SIX
GALICIAN
POETS

Translated by
Keith Payne

Edited and with an introduction by
Manuela Palacios

2016
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XOSÉ MARÍA ÁLVAREZ CÁCCAMO

The poems ‘Sinto a traxedia dos trens...’ and ‘Fronte a nós os rostros da ruína...’ are published here for the first time.

CHUS PATO
‘eu, Davinia Bardelás...’; ‘Xonás: Pero que facía ela alí...’ from m-Talá (Vigo: Edicións Xerais, 2000), also translated into English by Erin Moure in m-Talá (Exeter: Shearsman, 2009); ‘o que vostede escribe é representativo...’; ‘o exterior do poema...’ from Charenton (Vigo: Edicións Xerais, 2004), also translated into English by Erin Moure in Charenton (Exeter: Shearsman and Ottawa: BuschelBooks, 2007); ‘Non, o paraíso non é a infancia...’ from Hordas de escritura (Vigo: Edicións Xerais, 2008) Critics’

The following poems are published here for the first time: ‘Decide ir cara esa boca (unha vocación), en consecuencia emprende(s) unha viaxe en barco’, ‘As sibilas somos Xeografía...’, ‘Pódese escribir coa imaxinación un poema que non se quere escribir? Carta a un poeta imperial’.  

**YOLANDA CASTAÑO**


**ESTEVO CREUS**


**MARÍA DO CEBREIRO**

‘nota sobre a escultura’, ‘Ismael et agar dans le désert (un cadro de francois-joseph navez)’, ‘o frio’, ‘a pel’, ‘o sangue’, ‘o amor’ from *O deserto / The desert* (A Coruña: Apiario, 2015) Critics’ National Prize, 2016; ‘a loba’ from *Non queres que o poema te coñeza / You don’t want the poem*

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Six Galician Poets is the thirteenth volume in a series of bilingual anthologies which brings contemporary poetry from around Europe to English-language readers. It is not by accident that the tired old phrase about poetry being ‘lost in translation’ came out of an English-speaking environment, out of a tradition that has always felt remarkably uneasy about translation – of contemporary works, if not the classics. Yet poetry can be and is ‘found’ in translation; in fact, any good translation reinvents the poetry of the original, and we should always be aware that any translation is the outcome of a dialogue between two cultures, languages and different poetic sensibilities, between collective as well as individual imaginations, conducted by two voices, that of the poet and of the translator, and joined by a third interlocutor in the process of reading.

And it is this dialogue that is so important to writers in countries and regions where translation has always been an integral part of the literary environment and has played a role in the development of local literary tradition and poetics. Writing without reading poetry from many different traditions would be unthinkable for the poets in the anthologies of this series, many of whom are accomplished translators who consider poetry in translation to be part of their own literary background and an important source of inspiration.

While the series ‘New Voices from Europe and Beyond’ aims to keep a finger on the pulse of the here-and-now of international poetry by presenting the work of a small number of contemporary poets, each collection, edited by a guest editor, has its own focus and rationale for the selection of the poets and poems.

In Six Galician Poets we are presented with work which exemplifies the range of concerns and preoccupations of the last three decades. Vigorous and innovating, contemporary Galician poetry has a strong presence on the literary scene of Spain, continuing a centuries-old unbroken line of literary creation in the language of the country. It is remarkable in its capacity for artistic questioning, and for political, social and historical commentary combined with a deep-felt connection with the land and nature. And this is what the poems in this anthology seem to have in common: they appear to grow from roots firmly planted in home soil, their branches reaching out beyond the boundaries of a single literary tradition into a space where they intertwine, blossom and bear fruit.

The publishers would like to thank all those who have made this edition possible.
The Spanish-language poet Antonio Gamonedo, who was awarded the Miguel de Cervantes Prize in 2006, has recently said of Galician poetry: "Galician is the language in which, from a qualitative point of view, the most important poetry in Spain is currently being produced." Apart from the complimentary value-judgement of this statement, we notice that it acknowledges the intimate bond between language and literature, and adds currency to the prevailing idea that today Galician literature is literature written in the Galician language.

