

MELANCHOLY AND SUBLIME SPAIN: A STUDY
OF GEORGE BORROW'S REPRESENTATION
OF THE SPANISH LANDSCAPE
IN *THE BIBLE IN SPAIN* (1843)

ESPAÑA MELANCÓLICA Y SUBLIME: ESTUDIO
DE LA REPRESENTACIÓN DEL PAISAJE ESPAÑOL
EN *THE BIBLE IN SPAIN* (1843)
DE GEORGE BORROW

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Abstract

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This article explores the representation of different Spanish natural and urban landscapes in George Borrow's travel book *The Bible in Spain* (1843). The study focuses on the author's allusions to the aesthetic category of the sublime and to melancholy, an emotion associated with the experience of sublimity in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. The principal objective is to examine the way in which Borrow appreciates the diversity of different regions of Spain through his interpretation of the Spanish landscape as melancholic and sublime. The traveller's descriptions of the solitude and melancholy of Salamanca and the plains of Castile contrast dramatically with his vision of Seville as a paradise where melancholy cannot be felt. Moreover, Borrow portrays the Castilian plains and the valleys of El Bierzo as sublime, but he claims that the Leonese landscape resembles the English countryside and lacks the cheerlessness that characterises Castile. Lastly, the traveller emphasises the harshness of the sublimity of Cape Finisterre and associates this quality with the essence of Spaniards. Therefore, this article demonstrates that Borrow does not picture Spain as a homogeneous country because he distinguishes between different landscapes and regions through the concepts of melancholy and the sublime.

Keywords: British travel literature, George Borrow, Spanish landscape, melancholy, the sublime.

Resumen

Este artículo analiza la representación de diferentes paisajes naturales y urbanos de España en el libro de viajes *The Bible in Spain* (1843) de George Borrow. El estudio se centra en las alusiones del autor a la categoría estética de lo sublime y a la melancolía, una emoción que se asocia a la experiencia de la sublimidad en la filosofía de Immanuel Kant. El objetivo principal es examinar la forma en la que Borrow aprecia la diversidad de diferentes regiones de España a través de su interpretación del paisaje español como melancólico y sublime. Las descripciones que proporciona el viajero de la soledad y la melancolía de Salamanca y las llanuras de Castilla contrastan radicalmente con su visión de Sevilla como un paraíso donde es imposible sentir melancolía. Además, Borrow describe las planicies castellanas y los valles del Bierzo como sublimes, pero afirma que el paisaje leonés se parece a los campos ingleses y carece de la melancolía que caracteriza a Castilla. Por último, el viajero destaca la dureza de la sublimidad del Cabo Finisterre y asocia esta cualidad a la esencia de los españoles. De este modo, este artículo demuestra que Borrow no representa España como un país homogéneo porque distingue entre diferentes paisajes y regiones a través de los conceptos de la melancolía y lo sublime.

Palabras clave: literatura de viajes británica, George Borrow, paisaje español, melancolía, lo sublime.

1. Introduction

The eighteenth century witnessed a transformation in the artistic and philosophical interpretation of nature. The emphasis on progress and rationalism that characterised the Age of Enlightenment had moulded the way in which nature was appreciated by intellectuals. Natural landscapes were valued in accordance with the economic benefit that could be obtained from them. Thus, fertile lands that could be exploited by men and areas of geological interest that could offer natural resources to enhance financial prosperity were held in the highest regard (Ortas Durand 1999: 56-57). Nevertheless, the Romantic sensibility that arose in the second half of the eighteenth century led to the emergence of a renewed interest in the aesthetic value of nature. Artists, philosophers and travellers began to analyse the emotions that the observation of certain natural elements made them feel, and the admiration of nature from a practical perspective was gradually substituted by a fascination with its aesthetic qualities. This paradigm change motivated the establishment of aesthetic categories that could encapsulate the new perception of nature. As a result, a series of aesthetic concepts that had been studied and developed in the eighteenth century were incorporated into the artistic and

literary ideals of the Romantic movement. The Romantic conception of nature was exceptionally influenced by two categories that had been explored by philosophers Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant: the beautiful, which evokes pleasure and joy; and the sublime, which causes terror and pain. The picturesque, which was mainly analysed by William Gilpin (1792), was another aesthetic quality that was highly valued by the Romantics. It refers to natural landscapes whose variety and singularity make them perfect to be captured by an artist in a painting.

