

## From Pondal (1835-1917) to Cabanillas (1876-1956): Ossian and Arthur in the making of a Celtic Galicia

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### Abstract

The second part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the upsurge of the other cultures, languages and literatures of Spain, main dormant since the late Middle Ages, when Spanish or Castilian became the new national language of a united Spain (1492). Among these, Galicia, the humid, green north-west corner of the Iberian Peninsula led the way. The Romantic Movement taking place in this region was given the name of *Rexurdimento* or 'Resurgence'. But there is something that makes Galicia different from other parts of Spain experimenting similar processes such as Catalonia or the Basque Land. Galicia made its collective mind up to turning into a full Celtic nation. Manuel Murguía (1833-1923), historian and main leader of the *Rexurdimento* movement published a *Historia de Galicia* or 'History of Galicia' in 1865, where he claimed the two main elements of the Galician identity were the language and its Celtic roots. He elaborated and reconstructed the history of Galicia and claimed that the pre-Roman Celtic past was the real nature of Galicia and that Celtic Galicia has always been at war with the Romans, the Germanic invaders, the medieval kingdoms, etc. These polemical, surprising, but fascinating theories soon became very popular, not only among the intellectuals but among the people at large. It constituted a very curious cultural, social and political phenomenon which helped build a national identity of their own, frequently opposed to mainstream Spanish culture and nation. Of course, this peculiar Galician Celtic Revival proved an excellent source of inspiration for many Galician writers who committed to write in Galician and to promote an independent Galician culture. On the one hand, this paper will focus its attention on Eduardo Pondal (1835-1917), the so-called Bard of Galicia and his book of poems *Queixumes dos pinos* (1886) (Complaints of the Pine-Trees). On the other, on Ramón Cabanillas (1876-1956), named the National Poet of Galicia, and his *Na noite estrelecida* (1926) (Under a Starry Night), which consists of three narrative poems: *A espada Escalibor*, *O cabaleiro do Sant Grial*, *O soño do rei Arturo*. Both of them represent the final triumph in literature of the idea of a Celtic Galicia. Their compositions are full of Ossianic, Arthurian and other Celtic motifs, which this article will try to disclose as well.

Key words: Arthur, Ossian, Galicia, Celtism, nation building

### Resumen

La segunda mitad de siglo XIX conoció un resurgir de las otras culturas, lenguas y literaturas de España, adormecidas desde finales de la Edad Media, cuando el español o castellano se convirtió en la nueva lengua nacional de la España unida (1492). Entre estas, Galicia, el húmedo y verde rincón occidental de la Península Ibérica, pronto se puso a la cabeza. El movimiento romántico que tuvo lugar en esta región se denominó *Rexurdimento*. Sin embargo, hay algo que convierte la realidad de Galicia en un fenómeno diferente de aquellos similares que estaban experimentando otras zonas de España como Cataluña o el País Vasco. Galicia en su conjunto, y de manera colectiva, tomó la decisión de transformarse en una

plena nación celta. Manuel Munguía (1833-1923), historiador e impulsor máximo del movimiento del *Rexurdimento* publicó su *Historia de Galicia* en 1865, donde defendía la idea de que los dos elementos principales de la identidad gallega eran su lengua y sus raíces celtas. Elaboró toda una reconstrucción del pasado prerromano de Galicia donde consagró la visión de que dicho pasado constituía su identidad real y que la auténtica Galicia siempre había estado en pie de guerra contra romanos, invasores germánicos, reinos medievales, etc. Estas polémicas y sorprendentes teorías, a la par que fascinantes, pronto se volvieron muy populares, no solo entre los círculos de intelectuales, sino entre el pueblo gallego en general, lo que constituye todo un fenómeno cultural, social y político de lo más curioso y que sin duda contribuyó a definir una identidad nacional propia desde entonces, a menudo opuesta a la identidad general de la cultura y la nación española. Por supuesto, este peculiar renacer celta gallego pronto demostró ser también una excelente fuente de inspiración para muchos escritores gallegos, a menudo comprometidos a escribir en gallego y en la promoción de una cultura gallega autónoma. En consecuencia, el presente artículo fijará su atención, para iniciar su revisión, en Eduardo Pondal (1835-1917), el llamado bardo de Galicia y en su libro de poemas *Queixumes dos pinos* (1986). Y para avanzar en la misma, principalmente, en Ramón Cabanillas (1876-1956), nombrado el Poeta Nacional de Galicia, y en su *Na noite estrelecida* (1926), compuesto de tres poemas narrativos: *A espada Escalibor*, *O cabaleiro do Sant Grial*, *O soño do rei Arturo*. Ambos representan el triunfo literario de esta idea de una Galicia celta. Sus obras abundan en motivos ossiánicos, artúricos y de otras temáticas celtas, asunto que se estudiará en el presente artículo.

Mots-clés: Arturo, Ossian, Galicia, celtismo, nacionalismo

## Introduction

In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was an upsurge in the other cultures, languages and literatures of Spain, mainly dormant since the late Middle Ages, when Spanish or Castilian became the new national language of a united Spain (1492). Among these, Galicia, the humid, green north-western corner of the Iberian Peninsula, led the way. The Romantic Movement taking place in this region was called the *Rexurdimento* or 'Resurgence'. But there is something that makes Galicia different from other parts of Spain experiencing processes similar to Catalonia or the Basque Country. Galicia made up its collective mind to turn into a full Celtic nation.

