

The Spanish theme in *The Stone Guest* by Pushkin and Byron's *Childe Harold*

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Pushkin and Byron. Two great names. Two great poets. Both of them were very fond of Spain – in fact, they were infatuated with that glorious land.

The Spanish theme sounds especially powerful in *The Stone Guest* by Pushkin and Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. The two poets created two masterpieces which highlighted many differences and similarities.

If Pushkin's images of Spain and the Spanish were based, according to Anna Akhmatova, the outstanding Russian poet, and Leont'ev-Sheglov, the Pushkin scholar, on personal, psychological and aesthetic values,¹ Byron's imagery of the same phenomena comes from his socio-critical attitude towards reality.

In the first place, a few of Pushkin's works, including *The Stone Guest*, indicate his genuine interest in the Renaissance period and Spanish culture in particular. His interest in Spain was not coincidental. At the beginning of the nineteenth century Spain had a dominant influence on progressive Russian people. The country seethed with revolutionary life, as during the Napoleonic wars there were a lot of peasants' uprisings. Spain as a country with ancient traditions and love for freedom seemed far-off and fascinating. The cultures of Spain and Russia had a lot in common – vast territories, similar to colonies (America and Siberia), monarchy, the durability of a feudal regime, a special place among the other European countries, and so on. Both Russia and Spain played important roles in the history of the Middle Ages when defending European civilization from Arabic and Mongolian invasions, thus providing an opportunity for the political and cultural development of Europe.²

In the nineteenth century Russia was particularly interested in Spanish theatre, poetry, and records of Spanish classic literature.

Pushkin had never been to Spain, yet that great love for the country which existed in Russian society was heated up when he wrote his lyrical poem *I'm here Inezilia* (1830) under the influence of Barry Cornwall (1787-1874),³ Byron's fellow-student in Harrow. Pushkin's poem became popular and known to the general public through a wonderful song by M.I. Glinka. According to V.G. Belinsky, the famous Russian literary critic, the song was supposed to be performed by Laura in *The Stone Guest*, but was not included in the play:⁴

I'm here Inezilia,
here under your window,
Seville is dark and sleepy.⁵

Belinsky considered *The Stone Guest*, one of the four Little Tragedies (1830), to be a jewel among Pushkin's other works. The critic admired its wonderful harmony between form and idea. He called Pushkin's verse 'transparent and soft', 'marvelous like music'.⁶ In other words, for Belinsky *The Stone Guest* was the greatest of Pushkin's artistic creations.

It is a well-known fact that Byron's supreme gift of vivid portrayal of the Spanish scenes created the effect of the reader's presence in that fantastic country, whether he depicted the passionate temperament of the Spanish or the historical context of actual events of the Napoleonic war.

Byron was lucky – he had a chance to travel and see the great ancient land with his own eyes. He was there in a very difficult period for the country, in 1809, when he was twenty-one. As Fiona MacCarthy writes, for Byron and Hobhouse 'the atmosphere of activity and danger was part of the attraction'.⁷ They ignored the fact that it was dangerous. Even the real threat to their safety did not prevent them from travelling: they were stopped several times for the checking of their passports, met a troop of Spanish patriot soldiers and 'fended off an attempt by a government official to requisition their horses'.⁸

2: Пиков Г.Г. Из истории европейской культуры. Глава 10. Дон Гуан и Дон Хуан: взгляд историка на проблему восприятия испанской культуры в России начала 19 века. http://gkaf.narod.ru/pikov_10.html; Амелъченкова С.А. Испанское влияние на русскую культуру в XIX веке: автореф.дис....канд.культ.наук: 24.00.01. М. 2010. <http://sciepeople.ru/publication/96911>

3: Григорий Кружков. Ностальгия обелисков. Глава X. Поэт и эхо. <http://grigorykruzchkov.narod.ru/essays/nostalgia-obeliskov/x-poet-i-echo.html>

4: ЭНИ «В.Г.Белинский». Т.VII, с.568. <http://www.vgbelinsky.ru/about/>; Критика Белинского о Пушкине. <http://www.pushkiniada.ru/kritika/001-12.htm>

5: Пушкин А.С. Стихотворения 1825-1836. Собрание сочинений в десяти томах. Т.2, 1975, М. С.242.

