

TORRECILLA, JESÚS. *Guerras literarias del XVIII español: la modernidad como invasión*. Salamanca: Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca, 2009. 172pp.

For various reasons, eighteenth-century Spanish culture is under-represented in university course catalogs, academic conferences, and literary journals. Thus, one of the challenges for the specialist in eighteenth-century Spain is to convince students (and even other Hispanists) that the field is worthy of in depth analysis. In *Guerras literarias del XVIII español: la modernidad como invasión*, Jesús Torrecilla recognizes that the literary works of the time are often difficult to approach and classify: “[las obras del XVIII son] extrañas y heterogéneas [. . .] en las que determinados rasgos del neoclasicismo y del barroco se mezclan de manera aparentemente torpe o inexperta” (156). Nonetheless, one of Torrecilla’s goals is to convince the reader that the contradictions in the literature are not justification for its condemnation, but rather they are indicative of a symptom that needs to be explained. And Torrecilla’s explanations are fascinating indeed.

In the introduction to *Guerras literarias*, Torrecilla clearly and succinctly states his thesis and overall plan for the book. His starting point is a reconsideration of the concept of modernity, which, Torrecilla insists, should not only be thought of in terms of time, but also in terms of space. It takes a strong society, the critic reminds us, to define modernity and impose its definition on other, more marginal societies. Eighteenth-century Spain, then, cannot be properly understood without keeping in mind the influence of France, which had supplanted Spain as the hegemonic country in Europe. Even though Neoclassicism is often promoted as rational and universal, in Spain (as was the case elsewhere) its acceptance was problematic because it was associated with the French. Torrecilla explains that France’s dominating presence caused Spain to react by adapting its literature. Although a few Spaniards rejected Neoclassicism entirely because of its French origin, there were others who imitated it unconditionally in order to not appear behind the times. The vast majority of writers, however, were ambivalent, imitating what was considered modern while resisting the perception of French influence.

Throughout *Guerras literarias*, Torrecilla compares the imposition of modern French literary trends to a military invasion. However, he uses this metaphor because the writers themselves perceived a strong

correlation between a country's military strength and its ability to impose its culture. In the citations that Torrecilla highlights, literary debates are compared to skirmishes and battles, and the participants in the debates are likened to national heroes or traitors. Likewise, the strategies that writers employ to articulate their positions are called weapons and attacks, while national literary traditions are enlisted as allies to defend against French influence. Interestingly, the literary battles are not between Spain and France, but rather between Spaniards who approached their country's marginalization in different ways. The Spanish writers examined in *Guerras literarias* include Feijoo, Ignacio de Luzán, Moratín, Juan de Iriarte, García de la Huerta, Jovellanos, Cadalso, Meléndez Valdés, and many others; the wide array of dramatists, poets and essayists underscores the pervasiveness of Spain's anxiety of influence and its role in the creation of interesting and unique literature.

Of the various chapters in *Guerras literarias* that focus on the strategies of Spanish writers, I wish to highlight the second chapter, entitled "Hegemonía y modernidad," in which Torrecilla shows that it is not just the Spanish who used war imagery, but also the French, English, Germans, and Italians. For this reason, this chapter reveals the depth of Torrecilla's understanding of eighteenth-century Europe. Although this chapter might be of less interest to the reader who only wants to learn about Spain, it is perhaps the most important chapter in the work because it shows that all European countries had to react in one way or another to French cultural domination. The evidence suggests that the concept of modernity throughout Europe was indeed linked with that of hegemony, or to put it another way, "[es] como si la monopolización del concepto de lo nuevo tuviera necesariamente que sustentarse sobre un fondo de fuerza" (22).

Torrecilla's approach is not likely to be the most popular among other specialists in the field, since it has been more common to evaluate eighteenth-century Spanish literature according to the extent to which it conforms to criteria developed in discussions of eighteenth-century literature elsewhere. Nonetheless, it is difficult to argue with the conclusions drawn from the textual evidence that Torrecilla presents. In fact, those of us who agree with his approach might, at times, wish that he would directly address critics who present alternate, less convincing (yet often repeated) theories. Nevertheless, Torrecilla is

tactful in his criticism, and he avoids polemics by explicitly recognizing the necessity of competing approaches.

Elsewhere Torrecilla has touched on some of the themes presented in *Guerras literarias*, but the work is an especially nice complement to his *España exótica*, which along with his latest book represent significant contributions to the understanding of eighteenth-century Spanish culture. Perhaps the most appealing aspect of *Guerras literarias* is that it contains interesting insights for scholars of Golden Age and nineteenth-century Spanish literature, as well as eighteenth-century literature of other European countries. That *Guerras literarias* should draw readers with other interests to a new study of eighteenth-century Spain may, in fact, be its greatest accomplishment.

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