MARTA DAHLGREN

An Introduction to Galician Poetry

Galicia, situated in north-western Spain, borders on Portugal to the south and the Spanish provinces of Zamora. León and Asturias to the east. Its remaining border is the Atlantic Ocean, whose winds and rain sweep the coast. Galicia is a land of green mountains covered with pine trees and misty valleys populated by oak and chestnut trees—or used to be, as in recent years spells of hot weather have caused large forest areas to be destroyed by wildfires.

Galicia is one of the autonomous regions of Spain and, like Catalonia and the Basque Country, it is now officially bilingual. The Galician language (Galego) had to struggle for its survival, suffering the status of a minoritized language for centuries. As a court language during the Middle Ages, Galician had enjoyed a period of splendor as the language of poetry, but with the rise of Castilian hegemony it was relegated to rural areas and was then considered the language of peasants. Its situation improved with a literary renaissance in the 19th century, but worsened again under the persecution of Franco's dictatorship, when it was viewed as a dangerous sign of separatist tendencies. It was not until the creation of the autonomous regions and the enactment of the Galician Statute of Autonomy in 1981 that Galician shared with Castilian the status of the official language of the region and began to be taught in schools and employed in administrative contexts. A Galician television channel broadcasting solely in Galician has also been helpful in disseminating the language.

The Celts are inevitably cited when talking about 'Galician culture'. Galicia is often thought of as a Celtic nation, but the degree of influence of the Celts is subject to controversy. Celtic tribes were predominant in central Europe around 1000 BC, and were later also present in southern Europe from Turkey in the east to Portugal and Galicia in the west. According to Sylvia and Paul Botheroyd, Celtic culture was not divided along the lines of realistic/materialistic versus spiritual beliefs, and the Celts held fast to their myths in spite of contact with other religions, especially in Ireland (see Botheroyd & Botheroyd, 1996 and 2001)1. In Galicia, Celtic heritage is evident in the presence of excavations of their typical round stone huts, which are still being found in a great number of sites. These dwellings belonged to the so-called *cultura castrexa* [hill-top culture], which lasted from the 7th century BC to the first century AD,

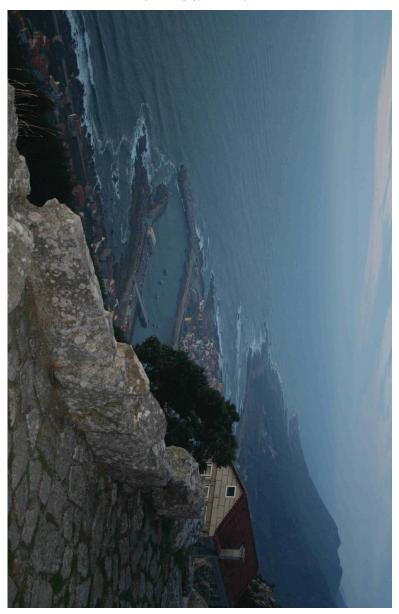


Figure 1. The tiny harbor of A Guarda and the Atlantic Ocean, seen from Santa Tegra mountain (Pontevedra province). Photograph: Terence Odlin $\,$

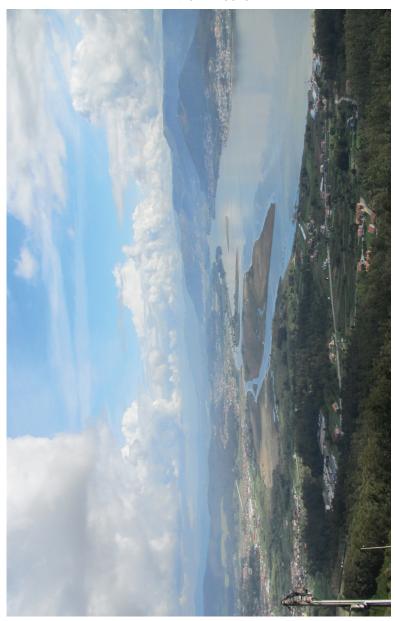


Figure 2. The border between Galicia and Portugal (the river Miño) seen from Santa Tegra. Photograph: Marta Dahlgren.





Figure 3. Figure 3 a. A Bronze Age sunwheel (Museum at Santa Tegra). Figure 3 b) A charm following the Santa Tegra sunwheel.





