Theorizing Imperial Ambivalence

Spanish imperialism in the Americas was a selfless endeavor that, despite being misguided, greatly benefited the colonies in the long run. That, at least, is the ambivalent characterization of the early modern Spanish Empire that Ángel Ganivet (1865–1898) offers in his essay *Idearium español* (1897), a work that has been described as “el texto clásico y fundante del nacionalismo español” [the classic and founding text of Spanish nationalism] (Abellán, “Introducción” 15). Written and published in the midst of the imperial crisis sparked by the Cuban War of Independence (1895–1898), *Idearium español* addresses Spain’s transition from an imperial to a post-imperial nation in a curious manner. While it remains silent about Spain’s “new colonialism” in the nineteenth century in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines, it has much to say about other European colonialisms in Africa and Spain’s “old colonialism” in the Americas – that is, about the colonial practices that took place in the territories of what contemporaries knew as the Monarquía hispánica.

In addition to various references to British imperialism (123–24), Belgian imperialism in Africa (139), and the status of Spain’s former colonies in Latin America (202–16, 226–27), one often finds the early modern Spanish Empire metonymically associated with some of its main figures (from Charles V and Philip II to the conquistadors) and cultural dispositions (the spirit of conquest itself). But one would be hard pressed to find a single reference to the system of administrative domination and fiscal exploitation that Spanish Liberals established in their colonies in the Antilles and the Pacific in the mid-nineteenth century. This system, which was based upon the enslavement of African peoples in the Antilles and the forced labor of Filipino peasants, the fiscal pillaging of local treasuries, and the political repression of the rights and aspirations of colonial societies, saw its successful institutionalization between 1858 and 1861. Shortly thereafter,
it revealed its many weaknesses – just recall that the Ten Year’s War against Spain broke out in eastern Cuba a mere seven years later in 1868. By 1897, when *Idearium español* was published, the definitive crisis of the nineteenth-century Spanish colonial system was evident to all, but Ganivet only made occasional references to it in his works, characterizing it as a pre-modern colonial system, and thus inherently “spiritual” and generous, as if it were an idealized continuation of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century empire.

In this chapter, I will examine *Idearium español’s* fixation with the early modern Spanish Empire in the context of Spain’s transition from an imperial state to a post-imperial one, paying special attention to the author’s ambivalent relationship to the imperial dimension of Spanish national identity. Succinctly put, I will argue that the essay relates to the loss of imperial ideals in a manner that resonates with Freud’s account of melancholia. As Freud remarked, when a melancholic tie is formed with a lost object, “the relation to the object is no simple one; it is complicated by the conflict due to ambivalence” (256). As we shall see in what follows, the identification process associated with melancholia provides the key to explaining why the symbolic loss of a series of thoroughly idealized imperial values, which Ganivet ambivalently experienced, is such a crucial element in the formation of Spanish national identity.

That *fin-de-siècle* intellectuals ambivalently related to a soon-to-be-lost Spanish Empire, that they simultaneously projected the opposing affects of love and hate upon the signifiers of imperial power, should come as no a surprise. On the one hand, we should keep in mind that in the late 1890s imperialism did not have the charge of immorality and illegitimacy that it has today. In an age when, as Eric Hobsbawm notes, “about one-quarter of the globe’s land surface was distributed and redistributed as colonies among a half-dozen states” (*The Age of Empire* 59), empire was more an object of desire than a cause for abjection. As a result, it also became a crucial component in the national imaginaries of capitalist countries: “la posesión de un imperio pasó a ser el criterio supremo para valorar, no ya a un Estado, sino a la nación a la que representaba” [the possession of an empire became the undisputed standard by which to evaluate not only a State but also the nation that it represented] (Álvarez Junco, *Mater dolorosa* 503). On the other hand, as we have seen with Unamuno, imperialism was an obsolete tool for political legitimation because the core values of the modern Spanish idea of empire were identified with those of traditional, reactionary social forces (the commercial oligarchy, the military, and the religious orders). Ambivalence thus marked how many Spanish intellectuals related to empire, but for each of them it acquired its own specific form. The case of Ganivet, for instance, contrasts with that of Unamuno. For Unamuno, ambivalence
toward empire manifested itself in two different moments and textualities (recall the fleeting anti-imperialist stance of *En torno al casticismo* and the cultural neo-imperialism of his later, Hispanist work). However, Ganivet’s *Idearium español* internalizes the loss of imperial ideals in such a way that the early modern Spanish Empire is often valorized and devalued in the same sentence or paragraph.

Although Ganivet’s ambivalence toward empire in *Idearium español* has not been theorized as such (that is, as a specific way of relating to the loss of imperial ideals), it certainly has informed the secondary literature on his views on the subject of colonialism. As several critics have noted, issues of imperialism and colonialism lie at the heart of Ganivet’s fiction and essays (particularly, his novel *La conquista del reino de Maya por el último conquistador español Pío Cid* [1897] and *Idearium español*). Critics thus far have produced two mutually incompatible sets of interpretations. Some critics have argued that Ganivet’s works are undoubtedly anti-colonialist and that they question Western conceptions of progress, while others have contended that there is a more or less covert colonialism present. In between these diametrically opposed interpretations, one finds a number of critics that try to account for both the imperialist and anti-imperialist elements in Ganivet’s works, thematizing ambivalence as an integral part of his writings. Concerning *Idearium español* more specifically, such ambivalence is hinted at in readings that interpret the essay as a nationalist mystique that seeks to recover Spain’s former greatness (Shaw 58) and as a “call for national renewal [that] reflects an intellectual-cultural will to power in the former and contemporary colonies” (Aronna 64).

