

Castelao and the Generation of 1898: History and Topics

Alfonso Rodríguez Castelao is one of the most well known Galician writers of all time. The first to write all his works in the Galician language, he was also the founder of the Galician Nationalist Party, one of the first representatives of Galicia in Congress, and the first president of the Galician Counsel, an honorary organization that became the government of Galicia abroad while Francisco Franco's repressive regime was established in Spain. Apart from the fact that Galicia, the northwest region of Spain, is the focus of all his novels, essays or short stories, critics have never agreed on what kind of writer Castelao was. When approaching his work, it is difficult to agree on a classification in regards to a literary movement or group. On one hand, he has been regularly considered a member of the Xeración Nós¹. On the other, for critics, like Carballo- Calero or Anxo Tarrío, although Castelao shared many of the characteristics of this generation, his political interests situated him far from the culturalist tendencies of his contemporaries. Castelao became more concerned with the political and social awakening of the nation than the manner in which these advancements should reflect on Galicia. Other scholars such as Isabel Gómez Rivas consider him a debtor of the Spanish Generation of 1914 because of his straightforward style, together with a drive towards renovation, creativity and intellectuality.

Nevertheless, a forgotten influence very close to Castelao and other writers at that time is his connection with the Spanish generation of 1898². Although the purpose of this essay is not at all to dismiss the characterization of this group and the criticism that has been long going on regarding whether they were in fact a group or are only so depicted by the marked tendencies of some specific writers, the goal will be to analyze Castelao's work from the perspective of these writers, including their characteristics, their philosophies, their influences, their histories and aspirations. This group of Spanish writers, created before the generation *Nós*, had similar points

of view and purposes. Their love for the land and its recovery, the development and promotion of the Castilian language, and their determination to recover their ties with Europe are some of the elements that may be observed in the Galician Xeración Nós. Likewise, although this is not going to be a focus of the paper, a very important development in the study of the Spanish Generation of 1898 is the fact that for many decades, as Donald Shaw points out, this group has been studied only on the basis of its thematic connections with Francoist Spain and its ideology. For Shaw, critics like Laín Entralgo and others used these writers to emphasize the unity of Spain as a country rather than analyzing what their literature was claiming. Nevertheless, the Spanish Generation of 98 as well as the Galician Xeración Nós did not consider their lands as objectives in themselves to preserve and guard but as peoples, cultures and identities that had to be fulfilled outside themselves in their connections with Europe and the world. Castelao presents Galicia as the land of living forces that generates the character and the destiny of a people. In his works, Galician is not only a language of peasants but the main characterization of a particular people, and Europe, more than Spain, is the symbol of unity and fraternity among peoples who are able to share common interests without losing their identity.

To embark upon this task, it is fitting to delimit the works upon which this paper is based. Some of them, such as Angel Ganivet's *Idearium Español*, Azorín's *La generación de 1898*, Ramiro de Maeztu's "El alma de 1898", Pío Baroja's "La supuesta generación del 98" and Unamuno's "Nuestra egolatría de los del 98" are basic but invaluable reflections of these generational authors upon themselves and their work. Beyond this time, however, there were also infinite critical analyses that finally defined what this group meant for Spain and Spanish literature. Among the works that will be used to analyze Castelao's are Torrente Ballester's *Panorama de la literatura española contemporánea*, Díaz-Plaja's *Modernismo frente a Noventa*

y ocho, and more recently, Guillermo de Torre's *Del 98 al Barroco*, Donald Shaw's *The generation of 1898 in Spain*, Tzitsikas' *El sentimiento ecológico de la generación del 98* and Torrecillas' *La generación del 98 frente al nuevo fin de siglo*.

