ELLEN MAYOCK

5. TEACHING HISPANIC FEMINISMS

From Academic Consciousness-Raising to Activism

With 25 years' experience teaching in the Hispanic Studies classroom, I have experimented in several different ways with the incorporation of the "gender question," thus establishing a long pedagogical trajectory open to critical reflection. In this essay, I borrow from Elaine Showalter's (1985d) notion of gynocritics to think about the following issues and themes in the teaching of gender through Hispanic literature and culture: (1) the need to give voice and visibility to the many women writers and creators whose works did not make the canon(s) of the pre-20th and/or pre-21st-centuries; (2) the introduction of feminist theories through Hispanic literature in courses not specifically listed under the Women's and Gender Studies rubric; (3) the examination of the female protagonist in Spanish literature; and (4) the design of a course titled "Hispanic Feminisms," its goals, and its association with Hispanic Studies, Latin American and Caribbean Studies, and Women's and Gender Studies departments and programs. An evaluation of the content and reception of four different courses permits an analysis of how and why we guide students in gathering information, building skills in research, writing, and oral presentation, sharpening analysis, and, in some cases, moving towards their own brand of activism.

Before leaping into the decades-old Anglo-American notion of gynocritics and justifying its use for this essay, I want to comment on feminist nostalgia and the impact of the changing modes of programmatic studies from women's studies to gender studies to sexuality studies. Over the past five years, I have heard several feminist critical scholars, both well-known and not yet known, express a profound gratitude and pride in the advances in many places of LGBTQ politics and policies, while at the same time lamenting or gently mentioning a nostalgia for women-centered politics and change. While women's studies has rightly made room—both in the academic program and in social space (both real and virtual)—for theoretical examinations and practical advocacy for LGBT constituencies and broader understandings of sex, gender, and sexualities, it has perhaps ceded space to the question of feminism and women's rights. Judith

L. Gómez et al. (Eds.), Teaching Gender through Latin American, Latino, and Iberian Texts and Cultures, 81–97.

Butler's (1990) *Gender Trouble* was an exciting, field-changing work that allowed us to think about sex as a movable biological category and about gender as an imposed, and sometimes chosen, set of performances. As Butler (1990) puts it:

> No longer believable as an interior "truth" of dispositions and identity, sex will be shown to be a performatively enacted signification (and hence not "to be"), one that, released from its naturalized interiority and surface, can occasion the parodic proliferation and subversive play of gendered meanings. This text continues, then, as an effort to think through the possibility of subverting and displacing those naturalized and reified notions of gender that support masculine hegemony and heterosexist power, to make gender trouble, not through the strategies that figure a utopian beyond, but through the mobilization, subversive confusion, and proliferation of precisely those constitutive categories that seek to keep gender in its place by posturing as foundational illusions of identity. (pp. 33–34)

Feminist studies and practices had been heading in the direction of this confusion of binary categories for decades, and Butler (1990) was quite appropriately tapping into modes of undoing masculine hegemony and heterosexist power, while also advancing the cause for masculinity studies and an awareness that strict gender scripts can be detrimental for us all. All these years in, however, I cannot help but wonder if somehow feminism is weakened because actual women have disappeared from some of our theoretical paradigms. With continued global crises in "wars on women," sexual violence, sex trafficking, domestic violence, and education for girls and women, we can see that we have not successfully undone the privilege binary and that, at times, we have to define women as women in order to name collective problems, mobilize world resources, and establish mechanisms for sustained, creative solutions for women as women. In other words, as we move towards a hopefully and possibly post-gender world, we currently find ourselves in a theoretical and practical limbo in which so much of what we still do and so many ways in which we define our world are still based on categories of sex and gender. (I'm thinking, for example, of the admirable move in college athletics towards inclusion of all sexes, genders, racial and national identities, and levels of ability, but the fact that Title IX still uses female/male categories in legal theory and practice.) It is therefore with a degree of nostalgia that I return to Elaine Showalter's (1985d) gynocritics to underscore the importance of classroom consciousness-raising on women's and gender issues and to suggest ways in which classroom activities can translate to real world activism.

