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The Plaza Mayor and the Shaping of Baroque Madrid (review)

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(Review)

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Las cuatro primeras novelas de Rodoreda reflejan el rechazo de las tendencias políticas conservadoras del *noucentisme* y la consiguiente censura de la actividad creativa. La autora catalana forma parte de la nueva *avant-garde* de izquierdas. El tema central de su producción en esos años es el conservadurismo que discrimina contra la actividad cultural de la mujer.

En los tres primeros capítulos se muestra la crítica ante las premisas del modernismo catalán en las novelas iniciales de Rodoreda. Por ejemplo en *Sóc una dona honrada?* (1932) se reescribe el mito de Don Juan, un topos muy popular en las obras modernistas castellanas y catalanas. En esta novela se expone el modelo de identidad nacional catalana propuesto por Eugeni D'Ors encarnado en "la Ben Plantada." Rodoreda afirma que la ciudad-nación utópica de D'Ors excluye la realidad de la mayor parte del territorio catalán, alejado de la influencia de Barcelona. La novela manifiesta el fracaso del modernismo burgués en promover una renovación social eficaz. La crisis de la "avant-garde" catalana se expone en *Un dia de la vida d'un home* (1934) junto con algunos artículos periodísticos de aquellos años y *Polèmica* (1934), obra escrita en colaboración con otros autores. A través de la perspectiva de género y clase se ve en *Del que hom no pot fugir* (1934) la relación entre ciudad y campo, cultura y naturaleza, rasgos típicamente modernistas, desde el prisma renovador de la autora. Esta novela se estudia frente a otras obras modernistas catalanas como *Solitud* (1905) de Víctor Català y *Gualba, la de mil veus* (1915) de Eugeni D'Ors.

Los prejuicios modernistas en cuanto al género ocupan un lugar central en *Aloma* (1938/1969) y *El carrer de les Camèlies* (1966). *Aloma* es un texto híbrido que subvierte las jerarquías socioculturales tradicionales. *El carrer de les Camèlies* ofrece la revisión del símbolo cultural modernista por excelencia, el "flaneur," convertido en prostituta como forma de interrogar el lugar de la escritora en el mundo moderno. La reivindicación del modernismo en los años setenta y la configuración de la identidad nacional catalana se ven en *Mirall trencat* (1974),

que recoge la historia de la Cataluña moderna en un tipo de literatura comprometida con su momento histórico. *La mort i la primavera* (1986) es una denuncia frente a la represión promovida por los nacionalismos del siglo XX. En la conclusión se analiza la relación del modernismo con el postmodernismo en las letras catalanas y españolas.

El estudio de Arkininstall es fundamental en el entorno actual porque provee las pautas propuestas por Rodoreda a lo largo de su producción literaria. El arte se convierte en un medio de transformación sociopolítica a través de una reescritura que tiene en cuenta a los "otros" seres tan temidos como la mujer, el pueblo llano y géneros literarios no considerados dignos en el ámbito cultural canónico propuesto por el modernismo.

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The Plaza Mayor and the Shaping of Baroque Madrid

Cambridge University Press, 2003

By Jesús Escobar

Spanish architectural historians have increasingly focused their attention on site-specific studies through interdisciplinary research. By incorporating a vast array of discrete archival sources and methodologies, scholars have become adept at integrating seemingly peripheral documentation into a coherent analysis of the construction, purpose and function of urban monuments and public spaces. The result is the emergence of a new intellectual framework through which Spanish cultural history is being written from the inside out. Historic structures that have been seen from afar as illustrations of the vision of a few, or, beginning in the middle of the nineteenth century, as illustrations of a nationalist impulse, are now being scrutinized from within complex contexts evolving through collaborative processes involving many.

Professor Jesús Escobar, an outstanding exponent of this new writing of Spanish history, has focused his attention on one of the most significant urban structures of Spain, the Plaza Mayor of Baroque Madrid. Through interdisciplinary methods he has succeeded in bringing primary archival resources into an intellectual framework that allows the reader to appreciate the literal, social and symbolic construction of Madrid's principal public space. He has also succeeded in delineating the centrality of the Plaza Mayor to the creation of Madrid under the Habsburgs.

After reconstructing the inchoate urban scene from which the Plaza Mayor emerges at the end of the sixteenth century and the first half of the seventeenth, Escobar provides a careful study of various aspects of the creation of the Plaza Mayor in context. Perhaps most important in his reconstruction of the creation of the Plaza Mayor is his invaluable study of its actual construction. By carefully examining accounting records and construction appraisals, Escobar has grounded his commentary on archival documents. By scrutinizing property suits filed against the municipal government, he has developed a means to follow the building chronology and to explore the spatial organization of the housing as well as the history of the inhabitants. Parallel to the examination of the construction of the Plaza Mayor is an excellent analysis of the role of the monument in the thinking of the Habsburg rulers, and many others, who conceived and executed the Plaza for political and social reasons.

