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**Pura Fernández. ed. 2015. *No hay nación para este sexo: La Re(d)pública transatlántica de las Letras: escritoras españolas y latinoamericanas (1824-1936)***

The term ‘Transatlantic’ has in recent years become ubiquitous in Hispanic Studies on both sides of the Atlantic with its accommodatingly wide range, both spatially and in the number of subjects it can cover. Such has been the success of this topographical reorientation, propelled by the equally topical spatial turn in theory, that rather than ask what is Transatlantic, one should ask what is not. Against these accusations of discursive dilution, it is worth remembering that a decentralized approach is the founding principle of the Transatlantic lens. A wish to deconstruct the horizontal hierarchies that underpin traditional critical models drives these epistemological reexaminations. If anything, and to paraphrase one of its leading scholars in the Spanish field, Transatlantic studies risks being a victim of its own success (Ortega, 95). Yet far from being exhausted, it remains a useful perspective, as demonstrated by a recent collection of essays skillfully steered by its editor Pura Fernández. In this way, *There Is No Nation for This Sex. The Transatlantic Republic of Letters: Spanish and Latin American Writers (1824 – 1936)* (*No hay nación para este sexo. La Re(d)pública transatlántica de las Letras: escritoras españolas y latinoamericanas (1824–1936)*), joins a revisionist wave of works with a gendered angle that includes other recent compilations like *Communication Networks: Studies on the Press in the Spanish-Speaking World* (*Redes de comunicación: Estudios sobre la prensa en el mundo hispanohablante*) (2016), *Transatlantic Mosaic: Writers, Artists, and Imaginaries (Spain– U.S.A., 1830–1940)* (*Mosaico transatlántico: escritoras, artistas e imaginarios (España–E.E.U.U.,1830–1940)*) (2016) and its companion *Cross Perspectives: Writers, Artists, and Imaginaries (Spain– U.S.A., 1830–1930)* (*Miradas cruzadas: escritoras, artistas e imaginarios (España–E.E.U.U., 1830–1930)*) (2015).<sup>1</sup> All three share a similar impulse to reclaim the role of women during a span of time that saw the consolidation of the liberal state model and the foundations for our current democracies.

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<sup>1</sup> The term ‘Re(d)pública’ is not easily translatable, being a wordplay on ‘red’ (‘network’) and ‘república’ (‘republic’), a reference to the networking practices studied in the essay collection.

The Transatlantic lens reinserts Spanish-speaking countries into a map of modernity from which they have traditionally been excluded, portrayed as trailing behind its more precocious Anglo- Saxon counterparts when it came to implementing the foundations of liberalism. The contribution of women to the political landscape of the Hispanic world is thus buried under two assumptions: the peripheral position of these nations in the grand scheme of liberalism, and the political passivity of women, who regardless of nationality have been portrayed as safely barricaded behind the walls of the home. However, recent attempts to reframe Spanish liberalism within European political cultures (Paquette 2015) have contributed to a reevaluation of the role played by women in its construction and dissemination. Other maxims have been questioned too, crucially the traditional division between the public and the domestic, or as Anne K. Mellor suggests '[a]t the very least, the conception of a hegemonic "domestic ideology" [...] must be fundamentally revised to include women's active role in the discursive public sphere' (7).

Such theoretical shifts inform *No hay nación para este sexo*, which both firmly connects the Hispanic world to all the major intellectual streams of the second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, as well as questioning dichotic divisions that relegate women to the private sphere. Fernández clearly articulates this aim in the accompanying introduction: 'The analysis of the cultural practices of nineteenth century women writers show the need to rethink a theoretical model still based on the binary system that pits against each other the public and private sphere, professionalization and the realm of domesticity' (33; 'El análisis de las prácticas culturales de las escritoras en el siglo XIX evidencia la necesidad de repensar un modelo teórico que siga basado en el sistema binario que enfrenta las esferas pública y privada, la profesionalización y el ámbito de la domesticidad').

It is a much needed effort given the still small historical imprint of women in the construction of the modern state. Fernández highlights this female absence from the narratives of an emergent political liberalism with her choice of title, *No hay nación para este sexo*, a reference to a poem by the Romantic writer Carolina Coronado. Raised in a progressive family deeply invested in the fate of the nation, Coronado penned the ironically titled *Libertad* (1846) in which she denounces the exclusionary nature of a political project predicated on male participation: 'But, I tell you sisters / that the law is only for them / that women do not count / nor is there a Nation for this sex' (390; 'Pero, os digo, compañeras,/ que la ley es sola de ellos,/ que las hembras no se cuentan/ ni hay

Nación para este sexo’). A brief overview of the family trees drawn during this period, all dominated by men, serves to highlight the absence of women from the ancestral plots crafted by politicians, historians, writers and painters alike. The void is articulated by the writer and journalist Sofía Casanova more than half a century later after the laments of Coronado. In a 1910 lecture at El Ateneo de Madrid, still a minority in this forum, she denounces the fact that ‘the Spanish woman has been erased from the intellectual constellation of Europe, like Atlantis swallowed by the sea, a floating epiphany with only two names: Isabella The Catholic and Teresa of Ávila (Casanova, 5; emphasis Casanova’s; ‘la mujer española está borrada de la cosmogonía intelectual de Europa, cual Atlántida que devoró el mar, flotador epitafio de solo dos nombres: Isabel la Católica y Teresa de Jesús’).

