

LANDSCAPE AND IDENTITY. THE VISION OF CASTILE AS A NATIONAL LANDSCAPE (1876-1936)

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Landscapes have often been understood as significant representations of the historical and national characteristics of their corresponding societies. Some of them have come to be converted into symbols of history itself and the collective entity. They are perceived and evaluated collectively as national landscapes, that is to say landscapes to which are attributed the quality of condensing, expressing and symbolizing the keys to the corresponding national identity. They thus offer a symbolic representation, collectively recognized, of the values of the history and the identity of the human groups that are related to them.

In Spain, as in other countries, there has been an attempt to discover a landscape that could be considered representative of the collective identity. And this attempt led to the vision of the landscape of Castile as the national landscape, that is to say, the vision of Castile as a landscape that is representative of certain values that are considered fundamental—and foundational—of the history of Spain and the national identity associated with her.

This evaluation of the landscape of Castile as a national landscape was conformed in the intellectual horizon of the liberal reformism of the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and the first third of the twentieth, in which many figures participated actively, first, Francisco Giner de los Ríos and the Institución Libre de Enseñanza, founded in 1876, and afterward, from the last years of the century, the writers and painters of the generation of 98.

The Institución Libre de Enseñanza, headed by Francisco Giner, participated actively in the construction of a Spanish national identity, and his manner of seeing the landscape was directly connected to the interpretations and aspirations of that intellectual and political undertaking. His evaluation of the landscape was never separated from the proposal to identify the key characteristics of the national community. It was inseparable from his patriotic intentions, from his search for the Spanish identity, from the zeal of his nationalism, that always appeared as liberal and progressive.

Giner's and the Institution's image of Castile tried to express the entity of its landscape, the qualities that it contained and its meaning, what it had as witness and symbol of the very history and national identity of Spain. And that image made converted the Castilian landscape into a truly national one, a landscape capable of representing the values that were

considered characteristic of Spanish history and identity. Similar to what occurred with the French rural landscape, in which a unifying image of France was sought, representative of its history and its collective identity, one found in the Castilian landscape the worthy expression of the key factors that presided, in the interpretative horizon of Giner's and the Institution's circle, shared to a great extent by other nuclei of liberal reformism of the time, over the historical trajectory and the identity of the Spanish nation.

The vision of the Spanish landscape that Giner and, following his steps, the Institución Libre de Enseñanza offered was inscribed in the coordinates of modern geographical foci. The writing of Francisco Giner that contains his most achieved expression of his ideas and experiences regarding landscape is in what he published in 1886, in *La Ilustración Artística*, under the title «Paisaje.» In this article Francisco Giner offered the most complete expression of his manner of seeing and evaluating the Castilian landscape. He spoke of its natural characterization, of the forms of its relief and its vegetation, and he relates that characterization with some of the aesthetic qualities that he mentions. And to this aesthetic evaluation of the landscape Giner adds a moral evaluation, the attribution of qualities that contribute decisively to the conformation of its cultural significance.

The Castilian landscape possesses, according to Giner, a combination of characteristic qualities. The two expressions of that landscape that Giner considers, the mountain and the plain, are different environments, with notable contrasts in their natural forms, but both share a combination of significant qualities, those that characterize the entity of the landscape of Castile. The qualities that Giner attributes to the Castilian landscape—robust inner strength, severe grandiosity, nobility, dignity, stateliness, among others—expressed the characteristic qualities of the Spanish people. They were the qualities that had been forged, according to his historical interpretation, in medieval Castile, and that had contributed decisively, due to Castile's protagonism in Spain's history, to the conformation of the national identity of Spain. Those are the connections and correspondences between the qualities of the landscape and the characteristic features of the very history and identity that make up the cultural evaluation of the Castilian landscape promoted by Francisco Giner and seconded by his collaborators of the Institución Libre de Enseñanza. To approach the Castilian landscape, to understand its values and qualities, was, for Giner and the institutionists, a way of approaching and understanding the historical and national keys to Castile and Spain.

The Castilian landscape became, within Giner's and the Institution's reformist and patriotic horizons, a true symbol of the vertebrate values of Spanish history and identity. They turned this landscape into a true national landscape, a landscape that was representative of the characteristic feature of the very collective identity. And that evaluation, initially promoted by Giner, not only took root and grew in the Institución Libre de Enseñanza, but also influenced directly other intellectual and artistic circles, among which the generation of 98 played a notable role.

The writers of the generation of 98, who constituted in Spain the first group of intellectuals in a modern sense, played an outstanding nationalizing role. In Castile they sought the keys to an understanding of Spanish history and the national identity that derives from it. They thus reinforced the national character that was attributed to its landscape, its meaning as a national landscape. And that vision was promoted not only by the authors, but also, decidedly, by the

painters of that generation, as is seen markedly, for example, in the paintings of Aureliano de Beruete, Darío de Regoyos or Ignacio Zuloaga.

In the literary terrain, Antonio Machado, who was Francisco Giner's student in the Institución Libre de Enseñanza, offered numerous examples of that manner of understanding and evaluating the Castilian landscape, many of which are found in *Campos de Castilla*, whose first edition is from 1912. Azorín also offered many images of the Castilian landscape. The perspective he adopted in order to approach Spanish reality was based on two pillars: on a markedly Castilian historiographical conception and on the idea of national continuity, that is to say, on the affirmation of the existence of a secular continuity of the national mentality. Both factors are manifested in his vision of the Castilian landscape, through which Azorín approaches the history of Spain and the people who were its protagonists, until he identifies the very keys to that history and collective identity that arose from it.

In the writings of Miguel de Unamuno we can also find frequent representation of the Castilian landscape. Unamuno, a consummate describer of landscapes, knew how to conjoin masterfully an interest for natural and geographical features and an attention toward their symbolic dimensions. One of the most representative examples of his manner of approaching and evaluating the Castilian landscape was his series of five essays that, with the combined title «En torno al casticismo,» that he published in 1895, in *La España Moderna*. According to Unamuno, there is a close correspondence between the Castilian landscape and its inhabitants, and in both cases one can find the expression of spiritual values that are representative of the character attributed to the Castilian and Spanish nation.

The authors mentioned —Machado, Azorín, Unamuno— offer visions of the Castilian landscape that prolong and enrich, in the horizon of the generation of 1898, the evaluation that Francisco and his institutionist collaborators had promoted of that very landscape. They are visions that are internalized, like those of Giner and the institutionists, in the evaluation of the meaning of the landscape, in what the landscape expresses and represents of history and identity themselves. They thus continued, enriching with their literary qualities, the road to a cultural and symbolic evaluation of the Castilian landscape, of the vision of that landscape as the expression of a national identity —as a national landscape—, that the Ginerian and institutionist circle had begun.

