

13. ‘Covering the Skeletons with Flesh and Blood’: Spanish Golden Age Drama in English and Dutch Nineteenth-Century Literary Histories

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Abstract

Many current views about the early modern period are still determined by nineteenth-century interpretations. In this period national identities and historical and literary canons started to get forged, consolidating the Golden Age as the key era in the national-historical consciousness. The Spanish Golden Age was identified as the core of the Spanish literary canon and singled out by foreign scholars as the perfect mirror of Spanishness, in all its Hispanophilic and Hispanophobic connotations. This chapter delves into the legacy of Spanish cultural influence at the time of the forging of national dramatic canons. It explores how Spanish Golden Age literary influence is negotiated within England and the Netherlands and linked to their own national dramatic traditions.

Keywords: Nineteenth-century literary historiography, Golden Age drama, national images, Anglo-Dutch-Spanish cultural exchange

The richness of the Spanish Drama is proverbial; yet it has occupied the attention of students and critics less than the drama of almost any other nation. [...] The Spaniards have had the honour of supplying Europe with plots, incidents, and situations.¹

¹ Lewes, *The Spanish Drama*, p. 5.

With these words, literary critic George Henry Lewes overtly praises Spanish drama and its role in the development of European theatre at large. The argumentation in this opening fragment of *The Spanish Drama: Lope de Vega and Calderón* (1846), considered by many the first full-length study of Spanish theatre in English, is further developed thusly:

After such luxuriance of dramatic invention as it supplied, there was but little need for more; accordingly succeeding writers were for the most part content in this respect to translate, imitate, and improve that which Spain had so prodigally thrown forth; covering the skeletons with flesh and blood of their own creation.²

Lewes's initial laudatory appraisal of Spanish drama, described as 'luxuriant' and 'prodigal', is somehow downplayed afterwards since it is up to (English) authors to climb the translatio-imitatio-aemulatio rhetorical ladder and 'improve' the 'bony' or 'sketchy' Spanish materials, providing them with what they seem to lack: flesh and blood. Even the term 'luxuriance' is tinged in its contextual interpretation with a certain negative connotation, as we shall see. Lewes's assessment reflects the ambivalence in nineteenth-century literary historiography regarding the literary legacy of the Spanish Golden Age: admiration and recognition, on the one hand, and critique or disavowal, on the other. In this disavowal coalesce long-existing perceptions on Spain's historical role. This is particularly the case not only for English discourse, but also for Dutch.

In the age of cultural nationalism, when national literary and historical canons were being forged, a new way of studying literature emerging from the end of the eighteenth century started to solidify, producing a shift from an antiquarian mode to a philological one.³ The first literary histories played an essential role in charting interpretations and evaluations of different literary traditions through distinctive patterns of selection and organization. These narratives dealt with, among other aspects, what made nations distinct and unique. Since writing national literary histories implied constructing a canon of national literature that was 'superior' to others, nations attempted to profile themselves as exceptional in comparison to others, engaging in a process of what has been called 'exceptional universalism'. Immersed in a 'game of ranking', critics pondered questions like

2 Ibid.

3 For the impact of modern philology on the study of modern languages and literatures, see Momma, *From Philology to English Studies*.

whose literature and literary legacy could be considered as foremost within Europe, and whose could not and why. From the late 1820s, with Goethe's term *Weltliteratur*, a new perspective on national literatures would develop. Despite the variegated employment of the term, Goethe's seminal concept did not seem to imply the end of discrete national literatures, but envisioned a process of interaction and literary reception amongst men of letters in diverse nations that would lead to a greater literary and critical balance worldwide.⁴ However, most of the authors dealt with in this essay wrote before these new ideas spread throughout Europe.⁵ Intellectuals writing these first literary histories were furthermore imbued in the Romantic theory of national literature as the genuine expression of the character of a nation.⁶ In this way, it was problematic for the acknowledgement of Spanish influence that the Golden Age was considered as the core of the Spanish literary canon and that it was therefore singled out by foreign scholars as the perfect mirror of Spanishness. How could Golden Age Spanish literature have influenced English and Dutch literature at the time when their own budding national literatures were at their zenith? Especially in a period when Spain's reputation was so blackly hued? Barbara Fuchs's term 'occlusion of influence', as explained in the introduction of this volume, is particularly useful to describe how certain literary histories dealt with the influence of Spanish materials on their own national theatre.

In order to conceptualize the literary past and to map literary influences, it is essential to expose the underlying practices of literary histories and their specific national styles with their own distinctive features and trajectories, as Ansgar Nünning contends.⁷ Therefore, a first attempt will be made here to expose and interrogate the presence of descriptive and/or prescriptive statements in a selection of literary historiographical sources (English and Dutch) composed in the first half of the nineteenth century.⁸ The focus lies on a reduced corpus of what we can broadly consider as 'literary histories' or 'literary treatises', two by English and two by Dutch authors who delved into Spanish theatre. We are partially dealing with

4 Pizer, 'Johann Wolfgang von Goethe', pp. 5-6. Obviously, as Pizer remarks, Goethe's paradigm was determined by a Eurocentric perspective.

5 Gradually, the discipline of comparative literature will develop, emerging in the nineteenth century as a countermovement to methodological nationalism in the philologies. See Leerssen, *Comparative Literature*.

6 Leerssen, *National Thought*, pp. 122, 197.

7 Nünning, 'On the Englishness', p. 163.

8 I will be further deploying this topic in a monograph that will deal more extensively with this Hispanophobic/philic ambivalence, also in other literary genres.

forerunners in the development of literary history who can be associated with antiquarian criticism and whose academic approach to literary criticism could be contested, but they are nonetheless influential in the further development of the discipline.⁹ The selection of authors is further informed by Richard Schoch's claim that to truly fathom theatre history the overlooked scholarship undertaken by a wide array of individuals (not only professional historians) must be taken into account, such as theatrical insiders.¹⁰ How is the legacy of Spanish Golden Age drama negotiated within English and Dutch drama and how is it linked to the national dramatic traditions of these countries? What terms do literary critics deploy to define and nuance the character of Spanish Golden Age drama and its influence?

