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**From Consciousness Raising to Intellectual Empowerment:
Teaching Gender Since the Early 1980s**

Gender has been a constant interest and commitment in my teaching, whether I taught American literature, American Studies, or literary and cultural theories. Spanning over 25 years, my teaching career seems to be peppered with courses devoted in some way to understanding women's culture: literary texts by, about, or for women, the women's movement, or feminist theories.

In the following, I will give a short overview of my gender related academic activities of the past 25+ years, discuss the context that bred them, and outline certain changes in emphasis and direction. As in many other socially engineered intellectual enterprises in Central Europe, the historic years of 1989-1990 served as a watershed in the teaching of gender too. Before 1990, I considered teaching and activism to be co-dependent, with teaching serving social change in a rather direct way, while from the early 1990s on, I came to believe in slower, more indirect ways that changes might be triggered in a university setting. Teaching and activism never became completely separate, though. For however theoretical, objective, or detached one may assume one is, teaching gender will always be — especially in countries with a history of gender relations such as East-Central European/ post-communist Hungary — more than just an academic pursuit: it will affect lives whether we acknowledge it or not. Parallel with the change over the years in the teaching/activism dynamics, another change became quite prevalent: that between teaching the textual (or factual) and teaching theory. As my teaching was less geared toward political activism, teaching theory became overwhelmingly important for both the students and me, neatly balancing the necessity to convey information. I explain the growing interest in theory by two factors: first,

feminist political activism has emerged in the meantime, second, women have demanded to understand not only written texts, but also pertinent social texts. Feminist literary and cultural theories offer a particular empowerment to women, which will allow them to more fully understand surrounding social processes and to become actors, agents, in their own lives.

1. The 1980s: ELTE, JATE

These were the pioneering years in Hungarian feminism. It was in the early 1980s that I started to smuggle into classes some supposedly subversive ideas (ideas that at the time were censored in print) about the Civil Rights Movement, affirmative action, equal opportunity, gender segregation, reproductive rights, sexual aggression, date rape, sex roles, pornography, prostitution, etc.[1] Books, too, had to be smuggled across borders. My first feminist collection of ten books were all confiscated at Budapest airport in January 1982, and then “accidentally recycled,” as the friendly police interrogator informed me later. In the early 1980s there were no slots in the curriculum for teaching gender, so one had to shrewdly find covert ways to do that. I devised two such outlets for feminist ideas: the first within the framework of undergraduate “American Culture and Society” classes, teaching American women’s history; the second being in American literature classes, focusing on women writers, women’s literary traditions and genres, and patterns in women’s writing.

In the early 1980s I taught several classes at Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE), Budapest, with such angles. I insisted on introducing the *Seneca Falls Declaration* next to *The Declaration of Independence*, Dickinson side by side with Whitman, or Gertrude Stein next to F. Scott Fitzgerald. I recall a particularly memorable class in a culture course. We were discussing two somewhat scandalous (at least in those times) reading assignments, “The Bitch Manifesto” and Anne Koedt’s essay on the myth of vaginal orgasm, in the presence of an unannounced inspector, an intimidated older woman colleague, sent by the suspicious department chair. As I heard later, the chair was not amused. I remember other spirited discussions too: of Emily Dickinson’s female epistemology, female utopia in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, and female slave narratives. In each of these cases the woman writer appeared as an equal to her male counterparts, and students who never really had a chance to contemplate such issues before, were shocked into agreement.

Obviously, teaching is always supported by writing and research.[2] My gender related scholarly publications from the period seem less covert. So, for example, I openly discussed gender roles in the poetry of Emily Dickinson, Sylvia Plath, and Anne Sexton in conference talks and

essays, or the American feminist movement in a late night radio program. However, feminist ideas were only tolerated within the realm of scholarly discourse: with state censorship in full swing, dailies and weeklies with a wider circulation all refused my pieces of journalism submitted there.

