
Introduction: Critical Approaches to the Nation in Galician Studies¹

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Questions of identity, and especially national identity, have always been the driving force in Galician culture and the related discipline of Galician Studies. As we might expect in a stateless nation such as Galicia, the focus of Galician culture since the nineteenth century and of Galician Studies since the second half of the twentieth has been on national identity and the formation of a strong national culture and institutions. Now, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, this seems to be changing: some of the most dynamic cultural discussions in Galicia at the moment are happening on the margins of institutionalized forums and identities, perhaps most markedly in the case of gendered identities and sexualities, but also in the case of Galician identities whose national identification is inflected by other geo- and bio-political markers such as race, ethnicity, class, language and location. There is an increasingly tangible gap between how identities and critical standpoints are valorized within and by Galician institutions on the one hand, and how they are expressed by individuals and popular discourses on the other.

The essays included in this special issue of the *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* aim

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to provide a window on the dialogue that is beginning to take place between scholars and artists with an interest in these theoretical questions and how they have materialized into cultural action. The brief given to authors was to address – whether to historicize, contextualize, deliver a critique of, re-imagine or celebrate – the national as a conceptual framework for both generating and studying Galician cultural production. We asked authors to consider how individual writers, artists and thinkers, past and present, have revisited or subverted the national, and how they have explored discourses and identities other than the (purely) national in their works. How, we wondered, have writers and artists addressed the tensions between competing identities, such as allegiance to feminism and to nationalism, to Galicia and to Spain (or the myriad other countries where Galicians are settled), or to self and to community? What alternative conceptual frameworks might already exist, or be created, not only for generating but also for understanding cultural production in Galicia, past and present? The five essays included in the volume, by José F. Colmeiro, María do Cebreiro Rábade Villar, Joseba Gabilondo, Helena Miguélez Carballeira and Eugenia Romero, address these questions in various ways and from various perspectives, and they come to various conclusions. Taken individually and as a body, these essays demonstrate some of the exciting and often challenging new currents coursing through Galician Studies today.

No longer unbroken: new readings of the nation

Our approach to studying the nation draws on developments in studies of other peninsular cultures, such as the notion of discontinuity, of a fragmented, disrupted narrative, that lies at the heart of Joan Ramon Resina's study of the so-called decadence of Catalan literature during the sixteenth century. Resina's argument for the need to turn to history, and to understand this period in the context of the deferred development of a Catalan national culture, speaks to a wider understanding of the historical development of the Iberian Peninsula. He begins with a reassessment of the fifteenth-century phenomena of the annexation of the Iberian kingdoms under the reign of the Catholic Monarchs Ferdinand II of Aragon and Isabella I of Castile and of the *Reconquista*. According to this reassessment, the *Reconquista* and the takeover of Spain's 'other' kingdoms are both considered historical processes based on the premise of an artificial cultural and territorial continuity. Resina then argues that it was precisely this act of forcible assimilation that brought about severe 'implications for those other cultures that, remaining in their "niche," found the integration or homogenization process decisively obstructive for *their* continuity' (Resina 1995: 284–85). While this fact, according to Resina, is part and parcel of the 'official' history of nation-formation, his argument becomes more complex in that it foregrounds the consequences that such processes of 'disunification and breaking of identities' have in the realm of cultural production. The lack of a creative impulse in Catalan letters during the sixteenth century is, of course, a prime example of this (1995: 300). So, too, is the

period from the sixteenth century to the eighteenth, traditionally known in Galician literary history as the *Séculos escuros*, or Dark Centuries.