This huge task was heralded by different generations of intellectuals and artists who persistently intended to promote the Galician language and literature, and defend the existence of a *Galician Celtic nation*, separated from the rest of Spain.

These polemical, surprising, but fascinating theories soon became very popular, not only among the intellectuals but also among the people at large. The theories constituted a curious cultural, social and political phenomenon that helped them to build a national identity of their own, frequently opposed to the mainstream Spanish culture and nation.

Of course, this peculiar Galician Celtic Revival proved an excellent source of inspiration for many Galician writers who committed themselves to writing in Galician and promoting an independent Galician culture. On the one hand, this paper will focus its attention on Eduardo Pondal (1835-1917), the so-called Bard of Galicia, and, on the other, on Ramón Cabanillas (1876-1956), called the National Poet of Galicia. Both represent the final triumph in literature of the idea of a Celtic Galicia. In other words,

their compositions are full of Ossian, Arthurian and other Celtic motifs, which this paper will try to disclose as well.

Other names – thinkers, writers and scholars – will be mentioned and invited to join the fascinating route on which this paper attempts to take its readers through the unique story of a Celtic collective vindication, enriched with many purposes.

### **The Celts in the Iberian Peninsula**

Is it possible to have a Celtic nation in the Spanish Peninsula? This is the question. Clint Twist, the author of the popular *Atlas of the Celts* (2001), elaborates on this idea as follows:

“There is no doubt that Celts inhabited areas of the Iberian Peninsula; modern archaeology has confirmed their presence as reported by the classical authors. However, the relationship of these Celtiberians to the rest of the Celtic world is far from clear ... Even more than with other groups of early Celts, our knowledge of the Celtiberians is plagued with *uncertainties* ... By ca 400 BC, Celtic languages were spoken (but not exclusively) throughout much of Iberia ... Four groups – Iberian, Phoenician/Greek, Basque and Celtic – were spoken.” (Twist, 2001: 48)

So, for Archaeology and Ancient History researchers, the presence of Celtic people in the Peninsula is a polemical issue still under much discussion. However, there seem to be some points of agreement in the leading scientific literature on the Celts (Twist, 2001: 49):

- The Celts arrived in Hispania around the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC crossing the Pyrenees. There is no sound evidence of Celts arriving from the sea. They were the most important Indo-European (I-E) group who populated the Peninsula, but not the first or only group, I-E or not.

- Broadly speaking, they occupied mainly the central and western areas of the Peninsula. The Southern and the Mediterranean regions were populated by other groups of non-Indo-European people: Basques, Iberians, Phoenicians, etc., a phenomenon known as *The two Hispanias*.

- They established their heartland in the central northern area of Iberia, from where they began expanding between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries BC to the South, the North and the West, where they invaded and dominated other ethnically different territories. Some of the most reputed Latin classical writers even proclaimed their Celtiberian origin:

“All the texts are written in Latin or Greek. Contrary to what is often claimed, the writers include some who had Celtic connections, if not ancestry. Epigrammist poet Martial (c. AD 40-102) claims several times that, as a Celtiberian from *Bilbilis* (near Calatayud in central Spain), his ancestry was half Celtic and half Iberian” (Collis, 2003: 14).

- This is when they reached the north-west, i.e. the region known today as Galicia.

•Celtiberians, the popular name among Latin writers, can refer to all the Celts of Hispania or only to those who settled down in the north central area, deeply influenced by the Iberian culture, and who rebelled strongly against the Power of Rome, e.g. the epic siege of the Celtiberian city of Numantia:

“Numantia is a symbol of Celtiberian resistance to Roman rule. For 14 years the city (close to present-day Soria,<sup>1</sup> Castile-Leon - north-eastern Spain) successfully resisted Roman attempts to capture it. In 133 BC, after a long siege by Roman forces led by Scipio Aemilianus, and a failed attempt to breach the Roman ramparts surrounding the city, the Celtiberians decided to commit suicide rather than surrender to the Romans. The inhabitants torched their city before stabbing or poisoning themselves. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Spanish historians interpreted this as an expression of national pride and courage” (Twist, 2001: 74).

Consequently, serious researchers seem to have reached the following conclusions (Collis, 2003: 112-113, 122-123, 130-132, 177-180, 201-203, 230):

- 1) Galicia was neither the first nor the most enduring or intensely dominated area of Celtic settlement in the Peninsula of Hispania.
- 2) What the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century romantic and nationalistic Galician historians claimed about Galicia being the *par excellence* Celtic area of Spain does not seem to be true.

The fact is that international researchers specializing in the Celtic world have frequently neglected Celtic Iberia and this complex panorama (Marco-Simón, 1990: 93), still not fully resolved. Understandably, Spanish researchers have been studying these issues for many decades and the body of literature is huge. For those interested in learning more, the bibliographical presentation ranges from the popular monographs by F. Marco-Simón (1990) and F. Burillo-Mozota to the book chapters by M. Almagro-Gorbea, F. Burillo-Mozota, and A.J. Lorrio (1991) – among many others.

