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Joselyn M. Almeida

University of Massachusetts - Amherst, almeidab@english.umass.edu

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Joseph (José) Blanco White's *Bosquexo del comercio en esclavos*: British Abolition, Translation, and the Cosmopolitan Imagination

JOSELYN M. ALMEIDA
University of Massachusetts, Amherst

Writing to Asturian deputy Andrés de La Vega in 1812, Lord Holland, the English Whig politician and a main supporter of Spain's cause, took up the subject of the abolition of the slave trade. During Spain's constitutional convention, the Cortes had abolished the slave trade for a brief time in 1811 before the formidable Cuban planter lobby, led by Francisco Arango y Parreño, pushed for its quick reinstatement.¹ Holland, who was also on the Board of the influential abolitionist African Institution in Britain, encouraged de La Vega to reintroduce the question:²

You are, I am sure, conversant with the arguments against that horrible traffic in human flesh and misery and you must know that the trade, extensive as it is, is carried on by *British* not *Spanish* capital, though under *Spanish* not *British* flags. Thus, in fact, Spain has only the infamy and England the profit (if any thing gained by such atrocities can be called profit) of this ignominious contrivance to perpetuate by the evasion of municipal law a traffic repugnant to the principles of moral justice itself.³

Behind Holland's letter were reports from the Admiralty that the African Institution had received. Naval patrols had captured a number of British ships whose owners had used elaborate schemes involving fake bills of sale, property transfers, and aliases to acquire a Spanish or Portuguese "owner," name, and

1. See Francisco Arango y Parreño, "*Representación de la Ciudad de la Habana a las Cortes, el 20 de Julio de 1811, con motive de las proposiciones hechas por D. José Miguel Guridi Alcocer y D. Agustín de Argüelles, sobre el tráfico y la esclavitud de los negros,*" in *Documentos para la historia de Cuba*, ed. Hortensia Pichardo Viñals (Habana: Editorial Pueblo y Educación, 1973) 1: 240-270; Arthur Corwin, *Spain and the Abolition of Slavery in Cuba, 1817-1866* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1967).

2. The Institution's board included notables such as the Duke of Gloucester, Earl Spencer, the Bishop of London, Lord Holland, Lord Grenville, Henry Brougham, Thomas Clarkson, Zachary Macaulay, Granville Sharp, and William Wilberforce. See also Wayne Ackerson, *The African Institution (1807-1827) and the Anti-slavery Movement in Great Britain* (New York: E. Mellen Press, 2005).

3. Lord Holland to Andrés de la Vega, Holland House, 12 October 1812, in *José María Blanco White: Epistolario y Documentos*, eds. André Pons and Martin Murphy (Oviedo: Instituto Feijoo del Siglo XVIII, 2010), 368.

captain, then buy enslaved people in the African coast, resell them in the Americas, and finally revert the ship to its original owner with impunity.⁴

The “desire to repair the wrongs” that Africans had suffered at the hand of Europeans “to promote their civilization and happiness” drove the larger and more long-term aims of the African Institution and reflected those of the abolitionist movement.⁵ Historians such as David Brion Davis, Hugh Thomas, David Turley and cultural critics such as Moira Ferguson show how Evangelical, Quaker, Methodist, Baptist, and other religious denominations promoted and sustained a culture of antislavery.⁶ At the same time, abolition intersected with the emergence of cosmopolitanism and the consciousness of a growing transnational interconnectivity both within and outside Europe during the Age of Revolutions and the Romantic period.⁷ As philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah writes, cosmopolitanism consists of the idea that “we have obligations to others, obligations that stretch beyond those to whom we are related ... or even the more formal ties of a shared citizenship.”⁸ The cosmopolitan idea of “obligations to others” beyond Britain’s national borders extended to others whether in Africa or Spain. Holland explicitly linked abolition to the public spirit that could sustain the

4. One of the more peculiar cases of this swindle involved the ships *Galicia* and *Palafox*. The committee noted that although the ships were registered to a Don Jorge Madre Silva, who swore before the Admiralty Court he was “a native Spaniard ... one of the ships was ascertained to have cleared out from England, by the name of the *Queen Charlotte* and to be still the property of British merchants ... The other had cleared out from Kingston in Jamaica under the name of *Mohawk*.” Jorge Madre Silva “proved to be an Englishman who had sailed from the river Thames in the *Queen Charlotte*,” and whose name was a translation of George Woodbine, his legal name. This was also the case with Portugal. See African Institution, *Fifth Report of the Committee of the African Institution* (London: 1811), 15-32.

5. African Institution, *Report of the Committee of the African Institution Read to the General Meeting on 15th of July 1807* (London: 1811), 1.

6. See David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); Hugh Thomas, *The Slave Trade: The Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1440-1870* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997); David Turley, *The Culture of English Antislavery, 1780-1860* (New York: Routledge, 1991); Moira Ferguson, *Colonialism and Gender Relations from Mary Wollstonecraft to Jamaica Kincaid: East Caribbean Connections* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) and *The Hart Sisters: Early African Caribbean Writers, Evangelicals and Radicals* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993).

7. Mary Louise Pratt argues for a “planetary consciousness among Europeans” coalescing in the mid 18th century. “Circumnavigation and mapmaking, then, had already given rise to what one might call a European Global or planetary subject ... As Defoe’s terms make clear, this world historical subject is European, male, secular, and lettered; his planetary consciousness is the product of his contact with print culture and infinitely more ‘compleat’ than the lived experience of sailors.” *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2007), 29-30.

8. Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (New York: Norton, 2006), xv.

Anglo-Hispanic alliance against Napoleon, warning de la Vega, “the continuance of the Slave Trade checks the zeal of the Puritans, Methodists, and Sectaries, and many other warm and ardent minds in the cause of Spanish independence and liberty.”⁹ He was not alone in that opinion. Earlier that year, Henry Brougham, who eventually became Lord Chancellor, had made the connection more forcefully in the influential *Edinburgh Review*. Brougham wrote, “Every horror that we have fancied the enemy to enrage all of Europe ... our faithful allies—the friends of Spanish and Portuguese liberty ... are hourly perpetrating in Africa, against the most innocent creatures in the world, without ever exciting one moment’s indignation in Europe.”¹⁰ He called the Anglo-Iberian alliance into question and objected to Britain’s spending “treasure and forces” to defend nations who would oppress others, demanding that pressure be put on Spain and Portugal to abolish the slave trade.

