
RESEARCH REPORTS AND NOTES

FEMINIST CRITICISM OF LATIN AMERICAN LITERATURE: Bibliographic Notes

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Recent years have witnessed a massive resurgence of interest in the question of socially determined sex roles. Investigators, both rigorous and popular-essayistic, have inquired into the ways in which society regulates which attitudes and behaviors are appropriate to men and which to women. There have been widespread expressions of dissatisfaction with the excessive constraints inherent in the traditional female role, along with numerous proposals for affording women greater freedom. The consideration of this set of related issues might most accurately be described as the critical questioning of sex roles, but it is generally referred to as feminism.

This article looks at the impact of feminism on several aspects of Latin American literature: the diffusion and promotion of that literature as well as the critical response to it. Above all, it seeks to provide a guide to the feminist criticism now emerging in this field. By feminist criticism, I mean literary commentary in which principles of sex-role analysis derivable from modern-day feminism play a significant part.

Because of the diversity of elements examined here, a preliminary outline of contents is in order. The first section looks at the elements of sex-role analysis that have traditionally been present in the criticism of Latin American literature. The following segment surveys the impact of 1970s feminism on the field of Latin American letters: the tendency, early established, to promote female writers rather than to attack male ones; the attempt to reorganize literary promotion and

publishing in order to give women better representation; and the creation of new literary enterprises dedicated exclusively to women's literature and feminist discussion. The third part lists and comments upon feminist criticism existing outside specialized feminist publishing outlets. This section deals with book-length studies as well as journal articles and includes reference to parallel developments in the criticism of Spanish literature. After this review of the standing criticism, there is an assessment of the areas that feminist critics have neglected and some indication of how this neglect may be remedied.

Some sex-role commentary has long been implicit in much nonfeminist discussion of Latin American writings. One need only look at characterizations of, for example, Jorge Isaacs's *María* (Colombia, 1867) or José Mármol's *Amalia* (Argentina, 1851–55). Representative examples include Enrique Anderson Imbert, "Isaacs y su romántica *María*," in his *Estudios sobre escritores de América* (Bs.As.: Editorial Raigal, 1954), pp. 81–107, and David William Foster's discussion of *Amalia* in *Currents in the Contemporary Argentine Novel* (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri, 1975), pp. 5–6. As commentators note, these literary works rely on cultural notions of femininity. In addition, there are imaginative and essayistic texts so focused on the sex-role issue that commentators must necessarily recognize the question. The paradigmatic instance is the 1691 "Respuesta de la poetisa a la muy ilustre Sor Filotea de la Cruz" by Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (México). An unmistakable anger over woman's status stands out in many poems of the Argentine Alfonsina Storni (1892–1938).

Rather adjacent to the discussion of the sex-role theme in literature is the consideration of the "femininity" of women writers. This partially extraliterary interest finds a famous expression in Germán Arciniegas's portraits of women authors in *Las mujeres y las horas*, volume 2 of his essayistic *América mágica* (Bs.As.: Sudamericana, 1961).

Still outside the realm of deliberately feminist criticism, sociological criticism may examine woman's status through the testimony of literature. The Argentine social critic Julio Mafud has long been interested in the literary underrepresentation of woman in Argentina. See his "El desarraigo en la literatura: lo femenino," in *El desarraigo argentino* (Bs.As.: Américalée, 1959), pp. 100–3, and *Contenido social del Martín Fierro* (Bs.As.: Américalée, 1961), pp. 27–29, 38–41, and 75–77. Sexuality and sex role have also attracted commentary from another literarily oriented Argentine social essayist, Arturo Jauretche, in his *El medio pelo en la sociedad argentina* (Bs.As.: A. Peña Lillo, 1966), which discusses fiction, pp. 193–211. A lesser-known sociologist, Alfredo Moffatt, analyzes both literary and popular-culture material in his *Estrategias para sobrevivir en Buenos Aires* (Bs.As.: Jorge Alvarez, 1967). An inquiry into woman's status through an examination of very popular writings is found in Juan José Sebreli, the Argentine social polemicist; one may consult especially his *Eva Perón: ¿aventurera o militante?*, 4a ed. rev. (Bs.As.: La Pléyade, 1971).

