

LARRA'S «LOS BARATEROS»: COGNITIVE DISSONANCE AND THE ROMANTIC CRISIS OF VALUES

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In her valuable study, «Larra entre 'Literatura' y 'Horas de Invierno'», Susan Kirkpatrick uses those two articles from January and December of 1836 respectively, as well as Larra's well-known review of the Dumas play *Antony* from June of the same year, to trace what she sees as the steady trajectory in Larra's thinking from optimism to deep disillusionment with liberal ideology. This «modificación de las pautas profundas de su pensar» (Larra entre Literatura 621) is reflected in Larra's increasingly bitter criticism of the political events of the period, specifically what he sees as the failure of the Mendizábal government to enact the promised reforms, and his growing cynicism about the possibility of reform. Although essentially in agreement with Kirkpatrick, we shall suggest further that what we witness in this period is Larra's own philosophical and political radicalization in which the Romantic «crisis of belief» is clearly evident. This crisis results in the fusion of his Romantic literary instincts with his increasingly radical and pessimistic thought.

Traditionally, when we think of the romantic tendencies in Larra's journalistic work, we immediately look, as Kirkpatrick and other critics have done, to the end of 1836 and the two canonical articles which are always used to illustrate that aspect of Larra's thought, «El día de difuntos de 1836» and «La Nochebuena de 1836». As Kirkpatrick asserts: «[Along with 'Horas de invierno', these articles] further reflect a crisis in the values and assumptions

that had formerly guided his writing» (Spanish Romanticism 467). In this essay, however, we shall suggest that this crisis is clearly visible much earlier in the final year of his life, specifically in the underappreciated article «Los barateros», which was published in *El Español* on April 19, 1836. «Los barateros» is a hybrid work in which, among other things, Larra employs a number of Romantic call-signs to present a substantially radicalized viewpoint. This important article deserves to be discussed alongside its more famous cousins. It should be added to the Larra canon not only as an earlier, key example of this growing doubt and disillusionment in Larra's thinking but also as a paradigmatic example of the fusion of romantic literary art and political ideology. In addition, we see in it a startling example of Larra's proto-modern journalistic practice.

Kirkpatrick succinctly summarizes what must have been taking place in this period in the evolution of Larra's literary and socio-political thought. She observes that the evolution of Romantic ideas and of liberal attitudes was often a parallel one, that «as these writers explored their liberal ideas in the artistic sphere of feeling and imagination, these concepts were simultaneously being tested in the practical experience of the struggles of the 1830's» (Spanish Romanticism 456). In other words, the Enlightenment assumptions which provided the rationale for liberal programs and principles were being sorely tested in the Spanish of the 1830's, and especially in 1836 for Larra, first in February when Mendizábal abandons the central liberal principle of expanding the franchise, then in March with his plan to dispose of confiscated Church lands. Both Larra and Espronceda view the latter as a clear case of the liberal establishment pursuing its own selfish economic interests to the detriment of the middle and lower classes. This interaction of Romantic ideals with an increasing ambivalence toward the entire liberal enterprise reflects the «symptoms of that crisis of values which had originally spawned [the Spanish Romantics] newly-adopted literary models» (Spanish Romanticism 456). It seems entirely natural then that Larra, provoked by the failure of his «guiding mission», that is, «the consolidation of a liberal, middle-class public» (Spanish Romanticism 456), makes use of the Romantic idiom to express his frustration and despair¹. We shall suggest that this is specifically

¹ The fusion we see in «Los barateros» of Larra's politico-ideological attitudes with his literary Romanticism seems pertinent to the polemic concerning the two

what we see in his journalism for the first time in «Los barateros». Further, in «Los barateros», he produces something which goes well beyond «skepticism» to resemble a revolutionary manifesto².

