
Feministas

U n i d a s



*A Collection of Feminist Scholars in Spanish,
Spanish-American, Luso-Brazilian, Afro-Latin American,
and U.S. Latina/o Studies*



ABOUT THE ARTIST

Name: Mariela Paniagua

Address: Plutarco Elías Calles 1285-31, Fracc. Nogales, Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, México.

Tel. 52 656-613 60 73

e-mail: marielapg11@hotmail.com

EDUCATION - BACKGROUND

She was born in Santiago, Chile in 1961. She studied Interior Design, Drawing & Painting, Music, and Dance & Drama. working on pastel technique, later when works on oil and charcoal, and she is making an incursion with other materials and mixed techniques. At the present, she works on monoprint, oil, aquatint, and charcoal with pigments and smoke.

EXHIBITIONS :

2001 North States of México Scheduled Exposition “ North Painting showing”

2000 El Manzano Gallery. Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua.México

Luna Sol Café. Los Angeles, C.A. U.S.A

Camino Real Hotel. El Paso, Tx. U.S.A

1999 Chamizal Museum. Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua.México

City Council Offices. Cuauhtemoc, Chihuahua. México

1997 Cabrillo Arts Pavillion Gallery. Santa Barbara, C.A. U.S.A.

Fine Arts National Institute Museum. Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua. México

Siena café and Terrapin Library. Santa Barbara, C.A. U.S.A.

1996 History Museum. Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua.México

«Updown Whittier» Art Fair. Whittier, C.A. U.S.A.

1995 Chamizal Museum. Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua.México

1991 National Arts Exhibitions, Santiago, Chile

1989 Cultural Institute of Las Condes. Santiago, Chile

INDIVIDUAL EXHIBITIONS

2000 Fine Arts National Institute Museum. Ciudad Juárez. Chihuahua. México.

1990 Chilean Northamerican Institute of Culture. Santiago, Chile.

1987 University of Concepción. Concepción, Chile.

Letter from the Vice-President

October 2003

Queridas/os Socias/os de Feministas Unidas—

It is with great regret that I must inform you of my decision to resign as Vice President of Feministas Unidas. After much reflection, I have come to the conclusion that I will not dispose of the dedication needed to serve Feministas Unidas as its Executive Board devises strategies to expand the membership base, develops ties with other national and international feminist organizations and redesign the website among other responsibilities. The reasons that have led me to make this difficult choice involve elder care issues that will require considerable commitment on my part.

I would like to thank Beth Jorgenson, Cynthia Tompkins and Candyce Leonard for sharing their knowledge and providing their support these past two years as well as extend my gratitude to the members of Feministas Unidas.

Best wishes,

Patricia Greene, Vice President



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Carta de la Presidenta

November 2003

Queridas/os Socias/os de Feministas Unidas

As I write this column for the fall newsletter, the Executive Committee has recently learned of Patricia Greene's necessary resignation as vice-president/incoming president of Feministas Unidas, effective immediately. The Executive Committee in consultation with former officers of the association will make plans for selecting a replacement in accordance with our By-Laws. It should be noted that the By-Laws only offer general guidelines for this unexpected situation, but we will work to ensure the smooth running of the organization during the transition. We will be in communication with the membership before the end of the fall term with a schedule and a procedure.

The two years of my term as Feministas Unidas President have gone by quickly. When I started my term, Feministas had just completed the review process to maintain our status with the MLA under the able leadership of Elizabeth Horan. We had solid documentation of the organization's record of conference sessions and other achievements, a working list serve, unbroken publication of our semiannual newsletter, a website in progress and a somewhat mixed financial situation. I hoped at the very least to help remedy the budget imbalance; and to start up the long-discussed "Feministas Unidas Essay Contest for Younger Scholars." The Executive Board and I have met these two goals. The financial statement prepared by Candyce Leonard for this newsletter shows a healthy balance in both the general and the scholarship funds, and in 2002 and 2003 we successfully ran our first essay prize contests in cooperation with the AILFH and their publication *Letras Femeninas*. The routine workings of Feministas (MLA sessions, panels at other conferences, membership recruitment) have proceeded smoothly as well, thanks to the volunteer efforts not only of the Executive Committee, but of many members as well.

Now that we are well past the twenty-year anniversary of the founding of Feministas Unidas, it is fair to say that we continue to thrive in our role as an Allied Organization of the MLA and as an alliance that encourages and disseminates feminist scholarship in our diverse fields of study. The interdisciplinary and intercontinental nature of our work are strengths that become more apparent and more urgent each year. However, it is also important to note that in spite of our activities, we are not growing. In fact, there has been a slight decrease in total membership. A quick count of the "paid up" members, using the Fall newsletters of the past three years for comparative and comparable data, reveal these numbers: 225 members in 2001; 200 in 2002; and 176 (plus 30 listed but not renewed since 2002) in Fall 2003. A discussion of ways to keep our organization vital and essential for both new colleagues and long-time members should be a priority for the coming year or two. Other needs that we have are a revamped website (perhaps one that does not depend on PDF files and Acrobat Reader), and a new newsletter editor to allow Cynthia Tompkins to step down as she wished to do last spring.

In closing, it is my great pleasure to recognize and thank the other officers who have worked hard and graciously with me. Pat Greene was the right person to manage the essay contest in its initial years. She took the basic parameters that we established for the contest, and she fine-tuned the details into a workable process. Candyce Leonard continues to maintain careful and accurate financial and membership records, paying bills and providing up-to-date information throughout the year. Cynthia Tompkins has maintained the continuity of our newsletter under less than ideal institutional circumstances, and she has also been our screener and our conduit for list serve communications. Rosemary Feal, while not currently on the Executive Board, was also instrumental behind the scenes. All of these women contribute their time and energy with generosity and good humor, and it has truly been a pleasure to work with them. I look forward to many more years of participation in Feministas Unidas, and I wish all of our membership the very best finish to the fall term and a peaceful and productive New Year.

Best Wishes,

Beth E. Jorgensen, President



Carta de la Editora

Queridas/os colegas:

Ante todo, quisiera agradecerle a nuestra colega transandina Mariela Paniagua el habernos facilitado la imagen que lleva la portada. Gracias, también, a Ramona Ortiz García y a Carmen Amato por sus gestiones para que este proyecto llegara a buen término.

Mi profundo agradecimiento a otra amiga chilena, la estudiante graduada Margarita Pignataro, quien nos hizo el enorme favor de crear la lista de compañeras que presentan en la conferencia anual del MLA.

Mi reiterado agradecimiento a Christine Henseler por brindarnos la matriz.

Es realmente alentador ver cuánto están publicando nuestras colegas, ¡adelante!

Me apena muchísimo, como a todos/as, que Patricia Greene no pueda asumir la presidencia. Quisiera agradecerle la dedicación que le brindara al proceso de selección de trabajos (Feministas Unidas Essay Prize), en estos dos años.

En la conferencia anual de la Asociación Internacional de Literatura Femenina Hispánica (AILFH), para la cual Beth Jörgensen organizó dos paneles, se mencionó el premio Feministas Unidas, que consiste en la publicación de un artículo en Letras femeninas, el órgano de dicha asociación. En la asamblea se mencionó la idea de un trueque, que no me parece mala, y más considerando que muchas/os de uds. pertenecen a ambas asociaciones. Básicamente se sugirió que una ponente en las sesiones de Feministas Unidas en el MLA represente a AILFH. ¿Qué les parece?

De acuerdo a la sugerencia de Beth, esta vez exportaré las secciones de la revista en htm a fin de facilitar su lectura. La revista entera estará en pdf (al final de la lista de la página, para la posteridad).

Ahora que me estoy actualizando con respecto a las páginas web, y especialmente viendo las fotos de la de Margarita Vargas, me entusiasma la idea de darle un “lifting” a la nuestra. ¿Hay voluntarios? Además, quisiera que se discutiera la posibilidad de que la página fuera independiente, a fin de que la membresía pudiera encontrarla fácilmente. Me preocupa, sin embargo, la posibilidad de que pirateen las direcciones electrónicas... ¿Comentarios sobre ramificaciones legales?

Me despido, deseándoles dicha, prosperidad, y sobre todo paz, para el 2004. ¡Que el año entrante sea menos álgido y borrascoso!

Un abrazo,

Cynthia Margarita Tompkins



Feministas Unidas Essay Prize

The Executive Committee of Feministas Unidas, an allied organization of the MLA, is pleased to announce a call for papers for the Third Annual Feministas Unidas Essay Prize competition for scholars in the early stage of their careers. Feministas Unidas, founded in 1981, is a coalition of feminist scholars in Spanish, Spanish-American, Luso-Brazilian, Afro-Latin American and U.S. Hispanic Studies.

The Feministas Unidas Essay Prize is awarded for an outstanding unpublished essay of feminist scholarship on women writers in the areas covered by our organization's mission (listed above). Graduate students, instructors, lecturers and untenured assistant professors who are current or new members of Feministas Unidas are eligible to submit their original research for the prize. The purpose of the essay prize is to promote feminist scholarship on women writers by those who are entering our profession or who are in the early stages of their professional career.

The prize carries an award of \$200, and publication of the essay in the December issue of the journal *Letras Femeninas*. The author of the winning essay must also be a member of the Asociación Internacional de Literatura Femenina Hispánica at the time of publication of the essay. The selection committee is drawn from officers and members of Feministas Unidas and the editorial board of *Letras Femeninas*. Feministas Unidas reserves the right not to award the prize in a given year.

We invite submissions according to the following guidelines:

An unpublished paper completed in the year 2003.

Length: 18-25 pages, double-spaced, including notes and works cited.

Format: MLA style

NOTE: Prepare according to instructions for "Anonymous Submissions"

Languages: Spanish or English

Deadline for submission: February 15, 2004

Announcement of award: April 15, 2004

Items to be submitted: three hard copies of the essay; 200-word abstract of the essay; author's c.v. Submit all materials to the chair of the selection committee in the one of the following ways: hard copy of all materials listed above and as an e-mail attachment; or hard copy of all materials listed above and one copy on diskette. Mail to:

Prof. Margarita Vargas

Vice-President, Feministas Unidas

Modern Languages and Literatures

University at Buffalo

Romance Languages and Literatures, 910 Clemens Hall

Buffalo, NY 14260-4620

E-mail: mvargas@buffalo.edu

Visit our website at: <http://www.asu.edu/clas/dll/femunida>



Treasurer's Report

END-YEAR TREASURER'S REPORT 2003

Submitted by Candyce Leonard

07 October 2003

We have fully enacted our Premio Feministas Unidas with our Spring 2002 Essay Competition, and are immensely pleased with your response in supporting the Fund with your continued contributions. The interdisciplinary nature of our organization makes Feministas Unidas unique and allows us to explore a virtually unlimited number of fields of study relating to Hispanic women. Please encourage colleagues in other departments at your school to join, and consider the option of sponsoring a younger scholar.

Previous Balances	(1) General Fund	\$ 4,087.97	
	(2) Scholarship Fund Balance	2,300.00	
Credits	(1) Dues, donations & dividends	\$ 1,395.00	
	(2) Scholarship Fund		130.00
Subtotals	(1) General Fund	\$ 5,482.97	
	(2) Scholarship Fund	2,430.00	
Disbursements:	(1) Spring 2003 newsletter	\$ 637.09	
	(2) Scholarship Award	100.00	
	(3) Membership renewal letters	60.00	
CURRENT BALANCES:	(1) General Fund	\$ 4,785.88	
	(2) Scholarship Fund		\$ 2,330.00



Feministas Unidas at the MLA

Saturday, 27 December

3:30 p.m.

35. Business Meeting of Feministas Unidas

3:30-4:45 p.m., Torrey 2, San Diego Marriot
Presiding: Patricia V. Greene, Michigan State Univ.

612. Bridging the Gap: New Approaches to Conducting Research on Feminist Theory

3:30-4:45 p.m., Marina Ballroom Salon D, San Diego Marriott

Presiding: Lisa M. Vollendorf, Wayne State Univ. Peggy Sharpe, Univ. of Mississippi

Speakers:

1. "Es que es muy facha": Ideologically Suspicious Feminists and Hispanic Feminist Scholarship and Teaching" Joyce Lynn Tolliver, Univ. Of Illinois, Urbana;
2. "Issues in Feminist Research: The Case of Estela Canto," Patricia N. Klingenberg, Miami Univ., Oxford
3. "The Return of the Poetess and Other Gynocritical Anachronisms: the Portuguese Context," Anna Klobucka, Univ. of Massachusetts, Dartmouth;
4. "Looking at the Margins from the *Borderlands*: Understanding Gender and Ethnicity in Brazilian Women's Literature, Cristina Ferreira-Pinto, Texas State University – San Marcos;
5. "Thinking/Feeling Ourselves: The Embodied Cognitive Revolution and Some Examples for Gender and Cultural Studies," Catherine Connor (Swietlicki), University of Vermont



Noticias



Gladys Illarregui

Imágenes y palabras para contar la crisis.

Un proyecto de mujeres en la Universidad de Delaware.

Desde el 13 al 22 de octubre se llevó a cabo en la Universidad de Delaware, Perkins Gallery, el evento: “Buenos Aires: A Tale of Two Cities. Mapping the New Reality Through Poetry and Photography”, realizado por el Programa de Estudios Latinoamericanos dirigido por Cynthia Schmidt-Cruz. Gladys Illarregui, poeta y profesora, tuvo a su cargo reunir un collage poético que representará el nuevo lenguaje para hablar de la realidad social en Argentina. Desde ese collage poético se podía leer la angustia, solidaridad, sobrevivencia que se sucedió a los sucesos posteriores al 2001 en Buenos Aires, cuando los bancos congelaron los depósitos de la clase media, y una rueda de cinco presidentes se disputó por horas- en algunos casos- la tutela del país.

Aun así, Argentina no perdió el marco institucional, y en medio del caos algunos mensajes resuenan como cartografías íntimas y proféticas de todo lo acontecido en los últimos años en el país. Silvina Frydlewsky (corresponsal del *Washington Post* en Buenos Aires) produjo las suites fotográficas para ilustrar esa doble fase de la ciudad espléndida y dolorosa: cartoneros, familias deambulando con la basura, niños desgarrados. Diana Bellesi, Ivonne Bordelois y Delfina Muschietti aportaron la experiencia de la palabra poética en Buenos Aires, y otras poetas se sumaron a este proyecto tales como Marta Cwielong, Zulema Moret, Barbara Gill, Cecilia Rossi y otras poetas calificadas y sobre todo, viviendo en Buenos Aires.

La exhibición se llevara a dos sitios más de Delaware en Noviembre y Marzo del 2004.



