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Literature in the Construction of  
'Cuban Identity', 1823-1845

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**EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE  
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## **Abstract**

The main aim of this article is to discuss some of the characteristics of the identity project constructed by the Cuban liberal autonomists' group during the transition from the Ancien Régime to liberalism. This faction was made up of both intellectuals and members of the Havana sugar oligarchy. Their purpose was to work for a better position for the island within the framework of the Spanish liberal state in construction throughout the first decades of the nineteenth century. Due to censorship, the faction could not use political speech making to achieve its aims. This meant that the group had to look for an alternative way to express its ideas, and literature became the weapon.

## **Keywords**

Identity, Cuba, Literature, Autonomy, Culture



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**Introduction**

The history of empires, during the transition from the Ancien Régime to liberalism, has been written from a historiographical standpoint that considers states were built by metropolitan groups of power from their metropolises<sup>1</sup>. However, in recent years, some writers have shown us how, in the process of assembling states during the nineteenth century, the power elites of the so-called 'colonial peripheries' confronted the state projects that reduced them to the category of colony, and tried to get a more advantageous situation for their territories<sup>2</sup>. This article is at the heart of this debate and it aims to clarify the form in which it was settled in the foundations of a Cuban identity project which gave a conscious identity to a region of the Spanish Empire, the island of Cuba, that had lacked it until then. This cultural network was developed by a group of intellectuals with the support of a part of the Havana sugar oligarchy. Their objective was to look for a more advantageous position for the island of Cuba in the framework of the Spanish liberal state that was under construction throughout the nineteenth century.

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<sup>1</sup> MARX, Karl: *El colonialismo*, Mexico City, Grijalbo, 1970; WEBER, Max: *Estructuras de poder*, Buenos Aires, Leviatán, 1985; WALLERSTEIN, Emmanuel: *The Modern World System*, New York, Academy Press, volume I, 1974.

<sup>2</sup> Subaltern Studies and Postcolonial Studies have helped developments in this direction. CHATTERJEE, Partha: "A Brief History of Subaltern Studies", in *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, London, volume XXII, pp. 1537-1541; PRAKASH, Gyan: "Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism", *American Historical Review*, volume 99, nr. 5, 1994, pp. 1475-1490; SAID, Edward: *Orientalismo*, Barcelona, Debolsillo, 2004; COOPER, Frederick: *Colonialism in Question. Theory, Knowledge and History*, Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2005, pp. 3-54; DANIELS, Christine, and KENNEDY, Michael V.: *Negotiated empires: centers and peripheries in the Americas, 1500-1820*, New York, Routledge, 2002, pp. 2-15.

The originality of this research is that it deepens knowledge of that process through the study of a literary work, *El Conde Alarcos*, written by José Jacinto Milanés. In 1838 this play opened in the *Teatro Tacón de La Habana*, and it had a success with the public that was unprecedented for a Cuban writer. The printed edition of the play was sold out in a few hours. Surprisingly, Cuban literary critics have overlooked this artistic event<sup>3</sup>. Up to now, nobody has explained why a 'noble' and 'medieval' romance had such an effect on an oligarchy that was moving towards a bourgeois society and capitalism but that, contradictorily, owned slaves, bought noble titles and had ideological limitations<sup>4</sup>. However, if we study the relationship between *El Conde Alarcos* and the construction of the concept of Cuban identity developed by the circle of intellectuals around Domingo del Monte (del Monte's group), we will be able to understand why this work had such a great impact at the time.

To carry out this study, it is fundamental to understand that the concept of 'nation', such as we understand it today, is a recently created construction in history. Historiography, however, has taken time to understand this fact. From the nineteenth century, the term 'nation' was used to designate those human groups that were believed to share some cultural characteristics. This legitimised their possession of political power, that is, as an independent state or a relatively autonomous government inside a wider political structure. But studies about the nation and nationalism have changed a lot in the last forty years. Hans Kohn or Carlton Hayes had no doubt that nations were natural realities, and they debated only the elements which defined them<sup>5</sup>. All authors were forced to make an almost canonical review through race, language, religion, and the historical past. Towards 1960, Elie Kedourie observed that states needed the support of the population. At the same time and for this reason, a state could not allow anyone to debate the cultural identity that supported its uniqueness. Because of this, states made the effort to guide the population's will, to educate it. The national problem, concluded Kedourie, was an educational question, and the main promoter of political education was the state. But to outline the problem in this way meant giving a place to inheritance. Instead of accepting national identities as natural realities, historians began to see them as artificial creations, moved by political interests<sup>6</sup>. The fundamental studies of Ernest

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<sup>3</sup> MILANÉS, José Jacinto: "El Conde Alarcos", in MILANÉS, José Jacinto: *Obras*, New York, 1965.

José Jacinto Milanés was born in Matanzas in 1814, and he died there in 1863. He was the eldest son of a large family. He attended Ambrosio José González's classes and studied with Francisco Guerra Betancourt. The rest of his education was carried out alone. His period of maximum literary production was from 1836 to 1843. He published in all the journals of Havana and Matanzas, and he was one of the first Cuban authors who cultivated the romantic drama in the Spanish language. For reasons of ill health, he stopped publishing in 1843. MARTÍNEZ, Urbano: *José Jacinto Milanés*, Havana, Unión, 1989, pp. 148-178.

<sup>4</sup> Manuel Moreno Friginals was the first and only author to study this work up to now. He did show that *El Conde Alarcos* was the best example of the great literary quality of the authors around Domingo del Monte. However, he did not explain that this text was one of the most complete examples of Cuban identity (whose history was connected with the old Castilian tradition) that Domingo del Monte's group tried to build. MORENO FRAGINALS, Manuel: "El Conde Alarcos y la crisis de la oligarquía criolla", in *Revolución y cultura*, nr. 103, 1981, pp. 21-47.

<sup>5</sup> KOHN, Hans: *The Idea of Nationalism: a Study in Its Origins and Background*, New York, 1944; HAYES, Carlton: *Nationalism: a Religion*, New York, 1960.

<sup>6</sup> KEDOURIE, Elie: *Nationalism*, London, 1960.



Gellner, Benedict Anderson, and Eric Hobsbawm, among others, have continued on this path over the last thirty years<sup>7</sup>.

Subaltern Studies have also contributed, from the 1980s, to advances in this direction. This school of historiography has underlined the relative historicity of the state-nation as a political organisation. It has allowed us to understand the history of empires and colonial relationships from the point of view of the colonised, to understand the role of peripheral groups of empires in the construction of nations. Along the same lines, the comparison between different models of political evolution and between regions or territories inside empires, proposed by 'comparative history', has helped us to put into relation the role of the nation-state, and to understand the internal complexity of these territories. Finally, 'trans-national history' has stressed the relationships between human groups in 'different imagined communities'. This approach has also allowed us to reach a more complex vision of the internal relationships established in the heart of imperial organisations. These were not only structural relationships polarised in central states (settlers) and peripheral states (colonised), but also entities that were sustained in much more complex relationships (of an economic, social and cultural nature). This has allowed us to discover the different voices that communicated in that relationship and the processes of miscegenation that took place<sup>8</sup>.

