

## Toponymy and the dialectics of space and place in Chus Pato's *m-Talá*

## Toponimia y dialéctica del espacio y del lugar en poesía *m-Talá* de Chus Pato

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**Abstract:** Toponyms are naming of places. Toponyms go beyond just names of places but serves as symbolic carriers of history and the memory attached to a place. This article intends to examine the toponyms and microtoponyms of select poetry of Chus Pato's anthology *M-Tala* through a close textual analysis. This article utilizes Michel de Certeau's concept of toponyms, as presented in his seminal work *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), to analyze how place names extend beyond their geographical roles to function as sites of memory, identity, and resistance. This article intends to highlight the value of marginalized cultures as counter-narratives to the cultural homogenization that is brought in by internal and modern globalizing pressures.

**Keywords:** toponyms; Galician poetry; counter-narratives; cultural displacement; resistance.

**Resumen:** Los topónimos son denominaciones de lugares. Los topónimos van más allá de los simples nombres de lugares, y sirven como portadores simbólicos de la historia y la memoria asociada a un lugar. Este artículo pretende examinar los topónimos y microtopónimos de poesía selecta de la antología *M-Tala* de Chus Pato a través de un análisis textual detallado. Este artículo utiliza el concepto de topónimos de Michel de Certeau, tal como lo presenta en su obra fundamental *La práctica de la vida cotidiana* (1984), para analizar cómo los nombres de lugares se extienden más allá de sus roles geográficos para funcionar como sitios de memoria, identidad y resistencia. Este artículo pretende resaltar el valor de las culturas marginadas como

contranarrativa a la homogeneización cultural provocada por las presiones globalizadoras internas y modernas.

**Palabras clave:** topónimos; poesía gallega; contranarrativas; desplazamiento cultural; resistencia.

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## INTRODUCTION

Space is an abstract concept that is often considered to be neutral and uninhabited by human interactions. A space becomes a place when it is given a cultural, historical, social, and emotional meaning. Yi-Fu Tuan's (1977) seminal work, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, highlights how space becomes a place when it is personalized or transformed by human experience. A forest, for example, may seem like a neutral place, but to many indigenous communities, it holds cultural and spiritual significance. Similar to this, many other areas become places when they are connected to different cultural and emotional elements. The dynamic relationship between place and space, in which each defines and redefines the other, is central to the dialectics of place and space. Lefebvre's (1991) *The Production of Space* highlights that space is socially constructed through cultural, political, and economic processes. Similarly, Agnew (1987) identifies three key aspects of place: Location (the physical coordinates), Locale (the settings where social interactions occur), and Sense of Place (the emotional and symbolic meaning attached to a place). The interplay between these aspects reveals the dialectical process: spaces are transformed into places through human engagement, while places influence how spaces are organized and perceived.

Questions of identity and power are also central to the dialectics of place and space. Cresswell (2004) examines how spaces are both places of inclusion and exclusion, and how spatial practices reflect power dynamics. For example, colonized spaces were reimagined as places of exploitation and control through practices like cartography and toponymy. In this context, Edward Said's (1978) *Orientalism* demonstrates how Western powers constructed the "Orient" as a place of otherness to maintain dominance. Toponymy, or the naming of places, exemplifies the dialectics of space and place. Place names anchor abstract spaces in cultural and historical contexts, making them meaningful to the communities that inhabit them. This process is especially significant in regions with contested identities, where toponyms can act as tools of resistance or erasure (Azaryahu, 1996). For example, the renaming of colonial spaces

reflects efforts to reclaim cultural identity and autonomy. Place names bring together history and geography, connecting locations with group identity through the shared meanings and context in which they are used. Along with its geographical and historical significance, there has also been an emphasis on how place names function as tools for political and cultural identity, which connects the local with the global.

Berg and Kerns (1996) state that place names play a significant role in the social construction of space and also discuss the process of contestations associated with attaching meanings to place names and places. The study of toponyms has taken different approaches, and recently scholars have explored the naming of places as a part of colonialism and used them as symbolic mediums for reclamation of the subordinated indigenous histories and lost language and memory (Breymaier, 2003; Nash, 1999). Alderman (2008) defines two kinds of constructs to understand the naming of places culturally, namely “naming as symbolic capital” and “naming as symbolic resistance.” In “Naming as Symbolic Capital,” he speaks of how certain place names serve as sites of memory, wherein it functions as “a form of symbolic violence or marginalization for other stakeholders who remember the past differently.” In “Naming as Symbolic Resistance,” he suggests that the people belonging to minority groups name places as a strategy to show resistance to the existing norms and assert their historical struggles and achievements.