Amy Kaminsky

The Department of Women’s Studies at the University of Minnesota welcomes applications for its interdisciplinary Ph.D. Program in Feminist Studies. Minnesota is an excellent place for students interested in pursuing an advanced degree in feminist studies in Spanish, Latin American, Chicano and/or Lusophone literary and cultural studies. Faculty in Women’s Studies include Amy Kaminsky (nation, exile, gender, and representation in the Southern Cone) and Edén Torres (Chicana cultural studies). Faculty in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese Studies include Fernando Arenas (Portuguese, Brazilian and Lusophone African literary and cultural studies, sexuality), Ofelia Ferrán (Contemporary Spanish Peninsular Literature and Women Writers), Joanna O’Connell (Latin American literature and culture; feminisms and feminist theory), Constance Sullivan (Spanish literature and culture of the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries; women writers of Spain; feminist theories), Barbara Weissberger (Medieval and Renaissance Spanish Literature: Ideology of gender, sexuality, ethnicity. Isabel the Catholic and female sovereignty. Feminist theory). For further information and more complete faculty listings, see our website: <http://womenstudy.cla.umn.edu>, and click on “faculty” and on “graduate.”

Amy Kaminsky
Professor and Chair
Department of Women’s Studies
425 Ford Hall
Minneapolis, MN 55455
tel: (612) 624-7319
fax: (612) 624-3753

Iñigo Sánchez Llama ha publicado:

Benito Pérez Galdós. *El audaz. Historia de un radical de antaño?* Ed. Iñigo Sánchez Llama. Madrid: Libertarias, 2003. 529 pp. ISBN 84-7954-614-X

Contiene una introducción de 107 pp., notas, variantes textuales y un apéndice con ensayos de Pérez Galdós sobre el Siglo XVIII y reseñas escritas en el XIX sobre la novela

Benito Pérez Galdós. “La familia de León Roch”. Ed. Iñigo Sánchez Llama. Madrid: Cátedra, 2003. 663 pp. ISBN 84-376-2074-0 Contiene una introducción de 127 pp, notas y variantes textuales.

Podría decirse que en las introducciones de ambas obras se analiza la construcción del discurso post-isabelino durante el decenio de 1870. Bajo ese contexto cultural Pérez Galdós elabora novelas que responden a las expectativas (masculinas) estéticas dominantes en España desde 1868 (i.e. neokantismo) y simultáneamente desacredita, mediante feminizaciones paródicas, aquellos registros artísticos asociados con el género femenino. En “El audaz” (1871) se feminiza y caricaturiza el neoclasicismo mientras que “La familia de León Roch” realiza idénticos procesos discursivos con respecto a la literatura neocatólica.



Carmen Urioste-Azcorra, David W. Foster y Cynthia Tompkins

Queridas Colegas:

Quisiéramos anunciar nuestro exitoso programa de posgrado en letras hispánicas (Literatura Latinoamericana, Peninsular y Chicana/o, así como Estudios culturales) en el cual ofrecemos de dieciséis a veinte ayudantías anuales.

Además de las ayudantías regulares y por iniciativa de Decanato, la Sección de Español, Portugués y Rumano de la Universidad Estatal de Arizona ofrecerá dos superbecas anuales, que se otorgarán a los estudiantes doctorales más excepcionales admitidos en el programa.

Las superbecas tendrán una duración de tres años (de haber obtenido el estudiante la maestría anteriormente) o de cinco años (en el caso contrario). Estas dos superbecas ascienden a un monto de 20.000 dólares, incluidos los costos de matrícula y seguro médico. A quienes reciban la superbeca se les asignará dos tareas semestrales relacionadas con la enseñanza — enseñar un curso, asistir a un profesor en un curso con excesivos estudiantes, o crear componentes tecnológicos para clases de lengua, cultura, literatura, o lingüística, entre otras—, a fin de cumplir con el requisito de media jornada estipulado para las ayudantías (.50 assistanceship).

Además de enviarnos candidatos para las superbecas, le agradeceríamos nos remitiera estudiantes para las ayudantías anuales.

Para obtener información más detallada puede dirigirse a:

<http://www.asu.edu/languages/spa/gradpage/sgfa.htm>

Le rogamos encarecidamente difundir esta información entre sus estudiantes.



Luzma Umpierre fue la invitada especial en la celebración del mes de La Raza en Albion College en Michigan.

La Dra. Umpierre participó en varias clases de literatura y creación y dio una lectura de poesía/biografía el 17 de septiembre, 2003.

Un poema nuevo de Umpierre titulado "On A Stolen Book" ha sido aceptado para la revista *Heliotrope*.



Noël Valis

The Culture of Cursileria de Noël Valis ha ganado el premio Katherine Singer Kovacs Prize, de la MLA!

El link de Duke UP para *The Culture of Cursileria* es <http://www.dukeupress.edu>



Margarita Vargas

As newly elected vice-president of Feministas Unidas, one of my main responsibilities is to run the essay contest, therefore, I am writing to urge you (if you qualify under the guidelines) to submit an essay and to encourage your graduate students and colleagues to do the same.

This year the award has been increased to \$200, so we hope to see many more entries. The deadline for submission is February 15, 2004 and the award will be announced April 15, 2004.

Please send the essays to:

Prof. Margarita Vargas
Vice-President, Feministas Unidas
Romance Languages and Literatures
University at Buffalo
910 Clemens Hall
Buffalo, NY 14260-4620
E-mail: mvargas@buffalo.edu

Please go to our web site for details:

<http://www.asu.edu/languages/femunida/s03/index.htm>

<http://www.acsu.buffalo.edu/~mvargas/>



May Summer Fansworth is working on her dissertation, titled *A Study of Feminist Theatre in Latin America including Mexico, Argentina, and Paraguay, from 1920-1950*

Publications



Christine Henseler *En sus propias palabras: escritoras españolas ante el mercado literario*

En sus propias palabras: escritoras españolas ante el mercado literario, de Christine Henseler, abre por primera vez un espacio creativo y crítico para hablar de la intersección entre la escritura de la mujer y la promoción de la mujer en el mercado literario.

Con la reunión de los textos de estas diez escritoras, podemos llegar a un mejor conocimiento de sus puntos de vista sobre las dificultades que entraña la divulgación de las obras escritas por mujeres con respecto al mercado, a la edición, a la crítica... Por lo que resulta un libro de enorme interés y un documento excepcional.

El libro incluye ensayos de las siguientes autoras:

Paloma Díaz-Mas, Elena Santiago, Almudena Grandes, Clara Obligado, Laura Freixas, Paula Izquierdo, Care Santos, Marta Sanz, Lola Beccaria Begoña Huertas

Ediciones Torremozas, P.V.P.13 Euros (12,50 Sin IVA), 195 páginas

Si te interesa este libro, solicítalo en el formulario de nuestra página web:
<http://www.torremozas.com/ventas.htm>,



Emily Hind. *Entrevistas con quince autoras mexicanas*. 2003. 270 p. 18.80 ISBN 8484891151

Esta colección de entrevistas con quince autoras mexicanas cubre un amplio panorama de generaciones, desde las figuras consagradas hasta las escritoras nuevas que anuncian los posibles caminos de la literatura mexicana en el siglo XXI.

El libro incluye entrevistas con: Sabina Berman, Carmen Boullosa, Ana Clavel, Brianda Domecq, Ana García Bergua, Mónica Mansour, Ángeles Mastretta, Silvia Molina, Angelina Muñoz-Huberman, Rosa Nissán, Susana Pagano, Aline Pettersson, María Luisa Puga, Cristina Rivera Garza, Martha Robles. Cada entrevista viene acompañada de una bibliografía detallada.

«No hay nada semejante. Cubre una serie de autoras de las más conocidas y resulta lleno de datos y afirmaciones interesantísimos [...]» (Donald Shaw, Universidad de Virginia)

Emily Hind es profesora de literatura en la U. Iberoamericana de México.

Para pedir: la dirección de la editorial Vervuert es www.iberro-america.net.



“In the Vortex of the Cyclone”: Selected Poems by Excilia Saldaña: A Bilingual Edition Edited by and translated by Flora González Mandri and Rosamond Rosenmeier

The first-ever bilingual anthology by the Afro-Cuban poet Excilia Saldana contains a wide-ranging selection of her work, from lullabies to an erotic letter, from lengthy autobiographical poems to quiet reflections on her Caribbean island as the inspiration for her writing. She celebrates her African ancestry with poems that are filled with the flora and fauna of Afro-Cuban rituals. She explores her feminine rites of passage in the context of her country’s momentous journey. In these poems, Saldana weaves the personal, the mythical, and the literary, bringing together the domestic with the transcendental, the temporal with the eternal.

Known in Cuba as a poet, essayist, translator, and professor, Saldana won the prestigious Nicholas Guillen Award for Distinction in Poetry in 1998 and the La Rosa Blanca Prize for *La Noche*, a children’s book, in 1989. Before her death in 1999, most of her work had appeared in Spanish exclusively in Cuba with only scattered translations. This collection emphasizes her construction of a personal and poetic autobiography to reveal the identity of one of the best Afro-Caribbean poets of the twentieth century.

Contents:

Foreword by Nancy Morejon

Introduction by Flora Gonzalez Mandri

Anonymous Landscape

The Wife’s Monologue

Through the Looking Glass

Lullabies: Lullaby for an Elephant Out for a Stroll, Lullaby for the Child-Cosmos, Lullaby for My Naughty Child,

Lullaby for the Missing Daughter

I’m Thirsty, Grandmother

My Faithful One

My Name (A Family Anti-Elegy)

Unfinished Danzon for Night and Island

Afterword by Cintio Vitier

Flora Gonzalez Mandri is associate professor of writing, literature, and publishing at Emerson College, Boston.

Rosamond Rosenmeier is professor emerita at the University of Massachusetts, Boston.

3/30/2002. 144pp. 6 X 9.

Glossary, notes, bibliography, index.

0-8130-2459-5 \$34.95s

“A wonderful book, strong, with enormous energy, fast-paced, truly poetic, with a varied and rich vocabulary ranging from the vernacular to the exalted. This is poetry to be said aloud, sometimes chanted, sometimes shouted, sometimes sung . . . a book that is both original and significant.”—Cola Franzen, translator of *Horses in the Air and Other Poems*, by Jorge Guillen

“A much-needed contribution to Afro-Cuban and Caribbean studies.”—Vera M. Kutzinski, Yale University

<http://www.upf.com/Spring2002/saldana.html>



Noël Valis. *The Culture of Cursilería: Bad Taste, Kitsch, and Class in Modern Spain*. Duke University Press, 2002

Not easily translated, the Spanish terms *cursi* and *cursilería* refer to a cultural phenomenon widely prevalent in Spanish society since the nineteenth century. Like “kitsch,” *cursi* evokes the idea of bad taste, but it also suggests one who has pretensions of refinement and elegance without possessing them. In *The Culture of Cursilería* Noël Valis examines the social meanings of *cursi*, viewing it as a window into modern Spanish history and particularly into the development of middle-class culture.

Valis finds evidence in literature, cultural objects, and popular customs to argue that *cursilería* has its roots in a sense of cultural inadequacy felt by the lower middle classes in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Spain. The Spain of this era, popularly viewed as the European power most resistant to economic and social modernization, is characterized by Valis as suffering from nostalgia for a bygone, romanticized society that structured itself on strict class delineations. With the development of an economic middle class during the latter half of the nineteenth century, these designations began to break down and individuals across all levels of the middle class exaggerated their own social status in an attempt to protect their cultural capital. While the resulting manifestations of *cursilería* were often provincial, indeed backward, the concept was—and still is—closely associated with a sense of home. Ultimately, Valis shows how *cursilería* embodied the disparity between old ways and new, and how in its awkward manners, airs of pretension, and graceless anxieties it represents Spain’s uneasy surrender to the forces of modernity.

“Noël Valis’s writing is powerful and insightful. Her arguments are brilliant, subtle, and carefully textured; they cleverly elucidate the duality of *cursi*. This is an important, imaginative, fully accomplished book that will be essential reading for anyone interested in understanding more fully the cultural and literary realities of Spain a century ago.”—DAVID T. GIES, University of Virginia

“Noël Valis offers brilliant, innovative insights into a cultural phenomenon that illuminates many aspects of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Spain. As perhaps one of the most distinguished cultural critics of Hispanic Studies today, Valis takes an interdisciplinary approach to expose the links among text, economics, politics, and historical events.”—HARRIET S. TURNER, University of Nebraska

Noël Valis is Professor of Spanish at Yale University. Her previous books include *The Decadent Vision in Leopoldo Alas*; *The Novels of Jacinto Octavio Picón*; and *In the Feminine Mode: Essays on Hispanic Women Writers* (coedited with Carol Maier).



Reviews

Los espejismos de la memoria genealógica puertorriqueña

Anderson Córdova, Blanca. *La edad del arrepentimiento*. Fair Haven, N.J.: Nuevo Espacio, 2003. ISBN: 1-930-879-36-9. 227 pp.

Al llegar a los cuarenta, edad que da pie al título de esta novela, la narradora Victoria Williams Dávila recupera textos y recuerdos de su familia en un intento por reencontrarse consigo misma. “Recuérdalos, ponlos en su lugar para redescubrir el tuyo y luego vacíalo, no te olvides de vaciarlo.” (53), le exige su tía Remedios, “origen, medio y fin de estas palabras” (24) que dan forma a la novela.

Recordar y recrear, es decir escribir, para a continuación poder olvidar es el primer movimiento dentro de esta indagación genealógica en la que, como ya resulta habitual en este tipo de estructuras, no hay identidad más cierta que la del desplazamiento continuo. Recordar, recrear, olvidar, fijar repeticiones buscando en ellas una diferencia en la que reconocerse, eso es lo que parece proponer Blanca Anderson Córdova en esta novela de fuerte lirismo autorreflexivo. Repetición y diferencia, primera pareja de elementos mediante los que se facilita esa elusión del centro, ese desplazamiento continuo sobre el que pretende erigirse esta historia. Repetir la necesidad, experimentada décadas antes por la tía Remedios, de crear un nuevo tapiz familiar sobre el que asentarse; un nuevo tapiz que le permita a Victoria vaciar, liberarse de versiones creadas por las otras voces familiares que, en casos como el de la matriarca, han quedado revestidas de esa falsa autoridad que emana de toda inmutabilidad.

Sin embargo, la negación de todas estas figuras familiares, implícita en el consejo de Remedios, queda matizada por la superación textual de un nuevo binomio: ausencia-presencia. Victoria, pionera dentro de su familia de la ola migratoria puertorriqueña, escribe sus orígenes desde la ausencia; orígenes indeterminadamente localizados en una galería de tías, tíos y primos cuando no muertos, alejados de la isla. Pese a esto, el texto pone en entedicho dichas ausencias no sólo a través del efecto rescatador de la escritura, sino mediante la recurrente aparición a lo largo de la novela de elementos mágicos (tales como apariciones fantasmagóricas, contactos oníricos y vaticinios efectivos) capaces de poner en cuestión los límites entre lo ausente y lo presente, el silencio y la palabra.

