
Alternative Values: From the National to the Sentimental in the Redrawing of Galician Literary History¹

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Abstract

This essay develops the question of gender and the ways in which critical discourses operating within the nation have been conditioned by gender, whether implicitly or explicitly. It engages with the developing postnational paradigm, but from a more cautious and critical perspective, proposing Donald E. Pease's concept of the *intranational* as an alternative that is not bound by chronology, but instead acknowledges what I call the 'persistent adequacy of the nation'. This essay argues that a truly transformative understanding of Galician literary history can only emerge with further distance from the qualifier 'nation'; the project of the second half of this essay is, therefore, to explore the potential of another measure of literary value: the sentimental, which intersects not only with nation but also with gender and all its related conceptual binaries.

Resumen

Este artigo céntrase na cuestión do xénero e na maneira en que os discursos críticos que operan dentro da nación teñen sido condicionados polo xénero, ben implícita ou ben explicitamente. A autora tamén contribúe ao debate emerxente sobre o chamado 'paradigma postnacional', pero dende unha persepectiva máis prudente

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e máis crítica. A súa achega a esta temática inspírase na terminoloxía do 'intranacional', elaborada, entre outros, por Donald E. Pease, na medida en que esta alternativa non está delimitada cronoloxicamente e admite o que ela chama 'o valor persistente do nacional'. Con todo, o verdadeiro entendemento da historia literaria galega ha de vir da man dun maior distanciamento do termo 'nación'. Na segunda metade deste artigo, a autora explora o potencial doutro indicador de valor literario: o sentimental, que interactúa non só coa nación, senón co xénero e con moitas das dicotomías asociadas ao discurso de xénero.

porque me souben lúcida pero sentimental despois de todo.
María do Cebreiro Rábade Villar, *O estadio no espello*

The postnational(ist) debate and recent challenges to Galician literary history

Although seemingly isolated in their initial formulation, two theoretical trends in the Galician cultural and academic field seem to have gathered momentum in recent times, to the point that they may be signalling a genuine crisis in Galician literary historiography. The first one is the increasingly prominent controversy over the ontology of the so-called 'Galician literary system'. This coinage derives, of course, from Itamar Even-Zohar's polysystem theories and the frequency of its usage today is perhaps unprecedented in any previous academic term in Galician scholarly discourse. Two important research projects at the University of Santiago de Compostela are founded on Even-Zohar's methodologies, namely the ongoing work of the group Galabra (which looks at the cultural relations between Galicia and other lusophone cultures) and the project 'Methodological bases for a comparative history of the literatures of the Iberian Peninsula', directed by Fernando Cabo Aseguinolaza. Polysystem theory is also central to the work in Translation Studies produced at the University of Vigo, which has focused on the significant role that translated literature has played in the configuration of the Galician literary system (Cruces Colado 1993; Luna Alonso 2003/2004; Castro Buerger 2005).

Outside academia, the term 'Galician literary system' has crossed into the more prosaic contexts of cultural journalism. The sheer frequency with which the term is used in literary supplements and magazines such as *Grial: Revista Galega de Cultura*, *ProTexta* (the quarterly literary supplement of *Tempos Novos*), or *Luces* (the literary supplement of the Galician edition of *El País*) shows that the expression's former technical resonance has worn off and it is now a very useful (and usable) entry in the glossary of multi-purpose, non-specialist buzzwords.

Despite its ubiquity, however, the term 'Galician literary system' still enjoys theoretical currency and the recent controversy over its possible meanings, now appearing as much more complex and elusive than Even-Zohar's descriptive sociological empiricism may have envisaged for his systemic terminology, can

be taken as a testament to its enduring topicality.² Put simply, a debate seems recently to have emerged over the very existence of a Galician literary system and what it can possibly represent. This controversy has been stirred by some of the system's most visible, perhaps most vociferous agents. I have identified three principal positions in the debate.

First, we find those voices who endorse and speak for the Galician literary system. These are mainly the voices of writers, critics and scholars who view their activities as integrated in an increasingly multifarious, well-established cultural system, here understood as a collaborative project whose main goal is the normalization of all aspects related to literary creation and reception in the Galician language. The emphasis here on Galician language is important, as the link between literary production and indigenous language is central to these agents' understanding of what the Galician literary system is. This notion of literary system came hard on the heels of the old discussion about what could be classed as Galician literature, a far-reaching debate, which for a long time seemed to have been sealed expeditiously by the opening line of Ricardo Carballo Calero's *Historia da literatura galega contemporánea* and his almost casual assertion that the 'easiest' and 'most natural' scope of a history of Galician literature is to consider only literary writing in that language (Carballo Calero 1975: 11). The Galician literary system, understood as a hyperonym of Galician literature, would thus be the system of interrelated literary events carried out in the Galician language. For those who uphold this view, the Galician literary system is not only an unquestionable entity but, in fact, is also the meticulously polished result of their lifelong efforts, commitment and political vision. To question it would not only be theoretically unsound but actually anti-Galician.

Second, and in more recent times, some voices have begun to draw attention to the usually downplayed polysemy of a term such as 'Galician literary system', while foregrounding the potentially excluding effect that the traditional, normative meaning may have had on those creative and critical voices that in one way or other tried to quibble with it. In an interview published in *Luces*, for instance, the poet and literary scholar María do Cebreiro Rábade Villar openly stated that the term 'Galician literary system' in reality stands for 'Galician national literature' (Rábade Villar 2007). Although this acknowledgement of the political implications of a scholarly turn of phrase is still unusual in

2 Even-Zohar's definition of 'literary system', inspired, as is suggested by his words below, by Saussurean linguistics, was as follows: 'a network of relations that obtain between texts (including potential texts, i.e. models) by virtue of which they are believed to both "belong to" and "constitute" one whole, usually labeled "literature". The idea that "literature" can more adequately be analysed as a historical phenomenon, if conceived of as a system, emerged in the context of a development of the system idea in linguistics. By analogy with the latter, the purpose of the concept is to replace the search for data about material aspects of phenomena by "discovering" the functions of these aspects. Thus, instead of a conglomerate of material phenomena, the functional elements hypothesized by the system approach are considered interdependent and correlated. The specific role of its element is determined by its relational positions vis-à-vis all other (hypothesized) elements' (Even-Zohar 1986).