### **A Celtic nation named Galicia**

There is something that makes Galicia different from other parts of Spain experiencing nation-building processes similar to Catalonia or the Basque Land. Galicia made up its collective mind to turn into a full Celtic nation. This is a historical and cultural fact that cannot be neglected.

Nevertheless, this decision found support in some legendary and/or historical facts.

- When the leaders of the Galician Celtic revival realized that there were no myths and heroes to support their beliefs, they turned to Ireland where they found them in an Irish manuscript from the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the *Leabhar Gabhala* or ‘Books of the Invasions’ and one of its heroes, ‘Breoghan’ or ‘Breogán’. According to this manuscript, Ireland was invaded by different people, all of them coming through Spain. The last invasion was that of the sons of Mil. But the core of the story began with victorious Spanish Celtic King

Breogán, who successfully kept all other Spanish people out of his Galician land, and who founded the city of Brigantia, future La Coruña, and erected a tall tower – a lighthouse – next to the sea. One of his sons, Ith, could see Ireland from this tower and wanted to travel to the distant country. Unfortunately, he was killed there by the Tuatha, inhabitants of the island at the time. Another son of Breogán, Bile, had a son of his own named Mil. This Mil and his sons took revenge and finally conquered Ireland. The links between Galicia and Celtic Ireland were established (Sainero, 1987: 71-80; 1988: 392-393).

Present-day Irishmen are probably not aware of the powerful influence that this legend has exercised on the Galician people. La Coruña, former Breogán's Brigantia, lives around the famous tower, today called 'La Torre de Hercules' (Heracles' Tower), where a monumental sculpture of that mythical king has also been placed.

- *Britonia*. It is well known that between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries, numerous groups of Bretons left Britain, fleeing the Germanic invaders of Anglo-Saxon tribes, and settled in Brittany. But it is not so well known that some of them also colonized the northern areas of Galicia and founded a diocese named 'Britonia' in the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD. This diocese, *Sedem Britonorum* in Latin, held all the churches of these newly arrived Bretons, which is fully documented: many Christian Councils of the Suevian Germanic Kingdom – Galicia and North of Portugal – later incorporated into the much larger Visigoth Kingdom in 585, enjoyed the participation of a bishop Maeloc or Mailoc, representing this Britonia: Braga I, II and III (561, 572, 675), Lugo I (569), and Toledo IV, VII and VIII (From 585). In addition, several place names around present-day Galicia still testify to this arrival: 'Bretoña', 'Bretonia' and 'Bertoña'. Of course, it was never a massive phenomenon such as that taking place in Brittany, but it did exist. Finally, nothing remains in present-day Galicia of the Celtic language that they brought with them.

### **The *Rexurdimento***

*Rexurdimento* is the romantic cultural period in the history of Galicia that lasted from the 1840s to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and was marked by the revival of the Galician language, literature and culture, and the general interest in everything local and Galician, after centuries of neglect in favour of Castilian or Spanish – the so-called *séculos escuros* (dark centuries). Its three leading figures were: Rosalía de Castro (1837-1885) and her poetry landmarks 'Cantares Gallegos' (1862) and 'Follas Novas' (1880); Manuel Curros Enríquez (1851-1908) and his 'Aires da miña terra' (1880), and Eduardo Pondal. The ideologue and main promoter of the movement was Manuel Murguía, Rosalía's husband. Rosalía de Castro, the greatest figure of the *Rexurdimento* and of Spanish romantic letters in general, has reached a legendary level, and her poems have become the best symbols of the Galician soul ever since.

### **Manuel Murguía**

Murguía (1833-1923) was a nineteenth century Galician intellectual and writer who managed to influence his contemporaries effectively, and communicate his talent and ideas among his contemporaries as a writer, journalist, poet, art critic, politician and intellectual thinker, etc., and as a modern patriarch of the Galician culture. He was also a *historian* and main leader of the *Rexurdimento* movement. He began publishing a monumental *Historia de Galicia* or 'History of Galicia' in 1865 – very romantic in scope (Otero-Pedrayo, 1975: 285-298; Delgado-Corral, 1996: 307-317; Barreiro-Fernández, 2001, 13-29; Máiz, 2001: 41-57; Mandianes, 2001: 59-68; Iglesias-Diéguez, 2001: 279-282) – where he emphatically claimed that the two main elements of the Galician identity were the language (Latin not Celtic) and its Celtic roots.<sup>2</sup> In contrast with the rest of Spain, Galicia was populated by a different ethnic group dwelling within a well-defined geography.

Furthermore, he was the founder member and first President of the *Real Academia Galega* (Galician Royal Academy) in 1906 – an institution that can still be regarded as a first protagonist of Galician cultural life today.<sup>3</sup>

In a few words, he felt responsible for saving and promoting a better future for his people, and he indulged in a kind of messianic vision of himself (Rodríguez-González, 1933: 169).

To this end, he elaborated on, and reconstructed the history of, Galicia, perfectly adjusted to his beliefs: The pre-Roman Celtic past was the real nature of Galicia, and Celtic Galicia has always been at war with the Romans, the Germanic invaders, the medieval Spanish kingdoms and united Spain, etc.

These polemical, but fascinating theories, which soon became very popular, were not only aimed at the intellectuals but also at the Galician people in general, who had the right to learn the truth about themselves. And the result was that the theories constituted a curious and successful cultural, social and political phenomenon that helped them build a national identity of their own, frequently opposed to the mainstream Spanish culture and nation.