Figure 4. Figure 4 a. A Bronze Age sunwheel (Museum at Santa Tegra). Figure 4 b. A charm following the Santa Tegra sunwheel.

but their inhabitants were not only Celts (Acuña Castroviejo, 1991: 289). Stone engravings in the form of variations of the sunwheel from the Bronze Age—basically coincident with the presence of the Celts in Galicia—have become emblems of Galicia and have survived in contemporary handicraft and jewelry. The Celtic language was replaced by Latin when the Romans took over the whole of Spain and imposed their language and customs.

Attempts have been made to prove that the Celts invaded Ireland from Galicia (see http://www.paranauticos.com for an account of the Breogan project) and that the traditions, music and mythology of both areas are connected. This is not the place to discuss whether a King Breogan actually existed or whether he is a myth, but he is certainly present in Galician literature (see the section below on "the third period"). However, in general terms, Galician folklore appears very similar to that of Ireland, the bagpipe being an essential element in any group playing folk music in both countries. The existence of shared Celtic roots between Galicia and Ireland cannot be proved, but, as Mary O'Donnell claims in her preface to an anthology of Galician poetry translated by Irish poets (O' Donnell and Palacios, 2010: 16), the two areas have more in common than Celticism: both are strongholds of Catholicism, and both Gaeilge [Irish Gaelic] and Galego suffer from the imposition of majority languages, English and Castilian respectively. A fascination with Ireland and Scotland used to be evident among Galician authors (see the poems by Luz Pozo Garza and Lois Pereiro in this selection), but classical myths are also favored, and more recent poetry covers a variety of subjects.

The Roman administrative division *Gallaecia*, occupying the area from Astorga in the east to the river Douro in the south, is the origin of present-day Galicia. The Latin language brought by the Roman invaders from the 2nd century AD developed quite differently in Galicia from in Castile. When Galician and Portuguese started to develop along separate paths in the 11th century, literary works had been in *Galego-Portugués*, a language used by poets and troubadors until the late Middle Ages. What is called "the first period" of Galician literature originated in the courts of the Castilian monarchs Alfonso X and Sancho IV, and Afonso III and Dom Dinis in Portugal. A great number of *cantigas*, profane poetry that was transmitted orally, was collected in *Cancioneiros* (the *Cancioneiro de Ajuda*, and the *Cancioneiro da Biblioteca Nacional*, now in Lisbon, and *Cancioneiro da Vaticana*). Best known are a *cantiga de amor* by Airas Nunes, the famous *cantiga de amigo* by Mendiño "Sediam'eu na er-

mida de San Simion" and the *cantigas de romaría* by Martín Codax. From this period are also the religious narrative poems in *Cantigas de Santa María*, all of them composed by King Alfonso X *el Sabio* ["the Wise"] and poets at his court in Toledo and preserved in codices in the Escorial monastery, in Florence, and in Toledo. (For the *Cantigas*, and translations by John Rutherford, see de Toro Santos, 2010: 49-101).

Music was an important aspect of the *Cantigas*. The instuments used in the Middle Ages by musicians and troubadors were copied from a very special source: the *Pórtico de Gloria*, the Romanesque entrance to the Cathedral at Santiago de Compostela—the goal of the pilgrims following the *Camiño de Santiago* [the Way of St James]—sculpted by Maestro Mateo in the 13th century. Recent recordings of the *Cantigas*, sung to and played on instruments faithfully reproduced by luthiers, are very popular and have had a great influence on contemporary Galician folk music.

Galego-Portugués fell into disuse after the rise of Aragon and Castile under the joint reign of Ferdinand and Isabella, despite the close familial relationship with Portugal that resulted from the marriages over several generations between princes and princesses (all cousins or even half-siblings) of the two countries. Thus began what scholars in Galician literary history call the Séculos Escuros [Dark Centuries], which lasted far into the 19th century.

The second period in the history of Galician poetry, the *Re-xurdimento* [the "Surge" or "Awakening"] is thought to have begun after the Peninsular War, which was fought in the first decade of the 19th century, and which marked the beginning of a new Galician nationalism. The icon of this period is the celebrated poet Rosalía de Castro, whose *Cantares Gallegos* (1863) and *Follas Novas* (1880) were influenced by popular culture. Her poetry was truly Galician in diction and nature, and introduced an innovative way of writing poetry.

Rosalía de Castro had to struggle against the fact that she worked in a marginalized country, in a minoritized language, and against daunting personal circumstances: her father was a Catholic priest and she had very little formal education. Her marriage to a famous intellectual, Manuel Murguía, helped improve her literary abilities.