Taking these works as the basis for this study, the first important characteristic that Castelao has in common with the generation of 98 is the consideration of the land and its function in the formation of a national identity and culture. For Castelao, the land is a mixture of pride and ignorance. Pride, because when talking about Galicia as a territory he conveys, as Valbuena Prat did with the generation of 98, that: "El descubrimiento del paisaje castellano es la gran adquisición estética del 98... La afirmación de raza era, en el fondo, la verdadera nota de estos paisajes, de estas visiones de arte" ("The discovery of the Castilian scenery is the great aesthetic acquisition of the Group of 1898... The affirmation of race was, at the end, the true note of these landscapes, of these artistic visions", 457). Galicia is the ground for a specific ethnicity and its affirmation; nevertheless, Castelao does not consider this race or this land of a superior nature or as a manifestation of a people but as a way to portray a degree of patriotism that appreciates the earth as a giver of life and an environment of beauty and familiar reassurance on which to subsist:

...para uns a Terra é o pequeno berce en que nasceron: a penas un fremoso val, que ten un río de prata, unhas casas que fumegan, un campanario lanzal e un cimiterio onde durmen os seus avós. Alí abriron os ollos e alí queren morrer. Para estes a Terra é unha nación pequena en extensión pero fonda en patriotismo.

("For some the Earth is the little crib where they were born, not even a beautiful valley, with a silver river, smoky houses, a picked bell tower and a cemetery where their grandparents sleep. They opened their eyes for the first time there and there they want to die. For them, the Earth is a little nation in extension but deeply patriotic" *Sempre en Galiza* ("Galicia, forever"), 91)

Thus, for Castelao, Galicia's land is, as in the case of the authors of 98, a distinctive feature of the Galician being; it becomes part of their character, molding their personality and in

some instances their future. It is in this regard that Castelao may also be seen as sharing the perspectives of an Azorín or a Ganivet. These authors lived and saw themselves as part of the scenery and its opportunity to enjoy it with all their senses. For Ganivet, a piece of land is not only a territory. The people who live on that land are also part of it (53). For Azorín, the landscape was part of the sense of taste, increasing appetite, it was also part of a sense of smell and of hearing; when one perceives the noise of the wind and the water falling, he becomes part of that world, with nature and unable to depart from it (64-65). For Helene Tzitsikas, the relationship between man and land is united in their history and their future, being that the land is not only the means by which man is surrounded but also his destiny: “La mayoría de estos autores usaron las relaciones entre el hombre y su ambiente para explicar la psicología y el comportamiento de los españoles, como también la historia cultural, social, económica y política de su país. Tenían un enfoque determinista...” (“...the majority of these authors used the relationships between man and his environment to explain the psychology and behavior of Spaniards, as well as their cultural, social, economic and political history. They had a deterministic focus...” 9). Castelao rejects determinism. He, as Ganivet affirmed, did not believe that the land is an inanimate object created from the exterior; he did not believe that man is unable to create his own destiny, and one of the objectives of his work was to convince his readers of the opposite. They did not need to accept what the central government of Madrid was doing for Galicia or how the rest of Spain saw this region; Galicians could take care of their own land and they should have the right to determine its destiny.

For Castelao, the Galician scenery is one of the common points in the definition of the land, its meaning and history. In his introduction to *Cousas*, for instance, the narrator engages the reader in a sensual and idyllic description of the Galician countryside on a Sunday morning. He

describes the night that precedes it, how the earth is turning around in the middle of a mixture of rain and mud, how the church bells ring and the moon lays its light over the crosses in the middle of the road. In the meantime, the morning is coming, and the rain fades away, making room for the light of the sun, the singing of the birds and the green of the land. In this regard, Castelao uses the scenery to wrap the reader in Galicia physically as a land. However, he goes beyond the mere superficial description. Through his narrative, he also gives a sentimental and romantic account of this land. The Galician mountaintops, round and soft, are for Castelao an expression of a land sweet for its mountains but strong in its core. It is a land united by ethnicity and topography, but above all, the Galician landscape is part of that notion of motherland in front of the Spanish State. Nevertheless, in spite of that vision, in *Cousas*, the narrator, while playing with the reader's senses, states: "Velaí o cadro dun pintor... O pintor ten que evocar algo máis que unha visión, pois na mesa de pedra do cruceiro, aquela mesma tardinna, pousaron o corpo morto dun rapaz que veu do servicio" ("Here you are, a painter's work... The painter must evoke more than a vision, because on the stone table in the cross roads, that same afternoon, they had placed the dead body of a boy who had come back from the army" 65-66).