6: Белинский В.Г. Ibid.

7: MacCarthy, Fiona. Byron Life and legend. Faber and Faber Ltd, 2003. 93.

8: Ibid.,95.

When the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* were published in 1812, Pushkin was still a student at the Tzarskoye Selo Lycee, the most prestigious educational institution for young Russian aristocrats. He was thirteen and full of romantic expectations. He and his peer students heard a lot about Napoleon, as the French emperor was defeated by the Russians who gave a great number of war heroes to the world. Later, after Napoleon's death, Pushkin, like Byron, was in a way enchanted by the charisma of the emperor, when it became clear that the social and political situation in Europe left much to be desired: the deposition of Napoleon did not improve the life of common people who had acquired a taste for national liberation. Besides, Pushkin heard of the revolutions in Spain, Italy and Portugal.⁹

By the time Pushkin started writing his Little Tragedies he had already been well acquainted with Byron's writing: in the twenties of the nineteenth century, Pushkin and his friends V.A.Zhukovsky, P.A.Vyasemsky, the Decemberists and other intellectuals, often discussed Byron's poetry, and certainly his *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. It goes without saying that Byron's Spanish scenes from *Childe Harold* were familiar to Pushkin who shared Byron's freedom-loving spirit and longing for seeing other places.

Yet, unlike Byron, Pushkin could only dream of visiting foreign countries – he was forbidden travel abroad. Alexander I, and later Nicholas I, never let him out of Russia because of his liberal ideas. In one of his letters in 1820, when Pushkin was also twenty-one, like Byron when travelling in Spain, the Russian genius wrote: 'Petersburg is stuffy for the poet. I long for foreign lands. Perhaps, the afternoon air will revive my soul.'¹⁰ Pushkin's dream of seeing new landscapes came true not in Europe, but in the Caucasus, when he joined General Rajevisky's family in their journey. Those were the days when the daughters of Rajevisky helped Pushkin read Byron in the original, and *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* was most probably among their main preferences (later, in *Evgeny Onegin*, Pushkin wrote about a 'Muscovite in Harold's cloak.') In the Caucasus, the poet couldn't help admiring the beauty of the place, so reminiscent of Spain, which, evidently, was reflected in *The Stone Guest* as the Spanish specific national colour.

In this connection, it seems relevant to dwell on such Spanish motives in the works by Pushkin and Byron as nature and weather, the national mentality, women, and music.

Thinking about the beauty of the Caucasus and its mild climate, Pushkin exclaimed in the letter to his brother Leo: 'Wonderful region, nature, satisfying my imagination – the happy, afternoon skies, the mountains, gardens, the sea ...'¹¹ This quotation echoes the famous words by Nikolai Bestuzhev about Spain: 'The morning breeze brings the fragrance of marmalade orange trees. One is enchanted by that scent, by the picture of the cloudless skies, and the feeling of a reviving warm after the English fogs.'¹²

Pushkin finished his *Stone Guest* in November 1830, in Boldino, the place where he was tormented by family problems and by his longing to get married to Natalia Goncharova. His boredom in his father's house, where he was stuck because of the cholera epidemic, made him miss the warm weather and happy emotions he had experienced in his youth in the Caucasus. His ordeal led to the description of the fantastic Spanish weather in *The Stone Guest*. Despite the fact that autumn was his favourite season, and the autumn in Boldino was extremely prolific for his writing, still he dreamt of beautiful warm days and the fragrance of lemon and laurel which could have haunted him after his journey in the Caucasus:

Come, open the door onto the balcony. How quiet are the skies.
Still is the warm air – the night smells of lemon and laurel,
The bright moon is glittering in the blue, thick and dark,
(...)
And faraway, in the north, in Paris
The sky might be clouded,
It's raining, and a cold wind is blowing,
And do we care?¹³

Philip H.Churchman notes that curiously enough neither in his poetry, nor in his letters does Byron mention the terrible heat he had experienced while travelling in Portugal.¹⁴ Fiona MacCarthy also highlights 'the steamily hot weather' in Byron's journey on the way to Seville and Cadiz in Spain.¹⁵ One can easily jump to the conclusion that travelling on horseback in such a heat was of little pleasure, but as Pushkin marvelled at the beauty of the Caucasus and young Childe Harold admired Portugal, Byron was enchanted by magnificent Portuguese landscapes, and

9: ФЭБ:Муравьева.Пушкин и Наполеон, 1991.С.9. <http://feb-web.ru/feb/pushkin/serial/ise/ise-0053.htm>

10: Пушкин А.С. Письма. Т.9, 1977. С.17.

11: Ibid. P.20

12: Бестужев Н.А. Гибралтар. Письмо 1. Русские альманахи: Страницы прозы Сост.и автор примечаний В.И.Коровин. М.: Современник, 1989 (Классическая библиотека «Современника») OCR Бычков М.Н. lib 10.ru> russian_classic...na gibraltar.2074

13: Пушкин А.С. Каменный гость. Т.4, 1975. С.300. (Here and below the quotations are translated by I.Shishkova)

14: Churchman , Philip H. Lord Byron's Experiences in the Spanish Peninsula in 1809,1909.66. http://www.persee.fr/web/revues/home/prescript/article/hispa_0007-4640_1909_num_11_1_1595

15: MacCarthy, Fiona. Ibid.

strongly impressed by the contrast between the grandeur of the palaces of Portugal and a modest and peaceful picture of the Portuguese-Spanish frontier:

Here leans the idle shepherd on his crook,
And vacant on the rippling waves doth look,
That peaceful still 'twixt bitterest foemen flow.¹⁶

Byron was intrigued by the Spanish mentality and praised the Spanish national character. He could not help noticing the courage of the Spanish people and their natural pride, no matter whether they were rich or poor: 'For proud each peasant as the noblest duke',¹⁷ their willingness to defeat France and defend their freedom. At the same time he lamented bitterly the former might of the country:

Oh, lovely Spain! renowned, romantic land!
(...)
Where are those bloody banners which of yore
And drove at last the spoilers to their shore?¹⁸

His heart went out to the Spanish poor who were weary of the war as they had lost everything in it. Despite their passionate but often merry and sunny nature, they could not enjoy life any longer because of the fighting monarchs, who had neglected the well-being of their vassals:

Not so the rustic: with his trembling mate
He lurks, nor casts his heavy eye afar,
Lest he should view his vineyard desolate,
Blasted below the dun hot breath of war.
No more beneath soft Eve's consenting star
Fandango twirls his jocund castanet:
Ah, monarchs! could ye taste the mirth ye mar,
Not in the toils of Glory would ye fret;
The hoarse dull drum would sleep, and Man be happy yet.¹⁹

Dostoevsky, in his famous speech dedicated to the opening of Pushkin's monument in Moscow (1880), pointed out the Russian poet's phenomenal penetration into the mentality of other nations: "Even in the case of Shakespeare, his Italians remain almost always Englishmen. The characters of Pushkin alone possess the individuality of their nations."²⁰ Dostoevsky wrote about *The Stone Guest*: 'Reread *Don Juan* and if there hadn't been Pushkin's signature under it, you would never have known that it was not written by a Spaniard'.²¹ Pushkin's admiration for the Spanish mentality reflected in his characters: Don Juan, Laura, Donna Anna, Don Carlos and Leporello. His Don Juan is a courageous knight and a poet:

Leporello: (...)Your imagination (...) is richer than that of any painter (...)
First guest: Whose verse is that, Laura?
Laura: Don Juan's.²²

Don Juan's Spanish temperament, talent and misconduct are very close to Pushkin's. The king in *The Stone Guest* sent Don Juan away as he wanted to protect him from the wrath of the family of the deceased Commander. Alexander I also banished Pushkin from St. Petersburg. The Spanish knight is exiled for having killed Donna Anna's husband, while Pushkin's exile is not only connected with his political poems but with his own Don Juan reputation as well. Pushkin had the reputation of a womanizer and a lady-killer. Because of gambling and women he had a few 'stories' in Kishinev which ended up with duels.²³ Making Don Juan appear illegally in Madrid, Pushkin, in his wishful thinking, mapped out different plans for leaving 'his mean abode of blizzards and cold'.²⁴

The poet's emotions, connected with his poverty and lack of parental and financial support, made him very unhappy and were reflected in the other Little Tragedy – *The Miserly Knight*. The shortage of means to live was the

16: *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* by George Gordon Byron-Project Gutenberg. Canto the First. XXXIII. <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/5131>

17: Ibid.

18: Ibid., XXXV.

19: Ibid., XLVII.

20: Russian Literature-Alexander Pushkin. Pushkin. Feodor Dostoevsky.1880.2004 Artrusse. http://www.artrusse.ca/Pushkin/pushkin_en.htm

21: Достоевский Ф.М. «Пушкин». Очерк. <http://literator.ucoz.ru/publ/7-1-0-94>

22: Пушкин А.С. Каменный гость. С.295, 297.

23: Кирпичников А.И. Пушкин (словарь Брокгауза и Ефрона – 1890-1907). http://pushkin.niv.ru/pushkin_bio_kirpichnikov.htm

24: Ibid.

insurmountable barrier between him and Natalia Goncharova's family. His future mother-in-law worried about her daughter's future life with a husband who couldn't provide her with the benefits she had counted on. At the same time there were all kinds of gossip tarnishing Pushkin's reputation like that of Don Juan's. In the tragedy Pushkin's Don Juan kills Don Carlos thoughtlessly, without feeling remorse and not thinking much of the consequences. Pushkin makes the reader realize that according to the Spanish mentality there was nothing extraordinary in such conduct. When Don Juan killed Don Carlos Laura blamed the former for that murder which he himself regarded as a misdemeanour:

Killed! wonderful! in my room!
(...)
Constant tricks – and never found guilty.²⁵

Laura is shocked by the unexpected murder of Don Carlos, and calls Don Juan, who ignores her protests, a scapegrace and a demon (which was also often associated with high-society's opinion of Pushkin).²⁶

Wanton,
shameless
godless Don Juan.²⁷

The motive of Don Juan's repentance for his former sins when he falls in love with Dona Anna echoes Pushkin's pangs of conscience when he writes to his mother-in-law from Boldino assuring her that his terrible excesses are all in the past.²⁸

If Pushkin's Spanish scenes were theatrical, Childe Harold witnessed real events with Byron's eyes when the poet highlighted the passion and courage of Spanish people who were fighting for their freedom:

Sharp is the knife, and sudden is the stroke;
And sorely would the Gallic foemen rue,
If subtle poniards, wrapt beneath the cloak,
Could blunt the sabre's edge, or clear the cannon's smoke.²⁹

However, as seen here in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Byron also noted the peculiarities of the vengeful and passionate Spanish character, which could be easily provoked and challenged to an unpredictable and irreparable act. Yet, while travelling in Spain during the war the English poet saw a lot of examples of real self-sacrifice from the young people who had to defend their country, pursuing monarchical whims. Naturally, sympathizing with the Spanish, the poet could not help protesting against the useless deaths of the young:

And must they fall – the young, the proud, the brave –
To swell one bloated chief's unwholesome reign?
No step between submission and a grave?
The rise of rapine and the fall of Spain?³⁰

Both poets noted the merry, carefree attitude of the Spanish to life. Through the words of Leporello, Pushkin in *The Stone Guest* let the reader imagine the typical residents of Madrid – gypsies, musicians, guards and cavaliers who are aware of Don Juan's notorious reputation but at the same time are not sinless either:

Leporello: It's difficult to recognize Don Juan. There's a heap of such people like him.
Don Juan: Joking?
Who's going to recognize me?
Leporello: The first guard,
A gypsy or a drunk musician,
Or your mate, an impudent cavalier.³¹

Byron highlighted the reluctance of the Spanish to part with their easy-going and buoyant habits of living even in the times of war:

But all unconscious of the coming doom,
The feast, the song, the revel here abounds; (...)
Here Folly still his votaries enthralls,

25: Пушкин А.С. Каменный гость. С.301, 302.

26: Щеглов И.Л. Ахматова А.А.

27: Пушкин А.С. Каменный гость. С.301.

28: Пушкин А.С. Письма. Т.9.С.297-300.

29: George Gordon Byron.L.

30: Ibid.LIII.

31: Пушкин А.С. Каменный гость. С.289.

And young-eyed Lewdness walks her midnight rounds:
Girt with the silent crimes of capitals,
Still to the last kind Vice clings to the tottering walls.³²

Similarly, Pushkin's characters in *The Stone Guest* are both light-minded and passionate, regardless of their social standing when their misconduct is not an obstacle for love:

Laura: Are you mad?
I'll order my servants to stab you right now,
Though you are a Spanish grandee. (...) Laura.
You, the wild one! Stay with me,
I liked you; you reminded me of Don Juan.³³

If Pushkin's Spain, despite his intuition, is still theatrical and deeply psychological, Byron's image of Spain, although not quite free from his impressions gained from books,³⁴ is more socially grounded and realistic:

From morn till night, from night till startled morn
Peeps blushing on the revel's laughing crew,
The song is heard, the rosy garland worn;
Devices quaint, and frolics ever new,
Tread on each other's kibes. (...)
And love and prayer unite, or rule the hour by turns.³⁵

In colourful Spanish life women played a very important role. Both poets praised their Spanish style. In one of his letters Byron wrote about their appealing national attribute – 'dark languishing eyes, clear olive complexions and forms more graceful in motion than can be conceived by an Englishman used to the drowsy listless air of his country women.'³⁶

In *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* the poet confirmed his attitude to their beauty:

Her glance, how wildly beautiful! how much
Hath Phoebus wooed in vain to spoil her cheek
Which glows yet smoother from his amorous clutch!
Who round the North for paler dames would seek?
How poor their forms appear? how languid, wan, and weak!³⁷

Pushkin echoed Byron in *The Stone Guest*, depicting Don Juan's impressions after his exile in one of the northern countries. The description portrayed Pushkin's emotions during his own exile while staying in his family home estate in Mikhailovskoye:

(...) I almost died of boredom. What people,
What of a land! And the skies?...
they are like smoke.
And women? And, in fact, I won't exchange
as you might see, my silly Leporello,
the last Andalousian peasant
For their first beauties.
Do believe me, at the beginning I liked them
With their blue eyes and paleness
and modesty, but more – for their novelty.
But thanks God soon I realized,
and saw that it's a sin to deal with them –
There's no life in them. They all are like wax dolls;
But ours ...³⁸

Echoing Byron's 'love and prayer unite, or rule the hour by turns', Pushkin highlights the passionate and freedom-loving nature of Spanish women: his zealous Laura is fond of Don Juan but when he vanishes from her horizon, despite her great love, she chooses Don Carlos for his mad temperament. When the latter asks her about her feelings she answers that at present she does love him:

32: Byron, George Gordon. Ibid., XLVI.

