Modern Spanish Women as Agents of Change

Essays in Honor of Maryellen Bieder

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Introduction

Jennifer Smith

Donald J. Trump secured the U.S. presidency in 2016 with 53 percent of white women's vote despite his explicitly sexist and hostile comments about women during the campaign. What followed was a great deal of speculation about why so many women, in twenty-first-century America, would vote for a man who exhibited such behavior. In an article in the *Nation*, Kathleen Geier argued that it was because feminism had failed to address the economic situation of white working-class women.[1] In an article in *Quartz*, Marcie Bianco related it to many white women's decisions to ally themselves with white men rather than women of color.[2] Citing what she sees as a "toxic cocktail of . . . internalized misogyny, and not-so-subtle racism," Bianco argued that this strategy always has, and always will, "impede women's political and economic progress."[3] Building on Bianco's idea of internalized misogyny, I would like to stress a point that is germane to the purpose of the volume at hand: it is not only men but many women who have rejected and continue to reject basic feminist principles, and this is the reason feminist scholarship and activism is still needed today.

Inspired by Maryellen Bieder's work as a teacher and scholar, I have dedicated most of my own research to the life and works of Emilia Pardo Bazán (1851–1921), one of Spain's first feminists. She was a prolific and talented author at a time when women who dared to take up the pen were dismissed in Spain as *literatas* (a term akin to the derogatory English word *bluestockings*). Frequently describing her own writing style as "manly" and "virile" so that it would garner the serious consideration it deserved, she rejected her subordinate status in society by boldly asserting that she had chosen to live by the same rights and freedoms that men enjoyed (and she did to the extent possible). Indeed, she was no big fan of political liberalism, which, she argued, had converted women into second-class citizens by giving rights and privileges to only one half of the population.[4]

Two things about Pardo Bazán's feminist beliefs and activism have haunted me in light of the recent U.S. presidential election results and many women's rejection of the 2017 Women's March on Washington, which occurred the day after Trump's inauguration. First is Pardo Bazán's assertion that women were actually a bigger obstacle to the success of feminism than men. In an article for the Buenos Aires newspaper *La Nación*, she wrote, "Mientras que los hombres españoles se burlaban del feminismo, las mujeres se crispaban, se escandalizaban se deshacían en protestas de sumisión a la autoridad viril. . . . Eran las peores enemigas de las que pensábamos reivindicarnos de derechos"[5] (While Spanish men made fun of feminism, women cringed, they were scandalized, they broke down in protests in favor of submission to masculine authority. . . . They were the worst enemies of feminism to those of us who were trying to earn our rights). Similar to Bianco's reference to female Trump supporters' "internalized misogyny," Pardo Bazán attributed women's opposition to feminism to a long cultural tradition of exalting men and masculinity and women's consequent lack of belief that they could find the same qualities they admired within themselves: "El inmemorial predominio del hombre en la ley y en la costumbre, ha afirmado en él carácteres que a la Mujer le ha ido perdiendo . . . la mujer hará bien en desechar lo que, a mi modo de ver, la tiene anquilosada: la timidez, la desconfianza en sus propias fuerzas, el amilanamiento fatal, fruto de tantos años de servidumbre"[6] (Men's immemorial legal and cultural dominance have created in men characteristics that women have lost . . . women would do well to disregard that which, in my opinion, keeps them stagnant: timidity, lack of confidence in their own strengths, a terrifying sense of being threatened, the fruit of so many years of servitude).

Unlike Anglophone suffragettes of the time, Emilia Pardo Bazán was not part of a much larger group; she challenged sexism mostly by herself and mainly through her writing. In her lifetime, however, she never saw most of fruits of her efforts: she was never allowed entrance into the Royal Academy of the Spanish Language, and when she finally was allowed to teach a course at the University of Madrid in 1916, near the end of her life, the course was boycotted by students and faculty alike and eventually canceled; they did not want a woman teaching at the university.

The second curiosity about Pardo Bazán's feminism that has come to mind these days was that she never spoke about female suffrage. There is nothing on record to explain this silence. However, those Spanish feminists who followed in her footsteps in the early twentieth century give us some insight. Many early twentieth-century Spanish feminists feared that because women were uneducated and strongly influenced by the Catholic Church and its traditional values, they would vote against a feminist agenda.[7] And indeed, when women were finally given the right to vote by the liberal government of the Second Republic (1933), the party that had given them the right to vote was swiftly voted out of office.[8] The degree to which women were responsible is still under debate,[9] but they were most definitely not overwhelmingly thankful to the party that had granted them suffrage, and this seems to confirm Pardo Bazán's assertion that women themselves were, at the time at least, an obstacle to their own liberation.