I share here a brief summary of Elaine Showalter's work in feminist criticism. In "Introduction: The Feminist Critical Revolution," Elaine Showalter (1985c) wrote of the work that had been done in feminist literary criticism since 1975:

> While literary criticism and its philosophical branch, literary theory, have always been zealously guarded bastions of male intellectual endeavor, the success of feminist criticism has opened a space for the authority of the woman critic that extends beyond the study of women's writing to the reappraisal of the whole body of texts that make up our literary heritage. Whether concerned with the literary representations of sexual difference, with the ways that literary genres have been shaped by masculine and feminine values, or with the exclusion of the female voice from the institutions of literature, criticism, and theory, feminist criticism has established gender as a fundamental category of literary analysis. (p. 3)

In this essay, Showalter (1985c) goes on to map phases of the development of feminist criticism, phases that are applicable to world literature and for which Showalter (1985c) provides examples predominantly from the United States, Britain, and France. The first phase exposes the "misogyny of literary practice" (Showalter, 1985c, p. 5), the second phase constitutes the recovery of women's writing across time and place (p. 6), and the third, and most complicated, phase is the ongoing theorizing about women's experiences and the "concept of a female aesthetic" (p. 6). In the end, this third phase is the area of inquiry that opens up women's studies to the insistence upon gender as a construct and, thus, to gender studies. For Showalter (1985), gynocritics serves "to construct a female framework for the analysis of women's literature, to develop new models based on the study of female experience, rather than to adapt male models and theories. Gynocritics begins at the point when we free ourselves from the linear absolutes of male literary history, stop trying to fit women between the lines of male tradition, and focus instead on the newly visible world of female culture" (Showalter, 1985d, p. 131).

Parallel to Showalter's incursions into feminist criticism in the Anglo and French traditions appear many seminal studies in Hispanic feminist criticism. These include, as early as 1979, Lucía Fox-Lockhert's (1979) *Women Novelists in Spain and Spanish America* and, Beth Miller's (1983) edited volume *Women in Hispanic Literature. Icons and Fallen Idols*, with a prolific collection of further studies throughout the 1980s '90s and to the present day.[1] The earlier volumes borrow from Anglo and French traditions, while also forging a "gynocritics" more particular to Spain, Latin

America, and U.S. Latin@ and to sub-regions and sub-groups of these broad geographic and demographic swaths. The trajectory of research on the "gender question" in Hispanic Studies, especially from 1975 to the present day, accompanies the development of many more courses on women writers, women writing women, portrayals of women in the traditional and non-traditional canons, feminist theory, queer theory, and gender theory. In other words, more progressive research agendas have nourished classroom approaches to gender. Especially in the liberal arts model of teaching, the reverse is also true: classroom themes and techniques motivate the production of research on feminist criticism.

How we teach the gender question in our colleges and universities is heavily influenced by geographic region, institutional history, pre-existing curricula, and the intellectual interests of departments, students, and professors. I have spent the majority of my academic career at a well-respected small, southern, liberal arts institution of the United States. My university co-educated on the undergraduate side in 1985, which changed the course of the institution's history, while also very clearly changing the demographics of the undergraduate population. When I arrived in 1997, there were few mid- or upper-level literature courses in the Spanish curriculum that included women writers, and there was only one course on women writers. This course was developed by a colleague of mine, who surely must have passed through many of the same evaluative steps that I did: look at the curriculum; analyze its trends, principally reflecting courses organized by period and/or genre; name the gaps; fill the gaps. Having finished a dissertation the year before on the female protagonist in Francoist and post-Franco literature, I was well-versed in the gender matters of gynocritics, the canon, power, sexuality, and creating a lens through which to understand central and peripheral spaces. I was not thinking about the context of the small, southern liberal arts college, but rather about the less-than-full curriculum that neglected such literary greats as Santa Teresa de Ávila, Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, Emilia Pardo Bazán, María Zambrano, Elena Poniatowska, Rosario Castellanos, Carmen Martín Gaite, Isabel Allende, Alfonsina Storni, Delmira Agustini, Rosario Ferré, and Nancy Morejón. (I haven't included Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz on this list because she tends to make her way onto even the most traditional course syllabi.) Although we all recognize that it is impossible to cover every interesting author and theme, we also know that some syllabus manipulation allows us to give "voz y voto" to more women authors and to more themes that require gender as a tool of analysis, and thus, to a broader spectrum of the publishing world and the intellectual arena.

