

CARMEN PEREIRA-MURO. *Género, nación y literatura: Emilia Pardo Bazán en la literatura gallega y española*. West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2013. 227 pp.

Jennifer Smith

How does a woman writer make a space for herself in a national literary project that seeks prestige by presenting itself as masculine? How does a woman writer who “writes like a man” find acceptance in a regional movement that defines itself and its literature as inherently feminine? And how can a woman writer write “woman” into the national imaginary when women are legally and socially marginalized? These are just some of the questions that Carmen Pereira-Muro sets out to explore through the figure of Emilia Pardo Bazán. In the first chapter of *Género, nación y literatura: Emilia Pardo Bazán en la literatura gallega y española*, Pereira-Muro traces the nationalist discourses of the Realist writers of the Generation of 68 in order to show the connection between nationhood and literature at the time. Since Spain’s attempt in the nineteenth century to establish a “nation,” in the modern and liberal sense of the word, was seen as a failure, the project of nation formation was taken up in the literary realm. These writers contrasted Realism with Romanticism by portraying the former as strong and masculine, and the latter as weak and feminine. They also asserted that Realism was an authentically Spanish style of writing and located its true origins in the *Siglo de Oro* and specifically in Cervantes. These writers could accept the influence of French Realism, which was sometimes critiqued as a “feminine” foreign import, because they argued that the French were merely imitating what the Spaniards had done in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. However, just as women were excluded from liberalism by being denied the status of legal subjects with equal rights before the law, they also were rejected from the Realist project. What was considered a virile vindication of traditional Spanish culture in male writers, was artificial, false, and “poco castiza” when undertaken by a woman writer (55).

Ironically, while Pardo Bazán was excluded from the fraternity of Realist writers not only for being a woman but also for not being Spanish enough, in other words, for being too Frenchified and cursi, at the same time she was rejected by important intellectuals in the Galician *regionalista* movement precisely for being *too* Spanish (and Cosmopolitan) and for not being Galician enough. In chapter two Pereira-Muro looks at how the leading intellectuals of the *regionalismo* movement, most importantly Manuel Martínez Muguía, chose to characterize Galicia, its people, and its literature as inherently natural, romantic, and feminine as a way of distinguishing Galicia from the rest of the nation. Paradoxically, this embrace of the feminine is portrayed as an “appropriation” and thereby converted into a masculine enterprise of feminine domination. Muguía, husband to Rosalía de Castro, was a fierce critic of Pardo Bazán and expelled her from Galician literature for renouncing her femininity and Galician heritage by writing like a man. For Muguía this was a double offense since nature and femininity were an inherent part of being both a woman and a Galician. He also criticized her occupation of the public sphere and her work as a literary critic as masculine endeavors and went so far as to question her class and racial lineage by pointing to her bourgeois mentality and possible Jewish origins. Pardo Bazán’s exclusion from the Galician literature cannot be explained by her choice

to write in Castilian since other Galician writers, such as Rosalía de Castro, were embraced even though they wrote in Spanish. Moreover, Pardo Bazán could not have been rejected by Galician intellectuals on ideological grounds since she shared their position regarding Galicia: they all favored greater regional autonomy and a greater recognition of Galicia's historical and linguistic identity, but did not advocate for independence.