I would like to take these critical allusions to *Idearium español*’s “imperial ambivalence” one step further. Like Shaw and Aronna, I will assume that ambivalence structures Ganivet’s thoughts on empire, but I would like to propose a theory that not only registers such ambivalence, but explains it. In other words, I will integrate ambivalence into a more general account of the ways in which the claims of the imperial past encroach upon *Idearium español*’s wish for a strong national identity. The first step in proposing such a theory will consist in asking how Ganivet characterizes Spain’s expansion in the Americas and elsewhere. Secondly, I will examine the function such expansion has in his theory of a Spanish spiritual community that is about to lose its last imperial remains. As I have already suggested, we shall find him using distinctly melancholic strategies that come to terms with the loss of imperial ideals not by disavowing them but by identifying with them.
Independence, Expansion, Modernity

As several commentators have pointed out, it is difficult to read *Idearium español* without making reference to Unamuno’s *En torno al casticismo*. Indeed, the two essays display a number of striking similarities: they are both mainly concerned with the so-called “problem of Spain,” they employ a similar method of study (the consideration of Spain’s ills as an eminently psychological problem), they arrive at an equally pessimistic diagnosis of the state of Spanish society (which in both texts is seen as undergoing a spiritual crisis and as lacking a guiding principle) and, finally, they offer a comparable solution to Spain’s national crisis (which can be summarized as a call for greater collective self-knowledge) (Ramsden, *1898 Movement* 12–17; Fox, “Introducción” 26). These parallels notwithstanding, it bears emphasis that many of *Idearium español*’s conceptual incongruities and stylistic deficiencies are not present in *En torno al casticismo*, a work whose literary stature seems well above that of Ganivet’s.5

As a whole, and taken as ideological performances, both Unamuno and Ganivet’s projects can be described as attempts at national reconstruction based on an idealist, foundational narrative that established a necessary link between the political community’s origin and its destiny. In the case of *Idearium español*, what Ganivet calls “la restauración de la vida espiritual de España” [the restoration of Spain’s spiritual life] (257) requires that Spaniards conduct themselves in accordance with the nation’s soul or moral being, an entity that has two main components: one, a Senecan type of stoicism that under Arabic influence developed into Christian mysticism and fanaticism (97–100), and two, what he calls the “territorial spirit of independence” (120–28). At the innermost core of Spanish national character we thus find two contradictory dispositions: an impulse toward conquest and subjugation (derived from Christian fanaticism), and a drive toward retreat and autonomy (derived from the spirit of independence). As Ramsden puts it, “on the one hand there is the crusading fervour that calls for expansion; on the other hand there is the territorial spirit of independence that demands withdrawal” (Ángel Ganivet 86).

In acknowledging that conquest and withdrawal are crucial ingredients in Ganivet’s account of the Spanish nation, one recognizes a fundamentally ambivalent libidinal structure in the essay and confronts the question of how Spain’s imperial practices in Latin America and elsewhere are related. The issue here, as elsewhere in the essay, will be to assess whether this particular set of events (Spain’s past imperial actions) is in agreement or contradiction with the fundamental traits of the Spanish national character. The centrality that national character, or the national soul, has
in the story of peoplehood told by *Idearium español* can be gauged from both a narrative and ethical perspective. From a narrative viewpoint, it is a major “constitutive event” in that it is “necessary for the story, driving it forward” (Abbott 24). Indeed, without the events surrounding the creation, manifestation, and future development of the national soul, *Idearium español* would tell an altogether different story. But the importance of the national soul is no less apparent from a moral viewpoint, for *Idearium español* is what political theorist Rogers Smith describes as an “ethically constitutive” story, that is, a narrative that presents “membership in a particular people as somehow intrinsic to who its members really are, because of traits that are imbued with ethical significance” (64).

Smith’s account of political membership is helpful in explaining the abundance of essentialist cultural references in fin-de-siècle Spanish national projects. According to Smith, most narratives of peoplehood blend economic, political, and ethically constitutive elements to moderate the repressive, dogmatic senses of political community attached to the affirmation of particularistic, self-contained identities (59–60). But *Idearium español* – like *En torno al casticismo* – offers little in the way of economic or political arguments. When Ganivet seeks to inspire trust and a belief in the worth of his proposed political community (a Spain with a restored spiritual life), he does so not by arguing for the economic and political benefits that such political community would bring to its members but by arguing that Spaniards should reclaim those components of Spanish history (Senecan stoicism and the territorial spirit of independence) that are constitutive of Spaniards’ identities. In fact, like many of his contemporaries, he profoundly distrusts the institutional arrangements of the Restoration regime and thus sees politics as a secondary, derivative issue when compared to the discourse on identity. Politics is incidental, while identity is primary (despite always being a retrospective construction – a point which seems to elude Ganivet):

> Los poderes [públicos] no son más que andamiajes […] lo esencial es la obra que, ya de un modo ya de otro, se ejecuta. La obra de restauración de España está muy cerca del cimiento.

[[Public] powers are nothing more than the scaffolding […] what is essential is the work that, in one way or another, gets done. The work of Spain’s restoration is very close to the foundations]. (243)

As far as economic benefits are concerned, *Idearium español*’s primary focus on collective ethics and stoic virtues relegates the promise of prosperity to the realm of the accidental. In his *sui generis* summary of Seneca’s teachings, Ganivet counsels his readers thus:
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No te dejes vencer por nada extraño a tu espíritu; piensa, en medio de los accidentes de la vida, que tienes dentro de ti una fuerza madre, algo fuerte e indestructible, como un eje diamantino, alrededor del cual giran los hechos mezquinos que forman la trama del diario vivir.

[Do not let yourself be conquered by anything that is foreign to your own spirit; think, in the midst of the vicissitudes of life, that you have within you a constituent force, something strong and indestructible, a sort of diamond-like axis around which the miserable facts that make up the texture of daily life revolve]. (85–86)

Like Dr. Andrey Yefimitch Ragin, the protagonist of Anton Chekhov’s unsettling novella “Ward no. 6” (1892), Ganivet valorizes certain virtues of the self (asceticism and inner peace) over the foolishness of a materialist world. But the main problem with Andrey Yefimitch’s stoicism, as with that of Ganivet’s *Idearium español*, is that the consolation that stoic principles may bring to the mediocrity and corruption of the world is illusory. This was well understood by Ivan Dmitritch Gromov, the well-educated paranoid locked up in Ward no. 6. For him, it was clear that stoic principles were hardly plausible in a modern (i.e. capitalist) context: “A doctrine which advocates indifference to wealth and to the comforts of life, and a contempt for suffering and death, is quite unintelligible to the vast majority of men, since that majority has never known wealth or the comforts of life” (73). The Senecan type of stoicism advocated by *Idearium español*, much like the kind defended by Andrey Yefimitch, was surely a symptom of fin-de-siècle, unevenly modernized societies (such as Russia and Spain), but it could hardly serve as a valid model for the construction of the self.