Regarding the Anglo-Dutch geographical selection of this essay, it is obvious that it embodies two different European literary traditions with a different degree of canonicity in the nineteenth century. The Dutch were practically at the margins of European literature, due to the linguistic limitations of Dutch literature abroad, whereas English literature, with William Shakespeare at the top of its canon, took a privileged and central position at the heart of European/global literature.¹¹ What is more, this English author (Shakespeare) had even managed to become the ultimate European representative of early modern theatre. For their part, in the Dutch discourse the question of literary decline since the Golden Age played an important role within national borders, with literary historians and authors reflecting on the present lethargic state of the nation and on the need for cultural renewal to regain the level of the glorious Golden Age.¹²

In the Dutch case, in particular, a tangible tension is felt when it comes to analysing the literary history of Netherlandish-Spanish relations. The Spaniards were *the* historical enemy who stood at the cradle of the creation of the Dutch national founding myth. Despite renegotiations of the vision of the Spaniards at several moments, as in the context of the Napoleonic wars and the new French enemy, or in the mid-nineteenth century against the backdrop of the Catholic emancipation and its contestation of a dominant Protestant interpretation of Dutch national history,¹³ nineteenth-century

9 Leerssen, *Comparative Literature*, p. 24.

10 Schoch, *Writing the History*, p. 3. I expand Schoch's geographical demarcation to the Dutch case.

11 The project 'Circulation of Dutch Literature' (CODL) studies the international dissemination of Dutch literature through translations and adaptations. See <http://www.codl.nl/> (last accessed: 26/7/19).

12 Johannes, 'Zoo is overdrijving', p. 28.

13 See Jensen's contribution in this volume.

literary historians were extremely ambivalent as to what to do with the Spanish cultural legacy. Admitting having learnt and 'absorbed' something from the enemy did seem an uncomfortable notion. Although early modern playwrights in the Low Countries were greatly influenced by Spanish drama, this fact was frequently by-passed in literary histories even up to the present day. Recent research on Amsterdam's key position as a European theatre hub rightfully emphasizes the importance of Spanish drama and attempts to add this chapter to state-of-the-art Dutch and European literary historiography.¹⁴

The first author we will engage with is Charles Dibdin (1745-1814), the author of *A Complete History of the English Stage, Introduced by a Comparative and Comprehensive Review of the Asiatic, the Grecian, the Roman, the Spanish, the Italian, the Portuguese, the German, the French and Other Theatres*, published in London in 1800 in five volumes. He was a unique figure in British entertainment. Described as the first singer-song writer, he was a prolific author of plays and sea songs and operas, an actor, and theatrical manager.¹⁵ The second English author is the above-mentioned George Henry Lewes (1817-1878), called 'probably the most highly-trained thinker who ever applied himself to the study of theatrical art in England'.¹⁶ He was not just an armchair scholar, since his passion for drama made him attempt to become an actor in the 1840s. Particularly in Lewes we find a critical way of looking at theatre from the principles and taste of contemporary audiences. His name is inextricably linked to his life partner, Marian Evans, alias George Eliot, whom he devoutly encouraged and supported.¹⁷ His *The Spanish Drama: Lope de Vega and Calderón*, preceded George Ticknor's (1791-1871) canonical *The History of Spanish Literature* by three years (1849). This classic work by the American professor of French and Spanish at Harvard is considered the first comprehensive study of Spanish literature.¹⁸

As to the two selected Dutch authors, one is Abraham Louis Barbaz, author of the *Overzicht van den Staat des Schouwburgs, in ons Vaderland* (Overview of the state of our theatre in our fatherland, 1816). He was an

14 See essays in this volume by Blom and Bood.

15 Gillaspie, 'Charles Dibdin'. It is remarkable that his literary historiographical epos, *A Complete History*, is not explicitly mentioned in his biography, just as a mere bibliographical note. Despite possible questions about Dibdin's academic approach, his views on European literature and especially on the Spanish legacy are relevant in reconstructing British perceptions.

16 William Archer, quoted in Greenhut, 'G.H. Lewes's Criticism', p. 350.

17 Ashton, 'George Henry Lewes'.

18 For an analysis of latent anti-Hispanic stereotypes in Ticknor's *History*, see Vélez, 'La hispanofobia en el hispanismo'.

accountant, and a moderately accomplished poet and dramatist, but his *Overzicht* is one of the first overviews of Dutch drama.¹⁹ The second author is Willem de Clercq, a commercial agent and leader of the Dutch Protestant Réveil. He was also a well-known improvisator and a literary scholar who interacted closely with the most important literary intellectuals of his time. As an entry in an essay prize competition in 1821 he wrote his *Verhandeling ter beantwoording van de vraag: welken invloed heeft vreemde letterkunde, inzonderheid de Italiaansche, Spaansche, Fransche en Duitsche, gehad op de Nederlandsche Taal- en letterkunde, sinds het begin der vijftiende eeuw tot op onze dagen?* (Treatise in response to the question: What influence has foreign literature, in particular, Italian, Spanish, French and German, had on Dutch language and literature, from the beginning of the fifteenth century up to today?) Although he does not specifically focus on drama, his work is particularly valuable because it is considered as one of the first examples of comparative European literary studies.²⁰

These works appeared in different eras. Dibdin lived at the watershed of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He wrote his literary history before the Napoleonic wars turned the Spaniards into courageous people revolting against Napoleon and siding with the British, before Spain was to be contemplated with increasing sympathy and admiration. Dibdin wrote before the most influential works on Spain were published by the first Hispanists *avant la lettre*, like Bouterwek, Simonde de Sismondi, Southey or Lord Holland.²¹ Barbaz was writing when the Napoleonic conflict was coming to a close, after a period of French occupation, also determinant for the development of Dutch identity. De Clercq and Lewes take up the pen in a changed world, when the multifarious image of Romantic Spain had long spread all over Europe and some of the most influential literary histories and other works dealing directly or indirectly with Spain and its literature had already been published.

All these authors engage in their works with a wide array of characteristics that defined 'Spanishness' in the nineteenth century. The most prominent traits were a vague Orientalism (obviously connected to Spain's

19 For Barbaz's biography, see Barbaz, *Overzicht*.

20 Schenkeveld, *Willem de Clercq*, p. 75. The treatise was published in 1824 with an epilogue; a second edition followed in 1826 (Brandt Corstius, 'Willem de Clercq', p. 482). It was also De Clercq who acquainted the Dutch public with the story of El Cid in his *De Cid, voorgesteld als het ideaal van den held der Middeleeuwen* (El Cid as heroic ideal in the Middle Ages, 1823). How his views on Spain and Spanish literary legacy relate to his evaluation of El Cid is a matter I shall further analyse in a future monograph.

