

Gender and Nation
in the Spanish Modernist Novel

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Preface

When I finished writing *Crossfire: Philosophy and the Novel in Spain 1900–1934*, my sense of accomplishment was somewhat diminished by an acute awareness that the book paid little attention to women writers. The focus of the book—philosophical fiction—precluded a full treatment of the cultural landscape of the period, especially since women did not for the most part write what I defined as philosophical fiction. In contrast with Virginia Woolf’s hypothetical Judith Shakespeare of the English Renaissance, published women writers—notably Carmen de Burgos, Concha Espina, Blanca de los Ríos, Sofía Casanova, María Martínez Sierra (“Gregorio Martínez Sierra”), Margarita Nelken, Federica Montseny, Rosa Chacel, and María Zambrano—were present in early twentieth-century Spain. In large part because their literary forms and themes were different from those of the men who played an important role in shaping the criteria of canonical inclusion, however, these women simply did not make it into the literary histories.

This book begins to fill the lacunae left by *Crossfire* and other books on early twentieth-century Spanish literary production that have neglected women writers. I have limited this study to fiction because, although male and female authors approached fiction in significantly different ways, both men and women cultivated the genre extensively between 1900 and 1939 and beyond. Male Spanish authors of the early twentieth century (often referred to as the Generation of ’98, the Generation of ’14, and the Generation of ’27) were more modernist in the traditional understanding of the term, emphasizing technical and verbal innovation in their efforts to represent the contents of an individual consciousness. Women engaged in what I call social modernism, a mode that focuses on interpersonal relations within formal and informal so-

cial parameters. Women's fiction, although less aesthetically innovative than male fiction, was known to for its presentation of themes such as women's social roles and unconventional sexual arrangements that were revolutionary by comparison to male novelists' treatment of the subjects. Unlike elitist male fiction, women's fiction was often published in popular venues.

This book opens up the Spanish modernist canon to include the social modernism of women writers, a modernism that focused on domestic issues, gender roles, and relations between the sexes. The lines of division between aesthetic and social modernism are not fixed. Semicanonical male authors such as Felipe Trigo wrote popular novels that argue for free sexual expression. Trigo also tendered certain feminist ideals, such as women's right to work and the need for paid leave for pregnancy and childcare. But because some of Trigo's themes would take my discussions in diffuse directions, I do not include his works in this book.

In part because of the difference in their emphasis, I originally considered devoting this book exclusively to women novelists, but that approach would have simply reversed the lack of balance. Moreover, a single-sex book would not have allowed me to argue, as I do here, that larger sociopolitical discourses (most specifically those on gender) had an important impact on both male and female authors of Spanish fiction in the modernist period. The work of women writers was shaped to a degree by the dominant male culture, and male literary production responded to some extent to the increased visibility that women came to achieve in the public arena at the turn of the century. As I directed attention to aspects of the novels other than philosophical content (as in Miguel de Unamuno's *Niebla*, for example), there emerged a commentary on contemporary gender roles, often of a prescriptive nature.

One of the greatest challenges in composing *Gender and Nation in the Spanish Modernist Novel* was to find significant common threads in the writings of men and women. Although, to some extent, male and female authors operated in different spheres and wrote for different audiences, I sought to highlight diverging approaches to the common interests of both spheres. One salient concern of male and female novelists was the past, present, and future of Spain as a nation, especially its traditions and the role of domestic arrangements within those traditions—that is, the

way in which gender informed their view of Spanish society. Novelistic reaction to the proliferating discourse on women and then to the growing feminist movement in Spain is a constant throughout the modernist period (roughly 1900–39). Thus, the intertwining of thought about the way that Spain was or ought to be and the proper place of the genders within a particular model of Spanish society guides the overall design of this work.

As the reader progresses through the book, it will help to keep in mind some working definitions of “gender” and “nation,” slippery concepts that have occasioned much theoretical writing since the 1970s. These multilayered terms appear to shift meaning in different contexts. Except when I refer to novelists as being male or female, where the meaning is essentially a biological category or sex, “gender” usually refers to a socially constructed condition in which male- or femaleness is defined by social norms and legal prescriptions. Many of my observations about male and female writers and their novels imply that social conditions influenced the way that men and women wrote and help explain the differences in male and female modernist narrative practices. The term “nation” refers to two basic categories: (1) At the end of the nineteenth century, the idea of the nature of Spain occasioned theorization that led to a variety of national myths, such as (a) the intrahistorical essential nature of the Spanish soul embodied in Castile and Spain’s glorious national imperial past and (b) new interpretations of literary figures (especially Don Quixote and Don Juan) that either exalt or vilify the Spanish nation. (2) “Spain” refers to a concrete contemporary political entity analyzed and criticized by writers who sought to influence and change it. Gender formed an important part of both the theories of a Spanish national essence and the efforts to shape the body politic.

This book is organized roughly along chronological lines, beginning with narratives from the pre–World War I era (Miguel de Unamuno’s *Paz en la guerra*, María Martínez Sierra’s *Tú eres la paz*, Azorín’s *El alma castellana* and *Castilla*) that wrestle with the concept of Spain’s eternal nature (Chapter 1). Chapters 2 and 3 analyze primarily pre–World War I fiction that incorporates themes from literary classics that allow male and female authors to field topics related to gender within the national tradition. Miguel de Unamuno’s *Niebla*, Concha Espina’s *La esfinge maragata*,