George R. Stewart, one of the founding members of the American Name Society, emphasized the need to reconstruct the history of how places were named to put together the cultural significance of the existence of that particular place. Zelinsky, a renowned scholar in cultural geography, documented the influence of nationalism and patriotism on place names in 1988, but Mitchell (2000) well documented the lack of focus on studying the people behind these landscapes. Kerns and Berg (2002) argue that “names are a constitutive component of the landscape, rather than being entities in [and on] the landscape.” Whether in written or spoken forms, place naming is now recognized as one of the markers that are used materially as well as symbolically in the process of cultural reclamation. Instead of simply reflecting history, as traditional studies of place names might suggest, toponyms actively integrate the past into the present, shaping and affirming the historical meanings they represent.

One of the prominent authors of Toponyms and Cultural Geography, Michel de Certeau, in his seminal work *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), explores how individuals navigate and resist power and dominant

systems through everyday practices. A central argument that he puts forth is that ordinary people creatively reinterpret spaces and places through everyday practices like walking, storytelling, and naming, thereby challenging the existing imposed power hierarchies. According to him, place names are “pockets of hidden and familiar meanings” (Certeau, 1984), which gives the necessary direction to a space that was previously not seen. He claims that place names transform spaces into repositories of narratives, thereby giving the necessary impetus for the reclamation of lost cultural spaces.

This theoretical lens is particularly relevant while examining Galicia's unique position on the world's geographical and historical map. Torn and united several times under various circumstances, Galicia has faced marked periods of colonization followed by migration and repression, through which the Galician identity is surviving and thriving. Galician literary cohorts played a major role in fueling, preserving, and revitalizing the region's linguistic and cultural identity. Toponymy, particularly regarding naming geographic features, plays a significant role in the history of Galician poetry. During the *Rexurdimento* (19th-century Galician cultural revival), authors like Rosalía de Castro and Manuel Curros Enríquez employed place names to evoke the natural beauty of Galicia and emphasize its distinct identity within Spain. Rosalía de Castro, who is considered to be the foundational figure in the modern Galician literary tradition, uses a lot of toponyms in her work as symbols for describing the unique sense of Galician identity, which makes her the first writer to politicize the landscape in her works (López Sánchez 2008, 2009), a strategy which numerous Galician writers later adopted. In the 20th and 21st centuries, writers like Emilia Pardo Bazán, Manuel Rivas, Eduardo Pondal, and Chus Pato, amongst others, have expanded this tradition by using place names not just as geographic markers but as tools for cultural critique, resistance, and reimagination. Place and toponyms play an active part in furthering the quest for identity and as a bridge between personal memory and collective experiences. This trend of using toponyms as an important marker can also be seen in the 13th-century Galician-Portuguese Troubadour Poetry, helmed as the classics of Galician literature.

Foreign toponymy in Galician poetry initially appeared in biographical contexts, such as emigration or exile. However, the modernization of poetic expression in the early 1980s marked a significant shift, enabling the incorporation of spaces beyond Galicia's borders. A key characteristic of what came to be known as *poesía dos oitenta* (eighties

*poetry*) was culturalism (Nogueira 1997), which often intertwined with a sense of cosmopolitanism, contributing to the incorporation of foreign toponymic references, some drawn directly from literature. In recent years, changes in lifestyle—such as new work, education, and leisure opportunities—have made women poets more mobile (Nogueira, 2014). This has brought fresh place names into their poetry, often focusing on travel, global viewpoints, or support for regions in conflict, showing a shift in how they write about places.

Building on the foundation laid by the Galician writers, Chus Pato, an important writer in the contemporary Galician literary landscape, whose work frequently incorporates toponymy, is Chus Pato. Chus Pato writes in one of Galician history's most politically and culturally eccentric phases. She stands as a bold expression of Galician cultural identity in the literary landscape of Galicia. Mejía Ruiz (2015) states that Pato's work is known for her experimentation with language which challenges traditional poetic forms and syntax. She further states that her poetry is a site of resistance, reconfiguring historical memory and collective experience through an innovative and deeply personal lens. Her poetry does not merely reflect on Galicia's cultural landscapes but interrogates the fluidity of space and place in an era marked by displacement, globalization, and cultural hybridity. The inclusion of foreign names and places becomes particularly prominent in her poetry after *M-talá* (2000), a collection often regarded as a turning point in her career. In *Charenton* (2004), the title reflects a micro toponymy with literary connotations, while the work draws on the chronotope of the journey to introduce spaces that the author revisits in her creative process. Pato's poetry uses references to places to explore themes like memory, displacement, and the shared meaning of certain locations. This connects with modern ideas in cultural geography, which focus on understanding how social processes—like shaping identity, creating social differences, feeling alienated or connected, and reclaiming culture—are deeply tied to places.

