

GALLOVIRUS OR BLOOD TRANSFUSION? A *FIN-DE-SIÈCLE* RESPONSE
TO FRENCH CULTURAL HEGEMONY ON EUROPE'S PERIPHERY

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El traslado de España al margen cultural de la Europa finisecular se debe en gran parte a que la crítica se ha empeñado y se empeña todavía en evocar las relaciones literarias internacionales en términos de la llamada 'influencia' de las literaturas nacionales 'fuertes' sobre las 'débiles'. El debate crítico en torno a la influencia de la literatura francesa en el modernismo español demuestra claramente este fenómeno. Sin embargo, un examen más detenido de la recepción crítica de la literatura francesa por parte de los modernistas no descubre la imitación servil de fuentes francesas, sino una reflexión crítica juiciosa, lo cual constituye la superación del concepto del receptor pasivo. Desde esta perspectiva el centro hegemónico también se convierte en un espacio donde obran las influencias y que es enriquecido gracias a ellas.

Spain's relegation to the cultural periphery of fin-de-siècle Europe has been facilitated by an insistence on describing international literary relations in terms of the 'influence' of 'strong' national literatures on 'weak' ones. Critical allusion to the influence of French literature in Spanish *modernismo* is a case in point. Closer examination of *modernista* reception of French literature, however, reveals not slavish imitation of French sources but discriminating critical evaluation. This challenges the traditional assumption according to which the so-called recipient of influence is a passive entity in the influence process, and by extension allows the hegemonic centre itself to be seen as a site open to and enriched by influences.

NEW METHODOLOGIES IN COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

The recent transfiguration of comparative literature by a critically plural perspective informed by intertextuality, reception theory, post colonial studies and polysystems theory among others, has provided a timely opportunity to reconfigure in a more acceptable guise the concept of literary influence, which fell from grace with the demise of critical humanism. The examination of textual *rappports de fait* has been superseded by exploration of relations of interference between literary systems or sub-systems. In this methodological environment, the concept of cultural centres and peripheries has emerged as a key one.

While the advent of these new approaches has been unquestionably beneficial, critics have on occasions been prone to refer to centres and peripheries –the “hegemonic” West, or the “peripheral” East of Europe, for example– without sufficient discrimination or differentiation. Spain, although geographically associated with Europe’s western “centre”, has been and still is very much on the margin. This paper will examine the reaction of this self-conscious cultural periphery to the influence of a cultural centre, and to explore what this reveals of a periphery and its relation to the centre.

SPAIN ON THE PERIPHERY

“Being the premier [film] director of the New Spain is rather like being the premier novelist of Milton Keynes”. Alex Cox’s prefatory remark to a BBC 2 screening of Pedro Almodóvar’s *¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto?* (*What have I done to deserve this?*) (20 September 1993) is a telling indication of the extent to which even today Spain is associated with Europe’s cultural periphery. Spaniards are and indeed have been far from oblivious or insensitive to the peripheral position to which their nation and culture have been relegated, as cultural debate in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries exemplifies.

Late nineteenth-century Spain was in a state of political, economic and cultural decline. This was to culminate in the “disaster” of 1898, when Spain lost its remaining colonies, Cuba and the Philippines, in the Spanish-American war. In the cultural domain, however, decline had been acknowledged by commentators of all persuasions from the late 1880s, prompting calls for regeneration and interest in the example of more vigorous and dynamic literary cultures. Typical of this trend are the following observations by Carlos Mendoza, Leopoldo Alas and A de Santaclara:

Tal es el concepto que tengo formado de nuestros rimadores y versistas; nada nuevo aciertan a decir, cuando tanto precisa hoy revestir de novedad las cosas, hasta el extremo de haberse formado en Francia la nueva escuela de los decadentes o decadentículos, sucesores de los parnasianos, los cuales están creando un nuevo estilo poético, y ¡vive Dios! que entre escuchar poesías zorrillescas o rimas y conceptos endiablados, prefiero este último, estando dispuesto a sufrir con mayor resignación cualquier wagneriano soneto de M. Stéphane Mallarmé, que no las más apañaditas redondillas *A una rosa*.

