

# Fragmento de Women Poets of Spain. 1860-1990

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*Rosalía de Castro*

UNLIKE HER SISTERS, Rosalía de Castro has established a secure reputation in Peninsular literature, but such was not the case during her lifetime (1837–85), when she fluctuated between being a “Nobody” (Emily Dickinson’s word) and a “santiña” (dear little saint).<sup>1</sup> Few have noted her “monstrous” qualities, to use Gilbert and Gubar’s metaphor for a committed woman artist whose subconscious mind is intent on self-determination; but it is the “monstrous” as opposed to “angelic” persona that interests today’s students of poetry. Rosalía’s “monster” persona can be glimpsed if her poems are read as texts that were generated by a writing subject who was also female. By foregrounding the monster within Rosalía, I believe that more of her poetic originality and influence on poets of this century can be appreciated.

With one or two notable exceptions, the major criticism of Rosalía’s work focuses not on female or feminist impulses but on those characteristics her poems share with all poetry: themes, style, symbols, regionalism, personal angst, religious doubt.<sup>2</sup> These studies are empathetic and exhaustive in their careful treatment of the important characteristics of Rosalía’s poems, but they focus on features that could be found in any Modern poet, most of whom are males—those very males who established the canonical standards by which poetry by women is traditionally judged. The fact that Rosalía was a woman, though not ignored,<sup>3</sup> is not foregrounded, a perspective that was altered in the early 1980s when Matilde Albert Robatto carefully studied the condition of woman during Rosalía’s time as well as the view the poet presents in her prose and poetry of the Galician woman’s predicament.<sup>4</sup> Then in 1986, several critics began to focus on Rosalía’s female and feminist characteristics<sup>5</sup> and to unearth a feminized infrastructure to her poetry; that

is, such studies began to allow postmodern readers to see that on one level Rosalía's work is a covert exploration of experiences that were central to her as a woman. A reader today can therefore make a legitimate attempt to find that on one level Rosalía's poetry was dealing "with central female experiences from a specifically female perspective."<sup>6</sup> Or, to follow Ostriker (*Stealing* 7) but to adapt her words: postmodern readers of Rosalía's poetry should begin to argue that an increasing proportion of her work is explicitly female in the sense that Rosalía chose to explore experiences central to her sex and to find a form and a style appropriate to the exploration of such experiences.