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DIFFERENCE AS FASHION: ENRIQUE GÓMEZ CARRILLO AND *MODERNISTA CHIC*

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> La moda obedece a una secreta necesidad de la mujer, a su aspiración al cambio, a su índole de capricho, a su necesidad de ser siempre diversa y de ser siempre la misma, a un tiempo. Las diversas combinaciones de colores, la variación en las líneas y en el corte obedecen a una secreta ley, más que a un capricho. No es posible creer que esas líneas rítmicas que embellecen el cuerpo femenino puedan durar eternamente, pues la esencia misma de la moda es su inestabilidad, su variación perpetua, su cambiar continuo. Y todos, hombres y mujeres, las seguirán necesariamente, empujados por el inevitable afán del cambio, por la inestabilidad humana.
> (Luis Orrego Luco, "Hechos y notas," Qtd. in Glickman 347)

Pierre Bourdieu, elaborating on his field concept, formulated a notion of difference as a revolutionary point of change in field dynamics. He explains:

> In the field of restricted production, each change at any one point in the space of positions objectively defined by their difference, their *écart*, induces a generalized change–which means that one should not look for a specific *site* of change. It is true that the initiative of change falls almost by definition on

> the newcomers, i.e. the youngest, who are also those least endowed with specific capital: in a universe in which to exist is to differ, i.e. to occupy a distinct, distinctive position, they must assert their difference, get it known and recognized, get themselves known and recognized ("make a name for themselves"), by endeavoring to impose new modes of thought and expression, out of key with the prevailing modes of thought and with the doxa, and therefore bound to disconcert the orthodox by their "obscurity" and "pointlessness." (*Field* 58)

Bourdieu's idea of difference, as a way for an agent to insert itself into the cultural field of production, relies on consistent updating of field ideas—thus the central role of "newcomers" in creating movements of change within the field.[1] *Modernista* writers, from 1880 to 1930, due to their re-invention of poetic, novelistic and literary-journalistic genres, asserted their position in the transatlantic Hispanic literary field as agents of change. During the decades of *Modernismo*, writers were able to maintain their central position in the field by resisting and questioning orthodoxy. They were also known for their so-called "frivolity" or, to use Bourdieu's term, their "pointlessness," due to their repetitive representation of daily modern life, primarily in journalistic formats. This constant difference aligned *Modernista* writers with the fashion industry of the turn of the twentieth century as a cultural sphere dependent on constant change, sensitive to social and political ruptures. The *crónica* genre became a discursive space where difference was displayed on a daily basis to the expanding reading public of Spanish America. Susana Rotker states that "la crónica se constituye en un espacio de condensación por excelencia, condensación modernista porque en ella se encuentran todas las mezclas, siendo ella *la mixtura* misma convertida en una unidad singular" (53). As Rotker notes, the *crónica* is a space where "mixtura" comes together as a coherent unity. Nevertheless, it is one that is founded

on change and representation of the transforming social, political and cultural spheres. In this "universe in which to exist is to differ," *Modernistas*, through decades of *crónica* repetition, occupied a field position founded upon constant difference; a difference that was repeatedly played out in the journalistic sphere of the period.

The ability for *Modernista* writers to maintain a firm hold for so long on the Hispanic literary field—this universe of difference—was through their participation in a stable repetition of what Bourdieu calls "discovery" or "value making" (*Rules* 167). According to Bourdieu, artists in the cultural field come into existence through an initial discovery by an agent who consecrated the artists' work through publication, commentary, and/or dissemination. Although in contrast to Bourdieu's model, which seldom departs from its application to the French cultural field, *Modernista* writers became their own marketers, publishers, and, consequently, their own "discoverers." This was accomplished primarily through journalistic venues. Bourdieu writes:

> The charismatic image of "great" dealers or great publishers as inspired discoverers who, guided by their disinterestedness and irrational passion for a work, have "made" the painter or writer, or permitted him to "make" himself by sustaining him in difficult times by the faith they have placed in him and by relieving him of material worries, transfigures the real functions. The publisher or the dealer can only organize and rationalize the distribution of the work, [...] can allow a producer to project an inspired and "disinterested" picture of himself and his activity by enabling him to avoid contact with the market, relieving him of the tasks, both ridiculous and demoralizing, associated with the marketing of his work. (*Rules* 168)

