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Iberian Feminism during the Second Republic: A Modern Approach to Unconventional Voices

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This article proposes firstly a reading of twentieth-century Iberian feminism sustained by an exploration of the joint signification of equality and difference and additionally the introduction of key feminist names obliterated by time. [1] I shall begin with a series of images, occurrences of the female self, some from a film and another one, a painting. They are separated by one hundred years and therefore create a bridge between the beginning and end of the twentieth-century. The way two critics have read them exemplify the reading I am aiming to put forward. The most recent image of female artistic subjectivity belongs to a film by Pedro Almodóvar, the oldest is a painting by Raimundo Madrazo.

It was interesting to read how the TLS review of Hable con ella, by award-winning Pedro Almodóvar, ignored what could be considered a crucial theme of the film: how to read difference and what it tells us about equality between the sexes as a problematic part of our culture. To make this reading through the “text”, text in the sense of tissue, the film needs to be regarded as an act of writing which preserves a meaning that may be totally unrelated to any intentionality by the author and that has to be, in a sense, teased out in order to signify.

The film in question begins and ends with two different ballets by German choreographer Pina Bausch. At the beginning of the film, the spectator encounters the unsettling spectacle of Bausch herself in her Café Müller, dancing spasmodically as a blind woman whose movements communicate a struggle to voice herself. This struggle can be interpreted, in my opinion, as symptomatic of the effort to voice female subjectivity that has conditioned and defined the work of so many female artists in the twentieth century. The end of Hable con ella offers a much more sedate choreography, domestic and bucolic, distinctively romantic, a happy image broken by a gasping dancer. The reviewer, Judith Flanders, describes the inclusion of Bausch’s latter piece and its relation with the film’s plot:

The film ends with a return to Pina Bausch, this time her tedious Masurca Fogo, a tourists'-eye view of Portugal, a picture-postcard land of happy peasants and quaint traditions [...]. On stage a row of men lift a motionless woman who holds a microphone to her lips but never speaks, only her gasping breath echoing around the auditorium. Yet Lydia and Alicia [female protagonists of the film] are not silent because they have chosen to be so, but because they have had choice taken away from them [...] (Flanders 10)

The text of Almodóvar’s film certainly provoked the reviewer’s sense of dislike. Thus the resulting review fails to see beyond what the film represents apparently and the signification that could be abstracted. Almodóvar is not of course scrutinising difference in his film explicitly and any suspicion that after all he does not go beyond binarism would certainly deserve discussion. He would not say that difference is what his films are about but indeed difference can be read in his cinematic texts. Flanders is deeply critical of the removal of volition Almodóvar inflicts upon these two female protagonists. For her, the film affirms difference in a negative way and by the objectification of women achieved

through the actions of the male protagonists, it would seem that it does not represent equality either. It also suggests that the only way women and men can communicate is when the former have choice taken away from them. Troubling though the removal of volition might be, I would, however, argue that by removing volition from the subjectivity of the two female protagonists, Almodóvar, intentionally or unintentionally, is able to expose the way female difference and equality between the sexes is shaped and misshaped in contemporary society. Flanders, on the other hand, considers Bausch's portrait as false as Almodóvar's representation of the silent female protagonists of the film. In my opinion, both Bausch and Almodóvar's characters are deeply dramatic in their silence.

As psychoanalytical criticism on Bausch shows, her dance theatre deals with exhausted subjects and traumatized figures. [2] Most of her productions transmit to the audience a sense of familiarity achieved by stage design, characterisation and of course repetitive, even boring, movements. Flanders is failing to take into account the link between silence and difference shown in Bausch's pieces and undeniably present in our culture and in the work of Bausch and Almodóvar. Both artists make silence performative and they make it perform difference. The aggressiveness of Café Müller and the romanticism of Masurca Fogo share then one theme: the disturbing representation of the silence of the female subject. In a sense, in writing silence, both works are writing difference and they need difference to signify fully. Katerina Bilova, ballet primadonna and problematic secondary character in the film, compares the world to a ballet. And it seems that in Bausch's pieces, as in the plot of the film, both the cancellation and the representation of difference condition the articulation of female discourse or its absence. Difference surfaces uncannily as the constant theme of the film and, given the connections between Bausch's works and psychoanalysis, it is possible to conclude that difference and by extension equality and inequality are the constant uncanny themes of her works. This is a reading we can transport to female literary and artistic subjectivity, to the formation of culturally active I's. The axiom that silence stages difference exposes the substantial worth of forgotten Iberian feminists. Silence does not equal absence but it is related to absence from representation and therefore to exclusion. Women culturally active at the beginning of the twentieth century struggled for representation, in order to have their difference represented and acknowledged and to be on equal authorial terms with men. The works of Pina Bausch and of Almodóvar challenge mimetic representation and in so doing explore difference and equality. The role of the visual and the treatment of female literary and artistic subjectivity

are useful tools to explore how to write difference and how to construct equality. The subject as a social construct, what we understand as sense of self or 'I', is unstable and dispersed. It mirrors the mobility of the world that causes its emergence. In certain cultural and artistic manifestations, the subject appears momentarily fixed and can be critically discussed. As far as the female subject is concerned, the notion of difference and its impact on politics of representation has diverse implications for a feminist agenda, differing according to social, historical and cultural circumstances.