A helpful contrast to Ganivet’s and Chekov’s narratives about the impossibility of adapting to a fully modernized society can be seen in Max Weber’s *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. While Weber’s description of the Protestant ethic rationalizes the ascent of the bourgeoisie to power and proposes a model for self-construction that is valid in a modern, capitalist context, *Idearium español* clearly falls short in this respect. Instead, it foreshadows the painful deficiencies of early twentieth-century Spanish national projects, which sought to evade contemporary economic and political issues by eternalizing a fragment of Spain’s past (I have in mind here Azorín’s *El alma castellana*, Unamuno’s *En torno al casticismo*, or Maeztu’s *Defensa de la Hispanidad*).

The lack of political and economic elements in *Idearium español*, together with the narrative and ethical centrality of the national soul, brings with it a puzzling paradox: the essay simultaneously affirms the value of a crucial element in the success of Spanish imperialism (the expansionism
inherent in Christian fervor) and a fundamental ingredient in its demise (the withdrawal from foreign lands). This striking juxtaposition of incongruous ideas can be seen in the essay’s depictions of some of the main protagonists and events of the colonization of the Americas. For instance, Ganivet reacts to the European demonization of the conquistadors – specifically Heinrich Heine’s depiction of Hernán Cortés as a “robber captain” in his Romanzero (1851) – by mounting a blanket defense of the Spanish conquest as an act totally consistent with the nation’s crusading fervor. This defense of Spanish colonialism, which was harshly criticized by Unamuno in their 1898 epistolary exchange (El porvenir 186, 215), is based on the characterization of the conquistadors as “legítimos guerrilleros” [legitimate guerrilla warriors] (138) who conquered “por impulso natural hacia la independencia, sin otro propósito que demostrar la grandeza oculta dentro de la pequeñez aparente” [by a natural impulse toward independence, with no other purpose than to show greatness hidden within apparent insignificance] (139). Lamenting Europe’s incomprehension of the conquistadors, Ganivet adds:

Cuando Europa, pues, habituada a la acción regular de la milicia y del comercio, ve a unos cuantos aventureros lanzarse a la conquista de un gran territorio, no pudiendo o no queriendo comprender la fuerza ideal que les anima, los toma por saltadores de caminos e interpreta las crueldades que por acaso cometen, no como azares del combate, sino como revelación de instintos vulgares, sanguinarios [...].

[When Europe, accustomed to the regular action of military forces and commerce, sees a handful of adventurers embark upon the conquest of a great territory, it is incapable or unwilling to understand the ideal force that inspires them, and instead takes them for highway robbers and interprets the cruelties they may have committed not as the vicissitudes of combat but as the revelation of vulgar, blood-thirsty instincts {...}]. (140–41)

The ad hominem quality of Ganivet’s vindication of the conquistador’s idealism contradicts not only the “European view” of Spanish colonialism (a notoriously fuzzy abstraction that refers to the perspective of a fully modernized society) but also – and this is what is both significant and puzzling – his own general view of the conquest and colonization of the Americas. Shortly before and after the above-quoted apology of Spanish colonialism, Ganivet rejects the entire imperial enterprise as a deviation from the territorial spirit of independence, which is conceived as a product of physical conditions, a result of the fact that “los territorios tienen un carácter natural que depende del espesor y composición de su masa” [territories have a natural character
that is a function of the thickness and composition of its mass] (121). In Ganivet’s historical narrative, Spain’s American empire acquires the status of a historical error and of an unnatural, un-Spanish endeavor insofar as it contravened the ideals of self-government and non-aggression inherent in the notion of independence. “Apenas constituida la nación,” he writes,

nuestro espíritu se sale del cauce que le estaba marcado y se derrama por todo el mundo en busca de glorias exteriores y vanas, quedando la nación convertida en un cuartel de reserva, en un hospital de inválidos, en un semillero de mendigos.

[As soon as the nation constituted itself, our spirit overflowed its boundaries and spilled into the whole world in search for vain, exterior glories, transforming the nation into a reserve barrack, a hospital for the disabled, and a hotbed for beggars]. (174)

As this quotation suggests, the territorial spirit of independence, which is one of the components of the national soul, has both an explanatory and a normative dimension. A notion redolent of Hegel and Taine, the spirit of independence provides the key to Spain’s history and makes it intelligible:

la evolución ideal de España se explica sólo cuando se contrastan todos los hechos exteriores de su historia con el espíritu permanente, invariable, que el territorio crea, infunde, mantiene en nosotros.

[Spain’s ideal evolution can only be explained when all of the exterior facts of its history are contrasted with the permanent, invariable spirit that the land creates, instills and maintains in us]. (120)

But the revitalization of the spirit of independence, its renewed consideration as a guiding principle for national action, is also considered a *sine qua non* condition for the nation’s future regeneration, which is envisioned as a strict return to tradition:

España comienza ahora una nueva evolución o ha de comenzarla en breve y en ella ha de continuar siendo la España tradicional […] Pero lo que nosotros debemos tomar de la tradición es lo que ella nos da o impone: el espíritu.

