

RECOVERING AND DISCOVERING
ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE:
Recent Books on Latin American Women Writers

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CONTEMPORARY MEXICAN WOMEN WRITERS: FIVE VOICES. By Gabriella de Beer. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996. Pp. 266. \$35.00 cloth, \$15.95 paper.)

A DREAM OF LIGHT AND SHADOW: PORTRAITS OF LATIN AMERICAN WOMEN WRITERS. Edited by Margorie Agosin. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995. Pp. 342. \$32.50 cloth.)

LATIN AMERICAN WOMEN'S WRITING: FEMINIST READINGS IN THEORY AND CRISIS. Edited by Anny Brooksbank Jones and Catherine Davies. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996. Pp. 250. \$65.00 cloth.)

THE OTHER MIRROR: WOMEN'S NARRATIVE IN MEXICO, 1980-1995. Edited by Kristine Ibsen. (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1997. Pp. 204. \$59.95 cloth.)

PROSPERO'S DAUGHTER: THE PROSE OF ROSARIO CASTELLANOS. By Joanna O'Connell. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995. Pp. 263. \$35.00 cloth, \$15.95 paper.)

REINTERPRETING THE SPANISH AMERICAN ESSAY: WOMEN WRITERS OF THE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURIES. Edited by Doris Meyer. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995. Pp. 246. \$25.00 cloth.)

REREADING THE SPANISH AMERICAN ESSAY: TRANSLATIONS OF 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY WOMEN'S ESSAYS. Edited by Doris Meyer. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995. Pp. 324. \$40.00 cloth, \$19.95 paper.)

During the past two decades, an unprecedented number of Latin American women writers have published their novels, poetry, essays, plays, and testimonial narratives. This mushrooming corpus of women's writing is by no means homogeneous. The literary styles of these works range from the highly aesthetic, metafictional, and hermetic prose of writers such as Diamela Eltit and Julieta Campos to the more accessible narratives of internationally acclaimed writers like Laura Esquivel and Isabel Allende. The last two authors' "best-sellers," *Como agua para chocolate* and *La casa de los espíritus*, have achieved tremendous commercial success and been made

into major motion pictures. Similarly, Nobelist Rigoberta Menchú's testimony, *I . . . Rigoberta Menchú, an Indian Woman in Guatemala*, edited by anthropologist Elisabeth Burgos-Debray, has been translated into many languages and taught widely in courses in gender studies, ethnic studies, and Latin American studies throughout the United States.¹ As Jean Franco has pointed out, "[T]he proliferation of women's studies courses and the incorporation of Third World women writers into the curriculum have suddenly provided them with the kind of international readership that the writers of 'the Boom' have long enjoyed."²

In the field of Latin American literary and cultural studies in Latin America, the United States, and Europe, interest is growing in the works of women writers. This trend is visible in the marked increase of Latin American feminist scholarship on well-known and yet-to-be-discovered female authors.³ Feminist criticism among Latin Americanists takes a variety of forms and includes many projects with a wide range of objectives. Some feminist critics interpret male-authored texts, while others focus exclu-

1. This testimony recounts the gross injustice and exploitation of Mayan peasants and the brutal savagery of the military during the 1980s. In direct language, she recounts how her brother, father, and mother were all killed in separate horrifying incidents, and she also describes many of the customs, rituals, and beliefs of her indigenous community. This book has stirred heated debates about revision of the humanities curriculum at Stanford University and is often cited in the ongoing "culture war" controversy within academic circles about curriculum reform and multiculturalism. The recent publication of Robert Stoll's *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalens* has sparked more debates regarding history and literature, fact and fiction in Rigoberta's testimonial.

2. Jean Franco, "Going Public: Reinhabiting the Private," in *On Edge: The Crisis of Contemporary Latin American Culture*, edited by George Yúdice, Jean Franco, and Juan Flores (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 73.

