

Literature Criticism
from 1400 to 1800

LC 238

Volume 238

Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800

Critical Discussion of the Works
of Fifteenth-, Sixteenth-, Seventeenth-, and
Eighteenth-Century Novelists, Poets, Playwrights,
Philosophers, and Other Creative Writers

Lawrence J. Trudeau
Editor



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Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800

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- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.
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Contents

Preface vii

Acknowledgments xi

Advisory Board xiii

José de Cadalso y Vázquez 1741-1782	1
<i>Spanish poet, satirist, novelist, and playwright</i>	
Daniel Defoe 1660?-1731	89
<i>Entry devoted to the novel Roxana (1724)</i>	
María de Zayas y Sotomayor 1590-1661?	193
<i>Entry devoted to the novella collection The Disenchantments of Love (1647)</i>	

Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Author Index 327

Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Topic Index 449

LC Cumulative Nationality Index 471

LC-238 Title Index 475

José de Cadalso y Vázquez

1741-1782

(Also wrote under the pseudonyms Joseph Vázquez and Don Joseph Vázquez) Spanish poet, satirist, novelist, and playwright.

INTRODUCTION

José de Cadalso y Vázquez is regarded both as a major figure of the Spanish Enlightenment and as a progenitor of Romanticism. According to many Hispanists, including Russell P. Sebold (2008; see Further Reading), Cadalso's work marks a transition in literary history from the Enlightenment to the Romantic period, and he is among the earliest European writers to express the suffering, desperation, and grief that became hallmarks of that era. Cadalso published works in several genres during his life, including the satire *Los eruditos a la violeta* (1772; may be translated as *Wise Men without Learning*) and the lyric poetry of *Ocios de mi juventud* (1772; may be translated as *Pastimes of My Youth*). His most significant works—*Cartas marruecas* (1789; may be translated as *Moroccan Letters*) and *Noches lúgubres* (1789-90; published as *Lugubrious Nights*)—went unpublished during his lifetime due to censorship. These books now form the basis of Cadalso's literary reputation and are considered important works of the Spanish Enlightenment.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Cadalso was born in the city of Cádiz in Andalusia, Spain, in 1741 to a noble family. After his mother's death in 1744, he was raised by his great-aunt in the home of his maternal grandfather. Cadalso did not meet his father, the merchant José María de Cadalso y Vizcarra, until he was nearly thirteen years old, and he struggled with the elder Cadalso's emotional detachment his whole life. Cadalso received a Jesuit education, first in Cádiz—where his uncle was a professor of rhetoric, philosophy, and theology—and later in Paris at the Collège de Louis-le-Grand.

Cadalso traveled widely in his youth, acquiring what he described in his autobiography as "all the wildness of a Frenchman and all the harshness of an Englishman." Obeying his father's request, Cadalso left his studies in Paris and moved to England, where he learned English while living in Kingston from 1755 to 1756. Cadalso later attended the Jesuit college in Paris before returning to Spain, a country that he described as "totally strange to me, although it was my fatherland." From 1758 to 1760, Cadalso studied at the Real Seminario de Nobles in Madrid, but his father, wary of Jesuitical influence, withdrew him from the school and sent

him first to Cádiz and then to London. Cadalso was abroad for a year and a half, traveling throughout England, France, Belgium, Holland, Germany, and Italy. He read the works of prominent Enlightenment thinkers, including Montesquieu, Voltaire, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Francis Bacon, John Locke, and Isaac Newton. During this time, the elder Cadalso died while traveling in Denmark, leaving his son in a state of poverty.

Cadalso enlisted in the Regimiento de Caballería de Borbón as a volunteer in 1762, ascending to the rank of captain by 1764. During the 1766 Riots of Esquilache—an uprising against foreign influence in Spanish politics, among other things—Cadalso is said to have saved the life of Count Alexander O'Reilly, an Irish-born Spanish military leader, by telling the rioters four Andalusian sayings. After this event, which is recounted in Cadalso's autobiography, his nobility was verified and he was named a Caballero de la Orden Militar de Santiago. Cadalso was exiled from Madrid in 1768 for six months as the suspected author of a satirical work that contained thinly veiled portraits of prominent aristocrats. With almost no money and little to occupy him, Cadalso found life away from Madrid difficult. In 1770, he fell in love with the actress María Ignacia Ibáñez, who supported him when he was poor, sick, and abandoned by his aristocratic friends. Ibáñez played the role of Doña Ava in Cadalso's tragedy *Don Sancho García* (1771); she died a few months later on 21 April 1771, at the age of twenty-five. In his analysis of the autobiographical aspects of *Lugubrious Nights*, a work inspired by Ibáñez's death, Bruce W. Wardropper (1952) examined a letter written by an acquaintance of Cadalso indicating that the writer tried unsuccessfully to exhume his lover's corpse, a crime for which he was again exiled from Madrid.

