

Futurism in Spanish Literature

İspanyol Edebiyatında Fütürizm

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Abstract

At the beginning of the 20th century, a group of authors, poets and artists known as “Vanguardistas” (modernists) paved the way for modern movements in art and literature in Spain. Inspired by the Italian poet Filippo Tomasso Marinetti, the Futurism movement quickly showed its influence in Spain as well as other countries. It rose to prominence due to its original and dynamic perceptions as well as its appreciation of modernism. As the world is constantly changing, old traditions, lifestyles, outdated ideas as well as previous attitudes, perceptions, styles and movements in literature and art should be abandoned in favor of newer, more original and current ones. This point of view is especially clear in the works of Ramón Gómez de la Serna. Italian Futurism suggests that previous ideas, literary styles and lifestyles cannot have strong links with the present and it is a challenge that makes it difficult to open the doors for the future. Based on this idea and adding different points of view, the Spanish writers aimed at building an original Futurism with its roots in the past but focusing on the future. Spanish intellectuals protested the oppression and censorship of the ruling order in that period, benefiting from the innovative style and perceptions of Futurism in literature.

Keywords: Futurism, Spanish Literature, Ramón Gómez de la Serna, Gabriel Alomar, Marinetti.

Öz

XX. yüzyılın başlarında İspanya’da “Vanguardistas”(yenilikçiler) diye adlandırılan bir grup yazar, şair ve sanatçı, İtalyan şair Filippo Tomasso Marinetti’nin etkisiyle, sanatta ve edebiyatta yenilikçi akımlara kapı açmışlardır. Sürrealizm, Dadaizm, Ultraizm gibi akımların başını çeken Fütürizm, yenilikçi algının öncülerindedir. İtalya kökenli Fütürizm akımı, etkisini diğer ülkelerde olduğu gibi İspanya’da da çok geç olmadan göstermiştir. Özgün ve dinamik bir algıya sahip olan akım, aynı zamanda Modernizme olan övgüsüyle ön plana çıkmaktadır. Dünya sürekli değişmektedir. Eski gelenekler, yaşam biçimleri, fikirler, edebi ve sanatsal alandaki önceki tutumlar ve anlayışlar, tarzlar, akımlar devam ettirilmemeli; daha yeni, daha özgün ve daha güncel olana yönelinmelidir. Bu düşünce yapısı üzerine kurulmuş olan Fütürizm, kısa zamanda -Ramón Gómez de la Serna’nın eserleri başta olmak üzere- etkisini İspanyol Edebiyatında da göstermeye başlar. İtalyan Fütürizmine göre geçmişten gelen düşüncelerin, edebi tarzların ve yaşantıların güncellikte güçlü bir bağlantısı olamaz ve bu geleceğe açılan kapıları zorlayacak bir unsur olacaktır. Özgün ve yeni olana yönelen Fütürizm, bu yönüyle isyankâr tutum ve kurulu düzene bir başkaldırı niteliğindedir. 1908 senesinden itibaren Serna ile kendini gösteren akım, aydın yazarların düzenledikleri edebi toplantılarda başlayarak çeşitli dergilerle ismini duyurmaya ve kabul görmeye başlar. İspanyollar tarafından, geçmişle bağını tümenden koparmadan geleceğe yönelmiş özgün bir Fütürizm inşa etmek amaçlanmıştır. Dönemin baskıcı ve sansürcü yönetimine karşı çıkan İspanyol aydınları, edebiyatta Fütürizmden faydalanarak, süregelen düzene yenilikçi bir tarz ve anlayışla karşı koymayı amaçlamışlardır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Fütürizm, İspanyol Edebiyatı, Ramón Gómez de la Serna, Gabriel Alomar, Marinetti.

