

Oriental Andalusia: British and American Women Explorers from a Postcolonial Perspective

ALBERTO EGEA FERNÁNDEZ-MONTESINOS



El Centro de Estudios Andaluces es una entidad de carácter científico y cultural, sin ánimo de lucro, adscrita a la Consejería de la Presidencia de la Junta de Andalucía.

El objetivo esencial de esta institución es fomentar cuantitativa y cualitativamente una línea de estudios e investigaciones científicas que contribuyan a un más preciso y detallado conocimiento de Andalucía, y difundir sus resultados a través de varias líneas estratégicas.

El Centro de Estudios Andaluces desea generar un marco estable de relaciones con la comunidad científica e intelectual y con movimientos culturales en Andalucía desde el que crear verdaderos canales de comunicación para dar cobertura a las inquietudes intelectuales y culturales.

Las opiniones publicadas por los autores en esta colección son de su exclusiva responsabilidad

© Alberto Egea Fernández-Montesinos

© 2009. Fundación Centro de Estudios Andaluces. Consejería de Presidencia. Junta de Andalucía
Ejemplar gratuito. Prohibida su venta.



Centro de Estudios Andaluces
CONSEJERÍA DE LA PRESIDENCIA

C2009/03

Oriental Andalusia: British and American Women Explorers from a Postcolonial Perspective

Alberto Egea Fernández-Montesinos

**Centro de Estudios Andaluces
Universidad Pablo de Olavide**

Abstract

This working document explores travel narratives by three British and American 19th-century and 20th-century women writers in Spain from a postcolonial perspective. The critical and analytical work done so far in this area has dealt with texts written by male authors, such as Washington Irving, George Borrow or Richard Ford, and has focused mostly on historiographical and philological issues. However, a rigorous exploration of these texts considering the theoretical contributions of Edward Said, Homi Bhabha or Ranahit Guha is still pending and can serve to open new perspectives in the field.

Resumen

Este documento de trabajo explora las narrativas de viaje de tres exploradoras británicas y norteamericanas del siglo XIX y principios del XX en sus viajes por España desde un enfoque poscolonial. La bibliografía crítica hasta la fecha en este campo ha tratado sobre autores varones, tales como Washington Irving, George Borrow y Richard Ford, y se ha dedicado principalmente a análisis historiográficos y filológicos. Sin embargo, una investigación rigurosa de estos textos que tenga en cuenta las contribuciones teóricas de Eduard Said, Homi Bhabha y Ranahit Guha es una tarea pendiente, a la que contribuye este artículo, y puede servir para abrir nuevas perspectivas en el campo del análisis de la imagen orientalista de Andalucía.

Considering the number of Anglo-saxon women writers who visited the Iberian peninsula in the 19th-century, it is surprising that scholarly studies have not focused on this area earlier. A postcolonial approach in this case is justified considering that even if the subject and the object of narration (Britain/Spain, the United States/Spain) are both western countries, the ethnocentric gaze and the imperial rhetorics used to represent the relationship between the metropolis and the visited territories are very similar to the ones used in texts about more oriental and orientalized nations such as India, Egypt and other peripheral lands.¹

The current study is part of a broader project, in which I am currently working, which analyzes the particular manner these women re-present the image of Spain. The writings of almost all of these women writers remain unpublished in its Spanish translation and have received little attention by critics if compared to their male counterparts, perhaps due

¹ Some interesting coincidences can be appreciated when comparing both textual and visual representations in works dedicated to Spain and those depicting India, for example. Some of the engravings and descriptions by Olive Patch in *Sunny Spain: Its people and places, with glimpses of its history* with, are very similar to those presented in *Oriental Annual: Scenes in India* by William Daniel. The poses, attitudes and depictions of oriental images of Spain evoking medieval times use the same representational techniques as the ones dedicated to India.

to the difficulties in locating the original texts and identifying the authors. Most of the critics have analysed the texts from a rather traditional point of view, documenting sites and providing detailed data on aspects such as monuments, customs, and historical characters. However, very little has been done to offer a thorough reading from a postcolonial perspective which can include cultural and anthropological considerations.²