With this historiographical perspective as background, I will now move on to explain the meaning of the drama *El Conde Alarcos*. This was José Jacinto Milanés' most perfect work, according to all the critics. Milanés was born in Cuba and wrote this text in 1838 in the form of a play divided into three acts, following the advice of his friend and mentor, Domingo del Monte. Del Monte believed that the romance was literature's most noble genre and the one with more of a tradition in Castilian literature. In this text Milanés tells the story of Count Alarcos. The Count lived in Seville in the thirteenth century and he served the King of France against the King of Castile. Alarcos fell in love and married Leonor, a Castilian, without asking the permission of his King. Furthermore Blanca, the daughter of the King of France, was attracted to Alarcos and wanted to steal him away from Leonor<sup>9</sup>.

The Count had fought next to his father and the King of France in Palestine against the Muslims, and Alarcos had attended the King when he was sick with the plague. Although 'Spain' (Castile) has broken the peace with 'France', the Gallic King continued his relationship with Alarcos because of the help the Count had given him<sup>10</sup>. However, the French sovereign took offence because Alarcos had married without

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<sup>7</sup> GELLNER, Ernest: *Nacionalismo*, Barcelona, 1998; ANDERSON, Benedict: *Comunidades imaginadas. Reflexiones sobre el origen y la difusión del nacionalismo*, Mexico, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1993; HOBSBAWM, Eric: *Nación y nacionalismo desde 1780*, Barcelona, Crítica, 1992.

<sup>8</sup> YUN CASALILLA, Bartolomé: "Estados, naciones y regiones en perspectiva europea. Propuestas para una historia comparada y transnacional", in *Alcores. Revista de historia contemporánea*, (forthcoming). I am grateful to the author for allowing me to read his article; GUHA, Ranajit: *Las voces de la historia y otros estudios subalternos*, Barcelona, Crítica, 2001; BLOCH, Marc: "Pour une histoire compare des sociétés européennes", in *Revue de Synthèse Historique*, nr. 46, 1928, pp. 15-50; ESPAGNE, M. and WERNER, M. (eds.): *Transferts : les relations interculturelles dans l'espace franco-allemand (XVIIIe et XIXe siècle)*, Paris, Editions Recherche sur les civilisations, 1988.

<sup>9</sup> MILANÉS, José Jacinto: "El Conde Alarcos". The characters are: the Count Alarcos, Leonor, the King, Blanca, Matilde, Florisa, the minstrel, Pelayo, Elvira, captain of the guard, the *embozado*, Teodoro, Enrique, maids of honor, palace gentlemen and armed pages.

<sup>10</sup> The king of France took pride in being French and saw Alarcos as a "Spanish gentleman" who keeps his word. But those concepts of "French" and "Spanish" didn't exist in the thirteenth century.

requesting his permission. Furthermore, Blanca claimed, falsely, that the Count has dishonoured her. The King chose to believe his daughter and was convinced that Alarcos had committed a very serious crime. The King concluded that Alarcos would have to marry Blanca, first killing his wife Leonor, to pay for his crime. The Count refused, but the King reminded him that he was his vassal and should obey his orders. Alarcos had returned to France because the King, his King, had requested this of him, but in that moment he repented his obedience and he cursed both his honour and the oath that he had made to the King. He thought of escaping by bribing the men guarding himself and his wife Leonor but he failed and his wife was murdered for a crime that the Count had not committed<sup>11</sup>. Although there are two more versions of this work, none of them resemble the one by Milanés. He introduced the idea of the Count's rebelliousness against the King's order to kill Leonor. In the other two adaptations, both written by peninsular authors, the Count carried out the King's order thereby subscribing to the codes of chivalry and honour<sup>12</sup>.

### **The language of symbols in *El Conde Alarcos***

To understand this work we must bear in mind that from the late eighteenth century, and particularly after the arrival of Napoleon's army in the peninsula in 1808, the Spanish Empire was undergoing a profound transformation in the structure of the Ancien Régime and moving towards a liberal-capitalist system. The concept of the king's vassals was substituted with that of citizens, the right to private property was secured, liberal constitutions and the sharing of power developed, and territory ceased to be the king's patrimonial possession and instead a national state developed<sup>13</sup>. This system of liberal organisation of the state, after some vacillating and the loss of most of the American territories, advanced in the peninsular territory of the Empire after Fernando VII's death in 1833. A *Consejo de Regencia* (Regency Council) took power and was presided over by Fernando VII's wife, María Cristina, and after this by Baldomero Espartero, until Isabel II became of age. At the same time the liberal state moved towards centralisation. In this process, the overseas territories were reduced to the category of colony. This last decision, taken by the metropolitan government, was a powerful influence on the opinions of the Captain General of the island of Cuba, Miguel Tacón, who occupied this position between 1834 and 1838<sup>14</sup>.

Tacón consolidated an absolutist form of government for the island of Cuba that excluded the economic elites of the Havana area (Arango-Aldama-Soler, which until then had had quite significant quotas of political power) from public life. This oligarchy, however, wanted its weight and its economic contribution to the coffers of the state reflected in the leadership of the society in which they were based. Hence, they supported and maintained a group of intellectuals, headed by Domingo del Monte, that

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<sup>11</sup> MILANESE, José Jacinto: "El Conde Alarcos".

<sup>12</sup> José Jacinto Milanés confirmed that the topic of this work was inspired by an anonymous romance that he found in volume IV of the *Colección de Durán*. There are two other theatrical versions of the same romance, written by Castilian authors. In the seventeenth century Lope de Vega and Mira de Mescua treated the same theme. The first one titled his work "La fuerza lastimosa", and he placed his count in Ireland. Mescua located him in France. Milanés placed him in the thirteenth century, when feudalism was at its most strong. The three plays are completely different except in their narrative base.

<sup>13</sup> FONTANA, Josep: *La crisis del Antiguo Régimen*, Barcelona, Crítica, 1979; HOBBSAWM, Eric: *Las revoluciones burguesas*, Barcelona, Labor, 1985; GIL NOVALES, Alberto: "Tras la revolución: Europa a partir de 1800", in *Trienio*, nr. 38, November 2001, pp. 5-19.

<sup>14</sup> FRADERA, Josep María: *Colonias para después de un imperio*, Barcelona, Bellaterra, 2005.

gave form to an '*identitario*' project which they qualified as 'Cuban', with the aim of getting a bigger share in the political life of the island. However, all subsequent governors continued the system of government imposed by Tacón. This led to conflicts that were resolved only in 1898 with Cuba's independence<sup>15</sup>.