The poetry of Chus Pato is a combination of elements like her cultural identity as a Galician in the culturally homogenizing atmosphere, along with her identity as a woman. Queizán (1995) rightly states that Chus Pato's poetry is marked by uncompromising innovation and opens up new horizons without being just a mere novelty. Her work resists trends and conventional symbolism, embracing complexity while remaining deeply aware of the transformative power of language. Nogueira Pereira (2011) observes that much of her poetry delves into the representation of a

historically subjugated nation, deprived of its sovereignty and threatened in its language. Further she states that Pato's works are transgeneric in nature as the works does not simply mix genres but it challenges and reconfigures them, making her poetry a space wher traditional boundaries between narrative, essay, and lyrical poetry dissolve. Pato also employs in its lines the physical and symbolic geography of Galicia and many other real, mythical, and imagined landscapes to strongly put forth the ideal of identity and resistance. Toponyms in her poetry go beyond naming; it is an act of subversion that resists rigid notions of place and identity. It contests the simplification of place names to static points in geography but uses them as drivers of sociopolitical change, which draws upon Cresswell's (2004) notion that places are inherently political. Her toponyms resonate with Escobar's (2001) analysis of cultural geography, where space is understood as a site of negotiation and identity-making. This approach aligns with feminist geography, emphasizing the intersection of place and identity, particularly for marginalized voices (Rose, 1993). As a Galician woman poet, Pato's use of toponyms becomes doubly significant: it asserts her cultural heritage while resisting patriarchal and hegemonic structures that seek to define and confine identity. Her landscapes are not merely settings but active participants in the narrative of resistance, and they highlight how space and identity are interwoven.

Through a close textual analysis of *m-Talá*, a poetry collection by Chus Pato translated into English by Erin Moure (2009), this article examines the role of toponyms and microtoponyms as emblematic indicators of Galician cultural resilience and reclamation. Rather than treating *m-Talá* as an anthology, this study situates the text within Pato's poetic trajectory, recognizing its significance in the negotiation of space, memory, and identity. This article employs Michel de Certeau's concept of toponyms, as outlined in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), to explore how place names function beyond their geographical roles as sites of memory, identity, and resistance. De Certeau differentiates between place (*lieu*), a static entity defined by boundaries, and space (*espace*), a fluid construct shaped by human activity, movement, and storytelling. In this framework, place names are not merely labels but living symbols embedded with historical narratives and cultural significance, reflecting social and political power dynamics. The act of naming places can serve both as an assertion of control—such as in colonial renaming—and as a form of resistance, as when marginalized groups reclaim ancestral place

names to reaffirm identity. De Certeau also describes toponyms as "ghostly," layered with historical echoes that persist despite physical or cultural transformations. This theoretical model is particularly relevant to Chus Pato's poetry, where toponyms emerge as symbolic markers of Galician cultural endurance. The study examines toponymy in *m-Talá* through three interrelated threads: Mythical Landscapes and Cultural Palimpsests, Toponyms and Cultural Displacement, and Toponyms as Markers of Estrangement and Identity. By analyzing Pato's use of toponyms, this article underscores the significance of cultural narratives in counteracting the forces of internal and global homogenization. Additionally, it highlights how toponyms serve as crucial cultural markers, offering insight into the complexities of Galician identity and the broader dynamics of cultural memory and resistance.

## 1. MYTHICAL LANDSCAPES AND CULTURAL PALIMPSES

Michel de Certeau (1984) points out the symbolic power of toponyms, seeing them as expressions of cultural and political identity that reveal power dynamics between dominant and marginalized groups. Pato's poetry breaks the boundaries of space and place and explores how her usage of toponyms reflects on the various scenarios of how toponyms reflect identity, memory, and resilience. As articulated in the United Nations report on the value of place names, toponyms are "irreplaceable cultural values of vital significance to people's sense of well-being and feeling at home" (NORNA rapporteur 13, 2002). This understanding is central to Pato's poetic vision, as she uses place names to reconstruct a shared cultural consciousness and resist forces of globalization that threaten local identities.

A geographical space, actual or imagined, is typically associated with a place name. As the nature of the landscape changes, so does the reference to the name. Place names serve a critical function, making them an indispensable linguistic instrument widely used. In the following lines taken from the poem that starts with the line "I've reached," Pato uses mythical and imagined toponyms that connect to a sense of cultural memory, which is a marker for the active cultural reclamation process. "They suggest huge leaves of tropical plants, carnivorous, then strewn islands, Saint Brendan's, verdant" (Pato, 2009: 17). In these lines, Saint Brendan, a figure from Irish Christian mythology, is renowned for his legendary sea voyage in search of the "Promised Land of the Saints," an

