



A Romantic in Spain (Classic Travel Writing)

Theophile Gautier

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"I travel for the sake of traveling, to escape from myself and others. I travel to make a dream come true, quite simply, or to change skin if you like."

In May 1840, Théophile Gautier, the enfant terrible of the French Romantic movement, set off by coach from Paris for a journey to Spain. Hired by the journal *La Presse* to send back regular installments of his travelogue, Gautier recorded his experiences and impressions with extraordinary vividness and enthusiasm. The end result was the book *Voyage en Espagne* (1845), an enthralling piece of travel writing later translated into English as *A Romantic in Spain*.

For Gautier, Spain promised the allure of an exotic and passionate culture; it was a revelation, he said later, like discovering his true home, the native land of his spirit. From the searing heat of the central plains of La Mancha, he journeyed to the olive groves and historic cities of Andalusia. Observing the vibrant street life of Madrid, he also explored the secret courtyards and Moorish buildings of Seville and Córdoba. Moving slowly by carriage, mule or wagon through Spain's vast landscapes, Gautier came into contact with a rich panoply of people and places. Endlessly curious, he wrote with verve about architecture, bullfighting, costume and women, especially the manolas of Madrid and the cigareras of Seville who were also to inspire Mérimée's *Carmen*.

By turns lyrical and acerbic, Gautier's narrative reveals a Spain in transition, emerging from civil war and a feudal past into the modern world. It was a country plagued by bandits, where Gautier endured fly-blown cafés and flea-ridden inns, but his passion for Spanish architecture, landscape, and music remained undimmed throughout his five-month journey. Even today, visitors to places as different as El Escorial or the Alhambra will appreciate the freshness and incisiveness of his writing.

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