[Spain is now starting, or should start momentarily, a new stage in its evolution in which it has to remain the traditional Spain […] But what we have to take from tradition is that which it gives us or imposes upon us: the spirit]. (232)
Simultaneously justifying the conquistadors and disavowing Spanish imperialism, *Idearium español* displays an ambivalence concerning empire that comes to the fore more clearly in its general evocation of the conquest of the Americas. Castilian expansion across the Atlantic figures both as an enterprise rooted in the depths of the national soul and as an event imposed by exterior forces (identified here, rather unoriginally, with God’s providential designs):

Los descubrimientos y conquistas en América, que tan profunda brecha nos abrieron, tenían también su justificación en nuestro carácter, en nuestra fe y en la fatalidad providencial con que nos cayó sobre los hombros tan pesada carga.

[The discoveries and conquests in America, which opened such a profound fissure in us, also had their justification in our character, in our faith, and in the providential fatality with which such a heavy burden fell upon our shoulders]. (181)

Ganivet’s simultaneous attraction to, and rejection of, empire is likewise exemplified in his observations about the Habsburg monarchs most responsible for expansion: whereas Charles V is seen as a shrewd yet foreign monarch who never understood the native territorial spirit of independence “porque él miraba a España desde fuera y nos atribuía las mismas ambiciones que a él, nacido en el centro del continente, le atormentaban” [because, born in the center of the continent, he looked at Spain from the outside and attributed to us the same ambitions that tormented him] (185), Philip II appears in a more favorable light, as a coherent, decidedly Spanish, idealist king who was willing to “arriesgar el dominio material por sostener el imperio de la religión” [risk material dominance in order to perpetuate the empire of religion] (187).

The opposition between a material order (the accumulation of land) and an ideal order of things (here identified with religion) is central to the essay’s argument, for it provides the terms with which Ganivet imagines a solution to Spain’s decadence and the role that imperialism played in it. It is already possible to discern this conflict between materialism and idealism in the threefold structure of *Idearium español* (each section simply titled “A,” “B,” and “C”): the preference for the ideal order of things that Ganivet shows in the first two parts, where he relates the events surrounding the constitution of the national soul and its manifestation in four spheres of national activity (military, legal, artistic, and foreign policy; see 83–237), culminates in the third part, where he affirms that “nuestro papel histórico nos obliga a transformar nuestra acción de material en espiritual” [our historical role
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obliges us to transform our material actions into spiritual ones] (240). He goes on to add:

España ha sido la primera nación europea engrandecida por la política de expansión y conquista; ha sido la primera en decaer y terminar su evolución material, desparramándose por extensos territorios y es la primera que tiene ahora que trabajar en una restauración política y social de un orden completamente nuevo.

[Spain has been the first European nation to be aggrandized by pursuing a politics of expansion and conquest; it has been the first to decline and conclude its material evolution, spreading itself over extensive territories, and now it is the first that has to work for the political and social restoration of a completely new order]. (240–41)

In this new, spiritual order where Spain will regenerate itself and regain its lost preeminence – where it will again be “the first” – its former colonies play an important if subordinated role since they are to be the object of an intellectual pedagogy. With utopian fervor and inflated rhetoric, Ganivet writes:

[… si por el solo esfuerzo de la inteligencia lográsemos reconstituir la unión familiar de todos los pueblos hispánicos e infundir en ellos el culto de unos mismos ideales, de nuestros ideales, cumpliríamos con una gran misión histórica, y daríamos vida a una creación, grande, original, nueva en los fastos políticos; y al cumplir esa misión no trabajariamos en beneficio de una idea generosa, pero sin utilidad práctica, sino que trabajariamos por nuestros intereses, por intereses más trascendentales que la conquista de unos cuantos pedazos de territorio.

[… if through the exclusive effort of our intelligence we were able to reconstitute the union of all Hispanic peoples into a single family and inspire in them the cult of the same ideals, of our ideals, we would accomplish a great historical mission and we would give life to an awesome, original, and new creation in the annals of politics; and by accomplishing such a mission we would not be working in the service of a generous idea devoid of practical utility, but rather in the service of our own interests, interests that transcend the conquest of a few tracts of land]. (242)

This utopian vision of Spanish-American fraternity, with its implied affirmation of Spain’s cultural hegemony over Latin American nations, relates on the one hand to the liberal regenerators’ efforts to reconstruct
the nation by strengthening the existing cultural ties with Latin America, and on the other to Ganivet’s visceral rejection of modernity (note here that the celebration of ideals and intelligence is opposed to territorial expansion, which, as we shall see, is identified with modern imperial plunder).9

Born in a small provincial town (Granada in 1864), Ganivet first came into contact with modern, urban life while holding diplomatic posts in Antwerp, Helsinki, and Riga between July 1892 and November 1898. During this short period of time, he composed and published all of his major works. In contrast to the Baudelaire of *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1857) who produced lyric poetry out of the shock experience of modern life – “the kind that manifests itself in the standardized, denatured life of the civilized masses” (Benjamin 314) – Ganivet invariably relates to such experience with contempt, disgust, and no small amount of anxiety.10 For him, the realm of ideals (of philosophy, religion, art, and poetry) and the material realities of modern life are not only opposed but incompatible. When aspects of modern experience, such as the industrialization of production, the rise of private ownership and, most importantly for us, the expansion of capitalist imperialism appear in *Idearium español*, they are systematically depicted as crass, materialistic developments that are doomed to failure.11 Hence Ganivet’s professed loathing of both private and collective property and his declared preference for moneylenders and artisans over bankers and industrial workers (142–45). Hence, too, his condemnation of the second phase of European expansion (c.1870–1914) that was based on the economic exploitation of Asia and Africa. The Dutch, British, and Belgian empires (the latter familiar to Ganivet thanks to his stay in Antwerp) are critiqued as debased versions of the Spanish Empire, as political structures whose “colonización se transformó en negocio comercial, en algo útil, práctico, sin duda, pero que ya no era tan noble” [method of colonization was transformed into a commercial venture, into something which was surely useful and practical, but which was not so noble] (139). “Todo el progreso moderno,” writes Ganivet, “es inseguro, porque no se basa sobre ideas, sino sobre la destrucción de la propiedad fija en beneficio de la propiedad móvil” [Modern progress is unstable because it is not built on ideas, but rather on the destruction of fixed property in the interest of mobile property] (143). However, the Spanish Empire of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, precisely by virtue of its “early modern” character, is exempt from such accusations of mutability and destruction.

