

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Virility, fascism and regeneration in post-Civil War Spain: On interpretations of literary Romanticism under the Franco regime

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*The author participates in the project “Género y nación franquista. Perspectivas transnacionales e interseccionales” (PID2022-141082NB-C22) under the coordinated project *Franquismo, nación y género en perspectiva transnacional* (FRANGETRANS), financed by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation.

Funding information

Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation, Grant/Award Number: PID2022-141082NB-C22

Abstract

In the years immediately following the Spanish Civil War, the political culture of Falangism developed a deeply gendered regenerationist discourse, which proposed that regeneration would only be possible if the nation recovered its virile attributes. This article focuses on a case study that allows us to better understand this gendered conception of the nation in terms of virility: the discourse developed around the Spanish Romantic writers of the 1830s, a literary movement difficult to incorporate within conceptions of the virile nation. This gained prominence particularly because several centenaries associated with these writers occurred during the war and post-war period.

The period in Spanish life that comprised the years of the Civil War, from 1936 to 1939, and the immediate *posguerra* or post-war period, which continued until at least 1945, was a time that has been interpreted as one of intense fascistisation. It also provided the context for the celebration of three centenaries associated with the first generation of Spanish Romantic writers.¹ The first came in February 1937, the hundredth anniversary of the suicide of the satirist Mariano José de Larra, one of the greatest chroniclers of the political and social realities of Spain, who took his own life aged only twenty-seven years in Madrid.² The second was in 1942, the centenary of the death of José de Espronceda, an esteemed Romantic poet who had also died prematurely of diphtheria in the same city. Last, the third arrived in 1944, a happier anniversary that commemorated the premiere of the play *Don Juan Tenorio*, the foremost work of José Zorrilla.

In differing ways, the Franco regime marked all these three dates connected with the Romantic writers of the generation of 1830, an ideologically plural generation that had extended from the

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liberalism of Espronceda or Larra to the conservatism of Zorrilla, in order to insert them within its own discourse on the nation. For a regime with a markedly historicist mentality, and which was to a great extent legitimised by images of tradition, a fresh reading of such eminently Spanish writers – whether to incorporate them into its own canon, assign them new meanings or even question them – was an opportunity that could not be ignored.³ Despite the liberal inclinations of two of them, these authors were unquestionably the foremost exponents of Spanish Romantic literature.⁴

The discourse surrounding these writers was plural in form and often divergent. As has become clear, thanks to recent studies that analyse Francoism from the standpoint of the political cultures from which it was composed, the Spanish dictatorship was, like others in interwar Europe, heterogeneous, multiform and hybrid in nature. Like its equivalents elsewhere, Francoism acted as a political space for the coming together of the two principal anti-liberal and nationalist political cultures that, transnationally, dominated the first half of the twentieth century in Europe and equally gained a hegemonic role in Spain: fascist political culture, represented in Spain by the party of the *Falange Española y de las JONS*, and the political culture of Catholic, reactionary, monarchist nationalism, represented in the first instance by the former supporters of the deposed King Alfonso XIII who had formed the *Acción Española* ('Spanish Action') group before the Civil War.⁵

Understanding Francoism from this perspective implies that we need to pay special attention to the differences and disputes that emerged between one political culture and the other regarding the definition of the nation. As Xavier Andreu has highlighted, while not all political cultures are nationalist, most of those that developed in contemporary Spain have been: political families and traditions of very varied ideological leanings that have all coincided in articulating their specific visions around the formulation and promotion of a particular idea of what they felt Spain to be.⁶ Within the Franco regime, the two cultures already mentioned were undoubtedly nationalist, since each engaged in the elaboration of a substantially distinct nationalist project, one based on a totalitarian fascist ultranationalism and the other on the restoration of a traditional Catholic nation. This does not mean that there were not mutual influences or permeable boundaries between them, due to their both forming part of the same political regime under Franco, nor that certain elements, such as Catholicism, were not also key features of Spanish fascism. Rather, it means that the regime as a whole needs to be analysed on the basis of the different actors which composed it, with due attention to the dynamics that developed between them.⁷

In the omnipresent discourse and language on the nation of the first years of Francoism, ideas of gender were widespread. This is not a new conception, for the use of categories associated with the attributes traditionally considered masculine or feminine has been part of the nationalist imagination in many contemporary contexts and political cultures.⁸ In the case of Francoism, it was Falangist fascism that accentuated this gendering, linking its image of Spain inherently with a notion of virility and endowing this in turn with an evident power of national regeneration.⁹ In contrast, the 'Anti-Spain', a motif employed by the anti-liberal right since the years of the Second Republic (1931–6), and which became more vituperative during the Civil War as a means of indicating an amalgam of all those considered enemies of the fatherland, was framed in terms of attributes of effeminacy. This extended from descriptions of republican politicians, such as President Manuel Azaña, and the portrayal of enemy combatants to the area of most interest to us here: the characterisation of liberalism as a whole.¹⁰

This article suggests that the discourse deployed around the three literary centenaries was more generally significant for Spanish political history. On the one hand, what were apparently specific, discrete narratives about literary figures can also be seen as privileged case studies that help us go deeper into an analysis of the discourse on virility around which the Falange conceived the regeneration of Spain. On the other hand, the rhetoric deployed around this first group of Romantic writers not only allows us to envisage the virile attributes and virtues that were to shape the fatherland, but also helps us understand the emotional dimension of virility, revealing the emotions through which the relationship with the nation was to be established, and the attitudes and posture each individual was expected to have towards it.

