantic Literature: The Example of M. J. Larra and the “Inner-Orient” Model

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Abstract

The study analyzes the traces of Eastern traditions in the works of M. J. Larra within the framework of Spanish romanticism along two lines: the romantic aestheticization of the memory of Al-Andalus as an inner orientation (Moorish/Moorish motifs, the memory of the Granada war, the staging of medieval palace spaces); the limited but semantically loaded use of exotic Eastern codes. The aim is to show how, despite Larra's mainly journalistic-costumbrist role, the image of the East intersects with the discourse of national self-awareness in his historical-romantic texts ("Macías", 1834; "El doncel de don Enrique el Doliente", 1834). The article traces Eastern traditions in Larra's works through a three-level "analytical prism". At the first level, the aestheticization of historical memory is explored: the problems of how medieval space and Al-Andalus motifs are reflected in romantic decoration, topos, and plot construction are explored. At the second level, the rhetoric of exoticism is brought into focus:

Emotional impact: Hope, fear, enlightenment, the unknown. Light creates a sense of the hero's "rightness" or "divine sign", while darkness creates an atmosphere of danger, guilt, hidden intent. As a result, the tension increases, the reader is kept in suspense; turning points ("sudden light", "coming out of the shadows") become dramatic peaks. Sacred admiration is the attraction of the body/desire. This clash creates a sense of taboo: "necessary obedience" and "forbidden desire" come face to face. This, in turn, evokes dual feelings in the reader - the reader is emotionally attracted by both admiration and conscience (guilt, shame). At the third level, ethical-affective identification is assessed: how are empathetic feelings established with the image of the Moor/Morisko or in what cases does distance arise? This approach combines the frameworks of comparative poetics, thematology and imagology and makes both the form and positional layers of the text visible at the same time. Although Mariano José de Larra (M. J. Larra) is known mainly for his journalism and costume design, traces of Eastern traditions in his historical-romantic texts ("Macías", 1834; "El doncel de don Enrique el Doliente", 1834) create remarkable examples in terms of the aestheticization of national memory and the dynamism of identification. At this point, I would like to note a brief comparative context of this topic I have presented with Azerbaijani literature. While in Spanish romanticism the memory of Al-Andalus is present as a complex "other" living within the national past, in Azerbaijani romanticism national self-awareness was formed against the background of the imperial occupation, political fragmentation and cultural modernization of the 19th century. At the beginning of the 19th century, as a result of the military campaigns of the Russian Empire in the South Caucasus, the Northern Azerbaijani khanates were occupied and incorporated into the empire. The Gulistan and Turkmenchay treaties signed after the Russian-Iranian wars of 1804–1813 and 1826–1828 consolidated this occupation and annexation from a legal and political perspective; the Araz River became the border of the division of the historical and cultural space between the two empires. This event did not only change the political map. It turned the concepts of homeland, language, historical memory and national integrity into one of the main problems of Azerbaijani literary thought.

At the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, the Azerbaijani intelligentsia was formed in a contradictory historical environment: on the one hand, the political control of the Russian Empire and the pressure of cultural assimilation, and on the other hand, through the imperial space, there was acquaintance with European science, secular education, new press and modern political ideas. Therefore, Azerbaijani romanticism became not only an aesthetic school, but also a special language of thought in which national identity expressed itself. Mahammad Hadi, Huseyn Javid, Abbas Sahhat, Abdulla Shaig and the "Füyuzat" group transformed the concepts of "freedom", "renaissance", "homeland", "nation", "Turan" and "national unity" into poetic and philosophical categories. The romantic hero's quest for freedom became an expression of the people's right to determine their own history and future.

The expanding press and public opinion environment after the 1905 revolution accelerated the process of national self-awareness. The ideas of spiritual and intellectual renewal put forward in the magazine "Füyuzat", the calls for awakening and freedom repeated in romantic poetry gained political form in 1918. The proclamation of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic on May 28, 1918 showed that national thought was more of a state project than a cultural program. Steps such as the establishment of a parliament, a state language, a tricolor flag, national education and Baku State University turned the idea of independence, which had long been preserved as an ideal in literature, into a real political experience. In Ahmad Javad's poetry, the flag had already moved from an abstract romantic symbol to a symbol of the existing state, national dignity and historical will.

However, this phase was very short-lived. The entry of the 11th Red Army into Azerbaijan on April 28, 1920, led to the collapse of the Republic and the Sovietization of the country. After that, the national-romantic discourse began to be considered politically dangerous: some ideas were silenced, some were adapted to Soviet ideology, and others were indirectly revived within historical and mythological plots. The continuous posing of the problems of power, violence, historical responsibility, and moral freedom in Huseyn Javid's works such as "Iblis," "Topal Teymur," and "Sayavuş" acquires special significance in this regard. Javid's arrest and exile during the repressions of the 1930s, and the shooting of Ahmad Javad showed the heavy political pressure under which the idea of national memory and freedom lived.

This comparison shows the proximity of two different historical models. In Larra's Spain, the past of Al-Andalus is both an appropriated and "alienated" memory within national identity. In Azerbaijani romanticism, national identity is constructed within the context of imperial occupation, divided historical geography, the experience of brief independence, and the trauma of Sovietization. However, in both literatures, romantic historicism fulfills the same important function: the past is not a decorative backdrop, but a critical mirror for modern society to question itself.

From this perspective, it is possible to speak of a methodological parallel, although not directly historical, between Larra's "inner-orient" model and the national memory model of Azerbaijani romanticism. In both cases, literature rereads the contradictory layers of the past and raises the questions "who are we?", "who shaped history?", "what moral responsibility does freedom and national integrity require?" In Spanish romanticism, these questions are expressed through the memory of Al-Andalus and the Reconquista, and in Azerbaijani romanticism, through the experience of imperial occupation, a divided homeland, the Republic, and Sovietization. As a result, it can be said that the East, presented as a distant exotic in Larra's historical-romantic texts, actually acts as an internal element of Spain's dialogue with its past, national memory, and contradictory identity.

Keywords

Al-Andalusian heritage, Azerbaijan romanticism, Spanish romanticism, Larra, Orientalism, Huseyn Javid, Eastern traditions, Transcultural influence.