There are two very different methods of colonization for Ganivet: an earlier method that incorporates colonial subjects into European civilization and a modern method that exploits wealth and creates markets. The first method is carried out by “los antiguos conquistadores” [the old conquistadors], the second by “los modernos comerciantes” [modern traders] (228). Reduced
to its most simple expression, Ganivet’s thesis can be condensed in the following sentence:

La verdadera colonia debe costar algo a la metrópoli, puesto que colonizar no es ir al negocio, sino civilizar pueblos y dar expansión a las ideas.

[The true colony should cost the metropolis something, for to colonize is not to be in business but rather to civilize peoples and expand ideas].

The extent to which Ganivet silences the material aspects of the nineteenth-century Spanish imperial experience in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines while idealizing the early modern empire in America can be apprehended by recalling Hannah Arendt’s description of imperialism as an ideology driven by economic expansion. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, she argues that “expansion as a permanent and supreme aim of politics is the central political idea of imperialism” (125) and goes on to observe the contradictions and political limitations inherent in political entities (empires) whose logic is based on an economic concept: “this concept [expansion] is not really political at all, but has its origin in the realm of business speculation, where expansion meant the permanent broadening of industrial production and economic transactions characteristic of the nineteenth century” (125). Ganivet might have chosen to speak of “the expansion of ideas” instead of the expansion of economic markets, but the truth of the matter is that the profit motive had been a steady companion of Spanish colonialism since Columbus’s first voyage to the nineteenth-century colonial enterprises in the Caribbean and the Pacific. Commenting on the latter, a recent historical account strikes at the heart of Ganivet’s idealization by remarking that “las ayudas a la metrópoli constituyeron el principal interés del Estado en relación con sus remotas posesiones de las Antillas y del mar de China” [the State’s main interest in its remote possessions in the Antilles and the South China Sea resided in their economic assistance to the metropolis] (Fradera, *Colonias* 547).

In his highly selective and deeply nationalistic criticism of modern European imperialism, Ganivet radicalizes the views of those nineteenth-century advocates of the Spanish imperial tradition, such as José del Perojo, Rafael María de Labra and Víctor Balaguer, who “rejected the vision of capitalist modernity articulated by [Adam] Smith and others – one based on individual liberty, initiative, and accumulation of wealth – in favor of the broader cultural impact of Spain on conquered lands and peoples” (Schmidt-Nowara, *The Conquest* 34). Indeed, the logic of the nineteenth-century
vindication of Spain's civilizing mission in the Americas is pushed to its limits in *Idearium español*, where it is represented as both a historical error (insofar as it contravenes the spirit of independence) and a self-sacrificing endeavor whose benefits are only apparent in the colonies:

la antigua colonización representa para la metrópoli una pérdida de fuerzas que a primera vista no ofrecen un resultado beneficioso, pero que a la larga fructifican donde deben fructificar, esto es, en las colonias.

[the earlier colonization represents a loss of strength for the metropolis, one that at first glance does not offer a beneficial result, but that in the long run proves fruitful where it should, that is, in the colonies]. (228)

This ambivalent flight from the materiality of modern imperialism into the realm of pure ideas that purportedly characterized the early modern Spanish Empire surely implies a desire to escape from the commodification of modernity, but it also indicates a retreat into the realm of interiority, into a self devoid of contingencies and exterior constraints. In order to find a solution to the dilemmas posed by modern colonialism to the national self, Ganivet advocates a return to the classics. In one of his most oft-quoted passages, he summarizes his project for national regeneration by nationalizing Augustine’s notion of the inner man: “Noli foras ire; in interiore Hispaniae habitat veritas” (237). Thus, the self created out of an antagonism to the commodification of modern life and the decadence of the imperial nation is expressed as a return to interiority, as a recognition that truth dwells within the borders of the Iberian Peninsula. What could be less imperialistic than this inward-looking program for national regeneration? But if this is true, how is one to understand the last assertion of the essay, where Ganivet imagines the regenerated Spanish self as one that will find “una inmensidad de pueblos hermanos a quienes marcar con el sello de nuestro espíritu” [an immensity of fellow peoples upon whom we can impress the stamp of our spirit] (268)? What could be more imperialistic than this aspiration to leave a (cultural) mark on the peoples of Latin America?

Much like Unamuno’s focus on the Spanish people’s *intrahistoria*, Ganivet’s emphasis on inner regeneration can be read as a response to the new militarist nationalism that was clinging to the idea of empire. As Enric Ucelay-Da Cal observes, “If the militarists wanted to regain a sense of outer projection of the state as a way of renewing nationhood, and thereby developing mass participation in public affairs, the left rejected anything but the exploration of inner space, the forgotten Spain that was the ‘origin of the race’” (“The Restoration” 130). The task that young, heterodox intellectuals
like Unamuno and Ganivet had set for themselves was the construction of new senses of peoplehood out of the Restoration’s prevailing sense of political identity – one that was Catholic, monarchic, and imperialistic. In *Idearium español*, however, this task remains even less complete than in *En torno al casticismo*. In Ganivet’s political imagination the new Spanish self certainly renounces action in favor of ideas but, as we have seen, it does not really break with imperial values. In fact, the cultural and civilizing values that were part and parcel of Spanish imperialism are internalized as part of the new Spanish self: they are the ideals with which Latin American nations are supposed to identify (*Idearium español* 242).

**The Paradox of Empire and Melancholia**

In an attempt to solve what we might call “the paradox of empire” in *Idearium español*, the simultaneous celebration and devaluation of imperial ideals as constituent elements of the national soul, I turn again to Freud’s “Mourning and Melancholia” (1917). We have seen that *En torno al casticismo* is a text that reflects a Freudian economy of mourning, where the central aim is to sever ties with imperial ideals and substitute them with the consoling fiction of *intrahistoria*. *Idearium español*, in contrast, is a melancholic text that comes to terms with the loss of imperial ideals not by disavowing them, but rather by identifying with them.