FASCISM, VIRILITY AND REGENERATION

That fascism is a regenerationist ideology is not a surprising idea. Ever since Roger Griffin put forward his well-known definition of the fascist phenomenon stressing its palingenetic component in the early 1990s, the central importance of discourse on the decadence, death and resurrection of the nation as a nucleus of the revolutionary and ultranationalist ideology particular to fascism has been broadly accepted.¹¹ Griffin himself has pointed in successive studies to the progressive growth of a consensus around this definition and the extension of its application beyond the paradigmatic cases of Italy and Germany.¹²

Ruth Ben-Ghiat rightly observed some years ago that fascism's success and power of seduction resided precisely in this palingenetic component, since it was through it that this ideological 'late-comer' connected with the fears and hopes of its era.¹³ It is true that fascist movements radicalised and took to an extreme the available rhetoric on the necessity of revitalising, by revolutionary means, nations that were felt to be moribund. However, it is also the case that through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a belief in national decadence and degeneration had become widespread across Europe, becoming a narrative that was shared across differing political sensibilities.¹⁴ This cultural pessimism, as Arthur Herman has described it, led to the search for regenerative solutions that could drag nations out of the morass in which they seemed immersed becoming a priority in the thinking of a broad and varied range of political actors.¹⁵

The importance of gender in this rhetoric on the decadence and regeneration of nations has been noted on many occasions. The asymmetry inherent in gendered representations has frequently made it possible to associate power with virility and its absence with effeminacy.¹⁶ In the context of the nineteenth century, marked by burgeoning imperialism and notions of Social Darwinism that spoke of nations and races as strong or weak, images of masculinity and virility served to identify the power and strength of particular countries, while their absence indicated weakness.¹⁷ Years later, in the inter-war period, the ideal of virility continued to operate as the antithesis of all the symptoms identified with decadence – weakness, cowardice, immorality, physical deformity – and exemplified by the different groups that supposedly threatened the integrity of the fatherland (for example Jews, foreigners, homosexuals).¹⁸ As Silvana Patriarca has noted in considering the inheritance Italian fascism took from the *Risorgimento*, it was precisely in this gendered content that we can find similarities between nationalisms of different political orientations.¹⁹

Spain was not an exceptional case within this broad European context. An awareness of national crisis and reflections on how the country could emerge from decadence played a central role in discussions throughout the nineteenth century, becoming particularly acute after 1898 with the loss of Spain's last major colonies in the Spanish-American War. This stretched into the fascism of the Falange, for whom this was a key element in its palingenetic ultranationalism.²⁰ In this regard, the latter can be seen as a late, extreme, totalitarian and anti-liberal version of earlier 'regenerationism'.²¹ The term has been used in Spanish historiography to identify the varied collection of authors, ideas and proposals that, from the 1870s, and more intensely following the 'Disaster' of 1898, focused on reflections upon Spain's decadence and the manner in which the inert homeland could be reanimated. In Spain, too, this widespread discontent was coloured by gender. On all sides of the political spectrum, allusions to a loss of virility became notably visible in explanations of the nation's condition, as a cause of a decadence that after the *Desastre* (the term that covered everything that had happened in 1898) was interpreted as a genuine process of national and even racial degeneration.²² As Nerea Aresti has summarised, 'the crisis of 1898 was expressed, among other ways, in terms of a crisis of national masculinity'.²³

I have examined what the radical Falangists of the immediate *posguerra* understood by virility in previous studies. This article goes further by focusing on these case studies.²⁴ The concept of virility was highly normative, viewed as a desirable quality to which one should aspire, and constructed from a binary reading of sexual difference. It was based on two complementary elements: on the one hand, determination, decisiveness, boldness, strength, vigour and valour, and on the other hand,

austerity, self-control, sobriety, seriousness, rigour and composure. Consequently, and with regard to the questions that concern us here, virility acted as a normative ideal that was presented as a 'golden mean' between strength and moderation, in that not just inadequacies but also excess and a lack of forethought were equally to be condemned.²⁵ Consequently, the new Falangist Spain was to be a nation that was strong and fearless, but also restrained and severe, serious-minded and deep-thinking. Opposing it, as its antithesis and a cause of the nation's decadence, stood the gendered obverse of virility: the danger of effeminacy that resided in everyone and everything that either through deficiency (by being weak, pusillanimous or accommodating, and therefore failing to attain the dash, strength and valour of the new Spain) or excess (by overwhelming the necessary composure, seriousness and austerity with frivolity, superficiality and boastfulness) might represent a challenge to virile attributes.

Reflecting these ideas, the discourse deployed by politicians and intellectuals around the centenaries of Mariano José de Larra, José de Esponceda and José Zorrilla would be closely linked to the question of the precise extent to which these writers could, or could not, represent the regenerative virility expected of post-war Spain.

ANTI-PATRIOTIC PESSIMISM OR PROFOUND, VIRILE *ESPAÑOLISMO*? CONTRASTING EMOTIONS TOWARDS MARIANO JOSÉ DE LARRA

Saturday, 13 February 1937, seven months after the outbreak of the Civil War, was the hundredth anniversary of the suicide of Mariano José de Larra. The date certainly did not go unnoticed in the insurgent zone, where the *Delegación del Estado para Prensa y Propaganda* (State Department for Press and Propaganda), created a few weeks earlier and headed by the Germanophile Vicente Gay, commemorated the celebrated author. In tributes broadcast by the also recently established *Radio Nacional*, extracts were read of his works and praise was heaped upon him, presenting an image that, as *El Adelanto* reported, highlighted his concern to see a better Spain.²⁶ It was true, writers acknowledged, that to his contemporaries Larra had often appeared an embittered spirit and a difficult character, but one must not forget that what most characterised the way he viewed Spain had been satire and caustic wit. Posterity had understood very well that what led him to take up his pen had in fact been 'the impulses of pure patriotism that moved him always to write the truth', even when this truth was unforgiving. To continue the tribute, the same newspaper republished '*En este país*', one of Larra's best-known articles, in which he wrote ironically of the idleness and inactivity represented by a certain kind of Spaniard.²⁷