The above-listed examples represent the variety of sex-role commentary found outside of overtly feminist discussion. A tradition of more direct commentary exists in the writings and statements of literary women. The special

position of the outspoken woman writer far antedates the emergence of women's studies, although the most recent practitioners of this form of discussion are influenced by the so-called "women's liberation movement." Victoria Ocampo, the celebrated matriarchal figure of the Argentine literary establishment, practiced an essayistic feminist criticism. Of particular relevance are her "Literatura" and "La mujer" in *Testimonios: Segunda Serie* (Bs.As.: Sur, 1941), pp. 12–234, 237–86, respectively. Also pertinent is a special number of her literary review *Sur* [Bs.As.] combining issues 326–28 (1970–71), presenting the views of many creative and intellectual women on questions of sex role. Less "genteel" is the criticism of Rosario Castellanos (Mexico). Her 1973 *Mujer que sabe latin . . .* (México: SepSetentas) is the best-known manifestation of her literary feminism, but the same concepts are present throughout her writings. Especially impressive is her feminist analysis of Choderlos de Laclos's *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, in her 1966 *Juicios sumarios* (Xalapa, Veracruz: Universidad Veracruzana), pp. 221–30. In connection with Castellanos's method, one may see Naomi Lindstrom, "Rosario Castellanos: Pioneer of Feminist Literary Criticism," in the forthcoming *Homenaje a Rosario Castellanos*, Maureen Ahern and Mary Seale-Vásquez, eds. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina). Silvina Bullrich also has published essays on literature with a strong feminist statement. These are general informative works intended to spread feminist concepts to a large audience. Examples are *George Sand: una mujer como yo* (Bs.As.: Emecé, 1972) and *La mujer argentina en la literatura* (Bs.As.: Centro Nacional de Documentación e Información Educativa, 1972). Interviews and journalistic efforts often provide women writers with an opportunity to diffuse feminist thought. Two forthright women who have made wide use of mass-media outlets are Marta Lynch (Argentina) and the Mexican novelist-journalist, Elena Poniatowska.

With the advent of the decade of the 1970s, there arises a deliberate attempt to extend feminist principles to the discussion of literary texts. From its inception, feminist criticism faced certain fundamental questions of orientation. What corpus of literary work is most suitable for consideration by feminists? Is an essentially value-free sex-role analysis a proper critical ideal, or should the committed feminist promote and/or attack works of literature? In English-speaking countries, feminists have often guided themselves by the model of Kate Millett's 1970 *Sexual Politics* (Garden City: Doubleday). The greater part of this work is dedicated to taking male writers to task for allegedly disseminating prejudicial, yet powerful, images of women.

This denunciatory labor has not become widespread in Latin American studies. The validity of the Millett model and its applicability to Hispanic studies is the topic of a polemic in *Journal of Spanish Studies: Twentieth Century*. Patricia O'Connor's Millett-patterned "Francisco García Pavón's Sexual Politics," 1, 1 (1973):65–81, draws a rebuttal from Birgitta Vance in the latter's "The Great Clash: Feminist Literary Criticism Meets up with Spanish Reality," 2, 2 (1974): 109–14; an ensuing exchange of letters appears in 2, 3 (1974):193–96.

