

Symbolism and Modernism (By Luis Beltrán)

There is strong critical consensus in identifying the 20th c. with modernism and the 19th with realism. It is presumed that the difference is distinguishable by the presence of the such traits as the mythical, metafiction and skepticism, etc. Nonetheless, the epiphanic function and the rejection of epistemic authoritarianism are manifested equally in the literature of the 19th c. Realism, as a term, shows up in the middle of that century referring to a literature oriented towards the present or immediate past, a trait that is not absent in other prestigious works of the 20th c. or those of the 21st. This article holds that it is actually symbolism, understood as the poetics of modernism, which can better categorize the esthetics of the two previous centuries. It is observed that there is a need to undo the culturalist methodology in which the identification and characterization of relatively small segments of cultural development is based and, in its place, it is proposed to consider the verticality of the greater social tendencies and, more importantly, the aesthetic tendencies. From this perspective, symbolism is transformed from a circumstantial movement into aesthetics of modernism proper. It extends its premodern roots to classical humanism, from which it takes the hermetic symbolism, it is manifest in modernity as humoristic symbol and, finally, it is made felt in the 20th c. as a return to the spoken word, that is, to traditional imagination, whether popular or folkloric.

Key words: Realism, Modernity, Symbolism, Mimesis, Javier Cercas, Soldados De Salamina, Literary Criticism, Literary History, Periodization.