Galician literary scholarship, a growing number of specialists are beginning to adopt this stance, thus championing a more inclusive notion of literary system. Arturo Casas, for instance, speaking at the first Conference of Galician Literary Critics held in Santiago de Compostela in the summer of 2007, emphasized – in keeping with the views he had already expressed in previous studies (Casas 2003) – the need to modify the age-old dependence of Galician literary criticism on historicist, philological and national approaches to literature, a scholarly mode from which the connection between literary system, language and the nation ensues. Such dissident voices enter into dialogue with comparable debates also emerging in the context of the history of literature in Spanish. For example, in his contribution to the markedly meta-critical volume *Spain beyond Spain* (2005), Mario Santana described the linguistic criterion on which national literary histories have been founded as a disservice to the rather more polyvalent cultures they aim to represent. In particular, his point that excluding Rosalía de Castro's poetry in Galician from histories of Spanish literature has served to suppress 'a significant corpus of reflection about the nature of Spanish hegemonic "nationality"' (2005: 118) is unusual, in that it acknowledges the engrained asymmetries that underpin literary histories based on language, in contexts where linguistic centres and peripheries cohabit. (He is thinking specifically of her poem 'Castellanos de Castilla', from the collection *Cantares gallegos*.) Ultimately, his argument has much in common with the debate arising in the Galician and other regional contexts. In fact, he says, it is surprising that at a time when the covert political interests informing regional literary histories are being identified and brought to the fore, the same process has not been forthcoming in the case of 'the histories of Spain's "national literature", whose own regionalism does not tend to be recognized' (2005: 115–16).

The third position in the controversy over the Galician literary system is the fairly idiosyncratic one recently expressed by the writer Teresa Moure, who denies the very existence of a Galician literary system as such. In an interview published in *ProTexta* (2007), Moure describes the notion of literary system purely as a fabrication of critics and academics who, she claims, desperately need to create this type of category in order to continue to do their job. Instead, she argues, writers work more or less in a vacuum, which they fill with individually selected literary influences, individual tendencies, tastes and goals (Moure 2007). This wayward stance provoked a prompt response in several forums, in electronic and printed formats (see, for instance, the discussion that took place on the blog 'Nubosidade Variábel'). A token of this response was the article published by Dolores Vilavedra in *Luces* on 23 November 2007, where she described this type of attitude as a sort of 'syndrome' (she dubbed it the 'síndrome do Padornelo'), which besets Galician writers the moment they begin to gain recognition elsewhere. In her article, she describes this attitude as springing from an almost treacherous lack of self-awareness and ultimately ingratitude, even a body-blow to people 'back home', who devote their time and energies not only to believing in but also, as Vilavedra puts it, 'reivindicando' the existence of the Galician literary system.

While Teresa Moure's personal view that the Galician literary system simply does not exist may be considered an isolated event and a token of the writer's provocative persona (demonstrated by her regular and much-discussed invectives against academia), the debate it immediately ignited exemplifies the ongoing confrontation between the first two stances discussed above, namely: the well-established conception of the Galician literary system as a collaborative, engaged national project, and the more unorthodox creative and academic stances calling for an updating of the historically monolithic categories (nation, language, culture) that have traditionally underpinned this project in Galicia.

At a more profound level, the fact that such disputes may have at times verged on the acrimonious hints that the notion of a literary system in the Galician context will typically get enmeshed with a range of elements that are extraneous to its original purview. These include questions of normality and normativity, political affiliation and personally held attitudes towards the presence of the institutions in the field of cultural production. In the end, the concept of literary system, which was in its inception a theoretical premise for descriptive studies of a markedly empirical thrust, has ended up acquiring prescriptive overtones in the Galician context. The growing awareness of this circumstance, itself a by-product of the naturalized marrying of literary scholarship with a programmatic cultural policy, has put literary history (understood as the academic practice that has thought through and pronounced upon literature's historical content and boundaries) in the spotlight.

Because literary history has customarily connected such contents and boundaries with the perceived contents and boundaries of nations (both politically constituted and desired), the advent of the so-called postnational challenge, the second of the theoretical trends I would like to discuss here, may have served to deal another blow to the discipline's traditional agendas. This certainly appears to be the case in the context of contemporary Galician studies. As a result of accelerated changes in traditional forms of citizenship and of the liberal nation-states, the articulation of a new theory of cosmopolitanism in a postnational framework has been a crucial endeavour of socio-political theory at the turn of the century. One of the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas's lifelong projects has been to map out the underpinnings of a new socio-political order, whereby the nation-state, historically and ethnically understood as 'a community of fate shaped by common descent, language and history' (Habermas 2006: 34), gives way to a 'civic' notion of the nation, the spacious locus for a citizenry brought together by a plurality of affinities, supported by the even more instinctive, yet perhaps less artificial, of all collective drives: a 'solidarity between strangers' (2006: 34).

Habermas's postnational paradigm, developed in a series of books and articles (1989; 1998; 2006), has, of course, had important repercussions for literary studies and literary historiography. As I suggested above, this is no coincidence given that 'literary history has always been primarily connected to the idea of national objects, in this case, national literatures' (Tamen 1999: xvii). In the

context of Iberian Studies and, pointedly, in the fields of Catalan, Basque and Galician Studies, the postnational debate has brought about greater meta-critical reflection on the structures of literary historiography, together with the spark of a new revisionist thrust. Although the postnational approach has given rise to many critical positions, informed by a range of attitudes towards its plausibility that go from the impetuous to the guarded, it is not difficult to locate the pioneering voices in each of these fields. Joan Ramon Resina has covered a great deal of groundwork, which had ample implications for both the redrawing of peninsular Hispanic Studies as Iberian Studies and for Catalan Studies in particular (Resina 1996, 2000). The scholarship of Joseba Gabilondo has been at the forefront of contemporary Basque cultural studies, where his application of postnational theories has featured centrally (Gabilondo 2000; 2003; 2008). In the context of Galician Studies, Kirsty Hooper has recently highlighted the necessity of a postnational, post-philological approach to the writing of Galician literary histories (2006), calling for a dramatic shift in the persistent inertia of literary studies in Galicia, where, as Thomas Harrington also put it, 'institutions have demonstrated a marked tendency to promote and reward the type of studies that "discover" and/or "rediscover" proof of the highly autonomous trajectory of their own national cultural systems' (Harrington 2005: 216). What links the work of these scholars together, however, is not that they engage with the theories of postnationalism according to their particular academic agendas, but that they do so with an awareness of the term's potentially deceptive allure, its inevitable (and still unshakable) link with nationalism, and ultimately, also, its capacity for violence (Epps 2003).