Journalism gave *Modernistas* a de facto institution that allowed them to market themselves without the "ridiculous and

demoralizing" consequences expressed by Bourdieu. In fact, *crónica* production allowed for a perpetual auto-discovery both due to the extent of *Modernista* journalistic participation and the relative autonomy that the writers obtained from newspaper editors. Therefore, *Modernista* writers held multiple roles in the literary field that allowed them to produce, market, and influence work that occurred in the field. The continuous difference and newness that *Modernistas* introduced in the field as well as their invariable auto-discovery through the *crónica* genre defined and sustained *Modernismo* as a literary movement.

Incorporating concepts from Bourdieu's idea of difference helps to understand the lasting literary revolution that was enacted by *Modernista* writers. Their ability to maintain longevity as a group, having extensive influence in the literary field, created a constant renewal in the way they expressed themselves through their literature. Bourdieu's view of difference as a force in entering and gaining power within the literary field attests to the *Modernista* concern with the role of the artist in public life and the constant renewal that occurred in the literary field that were propelled by and motivated through *crónica* production. Applying Bourdieu's notion of difference to the *Modernista* movement and attempting to reframe the literary period as one that is under a state of constant transgression or revolution is exemplified through a rhetoric where the literary *chic* and fashion is central to the movement's success.

In Juan Valera's famous letter praising Rubén Darío's *Azul*..., which effectively assisted the poet in rising to a high position in the transatlantic Hispanic literary field, he explains how the Nicaraguan poet, as untraveled as he was, is not only chic and fashionable but is an authority of fashion who has the power and distinction to modify and impose his style on others. He writes: "Resulta de aquí un autor nicaragüense, que jamás salió de Nicaragua sino para ir a Chile, y que es autor tan a la moda de París y con tanto *chic* y distinción, que se adelanta a la moda y pudiera modificarla e

imponerla" (11). Coming from the famed Spanish writer, the wording of the letter demonstrates that at the cusp of *Modernista* success in the Americas, the Hispanic literary world also responded to *Modernista* difference and the effect it had on literary fashion. Darío further elaborates on the notion of revising and refashioning literary style in his manifesto-like *crónica* "Los colores del estandarte." Responding to Argentine critic Paul Groussac's unfavorable review of his book *Los raros*, the poet expands upon his revisionist literary technique: "La sonoridad oratoria, los cobres castellanos, sus fogosidades, ¿por qué no podrían adquirir las notas intermedias, y revestir las ideas indecisas en que el alma tiende a manifestarse con mayor frecuencia?" (121). The desire to "redress" language and ideas is a central goal of *Modernistas* and one that is grounded on individual originality. Darío continues:

> No son los raros presentados como modelos; primero, porque lo raro es lo contrario de lo normal, y después, porque los canones del arte moderno no nos señalan más derroteros que el amor absoluto a la belleza—clara, simbólica o arcana—y el desenvolvimiento y manifestación de la personalidad. Se tú mismo: esa es la regla. (123)

Articulating and asserting an original literary and artistic personality is the apogee of literary fashion of the period. Darío knows that through his "redressing" of the modern world, his aestheticization of everyday life, he is both differentiating himself as an artist, and adding upon the canon of modern art. Therefore, the creation of the concept of canonicity as "*raro*" and different, with an emphasis on personal creativity, places the artistic authority garnered by members of the movement upon the shoulders of the writers themselves. Consequently, *Modernista* writers employed this model of *raro* as personality based originality and repeatedly renewed their

public identities through journalistic textual production. They were able to "imponer" and "modificar" literary and cultural fashion because of their pronounced presence in the public and literary spheres not only in Spanish America, but in an enunciated relationship with the other side of the Atlantic. *Modernista* Enrique Gómez Carrillo exemplifies this redressing of everyday life and further develops the connection between fashion and difference in his own *crónicas* in theorizing aesthetic originality and the foundational role of personality in artistic production.