The Falangist eulogies devoted to *Figaro* (the pseudonym under which Mariano José de Larra published most of his articles) soon brought a response from within the same Francoist camp. A few days after the anniversary, the Traditionalist commentator Narciso José Boj put forward an argument that was scarcely original: nothing good could be expected from Larra, he wrote, nor, equally, from his continuation in the work of the 'Generation of 98', the group of writers particularly affected by the collapse and crisis of morale that followed the defeat of 1898, headed by figures such as Pío Baroja, Miguel de Unamuno, *Azorín* (the pseudonym of José Martínez Ruiz) and Ramiro de Maeztu.²⁸ All were offspring of the disastrous nineteenth century, a century that had been 'fatefully liberal, from the pedantic encyclopaedists of the Cádiz Cortes of 1812 to the defeatist and ill-humoured generation of 98'. Virtually nothing that had come down from that era to the twentieth century was deserving of celebration, because its mixture of Romantic liberalism and historical materialism had led a whole generation of Spaniards to be dragged down by pessimism. For this Traditionalist writer, one of the merits of a war already described as a 'Crusade' was that it permitted the upsurge of a Spanish youth that was Christian and vigorous, but also joyful and firmly patriotic, who, in the serene days of peace, would loudly proclaim their national jubilation.²⁹

The opposition thus presented between pessimism and optimism, or between what Narciso José Boj regarded as defeatism and ill-humour and patriotic national jubilation, was an important one. In effect,

the readings the different sectors of Francoism made of the nineteenth century and Spain's situation since 1900 contained an element of emotional war that affected not only how they understood the past and what they felt they should retrieve from it, but also the question of what emotions and motivations were to predominate among the generation that had fought the war and was called upon to raise up the new Spain of the post-war era. In this respect, as contrasting political cultures, the two projects that struggled with each other to define the Francoist nation also diverged in the emotional hegemonies they put forward, laying out different repertoires of expression and varying selections of emotions that could be considered appropriate and others that were reprehensible.³⁰

A central part of the problem lay in the question of to what point the despair of a *Figaro* and his mordant social criticism, inherited by the writers of 1898, could also serve to inspire an *Españolista* patriotism.³¹ An *Españolista* patriotism that was deep, full of gravity, serious-minded, critical, uncomplacent and so authentic and regenerative in a virile manner, as the Falangists maintained, or whether, these were simply traitorous, submissive, anti-patriotic attitudes that would only lead the nation into the mire, as Catholic and conservative sectors argued. As one can see, what was at issue was the question of the attitude one should have towards the virile fatherland, and the emotional register that should be employed to regard it.³² If this were settled, one could then also know which references from the previous century ought to be retained as sources of inspiration in the present, and which had to be eliminated from the new Francoist Spain. The two political cultures within the regime differed on these questions, as the commemorations of Larra would make manifest.

To the veteran Galician Falangist José Vidal Lombán, it seemed clear that the seriousness and deep-thinking appropriate to national virility, as opposed to effeminate frivolity, superficiality and a desire for easy living, was necessary to address Spain's problems. Recalling the long tradition of mordant criticism of the homeland, among which Larra had stood out, Vidal Lombán proclaimed the valuable example that *Figaro* had left for the present generation. Deploying an ingenious play on words, he argued shortly after the anniversary of the writer's death in 1938 that he was not criticising for the sake of criticism. Instead, at a critical point in the war, he was attempting to make every effort to develop this critique to be the best that God might allow.³³

Larra had been above all, as the philosophy professor Manuel Remuñán García argued in lectures organised by the Falangist student union SEU (Sindicato Español Universitario) during the fascistised spring of 1941, a good and patriotic Spaniard who had suffered due to 'the desolation of a country that he wished to be better'. In the end, it had been 'the pain of loving and the pain of Spain' that had consumed 'this exceptional spirit'.³⁴ Nothing seemed to demonstrate this better than the fact that he had chosen that 13 February to shoot himself: Carnival Monday, an exemplar of that trivial, grotesque Spain he had criticised so many times as he looked upon his nation with profound insight and regenerative regret. As Larra himself had written, in 1833 in the magazine *El Pobrecito Hablador*, 'all year it's Carnival'.³⁵

For Falangist writers, the proof of Larra's fertile patriotism lay in his desolating critique and the pain he felt for Spain, and in this profound *españolismo* he was not alone. As Narciso José Boj had noted in his own resounding critique, the generation of 1898 were a natural continuation of Larra. They had proclaimed this connection themselves in a celebrated tribute they had paid to him in 1901, when a deputation headed by two leading members of the 1898 circle, Pío Baroja and Azorín, visited the San Nicolás cemetery in Madrid to pay homage at his grave on the sixty-fourth anniversary of his suicide.³⁶ It had been there, alongside his tomb, that Azorín had proclaimed Larra as his master, emphasising among his merits precisely the spirit of rebellion and protest he had maintained in the face of everything that was absurd, illogical and incoherent in Spanish life.³⁷

Three decades later, in 1932, the first generation of Falangists did the same to declare their own affiliation with their earlier masters, as 'grandchildren of 98'. This was proclaimed by the prominent Falangist propagandist Ernesto Giménez Caballero in the first chapter of his widely read *Genio de España*, in which he established his kinship with the 1898 writers under the heading *Filiaciones* (*Affiliations*). Around the same time, the histrionic author also wrote a brief article titled 'By the tomb of Larra', in which he interpreted the 1901 tribute as the final consecration of the 1898 generation

before their father, indicating that this equally highlighted the links between the first Falangists and the patriotic dissatisfaction so well represented by the Romantic author. If they were the grandchildren of a generation that considered themselves descendants of Larra, the latter became the great- or great-great-grandfather of those young men who, looking towards Italy, founded the first fascist movement in Spain in the 1930s.³⁸ In the first years after the Civil War, a writer as prominent in Falangist circles as Pedro Laín Entralgo would refer again to the Falangists' status as 'grandchildren of 98' to establish a bond on the basis of shared emotions. These feelings were prompted by a common dissatisfaction that both the 1898 writers and the war's victors felt when faced with the reality of Spain, a dissatisfaction that constituted a motor for change, and a common way to articulate this shared desire.³⁹ In contrast, the supposed 'apostles of regeneration', men such as Joaquín Costa, Lucas Mallada or Macías Picavea, also expounded the need to regenerate Spain, but through proposals that sought rational and technical solutions to the country's ills. However, the Falangists shared with the generation of 1898 their devotion to a nation that they did not love in any rational way, but through sentiment and raw emotion.⁴⁰