Underlying Resina's explanation of this episode in Catalan literary history is the connection he forges between the idea of continuity and that of nation as the imagined space – in his words 'as fleeting a structure as any other product of the social life of human beings' (1995: 301) – where cultural action takes root. That is, he identifies continuity, or the illusion of continuity, as an essential factor in the creation of a successful nation. In this view, the national is seen as a fluctuating, yet persistently ingrained, geographical and imaginary locus for cultural production, its development premised on eradicating – whether by dispersal or demarcation, or by overtly excluding – those cultural forces that lie beyond its geographical or ideological borders. However, similar mechanisms can also characterize national cultural regeneration from within. This might mean, for example, that discontinuity is not necessarily a predicament only of the 'other' cultural histories that the growth of a national literature necessarily silences or interrupts, but that it might also be the defining trait of a national literature's model for expansion. In this sense, national literatures (or, to use the terminology more current in Galician Studies, literary systems which develop in accordance with a selectively defined national programme) rest on the creation and perpetuation of many inner voids: times and spaces that may on occasion be discontinued in order to facilitate the impression of the national as a unified lived experience, a collective sentiment, an unarguable truth that has always been there.

The extent to which such an illusion of continuity is an inevitable facet of the nation has in recent years been a source of discussion. In a forthcoming article the Galician poet and critic (and contributor to this volume), María do Cebreiro Rábade Villar, argues that in fact the roots of Galician literature are to be found in the loss of political power and the conscious decision of Galicia's early writers to 'make virtue from political necessity' and to employ what Walter Benjamin called the 'language of damaged experience'. For example, Rábade Villar proposes the poet Rosalía de Castro (1837–85) as the paradigmatic example of a writer consciously choosing a language of rupture. However, this act is not, she argues, one of resignation, but of defiance – and the distinction is essential to the future of Galician culture, given the continued influence of cultural planning, because a culture planned around resignation to (and attempted avoidance of) that culture's inevitable fragmentations, ruptures and discontinuities will have a very different future to one that embraces them as a productive site for resistance.

Recent critiques of the concept of nation seem to confirm the predominance of the continuity/discontinuity dialectic. From a variety of different perspectives (from political theory to sociology and cultural studies), the idea of nation has been undergoing sustained theoretical transformation, a transformation that is, of course, in tune with the rapid changes in a new geopolitical order, marked by more complexly defined forms of citizenship. Formerly a category of almost

teleological status in the definition (and distribution) of territories and identities, the concept of nation today evokes the idea of a repository with some storage problems. The capaciousness of the nation is evident from the fact that recent socio-political, legislative and intellectual agendas are making some attempts to accommodate the no longer curious specimens of multiculturalism, transnationality or diaspora (as well as their usually polylingual and not so disoriented offspring) within national discourses.

It is important, however, to remember that the debate around the nation, its possible transmutations and the effect that these may have on literary and cultural studies is not merely another success story emanating from postmodernism's disclosure of the ideological subtext underlying all cultural practices. Recent critiques of the nation have had to confront the fact that the nation continues to be an enabling category for those historically disenfranchised cultural practices now exercising a 'politics of recognition'. Just as feminist-identified authors have been 'keen to keep the author alive' even after Barthes' famous (and possibly misinterpreted) call for *his* death (Eagleton 2005: 4), so-called minority cultures have had marked reservations about embracing the theoretical demise of the nation as an act of liberation. Such reservations have taken the shape of various forms of cultural, political and intellectual activity, ranging from a refusal to question the national paradigm (with the view that such questioning serves only to weaken the minority culture's struggle for visibility and self-representation) to a willingness to enter into dialogue with such debate, with a view to exploring its creative and critical potential, to the whole-hearted celebration of it. The coexistence of such disparate attitudes is one of the hallmarks of contemporary Galician cultural production, where forms of literary scholarship fuelled by a naturalized relationship between geography, language and identity (see, for instance, Anxo Tarrío Varela's article 'Espazos culturais e literatura na Galicia contemporánea', in Tarrío Varela 2007) occur alongside ironic or wilfully provocative forms of artistic production such as the last album of the B-rock band 'Ataque Escampe'.² In any case, it is in the fraught space that emerges from this struggle and negotiations that questions of the validity or resilience of the nation are truly tested. This is proof that the theoretical debates emerging in the context of minority cultures are not only of importance to, but in fact are not too different from, current theoretical preoccupations with globalization and the post-colonial condition.

Concerns about national identity have of course loomed large in Galician cultural production and the related discipline of Galician Studies. As we might expect in a stateless nation, the focus during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was on national identity and the formation of a strong national culture and institutions. The influential critic and father of modern Galician Studies, Xoán

2 With song titles such as 'Galicia es una mierda' or 'Arredor da cuestión nacional', the album offers a wry and humorous take on Galician national identity and the current debates around it: http://www.aregueifa.net/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=84 (accessed 15 September 2008).