Examples:

- *Historia de Galicia* (1865-1911). This monumental work, created in collaboration with Benito Vicetto, consists of fourteen volumes, from prehistoric times to the present.

*Volume I* (1865) deals with prehistoric and Celtic/druidic Galicia and the coming of the Apostle Saint James to Santiago de Compostela. Its main ideas, with or without much scientific support, can be summarized as follows (Murguía and Vicetto, 1979: 20-112):

-The peoples who first inhabited the lands of Galicia before the arrival of the Celts left nothing behind.

-It is impossible to doubt the Celtic origin of Galicia.

-All our legends originate in our Celtic background.

-Our people are fully Celtic by race.

-Most of our place names are Celtic.

- ‘Prólogo’ to *Célticos. Cuentos y leyendas de Galicia* by José Ojea (1883) (Celtic Tales and Legends of Galicia).

In 1883 Manuel Murguía wrote a ‘preface’ or ‘prologue’ to this collection of local tales and legends, which revealed his ideas about his homeland and people in just a few sentences:

“Cuanto más se estudia y conoce la historia de nuestro país, cuanto más se penetra en ese pasado misterioso que parece empeñado en ocultarse á la mirada de los suyos, ... nos dice de una manera clara é indubitable que este pueblo gallego, diverso bajo tantos aspectos de la mayoría de los que forman la nación española ... Bien pronto se echa de ver ... que es una raza distinta y perfectamente acusada, la cual se mueve en su mundo, tiene vida propia y por lo tanto su instinto poético, su filosofía, historia y costumbres” (Murguía, 1883: v).

(The more you study the history of our country, the more you disclose that mysterious past that seems determined to remain hidden from the people who made it, the more you realize that the Galician people, so different from most of those people belonging to the Spanish nation in so many aspects, ... are a different race and a very markedly distinct one, a race with a world of its own, and their own poetic instinct, philosophy, history and customs). (My translation.)

Of course, this peculiar Galician Celtic Revival proved an excellent source of inspiration for many Galician writers who committed themselves to writing in Galician and promoting an independent Galician culture.

**The *Irmandades da Fala* and the *Xeración Nós*** (translated as the ‘Brotherhoods of the (Galician) Language’ and the ‘*Nós* (We) Generation’)

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the consolidation of Galician was very feeble. The *Irmandades* were a number of societies from different Galician localities whose aim was the radical promotion of the local language and the vindication of its use in all the areas of officialdom. The first one was founded in La Coruña – ‘Corunna’ in English – in 1916. They also started producing dictionaries, grammars and books in Galician, and published a newspaper in order to reach greater audiences, ‘A Nosa Terra’ (Our Land). Their ideology was also very nationalist, Vicente Risco and Ramón Cabanillas were among their main representatives. It can be stated that the movement ended in 1931, when they turned into a political party, ‘Partido Galeguista’.

One of the pet publication projects of the *Irmandades* was the periodical ‘*Nós*’, which eventually gave rise to another movement: the ‘*Xeración Nós*’, which was published in the Galician city of Orense between 1920 and 1936. Their approach was entirely different: it was intellectual and cosmopolitan rather than political. They wanted to put an end to the excesses of localism and ruralism inherited from the *Rexurdimento*, and open Galician culture and letters to the best international cultural and literary avant-garde currents, as the best strategy to strengthen and universalize the local language and culture. Many prominent European thinkers and artists published in *Nós*, and the periodical used to include Galician translations of many key works of the period. Leading representatives of the generation were writers and artists such as Vicente Risco,<sup>4</sup> Ramón Cabanillas, Ramón Otero Pedrayo<sup>5</sup> (1888-1976) and Alfonso Daniel

Castelao (1886-1950), a legendary figure and radical father of Galician nationalism – or ‘galeguismo’ – who died in exile in Buenos Aires as a declared enemy of General Franco’s dictatorship.

### Ossian in Spain and Galicia

When researchers study the reception of the poems of James MacPherson (1736-96) on Ossian in Spain, they realize that, although there are very interesting references, imitations, translations, uses of typical terminology and quotations related to the sentimental and anachronic Celtic world of Ossian, in general, the reception of the Gaelic poems of Macpherson in Spain was poor and very late. Historical and cultural facts account for this phenomenon and for the long delay in the arrival of the new epoch and the slow triumph of the Romantic Movement in Spain. Spanish Neoclassicism proved to be much stronger and more enduring in Spain than in the Romanticism-prone northern Germanic nations. The barbaric world of Ossian – as well as the morbid poems by Young, for example – were supposedly regarded as a threat to the culture and religion of a Latin Catholic country such as Spain (Montiel, 1974: 37-39).