The censorship of the press imposed by Miguel Tacón meant that differing political positions could not be expressed in writing. Because of this del Monte's group had to express political ideas through literature which was not as heavily controlled by the censors. *El Conde Alarcos* is the best example of this method of expression. In this work, the Count opposes the King's absolute power with all the passion of a romantic hero, in the same way that the farmer's group of Aldama-Soler fought against the all-embracing power of Tacón, the Captain General of Cuba. In the minds of the spectators of the island these parallels were certainly immediately obvious<sup>16</sup>. It does not matter that Milanés located the events of his drama in the thirteenth century; the atmosphere in which the plot developed was not unfamiliar to spectators. The first outstanding fact was royal injustice, that is, the ingratitude towards the Count who had lent him so many services: Alarcos: "*¿De este modo galardonas/ a tu antiguo paladín?/ ¿Así, señor, me abandonas?/ ¿Y en vano ruego, y al fin/ te vas y no la perdonas?/ ¿Piensas que obedeceré/ tus órdenes?/...*"<sup>17</sup>. Faced with ingratitude and royal injustice, there was no longer any justification for obedience. Milanés begins pointing out the King's fallibility. Naturally, he puts the expression of distrust towards the King in the mouth of a plebeian, Pelayo. And it is significant that it is a plebeian, that is, a villager, who takes the name of Pelayo meaning 'glorious in Spanish nationalism'. Starting with the King's injustice, Alarcos justifies rebellion against him and disobedience: Alarcos: "*¿Piensas que soy de la grey/ miserable, cuya ley, es servir?/ ¿Me juzgas hombre que/ no me ría del nombre sonoro/ que emboza a un rey?/*"<sup>18</sup>. The Count curses the honour that forces him to act against his homeland. Leonor and his sons represent the 'homeland' that he loved, and this would have been clear to a contemporary audience. For this reason, he could not accept the honour of being faithful to 'Spain' if this honour damaged 'Cuba'. The Havana oligarchy felt that as 'Spaniards' they had been insulted and humiliated by another 'Spaniard' (Tacón perhaps, the Captain General of the island?). But it is in his portrayal of the Captain, a man sent by the King to execute his orders, a man described as cold, calculating and inflexible, who wears on his index finger the King's ring conferring him with supreme power (Tacón perhaps?) where Milanés reaches the greatest descriptive power. Read this brief description that makes the Captain an executioner:

*"Él sirve al rey como yo y quizás/ ama su yugo y en romperlo no pensó./ Todos le alaban y no le llama nadie verdugo"*.

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<sup>15</sup> PÉREZ DE LA RIVA, Juan: *Correspondencia reservada del capitán general don Miguel Tacón, 1834-1838*, Havana, Biblioteca Nacional José Martí, 1963; FRADERA, Josep María: *Colonias para después de un imperio*; PÉREZ, Louis A.: *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2006.

<sup>16</sup> MORENO FRAGINALS, Manuel: "El Conde Alarcos y la crisis de la oligarquía criolla", pp. 21-47.

<sup>17</sup> Alarcos: "In this way do you reward / your old soldier?/ In this way, Master, do you abandon me?/ And in vain do I request, and in the end / will you leave and not forgive me?/ Do you think that I will obey / your orders?/..."

<sup>18</sup> Alarcos: "Do you think that I belong to the miserable flock / whose law, is to serve?/ Do you judge me as a man who/ does not laugh at the sound of a name / that silences a King?"

Leonor: / ¿No sabéis lo que es piedad?/

Capitan: /No. Porque sirvo en palacio/”<sup>19</sup>.

This work, while operating as a critique against Tacón’s government, also worked as a defence of the human being as an individual, Alarcos and his rights inside a community, one of the fundamental elements of a liberal system. In this area, Milanés developed the ideas that Ramón de Palma and Gabriel de la Concepción Valdés, both writers and friends of the *matancero*, had begun to sketch in their own work. These authors placed the origin of the *montero*, a typical character of the Cuban *manigua* (field), in the medieval period. This was a time when Castilian heroes fought to expel Muslims from the peninsula and when the Crusaders went eastwards with the ‘Christian nations’, to combat the ‘Muslim enemy’. In this way both writers located the origins of liberal principles in this world of medieval gentlemen<sup>20</sup>. These men embodied the individualism that defended liberalism and were considered demigods representing the identity values of a group (volk), based on which the nation would be built. When a hero died in combat, or was murdered and buried by the enemy, his tomb became that of an unknown soldier whose memory evoked the defence of those principles and of that identity for which he had died. The state used this to unite its people<sup>21</sup>.

*El Conde Alarcos* is also a critique of the nobility of the Ancien Régime. The nobility contributed to viewing the island of Cuba as inferior to the peninsular territories because, theoretically, their titles were inherited by blood and tradition. However, Milanés believed that nobility lay not only in a title, but also in the actions carried out to deserve that title. Here he took the bourgeois idea that there is no such thing as a born nobleman, no ‘nobility by blood’:

“Blanca: / Pero él puede mostrar, aunque noble nace/, que la nobleza se hace sin que ninguno la herede/...

Leonor: / Yo te enseñaré, hijo mío/, la choza pajiza/ donde mi anciano padre vivió/, que fue un escudero pobre/ [...] porque has de saber Teodoro/, pues no es justo que lo ignores/, que tú y Enrique tenéis/ sangre oscura y sangre noble/...

Teodoro: / Sangre noble...sangre oscura.../ no entiendo esas distinciones./ ¿La sangra no es una misma?/ ¿No son iguales los hombres?/...”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> “He serves the king as I do, and maybe / he loves his yoke and he does not think of breaking it./ All praise him and nobody calls him executioner /.

Leonor: / Do you not know what pity is?/.

Captain: / No. Because I serve a despot/”.

<sup>20</sup> The fight against Islam and in favour of the Catholic faith was something “necessary” and a medieval “virtue” that was revived:

Ramón de Palma’s Crusader hymn writes of the ‘barbaric East’ and the shame of the West leaving Christ’s sepulchre abandoned for so long to the ‘infidel’. He calls for noblemen to take up arms, to go to the ‘sacred city’ and take revenge. PALMA, Ramón de: “Himno de guerra del cruzado”, in PALMA, Ramón de: *Obras de don Ramón de Palma*, Havana, Imprenta del Tiempo, 1861; see also “El Cruzado”, and “La despedida del cruzado”; VALDÉS, Gabriel de la Concepción: “El hijo de la maldición”, in *La Cartera Cubana*, October 1840.

<sup>21</sup> ANDERSON, Benedict: *Comunidades imaginadas*, pp. 70-73.

<sup>22</sup> “Blanca: ...But he can show, although he is a born nobleman, / that nobility is made without the need to inherit it/.

Despite the fact that this group considered noble titles a thing of the past which did not fit in with the bourgeois principles they preached, the reality of the island was very different. Although there are few studies on the Cuban oligarchy, from the point of view of the world of symbols, it is important to note that throughout the eighteenth century, Cuban aristocratic families acquired twenty-three noble titles, and between 1800 and 1838, they bought thirty-nine more. At the end of this period, there was a total of sixty two counts and marquises, almost all of them resident in Havana. For each one of these noblemen, it was necessary to count their brothers, wives, children and grandchildren, all of whom constituted the closed world of 'high society'. To become 'ennobled' meant, besides the essential factor of money, complying with the three basic principles in the scale of values of the Ancien Régime: having pure blood, meaning they did not have black, Moorish, Jewish or heretical ancestors condemned by the *Santa Inquisición*; supporting the Catholic religion as the juridical support guaranteeing royal power by the grace of God; giving services to the Crown. The last of these was the only way of breaking into the closed circle of the traditional peninsular nobility, which refused to accept the 'americanos' (American) with money and without 'class'<sup>23</sup>.

