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THE PROPAGANDISTIC NARRATION OF THE DEFEAT OF THE SPANISH ARMADA AND THE MYTHICAL CONSTRUCTION OF SIR FRANCIS DRAKE IN ROMANTIC BRITAIN

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ABSTRACT: In this article, I analyse the literary images of the Spanish Armada and of one of its main English protagonists, Sir Francis Drake, as perceived and depicted by Robert Southey and by a number of British Romantic poets, travel and short story writers (George Lipscomb, Lord Byron, Thomas Babington Macaulay, Joseph Train, Mrs Anna Eliza Bray and Christian Isobel Johnstone). In their literary descriptions of the alleged Spanish naval disaster in 1588, they spread the English «victory» to a wider and a younger readership and mocked Spain's past naval hegemony. As far as the depiction of the legendary Drake, they insisted on presenting an idealised version of the English hero. I explain the gradual Romantic construction of two popular English myths that are still rampant in the British imaginary: the uncontested English victory on the Spanish Armada in 1588 and the deification of the persona of Drake, a process in which Southey took a leading role.

KEY WORDS: English Romanticism; The Spanish Armada; Sir Francis Drake; Robert Southey; Thomas Babington Macaulay; Anna Eliza Bray; Devonshire folklore

EL RELATO PROPAGANDÍSTICO DE LA DERROTA DE LA GRAN ARMADA Y LA CONSTRUCCIÓN MÍTICA DE SIR FRANCIS DRAKE EN LA GRAN BRETAÑA ROMÁNTICA

Resumen: En este artículo analizo las imágenes literarias de la Gran Armada y de uno de sus principales protagonistas ingleses, Sir Francis Drake, tal como las percibieron y representaron Robert Southey y otros poetas, escritores de viajes y cuentos románticos británicos (George Lipscomb, Lord Byron, Thomas Babington Macaulay, Joseph Train,

Mrs Anna Eliza Bray y Christian Isobel Johnstone). En sus descripciones literarias del supuesto desastre naval español en 1588, difundieron la «victoria» inglesa a un público más amplio y más joven y se burlaron de la pasada hegemonía naval de España. En cuanto a la representación del legendario Drake, insistieron en presentar una versión idealizada del héroe inglés. Explico la paulatina construcción romántica de dos mitos populares ingleses que aún proliferan en el imaginario británico: la inapelable «victoria» de los ingleses sobre la Armada en 1588 y la deificación del personaje de Drake, proceso en el que Southey tuvo un papel protagonista.

Palabras Clave: Romanticismo inglés; la Gran Armada; Sir Francis Drake; Robert Southey; Thomas Babington Macaulay; Anna Eliza Bray; folclore del condado de Devon.

The propagandistic English literature and historiography written about England/ Britain's victory over the Spanish Armada in 1588 throughout nearly three centuries gradually converted into an educational resource for a younger readership due to the relentless passing of time and the loss of the events' historical immediacy. A didactic as well as a patriotic perspective was given to most narrative poetry on the Armada written from the late 17th century onwards, a process that culminated in the 19th century. Indeed, in 1798, at the very entrance gate of the Romantic period, Wordsworth and Coleridge's friend and ideological partner Robert Southey (1774-1843) published the poem «The Spanish Armada». This poem was aptly written to raise patriotic morale while Britain felt threatened once more by a possible French invasion due to the signing of the Treaty of Basel (1795), whereby Spain and revolutionary France allied against Britain (Saglia, 2000: 42). Though considered by Southey himself as a «minor» piece of his literary production, hence its later inclusion in The Minor Poems of Robert Southey (1823, 11: 43-46), the poem was read by a good number of young and adult readers, especially after he was made Poet Laureate in 1813 and the danger of an alien invasion had disappeared. The poem was also included in another edition of his poetical corpus, Selections from the Poems of Robert Southey, Esq. LL. D. Poet Laureate, &c. &c.: Chiefly for the Use of Schools and Young Persons (1831: 89-90) aimed at a young readership, and in The Poetical Works of Robert Southey *Collected by Himself* (1837, 11: 187-88).

In the twelve unrhymed quatrains of «The Spanish Armada» Southey tells of the imprudent attempt of the Spaniards to conquer England in 1588. The simplicity of the language used —the «language really used by men», as Wordsworth wrote in the 1800 edition of the «Preface» of the *Lyrical Ballads* (1, 1800: 5)— and the straightforwardness of the patriotic message conveyed made the poem easily assimilated and subsequently valued by the new Romantic readership. Whereas Spain, described in the 1798 poem as Britain's foe, represents Papism, foolish triumphalism and wrath, Britain is depicted as a country benefitting from a perfect communion with nature, which is always on England's side. Furthermore, English sailors and Southey's compatriots seemed to boast an inborn manliness and vitality and as well as love of freedom to fight and shake off "the stranger's yoke» (l. 28). Indeed, the Spaniards —«O fools!» (l. 1 and 3)— had proved to be too unwise for not having anticipated the gallantry of the British mariners, Britain's love of freedom, or the open favouritism that the personified Nature, Ocean, Winds and Waves showed for England.