In my view, our rhymesters seem incapable of producing anything new, at a time when literary renovation is so necessary that in France a new school with a new poetic style called the Decadents has formed in the wake of Parnassianism; and, by God, if it's a choice between yet another imitation of Zorrilla and satanic verses, I'd rather put up with a Wagnerian sonnet by M. Stéphane Mallarmé than yet another overworked *Ode to a Rose* (Mendoza, 1886: 122).

Ves ese pesimismo, ese trascendentalismo naturalista, ese orientalismo panteístico o nihilista, todo lo que antes recordabas tú como contrario a tus aspiraciones, pero reconociendo que eran fuentes de poesía a su modo? Pues todo ello lo diera por bien venido a España, a reserva de no tomarle para mí, personalmente, y con gusto vería aquí extravíos de un Richepin, Satanismos de un Baudelaire, preciosismos psicológicos de un Bourget, quietismos de un Amiel y hasta la procesión caótica de simbolistas y decadentes; porque en todo eso, entre cien errores, amaneramientos y extravíos, hay vida, fuerza, cierta sinceridad, y sobre todo un pensamiento siempre alerta.

You know that pessimism, that transcendental naturalism, that pantheistic or nihilistic orientalism that you used to call so contrary to your aspirations, while acknowledging that they were, in their own way, capable of engendering poetry? Well I'd welcome them all in Spain - as long as I didn't have to adopt them myself - and happily see here the waywardness of Richepin, the Satanism of Baudelaire, the psychological delving of Bourget, the quietism of Amiel, and the whole chaotic procession of Symbolists and Decadents; because in all of them, in spite of their many misconceptions, their affectation and extravagance, there is at least a vital strength, a sincerity of a kind, and above all an alertness of thought (Alas, 1887: 85).

¿Qué quedaría de nuestros "grandes maestros" contemporáneos si se les comparase con los de Francia, Alemania y hasta Rusia? Abstracción hecha del teatro, que en España sigue a la altura de las

demás naciones, continuando la obra de Calderón y Lope de Vega, estamos en una indiscutible inferioridad. En la poesía creo superiores a nuestro Núñez de Arce y Campoamor a los alemanes Geibel, Freiligrath y Hamerling, y en Francia, Musset, Baudelaire y Hugo.

How would our current “grand masters” of literature fare if we compared them with those of France, Germany and even Russia? With the exception of the theatre, which in Spain maintains a quality comparable with that of other nations and carries on the achievements of Calderón and Lope de Vega, we are unquestionably inferior. In my opinion, the German poets Geibel, Freiligrath and Hamerling and the French poets Musset, Baudelaire and Hugo are better than our Núñez de Arce and Campoamor (Santaclara, 1897: 2).

This corresponds to the phenomenon which according to Itamar Even-Zohar, occurs “when conditions within [...] [the literary system] have created a certain situation which cannot be dealt with by the relevant literature exclusively –or mainly– by means of its own sources” (Even-Zohar, 1990: 55). Thus arose a polemic regarding influences from abroad, set against the background of the turn-of-the-century debate waged in publications such as *La Renaissance Latine*, concerning the decadence of the so-called Latin cultures in comparison with the vigour of the Nordic and Slavic ones. In this context, the term “influence” understandably acquired controversial connotations. Some saw in receptivity to foreign influences a sign of a healthy and timely cosmopolitanism. For others it became a symptom of vulnerability to predatory cultural imperialism or the forces of degeneration. The implications for questions of national identity are evident in the Spanish preoccupation with the integrity of national traditional values and national genius. The notion of Spanish national genius and traditional values, enshrined in the term *casticismo*, was the contemporary manifestation of the holy myth of sacred ethnic destiny from which derives, according to Anthony D. Smith, “[a] doctrine of polycentric uniqueness [...] [which] preaches the universality of ‘irreplaceable cultural values.’” (Smith, 1991: 84). We can also observe in Spanish response to foreign influence a phenomenon that Claudio Guillén sees as characteristic of nineteenth-century thought, namely a “stress upon the idea of national character and the prestige of the biological sciences. It was thought that every literature existed, breathed, grew and evolved like a living organism, its roots anchored in a specific social subsoil and a certain national idiosyncrasy [...] A firm belief existed: the belief in the unique character of each nation” (Guillén, 1985: 52-53).

