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Washington Irving's Romantic Vision of Spain in *The Student of Salamanca*: Life Experience or Erudition?

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ABSTRACT

The present research project is going to deal with the specific image of Spain (particularly Granada and the Alhambra) depicted by Washington Irving in his short story *The Student of Salamanca* (1822) (generally translated into Spanish as *El Alquimista de Granada*), and how his works –as well as his particular interest in the Iberian Peninsula– largely contributed to a paradigm shift in the way Spain was seen beyond its borders. In order to do so, in this essay I will try to answer the following two questions: (1) did Washington Irving write *The Student of Salamanca* having evidential facts that confirmed his assertions about Spanish history, culture and environments? And, (2) did he portray a romantic and orientalist image of Spain in his short story due to the fact that he was a romantic writer, or this was just a strategy to mislead the reader?

KEYWORDS: *image, Spain, Granada, Alhambra, Spanish Orientalism, romantic.*

El presente trabajo de investigación versará sobre la imagen específica de España (particularmente Granada y la Alhambra) retratada por Washington Irving en su historia corta *The Student of Salamanca* (1822) (traducida generalmente como *El Alquimista de Granada*), y como sus obras –así como su interés particular por la Península Ibérica– contribuyeron en gran medida a un cambio de paradigma en la forma en la que se veía España más allá de sus fronteras. Con este fin, en este ensayo trataré de responder a las siguientes dos preguntas: (1) ¿Escribió Washington Irving *El Alquimista de Granada* basándose en hechos probatorios que confirmaran sus aseveraciones acerca de la historia, la cultura y el ambiente de España? Y (2) ¿retrató una imagen romántica y orientalista de España en su historia corta debido al hecho de que era un escritor romántico, o fue simplemente una estrategia para confundir al lector?

PALABRAS CLAVE: *imagen, España, Granada, Alhambra, Orientalismo español, romántico.*



Washington Irving (picture by Stuart Newton, 1820)

Index

1. Introduction.....	6
2. Spanish Orientalism.....	8
3. Washington Irving and Spain: Biographical Aspects.....	11
4. Overview and Analysis of <i>The Student of Salamanca</i> 4.1 Plot Overview.....	17
4.2 Analysis.....	18
5. Conclusion.....	26
Annex: Illustrations.....	28
Bibliography.....	30

1. Introduction

The present work will examine the particular depiction of Spain portrayed by Washington Irving in his short story *The Student of Salamanca*. The specific vision of the American author about Spain pictured in this tale is particularly interesting, since he describes with great skill the customs and manners of Spanish society before even having been at the Peninsula. Thence, it is especially fascinating the way in which an outstanding author as Washington Irving could have been so interested in a country whose image was rather seen as cruel and primitive in the period he wrote about it (early 19th century). In fact, from the 16th and 17th centuries to the late 19th century (or rather beginnings of the 20th century) Spain was seen as a ruthless and a savage country as a consequence of the human rights abuses committed by the Spaniards during the American Conquest. Later, this negative image –motivated above all by the Spanish settlers– derived into a more general criticism against the Spanish Empire; these judgments toward the Peninsula are what we now know as the *Black Legend*, defined by Herrera-Sobek in *Celebrating Latino Folklore: An Encyclopedia of Cultural Traditions* as follows:

“The Black Legend as a term was coined in 1914 by Julián Juderías as a way of explaining the antipathy toward Spain that originated with colonial settlement in the sixteenth century. English and Dutch writers and thinkers classified the Spanish as morally inferior through their use of the Black Legend. By the early eighteenth century, the Black Legend was widely known and disseminated. Popular lore held that the Spanish colonists were crueler to natives than were their English and Dutch counterparts.” (Herrera-Sobek 117)

Accordingly, it is difficult to understand how Washington Irving could have transformed this negative image of the country –particularly in the United States and England– into another one that not only promoted the costumes and behavior of Spanish society but, also, the vision of the Peninsula as an exotic and an unexplored country who everyone should visit. Nonetheless, the American writer kept that negative image of the Spanish Catholic Church in the *Student of Salamanca* (as it is going to be seen in the analysis of the story), but his particular idealization of the Spanish landscapes and people gave the peninsular country a chance to recover from the negative image promoted by the Black Legend.

Nevertheless, even if he used some romantic techniques and devices to describe and define his personal points of view about Spanish themes and issues, as we will see later, we cannot state that Washington Irving was a defined romantic writer as later American authors such as Edgar Allan Poe or Nathaniel Hawthorne; although he was one of their main influencers. One of the main reasons of this is that many of his works are dominated by sarcasm and irony, and these are features that distanced him from being a Romantic writer.

Hence, in order to answer the two questions previously stated in the abstract and to remark the aforesaid change of paradigm, the present work will be organized into the following main sections: (1) clarification of the term “Spanish Orientalism” (in order to understand the term, and consequently, Irving’s fascination about Spain); (2) Washington Irving’s life, works and interest on the Peninsula; (3) overview and analysis of the main elements of *The Student of Salamanca*; and (4) conclusion (where I will try to give an answer to the above-mentioned questions).

Finally, it is important to make clear that in order to be more accurate and academically correct in the information that is going to be given, the present essay is going to be based on quotations, paraphrasing and extraction of excerpt from *The Student of Salamanca* and other writings and works (as to analyze and comment the relevant information that is going to be dealt with). On the other hand, it is also important to clarify that as the present work is going to deal with Irving’s particular vision of Spain in *The Student of Salamanca*, the narrator’s voice may be understood in some cases to be expressing Irving’s own opinions.

