

ING 017

John Gwilliam

The Battle of Albuera: A Poem.

*With an epistle dedicatory
to Lord Wellington*

[selecciones]

1811

PROYECTO OLE 11
ARCHIVO ELECTRÓNICO DE FUENTES PRIMARIAS
POESÍA PATRIÓTICA PROESPAÑOLA EN INGLÉS, FRANCÉS, ALEMÁN Y PORTUGUÉS (1808-1814)
TEXTO INDIVIDUAL DE OBRA ING 017

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I

PEACE to the brave, who nobly died,
Albuera, on thy marshy side,
When carnage, scatter'd far and wide,
 Had strewn thy fields with dead!
But blasting, like the fire of Heaven,
Fierce be the bolts of vengeance driven
 On his, the ruthless tyrant's head;
To soothe whose proud vindictive mood,
These peaceful plains were dyed with blood!
Peace to the spirits of the brave!
They lie interr'd in Honour's grave,
Who shed their dearest blood to save
 Their dearer country's liberty!
While by their side the heroes rest,
Who died to save a land oppress'd,
 And bid her, like themselves be free!
And Britain, whilst thy sorrows flow
For many a valiant chieftain low,
 And hundreds of thy soldiers dead.
Awhile maternal anguish pause,
Remembering that in Freedom's cause
 Thy gallant heroes bled.
For this, on the Albuera's side
They nobly fought and nobly died!

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II

At morning when the sun arose,
Albuera, on thy verdant plains,
It woke not from their sweet repose
Thy handmaids blythe, and shepherd swains;
To lead to distant vallies deep
Their lowing herds, or bleating sheep;
Nor call'd the labourer from the vine
To press the stores of generous wine.
On scenes of peace and frolic play,
Broke not, I ween, its earliest ray.
It shone in wood, and mead, and glen,
On sixty thousand armed men.
For there the warrior sons of Gaul,
In firm phalanx to battle trod,
At his the haughty despot's nod,
Who wish'd to triumph lord of all.
Brave Lusitania's troops were there,
By British chieftains led to war,
And with them were a gallant train,
Whose watchword was, "St. James for Spain!"
And borne before the valiant band,
Whose leader held the chief command
The hope –the terror of the world,
St. George's banner was unfurl'd!
So rose the sun! –but in the west,
At evetide when it sunk to rest;
Five thousand of those gallant foes,
Who anxious watch'd its rising beam,

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Had slept that sleep of deep repose,
Unbroken e'en by Fancy's dream.

III

Full soon on that eventful day,
For battle form'd in deep array,
Ready, aye, ready, for the fray,
 Were the brave troops of Gaul.
Nor backward was each bold ally,
To fight the fight of Liberty,
 Or in her cause to fall.
Their bosoms felt that sacred glow,
Which they, and they alone can know,
Who, Freedom's holy cause to aid,
Defensive draw the ready blade,
And sure since Heaven, for purpose wise,
 Beyond a mortal power to scan,
Permits these cruel butcheries,
 This havoc of the race of man;
Its ever just, unerring laws,
Will still protect their righteous cause.

IV

Firm in these hopes, the heroes stood,
 For every chance of war prepar'd;
Nor long ere issuing from the wood,
 In deep and lengthen'd line appear'd,
 A gallant force of cavalry;

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Whilst guarded by their numerous horse,
Unharm'd, the rivulet across
 They push their bands of infantry.
On Spanish land, not oft, I ween,
Was such a gallant army seen,
 By such an able chieftain led.
Their marshall'd troops in well-form'd line,
Evinc'd no common discipline,
 And well might cause no common dread;
But that, the very name of fear,
Is all unus'd to British ear,
 Is all unfelt by British heart.
For ne'er was England's valour tried,
Whate'er the odds on foeman's side,
But every son of hers has died,
 Rather than act a coward's part.
Nor often, through a long campaign,
Have sons of Portugal or Spain,
Though summon'd from the peaceful plain,
To beat the agricultural share
To deadly instrument of war,
Shrunk from the foe: though all untaught,
Like veteran troops these peasants fought;
With that strong arm, the courage high,
Caught from the glow of liberty,
That bade them chase each selfish fear
When all was stak'd –to patriot dear,
As seem'd their country's fate to be
Dependant on the victory!

