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The Diana Morán Workshop An Exceptional Space for Resistance and Sisterhood

Background

I begin these thoughts by attempting to create a history of a road travelled for almost four decades. In the wake of the discussions arising out of International Women's Year, celebrated in Mexico in 1975, three colleagues from the Colegio de México's Center for Literary Linguistic Studies Literature and Society Seminar, decided to present a paper at the First Mexico-Central America Symposium on Women in 1977, organized by the colegio and the Ford Foundation. Based on the works by Mexicans we read and analyzed in the seminar in the light of

Marxist and structuralist theoretical currents, we picked a body of eleven writers born in the twentieth century, of whom only two were women (Rosario Castellanos and Elena Poniatowska). The paper's title telegraphed a critical position: "Images of Women in Contemporary Mexican Fiction." It was chosen to be included in a book called *La mujer y la cultura* (Women and Culture). Our aim was to analyze images of women in their day-to-day lives using historical, political, and literary criteria. We chose to use Marxism as the theoretical framework according to our understanding of literature and society, but shaded this by our reading of Lefebvre's *La vie quotidienne dans le monde moderne* (Everyday Life in the Modern World) and *Notas sobre la cultura en México* (Notes about Culture in

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Mexico) by Carlos Monsiváis, as well as the feminist take by Gisèle Halimi in her then-recent book *La cause des femmes* (published as *The Right to Choose* in English) (1976).

The Diana Morán Workshop

This working group originated in 1984 in the Workshop on Mexican Women's Fiction, promoted by Aralia López González, with the backing and enthusiasm of Elena Urrutia, then the coordinator of the Colegio de México's Interdisciplinary Women's Studies Program (PIEM), today the Interdisciplinary Gender Studies Program (PIEG). The workshop's first aim was to review Mexican women writers' fiction from the time of the Revolution (1910) to 1980, in order to begin a project to write the history of women's literature in Mexico. In 1988, a seminar on feminist literary criticism was added, which met on Fridays, alternating with the workshop. At that time, Luz Elena Gutiérrez de Velasco and Nora Pasternac joined the coordinating team, and soon attendance grew from fifteen to thirty. Some of the researchers who did not work at the Colegio de Mexico, such as Gloria Prado and Doris Maquini, remember having joined after seeing the announcements aimed at persons interested in literature written by women, published in the *Tiempo Libre* weekly magazine and the *Excelsior* daily paper. Others, like Laura Cázares and Diana Morán, and some of the younger members like Graciela Martínez-Zalce—who has spent more than half her life in the workshop—received invitations. After Diana Morán died in 1987, Luz Elena Gutiérrez de Velasco proposed that the workshop be named after her because she was an excellent poet and an advocate for social causes who we all loved very much. With time, the workshop was closed to new recruits for two reasons: one was the physical space needed, and the other was the intellectual space that had to be safeguarded.

Progression Over Time

From its beginnings, the workshop has followed its methodology in three phases, which coincide with those established by Diana Decker in her article "Hacia una revisión de la crítica literaria feminista" (Toward a Review of Feminist Literary Criticism), which states, "In the first stage, an analysis showed both the misogyny in literary practice

and the stereotyped images of women (as angels or monsters) and what is called textual harassment, together with a systematic exclusion of women writers from literary history." Meanwhile, in the PIEM workshop, we reviewed our literature—a decade later than the English-speakers—and we discovered the absences and disparagement of what has been called "macho criticism." We discovered splendid women authors who were not included in our graduate literature programs, as well as certain curious items, such as, despite the fact that Max Aub stated in an article that Nellie Campobello was one of the most interesting writers of the Mexican Revolution, he did not include her in his anthology. In the face of some women writers' success with the public, the criticism of certain reviewers was frankly just acrimonious.

In a second phase, we set ourselves the task of building a genealogy of literature penned by women in the twentieth century, tracing their mothers and grandmothers. We tracked down their nineteenth-century literary roots, with great difficulty in acquiring the texts; years later, we used this work to publish what would be the workshop's first book, *Las voces olvidadas* (The Forgotten Voices), a critical anthology of Mexican women writers born in the nineteenth century. We began to publish the results of our research and to participate in conferences and congresses, like those held in Tijuana between 1988 and 1990 at the Northern Border College (COLEF), organized by the PIEM, the COLEF, and the University of California. Later, we also initiated relations with women researchers and professors working at the Casa de las Americas and the University of Havana, concretely during the meeting of Mexican and Cuban women writers in 1990.

