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BLANCO'S LONDON, 1810-1832

Martin MURPHY¹

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3356-1894>

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ABSTRACT: The Spanish journalist and writer José María Blanco y Crespo went into exile in London in 1811 and from then on, under the name Joseph Blanco White, he developed his life and work there. This study presents the main features of the relationship between the writer and London up to the time he left the city.

KEY WORDS: Blanco White, London, Spanish liberal exile.

EL LONDRES DE BLANCO, 1810-1832

RESUMEN: El periodista y escritor español José María Blanco y Crespo se exilió en Londres en 1811 y desde entonces, bajo el nombre de Joseph Blanco White, desarrolló allí su vida y su obra. Este estudio presenta los trazos principales de la relación entre el escritor y Londres hasta el momento en que abandonó la ciudad.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Blanco White, Londres, exilio liberal español.

About 11 o'clock on the morning of 3 March 1810 the packet boat *Lord Howard* dropped anchor in Falmouth harbour at the end of a stormy voyage from Cádiz. Among its passengers was José María Blanco y Crespo, *capellán magistral* of the Royal Chapel of St Ferdinand in Seville, who within a few weeks was to reinvent himself—to the surprise of many of his Spanish friends—as Joseph Blanco White. Twenty years later he recalled his feelings on arrival:

A chill such as I had never experienced seized my whole frame. I thought I was breathing in death with the fog. Thus I stood on the deck in the midst of the con-

¹ *Cuadernos de Ilustración y Romanticismo* tiene el gusto de publicar este texto inédito de Martin Murphy, escrito para impartir una conferencia en el Instituto Cervantes de Londres, como nuestro particular homenaje a este hispanista nacido en Reading en 1934, memorable estudioso de la figura de Blanco White, entre otras materias, ya apartado de la vida académica por su avanzada edad y delicada salud. Es de justicia honrar siempre a los maestros. (Nota de la dirección de CIR.)

fusion which attends all landings, especially where there is a crowd of passengers, all anxious to get on shore ... I stood motionless, waiting for the last turn, and perfectly indifferent whether I passed the remaining part of the day and the ensuing night in the packet. A strong persuasion that the climate would kill me in a short time took possession of my mind, and I felt as if I were going to land in the grave (*Life* I.165-66).

Strange sentiments in one arriving in the land of freedom! The fact is that Blanco's flight to England, far from being planned, was the result of impulse. Instinct, not reason, had prompted his earlier decision to leave Seville when it was on the point of falling to the French. While his closest friends stayed on to welcome Joseph Bonaparte, he joined the «patriots» who took refuge in Cádiz. There he could have played a leading role as a political journalist, but that would have meant continuing to lead a double life, as priest and unbeliever. It was despair which led him to seize the sudden opportunity of a passage to England. Yet while he knew what he was running away from, he had no idea exactly where he was going, or what he was going to do when he got there. Hence his reluctance to get off the boat on that foggy February morning.

Blanco is often presented —indeed he often presented himself— as a tragic figure, a victim, a martyr even. But in many respects he was a fortunate man. In Seville he had acted as guide and cicerone to several distinguished English visitors, so that when he suddenly turned up in London (rather to their surprise), he was warmly welcomed and introduced to society. He put the best of himself into his friendships. By all accounts he was an enchanting conversationalist, and he paid his friends —especially women— the compliment of listening to them with grave, concentrated attention. In Seville, after all, he had been much in demand as a confessor and spiritual director of nuns. He had one other very useful passport to the English drawing-room: his violin, which he played like a maestro. Cardinal Newman in his old age recalled how Blanco excelled as an interpreter of the music of Beethoven, at a time when that composer was considered rather avant-garde (in Oxford, at least). Blanco made many friends in England, and with only one or two exceptions these friendships survived his many changes of religious allegiance.