21 Bouterwek, *Geschiedte*; Simonde de Sismondi, *De la littérature*.

rich Muslim-Arab past), a strong sense of chivalry and an intense feeling for piety or religiousness.²² Nonetheless, the analysed English and Dutch authors do not always connect the Spaniards and their dramatic Golden Age production to these mainly Romantic characteristics, and they certainly do not do it with the same rhetoric.²³ Neither do they acknowledge Spanish influence in the early modern period in the same manner. Furthermore, anti-Hispanic ethnotypes are often encountered in both geographical contexts in 'occluded form' or as 'dormant frames'. To use Leerssen's words: 'Latency is always a default state for ethnotypes and prejudices.'²⁴ In this latency the ambivalence, the tension between Hispanophilia and Hispanophobia, comes to the fore. The prominent characteristics of Spanishness crystallize in the different historiographies through different concepts or metaphors that reflect particular attitudes towards Spanish materials and Spanish cultural legacy. The metaphor of luxuriance in the English context is a telling example, whereas a different literary discourse is deployed by Dutch authors, who voice a long-standing historical narrative marked by national opposition. The Spaniards were *the* historical enemy par excellence, who shaped Dutch national self-definition, and this entrenched natural opposition lies at the very heart of their relations. During the Napoleonic wars the French were indeed to fulfil a comparable role in the forging of the Dutch national identity, but the virulence towards the Spanish enemy is without doubt the most historically persistent.²⁵

Spanish luxuriance in English eyes

In his autobiography, *The Professional Life of Mr. Dibdin, Written by Himself*, published in four volumes in 1803, Charles Dibdin stresses the importance of his *A Complete History of the English Theatre*: 'I determined to leave nothing undone that might elucidate a subject of such infinite importance to the interest of every nation, and to civilization in general.'²⁶ Dibdin's historiographic objective mirrors the preoccupations of his time as to how – and why – to conceptualize the literary past. In his history, after having dedicated a whole volume to other theatres, he finally explains his objective

22 Pérez Isasi, 'The Limits of "Spanishness"', p. 179.

23 See also Raphaël Ingelbien's chapter in this volume on the different 'grammars' deployed by British and Netherlandish authors.

24 See introduction.

25 Jensen, 'The Dutch against Napoleon'.

26 Dibdin, *The Professional Life*, vol. 1, p. 111.

to his public: 'The English reader will now see that I have so long kept him at a distance from his native country only that it may be the more dear to him on his return. [...] I have done this to prove, upon a comparative review, the superiority of our theatre at home.'²⁷ The assertion of writers from other countries that 'the dramatic art arrived to no perfection in England till it had been perfected by all its neighbours' and the fact that 'our own writers have very tamely acquiesced in this calumny' inspired Dibdin to take up the pen.²⁸ With this remark he aligns himself with the tradition of eighteenth-century poets and critics who utilized foreign literature to vindicate the superiority of English literature and to show 'how the native literature could be enriched by judicious imitation of foreign literatures'.²⁹ This point of departure implies placing other literatures in an inferior position. Nonetheless, in comparison to other European literatures, he strongly stresses in several passages the importance of Spanish drama and acknowledges its influence: according to him, Spanish plays have been plundered, and 'have served like a rich mine for the French, and, indeed, the English at second hand to dig in'.³⁰ He further adds that Spanish plays 'have furnished some very rich material which the French and English theatrical chymists have ingeniously extracted to ornament their own productions'. But not everybody was capable of accomplishing this extraction successfully. Dibdin objected to how the Dutch imitated Calderón's curvettes and caprioles: 'As awkwardly on the stage of Amsterdam, as a guinea pig imitates a squirrel'.³¹ To prove the superiority of English drama, Dibdin embarked on a long trip, starting in Asia, and on arrival at European shores he openly states that he wondered 'at the astonishing fertility and redundancy of the Spanish drama, like a tree too luxuriant to be pruned, and charged with too much fruit to ripen'.³² The negative undertone is undeniable here, since abundance thwarts the maturity of the result. That the value of Spanish plays was relative had been stated before by the author: 'Their wit, however, like

27 Dibdin, *A Complete History*, vol. 2, p. 220.

28 Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 221-222. 'I shall, for the first attempt of this kind, begin my task by endeavouring to rescue the English stage from so much obliquy, and shew that we are in everything antecedent to the French, and, perhaps, every other people but the Spaniards; and that there are vestiges of the dramatic art traceable in this country long before the fall of the Roman empire'.

29 Peter Leithmann quoted in Leerssen's *Comparative Literature*, p. 20.

30 Dibdin, *A Complete History*, vol. 1, pp. 131, 139. According to Barbara Fuchs, Dibdin characterizes the use of Spanish sources as 'plunder', voicing 'a fantasy of appropriation by which the Spanish New World wealth of minerals is transmuted into a literary lode available for English extraction' ('The Black Legend', p. 223).

31 Dibdin, *A Complete History*, vol. 1, pp. 145 and 161.

32 Ibid., vol. 2, p. 220.

their hard dollars, can never be considered as staple, but a useless mass of no intrinsic value till manufactured into literary merchandise by the ingenuity and labour of other countries.³³ This opinion echoes Lewes's metaphor of the skeleton, the bones and the flesh. 'Spanish materials' are not enough.

