

CANON AND SUBVERSION: NEW PERSPECTIVES ON ROSALÍA DE CASTRO

Helena González Fernández; María do Cebreiro Rábade (ed.) (2012).
Canon y subversión. La obra narrativa de Rosalía de Castro
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Canon y Subversión, which forms part of Icaria press's *Mujeres y Culturas* series, is the result of collaboration between members of the University of Santiago de Compostela's Research Group on the narrative work of Rosalía de Castro, members of the Centre Dona i Literatura at the University of Barcelona, and the British academic, and specialist in 19th century women's writing in Spain, Catherine Davies.

The essays collected in *Canon y Subversión* are centered around Rosalía de Castro's narrative work in Castilian, which, as the editors of the volume, María do Cebreiro Rábade and Helena González Fernández note in their introductory chapter, if no longer ignored in scholarship, in its generic and linguistic complexity still presents difficulties for a Galician nationalist discourse that applies a linguistic criteria to the definition of Galician literature, and a Spanish literary historiography that understands the 19th century novel in terms of a development towards literary maturity through the adoption of the techniques of realist fiction. The editors propose a move away from debates based on binary oppositions of romantic/realist, backward/advanced that have characterized much of the critical discussion of the place of the Galician writer's novels in literary history, and prefer an approach to the entirety of Rosalía de Castro's production that restores the singularity of her work, but which also takes advantage of contemporary critical approaches. They argue for Rosalía's status as a European writer, who read Hoffmann, Poe, and Sand, and whose novels problematize not only social and literary institutions, but also the way in which Spanish literary history of the 19th century has traditionally been conceived. The enigmatic or fragmentary nature that critics have often attributed to Rosalías prose works would be, from this perspective, more a reflection on the critics, and the institutional and cultural framework within which they write, than on the texts themselves.

Catherine Davies' essay, 'La loca, soñando: Rosalía de Castro (1837-1885),' opens the first section of the collection, dedicated to the Foucauldian ques-

tion, 'What is an author?', and provides a valuable overview of Rosalía's life and work. Davies emphasizes Rosalía's paradoxical position as a peripheral writer who is, at the same time, the most central figure of the periphery, a paradox that is also central in Dolores Vilavedra's essay, 'Rosalía de Castro: Escribir desde la(s) frontera(s).' In perhaps one of the most programmatic sections of the book, Vilavedra opens with a clear statement of intent: a critical revision of the role Rosalía has traditionally played in the literary canon and orthodox nationalism. Vilavedra is interested in highlighting the paradoxes and contradictions in Rosalía's life and work that resist facile incorporations into nationalist or feminist narratives, and which place her in the margins or on the 'frontera' in both formal and linguistic terms. Perhaps one of the most suggestive aspects of Vilavedra's essay is her speculations as to the motivations behind Rosalía's return to Castilian writing at the end of her career. Rosalía De Castro's 'demisión' from Galician language writing has often been attributed to the controversy raised by her article describing a Galician coastal tradition that involved the extension of sexual favors to foreigners. Vilavedra, however, argues that Rosalía's decision not to write in Galician has more to do with her discomfort at becoming an iconic figure in a national mythology than the trauma of the public controversy surrounding her article on what has been termed 'prostitución hospitalaria.' The lack of paratextual notes to Rosalía's final collection of poetry, and her destruction of unedited works are, for Vilavedra, Rosalía de Castro's silent expression of an anxiety of authorship that cannot find expression within the strict boundaries of the nationalist project as traditionally conceived.

Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Guber's argument for the woman writer's anxiety of authorship is also the focus of Joana Masó's piece. Masó observes Rosalía's reticence in using the feminine declination of the noun 'autora' to refer to women's writing, and her preference for phrases such as 'su autor es una mujer' (qtd. in Masó, p. 65). This reticence is, for Masó, especially striking in texts such as *La hija del mar*, which explicitly address women and the injustices they suffer. References to George Sand are an exception to this reticence, as Sand is described as an 'autora' or 'escritora'. The instability of the declination of the noun 'autor' is, for Masó, indicative of Rosalía's anxiety of authority, the difficulties for a woman to find an authentic authorial voice in a patriarchal literary tradition, and is, if not resolved, at least staged in the dialogues between writers that recur in her work.

The second part of the collection, entitled 'Utopía, crítica social y literatura gótica', brings together six essays, all of which in one way or another en-

gage with Rosalía as a modern (or anti-modern) writer, concerned with the social configuration of her society and interested in exploring the various formal and generic means through which to carry out social critique.