Introduction

Having its roots in Italy, Futurism made its name in the *Manifesto del Futurismo* of Filippo Tomasso Marinetti, an Italian poet. At first popular only in Italy, the Futurism movement started to expand and gain more attention when *Manifesto del Futurismo*, first published in *Le Figaro* magazine in 1909, was translated into other languages and published in other European countries and when Marinetti’s other works were published in political and literary magazines. After the work of Marinetti, who was a revolutionist and non-fascist, was translated into Spanish and published in that country, the Italian author wrote another work entitled *Proclama Futurista a los Españoles* in order to appeal to the Spanish public. Marinetti highlighted his view of Futurism that change and evolution are inevitable and we should adapt ourselves to this evolution as the living conditions, political dynamics, scientific research and technology change. He also underlined that Futurism is an important movement for more liberal and combative communities. The Italian poet’s work influenced the whole country and planted the seed that would expand the movement in Spain in a short time.

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Ramón Gómez de la Serna and Futurism

Being one of the most important authors of Spanish literature in the 20th century thanks to his hardworking, determined, revolutionist character as well as his literary and intellectual creativity, Ramón Gómez de la Serna's works led to the Futurism movement being known, adopted and expanded in Spain. By supporting Modernism while appreciating Spanish traditions and values, Serna suggests that the Futurism movement supports development. "Futurism is one of the most beautiful calls which shows us permissiveness and courage which we need for leaping forward" (Gómez de la Serna, 1909, p. 91). Although Serna was born between the 98 and 27 generations of Spanish literature (composed of authors who took part in the republican struggle), he remarked that he was not included in any specific generation (Gómez de la Serna, 1988, p. 80). He derived much benefit from the experiences of the 98 generation authors, had a remarkable admiration for them and was inspired by them while building his strong character and literary works. Serna's knowledge of the classical movement, experiences in the fields of history and policy, journeys to many countries, experiences on these journeys and skills of elaborated observation not only made him an original and valuable author but also played an important role in the intellectual formation of his country. While the way for the 27 Generation due to the impact of his works, meetings and conferences on the intellectual class, Serna also appreciated the ideas and words of Marinetti, published his *Manifiesto del Futurismo* in *Prometeo*, the Spanish cult magazine of that period, and shed light upon them through his own works published in the same magazine, thus making Futurism known to the Spanish people.

Published between 1908 and 1912, *Prometeo* magazine was both a platform where new ideas and movements were promoted and a publication where Republicans intellectually held sway. As Futurism started to expand in the Spanish platform with Marinetti's *Manifiesto* and Serna's works, the Spanish author held various *tertulias*, gave speeches in at conferences and lessons and finally became "the envoy of Futurism in Spain having roots in Italy" (Mancebo Roca, 2006, p. 3). Highly excited and determined, Serna continued to work non-stop with the excellent intellectual infrastructure and support of Gutierrez Solana (the Painter), Joan Miró (the author), Luis Buñuel (the film producer and screenwriter José Ortega y Gasset (the philosopher), as well as Azorín, Valle-Inclán and Lorca from the 98 Generation. Thus, he enabled the Futurism movement to be known, interpreted and restructured in Spanish Literature. Number of participants attending the *Tertulia de Pombo* meetings held in 1915 increased day by day. Republican and revolutionary ideals were dealt with at these meetings, where Futurism gained momentum under the guise of Modernism, which still had links with the past.

Futurism turned out to be a perception where such contradictions as national elements-foreign elements, tradition-modernism, socialization-alienation, national sources-foreign sources were handled and evaluated collectively (Mancebo Roca, 2006, p. 4).¹

In addition to his essays, conferences, meetings and *tertulias*, Serna also participated in radio programs and spontaneous interviews. These liberal platforms brought together painters, sculptors, men of letters, musicians, film producers and architects in their appreciation of Modernism. Then Futurism veered from Marinetti's original examples when it started to become more Spanishized as ideas were shaped in accordance with Spanish traditions and culture over time.