2. Spanish Orientalism

“Spain and the Spanish past are topics of long standing in the Western canon” (Steven 24). Indeed, Spain and its past are themes that have attracted and charmed foreign writers along history as a result of an orientalist conception of the Peninsula. The term Orientalism is defined by the literary critic and theorist Said (2006: 2) as “a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between “the Orient” and (most of the time) “the Occident.”” In other words, a style that has its roots in the image of the “social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, “mind,” destiny, and so on” (Said, 2006: 2,3) portrayed by travel writers in Europe in the first three decades of the 19th Century. Specifically, those travel writings, in which Spanish Orientalism can be detected, use to describe the Alhambra, Granada and Spain in general as primitive, undeveloped and decadent places. Nonetheless, this negative depiction of Spain is only from the economic point of view since, in literature, it was portrayed as an exotic, an unexplored and a fascinating country. Thus, stereotypes like gypsies, flamenco, bullfighting or the lax character of the Spanish people were seductive and, therefore, recurrent themes in foreign writings. In such a way, this attraction was induced by the rise of the Romantic movement that started at the beginning of the period and, also, as a consequence of Thomas Rodd’s translation of Genes Pérez de Hit’s writings: *The Civil Wars of Granada* (1801) and *Ballads from the Civil Wars of Granada and the Twelve Peers of France* (1803), both based on the original *Historias de los Bandos de Cegriés y Abencerrajes* and *Guerras Civiles de Granada* (1595/1604). Moreover, to these literary innovations that created an exotic image of the peninsula all over the world, it was added the historical knowledge of Spain’s Moorish past through books such as: *A Concise History of the Moors in Spain* (1811) by Thomas Bourke; *The History of Empire of the Mussulmans in Spain and Portugal* (1815) by George Power; or *The Arabian Antiques of Spain* (1815) by James Cavanah Murphy (Steven 24; Buchanan 269; Colmeiro 127; Kagan 9-11; Said 2, 3; Hilton 38).

As a result, Spain –particularly its southern part– became the focus of interest in literature; it was represented as a place where past and present cultures were mingled. Furthermore, the city of Granada, and concretely the Alhambra, was seen as the last remaining piece of the glorious past of the Moors in Spain; its last essence. Hence, in

the academic field, the expulsion of the Arabs from the peninsula was and is still frowned upon; scholars criticize this fact and write nostalgically about it. For example, the Spanish Philologist and Arabic language and culture's specialist Julián Ribera—answering Miguel Asín Palacios' speech on Dante and Islam—states:

I repeat (and I will repeat until satiety, since justice requires it) that the Muslims of the Peninsula were Spaniards: Spaniards in race, Spaniards in tongue, Spaniards in character, taste, tendencies and genius... And we should consider the merits of the Spanish Muslims to be our own national, Spanish wealth; by means of their civil virtues, they made southern Spain the best run country, the most powerful, the richest and most cultured of the first half of the Middle Ages, and by means of its natural gifts of genius they excelled to such an extent in the deeds of the spirit that they created a peculiarly Spanish scientific, literary and artistic culture, absolutely unique and without equal in any of the previous periods in the history of Spain. Julián Ribera (in Mallette 57)

Thus, the mysteriousness, exoticism, primitivism and backwardness in which Spain was portrayed in literary and historical books, created a Romantic image of the country outside its borders. Particularly, in the United States this new image about the Peninsula started at the beginning of the 19th century coinciding with the birth of the American Romantic Movement:

Literary historians have traditionally recognized the decades before the American Civil War (the 1820s through the 1860s) as “the Romantic period in American literature,” which occurred about a generation after the Romantic Movement in European literature [...] Romanticism differs significantly from Classicism, the period Romanticism rejected. Hence, Romantic literature rebelled against the formalism of eighteenth-century reason, being more concerned with emotion than rationality. It generally values the individual over society, nature over the city. (Pakditawan 6)

In addition, Iván Jaksic in *The Hispanic World and American Intellectual Life, 1820-1880* claims that:

Romanticism served as the vehicle for building national traditions, even where few were to be found. Americans by and large [...] did not seek to anchor national traditions in the Native American past. They went elsewhere, to a Pan-European spectrum of sources [...]. They focused on Spain. (Iván Jaksic 2012:4)

Indeed, American writers (specially) in the 19th century tried to borrow and adapt many of the European themes, motifs and style of writing in order to establish their own tradition. Spanish issues were very seductive to many of them, but the first one who introduced this interest on the Peninsula was Washington Irving (1783-1859); one of the greatest American authors and short story writer. He adapted and used many of the European themes and literary techniques (many of them Spanish) in his works. What is more, he introduced many romantic elements before any other American Romantic writer in the period; therefore, we can consider him as one of the initiators of the movement in the United States. Nonetheless, and as it has been anticipated in the introduction of the present work, he was not a clear romantic writer since he tried to break with the possible romantic images he described in his works by introducing elements of humor, sarcasm or irony (Gieseler 3-5; Ladd et al. 23, 24; Kagan 49-51; Iván Jaksic 4).

3. Washington Irving and Spain: Biographical Aspects

Washington Irving was born in 1783 in New York as one of the sons of a wealthy English family. His parents were great admirers of General Washington; therefore, they decided to name him like the former. Since his youth, he presented a great attraction towards reading and writing, and even if he felt a particular tendency towards literature, he decided to study law. However, he never let aside his interest in literature and worked in several magazines, editorials and journals. Between 1804 and 1806, the American author traveled for the first time to Europe residing chiefly in Italy and France and returning to the United States very influenced and seduced by the European culture. Thus, he started writing between 1805 and 1815 portraying this admiration towards Europe; among his works stand out *A History of New-York from the Beginning of the World to the End of the Dutch Dynasty*, by *Diedrich Knickerbocker* (1809), which is a humorous work published under the pseudonym of *Diedrich Knickerbocker* –it achieved a great success in his country–. Hence, he became the first American professional writer who was paid author's royalties both in the United States and later, in Europe. Moreover, he is considered by some scholars as one of '*the founders of the American literary tradition*' (Kidder and Oppenheim 27; Hilton 1-61; Burt 198,199; Scotfield 10; Irving, 1998: 11-35).