3. In addition to the seven books reviewed in this essay, some of the most significant contributions published during the 1990s are Margorie Agosin, *Mujer, imagen, escritura* (Santiago, Chile: Cuarto Propio, 1993); *Knives and Angels: Women Writers in Latin America*, edited by Susan Bassnett (London: Zed Books, 1990); Debra Castillo, *Talking Back: Toward a Latin American Feminist Literary Criticism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992); Jean Franco, *Las conspiradoras: La representación de la mujer en México* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1994); Kay García, *Broken Bars: New Perspectives from Mexican Women Writers* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994); Magdalena García Pinto, *Women Writers of Latin America: Intimate Histories* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991); *Splintering Darkness: Latin American Women Writers in Search of Themselves*, edited by Lucía Guerra-Cunningham (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Latin American Literary Review Press, 1990); Amy Kaminsky, *Reading the Body Politic: Feminist Criticism and Latin American Women Writers* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992); *Spanish American Women Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Source Book*, edited by Diane E. Marting (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1990); Ileana Rodríguez, *House/Garden/Nation: Space, Gender, and Ethnicity in Post-Colonial Latin American Literature by Women* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1994); Claudia Schaefer, *Textured Lives: Women, Art, and Representation in Modern Mexico* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992); Cynthia Steele, *Politics, Gender, and the Mexican Novel, 1968–1988: Beyond the Pyramid* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992); and *In the Feminine Mode: Essays on Hispanic Women Writers*, edited by Noel Valis and Carol Maier (Lewisburg, Pa.: Bucknell University Press, 1990).

sively on women's literary production. Diverse feminist critical perspectives include socio-historical, psychoanalytic, postcolonial, poststructuralist, and deconstructive modes, to mention just a few. Latin American feminist criticism also includes projects to recover the literary production of important but marginalized women writers whose writing has been omitted from most anthologies and given little critical attention. Other critics are involved in writing women's literary history, revising the patriarchal literary canon, assembling bibliographies, interviewing women writers, and translating their literature. Still other scholars are developing theories about the complex relationships among gender, power, class, ethnicity, and politics in various Latin American countries. An ongoing debate in Latin American feminist criticism is the appropriateness (or inappropriateness) of applying "foreign feminisms" (either Anglo-Saxon or French versions such as those of Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva) to texts written by Latin American writers without having examined the field of production from which these particular theories emerged.

What Latin American feminist critics have in common is that they are still writing from the margins of mainstream literary activity, which continues to be dominated by a patriarchal hegemonic structure. Two shared objectives are to dismantle this system of gender oppression and to subvert the phallogocentric logic that continues to subordinate women and marginalize women writers and critics. By recognizing the essential contributions of past and present women writers to the intellectual and cultural history of Latin America, feminist critics are presenting a challenge to the existing literary canon and helping form a "new canon" that celebrates the previously silenced and ignored role of Latin American women writers as well as the significance of popular culture and ethnic and other minority discourses. This wide spectrum of diverse trends in Latin American feminist criticism is manifested in the seven books under review in this essay.

Margorie Agosin, a Chilean poet, prose writer, and critic, currently teaches at Wellesley College. Her valuable edited volume, *A Dream of Light and Shadow: Portraits of Latin American Women Writers*, consists of sixteen original essays focusing on the relationship between the biography and the literary production of selected women writers. Those chosen include eminent figures such as Nobel Prize winner Gabriela Mistral, Delmira Agustini, Victoria Ocampo, and Elena Poniatowska as well as less-known writers like Argentine art critic and novelist Marta Traba, Ecuadorian cultural critic Cecilia Ansaldo, and Uruguayan poet Marosa Di Giorgio. The last three remain mostly undiscovered outside their respective countries. All the essays are written with insight and depth of understanding of each author's life, literary production, and the specific historical and literary context from which her texts emerged and to which they respond.

Agosin explains her reason for choosing these particular authors for this anthology: "I have focused on women who have forged a destiny and

contributed a sense of vision to the cultural landscape of Latin America. . . . By bringing these authors together in a single collection, I hope to shed light on a shared tradition, and to show how each woman's individual vision responds to a feminine form of expression, a certain way of looking at writing and at the society in which she chooses to live" (pp. 1–2). One virtue of this book is the way it establishes a link between the private and the public, while highlighting the intrinsic union among life, art, and the individual challenges faced by each writer in the process of creation. By viewing these authors as a group rather than as isolated phenomena, readers can perceive a "shared tradition" and what Agosin terms "a community of artists with a collective vision" (p. 11). Given the glaring lack of biographies on Latin American women writers and cultural figures, this book is an especially welcome resource for scholars as well as fascinating reading for a broader public.