Instead of an attack on male authors, there has been a renewed interest in and a vigorous promotion of female writers. Various activities have sought to

bring women's writings the critical and popular attention they have often lacked. A prominent feature of this effort is the convocation of conferences involving writers, critics, and others concerned with women's literature. A widely publicized meeting took place at Carnegie-Mellon University in 1975 under the auspices of *Latin American Literary Review* (Yvette Miller, ed.; conference proceedings issued as *Latin American Women Writers: Yesterday and Today*, 1978); more recently (1978) one was held at the Instituto Allende in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico. Proceedings of such sessions may be published. These efforts provide a valuable stimulus, but one wonders how many nonfeminists they will reach. As is notoriously true of proceedings, they tend to be disparate in approach and uneven in scholarly merit. However, one surprising collection stands out for its unified treatment of woman in literature. Vicente Cicchitti et al., *La mujer: simbolo del mundo nuevo* (Bs.As.: Fernando García Cambeiro, 1976), treats female images in literature without concern for the sex of the author. The essays are all aligned with an attempt to create a hermeneutical, Peronist criticism following a pattern set by Leopoldo Marechal. Whatever one may make of this extremely interpretive system with its heavy load of religious and political doctrine, it does make the volume original and unique among such collections.

Journals, more accessible than proceedings, also have sprung up around the women's literature issue. The Asociación de Literatura Femenina publishes a journal, *Letras femeninas*, and plans the production of special volumes of essays. The Asociación and its publications are headed by Victoria Urbano, Department of Modern Languages, Lamar University, Beaumont, Texas. In Mexico City, Elena Poniatowska, Beth Miller, and other active literary feminists have supported the creation of a new journal, *fem.* (eds. Alaide Foppa and Margarita García Flores).

A related enterprise is the organization of an information clearinghouse to disseminate news about women writers and their works. Kathleen O'Quinn originated the San Francisco-based Clearinghouse on Latin American Women Writers. Besides its news service, the Clearinghouse was considering a publication program, but it has ceased operations. Diane Marting, Comparative Literature, Rutgers University, is seeking to centralize and disseminate information about Latin American women writers' works in English translation; a regular newsletter is being planned.

The principal drawback to these specialized outlets is the fact that they are basically attractive to those already willing to take an interest in women's writings. Certainly it would be unfortunate if the writings of women were to become "marginal" literature, as are the literary works of Chicano authors at this time. What is really needed is a full integration of women into literary life, their works enjoying the same opportunities for publication, promotion, and favorable reception as male-authored writings.

In recent years, there have been indications of a feminist move into the literary-critical mainstream. Certain newer journals have shown willingness to feature new creative writings by women, including women of no great reputa-

tion. *Hispanérica* (Takoma Park, MD; Saúl Sosnowski, ed.) and the defunct *Crisis* [Bs.As.], directed by Eduardo Galeano, stand out in this respect.

The production of anthologies of female-authored writings appears to have been stimulated by the debate over sex roles, although this publishing practice is neither novel nor inherently feminist. What is interesting is the attempt to structure an anthology of women authors into a coherent presentation of women's role-related difficulties. A model of such organization is Amalia Martín Gamero, ed., *Antología del feminismo* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1975). This volume includes both Latin American and Spanish authors. The introduction and the prefaces to each author's work focus the reader's attention on the element of sex-role analysis present in the selections.

Feminist criticism outside the specialized women's-studies outlets has increased. Known critics have joined in this endeavor. In the majority of such studies, the goal is to have literature "bear witness" to woman's status in a fairly pragmatic manner. For this reason, formal issues of literary representation have received relatively little attention. Typical, in many ways, is Hernán Vidal's 1976 *María Luisa Bombal: la feminidad enajenada* (Barcelona: Colección Aubí). Vidal does note the Chilean author's approach to the presentation of her subject matter, in particular her assimilation of tenets derivable from surrealism. His main interest, though, is the Marxist analysis of her testimony to women's alienation. Social, rather than stylistic or structural analysis, predominates again in Wolfgang Luchting's 1974 *La mujer o la revolución* (Lima: Ecoma). Here Luchting examines woman's changing status in Peru. His point of departure is the rereading and interpretation of a 1958 novel by Enrique Congrains Martín. Much of the commentary has to do with real-world conditions in Peru rather than with the novel in question. This semijournalistic study has the virtue of being entertainingly written.