González-Millán, described this process and its consequence as *nacionalismo literario*, or literary nationalism, where, in the absence of strong Galician political institutions (both before and during the Franco regime), the cultural field was placed at the service of the national project and was thus forced to shoulder an especially heavy burden. This process is not peculiar to Galician Studies – the potentially essentializing dynamics deriving from this type of cultural politics has also been highlighted from the point of view of Hispanic Studies and its focus on Iberian identities (Labanyi 1995: 403). But it is especially pronounced there, as the groundbreaking studies of González-Millán and his colleague Antón Figueroa, which took direct issue with Galician *nacionalismo literario* and its discontents, have shown (González-Millán 1994, Figueroa 2001).

The critique of *nacionalismo literario* begun by González-Millán and Figueroa during the 1980s and 1990s has opened up the floor for a new wave of scholarship in Galician Studies. This scholarship is influenced not only by the British and French social theory (Bourdieu, Raymond Williams), on which González-Millán and Figueroa so innovatively drew, but also by the more heterogeneous field of cultural studies emanating from the anglophone world, where an increasing number of Galicianists are based. The ‘cultural studies turn’ in the field of (principally) anglophone Galician Studies reflects a similar turn taken in the wider field of anglophone Hispanic Studies, and brings with it similar benefits and similar problems. Most notably, while introducing new currents and new ideas, it has also been a factor in the growing division between English-language and Galician-language scholarship on Galician Studies, where the choice of language often implies greater or lesser access to distinct academic traditions. The absence of a sustained dialogue between academics working within the two traditions is a significant drawback in the development of a strong and diverse intellectual field. Furthermore, the use of either English or Galician in academic work on Galician Studies inevitably leads to asymmetries in the reception that such works will be granted, asymmetries that have less to do with personal choices or differentialist positions than with the seldom acknowledged reality in international academia that English is not as yet the unproblematically adopted lingua franca of all. This volume is the first publication to emanate from a project – ‘Coming out of the Nation: Beyond the National in Galician Studies’ – that aims to provide a space for dialogue between, within and beyond the two existing traditions.

Coming out of the nation: an overview

Most of the studies included in this special issue of the *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* were first presented at the conference ‘Saíndo da nación: máis alá do nacional na produción cultural galega contemporánea/Coming Out of the Nation: Beyond the National in Contemporary Cultural Production in Galicia’. This conference, which took place between the Universities of Liverpool and Bangor in March 2008, was conceived with the aim of facilitating dialogue between scholars and

artists working in a variety of fields and in a variety of languages. Our intention was to promote a dialogue that was not only self-reflective (that is, veering between the subjective and the scholarly) but also proactive. But dialogue, even if understood in the barebones, Jakobsonian definition of communication, necessitates context, code and contact in order to emerge and be effective. The context in which the many and varied discussions developed during the conference was that of a shared desire to engage inquiringly with the nation as a paradigm for cultural production. Essential to the vitality of the discussion and of the synergies that formed over the three days of the conference was the peculiar linguistic environment in which it took place. We had always intended the conference to be, at the very least, bilingual – from the title to the conference materials, everything was available in English and Galician. However, what we could not have foreseen was the curious energy with which the language of the conference took on a life of its own, evolving, unconfined, into a hotchpotch of languages (and, indeed, registers), from native-like Galician, English and Spanish to the criss-crossed languages of bilingual speakers, learners (and poets). The conference location(s), Jakobson's 'physical channel' for communication, reflected the unbounded nature of the discussion, as we moved between a variety of locations in the cities of Liverpool and Bangor (and the border-crossing space between them, which we travelled together) which, with their sheer distinctiveness, provided us all with a good enough reason to come out of the nation.