Although Lewes does not expressly mention Dibdin in his work (whereas he does engage in dialogue with many other literary scholars), the resemblance in their discourse is unmistakable.³⁴ Lewes's initial citation at the beginning of this essay on the proverbial richness of the Spanish drama can be found in the very beginning of his introduction, and it contains several aspects that are essential for the reconstruction of nineteenth-century literary imagination regarding Spanish drama. Particularly subtle is the way he further elaborates on the limits of imitation and exploitation of literary models. He admits that the debts to Spanish sources include incident and intrigue of the plays, but 'character, passion, wit, or poetry own no such parentage'.³⁵ Both Dibdin and Lewes acknowledge openly the undeniable influence of Spanish Golden Age drama on the English, but they underscore the literary achievements of their countrymen and the exceptionality of English literature. On the fuzzy lines between imitation and originality, Lewes disagrees strongly with the German critic August Wilhelm Schlegel. He rebuts Schlegel's perspective: 'Ingenious boldness, joined to easy clearness of intrigue, is so exclusively peculiar to the Spaniards, that Schlegel considered himself justified in suspecting every work in which these qualities were apparent to have a Spanish origin.'³⁶ Lewes seems to imply that a dramatist can adapt a certain plot, but what he further does with it (Dibdin's 'literary merchandise'), does not impugn his creativity, since the resemblance between the original play and the new product is simply that of form.

Furthermore, according to Lewes, English and Spanish dramas are opposed in spirit, object and construction and Shakespeare and Calderón de la Barca are the playwrights who best embody these two distinctive

33 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 131.

34 Dibdin did not inspire other contemporaries like Thomas Campbell, who turned to August Willem Schlegel as a model. According to Leerssen, Dibdin's antiquarian approach vs the latter's philological and Romantic approach could explain this development (Leerssen, *Comparative Literature*, p. 20).

35 Lewes, *The Spanish Drama*, pp. 6, 8.

36 Ibid., p. 6. Lewes is critical of Schlegel on other occasions, see Greenhut, 'G.H. Lewes's Criticism', p. 366. Lewes's analytical approach collided with Schlegel's penchant for 'synthesis'. In *The Spanish Drama* Lewes defines the German intellectual as 'a striking rethorician not reliable as critic' (p. 174) and laments the lack of concrete examples in his argumentation (p. 175).

– and opposing – tendencies. Their aims and audiences were different; the English poet wishes to illustrate character and passion, the Spanish poet, on the contrary, sets himself the task of representing an interesting and complicated story, to this purpose he uses character as the instrument and plaything of the story.³⁷ Lewes echoes here the idea that Spanish *comedias* were plot-driven whereas English drama, the Shakespearian one especially, revolved around character development. He then concludes rather mercilessly: 'In the high sense of the word, the Spanish poets are not dramatists, they are only ventriloquists.'³⁸ Despite offering some negative views, Lewes is also openly appreciative towards Spanish drama, especially when it comes to Lope de Vega, whom he highly values (in contrast to Calderón), and whose dramatic exceptionality he wishes to expose. Lope is, according to Lewes, unfairly 'written down' in literary historiography, and what is more, he contests Lope's reputation as a 'slapdash writer whose sole merit is fecundity', adding: 'In spite of criticism, Lope remains one of the most extraordinary writers in the annals of literature.'³⁹ For his part, Dibdin is clearly less sympathetic to Spanish dramatic achievements than Lewes, since he finds Lope's irregularity and his 'licentious abuse of the ancient rules' problematic.⁴⁰ His judgement can probably be related to still prevailing aesthetic mores of neoclassicism that rejected Spanish baroque profusion.

Luxuriance seems to be the key word when describing Spanish Golden Age drama for these two English authors writing at two different historical moments. Lewes even points to the importance of the concept of 'luxuriance' not only for drama, but for everything in life, expanding the vegetal metaphor: 'In the drama, as elsewhere, the primary condition is luxuriant life; pruning, polishing, and refining will come afterwards.' And then he adds, in his effort to silence prejudiced critics: 'Pedants never saw this'.⁴¹ One would think that luxuriance, in its intrinsic connotation of abundance, lavishness and proliferation should be positive, but it can also turn into a negative overgrowth. There is therefore a downside to this Spanish creative and formal profusion and exuberance. Luxuriance makes Spanish plays

37 Ibid., pp. 100-107.

38 Ibid., p. 107.

39 Ibid., p. 88. And later on: 'I have thus endeavoured to fetch out the merits of Lope de Vega as a writer, because he has been inconsiderately decried; and have laid stress upon his literary qualities, because it has been the fashion to attribute to him only those of quick and fertile invention of plots and situations' (p. 96).

40 Dibdin, *A Complete History*, vol. 1, p. 136.

41 Lewes, *The Spanish Drama*, p. 19

too overwhelming and over the top.⁴² This luxuriance is also related to irregularity, which in Dibdin's eyes, untouched by Romantic principles, was a dreadful dramatic pitfall. He admits to his readers that 'no nation was ever so fertile in invention, or so wide of regularity as Spain'.⁴³ In his diachronic approach he connects Spanish fertility in invention and irregularity with an older tradition: 'Their manners are derived originally from the Moors, and are tinged with a sort of African taste, too wild and extravagant for the adoption of other nations, and which cannot accommodate itself to rule of precision.'⁴⁴

These 'racialized and genealogical terms'⁴⁵ connect Dibdin to the discourse of Spanish Orientalness. He was writing more than a decade before Charles Léonard Simonde de Sismondi (1773-1842) in his famous *De la littérature du Midi de l'Europe* (1813) would define Spanish literature as quintessentially Oriental, and, therefore, not European, banishing it to a peripheral and marginal status.⁴⁶ According to the Swiss scholar, the Oriental dimension was the most typical element of Spanish literature, distinguishing it from other Romance languages. This Oriental essence was tangible in the role of rhyme, the overwhelming imagination (origin of the strong baroque character of Spanish literature), its individuality and isolation, and a certain idea of 'stagnation'.⁴⁷ Elements such as love for invention and discovery of knowledge, and also for vain pomp and florid embellishment, all came to the fore in Spanish literature, seasoned by an element of ardour. Although Simonde de Sismondi drew on Juan de Andrés, an eighteenth-century Spanish Jesuit author considered by many as the founding father of comparative literature, the Swiss scholar altered ingeniously Andrés's narrative, shaping the idea that Europe contained within itself its own Oriental other. Furthermore, Simonde de Sismondi also agreed with his friend Madame de Stäel on the existence of two completely distinct literatures, a Northern and a Southern one.⁴⁸ This

42 Dibdin compares the Spanish stage to 'a crowded garden, overrun with weeds and interspersed here and there with flowers of rare and peculiar beauty' (*A Complete History*, vol. 3, p. 10).

43 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 140.

44 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 132.

