

Manuel Rivas: No confín, a boca da literatura

por
María López Sánchez

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MANUEL RIVAS (A Coruña, 1957) é unha das grandes voces da literatura actual, un escritor multifacético e enormemente recoñecido no panorama internacional. *Premio Nacional das Letras Españolas 2024*, ao longo da súa traxectoria cultivou a narrativa, a poesía e o ensaio, tanto extenso coma breve, na estela de escritores xornalistas que, como Gabriel García Márquez, conxugaron un enorme talento literario coa implicación e o compromiso coa realidade social do seu tempo. Malia a súa diversidade, a súa obra conforma un macrotexto sólido e coherente, atravesado por un conxunto de temas e preocupacións entre as que destaca a memoria histórica, arredor da cal teceu obras maxistras coma *O lapis do carpinteiro*; ou a preocupación medioambiental, expresada de modo paradigmático arredor da crise ecolóxica ocorrida coa marea negra do Prestige.

O 12 de decembro de 2009 Manuel Rivas ingresou como académico de número da Real Academia Galega cun discurso titulado *A boca da literatura: memoria, ecoloxía, lingua*, no que quedan de manifesto tres dos aspectos esenciais do seu

compromiso como escritor: a memoria, o compromiso social e a lingua. Nese discurso erixíase a imaxe de Noé coma “unha dorna chea de palabras que transporta a memoria, de palabras portadoras de vida”, sintetizando así o que a súa propia creación literaria constitúe xunto a ese océano inmenso que o viu nacer. Porque, asimilada ao faro de Hércules que se ergue xunto á súa cidade natal, a palabra é -na súa concepción- luz que ilumina e funda.

A súa defensa da diversidade lingüística e cultural e, máis especificamente, da cultura galega á que pertence, concrétese no uso do galego como lingua de creación, algo que se sostén no tempo de xeito sólido e consistente, se ben isto non impediu a gran difusión e recoñecemento da súa obra, inmediatamente traducida non só ao castelán, senón a un bo número de linguas estranxeiras. Sirvan de exemplo as 36 linguas ás que se traduciu *O lapis do carpinteiro*, demostrando como desde unha lingua minorizada se pode chegar ao centro do sistema literario mundial. Rivas é, en palabras de Salvador Castro Otero (2019: 97), “o autor galego máis traducido da historia”. Como recoñecemento ligado a esta dimensión da súa figura outorgóuselle, en 2019, o *Premio Internacional Ostana: Scritture in Lingua Madre*, en Piamonte (Italia). A súa ollada desde a marxe e a subalternidade vese ratificada polo seu compromiso coa igualdade de xénero, que atravesa o conxunto da súa produción, a pesar de que en ningún

momento o ideolóxico afogue a altura e calidade literaria que é, sen dúbida, o que máis o define e caracteriza. Porque, desde a periferia europea, desde a cidade da Coruña que el converteu en capital literaria (Axeitos 2009: 37) -recuperando pola memoria o espírito ilustrado da Coruña da preguerra-, Manuel Rivas Barrós é un autor universal, que atopou unha voz propia coa que unirse ás grandes obras que interpretaron e marcaron o tránsito do século XX a un aínda máis complexo século XXI.

O comezo dunha traxectoria: o maior milagre do mundo

A súa irrupción no panorama literario produciuse a través do xénero poético, con *O libro do Entroido* (1980), ao que seguiron *Balada nas praias do Oeste* (1985), e, ao ano seguinte, *Mohicania* (1986). Rivas definiu a poesía no seu discurso de ingreso na RAG coma “o maior milagre do mundo”, facendo seu o verso-manifesto de Luis Pimentel. A súa produción poética ata o ano 2003 foi recollida no volume *Do coñecido ao descoñecido. Obra poética* (1980-2003), publicado en 2003. En 2009 publicou *A desaparición da neve, la desaparición de la neu, Elurrarena urtzea, La desaparición de la nieve*, na que conflúen as catro linguas do estado. Recibiu premios coma o Leliadoura (por *Ningún cisne*, 1989) ou o

premio Casa dos Poetas, da Fundación Curros Enríquez, en 2014. Recentemente, a obra *O que fica fóra* (2022) foi Premio de Creación Literaria de Galicia.

Pero o lirismo, en Rivas, soborda a propia poesía: é unha tonalidade, unha clave, un xeito de ollar que impregna o conxunto da súa produción. Beleza, tenrura, humanidade e lirismo son termos recorrentes nas recensións e análises críticas da súa obra. Así, na recensión de *Os libros arden mal* do *Publishers Weekly*, califícase a novela de “refutación lírica do totalitarismo e a crueldade” (‘an epic and resoundingly lyrical refutation of totalitarianism and cruelty’) e no *Financial Times* descríbese como obra de inusual beleza (‘a work of unusual beauty’), idea na que abunda Gap Travel (‘This is an epically long but beautifully written book’). Arturo Pérez-Reverte calificou *O lapis do carpinteiro* de novela fermosa, ategada de tenrura e humanidade. Como afirmou Xosé Luís Axeitos (2009: 39) na resposta ao seu discurso de ingreso na Real Academia Galega, “unha especie de alento lírico invade todos os relatos e novelas do autor”, nas que se percibe unhas “atmosfera lírica e sentimental tan caracterizadora” (41), ata o punto de que nel atopa “parágrafos coma poemas” (41).

Un grande narrador universal

A dimensión acadada pola súa obra narrativa eclipsou, malia todo, os seus innegables méritos como poeta. En 1989 publicou o libro de relatos *Un millón de vacas*, ao que seguiron, afondando no mesmo xénero, *Que me queres, amor?* (1995), *Ela, maldita alma* (1999) ou *As chamadas perdidas* (2002). A súa enorme talla como escritor de contos breves entronca cun trazo esencial da literatura galega: a enorme relevancia e calidade deste subxénero, na liña de autores como Ánxel Fole, Álvaro Cunqueiro ou Rafael Dieste.

No xénero narrativo recibiu infinidade de premios: Premio da Crítica Española en 1989 por *Un millón de vacas* (obra que foi, así mesmo, finalista no Premio Nacional de Narrativa), en 1998 por *O lapis do carpinteiro* e en 2006 por *Os libros arden mal*; o Premio Nacional de Narrativa por *Que me queres, amor?* (1995) e o Premio da Crítica de Galicia por *Os libros arden mal* e *En salvaxe compañía* (1993). En 2024 foi recoñecido co Premio Nacional das Letras Españolas, premio que distingue toda unha traxectoria.

