Literary Hispanophobia and Hispanophilia in Britain and the Low Countries (1550-1850)

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12. Historical Fiction, Cultural Transfer and the Recycling of the Black Legend between the Low Countries and Britain: A Nineteenth-Century Case Study

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Abstract
This chapter compares Henri Moke's *Le Gueux de Mer* (1827) and Thomas Colley Grattan's *The Heiress of Bruges* (1830), two historical novels set at the time of the Dutch Revolt and written in the final years of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands. The comparison provides insights into the respective priorities of British and 'Netherlandic' writers who dealt in images of Spain in the early nineteenth century. Beyond some clear differences in the ideological urgency of their work, the authors' liberal politics, their sympathy towards Catholicism and the influence of Romantic Orientalism create important nuances in their versions of the Black Legend, which are ultimately denunciations of bigotry and tyranny rather than expressions of wholesale Hispanophobia.

Keywords: historical novel, cultural transfer, Dutch Revolt, Catholicism, liberalism

The rise of the Black Legend in Renaissance Europe was partly a result of intense interactions between the Low Countries and England. A shared hostility to Spain was reinforced by Protestantism, geographical proximity and commercial ties that facilitated intellectual and cultural exchanges. In the decades of the Dutch Revolt, various forms of Dutch anti-Spanish propaganda were translated and/or disseminated on a large scale within
England.¹ In later centuries, however, the anti-Spanish images that nations like England and the Netherlands had jointly forged in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries morphed into topoi that belonged to increasingly separate cultural grammars.

By the early nineteenth century, the close cultural bonds that had once enabled the circulation of the Black Legend in a Protestant Anglo-Dutch sphere had loosened to the point where British commentators on the Netherlands claimed to enlighten readers who were generally ignorant about their neighbours across the North Sea. In the preface to an 1824 anthology of Dutch poetry, the English editor wrote: ‘There is a country almost within sight of the shores of our island, whose literature is less known to us than that of Persia or Hindostan.’² The cultural traffic between the Netherlands and Britain was then at a low ebb, at least as far as Dutch exports were concerned. The still comparatively new influence of British culture across Europe was duly making itself felt in the Netherlands, but literary histories of Romanticism suggest little in the way of reciprocity. However, a handful of now forgotten British writers sought inspiration in the Low Countries: among them was Thomas Colley Grattan, an author of Irish origin who settled in Brussels (in what was then the United Kingdom of the Netherlands) around 1827/1828, and soon set out to become a resident British expert on the Low Countries.³ The work of this cultural mediator will help us gauge the extent to which nineteenth-century trajectories of the Black Legend actually diverged on both sides of the North Sea.

Grattan wasted little time in turning to ‘Netherlandic’ material – the adjective will here sometimes be preferred to ‘Dutch’ in order to reflect the context of a united kingdom that combined the Northern and Southern Low Countries into a single polity. A History of the Netherlands (which encompassed the Southern provinces as well) by his hand was first published in 1830, and two historical novels followed in quick succession: The Heiress of Bruges (1830) and Jacqueline of Holland (1831). In a foreword to the latter, the Anglo-Irish author confirmed the exotic nature of his subject matter when he remembered ‘venturing on ground so unexplored as the countries I have chosen for the scene of this and my last novel’ (p. vi). Grattan already had a reputation as a purveyor of literary images of the European continent: his

¹ See, particularly, Dunthorne, Britain and the Dutch Revolt, pp. 4-29.
² Bowring and Van Dyk, Batavian Anthology, p. 1.
³ Background information on Grattan is based on the entry in the Oxford Dictionary of British Biography (Boase and Vance, ‘Grattan, Thomas Colley’) and on the contemporary sketch in Anon., ‘Our Portrait Gallery’.
Highways and Byways; or, Tales Picked up in the French Provinces had earned him some success in 1820s. His finances, though, were often precarious, which prompted him to maintain a steady output of writing. In Brussels, Grattan saw an opportunity to adapt local material for British consumption. His transformation of those sources and of their anti-Spanish motifs affords an insight into the different priorities of British and Dutch/Belgian novelists who recycled the Black Legend in the 1820s.