Desde mi punto de vista, el mayor logro conseguido por Blanca Anderson Córdova en esta primera novela ha sido el alcanzar una voz capaz de sostenerse en un discurso ajeno a toda afirmación. *La edad del arrepentimiento* elimina de manera radical todo personaje/palabra/poder masculino, al situarlos bajo el epíteto de “indeseables” fuera del núcleo familiar, al tiempo que rechaza descansasar sobre la diversidad de márgenes representados por los personajes cosanguíneos, etiquetados como veteranos de guerra, enfermos mentales, enfermos de SIDA, desilusionados, alcohólicos, homosexuales, artistas, etc., cuyo único elemento en común es su incapacidad para realizarse de una manera plena. Las afueras de la dicotomía y el umbral de la identidad es el espacio conquistado página a página en este viaje genealógico.

Silvia Álvarez Olarra
Penn State University



Cami-Vela, María. *Mujeres detrás de la cámara. Entrevistas con cineastas españolas de la década de los 90*. Madrid: Ocho y Medio, 2001.

Es bien sabido que de todas las formas de representación artística, el cine es aquélla que durante más tiempo se ha mantenido bajo control masculino. Hasta los años 90 la nómina de realizadoras españolas se limitaba a una docena de nombres. Aunque no podemos hablar aún de paridad, las cosas están cambiando y el boom de directoras que surge en los últimos años es un reflejo de la creciente presencia de la mujer en el ámbito laboral. Por tratarse de un fenómeno muy reciente, aún no existen suficientes estudios críticos de este interesante fenómeno artístico y sociológico. De hecho, María Cami-Vela es una de las pioneras en esta empresa documentadora y crítica. En *Mujeres detrás de la cámara*, explora qué opinan las actuales directoras sobre el papel que las mujeres desempeñan en el área de realización y documenta la incorporación de la mujer española a la industria cinematográfica durante la década de los 90: “Se trata de hacer visible el fenómeno de la aparición de una nueva generación de realizadoras que está contribuyendo a renovar la cinematografía española y brevemente indagar en las posibles causas de este fenómeno”.

Mujeres detrás de la cámara se abre con una bien documentada introducción en la que Cami-Vela explica cómo ha evolucionado la industria cinematográfica española para dar cabida a un mayor número de mujeres, entre las que se encuentran las 16 entrevistadas: Marta Balletbó-Coll, Icíar Bollain, Isabel Coixet, Ana Díez, Chus Gutiérrez, Mónica Laguna, Eva Lesmes, Laura Mañá, Dolores Payás, Gracia Querejeta, Azucena Rodríguez, Manane Rodríguez, Mireia Ros, Helena Taberna, Pilar Távora y Rosa Vergés. En la parte central, dedicada a las entrevistas con las directoras mencionadas, la autora indaga en su formación y trayectorias profesionales, explorando sus distintas vías de acceso al campo de la realización. Cami-Vela conoce muy bien las obras de las realizadoras y dedica una buena parte de la entrevista al análisis crítico de cada una de las películas, centrándose en sus diversas estructuras narrativas, planteamientos formales, temas y caracterización de personajes. Detrás de las inteligentes preguntas de Cami-Vela, se plantea, desde distintas perspectivas, las siguientes preguntas: ¿Se puede hablar de una mirada femenina que condiciona la temática y las técnicas cinematográficas usadas al dirigir películas? ¿Existen unos planteamientos de género válidos en la mayoría estos filmes dirigidos por mujeres? Aunque la respuesta de la autora es afirmativa, casi todas las directoras (excepto Payás y Távora) rechazan el calificativo de feminista y expresan su rechazo de la etiqueta de “cine de mujer”. Esta postura defensiva, es abiertamente agresiva en el caso de Marta Balletbó-Coll, quien, de forma injustificada, llega a recriminar a la entrevistadora: “Me has hecho las mismas preguntas que me haría un hombre”. Cami-Vela explica que la reticencia de las directoras a ser incluidas dentro de un subgrupo o subcategoría que las reconoce al mismo tiempo que las margina es comprensible; sin embargo, es importante reivindicar la existencia de una mirada femenina.

El libro de Cami-Vela incluye un “diccionario de cineastas” que contiene la biofilmografía de las treinta y cinco realizadoras que debutan en los noventa. De gran utilidad es también la última parte, un “diccionario de los filmes” que presenta las fichas artísticas y técnicas y un resumen de sus películas.

Mujeres detrás de la cámara es una valiosísima aportación que actualiza y complementa el libro de Carlos Heredero *La mitad del cielo: Directoras españolas de los años 90* (1998). De lectura amena, es imprescindible para todos aquéllos que quieran conocer más a fondo el cómo y el porqué de la renovación creativa del cine español en los años 90 y busquen documentación sobre la creciente nómina de realizadoras.



Luibhéid, Eithne. *Entry Denied. Controlling Sexuality at the Border*. Minneapolis and London: U of Minnesota P, 2002. xxvii + 253 pp. ISBN 0-8166-3803-9.

During a recent trip to Madrid, a taxi driver spoke to me, unprompted, about Africans in Spain. The moros, he said, rob, steal, and kill. They have too many children. They have no concern for the laws of civilized society. So taxi drivers have banded together, and now carry guns for protection from the immigrant threat.

In the past decade, Africans have flocked to Europe and refugees from the world over have attempted to enter the United States. It is common knowledge that desperation drives those who risk their lives to enter more prosperous countries. It also is common knowledge that a groundswell of reactionary politics increasingly has plagued immigrants and immigration policies. So it is that the taxi drivers in Spain hold views similar to millions of other people who perceive immigrants as a threat to their way of life.

Like other nations around the world, the United States faces increasing pressures to accept refugees from war-torn and economically-bereft countries. Eithne Luibhéid's compelling book, *Entry Denied. Controlling Sexuality at the Border*, deals specifically with the United States. Yet the Spanish taxi driver's ideas about African immigrants serve as a potent reminder that immigration is a major issue everywhere, and that books like Luibhéid's apply broadly to transnational politics.

The strengths of Luibhéid's book are twofold. First, *Entry Denied* provides ample historical evidence to demonstrate the racist and sexist ideologies of the United States immigration system. Working through familiar territory, for example, the opening chapter provides an overview of immigration history specifically from the perspective of sexuality and gender. The chapter has useful information for all audiences, who might not know, for instance, that gay immigrants could not gain entry into the U.S. from 1952-1990, or that anxieties about high birth rates among immigrants existed throughout the twentieth century. Luibhéid makes it clear that the U.S. government has responded with policies that, even in the twenty-first century, continue to exclude people based on racist and sexist ideologies.

The other important contribution made by *Entry Denied* is the argument that ties sexuality to immigration policy. Luibhéid persuasively argues that the government needs to rethink immigration policy vis-à-vis women and sexual minorities. The author bolsters support for better immigration policies through stories of women raped by immigration officers and immigrants deported for purported homosexuality.

Less convincing, however, is the argument made at the end of the book regarding sexual violence in migrant- and other immigrant-labor communities. No sane person would argue that such violence is not a problem. Since the issue lies on the periphery of Luibhéid's otherwise cohesive presentation of women, sexuality, and border control, the section on service sector violence dilutes the focus on immigration policy.

Entry Denied originally was a dissertation and, as such, it could have used more revision before it went to press. Specifically, several chapters seem to end abruptly, without pushing the analyses to more cogent conclusions. Given the political importance of immigration, it is unfortunate that Luibhéid chose to employ theoretically-bound language throughout the book. One typical example appears in the author's interpretation of aspiring immigrants' narratives of rape as the "reiteration of nationalist and colonialist contrasts between the United States' supposed enlightenment and sending countries' supposed backwardness" (117). Luibhéid argues here that



victims of violence are forced to present their countries as barbaric in comparison to an advanced, civilized United States. This is a good point to make, and certainly one that provides a useful transition to sexual violence and immigration issues. Yet the very language used to discuss the topic probably will leave readers with little knowledge of feminist and postcolonial discourses out of the discussion. Likewise, terms such as “heteropatriarchal” and “reinscription” appear frequently, and will leave some readers cold.

Those of us whose scholarship centers on gender issues and employs feminist and post-colonialist theoretical models face the same conundrum as Luibhéid. I would suggest that, particularly with a topic of pressing political importance, feminist scholars might re-think their use of language and try to reach out to broader academic and even non-academic audiences. While there is real value in the theoretical frameworks of sexuality, gender, race, and violence relied upon for *Entry Denied*, the theory-specific language could have been culled to make the book more accessible to a much wider audience.

Luibhéid clearly is capable of making formidable arguments that should be heard by a wider audience. Hard-hitting examinations of the history of immigration control, lesbian immigrants, and sexual violence raise many questions about the viability of the United States’s past and current approaches to border control. Perhaps the author will consider writing a more popular book about these same issues. Every-day citizens, as well as INS agents and politicians, would benefit from reading a book that questions the treatment of women as a different kind of immigrant.

An engaging book on immigration policy and sexuality would need to take up the complex issues of immigrant birth rates, immigration policy, and women immigrants in a way that would be useful for policy makers. Luibhéid convinces us handily that policies have been informed by eugenics and a sense of American superiority for generations. Less evident in *Entry Denied*, however, are proposed solutions to these problems. It would be a great service to those women denied entry if somebody like Luibhéid took on the difficult questions of immigration policy.

More of us who are sympathetic to the immigrant plight and aware of the ill-intentions of our government need to weigh in on the realities of immigration—including high birth rates, lack of education, and other issues that many citizens perceive as proof that immigrants unnecessarily tax the state. These are sticky questions, but sound policy recommendations cannot be made without bold considerations of these and other political hot buttons.

As increased mobility allows for more migration around the globe, more people should read books like Luibhéid’s and educate themselves on the policies that continue to unjustly exclude groups of people based on nationality or ethnic origin. In *Entry Denied*, Eithne Luibhéid convincingly demonstrates that sexuality also forms the basis for discrimination at the border. *Entry Denied* provides an excellent starting point from which advocates for reform can appeal to policy makers to stop discriminating against women and sexual minorities at the border. Without intelligent discussion about immigration policies, more citizens will follow the route of the Spanish taxi drivers, who perceive violence as a viable solution to the immigrant “problem.”

Lisa Vollendorf
Wayne State University



Suez, Perla. *Letargo*. Buenos Aires: Grupo Editorial Norma. Colección “La otra orilla.” 2000. 108 páginas. ISBN: 987-9334-60-4.

Perla Suez is known principally as the award winning author of books for children and young adult and with the publication in 2000 of *Letargo*, she produces her first novel for an adult readership. Her second novel *El arresto* was reviewed in the spring 2003 newsletter by Janis Breckenridge. Suez’s protagonist, Deborah, as an adult narrates through fragmented passages her painful childhood in Basavilbaso, one of the Jewish colonies in Entre Ríos, as she travels back there after decades to visit her mother’s grave. Her journey will enable her to put to rest her memories of her mother in addition to coming to terms with her childhood. Almost at the end of the novel, Deborah wishes that her mother, father and grandmother could travel with her so they could speak “de lo que tienen que hablar el tiempo que necesitan, para decir lo que no pudieron decirme entonces” (107). Deborah literally narrates a journey back to her hometown as well as a metaphorical one to understand what she was not told and her memory has hidden and tried to forget. Suez in an interview describes it as a “viaje hacia la memoria.” Margara Averbach confirms that “El viaje es un movimiento terrible pero necesario hacia los orígenes, hacia lo que hay que recordar aunque no se quiera y, a la vez, hacia *Letargo*, hacia la historia que estaba dormida, esperando que la contaran, como los personajes de Pirandello” (Clarín 30 de julio de 2000).

Deborah hears things that as a youngster she shouldn’t about her mother’s mental illness and father’s affair and participation in the communist party which she doesn’t understand completely. Her maternal bobbeh (grandmother) lives with her and her parents and owns the store next to their house. Bobbeh is a dominant figure in her childhood who attempts to shield her and provide normalcy by controlling the events within the house and to quell gossip about her parents. As a youngster Deborah attempts to name that which is unnamable as she lacks the vocabulary to explain and to express her dismay and pain at the loss of a baby brother along with her mother because of an unspecified mental illness and her subsequent suicide. Thus, as the grown narrator, she articulates what the child has been unable to express regarding her “family secrets.” In “La Escritura, un modo de supervivencia,” Suez alludes to the fact that the inspiration for the story is loosely based on memories of her aunt who lost a son and walked around without a sound looking ghostly.

The novel is divided into seven notebooks or journals where Deborah is sometimes the protagonist and sometimes the narrator interweaving her recounting between “I” of the present and the girl or third person “la niña” she was between the ages of eleven and thirteen. The journals are her secret companions and the only place where she can express her dismay and confusion about the events she witness at home. As a result, we perceive her need to move back and forth between her agonizing childhood memories and those altered through time in order to reinvent what happened. These two voices shift between sentences and sometimes interweave within the same testimony to remind us that we are spectators to the reconstruction of memory: “Nadie en la casa explica a la niña qué tiene la madre, pero ella le basta con mirarla para adivinarlo. Yo le dije a la bobbe que mamá estaba así por la muerte de mi hermano” (41). The language of the novel echoes the melancholic atmosphere surrounding Deborah’s home life and the need to maintain “secrets” within the province of the family. At times, there are blank spaces of several lines between the lines of text to highlight the temporal jumps as well as the silence of what is not being said or could not be said or expressed by the young narrator.



Familial history, memories and literature entwine in this bittersweet and lyrical novel. Perla Suez's language is evocative as are the spaces of silence created by the gaps in memory and the youngster's inability to articulate what is going on around her. Suez deftly handles moments of great tension with finesse and skill; she is a skillful and suggestive writer who is able to reproduce in a natural tone the introspective musings of adolescent Deborah, this is where we glimpse Suez's expertise as an author of children's literature. She penetrates the difficult moments Deborah faces while avoiding mere descriptions of the setting and clichés to penetrate the inner thoughts of the narrator who hears more than she should and who is unable to respond because she lacks the maturity to fully grasp the situation. *Letargo* is of interest to specialists in Southern Cone and women's literature, but also to those who study identity construction as well as Latin American Jewish writers moreover, *Letargo* will be of interest to all those who enjoy a skillfully wrought story.

Beth Pollack
New Mexico State University



Moret, Zulema. *Noche de rumba*. Madrid: Ediciones Torremozas, 2002.

