

Book review

Us & Them: Women Writers' Discourses on Foreignness

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The present volume explores the representation of foreignness in the artistic production of women writers over the last four decades. In the scope of analysis, the author places the spotlight on the work of Irish and Galician authors, something significant due to the vast amount of similarities these geographical places have—from their Celtic roots to the will to vindicate their own identity, in both cases historically neglected in favour of the hegemonic one. Therefore, apart from focusing on the points of convergence and divergence between these discourses, the author delves into what in her own words is the “contingent nature of the constructions of the foreignness” (11). In the process, she examines how Irish and Galician identities may have been Othered. The fact that the author focuses on women writers is significant here, since, as Palacios puts it, “the notion of gender is especially relevant for any discussion of otherness” (14). Moreover, due to the fact that “migrant identity is characterized by perceptions of fragmentation and loss, and fosters a critique of tradition notions of the self” (11), Palacios also aims to assess if the authors under study tend to embrace or reject the imposed role of the Other.

With regard to the works under study, the ample and thoughtfully chosen corpus merits mention, as it covers a wide range of genres: poetry collections, short stories, novels, and dramatic pieces. In each of these sections, collected in Part I of this volume, the author focuses on a particular Irish and Galician writer who has made well-known contributions dealing with the topic of foreignness. After the analysis of each genre, Palacios concludes each study with a short section entitled “Correspondences”, which examines the results found in each comparative study and their relevance concerning the construction of the Other.

The first of this section is the one devoted to poetry (Section 1.1.). To bring the discussion of foreignness as near as possible to the present, the author examines two recent poetry collections: Alba Cid’s *Atlas* (2019) and Mary O’Donnell’s *Massacre of the Birds* (2020). As Palacios suggests, in an era of global environmental risks, these two volumes address the conflicts between the local and the global as well as the possibility that the ecological crisis may shorten the distance between “us” and “them”. In the process, she identifies two different reactions in each writer: while O’Donnell’s poetry is more focused on delivering criticism of despoliation, Cid’s collection puts the focus on biodiversity.

Differently from the previous section, in the one devoted to short fiction (Section 1.2.) there will be more than two authors under study, as Palacios analyses several short stories. In the case of the Irish texts by Fiona Barr, Anne Devlin, and Mary O'Donnell, she finds that Englishness plays a central role in the narrative, while the Galician stories selected—by Ánxela Gracián, Rosa Aneiros, and Iria Collado López—are more focused on the nomadic experience of women. Considering that the sense of being foreign turns into part of these women's identities, Palacios brings Julia Kristeva's arguments on the fact that “the foreigner lives within us”; hence, “by recognizing him within ourselves, we are spared detesting him in himself . . . the foreigner comes in when the consciousness of my difference arises, and he disappears when we all acknowledge ourselves as foreigners, unamenable to bonds and communities” (Kristeva 1). As Palacios concludes in this section, despite the similarities found, it may also be striking to the reader to observe that “the three Galician stories selected for this short fiction section do not deal with conflicts of a colonial tenor between a Spanish or Castilian dominant group and the Galician subaltern population” (Palacios 95).

Similarly, section 1.3. deals with two novels in which emigration plays a vital role: Evelyn Conlon's *Not the Same Sky* (2013) and Eva Moreda's *A Veiga é como un tempo distinto* (2011). As Palacios notes, given the distinctive differences in the presentation of migration challenges in the two novels, there is an important question concerning the role of representation of migration narratives in the global context following the 2007 financial crisis. Both novels depict harsh political and economic conditions in their respective communities, leading to large-scale emigration and subsequent interactions with other cultures.

The last section of analysis is devoted to drama (1.4.) and covers theatrical productions from the last two decades focusing on the reinterpretation of Greek myths in Irish and Galician productions. Palacios explores this by analysing Luz Pozo Garza's *Medea en Corinto* (2003) and Lorna Shaughnessy's *The Sacrificial Wind* (2016). She also offers a comprehensive overview of women's role in contemporary drama beyond acting or costume design. With this, the author suggests that the marginalization of women playwrights in contemporary theatre may mirror that experienced by female characters in classical Greek narratives. Moreover, Palacios explores the role of unfamiliarity within the myths of Iphigenia and Medea, giving rise to comparisons to contemporary Western society.

After having delivered the previous analysis, Palacios provides two additional sections, namely Part II and Part III. The former delivers an insight into the role of translation in constructing these discourses and its potential importance during the disseminating process of works originally written in “minoritized languages” like Irish and Galician (23). Moreover, it also deals with “strategies that maintain the local singularity of literary texts in transnational cultural projects” (183). On the other hand, the latter part expands the previous analysis delivering further insights into topics such as emigration and exile, wanderlust and travel and writing. Using a questionnaire, several authors have been asked about these topics. The selection of Irish writers includes Celia de Fréine, Lia Mills, Mary O'Donnell, Rita Kelly, Mary Hosty, and Lorna Shaughnessy; as for Galician authors, the author has chosen María do Carme Kruckenberg, Marilar Aleixandre, Luz Pichel, Chus Pato, Teresa Moure, Lupe Gómez, María do Cebreiro, Yolanda Castaño and Eva Moreda. Furthermore, it includes two appendixes, one devoted to expanding on the information provided about each writer and another presenting the actual questionnaire these authors were asked to respond to.

After having displayed the general perspective of the present volume, it can be stated that Palacios's research can be labelled as an invaluable contribution to the fields of study of foreignness and gender. At the same time, it provides a thorough analysis of a vast corpus of Irish and Galician works from the last decades which stands as a landmark in Comparative Literature. Palacios also concludes this research by noting that in both regions nomadic lives are seen as "a natural process" beyond the political, and economic triggers. Moreover, "in many cases, the beginning of their writing career is related to the experience of displacement and their travels" (203). Besides, the conclusions also give rise to further comparative research since, as Palacios has identified in the section devoted to drama, many of the recurrent motifs which combine gender and foreignness can be analogous to those found in classical myths. The general findings in each section shed light on the expected similarities but also on different approaches and tendencies to be considered in future studies.

Among the updated and thoughtfully chosen sources that sustain Palacios's research, she mentions Domiguez, Saussy and Villanueva's study on Comparative Literature whose statement may be significant in light of Palacios's conclusions:

[A] common reader tries to make sense of what s/he is reading, creates 'some kind of whole,' which is made up of the fabric of words as rewoven in her/his mental encyclopedia. Within this mental encyclopedia, connections are made among literary works, most of these connections consisting of comparisons across languages, time, space, cultures, arts, discourses. By comparing we build sense, for comparison is a cognitive operation, and a connection between at least two elements transforms both elements. (Domiguez et al. xi)

Indeed, Palacios's comparison of these works "transforms" the elements of study as it delivers new insights to be considered on the differences of the construction of the Other and the concept of foreignness in women authors.

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