Resina's critique of the term is extremely well developed (2002; 2003a; 2003b). While conceding that it may have some operational value in the realm of theory, he points at the (mainly practical) loopholes in Habermas's proposal for a post-national community of communities: how it is premised on the dubious constitution of a body of 'culturally neutral subjects' (2003a: 50), who would swear allegiance to a sort of spectral postnational state preceding them; its engrained locality within the specificities of German history and difficult applicability to other geopolitical enclaves (51); and the theory's ultimate inability to provide a real 'communicational space' (53) for both states and what he terms 'substate political-geographical formations' (55) to make their democratic case for presence, or even existence. However, the aim of Resina's argument is not so much to expose postnationalism's disabling weaknesses, as to take issue with the notorious degree of critical consensus according to which nationalism, and its enduring 'cognitive framework' (67), has been demonized in the present intellectual context.

This is where a brief detour into the terminology at stake, whose variability is usually dismissed swiftly in introductions as demonstrating a certain theoretical pettiness, may be revealing. It seems to me that the interchangeability with which the terms 'postnational' and 'postnationalist' are being used may hold one of the keys to a notorious problem. For, while evidently related, these two terms stand

for two different things. The adjective 'postnational' refers to the socio-political, as well as the intellectual context, where the concept of the 'classic nation' (not necessarily the concept of 'nation' altogether) has been superseded (and with it, its formerly defining features such as 'tight borders, state and state-supervised education, a guided economy, and an independent monetary policy' (2003a: 69)). Postnationalism, on the other hand, stands for the socio-political as well as the intellectual context, where nationalism, understood as a deleterious discourse of 'bigoted particularism' (70), has been dismantled and overcome.

While Resina has no major stakes in opposing the former (no one would, unless they could prove the possibility of a locutionary position outside globalization's scope of influence), he does contest the latter vehemently. In other words, Resina concedes that the notion of nation, although resilient, is and needs to be put under theoretical and practical duress. Nevertheless, he argues, the concept of 'nationalism' has been effectively maligned in today's self-serving logic of the global playground (where some *nations* are the eternal, bowlegged goalkeepers), by dint of a recurrent double standard, namely that resting on the wilful equation between 'nationalisms that inherited an imperial legacy' and 'nationalisms that challenge domination' (69). Resina then addresses the semantic indefiniteness, yet identifiable programmatic nature of the postnationalist proposal by calling for an unprejudiced understanding of nationalism not as 'an irrational force, but a tool, at times a weapon, in the struggle to alter the picture of world relations and to recreate the space of the world [...]. An instrument for progress and also an imposing bulwark for immobility' (71).

My critical stance reflects Resina's. I don't believe that one can read his article 'The Scale of the Nation in a Shrinking World' (2003a) and *not* take sides (and after all, he does call Hitler a 'full-fledged postnationalist' (2003a: 59)). I feel that we could therefore unabashedly sustain the debate on nationalism (no need to install ourselves just yet in the dubious promise of a better-balanced and egalitarian, postnational land), and we can do so precisely because this debate is empowered by our demand that nationalist discourse's capacity for self-renewal is exploited. The question that requires greater clarity as well as meta-critical awareness is not 'whether nationalism is true or false, but which truths it allows to be established and which it stifles and holds back' (67). The great merit of the postnational(ist) challenge is that by compelling critics to face a rapidly changing theoretical landscape, it poses a fundamental question about nations and nationalism that explores not only how their discourse can and has been manipulative but also how it has been manipulated.

The above is a necessary debate and is also implied, although to different effect, in Gabilondo's and Hooper's applications of it to the Basque and Galician contexts respectively. In his outline for a postnational history of Basque literatures, Gabilondo criticizes Habermas's seizing upon the European state 'as the ultimate horizon to postnationalism' (2008: 4), arguing that the philosopher's postnational vision is still essentially national in its aspirations (Resina had also underscored this point in his 2003 article (2003a: 50)). Hooper develops a compa-

rable argument in her critique of González-Millán's pioneering identification of *nacionalismo literario* and its firm hold on both creative and critical cultural production in Galicia. His project, she states, remains too focused on demonstrating the applicability of polysystem theory to the Galician case to unpick the intricate (Resina would argue, inextricable) relationship between nation and culture (Hooper 2006: 67). Her argument for fresh readings of Galician culture, whose image of the cartographical resituating of centres and boundaries, she says, was inspired by Resina's article is, however, much more favourable to postnational(ist) terminology than Resina's ever was. But two important qualifications are implied in her analysis, which ultimately bring their stances to a shared ground: as regards the role of the national in her discussion, she argues that her use of 'postnational' as a frame of reference does not imply a 'visión apocalíptica do final da nación galega' (2006: 69); as for her critique of nationalism, this is directed, as she states from the outset, exclusively at the 'formas tradicionais do nacionalismo cultural' and its 'identidades asociadas' (65, my emphasis). Ultimately, then, her proposed postnational(ist) framework likewise springs from the profoundly revisionist view of nationalism that is both possible and necessary. The postnational(ist) debate is thus, as I understand it, subsumed under this larger (and largely unfinished) enterprise.