It is this Atlantis that Fernández and her contributors seek to partly reconstruct a century later by looking at both sides of the Atlantic, as well as the cross-pollination that took place mainly between Spain, Latin America and the United States. As Beatriz Ferrús and Alba del Pozo point out in the aforementioned *Mosaicos transatlánticos*, the second part of the nineteenth century witnesses three key phenomena that would significantly shape the ideological landscape. Firstly the coming of age of Latin American states that had emancipated themselves from Spain in the first part of that century and the competing constructions of ‘Hispanic’ they produced; secondly the rise of a new imperialism led by the United States but that also cast Spain in an increasingly peripheral position as it hemorrhaged colonies; and finally a growing female presence in the public eye as they joined the different professional ranks and had their voices heard from an emerging number of new publications and platforms (Ferrús & del Pozo, 9). All of these form key pieces in our attempt to unravel the ensuing discursive patchworks of the period.

Revisiting the period through a gendered lens can throw light on the complicated relationship between women and a liberal project that Coronado had berated for ostracizing them, or as Fernández puts it ‘the paradox that it was liberalism that had put an end to women’s dreams of emancipation’ (27; ‘la paradoja de que fuera el liberalismo el que hubiera roto el sueño emancipador de la mujer’). Although women had to wait until the twentieth century to be granted the vote, the collections of essays assembled by Fernández showcase a veritable spectrum of lobbying strategies outside the realms of suffrage and political office. We are presented with a mix of strategies that go from old-fashioned clientelism and family connections – many of these women were

the daughters, wives or nieces of establishment figures – to the culture of assembly and associations that emerges with the modern age and underpins new civic structures.

Noël Valis examines the role of male patronage in the literary aspirations of Romantic writers in Spain, such as Carolina Coronado, and compares them to the equally complex power dynamics that characterized the relationship between the American poet Emily Dickinson and her mentor Thomas Wentworth Higginson. Rather than the romanticized tale of an outlier battling alone against an unflappable patriarchy, Valis reminds us of the male allies that helped them enter literary networks. Similar narratives of solitary struggle are deconstructed by Claudia Cabello-Hutt in her analysis of the exchanges between the Chilean poet Gabriel Mistral and the Spanish writers Carmen Conde and Concha Espina, both of whom offered to publish the former's work in Spain. As Cabello-Hutt reminds us: 'To explain their success as being purely a matter of extraordinary success, to strengthen the narrative of exceptionality of these women writers, prevents us from seeing the processes that empowers them, their strategies to insert themselves in the cultural field and the social and institutional barriers they face' (369; *Agotar la explicación del éxito en el talento extraordinario, reforzar la narrativa de la excepcionalidad de estas escritoras, impide ver los procesos que las habilitan, sus estrategias de inserción en el campo cultural y las barreras sociales e institucionales a las que se enfrentan*).

This does not mean that there was not an inherent power imbalance in these relationships – particularly in their relationship with male mentors – or that both parties always shared goals. Women were in a precarious position between a role firmly placed in the private sphere (the male patron is quick to reassure readers that any literary aspirations harbored by his protégé have not led to a neglect of her domestic duties) and at the same time one in the public eye through the visible act of promotion of their works. That women writers might have cultivated the more lachrymose varieties of Romantic imagery does not entail a complete lack of political engagement. Instead writers like Coronado are a product of their period, in this case a socio-cultural climate that conceived women as being in possession of a heightened sensitivity, which in turn legitimized those with literary ambitions to operate within a narrow poetic space. Valis shares this goal to take women out of a timeless apolitical space and recast their output as timely reactions to their period with a clear ideological weight. This engagement is foregrounded in the opening essay by William Acree 'The Strings of Female Duty. The Needle and The Symbolism Economy of War from a Transnational Perspective: 1810 –

