El presente artículo analiza la poesía de Mary O’Malley y Marga do Val sobre dislocación y emigración, con el fin de determinar el cuestionamiento de nociones como hogar, pertenencia, movilidad y otredad por parte del sujeto femenino. A pesar de la diferente proveniencia nacional y cultural de las autoras, la historia común de emigración masiva en Galicia e Irlanda nos permite plantear la hipótesis de que la poesía contemporánea de estas dos autoras y sus reflexiones sobre la migración son de relevancia recíproca, tal y como apunta la investigación previa sobre la movilidad de mujeres gallegas e irlandesas (Lorenzo-Modia 2016, Acuña 2014). A medida que se analiza la poesía de cada autora, identificamos sus propuestas más significativas y afines, lo que nos permite concluir que hay en ambas una voluntad de relacionar el tema de la migración con su experiencia autobiográfica de movilidad y que ambas son totalmente conscientes de la relación entre los flujos pasados y presentes de emigración e inmigración.

Palabras clave:
poesía irlandesa; poesía gallega; mujer y migración; hogar; otredad

Resumen

Otherwhereness and Gender: Mary O’Malley’s “Asylum Road” and Marga do Val’s “A cidade sen roupa ao sol”

This article aims to delve into the gendered nature of Mary O’Malley’s and Marga do Val’s poetry on displacement and migration, so as to assess the female subject’s questioning of notions such as home, belonging, mobility and otherness. In spite of these writers’ different national and cultural backgrounds, the common history of massive emigration from Galicia and Ireland allows us to hypothesize that their poetry and contemporary reflections on displacement are mutually relevant, as former research on Irish and Galician women’s mobility has indicated (Lorenzo-Modia 2016, Acuña 2014). As each writer is analysed, their most significant and germane propositions are identified. This allows us to conclude that there is a will to connect the theme of migration to the writers’ autobiographical experience of mobility and that O’Malley and do Val are thoroughly aware of the relation between past and present flows of emigration and immigration.

Keywords:
Irish poetry; Galician poetry; women’s migration; home; otherness
In her poem “Daughters of Colony”, the Irish poet Eavan Boland wrote about the predicament of those Anglo-Irish women who, after living in Ireland for generations, had to leave the country and return to Britain, though they were no longer certain of which country “they belonged to” (2005, 247).

Boland’s poetry illustrates to perfection the hybrid condition of colonists and colonized after centuries of co-habitation: “I am also a daughter of the colony. / I share their broken speech, their other-whereness” (248). Boland’s coinage, “other-whereness”, seems to us a very apt rendering of the migrants’ condition and their difficult negotiation of belonging and alienation. Boland’s focus on female migrants’ “distaff side of history” (248) is also highly relevant and serves as an introduction to the present analysis because, although migration is a universal phenomenon, its discourses and practices are gendered, as the poetry of the Irish poet Mary O’Malley and the Galician poet Marga do Val well attests.

Besides their Atlantic situation in Western Europe and Ireland and Galicia share a number of social and cultural features (Palacios and Lojo 2009). Of special bearing on this study is their common history of migration at times of economic crises, in particular throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Lorenzo-Motia 2016; Acuña 2014). The present study aims to delve into the gendered nature of Mary O’Malley’s and Marga do Val’s poetry on displacement and migration, so as to assess the female subject’s questioning of notions such as home, belonging, otherness, alienation, mobility and choice. In spite of these writers’ different national and cultural backgrounds, their poetry and contemporary reflections on displacement are, as we would like to argue, mutually relevant and illuminating.

Mary O’Malley: Fault Lines, Borders and Difference

Mary O’Malley is the author of eight poetry collections to date, from A Consideration of Silk (1990) to her most recent Playing the Octopus (2016). Born in a fishing village in Commaer in 1954, she graduated from University College, Galway, lived for a number of years in Lisbon and travelled widely in Europe and America. One of her literary residencies took place on a ship, where she held the post of “Resident at Sea”, a title that aptly suited O’Malley’s perception of herself and of her literary project. Her insights from this voyage on a research ship have been gathered in the poetry collection Valparaíso (2012).

