

CHAPTER TWO

STUCK WITH THE LABEL: THE PROBLEMATIC RAPPOR BETWEEN PENINSULAR WOMEN WRITERS AND ANGLO- AMERICAN FEMINIST HISPANISTS¹

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This essay is in tune with what is proving to be a new direction in recent work by Anglo-American Hispanists, namely the one occasionally referred to as metacriticism (Moreiras 1999, 141; Epps 2005, 253). Although the actual concept and the critical practice that this coinage underpins have been around for some time now (especially within the fields of English studies or critical studies), the term metacriticism has not generally been employed. This essay will explicitly engage with both the practice and its specific terminology in an attempt to establish them within the field of Hispanic studies.

Besides this overarching objective, the present study aims also to be an instance of metacritical practice. For this purpose, a definition of metacritical work will firstly be advanced. Second, I will be commenting on a few recent instances of this critical mode within Hispanism and on the kind of suspicions that they have focused on. Finally, I will try to show that these tensions are visibly at work in the intersectional space between gender studies and Hispanism. For this purpose, three recent articles by feminist Anglo-American scholars will be brought under scrutiny, with a view to shedding light on a phenomenon that has become something of a platitude within the critical debate about peninsular women writers: the controversy around the validity of the label “feminist” when applied to authors who continue to reject it vocally (Johnson 2005, 245-248).

1. Defining Metacriticism

Metacriticism can be defined as the analytical mode entered by the critic when, instead of looking outwardly at the cultural product as an object of study (be it literary, filmic, etc) or to other congenial analytical tools or theories that might serve to elucidate the cultural product’s signification and significance, she chooses

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to look inwards at her own modes of analysis, or outwards at the ways other critics have proceeded in their endeavours to give shape to the discipline. There is therefore a decisive shift in the critic's object of analysis, going from the cultural product to the critical text itself and the discipline that the latter helps to fashion. As mentioned above, this mode of analysis has been particularly prominent in the field of English studies and, more generally, critical studies (Aram Veesser 1996). Metacriticism in these disciplines has manifested itself in the form of institutional analysis of a variety of scopes, ranging from extensive historical accounts of the development of academic disciplines (Graff 1987; Kittler 2004), to more pointed approaches to specific practices within the institution (Fish 2004). Underlying such studies is the critic's conviction that by feeling the pulse of institutional movements we may reach an understanding of "the active roles they play in subject-formation, geopolitical relations, and imaginative productivity" (Poovey 2004).

Within Hispanic studies, metacritical research has not reached the degree of institutionalisation this type of studies has acquired elsewhere, although the early work of Barry Jordan, Nicholas Round, and Malcolm Read may be classified as metacritical (Jordan 1984-1985, 1990; Read 1991, 1992, 2003; Round 1992-1993). The 2003 issue of *Anales de la literatura española contemporánea* has contributed to revitalizing this practice, with articles by Roberta Johnson, Randolph Pope, and Leora Lev specifically focusing on the increasingly controversial methodological question of whether Anglo-American Hispanists have resorted mainly to French and North-American theorists when interpreting Hispanic literatures, in ways that have occasionally proved opportunistic. More recently, Mabel Moraña's edited volume *Ideologies of Hispanism* (2005) has come to sanction metacriticism as an opportune critical mode within the discipline, at a time when innovative "methodological transformations" and "new disciplinary articulations" are being advanced (Moraña 2005, xvi). It is remarkable, however, that the above collection of articles, for all its steadfast disclosure of the biases and imbalances that have marked the discipline since its inception, includes no approach to the issue of gender within Hispanic studies from a metacritical stance. Studies in this vein, although they are scarce, have been carried out within the discipline. They connect to a series of concerns that have been more vocally expressed within the field of feminist anthropology, which revolve around the notion that "feminist researchers in today's culture of self-reflexivity often engage in merely rhetorical maneuvers that are rapidly acquiring the status of incantations" (Patai 1991, 149), or what has been described as the "add-women-and-stir method" in metacritical analyses of the discipline of women's studies (Boxer 1982, 682). What follows aims to be a survey of such preoccupations, as they have emerged in gender-centred Hispanic studies, as well as a call for the continuity of metacritical work along these vectors. My contention is that tensions such as the ones coming to the fore when metacritical

work has been undertaken within Hispanism, which range from the general disregard by Anglo-American scholars of autochthonous theories (Molloy 2005, 193) to the perceived gulf between Peninsular and Anglo-American academic enclaves (del Pino & La Rubia Prado 1999, 9) or the discipline's relationship with its own object of analysis, fraught with enduring "preoccupations with *status and prestige*" (Faber 2005, 64), are noticeably operative across gender-oriented strands of Hispanism.