I had the chance deliberately further commit myself to teaching gender after 1985 at József Attila University (JATE), Szeged (now Szeged University). Here openly feminist courses, introduced under the curricular heading of Women's Studies, were more welcomed. In addition to the general culture and literature courses where only a few sessions were devoted to women's issues, now I could announce and teach courses on feminism, the Women's Movement, or women's culture and literature. The slow thawing that permeated the political climate of the whole Soviet block had its beneficial effects in the academia too in the sense that the American Studies curriculum became more diverse and more politicized. Courses with titles like "Feminist Movement and Feminist Thought" or "Feminist Studies: Myths of Womanhood" seemed to happily satisfy this new interest in ideas on pluralism, radicalism, and the personal as political. Hungarian students' interest in personal politics and its intellectual aspects was amplified by the presence of a growing American student body, exchange students from Oregon, with an insatiable interest in the situation of women in the Eastern European region. For years I was involved in the JATE-Oregon Exchange, giving surveys of contemporary East-Central European culture, where women's issues were duly highlighted. Just by serendipity, the inquisitiveness of the Americans was met by an outstanding generation of Hungarian students. Those in their senior years in 1988-90 formed the nucleus of my feminist courses and study groups, as well as consciousness-raising groups with activist cells. They went out to high schools to speak about contraception and safe sex; took polls among women students on how they viewed gender segregation; raised money to take taxi cabs, which at that time were plastered with pictures of nude women, only to glue over them their own home-made "Stop pornography" stickers. In that singular historic moment we formed a regular organization. This was *Hungarian Feminists*, the first non-communist discussion group in Hungary devoted to gender. Its members were primarily university professors and students who had been affiliated with JATE. Here we formed a work-team active both intellectually and politically. "By launching the first feminist group of Hungary, we intended to merge the academic with the political, and support a women's movement in Hungary," the *Statement* claimed.^[3] These were momentous times indeed, when we felt that since we had not had a Civil Rights Movement, we could fold, so to speak, the sixties into the nineties.

During these years, my gender related writing was overwhelmingly political also. I was writing manifestos and pieces of radical journalism, demanding social and political visibility for women, calling for a general raising of consciousness, attacking a Hungarian sexist who called feminists "murderers of mothers" (sending them "feminist thorns"^[4]), participating in abortion

debates, or speaking in political rallies. Moreover, I withstood the growing attack of ever curious journalists, who asked for interviews about women under communism, women affected by the political changes, the future of women in post-communist East-Central Europe.^[5] Finally, there were the many links in the chain of international networking from Washington to Zagreb, as well as the international meetings and conferences from London to Vienna, New York to New Delhi — one was always on the move. During the little free time I tried to do my own research and writing. Even though one really had the sense of being part of history, ultimately I paid with my relatively scarce scholarly output during these years. It was a relief when this very strained period came to an end by my accepting a diplomatic post in Washington, D.C. After this detour in Foreign Service, I returned to academia in 1994.

2. 1994 to the Present: ELTE and other universities

Since the mid-1990s I have been teaching a rather large number of courses related to gender. Most of them have been offered in the Department of American Studies at ELTE for English or American Studies majors, while others were taught in the University of Debrecen, as well as the University of Oregon, the University of Iowa, and Turku University, Finland.

Since the 1970s and 1980s, American Studies has gone through a fundamental paradigm change: the discipline grounded in the modern and structuralist notion of literature and history opened up towards a more pluralist concept of culture. The old grand narratives were replaced by new narratives that were de-centered (or had many centers), de-privileged, de-hegemonized, exhibiting traits of diversity and post-coloniality.^[6] This poststructuralist-postmodern-multicultural-post-hegemonic context of “New American Studies” welcomed a focused interest on women. Teaching — as well as writing^[7] — within the New Americanist framework, I have insisted on offering courses on American literature and culture, as well as literary and cultural theory that were either fully geared towards women or included representative segments on women. When I teach the literary canon in the form of survey courses or courses focusing on literary movements, schools, genres, etc., I try to equally balance the attention between male and female writers.^[8] I have also offered several courses with a more direct angle on gender: among them, “Women’s Modernism,” “American Women Writers,” and “Contemporary American Women Writers.” My teaching is permeated by my strong belief that students of American literature, especially in our region, must be acquainted with the current expanded canon, one that is multiethnic, multiracial, doubly gendered and of multiple sexualities. Teaching women’s writing is part of this mission.

