

*Review***BARBOUR,
Catherine***Contemporary
Galician Women
Writers*

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See, for example, Marisol Rodríguez's *Feminismo e innovación en la narrativa gallega de autoría feminina: Xobana Torres, María Xosé Queizán, Carmen Blanco y Teresa Moure* (Edwin Mellen Press, 2013), Ana Garrido's *Xobana Torres: Da viúva de vivo á muller navegante* (Concello de Santiago de Compostela, 2020) and Lorena López López's *Ainda invisíbeis? Narradoras e margens na literatura galega contemporânea* (Através Editora, 2022).

Contemporary Galician Women Writers by Catherine Barbour sets out to analyse how Galician identity is performed in six novels published between 2000 and 2010 by the popular Galician-born writers Teresa Moure (b. 1969), Luisa Castro (b. 1966) and Marta Rivera de la Cruz (b. 1970). The corpus includes Moure's Galician-language *Herba moura* (Xerais, 2005) and *A intervención* (Xerais, 2010), both written in standard Galician before the author's decision to write using the Portuguese orthography, a linguistic variety also called International Galician and the *lusista* or *reintegracionista* norm, in 2013; Castro's Spanish-language *Viajes con mi padre* (Planeta, 2003) and *La segunda mujer* (Seix Barral, 2006); and Rivera de la Cruz's *Linus Daff, inventor de historias* (Plaza y Janés, 2000) and *Hotel Almirante* (Espasa, 2002).

Based on the author's doctoral thesis, defended at the University of St Andrews under the supervision of Gustavo San Román and Catherine O'Leary, this book is part of a growing line of research on Galician women writers that follows on the pioneering work of Helena González Fernández, based at the Universitat de Barcelona. Yet, unlike most scholars working on this topic, Barbour analyses works written in both Galician and Spanish.¹ Instead of limiting the adjective 'Galician' to mean Galician-language works, Barbour sets out to examine the prose work of critically and commercially successful Galician-born women writers who write in Galician and Spanish. In doing so, her work departs from standard Galician Literary Studies. During the twentieth century, the language-specific concept of Galician literature was naturalised and then institutionalised. Thus, nowadays, it is widely accepted that only Galician-language works (that is, what is conventionally called 'Galician literature') fall under the remit of Galician Literary Studies, with some exceptions being occasionally made for the Spanish-language works of canonical authors such as Rosalía de Castro. However, in the last fifteen years scholars such as Danny Barreto, José Colmeiro, Joseba Gabilondo, Kirsty Hooper and Helena Miguélez-Carballeira, all based outside Galicia, have warned against the

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conflation of ethnic and linguistic identity which has taken place in Galicia. Barbour's research is a proud example of this trend of Postnational Galician Studies. Although she does not self-describe her work as 'postnational', she draws extensively from a body of work which does. Thus, *Contemporary Galician Women Writers* may be productively described as a postnational reading, in the sense given by Hooper in *Writing Galician into the World: New Cartographies, New Poetics* (2011).

The book is framed by a short introduction and conclusion and divided into five chapters. The first two examine general issues and the last three analyse each writer's two novels. 'Galician Literary History: Challenges and Accomplishments' (Chapter 1) offers a necessarily brief survey of the literary field since the nineteenth century and the role of Galician in political discourse. The historical introduction presented in the first part follows official literary history, which only includes Galician-language writing, thus being slightly inconsistent with the methodology of the book. It would have gained much by engaging with scholarship that questions the official narrative. For instance, Barbour states that 'the *criterio filolóxico* [language criterion] came to be the defining factor of Galician literature' in the early twentieth century (*italics in the original*, 12). However, as Elias J. Torres Feijó explains, in the emergent Galician literary field the discursive centrality of Galician did not always correlate with its use in practice. So much so that the 'criterio filolóxico' can only be said to have been firmly established in the mid-1960s. Having said this, the aim of the monograph is not to write Galician literary history afresh, a gargantuan collective task that is yet to be undertaken. The second part of the chapter discusses the fraught relationship between literature, language, and nationhood. Drawing on many of the scholars mentioned before, Barbour successfully summarises how the linguistic complexities of Galician literary writing cannot be accommodated within the rigid confines of Galician national literature.

'Narrative by Women: New Directions' (Chapter 2) zooms in on the book's topic. The focus is mostly on Galician-language writing, but Barbour does highlight some of the discrepancies between accepted literary history and evidence about Galician women literary activity, especially as prose writers, regardless of their language. In the last twenty years there has been an increase in female-authored books and women authors winning awards, so there are abundant reasons to be optimistic. Nonetheless, Barbour also joins Miguélez-Carballeira in warning us against the pervasive nature of the patriarchal values which rule literary institutions. The general argument put forward in this chapter is that nationalism consistently excludes women's writing from the central positions of the literary field.