My last image comes accompanied by the comments of Lou Charnon-Deutsch. It is an engraving by Raimundo de Madrazo called "Haciendo su retrato" [Woman painting her portrait] which appeared in La Ilustración Española y Americana at the end of the nineteenth century. Charnon-Deutsch observes:

Madrazo offers three versions of the same woman: the meticulously executed painter with her brushes and palette in the centre wears a white satin costume that is not protected by an artist's smock; a cutoff profile of the woman in a full-length mirror looks almost as well executed as the woman herself; and the self-portrait of the woman on the (improbably tilted) canvas is a perfunctory affair that does not lead the viewer to hold out much hope for the painter's talent. The masterpiece is the distinguished looking woman herself, or rather the woman as painted by the master painter who complacently makes the impossibility of the female artist one of the subjects of his painting (Charnon-Deutsch 166).

Charnon-Deutsch reads then the impossibility of the female artist in Madrazo's engraving. The masterpiece is male-authored and is beautiful, what we do not know is whether the impossibility of the female artist was also in the mind of the painted woman painter or whether she would be doubtful about the existence of an artistic self in her. This engraving can also be considered an early expression of what was to become a crucial site of scientific and cultural debate during the first three decades of the twentieth century in Spain: the identity of the female subject who writes, performs, wants to know or, in short, wants to dress the characteristically masculine attire of scientific or intellectual knowledge.

The twentieth century separates Madrazo's engraving from Almodóvar's movie. Only a couple of years separate Charnon-Deutsch's reading of Madrazo's engraving from Flanders' reading of Almodóvar's film. Both critics read the engraving and the film

respectively as being narratives of failed female subjectivity. Charnon-Deutsch's reading of the piece as a narrative of the subjectivity of the female artist is all the more revealing when one thinks that this engraving appears at a time when the education of women, which was going to become a key feminist debate throughout the twentieth century but especially in the years prior to the Civil War, was starting to have a presence in Spanish society. [3] The impossibility of the female artist, a marginal subject position hitherto virtually unimagined ties with the subject position of the educated woman, who was going to struggle for representation and voice throughout the twentieth century. There is also another highly significant part of Madrazo's vision of the female artist: femininity. The subject of his painting is highly feminine. Her genderisation is citational: the way she holds the brush, the way her other hand is shown, her neat hairstyle enhancing a perfect profile—perfect from every angle, as the three images show us,— the correct proportions of her body. Madrazo did not make her ugly and he dressed her like a woman. So impeccable is the femininity of this image that the critic commenting the engraving considers her attire makes it impossible for the painter to be a real one. The nineteenth-century saw a revolution in portrait painting and cross-dressing became consolidated as a device to represent artistic or intellectual subjectivity. It also represented gender ambiguity. A woman dressing like a man could symbolise gender unorthodoxy for others. A certain type of woman, an artist, an intellectual, a lesbian or bisexual could and often would challenge gender boundaries through clothes. Of course, in Almodóvar's movie, bullfighter Lydia dies dressed like a man, attired as a male bullfighter and she dies a bullfighter's death. [4] A bull gores her when she is performing her first pass, kneeling down on the arena with her cape spread waiting for the bull to come out. Before she dies, the spectator gets a glimpse of her profile looking around the plaza. Her profile shows her hair tightly combed back, her "coleta" makes her look androgynous. The spectator knows it is a woman, but the shot where her profile is shown conjures up another mythical bullfighting figure: Manolete. Her profile taking over the screen makes her look like him but whether her death will turn her into a mythical "figura del toreo" we do not know. It is not relevant to the film's plot. [5]

The development of feminist thought in Spain, understood as the writing of equality between the sexes, can be read as a constant re-writing of difference. Consequently, both equality and difference appear as concepts the female subject has to be constantly renegotiating. Her agency depends on them.