My institution encourages consistent, creative design of new courses, and so during my second year I proposed a course on my dissertation topic, the development of the female protagonist in 20th-century Spanish literature. To complement the course, I invited Lidia Falcón, renowned author, lawyer, and founder of the Spanish Feminist Party, to a two-day visit to our university. Dr. Falcón's visit created quite a splash, one that I had naively not fully anticipated. Here she was, Founder of the Spanish Feminist Party, coming to rural Virginia to talk about communist and feminist ideals. Many students and community members in the audience were more undone by the communist overtones than by the feminist ones, thus demonstrating the potential and power ("danger") of communism and the perceived lack of potential and power of feminism. Falcón's assertion that "Feminism is simply a process of improving communism" ("El feminismo es simplemente la superación del comunismo") caused even more of a stir, and to good effect. Students in the class understood more viscerally and intellectually the challenges women face in a repressive climate and the "repression hangover" of the post-Franco era. They were also able to examine some of these issues in their own lives and environments. I tell this story to recognize that we each approach cultural canons in different ways, depending on where we teach. After the Falcón visit, I was more conscious about and more deliberate in the choices I made as I continued to teach the gender question in the Hispanic Studies classroom. I continued to take risks, but they were much more calculated and aware than those I had taken with the quick-impulse invitation to Lidia Falcón.

In her early works on feminist criticism, Elaine Showalter astutely described the various trends in feminist literary criticism in the mid-1970s, highlighted the uniting factors among the trends, and theorized about why feminist literary criticism had not yet gained significant traction. The richness of women's literary contributions across a broad geographical swath also complicates the creation of a relatively uniform approach to women's works, as evidenced by many of the trends in Third-Wave, or "multiculturalist," feminism. Nevertheless, the year 1975 served to ring a clarion call regarding women as creators and as critics, and the call was heard throughout the world. While Latin America and Spain celebrated "The Year of the Woman" ("El Año de la Mujer"), a few women authors began to approach center stage and to be recognized in the popular and academic presses. Forty years later, women creators (writers, film directors and producers, musicians, etc.) from a Spanish-language tradition or culture have gained some visibility, but not as much as forty years might indicate they should. Our high school and university curricula still reflect a

traditionalist approach to course design, and much work remains to be done. In the next sections, I describe four courses I have offered in order to expand and enrich the curriculum. In addition, I analyze the reception of the courses and assess the level to which the students have applied knowledge and skills acquired through these classes beyond the classroom.

VOICE AND VISIBILITY THROUGH THE COURSE TITLED "ESCRITORAS MEXICANAS Y MEXICOAMERICANAS"

In "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness," Showalter (1985b) examines the history, styles, themes, genres, and structures of women's writing. She emphasizes also the "psychodynamics of female creativity" (p. 248) as a way to get at the core of women's writing and to ask the question, "What is the *difference* of women's writing?" (p. 248). This course's sole focus on women writers allowed the students and me to re-evaluate women writers *as individuals* and *as a group*, to discuss canon formation and expansion, to understand the strategies of feminist criticism, and to raise consciousness about the traditional marginalization of women writers and their writings.

Our Spanish department for the most part has covered Mexican authors very well and capably. Nevertheless, except for the famous case of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, few Mexican women authors had been included in our curriculum in the incipient and advanced major levels. Two of the principal aims of this course were to fill this gap by including important Mexican women writers of the 20th century and to create a link between Mexico and the United States through the examination of works by several Chicana authors from the U.S. The course was the first one in the entire curriculum of the university to treat U.S./Latin@ authors in any way, and it required a rethinking of the uses of Spanish and English in the Spanish-language literature classroom.