The most important available study about Ossian’s reception in Spain is the aforementioned by Isidoro Montiel (1974: 37-39), a classic within the Spanish bibliography on English Studies. This monograph provides a detailed account of all that wealth of references, imitations, translations, quotes and Ossian terminology present in many different Spanish writers from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century to the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The few translations have never been complete or satisfactory: the *Poemas de Ossián* (1788) of José Alonso Ortiz (1755-?), the *Fingal* (1800) of Pedro Montegón y Paret (1745-1824) or the *Poemas de Ossián* (1804) of José Marchena (1768-1821). The number of canonical poets – from pre- to post-romantic poets – who have imitated or adapted motifs, arguments or full poems – is much larger, but never too satisfactory either: Juan Meléndez Valdés (1754-1817); Nicasio Álvarez de Cienfuegos (1764-1809); Juan Nicasio Gallego (1777-1853) who adapted *Minora* and *Temora* into Castilian-Spanish metrical verses in 1829; Antonio García Gutiérrez (1813-1884), the author of a fully romantic tragedy entitled *Fingal* (1829); Ángel de Saavedra, Duque de Rivas (1791-1865); or, among many others, José Espronceda (1808-1842), one of the leading Spanish romantic poets, and his Ossian-influenced major poems from 1834: *Óscar y Malvina* and *Himno al sol*<sup>6</sup>

Nevertheless, there was a poet for whom Ossian was a key source of artistic inspiration. This poet was, of course, Eduardo Pondal, the most important heir of Ossian in Spain. He wanted to be the Macpherson of Galicia: to emphasize the alleged Celtic roots of Galicia and make the world aware of it. Consequently, Isidoro Montiel devoted one chapter of his book to Eduardo Pondal (Montiel, 1974: 180-201).

### Eduardo Pondal

Pondal (1835-1917) became the most successful and enthusiastic poet of those who lent a lyrical voice to the new vision of their homeland. The so-called Bard of Galicia – as he was called by his contemporaries – soon became the greatest poet of a Celtic Galicia, and he identified with the title.

Murguía and Pondal met in the Galician city of Corunna where they joined a cultural circle or club that used to meet in the backroom of a bookshop located at the

popular 30 Real Street. They called it *A Cova Céltica* (The Celtic Cave). For them and all the artists and intellectuals meeting there, a Celtic Galicia was their first dogma.

Murguía provided scientific or pseudo-scientific support to the defence of the distinctive Celtic features of Galicia, and Pondal produced the poetic myth of an independent nation struggling for its political freedom and cultural autonomy for many centuries. Perhaps, they never expected their theories and truths to become so successful and popular.

Pondal's main book: *Queixumes dos pinos* (1886) (Complaints of the Pine Trees) can be studied as the perfect symbol of their beliefs and national struggle within the cultural *Rexurdimento* movement.

As a committed Galician Bard, he devoted his life to produce an original Celtic Galician poetry. He made himself a kind of chosen prophet of the Celtic roots of the land, an oracle of the future glory of Galicia. That was to be his life mission: to awaken his people's dormant conscience.

There were three main sources of Celtic inspiration that he used during this his dramatic life struggle (Montiel, 1974: 180-201):

- The theories by Murguía and Vicetto about the Celtic historical roots of Galicia.
- The Irish *Leabhar Gabhala*: for the promoters of the *Rexurdimento* movement, this old Irish book supported the Celtic origin of Galicia, mainly due to the legends of Breogán.
- The poems of Ossian, by James Macpherson, which were introduced to him by Murguía.

Examples:

The Galician race is completely different from the races of the rest of Spain:

“Nos somos alanos  
E celtas de suevos,  
Mas non castellanos,  
Nos somos gallegos.  
Seredes iberos,  
Seredes do demo.  
Nos somos dos celtas,  
Nos somos Gallegos”  
(Pondal, 1988: 429).

(We are Alans, Celts and Sueves (i.e. Celt and Germanic people) but not Castilians (Spanish). We are Galician. You are Iberians, sons of the devil. We are Celts, we are Galician.) (My translation.)

Galicians, as Celtic people, are a strong and valiant race:

“Caeran os fortes,

caeran os bravos,  
 cal soen os pinos  
 qu'os ferros tallaron.  
 Os fillos dos celtas,  
 garridos e ousados,  
 nos duros combates  
 dos tempos pasados,  
 certo, eles morreran ..., mas viven  
 nos cantos dos bardos.”  
 (Pondal, 2002: 89)

(Fortresses will fall down, and the brave will fall down, as the pine trees do when iron cuts them down. The sons of the Celts – strong and valiant – in the fierce combats of bygone times, sure, they died, but they still live in the songs of the bards.) (My translation.)

One poem by Pondal, *Os pinos*, was selected as the official hymn of the Galician nation. This is its last stanza:

“Galegos, sedes fortes,  
 prontos a grandes feitos;  
 aparellade os peitos  
 a glorioso afán;  
 fillos dos nobres celtas,  
 fortes e peregrinos,  
 loitade plos destinos,  
 dos eidos de Breogán.”  
 (Pondal, 2002: 128)

(Galicians, be strong, ready to perform great deeds; keep your chests open for glorious enterprises; sons of the noble Celts, strong wanderers, struggle for your destiny, for Breogán's lands.) (My translation.)

### Vicente Risco

Risco (1884-1963) was one of the leading members of the *Nós* Generation and one of the main 20<sup>th</sup> century Galician intellectuals and writers who continued to give new life to the story of a Celtic nation. He was also the author of a huge number of works – in both Galician and Castilian-Spanish – in different literary genres, fiction narrative, theatre plays and essays, and non-literary prose dealing with various fields of knowledge closely related to the humanities and social sciences: ethnography, folklore, history and biography, mythology, politics, geography, etc. However, no matter the genre or the discipline in which he was interested at any given time, Galicia was always his subject matter.