idyllic and unattainable place of freedom and salvation. By invoking Saint Brendan, Pato ties this mythic quest to Galicia's struggle against cultural and socio-political displacement. For Galicia, this ideal state represents a collective identity rooted in local pride and cultural celebration, a stark contrast to the forces that drive migration in search of better opportunities. This mythical toponym situates Pato's journey in a liminal space between reality and myth, where the longing for a sense of place becomes a metaphor for the broader search for identity. Another line from the same poem, "Forty years staring at the wall, windowed, on the same grand scale as the Carthage airport" (Pato, 2009: 17), contrasts a personal experience with the larger, symbolic image of Carthage. Carthage, an ancient city known for its destruction and cultural loss, connects the speaker's feeling of confinement with the shared memory of lost civilizations, which calls for a deeper reflection on cultural resilience in the face of cultural erasure, which is extremely symbolic in contemporary times with many Galicians embracing foreignness rather than their own cultural identity. The speaker's act of "staring at the wall, windowed" (Pato, 2009: 17) is a small but powerful way of remembering—a quiet resistance against forgetting, even when alone. By connecting personal memory to Carthage's history, Pato turns single, solitary moment into a symbol of shared resistance against forces that threaten to erase certain identities and experiences.

The majority of place names originate from descriptions of specific features of the local area they represent, offering insights into the natural and cultural conditions present at the time they were named (Helleland, 2001). In the following lines taken from the poem "The Poet," she talks about Galicia's ongoing struggle for cultural recognition and preservation. "Fourth voyage of the third prostitute of Qumaran" (Pato, 2009: 54) refers to a significant archeological site associated with the Dead Sea Scrolls, which are a set of ancient Jewish manuscripts from the Second Temple period. By invoking Qumaran, Pato draws a parallel between the ancient site associated with the Dead Sea Scrolls and Galicia's ongoing battle for recognition and preservation. The phrase "third prostitute" symbolically represents the marginalized voices that have been erased from history and its records. The "fourth voyage" further symbolically represents a series of journeys in reclaiming something that is hidden. By framing this figure in the context of Qumaran, Pato suggests a reclamation of these silenced voices, much like the rediscovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls shed light on forgotten or suppressed traditions. Towards the end of the poem, she



writes the following lines: “In this non-place: tundraGnawed-opening” (Pato, 2009: 54), wherein the terms non-place and the imagery of “tundra” signify dislocation and isolation, contrasting sharply with the rich landscapes previously mentioned in the poem. This “non-place” represents a psychological and cultural oblivion—a barren space where identity is slowly “gnawed” away and worn down over time. The phrase “gnawed-opening” suggests the exhaustion and pain that are there constantly because of defending one’s identity.

Her poetry also incorporates the personal, psychological, and cultural dimensions of place attachment. For instance, Pato has brought in the toponym “Babylon,” a city that has conventionally been associated with destruction and fall, which acts as symbols for the poet’s contemplation of ruin, loss, and also survival. Pato uses these emotions within place names to connect it with the Galician scenario and to communicate to the fellow Galicians a sense of resilience amidst challenges. Her references to “the south’s fanged scarlet” and “tundra” employ toponyms to capture the ambivalent emotions of longing and estrangement. While providing the poet with a mental landscape to work through her identity, these landscapes also evoke memories of estrangement, highlighting the therapeutic role place names play in the construction of personal identity.

Pato’s references to mythological and historical places like “Pausilipos” and “Babylon” function as cultural palimpsests, embodying layers of meaning that evoke a complex cultural inheritance that resonates deeply with the Galician identity. In referring to “Pausilipos”—a place associated with peace and respite in ancient mythology—Pato may be signaling the Galician desire for a cultural “place of rest” amid political upheaval and historical displacement. Similarly, “Babylon” reflects the layered complexity of civilization, echoing Galicia’s own multifaceted identity as a region both within and apart from the dominant Spanish narrative. According to Lewicka (2011), historically significant toponyms often strengthen the bond between generations, linking people over time. In Pato’s poetry, the usage of mythic and ancient locations connects her to her ancestors and cultural history, creating an “intergenerational dialogue” where identities from past, present, and future intersect in the same toponymic spaces. Basso (1996) notes that historically rooted place names can create continuity by linking generations, and Pato’s use of such terms reflects her effort to bridge past and present struggles.

Pato blends historical and mythical references with real landscapes to show that place names are more than just geographical labels—they are

powerful symbols of resistance and protectors of a community's identity and shared memory. Her mentions of places like Carthage and the mythical island of Saint Brendan go beyond their physical presence, giving them deep cultural and symbolic meaning. These references highlight the struggle between the loss of cultural identity and the resilience of marginalized communities, turning these landscapes into meaningful spaces. Inspired by Casey's (1997) idea of a "place-world," which sees places as rich with emotional and historical significance shaped by human experience and imagination, Pato uses these locations as tools for cultural resistance. Casey explains that places hold memories and identities that connect communities to their histories. By combining myths and memories with real and imagined landscapes, Pato strengthens the bond between place, memory, and identity, showing how cultural stories can resist erasure and preserve diversity.