It is precisely this bond between language and literature that helps us trace an early peak of Galician poetry back to the Middle Ages when the West Iberian Romance language known as Galician-Portuguese produced some of the most influential lyrical writing in Western Europe. The Cantigas of the court of the Castilian king Alfonso X and the poetry produced by King Denis of Portugal are, along with the output of other remarkable minstrels of the troubadour tradition, outstanding examples of this early achievement of Galician-Portuguese lyric production. Galician poetry did not, however, enjoy such renown again until the development of regionalist movements in the nineteenth century. This was the time of the Galician Rexurdimento (Revival) which aimed to foster a differentiated sense of identity. The year 1863 witnessed the publication of a collection of poetry entirely written in Galician, Cantares Gallegos (Galician Songs), by Rosalía de Castro – few other national literatures can boast or even acknowledge a female founding figure – and the 1880s flourished with the poetic output of ground-breaking poets such as Manuel Curros Enríquez and Eduardo Pondal.

Continuing political and cultural activism at the beginning of the twentieth century brought with it the creation of academies, associations, journals and Galician language movements that invigorated Galician culture, while throughout the 1920s and first half of the 1930s, the intellectuals involved in the magazine Nós (Ourselves) stimulated the internationalization of Galician culture. Atlanticism and Celticism remained among the driving forces for this transnational effort, and Irish writers such as James Joyce and W. B. Yeats received privileged attention through various translation projects, while, simultaneously, the European avant-gardes were introduced to Galicia through various literary journals.
and the poetry of Manuel Antonio, especially his book De catro a catro (From Four to Four, 1928).

General Franco’s military uprising in 1936 and the ensuing Civil War (1936-1939) and dictatorship (1939-1975) resulted in a major setback for both Galicia’s political aspirations and its cultural flourishing, with many of its intellectuals executed or forced into exile, and Buenos Aires becoming one of the surrogate centres of Galician culture. Within the Spanish peninsula, Galician culture was slow to recover during Franco’s dictatorship, mainly because of the hostility of Spanish nationalism to other peripheral cultures, languages and national aspirations. The year 1950, however, constituted a landmark in the reconstruction of Galician culture with the foundation of Galaxia, a publishing house with a broad range of literary projects, among them the launch of the journal of Galician culture Grial which remains in print to this day.

The poet and critic Xosé Luís Méndez Ferrín has identified three successive, post-war, generations of poets, although it should be noted that they are neither self-enclosed nor homogeneous groups. The first one was the ‘Generation of 1936’, which included poets who experienced the severity of the Civil War and the harassment of its aftermath. These were writers with a wide variety of formalist and existential concerns that stretched from a quest for the simplification of verse, as in the case of Aquilino Iglesia Alvariño, to elaborate and erudite formal structures, as in Ricardo Carvalho Calero’s work. Their subject matter ranged from an engagement with the problems of poverty and repression, as in Celso Emilio Ferreiro, to a radical perception of intimacy, as in María Maríno. These themes also co-existed with legendary ones, as in Álvaro Cunqueiro, and with the nostalgic exploration of the past as in Pura Vázquez. The following generation was an intermediary one as its name, ‘Promoción de Enlace’ [Connecting Generation], suggests. Among its writers we find the prolific Luz Pozo Garza and María do Carme Kruckenberg, both of whom were intent on refining poetic expression into a stately and dignified form while at the same time exploring existential concerns about life, love, the passage of time and death. Méndez Ferrín’s third generation of writers was born after the Civil War and gathered around a number of cultural initiatives in Galicia (Minerva Literary Festivals) and in Madrid (Brais Pinto Group). These poets embraced innovation in
writing and engaged in left-wing nationalist politics, while still remaining a very heterogeneous generation. Some wrote anguished poetry of social realist import, as in the case of Manuel María, while others, such as Uxío Novoneyra, explored transcendental rapport with nature. Xohana Torres stood out from the male voices of this generation thanks to her rigorous and exploratory poetic craft, the scrutiny of memory and the celebration of female bonds.