At the same time, the complex identities of Grattan and of one of his key ‘Netherlandic’ sources will qualify any sense in which their works could be simply equated with contemporary British or Dutch outlooks. Grattan may have been trying to please a British audience, but for all his opportunism he was also an Irishman, a moderate Protestant, and a principled Whig. As for one of the ‘Netherlandic’ authors who probably inspired Grattan, Henri Moke was a francophone writer who produced the first ‘Belgian’ historical novel.4 Le Gueux de Mer (1827) was significantly set in the period of the anti-Spanish rebellion, and its conclusion looked forward to the newly formed United Kingdom of the Netherlands and its ruler, King William I of Orange-Nassau, of whom Moke was then a fervent supporter. The novel closes as the Duke of Alba leaves the Low Countries and, in a remarkable change of heart, prophesies a time when Belgians, ‘united under Nassau, will only remember the foreign yoke, the better to cherish the rule of a king whom they will able to call their compatriot with a justifiable pride’.5 Moke was furthermore a moderate Catholic and a liberal in his politics. If broad differences between Britain and the Netherlands in the early nineteenth century had an impact on how Grattan and Moke each reworked the Black Legend, so too had the variegated forms of ‘British’ and ‘Netherlandic’ identities that both authors represented.

Le Gueux de Mer set the template for later and now better known fictional treatments of the anti-Spanish rebellion in Belgian literature, such as Charles De Coster’s Légende d’Ulenspiegel.6 It was most probably also noticed by the Irish writer who set up shop in Brussels within a year of the publication of Moke’s novel. Grattan read up extensively on historical sources on the Low Countries, from luminaries of European historiography like Tacitus,

4 Background information on Moke is based on Varendonck, Henri Moke.
5 ‘Réunis sous un Nassau, il ne se souviendront du joug étranger que pour chérir le gouvernement d’un Roi, qu’ils pourront, avec un juste orgueil, nommer leur compatriote’ (Moke, Le Gueux de Mer, I, p. 281). English translations from Moke’s Le Gueux de Mer provided in the main text of the article are mine. Moke’s original is provided in endnotes; his sometimes archaic French spelling has been preserved.
6 For a survey of the theme, see Quaghebeur, ‘The Sixteenth Century’.
Voltaire, Robertson and Schiller to more local sources such as Vandervynckt and Van Meteren. These are all mentioned in his *History of the Netherlands*, which is a competent synthesis of existing treatments of the history of the Low Countries from antiquity to the early nineteenth century. Grattan was concurrently working on the first of his ‘Netherlandic’ historical novels: *The Heiress of Bruges: A Tale of the Year Sixteen Hundred*. Its plot, while partly inspired by Grattan’s historiographical research, also owes something to the fictional formula used by Moke.

In both novels, the main plot revolves around the complicated love between a daughter of the Flemish elite and a heroic figure of the anti-Spanish revolt in the late sixteenth century. The female protagonists are in turns courted, kidnapped and freed by (pro-)Spanish and rebel figures, all against the backdrop of various battles between the two camps. Needless to say, the Flemish rebel hero eventually carries the girl off, much to her own delight, even if in Grattan’s case the couple will have to live happily ever after by moving to the United Provinces. The ideological dimension of that sentimental plot is obvious and is also a generic feature of many historical novels, including the influential work of Walter Scott, but other similarities suggest that Grattan lifted some elements directly from Moke. To mention but two: in both novels, the heroine is accompanied by a chaperone whose old-fashioned ideas provide comic relief in various scenes, and both plots feature Moorish/African characters who are part of the household of a Spanish commander, but who develop sympathy for the local rebels.

Whether such similarities amount to a mild form of plagiarism need not concern us here; cases like this were not rare in the rapid spread of the historical novel in the Romantic era. Rather, our focus will be on Moke’s and Grattan’s respective treatments of the Black Legend, and on what the comparison reveals about the ideological motives behind both authors’ representations of Spaniards for their Dutch/Belgian and British audiences. After an imagological survey of the portrayal of Spanish character in both works, the essay will dwell on the recurrence or absence in the novels of various motifs that are central to the Black Legend: Catholicism and the Inquisition, Spanish colonial abuses in the New World, and the African

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7 On Grattan’s relation to Low Countries historiography, see Ingelbien and Waelkens, ‘A Twice-told Tale’.
8 On the allegorical significance of sentimental plots in Romantic-era historical fiction, see, for example, Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism*, pp. 128-157.
9 On Grattan’s unacknowledged debts to contemporary ‘Netherlandic’ literary models, see Ingelbien and Eelen, ‘Literaire bemiddelaars in bewogen tijden’.
or Moorish strains within Spanish identity that were historically used by English and Dutch authors ‘to denigrate Spain as the black other of [their] northern European self’. 10