«Los barateros» has usually been analyzed for what it reveals about only half of this equation of fusion, that is, for its political content, for its denunciation of social injustice and elaboration of Larra's ideas about the necessity of incorporating all of society into «la estructura de poder» (*Laberinto inextricable* 137). Kirkpatrick, for example, discusses the evident tension in «Los barateros» between Larra's «desconfianza elitista» in the lower classes, that is, between «el individualismo radical de sus convicciones liberales» and his growing realization of the importance of «acción colectiva» (*Laberinto inextricable* 148). However, what interests us here is not solely the political dimensions of Larra's «crisis of values», but rather the literary techniques he chooses which illustrate it, and what those choices show us about the trajectory of his evolution as a Romantic. In another article, «'Los barateros' and its Mirror Images», Kirkpatrick states that «the great virtue of the essay» is its application of «common formulations of liberal rhetoric» to specifically contemporary events that «demonstrated social inequality» (81). However, as we shall see, «Los barateros» goes well beyond standard liberal rhetoric to insist that Society as it is currently constituted is false and illegitimate. In doing so, Larra employs techniques which far surpass this «common formulation» precisely because of the context into which they are inserted. He joins this «formulation» with the Romantic literary idiom to mark not only a dramatic leap in his political evolution, but also to create as pro-

branches of Spanish Romanticism and the disagreement as to which is the more «authentic». It would seem to support the contention of Shaw et. al. who link Spanish Romanticism with «liberalism, with spiritual malaise and with a so-called «cosmic rebellion» as Flitter puts it in his study *Spanish Romantic Literary Theory and Criticism*. Flitter holds «that any exclusive association of Spanish Romanticism with liberalism is untenable». He finds «dogmatic» the fact that Shaw «has... dealt principally with the relationship between the literary movement and contemporary ideological concerns», assuming that literary Romanticism and political liberalism were interdependent historical phenomena (1-3).

² We see more evidence of this growing radicalization just two and a half weeks later on May 6, 1836 in Larra's review of Espronceda's «folleto» against the abuses and failures of Mendizábal in which he completely identifies with Espronceda's thinking and issues what can only be termed a call for a generational changing of the guard and revolutionary action: «La revolución ha gastado y desgasta los nombres viejos y conocidos; la juventud está llamada a manifestarse» («El Ministerio de Mendizábal» in *Obras de Larra* II, 214,15).

found and representative a literary work as any of the more famous articles fo follow later that same year.

Why, after all, did Larra choose the curious topic of a dispute between two prisoners in the Madrid jail and the knife fight in which one dies and the other is then condemned to death? At first glance it seems an odd choice: a lowly, violent criminal is asked to carry the weight of representing «el pueblo», as well as what remains of Larra's liberal hopes. However, this choice admirably accomplishes Larra's dual purpose of addressing not only the theme of social injustice —as Martín observes about that theme: «[Larra] critica la desigualdad del individuo ante la ley» (109)— but also of elaborating it within the romantic idiom. We shall see that «el baratero» himself serves as much more than simply a metaphor for the lower classes or even «el pueblo». The «baratero» is truly a Romantic trope. He becomes the individual Romantic hero, Espronceda's «pirata» imprisoned on dry land, who suffers society's injustices, but nonetheless remains defiant and demands justice. In fact, as Larra constructs what quickly becomes a sketch for a Romantic «drama», he not only borrows ideas and vocabulary from the poetry of Espronceda, but we also hear echoes from his own play, *Macías*, and Duque de Rivas's *Don Álvaro* as well.

The essay begins, in effect, with its subtitle and epigraph. The latter is a brief excerpt from the *Diario de Madrid* of April 15, 1836 announcing the execution of one prisoner for killing another in the Madrid jail. Published four days after the execution, the story Larra reconstructs in «Los barateros», then, is based on this real, if relatively insignificant, historical event which would still be fresh in the mind of Larra's readers. The subtitle —«el desafío y la pena de muerte»— refers directly to their «duel» or knife fight and reveals the essence of the plot of the event which Larra is going to recreate. Kirkpatrick has pointed out the presumably not-uncoincidental occurrence of a duel between Mendizábal and Istúriz three days prior to the publication of Larra's article, as well as its sociopolitical ramifications and background (Mirror Images 463). That duel was but one more event contributing to Larra's growing comprehension of the social divisions and inequality distorting liberal thought and making true reform impossible. It also lends the subtitle another ironic twist. And, of course, it is another event which would still be fresh in his reader's minds, Mendizábal himself presumably first among them.