One of Blanco's companions on the *Lord Howard* was a young artist, Lascelles Hoppner, «a youth of the most affectionate and agreeable temper», son of the eminent portrait painter John Hoppner, who had gone to Seville to study the work of Murillo and was now hurrying home after receiving news that his father was terminally ill. He should have left earlier, but —in Blanco's words— «an attachment to a Spanish lady had made him delay his return longer than circumstances permitted». He and Blanco drove post-haste from Falmouth to London. It was dark when they arrived at the Hoppners' house in Charles Street, just off St James's Square, and the young man, who by now had reason to fear the worst (his father had in fact died some seven weeks earlier), rushed inside, leaving his Spanish friend in the chaise. When Blanco at last ventured timidly in, he found the Hoppner family plunged into collective grief. «I sat», he recalled, «listening to a series of speeches, every one of which made my poor young friend burst into a flood of tears, accompanied by convulsive sobbings». It was not an auspicious introduction to English family life.

His first night was spent nearby. Twenty years later he wrote:

Alban Street [now St Alban's Street], where I lodged, in the immediate vicinity of Carlton House, has disappeared, with the Palace itself, and with it a multitude of wretched lanes which extended from Alban Street to the Opera [the Italian opera

house on the corner of Haymarket and Pall Mall]. These, however, were the objects which met my view as the first specimen of London. Dirt, smoke and darkness seemed to have undisturbed possession of everything I saw. The whole town looked as if built of coal and cinders (*Life* I.169-70).

When he drew the curtains that first morning he could see Carlton House itself «lying low behind a screen of columns, to allow the occupier to skulk away from the world». In fact the «occupier» —the Prince of Wales— was by then seldom at home, since he had transferred his residence to the flamboyant, and even more extravagantly furnished, Royal Pavilion in Brighton. Carlton House, on the southern side of Pall Mall, which he had rebuilt only twenty years earlier on a lavish scale and at vast expense, had an extraordinarily short life. All that remains of it now are its columns, incorporated into the frontage of the National Gallery.

The London to which Blanco came in 1810 had much in common with the London of 1940. There was the same mood of defiant embattlement: of a capital city and an island standing almost alone against a tyrant who on the continent of Europe was carrying all before him. The initial euphoria inspired by the rising of the gallant Spanish in 1808 had since been tempered by bad news: the retreat of Sir John Moore to La Coruña, and a failure to exploit military success in Portugal. London was full of political refugees, chiefly French royalists. The better-off among them congregated in the parish of St Marylebone, in a quadrilateral bounded by Oxford Street, Portman Street, Harley Street and the Marylebone Road —an English version of the Faubourg St Germain. The poorer French émigrés gravitated towards the recently built but unfashionable quarter of Somers Town, in the parish of St Pancras— an area in which Spanish refugees later settled.

We left Blanco standing at the window of his hotel in Alban Street. His thoughts were as gloomy as the view:

«Well then», said my judgment, assuming a tone which it had not ventured to take for a long time, «what do you intend to do in England?» (*Life* I.170).

In fact he found his feet with astonishing rapidity, both professionally and socially. On the basis of his previous experience as editor of the *Semanario Patriótico* in Seville he set up a Spanish-language journal, *El Español*, which was to play a key role in disseminating throughout the Hispanic world news of the war in Europe and of the first stirrings of revolution in Spanish America. The project would not have got off the ground without the patronage and encouragement of Lord Holland, the discreet support of the Foreign Office, and the cooperation of American émigrés. But the editorial line which Blanco took from the start —critical of the Cádiz Junta and the Regency, and sympathetic to American demands for self-government— made him *persona non grata* to the Regency's representatives in London, who mounted a press campaign to discredit him. In the summer of 1810 he received an anonymous death threat. He was then living in lodgings in Bayswater, and late at night, returning from work, had to cross the open fields which then separated Bayswater from the end of Oxford Street. As a precaution he bought a brace of pistols.

He was *persona grata* nevertheless to the Regency's ambassador extraordinary in London, the Duke of Albuquerque. As commander of the army of Extremadura early in 1810 the Duke had by his prompt initiative saved Cádiz from falling to the French, and he entered that city in triumph. But he soon fell out with the merchant oligarchs who made up the Cádiz Junta and who resented the presence among them of a grandee. The