As a historian, Risco can be regarded as an heir to Murguía. Risco himself published a book on him entitled: *Manuel Murguía. Conciencia de Galicia* (M. M.

Galicia's Conscience), in which he expressed all his affection and admiration for the master:

“Ao compréense os cen anos dende a nacemento de Don Manuel Murguía, unha aura de unánime respecto arrodea a seu nome ilustre. Tódolos galegos, pensen como pensen, ofrécenlle hoxe o homaxe da súa lembranza agradecida ao home enteiro que vivindo padecéu aldrases, esquecementos e traballos por mor da xusticia da causa da nosa Terra. Murguía é hoxe unha figura histórica de tan acusado releve que pode ser collida como símbolo da renacemento galega” (Risco, 1976: 7).

(Now, when we celebrate the first centenary of Manuel Murguía's birth, his illustrious name appears surrounded by an aura of unanimous respect. All Galicians, whatever their ideas, pay him homage and feel grateful to the man without disguises who, when still alive, suffered despair, abuse and dire straits because of his struggle for justice and for the cause of our Land. Today, Murguía has become such a highly prestigious figure that he can be regarded as the symbol of Galician Renaissance.) (My translation.)

Risco also wrote his own *Historia de Galicia*, published in 1952. His thesis on the first inhabitants of Galicia was that there had been a pre-historic, pre-Celtic people – who he called ‘Oestrymnios’ – and who, based on the data provided by Archaeology and Folklore and by later Latin writers, such as the traveller Avienus, from the 4<sup>th</sup> century, are the same people who populated Galicia, Armorica (Brittany) and the British Isles during that period. In other words, the common substrate among all these Atlantic territories is the Celtic settlement, providing further emphasis. In other Atlantic coasts, there are different given names: Fir Bolg, Picts or Silures, etc. This Celtic invasion began in the Iron Age, and the Celts and the Oestrymnios fused their races, and their new culture bloomed and remained intact until Roman times.<sup>7</sup> For him, there is undoubtedly a historical continuum between those Celts and modern Galicians: Risco does not hesitate to use the terms ‘Galician’ and ‘Galicia’ when referring to those pre-Roman times, peoples and territories. Thus, the Galicians were a warrior-like people and used to worship mountains, rivers, fountains and trees. Probably aware of the weaknesses of his theory, he strove to provide a full array of data, more or less scientific, but he could occasionally not avoid using expressions such as ‘hypothetical’ or ‘insoluble problems’ (Risco, 1978: 9-28).

Although successful and well-integrated in an already old school of thought defining everything Galician as Celtic, Risco's construction of the history of his Land, especially its origins, has been the object of much research interest and controversy, due to its lack of sound evidence and its nationalist political implications. Among many others, in 1981 Francisco Bobillo published a monograph fully devoted to his ideology and proposals – those dealing with his pan-Celtic vision. In a few words, Risco believed that (Risco, 1978: 180-3):

- European civilization based on Mediterranean cultures was definitively about to fall.
- The cultural centre and the new force that would save Europe would shift from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic. For this purpose, he also rehabilitated the old myth of the Atlantis.

- The Mediterranean races have degenerated due to cross-breeding among themselves. The Arian Atlantic races are still pure.
- Celtic populations occupy places of privilege within the Atlantic coasts and make up seven distinct nations: The Highlands, Isle of Man, Ireland, Wales, Cornwall, Brittany and *Galiccia*.
- These nations will lead the spiritual regeneration of Europe. They are a chosen people.

And so the story of a Celtic Galicia continues.

### Ramón Cabanillas

Cabanillas (1876-1956) was the most talented younger literary heir of Pondal and because of this heritage he was to be known as the National Poet of Galicia or as *Poeta da raza* (poet of the Galician race). He was not only a devout promoter of cultural and political nationalism – he always wrote in Galician – but he also represents the final triumph in literature of the idea of a Celtic Galicia.

The best example of this can be found in his poetry book entitled: *Na noite estrelecida* (1926) (Under a Starry Night), which consists of three narrative poems or sagas: *A espada Escalibor*, *O cabaleiro do Sant Grial*, *O soño do rei Arturo*. It is an original all-Celtic combination of the Celtic and Ossian motifs found in Pondal and the new Arthurian motifs that he introduced himself. He could do this because he was an admirer of Tennyson and the Pre-Raphaelites, through whom he learned Arthuriana. He also translated many short poems by Tennyson into Galician.

Consequently, for him:

- *Excalibur* is found in the isle of Sálvora (Galicia) in the *A espada Escalibor*.
- *The Saint Grail* is found in Mount Cebreiro (Galicia) by Galahad in *O cabaleiro do Sant Grial*.
- And finally, *King Arthur* sleeps his millenarian dream in Galicia until the moment he will return to save all Celtic peoples in *O soño do rei Arturo*.

Pondal tried but could never finish the great founding epic poem that the new Galician nation needed to legitimize itself. Cabanillas did this by means of the Arthurian motifs, another Celtic source of inspiration, and produced this curious set of poems (*Na noite estrelecida*).