For its first three paragraphs the essay seems to be a relatively straightforward and closely-argued discourse on penal reform, emphasizing Larra's concerns about the potential injustice of pretrial detention. It begins with a discussion of the role of society with respect to crime and the criminal, and society's right to defend itself from them. Society is viewed as if it were an individual with certain rights and prerogatives, a characterization which will quickly assume greater significance in Larra's scheme. In the first paragraph, Larra asserts that the right of society to incarcerate is «nada más que el derecho del más fuerte» (451). Ironically, this is the very «right» which holds sway in the alternative «society» which Larra says inevitably forms inside a jail in the vacuum created when the larger Society abandons its responsibility to provide appropriate penal facilities³. In this classic «liberal formulation», he insists that society's goal in imprisoning an individual should not be one of revenge or even necessarily one of punishment, but rather that incarceration should function as a cautionary example to others. He says: «No es tanto su objeto castigar como escarmentar; no se propone por fin destruir al criminal, sino al crimen» (540). Larra, then, advocates the modern, if debatable, conception that incarceration is a deterrent to other criminals. Next, he briefly discusses the issue of pretrial confinement, again insisting that this should not be a punishment. He points out that, in fact, this sort of confinement of a potentially innocent person becomes an unjust punishment if the conditions in jail are such as to cause harm to the detainee. He speaks of society's «sagrada obligación» to maintain appropriate conditions so that «la cárcel no sea una pena para el acusado, inocente o culpable: la cárcel no debe acarrear sufrimiento alguno... ni mucho menos influir moralmente en la opinión del detenido» (541).

After these three opening paragraphs, however, Larra abruptly

³ Significantly, in terms of his own mental state, this theme of jail and the possibility of imprisonment seems to be one with which Larra is obsessed during this period. We see it mentioned in several articles in which he comments that part of the writer's role is to be persecuted and even imprisoned. For example, in his review of Espronceda's «folleto» on Mendizábal, he says that «el escritor público... debe aprender de coro sus doctrinas [y] propagarlas de viva voz, sufrir en fin la persecución, la cárcel, el patíbulo si es preciso» (II, 214). See also «Al Director de *El Español*» (II, 217) and «Horas de invierno» (II, 289). In addition, Gregorio Martín discusses this issue in his article, «Larra: Los artículos de miedo».

shifts gears, radically altering his technique and the content of the essay, leaving far behind the apparent treatise on prison reform. Kirkpatrick calls what appears next «a prototype of investigative journalism» (Mirror Images 82). Indeed, it is all of that, but something even more radical takes place here as well. Larra seems to leap over that familiar modern genre, as if he had somehow foreseen and intuited the lessons of the so-called «New Journalism» of the 1970's, in which the writer recreates a setting and then narrates in a semi-documentary fashion the actions, speech and even the thoughts of the participants in an historical event. In other words, from the brief news item alluded to in the epigraph, Larra imagines and describes in vivid detail the events that might have taken place in the Madrid jail which end in the death of this Gregorio Cané and the execution of this fellow «baratero», Ignacio Arguñañes. The article, then, departs altogether from any sort of recognizable «common formulation» of liberal rhetoric, and takes us behind the epigraph and into the jail itself. Indeed, Larra sketches a remarkably compact kind of metaphorical Romantic drama here. Certainly Larra's technique in his articles on Spanish customs and mores always involved the recreation and fictionalization of scenes and dialogue and invention of characters, but here he manipulates a real historical event. This seems far removed from the usual peripetitions of Fígaro and his earlier incarnations. What is even more striking and innovative about this departure is the imagery Larra uses to present the drama. In the next four paragraphs we find a dense grouping of what Gies, offering a tentative classification of «los tópicos románticos», calls: «[un] conjunto de signos... [una] constante avalancha de imágenes que formaron un lenguaje» (57). Of these images, Gies adds: «las imágenes románticas [españolas] crearon una gramática de subversión y de desorden» (57). We will see that the «desorden» which Larra depicts and bitterly criticizes inside the jail is literally and metaphorically «el desorden» of which Gies speaks, the very disorder and chaos of the Romantic crisis. It is, as Shaw defines it, «el vacío que ha producido el derrumbamiento primero de los absolutos religiosos y luego del ideal racionalista» (18), and it reflects forcefully the crisis in values Larra himself is experiencing in this period as well.

