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Pigging in Germany: Emigration and Gendered Subalternity in Roberto Vidal Bolaño's *Cochos*¹

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This article advances the first gendered reading of Roberto Vidal Bolaño's play *Cochos. Relatorio valeroso en dous tempos, un prólogo, e un epílogo, para porca e actor en cativerio* (premiered 1987; published 1992). Firstly, I examine the inversely proportional metamorphoses, from human into pig and from pig into human, undergone by the main protagonists: Sebas, a peasant who emigrated to Frankfurt in 1968, and Rosiña, the pig he rears in the communal shack in which he resides. I pay close attention to the strategies employed by Sebas to exert power and argue that a reading of Sebas as a powerless peasant subordinated to the German and Spanish authorities does not take into account that, as a member of the dominant gender group, Sebas exerts power upon the feminine figures in the play, among them Rosiña. Secondly, I elucidate why *Cochos* has thus far been analyzed exclusively as Sebas's tragic emigration story. It is my contention that two related factors have contributed to this: the national longing for a heroic epic narrative of the emigration of the Galician working-class and the 'overarching umbrella' effect of Galician nationalism.

Keywords

Contemporary Galician theatre
Roberto Vidal Bolaño
Gender subalternity
Animal metaphor
Pig
Overarching umbrella

Palabras clave

Teatro galego contemporáneo
Roberto Vidal Bolaño
Subalternidade de xénero
Metáfora animal
Porco
Paraugas totalizador

Abstract

Resumo

Este artigo ofrece a primeira lectura de xénero da peza teatral de Roberto Vidal Bolaño, *Cochos. Relatorio valeroso en dous tempos, un prólogo, e un epílogo*,

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para porca e actor en cativerio (estreada en 1987; publicada en 1992). Primeiro, examino as metamorfoses inversamente proporcionais de ser humano a porco e de porca a ser humano, que sofren os principais protagonistas: Sebas, un labrego emigrado a Frankfurt en 1968, e Rosiña, a porca que cría no barracón no que vive. Préstolle especial atención ás estratexias de poder empregadas por Sebas e sosteño que unha lectura de Sebas coma un labrego desposuído subordinado ás autoridades alemás e españolas non ten en conta que, coma membro do grupo xenérico dominante, Sebas exerce poder e este ten un impacto negativo en si e nas figuras femininas da peza, entre as que se conta Rosiña. Segundo, esclarecerei por que polo momento *Cochos* foi analizada exclusivamente coma a trágica historia emigrante de Sebas. Sosteño que dous factores relacionados contribuíron a esta recepción: o desexo nacional por construír unha narrativa épica da emigración da clase traballadora galega e o 'paraugas totalizador' do nacionalismo galego.

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I, in this room, separate, alienated, distrustful, find in my purpose not an open world, but a closed, hopeless jail.

Saul Bellow, *Dangling Man* (1944)

A túa voz alzarase tanto
como mingüe a miña

Manuel Rivas, *Costa da morte blues* (1995)

On 29 November 1987, Roberto Vidal Bolaño's play *Cochos* was premiered in Verín (Galicia). In the months that followed, the play travelled to all Galician cities and most towns, eliciting some interest from regional newspapers (often unenthusiastic about Galician theatre) and ultimately attaining the status of 'obra de culto' amongst its audiences (Montoto 2008). In 1992, the year which 'marca un punto de inflexión a respecto da edición das obras de Vidal Bolaño' (López Silva 2001: 73), many of the author's plays, including the original unabridged text of *Cochos*, were rescued from the drawer to which they had been relegated and entered into print. Thus, *Cochos: Relatorio valeroso en dous tempos, un prólogo, e un epílogo, para porca e actor en cativerio*, escaping the ephemeral nature of theatre, ultimately became a part of the repertoire of contemporary Galician dramatic literature. Vidal Bolaño (1950–2002) on his part was a Galician playwright, director, actor, light technician, and impresario who belonged to the 'categoría polivalente de home de teatro' (Villalaín 1998: 89) that critics have called 'autor *factotum*' (López Silva 2001: 70). A prime representative of the 'Grupo Abrente', the 1970s Galician independent theatre movement, Vidal Bolaño is, alongside Manuel Lourenzo and Euloxio R. Ruibal, a member of 'a tríada indiscutíbel dos nosos grandes dramaturgos' (López Silva & Vilavedra 2002: 79).

Although in his capacity as impresario and director Vidal Bolaño staged most of his own plays, *Cochos* is one of the few exceptions. The play became the debut production of Uvegá Teatro (1987–2005), the newly created theatre company of Vicente Montoto, himself an actor, director, and impresario, who was introduced to the text by Xoán Cejudo, the actor who in 2000 would go on to direct Vidal Bolaño's *A burla do galo*. A first reading of *Cochos* left Montoto not only bewildered, but deeply moved and interested:

[A peza] Era un monólogo, experiencia a que eu lle tiña ganas como reto. A linguaxe era dunha beleza teatral impresionante. O tema, un emigrante na Europa no ano 1968, érame próximo. Pero o texto, abondoso, case imposible, metíame moito medo. E se isto fose pouco, precisábase a presenza dun cocho en escena, e unha ambientación sonora complexísima. (Montoto 2008)

Cochos is indeed a technically demanding and lengthy monologue interleaved with numerous off-stage voices that tell the tragic story of Galician emigrant, Sebastián 'Sebas' Rilo Castro, who keeps and rears his pig in a crowded communal shack in 1968 Frankfurt. The *status quo* is altered when a fellow emigrant denounces Sebas to the authorities for violating the community's health regulations. After repeated and ignored requests to present the pig for inspection, the German authorities attempt to check the pig in the shack but Sebas, frightened at the prospect of having the

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Unlike the positive use of the metaphor in *Cochos*, the most well-known example of the metaphor in Galician literature, Vicente Risco's novel *O porco de pé* (1928), uses the pig image to describe the protagonist, Don Celidonio, as somebody without scruples who 'ascendeu de porco a marrán e chegou a ser alcalde' (2003 [1928]: 7).

animal taken away from him, refuses to allow them access and responds by locking himself and the pig inside. Starting *in medias res*, in the wake of two contextualizing prologues, the play describes the siege of Sebas and his companion by the German authorities. Despite the mediation of several people, Sebas, who suffers from a serious episode of mental illness, refuses to go out, let anyone in, or give the pig away. Before the German authorities take the shack by force so that the veterinarian can check the animal, the tragedy unfolds and Sebas commits suicide by emulating a traditional Galician pig killing—bleeding himself to death after fasting.