It can be said that Futurism evolved in two phases – the first being when Marinetti's *Manifiesto* was published in Spanish (1909). The second began when Spanish intellectuals became idealistically more mature (1928). In this period, Marinetti visited Spain and participated in *tertulias* and conferences. Spanish authors and artists started to interpret

¹ Translated into English by the author.

Futurism with a more original point of view and style. The unilateralism in Marinetti's first work was substituted by a combination of different values in Spain.

Works on Futurism

Catalan author Gabriel Alomar's work named *el Futurismo* is important as it was written (though not published) in 1905, four years before Marinetti's *Manifesto*. Even though Futurism was brought to Spain by Marinetti, it had been handled in literary terms a few years before –It suggests that Spanish Literature had developed its own Futurism.

Gabriel Alomar's *el Futurismo* reflects the idea that inspiration from the past travels into the future in the form of a new movement and this weak link with the past lies behind the future. Alomar's "work does not sacrifice tomorrow; on the contrary, it focuses on living today for tomorrow" (Alomar, 1990, p. 22). It is important to live today for the gains and hopes of the future, not under the impact of traditional and conventional frame of mind, political experiences and attitudes of the past. It is possible to build the future only with innovations, discoveries and inventions in the fields of literature, art, science, policy, technology and architecture.

Alomar's Futurism emphasizes a liberal and modern spirit while criticizing imprisoned and narrowed frames of mind which cannot break the walls. He suggests that Futurism is not a simple discipline, does not belong to one single era, will make its way towards constant progress and will evolve with the changes by integrating with the humans to be purified of the beliefs and ideas of previous centuries. He believes that Futurism indicates a dynamic, energetic and progressive attitude. It needs a perception which is directed towards the ideas, forecasts and visions integrated with "tomorrow".

The articles entitled *El Futurismo en París* and *Pequeña Historia de Mi Palabra* published in Alomar's *El Poble Catalá* magazine in 1909 are valuable literary works of Spanish Futurism. In these, Alomar criticizes some Spanish journalists for believing that modernism and Futurism exist only in Paris by focusing attention on Spain and Catalonia, which should also be regarded as promoters of Futurism. Futurism cannot be a movement adopted only by the Italians or the French. Spanish intellectuals can also create an original and native Futurism – different and unique with its own cultural, historical, literary and political infrastructures and values.

Inspired by the works of Alomar, Marinetti and Serna, the Spanish author Andrés Gómez Blanco published his article entitled *El Futurismo: una escuela nueva literaria* (Futurism: A new school of letters) on in the *Nuestro Tiempo* magazine in 1910, in which he criticizes the traditional frame of mind that is strictly bound to the past while underlining the necessity a strong and academic background as well as progress. Emphasizing the importance of academic studies and scientific developments, he claims that there should be more artistic and cultural elements such as museums and theaters. Development is possible through the personal efforts of individuals as well as the intellectual and artistic developments of the society. In his *Llamamiento a los intelectuales*, published in *Prometeo* magazine, he expressed the same ideas to encourage Spanish intellectuals like Alomar. Emphasizing the need for original intellectual creations, Blanco invites Spanish intellectuals conduct literary, artistic, technological and scientific developments with courage, virtue, honor, determination and belief.

Silverio Lanza, another Spanish author who was inspired by the 98 Generation and Serna, contributed much to the literary background of Spanish Futurism with his work *Arte Joven*, published in *Prometeo* in 1909. He puts forward the view that people, hence societies, always need to develop in order to attain happiness and an easy life and only with the help of science and technology can this happen.