En *Noche de rumba*, que forma parte de la colección *Ellas también Cuentan*, se presentan una colección de ocho cuentos incluyendo "Noche de rumba", que le da título al libro. Los relatos incluyen: "En tiempos de Sidney MacIwan", "A ras de suelo, Sara", "No mires el mar", "San Isidro en metro", "Bonheur", "Adivinatoria" y "Algunas preguntas en torno al 'finadito'".

Todas las historias tienen a mujeres como protagonistas (tan distintas como una niña y una mujer loca) y temáticas que abarcan desde lo cotidiano hasta lo sobrenatural. El género es híbrido, ya que los cuentos se presentan como un collage de historias y enlazan una multitud de formas diversas de narración. Al incorporar múltiples voces se crea, de manera premeditada, la heteroglosia en el relato. La mayoría de los cuentos son precedidos por epígrafes que parecen inconexos con el resto del texto y sin embargo, entablan diálogo con su intertextualidad.

Aún los cuentos que detallan eventos que podrían parecer insignificantes y que hasta parecen carecer de clímax en ciertos momentos, construyen una narrativa que genera gran expectativa y suspenso. Otras narraciones nos intrigan, porque nos permiten familiarizarnos con fragmentos de pensamientos y observaciones de estas complicadas vidas. Se narra la intimidad de estas mujeres como si el lector fuese a la vez el receptor de un diario personal. La narrativa fluye presentando un continuo monólogo interior, que a la vez es un diálogo íntimo y cómplice con el lector.

Fabiola Fernández Salek
Chicago State University



Feministas Unidas at MLA

Saturday, 27 December

3:30 p.m.

35. Business Meeting of Feministas Unidas

3:30-4:45 p.m., Torrey 2, San Diego Marriot

Presiding: Patricia V. Greene, Michigan State Univ.

Saturday, 27 December

5:15 p.m.

52. Welcome to the MLA

5:15-6:30 p.m., Upper Room 4, San Diego Convention Center

Speakers: Rosemary G. Feal, MLA

95. Visual Representations of Twentieth-Century Spanish Culture

5:15-6:30 p.m., Point Loma, San Diego Marriot

Presiding: Roberta Johnson, Univ. of Kansas

3. "Civil War Ghosts Entombed: Lessons of the Valley of the Fallen," Noel M. Valis, Yale Univ.

Saturday, 27 December

7:00 p.m.

97. Muslim-Christian Relations in Medieval Literature

7:00-8:15 p.m. Torrey 3, San Diego Marriott

1. "Muslims at the Monastery: A Medieval Muslim Mystic and His Critics," Lourdes María Alvarez, Catholic Univ. of America

Sunday, 28 December

8:30 a.m.

181. The City and Its Discontents

8:30 – 9:45 a.m., Coronado, San Diego Marriott

2. "Cortázar and the Urban Aesthetic." Amanda Holmes, McGill Univ.

Sunday, 28 December

10:15 a.m.

191. The Publishing and Tenure Crises

10:15-12:00 noon, Upper Room 4 San Diego Convention Center

Presiding: Debra Ann Castillo, Cornell Univ.



Sunday, 28 December

12:00 Noon

265. Rethinking Mexico: Cultural Citizenship in a Globalized Nation

12:00 noon-1:15 p.m., Torrance, San Diego Marriott

Respondent: Rebecca Elizabeth Biron, Univ. of Miami

Sunday, 28 December

7:15 p.m.

404. Silvina Ocampo for the Twenty-First Century

7:15-8:30 p.m., Boardroom, San Diego Marriott

A special session: session leader: Patricia N. Klingenberg, Miami Univ. Oxford

414. Immigration in Twentieth-Century Spanish Culture

7:15-8:30 p.m., Cardiff, San Diego Marriott

3. "Buscando visa para un sueño," Patricia V. Greene, Michigan State Univ.

Sunday, 28 December

8:40 p.m.

417. The Presidential Address

8:40 p.m., San Diego Ballroom Salon B. San Diego Marriott

Presiding: Rosemary G. Feal, MLA

Monday, 29 December

8:30 a.m.

448. Imagining Peace in Latin American Science Fiction

8:30-9:45 a.m., Carlsbad, San Diego Marriott

2. "Fantasies of Inclusion in Cristina Peri Rossi's Short Fiction," Amanda Holmes, McGill Univ.

Monday, 29 December

3:30 p.m.

612. Bridging the Gap: New Approaches to Conducting Research on Feminist Theory

3:30-4:45 p.m., Marina Ballroom Salon D, San Diego Marriott

Presiding: Lisa M. Vollendorf, Wayne State Univ. Peggy Sharpe, Univ. of Mississippi

Speakers: Joyce Lynn Tolliver, Univ. Of Illinois, Urbana; Patricia N. Klingenbrg, Miami Univ., Oxford; Anna Klobucka, Univ. of Massachusetts, Dartmouth; Cristina Ferreira-Pinto, Texas State University – San Marcos; " Catherine Connor (Swietlicki), University of Vermont



Monday, 29 December

7:15 p.m.

669. Mother Tongue? Gender and Heritage Languages

7:15- 8:30 p.m., *Columbia 1, San Diego Marriott*

2. "Visions on the Line: Healing Voices, Gender and Visual Representations," Magdalena M. Maiz-Peña, Davidson Coll.; Luis H. Peña, Davidson Coll.

Monday, 29 December

9:00 p.m.

691. The Symbolic Violence of Border Theories: Toward a Devictimization of Border Literature

9:00-10:15 p.m., *Carlsbad, San Diego Marriott*

Respondent: Debra Ann Castillo, Cornell Univ.

Tuesday, 30 December

8:30 a.m.

702. Beyond Difference: Contemporary Theories of Culture in Latin America

8:30-9:45 a.m., *Leucadia, San Diego Marriott*

2. "Queer Elsewhere: Global Divas and Border Patrol in Mayra Santos Febre's *Sirena Selena vestida de pena*," Dara E. Goldman, Univ. of Illinois, Urbana.

Tuesday, 30 December

10:15 a.m.

726. Travels and Travelers in the Portuguese Speaking World

10:15-11:30 a.m., *Boardroom, San Diego Marriott*

Presiding: Anna Klobucka, Univ. of Massachusetts, North Dartmouth

Tuesday, 30 December

12:00 noon

752. Medieval Forgeries, Fakes, and Imposters: Then and Now

12:00 noon-1:15 p.m., *Warner Center, San Diego Marriott*

3. "Faking It with an Arab Accent," Lourdes María Alvarez, Catholic Univ. of America.

753. Letters, Diaries, Memoirs as Cultural Memory

12:00 noon-1:15 p.m., *Boardroom, San Diego Marriott*

Presiding: Maryellen Bieder, Indiana Univ., Bloomington

1. "Concha Méndez: Memorias habladas, memorias armadas," Margaret H. Persin, Rutgers Univ., New Brunswick



MLA 2002 Conference Papers

“Es que es muy facha”: Ideologically Suspicious Feminists and Hispanic Feminist Scholarship and Teaching

Joyce Tolliver
University of Illinois-Urbana

One of the myriad discoveries I made during my first trip to Spain during graduate school was that, indeed, there were many, many more Spanish women writers than my M.A. reading list would suggest. Feeling like a famished woman surveying the laden banquet table, I knew I could not read, much less buy, every female-authored work that caught my eye in the bookstores, so I asked a well-read non-academic madrileña friend for advice. What authors did she enjoy reading? She mentioned a few whose work I had already discovered—Rodoreda, Roig, Tusquets. How about Rosa Chacel? , I asked . My friend’s face took on an expression of disbelief, mixed with embarrassment. “¿Chacel? Es que...es muy facha, ¿no?” I gathered that Chacel, having sat at the feet of Ortega y Gasset, was at best a shameful example of how women’s talents could be ideologically misdirected. So I shelved Chacel for a while, not wanting to give anyone the wrong impression, were they to see Teresa or *Memorias de Leticia Valle* sticking out of my backpack. Several years later (during which time I bravely read both of those novels without any noticeable damage to my liberal feminist values) I found myself at a social event, again in Spain, where I was surrounded by academics who worked in fields outside of literature. When I was asked about my research, I mentioned my current project on the stories of Emilia Pardo Bazán. “Ajá, La Condesa,” my interlocutor replied, stroking his beard. He narrowed his eyes a bit and peered at me rather suspiciously. “Era muy facha.” I explained that, while Pardo Bazán’s identification with the aristocracy, and her class politics in general, were certainly annoying and perhaps even objectionable, she was also a crucial figure in the history of Spanish feminism. “Pues sí,” was the reply, “Muy facha.”

For some time, I wondered at, and tried to understand, the “muy facha” stigma that had been attached to certain Spanish women writers, whose work I found to be fascinating and even crucial to an understanding of what I thought of as a tradition of women’s writing in Spain. I assumed that the notion that readers could somehow be ideologically contaminated by reading works of women whose class ideology was suspicious was one not shared by specialists in literature, and certainly not by feminist researchers. But when I began to listen more carefully to the conversations of my colleagues, and to read our feminist scholarship more carefully, I began to notice more and more instances of what I came to think of as the “muy facha” school of feminist thought. I felt vaguely guilty, perhaps, about admiring the gender ideology of writers whose class prejudices were such that they barely acknowledged the existence of people who came from a social background like that of my own family—working class folk with little formal education. But my subtle feelings of guilt were replaced by a sense of dismay when a graduate student related to me the reaction of one of her professors upon learning that she intended to research an aspect of the fiction of Concha Espina. The student was told, in no uncertain terms, that it would be a waste of time to dedicate her energies to the work of this author, who was, after all...you guessed it: “muy facha.” But perhaps the “muy facha” way of thinking was explainable as an entirely logical response to the trauma of the Franco dictatorship, a reaction that it was certainly not my place to question. Or perhaps not. After a discussion of the unsettling class prejudices expressed in Rosalía de Castro’s “The Bluestockings” [“Las literatas”], I put the question to the undergraduate students in my class on women’s literature, most of whom were not Spanish majors and many of whom were majoring in the hard sciences and engineering. Could we possibly conceive of a feminist writer who was not particularly sensitive to



issues of class and race? One student raised her hand immediately—the one student in the class who had registered for the class under the Women’s Studies rubric. “No, that is not possible,” she said firmly. “Feminist writing always expresses a recognition that gender, race, and class are related.” She was, of course, right. And that was part of the problem.

Most western feminist academics, in the past quarter century or so, have assumed an understanding of feminism that posits the indivisibility of the “holy trinity” (gender, race, and class). Indeed, one could argue that academic feminists have made perhaps their most significant contribution to western feminist philosophy through the recognition that these three forms of oppression are inextricably intertwined, and essential to the formation of patriarchy. But when we find it impossible to separate the three aspects of the “trinity” in our analyses of interventions in the conversations regarding feminism and the “woman question” of earlier periods, we run the risk of limiting the scope of our analysis to only those figures whose ideologies of class and/or race appeal to a late-twentieth century sensibility: it becomes impossible, by definition, to conceive of any authentic feminism that is not also anti-classist and anti-racist.

When it comes to scholarship on feminism, we often want to assume that an “authentic” feminist, by definition, should always work to dismantle all oppressive institutions; that there must be a symmetry between what one thinks, writes, and says about gender issues, and what one thinks, writes, and says about other aspects of the patriarchy. At the same time, on the other hand, many of us find it easy to acknowledge the important contributions made by male anti-racist theoreticians and activists whose gender ideology is questionable; likewise, many of us find no inherent contradiction in applying theories of economic and social class that were propounded by frankly misogynistic men. And, of course, the “holy trinity” vision of feminism as a basis for a lived practice, or even for a code of ethics, is clearly idealistic: most of us who have worked in the Academy for any length of time have witnessed painfully disappointing instances of classism and racism in our own feminist heroes, in our feminist colleagues, or even in ourselves—not to mention instances, even among scholars of women’s writing, of the sort of competitiveness, backstabbing, and gangsterism that makes one really wonder about Carol Gilligan’s theories of female collaborative behavior.

I do not mean to imply that we should fragment the “holy trinity”; not only is its existence, by now, feminist doctrine, but it is feminist doctrine that I think is theoretically robust, and that, as an ideal, serves to make the world a better place. But I would like to argue that an unquestioned assumption of the trinitarian definition of feminism is fundamentally anti-historicist. As Karen Offen’s recent study makes clear, the term “feminism” (and its equivalents in other languages) only entered the lexicon fairly recently, and certainly not before the 1870s (19). When it did enter the language—and it seems to have appeared first in French—it was “commonly used as a synonym for women’s emancipation” (Offen, 19). Taking into account a broad range of evidence drawn from archival sources that document women’s emancipation movements in a variety of western cultures, Offen suggests the following baseline definition of feminism: “the name given to a comprehensive critical response to the deliberate and systematic subordination of women as a group by men as a group within a given cultural setting” (20). This definition, obviously, is an historical, and not a philosophical or theoretical one; it does not attempt to link the critical response to women’s subordination to a critical response to other types of subordination (e.g. those based on race or class). In fact, speaking strictly as a feminist historian, and contrasting her own historical perspective with a feminist philosophical perspective, Offen rejects the notion that “feminism is—or should be—’a movement that challenges all injustices.’” Instead, it is, she says, “a theory and a practice that challenges one injustice” (15-16).



The historical separation of feminism from other types of challenges to injustice is perhaps seen most vividly in the relationship of European feminist movements to the socialist and anarchist movements. Certainly, feminist movements at the turn of the century did not always challenge class biases; even more certainly, socialist and anarchist movements did not always challenge gender biases. The Asociación Nacional de Mujeres Españolas—which Scanlon describes both as “la organización feminista más importante de España” [of the early twentieth century] and as politically conservative and socially elitist (203)—strongly supported the inclusion of Article 36, guaranteeing women’s right to vote, in the new Republican Constitution. Victoria Kent, on the other hand, who represented the Radical Socialist Party in the Cortes Constituyentes, argued that to give the vote to Spanish women would be fatal to the Republic, since women were not yet politically sophisticated enough to support the socialist cause. Likewise, in 1904, Carmen de Burgos stated that feminism was necessarily an elitist movement, one that was irreconcilable with anarchism: “Las mujeres del pueblo, enténdase esto bien, no son nunca feministas, sino esencialmente anarquistas” (7). Federica Montseny, the Spanish anarchist leader, was known for her firm rejection of feminist postulations and initiatives, asserting the primacy of “humanismo” over “feminismo.”