Through Castelao's narratives, the reader has the impression that the narrator of the story is playing with him. First, he submerges him in an idyllic trip to the glories of the past, the land, the happiness of the beauty around him, and then, all of a sudden, and without warning, that same narrator changes his tone and portrays reality: the box of a dead soldier, the women in black who follow the priest in his procession, the slaves of state taxes who have to work all day long to pay them. For Castelao, the land or the scenery does not mean as much as what it contains: the people, the fruits given by that land, the trees, the wheat, the corn and also the hopes and aspirations passing along with that scenery, looked after by the people who live in it.

Land is a geographical entity formed by four provinces with very determined borders that delimit and sometimes constrain the authentic Galician being. Geographically, Galicia is a region formed by others: “Ninguén pode negalo. A entidade xeográfica galega ten fronteiras naturaes perfectamente recortadas, e comprende algo máis que o territorio das nosas catro provincias” (“Nobody can deny it. The geographical Galician entity has perfectly marked natural frontiers, and it encompasses a little bit more than our four provinces” 89).

Galicia does not only include four provinces but also a part of Portugal. The landscape marks the differences between Galicia and the rest of Spain and also shows how a part of Portugal could belong to Galicia. The land and its limits are not only a political unit but a psychological and racial entity, a position also defended by other writers of the Nós Generation, specifically, Otero Pedrayo and Vicente Risco. Dolores Vilavedra, among other important critics, has seen in Pedrayo and Risco a conglomeration of topics such as land, living conditions and historical impositions that are considered essential factors in forming the Galician identity. In the same way in Castelao there is also this connection between land and culture, in spite of his rejection of other points of view and approaches to Galician identity made by these two intellectuals (189-190). Far from Otero’s and Risco’s visions, Castelao did not share a culturalistic and spiritual idea of Galicia. He rejected to make Galicia a part of a mythological or religious ancestry. He did not like the connections that many intellectuals were making between Galicia and the Celts, Galicia and Priscilianism or Galicia and the kingdom of Castile because, although all these connections were true in some moments in history, these connections did not help the people overcome the economic and social problems that became endemic in the land.

However, his rejection of culture and history did not prevent him from acknowledging the links between these two elements and their influence in the construction of the nation. It is in

this context that Castelao himself affirmed how “...a Terra é a fonte de vida” (“...the Land is a source of life”, (91) and “...a nosa Terra diferente crea hábitos peculiares de vida, que se manifestan en cada época baixo formas autóctonas de cultura” (“...our different Land creates peculiar living customs, manifested, each time, under vernacular forms of culture” *Sempre en Galiza*, 96). The land is not a dead element but a living component with the capacity to mold its inhabitants and their future as well as their cultural characteristics. Inside this entity, there are the elements that will constitute Galicia as a country: their economy, their history, their climate but above all, their language. For language, this author refers not only to an instrument to speak but to the revelation that such an instrument makes of a particular cultural upbringing as well as their use.

For the Spanish writers of the Generation of 1898, which language to use in their texts was not the dilemma; rather, the issue was how to renovate and regenerate the Spanish language suffering from traditionalism and the numbness of several centuries. According to Torrente Ballester, these writers would oscillate between using the purest and simplest Spanish possible, as Azorín and Unamuno would try to do, and introducing popular terms and regional expressions, as Baroja and Valle-Inclán were inclined to use (123-128). In “Ruben Dario y la generación del 98: personas, personajes y máscaras”, María A. Salgado makes this desire to renovate the language a common ground to relate the productions of the generation of 98 writers with the works of the Modernists. For Salgado the art of the portrait that Ruben Dario and the Modernists introduced in Spain was one of the many ways to transform linguistic expression. For the modernists and the writers influenced by them, to read a text was a way to read and get to know the person behind it (725). The language was an indication of the people who used it. In that same trend of trying to connect the language to the people who spoke it, Azorín himself

relates a conversation that he kept with Amadeo Vives in which they discussed the importance of style, precision and vocabulary accuracy in which the second advocated for opening the language not only to academics and writers but to those who really were specialist in their fields, even if they could not read or write but were familiar their lines of work (45-47).

