Spanish Romanticism and the Melancholy of Modernity

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The loss that lives on as sweet, sad remembrance. Sweet because memory can still caress it. Sad because there is no turning back. Sweet because there is a pleasure in not letting go, even as one is impelled to move on. Melancholy is one of the words that names this feeling-state, and to look at the present—any present—through its lens is to apprehend things with a keen attunement to what has passed or is passing. It is to see the world in the light of things dissolving in time. Perhaps for this reason, melancholy has been very much at home in times of rapid change. It seems to flourish in moments of historical rupture and transformation, when the sense that the past and the future will soon have little to do with one another becomes especially acute. Lost love is one of the more predictable signs of this break within the realm of individual, subjective experience, but the same can hold true collectively. Melancholic attachments can encompass beloved facets of disappearing life-worlds, of waning social orders and their values, and of modes of being that appear to be on their way to obsolescence.

For this reason, melancholy and that grand process of historical change known as modernization have historically been bound to one another in fascinating and complex ways. Already by the mid-1800s, Marx and Engels would famously speak to the extraordinarily disruptive, transformative power of the modern world of capital: "All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify" (34). For the authors of *The Communist Manifesto*, such sweeping change held the promise of facing "with sober senses" the true nature of the modern, world, but their text also makes clear how a collective sense of loss and hence of melancholy might easily install itself alongside the new sobering realities of the emerging world of modern capitalism. It is no surprise that across Europe, late-eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century literature often circulated in a melancholy key. The Age of Revolution (1789-1848) was also, by and large, the age of romantic melancholy, the *mal de siglo* (the malady of the century, but also of the world), that seemingly afflicted artists and writers across the continent.

In Spain, one need only recall the political tumult of the early 1800s in order to appreciate the extraordinary changes that shook the country to its core, as a prior century of enlightened reform and traditionalist resistance morphed into more openly agonistic times: Napoleonic invasion and occupation, the War of Independence, the Courts of Cadiz and the liberal revolution, absolutist retrenchment, the collapse of empire and the emancipation of South America, an unstable political culture of *pronuciamientos*, the first Carlist Wars, etc. As Georg Lukacs would observe in *The Historical Novel*, in Europe the era was marked by the broad dissemination of a new, historical consciousness, the sense of living in distinctively modern and new historical times (19-30). Romantic melancholy was bound up with this new consciousness, and the literature of the period offers a rich and varied archive of the sentiment, which became what, following Raymond Williams, might aptly be called an emergent structure of feeling.

For the purposes of this essay, I will focus on three key works within the Spanish romantic archive (José Cadalso's *Noches lúgubres*, José de Espronceda's "Canto a Teresa," and Enrique Gil y Carrasco's *El señor de Bembibre*) in order to examine what some of the better-known Spanish literary engagements with melancholy reveal about the feeling and its relationship to its modernizing historical moment. At the same time, my interest in what follows will be to

underscore the double-valence of romantic melancholy as an emotion that is at once profoundly personal and, just as importantly, *deeply social*. While seeming to unfold as an individual, largely subjective phenomenon, romantic melancholy often resonates in socially significant ways. The echoes of a social "we" can often be heard within the much celebrated, romantic "I," and by focusing on this conjuncture I aim to tease out more specifically what romantic melancholy tells us about the rapidly modernizing world from which it emerged.

Within Spanish letters, the early stirrings of modern melancholic sentiment can be found across late-eighteenth-century gothic literature, and perhaps most notably in José Cadalso's *Noches lúgubres.* A symptom of what Guillermo Carnero called "la cara oscura del siglo de las luces," the text belongs squarely to its moment in the late eighteenth-century while presaging later romantic melancholy in uncanny ways. Cadalso's short work famously plunges the reader into a macabre, disorienting, nocturnal world, the world of the protagonist Tediato, whose voice dominates a text that, formally at least, is a dialogue between a master and his servant. The *locus amoenus* of the classical world, sems to have given way to a new, *locus horribilis* that would resound across much of the melancholic literature that followed in later decades. At the level of plot, *Noches lúgubres* recounts a fairly straightforward series of events. For three nights, Tediato meets his servant Lorenzo at a cemetery where, as the two dialogue, it slowly becomes apparent to readers that the anguished master intends to disinter his recently deceased beloved in the hopes of lying with her once more before immolating himself with her. Suicide is the stated objective, both as a consummation of love through death, and as an imagined overcoming of loss at the expense of life itself. This goal, however, is never attained, and the work ends with Tediato and readers awaiting the arrival of another day.