As Offen, Mary Nash, Shirley Mangini, Geraldine Scanlon, and others have demonstrated, the feminist debates of nineteenth-century Europe, and specifically those of Spain, were tightly intertwined with other cultural polemics, first and foremost, perhaps, the rise of positivism, which influenced social and scientific theories alike. Many self-identified feminists of this period accepted, at least to some degree, the now-questionable ideological tenets of positivism, which were used to support theories of racial inferiority; many also promoted overtly elitist class ideologies. In like fashion, in the years leading up to and after the Spanish Civil War, the right of middle-class women to work for pay outside the home—one of the primary causes defended by nineteenth-century feminists—is once again defended, but by women whose political ideology is thoroughly repugnant to most of us. To elide these ethical and ideological complexities in order to make more palatable the image of figures like Emilia Pardo Bazán, Concepción Gimeno de Flaquer, or Carmen de Burgos, is to deny history, to insist on reading the works of these figures outside of their historical context. Likewise, to exclude from our scholarly analyses, and from our course syllabi, figures such as Concha Espina, Carmen Conde, Rosa Chacel, or even Carmen de Icaza, on the grounds of their suspicious political ideology, is to reject an opportunity for study that might lead to a fuller understanding of the role of women in the genealogy of gender ideology and feminism. Fortunately, Chacel’s work has received a fair amount of critical commentary; Espina’s less so, but work on her is far from non-existent. In recent years, Michael Ugarte, Roberta Johnson, and Judith Kirkpatrick have done particularly cogent studies of her work; and Anna-Marie Aldaz has just published a translation of her novel *El metal de los muertos*. On the other hand, both Carmen Conde and Carmen de Icaza seem to suffer incurably from the “muy facha” stigma. I see as an encouraging corrective to this tendency the recent work done by Chela Andreu, not only on Icaza but also on the writings of Spanish fascist women in general, and on the relationship between the Sección Femenina and popular postwar women’s literature.

By no means am I suggesting that we renounce the Trinity. But when we uphold the holy trinity by blacklisting women writers and thinkers who get failing grades on their class ideology, by refusing to read or teach or analyze the works of those authors whose political ideology makes us uncomfortable, ironically, we ourselves perpetuate an essentially elitist notion of what it means to be a feminist, one based on recent first-world academic formulations of feminism. Further, we commit the “generational fallacy”: the “simplistic teleology of assuming that later theory is therefore better theory, and the best theory of all is the position from which we happen at the moment to be speaking” (Barrett and Phillips 7)—a logic which, ironically enough, is now anachronistic, being “quintessentially nineteenth-century and modernist,” grounded as it is in the Marxist model of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis (Barrett and Phillips 7). I’d like to suggest that, as we teach and research the history of Hispanic feminisms and gender ideologies, we try to be a bit more conscious of “the position from which we happen at the moment to be speaking,” and to realize that that position is likely very different from the positions taken by the women whose works we study. I am suggesting, ultimately, that our study of the history of



Hispanic women's writing, and of Hispanic feminist writing in particular, pay as much attention to the history of feminism as we have paid to the philosophy of feminism. When we do this, I suspect we will find that to expect all feminist texts, by definition, to rigorously challenge all aspects of the patriarchy is, as Offen (16) says, simply "asking too much."

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Issues in Feminist Research: The Case of Estela Canto

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The question posed by this panel, how to practice feminist criticism and research within Hispanic texts and culture, leads me to reread my favorite definitions of feminism. For me, they are contained primarily in a volume published in 1987 called *Feminist Issues in Literary Scholarship*, itself largely a reprint of an award-winning special issue of the *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, of two years earlier. In her introduction, Catherine Stimpson lists four principles of feminist criticism which I will here reduce to two: a recognition of the role gender has played in language and history, politics and culture; and a need to act to change the status quo. As scholars and critics our role is, according to Stimpson, "to seek out and then to codify the texts women have produced" (2). As we know, in the intervening years since the volume appeared the basic premise of this endeavor has led to a sea change in the way we read and what we read. Whatever has happened since 1987, including a deconstruction of the word "women," I consider that Stimpson's fundamental definition still serves, even across cultural boundaries—would one argue that Hispanic culture has been immune from male-dominated language and history?—and that at least one activity of the scholar is to seek out and try to understand texts written by women. Of course, this is easier said than done. Virginia Woolf herself, in *A Room of One's Own* (1929), admitted to being "twitched away" by women's writing because it veered from what is understood as the "common stuff of humanity" (95). She admits to feeling relief upon returning to works by men. Despite declarations in this country announcing the age of post-feminism, evidence abounds to suggest that we are still struggling with this impulse, that is, to define male experience as universal and anything too overtly female as marginal, embarrassing, derivative, conventional/conservative, simplistic, and in Spanish we must add, "cursi."

My work on Silvina Ocampo, an Argentine writer of the "boom" generation, and my interest generally in women writers of the mid-twentieth century, has confirmed my suspicion that these writers struggled at least as much as their nineteenth-century counterparts to put their own experience into words, to find ways to represent in fiction a particularly feminine subjectivity. In every culture—from Virginia Woolf to Alfonsina Storni, Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath to Alejandra Pizarnik—the supposedly free "new woman" of the first half of the twentieth century found mostly despair, in fiction (or poetry) and in "life." The attempt to write was still a task which ran counter to every expectation of feminine existence. Maybe we in the twenty-first century have come a long way as writers and scholars, but in looking back, we must, in my view, take this struggle into account. Indeed, it is this struggle which makes our presence here possible, at the MLA and in the academy. But historical readings are only one step. While various post-modern theories are widely supposed to conflict with such a reading, I believe theoretical approaches actually open many texts in ways not possible without them. In particular, psychoanalytic feminist theory has been invaluable in helping to identify the ways in which we—all of us—are complicit in maintaining patriarchal structures. We biological women have a stake in patriarchy; undoing its unconscious hold on us is a slow and painstaking task. Psychoanalytic theory can help to do several things: to recognize the small steps which literary imagination can occasionally make in breaking out of old patterns, to have patience for the inevitable lapses which occur either in the authors we read or in ourselves as critics. While psychoanalysis helps to identify the unconscious ways in which gender functions, and allows us to dream of an ungendered world, deconstruction allows us to imagine hanging on to gendered identity, but to



work to eliminate the imbalance of power between the two poles of the male-female dichotomy. So, in life and in work, I want it all: a recuperative history, an activist agenda, a combination of theoretical approaches.

In choosing Estela Canto as a case study here, I turn to a writer who began publishing in mid-century (1945) who has been largely forgotten both by U.S. feminist scholars as well as by those in her native Argentina. My interest, like that of others, was kindled when in 1989 Estela Canto published a kind of biography called *Borges a contraluz* in which she relates her personal experiences with the famous writer as mentor, would-be lover, and finally friend. Her chief claim in this book is that Borges's dedication to her of his famous story, "El Aleph," hints at the story's basis in their brief love affair. The book, when it appeared, offered a fascinating new glimpse of Borges in which, among other things, Canto reveals that at one point he asked her to attend several psychiatric sessions with him and that his mother presented a constant barrier, not just to their affair and potential marriage, but years later, to their friendship. The key moment relevant to my analysis here is Canto's claim that Borges asked her to marry him, but she refused unless they entered a sexual relationship first. This impasse ended one phase of the relationship: he could not agree to have sex outside of marriage, she refused to marry without first having sex. Dan Balderston has pointed out that although the book is about Borges, Canto takes the opportunity to remind her readers of her own prolific literary production. Balderston also highlights passages from the book and comments from a personal interview with Canto to confirm that in retrospect she did blame herself for inflicting more pain than she knew on Borges: "El hecho de que yo haya creído tan fácil lo que supuse muestra hasta qué punto estaba alejada de los problemas reales de él, hasta qué punto era yo egoísta e insensible (111)" (quoted in Balderston 136). Alberto Moreiras has discussed Canto's first two novels, *El muro de mármol* and *El retrato y la imagen* (1950) as veiled responses to Borges's "El Aleph." Borges's hilarious story situates the hidden precious object, the aleph, within the house formally occupied by his now dead beloved, Beatriz Viterbo. In her intertextual play with this notion, Canto's fiction seems to present one dead female body after another to show that the ecstatic vision of Borges's fictional quest cannot be available through female sacrifice. Though Moreiras suggests no specifically feminist impulse on Canto's part and he restricts his remarks to the two novels written just before and just after the key episodes with Borges, I believe that the intertextual conversation continues for years following and that it does obey a feminist protest of a personal sort. That a woman who is at first seen as object of desire may turn out to have (transgressive) desires of her own is repeatedly viewed with horror by the male characters of Canto's fiction. In other words, she repeatedly revisits in her novels experience lived out with Borges. If Canto seems to take a somewhat matter of fact tone in discussing the impasse she reached with Borges in her biography, her fiction views it with an acute level of anxiety.

The obsessive theme of Canto's fiction, starting with her 1945 novel, *El muro de mármol*, is the crime of passion. Generally it is a woman who is killed in these narratives, and always the crime is "perfect," in the sense of unpunished. To the world of the fiction, the murders appear to be accidents or suicide, and only the narrator and reader know the truth. The motivation for the murders is, not surprisingly, jealousy; but more particularly, it is the victim's refusal to remain in her place which occasions her violent death. In *El muro de mármol*, for instance, the woman in question has been viewed almost exclusively within the confines of the house, appropriately named in the title as a kind of prison. When she contemplates leaving it with a lover, she is shot by a young boy who has been acting as go-between. The boy murderer is also the narrator, and it is clear from this privileged interior vantage that throughout his tale he is in thrall to both people, the woman and her lover. The shooting remains to the end extremely ambiguous, since he seems unaware of his own complex motivations for doing something "accidentally on purpose." Canto's 1953 novel, *El hombre del crepúsculo*, comes at this theme with the characters reversed. The murderer is again the point of perspective for the reader, but this time he is a much-older



obsessed with a young girl, only 15 years old. The girl jumps off a cliff into the sea and the world sees a suicide; however, the readers of this novel are led to believe that she was pushed, either physically or emotionally, by the narrator who repeatedly accuses her of being impure. Canto explores over and over the idea that men react with shock and murderous rage at women's sexual freedom. This plot line might offer the opportunity to explore male rage and jealousy, but the male murderers are viewed as innocently unaware of their own passions. It is dismaying to suspect that most readers would view the female victims of these novels as in some way "asking for it."

Two later novels, *Los otros, las máscaras* (1973) and *La hora detenida* (1976), reproduce this plot yet again, continuing a literary conversation now thirty years old. Both novels published in the 1970s refer to specific political activities as background to the crime of passion, and make social class a point of contention within the plot. These two novels bring the exploration of female guilt to a head, with surprising results. The earlier of the two, *Los otros, las máscaras* (1973) depicts the young woman-victim, called Pirincha, as a sort of upper-class bachelorette play-girl. She is first seen in a bar somewhere in Rio de Janeiro, where she publically kisses a black man; the narrator thereby assumes that she is a prostitute. Later when she takes the narrator to a beach and seduces him, he discovers to his surprise that she is a virgin and he falls in love, assuming his feeling are reciprocated. Still later, another character tells him that she is not exactly a virgin since she prefers to have sex with women. The narrator never knows exactly what to think of her, and repeats this roller coaster of misinterpretation throughout the novel. Even though the reader is not as tied to his information and reactions as in other of Canto's novels, ultimately we too have little understanding of Pirincha's motivation or character. One description of her apartment seems to describe her better than any other element of the novel. Its impersonal luxury, faked elegance, and contempt for items that might be useful—the refrigerator is noted for its "mezquina vejez" in contrast to the other expensive goods—portray Pirincha as lost in a vacuous society devoid of warmth or tradition which has freed her only to inflict harm on herself and on others. Indeed, her greatest ambition, defined in this same scene, is not to *play* Shakespeare's Juliet in the performance the characters are producing, but to *be* Juliet. Pirincha says that she wants to "entregarse del todo," "confiar incluso ante la muerte" (124). The conclusion that Pirincha sought her own death is thus supported in various moments in the text.

The narrator-murderer is a Marxist, or at least someone who is marginally involved with the organization. In the novel's conclusion he is portrayed as married to a woman from "más allá de Liniers," a working-class neighborhood then at the outskirts of Buenos Aires, and views the Barrio Norte as almost a different world where he says he never ventures after the murder. It is at this juncture that Pirincha's real name, María Inés French, seems especially relevant. French, as is pointed out in the narrative, is the name of a street which runs through Buenos Aires's elegant neighborhoods. The narrator's brush with his female victim is overtly allegorized in the novel as an unpleasant encounter with a decadent upper class. What are we to make of a character who murders the upper-class woman whom he considers frivolous and immoral and lives happily ever after with his grounded and kind working class wife? Is this Canto's metaphor for social revolution? Is she transforming the crime of passion into a political allegory?

Her subsequent novel, *La hora detenida* of 1976, goes some way to confirm this reading. I will not rehearse its complicated plot. Suffice it to say here that the title refers to the moment in 1952 when Eva Perón dies and for days after the clocks of Buenos Aires were halted at 8:25. The title's significance only becomes clear as the novel nears its conclusion. Indeed, the novel seems to have started off with a new version of the crime of passion, this time with the narrator-murderer as a woman and the victim a man; in the last third the narrative emphasis shifts, marginal characters become central and others disappear. The crime of passion is almost lost to view in these new twists of the plot. Evita's death, mentioned only as background throughout, becomes the focus of the novel's conclusion. The novel ends with the two sisters joining the line of





mourners waiting to walk past Evita's coffin. The last words seem to have little to do with the rest of the novel, but have a great deal to do with Canto's other works. One sister says as they join the long line: "Vamos a ver lo que no hemos visto, vamos a ver la culpa" (256). Here is another dead female body who in Canto's fiction is viewed as responsible for harm done and for her own death. Now Canto has transferred her personal obsession onto a macropolitical level.

The fact that the novel was written in 1976, a fateful moment in Argentine history, about 1952, another fateful moment, suggests that the kind of micropolitical reading that I have been doing needs to shift gears to include Canto's evident attempt to do what Tulio Halperin Dongui suggests is necessary, to reread the past in light of the present. He names David Viñas and Ricardo Piglia as authors who do just that in their fictions (particularly of 1980 and '81). Canto, like them, writes about the past as a way of understanding the terror of the contemporary moment; Canto's novel presents a complex vision of a society going profoundly wrong. It seems too that she blames a woman for the situation. Just as Estela Canto blames herself for (aggravating) Borges's sexual problems, she blames Evita for the nation's. Feminist scholars will find these an undeniably painful set of images. But instead of turning away, I would argue that we should pay attention to both the obsessive need to revisit the issue of monstrous female sexuality and the troubling image of nation that ultimately emerges.