The Black Legend created enduringly popular caricatures of Spaniards as, among other traits, fierce, cruel, brooding, haughty, jealous and passionate. 11 Moke’s portrayals of Spanish character run the gamut of that stereotyped temperament. He liberally applies the adjective féroce (fierce) to various Spaniards, and pairs it with other expressions or attitudes that typify the villains of his novel. To give a few examples: one episode features a ‘fierce Spaniard smiling disdainfully’, others show how Spaniards mistreat a captive woman as ‘fierce soldiers brutally pushed her back and laughed at her tears’, or how ‘the fierce Jean de Vargas started laughing with a hard and sinister laugh’. Only once in the novel is the adjective applied to other characters, namely some of the gueux rebel sailors whose rugged looks are fierce enough to frighten the ladies. 12

Grattan also shows a fondness for the adjective ‘fierce’, notably in descriptions of his Spanish arch-villain, the brooding Don Trovaldo:

Trovaldo, whose dark mind had been in a state of constant ferment since the discovery of Beatrice’s flight, now hurriedly paced the cabinet […] while the Venetian mirror [...] showed him his gaunt figure as he strided past, and the fierce play of his features, which were moved with no common excitement. 13

Trovaldo gazed with straining eyes. An occasional movement of compassion struggled with his fierce enjoyment. Had Gaspar but winced, he might, perhaps, have snatched him from the open jaws of destruction – but his unflinching bearing irritated and inflamed his cruel master, the worst feelings of whose nature crushed every rising effort of remorse. 14

10 Those motifs are identified as key elements in the main studies of the Leyenda Negra, starting with Juderías (La Leyenda Negra). On the ‘persistence of Moorishness within Spanish self-identity’ and its role in Hispanophobia, see Greer, Mignolo and Quilligan, Rereading the Black Legend, p. 18.
11 For a summary of the imagological traits attributed to Spaniards, see López de Abiada, ‘Spaniards’.
12 In Moke’s original words: ‘le féroce espagnol souriant avec dédain’ (Le Gueux de Mer, I, p. 165); ‘les féroces soldats la repoussoient brutalement, rioient de ses larmes’ (I, p. 57); ‘Le féroce Jean de Vargas se mit à rire, d’un rire dur et sinistre’ (I, 203); ‘la jeune fille effrayée de leur voix rauque et de leur air féroce’ (I, p. 84).
14 Ibid., III, pp. 253-254.
However, Grattan sometimes uses the same adjective to describe rebels – and with much greater regularity than its exceptional use in Moke’s *Le Gueux de Mer*. He thus writes of how ‘their duties went on in gloomy anxiety for the hour that was again to let loose their fierce passions, and see them quenched in blood’ (III, 247). The rebel commander Bassenvelt’s rousing speech to his besieged and starving soldiers meets a ‘fierce murmur of applause and [a] ferocious and cannibal grin’ (IV, 43); Bassenvelt himself elsewhere shows ‘a fierce pride in the intention of revealing himself to [his beloved] and claiming her for his own’ (IV, 85). Grattan’s characterization of his rebel leader may be explained by the fact that Bassenvelt was educated in Spain and served the Spanish king before switching sides, but it certainly complicates the novel’s imagological contrasts. Grattan further blurs distinctions between the opposing factions by having some Spanish mercenaries fight in Bassenvelt’s regiment of Black Walloons, even after he enlists them in the service of the anti-Spanish rebellion. One Spanish soldier declares that he will remain faithful to his commander unto death: “Corazon del fuego! Yo vos seguire a la muerte!” [sic] (I, 267): the passionate nature of Spanish character can thus be a force for good in *The Heiress of Bruges*.

Even if Moke’s humoral characterization is more Manichaean than Grattan’s, *Le Gueux de Mer* is not relentless in its demonization of Spaniards. The latter include an inquisitor who shows gratitude to the rebels for helping him get rid of his worst enemy within the Spanish camp, and who is torn with remorse when he discovers that a girl he had persecuted was actually his own daughter (II, 175-176). Elsewhere, a Spanish priest begs a rebel hero to believe that ‘there are in Spain ecclesiastics who suffer as see they so-called defenders of religion behave more ruthlessly and barbarously than the most odious monsters who have been recorded in history’.15

All in all, Grattan’s fictional portrayals still appear more nuanced than Moke’s in their imagological contrasts. The most damning assessment of Spanish character that flowed from the Anglo-Irish writer’s pen is arguably a passage from his *History of the Netherlands* which describes how the ‘dark, vindictive dispositions of the [Spaniards] inspired a deep antipathy in those whom civilization had softened and liberty rendered frank and generous; and the new sovereign [Philip II] seemed to embody all that was repulsive and odious in the nation of which he was the type’ (p. 81). Grattan’s *History* was heavily indebted to Schiller, whose portrayals of Philip II are considered