33: Пушкин А.С. Каменный гость. С.297.

34: MacCarthy, Fiona. Ibid.,95.

35: Byron, George Gordon. Ibid., LXVII.

36: MacCarthy, Fiona. Ibid., 96.

37: Byron, George Gordon. Ibid., LVIII.

38: Пушкин А.С. Каменный гость. С.290.

I cannot love two men at a time.³⁹

Yet, when Don Juan comes to Madrid, she immediately goes back to him. In her turn, the inconsolable widow Donna Anna, who is supposed to be faithful to her husband even after his death, cannot resist Don Juan's approaches.

In *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* Byron extols the courage of Spanish women during the war when they hung their guitars on the willow and joined their men on the battle field:

Is it for this the Spanish maid, aroused,
Hangs on the willow her unstrung guitar,
And, all unsexed, the anlace hath espoused,
Sung the loud song, and dared the deed of war?⁴⁰

The reader is led to believe that the maid from Saragoza possesses absolutely unique qualities:

Ye who shall marvel when you hear her tale,
Oh! had you known her in her softer hour,
Marked her black eye that mocks her coal-black veil,
Heard her light, lively tones in lady's bower,
Seen her long locks that foil the painter's power,
Her fairy form, with more than female grace,
Scarce would you deem that Saragoza's tower
Beheld her smile in Danger's Gorgon face,
Thin the closed ranks, and lead in Glory's fearful chase.⁴¹

Both poets were very fond of music. Music accompanied different life and historical events in their works. Byron could not be indifferent to the beauty of Spanish songs. The magnificent folk songs praised the glorious past and the heroes' difficult fates:

Teems not each ditty with the glorious tale?
Ah! such, alas, the hero's amplest fate!
When granite moulders and when records fail,
A peasant's plaint prolongs his dubious date.
Pride! bend thine eye from heaven to thine estate,
See how the mighty shrink into a song⁴²

With the development of the war, the melodies change, and the poet calls the Spanish people to fight against the enemy:

Awake, ye sons of Spain! awake! Advance
Lo! Chivalry, your ancient goddess, cries,
But wields not, as of old, her thirsty lance,
Nor shakes her crimson plumage in the skies (...)⁴³

Pushkin's Laura is inseparable from her guitar. Her guests always ask her to sing:

Thank you, enchantress. You marvel
Our hearts. Out of all the pleasures of life
It is to love that Music yields,
But love is also a melody ...⁴⁴

In his passionate monologue, Don Juan, begging Dona Anna's love, mentions serenades as the true means for winning a woman's heart:

If I were mad, I'd spend
Nights under your balcony
Disturbing your sleep by serenades.⁴⁵

39: Ibid., 299.

40: Byron, George Gordon. Ibid., LIV.

41: Ibid., LV.

42: Ibid., XXXVI.

43: Ibid., XXXVII.

44: Пушкин А.С. Каменный гость. С.297.

45: Ibid 307.

According to Akhmatova, a careful analysis of *The Stone Guest* makes us realize that under the fictitious names and situations we do not only have a new version of the world legend about Don Juan, but a deeply personal and original work by Pushkin, the main feature of which is defined not by the plot of the legend but by the personal lyrical feelings of Pushkin himself, which were inseparably connected with his life experience. We can see a dramatic impersonation of the poet, the artistic detection of what was tormenting and fascinating him.⁴⁶

However, one cannot agree with Pushkin that Byron cast a one-sided glance at the world and the nature of mankind and then turned away from them being absorbed by his own personality.⁴⁷ In *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* Byron voiced the burning issues of the life of Spain and was far from being indifferent to the fate of its people.

Thus, for Pushkin and Byron Spain became a place where love and hatred, life and death, loyalty and betrayal stepped side by side and filled their hearts with poetic inspiration.

46: Ахматова А.А. Ibid.,195.

47: Пушкин А.С. О трагедиях Байрона.Т.9. С.20.