Fronte a unha enumeración de premios, traducións e recoñecementos que sería necesariamente prolixa e abrumadora, exemplificaremos o volume de recoñecementos recibidos a partir da atención específica a unha das súas obras: *Os libros arden mal*. Esta magna novela, publicada en

2006, recibiu os Premios Antón Losada Diéguez, o Premio da Crítica de Galicia na modalidade de creación literaria, o da Crítica Española, o Premio Cálamo, o VII Premio Libro do Ano, así como o da Asociación Galega de Editores ao mellor autor e obra, o XVI Premio Irmandade do libro e o da Asociación de Escritoras e Escritores en Lingua Galega. Foi traducida a castelán, catalán, francés, inglés e italiano, a pesar dunha complexidade e extensión que constitúen auténticos desafíos para a tradución. Da cálida e entusiasta recepción da obra de Rivas no estranxeiro dan testemuña as numerosas referencias e recensións en prensa, das que sería imposible dar conta exhaustiva, sirva de exemplo o seguinte extracto da recensión publicada en *The Independent* sobre a novela *Os libros arden mal*:

This is an exceptional book by an exceptional writer. Even among the near-industrial quantity of books now published on the Spanish Civil War, it is unusual. And within Manuel Rivas's own measured and exquisite output, not only does it attain the stature of a magnum opus, being roughly the combined length of his four preceding novels (all ably translated from Galician by Jonathan Dunne). It combines the folkloric lyricism of his *In the Wilderness* with the theme of the civil war already

pursued by his first novel, *The Carpenter's Pencil* (...). The book has an oneirically timeless quality that collapses past into present, and towards its end steers the reader back to England in 1968. The Odyssean journey is accomplished as the most "anthropomorphic" of artefacts returns. For books, like humans, can sometimes "survive the flames, the dampness of the dungeons, the robbers in the Palace of Justice". This tour de force comes full circle in a unique literary enterprise¹.

Máis alá do que revelan os premios, a obra narrativa de Rivas caracterízase pola forza emocional e a brillantez formal, especialmente pola súa capacidade para crear grandes metáforas explicativas. Na recensión de *Todo é silencio*, Manuel Ángel Candelas Colodrón (2011) condensou unha serie de trazos da produción de Rivas: a presenza simbólica e poderosa dos mapas; a importancia da escola e da figura do mestre ilustrado de xinea republicana; as metáforas que toman a imaxe do mundo da botánica e a zooloxía; as patoloxías parapsiquiátricas como punto de partida do fluxo de conciencia; os equívocos e a riqueza lingüística dunha prosa sonora e rítmica que traza círculos e recorrencias; os

1 Recensión a cargo de Amanda Hopkinson, profesora de tradución literaria na Universidade de East Anglia.

contrapuntos do humorístico e o trascendente, do épico e o lírico.

Dos contrastes, da antítese e do oxímoro fai Rivas unha defensa explícita na súa autopoética, entendendo que na tensión que conteñen hai algo que vai máis alá do estético que permite atribuírlles unha maior xeración de verdade:

Os surrealistas sabían o que dicían cando amosaban a súa preferencia polas asociacións dos antónimos máis extremos ou os termos e imaxes máis contraditorios e afastados. Non soamente se produce un efecto estético de choque, senón que tamén produce máis verdade (Rivas 2009: 28-29).

Esa forza dos contrastes na súa obra foi salientada no *Irish Times*: "A novelistic tour-de-force ... hauntingly poetic use of language and light touch ... Rivas never loses faith in the human ability to overcome the bleakest of situations." O propio John Berger afirmou del, a propósito de *O lapis do carpinteiro*, a confluencia da lucidez cunha sorte de inxenuidade que pervive: "An important storyteller ... He is sensitive and has an incredible ear, which, in his fiction, is allied to great ingenuity." É, por todo iso, un dos grandes narradores entre os

dous séculos, cun universo narrativo sólido e coherente e unha voz singular e chea de forza. Esa forza simbólica fixo que Dolores Vilavedra (1994) falase dunha “aureola lendaria” a propósito de *En salvaxe compañía*, texto do que afirma que agocha “toda unha alternativa axiolóxica e etnolóxica de identificación colectiva”.

Autoficción e revelación do eu desde a confluencia interartística

O propio Rivas permítenos unha achega á súa dimensión máis persoal a través da escrita autobiográfica e autoficcional, tamén nesta dimensión transitando entre xéneros e formas de escrita. No discurso de ingreso na Real Academia Galega en 2009 remóntase ao espazo da orixe de todo: “O lugar do faro era o espazo dos xogos da infancia” (2009: 13). Nado no confín de Europa, nas marxes oceánicas do vello mundo, o mar como presenza e Galicia coma espazo de pertenza conforman a esencia mesma deste autor fiel a si mesmo e ás súas orixes. Ese mar coñeceu a marcha de moitos dos do seu pobo e Rivas trae ao recordo unha lembranza escolar na que un compañeiro de infancia, á pregunta do mestre sobre que querían ser de maiores respondeu, tras unha pausa colectiva: “emigrantes!”. Evoca a infancia vivida en Monte Alto, fronte ao

faro, nun baixo da rúa Marola, coa súa irmá María, a importancia das escaleiras -de varias escaleiras, tamén as do propio faro- e afirma a relevancia daquelas primeiras casas, tamén as dos avós por parte de nai e pai. Na casa de Corpo Santo atopa unha “verdadeira escola do relato”, na que escoitar se transformaba no “traballo máis fermoso do mundo”. Naquela casa na que se contaba todo tipo de contos -tradicionais, mais tamén de acción, de lobishomes, historias de maquis e viaxes arredor do mundo-, cando os nenos debían subir a durmir sentaban no último chanzo e as historias chegaban a través da escaleira, conectada dalgún xeito enigmático á escaleira do faro romano máis antigo conservado que marcou coa presenza da súa luz a infancia do autor. Mais o paraíso da infancia é, nos seus propios termos, un “paraíso inquieto” -máis adiante dirá “inquietante”-, un lugar fermoso ateigado de elementos de desacougo -o cemiterio de San Amaro, o cárcere- que fixeron del unha metáfora do mundo: o lugar que modulou a ollada e a voz do autor. Na voz agochada e silenciada dese lugar está, tal vez, a raíz da súa literatura, ou unha das manifestacións da boca da literatura:

Foi o lugar do crime. Do maior crime da historia da cidade e posibelmente da historia de Galicia. A estirpe do libro, a estirpe da luz, a estirpe da dorna dos libros,

a Coruña solidaria, a Coruña dos ateneos, as bibliotecas e as escolas racionalistas, a Coruña das Irmandades da Fala e do Despertar Marítimo, das casas-xardín do socialista Maceda, das casas-barco de Caridad Mateo, en fin, esa Coruña ilustrada, urdida como “realidade intelixente” foi violada e fanada polo fascismo triunfante.