The selection of articles included in this special issue represent the coherence of the debates initiated during the conference and their considerable potential for innovation in the field of Galician literary-cultural studies and literary-cultural history. Many of them develop an essay published in 2006 in the *Anuario de Estudos Literarios Galegos* by Kirsty Hooper, which was the first to engage with the work of González-Millán, not only to acknowledge its towering importance but to propose a foray beyond its scope (and it is telling that his analyses of the mechanisms of *nacionalismo literario*, which were in so many ways a call for action, did not elicit this type of response until so very recently). In this article, 'Novas cartografías nos estudos galegos', Hooper proposed that a possible way of surmounting the restrictiveness of nationally defined cultural practices in Galicia was to historicize the concept of 'national', distinguishing between the production of works during the period of national consolidation and their reception now, at a time when the national was coming into question. Working with the idea of the postnational that had previously been a tool both for Resina in *Catalan Studies* (2003) and Joseba Gabilondo in *Basque Studies* (2001, 2003), the article envisaged a novel paradigm for the reception of Galician cultural production, where positions until then considered tangential or even counter to the national project (because of their perceived linguistic or thematic unorthodoxy, or because of their persistence in inflecting the national with markers of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity or citizenship) should instead be considered essential to its development and, indeed, survival.

Hooper's article opened up a variety of novel debates. Written originally in

English in 2004 as a conference paper, the article's impact in Galicia-based literary and cultural studies is in no small part related to the fact that it was published in Galician, in a Galician-based journal.³ Its genesis and fate thus reveal probably the most determining factor in the often lamented development of the disciplines of *Filoloxía galega* and Galician Studies as two distinct fields that only fleetingly merge into a kind of bicephalic whole: namely the question of language. Its controversial proposition – that the nationally defined purview of *filoloxía galega* be scrutinized, historicized and hybridized through a turn towards postnational cultural studies – has undoubtedly galvanized both creative and critical voices into responding, thus opening the floor for a more lively and heterogeneous debate on what continues to be a central concern for cultural agents in Galicia: the extent to which the nation continues to be a viable frame of reference for the generation and the reception of Galician cultural production. This question is at the heart of the essays that follow, which have been chosen because they articulate some of the key (pro)positions within this debate. By publishing them in English, and especially in this particular forum, our intention has been to bring them to the attention of readers who may be unfamiliar with the most recent developments in this corner of the field and their multiple and varied intersections with some of the most pressing debates currently taking place not only in Hispanic Studies but throughout the academy as a whole.⁴

In 'Peripheral Visions, Global Positions: Remapping Galician Culture', which was one of three keynote papers delivered at the March 2008 conference, José Colmeiro synthesizes some of the most dramatic changes taking place in the Galician cultural landscape. He argues for a shift towards a postnational and interdisciplinary cultural studies approach based on what he calls a 'deterritorialisation of the Galician cultural map', where the hitherto privileged institutional channels of cultural identity – language, literature, territory – are set alongside new cultural formulations, whose provenance and import is not only Galician but global. Examining literary, cultural, musical and visual works emanating from Galicians around the world and from citizens of the world based in Galicia, Colmeiro proposes an interpretation of Galician cultural production in which the peripheral is reimagined as central and the Galician as incontrovertibly global.

If Colmeiro proposes a reframing of Galician literature through a cultural studies approach, María do Cebreiro Rábade Villar, in the essay that follows, reassesses Galicia's literary history on its own terms. In 'Spectres of the Nation: Forms of Resistance to Literary Nationalism' (the second of the keynote papers delivered at the March 2008 conference), Rábade Villar takes the issue identified by Colmeiro as key to the understanding of Galician culture today – the naturalized link between what she calls 'the shared home and its language and territory' – and turns it on its head, postulating instead the centrality, in Galician literary production, of what, following Beckett, she refers to as the 'unspeakable

3 Hooper's article has since then appeared in English translation, in the volume *Reading Iberia* (2007: 123–40).

4 A wider selection of essays is to be published in Galician during 2009 by Edicións Xerais.

home'. Focusing on the works of Rosalía de Castro, considered the foundational texts of modern Galician literature, Rábade Villar shows how this most canonical of writers, far from perpetuating the 'illusion of continuity' of which we wrote above, in fact locates her work in the liminal spaces between possession and dispossession, the cracks and fissures between reality and the supernatural inhabited by the ghosts who, for Rábade Villar, constitute the crux of the national project.

