

**Andalusia on Our Minds:  
Two Contrasting Places in Spain As Seen  
in a Vernacular Poetic Duel  
of the Late 19th Century**

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knew he would have to move entirely during the day when the Gorretin was asleep. So he busied himself early in the morning. Unfortunately he dawdled some as his household goods were slight. And when he was about finished in mid-afternoon, the priest came by to visit and inquire after the purpose of his move. And one wine led to another and by the time the priest left it was nearing nightfall. So the old man hurried and loaded his last article, his nightstand, upon his back, locked the door and as dusk fell made his way down the street. Halfway to his new house he heard the drawer of the night table open a crack behind him and the Gorretin jumped out upon his shoulder and whispered in his ear, "Si tu te vas voy yo tambien!"—"If you are going, I am going too." Well, you can't escape your demons.

Now one demon I can't escape as a Hispanist is the demon of Andalusia . . . a place in Spain of such powerful and compelling character that it is hard to convince those foreign to the cultural complexity of Iberia that this part of Spain and its characteristics are not the whole of Spain. I have trouble convincing people, surely people with tourist or other fashionable interests in Spain, that the part of Spain I work in, in contrast to the Andalusian part—I do not wish to deny what an authentic part it is—doesn't fight bulls, enact "machismo," dance the Flamenco, cook with olive oil, vigil virgins, engage in the politics of patronage, have a large dispossessed rural proletariat, and so forth. When the European and American public thinks of Spain it is usually Andalusia that is on their minds.

When we consider the constraints of place upon our work, we should include in that consideration the problem of metonymic misrepresentation, that is, the way that one place, which is simply a part of a much larger place—whether a province, a region, or a nation—comes to stand for a whole place, its particular problems coming to be perceived as the problems of the whole place. And this is true even though, approaching the problem from another more conscious perspective, we often cannot agree on a place that will stand for the whole place. For example, in a recent colloquium in appreciation of the work of the Hispanist Michael Kenny, the Catalan anthropologist, Oriol Pi-Sunyer wishes to make clear that Kenny's pioneering monograph, *A Spanish Tapestry*, "is more properly a Castillian than a Spanish Study,"<sup>4</sup> even though it treats of a central province in Spain and of Madrid itself. In subsequent discussion it was recognized that given Spanish provincial diversity it would be difficult to find any place in Spain that could be admitted to stand for the whole place, and that generalized definitions of things Spanish were characteristic of authoritarian formations of various kinds, such as the Franco regime.

Now it is a very interesting question why one part of a place, say Andalusia, should be taken to stand for the whole place and not some other part. In the Spanish case, why is it that Galicia, or Catalonia or Asturias<sup>5</sup> have not come to stand for Spain in the way that Andalusia has? There are some obvious answers, but I think an explanation of this phenomenon of metonymic misrepresentation can take us some way in understanding the problem we have before us.

The "demon" of Andalusia, as I call it, is not only the demon of metonymic misrepresentation but it is also the demon that jumps out of the tension between the north as a place and the south as a place. The north-south dialectic, as Camp-

bell and Levine have shown,<sup>6</sup> is not simply an Iberian dialectic or a European dialectic but it is virtually a worldwide dynamic of ethnocentric identity formation with a comparable set of contrasting stereotypic values attached to the two poles and with some tendency toward reversal of these two values in the southern hemisphere. In the spirit of moving beyond the anxieties and preoccupations of one's place of origin in the north-south dialectic, any fieldworker from a northern place who wishes to work in the south (or vice versa) would be advised to inform himself of those latent stereotypic values when he displaces himself to a southern place or a northern place, lest they enter into his readings of the characteristics of that place as an inadvertent confirmation of his or her northern or southern identity.

If we take this north-south dynamic as a real and usually insidious "definition of situation" in human affairs, as I think we must, we can understand why within that southern place, which from the perspective of northern Europe and North America Spain is seen to be, a southern part within that place should so often be taken to represent the whole. To take a northern part of a southern place, say Catalonia or Galicia, to stand for the whole would be to confuse the clear and simple identity-confirming sense of difference that stereotyping achieves. It would be to create cognitive dissonance. We northern North Americans may perhaps come to understand this when we reflect upon the fact that in the world at large we are referred to as Yankees. We may want to ask ourselves why a southern North American with all that the words "Damn Yankee" conveys to him or her should in the larger world want to be taken as a Yankee. But of course it would be dissonant to take a southern part as representative of a northern place . . . to be referred to as Johnnies rather than Yankees. And, of course, when one thinks of North America in the world at large one doesn't usually think of Florida or Louisiana or Georgia. There would be something of a humorous anomaly there as when John F. Kennedy referred to Washington, D.C., as a city of southern efficiency and northern charm.