## 2. TOPONYMS AND CULTURAL DISPLACEMENT

Cultural displacement is the experience of being distanced/removed from one's cultural roots due to various cultural, personal, and political factors, such as migration, colonization, war, or socioeconomic changes. This has a profound impact on an individual's or group's sense of identity, belonging, and connection to familiar cultural practices, symbols, and environments. The Galician landscape has experienced different waves of political suppression and migration due to various factors, because of which the impact of cultural displacement is profound. Historically, Galicia's strategic position in northwest Spain and its cultural richness along with rich landscapes made it a victim of political control. The annexation of Galicia by the Kingdom of Castile in the Middle Ages marked the beginning of political centralization that marginalized the Galician culture and language. This suppression intensified under Franco's regime (1939-1975) during the Spanish Civil War, during which the regional identities of Spain were systematically discouraged and forcibly repressed. Franco's policies sought to homogenize Spain culturally and politically, silencing regional voices (also Galician's voice) in literature, education, and governance (Hooper, 2021). This political suppression was compounded by the economic hardship of Galicia, particularly in the 19th and 20th centuries, when Galicia faced famines, decreased agricultural output, industrial underdevelopment, and widespread poverty. These were the exact conditions that exemplified the

migration of the Galicians towards other countries, particularly the North and South American countries. This effect of cultural and political displacement has had a lasting impact on Galician writers who have explored themes like longing, identity, landscape and reclamation of cultural space in their works (López Sánchez, 2008). Through the use of toponyms, subtly, Pato frequently addresses the theme of cultural displacement in her poetry. Toponyms, which frequently stand for historical and cultural origins, mostly serve as symbolic markers for the connection the Galicians yearn for. According to Azaryahu and Golan (2001), toponyms serve as linguistic tools that help people retain their sense of identity when they are relocated, preserving memories of their ancestral lands even when they are living in new environments.

Interpreting the place name critically shows the complex layers of meaning that are attached intrinsically to knowledge or power relationships. Michel de Certeau (1984) highlights how place names or toponyms are a significant symbolic representation of both the powerful and the weak. The following poem, which begins with the line “There’s eight boats,” invokes a sense of emotional and historical weight and memory associated with the locations mentioned in the poem. In the line “--- if we keep on, sir, we’ll run aground: Arousa and arousal—” (Pato, 2009: 26), Chus Pato employs the toponym Arousa. Arousa is the name of a place in Galicia and the only island municipality of Galicia. Arousa is linked here with “arousal,” suggesting a cultural awakening or a call to action, along with an emotional drive to assert one’s identity. By juxtaposing “*arousal*” with Arousa, Pato infuses the toponym with a sense of urgency and vitality, transforming it into a metaphorical call to resist cultural dormancy. This pairing underlines the need to awaken and honor the unique heritage embedded with such dynamic locations. Through this, Pato portrays Arousa as a site of cultural assertion and resilience rather than a mere physical space. Further, the line “if we keep on, sir, we’ll run aground” (Pato, 2009: 26) uses nautical imagery (a recurring imagery in Pato’s poetry) to add a layer of meaning to Arousa. Surrounded by the Atlantic, Arousa becomes a symbol of the blending of local traditions with global influences, which is a reflection of the blending of Galician with the world due to migration and other external pressures.

In “the Jamaican ensign in the depths” (Pato, 2009: 27), the Jamaican ensign evokes the history of Jamaica’s colonial resistance and maritime struggles, similar to Galicia’s encounters with its larger imperial powers at home. Jamaica—a site symbolically tied to the transatlantic slave trade,

rebellion, and eventual independence. This reference is symbolic of a shared history of resistance and resilience in marginalized communities. By invoking “Jamaica” and connecting the struggle of a Caribbean nation with that of a European region, Pato tries to bring in the universality of resistance against colonial and imperial domination. The Jamaican maritime history is dominated by colonial trade and slavery; in Galicia, it was a space for the exploitation of resources, migration, and smuggling of illegal goods. Pato uses this maritime imagery to evoke the resilience of these communities, their enduring connection to the sea, and the ways they have navigated and resisted external forces.

The poem that begins with the phrase “or in a rush” opens with a reference to “Delphi.” Delphi is traditionally associated with being a site of prophecy and wisdom, yet here linked to a mundane search for a café, “dark curis, Dunhill. Home of dioramas” (Pato, 2009: 63), transforming an ancient, sacred site into a symbol of modern displacement and superficiality. The ancient sense of wisdom and connection to heritage is replaced by fleeting, commercialized experiences, showing a major change in how cultural and historical places are valued in today’s globalized world. Delphi, as a symbol of cultural and historical significance, resonates very deeply the cultural displacement of Galicia. In the ancient world, Delphi is considered to be a sacred site for prophecy and wisdom. However, in Pato’s poetry, the transformation of Delphi into a mundane space (a place associated with cafes and dioramas) reflects the fragmentation of identity caused by migration and the modern commodification of historical spaces. Much like Delphi’s metaphor, Galicia’s cultural markers (its landscapes, traditions, typonyms) risk losing their deeper globalized world where external forces dominate local metaphors. The connection between location and fragmented identity reflects cultural displacement, as geographic markers lose their historical significance when separated from their original contexts.