Feminist theory always takes a prominent place in my literary and cultural theory classes, whether offered at the graduate or doctoral level. Contextualizing feminism within post-structuralism, postmodernism, deconstruction, and queer theory, we read, among others, some basic texts of French feminism (Cixous, Irigaray, Kristeva, Wittig), study anti-essentialist and performative theories of identity and subjectivity (Riviere, de Lauretis, Butler, Fuss, Sedgwick), investigate theories of desire, gaze, and the body and theories of sexuality (Cixous, Mulvey, Braidotti, Bordo, Grosz, Sedgwick), explore issues of discourse, power, and authority (Millett, Foucault, Butler, Sedgwick), and interrogate Black feminism side by side with post-colonial theories (Barbara and Valerie Smith, Morrison, Spivak, hooks, Anzaldúa, Davies).

Today I see a rapidly growing interest among students in women's issues and feminist ideas. This applies both to our male and female students (the latter taking up ca. 70% of the student body in the humanities). Having observed the sexist/feminist dynamics among our students for many years now, it seems to me that while just 10 years ago, the resident vocal sexist could survive and even be popular among some "girls," today he is not really tolerated. Students seem to have become more and more demanding and, dissatisfied with under-theorized readings of women authors, they want to acquire the methodological-theoretical tools for reading them and so to take charge of their own lives. Every year we have a growing number of students who write their M.A. Theses on gender related textual-theoretical topics. Wholly committed to living a life based on agency and self-determination, they go out into the world to become high school teachers, reporters, public servants, or college professors. They carry and spread the germinated seed that was planted.

Gender related courses:

<i>course title</i> <i>university</i>	<i>year</i>	<i>level</i>	<i>department,</i>
American Culture & Society	1981, 1983	undergraduate	English, ELTE
American Literature ELTE	1982, 1983	undergraduate	English,
Emily Dickinson	1984, 1985	undergraduate/graduate	English, ELTE
Hungarian Literature in Translation Literature, University of Oregon, Eugene	1987	undergraduate/graduate	Comparative
The Black Mountain College of Oregon, Eugene	1987	undergraduate/graduate	English, University
American Culture & Society	1987, 1988	undergraduate	English, JATE
Minority Cultures in the U.S. JATE	1989	undergraduate	English,
Feminist Movement and Feminist Thought JATE	1989	undergraduate/graduate	English,
Feminist Studies: Myths of Womanhood	1990	undergraduate/graduate	English, JATE
Culture and Society in East-Central Europe Exchange Program	1988, 1989	undergraduate/graduate	JATE-Oregon
Hungarian Culture: Contemporary Issues Exchange Program	1989, 1990	undergraduate/graduate	JATE-Oregon
American Literature Survey I ELTE	1994- (every fall)	undergraduate	American Studies,
American Literature Survey II ELTE	1994- (every spring)	undergraduate	American Studies,
American Postmodern Poetry ELTE	1995, 1997	graduate	American Studies,
Modern Hungarian Literature in Translation University of Oregon, Eugene	1996	graduate	Comparative Literature,
Literary Canons ELTE	1996	graduate	American Studies,
American Women Writers ELTE	1997	graduate	American Studies,
Canons of American Poetry Program, DE	1997, 1999, 2001	doctoral	American Studies PhD
Early Postmodernism Iowa, Iowa City	1998	graduate	English, University of
American Literary Theory: Advanced Survey ELTE	1998, 200, 2001, 2004	graduate	American Studies,

