

Manuela Palacios González y Helena González Fernández (Eds.), 2008. *Palabras extremas: Escritoras gallegas e irlandesas de hoy*. Oleiros: Netbiblo*

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A worthy addition to the Irish Studies Series promoted by the Amergin Research Institute of Research in Irish Studies, *Palabras Extremas* moves the confluences between contemporary Galician and Irish women poets to the foreground. In its ten chapters, which give voice to both poets and literary scholars, this volume, edited by Manuela Palacios and Helena González, provides readers with the chance to explore the characteristics of the literary production written by women poets in Ireland and Galicia. An eleventh chapter in its own right, the editors' Introduction highlights the similarities between the Irish and Galician contexts, providing an account of the circumstances surrounding the peak of poetry-writing by women which both literary traditions experienced in the last decades of the twentieth century. Thus, the editors mention the importance of the radical political and social transformations taking place in Ireland and Galicia during the 1970s, which contributed to the visibility of women in general and women authors in particular. After emphasizing the suitability of poetry as the medium through which women can explore a common imaginary, the editors proceed to account for the contents of the essays included in the collection and for their grouping into two parts, entitled "Naturaleza, Lenguaje y Mito" and "Con voz propia: Ensayos y Entrevistas" respectively.

The structure of the first part of the collection, containing six chapters, resembles a dialogue between scholars, in turns providing a study on a common aspect within the context of either the Galician or the Irish literary tradition. The collection opens with reflections on Nature, first provided by María Xesús Nogueira's "Palabras de tierra para detener la marea. El paisaje en las poetas gallegas". In this chapter, Nogueira discusses the presence of rural and sea landscapes as poetic motifs in the production of contemporary Galician women poets. The author uncovers the connection of sea landscapes to the tradition of

medieval literature and elucidates the dichotomy hidden in the evocation of rural landscapes – which are recognized as elements of identity but also have to be demystified and detached from their romanticised or pastoral features. Her analysis contains a reference to the recent ecocritical perspective and to the negative connotations of the urban landscape, also associated to autobiographical elements. More importantly, Nogueira coins the term “denounced landscapes” in her study of texts which contain socioeconomic or ecological denunciations. Her final overview on the use of landscape by women poets today reflects on the predominance of critical voices using landscape as a means to subvert or rewrite previously established notions of the literary canon.

In the second chapter, “La luna en el cristal: poetas irlandesas y naturaleza”, Manuela Palacios offers her reply to the reflection on Nature from the perspective of the Irish context. Following Nogueira up on the analysis of the landscape motif, Palacios establishes firstly the similarities between the Irish and the Galician landscapes and refers to the claims for a fellowship of Atlantic and Celtic nations already vindicated by the *Xeración Nós*. Having introduced the reader to the birth of the Irish poetic tradition, which is strongly connected to works where Nature is given a voice, Palacios focuses on the treatment of this motif in the work of contemporary Irish women poets. Thus, she discusses Eavan Boland’s work from an ecocritical perspective, analysing her use of the figure of the farming woman as a way to unveil the political dimension of landscape. Palacios emphasizes here the poet’s intentional rejection of identification with the woman farmer – a situation which, in turn, would lead to the inclusion of the pastoral element and to an identification of the rural with the national, a stigma long suffered by Irish women (poets). However, reflecting on the unavoidable association between poetry and nation, Palacios takes the work of Paula Meehan as an instance of the inclusion of nature as a healing element within the urban landscape. Analyzing Meehan’s poems through an ecofeminist prism, Palacios dwells on the union between nature and maternity and on the symbolism of the River Liffey, which unites nature and woman in the heart of the city of Dublin. Finally, and as a sort of introduction of the next central theme to be discussed, the author explores the merging of nature, woman and (Gaelic) language in the poetry by Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill.