The picturesque had a huge significance in the nineteenth century, especially among travellers who visited other countries in search of that precious aesthetic ideal. Travellers did not only seek the picturesque in nature, but also in the native people of foreign nations whose traditions and costumes had a distinctive identity. That is the principal reason why Spain became one of the most widely visited countries in the nineteenth century. A large number of travellers embarked on a journey to Spain to discover a land that, as believed by other European nations, was anchored in the past, oriental and, in essence, exotic and picturesque (Ortega Cantero 1990; Vega 2004; González Moreno and González Moreno 2010; Andreu Miralles 2016). Such was the case of George Borrow, an English writer entrusted by the Bible Society with the task of circulating the Bible in the vernacular in Spain. This mission gave him the opportunity to explore the country in depth over the course of five years. His experience on the peninsula inspired him to write *The Bible in Spain* (1843), a travel book in which he narrates his adventures and provides descriptions of the customs and the inhabitants of the different regions that he visited. Furthermore, the book portrays countless Spanish landscapes in great detail. Borrow alludes to the aforementioned aesthetic categories to illustrate the attributes of the scenery and his own impressions. Numerous locations are considered “picturesque” by the traveller, but to describe other places he employs the terms “sublime” and “sublimity”. Therefore, Borrow continues the tradition of depicting Spain as a picturesque land, but he also portrays the country according to the Burkean and Kantian sublime that Romantic artists and poets sought in regions such as the Alps. Moreover, the sublime landscapes that the traveller contemplates in certain parts of the Castiles and the Kingdom of León evoke an emotion in him: melancholy. The connection between sublimity and melancholy is analysed profoundly by Kant in his philosophical treatises. He clarifies that the special sensibility that melancholic people possess makes them prone to perceive the sublime (Kant 2011: 27). In addition, he interprets melancholy as an inherent emotion in the experience of sublimity, arising from the pain and powerlessness that the sublime causes. Thus, Borrow’s representation of the Castilian and Leonese sublime serves as a literary testimony to the Kantian conception of melancholy and its association with sublimity. However, the traveller’s depiction of the Spanish sublime is not always melancholic, as he portrays other regions

whose grand natural landscapes differ enormously from “arid and cheerless” Spain (Borrow 1843: 138). For instance, he even states that Andalusia is a land where melancholy cannot be felt.

This article examines George Borrow’s representation of certain Spanish landscapes and cities as melancholy and sublime in *The Bible in Spain*. The primary objective is to analyse how Borrow perceives the diversity of different regions of Spain through a Romantic prism based on the aesthetic concepts of sublimity and melancholy. Moreover, this study aims to explore the continuity of the Romantic ideals in mid-nineteenth-century Britain, as well as the influence that the philosophies of Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant had on Borrow’s understanding of the Spanish landscape. First, the way in which the sublime was conceived by Burke and Kant in the eighteenth century is examined, laying emphasis on the notion of melancholy as a sentiment closely connected with the experience of sublimity. Second, some fragments of Borrow’s travel book are studied to demonstrate that he establishes a distinction between different Spanish regions. In the end, this article is expected to reveal that Borrow does not imagine Spain as a homogeneous country, but as a land composed of contrasting landscapes whose sublimity inspires feelings that oscillate between melancholy and joy.

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2. Philosophical and Artistic Perspectives on the Sublime and Melancholy

The eighteenth-century conception of the sublime was highly influenced by the *Περί Ύψους*, a treatise dating to about the first century AD in which the sublime is associated with the emotion of ecstasy that good writing and rhetorical style can generate in an audience (Ortas Durand 1999: 107-108). It is thus important to notice that, since its origin, the study of the sublime has laid emphasis on the internal perspective of the person who experiences it. Although the sublime was initially bound to the sphere of rhetoric, in the eighteenth century it was conceived as an aesthetic quality of nature. In his treatise *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), Edmund Burke defines the sources of the sublime as the origin of “the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling” (1823: 45). Therefore, the philosopher’s analysis of sublimity is focused on the internal commotion experienced by those who perceive the sublime in nature. “Astonishment” is the name given by Burke to the highest effect caused by the sublime, and it is described as a state in which a person’s capacity to reason and act is lost, as happens when one experiences horror. Hence, Burke associates the sublime with pain and fear and claims that terror is its ruling principle. Whereas beautiful objects provoke pleasure and love in the

observer, sublime objects produce apprehension. Furthermore, the philosopher illustrates the founts of the sublime, which include features present in nature such as vastness, infinity, vacuity, solitude and silence. Greatness of dimension being one of the most powerful causes of sublimity, mountainous landscapes were the fundamental source of inspiration of Romantic artists and travellers who were avid for the sublime.