2. Approaching metacritical concern in feminist-oriented Hispanism

In the year 1983, a curious study was published within the emerging field of feminist studies, and obliquely feminist Hispanism, which boldly addressed some of the issues surveyed in this article. The study in question, Linda E. Chown's article "American Critics and Spanish Women Novelists, 1942-1980" (1983), sprang from a clear critical aim and cultivated a lexicon where words such as "appropriation," "misconception," and "selection" featured prominently, and which is, after two decades, still most pertinent today.

Her study records the problematical lack of rapport between American critics and Spanish women writers, with an eye to the instances of mismatched figurations and frustrations with which this encounter is fraught. As such, her article is one of the first extensive metacritical analyses of this subject to emerge within Hispanism. It offers a clear historical review of studies dealing with Spanish women authors produced in American universities, going from the somewhat apologetic, pioneering works of the fifties to the gradually more visibly feminist, yet rather rigid readings by up-and-coming critics in the seventies. Her aim was subsequently to focus on the possible causes for distortion informing this dialogue, centring on three sites of tension: first, what she describes as the "different assumptions about the importance of the physical world" (Chown 1983, 96), and the frequency with which the sense of inward change and improvement usually achieved by the heroines of Spanish novels is often overlooked by the more socially oriented theories of feminist progress informing American criticism. Linked with this shortcoming is Chown's second posited cause for critical misprision, namely American critics' "culturally inherited presuppositions about solitude, time, and the right to progress" (Chown 1983, 98), which on occasions precludes a positive appraisal of the female characters' differing experience of these concepts. To put it in Chown's own words:

We tend to believe that solitude is a sign of loneliness, that time is linear, that progress and, with luck, perfection and social metamorphosis are our right. Our vision of liberation for women very often presupposes work, creation, activity, and the right to change. However, as a consequence of our wholehearted faith in these

goals, American readings frequently disparage novels in which the invisible action does not correspond to such a vision. (Chown 1983, 98)

One last conceptual space where, according to Chown, American critics' ideological leanings impede more accommodating readings of Spanish women-centred novels is that of images of womanhood. Again, Spanish women's sense of autonomy and development may not be traceable in the camps of sociology, economy, or law but in a more intimate space (Chown suggests the adjective "moral"), where improvement is gauged by individual parameters. Though Chown does not mention the words, I believe an understanding of the concepts of resignation or self-sacrifice as are practised by female characters in Spanish novels plays a decisive role for the plausibility of her argument. In other words, where American women would seek measurable progress in the form of tangible social change, activism, and success, Spanish women would content themselves with a well-deserved sense of inner peace. Although this correlation rests on a gross generalisation, Chown's argument proceeds to making a highly valid point in metacritical terms, namely that:

Above all, we need to avoid projecting our expectations and values upon Spanish heroines. That practice results in the greatest limitation of our criticism to date: we remain too critical of Spanish men, women, customs, goals, beliefs, and assumptions. Although we cannot push a button and shed automatically the culturally inherited assumptions that inhibit our understanding of the Spanish novel, we can at least become more fully aware of them and attempt to compensate for them by keeping in mind those peculiarly Spanish notions that govern and shape the world as Spanish women live and see it. (Chown 1983, 102)

By way of conclusion, Chown calls for a greater versatility and tolerance in feminist literary criticism, for a scholarly idiom that will not simply fulfil a prescriptive, benchmarking purpose but which will explore the potential for progress as is culturally stipulated in different countries. Again, her final statement is worth quoting in full:

It is to be hoped that critics of foreign literatures will approach these literatures with a questioning spirit, that a feminist response to Spanish fiction specifically will be open and courageous enough to perceive and, more importantly, respect the particular, peculiar ways that Spanish women inherit, modify, and break free of their own moral and cultural givens. When that happens, when we are able to challenge ourselves and our fixed habits of thinking, we will be, in the deepest sense, liberating ourselves. (Chown 1983, 107)

Despite its pioneering claims, Chown's article has triggered scanty critical echoes and an even more meagre practical implementation of the shifts and reforms it championed. The questions she raised about the prejudiced rapport

between Spanish women-centred narratives and American critics were not brought to the fore through a metacritical methodology until 2003. In this year's issue of *Anales de la literatura española contemporánea*, two succinct articles by critics Roberta Johnson and Randolph Pope preface the rest of the volume. In the first one, entitled "Spanish Feminist Theory Then and Now," Roberta Johnson elaborates on a series of critical trends detected after perusing a significant number of articles on feminist Hispanism published in North-American periodicals since 1980. Among the tendencies identified, a propensity to support studies with the work of French and North American theorists features prominently. This *modus operandi* can be attributed to critics' underlying will to legitimize their object of study by force of more or less subtle name-dropping or, as Johnson puts it, "window-dressing" (Johnson 2003, 14). By invoking the claims in Linda Chown's article, Johnson maintains that this tendency has dominated the bulk of feminist Hispanism coming from American institutions for some thirty years, and puzzles over the problem of whether "Spanish feminist criticism has become a *de facto* colony of Anglo-American feminist scholarship" (Johnson 2003, 13). In her own words:

Chown's admonitions apparently had no effect. Since the publication of her article in 1983, Anglo-American feminist models and references have multiplied in work by U.S. Hispanist critics.... Toward the end of her article Chown suggests that we consider Spanish feminist scholarship in U.S. studies of Spanish literature ... but to date I have not noted any rush to follow Chown's advice. (Johnson 2003, 14)

Johnson's overall aim is to expose and address this tendency head-on, and finally to call for greater critical recourse to Spanish feminist theorists with a view to producing research that is approximal (in the sense of coming closer to its object of study), and integrative of autochthonous idioms. By adopting this renewed approach, the distancing that characterizes much of American feminist Hispanism, together with the somewhat awkward interpretive acrobatics this stance has occasionally yielded, could be reduced. Johnson's 2005 article re-addresses this quandary and offers a possible solution to it. By formulating an "issues"-based approach, as opposed to an author-by-author chronological approach to the history of Spanish feminism, she puts forward a reading of Spanish feminist theory that does not collide with "the development of feminist theory in other countries" (Johnson 2005, 244). She thereby bypasses the sense of despondency felt by some Anglo-American scholars who have partially failed to encounter relevant counterparts of home-grown feminist thought and activism in the cultures they study.

Randolph Pope's article addresses the same issue as Johnson's more broadly, although he makes no specific reference to feminist research. His article is interesting for our purposes, however, in that his questioning of the validity of international theoretical apparatuses (such as those orbiting the sonorous names of

Derrida, Irigaray, Bhabha, or Said) when it comes to probing into Hispanic letters significantly supplements Roberta Johnson's previous arguments. Again, the point is pressed for a more attentive integration of theoretical and philosophical peninsular idioms, which have patently not been given their due in U.S. Hispanism. As he carefully puts it:

I am not proposing any sort of *crítica castiza*, which I would find especially inappropriate to the present moment of multiculturalism and globalization.... My lament is that we are, on the one hand, borrowing problems and issues from theoretical works that respond to a different experience to the one from where the Spanish novels we study originate, and, second, that the creative and complex thought, for example on the topic of nationalities and political power, taking place now in Spain, say by philosophers such as Rupert de Ventós and Fernando Savater, is not being incorporated enough in our work so that it becomes known beyond Hispanism in this country. (Pope 2003, 23-24)

