Spanish Romanticism and the Uses of History

Ideology and the Historical Imagination

Derek Flitter

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INTRODUCTION

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The Changeful History of Spanish Romanticism

The diverse political tyrannies of the twentieth century have left modern civilization no doubt as to the potential rewriting or reordering of history for ideological ends. Régimes such as that of Hitler in Germany, Stalin in Russia, or, more pointedly in the Spanish context, that presided over by General Franco between 1939 and 1975, employed a skewed and slanted account of the historical relationship, in both national and international terms, between past and present. Each of their respective rewritings is familiar to us as a form of self-justification, as a putative source of doctrinal truth, or as the revelation of an appointed destiny. We make a grave error, however, if we conceive of such a process as a strictly contemporary phenomenon; as Hayden White noted in his seminal analysis of the nineteenth-century historical imagination, most of the significant theoretical and ideological disputes occurring and developing in Europe between the time of the French Revolution and the Great War involved conflicting claims to the definitive or 'realistic' representation and explication of the current historical moment.[1] White is especially interested, he declares in the introduction to his *Metahistory*, in alternative interpretations of the same set of historical events and in differing notions of the nature of historical reality.[2] White's 'ideological dimension' in fact stems directly from the assumption, by the historian, of a particular perspective on the nature of historical knowledge and on the implications that may be drawn from the study of the past for the understanding of the present.[3]

Romantic historiography was to cohere in a period acutely subject to such ideologically significant narratives of past events. The political thrust of the Congress of Verona lay in a collective and corporate affirmation of a new Europe, predicated upon an alliance between the various European monarchies calculated both to preserve their own traditional rights and to function as a buttress against possible changes in political structures and in popular representation. Study of the past, as José Vila Selma avers, was thus enlisted as a particularly appropriate means by which to countervail revolutionary change, and one which led to an enhanced apprehension of the intimacies of historical events and processes. Historical writing was intended implicitly to revise and effectively to discard the equally revisionist Enlightenment perspective, which the proponents of this metaphysically orientated Romantic historiography would consistently dismiss as superficial empiricism. Vila Selma therefore identifies as keynotes of post-Napoleonic ideology the principle of royal legitimacy and, secondly, what he calls the desire to comprehend the world as a harmonious and unified whole, the conservative desire for a reassuringly integrated cosmological vision; this last was the ideological matrix of the work that he is here prefacing and one of the salient

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examples of the historical vision that he summarizes: Juan Donoso Cortés's trenchant *Ensayo sobre el catolicismo, el liberalismo y el socialismo* of 1851.[4]

What follows is a study of the Romantic historical imagination in Spain within the context of these defining ideological parameters. It is intended as a critical exploration of what, if we follow the promptings of Giovanni Allegra, we might interpret as an intellectual culture of conservative retrenchment. In Spain, as Allegra has forcefully indicated, a conspicuous defence of national cultural heritage targeted at hearts as well as minds had repeatedly baulked the dissemination of characteristic Enlightenment premises regarding the ordering of society, the workings of the individual psyche, or indeed regarding any form of philosophical speculation or aesthetic inclination. The end result was a marked refusal to countenance any of what the Italian critic designates the myths of our own time: in other words, the secular, rationalistic and democratic intellectual promptings that we associate with the modern age.[5] The reactionary struggle is itself articulated, he asserts, according to a conception of the world that denies modernity, and is aided and abetted by theories of art and literature that project and contain a justificatory reappraisal of Spain's distinctive historical culture. He depicts then a conscious return to that cultural legacy which the Enlightenment, in the shape of its French master practitioners and their Spanish adherents, had scorned and depreciated, to a tradition that, as he put it, had been placed in the dock and subjected to the arrogant and cynical interrogation of the *Encyclopédie*.[6]

