

## Between Tradition and Modernity: The Galician Poet Filomena Dato's Nineteenth-Century Poetic Revision of Feijóo's "Defensa de las mujeres"

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Filomena Dato Muruais was a figure of note in late nineteenth-century Galicia. In Tere Gradín's 2010 article "La importancia de llamarse Filomena" published in *La Opinión A Coruña* she is described as "una de las voces más significativas y reconocidas del feminismo galleguista de entre siglos, aunque . . . su nombre pueda pasar desapercibido para muchos." Dato was the second woman, after Rosalía de Castro, to compose poetry in the Galician language though, like Rosalía, she wrote in both *castellano* and *galego*. With her 1887 "Defensa d' as mulheres" ("Defensa de las mujeres"), however, she became the first woman to compose a feminist-themed poem in Galician.<sup>1</sup> Included in the lengthy catalog of female figures in Juan Pedro Criado y Domínguez's 1889 *Literatas españolas del siglo XIX* (91),<sup>2</sup> the poet would also become a respected member of a wide literary circle that included such national figures of note as Unamuno and her fellow Galician Emilia Pardo Bazán, as well as the major regional figures of Galician literature and the Revival of the late nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup> Jesús-Fernando Román Alonso, in his biographical study of Dato, documents numerous appraisals of her poetry by her contemporaries, as well as frequent examples of works dedicated to her both in Spain and abroad, in places like Cuba, where the Galician immigrant community was significant.

Noteworthy among Dato's Galician language poems from her 1891 collection *Follatos* is the lengthy "Defensa d' as mulleres," inspired by the essay "Defensa de las mujeres" written

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<sup>1</sup> Quotations from Dato's original poem reflect the state of the Galician language at the time of its composition, nearly 100 years before the 1983 "Lei de Normalización Lingüística," which created uniform rules on spelling and usage. The Spanish translations included here, taken from the bilingual edition of *Follatos* (Vigo: Trymar, 2007), are intended for "el lector que desconozca la lengua gallega" and, according to the editor's statement, "se han respetado los modismos y giros propios de la lengua originaria" (5). They are primarily functional translations, with occasional minor errors, reflecting no intention to "mantener la indiscutible calidad literaria del texto al cambiarle el lenguaje, ni mucho menos, reinventarla" (5).

<sup>2</sup> The author unfortunately lists the poet's second surname incorrectly as "Murnay" instead of "Muruais."

<sup>3</sup> Other regional figures of the Galician Revival or *Rexurdimento* include Manuel Curros Enríquez, Manuel Murguía, Valentín Lamas Carvajal, and Ramón Cabanillas. Other Galician women writers such as Fanny Garrido and Sofía Casanova also gained recognition in the late nineteenth century, though they did not write in the Galician language.

by the Benedictine monk and central figure of the Spanish Enlightenment Benito Jerónimo Feijóo (1676-1764). Originally composed for a Feijóo-themed literary contest as part of the 1887 “Juegos Florales” in Orense (and for which Dato won the top honor for that year’s event),<sup>4</sup> the poem revives but also revises Spanish intellectual tradition, “entering” as Adrienne Rich famously suggested, “an old text from a new critical direction” (9) and in the process bringing an updated nineteenth-century perspective and a new set of challenges to Feijóo’s progressive discourse regarding women’s roles and rights. More importantly, Dato’s text documents the complexities of the emerging feminist consciousness in late nineteenth-century Spain, and the interplay of religious, scientific, and social discourses attempting to define gender roles and women’s rights at the time. Although the poem evokes certain conservative Catholic overtones, and much of its argumentation is rooted in traditional Christian imagery and tradition, it in fact presents clear and at times rather bold assertions in defense of women’s rights, albeit within the framework of an early (and evolving) feminist consciousness in Spain, one which did not assume these two thought systems—religious tradition and progressive views on women’s rights and roles—to be mutually exclusive by nature.

“Defensa d’ as mulleres” is the most often cited of Dato’s poems, both by her own contemporaries and by the few literary scholars who have referenced her work.<sup>5</sup> The text is divided into eight sections, many evoking distinct points of Feijóo’s original essay, others newly composed by the poet, but in all cases bringing a revised perspective and often new information to bear on the issues surrounding women’s place in society and potential for intellectual work, leadership, and political action. As the opening piece in a collection of poetry already noteworthy for its evocations of Galician customs and legends, anti-war sentiment, and social commentary, including a biting critique of fashion, the text merits attention particularly since it was recognized with an award (by a committee that included Emilia Pardo Bazán) and subsequently published amid an environment in which, according to Carmen Blanco, the “polémica feminista” had “moi pouca presenza, semellando case non existir” (74). But Blanco’s remark in her study *Literatura galega da muller* begins to suggest a contradiction between theory and practice where discussion of the women’s movement in nineteenth-century Spain is concerned. While on one hand she can accurately state that there was no organized feminist movement in Galicia until well into the twentieth century, she also recognizes that Dato’s poem, which she first locates “dentro da liña profeminina do cristianismo” (324), nevertheless has a “ton reivindicativo” that could be called “feminista” given that it critiques “a tradicional misoxinia, que identifica ás mulleres co mal, e o androcentrismo prexuzoso, tanto do pensamento filosófico coma do científico” (325). The poem, she argues, also defends “a capacidade política e intelectual” of women, and the

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<sup>4</sup> See Helena González Fernández.

