

6 *Review*

**PALACIOS
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Manuela; e
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FERNÁNDEZ,
Helena, eds.**

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*Palabras extremas:
Escritoras gallegas e
irlandesas de hoy*

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This edited volume springs from a welcome exercise of (self-)reflexivity in two areas of study that have occasionally lent themselves to clichéd or predisposed attitudes in the cultural and academic fields. On the one hand, and as critics like the book's editors have been stating in their previous work, women's writing has at times been approached in contemporary literary studies as a sort of self-explanatory category, best explained by means of a closed set of analytical tools springing from gender and feminist studies (revisionism, visibility, subversion or socio-political urgency are amongst the most recurrent ones). On the other hand, the comparative framework provided by the Irish and Galician contexts has also been the space in which a variety of stereotyped images, based on an uncritically held discourse of shared affinities, have been granted currency for, perhaps, far too long. That women's writing can be a political literary phenomenon deserving sustained and autonomous attention is something that this book does not refute. Neither does it deny the many analogies that can be observed between Ireland and Galicia historically and which range from their preoccupation with the nation, the tense co-habitation of two languages or the social and political influence that Catholicism has held over the centuries (xix-xx). However, the editors' stance, and the one

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visibly adopted by all the contributors, is a profoundly critical one, wary of resorting to stock interpretations or phrasings, and alert to the sharp differences and contrasts that emerge and render this debates so engaging.

The editors' introduction explains what the volume's chief goals, namely: to bring the writing of contemporary Galician and Irish women poets to the fore (and not exclusively to the attention of a specialised readership) and to emphasise the ways in which their work is subversive of a series of conventionalised metaphors and discourses (the nation, the body, the landscape). After their opening lines, the book splits into two main parts. First a series of academic articles penned by some of the most expert researchers in the field of women's writing, both Irish and Galician. A set of shared concerns emerges from this selection, which includes the apparent recurrence of the landscape and of nature-related metaphors to explain women's experiences of selfhood and writing, in both the Irish and the Galician context (María Xesús Nogueira, Manuela Palacios), their revision of the mythological intertext (María Xesús Lama, Luz Mar González) or the imprint of the body on their texts (Laura Lojo). Helena González's article (29-47) offers an overview of the significance that Galician women-authored poetry had in the nineties. When reviewing this phenomenon, her stance is very clearly put: 'La escritura poética de autoría femenina se ha convertido en el laboratorio creativo más característico, productivo y fértil del actual tránsito intersecular en la literatura gallega' (32). This optimistic view is further qualified, as is often the case in the author's work, by a more critical reading of the public mechanisms that have finally granted visibility to the phenomenon of women's writing in Galicia: the so-called *discurso normalizador*, eager to fill in the gaps of a literary system perceived as still riddled with them, or the comparably aggressive influence of market drives, where women's narrative seems to have fared not too badly of late. González's view, however, remains assertive of the robustly subversive and politically engaged value of Galician women's poetry.

The second part of the book, a selection of essays by, interviews of and conversations with the poets themselves, begins with a piece by Galician poet María do Cebreiro, who, interestingly enough, challenges those views like Helena González's above, which maintain that the corpus of women-authored poetry in Galicia during the nineties was politically relevant. In perhaps one of the first studies, if not the very first one, to look back at the boom of Galician women's poetry in the nineties in a (self-)reflective manner, María do Cebreiro dampens the inertia of certain, perhaps too overly complacent creative and critical stances, and asks of us (and of herself, as both a creative and scholarly actant in the Galician cultural field) to take stock of the situation. In doing so, she asks a crucial question: '¿Era político, en verdad, el cuerpo cantado por las mujeres gallegas en los años 90?' (104). María do Cebreiro's answer is no. Her personal elaboration on why it was not is extremely illuminating, inasmuch as it dismantles a series of engrained commonplaces about Galician women's poetry in the nineties. Particularly, her apt differentiation between being political almost by default (undeniably one of the historical predicaments of women's writing and one that has ridden roughshod over many women authors' individual projects and trajectories too) and wanting to be political is extremely useful, especially when one needs to discern among a myriad different names and projects (Olga Novo, María Lado, Yolanda Castaño, Lupe Gómez, and María do Cebreiro herself, among many others) that

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were lumped together as part of a conveniently homogenised phenomenon. María do Cebreiro's concerns and others are echoed in the pieces by Irish poet Anne Le Marquand Hartigan and in the conversations with Chus Pato, Mary O'Donnell and Celia de Fréine, which closes the collection.

Manuela Palacios and Helena González's volume is a much welcome contribution to several fields and it will appeal to researchers and students in women's studies, Irish and Galician studies. It successfully highlights the perceived analogies that form the skeleton of their ongoing project (a research project that Manuela Palacios herself directs and which will expand into other areas of inquiry and genres in the field of women's literary creation, their critical and academic reception). But it also signals how the past may be approached with innovative theoretical tools (the use of ecocriticism in the articles by María Xesús Nogueira (3-13) and Manuela Palacios (15-28) is but one topical example) and what the current and future directions may be in the projects of a body of writers and critics who have seldom chosen to conform to prescribed discourses.