A Dream of Light and Shadow is divided into three sections. The first includes mainly upper-class women (Sofia Espina, Victoria Ocampo, and Clementina Suárez) who "sought and created alternative spaces—magazines, literary salons—through which to promote art and literature" during the 1920s and 1930s (p. 23). It also includes authors Delmira Agustini, Alfonsina Storni, and Gabriela Mistral, initiators of a women's cultural tradition who created a foundation that future writers would build on. Elizabeth Horan's "Gabriela Mistral: Language Is the Only Homeland" successfully deconstructs the hagiography linking Mistral "to a preexisting code of feminine saintliness" (p. 123). Horan suggests that these "official homages" suppressed Mistral's sexual identity. Horan convincingly demonstrates that Mistral's verse manifests a "transgressive consciousness" and argues that "the poet's friendships with women were at the center of her daily life, and that her emotional intimacy with women sustained her through her deepest crises" (p. 141). In "Violeta Parra, Singer of Life," Inés Dölz-Blackburn examines the cultural legacy of the Chilean poet, singer, composer, painter, political activist, and folklorist who compiled more than three thousand popular songs. Dölz-Blackburn presents a synopsis of existing biographies on this mythic cult figure and comments succinctly on her songs, her autobiographical *Décimas*, and her letters. Parra is the only women writer in this volume who was born into a peasant household. Agosin rightly points out that Parra "occupies a seat of honor within the popular culture of Latin America" (p. 28).

The second section celebrates cultural workers whose broad achievements are not limited to a single field. These include Marta Traba (Argentine art critic, novelist), Elena Poniatowska (Mexican journalist, novelist, biographer, author of testimonial narratives documenting Mexican social history), Carmen Naranjo (Costa Rican poet, novelist, journalist, and Minister of Culture), and Cecilia Ansaldo (cultural critic and founder of *Mujeres del Atico*, the most important women's group in Ecuador). Recur-

ring themes in these women's writings are the struggle for social reform, denunciation of gender and class oppression, and the need to form solid alliances with dispossessed women. Many of these women (Mistral, Naranjo, Poniatowska, Menchú, Traba, and Suárez) played fundamental roles in shaping national and cultural consciousness. The final section of *A Dream of Light and Shadow* "focuses on profound experimentation with language, the unconscious, and poetry" in the writings of Brazilian Clarice Lispector, Argentine Alejandra Pizarnik, and Uruguayan Marosa Di Giorgio (p. 34).

Reinterpreting the Spanish American Essay: Women Writers of the 19th and 20th Centuries contains twenty-one critical studies on Latin American women essayists by noted experts. The essays are consistently high in quality and informed by contemporary feminist theories ranging from sociohistorical to psychoanalytic interpretation. This book and its companion volume, *Rereading the Spanish American Essay*, also edited by Doris Meyer, contribute to a major revision of the canon by recovering essays omitted from most anthologies of this genre. Latin American women have long written essays on topics ranging from gender identity and women's experience of subordination in patriarchal societies to social injustice, political repression, and the need for educational reforms. Women's essays have usually been ignored, a situation that this two-volume project seeks to remedy.

Certain characteristics of the essay as a form—its flexibility, exploratory nature, and subjective tone—have made it particularly attractive to women. As Meyer points out in her introduction, "The Spanish American Essay: A Female Perspective," the essay "has lent itself to the expressive needs of a marginalized gender" (*Reinterpreting*, p. 4). Since the era of independence, the Latin American essay has been a genre closely associated with the search for cultural and national identity. Thus the recovery of the essays of previously silenced women contributes to the necessary reexamination of Latin American intellectual history from a feminist perspective and also documents the evolution of women's intellectual history in Latin America.