Returning to my initial point, then, I think Pardo Bazán understood something that we contemporary feminist women might sometimes forget: a lot of women are not feminists. Even today there are still women who subscribe to traditional values and are attracted to the idea of a strong man who will take care of them—maybe for the same reason that so many people of both sexes are attracted to the idea of a religious savior who will save them—more than to the idea that they are just as capable of fending for themselves.[10] Many conservative American women's disassociation from, and even condemnation of, the Women's March on January 21, 2017, is further evidence of this mind-set. Thus Pardo Bazán's view of women as impediments to their own emancipation seems to still hold today. However, unlike in Pardo Bazán's time, ideas that were once considered radical are now embraced by millions of women and men across the globe. Indeed, the 2017 Women's March has been estimated to be the biggest march in world history.[11] And for that, we are indebted to women like Pardo Bazán and many of the other women writers studied here, who were a small minority of defiant women who had to fight these battles with much smaller numbers.

Although things surely improved for women by the 1970s in the United States (Spain, of course, did not firmly establish full voting rights for women until 1977),[12] there still was a lot of work to be done, a fact attested to by the emergence of second-wave feminism. An important part of this battle was an increase in the number of women entering the world of academia, still very much a field dominated by men. One of these women was Maryellen Bieder. Bieder completed her PhD at the University of Minnesota in 1973 with a dissertation on narrative technique in the post–Civil War novels of Francisco Ayala. Wayne C. Booth's *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1966) introduced "theory" and the reading of "texts" (a new word) through theory to the academic world of the time. Booth's eminently readable handling of narrative, perspective, irony, and unreliable narration came at just the right time for analyzing contemporary fiction and informed Bieder's dissertation, and soon-to-be book, *Narrative Perspective in the Post–Civil War Novels of Francisco Ayala.*[13] The book, which undertook a theoretical reading of two of Ayala's novels through Booth's categories, especially perspective and unreliability, was revolutionary in Bieder's career and linked her to the "theory" revolution in literary studies. It broke with a long tradition of plot analyses, thematic studies, and biographical approaches that linked the characters, places, and action of the novel to real people and places in the author's life.

While Bieder continued to study male writers—her work on Benito Pérez Galdós and Juan Goytisolo immediately comes to mind—it is mostly her groundbreaking work on Emilia Pardo Bazán and other women writers that has earned her a lasting reputation as a leading scholar of international stature in the field of Spanish literature. Bieder's interest in women writers came after the completion of her degree in the early 1970s. Bieder revolutionized the extant criticism on Pardo Bazán by bringing the question of gender more explicitly into the fold. Her early work on Pardo Bazán dealt largely with how this author sought to garner respect and authority as a novelist at a time when most male novelists refused to take a woman's work seriously.[14] She also explored Pardo Bazán's relationships with other women writers of the time,[15] a theme she had taken on again recently in her research on Pardo Bazán's relationship to the English author Gabriela Cunninghame Graham.[16] Moreover, Bieder helped define Pardo Bazán as one of Spain's first feminists by studying her essays on women,[17] her role in shaping an emerging feminist discourse in Spain,[18] and her ingenious narrative strategies that subverted conventional understandings of gender.[19] One of the first to give serious attention to Pardo Bazán's interest in the French literary movement of decadence, Bieder also studied how Pardo Bazán used it for feminist objectives in her last novel, *Dulce dueño* (*Sweet Master*).[20] In addition to studying the novels, essays, short stories, and theater of Pardo Bazán,[21] Bieder had recently turned her attention to visual portrayals of Pardo Bazán in the periodical press[22] and had begun to explore Pardo Bazán's views on race, religion, and class in relation to gender.[23]

Bieder was also pivotal in raising awareness of female authors who had yet to garner much critical attention when she entered the field. In the 1990s, she began to publish essays on the life, writings, and works of Concepción Gimeno de Flaquer (1850–1990)[24] and Carmen de Burgos (1867–1932).[25] And as early as the mid-1970s, she began researching contemporary women writers, particularly those who lived through and wrote about the Spanish Civil War. Her work on Mercè Rodoreda (1908–1983) focused largely on the role of language in shaping female identity in the novels and short stories by the Catalan author,[26] and her work on Carme Riera (1948–) investigated the interplay of gender and nationality and gender and literary consumption as well as the question of historical memory.[27] Bieder's recent coedited volume *Spanish Women Writers and Spain's Civil War* brings together cutting-edge research precisely in this field. Bieder also explored questions of nationality and historical memory in relation to gender in articles written on works by Marina Mayoral,[28] Neus Carbonell,[29] and Cristina Fernández Cubas.[30]

By the time I arrived at Indiana University as a graduate student in 1996, Maryellen Bieder was well established as a full professor teaching a wide range of courses on topics related to nineteenth- through twenty-first-century Spanish literature. She had rightfully garnered the reputation among the graduate students as one of the most intellectually engaging professors in the department. It was, of course, as my professor and mentor that Bieder had the greatest impact on my life and career. Her genuine interest in my ideas gave me confidence in myself and an enthusiasm for my work that is still with me today. In one of our discussions in her office on teaching, Bieder said to me, "If you really reach one or two students in a class, your class has been a huge success." I ponder these words several times a semester when not all my students' faces mirror my own enthusiasm for the works I am teaching, and it makes me feel better. But more importantly, I mention it here because Bieder, through her teaching, not only reached me but helped bring meaning and direction to my life. So I would now like to modify Bieder's statement to say that if in the course of one's career a professor can affect a student's life as profoundly as Bieder affected mine, that professor has had a successful career.