The second half of the 1970s, with the advent of democracy after General Franco’s death, witnessed a notable change in the course of poetry and the rise, in Galicia, of neo-avant-garde and counter-cultural poetic groups such as ‘Rompente’. The manifesto of the group ‘Crafo fondo’ and Galician writers in Madrid – gathered around the magazine Lota – were similarly active in the re-drawing of poetic practice. Critics point out the novel approach to poetry by writers such as Méndez Ferrín, Arcadio López Casanova and Alfonso Pexegueiro. Their broad-ranging literary allusions, their precisely-constructed collections, and their reflections on the intertwining of language and power marked a watershed in Galician poetry.

The new political and legal situation in Galicia, with the 1981 Statute of Autonomy and the 1983 Law of Linguistic Normalization, favoured the growth of the publishing industry and cultural production. Publishers initiated poetry catalogues, cultural associations awarded prestigious literary prizes and new literary journals disseminated contemporary poetry. There persisted, in a number of writers, a strong political engagement although the social-realist approach was more often than not seen as a throwback to another era. The list of writers with noteworthy collections published in this decade is rewardingly long and includes, to name only a few, Xabier Rodríguez Baixeras, Dario Xohán Cabana, Xosé María Álvarez Cáccamo, Ramiro Fonte, Manuel Rivas, Pilar Pallarés, Miguel Anxo Fernán-Vello, Claudio Rodríguez Fer and Ana Romani.

The 1990s continued to be prolific years with the formation of numerous poetry groups, among them the ‘Batallón Literario da Costa da Morte’, and collective publishing projects such as Letras de Cal. Estevo Creus, one of the poets in this anthology, was a founding member of several of these innovatory cultural initiatives. Poetry prizes, catalogues, festivals and performances in public places brought poetry
closer to the general public. The younger poets had finally been able to study the Galician language at school and university, which showed in their confident use of the language and their solid knowledge of the Galician literary tradition. They frequently used free verse and a conversational tone, included subject matter from daily life and often committed themselves to alternative ideologies such as feminism, ecology and antimilitarism.

While new publishing ventures gave preference to experimental projects and to innovation, the 1990s also witnessed the unprecedented emergence of female writers who added their voices to those of the older generation of women poets with longstanding literary careers, such as Xohana Torres, Luz Pozo Garza and María do Carme Kruckenberg. Chus Pato’s ground-breaking experimentation pushing the frontiers of the poetic genre co-existed with the radical questioning of gender roles evident in the texts and performances of Ana Romaní and Antón Lopo. Marílar Aleixandre’s familiarity with the tenets and main voices of international feminism guided her relentless inquiry into power relations both outside and within the domestic world. Also in the 1990s, Yolanda Castaño, Olga Novo, María do Cebreiro and Lupe Gómez – each of them in her own distinctive manner – began inspiring literary outputs that contributed compelling reflections on the tensions between genre and gender, the desiring body, the allure of nature and the notions of belonging and alienation. This decade marked an unparalleled peak in the publication of Galician poetry. The editors of the anthology *Efecto 2000* (Letras de Cal, 1999) included almost one hundred poets who had published their first collections in the 1990s.

The new millennium began with the consolidation of poetry that aimed at social, cultural and political intervention. Such was the case of Redes Escarlata (Scarlet Network), with their left-wing nationalist stance, as well as their ecological and political activism in response to the environmental catastrophe caused by the sinking, and subsequent oil-spill, of the oil tanker *Prestige* in November 2002. As important as the leading intellectual figures that shook the citizens’ conscience were the numerous initiatives and networks assembled by writers that would strengthen the ties among them and favour enduring cultural projects. The onset of the financial crisis,
however, entailed draconian cuts in public funding of cultural projects which, together with the changing circumstances of the publishing market, have made the publication of poetry more difficult.

While the historical survey above may give the impression of neat generational divides, in reality writers of different ages, with different interests and literary trajectories, have coexisted and have often collaborated in collective cultural projects. Younger poets are now well acquainted with their predecessors' work and converse with them in their own writings.