The *casticista* campaign of cultural reclamation detailed by Allegra, as much as the strategies of historical legitimation highlighted by Vila Selma, broadly coincide in time and space, as the latter acknowledges, with Romanticism in its multifarious literary, philosophical and artistic forms.[7] We are consequently led to a further source of conflicting and conflictive interpretation, to what Iris M. Zavala, with particular reference to Spain, describes as a cultural production acutely susceptible to 'interpretaciones antagónicas' [antagonistic interpretations]; Romanticism figures in Spanish literary history, she observes, beneath the sign of the paradox.[8] We might indeed postulate, therefore, a second, superimposed, ideological dimension, one projected backwards from our own day upon the work of the Romantics themselves. Leonardo Romero, within the overview contained in his *Panorama crítico del romanticismo español*, makes what is a fundamental connection; referring to those 'componentes ideológicos' [ideological components] present in any and every scrutiny of the recent past, he contends that where Romanticism is concerned they go so far as to constitute a diagnostic test of the researcher's own affiliations.[9] Philip Silver, in his own revisionary thesis, stresses that perspectives on Spanish Romanticism have long been ideologically charged, and specifies one significant misreading: that of modern critics who, failing to find Spain's essentially conservative, *moderado*-led Romanticism to their liking and acutely conscious of the political events of their own day, 'imagined a liberal political and literary romanticism that had not in fact been there'. What they failed to take duly into account, he continues, was the series of interrelationships between historical Romanticism, the continuing bourgeois revolution of their own day, and the Romantic historiography of the period between 1840 and 1870, which went a long way towards defining our own present view of both mediaeval and modern Spanish history.[10]

Silver's candid reference to a 'substantial, politically interested, albeit conservative' Romanticism reinforces, from a different methodological angle, the thesis I put forward in my earlier polemical study of the reception of Romantic aesthetics in Spain.[11] Part of the original research for that book, but a component part that swiftly outgrew the dimensions that might have been assigned to it within the published volume, concerned the interpretation of history enunciated by Spanish intellectuals of the Romantic period, and particularly in the decade of the 1840s, when historical study possessed to a marked degree the kind of ideological dimension identified and defined by Hayden White. As Inman Fox declares in another recent assessment of nineteenth-century intellectual history, the construction of Spain's national cultural identity was essentially historico-political in nature; he subsequently cautions that such constructs are not always concerned with the elucidation of truth but more often contain the mythification or outright falsification of given moments in history.[12]

One problem with Inman Fox's assessment, as I see it, is his exclusion from discussion of those general histories of Spain published in the 1840s, which not only antedate but consistently anticipate, most crucially in their theological coordinates, the construction of national identity he feels to have been embarked upon from the mid-century. Concomitant with literary Romanticism and possessing many profound points of contact with it, the historical outlook of the period prior to 1850 is best characterized by what Ana-Sofía Pérez-Bustamante Mourier calls the unqualifiedly conservative slant taken by forms of *casticismo* from the writings of the political and religious reactionaries of the late eighteenth century and after, a cultural nationalism implanted from the higher intellectual echelons of Spanish society but thriving among the population at large as a result of its encapsulation of an instinctively felt and intimately desired populism.[13] Within a period she defines as the germination of modernity, Pérez-Bustamante Mourier specifies a retrenched and defiant cultivation of *lo castizo* at an historical moment when not just popular imaginative identity but also an entire 'sistema integralista nacional' [integrationist national system] was perceived to be under serious threat.[14]

Just how closely these comments dovetail not just with my own analysis of Spanish Romantic literary theory and criticism and with Philip Silver's depiction of a triumphant historical Romanticism, but also, much more specifically, with the dominant interpretative tenor of Romantic historiography, will become increasingly clear as the wider picture I am constructing here begins to emerge. Deserving of notice at this stage, as a signally clear portent of the intellectual context in which my study will be immersed, is Pérez-Bustamante Mourier's assertion that such populist affirmations of a distinctive national identity are especially marked in moments of historical crisis or uncertain transition, at those critical junctures when 'fuerzas cohesionadoras' [cohesive forces] are invoked in the face of revolutionary encroachment. In this way, she continues, the consciously intellectual culture of the Enlightenment generates a broad-based conscious reaction in which *lo castizo* constitutes a relentless and uncompromising attack upon those allegedly subversive ideas that threaten to corrode the prevailing integrationist model. *Casticismo* is, then, within Pérez-Bustamante Mourier's terms, a movement in defence of the national past corresponding to a *Volksgeist*-dominated Romanticism, one that re-fashions popular tradition in a manner that

is essentialist and metaphysical in its emphases.[15] Similarly, much of nineteenth-century intellectual history is characterized by the calculated manipulation of *casticista* prescriptions by the forces of ideological reaction.[16]