I think that is as much as it is useful to say about the north-south dynamic in human definitions of self and other. For more grounded illumination I would like to turn to these villagers of ours, our Asturian provincials, who have such a strong sense of place themselves, as we have said, and such a strong sense of the difference between northern Spain and southern Spain . . . between Asturias, as it happens, and Andalusia. This is a difference that is on their minds as well.

In the interests, also, of disturbing our stereotypes about Spain as a southern place I would like to examine a famous—at least in Asturias—poetic exchange in the vernaculars (of Bable-Asturiano on the one hand and a sibilant elliptical Andalus on the other) in which the stereotypes of northern and southern places are at play. . . . It is a dialectic of northern and southern places in southern Europe. To recall our epigraph, there are different sympathetic associations here, which is to say tribal attitudes toward regions, all bound up in poetic metaphor.

#### "Benevolos Dicterios": Andalusia y Asturias

The poetic exchange we have before us,<sup>7</sup> between an Andalusian University Professor of Mathematics living in Asturias, Diego Terrero, and the best known

zi te debaran caer  
De lo maz arto, quiza  
Tardariaz, y digo poco,  
Una zemana en bajar.

If they would let you fall  
From the highest point, perhaps  
You would take, and modestly,  
A week in coming down.

And this first poem in Andalusian ends with an observation on the Asturian dialect:

Conque, cayate, compare  
y arguna vez vete aya  
para ver aqueya tierra  
que's la gloria celestial:  
y cierre mu bien er pico,  
pues zi te oyen jabla,  
l'azeguro que a loz perroz  
les zirvez pa merendar.

So shut up, compadre,  
And go there sometime  
To see that land  
Which is a celestial glory:  
And shut tightly your beak,  
Because if they hear you speak,  
I assure you that to the dogs  
They will feed you as a snack.

To give a sense of the lexical difficulties in Asturian, here is Cuesta commenting on the Andalusian dialect. It comes

de la tierra del ceceu  
y del ronquiu q'apesta  
pos pa falar y'escusao  
remendar a una nuviella!

from the land of the lisp  
and of pestilential hoarseness  
where in speaking it's forgiven  
to imitate a sucking calf!

Perhaps above all else, language or dialect gives a sense of place. At any rate, in the contemporary Asturian struggle, among the many other present regional struggles in Spain, to reestablish their province as an Asturian place, it is the struggle against the Castilianization of their language—which is to say the making (displacement) of their province into part of a Castilian place—which has the greatest importance.<sup>11</sup>

But of course there are other obvious markers of the distinctiveness of place and the stereotype of region, and chief among these are culinary traditions and the beauty of young women. People coming back from a foreign place are most likely to make observations on the food and drink and, particularly if the explorers or travelers are young men, the beauty (or lack of it) of the women. This poetic exchange is no different, and a great deal of this verse is devoted to invidious comparisons of food, drink, and women. Here is the Andalusian Terrero lauding the lively dance of the Andalusian woman:

Cundo eliges por pareja  
arguna moza junca  
en tocandola er fandango  
la veraz pronto zartar,  
y diraz, ezto no ez baile,  
ezto se yama volar

When you select as a partner  
Some country lass  
In striking up a fandango  
Quickly she will spring up,  
You'll say that's not to dance,  
That's called flying

And then he goes on to contrast this gracefulness with the heaviness of the Asturian dance, since Asturians often dance in wooden shoes (*madrenas*):

pero aqui por ezta tierra  
que yo yamo esgracia,  
con zapatos e maera  
loz he vizto yo baila,  
y un tambor con una gaita,  
que da ganaz e yora,  
ez la muzica zubrime  
que acoztumbran a toca.

But here in this land  
That I would call unfortunate,  
With wooden shoes  
I myself have seen them dance,  
And with a drum and bagpipe,  
It makes one want to cry,  
It's the sublime music  
They are accustomed to play.

Cuesta, the Asturian, responds that there is little news in the fact that Andalusian girls are pretty. "Eve's daughters are born everywhere of all sizes and shapes." But for truly sweet faces,

nunca Uvicio  
a dalgun otru pueblo tuvo mieo  
Q'al son de la guitarra dan  
carcobos  
con tanta gracia, que dexaren bobos  
a toos los d'Asturies!  
Vaya! Vaya!  
non mos cai por tan poco  
la babaya!

never has Oviedo  
had fear of any other town  
That at the sound of the guitar  
they make curvacious leaps  
With so much grace they stupify  
All those of Asturias,  
Go on! Go on!  
We are not so easily taken in by  
foolishness.