The course description reads: "In this course we examine a series of Mexican and Mexican-American authors, from Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz to Sandra Cisneros. We explore the following questions: under which political circumstances do these authors write?; how do they absorb and reflect the culture of which they are an inherent part?; how are culture and gender related, and how do they manifest in the works studied?; which elements of Latin American feminisms appear in these works or are subtly incorporated?; what are the fundamental differences between the narrative, dramatic, and poetic works of these writers?; what is Chicana writing?; how are the Mexcian and Chicana authors and their works related?" ["En este curso pretendemos examinar a una serie de escritoras mexicanas y mexicoamericanas, desde Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz hasta Sandra Cisneros.

Exploramos las preguntas a continuación: ¿bajo qué circunstancias políticas escriben estas autoras?; ¿cómo absorben y reflejan la cultura de la cual son una parte inherente?; ¿cómo se relacionan cultura y género y cómo se manifiestan en estas obras?; ¿qué elementos del feminismo latinonamericano aparecen en estas obras o están sutilmente incorporados?; ¿cuáles son las diferencias fundamentales entre los escritos narrativos, dramáticos y poéticos de estas escritoras?; ¿qué es la escritura chicana?¿cómo se relacionan entre sí las escritoras mexicanas y las chicanas y sus obras?"].

In the course, we spent three weeks reading Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, spending a significant amount of time on her "Respuesta" (1691/2007) in order to use the text to establish the overarching themes and questions of the course. We spent some time, too, on "Primero Sueño" (1692/2007) so that students could grasp first-hand the intellectual and spiritual complexity and poetic beauty of the text. We also viewed *Yo, la peor de todas,* (1990) which allowed us to compare our own portraits of the life and works of Sor Juana with that of director María Luisa Bemberg. Starting the course in this way allowed students to use Sor Juana as a literary anchor (an author whom they had read before), to expand exponentially on their interpretation of her work, and to "legitimize" the feminist questions raised in her life and works, thus also legitimizing for any skeptics the goals of the course and the ensuing texts we would examine. In other words, starting with the canon implied to the students that the course had been "vetted," that it was legitimate, acceptable, to read these works and to ask these questions of the texts. This is an important point in the context of my university. With 18 students enrolled in the class (nine men, nine women), I needed a firm way in, and Sor Juana was it. At the same time, the students were surprised to be asked to talk about a feminist poetics in Sor Juana's works and about gender and sexual identities raised both in the works and in the Bemberg film. Sor Juana became for the students both a recognized part of a traditional canon and the tormented figure of an iconoclast who herself taught valuable lessons about the gender question in "New Spain." In a sense, Sor Juana captures all three of Showalter's gynocritical categories: feminine (recouping and valuing women's writing), feminist (establishing questions of patriarchy and women's full access to the world), and female ("female experience as the source of an autonomous art" (1985c, pp. 137–139), and thereby "jumpstarts" any course on gender in the Hispanic classroom.

Subsequent examinations of Elena Garro, Rosario Castellanos, and Laura Esquivel served to establish further questions about the Mexican Revolution, politics, borders, and the inscription of women in both public

and private spaces. Rosario Castellanos' very explicit call to Latin American feminism (with overt Western European influences) allowed the class to compare a "feminine" stage of writing to an explicitly "feminist" stage. Students had to evaluate how Paz (1959/1997) mapped gender questions through the figure of La Malinche, what the role of female film directors has been in the depiction of women characters, and which Mexican influences have impacted Chicana writers the most and the least. I distinctly remember what happened when a student gave an individual presentation on Frida Kahlo's contributions to the visual arts. She started her talk with, "I'm not a communist, but today I will talk about Frida Kahlo." This surprising and comical introduction to her talk afforded the students and me an opportunity to address the relationship between the artist, the message, and the audience and then, more specifically, the ways in which Frida Kahlo broke many traditional molds—her status as accomplished woman artist, living most of her life with disability, politics, and bisexuality—and created a model for many others to follow. In the end, the course served to fill gaps in the curricular canon of my department (and of the English Department) in terms of valuing women's literary production, to establish research questions about gender in Mexico and the United States, and to encourage an incipient awareness about gender questions in the students' own lives.

