

Álvarez Rubio, María del Rosario. *Las historias de la literatura española en la Francia del siglo XIX*. Zaragoza: Prensas Universitarias de Zaragoza, 2007. 398 pp.

COLLIN MCKINNEY

Spain and France have always looked to each other as a model for self-understanding, and nowhere is this tendency more evident than in the reception of Spanish literature by French scholars in the nineteenth century. In *Las historias de la literatura española en la Francia del siglo XIX*, a thoroughly researched study that systematically outlines the burgeoning field of Hispanism in nineteenth-century France, María del Rosario Álvarez Rubio provides extensive documentation and a lucid commentary on a variety of sources, including public lectures, multi-volume philological studies, anthologies, and newspaper articles. As Álvarez Rubio explains, these histories usher in a new period of literary studies in France that re-imagines the genre of literary history as an evaluative tool rather than a simple collection of biographical notes about the authors coupled with some models of the various genres. In so doing, these histories reveal as much about France's ideological perspective as they do about the foreign literatures they discuss.

Álvarez Rubio is not the first to comment on the reception of Spanish literature in France (Thomas Hart's 1952 Ph.D. dissertation "A History of Spanish Literary History, 1800–1850" and, more recently, Wadda Ríos-Font's "Literary History and Canon Formation," especially pages 21–27, are two notable examples), but you will unlikely find a more thorough or in-depth examination of the topic than hers.

The book can be divided into two parts, the first of which highlights some of the reasons for the growing popularity of Spanish literature in France, while the second part contains a summary of the primary histories of Spanish literature published in 19th-century France. As she points out in part one, the renewed interest shown by the French for Spanish literature can be traced to the romantic fascination with all things exotic, in this case "el

exotismo hispánico,” as well as a growing preoccupation with national identities.

The main focus of Álvarez Rubio’s study, however, is the influential literary histories that would shape French Hispanism in the nineteenth century and beyond. Ironically, the most significant works that she reviews in the second part of the book are not even by French scholars. In 1812 German philosopher and historian Friedrich Bouterwek’s *Histoire de la littérature espagnole*, originally part of a general history of literature, was translated into French. It was a seminal piece that would become the most influential of the histories of Spanish literature published in France in the nineteenth century. Bouterwek’s stated goal is to describe the progression of Spanish letters and literary tastes as they evolve with advances in civilization. Beginning with its medieval origins and ending with the 18th century, Bouterwek suggests that the unique national flavor of Spain’s literature, what Álvarez Rubio identifies as the “espíritu caballeresco,” is influenced by such factors and cultural absorption, religious intolerance, political successes or, in the case of the first constitutional monarchy, failures, and other key historical events. While his historical approach was certainly a catalyst for legitimizing Spanish literature as distinctive and worthy of attention, Bouterwek hardly strayed from the traditional canon in his preference of authors: Fray Luis, Garcilaso, Calderón, Lope, Cervantes (the *Quijote* will be the cornerstone of virtually every history of Spanish literature published in the nineteenth century), and, from the eighteenth century, Meléndez Valdés. In the decades to follow, scholars relied heavily on Bouterwek’s work as they continued to look more closely at Spanish literature.

Álvarez Rubio examines the usual list of suspects—August Wilhelm von Schlegel, Simonde de Sismondi, George Ticknor—as well as many lesser-known authors, all of whom followed Bouterwek’s lead with respect to the authors and works they highlight. Not until the publication of Gustave Hubbard’s *Histoire de la littérature contemporaine en Espagne* in 1876 is there a real break with tradition. In her examination of Hubbard’s publication Álvarez Rubio reveals a literary history that is unique for both its strong ideological bias and its emphasis on the nineteenth century.

*Histoire de la littérature contemporaine en Espagne* appeared just as Hubbard was returning to France after spending more than two decades in Spain as a political exile, and the literary preferences expressed in the work betray his ideological leanings. Though he does provide a cursory glance at the traditional canon from medieval times through the eighteenth century, three volumes on the nineteenth century indicate his true enthusiasm for Spanish letters, not so surprising given the themes of emancipation and citizenship that one finds in the literature of this period. What Álvarez Rubio's overview of Hubbard's work reveals, indeed what she shows with respect to all of the literary histories that she examines, is that while the canon of Spanish literature does not change very much throughout the nineteenth century, the rhetoric found in the numerous literary histories as well as the ideological justifications for including specific works or authors varies greatly.

Álvarez Rubio's meticulous summaries and extensive footnotes, which often include direct citations from the French originals, are at times unavoidably repetitive. Furthermore, the comprehensive quality of this study may pose an obstacle for readers, particularly for students who may feel somewhat overwhelmed by so many names, titles and dates. This is especially true of the footnotes, which dominate nearly every page of the text (so much so that in the prologue Antonio Fernández Insuela states: "Hablando de notas, digamos que, a veces, tienen tal cantidad de información que, muy posiblemente, podrían ser el origen de un futuro trabajo académico" (9)). In the end, however, such stylistic drawbacks can be easily overlooked considering that the true value of *Las historias de la literatura española en la Francia del siglo XIX* lies not in its readability but as a reference tool full of well-researched documentation, of which the extensive footnotes and bibliography represent a significant contribution to the field and for which specialists will be grateful.

*Las historias de la literatura española en la Francia del siglo XIX* will be indispensable reading for specialists dealing with the literary interaction between Spain and France, but it should also be useful for anyone interested in canon formation of foreign literatures.

Álvarez Rubio's study reveals that when it comes to literary preferences the French gaze is inevitably specular. Authors of literary histories in the nineteenth century read, interpreted, evaluated and disseminated Spanish literature in a way that says just as much about nineteenth-century French aesthetics, political systems, and philosophical thought as it does about Spanish literature.