H. Ernest Lewald has a longstanding interest in the Argentine essay and in the social-essay component of Argentine fiction. An outgrowth of this concern is his enthusiastic championing of Argentine women writers. Lewald's basic tenet is that, because of the difficulties imposed by their role, these women provide a privileged source of ironic and denunciatory social commentary. One may consult, for example, his remarks in his anthologies, *Escritores platenses: ficciones del siglo XX* (New York: Houghton-Mifflin, 1971), pp. 20–21 and *Diez cuentistas argentinas* (Bs.As.: Ediciones Riomar, 1968), pp. 5–6, 8, 88; his "Aspects of the Modern Argentine Woman," *Chasqui* 5, 3 (1976):19–25; review of Silvina Bullrich, *Será justicia*, in *Chasqui* 6, 2 (1977):94; commentary in his *Eduardo Mallea* (New York: Twayne, 1977), pp. 41–42.

At this point, one should also make some reference to a parallel development in monographic studies on Spanish authors. Here, it is possible to see two divergent approaches. On the one hand, there is renewed interest in those authors whose feminist views are well-known and well-documented. For example, Teresa A. Cook, *El feminismo en la novela de la Condesa de Pardo Bazán* (La Coruña: Diputación Provincial de La Coruña Publicaciones, 1976) looks at the novelistic manifestations of the feminist views that the countess elsewhere ex-

presses in direct assertions. The other approach looks for an implicit examination of questions of sex role in the works of authors not generally held to be feminists. Patricia O'Connor, named above as a participant in the Millett debate, demonstrates her independence from the Millett model in her 1977 *Gregorio and María Martínez Sierra*. Thematic analysis of these authors' writings concentrates on the accurate portrayal of female experience rather than on the detection and negative criticism of "sexism." As the title indicates, O'Connor has a special interest in establishing as literary-historical fact María Martínez Sierra's collaboration on work that appeared under her husband's name—a further feminist element in the study.

Looking at feminist criticism in mainstream journals (i.e., those aimed at a relatively large and general audience of Hispanists), one sees an overwhelming reliance on thematic discussion. A typical concern is the identification of qualities assigned to women in literature. The female character is identified as having the attributes of weakness, strength, mysterious power, treachery, innocence, etc. A productive relation with the central sex-role issue is not always in evidence. For example, George O. Schanzer's below-cited study on Rubén Darío has the term *Ms.* in the title and begins with a citation from a feminist group statement. However, the ensuing discussion is akin to other analyses of Darío's feminine theme with its fusion of religious and erotic elements. The connection with the current-day question of role is disproven in the course of the analysis. Schanzer concludes: "If Darío were alive today, rather than supporting Betty Friedan or Sister Margaret Traxler, I could imagine him benefiting from occasional contributions to *Playboy* or *Cosmopolitan*" (p. 151). One wishes all critics would be as honest as Schanzer in stating the lack of relation between his critical analysis and feminist thought.

The following listing includes no articles from *Letras femeninas* or *fem.*, because the reader needs no bibliographic aid to locate feminist criticism in a feminist journal. Its basic purpose is to show the appearance of feminist criticism in journals read by a broad cross-section of Hispanists. Articles have been judged to be feminist if they reveal a marked conceptual relation and/or explicit reference to the debate over woman's role as that debate has been formulated in the 1960s–1970s period.

Before listing articles in the Latin American area, one should note the emergence of feminist journal criticism on peninsular authors.

These articles appear to fall into three general categories. First, there is a renewed inquiry into the feminism of nineteenth-century intellectual women, e.g., Teresa A. Cook, "Emilia Pardo Bazán y la educación como elemento primordial en la liberación de la mujer," *Hispania* 60, 2 (1977): 259–65; Rosario Cambria, "Women's Rights in Spain: It All Began with Concepción Arenal," *The American Hispanist* 2, 17, (1977): 7–10; and Nilita Vientós Gastón, "Concepción Arenal," *Sin nombre* [San Juan, P.R.] 7, 3 (1976): 46–61.

