

2014. *El fin de los dinosaurios*. Madrid: Páginas de espuma,

2014. *El hombre bicolor*. Barcelona: Anagrama, 2014.

BOOK REVIEWS/RESEÑAS

Christine Arkinstall, *Spanish Female Writers and the FreeThinking Press, 1879-1926*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2015, 244 pp.

Surveying conventional histories of fin-de-siècle Spain, one would be inclined to think that Spanish women had little to contribute to the events of the day, and that they were overwhelmingly apolitical. Yet, what Christine Arkinstall shows us here in her study of Amalia Domingo Soler (1835-1909), Angeles López de Ayala (1856-1926), and Belén Sárraga (ca. 1873-1950) turns such conventional assumptions on their head. Arkinstall's extensive archival research has unearthed a wealth of information about these three women who were all ardent anti-Catholic political activists and writers, and united the movements of freethinking, feminism, republicanism, and freemasonry. Moreover, through the revelation and analysis of exchanges between these women, and of their participation in common activities and organizations, Arkinstall effectively uncovers a sisterhood of female intellectuals and writers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Her book, therefore, fills lacunae not only in the study of "first-wave Spanish feminism" and the recovery of "the female equivalent of the Generation of 1898," but also in the history of the Spanish press and early Spanish republicanism (4). In the introduction Arkinstall contextualizes her study by defining freethinking and emphasizing the importance of associations and the press for these women's left-wing political activism and the formation of their "sisterhood." She defines freethinking as a heterogeneous movement comprising diverse groups such as Masons, anarchists, socialists, and republicans who believed in the right to freedom of conscience. They supported secular education, the working class, and feminism, and "contributed to the ideal of a cosmopolitan society envisaged as transcending gender, class, ethnic, political, and national boundaries" (9). All the authors studied here were freethinkers and republicans who belonged to associations and published their ideas in the liberal periodical press.

Chapter one explores the works of the well-known spiritist Amalia Domingo de Soler. Arkinstall focuses primarily on the periodical she founded in 1879, *La Luz del Porvenir*, her use of the

genre of *testimonio* in her autobiography *Memorias de una mujer*, and the debates that her volume *Sus más hermosos escritos* (1903) records between freethinking women on questions of aesthetics, female emancipation, and the right of women to write in fin-de-siècle Spain. Domingo de Soler is considered the greatest female figure in Hispanic spiritism, a movement that aimed "to demonstrate the existence of the spirit and eternal life through experiential contact with those who have passed from this world" (17). She, like other spiritists, advocated "for secular education, theoretical gender equality, a society built on cooperative principles, and the rejection of militarism and slavery" (17). Her weekly periodical *La Luz del Porvenir* published information on spiritist meetings, essays on spiritist philosophy, and additional essays, poems, short stories, and announcements. Arkinstall then moves on to analyze Domingo Soler's autobiography *Memorias de una mujer*. In line with John Beverly's definition of *testimonio*, the protagonist of Domingo Soler's *Memorias* (the author herself) is made to represent entire subaltern groups (women and the working classes) and her life-story is portrayed as having "a left-wing moral" (35). Moreover, the spiritist structure of *Memorias* allows for someone else, in this case spirits, with more authority to speak for the subject, a dynamic we see in the *testimonio* where it is usually a first-world person who gives authority to the account of the subaltern protagonist. While some may question the truthfulness of such a structure, Arkinstall advocates for reading *Memorias*, like other *testimonios*, as a "performance," that should be examined for its "truth impact" rather than for its "truth value" (36). Arkinstall then turns her attention to Domingo de Soler's letters to other women writers, which are collected in *Sus más hermosos escritos*. Through these letters Domingo Soler reveals her belief that art should inspire empathy and compassion, that feeling and love should dominate over reason, that love is committing oneself to personal and collective progress, that women as a group are fundamental to human progress, and that rebuilding new social institutions is as important, or more so, than destroying old, oppressive ones. But, perhaps most importantly, what these letters reveal is a forum and sisterhood of female writers.

Both chapters two and three explore the life and works of Ángeles López de Ayala, a freethinker, freemason, and feminist who wrote for the radical press for 35 years. She founded and headed four major Barcelona periodicals and wrote plays, novels, novellas, short stories, essays, and journalistic pieces. Although of upper middle-class origins, her political activism led her to suffer financial difficulties, censorship, and political persecution throughout her life.

She did not, however, belong to any political party and openly expressed her concern about the possible harmful effects of divisions among republicans. Chapter two charts her life, activism, and socio-political thought through her publications in freethinking periodicals and her political activism. By these means she advocated for emancipation of the working classes through education and the creation of a new social order that reached all classes. She maintained an exhausting schedule of sociopolitical activities, which included giving speeches and lobbying for a review of the Morfijnich trial. She also wrote poetry in which she reframes Romantic tropes, such as nature, to infuse them with greater political intent, and invert traditional gendered metaphors. López de Ayala, along with Domingo Soler and the anarchist Teresa Clararunt, founded the Sociedad Autónoma de Mujeres, which nine years later became the Sociedad Progresiva Femenina, the freethinking feminist organization with the greatest impact in those years and with strong links to international feminist organizations. In the last part of this chapter Arkinstall looks at exchanges between Ángeles López de Ayala and Domingo de Soler, and between the former and Rosario de Acuña. While the poetic exchanges between the first two women are affectionate and reveal a genuine interest in dialog, the former critiques the latter of being too bitter and destructive in her approach to social change. López de Ayala responds that, for the moment, the only way to proceed is to destroy the old. Domingo Soler also criticizes López de Ayala for having a blinding passion for science that forecloses spiritual possibilities. The relationship between Rosario Acuña and López de Ayala was even stronger and their poems, letters, and articles reveal that the latter acknowledged Acuña as her mentor and inspiration. The two women supported each other in times of financial hardship and ailing health.