<sup>5</sup> While Dato’s name is recognized, traditional academic treatment of her work to date has been rather thin, and more biographical than analytical in nature. In addition to Román Alonso’s general treatment of Dato’s work, the poet is highlighted, for example, in Aurora Marco’s *As precursoras* (63-65), or González Fernández’s brief biography (subtitled “A poeta galega máis premiada de finais do XIX”) included in the section “Álbum de mulleres” curated by the Consello da Cultura Galega. Both scholars foreground Dato’s prize-winning “Defensa d’ as mulleres,” placing it within a wider context of her feminist thought and practice. They note her participation as a speaker at various literary events, including her 1900 speech as President of the *Xogos Florais* in Lugo, which displayed a “marcado acento feminista” (Marco 63).

successes achieved “gracias á sabedoría e á bondade femininas ao longo da historia, a pesar do ambiente hostil no que tiveron que florecer” (325).

Despite a longstanding narrative documenting the lack of an organized feminist movement in Spain (and more specifically in Galicia) in the nineteenth century, several recent studies have shed useful and productive light on the issue through a simple shift in perspective, assessing the question within a more fitting context. Katharina Rowold explicitly recognizes this disconnect between retrospective categorizations and historical reality in her examination of women’s higher education in nineteenth-century Europe, demonstrating that while an organized women’s movement did not officially begin in Spain until 1918, “decades after the development of similar movements in Britain and Germany,” the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries nevertheless marked a period of “feminist awakening” and “feminist consciousness” (155) there that was “as ‘modern’ as elsewhere” (156). Sharon R. Roseman similarly argues that in Spain “discussion about sexist barriers to equal opportunities for education, training, employment, terms of divorce, and so on prevailed over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries,” even though the historical narrative regarding feminism in the Spanish context suggests “that an explicitly feminist politics developed late . . . relative to the situation in other countries” (46). For her part, Marco, in her introduction to *As precursoras* suggests that the “polémica feminista” indeed had a strong presence in Galicia in the nineteenth century, affirming that “educación e instrución, . . . emancipación, o dereito ao sufraxio, a muller e a escrita, son temas asíduos en libros, nas páxinas de revistas e xornais e en conferencias” (11). Finally, Karen Offen’s broad and inclusive definition of the term, “distilled from historical evidence ranging over many centuries of European history,” further facilitates the notion of a developing if not explicitly defined feminism in late nineteenth-century Spain. In her view, “Feminism is the name given to a comprehensive critical response to the deliberate and systematic subordination of women as a group by men as a group within a given cultural setting” (20). Both “a system of ideas and a movement for sociopolitical change” (20), and “an encompassing program of sociopolitical critique and remediation” (24), feminism “posits the notion of gender, or the differential sociocultural construction of the relationship and behaviors of the sexes, based on observed physiological differences, as its central analytical concern” (21). This mode of thinking is certainly evident in Dato’s poem and elsewhere in the literature of the period in Spain.

Other studies suggest that misunderstandings and inaccurate representations of the emerging feminist consciousness in Spain begin well in advance of the nineteenth century, and from early on are tied to lingering notions of the incompatibility of Spain’s Catholic culture with the possibility of feminist progress. In examining the role of women in eighteenth-century Spain, Theresa Ann Smith finds a similar misrepresentation of historical reality, which, despite a series of “gains and losses” (14) through which ultimately “women, present in much of Spain’s political discourse beginning in the 1740s, disappeared from most public institutions in the early nineteenth century” (11), nonetheless suggests that “gender was at the heart of the Enlightenment in Spain” and that “redefining gender identities was critical to Spain’s political, social, and economic modernization” (7). She sees the misrepresentation as in part due to “the language historians use to describe and analyze women’s history today,” which was developed “in the 1980s and 1990s by scholars of France, England, and the United States.” Thus, “for

scholars of other national contexts, the language of the discipline has been an uncomfortable fit" (3). Further complicating interpretations of Spain's history is the common notion or "persistent myth" that "liberal rationality entails the wholesale rejection of religious passion." Thus, just as "[w]hen measured against a French yardstick, the virtual absence in Spain of the strident religious critiques made by key French philosophes has led many to emphasize Spain's lack of Enlightenment spirit" (5), a similar bias has tended to emerge regarding Spain's nineteenth-century feminist tradition. Even as far back as 1907, Francisco Mañach noted the negative impact of Concepción Arenal's Catholicism on the perception of her feminist achievements, despite her significant influence; he cites an unnamed critic who accused her approach to women's issues of having a "patente de catolicismo poco limpia, sin cuya falta, resultaría un feminismo [*sic*] aceptable" (27).