Tediato's macabre melancholy significantly colors not only his anguished psyche but also the space, time and ambiance of the work as a whole. Readers come to understand the outer world of stormy nights, cemeteries, prisons, howling winds, terrifying sounds etc. as images of the protagonist's inner torment. For Russell Sebold, Tediato is an early and prescient example of "egocentric pantheism," the quasi-solipsistic affliction in which, wherever the self looks, it finds only images of its own anguish. From the vantage point of object-relations psychoanalysis, one might also see in Tediato the process whereby a lost love-object installs itself within the self. The darkness covering Tediato's soul and his surroundings are in effect the shadow of the un-mourned dead beloved that he carries within. As such the protagonist's name signals the classic *tediatum vitae*, but also something more. He appears as a psyche in the grips of what Freud would later come to diagnose as melancholy, a loss that "lives on" within the self as part of the unfinished work of mourning. What the protagonist sees and feels everywhere is "egocentric pantheism," as Sebold suggests, but Tediato's is an ego shrouded in the darkness of the lost beloved.

There is, in this regard something deeply suggestive in the open-ended structure of *Noches lúgubres*, whose three nights elapse without the completion of Tediato's quest. The structure discursively conceives of melancholy-time as a repetitive, cyclical return, an inability to "move on" precisely because the work of mourning and the acceptance that presumably accompanies it remain arrested or incomplete. In this sense Cadalso's text and its peculiar "ending without an end" underscores a dimension of melancholy that is not always readily apparent. Where there is melancholy— *Noches lúgubres* teaches—, there is deferral. Melancholy puts off the imagined end of its suffering in the name of rehearsing the loss, once and again. At the level of plot, Tediato does not realize his suicidal ideations because to do so would, at the level of the work, put an end to the melancholic attachment. As long as another day—or more precisely another night—awaits, the pained memory of his loss will continue to live within. Like its better-known cousin, desire,

melancholy thrives in the time of the unfulfilled. At the least that is where a psychological approach to melancholy, informed largely by Freud's classic, "Mourning and Melancholia" might lead us.

The social dimensions of this loss, however, come to the fore when one considers what the beloved represents for Tediato. The text is extremely scant in describing her, but what little we learn is telling. In a world that Tediato sees as bereft of friendship, loyalty and camaraderie, a world awash in money and self-interest rather than compassion, his beloved is the symbolic placeholder for a different form of sociality. "¡Ay, dinero, lo que puedes!—he exclaims at the beginning of the "Noche Primera,"—"Un pecho solo se te ha resistido…Ya no existe…Ya tu dominio es absoluto…Ya no existe el solo pecho que se te ha resistido" (368). The beloved is marked as somehow outside of—and resistant to— the modern logic of money and exchange value, and in this regard, Cadalso's text offers an early articulation of the uneasy relationship that romantic melancholy would maintain with the emergent world of capitalist modernity over the course of much of the nineteenth century. Love in *Noches lúgubres*—and within the later romantic paradigm more generally—is imagined as a space of respite from a world increasingly governed by the value that Tediato names as he pays Lorenzo his wages: "¡Interés, único móvil del corazón! Aquí tienes el dinero que te prometí" (369). The disruptive potential of love has of course been a literary mainstay throughout the ages, but it is precisely against such a vast backdrop that the distinctive qualities of love within the romantic frame can be grasped more clearly. With the advent of economic liberalism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries romantic love increasingly becomes an emotion that is invoked in contrast the values of self-interest, commerce, property and money. Set in a past that cannot be recovered, as it is in *Noches lúgubres*, love's melancholic memory becomes a mode of inhabiting a seemingly inhospitable, alienating present.[1]

Something similar is in play a half-century later in José de Espronceda's famous, elegiac poem, "Canto a Teresa," where a dead beloved also occasions a broader, melancholic meditation on loss.[2] A brief review several of the poem's key moments reveals that here too a harsh, distinctively modern world swirls around what might initially seem to be a solely personal circumstance. In the poem's opening stanza melancholy manifests itself as the unwanted return of happy memories in the midst of an anguished, desolate present:

> ¿Por qué volvéis a la memoria mía,
> Tristes recuerdos del placer perdido,
> A aumentar la ansiedad y la agonía
> De este desierto corazón herido?
> ¡Ay! que de aquellas horas de alegría
> Le quedó al corazón sólo un gemido,
> Y el llanto que al dolor los ojos niegan
> Lágrimas son de hiel que el alma anegan (56).