As a sign of my appreciation, I have put this volume together as a testament to the various ways that Bieder has inspired me and so many of the other fine contributors here who are all former students or colleagues of Bieder. These essays seek to honor Maryellen Bieder's influence and invaluable scholarly contributions by bringing together innovative research on modern Spanish women as writers, activists, and embodiments of cultural change.[31] It also seeks to remind us all of the importance of the work we do and of the lives and efforts of the many brave, dedicated women who came before us. This collection of essays is innovative in its focus on women as political activists, its inclusion of lesser-known women writers, and its incorporation of recent theoretical approaches such as postcolonialism, intersectionality, Lacanian psychoanalysis, affect theory, spatial theory, and queer theory. Moreover, the authors included here study women as agents and representations of social change in a variety of literary and nonliterary genres—namely, short stories, novellas, novels, plays, essays, and journalistic pieces. The essays cover canonical authors such as Emilia Pardo Bazán, Leopoldo Alas "Clarín," Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, and Carmen de Burgos as well as lesser-known writers and activists such as María Rosa Gálvez, Faustina Sáez de Melgar, Sofía Tartilán, and Caterina Albert i Paradís.

PART I: MODERN SPANISH WOMEN WRITERS AS ACTIVISTS

This section looks at nineteenth- and early twentieth-century women authors whose writings were specifically tied to their political activism. These women writers embraced causes ranging from the opposition to slavery, colonialism, and discrimination based on race, sex, and class to the support of female suffrage, freemasonry, and freethinking. Their activism, sometimes unconventional and even paradoxical, is long overdue for the critical attention it receives here. In the first essay in this section, "Gender, Race, and Subalternity in the Antislavery Plays of María Rosa Gálvez and Faustina Sáez de Melgar," Akiko Tsuchiya examines the intersections of these three categories in two abolitionist works: María

Rosa Gálvez's *Zinda* (1804) and Faustina Sáez de Melgar's *La cadena rota* (*The Broken Chain*; c. 1876). While *Zinda* and *La cadena rota* were written during different periods of the nineteenth century, both works highlight the struggle for the affirmation and autonomy of the female subject through the denunciation of slavery, which stood as a metaphor for woman's condition. In both Gálvez and Sáez de Melgar's dramatic works, the female subaltern subject—representing the racial other—must negotiate between the Enlightenment values identified with the masculine, metropolitan subject and the dominant discourses of race and gender that inscribe the colonized woman in a position of (double) subalternity. Departing from Gayatri Spivak's famous question "Can the subaltern speak?" this essay interrogates the notion that antislavery discourse, rooted in the Enlightenment project, necessarily leads to the decolonization of the subaltern subject, or a questioning of colonial discourse. At the same time, it argues that while Gálvez's work asserts female agency within the limits of the colonial order, subsuming the question of race under gender, Sáez de Melgar goes further in destabilizing metropolitan discourse through a recognition of the female subaltern subject's embodied personhood and her emergence as a political subject. Thus Sáez de Melgar is able to forge a space of discursive resistance that was not yet possible earlier in the century.

In the next essay in this section, "Forging Progressive Futures for Spain's Women and People: Sofía Tartilán (Palencia 1829–Madrid 1888)," Christine Arkinstall examines how Tartilán, from the 1860s until her death in 1888, carved out a prominent name for herself in fin-de-siècle letters. Associated with freemasonry, Tartilán contributed to Spanish and Portuguese periodicals, corresponded with leading contemporary male writers and critics, and hosted literary *tertulias* (gatherings) in Madrid in the late 1870s. On receiving her calling card, which identified her as an *escritora* (writer), Clarín admiringly described her as a *monstruo* (monster). First and foremost an essayist, she wrote critical works on Arab literature in Spain, historical studies, and a history of literary criticism. However, she also translated from Portuguese and Catalan, and her *Costumbres populares* (*Popular Customs*; 1880) enjoyed the distinction of a prologue by Mesonero Romanos. Her staunch advocacy and activism for the education of women and the working classes are evident in her *Páginas para la educación popular* (*Pages for the People's Education*; 1877), essays that previously appeared in the periodical *La Ilustración de la Mujer* (*The Enlightenment of Women*; Madrid). In fact, she replaced Concepción Gimeno as the director of this periodical and served in that role from approximately 1875 to her death. There Tartilán worked closely with other major female writers such as Matilde Cherner and Josefa Pujol de Collado. To date, the few articles that address Tartilán's works have focused on *Costumbres* and *Páginas*. Seeking a greater approximation to this figure and her place within fin de siècle Spanish culture, Arkinstall proposes to analyze a selection of