Thus, if on one hand Dato's text can be characterized as feminist, it must also be pointed out that her stance ranges from moderation and conventional notions to contentious and controversial assertions, and that while she held firm views on the intellectual capacity of women and their inherent right to equality with men, she couched these views within a fairly traditional Catholic belief system. However, this phenomenon cannot be discounted in late nineteenth-century Spain, as feminist thought was developing in distinct cultural settings throughout Europe. Criado y Domínguez viewed their "fidelidad á la doctrina católica" as a "mérito principalísimo" of Spain's nineteenth-century literary women, one which, from his androcentric perspective, he valued as highly, if inaccurately, as their "alejamiento de la política en lo que ésta tiene de lucha implacable, de fiebre devoradora" (59). Rowold argues, from a contrasting perspective, that many Spanish feminists of the time "appropriated aspects of religious and scientific thought to varying degrees to argue for changes in women's rights and roles" but also notes, rather than the "fidelidad á la doctrina católica" ascribed to them by Criado y Domínguez, these women's "simultaneous engagement with how both of these sources of authority had potentially adverse effects on perceptions of the position of women" (171).

This duality becomes evident in Dato's text. On one hand, the poem's reliance on arguments based in Christian tradition, as well as its conventional and essentialist characterization of women, might appear jarring and perhaps not compellingly *feminist* to a contemporary reader. But at the same time these features are complemented and challenged by the poet's subtle subversions of Christian tradition, and by equally compelling arguments regarding the socio-cultural construction of gender and its detrimental effect on women not only throughout history but in Dato's own time, particularly on the question of women's education, which Rowold characterizes as an "ideological battlefield" in late nineteenth-century Spain (155).

Many sections of Dato's poem evoke or reiterate the structure and arguments of Feijóo's text, though in most cases she expands those arguments while moving them in a different or more contemporary direction. But a significant portion of the entire text is comprised of the poet's own insights and critiques, most notably a stronger and clearer stance on women's right to education, and critiques on subjects such as the hypocrisy and injustice regarding gender roles in the context of war, a theory about the possible human origins of the mythical goddesses of Antiquity, and an alternate reading of biblical tradition that exalts rather than denigrates women, all territory on which Feijóo did not tread in 1726. Finally, despite the various conventional elements that Dato's poem exhibits, the primary

and most important aspect in which she diverges from Feijóo's essay is, in fact, in her underlying principal argument. Feijóo, for all the progressive thought expressed in his text, ultimately still held firm to the logical acceptance of male dominance, an order seemingly ordained by God and not fit for questioning, though within this order he sees both the possibility and the need for more respect and rights granted to women. The Benedictine, suggests Smith, "hoped to improve the lives of men and women and ensure moral behavior, but he did not imagine significant alterations in the social order" (34). Dato's text is more accurately aligned with the discourse of differential equality or complementarity between the sexes, a stance often associated with the anarchist movement, which posited that "women and men possessed different aptitudes, equally necessary for the march of progress" (Rowold 179). While by comparison Feijóo's tone may appear apologetic or conciliatory (primarily because he addresses a mainly male, and therefore likely hostile, audience), Dato makes no such apologies in presenting her case. Although her readers would have been both male and female, the explicit recipients of the poem's message, named beginning with its second section, are men ("Homes" ["Hombres"; 8; 9]) who were from that point confronted with facts and history, much of it borrowed from Feijóo, some of it newly introduced by the poet. In a particularly illustrative moment, Dato suggests a playful impatience with Feijóo's thorough, lengthy style and the rational strategies employed in his essay. While he spent pages examining the question of unequal levels of "humedad" in male and female organisms, and whether or not it accounts for differences in their intelligence, she reduces his arguments to four simple lines of verse:

Eu non me met' a estudar  
si tein húmido o cerebro,  
.....  
porqu' eu as cousas non busco,  
que soilo busco os efeutos. (18)

Yo no me meto a estudiar  
si tiene húmedo el cerebro,  
.....  
porque yo las cosas no busco,  
que sólo busco los efectos. (19)

Dato both opens and closes her poem interpreting Christian scriptural tradition in a gently subversive manner, re-framing women's place in the creation story and the narrative of Christ's life, culminating in the Crucifixion.<sup>6</sup> Contrary to the traditionally held biblical version of woman created by God as a virtual afterthought, primarily for the companionship of men, Dato makes the case in the opening section of her poem that woman was, in fact, "a espréndeda coroa" ("la espléndida corona") of all creation; it is not the sea, or the stars, the white light of dawn or even, in her imagery, "a estáuta de barro / qu' . . . un alma lle infundira" ("la estatua de barro / que . . . un alma le infundió"; 6; 7). Rather, for Dato:

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<sup>6</sup> If the framing stanzas are primarily religious in nature, however, the remaining sections of Dato's poem are decidedly secular, and many evoke the primary arguments of Feijóo's essay while adding a contemporary perspective and character to these assertions.