According to the Cuban author Manuel Moreno Fraginals, the Havana oligarch was an interloper in the process of construction of a Spanish identity, that is, a 'second class Spaniard'. Many of these oligarchs thought about the need for equality. Because of this, they asserted that stereotypical 'Cuban things' were as good as 'peninsular things'. But, the characteristic of this line of thought was that the paradigm was 'peninsular Spanish things'; for this reason, those born on the island of Cuba did not come out well in the game of comparisons. Although some of them thought that they did not need the support of a title to feel their existence as a class, the general tendency of the oligarchs was to continue their purchase of noble titles while, at the same time, supporting an intellectual current that made fun of those who bought titles. This contradiction was a reflection of the deep antagonism within this class and the battle between nascent liberal principles and the attachment to the Ancien Régime that still persisted in many people<sup>24</sup>.

In this play, Milanés also highlighted the 'military' support that the Count had given to the King and which had not been repaid. In Havana, the oligarchy to which Milanés belonged (the Arango-Aldama-Soler's clan) had provided considerable service to the monarch at the beginning of century and the Crown had not had repaid this. Also here, he disguised a defence of liberal principles and of an identity concept in formation. Medieval armies were mercenary, that is, they were paid by a king because they defended his patrimonial interests. To the contrary, in a bourgeois army all citizens of a nation participate because the objective is the defence of that 'imagined community', the nation. In Milanés' work, just as in the island of Cuba at the time, we find an

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Leonor: ...I will teach you, my son /, about the straw-covered shack / where my old father,/ who was a poor squire, lived / [...] because you must know Teodoro / because it is not good that you are ignorant of the fact/ that you and Enrique have / mixed blood.

Teodoro: mixed blood..., the blood of a nobleman.../ I do not understand these distinctions/ Is not blood oneself?/ Are men not the same?/..."

<sup>23</sup> CALCAGNO, Francisco: *Diccionario biográfico cubano*, volume I and II, New York, 1878.

<sup>24</sup> MORENO FRAGINALS, Manuel: *Cuba/España, España/Cuba. Historia común*, Barcelona, Crítica, 2002; MORENO FRAGINALS, Manuel: "El Conde Alarcos y la crisis de la oligarquía criolla", pp. 21-47.

intermediate system, in which the military obeyed the king, but the army defended the integrity of a community in the process of construction<sup>25</sup>.

Milanés tried to show us in his work that Cuban noblemen were among the most faithful military on which Fernando VII could depend. General José de Zayas had led the troops that accompanied Fernando VII on his entrance into Madrid after his return from exile in 1814. Rafael de Arango, a *teniente coronel* (lieutenant colonel) and Francisco Arango's cousin, was one of the military who, with Luis Daoiz and Pedro Velarde, began the so-called *Guerra de Independencia Española* (Spanish War of Independence). He was, possibly, one of the ideologues of the *Levantamiento del Dos de Mayo de 1808* (Rising of 2 May 1808). Luis Daoiz Arango died in Rafael Arango's arms, and Pedro Velarde's blood sprinkled his clothes. Not very much later, Rafael was a hero in the decisive *Batalla de Bailén* (Battle of Bailén), and in another heroic action he was gravely wounded<sup>26</sup>. Was this same Rafael Arango Milanés's Count of Alarcos?

Andrés Arango, a military engineer and a colonel, was another of the heroes of the Spanish War of Independence against the French. According to Moreno Fragonals, hundreds of inhabitants of the island of Cuba also defended the Empire against the independence of Latin America in the turbulent years between 1790 and 1834. The Cuban poet Manuel de Zequeira y Arango, Francisco Arango's cousin, was made *subteniente* (sub-lieutenant) for his heroic actions in the battle against French troops in Santo Domingo in 1793. In 1813, Zequeira fought against Colombian troops, led by the Captain General Montalvo (also born in the island of Cuba), and was made a colonel. It was not only the oligarchy, but rather the battalions of *pardos* and *morenos* of the island of Cuba, integrated with people born in those territories with African origins, who were the most effective troops on which the peninsular government counted in its impossible effort to save and, later on, to 'reconquer' the lost Empire. These forces resisted for months in Veracruz and after that at the port of San Juan de Ulúa<sup>27</sup>.

*El Conde Alarcos* also contributed to a recreation of the division between 'Creoles' and 'peninsulars', as in the scene in which the Count attempts to persuade the pages of the King's palace. In this scene, the *matancero* author wants to denounce the supposed expulsion of the 'Creole aristocracy' from the Captains General's palace in Havana, and the formation of a new circle, limited to peninsular merchants, around the Captain General. For that reason, these latter were always represented as leeches, avid for gold and official honours:

“Alarcos: /¿Que mi alma acaso es/ el alma soez de un palaciego eterna/ a la ambición vendida/ que si se lo manda el interés adora/ si se lo veda el interés olvida?/ [...] /¿Pues no ignoras tu/ que oro es el honor de los viles?/ [...] que me importa, sabandija de palacio/ que porque agencies ahora este asesinato/, el rey te abraçe en público/ y ponga un signo más en tu adarga/ y dos plumas en tu gorra/...”<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> MILANÉS, José Jacinto: "El Conde Alarcos".

<sup>26</sup> MORENO FRAGONALS, Manuel: *Cuba/España, España/Cuba*.

<sup>27</sup> KUETHE, Allan: *Crown, military and society*, Tennessee, The University of Tennessee Press, 1986; MORENO FRAGONALS, Manuel: *Cuba/España, España/Cuba*.

<sup>28</sup> “Alarcos: That my soul is maybe / the vile soul of an eternal courtier / sold to ambition / that, if it receives patronage it adores / if there is no patronage the soul forgets?/ [...] / Do not forget that gold/ is the honour of the vilest?/ [...] What does it matter to me, palace vermin / that because you accept this murder/, the king embraces you in public / and puts another badge on your suit/ and two feathers in your cap/ am I going to sell my soul, the same way as you have done?/”.

Milanés, as an integral member of Domingo del Monte's group, tried to participate in the construction of a Spanish identity that had been developing from the peninsula, but Milanés and del Monte's group demanded the right to introduce some of their own particularities to this scheme. *El Conde Alarcos* expressed the definitive version of the identity concept built up by this group of intellectuals based on the division between 'Creoles' and 'peninsulars'. Their objective was to give identity to the island of Cuba, which until then only possessed a geographical distinction, inside the Spanish State.

As I have said, this work had a great impact on spectators on the island, but it was soon forgotten. In several newspapers critical articles appeared which tried to demonstrate that *El Conde Alarcos* invented a tradition and was a defence of liberal principles. José Quintín Suzarte, in *La Siempreviva*, and Manuel de Castro Palomino, in *La Cartera Cubana*, considered that the play did not illustrate medieval reality as it had been historically. Another defect of the work was that 'good' did not triumph, that is, the Count Alarcos, representing liberal principles, did not triumph over the King, who represented absolutism<sup>29</sup>. According to Moreno Friginals the work was soon forgotten because in 1838, the moment when Tacón was recalled to the peninsular, the play hit home, but only a short time later the situation, ever changing, presented the oligarchy with other more dramatic and more distressing problems and this text lost its topicality. The message that the oligarchs wanted to put across was another<sup>30</sup>.