María do Cebreiro Rábade Villar discusses Rosalía's narrative in terms of modern notions of temporality and progress, and the ambivalence of the author's position as, on the one hand, a defender of notions of democratic revolution, and, on the other, a defender of the cultural specificity of Galician culture. Rábade Villar finds an innovative solution in Rosalía's famous description of the Galician tradition of sexual hospitality, which she reads in terms of a logic of sacrifice, a function in a community defined by excess, which is neither traditional nor advanced. Interestingly, Rábade Villar quotes a letter from Rosalía in which she describes the same practice of sexual generosity to the stranger, but this time among the creoles in Lima to the arriving Spanish. Placing the Galicians as creoles and the Spanish as strangers, Rábade Villar argues that Rosalía makes present times and spaces impossible to integrate into a modern sense of temporality, and implicitly questions ideas of communal homogeneity. The shorter pieces, *Ruinas* and *El primer loco* are also, in Rábade Villar's perceptive reading (informed by the theories of community and immunity of Jean Luc Nancy and Roberto Esposito), demonstrative of an ethical commitment to otherness, and challenge us to rethink our notions of community.

As Rábade Villar's article deals with modern temporality, so in her complex and well argued text Margarita García Candeira focuses on spatiality in the novels, and the 'poética del desierto' which she identifies in *La hija del mar*. García Candeira notes the stark difference between the description of space in the *Cantares gallegos*, which depict a verdant and hospitable natural environment, and the portrayal of a hostile and wild natural world in *La hija del mar*. The poetics of the desert or of the 'vacío', reflects, for García Candeira, the absence of feminine literary tradition upon which the female writer can base her authority, but, perhaps more interestingly, is also the condition for a creative imaginative process that points to emancipatory and utopic political endeavour. The orphanhood of the main character of the novel, Teresa, would be in perfect consonance with this poetics of the desert, a rejection of the arborescent model of lineage for the utopian possibilities of the yet to be.

Helena Miguélez-Carballeira, for her part, reads *El caballero de las botas azules* as an anti-system text which criticizes both the material and cultural conditions of capitalism. For Miguélez-Carballeira, the novel is not only a critique of modern capitalism, but is also a programmatic text, which proposes

solutions for the problems inherent in capitalist systems. Building on previous work on *El caballero de las botas azules* by Lou Charnon-Deutsch, Susan Kirkpatrick, and Francisco Rodríguez, and the theories of Thorstein Veblen and Pierre Bourdieu, Miguélez-Carballeira elaborates on three major themes in the novel: the criticism of bourgeois leisure, the criticism of consumerism, and a patriarchal vision of female beauty. The possible solutions to the injustices of capitalist systems she identifies in the austerity that the protagonist of the novel, the Duque de la Gloria, recommends to the leisured classes he encounters, the subversion of mass media communication networks in the distribution of the 'Book of Books' at the end of the novel, and the condemnation of masculine and militarist codes of violence in the Duque's rejection of the etiquette of dueling. The author concludes that, in the present context, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that Rosalía de Castro 'tenía razón'. *El caballero de las botas azules* is also the focus of María Xesús Lama's text, 'La musa andrógina y la regeneración social'. The androgyny of the muse who enters into dialogue with an aspiring writer in the prologue has provoked much discussion in the critical reception of the novel; here María Xesús Lama attempts to connect the concept of androgyny with social regeneration. She begins with a remarkably concise tracing of the concept of androgyny in ancient and modern contexts, and highlights its significance in the mid 19th century as a symbol of a utopian state in which injustices, including those suffered by women on account of their gender, would be surmounted, and thus reveals how androgyny and social regeneration could have been related concepts in Rosalía de Castro's thought.

The final two texts, those of Isabel Clúa Ginés and Helena González Fernández, interrogate Rosalía's novels in terms of the gothic and the fantastic. Clúa Ginés identifies traces of gothic literature in *El caballero de las botas azules*, even if this is difficult to perceive at first glance in the decidedly nongothic setting of urban Madrid. Using Eve Sedgwick's linking of the gothic to desire and a fascination with surfaces and masks, Clúa Ginés produces a perceptive and innovative reading of the novel. González Fernández concentrates on the influence of the fantastic, and especially the work of George Sand and Edgar Allan Poe, in Rosalía's novels, and emphasizes the subversive potential of the fantastic as a genre. In her reading of *El primer loco*, the author analyzes the significance of the figuration of the two female characters, Berenice and Esmeralda, as statue and vampire. For González Fernández, these phantasmagoric depictions of the feminine represent the terror inspired by undomesticated women in a patriarchal culture.

Canon y subversión is an attractively edited collection, and reflects the potential for a critical revision of the work and figure of Rosalía de Castro. Especially interesting in this regard are the essays which consider Rosalía's position in nationalist narratives, and question the function of the author in a national mythology using contemporary theorization of notions of community alongside a close reading of both the novels and the archival resources currently available. The readings of Rosalía's work in the collection that reveal or develop links with literary traditions and tropes such as the gothic, androgyny, and vampirism, are also important contributions to an understanding of the author. It is to be hoped that future work on the archival material related to Rosalía de Castro will allow for a more complete realization of these possible lines of inquiry, and help understand her paradoxical place at both the center and the margins of Galician, Spanish, and European modernity.

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