When we look back on the work done by the Sección Femenina during Francoism, it seems obvious that their monumentalisation of motherhood operated both in a real and in a symbolic way. The same could apply to intellectual women being perceived as dressed in men's clothes in the buzzing atmosphere of the Second Republic. Clothes not only make the man, they also make the woman and communicate gender boundaries. Although there are examples of cross-dressing in the Spanish Middle Ages and, in more modern times, Concepción Arenal attended university dressed in men's clothes, during the time of the Second Republic, the arbitrariness of gender boundaries could be and indeed was expressed through actual cross-dressing. Carmen de Zulueta, "institucionista republicana", was born in 1916 and currently lives in New York. In her book La España que pudo ser. Memorias de una institucionista republicana (2000) she has a very vivid image of her fellow students in Madrid, at the time of the Second Republic. There were female "institucionistas", students of the Krausist "Institución Libre de Enseñanza" or Institute of Free Education, who during Zulueta's childhood and adolescence, before the Civil War, cut their hair like boys and wore corduroy knickerbockers and high leather boots (Zulueta 37-38), the garments associated with the male members of the Institute. The historian Raymond Carr comments that the Institute, "with its modern syllabus (the dogmatic content of Catholic education was matched by its archaic pedagogic methods) and such innovations as walks in the country, sports, and visits to art galleries, were regarded with horror by right-wing Catholics" (Carr 43). This is true. It is also true that most politically active Spaniards were more concerned with tearing down the Republic whether from the Left or from the Right and even the centre. The failure of the Second Republic can be directly related to a very important achievement for the development of a feminist conscience: education reform. The main difference between Spanish feminism and Anglo-American feminist thought lies in their origins and is not solely related to chronology. If it is true that Spanish feminist thought made its presence felt later than its Anglo-American counterpart, it is also true that the motives conditioning their emergence –the right to vote in UK and US, the right to have an education in Spain– vary and this variation can only be fully understood by resorting to notions of equality and difference in each specific society. An ongoing debate in education continued from the fin de siècle until the end of the millennium, i.e., through the Second Republic, the Francoist era, the transition to democracy and beyond, and fuelled important discussions on equality, difference and discrimination. At the time these authors started to produce, equality and difference had their definition pending. Essentialisation was strong and difficult to challenge. How could anyone challenge ideas

that were being legitimised from the scientific and ecclesiastical ambits? It took a lot of courage and intelligence to do so. Difference signified in order to cancel out claims of equality. In contemporary society difference signifies in a multiform way. It never ceases to be formulated. It expands constantly. Both equality and difference have to be respected. That is the way we have to think about them. Discrimination is illegal and equality is a legal principle at least in theory if not always in practice. Equality between the sexes at the time of the first Iberian feminism needed to be thought and conceptualised. Discrimination did not exist as a term during the Second Republic. It has taken most of the twentieth century to create that notion.

There are two social realms important in the reading this article puts forward: the realm of authority and the realm of intellectual and cultural activity. Foucault believed that the relationship between power and knowledge is multiform and permeates everything. The years before the Civil War were not only marked by regenerationist tendencies but also by an interest of eugenesis and pedagogy and also an intense preoccupation, especially after the First World War, about the woman question or “el problema de la mujer” as was called in Spain. Concha Méndez, Maruja Mallo, Elena Fortún and so many others were challenging the status of realms in which the presence of men was grounded, stable, perceived as just and fair, therefore legitimate and not deserving to be challenged. These women who were the protagonist of the feminist debate at the beginning of the twentieth century were considered masculine, ambiguous. Most of their male contemporaries, famous names with misogynistic tendencies such as Ramón y Cajal and Gregorio Marañón, felt that surely, there was something manlike in these ladies, given that they wanted to be like men. At this time, women who wanted to have knowledge inspired fear in their male contemporaries who felt their virility at stake. Mangini (2002) has discussed the way in which the male dominated cultural and scientific establishment perceived female intellectuals. «Varoniles», «viriles» or «hombrunas» were some of the labels women who transgressed cultural boundaries had to endure. Claims of equality were feared by male intellectuals and scientists and difference was constantly being discussed by both males and females. The influential Revista de Occidente (July 1923) was inaugurated with an issue in which Ortega y Gasset set out to prove that the voice of a female writer could not be universal given that by nature it was always personal in essence and in excess. As Quance puts it, any female-authored text was considered to be ultimately somewhat illegitimate. The open presence of a female name in an authorial realm was too avant-garde even for