In 1992, the seminar and workshop closed their first cycle, that of the PIEM. We then began a non-institutional stage that was close to self-organization with a self-sufficient economic structure, an annually rotating coordinating committee very different from authoritarian male models. Gloria Prado took us in at the Coyoacán College. The workshop's third phase, which continues to this day, has implied greater challenges since we have had to reformulate our initial conceptual basis and theoretical suppositions, which had had an androcentric, centralist view of study and literary criticism. To do this, we have reviewed and used English- and French-language-based feminist theory as our theoretical framework, and later a Latin-American-based view, to produce a view rooted in Mex-

ico. The workshop has been an extraordinary space for thinking and working in freedom and sisterhood. Its members have come and gone, but almost all the founders have remained. It is particularly noteworthy that the group has been inter-institutional and continues to include members from both public institutions of higher education (Colmex, UNAM, and UAM) and private ones (the Ibero-American University [UIA], the Autonomous Technological Institute of Mexico [ITAM], and the Monterrey Technological Institute [ITESM]).

Scope

Despite the fact that the workshop is no longer part of an institution, the change in location to the Coyoacán College brought a new challenge: to be considered a research group as an independent collective without direct institutional backing or financing, but with a work record and some publications in academia. And it was precisely the solidity of our work that allowed us to later get financing from other institutions such as the National Fund for Culture and the Arts (Fonca) and the National Council for Science and Technology (Conacyt) to publish more books.

In addition to the initial publications, which, as mentioned above, resulted from the border colloquia and works published by the *Casa de las Américas* magazine after our 1991 meeting with Cuban colleagues, the workshop has continued to publish its work, both alone and as co-publications. In all of them we can observe the theoretical-methodological evolution that has guided our collective. In retrospect, we can say that our workshop, and therefore its publications, followed the stages pointed out by Diana Decker: first, in the 1970s, denouncing misogyny in literary practice and shining a spotlight on the stereotypical images of women as angels or monsters; secondly, critiquing textual harassment together with the systematic exclusion of women writers in literary histories; and thirdly, applying our theoretical tenets to criticism.

The first book published the workshop collective published after the two Tijuana volumes was *Las voces olvidadas* (The Forgotten Voices), a critical anthology of Mexican fiction writers born in the nineteenth century, put out by PIEM Colmex in 1991. This was followed by titles such as *Sin imágenes falsas, sin falsos espejos* (No False Images, No False Mirrors); *Narradoras mexicanas del siglo xx* (Twenti-

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eth-Century Mexican Women Writers); *Escribir la infancia: narradoras mexicanas contemporáneas* (Writing about Childhood: Contemporary Mexican Women Writers); and *Femenino/masculino en las literaturas de América. Escrituras en contraste* (Feminine/masculine in the Literatures of the Americas. Writings in Contrast). These are only a few of the many listed at the end of this article, which are evidence of the collective's long and fruitful endeavors.

Evaluation

In addition to the accomplishments mentioned above, the workshop has made very important achievements in other spheres. In 1990, we evaluated the workshop using several questionnaires. The members pointed to the constant, continual research together with its pluralism as pluses for the collective. Others mentioned the atmosphere of solidarity that we know today as sisterhood, the free confrontation of ideas, its being a welcoming space, the stimulating reflection about women and their symbolic production, as well as repeated mention of the high level of most contributions, the feedback received in terms of interests and common concerns, and the appropriateness of complementing theory with the practice of textual analysis.

The workshop is one of the spaces of resistance that we have. Despite the differences in age and training of its members as new participants joined in the 1980s, 1990s, and the new century, it has been a space where we have educated and reformulated rigorously, respectfully, creatively, and with very enjoyable and tenacious discipline. The writers who have accompanied us, in addition to Aralia López, include Aline Petterson, who for many years was a member of the workshop; Josefina Vicens; Leonora Carrington; Elena Poniatowska; Angelina Muñiz; Margo Glantz; Amparo Dávila; Tununa Mercado; Adriana González Mateos; Cristina Rivera Garza; Ana Clavel; and Rosa Beltrán, among others who went to our congress.

In our experience of working and living together, we have prioritized new ways of inter-subjective relationships around a shared task and a fondness for each other that we don't avoid, but also do not put first. The workshop has overcome the danger of becoming a club of girlfriends interested in literature, an activist feminist group, or a seminar in which theoretical rigor and the quest for excellence creates competitive resentments. The very competitive people who participated in the workshop have left, because we are very tolerant of differences and not everyone can put up with that. In this intense space, we have collectively created an atmosphere for work and self-reflection in which academic discussion, critical experimentation, sisterhood, and the joy of knowledge come together, all of which is reflected in an extensive oeuvre. ■■■