It goes without saying, therefore, that I shall be especially concerned, like Hayden White, with those histories that contain, as well as data, 'theoretical concepts for "explaining" these data, and a narrative structure for their presentation as an icon of sets of events presumed to have occurred in times past'.[17] Antonio Gil y Zárate, in embarking upon an expansive introduction to modern history ('modern', as the Romantic period understood it, as referring to the entire period from the fall of the Roman Empire), professed his task to lie in probing the causes of events and the relationships between them, and to uncover, in a word, their interdependence.[18] As the cultural historian José Amador de los Ríos put it in 1845, the nineteenth-century mind had imprinted upon the study of history the hallmark of philosophy; it was prompted to investigate earlier processes of both cause and effect, in order not just to avoid any repetition of deleterious examples of the former but also to extract salutary lessons from an intimation of the latter.[19] Historical writing thus involved a search for what the philosopher and historian Tomás García Luna, writing in 1847, called the intimate correspondence between apparently unconnected events and for a founding principle by which to explain them, a search that he felt had been made possible by Vico's *Scienza nuova*.[20] Spanish Romantic historiography, to cite Emilio Castelar's Ateneo lectures of 1858, much more than a narrative of events comes to be an exposition of a systematic philosophy in which 'los hechos vienen a ser la forma de las ideas' [factual events become the formal expression of ideas], a system defined by 'leyes incontestables' [unanswerable laws];[21] it therefore subscribes, within Hayden White's conceptual pattern, to the 'Organicist' mode of historical writing that is characterized by transcendent aspiration.

Again like White, but with more specific application to Spain, within rather less ample theoretical referents, and with rather closer regard to the anatomy of a single intellectual generation, I aim to probe that level of consciousness on which a writer chooses such conceptual strategies by which to explain or represent history.[22] It is a task not heretofore undertaken with reference to the period of Spanish Romanticism proper: Manuel Moreno Alonso's panoramic *Historiografía romántica española* is, as its sub-title implies, conceived as a broad introduction to the general tenor of nineteenth-century historical study, and does not include within its professed remit any close analysis of the kind of ideological dimension I have begun to identify here;[23] Inman Fox, meanwhile, elects end-dates that preclude the integration of Romantic historiography into an intellectual focus that is otherwise much nearer to my own. The lack of a thoroughgoing study, with specific reference to Spain, of the Romantic historical imagination is all the more striking when we bear in mind that historical thinking in the Romantic period is acutely marked by what White describes as the degree of theoretical self-consciousness with which historians researched the past and subsequently constructed their narrative accounts of events.[24] We are dealing, after all, with decades that saw the rigorous modern implantation within Spain of the philosophy of history as a key intellectual and theological concern; those historical studies that will form the bedrock of my thesis are ones in which, again in White's

terms, 'the element of conceptual construct is brought to the fore, explicitly set forth, and systematically defended, with the data used primarily for purposes of illustration or exemplification'.[25]