In Castelao, there is also a similar conversation regarding which language to speak and how to speak it. His writing is characterized by many (Varela Jácome and Carballo- Calero specifically) as simple and straightforward. He utilizes words to express exact feelings and conditions. He goes beyond the literary field to encompass other subjects like economy and social issues. Language is for Castelao not only a way to express his ideas but above all a weapon to fight for Galicia's interests. It is in this regard that the author defends Galician as the true and irrevocable language of this region in the same way that the writers of 98 tried to preserve and modernize the Castilian language as a way to revive the Spanish empire and magnificence. Galician is for Castelao a language in its own right that preserves in its use the psychology and mindfulness of a people. The political establishment in Spain made the mistake to take the Castilian dialect and call it Spanish, eliminating in this fashion all the other Spanish languages of the Iberian Peninsula: "Tamén se intentou chamarlle hespañol á língoa castelá. E iso si que non, tampouco. O castelán pode ser o idioma oficial do Estado; pero non é máis hespañol que o catalán, o galego e o vasco" ("They tried also to call the Castilian language, Spanish. And there is no way either. Castilian may be the official state language; but it is not more Spanish than Catalan, Galician and Basque" *Sempre en Galiza*, 153).

Castelao's statement, although accurate with the perception of the Spanish languages and their use, shows a point of differentiation between this writer and his *fin de siècle* counterparts. Although Baroja and Valle- Inclán included in their writings expressions of different regions of

Spain that would not be considered as true Spanish, there are other authors like Miguel de Unamuno and Maeztu who stand up for the preservation of the Spanish language purity. In this regard, while Carlos Feal affirms the Galician characteristics of Valle-Inclán's character Juanito in *Las galas del difunto* (1930), Roberta Johnson and Joan Ramón Resina declare how this group of intellectuals was devoted to "influence the national conscience" (Johnson, 141) inside and out and establish the principles "which a century later still impede recognition of Spain's multicultural composition and the implicit plurality of national rights" (Resina, 240). According to Resina, it was particularly Miguel de Unamuno, the scholar who rejected the use of the different Spanish vernacular languages, considering them unfit to express the ideas and concepts well adapted to the Spanish language and the languages of a low minority without any political or social influence. Regarding the Galician language, Resina points out how Unamuno "disallows (it) in the grounds that it cannot reconquer the urban middle class. Its literary use, though undeniable, is restricted to the low style, a trademark of the uneducated" (247).

Opposite to Unamuno's views, Castelao did not only recover the Galician language as the main instrument of communication of peasants and fishermen but as the central attribute of the region and its people. The objective for Castelao was first the recovery and the position of the Galician language among the other languages in the word and second, as Amadeo Vives was advocating, to give a voice to those who were using it for centuries: the lower classes. In *Un olo de vidro* ("A Crystal Eye"), the story of an skeleton who lives in a cemetery and can observe life there through his crystal eye, the narrator complains how the other skeletons don't want to speak Galician in spite of the fact that they don't have a throat to pronounce the Castilian "j", in *Cousas*, only weak characters, like the child made out of butter, speak Castilian while the others use Galician. Galician is seen in *Sempre in Galiza* as the one and only language that should be

spoken in the region, one with a longer history than Spanish and Portuguese, used not only by the peasants but by intellectuals in Galicia and those abroad like Garcia Lorca. For Castelao, the use for the language is one of the most basic rights of a human being, reflecting the psychological and cultural makeup of the people who were born in it. The Galician language is not a dialect taken from the Spanish or a mode of expression to be rejected for more extended or universal alternative. In the same way, for this author, it is a shame that the language was forbidden from being spoken and taught, from being used by the administration and in the courts of justice or in public gatherings. In a similar situation were Pío Baroja and Unamuno himself. Both of them being Basque, they were accused of incorrectly using the Spanish language, grammar and of not having a definite style. According to Eloy Placer, that appreciation was proven wrong, since neither one of them learned the language and lived in Euskadi for an extended period of time. According to Placer, the use of Basque words and grammatical structures was not as much out of carelessness as to add a note of color to their novels (222-223).