SIX GALICIAN POETS

The authors included in this anthology are poets whose innovative contributions have enriched Galician poetry – their work is followed attentively and each new publication is eagerly anticipated. Two of the poets in this selection, Xosé María Álvarez Cáccamo and Chus Pato, have consolidated literary careers, but they re-invent themselves with each new work. The other four poets, Yolanda Castaño, Estevo Creus, María do Cebrêiro and Daniel Salgado are younger in age, but they also have a good number of collections already published, have been awarded some important literary prizes and enjoy the recognition of their peers. These six poets are characterized by their unrelenting examination of literary forms and by their probing of new conceptual worlds. Readers will recognise in their work some common concerns and occasional mutual influences. The order for the presentation of the poets in this selection follows the date of publication of their first poetry collection. The poems, and their order, were chosen by the writers themselves with the exception of Daniel Salgado, whose poems were selected by Ana Salgado.

Critics have identified two main interests in the poetry of Xosé María Álvarez Cáccamo, one that explores the private realm of childhood and family bonds and another that gives expression to his civic engagement and denunciation of injustice. In writing about the past, he avoids nostalgia by revisiting individual and collective memories and breathing new life into them, and acknowledges his indebtedness to a type of symbolism shaped by surrealism and the exploration of emotions. He acknowledges that his work has been influenced by Lorca's surrealist expressionism (in Poet in New York), Rilke's existential hermeticism, Whitman's vigorous and
overflowing discourse, Neruda's imaginative performance, Borges's conceptual rigour, Ginsberg's choral and critical consciousness and, of course, by many other writers in the Galician literary tradition.

Although his first poetry collections were published in the 1980s, Álvarez Cáccamo has chosen to be represented in the *Six Poets* anthology series by poems written after 1990. Some of his texts are prose poems with long poetic and rhythmical lines, while others play with the tensions between short lineation and syntax. There is an elegiac tone in poems that deal with intense, though brief, past love, set in desolate landscapes and frequently articulated through oxymoron. His acute sense of plasticity recalls imagist poetry that he, as a Galician poet, moulds into his personal style. His portrayal of the natural world enriches the symbolism of the poem and at the same time accurately depicts the local geography and landscapes that inspire his poetry.

One term that, according to Miriam Reyes, characterizes Chus Pato well is that of 'transgression', as she interrogates the limits of literary genres and enquires into social and intellectual formations such as language and history. Pato justifies the figure of the reader as a producer – and not merely a consumer – of meaning. Attentive to recent developments in contemporary philosophy, she creates in her writing a multiplicity of voices, forms and settings. About her writing experience she has commented: “I remember the impossibility of writing that which was imposed on me as writing, and the impossibility of language – I write in a language that I do not know in any normal way” (Casas 2003). Among her international literary influences Pound, Plath, Bachman, Celan, Hölderlin, Shelley, Byron and Beckett could be mentioned, but she is also unyieldingly committed to the construction of a potent national literary system in Galicia. Pato endorses those poetic projects that refuse to write what has already been written, that transform our perception of language, that engage in a profound mutation of poetic discourse, that unearth formerly silenced voices, and that explore the limits between the speakable and the unspeakable.

Although Pato published her first poetry collection in 1991, she has chosen, for this anthology, mainly poems from a series of five books published after 2000 together with a few formerly uncollected poems. In these five books, Pato
explores the writing process and the building of identity, both national and individual. Contrary to the unified subject of much lyrical poetry, Pato deliberately constructs mutating subjectivities that destabilize our few certainties and grand narratives. Her metaliterary reflections are often intertwined with political thought. Although the format of this anthology has led her to select short fragments from her books, her work usually deploys large-scale formats that are more suited to her experimental and unending quest.