### **The process of construction of a literary network**

José Jacinto Milanés' work is, next to the novel *Francisco* by Anselmo Suárez Romero, *Cecilia Valdés* by Cirilo Villaverde, and *Matanzas y Yumurí* by Ramón de Palma, the complete expression of the identity concept that was elaborated by Domingo del Monte's group<sup>31</sup>. Milanés could write this text thanks to events that occurred during the second half of the eighteenth century and the first years of the nineteenth century. In the process of introducing the principles that legitimised them the Enlightenment, and later liberalism, used, in the Spanish case as in other places, the formation of a cultural network that sought to extend an element of homogeneity and cohesion into a reality that was very heterogeneous. Liberals used several instruments and among them were: first, the construction of an educational system that gave legitimacy to the principles of the new system; second, the writing of the history of that new state with the same intention; third, the creation of a literary tradition<sup>32</sup>. On the island of Cuba, the *Sociedad Económica de La Habana* (Economic Society of Havana), through *El Diario de La Habana* and other publications, was the institution that the government of the metropolis tried to use to this end, that is, to extend the identity that they were forging in the peninsula. The final objective was to reduce Cuba to the category of colony inside the new state<sup>33</sup>.

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<sup>29</sup> QUINTÍN SUZARTE, José: "Crítica al conde de Alarcos", in *La Siempreviva*, nr. 1, 1837, pp. 249-262; CASTRO PALOMINO, Manuel: "Crítica al conde Alarcos", in *La Cartera Cubana*, December 1838.

<sup>30</sup> MORENO FRAGINALS, Manuel: "El Conde Alarcos y la crisis de la oligarquía criolla", pp. 21-47.

<sup>31</sup> SUÁREZ ROMERO, Anselmo: *Francisco. Novela cubana*, New York, 1880; VILLAVERDE, Cirilo: *Cecilia Valdés o la Loma del Ángel. Novela de costumbres cubanas*, New York, Imprenta de El Espejo, 1882; PALMA, Ramón de: "Matanzas y Yumurí" in *El Aguinaldo Habanero*, 1837.

<sup>32</sup> ÁLVAREZ JUNCO, José: *Mater Dolorosa: la idea de España en el siglo XIX*, Madrid, Taurus, 2002.

<sup>33</sup> *El Diario de La Habana* was published in the island from the last years of the eighteenth century. Its editors were Tomás Agustín Cervantes and José Toribio de Arazoza. It was printed in the Imprenta de

However, Domingo del Monte's group did not agree with this and, for that reason, fought to obtain a more advantageous position for their interests. Along with other liberals, del Monte had learnt that the publication of literary and scientific topics was a very effective arm with which to introduce the cultural network they were looking for. On the way back to the island at the end of the 1820s, after his trip to the peninsula to obtain his law degree, del Monte visited his teacher, Félix Varela, in the United States. Here his ideas in relation to the formation of an identity concept different to the one outlined from the metropolis matured. To give form to this project, he gathered together a group of intellectuals living in Havana and in surrounding towns<sup>34</sup>. In 1831 he was able to give legal form to the group through the constitution of the *Comisión Permanente de Literatura* (Permanent Commission of Literature), created inside the Economic Society<sup>35</sup>.

Although the experiment of the Commission was repressed some years after its foundation, while it was operating it began the construction of the identity concept that del Monte's group was assembling. To this end the group began work in three areas: it created a literary competition in 1831, devoted to reward authors and the more indigenous works of the island; it published a dictionary of 'provincialisms' (language differing from peninsular Spanish) and this included seven hundred words characteristic of Havana and the island; and, finally, some of the members of the Commission wrote the so-called *Elogios Póstumos* (Posthumous Praises), the obituaries of the recently dead closely linked to Havana and Cuba. Del Monte's group's most important achievement was the publication of the *El Puntero Literario*, *La Moda o Recreo Semanal del Bello Sexo* and, above all, the *Revista Bimestre Cubana*, where these authors' works were published<sup>36</sup>.

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Araoz y Soler, and most of the public figures of the island collaborated with it. LLAVERÍAS, Joaquín: *Contribución a la historia de la prensa periódica cubana*, volume I and II, Havana, Publicaciones del Archivo Nacional de Cuba, 1957; BATISTA VILLAREAL, Teresa: *Catálogo de publicaciones periódicas cubanas de los siglos XVIII y XIX*, Havana, Biblioteca Nacional José Martí, 1965; VVAA: *Diccionario de la Literatura cubana*, volume I and II, Havana, Instituto de Literatura y Lingüística de La Habana, 1984; BACHILLER Y MORALES, Antonio: *Apuntes para la historia de las letras y de la instrucción pública en la isla de Cuba*, volume I, II, and III, Havana, Cultural, 1936.

<sup>34</sup> MONTE, Domingo del: *Escritos de Domingo del Monte*, volume I and II, Havana, Cultural, 1929; MARTÍNEZ, Urbano: *Domingo del Monte y su tiempo*, Havana, Unión, 1997.

<sup>35</sup> The members of the Commission of Literature were Domingo del Monte, Manuel González del Valle, Ignacio Valdés Machuca, Agustín Govantes, and Nicolás de Cárdenas y Manzano. MONTE, Domingo del: "Exposición de las tareas de la Comisión de Literatura", in *Actas de la Sociedad Económica de La Habana*, 1830 and 1831; MITJANS, Aurelio: *Historia de la literatura cubana*, Madrid, Editorial América, 1918, pp. 123-127.

<sup>36</sup> MONTE, Domingo del: *Centón epistolario*, volumes I to VII, Havana, Imagen Contemporánea, 2002. José Antonio Echeverría won the literature competition in 1831 with his poetry ECHEVERRÍA, José Antonio: "Oda al nacimiento de la serenísima infanta doña María Isabel Luisa", Biblioteca Nacional José Martí (BNJM), Sala Cubana, Echeverría. The dictionary was published some years later by PICHARDO, Esteban: *Diccionario provincial casi razonado de voces cubanas*, Havana, 1849. In 1832, José de la Luz wrote about Juan José Díaz de Espada y Landa and, later on, about Gonzalo O'Farrill, José María Xenes y Montalvo, José Agustín Caballero, and Tomás Gener, LUZ, José de la: *Obras*, Havana, Imagen Contemporánea, 2002, volume V, pp. 292-343.

*El Puntero Literario* was published from 2 January 1830 to 1 May 1830. It was printed in the Imprenta de Antonio María Valdés, and in the Oficina de Boloña. Its editors were Domingo del Monte, Antonio Bachiller y Morales, José Antonio Cintra, and Anacleto Bermúdez.

*La Moda o Recreo Semanal del Bello Sexo* was published between 7 November 1829 and 11 June 1831, in the Imprenta de Lorenzo María Fernández de Terán. Its editors were Domingo del Monte and José Villarinos, and later on, Manuel González del Valle and Ignacio Valdés Machuca.