Así, a función do relato é ser memoria fértil das “feridas dos corpos, da terra e das palabras”. Emerxe a noción de “lugares da dor”, que une a Rivas co espazo evocado por Samuel Beckett en *Esperando a Godot*, que dota de universalidade á súa propia obra, xurdida nun deses espazos, e Rivas converteuse no escritor que captou os murmurios, as voces silenciadas, para facer delas literatura. A literatura, para Rivas, acode ao rescate alí “onde non se pode mirar, non se pode ler, non se pode dicir” (2009: 20), e non é dogmática, senón interrogativa.

Do conxunto de artigos xornalísticos *Storyboard*, publicados ao longo de 2010, nos que recolle impresións persoais do que el mesmo definiu como “presente recordado”, pasou ao ámbito da autoficción na obra *As voces baixas* (2012). O propio título apunta a esa polifonía de voces que se agochan e conviven nunha memoria que é persoal pero que acada unha significación colectiva e da que Assunta Polizzi dixo que nela o

individual e o colectivo conviven en continua reverberación. Nesa confluencia de voces e discursos para a reconstrución da memoria persoal faise presente a arte, nunha dimensión fortemente interartística, na que fotografía, pintura e cinema interseccionan coa literatura e a vida nunha semiótica preñada de significado. Así, para a reconstrución do paraíso duro da súa infancia, no que os cabalos comían espiñas e que tiña nome de batalla, o Castro de Elviña, conflúen a poética de Gaston Bachelard e a pintura de Chagall.

Xornalismo e ensaio ou a forza do pensamento

Se do seu universo literario se desprende unha visión potente na que agroma con forza o seu pensamento, este encontra o cauce de expresión máis directo na súa actividade xornalística e ensaística, na que só pode ser calificado de maxistral. Comezou a traballar aos 15 anos como “meritorio” no xornal *El ideal Gallego*, con sede en A Coruña. Unha selección das súas reportaxes xornalísticas, concibidas como relatos, publicouse co título *El periodismo es un cuento* (1997 e 2015). A súa ollada certa e global, atenta sempre ás marxes, plasmouse na coautoría do libro *Haití*, escrito en colaboración con Georgina Higuera e Gustavo Martín Garzo, tras unha estada nas Antillas en 1998. Tamén plasmou unha visión da India en

2013: *Rumbo a las estrellas, con dificultades*. No xénero do ensaio levou a cabo agudas análises da realidade social e política da sociedade galega, atendendo a procesos históricos como o estatutario. A súa brillantez no xénero do artigo de opinión e o ensaio breve mereceu premios e xerou un importante número de volumes recopilatorios, coma *Toxos e flores, Galicia, Galicia* ou *Galicia, bonsai atlántico*.

Adaptacións cinematográficas e relacións co mundo do cinema

O impacto da súa obra déixase sentir nas numerosas adaptacións cinematográficas das súas novelas e relatos. Sirvan de exemplo as adaptacións de *A lingua das bolboretas*, *O lapis do carpinteiro* ou *Todo é silencio*.

No seu achegamento ao mundo do cinema, foi guionista dos documentais *Galicia, arpa de niebla* e *E punto final*, levou a cabo a adaptación da súa novela *Todo é silencio*, escribindo o guion para a película e dirixiu a cortometraxe *Mayday, Mayday*, sobre a marea negra do Prestige, acontecida en 2002. Creou os argumentos de *Rosa de pedra* e da serie *Vivir sin permiso*. Esta dimensión audiovisual da súa figura foi obxecto de estudo académico na tese de doutoramento *Manuel Rivas e o cine*, da autoría de Salvador Castro Otero baixo a dirección de

Carmen Becerra, defendida na Universidade de Vigo en 2015. O estudoso sinalou a forza do cinema dentro da literatura de Rivas, contabilizando mencións a máis de 150 películas na súa obra e sinalando que o cine é, na obra de Rivas, metáfora da beleza do mundo, da intensidade da vida. E o propio Salvador Castro Otero recorre a unha metáfora de voo, tan do gusto do propio Rivas, para expresar como o autor “sobrevoa as fronteiras dos xéneros con total liberdade”.

Deste xeito, nunha manifestación máis da dimensión interartística da súa produción e da súa ollada, o lector implícito da obra de Manuel Rivas está marcado pola cultura cinematográfica que nos séculos XX e XXI conformou o imaxinario global e deu unha nova forma de plasmación a ese universal antropolóxico que é a narración de historias. Todo isto fai del “un autor ideal para estudar a relación entre cinema e literatura” (Castro Otero 2019: 98). A súa propia técnica narrativa está marcada por esa atracción cara ao mundo do cinema, desde a propia fasquía secuencial da construción de moitos dos seus textos a enfoques que evocan a visualidade cinematográfica ou aos efectos sonoros que, a xeito de banda sonora, crean un estado emocional, coma os ratos no faiado en *Os comedores de patacas*, que dan expresión á angustia do síndrome de abstinencia do protagonista. Achégase, nesta dimensión interartística, a outros autores clave da literatura

universal coma Kazuo Ishiguro, premio Nobel de literatura en 2017.

Memoria, espazo, ecoloxía

A intersección entre memoria, historia e esquecemento e a súa plasmación nos espazos na obra de Manuel Rivas foi obxecto de estudo por parte de Neil D. Anderson (2015), a través da análise da escola de indianos de *Todo é silencio*. Nun momento marcado polo que se deu en designar como “xiro espacial”, que marcou nas últimas décadas desde o pensamento filosófico e a epistemoloxía ata a narratoloxía e a creación artística, cómpre sinalar a enorme densidade semiótica dos espazos na obra do autor de Monte Alto. A escola de indianos nesta novela representaría un deses espazos nos que a memoria non está enteiramente curada, pero tampouco plenamente viva, e que por iso mesmo semellan espectrais; lugares nos que se abren a cuestionamento a memoria e o coñecemento locais. En relación a tales espazos, preeminentes na historia de Galicia, a ficción literaria xoga un papel de desvelamento, interpretación e significación. Deste xeito, a escola en ruínas conforma “unha estética da perda colectiva” (Anderson 2015: 15). Como expresou Rivas no seu discurso de ingreso na Real

Academia Galega, o poder case mítico da literatura pode redimir fronte ao silencio hexemónico, coas palabras agromando a través de fendas escuras: “As verbas son sobreviventes que agroman malferidas, reticentes e resentidas polas fendas das ruínas” (Rivas 2009: 19).

Na escola de indianos o chan é un mapa mundi, como plasmación da querencia cartográfica na obra de Rivas, reveladora explícita da carga semiótica dos espazos. Na literatura galega, a descrición do mapa de Fontán na obra *Arredor de si* de Otero Pedrayo marcou un fito e configurou este mapa como un emblema cultural. Esta centralidade da cartografía sen dúbida se relaciona coa problemática profunda da identidade das nacións sen estado. En *Todo é silencio*, o mapa no chan da escola é expresivo dos soños ilustrados dunha empresa colectiva que se viu, coma tantas cousas, fanada pola Guerra Civil. A natureza medra, o burato no teito agrándase, e os personaxes de Fins e Leda expresan, opositivamente, a memoria e o esquecemento, que marcaron a Galicia e a España franquista. Co seu dobre poder de destrución e renovación, o lume consome a escola no fin da narración, trasladando o peso do lugar ao suxeito que lembra.