In this heated climate, as Christopher Schmidt-Nowara chronicles, the African Institution in the persons of Holland and William Wilberforce proposed to Joseph (José) Blanco White the “Spanishing” of Wilberforce’s *Letter on the Abolition of the Slave Trade* (1807), which he later published as *Bosquexo del comercio en esclavos* (1814).¹¹ The *Bosquexo* added original essays to frame the translations from Wilberforce and Mungo Park that Blanco had been publishing in the widely circulating *El Español* (1810-1814), and responded to the pro-slavery arguments in Arango’s *Representación de la ciudad de la Habana a las Cortes* (1811).¹² With the exception of seminal essays by André Pons and Manuel Moreno Alonso and recent analysis by Schmidt-Nowara and Almeida, Blanco’s abolitionism has received little attention in the deserved renaissance that this pivotal Romantic-era writer has enjoyed in Spain and North America. Moreno Alonso and Pons have argued for the influence of Lascasian thought in the *Bosquexo*; more recently, Schmidt-Nowara situates Blanco within the history of Spain’s participation in the Atlantic slave trade and other Spanish abolitionists

9. Lord Holland to Andrés de la Vega, Holland House, 12 October 1812, in *José María Blanco White: Epistolario y Documentos*, 369.

10. Henry Brougham, Review of *Sixth Report of the Directors of the African Institution; Read at the Annual General meeting on the 25th of March 1812*, *Edinburgh Review* 20, no. 39 (1812): 60. [58-79]

11. Christopher Schmidt-Nowara, “Wilberforce Spanished: Joseph Blanco White and Spanish Antislavery, 1808-1814,” In *Slavery and Antislavery in Spain’s Atlantic Empire*, ed. Christopher Schmidt-Nowara and Josep M. Fradera (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013), 158-75.

12. Chapters 1-3 in the first part of the *Bosquexo* include most of the material from Wilberforce and Mungo Park.

like his friend Isidoro de Antillón.¹³ He elucidates the *Bosquexo*'s importance in the history of the development of Spanish abolition, concluding "Blanco responded to the overtures of Wilberforce and other British abolitionists by translating the 1807 *Letter* into a Spanish idiom of warfare, captivity, and exile; such a rendering was intensely personal but also potentially forceful for other Spaniards who confronted the French."¹⁴

This nationalist frame elucidates the implications of Blanco's foray into the anti-slavery debate for an incipient Hispanic abolitionist consciousness, a debate that would continue throughout the nineteenth century.¹⁵ My inquiry considers the *Bosquexo* as a pan-Atlantic text that encodes systems of material, political, and cultural relations between Britain, Africa, and the Hispanic world. In this transcultural zone, the *Bosquexo* also can be read in relation to the public sphere of British abolitionism and the Romantic cosmopolitanism that pervaded it. This reading brings into view the imbrication of translation, cosmopolitanism, and the transnational operations of capital in the 1810s at a point when free trade and capital from Atlantic slavery compenetrated one another. As Lydia Liu explains, "The foreign quality (*Fremdheit*) of language describes a shared process of circulation in translation and in economic transaction, which produces meaning as it produces value when a verbal sign is exchanged with something foreign to itself."¹⁶ Translation as a practice was embedded in the symbolic and material transactions that extracted value from the bodies and labor of millions of enslaved Africans¹⁷ at the same time that it legitimized the ideology and operations of British cosmopolitanism in the 1810s.

Liu demonstrates that the translator is in a position to challenge or to uphold the abstraction of "hypothetical equivalence" across languages, one that homogenizes linguistic and historical difference to facilitate economic and

13. For a general overview of Spanish abolition, see also Emily Berquist, "Early Anti-Slavery Sentiment in the Spanish Atlantic World, 1765-1817," *Slavery and Abolition: a Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies*, 31: 2 (2010): 181-205.

14. Schmidt-Nowara, *op.cit.*, 170-71.

15. See Francisco de Solano, ed., *Estudios sobre la abolición de la esclavitud* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1986). Christopher Schmidt-Nowara, *The Conquest of History: Spanish Colonialism and National Histories in the Nineteenth Century* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006); Sherwin K. Bryant, Rachel Sarah O'Toole, and Ben Vinson III, eds., *Africans to Spanish America: Extending the Diaspora* (Urbana: Illinois University Press, 2012).

16. Lydia H. Liu, "The Question of Meaning-Value in the Political Economy of the Sign," in *Tokens of Exchange: The Problem of Translation in Global Circulations*, ed. Lydia H. Liu (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 22

17. See Ian Baucom, *Specters of the Atlantic: Finance Capital, Slavery, and the Philosophy of History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

semiotic exchange.¹⁸ Drawing on this conclusion, I argue that Blanco apprehended how the linguistic operations of translation and cultural appropriation that sustained Britain's cosmopolitan commitments in foreign theaters like Spain and Africa also reproduced the structures of credit and finance that connected Atlantic slavery and free trade. Blanco's *Bosquexo* interrupts the linguistic operations of cosmopolitanism and capital by using translation to shift the imagination from the aesthetic and epistemic registers of British abolitionist discourse to an ontological position that recognizes and insists on the other's separateness from the self as a precondition of ethical mutuality. Using translation paradoxically to point out the untranslatable, Blanco disturbs the illusion of hypothetical equivalence that assumes the other's translatability as a matter of course. Blanco interrogates this assumption by questioning Romantic historicism and its uses of the Spanish past in reading the present, specifically with regard to Las Casas, and probes the limits of the cosmopolitan imagination that sought to make the other familiar through cultural appropriation and / or political advocacy.

These limits can be traced textually at the level of intersemiotic translation, which Blanco recognized when he noted that "the character and style of that composition [Wilberforce's *Letter*] was too little to the Spanish taste," and thus produced an adaptation rather than a straight translation.¹⁹ Moreover, the modifications that Blanco makes to the British archive as a cultural mediator are just as telling as what the *Bosquexo* actually says to his Spanish readers. Although Wilberforce's *Letter* is Blanco's principal source, it is counterbalanced by Mungo Park's *Travels into the Interior Districts of Africa* (1799). By exercising agency as editor and translator, Blanco renders Mungo Park as a denaturalized Briton to enact alterity through translation—that is, in the scene of cultural mediation not only does one experience the positions of self and other anchored in nation and history, but also the space of untranslatability, from which the self is experienced as the other, as the stranger. From this standpoint, Blanco's "Spanishing" of Wilberforce performs an interruption that exposes the limits of Romantic cosmopolitanism as an abetter of Britain's interventionist program even as he attempts to create a space for the imagination that can conceive of mutuality because of that which cannot be translated, the "kernel of the original text," which according to Jacques Derrida, "is untouchable by the translation, and this untouchable something is the sacred."²⁰

18. Liu, *op.cit.*, 37.

19. Blanco White quoted in Manuel Moreno Alonso, *Divina libertad: la aventura liberal de Don José María Blanco White, 1808-1824* (Sevilla: Ediciones Alfar, 2002), 208.

20. Jacques Derrida, *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation*, ed. Christie V. McDonald, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Schocken Books, 1985), 115.

