# EXAMINATIONS OF THE STUDY OF NEW HISPANIC/SPANISH AMERICAN CULTURE AND LITERATURE

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*CRITICAL LATIN AMERICAN AND LATINO STUDIES*. Edited by Juan Poblete. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003. Pp. xli+241. $59.95 cloth, $19.95 paper.)

*THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO MODERN LATIN AMERICAN LITERATURE*. Edited by John King. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. Pp. xxiv+356. $65.00 cloth, $24.99 paper.)

*THE LATIN AMERICAN CULTURAL STUDIES READER*. Edited by Ana del Sarto, Alicia Ríos, and Abril Trigo. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004. Pp. 818. $99.95 cloth, $32.95 paper.)

*IDEOLOGIES OF HISPANISM*. Edited by Mabel Moraña. (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2005. Pp. xxi+333. $79.95 cloth, $34.95 paper.)

Pedro Henríquez Ureña divided Latin American literary studies into periods and systematized the inquiry on the literature of the continent. This became the foundation of the organized study of Latin American literature and culture. Most critics see cultural studies as the logical evolution of the Latin American essay tradition. They read Bello, Martí, González Prada, Rodó, Lugones, Quiroga, Mariátegui, Reyes, Paz, and Carpentier as necessary antecedents to the present in which the social sciences have displaced philological and textual analysis. New generations of thinkers and analysts undertook the study of the cultural and social reality as a whole instead of the essentialist study of literature as the soul of the nation. Following this approach, Cornejo Polar redefined Fernando Ortiz's concept of transculturation as an asymmetric, syncretic plane, with the synthesis in the place of hegemonic culture or García Canclini's (1990) concept of hybridity, which more optimistically links modernity to emancipation, expansion, renovation, and democratization. These concepts are key epistemological tools at a time in

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which the process of westernization of Latin American countries is being accelerated, and simultaneously the national importance of indigenous and subaltern groups is increasing. These developments are not incompatible, but they represent a challenge that nations must face. According to Mabel Moraña, the advantage of hybridity is that it replaces essentialist notions. There is a partial consensus that the most important tasks ahead of us are the strengthening of civil society and the creation of a Latin American common cultural market to reinforce the identity of the continent. In this context García Canclini defends modernism and modernity as Latin American.

It makes sense to start my commentary on these books with the *The Latin American Cultural Studies Reader* because it provides a collection of studies that run from 1970 to the present. The editors' purpose is to produce a canon now that a tradition of more than thirty years has been developed. They emphasize that this field is an autochthonous production and must be studied in its historical context. Cultural studies in Latin America reached their present form under the influence of the Birmingham School during the sixties. The creation of multidisciplinary centers of Latin American studies at U.S. universities also helped shape the field. There are topics that are common to many of the essays: the role of the nation-state and the identity problems that have arisen around it, the impact of dependency theory, the epistemological shift from close textual analysis to cultural studies, neo-colonialism, urbanization, secularism, the emerging role of the middle classes, the "lost decade," and neoliberalism. The editors have divided the book into four sections: Forerunners, Foundations, Practices, and Positions and Polemics. Antonio Cornejo Polar, Angel Rama, Carlos Monsiváis, Beatriz Sarlo, Néstor García Canclini, John Beverley, and Nelly Richard are among the contributors to this collection of thirty-six articles. In general, the historical and diachronic studies fare well while theoretical articles get mixed results in the four books covered by this essay. I comment here briefly on some of the lesser-known texts, such as the contribution by Jesús Martín-Barbero (1987), who sees the need to carry out a more sophisticated analysis of consumption because it is also the realm of desire, pleasure, and resistance. Furthermore, he advocates a progressive reading of the role of the family. His analysis of the melodrama as a Latin American genre is superb. Eduardo Archetti (in *The Latin American Cultural Studies Reader*) explains in detail how soccer contributed to the creation of the nation-state Argentina by integrating the immigrants and creating a national soccer identity. The article on prostitution in Tijuana, by Debra Castillo, María Gudelia Rangel Gómez, and Armando Rosas Solís, is an example of the excellent results honest collaboration between U.S. and Latin American universities can produce, both in the contact zones and in the interior.

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My problem with this book is not so much the selection of the texts, but the repetition by the editors of clichés that deserve to be rethought. For example, Alicia Ríos again repeats the nonsense that "master narratives [have] lost their validity" (32). Have capitalism, the Catholic Church, the presidency of Mexico, or the Constitution of the United States lost their validity? I do not think so. The fact that some master narratives like patriarchy may be in crisis does not mean they disappear as new master narratives are being created. Ana del Sarto proclaims "the nation-states, now in ruins . . ." (160). The map of Latin American nations has barely changed in the last 150 years despite the weakness of the institutions. Are Argentina, Mexico, Honduras, Chile, or Colombia going to disappear in the following weeks or months? Latin American nations have endured invasions, civil wars, the GATT, Mercosur, the G20, and NAFTA, and they will survive CAFTA and the FTAA. Del Sarto affirms that a cultural practice, once it becomes a commodity, loses its "critical edge and transgressive value" (162). Does the Alianza edition of a Borges book sold in Barcelona in a FNAC store lose its critical edge once it is purchased in euros with a Visa card? After all, the present book is also a commodity.