Rereading the Spanish American Essay: Translations of 19th and 20th Century Women's Essays includes thirty-six original essays by twenty-two women writers. They include Flora Tristan (Peru), Teresa de la Parra (Venezuela), Nellie Campobello (Mexico), Rosario Castellanos (Mexico), Rosario Ferré (Puerto Rico), and Julieta Kirkwood (Chile). All the essays were translated into English for the first time and are prefaced by a brief biographical sketch. Although the two volumes can be read separately, Meyer asserts that "the authorial 'I' and the critical eye will be mutually enlightening for the interested reader. . . . Together, they will help to remap the unexplored landscapes of women's intellectual history" (*Rereading*, p. x). One weakness of *Rereading* (not found in *Reinterpreting*) is that most of the essays selected for this volume are brief, and too many deal exclusively with gender-specific topics. They leave readers wanting to know more

about these women essayists' ideas on other pressing political, social, and cultural issues of their day.

Journalism in all its forms (newspapers, magazines, journals) has played a central role in the development of Latin American women's essays. Many of the essayists studied in *Reinterpreting*, such as Clorinda Matto de Turner and Gabriela Mistral, were editors, columnists, and regular contributors to prominent periodicals. Ardis Nelson notes that Carmen Naranjo wrote "over two hundred journalistic articles on a wide range of topics," many of them dealing with political, economic, educational, and cultural crises in Costa Rica (p. 186). Gwen Kirkpatrick's study of Alfonsina Storni's journalistic production emphasizes the way that Storni combined autobiography with social commentary. Kirkpatrick argues that Storni's "roving eye" captured and recorded "the radical dislocations in gender and familial roles in a rapidly urbanizing environment" in the only venue open to her—the "women's pages" of local newspapers (p. 138).

In addition to journalistic articles and editorials, the essays in *Rereading* (many of which are analyzed in *Reinterpreting*) can be classified in a variety of subgenres: memoirs and travelogues (Flora Tristán and the Countess of Merlin), letters and autobiography (Victoria Ocampo), reflections on literature, art, and culture (Magda Portal, Yolanda Oreamuno, Margo Glantz, Elena Poniatowska), literary portraits (Clorinda Matto de Turner, Gabriela Mistral), book-length monographs on politics, history, and society (Julieta Kirkwood), hybrid forms that blend narrative, fantasy, and feminist theory (Rosario Ferré and Cristina Peri Rossi), and the more traditional brief expository form.

Mary Louise Pratt's "'Don't Interrupt Me': The Gender Essay as Conversation and Countercanon" is one of the few studies not concerned with a specific writer. Pratt suggests two "discursive models" as useful for describing a large portion of Latin American women's essays: one takes the form of "a historical catalogue," in which the author exalts the contributions of intellectual and cultural "foremothers," while the other, more common model is referred to as "the analytical commentary on the spiritual and social condition of women" (pp. 17–18). Regarding the first, Meyer's "Reciprocal Reflection: Specular Discourse and the Self-Authorizing Venture" provides examples of discursive strategies employed by women writing about other women (Sor Juana, Mistral, Ocampo). With respect to the second model, gender-related issues that women have frequently written about include education (Rosa Guerra, Amanda Labarca, Carmen Naranjo, Mistral, and Storni) and feminine sexuality and the erotic imagination (Ferré and Peri Rossi).

Other topics analyzed in *Reinterpreting* are those traditionally addressed by male authors in the "criollo identity essay" (p. 23), such as national cultural identity (Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, Teresa de la Parra, and Carmen Naranjo) and national politics (Eduarda Mansilla de García

and Magda Portal). As Meyer and Pratt indicate, when these feminine voices are ignored, important aspects of Latin American intellectual and social history are lost. Agosin's "Vision and Transgression: Some Notes on the Writing of Julieta Kirkwood" shows how this sociologist and human rights activist has provided a feminist reading of Chilean history, documenting women's participation in political and social life. Kirkwood's research, supported in part by "unpublished documents, flyers, and speeches," theorizes about the connection between political and domestic authoritarianism (pp. 211–13).