For the present article, however, we will centre our attention on her fourth collection, Asylum Road (2001), and on its examination of migration and the female traveller’s predicament. The term “asylum” in the title is actually revealing, since it evokes notions of displacement and alienation – the latter understood both as uprootedness and psychological derangement. An important feature of this book is its intertwining of past Irish emigration and present-day immigration in Ireland from Europe and beyond, an outflow and inflow that somehow convey the impression of unceasing circularity. The blurb on the back cover of Asylum Road clearly lays out the subject matter of the book:

Mary O’Malley’s fourth collection takes as its focal point the Irish identity and explores our response to recent immigration in the light of our own history. “In the Name of God and of the Dead Generations” calls for an imaginative reappraisal of who we are as we respond to emigrants who seek asylum in Ireland... (O’Malley 2001).

O’Malley once let us know, in private correspondence, about her interest in Mary Louise Pratt’s views in Imperial Eyes. Travel Writing and Transculturation, a book on European exploration writing that defines travel accounts as an “ideological apparatus of empire” that is intended to produce “the rest of the world for European readerships” (1992, i). Other important considerations in Pratt’s analysis for our study have to do with the need to decolonize knowledge, redefine its relation with gender, and assess the ways in which the Other defines us. Also, of relevance both to O’Malley’s and Do Val’s attention to liminal spaces such as borders is Pratt’s definition of contact zones: “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination” (1992, 4).

One salient polarity that both O’Malley and Do Val deconstruct is that of “home” and “abroad”. O’Malley’s Asylum Road begins with a quotation from The Odyssey that functions as the preliminary epigraph of the first part of the book: “trials and dangers, even so, attended him / even in Ithaca, near those he loved” (2001, 1). Thus, Ithaca and the family home are not devoid of hazards, as the repetition of the adverb “even” suggests, and home does not constitute a safe realm that may function as the opposite to Ulysses’ perilous travels abroad. Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose (1994, 3) have drawn our attention to the fact that the division between private and public spaces only emerged in the early nineteenth century as part of the cultural project of a European and North-American middle-class. This may explain why, in ancient classical literature, the politics of Ithaca actually assaulted Penelope’s home and disrupted her family bonds.

O’Malley also establishes intertextual relations with a canonical text on women’s travel: Elizabeth Bishop’s poem “Questions of travel” from Bishop’s homonymous book (1965). O’Malley’s poem explicitly signals to Bishop’s text both in the title and in the initial epigraph of her poem “A Question of Travel” when she quotes Bishop’s words: “Continent, city, country, society: / the choice is never wide and never free” (2001, 75). Challenging utopian narratives of women’s liberation through travel, both O’Malley and Bishop examine and unsettle notions such as freedom of mobility, its emancipatory potential and the home-abroad opposition. The enumeration of places – “continent, city, country, society” – might suggest that there is a relatively ample range of possibilities of choice, but the line that follows – “the choice is never wide and never free” – is conclusive in its refutation of that illusion of choice.

Regarding the home-abroad opposition, Bishop poses a question at the very end of her poem – “Should we have stayed at home, / Wherever that may be?” – the second part of which challenges the concept of home and its magnetic attraction (2008, 75).

On her part, O’Malley’s poem “A Question of Travel” deftly puts forward the trope of the fault line, a geological fracture that destabilizes all our certainties about home and identity: “I have lived at the edge of volcanic faults / before. The possibility of fire under my feet / suits me –this narrow crust fools no-one” (2001, 75). Contrary to common readings of the volcano as a...
because of its alleged biological basis—difference, which O'Malley's notion of exclusion is further complicated with subordination" (Pratt 1992, 4).

Other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, we see a definition of contact zones and their asymmetries: "social spaces inside or outside, thereby facilitating the underlying thesis of an "The Mother Tongue" in Eavan Boland's "I was born outside the pale—mark of exclusion imposed by others and deeply interiorized. Colonial settlements—becomes, in O'Malley's poem, a clear contrast of the pale—the boundary that used to circumscribe British realms of Hy Brasil, which, O'Malley explains, was erased from maps in the 1860s, only to increase its presence in folk culture, and which had been formerly situated in such varied places as the coasts of Ireland, Azores, Madeira and Canada (2016, 234).