*The Cambridge Companion to Modern Latin American Literature* is a very solid manual. The first two chapters are an overview of Latin American history: pre-Columbian and the colonial, and from the independence movement to the present. They comprise a necessary introduction that places literary studies in context. Chapters three through five are dedicated to the narrative: 1810–1920, 1920–1970, and 1970–present. Chapter six is about Brazilian narrative. Chapter seven is on poetry, eight is devoted to popular culture, nine treats art and architecture, ten tradition and transformation, chapter eleven studies theater, twelve cinema, and thirteen, the last chapter, is entitled "Hispanic USA: Literature, Music and Language." The authors are well-known scholars from British, Canadian, and U.S. academia. The editor, quoting Borges, unambiguously states the main premise of this manual: "I believe that our tradition is the whole of Western culture" (7). Another positive development, following modern historiography, is to downplay the role of the changes brought by independence and stress instead those of the 1920s and 1930s. The weaker chapters are those on poetry (William Rowe), theater (Catherine Boyle), and Hispanics in the United States (Ilan Stavans). The strongest is the one on popular culture (Vivian Schelling). The chapters on art (Valerie Fraser) and cinema (John King) are very informative. These chapters are a useful introduction for students to Latin American literature and culture. All chapters include a bibliographical section mainly in English.

*Critical Latin American and Latino Studies* is a book that explores the interaction and complex relationship between Latin American and

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Latino Studies. In the introduction Juan Poblete quotes Sander L. Gilman regarding the question of bilingualism: "Why is it that bilingualism is good for the upper classes, who actively pay for its implementation, while it is socially and politically discouraged for the lower classes? Why is it that bilingual elites are an asset while Hispanic citizens seem to be a menace for the U.S. national polity?" (xvii).

Poblete advocates a "multicultural and multilingual multiculturalism [sic]" (xvii) in which new immigrants help U.S. Latinos to reinforce their roots. The other side of the coin is that Hispanics in the United States send billions of dollars to their countries of origin and are able to share the experience of a democratic and civil society with their fellow citizens. They can offer information on everyday life in the United States to complement that provided by the mass media. Poblete's book is divided into three parts. The first is "On the History of Area and Ethnic Studies," and it includes articles by Frances R. Aparicio, Walter D. Mignolo, and George Yúdice. Aparicio defends the inclusion of Latino Studies in both English and Spanish departmental programs. According to her, this area of studies has brought the working class into the historical picture and has denounced neocolonialism. She explains how in the Midwest the greatest struggles that Latino scholars have had to face are to open up the black-white paradigm and to find a place for Latinos in the view of racial relations.

Walter Mignolo resists the idea that democracy and capitalism go together and he is not very fond of neoliberalism. What is interesting about this article is his explanation of the main epistemological traits: Occidentalism (Iberian Peninsula) was built upon the Renaissance and based mainly on philosophical theology, law, and historiography. Orientalism (France, England, and Germany) was developed from the Enlightenment and the disciplines of philology and history of the Orient. In more recent times in the United States, Area Studies were developed from the perspective of the social sciences. All these divisions of knowledge have been accompanied by economic inequalities and exercises of power. Mignolo denounces the fact that the field of Latin American studies "presupposes English as the official language" (61). George Yúdice still holds to the old adage that because the distribution of wealth is based on science and technology "developing regions will decline even further" (76). This is a pessimistic view and is not based on reality. Many Latin American nations have moved from the Third World stigma to the more dynamic label of "developing nations," and there are countries that have passed the 10,000 GDP-per capita (Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Uruguay [CIA 2006]). He also notes that identity has become more important than multiculturalism and diversity in the last two decades of the twentieth century. For Mignolo, the primary source of the

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problems is free trade because it "means the disenfranchisement of citizens as transnational capital prevails over state jurisdiction by means of deregulation" (89).

Section two, "Different Knowledges and the Knowledge of Difference: Gender, Ethnicity, Race, and Language" contains articles by Angie Chabram-Dernerseian, Kirsten Silva Gruesz, Stefano Varese, Román de la Campa, and Giorgio Perissinotto. Chabram-Dernerseian, following the bibliography on the topic of denomination, sees "Hispanic" as a U.S. Census term that tries to make a group homogenous with middle-class aspirations, whereas "Latino" is more performative and comes from the civil rights movement.