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by Juderías and others as a prime mover in nineteenth-century revivals of
the Black Legend. *The Heiress of Bruges*, however, is a *Tale of the Year Sixteen
Hundred*, which situates the plot two years after Philip’s death: most of
Grattan’s Spanish characters are fictional ones. The subtitle of *Le Gueux de
Mer*, by contrast, is *La Belgique sous le Duc d’Albe*. Moke shows us both the
Duke of Alba and Philip II in person, and brings out every repulsive feature
that the Black Legend had attached to the king and to his representative in
the Low Countries. Of Alba, Moke writes: ‘His high forehead; his piercing
eyes, overshadowed by large eyebrows blacker than ebony; his hooked nose
resembling the beak of a bird of prey: all his features betrayed pride, ambition
and bloodthirstiness.’ Grattan’s decision to shift the plot of his novel to a
later period than the dark years of Alba’s command blunts the edge of the
anti-Spanish sentiment that animates Moke’s pages.16

In the early modern period, the Black Legend had thrived in two Prot-es-
tant countries that cast Spain not just as a political threat to their interests
or survival, but as the leading Catholic power in a deeply divided Europe. By
the early nineteenth century, anti-Catholic prejudice still had some traction
in Britain and in the Netherlands,17 but punishing Armadas no longer loomed
on the horizon. Moreover, Britain and the Netherlands were undergoing
reconfigurations that called for the inclusion of new Catholic elements
within their respective polities. The 1800 Act of Union between Great Britain
and Ireland had held out the promise of emancipation for Catholic subjects.
This had been slow in materializing – it was only passed in 1829, with the
support of liberal Irish Protestants like Grattan himself, who was then at
work on *The Heiress of Bruges*.18 After Napoleon’s defeat, European powers
had decided to merge the Catholic Southern Low Countries with the largely
Protestant Netherlands, and to entrust the House of Orange-Nassau with the
successful completion of that union. Although many Catholic Southerners
baulked at King William I’s policies, some francophone liberal Catholics
like Moke still kept faith with the United Kingdom of the Netherlands.19

Those considerations explain why Moke’s and Grattan’s versions of the
Black Legend do not attack Catholicism as such: most of the Southern

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16 ‘Son front élevé; ses yeux perçants, ombragés par de grands sourcils plus noirs que l’ébène;
son nez recourbé comme le bec d’un oiseau de proie: tous ses traits révéloient l’orgueil, l’ambition
et la soif de sang’ (ibid., I, p. 244).
17 For Britain, see Wheeler, *The Old Enemies*; for the Netherlands, see Lotte Jensen’s contribution
to the present volume.
18 See Brown, Geoghegan and Kelly, *The Irish Act of Union*. Grattan’s support for Catholic
Emancipation shows through in his memoirs, *Beaten Paths* (e.g. I, pp. 25-26, and II, pp. 135-136).
19 On Moke’s political manoeuvring in those years, see Varendonck, *Henri Moke*, pp. 53-84.
rebels they cast as heroes are Catholics who naturally invoke or worship the Virgin Mary.\textsuperscript{20} The rigours of Spanish Catholicism, on the other hand, are represented as a foreign and fanatical imposition on the innocent faith of the Southern Netherlands. Moke suggests that the Spanish Church itself is actually divided between fanatics and good-natured pragmatists: a priest thus describes how in the Spanish countryside ‘men are to be wet with [...] who do not make loathsome the doctrine they profess: ministers of peace and of charity, they try all they can to bring solace to the afflicted, and not to fill them with fear’.\textsuperscript{21} The Protestant Grattan likewise draws a distinction between the benign superstition of his Flemish protagonists and the bigotry that animates their rulers. Of his heroine’s father, the Bruges alderman Van Rozenhoed (whose very name means ‘rosary’), he writes:

His character was one of those which mark strongly the difference between superstition and bigotry, and seem to prove them incompatible with each other. [...] Van Rozenhoed looked with awe on the mysteries of his religion; he honoured its agents and obeyed its forms, but his veneration went no farther. He could fix no creed for himself on the needle points of sectarian distinctions, nor hate another for his incapacity to comprehend them, any more than for his disability to count the stars.\textsuperscript{22}

The institutions of the local Church are occasionally criticized in references to ‘the ravings of Francis Coster, of Mechlin, called by his admirers “the Hammerer of the Heretics,” or some burst of bigotry from the Jesuits of Louvain’ (I, 96). But Grattan’s pragmatic and enlightened bourgeois heroes have no share in the bigotry whose low cunning can win over the multitude to the side of the Spanish oppressor, as when rebellion finally fails in the Southern Netherlands: ‘The true patriots were broken, imprisoned, and powerless – the rabble were all the creatures of priestcraft and tyranny – and Bruges was lost!’ (IV, 254).