Apart from the challenge of performing a long monologue and staging a demanding play which requires the presence of an animal on stage, Montoto was drawn to the text by the subject matter: the Galician emigration to Europe in the second half of the twentieth century. Montoto (b. 1943) experienced emigration twice: first, to Buenos Aires (Argentina), where he lived with his family as a child and young man between 1950 and 1964, and, second, to Geneva (Switzerland), where he lived briefly between 1968 and 1971. Critics and journalists have also been drawn to this subject matter, and its discussion has so far monopolized criticism of the play. This essay will argue, however, that *Cochos* is more than a play about migrants: it is a play about the relationship between Sebas and his pig, which is a female pig, a fact which critics have systematically failed to notice.

In this article I will therefore seek to redirect the aforementioned critical focus by advancing the first gendered reading of the play. I will examine how critics' exclusive focus on Sebas's attributes as a powerless peasant subordinated to the German and Spanish authorities who, in order to escape state control, commits suicide, is based upon an understanding of Sebas as a subaltern figure. I will argue that this understanding illustrates what Nikita Dhawan has called the 'fatal "paradox"' present 'in the notion of "migrant-as-subaltern"' (2007: 1) and suggest that a definition of the subaltern that is gender blind and includes both the male and female figures in the play does not add to our understanding of the nature of subalternity and gender inequality. My aim, therefore, is to illustrate how literary texts about subordinate male figures may be predicated upon patriarchal values and therefore upon the oppression of the gendered subaltern. Furthermore, I will elucidate why the analysis of *Cochos* has thus far focused exclusively upon Sebas's emigration story — often read as an allegory of the oppression of the nation or the national working-class — and how such a reading has rendered the gender politics of the play invisible.

The Importance of Pigs

As its self-explanatory title proclaims, *Cochos* is a play about pigs. The obvious referent is Sebas's companion, a female pig which answers to the endearing name of Rosiña; the other referent is, as we learn throughout the play, Sebas himself, who metaphorically turns into a pig. Indeed, *Cochos* revolves around the metaphor of 'human as pig'. Whereas at an iconic level, the metaphor expresses physical and behavioural similarities between pigs and humans, often describing somebody as fat, filthy, greedy, unpleasant, or unkind (Goatly 2006: 27), at a symbolic level, pigs, highly prized domestic animals in many traditional cultures and certainly in Galicia, stand as a symbol of bonanza and luck.² In suggesting conflicting interpretations

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In order to lighten the text, all quotations from the play are given as follows: (co page number).

of the metaphor, *Cochobos* constitutes a case in point for the 'llamativa [...] polisemia y ambivalencia axiológica [de la palabra cerdo]' (Tutáeva 2009: 5). In the sections that follow, I will first discuss the symbolism of the pig within the play, before examining the zoomorphic metaphor of Sebas as a pig within the context of the metaphorical metamorphoses undergone by the main protagonists in the play—Sebas turns into a pig, while Rosiña turns into a female figure.

Sebas's main motivation for rearing a pig in his Frankfurt shack is to economize and thereby be able to send more money to his wife and children in Galicia. Although by rearing his own meat, Sebas is to some extent therefore trying to escape modern capitalism, he is nevertheless aware of the futility of his attempt and resigned to the inevitability of the capitalist enterprise: 'se todos cantos estamos aquí por necesidades, fixesen o ca min, íanse a metade dos negocios da carne para o nabo. E non pode ser. Eu enténdoo. Enténdoo' (co 69).³ Sebas is thus a part of 'the new-immigration-in-capitalism or Eurocentric economic migration as a critical mass that is based on hope for justice under capitalism' (Dhawan 2007: 8). However, he fails to notice that, instead of making a profit, he is losing money. The spectators/readers are told in the first prologue, called 'prólogo propiamente dito' and voiced by a sociologist, that Sebas's tragedy is 'o intento inútil, utópico, por reproducir nun marco xeográfico, social, económico e cultural radicalmente diferente aquel da súa procedencia, un esquema de autoconsumo que, xa daquela, mesmo en Galicia, comezaba a deixar de ser rendible en termos económicos' (co 13).

Sebas's motivation is not wholly fiscal, however. As he explains in a rather emotional way, 'O que eu quería era aforrar máis. E ter *porco de confianza* na casa' (co 80; the italics are mine). The idea of a trustworthy pig (and pork) can be interpreted at the tangible, symbolic, and metaphorical levels. Sebas wants to eat food that is traditionally produced. Research in areas as diverse as anthropology, history, and nutrition has found that eating habits and 'culturally determined flavour preferences [are] one of the most enduring characteristics of an ethnic group' (Gérard Noiriel qtd. in Castro 1998: 327). Hence, it is common for migrants to go to great lengths to consume the food that they had consumed in their original communities. As a staple food in traditional Galicia, the pig is a symbol of wealth. Known in Spain for the large quantities and good quality of its produce (Varela & Moreiras Varela qtd. in Castro 1998: 11–12), food is key to Galicia's contemporary identity. However, as the medical doctor and intellectual Domingo García-Sabell argues in 'Notas sobre a fame galega' (1991), the reason as to why Galicians are obsessed with food is not because it is good or abundant, but because it was scarce and of poor quality for a long time. Conversing about war, Sebas mentions famine and asks Rosiña: '¿Onde vos metestes vós [os porcos] logo da nosa [guerra civil]?' (co 52). Sebas's ability to feed himself and his family is paramount to his concept of himself and his father: 'O vello, ser, será o que sexa, pero da fame librounos' (co 52). Yet, in metaphorically becoming a pig as the play progresses, Sebas himself constitutes an animal ready to be slaughtered. Interestingly, Sebas's metamorphosis goes hand in hand with Rosiña's, who metaphorically turns into a woman.