Emily Dickinson ELTE	1999, 2004, 2006	graduate	American Studies,
Contemporary American Culture and Society ELTE	1999, 2000, 2006	graduate	American Studies,
American Individualism Studies, ELTE	1999	graduate	American
Postmodernism: Theory and Practice ELTE	1999	graduate	American Studies,
U.S. Literary Canons in International Perspective University of Iowa, Iowa City	2000	graduate	American Studies,
U.S. Studies: A New Americanist Perspective Program, ELTE	2000	doctoral	American Studies PhD
American Modernism: Women Writers ELTE	2000	graduate	American Studies,
Ethnic Literatures in the U.S. University of Turku	2002	graduate	Comparative Lit,
Jewish American Literature ELTE	2002	graduate	American Studies,
The New Negro Renaissance ELTE	2002	graduate	American Studies,
20th Century American Drama ELTE	2002, 2003	graduate	American Studies,
Canons of American Literature Program, ELTE	2003	doctoral	American Studies PhD
Contemporary American Women Writers ELTE	2003	graduate	American Studies,
American Postmodern Fiction ELTE	2004, 2005	graduate	American Studies,
American Literary and Cultural Theories Studies PhD Program, ELTE	2004	doctoral	American
Reading Critical Texts ELTE	2005	graduate	American Studies,
Performed Identities ELTE	2006	graduate	American Studies,

[1] That they were indeed considered subversive by the authorities has recently received its conclusive evidence, when in my secret police files I found that my “spreading dangerous ideas about women” was recorded by informants as early as 1981.

[2] For the bibliography of my gender related publications, see my home page:
www.bollobas.hu/eniko.

[3] For the whole text of the 1989 Statement of *Hungarian Feminists*, see my home page:
www.bollobas.hu/eniko.

[4] “Feminista tövisek Fekete Gyulának” [Feminist Thorns for Gyula Fekete]. *Hitel* 13 (1989). 52-53. For the English text, see my home page.

[5] See for example: Chikán Ágnes, “Gyerekkorom óta feminista vagyok. Bollobás Enikő szerencsés csillagzata” [I have been a feminist since I was a child: the lucky star of Enikő Bollobás]. *Nők világa* II/25 (1990. június 20). 12-13; Petra Weber, “Women: Underpaid and Overburdened.” *The Hungarian Observer* 1990/5. 28-29; Lesley Abdela, “Testing the Winds of Change: What has the Hungarian Revolution Really Done for Women?” *The Guardian* [London] March 27, 1990. 17; Slavenka Drakulić, “Glasne žene Glasnosti.” *Svijet* [Zagreb] XXXVII (1990). 10-12; Chikán Ágnes, “Feministák Szegeden. A nőnek hallgass a neve ...!” [Feminists in Szeged. Should she hold her tongue?] *Csongrádi Hírlap* March 1990; Márok Tamás, “‘Gyanús ez a kedvesség!’ Feminista csoport Szegeden” [Suspect formalities. The Szeged feminists]. *Szegedi Egyetem* March 1990; Párhuzamos interjú: “Szép lehetsz, de okos is! A Boróka-csoportról [Parallel interview: Be pretty *and* sharp — on the Ginevra group]: Faragó József, “Tűzhely vagy munkahely” [Hearth or work] — Chikán Ágnes, “Szüljék, ne szüljék?” [Have a baby or not?]. *Népszabadság* January 11, 1990.

[6] On the paradigm shift from “Old American Studies” to “New American Studies,” see my *American Quarterly* essay: “Dangerous Liaisons: Politics and Epistemology in Post-Cold War American Studies.” *American Quarterly* 54/4 (December 2002). 563-579.

[7] For a multicultural canon in my own writings, see in particular my *History of American Literature* recently published in Hungarian: *Az amerikai irodalom története*, Budapest, Osiris, 2005, 874 pp.

[8] For syllabi and reading lists, see my home page: www.bollobas.hu/eniko.