
Feministas Unidas profiles



Camen de Urioste es profesora asociada de literatura española en la Universidad Estatal de Arizona, donde dicta cursos de literatura, cultura y crítica literaria. Es autora de *Narrativa andaluza (1900-1936): Erotismo, feminismo y regionalismo* (1997), coautora de *The Writer's Reference Guide to Spanish* (1999) y coeditora de las antologías *Literatura española: una antología* (1995) y *Spanish Literature* (2000). Ha publicado artículos en *Confluencia*, *Letras Peninsulares*, *Revista Monográfica*, *Revista de Estudios Hispánicos*, *Hispania* y *Revista Hispánica Moderna*, entre otras revistas especializadas. *Desiderátum* es su primer poemario.

Cynthia Margarita Tompkins is associate professor of Spanish at Arizona State University. She has published widely on Latin American women writers and has co-edited *Utopías, ojos azules, bocas suicidas: La narrativa de Alina Diaconú*, *Teen Life in Latin America and the Caribbean* and *Notable Twentieth-Century Latin American Women*. Tompkins co-translated Martin Hopenhayn's *No Apocalypse, No Integration: Modernism and Postmodernism (Ni apocalípticos ni integrados)*. Her *Latin American Postmodernisms: Women Writers and Experimentation* has just been published by University Press of Florida.



Carmela Ferradáns is professor of contemporary Spanish literature and cultural history at Illinois Wesleyan University. She has published papers on contemporary Spanish poetry and its relationship to popular culture in major scholarly journals within her field. Lately, her research interests have shifted to the study of the Galician avant-garde of the twenties and thirties. She has been the Chair of the Department of Hispanic Studies at IWU since 2001. Her latest poetry chapbook *My Right Breast and other Poems* deals with the aftermath of breast cancer.

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Letter from the President/Carta de la presidenta

December 2006

Estimadas colegas:

En esta ocasión me gustaría reflexionar sobre el tema de las interacciones entre el conocimiento científico y la exclusión de las mujeres de éste y de otras dimensiones de la vida en sociedad.

El conocimiento científico basado en la objetividad y la neutralidad crea un concepto de Verdad homologado al concepto de Hombre (varón). Por lo tanto, toda desviación de esta Verdad-Hombre es considerada errónea con lo que la mujer queda fuera del conocimiento científico así formulado. Insertar el concepto de género dentro del conocimiento científico supone pasar de un marco epistemológico a un marco postepistemológico (Joseph Rouse), es decir de un marco de pensamiento patriarcal a un marco de pensamiento feminista. Realizar este cambio de marco conceptual lleva irremediamente a revisar el concepto de lenguaje (y consecuentemente el concepto de escritura), pues el pensamiento y la identidad se articulan a través del mismo.

Es decir, el punto de partida del conocimiento postepistemológico pasa por la revisión de las teorías sobre el lenguaje y la existencia de un lenguaje femenino. Se plantean preguntas tales como la objetividad de una diferencia en la discursividad femenina; ¿cuáles son las características de esta discursividad?, si es que efectivamente existe; ¿es el feminismo una forma o un contenido? o ¿es el feminismo una experiencia de vida? Y en última instancia ¿debe el feminismo tender a la Verdad?

Dentro del campo de los estudios culturales y en relación con el lenguaje, la inserción del género en literatura sirve para revisar toda la literatura a la luz de la marginalidad de la mujer, con el posicionamiento de la misma en un lugar secundario. En este sentido, el feminismo crítico-literario se alza contra la exclusión de la mujer del canon literario/cultural y entra en el campo de la orientación política para redefinir conceptos tanto literarios como extraliterarios. El feminismo crítico-literario trata de exponer/delimitar las premisas del patriarcado, detectar los prejuicios resultantes, promover reevaluaciones de textos escritos por mujeres, volver a examinar el contexto social, cultural, sexual, psicológico de la literatura/cultura y de la crítica literaria.

Sin embargo, el feminismo postepistemológico no solamente realiza estudios de literatura crítica feminista, sino también promueve programas de estudios feministas en la academia, librerías, estudios de género con relación a las minorías raciales y sociales (feminismo negro/lésbico/latino en oposición al feminismo de la mujeres blancas burguesas), analiza la relación de la producción de textos con el género (industria cultural y género) y un largo etcétera.

Os animo desde estas páginas a continuar con este proceso dual de revisión y progreso. Saludos cordiales,

Carmen de Urioste
Feministas Unidas, Presidenta
Arizona State University

Letter from the Editor/Carta de la editora

Diciembre 2006

Queridas/os colegas:

El boletín de *Feministas Unidas* que tenéis en las manos no solamente estrena número ISSN (International Standard Serial Number) sino que la Biblioteca del Congreso en Washington lo ha elegido para su colección permanente. Noticias excelentes que darán más visibilidad a nuestra organización. Como siempre agradecer a mi estudiante y asistente Rachel Slough por organizar y compilar las sesiones de MLA donde participan afiliadas/os de *Feministas Unidas* (páginas 8-11), y también agradecer a la oficina del *Dean and Provost* de IWU que corre con los gastos de copia y correo de este boletín.

Nuevo en este boletín es la sección de *Profiles/Perfiles* de afiliadas. Mi idea es dar a conocer a las personas que trabajamos más de cerca en esta organización. Me gustaría incluir tres o cuatro afiliadas en cada boletín. Por favor enviadme una foto y un bio si queréis estar incluidas en *Profiles/Perfiles*.

Este año en el congreso de MLA en Philadelphia habrá dos sesiones organizadas por *Feministas Unidas* bajo el tema de feminismos y religión. Incluidos en este boletín están los cuatro ensayos que serán presentados en la sesión *Feminisms and Religion: Challenges in the Classroom* (Jueves 28 de diciembre a las 3:30PM). Por razones técnicas, totalmente fuera de mi control, no he podido incluir en este boletín los ensayos de Lisa Vollendorf y Meghan Gibbons de la sesión *Feminisms and Religion: Theoretical Musings* (sábado 30 de diciembre a las 12:00PM). Gracias a la magnífica labor de las colegas en Arizona State University, todos los ensayos de las dos sesiones se pueden descargar de la página www.asu.edu/languages/femunida/f06/index.htm

Para el número de mayo 2007, por favor enviadme una copia electrónica de documentos, reseñas, noticias, publicaciones y demás directamente a mi correo electrónico.

Mucha suerte con el trabajo de fin de curso y que tengáis unas vacaciones estupendas y relajadas.

Un abrazo,

Carmela

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 Fifth Annual Feministas Unidas Essay Prize competition for scholars in the early stage of their career. 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: Spanish, Spanish-American, Luso-Brazilian, Afro-Latin American, and U.S. Hispanic Studies.

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 is the product of collaboration between Feministas Unidas and the Asociación Internacional de Literatura Femenina Hispánica. 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.

AWARD: \$200 and publication of the essay in the December issue of the journal *Letras Femeninas*. The author of the winning essay must be a member of the Asociación de Literatura Femenina Hispánica at the time of publication of the essay.

ELIGIBILITY: 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.

GUIDELINES:

- An unpublished paper completed in the year 2006
- Length: 18-25 pages, double-spaced, including notes and works cited
- Format: MLA style. Prepare the manuscript according to instructions for "Anonymous Submissions"
- Languages: Spanish or English
- **Deadline for submission: August 15, 2007**
- **Announcement of award: September, 2007**

ITEMS TO BE SUBMITTED:

- Essay
- 200-word abstract of the essay
- Author's c.v.
- Submit all materials in the following ways: **one hard copy and as an e-mail attachment**

MAIL TO:

Prof. Carmen de Urioste
Dept. of Languages and Literatures
Arizona State University
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Tempe, AZ 85287-0202

e-mail: carmen.urioste@asu.edu

Essay Prize Winner 2006

El ensayo premiado este año ha sido “Women and the Discourse of Underdevelopment in Rosa Chacel’s *Memorias de Leticia Valle*” de Debra Faszler-McMahon, UC, Irvine. El ensayo será publicado en el número de diciembre de *Letras Femeninas*.

ABSTRACT

Memorias de Leticia Valle has garnered interest among feminist critics intrigued by Chacel’s portrayal of the protagonist’s “inaudito” behavior and mature narrative voice. Leticia Valle is an eleven year-old girl seeking a liberal education in small-town Castile who resists societal conventions by seducing her male professor. Some critics question, however, whether the seduction of an eleven year-old girl can be read as a feminist text. This study explores how Leticia’s mature sexuality and adult literary voice are connected to age-related gender discourse in Spain. *Memorias* is concerned with women’s artistic and cultural development, and thus Leticia’s adult register and sexual agency might be read as strategic representations employed to critique the idea that women are culturally and intellectually childlike. Women’s child-like status was a commonly held notion in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Spain, and it is referred to here as the “discourse of underdevelopment.” *Memorias* can indeed be read as a feminist text, but such a reading must take into account the work’s unusual representation of age. By highlighting social structures that falsely posit women’s cultural and mental immaturity, their need for supervision and boundaries, and their sexual innocence, *Memorias* challenges the discourse of underdevelopment and affirms women’s sexual and intellectual agency.

Feministas Unidas at the MLA 2006

Thursday 28 December 3:30 p.m.

Feminisms and Religion: Challenges in the Classroom

3:30-4:45 p.m., Congress A, Loews

Program arranged by Feministas Unidas. Presiding: Lisa Vollendorf, California State Univ, Long Beach

1. "Teaching Spanish Women Writers and Feminist Theory at a Religiously Affiliated University." Valerie Hegstrom, Brigham Young Univ, UT
2. "A Postmodern Approach to Negotiating Religion in the Classroom," Cynthia Margarita Tompkins, Arizona State Univ. Tempe
3. "Retablos de la frontera: Trauma, territorios y geografías espirituales," Magdalena M. Maiz-Peña, Davidson Coll.
4. "Pat Mora's *The House of Houses: An Exploration of Women's Wisdom*," Dawn Slack, Kutztown Univ. of Pennsylvania.

For copies of abstracts, visit www.asu.edu/languages/femunida/f06/index.htm

Saturday, 30 December 12:00 noon

Feminisms and Religion: Theoretical Musings

12:00 noon-1:15 p.m., Commonwealth Hall A1, Loews

Program arranged by Feministas Unidas. Presiding: Margarita Vargas, SUNY at Buffalo

1. "Reverendo Deus: The Female 'I am' in Lispector's *A paixão Segundo G.H.*," Joyce Baugher, Tulane Univ.
2. "Gender, Religion, and the State: Masculinity and Feminism in Spain Today," Lisa Vollendorf, California State Univ, Long Beach.
3. "Catholic Nationalism and Argentina's Military Dictatorship," Meghan Keory Gibbons, Univ. of Maryland, College Park.
4. "Female Mysticism: Cecilia del Nacimiento and María de San Alberto" Julian Olivares, Univ. of Houston

For copies of papers, visit www.asu.edu/languages/femunida/f06/index.htm

Both meetings at **Loews Philadelphia**, located at Market St. and 12th

Feministas Unidas at the MLA 2006

Electa Arenal: Thursday 28 December 7:15 p.m.

“Untold Sisters: Hispanic Women Writers and the Canon (Pre-1800)”

7:15-8:30 p.m., Regency Ballroom C2, Loews

A special session. Presiding: Alison Parks Weber, Univ. of Virginia

Speakers: Electa Arenal, Graduate Center, City Univ. of New York; Anne J. Cruz, Univ. of Miami; Barbara Louise Mujica, Georgetown Univ; Amanda Powell, Univ. of Oregon; Stacey Schlau, West Chester Univ.

Gwendolyn Barnes-Karol : Friday 29 December 12:00noon

“Engaging Twenty-First-Century Students with the Spanish Golden Age: Success Stories from Small Colleges”

12:00 noon-1:15 p.m, Washington B, Loews

A special session. Presiding: Micheal W. Joy, Northern Michigan Univ.

1. “Creating a Meaningful Career When the Spanish Golden Age ‘Brilla por su Ausencia,’” Gwendolyn Barnes-Karol, Saint Olaf Coll.
2. “Don Quixote in the Cave, Students on the Mountain: A Curricular Innovation at a Franciscan University,” Zennia D. Hancock, Saint Bonaventure Univ.
3. “Developing Golden Age Courses for the First Time in a Generalized Spanish Major,” Mark J. Mascia, Sacred Heart Univ.