As Tarrío Varela (1994:125) says:

Cantares Galegos (sic) é o fito simbólico que marca o inicio do lento proceso que se estende ata hoxe mesmo e que aínda non podemos dicir que estea pechado, por



Figure 5. The famous Illa de San Simón /Saint Simon´s Island/ in the $\it Ria$ de $\it Vigo.$ Photograph: Rosa Alonso





Figure 6. Figure 6 Figure 6. Santiago de Compostela: Cathedral. FaÇade and detail from 12th C. *Pórtico de Gloria*: musicians with a *zanfona* [hurdy gurdy]. Courtesy: A. García Omedes

moi bos que sexan moitos dos productos rexistrados ó longo dos case 130 anos que media dende aquela data ata agora. [Cantares Galegos is the symbolic event that marks the beginning of the slow process that is still ongoing today, and which cannot be considered closed in spite of the excellence of many of the works that have appeared during the nearly 130 years since that date (my translation)].

This opinion was certainly valid when it was written, but Galician poetry during the last two decades has developed towards what might be termed "contemporaneity". However, in her metrics and ideology Rosalía de Castro (often familiarly referred to as Rosalía) was the forerunner of the poetic revolution that took place a few decades later. Parts of her most famous poems are often repeated, if not verbatim, at least with very similar wording:

Negra sombra, negra sombra
Negra sombra que me asombra...
[Black shadow, black shadow,
Black shadow that astounds me...]

and the poem

Un-ha vez tiven un cravo cravado no corazón
Y eu non m' acordo xa s'era aquel cravo D' ouro, de ferro o d' amor. [...]
[Once I had a nail nailed into my heart and I no longer remember if that nail was of gold, of iron or of love.]

(This poem is reproduced in de Toro Santos, 2010: 168. The translation is by John Rutherford.)

Ramón Cabanillas (1876-1959), one of the many intellectuals who spent part of his life as an exile in Cuba, writes

Ai do peito Sentín que me arrincaron

Un "non-sei-que" de vida e de cariño
Algo que tiña dentro moi cravado!
[Oh, from my breast
I felt has been torn
A certain something of life and of tenderness
That was nailed deep into my heart!]
(Cited in Raña, 1996: 40)

A third period that saw a flourishing of Galician poetry was initiated by the foundation of the literary journal Nós in 1920. This editorial effort linked together a group of intellectuals such as Vicente Risco, Ramón Otero Pedrayo, and the most celebrated of them all, Daniel Rodríguez Castelao. It has to be said that these writers were more active in composing essays on political and social issues and publicizing European literary innovations in Galicia than producing their own novels and poetry. However, without their efforts to dignify Galego as a language of culture and literature, the subsequent literary production would not have been possible.

The turn of the century saw the birth of a great number of poets, closely linked to the University of Santiago de Compostela and the *Seminario de Estudos Galegos* [Seminar of Galician Studies] founded in 1923. Many of these poets have sufficient merits to be included in the present selection (among them, Eduardo Pondal, Manuel Antonio, Luís Pimentel, Eduardo Blanco-Amor and Aquilino Iglesia). Pondal is the author of the lyrics of the Galician national anthem, which begins

Que din os rumorosos
na costa verdescente,
ao raio transparente
do plácido luar?
[What say those whisperers
On the greening slope
In the transparent ray
Of placid moonlight?]
(Translation by John Rutherford, in de Toro, 2010: 143).

To Pondal, Galicia is the *Fogar de Breogán* [Home of Breogan]. Luz Pozo Garza's portrait of his work gives a clear indication of the romantic flavor of his writing:

Pondal [...] sang lovingly of the Allóns Valley, of the green meadows and the murmuring pines of a wild and windblown coast. It was a land of truth and dreams that communed with the stars on placid moonlit nights. Such was the wellspring of his poem "Os Pinos" (The Pines), that lays claim to the Galician land and language [...] (Luz Pozo Garza, 2010: xii).

Manuel Antonio, born in 1900, is a poet of great interest. He died at only 30 years of age and only published a single book during his lifetime: *De catro a catro* (1928), which was sufficient to cause an impact on the literary scene. However, his main contribution is the manifesto "¡Máis alá! [Onward!]" in 1922. Manuel Antonio and Álvaro Cebreiro penned violent attacks on the "ruralism" and "false romanticism" of Galician poetry, including some of Rosalía de Castro 's verse (see Raña, 1996: 45-56).