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Nor shrunk they on that glorious day,
But gather'd in their close array,
Fearless to meet the battle storm,
Our right their valiant legions form.
Nor long was that fierce storm delayed,
Nor long ere every hostile blade
 Was glittering in the sun;
Whilst quickening step of man and horse,
Direct towards th'Iberian force,
The foe came marching on,
Dread was the onset of the fight;
For Heaven its own resplendent light,
As shudd'ring at the awful sight,
 To clouds of mist withdrew;
Yet bayonet with bayonet clash'd,
Yet to the charge the war-horse dash'd,
Whilst swordsmen all at random gash'd;
 Or friends or foes they scarcely knew.
Yet midst the misty drizzling rain,
Each against each, the armed train
 Discharged their volleying musketry.
And louder still, and e'en more loud
Than when each dark surcharged cloud,
Together in concussion driven,
Peals through the vaulted arch of heaven,
 Was heard the dread artillery.
Each peal became a funeral knell,
For many, many warriors fell,
Whose deaths no other passing bell
 Than this, shall e'er proclaim.
For gather'd in one common grave,
O'er which no weeping willows wave,

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Commanders sage, and soldiers brave,
 Repose unknown to fame.
For hundreds bled, and hundreds fell,
Whose names no sorrowing Muse shall tell,
Ere Gallic legions could compel
 The Spaniards to give way:
At every inch of ground they gain'd,
Each bayonet with blood was stain'd;
So well their troops the fight maintain'd;
 So dreadful was the fray!
And e'en when driven down the hill,
Form'd on its rise, they struggle still,
Firmly each desp'rate charge withstand,
A valiant, an unbroken band!

VI

When Beresford, with eagle eye,
 The conduct of the field survey'd,
Instant toward his bold ally,
 He thus dispatch'd the ready aid:
"Charge, Stewart, charge! –On, Colburne, on!
"At length the foe the height has won,
"And o'er the bodies of the brave,
"The Gallic eagles proudly wave!
"Charge, Stewart, charge! Whate'er the loss,
"On yonder height St. George's cross
 "Triumphantly display.
"Force down those legions to the plain,
"And boldly struggle to regain
 "The fortune of the day!"
This short command, like light'ning sped,

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Swift as the light'ning was obey'd:
So soon with Stewart at their head,
Our gallant troops advance:
Nor less prepar'd for deeds of blood,
In firm phalanx of battle stood
The gallant troops of France.
Their steady fire, our fire return'd;
With glory high their bosoms burn'd,
And well the vet'ran bands had learn'd
To check th' assailing host.
For though our bullets, whizzing round,
Stretch'd many a comrade on the ground,
They yet maintain'd their post.

But little when our fire avail'd,
When all in vain our guns assail'd,
A remedy that never fail'd,
-A British charge was tried.

Then bayonet with bayonet,
In fierce and rude concussion met,
And many a steel with blood was wet,
And many a hand with blood was dyed:
And if that had the steel withdrew,
'Twas only to be plunged anew,
And every plunge the life-blood drew,
In some opposing warriors side.

For few the thrusts our bayonets gave
But found some Gallic soldier brave
A place in Valour's laurell'd grave;
Where, mix'd the hostile red and blue,

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The slayer rests by those he slew.

VII

“On, Colburne, on! The foe gives way:

“Proudly no more his eagle soars.

“Another thrust –we win the day!

“Another step –the heights are ours!”

But who are they, the stranger bands,

With antique lances in their hands,

Like dark marauders of the sands

And deserts drear of Araby?

And what are they, the pennons red

Waving before each horse’s head,

As on they troop so gallantly?

Loud when the British bugles blew,

As to the charge her warriors flew,

Shrouded in mist the warlike train

Seem’d like the friendly troops of Spain:

And hence, instead of deadly blow,

And greeting dire ‘twixt foe and foe,

Our soldiers give the joyous cheer

Announcing an ally was near.

The wary foe, for foes they were

Well vers’d in every *ruse de guerre*,

Return the cheer, yet inly smile,

As, unsuspecting of the guile,

The British troops march on the while.

Those wary bands from Poland came,

Once a land of warrior fame;

Though now the shadow of a name.

Their lances bear those pennons red

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Waving before each horse's head,
Lest, when they mingle in the fight
The hostile falchions, glittering bright,
Should cause them rear in wild affright,
And snort with fear, and turn away
In tractless terror from the fray.

...

XI

...