A very different opinion was put forward by the monarchist, reactionary and Catholic sectors of the regime, for whom the pessimism to be derived from a critical outlook was, as noted, something to be feared in a context of victory. This was the view, for example, stressed by the monarchist Leopoldo Eulogio Palacios, who was a follower of the rightist Ramiro de Maeztu, a collaborator in *Acción Española* and a future columnist for the Opus Dei magazine *Arbor*. Writing in *La Voz de España*, newspaper of the Carlist Traditionalist movement, he insisted that, if the post-war generation was to be one of virtue, it could not be a generation of pessimism, as the liberals of 1898 had become. For Palacios, if a 'resigned quietism' was scarcely Spanish, still less so was a pessimistic view of the fatherland.⁴¹

For people like Leopoldo Eulogio Palacios, the pessimism and a critical mentality associated with the generation of 1898 indicated not only a lack of pride in the nation, but also an incapacity to regenerate Spain. This antipatriotism seemed, moreover, to have deeper roots, going back as far as their spiritual father and predecessor, Larra. Thus, while on the centenary of his death, Falangist discourse about the author had been laudatory and sought to assert the deep Spanish patriotism he represented, an editorial in the Traditionalist newspaper *El Pensamiento Alavés* in the same year declared that Larra had been '*afrancesado* ["Frenchified"] up to the hilt and liberal to the marrow'. It should not be surprising, then, that he was considered 'the precursor of the anti-Spanish generations of 1898 and 1931'. From 1898, it seemed that the only writer worth saving was Ramiro de Maeztu, who thanks to the Traditionalist and Christian atmosphere of Vitoria (where the newspaper was published) had managed to disassociate himself from the 'liberalizing and pessimistic baggage left by Larra'.⁴²

Larra, it should not be forgotten, had been part of a literary movement, Romanticism, not all of which, according to Traditionalist writers, was worth preserving in the post-war era. The same Catholic Traditionalist newspaper stated this clearly in January 1938. There was, it explained, a certain kind of harmful Romanticism that could not resist seeing everything as black, and bombarded its readers with stabbings and cemeteries, souring life 'with that persecution mania of disillusion and cruel deviations'.⁴³ This kind of Romanticism, exemplified by Larra, was to be condemned. However, if it was thought necessary to retain something from the era and the Spanish Romantics, he could be passed over to leave José de Espronceda, the Duke of Rivas or José Zorrilla. This had also been explained in an article published in 1937 addressed to the youth of Catholic Action, *Acción Católica*.⁴⁴ With Espronceda, it was true, his liberal past could be held against him, as could some typically Romantic aspects of his life, such as his dandyish, bohemian behaviour and his passionate doomed love affair with Teresa Mancha, which did not sit well with the reactionary attitudes and morals of the most conservative circles.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, this did not prevent his lightness of touch and lack of a critical demeanour being cited as a principal argument for his insertion within the literary canon from the early nineteenth century that could represent the Francoist nation. In effect, the list of authors that the Marquis of Lozoya, the regime's Director-General of Fine Arts, surveyed a year later in his reflections on nineteenth-century Spain left out Larra entirely to conclude, in contrast, that one would have to go

back to the seventeenth-century Golden Age ‘to find dramatists and poets of the quality of the Duke of Rivas, Zorrilla, and Espronceda’, whom he described as ‘splendid literary figures’.⁴⁶

The readings each political culture made of the Romantic writers were passed on into the areas of power that each possessed in the first years of the dictatorship. Hence, the writers included in the educational canon transmitted through the histories of Spanish literature codified by the very Catholic and reactionary Ministry of National Education, headed by the monarchists of *Acción Española*, were not the same as those that featured in the new editions produced by publishers that, from the first moment of the establishment of state authority by Franco in 1936 and up to 1945, were subordinate to the successive Press and Propaganda departments controlled by the Falange.⁴⁷ As a result, while Larra was scarcely visible in text books, by comparison with Espronceda, Rivas or Zorrilla, his works were still published in post-war Spain.⁴⁸ They appeared, moreover, accompanied by studies and introductory essays, which once again highlighted Larra’s status as a deeply patriotic writer.

This was the argument put forward, for example, by the literary historian and fervent admirer of fascist Italy Manuel de Montoliú, in a prologue he wrote for a new edition of Larra’s complete works in 1941. For Montoliú, Larra’s essays constituted an ‘elegy for the decadence of Spain’. Through his writing, one could feel ‘with an unequalled vigour the grieving heart of a great patriot’, exasperated due to his ‘deep *españolismo*’, which explained ‘the cutting, caustic style of his satire, against everyone and against himself’.⁴⁹ This opinion was shared by the writer’s great-grandson, Fernando José de Larra, in the biography he wrote of his illustrious ancestor, where he insisted that the satire and irony of *Figaro* had not been mere moaning, but had set out to awaken his fellow citizens from their passivity.⁵⁰

However, the divergences between these two political cultures of Francoism were not limited solely to Larra and his emulators among the generation of 1898, but also affected other Romantic writers such as Espronceda, Zorrilla or Rivas, who at first sight seemed less problematic and more suitable for Catholic and reactionary sectors. In their case, too, the acceptance or rejection of these writers among Falangists would depend upon the possibility that they could be inserted, or not, into a gendered narrative of the nation, a narrative that advocated a virile, firm, deep-thinking and serious Spain that had to be ever-vigilant against the danger of falling into the typical frivolity and superficiality of another, effeminate Spain.