Respondent: Katie G. Maclean, Kalamazoo Coll.

Jennifer Browdy de Hernandez: Thursday, 28 December 5:15 p.m.

“Writing Resistance: Readings by African Women Writers”

5:15-6:30 p.m., Congress A, Loews

Presiding: Jennifer Browdy de Hernandez, Simon’s Rock Coll. Of Bard; Anne M. Serafin, Newtonville, MA

Speakers: Odile Marie Cazenave, Boston Univ; Nathalie Etoke, Brown Univ. ; Maramé Gueye, Vassar Coll.; Sefi Ransome-Kuti, Meridian, MS

Lou Charnon-Deutsch: Thursday, 28 December 10:15 a.m.

“Peripheries of Nineteenth-Century Spain”

10:15-11:30 a.m., Washington C, Loews

Program arranged by the Division on Eighteenth and Nineteenth-Century Spanish Literature.

Presiding: Susan L. Martin-Márquez, RutgersUniv, New Brunswick

- 1.” Weapons of Mass Denigration: Cartoons and the War of 1898,” Lou Charnon-Deutsch, Stony Brook Univ, State Univ. of New York
2. “Foreign Travel and Regional Identity: Cultural Difference in Valle Inclán’s Sonatas” Gayle R. Nunley, Univ. of Vermont

Roberta Johnson: Friday 29 December

Khronic Mediations in Modern Critical Discourse: John W. Kronik’s Legacy to Hispanism and Beyond

1:45-3 p.m. Commonwealth Hall B, Lewis

A special session. Presiding: Susan L. Fischer, Bucknell Univ.

1. “John W. Kronik and Nineteenth-Century Spain: ‘The Witching Hour of the Modern Imagination’” Harriet Stevens Turner, Univ. of Nebraska, Lincoln

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2. "He Saw Hitler: John W. Kronik's Cataclysmic Criticism of Twentieth-Century Spanish Literature," Roberta Johnson, Univ. of Kansas
 3. "Playing with the Game that Art is: Taking John Kronik's Work on Self-Conscious Art into the Twenty-First Century," Christine Henseler, Union Coll, NY.

Respondent: Akiko Tsuchiya, Washington Univ.

Carol S. Maier: Friday 29 December 9:00 p.m.

Eros, Ethos, Relatedness: Translators on What Drives Their Practice

9:00-10:15 p.m. Jefferson, Loews

A special session. Presiding: Suzanne Jill Levine, Univ. of California, Santa Barbara

1. "Eros as Relatedness" Lynn Hoggard, Midwestern State Univ.
2. "Translating Nuria Amat's Faithless Love for Emily Dickinson," Carol S. Maier, Kent State Univ, Kent.
3. "Translating the Cuban Revolution: Eros and Ethics," Kathleen Ann Ross, New York Univ.

For copies of abstracts, write to cmaier@kent.edu after 1 Dec.

Madgalena M. Maiz-Peña : Saturday 30 December 12 noon

"Women Administrators in the Humanities: Reimagining Academic Leadership"

12:00 noon-1:15 p.m., Independence Ballroom Salon II, Philadelphia Marriott

Program arranged by the Women's Caucus for the Modern Languages. Presiding: Madgalena M. Maiz-Peña, Davidson Coll.

Speakers: Julia V. Douthwaite, Univ. of Notre Dame; Nancy A. Gutierrez, Univ. of North Carolina, Charlotte; María Herrera-Sobek, Univ. of California, Santa Barbara; Karen R. Lawrence, Univ. of California, Irvine.

Respondent: Yi-Chun Tricia Lin, Southern Connecticut State Univ.

Linda Materna: Saturday 30 December 1:45 p.m.

"Diverse Dialogues in Recent Spanish Film"

1:45-3:00 p.m., Congress C, Loews

Program arranged by the Twentieth-Century Spanish Association of America. Presiding: John Philip Gabriele, Coll. of Wooster

1. "From Spain to Argentina and Back Again: A Dialogue with Saura in *Tango* (1999): Greta Trautmann, Univ. of North Carolina, Asheville
2. "Strains of Mysticism in Pedro Almodóvar's *Hable con ella*," Brian J. Cope, Coll. of Wooster.
3. "Fetishized Difference and the Destabilizing Other: Representations of African Immigration in Spanish Cinema," Linda Susan Materna, Rider Univ.

Amanda Powell: Thursday 28 December 7:15 p.m.

"Untold Sisters: Hispanic Women Writers and the Canon (Pre-1800)"

7:15-8:30 p.m., Regency Ballroom C2, Loews

A special session. Presiding: Alison Parks Weber, Univ. of Virginia

Speakers: Electa Arenal, Graduate Center, City Univ. of New York; Anne J. Cruz, Univ. of Miami; Barbara Louise Mujica, Georgetown Univ; Amanda Powell, Univ. of Oregon; Stacey Schlau, West Chester Univ.

Rocío Quispe-Agnoli: 12:00 noon-1:15 p.m. Washington C, Loews

"Interdisciplinary Dialogues and Methods in Colonial Latin American Studies"

Program arranged by the Division on Colonial Latin American Literatures. Presiding: Kathryn J. McKnight, Univ. of New Mexico, Albuquerque

1. "Bernal Díaz and the Territories of History," Sarah H. Beckjord, Boston Coll.
2. "New Textual Criticism and Colonial Latin American Studies," Paul P. Firbas, Princeton Univ.

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3. “¿Colonialista o Poscolonialista? El shock poscolonial del reconocimiento dentro de nuestro campo de estudio” Rocío Quispe-Agnoli, Michigan State Univ.

Iñigo Sánchez-Llama: Friday 29 December 7:00 p.m.

“Reperiodizing the Spanish Nineteenth Century”

7:15-8:30 p.m., Tubman, Loews

Program arranged by the Division on Eighteenth-and Nineteenth-Century Spanish Literature.

Presiding: Wadda C. Ríos-Font, Barnard Coll.

1. “Modernidad y secularización en la erudición hispánica ochocentista: La interpretación de la literatura dieciochesca en el ultimo tercio del siglo XIX” Iñigo Sánchez-Llama, Purdue Univ, West Lafayette
2. “Historiographic Dissonance in Nineteenth Century Studies,” Michael Iarocci, Univ. of California, Berkeley.
3. “Periodizing across the Pyrenees,” Elizabeth Amann, Columbia Univ.

Stacey Schlau: Thursday 28 December 7:15 p.m.

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Stacey Schlau : Friday 29 December 10:15 am

“New Visions of Teresa of Avila and Sor Juana”

10:15-11:30 a.m. Commonwealth Hall D, Loews

A special session. Presiding: Stacey Schlau, West Chester Univ.

1. “ Teaching Teresa of Avila,” Alison Parks Weber, Univ. of Virginia
2. “Approaches to Teaching Sor Juana: Collaboration and Contextualization” Emilie L. Bergmann, Univ. of California, Berkeley
3. “ Rethinking Colonial Literature: An Exercise in Devotion,” Grady C. Wray, Univ. of Oklahoma

Ana Serra: Friday 29 December 7:15 p.m.

“Culture and Crisis in Cuba”

7:15-8:30 p.m. Regency Ballroom C2, Loews

A special session. Presiding: James Buckwalter-Arias, Hanover Coll.

1. “Toward a New Literary Militancy?” James Buckwalter-Arias
2. “Political Visions, Cultural Blindness?” Guillermina De Ferrari, Univ. of Wisconsin, Madison
3. “Havana This Instant: The Construction of Everyday Life in this Special Period,” Ana Serra, American Univ.

Peggy Sharpe: Friday 29 December 3:30 p.m.

“Literature and the New Media Economy”

3:30-4:45 p.m., Washington A, Loews

Program arranged by the Division on Luso-Brasilian Language and Literature. Presiding: Peggy L. Sharpe, Florida State Univ.

1. “ The Erotic and Exotic Lure: A Cultural Decoy,” Maria José Somerlate Barbosa, Univ.of Iowa.
2. “ The Material Girl’s Digital Archive: Literature and New Media Economy in Clarah Averback’s Máquina de pinball,” Leila Maria Lehnen, Univ. of New Mexico, Albuquerque.
3. “A hora de estrela: A doméstica no cinema brasileiro contemporâneo,” Sonia M. Roncador, Univ. of Texas, Austin.

4. "Singing under Siege: Resistance Music in Portugal and Brazil," Patricia I. Vieira, Harvard Univ.

Cristina Ferreira-Pinto: Friday 29 December 9:00 p.m.

"Beyond Three Sad Races: New Representations of Ethnic Hybridity in Brazil"

9:00-10:15 p.m., Washington A, Loews

Program arranged by the Division on Luso-Brazilian Language and Literature. Presiding: Cristina Ferreira-Pinto, Texas State Univ.

1. "The Two Deaths of Natálio Litvinoff: Brazilian and Jewish Identity in Adão Voloch's Trilogy," James Hussar, Univ. of Notre Dame
2. "'Mess in the Freeway': Subjectivity and the Politics of Ethnicity in Afro-Bahain Music," Alvaro Neder, Brown Univ.
3. "At the Global Crossroads of Myth and Womanhood: Miriam Alves and Conceição Evaristo," Peggy L. Sharpe, Florida State Univ.
4. "Iracema No More: Brazilian Indigenous Women in Eliane Potiguara's Poetry," Cristina Ferreira-Pinto

Cynthia Margarita Tompkins: Saturday 30 December 8:30 a.m.

"Pregnant Bodies and Other Bodies in the Academy"

8:30-9:45 am Liberty Ballroom Salon B, Philadelphia Marriott

Program arranged by the MLA Committee on the Status of Women in the Profession. Presiding: Cynthia Margarita Tompkins, Arizona State Univ, Tempe.

1. "Your Mother Doesn't Live Here: Resisting Gender Roles in Feminist Pedagogy," Jessica Barnes, Illinois State Univ.
2. "Morality, Motherhood, and Misogyny: Benevolent Sexism Couched as Concern in the Academic Workplace," Jeanine Silveira Stewart, Washington and Lee Univ.
3. "'Mothering' Language: Undoing Tendencies toward Stereotyping in the Academic Workplace" Ellen Cecilia Mayock, Washington and Lee Univ.
4. "Institutional Culture and the Meaning of Motherhood," Alice A. Weldon, Univ. of North Carolina, Asheville.

For copies of papers, visit [www. public.asu.edu/~idcmt/](http://www.public.asu.edu/~idcmt/) after 30 nov.

Alice Weldon: Saturday 30 December 8:30 a.m.

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4. "Institutional Culture and the Meaning of Motherhood," Alice A. Weldon, Univ. of North Carolina, Asheville.

MLA 2006 Conference Papers

Feminisms and Religion: Challenges in the Classroom

Teaching Spanish Women Writers and Feminist Theory at a Religiously-Affiliated University

Valerie Hegstrom
Brigham Young University

I have taught women writers and feminist theory at Brigham Young University for a dozen years. The majority of my students arrive in class with a predisposition for suspicion about “Feminism” and any ideas that might question authority. The students’ fear of “Feminism” has not led them to ask what the word means; it has generally speaking reinforced their ignorance. These suspicions and fears complicate the teaching process. My position as a woman professor of women writers and feminist theory at a Latter-day Saint (or Mormon) university is somewhat unique, but my experiences may resonate with instructors the majority of whose students belong to other religious groups (Catholicism, Christian Evangelicalism, for example).

I have come to recognize three possible approaches to my students’ attitudes. I have practiced and sometimes do practice all three. 1) I can realize the superiority of my ideas and show them the weaknesses of their beliefs. This typically leads to defensiveness on their parts and frustration on mine. I then shake my head and find a colleague to whom to complain. My colleagues can console me, but my students’ minds remained closed. 2) I can hunt for a small group of open-minded students to nurture. A minority of students, particularly some women students, arrive at my classes with a desire to learn exactly what I want to teach. I enjoy teaching them; it brings automatic and easy rewards. I can

and have increased their numbers and percentage in my classes by advertising course content ahead of time, and by warning students on the first day of class that the course will focus on women writers and feminist theory. 3) I can try to nurture an atmosphere of trust that makes it easier for many sincere students to open their minds to new ideas and understand ideas written in women's language. In this classroom atmosphere, students feel less threatened and greater numbers of them open their minds to ideas that they might initially have rejected. This approach allows me to make a meaningful difference within the institution.