Yolanda Castaño is to be thanked, first of all, for her painstaking efforts to facilitate the present anthology. This versatile poet has upheld the poet’s right to wear and flaunt a variety of personae, regardless of social impositions and expectations about the figure of the female writer. Hers has been identified as “a poetics of mirrors, masks and mirages” (Requeixo 2012) that traces the meandering flow of consciousness and reaches into the realm of illusion and ambiguity. Her early poetry collections of the 1990s explored woman’s desire and eroticism in the wake of other Western female writers who had struggled to reclaim the female body and inscribe women’s desire in the poem. Her more recent books focus on identity as articulated by language, construed through appearance and interrogated by a detached Other both within and outside of us. Castaño relishes a provocative and ironic stance with a subtle range of tones, from the caustic to the comic. Among the poems selected by Castaño are those from her most recent collection A segunda língua (The Second Language), which examines the sundry recesses of the writing profession.

Estevo Creus has participated in the creation of alternative literary projects as diverse as publishing houses, poetry movements and theatre companies. His experimentation with graphic design, audiovisual media, and his combined literary and musical performances are proof of his imaginative and audacious stance. His early poetry was associated with the surrealist and naïve poetic currents of the 1990s in Galicia, and he is indebted to the European avant-garde, in particular to Dadaist rebelliousness, radical dislocation, and a deep mistrust of language. Writing is for him a compulsion “so as to organize the I, to organize the world” as he puts it. His apparently straightforward language conveys complex psychical states and the uniqueness of his characters and
voices must be approached from a non-rational standpoint. Although his poetry books mostly consist of long poems that pour over and beyond the page, Creus has, for this anthology, selected significant excerpts from various books so that we can gain an insight into his landscapes of desolation and undecidability.

"Our body is not a temple or a plot of land. Our body is a battleground," stated MARIA DO CEBREIRO in her essay about the various configurations of the female body in the poetry of Galician women in the 1990s. Maria do Cebreiro called her contemporaries' attention to the urgency of registering the visible traces that suffering leaves on people's bodies. Writing about the body, she claimed, must avoid self-complacency and should expose power relations. Women writers, she added, would do well to conquer as many territories of the physical body as possible, and to scrutinize its intersections with gender, language, class, science, and nature.

The poems by Maria do Cebreiro in this anthology often explore the circumstances of bodies in pain, and examine our perplexity when confronting artistic representations of the body and experiencing a magnetic pull towards them. Although her dramatic voices challenge the mystique of motherhood, with an equally freemind they acknowledge their fascination with maternal bodily functions. The importance she places on our human and animal nature suggests that a new approach to nature is possible in women's poetry that is neither biologically deterministic nor a mere intellectual construct. Of the eight poems by Maria do Cebreiro selected here, six form part of her most recent collection entitled O deserto (The Desert, 2015).

The critic Miriam Reyes has said of DANIEL SALGADO that he writes the poetic chronicle of our adverse times and targets our critical thinking with tools indebted to the philosophical and aesthetic discourses of Gilles Deleuze, Karl Marx and J. G. Ballard. Among the international writers Salgado most respects are Dante, Faulkner, Dylan Thomas, Conrad, Mahmoud Darwish, Hölderlin, Celan, Ginsberg – whose Howl Salgado translated into Galician – and Perec. As important as these are the musical influences of free jazz and the music of John Coltrane, Charles Mingus, Hank Williams and Brian Wilson. Maria Xesús Nogueira has suggested that their music may be behind certain structural and rhythmic patterns in
Salgado’s poetry, with its overflowing verse, the recurrent enjambments, and its abruptly syncopated rhythms.

Manuel Outeirinho has affirmed that Salgado’s “rough speech [...] searches for and performs freedom, conscious as he is that literature is not a sin (it is only a sin when it plays an ancillary role).” Salgado’s poetry is not a mirror of the world but a provisional and precarious testimony of havoc. Bonds, whether literary, social or personal, are stretched and fissures scrutinized – to the extent that Salgado’s poems become deeply destabilizing. Ana Salgado’s thoughtful selection from eight different published collections provides us with a highly informative and representative survey of the poet’s writing from 2004 to 2013.

Manuela Palacios

REFERENCES