In Freud’s early theories, melancholia names a pathological failure to mourn, one that is characterized by feelings of self-aggression and self-punishment that arise from an object-relation blemished by ambivalence. This ambivalence originates in “all those situations of being slighted, neglected or disappointed, which can import opposed feelings of love and hate into the relationship” (251) and precludes the possibility of liberating the ego from its libidinal attachment to the lost object. As Freud puts it:

> The object-cathexis proved to have little power of resistance and was brought to an end. But the free libido was not displaced on to another object; it was withdrawn into the ego. There, however, it was not employed in any unspecified way, but served to establish an identification of the ego with the abandoned object. Thus the shadow of the object fell upon the ego, and the latter could henceforth be judged by a special agency, as though it were an object, the forsaken object. In this way an object-loss was transformed into an ego-loss and the conflict between the ego and the loved person into a cleavage between the critical activity of the ego and the ego as altered by identification. (249; emphasis in orig.)
The internal work of melancholia thus entails a double process. On the one hand, the melancholic ego strengthens the connection with the lost object (here imperial ideals) by withdrawing it into the ego (a process that recalls Ganivet’s return to interiority) and adopting some of its features. On the other hand, such identification establishes a division within the psyche, one that is responsible for the melancholic’s internalization of aggression. Divided into the ego, the id, and a “critical agency” (what Freud would later call the superego), the psyche is transformed into a stage where both a love relation (the identification with the object) and a hate relation (the aggression of the “critical agency” against the ego) are performed.

Bearing this process in mind, it is not difficult to see that there are several aspects of Idearium español that make it a paradigmatic melancholic text. First and foremost, as we have seen, the essay constitutes a textbook example of the ambivalence Freud describes as a precondition of melancholia. Even Spain’s empire in the Americas during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, for all of its glory and supposedly lofty ideals, figures as a historical error and as a burden. The ambivalent characteristic of melancholia, Freud tells us, “is either constitutional [...] or else it proceeds precisely from those experiences that involved the threat of losing the object” (256). Either possibility seems pertinent to explain the ambivalence concerning empire in Idearium español: ambivalence structures, at its most basic level, Ganivet’s relation to empire, but it can also be seen as a reaction to the threat of losing the last colonies. In its constitutional dimension, ambivalence is like a dye that seeps into every sentence that recalls events or figures associated with empire. The above-quoted depictions of the discovery and conquest of the Americas are exemplary here, for these occurrences simultaneously appear as blessings and curses, as events that had their justification in the Spanish national character and that were simultaneously considered burdens imposed by fatality (181). At the same time, there is textual evidence that these feelings of love and hate may have been activated by the threat of being dispossessed of the last colonies. Not only is Idearium español written in the summer of 1896, when all of the participants in the war saw the United States’s intervention (and thus the impending loss of the colonies) as only a matter of time (Balfour, The End 21), but the essay itself works within the assumption that sovereignty over the last colonies will be lost in the near future:

sólo podemos aspirar a que el mantenimiento de nuestra dominación no nos cueste demasiados sacrificios, y para ello hemos de [...] renunciar a la dominación “materialista” [...] y conceder más importancia que a la administración directa de las colonias por la metrópoli, a la conservación de nuestro prestigio.
[we can only hope that maintaining our dominance will not imply too many sacrifices on our part, and for this we must [...] renounce the “materialist” domination of the colonies [...] and concede greater importance to the conservation of our prestige rather than to the direct metropolitan administration of the colonies]. (228)

Whether constitutional or contingent, there can be little doubt that the relationship of *Idearium español* to empire is one marred by ambivalence.

Second, Ganivet’s account of the regenerated Spanish self’s inner world bears numerous traces of the kind of identification Freud describes, in which the ego takes on the characteristics of the lost object. As we have already seen, the regenerated Spanish self is littered with tropes suggestive of an imperial will to power. It is a self that relishes the prospect not only of imposing its cultural values on the Latin American nations (242), which will then be marked with “el sello de nuestro espíritu” [the stamp of our spirit] (268), but also of attempting a future conquest of Africa once the nation’s regeneration is complete. Qualifying his earlier prescription for national introspection, Ganivet leaves the door open for a future mission in Africa in *El porvenir de España*:

Yo decía también que convendría cerrar todas las puertas para que España no escape, y, sin embargo, contra mi deseo, dejo una entornada, la de África, pensando en el porvenir.

[I also said that it would be better to close all doors so that Spain does not escape, and yet, thinking about the future, I am leaving one ajar against my wishes, the door to Africa]. (205)

As we know, this very modest “conquest” of Africa happened in the end more by accident than by political will when Spain accepted a limited sphere of influence in northern Morocco by virtue of the Treaty of Algeciras in 1906.15

Third, and finally, the essay abounds in examples of the internalized aggression that Freud sees as characteristic of melancholic subjects. The inhibition of the melancholic’s ego, what Freud calls “a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings” (244), is most evident in the last part of the essay, where Ganivet directs numerous accusations against the national self (of which he is, of course, a part). For instance, Ganivet complains that “vivimos en perpetua guerra civil” [we live in perpetual civil war] (239). And he adds that this state of internal strife is generated by the Spaniards’ inability to adopt new, constructive ideas:
ideas, instead of being used to create durable works {…} are used to destroy everything, to devastate everything, to annihilate everything to the point that they too perish among the ruins. (240)

His precise diagnosis of the Spanish self is that it suffers from aboulia, an “extinción o debilitación grave de la voluntad” (247) [an extinction or grave weakening of the will] that Max Nordau saw as one of the characteristics of degenerates in his famous work *Degeneration* (1895). Nordau described aboulia as “a disinclination to action of any kind, attaining possibly to abhorrence of activity and powerlessness to will” (20), a notion that clearly resonates with Freud’s description of the melancholic’s inner world, which is characterized by “a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, [and] inhibition of all activity” (244). Unable to find a guiding idea, the will of the aboulic nation is paralyzed. It is able to accomplish routine, instinctive acts but fails to bring to fruition more free acts, “como sería intervenir conscientemente en la dirección de los negocios públicos” [as conscious participation in the direction of public affairs would entail] (251). Only a book such as *Idearium español*, full of clear, constructive ideas (what Ganivet calls “ideas redondas” [rounded ideas] as opposed to “ideas picudas” [sharp ideas] [259]), could enable the melancholic to properly mourn the loss of imperial ideals. But, of course, we know that *Idearium español*, an essay that has been described as “a work of intoxicated, therapeutic intellectualization” (Ramsden, Ángel Ganivet 150), did not succeed in breaking the melancholic attachment to imperial ideals, just as it did not help Ganivet himself avoid the most extreme form of melancholic self-punishment, suicide.