«Era uno de los días del mes de marzo», the fourth paragraph begins, and then Larra describes in vivid and concise detail the scene in the jail. He heightens its immediacy by employing a series

of accoustical effects. The «patio» of the jail is full of prisoners, and there is a din of «estrepitosas carcajadas [y] las soeces maldiciones y blasfemias», along with «sarcásticos estribillos de torpes cantares» (541). We are reminded at once of similar effects found throughout «El estudiante de Salamanca». Curiously, and perhaps not coincidentally, Larra had access to a fragment of that poem, its first seventy-five lines, which had been published six weeks earlier on March 7, also in *El Español*. In that fragment, of course, the sounds of a duel are also prominently featured⁴. We observe there an ambience of «misterios sonidos / de maldiciones y anatema» (El estudiante 88), the same cacophonous environment of fear and violence that Larra reproduces in «Los barateros».

Located at the very center of this striking, recreated scene in the Madrid jail is «el juego», another paradigmatic element of the Romantic vocabulary. One wonders if Larra knew of the importance «el juego» would also play in Espronceda's poem or if he simply anticipated it. He would have been familiar, or course, with the important scene of the card game in *Don Álvaro o la fuerza del sino*—published in March of 1835— which takes place just before Don Álvaro's fateful meeting on the battlefield with Leonor's brother, Don Carlos. As Gies observes: «El juego de naipes o la apuesta es un emblema... que refleja el universo caprichoso en que el héroe romántico se ve injustamente atrapado» (53). Larra tells us in the fourth paragraph of «Los barateros» that «el juego» results in «[un] desenlace fatídico y misterioso» (542). Further, according to Larra, in jail «el juego» is so significant that «se llama vulgarmente destino en la suerte de los detenidos» (542, emphasis added). As Shaw points out: «[es] la visión de la vida dominada por una fatalidad injusta, que, al final, reduce todo a un juego de azares sin sentido» («Introducción» 20). Larra then adds that «el juego» is a symbol of «la solución misteriosa y de la verdad incierta que el hombre busca incesantemente desde que ve la luz hasta que es devuelto a la nada» (542, emphasis added). Thus, we see already in this bleak and dis-

⁴ Espronceda uses a condemned prisoner facing an indifferent, if not hostile, Society as the protagonist in his poem «El reo de muerte», a poem to which Larra also had access. We see in that poem some of the same accoustic devices that appear in «Los barateros»: As the young prisoner contemplates his death and «se oye al fraile agonizante / en son confuso rezar», the poet juxtaposes other sounds that seep into the prison from outside: «el cantar de las rameras, / y el desorden bacanal / ...y carcajadas, / cual de lejos arrojadas / de la mansión infernal», and then the youth, «el sentenciado», «maldijo el mundo todo» (*Obras poéticas* 29).

turbing penal setting the full «cosmovisión romántica», with its attendant despair and disillusionment, including the crisis of faith in divine providence, all dramatized as if Larra were reporting historical fact.