Not long the French our bayonets stood
-Not long before they fled.
They rallied not upon the height,
Dar'd not again the fearful fight,
But spend them rapid in their flight,
Nor paus'd to look behind.
Whilst Stewart's conquering troops pursue,
And Cole, who with his legions flew
To aid, when deep the combat grew,
And in the vict'ry join'd.
With Lumely, whose inferior force
So bravely foil'd the Gallic horse,
When proudly spurring o'er the plain,
They thought to turn the front of Spain.

...

XIII

"Loose, Britain, loose each courser's rein;
"Spur Lusitanians, o'er the plain;

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“Chieftains of Hanover and Spain,
 “Push on with all your cavalry!
“Spare not the strength of man or horse,
“But haste, pursue the flying force,
“Nor pause a moment in your course,
 “Your glorious course of victory!”
In full pursuit our soldiers ride,
Down to the very river’s side,
Where France retreats the stream across,
Her footmen, guarded by her horse;
 And yields the hard-fought day.
But had our horsemen equal been,
Or nearly so, not thus I ween,
 The foe had ‘scap’d away.
Few, few, had return’d to tell
How many thousand Frenchmen fell,
When England, Portugal, and Spain,
Rose victors on Albuera’s plain.

...

XV

And gladly would we pause to tell
The gallant deeds of those who fell,
 Albuera, in thy victory!
But that ‘tis all enough to say
(What higher praise can minstrel pay?)
Conspicuous through the glorious day,
 They fought with English bravery.
Whilst, quivering on the latest breath
The soldier’s spirit mark’d their death.

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And we would strive a borrow'd fame
To catch from many a hero's name,
 Inwoven with our lays.
But that, where all alike demand
A garland from the Muse's hand,
 'T were dangerous to praise.
Where chief and soldier both unite
With equal courage in the fight,
Whilst Britain, Portugal an Spain,
Bring equal valour to the plain;
Their worth the same. The same renown,
One common wreath, their fame should crown;
For those who live, and those who died,
Were once alike their country's pride.

XVI

But who can hope from mourner's eye
To chase the tear, or check the sigh,
That, dimming Victory's brightest wreath,
Proclaims the ravages of death?
To orphan'd hopes, to widow'd love,
To each fond maid who thought to prove
 The raptur'd joy of doating wife;
To some brave youth who, midst the slain,
Is stretch'd upon the gory plain.
 We cannot call them back to life,
Blest in whose smiles they wish'd to live,
Nor bid their ruin'd hopes revive.
We can but say, with mournful pride,
In Victory's arms their heroes died;
As point we the honour'd tomb,

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Where Glory's brightest laurels bloom,
O'er those who fell in Freedom's cause.
To check the tide of private woes,
For kindred slain, that vainly flows,
We can but public gain oppose,
And three whole nation's loud applause.
We can but hope, affection's grief
From Time's slow hand will find relief;
And in the while, their cause commend
To Him, the mourner's surest friend,
Who bears the widow's heavy load,
And proves himself the orphan's God.

XVII

Yet 'midst her grief, there is a joy
For her who weeps her only boy,
In victory's course untimely slain:
For her who mourns a husband gone,
Whilst she is left to weep alone
His death, on Glory's crimson'd plain.
If, like the gallant youth, they died,
Whose heart beat high with warrior pride,
As, 'midst the hottest of the war,
His hand the Buffs' proud ensign bore,
Resolv'd, how fierce soe'er the strife,
To yield it only with his life.
Assail'd by foes, the hero fought
And fell, as British hero ought.
While, struggling for the latest gasp,
His fingers still the banner grasp
For which he bravely died:

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Nor died in vain; a hand as brave
Triumphant next those colours wave,
 With equal warrior pride.
The gallant Walsh, when many a wound,
Stretch'd him for dead upon the ground;
Amidst the keenest agony,
With soul dauntless energy,
Tore the pierc'd ensign from the staff,
And plac'd it in his breast, to quaff
The streams of blood, profuse that flow,
And thus preserv'd it from the foe.

XVIII

Peace then to such, who boldly died,
Albuera, on thy marshy tide,
When ruin scatter'd far and wide,
 Had strewn thy field with dead.
But blasting, like the fire of Heaven,
Fierce be the bolts of vengeance driven
 On his, the haughty tyrant's head,
To sooth whose proud, vindictive mood
These peaceful plains were dyed with blood.
Patriots of Portugal and Spain!
Let not this blood be shed in vain;
With Britain joining heart and hand,
Expel the tyrant from your land;
Give every feud of party o'er,
 And let your volleying musquetry,
Join'd with your cannon's loudest roar,
 Tell him your country will be free!

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