What these two recent publications seem to indicate is that there has been an increase in the level of awareness as to the recurrent mechanisms of academic Hispanism in America and as to the sense of stasis that they have partly yielded. In other words, the breach has become more and more ineludible between the discipline's object of study (Spanish literature) and the tools utilized to investigate it (tools that can be both the critic's personal socio-cultural and institutional enclave, as was the nub of Chown's early argument, or the prestigious theoretical bases applied, as Johnson and Pope suggested). Similar preoccupations have also been articulated within the field of Latin American studies (D'Allemand 2000). In general, this critical predisposition to align the object of study with an existent set of tools that is conveniently at hand has served its purpose, as Johnson put it (2003, 18). It has made Hispanic studies come into relief within the complex grid conformed by university modern-language departments today, characterized by relatively rapid shifts in critical trends and demands. As regards the gender-centred strand, "it introduced Hispanism to feminist criticism at a time when our graduate departments and the departments in which we took our first jobs were not conducive to undertaking this kind of research" (Johnson 2003, 18). After this "thirty-year apprenticeship" (Johnson 2003, 18), a need to strike a consensus between the body of cultural and literary objects under scrutiny and scholars' critical gaze is in order, if a more capacious and expansive dialogue is to develop. In the remainder of this study, three recent articles on Peninsular women writers penned by U.S.-based, feminist-identified critics will be analysed, with a view to showing how the tensions explained above have outlasted the early paradigmatic changes they helped to fashion and are still operative in recent work. Specifically, the ongoing controversy around the use and validity of the label "feminist" when applied by Anglo-American scholars to a number of contemporary Peninsular

women authors will be studied as a noteworthy practical instance of the theoretical imbalances on which Johnson and Pope have commented.

3. Recent American criticism on Peninsular women writers

The study of lesbian literary discourse in Spain has been a persistent *cause célèbre* in Anglo-American Hispanism. A considerable number of studies have repeatedly addressed the seemingly irritating frequency with which arguably lesbian-identified authors opt for diffuse forms of self-representation or characterization, to the extent that their narratives retain an aura of repression or defeat that renders them self-cancelling as potentially subversive works. The work of Brad Epps on Carme Riera (1995) and a large section of criticism on Esther Tusquets (Biggane 2001; Lee Six 2002; Ortiz-Ceberio 2001; Smith 2002) are intended to denounce this state of affairs. To single out one from a multitude, I propose the following analysis of Sandra Kingery's article "Silencing Lesbian Desire in Ana María Moix's 'Dedicatoria'" (2003), published in the feminist periodical *Letras femeninas*. This study begins with the widely accepted fact that Moix's texts are of value to the feminist critic for "their woman-centered (at times, lesbian) themes, postmodern narrative stances, varying voices and time frames, and genre-bending transgressions of traditional literary boundaries" (Kingery 2003, 45). A set of interpretive expectations is thus generated with which critics often approach the text, only finally to have to collide with these narratives' baffling, ultimate disavowal of any previous potential indicator of gender transgression. Focusing on the short story in hand, Kingery builds on a series of textual traces that indicate "Dedicatoria" is a narrative of lesbian desire. Among these indicators, her investigation of the biographical link between Moix and Esther Tusquets and of the many mutual references these authors have covertly integrated into their literary work, thus suffusing their narratives with a kind of private-joke playfulness, is intended to demonstrate that "Dedicatoria" is, above all, a love letter from Ana María Moix to the older, mentor-like Tusquets. However, the final narratorial switch from an implicitly understood, first-person female narrator to an unequivocally male one, creates a shock in the reader. More importantly, the story's subversive power, implicit all along in its apparent lesbian connotation, is bluntly severed. Kingery formulates her conclusion by addressing the self-harming contradiction represented by this text. In her view, what could have stood as a richly duplicitous narrative is briskly turned into a mainstream text of hidebound values. She takes this line of argument one stage further by insinuating that it is the problematic socio-cultural environs in which this type of narrative is produced that puts a strain in the author's creative freedom. As Kingery put it:

In a lesbian story, the substitution of a male narrator for one of the female protagonists eliminates both the female voice and the homosexual perspective and

thus resurrects the “reassuring presence of both masculinity and heterosexuality” (Epps 342). Of course one must afford “proper respect to the desire of writers (specifically lesbian writers) to protect themselves from the dubious benefits of visibility” (Smith and Bergmann 2). Still, it is interesting to note the causes for and consequences of this heterosexualizing of a lesbian reality. (Kingery 2003, 52)