Foi a muller que tivo  
a fertuna grandiosa  
de xuntal-as.bellezas  
que ten total-as cousas. (6)

Fue la mujer que tuvo  
la fortuna grandiosa  
de juntar las.bellezas [sic]  
que tiene [sic] todas las cosas. (7)

Most importantly, her love is the source of life: “dá vida” (“da vida”; 7; 8). The image of woman as mother is more than once evoked in Dato’s poem as one of power and perfection, not subservience. In its lengthy and final section (VIII), in contrasting the inherently benevolent nature of women with men’s greater propensity toward violence and crime, Dato asserts that a woman is ultimately born for motherhood, and that “. . . esta razon basta ben / pra comprender o prefeuta, / que Dios a quixo faguer” (“. . . esta razón basta bien / para comprender lo perfecta, / que Dios la quiso hacer”; 22; 23). The final brief stanza of the poem further makes the case that upon his death, as Christ wished to leave the world, out of love, the thing he most prized, he left, “¡Unha nai...! ¡Unha muller!” (“¡Una madre...! ¡Una mujer!”; 26; 27). The Virgin Mary becomes the most important symbol of Christian tradition primarily in her role as a mother, the most natural, though not limiting, role of a woman. This shifting of scriptural interpretation toward the re-evaluation of women can be seen in other examples of religious discourse of the era, and not only in texts written by women. In his speech of 1882 “Apostolado de la mujer en las sociedades modernas,” Manuel Polo y Peyrolón says of women’s growing equality with men that it is due not to “las ciencias, ni a las letras, ni a las artes, ni a la cultura, ni al progreso moderno; sino a Cristo Jesús, que libertó nuestras almas de la esclavitud del pecado y os sacó a vosotras de la degradación y de la miseria, para colocaros en la cumbre de la civilización cristiana” (92). He similarly highlights, from an androcentric perspective, the central role of motherhood, since a good Catholic woman “es la que madre, cristianiza al hombre niño” (92).

In the penultimate stanza of Section VIII, Dato again evokes a revised religious tradition as she makes her *closing arguments* in the defense of women. In a concise retelling of Christ’s life, she foregrounds the impact of women throughout the narrative, noting first that when God chose to come to earth, he also chose to be born of a woman: “. . . / por ter un pouco de groria / quixo ter nai e nacer” (“. . . / por tener un poco de gloria / quiso tener madre y nacer”; 24; 25). And though at the height of his mission on earth Jesus was surrounded by thousands of men, the tide turned once he was arrested and condemned. Here, she notes, referring to the story of Simon during the walk to Calvary, that a man had to be obligated by law to help Christ carry his cross. Meanwhile, his disciples remained hidden and fearful:

. . . fuxiron  
e votárons’ á tremer  
cand’ algun lle perguntaron,  
si profesaban a fé

de Xesús de Galilea  
..... (26)

... huyeron  
y echaronse [*sic*] a temblar  
cuando algunos le [*sic*] preguntaron,  
si profesaban la fe  
de Jesús de Galilea  
..... (27)

Yet it was a woman, she notes, referring to the figure of Veronica, who, of her own free will, “d’as turbas, ... / ábrese pas’ e non treme” (“de las turbas, ... / ábrese paso y no tiembla”; 26; 27). She then reminds the reader that despite the many, and presumably male, recipients of Christ’s miracles—the dead brought back to life, the blind who can see, the lame who can once again run—none of these men can be found at the scene of the crucifixion. Rather, she suggests, the only faces he encounters are “[a]s mulleres que disprezan / á aquela turba soez” (“... las mujeres que desprecian / a aquella turba soez”; 26; 27).

Dato’s poem, then, unlike Feijóo’s original treatise, is framed by arguments rooted in Catholic scriptural tradition, but which, even so, gently subvert that tradition to assert the important role and strong position of women, and the high regard in which they were held by Christ himself, despite arguments to the contrary by church leaders and over the course of the institution’s development. She, like Feijóo before her, wishes to correct this injustice, as she asserts in the poem’s second section:

Non é razon pr’ aldraxalas,  
qu’ algun santo padre berre,  
cicais botándoll’ a culpa  
de qu’ o mundo se perdese. ... (8)

No es razon [*sic*] para ofenderlas,  
que algun [*sic*] santo padre grite,  
quizás echándole la culpa  
de que el mundo se perdiese. ... (9)

The section opens with a parallel evocation of both Feijóo’s essay and the well-known seventeenth-century *redondilla* by Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, which, beginning with its opening accusation of “hombres necios,” laid bare the hypocrisy of men’s treatment of women:

Homes qu’ â muller culpades  
d’ os crimes que cometedes  
e decís que d’ as disgracias  
sempre son causa as mulleres,  
oind’ o que dí Feixóo  
n-aquel libr’ en qu’ as desfende. ... (8)

Hombres que a la mujer culpáis  
de los crímenes que cometeis [*sic*]  
y decís que de las disgracias

siempre son causa las mujeres,  
oid [*sic*] lo que dice Feijóo  
en aquel libro en que las defiende. . . . (9)