For the sake of clarity and with a view to the construction of an original thesis with appropriate and transparent connections, I have isolated six principal areas of investigation. Firstly, I deal with the intellectual parameters of the Romantic 'mediaeval revival', a broad artistic phenomenon that, within Spain, is a prevalent factor both quantitatively and in terms of its ideological content. An idealized view of the Middle Ages, particularly the Spanish Middle Ages, imaginatively recalled as a stable and reassuring moral universe via specifiable and ideologically significant emphases that stem directly from the dominant Schlegelian pattern, provides, more than any other area of historical inquiry, the fundamentals of the Spanish Romantic response to the past. Chapters two and three are then concerned with conflicting and politically laden sequential interpretations of history. Guizot's 'elementary' and progressive formula, together with Vico's cyclical and providentialist account, with their respective ideological labels firmly attached, represent the battleground upon which politically interested interpretations of history struggle for intellectual supremacy. The prevalent reliance upon Vico's pattern as a discourse of order and authority reveals much of the psychological intimacy of the intellectual moment, and anticipates a substantial part of the language and rhetoric of the dominant historical perspective on the recent past. Assessments of the contemporary moment, in the wake of the perceived collapse of Enlightenment premises, the cataclysm of the French Revolution and the uncertainties of Spain's turbulent nineteenth century, are predicated upon a desired return to established scales of value and an unconditional adherence to Catholic tradition, and, accordingly, upon a trenchantly conservative, *casticista* historical reading that draws much of its inspiration from the earlier religious reactionaries and their committedly Manichaean narrative of history. Chapter four examines the rejection of Enlightenment formulae and the primitive fear of an absent but pyschologically potent Revolution, while the following chapter moves on to consider historical diagnoses of nineteenth-century reality within the prism of the 'Two Spains' and to postulate the prevailing emphases of the *década moderada*. Chapter six then appraises the *casticista* credentials of Romantic literary history, focusing upon its acute reiteration of the kind of cultural nationalism contained in Schlegelian Romantic theory and upon its exclusion from its chosen canon of both neo-Classical formalism and radical, principally French, manifestations of Romanticism. The concluding chapter seeks to relocate Romantic thought within Spanish intellectual history by cementing its connections both with earlier reactionary formulae and the later historical prescriptions of the distinguished cultural historian Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo. It aims also to chart the consecutive processes of historical transference, whereby successive generations relate the prevailing thought and response of their own age to those of their historical predecessors. Such transferential readings constitute the most fundamental continuity within modern Spanish history.

In the broadest terms, what I have sought to do is to provide a convincing explication of Spain's Romantic historical imagination and its increasingly conservative drift in the twenty or so years preceding and immediately following the mid-century. For,

as is now widely acknowledged, the triumph of a liberal Romanticism after 1833 was precarious and short-lived: Vila Selma's assertion of the 'coincidencia triunfante' [triumphant coincidence] of literary Romanticism and political liberalism throughout western Europe, as a result of which those more conservative forms of Romanticism surrendered both popularity and imaginative potential,[26] like so many similar proclamations delivered within the last thirty years, is deceptive and unreliable, and effectively discards not just the majority of the Spanish movement's creative output but also, and most crucially in the present context, the apprehension of the relationship between past and present upon which that output was largely founded.[27] Only a thoroughgoing consciousness of the extent and significance of diverse forms of *casticismo* enables us to reconcile the ultimate direction of literary Romanticism in Spain with its conflictive historical moment and with the interpretative tenor of contemporary assessments of the past.

Notes to the Introduction

1. *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore, 1973), p. 46.
2. *Metahistory*, p. 13.
3. *Metahistory*, p. 22.
4. See Vila Selma's introduction to his annotated edition of the *Ensayo sobre el catolicismo, el liberalismo y el socialismo* (Madrid, 1978), pp. 13–14.
5. *La viña y los surcos. las ideas literarias en España del XVIII al XIX* (Seville, 1980), p. 13.
6. *La viña y los surcos*, pp. 13–14.
7. Donoso Cortés, *Ensayo*, 'Introducción', p. 13.
8. *Romanticismo y realismo. Primer suplemento*, Historia crítica de la literatura española, ed. by Francisco Rico, 5.1 (Barcelona, 1994), p. 25.
9. *Panorama crítico del romanticismo español* (Madrid, 1994), p. 74.
10. *Ruin and Restitution: Reinterpreting Romanticism in Spain* (Liverpool, 1997), p. xiii.
11. *Spanish Romantic Literary Theory and Criticism* (Cambridge, 1992); it was followed by a Spanish version, *Teoría y crítica del romanticismo español* (Cambridge, 1995).
12. *La invención de España: nacionalismo liberal e identidad nacional* (Madrid, 1997), pp. 12–14.
13. 'Cultura popular, cultura intelectual y casticismo', in *Casticismo y literatura en España* ed. by Ana-Sofía Pérez Bustamante Mourier and Alberto Romero Ferrer (Cadiz, 1992), pp. 125–62 (148–49).
14. 'Cultura popular, cultura intelectual y casticismo', p. 150.
15. 'Cultura popular, cultura intelectual y casticismo', pp. 150–51.
16. 'Cultura popular, cultura intelectual y casticismo', p. 152.
17. *Metahistory*, p. ix.
18. *Introducción a la historia moderna; o, Examen de los diferentes elementos que han entrado a constituir la civilización de los actuales pueblos europeos. Lecciones dadas en el Liceo Artístico y Literario de Madrid* (Madrid, 1841), p. 7.
19. 'Estudios históricos: el rey don Pedro', *El Laberinto*, 2 (1845), 150–51 (p. 150).
20. '¿Cuál es el provecho que puede reportarse de las investigaciones históricas acerca de Grecia y Roma? ¿Por qué es reciente la filosofía de la historia?', *Revista Científica y Literaria*, 1 (1847), 378–82 (p. 381). García Luna was an influential figure in Spanish philosophical circles whose *Manual de historia de la filosofía* was to become a textbook at almost every national university.
21. *La civilización en los cinco primeros siglos del cristianismo. Lecciones pronunciadas en el Ateneo de Madrid*, 3 vols (Madrid, 1858), III, 55.
22. *Metahistory*, p. x.
23. Manuel Moreno Alonso, *Historiografía romántica española: introducción al estudio de la historia en el siglo XIX* (Seville, 1979). Moreno Alonso's study, together with Allegra's *La viña y los surcos* and Javier Herrero's *Los orígenes del pensamiento reaccionario español*, has nevertheless proved an invaluable documentary source and remains an excellent point of departure for the specialist.