The sense of disenchantment permeating Kingery’s article is a current phenomenon detectable across gender-centred strands of Anglo-American Hispanism that would indeed repay further study. Some possible reasons for this phenomenon will come into view as we move along. Let us now turn to another study where similar tensions to those underlying Kingery’s work are more vehemently put. Kathleen M. Glenn’s 2001 article on Carme Riera’s short fiction addresses from the outset the increasing friction between Spanish women authors and American scholars. The case is made for what appears to have developed as a specifically Spanish diatribe, namely the one fostered by Spanish women authors vocally denying their work’s affiliation with the label “feminist,” and Anglo-American critics repeatedly resorting to it, be it as a starting point for their analyses or as the whole point for contention and ultimate validation of the original work. The main site of dispute is precisely the legitimizing intention underlying critics’ persistently feminist readings of the work in hand. To put it in Glenn’s terms when commenting on an interview with authors Mercedes Abad, Soledad Puértolas, and Cristina Fernández Cubas:

The conversation is intriguing, because it shows the American questioners returning again and again to the issue of feminism and feminist writing and the Spanish authors growing increasingly annoyed. Implicit, and at times explicit, in their responses is the conviction that critics try to force writing by women into a specific framework or straightjacket. (Glenn 2001, 374-375)

Glenn’s words above seem to have hit the crux of the matter. In order to avoid being continually subjected to critical encasement by feminist critics, a great number of Spanish writers (Glenn mentions Mercedes Abad, Cristina Fernández Cubas, Marina Mayoral, or Paloma Díaz-Mas, to name but a few contemporary ones) refuse to be associated with a feminist agenda. However, their endeavours toward this characteristic elusiveness are usually neutralized by critical manoeuvres that more often than not manage to override the authors’ call for cautiousness in this regard. Interestingly enough, Glenn’s article, which begins by tackling this quandary in sobering tones, eventually exercises this critical turn. In the following paragraph, for instance, the potential critical impasse brought about by Carme Riera’s explicit positioning as an author unconcerned with the literary feminist cause is dispatched with expeditious argumentation:

Behind their statements lies the identification of feminist writing with advocacy and the assumption that it lacks literary worth. These writers want their work to be taken seriously, to be valued for its own merit—not for the sex of its author—and to be read by men and women alike. They resist being relegated to the ghetto of literature by and for women. It is within this context that we should evaluate Riera's declaration that she is not a feminist writer. From this side of the Atlantic, however, she indeed looks like one. (Glenn 2001, 375)

This critical posture indicates a somewhat patronizing, as in pre-patterned, approach to the object of study. Moreover, the critic visibly resorts to somewhat sardonic tones in order to round the matter off. The result is a distancing effect, necessary for her to proceed with the argument by minimizing the import of the author's own insights which, if fully incorporated, would certainly preclude such a study. Concomitantly, a division is delineated between Spanish women writers' seemingly unconscious, almost compulsive rejection of the feminist tag for socio-cultural reasons that fall beyond their grasp, and American critics' better informed, removed critical position, which allows them to appreciate the whole picture and thus produce more comprehensive figurations. A relationship of inequality visibly informs this interaction and precludes the possibility of a more mutually validating rapport.

Very recent studies, such as those focusing on relatively novel women writers, still evidence this type of *modus operandi*. In essence, many articles penned by American feminist Hispanists can be said to respond to a certain obsession with the label "feminist," which could be understood as an inversion of the similarly compulsive refusal to use the label practised by many Spanish women authors. Put differently, just as numerous Spanish writers will recurrently distance themselves and their work from overtly feminist agendas in what is perceived as an instinctual and uninformed reflex that exasperates American critics, one could argue the latter likewise succumb to the label's allure in similarly mechanical ways. It should go without saying that this persistent critical trend galls Spanish women writers to a comparable measure and that this specific section of American Hispanism seems to be encased today in a vicious circle. Let us look at the last proposed article.