In *Critique of Judgement* (1790), Immanuel Kant affirms that a natural object cannot be called sublime, since sublimity refers to the mental experience that the object arouses, and, therefore, it can solely be sought in our ideas. Moreover, the philosopher associates the sublime with magnitude and unboundedness. He claims that it is connected with quantity and not with quality because it is the vastness of a natural object that agitates the mind. Hence, the sublime is caused by nature's chaos and devastation, which is found in fearful objects such as an erupting volcano or a tempestuous ocean. For Kant, the sublime is experienced as a painful emotion due to the incapacity of the human mind to measure the magnitude of the natural object that provokes it. It is in this moment of fear, confusion and spiritual commotion when melancholy emerges. The sentiment of melancholy is derived from the fear that the soul suffers when its limitations are exposed in confronting a challenge that cannot be overcome (Rivas López and García Platas 2013: 79; Morán Roa 2022: 335-336). In his work *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (1764), Kant distinguishes between three different types of sublimity:

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The feeling of it is sometimes accompanied with some dread or even melancholy, in some cases merely with quiet admiration and in yet others with a beauty spread over a sublime prospect. I will call the first the terrifying sublime, the second the noble, and the third the magnificent. (2011: 16)

Therefore, melancholy is a response to the pain and impotence caused by the terrifying sublime. Nevertheless, the Kantian conception of sublimity combines terror and pain with what the philosopher calls “negative pleasure”, since natural objects that are sources of the sublime “raise the soul's fortitude above its usual middle range and allow us to discover in ourselves an ability to resist [...] which gives us the courage [to believe] that we could be a match for nature's seeming omnipotence” (Kant 1987: 120). Thus, the experience of sublimity allows people to relativise the magnitude of other natural objects and even of their human concerns, because when an object is considered to be a fount of the sublime, it is implied that its vastness is such that everything else is small, and this capacity to reason illustrates human independence from nature. As a result, a pleasurable feeling emerges from the pain and melancholy caused by the sublime (Brady and Haapala 2003; Rivas López and García Platas 2013: 79). The synthesis of pleasure

and displeasure is a characteristic shared by the sublime and melancholy, and this double nature is what allows the latter to be deemed an aesthetic emotion (Brady and Haapala 2003).

The duality of melancholy as an aesthetic emotion that generates both pleasure and displeasure is based on its reflective character. Although melancholy can be accompanied by painful feelings of sorrow and nostalgia, it invites people to reflect on jovial memories of the past and to fantasise around them (Brady and Haapala 2003). This explains the connection between the sublime and melancholy, since “the two emotions share a higher reflective element; a feeling of elevating ourselves above the crudeness of stronger, more immediate feelings” (Brady and Haapala 2003). In addition, melancholy has often been associated with nature, since natural areas serve as places of meditation where a person can be in a solitary state that facilitates reflection. Thus, the sublime and melancholy have their origin in nature:

With melancholy, nature provides the solitude that serves as backdrop to our mood; while with the sublime, it is most often natural objects that evoke this feeling. The same desolate moor, or indeed a vast, gloomy ocean, may give rise to either melancholy or sublime feeling. (Brady and Haapala 2003)

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This notion can be associated with the philosophy of Edmund Burke, who, as previously mentioned, conceives the ideas of solitude and silence as founts of the sublime. Furthermore, Romantic art constitutes the tangible evidence of the late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century interpretation of melancholy as an aesthetic quality of nature. Romantic landscape painting is characterised by the sovereignty of nature, which is normally represented without the presence of any human figure and becomes the protagonist of the scene, producing feelings of fear and melancholy in the observer (Argullol 1987: 16-17). A well-known example of the Romantic taste for tragic landscapes that inspire melancholy is J.M.W. Turner’s oil painting *The Pass of Saint Gotthard, Switzerland* (1803-1804), which portrays an Alpine scene dominated by the sublimity of a vertiginous mountain abyss. Romantic sensibility is thus founded on a combination of melancholy and pleasure, which is reflected in the destructive yet enthralling essence of nature (47).