In 1772, Cadalso published the works that brought him the most success during his lifetime, *Wise Men without Learning* and its *Suplemento* (may be translated as *Supplement*). Written in the form of a conduct manual, these satires parodied the superficial erudition displayed by young fashionable types in Madrid. *Wise Men without Learning* includes the poetry collection *Pastimes of My Youth*, which combined rococo themes with Neoclassical forms influenced by Spanish Golden Age authors. In the early 1770s, Cadalso composed *Lugubrious Nights* and *Moroccan Letters*, both of which were posthumously serialized in *Correo de Madrid*. Continuing his military career, he participated in the 1779 siege of Gibraltar. In 1782, he rose to the position of colonel; he was killed by a grenade in a military accident in Gibraltar later that year.

MAJOR WORKS

Cadalso's most critically acclaimed works are the posthumously published *Moroccan Letters* and *Lugubrious Nights*. Inspired by Montesquieu's *Persian Letters* (1721), *Moroccan Letters* is an epistolary novel featuring three characters that reflect differing perspectives and ideological positions in late-eighteenth-century Spanish society. Nuño Nuñez, a young Castilian Christian, is pessimistic about the state of Spain. Gazel, a young diplomat visiting from Morocco, is optimistic at the outset of the work, describing idiosyncrasies of Spanish customs and politics. However, as the letters progress, he becomes increasingly disillusioned with Spanish society. Ben-Beley, advisor to Gazel, is a wise old man who balances the debate, providing philosophical insight as the three correspondents discuss such topics as virtue and vice, the prevalence of human suffering, the nature of truth, the history of Spain, and the duties of the cavalier. The work also questions the foundations of the Bourbon monarchy in Spain. *Moroccan Letters* demonstrates Cadalso's concern with Spanish politics, economic progress, and social reform, as well as his awareness of the struggle for goodness in the face of social evil.

Modeled on English poet Edward Young's poem *The Complaint; or, Night-Thoughts* (1742-46), *Lugubrious Nights* is an autobiographical work that describes three days in 1771, a period coincident with the death of Ibáñez. Many critics have characterized the protagonist, Tediato, whose name is a play on the Spanish word *tedio*, meaning "tedium," as Cadalso's fictional double. *Lugubrious Nights* details Tediato's macabre desire to disinter his lover's corpse, lie beside it one last time, and then commit suicide after burning the mausoleum to ensure their complete disappearance. The tale is told in a succession of dramatic monologs alternating between Tediato and the poor gravedigger Lorenzo, and features many Gothic elements. Cadalso does not resolve the story, which ends before the men can exhumate the body and closes with Tediato's words: "let's keep walking, my friend, let's keep on walking." Highly lyrical and expressing extremes of passion, suffering, and spiritual torment, *Lugubrious Nights* is considered by some critics to be among the earliest examples of the Romantic sentiment that came to dominate European literature during the first half of the nineteenth century. The work is also notable for its depiction of a relationship between two desperate men from different social spheres, which scholars have argued reflects the Enlightenment ideal of friendship.