I By then Southey had travelled to the Iberian Peninsula (1795-96) and published *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Spain and Portugal... With some Account of Spanish and Portugueze Poetry* (1797). This travel book offers the first testimony of Southey's initiation into things Spanish and Portuguese that eventually made him one of the leading English Hispanists and Lusophiles of the early 19th century.

Southey begins the poem by describing the empty enthusiasm and unreasonable optimism for victory of the huge and proud Spanish Armada when they left Coruña for England: «They go to triumph o'er the sea-girt land, / And Rome hath blest their arms» (1. 7-8). The Spaniards feel especially confident for having the Pope's blessing. The sea journey of the Armada is made in good weather («Clear shone the morn, the gale was fair», l. 1). The Spanish fleet, described as a «moving citadel» (l. 21), sails majestically until it comes to «the silvery cliffs» of the «sea-girt land» (l. 7, 24, 26, 40) that is England, Nature's ally. Indeed, Southey is fully invested in the *Lyrical Ballads* manifesto, whereby «the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature» (I, 1800: 5). The unnamed «Spanish despot» (l. 42) of the poem (=Philip II of Spain) can hear the storms in the distance, an image that anticipates the bad news he will soon receive in his «palace-towers» (l. 41). England is presented as being on the right side, on Nature's side, whereas her enemies (ruled by a tyrant and the Pope) are represented by the grandiose urban entities of Rome and the Spanish «palace-towers»:

O fools! to think that ever foe Should triumph o'er that sea-girt land! O fools! to think that ever Britain's sons Should wear the stranger's yoke!

For not in vain hath Nature rear'd Around her coast thouse silvery cliffs; For not in vain old Ocean spreads his waves To guard his favourite isle!

On come her gallant mariners! What now avail Rome's boasted charms? Where are the Spaniards's vaunts of eager wrath? His hopes of conquest now?

And hark! The angry Winds arise; Old Ocean heaves his angry Waves; The Winds and Waves against the invaders fight, To guard the sea-girt land. (l. 25-40)

The first decades of the 19th century brought a new propagandistic corpus of victorious English poems that added to a long continuum of an earlier ideological production that insisted on portraying Spain's shameful naval defeat and the loss of her hegemony of the seven seas. In his poem, Southey employed an informal (and juvenile) tenor to describe the Spanish/Catholic venture of 1588 as a laughable fiasco, depicted merely as an entertaining episode for the pleasure and the patriotic satisfaction of young British minds. An example of Southey's attempt to «infantilise» his Armada poem may be found in the allusion to the aid given to the English navy by «Daddy Neptune» in the defence of England (all daddies defend their children from danger). The Roman god of the seas does not hesitate to boast his partiality for a maritime country *par excellence* such as England.

The playwright Thomas John Dibdin the «Younger» (1771–1841) had his popular «historical» poem/song «The Tight Little Island» published during the first third of the 19th century and reedited in chapbooks several times, under different titles such as «Daddy

Neptune» (1815-25) or «The Snug Little Island» (1820). In fact, I have found the poem in four anonymous compilations/chapbooks, *The Tight Little Island, When the Hollow DRUM, and There was an Old Woman in our Town* (1818); *Catharine Ogie, to which are added Daddy Neptune and The Lincolnshire Knight* (1815-25); *The Bonny Lass of Calder Braes, to which are added, The Snug Little Island, Jeanny's Bawbee, and Q Mary of Scotland's Farwel to Calais* (1824), and *The Lyre: A Collection of the Most Approved English, Irish, and Scottish Songs, Ancient and Modern* (1824, I: 72-74), clear evidence of its popularity at the time. It was the only song performed in Dibdin's comical play *The British Raft* (1797-98), written around the same time as Southey's «The Spanish Armada».

However, in Dibdin's «The Tight Little Island», played on stage as a jig, the French threat of invasion of Britain during the recent Napoleonic Wars was ridiculed, especially now that France had stopped being dangerous after Bonaparte's defeat at Waterloo (1815). Dibdin's piece begins by listing the main highlights of English history, which include the failed or imperfect —and occasionally successful— attempts of various foreign peoples to invade England, namely the Romans, the Picts, the Saxons, the Danes, the Normans, the Spanish, the French and the Dutch. Two stanzas are dedicated to the Spanish Armada's unsuccessful assault on the island. The poem's humorous/sarcastic mood, at this stage rather far from the epic tone of English depictions of the Armada episode of earlier centuries, is evident in the colloquial language employed: verb contractions (1. 39), terms of endearment («our Drake», 1. 48), nicknames («Queen Bess», 1. 39), popular interjections («Huzza!», 1. 50) and other colloquialisms («tuck up», 1. 32; «snug», 1. 43). The English nation is described as a compact beehive, led by its Queen, against the intruder, the Dons (=Spaniards). The protagonist roles of the English success are granted to Queen Elisabeth I, to Drake and to «the lads of the island» (=the Royal Navy) due to the protection of their country. The Spanish are once again marked for their foolishness, as in «But how would they come off at the island?» (1.54) and for their excessive pride, as in «proud puff'd-p cakes» (l. 46), a humourous and graphic description of their alleged national trait. The limerick structure employed in the second halves of the two Armada stanzas is another example of the overt comical intention of Dibdin's poem:

Then the Spanish Armada set out to invade a',
Quite sure, if they ever came nigh land,
They couldn't do less than tuck up Queen Bess,
And take their full swing in the island.
Oh! The poor queen and the island.
The Dons came to plunder the island;
But snug in her hive,
The Queen was alive,
And buzz was the word in the island.