The Workshop's Bookshelf

- 1991, *Las voces olvidadas. Antología crítica de narradoras mexicanas nacidas en el siglo XIX*, Ana Rosa Domenella and Nora Pasternac, eds. (El Colegio de México/PIEM).
- 1995, *Sin imágenes falsas, sin falsos espejos. Narradoras mexicanas del siglo XX*, Aralia López González, comp. (El Colegio de México/PIEM).
- 1996, *Escribir la infancia. Narradoras mexicanas contemporáneas*, Nora Pasternac, Ana Rosa Domenella, and Luzelena Gutiérrez de Velasco, comps. (El Colegio de México/PIEM).
- 1999, *De pesares y alegrías. Escritoras latinoamericanas y caribeñas contemporáneas*, Luzelena Gutiérrez de Velasco, Gloria Prado, and Ana Rosa Domenella, comps. (UAM-I and El Colegio de México/PIEM).
- 2000, *Territorio de leonas. Cartografía de narradoras mexicanas en los noventa*, Ana Rosa Domenella, comp. (UAM-I and Casa Juan Pablos).
- 2004, *Escrituras en contraste. Femenino/masculino en la literatura mexicana del siglo XX*, Maricruz Castro, Laura Cázares, and Gloria Prado, comps. (UAM-I and Editorial Aldus).
- 2004, *Escritoras mexicanas. Voces y presencias*, Milagros Ezquerro and Nora Pasternac, eds. (Éditions INDIGO & Côté-femmes).
- 2005, *Femenino/masculino en las literaturas de América. Escrituras en contraste*, Graciela Martínez-Zalce, Luzelena Gutiérrez de Velasco, and Ana Rosa Domenella, eds. (UAM-I and Editorial Aldus).
- 2005, *Territorio de escrituras. Narrativa mexicana del fin del milenio*, Nora Pasternac, comp. (UAM-I and Casa Juan Pablos).
- 2005, *Lo monstruoso es habitar en otro. Encuentros con Inés Arredondo*, Luz Elena Zamudio, comp. (UAM-I/Casa Juan Pablos).
- 2006, *Josefina Vicens. Un vacío siempre lleno*, Maricruz Castro and Aline Pettersson, eds. (Tecnológico de Monterrey/Conaculta-Fonca).
- 2006, *Nellie Campobello. La revolución en clave de mujer*, Laura Cázares, ed. (Tecnológico de Monterrey/Universidad Iberoamericana/Conaculta-Fonca).
- 2006, *Rosario Castellanos. De Comitán a Jerusalén*, Luz Elena Zamudio and Margarita Tapia, eds. (Tecnológico de Monterrey/Conaculta-Fonca).
- 2006, *María Luisa Puga. La escritura que no cesa*, Ana Rosa Domenella, ed. (Tecnológico de Monterrey/UAM/Conaculta-Fonca).
- 2008, *Elena Garro. Recuerdo y porvenir de una escritura*, Luzelena Gutiérrez de Velasco and Gloria Prado, eds. (Tecnológico de Monterrey/ Universidad Iberoamericana/Conaculta-Fonca).
- 2009, *Amparo Dávila. Bordar en el abismo*, Regina Cardoso and Laura Cázares, eds. (Tecnológico de Monterrey/UAM).
- 2010, *Guadalupe Dueñas. Después del silencio*, Maricruz Castro and Laura López, eds. (Tecnológico de Monterrey/ Universidad Iberoamericana/UNAM/UAM-I/Conaculta).
- 2010, *Concha Urquiza. Entre lo místico y lo mítico*, Margarita Tapia and Luz Elena Zamudio, eds. (Tecnológico de Monterrey/Universidad Iberoamericana/Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México/Conaculta-Fonca).
- 2010, *Enriqueta Ochoa. En cada latido, un monte de zozobra*, Gloria Prado and Blanca Ansoleaga, eds. (Tecnológico de Monterrey/Universidad Iberoamericana/UNAM/UAM-I/Conaculta-Fonca).
- 2010, *Luisa Josefina Hernández. Entre iconos, enigmas y caprichos. Navegaciones múltiples*, Gloria Prado and Luzma Becerra, eds. (Tecnológico de Monterrey/Universidad Iberoamericana/UNAM/UAM-I/UAEM/Conaculta-Fonca).
- 2010, *Julieta Campos. Para rescatar a Eurídice*, Luzelena Gutiérrez de Velasco, ed. (Tecnológico de Monterrey/UAM).
- 2016, *Diana Morán. Encallar en los arrecifes de la espera*, Laura Cázares and Luz Elena Zamudio, eds. (UAM-I).
- 2017, *Esther Seligson. Fugacidad y permanencia. "Soy un reflejo del sol en las aguas..."*, Luzelena Gutiérrez de Velasco and Ana Rosa Domenella, eds. (UAM).