Cadalso is also significant for his role as the first leader of the second Salmantine school of poetry. This group, which also featured the poet Juan Meléndez Valdés, is known for its Neoclassical-rococo poetry based on the works of the Greek poet Anacreon, whose verse explores homoerotic love, earthly pleasures, and wine. According to some critics, these writers forged a poetic escape using rococo elements in order to be able to assume their political and civil duties. Cadalso's correspondence contains

numerous passionate expressions of loyalty, admiration, and friendship for the members of this influential and exclusive poetic group.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Much of the criticism on Cadalso has focused on his place in literary history, specifically on whether *Lugubrious Nights* constitutes the earliest example of Romantic literature in Europe. This claim has significant implications both for the history and development of Romanticism and for Spain's importance in the broader context of European literature. *Lugubrious Nights* precedes the works of such early English Romantic poets as William Blake and Lord Byron, as well as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774) and François René de Chateaubriand's novel *René* (1802). For those who consider it a work of Romanticism, *Lugubrious Nights* places Spain at the forefront of literary development in the late seventeenth century. Michael Iarocci (2006) provided an overview of this debate, considering the work's place in literary history and its reception in nineteenth-century Spain. He focused on Cadalso's depiction of the "contours of interiority" in the context of the modern idea of the self. Wardropper surveyed critical approaches to *Lugubrious Nights* in the early twentieth century. He noted how many scholars have explored Cadalso's indebtedness to Young's *Complaint*, but have failed to find significant parallels between the two works. Wardropper challenged the idea that *Lugubrious Nights* is a personal expression of Cadalso's torment, citing evidence that the work is the product of multiple influences, including the Spanish Baroque, Neoclassicism, and Enlightenment rationalism. Wardropper also compared *Lugubrious Nights* to Cadalso's earlier books, including *Moroccan Letters*.

Many critics have examined the publication history and thematic content of *Moroccan Letters*. Nigel Glendinning (1960) considered the extent of the early circulation of Cadalso's *Moroccan Letters* and the reasons for its delayed publication. Reviewing personal letters and official requests sent to the Real Academia de la Lengua Española, Glendinning established the textual history of *Moroccan Letters* from its composition in the early 1770s to its posthumous publication in *Correo de Madrid*. Alberto Medina (2008) investigated the nature of Spanish identity as represented in the work. Drawing on the anecdote of Cadalso using Andalusian sayings to save O'Reilly's life, Medina discussed the author's notion that identity, and Spanish identity in particular, is created in part through performance. The thematic and stylistic similarities between Cadalso's writing and works by the Spanish artist Francisco de Goya has also been a critical focus. Edith F. Helman (1958) explored their fascination with the monstrous. According to Helman, traces of Cadalso's vignettes can be found in Goya's *Caprichos*, a series of etchings completed

in the late 1790s and known for their often bizarre and disturbing images. In comparing the *Caprichos* to the *Moroccan Letters*, she argued that “[t]he impression that both works leave of the Spain of their day is of a topsy-turvy world, in which everything is confused, truth and falsehood, good and evil, the sacred and the profane.”

Greg Luther

PRINCIPAL WORKS

Don Sancho García, Conde de Castilla. Tragedia española original [may be translated as *Don Sancho García, Count of Castille: Original Spanish Tragedy*]. As Don Joseph Vázquez. Madrid, Jan. 1771. Madrid: Ibarra, 1792. (Play)

**Los eruditos a la violeta, ó curso completo de todas las ciencias* [may be translated as *Wise Men without Learning; or, Complete Course in All of the Sciences*]. Madrid: Sancha, 1772. (Poetry and satire)

Suplemento al papel intitulado Los eruditos a la violeta [may be translated as *Appendix to the Leaflet Titled Wise Men without Learning*]. As Joseph Vázquez. Madrid: Sancha, 1772. (Satire)

†*Cartas marruecas* [may be translated as *Moroccan Letters*]. Madrid: Sancha, 1793. (Novel)

Obras [may be translated as *Works*]. 4 vols. Madrid: Repullés, 1803. (Novel, poetry, and satire)

‡*Noches lúgubres* [published as *Lugubrious Nights*]. Valencia: Cabrerizo, 1817. (Prose)

Escritos autobiográficos y epistolario [may be translated as *Autobiographical Writings and Correspondence*]. Ed. Nigel Glendinning and Nicole Harrison. London: Tamesis, 1979. (Autobiography and letters)

Solaya o los circasianos [may be translated as *Solaya; or, The Circasians*]. Ed. Francisco Aguilar Piñal. Madrid: Castalia, 1982. (Play)

Principal English Translation

Lugubrious Nights: An Eighteenth-Century Spanish Romance. Trans. Russell Sebold. Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 2008. Print. Trans. of *Noches lúgubres*.