What is interesting about the texts is that their sometime alternative views of the social and cultural realities of Spain serve to contrast and question stereotypical approaches of the male romantic travellers. That is, that their texts approach what I have called the postcolonial periphery, both as a geographical and as a discursive space. Without their perspective, the picture of Spain as a whole remains only a partial one. To analyze these texts under a postcolonial lens will allow us also to problematize notions such as "picturesque" and "exotic", when applied to the locals and the landscapes. The theoretical frame used to approach the texts considers also

² Among the scarce publications of Anglo-saxon women writers in Spain, Blasina Cantizano Márquez has analyzed some of the texts offering not only a general view from the British travel narrative perspective but also studying how local women have been portrayed by foreign female writers. Blanca Krauel Heredia laid the foundations for the field with *Viajeros británicos en Andalucía, de Christopher Hervey a Richard Ford (1760-1845)*, but based her interpretations primarily on male writers. Antonia López Burgos has written extensively on bandits and on the experiences of British travellers in the province of Granada.

the contributions from Dorothy Middleton and Lila Marz in their insightful postcolonial approach with a gender agenda.

Three authors are included in the analysis: Emmeline Stuart Wortley, Katharine Lee Bates, and Virginia Woolf. The first one, Stuart Wortley, is a British writer born in 1806 in an aristocratic family, acquainted to the Royal family, including Queen Victoria herself, and Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli. Besides Spain, her other trips include Cuba, Peru, Constantinople, Morocco and most of the US. Death was the only thing which stopped her from travelling: in her trip in the Holy Land, she died of a heat stroke. After visiting Spain in 1851 she wrote *The Sweet South*, in two large volumes, covering all aspects of Spanish history and culture. In the first page the curious inscription "For private circulation only" (1856: 1) can be read, acknowledging the fact that it was a publication by a female author who did not deserve more than a symbolic and limited edition.

The second one is Katharine Lee Bates, an American writer who visited Spain in 1899, and is widely known in the US as the creator of the lyrics for the patriotic hymn "America, the beautiful". She is considered a pioneer feminist and is currently recognized as a lesbian writer. Her book *Spanish*

Highways and Byways recounts a challenging tour only a few months after the end of the Spanish American War of 1898. Her narrative avoids essentialism and the picturesque, trying to focus on social injustices and education, and showing a deep interest in Southern rhythms of life.

The third writer, and the only one widely known, is Virginia Woolf, who is also the most contemporary one. Born in 1882, Woolf was a significant figure in London literary society and a member of the Bloomsbury Group. Most of her works are widely available but my analysis is based on her letters, personal diary, and the articles she published in *The Guardian* after her two trips to Spain, in 1905 and 1923. Her gatherings from that country pay tribute to the "founding fathers", George Borrow and Richard Ford, but go into a much deeper exploration of Spanish people and her interpretations of concepts such as travelling, the foreign otherness, and authority.

Most recent theories on the travel narrative have developed interesting genre definitions not based on formal aspects but rather considering it just as another element of imperial discourse. In that respect, Sara Mills comments: "travel writing is essentially an instrument within colonial expansion and served to reinforce colonial rule once in place" (1991: 2). On the other side, Mary Louise

Pratt elaborates on the importance of the literary pieces in the conformation of European national identities: "travelogues written by Europeans on those non-European parts of the World deal with the creation of the issue of Euroimperialism" (1992: 4). Finally, Douglas Ivison argues that in the 19th-century "practice of travel writing, and that of reading travel books, was intertwined with the creation and maintenance of European imperialism" (1994: 1). The interesting part of my analysis is based on the different ways in which these women must use imperial discourse but at the same time are able to reformulate some of its rhetorical devices in order to debunk some of its foundations.

Looking from the other side of reality, from the other shore of the Atlantic, a lot can be said about the construction of the national identity of America just by reading these texts whose main objective was, nonetheless, Spain and not the United States. In fact, travel narratives are an interesting place to locate the elements which helped to construct the emerging notion of Americaness during the 19th-century. Identity politics and travel narratives are always intermingled as postcolonial studies by Partha Chatterjee and Homi Bhabha have shown. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha presents the narratives produced by the "other" which serve to contest and question

authoritative narratives: "Counter-narratives of the nation that continually evoke and erase its totalizing boundaries--both actual and conceptual--disturb those ideological maneuvers through which 'imagined communities' are given essentialist identities" (1994: 149).

