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## Review/Reseña

Adela Pineda Franco. *Geopolíticas de la cultura finisecular en Buenos Aires, París y México: las revistas literarias y el modernismo*. Pittsburgh: Instituto Internacional de Literatura Iberoamericana, 2006.

## The Transatlantic Negotiations of Modernismo

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Adela Pineda's *Geopolíticas de la cultura finisecular en Buenos Aires, París y México: las revistas literarias y el modernismo* provides original insights into the genesis and construction of Latin American *Modernismo*. Through careful readings of four literary magazines central to the dissemination of *Modernismo* in the *fin-de-siècle*, Pineda emphasizes the diversity of *Modernismo* and the complexity of its negotiations with European culture. While recent studies by Gerard Aching, Cathy Jade,

Rosemary LoDato and others have deepened our knowledge of the philosophical, literary and ideological underpinnings of Modernismo, Pineda allows us to better understand the specific ways in which the idea of the so-called “new spirit” of Modernismo emerged in uneven and contradictory ways through transatlantic dialogue. The *Revista de America* (Buenos Aires; 1894), the *Mercure de France* (Paris; 1890-1933), *Revista Azul* (Mexico; 1894-1896), and *Revista Moderna* (Mexico; 1898-1911) provide Pineda with fertile ground for demonstrating the mechanics and ambiguities of transatlantic citation and revision that contributed to the maintenance of different versions of Modernismo. Thus, the construct of Modernismo that emerges in Pineda’s study is not that of a stable school of thought or a corpus of ideas but a series of distinct local conversations taking place through different literary magazines in separate national contexts.

In Chapter 1, “Con Rubén Darío en Buenos Aires: el caso de la *Revista de América*,” Pineda explores the ways in which Darío used the *Revista de América* to promote himself as a privileged transatlantic mediator and authority on Modernismo. Through a careful reading of Darío’s criticisms of Richard Le Gallienne’s *The Religion of a Literary Man* (1893), Pineda argues that the Nicaraguan poet deliberately misread Gallienne’s discussion of decadentism in order to transform the concept into something more akin to later, more idealistic and transnational definitions of literary symbolism espoused by Arthur Symmons in *Symbolism in Literature* (1899), Andre Barre’s *Le symbolisme: essai historique sur le mouvement symboliste en France de 1855-1900* (1911), and Guy Michaud’s *Message poétique du symbolisme* (1947). Darío’s appropriation of decadentism strips it of its effeminate and pathological qualities and transforms it into a transcendental vessel for his Latin American followers to proudly adopt as their own. However, Pineda is careful to point out that this version of decadence

did not represent a generalized view. The Guatemalan *flâneur* Enrique Gómez Carrillo uses the concept as an extension of the luxuriant and sensual ambiance of Paris. “En este sentido,” writes Pineda, “la labor de crítico que Gómez Carrillo lleva a cabo es la de un coleccionista de rarezas” (38).

The theme of how the Modernistas struggled to create textual spaces that validated them is brilliantly demonstrated in Pineda’s second chapter, which examines how Pedro Emilio Coll, Eugenio D. Romero, Enrique Gómez Carrillo and Francisco Contreras used a small, marginalized space within the French literary magazine the *Mercure de France* to legitimize the movement and bolster it against attacks by critics such as Miguel de Unamuno. It is in this chapter that Pineda is most adept at showing how literary critics can treat nineteenth-century literary magazines as more than inert, decontextualized vessels of “content” to be mined for critical exegesis. For example, Pineda demonstrates that the Modernistas of the *Mercure de France* strategically adopted the views of the magazine’s editor, Remy de Gourmont, who argued that contemporary Latin American literature represented a linguistic and aesthetic renaissance hinging on the rejection of Spanish influence and the adoption of French models. This discourse was no doubt convenient as a rebuttal to Spanish critics of Modernismo but, if accepted uncritically, it was hardly ground for celebrating a truly original Latin American literature. Thus, the Latin American writers of the *Mercure de France* subtly amended Gourmont’s emplotment of literary history to demonstrate that what was more important about emergent Modernismo was its relationship to Latin American modernization.

...las crónicas hispanoamericanas modifican la visión antipeninsular de Gourmont al conextualizar los aciertos estéticos del afrancesamiento modernistas en el accidentado terreno de la modernización en América Latina. Una de las implicaciones de esta contextualización es la de eludir la

subordinación del espacio hispanoamericano a la metrópolis francesa, entendiendo el afrancesamiento en términos de afinidad y no de imitación...Los modernistas compartían el pesimismo finisecular característico de los escritores decadentes; sin embargo, en su caso, éste no era el resultado del tedio producido por el progreso positivista tan detestado por los seguidores de Verlaine, sino de la persistencia de un legado colonial obsoleto en el terreno de la cultura, y de una modernización incipiente y periférica que no permitía la autonomía en la esfera literaria. (64)

In addition to these situational, intertextual strategies of validation, the Modernistas did their best to literally carve out more space for Latin American literature in a magazine and culture that constructed them as peripheral actors on the scene of world literature. For example, Latin American writers were discussed in the “Spain” section of the magazine, which was edited by Enrique Gómez Carrillo. Although this strategy might be read on one level as conspiring against the internationalization of Latin American literature as autonomous from Spanish literature, it was also, on a very literal level, a way to give more exposure to writers like Rubén Darío.

The last two chapters are centered on the Mexican *Revista Azul* and *Revista Moderna* which were framed by the culture and politics of late nineteenth-century Porfirian Mexico. Whereas the chapters on the *Revista de América* and *Mercure de France* exhibit a Modernismo in search of a space to call its own in the cosmopolitan circuits of intellectual debate, these chapters highlight the ways in which Modernismo’s internationalist ambition was mitigated by service to the bourgeois and nationalist cultural norms of Don Porfirio’s Mexico. Cosmopolitanism in art did not signify a rejection or critique of modernity but rather an alliance with the commodification of culture promoted by Porfirian elites. Descriptions of Paris blurred into self-congratulatory descriptions of the glories of the Porfirian capital. Decadent versions of masculinity

and femininity were ultimately tempered by the defense of more conservative definitions of gender. Although the sensual illustrations of Julio Ruelas for *Revista Moderna*, including naked women and snakes, may be read as providing a risqué counterpoint to such discourses, it is striking to see the taming of Mexican Modernismo in Pineda's account.

The originality and contribution of *Geopolíticas de la cultura finisecular en Buenos Aires, París y México* lies in Pineda's effective use of late nineteenth-century print media to say something new about the tensions inherent in Modernismo. As she writes in the introduction, literary magazines are dynamic spaces where different texts exist in tension and dialogue with one another (11). Throughout her book, Pineda sustains this posture and argues that Modernismo is best understood as a transatlantic conversation instead of a fixed, aesthetic mentality. Moreover, as demonstrated by her chapters on Mexico, Modernismo was not exempt from the influence of state-sponsored nationalism. My criticism of this important contribution to the study of nineteenth-century book is minor. Pineda's book is so controlled that it won't allow for expansiveness on the place of the magazines under study within a broader, continental panorama of literary magazines or for dwelling longer on a few fascinating figures and problematics, such as the canonization of the famous Modernista dead in the *Mercure de France*. This quibbling aside, Pineda's *Geopolíticas de la cultura finisecular* is a deeply rewarding book that provides us with a necessary corrective to more essentialist and traditional definitions of Modernismo-as-Philosophy. Pineda's situational and contextual Modernismo, beating inside the contradictory and crowded lettered box of the nineteenth-century literary magazine is, without a doubt, essential reading for literary critics and historians of Modernismo and Latin American journalism.