INTRODUCTION OF FEMINIST THEORIES THROUGH HISPANIC LITERATURE IN THE COURSE TITLED "NOVELA ESPAÑOLA DESDE 1897"

This "stock" course had traditionally included four novels by four male writers whose works spanned from the end of the 19th century to the end of the 20th century. The course description reads: "This course examines the evolution of Spanish narrative from the 19th century to the present day. By reading a series of novels and short stories, we study theme and narrative style to explore the changes this genre has experienced over more than a century. We will try to make conclusions regarding the relationship of literature to vertiginous change in politics, society, and cultures of Spain. Besides reading four novels and short stories, we will view and analyze a film for each segment of the course. All readings, films, and class discussions will be in Spanish" ["Este curso pretende examinar la evolución de la narrativa española desde el siglo XIX hasta la época contemporánea. Al leer cuidadosamente una serie de novelas y cuentos, estudiamos la temática y estilística narrativas para explorar los cambios que tienen lugar en este género durante más de un siglo. Intentamos llegar a

conclusiones con respecto a la relación entre la literatura de la España del siglo XX con los cambios vertiginosos en la política, sociedades y culturas del país de la misma época. Además de leer cuatro novelas representativas, veremos y evaluaremos una película para cada segmento del curso. Todo lo que leamos, veamos y comentemos lo haremos en español"]. When I inherited this course back in the 1990s, I changed the syllabus to include two male and two female authors and also included theoretical units on narratology, Marxism, New Historicism, and feminism. In this section I will discuss the students' reactions to the inclusion of men and women writers and to the discussion and application of feminist theory.

I teach this course every other year and therefore have changed the list of authors somewhat frequently. Nevertheless, I always maintain the two men/two women balance, a strategy which, although it does not recognize on the surface Butler's performative theories of gender, does recognize biological categories of sex and the underrepresentation of women on many course syllabi in my university. I do not mention this to students as a deliberate move on my part, but many notice and comment upon it as we get into the second half of the course. I like having them question and analyze some of my canonical choices. They recognize that I am choosing from a rich array of quality women and men authors and that I can easily establish parity in the numbers of women and men we read. I do this in a no-nonsense, this-is-just-fair way that I believe makes the students also feel more no-nonsense about parity. We have studied Larra, Pardo Bazán, Pérez Galdós, Unamuno, Cela, Martín Gaite, and Dulce Chacón. In some years, when I'm feeling particularly brave and energetic, I leave the fourth novel open and allow students to choose a novel from a list and then develop their own work on that novel. This keeps me reading the contemporary canon and keeps the course fresh, but it also changes the ways in which we can have common conversations in the course.

More polemical than the choice of authors (about which the students usually know less at the beginning of the term) is the inclusion of feminist theory as a possible approach to the texts we read in class. In the earlier years, students would write on their final course evaluations, "I liked studying theory, but why did we spend so much time on feminism?," "Why is feminist theory so much more important than the other approaches covered?" My first reaction to this response was that perhaps, in my zeal to establish the gender question in Spanish literature, I had given feminist theory a preeminent position in the course. Nevertheless, upon reviewing the course syllabus and texts, I reassured myself that we had spent exactly three weeks on each of the theoretical approaches, with an equal number of secondary articles and student-led presentations on each one. Therefore, it

was the perception of some students that "feminism had taken over." In ensuing years, I have been more transparent in explaining the four novels-four theoretical schools approach, and the students have understood better what theory does for us as critics and why certain texts lend themselves to specific critical approaches.

Students typically leave the course with an understanding of the trajectory of Spanish narrative from the 19th century through the present day, a respect for men and women novelists within the Spanish tradition, a basic understanding of what literary theory is and why it is useful, and, yes, a brief introduction to feminist literary theory in order to expand their abilities in analyzing the gender question in Hispanic literature.