En liña con esta centralidade do espazo na súa produción, o compromiso ecolóxico en Rivas fusiúnase coa súa propia concepción da literatura e a linguaxe. A súa plasmación da natureza vai alén da creación de atmosferas ou dunha

dimensión meramente representacional ou ornamental. A palabra, feita literatura, convértese en voz da natureza, permite escoitar as voces baixas dun mundo ferido; pola literatura opera simultaneamente un restañamento da propia natureza e da linguaxe. “De falar, falarei coa terra”, di un dos versos do autor. E a esta idea, en toda a súa profundidade, consagrou a súa intervención como convidado a pronunciar a *Conferencia Spinoza* na Universidade de Amsterdam en 2022, que levou por título “A ecoloxía das palabras no manuscrito da terra”. Deste xeito, o compromiso coa terra e a súa preservación forma un todo coherente co posicionamento ecolingüístico, porque preservarmos as palabras tamén é un xeito de defendermos a natureza.

Aplauso crítico e adhesión popular: un autor consagrado no cume da súa produción

Pode afirmarse que Manuel Rivas é un deses poucos autores que concitan simultaneamente o aplauso crítico e a adhesión popular. É esta unha dicotomía que marca a cultura actual, na que os trazos da creación posmoderna, máis intelectual e conceptual, a miúdo se afastan das producións de consumo que acadan divulgación masiva. A confluencia na creación de

Rivas da alta calidade artística coa vibración humana e emocional operan, con todo, ese dobre aplauso.

El mesmo apostou por unha “fértil endogamia entre a cultura popular e a cultura académica”, inserindo na polifonía da súa obra lendas, contos orais, letras de cancións, letras de tangos e alternando as “máis requintadas metáforas (...) coas expresións e ditos máis populares” (Axeitos 2009: 44). Nesta procura desa aparente contradición, reveladora tamén, como sinalou Rivas, de maior verdade, resólvese a dicotomía que Umberto Eco formulou nos termos opositivos de apocalípticos e integrados. Rivas insire o popular, a xente humilde do pobo, como parte esencial do seu compromiso social e do espazo xeográfico e cultural no que se afínca a súa produción, e con eles elementos propios desa cultura popular, pero ao facer con eses materiais unha obra de alta calidade, ergue a propia cultura popular e de masas ao nivel da alta cultura, merecente do aplauso crítico e do maior dos recoñecementos.

Ao mesmo tempo, cómpre para definir a obra de Rivas no momento actual, conxugar a dicotomía do autor consagrado que se atopa nun momento culminante e produtivo da súa creación. En 2024 non só viu refrendada a súa traxectoria literaria co *Premio Nacional das Letras Españolas*, senón que tamén publicou un novo libro, *Tras do ceo*, do que a crítica literaria Dolores Vilavedra salientou o entroncamento cun “proxecto literario propio e singularísimo”, ao tempo que a súa

novidade de aposta estética e no que o lugar, que “se resiste á identificación referencial, é epítome de moitas das Galiciaas reais e posibles” e a marxinalidade desprázase ao centro porque os seres non produtivos resultan ser os máis funcionais. Intensidade emocional conxugada con ironía e enxeño, a destrución do rural e imaxes recoñecibles no macrotexto do autor (mesmo o esqueleto dunha vella escola) conforman, en palabras da autora, o “resultado brillante e maduro da evolución natural dun autor inqueda”.

A universalidade dun autor das marxes

O impacto internacional de Manuel Rivas é enorme, malia ter escrito sempre, de xeito constante e sistemático, como primeira lingua de creación, nun idioma minorizado do contexto europeo como é o galego. A súa figura foi obxecto de xornadas no *Centre de Recherches Interdisciplinaires sur les Mondes Ibériques Contemporains* en 2010. Oana Mihalcea (2013) abordou a súa recepción en Rumanía a través da tradución de *O lapis do carpinteiro* ao romanés, poñendo o foco no aspecto que fai significativa a novela de Rivas a un contexto europeo tan distante, pero que comparte o silencio e o trauma histórico como espazo desde o que achegarse á novela do autor galego: “Cargada de transparencia e lucidez, a

obra de Rivas expón con claridade todo aquilo que se esconde detrás da cortina dunha guerra civil e dun sistema totalitario”.

A escrita da memoria histórica da Guerra Civil española tardou máis en agromar que a tecida arredor da Segunda Guerra Mundial, sen dúbida pola diferenza no resultado de ambos conflitos: fronte á derrota de Hitler en 1945, que permitiu levar a cabo unha fractura ideolóxica co nazismo, o réxime ditatorial imposto en España tras a contenda civil durante 40 anos impuxo unha lousa de silencio, un medo á enfrontarse ao peso esmagante do que outro autor galego, Celso Emilio Ferreiro, definiu como a “longa noite de pedra”. Rivas é, desde unha das linguas e culturas periféricas do estado e de Europa, que sufriron en grao extremo a represión da súa propia identidade, unha das voces que racharon co silencio imposto para pór palabras ao acontecido. A pegada da Guerra Civil española percorre transversalmente a súa produción. O Premio Nobel de literatura Günter Grass declarou ter aprendido máis sobre este conflito lendo *O lapis do carpinteiro* de Rivas ca nos libros de historia.

As recensións e referencias ao autor aparecidas en medios internacionais son incontables. Nelas convive a comparación e procura de conexións con grandes figuras da literatura universal como a afirmación da súa grandeza e singularidade, non asimilable a ningunha outra figura:

"It's time for reviewers and sundry pundits to quit the flattering comparisons with Lorca, Joyce and Garcia Marquez. Manuel Rivas reads like no-one else on the planet . . . one of those novels to lavish on friends. . . . Manuel Rivas' sweeping novel, translated into English for the first time, is an undoubted classic." — The Scotsman

"As vivid as Orhan Pamuk, as learned as Alvaro Mutis, Rivas writes magnificently, and Dunne's translation will take one's breath away on nearly every page."— Booklist

`Manuel Rivas reads like no-one else on the planet... Rivas' sweeping novel... is an undoubted classic.' -- The Scotsman

"This is an exceptional book by an exceptional writer." --The Independent

Manuel Rivas: un premio Nobel para a Europa non hexemónica

Deste xeito, a magnitude literaria e intelectual de Manuel Rivas fan del un candidato sólido ao Premio Nobel de Literatura. O compromiso de Europa coa súa diversidade lingüística e cultural, expresada na *Carta Europea das Linguas Rexionais* e

Minoritarias, implica un recoñecemento ás realidades periféricas e ás linguas sen estado no contexto europeo. O Premio Nobel de Literatura superou hai anos o eurocentrismo e ampliou a ollada ás literaturas mundiais tradicionalmente excluídas do canon. Pero o canon occidental tamén excluía realidades internas, culturas e linguas periféricas que deben recoñecerse na polifonía dun mundo global e diverso que rache coas xerarquías tradicionais. Manuel Rivas escolleu escribir nunha lingua que “leva séculos empurrada á liña fronteiriza entre a vida e a morte” (Rivas 2009: 32), mais a súa voz xermolou a través da tradución e a súa obra atopou eco e significación en lugares e culturas afastados.

