CULTURAL MODERNITY AND ATLANTIC PERSPECTIVES

Estanislao del Campo’s Fausto (1866) and its French Contemporaries

Andrew Ginger

This article presents an Atlantic perspective on the origins of cultural modernism in the mid-nineteenth century, through a consideration of the Argentine Estanislao del Campo’s poem Fausto and its links and parallels with French culture. The article considers in particular the role of “fresh seeing,” “absorption,” and reflexive self-awareness of the medium on both sides of the Atlantic. The Atlantic perspective calls significantly into question the model of distinct, plural, polycentric modernisms, but equally is at odds with the assertion of transnational commonalities across modernisms. In consequence, the internationalization or transnationalization of cultural modernity in the Atlantic space shatters the generic intellectual patterns that underlie the very theorization of international modernism itself.

KEYWORDS: Argentina; modernism; gaucho; Estanislao del Campo; Domingo Sarmiento

The theorisation of the origins of cultural modernity has tended to centre on France, and more particularly Paris, in the mid-nineteenth-century, the time of Manet, Flaubert, and Baudelaire.¹ Most theoretical accounts from Greenberg through Clarke, Bourdieu, Benjamin, Fried, and Brettell, whether seeking to overcome or to reinforce cultural modernism, have recognised as one of the several key components of the latter a profound attempt at a renewal of vision. There are two dimensions to this “Fresh Seeing,” in the phrase that Brettell adopts from the Canadian painter Emily Carr. The first, widely observed in Courbetian Realism, is the attempt to undermine what Fried terms “theatricality,” that is to say to overcome the sensation that we are looking at something that has been assembled, usually in a conventional manner, for the benefit of its audience. Instead, cultural modernism aspires to what Fried calls “absorption” or what Brettel, following Laforgue, terms “the flash of identity between subject and object” that is “almost universally accepted as the duty of the modern artist.” However, this breaking through the theatrical barriers of conventional representation, this intimate identification with what is seen, this “fresh seeing,” supposes simultaneously and from Courbet onwards a profound focus on the medium in which the viewing is conducted. The fresh seeing is

¹ See, for example, Brettell, Modern Art 1851 – 1929, 3; Frascina et al., Modernity and Modernism, 58; Reed, Manet, Flaubert, and the Emergence of Modernism, 1.
effected precisely by that focus on the medium in which things are viewed, leading to what Greenberg dubbed “the imitation of imitating.” The theorization of cultural modernity habitually implies a consequent and profound fusion of these two tendencies, absorption and a turn to the medium in itself, of which the first great practitioner is the Manet of the 1860s, bringing together the otherwise improbable combination of disjointed art historical pastiche with Realism. 2 The theoretical and intellectual force of this fusion is evidenced throughout the canonical history of modernism from Manet to Picasso to Pollock in the visual arts, and from Baudelaire and Flaubert through Joyce, Eliot, and Proust in literature. It has consequently remained at the very heart of debates about cultural modernity.

Until recently, serious opposition to this narrative of the origins of cultural modernity has tended to come from cultural historians anxious to establish a polycentric, multinational vision of modernism, in opposition to the Francocentric canon of the mid-century. 3 However, tendencies towards transnational, and especially globalised histories, have more recently begun to undermine the assertion of distinct schools of national modernism, as well as the unqualified centrality of Paris. Thus Brettell, writing in 1999, concludes, “the commonalities are more important than the national or regional differences” and looks forward to the “painless death” of national schools. 4 Recent writings in political, social, and economic history can only serve to reinforce such trends, as when Bayly in 2004 argues that “the interdependence of world events” leads him to discern a growth, from the nineteenth century on, of global uniformity and of complexity solely within these increasingly uniform terms. 5

Hispanism, for all its interest in Postcolonialism and historical pluralism, has rather sat to one side as an observer in this debate about the defining originary narrative of cultural modernism, despite the high theoretical stakes that it entails. I do not mean by this that Hispanists have not discussed the origins of modern cultures in a broader sense, as clearly they have, nor that they have not considered in some depth the culture of the mid-nineteenth-century, as has certainly happened with studies of Latin America (more than Spain) such as Nancy Hanway’s Embodying Argentina. I mean rather that, as regards the crucial period of the mid-century (1850-1870), specific engagement with the core theoretical issue of fresh seeing and the medium of representation in relation to its ramifications for notions of polycentricity or Francocentricity has been somewhat limited. The silence is particularly noticeable given the large geographical area—and indeed population—that Hispanism’s field of enquiry covers across the Atlantic and out to the Pacific. 6 This is all the more unfortunate given that, as I have argued elsewhere, Hispanism’s subjects of cultural study often present serious challenges to the theoretical model of cultural modernity that has been derived from the mid-century canon and constantly reapplied. 7 In this article, I aim to take a significant case study, Estanislao del

2 Brettell, Modern Art, 83, 87; Greenberg, Art and Culture, 8. For Michael Fried’s views on the mid-century, see his studies, Courbet’s Realism and Manet’s Modernism.

