

Women and Identity. Literary and Artistic Representations in Contemporary Plural and Multicultural Hispanic Context

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This monograph explores a variety of iconic female literary and artistic representations of women identity within the contemporary plural and multicultural peninsular Hispanic context.

The collected contributions apply different methodologies to characterise the definition and the evolution of female identity and its representations in literature (drama, poetry, novel, etc.), linguistics, art as well as media and cultural studies. Transgeneric, cross-cultural and transnational analyses, therefore, are used to stress the peculiar ways in which characterisation of women was and is produced in this specific area and time.

Gender stereotyping can be considered a constant in the history of human relations, its linguistic expressions and representations of all kinds, and, consequently, also in literary and artistic ones. Women were (are?) often relegated within specific parameters (socio-cultural prejudices?) of subordination, dependence and (induced) vulnerability. These subjective and social perceptions and roles, that (men) have established and imposed from past times to the present day, have paralleled female action and self-realisation by women writers and artists, their works and/or characters.

Thus, in the past and, in some cases, as a reflection of the mentality and *cultural codes* of the time, literature and art have negatively influenced the perception of female identity (women artists and female characters) by promoting rigid gender roles and stereotypes, influencing those who did not meet the established standard and how individuals of different genders could be involved in the world of literature and art as authors, characters and even readers.

As a result, literature and art have had (and have) a significant impact on the promotion of gender stereotypes. This reinforced the stereotyped status of female authors, works and characters (submissive, beautiful and delightfully charming, emotionally overwhelmed; in short, an object –of love or otherwise). But, for these same reasons, they have played (and play) a key role also in reversing gender roles and their multiple representations, and in the emergence of Gender Criticism, which influenced (and still strongly influences) the way people perceived (and perceive) gender roles, focusing on the way cultures use symbols to define and impose the traits of a particular gender on individuals. So, we faced (and face): a gendered language, as a result of the historical patriarchy in which being a man was (is?) a normative, and everything else was (is?) marked as *the other* and discriminated; and a distorted perception of the author's gender, in that male artists had (have?) an advantage in creation, while women's artistic expression was considered immoral, treated with prejudice, underestimated and criticised.

In the context studied, many prominent women writers, artists and intellectuals stood out for their talent and active participation in the cultural, social and political life of their time. They used their literary and artistic production to prescribe gender equality and to define and promote different female identities. These figures, their works and their female characters are certainly recognisable, as are the sensitive topics they addressed. It can be stated, therefore, that literature and art are undoubtedly a powerful tool which allows women authors to reinforce or subvert the gender roles

characteristic of a time and place, and to rescue and reaffirm identity profiles that were (are?) too often ignored, undervalued and marginalised.

The articles collected in this monograph illustrate the outcomes of the research on some key testimonials of strong women's deviations, that not only challenged (and challenge) power and society but disrupted (and disrupt) the male-centred world created by men and male chauvinist societies. Their vision and progressive emancipation had (and have) a strong impact on the literary and artistic world and beyond, on society, politics and history. So, these contributions demonstrate how the representation of female identity in literature and art has evolved during the 20th and 21st centuries in this context. They focus on theoretical and hermeneutical aspects, supporting the analysis carried out with specific case studies, which highlight how women artists and intellectuals have been marginalised in the time in which they lived and created and with what strength they have reacted to struggle against this state of things, paving the way for the newest generation of female artists. The latter are currently enhancing the legacy of those who preceded them with great energy and lucidity, achieving results of great importance.

Thus, some contributions focus on the relationship between language, (socio)linguistics and identity, from different perspectives and with reference to specific historical moments, social contexts and figures of contemporaneity.

Amelia Benito del Valle Eskauriza, in "Identidad literaria, lingüística y de género en textos escritos en euskera por mujeres", studies the contemporary literary production in the Basque or Euskera language, deeply rooted in the socio-historical and economic context in which it was written and developed. She, therefore, reflects on contemporary plural and multicultural Spain –questioning to what extent it is really such– and its relationship with the other nations of the State, in particular, with the Basque one. As a result of her research, she emphasises the need for a new literary leadership in Basque signed by women, in the wake of Bizenta Mogel (1782-1854), but also Begoña Bilbao (1932-2005), Arantza Urretabizkaia (1947), Eukene Martín Sampedro (1948), Mariasun Landa (1949), Laura Mintegi (1955), Itxaro Borda (1956), Miren Agur Meabe (1962) o Karmele Jaio (1970). The issue, however, does not only concern Basque-language production but also the real possibility of reception in the Basque language by readers, an aspect that the author analyses in detail.

