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| Lejárraga, María de la O (1874-1974) |
| María [Gregorio] Martínez Sierra (1874-1974) |
| María de la O Lejárraga was a Spanish playwright, novelist, essayist, and feminist intellectual of the early twentieth century. She published under her married name, María Martínez Sierra, and also pseudonymously under the full name of her husband, the modernist writer, theatre artist, and publisher Gregorio Martínez Sierra. Scholars have recently shown that many works originally attributed to him were actually penned by Lejárraga. She was a strong and unique feminist voice in literary circles and the burgeoning women’s movement in early twentieth-century Spain. |
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Despite her professional teaching career, she was extremely passionate about literature and maintained a strong desire to write and publish. In 1900 she met and married the young poet and playwright Gregorio Martínez Sierra and soon began publishing under his name, composing plays, fiction, and essays. In this way, she was able to participate in literary circles that were typically closed to women in early twentieth-century Spain; however, she received little to no credit for her work. The husband-and-wife pair collaborated for decades in what many scholars have categorized as an exploitative relationship, given that Lejárraga earned little compensation or recognition. Moreover, in 1906 Gregorio fell in love with a young actress, Catalina Bárcena, who worked in his theater. Lejárraga suffered in her marriage as a result of his infidelity, which she tolerated until 1922 when Catalina gave birth to Gregorio’s daughter. Nevertheless, even after their separation, Lejárraga continued to write for him and to use his name when publishing.  Lejárraga first published a collection of short stories for children in 1899, which is the only literature she wrote that bears her own name. The most well-known play written with her male pseudonym is *Canción de cuna* (*Cradle Song*), which premiered in Madrid in 1911. Originally attributed to Gregorio, it has since been identified as her work. The careful development of complex female characters was praised as innovative for early twentieth-century Spanish theater, and the drama was soon translated to English and has inspired four film adaptations. Her other popular dramas (*comedias*) include *Tragedia de la perra viva, Sueños en la venta,* and *La abuela vive en sí*. Lejárraga also composed libretos for the elaborate theatrical productions *El amor brujo* and *El sombrero de tres picos.* Lejárraga’s literary output under her husband’s name is indeed vast, and her oeuvre includes novels, poems, plays, and essays. One of her first long novels, *Tú eres la paz* (1906), was a best-seller; other titles include *La humilde verdad*, *El amor catedrático*, and *Sol de la tarde*. Together with *Canción de Cuna*, these publications established ‘Martínez Sierra’ as a respectable name within modernist literary and intellectual circles in Spain.  During the 1920s and 1930s, Lejárraga was a vocal and active feminist in an otherwise relatively muted Spanish women’s movement. She was affiliated with the Socialist party and became one of the first women to participate in government when she was elected as a representative to the Republican Congress (for Granada) in 1932. Prior to the beginning of the Second Spanish Republic, Lejárraga gave public speeches on feminism and the women’s movement, working particularly hard to inspire middle-class women. As a vocal socialist and feminist intellectual during the Republic, Lejárraga was forced into exile in France during the Spanish Civil War and subsequent years of Franco’s dictatorship. She traveled to New York and then lived for a while in Mexico before moving permanently to Buenos Aires, where she continued writing literature and journalistic prose. In 1952 Lejárraga published the first of two autobiographical texts, *Una mujer por caminos de España*, in which she detailed her participation in Spanish politics prior to the Civil War. Her second memoir, *Gregorio y yo. Medio siglo de colaboración* (*Gregorio and I: Half a Century of Collaboration*), reveals her true role as the principal author of many plays and novels written under the name ‘Gregorio’.  Lejárraga stands out among her fiction-writing female contemporaries for her essayistic prose. Under the name ‘Gregorio’, she published five lengthy essays detailing the most important aspects of feminism, her particular stance as a Spaniard, and the need for feminist reforms in Spain. These include *Feminisimo, Feminidad, y Españolismo* (1917)*; La mujer moderna* (1920);and *La mujer española ante la República* (1932). She aimed to redefine Spanish women’s traditional role, which had been defined exclusively through the ideological discourse of domesticity. Crucial to her discursive strategy was a reconceptualization of domesticity and motherhood in which she rejected the glorification of female passivity and self-sacrifice. Lejárraga proposed that women construct a notion of citizenship that would allow for motherhood to be combined with participation in the public sphere, thus intertwining maternity and patriotism. The themes of motherhood and maternity are in fact central to both her fictional and non-fictional publications. In light of the recent discovery of her authorship of Gregorio Martínez Sierra’s works, contemporary feminists and literary scholars are re-examining her life and literary production in order to gain new insights into the changing role of Spanish women in literature, politics, and social movements during the early twentieth century.  Lejárraga died in Buenos Aires, Argentina in 1974. List of Select Works Martínez Sierra, Gregorio [María]. (1911) *Canción de cuna; Lirio entre espinas; El ideal*. Madrid: Biblioteca Renacimiento.  In English: *The Cradle Song, and Other Plays*, trans. John Garret Underhill and May Heywood Broun, New York: E.P. Dutton, 1922.  Martínez Sierra, Gregorio [María]. (1920) *La mujer moderna,* Madrid: Editorial Saturnino Calleja, S.A.  ---------- (1920) *Tú eres la paz.* Madrid: Estrella.  In English: *Ana María,* trans. Emmons Crocker. Boston: R.G. Badger, 1921.  Martínez Sierra, Gregorio [María]. (2003) Ed. Alda Blanco. *A las mujeres: Ensayos feministas de María Martínez Sierra,* Logroño: Gobierno de la Rioja, Instituto de studios Riojanos.  Martínez Sierra, María. (1952) *Una mujer por caminos de España*, ed. Alda Blanco, Madrid: Castalia. Instituto de la Mujer.  ---------- (1953) *Gregorio y yo. Medio siglo de colaboración*, ed. Alda Blanco, Valencia: Pre-textos. |
| Further reading:  (Blanco)  (Ciallella)  (Johnson)  (Lejárraga)  (O’Connor)  (Rodrigo) |