One of the greatest obstacles I have struggled with in trying to communicate with my students occurs frequently when my male students identify with male authors, narrators, and characters, even when these behave badly. I have had to learn how to help them identify along ideological and ethical lines, rather than gender lines. I have to teach my female and male students to read as women. I have sometimes accomplished this by speaking to them in their religious language, then helping them translate, and finally teaching them women's language. I have used both male- and female-authored texts to teach this language (and some of the differences between masculine and feminine language). I have used Don Juan Manuel in classes to uncover differences between implied and real readers. This permits students to identify with real twenty-first century readers (even religious authorities who speak in favor of fair treatment for women), rather than misogynist Medieval noblemen. Carefully reading Góngora and Bécquer (and almost every other male poet) has helped my students recognize men's position as subject and women's position as object. Saint Teresa and mystical (women's) spirituality becomes meaningful to my students when contextualized in the Biblical mystical

tradition. Zayas has helped my students get beyond simplistic readings of immoral content (spousal abuse and murder, for example) to articulate more sophisticated readings of the ethics inherent in the immoral content.

By learning to speak their language and teaching them to read and speak women's language, I have been able to teach my male and female students to care about feminist theory, women writers, and perhaps most importantly, women's social issues.

Retablos de la frontera: trauma, territorios interiores y geografías espirituales

Magdalena Maiz-Peña
Davidson College

Los retablos femeninos fronterizos como artefactos religioso-culturales de carácter iconográfico intersectan género, trauma, territorios interiores y geografías espirituales modelando en su retórica iconográfica cuerpos, identidades y narraciones desestabilizadoras y confrontacionales. El habla-mujer contenida en estos retablos fronterizos sedimenta una textura geográfica espiritual que desde el filtro del género disemina y promueve no solamente topografías espirituales de petición, agradecimiento, o manda, sino que genera simultáneamente hilos narrativos en dispersión que encarnan un testimonio auto/biográfico subalterno politizando una propuesta estético-genérica enraizada en su carácter religioso.

Iconografía, geografía y topografía intersectan zonas, bordes y fronteras terrenales y celestiales registrando un drama disidente ante el imaginario hegemónico dominante, mientras dan cuerpo a sus subjetividades maternal a partir de intervenciones maternas, en una forma de expresión artística de carácter popular religioso que articula su testimonio político. Género, desterritorialización y geografía espiritual convergen en el centro narrativo de una práctica artesanal iconográfica donde las huellas corpóreas de un cuerpo maternal nombran las fisuras de su geografía interior, delineando en el retablo un territorio espiritual en dónde se deposita un gesto de gratitud ante el favor concedido, ante la dis/locación causada a raíz del borde fronterizo.

La experiencia fronteriza femenina acogida en una veintena de retablos seleccionados para nuestra reflexión crítica de la colección compilada en Miracles on the Border: Retablos of Mexican Migrants to the United States (1995) de Jorge Durand y Douglas S. Massey, entreteje un discurso híbrido de resistencia articulado desde un discurso devocional femenino personal, familiar y colectivo en estas láminas pequeñas de estaño o de metal, compuestas con sencillez, espontaneidad, urgencia e inmediatez, desde un cuerpo maternal que da fe de su agradecimiento al haber recibido el auxilio divino de una figura celestial, que en la mayoría de estos retablos descansa en la figura de la Virgen de San Juan de los Lagos. Un análisis en detalle de cada uno de estos retablos signados entre 1917 y 1977 desde la voz narrativa de Tivurcia Gallego, M. Ester Tapia Picon, Concepción Zapata, la madre de la señorita M. Elifonsa Durán, Paula Martínez, Dolores García, Eulalia Ortiz, María de Luz Casillas, Consuelo y Juanita de León, Juanita Limón, entre otras, nos dejan ver en su expresión artesanal devocional, historias entrehiladas entre cruces de geografías divinas y geografías transfronterizas intersectando California, Jalisco, Texas, Guanajuato, San Luis Potosi y espacios de la frontera nombrando en su interior geografías espacio-temporales, sociales, culturales, económicas y políticas ancladas en testimoniales subalternos.

Un acercamiento en profundidad a cada una de estas composiciones artesanales de carácter iconográfico subraya las posicionalidades diferenciales del sujeto femenino hacia dentro y hacia fuera del retablo, desestabiliza marcos referenciales, desarticula márgenes de la representación, escenifica el gesto performativo del agradecimiento, o la acción petitoria y redramatiza en escena presente y/o pasado del momento que originó la petición o el favor y que es motivo de causa del agradecimiento. Estos cuadros vivientes

registran una temporalidad terrenal y celestial desde una memoria interpretativa femenina que genera narrativas sobre dislocación y desterritorialización dibujando geografías emocionales y espirituales desde una tonalidad, sensibilidad y oralidad contenidas en el cuadro-retablo particular, mientras va articulando realidades personales, familiares, colectivas y nacionales de discursos auto/biográficos de profunda significación política.

Geografía personal, cartografía familiar, topografía colectiva de un sujeto femenino marcado por desplazamientos, dislocaciones y nomadismos propios o ajenos, materializados en una narrativa estético-genérica espiritual que deviene una narrativa política al dibujarse el agradecimiento ante la urgencia del milagro, ante la salud enfermiza, ante la amenaza de un texano acechando a una mujer, ante la enfermedad desconocida del hijo sufriendo en el Norte, ante una operación, choque, atropellos, o accidentes catastróficos en tierra ajena, al librar al esposo de ir a la Guerra de Korea, y/o por el milagro de salvar al hijo de la muerte en la Guerra de Vietnam, por el esperado regreso milagroso del hijo que vuelve con documentos, por el retorno del esposo casi ciego que estaba en el otro lado, por la ayuda celestial intercesora ante la omnipotente vigilancia de la migra al acecho de la llegada de una familia a Los Angeles. El habla-mujer de este imaginario “divino” sedimentado en el imaginario diaspórico se recoge en territorios espirituales dibujados dentro del retablo a partir del diseño de zonas celestiales donde se perfila la figura divina a la que se le muestran y en quien se depositan las heridas abiertas, los miedos, Dolores, angustias, temores, ansiedades y sentries dolorosos resultantes de la separación fronteriza. Cada uno de estos retablos

femeninos, responde y corresponde a la particularidad de la realidad representada e iconografiada, desenterrando narrativas oposicionales de cuerpos, identidades, historias, familias y comunidades fragmentadas, desde la voz de la madre, la esposa, la abuela, la nieta, la mujer migrante soltera. Los retablos acumulan y relacionan nudos narrativos diáspóricos topografizando visualmente los bordes de la espera, el deseo, el rezo, la devoción, la imploración, la esperanza y la fe ante una presencia e intervención divina en situaciones liminales, o ante causas perdidas. Memoria, narración, historia, lenguaje y conocimiento documentan en el retablo historias de sujetos nómadas, de sus familias y comunidades, geografías locales y transfronterizas, terrenales y celestiales, dominantes y subalternas enmarcando iconográficamente la memoria histórico-cultural genérica de peregrinajes transfronterizos, de viajes nómádicos, de travesías vigiladas propias o ajenas.

Algunos componentes discursivos que entran en juego en estos relatos visuales de carácter devocional desde el habla-mujer añadiendo al nivel de complejidad de estos relatos fronterizos, además de los planos narrativos polifónicos y fragmentarios, de ópticas entrecruzadas y de escenas redramatizadas, son el uso del volumen de las figuras y escenas representadas, el color, los haces espacio-temporales, los encuadres, los planos del relato, los símbolos iconográficos que la zona espiritual gráfica inscrita en el relato, además de la inscripción textual que signa-firma el sujeto femenino en el retablo. Los retablos fronterizos documentan entre imagen y texto realidades espirituales que van más allá del cruce fronterizo terrenal apuntando simultáneamente a su contenido político al diseñar en su interior y al poner en escena el miedo a la migra, la curación de una

enfermedad en el otro lado, la depresión o enfermedad mental del ser querido, la violencia de género, la salud quebrantada, el accidente de coche o de tren, la operación quirúrgica desesperada, la sobrevivencia a accidentes, catástrofes, a la Guerra de Corea y/o a la Guerra de Vietnam .

Armazón contestatario signado-autorizado desde una corporeidad maternal fronteriza que desmantela la cartografía espiritual bosquejada, tornándola un sujeto-sitio desde el que se recogen sufrimiento, ansiedad, miedo, violencia, temor, inseguridad, imposibilidad, desesperanza, vivencias del nomadismo o del peregrinaje fronterizo. Es interesante observar en estos retablos como el entorno celestial dibujado en la parte superior del cuadro, interseca, se sobrepone, o domina la realidad terrenal capturada visualmente movilizandoy quebrando significados y significantes de manera que la geografía espiritual no deja de articular una macronarrativa geopolítica, económica, social, genérica, espiritual, transcultural y étnica que no se resiste a ser traducida en el retablo.

En esta muestra de retablos femeninos de la frontera se iconografizan propuestas estético-políticas y genéricas desde un cuerpo maternal quematerializa arte, espiritualidad, subjetividades, género, lenguajes, dislocaciones y desterritorializaciones. Narrativización visual de carácter religioso popular que nos propone en estos artefactos culturales femeninos una forma de conocimiento, de protesta y de denuncia social que articula visualmente un conocimiento fronterizo de género, desde un habla-mujer que configura redes experienciales de una comunidad diáspórica desde ambos lados de la frontera a partir del registro visual de territorios espirituales en donde signos-señal-huellas devienen topografías fronterizas genérico-políticas contestatarias.

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Pat Mora's *The House of Houses: An Exploration of "Women's Wisdom"*

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The topics of feminisms and religious practices are often daunting, especially in terms of practical pedagogy. One of the best ways to lose students' interest is to mention the words "women's issues" or "feminisms." The males in the class, the few that were there to begin with, become defensive ("After all, how can I, as a male, be a feminist?"); and, the females in the class, although slightly more interested, are also wary ("Does being in the class mean that I'm automatically a revolutionary man-hater?"). Add to this confusing *mélange* two other highly charged words, "religious practices," and the class might as well be canceled.

Such interpretations, unfortunately, are not necessarily exaggerations; and, they are not limited to just the students: sometimes colleagues and more frequently administrators or those outside of academia react in much the same way. According to Henry Giroux, this form of intolerance is, ironically, a violation of academic freedom (4). A case in point is the current Pennsylvania House Resolution #177, "The Academic Bill of Rights." Since early spring 2006, this bill has been a topic of great discussion and grave concern among educators in the state of Pennsylvania. This resolution, brought forth by the Pennsylvania House of Representatives Select Committee on Academic Freedom, is the end-result of the Committee's investigation of academic freedoms at the state's institutes of higher education. One of the Committee members, Representative Gibson Armstrong has stated that "We are ensuring that we as a legislature are exercising our fiduciary responsibility. Two billion dollars in state funding goes to higher

education; we need to make sure that they are abiding by their own policies, and not indoctrinating their students” (in Smith, 2).

But, what guides, or rather misguides, these reactions, (aside, perhaps from a certain degree of political fear and/or economic interest) is confusion. Analytical feminist discussion is mistakenly viewed as brain-washing for immediate revolution; academic religious conversations are misinterpreted as top-down preaching; exposure is erroneously equated with mindless inculcation. What is forgotten is that one need not be female to care about women’s issues and that one need not forsake one’s own personal religious beliefs in order to examine other spiritual practices in an intellectual manner.

If the goals of a university education are to empower students with the tools for critical thought and the desire for life-long learning, then students must be exposed to the universe so that they may become informed and proactive citizens, members of the city: universe + city=university. Therefore, initial resistance must be counterbalanced. One such method I propose is exemplified by contemporary award-winning Chicana author Pat Mora’s *The House of Houses* (1997). Although referred to by critics such as Janet Peery as a “textual feast,” I put forth this novel is a spiritual feast, and therefore a good text for use in classes focusing on religious practices and/or women’s issues. Throughout the entire novel, inclusion is prioritized over exclusivity. I suggest, therefore, that studying spiritual practices and feminisms through an approach that highlights multiplicity breaks down the barriers of resistance and allows for full educational engagement.