POMPOUS AFFECTATION OR TRULY SPANISH MEN OF LETTERS? THE CENTENARIES OF ESPRONCEDA AND THE PREMIÈRE OF *DON JUAN TENORIO*

The year 1942 brought the centenary of the death of the poet José Espronceda, who, as mentioned, had perished of diphtheria in Madrid in May 1842. To honour his memory, the municipal authorities of Almendralejo in Extremadura, the writer’s accidental birthplace (his mother had been travelling to Badajoz when she had to give birth), organised several events in December that year. A floral tribute was placed beneath a bust of the poet, a plaque was unveiled on the house where he was born and a literary competition was held in his name. At the prize-giving ceremony, as guest of honour, the prominent monarchist writer José María Pemán gave a lecture on Espronceda’s life and work.⁵¹

A few days after these celebrations, the Falangist writer Pedro de Lorenzo surveyed the centenaries and tributes marked during the previous months, including that of Espronceda, to suggest that 1942 could be considered ‘the date when we youth have come together for a definitive assault on the Romantic fortress’. In his view, the Espronceda centenary had permitted the ‘affirmative generation of 1936’ to submit the famous poet to a critical re-examination, from which little of his reputation survived, because the youth that were constructing the new Spain of the post-war era dreamt of a life that was heroic, sincere, simple and passionate and were repelled by the ‘overblown, mystified panorama of Romanticism’.⁵²

‘Perhaps the entire Spanish Romantic adventure of the first third of the last century’ was no more than ‘disorderly pastiches of poetical *feuilletons*’. This time it was José María Alfaro, a member of the

Political Council of the Falangist national movement, who emphatically passed sentence on literary Romanticism in an article on Espronceda that appeared in the same centenary year.⁵³ From this point of view, it was certainly complicated to feel any involvement in commemorating the poet, because, as the journalist Eugenio Nadal summed up, it was difficult to approach his work a century after his death 'without feeling entirely distant', since it was 'not possible to find in Espronceda any degree of complicity with ourselves'.⁵⁴

The interesting feature of these opinions is that they described this contemporary of Marino José de Larra with evaluations and characteristics far removed from those used to praise the latter. If Larra had been notable for his deep thinking, profundity and a difficult character that seem entirely suited to the national virility of post-war Spain, Espronceda stood out for effeminate qualities, and his work was dismissed as empty, devoid of any solidity or difficulty, and emblematic of a semi-mystical, trivial movement.⁵⁵

José de Espronceda was not alone in receiving such an unfavourable description. Two years later came the third anniversary that concerns us here, in 1944, with the centenary of the first performance of *Don Juan Tenorio* by José Zorrilla in Madrid. The Romantic dramatist's most famous work, this was one more version of the well-known myth of Don Juan, the archetypal seductive womaniser popularised in Spain two centuries earlier by Tirso de Molina in his *El Burlador de Sevilla* and who, by the mid-nineteenth century, had appeared in a great many adaptations across Europe, including the also-Romantic presentations by Prosper Mérimée and Alexandre Dumas in France.⁵⁶

This anniversary, too, was marked in various ways. For example, the official *Instituto Nacional del Libro* (National Book Institute) sponsored a commemorative volume titled *Centenario del estreno de 'Don Juan Tenorio'* (1844–1944), with contributions by erudite conservative figures such as Francisco Cervera y Jiménez-Alfaro, a historian close to *Acción Católica*, and Antonio Sierra Corella, a priest and archivist. In the María Guerrero theatre in Madrid, a comedy was presented specially written by Juan Ignacio Luca de Tena, another prominent conservative writer, *De lo pintado a lo vivo* (*From painting into life*), in which he recreated the first performance of *Tenorio* a century earlier. This led Emilio de Acevedo, critic of the equally conservative *El Alcázar*, to conclude that the idea of Don Juan 'still has sufficient strength to remain alive'.⁵⁷

This claim was certainly correct, for, beyond the special commemorations for the centenary, the established tradition of performing *Don Juan Tenorio* in many theatres for several days around All Saints' Day (1 November) persisted in the new Francoist Spain, as can be seen from theatre listings in the main cities. It was following a performance of the play in November 1940 that Luis Climent, a frequent contributor to the Falangist press, asked why this tradition had developed and whether it was still appropriate, concluding that, with the new post-war generation, the time had come for the decline of *Tenorio*, which had become a fossil. In effect, the 'fecund dawn, full of prolific life' that characterised the new Spain was enough to do away with the 'old spirit of Don Juan' and 'his era of decadence'.⁵⁸

Reflections on Don Juan and whether he had a place within a nation that considered itself virile were nothing new. As the studies of Nerea Aresti have shown, concern over the identification that could be made between this dubious character and the essential nature of the Spanish nation, and the models of behaviour that existed within it, had already preoccupied liberal intellectuals and politicians before the Civil War.⁵⁹ Not without reason, in the context of the national crisis after 1898 and regenerationism many writers and intellectuals such as the 1898 generation and later Gregorio Marañón, Ramón Pérez de Ayala and José Ortega y Gasset had devoted extensive writings to pondering their links with the myth of Don Juan and the significance it could have for the nation's destinies.⁶⁰ In the 1940s, leading Falangist intellectuals like Laín Entralgo and Dionisio Ridruejo also reflected on Don Juan as a model of conduct, although it should be said that the former did so with little interest and the latter with a detached and aseptic tone.⁶¹

However, the significance the famous libertine might have for the nation overall was not the aspect of most concern to Spain's fascists in the post-war years. As Julio Coll, theatre critic of the magazine *Destino* wrote acidly in 1945, it was entirely improbable that the audiences who went every

November to enjoy *Don Juan Tenorio* knew anything of the theories of Gregorio Marañón or Alfred Adler. This allusion was loaded with irony, for the celebrated liberal doctor Gregorio Marañón had undertaken extensive studies of the differences between the sexes and, in the 1920s, had developed his own particular theory to demonstrate that the indiscriminate sexual appetite exhibited by Don Juan was proof of a lower state of evolution and, therefore, of a more vaguely defined sexual identity. In this view, the great seducer, far from a model of virile masculinity, was exactly the opposite, effeminate, of dubious sexual inclinations and insufficiently masculine.⁶² It did not seem, however, Julio Coll went on sarcastically regarding the complex ideas of Marañón, that, despite the psychoanalytical preoccupations Don Juan had inspired before the Civil War, the audience members saw any Freudian import in the classic lover.⁶³ In contrast, what was of most concern for the Falange in a play like *Don Juan Tenorio*, as with similar cases for other fascist movements, was that this was one of the most prominent examples of a Romantic literature they regarded as sickly, false and superficial, and therefore frivolous and effeminate, inappropriate to the attitude of depth and seriousness the fatherland required.⁶⁴