The decision not to include here the poets mentioned above was taken for two main reasons: our emphasis is on poetry published in the second half of the 20th century and later, and also because of several characteristics present in the poetry of Álvaro Cunqueiro, whose poem Eu son Danae [I am Danae] opens the selection. Tarrío Varela (1964:285) is of the opinion that, if Manuel Antonio was the most audacious poet of his time, Cunqueiro was the better poet. Cunqueiro, in his first poetry collection Mar ao norde [North Sea] and in Dona do corpo delgado [Lady of the Slender Body] acknowledges his debt to Manuel Antonio and to the Cancioneiros, the existence of which had remained practically unknown until the beginning of the century. Cunqueiro became quite well known as a novelist in Castilian. The fact that he did not write in Galician until long after the end of the Spanish Civil War (1936-39) was due to the political repression of any vestige of Galician nationalism, which included the use of the Galician language and lasted throughout the Civil War and the subsequent dictatorship of General Franco. (For biographies of Cunqueiro, see Armesto Faginas (1987) and Fernández del Riego (1991), and on his *oeuvre* in Galician, Forcadela (2009).

While Cunqueiro achieved a certain fame as a novelist in Castilian, other Galician poets preferred to remain practically unknown to the mainstream Spanish audience, writing in Galician and publishing limited editions of their work for an equally limited number of readers. Among these authors were Celso Emilio Ferreiro and some of the poets represented in the present selection, such as Salvador García-Bodaño

and X.L. Méndez Ferrín.

It should be pointed out that in Galicia until quite recently children learned how to read only in Castilian, a fact that can be borne out by any Galician who attended school during the Franco period. The poet Chus Pato went as far as to say "A miña lingua nativa é o fascismo [My mothertongue is fascism]" (Chus Pato, cited by Fran Alonso, 2010: 35). Many poets born before the Spanish Civil War did not publish their work in Galician until the late 1950s, as in the post-war period the choice was between publishing in Castilian or hardly publishing at all. For many Spanish intellectuals it became necessary to emigrate, usually to Latin America. An example is Castelao, perhaps the best known Galician intellectual, who spent a long period of his life in Buenos Aires.

Literary production was basically a male affair until the advent of the Autonomía, but there were exceptions such as Luz Pozo Garza and Xohana Torres. Both started publishing in the 1950s and were, with María do Carme Kruckenberg, the forerunners of a plethora of female poets born in that decade and in the 60s. The anthologies of Galician poetry consulted at the outset of this project -Casas (2003) and Rodríguez (2002; 2004)- clearly show this dominance, while Fran Alonso's Poetizate, published in 2006, includes a large number of women poets. In Luciano Rodríguez's (2004) Poetas galegos, only four female poets have been included for the period 1904-2004. Casas, starting with Cunqueiro and ending with Olga Novo, includes 20 male and 6 female poets. In De Toro (2010), if the count starts with Cunqueiro and ends with the poet that closes the selection, María do Cebreiro, the ratio is 59 male/11 female poets. In the present selection a large number of the authors are women, perhaps because they are closer to the editor's and the translators' personal sensitivity, but this does not mean that the male authors are not equally excellent. (On the presence of women writers in Galicia today, see Nogueira et al, 2010).

There are two elements that have influenced the growth of publication in the Galician language. One was the foundation of certain publishing houses that encouraged the use of *Galego: Ir Indo, Galaxia*, and *Edicións Xerais*. Publication of novels increased exponentially and serious efforts were also made to publish translations of important literary works from foreign languages into *Galego*. As regards poetry, a special case is that of *Espiral Maior*, founded by Miguel-Anxo Fernán Vello (himself a poet), where some of the most important poetry collections have appeared. Another contributing element was the academic initiatives of the Galician university system: the creation of BA degrees in Galician

and Portuguese Language and Literature at Santiago de Compostela, in Galician Language and Literature at A Coruña and Vigo, and in Translation and Interpreting at Vigo. Among the younger poets represented in this selection, practically all have BAs from a Galician university and earn their living teaching in secondary schools or at the university.

The number—and above all the quality—of Galician poets publishing their work around the turn of the 20th C. and up to the present is one of reasons for the presence of truly contemporary poetry in our selection. The influence of a university education is clearly felt in references to classical mythology, familiarity with the literary canon in Europe and the USA, and with intertextual elements. But there is also the strong presence of a grounding in rural Galicia, and the way of life in the villages where many of the poets have their roots.