Debate was particularly dramatic and inflected in respect of French influence. During the course of the nineteenth century France emerged from political bankruptcy to establish itself as the hegemonic culture of Europe, with Paris as its centre. By the 1870s, the influence of French literature on Spanish writers, which had been held in check for much of the nineteenth century by the forces of tradition and conservatism (Shaw, 1968), became an issue once more (Bretz, 1992: 2; Cardwell, 1977: 91-92).

FRENCH CULTURE: A PROBLEMATIC HEGEMONY

Some of the earliest examples of response to resurgent interest in French literature came from traditionalists who were to a greater or lesser degree resistant to “Gallification”. This attitude can be traced back to suspicion of the *afrancesados* (pro-French liberals) and the trauma of Spain’s Napoleonic experience in the early nineteenth century, and also, within a specifically literary context, to conservative resistance to the wave of purportedly corrupting and impious scepticism and *mal du siècle* unleashed by the writers of Spain’s Romantic movement in the 1830s. One such commentator was the novelist and critic Juan Valera. In essays written between the 1880s and the turn of the century, Valera acknowledged France to be “La nación más influyente en las otras” [“the nation which has most influenced other nations”] (Valera, 1942: 659), but advocated critical caution when faced by the rich and alluring tapestry of French culture: “Lo que pido es juicio para que imitemos y sigamos a Francia en lo bueno y no en lo malo, y para que nosotros pensemos también also por nosotros mismos, y no tenemos sin reflexión los peores sentimientos [...] según vienen hechos de Francia” [“All that I ask is that we imitate the good that comes from France and not the bad, and that we think for ourselves, and not accept without reflection or criterion the worst, shoddiest kind of thinking [...] just as it comes from France”] (Valera, 1942: 607). Like his anti-Romantic forebears, Valera feared the spread of the atheism, materialism and pessimistic posturing which he claimed to detect in the Naturalist novelists and the “dissipated” poets like Maurice Rollinat and Charles Baudelaire. For Valera such attitudes constituted “un delirio sombrío que se ha apoderado de buena parte de los literatos franceses y que amenaza contaminar a los españoles” [“a dark delirium that has got a good number of French writers in its grip, and that [...] is now threatening to infect Spanish writers too”] (Valera, 1942: 658-659). Valera feared that this contagion would spread quickly not only because French

influence was aggressive and predatory in a way that recalled France's imperialist ambitions in Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century, but also because Spain's "exagerada modestia colectiva, nuestra humildad y abatimiento como nación" ["excessive collective modesty, [...] humility, and current state of national demoralisation "] (Valera, 1942: 612) made it more vulnerable to an influence of this order.