Philosophy of Futurism

Although Futurism has an intellectually rich background, it is unfortunately weak in implementation because of the impacts of that period. This movement sparked and burst into flames but was unfortunately blown out in the end. Even so, it was still appreciated and welcomed by the intellectuals. Claiming that it is necessary to be dynamic and impetuous against fascist and oppressive regimes, Futurism tells young people that they can live with the danger. Futurism also criticizes the frame of mind of a society which is monotonous, superficial and lacking in foresight and commonsense as well as cowardly. Society is overwhelmed by the unfair administration and order which is like an insult to its spirit. "Denial of the past" which is one of the fundamental concepts of Futurism is indeed a reference to the people's suffering. It is possible in Modernism and innovation (in other words, Futurism) to hope, recover and keep going ambitiously; as can be seen in "Raise your heads. "Standing, towards the sky, we challenge the stars again" (Marinetti, 1909, p. 1). Adopting the concepts of rebelling and holding one's head high against injustice, Futurism (with the help of its dynamic structure) aims at destroying the monotony which hurts the mentality and spirit of the society. "We would like to sing the song of love for danger, strength and courage" (Marinetti, 1909, p. 1).

Famous for his work entitled *Julepe de Menta*, the Spanish author and philosopher Ernesto Giménez Caballero invited Marinetti to Spain in 1928 to deliver a speech at a conference. In this conference, regarded as the second phase of Futurism in Spain, the Italian poet shed light on the philosophy of Futurism through his words "we will cleanse the world of the war by destroying it" (Marinetti, 1909, p. 1) and also explained why Futurism did not have any link with the past. He introduced to Spain once again this modern movement with its hopeful view of the future. Since Futurism had a dynamic, innovative and modern structure which is closed to the old and past, it could include all the colors, technological elements, liberal and idealist mentality, light and energy in the fields of cinema, literature, music, sculpture and painting.

In *Manifesto*, the work of Marinetti which is regarded as the beginning of Futurism, dangerous, brave, rebellious, impudent and aggressive attitudes are dignified while technology, desire for victory, ideal of revolution, unity as well as courageous individuals and societies are also appreciated. His premise of "few words more works", the Italian poet touches upon the importance of action and movement in his *Manifesto*. Old things should be transformed into new ones: villages, counties and cities as well as beliefs and behaviors should be renewed; machines, tools, etc. should be included in our lives and the number of inventions should be increased; Transportation and communication should be improved; technologies for cars, trains, vessels and aircrafts should be developed; and industry and trade should be expanded in the cities and relevant centers should be established.

Inspired by the patriotic ideas of the Italian poet Serna suggests in *El Movimiento Intelectual: Futurismo* (Futurism as an Intellectual Movement) that this movement can put the lives of people into order. It is able to provide the change which is needed by people and societies. In this regard, "Futurism is an excellent call" (García García, 1998, p. 18). Serna and other intellectual authors were ready to take the necessary steps for Spain to lose blood because of the disaster in 1898. Setting off to build a new and strong country, the Spanish author focuses attention on individual liberalism, epic feelings, national dignity, intellectual depth, development in science and technology, innovations in industry as well as commercial initiatives. Pointing out that a military ideology and system should be reinforced in order to protect territories, Serna also puts forward that everybody should be prepared for war and victory at any time. It is necessary to run the risk of danger and be courageous in difficult situations. It is also necessary for the society to feel emotions such as love while being motivated towards art, literature and beauty. He also calls on clergymen and landlords, who feel

the pulse of traditions and are considered to be more open-minded with a larger and deeper point of view, to support tourism for the commercial development of the country. They are also asked to abandon hyper nationalism and pay attention to the welfare and development of the country because it would be impossible to do so with the old and outdated frames of mind.

Intellectual Differences

Although the Futurism introduced by Marinetti was welcomed by Spanish intellectuals, they viewed some points differently and the movement was re-interpreted with original values. In Alomar's work, there is an attitude which protects traditions and history much more compared to the ideas of the Italian poet. It emphasizes achieving today and the future "through ideas and beliefs which existed for ages" (Alomar, 1990, p. 22). In this regard, Alomar's *El Futurismo* is different from Italian rooted Futurism. The Catalan author suggests that it may be wrong to completely turn one's back on history and turn one's head only towards the future as expressed by Marinetti's Futurism. It cannot have an organic link with Spanish society because it could cause damage in a society which currently depends on its traditions and appreciates its own national values. Based on this idea, Alomar puts forward the view that it would be more appropriate to head towards the future based on the inspiration and specific disciplines remaining from the past as well as an important historical infrastructure. He believes that "the future should be conquered by maintaining values of the past" (Mancebo Roca, 2006, p. 8).