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“The Return of the Poetess and Other Gynocritical Anachronisms: the Portuguese Context”

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The gynocritical paradigm in feminist theory and criticism, as defined by Elaine Showalter in her influential essay, “Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness” (1978), and fleshed out in what can be described as its founding texts, Showalter’s *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) and Sandra M. Gilbert’s and Susan Gubar’s *Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), has become over the last two decades an empowering framework for a considerable number of critical studies aiming to trace a specifically female literary tradition in various national and transnational contexts. To give but one among many possible examples, monographs published in the series *Women in Context* (Athlone Press) are historical investigations (dating back to mid-nineteenth century) of women’s writing in, respectively, Norway, Italy, France, Sweden, and so on. Showalter herself had projected that feminist studies proceeding from gynocritical postulates would aim to investigate and theorize such subjects as “the psychodynamics of female creativity; linguistics and the problem of the female language; the trajectory of the individual or collective female literary career; literary history; and, of course, studies of particular writers and works” (1992, 382). Some of these pathways of inquiry—especially those dependent on the potentially essentializing and homogenizing notions of “female creativity” and “female language”—were soon to be accused, on the one hand, of relying on a naively tautological assumption “that a ‘feminine’ identity is one which signs itself with a feminine name” (Kamuf 285) and, on the other, of ignoring or diminishing the constitutive importance of racial, ethnic and geopolitical differences among women writers. By contrast, socially and historically contextualized investigations focusing on the politics of canonicity and the symbolic and ideological constructs shaping national literary histories were energized by the gynocritical call to arms, while at the same time remaining relatively immune to the charges of theoretical and political nearsightedness.

In her own recent (1998) contribution to the series *Women in Context*, *Spanish Women’s Writing 1849-1996*, Catherine Davies recognizes that the last two decades of the twentieth century witnessed “a surge of books on the culture and history of Spanish women” and of “excellent critical studies” on the literary production by women in Spain (1). While it is debatable to what extent this dynamic publishing activity (rooted largely, although not exclusively, in Anglo-American academic environments) has affected canonical constructs of critical and literary-historical writing in Spain itself, it appears that the gynocritical model (as represented, among others, by Susan Kirkpatrick’s pioneering study *Las Románticas: Women Writers and Subjectivity in Spain, 1835-1850* [1989] or John C. Wilcox’s more recent *Women Poets of Spain, 1860-1990. Toward a Gynocentric Vision* [1997]), has interfaced well with the Spanish literary and cultural contexts, especially of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

It is through an examination, however cursory, of this contrastive Iberian setting that we can perceive with greater clarity the unique challenges that arise when the gynocritical paradigm of historical-literary investigation is tentatively deployed in the Portuguese context and the urgent need for a wide-reaching, theoretically grounded debate on actual and potential directions that feminist criticism of Portuguese literature has taken and/or may be hoped to take. As a theoretical and pragmatic viewpoint, gynocriticism is dependent on historical depth; it is only against the background of *longues* (or at least medium-sized) *durées* that explicit or implicit genealogical plotting of patterns of intertextual or metaliterary connectedness among individual women writers or literary generations can occur. In formal terms, such studies rely on relational and developmental modes of inquiry; they emphasize patterns of historical (dis)continuity and foreground such key concepts as trajectory, evolution, recovery, reinterpretation, or rewriting.

Yet, the archaeological excavation that provides the foundation for Isabel Allegro de Magalhães’s *O tempo das mulheres* (1987)—the first (and to date only) book-length essay published in Portugal



that is framed by a historically grounded gynocritical perspective—presents itself as working against all-but-overwhelming odds in attempting to reach back from the second half of the twentieth century toward female-gendered antecedents of contemporary Portuguese women writers. Almost each of Magalhães’s brief chapters on the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the Romanticism begins with an apologetic disclaimer: “A Idade Média não nos deixou a obra literária de nenhuma daquelas mulheres poetisas e rainhas que ilustram a literatura medieval de outros países” (103); “O século XIX parece não ter tido em Portugal mulheres [escritoras] como as que outros lugares na Europa viram crescer” (171). Similarly, in her more recent (1997) critical overview of cultural and political contexts informing the work of twentieth-century Portuguese women writers, Graça Abranches frames her discussion by stating that,* in comparison with other Western European countries, Portuguese culture was historically marked by a far more profound and extensive “mutismo cultural” imposed on women by the social establishment and by a far more absolute dominance of a “texto social masculino, monológico e homossocial” (2). The correlate all-but-complete absence of plausible writing foremothers recorded, however marginally, by national literary history is thus one generally cited reason for the scarcity of critical endeavors purporting to construe an autonomous tradition of women’s literature or, more broadly speaking, of female-gendered symbolic production in the context of Portuguese culture. The effective weight of this deterrent may well be questioned: after all, in 1924 Thereza Leitão de Barros was able to write and publish a two-volume history of Portuguese women writers from the Renaissance to the late nineteenth century, an ambitiously designed proto-feminist project with no real precedent nor—lamentably so—any worthy successor. Its power as an argument against historically-minded gynocritical endeavors is, however, greatly enhanced by the prominent presence in the Portuguese literary canon of female-voiced masterpieces that are known to have been authored by men, from the Medieval *cantigas de amigo*, through the Renaissance novella *Menina e moça*, to the paradigmatically ambiguous case of the *Lettres portugaises*, long believed to be written by the seventeenth-century Portuguese nun Mariana Alcoforado, but now generally attributed to a French male writer. Suspicion of the female signature as a guarantor of feminine authenticity is thus inherently inscribed in the Portuguese literary canon, conspiring, together with weak evidence of certifiably female authorship, to preempt or at least hamper any gynocritical projects that do not devise preemptive strategies of their own in confronting this uniquely problematic situation.

Yet another, less immediately evident but more structurally insidious obstacle to the construction of a gynocritical perspective in Portuguese literary history is the asynchronous relationship between the evolution of feminist theory and praxis on the international scene, especially in Anglo-American academic contexts, and the (non-)corresponding state of affairs in contemporary Portuguese intellectual culture. To be sure, the early to mid-1970 witnessed an extended instance of nearly absolute synchronicity between developments on the scene of international feminism(s) and the revolutionary struggle of Portuguese women against fascist and patriarchal oppression, as epitomized by the manifesto-like *Novas Cartas Portuguesas* (1972): the book’s suppression by the Caetano regime and the trial it mounted against the three authors (Maria Isabel Barreno, Maria Teresa Horta and Maria Velho da Costa, a.k.a. “the Three Marias”) echoed around the world, as feminist movements throughout Western Europe and the Americas led an international campaign of protest against the Portuguese government. Rapidly translated into English and French (not to mention other languages), *Novas Cartas* became, at least for a while, the most internationally renowned work of Portuguese literature since *Camões*, largely owing to the multiple ways in which it resonated with second-wave global feminist activism of its time. And yet, as Linda S. Kauffman has pointed out, many reviews of *The Three Marias* (the title under which the English translation of the book was originally published) that appeared in the US and the UK showed a consistent pattern of anachronistic misreading: the text, deemed by a number of reviewers to be “outmoded” in its way of articulating amorous discourse and discourse on women’s issues, was in effect, as Kauffman contends, ahead of its Anglophone critics who failed to perceive its avant-garde theoretical dimension, akin for instance to Julia Kristeva’s poststructural textual strategies (Kauffman 308-10).



If asynchronous *desfasamento* of method and purpose can be detected already in the process of the international reception of *Novas Cartas*—this in spite of the spectacular, short-term political coming together that the book’s publication and suppression provoked—it would only become more pronounced in the subsequent years. In Portugal, the mid-1970s heyday of feminist political activism was not followed by a consolidation of feminist cultural politics at the institutional level, particularly in the humanities. If in the United States the 1980s saw the rise of Women’s Studies programs at universities nationwide and by the 1990s, despite incontrovertible evidence of anti-feminist “backlash” in American media and politics, the institutionalization of the discipline was no longer subject to controversy, in Portugal no comparable development took place, although some traditional disciplines have proven less resistant than others to the rise of feminist scholarship. Today, the only MA program in Women’s Studies in the country (at Lisbon’s Universidade Aberta) has a strong concentration in history and the social sciences, literature being conspicuously absent from the roster of electives in other disciplines that complete the history-based curriculum (anthropology, sociology, linguistics and psychology) (Branco 8).

The effective near-absence of institutionally legitimized feminist scholarship in literary studies in Portugal (with the possible exception of some Anglo-American studies programs) is compounded by the cultural environment in which most “discussions” of literary production by women tend to begin—and inevitably end—with the mindlessly reiterated, worn-out question, “Haverá mesmo escrita feminina?” It is of relatively little comfort that such paralyzing fixation on ontological apriorism is not unique to Portugal: in the opening pages of her witty and keenly argued essay, *Literatura y mujeres: escritoras, público y crítica en la España actual*, Laura Freixas addresses a rhetorical question to herself and to her fellow women writers and readers: “¿Cómo responder, por ejemplo, . . . cuando nos formulan la originalísima pregunta (recurrente, me figuro, porque las también originalísimas respuestas suelen dejarnos exactamente donde estábamos) de si existe una literatura femenina?” (18). As one recent example from the Portuguese context will illustrate, the answers tend to be not only unoriginal but often heavily predetermined. A year and a half ago, the magazine section of the weekly *Expresso* accompanied its cover story on the writer Maria Velho da Costa with a two-part *inquérito* entitled “A escrita tem sexo?” Answering in the affirmative was the designated feminist of Portuguese literature, member of the historic collective of the Three Marias, the now sixtyish Maria Teresa Horta, whose smiling grandmotherly photo printed next to her response was an eloquent reminder of her generational affiliation. It also contrasted vividly with the image of the woman writer entrusted with expressing the opposite point of view (“A escrita tem sexo? Não”), the young and fashionably intellectual Mafalda Ivo Cruz, whose hard-set and defiant face scowling at the reader from her photo reinforced the uncompromising tenor of her declarations (“Quando me falam de ‘escrita feminina’ tenho tendência a deixar de ouvir para fugir ao tédio”). As this episode helps demonstrate, the self-perpetuating sterility of much pseudo-critical discourse ostensibly interested in addressing the putative interface between gendered identity and literary production is locked in a vicious circle with the generally marginal status accorded serious feminist scholarship in the Portuguese humanities. Just as importantly, the way in which the juxtaposition of the two statements was designed and presented by *Expresso* clearly betrays a perception of the key gynocritical article of faith—that literary writing is a gendered activity—as an anachronistic leftover from the 1970s (the decade with which Horta as a writer and activist is strongly associated), out of place in the theoretically sophisticated, ironically knowing intellectual climate of the twenty-first century.¹

In face of such challenges, it is my contention that models of both theoretical and political strategies that can be used to bypass the tired and ultimately uninspiring stalemate illustrated by the above example need to be sought as well in the work—if not necessarily in explicit declarations to the press—of contemporary Portuguese women writers, many of whom have continued the gynocritical project of *Novas Cartas Portuguesas*, as Hilary Owen, among



others, has argued with regard to the fiction of Teolinda Gersão, Hélia Correia, Olga Gonçalves, and Lídia Jorge. The writer whose work has particularly inspired my own thinking about these issues in recent times, and on whom I will therefore focus my remaining comments here, is the poet Adília Lopes, an increasingly prominent presence on the Portuguese literary scene since 1985 (the year in which she published her inaugural volume, *Um jogo bastante perigoso*).

Indices of a gynocritical perspective are on prominent display throughout Lopes's work. As Elfriede Engelmeyer has claimed in her postscript to Lopes's volume of collected poetry, the author's choice of epigraphs for the collection—quotations from Agustina Bessa-Luís and Sophia de Mello Breyner Andresen, the two matriarchal figures of contemporary Portuguese letters, to whom the book is also dedicated—is a conscious declaration of gendered genealogical affinity (470). Such a gesture is, in fact, something of a personal trademark for Lopes: scanning the heavy volume of her *Obra* (comprising poems published from 1985 till 2000) renders glimpses of virtually all major Portuguese women poets of the twentieth century, from Florbela Espanca and Irene Lisboa, to Sophia, Natália Correia, Fiama Hasse Pais Brandão and others, not to mention many non-Portuguese women writers (Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, Clarice Lispector, and so on), while the book's illustration consists of three original etchings by the London-based Portuguese painter Paula Rego.

At the same time, however, as she signals her indebtedness to the historical continuum of female creativity, Lopes emphasizes and, indeed, embraces the theoretical and ideological challenges that such a gynocritical project entails, especially when undertaken in the Portuguese context. Given the constraints of space, I will concentrate here on a single aspect of her work, which nevertheless assumes central importance with regard to the task of strategic (re)construction of feminist perspectives in literary and cultural studies in Portugal: Lopes's interest in, and performative exploration of, anachronism as a feminist (or, as I would argue, post-feminist) tactic aimed at shaking the reader out of ahistorical complacency and reactivating awareness of gender as an undeniably crucial factor of social and cultural hermeneutics.

Emblematic of this approach is the author's prominent parodic reclaiming for herself of the outdated (and now generally abandoned) label of "poetess": *poetisa*, not *poeta*, is how Lopes generally refers to herself in her lyric as well* as in other writings and interviews, and the word figures in the titles of two of her volumes (the 1997 *Clube de poetisa morta* and the 2001 anthology *Quem Quer Casar com a Poetisa?*). That this is a self-consciously historicist appropriation becomes clearly demonstrated in the ironically titled poem "Patronymica Romanica," where the poet traces the genealogy of her real name (Maria José da Silva Viana Fidalgo de Oliveira) through a matrilineal sequence that ends with her self-identification as a "freira poetisa barroca" (2000, 339). Another gesture of literary self-invention links Lopes to the paradigmatic poetess of Portuguese literature, Florbela Espanca (1895-1930); however, as demonstrated by the opening poem of the volume *Florbela Espanca espanca* (1999), with its profane rewriting of one of Florbela's most famous verses ("Eu quero foder foder / achadamente"), Lopes's tactics are boldly terrorist rather than quietly celebratory. As I have argued elsewhere (2003), the poet's evocation of Florbela reenacts one of literary feminism's signature operations from an oblique, displaced perspective that emphasizes gaps and absences as it proposes to found a Portuguese women's poetic tradition on the uncertain grounds of genealogical (dis)continuity and with recourse to what Abranches has termed "outras genealogias, ou tradições de escrita" (2).