Valera's figurative representation of undesirable influence as illness—an example of the appropriation of medical discourse by contemporary Spanish writers and literary critics (Cardwell, 1995)—acquired literal meaning in the hands of another group of commentators. By the second half of the nineteenth century ascendant scientific positivism had spawned a form of social Darwinism the extension and popularity of which can be traced by the crop of translations of works by its exponents and the controversy which it provoked. Significant among these was Max Nordau, the Austrian disciple of the Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso and populariser of the Theory of Degeneration, formulated comprehensively in B. A. Morel's *Traité des dégénérescences* in 1857. Nordau's *Entartung* (1892) constituted a virulent attack on contemporary literature from a psychological perspective. Translated into Spanish by Nicolás Salmerón y García in 1902, it was already widely known in Spain in the French translation of 1894 and through works by Spanish authors of a similar persuasion such as *Literaturas malsanas* by Pompeyo Gener (1894) and *Alma contemporánea* by José María Llanas Aguilaniedo (1899). Nordau inherited Lombroso's thesis that artistic genius was a form of psychological degeneration. The Austrian's views diverged from those of his mentor, however, in two significant respects. Firstly, Nordau, unlike Lombroso, who thought that "highly gifted degenerates are an active force to the progress of mankind", believed that such subjects "corrupt and delude", exerting a profoundly harmful influence. For this reason he likened their form of degeneration to a contagious disease (Nordau, 1968: 24; 31). Secondly, he propounded that the hitherto limited occurrence of this "disease" had acquired epidemic proportions as a result of the stressful lifestyle associated with urban expansion and increasing industrialisation, leading to "a sort of black death of degeneration and hysteria" (Nordau, 1968: 537). Nordau discerned in contemporary literature the symptoms of this malady. France, and Paris in particular, was identified as the epicentre. This was attributed to the additional stresses of political upheaval and war that the country had suffered during the course of the nineteenth century, while a "highly

developed taste and widespread fondness for all artistic pursuits” (Nordau, 1968: 208) explained why French art should have become a particularly effective channel for transmission of the disease. Nordau used the French term *fin-de-siècle* to designate the mental state characteristic of the contagion, and of the eleven literary “case studies” examined in *Entartung*, no less than five were French: the Symbolists, the Neomystics, the Parnassians, the Diabolists, decadents and aesthetes, and Zola’s Naturalist school. A similar predominance of French examples is to be found in the Spanish studies cited earlier.

It was left to the young writers associated with Spain’s *fin-de-siècle* movement of literary regeneration, dubbed by contemporaries *modernismo* or *la nueva literatura*, to present French influence in a more favourable light. These writers found in French literature from Romanticism onwards and specifically, as elsewhere in Europe (Evtimova & Hambrook, 1998: 267-270), in Francophone Symbolism an articulation of their own aesthetic aspirations and the key to a literary revival in the form of an aesthetic discourse capable of configuring “the new”. Interest in French literature manifested itself in a variety of guises. Some, like “Francophile propagandists” Enrique Gómez Carrillo (Kronik, 1967; Hambrook, 1991) and Luis Bonafoux embraced as their mission the diffusion of French literature in the Hispanic world through translations, critical reviews or literary chronicles. Others sought to identify French sources which encapsulated the quintessence of the new aesthetic. To give just a few examples, synaesthesia was seen as the stylistic key to the new poetic and traced its origin to Baudelaire (Valle Inclán, 1902); the French decadent poets’ cult of artificiality was identified as the essence of true art, and the alienated elitism of the poet-dandy was seen as the hallmark of contemporary poetic genius (Martínez Ruiz, 1947: 184-185); the quintessential spirit of the new poetic was discovered in the work of Symbolist and *Naturiste* poets such as Jammes, Rénier, Samain, but above all the archetypal *poète maudit* Paul Verlaine (e.g. Darío, 1896; González Blanco, 1903; Jiménez 1903; Sawa. 1903; Verlaine, 1903) and the exponent of a new mysticism, Maurice Maeterlinck (e.g. Anon., 1903a, 1903b, 1904; Maeterlinck, 1903; Días e Fidalgo, 1904).

THE PERIPHERY: FROM VICTIM TO AGENT

The three trends summarised above share a common perspective: consciousness of the peripheral position of Spain on the *fin-de-siècle* cultural map, and the need for conscientious custodianship of the national genius. The traditionalists feared the corruption of national values and the national psyche just as the psychologists feared the infection of the latter by a degenerative psychosis. For both these groups, peripheral status meant vulnerability, while the hegemonic culture, primarily in the guise of France, but also in the form of specific literary manifestations of the “strong” Nordic or Slavic cultures, was demonised as malign, tainted, corrupt. Where influence –for this is the term by which contemporary encounters with other literary systems was invariably designated– acquired more positive connotations, as was the case with the *modernistas*, opinion was ambivalent, more nuanced, more inflected. The *modernistas* were discriminating in their evaluation of potential models for emulation or objects of literary interest. They were, moreover, at pains to point out that influence was not embraced at the expense of the *genio nacional*, but rather in a manner that complemented it. Such an attitude appears to acknowledge, albeit implicitly, the active status that more recent comparative theory accords to the so-called “recipient” in the process of influence or interference. This phenomenon merits further consideration.