[1] For more extensive analysis of *Noches lugubres*, see Iarocci (*Properties*, 53-98).

[2] "Canto a Teresa" first appeared as Canto II of Espronceda's *El Diablo Mundo,* with the following author's footnote: "Este canto es un desahogo de mi corazón; sáltelo, el que no quiera leerlo, sin escrúpulo, pues no está ligado de manera alguna con el poema." It has subsequently circulated both as part of the larger poem as an independent poem in its own right. For analysis of connections between Canto II and the large poem, see Polt. For the purpose of this essay, I will focus solely on the Canto.

The initial apostrophe to the memories themselves registers the involuntary dimension of melancholy feeling. Like the remembrances that the lyric subject addresses, melancholy has a life of its own. It arrives of its own accord, regardless of what the self wants or hopes for. At the same time, this romantic reworking of the Petrarchan *in morte* tradition—Garcilaso's Sonnet X comes to mind (Polt)—underscores the paradox of melancholic feeling as a peculiar conjuncture of happiness and suffering. It is not just that happier times seem irreparably lost in this stanza, but that their memory in fact exacerbates suffering in the present. At the same time, the contrast between a relatively impassive exterior—tears do not come to the eyes—and the subject's interior—a soul awash in bitter tears—underscores the deep anchoring of the feeling beyond traditionally legible emotional expression.

As the poem progresses, it moves from a somewhat generic, happy past to something more specific, and the poem begins to flesh out the details of past youth as a quasi-Edenic, lost paradise.

> ¿Dónde volaron ¡ay! aquellas horas
> De juventud, de amor y de ventura,
> Regaladas de músicas sonoras,
> Adornadas de luz y de hermosura?
> Imágenes de oro bullidoras.
> Sus alas de carmín y nieve pura,
> Al sol de mi esperanza desplegando,
> Pasaban ¡ay! a mi alrededor cantando.
>
> Gorjeaban los dulces ruiseñores,
> El sol iluminaba mi alegría,
> El aura susurraba entre las flores,
> El bosque mansamente respondía,
> Las fuentes murmuraban sus amores...
> ¡Ilusiones que llora el alma mía!
> ¡Oh! ¡cuán süave resonó en mi oído
> El bullicio del mundo y su ruido! (56-57).

Time metamorphoses into landscape as the flying hours of the first stanza become flying nightingales in the second, and it is worth noting that in this case, the Edenic landscape is part of a distinctively romantic, post-Rousseaian rewriting of childhood and youth. The historical emergence of this paradigm over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is complex, but romantic evocations of an innocent, happy childhood resonate against the backdrop of a distinctively modern "adulthood." Within a broadly Rouseauian framework, nature here becomes a figure for a state of nature still oblivious to the harshness of modern civilization. The progression from youthful happiness to adult suffering is clearly individual, but one need only recall that during the same years of Espronceda's mature writing, Auguste Compte was already publishing his *Course on Positive Philosophy* (1830-1842), where he proposed that collective, human development be understood similarly, as a progression of ages (the theological, the metaphysical, and the positive). Espronceda himself would refer to the year in which he was writing *El diablo mundo* (1840) as "este siglo que llaman positivo." (v. 1936). In this sense, while "el bullicio del mundo y su ruido" might, for classically trained readers, contain echoes of an older opposition between nature and social life"—Fray Luis de León's "mundanal ruido" also seems to sound here as an intertext—,

the noise of the world takes on distinctively modern qualities against the backdrop of the historical changes that were sweeping through Spain and Europe in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Edenic youth, however, is not all that has been lost to the lyric subject. As the poem progresses, those younger years are also figured in terms of a bygone era of naval heroism:

> Mi vida entonces, cual guerrera nave
> que el puerto deja por la vez primera,
> y al soplo de los céfiros suave
> orgullosa desplega su bandera,
> y al mar dejando que a sus pies alabe
> su triunfo en roncos cantos, va, velera,
> una ola tras otra, bramadora,
> hollando y dividiendo vencedora.(57)

These verses lend themselves to being read in both a personal register and against the backdrop of more collective phenomena. The invocation of youth as something heroic, and triumphal, points to the sense of invincibility of the adolescent world view, the feeling that things are only beginning, that everything lies ahead, and that nothing is out of reach. More subtly, these verses also figure life, and more specifically love, as a field of struggle in which the young have the upper hand. The triumph that echoes in song here is a metaphor of youthful vitality delivered within a conventionally gendered conception of male conquest, and the fact that the lyric subject is looking back at such a time to register his loss paints the picture, by contrast, of a dreary present that is unheroic, defeated, no longer forward-looking, and far less lively. In short it conjures the diminished sense of vitality we habitually associate with melancholy and its more modern psychological cousin, depression.

Turning from the personal to the collective, a very different but related set of meanings also come to the fore. The image of a sailing ship seems straightforward enough, but in a century marked by the advent of the steamboat and the increasing mechanization of sea going vessels, it is also the figure of an older, pre-modern world that was, historically speaking, on its way out. Similarly, what can be read as adolescent vitality at the level of the individual finds a correlate in the tacit image of a nation whose "youthful" moment of glory lies in the past. The image of past naval triumph takes on a particular kind of poignancy against the historical backdrop of the spectacular naval defeats that had become signs of Spanish imperial decline: the invincible armada of 1588, to be sure, but also—more proximately, and within the living memory of many readers at the mid-century—the 1805 defeat at the Battle of Trafalgar. Espronceda's poem is not expressly about these events, but this history nevertheless hovers around the imagery in this stanza, pointing to a kind of imperial nostalgia that often accompanies romantic melancholy in Spain. Only a few years before Esproneda's poem, Mariano José de Larra had equated literary power and imperial power in order to express his own sense of despair over Spain's imperial diminishment. In his 1836 essay "Horas de invierno," he gives clear expression to the idea:

> El pueblo que no tiene vida sino para sí, el pueblo que no abruma con el excedente de la suya a los pueblos vecinos, está condenado a la oscuridad; y donde no llegan sus armas, no llegarán sus letras; donde su espada no deje un rasgo de sangre, no imprimirá tampoco su pluma ni un carácter solo, ni una frase, ni una letra.

> Volvieran, si posible fuese, nuestras banderas a tremolar sobre las torres de Amberes y las siete colinas de la ciudad espiritual, dominara de nuevo el pabellón español el golfo de México y las sierras de Arauco, y tornáramos los españoles a dar leyes, a hacer Papas, a componer comedias y a encontrar traductores. Con los Fernández de Córdoba, con los Espínolas, los Albas y los Toledos, tornaran los Lopes, los Ercillas y los Calderones.

While many national romanticisms across Europe responded to the modern industrial world in similar ways, Spanish romantic melancholy was also often tinged with the sense of imperial loss that accompanied its entry into the modern world (Iarocci, *Properties,* 139-202).

Returning to the poem's more personal register, what one finds in the many additional stanzas devoted to the lyric subject's youth are a series of well-established romantic topoi: devotion to liberty ("La libertad con su inmortal aliento, / Santa diosa, mi espíritu encendía"), commitment to chivalric faith, heroism and poetry ("El valor y la fé del caballero, / Del trovador el harpa y los cantares), and more significantly, the first stirrings of love, the feeling around which the suject's pain has been coalescing from the outset:

> El dulce anhelo del amor que aguarda,
> Tal vez inquieto y con mortal recelo;
> La forma bella que cruzó gallarda,
> Allá en la noche, entre medroso velo;
> La ansiada cita que en llegar se tarda
> Al impaciente y amoroso anhelo,
> La mujer y la voz de su dulzura,
> Que inspira al alma celestial ternura:
> A un tiempo mismo en rápida tormenta
> Mi alma alborotaban de contino,
> […]
> Y de gloria y de amores suspiraba (58-59)

