

Spanish-English Relationship in the Work of Thomas Gage, al. Tomás de Santa María

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Thomas Gage (1602-1656) is a complex character, the product of the complicated XVII c. of his country. Born inside that small group of the English aristocracy who had remained faithful to Catholicism and were being sent to Spain to receive the “right” education for their social status.

Many English Catholics attended the English college of St. Alban in Valladolid and the college of St. Gregory in the same town where they were trained to go back to England as missionaries. These young people had to suffer great difficulties on returning home, a fiery persecution put many of these jealous defenders of their faith to a horrible death, which forced them to change their names, many of them taking Spanish names.

A Spanish lady, Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza, born in Extremadura, moved by the execution of the Jesuit Henry Walpole in 1595, decided to devote herself to the cause of England. With the share of the family fortune, Luisa founded a college for English Jesuits at Louvin, in Belgium, which was transformed in 1612 to Waten near Saint-Omer, where it remained until the suppression of the order in 1705. Thomas Gage was one of the young English men who was first sent to St. Omer and then to Valladolid and so he had to suffer not only the traumatic experience of having to live away from country and home but an inner political and religious struggle as well; he had already received the influence of the Jesuits during his childhood from his family environment, and now he became “Hispanic” in many of his reactions and, perhaps without ever really being conscious of it, felt identified with the great controversies of the times.

In Spain he took the habits of the Dominican Order, from his writings we know that he studied in the College of San Gregorio and that from here, like many other students, he passed to the friary of San Pablo where he made his vows¹ and took the name Thomas de Santamaría, this helped him use all the advantages that were offered to him in the Hispanic world. He joined the missionaries of his order with the sole intention -according to his own confessions- to travel to the New World with the rights that only the Spaniards had in those days and that were -he said-

“unjustly banned to those of the English Nation”²

Later in his life, he had his great opportunity when -advised by his friend and patron Chaloner- he put his knowledge to the service of his country, even though being able to find his little place in the Anglo-Saxon world supposed his having to apostatize from his Catholic faith becoming first an Anglican but -conversion proving a little too premature- he did not hesitate to give the further step and become a Presbyterian when Cromwell and his Puritans succeeded over the king for which he received a small rectory with a rent

of £80 a year.

In 1648 he published his book *The English American or a New Survey*, cronicle of a voyage of 1.300 miles to and through a mysterious continent unknown to his English Contemporaries who had up to now, only read about it in translations from the Spanish, or descriptions of the coasts by Hawkings and Drake and, above all, "Rawleigh...", who had written very accurately but according to Chaloner in his introduction in verse to the book of Gage:

"...as a man who in a ship doth pass of trade winds, currents, Hurrican´s doe tell, of Headlands, Harbours... of Rocks and Isles: wherein they might as well talk of Nut and only shew the shell" VII³.

In the England of Cromwell, triumphant in the Domestic wars and in an atmosphere favourable to greater enterprises, Gage finds the appropriate ground for the projects which he had been planning while he was taking minute notes about the social and political circumstances of the country he was visiting. It is a political opportunity and his book achieves his aim of attracting the interest of the Lord Protector who will send a whole armada which -although a complete failure in his first aim of conquering La Hispaniola- succeeded in the very important acquisition of Jamaica for the British army who would use it as the headquarters for ulterior conquests and settlements in the Caribbean Islands.

The book has a great testimonial value of what we could call the appreciation of events by "the common man" -that is: "the man in the street"- . Gage is not a historian but he has a good eye for what is outstanding or colourful, he is writing his book in a dark rectory in England and, only naturally, he would remember the wonderful colour and light of the New World; but -although he has often been quoted as a reference about the way of life of Spaniards and Indian natives during the XVII c.- he is not a historian in the strict sense. He calls himself "the English American" which, in those days, meant the English-Spanish; America being just a province as he himself states -just the same as Castile, Biscay, Aragon etc.⁴ and notices things that could not have been appreciated by other people- either English or Spanish. This Englishman turned to Spanish, lives in his inner self the turmoil of opposing tendencies, in a moment in which Spain and England were nearest but beginning to come further and further apart (perhaps for ever) and, therefore, his testimony must be "appreciated" in this context, taking into account his personal limitations and prejudices as -although it might be true that he was using the notes he had taken during the time he had spent in America- he only wrote the book after twelve years of being well settled in England with the spirit of a Puritan reformer and the obvious necessity of pleasing the Lord Protector.

There is no doubt that the aim of the author was not literary, he had an absolute disregard for this aspect of the book and his style is chaotic. However, his style is of great interest as it proves, in the mind of the author, a synthesis in his education which is both Spanish and English, clearly reflected in the two sources: the Spanish in the three styles which had been in vogue during the time he spent as a student in this country: the picaresque, the 'capa y espada' and the 'novela cortesana', and the English in the long bombastic sermons so much in use in his own country during his lifetime.

