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Review of: Jesus Cruz, *The Rise of Middle-Class Culture in Nineteenth-Century Spain*

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Jesus Cruz, *The Rise of Middle-Class Culture in Nineteenth-Century Spain*. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2011. 294 pp.

Recently, for whatever reason, English-language publications on Spain's nineteenth century history have unfortunately been far and few between. While the trend among modern Hispanists to study twentieth-century topics such as the Spanish Civil War, the Spain of the Franco Regime, or the post-Franco transition to democracy is welcomed, Jesús Cruz's splendid new book on the making of bourgeois culture in Spain reminds us there is still very much to be said about the nineteenth century which, in turn, will inform our understanding of contemporary Spain. Cruz examines the making of the bourgeois lifestyle as it transformed from a practice conferring distinction imported from beyond Spain's borders (especially from Britain and France) by a style-conscious minority to a twenty-first century tradition characteristic of the modern middle-class not just in Spain but throughout western civilization. He argues that the Spanish middle class culture formed over the course of the nineteenth century contributed to Spanish prosperity and democratic stability since 1975.

In the tightly-written introductory chapter that surveys primarily literary sources Cruz (Professor of Iberian History at the University of Delaware) explores the problematic use of the terms "bourgeois", "bourgeoisie", and "bourgeois revolution" in order to assert that it was in the nineteenth century when the concept of the Spanish middle class started to be broadly used with the meaning it has at present. He clarifies that this book is a cultural history not of ideas and high culture, but rather a history of how the cultural practices of a small stratum of the urban Spanish population in the nineteenth century became the hegemonic cultural practices that continue to mark the Spanish bourgeoisie into this century. As Cruz joins a generation of cultural historians delighting in the recovery of the work of Norbert Elias he seeks to employ a fascinating variety of sources in order to chronicle the "civilizing process" among the Spanish middle class. The tradition of etiquette manuals that dates back to Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier* and the literature of the eighteenth-century Spanish Enlightenment informs Cruz's second chapter, which details how foreign standards of politeness and manners were recast to establish prescriptive behaviors, fashions, and attitudes for the Spanish bourgeoisie. With his third chapter Cruz returns to probate sources and other notarial documents from Madrid's Archivo de Protócolos, which proved so illuminating in his first

monograph (*Gentlemen, Bourgeois, and Revolutionaries* [Cambridge UP, 1996]) in order to study the homes of the Spanish middle class and access their “material reality.” Here the author almost walks his reader into the homes--if not the wardrobes--of nineteenth-century families when he meticulously details the textile fabric composition of people’s closets or how coats, vests, and breeches became must-have fixtures of the dress component inventories of men between the beginning of the eighteenth century and the end of the nineteenth century. Cruz asserts that the homes inhabited by historical families approached the ideal of the bourgeois home described in the conduct journalism and literature delineated earlier in the book and thus, he concludes that the lifestyle of the Spanish bourgeoisie developed similarly to other Western countries including the USA. Upon observing and lamenting that the study of Spanish consumer culture has been neglected by scholars drawn to such topics as American conspicuous consumption or Paris’s iconic *Bon Marché* department store Cruz demonstrates in his next chapter that Spain played a role in the making of a modern consumer society. Once again, it was in the Spanish middle class’s emulation of their northern European neighbors and the spread of new consumer attitudes that built upon a longstanding consumer culture rooted in the early modern period where we can find the foundation of Spain’s twentieth-century mass consumer society.

Among the consequences of the diffusion of the bourgeois *habitus* analyzed in his previous chapters is the creation of the bourgeois city, or the modification of cities to adapt to the new economic and social conditions of nineteenth-century Spain. Continuing with his variegated approaches to the history of the period, Cruz delves into a spatial-social interpretations of the material culture constituted by the buildings, streets, gardens, plazas, sewers, and so on primarily in nineteenth-century Madrid and Barcelona as historical elements inherent in the process of nation building. Michel Foucault’s concept of *gouvernementalité* looms large here as Cruz logically argues that the ideals of refinement, courtesy, community spirit, comfort, consumption, and also the continued gendered division of spheres of influence in the bourgeois lifestyle required a new type of city, replete with broadened boulevards, open spaces, and none of the ubiquitous stink of Old Regime cities. Finally, Cruz devotes his final chapter to describe the avenues of sociability and leisure that took place in those new cities. While the old society in Spain restricted consumption of high culture and enjoyment of leisure to a small social minority, the new modern mass consumer society created leisure as a fundamental component of the nineteenth-century bourgeois experience. Cruz’s exploration of the nineteenth-century Spanish leisure society (its novels, theaters and plays, casinos and museums, vacations and sport) is evocative, but also highlights the continued need for studies in modern Spanish leisure.

Despite the beginnings of the bourgeois lifestyle over the course of the nineteenth-century, Spain does not fully become a modern mass consumer society until the 1960s, over half-a-century after England. Obviously, Hispanists know that many of the same political and religious differences that bitterly divided the popular classes also split the Spanish bourgeoisie in the early twentieth century, but general readers and non-Hispanists no doubt would find useful a brief narrative description of those painful, bloody, break-downs in order to historically contextualize Cruz's subject matter. Still, Cruz demonstrates that while politics and religion divided the bourgeoisie the exercise of the bourgeois *habitus* and the healthy pursuit of leisure gave this group a sense of belonging and spiritual joy. Spanish bourgeois then strove to introduce a variety of social practices aimed at curbing social unrest and balancing the socially stratified society. That diffusion of bourgeois culture deeply transformed the life of Spaniards peacefully in the long run, which ultimately signals that Spain's embourgeoisement was ultimately not different (just slower) than the processes seen throughout Western Europe. Extensively researched, impressively interdisciplinary and broad in scope, and elegantly written, Cruz's book could quite possibly be the best monograph on nineteenth-century Spain in generations!

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