EXAMINATION OF THE FEMALE PROTAGONIST IN 20TH-CENTURY SPANISH LITERATURE AND FILM

This upper-level course allows for a multi-genre approach much appreciated by students. Despite the clear thrust towards gender in the title of the course, the course can unfold in many different directions, thus allowing students a subtle "way in" to the discussion of gender. Female and male authors are included, and thematic questions addressed are: how does the female protagonist absorb and reflect the culture of which she is a part?; how are gender and culture related, and how does this manifest itself in the works studied?; what is Spanish feminism?; what are some of the challenges and victories of female authorship and authority?; what are the differences among the narrative, poetic, and dramatic portrayals of the female protagonist?

The course begins with María Martínez Sierra's *Canción de cuna*, which builds students' reading confidence, portrays a host of female types, and introduces the very complicated question of female authorship. Students have been fascinated by the personal and professional relationship between María and Gregorio Martínez Sierra and been very curious about María's deferral to her husband in claiming fame for their literary collaborations. Female and male students alike wonder at María's lack of ego and, in a sense, begin the course wishing for more appropriately-placed critical acclaim for Spain's women writers.

La casa de Bernarda Alba—both the García Lorca play and the TVE2 production—capture students' interest through the depiction of the almost all female cast, the beauty of the writing, the poignant nature of women's oppression, and the also gendered portrayal of the male suitor. The play encourages a full discussion of gendered spheres and gender roles. The last time I taught the course, the students were required to select and perform

scenes from the play. Several male students played female characters and were required to do so in a believable fashion. The live gender dynamics in the play itself and in this cross-dressing approach were further complicated when the class performed their scenes at Virginia Military Institute for an all-male, upper-level Spanish class. Hanging in García Lorca's beautifully crafted, stifling air of oppression were questions of enclosure and freedom, repression and desire, gossip and silence. The students captured live many of the limiting elements for Spain's 20th-century female protagonist.

As we continued to read more works featuring female protagonists and/or voices (Laforet's *Nada*, Gloria Fuertes' poetry, Delibes' *Cinco horas con Mario*, *Doce relatos de mujeres*, and Lourdes Ortiz' *El cascabel al gato*), students also individually prepared presentations on Hispanic feminist criticism and secondary readings on the primary authors. These included works by Spanish historians, such as Pilar Folguera, by literary critics, such as Mariana Petrea and Elizabeth Scarlett, and by the authors themselves, including Carmen Martín Gaite's personal essays from *Hilo a la cometa*. In this sense, each student read and "owned" a piece of the theory that served as the backdrop to the class. The students and I keep in mind that the feminist critical approach is one choice among many, as Annette Kolodny states more eloquently:

> All the feminist is asserting, then, is her own equivalent right to liberate new (and perhaps different) significances from these same texts; and, at the same time, her right to choose which features of a text she takes as relevant because she is, after all, asking new and different questions of it. In the process, she claims neither definitiveness nor structural completeness for her different readings and reading systems, but only their usefulness in recognizing the particular achievements of woman-as-author and their applicability in conscientiously decoding woman-as-sign. (As cited in Showalter, 1985b, p. 246)

While Showalter (1985b) seeks a more unified sense of feminist literary criticism, especially "at this early stage" (p. 246), she recognizes Kolodny's "playful pluralism" (p. 246), which is perhaps largely a function of the inclusive nature of many women's movements. This is another element ripe for debate in classes on gender: *Do*es feminist criticism require a set of stock, immovable definitions in order to appeal to the "uninitiated" (Nina Auerbach's term used by Showalter, 1985b, p. 181), or is pluralism, what we now might call multicultural feminism, a necessary and inherent aspect of feminist criticism? In this 1985 essay, Showalter remarks that feminist literary theory has much to learn from international feminism (p. 247), and

certainly the many Hispanic critics cited earlier in this essay have taken feminist literary in new, and, in some cases, less male-centered, directions. The final project for this course employed explicit feminist pedagogical practices. For the project, students had to choose a text featuring a female protagonist not covered in class, write an analytical paper on the text in which they fully evaluated the role of the female protagonist according to the overarching themes of the class, do a creative interpretation of the work through a painting, song, short film, script, poem (etc.), and serve as a peer reviewer for a classmate's project.