A magnitude literaria e intelectual de Manuel Rivas fixeron del o primeiro autor galego gañador do *Premio Nacional das Letras Españolas*; pero sen dúbida é un candidato ao Nobel no que conflúen de xeito dificilmente igualable a calidade literaria e a significatividade dun autor de primeira liña no que se visibilizan as linguas sen estado, recoñecendo unha tradición literaria como a galega como parte integrante do patrimonio cultural mundial.

En 2009, Manuel Rivas constataba: “a boca da literatura galega, antes e despois, ábrese na vangarda e no universal”. A súa obra, por calidade, forza e compromiso, ben merece ser a que poña a literatura galega, que bebe dunha tradición lírica medieval sobresaliente e da figura inmensa de Rosalía de

Castro, no panorama universal que o Premio Nobel de literatura referendaría de xeito definitivo.

Manuel Rivas: At the Atlantic Fringe, the Mouth of Literature

by
María López Sánchez

Galego

An initiative by



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MANUEL RIVAS (A Coruña, 1957) is one of the great voices in contemporary literature, a multifaceted writer widely acclaimed on the international stage. Winner of the 2024 *National Prize for Spanish Literature*, throughout his career he has explored narrative, poetry, and essay writing, both in extensive and brief forms, following in the footsteps of journalist-writers like Gabriel García Márquez, who combined extraordinary literary talent with deep engagement and commitment to the social realities of their time. Despite its diversity, his work forms a solid and coherent macrotext, interwoven with a set of themes and concerns, notably historical memory, around which he crafted masterpieces such as *The Carpenter's Pencil*; or environmental concerns, paradigmatically expressed in the context of the ecological crisis caused by the Prestige oil spill in 2002.

On December 12, 2009, Manuel Rivas was inducted as a full member of the Royal Galician Academy with a speech titled *The Mouth of Literature: Memory, Ecology, Language*, in which he highlighted three essential aspects of his commitment as a

writer: memory, social engagement, and language. In the speech, he evoked the image of Noah as 'a boat filled with words carrying memory, words as bearers of life', thus encapsulating what his own literary creation represents within the vast ocean that witnessed his birth. For, akin to the Tower of Hercules that stands beside his hometown, the word is – in his conception – a light that illuminates and founds.

His defense of linguistic and cultural diversity, and more specifically of the Galician culture to which he belongs, is evident in his use of Galician as the language of his creative work. This commitment has been maintained solidly and consistently over time, without hindering the widespread dissemination and recognition of his work, which is immediately translated not only into Spanish but also into numerous foreign languages. For instance, *The Carpenter's Pencil* has been translated into 36 languages, demonstrating how a minoritized language can reach the heart of the global literary system. Rivas is, in the words of Salvador Castro Otero (2019: 97), 'the most translated Galician author in history'. As a recognition of this aspect of his career, he was awarded the *International Ostana Prize: Writings in Mother Language*, in Piedmont (Italy) in 2019.

His perspective from the margins and subalternity is further reinforced by his commitment to gender equality, which permeates his body of work. Yet, at no point does ideology

overshadow the literary excellence that undoubtedly defines and characterizes him most. From the European periphery, from the city of A Coruña—transformed by him into a literary capital (Axeitos 2009: 37) by recovering the enlightened spirit of pre-war A Coruña through memory—Manuel Rivas Barrós is a universal author. He has found a distinctive voice that aligns with the great works interpreting and shaping the transition from the 20th century to an even more complex 21st century.

The Beginning of a Journey: The Greatest Miracle in the World

His emergence on the literary scene began with poetry, debuting with *O libro do Entroido* (*The Carnival Book*) (1980), followed by *Balada nas praias do Oeste* (*Ballads on the Western Beaches*) (1985) and, a year later, *Mohicania* (1986). In his speech upon joining the Royal Galician Academy, Rivas described poetry as ‘the greatest miracle in the world’, adopting the manifesto-like verse of Luis Pimentel. His poetic works up to 2003 were compiled in the volume *Do coñecido ao descoñecido. Obra poética (1980-2003)* (*From the Known to the Unknown. Poetic Work*), published in 2003.

In 2009, he released *A desaparición da neve* (*The Disappearance of Snow*), a work where the four languages of

Spain converge: Galician, Catalan (*La desaparició de la neu*), Basque (*Elurrarena urtzea*), and Spanish (*La desaparición de la nieve*). Over the years, his poetry has earned him notable awards, including the *Leliadoura Prize* (for *Ningún cisne* (*No Swan*), 1989) and the *Casa dos Poetas Prize* from the Curros Enríquez Foundation in 2014. More recently, his work *O que fica fóra* (*What Remains Outside*) (2022) won the *Galicia Literary Creation Prize*.

But lyricism in Rivas transcends poetry itself: it is a tone, a key, a way of seeing that permeates his entire body of work. Beauty, tenderness, humanity, and lyricism are recurring terms in reviews and critical analyses of his writing. For example, in a *Publishers Weekly* review of *Books Burn Badly* (*Os libros arden mal*), the novel is described as ‘an epic and resoundingly lyrical refutation of totalitarianism and cruelty’. Similarly, the *Financial Times* refers to it as ‘a work of unusual beauty’, an idea echoed by *Gap Travel*, which notes, ‘This is an epically long but beautifully written book’.

Arturo Pérez-Reverte described *The Carpenter's Pencil* as a beautiful novel, filled with tenderness and humanity. As Xosé Luís Axeitos (2009: 39) remarked in his response to Rivas's induction speech at the Royal Galician Academy, ‘a kind of lyrical breath pervades all of the author's stories and novels’, where one perceives a ‘lyrical and sentimental atmosphere so

characteristic' (41) that one finds in his work 'paragraphs like poems' (41).

A Great Universal Storyteller

The scope achieved by his narrative work has overshadowed, however, his undeniable merits as a poet. In 1989, he published the short story collection *Un millón de vacas* (*A Million Cows*), followed by others in the same genre such as *Que me queres, amor?* (*What Do You Want from Me, Love?*, 1995), *Ela, maldita alma* (*She, Damned Soul*, 1999) and *As chamadas perdidas* (*The Missed Calls*, 2002). His exceptional talent as a writer of short stories connects with an essential trait of Galician literature: the significant relevance and quality of this subgenre, in the tradition of authors like Ánxel Fole, Álvaro Cunqueiro, and Rafael Dieste.