As a consequence of his delight about Europe, in 1815 Irving decided to go back to the old country with the intention to return to his native one in a few years. Nonetheless, he remained in Europe until 1832, '*he was forty-nine years old, and when he arrived [...] he had been absent from his native country for the past seventeen years*' (Irving, 1956: 14). Although, he became a very important figure in the United States during his absence, his writings did not deal with American themes, landscape or manners, quite the contrary, '*he had become thoroughly Europeanized, and he had written mainly of England, Germany, and most recently, of Spain and the Alhambra*' (*ibid*). Therefore, he tried to compensate this lack of knowledge about his own nation exploring the scenes and sketches of the plains of the '*far west*' of America in the book *A Tour on the Prairies*, published in 1932. In the introduction of the former, he stated:

As I saw the last blue line of my native land fade away, like a cloud in the horizon, it seemed as if I had closed one volume of the world and its concerns, and had time for meditation, before I opened another. That land, too, now vanishing from my view, which contained all that was most dear to me in life; what vicissitudes might occur in it—what changes might take place in me, before I visit it again! Who can tell, when he sets forth to wander, whither he may be driven by the uncertain currents of existence; or when he may return; or whether it may ever be his lot to revisit scenes of his childhood!

Such were the dubious thoughts that passed like a shade across my mind many years since, as I lost sight of my native land, on my voyage to Europe. Yet, I had every reason for bright anticipations. I was buoyant with health, had enough of the “world’s gear” for all my wants, was on my way to visit the fairest scenes of Europe, with the prospect of returning home in a couple of years, stored with recollections for the remainder of my life. (Irving, 1956: 3)

In these fragments we can observe his first feelings about leaving his beloved country and how his intentions of returning turned into a “*lost (of) sight of my native land, on my voyage to Europe.*” Certainly, Europe came to be his home. He had been idealizing the country and learning about it since his youth. Furthermore, and as we have seen, in the case of Spain thanks to his fascination about reading and writing from a very young age, he became to be a great connoisseur of the Spanish literature and culture before even visiting the peninsula; Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra and Ginés Pérez de Hita were two of the most important influences on his forehand knowledge about the European country. Besides, after being several times to Spain and knowing its reality, he became the most important American and English Hispanophile¹ and Hispanist² (above all, because of ‘*The Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus*’ (1828) and ‘*Chronicles of the Conquest of Granada*’ (1829)); something that Rolena Adorno (in

¹ “A Hispanophile may express a particular love or passion for Spain and its culture but does not necessarily write about Spanish (or Hispanic) subjects. To be sure, many Hispanophiles [...] are also Hispanists, but the two words are not necessarily synonymous” (Kagan 2).

² “Spain’s ‘Diccionario de la literatura española’ defines hispanismo, or Hispanism, as “the study of language, literature, and history of Spain by foreigners.” More broadly, Hispanism is a twentieth-century neologism that has yet to appear in many English-language dictionaries. Nineteenth-century scholars used the term ‘Hispaneolized’ to refer to individuals immersed in Spanish culture [...] but there were no Hispanists per se. Nor are Hispanists to be confused with Hispanophiles, the modern term for someone who is Hispaneolized” (Kagan 2).

Kagan 49) clearly states in the following quotation:

Any consideration of the origins of Anglo-North American Hispanism must take into account the United States' first man of letters, Washington Irving (1783-1859). Irving's lifelong interest in Spanish culture can be summed up by the literary production of his long stay in Spain: *A History of the Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus* (1828), *The Conquest of Granada* (1829), and the always-in-print *Alhambra* (1832), better known today as the Legends of Alhambra. Whether working in the private library of the U.S. consul and bibliophile Obadiah Rich in Madrid, living in apartments of the Alhambra in Granada, or recalling his Alhambra days while carrying out diplomatic chores in London, Washington Irving represented a triangulation of interests and influences that embraced Spain, England, and the United States. Born of English parents and ever grateful, he said, to have been born on the banks of the Hudson River, Irving had a love affair with Spain that extended from the time of his boyhood readings through the end of his life. (Kagan 49)

During Irving's second sojourn in Europe, he wrote a collection of short stories signed under the pseudonym of *Geoffrey Crayon*. Thence, he published them in installments in Philadelphia and New York during 1819 and 1820, and in 1820, as a book in London under the name of *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gentleman*. Such a compilation, consists of thirty short stories among which there are two of Irving's most famous tales: *Rip Van Winkle* and *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*. Both stories mingle fantasy and terror with European customs and manners. Furthermore, they were the first greatest contributions of Washington Irving to the development of the American short story tradition³ (Scotfield 1-14; Hilton 36-38).

In 1822, he published an extension of this volume under the name of *Bracebridge Hall*; a book composed of European tales containing the short story that occupies the present work: *The Student of Salamanca*. As it has been said, Irving was greatly influenced by Spanish writers like Pérez de Hita or Cervantes; and we can observe a clear

³ "The short story in America has for almost two centuries held a prominent, even pre-eminent place in the American literary tradition. [...] It could be argued, indeed, that around the 1820s and 1830s the Americans virtually invented what has come to be called 'the short story,' in its modern literary sense (although one should of course note the parallel European tradition in, for instance, the development of the Russian short story from Gogol in the 1830s). Certainly the short story found its first theorist in one of its major early practitioners, Edgar Allan Poe; and the short story was for Poe his most successful and influential literary form. A number of other American writers in both the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries have, arguably, done their best work in that medium" (Scotfield 1).

intertextuality in his works referring to the previous ones. Particularly, Hita's descriptions of the landscape and settings in *Historia de Las Guerras Civiles de Granada* (1595/1604) were essential for Irving to write about Granada in *The Student of Salamanca*; a place he had never seen when he wrote about it. Thereby, in order to illustrate the impact that the former book caused in Irving, we could consider the following quotation from Pérez de Hita:

Entre el Albaicin y el Alhambra pasa por lo hondo el rio Darro, hacienda una ribera de árboles agradables. A esta fundación no la llamaron los moradores de ella Iiberia como la otra, sino Granata, respecto á que en una cueva junto á Darro fué hallada una hermosa doncella que se decia Granata, y por eso se llamó la ciudad así; y despues de corrompido el vocablo se llamó Granada. Otros dicen que por la muchedumbre de las casas, y la espesura que habia en ellas que estaban juntas como los granos de la Granada, y la nombraron así. Hízose esta ciudad famosa, rica y populosa, hasta el infeliz tiempo en que el rey don Rodrigo perdió á España, lo cual no se declara por no ser á propósito de nuestra historia: solo diremos como, despues de perdida España hasta las Asturias y confines de Vizcaya, siendo toda ella ocupada de moros, traídos por aquellos dos bravos caudillos y generales, el uno llamado el Tarif, y el otro Muza, asímismo quedó la famosa Granada ocupada de moros, y llena de gente de Africa. (Pérez de Hita 2)

As it can be observed, Pérez de Hita explains with great detail why the Andalusian city was named Granada and, how King Rodrigo could not defend Spain from the Moorish invasion. In this manner, the American Hispanophile took ideas and descriptions like the former in order to set *The Student of Salamanca* in the Peninsula and portray Spanish customs and manners before visiting the country.