24. *Metahistory*, p. 39.
25. *Metahistory*, pp. 427–28.
26. Donoso Cortés, *Ensayo*, 'Introducción', pp. 16–17. Only thus can he categorically state at the outset that 'Donoso jamás fue romántico' [Donoso was never a Romantic] (9), an imprudently sweeping declaration that is at odds with a great deal of the textual evidence.
27. A perspective comparable to that adduced by Vila Selma can be found, for example, in Susan Kirkpatrick, 'Spanish Romanticism', in *Romanticism in National Context*, ed. by Roy Porter and Mikuláš Teich (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 260–83. Kirkpatrick attempts to subordinate all of the material evidence to a formulaic Marxist definition, programmatically accounting for the historical development of Spanish Romanticism — as much the uncertainty of its hold as its precisely fixed heyday and its alleged attenuation after 1843 — with reference to 'the erratic progress of Spain's liberal revolution'(pp. 262–66).

CHAPTER 1

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The Meaning of the Mediaeval Revival

The most prominent feature of Romanticism's imaginative vision of the historical past, what John B. Halsted has called the historicizing of Europeans' thought, was unquestionably the revival of creative and intellectual interest in the Middle Ages; Halsted himself highlighted the Gothic revival in art and architecture, the historical view of their own work expressed by the German Romantic theorists, and their dating of the beginnings of the modern era to the end of the Roman Empire.[1] All of these, but perhaps most pointedly in the present context the last, reveal how Romantic historicism provided nineteenth-century Europe with an entirely new perspective on the past. Voltaire and Enlightenment historians generally had mapped out, in their respective overviews of historical development, what amounted to a sequence of peaks and troughs, of brilliant civilizations — signally Classical antiquity and the European Renaissance — alternating with more extended periods of dissolution and savagery. Romantic writers, on the other hand, preferred to see the period between the fall of Rome and the Renaissance not as a barbaric Dark Ages but as an historical epoch superior in every sense to the Classical age, particularly in its celebration of a transcendent religion and in its nurturing of the elevated values of the chivalric ideal. This 'mediaeval revival', or cultural reclaiming of the Middle Ages as a period of extraordinary and unsurpassed human dynamism and sublimity, came to be a broad-based and pervasive influence affecting many diverse aspects of art and life. Mediaevalism in all areas of creative art and study acquired overtly sentimental and elegiac terms as a lament for a more noble past, one imaginatively endowed with a legendary or even supernatural mystique that allowed it to transcend what now came to be seen as the brutalizing prescriptions of philosophical rationalism and rampant materialism. Chateaubriand epitomized the imaginative effect of a Gothic church by stating that as one contemplated it 'L'ancienne France semblait revivre' [the France of old seemed to come back to life],[2] while Jules Michelet memorably evoked his researches in the Archives du Royaume in recounting that 'Je ne tardai pas à m'apercevoir dans le silence apparent de ces galeries, qu'il y avait un mouvement, un murmure qui n'était pas de la mort [...] Tous vivaient et parlaient' [It did not take me long to perceive that in the apparent silence of those galleries there was a movement, a murmuring that was not of death [...] Everything lived and spoke].[3]