Maria Isabella Mininni, in "La identidad humillada de las *rojas*: vocabulario misógino en las páginas de los médicos Antonio Vallejo Nájera y Félix Martí Ibáñez", focuses on the role of language use and linguistic strategies in defining the identity image of women, this time from the perspective of their discrediting and oppressive use. She analyses how *las rojas*, the republican women who actively participated in the Spanish Civil War, were the subject of misogynistic considerations both in the theories of the Falangist psychiatrist Antonio Vallejo Nájera (1889-1960) and in the observations and recommendations of the anarchist doctor Félix Martí Ibáñez (1911-1972). By reading some of their pages, Mininni highlights the use of misogynist language, typical of men of science between the Civil War and the establishment of Francoism. In particular, she notes an insistent and generalised use of words and expressions conveying aversion, rejection and contempt for women, considered mentally inferior to men and therefore only able to perform the role of bride and mother assigned to them by the Francoist mentality.

Esther Gimeno Ugalde, in "La poética autotraductiva de Carme Riera: entre la recreación y el borrado", identifies in the self-translative process a mode of (re)definition of female subjectivity, in the transition from one linguistic dimension to another in a bilingual female author. She explores Carme Riera's self-translation

practice as a multifaceted and ambiguous literary activity, which nonetheless –or precisely because of this– defines her personal identity in a characteristic way. In the article, the stereoscopic reading of some texts from the short stories' anthology *Contra l'amor en companyia i altres relats / Contra el amor en compañía y otros relatos* (1991) reveals a self-translation poetics halfway between creative rewriting and geopolitical rewriting. As it is shown, the continuous negotiation between recreation and effacement constitutes a defining feature of Riera's work in Spanish, while makes it possible for her to be recognized as a Spanish author.

Asunción Bernárdez Rodal and Ignacio Moreno Segarra, in “De la comedia femenina al pesimismo feminista como *cathexis* en la serie española *Autodefensa* (2022)”, considering Connells' concept of cathexis and the framework of critical theory and discourse analysis, describe the political implications of the sentimental discourses proposed by *Autodefensa* (by Barenys, Blanca and Prieto, 2022), with a special focus on the perspective of feminism as a collective project. The authors examine the relationship between the genre of female choral fiction, deployed in the Spanish peninsular context to articulate postfeminist positions, and the affective politics of social and economic precariousness. The sadness, cruel optimism, self-mockery, post-feminist rage and hetero-pessimism displayed by the TV series can be seen as symptoms of the growing distance between the private, everyday lives of young Spanish women and feminism as a public discourse.

Another line of research deals with the body as a strong identity element. This topic is developed from different perspectives: the body and the concept of gender identity, not necessarily binary; the body that suffers violence and is therefore a sign of an assaulted, abused identity; the body and motherhood, desired, denied, to be combined with other key aspects of a woman's life or even tragically annihilated by infanticide.

Montserrat Palau Vergés, in “Cos i identitat de gènere: de les poetes catalanes dels anys 20 del segle XX a les dels anys 20 del segle XXI”, shows how, over the last century, gender identities have been treated by different disciplines and points of view. Women have gone from being otherised objects to being active subjects when writing about their identity and, specifically, their bodies and sexuality. In her article, Palau Vergés draws a general outline of these changes, based on the text and context of the Catalan poets of the 1920s: these women were beginning to explore their subjectivity through their bodies and desire, and they lived in a very different context from today's 21st century poets, who express themselves freely and break taboos. This is a fairly large group of female poets, starting with the forerunners Maria Antònia Salvà and Clementina Arderiu, and including Concepció Casanova, M. Carme Comas Valls, Simona Gay, Palmira Jaquetti, Roser Matheu, Maria Mayol, Maria Perpinyà, Anna Maria de Saavedra, Maria Verger, M. Teresa Vernet, Cèlia Viñas, Maria Faura i Cots, Mercè Vila i Reventós, Maria Roig i Verdaguer and Maria Verger.