Joseba Gabilondo, too, looks to the past in order better to understand the present of Galician literary production. In 'Towards a Postnational History of Galician Literature: On Pardo Bazán's Transnational and Translational Position', the Basque critic controversially revises contemporary Spanish and Galician literary history and proposes a postnational critique of the Spanish canons (Spanish, Galician, Basque, etc.), which continue to be monolingual and therefore nationalist. By studying the work of Pardo Bazán, Gabilondo argues that, even when the work of a writer is fully assimilated into a specific canon (in this case, the state canon of Spanish literature written in Spanish) the traces of the other language and geography (Galicia/n) remain and, from their marginality, continue to define and defer her 'originary identity and language' – Galician – which cannot be captured or canonized in nationalist terms; neither Galician nor Spanish. The article concludes that Pardo Bazán's 'identity' and language, which are translational and transnational, point to a new geography that defies the (Spanish) state and therefore posits the secondary nature of any state reappropriation as the departure point of any new post-national history of literature.

Gabilondo's essay makes a strong case for the importance in discussions of the nation of including bio-political factors (gender, race, ethnicity) alongside the geopolitical factors that have so often been the defining features of national discourse. In 'Alternative Values? From the National to the Sentimental in the Redrawing of Galician Literary History' Helena Miguélez Carballeira also picks up on the question of gender and the ways in which critical discourses operating within the nation have been conditioned by gender, whether implicitly or explicitly. She, too, engages with the developing postnational paradigm, but from a more cautious and critical perspective, proposing instead Donald E. Pease's concept of the *intranational* as an alternative that is not bound by chronology, but instead acknowledges what she calls the 'persistent adequacy of the nation'. For Miguélez Carballeira, a truly transformative understanding of Galician literary history can only emerge with further distance from the qualifier 'nation'. Her project in 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.

The final essay, by Eugenia Romero, brings together many of the questions that we have already seen discussed by Colmeiro, Rábade Villar, Gabilondo and Miguélez Carballeira. In 'Popular Literary *lieux de mémoire* and Galician Identity in Manuel Rivas's *En salvaxe compañía*', Romero provides a novel reading of a relatively recent work by Rivas, probably Galicia's best-known contemporary

novelist and short story writer. Reading this unusual text from the perspective of memory studies, and specifically through the prism of Pierre Nora's concept of the *lieu de mémoire*, or site of memory, Romero outlines a reading of Rivas's concept of contemporary Galician identity as a product of the past, yet nevertheless inextricably bound up with a constant reinterpretation and re-evaluation of that past for the present and future. More specifically, Romero explores Rivas's vindication of the popular, traditional, folkloric aspects of Galician identity – the village, the parish, the Santa Compañía, the *pazo* (discussed also by Gabilondo), and the cemetery – that have so often seemed at odds with Galicia's march towards modernity. Romero's argument that it is in the borders between past and present where we must seek national meaning adds a temporal dimension to Rábade Villar's identification of the 'places between' as the defining locations of national meaning, and to Colmeiro's postulation that Galicia takes on meaning in the very act of exceeding the borders of the traditional nation.

Conclusions

While all of the essays included in this special issue work with different paradigms and concepts, they share certain central concerns. Firstly, they all work on the assumption that any discussion of the nation and its future, far from positing a swift replacement of the national paradigm with something else, demands in fact a sustained exercise of reflection that cannot end with terminological calcification. For this reason, the essays included in this issue do not simply posit a teleological, theoretical progression from a national to a postnational framework, but dwell (cautiously and self-critically) on the reasons why alternative analytical tools for dealing with past, present, and future cultural products should be developed or exist alongside more established ones. Such tools may relate to the need for a wider scope of vision when it comes to assessing the value of cultural artefacts: that is, one that does not limit itself to valorizing only those products which concur with naturalized (and therefore often unspoken) conditions for national cultural production. As José Colmeiro's proposal for postnational, interdisciplinary, but still Galician cultural studies, Joseba Gabilondo's radical rereading of the work of Emilia Pardo Bazán, and especially María do Cebreiro Rábade Villar's reframing of Rosalía de Castro's poetry show, such a renewed outlook can give rise to novel readings of both canonical and marginalized cultural objects individually. At the same time, Helena Miguélez-Carballeira's exploration of the sentimental as a novel measure of literary value and Eugenia Romero's reading of the *lieu de mémoire* as a location for interaction between past and present demonstrate the potential for thoroughly uncommon ways of articulating Galician literary history altogether, not only 'in factual-genetic terms' but as the long and knotty process where complex forms of production and reception, inspiration and interpretation intertwine in ways that usually escape square categorizations or guidelines (Leerssen 2004: 241).