the avant-garde unless her text was a complement to the personality of a coquette. In that case, it was fine. Quance declares that we tend to imagine avant-garde females taking part in all cultural affairs on equal terms with the men but the truth is that it took them a very long time to “incorporarse con naturalidad a estos círculos”. As an example, the painter Norah Borges “sólo colabora en las revistas ultraístas a través de su hermano [Jorge Luis Borges]; no conocía personalmente a los hombres que hacían las revistas porque las chicas de entonces, decía, frecuentaban los salones de té, no los cafés” (Quance in Valender 105). The many “cafés” were determinant in the development of the Spanish avant-garde and as a space for literary, political and intellectual debate. We know how important it was for Buñuel, Lorca and Dalí, for example, to have that space where their respective artistic subjectivities would find expansion and dialogue. Hildegart, Fortún, Marga Gil, all of them experienced a level of solitude and isolation as part of their artistic subjectivity that males did not have to endure unless they chose to. Federico García Lorca read his poems and plays in different cafés, often dressed in the blue overalls distinctive of his theatre company “La Barraca”. Critics have implicitly or explicitly read the detail of the blue overalls as a connection to Lorca’s Republican and leftist ideology. Concha Méndez used identical clothing for working in her editorial office actually operating the press herself like Leonard Woolf. Critics such as Quance have seen in her attire the precursor for the uniform of the “miliciana” uniform in the Spanish Civil War. Her press disseminated the work of many avant-garde authors. However, critics at the time referred to her poems only infrequently and the bohemian atmosphere of her home and family received more attention. In Malvadas y virtuosas. Retratos de mujeres inquietantes (1997), Joaquín Leguina mentions that in his adolescence, lived immediately after the Civil War, he and his generation were subjected to readings meant to consolidate “la formación del espíritu nacional”, books that pointed an accusing finger towards a very concrete enemy: “la anti-España”. This other Peninsular country was inhabited, it appears, by “las tiorras y los milicianos” (Leguina 104), not “milicianas”, “rojas” or “comunistas” but “tiorras”, in other words, masculine women representing an ambiguity that threatened the stability of society and by extension of the nation.

At the beginning of the twentieth century female artists in Europe and in America, living in different social and historical circumstances, shared a tendency to adopt an androgynous representation for the female subject. This visual and textual ideal responds to both a need for the female artist to differentiate herself from conventional femininity and to represent

herself as equal to her male counterparts. Women artists and writers have shaped gender unorthodoxy in their works and, at the same time, they have challenged generic conventions or canonical form although writing at different times and in different social circumstances, different geographical locations throughout the twentieth century and beyond. The female “institucionista” could differentiate herself from other women through her clothing, movements and what in gender criticism terminology we would consider citational acts, a series of small acts and features that together create a picture, deceptively holistic, of a new self or ‘I’. This new way of “doing woman” or representing femaleness has to be contextualised within the emergence of dandyism in Europe and America. As far as representation and female literary and artistic subjectivity are concerned, then, something very important was happening at the beginning of the twentieth century. Self-portraiture was undergoing a revolution [6]. Modernism and the avant-garde were in full swing only to slowly ebb away when, for example, Elena Fortún started to publish, Marga Gil to sculpt, Hildegart to write on sexual politics and so many other forgotten women tried hard to emerge as cultural subjects.

In art and particularly in self-portraiture there has been some research into the expression of gender unorthodoxy and the challenge to generic expectations in portrait painting. My guess is that an unorthodox image of the artist in a photograph or in a canvas causes a much more immediate impression than a similar image textually conveyed. The effect of a text that deals with the defiance of gender expectations, while destabilising generic form, works differently from the visual impact of, for example, the female dandies of Romaine Brooks, the American painter who lived in Europe until her death in 1970. Gilbert picks up on the impact of modernism on the representation of the female artist and states that “[.] just as male modernist costume imagery is profoundly conservative, feminist modernist costume imagery is radically revisionary in a political as well as a literary sense”. Going beyond gender became important for the female modernist at the same time as male modernists needed to fix gender and essentialise it thus turning it into a quasi-irrefutable source of meaning. This has led many twentieth-century women to struggle in many ways “–sometimes exuberantly, sometimes anxiously– to define a gender-free reality behind or beneath myth, an ontological essence so pure, so free that “it” can “inhabit” any self, any costume” (Gilbert in Abel 196).

This struggle for definition and representation behind or beneath myth and also beyond gender makes difference and equality assist the creation of unconventional gendered individuations. This feature unites forgotten names such as Elena Fortún, Marga Gil Roësset, Lucía Sánchez Saornil, Hildegart Rodríguez Carballeira, Concha Méndez and Isabel Oyarzabal de Palencia. They were unconventional in some way or other from the point of view of gender. Each one of them is a case study in their own right but together they build a convincing picture of what the origins of Iberian feminism were like from the active point of view of women eager to produce art and culture. Their lack of conformity took many forms and hid many things. Each one of them reveals a different concern for the female self and a specific attitude towards its consolidation. Each one of them gave importance to a different pillar each one of them considered of major worth for the emergence of the new female subject: eugenesis in the case of Hildegart, pedagogy and the psychology of childhood in the case of Fortún's series of books Celia y su mundo, the awakening of the female self in Constanca de la Mora's only book In Place of Splendour (1944), sport and poetry for Concha Méndez and Ana Sagi and, finally, for all the names mentioned, women's education. It can now be stated that many names have been rescued from oblivion. We know a lot about Carmen de Burgos, Colombine, it is possible to read about Victoria Kent, Clara Campoamor or La Pasionaria. It was not possible to know that much about them ten years ago. The diaries of Zenobia Camprubí Aymar have very recently been published and the works of religious feminist and sportswoman Lili Álvarez can be bought second hand.