These proud puff'd-up cakes thought to make ducks and drake Of our wealth, but they scarcely could spy land, Ere our Drake had the luck to make their pride duck, And stoop to the lads of the island.

Huzza! For the lads of the island!

The good wooden walls of the island!

Devil or Don,³ Let 'em come on, But how would they come off at the island? (1824: 173; l. 37-54)

The tragedy of the Spanish Armada as the result of the uncontrollable strength of the seas was also used by other relevant English Romantics to stress the intense power of nature, its superiority over any human work, and its alliance with Britain's defence. In *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812–18) Lord Byron (1788–1824) addresses the ocean as a deified entity of extreme might when he describes it as «an arbiter of war», dreaded both by monarchs and by the walls of rock-built cities for its proven capacity to destroy «Alike the Armada's pride or spoils of Trafalgar» (Canto IV, CLXXXI, l. 9).

As regards the dissemination of the English victory over the Armada in the historiography of the period, Southey again played a leading role. He contributed to spreading the patriotic pro-English version of the Spanish fleet's disaster through his biographical/historical prose account of «Charles, Second Lord Howard of Effingham and First Earl of Nottingham 1536-1624», a sub-section of «Lives of the British Admirals with an Introductory View of the Naval History of England», a chapter of the best-selling One Cabinet Cyclopedia Conducted by the Rev. Dionysius Lardner (1830-46). Southey's main sources of information for his narration of the Armada episode were all established historiographical and propagandistic English accounts of the event that dated back to the late 16th century (Richard Hakluyt, 1589); to the 17th century (Edward Grimstone, 1608, and William Camden, 1615-17),5 or to the early 19th century (John Strype, 1824).6 However, Southey, familiar with Spanish literature and historiography, was the first English historian to take into consideration a Spanish account on the Armada event, though only one: the third part of Antonio de Herrera y Tordesillas's Historia General del Mundo (1612), an insider's chronicle of Philip II's reign that had accepted the narration of the Spanish defeat of 1588. Despite his reasonably pro-English account, Southey boasts a certain degree of historian's honesty and moderate objectivity by not failing to conclude that, had it not been for the action of Providence and the elements that conjured against Spain, the English fleet would not have stood a chance against the Spanish navy. Nature's siding with the English was a clear sign of the Protestant God's partiality for England.

In the early eighteen-thirties, an intense spirit of nationalism was flowing generously in Europe. A revival of English patriotism in Britain counteracted the dangerous west winds of freedom in the form of liberal ideas incessantly pouring in from Europe after

 $_{3}$ In the 1818 edition of the poem/song, the term «Devil» is replaced by «Monsieur».

⁴ The «British Admirals» chapter was turned into a book on its own, Lives of the British Admirals, with an Introductory View of the Naval History of England (1833-40), 5 vols. Vol. v was continued by Robt Bell, Esqr, 1840.

⁵ In 1597, Baron Burghley commanded the English historian, antiquarian and geographer William Camden (1551-1623) to write *Annalium Rerum Anglicarum et Hibernicarum*, regnante Elizabetha, ad annum salutis M.D. LXXXIX (1615-17). Camden was deeply influenced by Petruccio Ubaldini's (c.1524-c.1600) narration. The main idea conveyed by Camden's narration is that the principal merits of the English victory must go to the English spirit of national unity and patriotism and to the private and daring initiative of the English sea dogs. One century later the English antiquarian and editor Thomas Hearne (1678-1735) did his share in maintaining this victorious perception of the Armada affair by preparing the 1717 edition of Camden's historiographical work.

⁶ Strype's edition consulted by Southey is Annals of the Reformation and Establishment of Religion, and Other Various Occurrences in the Church of England, during Queen Elizabeth's Happy Reign (1824). The Armada narration is told in chapters 15 and 16.

the new revolutionary resurgences of the 1820s,7 and, to a lesser extent, of the 1830s.8 The recreation of the Armada's defeat was conveniently employed by the British cultural establishment and historiography in the 19th century whenever the political and ideological authorities wished to fight alien ideas coming from the Continent. The remembrance of the Spanish Armada's threat was a key event to raise English patriotism. Indeed, in the year 1832, The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal published an English translation (by Lieutenant-Colonel H. Bristow) of the Duke of Medina Sidonia's handwritten journal of his voyage to England as preserved in the Archivo de Simancas titled «Relation of the Voyage Performed from Corunna by the Royal Armada, Commanded by General the Duke of Medina Sidonia and of the Events which Happened on Board» (1832, 49-57),9 where the English victory was once again recreated. In 1832 the English MP and historian Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800-59), Baron Macaulay, wrote «The Armada: A Fragment», which he later inserted in *Lays of Ancient Rome* (1842), a personal collection of narrative poems (or lays) based on heroic Roman episodes and other relevant historical events. In his Armada poem, Macaulay used the highest epic language to describe the mood of the English folk during the initial hours of the dreaded enemy's forthcoming arrival to the English Channel. The poem's narrator recreates the poetic military/warlike voicing of bards or minstrels to relate the past heroic deeds of the English nation to his (English) audience:

Attend all ye who list to hear Our noble England's praise! I tell of the thrice famous deeds She wrought in ancient days, When that great fleet invincible Against her bore in vain The richest spoils of Mexico, The stoutest hearts of Spain. (1. r-8)

Macaulay begins his «oral» narration by depicting the prompt defensive reaction of the local Plymouth people after the breaking of the news of the sighting of the Armada. He emphasised the effective immediacy of the English population's reaction when they proceeded to the lighting of the numerous beacons along the English coast, a crucial move to communicate to the whole country the tidings of the Armada's approach in the form of «Castile's black fleet» (l. 13) and «the tall Pinta» (l. 19). The illuminating message of warning delivered by the numerous watchtowers on the southern shores inspired the patriotism and utter aspiration for freedom of the Englishmen of all walks of life, even in the remotest corners of the island. Macaulay insists on the idea of a compact spiri-

⁷ The literary (mainly poetic) production written and published in Europe as the result of the dissemination of liberal ideas in the early 1820s has been collected and analysed in Cáceres Würsig and Solano's Reyes y pueblos: poesía alemana del Trienio Liberal; Gândara Terenas and Peralta García's Contadles a los españoles: poesía portuguesa del Trienio Liberal; Clímaco and Bermúdez Medina's El llanto de España: poesía francesa del Trienio Liberal; González Martín and González de Sande's La Constitución soñada: poesía italiana del Trienio Liberal; and Coletes Blanco and Laspra Rodríguez's Romántico país: poesía inglesa del Trienio Liberal. The five books were published in 2019.

⁸ Britain did not participate in the 1830 political revolution like the rest of Europe as the country was already immersed in a social movement with a strong presence of the working classes (trade unionism and Chartism). In 1832, the Reform Act allowed more British subjects to vote and to be represented in Parliament.

⁹ Medina Sidonia's diary starts on the day of the departure of the Armada (22 July) and ends the day after doubling the last islands of Scotland with the purpose of steering for Spain (12 August).

tual union of the English. They unhesitatingly headed for spontaneous battle stations to defend their country's freedom from the imminent attempt of invasion. The poem depicts the English as acting as one man in their defence of the nation, country and queen: «Forthwith, a guard at every gun / Was placed along the wall; The beacon blazed upon the roof / Of Edgecombe's loft hall» (l. 20-23).

Macaulay's poem after its initial publication in 1832 transcended the 19th century. It was included in Lays of Ancient Rome; with Ivry; and The Armada throughout the 19th century, in 1851, 1872, 1880 (with the title *The Armada, and Other Poems*), in 1885 (with the title Essays and Lays of Ancient Rome), in 1895 (titled Lays of Ancient Rome and Other Poems), in 1903, 1906 and 1912 and again as part of *The Works of Lord Macaulay* (1866). The multiple editions of Macaulay's poem in a number of poetic collections is evidence of the wide dissemination and impact that it retained in the British mentality of the late 19th and early 20th centuries and of its firm consolidation as an «official» narration of the Armada episode that bordered the status of historical chronicle of the event, despite its literary —i. e. subjective— nature. The fact that Macaulay was widely known and highly respected as a historian and politician, especially for his five volumes of *History of England from* the Accession of James the Second (1848) and for his Parliamentary speeches, contributed to converting his poem into an almost established and unmovable version of England's first hours of preparation for the battle in the collective mentality of the English. The didactic potential of Macaulay's «The Spanish Armada» for youngsters was eventually perceived by the popular English songwriter and ballad collector William Cox Bennett (1820-95), 10 who included it in his edition of *The School Book of Poetry* (1870, 89-93).

Another perceivable trend in the Spanish Armada poetry of the Romantic period is the occasional symbiosis of its patriotic narration with Britain's regional folklore, ancient lore, myths and legends and even with some added ingredients of gothic flavour. This is the case of the ballad «Elcine de Aggart», by the Scottish antiquarian, poet and exciseman Joseph Train (1779-1852), with whom Sir Walter Scott maintained correspondence in the early 19th century.¹¹ In John Gibson Lockhart's *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott* (1837), «Elcine de Aggart» is mentioned as the ballad that Train wrote while he was exploring his own native area of Ayrshire following a suggestion made by Scott (1837, II: 149).