The focus on spiritual practices is evident in *The House of Houses* and is even immediately introduced by the title’s structural echo to the Biblical phrase: “the King of

Kings.” Although it may seem that the title prioritizes Christianity, this is not the case in the novel. Rather, a wide range of belief systems are represented in an equalizing manner. Formal, organized religions (particularly Catholicism), ancient indigenous practices, and folkloric knowledge are all included.

For example, aside from the titular reference, formal religion is presented most notably via Mamá Cleta, who is often onomatopoeically associated with her prayers: “At the first pale sun rays, Mamá Cleta begins to pace her prayers, *clck, clck*, the rosary she murmurs round the *portal*, ‘*Dios te salve, María llena eres de gracia*’” (Mora 229, italics are Mora’s). Aunt Lobo is often depicted with and by her missal book: “I hold her missal, look again at all the pictures she kept in it, always praying for each of us” (Mora 42). Mamande’s religiosity is described with detail:

On her bed each day Mamande lays out her prayer books, rosary, prayers, novenas, holy cards of El Sagrado Corazón and El Niño de Atocha, covers the bedspread with them. [. . .] She looks up at her statue of Saint Rafael and the boy Tobias. [. . .] A statue of La Virgen de Guadalupe stands on the chest of drawers. . . . (Mora 64)

The religious devotion exhibited by these protagonists is especially important in that all of them appear in the novel in spiritual form, having died various years prior to the time of narration. Yet, this is also the case for many other Mora family protagonists, such as Papande, Don Raúl, and Stella, as well as key figures in Christianity, such as Our Lady of Guadalupe, the Santo Niño de Atocha, and Saints Rafael, Martin, and Cecilia (Mora 231). Within the uncanny framework of the novel, all are depicted with a sense of common humanity: Our Lady of Guadalupe enjoys eating pan dulce as much as anyone.

In addition, indigenous spiritual practices are also highlighted throughout the novel. Practically all chapters, which are organized by months, connect with its moon: the Wolf Moon for January, the Snow Moon for February, through to the Long Night's Moon in December. Mamá Cleta, "who listens to the secret life of spiders, to beetles burrowing, pods swaying in the trees," passes on her knowledge of how to plant according to moon cycles and how to sing to plants to encourage their blooms (Mora 139-40). The *Popol Vuh*, the Quiché Maya Book of the Dead/Book of Creation, is referenced as well.

The protagonist/narrator/author Pat Mora continues this practice, too. For instance, in a dialog with her father's ghost she explains that:

"Pueblo Indians say that smoke or steam or clouds are a visible sign of
the cosmic breath. [. . .]"

"My relatives, *los indios*, believe that?"

"The Maya believed that in caves the earth god's daughters grow cotton
that when struck by lightning becomes rain-heavy clouds, and the
Aztecs [believed] that in caves are clay pots filled with clouds,
seeds, lightning. When you die, you become a cloud, a
rainmaker."

"Interesting, very interesting," my father grins walking around the altars,
then rises with the wisps of smoke [and] becomes a heavy cloud
sailing above the garden. (Mora 256, italics are Mora's)

Intrigued by what he learned, he converts her theory of ancient beliefs into contemporary practice.

Folkloric knowledge, or common lore, is also scattered throughout the novel. Pat's mother kept a written journal of useful hints: "aloe vera - cut piece and use on any sore" and "vinegar helps remove hemlines" (Mora 180); Abuela Elena, although dead, still heals bleeding cuts on her fingers with spider webs (Mora 71); and, Mamá Cleta, also in spiritual form, still cares for her great-great-granddaughters by "simmering these chamomile heads for an hour in last night's rainwater. The liquid will bring out the golden highlights in [their] hair" (Mora 223). With great frequency, this type of knowledge is also depicted through proverbs: "*No hay rosa sin espina*" (Mora 41, italics are Mora's).

There are also several occasions in which there is a blending of these spiritual beliefs. Proverbs reference formal religion: "*Cuando Dios quiere, el agua es medicina*" (Mora 255, italics are Mora's). And, Mamá Cleta knowingly recites both the traditional use of certain herbs and flowers and their religious names (Mora 9). The novel presents both an equalized vision of religious practices and a blending or hybridity among them. As multiplicity is celebrated and accepted, rigidity and difference are undermined; thus, dualities such as dominant/non-dominant are erased. This parallels family relations theory in that such images of "a traditionally defined and socially controlled family either subtly undermine or explicitly denounce the inherent injustice and dysfunctionality of such a construction" (Cooper 2).

This inclusive treatment of multiple spiritual beliefs allows for a non-threatening and multifaceted approach for classroom discussion. Since no one particular practice is favored, all can be examined within their contexts. Giroux concludes that students "must be able to move in and out of different cultures so as to appreciate and appropriate the

codes and vocabulary of diverse culture traditions” (245). Through this critical exposure to multiplicity, students become engaged learners.

Furthermore, the variety and the blending of belief systems represented allow students to find at least one element with which to connect on a more personal level. This can be accomplished and/or developed with comparison discussions, research investigations, or journal writing. Relating what is featured in the novel to one’s own family practices, personal exposure to alternate beliefs, and experience with common knowledge is fruitful ground for exploration. As Sara E. Cooper notes: “in family, everyone and everything impacts and is impacted by every other person, event, and thing” (112). Since religious beliefs are set within a context of cultural development and family history, a sense of connection and commonality is created, which facilitates the transition from being just an isolated individual to a member of society.

In this manner, proverbs are especially useful for cross-cultural comparisons (i.e.: “el mundo es un pañuelo” versus “it’s a small world”). And, since proverbs are easy to access and often humorous, they help create an environment for open discussion. From a more critical standpoint, David Lloyd notes that proverbs and common knowledge phrases not only contain vestiges of hegemonic inculcation, but also counter-hegemonic resistances (221). Similarly, the student becomes a member of society who is informed about “their own communities and histories while struggling against structures of dominance” (Giroux 245).

While the range of coexisting and mutually-accepting spiritual practices is certainly noteworthy in *The House of Houses*, so too is how they are portrayed. The majority of the protagonists who share this wide gamut of beliefs are the female members

of a Mexican-American family. As previously referenced, spectral protagonists have as much narrative presence and authority as current living ones.

Certainly the tendency of the female family members to carry on tradition through teaching, be it family history or religious education, is common. According to Cooper's examination of family dynamics theory, the Hispanic family is "an enormous network of kinship supporting and passing on conventional value systems" (2). What is vital in this novel, though, is how each generation portrays its women's issues. For example, Stella recounts how she had to give up her dream of advanced education in order to support her family. That her Anglo counterparts did not is no small coincidence:

"What are you doing here, Stella?" her teachers ask frowning slightly when they see her in the lingerie department, hand her the bras and shiny slips they wish to purchase.

She watches the girls who live in big homes but who get so nervous when they speak in front of the class, who think they're better than she is, ask, "Gee, Stella, that was sure a good speech. Uh, do you write those yourself?" Now they see her here, a salesclerk. (Mora 178)

She has been reduced in a triple manner due to societal assumptions based on her need to work rather than go to college. First, she is now only acknowledged as an inferior service provider. Second, it is assumed that her promising future will now be permanently stifled because of it. And, finally, in spite of the fact that she was the only one chosen from her school to win a prestigious regional award, her initial talent and intellect are now being questioned and subverted.

In more contemporary times, Pat Mora recalls how, as a child, she eagerly collected holy cards. Although at the time her faith did not waiver, she did wonder why there were never any saint cards in Spanish: “I’d go down the steps and study what new saints had come in, no *Nuestra Señora del Carmen*, *Nuestra Señora de Atocha*,...” (Mora 246, italics are Mora’s). Although she continues to name five more missing saints in Spanish, it is understood that the list is, indeed, much longer; the comment on linguistic and cultural discrimination is perfectly clear.

While traditional values may be passed on, as Cooper posits, I would also suggest that through the examination of family histories and value systems, they can then be contextualized, analyzed, and altered in ensuing generations. Although the specific issues may change from person to person, from generation to generation, the need and desire to find a voice of resilience, recuperation, and resistance has not. The narrator comments about her Aunt Lobo:

Her repeated stories are about the exterior world. I wonder about what she loved, what she feared. How she spent her days? Who were the men she noticed, hoped would ask her to dance, or hold her hand, or whisper in her ear? “But tell me about you, Lobo. I want to know about your life.” (Mora 29)

Family relations theory proposes that it is just as important to focus on the female as a member of a family or a society as it is as an individual; all variables should be analyzed. Therefore, the contrast between “history” and “her story” is clearly noted; and, both must be examined for full knowledge.

In terms of pedagogy, this generational perspective of changing feminisms is essential: “There is no generalized female experience” (Lather 28). This points again to a practice of inclusion, not exclusion. Multiplicity is the key. By tracing the generational issues, these myriad examples of “women’s wisdom,” understanding them within their original context, and then comparing them with current situations, a change in perspective is made evident.

Giroux notes that there is a constant need “to challenge, remap, and renegotiate the boundaries of knowledge” (26). I would add that before that can take place, one must understand one’s own perspective in relation to an issue, be it a spiritual practice, a feminist manifestation, or any other issue. To do this, one must first know oneself and one’s own formation. This conforms with Lather’s observation on feminism: “because feminism has had long experience in self-reflexivity and in making common sense problematic, it can also provide the basis for the development of practices of self-interrogation and critique” (x). Also, Blanca Silvestrini theorizes that “storytelling [. . .] and narratives are the most important ways in which women leave marks in our lives” (177). Therefore, tracing both fictional (from the texts) and non-fictional (from students’ experience) family trees and collecting tales are valid pedagogic processes. As Mora writes: “In our creations, the unconscious surfaces, becomes visible, and in reflecting us, lets us reflect on who we are, offers epiphanies. . . . I shape what I inherit into what I need, shape what shaped me” (272).

Admittedly, by creating a particular course or including a specific set of texts, the professor has inherently established an authoritative position. Lather expounds on this concept in *Getting Smart*. Yet, it must not be forgotten that by enrolling in the course,

the student, too, has established an authority. Therefore, there is the opportunity for the creation and nurturing of a shared, collaborative authority. This can be what Lather refers to as a location wherein students can “renegotiate definitions and ways of perceiving” (145). This is the space wherein initial “gut” reactions of resistance to women’s issues and spiritual practices (as well as other topics) can be explored. In sum, by incorporating pedagogic methods and texts that highlight inclusion and analytic multiplicity and by prioritizing student experience and perspective, both educators and students have a better opportunity to become engaged learners who, rather than accept blindly, question knowingly.

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Postmodern approaches to negotiating religion in the classroom

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To begin is impossible. I will begin with that, with *postmodernism* as a figure of the impossibility of beginning, of positing (*posting*) a definition, a place, point or position from which to depart . . .

--Dawne McCance, *Posts: Re Addressing the Ethical*.

I. Postmodernism

Postmodernism has spawned countless definitions, which range from a “fundamentally contradictory, resolutely historical, and inescapably political, cultural activity” (Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* 4) to the Marxist view that considers it the cultural dominant of late capitalism (Jameson).¹ While some critics argue that as suggested by its prefix, postmodernism may be the final stage of modernity, others stress the paradigm shift.² Postmodernism is widely viewed as the death knell of metanarratives, given the view that truth is said to reside in the different regimes of discourse (Lyotard). Moreover, recent articulations stress its critical stance.³ As deconstructive pluralism, postmodernism becomes an instrument of political resistance to the extent that it destabilizes, or at least challenges, Western systems of knowledge.⁴ Yet, to the extent that critics concur on the postmodern critique of the legitimizing force of the metanarratives of modernity, postmodernism defies definition (Huyssen 183). Therefore, all of the above attempts are flawed by their attempt to define postmodernism according to universal paradigms, that is, giving way to other master discourses.