Balanced between the scrutiny of construction and the grand vision of the execution of the Plaza Mayor by committee. Escobar persuasively argues that the monument was the result of extensive discussions by a host of figures over a period of time: aldermen, judges, scribes, architects, construction architects, and appraisers (*alarifes*). Regarding this latter group, Escobar provides a nuanced study that reveals an intricate web of trades and personalities who contributed to the making of the Plaza Mayor. Moreover, as the result of this careful study of the creation of the Plaza Mayor

by committee, Escobar demonstrates that the monument resulted from a consensus formed by many and over time as to the nature of the building and its symbolic role in the city and the realm.

A further strength of the book is to be found in the exploration of the public uses of the Plaza Mayor. Escobar affords glimpses into the Plaza Mayor as the great market of the city, an environment filled with shops, stalls and tradesmen. His research in archival resources has thus resulted in more than a description of the making of the Plaza Mayor. It has allowed him to document lived experience within Madrid's principal space.

As a counterpoint to the examination of daily life, Escobar elaborates on the Plaza Mayor as the city's stage and place of spectacle. Although it is understood that public ceremonies were essential to development of an urban culture on a grand scale in Baroque Europe, Escobar has shown how the Plaza Mayor fulfilled this role in the imperial city through a wide range of festivals generated by equally diverse communities within the city.

The book is clearly a significant contribution to our understanding of Spanish history. No scholar of city of Baroque Spain or the Americas should pursue research without a careful reading of this work. My few reservations pertain less to Escobar's analysis of the Plaza Mayor in the shaping of Baroque Madrid than to the presentation of a book to be read in the twenty first century. For example, it would have been helpful to the reader to understand more fully Juan de Villanueva's restoration of the Plaza Mayor after the fire of 1790. Completed during the first third of the nineteenth century, the reforms not only changed the physical appearance of the Plaza but also transformed the environment in which the monument functioned within the urban fabric. Those reforms that altered the Baroque Plaza Mayor deserve more than four concluding paragraphs and a brief mention in the introduction to the subject, especially given the fact that many illustrations that accompany the text necessarily postdate the neoclassical reforms of the Plaza Mayor.

Unfortunately, the book's illustrations form an insufficient graphic support for this excellent text. Although the author has retrieved historic images from various archival sources, their reproduction and integration appear to be insufficient. For a book in which visual documentation could be an extraordinary support, the images diminish its overall effectiveness, especially for students of Spanish cultural history.

Of the 123 illustrations included to support the text, some two dozen images are snapshots taken by the author. Poorly composed and insufficiently edited, these images are improvisations that undermine the rigorous study itself. When Escobar introduces his own photographic reproduction of plans and elevations from the Archivo de la Villa de Madrid, the reduced contrast and crumpled papers render them virtually unintelligible. The results are satisfactory in the reproduction of documents held in the Library of Congress, The New York Public Library, the Biblioteca Nacional, and other institutions with credible photographic services.

Nevertheless, the study itself is an important contribution to the study of Spanish architectural, social and cultural history. Thoroughly grounded in disciplines that range beyond architectural history, Escobar has written a book that shall be essential reading for any study of the development of cities in Habsburg Spain and the Americas.

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The Cuban Revolution: Years of Promise
University Press of Florida, 2005
Edited by Teo A. Babun and Víctor Andrés Triay

The Cuban Revolution: Years of Promise, by Teo A. Babun and Víctor Andrés Triay, is an exceptionally significant contribution to Cuban history through the power of photography. This book which is also subtitled, *A Photographic*

History of the Cuban Revolution, consists of 110 pages of photographs and 20 pages of textual information and narratives of the illustrated events. Most of the images are always accompanied by short descriptions of the events that led to the Cuban revolution and its immediate aftermath. Unlike many other historical texts in which the participants have no faces, this book captures not only the faces of its most important revolutionaries but the photographs are also a powerful testimony of the direct participation of many Cubans in the political developments in the island before and after the 1959 revolution.

In this book, the authors employ a chronological approach highlighting four principal stages of the Cuban revolution beginning in 1953 with the attack on the Moncada military barracks and ending in 1961 with the failed Bay of Pigs invasion. However, it is the preface that serves as an introduction, where Teo A. Babun Jr. one of the authors, sets the frame for the pictures that describe the first incidents of the revolution. According to Babun on May 28, 1957, almost six months after his arrival to Cuba, Fidel Castro led a small group of guerrillas in an attack against a Cuban army garrison near his father's sawmill of El Uvero, near a town of the same name. Later, Babun goes on to mention that this small battle was the first important victory for Castro's army against the forces of dictator Fulgencio Batista. The author describes how his father, an influential industrialist, from Santiago, Cuba, had the intuition that these small developments were the beginning of an important time in the history of his country. In time, according to Babun himself, his father went on to develop a relationship and became a sympathiser to the rebel's cause and used his businesses as a cover to help smuggle arms and ammunition to them. Ironically, says Babun Jr., little would his father ever know that a few short years later Babun's family members would participate in the Bay of Pigs invasion. After his father's death in 1987, Babun goes on to say how he found two shoe boxes filled with photographs of this important part of Cuban history that his father had collected, including many of the pictures that Mr. Jose "Chillin" Trutie had taken. After many years