Dato continues the poetic paraphrase of Feijóo, arguing that, while certainly there are women “que teñen / cicais perdid’ a vergonza” (“que tienen / quizás perdida la vergüenza”; 8; 9), there is no justification for generalizing all women in this way, and while certain church fathers may have focused their attention on these perverse women (“perversas” [“perversas”]), certainly “non con todas s’ entende” (“no con todas se entiende”; 8; 9). The poet then reminds us, again evoking Sor Juana, of the hypocrisy behind the double standard practiced by men who blame women for their own shortcomings:

Pois si por elas pecades  
a culpa non lle votedes,  
que nunc’ o sol tivo culpa  
de que quen o mira cegue. (8)

Pues si por ellas pecáis  
la culpa no le echéis,  
que nunca el sol tuvo culpa  
de que quien lo mira ciegue. (9)

To conclude the section, Dato briefly evokes two legendary feminine figures that also appear in Feijóo’s text: Eve and La Cava.<sup>7</sup> As in Feijóo’s essay, both women are vindicated here: Eve sinned, yes, but she was deceived, outsmarted by “un ánxel, qu’ aunque reberte / era un ánxel e tería / intelixencia esprendente” (“un ángel, que aunque rebelde, / era un ángel y tedría [*sic*] / inteligencia esplendorosa”; 8; 9). But lest we forget, she reminds us, Adam, a man, was equally curious, and weak, and yet “non tivo pra tentalo / nada o demo que faguere” (“no tuvo para tentarlo / nada el demonio que hacer”; 8; 9). Meanwhile, we are assured, anyone who says La Cava betrayed Spain is simply lying: It was a count (conde Julián) and a bishop (Julián’s legendary co-conspirator Orpas) who were more accurately responsible for this historically transformative event. While most likely in the service of poetic concision, Dato in this case glosses over Feijóo’s more complete defense of La Cava. In his view, she is not only free of responsibility for the offense attributed to her, but in fact a classic example of a blamed victim, since “[ella] no hizo mas que manifestar al padre su afrenta. ¡Desgraciadas mujeres, si en el caso de que un insolente las atropelle, han de ser privadas del alivio de desahogarse con el padre ó con el esposo!” (Feijóo 100). Still, Dato has effectively used the poem’s second section to move away from the essentialist imagery used to characterize women in the first section and toward, in the tradition of Feijóo, a more reasoned, logical, and compelling defense of women, while also dispelling, as he did, historical misinformation related to two iconic female symbols.

Section III of Dato’s poem similarly evokes Feijóo’s critique of two misguided male historical figures, one from the Middle Ages, one from Antiquity. These are Almarico, the

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<sup>7</sup> La Cava has been the subject of numerous *romances* who, for her seduction of Rodrigo, the last of the Gothic kings, is held culpable in the popular imagination for the fall of the Iberian Peninsula to the Moors.

twelfth-century Parisian doctor who posited that “if man had continued in a state of innocence, every human would have been born a man from the hands of God himself” (Smith 29), and Aristotle, the main influence on Almarico’s denigrating view of women. In his refutation of both men, Feijóo cites and celebrates the fact that in Parisian church proceedings in 1209, Almarico’s errors were condemned, and though the doctor had already died, his bones were exhumed and thrown in “un lugar inmundo” (Feijóo 102). It so happened that the reading of Aristotle was also censured at this same proceeding, by Pope Gregory IX. Dato seems less delighted by these facts, as they do not receive attention in her poem. Feijóo’s second point regarding Aristotle, however, in her view points to the inherent hypocrisy and logical gap in his alternating disparagement of women as a group, and his somewhat irrational worship of the women he loved, to the point that he is said to have burned incense at an altar, as if to a deity, in honor of his love Pythias. Here Dato makes a gentle joke at Aristotle’s expense, noting the irony of the money he wasted on this endeavor. She echoes Feijóo’s logical argument, in a concise, more playful fashion:

Aristóteles falou  
contr’ as mulleres y-eu penso,  
si sería un gran catiña  
que choraría o diñeiro  
que gastou en lles queimar  
com’ á deidades incenso. (10)

Aristóteles habló  
contra las mujeres y yo pienso,  
si sería un [sic] gran pérdida  
que llorara el dinero  
que gastó en quemarles  
como a deidades incenso [sic]. (11)

Still roughly following the progression of Feijóo’s argument, Section IV of Dato’s poem addresses women’s capacity for leadership, action, and bravery, and she, like Feijóo, cites a lengthy and thorough list of historical examples to prove that the viewpoint that women are not capable of such qualities is simply contradictory to the historical record. The lists of women presented in both texts share many names in common. Many are obscure figures from Antiquity, whose stories may or may not have been readily familiar to Feijóo’s or Dato’s readers; in the latter text, the stories are distilled to the most essential elements to poetically evoke stories of leadership and bravery. They include women rulers as well as women remembered for their wisdom or acts of great bravery, primarily in the context of battle. In evoking the figure of María Pita, the Galician army captain’s wife instrumental in the defense of Corunna against the British in 1589, Dato employs a strategy quite distinct from that of Feijóo. His account is relatively detailed, highlighting how she “exprobó á los nuestros su cobardía, arrancando espada y rodela de las manos de un soldado y clamando que quien tuviese honra la siguiese” and that “Felipe II premió el valor de la Pita” (116 ). However, to underscore the fame that she had since reached in Galician culture, Dato chooses a form of ellipsis rather than recounting details of the heroine’s story, suggesting that none of her readers should need such reminders. She refers only briefly to:

... a nosa María Pita  
groriosísima gallega,  
de cuyos feitos non falo,  
pois non hay quen os esquenza. (14)

... nuestra María Pita  
gloriosísima gallega,  
de cuyos hechos no hablo,  
pues no hay quien los olvide. (15)

Dato further expands on Feijóo's argument by including a more contemporary example, Agustina Zaragoza, heroine of the Spanish revolt against the French in 1808, who "n-a guerra d' a endependenza, /... foi groria d' este sigro" ("[e]n la guerra de la independencia, /... fue gloria de este siglo"; 16; 17). Employing and revising the technique used by Feijóo, Dato uses the objectivity of the historical record and numerous examples to disprove the assertion that women are different from men in their capacity for action or bravery and their ability to hold positions of power.

In his essay, Feijóo felt compelled before leaving the theme of women's bravery to disavow one last long-held and misguided notion regarding women's inferiority to men: "Resta en esta memoria de mujeres magnánimas decir algo sobre un capítulo, en que los hombres mas acusan á las mujeres, y en que hallan mas ocasionada su flaqueza, ó mas defectuosa su constancia, que es la observancia del secreto" (119). He cites as his examples numerous women from Antiquity who underwent suffering, torture, or death rather than betray a trust. Here again, Dato opts for concision on this matter, summarizing:

¿E quén dixo qu' a muller  
non sabe gardar sacretos?  
Non quero buscar n-hestoria,  
que ten millares d' exempros... (16)

¿Y quién dijo que la mujer  
no sabe guardar sacretos?  
No quiero buscar en la historia,  
que tiene millares de exemplos... (17)

Leaving aside Feijóo's multiple examples of women throughout history, Dato prefers the impact of one powerful image: that of Mariana Pineda, the woman from Andalusia who was condemned to death for conspiracy against the repressive government of Fernando VII when found in possession of a liberal-themed flag. Dato acknowledges that the image of Pineda is still current and relevant, reminding the reader that she went to death for her silence, leaving her children motherless, even though

Nadie ñora con qu' afan  
o perdon lle pormeteron  
s' ôs cómpreces descubría  
d' aquil libeiral intento... (16)

Nadie ignora con que afan [sic]  
el perdon [sic] le prometieron

si a los cómplices descubriría  
de aquel liberal intento... (17)

Sections VI and VII of Dato's poem turn more specifically to the question of women's intellectual capacity, addressing and refuting notions of women as intellectually inferior to men. And it is here that Dato's poem most clearly begins to diverge from Feijóo's original text, making stronger assertions and implying a clearer call for remediation. First, employing a seemingly metaphorical technique, the poet cites examples from the roots of Antiquity, where mythical figures were emblems of female intellectual and creative activity:

¿Quén foi Minerva? decí,  
¿Porqu' as ciencias se puxeron  
debaixo d' o seu amparo  
e lle queimaron incenso?  
¿Quén foron as nov' hirmás  
que tiveron tantos tempos,  
e pr' as qu' aínda os poetas  
erguen altares n-o peito? (18)

¿Quién fue Minerva? decid,  
¿Porque [sic] las ciencias se pusieron  
bajo su amparo  
y le quemaron incienso?  
¿Quiénes fueron las nuevas hermanas  
que tuvieron tantos templos,  
y para las que aún los poetas  
yerguen altares en el pecho? (19)

But she then makes the potentially controversial assertion that these mythical women were, in fact, likely real women “á quês divinizaría / a admiración y-o tempo” (“a quienes divinizaría / la admiración y el tiempo”; 18; 19). She ponders when exactly the tide changed, since history shows that women's intelligence was recognized and valued, that they had “sempre autitú pr' o saber / e demostraron inxenio” (“siempre actitud para el saber / y demostraron ingenio”; 20; 21). In Section VII, she creates another metaphorical vision, addressing an imagined sisterhood of wise women as a bouquet of flowers “d' os xardís d' as letras / ... / qu' euxala[n] o perfume / d' os dioses, a poesía” (“de los jardines de las letras / ... / que exhala[n] el perfume / de los dioses, la poesía”; 20; 21), through whom she longs to connect the fields of ancient Greece to those of Galicia, and Sappho to Rosalía (de Castro).<sup>8</sup>

However, in the other stanzas of these sections, the tone is less metaphorical, more frank, and concrete. Despite these exceptional female figures, there is still a problem at