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Metamorphic Bodies: Animalization and Anthropomorphism

We are persuaded of the metamorphosis of both characters by not only the space where the action takes place, but the assignment of gender roles in relation to hygiene and the christening of the pig. As both the *Diccionario da Real Academia Galega* (1997) and the *Dicionário Eletrónico Estraviz* show, *cocho* may also refer to a secluded place, typically inhabited by animals; a pig barn or rabbit warren, for example. The communal shack is often described as a small, filthy and cluttered place that looks ‘coma [...] a corte dun cocho talmente’ (co 26) and is therefore unfit ‘para xentiña de ben’ (co 9). Moreover, when Sebas’s wife visits in an effort to convince him to surrender, she implores: ‘Sae Sebas. Sae dese cortello e ven para a casa. Coa túa muller e os teus fillos’ (co 44). The way in which leaving ‘ese cortello’ and returning home are juxtaposed here suggests that the word *cortello* should be read as an allusion to emigration. Sebas’s living conditions are therefore those of an animal. Furthermore, to maintain his dignity, Sebas becomes fixated upon grooming himself and the pig: ‘Traxe novo, raia ó dereito e a mandar que son tres días. E ti ben lavadiña aínda que sexa con cuspe ou con mexo, para non nos perder por causa da limpeza’ (co 36). Indeed, Sebas is no stranger to grooming as a dignifying strategy and, turning once again to the distancing third person, he proudly recalls how ‘xa ten ido centos de veces ó baile [...] cos zapatos de charón furados e a camisa chea de remendos, e aínda nin dios se decatou hoxe’ (co 36). Although Sebas performs the actions involved in washing himself and the pig, getting dressed and undressed, among others, the responsibility is conveniently handed over to Rosiña, whom he scolds for not being in control: ‘¡E ti ves que o vou pór [o traxe] sen facelo [barbearme] antes e non dis nada! ¡Vaia compañeiríña que me saíches!’ (co 50). Sebas also reprimands her for the dirt: ‘¡A pucha, como puxen o traxe! ¿Ti víche-lo que me pasou pola túa causa? Alá vai a bonitura’ (co 56). Accordingly, Rosiña is reprimanded for being a pig and therefore failing to fulfill her human gender allocation correctly.

Although in the following pages I will give evidence of Rosiña’s anthropomorphic nature in the play, here I would like briefly to discuss the episode of her christening. Towards the end of the play, Sebas admits: ‘Tamén amola de moito nabo, chegar a isto, e pasalas tan mal os dous xuntos, e non nos saber un o nome do outro’ (co 63). Sebas claims that his name ‘sábese de contado’ (co 63), but Rosiña’s case is more difficult to solve because of her lack of a name. Questioning the traditional mode of rearing pigs, Sebas wonders ‘por que será que ós porcos nunca se vos pon nome, coma ós cans ou coma ós gatos’ (co 63), although ‘sempre se vos tiveron máis cousas que agradecer ca a eles nunha casa de familia’ (co 63). Yet by naming the pig, the carer would establish an intimate relationship with the animal more similar to that of pet and owner which would defeat the objective of rearing the animal for meat because ‘ben mirado, se se vos coñecese no íntimo, ¿quen era o home de lle mete-lo dente á vosa cacheira logo de ter acariñado co dono dela?’ (co 63). Yet Sebas insists on christening Rosiña because their relationship ‘nunca foi coma o común entre homes e porcos’ (co 63) but similar to a platonic heterosexual relationship: ‘Ti e mais eu razoamos ben un co outro. Durmimos no mesmo cortello [...] Hoxe, mesmo xantamos á mesa, un de par do outro. Coma a xentiña, talmente’ (co 63). He therefore suggests names for the pig, interprets Rosiña’s squeals as approval, and performances a Christian christening with wine. Yet by

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naming her, he can no longer kill her to eat her meat, because '¿quen mata unha porca con nome de seu?' (co 74).

Alienating Speech: Verbosity and Silence

As we have seen, Montoto described Vidal Bolaño's text as 'abondoso, case imposible' (2008) and, without question, one of the most striking features of the play is its skilful and challenging use of language(s) to express its axial theme: the alienation which goes hand in hand with emigration. Vidal Bolaño presents a scenario wherein speech *per se* is alienating and exemplifies his point through linguistic diversity, verbosity, and silence/ing.

Unlike those texts set in multilingual contexts, where linguistic unintelligibility is resolved thanks to a *deus ex machina* which resembles the Holy Spirit descending upon Christ's disciples during Pentecost, *Cochos* seeks verisimilitude in fully engaging with linguistic diversity: five languages are used during the play (Galician, Spanish, Italian, German, and English) and miscommunication is rife. Vidal Bolaño, who championed the importance of the Galician language to Galician theatre, here demonstrates both awareness and sensitivity towards multilingualism. For the purposes of analysis, we must first distinguish between his use of Galician and Spanish, on the one hand, and, on the other, his use of Italian, German and English. Both understood and spoken by the protagonist, and by the audience, Galician and Spanish are part of Galicia's diglossic reality. Sebas, a poor peasant who has only recently emigrated to Germany, speaks Galician, and so does his family. However, being a diglossic but uneducated speaker, he makes use of his appalling Spanish to talk to the Spanish authorities and write a letter to his family. Vidal Bolaño is keen to present the linguistic difficulties and inadequacies of other Galician speakers: Sebas's son reads the letter out loud, having suggested that his mother is a less capable reader, but, as we are told by the stage directions, he himself only does so 'con dificultade' (co 35). In order to avoid a Manichean vision of the diglossic situation, Spanish is also spoken by a fellow Andalusian migrant. However, where the use of Galician and Spanish represents a diglossic reality recognizable to the audience, the use of Italian and German serves to represent emigration: Sebas's fellow migrant Pino Casto de Giuseppe speaks Italian, and German is the language spoken by the German authorities, with whom Sebas is unable to communicate despite the numerous attempts made by both sides.

In not translating these languages, *Cochos* ensures that the audience simultaneously shares in and is excluded from the protagonist's experiences. On the one hand, by presenting long texts in Italian and German, languages unknown to most spectators in Galicia, audience members themselves experience the protagonist's linguistic anxiety and frustration at being unable to understand and therefore communicate with the increasingly aggressive German authorities. On the other hand, the presentation of a mishmash of multilingual texts is one of the many techniques Vidal Bolaño employs in the play to create a Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekte* aimed at preventing empathy and promoting estrangement. The 'prólogo propiamente dito' is a prime example of this technique. Upon entering into the theatre, the audience is presented with multilingual visual and audio stimuli so, as the poster of the performance warns, 'o espectáculo principa denantes de que vostede chegue' (Uvegá

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1987). Indeed, the introduction only lasts as long as it takes the audience to take up their seats. As such, every evening it has a different duration, and the communicative situation is differently affected by noise, in the linguistic sense. How much the audience knows, or has guessed, by the time the second introduction (a short summary in Galician) begins is uncertain. These multilingual visual and audio stimuli comprise not only a number of off-stage voices that talk about the tragic story which will soon unfold before the audience, but also the display of several television sets distributed among the stalls, each striving to contextualize Sebas's story in the virulent, revolutionary and increasingly capitalistic context of the late 1960s.