Part II of O'Malley's Asylum Road begins with a poem that deftly weaves the themes of national identity, otherness—outside and within us—and emigration. "In the Name of God and of the Dead Generations"—the title of the poem reproduces the initial words of the Easter 1916 Proclamation of the Irish Republic—states, in a self-assertive, declarative tone, the poetic persona's sense of strangeness, which goes back to, although it does not end with, the British colonization of Ireland: "I was born outside the pale / and am outside it still. I do not fit in" (2001, 25). The motif of the pale—the boundary that used to circumscribe British colonial settlements—becomes, in O'Malley's poem, a clear mark of exclusion imposed by others and deeply interiorized. This reference to the pale contrasts with the one in the poem "The Mother Tongue" in Eavan Boland's The Lost Land (1998). Boland's speaker is more ambiguous about her side of the pale, inside or outside, thereby facilitating the underlying thesis of an Irish-English hybrid identity. This recalls the earlier mentioned definition of contact zones and their asymmetries: 'social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination' (Pratt 1992, 4).

The old pale ditch can still be seen less than half a mile from my house—[
I was born on this side of the Pale.
I speak with the forked tongue of colony. (1998, 30-31)

O'Malley's notion of exclusion is further complicated with references to the speaker's ethnic—one could even say racial, because of its alleged biological basis—difference, which distinguishes her from other Irish people: "gypsy blood and skin / darker again than that / of certain fishermen along the coast" (2001, 25).

The poem "In the Name of God and of the Dead Generations" abounds in autobiographical references, some of them to foreign places where the author lived and relished a nomadic or diasporic existence. O'Malley's speaker proclaims, once more, her identification with spaces of an unstable and ephemeral nature—seismic lands, the narrow distance between high and low tides:

which might be why Mediterranean coastal regions pulled me with their small tides, or areas of high seismic activity such as Lisbon and San Francisco, so much for place. (25)

O'Malley has similarly shown her fascination for places of imprecise location on real maps—although firmly rooted in the intangible cultural heritage of songs and stories. Such is the case of Hy Brasil, which, O'Malley explains, was erased from maps in the 1860s, only to increase its presence in folk culture, and which had been formerly situated in such varied places as the coasts of Ireland, Azores, Madeira and Canada (2016, 234).

Gender also plays a significant role in the poem "In the Name of God and of the Dead Generations", not just because of the autobiographical import of the text, but because gender is explicitly singled out as a mark of social, cultural and linguistic difference in Ireland: "An old man form the Gaeltacht at a wedding / 'Excuse me, miss, I don't speak English so good' / the Miss a branding iron" (2001, 26). The linguistic conflict between Irish and English, which is one of the many effects of colonization, intersects, in this case, with gender difference, as if Irish-speaking rural Ireland were a male bastion in which the alien woman is marked the way cattle would be: "the Miss a branding iron".

Of special relevance is the correlation between past Irish emigration to the United States (the so-called "black Irish") and present-day immigration in Ireland, rendered in parallelistic semantics and syntax: "They left in the darkened holds of coffin ships, / they arrive sealed in the hold of containers" (2001, 26). This circular migratory outflow and inflow also features, as we will see, in Marga do Val's poetry and actually illustrates these two poets' critical consciousness in the face of contemporary massive migration movements. O'Malley concludes her poem with a forthright condemnation of the different treatment accorded to migrants and tourists: "wounded, sometimes dead, between the jigs and the reels / and the Céad Mile Fáilte" (2001, 26), a distinction that will also be the object of Do Val's irony.

Marga do Val: Portable Home-Bodies across Borders

A cidade sen roupa ao sol [The City without Clothes in the Sun] (2010) is, until present, the only single-authored poetry collection by Marga do Val (Vigo, 1964). Her previous book, Entre dunas [Between Sand Dunes] (2000), was co-authored with Paula de Lemos. Do Val, therefore, does not follow the common pattern of precocious publication that has characterized a good