3 Examples include Boime, The Art of the Macchia and the Risorgimento; Boude, The Macchiaioli; Rosenblum, Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition.

4 Brettell, Modern Art, 217, 128.

5 Bayly, The Birth of the Modern World, 3, 20-21.

6 On this latter point, see Anderson, Under Three Flags.

7 “The 1850s and 1860s: Towards a Comparison Between France and Spain.”
 Campo's poem *Fausto* of 1866, and show how, on the one hand, it presents a fundamental challenge to the fusion of self-consciousness and absorption characteristic of canonical modernity's fresh seeing. Yet, on the other hand, I aim to explain how it does so in a conscious response to the interaction between the Parisian cultural and civic urban model and local conditions, and within intellectual debates shared across the Atlantic, especially as regards the grounding of political thought in historicist reflection, and the debate, stemming from Diderot and others, concerning absorption and theatricality in the arts, and outlined by Fried. In so doing and in that sense at least, I hope at once to show that, as Brettell says, “exchangeability” of common ideas and cultural developments is at the heart of Atlantic and global cultural modernism. However, at the same time, I aim to undermine Brettell’s equation of such exchangeability with a high degree of generic commonality, and to show instead that a key theoretical tenet of canonical modernism is undermined by del Campo’s poem and his response to the place of Argentina within the Atlantic world.8 Study of the Atlantic space thus opens up a transnational understanding of the origins of cultural modernity, but simultaneously challenges the common basis upon which cultural modernity has been habitually theorized.

Estanislao del Campo’s poem has long been considered one of the masterpieces and defining works of modern Argentine literature, attracting the praise of such influential figures as the contemporary Argentine writer and critic Ricardo Piglia, who admires it for its contribution to what he sees as an Argentine tradition of pastiche.9 It was first published in late September 1866, in response to the first performances of Gounod’s opera, *Faust*, in the Teatro de Colón, Buenos Aires, beginning on 24 August 1866.10 Both the choice of opera and the location are significant. It has been said that, at the time, *Faust* was the most popular opera in the world;11 its performance was a vivid projection into Buenos Aires of the lofty heights of French culture. In turn, the very building of the Teatro de Colón, which opened in spring 1857, was part of a wider and conscious emulation of Western European urban values of which London, and especially Paris, were clear models. Indeed, the building was designed by a French-born portrait artist, Carlos Pellegrini, with parts transported from Britain. The theatre was constructed on the edge of the main square that contained the Pyramid of May, raised in 1811 to commemorate the 1810 revolution against Spain, and renovated in 1856 by Prilidiano Pueyrredón to include Dubourdieu’s statue of liberty. Nearby on the square was the seat of the presidency. Since the 1810 rising, the main square had become an emblematic location for national gatherings.12 The construction of the theatre, therefore, was part of a clear civic vision: that at the heart of the modern identity of Buenos Aires was its government and its theatre, public (or public-orientated) spaces in which the country was to be shaped by political and cultural advances, founded on a further open public space dedicated not least to the revolution which had given birth to them. In all these respects, the redevelopment and redeployment of the main square echoes the increasing dominance of public and civic

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8 Brettell, *Modern Art*, 217.
9 See *Crítica y ficción*.
10 del C., introduction to Estanislao del Campo, *Fausto*, 9–12 (9).
11 Osborne, “Cluytens Conducts *Faust,*” 14–17.
12 Wilson, *Buenos Aires*, 60–61, 66, 129; “Sitio web oficial del Teatro Colón”; http://www.teatrocolon.org.ar/inicio.htm (3 October 2006). Cagliani, “Las plazas de Buenos Aires y su historia.”
space and buildings in Paris since the French Revolution (and to some extent during the Enlightenment), including the conversion of existing spaces and buildings to that end. During the 1850s and 1860s, and under new ideological direction, the redevelopment of the public space under Napoleon III was transforming the city.\(^\text{13}\)