A common thread in the contributions to *Reinterpreting* is the underscoring of a persistent search by Latin American women essayists for a discursive space in which to write. Given the silencing and marginalization of women throughout history, this issue is perceived as an urgent need. Feminine discourse is consequently presented as contesting and challenging the tenets on which patriarchal authority is based. Ironically, as Martha Lafollette Miller suggests in "The Ambivalence of Power: Self-Disparagement in the Newspaper Editorials of Rosario Castellanos," once in a position of authority, women sometimes display gender-based ambivalence, self-censorship, and doubt about their own access to power through writing. María Cristina Arambel Guiñazú notes similar contradictions in Victoria Ocampo's early essays. This ambivalence can be largely understood in terms of the internalized anticipation of hostile reactions from a reading public that often discouraged or rejected women's writing.

This valuable two-volume collection begins a dialogue with what Pratt has referred to as "the male monologue" of the continent's intellectual history. As Meyer correctly observes, "The history of the Spanish American essay must be rewritten to include the contributions of women and their historical circumstances" (*Reinterpreting*, p. 7).

In *Contemporary Mexican Women Writers: Five Voices*, Gabriella de Beer has chosen to profile a group of writers who began publishing in the 1970s and 1980s: María Luisa Puga, Silvia Molina, Brianda Domecq, Carmen Boullosa, and Angeles Mastretta. All five now rank among the most important literary figures of either gender publishing in Mexico today. They illustrate the range of innovative writing by a new generation of women writers who are building on the tradition of their feminist "foremothers": Nellie Campobello (1900?–1995), Elena Garro (1920–1998), Rosario Castellanos (1925–1974), and Elena Poniatowska (1933–). In the past two decades, women writers have finally become a recognized force in Mexico's literary and cultural production.

The main chapters of *Contemporary Mexican Women Writers* are structured similarly. For each, de Beer begins with a critical essay that contains some general biographical information. She focuses mostly on why the author under study chose "to pursue a career as a writer," describing her apprenticeship and providing a general discussion of her major works (p. 2).

This part is followed by a transcribed interview with the writer in which de Beer inquires about the author's background, literary and other influences on her narrative, her views on her own writing, and books in progress. The interview is followed by selected writings of the writer's not previously published in English translation. A complete bibliographic listing of the author's works, the English translations, and criticism on her writings concludes each section.

Contemporary Mexican Women Writers will appeal to an English-speaking public interested in women writers, gender studies, and contemporary narrative. Scholars of Mexican literature and Latin American women writers will find it compelling reading and a useful source of information on these writers and their narrative. The volume would be an ideal text for courses in women's studies and Latin American literature in translation. The interviews were conducted skillfully and elicit keen insights into the author's personality, sense of humor, and opinions about herself and her writing as well as her ideas on feminism, other women writers, and the current state of Mexican literature and culture. The selected writings are a pleasure to read for their own sake and provide an excellent introduction for readers unfamiliar with these popular creative writers.

Although the essays in *Contemporary Mexican Women Writers* are more descriptive than analytical, they are refreshingly accessible and offer a succinct overview of each writer's work. De Beer successfully weaves passages from each author's narrative into her discussion. The conclusion contains insights into the unique literary style and original contributions of each author. For example, de Beer notes that María Luisa Puga's reflections on the act of writing are visible throughout her narrative: "she is at times part of her work and establishes a relationship between herself, the reader, and her fictional world" (p. 256). Similarly, de Beer observes, "Silvia Molina's work reflects her belief that writing is a game with a complex set of rules" (p. 257), while Brianda Domecq combines imagination and historical research in recreating Teresa Urrea in *La insólita historia de la Santa Cabora*. De Beer argues that Domecq uses the past to explain the present in her effort to portray women's struggle for empowerment in a repressive society. In discussing Carmen Boullosa's novels, de Beer points out, "all are intricate works that challenge the reader with a mixture of reality and fantasy, contradictions, historical and fictional characters, movement in time, and other narrative techniques" (p. 258). De Beer attributes Angeles Mastretta's popularity to many factors, among them "her ability to express something serious in a fresh and easily accessible way and her creation of characters whose humanity touches the readers or tantalizes them into trying to identify" the real-life models (p. 258).