As the result of his travels in the southwest of Scotland, Train published *Poems*, with Notes Illustrative of Traditions in Galloway and Ayrshire (1814), ¹² a collection that Scott himself praised. ¹³ Train's «Elcine de Aggart», inserted in it, is faithful to the superstitious tradition of mystic spells of the evil Scottish enchantresses or doideagan in the remote south-western Lowlands. It tells the story of an old witch of Carrick known as Elcine de Aggart who sat on a rock near Tumberry Castle with a blue ball in her hand subverting lethal winds with her black magic powers until they destroyed «the proud Dons» of a wretched Spanish Armada vessel. The witch's purpose was to protect the strand (Ayr Bay) from the arrival of foreign invaders who would not bring any good to Britain's independence:

¹⁰ Bennett was especially well known at the time for his *Proposals for and Contributions to a Ballad History of England and the States Sprung from Her* (1868), among other ballad collections.

II Because of his intense connection with Scott, Train became a minor literary celebrity himself. Dickens once met him personally and published an article about him in *Household Words* (1853).

¹² This book has been impossible to find. However, I have been able to read the complete ballad in Patterson's Memoir of Joseph Train, F. S. A. Scot, the Antiquarian Correspondent of Sir Walter Scott (1857: 24-25).

¹³ The information on the region could have even been more than useful in Scott's writing of his novel *Guy Mannering* (1815), as the plot is set mostly in the Galloway area, specifically that explored by Train.

Although the proud Dons are now passing the Moil, On this magic clew, That in fairland grew, Old Elcine de Aggart has taken in hand To win up their lives ere they went to our strand.

The five eight-line stanzas of the ballad end with similar quatrains, varying only slightly from one stanza to the other. The reiterated message is clear: «Old Elcine de Aggart has at her command / A foreign foe never shall come to our strand» (1. 38-40).

The allusion to place names of well-known connections with Armada themes and events is noticeable in the literary production of the period. This is the case of Tilbury, a tourist magnet for visitors who showed an interest in relevant English historical sites. In *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus* (1831), Mary Shelley (1797-1851) made two of the novel's protagonists, Victor Frankenstein and his best friend Henry Clerval, then staying in London, pay a «tourist» visit to Tilbury Fort by the river Thames in Essex. Mrs Shelley depicts Tilbury, of intense connection with the Armada, ¹⁴ as a place of cultural-patriotic pilgrimage for the British in the early 19th century. She assures that many European foreigners —like Frankenstein and Clerval— had heard of a number of English historical sites in their respective countries of origin (Italy and Switzerland). Victor describes his travels and sightseeing in England in chapter 18 of the novel's second edition:

The banks of the Thames presented a new scene; they were flat but fertile and almost every town was marked by the remembrance of some story. We saw Tilbury Fort and remembered the Spanish Armada, Gravesend, Woolwich, and Greenwich — places which I had heard of even in my country (1831: 135).

The mythical figure of Sir Francis Drake, of deep spiritual association with the 1588-episode of the Spanish Armada, was from the 1830s onwards recreated with gusto by the Romantics via popular folklore. The summit of Drake's deified status in English folklore was reached during the early 19th century, when most of the legends and anecdotes attributed to him and traditionally transmitted orally in the Devonshire area began to be collected and published in anthologies and compilations. Overall, 19th-century English folklore depicted him as a loving and kindly natured aristocrat towards the most humble layers of English society, whom he generously protected and defended from abuse or from foreign invasions, as if he were a modern Robin Hood figure, by resorting, if the need should rise, to his magic to achieve his noble endeavours. The supernatural powers of wizardry often attributed to Drake in Devonshire and nearby areas would always be employed by the mariner in the defence of sacred English values, namely the

¹⁴ Legend goes that it was at Tilbury where Queen Elisabeth harangued her troops in the summer of 1588 against the enemies of England, the Spanish Armada.

¹⁵ In English Folk-Heroes (1948: 25), the English folklorist Christina Hole mentions an example of Drake's alleged superhuman power. Drake's capacity to convert chips of wood thrown into the water into real ships of war may have been inspired, she adds, by the magic practice exercised by the old Irish and Manx mythological god Mannannán mac Lir (25), who used to be able to turn wood pieces into highly ornamented vessels. Indeed, in Hole's collection of folk tales Drake was also described as sitting on the Devil's Point at Plymouth whittling a stick and producing veritable men-at-arms fully prepared to go into action against the Spanish galleons (12). Drake's power of witchcraft is mentioned by Hole in Haunted England (1940: 139-40). She tells of Drake's ghost appearing as driving a black coach drawn by headless horses through the village of Dartmoor followed by black fierce hounds that kill every dog that they come across in their deadly expeditions through the town.

protection of country and religion from any attack coming from abroad. As soon as the local Devonshire traditions were printed, Drake left his strictly regional fame behind to turn into a national hero, worshipped all over the island. He was praised for his indefatigable capacity for combat against the Spaniards both on their own territories (the Iberian Peninsula and their American territories) and seas (Atlantic and Pacific); for his proven capacity of survival thanks to ingenuity and bravery; for his defence of the sanctity of the traditional institution of lawful marriage, or even for his personal interest in the humanitarian improvement of the working conditions of both the English folk and sailors.