Second, critics have sought to draw attention to the depiction of woman in the imaginative writings of modern authors. Representative studies are: Phyllis Zatlin Boring, "Carmen Martín Gaité, Feminist Author," *Revista de estudios hispánicos* [Alabama] 11, 3 (1977): 323–38; Carolyn L. Galerstein, "Carmen La-

Foret and the Spanish Spinster," *Revista de estudios hispánicos* 11, 2 (1977): 303–15; Patricia O'Connor, "José Ruibal: Feminist Unaware in *La secretaria?*," *Revista de estudios hispánicos* 8, 3 (1974): 413–17, "Eros and Thanatos in Francisco García Pavón's *El último sábado*," *Journal of Spanish Studies: Twentieth Century* 4, 1 (1976), and "Gregorio Martínez Sierra's Maternal Nuns in Dramas of Renunciation and Revolution," *The American Hispanist* 2, 12 (1976): 8–12; José Ortega, "La frustración femenina en *Los mercaderes* de Ana María Matute," *Hispanófila* 54 (1975): 31–38; Alfred Rodríguez and John Timm, "El significado de lo femenino en *La familia de Pascual Duarte*," *Revista de estudios hispánicos* 11, 2 (1977): 251–64; Rosalina R. Rovira, "La función de la mujer en la literatura contemporánea española," *Explicación de textos literarios* 3, 3 (1974–75): 21–24; and Lynette Hubard Seator, "'Ana Kleiber' and the Traditional Nature of Sastre's Unconventional Women," *Revista de estudios hispánicos* 12, 2 (1978): 287–302.

A third area of endeavor is the reexamination of older works in the light of recent discussion of women's status. This reassessment may lead to an upward reevaluation of works because of their undistorted or "progressive" portrayal of women. In this area, one finds Carolyn Bluestine, "The Role of Women in the *Poema de Mio Cid*," *Romance Notes* 18, 3 (1978): 404–9; Ruth A. Schmidt, "Woman's Place in the Sun: Feminism in *Insolación*," notable for finding Emilia Pardo Bazán's feminist thought in what might easily seem one of her least feminist works, *Revista de estudios hispánicos* 8, 1 (1974): 68–81; Joseph P. Spieker, "El feminismo como clave estructural en las *novelle* de doña María de Zayas," *Explicación de textos literarios* 6, 2 (1978): 158–60; and Edna N. Sims, "Resumen de la imagen negativa de la mujer en la literatura española hasta mediados del siglo XVI," *Revista de estudios hispánicos* 11, 3 (1977): 433–49.

What follows is an introductory listing of articles in the Latin American field:

- ARIAS DE LA CANAL, FREDO. "Feminismo y homosexualidad," *Norte* [México], Núm. 265 (1975): 25–31.
- BARRADAS, EFRAÍN. "El machismo existencialista de René Marqués," *Sin nombre* 8, 3 (1977): 69–81.
- BARROS, ALCIDES JOÃO DE. "A situação da mulher no teatro de Consuelo de Castro e Leilah Assunção," *Latin American Theater Review* 9, 2 (1976): 13–20.
- GONZÁLEZ, JOSÉ EMILIO. "Julia de Burgos: la mujer y la poesía," *Sin nombre*, 7, 3 (1976): 86–100.
- GYURKO, LANIN A. "The Pseudo-Liberated Woman in Fuentes' *Zona Sagrada*," *Journal of Spanish Studies: Twentieth Century* 3, 1 (1975): 17–43.
- . "Women in Mexican Society: Fuentes' Portrayal of Oppression," *Revista hispánica moderna* 38, 4 (1974–75): 206–29.
- KAMINSKY, AMY. "The Real Circle of Iron: Mothers and Children, Children and Mothers, in Four Argentine Novels," *Latin American Literary Review* 4, 9 (1976): 77–86.
- KIRSNER, ROBERT. "De doña Bárbara a Luisiana: feminismo refinado," *Caribe* 1, 2 (1976): 57–64.