Joanna O'Connell's *Prospero's Daughter: The Prose of Rosario Castellanos* is the first book-length study on Castellano's prose writing. This fine work of scholarship represents a significant contribution to the existing bib-

liography on this pioneering writer and feminist social critic. *Prospero's Daughter* focuses on the evolution of Castellanos's feminist thought as refracted in her prose, suggesting that the author's experiences as a Mexican woman led her to a position of solidarity with the oppressed indigenous population of her home state of Chiapas. Chapter 1 considers the *Tempest* analogy often used in postcolonial studies to refer to relations between colonizer and colonized. O'Connell argues that the Miranda metaphor aptly describes Castellanos's "(ambiguously) non-hegemonic" and contradictory social position as a woman writer: she is privileged by race, class origins, and education yet still subordinated because of her gender (p. viii).

Chapter 2 offers a detailed analysis of Castellanos's essay "Sobre cultura femenina" (1950), using Judith Fetterly's concept of the "resisting reader" to demonstrate the ways in which Castellanos located herself as an ironic female reader in this essay in order to read against the grain, questioning the assumptions of male superiority on which the Western philosophical tradition is founded. Castellanos called on women to create a more authentic representation of themselves based on their own experiences.

In Chapter 3, O'Connell offers an overview of Mexican *indigenismo*, considered here as an ideology, as social practice, and as aesthetic practice. The author thus establishes the context for her subsequent analyses in Chapters 4, 5, and 6 of the major narratives of ethnic conflict in the so-called Chiapas cycle: the novels *Balún Canán* (1957) and *Oficio de Tinieblas* (1962) and the collection of short stories entitled *Ciudad real* (1960). O'Connell reads Castellanos's indigenista fiction "as it explores the use of language as an instrument of domination and as a means of resistance, and the ways that different practices of interpretation shape social conflict" (p. viii).⁴

Chapter 7 discusses *Los convidados de agosto* (1964) and *Album de familia* (1971). Both these collections of short stories center on women rather than on ethnic conflict. *Los convidados* deals with the provincial world and suffocating values that shape the lives of elite *ladina* women in Chiapas, while *Album* marks a shift in setting to Mexico City and concerns three stages of married life among middle-class women. O'Connell notes that with *Album*, Castellanos "gives us for the first time female characters in the situation of 'toma de conciencia,' characters who move toward the capacity for self-analysis that informs her own poetry and fiction" (p. 191). The final chapter of *Prospero's Daughter* addresses how Castellanos's four books of essays outline the trajectory of her feminist social analysis. O'Connell discusses the role of the essayist as a female critic and reader and the strategies that Castellanos used (such as personal experience or an ironic voice)

4. In light of the 1994 Zapatista uprising and ongoing "low-intensity war" against the indigenous communities of Chiapas, O'Connell's discussion of the history of indigenismo and ethnic conflict in Mexico remains relevant.

to “authorize her introduction of women’s experiences and perspectives into the arena of public intellectual life in Mexico” (p. 215).

One of the major strengths of *Prospero’s Daughter* is that while it builds on existing scholarship (by Joseph Sommers, Maureen Ahern, Cynthia Steele, and others), it also offers new insights into Castellanos’s prose writings informed by recent postcolonial and feminist theories (especially those of Judith Fetterly and Margaret Homans) as well as current anthropological research on indigenismo in Latin America (by Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, Victoria Feilfler Bricker, Antonio Cornejo Polar). Through O’Connell’s convincing close readings of all Castellanos’s major prose writings, the reader is able to observe the development of her thought. O’Connell persuasively demonstrates the ways in which this important Mexican writer came to understand her own contradictory social positioning as a privileged woman writer as she denounced gender, racial, and class oppression in her country.