II. Underlying Assumptions

The ideology of modernity is usually associated with a universal subject and a teleological sense of history based on determinism, rationalism, universality, progress, emancipation, unity, and continuity—foundations that regulated the civilizing process of the West.⁵ The “de-centering” of the unified subject is perhaps the fundamental paradigm shift ushered in by Postmodernism (Hutcheon, *A Poetics*, 159; Huyssen 208). From a post-structuralist perspective subjectivity is “precarious, contradictory and in process, constantly being reconstituted in discourse each time we think or speak” (Weedon 33).⁶ However, material conditions and institutionalized practices are involved in the subject's interpellation:

[I]t is clearly not the case that “I” preside over the positions that have constituted me, shuffling through them instrumentally, casting some aside, incorporating others . . . The “I” who would select between them is always already . . . *constituted* by . . . these “positions” [which] are not merely theoretical products, but fully embedded organizing principles of material practices and institutional arrangements, those matrices of power and discourse that produce me as a viable “subject”. (Butler 9)

In terms of history, Hayden White's link to postmodernism is based on the influence of the pantextualists (Foucault, Barthes, Derrida, etc.), who posit the discipline “*either* as a text subject to many different readings (like a novel, poem, or play), *or* as an absent presence the nature of which is perceivable only by way of prior textualizations (documents or historical accounts) that must be read and rewritten in response to present interests, concerns, desires, aspirations, and the like” (485).⁷

In terms of pedagogy, the chart in which Lather compares Pre Modern, Modern, and Post-Modern Weltanschauungs from the perspective of forms of authority and legitimate knowledge, conception of the individual, material base, view of history, and place of community/tradition (160-61), is extremely useful in walking students through different paradigms. [The chart will be distributed at the MLA].

III. Postmodern Ethics

Though postmodernism calls into question claims to universal scope and validity, ethics has become a burning topic. According to Zygmunt Bauman moral phenomena are inherently nonrational insofar as they precede consideration of purpose. Moreover, given the postmodern ban on metanarratives, morality is *nonuniversalizable*. So, ambivalence defines human beings, and by extension, morality. Paradoxically, Bauman argues that being *for* the Other is the first reality of a self constituted on the basis of moral responsibility. Therefore, postmodern morality becomes “an ethics of self-limitation [based on] visualizing the consequences of action or inaction [in a context in which] uncertainty is neither dismissed nor suppressed, but consciously embraced” (320-21).

Like Bauman, Ewa Plonowska Ziarek endorses Emmanuel Levinas's notion of “anarchic obligation,” that is, “a nonappropriative relation to the Other” (2), which defines freedom as an engagement in a transformative practice motivated by an obligation for the Other. However, she stresses the ethical and political significance of sexuality and embodiment and wonders “whether obligation based on respect for alterity and accountability for the Other's oppression can motivate resistance and the invention of new modes of life” (2), especially given the internal conflicts within the subject.⁸ Ziarek also emphasizes an “ethos of becoming,” which involves “the task of resistance to power

and, second, the transformation of the negative thought of resistance into a creation of the new modes of being” (15). Superseding the modernist notion of continuous progress, Ziarek construes becoming as discontinuous, thus shifting, “the concern with the universal norms of ethical behavior to the task of transforming the subjective and social forms of life beyond their present limitations” (15). Along these lines, rather than being seen as an attribute of the subject, “freedom is conceptualized as an engagement in praxis” (15). Furthermore, “since subjective and social transformation occurs on the level of bodies, materiality, and power, the ethos of becoming contests the disembodied subjectivity of traditional ethics” (15).

IV. Impact of Religious Discourse on Politics

At a global level, the “interactions among colonialism, gender and religion constitute some of the most significant and contradictory forces influencing our world today” (Donaldson and Kwok Pui-lan 1). In the United States, research on the interconnection between religion and politics covers a wide array of subjects such as “the extent to which the framers of the Constitution were religious men who wished to establish a Christian nation, the meaning of the church-state separation [and] the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s” (Olson 4). However, current interest has been spurred by the rise of Christian fundamentalism leading to George W. Bush’s presidential victory with the majority in both houses in 2000, and by the momentous events of September 11, 2001 (Chilton, Crowley, Wilcox, Murphy and Miller).⁹

V. Postmodern Pedagogies

Lather underscores “the value-ladenness of inquiry,” in other words, “ways of knowing are inherently culture-bound and perspectival” (2). Along these lines, and

echoing Bakhtin, she notes that “knowledge production and legitimation are historically situated and structurally located” (3). In terms of postmodern practices in the classroom she offers the following pointers:

-Did I encourage ambivalence, ambiguity and multiplicity, or did I impose order and structure? . . .

- . . . What has been muted, repressed, unheard? . . . Have I confronted my own evasions and raised doubts about any illusions of closure?

- . . . Have I questioned the textual staging of knowledge in a way that keeps my own authority from being reified?

-Did I focus on the limits of my own conceptualizations?

-Who are my ‘Others’? What binaries structure my arguments? What binaries are at play? . . .

-Did I make resistant discourses and subject positions more widely available? . . . Perhaps more importantly, did it go beyond critique to help in producing pluralized and diverse spaces for the emergence of subjugated knowledges and for the organization of resistance? (84)

Most of the studies on the interrelation of religion and politics focus on discourse by analyzing myths and metaphors.¹⁰ However, from a rhetorical standpoint, Sharon Crowley demonstrates the impossibility of a dialogue between liberals and Christian fundamentalists.¹¹ She argues, “the tactics typically used in a liberal argument—empirically based reason and factual evidence—are not highly valued by Christian apocalyptists, who rely instead on revelation, faith, and biblical interpretation to ground

claims” (3). Crowley contends that “ancient rhetorical theory has much to offer postmodernity [in terms of] attention to location and awareness of contingency [as well as] on the postmodern turn toward language” (45). She notes that according to Protagoras, “logoi (words or speech) make the world apparent. [Furthermore] subjectivities, and our impressions of reality itself, are mobile, various, and contingent on circumstance” (48). In other words, Crowley’s “sophistic model of rhetorical invention” is postmodern insofar as it privileges “movement, flexibility, contingency, and difference” (56).

Like Butler and Ziarek, Crowley underscores the embodied but always already changing nature of ideology by way of “the reflexive relations between culture and ‘selves’ that Pierre Bourdieu calls ‘the *habitus*’” (57).¹² Given the current impasse regarding an understanding between Liberals and Christian fundamentalists, Crowley suggests resorting to “ideology, fantasy, and emotion [in their role of] primary motivators of belief and action” (59). The public acceptance of Bush’s judgement of Osama bin Laden underscores these factors. For, in addition to referring to him as the mastermind of the events of September 11, Bush was able to elicit the ideological residue of Disney’s racist portrayals of Arabs [fantasy?] as well as the Christian connection between evil and Satan--including the concurrent fear [emotion?] (59).

Crowley not only argues “that the ancient notion of conjecture is compatible with the postmodern insistence on indeterminacy” (67), but adds that “beliefs are conjectures, [insofar as they] are views or attitudes or assessments about nature (including human nature) that serve the interests of the believer and/or some other person, group or institution” (68). This is important because “beliefs that circulate in one ideology can be

borrowed for use in another” (75). Furthermore, “fantasy, like belief, is a conjecture. However, fantasy depicts not ‘what is’ but ‘what is desired,’ what is missing” (94).¹³ Along these lines, Crowley defines myth as “a special case of collective fantasy” (97).

Crowley contends that “the relations between and among the moments of belief, fantasy, and myth can [not only] be traced, [but also] shown to make a kind of sense that is not covered by the term *reason*” (59). Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe define them as “moments,” that is as “differential positions, insofar as they appear articulated within a discourse” (60). It follows that “a ‘moment’ is some belief that is more or less firmly situated by a history of its use within one or more discursive contexts” (60). Crowley, however, coins the term “*ideologic*” to name “an articulation . . . a connection that [under certain conditions] can make a unity of two different elements. It is a linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute, and essential for all time” (60). For instance, “a worker who defends capitalism has taken up a position, . . . although the potential for alternative readings is limited by the present hegemony of capitalism. . . He or she can then deploy a familiar *ideologic* . . . A common move in the defense of free-market capitalism . . . is to connect belief in it to the belief that poor people are so because they are lazy, thus excusing capitalism from its structurally unfair distribution of income” (60).

VI. Postmodern Praxis¹⁴

Departing from “Gramsci’s thesis that ideology is the medium through which consciousness and meaningfulness operate in real life” (2), that is, acknowledging that we are always already in ideology, and drawing on Spivak, Lather advocates deploying “strategies of displacement rather than strategies of confrontation in order to multiply the

levels of knowing and doing upon which resistance can act” (13). Her postmodern pedagogy is based on deconstruction--a process described in shorthand as follows:

1) identify the binaries, the oppositions that structure an argument; 2) reverse/displace the dependent term from its negative position to a place that locates it as the very condition of the positive term; and 3) create a more fluid and less coercive conceptual organization of terms which transcends a binary logic simultaneously being both and neither of the binary terms (Grosz, 1989:xv qtd in Lather 13).

Textual Examples--Deconstruction I:

Melissa M. Wilcox’s “Discourse Bless America: Rebuilding the National Mythos After September 11,” purports to offer “a reading of public responses in the U.S. to the September 11 terrorist attacks through a theory of symbolically disruptive violence” (26). Wilcox argues that “the responses . . . indicate an initial narrative failure—an inability to tell the story of September 11 through existing tropes of U.S. national storytelling—and temporary destruction of the national mythos” (26-27). She concludes, “efforts to rally from this mythical displacement thus involved attempts to find an appropriate, pre-existing narrative framework and to shore up the crumbling towers of the national image” (27). In the first of six sections Wilcox concludes that: “spectacular violence becomes symbolically disruptive violence when its symbolic meaning goes beyond the destruction of property and the loss of life, when the location, the timing, the method, the people involved, or all of these factors carry symbolic import for an individual or a group of people” (28). The second section focuses on the “narrative failure” which resulted from the “inability to incorporate [the events of September 11] into existing narrative

structures” (28). The third one dwells on a paradox: “despite the irrefutable evidence that the perpetrators of the attacks had died along with their many victims, and despite the fact that no group claimed responsibility for the attacks, the enemy “was imagined to be alive and well. He was also imagined to be male” (31). Wilcox also traces the increased “othering” and “Orientalizing” of the enemy, visited on “Muslims, Sikhs, Arabs, and South Asians,” as well as on “Latinos and Native Americans,” who were “told to ‘go home’” (33). She notes that once the attacks were attributed to bin Laden, the othering focused on “Afghanistan” (33). The fourth section centers on the “blatant physicality” and the “gendered nature” of the images of “the violated nation.” The fifth revolves around the six main features of the national mythos: “omniscience, omnipotence, impregnability and indivisibility, divine election, supreme goodness, and a salvific mission” (35). In tackling the question of “supreme goodness,” Wilcox includes a reference to the “film clip of Palestinian children celebrating the attacks,” which allows for discussion of the implicit question “Why do they hate us?” Though she admits that the few “political analysts [who] tried to answer this question by explaining the ways in which the U.S. deviates from its beloved self-image . . . were often decried as unpatriotic” (37), her discussion of the nation’s “salvific mission” replicates perceived national behavior:

Over the course of the twentieth century, but especially in the aftermath of World War II, the United States developed a sacred story of itself as a savior or superhero. With its powerful military, its democratic government, its commitment to “liberty and justice for all,” and its divine blessing, the country’s leaders (as well as its citizens and many hopeful immigrants) have cast it as the leader of the

free world, the defender of democracy. . . and the land of opportunity. With growing military might and a rising fear of communism driven largely by the Soviet challenge to U.S. preeminence, the U.S. turned rhetoric to action in a variety of interventionist wars and skirmishes during the second half of the twentieth century. While these occasionally destabilized the savior image rather than enforcing it (especially, of course, during and after Vietnam War), the economic boom of the 1990s and the lack of spectacular military failures during that time had allowed the image to become re-entrenched (37-38).