Refusing Hypothetical Equivalence: The Case of Las Casas as Type

Notwithstanding the productive connections Pons and Moreno Alonso draw between Blanco's abolitionism and Las Casas, to fully situate Blanco in line with Las Casas needs to further account for the signification Las Casas carried in the abolitionist public sphere within the larger field of pan-Atlantic translations and appropriations of Hispanic culture in Britain in the 1800s. Blanco's own omission of Las Casas from the *Bosquexo* —remarkably the name does not appear once— furthermore problematizes the claim to a direct genealogy. This absence is all the more striking given that Manuel Quintana, Blanco's longtime friend, included Las Casas in his *Vidas de españoles célebres* (1807), in which he remarked on the bishop's cosmopolitan signification: "Recommended by history, praised by eloquence, [Las Casas's] name no longer belongs particularly to Spain ... but to America ... and to the world, who respects and admires him as a paragon of zeal, humanity, and virtue" (*Recomendado por la historia, preconizado por la elocuencia, su nombre ya no pertenece precisa y peculiarmente a la España ... sino a la América ... y al mundo todo que le respeta y admira como un dechado de celo, de humanidad y de virtudes*).²¹ Blanco's decision to leave out Las Casas certainly might be read as strategic in light of Arango's invocation of Las Casas to the Corte in the *Representación de la Ciudad de la Habana*, "the fruitless piety of Father Bartolomé de Las Casas brought us blacks" (*La piedad inconsecuente del P. Fr. Bartolomé de las Casas nos introdujo los negros*).²² In terms of the British abolitionist public sphere, however, Blanco's omission of Las Casas refuses to establish a symbolic equivalence between the historical Las Casas and the "new Las Casas of a ruined race," as poet James Montgomery styled William Wilberforce in his anti-slavery poem, *The West Indies* (1808).²³ The omission also

21. Manuel Josef Quintana, *Vidas de españoles célebres* (Madrid: Imprenta Real, 1807; Madrid: Imprenta de D.M. de Burgos, 1833) 3: 433. As Martin Murphy notes, when Blanco began publishing *El Español*, Quintana wrote to Lord Holland and delivered "a devastating rebuke from a man who had been Blanco's intimate confidant and protector." *Blanco-White: Self-Banished Spaniard* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 67. Quintana also inspired one of Blanco's most revealing poems, "Elegía a Quintana," where he writes about his failed love. Antonio Garnica Silva and Jesús Díaz write, "With this and other poems of this period [1806-1809], Blanco adumbrates the beginnings of Romantic poetry in Spain (a detailed comparison between passages in 'Elegía a Quintana' and Espronceda's 'El canto del cosaco' reveals how Blanco was already a social and literary revolutionary)." See José M. Blanco White, *Obra poética completa*, eds. Antonio Garnica Silva and Jesús Díaz García (Madrid: Visor, 1994), 212. Their friendship survived the breach.

22. Arango y Parreño, *op.cit.*, 240

23. James Montgomery, *The West Indies and Other Poems on the Abolition of the Slave Trade* (New York: Prior & Dunning, 1810), 4.136. Montgomery acknowledged the "many obligations to Mr. Wilberforce's eloquent Letter on the Abolition of the Slave Trade, addressed to the freeholders of Yorkshire, and published in 1807, previous to the decision of the question" before

points Blanco's preoccupation with how speculation with regard to history and commerce compromised—or as he put it—“infested” the imagination.²⁴

For if Africa was a site for commercial speculation, Blanco saw how Spain became a locus for British cultural speculation. From 1807-1815, British writers such as Robert Southey, Walter Scott, Felicia Hemans, and Lord Byron translated and appropriated Hispanic culture en masse to produce what Diego Saglia calls “the Spanish text,” and to a greater or lesser degree, vestiges of the *leyenda negra* reappeared in their work.²⁵ Yet the British Romantic transculturation of Hispanic material in Britain arguably began decades earlier, launched by Scottish historian William Robertson in his acclaimed *History of America* (1777). The strain of “chivalric romance” which Barbara Fuchs observes with regard to sixteenth century *cronistas* was not lost on later British interpreters of Hispanoamerican history, including Robertson.²⁶ Edmund Burke found that Robertson's *History*, “represents splendid, romantic, and poetical scenes. All the marvelous of ancient fable, excepting when it departs from nature and reason, is here realized or exceeded” (214). For Romantic era British authors and their readers, historical actors like Las Casas (and Columbus, Cortés, Pizarro, Montezuma, and Atahualpa) traversed the boundary that separated history from story into the terrain of romance and Spanish from English culture.²⁷ Alongside histories, plays such as Richard Sheridan's extraordinarily popular *Pizarro*, narrative poems like Helen Maria Williams's *Peru*, Robert Southey's *Madoc*, and Samuel Rogers's *The Voyage of Columbus* parlayed British fascination with

defending Las Casas by translating part of the Abbé Gregoire's defense. Montgomery, *West Indies*, 46.

24. “*Pero no concluyamos con calculos tan odiosos, ni dexemos infestada la imaginación de nuestros lectores y la nuestra con los abominables regateos de la insensibilidad y la avaricia.*” Joseph (José) Blanco White, *Bosquexo del comercio en esclavos y reflexiones sobre este tráfico considerado moral, política, y cristianamente* (Londres: Ellerton y Henderson, 1814), 142.

25. Saglia writes, “On the one hand, the liberal revolt and its aftermath renewed the interest in Spain and the Spanish text as an arena for paramount contemporary issues such as revolt and revolution, the status of Britain as a world-power, liberalism and constitutional movements in southern Europe, or free trade and the British empire. On the other hand, the overwhelming presence of Spanish materials opened a space for narratives debating such notions as domesticity, the public sphere, feminism, heroic subjectivity, individual agency in history, or national culture in relation to other cultures.” *Poetic Castles in Spain: British Romanticism and Figurations of Iberia* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), 32.

26. Fuchs writes, “In the New World, Spanish conquerors resorted to chivalric romance as they searched for a way to describe the marvelous sights that they encountered.” *Romance* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 81.