Lopes's ingenious use of deceptively simple language and attention-grabbing iconoclasm as an instrument of feminist critique and analysis is perhaps most visibly on display in the poem "Poetisa-fêmea, poeta-macho (cliché em papel couché)" (2002, 39-41), which intertwines first-person discourses of parodic self-definition of male and female poetic subjects. While the female poet at first appears to be as much an object of parody as the male ("Eu estou nua / eu estou viva / eu sou eu // Eu uso gravata / e, olhe, não foi barata"), the poem gradually segues into a harsher and more politicized mode that broadens to encompass a critique of gendered



polarization of power in the social, political and discursive sphere (“Sou um poeta-macho / tenho um gabinete / sou uma poetisa-fêmea / escrevo na retrete // Sou um poeta-macho / sou um badalo / sou uma poetisa-fêmea / calo-me // . . . // Senhora doutora, / os seus seios / são feios // O poeta-macho / assina o despacho”). The poem is illustrated with a drawing of a woman seated on a toilet (“retrete”) with a closed cover, which she is using as a writing desk; the drawing echoes visually illustrations elsewhere in the book that can be taken to depict Lopes herself. Through thus inscribing her own poetic persona into her satirical evocation, Lopes signals her solidarity, if not outright identification, with the “poetisa” performatively brought to life in the poem. While that composite creature (whose one other referential correlative is the poet Natália Correia, explicitly mentioned in the last stanza) is not quite spared from the poem’s aggressive drive, she is also recovered and absorbed as a problematic, but very much recognizable ancestress, whose travails, establishing a close parallel between power politics of literary creation and the enactments of political power in the public sphere, are ultimately not quite a thing of the past. The apparently anachronistic polarizing split between “poeta-macho” and “poetisa-fêmea”—certain to attract opprobrium if it were performed in the context of literary critical interpretation—is thus deployed by Lopes in such a way as to foreground both its inherent absurdity and its pervasive relevance in the social world at large. In other words, rather than trivialize the discussion of writing and gender—as her intentionally crude terms might seem to suggest—she actually refines and complicates it, opening up the badly needed discursive space that is nonexistent in supposedly more ambitious but in effect limited and limiting discussions (such as the *Expresso* survey described above).

NOTES

1. An awareness of a need for preemptive arguments against potential charges of critical and theoretical anachronism clearly prompts the opening paragraph of Ana Paula Ferreira’s introduction to her recently published anthology of short stories by Portuguese women writers of the 1940s: “Num momento em que uma das categorias fundamentais de identidade, ser mulher ou homem, está sujeita a problematizações teóricas que colocam sob suspeita o seu valor referencial, não é fácil reerguer o bastão realista de antigos projectos feministas alarmados com a exclusão das mulheres de cânones literários estabelecidos” (2002, 13). However presumably anachronistic, such projects must nevertheless be undertaken, since, as Ferreira argues in another context, in Portuguese literary studies “there is still much need to address one of the most important items on feminist critical agendas of the late seventies and early eighties: the broadly historical and cultural project of recuperating forgotten women writers and read[ing] anew the Portuguese literary canon” (1998, 3).

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Looking at the Margins from the *Borderlands*:
Understanding Gender and Ethnicity in Brazilian Women's Literature

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This paper presents some ideas regarding gender and ethnicity and how they intersect and shape one's identity within the context of Brazilian culture. I chose the word "ethnicity" over "race" due to what I and other scholars consider the complexities of Brazilian society regarding issues of color, "race," ethnic origin, regional origin (as marked by facial features, skin color, speech accent, and so forth), and with regards also to class. Someone might claim that all these considerations are nothing more than ways of avoiding naming what should be named a matter of race identity. And, consequently, a way of avoiding the issue of racial discrimination and the effacement of the Other: the "black" culture or "Afro-Brazilian" culture. I am aware that over-emphasizing the amalgam of all these identity-shaping aspects could lead, paradoxically, "à ignorância da diferença e da multiplicidade," as Black Brazilian writer Miriam Alves has put it, since in Brazil it has invariably meant "a dominação de um [grupo] sobre o outro, no caso sempre predominando a cultura e etnia branca européia sobre as outras" (Penna 223).

In Brazil, the "ideologia da mestiçagem" (the old myth of a "racial democracy") has been predominant since nineteenth-century writers set out to define our national identity as different from—but not less noble than—the European. Such ideology, however, has been most often a means of securing the hegemony of a "cultura morena" identified with its white, "aristocratic" ties. Black Brazilian playwright and activist Abdias do Nascimento aptly describes this situation:

Uma das idéias que constituem o próprio cerne da 'democracia racial' é a de que um dia seremos todos 'morenos,' ou seja, pessoas de pele azeitonada, cabelos lisos, traços ditos 'finos' e ideologicamente vinculadas a alguma variante da cultura ocidental—ainda que possam ostentar traços secundários provenientes das culturas africanas ou indígenas. Aparentemente avançada em sua tolerância, essa idéia encerra, na verdade, a total impossibilidade de conviver com o outro, com o diferente de nós. (12-13)

Nascimento describes the ideological process of effacement by which those elements that characterize the Other are made to conform within the parameters of the accepted, dominant norm. In this way, we are all "morenos" (but thank God for the existing "Xuxas"!), and the "morenice" is just an embellishment of what our white, European forefathers gave us.

However, a question arises: how does the "moreno", or in the case here, the "morena," the "mestiça," live with and live out her "mestiçagem"? How does she negotiate being not one, not the other, but a cultural Other that is all those different, opposing, clashing elements? For those complexities that I mentioned at the very beginning of this paper—skin color, regional characteristics, class—cannot really be effaced, even if society and the individual herself pretend to ignore them. Again, the word "race" might say it all, but it must be continuously stressed that "Raça não é um conceito naturalizado e determinado biologicamente. Ao contrário, é uma categoria histórica, construída socialmente. . . . raça é uma categoria construída relacionalmente" (Luiz Alberto 63; my emphasis).

In addressing here the intersection of gender and ethnicity in Brazil as represented in the literature of Brazilian women writers, I take "ethnicity" to convey this relational dimension of the construction of one's identity. My concern is less with how the hegemonic ideology defines the racial/ethnic Other, but rather how the individual understands herself vis-à-vis all the elements that have impacted her sense of identity. In other words, I will focus not on how the "High" defines the "Low," but rather how the "Low" identifies herself.



I have been studying questions of female identity as it relates to race/ethnicity, regional origin, and class, in works by different Brazilian authors, among them Clarice Lispector, Helena Parente Cunha, Marilene Felinto, Miriam Alves, and Sonia Coutinho. For a few years now I have been questioning whether it would be appropriate to include Lispector's *The Hour of the Star* (1976) in a course on race and Latin American women writers (the course was not my own, but another professor's). To me it was a misunderstanding or lack of knowledge about Brazil to see Macabéa, Lispector's protagonist, as a black woman; and it seemed too simplistic to reduce *The Hour of the Star* to a novel about race, for Macabéa represents that amalgam of identities, and the subject's struggle with language.

The issue here is one we all have been cautioned about: the problems that often arise when scholars and students of literature employ Anglo-oriented theoretical lenses to examine literary works by Brazilian women writers. Or when such works are read in a wide context that does not account for the specifics and variants of Brazilian culture, or does not consider what I'm calling an "identity-amalgam." I want to propose that Gloria Anzaldúa's "New Mestiza methodology," and her conceptualizing of a "borderland existence" offer the US reader useful approaches to texts by Brazilian women writers that challenge the apparently clear-cut categories of "black" and "white," "Third World" and "Western" identities. Like Anzaldúa's mestiza, there exists a Brazilian "morena" who claims all aspects of her heritage in order to construct a sense of self. Rather than identifying with the dominant white culture, this "morena" seeks to transgress and transform it, as she celebrates and lives out the Other in herself. In this way, for this multidimensional "morena," as for Anzaldúa's mestiza, "alterity [is] power" (Saldívar-Hull 5), a transforming power.

At the same time, the concept of a "borderland existence" is a useful means to highlight the shifting position of the "morena" within Brazilian culture, as this position is determined by the subject's racial, ethnic, and class identity. A textual approach that focuses on the text's representation of actual socio-cultural borderlands can lead to a better understanding of the ambiguities and denials involving gender and ethnicity in Brazil. Anzaldúa tells us that "the Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy" (19). These words could have been written about Brazilian society, where the space between individuals has been shrinking more noticeably as more and more members of minority groups speak out, as social activists, as politicians, as artists, and writers. Authors such as Miriam Alves, Conceição Evaristo and Esmeralda Ribeiro have given expression to their social and cultural reality in their prose fiction, essays, and poetry. They identify themselves as Black Brazilian women, and in order to claim and assert their identity they evoke in their works African and Afro-Brazilian myths, gods, and historical figures, particularly female figures such as Iansã and Luiza Mahín. By privileging their African heritage, they underscore their identity as women who are the social Other living in the Bord Borderlands of Brazil.

The female subjects who speak up in the works of Alves, Evaristo and Ribeiro occupy a different position in Brazilian society from that often occupied by Sonia Coutinho's protagonists, on whose work I want to focus here. Coutinho's 1989 novel *Atire em Sofia* is an exemplary representation of the "morena" I discussed above. Sofia, as many of Coutinho's female protagonists, lives in those Borderlands that cross much of Brazilian culture, that ambiguous, grey area, always expanding and contracting, as ready to "welcome" the Other when convenient, as it is ready to expel her as an outsider, unwanted and unbecoming to the established order.

Coutinho was born in a small town in the state of Bahia, moved to the capital, Salvador, while still a child, and later to Rio de Janeiro where she has lived since 1968. Her novels and short stories frequently place these two cities in opposition: Salvador, more provincial and conservative, and with a strong African heritage, and Rio de Janeiro, a large cosmopolitan city



where one experiences all the problems common to a big urban center, among them loneliness, isolation, and anonymity. Her protagonists are generally middle-class women whose backgrounds are somewhat similar to the author's, having also moved from a provincial town to the Cosmopolis. There they find themselves split between the patriarchal traditions within which they grew up, and the new social values of the big city, with its promises of freedom, independence, and self-realization. The author often portrays marriage as patriarchal and repressive for women, and her paradigmatic female character is a single woman, either divorced or never married, who becomes aware of her social situation, of the obstacles she will have to overcome in order to achieve self-realization.

The protagonist of *Atire em Sofia* faces these same problems as a woman who has transgressed the dominant patterns of female behavior accepted in her native town of Salvador, to which she returns for a visit leaving behind the city of Rio de Janeiro where she had been living for years. Her transgression: wanting more than what a traditional marriage within the upper, "white" classes of Salvador had to offer a woman of her generation and of her social position—children, a nice home, maids, afternoon tea with her friends; and leaving everything behind for another man and, finally, for her social and psychological independence. In this way, various important elements come together to shape Sofia's identity. In addition to those I mention here (upper-class, patriarchal origin; family identification with "white" Eurocentric values; traditional marriage; motherhood; transgressive behavior), a most important aspect of Sofia's identity is her African heritage, one that is not acknowledged, much less accepted, by her family and original community.

Sofia is thus a multi-faceted subject who challenges cultural dualities that have served to imprison women in fixed positions: the white woman who marries, has children, and remains in the confines of the patriarchal home; or the other woman, the black, Indian or mulatta who has served that home, and serves the master in her bed. Says Coutinho: "From the beginning, I reacted to the myth that Bahia is a paradise, where all of the women are *Gabriela, Clove and Cinnamon*. Good-hearted and ready to do whatever a man wants. I was always entirely different from this, and I think that it left a mark upon my literature" (Interview 224). Thus Coutinho's protagonist rejects the single identity the dominant culture imposes upon her, and embraces, on the contrary, a multiethnic heritage of women: Lilith, the first woman; Maria Callas, seen in the novel as a madwoman; Maria Quitéria, a nineteenth-century Bahian woman who disguised herself as a man in order to fight for the country's independence against the Portuguese; and, foremost among them, Iansã, the Afro-Brazilian *orixá*, goddess of the tempests, the sexual *Oya* who is also a transgressor in the African pantheon of gods.

Coutinho brings into her novel the stories/histories of these and other women, reclaiming for Sofia their strength and rebelliousness, much as Anzaldúa has rewritten the stories of La Malinche, Our Lady of Guadalupe, and La Llorona. Sonia Saldivar-Hull has commented that Anzaldúa's strategy aims to "uncover the names and powers of the female deities whose identities have been submerged in Mexican history" (6). Coutinho uses a similar strategy, the result being a pantheon of female historical and mythical figures, one that is multiethnic and crosses space and time frames. These women come together to create a new female identity, and this identity is given expression through the use of diverse languages, among them, Yoruba, French, and English (in rock songs by Jim Morrison, and by the group Iron Maiden), in addition to Portuguese. In all, these languages, and these various women, speak of rebelliousness and transgression, and speak also of loneliness and exile. Foremost, the texts and the female voices woven together in *Atire em Sofia* create a narrative of resistance. Sofia, the Brazilian "morena" who negotiates multiple subject positions, displays and suffers the contradictions and ambiguities of Brazilian society. Living in the Borderlands, she can be desired and punished, accepted or rejected. Much like the "New Mestiza," this "morena" synthesizes the major elements that have come together to shape Brazil's cultural profile while, at the same time, rejecting the dominant ideology of effacement of



the Other. On the contrary, without ignoring all the elements that shape her identity, Sofia embraces the Other in herself, identifies with it, for the Other *is* the possibility of resistance and change.

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Thinking/Feeling Ourselves: The Embodied Cognitive Revolution and Some Examples for Gender and Cultural Studies

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This paper on embodied cognitive studies takes seriously the challenge of our MLA session's title, "New Approaches to Conducting Feminist Research," by sketching out new discoveries highly appropriate to our cultural and gender-centered concerns and interests. An embodied cognitive approach? Its very name points to its broad human consequences, but the fact that it focuses on the body/brain co-dependence makes it particularly attractive to feminist studies and fields traditionally marginalized. That is, the body/brain approach attests not only to what humans hold in common but to what makes each individual truly different. Cognitive studies are not Anglo-centric, nor Eurocentric nor specific to any ethnic group or gender, and thus they "level the playing field" among theoretical approaches by recognizing that we all have to use the same basic body functions in any and all our brain procedures. For example, no matter how superior or "rational" a dominant group might assume its self-justifying theories to be, embodied cognitive studies emphasize the material and biological dependence of all mental processes. No one—male or female, white or of color—can think, read or write without the essential body, and no one can function rationally without using emotion at every stage of thought. The co-dependence of reason and emotion, a key component of body/brain dependability, has been uncovered by neurologists and is being further studied by cognitive specialists in psychology, linguistics, anthropology, gender, cultural studies and literature.¹ This is not a view of the brain as a computer with a "little man" or even a woman at command central in the brain. Rather, the whole body—with all its connections between the supposedly higher and lower parts of the brain—is needed to reason, think, create or just be.