The Other Mirror: Women’s Narrative in Mexico, 1980–1995, edited by Kristine Ibsen, brings together thirteen critical essays on recent works by nine writers: Elena Poniatowska, Rosa Nissán, Cristina Pacheco, María Luisa Puga, Bárbara Jacobs, Angeles Mastretta, Laura Esquivel, Carmen Boullosa, and Sabina Berman. Ibsen’s introduction indicates that all these authors have sought to map out uncharted terrain in which women are not defined as “man’s symbolic Other, the mirror in which he sees himself reflected” (p. 8). She indicates, “[W]hether by appropriating, inverting, or rejecting outright the canonical versions of femininity, these texts seek an alternative space in which creative women may set forth possibilities for the future” (p. 8).

Danny Anderson’s “Displacement: Strategies of Transformation in *Arráncame la vida* (1985)” provides a solid analysis of Mastretta’s use of parody to displace official versions of Mexican history and to explore public and private relations of power during the 1930s and 1940s in Puebla. Dianna Niebylski examines the subversive employment of humor in Mastretta’s collection of thirty-seven short stories, *Mujeres de ojos grandes* (1990): “By capitalizing on, parodying, exaggerating, exposing, and inverting a number of deeply entrenched clichés, the stories work to exorcise the repressive force of the taboos on which the transgression rests. They do so by making us laugh, not at the aunts but at the deliciously charming lightness with which these women proceed to break some of their culture’s most petrified and petrifying laws” (p. 36).

Florence Moorhead-Rosenberg focuses on the transformation of the reader and argues that in *Pánico o peligro*, María Luisa Puga “has constructed a blueprint for an authentically feminine/feminist linguistic space” (p. 148). From this space, the novel’s protagonist, Susana, defines her own subject position and resists linguistic domination through the writing of her autobiographical notebooks.

Additional books analyzed in *The Other Mirror* that integrate autobiographical elements into narrative are Poniatowska's *La flor de lis* (1988), Berman's *La bobbe* (1990), and Nissán's *Novia que te vea* (1992). Jean Vaughn studies the problematics of identity in Poniatowska's semi-autobiographical novel from a feminist and psychoanalytic perspective employing Teresa de Lauretis's notion of "Oedipal with a vengeance" to interpret the constructions of femininity and nationality in this text. Berman's and Nissán's works trace the life stories of women who are doubly marginalized, as women and as Jews. Darrell Lockhart adopts the Bakhtinian notion of dialogism to demonstrate that these works use multiple languages (Yiddish, Hebrew, and ladino words and phrases) and represent an alternative cultural perspective to challenge official discourse by including the voice of Jewish writers.

María Concepción Bados-Ciria's "Bárbara Jacobs: Gendered Subjectivity and the Epistolary Essay" maintains that Jacobs is interested in rescuing "her experiences in relation to her duty as a writer" (p. 183). Bados-Ciria shows how Jacobs intertwines the travel essay, the critical essay, and the autobiographical essay to refer to her experiences, her reflections, and her emotions (p. 177). Beth Jörgensen's "Light-Writing: Biography and Photography in *Tinísima*" brilliantly explores the intersection of the biographical and autobiographical as well as other complex factors in Poniatowska's construction of the life of Tina Modotti, the famous Italian photographer, revolutionary, and political refugee.

Other original articles in this volume include Cynthia Tompkin's "Historiographic Metafiction or the Rewriting of History in *Son vacas, somos puercos*" and Ibsen's "On Recipes, Reading, and Revolution: Postboom Parody in *Como agua para chocolate*." Both apply Linda Hutcheon's theories to show how Boullosa and Esquivel incorporate parody as a narrative strategy to rewrite history from the perspective of the periphery. Also focusing on the margins, Linda Egan examines the representation of voices of the oppressed in Cristina Pacheco's documentary fiction. She argues that Pacheco's language venerates "the abject stoicism with which Mexico's historical downtrodden survive" (p. 139) and that the lack of humor in her novels "fastens a paradoxical 'anti-feminism' to her densely feminine discourse" (p. 138).

The main weakness of *The Other Mirror* is that the articles are somewhat uneven in quality. For example, the studies by some critics (Yael Halevi-Wise and Charlotte Ekland) pale in comparison with others (written by Ibsen and Jörgensen) on the same novels (*Como agua para chocolate* and *Tinísima*) and probably should not have been included.