Janet Pérez's article "Tradition, Renovation, Innovation: The Novels of Belén Gopegui" (2003) can be seen as an instance of the propensity towards unqualified applications of the label "feminist" mentioned above. By dealing with a relatively new Spanish woman writer (Gopegui published her first novel *La escala de los mapas* in 1993), Pérez's article fulfils an introductory function and offers a broad-brush overview of the author's first three novels.

After a panoramic foray into the possible creative patterns observable in late twentieth-century, women-authored fiction in Spain, the critic locates the author in hand by denying the plausibility of a feminist reading of her novelistic production: "Any mention to Gopegui in relation to other women novelists should make clear that she cannot in good conscience be classed as feminist" (Pérez 2003, 116). Consequent upon this remark, the reader expects a study that would explore

theoretical bases other than the feminist. However, the critic repeatedly falls back into this mode of analysis, thus generating a study that seems incongruous in critical terms. When addressing style in Gopegui's second novel *Tocarnos la cara* (1995), for instance, she uses the adjective "feminine" without qualification by stating that language in this novel is invigorated with "startlingly fresh, original metaphors and similes, rhetorical figures both personal and unmistakably feminine, as well as representative of her particular sub-culture" (Pérez 2003, 117). The semantic load of a descriptor such as "unmistakably feminine" is elusive in this context, inasmuch as the question still arises as to the intended significance of the adjective "feminine" when applied to an author who has been previously presented as unequivocally unconcerned with feminist agendas. One's impression that the adjective functions here as a phraseological fixture intended to legitimize scholarly attention on this author from a feminist stance is the stronger when we turn to the article's thematic analysis. Again, attention is directed towards the ways in which female characters in Gopegui's novels may or may not be ratifiable from the feminist viewpoint. For example, the female narrator of *Tocarnos la cara* is brought under this type of scrutiny:

Although Sandra originally appears as a somewhat autonomous female, with a degree of independence (she is self-supporting), she lacks a feminist consciousness, and her observations of the director's womanizing and exploitative relationships do not prevent her from succumbing to his seductive attractions. A feminist reading of this novel would necessarily point out Sandra's regression from quasi-subject status in the beginning to consenting object at the end, her role as accomplice in her own exploitation as she renounces her agency in exchange for an uncertain relationship whose continuation is unlikely. (Pérez 2003, 122-23)

The remarks above are problematic as an interpretation of Sandra in *Tocarnos la Cara*, for the reason that they rely on the questionable assumption that Sara is necessarily (or should be) looking for a "certain" relationship whose continuation is "likely." However, to dwell on the applicability of this conjecture to the fictional plot in hand is beside the main point. Rather, I would like to address the pertinence of such qualifications, again, in the light of the critic's introductory comment of Gopegui's work. As it stands, a feminist evaluation of the narrator seems inapplicable in this context and reveals a great deal more about the critic articulating it (and about the critical milieu in which it is formulated) than about the literary work itself. It could be suggested that there is an urge in this study to articulate a feminist reading almost coercively, even when this stands, by the critic's own admission, in contradiction with the overall significance of Gopegui's production. The conclusions reached partly confirm this hypothesis, as Pérez persists in searching for possible critical paths to validate the literary work in

feminist, or at most, post-feminist terms, a label whose suitability for the understanding of Gopegui's work Pérez has recently confirmed (Pérez 2005, 47):

Somewhat curiously, despite the predominance of ideological themes in many of their conversations, feminism never figures as an issue; some women in this novel—successful professionals—bear little resemblance either to the traditional feminine gender model imposed by the Franco regime or more consciously feminist models of the 1980s, again suggesting the possible appropriateness of a “post-feminist” classification for Gopegui. (Pérez 2003, 124)

This drive towards pressing for a feminist reading does not only operate at the cost of the original work's importance as “*literatura comprometida*” along other fronts, elsewhere attested by critics such as Eva Legido-Quigley, who see in Gopegui's novels a bracing backlash against typically postmodernist forms of social cynicism and disillusionment (Legido-Quigley 2001). It is also implemented to the detriment of the article's line of argumentation, as the reader is left wondering to what extent the insertion of captious commentary about the novels' feminist value is at all relevant when those novels have been classified as disassociated from feminism as a literary cause. This critic's tendency to crowbar a feminist appraisal into her article is one recent instance of a pervasive pattern across gender-oriented American Hispanism, a pattern that may appropriately remind us of psychologist Abraham Maslow's famous aphorism: “If the only tool you have is a hammer, you tend to treat every problem as a nail.”