The devastating power of nature can also be observed in the ruins of ancient edifices that have succumbed to the passage of time and are covered with vines and weeds. Ruins are the material manifestation of the inevitability of time and the supremacy of nature (23). Romantic poets and artists were fascinated by ruins because they were remnants of an idealised past that was remembered with nostalgia (Crawford 1983; Argullol 1987: 22-23). In his philosophical work *The World as Will and Idea* (1818), Arthur Schopenhauer considers ruins as a source of the sublime because, due to “their great age, that is, their temporal duration,

we feel ourselves dwarfed to insignificance in their presence, and yet revel in the pleasure of contemplating them” (1909: 273). Ruins were admired as symbols of a very distant past that represented the Romantic ideals and offered an escape route from the industrial society of the time. Therefore, ruins engender reflection on the past, and regardless of whether the memories that they evoke are real or imagined, they awaken a feeling of nostalgia and melancholy: “Ruins express the passage of time, and more specifically the qualities of impermanence and transience, all closely associated with melancholy. Ruins induce a contemplative state of mind, suggestive of events and lives from past ages that have come to an end” (Brady and Haapala 2003). Consequently, the connection between ruins, the sublime and melancholy elucidates the reason why the Romantics were captivated by those vestiges of ancient times. Poems such as Percy Bysshe Shelley’s “Ozymandias” (1818) or Robert Browning’s “Love among the Ruins” (1855) are just a few examples of the great inspiration that ruins were to late-eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British authors.

Poets and painters were not the only ones who found inspiration in sublime and melancholic landscapes or in the ruins of castles and churches. Travellers were tremendously influenced by the aesthetic ideals of Burke, Kant and Gilpin, and thus organised trips to foreign countries in pursuit of the sublime, the beautiful and the picturesque. Since mountains were considered the epitome of sublimity, most travellers selected mountainous countries for their tours, and Switzerland became the most popular one for this kind of tourism (Ortas Durand 1999: 122-126). Another country that attracted outstanding attention in the nineteenth century was Spain, and a large number of travellers decided to visit this land, which had mostly been ignored by tourists in the past (Vega 2004: 94-95). The Peninsular War (1808-1814) inspired the Romantics, who idealised the bravery of the Spaniards during the uprising and exalted their heroism and nationalism (Saglia 2000; Vega 2004; Andreu Miralles 2016: 61-69). Additionally, the oriental past of Spain contributed to the creation of a Romantic myth that imagined Spain as an exotic nation that had not progressed with the times and that was not European (Andreu Miralles 2016). As a matter of fact, the majority of travellers who visited Spain prioritised Andalusia, which occupied the largest part of their travel itineraries, because they considered that this region and its inhabitants perfectly represented the Spanish picturesque and oriental character (90). As a consequence, numerous travellers contributed to the Romantic myth of Spain by portraying a homogeneous country that was, in essence, Andalusian and oriental (Andreu Miralles 2016). Moreover, Spain and Spaniards were highly valued for their ruralness and their originality, since the Romantics abominated the process of industrialisation that was transforming cities into uninhabitable places, as well as converting all of the European countries into copies of one another (Ortega

Cantero 1990). In this manner, the deeply entrenched traditions of Spain and its country landscapes and ancient towns became sources of the picturesque, and numerous travellers were enthusiastic about escaping the monotony of industrial Europe (Ortega Cantero 1990; Vega 2004). With respect to urban landscapes, travellers were passionate about ancient cities like Toledo or Granada, whose ruinous edifices and labyrinthine layouts of narrow streets provided them with a picturesque appearance that was quite dissimilar to the modern European model (Ortega Cantero 1990: 130-131). However, the picturesqueness of Spain did not prevent travellers from experiencing the sublime in some of its landscapes and towns. The following section explores George Borrow's representation of Spain as sublime and melancholy in his travel book *The Bible in Spain*.