In “Encrucijadas identitarias gallegas y el laboratorio del lenguaje”, Helena González depicts the appropriation of language in the work of contemporary Galician women poets. González firstly introduces the philological criteria whereby the canon of Galician literature excludes those works which are not written in the Galician language. Having described the combination of feminist and postmodern perspectives as a background to the production of contemporary poets, González considers women authors’ privileging of poetry writing over fiction writing as a product of the introduction of modernizing and normalizing politics into the Galician literary system. She also brings into the discussion the notion of the “language laboratory”, a mode of poetic writing whose by-products are not to be merely consumed by the reader; rather, they attempt to engage the reader in a communicative process. To illustrate this point, González offers an overview of the use of this mode in the work of several contemporary poets and its radically different results. Thus, the concern over language is characterised by disobedience, hybridity, orality or fragmentation in the production of Xela Arias, Chus Pato, María do Cebreiro or Emma Couceiro respectively. To conclude her study, González points out the apparent paradox provoked by the shift from an identity-focused poetry to a language-concerned one in allowing for the recuperation of previously silenced authors. Thus, as González highlights, through a resort to marginal positions some authors have placed themselves at the core of the Galician literary discourse.

Laura M^a Lojo continues the discussion on language in the fourth chapter, “Corporeidad y lenguaje en la poesía irlandesa actual”, which explores, within the Irish context, notions that the reader of the collection has already come across by now, such as the inscription of the body in writing, the construction of subjectivity and its relation to the feminine body, the adaptation of language to take in female experience or the framing of women poets’ writing within the national discourse. More specifically, Lojo refers to the need on the part of women creators for rewriting stereotypical icons in order to allow for a visible space for women poets. For instance, she mentions the authors’ exorcising of the disempowering connotations of motherhood or their rejection of the classical image and role of the Muse. Lojo’s points are illustrated with carefully chosen poetic fragments, for which

she also offers her own translations, thus providing her readers with a first-hand experience of the ways in which, within the Irish literary tradition, body and femininity are subverted in order to be repossessed.

The fifth and sixth chapters engage in the discussion of the presence of myth in contemporary poetry written by women. In “Tejiendo y destejiendo mitos o el moldeable tapiz de la realidad en las poetas gallegas”, M^a Xesús Lama analyses the insertion of myth (connected here both to Celticism and femininity) in the poetical production by women authors. Lama delves extensively in the myriad of mythological references at play in the poetic production of Chus Pato. She also compares the different purposes served by the use of myth in the poetry of Pato and that of other authors, such as Luz Pozo Garza or María do Cebreiro. Preparing the ground to move the discussion over to the Irish context, Lama makes reference to the interest in the myths of the Irish tradition and the Celtic world which has produced an effective rewriting of the Galician tradition – providing myth with a double role, both legitimizing and transforming.

In a similar manner, in Luz Mar González’s “Intertextualidad clásica en la poesía irlandesa de autoría femenina: 1980-2007”, classical myths are seen as elements taking part in both the construction and reconstruction of national identity. González offers a description of the Irish socioeconomic and political context in the last decades of the twentieth century in order to account for the utilisation of mythology as a way of coping with the various post-modern, post-Tiger dissatisfactions. To elaborate on this notion, Gonzalez looks closely at the use of different classical female figures in the work several poets. She mentions the presence of Penelope in Eva Bourke’s and Anne Le Marquand Hartigan’s poems, the insertion of the image of Helen of Troy in poems by Mary Coll or the seditious appropriation of Cassandra or the Medusa by Katie Donovan. Through her analysis of Eavan Boland’s use of the myth of Philomel, Gonzalez ends her study by showing how the resort to mythology subsumes the possibility of deconstructing stereotypes affecting women.

