

6 *Review***HOOOPER, Kirsty***A Stranger in
My Own Land:
Sofía Casanova, a
Spanish Writer in
the European Fin de
Siècle*

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Sarah Wright
Royal Holloway,
University of London

According to Kirsty Hooper's own research, there were at least 250 women active in Spanish cultural and intellectual circles at the turn of the nineteenth century (10). Nevertheless, most of these women are absent from the historical records of the period and certainly from the canons of the *fin de siglo*. In 1910, Sofía Casanova (1861-1958), a Galician-Spanish expatriate poet, novelist and journalist, gave a lecture at the *Ateneo de Madrid*, in which she remarked that 'la mujer española está borrada de la cosmogonía intelectual de Europa. Cual Atlántida que devoró el mar, flotador epitafio de sólo dos nombres: Isabel la Católica y Teresa de Jesús' (1). Upon her death, Francoist obituaries recast Casanova as a 'passive, sentimentalised icon of Francoist femininity' (4), whilst her writing and contributions to Spanish and Galician intellectual and cultural life were consigned to oblivion.

In this book, Hooper explores Casanova's position within both Spanish and Galician tradition at the turn of the nineteenth century, as well as teasing out the overlapping contexts (biographical, political, cultural and transnational) for her writing. During time spent in Poland, Casanova worked (for two decades) as Eastern European correspondent for the daily *ABC*. She wrote short novels, as well as travelogues, chronicles, essays and a children's book. Hooper recuperates Casanova's work, giving due credit to a writer who has been ignored. But the worth of this book resides not only in the focussing of attention on an absence in Spanish literary history. It is an intellectually stimulating piece of work which offers intelligent value judgements on the question of women's place within literary histories. Furthermore, it engages to a very high level with

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the works of Casanova in question, and additionally offers a vivid recreation of the period from an unexpected and unusual point of view.

In chapter two, Hooper examines Casanova's novel *El doctor Wolski* (1894) a novel which, where it is examined at all, is generally thought to be an autobiographical account of Casanova's relationship with her husband, Polish doctor Lutostawski. But Hooper follows geographer Gillian Rose's concept of 'paradoxical space' to address the polarities of the text (moving between Casanova's desire for public recognition of authorship and 'the need to maintain "feminine" respectability') (26). Paradoxical space 'allows the (female) subject both to acknowledge the way her life is shaped by the limitations of hegemonic space and to resist these limitations – to function as "both prisoner and exile"' (49). With its engagement with contemporary Polish politics, *El doctor Wolski* thus becomes 'not just a rare example of a Spanish novel set outside Spain but also [...] a consciously feminist intervention in pan-European conversations about fin de siècle fears about the breakdown of society' (50).

Chapter three focuses on *Lo eterno* (1907), the work which sees Casanova's re-entry into Galician letters. Public spaces were opening up to women, and Casanova (along with contemporaries such as Emilia Pardo Bazán, Concepción Gimeno, María Martínez Sierra and Carmen de Burgos) moved into these spheres to engage with the questions of the day. Hooper notes that previous readings of *Lo eterno* have tended to see it as a rather conservative reading of a sentimental relationship. Hooper, meanwhile, brings out the racial ambiguity of its male protagonist, to offer a view of the novel as a response to fin de siècle fears about the breakdown of race, class and especially gender, creating a space for female perspectives on *fin de siglo* intellectual debates.

In chapter four, we learn about the fascinating case of *Más que amor* (1908), which ran into problems with the Russian censors in Poland for being 'prejudicial to the State' (79). Here, Casanova uses the epistolary genre to test our narrative voices, treating questions of authorship and the relationship between public and private, politics and literature. Chapter five examines 1909's *Princesa del amor hermoso*, in which Hooper shows how Casanova draws on the *novela corta* tradition to rework the genre as well as offering an intelligent play on that well-known cultural model, the Don Juan archetype. Don Juan allows Casanova to engage with Valle-Inclán's modernist incarnation of the archetype in the *Sonatas* (here we have a Doña Juana), providing a sophisticated dismantling of the archetype. Hooper also concentrates on the importance of the Galician literary tradition for an understanding of the work. Thus, 'Casanova's text dialogues with a series of cultural models, including the sentimental romance, the nineteenth century novelistic tradition, early twentieth century modernism, "new woman" fiction, the pastoral idyll, and Galician regionalism, and questions them all' (135).

Chapter six explores *El pecado* (1911) and *El crimen de Beira-mar* (1914) and here Hooper shows that the project of both works is to draw out the tensions between a newly radicalised Galicia and the Spanish state. The first of these texts is cautiously optimistic about the outcome, but three years later, the later text sees no grounds for optimism: rejecting both Galicia and Spain as potential locations for challenging social injustice, but hinting enticingly at the possibilities of the new world.

The research is complemented by a complete bibliography of the published works of Sofía Casanova which bears testament to the sheer

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output of works that have been ignored for so long. There is also an index of letters offering further reading on *Más que amor*.

This book underscores the important work being done and still to be carried out on the women writers of the Spanish *fin de siglo*. Moreover, it is an excellent piece of research, admirably sustained by careful investigations into the period and lively and bold readings of the works. It will be of enormous interest to those working in Galician studies, feminist studies and to those who are interested in recasting our views of Spanish literary history.