After the closure of the Academy of Literature, Domingo del Monte decided to spend some time at the sugar plantation belonging to his parents-in-law in Matanzas. There he rediscovered some of his old friends and he met a young man born to write who he took on as his pupil, José Jacinto Milanés. When del Monte left the city to return to Havana, he maintained contact with all of his friends through correspondence<sup>37</sup>. In Havana, he organised a *tertulia* (particular meeting) with the group of thinkers that had been part of the Commission of Literature. This continued their project for cultural creation in a private way and was, therefore, much less controlled by official institutions. In these meetings the works written by Milanés began to stand out. These arrived from Matanzas by mail and were discussed and corrected by people who participated in the meeting<sup>38</sup>. In fact, on several occasions, Milanés travelled to Havana and presented his work in person at the meeting. This meant he got to know many of the intellectuals he met there. During this whole process, del Monte, who was the brain behind these initiatives, began to formulate a second plan, leaving the task of writing to the intellectuals that surrounded him. Although he left the Economic Society, all the works of this period were published in journals paid for by this institution. In 1837, *El Aguinaldo Habanero* was published, and between 1838 and 1840 *El Plantel*, *El Álbum*, *La Cartera Cubana*, and *La Siempreviva* were begun<sup>39</sup>.

During the period of time that Domingo del Monte passed in the peninsula, he entered into contact with whole areas of culture and romantic thought that were developing there at the time. This prompted him to think about the importance of literature as the expression of and as a tool for the transmission of political thought. When he returned to Cuba, del Monte tried to use poetry with this objective because this literary form adapted most easily to his intentions; it was the most ambiguous and the genre that allowed for a broader diversity of interpretation. However, precisely because of these characteristics, poetry as a tool was questioned. Because of this, del Monte promoted novel writing among the members of his group; prose writing meant interpretation was much less ambiguous and the novel allowed for a more complex plot in which more topics could be entertained. Del Monte found a very interesting field of work in the novel, especially the 'historical novel', that is, the inclusion of real and

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*La Revista Bimestre Cubana* was published between 1831 and 1834 in the Imprenta Fraternal de Boloña, and in the Imprenta del Gobierno. It was directed by Mariano Cubí Soler and José Antonio Saco. Among their editors figured Domingo del Monte, Félix Varela, José de la Luz, José Antonio Saco, and Santos Suárez.

<sup>37</sup> MARTÍNEZ, Urbano: *Domingo del Monte y su tiempo*; MARTÍNEZ, Urbano: *José Jacinto Milanés*.

<sup>38</sup> In del Monte's particular meeting at his home, all the members of the old Commission of Literature participated and new talents like Gabriel de la Concepción Valdés, Anselmo Suárez Romero, Ramón de Palma, Cirilo Villaverde, José Jacinto Milanés, and José Zacarías González del Valle. MONTE, Domingo del: *Centón Epistolar*, volumes I to VII.

<sup>39</sup> *El Aguinaldo Habanero* was planned as a periodical, but only the first issue was published in 1837 in the Imprenta de Palmer. The editors were José Antonio Echeverría and Ramón de Palma. Some of the poetic works of del Monte's group were collected in it.

*El Plantel* was published from September 1838 to August 1839. It was directed by Ramón de Palma and José Antonio Echeverría to begin with and, later, by José María Anduela and Mariano Torrente. It was published by Ramón Oliva at his own printing press.

*El Álbum* was published from April 1838 to March 1839, in the Imprenta de Boloña, Oficina de Ramón Oliva, and the Imprenta Literaria. It was edited by Luis Caso Solá and Ramón de Palma.

*La Cartera Cubana* was printed between 1838 and 1840 in the Imprenta Literaria by Vicente Antonio de Castro.

The publication of *La Siempreviva* began in 1837 by José Quintín Suzarte in the Imprenta del Gobierno in Havana.

established facts in the narration. In this sense the historical novel became a useful instrument because it allowed for a mix of reality and fiction. It was therefore a tool that, used correctly, was perfect for the intention of interpreting the history of the island in favour of the economic interests of those the group represented. Nevertheless, at the same time that Del Monte promoted the development of the novel as a way of legitimising the group's thought, he was aware that Cuban society was largely illiterate. For this reason, following the work of the cultured classes in the peninsular in the previous century, the group understood that work for the theatre needed to be developed, as a form of social indoctrination through images. In this sense, *El Conde Alarcos*, was the most perfect expression of this group's intentions, and José Jacinto Milanés was the greatest specialist in this field<sup>40</sup>.

### Literature's coming of age

Domingo del Monte had used various forms of literature in the construction of identity, responding to the economic interests of those he and his group represented<sup>41</sup>. When the Academy of Literature disappeared, in 1834, José Jacinto Milanés, Ramón de Palma, and Gabriel de la Concepción Valdés started to put into practice this whole area of thought. For this reason a great quantity of their work was devoted to 'drawing' the characteristics of the 'wild' and 'untamed' nature of the island. These descriptions of the landscape of some areas of Cuba, in spite of their simplicity, were of great importance in the formation of a Cuban identity. Until that moment Cuban poets had tried to imitate peninsular poets and, in the narration of the reality that surrounded them, the Castilian writers. Opposing this, Milanés and the whole group described the features of the savannah, the Cuban forest, rivers like the Cayaguategu (flowing through the western part of the island of Cuba) and the Sansueñas, the violent tropical storms (hurricanes), trees like the *seiba*, *jagüey*, *guayabal* and, of course, the sea as the main protagonist. In addition, in their writing these men used a great many 'Cuban provincialisms'<sup>42</sup>.

Milanés also described the landscape in relation to the economic activities that were carried out on the island. Until then a portrait of the 'domesticated' or 'cultivated'

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<sup>40</sup> SCOTT, Walter: *Obras selectas (Ivanhoe, El Talismán, El Anticuario)*, Carroggio, Barcelona, 1990; LUCÁCS, Georg: *The Historical Novel*, Merlin Press, London, 1962; GRACIA DE ALDRIDGE, Adriana: "Two Latin American Theorists of the Historical Novel", in *Clio*, nr. 4, 1975, pp. 183-199; PECKHAM, Morse: *The Triumph of Romanticism*, University of South Carolina Press, Columbia, 1970; SÚAREZ MURIAS, M.: *La novela romántica en Hispanoamérica*, Hispanic Institute in the United States, New York, 1963; HENRÍQUEZ UREÑA, Max: *Panorama histórico de la literatura cubana*, volume I, Editorial Arte y Literatura, Havana, 1978; LAZO, Raimundo: *La literatura cubana*, UNAM, Mexico, 1965; MITJANS, Aurelio: *Historia de la literatura cubana*, Editorial América, Madrid, 1918; RAMOS, Juan J.: *Historia de la literatura cubana*, volume II, Cárdenas y Compañía, Havana, 1945; GONZÁLEZ CASANOVA, P. (ed.): *Cultura y creación intelectual en América Latina*, Siglo XXI, Mexico, 1984; BELLINI, G.: *Historia de la literatura hispanoamericana*, Castalia, Madrid, 1985; FRANCO, Jean: *An Introduction to Spanish American Literature*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1969; CARILLA, E.: *El romanticismo en la América hispana*, Gredos, Madrid, 1975.