27. For a discussion of Robertson's romantic historicism, see Almeida, “British Romanticism and Latin America 1: Shock and Awe in the New World,” *Literature Compass* 7 (2010): 713-730. doi: 10.1111/j.1741-4113.2010.00732.x; see also Stuart J. Brown, ed., *William Robertson and the Expansion of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

Spain's past into a creative, yet speculative historicism. As Ian Baucom shows, aesthetic speculation developed in tandem with finance capital; he defines speculation as "that procedure by which value detaches itself from the life of things and rearticulates itself in the novelistic theater of the typicalizing imagination."²⁸ When Baucom's insight is applied to translation, we find that the speculative, "typicalizing imagination" exponentially elevates hypothetical equivalence between words from different languages through the creation of cultural types. The signifying function of the translated "type" in the target culture thus depends on the dissemblance of the relations that generate meaning in the source culture to the point of vanishing.²⁹

Las Casas became such a type. His indeterminate status between history and literature allowed on the one hand for his inscription into a kind of abolitionist gesture within the sphere of public debate, and on the other, into a figure of speculative history in literary works used as a vehicle to explore the "what ifs" of historicized fictions about the destruction of the Americas. In Britain, he perhaps signified more through what was written about him and was as polarizing there as he later would be in Spanish and Cuban historiography.³⁰ During the years leading up to the Peninsular War / *Guerra de Independencia*, Las Casas embodied Britain's pan-Atlantic preoccupation with slavery and Spain's empire in the Americas, and dramatized the tension of the uses of the Spanish past to read Britain's present. Abolitionists and planters alike claimed him as a founding voice that lent their positions the legitimacy of history through the question of the degree of responsibility Las Casas bore in establishing African slavery. Robertson's severe judgment, "While [Las Casas] contended earnestly for the liberty of the people born in one quarter of the globe, he labored to enslave the inhabitants of another region; and in the warmth of his zeal to save the Americans from the yoke, pronounced it to be lawful and expedient to impose one still heavier upon the Africans," provoked letters, debates, and defenses, such as

28. Baucom, *op.cit.*, 106.

29. The relationship of signification between translation and original referent shares a kinship between metaphor and language, which Derrida analyzes in "White Mythology." He writes, "Abstract notions always hide a sensory figure. And the history of metaphysical language is said to be confused with the erasure of the efficacy of the sensory figure and the *usure* of its effigy. The word itself is not pronounced, but one may decipher the double import of usure: erasure by rubbing, exhaustion, crumbling away, certainly; but also the supplementary product of a capital, the exchange which far from losing the original investment would fructify its initial wealth, would increase its return in the form of revenue, additional interest, linguistic surplus value, the two histories of the meaning of a word remaining indistinguishable." See Derrida, "White Mythology," in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 210.

30. For an analysis about Las Casas and Spanish historiography, see Schmidt-Nowara, *The Conquest of History*, *op.cit.*, 130-60; for Las Casas as controversial figure today, see Castro, *op.cit.*

the Abbé Gregoire's *A Defence of Bartholomew Las Casas, Bishop of Chiapa: by Henry Grégoire, Ex Bishop of Blois, Senator of France* (1802).³¹ Yet as Arango's *Representación* showed, planters were quick to seize Robertson's interpretation.³²

Despite the controversy, British abolitionists claimed Las Casas as a symbol of moral and legal authority early on. Thomas Clarkson, in his *An Essay on the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species* (1786), set the tone of a characterization that would recur throughout the period:

This amiable man, during his residence in Spanish America, was so sensibly affected at the treatment which the miserable Indians underwent, that he returned to Spain, to make a public remonstrance before the celebrated emperor Charles the fifth, declaring, that heaven would one day call on him to account for those cruelties which he then had in his power to prevent" (vi).

The repeated invocation of Las Casas in connection with the abolitionist cause made him synonymous with humanitarian cosmopolitanism; in effect, abolitionists turned the invocation of Las Casas into a gesture that legitimized cultural appropriation in the service of benevolent intervention. He became a trans-historical figure who signified a hypothetical equivalence between catastrophic historical events—the destruction of Amerindian civilizations and Atlantic slavery—and legitimized the universal claims of the British argument for the abolition of the trade. This gestural shorthand even appeared in the charter of the African Institution: “While the Aborigines of the West Indies were sinking under the oppression of the Spaniards, they were described by those adventurers as cannibals ... [until the court] was disabused, when too late, by the humane efforts of Las Casas. The African is also oppressed in the new world, and vilified in the old.”³³ By analogy, abolitionists were to King George and Las Cortes what Las Casas had been to Charles V.

As a type in Romantic literature, Las Casas served as a figure for a cosmopolitan humanitarianism predicated on speculative history. Two notable “what ifs” exemplify such speculative history in Helen Maria Williams' *Peru*

31. William Robertson, *History of America*, 10th ed. (London: A. Strahan, 1803), 1: 319.

32. The planters adopted only one side of Robertson's argument, since the historian's position on slavery and even Las Casas was conflicted; see Neil Hargraves, “Enterprise, Adventure and Industry: The Formation of ‘Commercial Character’ in William Robertson's *History of America*,” *History of European Ideas* 29.1 (2003): 33-54; Joselyn M. Almeida, *Reimagining the Transatlantic, 1780-1890* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2011), 19-32.

33. African Institution, *Report ... 15th of July 1807*, 19.

(1784) and Sheridan's box-office sensation *Pizarro* (1799).³⁴ In *Peru*, Williams recreates the demise of the Incan empire through an epic romance that fragments the historical narrative and speculatively portrays Las Casas as an anachronistic "Pitying Angel."³⁵ He repeatedly enters the action as a *deus ex machina* to rescue Amerindians from torture or danger in scenes of pathos that reiterate the *leyenda negra*. Toward the middle of the poem, Valverde, Pizarro's chaplain, is torturing an Inca priest to force him to convert to Christianity in front of his daughter Zilia, whose fiancé has just been killed by the Spanish. Williams graphically details the pain of the unnamed Inca priest as he refuses to convert, "And now with rugged cords his limbs they bound, / And drag the aged Suff'rer on the ground."³⁶ Las Casas arrives just before the moment of his death, "With eager steps he flew, with trembling hands / Broke the strong fetters, burst the iron bands."³⁷ The tortured Inca priest becomes the background to a speech in which Las Casas challenges Valverde and indicts the Inquisition. The juxtaposition between the anonymous, silent Inca priest and the named and speaking Las Casas undercuts Williams's attempt to get her audience to identify with the Peruvian man. In these and other scenes, he becomes a figure for foregrounding benign, Christian intervention against the background of the indigenous and at the cost of Amerindian lives.

Like Williams, Sheridan also places Las Casas in Peru, giving him a pivotal role in establishing the conflict of the play between Pizarro and his former pupil Alonzo, who after hearing the ecclesiastic's denunciations, abandons the Spanish camp to become an ally of the Incan prince Rolla and marry a Peruvian woman; in the words of Pizarro, "to forego his country's claims for those of human nature."³⁸ Las Casas articulates a cosmopolitan ethos when he accuses Pizarro of violating the reciprocity of hospitality: "Generously and freely did they share with you their comforts, their treasures, and heir homes: you repaid them by fraud, oppression, and dishonour. These eyes have witnessed all I speak—as gods you were received; as fiends you have acted."³⁹ Yet the moral indignation that this fictional Las Casas unleashes on Pizarro, Almagro, and Valverde, "I curse your purpose, homicides!" remains at the level of Ciceronian invective after he

34. Robertson's *History of America* had a marked influence in these and other literary works, the most iconic being John Keats's sonnet "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer" (1816). In the Advertisement to *Peru*, Williams contrasts the episodic nature of her work with "a full, historical narration of the fall of the Peruvian empire," thus alluding to Robertson.