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The experience of displacement, in its sundry forms, is conspicuous in *A cidade sen roupa ao sol*, a collection that explores identity through memory – family, childhood, cities the poet lived in – and through the process of literary training. In this reconstruction of identity, the relation between displacement and gender is embodied in a number of characters – mostly female – of a nomadic condition. Contrary to the more frequent literary rendering of mobility as an adventure or a long journey, *A cidade sen roupa ao sol* makes of the daily walk to school a travel of initiation. Such is the case of the poem “Escola” [School], in which the poetic voice opposes the “nenas listas” who “camiñan pletóricas as mañáns”, “regresan abide / the duty that awaits them / future ladies with a ring” [sad girls who sadly abide by / the duty that awaits them / future ladies with a ring] to the “nenas tristes” who “acompañan tristemente / o carro da vaca da avoa Benedicta, nese mapa construído desde os nomes das terras da familia: o Coratel, A Rotea...” [sad girls who sadly abide by / the duty that awaits them / future ladies with a ring]

Among the biographical spaces featured in Marga do Val’s collection, Tui – the place we intuitively identify as that city border. The demarcation between Galicia and Portugal with the river Miño and the international bridge between the two, brings on, in the poem “Oferta e demanda” [Supply and demand], the visualization of a clandestine, itinerant group: the female smugglers in post-war Galicia who became heroines because, on account of their trade with small goods, they managed to ensure “o pan na mesa” [bread on the table].

In her autobiography for the *Biblioteca Virtual Galega* [Galician Virtual Library] the poet also refers to this daily trip: “Había que camiñar moito para ir á escola, a Torreiros. Moito para ir ao instituto do Porríno” [We had to walk long distances to go to school in Torreiros. Long distances also to go to secondary school in Porríno] (2002, n. pag). The writer identifies in these early itineraries of a daily domestic nature the origin of her future wanderlust to be rendered in writing:

“Había que camiñar moito para ir á escola, a Torreiros. Long distances also to go to secondary school in Porríno” (2002, n. pag). The writer identifies in these early itineraries of a daily domestic nature the origin of her future wanderlust to be rendered in writing:

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man’s land as a trope of that other reality of transborder contraband:

felices atravesabamos a ponte
felices pasabamos a fronteira
felices regresabamos con peras lisboetas
e no medio da ponte
cebabamos aquel globo mercado Na praza da Liberdade en Valença]

no final da ditadura polo tempo dos caraveis
xusto no medio da ponte
territorio de ninguén
abaixo o río
ascendía o globo
to trazar no ar esa liña do estraperlo da fronteira.

[Happy we crossed the bridge /happy we crossed the frontier /happy we returned with Lisbon pears / and in the middle of the bridge / we freed that balloon bought At Liberty Square in Valença / towards the end of the dictatorship, around the time of carnations /just in the middle of the bridge // no man’s land /the river below /the balloon going up in the air /drawing that line of border contraband].

The configuration of the “eu poético viaxeiro vencellado a Galicia e Europa” [the travelling poetic I, connected to both Galicia and Europe] (Marante 2010, 96) becomes explicit in the long poem “Autorretrato” [Self-portrait], in which the poet compares the dearth of bananas in East Germany with that in her childhood, as there were no bananas in the local shop and she first tasted them on the intercity coach. The comparison between the fruit savoured on the intercity coach and the banana as a symbol of the unification of Germany after the fall of the Berlin wall – another border – bridges two spaces inhabited by the author at different times of her life:

[An exotic product on the other side of the wall... / the other side of the wall / like my own childhood / they celebrate ten years later a feast with bananas / a feast like that in my childhood / on the intercity coach / before arriving home].

Both in A cidade sen roupa ao sol and “A viaxe na procura das palabras”, the poetic voice is a nomadic subject – with a portable home-body – familiar with the experience of foreignness while nonetheless trying to forge a linguistic and poetic identity:
also identifies the role of the port of Vigo in Galician emigration: “O meu primeiro soldo profesional gasteino nunha viaxe a Venezuela, para habitar a emoción da paisaxe herdada, onde viaxou unha máquina de coser Refrey e de onde regresou a Vigo” [I spent my first salary on a journey to Venezuela so as to inhabit the emotion of the inherited landscape. That was the destination of the Refrey sewing machine and the place where it came from on its way back to Vigo] (Nogueira 2014, 163). The already mentioned sewing machine that goes “around the world” anchors the writer’s identity to a lineage of seamstresses who, very much like the female smugglers mentioned earlier, know the experience of mobility and transnationality.