The arch-bigot of both novels is, unsurprisingly, Philip II – though only a memory in Grattan’s novel, he is still remembered for his ‘bigotry and gloom’ (II, 295). The Spanish monarch’s reputation in Dutch popular memory was closely connected to an institution that became another central motif of the

\textsuperscript{20} See e.g. \textit{Le Gueux de Mer}, I, p. 217; I, p. 231; II, p. 47; and \textit{The Heiress of Bruges}, III, p. 139.
\textsuperscript{21} ‘Il se rencontre des hommes [...] qui ne rendent point odieuse la doctrine qu’ils professent: ministres de paix et de bienfaisance, ils s’efforcent de consoler les malheureux et non de les effrayer’ (II, p. 201).
\textsuperscript{22} Grattan, \textit{The Heiress of Bruges}, I, p. 79.
Black Legend: the Inquisition. The tribunal of the Holy Office features in extended scenes in both Le Gueux de Mer and The Heiress of Bruges. Moke thoroughly exploits its terrifying potential. His scene is actually set in Spain, with King Philip himself attending a trial. Before the king arrives, a Flemish envoy is puzzled by noises in the palace. A Spaniard tells him: ‘[W]e hear that music all day long: those are the cries of wretches to whom blows are administered in order to mortify the flesh.’ A footnote then mentions that Philip enjoyed watching heretics being tortured above all other spectacles: ‘having travelled to Valladolid in 1560 in order to abet the sentencing of a large number of heretics […] he wanted to be present at their death, and showed a horrible joy while they expired in the flames’. Moke also renders in graphic detail the moment when an old Franciscan friar is put to the question. The interrogators are ‘men covered with a black veil and resembling funereal spectres: some prepared the instruments of torture, others boiled water and melted lead’. The friar is then quartered, and even though the text stresses that quartering was a comparatively mild form of torture by the standards of the Inquisition, the reader is not spared any detail: ‘his shoulders […] were dislocated, and the joints came apart with a horrible cracking noise’, and ‘his bulging veins traced thick black or purple lines all over his body, his eyes left their sockets, his lips were covered with foam, and excessive pain gave to his figure an air of horrible laughter’. Towards the end, the king is seized by an awful suspicion that the tortured monk may have been innocent, but after examining the corpse and hearing from the judges that the friar’s death confirms his guilt, the sovereign kicks the dead man away from him and pronounces in a frightening tone: ‘He is well and truly dead.’

Although local tribunals existed in the Low Countries, the opponents of Spanish rule often spread rumours that Philip II wanted to bring the provinces under the direct jurisdiction of the Spanish Inquisition – rumours that later histories sometimes conflated with local realities. See Thomas, ‘De Mythe van de Spaanse Inquisitie’.

‘Nous entendons cette musique toute la journée: ce sont les cris des pauvres diables auxquels on inflige des coups de discipline pour mortifier la chair’ (II, p. 168), ‘en 1560 s’étant rendu à Valladolid pour y presser la condamnation d’un grand nombre d’hérétiques […] il voulut être témoin de leur mort, et montra une horrible joie pendant qu’ils expiroient dans les flammes’ (II, p. 171).

Grattan also includes a scene in which a heretic (in this case, a Morisco woman) is tried by the Holy Office. But although Gothic elements are clearly present, the scene is less terrifying than Moke’s. The elements of menace in Grattan’s scene alternate with mockery of the Inquisition:

Dom Lupo was not one of those imbecile brothers who obtained admission under the title of Inquisitor of the Faith, avowedly because they were deficient in reason, whose ignorance gave rise to the well-known proverbial question and answer:

Qu. Que cosa es Inquisicion?
Ans. Un santo christos, dos candeleros, y tres majaderos. [sic]

He was a learned monster, who prostituted powerful talents to the worst purpose.26