In her interesting book *Spain's Long Shadow*, María DeGuzmán points out that the US was a relatively young nation by the beginning of the 19th-century so the narratives of its own traditions and culture had to be developed in relationship with other countries (2005: 6). In fact, most of the travelogues by these women show a recurrent interest in the History and traditions of Spain. We have to point out that some of the expeditionary and literary trips of these adventurers occurred during the initial economic development of the US, that is, in the 1840s, which coincided with the emergence of the idea of Imperialism in the continent. It was exactly during those years when the United States bought Texas, and also when the Spanish presence in California was eliminated after the 1846 war. These imperial gestures served a double purpose, first they were used to differentiate the US from other foreign countries and from historical past moments. Secondly, they served to affirm the superiority of the US as a nation in order to justify the colonial expansion project. It is interesting to point out how a country which was developing

its imperial identity by conquering/acquiring areas which were originally Spanish, such as California, Texas, Mexico, or Florida, was at the same time sending its travellers to that country, Spain. In this respect, it is a productive exercise to explore how these travellers managed to integrate or, to the contrary, distance themselves from the nation which had given origin to their emerging imagined community.

In order to describe the interaction between these Anglo-Saxon protestant women and catholic Spaniards we could use the term *transculturation*, as defined by Mary Louise Pratt. The word describes the phenomenon of merging and converging by which cultures in contact zones "absorb and modify concepts and images from colonized cultures" (1992: 124). In addition, transculturation affirms that those colonized cultures were not mere passive agents but that there were elements and ideas which became part of the imaginary of the colonizers, and were key in the formation of currents and movements, such as Romanticism in Europe. This double process is evident in both cases, how the writers absorbed and transferred Spanishness to their homelands and how their native cultures and identity politics were also shaped by these other discourses.

The relationship between colonial narratives and travel discourse in general has been pointed out by Mary Louise Pratt who states that both use the same rhetorical structures which facilitate imperial exploitation. In that sense, the idea of how fertile and generous Spanish soil is is recurrent in many of the recounts of these women. The land is wonderful and rich, according to them, but their description of the Spaniards, and of the work they do, is not so positive: from the way it is presented the reader could think that it is just another case of lucky individuals who enjoy a privileged environment but who do not know how to take advantage of it. This is a clear example of the positivist approach which led most colonial writings from the beginnings of the century. Even if on certain occasions, these texts try to escape the racial conventions of the 19th-century, in this case it is difficult for them get rid of discursive determinants such as the guiding principles of Arthur Gobineau as expressed in his famous book *The Inequality of Human Races*. In the cases of *Cositas de España* by Pitt Byrne, the notions of primitivism, ruralism and underdevelopment also address the common ground shared by travelogues and colonial discourse.

With regards to sexuality and erotics as presented by these narratives, Katharine Lee Bates describes the particularities of local beauty focusing mainly on women.

The attractiveness of their eyes, cheeks, lips, and the slenderness of their captivating bodies is recounted in detail through the pages of her narration *Spanish Highways and Byways*. Explicit comments on women's bodies are always present, as well as details about their skin colour and complexion, all with the distant look of the colonizer describing the "other": "the clear brunette complexions, the delicate contours, the rich black hair worn high and crowned with natural flowers, the waving fans and flashing glances, cast glamour over the whole scene" (1912: 43).

If one theoretical term had to be chosen to describe this process we could use the Derridian *difference* to denote the distance established by the author between the object of description, the Spaniard, and the target audience, the American reader. A similar case is present in *The Sweet South* by Emmeline Stuart Wortley. In her descriptions of female characters in Seville and Granada, there are various instances of a homoerotic positioning. These would serve to prove that it was not only the male gaze on the opposite sex, as pointed out by Justin Edwards (2001: 12), what was present in the erotics between the colonizer and the colonized. In that respect, and considering theoretical approaches to this matter, one aspect not present in precursor critics on Orientalism such as Edward Said and Mary Louise Pratt is their disregard in considering the

possibility of same sex desire between the colonizer and the "colonized". Both Said and Pratt analyzed colonial texts as a highly erotized discourse with the only option of heterosexual fantasies but not leaving any space for homoeroticism.