But let us go back to that one aspect of the postnational(ist) debate that remains within the purview of this article, namely that it has had a direct effect on Galician literary history and historiography. There is little doubt that the postnational(ist) challenge has brought into relief literary history's particular frailties in these revisionist times. When the socio-political construct which sustained its very *raison d'être* (the nation) is no longer perceived as a stable and aprioristic entity, but, in fact, 'as the embarrassing result of the continuous work, together with all its remains, of the production of an entelechy' (Tamen 1999: xx), literary history then turns into the open conundrum that it is today, a cultural exercise long ripe for theoretical renewal with a limitless capacity for practical combinations.

For understandable reasons, the coupling of postnational(ist) theories and literary history has yet to yield fruits beyond the realm of theoretical abstraction. The writing of literary histories disengaged from a national (or, at least, a principally communitarian) perspective necessitates at the very least and, as Gabilondo puts it when reflecting about the possibility of completing one for Basque literatures, 'further research, writing and translation' (2008). In any case, even if the work was done (and there is increasing evidence that it is), there is no real indication that the national framework, however defined, will not continue to loom large in future works of literary history. As Resina himself somewhat ominously foresaw, 'National politics will not disappear; it will just multiply its centers' (2003a: 71), with the concomitant implication that nation-centred literary history will not only *not* be deposed, but that it will probably (at least for the foreseeable future) proliferate into partially alternative, perfectly self-aware, creatively revisionist versions of itself, in which the national will still, in one way

or other, oversee the process. This is the case, for instance, of the projects *A New History of Spanish Writing: 1939 to the 1990s* (Perriam et al. 2000) and *A Revisionist History of Portuguese Literature* (Tamen and Buescu 1999), where there is indeed a departure from traditional literary histories in that, for example, chronological linearity is broken, or a thematic approach is adopted, but where the end results continue to be of direct concern to (and are directly concerned with) a single nation. *The Cambridge History of American Literature* (2005) is another case in point. In their introduction to the volume, the editors acknowledge the following:

This [nationality] has become a defining problem of our time, and it may be best to clarify what for earlier historians was too obvious to mention: that in these volumes, America designates the United States, or the territories that were to become part of the United States. Although several of our authors adopt a comparatist trans-Atlantic or pan-American framework, although several of them discuss works in other languages, and although still others argue for a postnationalist (even post-American) perspective, as a rule their concerns center on writing in English in the United States – “American literature” as it has been (and still is) commonly understood in its linguistic and national implications. (Bercovitch and Patell 2005: xv)

The above declaration does not spring from, or is not the result of, an unproblematic understanding of nation. As the editors go on to argue:

[Our contributors] have taken advantage of time, space, training, and newly available materials to turn nationality itself into a *question* of literary history. Precisely because of their focus on English-language literatures in the United States, the term America for them is neither a narrative *donnée* – an assumed or inevitable or natural premise – nor an objective background (*the national history*) [...]. (Bercovitch and Patell 2005: xv)

The field of American Studies is, of course, profoundly conversant with theorizing about the nation. Statements such as the one above, far from constituting a defeated regress into a working framework that has proved too tenacious to be fought any more, are a recognition of its efficacy for the continuous re-description of literary histories that has become so central to literary studies and critical theory today. Donald E. Pease, who has positively advocated postnational(ist) terminology, recognizes that it ultimately rests on the capacity of national identities to be ‘multiply interpellated’ by ‘ongoing social movements’ (Pease 1992: 8, 9). As I see it, this interpellation occurs not so much in a postnational space, defined by a set of imagined coordinates whose somewhat futuristic aura remains, in my view, too airy to be of use to contemporary literary studies, but in an *intranational space*. I have borrowed this idea from Pease himself, who, in his definition of the New Americanist, talks about the key transitional moment when the traditionally monolithic national discourse is confronted, by dint of the multiple identities of the subjects that populate it, with its capacity for critical redefinition:

On these surfaces, the energies that previously had bound the national identities, which could never wholly embody them, to the national symbolic order were recathected at the divide, thereby activating intranational relations between previ-

ously subjected and national peoples. At this intranational boundary, the national subjects, who had previously derived their sense of identity from incomplete identification with the meta-social subject of the national narrative, could become dislocated from this structure and could rediscover national identity itself as a permanent instability, an endless antagonism between figures integrated within ever changing social imaginaries and singularities forever external to them. [...] (Pease 1992: 5–6)

I believe Pease's idea of an intranational network of interacting influences highlights the central crux of the debate: that the critical efforts of those for whom literary history is the fascinating locus of contending values, vying for 'consecration, legitimation, and canonization' (Moisan 1991: 687), seem to converge on the discovery and articulation of 'alternative constructions' (Pease 1992: 8) of nation, and consequently, of literary history, rather than on their demise. The national/intranational terminology, in its recognition of the persistent adequacy of the nation as an operative construct, seems to me more apt than the national vs. postnational one, which has, no doubt, not only contributed to but actually enabled the current discussion, but which has also, paradoxically, served to obscure it. My intention, therefore, is to explore a potential practical take on what I find to be a salutary new intellectual context in literary historiography, eloquently described by Jonathan Arac as fuelled by

a concern with what goes 'against the grain' or might have seemed beside the point of canonical understanding. Such juxtaposition from athwart may lead to connection, and new connections produce new perspectives, which refresh, transform, and even reverse what we had thought. Irony by reversal, metaphor by perspective, and metonymy by connection are no less figures of history than is synecdoche by totality. (Arac 1992: 15)

From a similar critical position, I will try to delineate, in what follows, a perspective from which to articulate an alternative construction of a Galician literary history. But first, a word on values.

From the national to the sentimental (and back)

My introductory discussion of the controversy taking place in Galician cultural circles around the notion of 'literary system' pointed to the possibility that such debate springs from the seldom acknowledged conflation between descriptive and prescriptive standpoints. Put differently, the tools normally used for descriptive kinds of enquiry (for instance, the concept of 'literary system') will get mixed up with the tools usually underlying prescriptive analyses (so often informed by values). An interesting corollary of such conflation is that because values are indeed historically contingent and culture-specific (a notion that the works of Barbara Herrnstein Smith and Pierre Bourdieu have helped us incorporate into our working narratives), the version of the literary system that results from its 'contamination' with values will also display those features (historical contingency and culture-specificity). This realization, which contrasts with the

view of a literary system as a synchronic network of texts and agents (as well as gaps or absences), which function in ways that are for the literary scholar to identify, paves the way for the kind of understanding of the Galician literary system as a constantly transforming entity (not only in size and quality, which is the premise of the nationalist take on it), transfigured by variously defined peoples and languages (not just the Galician language) and, most emphatically, through a historically fluctuating system of values.