45 Fuchs, 'The Black Legend', p. 223.

46 Simonde de Sismondi, *De la littérature*, 3, p. 100: 'Les literatures don't nous nous sommes déjà accupés, celles que nous avons reserves pour un autre temps, sont européennes: celle-ci est orientale. Son esprit, sa pompe, le but qu'elle se propose, appartiennent a une autre sphere d'idées, a un autre monde.'

47 Andreu Miralles, *El Descubrimiento de España*, p. 83.

48 Dainotto, *Europe (in Theory)*, pp. 162-163.

polarity between North-South would complicate the literary balance within Europe, transcending nation-based arguments and giving impetus to an idea of opposing European literatures in the context of modernity. Spanish literature (as Southern) was obviously to be categorized as premodern and over time as backward. In Dibdin's case, it is probable that he was acquainted with Thomas Warton's pioneering *History of English Poetry, from the Close of the Eleventh to the Commencement of the Eighteenth Century* (1774-1781), considered to be the first narrative English literary history. Warton points already at the Arab roots of Spanish literature, and the related 'exuberance of invention', 'variety of imagery' and the unusual pompous style and affected diction. However, he does not indulge into taxonomies or theories on North-South dichotomies or superiorities or further criticism.⁴⁹

For his part, Lewes writes with the Schlegels's, Bouterwek's and Simonde de Sismondi's visions in mind, and he also picks up the thread of Simonde de Sismondi's Oriental argumentation.⁵⁰ In this way, he remarks not very enthusiastically that 'Spanish comedies are uniformly written in florid verse. Closets are in perpetual requisition. Pursuits and concealments, equivoques and quarrels, are thick as leaves in Vallombrosa. The "bustle" of the stage is incessant.'⁵¹ It is noteworthy that comparable vegetal/luxuriant metaphors are also used by other contemporary authors. Mary (Wollstonecraft) Shelley, when writing on Spanish poetry in the 1830s resorts to similar metaphors to describe what might be deemed a defective Spanish 'writing style'. Lope de Vega, in particular, embodies for Mary Shelley what she defines as diffuseness,⁵² an extremely digressive rhetorical form comparable with 'tangled underwood and uncultivated interminable wilds' where a poem 'resembles a pathless jungle'.⁵³ Although Lewes does not refer to this so-called 'national defect', he can also be very irritated by Calderón's prodigality with

49 See Rodríguez Pérez, 'Being Eurocentric within Europe'; Warton, *History of English Poetry*, Dissertation I: 'Of the original of romantic fiction in Europe'. <http://find.galegroup.com/ecco/>

50 Lewes, *The Spanish Drama*, pp. 115-116. Lewes mentions Simonde de Sismondi about seven times, Bouterwek five times. He generally agrees with these critics' perspectives. He is very critical of the Schlegels, whom he mentions almost 20 times, using terms of disagreement, such as 'high-flown eulogies' (p. 164) and 'panegyrics' (p. 178) when writing about Calderón. He is especially critical of Wilhelm August: 'his inaccuracies, prejudices, and want of precise conceptions are exhibited' (p. 174).

51 Ibid., p. 122.

52 Sánchez Jiménez, 'Mary Shelley', p. 33. Mary Shelley published her *Parallel Lives* of Lope and Cervantes in Dionysius Lardner's *Lives of the Most Eminent Literary and Scientific Men of Italy, Spain and Portugal* (1835-1837).

53 Ibid., p. 34.

adjectives, which produces a comparable impression of overgrowth. In his eyes, Spaniards are addicted to a particular species of poetry, the *glosa*, that consists in taking up a proverb or poetical thought and varying it in every imaginable way. He also complains: 'While the reader is anxious to get a clue to the mystery of the plot, he has to wade through these terrible displays of rhetoric.'⁵⁴

However, when dealing with his admired Lope de Vega, Lewes presents the dramatist as an example of Oriental prodigality,⁵⁵ referring to 'his taste for Oriental pomp of language', but he will further enthusiastically praise Lope's literary qualities.⁵⁶ This prodigality was frequently connected to Lope's well-known prodigious fertility, which made him the very embodiment of literary abundance already in the early modern era.⁵⁷ Both Dibdin and Lewes inextricably link Lope de Vega's productivity and the quality of his plays with the term 'luxuriance' as well.⁵⁸ The quantity/quality dichotomy will become over time the crux of the comparison between Lope and Shakespeare and the affirmation of the latter's superiority.⁵⁹ Whereas Lewes fights with his ambivalence towards Spanish drama, Dibdin is less sympathetic on this front. Not to be forgotten is the fact that both authors happened to be dramatists themselves, and experts on the performative side of theatre which makes them very critical of the (im)possibilities for success on the stage of a given play. For Lewes it was in any case certain that Lope could be a very good example for 'aspiring dramatists'.⁶⁰

54 Lewes, *The Spanish Drama*, pp. 108-109.

55 Ibid., p. 74.

56 Ibid., pp. 92-93. 'But if without wrong standards, prejudices, and critical canons, you take up the volume, you will find it difficult to set it down unread. There is an endless charm in Lope – his gaiety. His unflagging animal spirits, playful irony, and careless gaiety, keep your mind in a constant smile, which gently curls about the lips.'

57 Lope was called in his time, '*el copioso*', the 'proliferous'. Admiration for his 'perennial fountain' was predominant, but criticism on the tension between quantity and quality was also voiced in Spain. On Lope's abundant writing and a comparison with Shakespeare, see Amelang, *Playgrounds*, p. 150.

58 On the wrong way Beaumont and Fletcher attempted to imitate Lope: 'Most of the plots are Spanish, and seems as if they thought that when they had lopped off part of the luxuriance of *Lopez de Vega*, they had done enough, whereas they should not have left a twig, but have let the new shoots have gained their strength by springing at once from the stock' (Dibdin, *A Complete History*, vol. 3, pp. 205-206).

59 'Lope was no prodigious "unactable unacted" boasting of a barren rapidity' (Lewes, *The Spanish Drama*, pp. 73, 88-91).