When they started to work they were aware of the controversy surrounding the figure of the woman author. Already Pardo Bazán had mentioned it at the end of the nineteenth century. An ignorant woman made the new bourgeois male feel ashamed. Progress needed women to progress too. New masculine types required new feminine types that should not ambition "la instrucción fundamental y nutritiva" but should be given "un baño, barniz o apariencia" that would make them presentable and would turn them into the most precious possession of the successful male. Pardo Bazán saw the increasing importance that exterior femininity and the embellishment of women was gaining and she considered it a product, albeit a regrettable one, of that new thing called progress. "[H]oy un marido burgués se sonrojaría si su esposa no supiera leer ni escribir", Pardo Bazán remarks, to conclude criticising the fact that different types of knowledge are deemed suitable for each sex. Women were to be kept away from history, astronomy, mathematics and even more from

philosophy and classics. Drawing, knowing a bit of geography, a bit of French and of music was a good accomplishment for women as long as it did not become a serious vocation with which to earn a living. Pardo Bazán realised that this education system actually limited women, objectified them by belittling them and preventing their brain from engaging in real intellectual activities. More than a hundred years later Nawal Al Saadawi, the Egyptian feminist writer, would be speaking in similar terms about the Western woman.

Throughout Spanish twentieth-century history, difference, equality and inequality have worked as variables conditioning the emergence of the female subject in all areas of life from the Second Republic and Civil War, through the years of Francoism, its end, the transition to democracy and beyond. Franco's victory brought with it a return to and of femininity. Essentialising practices based on a discourse of difference and influenced by economic depression proliferated under the new regime, as the totalitarian political mode quickly developed. Two years before Franco's death in 1975, Pilar Primo de Rivera, sister of the founder of Falange, the Spanish fascist party, and head of its feminine section (Sección Femenina), achieved a much awaited reform in the Penal Code. Until 1973, Spanish women lost their legal majority when they got married and, for the purposes of the law, therefore became minors, losing, among others, the right to buy and sell even their own, property. The force behind the change in legislation was an ultra right wing woman who defined herself as feminist when it suited her. Pilar Primo de Rivera was the founder of the Sección Femenina and carried out therefore an active role in the education of women from the end of the war until the end of Francoism. In 1969, chronologically half way between the Galician Pardo Bazán and the Egyptian Nawal Al Sadaawi, the ultraconservative Pilar Primo de Rivera, judged it necessary to implement the reform in the Penal Code. By being involved in the improvement of women's education even if her approach was sexist, she came to the conclusion that women who knew and women who worked contributed to the common good and to the improvement of culture. Those were good things. She did not doubt that this "debiera haber empezado mucho antes, venciendo las resistencias arcaicas y rutinarias que ahora la Sección Femenina, en servicio a una mayor justicia social, estamos venciendo en España con la Ley de los Derechos de la Mujer que abarca a toda clase de trabajadoras y a las universitarias". [7] Up to this point of her speech, one could think that late in life she had realised that equality between the sexes was a right to be enjoyed by all. Up to this point, it would seem that even if she could not be critical of her own organisation, she was implicitly admitting an evolution in her opinions about

women's equality, difference and rights. But these hopes soon are dismissed, as she continues: "porque no es lo mismo la mujer casada con la responsabilidad fundamental de hijos menores y marido en casa, o la viuda con hijos menores también, que la viuda o la casada sin hijos... y ya no digamos de la soltera, que es libre del todo". Hers is a very peculiar conception of equality and difference. The married woman was not the responsibility of the state and its social policies. The common good she is talking about is at that time defined by capitalism. The married woman with a family is untouchable, an unmoveable identity that stands outside time and that cannot change for Spanishness abides in her. But times were changing in the 1960s. It is interesting to observe that in agrarian pre-capitalist societies women often become the repositories of the concept of honour. In relation to these societies, Michael Johnson states that "honour is a fundamental property of men whose task it is to defend their women's shame from assault and ensure they do not descent into a shameless state" (Johnson 32). They are where honour is located. On the other hand, the concept of honour can work in fact as a reaction against capitalism. In Spain, Franco's dictatorship took up much of the twentieth century and, under this totalitarian regime, as was the case in Italy and Germany, gender difference was highly significant in securing national identity. This fact, according to Johnson, is quite recurrent and does not apply solely to Spain. In a Foucauldian fashion, Johnson affirms that as society shifted from agrarian to urban, "women remained the "property" of men, the difference being that they now "belonged" to their husbands or fathers instead of their lords" (Johnson 67). This is something we see in Francoist Spain. And the Feminine Section considered themselves guardians of this unique Spanish womanhood. And it is interesting to see that in Arab-Islamic culture the honour of a family is perceived "to be located in the bodies of the women of that family, in their virginity first and foremost, but also in the clothes that they wear, and in the modesty with which they deport themselves" (Makiya 288). Makiya's statement could be applied to conservative Catholic Spain, to Francoism. Most importantly, it was the raison d'être of the Feminine Section, active in the education of women and in the protection of their honourable bodies from the late 1930s to the early 1980s. This contrasts sharply with the European liberal education that the Free Institute of Education, the American Institute, Female Residence and other Republican associations concerned with co-education postulated. Liberalism in education could be found at the beginning of the twentieth century but women experiencing them at that time would find their intellectual development seriously hindered if not totally impeded during Francoism.