In Cadalso's earlier, gothic articulation of melancholy, the beloved had been characterized as the sole bosom that had resisted a world awash in "interés," and her loss had thus been indexed to a broader socio-economic world of which Tediato was deeply critical. In Espronceda's poem love similarly becomes imbued with values that are seemingly antithetical to the emerging modern world. It is marked as a profoundly spiritual, internal phenomenon, at the opposite pole of commerce, property and money. What ignites love within the soul is a secret internal voice, the song of spirit:

> Hay una voz secreta, un dulce canto,
> Que el alma sólo recogida entiende,
> Un sentimiento misterioso y santo,
> Que del barro al espíritu desprende;
> Agreste, vago y solitario encanto
> Que en inefable amor el alma enciende,
> Volando tras la imagen peregrina
> El corazón de su ilusión divina (59).

It is no surprise then, that when the beloved makes her appearance in the poem it is as a disembodied spirit whose presence the lyric subject senses throughout the natural world in a kind of amorous pantheism:

> ¡Una mujer! En el templado rayo
> De la mágica luna se colora,
> Del sol poniente al lánguido desmayo
> Lejos entre las nubes se evapora;
> Sobre las cumbres que florece Mayo
> Brilla fugaz al despuntar la aurora,
> Cruza tal vez por entre el bosque umbrío,
> Juega en las aguas del sereno río.
> ¡Una mujer! Deslizase en el cielo
> Allá en la noche desprendida estrella.
> Si aroma el aire recogió en el suelo,
> Es el aroma que le presta ella.
> Blanca es la nube que en callado vuelo
> Cruza la esfera, y que su planta huella.
> Y en la tarde la mar olas le ofrece
> De plata y de zafir, donde se mece. (59-60)

One need only recall the emerging nineteenth-enctury world of private property, material interests, commerce, exchange and the rise of cities in order to appreciate that the beloved in this poem symbolically stands outside of this order. At the same time, in a psychologically astute turn the poem makes clear that this conception of the beloved is, in the end, a fantasy, a consequence of the way love idealizes and dreams:

> Mujer que amor en su ilusión figura,
> Mujer que nada dice a los sentidos,
> Ensueño de suavísima ternura,
> Eco que regaló nuestros oídos;
> De amor la llama generosa y pura,
> Los goces dulces del amor cumplidos,
> Que engalana la rica fantasía,
> Goces que avaro el corazón ansía (60).

The beloved is thus a placeholder for a series of values that were in the process of fundamental transformation at the mid nineteenth century: love in a world of increasingly governed by economic self-interest, spirit in an age of increasing materialism, idealization in a world of sober realities.[3]

Espronceda's historical beloved, Teresa, will of course also come into the poem in a long series of stanzas from the last third of the poem, but even she pales in comparison to the ideal that

[3] The representation of Teresa as either angelic, disembodied, and spiritual, on one hand, or as degraded and corrupt in corporeal form conforms largely with the misogynistic patters of representation that predominated in the writing of male romantic authors in Spain. For an incisive analysis of what romantic women were writing during these years, see Kirkpatrick.

the lyric subject has projected: "Mas ¡ay! que es la mujer ángel caído / o mujer nada más y lodo inmundo." Disenchantment, the crude awakening to a world in which one's fantasies, ideals and aspirations have collapsed in the face of harsh realities—figures prominently. Indeed, one might even claim that what the lyric subject grieves throughout the poem is not Teresa herself but everything for which she is a symbolic stand-in. Such are the basic coordinates of the lyric-subject's melancholic pain, which comes to a head in the poem's last two stanzas:

> Oh! ¡crüel! ¡muy crüel! … ¡Ay! yo entre tanto
> Dentro del pecho mi dolor oculto,
> Enjugo de mis párpados el llanto
> Y doy al mundo el exigido culto:
> Yo escondo con vergüenza mi quebranto,
> Mi propia pena con mi risa insulto,
> Y me divierto en arrancar del pecho
> Mi mismo corazón pedazos hecho.
> Gocemos, sí; la cristalina esfera
> Gira bañada en luz: ¡bella es la vida!
> ¿Quién a parar alcanza la carrera
> Del mundo hermoso que al placer convida?
> Brilla ardiente el sol, la primavera
> Los campos pinta en la estación florida:
> Truéquese en risa mi dolor profundo. . .
> Que haya un cadáver más ¿qué importa al mundo? (67)