Apparently Wilcox doesn't consider what she has repressed by setting a specific timeframe. From a Latin American standpoint, U.S. expansionism resulted in gutting Mexico (California, Texas, and the territory between them, that is Arizona, New Mexico, parts of Nevada and Colorado) and in the annexation of Puerto Rico—the repercussions of which continue to date. During the 20th Century perhaps the most egregious interventions included the U.S. backed toppling of Jacobo Arbens' (1913-1971) government in Guatemala (1954), and Salvador Allende's (1908-1973) in Chile (1973). The tactics learned at the School of the Americas to preserve the doctrine of national security were purportedly justified by the Red fear. However, the sheer scope of *Operación Cóndor* (Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Brazil, Paraguay, Bolivia and to an extent Peru) and the staggering number of disappeared tell a different story. More recent interventions include the subvention of the *Contras* in Nicaragua . . . At a broader scale, any consideration of the Middle East involves taking into account the ad hoc configuration of countries emerging from Colonial policies, the U.S. stakes in oil, and the overt and seemingly uncritical support of Israeli actions. In sum, by failing to consider

“Who are my ‘Others’?,” her argument lists periods of relative success, which justified by the banner of freedom expanded the reaches of capitalism and its more recent avatars: neoliberalism, and more recently, globalization. Though the carnage of September 11 cannot be condoned, the blind spot of Wilcox’s argument replicates that of a nation which forecloses a critical examination of political interventions that may or may not generate animosity toward the U.S.

Deconstruction II:

In “Worlds Apart,” Chapter 9 of his analysis of political discourse, Paul Chilton compares statements made by George W. Bush and Osama bin Laden about September 11, 2001. Chilton begins by contextualizing unrest in the Middle East, including: Theodor Roosevelt’s promise “to protect the Saudi dynasty in return for indefinite access to Saudi oil reserves;” the “Carter Doctrine,” which stated that the USA would resort to military force to repel any threat to its oil interests in the Persian Gulf;” and “Operation Desert Storm,” which concluded with “the stationing of American troops in large numbers in Saudi Arabia” (156). Similarly, contextualization of the American mindset includes references to previous attacks to the White House (1812), Pearl Harbor (1941), the Cold War, and the Cuban missile crisis (1961). Chilton’s analysis sets up “a multi-dimensional model, . . . that involves space, time, and modality. [wherein] all entities (people, things) and actions . . . are positioned in relation to the self’s location, time of uttering, beliefs and values” (157).

In his October 7, 2001 speech, Bush informs the nation about the military strikes against al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. He refers to different types of allies and concludes by polarising the world between “the outlaws and killers of innocents” and “us.” Osama bin

Laden's speech was broadcast in Arabic by alJazeera on the same date. After noting the risk implicit in analyzing a translation, Chilton focuses on the political and theological concepts involved in the address. Bin Laden's speech begins by praising God for having allowed the destruction of the U.S., and proceeds to list possible motives including eighty years of Muslim bloodshed, the Israeli occupation of Palestine and other territories, and even the victims of the atomic bombs. As Bush, bin Laden concludes by dividing the world, "in two regions—one of faith . . . and one of infidelity" (172). Not only are the analogies between the spatial and moral markers of the speeches striking but also the "connection with . . . what politics is about: . . . space and territoriality, . . . past and future action, and . . . above all, about being right" (157).

The deconstruction of these similarities takes place in Chapter Ten, Chilton's analysis of the role of religion in politics. Once again, Chilton begins by exploring underlying assumptions, that is, "what Bush and bin Laden presume hearers presume about religion" (175-76). Thus, we are informed that while bin Laden's text draws on the Koran, "he presumes the reality of the *Hubal* . . . one of many Gods who, in the seventh century was worshiped by infidels . . . in Mecca . . . Thus [the *Hubal*] stands for infidelity and also for defilement of a sacred place" (176). This is essential, since according to "the schema . . . mapped onto a geopolitical representation of the world [in] 2001: America is the 'head of the Hubal'" (177-78). Thus, bin Laden's audience "will infer that the referent is . . . Saudi Arabia . . . supported by successive U.S. governments since 1945. Second, the mapping entails that America is present in a sacred place . . . the Arabian Peninsula" (178). Though the analysis is much richer, the conclusion is that an analogy is developed

between bin Laden and Mohammed's call to monotheism and the destruction of the *Hubal*.

Chilton compares bin Laden's text to Bush's "Remarks at National Day of Prayer and Remembrance" at the National Cathedral on September 14, 2001. In addition to highlighting the separation of church and state, Chilton focuses on religious pluralism, and given the circumstance, on the idea of a god whose designs are unknown. Despite "drawing on the collective resources of a current Christian teaching that has historical discourse antecedents in the origins of the American state" (189), the most striking difference between both texts is the notion of history. Very much like in Wilcox's text, by referring to "the distance" and [to our] "responsibility" to "history," Bush forecloses the possibility of an examination and/or a critique of the [historical presence] of the U.S. in the Middle East.

Examples deploying Rhetoric in Postmodern ways:

Crowley argues that "new or countering beliefs are more likely to be heard and considered by subalterns" (192). She advocates telling stories given their close relation with conjecture (197-99). Following Bordieu, she notes that "political action" is possible if we "produce and impose representations (mental, verbal, visual or theatrical) of the social world which may be capable of acting on this world" (*Language* 127, qtd 199). Therefore, "liberal and leftist rhetors should not only tell audiences that they support universal health care; they should depict the world as it would exist with this policy in place with all the *pathos* and compelling detail they can muster" (199). Another strategy is to rewrite values. Thus "family" "can be reconstructed to include groups of committed relatives or friends who share a home" (200). Conversely, the contingency of values can

be underscored. For example, “a rhetor might be able to demonstrate the hateful effects of defining homosexuality as a sin. Rhetors could also deploy the economy of nature, arguing that since homosexual practices are not a choice they cannot be sinful (of course this approach risks essentialism)” (201). Finally, though close to liberal reasoning, another strategy “involves disarticulating a particular belief from the others with which it is articulated. . . . [For instance]: If abortion is murder, doesn’t murder also occur when a woman is forced by the state to bear a child to term if doing so will end her life? Isn’t capital punishment also murder by the state? Isn’t war the murder of innocents just as abortion is claimed to be?” (201).

Conclusion

Any attempt to engage in issues of religion from a postmodern [pedagogy] standpoint should invoke a moral stance, which in consonance with Bauman and Ziarek among others, implies our inescapable responsibility for the Other. In other words, each and every one of previous examples is offered as a means to ponder on the subtending similarities (including religious attitudes and behaviors) that undercut the current political division between “them” and “us.”

Notes

¹ Like Hutcheon, Delanty stresses the culture wars defining postmodernism a “a diffuse set of ideas, ranging from the strictly aesthetic dimension of culture to its normative and cognitive dimensions” (132). On a “number of postmodernisms,” see McHale, 54.

² In addition to the end of totalizing and exclusionary metanarratives, the postmodern paradigm shift includes “dissension, and a culture of debate” (de Toro 48)

³ Hutcheon was one of the first critics to stress the contestatory angle of Postmodernism, see *Politics*, 11.

⁴ According to the views of deconstructive pluralism, “the modernist referents of reality,

truth, reason, and logic are simply fictive sociolinguistic constructs that act as mechanisms of social and individual control” (Jarvis 55; 66).

⁵ Postmodernism is also associated with the multiplicity of meaning resulting from the secularization of truth-as-origin and text-as-original and the abandonment of certainty. See Richard, 210-11.

⁶ Based on W. E. B. Du Bois's seminal work on “double consciousness” (1969 [1903]: 45), and a gendered and racial and ethnic standpoint, Norma Alarcón arrives at a similar position: “[M]any of *Bridge's* writers were aware of the displacement of their subjectivity across a multiplicity of discourses: feminist/lesbian, nationalist, racial, socioeconomic, historical, etc.; [i.e.] a multiplicity of positions from which they are driven to grasp or understand themselves and their relations with the real” (356). Furthermore, concurring with Weedon, Alarcón notes, “These voicings (or thematic threads) are not viewed as necessarily originating in the subject, but as discourses that traverse consciousness and which the subject must struggle with constantly” (365).

⁷ For a more in-depth treatment of Postmodernism, and essentially what it means for/from Latin America, see my recent book.

⁸ For an ethical reading of deconstruction, inflected by Levinas, see Critchley.

⁹ American students became aware of the long history of Liberation theology in Latin America by way of Rigoberta Menchú Tum's testimony. On the impact of Liberation theology in the Phillipines, see Ojoy. On the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, see Moaddel.

¹⁰ The term “meme,” coined by Richard Dawkins is defined as, “a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of *imitation* . . . Examples of memes are tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes fashions, . . . memes propagate themselves . . . via a process [of] imitation. If a scientist hears, or reads about, a good idea, he passes it on to his colleagues and students” (Dawkins, 1976:206 qtd in Lowe 3). Brian Lowe also resorts to metaphors as systems of meaning:

We may not always know it, but we think in metaphor. A large proportion of our most commonplace thoughts make use of an extensive, but unconscious, system of metaphorical concepts, that is, concepts from a typically concrete realm of thought that are used to comprehend another, completely different domain. Such concepts are often reflected in ordinary language, but their most dramatic effect comes in ordinary reasoning (Lakoff, 1995: 177, qtd in Lowe 9).

Thus, Lakoff and Johnson's 1999 metaphor theory, “accounts for many apparent inconsistencies within contemporary American politics, such as anti-abortion ‘right to life’ activists who simultaneously oppose abortion and oppose government-supported prenatal programs intended to reduce infant mortality” (Lakoff, 1995: 178 qtd in Lowe 9).

¹¹ Indeed, Crowley focuses on the issue of resistance, which has long plagued feminist pedagogy. On student resistance see Elizabeth Ellsworth and Lather, “Staying Dumb? Student Resistance to Liberatory Curriculum,” 123-52. Crowley states:

I part from liberal belief in at least two respects. I reject the claim that disagreements can be resolved solely by appeals to empirically based reason Second, I do not expect that full agreement can ever be reached on any issue that concerns a large group of citizens. The liberal hope is that reasoning through difficult issues will somehow allow a consensus to emerge. But the only way to achieve consensus is to discount or eliminate dissent, that is, to quiet or exclude differing points of view. The fact is that the liberal depiction of tolerant deliberation is itself a belief, part of an ideology that rigorously excludes those who value other sorts of proof, such as gut feelings, or who appeal to various sorts of authority, such as faith in tradition or human nature of God, in order to authenticate those claims (44).

¹² Crowley notes that, “the assumption that human beings operate in relation to some medium is characteristic of postmodern thought, whether this medium is called “discourse” (Foucault), “writing” (Derrida), “the Symbolic” (Lacan), “hegemony” (Gramsci), or “the *habitus*” (Bordieu)” (62). The *habitus* is defined as “the system of structured, structuring dispositions . . . which is constituted in practice” (*Logic* 52, qtd Crowley 62). In other words, it “includes cultural representations such as history, memory, ideology, fantasy, myth, and lore, and it also includes habituated practices [such as] ‘a durable way of standing, speaking, walking, and thereby of feeling and thinking’” (*Logic* 70, qtd Crowley 62). Moreover, it not only is a product of history but also has a material dimensions. “It provides templates from the production of buildings . . . artifacts, political and ethical practices Some habits endure over vast periods, while others emerge and disappear in a relatively brief period of time” (62).

¹³ “The most powerful signifiers in American discourse . . . cluster around sex, race, power, and money. Individual and collective fantasies are repeatedly enacted or performed by the desire to identify with the master signifiers thrown up by heterosexism, racism, and capitalism” (Crowley 96).

¹⁴ See also Henry Giroux’s seminal “Towards a Postmodern Pedagogy” (71-88), especially if rewriting section # 3 (74-75) on the need to focus Critical pedagogy on the issue of difference in an ethically challenging and politically transformative way, to include religion in the worn-out (race, gender, and class) mantra.

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Reviews/Reseñas

El arte de no olvidar: Literatura testimonial en Chile, Argentina y Uruguay entre los 80 y los 90. By Nora Strejilevich. Buenos Aires, Editorial Catálogos, 2006. 146 pp.

The most recent publication by Nora Strejilevich, *El arte de no olvidar: Literatura testimonial en Chile, Argentina y Uruguay entre los 80 y los 90*, provides a glimpse of the Argentine activist and novelist in the role of literary critic. This slender volume offers a broad survey of the fundamental themes, major authors, and principal literary works denouncing the military dictatorships that proliferated in the Southern Cone during the 1970s and 80s. The author successfully demonstrates that Chile, Argentina and Uruguay—linked politically through similar methods of repression—maintain a parallel tradition of contestatory testimonial texts. Citing prominent theorists and critics, Strejilevich provides a comprehensive overview of this committed literature while effectively placing the works in their specific socio-historical context.

