

Medina Calzada, Sara. *José Joaquín de Mora and Britain: Cultural Transfers and Transformations*. Anglo-Iberian Studies Series. Peter Lang, 2022. 259 pages

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The publication of a book about the life and work of the nineteenth-century Spanish anglophile José Joaquín de Mora (1783-1864) was already peremptory and should therefore be received with joy. Until recently, only a few serious and compact studies have been published on Mora's multifaceted range of cultural, political and literary endeavors, but they concentrate only on specific aspects of de Mora's life and written production, thus lacking a sense of completeness and definitiveness.

Mora was the best disseminator of the British models to follow in Spain and in the new American countries regarding the urgent reformation of what was perceived as decadent and defective or inadequate in them. For the first time, a monograph has been published assembling with consistency and almost scientific thoroughness —it contains 675 footnotes— on his biographical highlights, trips, occupations, and the numerous activities carried out by this Spaniard, placing a special interest on his literary work. In her volume, Dr. Medina Calzada has collected Mora's life, deeds and oeuvre laying her studious emphasis on analyzing his regenerative enterprises within the literary, historical, social, economic and political framework in which he carried out his extensive and valuable work of encouragement of Anglo-Hispanic relations.

Mora is remembered today, above all, for his literary work *Leyendas españolas* (1840), for his personal recreation of Byron's *Don Juan*, and for being one of the first translators into Spanish of two novels by Walter Scott, namely *Ivanhoe* (1825) and *The Talisman* (1826). The Spanish translations of Scott's novel, completed between 1825 and 1840, exerted an unquestionable influence on the Spanish narrative of the time. Most of the existing translations had been done from the French versions of such novels (Peers and Montesinos). Thanks to the translations of Scott's historical novels, the so-called "scottismo" became fashionable in Spain, as numerous writers translated, adapted, imitated or published historical

novels set on Spanish soil.¹ The anglophile author was trying to separate Spanish literature from its close attachment to French literature.

Mora aptly demonstrated his intellectual versatility, an aspect on which the Medina insists. She provides ample evidence that Mora's oeuvre (generally not sufficiently known or widespread at his time and, as a result, difficult to access today) is indeed very extensive. Mora left no stone unturned as to the variety of activities and literary genres that he practiced during his adventurous life: he was a soldier during the Peninsular War (1807-1814; known in Spanish historiography as "Guerra de la Independencia"), a French prisoner, a spy, a political exile in London, a diplomat in England, a political commentator in numerous Spanish and Latin American newspapers and magazines, a journalist, a pedagogue, a historian, a translator (from English and French), an economist (a promoter of free trade à la anglaise and a disciple of Jeremy Bentham), a poet, a literary critic, a professor, a secretary, a political and legal advisor in Argentina, Peru, Chile and Bolivia, an active participant in the writing of the constitution of Chile of 1828, a member of the Royal Academy of the Spanish Language, a political authority in Madrid, as well as (probably) a convert to Protestantism. In each of those tasks, he stood out for his efficiency and his sincere endeavor to attempt to improve the countries, societies and people for whom he worked at different periods.

Medina Calzada has collected in a single volume what other researchers had done before her meritoriously, without a doubt, but only partially. In her book, the author insists on showing Mora's three fundamental ideas, namely a) that he was 'a multi-stringed guitar', a condition that turned him into a prolific and versatile intellectual and, therefore, a particularly respected scholar whose written production was of the highest relevance for the understanding of Spain, Latin America and Britain as well as the political, cultural, literary relations existing among them all, always from the perspective of a convinced Anglophile; b) that he tried to promote the much-needed reforms in a decadent Spain and a Latin America which was still in its infancy, all following the model of his admired Britain; c) that he tried to spread the the British achievements, which were at the peak of its international prestige at that particular point in time, among the Spanish-speaking countries for the benefit of them all. All in all, Medina Calzada has

thus tried to update and put the finishing touches on the meritorious but incomplete biographies of Mora written by Miguel Luis Amunátegui and Luis Monguió.

Medina Calzada's book is divided into four chapters. The first one analyses Mora's admiration of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Britain and British customs and political administration. In the second chapter, the author focuses on studying the educational accomplishments that Mora carried out on both sides of the Atlantic in order to disseminate Utilitarianism and the British economic theories of the time as well as the advantages of Smith, Mill and McCulloch's economic liberalism and the Scottish philosophy of Common Sense. In chapter three, she focuses on explaining Mora's attempts to spread the literary models of Romantic Britain in Spanish literature, with Byron, Scott and Shakespeare as his favorite authors. In the fourth chapter, Medina Calzada examines Mora's own literary work during the period in which he collaborated with the German publisher specializing in Spanish literature in London, R. Ackermann, as a result of which four issues of *No me olvides* (1825) and his collection of poems *Meditaciones poéticas* (1826) were published. In the latter, he evinced the powerful literary influence exerted by the British Romantics on his written production as well as by William Blake on a more visual level. Mora's books, speeches, pamphlets, articles and translations became genuine examples of what Blanco White came to label as "Anglo-Hispanic literature" (Torralbo Caballero 248).

The author closes her work with valuable appendices of the hitherto disseminated and sometimes even unknown complete oeuvre of Mora's. In the first appendix, she orders Mora's written production chronologically, from 1814 to 1859. The second appendix is devoted to the chronology of the correspondence between Bentham and Mora. The third appendix deals with the entries on political economics that Mora wrote for *Enciclopedia moderna* (1851-55). Finally, the fourth one presents the translations and adaptations of texts that Mora consulted and employed in order to write his *No me olvides* (1825). Finally, Medina Calzada includes a very extensive bibliography of Mora's primary sources and other 19th-century texts that influenced him, as well as a long list of secondary sources on the life and work of this prolific Spanish intellectual.

For all that has been explained, one cannot but conclude that Sara Medina Calzada's book is a mandatory one on the library shelves of any British, Spanish or Latin American scholar interested in the Anglo-Hispanic literary and political relations of the nineteenth century.

Notes

¹ Enrique Gil y Carrasco's novel *El Señor de Bambibre*, evidently influenced by *Ivanhoe*, *The Bride of Lammermoor* and *The Talisman*; or *El golpe en vago*, by José García Villalta, also influenced by *Ivanhoe* and *Guy Mannering*; or Telesforo de Trueba y Cossío, an exile in London and highly knowledgeable of English to the extent of being able to write and publish in this language relevant historical novels for an Anglophone readership such as *Gómes Arias or the Moors of the Alpujarras*, *Life of Hernan Cortes*, or *The Castilian*; José de Espronceda was also imbued in "scottismo", perceivable in his only published novel, *Sancho Saldaña o el Castellano de Cuéllar*; the same applies to Francisco Martínez de la Rosa in *Doña Isabel de Solís, reina de Granada*.

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