Regency resolved the impasse by appointing the Duke as their special envoy to London. In March 1810 he took up residence at the Clarendon Hotel in Bond Street —the largest and most fashionable hotel of its day, patronised by visiting royalty. He did not get on well with his staff at the embassy but took a shine to Blanco, who helped him to compose an apologia vindicating his military record which had been impugned by his enemies in Cádiz. Its publication in London provoked the Cádiz Junta into issuing a riposte couched in the most offensive terms, describing the Duke as a traitor: «imprudente, enemigo del bien y de la patria». For a grandee and a man of honour this public insult was, in Blanco's words, «like being stung in the heart by a nest of hideous scorpions». Blanco was summoned urgently to the Clarendon Hotel and there witnessed a shocking scene as the Duke first tried to throw himself off the balcony, then turned on his companions, and finally broke down in a flood of tears. On 19 February *The Times* reported his confinement «in a private house for the reception of persons in his unhappy state». He died that same day, aged only 37. Blanco's account of these events is confirmed by the report of the French physician who attended the Duke and ascribed his death to the consequences of «un chagrin violent, une âme tres exaltée, une sensibilité outrée». In other words, he died of a wound to his honour.²

The funeral was quite simply magnificent. After pontifical High Mass at the Spanish Chapel in Manchester Square, at which the choir sang Mozart's Requiem, the hearse was drawn by six horses in solemn procession through the streets of London to Westminster Abbey. Escorted by a detachment of dragoon guards, the coffin was followed by eleven coaches of mourners, the separate carriages of twelve cabinet ministers and eminent politicians such as Canning, Castlereagh and Lord Holland, and a hundred carriages of nobility and gentry —not to mention *émigré* French bishops. According to the London cab-drivers it was the best «black job» to come their way for years. Every window and balcony on the processional route was crowded with curious spectators, and the silence was broken only by the firing of a gun salute in Hyde Park at 1-minute intervals. At the Abbey the coffin was met at the west door by the Dean, clergy and choir, and then laid to rest in the Ormond vault beneath Henry VII's chapel, alongside the remains of John Churchill, 1st Duke of Marlborough.³ A Latin epitaph was composed by John Hookham Frere, sometime ambassador to the Junta Central, who heaped on his friend all the honours that had been denied him by his compatriots. Four months later the coffin was removed by sea to Cádiz and laid to rest in the church of the Carmen. The ceremonies on that occasion were, by comparison, strikingly low-key.

In its report the *Times* declared that invitations to the funeral had been sent out «to all the Spaniards resident in London». All, that is, except Blanco. As the Duke's loyal supporter and confidant he had more reason than most to expect an invitation. Two of his friends, however, were among the pall-bearers: Colonel Juan Murphy, and José Francisco de Fagoaga, Marqués del Apartado. They will introduce us to Blanco's American circle in London.

Juan Murphy, a Colonel in the Spanish army, was the son of Irish parents who had settled at Málaga. The firm of Porro [Power] and Murphy prospered initially by exporting wines to the British Isles. In the 1790s the Murphy brothers went into partnership with James Duff of Cádiz and his cousin William Gordon, and their new company, Gordon, Murphy & Co., expanded rapidly. It became heavily involved in trade with

² Account of the Duke's last days, death and funeral in AGS E-8320. See also W. R. de Villa-Urrutia (1911: 11, 134-165).

³ *The Times*, Monday 4 March 1811.

Mexico, where Juan Murphy's brother Tomás was based. From 1805 the company took on a political as well as a commercial role. Though Spain and Britain were then officially at war with each other, British merchants needed to maintain access to Spanish American markets, and Spain needed to keep up the supply of silver bullion from Mexico without hindrance from the British navy. The situation required a neutral third party willing to break the official trade embargo with the connivance of the two belligerents, who would thus be spared the embarrassment of negotiating with each other directly. This is where Gordon and Murphy came into the picture —to their considerable financial advantage. The company's ships transported Mexican bullion to Europe, and returned loaded with British goods, while the authorities on both sides turned a blind eye. Juan Murphy in London and his brother Tomás in Veracruz were the key players in this game. Paradoxically, after Britain and Spain became allies in 1808, the company's operations were made more, rather than less, difficult. The Regency in Cádiz, under pressure from the merchants of that city, was deeply suspicious of British commercial designs on America, and was reluctant to lift the embargo on British imports. Nevertheless Gordon, Murphy & Co., based in the City of London at 26 Austin Friars, were licensed to continue transporting vast amounts of silver bullion across the Atlantic, and thus made a vital contribution to the allied war effort (Jiménez Codinach, 1991: 223-304).