The following three chapters analyse how Galician identity is depicted in two novels by each writer. First, in Chapter 3, Teresa Moure's *Herba moura* and *A intervención* are studied. Unlike Castro and Rivera de la Cruz, Moure is based in Galicia (she is a university lecturer at the University of Santiago de Compostela) and her original work is mainly written in Galician. However, she self-translates her work into Spanish, thus participating in both Galician and Spanish national literatures. The former novel, a commercial and critical success, was seen by many as a pioneering feminist novel. As Miguélez-Carballeira argues in a 2006 article, its originality was, however, greatly overstated to the detriment of María Xosé Queizán and Xohana Torres, two feminist writers who were born thirty and forty years before Moure. *Herba moura* is, nonetheless,

an ecofeminist historical novel which tells the story of three empowered women (Queen Christina of Sweden, Hélène Jans and Einés Andrade) who were connected to René Descartes. For Barbour, although the novel uses 'stereotypical tropes of language, nature, sentimentality and folklore, [it] proposes a cosmopolitan Galician identity informed by global perspectives, ecological awareness and minority voices' (49). Deeply concerned with social equality, *A intervención* 'attempts to reclaim the Galician attachment to the land as a site of artistic, ecofeminist revolution' (49) by telling the story of a group of artists who come together to create a protest piece of land art. In sum, both novels 'demonstrate in both characterisation and themes an ecofeminist and outward-looking Galician identity that sits uncomfortably with narrow definitions of the same' (54).

The fourth chapter examines Luisa Castro's autofictional novels, *Viajes con mi padre* and *La segunda mujer*, which explore themes of class, gender, language and migration. Castro, who is a Galician native-speaker but has lived outside Galicia most of her adult life, is mostly known for her Spanish-language novels. However, early in her career, she enjoyed some success as a Galician-language poet. Her poetry collection *Baleas e baleas* (1988), with her candid, unromantic images of working-class seamen and fish canning factory women workers, is often credited with being a precursor of the revolutionary Galician-language women poetry of the 1990s. Unlike Moure's Galician nationalist and ecofeminist views, Castro believes 'in a multifaceted, non-nationalist and plurilingual approach to Galician culture' (60) and 'professes an individualistic approach to the role of gender in literary production' (61). Set in Castro's hometown of Foz, *Viajes con mi padre* explores the tensions derived from feeling close to one's roots after moving away, geographically, culturally, and socially, hence the occasional use of Galician to convey closeness and familiarity. *La segunda mujer* is a cosmopolitan novel that tells the story of a divorce and seems to be inspired in the writer's publicised divorce from the Catalan politician and philosopher, Xavier Rubert de Ventós. The main themes are the tensions between their identities as a Galician from a working-class background and an upper-class Catalan, and between her female empowerment and his patriarchal ideology. Barbour concludes that, although Castro presents some traditional images of Galician identity, she also attempts 'to combine her cosmopolitan outlook with her attachment to home, ultimately demonstrating a pluralistic Galician identity' (75). Also, despite Castro's reluctance to identify as a woman writer, both novels explore the gender-specific challenges women writers face and Barbour persuasively describes *Viajes con mi padre* as metafiction.

Finally, the fifth chapter focuses on Marta Rivera de la Cruz, a bold choice because of her open criticism of Galician language policy and her Spanish-nationalist political profile. As a supporter of the anti-Galician organization Galicia Bilingüe, which wants to curtail the linguistic rights of Galician speakers, Rivera de la Cruz disagrees with the institutionalization of the language criterion and proposes instead the long-rejected ethnic or origin criterion. She was a prolific Spanish-language writer until 2016, when she became an MP of the centre-right party, Ciudadanos. In 2019, she joined the cabinet of Isabel Díaz Ayuso, the controversial PP president of the Comunidad de Madrid, as chief of the Consejería de Cultura, Turismo y Deporte. At the time of writing this review, Rivera de la Cruz has left Ciudadanos and rejoined Díaz Ayuso's cabinet as an independent politician after the 2021 reshuffle. All of this goes a long way in explaining

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why her literary and political project is dismissed by most Galician literary institutions and scholars, who mostly operate under the influence of Galician nationalism. Barbour's decision to include Rivera de la Cruz in her corpus alongside Moure and Castro is worth praising. Indeed, here lies one of the strengths of the book —it analyses the work of women writers 'who profess notoriously opposing political and linguistic standpoints' (2). Because of the ideological profiles usually associated with Galician-language writing, by following the 'criterio filolóxico', scholars tend to end up excluding from their analysis writers who self-identify as Spanish nationalists. (Needless to say, there are many exceptions to this). The two novels by Rivera de la Cruz under analysis, *Linus Daff, inventor de historias* and *Hotel Almirante*, focus on themes of origins, displacement, and social mobility. Barbour concludes that these novels 'package a considerable number of traditional Galician themes for a Spanish-language readership' (100), also described earlier in the chapter as 'traditional regionalist tropes of the Galician imaginary' (90). Some of these elements are lower-class hard-working women, superstitions, *morriña* and good, simple food.

In conclusion, *Contemporary Galician Women Writers* presents a compelling, well-written textual analysis of six novels that adds substantially to our knowledge about three commercially successful writers who, except for Moure (the Galician-language writer), are yet to receive sustained attention. The book convincingly shows that much is learnt about the literary representation of Galician identities when the works under study are by authors who are located outside Galician national literature. The book will be of interest to scholars working on Hispanic Peninsular, particularly Galician, Literary Studies, but it also has much to offer to other literary scholars, especially those working on women's writing.