Finally, *Latin American Women's Writing: Feminist Readings in Theory and Crisis* features provocative and original readings of the works of ten writers. They include canonized authors such as María Luisa Bombal, Norah Lange, Isabel Allende; well-known writers like Griselda Gambaro,

Cristina Peri Rossi, Alejanda Pizarnik, Sonia Coutinho, and Nellie Campobello; and others who are building their reputations, namely Diamela Eltit and Afro-Cuban poet Excilia Saldaña.

Editors Anny Brooksbank Jones and Catherine Davies explain that *Latin American Women's Writing* "offers very specific readings that foreground the unsettling and powerfully productive potential of the crisis in and around theory. In the process it intervenes in debates that are helping to reposition feminist critical discourse within Latin American studies and the academy at large" (p. 2). The contributors are noted scholars working in Latin America (Nora Domínguez, Luisa Lobo), the United States (Debra Castillo, Jean Franco, Susan Frenk, Linda Gould Levine, Sharon Magnarelli, Adriana Méndez Rodenas, Doris Meyer), and Europe (Susan Bassnett, Anny Brooksbank Jones, Catherine Davies, Jo Labanyi). Each of these contexts is defined by a different set of possibilities and constraints.

Although the editors claim to include essays representing a wide range of theoretical approaches in feminist criticism today (postcolonial, cultural-political, psychoanalytic, poststructural, and postmodernist), half of these articles are written from a psychoanalytic perspective and based on French feminists Irigaray and Kristeva. For readers unfamiliar with these complex theories, several of the essays (especially those by Labanyi, Méndez, and Bassnett) may prove inaccessible because of their heavy use of jargon, lack of contextualization, and application of theoretical concepts that are insufficiently explained or elaborated. Space constraints limit my comments to brief observations on several of these essays.

Two outstanding contributions to *Latin American Women's Writing* consider the link between gender and performance: Sharon Magnarelli's "Acting/Seeing Woman: Griselda Gambaro's *El despojamiento*" and Nora Domínguez's "Literary Constructions and Gender Performance in the Novels of Norah Lange." Magnarelli explores the theatrical element as a thematic thread in Gambaro's play, itself an allegory of the military regime in Argentina during the 1970s. She argues that this thread weaves together several facets: "the notion of woman as an actress by definition, compelled to assume the various roles assigned her; the voyeuristic relation of the audience, male or female, to the performance; and the generally unacknowledged position of the theatrical institution per se, as simultaneous exploitation (economic or sexual) and imposition of the values of the status quo" (p. 11). Domínguez uses Judith Butler's theory to explore gender performance with respect to constructing the family imaginary. She shows how Lange's female first-person narrators adopt different disguises to escape from the private spaces in which they feel trapped.

Susan Frenk contends that the "readability" of Isabel Allende's narrative "is not an escape from the social but one element in an exploration of the political, ethical and discursive possibilities of romance" (p. 4). Doris Meyer appropriates Bakhtinian theory to discuss Nellie Campobello's ex-

ploration of autobiographical narrative and oral testimonies in composing *Cartucho*, a novel that challenges the official discourse of the Mexican Revolution and questions generic boundaries. *Latin American Women's Writing* ends with three interesting essays by Anny Brooksbank Jones, Debra Castillo, and Jean Franco that discuss current debates surrounding feminist theory and politics in Latin American literary and cultural studies. They attempt to bridge the gap between some Latin American anti-colonialist oppositional criticism that tends to emphasize the political and historical context and some feminist criticism (especially French models) that highlights gender oppression and places the female body at the center of its analyses.

This brief review essay has attempted to outline some of the ways in which these seven valuable new works of feminist scholarship represent several trends in the field of Latin American feminist criticism and contribute to the necessary process of revising and rewriting Latin American literary history. Each of these books provides significant insights into the lives and literary and cultural production of Latin American women writers whose voices have for too long been silenced or ignored by the patriarchal literary establishment.