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*A Stranger in My Own Land: Sofía Casanova, a Spanish Writer
in the European Fin de Siècle* (review)

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focuses on images of Argentina in the novels of Judith Katz and Isaac Bashevis Singer. The eighth, "The Outlaw Jews of Buenos Aires," continues the analysis of Singer and Katz, showing how they (and earlier, Sholem Aleichem) grapple with the presence of Jewish groups in "white slavery" and prostitution in Argentina early in the twentieth century (also the subject of a well-known historical study, Donna Guy's *Sex and Danger*). The ninth, "Dirty War Stories," focuses on international representations of the military dictatorship of 1976–1983, with particular attention to Lawrence Thornton's Dirty War trilogy (of which the first novel, *Imagining Argentina*, was the best known), Douglas Unger's *Voices from Silence*, and Manuel Vázquez Montalbán's *Quinteto de Buenos Aires*; an eloquent final section concerns V. S. Naipaul's essay "The Return of Eva Perón." The tenth, "Violent Exclusions," analyzes films such as Robert Duvall's *Assassination Tango*, Wang Kar-Wai's *Happy Together*, and Martin Donovan's *Apartment Zero*, showing how these works explore the connections between sexual repression and state violence. The final chapter, "The Persistence of Memory," continues this exploration of cinematic representations by looking at Alan Parker's *Evita* (and the much earlier *Down Argentine Way* and *You Were Never Lovelier*); the final pages sum up the ways in which Argentina is represented as familiar and other in works by Blasco Ibáñez, Dominique Bona, and several recent films on tango.

Kaminsky's work is polemical in the best sense of that term. She grapples with the ways in which familiar explanations are inadequate, looking at things from different angles. Even as early as *Reading the Body Politic* her account of the uses of feminist theory in the field of Latin American literature grappled with linguistic and cultural difference, though ultimately the kind of gender analysis that she argued for, and the word *género* itself, did come to the fore in work on the topic in Latin America. In recent work, she brings layers of complexity to her discussions of sex, gender, sexuality, national identity, and linguistic self-fashioning. Kaminsky once again in *Argentina: Stories of a Nation* reveals her intellectual curiosity and wide-ranging knowledge, bringing together texts and problems that no one had thought to bring together before; she finds connections, and explores tensions, in a way that I can only call eloquent.

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HOOPER, KIRSTY. *A Stranger in My Own Land: Sofía Casanova, a Spanish Writer in the European Fin de Siècle*. Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt UP, 2008. 235 pp.

Female writers and female writing have always been topics of interest for critics and scholars alike. It appears, however, that Spanish female writers and their

works, especially those of the *fin de siglo* period, have not captured enough interest and attention. Kirsty Hooper's *A Stranger in My Own Land* stands on its own merit by offering an intellectually stimulating study of one of those less-studied authors: Sofia Casanova. In her book, Hooper sets out to examine the place of the Galician-born writer's authorship within both Spanish and Galician tradition at the turn of the nineteenth century, as well as the biographical, social, political, and cultural contexts of her early narrative. In doing this, Hooper attempts to show "the disparity between the evidence of active participation in *fin de siglo* social, cultural and political debates by women such as Casanova and their absence from the historical record" (8).

In her famous speech "La mujer española en el extranjero," given at the Ateneo de Madrid in 1910, Casanova complained that Spanish women had been erased from the European intellectual map "cual Atlántida que devoró el mar" (1). Up until now, Casanova's complaint has become a self-prophecy, since there have been no scholarly studies about her works. With this book, however, Hooper makes sure that Casanova's radical and poignant representations of gender, social class, race, national identity, and contemporary politics find their way to Hispanists and Galleguistas alike. Although her book offers what some would consider close readings of literary texts, Hooper's distinctive and clever readings of Casanova's early fictional writings are contextualized within the personal, social, and political climate of their production. The truth is, as Hooper points out, it is very difficult for those who are interested in lesser-known female authors like Casanova, Concha Espina, and Blanca de los Ríos, or even more mainstream writers such as Emilia Pardo Bazán and Carmen de Burgos, to find adequate "models of criticism and interpretation," since they have been "developed in response to a limited range of narrative modes and narrative voices from which women writers are, by default, excluded" (172).

The introductory chapter, taking the quote from Casanova's speech as its title, situates the author in her sociohistorical context as it also analyzes the conditions of female writers in Spain and Galicia at the *fin de siglo*. In other words, Hooper attempts to find a place for Casanova both within Spanish and Galician *letras* at the end of the nineteenth century with the objective to "challenge the familiar narrative with alternative ways to seeing, reading and understanding the *fin de siglo*, a goal that can be achieved only through serious and searching analysis of the writings of the women who contributed so critically to this crucial period in the formation of modern Iberian identities" (22). However, Hooper's text also allows readers to see the relevance of this type of study for the present; her purpose is not necessarily to "reconstruct the fragmented history of women's writing" (11) in Spain or Galicia, but to demonstrate that "accurate bio-bibliographical and

textual details” (12) allow scholars to properly evaluate the great literary and narrative histories taking into consideration contemporary female writers.