1910 in the River Plate' ('Los hilos del deber femenino. La aguja y la economía simbólica de guerra en perspectiva transnacional: 1810 – 1910 en el Río de la Plata') on the propaganda potential of embroidering. Acree demonstrates how women exercised agency through their needles, contributing to national imagery through the shaping of such potent symbols as flags and military attire. There could be no clearer image to illustrate the domestic as political despite the reluctance of liberalism to acknowledge this. Although the liberal project rested on an explicit division between the public sphere reserved for men and the private realm allocated to women, the division was in some respects more of a prescriptive, rather than a descriptive one – undermined most visibly by the many working class women compelled to contribute to the household. Embroidery becomes a way for women to participate in nation-building, but only from the safe confines of domesticity. Consequently sewing blurs the boundary between the public and the private and confers women agency, yet paradoxically also cements the division of the sexes. After all, sewing legitimizes women to transgress the domestic realm precisely because it is an activity identified exclusively with womanhood, in the same way that their casting as inherently more sensitive creatures allowed Coronado and her peers to express themselves within a carefully sanctioned register.

A central theme within these essays is therefore the complex and often conflicting strategies employed by women in their pursuit of increased visibility. How they also promoted certain activities and emotions as innately feminine – thus feeding the gender gap – but with the aim of expanding their roles. Women writers often invoke sewing metaphors to appease any suspicions that their literary pursuits might prove disruptive, despite distractions. 'I baste my articles and the clothes for my family' ('Yo hilvano mis artículos y las prendas de vestir de mi familia') wrote the peninsular Pilar Contreras tellingly in *Mis distracciones* (1910), 'to such an extent, that many times I dropped the thread of mending to pick up the thread of an idea, and on several occasions, whilst I have wound a skein for a ball of yarn, I have wound up myself, lost the thread, incoherent, in the search and capture of a consonant – for example – to add the finishing stitches to a poem, getting all tangled up if I fail to find it.' (quoted in Ramírez Almazán, 177; 'tanto es así, que muchas veces dejé el hilo de zurcir, para coger el hilo de una idea y en bastante ocasiones, mientras he devanado una madeja para hacer un ovillo, me he devanado los sesos toda deshilvanada y desmadejada con la busca y captura de una consonante – por ejemplo – para empalmarla a una poesía resultando yo hecha el 'ovillo' si no he dado con él').

Riffs on sewing feature as recurrent and evocative metaphors in *No hay nación para este sexo*, in the multi-faceted attempt to unravel the strands of the different networks women stitched together. Some could be described as sororities, others included male allies and most of them extended beyond the Atlantic in an effort to find new literary markets and create new more inclusive spaces. This is not say that women were not impervious to imperialist discourse. A desire to contain Anglo- Saxon ascendancy by building bridges between Spain and its former colonies informs many of these Transatlantic exchanges. Other initiatives are more utopian and seek to dismantle hegemonic cultural centers that marginalize women. Often imperialist and utopian impulses coexist in complex but more strategically supple relationships.

Not only does *No hay nación para este sexo* expand the parameters of participation in nation construction, it also casts a wider net on the modes of production. Ana Cabello and Christine Rivalán Guego focus for example on the contribution of women to the short novel, a genre that enjoyed great commercial success in the first decades of the twentieth century, but which has been overlooked by canonical models. Others like Javier Lluich-Prats explore the periodicals of the time as ‘searching through the press permits us to outline the construction of the national’ (27; ‘el rastreo de diarios posibilita perfilar la construcción de lo nacional’). The nineteenth and early twentieth centuries experienced an extraordinary flourishing of the press, which would become one of the emblematic vehicles of modernity. Digital innovation, particularly the development of scanning technologies, has significantly eased our ability to navigate through old newspapers and other publications that ushered in the era of mass media communication and opened up new platforms for women with literary ambitions. Ironically, this modern development conspired in the long term to efface female contributions to modernity, like the fading yellowing pages of these newspapers withering in dusty archives. Digital innovations have enabled us to search through these preserved memories with greater speed and accuracy, in other words, our own modernity has provided us with the means to assess more comprehensively the remains of past modernities.

The collection of essays assembled by Pura Fernández constitutes an important contribution to the field of Transatlantic studies and generates new ways to think about gender and politics in the Hispanic world during the long nineteenth century beyond conventional narratives that have placed these countries at the periphery of modernity. Fernández displays an impressive erudition in the introduction that shows her deep

familiarity with all Transatlantic cross-pollination, from Bourdieusian fields and the polysystem theory of Itamar Even-Zohar to the more recent affective turn in theory. If anything, a reader less versed in heuristic trends might feel a bit lost at the swiftness with which Fernández occasionally moves from one methodology to other, sometimes covering a lot of theoretical ground in very little space. Some minor pacing quibbles aside, this is a deftly edited collection, ambitious in its scope and engaging in style and content that should inspire further research in the still sadly overlooked role of women in the shaping our modern national imageries.