When he began to compose his book he stated that he had been speaking Spanish and studying books in this language for such a long time that he was afraid he had forgotten his own language:

"When I came to London I was much troubled within myself for want of my mother tongue... for I could only speak some few broken words"⁵

The interest that his book had for his contemporaries caused it to be edited four more times. The

first time only seven years later, in 1655, by express desire of the author who judged it necessary to prove what he called his “English improvement” but-after an exhaustive comparison between these first two editions- I have found that this “English improvement” is limited to a few changes of spelling, that were not even consistent, and just three small syntactic changes of no importance. In all probability the above statement had been his way of boasting of his ‘foreign Spanish influence’ as I cannot trace even a sentence with a typical Spanish structure which would prove that he was thinking in this language and translating into English. Nevertheless, there is a more interesting aspect in the phrases and sentences which he put in Spanish because he believed that either they could not be translated or that the narrative would lose its flavour:

In the description of a naval battle that the Spaniards fight against some English pirates, the Spanish sailors use their “peculiar” language which Gage reproduces bluntly:

“Voto a Dios voto a Cristo... hijos de puta, borrachos, infames ladrones”⁶

Or in the scene which he describes, with a vivid language, how his friend Fray Antonio Meléndez convinces him to embark to America over some bottles of good Xerez Sack and Pier Ximeni (these are still nowadays among the best Spanish wines) which no doubt says something about a man who can remember the name of a wine after so many years and so many changes in his life; or in the description of Count Gelves whom the Spaniards, nicknamed “el terrible justiciero”, y “fuego de ladrones”.⁷

In order to expose the “criolians” he tells a story which is a flagrant plagiarism of *Lazarillo de Tormes* the same as the “*escudero...*” who came to the gate of his house:

“... a escarbarse los dientes que nada entre si tenian”⁸

the criolian of Chiapas:

“...after a meal of frixoles in black broth boyled with pepper and garlick, saying it was the most nourishing meal... they will be sure to come out to the street-dore of their houses to see and to be seen, and there for half an hour will they stand sbaking off the crums of bread from their cloaths... and from their moustachoes. And with their tooth pickers they will stand picking their teeth” and say “A senor que linda perdiz he comido hoy”⁹

Another very interesting example is the case of the “*Chocolate of Chiapa*” or “*El chocolate del obispo*” which is a short story of the genre of “*capa y espada*”. In this story a problem between the bishop and the ladies of the town who had got used to drinking a cup of chocolate and eat some sweet meats served by their maids during the sermons, which says Gage:

“could not be done... without a great confussion and interrupting both Masse and Sermon”¹⁰

provoked a fight between the supporters of the bishop and the husbands who dared to draw their swords inside the church to defend “the weak stomachs” of their wives. The problem however was not settled until the bishop died of a sudden death, after having drunk a cup of chocolate sent by a well known lady of the town. This very lady sent our author a present of some tropical fruits, in an artistic little wooden

basket but he sent it back with a short rhyme cut out with a knife on the basket which read:

“fruta tan fria amor no cria”¹¹

for which “witty” answer he was very celebrated to all the people in town but, understanding that his life had become too dangerous, he decided to leave Chiapas for ever.

There are several stories in the mood of the “novela cortesana” the most interesting one is that of Dña. Juana de Maldonado y Paz, this lady, who was the wonder of the city and had a notorious love affair with the bishop caused a civil war in the city when she decided to be appointed Abesse over a much older and better endowed nun. Or the story of Pedro Mexia who was excommunicated by the arch-bishop and was the cause of a riot. In this story Gage used many sentences in Spanish:

“Judas, Judas, allá va Judas. Muera el bellaco descomulgado, la muerte de Judas, muera el pícaro, muera el perro” and later on: “Muera el Rex, muera el mal gobierno, mueran los descomulgados”¹²

In *El Auge del Imperio Español en America* Salvador de Madariaga quotes Gage’s account of the story of Dña. Juana to prove how colourful and gay was the life in the New World:

“¡Que lejos –he writes– estamos de ese cuadro sombrío y medieval que nos pintan sombríos y medievales historiadores aún de nuestros tiempos! Esta vida de las Indias que nos describen los que la vieron con sus propios ojos era precisamente la que tenia que surgir cuando la pasividad apasionada de los españoles topase con aquel torrente de riquezas y bienestar que emanaba del abundoso Nuevo Mundo. Olas sobre olas de color de goce de fruición presente que surgen entonces en las Indias bajo el sol esplendoroso de la paz y la abundancia”.¹³

Gage’s account of the Conquest of Mexico in chap. X by Cortes is, according to Southey in his poem *Madoc*, a translation from the beautiful account of the Spaniard “Gomara”.

But what gives unity to all these, otherwise unconnexed, stories is the Puritan mood which underlies his sermon like reflexions about the evil ways of Rome -”the whore of Babilon” through her representative: Spain and her agents the Jesuits. He begins his book in what seems a long digression about the church and the power of the Pope who, being specially supported by the Jesuits, has the keys of earth and heaven in his hands. But the worst instance he can think of, about the evil ways of the Jesuits with the poor Indians is how they make them sing and even dance! in church.