Value accrues from its association with a variety of qualifiers, which gain or lose currency as the system develops. As the work of Xoan González-Millán and Antón Figueroa has demonstrated, the qualifier 'national' has both overtly and covertly been at the centre of most discussions about literary value in Galicia, as well as being itself a *measure* for value. This has, as is well known, resulted in the emergence of ad hoc codes of literary evaluation whereby literary creation and commentary are intimately linked to the desire for a viable – and monolithically understood – national project.³ It is not uncommon, for instance, for a literary critic to disparage a novel openly because the language used in it is not up to date with the current Galician written norm, or because its cadence is too reminiscent of Spanish. Another manifestation of the same strategy may be that the expected evaluative function of journalistic literary criticism becomes less important than an overriding, unstated rule: that to highlight any weakness in an artistic artefact branded as Galician (usually because it is in the Galician language) is to do a disservice to the cultural field as a whole. Figueroa describes it trenchantly:

o lector deberá tamén considerar o texto dentro da estratexia da súa produción para comprendelo realmente, para explicar citas que non veñen a conto, non-citas inexplicables, recensións case sempre laudatorias, por outra parte comprensibles polo medo á *traizón* da que falamos máis arriba ou tal vez á perda da posición propia no campo, que dan como saída o recurso á maledicencia boca a boca: '¿Que che pareceu tal representación teatral, tal exposición, tal libro, tal artigo? – Infumable, deplorable, ¿Que vas facer?... pois... dixen que tiña algúns probleminiñas...'. Medo. Medo alleo que é tamén utilizado ás veces para contar cunha certa impunidade para o discurso propio. Medo a desmontar extratexias moi simples ás veces para non arriscar a propia situación nun campo identitario de características tan especiais. (Figueroa 2001: 82)

The short-sightedness of many an academic and artistic move operating within this particular logic of nationalist cultural production, the unsustainable exclusions it effects and the self-protective impenetrability of its material constitution and preservation have been amply studied by González-Millán, Figueroa and Hooper. I do not wish, therefore, to belabour the point here. But these critics' work on how the national turned into a measure for literary value leads me to

3 I am not suggesting that this phenomenon is specific to the Galician cultural field. For an explanation of how the identification between national identity and literary quality was a core critical operation with dramatic implications for women writers in the emerging discourse of Spanish literary criticism after 1868, see Blanco 1995.

wonder how other qualifiers may have operated in similar ways in the Galician context. Of all these possible qualifiers, I have singled out the term 'sentimental' and its related discourse. By sentimental discourse I mean the type of ideologized language that engages with matters of the heart and which intersects with ideologies of gender, the nation, cultural creation, reception and their institutions. Focusing on this type of discourse provides us with an alternative analytical prism with which to gauge the extent to which Galician literature, literary history and criticism have rested on a set of ingrained gendered binaries (rational and intellectual vs. sentimental and instinctive; genius vs. intuition; canonical vs. dispensable) which Galician authors to this day continue to perpetuate or contest (but which they seldom unconsciously ignore).

Sentimental discourse and its narratives have been widely studied in philosophy, politics, cultural and literary studies, sociology and all of the interdisciplinary spaces that result from the myriad combinations between these fields and their ancillaries. From the point of view of cultural history, sentimentalism is seen as 'a dominant political and cultural discourse, inscribing deep within the cultural unconscious the authority and discipline of white, bourgeois, Christian values' (Dobson 1997: 283). The literary manifestations of sentimental discourse have undergone remarkable transformations across different periods, movements and geographies. An extremely simplified account of its development would start with the profound socio-political transformations that took place during the Enlightenment and their literary and philosophical counterparts in national literatures (Sterne and Mackenzie in England; Goethe and Lessing in Germany; Karamzin in Russia, or the writers of *sensibilité*, Baculard d'Arnaud, Gorjy or Vernes, in France). It would then trace it forward to the rhizomatic forms of Romanticism and on to the immensely popular sentimental novels by women authors published in the second half of the nineteenth century across several countries (including Spain, but most prominently North America, in the works of Harriet Beecher Stowe and Susan Warner). Then further on to high modernism's repression of lachrymose discourses and the formalist intellectual mood that followed it, to postmodernism's unpicking of the ideologically (seldom purely aesthetically) slanted reasons why this repression took place, its own obsession with the dismantling of ingrained binaries (on which the historical favouring and disfavouring of sentimentality rests) and sentimentality's best ally: mass culture.

The above rationale is, of course, too simplified and, for that reason, not entirely helpful. It is useful, however, for us to realize, even at a basic level, that between young Werther's ostentation of his inflated capacity for sentiment as a commendable quality in 1774 and Adam Zagajewski's *defence* of ardour in 2004, there lies the enthralling story of sentimentality's fall into disrepute and only recent revival. The most convincing reconstruction of that story remains the one offered by feminism and gender studies. Since the 1980s (mainly Anglo-American) scholars working from this perspective have identified the set of gendered prejudices whereby, as romantic indulgence in emotion became associated with

women (both as producers and consumers), the sentimental and its imaginary were gradually and steadily excluded from the cultural canon (Tompkins 1985; Clark 1991; Dobson 1997; Merish 2000). Working from the realization that '[m]ultiple issues of class and gender, of power and desire, were contained in this opposition to the sentimental' (Clark 1991: 1), the main objectives of this body of work have been: 1) to subvert the engrained critical agreement that sentimental writing is an inferior form of literature;⁴ and 2) to rekindle research on the works of many American women writers such as Louisa May Alcott, Harriet Jacobs or Maria Susanna Cummins (to whom, I should add, Rosalía de Castro referred in her prose).