With this, we are now in a position to explain, rather than simply register, the imperial ambivalence that structures the formation of national identity in *Idearium español*. Understood within a Freudian economy of loss, this ambivalence is not simply the result of the essay’s contradictions and shortcomings, but also, and most importantly, the precondition for the formation of a melancholic tie with the forsaken ideals of imperial grandeur. Forced to confront the loss of imperialism as a grounding value of national identity, the story of peoplehood told by *Idearium español* is a narrative that introjects and identifies with such imperial values, adopting their drive for expansion. At the same time, *Idearium español* openly rebels against such identification, emphasizing the need for withdrawal and introspection. One
of the ways in which one can explain the fact that the imperial past figures in the text as both an object of love and hate is, precisely, through Freud’s account of melancholia.

If we think back to other texts by Ganivet, we find that this ambivalent and melancholic rendering of past imperial ideals already made an early appearance in the last chapter of *La conquista del reino de Maya*, Ganivet’s first novel. When the protagonist, Pío Cid, realizes that he has failed to modernize the imaginary kingdom of Maya according to the principles of nineteenth-century European colonialism (famously summed up by Joseph Conrad in *Heart of Darkness* as “the merry dance of death and trade” [17]), he has a dream in which the ghost of Hernán Cortés appears to him and helps him realize that such (material) failure is indeed a (spiritual) success. As Cortés puts it to Pío Cid,

> Conquistar, colonizar, civilizar, no es, pues, otra cosa que infundir el amor al esfuerzo que dignifica al hombre, arrancándole del estado de ignorante quietud en que viviría eternamente. Yo veo pueblos que adquieren tierras y destruyen razas, y establecen industrias, y explotan hombres; pero no veo ya conquistadores desinteresados y colonizadores verdaderos.

Cortés, the old conquistador schooled in the “spiritual” values of early Spanish colonialism, redeems Pío Cid, the new conquistador blinded by ideas of modern progress, and helps him to “remontar mi espíritu a esas alturas ideales” [raise his spirit to those ideal heights] (368). Much as in *Idearium español*, Pío Cid introjects and identifies with a series of idealized imperial values that are exemplified by Cortés and that primarily had a cultural existence – for such is, presumably, the consistency of those “alturas ideales.”

My objective in calling attention to the melancholic form and content of *Idearium español* has not been to argue for or against an imperialistic reading of the essay, but rather to complement previous interpretations by reframing the question of imperialism so as to better observe its ambiguous political implications. Recent evaluations of *Idearium español*’s political meanings have rightly pointed out that Ganivet’s essentialist,
Castilian-centered notion of the national soul is deployed at the expense of the stateless nationalist movements that were gaining momentum in the Iberian Peninsula (Labanyi, “Nation” 132; Resina, “A Spectre”). Ganivet’s own opinions on the political aspirations of the plurality of cultures that make up the Spanish state bear out these judgments, for he makes clear that no other region may challenge Castile’s hegemony. As he wrote in one of the letters of El porvenir de España: “Yo soy regionalista del único modo que se debe serlo en nuestro país, esto es, sin aceptar las regiones” (I am a regionalist in the only way one should be a regionalist, that is, without accepting the regions) (228). Tackling the political implications of imperialism, other critics have observed that “it is difficult to overstate the impact that Ganivet’s exaltation of Spanish imperialism would have on Spain’s later involvement in Africa” (Martin-Márquez 100) and that Ganivet’s representation of Africans is unabashedly colonialist (Agawu-Kakraba). All of these ethical and political evaluations of Ganivet’s works are certainly important contributions that reveal how an essentialist, reified concept of national community can be consonant with cultural and political imperialism. But if one accepts that ambivalence structures Ganivet’s fable of identity from the most general down to the most basic units of discourse, then one should also grant that its political implications cannot be univocal – a feature that perhaps explains the essay’s continued success and conflicting interpretations.

In closing, I would like to suggest that what gets lost in these political interpretations is that the story of peoplehood told by Idearium español is a narrative that also (but surely not only) seeks to do away – in an admittedly equivocal and insufficient manner – with the Restoration’s use of empire as a tool for political legitimation. If we recall the socially symbolic meanings that empire had in Europe at the time, Ganivet’s 1897 injunction to concentrate energies within national borders can be seen as nothing less than a call for a new, non-imperialistic type of international policy. For the 1897 Spanish reading public bombarded with imperialistic propaganda, the idea of relinquishing imperial possessions because they were a deviation from the traditional Spanish spirit of independence would certainly have been a surprising if not a clearly anti-patriotic gesture. As we now know, however, it was an anti-imperialistic gesture that, as it was being expressed, was also blatantly ignoring the nineteenth-century Spanish imperial experience in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines, and was indicating a clear drive toward expansion both within the Iberian Peninsula and in Africa. Such, it seems, are the predicaments and shortcomings of the ambivalent, melancholic stories of peoplehood that structured, in part, the national experience in turn-of-the-century Spain.
Notes

1 My references to Idearium español come from the critical edition prepared by Fernando García Lara, published by Diputación de Granada and Fundación Caja de Granada in 2003.

