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Humoring Resistance: Laughter and the Excessive Body in
Latin American Women's Fiction (review)

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The Inordinate Eye. New World Baroque and Latin American Fiction illuminates the understanding of contemporary fiction and its underlying connection to visual and verbal transcultural modes of perception and expression. In this context, Lois Parkinson Zamora's "cultural legibility" proves essential to alternative and accurate accounts of Latin American modernity. She sets an important precedent for scholars whose interest is the study of literature that reflects hybrid modes of imagining. She demonstrates the latter through the sign of the New World Baroque and its syncretic forms and defying perspectives, which she brilliantly traces in contemporary Latin American fiction.

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Humoring Resistance: Laughter and the Excessive Body in Latin American Women's Fiction
State University of New York Press, 2004
By Dianna C. Niebylski

Humoring Resistance: Laughter and the Excessive Body in Latin American Women's Fiction is about humor and laughter, but it is no laughing matter. This is a highly original and witty study of alternative feminist strategies of disruptive humor in contemporary Latin American women's writing. Niebylski has produced a superb piece of literary criticism that coherently and convincingly demonstrates the importance of humor as a transgressive discourse. True to her comparativist training, she elegantly bypasses the binary simplifications of male vs. female perspective, as well as domesticity vs. victimhood, and engages in brilliant, genuinely original and highly creative discussion of first rate texts. Her engagingly accessible writing and brilliant and challenging argumentation takes the reader to most unexpected realms of Kristeva's and Bakhtin's theoretical apparatus, connecting the

notions of Freud's vision of humor with feminist and postmodern theories. Although Niebylski focuses on fictional works of five authors, Laura Esquivel, Ana Lydia Vega, Luisa Valenzuela, Armonía Somers and Alicia Borinsky, all rooted and living in different national locations, her discussion offers a useful and suggestive typology of textual strategies of feminine and feminist comic mechanisms that transgresses the national, as well as borders of genre.

Niebylski's book consists of an introduction, a theoretical first chapter that draws on the relationship between humor theory, cultural history, and women's embodied humor, five additional chapters on individual narratives that exemplify a diversity of strategies of feminist survival and subversion, an epilogue and an extensive, well researched bibliography. Before entering the realm of specific fictional texts, Niebylski establishes the connection between the comic and the feminine, with a particular emphasis on the humor theory and the changing cultural attitudes towards the female bodily "humors." In that sense, she posits the female body, traditionally framed by patriarchy through numerous prejudices and prohibitions, in the center of her later discussion. After having identified a problem, Niebylski gives a critical overview of the ways in which the contemporary women writers have approached the literary minefield in which they have found themselves. Therefore, she theorizes the incontinent, over-sexed, provocative, torpid, infected, anarchic and mutating bodies. Her writing is full of unanticipated twists and turns, and in the end, the reader is left with a richer understanding, provoked and stimulated to carry out further research.

The five chapters in which Niebylski persuasively engages in a nuanced analysis of selected Latin American women authors is also a prime resource, if not an arsenal, of comic weaponry. And so, the reader is faced with a sentimental comedy of Laura Esquivel's *Como agua para chocolate* (*Like Water for Chocolate*), the carnevalesque lustfulness of Ana Lydia Vega's "Pasión de historia" ("Red Hot Story"), with a comic, often burlesque irony

of Luisa Valenzuela's *Realidad nacional desde la cama* (*Bedside Manners*), black humor of Armonia Somer's *Sólo los elefantes encuentran mandragora* (*Only Elephants Find Mandrake*)—the only one of works studied that is still awaiting its translation from Spanish—and campy farce of Alicia Borinsky's *Cine continuado* (*All Night Movie*).

Humoring Resistance: Laughter and the Excessive Body in Latin American Women's Fiction is a unique study of great importance for those interested in strategies employed by women authors towards overcoming patriarchal censorship. It is a serious book about the humor and female

agency that have helped frame as well as advance and re-vitalize a very important and neglected discussion in feminist scholarship. Niebylski's fresh approach is characteristically complex and her intelligence is palpable in every one of the chapters. The book is written with clarity and passion and it stands out as one of the most valuable explorations in the topic of humor in recent Latin American criticism.

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