- LEWALD, H. ERNEST. "Aspects of the Modern Argentine Woman," *Chasqui* 5, 3 (1976): 19–25.
- LLAMAS, MARÍA DEL REFUGIO. "Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz," *Norte*, Núm. 265 (1975): 25–31.
- MORA, GABRIELA. "La otra cara de Ifigenia: una reevaluación del personaje de Teresa de la Parra," *Sin nombre* 7, 3 (1976): 130–44.
- . "Los perros y La mudanza de Elena Carro: designio social y virtualidad feminista," *Latin American Theater Review* 8, 2 (1975): 5–14.
- RODRÍGUEZ-PERALTA, PHYLLIS. "Images of Women in Rosario Castellanos's Prose," *Latin American Literary Review* 6, 11 (1977): 68–80.
- SCHANZER, GEORGE O. "Rubén Darío and Ms. Christa," *Journal of Spanish Studies: Twentieth Century* 3, 2 (1975): 145–52.
- URBISTONDO, VICENTE. "El machismo en la narrativa hispanoamericana," *Texto crítico* 4, 9 (1978): 165–83.
- VALDIVIESO, MERCEDES. "Social Denunciation in the Language of *El árbol* [The Tree] by María Luisa Bombal," trans. Ellen Wilkerson, *Latin American Literary Review* 4, 9 (1976): 70–76.
- Zapata, Celia de. "One Hundred Years of Women Writers in Latin America," *Latin American Literary Review* 3, 6 (1975): 7–16.
- Zavala, Iris M. "Dos mujeres contra el mundo: Flora Tristán y Louise Michel," *Sin nombre* 7, 3 (1976): 37–45.

As the abovegoing shows, one area is still in very great need of development: there is a dearth of studies that, while including sex-role analysis, still treat the text as an autonomous, self-aware artifact, rather than as an artfully disguised document on women's status. Literary criticism, as a whole, manifests an increasing attention to the "materiality" of texts, the mechanisms that give an artistic structure to experience. If feminist discussion limits itself to thematic analysis, it will necessarily remain marginal to the literary-critical endeavor in our time.

In fact, there have been attempts to move away from this "contentism." Slightly adjacent to feminist criticism, Rachel Phillips's *Alfonsina Storni: From Poetess to Poet* (London: Tamesis Books, 1977) is especially welcome for its formal analyses of specific poems. Phillips's thesis is that Storni initially handicapped her efforts by excessive reliance on her persona as a woman poet. As her technical mastery grew, Storni developed an androgynous poetic persona. This study is of special interest for its discussion of the reception of female-authored works—a paradoxical reaction of overpraise and underestimation.

What, however, of female authors whose contribution includes the structuring of specifically female experience and consciousness? Here, what is needed is an approach combining an issue of sociocultural value dimensions—i.e., sex role—with explicit structural analyses of works. Rosario Castellanos's essays point in this direction by identifying a successful expression of feminine experience through the structural recourses of fiction and the essay. Castellanos looks for the creation of fictional female voices, the representation of woman's perception of time, space, and self, the elaboration of a language capable of conveying

woman's outlook. Concerned with spreading her ideas to a fairly large audience, Castellanos does not work out the detailed analyses that could be based on those ideas. To apply these notions in the study of specific literary works has been the purpose of my "Woman's Voice in the Short Stories of Marta Lynch," *Proceedings of the Conference on Latin American Literature, Montclair State College, 1978* (forthcoming) and "The Literary Feminism of Marta Lynch," *Critique: Studies in Modern Fiction* 20, 2 (1978): 49–57, as well as in my recently completed monograph, *Women's Voice in Latin American Literature: Four Fiction Works*. As is evident, there are still a great number of works, both male- and female-authored, both newer and older writings, to be analyzed for their literary elaboration of aspects of sex role. The way in which this endeavor is undertaken will determine whether sex-role analysis remains a side issue or can be an integrated part of the total enterprise of literary criticism.