Although its first part closes with a reference to silenced witnesses through the figure of Philomel, the collection *Palabras*

Extremas becomes an even more interesting read when its second part “Con voz propia” offers women poets a chance to discuss their own work and that of their contemporaries. The first contribution to this part is made by María do Cebreiro in “Nuestro cuerpo es un campo de batalla. El sentido político de la poesía gallega escrita por mujeres”. The author deals here with her own reactions to the inclusion of corporeity into women poets’ production and to the multiplicity of bodies present in the corpus of Galician poetry. The political significance invariably engrafted with the introduction of bodies within the poem is toned down by Cebreiro, who will rather focus on the vindication of internal difference in the production of Galician women poets. The importance of the multiplicity and diversity of bodies featuring in the work of contemporary poets resides, according to Cebreiro, in their being representative of the multiple and diverse intentions of their authors. Her final enlightening remarks constitute a reflection on what is to come in the panorama of contemporary Galician literature.

The next poet to speak is Ann Le Marquand Hartigan in “Librando espacio: Un porqué de la escritura”. Skilfully translated by Manuela Palacios, this eighth chapter is characterised by a lively and playful combination of prose and poetry. Hartigan addresses the readers’ imagination so that they can visualize her different concerns, such as her rejection of the professionalization of poetic creation and the need to clear a new space for every new creation; her views on the loss – and survival – of Gaelic; or her explanation on the perception of poetry and especially of women poets in Ireland. As Cebreiro’s had done, Hartigan’s final words leave the reader with a positive note, since they are devoted to identifying the act of writing with an act of reconciliation, stating that poets are reconciled with themselves and with others through their work.

Also in consonance with Cebreiro’s essay, and especially with her defence of internal difference, is María Xesús Nogueira’s “Los signos de la diferencia. Entrevistas con las poetas Chus Pato y Ana Romaní”. The setting of a similar questionnaire – on woman, the Galician literary discourse, feminism, and their own work – for two poets with different aesthetic perceptions allows the readers to trace confluences not only between these two authors but also with their

Irish counterparts. Curiously, both poets share a mixed reaction towards the figure of Rosalía de Castro, which brings similar parallels to their minds – the mother-daughter relationship in the case of Pato and the establishing of literary genealogies in the case of Romaní. Moreover, both poets dwell on the sorority of women poets as an outcome of the literary context of the 80s. Personal accounts, such as Pato's retelling of her first years as a poet, gain renewed strength in the light of Ann Le Marquand Hartigan's foregoing quest for space, still fresh in the readers' mind. Following the spirit of the collection, both authors are led to comment on the presence in their own work of some of the major themes that surface in the previous essays, such as myth, language or the representation of femininity.

“Poemas desde las fronteras del arte: Conversaciones con Mary O'Donnell y Celia de Fréine”, by Luz Mar Gonzalez Arias, gives two Irish poets the opportunity to join the debate. Both O'Donnell and Fréine discuss the cultural, literary and landscape transformations in post-Tiger Ireland. Particularly interesting are their reflections on language and on their relation to Gaelic, since these two authors have made different linguistic choices when creating. In addition to offering their views on the major concerns that have been mentioned throughout the collection, these poets account for the context of women writing in Ireland. They still feel the scarce visibility of women creators, which O'Donnell attributes to a lack of sufficient critical reception whereas Fréine associates it to the paucity of readers of poetry in Gaelic.

Curiously enough, the volume where these claims are included comes to compensate for any lack of visibility contemporary Irish and Galician women poets may still perceive. The clear and instructive contextualization and analysis carried out in every essay, together with the profusion of poems which are used as instances, make the collection a pleasure to read while completely fulfilling the editors' aim to promote the knowledge of the work of Irish and Galician women poets. Furthermore, the recent publication of the volume *Writing Bonds* and the anthology *To the Winds Our Sails* – where Manuela Palacios also features as editor – has furthered the editors' attempt to effectively bring down the barriers between Irish and Galician literature. The spirit of *Palabras Extremas* lives on in these other

initiatives, which successfully immerse their readers into a network of fruitful exchanges and leave them looking forward to yet another contribution to the exploration of the literary production of contemporary Irish and Galician women poets.

WORKS CITED

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