3. George Borrow's Melancholy and Sublime Spain

In *The Bible in Spain*, George Borrow recounts his experiences during the five years that he spent on the Iberian Peninsula as an agent of the Bible Society to circulate an edited version of the New Testament in Spanish. To accomplish his mission, he travelled through Spain and reached regions that had mostly been unexplored by foreign travellers in the past. The fervent interest in Andalusia caused, among other reasons, by its Moorish heritage, resulted in the recurrent marginalisation of other Spanish regions such as Galicia or Extremadura, which were not included in the itineraries of many travellers who visited the country (Vega 2004: 117; Andreu Miralles 2016: 90). Nevertheless, Borrow had the opportunity to travel across a large part of Spain and learn about the peculiarities of the different regions of the country, which he depicts in his travel book. Moreover, *The Bible in Spain* includes detailed descriptions of the natural landscapes and towns that the author explored during his travels. Borrow makes aesthetic judgements of several locations that he portrays as sublime and melancholy, which serve to establish a connection between the traveller's perception of the Spanish landscape and the Burkean and Kantian ideas on sublimity.

On his way to Medina del Campo, in the province of Valladolid, Borrow contemplates the infinite plains of Old Castile, which inspire him to write the following lines:

With all that pertains to Spain, vastness and sublimity are associated: grand are its mountains, and no less grand are its plains, which seem of boundless extent, but which are not tame unbroken flats, like the steppes of Russia. Rough and uneven ground is continually occurring; here a deep ravine and gully worn by the wintry torrent; yonder an eminence not unfrequently craggy and savage, at whose top appears the lone solitary village. There is little that is blithesome and cheerful, but

much that is melancholy. A few solitary rustics are occasionally seen toiling in the fields — fields without limit or boundary. (1843: 122)

Here, the traveller represents the plains as a source of the sublime based on the concepts of vastness and infinitude, which, as explained above, constitute the pillars of Burke's and Kant's philosophical perspectives. In addition, the traveller compares the plains of Old Castile to those of Russia, and states that the former are more savage because of their irregular ground. When Burke defines vastness as one of the founts of sublimity, he claims that "the effects of a rugged and broken surface seem stronger than where it is smooth and polished" (1823: 98). Thus, Borrow's description of the plains of Old Castile harmonises perfectly with Burke's conception of vastness and the sublime. Furthermore, Borrow claims that sublimity is an inherent trait of Spain, and, in their grandeur, the limitless plains of Old Castile are representative of the country. This idea can be related to Kant, who, in describing the different national characters in connection with the beautiful and the sublime, affirms that sublimity is a particular feature of Spaniards:

In the national character that has in it the expression of the sublime, this is either of the terrifying kind, which inclines a bit to the adventurous, or it is a feeling for the noble, or for the magnificent. I think that I have grounds sufficient to attribute the first kind of feeling to the Spaniard. (2011: 50)

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Hence, Kant associates Spain with the terrifying sublime, which, as stated previously, is the kind of sublimity that provokes a sentiment of melancholy. Consequently, both Kant and Borrow establish a connection between Spain and melancholy. In fact, Borrow refers to the plains of Old Castile as melancholy, and he relates their melancholic character to the solitude of the scene, which presents a "lone solitary village" and a "few solitary rustics". As a result, another Burkean source of the sublime can be found in the plains of Old Castile — that of solitude, which also evokes melancholy. Moreover, the traveller's description of the plains of Old Castile is similar to his perception of the plains of New Castile, which, although using fewer words, he portrays as "wide and melancholy" (1823: 64). Therefore, the contemplation of the magnitude and sublimity of the Castilian plains makes Borrow experience a melancholic feeling similar to the one described by Kant.