60 Ibid., p. 92.

On inherent national oppositions

Through the luxuriance metaphor a clear literary opposition is charted between Spanish and English drama. The opposition lies in distinct national differences in literary form and expression, and not in a historical conflictive past, at least in the authors under review. In the Netherlands, the attitude towards Spain was particularly complex in the early modern period, which is reflected in the nineteenth century. In the narrative on the development of Dutch Golden Age culture an oft-repeated discourse in the nineteenth century connects the growth of the Dutch Republic to the war with Spain. Indeed, the Golden Age was practically coterminous with the Dutch Revolt. One of the main forefathers of Dutch literary history, Jeronimo de Vries, whose approach to literature transcended the mere antiquarian interest in Dutch literary past,⁶¹ stated in 1810 that 'the transition from Spanish oppression to Dutch freedom endowed all arts in our Fatherland with a flexible elevation, especially regarding Poetry'.⁶² De Vries is actually openly referring to the words of the renowned sixteenth-century man of letters and historian P.C. Hooft, who had stressed the connection between freedom from Spain and literary prosperity.⁶³ As a consequence, Spanish influence is explained predominantly as a (negative) motor or a backdrop for original national production, not as a form of inspiration at the cradle of literary/dramatic development. One could say that Spain is merely seen as a 'facilitator' of Dutch cultural grandeur. In this vein, nineteenth-century authors struggle with what position to give to Spain's literary production. Matthijs Siegenbeek, the first professor of Dutch in the Netherlands, appointed in 1797, referred in 1826 to 'the wrestling fight against powerful Spain' and to the 'feeling of freedom and independence, the tension, flexibility and mental elevation that it caused and that is to be found in the poetry and other products of the time'.⁶⁴ However, further than that, the authors under scrutiny do not delve into charting oppositions (or similarities) according to literary premises.

61 Schenkeveld, *Willem de Clercq*, p. 78, p. 84.

62 De Vries *Proeve eener geschiedenis*, p. 389: 'De overgang van Spaansche dwingelandijk tot Nederlandsche vrijheid gaf eene veerkrachtige verheffing aan alle kunsten in ons Vaderland, bijzonder aan de Dichtkunst.' On Jeronimo de Vries, see Jensen, 'The Founding Father'.

63 *Ibid.*, p. 75.

64 Siegenbeek, *Beknopte geschiedenis*, p. 343: 'de worstelstrijd tegen het magtige Spanje [...] een gevoel van vrijheid en onafhankelijkheid, eene spanning, veerkracht en geestverheffing te weeg gebracht, waarvan de dicht-en andere voortbrengheselen van dit tijdperk, als 't ware, het zichtbaar afdruksel dragen.'

Within Dutch Golden Age literature, drama and the Amsterdam theatre, the Schouwburg, play a special role in literary historiography. As Barbaz in his early *Overview of the State of the Theatre* (1816) forcefully asserts at the very beginning: 'There is no other institution that endowes us with more glory and splendour than the Amsterdam theatre [...] the real temple of our Dutch Fatherlandish poetry.'⁶⁵ Barbaz, who does not forget to mention that most Dutch plays are not the result of own invention, since they had been transposed from other languages (and frequently maimed as a result), nuances that these plays have been transplanted into the national ground and there 'further nationalized and cultivated'.⁶⁶ However, although Barbaz acknowledges the existence of foreign influences on Dutch drama, he quickly proceeds to underscore the assimilation of works from abroad into national products. His avid interest in reconceptualizing foreign theatrical influence takes a remarkable direction with his complete negation of Spanish influence. Barbaz is a prime example of the 'occlusion of Spain'.

He acknowledges French influence (which is undeniable in the late seventeenth century and during the eighteenth century), but he does not pay any attention whatsoever to the previous phase when Spanish drama widely inspired French and other European drama. The Spaniards are only indirectly present in his work, as a rhetorical instrument in the context of the stereotypical topos of oppression of the Dutch Revolt. In this way, Barbaz informs his readers that through the continuous translation of French little tragedies (*treurspelletjes*), 'our dramatical poetry lost almost completely its national character' and that crazy theatre-tyrants forced the freed Dutchmen, those who had curbed mighty Spanish tyranny, to put onto the stage anything but the true and useful reflection of nature.⁶⁷ Spanish tyranny in the political dimension is transformed by Barbaz into French tyranny in the literary one, thus reflecting the recent political circumstances regarding the Napoleonic incorporation of the Low Countries. Barbaz's Francophone Swiss family came originally from the canton of Vaud, occupied by Napoleon in 1795; it is not improbable that this fact might account for this bellicose literary comparison.

65 Barbaz, *Overzicht*, p. 1: 'Geen stichting verstrekt onze Nederlandsche glorie tot meer luister dan den Amsterdamse Schouwburg [...] de wezenlijke tempel onzer vaderlandsche dichtkunst.' This idea had already been expressed in the seventeenth century by the reputed writer and historian P.C. Hooft.

66 Ibid.: '[W]ant hoewel onze meeste tooneelstukken juist geen eigenvindingen zijn, maar veelal voortbrengsels uit vreemde talen overgenomen, zyn ze echter, door dezelve inkleeding in Nederduitschen vaerzen, het eigendom en de schatten onzer poëzy geworden.'

67 Barbaz, *Overzicht*, p. 4.

A telling example of a vision of the interaction between Spanish and Dutch literature in the Golden Age is Willem de Clercq's treatise on foreign influence on Dutch literature and language, written as an entry in an essay prize competition, devised by Jeronimo de Vries. Although he won the prize, it must be said in fairness that he was the only one to submit an entry.⁶⁸ De Clercq has been praised by twentieth-century scholars for his 'nuanced contribution to the fatherland debate',⁶⁹ but the question is whether he was indeed that nuanced, since a wide array of historical stereotypes regarding the Spaniards colour his narrative. In his introduction, De Clercq defends the importance of 'literary history' and remarks that to evaluate 'our literature' in the correct manner it has to be considered 'at the same time with that of other peoples'.⁷⁰ Despite this original approach, the prize commission had some criticism on the actual contents. They found that French and German literature had been partially dealt with, but the Spanish not at all. In fact, the scanty references to Spanish literature reveal his biased perceptions. Already at the very beginning he refers in passing to the 'faint impressions that Spanish literature has left on ours', stating further on that although one would expect a rich harvest because of the many relations with Spain, those expectations are deceitful.⁷¹ The author was obviously overlooking the strong Spanish influence on European early modern drama, something foreign authors of literary histories had already mentioned before 1800. This cannot be related to his linguistic background. De Clercq was a polyglot who wrote his own diary in French, and spoke Italian and Spanish, among other languages.⁷² He was also acquainted and used in his treatise not only national, but the most recent foreign literary histories by Simonde de Sismondi, Eichorn, Bouterwek, Schlegel and Madame de Staël's *De l'Allemagne*.⁷³

