

RESEÑAS

SILVIA BERMÚDEZ AND ROBERTA JOHNSON, EDS. *A New History of Iberian Feminisms*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018. 522 pp.

This hearty anthology is packed with essays that treat the intellectual history of feminism and the “Woman Question” from the eighteenth century to the present. A strength of this collection is its multiple frames of reference for exploring “Iberian” feminisms. The essays compare figures within the peninsula and give attention to the transatlantic traffic in people, publications, and ideas. The sweep and detail of the essays make accessible a substantial swath of the extant printed literature, including minor and ephemeral texts published before 1910, complementing works like *Eve’s Enlightenment* (2009) and, for the earlier period, *Education and Women in the Early Modern Hispanic World* (2008). The comprehensive bibliography is a boon, though disaggregating primary and secondary sources might have made this tool more user-friendly.

The first two sections cover works published before 1910 and the second half (in four sections) takes the story to the present, with discreet treatments of the Republics and dictatorships. The transnational aspects of Iberianness attenuate as the Portuguese and Spanish empires dissolve over the nineteenth century, while constitutionalism and nationalism emerge as the main ideological containers for political discourse. Given the vagaries of Spanish state formation, it is no surprise that the details panned up in the works of minor and major female thinkers are consistent with the weak suffragism and family-based, religious social vision that have been well established in the historiography of feminism in the Luso-Hispanic world.

What emerges as fresh from this collection is the recognition of the prevalence of feminist conservative thought in Luso-Hispanic women’s writings. For most authors, “feminist conservatism” relates to Catholic piety and its corollary, the sanctity of marriage, rather than to left-right ideological frameworks. In this way, one of the most provocative hallmarks of Iberian feminist conservatism is the notion that men need to change rather than women. The sexual double standard and men’s abuse of women in public and private life are roundly critiqued in the conservative frame. The conservative appeal skirted the “liberation” and emancipatory discourses condemned by antifeminists for promoting masculinization and promiscuity. However, the conservative “men must change” approach would have required a social movement and fairly sweeping enforcement mechanisms. Instead, most of the early thinkers resolved, as women so often do, to change themselves, carving out imaginative spaces in periodical literature, theatrical scripts, fiction and poetry in order to nourish an

alternative sense of self. Despite the “shackles of slavery [that] are women’s patrimony,” affirmed the poet Rosalía de Castro (1835-1885) of Galicia, “[n]evertheless, I am free, free as the birds, as the breezes...” (135).

The other striking insight of this anthology is the affirmation that the rationalist intellectual tradition among pro-woman women writers lasted for an impressive length of time, well into the late twentieth century. This tradition underwrote a long-standing feminist commitment to education, including self-education, rather than more specific theological, legal, or psychological analyses of gender as a construct. The Enlightenment tradition fed a humanist and human rights sensibility rather than specific theories of gender or power. This “human agenda” (218-19) is mostly pragmatic and commonsensical as opposed to dogmatic. Its eclectic style of critique survived dictatorship and fascism, remained comfortable with contradictions and was, almost of necessity, opportunistic, despite the fact that most opportunities led to dead ends. For example, several authors make interesting observations about the period when Basque and Catalan were outlawed under Franco, when relatively unschooled women compared to men had prolonged access to these languages. Yet this cultural attachment neither anchored nor motored women’s aspirations within regional nationalisms in particular nor within cultural or educational agendas in general. The post-WWII story shifts almost entirely to the north in these editors’ handling, so readers are left wondering about Andalucía.

In the later twentieth century, the limitations of the Iberian rationalist tradition became manifest in its power to defang actual social changes. Socially-minded urban intellectuals theorized the vote as merely symbolic or masculinist rather than equalizing; paid labor was reframed as wage slavery rather than liberatory. The abstract, intellectualized quality of Iberian feminism derives from its disconnect from robust alternative social solidarities for women beyond the family and the Church. Iberian feminists claimed heirship to a transformative intellectual tradition, but one significantly relegated to private and semiprivate readerly settings in which women experienced individual conversion and personal enlightenment. Other privileged women in “the West” were better able to exploit empire, revolution and industrialization to their advantage. Iberian women, on the other hand, sustained remarkable continuity in authoritarian church and family relations.

Nonetheless, a number of authors suggest consistent aspects of Iberian feminism took cues from transnational constructs like the Republic of Letters, global Catholicism, and even the “International Year of the Woman” in 1975. These transnational frames provided the crucial contexts for Iberian women to contemplate their place in the world, rather than the liberal statist and constitutional frameworks so typical of Anglo-American social

thought. The new Spanish democratic constitution of 1978 was a victory for “equality” feminists, some of whom explicitly identified as “feministas ilustradas” (318), but the country nonetheless witnessed backlash, rooted in Barcelona, in favor of “difference feminism” and a powerful vindication of “a feminine self” (318). Buoyed in part by French feminism, recent Iberian women writers have resisted the demotion of spiritualized motherhood and the sacrifice of the globally significant Virgin Mary in favor of the flattening sameness – or worse, the masculinist sop – of nation-state citizenship.

Stronger attention to Pan-American feminism as a discreet political and cultural project would have strengthened the transnational reach of this anthology and its treatment of religious and rationalist thought. Nonetheless, Bermúdez and Johnson have produced a major work that belongs on the shelf of serious history students interested in women, Iberia, and feminism.

PATRICIA A. SCHECHTER
Portland State University

NURIA GODÓN. *La pasión esclava: Alianzas masoquistas en La Regenta*. West Lafayette: Purdue Studies in Romance Languages, 2017. 224 pp.

En *La pasión esclava: Alianzas masoquistas en La Regenta*, Nuria Godón presenta una nueva y convincente lectura de la novela canónica de Leopoldo Alas, *Clarín*, centrada en la manera en que el masoquismo funciona en el texto. Si bien la crítica literaria hasta ahora ha prestado poca atención a la dinámica masoquista, para la autora de este excelente libro ésta es tan fundamental a su interpretación que vertebra su lectura de la novela en torno a ella. El objetivo de Godón es asentar que el masoquismo de Ana Ozores junto con la dialéctica masoquista que establece la protagonista con su confesor Fermín del Pas llevan a que adquiera un rol como sujeto activo en la novela. Para llevar a cabo esta interpretación a contrapelo se requiere, según Godón, reconsiderar el masoquismo como teoría del dolor y reformularlo dentro del contexto español decimonónico, explorando los usos culturales del sufrimiento en la tradición cristiana y española desde un punto de vista feminista para así abrir un “espacio de reflexión” en que se transforma la articulación del masoquismo en los estudios peninsulares modernos. Por tanto, nuestra autora examina el entramado masoquista de la novela con el fin de mostrar que el masoquismo no es una psicopatía sexual de sumisión que le resta agencia a la mujer, sino más bien una conducta transgresora que “se manifiesta como lugar de resistencia y no de asimilación” (11), ya que significa una ruptura con los roles género del