Within Hispanic Studies, sentimental discourse has mainly been studied as a result of the growing academic interest in nineteenth-century feminine and domestic culture. In peninsular literary studies the work of Alda Blanco (1989) and Lou Charnon-Deutsch (1994) has been instrumental for an understanding of the ways in which nineteenth-century writers of domestic literature negotiated both the limitations and possibilities of the socio-political, religious and cultural discourses available to them, with a view also to conveying a potentially self-enriching or soothing message to their contemporary women readers. Their engagement with sentimental discourse, however, remains, in my view, preliminary, in that they tend to take it as an axiomatic category of patriarchal readings and historicizing of women's literature (Charnon-Deutsch 1994: 7). They subsequently fall short of exploring how most of these authors repeatedly deployed sentimental discourse as a means to communicate their critique of patriarchy's enabling mechanisms (marriage, education, religion), their alternative proposals for an idealized civil society, or simply consciously to exploit the increasingly rich pickings of the nascent editorial market for women (Sánchez Jiménez 2008), often from a profoundly (and self-consciously) ironic position. This has been the focus of Ana Peluffo's project on Peruvian nineteenth-century 'indigenist' writer, Clorinda Matto de Turner. In her 2005 book, Peluffo investigates 'the stylistics of sentiment and [...] the female figures – mainly women of charity – that challenge the gendered status quo *from within* by inverting and reusing the cultural codes available to the nineteenth-century female writer' (Austin 2008: 103–104, my emphasis). In so doing, she attempts to grasp 'the problematics of appropriating a hegemonic discourse from within its own restrictive boundaries, a paradigm that recreates the classic feminist conundrum in which gendered norms are both questioned and supported by the female voice that would seek to break free of gender restraints altogether' (2008: 104).

To my knowledge, no comparable project has been undertaken in the field of Galician studies, although this paradox has been a virtually ubiquitous creative

4 This is the central aim of Joanne Dobson's work. As she puts it: 'As a body of literary texts, sentimental writing can be seen in a significant number of instances to process a conventional sentimental aesthetics through individual imagination, idiosyncratic personal feeling, and skilled use of language, creating engaging, even compelling fictions and lyrics' (Dobson 1997: 265).

force in the literary production of a good number of literary voices, from Rosalía de Castro, Concepción Arenal and Emilia Pardo Bazán (to wildly different effect, of course) to Francisca Herrera, Marisa Villardefrancos, María Mariño, Xohana Torres, and, more recently, Teresa Moure or María do Cebreiro Rábade Villar. Alongside these creative projects, one would also have to consider how reception of these works has been articulated through a deep-seated and persistent ambivalence towards sentimental discourse itself, an ambivalence that translates into a critical idiom that, when faced with both female and male authors' treatment or appropriation of sentimental discourse, wavers paranoiacally between the scathing, the essentialist and the plain confused.

Galician literary history through the sentimental prism: potential lines of enquiry

The above distinction between production and reception provides us with a bare-bones delineation of how sentimental discourse may offer us, as David Denby put it in his study on sentimentalism and social order in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century France, 'a perspective, a principle of comparability, which brings out the continuities between supposedly separate periods and movements and thus allows us to isolate those elements where change and realignment do indeed take place' (Denby 1994: 240). In order to offer a few potential lines of enquiry that will provide a nexus of relations between cultural discourses constituted in Galicia in the second half of the nineteenth century and present-day ones, I turn to Rosalía de Castro and her oeuvre as an *event* transfixed to its innermost core by complex discursive negotiations around the sentimental, both from the point of view of production and reception.

The questions to be asked are myriad and interrelated: in what ways did Rosalía alleviate (or give a creative outlet to) the profound pressure exerted upon her by one of the central cruxes of her literary project, so poignantly expressed in her poem 'Daquelas que cantan...'?⁵ How is her critique of late nineteenth-century sentimental literature as a means for the continued enslavement of women's minds (Kirkpatrick 1995) effected in her prose writing, where the author mimics the forms and cadences of sentimental discourse itself, thereby blowing up its very foundations from within? And how has this poorly understood characteristic of her writing, until fairly recently, tricked critics (particularly those working within the framework of traditional Galician philological studies) into dismissing a considerable segment of her literary output as sentimental and, therefore, barely worthy of consideration? How can we reconcile this fact with the concomitant view that Rosalía was most emphatically not an 'amorous' writer

5 The poem in full goes as follows: 'Daquelas que cantan as pombas i as frores, / todos din que teñen alma de muller. / Pois eu que n' as canto, Virxe da Paloma, / ¡jai!, ¿de que a terei?' (de Castro 1995). While the significance of Rosalía's question has been widely discussed (García Negro 1985: 41; 1986: 78), very few ideas as to how she may have answered this in her literary programme have been offered.

(Fontoira Suris 1995: 12)? What is Rosalía's discourse on 'love and marriage'?⁶ And why has it been glossed over or considered irrelevant?⁷ There are many more questions to be asked, but it is for reasons of space that I cut this list short. However, I hope it shows how issues concerning the sentimental may still illuminate the complex creative paths of Rosalía's work, as well as the particularly contradictory contours of its reception for a good century and a quarter.

Similar paradoxes and tensions have characterized the works and critical reception of numerous writers after Rosalía de Castro. As has been the case in other cultural systems and periods, the qualifier 'sentimental' has been used under different guises in Galician literary history and literary criticism to grant or deny visibility to women writers, and negotiations around its assigned value have informed a variety of critical processes such as canonization, manipulation or ostracism of these authors' work and significance. But, crucially, Galician women writers themselves have assimilated, appropriated or contested the conventions of sentimental discourse in the fraught process of constructing themselves as writing, authorizing subjects: a predicament that has not affected writing by male authors to nearly such an extent. The cases of Francisca Herrera, the early Xohana Torres, and María Mariño spring readily to mind.