Spain was no exception to this Romantic preference for the Middle Ages. What effectively began with the espousal and dissemination, by Johann Nikolaus Böhl von Faber, Agustín Durán, and others, of the mediaevalizing tenets of Schlegelian

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Romantic theory became further popularized with the translation and imitation of the works of Walter Scott.[4] The trend, extended and accentuated after the Romantic 'explosion' of 1834–37, saw historical novels and dramas, verse narrative *leyendas*, and prose *cuentos*, all conspire to produce a literary ferment that extended to many other areas of writing. Magazines and periodicals carried numerous commentaries on characters and episodes from national history, from folkloric and religious traditions, and from earlier periods of Spanish literature, while potted accounts of the best examples of native architecture, religious and secular, normally accompanied by reference to famous events connected with each of them, as well as far more extensive projects such as Parcerisa and Piferrer's *Recuerdos y bellezas de España*, furnish untold evidence of this striking popular interest in the national past. In its first five weeks of publication, Mesonero Romanos's *Semanario Pintoresco Español*, which was to run under a series of editors from 1836 to 1857, carried features on San Lorenzo del Escorial, Fernán González, Westminster Abbey (a piece written by Mesonero himself under the heading 'Abadía de Westminster'), the Alcázar de Segovia, the Palacio de Buenavista and Gonzalo de Córdoba.[5]

In intellectual terms, a return to the Middle Ages became, as Alice Chandler cogently expressed it, a way of reorganizing humanity into a closely knit and organically harmonious set of structures that could engage emotions and loyalties with a wealth of traditions and customs.[6] As modern Europe faced a chaotic period of radical social upheaval and political instability (and Spain was certainly no exception here) the Middle Ages were increasingly idealized and viewed nostalgically as a desirable alternative to the traumas of recent experience. As I have shown elsewhere, a return to the literary traditions of the national past was consistently regarded by Spanish Romantic critics as a means of inspiring broader collective improvement.[7] This 'regenerationist' view of national literary tradition had proved a characteristic feature of the new sensibility as expressed by the German theorists so influential in determining the course of Romanticism in Spain. Moreover, as Siegbert Prawer has shrewdly reminded us, that new sensibility went hand in hand with endeavours to make history serve a purpose different from any envisaged by the Enlightenment; both art and history were perceived as enabling elements in the regenerative process, holding up to the present images of an idealized past that might help to shape future development.[8] At a period of crisis intensified by the far-reaching breakdown of religious beliefs and established values for which the Enlightenment was increasingly held responsible, the harmonious and unitary belief-system and cultural patterns of the mediaeval period began not just wistfully to be eulogized and imaginatively to be evoked but ideologically to be reasserted. The vogue enjoyed by things mediaeval, that is the intrinsically sentimental appeal of a vague romantic attachment, was thus no more than a surface image; once we scratch that surface, we become aware of much more fundamental intellectual processes at work.

Hayden White identifies as common denominators of historical consciousness in the first half of the nineteenth century an antipathy for Enlightenment rationalism and 'a sympathy for those aspects of both history and humanity which the Enlighteners had viewed with scorn or condescension'.[9] The aspirations of historical study, he goes so far as to claim, are best characterized 'in terms of what it objected to in its