Castelao defended the Galician language in the same way the Generation of 98 protected Spanish. He wrote all his literary works in Galician, and in one of his political speeches he affirmed how in Galicia the only language that should be taught and spoken should be Galician, even if in its writing it is difficult to understand: “hai moitos casteláns que non entenden os escritos de Unamuno, Ortega y Gasset, Valle-Inclán ou outros escritores que escriben en castelán” (“There are many Castilian people who do not understand Unamuno’s, Ortega y Gasset’s, Valle-Inclán’s or other authors’ writings who write in Castilian”, *Sempre en Galiza* 94). In spite of his views concerning the defense of one’s own language and culture, Castelao was a supporter of universalism, and another characteristic he shares with the Generation of 98 is

the idea that all the regions of Spain should become European and get closer to the rest of the countries in the continent.

In the Generation of 98, that closeness was intended to be mainly cultural. Azorín remembers how they wanted to be in contact with the literature and the art produced in Europe, not to transport it to Spain mindlessly, but with the objective of strengthening and renovating Spanish literature and therefore Spanish society. In this regard, he mentions the main influences in this period were Nietzsche and Wagner. For Donald Shaw, the *Noventayochismo* (“The Generation of 1898”) does not only have a direct connection with the Latin American Modernista movement (*The generation of 1898 in Spain*, 5) but it connects directly with the sensibilities and world vision of the European literature of I World War. The effect of the war, the end of the “Belle Époque” and the crisis of old values and beliefs are attributes common to both literatures. In a similar way, Javier Pinedo indicates the approach that Ortega makes in relationship with Europe. For Ortega the future and the stability of Spain were only fulfilled in its integration with Europe, assuming “un proyecto político y cultural globalizador” (“a global political and cultural project”, 156).

This project towards a European Union was not only felt in Spain as a country but in many of the regions that even while rejecting the government of the Spanish State had the hope of not being completely isolated in their endeavors but to be free to join a sort of European confederation in which the rights of every region would be respected while receiving the support and reinforcement of other nations. This was in essence Castelao’s approach. It seems rare that a man who fought so fiercely for Galician nationalism and the political freedom of this region from Spain could at the same time encourage the formation of a global community, or as he called them, the United States of Europe. Nevertheless, his support is due to three main reasons:

first, his own perspective on the independence and autonomy of the regions of Spain, particularly Galicia; second, his own vision of Europe and what other countries could offer to Galicia's problems and solutions; and third, his linkage in some ways with the Spanish "Generación del 98", particularly with their struggle between the idea of a "Europe becoming more Spanish" or the "españolización de Europa" and the opposite initiative, getting Spain closer to Europe or the "europeización de España" ("Spain becoming more European").

Castelao sees two different realities: on one hand, the reality of the regions, and on the other, that of Madrid and the central government. He understands that if Galicia and its culture are to survive, the only way to attain this is to concede Galicia enough autonomy and independence from the rest of Spain to pursue its own interests and defend its traditions. He does not claim total independence, although at the end of *Sempre en Galiza* and after spending eight years in exile, he was ready for the total separation of Galicia from the rest of Spain; nevertheless, his approach is that Galicia has to have the same rights as the rest of the historical regions of Spain, Catalonia and the Basque Country:

Nin reclamamos unha autonomía integral –que nos corresponde en conciencia, por ser Galiza unha nación- nin reclamamos integramente as atribucións que na Lei se outorgan. E pola porta que abreu Cataluña e que despois agrandou Euskadi, entrará o noso estatuto sen chiscar as paredes.

("We neither claim an integral autonomy –something that, in all conscience, belongs to us because Galicia is a nation- either we claim all the attributions given to us by the Law. Through the door opened by Catalonia and later enlarged by Euskadi, through that door we will introduce also our constitution, without touching any walls", 144)

Besides the rights of Galicia to become autonomous and have its own constitution, Castelao also sees the advantages of being associated with a more solid and multicultural federation as it was going to be Europe. For the author, the hope for a continent such as Europe has to rest in the economic union of all the peoples and nations in order to secure their survival

and their political independence and at the same time, preserving their sovereignty. Federalism is, for this writer, the only solution that will stop the complete subjugation of the nation- states over their different communities under their control and also prevent a revolution by those same communities against the injustice and discrimination suffered by the state: “A solución xusta está en que os pobos se somentan voluntariamente a un soio plan económico; pero conservando cada un deles a súa soberanía política” (“The solution is that each community will submit voluntarily to one economic plan; but it will preserve its own political sovereignty” *Sempre en Galiza*, 282)