The scant critical attention granted to Francisca Herrera until 1987, the year when she was the chosen writer for the *Día das Letras Galegas*, is characterized by constant references to her as an anachronistically romantic, sentimental author. Some of these are inordinately harsh:

Ó achegarme á novela de Francisca Herrera Garrido a reserva e desconfianza cara á obra eran os sentimentos que mellor definirían a actitude que me dominaba. Reserva e desconfianza motivadas, sobre todo, pola fama de "romántica" que tiña a autora e que me facían imaxinar un folletín intragable ó estilo dalgunhas das novelas das famosas irmás Dora e Pura Vázquez. (Ríos Panisse 1985: 475)

Furthermore, subsequent critical studies, which purported to spring from a feminist stance, tended to use the qualifier 'sentimental', either tacitly, to demean the work, or unqualifiedly to perpetuate a characteristically undemanding approach to her writing (Blanco 1986: 148; Noia 1990: 33–34, 42). The same studies consistently acknowledge what seems to be the central merit of Herrera's prose, namely that her writing style was carefully crafted and artistically valuable. However, such praise is limited precisely because these critics do

6 An extremely valuable postgraduate dissertation was completed at the University of A Coruña this year, which looks at Rosalía de Castro's deployment of anti-marriage views in her writing, in the light of the *Lei de matrimonio civil* passed in 1870 (Pardo Amado 2008). I would like to thank Manuel Forcadela for allowing me to read a copy of this dissertation.

7 Alberto Machado da Rosa's (1954) reading of Rosalía's poetry in the light of her biography, with particular focus on her pre-marital love experiences, was constantly disregarded in canonical studies of her work and has been recently re-edited by the publishing house Liaovento, not without some ado (see <http://www.galicia-hoxe.com/popImprimir.php?idWeb=2&idNoticia=89201> [accessed 10 September 2008]). For a survey of the highly negative response that Machado Rosa's study elicited in Galician criticism see Harvard 1974: 394.

not wish to be caught unwittingly overstepping the seemingly fine line between stylistic finesse and flowery claptrap. This is the tension underlying the above critic's concluding remarks:

Néveda representou para as letras galegas a creación dunha prosa estilisticamente moi cuidada [sic], dunha prosa artística. Ata ela os novelistas só se preocuparan de escribir en galego. Herrera ten outra preocupación: escribir literariamente en galego. Claro que esta preocupación non sempre beneficia á novela. O excesivo adorno dá orixe, moitas veces, a un tipo de frase longa, rimbombante, de corte romántico, desfasado para os anos da publicación da obra. (Ríos Panisse 1985: 486)

The question remains, however, as to how this tension is also present in Herrera's writing, as well as to how an inner, although outwardly imposed, struggle between reason (objectivity, truth) and irrationality (subjectivity, sentiment) could explain the understated uneasiness so often apparent in her texts.⁸ Similar questions continue to apply in contemporary times. In the case of Xohana Torres, Galician literary histories and criticism deployed an ambivalence towards the debilitating *sentimentalismo* of her early works, particularly *Do sulco* (1957), and the more positive acknowledgement that 'a grande forza dos sentimentos' is a central theme in her opus (Blanco 1987: 12). It would be interesting to look at how the process of Torres's canonization in the 1980s and 1990s continually danced around this eminently gendered tension. Similarly, it would be interesting to explore how interest in the work and figure of the poet María Mariño developed alongside a critical idiom that continuously reassured readers that the poetic force of her writing did not spring from 'feminine sentimentalism' but from another sentimental state that has been historically conceptualized as masculine and, therefore, not debilitating: melancholia, that anguished state of mind where true genius dwells.⁹ How, if not in this light, can we interpret critical representations of Mariño as a woman who 'non encaixaba no molde tradicional do seu tempo. Era vista como "rara" e "diferente" porque lle gustaba pasear soa pola ribeira do mar, extasiarse diante da contemplación da paisaxe' (Sanjurjo Fernández 1994: 14) and that 'A temática intimista, frecuente na literatura feita por mulleres, consegue en María unha altura e calidade sorprendentes. O seu é un intimismo radical, profundo, sen concesións, e a súa expresión ten, ás veces, fondura filosófica' (20, my emphasis)? Voids can also be more than partially explained by the particular tension that sentimental discourse exerts in both the

8 I am thinking, for example, of the following lines in her essay 'A muller galega', which appeared for the first time in the magazine *Nós*, in 1921: 'Pola primeira vez da miña vida... quixera eu esquencer que foi Galiza o meu berce: y-esto, soyasmente, e namentras roubo á muller da miña terra o segredo do seu ser! Que torno do meu, cicais diredes! Que m'espello en amores do chan própeo! Non, certamente! Verdade hei de dicir por dúas razón valederas: "Inda por riba do meu amor a o chan, está o meu amor pol-a verdá": velaf a promeira. A segunda é aínda máis sinxela: "Porque non sei dicir mintira"' (Herrera 1921: 9).

9 For a feminist analysis of the enduring association between melancholia and creative genius, which effectively excluded women as artistic subjects who were considered incapable of that particular mode of philosophic and artistic inspiration, see Schiesari 1992.

production and reception of Galician women's writing, if we think of authors such as Marisa Villardefrancos, the prolific Galician-born writer of sentimental novellas in Spanish in the 1950s, who has for these reasons been triply expelled from Galician literary histories.

When taking into account more recent phenomena such as the boom of female-authored poetry in the 1990s and the consolidation during the so-called 'noughties' of Galician women's narrative, we witness a critical idiom that has not caught up with the increasing complexity with which women authors will incorporate sentimental values in their literary projects. For example, a plausible reading of Teresa Moure's narrative and essayistic project could be that her writing is concerned with the promotion of a sentimental way of life. *A xeira das árbores* (2004) and *Herba moura* (2005) could both be studied as interrelated manifestos calling for a necessary revisiting of sentimentalism as a new order, led in these novels by the words and actions of her female (or feminized) characters. The synopsis on the back cover of *Herba moura* refers to Moure's writing developing 'sen caer nunca no lirismo gratuítu nin no sentimentalismo' (Moure 2005: back cover), thus demonstrating that not even those involved in the marketing of the novel, who might be expected to have read it in some detail, can avoid the entrenched prejudice that puts women's writing, sentimentalism and bad literature in the same basket. Equally worrying is the persistent appearance in academic journals of statements such as the following (taken from a review of Rosa Aneiros's novel *Veú visitarme o mar*):