In the line “I’m a woman who wears sea and comet under distant trees,” (Pato, 2009: 63), the speaker’s identity feels both connected and detached, showing a longing to belong somewhere while also expressing a free, wandering spirit. In another line from the same poem, “Words we carried with us across the Rhine,” (Pato, 2009: 63), the idea of migration and the cultural weight people bring with them, even as they cross real and symbolic borders like the Rhine—a river that, in European history, represents separation and migration is highlighted to show the weight that the Galicians carry with them when they cross borders due to various

sociopolitical influences. As Hummon (1992) discusses, places are often deeply interwoven with identity, creating an emotional map of cultural history and displacement. This idea is further illustrated in Pato's description of "little tombs," symbolizing inherited trauma as well as restrictive cultural and familial expectations. This cultural dissonance resonates with studies on diasporic identity, where memories linked to specific places shape an individual's connection to their cultural roots while highlighting a sense of exile (Fullilove, 1996).

In the poem beginning with the lines "this is a personal poem; keep your nose out of it," Pato expresses the pain and complexity of cultural displacement through a litany of toponyms that invoke Galicia's history of migration and associated sociopolitical landscape. Place Names like Buenos Aires, Santiago de Chile, and Montevideo carry with them the memories of Galicians who left their homeland, often under varied and difficult circumstances, in search of economic or political stability. The cities mentioned here are among the primary destinations for Galicians who left their homelands, especially during times of economic hardships, political instability, and repression with a particular rise in the 19th and 20th centuries. Buenos Aires, for instance, became a hub for Galician immigrants in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, earning the nickname "the fifth province of Galicia" due to its large Galician population. These emigrants formed communities that preserved Galician traditions, language, and collective memory, creating cultural associations and publishing works in Galician.

The memories associated with "Buenos Aires... a quadrilateral of gigantic microchips" (Pato, 2009: 75) and the "implacable Rio Plata" illustrate the alienation and strangeness experienced by Galician migrants in distant, industrialized landscapes. The depiction of Buenos Aires as a "quadrilateral of gigantic microchips" emphasizes the city's vast, impersonal, and industrial nature. This imagery suggests a landscape dominated by technology and modernity, far removed from the Galicians' intimate connection with their native land. The "quadrilateral" symbolizes rigidity and confinement, conveying how the urban grid can sometimes feel oppressive and alien to someone steeped in Galicia's natural geography. Similarly, the "implacable Rio Plata" evokes an image of an unyielding and vast river, reflecting both the physical and emotional distance between the migrants and their homeland. These descriptions mirror the Galician experience of being "othered" and marginalized within both Spanish national narratives and foreign lands. Moreover,

Montevideo and Buenos Aires possess significant meaning for Galicians, representing not merely sites of exile but also cultural intersections where Galicians have preserved their identity despite geographical separation. The speaker's mention of "the only female bust... that of Rosalía de Castro... gazing at the implacable Rio Plata" (Pato, 2009: 77) invokes Rosalía de Castro as a lasting symbol of Galician cultural memory and resistance. Castro's legacy, like the toponyms in Pato's poetry, is a reminder of the strength and persistence of Galician identity even amidst displacement. Through her use of toponyms, Pato emphasizes the resilience and fragility of Galician identity, portraying it as a culture continuously shaped by exile, displacement, and the yearning for connection to the homeland. The place names in her poetry serve as both geographic and emotional touchstones, maintaining a symbolic thread between Galicia's past and present, its homeland, and its diaspora. The Galician experience, where cultural displacement becomes a defining characteristic of identity and continuity, is encapsulated in this story of exile and the strong emotions associated with place and memory.

The migration of Galicians to distant places like Buenos Aires and Montevideo shows how cultural hybridity works in the diaspora, which connects to Homi Bhabha's notion of "third space." These new places became a site of challenge for the diasporic community at first and then they became centers for preserving and reshaping the Galician culture. The significant influx of Galician migrants into these urban centers led to the establishment of cultural associations, educational institutions, and publications in Galician. These efforts served as a means of preserving their linguistic and cultural heritage while simultaneously adapting to the sociocultural dynamics of their host countries. For the diasporic community this hybridization became the connect between nostalgic homeland and its adaptation into the new space. Festivals, culinary traditions and literature became vital tools for transplanting the elements of Galicia into the new land.