A second point on which the five essays concur is that any attempt to rewrite a

given literary or cultural history needs to go beyond what Griselda Pollock termed 'the inside/outside opposition' (Pollock 2001: 6). In other words, it is important to go beyond a critical strategy which, in an attempt to 'set the record straight', limits itself to demanding the inclusion of those works and figures which had hitherto been denied entry in the canon. Although the recovery of forgotten voices and texts is an essential part of reinterpreting any critical history, it is essential that the categories of that history are themselves scrutinized and not simply taken as read. Examples of this type of work are still thin on the ground in Galicia: those which do exist have appeared mainly as the result of feminist scholarship (Blanco 1991; Marco López 2007). However, these models of counter-history do not serve to dislodge the established canon, or do so only to a marginal extent. By contrast, the essays included in this issue articulate an understanding of canonical literary history as an all-embracing discourse which has historically shaped and favoured self-serving definitions of literary value and universality, and whose critique can only be carried out through a 'repoliticizing [...] of its deep structures' (Pollock 2001: 9). In this vein, a potential set of critical avenues may, of course, include the foregrounding of the many unacknowledged creative projects in Galician literary history, but must also pursue the redefinition of the discursive constructions that have served to legitimate some of these projects as acts of mastery, while relegating others to partial interpretation, oblivion or, in some cases, acrid attack. The importance of such a move, not only for our understanding of the new and exciting cultural forms of today but also for those of the past, is – as the five essays agree – essential.

Finally, a word on a writer whose work and image have underpinned the development of Galician studies from the start. Within Galician cultural history, however we define it, we find a series of 'focal points' from which to theorize the nation, and among these, the work of Rosalía de Castro remains of pivotal importance. The continual critical and institutional emphasis on the colossal status and multiple interpretations of Rosalía's work as an inexhaustible reservoir of inspiration and refuge has been, of course, and for a very good reason, one of the most recurrent narratives of national self-aggrandizement. Yet this act of constant homage has often been carried out alongside highly warped or formulaic interpretations of her work and at the expense of a real reckoning, not only with the contradictions and paradoxes that intersperse her texts but also with the intelligent and subtle mind of the woman behind them. Furthermore, Galician critical work on Rosalía de Castro, with its characteristically reverent tones and its focus on her Galician-language poetry at the expense of her Spanish-language narrative and journalism, stands in stark contrast to the vast body of scholarship produced elsewhere, although mainly in the context of Spanish literary history, which tends to treat her as an exemplar of Spanish late-Romanticism and considers *En las orillas del Sar* her most important work. Most of the articles included in this issue (Colmeiro, Rábade Villar, Miguélez Carballeira) attest to the fact that a critical appraisal of Castro's oeuvre in post-structuralist, post-Foucauldian historical and sociological terms is yet to be written. Most impor-

tantly, they indicate that such a reappraisal will almost certainly not emerge from the over-protective spaces of nationally defined literary histories (be they Galician or Spanish), but in the wider purview allowed by a critical idiom that does not compromise diversity, elusiveness and silence for the benefit of monolithic historical representations. Our project in 'Coming out of the Nation' is to contribute to the development of new spaces and new debates, which transcend or interconnect language, location, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, citizenship and ideology in hitherto unaccustomed ways, and in so doing, embrace multiple ruptures, discontinuities and – often – downright disagreements, thus opening up new paths for the creation, reception and, best of all, enjoyment of Galicia's vibrant, growing, and ever more complex culture.

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