After her arrest, the heretic is made to spend the night in a monastery. There, she falls prey to nightmarish visions where fleshless skeletons encased in statues crowd around her. Owing to her mental confusion, the reader is left to doubt the reality of the ghastly Catholic paraphernalia that fill the scene – instead of the graphic physical horror that Moke chose to present, Grattan prefers a mode of psychological terror associated with Ann Radcliffe’s Gothic and its so-called explained supernatural.27 The next day, the female heretic is sentenced to be buried alive – ‘many executions of the kind had varied by their bloodless atrocity the horrid butcheries committed all through the Low Countries during the tyranny of Alva’ (IV, 150). As the last bits of earth are about to close off on top of her, the defiant heretic is rescued by her brother, who dispatches one of the inquisitors into the freshly dug grave instead: ‘the mound of earth thus hastily thrown up […] were [sic] long marked by shuddering superstition as “the grave of the Mahommedan girl”’ (IV, 158-159). Although Grattan exploits the dramatic and anti-Romish potential of the Inquisition, his adaptation of that key motif of the Black Legend differs from Moke’s in that he does not dwell on the horrors perpetrated by the institution and other representatives of Spanish rule. In *The Heiress of Bruges*, Alba’s gory tortures are alluded to, but not described.

26 Grattan, *The Heiress of Bruges*, IV, pp. 134-135. The Spanish that is very occasionally used in the novel is often ungrammatical. Grattan obviously was not fluent in the language, but neither he nor his printer apparently thought that many British readers would notice or mind.
27 See Miles, ‘Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis’.
In the Black Legend, the tortures that the Inquisition inflicted on Dutch heretics vied for gruesomeness with the atrocities that Spaniards perpetrated on the native populations of the New World.28 The motif features in two scenes from Moke’s novel, which echo the famous descriptions of Spanish colonial abuses in Bartolomé de las Casas’s *Brevíssima relación de la destrucción de las Indias* (1552). A Belgian rebel who had visited the Americas remembers how the Spaniards terrorized the natives:

They attacked the peaceful tribes [...] and seized their warriors, snatched away women and children, and dragged them into the mines. [...] Huge dogs [...] were trained to devour the men. Lackeys and harlots who followed the troops, and were more cruel than those fierce animals, cut the throats of the poor Indians without any reason or advantage. Their monks [...] my God, what tigers those monks were! They preached slaughter in the name of the gospel, and tainted with blood the emblem of heavenly misericord.29

This, then, is apparently the treatment that the Spanish general Don Sandoval would reserve to the Dutch rebels’ wives and children, as he only plans to spare their lives in order to send them to toil in American mines (I, 43). Grattan, on the other hand, does not use the motif at all – which may appear somewhat surprising, given the fact that he had once planned to join Bolivar’s forces in fighting the last vestiges of Spanish colonial power in South America.30 New World elements could have added contemporary relevance to the novel: as Diego Saglia notes elsewhere in this volume, the 1820s had seen Britain gradually recognize newly independent states in Latin America, and the expansion of British influence in the region was a subtext in contemporary works set during the Spanish conquest. Spanish imperialism, at any rate, plays no part in *The Heiress of Bruges*. Its denunciation by Moke underscores the importance of nationalist motives in *Le Gueux de Mer*. As the Belgian novelist primarily intended his work to rouse patriotic feelings in favour of the United Kingdom of

28 On the uses to which Spanish colonial abuses were put in Dutch patriotic discourse, see Schmidt, *Innocence Abroad*.
30 See Boase and Vance, ‘Grattan, Thomas Colley’.
the Netherlands, he reminded readers of the horrors of foreign occupation, which he equated with the darkest episodes of Spanish overseas domination. The urgency of that ideological work in the ‘Netherlandic’ context of the 1820s was of course not shared by Grattan in his relation to his British readers.

While the Black Legend harped on Spanish ill-treatments of non-European populations, it sometimes also used Spain’s proximity to Africa and its Moorish heritage to portray Spaniards as half-barbarians whose behaviour put them beyond the pale of European civilization. It has been argued that the ‘blackness’ of the legend is not just metaphorical, but that it ‘often refers in unambiguous terms to Spain’s racial difference, its essential Moorishness’: Spain’s opponents wanted to ‘render Spain visibly, biologically black’. Indeed, ‘even as Spain goes to great pains to contain the influences of al-Andalus by racializing and othering conversos and moriscos [...] rival European states busily construct Spain as precisely the racial other of Europe’. Some argue that it was precisely ‘the appeal to this racialized Hispanic otherness that gave the Black Legend much of its rhetorical force’. Whatever purchase that argument may have on Renaissance or later versions of the Black Legend, it does not apply to either Moke’s or Grattan’s texts. Both novels actually feature Moorish or African characters, but far from hinting at Spanish degeneration through miscegenation, both Moke and Grattan use those exotic Others as positive foils for Spanish moral and spiritual decay.