The psychological and emotional aspects that are associated with this cultural hybridity caused by cultural displacement needs to be noted. The diasporic community often experienced a sense of longing for the landscapes, language and the traditions of their homeland and yet they also developed a sense of belonging to the new space that they reshaped. The "third space," as Bhabha (1994) describes it, emerges as a site of negotiation and transformation, where cultural identities are neither entirely preserved nor entirely abandoned but reimagined through

interaction and dialogue. In this reimagining, the Galician diasporic community navigated the challenges of cultural displacement by making their heritage visible and relevant in their new environments.

### 3. TOPONYMS AS MARKERS OF ESTRANGEMENT AND IDENTITY

The concepts of estrangement and identity are interlinked as they exhibit both divergent and similar traits. Toponyms serve as one of the symbolic tropes for connecting estrangement and identity. Estrangement occurs when individuals experience disconnection from their homelands during varied factors that can be personal or forced, with toponyms serving as metaphors for invoking memories of the lost or unattainable homelands (Cresswell, 2004; Relph, 1976; Said, 2000). On the other hand, despite geographical distance, toponyms serve as reminders of cultural heritage, collective memory, and a shared sense of self, demonstrating how identity is often rooted in place (Basso, 1996; Tuan, 1977).

Pato references certain places with extreme climatic conditions in her poems, like Greenland in the following line: “outside the womb just like huge Polar Bears on the ice-floes of Greenland” (Pato, 2009: 19) and the tundra as in “I’m self-cryogenating in this non-place: tundra Gnawed-opening” (Pato, 2009: 54). These lines create powerful images of distant, harsh, uninhabitable landscapes that symbolize isolation and also resilience. They symbolically emphasize the resistance to modern cultural assimilation by connecting with large, untouched natural spaces, and at the same time, they suggest a sense of emotional distance and alienation, reflecting on the current scenario of the Galician dilemma. This feeling of estrangement is consistent with Lewicka’s (2011) theory of place attachment, which holds that people frequently identify with their surroundings as aspects of who they are. The harshness of the tundra and Greenland’s icy landscapes functions as an existential toponym, representing the poet’s sense of cultural displacement. Her use of remote geographical locations mirrors the Galician struggle to preserve its unique identity amidst cultural and linguistic homogenization and other external influences. The harshness of these symbolic toponyms reflects the resilience in withstanding the Galician cultural identity despite forces of suppression and globalization. These untouched spaces also evoke a sense of psychological toll on an individual, where that person is caught in the limbo between the pristine purity of their native culture and the assimilated culture.

Pato's line "She wants to kiss the sun, the worst of all kisses" (Pato, 2009: 95) expresses a desire to connect with something vast and enduring, while also capturing the risk of feeling disconnected. This reflects Galicia's complex relationship with larger cultural influences. Through her poetry, Pato reimagines the Galician landscape as a space where personal struggles and external realities come together. This idea is clearly seen in her description of "a cylindrical burrow, a deep den, open to the skies" (Pato, 2009: 95). This image symbolizes a mix of feelings—being enclosed and protected, yet open and free. It mirrors the resilience of the Galician people, who feel rooted in their land but also connected to limitless possibilities. The landscape becomes more than a physical space—it acts as a reflection of Galician emotional experiences, blending feelings of isolation with hope and openness.

The poem that begins with the line "its not masochism" uses place names as potent markers of estrangement and dislocation of identity through a combination of toponyms and mythical and literary allusions. Toponyms such as Klagenfurt and Carinthia, coupled with allusions to mythical and literary characters such as Cassandra and Ophelia, create an emotional landscape that embodies cultural memory and individual and collective estrangement. Klagenfurt, the capital of Carinthia in Austria, is tied to its cultural and political history, while Carinthia, a region shared by Austrian and Slovenian identities, reflects a history of cultural tensions and negotiations. Pato includes mythical and literary figures like Cassandra and Ophelia in her poetry to connect ancient stories with modern themes. Cassandra, who was cursed to tell the truth but never be believed, and Ophelia, who represents innocence and victimization, symbolize feelings of being unheard and disconnected. Klagenfurt, a city in a historically disputed area, symbolizes struggles over culture and identity, while Carinthia reflects the challenges of blending different languages and histories. Similarly, Cassandra and Ophelia represent voices silenced by society—Cassandra's warnings ignored and Ophelia's innocence lost in tragedy. By connecting these mythical and literary figures with place names, Pato links past silences to modern cultural struggles and illustrates how personal and collective memories intersect across space and place. Such toponyms serve as "cultural markers," representing collective traumas tied to the poet's sense of belonging—or lack thereof—within a culture that has historically endured political repression and forced dislocation (Fullilove, 1996).



