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Abstract

Review of Gayle Rogers. *Modernism and the New Spain*. Oxford/New York: Oxford UP, 2012. xvi + 283 pp.

Keywords

Gayle Rogers, Modernism, Spain

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Rogers's work is an interesting study about Modernism during the first half of the 20th century from two distant and different European perspectives. Nevertheless, Modernism as a socially new way to recreate the environment with the aid of scientific knowledge, technology, and practical experimentation was something with which Spain was not necessarily associated in certain European circles. In order to understand the reasons for excluding Spain from this scientific and rational world, up to the years prior to the Spanish Civil War, we might have to go back to the propaganda and stereotypes that existed between the Protestant and Catholic worlds in the sixteenth century.

Rogers analyzes Spanish writers such as José Ortega y Gasset, Antonio de Marichalar, Victoria Ocampo, and Federico García Lorca, and places them in context with parallel English writers such as T.S. Eliot and his group. Rogers has done a good job summarizing the literary activities of Modernism and the efforts of a group of Spanish intellectuals to connect with their Anglo Germanic counterparts during the previous years of Franco's rise to power. Nevertheless, Rogers gives excessive prominence to Ortega y Gasset, referring to him as "Spain's leading intellectual" (4), while just mentioning in passing thinkers such as Miguel de Unamuno. Ortega, perhaps the most "pro-Northern-European" and "elitist" of all the Spanish writers of his time, is well known for rejecting and despising cultures that are not connected with the Germanic Christian past of Spain. The efforts and energy of some Modernist writers and intellectuals to Europeanize ("europeizar") Spain, mostly from Ortega's group, are well known. The same occurs with the opposite idea of "españolización" of Europe, proposed by Unamuno.

European Modernism is a concept as difficult to define as Europe itself. Indeed England, along with Spain and Portugal earlier, were empires that shared the reality of having had an extraordinarily broad global, cultural, and geographical reach. Spain, "the spiritual reserve of Europe"—as has often been defined by northern European countries—is counterpoised to the worshipers of "science," understanding "science" as the panacea, at least since positivism "replaced" religion. Ortega y Gasset, a very able thinker and speaker, left much to be desired as a historian, and has even been corrected by disciples of his such as Américo Castro, particularly when he spoke about the Spanish Semitic past. Ortega was much less versed in the history of Al-Andalus, an area of Spain than can arguably be qualified as the most civilized part of Europe during the Middle Ages. The rich racial and cultural syncretism of Euro-Mediterranean people, such as the Spanish and Portuguese, has not always been well understood by people with the more insular traditions of northern Europe. The geographical factor of

the Iberian Peninsula serving as a bridge between seas and continents has played, without a doubt, an important role in the contact with other peoples from Western and Eastern shores. This feature is not general for other less Romanized and geographically isolated European countries that give much more importance to race and ethnicity.

Science can be good or bad, depending whether it is put at the service of humankind or at the service of commercial interest that can lead to the destruction and exploitation of humanity. What is clear is that science and wisdom are two different things, as Unamuno points out in his masterwork *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida* (*The Tragic Sense of Life*.)

Other writers are mentioned several times as participants in this “Modern” period, with Lorca being one of them. Without a doubt, Rogers has been able to offer one the most objective and accurate perspectives on this writer in the entire book. We should not forget, nevertheless, that Lorca’s Modernist perceptions as an official Andalusian, as Jorge Luis Borges would define him, contrast sharply with other Nordic European ways of understanding life completely foreign to his persona. Lorca’s perception of spiritual emptiness and lack of soul (Wall Street) in the Protestant world is well summarized in his book *Poeta en Nueva York* (*Poet in New York*). “En ningún sitio del mundo se siente como allí la ausencia total de espíritu” “In no other place in the world you feel, like there, the total lack of spirit” (37).

In short, Gayle Rogers has effectively highlighted the most important Modernist cultural ties of two European countries that are theoretically peripheral but are in many ways central to what we understand today as modern Europe. Rogers has carefully crafted the biography and idiosyncrasy of some individuals during the years surrounding the Spanish Civil War. The most notorious of all would be Antonio de Marichalar: “a marquis himself, came from a line of liberal aristocrats who sided against the monarchist during the Carlist Wars” (114). There is no doubt that Rogers has thoroughly documented a period very often biased by a Manichean portrait of the two sides that fought in the Spanish Civil War. In Marichalar’s case, Rogers’s devout Catholicism was at odds with the Republic. At the same time, those connections with conservative Spain allowed Marichalar to return to Franco’s Spain after fleeing during the war. As we can see, Ortega was not the only one to think that Spain and England had the mission to redefine Europe in the 1930s.

The tensions and divisions between North and South are as old as the 16th-century religious wars between the Protestants and the Catholics. Today we can see that Europe, with its economic center located outside England and Spain, is still divided. Maybe geographical concepts such as Europe are becoming obsolete in a world with societies that are so interconnected and global, and at the same time so nationalistic and parochial, that it is almost impossible to predict what will

be the future of this area of the world. *Modernism and the New Spain* offers an interesting perspective on how writers can interconnect, no matter how different their backgrounds may be.

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