_Le Gueux de Mer_ features a mulatto called Don Alonzo, who serves the Duke of Alba. He turns out to be an illegitimate son whom the Spanish general engendered with the daughter of an African chief from the Atlas mountains. The beautiful girl had unleashed the Spanish Duke’s darkly passionate side, as he first loved and then murdered her. Their mulatto son remembers how

at times that proud Spaniard wanted to challenge all the prejudices of his nation and share his greatness with a daughter of the deserts; at times, grown indignant at the power that a negress had acquired over his heart, he tried in vain to break his shackles, and mistreated her in order to get used to hating her. A mad jealousy led him to a paroxysm of fury. [...]
I saw the gleam of the dagger, I saw the blood of my mother spurt upon me; ... and the murderer, ... was my father!  

Don Alonzo still desperately loves his Spanish father, but the Spanish blood that runs in his veins is countered by the noble African side of his character. He thus fraternizes with the rebels and eventually dies defending the female heroines from their Spanish goalers. Moke’s portrayal of Don Alonzo does not imply sympathy for Africans in general, as the mulatto dissociates his mother from black slaves: ‘[S]he did not resemble that degraded race that your merchants traffic in: although black, she had those noble and graceful features that are admired in the handsomest nations of Europe.’ Still, the half-breed emerges as morally superior to virtually all Spanish characters in the novel, thanks to his African blood and despite his Spanish genes.

Grattan’s *The Heiress of Bruges* features a pair of Morisco siblings whose mother was killed by Don Trovaldo during an expedition in the Alpujarra mountains of Andalusia, a Morisco stronghold after the Reconquista. Although officially converted to Catholicism, both Beatrice and Gaspar (also called Aben Farez) remain Muslims at heart and resent their subservience to Don Trovaldo; both eventually turn against their Spanish masters to side with the rebels’ cause. Grattan’s liberal pleas for religious toleration apparently extended to the rights of non-Christian minorities; as for the racial otherness embodied by the Morisco, it represented a ‘blackness’ that Grattan’s text contrasts positively with the literally and symbolically darker elements of Spanish physiognomy. A confrontation between the Morisco servant Gaspar and his master Don Trovaldo gives a fascinatingly complex illustration of that opposition:

[Gaspar’s] pale olive complexion looked mean in comparison with the bronzed face [i.e. Trovaldo’s] that confronted him. [...] His stature was of the middle size, but it looked diminutive beside his master’s commanding height; and the large and swarthy features of the latter were markedly

33 Moke, *Le Gueux de Mer*, I, p. 232: ‘Tantôt ce fier Espagnol voulait braver tous les préjugés de sa nation et partager ses grandeurs avec une fille des déserts; tantôt, s’indignant du pouvoir qu’une négresse avait pris sur son cœur, il faisait de vains efforts pour rompre sa chaîne, et l’accablait de mauvais traitements pour s’exercer à la haine. Une folle jalousie mit le comble à ses fureurs [...] J’ai vu briller le poignard, j’ai vu le sang de ma mère rejaillir sur moi; [...] et l’assassin, [...] c’était mon père!’

34 ‘Elle ne ressemblait point à cette race dégradée dont trafiquent vos marchands: quoique noire, elle avait ces traits nobles et gracieux qu’on admire dans les plus belles nations de l’Europe’ (I, p. 230).
opposed to the thin-edged outlines which were presented by Gaspar’s profile. Yet his aquiline nose, curved nostrils, and well-cut mouth, spoke a firmness and decision more than common: his eye looked piercingly bright in its dark tranquillity; and his high clear forehead bespoke a mind, far keener and stronger than that of the personification of power and passion who stood before him, and whom he held in awe.\(^\text{35}\)

The Morisco’s face looks paler than his Spanish master’s, yet Trovaldo’s bronze, swarthy complexion does not betray any African blood. Instead, it betokens his sinister nature. The Morisco siblings proudly see themselves as ‘warm and glowing as the climate of [their] birth-place, and by very instinct of the faith of [their] fathers’ (I, 99-100). It is the Spaniards’ treatment of racialized others that blackens them, not the taint of Moorish or African blood that is supposed to run through Spanish veins in some versions of the Black Legend.