Two of the initiators of the written compilations of folkloric Drakeana were Robert Southey and Mrs Bray. After marrying the vicar of the town of Tavistock (Devonshire), the birthplace of Drake, Mrs Anna Eliza Bray (née Kempe, 1790-1883), a moderately famous English novelist of historical fiction of the early 19th century, became duly acquainted with the oral folklore of the southern English counties of Devon and Cornwall, and more specifically with that of the area between the rivers Tamar and Tavy, where she moved in 1822-23. A few years after her settlement in Tavistock, Mrs Bray described the traditions, legends and superstitions of the region in her travel account A Description of the Parts of Devonshire Bordering on the Tamar and Tavy (1836).16 In one of the letters addressed to Robert Southey (whom she admired immensely) that she inserted in her travel book, Mrs Bray informed that the people in the area firmly believed that Drake had made a pact with the devil to beat the Spanish Armada (1836: 111, 175). Drake, she stated, was often imagined to be either a wizard or a friend of the devil. Southey, she added, attributed this peculiar conversion of the historical Drake into a fantastical magical devilish character to his enemies, the Spaniards, as he explained in his reply letter to Mrs Bray of May 26, 1833:

These stories probably originated in the notion which was very piously entertained by the Spaniards, that Drake dealt with the devil, and owed its success to the assistance which the devil gave him. The English Catholics are likely enough to have received this notion from their Spanish friends, and it made its way among the people because of its romantic character. (...) Lope De (sic) Vega, to whose "Dragontia" [sic, for *La Dragontea*] I have this moment referred to refresh my memory, says that Drake, our countryman, admitted his dealings with the devil, and he (Lope) praised him for it, so that it was no calumny of Spain's; "Que no es en esto España mentirosa" [Spain does not lie in this], and that he [Lope] when he was in the Armada, had heard all this from some soldiers in the same ship, who had been prisoners eight years in England" (Mrs Bray, 1884: 264-65).

A few decades later, in her posthumously published *Autobiography* (1884), Mrs Bray included yet more letters that she had personally received from Southey. In his epistolary production to Mrs Bray, the English poet acknowledged receipt of the legends and anecdotes on Drake told in the area that she had kindly sent him in the belief that they could be of help in his writing of a biography of the heroic English sea captain. Southey had already heard some of these legends before, he said. In fact, he told her that he himself

¹⁶ It was republished in two volumes in 1879, now titled *The Borders of the Tamar and the Tavy; their Natural History, Manners, Customs, Superstitions, Scenery, Antiquities, Eminent Persons, etc. In a Series of Letters to the Late Robert Southey, Esq.*

^{17 «}Soldados de la nave en que yo iba / A Ingalaterra [sic] aquí me lo han contado, / Que, en ocho años de prisión esquiva / Que en la corte de Londres han pasado, / Oyeron estas cosas que refiero" (Lope de Vega, 1598, Canto 1x, l. 67-72).

had tried to have one of these stories about Drake published in the *Quarterly Review* to illustrate an article of his own confection on Lope de Vega's works. Southey also added (and complained) that the journal's famed Devonshire editor and satirical poet William Gifford (1756–1826) had decided to strike it out in a last minute decision. This «story» on Drake, of which no more details are given either by Mrs Bray or by Southey in their correspondence, is merely referred to as the «Devonshire story of Sir Francis Drake» («To Mrs Bray, letter dated on Feb. 6, 1832», 1884: 242–45). In her *Autobiography* Mrs Bray included yet another letter written to her by Southey, dated on 26 May 1833 (1884: 264–67), where he expressed his personal admiration of her work of preservation of local stories. He praised her for having «collected a rich harvest of traditions concerning Sir Francis Drake» (264). Once again, Southey informed Mrs Bray that he had already heard several of these stories before he read them in her letters, although sometimes with some variations to the versions that she had collected. According to Wathen (2009: 130), thanks to Southey and Mrs Bray, the persona of Drake «remained predominantly a West Country hero» with a national vocation.

The folkloric and subsequent Romantic construction of Drake is based on a peculiar process of secular sanctification of his historical persona. This deification of Drake in the last years of the 18th century and the first third of the 19th century was confirmed by Mrs Bray herself when she informed the readership of her travel book about the existence of several «relics» of his preserved in Buckland Abbey (where he had lived for fifteen years), namely, the actual Bible that had accompanied him in his journey around the world, his sword, his ship drum and a portrait of him (1836, 11: 178). Before Mrs Bray, the physician, military man, antiquarian, travel writer and historian George Lipscomb (1773-1846) had already informed in A Journey into Cornwall, through the Counties of Southampton, Wilts, Dorset, Somerset & Devon (1799) of the preservation, in the mansion of Buckland Abbey, of an original portrait of Sir Francis Drake (dated in Anno Dom. 1593), a framed copy of his Patent-of-Arms from Queen Elizabeth, dated in 1581, his sword and his old drum, which, he wrote, had circuited the world with him (1799: 313-15). In his travel account of the south of England, Lipscomb exalted the name of Drake, the «great Naval Warrior of the 16th century», as he called him (312), over any other English (or foreign) mariners of the age.