Itxaro González Guridi, in “El tratamiento de la violencia machista en la novela *Tango urdina* de Aitziber Etxeberria”, analyses the physical and psychological violence against women in the novelist's work (2003), winner of the Donostia Opera Prima prize. To this end, a study is conducted on the manifestations of this violence and the consequences the abuse has on the victims. The final aim is to observe the extent to which literary fiction is able to reflect what theoretical production has conceptualised about this social problem. Indeed, the couple's relationship described, which becomes progressively more and more toxic, reflects how and in which terms this violence has consequences not only for the victim herself, but also for her immediate environment. One of the sub-themes to be highlighted in this text is the passivity of society with

regard to cases of abuse, considered a private matter and where intervention and/or denunciation is seen as an unnecessary interference in the lives of others.

Ánxela Lema París, in “Construír unha bi-bliografía: a bisexualidade na narrativa galega”, explores the representation of bisexuality in three contemporary Galician novels: *Dragona* (2007) by Xavier Queipo, *Sidecar* (2009) by Alberto Lema and *As estacións do lobo* (2019) by María Reimóndez. The article aims to offer a contribution to studies on the representation of bisexuality in contemporary Galician literature, specifically in the narrative genre, as a response to a questioned and invisibilised group, which feels the need to construct its own story and narrate it in its own terms. The contribution identifies the common points of the three novels with regard to the biphobic stigma and violence suffered by bisexual characters. Then, it highlights the connections in these works between this sexuality and non-monogamies: in the same way that no one stops being bisexual due to being tied to a specific person in the immediate present, non-monogamy is not abandoned due to having a relationship or lack thereof.

Mari Jose Olaziregi Alustiza, in “Maternidades contestadas en la narrativa de las escritoras Arantxa Urretabizkaia y Lourdes Oñederra”, studies from the perspective of the analysis of discourses on motherhood the referential Basque language-novels *Koaderno gorria* (1998, *The Red Notebook*) by Arantxa Urretabizkaia and *Eta emakumeari sugeak esan zion* (1999, *And the Serpent Said to the Woman*) by Lourdes Oñederra. Motherhood continues to be one of the most recurrent themes in current Basque literature written by women. In light of this, the aim of the contribution is to reflect on the peculiarities of these discourses and, especially, on the objectives that the act of remembering pursues in both novels. Memory is, therefore, the central element that makes it possible to transmit both narrative universes and to question gender politics and the roles that today’s society, and Basque society in particular, attributes to women.

Katuscia Darici, in “Crear o procrear: la difícil conciliación entre la maternidad y el oficio de la escritura en *A mí no me iba a pasar* (2019) de Laura Freixas”, deals with the difficult reconciliation between motherhood and the writing profession presented by Laura Freixas in *A mí no me iba a pasar*, her 2019 autobiography, while taking into account the feminist debate she faces as an essayist or prologue writer. The conflict between creating and procreating is a matter of negotiating with the ideological norms that define the construction of female identity. So, the author shows that Laura Freixas’ inner conflict is generated by the fact that she is relegated to second place, personally and professionally, compared to men, and how this inequality reflects a more general problem, which affects society as a whole. Freixas’ work sets up a debate and raises awareness among women: in this sense, it represents a cornerstone among works that stand out for dealing with the subject of motherhood from a woman’s point of view and in an unprejudiced manner.

Claudia De Medio, in “La madre infanticida en las literaturas castellana, catalana, gallega y vasca”, analyses four literary texts belonging to the different national literatures of the plural Spain that deal with the theme of infanticide, starting from the model of Medea. In particular, she focuses on *Intimidación*, one of the scenes of the play *Terror y miseria en el primer franquismo* by José Sanchis Sinisterra, the monologue *La infanticida* by Víctor Català, the poem *Medea en Corinto* by Luz Pozo Garza and the novel *Las madres no* by Katixa Agirre. The contribution pivots around comparing the different reasons that can lead woman to infanticide, stressing particularly the figures of the mothers and the relationship they experience with their social context, and identifying the elements that connect the lives of these protagonists, who are responsible

for the infanticides. De Medio also reflects on the environments in which these female characters live, since each of them is problematic and is at the origin of most of the reasons that drive the protagonists to commit the crime.