eighteenth-century predecessors', most specifically the essential irony of their outlook and the scepticism of their cultural reflection.[10] Manuel Moreno Alonso, whose broad introduction to nineteenth-century Spanish historiography remains the best starting point for any specialized scrutiny, similarly underlines as one of the salient trends of the Romantic period its harsh criticism of the historical studies produced by the preceding generation, which, it alleged, had neither taken the Middle Ages properly into account nor ascribed to that period its true worth.[11] The point is amply borne out by any number of sources; as just one example Fermín Gonzalo Morón, in the introduction to what began as a series of lectures delivered in Valencia and Madrid in 1840 and 1841 and subsequently became one of the most extensive general histories of Spain to be written in the 1840s, bemoaned the indifference and general disdain that 'los filósofos del siglo XVIII' [eighteenth-century philosophers] had, with few exceptions, bestowed upon historical study. Voltaire in particular he decried, claiming that his appraisal of the feudal system, of chivalry, and of the entire political order of mediaeval Europe, had been 'casi siempre superficial y muchas veces inexacta y falsa' [virtually always superficial and often false and inaccurate].[12] At much the same time, Antonio Gil y Zárate was asserting that until the end of the previous century modern Europe had laboured under the yoke of 'los recuerdos antiguos' [memories of ancient times]; the models of Classical antiquity, he argued, had dominated artistic and literary production as they had public institutions, and had been seen to represent exclusive standards of perfection, so much so that eighteenth-century reformers, in their desire to promote civil liberties, had, regrettably, used the examples of 'famosas repúblicas' [famous republics] that were 'nada aplicables al estado actual de las sociedades' [by no means applicable to the current state of human societies].[13] In referring to 'las dos grandes divisiones que constituyen la historia universal' [the two great component parts that together make world history], he regretted the fact that Europe in the modern age had not until recent years been accorded the attention nor the privileged position it undoubtedly merited; in particular, he specified the relative neglect in historiography of the period following the collapse of the Roman Empire, an historical age that had remained largely unknown, set aside as merely 'siglos de ignorancia y barbarie' [centuries of ignorance and barbarism]. It had nonetheless proved, he now contended, the cradle of the modern nation-states of Europe and the birthplace of contemporary institutions; it had passed on to later times the cultural legacy of language and artistic heritage, while the noble families of modern Europe all claimed descent from 'nuestra edad heroica' [our heroic age]. In the midst of that 'caos informe' [shapeless chaos], he continued, resided the germ of a new order of things, of 'una nueva civilización de todo punto superior a la civilización antigua, y más digna de la naturaleza divina del hombre' [a new civilization superior in every respect to that of the ancients and more worthy of man's divine nature].[14]

Rafael Mitjana, writing in 1845, agreed with Gonzalo Morón and Gil y Zárate that the previous age had not accorded the mediaeval period its due. He credited more recent scholarly investigation into the cultural history of the Middle Ages with having cast new light on that period, with the result that far from being the primitive and barbarous era that it was often casually labelled, the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in particular had outshone the most brilliant ages in all of those areas of knowledge

where human dignity and idealism are customarily most evident.[15] The art historian José Caveda, writing later in the decade, would view the whole issue in similar terms. In describing the inspiration of thinkers and creative writers of the Enlightenment, he observed that by comparison with the magnificent artistic contribution of the Classical world, that of the Middle Ages seemed to them lacking in worth and less deserving of their attention, although it was from the latter period that were derived 'las modernas sociedades, y su religión, y sus leyes, y su nacionalidad y sus costumbres' [modern societies, their religion, their laws, and their diverse nationhood and social custom]; this misreading he felt to be a fatal error.[16] As he saw it, then, 'las exigencias del clasicismo y el orgullo enciclopédico' [the demands of Classicism and the vanity of the *Encyclopédie*] had led to a deviation from historical truth, which had been lost from sight. He further explained his interpretation of events by asserting that the eighteenth century had placed undue trust in 'vanas teorías' [vacuous theories], and had allowed itself to be influenced more by what he labels 'escepticismo intolerante de la época' [the intolerant scepticism of that age] than by 'las tradiciones y venerables recuerdos de nuestros padres' [the traditions and venerable reminders of our forebears].[17] An ostensible result of this erroneous perspective had thus been, he went on, that any one of his eighteenth-century predecessors, seduced by the dogmas professed by 'los preceptistas' [preceptists], would necessarily have failed to comprehend mediaeval architecture and would accordingly have perceived examples of it as no more than the inspiration of uncultured and primitive peoples.[18] Eventually, however, had come the historical opportunity to put an end to this exclusivist Classicism; only then and for the first time had men of learning begun seriously to examine a Middle Ages that had previously lain in darkness and that was now, instead and by contrast, 'enaltecida con sus tradiciones, con la importancia de sus colosales empresas, con sus castillos góticos y espléndidos torneos, con el espíritu caballeresco de sus héroes y paladines, con sus leyendas misteriosas y sus trovas' [set on high with all of its traditions, with the greatness of its colossal undertakings, with its Gothic castles and splendid tourneys, with the knightly spirit of its heroes and its paladins, with its mysterious legends and the poetry of its troubadours].[19]