Enrique Gómez Carrillo, preeminent *cronista* of the *Modernista* movement, has been largely overlooked in Hispanic literary criticism despite his highly prolific literary career and his central role in shaping *Modernismo* as a literary movement and assisting in its propagation after the deaths of prominent figures of the movement, Rubén Darío and Amado Nervo in 1916 and 1919 respectively.[2] Publishing books and *crónicas* up until his death in 1927, Gómez Carrillo left a lasting mark upon the public face of Spanish-American letters on the European continent as he spent much of his life between Paris and Madrid. Content with critically engaging his detractors as well as other *Modernistas*, the Guatemalan did not hesitate to directly grapple with the struggles of literary field of the turn of the twentieth century. Quickly rising to a status enshrouded in controversy, Gómez Carrillo's personality was deliberately excessive. For example, he had a tenuous relationship with Darío, openly collaborated with Clarín—one of *Modernismo's* most vociferous detractors—and was repeatedly involved in personal disputes and sensationalistic romances. This performative personality as depicted through Gómez Carrillo's both turbulent and productive life helped to increase his prestige in both public and literary spheres. His ability to insert himself in the issues of the day and become involved in cultural and political circles garnered him publishing opportunities that propelled him to a high position in the literary field of the period. Different than other *Modernistas* who

were widely known for their poetic contributions, the Guatemalan focused on journalistic production in newspapers and magazines which he subsequently republished in dozens of *crónica* anthologies. Gómez Carrillo took frivolity and pointlessness by the reins and achieved an extensive readership based on his wide range of commentary through a literary and culture-based emphasis on everyday themes. This self-conscious identification as a commentator of daily life was often acknowledged by the writer as he appropriated himself to such positions as "ministerio de director de conciencias ligeras y de catedrático de coquetería transcendental" ("El arte" 98) and "doctor en ciencias frívolas" ("Las sibilas" 152). Asserting an authority as "doctor" and "director" of pointlessness underscores Gómez Carrillo's ability to maintain a sense of normalized novelty in his textual production as he provided the masses with his representation of regular cosmopolitan happenings. Hence he was able to differentiate himself in the literary field through repeated production in the most market-based textual formats such as newspapers and magazines while simultaneously claiming authority as eccentric and frivolous and also widely publishing more "literary" genres—such as the novel. Gómez Carrillo also published broadly in book form, a material form that also contributed to his validity and prestige in the literary field.

Additionally, Gómez Carrillo's travel writing and continuous textual reproduction allowed him to participate in an ever-transforming modernity. This global travel added to the Guatemalan's difference as he provided a continual stream of correspondence to Hispanic audiences in newspapers such as Buenos Aires's *La Nación* and Madrid's *El liberal*. Incorporating his experiences into his literary persona, he developed a semblance of transitivity, sensation, and a continual crossing of social and literary boundaries. Gómez Carrillo theorizes travel in his well-known essay "La psicología del viaje." He writes:

> Yo no busco nunca en los libro de viaje el alma de los países que me interesan. Lo que busco es algo más frívolo, más sutil, más pintoresco, más poético y más positivo: la sensación. [...] Comparando descripciones de un mismo sitio hechas por autores diferentes, se ve la diversidad de las retinas. [...] Cada hora del día, cada capricho del sol, cada cambio de la atmósfera, modifica radicalmente el paisaje. (265–66)

This sensationalism befits *Modernista crónica* production that is temporary and continuously shifting and differing on a daily basis. Repeating his sensations in newspapers and magazines as well as in his dozens of book publications and republications, Gómez Carrillo persuasively becomes the Spanish-American eyes and ears for myriads of readers across the Hispanic world. This creates an ambiance of perpetual fashion-making as the Guatemalan records what he, with all of the weight of his literary persona, senses on a regular basis. Beatriz Colombi called the privileged position of Gómez Carrillo's perspective "la impresión del instante" (185). The capturing and recapturing of the present, whether it is represented in his travel *crónicas*, his commentary on the ills of the Spanish book industry, or his innumerable articles on the fashions of the day, Gómez Carrillo plays the role of critic at the center of the happenings of the instant. The instantaneous impressions that Gómez Carrillo provides his readers during several decades allows the writer a never-ending pedestal to renew his capital in the literary field of the period.