Juan Murphy's patronage was invaluable to Blanco. He subsidised *El Español*, and placed a regular order for copies which he shipped to America and had distributed there. Blanco, for his part, could draw on Murphy's network of American contacts for gathering information. *El Español* was formidably well briefed on events and opinion in America. The two men were friends as well as collaborators. They shared a passion for music, and Blanco was invited to make up a quartet which met regularly at 34 Portland Place, Murphy's imposing town house. Here he could escape from the drudgery of his journalistic work into a higher world of refined harmony: «We allowed no audience, because we could not bear even a whisper. The initiated in the mysteries of music alone can conceive the luxury of such an arrangement» (*Life*, I.189-90).

And what of the Marqués del Apartado, Murphy's fellow pall-bearer at the Duke of Albuquerque's funeral? José Francisco de Fagoaga, Marqués del Apartado, belonged to one of the richest and most powerful commercial dynasties in Mexico. Their wealth was derived from silver mines, and politically they threw their weight behind the growing demands for free trade and home rule. The Marqués arrived in London from Cádiz in June 1811, and took up residence at 18 Montagu Street, Portman Square. The house carries no blue plaque, but surely deserves one in view of its importance in the history of the Spanish American independence movement. Here in the autumn of 1811 the Marqués founded a masonic lodge of *caballeros racionales*, affiliated to existing lodges in Cádiz, Buenos Aires, Caracas and Mexico. (The freemasonry was relatively unimportant: these were primarily patriotic societies, based on ideals of enlightenment and brotherhood.) Its members in London included the *porteños* Carlos María Alvear, José de San Martín and Manuel Moreno; from Mexico, the Marqués' cousin Wenceslao de Villaurrutia; the *caraqueños* Andrés Bello and Luis López Méndez, and —last, but not least— that picturesque and turbulent Mexican friar, Servando Teresa de Mier.⁴ Fray Servando spent five formative years in London as the guest of the Marqués in Montagu Street. Blanco, though not formally a member of the lodge, shared its panamerican vision. By 1812 he was living at 67 Edgware Road, a stone's throw from Montagu Street. The *caballeros* provided him with first-hand information from their various countries (and from the Cortes at

4 List of the *caballeros* in Jaksic (2001: 62, n. 12). See also Salvador Méndez (1995).

Cádiz), and he gave them the opportunity to disseminate their ideas. Though the *Español* was officially proscribed throughout the Spanish empire, the support of Gordon & Murphy and of the Lodges ensured its circulation and survival.

Blanco's closest friends among this group were Mier and Andrés Bello. It was Blanco who made Mier a celebrity by debating with him in the pages of the *Español*. Though they differed politically —Blanco being an advocate of limited American home rule under the Spanish Crown, while Mier was for full independence— they respected each other's opinions and set an example of civilised political dialogue. Blanco also provided his friend with the contacts which made possible the publication in London of the latter's masterwork: the *Historia de la revolución de la Nueva España, antiguamente Anahuac* (Pons, 1990).

Andrés Bello had arrived in London not long after Blanco, as a junior member of the delegation from Caracas which was seeking support from the British government. Little did he imagine that he would never return to his native Venezuela, and that he would spend nineteen years in London. They were years of isolation and dire poverty, and he would hardly have survived without the material and moral support of Blanco, who got him work as a tutor and translator, thus making it possible for him to support his growing family and to continue his studies in the reading room of the British Museum. Those studies, of law, literature, history and language, would eventually bear fruit in Chile, Bello's adopted country. Blanco consoled his friend on the loss of his first wife, and supported him through his crisis of faith with advice that came from the heart: *cor ad cor loquitur*. The two men collaborated on a complete edition of the Scío Bible which was published by the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1821. Bello moved from tenement to tenement at least nine times during his stay in London, mainly in the district of Somers Town, near St Pancras. As a result of the efforts of the late Miriam Blanco-Fombona de Hood, sometime cultural counsellor at the Venezuelan embassy, a plaque recording his residence was unveiled in Hampden Close, Coopers Lane.