The concise treatise bears a straightforward framework. Initial chapters introduce the role and function of testimony while tracing its history within Latin America. Particular attention is paid to the topics of memory and exile. Strejilevich provides a quick but surprisingly thorough overview of the production and critical reception of testimonial works from the Southern Cone during the last two decades. Though somewhat cursory, this chronological listing includes biographical sketches of the authors and brief summaries of each text. The main body of *El arte de no olvidar*, three chapters devoted to a specific country-by-country study, outlines particular historical, political and cultural contexts and analyzes with greater depth representative testimonial texts arising from these unique circumstances. Putting into practice the literary trajectory traced throughout, *El arte de no olvidar* closes with a more intimate voice, that of the author offering her own testimony—an eloquent illustration of the inescapable interconnection of the personal, historical and collective always present in testimonial works.

As a survivor, literary critic, and author of novelistic testimony in her own right, Strejilevich maintains a unique relationship to and understanding of *testimonio*. Emphasizing the value and authenticity of both subjective recollection and fictional re-creation of the past, the author challenges conventional expectations of the information-based, juridical function of testimony. Strejilevich passionately argues that *all* memory work is interpretative and that *all* forms of retelling rely on narrative structures. In her view, testimony need not necessarily impart objective facts with historical exactitude; of much greater significance is the fact that testimony transmits lived, subjective truths. It not surprising that the author champions literary representation as an ideal form of testimonial expression: “Quizás la voz poética sea, por esta razón, la más apta para transmitir las huellas de la tortura” (14). Such testimony, insists Strejilevich, serves as a vital form of questioning or exploration and ultimately fosters reintegration after trauma.

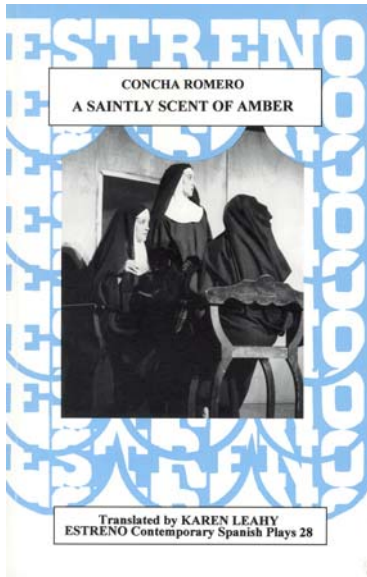
Given this predilection for the ‘poetic voice’ it is somewhat disappointing, for this reader at least, that the texts selected for individual analysis are primarily pioneering testimonies

from each country. Although the subtitle promises an examination of works from the 80s and 90s—an undertaking carried out when listing texts in the initial chapters—only publications from the first decade receive detailed analysis. These early manifestations, while certainly literary or fictionalized, remain openly denunciatory with a primary goal of imparting information or making events known. Perhaps not coincidentally, these are also canonical works, the ones most studied by critics and listed on course syllabi: *Tejas Verdes* (Hernána Valdés, 1979), *Preso sin nombre, celda sin número* (Jacobo Timerman, 1981), *The Little School* (Alicia Partnoy, 1986), and *Recuerdo de la muerte* (Miguel Bonasso, 1984) to name a few. With this limited focus, *El arte de no olvidar* misses an opportunity to investigate the increasingly experimental narrative strategies prevalent in the testimonial fictions penned in the 90s. However, it is also important to keep in mind that Strejilevich’s study was published in Argentina, where neither these testimonial texts nor the critical literature has been disseminated until very recently.

The final chapter of *El arte de no olvidar* offers an intimate look at the author’s own experiences rendering and soliciting personal testimony. In “Mi propia voz se rebela” a transition to first person narration (characteristic of the genre) accompanies a change in tone and content as Nora reflects on the process of writing her testimonial fiction, *Una sola muerte numerosa*. Much as the preceding chapters succinctly compile existing conceptual and critical material, this section retells the previously published tale of how the cathartic act of writing for a class on autobiography led to investigatory research and eventually to the publication of a multi-voiced narration (see Szurmuk, Mónica. “One Single, Countless Death: An Interview with Nora Strejilevich.” *Bridges*. Spring 2000: 97-100). But suddenly Nora makes an unexpected, and to my knowledge previously unexpressed, confession: “Pero tal vez no fue exactamente así. Lo que quería al principio, hay que decirlo, fue olvidar” (116). This painful acknowledgement, perhaps itself a narrative ploy—to elicit empathy and foster reader solidarity remains intrinsic to literary testimony—both complicates and personalizes (humanizes) the material under study. While underscoring the tension and ambiguity implicit in testimonial writing, this revelation serves as a moving reminder that, for Strejilevich at least, the testimonial act involves exploring the personal impact of a traumatic past.

El arte de no olvidar successfully achieves its goal of revealing testimony’s vital role in collective memory, “muestra que el testimonio no ha agotado su función social: orientar la reflexión de lo que pasó, de qué significa y cuál es el legado del genocidio” (7). One of the greatest strengths of this text, and a significant contribution to the field of testimonial criticism in the Southern Cone, is the detailed bibliography and carefully selected list of suggested readings that follow the critical analyses and personal testimony. *El arte de no olvidar* will be of particular interest as an introductory primer for the initiate. A compact yet comprehensive resource filled with bibliographic references, the text is especially useful as a starting point for further exploration of the topic.

Janis Breckenridge
Hiram College



Romero, Concha. *A Sainly Scent of Amber*. Ed, Phyllis Zatlin; Trans. Karen Leahy. Estreno: New Brunswick, 2005. 53 pp.

There are several reasons to be excited about the English translation of *Un olor a ámbar* (1983) by Concha Romero (b. 1945) beyond the attractive volume and introductions. *A Sainly Scent of Amber* is one of Romero's historical dramas, this one set in 1583 at the Convent of the Carmelitas Descalzas in Alba de Tormes shortly after the death and burial of Santa Teresa of Avila.

The conflict turns on who will possess the miraculous body of Santa Teresa. Her burial site at the Convent emits a powerful scent of amber that fills every part and particle of the Convent, a miracle in itself that attracts the attention

of the Church. Once exhumed in flawless condition, the remains of Santa Teresa are mutilated by the Provincial, Father Gracian, a devoted friend to the deceased, who secretly cuts off her hand to keep, and by his subordinate, Brother Cristobal, a wannabe. At the close of the two-year period leading to the nun's beautification, the women of the Convent yield their saint's body when threatened with excommunication by the new Provincial, Brother Gregorio whose vitriol and authority undermine all that Santa Teresa cherished.

Romero's delicious and mocking humor runs throughout *A Sainly Scent of Amber*. On the lighter side are the Prioress's double-edged rejoinders to the rigid Brother Gregorio, and the miracles that the Sisters' creative imaginations produce. The humor referring to the body—the site of Romero's feminist mandate—is darker. When a townsman asks for a relic to cure his small son, the Prioress orders that he receive a fragment of Santa Teresa's clothing. But Sister Catalina responds: "Don't bother, Sister. Here is a little piece of her skin that came off while washing her back" (31). When Brother Gregorio begrudgingly agrees leave an arm for the Sisters before he appropriates Teresa's body for the Church, Juana observes, "How easy! It's like cutting a chicken breast" at which point the Brother vomits. Catalina rejoins, "Or a piece of soft cheese", and Isabel, "It has the texture of a leg of lamb" (48).

While both the Convent and the Church claim Santa Teresa's body, the women cherish and honor their mentor whose body is a loving part of their own spirit, while the latter owns and objectifies her, repulsed at the reality of her human flesh. This funny but sobering play allows the college or graduate student from a wide assortment of disciplines to examine Spain's religious and gender-biased history from a contemporary feminist perspective.

Candyce Leonard
Wake Forest University

Elena Poniatowska. *Lilus Kikus and Other Stories*. Translation and introduction by Elizabeth Coonrod Martínez. Illustrations by Leonora Carrington. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005.

Con más de cuarenta libros publicados, la mexicana de origen francés Elena Poniatowska (1932-) ha destacado en la mayoría de los géneros narrativos: la crónica periodística, la entrevista, el relato corto, la novela epistolar (*Querido Diego, te abraza Quiela*), la novela autobiográfica (*La flor de lis*), la novela de investigación o reconstrucción histórica (*Tinísima*) y el testimonio (*La noche de Tlatelolco*). Su nombre es ya un referente clásico de la literatura latinoamericana escrita por mujeres y su obra continua y ahonda el legado cultural de otras novelistas mexicanas como Rosario Castellanos y Elena Garro. *Lilus Kikus*, novela corta escrita cuando Poniatowska apenas superaba la mayoría de edad, aparece ahora traducida al inglés y editada en compañía de cuatro relatos más tardíos que, lejos de completar un volumen de modo arbitrario, dotan de unidad de sentido al mismo y reclaman la atención sobre la temprana militancia feminista que ha vertebrado la trayectoria de su autora: desde el debut literario que supone *Lilus Kikus* y en adelante, la narrativa de Elena Poniatowska construye una meditación, por necesidad y por convicción estética a menudo irónica y siempre sutil, sobre la posición de la mujer en un contexto cultural, el mexicano, de marcado carácter patriarcal.

En este contexto mencionado (estamos hablando además de la década de los cincuenta) no sorprende que *Lilus Kikus* pasara desapercibida en el momento de su publicación o que quedara relegada a los anaqueles de la literatura infantil por la propia naturaleza “ingenuista”, acaso también, de su propuesta estilística. La peripecia de la novela relata en doce breves capítulos los avatares y primeros descubrimientos de una

niña hipersensible, la propia Lilus Kikus, hasta que es internada en un colegio de monjas al final de la historia. O si se quiere, la novela signa el viaje desde la luminosidad y la perpleja e infatigable curiosidad de la infancia hasta las servidumbres de la edad adulta y reprimida. Los juegos en la calle, un concierto de música en el Palacio de Bellas Artes, un día de playa en Acapulco, otro atrapada en mitad de una manifestación política, así como las relaciones que la protagonista teje con sus padres, sus compañeras de clase (en espacial con “La oveja negra, una adolescente de precoz rebeldía y desarrollo), el vecino filósofo o la propia divinidad, ofrecen material suficiente para que Poniatowska deslice indirectamente y sin “sal gorda”, en un tono “naive” y siempre humoroso, la siniestra trama de dominación masculina que desde múltiples ángulos (familiares, políticos, religiosos, sentimentales) va dirigiendo de forma igualmente oculta e indirecta (Lilus ama el internado de monjas, por ejemplo) los pasos de la protagonista y reduciendo su futuro al mero papel de mujer obediente y sumisa. El final de la novela, ambiguo y abierto, conforma un claro exponente de la recomendable distancia narrativa con la que Poniatowska aborda una temática tan propensa al facilismo en manos menos diestras.

Nada que reprochar a la excelente traducción y a la informativa introducción a cargo de Elizabeth Coonrod Martínez. Todavía menos a las sugerentes ilustraciones de Leonora Carrington que acompañan al relato.

Fernando Guerrero
SUNY at Plattsburgh.

Empanada, A delicious play by Anel I. Flores.

Reviewed by Sara E. Cooper, Associate Professor, California State University, Chico

Mmmmm... *empanadas, pastel de cumpleaños, barbacoa, chilaquiles, paletas y helados*... Silhouette of smooth hands running down the curves of the cocinera... Young fantasy of high-jacking the ice cream truck and reveling in the cold, sticky pleasures of forbidden places... Tongues are untied and set to savor the *sabor* of food and sexuality in a new version of the semi-autobiographical play *Empanada* by Anel I. Flores (June 9-11 and 16-17, 2006 Esperanza Peace & Justice Center, San Antonio, Tejas). However, it's not all fun and games for the Chicana lesbian author and her audience, as Flores daringly strips bare the societal, family, and self-imposed cover-up of what is real and vulnerable, what is dangerous and taboo, what is scary and seductive in her life.