On other occasions, the strangers in the poems are immigrant women recently arrived in Galicia: the “camareira cubana [que] levará na última bandexa / esperanza / esa palabra” [the Cuban waitress (who) will carry on the last tray / hope / that word] or the Dominican cleaner hired “por caridade” [out of charity]. The poem entitled “Emigración” [Emigration] elaborates on the feeling of uprootedness: “pregúntanche como é o teu país e non sabes que dicir”, “procuras a tribo / e achas tantas tribos como liñas que se escriben nas mans” [Asked about your country, you don't know what to answer, you search for the tribe / and find as many tribes as lines on your palms] (2010, 49). The poem contrasts the experience of migration with other types of congenial mobility such as tourism or with imperialistic exploration: “na túa equipaxe non vai roupa de turista / nunca houbo sextantes / nin cronómetros para a medición do mundo” [no tourist clothes in your luggage / no sextants ever / nor chronometers to measure the world] (2010, 49). There is special emphasis on the paradoxical tension between identity loss and quest: “es o oco que procuras / mentres perdes o eco / desa voz familiar que te reclama” [You are the void that you explore / while you lose the echo / of that familiar voice that claims you] (2010, 49). The multiple facets of emigration are also portrayed in the poem “Progreso” [Progress] with reference to the people remaining and waiting in the homeland – a theme already present in the Rosalía de Castro’s section “Das viudas dos vivos e dos mortos” [On the widows of the living and the dead] in Follas Novas (1880) – as well as to the notion of progress as the objective of emigration – here again to Caracas:

Emigration, past and present, is also introduced from a very critical perspective in references to a variety of places and circumstances:

Subían ao tren na estación de Guillarei
camiño de Suiza ellas tamén
Sen resignación sen Fe
Volvían vinte e un días no verán
O tren que me leva pola beira do Miño
Sempre de largo pola estación de Caldelas
Sen Fe
Miña señora de Ferro
Pola ponte vella até Valença
Coma antes ainda agora. (2010, 49)

[They would get on the train at the Guillarei station / on their way to Switzerland the women too // Without resignation without Faith // They would come back for a twenty one-day visit during the summer // The train that carries me along the bank of the Miño / never stops at the Caldelas station // Without Faith // My Lady of Iron // Past the old bridge towards Valença / like then, still today].

The poem insists on the centrality of the river Miño in the writer's personal cartography, as well as on the emblematic international bridge, which becomes here a symbol of borderlessness and fluent communication between both countries. The author referred to this same railway in the article “Desde a beira do Miño co tren” [From the Bank of the Miño on the Train] in which she proposes a “viaxe, unha sinxela e pequeniña, profunda e arredor de Nós, desde a estación de Tui até a de Valença, por esa ponte de ferro de máis de cento vintecinco anos” [a journey, simple, short, deep into and around us, from the Tui station to Valença, across that iron bridge of over one hundred and twenty-five years of age] (Do Val 2013, web). In this text there is also an allusion to the particular circumstances of migrant women: “Pensei nalguna mocinha emigrante que con vinte e dous anos subía ao tren no seu particular maio do 68 para chegar a Basel e traballar na limpeza dalgún hospital, desde aquí mentres o seu mundo se esfarelaba co troupelear do tren, outro lle nacía nas mans” [I thought of a young emigrant woman who, at the age of twenty-two, got on the train for her personal May 68 so as to reach Basel and work there cleaning a hospital; from here, as her world shattered with the clatter of the train, a new one blossomed in her hands] (Do Val 2013, web):
Another type of mobility dealt with in this collection refers to the experience of foreignness and exile, a subject dealt with in the poem “Exilio” [Exile]. This text is written in honour of Marivi Villaverde, a woman forced to seek asylum outside Galicia at various moments of her life. The poem inscribes uprootedness in the “esforzo imposíbel de pronunciar cada palabra / dunha lingua estraña / con esa patria imposíbel” [impossible effort to pronounce each word / of a strange language / with that impossible homeland] (2010, 50) and concludes by stating the impossibility of ever returning home: “Por iso o regreso é imposíbel / e desde o silencio non hai outra morada / o interior da cicatriz / a condenda eterna do exilio” [Return is therefore impossible / and from silence there is no other abode / the inside of the scar / the eternal punishment of exile] (2010, 50).