Blanco's introduction to London society was extraordinarily rapid. One of the visitors whom he had guided round Seville was the eminent scientist J. G. Children, who later referred to him in his Memoirs as «my ever-to-be-remembered kind friend Blanco». During his first month in London he enjoyed an almost daily round of visits to the theatre, concerts and exhibitions in the company of Mr and Mrs Children, and at their house was introduced to Children's scientific collaborator, Humphrey Davy —then «in all the freshness of his well-earned fame». Other introductions were provided by the Hoppner family. John Hoppner, who died shortly before Blanco's arrival, was one of the most successful portrait painters of his age —second only to Sir Thomas Lawrence— and his son Lascelles seemed likely to follow in his footsteps. The Hoppners introduced Blanco to their friend the art dealer and auctioneer James Christie and his wife Mary, who were to be his most devoted friends. It was their moral and religious example which inspired his return to Christianity, in its Anglican form. Christie's father James I (1733-1803) was a classic example of the Scotsman who thrives by industry, energy and shrewd business instinct, and crowns his success by sending his son to Eton and Oxford. James II, Blanco's friend, dutifully took over the reins of the company from his father and (though not a businessman by temperament) built on its firm foundations. Much of the firm's business during the Napoleonic War was derived from emigrés who were obliged to dispose of their treasures in order to raise money. Most of these vendors were French, but in March 1810 there was a notable sale of almost a hundred Spanish pictures advertised as «the property of a noble family in Spain, expedited to this country on their late removal from Seville». The Christies' house, first in Pall Mall, and later in Chelsea, was to be Blanco's real home in London. His son Ferdinand,

brought over to London from Madrid in 1813 at the age of four, was virtually adopted by the Christies and would later spend his school holidays with them.

The other lifelong friendship established in these early days was with the family of Dr James Moore, brother of General Sir John Moore. Blanco was an admirer and advocate of the late General (a man whose strategic retreat to La Coruña was better appreciated in England than in Spain), and this earned him the gratitude and affection of Dr James Moore's family. When Blanco's own brother Fernando turned up unexpectedly in London in 1814, having escaped from prisoner-of-war camp in France, he too was taken under the Moores' wing. So, too, was Fray Servando de Mier. Blanco did not hug his friendships to himself, but shared them.

The Moores, Hoppners and Christies were typical of the rising professional middle class, mainly Tory in its politics and evangelical in its religion. Holland House introduced Blanco to an altogether different society: aristocratic, Whiggish, free-thinking, and religiously unenthusiastic. Lady Holland's status as a *divorcée* meant that she could not be received at court, but she turned this to her advantage by creating a more lively court of her own which belonged in spirit more to the 18th than to the 19th century. The urbane and imperturbable Lord Holland had made Blanco's acquaintance earlier in Seville, and made him welcome from the moment of his arrival in London. Holland House hosted the most prestigious *tertulia* in London, and at its dinner table over the years Blanco met the *flor y nata* of literary and political society —European as well as British. Lord Holland was a confirmed europhile, which made him more friends abroad than at home. He acted as Blanco's mentor and political tutor, tactfully steering his thought in a more moderate direction. His *protégé* had the rare privilege of being allowed to borrow books from the library of Holland House, which included a rare Spanish collection (see Ilchester, 1937; Hudson, 1967).⁵

In 1814, with the end of the war in Spain and the restoration of Ferdinand VII, Blanco found himself without a job. Return to Spain was out of the question, so he set about creating a new identity for himself, not just as an Englishman, but as an Anglican clergyman. As the Reverend Joseph Blanco White he returned to Holland House in 1815 as tutor to young Henry Fox and his sister Georgina, the children of Lord and Lady Holland. He was a conscientious and sympathetic teacher, but the worldly and sceptical tone of the household made him feel ill at ease. Almost alone among the homes of the aristocracy Holland House had no chapel (or rather its chapel had been converted into a bathroom). The other problem was Lady Holland and her whims. «To fetch and carry», observed John Carrick Moore, «was the painful lot of most of her visitors». During her visit to Seville she had become addicted to the incense used in the cathedral, and caused Blanco intense embarrassment by pestering him to obtain supplies through his family. According to Moore he suffered the indignity of being sent on an errand to a silversmith in the West End, to purchase a thurible. (This passion for incense seems to have been passed on to Lady Holland's friends the Duke and Duchess of Bedford: at their palatial residence, Woburn Abbey, a dignified major-domo used to perambulate the state rooms after dinner swinging a large silver censer and wreathing the guests in holy smoke [Moore, 1888: 9-10; Hamilton, 1920: 325].)