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<sup>8</sup> Roseman also highlights the importance of this technique of “look[ing] beyond the borders of Galicia and the Galician language to other spiritual guides” (61) in the context of contemporary Galician feminist practice: “This activity of renaming (in the sense of resignifying) and conversing with the sources of poetic inspiration is a meaningful way in which the community of *Galeguistas feministas* is imagined” (62). Roseman specifically cites Dato's poetic image connecting Galicia to Greece and Rosalía to Sappho here.

hand, and it is clearly societal: men have access to education, women do not. Men are educated in great numbers, whether or not they are worthy of it:

... cuasque todos reciben  
d' a instruccion a luz diviña,  
e cicais de cada mil  
un tan soilo s' ilumina. . . (20)

... casi todos reciben  
de la instruccion [*sic*] la luz divina,  
y quizás de cada mil  
uno tan sólo se ilumina. . . (21)

In the case of women, on the other hand, so few receive the privilege of education, that those who receive “a luz diviña” (“la luz divina”) of instruction will shine “coma craros soles” (“como claros soles”; 20; 21). It is clear that Dato borrows an idea here from Feijóo’s text, although she interprets the situation and perhaps the data differently. Though Feijóo suggested a more favorable ratio where men’s education is concerned (“entre los hombres, apenas de ciento que siguen los estudios salen tres ó cuatro verdaderamente sabios”), he nonetheless recognized that “casi todas las mujeres, que se han dedicado á las letras, lograron en ellas considerables ventajas” (160). At the same time, however, he qualifies the situation in defense of his own gender, in order to avoid conceding superiority on the side of women (a recurring theme in his essay):

Pero porque esta reflexion podía poner á las mujeres en paraje de considerarse muy superiores en capacidad á los hombres, es justo ocurrir á su presuncion, advirtiendo que esa desigualdad en el logro de los estudios nace de que no se ponen á ellos, sino aquellas mujeres en quienes, ó los que cuidan de su educacion, ó ellas en sí mismas, reconocieron particulares disposiciones para la consecucion de las ciencias; pero en los hombres no hay esta eleccion. (160)

While Feijóo conceded that the high level of intellectual success among a small group of women over time could be a result of higher selectivity, and thus implied that the majority of women, just like the majority of men, would likely be “de habilidad corta” (160), he nevertheless also recognized that “[negative] views on women’s intelligence were shaped by the fact that men, rather than women themselves, wrote books on the female sex” (Smith 32). Dato echoes the view that women’s intelligence has been simply overlooked by a system biased toward masculine talents and skills:

Porqu’ as probes d’ as mulleres  
nunca tiveron enseño  
como os homes, qu’ eran tontas,  
os homes tontos dixeron. . . (18)

Porque las pobres de las mujeres  
nunca tuvieron ingenio  
como los hombres, que eran tontas,  
los hombres tontos dijeron. . . (19)

She praises those women who, over the course of history, achieved education and wisdom, given that

... ô pazo d' as ciencias  
entraban por regandixas,  
porqu' as portas lles pechaban  
os que lles tiñan cobiza. . . . (20)

... al palacio de las ciencias  
entraban por rendijas,  
porque las puertas les cerraban  
los que les tenían envidia. . . . (21)

In a cultural climate in which equal educational opportunity for both genders was well under discussion (though it would not become law until 1910), the poet expresses a note of optimism in this regard. If, she asks, some women were able to achieve greatness in the past, despite tremendous obstacles, then what will happen

¿... cand' elas sepian,  
que xa ninguen as cretica,  
por buscaren afanosas  
a luz d' a sabiduría? (22)

¿... cuando ellas sepan,  
que ya nadie las critica,  
por buscar afanosas  
la luz de la sabiduría? (23)

Finally, in the first stanzas of the poem's last section (VIII), Dato remarks on some essential, and arguably essentialist, differences between the sexes in a contemporary context. Men, she notes, make up the majority of criminals; those few women who fall into that category, she clarifies, most of society would not classify as women; they would be considered "mostro[s]" ("monstruo[s]"; 22; 23). Women, by nature, are compassionate, caring; they are "nais dende nenas" ("madres desde niñas"), filled with "manantiales de ternura, / pr' o coidar e protexer" ("manantiales de ternura, / para el cuidar y proteger"; 22; 23). This is clearly not women's only role, but this fundamental capacity for nurturing underlies the various roles they play and have played in society. Thus, as Dato shifts focus in the subsequent lines to the primarily male arena of war, a similar dichotomy between the genders results in inequity and injustice. She directly addresses men, who go to war by obligation or for ambition, assuring them ironically that

... vandes á merecer  
grande renome n-hestoria  
y-o favor d' o voso rei  
.....  
e porque sodes valentes  
unha estáuta pretendés. . . . (24)

... vais a merecer  
gran renombre en la historia

y el favor de vuestro rey  
.....  
y porque sois valientes  
una estatua pretendéis. . . . (25)

But what about the women, she asks, “esas monxas” (“esas monjas”; 24; 25), the nuns who follow the soldiers, care for the wounded, and risk their lives, asking neither for glory nor compensation? The question again brings the reader back to the issue of complementarity between the sexes. In yet another context, women are fully able to contribute to a societal need, and contribute in ways that, in Dato’s view, are in keeping with their nature, yet their contributions are clearly undervalued in contrast to their male counterparts.