It seems then that for the Spanish feminist, education was more important than the right to vote (in Spain in 1931) and this importance of education was justified by the belief in the need to regenerate Spain, a belief in which feminists participated as well, and also a belief which opened up the debate on equality and difference between the sexes. The existence of this debate correlates with the fact that a fair amount of the feminist titles published in Spain prior to the Spanish Civil War were in fact not very feminist in their political agendas. [8] It also fuelled the debate on education in general and coeducation in particular which, in turn, would eventually help to undermine the stability of the Republican government. Liberals believed that the crisis that was being felt in the country at the beginning of the twentieth century could only be overcome through education with a European perspective. Feminists participated in this belief but whether to educate for equality or for difference or respecting both was not clear. In relation to female literary authorship, Gilbert and Gubar describe “the separateness of a female subculture” (Gilbert and Gubar 50), sometimes exhilarating for women, sometimes dangerous in its isolationism. From all sort of discourses, scientific, Catholic, psychiatric and artistic this separateness was being discussed and filled with a content meant to define what is intrinsic to womanhood. [9] During the Second Republic women in Spain, in theory, became legally emancipated. In practice, it is another story. The Spanish political and social system was too testingly problematic prior to the Civil War for the feminist movement to develop into a cohesive way, as in other European countries. The Left saw feminism as irrelevant and bourgeois and, as Scanlon points out, considered their main aim was to offer anyway “la perspectiva de una total emancipación en una sociedad socialista o anarquista”. The Right saw clearly that “la mejor manera de debilitar el movimiento era apoderarse de él y explotarlo para sus propios fines” (Scanlon 11). In twentieth-century Spanish feminist thought, even the definition of feminism has never been clear-cut or free from polemic. Scanlon’s words historicise the beginning of a controversy that can still be felt in the political field nowadays.

This Second Republic was the country’s first attempt at genuine democracy and it failed miserably because of a general lack of money. Also, the fact that the Republic came about does not mean that all the political institutions of the old order disappeared as if by magic. The king Alphonse XIII had left the country but those in favour of the monarchy had not and in a sense the king was a Republican himself insofar as he believed that a Republican government would regenerate the nation and make it possible for him to come back to the

throne. For those in favour of the old order, i.e., for the Church and for the landowners and those supporting the monarchy, any attempt to change this order amounted to treason and this also applied to the identity of the Spanish woman, the guardian of so many values. The structure of the nation was the nation itself and changing the structure therefore implied an act of betrayal of that idea of the nation that, after the Civil War, Franco would preserve. Equality and difference walked hand in hand in Spanish history from the beginning of the twentieth century until the present day.

Many critics, among them Roberta Quance, talk about the new legislation for Spanish women under the Second Republic (proclaimed in April 1931). As far as artistic and literary subjectivity is concerned, this political circumstance, having equality as a political aim, is translated into the elimination of the need to insist and give constant relevance to the image of the new woman, adventurous and free and also a threat to the idea of Spanishness. For Quance, the feminist struggle of the 1920s through the achievement of legal equality “deja libres a las escritoras españolas para empezar a entrar en los terrenos de la diferencia, sin temor a volver a encontrarse allí encerradas sin llave” (Quance in Valender 113).