In chapter 2, Hooper explores Casanova’s novel *El doctor Wolski* (1894) within traditional readings of female literature (considered as an autobiographical text about a female character and her marriage to a Polish doctor), but she also makes an argument, following Gillian Rose’s critical approach, about the role of “paradoxical space.” According to Hooper, Rose’s concept is as intrinsic to the novel’s plot as it is emblematic of Casanova as a writer, since Casanova moves between her desire for public recognition of authorship and what Hooper calls “the need to maintain ‘feminine’ respectability” (26). Hooper’s notion of “paradoxical space” allows a woman writer “both to acknowledge the way her life is shaped by the limitations of hegemonic space and to resist these limitations” (49). Thus women writers typically put their female characters in situations requiring them to negotiate between dichotomies. In this chapter, Hooper strongly argues for the relevance of Casanova’s *El doctor Wolski*, since it does not follow traditional Spanish narrative of its time, for the novel is set outside of Spain and it is an overt feminist effort to engage in the debates of the period.

Chapter 3 is an analysis of Sofia Casanova’s *Lo eterno* (1907). In this chapter, Hooper focuses on the models of feminine writing used by Casanova to boldly criticize the “dogmatic Catholic response” to “fears about the *fin de siglo* breakdown of national, racial, and sexual boundaries” (52). Hooper not only situates Casanova’s text within this context, but she also highlights previous misreadings of the text and the lack of contextualization of obvious elements of the novel, such as the male protagonist’s Andalusian identity and the racial/national implications of his moving to Africa at the end of the novel. According to Hooper, it is also significant that the 1907 version of *Lo eterno* is set in Madrid, while the 1926 edition switches the setting to a small village in Galicia, for a close reading of Casanova’s texts and of other female writers of the period shows that the “*fin de siglo* is a time of transition in female-authored representations of space and, particularly, of the city” (59). Hooper explains that Casanova’s changes to the novel in the second edition “may have been intended to neutralize the critical view of church and nation in the original, [and] their effect—at least for the scholar with access to both versions—is to throw the excised passages into even sharper relief” (59). Hooper believes, and I agree with her, that these modifications reveal how Casanova once again struggled within a “paradoxical space,” between the fear of scandal and a damaged reputation as a writer and the desire to promote greater literary freedom for female writers. Unfortunately, it seems that the power of fear was stronger than the hope for change.

Chapters 4 and 5 offer close readings of *Más que amor* (1908) and *Princesa del amor hermoso* (1909). Hooper sees *Más que amor* as Sofia Casanova’s most “femi-

nine" novel and *Princesa* as the most "Galician." While Hooper offers a detailed analysis of these two novels within their respective contexts, the idea of "paradoxical space" largely disappears from the study at this point. Nevertheless, in both chapters, Hooper compares female and male characters of *Más que amor* and *Princesa* with the characters of the previously discussed novels. One certainly appreciates this comparative approach, since it gives a sense of cohesion and allows for a more comprehensive and unified approach to Casanova's *oeuvre*. Hooper's study of *Princesa* focuses on the novel from a "Spanish" perspective but also situates the text within Galician tradition. Her reading makes clear that Casanova's text negotiates between several dichotomies—national (Spanish) and regional (Galician) identity, traditional female and male roles, the country and the city, the *novela corta* and the novel as literary genre—making it very difficult to characterize the nature of this novel. In this chapter, Hooper engages in a masterly fashion with other canonical writers (Spanish and Galician), such as Azorín, Valle-Inclán, and Pardo Bazán, allowing the reader to see that "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 [that] it questions them all" (135).

The last chapter is the most complex, since Hooper turns to analyzing a collection of short stories published under the title *El pecado* (1911) and an unknown short novel *El crimen de Beira-mar* (1914). Hooper's approach here situates both the short stories and the novel within the general Galician tradition. Written for the reader unfamiliar with these texts and the Galleguista alike, Hooper's analysis shows that the relevance of these two works as well as their lack of recognition lies in their direct engagement "with the unprecedented cultural and political developments then taking place in Galicia" (138). If there were any doubts as to Casanova's contribution to Galician *letras*, this chapter certainly dispels them. It is rather symbolic that Hooper chose these two works, marginalized from Casanova's own literary production, to discuss an already marginalized peripheral literature.

A Stranger in My Own Land is complemented by a comprehensive bibliography of Casanova's published works that emphasizes the prolific production of this lesser-known female writer. Certainly, the most significant contribution of the book is that Hooper positions Sofía Casanova as a true *fin de siglo* intellectual, dialoguing with other texts and authors about issues such as "race, class, gender, and nation" (36) that constituted the struggle between degenerationist and regenerationist discourse both in Spain and in Galicia at the end of the nineteenth century.

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