Drake's unexpected death in 1596 had naturally given rise to a number of laudatory poems of his life, of his maritime and warlike exploits and of his relevance in English history. Drake's tomb, the sea (which received his holy body), and heaven (which received his soul), were the most frequent loci employed in the English poetic production written of his eventful life and unexpected end. A feeling of loss was felt and shared by the whole English nation that ran parallel to the Spanish happiness on the hearing of the news. But Drake's poetic figure ended up transcending earth and sea and was elevated to a heavenly status, a sanctification process that would reach its zenith in the late Romantic/early Victorian period, more specifically after Southey's Lives of the British Admirals (1833-40), a series of naval biographies commissioned by the Irish scientist Dr Dionysius Lardner (1793-1859), editor of the famous 133-volume Cabinet Cyclopaedia. Southey's was the first full-length biography of Drake after a number of more, now obsolete, biographies of the English hero in the 18th century (Wathen, 2009: 85-102). Southey contributed to Drake's glorification by reproducing the Elizabethan poet and clergyman Charles Fitz-Geoffrey's hagiographical poem «Sir Francis Drake, His Honorable lifes Commendation, and his Tragicall Deathes lamentation» (1596) in its entirety. Fitz-Geoffrey's deific images of Drake are abundant in the poem. His dead body is translated to the sky by the very gods of Olympus; he has been transformed into a star or a comet of constant radiant light and

into a dragon meteor that will bring misery to Spain for ever; his immortal soul is lodged in heaven; he is spoken of as a saint; he is addressed in endless praises that resemble fervent religious prayers, etc. Southey's word-by-word reproduction of Fitz-Geoffrey's laudatory poem on Drake reminds the English Romantic readership of the hero's glorious passing through earthly life as part of his journey towards a secular heaven in the form of a dragon-shaped constellation:

And that dear body held in Neptune's womb,
By Jove shall be translated to the sky;
The sea no more, heaven then shall be his tomb,
Where he a new made star eternally
Shall shine transparent to spectator's eye.
A fearful comet in the sight of Spain,
But shall to us a radiant light remain.

He, who alive to them a dragon was
Shall be a dragon unto them again;
For with his death his terror shall not pass,
But still amid the air he shall remain
A dreadful meteor in the eye of Spain;
As a fiery dragon shall portend
England's success, and Spain's disastrous end.

Known to the heavens by honour long before,

Now by the presence of the immortal soul,
O new-made saint (for now a man no more),

Admit my tender infant muse t'enrol

Thy name in honour's everlasting scroll:
What though thy praises cannot live by me,
Yet may I hope to live by praising thee.
(1834, III: 353)

English 19th-century folklore on Drake also gave particular coverage and relevance to the issue of his marital status. Mrs Bray relates a popular anecdote of «the old warrior», as he was often referred to in the Devon area. Drake was still on the other side of the globe during his circumnavigation journey when his wife, Lady Drake, wrongly believing him to be dead after having given no sign of life for seven years and therefore thinking herself a widow, decided to remarry. She was at the wedding ceremony when a stone cannonball shot by Drake from his ship in the antipodes of Devonshire found its way across the ceiling of the church and fell exactly between her and her mysterious bridegroom. One of Drake's spirits (one of many which usually informed him from time to time about how things were going in England) had notified him of the oncoming unlawful wedding of his wife. Lady Drake recognised the action of the cannon shot as typically Drake's and was thus able to ascertain that her husband was still alive: «He is alive, and I am still a wife. There must be neither troth nor ring between

¹⁸ The legend naturally includes a few historical incongruities. Lady Drake, Drake's first wife Mary Newman (d. 1581), was not «Lady» yet, for her husband was knighted in 1580, as soon as he arrived at Plymouth from his global journey. On the other hand, Drake's absence from England during his circumnavigation did not last seven years, but nearly three years (December 1577-September 1580).

thee and me», she said to the disappointed bridegroom (1836, 11: 178). To Mrs Bray's narration Southey cared to add that the stone that had fallen between the frustrated suitor and Lady Drake was still used as a weight on the barrow of a nearby farm and that when it was once removed from there, it mysteriously went back to its place on the farm (II: 264). Another addition provided by Southey's letter to Mrs Bray's story of Lady Drake's attempted re-marriage is that sometime after the cannon shot, Drake finally returned to his house in the dress of a beggar asking for alms from his wife at her own door, but a smile escaped him that gave him away. He was recognised straight away and she joyfully embraced him (11: 265). This is an episode of evident Odyssey resonance, specifically the passage when Odysseus, having finally arrived at Ithaca after a long absence spent at the Trojan War and travelling in the Mediterranean, appeared dressed as a beggar so as not to be recognised by his faithful wife Penelope. However, according to Southey, the ending of the story of Drake's homecoming had been copied from the legend of Guy Earl of Warwick, 19 dating back to an medieval Anglo-Norman French romance of the 12th century which, he added, could even also be found in other romances (II: 265).