If only in Malaga, we are told, they could hear Pinin play the bagpipe and Xacinto the drum. If they could see forty Asturian girls dance to all this they would think it was a dream. Above all,

Si vieren les gargantes  
mas blanguines  
que cuayes o fresques mantequines,  
y en elles el coral  
sofriendo agravios  
el color envidando de  
sos labios?

If they could but see their  
throats whiter than  
Coddled milk or fresh butter,  
Against which the coral necklace  
suffers by comparison  
Envyng the color of their lips?

But the Andalusian is too familiar with his Asturian milieu and its regional afflictions to easily accept this prideful boast. Where he asks

Aonde eztan ezas mujerez  
tan guapaz, tan jechiceraz  
que tienen una garganta  
que'z maz blanca que laz perlaz?  
Zon ezas que tienen bocio  
y que hay por Mierez y Lena,  
toitaz yenaz e coyarez  
pa taparse laz paperez?

Where are these women  
So pretty, so enchanting  
That have a throat  
Whiter than pearls  
Are they those with goiter  
Found in Mieres and Lena,  
Loaded down with necklaces  
To hide their bulging necks?

Terrero concludes that Cuesta has had no experience of the world, of other places, and hence he does not know what beauty in women is—that is, the beauty of cinnamon skin. And hence he is likely to find gracefulness in any old thing.

co la boquiaa postrera,  
 lo que se fai ye llevalu  
 en coche, caballo o yegua  
 deprisa a Villviciosa,  
 la flor, la mapa, la reina  
 de les villes d'esti mundo;  
 la que mas llagares cuenta  
 que garbanzos de Castilla  
 Ond'al vellu, toi seguru  
 d'amigos se ve rodiau . . .  
 y en una espicha soberbia  
 cuando arrinca la tenaza  
 el taruquin de madera  
 y el chorro se ve de sidra  
 con que la xarra s'enllena,  
 solo con arrecendello  
 con mirallo tan siquiera,  
 come com' un tapineru,

sana y contentu se queda.

The last gasp,  
 What they do is carry him  
 In car, horse or mare  
 Quickly to Villviciosa,  
 The flower, the model, the queen  
 Of the towns of this world;  
 The one with the most cideries  
 More than chickpeas in Castille.  
 Where immediately I'm assured  
 By friends he is surrounded . . .  
 At a fine barrel opening fete  
 And when the tongs pull forth  
 The wooden stopper  
 And the spurt of cider comes forth  
 And fills the wooden pitcher,  
 Smelling that sweet odor alone  
 Not having to even see it,  
 He will want to eat like a  
 ditchdigger,  
 And healthy and happy he  
 remains.

There are many other lively and interesting exchanges in this poetic duel. In general the Andalusian, Terrero, engages in direct boasting about his place and in direct put-downs of the Asturian milieu and its customs. Cuesta, the Asturian, is more given to telling droll stories about country folk who have been to Andalusia and drawn their own conclusions or to telling a folktale about a spoiled king whose proud boastfulness, like that of the Andalusian, makes him impervious to recognizing how much better things are outside his kingdom. The tendency to exaggerate is more profound in the Andalusian voice—as, indeed, it is stereotypically associated with the Andalusian character—while the Asturian voice here has an earthy rural quality, which is a stereotypic observation often made on the people of Asturias.

### The Transcendence of Place

There is a curious little coda by Terrero and Cuesta that appeared in the first edition of this exchange in 1871 and not thereafter, in which the two transcend the antagonisms and insults exchanged. The first short verse is by Terrero and the response again by Cuesta.

Compare, por vida mia  
 zin motivo hemos renio  
 pues siempre hermana jan  
 sio  
 Andalusia y Asturias!  
 Vengan los cinco.  
 Ahi van  
 Con mucho gusto, compadre;  
 pos si Espana ye la madre  
 hermanos nuestros seran.

Compadre by my life,  
 We have quarreled without motive  
 For they have always been  
 sisters  
 Andalusia and Asturias!  
 Let the other regions come forth  
 Here they come  
 And with great pleasure, Compadre;  
 Because if Spain is our mother  
 They will be our brothers.

The transcendence is achieved in the usual manner, by reference to an overriding, superordinate, national identity and the metaphor of the national family. As the proverb goes, "Where is the place that has to take you in whenever you show up? The family place!" This transcendence of sibling rivalry, as it were, of Asturias and Andalusia prefigures the subsequent exchange ten years later in 1881, which, while similarly quarrelsome and rancorous as the first exchange, is conditioned as the first is by an overriding family solidarity. There is, for example, the frequent expression, amidst the insults, of concern for the health of one's poetic opponent and his family.