Concerned that the German guards might break in if he sleeps, Sebas decides to keep himself awake. To this end, he must 'Falar e falar e falar. E facer cousas. E falar. Falar moito. Moito. Sen parar aínda que non saibas moi ben o que dis' (co 28–9). Speaking is not only his weapon against sleep, however, but also against others. Proud of himself, he asks Rosiña, '¿Viches como lles falo [aos gardas alemáns]?' (co 34), and, delusionally, claims that they 'afástanse do barracón para non ter que me oír. Amólaos escoita-la verdade, porque no fondo saben que levo razón' (co 34–5). Sebas's verbosity is also aggressive towards others and contrasts sharply with the silence/ing of Rosiña and the feminine figures associated with her. He talks to Rosiña but, of course, she cannot talk back, and Sebas gets angry: '¿Estasme escoitando? Non, que raios me vas estar escoitando. ¿Daquela por que mentes? ¿Por que móve-la cachola como dicindo que si, se nin tan sequera sábe-lo que che pregunto?' (co 29). When Rosiña squeals, she is aggressively told to shut up. The strategy used by the playwright to convey the silencing of Sebas's wife is subtler. When she visits him, her off-stage voice and Sebas's text are contrapuntally delivered, but there is no communication. As she states, 'Fáloche por un destes aparellos do demo, que non sei se me escoitarás, así dende tan lonxe. Ademais non sei moi ben o que che dicir' (co 43). The relationship between Sebas's parents is another example of male verbosity and female silence/ing: 'Miña nai [...] calada. Ó seu, sempre. E non coma meu pai, que só fechaba a boca para durmir' (co 72). The most powerful example of Sebas's silencing of gendered others takes place in the scene where Sebas proudly shows Rosiña a crying doll he has purchased for his daughter, Mercedesiñas. His judgement clouded when the doll starts crying, Sebas delusionally mistakes the doll for his daughter and, because he cannot stop the mechanism, his demands for silence go unanswered. Incapable of consoling the doll/daughter, he assaults her: '¡Cala, nena! ¡Cala! ¡Que cales, cona! ¡Demo de rapaza! (*Arrolando nela.*) ¡Non chores máis! [...] (*O pranto da boneca vai pasando paseniño á amplificación xeral.*) ¡Para a rapaza de diola! ¡Cala cona! [...] (*Completamente fóra de si.*) ¡Calaaaaaaaaaaaaa!' (co 76–7). Sebas's desire to silence others is in fact so great that he exclaims: '¡Me cago nos nenos de diola! ¡Deberían poñervos vetillo, coma ós cadelos!' (co 77). Here the metaphor of the 'human as dog' clearly connotes subordination, and the suggestion that children, like dogs, should wear a muzzle creates a powerful image of the abusive strategies wielded to silence others.

The relationship between Sebas and Rosiña, and the other feminine figures of the play, is based upon aggressive silencing, and oftentimes outright violence. In the next section, I will argue that, by performing a violent masculinity, Sebas signifies himself as a member of the dominant gender group and therefore becomes empowered. The consequences of this

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See, for example, José Babiano & Ana Fernández Asperilla (2009), Luís M. Calvo Salgado (2009, 2010), Antonio Cazorla Sánchez (2010), and Miguel-Anxo Murado (2008).

empowerment are negative not only for him, but for Rosiña and the other feminine figures in the play.

Performing a Violent Masculinity: 'Morte ditosa' and Gender Violence

Drawing upon social constructionist perspectives such as Judith Butler's theory of gender performance (1993, 2006 [1990]) this section draws on the understanding that in order 'to be credited as a man, what an individual male must do [...] is put on a convincing manhood act' (Schwalbe 2005). These manhood acts 'are aimed at claiming privilege, eliciting deference, and resisting exploitation' (Schrock & Schwalbe 2009: 281). In this light, *Cochos* can be read as the story of Sebas's attempt to perform a convincing manhood act. As we have seen, his decision to rear a pig (that is, to produce his own food) constitutes a failed attempt to reproduce his traditional mode of life in order to save money, thus bettering the economic status of his family in Galicia. A poor peasant back home and an unskilled construction worker in emigration, Sebas is poignantly aware of the difficulties he must face in order to fulfill his duty as the family breadwinner. Indeed, his failure is all the more acute because Sebas constantly feels that, as was generally believed, emigration to the Americas would have procured a better emigratory deal. Emigration to America, the prime destination of Spanish migrants before emigration to other European countries took off in the second half of the twentieth century, is described in positive terms: '¡Así e todo éche boa desgracia non nacer uns anos antes e poder ir face-la América! [...] Sei de máis de catro que foron á Arxentina co posto e en dous anos mandaron para unha casa nova, e en dous máis fixeron para vivir de rendas' (co 50). The suffering undergone by migrants is justified if their destination is America because 'a eles [aos que emigraron a América] polo menos asistíalle-lo aquel de que se cadra voltaban ricos' (co 50); while 'América foiche moita cousa. É isto [a emigración europea] non é a nin a metade de agradecido' (co 51). Sebas's account is not based upon hard data but instead a rupture on between the generations.⁴ As anthropology and trauma studies have shown (see Sider 2006), those who have been through a traumatic experience, such as emigration, exile and war, tend to share very little of their suffering with their offspring; the younger generation's conception of the past is accordingly rose-tinted or even non-existent. These specific socially constructed silences have important consequences. As Gerald Sider argues:

Silences [...] construct the (or a) present both against, and different from, the past, and also [...] construct the (or a) present both within and against an impending future. The separation of the present from the past, which is often an antagonism to the past, and also the romantic separation of the past both from its more real and from the present, also separates the present from the future. (Sider 2006: 149)

Sebas's suffering and mental crisis are fuelled by his unrealistic expectations of the migrant experience, predicated upon such a romanticization of 'facer as Américas'. If being an emigrant in 1968 Germany was not going to bring him and his family economic prosperity, why would he then continue to endure the experience? The reason may be found, I would argue, in Sebas's struggle to perform a non-hegemonic

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Sebas confides his extramarital sexual life to Rosiña: apart from using the services of prostitutes, both in Galicia and in Germany, although more in the latter than in the former, he had a sexual affair with a prostitute. The woman is described as an urban blonde-dyed prostitute who ambitiously promoted herself from working in A Coruña to Madrid but who had sex with Sebas 'de balde. E por acariñamento' (co 60). Their affair is used by Sebas as a prop to signify his virility.