In the field of narrative, he garnered numerous awards: the *Spanish Critic's Prize* in 1989 for *A Million Cows*, which was also a finalist for the *National Narrative Prize*; in 1998 for *The Carpenter's Pencil*; and in 2006 for *Books Burn Badly*. He received the *National Narrative Prize* for *What Do You Want from Me, Love?* (1995) and the Galicia Critic's Prize for *Books Burn Badly* and *In Wild Company* (1993). In 2024, he was honored with the *National Prize for Spanish Literature*, an award recognizing a lifetime of achievement.

Rather than presenting a necessarily lengthy and overwhelming enumeration of awards, translations, and recognitions, we will illustrate the volume of accolades received by focusing specifically on one of his works: *Books Burn Badly*. This monumental novel, published in 2006, earned the *Premio Antón Losada Diéguez*, the *Galicia Critic's Prize* in the literary creation category, the *Spanish Critic's Prize*, the *Premio Cálamo*, the VII *Premio Libro do Ano* (*Book of the Year Award*), as well as the *Asociación Galega de Editores* award for best author and work, the XVI *Premio Irmandade do Libro*, and the *Asociación de Escritoras e Escritores en Lingua Galega* award.

Despite its complexity and length, which pose significant challenges for translation, the novel has been translated into Spanish, Catalan, French, English, and Italian. The warm and enthusiastic reception of Rivas's work abroad is evidenced by the numerous references and reviews in the press, which would be impossible to exhaustively catalog. As an example, consider the following excerpt from a review published in *The Independent* about *Books Burn Badly*:

This is an exceptional book by an exceptional writer.
Even among the near-industrial quantity of books now

published on the Spanish Civil War, it is unusual. And within Manuel Rivas's own measured and exquisite output, not only does it attain the stature of a magnum opus, being roughly the combined length of his four preceding novels (all ably translated from Galician by Jonathan Dunne). It combines the folkloric lyricism of his *In the Wilderness* with the theme of the civil war already pursued by his first novel, *The Carpenter's Pencil* (...). The book has an oneirically timeless quality that collapses past into present, and towards its end steers the reader back to England in 1968. The Odyssean journey is accomplished as the most 'anthropomorphic' of artefacts returns. For books, like humans, can sometimes 'survive the flames, the dampness of the dungeons, the robbers in the Palace of Justice'. This tour de force comes full circle in a unique literary enterprise².

Beyond what the awards reveal, Rivas's narrative work is distinguished by its emotional strength and formal brilliance, particularly its capacity to craft profound explanatory metaphors. In a review of *All Is Silence*, Manuel Ángel Candelas Colodrón (2011) summarized several key features of Rivas's work: the symbolic and powerful presence of maps; the importance of the school and the figure of the enlightened teacher of Republican lineage; metaphors drawn from the

2 Review by Amanda Hopkinson, Professor of Literary Translation at the University of East Anglia

worlds of botany and zoology; parapsychiatric pathologies as a starting point for streams of consciousness; the ambiguities and linguistic richness of a resonant and rhythmic prose that traces circles and recurrences; and the counterpoints of humor and transcendence, of the epic and the lyrical.

Rivas explicitly defends the use of contrasts, antithesis, and oxymoron in his poetics, arguing that the tension they embody transcends aesthetics, enabling a greater generation of truth:

The Surrealists knew what they were doing when they expressed their preference for the association of the most extreme antonyms or the most contradictory and distant terms and images. Not only does it create an aesthetic shock effect, but it also generates more truth (Rivas 2009: 28–29).

The strength of contrasts in his work was highlighted in *The Irish Times*:

A novelistic tour-de-force ... hauntingly poetic use of language and light touch ... Rivas never loses faith in the human ability to overcome the bleakest of situations.

John Berger himself, speaking about *The Carpenter's Pencil*, remarked on the convergence of lucidity with a kind of enduring ingenuousness:

An important storyteller ... He is sensitive and has an incredible ear, which, in his fiction, is allied to great ingenuity.

For all these reasons, Rivas stands as one of the great storytellers bridging two centuries, with a solid and coherent narrative universe and a singular, powerful voice. This symbolic force led Dolores Vilavedra (1994) to speak of a 'legendary aura' in reference to *In Wild Company*, a text she claims conceals '*an entire axiological and ethnological alternative for collective identification*'.

Autofiction and Self-Revelation Through Interartistic Confluence

Rivas offers us a glimpse into his most personal dimension through autobiographical and autofictional writing, navigating

across genres and forms of expression. In his 2009 acceptance speech at the Royal Galician Academy, he traced his origins back to the primal space: 'The place of the lighthouse was the space of childhood games' (2009: 13).

Born at the edge of Europe, on the oceanic margins of the old world, the sea as a constant presence and Galicia as a space of belonging form the very essence of this author, loyal to himself and his origins. That same sea bore witness to the departure of many from his village, a memory Rivas recalls through a school anecdote in which a childhood classmate, when asked by the teacher what they wanted to be when they grew up, answered, after a collective pause: 'Emigrants!' He evokes his childhood in Monte Alto, near the lighthouse, in a ground-floor apartment on Marola Street, with his sister María. The stairs—several sets of them, including those of the lighthouse itself—played a significant role, as did those early homes, especially those of his maternal and paternal grandparents. In the Corpo Santo house, he discovered a 'true school of storytelling', where listening became 'the most beautiful work in the world'.

In that house, a variety of tales were shared—traditional stories, action-packed adventures, tales of werewolves, accounts of resistance fighters ("maquis"), and journeys around the world. When the children had to go upstairs to sleep, they would sit on the last step, where the stories

reached them from the staircase, mysteriously connected to the steps of the ancient Roman lighthouse. This lighthouse, whose light marked the author's childhood, became a symbol of enduring presence.

Yet, in his own words, the paradise of childhood was an 'uneasy paradise'—later described as 'disturbing'—a beautiful place imbued with unsettling elements, such as the San Amaro cemetery and the prison, which transformed it into a metaphor for the world. This space shaped the author's gaze and voice.

The hidden and silenced voice of that place might hold the root of his literature, or at least one manifestation of the 'mouth of literature':

It was the scene of the greatest crime in the history of the city, and possibly in the history of Galicia. The lineage of the book, the lineage of light, the lineage of the *dorna* of books; the Coruña of solidarity, of athenaeums, libraries, and rationalist schools; the Coruña of the *Irmandades da Fala* and the *Despertar Marítimo*; the garden-houses of the socialist Maceda and the boat-houses of Caridad Mateo—this enlightened Coruña, woven as an 'intelligent reality', was violated and plundered by triumphant fascism.