Blanco accompanied the Hollands when they toured the great houses of the Whig nobility, and he recorded his impressions in one of the *Cartas de Inglaterra* which were

⁵ The library of Holland House was set on fire by incendiary bombs in September 1940, and its Spanish collection suffered the worst damage. See *A Catalogue of a Selection of rare and beautiful books saved from the Holland House Library ... sold by Auction by Messrs Hodgson & Co., Thursday July 10th 1947.*

later published in the Spanish-language journal *Variedades*. The tour took in Woburn—more palatial than any royal palace—where their fellow-guests included the sculptor Antonio Canova, and Blanco witnessed the rituals of the shooting-party. The Duke and his guests bagged over 700 pheasants, the sight of which made him melancholy:

La necesidad de dar muerte a los animales que la naturaleza ha hecho inferiores a nosotros es inevitable; pero hace ya mucho tiempo que no puedo convertir esta necesidad en diversión.

He allowed the satirist in him to rise to the surface as he contrasted the outer magnificence of Woburn with the numbing vacuity within:

Si la naturaleza me hubiera goloso, o aficionado a esplendor y magnificencia, te pudiera dar una pintura de las comidas de Woburn Abbey cual hiciera la boca agua a los dispuestos a gozar de ambas cosas. Pero para mí, una de estas grandiosas comidas, con toda su abundancia de manjares y vinos exquisitos, y todo el esplendor de plata y oro que se ostenta en ellas, es un potro de tormento en que sufren mi alma y mi cuerpo. En ellas he visto hombres de los mayores talentos y finura; mujeres hermosas en extremo, y no menos discretas que hermosas; pero, reunidos para una de estas comidas, no parece sino que las almas de los unos se ha puesto espadín y peluca, y de las otras, cotilla y guardainfante; tal es la tesura y entonamiento que muestran en pensamiento y palabras ... Después de la eterna comida se sigue—nada. Las señoras, como es de costumbre, se retiran, acabados los postres; y los hombres se quedan bebiendo, al son de una conversación que rara vez es animada. Al fin llega el momento de dispersarse en los salones, adonde las señoras están no menos dispersas: y aquí es el ver hasta qué punto llega el tedio disimulado que los más sienten, por falta de algo que los reúna y anime ... Con pasos lentos y indecisos van saliendo los huéspedes, no como quienes vienen de un convite delicioso, sino como si los hubieran hartado de habas y lechugas, al son de la *Guía de Pecadores*, en un convento de capuchinos (Blanco-White, 1989, carta III: 61-62, 65-67).

The ostentation and profligacy which Blanco witnessed at Woburn and other stately homes was characteristic of a society which aped the prodigal and artificial tastes of the Prince Regent. He was particularly repelled by the so-called «wit» whose carefully prepared and languidly delivered «witticisms» were designed to wound and humiliate his victims. Unlike the good-humoured and spontaneous Spanish *gracioso*, the English *chistoso* «debe ser hombre de mucho mundo, observador, y de corazón no dispuesto a sentir afición a primera vista: el placer de divertir con sus agudezas ha de haberlo hecho insensible a la injusticia de buscar en cada cual la parte débil para exponerla a la burla» (65-655).

What struck Blanco as the «frialidad mortal» of upper-crust English social life provoked some of his most deliciously mordant satire. Here he is, for example, on the subject of London «parties»:

Durante la *estación* [season], o el tiempo del año en que todo el mundo está en Londres, las gentes *de moda* [fashionables] tienen por cosa indispensable el hacer ver cada cual su gran importancia por el número de gentes que pueden reunir a un mismo tiempo en su casa. Tal es el objeto real y verdadero de esta especie de alarde o revista que cada señora *de moda* hace de las tropas de conocidos a quienes por turno da una comida, por lo menos, al año. A menos costa (salvo de una persona)

pero con el mismo fin, nuestros paisanos de Sevilla reparten quinientas o seiscientas papeletas de entierro; midiendo su calidad e importancia por el número de los que vienen a dar su cabezada a los dolientes. Ni más ni menos acontece en las *partidas* de Londres (40-42).