What kinds of conclusions can gender and cultural studies draw from such revelations about the body? Cognitive examples of our dependence on the interactions of reason and emotion can give us greater insight into early women's writing and readers. From Santa Teresa de Jesús to the anonymous "cacique nuns" of Mexico, these writers' confessions and other male superiors expected their underlings' testimonies to be emotional—like women, nature and the body. They simultaneously required of them humble explanations for such expressions in the contexts of divine devotion. Despite supposedly "emotional" or "irrational" aspects of the women's writing, feminist scholars uncover the cleverly disguised logic interwoven with the emotive aspects of the nuns' works. Their efforts will find impressive additional support for their endeavors from other early modern scholars using embodied cognitive literary studies. In her book *Shakespeare's Brain*, for example, Mary Thomas Crane has revealed the inseparable currents of reason and emotion flowing throughout the soliloquies and actions of the bard's characters—male as well as female. In my own research on Don Juan-oriented plays, I have employed cognitive explanations to explore the ways that culturally situated poetic rhythms and imagery simultaneously communicate the "feel" and the "think" of the verses for spectators, and even readers. (2) Even if we view performances of Tirso's *Burlador de Sevilla* and Ana Caro de Mallén's *Valor, agravio y mujer* across cultural contexts, we are "equipped" to enjoy and to learn from the plays. Tisbea's erotic interplay with Don Juan and Leonor/Leonardo's seductive repartee with Estela make meanings within us since our common and intertwining emotive/cognitive capacities co-produce performances along with the actors' body/brains in motion (3).

In short, we connect during such performances because our bodies simultaneously feel and know the play in personal ways based on our individual body/brain experiences. These bodily



focused examples give new meaning to feminist claims for “writing the body,” “reclaiming the body,” and even rescuing the absent body from a total social construction. They definitely call for a reexamination of Julia Kristeva’s notion that certain writers—male or female—get in touch with the biological and pre-linguistic to create meanings and feelings more expressive than those available in the dominant linguistic orders. My reference to Kristeva does not imply a theoretical superiority for post-structuralism. Rather, it is significant that cognitive studies offer support for her biological reflections on artistic creativity and its possible socio-cultural connections. Embodied cognitive studies recognize how distinct theoretical approaches develop, given our knowledge that new neuronal connections form to create new meanings and body/brain mappings when gaps appear in existing structures, as I show later in this study. In a sense then, cognitive studies account for the emergence of any cultural expressions and how such systems relate to other ways of organizing reality. Cognitive research uncovers the biological and social underpinnings that contribute to the differences as well as the similarities in how we think and feel about life. Above all, this recognition means that our specific contexts reveal each one’s “truth of feeling” about who we are (Damasio, *Descartes’ Error* 125) and that our bodies are integral to this understanding (Varela et al. 149). This is because cognitive studies document the “evidence of the imagination” on a par with the evidence of neurology and evolutionary biology. Empirical evidence finds a place, yes, but not without the testimony of the imagination. (4). Indeed, leading cognitive neurologist, Antonio Damasio, calls for humanists and social scientists to explore this area where culture meets biology and to help us understand how we are all different despite our sameness (*Descartes’ Error* 124-35).

How then, can embodied cognitive scholars defend differences in writers and readers without rigidly defining them in categories of ethnic, economic, and gender distinctions? How can we break binary distinctions in our acts of signifying without falling into total chaotic meaninglessness, on the one hand, or into absolute homogeneity on the other? How can we have flexibility of meaning along with stability? We do so precisely because humans cannot function without creating categories to help them manage reality on an everyday basis. As cognitive literary scholar Mark Turner points out, human beings construct meaning in two general ways: “with extreme *variety and diversity* of meaning, along with continuous change and evolution,” and, with “strong *regularity* in the construction of meaning and of procedural stability across diverse constructions (*Cognitive Dimensions*, 141, author’s emphasis). Our most basic brain structures illustrate this because our cerebral cells themselves are containers or categories (Lakoff and Johnson). As we perceive the world, incoming information interacts with our existing cell categories to suit the situation being conceptualized. Our bodies’ varied kinesthetic, neurological, and chemical systems—including hormonal systems—all participate in the adjustment of concepts before our bodies enact in the world what we have perceived and conceived. This body/brain dependency continuously loops information back to the brain, adjusting concepts, and using them to interact again in the world. This procedure is rightfully called “enacting the world” since we can only know exterior reality in terms of the patterns our body/brains have established to classify our experiences and re-organize them in our individual categories. It is important to note, however, that categorization processes in the loop are prior to language, although grammar and syntax will tend to follow the general patterns of the mental images. Language is certainly a main element of culture, but our minds employ linguistic systems for only a small percentage of the body/brain cultural and biological functions they perform (Damasio, *The Feeling*).

Indeed, this biologically determined loop structure is also cultural because it is individualized according to one’s own body/brain experience in one’s personal cultural history. We know and feel that we *are* the embodied selves we identify with our bodies’ individual memories and psychological experience. That sense of an embodied self is held to be “natural” in most Eastern thought systems, whereas Occidental intellectual and cultural traditions still cling to residues of a Cartesian self, an “I” that is a mind machine, an absent body (Varela et al.).



Fortunately, embodied cognitive studies explain such cultural differences and substantiate the embodied sense of self the philosophical traditions of the Western developed world have lost. Most importantly, this cultural sense of the body/brain is a key component within our “loop” of perception and conceptualization. This cultural- perceptual and conceptual loop also demonstrates how sameness and difference co-exist within us—as research by cognitive scholars in anthropology, psychology, sociology, philosophy, linguistics and literature have been indicating. One of the best examples comes from research on color. (5) Cross-cultural studies demonstrate that the humans designate two predominant cultural categories in their perception: black and white or dark and light. The second most significant color cited by all cultural groups, however, is the color red. This stable core of biological and cross-cultural perception corrects Saussure’s suppositions about the arbitrariness of a meaning such as the signifier “red” and its relationship to the color red perceived in the world. Red does take on many additional meanings at the micro level, all reflecting cultural usage and personal experience, but not arbitrary connections. This is where humanists and social scientists can use cognitive cultural approaches to look at more nuanced hues of red in our areas of study. We can refine in body/brain terms the roles that different reds play, for example, in Caribbean cultures, as in the meanings that the red triangle of the Cuban flag might hold for poet Nancy Morejón, or how frequent references to roses take on embodied meanings in her verses. Other culturally refined senses of red might be studied in the brilliant strands of color Andean women weave into their textiles and songs. In any such examples, we share with the creators an embodied and similar sense of red, but we all have our own simultaneous meanings associated with reds particular to ourselves and our cultures.

Instead of explaining such differences just as evidence of a prison house of language or as the text undoing itself, embodied cognitive criticism accounts for such indications of anti-structure within our natural inclinations to adapt categories and to build new cerebral connections (Hart “Matter, System”). Significantly, new cellular categories of associated meanings and feelings arise when there are gaps in meaning, when the cellular boundaries of our brain’s containers become fuzzy and new connections are made to other cellular containers in order to produce new meanings. Imagine the bodily changes in cell arrangement when these containers of previously used and stored meanings stretch their borders, extending neuronal paths beyond their margins and linking to concepts in other cellular structures. The resulting cerebral categories redraw structures as they map out new meanings and feelings. Cognitive scholars call these procedures metaphoric since they transfer meanings across the brain and thus create new associations in biological/cultural settings. (6) It is particularly striking to realize that the borderlands—the very zones of culture and society from which the marginalized create new social meanings and cultural artifacts—are the precise biological media through which humans innovate in society, science or art. As the title of Gloria Anzaldúa’s well known anthology of women’s writing from the borderlands indicates, the authors are “making” art, meanings and feelings: *Haciendo Caras (Making Face, Making Soul)*. *Creative and Critical Perspectives by Women of Color*. Our body/brains enable this newness and individuality to develop despite evolutionary compulsions for self-protection and cultural pressures to control us. As Antonio Damasio’s neurological studies emphasize, our evolved and societal determinants are not absolute and there is freedom “for willing and performing actions that may go against the apparent grain of biology and culture” (Descartes’ Error 177). Without this embodied capacity, nothing would change—not even social structures.

The embodied cognitive explanation of how we make our own individual meanings—yet also might agree about other meanings within our varied cultural associations—can be materially substantiated in our own body/brains as well as in the testimony of the imagination. A cognitive approach thus provides real substance to cultural and materialist studies, demonstrating that our



art is not “merely subjective” nor insignificant to socio-cultural development. In short, we can imagine and effect social change because we can change our categories of defining and realizing the world. For us as literary and cultural critics and historians, embodied cognitive studies let us more accurately situate the varied meanings that a creative writer or artist has across distinct systems of categorization. An important distinction here is that embodied cognition explains how readers and spectators also create individualized meanings and feelings in combination or in contrast with those determined by mainstream or dominant groups in a particular context. In this sense, the cognitive approach refines Judith Butler’s examination of the meanings of performance art (“Performative Acts”) and redeems her devaluation of drag performances by creative artists of color (*Bodies That Matter*). Rather than concluding with her that subversive performativity ultimately fails because it does not immediately change society, embodied cognition justifies the performance’s challenge to basic gender categories. It emphasizes that performativity is effective if it feels and means something challenging to the performer and/or any spectators experiencing the event. Such individual senses of a body/brain in performance become socially effective in time. The imperatives to perform are both biological and socio-cultural. Both condition the circumstances of individual body/brain operations and simultaneously constrict and encourage the mapping of new creative expression.

In that regard, the embodied cognitive approach proves very appropriate for enjoying and learning from photographic art by Chicana lesbian performance artist Laura Aguilar. Her work clearly illustrates the strength of an individual body/brain to provoke our thought and feelings about several overlapping cultural categories and situations. In “Three Eagles Flying” she displays in black and white her own body blind-folded, her beyond-Rubenesque form bound in rope and the flags of her two nations. (7) Viewers are immediately challenged to make new categories of her uses of the flags, ropes, “eagles,” and her own blindfolded obese body. Spectators cannot but actively engage in meaning-making, creating new metaphors to account for concepts and aesthetics that mainstream white America and certainly the religious right might consider grotesque and immoral insults to the American and Mexican flags. Aguilar’s self-portrait plays on her lesbian Chicana identity in the borderlands between national, social and gender categories, and her “independent” sense of the eagle in her last name challenges all viewers to bring the photographer’s vision of herself into their own cultural and perceptual-conceptual loops. One cannot easily withdraw from Aguilar’s photos, and even the most hegemonically comfortable viewer must accommodate the artist’s compelling images into new meanings from the identities and categories Aguilar contests with her body/brain display.

The performance-oriented approach is particularly appropriate for demonstrating how helpful embodied cognition is for the works that focus our body/brain activity on cultural and gendered practice. Another clear and rather well known contemporary example is the work of Chicana playwright Josefina López—especially her play *Real Women Have Curves*. (8) The latter concentrates precisely on the differences within and the overlap across the body/brain categories we use in thinking about cultural groups, subcultures and individuals. The teenage protagonist Ana is both brainy and Rubenesque and, like many of her generation, she confronts conflicts with her family and within herself about how and whether she can use her brain and her body in our culture of anorexic aesthetics, Anglo domination, and the threat of poverty. As an independent film López’s play has had transcultural success in its portrayal of positive resolutions for all sorts of “real women”—with or without curves—who confront cultural categories throughout this country. Significantly, however, the play had to be sanitized for the broader audience by removing references in López’s text to the sketchy immigration status of some of Ana’s co-workers in her sister’s small and sweaty garment factory. The important point here, however, is that as spectators of the vivid events, we come to “think” and to “feel” how these women understand themselves as similar to others and yet different in their social contexts and their

personal cultural histories. Focusing on the dignity and co-dependence of all our bodies and brains in performance, Josefina López legitimizes her vision and portrays the relevance of the social margin to wider cultural and personal mappings. In sum, although embodied cognitive criticism is new to gender studies, approach has much to offer scholars like those in *Feministas Unidas*.³

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NOTES

- (1) The researchers whose work forms the core of most embodied cognitive approaches to literature and culture are neurologist Antonio Damasio, evolutionary biologist Gerald Edelman, cognitive linguist George Lakoff, his co-author in cognitive philosophy Mark Johnson, and cognitive psychologists Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch. Mark Turner is one of the earliest scholars of literature to work with them as seen in *The Literary Mind* and other work influenced by Lakoff.
- (2) In a forthcoming article, I examine precisely how embodied cognitive studies substantiate the diversity of meanings and feelings created by spectators of "Don Juan" plays by Tirso, Ana Caro de Mallén, and Molière. "The Cultural Cognitive Loop and Early Modern Spectators: Watching Don Juan(s) and Making Meaning.
- (3) "Co-production" is the term used today in theater and performance research to describe how spectators of performance events are, in effect, co-producers of meanings and feelings along with the performers. See Susan Bennett on audiences.
- (4) The evidence of the imagination in cognitive studies is discussed by Alain Richardson in his excellent introduction, "Studies in Literature and Cognition: A Field Map," for the forthcoming collection he has edited with Ellen Spolsky. Also highly useful is Hart's recent article situating various types of cognitive studies with relation to other intellectual fields ("The Epistemology...").
- (5) Lakoff and Johnson refer to the color studies, as do Crane and Richardson in their article on cognition and literary research.
- (6) "Metaphor" comes from the Greek terms for "change" (meta) and "to bear or carry across" (pherein). New ways of looking at metaphors in life, the body, and art are one of the most exciting innovations of cognitive research for the study of literature and culture.
- (7) I thank Astrid Fellner for bringing Aguilar's work to my attention in her presentation for the Hispanic Forum at the University of Vermont, October 2003. Her complete text is forthcoming as an article. The embodied cognitive and cultural reading of Aguilar's photo, however, is my own.
- (8) For my introduction to López's work I am indebted to the research of my Yolanda Flores. See *The Drama of Gender*.
- (9) At this point, there are only a few "pioneer" gender scholars working in cognitive studies. Ellen Spolsky's work points in that direction, as do Hart's and Crane's, in my estimation.



Anuncios

Estudios de Género en España

En otoño de 2004 se inaugurará en Valladolid un nuevo programa de Estudios de Género, el único de este tipo que existe en España para estudiantes norteamericanos. Organizado por Universitat Castellae y dirigido por la Dra. Jacqueline Cruz, el propósito del programa es ofrecer a l@s estudiantes un conjunto de cursos y actividades compacto y coherente, centrado en la problemática de género en España. De este modo, al mismo tiempo que disfrutan de las ventajas de la inmersión en la lengua y la cultura españolas, y obtienen crédito por el tipo de cursos que normalmente se imparten en los programas de estudio en España (literatura, cultura y cine), l@s estudiantes reciben un acercamiento temático a la realidad española, con énfasis en la cultura viva y cuestiones de actualidad.

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Para obtener más información, l@s estudiantes interesad@s pueden ponerse en contacto con:

Dra. Jacqueline Cruz (jcruzf@inicia.es), para cuestiones relacionadas con el programa de Estudios de Género.

Dr. Ricardo de la Fuente (ricardodelaf@hotmail.com), para todas las demás cuestiones.



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