A recurrent element in the analysis of colonial texts written by British writers is how they all tend to reaffirm ethnocentrism. Within this ideological system, some writers judged other groups in relation to their own particular ethnic group, especially in terms of language, behaviour, customs, and religion. One difference, though, while observing the texts written by women is that they were more interested in observation and description, rather than on analysis and judgement, and in recounting everyday life activities of the places they visited in Spain. Stories by these women tend to be more receptive with cultural relativity. In a sense, and as pointed out by Susan Morgan it was easier for women to identify themselves with "the other" (1986: 34). As women, they could have a broader understanding of how ethnicity (as gender in their case) was just another category for subjugation. An interesting point is that in many of the travelogues there are comparisons of local institutions with the ones back home, showing therefore a concern with how society establishes norms and systems in order to exercise power. The positive

contribution of their travel experience is that these women meditate and elaborate on themes such as women rights and colonial dominance and its origins.

Women and their writings have not been considered to have played a role in the colonial process but in reality, their participation and interaction in the phenomenon is something that should be studied in detail. To exclude women of colonial processes would be to simplify reality, even if they adopted conflictive rhetorical positions when participating in colonial narratives, as we can see in the analysis of these texts. In *Imperial Eyes: Studies in Travel Writing and Transculturation*, Pratt comments on 18th-century European travel writing and the way Enlightenment natural history produced a "Eurocentered form of global consciousness" (1992: 119). At the end of the century, the older survival travel literature was displaced by scientific and sentimental travel writing as can be clearly appreciated in the texts of Stuart Wortley and Bates.

As a conclusion, we can argue that these texts by Virginia Woolf and Katharine Lee Bates stand in the margins of colonial discourse. They are located between the imperial views of male writers and their portraits of the colonies and the problematic position of women trying to enter the

world of writing, reserved until the moment to the male sphere. Finally, I would like to add that analyzing their pages, the testimonies from the postcolonial periphery, one can discover both traces of the imperial gaze and, at the same time, some kind of resistance to writing within the limits of colonial discourse. Personal narratives are an important part of anthropological writing, one which incorporates the observer in the writing and allows anthropologists to become aware of the context of their own positions as observers. These women presented a particular vision of Spain which allowed them to be seen writing inside and outside of the discursive traditions which preceded them. On one side they embraced the looks of distance and disdain of their male counterparts, but at the same time, they tried to resist the rhetorics of a colonial discourse which made them also, as women, second class citizens within the limits of the periphery.

Works cited

Bates, K. L. 1900. *Spanish Highways and Byways*. New York: Macmillan.

Bhabha, H. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.

Cantizano Márquez, Blasina. 2001. *La mujer en la Andalucía del siglo XIX según la literatura británica de viajes*. Almería: Universidad de Almería.

Daniell, W. 1837. *Oriental Annual: Scenes in India*. London: E. Churton.

DeGuzmán, M. 2005. *Spain's Long Shadow*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Edwards, J. D. 2001. *Exotic Journeys: Exploring the Erotics of U.S. Travel Literature, 1840-1930*. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England.

Gobineau, A. 1933. *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*. Paris: Firmin-Didot.

Iverson, D. 1994. *Imagining the Empire: the Frontier and Masculinity in Fiction of Empire, 1885-1910*. Hamilton: McMaster University Press.

Krauel Heredia, B. 1986. *Viajeros británicos en Andalucía, de Christopher Hervey a Richard Ford (1760-1845)*. Málaga: Universidad de Málaga.

López Burgos, A. 2002. *Viajeros ingleses en Granada, 1860-1870*. Málaga: Caligrama.

McNeille, A. Ed. 1986. *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*. Volume I: 1904-1912. San Diego: Harcourt.

Middleton, D. 1982. *Victorian Lady Travellers*. Chicago: Academy.

Mills, S. 1991. *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism*. New York: Routledge.

Morgan, S. 1996. *Place Matters: Gendered Geography in Victorian Women's Travel Books About Southeast Asia*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Patch, O. 1884. *Sunny Spain: Its people and places, with glimpses of its history*. London: Cassell & Company.

Pratt, M. L. 1992. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London: Routledge.

Said, E. 1978. *Orientalism*. London: Pantheon.

Stuart Wortley, E. 1856. *The Sweet South*. 2 vols. London: George Barclay.

Trautman Banks, J. Ed. 1990. *Congenial Spirits: The Selected Letters of Virginia Woolf*. San Diego: Harcourt.