Another fabled story attributed to the Romantic Drake and collected by Mrs Bray in A Description of the Parts of Devonshire Bordering on the Tamar and Tavy (1836) has to do with the nobleman's alleged interest in the improvement of the working conditions of the modest women of Plymouth. Legend had it that when Drake realised that the poor wives of the area had to walk long distances in order to do their laundry in the village of Plympton due to lack of fresh water in their native Plymouth, he enthusiastically set out to look for a nearby spring with fresh water, until he found one in Dartmoor. He uttered the appropriate magic words and the spring began to flow generously with fresh water of the highest purity. A stream of limpid water followed Drake's horse all the way into Plymouth (1836, II: 171-72). Southey, who had also heard of the legend before Mrs Bray posted it to him in one of her letters, added that «the miracle of leading water is common in the lives of the saints, and specially of the Irish saints, who generally lead it up-hill to make the miracle greater» (II: 265).²⁰

Mrs Bray's collected folkloric stories on Drake were soon uncritically adopted by 19th-century English historiography. For example, in the third edition of *Lives and Voyages of Drake, Cavendish, and Dampier* of 1837 (for its first and second editions had been published in 1831 and 1832), its author, the Scottish journalist, historian, novelist and editor C(hristian) I(sobel) Johnstone (1771–1857) added these legends on Drake as told by Mrs Bray only one year before (1837: 13–124) as unquestioned historical facts.

Conclusion

In the last five centuries of England/Britain's history, English literature has contributed enormously to the process of worldwide dissemination of their «version» of the events, giving rise to an overt pro-English perception of Spain's Armada. Traditionally,

¹⁹ Guy Earl of Warwick was a popular medieval hero employed in some poems and stories in Romantic Britain. At least three works of his adventures and exploits saw the light in the early 19th century: the anonymous *The Famous History of Guy, Earl of Warwick* (1810), Marianne Baillie's *Guy of Warwick, a Legende and Other Poems* (1817) and the anonymous *The History of Guy Earl of Warwick, to which is affixed, a facsimile of his statue in the chapel of Guy's Cliff* (1828)

²⁰ All these stories on Drake were popularised even more in the 1950s, 60s and 70s by the English folklorists J. R. W. Coxhead, Katherine M. Briggs and Ruth Lyndon Tongue in their respective editions and compilations of folktales of the different English counties. Somerset, Devonshire and the Cotswolds took the leading roles as providers of the legends collected, many of which had Drake as their protagonist.

the role of literature in the diffusion of certain political and propagandistic ideas has been more than significant, especially when the written word (in poetry, fiction and historiography) and the spoken word (in church services and in theatre plays) have been one of the best ways to reach large groups of population. The Anglicised construction of the Armada narration has never failed to include a recurrent use of reviling images of the selfish, stubborn, avaricious, ambitious, proud, cruel, cold, insensitive, dictatorial king Philip II of Spain as the epitome of the flaws of the Spanish «dons». English/ British poets, playwrights and historians have unsparingly insisted on depicting their ad infinitum admiration and adoration of England's impeccable protagonists in the heroic defence of the English nation against a foreign invasion, namely the divine Queen Elizabeth 1, the deified Sir Francis Drake, and to a lesser extent the English folk and/or other glorious naval commanders and «patriotic» corsairs and sailors and artillery soldiers of the English Royal Navy. During the early 19th century the English literary output insisted on the firmness of the country's Protestant faith; on the creation or the fortification of their own ideological defence system against their real or imaginary enemies; on the encouragement and support of certain economic policies (free commerce, access to America, acquisition of precious raw materials, etc.), and on the creation of a national united front in Britain against Papism. The literati's propagandistic message was mainly addressed both to a juvenile and more lowbrow type of readership «in a selection of language really used by men».

English chroniclers and historians of the early 19th century, following those of the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, acted as staunch cultural, religious and political indoctrinators of the English population. Their ideological campaign insisted on bringing to the fore a number of recurrent negative aspects of the Spanish/Catholic contender, especially the impropriety of the Catholic Armada's attacks against Anglican England in daring opposition to the righteousness of the English cause as demonstrated by the Protestant God's collaboration with the English people's survival. The most laudatory terms of their accounts were reserved by the English literati and chroniclers to praise the fine sailing qualities of the English sea-dogs and seamen and of their leaders, perfectly knowledgeable of the unpredictable nature of the northern waters. Drake was depicted as the epitome of resourcefulness, astuteness and creativity. These writers also admitted the star role exercised by the stormy climate of the English Channel and the North Sea, which blatantly sided with England. It was after all the «English» weather, perceived as an ally of England that had also loyally and willingly participated in the Spanish defeat. God had shown to the world that He was favouring the Anglicans by sending «the Protestant Wind» against the enemies of England. The Romantic sensibility adopted Drake as a patriotic symbol of the English spirit of freedom, sheer patriotism, entrepreneurship, cunning, wit, daring and anti-Spanishness/Catholicism. He was made to look like the sole saviour of England in the face of danger of a violent, religious or ideological intended invasion by a foreign power, as the leader of the English Navy against the Spanish Armada and the main upholder of Protestant values as the finest of Englishmen. The conversion of the historical figure of Drake into a legendary and mythological character, promoted by a few of the foremost Romantic literati (Southey, Macaulay) and by other lesser ones (Mrs Bray), contributed to the construction of a new English hero for the new times. The ensuing Victorian period would do the rest. But that is another story.

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