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**It’s Complicated – Ortega y Gasset’s Relationship With Argentina**

Abstract

In 1916, Hipólito Yrigoyen is elected President of Argentina, thereby giving credence to the possibility of a liberal democratic movement after years of oligarchic rule. This same year, José Ortega y Gasset makes the first of two visits to Argentina – the country in which, outside of Spain, Ortega was most influential and which he even calls his “second homeland” – thereby giving credence to a transatlantic and Pan-Hispanic aesthetic and intellectual movement that was also on the rise. As Ortega posits in *El tema de nuestro tiempo* (1923), this movement, in conjunction with its seemingly forward-thinking European counterparts, constitutes a “generation.” The self-styled voice of this “new generation” that “belligerently” poses itself against the “old” is Ortega himself; within the Hispanic world, Ortega believes that Argentina harbors the greatest collective hopes for this new generation as well.

By the time of Ortega’s second visit to Argentina in 1928, a new social phenomenon is on the rise: the modern masses. While this theme has primarily been treated vis-à-vis Europe in Ortega’s *La rebelión de las masas* (1929), wherein Ortega calls on a “select minority” to save civilization from its imminent fall into “barbarism” at the hands of the masses, Ortega speaks to it during his second visit to Argentina. Soon thereafter, he articulates another invective against the masses within a specifically Argentine context in a pair of understudied essays entitled *Intimidades* (1929). Here, Ortega calls for a “select minority” that might militate against the Argentine masses (immigrant “abstract beings”), their “authoritative” leader (Yrigoyen), and the doomsday moral decadence that they all bring about. In time, such conservative ideas that countered any possibility of popular power sowed the seeds for the ascension of both Spanish fascism and the Argentine right in the 1930s. Indeed, the elitist and reactionary strains in Ortega’s philosophy appealed to Spanish and Argentine thinkers, serving as a critical part of a transatlantic co-conspiracy against the masses and the threat of anarchic (and democratic) disorder that they represented. This essay thus intends to explore the nature of Ortega’s tantalizing, up and down, and exceedingly intimate relationship with Argentina, along with its over-arching political implications.

Biography

**Robert Wells** is Assistant Professor of Spanish at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. His current research focuses on the Hispanic avant-gardes, transatlantic studies, and socio-political notions of masses, minorities, and multitudes.