<sup>41</sup> MONTE, Domingo del: *Escritos de Domingo del Monte*, volume II, pp. 211-244; BÉNICHOU, Paul: *Creación poética en el romancero tradicional*, Madrid, Gredos, 1968; BÉNICHOU, Paul: *La coronación del escritor, 1750-1830. Ensayo sobre el advenimiento de un poder espiritual laico en la Francia moderna*, Mexico City, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1981.

<sup>42</sup> Milanés also described trees like the mango, birds like the *sisonte* and the *tocoloro*, animals such as the *hutía*, and, of course, the whole Cuban *manigua*. MILANÉS, José Jacinto: "Bajo el mango", "El Sisonte y el Tocoloro", "En la Caza y la Sorpresa", in MILANÉS, José Jacinto: *Obras*; MANZANO, Francisco: "Cocuyera", in *El Aguinaldo Habanero*, Havana, 1837.

landscape that gave Cuba the *vegas* (the lands where tobacco is cultivated), the *hatos* and *haterías* (territory dedicated to the breeding of livestock), the *monteros* and the *monterías* (hunting of animals and establishments dedicated to the exploitation of the beautiful wood of the island) had not existed. Domingo del Monte, in 'El Montero de la Sabana' wanted to represent, through the fight between two men for the love of a woman, the confrontation that existed between different productive activities; for that reason, one of the characters was a Martínez's *veguero*, the richest *vega* in the whole island, located in the area of Pinar del Río, and the other was a *montero*<sup>43</sup>.

Milanés, following his teacher's direction, was also interested in the figure of the *montero*<sup>44</sup>. However, he introduced a novelty because he centred a great part of his poetic efforts in describing two economic activities that had not been written about before: work in the coffee and sugar plantations, the two main productive sectors of the western area of the island. In doing this he opened up a path that was continued in verse, but mainly in prose, by other writers. The portrayal of the coffee plantations, where the slave's work was less arduous than in the sugar plantations (as Anselmo Suárez Romero explained later), was not done through a physical description of this economic activity, but through slavery (mainly the figure of the slave), one of the most characteristic elements in the sugar and coffee plantations and one of the biggest impediments to the development of the liberal system on the island. For this reason Milanés criticised slavery, although he still did this in a rather romantic way. He centred his attacks on the terrible corporal punishments these slaves received, the worst of all being the "*boca abajo*"<sup>45</sup>. He gave hope to these people, hope for the '*cimarronaje*' (the escape), and treated them as human albeit in a proscribed way<sup>46</sup>. In his work 'Negro Alzado', Milanés described how a white boy used a black boy from the coffee plantation as a "*muleque*" (mascot), a playmate:

*“A las puertas del bohío/ sentado está el mayoral/ [...] Su hija mayor, con  
un peine/ negro alisándole va/ aquella gran cabellera/ [...] Dos chiquillos cerca de  
ella/ con un negrito, a la par/ todos tres desnudos, juegan,/ retozan, gritan, se dan/*

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<sup>43</sup> MONTE, Domingo del: "El montero de la sabana", "El desterrado del hato", "El guajiro", "La Patria", and "A un joven poeta, en su partida para Ultramar", in HERRERA DÁVILA, Ignacio (compiler): *Rimas Americanas*.

<sup>44</sup> MILANÉS, José Jacinto: "El Montero" and "Pesca nocturna, 1841", in MILANÉS, José Jacinto: *Obras*.

<sup>45</sup> MILANÉS, José Jacinto: "El esclavo, 1840", in MILANÉS, José Jacinto: *Obras*. This group bought Juan Francisco Manzano's freedom and transformed him into a poet: "*Cuando miro al espacio que he corrido/ desde la cuna hasta el presente día/ tiemblo y saludo a la fortuna mía,/ más de terror que de atención movido./ Sorpréndeme la lucha que he podido/ sostener contra suerte tan impía,/ si tal llamarse puede la porfía/ de mi infelice ser, al mal nacido./ Treinta años ha que conocí la tierra/ treinta años ha que en gemidor estado/ triste infortunio por doquier me asalta./ Mas nada es para mi la cruda guerra/ que en vano suspirar he soportado./ si la calculo oh Dios con la que falta*".

"When I look back over my life / from the cradle until now/ I tremble to greet my fortune, / because of my terror more than my attention./ I am surprised I have been able to / sustain this fight against such terrible luck, / if I can take this view of myself, / so lowly born. Thirty years / have passed since I met the earth / thirty years have passed/ sad distress everywhere assaults me./ But anything is raw struggle for me/ and I sigh in vain, oh God/", MANZANO, Juan Francisco: "Treinta años", in *El Aguinaldo Habanero*.

<sup>46</sup> MILANÉS, José Jacinto: "El negro alzado, 1835" and "En la Fuga de la Tórtola, 1841", in MILANÉS, José Jacinto: *Obras*.

*y cada vez que el negrito/ amenaza a algún rapaz/ el gran manatí del padre/ que los mira retozar/ levanta en su tierna espalda/ doloroso cardenal/...<sup>47</sup>.*

In this society in construction that Milanés's group wanted to illustrate, work, as the motor of economic development, was the way of gaining wealth and prosperity, and, for that reason, the group considered it a value that gave dignity to human beings. Idleness and play, elements that implied a loss of productivity, were not viewed well<sup>48</sup>. In the scale of values the group built, the 'dregs of society' (beggars, prostitutes, foundlings, drunkards, and bandits) were rejected. These people were on the margins of society, they were the 'garbage' of that society<sup>49</sup>. For this reason, Milanés and del Monte's group multiplied their efforts in promoting the development of the manual trades. Until then, this work was seen as fit only for 'coloured people', since white people considered it degrading to work with their hands; del Monte's group, with its work, wanted to convert this into honest labour for poor white people, as had happened in the Protestant world<sup>50</sup>.

These 'values' should be inculcated as the norm, and to do this del Monte's group tried to use religion. As a result, one of the characteristics these authors gave to the ideal society they recreated, was Catholicism. They understood that religion, used correctly, could be an instrument for the introduction and legitimisation of the values of the liberal system, as European Protestants had appreciated in their societies<sup>51</sup>. Milanés's God was compassionate, but at the same time vengeful, a God who demanded love of work, honour in a man and chastity and dedication to her family in a woman. This was a religion that criticised adultery, prostitution and gambling, but which did not combat them vigorously because they operated as escape valves in the maintenance of what was otherwise an untenable system<sup>52</sup>.

The safeguarding of those liberal principles also supposed the defence of the liberal government's structures in all the territories of the Empire. For this reason, Gabriel de la Concepción Valdés and José Jacinto Milanés gave continuity to the ideas that del Monte had outlined earlier: they wrote poems in favour of the development of a liberal monarchy, where they criticised Fernando VII's reign because he was an absolutist and tyrannical King, and they placed their hopes first in María Cristina and then in Isabel II<sup>53</sup>.