Os homes, máis seguros de si mesmos, adoitan ter menos dúbidas sobre o que fan, mais para as mulleres é importante a idea que os outros teñen delas e non sempre se arriscan ao xuízo dos lectores sen ter pasado antes por un xurado ao obter o beneplácito dun crítico recoñecido. En xeral, unha escritora aínda que teña varias novelas escritas dáse a coñecer cando consegue superar algún tipo de proba de calidade. E entre a morea de obras narrativas en galego que cada ano chegaban aos concursos literarios era frecuente atopar textos mal grafados que narraban historias sobre amores problemáticos con abundancia de elementos sentimentais; *eran argumentos intimistas de intenso dramatismo, que translucían con claridade a autoría feminina*. Pero ese tipo de obras, que non daban conseguido premio ningún nin suscitaban o menor interese dos membros do xurado, quedaron inéditas. *De existir un certame de narrativa popular ou de dispoñer no noso sistema literario dunha literatura de quiosco, sen dúbida había aumentar o número de narradoras.* (Noia 2004: 196, my emphasis)

To conclude this brief survey of how sentimental discourse has been and continues to be at the forefront of literary creation and reception in the Galician context, I want briefly to explore the recent emergence of literature written by male authors which seeks to explore the world of (heterosexual) romantic love, feelings and relationships. Usually referred to as the 'intimista' approach, this trend would include Xosé Carlos Caneiro's novels *Talvez melancolía* (1999), *Ámote* (2003) and *A vida nova de Madame Bovary* (2008), Antón Riveiro Coello's *A esfinxe de amaranto* (2003), or Camilo Gonsar's *A noite da aurora* (2003). The phenomenal shift towards the theme of romantic love observable in Carlos Casares' last and posthumous novel *O sol do verán* (2003) would also repay further study. So too

would the tacitly held critical view that this historically underdeveloped trend should be a creative alternative for male authors and that any *normalized* literary system worth its salt should welcome literature in this vein. In her review of Fernández Naval's *Unha cita co aire* (2005), Inmaculada Otero Varela stated that:

Mais non podemos desbotar as achegas introspectivas de escritores homes que, malia que ás veces mediatizan o seu discurso a través dunha protagonista muller, fano en moitas ocasións por medio dunha perspectiva masculina. Mesmo autores que se deron a coñecer con obras de carácter ben distinto a este téñense achegado nos últimos tempos a un sentimentalismo, *lexítimo dende logo*, comprensible, xa que o universo emocional alimentou moitos dos mellores relatos que se teñen escrito, e “*natural*” nun sistema literario que camiña cara á normalidade. (Otero Varela 2006: 94–95, my emphasis).

Such a rapid sanctioning of this new pattern in Galician literary production as ‘legitimate, of course’, raises the question of why earlier and perhaps more confident manifestations of this trend penned by women have been subjected to a far less straightforward and benign critical reception. In terms of the (never arbitrary) language of critical classifications, it would be interesting to discuss why it is that when writers in general decide to talk about emotions, one half will be referred to as ‘sentimental’, the other as ‘intimista’.

Concluding remarks

As a great deal of twentieth-century intellectual endeavour reveals, the language of history matters a great deal. The view that “‘history in words’ may be more reliable than ‘the historical narratives constructed by words’” (Burke, Crowley and Girvin 2000: 48, based on Crowley 1989: 57) informs influential studies of language and cultural change such as Raymond Williams’ *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1983) and its recent sequel (Bennet, Grossberg and Morris 2000). Williams’s introductory reference to the deterioration of the word ‘sentimental’ demonstrates how changes in language and in its uses are apt indicators of the changing ‘shape and concerns’ of societies (Williams 1983, in Burke, Crowley and Girvin 2000: 75). His intuitive words that ‘Nobody now asking the meaning of the word would be met by that familiar, slightly frozen, polite stare’ (2000: 75) have been since complemented by a vast body of work on gender and language bent upon demonstrating that the rationale for the processes of semantic deterioration undergone by certain terms is sexist. In fact, this remains a pivotal concern of feminist criticism to this day: to continue to uncover the ways in which both historical changes in language and the language of history have been used to denigrate women. Of course, the language of literary histories is not alien to such leanings and any self-reflexive approach to its discourse (together with that of literary criticism, with which it is inextricably bound) needs to remain alert to what Iris Cochón and María do Cebreiro Rábade have singled out as the chief sexist strategies to which this discourse is most prone, namely:

a linguaxe como mecanismo de reprodución dunha orde social non paritaria baseada no postulado dunha condición feminina “esencial” (o corpo-natureza); o xeito no que os textos culturais se refiren ás mulleres como “outras” e, por último, os mecanismos polos cales a lóxica patriarcal, pretendendo recoñecer a existencia das mulleres, en realidade as somete e as restrinxe aos estreitos límites do seu dominio. (Cochón e Rábade 2004: 192)

The rationale for a meta-critical history of modern Galician literature developed in this article would look at the often stalemated (although, in more recent times, also energizing) reciprocities between a receiving context bent on minimizing the achievements of women writers through an essentialized identification of their work with a pejoratively understood sentimental discourse, and the same writers’ discursive construction of a writing selfhood. There is still much groundwork to cover and the field’s imaginary is cut right across by enduring dichotomies: public institutions vs. personal lives; fiction vs. autobiography; rationality, intellect and genius vs. passion, imitation and mediocrity; the persistent anxiety that there must be a still speakable distinction (as speakable as the distinction between *bodies*) between ‘the shabby and the sublime’ (Zagajewski 2004: 25). There is no doubt that the above divisions and others are beginning to be collapsed in the projects of new voices in Galician literature and cultural studies. A study of the sentimental according to the rationale set out in this article would certainly not aim to exacerbate such oppositions, but to lean on the liberating idea, encapsulated in the epigraph by María do Cebreiro, that the capacity for love and the capacity for enlightenment have eluded neither men nor women, and need not always elude each other either.

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