Ashcroft's model of postcolonial identity formation highlights how language and place are central to shaping and resisting identity in colonial and postcolonial contexts. In *The Empire Writes Back* (1989), Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin argue that decolonization involves reworking colonial languages and symbols to create new identities. This idea helps us understand how Pato's poem "*Interrupt the Reader*" explores estrangement and identity by breaking apart traditional meanings of toponyms and socio-political metaphors. The poem uses references like "fields of grain," "Persephone," and "ASIATIC-FEUDAL-SEIGNORIAL-BANKING" (Pato, 2009: 88) to show how toponyms, once rooted in specific historical or cultural contexts, now feel fragmented in a modern, globalized world. Ashcroft's ideas suggest that this fragmentation reflects how colonial and postcolonial experiences disrupt traditional symbols of identity, forcing people to reinterpret or let go of their original meanings. This disruption creates a feeling of alienation as familiar cultural markers become distant or irrelevant in the present. The poem also critiques "lyrical" language, which the poet says once had "emancipatory power" but now seems disconnected from its original role of reflecting reality. This reflects Ashcroft's argument that language, once used as a tool of colonial dominance, can be transformed into a way to resist and redefine identity. By breaking apart historical toponyms like "Plague" and "Monarchy," the poem challenges their authority and shows how these symbols no longer define identity in the same way. Instead, they represent outdated systems of power that feel irrelevant in modern contexts. As Ashcroft argues, identity is not fixed—it is constantly shaped by reworking inherited symbols, which is clearly seen in the fragmented and reimagined toponyms in Pato's work.

Toponyms serve as symbols of fractured and complex identity in the poem titled "*She-Hrg hires an assassin*" (Pato, 2009: 95). Toponyms like "the grotto," "the desert," "the pond," and "the dungeon" symbolize a fractured, layered identity that resonates with the complex experience of Galician identity. Each place embodies a sense of disconnection from a cohesive self or rooted origin, mirroring Galicia's historical and cultural sense of exile, dislocation, and marginalization. These micro-toponymic spaces are more than physical locations; they represent psychological landscapes where identity feels incomplete or distorted, similar to Galicia's own fragmented cultural identity under external influence and historical suppression. The protagonist, *She-Hrg*, embodies this estrangement by navigating surreal, myth-laden landscapes, blending the

personal and the mythical. Her interactions with figures like Maria Aegyptica's lions and her journey through unresolved spaces echo Galicia's own journey of self-definition amidst cultural loss and forced displacement. In a place where identity and a sense of belonging are still elusive and ambiguous, each toponym serves as a marker of both place and memory, reflecting the Galician struggle for self-recognition within larger cultural narratives.

## CONCLUSION

Toponymy, traditionally the study of place names in geography, has evolved to examine how these names carry symbolic, social, and political significance, shaping cultural identities and histories. In Pato's poetry, toponyms transcend their conventional role as geographical markers, becoming symbols that bridge the personal and the collective by linking memory, history, and cultural identity. Michel de Certeau's concept of *space* and *place* provides a useful framework for understanding this transformation. According to de Certeau, *space* is dynamic and open, shaped by practices and movements, while *place* is static, defined by its stability and the meanings ascribed to it. Pato's use of toponyms embodies this interplay, reshaping Galicia's physical landscapes into meaningful landscapes of memory and resistance.

Through this reimagining, her poetry captures the fluidity and resilience of Galician identity, which is rooted in myth, memory, and historical continuity. Pato's toponyms serve as intimate and political tools, anchoring identity within landscapes marked by historical memory and cultural resilience. By naming specific places, she creates a poetic geography where exile and belonging coexist, allowing Galicia's unique cultural identity to resist homogenization and erasure. This reflects de Certeau's notion of *spatial practices*, where the act of naming and engaging with a space transforms it into a lived, meaningful place.

Toponyms in Pato's work do more than pinpoint locations; they act as symbols of resistance, preservation, and survival. They negotiate individual and societal trauma, exile, and cultural endurance, positioning Galician identity as a "spatiality of resistance" (de Createu, 1984). Mythological, historical, and geographical references layer her poetry with echoes of the past, creating a topographic palimpsest that ties narrators and characters to an ancestral memory. Each toponym becomes an act of defiance against cultural erasure, affirming the enduring significance of

Galicia's distinct landscape and its historical struggles. In aligning with de Certeau's idea of *tactics*—the everyday practices through which marginalized groups assert agency—Pato's poetry uses toponyms as tools of resistance. Her invocation of mythical and historical sites creates a continuum of resilience and adaptation, engaging in an “intergenerational dialogue” that bridges past and future generations.

This study, however, has limitations due to its focus on only one poetry of Chus Pato rather than her entire body of work, which is loaded with toponyms and their associated symbols. Further research could explore her other anthologies, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of how her use of toponyms evolves and interacts with broader themes of cultural continuity, exile, and belonging. Such an approach would provide a deeper understanding of her unique contribution to cultural geography and identity studies.

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