The performance of *Faust* at the Teatro de Colón is thus an expression of the incorporation of modern European values into Argentine national life. As such it corresponds to the aspirations of key Argentine intellectuals, in the line of the seminal work *Facundo* (1845) by the politician and intellectual Domingo Sarmiento (1811–1888) who sought to overcome both the supposed legacy of the Spanish, and the distinctive nationalism of the hinterlands which had been at the core of the putatively Federalist dictatorship of Juan Manuel de Rosas (1793–1877) from 1835 until 1852. The future, Sarmiento remarked, would instead be transatlantic, by which he meant it would emerge from European—by which he meant for the most part French—thought. It is true that Sarmiento rejects earlier Argentine revolutionaries, primarily because their inspiration in the supposedly universal values of French Enlightenment and Revolutionary thought showed scant regard for the historical, social, and geographical realities of the southern cone. In this respect, Sarmiento seeks to recognise what Ariel de la Fuente has recently termed “the decisive participation of the peasantry in larger historical processes,” and thus to recognise more than had earlier Unitarian (that is anti-Federalist) thinkers the reality of the power of provincial life. However, even in making this criticism, Sarmiento is explicitly echoing the major turn in contemporaneous French political thought towards a dialectical historicism that sought to remedy the same supposed defect in their own earlier revolutionaries. The method for addressing Argentine realities is French in origin, and the aim is to drag the rest of Argentina towards Buenos Aires (or at least to what is European in it, what is open to the Atlantic, literally and metaphorically), and to take Buenos Aires further eastwards towards Paris. In de la Fuente’s interpretation, the reality behind Sarmiento’s view of the hinterland is that Federalism was supported widely among the rural lower classes, across heterogeneous social groups, was neither predominantly criminal, nor based on banditry, and involved substantial, if complex political mobilisation based, among other things, on patron-client relations, kinship, ethnic loyalties (in some instances), and the perception of charisma. When Sarmiento’s transatlanticism classifies the *gaúcho* as inferior, the thinker is contributing to a central dispute over the power of local *caudillos* (leaders) in provincial—and in consequence national—life, and over such related issues as the state’s legitimate monopoly of violence, political rights, and the viability of rural finances and economies. The historian Slatta notes that in a particularly virulent outburst in 1861 Sarmiento called for the blood of the gauchos to be spilt, because the country needed this, and having blood was all they had in common with humans.\(^\text{14}\)

In this light, Del Campo’s treatment of his subject matter is peculiarly striking: not only does he set his poem outside Buenos Aires, but also the performance of Gounod’s

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\(^\text{13}\) Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World*, 186; Sutcliffe, *Paris*, 58, 69, 77, 88; Cole, *Paris*, 136–137, 144–145, 152, 165.

\(^\text{14}\) Sarmiento, *Facundo*; Salomon, *Realidad, ideología y literatura*, 5–9; Barrenechea, “Sarmiento, and the “Buenos Aires/Córdoba” Duality,” 61–63, 68; Botana, “Sarmiento and the Political Order: Liberty, Power, and Virtue,” 103–105; de la Fuente, *Children of Facundo*, 6, 19–21, 24–25, 32, 100–101, 125–127, 188–192; Slatta, *Gauchos and the Vanishing Frontier*, 180–181.
opera is recounted by a gaucho (El Pollo), the very sort of hinterland livestock farmer castigated by Sarmiento as the source of knife-wielding, despotc, Asiatic barbarism. El Pollo’s account of the opera is told furthermore in a pointedly rustic language and simple verse markedly at odds with that of the decorous libretto and the sophisticated music of Gounod’s work. Seeing the difficulties encountered by Faust in seducing Margueritte, Gounod’s Devil remarks: “Allons! à tes amours | je le vois, docteur | il faut prêter secours” (“Let us go! I can see, doctor, that we will need to assist you in your affairs of the heart”). In El Pollo’s account, Lucifer says in decidedly incorrect Castilian, “Si en el beile no ha alcanzao | el poderla arrocinar, | deje; le hemos de buscar | la güelta por otro lado.”15 In the course of the telling, long lyrical passages about the characters’ feelings and preoccupations are omitted, events are telescoped, and the narrator drinks progressively more alcohol. What primarily matters to El Pollo’s interlocutor, Don Laguna, is the storyline, and what ultimately matters to them once the story is told is to find a bite to eat at an inn with which the work ends. The nearest we get to a moral summary of the tale of Faust’s desperation and Margueritte’s salvation is Laguna’s observation that “what I really admire is your nerve watching all that witchcraft” (“lo que almiro es su firmeza | al ver esas brujerías”), to which El Pollo replies, roughly speaking, “It’s done my head in for four or five days” (“He andao cuatro o cinco días | atacao de la cabeza”).16