“... but now they apply their songs unto the king of Glory, or unto the Sacrament, using these or commonly like words...” *salid mexicanas, bailad Toncontin cansalas galanas en cuerpo gentil. Salid mexicanas bailad Toncontin Al Rey de la gloria tenemos aquí*”. “Thus -he adds- they go round dancing, playing in some places very well upon their guitars”¹⁴

This scene would, very obviously, horrify his Puritan contemporaries.

The language of these long digressions is the usual in the sermons of the day, abundant in quotations from the Bible, and this is not only his way to flatter the Lord Protector who is the addressee of his book but it is, above all, a reflexion of his inner struggle which is the reason of the incapacity of many members of his generation to accommodate to their socio-political situation and who cannot find their peace of conscience through succesive and necessary conversions.

Gage is a born preacher who has belonged to three schools: The Roman Catholic (as a Dominican

who call themselves “Orden de Predicadores” -Order of Preachers-), the Anglican and the Presbyterian. As a Dominican he praised himself of being a disciple of Las Casas in his desire to give even the last drops of his blood for “the cause” of the Indians.

“all that Nation which I doe very much affect , and would willingly spend the best drops of blood in my veins to doe them a good, and to save their soules”¹⁵

And to the end of his life he, not only called himself “Preacher of the Word”, -a very clear transcription of “Orden de Predicadores”- but justified that he had sent many Jesuits (hundreds he says) to a horrible martyrdom in a pamphlet “*A Dwell between a Dominican and a Jesuit*” in which he himself was the Dominican saving the life of a priest of his order but condemning the Jesuit :

“The Dominican pleaded for mercy and found it, the evidence not being very strong to prove orders of Mass saying, but only to prove him a friar.” “...The Jesuit having nothing to say against strong evidences was cast and condemned...”¹⁶

And, more “Lascasiano” than Las Casas himself, he proved his love for the Indians when he had the opportunity to die in America where he had led the English troops in order to save them of the superstition of the Catholic Church, after having to suffer the sight of the English soldiers plundering the island where they first set their foot. Hickeringel, the first British Historian who wrote about British Jamaica and who was direct witness of the conquest as he had taken part in it under the orders of General Venables writes:

“It (Jamaica) contained above two thousand houses, fifteen churches and chapels, and an abbey before the invasion of Penn and Venables... The English soldiers exercised their powers with so serious a zeal as to leave only two churches and about five hundred houses undemolished”¹⁷

Gage had written his last pamphlet addressed to Cromwell in the hope of being called “The English Christopher Columbus” but he never had the satisfaction of the recognition of the importance of the conquest of Jamaica, as Cromwell never appreciated it and resented his defeat in La Hispaniola, two years later the Lord Protector would write:

“The Spaniards is your enemy; and your enemy as I tell you naturally, by that antipathy which is in him, providentially, and this in divers respects, you could not get an honest and honorable peace from him; it was sought by the Long Parliament; it was not attained with honour and honesty. And truly when I say that he is naturally throughout an enemy; an enmity is put into him by God I will put an enmity between thy seed and her seed which goes but for little among statesmen, but is more considerable than all things! and he that considers no such natural enmity the providential enmity as well as the accidental I think he is not well acquainted with scripture and the things of God, and the Spaniard is not only your enemy accidentally but is providentially so, God having in his wisdom disposed it so to be when he made a breach with the Spaniard nation”¹⁸

Thomas Gage had a death that could have been more appreciated by the Dominicans than by his new co-religionists. From his death we have just the mention of his name among the deceased during a pla-

gue in the 18th July 1656, and a note on the State Papers:

“To recommend the committee at Ely House to settle a pension of £ 65.8 a week on Mary, widow of Thos. Gage who died in State’s service in the expedition to Jamaica. Approved in person”¹⁹ (the person being, in all probability, the Lord Protector himself).

NOTES

¹ “We do not have any records of his having attended the English College of St. Albans”

Thomson Eric: *Thomas Gage’s Travels in the New World*. University of Oklahoma press. 1958. p.XXVIII.

² Gage Thomas: *The English American* -London 1648, p. 8

³ Ibid p. 200

⁴ Ibid p.9

⁵ Ibid p.8

⁶ Ibid p. 201

⁷ *Lazaro de Tormes* -Col. Austral p.100 ed.1968

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Gage Thomas: *The English American* -London 1648, p.102

¹⁰ Ibid p.103

¹¹ Ibid p.104

¹² Ibid p.64-65

¹³ Madariaga Salvador: *El Auge del Imperio Español*, ed. Buenos Aires. 1955, p.273

¹⁴ Gage Thomas: *The English American*, p.155

¹⁵ Ibid p.178

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Hickingrill: *History of Jamaica*- General, ed. - vol II p.41

¹⁸ Cromwell Oliver: *Letters and Speeches*, vol IV p.95 (Speech pronounced in the XV c. September 1656)

¹⁹ Calendar of State Papers p. 1667-9, Domestic series p.28