Students responded to the feminist aspect of this course much more positively than to the short imposition of feminism in the 19th- and 20th-century Novel course. They liked treating broad aspects of gender for both female and male roles, and they liked reading female and male authors. I believe that students in general had increased exposure to gender studies before enrolling in this course through the establishment of our women's and gender studies program and therefore understood the program and its forms of analyses to be more mainstream. Finally, I believe that the performance exercises and the autonomy of the final project drew students into the course topic and required them to be both mature and engaged in the course materials.

This course showcases Showalter's (1985a) gynocritical approach in that it offers a wide variety of women (and some men) authors, it employs feminist literary theory as a means to examine the course texts, and it asks students to think about the possibility of a female aesthetic.

DESIGN OF COURSE TAUGHT IN ENGLISH FOR THE LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN STUDIES PROGRAM, "HISPANIC FEMINISMS"

The courses I have described to this point get students thinking actively about gender, but they do not necessarily get them working actively outside of the classroom or its course texts. This fourth course, so broadly conceptualized as a way to think about Hispanic Feminisms across Spain, Latin America, and the United States, became a way for students to engage in course questions and problems beyond the walls of the classroom. This was achieved, in large part, through the curiosity and hard work of the students themselves, through the reinforcing mechanisms of the two interdisciplinary programs that sponsored the course (Latin American and Caribbean Studies and Women's and Gender Studies), and through the visiting speakers for the course. In addition, unlike the other three courses described, this course was offered in English and, therefore, empowered both bilingual (Spanish-English) students and English-speaking students to

carry course questions on Hispanic feminisms beyond the classroom experience. Many of the students at my university who take the introductory course on women's and gender studies have little to no exposure to Hispanic feminisms (depending on the professor in charge of the course in a given semester), and so this "Hispanic feminisms" course establishes that Hispanic feminisms are often more rooted in women's experiences as part of a collective (e.g. family, work unit, political party) and are often more attuned to intersectionality (social class, perceived race and/or skin color, religion). In addition, students must come to understand the complex diversity of Latin American and Caribbean regions, nations, and diasporas.

It was clear from the outset that this course aimed to develop students' knowledge of the theories and practice of "Hispanic Feminisms." This course had three units: Spanish feminism(s), Latin American feminism(s), and U.S.-Latina feminism(s). We began by establishing a rationale for our use of the polemical term 'Hispanic,' which succeeded in layering on the major course themes from the start. In this conversation, some students self-identified as "Hispanic" or with different terms ("Latina") and then discussed why they made these choices. In addition, we read a series of articles from *The Latin@ Condition* (1998) in order to understand the scholarly dialogue taking place about imposing terms of identification and/versus embracing such terms. These themes included feminism as theory and practice and feminism as personal and political, the intersections between and among gender, color, race, place of origin, religion, and socioeconomic class, and feminist practices with non-feminist labels. Students were asked to develop a geographical area of expertise to provide more daily foundation for the class and to attempt to cut through the broad geographical swaths covered. More importantly, through a series of feminist pedagogical practices—taking turns being discussion leaders, shared journals, invited speakers, round table discussions—students learned to be in charge of their own learning and to develop a platform surrounding Hispanic feminist activism.

This was a small class of all women students. The size of the class allowed the intensive feminist pedagogies to work at their highest potential because there was ample time for formal and informal student presentations and for guest speakers. The two assigned research papers required students to research and become experts on one women's organization from Spain and one from Latin America. Students came to understand how to define women's issues and gender issues in general, the elements of grass-roots organizing, the constant tension between theory and practice, and the cultural implications of being a woman and/or of being a feminist. Each

student reported to the class on her chosen organization, thus painting a diverse picture of the manners and motivations of women's activism and allowing the students to ruminate on how to become an activist and how to define an activist agenda over time. I like to think of the classroom as a potential space for what Wendy Lynne Lee (2010) calls "the activism of the ordinary" (p. 229), an understanding that we can start small, in our own classroom or backyard or lunch table, to make small differences among people we know. Once students have studied grass-roots and more large-scale activist programs, they will see that "starting small" can lead to big change.