After leaving Holland House in 1817, Blanco rented an apartment for two years at 81 Pall Mall, above that of his friend James Christie and adjoining Christie's auction rooms. Christie had sent his wife and children abroad for the sake of their health, and appreciated his friend's company. Number 81 is the central portion of Schomberg House, originally built in 1697 and named after one of William III's Dutch generals. Only the façade survives today, but even so it is the oldest structure in Pall Mall, with a colourful history. The artist Thomas Gainsborough had his studio in the west wing, and in Blanco's day the King's morganatic wife, Mrs Fitzherbert, lived nearby. The central section, where Christie and Blanco had their apartments, had been leased in the 1780s to a quack doctor who turned the premises into what he called a Temple of Health and Hymen —or, in modern parlance, a fertility clinic. For a substantial fee his clients could spend a night in the good doctor's «celestial bed», from which they emerged with renewed progenitive powers. By 1817, however, the house had shed its dubious past (Survey, 1960: 368-377; Altick, 1978: 82-84).

Not long afterwards Christie moved with his family out to Chelsea, which was then becoming popular as a residential retreat for better-off Londoners eager to escape the noise and grime of the city centre. It was no longer respectable for wealthy businessmen to live over their shop. In 1823 Christie's auction rooms also moved to its present premises at 8 King Street, round the corner from Pall Mall. A contemporary painting by Gebaud shows James Christie presiding over the sale in 1829 of Sir Joshua Reynolds' popular success «The Snake in the Grass» —bought by Sir Robert Peel for what was then the record sum of £1260. The snake was merely incidental to a mildly *risqué* picture which depicted Cupid untying the girdle of a roguish and bare-breasted nymph.

The early 1820s were years when, for the first time, Blanco earned a comfortable income, which he needed to pay for his son's education. First there was the success of *Letters from Spain*, and then his lucrative employment by Rudolf Ackermann as editor of *Variedades*. This windfall allowed him to follow the Christies out to Chelsea and to rent a house at 7 Paradise Row, a few doors away from the Christies at number 2. Paradise Row, opposite what is now the National Army Museum, was demolished in 1906, but a surviving watercolour conveys its old-world charm. For someone as hypersensitive to noise as Blanco, Chelsea must have been a paradise indeed. He had a key to the Physic Garden, and a view of the Royal Hospital, where many veterans of the Peninsular War spent their retirement. There were musical evenings at the Christies' house, where he performed on the violin, and he attended scientific lectures at the Royal Institution, of which both he and Andrés Bello were members. Sometimes he would walk over to Kensington, to dine and stay overnight at Holland House. His diary records that one day in April 1823, on the corner of Sloane Street, he met «Mr Wordsworth the poet». Whatever they discussed, it was probably not poetry, since Mr Wordsworth's verse was not to Blanco's taste. «One is angry at almost every other page», he wrote, «and yet there is so much that makes one respect the writer that there is no avenging the annoyance by throwing the book away.»⁶

Characteristically Blanco used the opportunity of his good fortune to give practical assistance to some of his less fortunate fellow-countrymen. Christie was Registrar of the

6 Journal entry for 3 April 1823, Liverpool University Library

Literary Fund Society, a charity for the relief of writers in distress, irrespective of their nationality, and with his help Blanco obtained subsidies for Leandro Fernández de Moratín, Juan Antonio Llorente, Félix José Reinoso, and the botanist Mariano La Gasca.⁷ A little later, when the end of the liberal *trienio* led to an influx of Spanish refugees, he helped them publicly and privately. His eloquent «Letter on the claims of the Spanish refugees to public benevolence» was published in the *New Times* of 10 January 1823, and his account books record gifts to needy individuals, bestowed with unobtrusive delicacy.