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In an ironic turn, in 1995 the Andalusian theatre company La Jarana staged a Spanish-language version of the play (*Los cerdos*) as part of an institutional 'campana contra el racismo' on the grounds that the aim of the play is 'hurgar en la memoria del pueblo andaluz como emigrante y como tierra de acogida de otras culturas, ahora que se agudizan las tensiones por la llegada de miles de extranjeros en condiciones misérrimas' (J.L.P. 1995: 54).

masculinity. In the 'prólogo propiamente dito', this issue is anticipated: the audience is shown footage from the film *The Red Badge of Courage* (1951), directed by John Huston and based upon the famous eponymous novel by the nineteenth-century writer Stephen Crane. Set against the backdrop of the US Civil War, in the trailer's words, it is 'an essay in pure bravery, the story of a raw young recruit who overnight becomes a man through a baptism of fire' (Huston 1951). Vidal Bolaño's interpretation is, however, less heroic: in the stage directions, he describes it as 'ese batido [...] polas pouquidades do heroísmo e do valor' (co 12). Suggesting similarities between both protagonists, the author implies that the 'dramaturgical task' (Schrock & Schwalbe 2009: 279) that they perform in order to present themselves as men is flawed, but nonetheless necessary: Sebas claims that 'O de mandar é un mal que tamén ataca ós collóns' (co 52).

The play supplies many examples of such flawed manhood acts that seek to compensate non-hegemonic male positions. For instance, Sebas claims racial and national privileges by making constant xenophobic and racist comments: he resents that the prostitute with whom he developed a passionate sexual affair is dating a black man; Italians are described as 'Italianos y marranos, primos hermanos' (co 42) and Germans as *lobos* (co 36).⁵ The xenophobic portrait of the German authorities goes beyond Sebas's text and can even be found in the stage directions themselves. The 'prólogo propiamente dito' and the second prologue stress that in 1968 the German parliament passed the Emergency Laws which 'confiren ó goberno un poder semellante ó que o Reichstag outorgou a Hitler' (co 25). The allusions to Nazi Germany continue throughout the play, the similarity between Sebas's life in 'captivity' and life in the Nazi concentration camps offering a particularly unrefined example. Although Sebas's position as a Spanish/Galician subject is non-hegemonic — all references to the Spanish ambassadorial authorities and the Guardia Civil show awareness that the reasons to emigrate from 1968 Spain 'cannot be separated from the dictatorship's policies and the heavy toll that they imposed on the poor' (Cazorla 2010: 95) — Sebas shows a certain degree of Spanish patriotism. Funnily enough, his last words are: 'O que máis me amola é que, se cadra, por riba, vai a [sic] Madrid e perde co Bayer na casa' (co 83), and he accuses the Germans of xenophobia: '¡Se en vez de ser español fose doutro sitio do demo, se me montaban este cristal?' (co 42).⁶ Furthermore, Sebas elicits deference by flaunting his alleged heroic qualities in front of the German guards: '¡Ei! ¡Oedes! [sic] De min non poderedes dicir que me acovardei diante vosa' (co 32). Although he had not planned upon killing himself, once entangled in the situation, Sebas provokes a violent outcome instead of opting for negotiation and surrender. He wonders:

Porque se non entran manda nabo. Pero han entrar, que eles tamén teñen que se dar a valer. Se non isto vólvese unha carallada e calquera fai o ca min. ¿E se non entran Rosiña? ¿E se agardan a que nos venza a fame ou o sono, e saíamos nós sós? ¿Que sería de nós? [...] ¿Saír? ¿Cando? ¿De que xeito? ¿Para facer que cousa? ¿Pedichar un cacho de pan e unha códea de queixo? ¿Coas orellas gachas? ¿Téndollo inda que agradecer? Co ridículo asentado nas meixelas para sempre [...] ¿Que labirinto! [...] Estouno oíndo [...] ¡Velaí vai o Sebas! ¡Quixo facer unha valentía e saíulle unha parvada! Non. Non pode ser. Teñen que entrar. E vencernos pola forza. (co 73–4)

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Although we might be inclined to read Sebas's behaviour as the means by which he is able to resist exploitation, the fact remains that his reaction to a routine health procedure is exaggerated; indeed, so much so, that the critic Carmen Becerra has described it as 'pouco verosímil' (2000: 66). Sebas is aware of the existence of other options, but having opted for a violent exit, he blames his decision upon the '¡Misericordias de tucerial!' (co 70), or, in English, his pigheadedness. Sebas's manhood act might fly in the face of the human survival instinct, but it is necessary for Sebas to signify himself as a brave and indomitable male who seeks to elicit deference from others. Most off-stage characters, such as the German and Spanish authorities, Sebas's wife, and the priest of 'la colonia española' in Frankfurt try to convince him to surrender, and presumably would condemn his suicide, but there are other characters who support him, such as his son. The latter justifies his father's behaviour and ultimate death in the following terms:

Se fixo o que fixo sería porque botou de conta que era o que tiña que facer, polo ben de todos nós. E se non foi así, eu digo o mesmo que dixo el unha vez para me librar a min dunha malleira. ¡O meu pai é o meu pai con razón ou sin ela! (co 15)

Sebas's action is also sanctioned by both the text itself and the author's *oeuvre*. Xosé María Paz Gago argues that the interpretation of suicide as a form of liberation and subversion is 'unha constante do noso teatro' (1995: 43) generally, and in Vidal Bolaño's work particularly: his play *Bailadela da morte ditosa: (Sete baileretadas de amor e unha de morte)* (1992a) is, for example, a case in point. Suicide empowers those who are powerless by bestowing a dignifying death upon those unable to live a dignified life. In *Cochós*, Sebas has lost hope and therefore his sanity; ironically, by killing himself he re-takes control over his own life. Having decided during the siege that he could no longer kill Rosiña for her meat, Sebas's final instructions to his companion brings the process of his animalization and her anthropomorphism to its climax:

Fai porque [sic] lle manden os untos ós meus fillos [...] E non te esquezas de me meter uns dentes de allo no nariz, antes de que pegue as derradeiras boqueadas. Para que a carne saiba ben [...] Ós de eiquí non lles deas nada. As partes quentes que llelas manden á miña muller. Ela xa sabe. Que as lave no río para defende-la casa. Ninguén máis debe tocalas. ¡Oíches? Faino todo, tal que se foses ti mesma. (co 82)

The most violent incident of the play is not, however Sebas's suicide, which is not graphically presented, but the aforementioned attack on the crying doll. Having failed to silence the doll/daughter, Sebas '(Bate coa boneca barracón adiante ata a facer calar polas rompeduras.)' (co 76–7). His frustration is not only aimed at the doll/daughter but also at his wife, whom he imagines to be present:

(*Berrando.*) ¡Carme! ¡Carme! ¿Onde andas? ¡Terma desta nena e trae un vaso de viño! ¡E xamón! Teño fame. ¿Como que non hai viño? [...] ¿Non che teño dito que onde eu estea pode faltar de todo, pero o viño nunca? [...] ¡Un a traballar todo o día para vos manter, e logo, cando chega á casa, canso coma unha mula, agradecédesllo así! (co 77)

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The violence aimed against female figures is also rehearsed in advance. In a disturbing passage, Sebas asks Rosiña, '¿Se ti foses porco, e non porca, que lle farías á túa compañeira se un día a atopases con outro na cama?' (co 59) because 'os que botamos moito tempo fóra da casa témoscho que ter cavilado todo' (co 59). His prepared answer is clear:

A el a noraboa dar non lla daría, e se cadra na arroutada esa que lle debe entrar a un ó se ver no caso, dunhas hostias ninguén o libraba. Pero mira ti o que son as cousas. Máis mal tampouco lle había facer. Libre de que fose un amigo, un familiar, ou alguén que me debese respecto [...] Se a muller se deixa perder, nós que culpa lle temos. ¡Agora! A ela [...] ¡Mátoa alí mesmo! (co 60)

Above all, such violence demonstrates the way in which women may become props that men use to signify themselves as men in front of other men. A less dramatic example can be found in Sebas's declaration of love to Rosiña, which reinforces her anthropomorphic nature:

¿Que lle vou facer se me acariñei de ti? [...] Quero que saibas que [...] se en vez de porca, foses muller, quereríache. Aínda que só fose porque gracias a ti, ou pola túa causa, que xa non se sabe, levo quince días sentíndome ben comigo mesmo. Como un home feito e dereito. Eu que sempre andei amuado. Déboche iso. E iso heiche de agradecer mentres viva. E, se cadra, mesmo despois. (co 64)

Yet, after this declaration, he affirms: 'perde coidado que, antes de deixar que te leven con eles, matar, mátoe o mesmo. Aínda que a coitelada, ó cabo, me veña doer tanto a min coma a ti' (co 64). In a good example of the domestic abuse endured by the play's females and the responsible male's coping strategy, Sebas strikes Rosiña, subsequently asks if she is all right, apologizes wholeheartedly, and then strives to make up excuses for himself. In sum, by understanding Sebas as a prototypical, powerless migrant (that is, by describing him as a Spivakian subaltern) we fail to notice that, even in his precarious situation, Sebas has power whilst Rosiña does not. Such power originates in neither his nationality nor his social class, however, but in his membership of the dominant gender group. In other words, during the play Sebas is progressively empowered by exerting his authority over others, mainly gendered subalterns. He reflects: '¿Que mal lle podes facer ti a ninguén? Eu aínda podería, se quixese. ¿Pero ti? ¿A que, eh?' (co 68). As Michael Freedon contends, 'nor is a threat an *attempt* to exercise power but its actual exercise, though even then it may fail' (Freedon in Dowding 2011).

Despite the troubled gender politics of *Cochos*, critics have failed to engage with the issue or even notice it. I will devote the last section of this article to discussing the critical reception of the play in order to elucidate why it has been analyzed exclusively as a play about alienation and emigration, or an allegory of the migrant Galician working-class.

Receiving *Cochos*

Scholars and reviews unanimously describe *Cochos* as 'a traxedia do ser humano arrincado do seu medio cultural, que procura, non unha

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According to David García Vidal (2009), emigration was still a common subject for the plays submitted for the Concurso de Textos Teatrais (1973–80), organized by Agrupación Cultural Abrente, to which Vidal Bolaño belonged.

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Ruibal is not alone in pointing out the similarities between both playwrights (see López Silva 2001: 78–9 and Ruibal 2006). The juxtaposition of their names goes beyond intertextuality and can be explained as a canonization strategy. The Galician Spanish-language writer Valle-Inclán holds exceptional canonical capital in the Galician cultural field despite having been excluded from the Galician literary canon due to the linguistically restrictive understanding of Galician literature as that exclusively written in Galician (see Hooper 2007 for further discussion). A telling example of the transference of Valle-Inclán's canonical capital to Vidal Bolaño can be found in a change of programme. After the heirs to Valle-Inclán's copyrights refused to grant permission to stage one of his plays to inaugurate the first season (1984) of the newly-created Centro Dramático Galego, the institution replaced his play with Vidal Bolaño's *Agasallo de sombras. Romaxe de feridas e de medos en dous actos e dezanove escenas* (published 1992) (García Vidal 2009: 13–14).