On the other hand, one of the main sources of the use of the technique of metafiction (a very important strategy in this particular writing) by Irving in his works is found in Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (1605/1615). As Cervantes already did in his work, in *The Student of Salamanca*, Irving employed the technique of metafiction to begin the story. However, he went further than the Spanish writer and made it more complex; while Cervantes makes the reader believe that the story derives from some documents of someone called *Cide Hamete Benengeli*, Irving did not only play with the fact that the story is said to be written by Charles Lightly (one of the character's friend who wrote the story and died in battle) but also with the fact that the whole book –*The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon*– is written by Geoffrey Crayon; presumably the author and compiler (Barrio and Allué 319-325; Pere 52; Cassuto 34; Mancing 111,112).

In 1826, Washington Irving received a letter from Alexander Hill Everett –the United States Ambassador at Spain then– urging him to come to Madrid in order to investigate about the country and the conquest of America. Consequently, he could enjoy an open access to the main library of the American Embassy, which contained a large number of books on Spanish themes and issues. As a result, in his first visit to Spain, he wrote ‘*The Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus*’ (1828) and ‘*Chronicles of the Conquest of Granada*’ (1829); both works awarded him with the title of “*The Hispanist*”. His writings on Columbus are a mixture history –based on his studies on Spanish archives– and the fictional elements that he introduced on purpose in order to add fluency and eloquence to the narration. On the other hand, in 1829, the American author left Spain after having been appointed *the Embassy Prime Secretary* of the United States in London. Nevertheless, he did not forget about the country and continued writing and publishing on peninsular issues. Thus, in 1831 he published *Voyages and Discoveries of the Companions of Columbus*, and in 1832 he finished and published (both in England and in the United States) one of his greatest works: *The Alhambra Tales*. This was a selection of short stories set in the Muslim Andalusia that he started writing during his stay in Granada in 1829. In this manner, it can be said that if Irving paid tribute to Spain in many of his previous writings, in *The Alhambra Tales* his special homage to the peninsula achieved its highest magnificence (Hilton 16-19; Wallhead and Burnham 274).

Thereby, and having reached this point, it is important to clarify why is Washington Irving associated with a *romantic vision of Spain* in the present assignment. First, and as it has been pointed out, from a very young age the American author had a clear interest and tendency towards the peninsula, and in particular, towards its Arabic past because of his education. Moreover, he had a special concern with the glorious Moorish past in the southern region of Granada and its Alhambra. All of this passion about the history of the Nasrid kingdom of Granada, together with his obsession with reading Spanish works like the aforementioned, did nothing but to increase Irving’s idealization of Spain. Nonetheless, the ‘romantic’ perspective of the author regarding Spain reached its highest level with *The Alhambra Tales*; despite the disappointing feeling he suffered after his first visit to the Iberian Peninsula. Thus, there is a clear contrast between Irving’s Spain in *The Student of Salamanca* –where it is presented the way in which the

author saw the nation (its landscape, people and architecture) before having been at the country—, and the image he portrayed in *The Alhambra Tales* after having lived and traveled through the country for three years (one of these trips was only through Andalusia, in 1829). That being so, Irving felt somehow disappointed at his arrival to Spain since he realized that many of the preconceived ideas he had (many of which were acquired by reading Ginés Pérez de Hita's works –written in the 16th and 17th centuries–) did not coincide with the reality that he discovered. This impact, lead to a change in his style of writing making the descriptions and reflections of *The Alhambra Tales* the most mature and plausible narrations and thoughts about the reality of Spain. Notwithstanding this, in this particular moment is when Irving reached the most 'romantic' vision of his literature, offering the rest of the world a different perspective about the Peninsula; a country represented as an exotic and an enigmatic orient full of mysteries, beauty and tradition. In such a way, many intellectuals consider the American author as the driving force behind the positive change of the Spanish image out of its borders from the 19th century onwards (above all in the United States and England). Therefore, he was the main influential writer on other contemporary and younger American authors who also promoted a positive image of Spain abroad; Irving's main followers were H. W. Longfellow, W. C. Bryant, Culeb and Caroline Cushing, Severn T. Wallis, John E. Warren, Bayard Taylor and Charles W. March (Jaksic 186; Vilar et al. 35; Killick 58-61; Hilton 38,60).

In 1832, the American author decided to return to his native country after having been in Europe for seventeen years. Here, he started to participate more actively in the field of politics and in 1842 (ten years later) he returned to Spain for a period of three years as the American Ambassador in the Peninsula. However, as a consequence of the instability of the country at the time, he went back permanently to the United States.

Since my return, in 1846, from my diplomatic mission to Spain, I have been leading a quiet life in a little rural retreat I had previously established on the banks of the Hudson, which, in fact, has been my home for twenty years past. I am in a beautiful part of the country, in an agreeable neighborhood, am on the best of terms with my neighbors, and have a house full of nieces. (Irving, 1864: 219)

4. Overview and analysis of Washington Irving's *'The Student of Salamanca'* contained in the book *Bracebridge Hall* (1822)

4.1 Plot Overview

As it has been said, *The Student of Salamanca* is a short story included in the book *Bracebridge Hall* (published in 1822), which is a compilation of tales that deal with European themes and concerns. Hence, the story line in this narration deals with a young student of Salamanca, *Antonio de Castros*, who decides to go to Granada in order to increase his knowledge and to investigate about the city's Moorish past. In this manner, during his sessions of research in the college's library, Antonio became aware of the presence of an old man who spent the days absorbed in reading odd and ancient Arabic manuscripts. Attracted by this strange man, the young student decided to enquire about him and to try to talk with him, as they both were interested in the same topics. Nevertheless, the old man refused to strike up a friendly conversation with him and, as a consequence of his curiosity Antonio determined to follow him.