Gomez Carrillo exemplifies how *Modernista* writers not only modified literary fashions of the time, but also set out to define what it meant to be fashionable and *chic*. In an article aptly titled "La personalidad" he sets out to define fashion in terms of rarity, personality and a "*chic* peculiar" ("Personalidad" 83). At the start of the *crónica*, he differentiates the fashionable from a high consumerism that "ruins" men's pocketbooks but instead "lo arruine con

gusto, con arte, con originalidad y, sobre todo, con personalidad" (82). Highlighting the Parisian women's ability to manuver around the excessive consumerism of the time, in "la metrópoli del chic femenino, una mujer logra más fácilmente llamar la atención con una sola nota rara, por menuda que sea, que con muchos millones malgastados" (82). Fashion in the chic capital is based on a subtle difference in dress that, according to the *cronista*, easily calls attention to the woman. This small yet significant difference is based on individual personality and originality—something that all can achieve. He continues:

> En Paris no hay, en realidad, una moda que pueda aplicarse a todas las mujeres, sino muchas modas, y muchos modos de servirse de ellas [...]. Haga usted una docena de vestidos iguales, y delos usted a doce parisienses diferentes. Al día siguiente, cuando cada una de ellas se haya puesto el que le corresponda, no los reconocerá usted. La una habrá hecho del suyo una túnica de diosa, y la otra un envoltorio de muñeca. [...] Cada uno tiene su *cachet* especial, su *chic* peculiar, su gracia inconfundible. ("Personalidad" 83)

The democratization apparent in the Parisian world of fashion is what Gómez Carrillo calls "el secreto del chic parisiense" which "para llegar a la poesía del *chic*, sería necesario que cada *lady* tuviera el deseo de distinguirse de las demás" ("Personalidad" 84). Gómez Carrillo's represents Parisian *chic* in literary terms as the term possesses a poetic nature that allows women to differentiate themselves from others. This desire to differentiate and to be distinguished is a fundamental part of entering the world of the fashionable. In the literary field the dynamic is no different. Members must continuously invent and reinvent their literary production as well as their identities as field agents in order to differ. *Modernista* writers excelled at this continual refashioning. This differing

power, for Bourdieu, is what allows members of the literary field to change field dynamics, to update and revolutionize field orthodoxies.

In an epigraph, Chilean writer Luis Orrego Luco writes that fashion follows a human law that obeys a "necesidad de ser siempre diversa y ser siempre la misma, a un tiempo [...] pues la esencia misma de la moda es su inestabilidad, su variación perpetua, su cambiar continuo" (qtd. in Glickman 347). *Modernistas* differed by employing a rhetoric of originality in their texts—on a weekly and often daily basis—supporting and openly displaying the idea of artistic novelty and particularity. The concept of *chic* as described by Gómez Carrillo rejects passivity and values personal creative agency. For him, *chic* is an aesthetic value central to *Modernistas* that allowed them to infiltrate the transatlantic literary field through an active marketing of his/her own work. This marketing, as mentioned by Bourdieu, is fundamental in sustaining an artist's positionality in the field of cultural production. It is a role that *Modernistas* embraced and controlled in order to assert power as artists. Thanks to the instability of modernity and the fluctuating cultural identities and fashions, writers of the movement repeatedly revolutionized the literary world through a continued *chic*. Gómez Carrillo ends "La personalidad" stating: "No hay nada tan agradable como saber que no vestimos a un maniquí sumiso ante la moda niveladora, sino a una creatura de gusto, de fantasía, de capricho y de belleza espiritual..." (87). This affirmation suggests that, for *Modernistas*, fashion is indeed based on active use of creative agency. Gómez Carrillo applauds the use of fashion for original aesthetic difference instead of aimlessly following societal norms.

Modernista dialogue with fashion, particularly in Gomez Carrillo's texts, provided writers with a parallel universe of sorts. This universe, like the world of fashion, included material trends that they were able to witness first hand on the cosmopolitan streets of

Europe and Spanish America. Writers of the movement, themselves literary "designers," endeavored to carve a space for themselves in the realm of letters. As they were immersed in the material world of the city, *Modernistas* established a strong affinity with the fashion designers. In Gómez Carrillo's *crónicas*, this connection is transferred over to the popular consumer, who used the latest fashions to in turn create her own style. This opens up another parallel to *Modernista* ideology that is focused on public literature and the importance of literature in the daily lives of their readership. What fashion allows, whether it be clothes or literature, is the opportunity for citizens to enhance their existence in the modern world. *Modernistas*, through their journalistic works that were disseminated regularly to mass audiences, encouraged artistic consumption—a consumption of fashion that readers could apply to their everyday lives and ultimately give more meaning to their existence as subjects of modernity.