Examples:

The close combination of Ossian and Arthurian motifs is more than evident:

“*Caerleón*, a cibdade das pedras milenarias

Ergueitas pol-os dioses vencidos das pregarías,  
 a do ferro batido por varados guerreiros  
 ás proféticas voces de *osiánicos troveiros*”  
 (Cabanillas, 1976a: 257).  
*A espada Escalibor*, vv. 1-4

(Caerleón, the city of the millenarian stones, was raised by the gods, who were conquered by prayers, there iron was tried by strong warriors and there Ossian troubadours sang with prophetic voices.) (My translation.)

“Que os *gaélicos bardos* das arpas armoñosas  
 xa anunciaron os tempos das loitas fazañosas”  
 (Cabanillas, 1976a: 257).  
*A espada Escalibor*, vv. 25-26

(The Gaelic bards of the harmonious harps had already announced the times of victorious battles.) (My translation.)

“Brilaba a fúlxida espada  
*Escalibor*, o trunfal  
 Aceiro da heroica idade  
 Cantada por *Osián*”  
 (Cabanillas, 1976a: 260).  
*A espada Escalibor*, vv. 125-128

(The brilliant sword Excalibur was shining, triumphant stainless steel from that heroic age sung by Ossian.) (My translation.)

### **Galician followers of the Celtic Arthurian myth**

This inspired combination of sources, so wisely devised by Ramón Cabanillas in his Arthurian poems, had many followers in the history of contemporary Galician literature in Galician language. It is impossible not to mention at least the following:

Álvaro Cunqueiro (1911-1981): The most important and prolific Spanish Arthurian writer ever and the best-known 20<sup>th</sup>-century Galician writer (Zarandona, 2003), both in the Galician and Spanish languages<sup>8</sup> Among his many Arthurian works – long, short and very short ones – the following two titles are unavoidable:

- *Merlín e familia e outras historias* (1955). Merlin was always his favourite. Here he displays all his knowledge about the magician, who he combines with many other mythical characters. There is an English translation of this book (Cunqueiro, 1996).
- *Merlín y familia y otras historias* (1957). Spanish enlarged version of *Merlín e familia*. It can be regarded as a new original rather than a (very faithful) self-translation.

Xosé Luís Méndez Ferrín (1938- ): This writer proves that new generations of Galician writers have kept their interest in the Arthurian traditions. With Méndez Ferrín, Arthurian characters become enigmatic, nightmarish, experimental, absurd, revolutionary and profoundly original, as short stories of his such as the following two clearly testify:

- *Percival* (1958)
- *Amor de Artur* (1982)<sup>9</sup>

Manuel Lourenzo (1943- ): playwright specializing in children's theatre – also actor, theatre manager and performing arts scholar. Many of his best pieces – always written in Galician – are devoted to Arthurian subject matters, for example:

- *Todos los fillos de Galaad* (1979)
- *A sensación de Camelot* (1991)

Carlos González Reigosa (1948- ): Admirer of Malory, a passionate defender of the suitability of the Arthurian tradition for Galicia, and author of a trilogy on the matter of Britain entitled *Irmán Rei Artur* (1987), which consists of the following titles:

- *A tentación de Lanzarote*
- *Amor de Merlín*
- *A morte do rei Arthur*

Darío Xohán Cabana (1952- ): *Galván en Saor* (1989). Cabana is another Galician writer who has produced numerous Arthurian texts, his most outstanding being a long fictional work: *Galván en Saor* (1989). As a good disciple of Ramón Cabanillas, in his novel, Galván, or Gawain, leaves Arthur's Court and travels to Saor (Galicia), where he meets Merlin, now a bus driver, and settles down for a while. The action takes place in two different moments: the present and medieval times. And it jumps from one to the other without interruption. We see Gawain riding a horse now and then riding a motorbike immediately afterwards. Galician folk stories and popular traditions are also widely used.

## Conclusion

The route that we started travelling a few pages ago ends here. The subject matter of the contemporary making of a Celtic Galicia is complex and has many possible fields of further study available for those who may want to wander through it. However, names such as Murguía, Pondal, Risco, Cabanillas, Ossian, Arthuriana, Celtism, *Rexurdimento*, *Irmadades da Fala*, and *Xeración Nós* have, from my point of view, been informative and descriptive enough to familiarize my readers, who may thus far have been unaware of this curious phenomenon, with it.

Independent from its political, social or historical implications, what cannot be denied is that this interest in becoming and remaining fully Celtic has produced the sound benefit of beautiful, inspiring, original and fascinating works of literary art and popular culture for the full enjoyment of Galician, Spanish and world readers. In other

words, it is a story – ranging from Pondal to Cabanillas and beyond; and from Ossian, through Breogán, to King Arthur – which has been worthwhile writing.

This exercise of producing the best that individual and collective imagination and fancy have to offer still requires a book dealing with the whole history of modern Arthurian output, originating in Galicia, and with a Galician certificate of origin, against the backdrop of general Spanish Arthurian works and writers, and of the entire international history of the subject matter. This demanding task should include those Galician authors who wrote in Galician – those already mentioned and others – and all the others who wrote in Spanish but shared the same spirit of ‘Galeguidade’ (true Galician values). This book has not yet been written, but it will probably be written one day.