2 This extremely succinct description of the rearticulation of the Spanish colonial model during the nineteenth century is only meant to highlight the material aspects of Spanish imperialism that are completely absent from the pages of Idearium español. For a comprehensive account of the workings and weaknesses of the Spanish colonial system in the Caribbean and the Philippines, see Fradera’s Colonias para después de un imperio (535–664).

3 Ángel Ganivet held diplomatic posts in Antwerp, Helsinki, and Riga between July 1892 and November 1898. Writing a letter to his friend Unamuno from Riga in the summer of 1898 (an epistolary exchange that was later collected in El porvenir de España), Ganivet observed that “Cuando perdamos nuestros dominios se nos podrá decir: aquí vinieron ustedes a evangelizar y a cometer desafueros; pero no se nos dirá: aquí venían ustedes a tomar carbón” [When we lose our colonies they will be able to say to us “you came to evangelize and commit outrageous acts,” but they will not be able to say you came to take coal] (201). By characterizing the Spanish empire in the Caribbean and the Pacific as a pre-modern political system, Ganivet was, ironically enough, reproducing the North American and, more generally, Anglo-Saxon denigration of Spanish imperialism as a backward, pre-modern ideology – but for Ganivet, of course, this was a good thing.

4 For the anti-colonialist interpretation, see Gallego Morell, Sobre Ganivet (164); in a parallel line of interpretation, Franco proposes a reading of La conquista that emphasizes Ganivet’s questioning of the Western idea of progress. In contrast, Agawu-Kakraba stresses the novel’s colonialist meanings, Barriuso sees it as an anachronistic, compensatory imperialist fiction (86–101), and Britt Arredondo interprets it as a quest for spiritual conquest that affirms “an essential, ahistorical Spanish national-imperial identity” (129).

5 Santiáñez-Tió’s interpretation emphasizes that La conquista’s anti-colonialist stance is undermined by the its metaliterary dimension, which turns literary creation into a form of conquest itself (225), and Martin-Márquez believes that there is a shift in Ganivet’s views on colonialism between La conquista and Idearium español, one that she registers as the transformation of “[Ganivet’s] own brilliant satire of colonization [La conquista] into a fraudulent action plan for national regeneration [Idearium español]” (100).

6 In pronouncing this judgment I am merely following a well-established critical tradition. Idearium español’s historical incongruities were already noted by Rafael Altamira as early as 1902 (see Psicología del pueblo español (102)) and most famously by Manuel Azaña, who observed that the essay’s poor reasoning manifested itself in a series of defects such as “ligereza en la observación, insuficiencia del análisis, arbitrios sugeridos por una inclinación personal o empleo de palabras aturdidamente, guiándose de la apariencia mejor que del contenido” [flippancy in observation, insufficiency in analysis, judgments based on personal inclination or the reckless use of words, all guided by appearance rather than content] (71).

7 The inconsistencies and lack of practicality of Ganivet’s thoughts have been
Angel Ganivet’s Idearium español

highlighted by a number of critics. See, among others, Cerezo Galán, El mal del siglo (116); Ramsden, Angel Ganivet’s Idearium español; Shaw 58–60.

8 Upon reading Idearium español, Unamuno addressed a series of open letters to his friend Ganivet (they had met in Madrid in the spring of 1891, while sitting together in a competitive examination [opositiendo] for a University Chair of Greek). They were published, along with Ganivet’s replies, in El Defensor de Granada between June 12 and September 17, 1898. They were later collected and published by Biblioteca Nueva as El porvenir de España in 1912. My references to El porvenir come from E. Inman Fox’s edition of Idearium español that figures in the bibliography.

9 José Carlos Mainer has studied the way in which Spanish regenerationist intellectuals looked to strengthen cultural and economic ties with Latin America in their proposals for national reform in “Un capítulo regeneracionista”; on this subject, see also Pike 146–230, and Valero Juan.

For a lucid exposition of Ganivet’s relationship to modern society and art, see Santiáñez-Tió 26–116.

11 I use the term “capitalist imperialism” after Alejandro Colás’s description of this process of European overseas expansion in the late nineteenth century. For Colás, “it was the enormous advances in communications, transport, technology and finance, all fuelled by industrial capitalism, which facilitated and spurred on the imperial circuits of capital” (97). This is the imperialism against which Ganivet is writing. The problem is that, in doing so, he idealizes the ideological justifications of the early modern Spanish Empire, a political entity that did not oppose capitalist imperialism but rather made it possible.

12 Here I appropriate Santiáñez-Tió’s insight that Ganivet’s asceticism parallels that of Schopenhauer in that both seek to attain the silencing of the will through aesthetic experience (54–57).

13 I am fully aware that Freud’s accounts of mourning and melancholia evolved in light of the devastating effects of World War I. I draw here on “Mourning and Melancholia” (1917) rather than on The Ego and the Id (1923) because Freud’s early model of subjectivity (arguably a less complex and sophisticated one) resonates well with that of Idearium español (especially with regard to the pathological aspects of melancholia). For an engaging account of the evolution of Freud’s theory of mourning and melancholia within his later model of subjectivity, see Clewell.

14 For the details on the circumstances in which Idearium español was written, see Gallego Morell, Ángel Ganivet (125–29) and García Lara.

15 For an excellent study of the significance of Africa and Africans to Ganivet’s thought, see Martin-Márquez 85–100.

16 For a fascinating account of Ganivet’s (and Unamuno’s) use of aboulia and, more generally, of turn-of-the-century psychology, see Jurkevich.

17 Ganivet committed suicide by throwing himself into the waters of the River Dvina in Riga (present-day Latvia) on November 29, 1898. For an account of his last days, see Gallego Morell, Ángel Ganivet (171–88).

18 The jingoistic, war-mongering tone of the mainstream Spanish press was repeatedly denounced by, among others, Unamuno (“¡Muera Don Quijote!”) and Maetzu (see, for instance, “La prensa” in Hacia otra España [139–41]). The pro-war opinions of the established press are described by Balfour, The End of the Spanish Empire (11–48) and Álvarez Junco, “La nación en duda” (405–12).