How do we reconcile these pessimistic images with the fact that, in his review of the Dumas play *Antony* two months later in June, Larra seemingly condemns this very philosophy and its promotion of «fragmentación social?» (*Actas* 624) Kirkpatrick describes the «tortuosa ambivalencia» and the «disonancia mental» that Larra experiences as he writes about the threat to social order that he sees in Dumas's work, as opposed to the «certidumbre que manifiesta en el ensayo anterior», that is, in his «profesión de fe» in the article «Literatura» in January of 1836 (*Actas* 625). As Shaw notes: «[En *Antony*], Larra se encontró de pronto a sí mismo cara a cara con una verdad que no era 'útil' ni 'buena' ni 'la expresión del progreso' humano» (*Literatura española* 52). This, we suggest, is the source of his «disonancia mental»; it is the cognitive dissonance caused by the collision between liberal, essentially Enlightenment values used to justify liberal assumptions and programs and the darker, more pessimistic ideals of Romanticism which seem better to express the reality of his «lost illusions» (*Spanish Romanticism* 456). Further, Shaw observes: «en realidad Larra constata esto como un hecho que no sólo no intenta negar, sino que incluso sostiene que es el inevitable descubrimiento del resto de la humanidad en el futuro» (52). However, it seems that Larra had already integrated this pessimistic vision into his own thinking, at least by the time of «Los barateros». In «Los barateros» the only certainty is that the truth is «incierta», and what he condemns in *Antony* he has already himself recognized and presented overtly in «Los barateros». This, in our opinion, is what we see in «Los barateros»: despite his apparent desire to shield and protect others from this despairing vision, Larra himself is in the midst of a critically difficult period, one centered on a personal crisis of faith and values. By April, then, he has already arrived at, and frankly states, the Romantic position. As we would expect, this profound «disonancia mental» continues to manifest itself in his writing throughout 1836. The process is not a steady trajectory at all, but like most evolutions, is one of fits and starts. But, it seems apparent that the balance has been tipped well before the New Year and the two more famous articles from that period. We see this with clarity in several

well-known quotes from his two articles on *Antony* in which he again employs one of the same key words he uses in «Los barateros» in the context of describing «el juego» in the Madrid jail: «*Antony* es el grito que lanza la humanidad que nos lleva delantera... al encontrar el caos y *la nada* al fin del viaje», and again: «si el destino de la humanidad es llegar a *la nada* por entre ríos de sangre... no seamos nosotros los únicos privados del triste privilegio de la humanidad» (*Obras II* 248, emphasis added). This journey which terminates in the chaos and «la nada», the journey Larra appears to shun in *Antony* is precisely the one Larra has already mapped out in «Los barateros» two months earlier with its presentation of the nihilistic chaos and «desorden» of the Madrid jail, a «fin del viaje» which culminates in a state-sanctioned killing.

In effect, then, the condemned «baratero» functions as a fully Romantic hero. (Here, of course, all his passion is directed towards the loss of freedom and a demand for social justice, rather than towards a lover and the impossibility of love. For him there does not exist even the illusion of love as refuge). He has been rejected and abandoned by society. He lives «fuera de la sociedad» (543), isolated from it, precisely what the typical Romantic hero experiences. As Gies observes, one of the romantic hero's principal characteristics is «una enajenación física» in which: «con frecuencia se encuentra solo y separado de la cómoda *protección* del statu quo» (51, emphasis added). Larra underscores the same abandonment, the same absence of protection in the jail, and notes that the prisoners form their own society from the moment in which the greater Society, «olvidando la *protección* que les debe, los deja al arbitrio de un cómitre despótico» (542, emphasis added). According to Shaw, the image of the jail itself symbolizes almost perfectly the revolutionary branch of Romanticism which «anuncia la edad moderna con sus incertidumbres y sus dudas» (30). Again in Don Álvaro's soliloquy in the last act of Duque de Rivas's play, for example, or in Espronceda's «El diablo mundo» the formula is the same: «la vida es una cárcel» («Introducción 30»). Thus, its use here in «Los barateros» is symbolic commentary: the jail is Society, we see now, and we have our first inkling of the parallel world Larra is carefully constructing, one in which, ironically, the same «derecho de fuerza» dominates.