Caveda's text may be said to contain all of those structural dichotomies that were so forcefully to characterize the Romantic historical imagination in Spain. On the one hand, the historical overview predominant at the time of the Enlightenment is disparaged wholesale as a product of that intellectual arrogance typically pertaining to adherents of the *Encyclopédie*, as a set of spurious notions prompted by the intolerant scepticism of preceptists blinded by their own dogma, something that had distorted and misled in a perversion of historical truth. On the other, we find imaginatively exalted the sacred traditions of a God-fearing society underpinned by stable and enduring values, an historical age that had inspired humanity with the sublimity of its magnificent deeds and with the idealism of its chivalric enthusiasm. Caveda's insistence upon the mediaeval origins of 'religión', 'leyes', 'nacionalidad' and 'costumbres', meanwhile, provides an intimation of the *casticista* ideological prism that was to prove the hallmark of Romantic conceptions of early Spanish history.

José Amador de los Ríos, by 1850 an established academic at the University of Madrid, was as scathing as any of his colleagues when it came to the alleged

prejudices of Enlightenment historians against the Middle Ages. The *Ilustración* [the Enlightenment] had, in his view, unjustly maligned with the repulsive and unjustifiable label of 'barbaric' everything that was great, everything that was beautiful and everything that was sublime in the art and literature of the mediaeval era. He now went so far as to depict a form of historical conspiracy in which the efforts of rhetoricians, artists and poets had been harnessed in a calculated attempt to consign a set of precious but undervalued treasures to historical oblivion.[20] The Enlightenment idea of a 'Dark Ages', he insisted, was belied by the evidence (he singled out here the sublimity of mediaeval cathedrals), and he once again imputed to eighteenth-century cultural historians a blind Classicist prejudice: had it not been ludicrous to expect that feudal barons, heroic crusader knights and the Spanish warriors of the Reconquest should have felt and acted like Greek and Roman heroes? Since the two ages could not possibly have been united in their expression of feeling, in their systems of belief, and in their political and civil institutions, why had historical commentators been unable duly to appreciate the imaginative depiction of these great warriors 'con su verdadera fisonomía, con su brillante colorido?' [with their true features, in their brilliant colouring].[21]

As irresistibly suggested by a number of the above citations, Romantic historians in Spain as elsewhere in Europe did not wish merely to redress the perceived imbalance between the respective views of Classical antiquity and the mediaeval period that had previously obtained. It became a systematic part of their procedure to underscore the superiority of the Christian Middle Ages over the pagan societies of Greece and Rome. As Gil y Zárate expressed it, the last days of Rome were ones in which a 'civilización estacionaria' [static civilization] was sliding inexorably into barbarism; at such a moment it was indispensable that 'nuevos elementos' [fresh elements] breathe new life into an expiring society that had lost all of its vitality and vigour. These new elements of civilization were provided, he declared, firstly by the nature of the Christian faith and secondly by 'las instituciones germánicas' [the Germanic institutions] — a characteristic contemporary reference to the social organization of the tribes of northern Europe — 'que obraron en la caduca sociedad romana una revolución completa' [which worked an utter revolution upon the decaying society of Rome].[22] Gil y Zárate's account, like so many others written during the period in question, assumes something of a programmatic quality in asserting that, with the preponderance of Christianity, 'una religión espiritual reemplazaba a otra que se fundaba en el materialismo; sentimientos y deseos de nueva especie agitaban poderosamente los ánimos, y les comunicaban un extraordinario impulso' [a spiritual religion was now replacing one that been founded on materialism; feelings and aspirations of a new kind were working feverishly upon hearts and minds and lending to them an extraordinary urgency]. Christianity therefore attained, in Gil y Zárate's lectures as in those much earlier ones delivered in Vienna by A. W. Schlegel, the preeminent status of 'regenerador del mundo antiguo y creador de otro mundo nuevo' [regenerator of the ancient world and creator of a new and different one].[23] This essential dualism is maintained as the Spanish writer subsequently observes that since Classical antiquity had depicted only 'el hombre exterior' [outer man], it contained no true conception of the spiritual nature of the inner man, 'ni esa lucha de las dos