35. Helen Maria Williams, *Peru* (London: T. Cadell, 1784), 2: 486-7.

36. *Ibid.*, 3: 471-2.

37. *Ibid.*, 3: 507-8.

38. Richard Sheridan, *Pizarro*, in *The Dramatic Works of Richard Sheridan*, ed. Cecil Price (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975) 407.

39. *Ibid.*, 408.

decides to leave the Spanish camp in Act I to live in caves, exiting while declaring a refusal to see, “No longer shall these aged eyes be seared by the horrors they have witnessed.”⁴⁰ Although in these and other texts Las Casas provides an entry point for the identification of the cosmopolitan humanitarian with the history of the non-Europeans, the speculative deployment of his agency—the “what if” element in these texts—underscores the artificiality of the representation of violence against them. Rather than a witness against atrocity, Las Casas as type stands in for the inoculated viewer who looks but then safely retreats from the scene of violence.

Vision, Imagination, Action

That Blanco apprehended how the translation of types could anesthetize the imagination against the suffering of others even while it engaged the mind’s speculative faculty helps to account for his omission of Las Casas and his larger disavowal of literariness and “*artificio oratorio*” in the introduction to the *Bosquexo*. “*La presente está lejos de ser una obra literaria,*” he tells readers, underlining “*lo inculto y desaliñado de su estilo*”.⁴¹ This gesture might be read as rhetorical artifice were it not for Blanco’s placement of the reader as an agent in the vexed triangle between vision, speculation, and imagination throughout the text. From the outset of the *Bosquexo*, Blanco disturbed the safe distance that speculation as historical spectacle or as investment promised by focusing the reader’s attention in their confluence through a linguistic double take. He wrote, “*Los habitantes Negros de Africa han sido mirados por los Europeos como objeto de una especulación muy lucrativa*”. Through the verb “*mirar,*” Blanco established a link between the objectification of Africans as an activity that Europeans willingly undertook for financial gain and the gaze of the spectator who looks, but like Sheridan’s Las Casas, refused to witness. He pushed his reader to consider the implications of vision and the conditions of seeing, which for Blanco shed light not only on the inhumanity of the slave trade, but also “the abyss of error and depravity of which the understanding and the human heart are capable” (*el abysmo de error y depravación de que el entendimiento y corazón humano son capaces*).⁴² These stark extremes of “error and depravity” certainly troubled Blanco, but he was perhaps more troubled by the anxiety that “compassionate sensibility” (*la sensibilidad compasiva*) would atrophy through a repeated exposure to “painful scenes”: “Faced with the necessity of seeing painful scenes, a man of the highest sensibility, if not overwhelmed by them, will eventually view them with indifference” (*Póngase al hombre más sensible en*

40. Ibid., 409.

41. Blanco White, *Bosquexo*, *op.cit.*, “Advertencia.”

42. *ibid.*, 70.

*necesidad de ver escenas dolorosas, y si la fuerza de la impresión no lo abruma; pronto llegará, cuando menos, a verlas con indiferencia).*⁴³

Blanco shared the Romantic era preoccupation with the role of the imagination in creating what Adam Smith called moral sentiments. “In Smith’s vision, imagination is at the core of the socialised sentiments and moral judgments that help lead a cohesive society.”⁴⁴ Atlantic slavery in all its facets, as James G. Basker, Debbie Lee, Alan Richardson, Timothy Morton, Paul Youngquist, and others have argued, gave rise to the genre of abolitionist poetry and inflected theories of imagination and feeling.⁴⁵ Robert Southey and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who became Blanco’s friend and correspondent, had both been outspoken in favor of abolition during the 1790s. Coleridge had delivered an anti-slavery lecture in Bristol, excoriating Britons who consumed products that depended on exploitation in India and Africa such as “gold, diamonds, silks, muslins & calicoes for fine Ladies and Prostitutes, Tea to make a pernicious Beverage, Porcelain to drink it from, and salt-petre for the making of gunpowder with which we may murder the poor inhabitants who supply all these things.”⁴⁶ He is credited with coining the word “alterity” to explain the emergence of an ethical relationship between self and the other. Lee explains, “He [Coleridge] opposes ‘selfness and identity’ to ‘otherness and alterity’ whose ‘synthesis’ is the community of the spirit.”⁴⁷ Like other Romantic authors, Coleridge held the imagination to be the faculty that could unite the “understanding” with “the heart” and lead to ethical action. Although Blanco ultimately subscribed to this view in the *Bosquexo*, he remained on guard against the tendency to establish a hypothetical equivalence between language and the imagination’s objects. The vast scale of Atlantic slavery, the system of terrorizing and sadistic violence that upheld it, and the fate of Africans forced to make the middle passage and condemned to plantation life in the Americas caused Blanco to question the transparent reciprocity between feeling, the imagination and its object, and the immediacy of understanding that it could provide. While Blanco believed with Coleridge that the imagination “is put into action by the will and the

43. *ibid.*, *Bosquexo*, 58.

44. Richard Bronk, *The Romantic Economist: Imagination in Economics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) 59.

45. See James G. Basker, *Amazing Grace: an Anthology of Poems about Slavery* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005); Alan Richardson and Debbie Lee, eds., *Early Black British Writing* (Boston: Wadsworth Publishing, 2005); Timothy Morton, *The Poetics of Spice: Romantic Consumerism and the Exotic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

46. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “Lecture Six,” in *British Romantic Literature, 1780-1890*, eds. Ann K. Mellor and Richard E. Matlak (Boston: Heinle & Heinle, 1996), 689.

47. Debbie Lee, *Slavery and the Romantic Imagination* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 36.

understanding” of the reader,⁴⁸ he diverged from him in suggesting that the imagination could fail. Without the conscious decision to redress the imagination’s failures, a person faced with the horrors of Atlantic slavery was at risk of losing “all human feeling to the point expressed in a true and philosophical Spanish expression, *to make one’s soul regress*” (*todos los sentimientos de humanidad hasta tal punto que la lengua castellana lo expresa con la verdadera y filosófica expresión de, echarse el alma atrás*).⁴⁹

Blanco staged the powerlessness and vulnerability of the imagination before the horrors of Atlantic slavery to reproduce the affective space in which suffering is incommensurable with language and thus with translation. This paradox—to represent the weakness of the imagination to substantiate the suffering of the other—represents in Derrida’s terms the thing that “translation cannot touch” and remains outside the text, that is, the ontological fact of the other’s being, one as sacred as the self. Early in the *Bosquexo*, Blanco writes, “the imagination scarcely can encompass this immense catalogue of misery and crime” (*la imaginación apenas puede abarcar tan inmenso cúmulo de infelicidad y de crímenes*).⁵⁰ The “immense” scale of Atlantic Slavery triggers a crisis, which Blanco registers as a sense of disorientation in the imagination’s failure to “encompass” [*abarcar*], a verb which in Spanish has the added sense of perceiving a space through sight. The unseeing imagination then cannot begin to perform its functions, what Coleridge describes as the “reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities: of sameness, with difference; of the general, with the concrete; the idea, with the image ... a more than usual state of emotion, with a more than usual order; judgment ever awake and steady self-possession, with enthusiasm and feeling profound or vehement.”⁵¹ For Blanco, the magnitude of “misery” and “crime” exceeds even the “more than usual state of emotion” that Coleridge identifies, and threatens “judgment ever awake.”

