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Wojtaszek, associate professor of Spanish, analyzes the literary and cultural movements of the 19th century Galician revival

Summary: An Imagine Fund award will allow Wojtaszek will travel to the new Library of Galicia in northern Spain.

(October 5, 2010)-James A. Wojtaszek, associate professor of Spanish, received a 2010 Imagine Fund award to carry out his mission of “Revisiting the Galician Revival.” Specializing in 19th century Spain, Wojtaszek will use his project as a means to research the development of the Rexurdimento, a movement of cultural, political, and linguistic revival in Galicia during this period. He is particularly interested in archival resources, such as newspapers, journals, and personal correspondence, and hopes these tools will help document a more vibrant history of the movement and the individuals involved in it.

The Biblioteca de Galicia (Library of Galicia), located at Santiago de Compostela in the northwest corner of Spain on Mount Gaias, is the key to Wojtaszek’s quest. His long wait for this opportunity is nearly over. A decade in the making, the library is scheduled to open this year. It will consolidate and house Galicia’s bibliographic heritage in a wide variety of media and formats and provide special amenities for researchers. Wojtaszek will spend next summer there absorbed in a scholar’s dreamworld of total access to information.

The library occupies part of a huge complex known as the City of Culture consisting of museums, libraries, archives, and auditoriums, all featuring state-of-the art technologies. The first center devoted to Galician themes and culture, it is the outcome of a process begun in 1999 when the Galician regional government held an international architecture competition. Out of twelve entries submitted, a design by noted architect Peter Eisenman, one of the founding theorists of postmodern architecture, was chosen for being, in the words of the jury, “exceptionally in tune with the site’s location.” Constructed into an excavated hillside and surrounded by forest, the complex will integrate seamlessly with its setting.

Compared with the Basque and Catalan regions, Galicia’s development was hampered by its remote geography and economic disadvantages, Wojtaszek says, but it now enjoys an emergent culture coinciding with the rise of the center. As the showcase for Galician traditions, the center’s existence is the culmination of events that began in the 19th century. The Rexurdimento, or revival period, was characterized by a conscious effort to reassert the geographical and linguistic uniqueness of the region, says Wojtaszek. Its efforts were eventually stifled in the aftermath of the Spanish Civil War. But in the post-Franco era, renewed autonomy of ethnic groups and recovery of banned languages helped the Galician personality assert itself again as a genuine aspect of Spanish culture.

Wojtaszek is also interested in the role of women in this period. Rosalía de Castro, his particular focus, worked at the end of the Romantic period. Although more widely known for her poetry written in Spanish, Castro’s embrace of the Galician language in her work renders it synonymous with the language’s resurgence. The publication of her poetry collection *Cantares galegos* in 1863 is considered by many to be the definitive marker of the Galician revival, Wojtaszek says. “But Castro’s was one of a number of voices engaged in this movement, and I hope to bring some of those other voices back into the conversation. I would be thrilled to find other women were active in the revival.”

The City of Culture is itself a revival adapted for a different age. Thoroughly modern, it also links Galicia with its deepest past. Reclaiming the medieval landscape of the city of Santiago and the five pilgrim routes leading to its cathedral, the complex transforms them into a contemporary destination for seekers of knowledge and enlightenment, not to mention entertainment. Wojtaszek is sure to be one of the most fervent pilgrims.

Wojtaszek received a doctorate from Rutgers University in 2000. In addition to Spanish language classes, he teaches courses drawn from his specialty in 19th and early 20th century Peninsular literature.

Wojtaszek is one of seventeen Morris professors who received all-University 2010 Imagine Fund Awards. The program is supported in part by the McKnight Arts and Humanities Endowment. The endowment's mission is to support, sustain, and enliven arts and humanities research and activities on the four University campuses.

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