Futurism and Romanticism

In *El Futurismo* of the Catalan author, we witness a post-romantic attitude. rebellious and daring character while never relinquishing its links with the past, Romanticism also has traditional characteristics. Emphasizing the importance of emotional and spiritual values, Alomar also adds these characteristics to his own Futurism. "In contrast to Marinetti, he states that it is necessary to have knowledge traditions and have links with the past in a sense, so that it will be easier to attain the concepts presented by Futurism" (Lentzen, 1986, p. 4). If we describe Romanticism as "coincidentia oppositorum" (Löwy, Sayre, 2016, p. 9) (unity of contrasts) as defined by the sociologist Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre, a man of letters, we can understand the intellectual structure which lies behind the attitude of the Catalan author.

It is both revolutionist and anti- revolutionist, individualist and communalist, cosmopolitan and nationalist, realist and visionary, retroactivist and utopianist, rebel and melancholic, democrat and aristocrat, activist and thinker, republican and monarchist, red and white, mystic and sensual (Löwy, Sayre, 2016, p. 9).

In that case, there is a balance in Alomar's ideas, having an undeniable importance in the establishment of Spanish Futurism, in which contrasts are evaluated appropriately and new values are obtained. There are tracks of Romanticism in Spanish Futurism –especially those established and interpreted by Alomar.

Futurism in Poems

Having impacts on many areas, Futurism is especially remarkable in poems. Originally aimed at achieving innovations, it would foreshadow a new style, even new and different themes, in poems as well. A free style began to be adopted with "liberal words" (Ilie, 1964, p. 210) in order to reflect this idea. Guillermo de Torre, the Spanish poet, wrote poems in free verse with diverse themes. He sometimes included automobiles in his futurist poems in which he talks about dynamic and energetic issues and strength.

Automobile

In a dynamic happiness

Leaving a track

From its exhaust fumes (Foard, 1975, p. 78).

Francisco Vighi and León Felipe were other Futurist Spanish poets who wrote poems in verse libre. León Felipe, a Spanish poet participating in the *tertulias* (the literary, political and ideal meetings in which intellectuals of that period came together) wrote a poem called “Drop A Star”, which also had traces of Futurism.

The world is a slot machine,
 With a groove in the front of the sky,
 On the head of the sea.
 The machine has stopped,
 The rope is gone
 The world is something that works
 Like the mechanical piano of a bar.
 (The rope is gone,
 The machine has stopped ...
 Sailor,
 You have a star in your pocket
 Drop a star (Pliego, 2002, pp. 34-35).

In Futurist poems, there is a tendency to write lines of two or three words in addition to verse libre. In these Futurist poems, which may have only a single word in a line, the aim is to express “few words more works” (Marinetti, 1909, p. 1).

Conclusion

With the publication of Marinetti’s manifesto and his call to Spanish writers, in addition to Serna’s efforts to introduce the movement of Futurism and the inclusion of this movement in publications by many Spanish authors and poets, Spanish intellectuals adopted Futurism and created an original style different from Italian poets’ works. A different Futurism was developed comprising their new frames of mind as well as the traditional and historical infrastructure. Thus, it would be reasonable to discuss the existence of an original Spanish Futurism. Even so, there is always a feeling of appreciation for Marinetti, who had the greatest influence on this movement. “Marinetti, we greet you with an eternal Spanish appreciation” Lentzen, 1986, p. 4). Although it had a short life, Spanish Futurism will always preserve its value and importance in the history of Spanish Literature thanks to its targets and direction.

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