In the fifth paragraph, the «baratero» exclaims: «Estoy fuera de la sociedad; desde hoy... *mi ley es my fuerza*» (543, original empha-

sis). If we had any doubts as to what Larra is up to, they are now erased. He has, of course, borrowed directly from the refrain of Espronceda's «Canción del pirata» which had been published the year before in 1835. This «baratero», then, is not just a common, strong-arm criminal, rather he is no less than that paradigmatic Romantic figure, the pirate, like «el baratero» a victim of Society, marginalized, alienated and rebelling against the established order and declaring his liberty based on his own individual resources. Larra's use of this line from the poem's refrain perhaps entitles us to glance at the entire chorus of Espronceda's poem in which we discover «la esencia del movimiento romántico» (Ontañón xxxvii). The pirate, we recall, blasphemes like Larra's prisoners; his only god is liberty. Further, he declares that he has no country except the sea. The laws of men do not interest him. As Gies says: «[el héroe romántico] no acepta las restricciones sociales que la sociedad intenta imponerle... Son individuos que sufren una angustia cósmica, cuyo destino... reside en manos de una jerarquía social arbitraria» (50). This is the very accusation that «el baratero» will hurl at Society.

After this declaration by his protagonist, Larra again intervenes directly at the end of this, the fifth, paragraph, returning briefly to his initial theme of prison reform to accuse Society for a second time of withdrawing its «protección», the central accusation thus far. He says without hesitation that the prisoners' rebellion and crime are a direct result of this abandonment —«he aquí el resultado del desorden de las cárceles» (542)— not that he approves of their rebellion but, as with what takes place in *Antony*, it is a simple, if horrifying, statement of reality. After this authorial intrusion, a pause which in itself is an effective dramatic technique which allows the tension to subside briefly, the author returns to the «drama» and its first climax, the knife fight. «El día va a expirar», he tells us. The sun is setting; it is dusk, a classic Romantic hour. Again, acoustic effects are prominent, but this time we do not hear a blasphemous din but another, perhaps more shocking blasphemy, «una Salve a la Madre del Redentor», sung by one of the prisoners: «impudente y burlesca sobre el labio de el que la entona» (543). Then, with «el son del religioso cántico» ironically ringing in the background, the two «barateros» struggle, and «con el último acento del cántico», one of them, Gregorio Cané, dies. The use of the religious song, praying for a divine intercession which will never

come, is clearly also part of the Romantic vocabulary, not unlike the meaning of the symbol of the convent at the end of *Don Álvaro*, a retreat which does not provide refuge either, but only the illusion of refuge, and ultimately becomes the site of Leonor's death and Don Álvaro's suicide. We also hear in the «Salve María» echoes of the solemn canto, the «Miserere», at the end of *Don Álvaro*, which also ironically punctuates the events that take place there. So, in effect, Larra reinforces with these symbols what we saw with his selection of the word «la nada». They imply, along with the failure of Society to offer «protección», the failure as well of any providential being to shelter humanity. As Shaw asserts: «[Esto] expresa, ante todo, la falta de fe de los románticos en la interpretación providencialista de la vida como sujeta a designio divino benevolente» (Introducción 20). We sense the bitter irony in Larra's comment that «con el último acento del cántico, llega a los pies del altísimo el alma de un baratero» (543). A benevolent Providence has not been present in the Madrid jail either, and now the surviving «baratero» finds himself not only outside Society but bereft of all hope and «al fin de viaje».

At this juncture, the article turns another corner, moving even farther away from where it seemingly began as an essay on prison reform, and becomes a fully-dramatized allegory. Two actors appear, and a dialogue between them ensues. Society itself is personified and speaks to the surviving, and now-condemned, «baratero», who also appears «on stage» and responds in turn. As they debate, Society takes the unusual tack of openly confessing all of its ills and defects, almost taunting the «baratero» with its sins. As we have seen, Larra has accused Society of withdrawing its protection from the prisoners, and now Society itself arrogantly admits: «mis leyes no te protegían» (543). The «baratero» explodes in anger at this blatant injustice and inequality before the law, a double standard to which Society readily admits: «yo castigo tu homicidio, y tú no puedes castigar mi negligencia y mi falta de amparo» (544). We note at once the resemblance here to another Romantic work, Larra's own *Macías*. As Kirkpatrick points out, the ideal of liberty and equality before the law which Larra contrasts with the privileges of the aristocracy is the basis of that work too (*Laberinto inextricable* 124). In *Macías* the eponymous hero defies his lord, Count Enrique, a stand-in for Society, and we see again the crucial dichotomy, protection/abandonment, as well as the hint of class