It is readily apparent from the range of critical comment reviewed above that contrary to Max Nordau’s belief that the *modernistas* were imitating “ridiculous and affected French dandies” (Nordau, 1907: 243), the Spaniards’ interest in French literature was far from being the slavish emulation and uncritical admiration that some might presume to be the mode of engagement between a peripheral and hegemonic culture in this scenario of inter-cultural interference. Francophiles not only maintained a critical and differential perspective in their reviews of recent and contemporary developments in French literature – witness Spanish interest in Baudelaire’s *Les paradis artificiels* and prose poetry (Gómez Carrillo, 1905: 300-311; Hambrook, 1991) at a time when *Les Fleurs du Mal* remained the focus of attention elsewhere – but were far from being naively unaware of the resistance that their efforts would meet in Spain’s orthodox literary circles, where rabid Francophobia reigned and “cazando galicismos” [“hunting out gallicisms”] was a favourite pursuit (Gómez Carrillo, 1892:7). And although Spanish writers were prepared to declare quite openly that

“la influencia de Francia ha sido muy saludable” [“France’s influence has been most salutary”] (Machado, 1907: 339), insinuations that the Spanish Francophiles were passive entities in the influence process or that they scorned or had forsaken national literary tradition were countered in no uncertain terms. Let us consider an example. In August 1903, Argentinean critic Manuel Ugarte published in *La Revue* an article on French literary influence in Spain. Writing for a predominantly French readership, Ugarte rejected as false the belief that Spain was a literary backwater resistant to the free circulation of ideas, on the grounds that Spain was “directement sous l’influence des idées françaises” [“directly under the influence of French ideas”] (Ugarte, 1903: 350). The problem, according to Ugarte, lay in a residual traditionalism the intransigence of which amounted to an illness. Ugarte noted that although admiration for French models among the younger generation of poets at times took the form of uncritical and exaggerated imitation, “[l]es littératures n’assimilent que ce qui peut s’adapter à leur génie et leur caractère, aussi exagération ne veut pas dire péril” [“[l]iteratures only assimilate that which can be adapted to their genius and character, and so exaggeration does not constitute a danger”] (Ugarte, 1903: 534). The presentation, here, of influence as salutary and as posing no danger to the national genius appears to be quite consistent with the cosmopolitan perspective of progressive Spaniards. The implication, however, that the new generation of Spanish writers had rejected traditional national values provoked a spirited riposte from the *modernistas* associated with the review *Helios*:

Entre los poetas, el Sr. Ugarte halla un grupo que sigue paso a paso las huellas de los simbolistas franceses [...] un núcleo estimado que lucha en la revista *HELIOS* por trasladar al español la modalidad de arte que representan los simbolistas. De acuerdo con su programa de renovar las ideas y las formas de expresión, son los grandes enemigos del casticismo. Y yo volvería a preguntar aquél al Sr. Ugarte: ¿Quién le ha dicho a usted que somos enemigos del casticismo? ¿Quién le ha dicho a usted que seguimos paso a paso las huellas de los simbolistas franceses? Cogemos rosas clásicas y rosas decadentes, y nuestra floración es de sinceridad. Glosamos a los simbolistas cuando nos hieren con bellezas, y nuestro empeño está en mostrar al público la divina verdad del arte.