In chapter three, Pereira-Muro argues that Pardo Bazán employed the discourses used by the very groups from which she was being excluded in order to reconfigure her own presence alongside male Realist authors, and to make a space for herself, and for all women, in the modern Spanish nation. Like her peers, she affirmed the origins of contemporary Realism in Spain's *Siglo de Oro*, and her patriotism differed only in degree: it was actually more intense and of longer duration. Like the members of the *regionalismo* movement, she associated Galicia with "tierra" and feminine elements, and characterized the Castilian language as "rudo y musculoso" and overall as more masculine (133). In addition, she consistently portrayed masculinity and virility as positive attributes. For example, "viril" is an adjective she used to compliment the writing of other women writers she respected, and regarding herself she asserted that: "De los dos géneros de virtudes que se exigen al género humano elijo las del varón... y en paz" (134). While Pardo Bazán's position of denouncing patriarchy at the same time that she tried to ally herself with it seems contradictory, she reconciled this aporia by asserting that a nation must unite and include both sides of the binary oppositions of civilization/nature, masculinity/femininity, reason/instinct, Realism/Romanticism, and nation/province. This not only allowed for the inclusion of all subjects in her concept of nation, but also for Pardo Bazán to present herself as the perfect citizen who embodied all these polarities in her very person. Furthermore, she divorced the concept of "nation" from political organization (the liberal state which was characterized as masculine), and associated it with nature and instinct (feminine attributes) instead, thereby incorporating women into her concept of national identity. In this way, Pardo Bazán found a way to unite the oppositional categories being used by writers of the time and reposition herself and other women within them.

In her last novel, *Dulce dueño* (1911), Pardo Bazán completely reformulates her thinking on female subjectivity and women's relation to writing and the nation. In chapter four, Pereira-Muro explores Pardo Bazán's incorporation of a "feminine" modernist aesthetic that promotes gender confusion and associates feminine discourse with high culture. Although Pardo Bazán once positioned herself as a woman who wrote like a man, in *Dulce dueño* she promotes the idea of a national, feminine discourse, a type of *écriture féminine, avant la lettre*. Not only is it the Galician author's first novel with a first person female narrator, but within the text the narrator/protagonist is also a writer who makes use of mystical discourse. Mysticism, as "the only place in the history of the West in which woman speaks and acts so publicly" (Luce Irigaray) is associated with a feminine discourse that escapes the binary oppositions inherent in phallogocentricism. Moreover, Spain's own rich mystical tradition, in which Santa Teresa de Jesús figures prominently, makes this *écriture féminine* a national discourse as well. In this way, Pardo Bazán legitimizes a subversive mystical discourse/*écriture féminine* that is at once national and feminine. If while writing in the Realist vein Pardo Bazán chose to negotiate a space for herself and other women by uniting the very binary categories established by her

male pe
to expl
E
Atlanti
well as
of genc
cogentl
histori
that th
effectiv
Santa T
differen
1) If P
someho
gender
the mi
poor r
in con
by no
the fas
nación
piece
gender

male peers, with her adoption of a Modernist aesthetic, she uses mysticism/*écriture féminine* to explode these oppressive categories altogether.

Engaging with scholarship from the past and present, and from both sides of the Atlantic, *Género, nación y literatura*, is essential reading for all Pardo Bazán scholars, as well as anyone interested in Spanish national identity, Galician regional identity, or questions of gender, in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Spain. In this well-researched and cogently argued monograph, Pereira-Muro makes a solid and persuasive argument that is both historically grounded and in dialog with contemporary theory. While some might contend that the use of psychoanalytic theory and French feminism is anachronistic, it provides an effective theoretical lens for explaining Pardo Bazán's interest in hagiography, mysticism, and Santa Teresa as models of female emancipation, an assertion that has already been argued in different ways in the work of other scholars. Some of the questions this study opens up are: 1) If Pardo Bazán conceived national identity as "instinctual" rather than "political," did this somehow tie it more closely to race? 2) Where does the category of social class intersect with gender and national identity, especially considering Pardo Bazán's often seeming disdain for the middle class, which is also shared by the protagonist of *Dulce dueño*? And 3) Can the poor reception of this last novel, whose protagonist has not evoked much sympathy even in contemporary readers, solely be attributed to its feminist message? These questions are by no means criticisms of Pereira-Muro's work, but rather are just a few of the areas that the fascinating study points to for future research. In short, Carmen Pereira-Muro's *Género, nación y literatura: Emilia Pardo Bazán en la literatura gallega y española* is an outstanding piece of scholarship that breaks new ground in the study of the intersections of literature, gender, and nation in the life and works of Emilia Pardo Bazán.

Southern Illinois University