This was emphasised by José Cusidó, editor of the Tarragona Falangist newspaper *Diario Español*. When discussing the 1944 anniversary, he wrote that the success of *Don Juan Tenorio* represented ‘one more reason to deplore the sad state of human beings, as much given to [whatever is] light, easy and garish as they are reluctant to devote themselves to anything solid, difficult and profound’.⁶⁵ A similar opinion was put forward by the formerly modernist rightist writer Melchor Almagro San Martín, an enthusiastic defender of Larra and the 1898 generation for their ‘renovative and revolutionary patriotism’, as he argued in his prologue to a collection of Larra’s journalism.⁶⁶ In an article titled ‘A Revised Judgement of *Tenorio*’, he wrote that, while José Zorrilla’s dramas indisputably possessed a high poetic quality, his works also had a ‘sickly style’, reflected in ‘the vulgar sentimentality of certain images, the false resonance of many speeches’, which led him to ask whether the value of the play was really sufficient to merit the tributes and eulogies being offered on all sides.⁶⁷

The worst aspect of the play for Melchor Almagro San Martín came in the last act, in the celebrated conversion of Don Juan Tenorio to Christianity, thanks to the example of the love shown for him by Doña Inés. This scene was not just ‘verbosity in bad taste’, but exemplified the qualities that could be considered effeminate, as the opposite of virile depth. The whole scenario was ‘ill-judged, infantile and, let us dare say the right word, even ridiculous’, since ‘the mystical-philosophical muddle in which Zorrilla placed Don Juan, with a sudden conversion, without any sense of previous change [was] incomprehensible in a rogue and troublemaker such as him, a heartless libertine’. It was ‘absurd from every point of view’.⁶⁸

However, the scene that seemed ridiculous to Almagro San Martín was precisely the part of the play that enabled Catholics and reactionaries to incorporate it into their canon and applaud it. For them, far from nonsensical or saccharine, Don Juan’s conversion was entirely correct, and an example of the importance of religion for neutralising potential deviations and ensuring the salvation of the soul. Catholic commentators did not mince words in celebrating the importance of this conversion, as when the magazine *El Eco Franciscano* compared the contrition of Zorrilla’s character with no less than that of Longinus, the Roman soldier who supposedly pierced the side of Jesus with his spear, and subsequently converted to Christianity and became a saint.⁶⁹ As one writer put it in a magazine for Catholic Youth, the fact that the notorious womaniser’s eventual true love was a young maiden devoted to God could only be applauded as a marvellous intuition on the part of Zorrilla.⁷⁰

In reality, it was only logical that the most Traditionalist and conservative sectors of Francoism found no difficulty in accepting and admiring a writer like José Zorrilla. He had after all been a national symbol since his coronation as ‘national laureate’ in 1889, in a ceremony organised by the *Liceo Artístico* cultural society of Granada that had been supported by conservatives and liberals.⁷¹ Ever since then, Zorrilla had been regarded as the national poet *par excellence* and considered the finest exponent of an aesthetic traditionalism through which his verses became identified with ways of being Spanish that were eminently compatible with the mores of the victors of the Civil War.⁷²

He thus became the bard of a conservative vision of the nation especially suited to the Catholic and counter-revolutionary sectors of the dictatorship.⁷³ Zorrilla was characterised, moreover, as having enjoyed a healthy, optimistic relationship with Spain, the very opposite of the traitorous pessimism of Larra. For, although the dramatist had been closely associated with Larra – he had first made himself known by reciting a poem in Larra's memory beside his grave, on 15 February 1837 – the tone and patriotic sentiments of the two men were quite different. As the conservative *El Correo Gallego* put it, Zorrilla, far from viewing Spain with pessimism, had been 'capable of intoxicating the downcast Spaniards of the scarcely glorious nineteenth century with patriotic enthusiasm'. He had done so by regarding his nation with the precise qualities that for these same sectors of opinion made Larra, due to his lack of them, an anti-patriot: love and generosity towards his country.⁷⁴

The key element was the unquestionably Spanish character of Zorrilla, together with Espronceda and Rivas. For in itself Romanticism, while aesthetically incompatible with a conception of a virile nation such as that expounded by the Falange, was not easily assimilated by Traditionalists and Catholics either, albeit for different reasons. For the Falange, this was a question of forms of expression that meant that Romantic motifs, seen as effeminate, frivolous and *cursi* (kitsch or silly), could not represent a virile nation. Even a defender of the Spanish Romantics within Falangist ranks such as the Count of Montarco acknowledged that Romanticism needed rehabilitation, since much of it had become 'false, forced, even *cursi*'.⁷⁵ For reactionary political culture, in contrast, suspicions of Romanticism stemmed from its political associations with liberalism and revolution.