integración, imposible no seu caso, senón parapetarse dentro da súa propia coraza nun acto de afirmación' (AD 1988) set against the backdrop of Galician emigration. Despite the long-standing tradition of the subject matter in Galician theatre, Carmen Becerra argues that *Cochos* 'supón unha nova forma de tratar o tema' (2000: 66) due to its tragic ending, and I would argue too that this is certainly the case.⁷ Yet while the tragic element sets the play apart within Galician theatre, it also shows the coherence of Vidal Bolaño's *oeuvre*. A telling explanation of how he conceptualized his work can be found in an anecdote recalled by fellow playwright, Rubén Ruibal. On numerous occasions, Vidal Bolaño tried to copyright some of his plays under the generic label of 'desgraza'. Both playwrights were bewildered at the refusals of the copyright officers, because 'nos arquivos [da Sociedade Xeral de Autores] hai rexistradas algunhas cousas baixo o epígrafe "esperpento", que vén soando ben máis raro' (Ruibal 2005: 7). Ruibal's comment evidences the influence of Ramón María del Valle-Inclán's *esperpento* upon the Vidal Bolaño plays which have been classified under the labels of 'teatro de derrota e dignidade ou desgracias' (Villalaín 1998) and 'dirty realism' (López Silva 2001).⁸ In these plays, epitomized in *Saxo tenor* (1993), and significantly subtitled, *Desgracia arrabaldeira improbable entre loucos, chourizos, gángsteres, chulos, currantes e putas*, Vidal Bolaño focuses upon marginal situations and characters. With its 'ambiente marxinal e tráxico debido á condición periférica do personaxe [Sebas]' (López Silva 2001: 94), *Cochos* forms another example. Nevertheless, despite recognizing Vidal Bolaño's interest in marginal figures such as prostitutes, and his 'discurso crítico' (Becerra 2000: 66), critics have often failed to notice the sexual politics of the author's work. The reception of *Cochos* is a case in point.

The most striking feature of contemporary newspaper reviews of the play is the unstable sex of the pig (AD 1988; JV 1988), if not its erasure (Dapena 1987). The strategy employed to erase the sexed nature of Rosiña is the common practice of using a generic masculine to refer to non-specific correlates or to gloss over a feminine subject. Dapena (1987) always refers to Rosiña as 'el cerdo', thereby turning her into a generic specimen. The reviews published in the newspaper *Atlántico* (AD 1988; JV 1988) present a more interesting case because they offer a glimpse into the process of erasure of the gender marker: the pig is at first '[unha] porca', but she ends up being 'un porco' (AD 1988). The consequences of erasing Rosiña's sex can only be analyzed by taking into account the terms in which the relationship between Sebas and the animal have been described. In all reviews, the pig is similarly described as 'partenaire' (Dapena 1987) and 'compañeiro' (AD 1988; JV 1988). The protagonist and his pig are not portrayed as equals (after all Sebas is a human being and Rosiña a domesticated animal initially reared to be slaughtered and provide meat), but their relationship is described as one of 'ternura y afectividad' (Dapena 1987) and Sebas is said to project 'unha grande afectividade en torno a él [sic]' (JV 1988). The reasons given for this affectionate relationship are several. One reviewer suggests that Sebas is grateful to Rosiña because 'o cocho representa na tradición e hábitos da economía agraria, unha garantía de supervivencia' (JV 1988). This is irrefutably so, but, as we have seen, parallel to the development of their close relationship is Sebas's realization that 'nunca poderei levar á boca unha tallada de raxo, ou unha posta de xamón, por medo a que poida ser do teu' (CO 63). Another reviewer goes further and suggests that it is due to '[e]l conflicto que genera la situación de ambos seres abocados a un mismo destino trágico' (Dapena 1987). I understand the nature of

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this tragic destiny as the bleeding death of a pig and, in the light of my earlier comments, I consider the equation of both deaths unfortunate. As a domestic animal and a metaphorically feminine figure, Rosiña has been dispossessed of agency, and the violence she suffers is caused by Sebas, whose death is of his own doing. In sum, the reviews give a superficial account of the play which portrays Sebas and Rosiña as jail mates who suffer a 'cativerio' of the same nature. Although she acknowledges Rosiña's sex, Carmen Becerra, the author of the only article published so far which focuses exclusively upon the play, also portrays their relationship in affectionate terms: the pig is a 'única "interlocutora" que escoita as súas confidencias, as súas cavilacións, que lle alivia a soidade, que xera a súa tenrura' (2002: 260). How can we explain critics' description of the play as *exclusively* dramatizing Sebas's tragedy? It is my contention that the answer can be found at the problematic intersection between nationalism and literary studies.

Closing Ranks in the Quest for a Galician Emigration Epic

In 1998, the writer Carlos Casares voiced a concern shared by many since the nineteenth-century Rexurdimento: the double frustration of Galician literature at 'a ausencia dunha épica da emigración e doutra épica do mar' (Casares in Fernández Rei 1999: 76). From Vicente Risco, author of the play *O Bufón d'el-rei* (1928), to Xohana Torres, the first translator into Galician of children's literature in the late 1960s (Pena Presas 2010), Galician writers and intellectuals are often consumed by what Helena González identifies as 'hiperconciencia de carencia' (González Fernández 2005: 9), and often driven programmatically to fulfill the deficits. There are considerable differences between Risco's play and Torres's translations, mainly because they respond to the demands of an ever-changing society; there is a deficit, however, that seems enduring: the epic.

The longing for epic narratives in Galician culture has been widespread and goes from the work of nineteenth-century authors such as Florencio Vaamonde Lores, author of the epic poem *Os Calaiços* (1894), to contemporary authors such as the polymath Xurxo Souto, who has penned numerous narrative texts and lyrics about heroic Galician sailors. There does, however, seem to be a gendered bias towards the subject. This longing provides a prime example of the prevailing metanarrative of the History of Galicia, which historian José Carlos Bermejo Barrera calls 'o esplendor da miseria' (2007): a contradictory metanarrative which stresses the political marginalization and economic underdevelopment of Galicia while alleging a cultural magnificence. To my mind the reception of *Cochobos* must be understood within this longing for heroic epic narratives of the Galician working-class. Still, this epic impulse is not incompatible with a gendered reading, so how can we explain the silencing of the gender politics of *Cochobos*? Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan's concept of the 'overarching umbrella', introduced to Galician Studies by the groundbreaking work of Helena González Fernández (2005), may provide an answer. He argues that 'the politics of nationalism become the binding and "overarching umbrella" that subsumes other and different political temporalities' (1992: 78), among them feminism, and there is evidence to suggest that the 'overarching umbrella' of Galician nationalism has contributed to the reception of *Cochobos* for various reasons. First, Vidal Bolaño advocated 'un teatro que, no artístico,