As it was in the poem's opening, the closing verses take up again the contrast between the lyric subject's public visage and his internal state. Verbs of concealment—"oculto, enjugo, escondo"—figure melancholy as a pain that does not manifest itself openly, and there is an irony here (the Canto in its entirety is a deliberate making public of the poet's pain.) At the same time, Espronceda signals the self- violence that for many lies at the core of melancholy. The lyric subject insults his pain with laughter and takes pleasure in tearing his heart into shreds. It is a prescient poetic expression of what, years later, Freud would identify when he suggested that melancholy involves a form of anger turned inward: "an object-loss was transformed into an ego-loss, and the conflict between the ego and the loved person into a cleavage between the critical activity of the ego and the ego" (248). If melancholy here is anger turned inward, however, the last, caustically sarcastic stanza makes clear that the lyric subject's fury is also turned outward, as rage at a seemingly shiny, happy world that is fundamentally indifferent to his suffering and to suffering more generally. This is no longer an enchanted world suffused with spirit or guided by a caring, providential order. It is a colder, more modern world of social relations in which love seems to have become conspicuous by its absence.

While lyric poems like "Canto a Teresa" might seem especially apposite for the representation of melancholic feeling, romantic prose was also an important vehicle for its expression. Historical novels in the mode that Walter Scott made popular with works like *Waverly, Rob Roy*, and *Ivanhoe* became a distinctively nostalgic, and frequently melancholic genre. Set for the most part in an idealized Middle Ages, the romantic novel sought to recreate a world much like Espronceda's idealized youth, a world chivalry, magic, heroism and noble pursuits that had not yet been diminished by the modern world. In some sense, the genre delivered through fiction what

seemed increasingly unavailable within an increasingly disenchanted social and economic realm. It was the dominant form of the novel in the 1840s and 1850s in Spain, and Enrique Gil y Carrasco's *El Señor de Bembibre* (1844), is among the more successful examples from Spanish canon.

Gil's novel tells a tale of tragic love set against the backdrop of fourteenth-century León, and as the following brief plot-summary makes clear, the thwarting of love's possibility is at the heart of the melancholic feelings that the novel repeatedly stages. Doña Beatriz of Arganza, daughter of the nobleman Don Alonso Osorio, Lord of Arganza, is engaged to marry her beloved, Don Alvaro Yañez, Lord of Bembibre. Alvaro is the nephew of Don Rodrigo, Grand Master of the order of the Knights Templar in the region, and as the novel opens, readers learn that the powerful Count of Lemus has been pressuring Alonso to break his daughter's engagement to Don Alvaro in order to give him her hand in marriage, thereby forming a politically and economically advantageous allegiance between the two houses. Don Alonso agrees, and he demands that his daughter accept the new arrangement. Beatriz resists her father's wishes over much of the first half of the novel, which is interspersed with visits from Alvaro in which the lovers reaffirm their love and lament their situation. An unexpected turn of events, however, ultimately undermines Beatriz's resolve. News comes to her of Alvaro's death in battle (readers quickly learn that this is not true), while from her deathbed Beatriz's mother exhorts her daughter to follow her father's wishes. Emotionally bereft by the double trauma of Alvaro's and her mother's death, Beatriz agrees to her father's plans.

In the second half of the novel, Alvaro learns that Beatriz has married the Count of Lemus and is thus definitively out of reach. As a reaction to the news, he takes full vows with the religious and military Order of the Knights Templar, which is under threat of becoming disbanded. Just as a union between the two protagonists seems definitively doomed, however, the Count of Lemus is killed in battle, thus freeing Beatriz to marry Alvaro. Now the hero's religious vows are an obstacle to the union, and the couple's only hope is a special Papal dispensation. Time, however, is not on the lovers' side. Beatriz has been ill throughout much of the novel, with symptoms that eerily echo the tuberculosis that would ultimately take Enrique Gil's life, and she languishes as the two await news from Rome. When word finally arrives that the two can marry, it is too late. The ceremony takes place during her last hours of life, and after Beatriz's death Alvaro becomes a religious recluse.