Most importantly still, El Pollo’s narrative does not distinguish between the operatic narrative and reality. At the beginning and end of each act, he reminds us that the curtain rose and fell; the building in which he saw the opera has a proscenium stage of the sort that clearly delineates the external world of the audience from the theatrical production being seen; the performance is indoors, gas-lit in darkness, and makes use of elaborate stage-sets. Moreover, El Pollo has paid for a ticket in order to get in. There is every indication here of a theatrical divide between art and reality, but El Pollo ignores all these not so subtle clues. Indeed, he even overlooks the fact that the characters are singing in Italian. Instead, he tells us “the other night I saw the devil” (“la otra noche lo he visto | al demonio”).17

In this respect, we are seeing something more than a quixotic affliction, long familiar in Hispanic letters. There is no ongoing, explicit contrast within El Pollo’s narrative between fiction and reality (implicit contrasts will be addressed later in this article). There is no explicit frame separating El Pollo’s account from what really happened on stage. The storyteller, in that sense the producer of the work of art, presents us with no distinction between the work of art and an external reality. The one has become totally absorbed into the other within El Pollo’s experience and his narrative. El Pollo himself experiences the work of art as if it were real: he is totally absorbed in the performance.

In the terms of the sophisticated, urban, Francophile culture of the Buenos Aires elite, El Pollo is not merely a stupid livestock farmer; he is infantile, childishly incompetent in cultural matters. However, this precisely lends him his significance in the terms of the most experimental French culture of his time. El Pollo’s version of Faust has broken the barrier between the theatricality of art and reality, bringing to the fore a pointedly clumsy, culturally innocent, popular mentality. It does so through methods of story telling that are associated with labouring classes. There are relevant and significant parallels here with

15 Gounod, Faust, 87; del Campo, Fausto, 76.
16 Ibid., 139.
17 Ibid., 33.
Courbet’s Realism because El Pollo’s re-telling of Gounod’s work collapses the distinction between art and artist, and the real world that they represent, both by rejecting the boundary between art and reality, and by emphasizing the place of story-telling in the life of labourers, just as Courbet emphasised the artistry of workers. By recreating Faust among “barbarians” in the countryside, far from the stereotypically modern space of Buenos Aires, Del Campo presses forward with the notion that “absorption” is key to modern art. The point is echoed in some Argentine painting of the time, also dealing with gauchos. One year before Del Campo’s poem, the artist Prilidiano Pueyrredón painted his Surveying the Ranch, depicting a gaucho on horseback. The image features the characteristic devices of absorptive painting: the main character’s face is almost totally hidden from the viewer, turned inwards on the landscape, and the individual seems deep in reflection on his world of rural labour. At the same time, the light, bright colour patches that constitute the image provide the sketch-like immediacy of what the Italians called “macchia.” Hanway comments on how Pueyrredón breaks down divisions of civilization and barbarism; indeed, his preference for bright colours may link to another side of his work, a parallel repressed and rejected female disturbance, in the terms of his time. The beauty of immediacy and absorption is at the heart of gaucho life, in the very centre of their ranches. Where Courbet looked to French peasantry to achieve the most avant-garde of visions, Del Campo turned to his gauchos. Put at its most extreme, the barbarians are the founders of a new, and finer, civilization.

However, it would be wrong to think that Del Campo is simply endorsing the vision represented by El Pollo’s narrative. As many critics have observed, it is hard to take the poem seriously or at face value. However stupid livestock farmers might be claimed to be, it beggars belief that El Pollo should have mistaken an opera sung in Italian for Spanish conversation. More subtly, it has been observed that much of the supposed gaucho language is not authentic at all, but a clearly literary version of gauchismo, a pastiche. In this light, the poem itself seems like a literary joke, informed by a sophisticated cultural awareness. After all, it takes an informed and educated cultural brain, such as one might find in the heart of Buenos Aires, to produce such an extensive pastiche of the world’s most popular opera, at the very apex of contemporary French cultural exports. A self-conscious author reveals a fascination with patterns of re-creation across European and European-influenced culture. An educated Argentine presents us with a pastiche of a Gaucho who presents a version in (false) rustic Argentine Spanish, of an Italian version of a French opera, performed in Buenos Aires, and deriving from a substantial reworking of Nerval’s translation of the first part of a German text by Goethe. Even if we turn to El Pollo’s narrative itself, there are repeated signs that it is meant as a patraña, a shaggy-dog tale, as some critics have noted. El Pollo reminds us far too often that he is not making this stuff up. In that respect, the work is indeed, as Ludmer comments, part of an “autonomization of the literary” which is “typically modern.”