The course texts were particularly advanced for a 100-level class, but the students rose to the challenge. They appreciated learning theory and seeing how it makes its way into the day-to-day practice and struggles of activism, but they seemed to like even more that there are intelligent ways to extract lessons from the struggles themselves. Class visitors presented on the Pasionaria (Dolores Ibárruri), Afro-Caribbean cultural production, and the women of Juárez. This focused view of women's activism that is not necessarily self-declared as feminist allowed the students to see that a platform does not have to be labeled 'feminist' for it to expound upon some ideals of equity and equal access. In particular, the students became extremely alarmed about the situation in Juárez (in 2008, this was) and its lack of exposure in the United States media. One journalism student decided to write a series of op-eds on Juárez for Virginia newspapers. A student majoring in sociology and minoring in Latin American and Caribbean Studies (LACS) wrote her LACS capstone paper on women in Mexico, with a thematic focus on violence, and an English major with a minor in Women's and Gender studies wrote her English honors thesis on Rosario Castellanos' and Giaconda Belli's notions of feminism in the Latin American context. In addition, this student graduated and went on to teach English in Tucson, where she implemented a five-part unit on local activism. I was gratified to see that students had brought their prodigious critical thinking skills to bear on human rights issues and real, live social justice. Although no students in that course chose to focus on Spain for an activist project, I will be curious to see if Spain's current political situation (e.g. abortion laws), economic crises, and youth activist movements (e.g. 15-M) will modify the students' orientation in future iterations of this course.

This course succeeded in going beyond Elaine Showalter's gynocritical view because it moved students from the concept of the female aesthetic into a fourth stage, one that recognizes the students' ability to grasp advanced concepts about women, gender, and sexualities in the Hispanic

world, to read and write intelligently on the issues, and to apply their theoretical knowledge to a platform that both means something to them and has the potential to make small and large changes in the world.

Elaine Showalter (1985b) has characterized certain generalized national approaches to feminist criticism:

> English feminist criticism, which incorporates French feminist and Marxist theory but is more traditionally oriented to textual interpretation, is also moving toward a focus on women's writing. The emphasis in each country falls somewhat differently: English feminist criticism, essentially Marxist, stresses oppression; French feminist criticism, essentially psychoanalytic, stresses repression; American feminist criticism, essentially textual, stresses expression. All, however, have become gynocentric All are struggling to find terminology that can rescue the feminine from its stereotypical associations with inferiority. (p. 249)

Hispanic feminist criticism, so broad in its geography and so deep in its concepts, works in many cases to redefine and revamp family structures that have shaped women's writing, to revalue women's private and public contributions to society, and to recognize linguistic experimentation from gender to gender, genre to genre, and region to region. Raising students' awareness about Hispanic feminist traditions and enhancing ability to speak and write about them succeeds in amplifying the students' worldview, along with that of their departments and universities. It also "normalizes" the presence of women creators and theorists on university syllabi across the curriculum and advances discussions among intellectuals and activists surrounding some of the most polemical topics within feminist critical paradigms: unification versus pluralism; nation versus world; multiculturalism; theory and/versus practice; blurring of lines between sex and gender; inclusion of ecological questions in a feminist framework. Engaging with students in these conversations augments both their and my sense of civic responsibility and activism on questions of equality in the Hispanic world.

NOTE

[1] See References for a fuller listing of works on the Hispanic feminist literary tradition. See also Chapter 8 of *The 'Strange Girl' in Twentieth-Century Spanish Novels Written by Women* (Mayock, 2004) for a synthesis of feminist literary writing in the Spanish context through 2004.

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Ellen Mayock
Washington and Lee University