As the *Bosquexo* progresses, disorientation gives way to fear. Blanco writes of the fate of Africans who were captured and sold into slavery:

Eighty thousand human beings torn from their country, deprived of their parents, children, and siblings, and transported to a remote region, without the hope of returning to the country where they were born; and they, their children, and the children of their children are destined to work all their lives at the behest and for the profit of another man for generations! If they

48. Coleridge, “Biographia Literaria,” in Mellor and Matlak, *op.cit.*, 753.

49. Blanco White, *Bosquexo*, *op.cit.*, 59.

50. *ibid.*, 15.

51. Coleridge, “Biographia Literaria,” in Mellor and Matlak, *op.cit.*, 753.

have the same feelings, and do not belong to another species, if they think and feel like Europeans, they present a scene of suffering and misery that strikes the imagination with dread.⁵²

The “discordant qualities” of this scene cannot be reconciled. As Baucom writes, “Indeed, what we know of the trans-Atlantic slave trade is that among the other violences it inflicted on millions of human beings was the violence of becoming a type: a type of person, or terribly, not even that, a type of nonperson, a type of property, a type of commodity, a type of money.”⁵³ Blanco registers this violence in the juxtaposition of “eighty thousand” and “human beings” who suffer the violent separation from all familial relationships that define the self, which Schmidt-Nowara discusses in terms of the “language of exile.” Yet this is not the only thing “that strikes the imagination with dread.” Blanco deconstructs the hypothetical equivalence between “profit” as a sign that stands for wealth; instead, it signifies the disappeared personhood and labor of the “type of nonperson” that the enslaved become. He exclaims in despair, “Would it please Heaven that the we could be consoled by suspecting exaggeration in the circumstances of these cases! But in vain does the horrified imagination seek it” (*Pluguiera al cielo que nos quedase el alivio de sospechar exageración en las circunstancias de estos casos! Pero en vano lo busca la imaginación horrorizada*).⁵⁴

Blanco does not turn his eyes away, but instead models for the reader the conscious and willful reconstruction of the imagination’s vision and encounter with the people who suffer the atrocities of the slave trade. Towards the end of the *Bosquexo*, he writes, “The imagination will lose them out of sight unless she is supported by a repeated effort of the memory; but this effort is indispensable so that reason is not confounded by the sophisms and artifices of the traffickers in human flesh” (*La imaginación los pierde de vista al no estar sostenida por un esfuerzo repetido de la memoria; pero este esfuerzo es indispensable para que la razón no se confunda con los sofismas y artificios de los traficantes de carne humana*).⁵⁵ Blanco enacts the imagination’s foundering to dramatize how there can be no hypothetical equivalence for suffering; it remains outside the realm of

52. “Ochenta mil criaturas humanas arrancadas de su tierra, privadas de sus padres, hijos, y hermanos, y transportados a una region remota, sin esperanza de volver al pays donde nacieron, y destinadas a trabajar toda su vida a discrecion, y en provecho de otro, ellas, y sus hijos y los hijos de sus hijos para siempre! Si hay en ellas semejante a lo que nosotros sentimos: si no pertenecen a otra especie, si sienten y piensan como los Europeos; presentan un cuadro de dolor y miseria de que la imaginación se atemoriza.” Blanco White, *Bosquexo*, *op.cit.*, 22.

53. Baucom, *op.cit.*, 11.

54. Blanco White, *Bosquexo*, *op.cit.*, 64.

55. *ibid.*, 72.

language, and thus outside the realm of translatability. Yet just as importantly he underscores how the “repeated effort” to “support” the imagination and reconstruct the suffering of the other is fundamental to a relation of ethical alterity. In framing the section on the capture of people and the middle passage, Blanco modifies the tone of Wilberforce’s encapsulation of the achievements of British abolitionists to 1807. Wilberforce wrote, “Happily, the friends of these wretched beings have, at length, obtained the recognition of their human nature,” which Blanco translates as “*Ya por lo menos hemos ganado una victoria en favor de estas infelices criaturas: hemos hecho que se reconozcan por individuos de la naturaleza humana.*”⁵⁶ The mutuality of the human heightens for Blanco the stakes of vision, and he departs from Wilberforce’s text to return to the necessity of the imagination’s conscious engagement:

Yet far from this [recognition] serving as some relief for those readers with sensibility who might read this painful history, it will only serve henceforth to intensify the grief that awaits them, when they see that those rational creatures, those men, women and children, with whom they share the bonds of an undeniable human kinship are victims of a cruelty that would horrify them if they heard that it had been unleashed on animals.⁵⁷

Seeing through the imagination counters speculative looking because it affirms the responsibility towards the human in the act of witnessing “*esta dolorosa historia.*” As Lee shows, Emmanuel Levinas places “the suffering of compassion, suffering because the other suffers,” at the core of “what constitutes the ethical relationship between self and other.”⁵⁸ For Blanco, the reader that continues the story must make the conscious choice to take up the suffering of the other (“*la congoxa*”) in a mutual recognition of humanity. Not making it amounts to becoming complicit in the collective abandonment of the moral imagination and in the unjust violence that this choice perpetuates; and to willingly enter into the speculative economy of endless equivalence, in which by accepting that others are “a type of nonperson,” one too becomes a cipher. As Blanco warned his readers, in such a system “not only black Africans, but also the most cultured

56. Wilberforce, *A Letter on the Abolition of the Slave Trade; addressed to the Freeholders and other inhabitants of Yorkshire* (London: Cadell and Davies, 1807) , 287; Blanco White, *Bosquexo*, *op.cit.*, 47.

57. “*Mas, lexos que esto pueda servir de algún alivio a la imaginación de las personas sensibles que leyeren esta dolorosa historia; solo podrá servir de aquí adelante de agravar la congoxa que les espera, al ver que esas criaturas racionales, esos hombres, mujeres y niños, con quienes un innegable parentezco de humanidad nos enlaza; son víctimas de una crueldad que las estremecería si las oyeran referir como executada en bestias.*” Blanco White, *Bosquexo*, *op.cit.*, 47.