One of the bravest moments of the play comes in the first scene, *Carne in My Teeth*, when Flores reads aloud from her diary about her multi-faceted relationship with food. As the central element of family life and the special domain of women in Chicana culture (think Meredith Abarca's book *Voices in the Kitchen*), food is the family comfort, the creative expression of love, and the passing on of knowledge and power between *abuelita, madre, e hija*. At the same time, food is a source of guilty and bittersweet solace in the domestic sphere when a young girl's appearance and behavior do not match up with gender role expectations. Flores ponders how the dozen *tortillas* at dinner, the extra mouthfuls of *empanadas* and *carne asada*, add up to the rolls of fat that spur cruel taunting and social ostracizing. She watches her mother serve everyone else, giving up her own tortilla to her husband, playing to perfection the self-abnegation of the Virgin Mary. She savors the guilty pleasures of hidden food, similar to her secret and solitary expressions of sexual desire. Seldom discussed or acted, except as the butt of jokes, the

refreshingly honest look at food and eating, fat and femininity rings especially true for all generations of women.

The other central concern of the play is the main character's troubled relationship with traditional religion, in which she attempts to come to terms with her inner truth without losing what is culturally dear to her. Flores reveals, "When I began writing *Empanada*, I wrote from a place in my Corazón that had been formed by a Mexican American and catholic upbringing. I wrote from the memory of pressing my Mom's warm tortillas against my face and sleeping next to my Abuelita until I moved away, but I wasn't feeling convinced that this bliss was home for me. A part of me knew this home was also the place that brought me the most discomfort, because of the silence forced upon me" (3). Many vignettes feature Flores kneeling and praying to God for strength, apologizing for having abandoned God and religion, and ultimately demanding understanding and acceptance.

The series of vignettes taken from Flores' manuscript in progress *AriaAsada* are punctuated by hauntingly familiar traditional Mexican and Catholic vocal renditions by Isabel DeLaCerde. The acting of DeLaCerde and Flores brings an almost transparent innocence to the work, juxtaposed against the subtly stoic *chola conga* personality of AnaLisa Leos and the changeable characters acted by the versatile Jessica O. Guerrero. Director María A. Ibarra's vision of a complex yet uncomplicated interweaving of scenes results in a seamless production that kept the audience rapt, alternating between sighs, winces, and guffaws. An all-woman production, from the writing, set design and lighting to the fundraising and acting, *Empanada* is a testament to the brilliance of this next

generation of *Chicana feminista* artists. Saliva dripping, hungry for more, I await the forthcoming *AriaAsada* and whatever else these incredible women cook up.

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Abarca, Meredith. *Voices in the Kitchen: Views of Food and the World from Working-Class Mexican and Mexican American Women*. Texas A&M University Press Consortium, 2006.

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Sara E. Cooper, Associate Professor
California State University, Chico

Publications/Publicaciones

Latin American Postmodernisms: Women Writers and Experimentation

by Cynthia Margarita Tompkins

University Press of Florida

Details: 240 pages 6x9

Cloth: \$59.95 **ISBN:** 0-8130-3010-2

Expected publication date: 11/24/06

Overview

"An original and necessary contribution to our understanding of literary postmodernism in Spanish America and the ground-breaking writing produced by contemporary women from Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, and Mexico. Her feminist and deconstructive textual readings reveal not only the structural and linguistic audacity of the novels studied but also the ethical import of works that are both politically and socially engaged and highly experimental in language and subject matter."--Beth E. Jorgensen, University of Rochester

Tompkins seeks to redress the lack of critical and comprehensive studies of postmodern Spanish American women novelists who produce lucid, experimental, deconstructive, and self-reflexive texts. She traces a tradition of three decades of experimental women writers, grouping for the first time established authors such as Julieta Campos, Luisa Valenzuela, and Alicia Steimberg with an intermediate group including Albalucia Angel, Ana Teresa Torres, and Brianda Domecq, and young voices including Diamela Eltit--hailed as the paradigmatic postmodern novelist, Carmen Boullosa, and Alicia Borinsky.

Positing a hybrid literary postmodernism resulting from cultural cross-fertilization across the Atlantic and along the Americas, Tompkins historicizes rhetorical devices associated with postmodernism by showing continuities and similarities with modernist experimentalism, the *nouveau roman*, "nueva narrativa," the Boom, the neobaroque, and the post-Boom, even back to surrealism and Dada. But at its core, this tradition questions the status quo

from a woman-centered perspective. And although the texts make explicit political references to institutional repression, they refrain from offering utopic, salvational metanarratives, offering instead highly fragmented and contested imagined communities of dissensus.

Tompkins sheds light on a largely ignored contemporary tradition of female experimentalism as she maps out a hybrid, feminist, engaged postmodernism, which calls into question current dominant ideologies such as capitalism, patriarchy, and liberal humanism.

Cynthia Margarita Tompkins is associate professor of Spanish at Arizona State University.



Mestizaje

Critical Uses of Race in Chicano Culture



A major reassessment of how mixed-race identity affects Chicano culture and politics.

Focusing on the often unrecognized role race plays in expressions of Chicano culture, *Mestizaje* is a provocative exploration of the volatility and mutability of racial identities. In this important moment in Chicano studies, Rafael Pérez-Torres reveals how the concepts and realities of race, historical memory, the body, and community have both constrained and opened possibilities for forging new and potentially liberating multiracial identities.

Informed by a broad-ranging theoretical investigation of identity politics and race and incorporating feminist and queer critiques, Pérez-Torres skillfully analyzes Chicano cultural production. Contextualizing the history of mestizaje, he shows how the concept of mixed race has been used to engage issues of hybridity and voice and examines the dynamics that make mestizo and mestiza identities resistant to, as well as affirmative of, dominant forms of power. He also addresses the role that mestizaje has played in expressive culture, including the hip-hop music of Cypress Hill and the vibrancy of Chicano poster art. Turning to issues of mestizaje in literary creation, Pérez-Torres offers critical readings of the works of Emma Pérez, Gil Cuadros, and Sandra Cisneros, among

others. This book concludes with a consideration of the role that the mestizo body plays as a site of elusive or displaced knowledge.

Moving beyond the oppositions—nationalism versus assimilation, men versus women, Texans versus Californians—that have characterized much of Chicano studies, *Mestizaje* synthesizes and assesses twenty-five years of pathbreaking thinking to make a case for the core components, sensibilities, and concerns of the discipline.

Rafael Pérez-Torres is professor of English at the University of California, Los Angeles. He is author of *Movements in Chicano Poetry: Against Myths, Against Margins*, coauthor of *To Alcatraz, Death Row, and Back: Memories of an East LA Outlaw*, and coeditor of *The Chicano Studies Reader: An Anthology of Aztlán, 1970–2000*.

272 pages | 15 halftones | 5 7/8 x 9 | 2006

News/Noticias

From Sara Cooper

Queridos colegas y amigas,

I am delighted to inform you all that the MLA has **approved** the Cuban and Cuban Diaspora Cultural Production Discussion Group (Cuban Discussion Group, or CDG for short). As the principal organizer, I wish to thank all of the *feministas* that supported me in the entire process. I hope that you all will consider attending our organizational meeting this December at the MLA and running for office; we already have a strong *feminista* presence, and I want to make sure that it stays that way.

LOGISTICS: Soon any new MLA members or continuing members renewing the yearly membership will be able to select the Cuban Discussion Group as one of their choices.

At that time, each member will elect whether or not to make her/his email address available to the Cuban Discussion Group (CDG) executive committee. From this list of actual official members, we will begin to formulate a new and official email listserv.

Until then, my own personal e-mail distribution list will serve as the primary vehicle of communication for the new group.

To be an OFFICIAL member of this group, you must be an MLA member current on your dues. However, I am willing to keep a secondary personal list of all people interested, just to allow the best communication among all of us who are interested in this field.

Anyone who wishes to be ADDED to my personal distribution list may send me an email request.

Anyone who wishes to UNSUBSCRIBE may reply to this email with UNSUBSCRIBE in the subject line.

2006 MLA CONVENTION IN PHILADELPHIA:

The MLA has scheduled our organizational meeting for the new CDG during the upcoming convention in Philadelphia. The meeting will be Friday, 29 December, from 5:15-6:30 p.m. In the Adams Room of the Loews Philadelphia Hotel.

At this organizational meeting, which I will be happy to run, we have two objectives that must be met: elections of the CDG executive committee and initial planning of the first CDG session, to take place the following year.

Quoting from the letter I recently received:

Five MLA members must be elected to varying terms to constitute the new discussion group's executive committee. The terms to be filled are as follows: a one-year term (2007), a two-year term (2007-08), a three year term (2007-09), a four year term (2007-10), and a five year term (2007-11)...A committee member serves as chair in his or her next-to-last year of committee service. That is, the person serving the 2007-08 term will be the 2007 chair, the person serving the 2007-09 term will be the 2008 chair, and so on. (Thus, the person who serves the one-year term does not serve as chair.)”

If you wish to serve on this committee, or nominate someone else to serve, please inform me. I will keep a list, and the official vote will occur at the MLA convention. Note: only current MLA members may vote.

Dr. Sara E. Cooper
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De Luzma Umpierre

Luzma Umpierre fue la invitada de honor en el mes de marzo en la celebracion del mes de la historia de la mujer en Jersey City State College en Nueva Jersey. La Dra.Umpierre dio una charla sobre su generacion de Latinas en los Estados Unidos y una lectura de poesia seguida de una recepcion. La Dra.Umpierre tambien fue entrevistada en la Universidad de Puerto Rico en el mes de mayo, 2006 por la Prof.Carmen Haydee Rivera para un numero especial de la Revista Centro de Hunter College que saldra en el 2007. La Dra.Umpierre participara en el homenaje a Katherine Hepburn que se llevara a cabo en Bryn Mawr College en septiembre del 2006.

Dr. Luzma Umpierre
Consultant
Human Rights Advocate, Poet, Scholar
211 Randall Rd Apt. 116
Lewiston, ME. 04240

<http://www.luzmaumpierre.com>

Treasurer's Report

A. GENERAL FUND

Previous Balance	\$ 8,109.00
Deposits (dues + bank interest)	<u>875.00</u>
Subtotal	\$ 8,984.00

Current General Fund Balance **\$ 8,984.00**

B. SCHOLARSHIP FUND

Previous Balance	\$ 2,980.00
Contributions	<u>150.00</u>
	3,130.00
Debits: Essay Award	200.00

Current Scholarship Fund Balance **\$ 2,930.00**

CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITE AT <http://www.asu.edu/languages/femunida/f02/index.htm>

New Member/Renewal Form for JAN-DEC 2006 _____ (year/s for which you are renewing/joining)
JAN-DEC 2007 _____

Founded in 1981, Feministas Unidas is a Coalition of Feminist Scholars in Spanish, Spanish-American, Luso-Brazilian, Afro-Latin American, and U.S. Hispanic Studies. Our Coalition publishes a newsletter in April and November, and as an allied organization of the Modern Language Association, Feministas Unidas sponsors panels at the annual convention. As an interdisciplinary alliance, we embrace all fields of studies relating to Hispanic women.

- Professor (\$20)
- Associate Professor (\$20)
- Assistant Professor (\$15)
- Instructor (\$10)
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- Other (\$10)
- Institution (\$25)

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Name _____

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Preferred Mailing address (if new): _____

I would like sponsor a young scholar or graduate student with membership in Feministas Unidas:

Individual that you are sponsoring _____

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SCHOLARSHIP FUND—Please indicate your contribution to support our Premio Feministas Unidas Essay Prize Competition for Young Scholars: _____

Send this form with a check in U.S. funds payable to **Feministas Unidas** to:

Candyce Leonard, Treasurer & Membership Recorder
Wake Forest University, PO. Box 7332
Winston-Salem, NC 27109-7332
e-mail: leonaca@wfu.edu

Fall 2006 Membership List

Maria DiFrancesco maintains our listserv and has offered these instructions in order for you to enter or remove your e-mail address. Please send a message to me (leonaca@wfu.edu) regarding the changes so I can update our database.

Thank you to all,

Candyce Leonard, Membership Recorder and Treasurer

1. address an e-mail to majordomo@lists.ithaca.edu.

2. to **enter** your e-mail name, type: "approve femuni.admin subscribe femuni username@address.edu"

OR to **delete** your e-mail name, type: "approve femuni.admin unsubscribe femuni username@address.edu"

The following list is updated as of November 10, 2006

<i>Last Name</i>	<i>First Name</i>	<i>Membership</i>	<i>Email Name</i>
Adair	Olga M.	06	olgaadair@aol.com
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