On this account, what del Campo and Europeanized Buenos Aires really have in common with the gaucho is a fascination with falsity and artifice, and pastiche. The poem, Fausto, first appeared inside several of the leading newspapers of the time, presenting an arch commentary on a celebrated contemporary event, of a kind that is not untypical of

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18 Hanway, Embodying Argentine, 45–47.
19 See, for example, Borges, “Prólogo,” 17–18.
20 Ludmer, “The Gaucho Genre,” 622–623.
mid-nineteenth-century Western journalism. The point is not the Courbetian absorption, but the joke. In that respect, the poem echoes too the mid-century enjoyment of *blagues*, in which solemn works of art might be mockingly recreated or reinvented (one thinks, of course, of another Parisian triumph, Offenbach's *Orpheus in the Underworld*). In this respect, del Campo has more in common with the world of Manet and Flaubert than that of Courbet, and seems to be part and parcel of the mid-century's fascination with pastiche, with producing cultural objects that are no longer about the representation of emotion or of external realities, but rather are about the representation of modes of representation.

In short, as regards the central concern in cultural modernity with absorption and with the medium-in-itself, del Campo's poem pulls simultaneously in two different directions. In Ludmer's words, "the two cultures parody one another." It can be read as a story of profound, even extreme absorption that destroys the theatrical barrier between art and reality, producing a fresh seeing. Even if we conclude, ultimately, that El Pollo does not really believe his own story (and we have little certainty on this point), it seems that Laguna, for all his doubts, ends up giving them credence, or there would be little sense in his statement that what he admires is El Pollo's nerve in being able to watch so much witchcraft. However, equally, the poem can be interpreted as primarily a ludic game with representational media, showing no serious concern with absorption at all. This combination is not per se novel or surprising: the fusion of absorption with a turn to the medium in itself was at the heart of canonical cultural modernity, as we have seen. However, what is striking is the absence of any clear way in which these two aspects of the poem can be reconciled or fused with one another. To take one view of the work seems quite clearly to require us to reject the other, because on the one account, absorption is seriously recommended, and on the other, it is not a matter for serious interest at all. In this respect, we look in vain to Estanislao del Campo's own narrative voice to provide any such reconciliation of these two major aesthetic trends of cultural modernity in the mid-century, even at the level of providing a distinct style that could subsume and transcend the differences between them. In this key respect, del Campo is clearly at odds with the cultural world of Manet and his fellow Parisian early modernists. The poem mixes together pastiche informed by a Europeanized cultural awareness, gaucho shaggy-dog stories that are not informed by a deep awareness of a European cultural heritage, and a state of innocent absorption that transcends the divide between art and reality in the European cultural heritage. However, it does not resolve the relationship between any of these elements. As Ludmer puts it, del Campo ends up in a "no-man's land."

The source of this split voice, torn radically between sophisticated cultural awareness and primitive absorption, lies clearly in the failure of del Campo's overarching narrative persona to define the relationship between the *gaucho* and Parisian culture. The very suggestion that Argentines could treat the greatest opera in the world in such a rustic fashion serves immediately to underline once more the gulf between Parisian culture and the gaucho hinterland, the abyss between Buenos Aires and the rest of the country. During the 1840s, in his *Facundo*, Sarmiento had reinvented the dialectical thought he had learnt from his French masters such that the interplay between antithetical elements of progress and resistance to it (here represented by liberals and dictatorial, violent *gauchos*)