4. Concluding remarks

As we have seen, the incorporation of “exogenous” theorists' work to the study of Hispanic literatures and cultures is currently being debated, on the grounds that critical apparatuses produced in cultural enclaves distant from the Hispanic ones in their principles and preoccupations may prove ill-equipped, and ultimately alienating for the study of things Hispanic. These reservations notwithstanding, and for a well-built exploration of metacritical paths of enquiry in Hispanism to develop, both endogenous and exogenous voices need to be keenly listened to. In this context, the work of Pierre Bourdieu and particularly his calls for sustained sociological analysis of academic structures would prove instrumental for the delineation of metacritical practice and is increasingly present in Hispanic studies (Resina 2005, 171; Epps 2005, 233, 247). The work of post-axiological theorist Barbara Herrnstein Smith could also be advantageous for a metacritical exploration of the notion of (scholarly, literary, critical) value in Hispanism. Her study of the power differentials at work when applying certain critical categories to artistic objects would be particularly convenient for the analysis of the tense, and occasionally edgy, interaction between Spanish women authors and Anglo-

American feminist critics as I have described it in this paper. Specifically, her work on the function of certain classifications created and enforced by critical communities at the time of allocating literary value is highly pertinent. On this matter she says:

Of particular significance for the value of “works of art” and “literature” is the interactive relation between the classification of an entity and the functions it is expected or desired to perform. In perceiving an object or artefact in terms of some category (...) we implicitly isolate and foreground certain of its possible functions and typically refer its value to the extent to which it performs those functions more or less effectively. (Herrnstein Smith 1988, 32)

The double-edged nature of the critical manoeuvre explained above is not difficult to detect, and could arguably shed some light on the ongoing sense of disillusionment permeating much Anglo-American feminist-identified work on Peninsular women authors. In short, while on the one hand to assign the label “feminist” to a given literary trajectory serves to bring such body of work to the fore and to catapult it into visibility across academic circuits, the use of such tag can also be said to activate a peculiar type of interaction between critic and object of study, namely one that is fraught with expectations as to how well the latter will respond to the source culture’s own construction of the label’s meaning. Quite evidently, this type of dialogue is destined for the kind of disenchantment or sheer irritation that characterizes the articles here surveyed and many others. Paradigmatic of this sentiment is, for instance, Geraldine Nichols’ article on Esther Tusquets “Minding her P’s and Q’s: The Fiction of Esther Tusquets” (Nichols 1993) and Catherine G. Bellver’s article “Las ambigüedades de la novela feminista española,” where she refers to the ongoing tug-of war between Spanish women writers and American critics and supports the general view that the former’s disengagement with vocal feminism represents “una claudicación porque lleva una implícita autocensura y una tácita confirmación de la supuesta inferioridad de la literatura escrita por mujeres” (Bellver 2005, 36).

This essay aims to have stirred a metacritical discussion of the specific rapport between Anglo-American feminist critics and Peninsular women writers by analysing a sample of recent work in this field by U.S.-based critics. The study has also tended to the greater implications that the conclusions reached may have for a better understanding of certain ideological underpinnings of critical activity in the field of Hispanic Studies. More metacritical work addressing issues of critical authority or the tacit power differentials implied in this debate is in order. Analyses in this vein would compel critics to address the related questions of what means for the legitimisation of their object of study are being used and why, ultimately, are they necessary. As Sebastiaan Faber has put it, “the role and status of the Hispanist qua intellectual or scholar in relation to his or her object of study” has always laid

at the centre of the discipline's concerns' (Faber 2005, 64), and it is to the elucidation of such intricate (and possibly also delicate) matters that this essay has aimed to contribute.

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