*Includes the poetry collection *Ocios de mi juventud, ó poesías líricas de Josef Cadalso* [may be translated as *Pastimes of My Youth; or, Lyric Poetry of Josef Cadalso*].

†Originally serialized in *Correo de Madrid* in 1789.

‡Originally serialized in *Correo de Madrid* in 1789-90.

CRITICISM

Katherine Reding (essay date 1934)

SOURCE: Reding, Katherine. “A Study of the Influence of Oliver Goldsmith’s *Citizen of the World* upon the *Cartas marruecas* of José Cadalso.” *Hispanic Review* 2.3 (1934): 226-34. Print.

[In the following essay, Reding considers the influence of Oliver Goldsmith’s essay collection *Citizen of the World* (1762) on Cadalso’s *Moroccan Letters*. She discusses parallel structures, passages, and characters in the works, arguing that Goldsmith provided a model for Cadalso’s criticism of Spanish history and society.]

That Goldsmith’s *Citizen of the World* influenced Cadalso in his conception of the *Cartas Marruecas*¹ has been variously affirmed and denied. Ticknor stated that the latter show a greater resemblance to Goldsmith’s work than to Montesquieu’s *Lettres persanes*,² and this opinion was held by other critics, but recently two studies of Cadalso deny any influence of the *Citizen of the World* upon the *Cartas Marruecas*. Tamayo y Rubio in his *Estudio crítico*³ of these letters dismisses Ticknor’s suggestion as not worthy of discussion, since Cadalso makes no reference to Goldsmith either in his letters or in any of his other works and Miss Emily Cotton makes a similar statement in an article on *Cadalso and his Foreign Sources* in a recent periodical.⁴ In view of this disparity of opinion, it is our purpose to determine what relation there may be between the two works.

The *Cartas Marruecas* represent Cadalso’s attempt to make an analysis of his nation’s ills without touching on religion or politics. He uses the fiction of a Moor, Gazel, travelling in Spain and writing his impressions to the sage Ben-Beley in Africa. Nuño, an educated Spaniard, interprets the Spanish point of view to Gazel. Cadalso goes in the historical causes of Spain’s decadence and satirizes Spanish society and education of his own day.

Goldsmith began to write the Chinese letters when he was an as yet obscure journalist in London. He was inspired by the tremendous success of Montesquieu’s *Lettres persanes* and similar epistolary satires to try his fortune in the same field. The first Chinese letter, purporting to be written by a Mandarin sojourning in London, appeared in the *Public Ledger* of January 24, 1760. This was the beginning of a series which ran to one hundred eighteen letters in all, and won popularity not only for the writer but for the periodical as well.

The collected letters were published on May 1, 1762, under the title of *The Citizen of the World, or Letters from a Chinese Philosopher, Residing in London, to his Friends in the East*. A second edition was not printed until 1769 and a third was published in 1774. Between 1774 and

1800 there were only three English editions of the *Citizen of the World*.

The letters show Goldsmith's attempt to delineate the English character through observations made in fictitious correspondence between Lien Chi Altangi in London and Fum Hoam, First President of the Ceremonial Academy at Pekin, in China. In an early letter, Lien describes his meeting with the Man-in-Black, who becomes his companion and guide. The Man-in-Black, although he takes no part in the correspondence, is an indispensable personage in the narrative, for he represents the English attitude. The main body of the book is made up of letters from the Chinese philosopher, satirizing social, political and literary foibles of the age.

The *Citizen of the World* was more popular in the French translation than it was in England. Poire's *Le Citoyen du Monde* appeared in 1763 and went through three editions, and in the next three years four more editions of the work were needed to satisfy the demand of readers. Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes* had set a fashion and *Le Citoyen du Monde* profited by its popularity. It is likely, therefore, both from the circumstances of publication and the fact that Cadalso read French with greater ease than English, that he became acquainted with the *Citizen of the World* in the French edition. It is significant to notice that the period of greatest favor of the Chinese letters in France immediately precedes the inception of the *Cartas Marruecas*, the date of which is usually given as 1768.