At this point it seems relevant to mention another problem walking alongside “el problema de la mujer” throughout the twentieth-century: “el problema de España”. Spain was also seen as a problem. In the years prior to the Civil War every part of the political spectrum was incredibly faithful to Spain and their idea of Spanishness. Spain needed to be regenerated. The emergence of this view was gradual, as was the ability of Spaniards to realise that Spain was no longer an empire. As the twentieth-century progressed, it would become clear that the notion of empire itself was untenable and fifty years after 1898 the rest of the European nations had lost their colonies too. However, fifty years after 1898 regeneration was still in the air as the word progress started to be uttered again in a country coming out of a difficult post-war period and with the memory of a failed attempt to democracy aborted because it threatened the idea of Spanishness. The Civil War and Francoism was going to change this and writers would be trapped in archaic notions of difference without a key to get out because prior to this time, even if the identity of the new woman was made legitimate by the proclamation of the Republic, conservative sectors saw her as a threat to the nation and to the concept of Spanishness. In the middle of Francoism, the holder of all values, the Spanish woman, had retreated. Many young artists

and writers became silent or were silenced. Some sort of legal equality would only be achieved in 1973, as we have seen, and it is definitely not a legal coming of age for Spanish women.

It has repeatedly been affirmed that the democratic period brought major improvements to the position of the female subject in Spain. This affected the identity of the female artist, be it film maker, novelist, painter, etc. The presence of artistic subjectivity in general and representation of the female 'I' in particular are, in my opinion, crucial strands in order to establish a link between the beginning and end of the twentieth century as far as the analysis of national and historical feminisms are concerned. The development of Feminism in Spain during the twentieth century differed greatly from that of other European countries.

Discussing female literary subjectivity implies, to a great extent, dealing with difference as a constant, even if subliminal, constituent in a text's epistemological system. Writing difference or having difference written on her, the female literary or artistic subject strives to validate her position as such and, at certain times, to present it in such a way that appears as equal and as legitimate in the sense of authorial as that of the male artist and writer.

An examination of twentieth-century debates on what articulates difference, sexual or otherwise, and on what ways social and political equality should be or is failing to be structured can be used as an axis to articulate a new history of feminist thought, anchored in the concept of representation and sustained by a diachronic analysis of difference and (in)equality. Research done on the so called *écriture féminine* by, among others, French feminists Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray along with Gilbert and Gubar's already classic *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) and *No Man's Land* (1988), and also Adrienne Rich's *On Lies, Secrets and Silence* (1980) have as their project, in the words of Barbara Johnson, an attempt "to read the suppressed, distorted or disguised messages that women's writing has encoded". In this way, they postulate a reading strategy "that goes beyond apparent intentions or surface meanings, a reading that takes full advantage of writing's capacity to preserve that which cannot yet, perhaps, be deciphered" (Johnson 47). In a Derridean fashion, literature and also reading and writing are seen as subversive and this is where his concept of *différance* operates. However, and more in tune with Johnson's specification, it

is possible to move beyond the trickster the Derridean concept ultimately is and focus on the relationship between difference and equality. For Johnson then, difference cannot always be deciphered. It is there precisely where writing and its relationship to difference on the one hand and equality on the other lies. Difference can be read as a cultural trope constantly undergoing reformulation. Issues of equality are, fairly or unfairly, dependent on the same type of conceptual mobility, a mobility conditioned by history and society. Difference and equality, we could say too, vary with the context and vary together. Their joint variation signifies.

Access to education for women improved at the same time as psychoanalysis developed in Europe. If we take psychoanalysis as narrative we get a very revealing interpretation of its development at the end of the nineteenth century in Vienna influenced by a very specific type of female patient: bourgeois, suffering from tedium, repressed. The new discipline was trying to grasp this, in a sense, new identity. And this female self had much to tell about patriarchy in the process of her being turned into a pathology. Spain was a little behind the rest of Europe and access to education for women would not start to show any important sign of improvements until well into the twentieth century.

The importance of the debate on the education of women, an ongoing debate that has lasted from the end of the nineteenth century until the end of the twentieth, has caused the role of knowledge and its relation to power in the configuration of the female subject to be seen as of prime importance. The Freudian question “What does a woman want?” which he left unanswered in perplexed uncertainty, despite having written the best narrative on the archaeology of patriarchal power to date, has only relatively recently been placed at the centre of feminist debate in Spain. “What should a woman know and how should she have access to knowledge?” seemed to be the key question Spanish feminists and misogynists alike asked themselves in their writing. Sometimes, I hasten to add, these two could not be clearly differentiated and/or they could not keep their respective stances entirely separate either. The controversy on women’s education impinged upon the figure of the female artist and writer. The twentieth century also witnessed the construction of the Spanish state as we know it, a state characterised by the difference existing among the nations that integrate it. Needless to say, this was mainly a male project. As Susan Sontag and Victoria de Grazia, among others, remind us it is largely men who have built nations and states, men who have nationalised peoples. Until the 1970s Spanish women were not taxpayers,

they were not soldiers, and their role as workers was very restricted. The right to vote was achieved in 1931 in the middle of controversy regarding education: shouldn't women be educated to vote? In the middle of all this, the figure of the female author and artist is somehow a privileged even if marginal one. Eccentric though she may be, she had the power of her work and that is what we have inherited: works and texts, often generically unclear, which are a testimony to the gender unorthodoxy of the female subject that created them and the times in which she did so.