The repeated deferral of a desired union is the engine that drives the sentimental plot, and in this case the "loss" that typically triggers melancholy takes its reference from an imagined future. It is a curious phenomenon that highlights the way melancholy can be prompted as much by what has yet to come as by what has passed. In Cadalso and Espronceda, memory of a love extinguished by death colors a melancholic present, while in Enrique Gil what prompts the protagonists' melancholy is the image of a future consummation of love that never quite arrives. Whether in the past or the future, what comes into view is a feeling-structure in which happiness, fulfillment and plenitude tinge the present by way of absence, and while it is common to imagine romantic melancholy primarily within a backward-looking framework, it can have forward-looking dimension as well. Melancholy can emerge from the sense that a possible, better future will never be realized.

Such is the case for Gil's protagonists, and for this reason perhaps, almost every encounter between the two is a farewell, a parting that takes place under the melancholy light of a setting sun and thoughts of what might have been. An early encounter between Alvaro and Beatriz sets the paradigm:

> Estaba poniéndose el sol detrás de las montañas […] y las revestía de una especie de aureola luminosa que contrastaba peregrinamente con sus puntos oscuros […] Doña Beatriz clavaba sus ojos errantes y empañados de lágrimas ora en los celajes del ocaso, ora en los árboles del soto, ora en el suelo; y, don Alvaro, fijos los suyos en ella de hito en hito, seguía con ansia todos sus movimientos. […] embebecidos en su dicha, jamás habían pensado en darle nombre, ni habían pronunciado la palabra amor. Y sin embargo esta diha parecía irse con el sol que se ocultaba detrás del horizonte (22-23).

Some 500 pages later, at the story's conclusion this same sense of something impossible and out of reach persists. As Beatriz's death approaches, her preoccupations become increasingly otherworldly, and the relationship between romantic idealism and melancholy that has been operating throughout the novel receives one of its clearest articulations.

> Siempre había dormido en lo más recóndito de su alma el germen de la melancolía producido por aquel deseo innato de lo que no tiene fin; por aquel encendido amor a lo desconocido que lanza los corazones generosos fuera de la ruindad y estrechez del mundo en busca de una belleza pura eterna, inexplicable, memoria tal vez de otra patria mejor; quizá presentimiento de más alto destino (530).

The passage lays out nicely the curious temporality of the ideal, which is at home either in the past—"memoria tal vez de otra patria major"—, or in an unrealized future—"presentimiento de más alto destino."[4]

But what, we might ask, does this tale of tragic love, set in the Middle Ages, have to do with 1844, is moment of publication, or with nineteenth-century processes of modernization more generally? We have already suggested that as a genre the romantic novel often offered up to readers images of lost world very different from their own, and in the case of *El señor de Bembibre* disappearance and extinction loom large. Like the setting suns that predominate across Gil's landscapes, virtually everything that readers encounter in the novel (the Leonese Middle Ages, the order of the Knights of Templar, the battles, and the amorous aspirations of the protagonists) comes to us under the sign of things succumbing to time, things that are no longer. One can read this facet biographically, as a possible expression of Gil's own sense of mortality as his tuberculosis progressed, but just as Tediato's loss in *Noches lúgubres*, or the loss of the beloved in "Canto a Teresa" pointed to a harsh, modern world, the melancholy feeling that permeates the pages of *El señor de Bembibre* also invites a more collective, social reading. It points to a societal unease in the face of the large-scale revolutionary changes that were sweeping across Europe in the 1800s.

As the texts analyzed here suggest, romantic melancholy is anchored in a broader disquiet over several key features of modernization: the disenchantment of the world, the quantification of the world, the mechanization of the world, rationalist abstraction, and the dissolution of social bonds (Löwy and Sayre, 29-43). The sense of loss—of either an idealized past, or of future possibility—that we find in romantic works is linked to this unease, and it indexes an acute sense of the historical change. At the same time, it engages in a complex critique of the modernizing process, registering that the march of "progress" often exacted painful costs. Between its laments over what was disappearing and intimations of something better that never manages to arrive,

[4] For analysis of the relationship between the kind of idealism represented in El señor de Bembibre and the "postromantic" aesthetics of later poets like Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer and Rosalía de Castro, see Iarocci (*Enrique*)

romantic melancholy was a tacit commentary on an increasingly dynamic and unstable present in which all that was solid appeared to be melting into air (Marx 34).

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