There are two passages in the *Cartas Marruecas* which may be taken as specific references to the *Citizen of the World*: the mention of Chinese letters in the Introduction, and the use of the expression "citizen of the world" to describe Nuño in *Carta LXXX*:

Esta ficción no es tan natural en España, por ser menor el número de los viajeros a quienes atribuir semejante obra. Sería increíble el título de Cartas Persianas, Turcas o Chinescas, escritas de este lado de los Pirineos.⁵

De éstos [i.e. extranjeros] trata Nuño algunos de los que residen en Madrid, y los quiere como a paisanos suyos, pues tales le parecen todos los hombres de bien del mundo, siendo para con ellos un verdadero cosmopolita, o sea ciudadano universal.⁶

Goldsmith is not concerned with theories of government as is Montesquieu in his *Lettres persanes*, but wishes rather to ridicule definite practices and urge specific reform. His subjects are concrete and his thought is not subversive to the existing social order. He offers, therefore, a pattern amenable to Cadalso's purposes who, because of the strict censorship then existing in Spain, could not have touched upon religious or political problems, had he so desired.

But if Goldsmith and Cadalso are fellow citizens of the age of enlightenment, each one has a political nationality which stamps him indelibly. Goldsmith's England was the model

of constitutional liberty for all of Europe, while Spain, on the contrary, was only beginning to emerge from absolutism. While Goldsmith often wishes only to amuse with his satire, Cadalso surveys the structure of society earnestly, he will divert if he must to get attention, but above all he wishes to edify. The literary device of letters, which in Goldsmith is the *raison d'être*, is in Cadalso only a cloak for criticism which he could make in no other way.

The personages of the *Cartas Marruecas* correspond to those of the *Citizen of the World* in number and manner of characterization:

Gazel, Moor travelling in Spain	}	Educated Orientals travelling abroad for profit rather than pleasure.
Lien Chi Altangi, Chinese Doctor travelling in England		
Ben-Beley, African sage	}	Old men who comment on moral questions.
Fum Hoam, Chinese dignitary		
Nuño, educated Spaniard	}	Persons of unusual intelligence, interpreters of native customs to the foreigner; in both cases the true mouthpiece of the author.
Man-in-Black, educated Englishman		

A minor character, Lien's son, is without a counterpart. This limited number is in direct contrast to the *Lettres persanes* into which Montesquieu introduces a great variety of persons.

In *Cartas I* and *II*, Gazel explains to Ben-Beley his desire to remain in Spain that he may come to a more complete understanding of the country. Time will be necessary to observe customs in any but a superficial manner. He has been travelling with the Moroccan ambassador, in whose company he has come into too little contact with the Spanish people.

Letter *I* is a letter of introduction from a Dutch merchant presenting Lien to a London merchant. By frequently conversing with the English in Amsterdam he speaks their language, but is wholly a stranger to their manners and customs. He has come to London to see their science, arts, manufactures and their wealth.

Both Gazel and Lien, therefore, know the language of the country which they are visiting. Each states that only after having observed for some time will it be possible to form a judgment regarding foreign life. Each one addresses his former master in terms of the deepest respect, and gives assurance that the spirit of this master and friend will accompany him in his sojourn abroad. Not only is the conception of the characters alike, but there is a striking verbal resemblance in their mode of address: "O mi venerado maestro,"⁷ "O thou guide of my youth."⁸

Cadalso studies in the third to the tenth letter reasons for Spain's decadence with only one suggestion of Goldsmith's influence. This is found in *Carta IV* in which he

is decrying the soft effeminacy of the age.⁹ Here he coincides with an idea which is expressed in Letter LXXXVII, in which Goldsmith points out the folly of western nations in employing Russian soldiers to fight their battles.¹⁰

Si desembarcasen algunas naciones guerreras y desconocidas en los dos extremos de Europa mandadas por unos héroes de aquellos que produce un clima, cuando otro no da sino hombres medianos, no dudo que se encontrarían en medio de Europa, habiendo atravesado y destruido un hermosísimo país. ¿Qué obstáculos hallarían de parte de sus habitantes? ...¹¹

Except for the term *desconocida*, does not Cadalso's description fit the Russians? The idea that Europe, weakened by luxury and self-indulgence, is in no condition to resist the attack of a hardy nation is similarly expressed. Cadalso accepts it as an axiomatic truth that decadence in nations is a presage of destruction; Goldsmith cites the history of mankind as evidence of the fact.