There was something like adventure in the thing, which charmed his romantic disposition. He followed the stranger [...] They passed along the skirts of the mountain, and then by the shady banks of the Darro. They pursued their way, for some distance from Grenada, along a lonely road leading among the hills. The gloom of evening was gathering, and it was quite dark when the stranger stopped at the portal of a solitary mansion. (Irving, 1822: 70)

While following the old man, he admired the exotic landscape and surroundings of Granada until the stranger stopped at his home; a dark and ruinous mansion. When the unknown man was going to enter the house, Antonio could see that he lived with an old servant and a young and beautiful girl that he verified was his daughter. From that moment on, he started frequenting the mansion almost daily, and soon, he attained his purposes of finding out about the man and knowing more about the lady that obsessed him from the very first time he saw her. Hence, he discovered that Felix de Vasques (the old man) was an alchemist who was trying to find the philosopher's stone, and his daughter, Inez, was a descendant of a Moorish family; something that he found even more interesting and attractive. Thereby, the student started collaborating with Felix in

his research of the philosopher's stone both, because he was very interested in the investigation and, also, as a way of being near Inez.

With all his zeal, however, for the discovery of the golden art, the feelings of the student had not cooled as to the object that first drew him to this ruinous mansion. [...] he had frequent opportunities of being near the daughter; and every day made him more sensible to her charms. There was a pure simplicity, and an almost passive gentleness in her manners; yet with all this was mingled something, whether mere maiden shyness, or a consciousness of high descent, or a dash of Castilian pride, or perhaps all united, that prevented undue familiarity, and made her difficult of approach. (Irving, 1822: 82)

Later, Antonio became aware of the fact that his beloved, Inez, was in grave danger because Don Ambrosio (a rich man who was obsessed with her) was harassing her; and as a result of her fear, she presented a distant and cold attitude towards him at the beginning. Consequently, the alchemist's learner proposed that they should move to Valencia in order to be safe and continue their investigations about the philosopher's stone there. However, they could not move because Antonio, suddenly, disappeared. Furthermore, the Spanish Inquisition accused Felix de Vasques of witchcraft and Don Ambrosio kidnapped Inez. Nonetheless, after days of struggle, the old man's daughter could escape from Ambrosio's mansion with the help of an old girlfriend of the former and, Antonio arrived just in time to save Felix from the hands of the Inquisition and marry Inez. At the end of the story, the narrator explains the strange disappearance of Antonio, and how he could save the Spanish family from the inquisition:

It appeared that the lover [Antonio], who had sought her affections in the lowly guise of a student, was only son and heir of a powerful grandee of Valencia. He had been placed at the university of Salamanca; but a lively curiosity, and an eagerness for adventure, had induced him to abandon the university, without his father's consent [...] Trusty emissaries had been dispatched to seize upon him by main force, and convey him without delay to the paternal home. [...] The father, [...] a very reasonable man, as appears by his consenting that his son should return to Grenada, and conduct Inez, as his affianced bride, to Valencia. (Irving, 1822: 119)

4.2 Analysis of Washington Irving's *The Student of Salamanca* (1822)

Once made a brief summary of the argument and set the cornerstones of the story, we are going to examine those aspects, which from a literary and a cultural perspective are the most relevant for the present research project. It is important though –having

reached this point– to clarify that Irving did not set the central story in a particular period of the Spanish history. In addition, we can guess that due to his reading of Spanish works (many of them corresponding to the 16th and 17th centuries), he had a mixture of preconceived ideas about the Iberian Peninsula that he tried to describe in the story (many of these conceptions do not correspond with the reality of the Peninsula in the 19th century). Having made this clear, we are going to start analyzing the main elements that make up the tale.

First, we are going to examine one of the main stratagems that Irving used in several of his writings –and especially in this particular one–, which make of them some of his most creative works: the technique of *metafiction*. As it has already been anticipated in previous sections, in this short story the author –with great skill and technical complexity– begins the tale using the literary technique of *metafiction* (a method that he probably borrowed inspired by its use in Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*). In this manner, he presents a situation in which a group of people are gathering at Julia’s home; a young girl who has had a recent accident. Thus, in order to entertain her and the rest of the people, a man –in the narration referred to as *the Captain*– begins reading a story, which he assures that ‘*is one of the scribblings [...] of my poor friend, Charles Lightly, of the dragoons. [...] Poor fellow! He was shot down close by me at Waterloo⁴. [...] And, indeed, he died a few minutes afterwards.*’ Hence, *the Captain* continued telling the listeners how did the scroll that contained the tale came into his possession and adding that the story he was ‘*going to read is a tale which he [Charles Lightly] said he wrote in Spain, during the time that he lay ill of a wound received at Salamanca.*’ After this metafictional introduction of the story, the narrator of *The Student of Salamanca* clarifies that he had obtained a copy of the narration and therefore, he was able to make us (the readers) know about it. In such a way, we are facing a narration (the beginning of the story in which the narrator talks about Julia and the people around her) that is within another narration (the subsequent story that the Captain talks about), which is contained in another story (the one that the actual narrator is telling; he claims that he

⁴ As we know thanks to his education Irving was a great connoisseur of the European history and culture. Thus, in this part of the story he made a reference to the Napoleonic Wars; “*a series of wars between 1792 and 1815 that ranged France against shifting alliances of other European powers and that produced a brief French hegemony over most of Europe. The revolutionary wars, which may for convenience be held to have been concluded by 1801, were originally undertaken to defend and then to spread the effects of the French Revolution.*” (Definition taken from: “Napoleonic Wars (European History).” *Encyclopedia Britannica*. N.p., n.d. Web. 11 July 2014).

had obtained a copy of the tale), and this last one is as well included in another one (the real narration we are reading; the story as a whole). Furthermore, Irving's use of the technique of metafiction goes even further –the complexity of authorship in the story is even greater– given that he signed *Bracebridge Hall* under the pseudonym of *Geoffrey Crayon*.