Another key aspect of the research developed is the definition of the identity profile of women in the historical and social context of their time, in a complex and often conflicting dynamic with the present and past. These articles address the issues of the difficult role of the female intellectual and writer and the (re)definition of women's identity through confrontation with the past and, therefore, with the legacy of memory.

María Teresa Navarrete Navarrete, in ““No sonriáis, ya sé que soy mujer”: la poesía de Concha Lagos y la construcción de la mujer de letras bajo el franquismo”, analyses the laborious reconstruction of the identity of intellectual women during Francisco Franco's dictatorship, in an attempt to break its oppressor's schemes. In her article, she achieves this objective through the specific case study of Concha Lagos (1907-2007). As the author illustrates, Lagos was an intellectual woman who played a central role in the literary field in the 1950s and 1960s, directed the publishing house *Ágora* (1955-1973) and the journal *Cuadernos de Ágora* (1955-1964). Nevertheless, she was subsequently cornered in contemporary Spanish literary history. The results of Navarrete Navarrete's research demonstrate that the difficulties in rescuing and affirming the female identity did not only characterised the historical period of the totalitarian regime in Spain, but also continued beyond its end, as other contributions published in this monograph confirm.

Adriana Nicolau Jiménez, in “Repensar el passat per transformar el present: les genealogies feministes al teatre català contemporani”, involves in the complex identity dynamic the relationship with individual and collective memory. Indeed, during the 21st century, the Catalan stage has seen a significant number of plays performed that contain the feminist motif of genealogies, i.e., homage to women from previous generations, with the aim of both recovering historical female referents and legitimising contemporary women. Including plays portraying illustrious women, plays on anonymous or collective female figures and plays focusing on family genealogies, a body of over 50 works testifies to the importance of this motif in the last two decades of Catalan theatre. The figures claimed through the staging range from important women, to anonymous women, to ancestors (mothers, grandmothers), to groups of female characters who give life and bring *multiple genealogies* to the stage.

Veronica Orazi, in “Ruth Sánchez y Jessica Belda, *Españolas, Franco ha muerto* (2020). La (anti)transición (anti)ejemplar según el Teatro Documento”, examines a key play of actual Spanish Documentary Theatre, by two contemporary playwrights. The work is part of the trilogy that the two authors have written to analyse the phenomenon of the Spanish transition, through the prism offered by the documentation that has inspired the three works. The first, *La Sección. Mujeres en el fascismo español* (2017) focuses on the figure and role of women during Franco's regime, while the third, *Homanage to Billy el Niño* (2021), deals with torture and the impunity of torturers. The play analysed allows the reader/spectator to understand in what terms and to what extent the transition was a partial democratisation process which, in many key aspects of individual and social life, undervalued the issues affecting women and, therefore, women themselves, whose effects can still be felt today. Sánchez and Belda offer an interesting example of Documentary Theatre that they reinterpret through satire, sometimes declined according to the nuances of grotesqueness, combining it with the effect of Brechtian distancing and estrangement.

Barbara Greco, in “*Las peregrinaciones de Teresa* (1950) de María Teresa León o la lejana ilusión de España”, studies the narrative anthology published by León in 1950.

Based on some reflections on the literature of the Spanish exile of 1939, the article focuses on the role of women in the stories collected in the anthology, with greater emphasis on the narratives linked to the theme of the Spanish Civil War and of memory, both personal and collective, central themes in the author's narrative production. León's attention to the disinherited, typical of her works, is reserved in these nine narrative pilgrimages to the sphere of the woman. This is materialized in the anthology through the protagonist or creator of the stories, behind whom, in certain cases, the voice of León herself can be heard, who takes advantage of her past experiences to create plots and convey a message denouncing the patriarchal mould of Spanish society.

Finally, the study of women identity is addressed both through the analysis of the specific themes present in the production of certain authors, not necessarily women artists, and through the female figures and characters that populate their works, in literary as well as figurative fields.