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<sup>47</sup> "At the doors of the cabin / the worker sat down / [...] His oldest daughter, combed/ her long black hair / [...] Two boys near her / with a black boy, / all three naked, played, / frolicked, screamed, fought, / and every time that the black boy / threatened one of the other two / boys, the great manatí father, who / was watching them frolic, / felt in his tender back / a painful wound". MILANÉS, José Jacinto: "El negro alzado, 1835", in MILANÉS, José Jacinto: *Obras*.

<sup>48</sup> MILANÉS, José Jacinto: "La Leyenda", "El Hombre Indecente", "El Hombre de Bien", in MILANÉS, José Jacinto: *Obras*; BETANCOURT, J.V.: "El Jugador", in *La Siempreviva*, pp. 93-101.

<sup>49</sup> MILANÉS, José Jacinto: "El Mendigo, 1837", "La Ramera, 1837", "El Expósito, 1838", "La Cárcel, 1838", "El Ebrio", "La Promesa del Bandido", in MILANÉS, José Jacinto: *Obras*.

<sup>50</sup> MILANÉS, José Jacinto: "La Guajirita de Yumurí" and "El Guajiro", in MILANÉS, José Jacinto: *Obras*.

<sup>51</sup> VALDÉS, Gabriel de la Concepción: "La Ambarina", and "La Sombra de Pelayo", in VALDÉS, Gabriel de la Concepción: *Poesías de Plácido*, New York, n.d..

<sup>52</sup> In relation to the God in whom Milanés believed, see MILANÉS, José Jacinto: "Al convento de San Francisco, 1837", "Dios existe", and the translation of "El Salmo XXII de David, 1850", in MILANÉS, José Jacinto: *Obras*; MANZANO, Juan Francisco: "El Sueño", in *El Álbum*, October 1838; "Existencia de Dios", in *La Cartera Cubana*, June 1839.

<sup>53</sup> VALDÉS, Gabriel de la Concepción: "En la proclamación de Isabel II reina de España", "Diadema regia", "A la jura de la princesa heredera", "La ambarina", "A los días de la reina gobernadora de

“...¡Viva Isabel! resuena en mi cabaña,/ viva , viva Isabel y viva España./ En pos de la ciudad las ninfas bellas/ van con cestillos de olorosas flores,/ y Delio, y Vélez, y Desval entre ellas/ [...] Salud exclama a la inmortal Cristina/ y al nuevo sol que Iberia nos ofrece/ [...] Ved cual se lanzan/ de la tumba fría/ Rui-Díaz, Larra, Córdoba y Cisneros, / y ríe el panteón donde descansa / el vencedor de Lusara y Almansa./ Sagrados genios que la gloria hispana/ ensalzáis junto al regio Manzanares,/ venid a visitar la culta Habana/ que en su playa el clarísimo Almendares/ os mostrará la frente soberana/ coronada de piñas y palmares,/ y os dará de sus hijos el acento/ fraternal y benigno acogimiento./ Y luego a vuestros lares retornando regalareis la nueva venturosa/ a la esposa del séptimo Fernando,/ como celebra Cuba deliciosa/ su real Princesa, impávida jurando/...”<sup>54</sup>.

Nevertheless, in this period, del Monte's group sought the development of a liberal autonomous system of government for the island of Cuba but one that was inside the Spanish state. For this reason, they began to use the Creole-peninsular division in their works, assimilating Creole to a Cuban identity and the peninsular to a Spanish identity. They explained that the traders in black people, who were from the peninsular, carried out the poor treatment of the slaves. When slaves arrived on the sugar plantations the bad treatment was carried out by the *mayorales* who, according to Anselmo Suárez Romero's descriptions in *Francisco*, were generally also peninsular, but not by the owners of the sugar plantations, who he identified with Creole Cubans<sup>55</sup>.

### Conclusion

The Spanish Crown, more through circumstance than by conviction, was forced to convert peninsular territory into a nation state composed of citizens during the first half of the nineteenth century. At the same time that these transformations were being made in the metropolis, the different governments had to think about what part the American domains played in the Spanish nascent state. Most peninsular liberals, and a part of the Havana elite, were not in favour of inserting the overseas territories into the process of formation of the liberal state, and instead wanted to give them a politically inferior category through legislation, thus maintaining the status quo. However, and contrary to what Cuban and Spanish historiographers have maintained until now, a group of intellectuals from the island, supported by some of the most powerful families of the Havana sugar oligarchy, did not feel comfortable with the position of colony to which their territories were relegated in the new liberal state. Their answer was to try to get a

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España", in VALDÉS, Gabriel de la Concepción: *Poesías de Plácido*. In this area, the most important work was the *Oda al nacimiento de la serenísima infanta doña María Isabel Luisa*, written by José Antonio Echeverría. ECHEVERRÍA, José Antonio: *Oda al nacimiento de la serenísima infanta doña María Isabel Luisa*, Biblioteca Nacional José Martí, Sala Cubana, Echeverría.

<sup>54</sup> “...Hurrah Isabel! The name resonates in my home, / hurrah, hurrah Isabel and hurrah Spain./ The beautiful nymphs / walk with baskets of fragrant flowers, / and Delio, and Vélez, and Desval walk among them / [...] They call health to the immortal Cristina / and to the new sun that Iberia offers us / [...] See how Rui-Díaz, Larra, Córdoba, and Cisneros, rush out of the cold tomb, / and laugh at the vault where the champion of Lusara and Almansa rests./ Sacred geniuses that Hispanic glory / exalts next to the royal Manzanares, / come to visit the learned Havana / because on its clear beach the Almendares / will show you its sovereign forehead / crowned with pineapples and palms, / and its children will give you a fraternal and benign welcome./ And then, when you return home you will give the news to Fernando VII's wife, / you will tell her how the royal Princess is celebrated in the delicious Cuba”. VALDÉS, Gabriel de la Concepción: “Diadema regia”, in VALDÉS, Gabriel de la Concepción: *Poesías de Plácido*.

<sup>55</sup> SUÁREZ ROMERO, Anselmo: *Francisco. Novela cubana*.

more favourable situation for their own interests and those of the island inside the new state under construction. For that reason, they supported and actively participated in the construction of a concept of Cuban autonomous identity as distinct from that of the peninsular.

Domingo del Monte and the circle of intellectuals that surrounded him were responsible for giving form to this project. With this objective, they used literature as their instrument, they developed a concept of identity that gave unity to the island of Cuba and they connected their history to the Castilian tradition, of which they were considered part. This identity project was not born fully armed, but rather it was negotiated and modified over time, until it acquired a quite defined form by the end of the 1830s. The drama *El Conde Alarcos*, written by José Jacinto Milanés, was one of the most complete literary expressions in this direction. Yet, the metropolitan government and the governor of the island, Miguel Tacón, did not accept the proposal of del Monte's group. Although the sugar oligarchy ensured that the metropolitan authorities recalled Tacón, Cuba was reduced to the category of colony, governed through the *Leyes de Indias*, a code of the Ancien Régime, appropriate perhaps for a despotic government but not adapted to the needs of the island at that time.