Second, even if there might be scholars who classify *The Student of Salamanca* as a simple story, actually, we are dealing with a *romance tale* with hints of verisimilitude throughout the writing. In other words, this narrative has all the elements of a romance novel with the only difference that it is not a novel, but a short story. Thus, we can define it as 'a work of prose fiction that tells the story of the courtship and betrothal of one or more heroines' (Regis, 2003: 19). Moreover, the short story we are dealing with contains the same elements that define a romance novel; this argument can be supported by the enumeration of the main elements that make up this last style written in *A Natural History of the Romance*:

All romance novels contain eight narrative elements: a definition of society, always corrupt, that the romance novel will reform; the meeting between the heroine and hero; and an account of their attraction for each other; the barrier between them; the point of ritual death; the recognition that feels the barrier; the declaration of heroine and hero that they love each other; and their betrothal. (Regis 14)

Hence, *The Student of Salamanca* is a romance tale, in which Irving introduced many romantic elements. In order to second this idea, we are going to use the previous 'eight narrative elements' with the aim to analyze Irving's particular romantic vision of Spain portrayed in the story.

On the one hand, Irving's short story has many romantic and idealized descriptions of the Spanish landscape, buildings and people. Specifically, the narrator's descriptions of the Alhambra and the Vega of Granada are some of the main elements that represent this idealization and passion for the Peninsula. During the narration, through a little light setting, the storyteller describes the Vega and Granada's surroundings as an 'earthly paradise'. A place full of caves dug in the ground where it can be found treasures and ancient Arabic manuscripts banned by the Pope. Furthermore, the Vega is described as an ideal place for all those with a strong intellectual curiosity. Thus, we are

provided with an idealization of the Spanish landscape and history that can be only seen throughout the narrator's own words:

He had directed his steps one evening to the sacred mount which overlooks the beautiful valley watered by the Darro, the fertile plains of the Vega and all that rich diversity of vale and mountain which surrounds Grenada with an earthly Paradise. It was twilight when he found himself at the place where, at the present day, are situated the chapels known by the name of the Sacred Furnaces. They are so called from grottos, in which some of the primitive saints are said to have been burnt. At the time of Antonio's visit the place was an object of much curiosity. In an excavation of these grottos, several manuscripts had recently been discovered, engraved on plates of lead. They were written in the Arabian Language, excepting one, which was in unknown characters. The Pope had issued a bull forbidding any one, under pain of excommunication, to speak of these manuscripts. The prohibition had only excited the greater curiosity." (Irving, 1822: 70)

Another item –that especially stands out from the descriptions of the Peninsula (particularly, the representation of Spanish society)– is the reference to the Roma ethnicity and their relationship with the superstitions and the dark arts. Interestingly, the narrator uses the Castilian term 'gitanas' rather than the Anglo-Saxon word 'gypsy':

He found a group of Gitanas, a vagabond gypsy race, which at that time abounded in Spain, and lived in hovels and caves of the hills about the neighborhood of Grenada. [...] Antonio endeavored to obtain some information of them concerning the old building and its inhabitants. [...] "Some of the country people, who work in the vineyards among the hills, believe the old man deals in the black art, and they are not over-fond of passing near the tower at night. But for our parts, we Gitanas are not a people to trouble ourselves with fears of that kind." (Irving, 1822: 71)

Moreover, Irving goes a step further on the idealization of the Spanish society when he describes two of the main clichés of the Peninsula: the Castilian pride and the beauty of the Spanish women; tanned and with black eyes. These descriptions are summarized in the following two excerpts extracted from the text:

A female head looked out: it might have served as a model for one of Raphael's saints [...] a pair of fine black eyes darted a look of surprise [...] there was something in this sudden gleam of beauty that wonderfully struck the imagination of the student. It was like a brilliant flashing from its dark casket [...] this appearance of being shut up and kept apart gave her the value of a

treasured gem [...] She was attentive in her devotion; her eyes were never taken from the altar or the priest; and on returning home, her countenance was almost entirely concealed by her mantilla [...] But then the Spanish females were so prone to love and intrigue; and music and moonlight were so seductive, and Inez had such a tender soul languishing in every look. (Irving, 1822: 71, 72, 73, 83)

Felix de Vasques, the alchemist, was a native of Castile, and of an ancient and honorable line. Early in life he had married a beautiful female, a descendant from one of the Moorish families. The marriage displeased his father, who considered the pure Spanish blood contaminated by this foreign mixture [...] There were a pure simplicity, and an almost passive gentleness in her [Inez] manners; yet with all this was mingled something, whether mere maiden shyness, or a consciousness of high descent, or a dash of Castilian pride, or perhaps all united, that prevented undue familiarity, and made her difficult of approach. (Irving, 1822: 78, 82)

On the other hand, Irving did not only project a positive, exotic and romantic image of the Peninsula in *the Student of Salamanca*, as we have anticipated in the introduction, he also portrayed two main negative elements that contrast this idealized vision of Spain in the story: the past expulsion of the Moors (described as something sad and unwise); and, the idea that Spanish society is corrupted by religion (Inquisition).