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Drawing on López-Iglésias Samartim's definition, I understand *galeguismo* as 'o movemento de reivindicación da identidade diferenciada da Galiza com independéncia do grau de autonomía política proposto para a colectividade galega polos varios grupos ou agentes autoproclamados galeguistas, así como o proceso de fabricación de ideas que apoiam e justificam os varios graus desta reivindicación' (2010: 10).

fose expresión do seu ser, e no social [...] un argumento máis na defensa da nosa identidade cultural e dos nosos dereitos nacionais' (Vidal Bolaño 2006: 3) and proudly flaunted his nationalist credentials both under Franco and during democracy (see Quintáns 2005). Critics seem to be dazzled by Vidal Bolaño's contribution to the creation of a Galician national or popular theatre and have therefore displaced the author's interest in sexual politics to a peripheral role. Second, Montoto's production itself contextualized the play as a text about the disenfranchisement of Galician migrants. As we have seen, Montoto was daunted by the verbosity and technical requirements of the play, namely the need for a pig to be present on stage and the complexity of the sound effects. Ultimately Montoto was persuaded to stage *Cochobos* by the encouragement and help of several people, especially those who helped disinterestedly with the sound effects, ranging from a group of German visiting students at the University of Santiago de Compostela to fellow theatre people. Montoto's project also attracted the attention of many members of the Galician cultural scene. In the cast of off-stage voices we find journalists, musicians, intellectuals, and politicians. All of these people belonged to the cultural and political left and *galeguismo*,⁹ and their participation would have contributed to the understanding of *Cochobos*, both Vidal Bolaño's text and Montoto's production, as a political intervention in the public arena which denounced the precarious situation of Galician (male) migrants. We cannot surmise that all audiences identified all the off-stage voices, but there is evidence to suggest that most audiences would have recognized some. We must take into consideration that in the 1980s the Galician theatrical scene was very much a militant affair, and therefore many members of the public would have had left-wing and *galeguista* sympathies themselves and been acquainted with some of the off-stage cast. Moreover, some of the cast was well-known in the Galician public sphere: the politician Xosé Manuel Beiras, for many years leader of the Bloque Nacionalista Galego, is a case in point. However, of all the people who participated in the sound effects of the play, Miguel Cancio and Xosé Manuel Beiras's contributions stand out due to the layer of meaning that their personas brought to the play. They performed the respective roles of the sociologist and economist who, in the 'prólogo propiamente dito', contextualize Sebas's story historically as a prime example of the negative consequences of emigration and modernization in Galician society. In the stage directions, Cancio's character, Luís Villares, is described as 'doutor en ciencias sociolóxicas' (co 13) and Beiras's character, Miguel Anxo Boullón, as 'licenciado en económicas pola Facultade de Ciencias Económicas e Empresariais da Universidade de Santiago de Compostela' (co 16). The similarities between the real-life sociologist Cancio and the economist Beiras, author of the groundbreaking essay *O atraso económico de Galicia* (1972), are striking. Such was the similarity that Montoto could affirm that their casting was a given because 'Roberto Vidal escribiu [...] uns textos, nos que falaban un economista e un sociólogo, sen nomealos, pero que eran perfectamente recoñecibles na Galicia daquelas e tamén na de hoxe' (Montoto 2008). When Montoto asked Cancio and Beiras to play the parts, he found that they were highly enthusiastic: 'Beiras aceptou de inmediato, e [...] fixo de el mesmo (do Beiras público, que en pouco se parece ó outro), con moitísima gracia. Miguel puxo algunha pega, "eu iso non o diría así", pero sen máis fixo un Cancio que lle saíu bordado' (Montoto 2007). The authority of their texts is therefore doubly sanctioned by authoritative

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This line of thought has been fruitfully pursued by critics such as Joseba Gabilondo (2009, 2011), Helena González Fernández (2005), Helena Miguélez-Carballeira (2009, 2010) and Kirsty Hooper (2009, 2011), among others, to whom my work is indebted.

galeguista cultural agents: by the fictional characters and by the men performing them.

As has been convincingly examined by a wealth of critical work on nationalist discourses from a gender studies perspective (see, for instance, Yuval-Davies 1997, Walby 1996, and West 1997), nationalism is imposed through gestures that can often be described as manhood acts. Irrespective of the intention of individuals, 'manhood acts have the effect of reproducing an unequal gender order' (Schrock & Schwalbe 2009: 280). So, no matter the active intentions of reviewers and scholars, by erasing Sebas's violence towards female subjects and emphasizing 'a loita final pola dignidade' of the protagonist (Becerra 2000: 67) they contribute to the silencing of the stories of gendered subjects. By rendering Rosiña's story invisible, reviewers and scholars have rendered invisible the complex sexual politics of Vidal Bolaño's work. In sum, the importance of emigration to the agenda of *galeguismo* (an ideology shared by both the author of the play and the director of its 1987 production, and one which prevails in Galician historiography and literary studies) indicates why the reading of *Cochos* as presenting the failed heroic gesture of a Galician migrant has thus far monopolized discourse upon the play in both newspaper reviews and subsequent critical readings.

L'envoi

This article has highlighted the importance of undertaking a gender reading of Vidal Bolaño's *oeuvre*. His work presents numerous examples of the consequences of patriarchy upon both women and men, and illustrates an ongoing struggle to overcome gender inequality. Take, for example, the metamorphosis into the 'Galo de Portugal' of the womanizer Don Esmeraldino da Cámara Mello de Lima, Vizconde de Ribeirinha, in *A burla do galo* (2000) and the story of Regina in *Mar revolto* (2001). Moreover, this article attempts to show that by challenging the 'overarching umbrella' effect of nationalist discourses in Galician literary studies, we are able to listen to what other subaltern discourses, such as feminism, have to say.¹⁰ The aim is not, as Nikita Dhawan has argued *apropos* of the relationship between 'First World' and 'Third World' subalterns, 'to construct a hierarchy of victimization' (2007: 5), but rather to lay bare the ventriloquising practices of discourses which claim to speak on behalf of others on the grounds that they cannot speak 'instead of admitting that there is nobody to hear' (Milevska 2003). By unmasking these practices, we will hopefully continue to develop an attentiveness in us and in others, to silent and silenced voices, if only because, as Xan de Nartallo, the sibyllic character of *As actas escuras* (1997), forewarns Casiano, 'Hai máis silencio ca voces' (Vidal Bolaño 1997: 191).



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