In conclusion, there are two examples to think about. The first one does not belong to the great canon of the Galician literature, but, in 1991, a Galician local imprint published a beautiful book of short stories by Magdalena Stork in six sections, each recounting the romanticized realities of life in Galicia during a different historical era. The first one is devoted to Celtic Galicia and narrates a day in the life of Brigo, a young Celtic man who lived in a castrum. This is only possible when you believe in a Celtic Galicia (Stork, 1991: 23-40).

Five years later, the same local imprint published a so-called chronological history of Celtic countries, a translation of an original by Jakez Gaucher, a popular writer on everything Celtic from Brittany. All the manual pages are arranged in six parallel columns, one for each of the following Celtic nations and the main historical data in chronological order. The six nations are: ‘Irlanda’, ‘Escocia’, ‘País de Galés’, ‘Bretaña’, ‘Cornualles/Illa de Man’, and ‘Galicia’, written ‘Galiza’ as many local nationalists promote it. The first Galician item is indeed that connected with the arrival of Breton emigrants to the north shores of Galicia, renamed ‘Britonia’ (Gaucher, 1996: 45), in the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD. Even the most reputed international experts seem to have begun believing in the existence of a present-day Celtic Galicia or, at least, to have made up their minds about sharing the same pragmatic feelings as Mr Gaucher’s translator and prologue writer:

“I do not know if we are such a full Celtic people as it is said, but who cares? At the end of the day, what really matters is that it does not harm to believe it at all, but just the opposite: it has been the glorious source of some of the best and most powerful inspirations for our writers, from Pondal to Méndez Ferrín, for our artists, and for our musicians ... Let’s leave archaeologists to discuss it as passionately as they want to, and, meanwhile, let’s enjoy the pleasure of these fantasies” (Sixirei-Paredes, 1996: 5). (My translation.)

However, this type of international surrender to the local thesis of a Celtic Galicia is far from being universally accepted:

“Despite the lack of evidence, Galicia has made the greatest claims to a Celtic origin, and in recent years has aligned itself with the Celtic speaking countries, e.g. through the Lorient festival, though modern Galician is a Romance language closely related to Portuguese. At the end of the Franco period, when Spanish scholars were trying to break out of the restrictions imposed by the fascist dictatorship, Galicia offered to host the International Celtic Congress, an offer rejected by the linguists on the grounds that it

was not Celtic speaking (attitudes are now more relaxed, and should be so if one takes into account the role played by *Brigantia* in the founding myths of the Irish!)” (Collis, 2003: 201).

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> John Collis speaks about a new Celtomania taking place in Europe from the 1980s-1990s, with books on Celtic religion, Celtic art and the Celts themselves, both ancient and modern. As far as Spain is concerned, he mentions a very successful exhibition on *Celtas y Vettones* at Ávila (Castile and Leon) in 2001. See: John Collins, *The Celts*, p. 10. What Collis could not mention was a later great exhibition that was held in Soria, the heartland of the Celtiberia, in 2005: *Celtíberos. Tras la estela de Numancia* (Celtiberians. In the wake of Numantia). The event turned into a major cultural and tourist event, even including a so-called 'Celtiberian Gastronomic Week'. Celtomania is alive in modern Spain, even in places far away from Galicia.

<sup>2</sup> Murguía was not the first. Father Álvarez Sotelo was probably the first to claim this origin in his 18<sup>th</sup> century work entitled: *Historia General del Reyno de Galicia*, unpublished manuscript kept in the

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Spanish National Library. And the first to popularize the myth was historian José Vereá y Aguiar who published his *Historia de Galicia* in 1838 (De Toro, 2007: 40).

<sup>3</sup> In 1905, when Murguía was already a venerable old man of 72 years, he devoted himself to a new challenging cultural enterprise for the advancement of his Galician language, culture, people and nation: to found an Academy for the Galician language and culture. The *Real Academia Galega* was a reality a year later, in 1906, and Murguía was its first president, an office that he kept until 1923, without a moment of rest, i.e. the year of his death as a 90-year-old wise man.

<sup>4</sup> In 1931, *Nós* published, in four parts, a Galician translation of chapters XI, XII, and XIII of the *Leabhar Gabhala*, a key text for the making of a Celtic Galicia. Risco was the author of the introduction and the translator. He used as his source text the English translation by Macalister and MacNeill published in Dublin in 1916 (Álvarez, 2005: 74).

<sup>5</sup> Pedrayo published some passages from the *Ulysses* by Joyce in *Nós* in 1926. It was the first Spanish – into Galician – translation of the book (De Toro, 2007: 46-47).

<sup>6</sup> For a full account of Ossian's reception in Spanish literature and translated literature, see Montiel (1974).

<sup>7</sup> Murguía has claimed that the previous inhabitants had left nothing behind, that Galicia was fully Celtic. Furthermore, in the mid-130s BC, Roman general Decimus Brutus made the first inroads into the region of the far north-east – Galicia – and in 61 BC Julius Caesar captured the rebellious Celtiberian town of Brigantium (now La Coruña, north-west Spain).

<sup>8</sup> Cunqueiro unsettled the Spanish literary mainstream establishment of the 1950s – firmly rooted in neo-realism – with his magical and mythical fantasy fiction displaying a highly elaborated style drawing its inspiration from medieval sources to the best of the world literature references. Due to this fact, it took him and his work many years to be fully appreciated.

<sup>9</sup> There is also an English translation of this story (Méndez Ferrín, 1996).