From one side, the period in which the Moors dominated Spain is depicted in the story as a glorious epoch, in which the narrator saw the Peninsula (concretely Granada and the Alhambra) as an “*earthly paradise*”:

The Generaliffe, the palace of pleasure, in the days of Moorish dominion, but now a gloomy convent of capuchins [...] The palace is full of the sad story of past times [...] The whole garden has a look of ruin and neglect [...] The convent bell flings its sullen sound, or the drowsy vesper hymn floats along these solitudes, which once resounded with the song, and the dance, and the lover’s serenade. Well may the Moors lament over the loss of this earthly paradise; [...] well may their ambassadors smite their breasts when they behold these monuments of their race, and sit down and weep among the fading glories of Grenada! (Irving, 1822: 94)

Thereby, he laments the Moorish expulsion from a cultural point of view (their expulsion seen as a loss of culture and architectural beauty), and also from a historical perspective; this can be observed in the following quotation:

Felix de Vasques, the alchemist, was a native of Castile, and of an ancient and honorable line. Early in life he had married a beautiful female, a descendant from one of the Moorish families. The marriage displeased his father, who considered the pure Spanish blood contaminated by this foreign mixture. It is true, the lady traced her descent from one of the Abencerrages, the most gallant of Moorish cavaliers, who had embraced the Christian faith on being exiled from the walls of Grenada [...] When the dance was ended, two of the parties approached Antonio and Inez; one of them began a Moorish ballad, accompanied by the other on the lute. It alluded to the story of the garden, the wrongs of the fair queen of Grenada, and the misfortunes of the Abencerrages. It was one of those old ballads that abound in this part of Spain, and live, like echoes, about the ruins of Moorish greatness. (Irving 1822: 78, 95)

From another side, as an addition to the negative view of the Moorish expulsion, Irving criticized heavily the behavior of the Spanish Inquisition throughout the story. Furthermore, he was so concerned with this subject that, as it can be observe in the tale, he attached great importance to its criticism; it occupies much of the story lines. Hence, Irving referred to the miseries and tortures that prisoners suffered on account of the Inquisition and, made a detailed description of many of the inquisitorial processes. Moreover, he described the image of San Benito and the procedure of *Autos da Fé* and how they had become a social event to which everyone attended as if it were something to celebrate; *“for such is the horrible curiosity of human nature, that this cruel sacrifice was attended with more eagerness than a theater, or even a bullfeat”* (Irving, 1822: 114). In addition, he made clear his position to this unfair ‘justice’ in the story by criticizing the Spanish Catholic Church saying:

One would have thought it some scene of elegant festivity, instead of an exhibition of human agony and death. But what a difference spectacle and ceremony was this from those which Grenada exhibited in the days of her Moorish splendor [...] It is an awful thing –a voiceless, noiseless multitude! The hushed and gazing stillness of the surroundings thousands, heaped on walls, and gates, and roofs, and hanging, as it were, in clusters, heightened the effect of the pageant that moved drearily on [...] The faces of the prisoners were ghastly and disconsolate. Even those who had been pardoned, and were the Sanbenito, or penitential garment, bore traces of the horrors they had undergone. (Irving, 1822: 115)

Besides, the American author went beyond the criticism against the Inquisition by showing his opposition to the way in which the Catholic Church torture and murdered intellectual such as Raimond Lully or Pietro d’Albano –to whom he compared the character of Felix de Vasques–; probably, Irving was trying to say that intellectuals

represented a challenge to society and therefore, the Inquisition tried to put them all aside. For this reason, he reserved a section in the story to indicate his indignation:

For what would be the effect of this length of days, and this abundant wealth, but to enable the possessor to go on from art to art, from science to science, with energies unimpaired by sickness, uninterrupted by death? For this have sages and philosophers shut themselves up in cells and solitudes; buried themselves in caves and dens of the earth; turning from the joys of life, and the pleasance of the world [...] For this was Raymond Lully stoned to death in Mauritania. For this did the immortal Pietro d'Albano suffer persecution at Padua, and when he escaped from his oppressors by death, was despitefully burnt in effigy. (Irving, 1822: 104)

Thus, Irving's descriptions about the Inquisition are –even if raw and harsh– somehow burlesque and ironical, what probably made of *The Student of Salamanca* one of his most critical and satirical works about Spain and Spanish society. Hence, as a final remark about this section, it is important to highlight two brief quotations that represent this ironical (although severe) depictions and comments about the Spanish Inquisition:

And as the increase of wisdom is the increase of virtue, how may he become the benefactor of his fellow-men; dispensing with liberal, but cautious and discriminating hand, that inexhaustible wealth which is at his disposal; banishing poverty, which is the cause of so much sorrow and wickedness; encouraging the art; promoting discoveries, and enlarging all the means of virtuous enjoyment! [...] “Señor,” said he (the inquisitor), “this is all rambling, visionary talk. You are charged with sorcery, and in defence you give us a rhapsody about alchemy” [...] His trial continued for a long time with cruel mockery of justice, for no witnesses were ever, in this court, and the latter had continually to defend himself in the dark. (Irving, 1822:104)

She (Inez) was too ignorant of the nature of the inquisition to know that even innocence was not always a protection from its cruelty; and she confided too surely in the virtue of her father to believe that any accusation could prevail against him. (Irving, 1822: 110)

Finally, the *Student of Salamanca* deals with one final –but basic– element that is the central part of all romance novels (in this case, the central part of a *romance tale*), and in this particular story it gives rise to introduce many of the romantic descriptions and ideas that compose the story: the love affair between the protagonists *Antonio* and *Inez*.

Hence, on the one hand, the story deals with all the aforesaid love elements about the 'heroine and hero' between Inez and Antonio defined in *A Natural History of the Romance Tale* by Regis:

The meeting between the heroine and hero; and an account of their attraction for each other; the barrier between them; the point of ritual death; the recognition that feels the barrier; the declaration of heroine and hero that they love each other; and their betrothal. (Regis 14)

In such a way, in the tale there are two lovers who fall in love almost at the beginning of the story and show their attraction to each other. Then, several incidents (the sudden disappearance of Antonio, Inez kidnapping by Don Ambrossio and the imprisonment of Felix de Vasques condemned by the Inquisition for sorcery) made a barrier between them. Furthermore, all of these obstacles made their love seem almost impossible; according to Regis (2003: 35) this moment is called '*the point of ritual death,*' what she defines as "*the moment in the narrative when the union between heroine and hero, the hoped-for resolution, seems absolutely impossible, when it seems that the barrier will remain, more substantial than ever.*" Nonetheless, the lovers finally get over all the hindrances they had to face and, get engaged.