Many of these refugees moved into the tenements of Somers Town, recently vacated by French emigrés. Most of Somers Town was demolished later in the century to make way for the marshalling yards of St Pancras and Euston railway stations, and further destruction occurred in the Blitz of World War II, but the atmosphere of the place is preserved in literary records. Charles Dickens, then a boy in his teens, lived in Somers Town from 1825 to 1827, when his father was evicted for non-payment of rent. He later evoked the dingy dilapidation of the area in *Bleak House*. Readers of that novel will remember Harold Skimpole's grubby lodgings in the Polygon, where «poor Spanish refugees could be seen walking about in cloaks, smoking little paper cigars». Blanco painted a similar picture of squalor in his unfinished novel *Luisa de Bustamante*, set in nearby Clerkenwell, where the eponymous heroine lived «en el estado más triste que se puede imaginar». A far cry from Holland House!

Among those who benefited from Blanco's assistance was the veteran Joaquín Lorenzo Villanueva, leader of the exiled liberal clergy. He and the other refugee priests who had supported the Constitution were barred by the English Catholic Vicar Apostolic of London from exercising their priestly functions, on the ground that they were dangerous liberals, disloyal to the monarchy. There was no question of the refugees attending Mass at the chapel of the Spanish embassy: the records of their births, marriages and deaths are not to be found there, but in the registers of the Catholic chapel in Somers Town.

It was while he was living in Chelsea that Blanco made the fateful decision to enter the public arena as an opponent of the campaign for Catholic Emancipation. It was a decision which stemmed from culpable ignorance, misplaced principle, and a readiness to allow himself to be exploited. His polemical work, *Practical and Internal Evidence against Catholicism*, earned him an honorary degree from Oxford University, and a place there at Oriel College. When he left London for Oxford in 1826 he did so with the intention of spending the rest of his life in an academic cloister within reach of the university library. Oxford turned out not to be the quiet haven he had expected, and from 1828 he spent much of his time back in London as tutor to the children of Nassau Senior, a liberal economist who played a leading role in planning the social and political reforms enacted by the Whig party after their return to power in 1830. Blanco lived with the Seniors at 11 Kensington Square —another house with an interesting history. The Square (nowadays the most expensive piece of real estate in London, strategically situated behind Harrods) had its origins in the very early 18th century, when the court of William and Mary moved out to Kensington Palace and accommodation had to be built nearby for their followers. Number 11, which still survives, was the home of Prince Talleyrand from 1792 to 1794. In the 19th century the Square was much favoured by intellectuals such as John Stuart Mill (another friend and literary collaborator of Blanco) and the historian J. R. Green. At Senior's house he met a younger generation of rising politicians, who now called

⁷ Blanco's letters recommending these grants, and the acknowledgments of their recipients are to be found in the archive of the Literary Fund held at the British Library, files no. 474-475 (Moratín and Llorente), 545 (Reinoso), and 573 (La Gasca).

themselves not Whigs, but liberals. The word «liberal», borrowed from the Spanish, first entered the British political vocabulary in the early 19th century with a distinctly pejorative connotation, suggesting someone who held revolutionary and un-English views, but by the 1820 the term was beginning to gain ground as a respectable party label. The Whigs had been a predominantly aristocratic party who considered themselves to be the heirs to the «Glorious Revolution» of 1688, which had replaced an absolutist with a constitutional monarchy. The new Liberals came from the rising middle class, and looked to Jeremy Bentham as their ideologue. The leading intellectuals among them, whom Blanco met at Senior's house —the economists Malthus and Ricardo, for instance, and the social reformer Edwin Chadwick— were men who dealt in statistics and got things done.

Blanco's departure for Dublin in 1832, followed by his secession to Liverpool three years later, marked the end of his connection with London. Yet his oldest friendships survived his metamorphoses. The Christies, it is true, were deeply upset by his defection from the Church of England, yet when Mary Christie heard of his death in 1841 she wrote a letter to one of the Moore sisters which deserves quotation, not just because it shows what a profound impression Blanco made on her, but also because it echoes the solemnity of his famous sonnet:

I have met no-one in life who appeared to me to be looking into the dark things beyond with so single an eye, and so serious a purpose to be right. I cannot believe that 'He who is unsearchable and his ways past finding out' will keep in darkness one who so loved the light. I shall ever consider my acquaintance with him, and the kindness with which he always spoke with me, as a recollection to be treasured up and meditated upon.⁸

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⁸ Letter to Harriet Moore, May 1841, in Princeton University Library, Blanco White papers, Box 11, Folder 4.