68 Schenkeveld, *Willem de Clercq*, pp. 75-77.

69 Van den Berg, 'Verbeelding van het vaderland', p. 328.

70 De Clercq, *Verhandeling*, pp. 1-2; *ibid.*, p. 12: 'Men zal mij misschien beschuldigen, te veel over de vreemde en vroegere Letterkunde uitgeweid te hebben, doch ik begreep, dat, om onze Letterkunde juist te beschouwen, men op dat standpunt gesteld moest worden, waarop men deze, tegelijk met die van andere Volken, kan overzien.'

71 *Ibid.*, p. 13: 'De flauwe indrukken, welke de Spaansche Letterkunde in de onze heeft nagelaten'; p. 179: 'De menigvuldige betrekkingen met Spanje schijnen hierin, bij den eersten opslag, eenen rijken oogst te beloven, doch men vindt zich weldra in zijne verwachting bedrogen.'

72 He writes in his diary that during certain Spanish literary occasions, he did not like 'the manner in which Spanish was pronounced'. He also refers to the Meerman family's impressive collection of Spanish writers in original volumes. He is referring to what would become the oldest book museum in the world, the Museum Meermano-Westreenianum. See De Clercq, *Diary*, Vol. 11, pp. 32, 97.

73 Schenkeveld, *Willem de Clercq*, pp. 80-81.

That he downplays Spanish influence is not surprising, given his views on the core problem of Dutch-Spanish relations during the Dutch Revolt:

An aversion, grown from religious and political difference, kept these people separated from each other in such a way that, during eighty years great difficulty overshadowed the possibility of any sort of relation between Spain and the Netherlands.⁷⁴

De Clercq echoes here early modern propaganda views that attempted to present the Dutch and the Spanish as diametrically opposed in nature and character.⁷⁵ Furthermore, when it comes to placing the successful playwright Lope de Vega within the Dutch context, his own religious background impedes any rapprochement or recognition: 'A Lopez de Vega, familiar of the Inquisition, could never be a loved Poet for the Reformed/ Protestant Dutch.'⁷⁶ Lope de Vega is here equated with his connection to the Inquisition, rendering him an 'unfit' playwright who could have never appealed to a Dutch public on religious grounds. De Clercq was a staunch Calvinist who became a member of the Walloon Church in later years. It is interesting that Lewes draws a clear religious difference between Calderón, whom he considered the poet of the Inquisition, and Lope de Vega, whose background as a priest and his function within this religious institution go unmentioned.⁷⁷ De Clercq's Protestant perspective, dominant in Dutch and Anglophone scholarship until the mid-nineteenth century, would gradually be deconstructed by Catholic (literary) historians writing from another perspective.⁷⁸

74 De Clercq, *Verhandeling*, p. 180: 'Een afkeer, uit verschil van godsdienstige en staatkundige begrippen ontstaan, hield de Volken zoodanig van elkanderen gescheiden, dat, gedurende tachtig jaren, er eene grootere moeijelijkheid tot onderlinge toenadering dan met eenig ander volk heerschte.'

75 Rodríguez Pérez, "Un laberinto", p. 153. See also this volume's introduction.

76 De Clercq, *Verhandeling*, p. 180: 'Een Lopez de Vega, *de familiaar der Inkwisitie*, kon nimmer een geliefd Dichter voor den *hervormden* Nederlander worden.'

77 Lewes agrees with Simonde de Sismondi, who sees Calderón as 'the true poet of the Inquisition', Lewes, *The Spanish Drama*, p. 179.

78 See Jensen's essay in this volume. Nonetheless, the so-called 'Prescott's paradigm', after the famous American historian William H. Prescott (1796-1859), would prove resistant and pervasive for the appraisal of Spanish history (and literature). According to Prescott, Spanish history was to be understood as a consequence of Spanish decadence and the tyrannous nature of Spanish Catholicism. This interpretation can be considered as a 'latter-day version' of the Black Legend. See Burguera and Schmidt-Nowara, 'Introduction', p. 279. On these matters in Britain, see Yates, 'Anglican Attitudes'.

According to some contemporary critics, De Clercq's attitude towards foreign influence relates to his idea of an existing connection between imitation and the possibility of undergoing some sort of 'psychic assimilation process'.⁷⁹ In this light it is quite understandable that he wished to draw a strong line between the Dutch and the old Spanish enemy and everything connected to them. The limits of foreign influence preoccupy him. It should never dominate national literature, as he added in a later epilogue in 1824.⁸⁰ In this context of foreign influence, a discourse on 'degeneration' and negative impact from abroad (inherited from the eighteenth century) was widely spread in the Netherlands. To fight decadence and to regenerate national identity, a broad set of initiatives was deployed. For instance, the role of learned societies was of particular importance, since they brought citizens together who were interested in revitalizing Dutch culture and in fighting decline. It was a widespread notion at the time that a particular language and literature were a close reflection of the moral health of the nation in question.⁸¹ The search to remedy decline even extended to the economic dimension of the nation, with societies and poets engaging in the process of singing the praises of trade and its history.⁸² Gradually, Dutch (literary) historians will take increasingly greater distance from the 'monumentalization' of the Golden Age and plead for a search for new literary ways to wake up the slumbering nation.⁸³

Despite this impression of overpowering disavowal, appreciation for Spanish materials in the nineteenth-century Netherlands is also present, however low key. Scholars like Jacob Pieter van Walrée, interested in Southern literatures, would delve in 1838 into the connection between the Spanish national character (*volkskarakter*) and its early literature. Although he does not particularly reflect on drama, his views are useful to shed light on perceptions of 'Spanishness'. Despite the fact that his treatise starts with references to Romantic perceptions of Spain as an exceptional (in the negative sense) and anti-modern nation in the nineteenth century,

79 Brandt Corstius, 'Willem de Clercq', p. 503.

80 De Clercq, *Verhandeling*, p. 326.

81 Petiet, *'Een voldingend bewijs'*, chapter 4; Van Kalmthout, 'Eccentric Authors', p. 37.

82 Johannes and Leemans, "'O Thou Great God of Trade'". Between 1770 and 1830 around fifteen remarkably lengthy poems were published engaging in this discourse.