58. Lee, *op.cit.*, 40-41.

inhabitants in Europe, would face the fate blacks suffer, were it not for the defense of military forces” (*no ya los Negros de Africa, sino los habitantes más cultos de Europa, estarían expuestos a la suerte que sufren los Negros, a no ser porque fuerzas militares los defienden*).⁵⁹

Against Type: Translating Mungo Park

Blanco changes the conditions of seeing by upsetting the expectation of hypothetical equivalence between languages and cultures. He guards against type by somatizing the resonances between translation as linguistic passage and the experience of the middle passage, a physicalization that, as I have argued elsewhere, he expresses through the modern response of nausea.⁶⁰ Translation naturalizes the foreign at the same time that it denaturalizes the familiar through its contact with the other; thus for Blanco, translation encodes the permeable interchangeability between the positions of subject / object, self / other, familiar / foreign. In the *Bosquexo*, Blanco constructs Mungo Park as a denaturalized Briton to dramatize this process. Park appears as a figure dislocated from British and European culture, whose narrative acquires meaning because of his specific encounters with Africans. “The entry points to cross cultural conversations are things are shared by those who are in the conversation,” writes Appiah. “They do not need to be universal; all they need is what these particular people have in common.”⁶¹ Blanco heightens this sense of specificity in Park’s narrative by fragmenting the totalizing effect of the narrative, a text that has been read as part of the grand *récit* of colonizing epistemology.⁶² Through his agency as translator and editor, Blanco chooses episodes to produce a narrative in which, from the African point of view, the denaturalized Park repeatedly experiences the failure of hypothetical equivalence of cultural types, and in so doing, finds ethical mutuality.⁶³ Through Park, Blanco shows how ethical mutuality depends on the protection given the denaturalized stranger regardless of his untranslatability. Africans treat Park ethically not because he is like them—he is very clearly not—

59. Blanco White, *Bosquexo*, *op.cit.*, 87-88.

60. Almeida, *Reimagining*, *op.cit.*, 109-22.

61. Appiah, *op.cit.*, 97.

62. As Lee reminds us, critics and historians writing today catalogue “Mungo Park and his exploration of Africa ... in the same light as African slavery, as a shameful legacy” (*op.cit.*, 25). Blanco reproduces some of the extracts from Park that Wilberforce originally includes, but he also selects some independently.

63. Mungo Park, as Scott Juengel argues, “discovers that the venture of a white man in Africa is not simply a matter of navigating conspicuous difference; rather, it is an exercise in self forgetting, wherein the improvisations of encounter require, and even compel, a betrayal of identity that is, finally, no betrayal at all.” Juengel, “Mungo Park’s Artificial Skin,” *Eighteenth Century: Theory And Interpretation* 47, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 34.

but because of their recognition of shared difference as an ontological human truth.

Blanco begins to denaturalize Park in a counterintuitive move, linking the *Travels* to Bryan Edwards, one of the foremost leaders of the pro-planter lobby in Britain, whose *History Civil and Commercial of the British West Indies* (1793) had brought him fame among the literati. Blanco notes at the beginning, “Park depended on one of the most violent opponents of the abolition of the slave trade, and his voyages are edited by the very same” (*Mungo Parke dependía de uno de los mas violentos contrarios de la abolición del tráfico Negro, y sus viages están redactados por ese su protector*).⁶⁴ Blanco had read Park’s account, where the explorer clarified that he was publishing it “by direction of my noble and honourable employers, the Members of the African Association.”⁶⁵ Edwards is one of the several people Park credited with assistance, the others being Joseph Banks, the influential naturalist and prime mover behind the Association, and a Major James Rennell, who helped him with maps. Yet Blanco was right in pointing to Edwards’ heavy hand in the editing of the *Travels*. “Banks recruited Bryan Edwards ... to supervise the first time author. Edwards edited Park’s text to ensure it was ‘interesting and entertaining’ and had Banks ‘cast his eye’ over each chapter to final approval.”⁶⁶ In underscoring Edwards’ editorial role, Blanco foregrounded Park as an unlikely witness for abolitionists, and anticipated post-colonial readings of Park’s voyage as a venture of with ties to Britain’s own “infamy” in Africa.

No “Pitying Angel,” Park instead was an odd kind of amanuensis of empire from Blanco’s viewpoint, “of whom it is necessary to say that he was not disposed to exaggerate the deleterious effects of the slave trade” (*de quien es preciso decir que no se hallaba dispuesto a exagerar los malos efectos del comercio en esclavos*).⁶⁷ Blanco elaborated Park, or “Parke,” in contrast to Las Casas, who for abolitionists had become a figure of speculative history, to impress the contemporaneity of Africans to his Spanish readers. In presenting Africans as coeval, Blanco dismantled the temporal frames used to argue the separateness of European and African realities. Instead, he showed them as interrelated through his selections from Park, whom he calls “unfortunate” (*el desgraciado*).⁶⁸ African

64. Blanco White, *Bosquexo*, *op.cit.*, 6.

65. Mungo Park, *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa* (London: W. Bulmer & Co., 1799; New York: Arno Press, 1971), “Preface,” vii. Citations refer to the Arno Press edition.

66. Tim Fulford and Debbie Lee, “Mental Travelers: Joseph Banks, Mungo Park, and the Romantic Imagination,” *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 24, no. 2 (June 2002): 128.

67. Blanco White, *Bosquexo*, *op.cit.*, 6.

68. *ibid.*, 48.

women care for a destitute Park, men invite him to their villages, and slave traders make him part of their caravans. Park interacts in contexts that are not culturally or linguistically recognizable as European. While this isolation can be read phenotypically in terms of Park's race, as Scott Juengel argues, translation brings into view the semiotic and cultural alienation that Park experiences. Even as he attempts to translate African culture for European readers, in Blanco's treatment Park is the untranslatable figure, the absolute other.⁶⁹ The point is brought home when newly enslaved Africans, who travel with Park in Karfa's caravan, question him:

They were all very inquisitive; but they viewed me at first with looks of horror, and repeatedly asked if my countrymen were cannibals. They were very desirous to know what became of the slaves after they had crossed the salt water. I told them that they were employed in cultivating the land; but they would not believe me; and on of them putting his hand upon the ground, said with great simplicity, "have you really got such ground as this, to set your feet upon?"⁷⁰

The captives' subversion of the categories of civilized and savage identifies the European with cannibalism in a moment that recalls Olaudah Equiano's *Interesting Narrative*.⁷¹ Park's denaturalized presence, which the African signals by touching the earth to verify whether Park, and by extension Europeans, have a location and a connection to the earth, marks him as alien and potentially monstrous. Despite Park's efforts to reassure the enslaved people who become his

69. Juengel elaborates this argument through the trope of spectrality. Speaking about the episode of the blacksmith's homecoming, he writes, "That Park was on the one hand, unsolicited and thus unseen, throughout the long preliminaries of the blacksmith's report suggests how whiteness has become a spectral trope, unacknowledged without the narratives that produce it (in this case quite literally) ... Flickering thus between blindness and insight, absence and appearance, Park's whiteness becomes the source of great 'uneasiness' and suspicion, recalling the phantasmic Houghton." Juengel, *op.cit.*, 28.