Among the themes to be found in the poetry written by contemporary Galician women are the roots in the Galician aldea and emigration (as in Chus Pato), human relationships, sexuality seen from women's point of view (Marilar Aleixandre, Emma Pedreira, Lupe Gómez) and life in modern Galicia, which is now very much like life anywhere else in Europe. As the interested reader will see from the most recent poems in this selection, Breogán has been replaced by Ophelia, the whispering pines on the green slopes by the streets of Galician cities, and the poems offer a plethora of insight regarding our times.

Comments on the Translations

For this selection of poems in *Galego*, editions of the poets' collected work and books of recently published poetry have been used as sources. Some of the poems are unpublished work from the authors' most recent production.

Metamorphoses is a journal for translations that have not been published before. However, the present selection includes 3 poems that have already appeared in anthologies of Galician poems. The reason for this is that those poems have been thought to be highly representative for the author and important for an overview of the literary panorama in contemporary Galician poetry. For these poems an alternative translation has been offered. The idea is to present an approach to the original text which we believe might be helpful in the understanding of the Galician original and of Galician traditions and the present reality of life in Galicia.

For the re-translations and where no translation existed I sum-

moned the assistance of Dr Carys Evans-Corrales, who is a professor in Spanish Language and Literature at the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford (USA). Dr Evans-Corrales knows both Castilian and Galician well. More importantly, her command of English is extraordinary and she is an experienced poetry translator. Most poems in this volume have been translated directly from the Galician by Carys Evans-Corrales, with the exception of a few poems where we have worked together. We have strived for translations that respect the originals to the farthest extent possible, as regards rhythm, contents and imagery and to make it possible for the readers of the translations to spot intertextual quotes and voices. The case of the poet Luz Pozo Garza is different, as we have respected her wish that her poems appear in the translation of her "own personal translator", Alejandro Evangelista Vázquez Moreiras, who has worked out the versions in close cooperation with the poet.

One of the first anthologies of poetry in Galician was sponsored by the Pen Clube Galicia, which published a collection of poems and the corresponding translation in 2001, called *Poesía é o gran milagre do mundo /Poetry is the world's great Miracle*. All the poems were translated by the US poet and writer John Burns. From this book we have reproduced and re-translated Salvador García-Bodaño's *Those mornings...*.

Aquelas mañáns de música na Alameda nunha ida e volta de adeuses polo paseo... As xentes do pobo na varanda dos domingos.

Those mornings when there was music in the Alameda in a roundtrip of farewells on the street...

The townsfolk
Out on the Sunday veranda.

(García-Bodaño, translated by John Burns)

We have been fortunate enough to be able to discuss this poem and the translations with Salvador García-Bodaño. The poem describes the "ida e volta de adeuses", which refers to the habit of walking back and forth on the Main Street or in the Alameda (the parks in many Spanish

towns and villages are called *Alamedas*, as they used to be poplar or elm groves) while greeting friends as they go by. "*Adeus*" [Bye-bye] is the typical expression used when meeting somebody you know, and you don't have time to stop and chat. Our translation "comings and goings and greetings" admittedly does not do justice to the original poetic line. Also, the *varanda* is not a "veranda", but a balustrade on which people used to lean. Another element that appears frequently in Galician poetry at the time when this poem was written is "*patria*", which is used in reference to a Galician nation and is loaded with nationalist sentiments. Our version is more explanatory than Burns's, who maintains the tropes and the ellipses of the original, and we admittedly lose much of the original's concentrated force.

THOSE MORNINGS (II)

Those mornings when there was music playing in the park amid the coming and going of greetings on the Sunday promenade...

the townsfolk leaning against the balustrade.

In 2010 Mary O'Donnell and Manuela Palacios made a major contribution to the understanding of Galician poetry in *To the Winds Our Sails. Irish Writers Translate Galician Poetry*. The fact that the English versions have been written by poets is clearly felt, but it is also evident that most of them were working from cribs in English of the Galician originals (O'Donnell and Palacios, 2010: 18). This might be the reason for some deviations from the Galician originals. The fact that the original is not followed slavishly is in this case not a drawback but increases the poetic force of the translation. An example of this is Celia de Fréine's beautiful rendering of Xohana Torres' *Ophelia*, which, together with *Penélope*, is one of Torres' most anthologized and interesting poems.

The new interpretations might constitute a point of departure for a comparison between two ways of understanding translation: the poet-translator making use of more freedom and the 'craftsperson'-translator attempting to work closer to the original text.