On the other hand, this love affair between the two protagonists framed the story and made possible, as we have seen, Irving's particular 'romantic vision' and description of the Spanish landscape and society.

5. Conclusion

At this point, we are going to give answer to the two questions that compose the present research proposal: (1) did Washington Irving write *The Student of Salamanca* having evidential facts that confirmed his assertions about Spanish history, culture and environments? And, (2) did he portray a romantic image of Spain in the short story due to the fact that he was a romantic writer, or this was just a strategy to mislead the short story readers?

On the one hand, a careful reading of *The Student of Salamanca* is enough to see the fascination and admiration that Washington Irving felt about Granada and Spain during his life. Nevertheless, and as it is clearly stated along the present paper, this esteem about the Peninsula was a mere erudition. Moreover, and as we have seen, Irving was a great connoisseur of the Spanish culture, literature and history thanks to the reading of Spanish works as Ginés Pérez de Hita's *Guerras Civiles de Granada* (1595/1604), which motivated him to write about Peninsular issues. Whence, he extracted the elements he considered the ones that described Spanish society, costumes and manners and, hence, he created a story full of preconceptions and topical ideas about the country. It should be recalled the fact that the American author published *Bracebridge Hall* between 1819 and 1822, six years before going to Spain for the first time. In this manner, what we really have in *The Student of Salamanca* are fragments of preconceptions and stereotypes –taken from other writings and authors– mixed with the author's own imagination.

On the other hand, we can somehow assert that the protagonist of the short story, Antonio de Castros, is a mouthpiece of certain beliefs and assumptions held by Irving himself in the way in which, he idealizes the vision of the Alhambra and recreates in his own fantasies about its aspect in the years of its maximum splendor. Furthermore, the romantic vision of Irving about the Alhambra and Granada is also projected by way of the narrator's descriptions and ideas; the following passage is particularly telling:

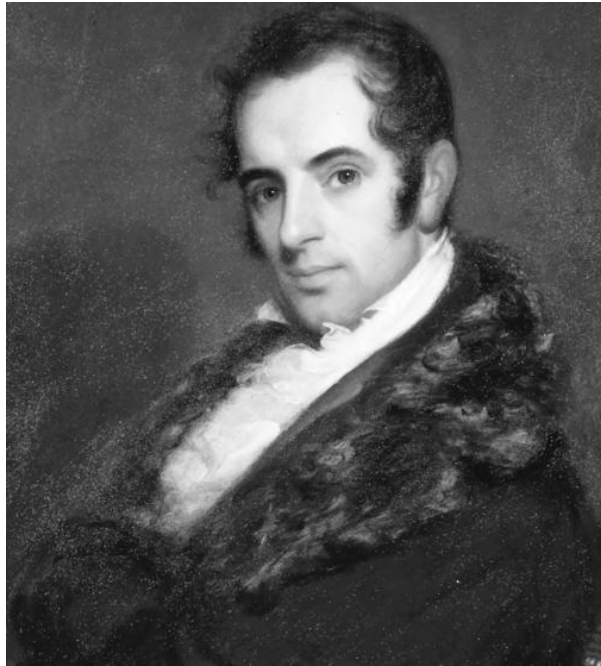
His mind soon became occupied by other objects. He passed several days wandering among the mouldering piles of Moorish architecture, those melancholy monuments of an elegant and voluptuous people. He paced the deserted halls of the Alhambra, the paradise of the Moorish

kings. He visited the great court of the lions, famous for the perfidious massacre of the gallant Abencerrages. He gazed with admiration at its Mosaic cupolas, gorgeously painted in gold and azure; its basins of marble, its alabaster vase, supported by lions, and storied with inscriptions. His imagination kindled as he wandered among these scenes. They were calculated to awaken all the enthusiasm of a youthful mind. Most of the halls have anciently been beautified by fountains. The fine taste of the Arabs delighted in the sparkling purity and reviving freshness of water, and they erected, as it were, altars on every side, to that delicate element. Poetry mingles with architecture in the Alhambra. It breathes along the very walls. Wherever Antonio turned his eye, he beheld inscriptions in Arabic, wherein the perpetuity of Moorish power and splendor within these walls was confidently predicted. Alas! How has the prophecy been falsified! Many of the basins, where the fountains had once thrown up their sparkling showers, were dry and dusty. Some of the palaces were turned into gloomy convents, and the barefoot monk paced through those courts which had once glittered with the array and echoed to the music of Moorish chivalry.” (Irving, 1822: 69)

Nevertheless, and as we have anticipated several times, even though we cannot assure that Irving in his works in general was a pure romantic writer, since he introduced some elements of humor and irony that distanced him from being a romantic author, in this specific tale he had a remarked tendency towards romanticism. In any event, thanks to Irving’s *The Student of Salamanca* (and his subsequent work *The Alhambra Tales*), the American author made possible a change of paradigm contributing to the change of a widely known negative image of the Peninsula, to an almost ‘*earthly paradise*’ image. This new vision of Spain was also motivated by the cultural elite of the time who, impelled by Irving’s works, propagated an exotic and mysterious image of the Peninsula in their writings; they depicted a country full of tradition and magical stories. Some of the most important American authors who helped actively to promulgate this new vision of the Peninsula were: H.W. Longfellow, W.C. Bryant, W.G. Prescott and G. Ticknor.

Finally, it is important to remark *that Washington Irving’s particular vision of Spain in the Student of Salamanca* should not only be seen as one of the main contributions to the change of the Spanish image abroad in the 19th century, but to be also taken (nowadays) as the origin and main inspiration of Hispanist and Hispanophile’s writings all over the world. In other words, such a relevant contribution to the American tradition should be remembered and taken as the basis of all literary works that promote and emphasize Spanish culture and history

Annex: Illustrations



Washington Irving by John Wesley Jarvis, 1809



"The gate of Justice, The Alhambra" (1881) by Gustave Doré



“Ladies of Granada, Listening to Itinerant Dwarf Musicians” (1881) by Gustave Doré



“Crusade Against the Moors of Granada” (late 19th century) by Gustave Doré

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