Difference is both useful and dangerous for the representation of female subjectivity. Readings of difference are complex and diverse. They depend on the different criteria on which they are based or which they elude. From this perspective, it is feasible to reach some sort of specificity that moves beyond the postmodern belief in the plurality of difference, or rather, of the 'different', thus rejecting the binary opposition of the 'other'. Identity is furthermore evidenced in difference. The need to read texts, be they cinematic, literary, pictorial or otherwise, as insights into the psychic routes of patriarchy did not end with Freud and Lacan, the fathers of psychoanalysis and, indirectly, best renderers of patriarchal ideology. I would argue that this reading is still valid and, indeed, necessary. In the case of Spain, it should be accompanied by the rediscovery of forgotten female authors.

The last decades of the twentieth century certainly saw an unprecedented change in the consciousness of many women. The need for women's education of women was acknowledged when the bourgeois male subject realised it was better to be accompanied by a literate female than by an illiterate one. The fact that the notion of parity between the sexes increasingly substitutes or further defines already established notions of equality illustrates the fact that equality remains an unattained goal or one that is constantly defined anew. Difference itself is constantly undergoing redefinition and requiring new analyses dealing with representations that even invite contradictory readings. Through the debate on education the figure of the female writer can be reached and a discussion of the author, authority and authorial power as literary and artistic topics generated. The twentieth century saw the consolidation of the death of the author as critical dogma. After the death of the author, resuscitation seemed nonsensical. Writing might be the destruction of every voice but it cannot be denied that, for a female voice, the death the author dies murmurs something else, might murmur the oblivion of silenced and silent female voices; the birth of the reader can be the origin of textual challenge or challenge to the canon. Ultimately,

the multiple voices destroyed by the text resonate differently for these authors and for us if we so wish.

Notes

[1] The author would like to thank the University of Lancaster for awarding me a scholarship which enabled me to visit the Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid and the British Library in London in order to research this article. Thanks are also due to the University of Cardiff and to Montserrat Lunati for inviting me to present my findings to their research seminar.

[2] See Psychoanalytic Criticism. A Reappraisal by Elizabeth Wright for further analysis on Bausch.

[3] For more information on the history of women's education in Spain see Cien años de educación de la mujer española by Carmen de Zulueta.

[4] It is not the first time Almodóvar seems to rely on the identity of an actor or actress outside the screen and in the other images the audience may have of the artists playing the roles to problematise genderisation through cross-dressing or to present ambiguity. Again, the role of difference is crucial in making this reading successful. Rosario is a star of contemporary rumba and flamenco fusion and as a singer, she has reinvented the well fixed identity of the "cantante folclórica" her mother Lola Flores represented. In the film, she is reinventing, even if briefly, another iconic figure, that of the matador. Her death can be read as a punishment for her difference and as a denial for representation of her "different" self on equal terms with that of male "toreros".

[5] In fact, Almodóvar exploits this resemblance to the full. His awareness of it is what justifies his reasons for choosing Rosario Flores for the role. In his own words:

En Rosario busqué la raza, y esos ojos inocentes y tristes que tan bien le van a un personaje vencido por el abandono. También busqué y encontré un cuerpo atlético y a la vez femenino. Vestida con la taleguilla delatora Rosario parece un torero de la

estirpe de Manolete. Y embutida en un modelo de Dolce y Gabana es un cañón de mujer.

For more information on the character and for images see:

<http://www.clubcultura.com/clubcine/clubcineastas/almodovar/hableconella/lydio.htm>

[6] The work of the feminist art historian and critic Frances Borzello has been, to my mind, crucial in this field, especially her extensive exploration of self-portraits by female artists and her treatment of these as narratives of the subject. Borzello writes that female artists were more likely to produce self-portraits than their male counterparts and explains that

This belief in the female affinity for self-portraiture may have drawn strength from the personification of the vice of vanity, and is actually a subtle insult. Since vanity was for centuries personified as a woman looking in a mirror, a female self-portrait is evidence of this female vice [...]. This negative view of women and their self-portraiture is part of a larger set of attitudes about women and art, all stemming from the fact that the female artist was a minority member of the art world with little control over the judgements, views and rules affecting her (Borzello Seeing Ourselves 25).

[7] Primo de Rivera, Pilar. Escritos, discursos y circulares. Madrid: c. 1943.

[8] e.g. Feminismo, feminidad, españolismo (Martínez Sierra 1920).

[9] See Richards's discussion of the political influence of medicine, sexuality and gender relations in 1930s Spain in his "Spanish Psychiatry c.1900-1945: Constitutional Theory, Eugenics and the Nation" BSS, LXXXI, 6, 2004: 824-848.

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