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21 Ibid., 623.
22 del Campo, *Fausto*, 139.
23 Ludmer, “The Gaucho Genre,” 624.
would be resolved not so much by an even-handed synthesis as by the synthetic mastery
that progress would be able to exert over the hinterland through a proper understanding
of it. Alternatively, perhaps rather, Sarmiento reveals his hostility even to some European
political theories (the doctrinaire or eclectic) that advocated a synthesis or equilibrium of
opposites, and was closer to those in Europe who sought an alternative, ostensibly “post-
Utopian” or “post-revolutionary” dialectic founded on some radical principle of
legitimacy. The historicist rejection of universals, the location of political theory within
the description of historical struggle, serves as a means to outmanoeuvre the gauchos and
all they (supposedly) represent. By the time del Campo wrote, Sarmiento’s old enemy
Rosas was gone, and Buenos Aires was back on the path to Europeanization, as is seen in
the very fact of the Gounod performance and by the urban developments to which I
referred earlier. Nevertheless, unlike in Facundo, in Fausto it is unclear that the
sophisticated commentator on the gauchos is, in fact, able to direct his observations
about them towards a programme of Europeanized cultural renewal in which the
hinterland is bound to the values of Buenos Aires. Too great a gulf separates the two
interpretations of the poem that I have underlined. Indeed, recent history had rather
dramatically underlined the extent of the problem in the relationship between Buenos
Aires and the rest of the country, and more broadly between Federalists and Unitarians. In
1853 the provinces of Argentina signed up to a new confederate constitution, but in a new
and profound division of the country, Buenos Aires did not, seceded from the
Confederation, and was not to rejoin the rest of Argentina definitively until 1862, four
years before the performance of Faust to which del Campo alludes. It only did so after
managing to inflict a decisive defeat on the Confederation in battle. The years following
1862, during which there were a series of revolts in the provinces, have been described by
de la Fuente as “one of the most conflictive periods in the history of Argentina, and a
crucial phase in the process of state formation.” In 1865, a further Rural Code was
introduced, in Slatta’s words, to “set out the boundaries of the gaucho’s shrinking world,”
with stringent regulations on rural life and labour. It is highly significant in this respect
that, whatever his sympathy for rural ills, and even sympathetic attraction to the world of
the gaucho, Estanislao del Campo was a military and political follower of Valentín Alsina, a
key leader of the September revolt of 1852 against the Confederation that led to the 1853
cession of Buenos Aires. Indeed, he was a “crudo” not a “cocido;” that is to say, he
supported the integrity and autonomy of Buenos Aires. Whilst, in one sense, Ludmer is
correct that the poem is striking for a lack of explicit political comment, in comparison
with its predecessors, the deep societal and cultural divides related to political divisions
are clearly exhibited in Fausto. The split narrative voice of the poem is redolent with the
exacerbated tensions of the immediately preceding period.

In the end, the various impulses towards a radically new modern culture are
unresolved, held together only by a quizzical irony: Buenos Aires is not quite Paris, and the
theoretical fusion at the heart of canonical theories of cultural modernity proves

24 See Botana, “Sarmiento and the Political Order,” 107; Ginger, Political Revolution and Literary,
47–93.
25 de la Fuente, Children of Facundo 7–8; Slatta, Gauchos and the Vanishing Frontier, 114.
26 Becco, “Estanislao del Campo,” 182–183; Raúl Cortázar, Poesía gauchesa argentina, 62;
Slatta, Gauchos and the Vanishing Frontier, 185–186.
27 Ludmer, “The Gaucho Genre,” 622.
unsustainable in Argentina’s distinct environment. In one sense, the exchange of ideas and
cultural and civic trends across the globe has led to parallel developments with
comparable characteristics, something like the global or Atlantic “exchangeability” that
Brettell discerns in cultural modernity or the increasing uniformity across the world
described by Bayly. Yet, at the same time, that core element of the canonical project of
cultural modernity, its subtle fusion of “fresh seeing” with a turn to the medium-in-itself is
shattered by del Campo’s Fausto. A truly Atlantic perspective on the origins of cultural
modernity is indeed transnational, and undermines at once the assertion of Parisian
centrality and the affirmation of polycentric, national modernisms. However, the moment
that we try to conflate or equate developments in this Atlantic space with one another, to
find the theoretical commonality that they share, we find that the most fundamental
presuppositions of theories of cultural modernity are called radically into question. The
deep level of the differences that we encounter means that the internationalization or
transnationalization of cultural modernity in the Atlantic space shatters the generic
intellectual patterns that underlie the very theorisation of international modernism itself.

**BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE**

Andrew Ginger is Professor of Hispanic Studies and Head of School of Languages,
Cultures, and Religions at the University of Stirling. His publications include the
monographs, Political Revolution and Literary Experiment in the Spanish Romantic
Period, and Antonio Ros de Olano’s Experiments in Post-Romantic Prose. His latest
monograph, Painting and the Turn to Cultural Modernity in Spain, is forthcoming in
2007 with Associated University Presses.

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Andrew Ginger, School of Languages, Cultures, and Religions; University of Stirling; Stirling FK4 4LA UK. Email: a.j.ginger@stir.ac.uk