These ideas had been taken by the monarchist intellectuals of *Acción Española* such as Eugenio Vegas Latapie before the Civil War from Charles Maurras and *Action Française*.⁷⁶ Maurras, a declared enemy of Romanticism, had sought to demonstrate its political dimensions, and its dangerous kinship with democracy and revolution.⁷⁷ Rescuing Spain's national writers from such connotations would depend upon whether one could disconnect them from these Romantic maladies and assert that theirs was a patriotic, very Spanish and therefore eminently rescuable form of Romanticism by comparison with its contemporaries in other countries. The principal argument consisted of stressing that the ills of Romanticism could be located in France (even though Maurras had attributed them to Protestantism and the Swiss figure of Rousseau) and that what had been seen south of the Pyrenees was substantially different. This point was argued by the critic Manuel Bueno in the first issue of *Acción Española* magazine, as he saved the customary few authors – the 'star' Zorrilla and his asteroids, in Bueno's metaphor, Rivas and Espronceda – from a generation, that of 1830, that had otherwise been virtually sterile due to its having written 'in imitation of French fashion'. These few were worth saving, he wrote, because they had not been 'simple mimics of that degenerate literary movement', but truly Spanish authors and, as such, Catholic, who had been stimulated by the exemplary Golden Century, and thus had imbibed the best of tradition.⁷⁸

These arguments survived into the first years of the dictatorship. The aim was ultimately to 'traditionalize' a series of authors who were to be rescued from the company of their baleful contemporaries and inserted, as innocuous and easily readable from a deeply conservative viewpoint, within the literary history that was acceptable to the most reactionary sectors of Francoism. They were to be seen as a faithful continuation of a long lineage of purely Spanish literary figures, going back to the golden tradition of the seventeenth century. In this way, they, too, could be optimistic representatives of the best in the nation. Far from the intemperate outbursts of Larra, his contemporaries, joyful and virtuous, satisfied the nationalistic expectations of reactionary circles. For a significant number of fascists, on the other hand, the exhibitionism, affectation and pomposity of Romanticism remained incompatible with a regenerated virile nation.⁷⁹ In 1944, the year of *Don Juan Tenorio*'s centenary, the Bilbao Falangist magazine *Hierro* declared that the Falange, as grandchildren and great-grandchildren of Larra, took up his legacy by answering the great satirist's question, 'Where is Spain?'. In doing so, they were addressing his infinite anxiety to see a better fatherland.⁸⁰ As we have seen, the foundations for this divergence in thinking lay, to an extent, in differing sensibilities regarding the concept of a virile nation, and, consequently, towards the authors and aesthetic that could represent it.

CONCLUSION

The various discourses on the intrinsic virility of the new Spain implied a body of attributes that could shape this new nation. They also suggested the appropriate attitudes and emotions towards the new Spain. The discourses that developed around the centenaries of Spanish Romantic writers during the highly fascist years of the immediate post-Civil War period exposed the differences between the two political cultures within Francoism. Reactionary and Catholic sectors argued for a simple, cheerful, optimistic view of the nation. Meanwhile, Falangists, favoured a notion of virility characterised by strength, drive and courage, alongside sobriety, self-restraint and composure, advocated attitudes and emotions centred on gravity and depth. If for the former, the key features were patriotic pride and self-satisfaction, for the Falange, their love for Spain was demonstrated through abrasiveness, a critical outlook and a capacity to look upon the country without complacency in order to ensure its regeneration.