As many other critics have perceived (among them, Ramón Maíz and Justo Beramendi), Castelao worked relentlessly to bring different groups and perspectives together. It is in this sense of building bridges that Castelao sought for Galicia not only a more harmonious union with the rest of the Iberian Peninsula, but for this region to become part of Europe and part of the global community. At the end of *Sempre en Galiza*, he sees the constitution of a European Union as the only way to save Spain from itself. Already in the middle of the Francoist dictatorship in 1945 and from his exile in Argentina, Castelao’s only hopes are that Europe opens the doors to all the different Spanish groups suffering right now in the hands of the military and change their history to become free and owners of their own destinies:

Non temos ningunha fe nos españoles pero témola en nós mesmos e nas ideas que profesamos. Estas ideas poden concentrarse nos catro principios seguintes:

- a) Autonomía integral de Galicia para federarse cos demais pobos de Hespaña.
- b) República Federal Española para confederarse con Portugal.
- c) Confederación Ibérica para ingresar na Unión Europea.
- d) Estados Unidos de Europa para constituir a unión Mundial.

(“We do not have any faith in the Spaniards but we have it in ourselves and in our ideas. These ideas may be summarized in the following four principles: (a) Complete autonomy for Galicia to be federated with the rest of Spain’s peoples. (b) The constitution of a Spanish federal republic that could confederate with Portugal. (c) An Iberian Confederation to enter the European Union. (d) The

constitution of the United States of Europe in order to pursue a World Union”,
580)

Castelao supported the formation of a European Union not as another way to impose a culture and an economy on other communities, but as a way for all the peoples in Europe and in the world to come and work together towards common and fair interests. It is in this way that at least in the beginning of his political career, Castelao seemed not so interested in attaining the independence of Galicia as much as an autonomy within that European Consortium that would allow this region to defend its interests and at the same time to avoid isolation. In many ways, it is this type of relationship between countries that would lead years later to the constitution of the European Union, a community of countries working together but without losing sight of their own interests and cultures.

It may seem quite a challenge to connect Castelao's nationalism with the ideas and aspirations of a group of writers like the generation of 1898; nevertheless, and in spite of the distance that separates them, both have elements in common. First, it was their perception of the land as a unifying component and creator of many of the characteristics that bring people together, characteristics like traditions and customs, ways of living and behaving. Second, another element that is similar in both cases is the perception of the language and its use to unify a community and renovate its history and objectives for the future. Finally, in both cases, Europe is seen as an opportunity to be saved to break the isolation, the monotony and the abuse and to look forward to new and better things. It is important to state that although Castelao lived in the same period and shared many of the ideas of the Generation of 98, and although thematically it seems that both share many of the same worries and dedicate their literature in some ways to the same topics, their focus is not always the same. The Generation of 98 and their literary concerns came about in part because of the loss of Cuba and Puerto Rico in the Spanish American war;

Castelao's interests, on the other hand, were more focused on portraying the history of abuses that Galicia had suffered under the government of Spain. Land, language and Europe are not for Castelao so much a way to reach a reader as to teach human beings the way of their survival.

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¹ Xeración Nós was a group of Galician writers born in the province of Ourense between 1880 and 1890 who were at the forefront of Galician national Renaissance during the 1930's. The most important authors were Ramon Otero Pedrayo, Vicente Risco, Rodríguez Castelao and Florentino Cuevillas. The group began his work around the publication of the literary and artistic journal “Nós” in 1920 and their main objectives were: the defense of the Galician language, the recovery of the Galician culture and the promotion of the connection between Galicia and Europe.

² The Spanish Generation of 1898 was a group of writers, artists and philosopher from different regions of Spain who came together at the time of the Spanish American War in 1898 and whose objective was not so much to redefine the position of Spain in the world after the loss of the last colonies, especially Cuba, but to renovate its literary and intellectual traditions. Among the most important representatives, there are: Miguel de Unamuno, Pío Baroja, José Martínez Ruíz (Azorín) and Antonio Machado.