In chapter three Arkinstall analyzes López de Ayala's political ideologies through her play *De tal sembra, tal cosecha* (1889), and two novellas, *El abismo* ([1896] 1907) and *Primitivo* (1906-07). Arkinstall reads López de Ayala's play as a reworking of Zorrilla's *Don Juan Tenorio* in which she reforms the paradigms of masculinity and femininity. Arkinstall concludes that the play ultimately shows "the transformations required in the domestic sphere to fashion a more democratic Spain" (118). The novella, *El abismo*, tells the story of Angélica, a young woman of aristocratic origins who has to flee her home because her father wants to kill her for having stained the family honor (something she in fact did not do). The novel deals with social inequality by exposing the appalling conditions in which the destitute Angélica and the people she encounters live as well as through the innate goodness of these characters.

Equally important is the figure of the doctor who helps Angélica; his actions show how the lower classes can be empowered by the upper-middle-classes. While the majority of the *El abismo* is quite conventional and sensationalist in tone, what is unique is the overt feminist discussion at the beginning of the work. The next novella, *Primitivo*, is about the eponymous protagonist, a poverty-stricken child who wants to study despite his family's objections. Primitivo succeeds with the help of Don Filiberto, his wealthy neighbor, and also with the help of his doctor (again stressing the importance of the upper middle-class's participation in improving the plight of the poor). At school, Primitivo meets fellow students Simplicio (from wealthy origins, handsome, selfish, and entitled) and Generoso (from poor origins, physically unattractive, but generous and hard-working). Simplicio, a bully, is ultimately expelled, whereas Generoso and Primitivo excel in their studies. The novella ends with Primitivo opening up his own school in which there is co-education of the sexes as well as the teaching of subjects such as history, science, anthropology, evolution, and hygiene. Generoso joins the teaching staff and hires Simplicio in order to prevent him from committing suicide after his family has lost his fortune. Simplicio's character ultimately repents and is reformed, becoming a teacher himself. The message of *Primitivo*, therefore, is in line with López de Ayala's belief about the importance of secular, rationalist education in reforming society.

Belén Sárraga is the subject of the fourth and final chapter. As with the previous two writers, anti-clericalism and the defense of the working classes are major themes in her works. Arkinstall first discusses Sárraga's role in radical republican politics on both a national and transnational level through her periodical publications, political activism, and public speaking. In 1896, at the age of 23, Sárraga, along with Amalia Carvía and López de Ayala, established the *La Conciencia Libre*, a politically progressive weekly with a diversity of radical political sympathies. In 1897, one year after founding *La Conciencia Libre*, Sárraga founded the Asociación General Femenina in Valencia, together with fellow freethinker and freemason Ana Carvía y Bernal. The principal objectives of the association were the education of women and the creation of ties of solidarity. In 1897 Sárraga also founded the Federación Malagueña de Sociadades de Resistencia. It was comprised of the radical left wing of freethinking republicanism. Although not an anarchist herself, Sárraga worked closely with many anarchists, as well as with members of Vicente Blasco Ibáñez's radical republican movement. From 1909 to 1931 Sárraga lived in Latin America, frequently travelling and giving public lectures, many of which were published

in the Latin American press. She also established at least three political centers in Latin America. Her lengthy residence overseas and her support of the free association of nations between Spain and Latin America, as well as her opposition to Spain's presence in Cuba, make her the most cosmopolitan of the three writers studied here. Sárraga returned to Spain in 1931, after the establishment of the Second Republic. She unsuccessfully ran for office, and went into exile in France after the Nationalists victory in the Civil War. From France she went to Mexico, where she barely survived by doing menial work until her death. The second part of this chapter examines her literary works, particularly her poetic compositions and essays, which are strongly anticlerical and promote her vision of sociocultural and political change. While some of her poetry seems to present a justification for armed revolution, more often it is a revolution through education and science. She consistently connects domestic concerns with international affairs and stresses the importance of the figure of the mother within the family. Moreover, the figure of the mother comes to stand symbolically for "an ethical state synonymous with Republican principals" (180).