The first exchange of insults seems to have been benevolent enough in tone to have created rather than destroyed the solidarity of the two provincial poets, leading to, finally, a sense of complementarity of regional difference within the panoply of the grand family of Spanish regional cultures. It may have been too simple a dichotomy when Henry Maine talked about territory (or locality) and kinship as being the two sources of group organization, but the dichotomy points us toward a fundamental transformation going on in this poetry—in these "benevolos dicterios"—from the separating bonds of locality to the overarching solidarity bonds of Spanish kinship. The transformation of place into other modalities of experience, in fact, is worth some discussion.

### Discussion

The question is: How do we talk about place, and what does that talk have to do with our understanding of a place in relation to another place; and, beyond that, what does that talk have to do with human solidarity or divisiveness? We can talk first of all about the climate and landscape of a place, and there is some of that in our poetic exchange. But more telling and more frequent is the talk about the customs of the people of a place, and that, largely, is what occurs in the poetry we have before us here. In effect, these customs of eating, of talking, of dancing and singing, of drinking, and of acquiring possessions come to stand for a place as its significant if limiting metaphors. They represent ways of talking about a place in other terms. Just as place or locality gets transformed into kinship, so it can get transformed into food habits or personal appearance and thenceforth when we think about a place these are the things we tend to think about in addition to or even rather than, in relation to Andalusia, the olive groves, the Sierra Morena, the Qualdalquivir, or the summer heat.

Thus, a metaphorical way of speaking about a place such as we see in this poetic exchange becomes transformed into a set of attitudes and practices taken toward a place and its inhabitants. We come to understand a place in those terms and consequently develop feelings of solidarity or divisiveness toward that place and its peoples. Metaphor becomes transformed into metonym, as we are wont to say. What is a figurative way of speaking about a place becomes transformed into a part of that place. In the poetic exchange discussed here, the divisiveness implicit in this poetic genre is transcended by an emergent sense of complementarity and family identification. Poetry, in any event, is closer to praxis than many might imagine.

## Northerners see themselves as:

1. Of strong character
2. Powerful militarily
3. Economically vigorous
4. Good organizers
5. Industrious, hardworking
6. Reliable
7. Manly
8. Serious
9. Thrifty

## Southerners see Northerners as:

1. Powerful economically
2. Powerful militarily
3. Hardworking, energetic
4. Physically strong
5. Slow and heavy
6. Rough and dirty
7. Egocentric
8. Stingy
9. Pessimistic
10. Hard-hearted
11. Serious
12. Stupid
13. Fanatic

## Southerners see themselves as:

1. Eloquent
2. Artistic
3. Socially refined
4. Patient
5. Clever, intelligent
6. Obliging
7. Graceful
8. Amiable
9. Generous

## Northerners see Southerners as:

1. Economically weak
2. Militarily weak
3. Lazy
4. Weak
5. Quick and fast
6. Amiable and oily
7. Unreliable
8. Wasteful
9. Optimistic
10. Lighthearted
11. Crafty
12. Clever
13. Spineless

"This popular challenge between towns, counties, provinces, or regions is a genre well known in Spain as "deastios" of the kind, for example, "Que tiene Sevilla que no tiene Granada?" In the Spanish light operas, Zarzuelas, these provincial or regional contests are recurrent as in the *Zarzuela en un Acto*, *La Patria Chica*, by Serafin and Joaquin Alvarez Quintero. The lovers and central characters, the folk dancers Pastora and Mariano, are stranded in Paris. The first is from Andalusia and the other from Aragon, and they court each other by singing the virtues of their respective regions. I owe this reference to Dorothy Noyes, who adds that the harmonious resolution, such as we see in both *La Patria Chica* and in the Asturias-Andalusia exchange, is probably most convincing in that sentimental "cosmubrista" context—that of the *Zarzuela*—especially since they were written for Madrid audiences.

\*See Terrero and Cuesta (1977:8).

\*Valdes (1946).

"The Asturian language or dialect used by Cuesta in this poem is the evolved form of the old Astur-Leones language spoken by the Asturian court and in the Asturian countryside from the 8th through the 11th century of the reconquest of the peninsula, when the center of Christian power and the court were either in Oviedo, the capitol of Asturias, or in Leon, the capitol of that province. Astur-Leones was replaced by another romance language, Castilian, in the 12th century (Pidal 1962).

"There has been a great deal published in Asturias and in Asturian on this language revival in the last decade and a half. For a discussion of the language of place and the place of language see Fernandez "The Territoriality of Words" (1986:130-156).

<sup>12</sup>See Appadurai (1986:359). But also see my discussion of the same phenomenon (1983b:165-173).

<sup>13</sup>For the argument that the study of the human condition demands a pancultural perspective and that in fact what we are studying is local expressions and necessarily part expressions of a more transcendent synthetic whole, see Needham (1978).

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