70. Mungo Park, *op.cit.*, 319. Blanco translates the passage as follows: "*Todos manifestaban gran curiosidad (dice Parke) acerca de su suerte; pero al principio me miraban con horror y me preguntaban repetidas veces si mis paysanos comían carne humana. Estaban ansiosos de saber que se hacía de los esclavos que pasaban el agua salada [sic]. Yo les dije que se empleaban en cultivar la tierra; pero no querían creerme; y uno de ellos tocando el suelo con la mano, dixo con gran sencillez, ¿es posible que tengais por allá un terreno como éste que pisar?*" Bosquexo, *op.cit.*, 48-49.

71. Equiano writes of his arrival at the slave ship. "I found some black people about me, who I believed were some of those who brought me on board, and had been receiving their pay ... I asked them if we were not to be eaten by those white men with horrible looks, red faces, and long hair?" *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*, ed. Vincent Carretta (New York: Penguin Books), 55.

fellow travellers, he is unable to establish a meaningful correspondence between their experience and what he describes. The Africans' collective skepticism of Park, which Blanco sharpens by changing "would" to "*querer*," rendering "would not believe me" as "*no querían creerme*"—a choice that affirms their volition—suspends the transaction of semiotic exchange involved in translation. Blanco also italicizes the Africans' use of *agua salada* for ocean, an emphasis that conveys how their skepticism of Park is bound with the anticipation of the suffering that awaits.

Park unselfconsciously confirms that the Africans are right in their refusal to believe him at the end of the journey. Although he protests that "I could not part with my unfortunate fellow-travellers ... without great emotion," he grants that they are "doomed, as I knew most of them to be, to a life of captivity and slavery in a foreign land,"⁷² contradicting his earlier characterization of the enslaved Africans' fate as "employed in cultivating the land." In spite of the horror that Park caused and their correct suspicion of his untranslatability, "these poor slaves, amidst their own infinitely greater sufferings, would commiserate mine; and frequently, of their own accord, bring water to quench my thirst."⁷³ Park presents the "poor slaves" as deserving of pity to single out their humanity. Blanco's heightening of the Africans' skepticism of Park based on the latter's untranslatability from their standpoint dares the reader to consider what it meant for them to give water to a suspected cannibal "during a journey of 500 miles."

Blanco's translational denaturalization of Park destabilizes the dialectic of center and periphery to highlight the European's strangeness and the Africans' at-homeness by giving prominence in the *Bosquexo* to the scene of an African's homecoming. A blacksmith returns to his village and brings Park with him. As they approach the village, they are met by the blacksmith's brothers and a griot, who bring them a horse and guns so they can fire shots to celebrate the return. They enter the village and the villagers gather as the griot sings about the blacksmith's overcoming of obstacles, and ends his song "*con recomendar a sus amigos que le preparasen una buena comida*" (Blanco 26). The blacksmith's parents come out to greet him, and his mother, who has gone blind, "*tocaba las manos de su hijo con las suyas, pasábaselas detenidamente por los brazos y la cara*" (28). Mungo Park realizes that despite the "*diferencias de las formas de la nariz y del color entre el Negro y el Europeo, los afectos y las sensaciones características de la naturaleza son absolutamente iguales en unos y otros*" (Blanco 28-9). In terms of the argument elaborated thus far, the scene revises the premises of Romantic cosmopolitanism. Blanco supplements Park's cosmopolitan

72. Mungo Park, *op.cit.*, 356

73. *ibid.*, 356.

affirmation of human universality with the unstated proposition that to recognize the human also entails the recognition that one is someone else's stranger. The respect Africans extend to Park not as one of the village, but as the stranger among them, and Park's observance of the duty not to harm establishes a relation of ethical mutuality for Blanco, one predicated on non-interference. As he reminds his readers at the end of the *Bosquexo*, "remember that you too have seen strangers ravish your homeland; therefore leave the strangers' in peace" (*acordaos que también vosotros habeis visto a estrangeros asolar vuestra patria; dexad pues, en paz a la agena*).⁷⁴

Conclusion

As Schmidt-Nowara observes, it is difficult to measure the impact of the *Bosquexo* within Spain itself given the slow rise of an abolitionist culture within it and its remaining colonies in the 19th century, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Phillipines.⁷⁵ In hindsight, therefore, the African Institution's claims for it in its report of 1823 seem rather grand. "A sketch of the Slave Trade, with reflections upon it, written in Spanish by Mr. Blanco White, contributed greatly in 1817, to the Treaty for the Total Abolition of the Spanish slave trade; and they have reason to believe that it has also been instrumental for rendering that abolition more complete."⁷⁶ Nevertheless, when we consider that Blanco first published most of the material in the *Bosquexo* in *El Español*, which was read throughout the Americas, Blanco's influence over the larger sphere of abolitionist debate in the Americas was not inconsiderable. The ever-vigilant Lord Holland observed how the message of abolition was reaching one side of the Hispanic world. Despite his sometimes caustic disapproval of South American independence, he noted in a letter to Blanco, "I am very anxious the Spaniards should take some measures against that infernal traffic, but it must at present begin in America."⁷⁷ Although it would be a long time before all forms of slavery disappeared throughout South America, emerging new republics forbade the slave trade. Given Blanco's influence on the public spheres of Venezuela, Argentina, and Mexico, he might be said to have contributed to that small success.

74. Blanco White, *Bosquexo*, *op.cit.*, 143.

75. Schmidt-Nowara, "Wilberforce Spanished," *op.cit.*, 170.

76. African Institution, *Sixteenth Report of the Directors of the African Institution* (London: Ellerton and Henderson, 1822), 26. The Institution sponsored the translation of the *Bosquexo* into Portuguese in 1821.

77. Lord Holland to Blanco White, Portsmouth, August 1810, in Murphy and Pons, *José María Blanco White*, *op.cit.*, 54.

In intimating the interrelation between translation, capitalism, and the imagination, however, Blanco also legated in the *Bosquexo* a model for the ethical interpretation of another's suffering, and highlighted the responsibility of the translator. His rendering of of Mungo Park as the denaturalized stranger to whom enslaved Africans gave water despite their justified terror of his cannibalism stands as a reminder that only by journeying in solidarity across the unspeakable terrain of each other's suffering are we human. The real fear, as he expressed to his readers, is that "there are few sensitive people who will be able to continue in this voyage—and humanity will demand many tears before they finish his sketch" (*tememos que hayan pocas personas sensibles que puedan seguir adelante — y la humanidad les exige muchas lágrimas antes de que acaben de recorrer este bosquejo*).⁷⁸

78. Blanco White, *Bosquexo*, *op.cit.*, 60.