Thus, the function of storytelling is to serve as fertile memory of the 'wounds of bodies, of the land, and of words'. The notion of 'places of pain' emerges, linking Rivas to the space evoked by Samuel Beckett in *Waiting for Godot*, a connection that lends universality to his work. Rooted in one of these spaces, Rivas became the writer who captured the murmurs and silenced voices, transforming them into literature.

For Rivas, literature comes to the rescue where 'one cannot look, cannot read, cannot speak' (2009: 20). It is not dogmatic but interrogative, constantly questioning and seeking meaning.

From the collection of journalistic articles *Storyboard*, published throughout 2010 and capturing personal impressions of what Rivas himself described as a 'remembered present', he transitioned to the realm of autofiction with *As voces baixas* (*The Low Voices*, 2012). The title itself points to a polyphony of voices that are hidden yet coexist within a memory that is personal but attains collective significance. Assunta Polizzi remarked that in this work, the individual and the collective exist in continuous reverberation.

In this confluence of voices and discourses reconstructing personal memory, art is ever-present, in a strongly interartistic dimension where photography, painting, and cinema intersect with literature and life in a semiotic tapestry rich with meaning. Thus, in the reconstruction of the harsh paradise of his

childhood—where horses ate thorns and which bore the name of a battlefield, the Castro de Elviña—Rivas draws from the poetics of Gaston Bachelard and the paintings of Marc Chagall.

Journalism and Essays: The Power of Thought

If his literary universe reveals a powerful vision rooted in deep thought, this finds its most direct expression in his journalistic and essayistic work, which can only be described as masterful. Rivas began working at the age of 15 as a trainee at the newspaper *El Ideal Gallego*, based in A Coruña. A selection of his journalistic reports, crafted as narratives, was published under the title *El periodismo es un cuento* (*Journalism is a Story*, 1997 and 2015).

His keen and global perspective, always attentive to the margins, was evident in his co-authorship of the book *Haití*, written in collaboration with Georgina Higuera and Gustavo Martín Garzo, following a stay in the Antilles in 1998. He also captured his vision of India in 2013 with *Rumbo a las estrellas, con dificultades* (*Heading for the Stars, with Difficulties*).

In the essay genre, Rivas has conducted sharp analyses of the social and political realities of Galician society, addressing

historical processes such as the Statute of Autonomy. His brilliance in opinion pieces and short essays has earned him awards and resulted in a significant number of collected volumes, such as *Toxos e flores (Gorse and Flowers)*, *Galicia, Galicia*, and *Galicia, bonsai atlántico (Galicia, Atlantic Bonsai)*.

Film Adaptations and Connections to the World of Cinema

The impact of Rivas's work is evident in the numerous cinematic adaptations of his novels and stories. Notable examples include the adaptations of *A lingua das bolboretas (The Tongue of Butterflies)*, *The Carpenter's Pencil*, and *All Is Silence*.

In his engagement with the world of cinema, Rivas contributed as a screenwriter to the documentaries *Galicia, arpa de niebla (Galicia, Harp of Mist)* and *E punto final (And Full Stop)*. He also adapted his novel *All is Silence* into a screenplay for the film and directed the short film *Mayday, Mayday*, about the Prestige oil spill in 2002. Additionally, he developed the storylines for *Rosa de pedra (Stone Rose)* and the television series *Vivir sin permiso (Unauthorized Living)*.

This audiovisual dimension of Rivas's career was the subject of academic study in the doctoral thesis *Manuel Rivas e o cine*

(*Manuel Rivas and Cinema*), authored by Salvador Castro Otero under the supervision of Carmen Becerra and defended at the University of Vigo in 2015. The researcher highlighted the profound influence of cinema within Rivas's literature, identifying references to over 150 films in his works and emphasizing that, in Rivas's oeuvre, cinema serves as a metaphor for the beauty of the world and the intensity of life. Salvador Castro Otero also employs a metaphor of flight—so characteristic of Rivas's own style—to describe how the author 'freely soars above the boundaries of genres'.

In yet another demonstration of the interartistic dimension of his production and vision, the implicit reader of Manuel Rivas's work is shaped by the cinematic culture of the 20th and 21st centuries. This culture has not only formed the global imagination but also redefined how the universal anthropological act of storytelling is expressed. All of this makes Rivas '*an ideal author for studying the relationship between cinema and literature*' (Castro Otero 2019: 98).

Rivas's own narrative technique is deeply influenced by his attraction to the cinematic world. This is evident in the sequential structure of many of his texts, visual approaches that evoke cinematic imagery, and sound effects that, like a soundtrack, create an emotional state. A striking example is the scurrying of mice in the attic in *Os comedores de patacas* (*The*

Potato Eaters), which mirrors the protagonist's withdrawal-induced anguish.

In this interartistic dimension, Rivas aligns with other key authors of universal literature, such as Kazuo Ishiguro, the 2017 Nobel Prize laureate in Literature, whose works also reflect a profound engagement with cinematic techniques and their narrative possibilities.

Memory, Space, Ecology

The intersection of memory, history, and forgetting, as reflected in the spaces of Manuel Rivas's work, has been studied by Neil D. Anderson (2015) through the analysis of the *escuela de indianos* (school funded by Galician emigrants) in *All Is Silence*. In an era defined by the so-called 'spatial turn', which has influenced fields from philosophy and epistemology to narratology and artistic creation over recent decades, the semiotic richness of spaces in Rivas's work deserves special attention.

In this novel, the *escuela de indianos* represents one of those spaces where memory is neither entirely healed nor fully alive, making it appear spectral. These are places that call local memory and knowledge into question. Within the context of

such spaces, prominent in Galician history, literary fiction plays a role in uncovering, interpreting, and assigning meaning. As such, the ruined school embodies '*an aesthetic of collective loss*' (Anderson 2015: 15).

As Rivas expressed in his acceptance speech at the Royal Galician Academy, the almost mythical power of literature offers redemption against the hegemonic silence, with words emerging through dark fissures: '*Words are survivors that sprout, wounded, reluctant, and resentful, through the cracks in the ruins*' (Rivas 2009: 19).

In the "escuela de indianos", the floor is a world map, embodying the cartographic fascination in Rivas's work and explicitly revealing the semiotic weight of spaces. In Galician literature, the description of Fontán's map in Otero Pedrayo's *Arredor de si* (*Around Himself*) marked a milestone, establishing the map as a cultural emblem. This centrality of cartography is undoubtedly tied to the deep question of the identity of stateless nations.

In *All Is Silence*, the map on the school floor symbolizes the Enlightenment dreams of a collective enterprise, which, like so many other things, was destroyed by the Civil War. Nature grows wild, the hole in the roof widens, and the characters Fins and Leda represent, in opposition, memory and forgetting—forces that shaped Galicia and Spain during dictatorship. With

its dual power of destruction and renewal, fire consumes the school at the end of the narrative, shifting the weight of significance from the place to the subject who remembers.