Yet Borrow's description of the Castilian plains as sublime is peculiar and unusual, since the Romantics were normally not attracted by this kind of landscape. Although Burke and Kant conceive infinitude as one of the principal sources of sublimity, the long extension of a plain is considered by Burke to be less grand than the height and depth that can be observed in a mountainous landscape. In addition, a cultivated field was generally perceived as the result of the degradation of a natural landscape that had been transformed by men for economic purposes (Ortega Cantero 1990: 126). As a matter of fact,

other nineteenth-century British travellers provide negative descriptions of the Castilian plains that differ significantly from Borrow's. For instance, in *A Handbook for Travellers in Spain and Readers at Home* (1845), Richard Ford writes the following lines on central Spain:

The interior of this portion, and especially the provinces of the two Castiles and La Mancha, both in the physical condition of the soil and the moral qualities of the inhabitants, presents a very unfavourable view of the Peninsula: these inland steppes are burnt up by summer suns, tempest and wind-rent during winter. The common absence of trees exposes these wide unprotected plains to the rage and violence of the elements; poverty-stricken mud houses, scattered here and there in the desolate extent, afford a wretched home to a poor, proud and ignorant population. (1845: 92)

Thus, Ford's depiction of the plains is much more unfavourable and offers a significant contrast to Borrow's appreciation of the Castilian sublime. Nevertheless, it is interesting to mention that, in the same manner as Borrow, Ford also refers to the melancholy feeling that the plains of Castile evoke:

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Her hedgeless, treeless tracts of corn-field, bounded only by the low horizon; her uninhabited, uncultivated plains, abandoned to the wild flower and the bee, and which are rendered still more melancholy by ruined castle, or village, which stand out bleaching skeletons of a former vitality [...] The wanderer, far from home and friends, feels doubly a stranger in this strange land, where no smile greets his coming, no tear is shed at his going. (47)

This description is quite similar to Borrow's, as Ford accentuates the solitude of the Castilian landscape and, although he does not allude to the sublime directly, he emphasises the infinitude of the plains. Moreover, he employs the term "melancholy" to refer to the plains, and he mentions the emotion in connection with the ruins that are sometimes found in Castile. Lady Louisa Tenison is another traveller who, in *Castile and Andalusia*, portrays the Castilian plains in a negative way:

The plains of Castile present little to interest the traveller. Wide and solitary steppes, as lonely almost as the Desert —affording indeed signs of cultivation, but scarcely a trace of the hand which tills them— meet the eye in every direction, and render a journey through them one of dull and unvarying monotony. (1853: 474)

Tenison describes the solitude of the plains, but she does not associate it with the sublime. Instead, she represents the plains as monotonous and, thus, as the opposite of the picturesque ideal of variety and irregularity that was extremely valued by nineteenth-century travellers. The disparity between the plains of Castile and the ideals of the picturesque is emphasised by Thomas Roscoe in his travel book *The Tourist in Spain: Biscay and the Castiles*:

There are but about six miles to travel from Segovia to St. Ildefonso. Nevertheless, the pilgrim of the picturesque would scarcely feel any regret if the distance were still considerably less, the whole foreground of the landscape which meets his eye consisting of mere barren plains, with a few hungry hamlets sparingly scattered over them. (1837: 138)

Therefore, it is evident that numerous travellers interpreted Castile as the antithesis of the ideal Romantic landscape (Ortega Cantero 1990: 130).

Nonetheless, Borrow is not the only nineteenth-century traveller who perceives the boundlessness and solitude of the Castilian plains as sources of the sublime. In *Tales of the Alhambra* (1832), Washington Irving compares the infinitude of the plains of the Castiles and La Mancha to the sublime vastness of the ocean:

There is something, too, in the sternly simple features of the Spanish landscape, that impresses on the soul a feeling of sublimity. The immense plains of the Castiles and of La Mancha, extending as far as the eye can reach, derive an interest from their very nakedness and immensity, and possess, in some degree, the solemn grandeur of the ocean. (1849: 3)

Irving admires the uniformity of the plains because it is the absence of vegetation that makes them seem endless and gives them their sublime grandeur. Moreover, Irving affirms that Spain “is a stern, melancholy country, with rugged mountains, and long sweeping plains, destitute of trees, and indescribably silent and lonesome” (2). Thus, Irving establishes a connection between the sublimity of the plains and the melancholy that characterises Spain. It can be observed that Borrow’s depiction of the Castilian plains closely resembles Irving’s, as both refer to Burke’s concepts of vastness and solitude and interpret melancholy as an essential attribute of the Spanish landscape. Taking into consideration that *Tales of the Alhambra* was published in 1832, the similarities between Borrow’s and Irving’s descriptions of the plains suggest that Borrow may have drawn inspiration from Irving’s work.

