

ACTIONS & VOICES

Women and Literature

At the end of the seventies the feminist movement played an important part in the political transition of the Spanish state and particularly in Catalonia. As a result of this raising of public awareness changes occurred in all areas, particularly in the cultural ambit involved in the changing of mentalities needed in order to progress. In this scenario great female authors appear within Catalan literature, such as M. Aurèlia Capmany, Montserrat Roig, Helena Valentí, M. Mercè Marçal, Marta Pessarrodona, Carme Riera, M. Antònia Oliver, Maria Barbal amongst others, who introduce with force, quality and sensibility, the vision and experiences of women in prose and poetry. At the same time there begin to be studies in feminist literary criticism, often by the same authors seeking out their genealogy, for example: Caterina Albert “Víctor Català”, Mercè Rodoreda and Clementina Arderiu. One should also not forget the important influence of the translation into our language (Catalan) of others such as Virginia Wolf (*A Room of One's Own*) and Doris Lessing (*The Golden Notebook*) that were intrinsic for questioning literary canons.

In fact, feminist literary criticism is included within the gynocriticism that proposes an interdisciplinary approach to the analysis and evaluation of the work of female writers, given that the frontiers between literature, philosophy and historical documentation in works produced by women are very fluid. Equally chronological classification or by literary schools of authors is conflictive for going beyond the limits of trends traditionally established by the androcentric vision.

In the eighties, the Catalan feminist movement, created their own publishing house, LaSal women's editions, with a collection of classical authors, that continued with the collection Espai de dones de Llibres de l'Eixample. They also organised the International Feminist Book Fair in Barcelona in 1990

The Committee of Women Writers within Catalan PEN was created at the beginning of the nineties, on the initiative of the poetesses M. Mercè Marçal and Montserrat Abelló, to recuperate historical memory, to promote literature written by women, to foment exchange between writers, to seek international projection and to vindicate and defend women authors against any possible discrimination.

“Women's studies” are slow in finding their place in the academic world of the universities and it is professors who consciously begin to create within Catalan universities, institutes and centres for women's studies, such as Duoda, Philosophy and gender and Women and Literature and others that have appeared. In the end the majority of which have been coordinated by the Institut Interuniversitari d'Estudis de Dones i Gènere (Inter-university Institute for Women's and Gender Studies). The magazines *Duoda*, *Lectora* of the University of Barcelona and the collection Capsa de Pandora (Pandora's Box) of the University of Vic are the visual evidence of these efforts.

At the moment it seems that the introduction, more or less generalised, of the term “gender” once again makes invisible and/or dilutes the field of action and research that as women we have struggled to achieve. The term “genere” in Catalan doesn't distinguish between “genre” and “gender” as happens in English which also doesn't help in clarifying the situation; so it is valuable to continue raising the visibility and talking about women writers, female authors, poetesses, literary critics and professors of literature. At the same time it is worth remembering that the feminine “vision” of life and of the world is as universal or as partial as the masculine vision of life and the world, because, if not, it might seem that it is a vision limited to women's interests and is only of interest regarding questions specific to women and this is by no means the case. It is specifically about looking at, accepting and valuing the difference in the equality of writers and opportunities.

MERCÈ OTERO



INTERVIEW

MARTA SEGARRA is a full professor of French literature and Gender studies at the University of Barcelona, director of the Centre for Women and Literature and coordinator of the UNESCO Chair Women, development and cultures at the university. She is also an associate scholar at the Centre d'Études féminines et d'études de genre at the University Paris 8, where she has been a visiting professor on several occasions. She has published various books and articles in the field of women's literature, feminist critique and literary theory and French contemporary literature, and has edited several anthologies. She is General Editor of the Series “Mujeres y Culturas” (Women and Cultures), published by Icaria, and of the international journal Expressions Maghrébines (Magrebi Expressions). She is a member of the Editorial Board of the journal *Lectora* and of “Critical Studies” (Rodopi). She received the Icrea Academia award in 2009.

Are we talking about the same thing if we say “women's studies” or “gender studies”? Could you give a brief explanation?

In principle, we are not talking about the same thing because “women's studies” as the name indicates, are dedicated to themes related to “women”, while on the other hand, “gender studies” includes “men”, who also form a “gender” (for this reason there are currently “studies about masculinity (or masculinities), that arose following in the steps of “women's studies”). Now if we really believe that gender is a cultural construction, and go as far to say, as Judith Butler does, that sex is constructed discursively, within “women's studies” we can include masculine authors or themes related to “men” as subjects for research.