Carmen Blanco, in "El ave de la muerte. Luz Pozo Garza, poeta del *planto* por la pervivencia", studies this female elegiac Galician poet, whose work includes *plantos* and peculiar visions of life and death, and who was inspired by authors such as Rosalía de Castro, Castelao and Luís Pimentel. These three creators approached death in their production and conjured it with the knowledge of past tradition and the poetic genre of the *planto*, ranging from the word, the gesture, the sigh, the scream, the cry or the weeping to the placid silence. Rosalía was characterised as a *llorona* and was also accused of being a *llorona*. Castelao diagnosed the pains of communal *planto* like his precursor Rosalía and, following them both, Pimentel tried to cure the evils that cause weeping with medicine of superior overcoming poetry. Carmen Blanco situates Pozo Garza in this creative line: in her contribution, she studies the poet's elegiac production and its very personal features and style. In Pozo Garza's *poetics of chiaroscuro*, stand out certain key themes and poetic images with strong impact, such as love and death, freedom and death, loneliness and absence, rest and peace.

Laura Pache Carballo, in "La representación literaria de la feminidad: *Los Abel* de Ana María Matute", points out that the representation of the female image in cultural and artistic manifestations plays a key role in the construction of the collective identity, which adjusts to the demands of a society, of a moment, and embodies, in turn, the vision of the universe of the author who conceives it. The analysis carried out focuses on the different functions of literary portraiture, in order to explain the author's personal style. These representations reflect the society in which they are created and read and become part of the national identity. The female protagonist of the novel echoes the transformations to which she is subjected by time, relationships and, in general, her passing through the world. She materialises a plural female representation, claiming the possibility of occupying a space of her own, nourished by an existential and critical background against certain models and the devastating effects of a war.

Andrea Venerina, in "*La novela posible* (2022) de José María Merino: historia de una pintora rescatada", studies how the author recovers the identity of Sofonisba Anguissola, an Italian painter active at the court of King Philip II during the Spanish Golden Age. Merino's production shows a reappropriation of female discourse and at the same time a willingness to confront the mental and social habits (almost always the result of patriarchal and chauvinist conceptions) that have often degraded or silenced women. The novel combines three genres, namely the historical novel, the autobiography and the sentimental tale. It is therefore a multi-genre, polyphonic and introspective novel, in which the story of Sophonisba's life is interwoven with that of the author's confinement and his fictional female neighbor. In this way, Merino's personal experience during Covid-19 serves as a backdrop. The female protagonist of

the work, from a distant time, helps them to overcome their difficulties. Merino's works always straddle reality and fiction, dream and vigil and, in this case, literature and painting, as well as the present and the past.

Anna Ciotta, in "La donna verbo-visuale di Eva Armisén e le altre", first focuses on the image of women in the production of the Aragonese artist (Zaragoza 1969), always attentive and sensitive to gender issues; subsequently, she analyses the relationship between image and word in some of her works. All the women depicted in the paintings under study are Eva Armisén, or rather, each of them represents one of the many women who coexist in her. In this total identification is probably to be found the reason why her female figures do not have a precise identity that differentiates them from each other but are instead very similar. The study of the female figures represented in the works of Armisén allows Ciotta to identify and define her *verbo-visual* woman. The results of this research provide a precise indication: in painting, the contemporary woman, with all her facets and femininity, can be effectively represented not only through images but also through words, used by the artist in a synergetic connection, in an original and renewed combination of text and image.

All these contributions reflect, through the results achieved, the constant re-definition of the identity profile of contemporary women in the plural and multicultural peninsular Hispanic context, by studying artists and works from the perspective of the different scientific fields involved, which allow us to define the complex articulation of the phenomenon investigated in this specific area.

Consequently, the multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approach underlying the project is confirmed as the only possible methodological choice to reach consistent outcomes to correctly understand the varied nature of the topics under study.

The collected articles, which represent the final output of the 7th phase of the international research project on *Glocal Perspectives on Iberian Studies*, offer a rich and evocative overview, permitting such a diversified panorama to be reconstructed, according to chronological and geographical specificities that cannot be ignored, as they are key elements of this linguistic-cultural dimension.