The year 2010 was a good year for Galician poetry in English. The Poetry Review Supplement published Jonathan Dunne's selection and translation of Galician poetry called "Contemporary Galician Poets",

which has been retrieved from www.poetrysociety.org.uk. Also in 2010, Antonio Raúl de Toro published *Breogan's Lighthouse*, which is a major collection of poetry and prose writing in Galician. The poetry translations were made by Professor John Rutherford. De Toro's anthology covers from the *Cantigas* of the 13th century to María do Cebreiro Rábade Villar (born in 1976) and offers a wealth of material for those who want to know more about Galician literature. From this selection Pilar Pallares' poem "No resplandor das horas" has been reproduced and an new translation has been made, in an attempt to show that an excellent poem admits different interpretations, and to allow the readers of *Metamorphoses* the opportunity of admiring John Rutherford's version of this poem.

Bernardino Graña's perhaps best known poem *O gato da tasca mariñeira* has not been included. *O gato* seems to be a kind of 'translators' pet poem' and has been translated many times. Therefore, the less known *En Padrón os alumnos no instituto* has been preferred for this selection.

In some poems the original Galician word has been left in the translations. This occurs with words that require awkward explanations. Apart from the proverbial *saudade* [sadness] and *morriña* [nostalgia], which is the feeling of homesickness that besets Galicians when far from the *aldea* [the village], there are a few other expressions that appear quite frequently:

- *Ría:* This is the Galician version of a Norwegian *fjord:* deep, narrow estuaries. The main ones are the *rías* of Vigo, Pontevedra, Arousa, Muros, Ares and Ferrol. See Figure 8 for the *Ría de Vigo*, in a version by one of "the moonstruck painters", José Lodeiro.
- *Illas Cíes:* The Cíes Islands are at the inlet of the *ría* de Vigo. These islands are mentioned in Torres' "Eramos navegantes das illas" and in Méndez Ferrín's "Agora é o intre do regreso".
- rúa: a street or an alley
- *curro*: a kind of *rodeo*, where the wild horses that graze on the mountains are driven into an enclosure of stone walls. Another word for this is 'a *rapa das bestas*' [the shearing of the animals]. The most famous curros are held at Mougás, Morgadáns and Sabucedo.
- patria, together with terra galega/a nosa terra and nación galega, carries associations related to the struggle for independence which is different from "fatherland", "Galician soil/our land", and "Galician nation". In this issue it has been translated as "homeland".

The rhythm of the Galician language is quite different from that of Castilian, with which more people might be familiar. This has been an

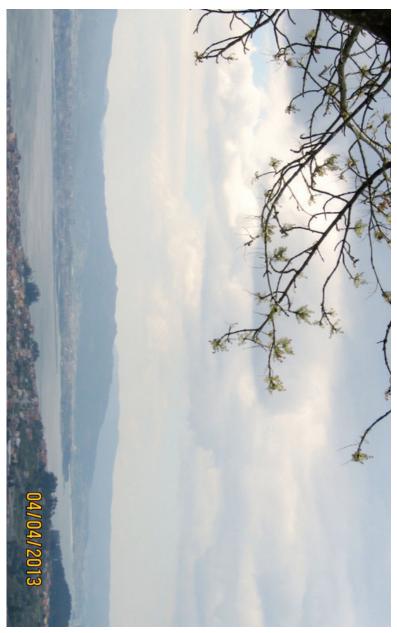


Figure 7. The Ría de Vigo. Photograph: Marta Dahlgren.



Figure 8. *The Ría de Vigo*. Oil on canvas. By the painter Xosé Lodeiro. (Colección Gómez-Chiarri Dahlgren)

asset rather than a difficulty in translation. Also, we have tried to make the poems understandable to an audience that is not familiar with Galician traditions, and especially not with rural ones. When doubts have arisen about the interpretation, the authors of the poems have been consulted, and we are grateful for their kind assistance. I would also like to acknowledge a debt of gratitude to Dr. Manuel Forcadela for unfailing advice and support.

Notes on the Selection

The poems in Galician have been reproduced from

- a) The original publications. The reference appears at the end of each poem.
- b) Some poems have been downloaded from the poet's website, in which case the date of retrieval has been indicated.
- c) A few poems are unpublished work graciously furnished by the authors.

Three poems, considered important in the authors' production, have been reproduced together with the corresponding translations, already published in the anthologies indicated below. Permission to publish has been granted by the translators. For the full reference, see "Works cited".

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^{1.} Their Lexikon der Keltischen Mythologie contains a bibliography listing the most important publications about the Celts in German, French and English. The book *Kelten* contains information about the Celts in Galicia.