When Borrow is travelling to Galicia, he enters the region of El Bierzo, in the Kingdom of León, and provides the following description of the natural surroundings that he contemplates: “Perhaps the whole world might be searched in vain for a spot whose natural charms could rival those of this plain or valley of Bembibre [...] it exhibits all the peaceful beauties of an English landscape blended with something wild and grand” (1843: 139). Borrow compares the Leonese landscape to an English one, but he employs the terms “wild” and “grand” to refer to the former. Hence, for the traveller, nature in El Bierzo possesses the quality of grandeur that Burke and Kant attributed to the sublime. It is interesting to remark that the sublimity of El Bierzo is also depicted by Richard Ford, who calls this land “the Switzerland of Leon” (1845: 595), thus comparing its natural landscapes to those of the Swiss Alps. Borrow is so amazed by everything that

surrounds him that he claims, “I could scarcely believe that I was in Spain, in general so brown, so arid and cheerless, and I almost fancied myself in Greece, in that land of ancient glory” (1843: 138). Although he does not employ the term “melancholy”, he claims that the majority of landscapes in Spain are “cheerless”, probably referring to the “melancholy plains” that he travelled through in the Castiles. Therefore, Borrow implies that melancholy is an inherent characteristic of the country, as he cannot believe that El Bierzo, a verdant and joyful place, could belong to Spain. Thus, he establishes a distinction between the Castiles and El Bierzo. The landscapes in all of them present elements that are sources of the sublime, but the Castilian ones are characterised by the sentiment of melancholy that surrounds them, while the ones in El Bierzo provoke a positive and agreeable feeling in the traveller. Additionally, when Borrow reaches Cape Finisterre, in Galicia, he claims that “on all sides there was grandeur and sublimity” (179). The traveller is astonished at the ferocity of the Atlantic Ocean and the savageness of the rocks that form the Galician shore, which he describes as “a fearful place in seasons of wind and tempest” (179). In fact, the wild maritime landscape inspires him to write the following lines:

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There is an air of stern and savage grandeur in everything around, which strongly captivates the imagination. This savage coast is the first glimpse of Spain which the voyager from the north catches, or he who has ploughed his way across the wide Atlantic: and well does it seem to realize all his visions of this strange land. “Yes”, he exclaims, “this is indeed Spain —stern, flinty, Spain— land emblematic of those spirits to which she has given birth”. (117)

It can be appreciated that Borrow refers to the Galician sublime as “stern” and “savage”, which bears a resemblance to the Kantian conception of the terrifying sublime as a source of fear and melancholy. Moreover, the traveller portrays the Galician shore and its stern sublimity as being distinctive of Spain and the character of Spaniards. Consequently, Borrow presents the sublime as an essential attribute of Spain again, which, as when he describes the Castilian plains, could be related to Kant’s reflection on the Spanish character and its connection with the terrifying sublime.

In Salamanca, Borrow experiences melancholy when he contemplates the ruinous and deteriorating state of the city and he recalls its former splendour:

A melancholy town is Salamanca; the days of its collegiate glory are long since past by, never more to return [...]. Yet, with all its melancholy, what an interesting, nay, what a magnificent place is Salamanca! How glorious are its deserted convents, and with what sublime but sullen grandeur do its huge and crumbling walls, which crown the precipitous bank of the Tormes, look down upon the lovely river and its venerable bridge! (116)

Borrow marvels at the sight of the decaying walls and edifices of Salamanca, and he portrays the ruins as a source of both melancholy and sublimity. The sentiment of melancholy that the apparent desolation of the city provokes in the traveller is not strictly unpleasant, as it arises through the experience of the sublime. On the one hand, Borrow interprets the ruins from a melancholic perspective as symbols of the passage of time and the ephemerality of life. On the other hand, the traveller depicts the ruins as vestiges of the illustrious history of the city, and their great antiquity generates a sublime feeling. As a result, the solitude of Salamanca and the majesty of its ruins transform the city into a place full of sublimity that captivates the author. It is interesting to mention that Richard Ford is another traveller who alludes to the melancholy character of the city, since he refers to “ruined Salamanca” (1845: 574) as “cheerless” (569).