Among the poets, Sr. Ugarte has come across a group who follows slavishly in the footsteps of the French Symbolists [...] a worthy clutch striving in the review *Helios* to translate into Spanish the aesthetics of

Symbolism. Their aim to introduce new ideas and forms of expression makes them the sworn enemies of traditional Spanish values. So I would put one more question to Sr. Ugarte: Who told you that we reject traditional Spanish values? Who has told you that we follow slavishly in the footsteps of the French Symbolists? We pick roses from the garden of Classicism as well as from that of the *Décadence*, and sincerity is the bouquet we arrange. We gloss the Symbolists when their beauty strikes a poignant chord in us, and we strive to bring to the public the divine truth of art (Anon., 1903c: 377).

It was left to Edmundo Gómez de Baquero to furnish an objective synthesis of a progressive interpretation of influence and the nature of national genius. In an article on the influence of foreign writers in contemporary Spanish literature, published in May 1903 in *La España Moderna*, Gómez de Baquero drew attention to intellectual debate generated by the preponderance of foreign influences in Spain's literature. The critic concluded that while reliance upon foreign models may betray "cierta escasez y pobreza en la producción intelectual" ["a certain dilution or poverty in intellectual production"] (Gómez de Baquero, 1903: 151), influences do not and indeed cannot constitute a threat to national character or genius, because they derive from a series of historical, geographical and ethnic circumstances which operate over a long period of time (Gómez de Baquero, 1903: 149), and are merely "supplementary" in character, serving to redress a lack without corrupting the national character. Neither, he concluded, was their effect detrimental, for insofar as they signified cultural cosmopolitanism and functioned as catalysts to cultural dynamism and modernisation, they ensured the healthy evolution of the national culture. This prefigures Even-Zohar's observation almost a century later that "no literature could manage without interference at one time or another during its history" (1990: 59). Gómez de Baquero's call for greater tolerance of influence as a process of literary evolution constituted an attempt to de-stigmatise influence, and to re-focus attention on preserving and respecting the national literary tradition. The ability to countenance influences without a sense of threat is just one factor that demonstrates that far from being a passive, vulnerable victim of the centre, the purportedly peripheral culture of *fin-de-siècle* Spain adopted an active role in the process of influence. Other factors include the capacity of many critics to diagnose from a critical but constructive perspective the problem of cultural stagnation, and their informed and discriminating evaluation of foreign literary models. This challenges the assumption that hegemonic centres impose their

cultural priorities on passive, vulnerable peripheries. It re-casts the recipient of influences as an active participant in, rather than the victim of the process of cultural interference, which itself acquires a more transactional character. This notion of agency should be taken further by emphasising that hegemonic centres may themselves welcome influence as beneficial: the literary movements which emerged from the geographical epicentre of Paris were themselves markedly cosmopolitan in character, and open to all manner of influences. Even-Zohar is correct in his observation that French literature did not evolve “in isolation from the rest of the world [...] having further developed its repertoire by using a variety of outside sources” (Even-Zohar, 1990: 55). Indeed, France refined use of external sources by creating in Paris a refractory and crucible for such sources. This cosmopolitanism, which did not pass unnoticed outside France, allowed voices from the periphery to relocate their own cultures in the mainstream, as Juan Ramón Jiménez sought to do when he identified among the antecedents of the Symbolist movement, “mal llamado francés” [“erroneously referred to as French”], not only German Romanticism, the poetics of Poe, and English mid-nineteenth century poetry and poetics, but also the Spanish mystics of the seventeenth century (Jiménez, 1961: 227; Hambrook, 1998). Furthermore, Jiménez’s observation serves to remind us of the inadequacy, for critical purposes, of the concept of nation as a unit of cultural production to describe literary activity at a time when, ironically, this concept was a discursive cornerstone of literary debate. The same, moreover, may be said of the term “influence” and even of more recent concepts such as interference. The supposition, traces of which can be found even in recent comparative theory, that it is sufficient to describe encounters between literary systems exclusively in terms of a relationship between the strong and the weak merits a more systematic reappraisal.

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