The various and at times seemingly convergent strands of Dato’s poem make a compelling argument for the value of women in society in both a historical and contemporary context, but one that also reflects the interplay of competing and interconnected discourses of religion and science typical of her era. While inspired by Feijóo’s forward-thinking and rational treatise, her poem, through its use of distilled and often playful language, encapsulates both the strides that had been made in the two centuries since Feijóo’s birth, and the work still needed to be accomplished before women achieved true equality. The tone behind much of Dato’s poem suggests a veiled sarcasm, as though suggesting that what the eighteenth-century thinker needed to argue so earnestly in his time should by her era be simply common sense to anyone with a rational mind; and yet, even in the late nineteenth century, myths, misinformation, and misguided thinking still prevailed. A decade earlier, in a lengthy (and also award-winning) essay on Feijóo,<sup>9</sup> Pardo Bazán articulated this regrettable state of affairs in a conciliatory footnote, carefully qualifying her admiration of the Enlightenment icon and his willingness to express openly his opinions on the value of women to a likely hostile audience:

La valentía que en Feijóo supone esta opinion que vamos á analizar, se comprende al ver la que aún hoy necesitamos, los que pensamos de igual modo, para decirlo. Es tan poco el terreno que se ganó, al menos en España, que al tratar esta cuestion se siente así como un recelo, hijo de la seguridad de ser poco caritativamente tratado de muchos, y acogido de pocos. Válganos el ejemplo de Feijóo. (103)

In his 1897 article “Literatas gallegas,” Manuel Castro López noted “el saber y el ingenio” of a list of Galician women writers of the time, among which he included Filomena Dato (qtd. in Román Alonso 146). A review of her work in the journal *Alma Gallega* described her as “una de las más inmediatas sucesoras del genio lírico de Rosalía de Castro,” as she possessed “su misma ingenuidad, su misma ternura, su arte incomparable par herir las cuerdas sensibles del corazón de su pueblo” (qtd. in Román Alonso 147). Yet, despite the apparent recognition of Filomena Dato in her time, and the esteem in which she was held by readers and other writers, she has certainly not in the long term achieved the status of Rosalía de Castro, Emilia Pardo Bazán, or Concepción Arenal, major figures of the feminist movement in Spain and all natives of Galicia, though Arenal and Pardo Bazán did not write in Galician. To an extent this may be simply a function of time and the vagaries of

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<sup>9</sup> *Certámen literario en conmemoracion del segundo centenario del nacimiento de fray Benito Jerónimo Feijóo, autor del Teatro crítico universal.*

the changing literary canon. It also appears, however, that the connection to traditional Catholicism expressed by Dato and some of her Galician contemporaries has over time alienated them from the more common secular version of feminism prominent since the latter half of the twentieth century. Blanco suggests in her study that Dato and many of her Galician contemporaries held to a “catolicismo retrógrado,” and that “todas elas se suma[ron] ao levantamento franquista” (332). While she accurately notes that a volume published in 1937 titled *Galicia por la España nueva*<sup>10</sup> included one of Dato’s poems titled “Al Santísimo Sacramento,” it is impossible to know with any certainty whether Dato’s support would have indeed gone for the Nationalist side since she died ten years before the Spanish Civil War began. Román Alonso points out this discrepancy in his biography of the poet and reminds his readers that “[o] emprego político das poesías por dirixentes políticos de calquera época non sempre está en mans dos autores e menos se estes están mortos” (160). But whether viewed as a figure worthy of further attention or a secondary figure of Galician literature at the turn of the century, Filomena Dato most certainly merits recognition as a respected poet of her generation and the voice behind the first feminist poem written in the native language of her homeland. Her poetic revision of Feijóo’s essay provides valuable insight into the status of debates and discussions around women’s roles and rights and the intersection of these themes and the broader context of cultural revitalization in Galicia during her lifetime.

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<sup>10</sup> *Galicia por la España nueva*, a short volume of prose vignettes, is authored by Esther Gallo Lamas, but incorporates poetry by other writers. Gallo Lamas’s pieces dedicated to aspects of Galician culture and history (in the service of promoting the conservative Nationalist agenda) are interspersed with related poems; Dato’s “Al Santísimo Sacramento” appears paired with a piece about the city of Lugo, “[d]esde 569, ...orgullosa por la exposición perenne del Santísimo Sacramento” (38). It should further be noted that, in addition to Dato’s poem, the volume also includes (in similar thematic pairings) four by Valentín Lamas Carvajal, and one by Rosalía de Castro; both poets were deceased at the time of publication. The only selections included by a living poet are two poems written by Francisca Herrera y Garrido, one written explicitly in praise of Franco, and another dedicated to the Galician “D. Jesús Teijeiro, Teniente Coronel del Tercio” (15).

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