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Review of: David Howarth, *The Invention of Spain: Cultural Relations between Britain and Spain 1770-1870*

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Howarth, David. *The Invention of Spain: Cultural Relations between Britain and Spain 1770-1870*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2007. xvii+244 pp. 22 illus.

An art historian with expertise in early Stuart England, David Howarth examines how British writers and artists envisioned nineteenth-century Spain. Based upon fictive notions of innate difference and national character, such expressions often presented Iberia as both exotic and pure, an island uncontaminated by modernity and industrialization. Catholic religiosity, an element of difference many Britons reflexively identified with Spanish society, is one of the threads that ties together Howarth's text. Artists like David Roberts tended to highlight rituals, priests and nuns as they interpreted Spain to an English audience. In many ways, this book captures the essence of the Black Legend, replete with images of an atavistic, stagnant country that stood in stark contrast to economic successes like England. Nineteenth-century intellectuals continued to hearken back to sixteenth-century conquistadors in constructing a picture of timeless Spain, a land of "colossal spectres looming through the gloom of bygone years," in the words of George Borrow (89). Seeing Spain through the lens of British culture, Howarth develops an argument that "reveals more about Britain than about Spain" (xii).

The Peninsular War significantly impacted popular attitudes toward Spain, as tens of thousands of British soldiers fought in Iberia between 1807 and 1813. As Britons stressed the unchanging rural communities and a sensuous piety that they believed epitomized Spain, many began to pine for a more traditional, conservative Britain to be reborn out of the ashes of modern, liberal society. These Romantic imaginings certainly shaped scholarship on the Peninsular War, from the histories of Robert Southey to William Napier. For instance, Howarth writes that Southey, despite feeling a great deal of "contempt for all things Iberian," paradoxically devoted himself to the study of the conflict and to the country itself (63). One Irish MP cited by Southey argued that Spaniards shared with their predecessors "the same enthusiastic superstition, the same persevering insensibility of failure, and, I will add, the same absolute indifference as to liberty, constitution, or cortes" (*History of the Peninsular War*, vol. 2 [London: John Murray, 1827], 652). Howarth shows that "the Spanish fallacy," characterized as Victorian nostalgia for an earlier age of supposed social harmony, contributed to British support for later interventions in Spain in the 1830s (38).

As an interrogation of cross-cultural interactions, *The Invention of Spain* can be read in conjunction with the work of D.A. Brading and Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, especially the latter's *Puritan Conquistadors*, which assesses the common religious worldview that informed both Catholic and Protestant colonial ventures in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. For example, multiple chapters analyze the influence of the Spanish churchman and exile José Blanco White, who, publishing in London, represented his native Spain as a bastion of clerical authority and ultramontanism. Blanco White's transatlantic appeal is noted briefly, as periodicals such as his *El Español* were distributed throughout Spanish America. Yet more might have been done to compare British opinions of both Spain and Spanish America during the Enlightenment and on the eve of American independence. Similarly, although Chapter 1 considers the texts of two quintessential figures from the Scottish Enlightenment, William Robertson and Adam Smith, Robertson's views of the New World are not mentioned (the Comte de Buffon's denigration of the Americas is discussed in passing in Chapter 3). Robertson proposed that the New World remained mired in an original state of nature, as a poor environment had left the Indians weak and indolent. Characterizing the indigenous as childlike and primitive, Robertson echoed Rousseau's conception of the noble savage. His views on environmental determinism colored his impression of European Americans as well. Robertson described Creoles in much the same language he used to disparage Indians: "By the enervating influence of a sultry climate, by the rigour of a jealous government and by the despair of attaining that distinction to which mankind naturally aspires the vigour of their mind is so entirely broken down, that a great part of them waste life in luxurious indulgences, mingled within an illiberal superstition still more debasing" (D.A. Brading, *The Origins of Mexican Nationalism* [Cambridge: Centre of Latin American Studies, 1985], 18). These sentiments closely resembled the rhetoric used by nineteenth-century Britons to portray the state of Spanish society. Connections between these discourses might have been explored in more depth.

Subsequent chapters look at mid-century historians, including the American William H. Prescott, as well as British Hispanophiles seduced by Spanish art and architecture. Howarth delves into the reception of Golden Age Spanish portraits by English elites and recounts tales of the diplomats who served as conduits for Spanish paintings in Britain. Some smuggled works out of the country as disentanglement and civil war opened up opportunities for unscrupulous aristocrats like the British ambassador George Villiers. Even Prescott is discovered to have been an avid art collector with a keen interest in depictions of conquistadors. Howarth cautions against reading too much into these activities, as

the presence of Spanish art in Britain “had more to do with violence and the desire to make money than with a taste in Britain for things Spanish” (165).

This book draws almost exclusively upon English language sources and archives, and the two-page bibliography at the end of the text is quite limited in scope. Furthermore, scholars may be dismayed to come across few references to historiographical debates or theoretical insights. The subtitle of the book most clearly explains the purpose of the text (the title already has been used in E. Inman Fox’s 1998 *La invención de España*), as Howarth convincingly argues that Spain served as a blank slate onto which Britons projected their ideas of the ‘other’. But while a number of sections focus on debates over Catholic emancipation in Britain, political and religious changes in Spain, from the Constitution of Cádiz to the papal concordat of 1851, receive short shrift. For example, Howarth blithely observes that Spain “achieved nothing politically from the death of Charles III in 1788 until the death of Franco in 1975” (30). Howarth’s reductive tendencies are also evidenced when he suggests that “the slave trade [in Britain] had been abolished...largely thanks to the efforts of Charles James Fox” (41). As a cultural study, on the other hand, this book provides a detailed analysis of important figures, from William Wordsworth to Sir William Stirling Maxwell, involved in Anglo-Spanish relations and exchanges during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

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