Anarchism as ‘the most Hispanic thing south of the Pyrenees’

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Abstract

This paper examines how preconceived notions about ‘the Spanish national character’ have shaped English language interpretations of what is generally described as the Spanish anarchist movement and how these have created misconceptions about its nature and extent. Gerald Brenan’s *The Spanish Labyrinth* is one of the most influential histories of modern Spain in the English-speaking world. Such is the power of cultural stereotypes that his interpretation of anarchism as ‘the most Hispanic thing south of the Pyrenees’ has been adopted almost unquestioningly by other scholars, thus perpetuating the view that it took root in Spain to a larger extent than any other European country because it was ‘naturally suited to the Spanish temperament’. Brenan’s romantic vision of a bygone pastoral age and notions about the enduring Spanish *pueblo* also colour his vision of the origins and social base of the movement, distorts its numerical strength, and overemphasises its spiritual dimensions. His exoticism, with its powerful appeal to foreigners, has proven to be more of an obstacle than an aid to understanding.