83 Van den Berg, 'Verbeelding van het vaderland', pp. 317-318 and 333. De Clercq argues that nineteenth-century Dutch writers should not slavishly follow Golden Age authors nor foreign authors, since the needs of their century are different: 'De Schrijvers en Dichters der negentiende eeuw moeten even min de slaafsche navolgers onzer groote mannen uit de zeventiende, als die van de Letterkunde der Vreemden zijn. Ons tijdvak heeft nieuwe behoeften, en er zullen nieuwe vernuften verrijzen, geschikt om dezelve te bevredigen' (*Verhandeling*, p. 329).

Van Walrée manages to present Spain and its literary production without negative prejudices. The most important aspect in his positive assessment of Spain is the country's unanimous resistance to foreign oppressors, be it the Muslim conquerors or Napoleon's invasion. Thanks to the Napoleonic Wars, and the French enemy, the Spaniards had for the first time the chance to be viewed as the rebellious party bravely fighting an oppressor, a complete reversal from their image in the Dutch Revolt.⁸⁴ Some Dutch authors even give a twist to the shared narrative of national opposition, stating that, thanks to the struggle against the Dutch, the Spanish strengthened their own national character.⁸⁵ Van Walrée, as a child of his time, cannot resist some old prejudices regarding Spain, mainly regarding well-known Black Legend traits, such as religious bigotry, or very en passant cruelty in America, but in his main discourse, he is positive. He refers to Spaniards' religious intensity, a strong sense of independence and respect for honour, for their monarchs and for the feminine sex. All these Spanish national traits could be interpreted in a negative light, if placed against the Dutch Revolt narrative, but he does not do this.⁸⁶

Negotiating Spain in literary histories

The articulation of literary histories in the nineteenth century is highly relevant for the reconstruction of ambivalent attitudes towards the legacy of Spanish Golden Age drama. Although it is obvious that both English and Dutch authors regarded literary canons from a rather ethnocentric perspective, underlining the superiority of their own national literary heritage, we encounter both similarities and differences regarding perceptions towards Spanish materials. Through descriptive and prescriptive statements a clear negotiation of Spanish cultural legacy is visible, sometimes through occlusion, but mainly evinced through a rhetoric of opposition.

The English authors under scrutiny articulate a narrative of intrinsic literary opposition through the use of the luxuriance metaphor, whereas Dutch authors seem impaired in their appreciation of Spanish materials by a troubled historical common past. The historical opposition seems to block, at least in the first half of the century, literary comparisons on

84 Van Walrée, *Proeven*, pp. 161-162.

85 Such as Willem Cornelis van Campen in 1814. See Lotte Jensen's essay in this volume.

86 Van Walrée, *Proeven*, p. 174. There are more Dutch authors who, outside the genre of literary histories, appreciate Spanish literary production.

grounds of contents and influence or style. However, in both geographical cases, literary Hispanophobia and Hispanophilia are to be found hand in hand, in different degrees and expressions. Despite the fact that Spanish productions are in Dibdin's eyes 'strange farragoes', 'mad frolics' or 'a strange heterogeneous jumble of jarring atoms', one thing remains undeniable for him: 'Spaniards have left something behind worth imitating, whereas from the Roman authors we have nothing but a Greek filtration, tasteless and insipid.'⁸⁷ For his part, and despite formal criticism, George Lewes is very positive on the qualities of the standard-bearer of Spanish theatre, Lope de Vega. Dutch literary historians, marked by the national narrative of early modern Spanish oppression, will gradually come to evaluate Dutch-Spanish literary relations in a more nuanced light in the nineteenth century.

Nevertheless, it will not be until the second half of the century, in 1881, that literary historian and professor of Dutch Jan te Winkel would fully stress the undeniably close connection to Spanish literature.⁸⁸ Professor Te Winkel, 'the *grand old man* of Dutch literary history',⁸⁹ is described as a rationalist and liberal scholar with a penchant for scientific objectivity.⁹⁰ His academic interest extended beyond his chair in Dutch and old-Germanic literatures, and during his study he followed lectures by the renowned Arabist Reinhart Dozy, specialized in Islamic Spain. He was the son of a Protestant minister, but his views on Spain were not coloured by religious difference. According to him, Spanish influence was not limited to translations, but included a 'Spanish spirit' ('*Spaansche geest*') present in many Dutch works.⁹¹ He also strongly contended: 'If an explanatory history of Dutch literature in general is attempted, and in particular regarding Dutch drama, one should not overlook Spanish influence, neither Latin one, nor the influence of Lope de Vega or Seneca.'⁹² Did he wish to emphasize the importance of Spain's

87 Dibdin, *A Complete History*, vol. 1, pp. 132, 134, 163, 167.

88 Te Winkel, 'De invloed'.

89 By the renowned literary historian Wisse A.P. Smit in his 'Het Nederlandse Renaissance-toneel', p. 169 (emphasis in the original).

90 Spies, 'Te Winkel', pp. 333-335.

91 Te Winkel, 'De invloed', p. 113: 'De invloed van het Spaansch toneel kan dus allesbehalve gering genoemd worden, te minder wanneer men bedenkt, dat ook in vele niet vertaalde stukken de Spaansche geest heerscht, en vele andere geput zijn uit romans, die oorspronkelijk ook weder uit Spanje hierheen overkwamen.'

92 Ibid., 'Wanneer het dus geldt eene verklarende geschiedenis te geven van de Nederlandsche letterkunde in het algemeen, en het Nederlandsch tooneel in het bijzonder, mag men den invloed van het Spaansch evenmin over het hoofd zien, als dien van het Latijn, den invloed van Lope de Vega evenmin als van Seneca.'

literary legacy with his reference to Seneca, also born in Spain? In any case, Te Winkel's words seem to suggest that Spanish influence was not only a matter of skeletons or of flesh and blood, since it could also be intangible and present in 'spirit'.

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