Aligned with this centrality of space in his work, Rivas's ecological commitment is deeply intertwined with his conception of literature and language. His portrayal of nature goes beyond creating atmospheres or serving a merely representational or decorative purpose. Words, transformed into literature, become the voice of nature, allowing us to hear the 'low voices' of a wounded world. Through literature, both nature and language undergo a process of healing.

'If I speak, I will speak with the earth', writes Rivas in one of his poems. This profound idea was the focus of his 2022 *Spinoza Lecture* at the University of Amsterdam, titled 'The Ecology of Words in the Manuscript of the Earth'. In this way, his commitment to the land and its preservation is intrinsically linked to his ecological-linguistic stance, emphasizing that preserving words is also a means of defending nature.

Critical Acclaim and Popular Appeal: A Celebrated Author at the Pinnacle of His Work

Manuel Rivas is one of those rare authors who garners both critical acclaim and widespread popular support. This duality contrasts with a cultural landscape often defined by the dichotomy between postmodern creation—more intellectual and conceptual—and mass-market productions that achieve broad dissemination. In Rivas's work, the fusion of high artistic quality with profound human and emotional resonance bridges this divide, earning him both forms of applause.

Rivas himself has championed a 'fertile endogamy between popular culture and academic culture', weaving into the polyphony of his work legends, oral tales, song lyrics, tango verses, and alternating 'the most refined metaphors (...) with the most colloquial expressions and sayings' (Axeitos 2009: 44). In this pursuit of what seems like contradiction—yet reveals, as Rivas has noted, a deeper truth—the dichotomy described by Umberto Eco as 'apocalyptic' versus 'integrated' resolves itself. Rivas incorporates the popular, the humble people of the town, as an essential part of his social commitment and the geographical and cultural space that anchors his work. By transforming these popular elements into works of the highest artistic quality, he elevates popular and mass culture to the level of high culture, deserving of critical recognition and the highest praise.

At the same time, in order to define Rivas's work in the present moment it is necessary to address the dichotomy of a

consecrated author at a productive and climactic point in his creative journey. In 2024, his literary career was not only recognized with the *National Prize for Spanish Literature*, but also marked by the publication of a new book, *Tras do ceo* (*Beyond the Sky*). Literary critic Dolores Vilavedra highlighted how this work connects with Rivas's 'unique and singular literary project', while also offering a fresh aesthetic approach. In this book, the setting—resistant to specific identification—becomes an epitome of many possible and real Galicias, with marginality shifting to the center, as the seemingly non-functional figures prove to be the most vital.

Combining emotional intensity with irony and wit, the narrative explores the destruction of the rural, interwoven with recognizable imagery from Rivas's broader oeuvre (even the skeleton of an old school). As Vilavedra described, the book represents 'the brilliant and mature result of the natural evolution of a restless author'.

The Universality of an Author from the Margins

Manuel Rivas's international impact is extraordinary, despite consistently and systematically writing in Galician, a minority language in the European context. His work and legacy were the focus of a symposium at the *Centre de Recherches*

Interdisciplinaires sur les Mondes Ibériques Contemporains in 2010. Oana Mihalcea (2013) analyzed his reception in Romania through the translation of *The Carpenter's Pencil* into Romanian, emphasizing the elements that make Rivas's novel resonate in a European context so geographically distant yet united by shared silences and historical trauma. As Mihalcea noted:

Loaded with transparency and lucidity, Rivas's work clearly exposes everything hidden behind the curtain of a civil war and a totalitarian system.

The writing of historical memory about the Spanish Civil War took longer to emerge than that about World War II, largely due to the contrasting outcomes of the two conflicts. While Hitler's defeat in 1945 allowed for an ideological break with Nazism, the dictatorial regime imposed in Spain after the Civil War maintained a 40-year-long silence, perpetuating fear and repression. This silence was famously described by another Galician author, Celso Emilio Ferreiro, as the '*long night of stone*'.

From one of the state's and Europe's peripheral languages and cultures—deeply repressed in its identity—Rivas became a voice breaking this imposed silence, putting words to what had happened. The imprint of the Spanish Civil War runs throughout his body of work. Nobel laureate Günter Grass once stated that he had learned more about the conflict from reading Rivas's *The Carpenter's Pencil* than from history books.

The international reviews and references to Rivas's work are countless. These reviews often simultaneously compare him to iconic figures of world literature and affirm his singularity, positioning him as an unparalleled voice:

It's time for reviewers and sundry pundits to quit the flattering comparisons with Lorca, Joyce and Garcia Marquez. Manuel Rivas reads like no-one else on the planet . . . one of those novels to lavish on friends. . . . Manuel Rivas' sweeping novel, translated into English for the first time, is an undoubted classic. — The Scotsman

As vivid as Orhan Pamuk, as learned as Alvaro Mutis, Rivas writes magnificently, and Dunne's translation will take one's breath away on nearly every page.— Booklist

*Manuel Rivas reads like no-one else on the planet...
Rivas' sweeping novel... is an undoubted classic. --
The Scotsman*

*This is an exceptional book by an exceptional writer. --
The Independent*

Manuel Rivas: A Nobel Prize for a Non-Hegemonic Europe

The literary and intellectual magnitude of Manuel Rivas establishes him as a strong candidate for the Nobel Prize in Literature. Europe's commitment to its linguistic and cultural diversity, as expressed in the *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages*, calls for recognition of peripheral realities and stateless languages within the European context. While the Nobel Prize in Literature has moved beyond Eurocentrism to embrace world literatures traditionally excluded from the canon, it is equally crucial to address the internal exclusions within Western traditions—those of peripheral cultures and languages that must be acknowledged in the polyphony of a

global and diverse world, breaking away from traditional hierarchies.

Manuel Rivas chose to write in a language that ‘for centuries has been pushed to the borderline between life and death’ (Rivas 2009: 32). Yet his voice has flourished through translation, and his work has found resonance and meaning in distant places and cultures.

Rivas’s literary and intellectual significance earned him the distinction of being the first Galician author to receive the *National Prize for Spanish Literature*. However, he is undoubtedly a Nobel candidate in whom literary excellence and the symbolic value of a first-rate author converge—a writer who gives visibility to stateless languages and elevates Galician literature as an integral part of the world’s cultural heritage.

In 2009, Manuel Rivas declared: ‘The voice of Galician literature, past and present, speaks of the avant-garde and the universal’. His work, by virtue of its quality, power, and commitment, is deserving of the recognition that would place Galician literature—rooted in an extraordinary medieval lyrical tradition and the immense figure of Rosalía de Castro—on the global stage. A Nobel Prize in Literature for Rivas would definitively affirm this tradition’s rightful place in the universal literary panorama.