conflict. Macías declares: «¿qué respeto por vuestra *protección* he de guardaros? ¿*Protegen* esta suerte los señores?... Si esto es amparo, sed desde hoy mi enemigo...» (Act 3, Scene VI, emphasis added). Macías challenges established authority, asserting: «...Sois inhumano, / injusto sois conmigo, don Enrique... porque ese infando / poder gozáis, con que oprimís vilmente, / en vez de proteger al desdichado...» (Act 3, Scene VI). Just as Macías defies don Enrique, «el baratero» defies and threatens Society, lending additional meaning to the «desafío» of the essay's subtitle. «Mi día llegará, oh falsa sociedad» (546), he swears. But, we suggest, the figure of «el baratero» is not so much Macías, or Rugiero in *La conjuración de Venecia* or even Manrique in *El trovador*, but rather a further stage in the evolution of the Romantic hero (as in Larra himself). He more closely resembles a more pessimistic, more marginalized hero, Félix de Montemar, another impudent blasphemer, who, as we have noted, had recently appeared unnamed in the first published fragment of «El estudiante de Salamanca».

Larra fully reveals the symbolism and deep Romantic intent of this brief «drama» when Society suddenly addresses the «baratero» first as «hombre del pueblo», then almost at once as «pueblo», then asks him: «¿no ves que no soy la sociedad, sino un monstruo de sociedad?» (545). This description is part of the Romantic «grammar» as well. Although not exactly a «fantasma», Society appears here as something analogous, a grotesque, deformed entity, «un cuerpo truncado», lacking its own soul and feet, that is, lacking its essential component, the «pueblo» itself. Thus, we have come full circle back to Larra's thesis: the greater Society is false. It is illegitimate, just as the society that the criminals form in jail is false. Now, however, the «baratero» is no longer a criminal at all, but rather an oppressed citizen, the representative of the «pueblo». The Romantic vision is complete. Society is an unjust, deformed monster, and the world in reality is a prison in which the ruling classes will continue to oppress «los barateros» with unequal enforcement of its laws. The death of Ignacio Argumañes is another unjust tax or «barato» that Society exacts from «el pueblo» in an ongoing «juego» which seems not to be a game of chance but rather a frightening swindle whose results have been fixed long in advance.

In conclusion, in this essay from April of 1836, we have seen Larra draw on—and at times even anticipate—various Romantic literary paradigms from his own work and that of his contempo-

raries. With these techniques, he dramatizes a particular ideological concern provoked by the very real political events of 1836. At the same time, they reflect the cognitive dissonance and increasing pessimism he felt confronting these events. As will become evident two months later in June in his discussion of the Dumas play *Antony*, he is horrified by his dawning recognition of the failure of his liberal beliefs and what that failure bodes for the future. «Los barateros», then, is truly «uno de los artículos más desoladores de Fígaro» (Martín 109), and of much greater significance both stylistically and thematically than has generally been recognized. In this crucial signpost in his intellectual and literary evolution, we observe how far Larra has already travelled by April of the last year of his life to arrive at a fusion of his political disillusionment with a Romantic literary vision. The optimistic enlightenment thematics of the «Ateneo» articles are still to come, but Larra is already well on his way along the trajectory which will culminate in «El día de difuntos de 1836», «La Nochebuena de 1836» and death. If Larra had lived and continued to evolve on this same trajectory of which «Los barateros» is such a significant point, perhaps he himself would have written the Spanish *Antony* for a world that he had begun to see as increasingly disordered and uncertain, living as he was in a Madrid which, months before it became «un cementerio», was already «una cárcel».

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