In an article published in the Spanish newspaper *ABC* in 1926, the Guatemalan poet further deliberates the importance of *chic* in terms of individual agency and how it produces culture that does not often fulfill societal norms. He writes:

> El *chic*, piensa la gente, en general, es el tacto, la elegancia fina, la gracia original, el ritmo impecable... Y, en efecto, a veces es eso. Pero otras veces no es eso. Y otras veces es lo contrario. [...] Lo que en un barrio es elegante, en otro barrio es ridículo. Hay salones, en las suntuosas avenidas de la Estrella, donde el *chic* no comienza sino en los linderos de la excentricidad, o, mejor dicho, para hablar como las damas que allí se reúnen, de la *originalidad*. Y no creáis que esto consiste siempre en la manía de querer adelantarse a la moda. [...] ¿Os figuráis, verbigracia, el efecto que ahora produciría una muchacha que se pasease escondiendo las pantorrillas casi hasta los tobillos? Dos o tres años, no obstante, eso era lo *chic*, lo

parisiense, lo elegante, lo gentil. Mañana volverá a serlo. ("El 'chic'" 7)

Gómez Carrillo's conception of *chic* is public yet individual. Feminine originality, for the writer, constitutes true fashion. Ironically, what is *chic* is at times composed by public opinion and other times, by contrast, it is entirely dependent solely on the creative subject. This subjectivity lives and dies in the context of originality and the subsequent reinvention and repetition of this originality. *Modernista* literary production parallels and embodies the fashionable and *chic*. *Modernistas* used the ever-increasing consumerism in the urban centers of the period to propagate their style which resulted in a massification of *Modernista* form and textual repetition. Gómez Carrillo is an example *par excellence* of *Modernista* use of the emerging mass media forms by publishing and republishing thousands of texts (which were in turn disseminated by the thousands) in magazines, newspapers and book volumes.

Gomez Carrillo uses the term *chic* to describe fashion that is original and creative. He also makes it clear that the Parisian *chic* is not necessarily categorized under the institutions of the fashion industry. Those that are *chic* are those that adapt to institutionalization and form it to create their own style. It is this creativity that gives them notoriety and prestige in social circles in Paris. Arguably, the same can be said of *Modernista* literature, which used what many thought to be cursi and formed it into something highly creative and original. Their literature, though criticized and abhorred by some, was elevated to "high culture" status by others. This "fashioning" of their literature though an adaptation to and dialogue with the transformations of modernity, gave them the flexibility to retain their status as central figures in the literary world during their lifetimes. It is because of their *chic* sensibilities, their continual interaction with the present, that they were able to continue to renovate the literary norms of the period on their terms allowing *Modernismo*

to exist in a permanent state of difference for several decades.

NOTES

[1]David Swartz explains that "Bourdieu conceptualizes modern society as an array of relatively autonomous but structurally homologous fields of production, circulation, and consumption of various forms of cultural and material resources. Fields mediate the relationship between social structure and cultural practice" (9). Scholarship incorporating Bourdieu's field allows for analysis that includes a deep contextualization informed by the mediating factors of production, circulation, and consumption and how they relate to the interests of field members. Members in a given field are in a constant struggle for position-takings that reflect both the internal rules that guide the field as well as the external influences from other fields. The understanding of these struggles and the interests that constitute them is found both in textual content and form as well as extra-textual influence such as networks of cultural agents, economic structure and pressure, and political contexts. For critical studies that use Bourdieu to analyze the *Modernista* movement see Jeff Browitt, José Eduardo González, and Alejandro Mejías-López.

[2]Gómez Carrillo had a monumental publishing record during his life. He published thousands of journalistic *crónicas*, directed newspapers and literary magazines, and published over 70 book editions of his work—many of which were republished in several languages during his lifetime.

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Monographic Review/Revista Monográfica ISSN: 0885-7512

ISSN: 0885-7512

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Printed in the United States of America

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Monographic Review
Revista Monográfica

Volume XXV — Kitsch, Cursi, "High" and "Low": Fashions in Hispanic Literature — 2009

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