This is the perspective of the “Centre d'études féminines”, established by Hélène Cixous at the beginning of the seventies in Paris (although it is now called “Centre d'études féminines et d'études de genre”, in order to conciliate different theoretical perspectives). Cixous herself explained that she gave it this name because “feminist” couldn't actually be used within the university (while “gender” wasn't used in France – and only in very few places in the world – at that time). But Cixous studied the writing of Jean Genet, for example, in the “feminine studies” for the reasons mentioned above.

Another question is that there are women who reject the concept “gender” (such as those of the school of Italian school of sexual difference, above all) because they consider it goes against women, who are not visible in this denomination.

Finally women's and gender studies have come into contact with the so called “Studies in sexuality (or sexualities)”, that include as an important perspective the sexual factor, the vindication of the respect of sexual orientations beyond the norm.

How do you see women's and/or gender studies currently in our country?

In Catalonia, women's and gender studies are well developed, both within the university and beyond, particularly in the area of Social Sciences (above all History and Geography) and the Humanities (above all Philology and Philosophy), even though there is important resistance against its institutionalisation and particularly against its academic recognition. For example, there is no recognition of the field of gender/women's studies in the official register of the Ministry (of Education), so that posts are not advertised with this profile (even if it is possible and in fact at the UB there is already a professorship that was advertised with a profile of gender studies, in Philology).

In my experience, I perceive that there is a lot of interest amongst the young in these studies, manifested in the growing desire to dedicate doctoral theses to it. In some universities, however, these studies have been little considered and people who do their doctorate or specialise within this area can still find themselves with huge impediments to being able to find a post within a university.

This phenomenon (the expulsion or lack of acceptance institutionally by the universities of these researchers, male and female, in gender studies) has meant that an important part of the research in women's and gender studies has been done out with the university, within other associated or institutional frameworks, or simply independently.

With regard to the relation between academia and the women's movement, I will add to my previous comments that once again I see the younger generations forming a strong link with social movements (not necessarily “for women”, but, linked to questions of sexuality, precariousness, anti-globalisation...), links that had perhaps been somewhat abandoned by a large number of academics over the years. At any rate I consider that academic studies and the women's movement have shared political objectives, with all the nuances that this implies.

What subjects, or lines of research, are most evident and dominant at the moment?

I think that amongst young people the lines of research that are strongest and arouse the most interest are those that question the traditional concepts of the sexes and genders (including feminist concepts), that is to say, the line of “queer studies”, sometimes also misnamed “post-feminist”.

How did the idea arise to set up the Centre Dona i literatura (Women's and Literature Centre) at the UB?

The professor Àngels Carabí (who was returning from a long stay in New York and who admired the Women's Studies being developed there), and I, at the beginning of the 90s, set up a “Seminar on literature written by women” to try to alleviate the lack of female authors present in the university programmes of the Philology Faculty of the UB. The initiative was unexpectedly successful within the student as well as part of the teaching body, and this encouraged us to create the Centre Dona i Literatura, that was consolidated in 1994. Other researchers joined, the majority of the faculty of Philology at the UB, and since then we have promoted the organisation of courses, congresses and seminars, lecture series and publications (above all the magazine *Lectora*, in collaboration with the UAB and the series “Mujeres y Culturas” published by Icaria) in order to continue to disseminate and promote research in the field of gender studies. Since the beginning the CD&L has been open to other perspectives, discourses and disciplines, even though we have conserved the name for practical, emotional and ideological reasons. In the last few years we have greatly intensified the promotion of research, with the direction of masters and doctorates, and with the support of numerous female and male scholarship holders, as well as publications instigated by the CD&L in Catalan, Spanish, Galician, French and English.

What is the presence of the Catalan language in women's and/or gender studies?

Aside from exceptions such as the collection “La capsa de Pandora” from Eumo or the magazine *Lectora*, and the personal choice of many researchers, I have the impression that the majority of women's and gender studies in Catalonia are written in Spanish (obviously apart from those focussed on literature in Catalan). It is a problem that affects everything produced within Catalan academia, not just these studies.

Even though I agree with the Institut Català de les Dones (Catalan Institute for Women) in the need to promote the use of the Catalan language in these studies, I don't agree with the fact that grants are limited to works written in Catalan, as there are publishers or places working in Spanish in Catalonia, that find themselves excluded from institutional support for this reason.

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