This survey of Black Legend motifs in *Le Gueux de Mer* and *The Heiress of Bruges* suggests that while literary Hispanophobia still had its obvious appeal in Britain and in the Low Countries in the 1820s, its revival was selective. Both Moke and Grattan thus appear careful not to use the legend in order to denounce Catholicism as a whole, which can be explained by their Belgian and Irish origins and the complexity of the Catholic question in both united kingdoms in the early nineteenth century. Neither author depicts Spain as tainted by North African and/or Moorish influences; instead, they contrast Moors positively with Spaniards. The reasons for this are less obvious, but could be related to the historical novelists’ use of sixteenth-century Dutch sources that showed sympathy for the Moriscos’ plight under Spanish rule,\(^\text{36}\) as well as to a broader ambivalence within Romantic Orientalism, which occasionally produced frankly positive portrayals of Moorish subjects.\(^\text{37}\)

Moke’s and Grattan’s recyclings of the Black Legend are also asymmetrical. Moke includes some references to Spanish colonial abuses, partly to denounce parallel forms of oppression in the Low Countries, but Grattan glosses over this theme entirely. The cruelty of Spanish tyranny and the evils of the Inquisition are predictable motifs in novels set at the time of the Dutch Revolt, but Grattan is less graphic in his representations than Moke: the Flemish writer’s insistence on the atrocities of Spanish rule was in keeping

\(^{37}\) Another Romantic text that denounced the oppression of Moriscos under Philip II was Coleridge’s 1813 play *Remorse* (see Valladares, *Staging the Peninsular War*, pp. 71-72, 84). For studies that bring out sympathetic strains in Romantic representations of Oriental subjects, see Leask, *British Romantic Writers and the East*; Sharafuddin, *Islam and Romantic Orientalism*. 
with the Orangist nation-building purpose of his novel, while the author of *The Heiress of Bruges* primarily sought to entertain British readers with a tale set in an eventful period of Low Countries history. Grattan possibly also wanted to educate readers about the Low Countries at a time when the Netherlands were a key British ally in post-Napoleonic Europe, but his work betrays less ideological urgency than Moke’s; its exotic concerns would remain peripheral in a nineteenth-century British culture that ultimately found more use for other villains than Spanish tyrants and inquisitors. Though no longer widely read now, *Le Gueux de Mer* remains a seminal work that influenced much of nineteenth-century Belgian historical fiction dealing with the Dutch Revolt. *The Heiress of Bruges*, by contrast, ranks among the many British novels inspired by the fame of Walter Scott that lapsed into oblivion after enjoying some success upon publication.

Given their respective backgrounds, Grattan and Moke may have been ultimately conflicted and unsure about the rhetoric of national identity of which the Black Legend partakes. Both, however, were fairly consistent in their liberal principles. And in Grattan’s case at least, this liberalism had an international dimension that informed various British authors’ support for Spanish liberals in the 1820s. The 1827 instalment of Grattan’s travel tales *Highways and Byways* had included ‘The Cagot’s Hut’, set in a Pyrenees village on the border between France and Spain. This location is the secret meeting place between lovers whose families are divided by the political quarrels of post-Napoleonic Spain. Grattan’s narrator voices dismay at the failure of liberal hopes in Spain after Louis XVIII’s armies had invaded to support the reactionary monarchists: ‘the forces of Spain were paralyzed under the withering influences of bigotry, and her patriots were scattered before its baneful breath; the execution of one such patriot left ‘the hearts of all that were liberal in Europe sickened with sorrow’. The defeat of Spanish liberalism eventually causes the Spanish lovers to emigrate to ‘regenerated Colombia’. Bolivar’s new nation here functions as an alternative liberal homeland, much in the same way that the United Provinces provide a refuge for the Flemish patriot heroes at the close of *The Heiress of Bruges*. Grattan’s sympathies and antipathies were not ultimately determined by nationality, but by a liberal outlook that cut across borders, and that could

38 On the closeness of Anglo-Dutch political ties after the Congress of Vienna, see Van Sas, *Onze Natuurlijkste Bondgenoot*.
40 On British expressions of support for Spanish liberals in the 1820s, see various essays in Saglia and Haywood, *Spain in British Romanticism*.
41 Grattan, *Highways and Byways*, vol. 2, pp. 126, 128.
as easily be projected back onto the Low Countries in the year 1600 as it was applied to Grattan's reading of Spanish politics in the 1820s. Grattan's revival of Black Legend themes was unsurprising given his indebtedness to local 'Netherlandic' sources, but its nuances show that it was directed against 'bigotry' and 'tyranny', rather than against Spain as such.

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