The differing interpretations given of Mariano José de Larra, José de Espronceda and José Zorrilla during their anniversaries enable us to reveal these divergences. Larra was proclaimed by Falangists as their metaphorical great-grandfather, with demonstrable continuities through to the 1898 generation they claimed as their grandparents. What appealed to Falangists was Larra's ability to look with asperity and critical clarity – and so in accordance with particular values of virility – on a homeland that they longed to see become better. Through this kind of virility, Falangists argued, Spain could move beyond its current decadence. The great satirist thus had a place within the virile nation, as an example for this post-war generation. Espronceda and Zorrilla in contrast, light, benign writers apparently without serious content, were considered superficial and frivolous, dangerously close to effeminacy and so difficult to incorporate into the new Spain that, in the radical years of the *posguerra*, and in line with other European fascisms, was conceived of in terms of profound virility.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹For the concept of the fascistisation of the Franco regime employed here, see Ismael Saz, *España contra España: Los nacionalismos franquistas* (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2003). The term refers both to the period in which fascist tendencies exercised a powerful influence within a partly pluralist dictatorship, which never became entirely fascist in itself, and to the power of seduction fascism exercised among sections of the traditional right.
- ²Although the Civil War was still in progress in 1937, the Francoists already dominated Galicia, large parts of Andalusia, Castile, La Rioja, Navarre and part of the Basque Country. Their centres of power were Burgos and Salamanca in Castile.
- ³Gustavo Alares, *Políticas del pasado en la España franquista (1939–1964): Historia, nacionalismo y dictadura* (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2017). On the relationship between literature, literary canon and nation, see Joep Leerssen, 'Introduction: Philology and the European Construction of National Literatures', in D. van Hulle and J. Leerssen (eds), *Editing the Nation's Memory: Textual Scholarship and Nation-Building in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008), p. 25.
- ⁴On the heterogeneity of the Romantics, see Dereck Flitter, *Spanish Romantic Literary Theory and Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
- ⁵*Falange Española y de las Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional-Sindicalista*, 'Spanish Falange and Councils for National-Syndicalist Offensive'; Ismael Saz, Zira Box, Toni Morant and Julián Sanz (eds), *Reactionary Nationalists, Fascists and Dictatorships in the Twentieth Century: Against Democracy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).
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- ¹¹ Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (New York: Palgrave, 1991); David D. Roberts, 'Palingenesis and Totalitarianism in Roger Griffin's interpretation of Fascism', in Constantin Iordachi and Aristotle Kallis (eds), *Beyond the Fascist Century: Essays in Honour of Roger Griffin* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), pp. 29–50.
- ¹² Roger Griffin, *International Fascism: Theories, Causes, and the New Consensus* (London: Bloomsbury, 1998); also *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 253–4.
- ¹³ Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities: Italy, 1922–1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).
- ¹⁴ David Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, c.1848–c.1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 4–20; Michel Winock, *Décadence Fin-de-Siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 2017), p. 24 and subsequent.
- ¹⁵ Arthur Herman, *The Idea of Decline in Western History* (New York: The Free Press, 1997).
- ¹⁶ Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, 'Political Camp, or the Ambiguous Engendering of the American Republic', in Ida Blom, Karen Hagemann and Catherine Hall (eds), *Gendered Nations: Nationalisms and Gender Order in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Berg, 2000), p. 271.
- ¹⁷ Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917* (Chicago: The University Press, 1995); John Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London: Routledge, 2004).
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- ¹⁹ Silvana Patriarca, 'Indolence and Regeneration: Tropes and Tensions of *Risorgimento* Patriotism', *American Historical Review* 110 (2005), p. 408.
- ²⁰ Manuel Suárez Cortina, 'Sociedad, cultura y política en la España de entre siglos', in Vicent Salavert and Manuel Suárez Cortina (eds), *El regeneracionismo en España: Política, educación, ciencia, sociedad* (Valencia: PUV, 2007), p. 22.
- ²¹ Saz, *España contra España*, Ch. 2.
- ²² Andreu Navarra Ordoño, *El regeneracionismo: La continuidad reformista* (Madrid: Cátedra, 2015), Ch. 1; José Álvarez Junco, 'La nación en duda', in Juan Pan-Montojo (ed.), *Más se perdió en Cuba: España, 1898 y la crisis fin de siglo* (Madrid: Alianza, 1998), pp. 460–62.
- ²³ Nerea Aresti, 'A la nación por la masculinidad: Una mirada de género a la crisis del 98', in Mary Nash (ed.), *Feminidades y masculinidades: Arquetipos y prácticas de género* (Madrid: Alianza, 2014), pp. 47–74.
- ²⁴ Zira Box, 'Los atributos de la nación: Género y clase en la España franquista', in Encarnación Lemus and Manuel Peña (eds), *Alianzas y propaganda durante el primer franquismo* (Barcelona: Ariel, 2019), pp. 125–46; also 'Renegotiating the Boundaries of the Virile Nation: the España Negra of José Gutiérrez Solana in the Art Exhibitions of Post-war Spain (1940–45)', *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies* 26 (2020), pp. 253–70.
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- ²⁶ Jesús Vivanco, *Guerra civil y radio nacional: Salamanca, 1936–1938* (Madrid: Instituto Oficial de Radio y Televisión, 2006).
- ²⁷ 'El centenario de "Fígaro"', *El Adelanto*, 14 February 1937.
- ²⁸ Inman Fox, *La invención de España* (Madrid: Cátedra, 1998), Ch. 7.
- ²⁹ Narciso José Boj, 'Gozo y dolor de España', *El Día de Palencia*, 19 February 1937. Maeztu, formerly a radical and liberal critic, moved sharply to the right after 1920 to become a leading figure of the monarchist and Catholic authoritarian right during the 1930s.
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- ³² On the relationship between emotional control and political authority, see Javier Krauel, 'The Battle for Emotional Hegemony in Republican Spain (1931–1936)', in Luisa Elena Delgado, Pura Fernández and Jo Labanyi (eds), *Engaging the Emotions in Spanish Culture and History* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2016), p. 147.
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- ³⁶ Pedro de Lorenzo, '13 de febrero, fecha mayor', *ABC*, 13 February 1966; Joaquín Álvarez Barrientos, 'Violetas para Larra (Un paseo con Cadalso, Azorín y Cernuda, junto a otros compañeros de viaje)', *Crítica Hispánica* XXI 1–2 (1999), pp. 5–13.
- ³⁷ Azorín, 'La Generación del 98 (IV y última)', *ABC*, 18 February 1913, pp. 5–6.
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- ³⁹ Pedro Laín Entralgo, 'Introducción', in *Sobre la cultura española. Confesiones de este tiempo*, vol. 1 (Madrid: Editora Nacional, 1943), p. 10.
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- ⁴³ 'Diferentes categorías del Versolari, más o menos culto, con diferentes ejemplos', *El Pensamiento Alavés*, 1 January 1938.
- ⁴⁴ 'España fue, es y será católica. Temas de Juventud de Acción Católica', *La Gaceta de Tenerife. Diario católico*, 20 November 1937.
- ⁴⁵ Acebedo, 'El romanticismo de Espronceda y el otro', *El Pensamiento Alavés*, 22 January 1942; Julio Aresti, 'El centenario de Espronceda', *El Adelanto*, 23 May 1942.
- ⁴⁶ Marqués de Lozoya, 'Recuerdos y enseñanzas. Montes de Oca', *El Diario de Burgos*, 9 November 1938.
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- ⁴⁸ María Victoria Sotomayor, 'Clásicos para niños en la España franquista. Una educación patriótica', *AILIJ* 8 (2010), pp. 139–59; José V. Salido, 'Clásicos y modernos para la educación literaria en la España franquista', *Tejuelo* 29 (2019), pp. 67–104.
- ⁴⁹ Manuel de Montoliú, 'Prólogo', in M. J. de Larra, *En este país* (Barcelona: Resurrección, 1941), p. 13.
- ⁵⁰ Fernando José de Larra, *Biografía apasionada del doliente de España* (Barcelona: Almatea, 1944), p. IV.
- ⁵¹ 'Bases para el concurso en honor de Espronceda', *La Vanguardia española*, 5 September 1942; 'En el primer centenario de la muerte de Espronceda', *ABC* (Madrid), 20 December 1942.
- ⁵² Pedro de Lorenzo, 'Los centenarios de 1942', *Patria*, 27 December 1942.
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- ⁵⁴ Eugenio Nadal, 'A los cien años de un poeta dinámico', *Destino*, 16 May 1942.
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- ⁵⁶ On the different versions of Don Juan, Nerea Aresti, *Médicos, donjuanes y mujeres modernas: Los ideales de masculinidad y feminidad en el primer tercio del siglo XX* (Bilbao: Universidad del País Vasco, 2001), pp. 143–54.
- ⁵⁷ *El Alcázar*, 28 March 1944.
- ⁵⁸ Luis Climent, 'El ocaso de D. Juan', *Diario Español*, 1 November 1940.
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- ⁷⁰ 'La simbología de un dogma en la obra de Pemán', *Spes. Revista-órgano Juventud Católica* 83, November 1941.
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How to cite this article: Box, Zira. 2024. "Virility, fascism and regeneration in post-Civil War Spain: On interpretations of literary Romanticism under the Franco regime." *Gender & History* 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0424.12800>

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