Christine Arkinstall's *Spanish Female Writers and the Freethinking Press, 1879-1927* makes an invaluable intellectual contribution to both Spanish history and letters. In accessible and immaculate prose Arkinstall shares the discoveries of her extensive archival work and adds to the extant knowledge about these women's lives, political activism, and literary output. Furthermore, Arkinstall combines historically rigorous research with keen and informed literary analyses. Some examples of such insightful and theoretically informed literary interpretations are her reading of Domingo Soler's spiritist autobiography as an example of *testimonio*, or of López de Ayala's *De tal siembra, tal cosecha* as a reworking of Zorrilla's *Don Juan Tenorio*. Another strength of Arkinstall's approach to these women's literary production is the way in which she contextualizes the works. For example, she reads López de Ayala's novellas *El abismo* and *Primitivo* in relation to the author's advocacy for the working classes and rationalist education and Sárraga's poetry with reference to poet's ideas on social reform. From a historical perspective, Arkinstall's study not only demolishes assertions about Spanish women's supposed fervent Catholicism and lack of interest in political matters but also puts into serious question the omission of women writers from the Generation of 98. Furthermore, she disproves claims about Spanish feminists' lack of engagement with international organizations, and reveals close ties among Spanish, female, left-wing activists that demonstrate that they were working together in a collective effort. The scant his-

torical attention these women have received becomes even more striking with Arkinstall's revelation of the many years these women dedicated to political activism, the extent of their writings, and their public prominence in their day. While Arkinstall attributes these omissions to the negative reaction to these women's contravention of traditional feminine roles, the androcentric bias of liberal histories, and the demise of republicanism in Spanish politics, such omissions will no longer be explicable after Arkinstall's groundbreaking study. In short, Arkinstall's monograph will inevitably reshape the direction of any and all future studies on women, feminism, republicanism, freethinking, freemasonry, spiritism, and literature in fin-de-siècle Spain.

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Estrella Cebreiro and Francisca López, eds., *Global Issues in Contemporary Hispanic Women's Writing: Shaping Gender, the Environment, and Politics*. New York/London: Routledge, 2013, 239 pp.

Women writers continue to inspire the attention of literary scholars; however, no longer so much because they are unknown, overlooked, or misunderstood, but because they have increasingly entered the discussions of the public sphere. This broad and open area, its nature, and activities nowadays have come to extend beyond national boundaries to encompass a seemingly congruous, world-wide space. The reaction of Hispanic women writers to this new reality of globalization is what serves to unite the diverse essays in *Global Issues in Contemporary Hispanic Women Writing*. However, given that the prevailing discourse of the world, for the most part, still stems from androcentric assumptions, the study of global issues from the perspective of gender continues to uncover feminist insights that are both valid and enlightening. Different kinds of abuse inflicted on women, the myriad limitations placed on them, and their struggles to fulfill themselves as individuals continue to weigh on them and to concern female writers. As the editors of the book affirm in their introduction, some women writers today enter into the general Western debates on gender, power, and the environment, and at the same time they defy traditional patriarchal views and standards.

The book comprises chapters on thirteen different woman writers arranged in four parts: "Reshaping Gender by Rethinking

Genre," "Gender and Violence: Stories of Denunciation and Resistance," "Women and the Environment," and "Global Politics from a Gendered Perspective." The first part, being centered on a literary rather than a social phenomenon, is not as tightly focused on global issues as the other parts. While it is true that the novelist Alicia Giménez Bartlett breaks the formula of detective fiction by inventing a female detective, her adoption of a popular and profitable fictional mode as well as her non-threatening treatment of her topics pose no challenge to mainstream culture. Dulce Chacón similarly exploits the detective genre in her works. Neither of the first two chapters discloses actual global concern or social criticism in these two writers. More cogent and, thus, more satisfying is Salvador Oropesa's study of the use of the picaresque and the melodrama modes by Lucía Puenzo to denounce social behavior and immorality in the society of Buenos Aires. The second part of the book centers on violence as part of institutionalized power and as a determinant of psychological development. It begins with an analysis of various segments of Juana Castro's narrative poem, *Del color de los ríos*, as they relate to such subjects as sexual abuse, incest, and motherhood. Melvy Portocarrero revisits the figure of "la Llorona" through a contemporary, global lens, and Dinora Cardosa systematically plots the violence of contemporary Columbian society as it appears in Laura Restrepo's novel *Delirio*.

The third section, the most cohesive of the four, addresses women writers who adopt an eco-feminist posture. Roberta Johnson traces, with clarity and depth, the development of the Spanish philosopher Alicia Puleo's thoughts on the environment. Amrita Das reads a novel of Marie Arana as a study in environmental crisis provoked by male culture, and Ida Kozłowska-Day explores the environmental concern evinced in a bilingual work of the poet Natalia Toledo Paz. The final section of the book begins with an essay that equates the attempt at interconnectivity between individuals to border crossing on the global level in three plays by Itziar Pascual. It is followed by an essay on the regional and global tolerance of sexual violence, which could well have been included in the second part of the book. Applying post-colonial theory, María DiFranceco examines the timely issue of immigration along with woman's condition as subaltern in the short stories of *Por la vía de Teriña* by Nieves García Benito. The volume closes with Luis I. Prádanos's examination of Belén Gopegui's employment of what he calls systemic narrative to critique contemporary neo-liberal tendencies. The essay affirms that it is possible to reinvent the engaged novel lost to the post-ideological fragmentation of postmodernism and to the depoliticization of our rapidly changing "network society."