There is a different view of displacement in the poem “Miña terra” [My Land], written in the memory of Lois Tobío (1906-2003). In this case, the experience of mobility does not seem restricted to exile but includes other travels for academic and professional purposes due to his role as a diplomat. His position as a translator is important for us to understand the following lines on nomadic identities:

\[
\text{Arte de nomear as cousas máis queridas} \\
\text{con que transitar os espazos} \\
\text{corpo} \\
\text{casa no corpo} \\
\text{espazo portátil. (2010, 51)} \\
\]

[Art of naming the most cherished things / for the wayfarer / body / home in the body / portable space]

Finally, the book also alludes to the particular self-imposed exile of a group of women who live “exilidadas da cidade” [exiled from the city] (2010, 69) making fish-shaped almond cakes. The expansion of the concept of exile to comprise confinement evinces the writer’s in-depth exploration of the notions of displacement and gender.

By means of a series of experiences, many of them autobiographical, embodied in female characters (the princess who wants to write, smugglers, migrants, the girl who crosses the international bridge) A cidade sen roupa ao sol represents identities in transit, made from scraps, from images projected on others. These identities are designated by that “portable home-body” whose place of return is the border itself. Do Val’s concluding remarks in her autobiographical note illustrate this: “E houbo un regreso a Tui, onde o Miño lembra á Mosela. Onde a fronteira existe. Regresar para sempre partir” [and there was a return to Tui, where the Miño recalls the Mosel. Where the border exists. Return is therefore impossible / and from silence there is no other abode / the inside of the scar / the eternal punishment of exile] (2010, 50).

Conclusions

A parallel reading of Mary O’Malley’s Asylum Road and Marga do Val’s A cidade sen roupa ao sol evinces these writers’ will to connect the theme of migration to their autobiographical experience of mobility and shows their awareness of the relation between past and present flows of emigration and immigration. Our analysis has identified the mutual relevance of their reflections: their destabilization of notions such as home, foreignness and free mobility; their perspicacious intertwining of migratory outflows and inflows, departures and returns; their critical stance on the different perception of tourism and migration; their focus on liminal spaces where the border is home, a frontier which entails being on both shores at once (Anzaldúa 1987, 78) in spite of old-time efforts to make the border a hostile divide between insiders and outsiders. Both writers reflect on the gendered nature of displacement and on their own difference, as they come to terms with the Other’s difference.

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Título:
Dislocación y género: “Asylum Road” de Mary O’Malley’s y “A cidade sen roupa ao sol” de Marga do Val

Contact:
manuela.palacios@usc.es

Notes

1 All translations from Galician into English are by the authors of this article.

2 The essay “A viaxe na procura das palabras” also provides a metaliterary reflection, as Do Val – alongside a few other contemporary Galician women writers – is asked to write there on the impact of travels on her work (Nogueira 2014). We would like to argue that her essay can be read as a paratext of her poetry collection A cidade sen roupa ao sol.

3 The line “smell of orange blossom” alludes to the Portuguese song “Senhora do Almortão” by José Afonso.

4 In the girl’s mother tongue, Galician, the word for axe is “machada”, while in Spanish, the language used at school, the word for axe is “hacha”.

5 The river Miño marks the frontier between Galicia and Portugal and the city of Tui is precisely on that border, next to the Portuguese city of Valença. This frontier was effective until 1992, the year when the treaty of free movement of European Union citizens came into effect.

6 The poem alludes to the Revolução dos Cravos [Carnation Revolution], which brought about the end of Salazar’s dictatorship and restored democracy in Portugal.

7 “A Cruña fita as brétemas d’Irlanda / Vigo os raña-ceos de Nova York” [Corunna fixes its eyes on Ireland’s mists / Vigo does so on the skyscrapers of New York] (Bernárdez 1994, 38).

8 “O tren que me leva pola beira do Miño” is the chorus of a well-known song by Andrés Dobarro.

9 The poetic voice dialogues with the expression “Nosa Señora de Ferro” [Our Lady of Iron] that the Galician writer Manuel Curros Enríquez (1851-1908) had used to refer to a locomotive in “A chegada a Ourense da primeira locomotora” [The Arrival at Ourense of the First Locomotive] where he claims progress as the religion of modern times.