Cadalso, also in the fourth letter, says:

La mejor fortaleza, la más segura, la única invencible es la que consiste en los corazones de los hombres, no en lo alto de los muros ni en lo profundo de los fosos.¹²

In Letter XXV Goldsmith tells the fable of the Kingdom of Lao, which passed from youthful vigor to power, luxury, effeminacy, decadence and ultimate decay, and in the final paragraph are these words: "Walls give little protection unless manned with resolution."¹³

With the tenth letter, Cadalso leaves subjects belonging exclusively to Spain and satirizes the shameless immorality of the fashionable libertine. He says:

La poligamia entre nosotros está, no sólo autorizada por el gobierno, sino mandada expresamente por la religión. Entre estos europeos la religión la prohíbe; pero casi me atrevo a decir que la tolera la costumbre.¹⁴

Gazel then engages in conversation with one of the *casta nueva*, as he terms them, who asks the Moor how many women he has in his seraglio. On hearing that he has only a dozen white and six black, the *señorito* responds:

Pues, amigo, ... yo sin ser moro, ni tener serrallo ... puedo jurarte, que ... salgo a otras tantas por día como tú tienes por toda tu vida entera y verdadera. ...¹⁵

Compare Goldsmith's letter on the same subject:

Their laws and religion forbid the English to keep more than one woman; I therefore concluded, that prostitutes were banished from society. I was deceived; every man keeps as many wives as he can maintain: the laws are cemented with blood, praised and disregarded. The very Chinese, whose religion allows him two wives, takes not half the liberties of the English in this particular.¹⁶

The similarity of the sequence of ideas is noteworthy: that so-called monogamous Christians are more promiscuous

than men in countries where polygamy is law; that western men fancy themselves in the rôle of masters of large seraglios. Further passages in both letters go to show that the offenders form a set apart, noted for their insolence.

In the twelfth letter of the *Cartas Marruecas* we suspect that the *Citizen of the World* may have served as a point of departure. Cadalso defines hereditary nobility in this manner:

Nobleza hereditaria es la vanidad que yo fundo en que ochocientos años antes de mi nacimiento muriese uno que se llama como yo me llamo, y fué hombre de provecho, aunque yo sea inútil para todo.¹⁷

In Letter XXXII we find the following passage in the course of the description of a sporting nobleman:

The gentleman ... has no claims from his own merit to distinction; he is possessed neither of abilities nor virtue; it is enough for him that one of his ancestors was possessed of these qualities two hundred years before him.¹⁸

Cadalso says in *Carta XVI* that modern nations have not built enough monuments to honor their heroic dead, with an obvious reference to Westminster Abbey. After enumerating Spanish heroes whom they might honor the letter ends as follows:

¡Cuán glorioso proyecto sería el de levantar estatuas, monumentos y columnas a estos varones! Colocarlos en los parajes más públicos de la villa capital con un corto elogio de cada uno, citando la historia de sus hazañas, ¡qué mejor adorno de la corte! ¡Qué estímulo para nuestra juventud, que se criaría desde su niñez a vista de unas cenizas tan venerables! A semejantes ardidés debió Roma en mucha parte el dominio del orbe.¹⁹

Goldsmith's Letter XIII is entitled "An Account of Westminster Abbey." In the midst of Lien's contemplation of this awe-inspiring edifice, he says to the Man-in-Black:

If adulation like this, continued I, be properly conducted as it can no ways injure those who are flattered, so it may be glorious incentive to those who are now capable of enjoying it. It is the duty of every good government to turn this monumental pride to its own advantage: to become strong in the aggregate from the weakness of the individual. If none but the truly great have a place in this awful repository, a temple like this will give the finest lessons of morality, and be a strong incentive to true ambition.²⁰

In Cadalso's *Carta XVIII* and Goldsmith's Letter XLII the underlying idea is the same: filial obedience, one of the fundamental laws of nature from which Europe has deviated, symbol of order in the state and of our relationship with God.

Cadalso and Goldsmith both touch upon marriage problems of the day, but as these were not the same in Spain and England, the only similarity to be found lies in the general topic.²¹