Borrow’s melancholic description of Salamanca differs greatly from the way in which Seville is represented in the book. The traveller is enchanted by the numerous charms of the Andalusian city, which he portrays as a “terrestrial Paradise” (1843: 261). He is delighted with the pleasant climate of Andalusia, the orange gardens that impregnate the city with their fragrance, and the oriental monuments that revive the exotic past of Spain. In fact, the traveller adores Seville to such an extent that he admits that he has “often sighed that [his] fate did not permit [him] to reside in such an Eden for the remainder of [his] days” (276). The magnificence of Seville is praised by the majority of the travellers who visited Spain, such as Richard Ford, who refers to the city as “the marvel of Andalusia” (1845: 241), or Lady Louisa Tenison, who is impressed with the vitality of the city and describes the Sevillians’ singing and dancing as “a picture of life which must certainly be considered as peculiar to Seville, lending from its strangeness a tinge of oriental romance to this fair city” (1853: 141). As a matter of fact, a horse ride in the neighbourhood of Seville inspires Borrow to affirm that “it is impossible to continue melancholy in regions like these, and the ancient Greeks and Romans were right in making them the site of their Elysian fields” (1843: 279). Therefore, the contrast between the descriptions of Seville and Salamanca is evident. Both cities astonish Borrow, but in a different manner. While Salamanca is in a decaying state that makes him experience the sublime and the sentiment of melancholy that it entails, Seville is a cheerful city that offers him countless pleasures. Furthermore, the way in which Andalusia and the Castiles are depicted by the traveller reflects a distinction between the regions. According to Borrow, the melancholic feeling that is predominant in the Castilian territory and that he conceives as a characteristic trait of Spain cannot be experienced in Andalusia. Thus, the traveller portrays a dichotomy between two different Spains — one that is harsh, obscure, secluded and melancholy, and another that is warm, vibrant and delightful.

4. Conclusion

The fragments of George Borrow's *The Bible in Spain* that have been studied in this article show that the traveller associates Spain with the aesthetic category of the sublime. He is awed at the endlessness of the Castilian plains, the brutality and harshness of the Galician coast and the grandeur of the Leonese mountains and valleys — extremely diverse landscapes that the traveller portrays as sublime. Moreover, Borrow is mesmerised by the ruins of Spain, since they are tangible reminiscences of the history of a country whose orientalism and Medieval chivalry were much admired by the Romantics. In particular, he praises the sublimity of the ruins of Salamanca, a city that he describes as melancholy because it represents the glorious past of Spain and its subsequent downfall. For Borrow, melancholy is an emotion that is frequently felt throughout Castile. The infinite plains where the presence of men is almost non-existent become the epitome of a melancholic region whose solitude bewitches the traveller.

144 Considering that *The Bible in Spain* was published in 1843, this analysis demonstrates the survival of the Romantic ideals and the continued influence of the philosophies of Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant in early Victorian Britain. Furthermore, and most importantly, this article reveals that Borrow does not conceive of Spain as a homogeneous country and, by describing the landscapes of the different regions, he contributes to, but at the same time challenges, the stereotypical Romantic image of Spain that tends to conflate Spain and Andalusia. Firstly, through the concept of melancholy, the traveller represents Andalusia as antithetical to central Spain. The melancholic sentiment that Borrow experiences in Salamanca and the plains of Castile has no place in Seville, which he portrays as a paradise on Earth. Secondly, the traveller sees opposing sublimity in the landscapes of Castile and El Bierzo. Whereas the Castilian plains are described as melancholy, arid and desolate, Borrow depicts the valleys of El Bierzo as cheerful landscapes with rich vegetation that are similar to the English countryside. Finally, the traveller portrays the sublimity of Cape Finisterre as fearful and rough, and claims that it perfectly represents the character of Spain and the Spaniards. Therefore, Borrow's image of Seville and Andalusia is completely idealised, which is in consonance with the Romantic myth of Spain, but he acknowledges the diversity of other Spanish regions and interprets the melancholy of Castile and the severity of Galicia as characteristic of Spain. Thus, Borrow pictures a Spain full of contrasts whose sublime landscapes and cities offer the traveller an experience that fluctuates between pleasure, astonishment and melancholy.

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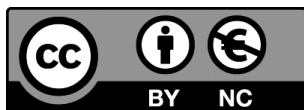
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