U.S. television in Spanish privileges Latin American over Latino issues. Silva Gruesz writes about the "Recovering of the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage" (RUSHLH) and the interaction between very distant publications dispersed throughout the United States that reprinted articles and commented on them, thus creating an imaginary community of identity and language resistance in the United States. Gruesz makes a strong case for the study of the United States as a Latin American country because of the nation's direct contact and conflict with Latin American realities and territories: the Caribbean slave-and-sugar trade, the Monroe Doctrine of 1823, Texas Independence, the invasion of Mexico in 1846, the filibustering of Central America and the Caribbean, the disenfranchisement of *californios* and *tejanos*, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the Pan-American Congress of 1889, the intervention in Puerto Rico, Cuba, and Panama, and the fact that U.S. culture had its Renaissance during the Mexican-American War long before the Civil War. The attacks on American imperialism by Rodó, Martí, Darío, and Mark Twain represent the acknowledgment of this situation. Varese advocates the politicization of indigenous people, the strengthening of their political organizations, and the restoration to these communities of control over their own lands.

The third section, "The Critique of the Future and the Future of Critique," contains articles by Juan Flores, Tomás Almaguer, and Beverley. Flores explores the future of Latino Studies, and Almaguer analyzes the difference of racial identity in the United States and Latin America as well as the difference between what he perceives as the rigidity of the U.S. system and the fluidity of Latin American identities. Beverley thinks that September 11th should not make us lose perspective because the political conflicts regarding class, gender, race, sexual orientation, and culture have not disappeared and the struggles continue.

*Ideologies of Hispanism*, edited by Mabel Moraña, belongs to the prestigious "Hispanic Issues Series" of the University of Minnesota. Moraña explains in the introduction that although this is a multidisciplinary task, she decided to include only professors of literature in this

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volume. In the introduction she describes the Spanish language as a technology of power and a device of domination that has evolved into what she calls the "Creole archive," the dominant culture in Latin America. At the same time, she denounces U.S. academia for pushing Spanish to a subaltern status. This volume is divided into four parts. The first is "Constructions of Hispanism: The Spanish Language and Its Others," which contains articles by Lydia Fossa, Ignacio M. Sánchez-Prado, and Sebastiaan Faber. Fossa studies the "colonial hispanization" of the Andes (3). It is the typical article that treats the topic as if it had happened yesterday. It is unfortunate that modern historiography, such as Hugh Thomas's *Conquest* (1993), is not used as a model. Sánchez-Prado deconstructs the evolution of Miguel León-Portilla and his approach to the "encounter." León-Portilla considers himself to be continuing the work of Fray Bernardino de Sahagún in translating and giving voice to the Amerindian. This early reading of Nahuatl texts was necessary to found the myths of the liberal nation. Subsequent, more progressive readings, such as those of Jorge Klor de Alva, seek to empower indigenous peoples. Faber does a fascinating comparative study of three journals founded in Mexico City between 1938 and 1940, *Revista Iberoamericana* (1938), *Romance* (1940), and *España peregrina* (1940). The first was a professional journal that belonged to the Instituto Internacional de Literatura Iberoamericana (IILI), whose contributors were primarily Mexican and U.S. scholars. The second continued *Hora de España*, a journal written during the Spanish Civil War, and the third was founded by Juan Larrea and José Bergamín of the Junta de Cultura Española. According to Faber, the foundation of ILII "represents the coming of age of Latin American literature" because it ceased being an appendix of peninsular studies (73). Torres Rioseco was the main theoretician of ILII and saw Latin American literature linked to its continental destiny. He was pro-United States, anti-Fascist, democratic, and anti-Communist and believed in a pure and professional field of literary studies. *España peregrina* tried unsuccessfully to revitalize an essentialist Hispanic nationalism but it was also part of an important cultural enterprise that laid the foundation for *La Casa de España* (soon to become *El Colegio de México* in 1940) and the Fondo de Cultura Económica. Alfonso Reyes and Daniel Cosío Villegas were part of this enterprise. Hispanism died because it ended up being just a propaganda tool, essentialist and prone to mystifications. Faber advocates a more interdisciplinary, democratic, and multicultural field of studies that take advantage of the strengths of the different approaches.

Part II, "Consolidation and Transformation of Hispanism: Ideological Paradigms," contains articles by Thomas Harrington, Anthony Cascardi, and Joan Ramón Resina. Harrington explores the essentialism of the four nationalisms present in Spain. Cascardi studies the

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influence of Américo Castro and José María Maravall. The most important influence of Maravall is that "Maravall attempted to view culture as a whole without privileging the aesthetic field" (143). Cascardi regrets that Maravall did not address the issue of subject-formation and that literature became mainly a testimony at the service of social history. Resina accuses both Hispanism and Latin Americanism of not having been able to study the multiculturalism and multilingualism of their societies and he also observes the overlap of the canon according to the North American, Latin American, and Spanish academia, which is essentially the same for all of them.

Part III, "Latin Americanism and Cultural Critique," includes articles by Sylvia Molloy, Alberto Moreiras, and Brad Epps. Molloy, following Klor de Alva, explains the issue of writing back from Latin America. The independence wars were "between Euro-Americans (criollos), Westernized mestizos, and even some Europeans (peninsulares) against other Europeans" (191), and at the same time the cultural model was not that of Spain but of France. This explains that Latin America was writing back as a "transculturated West" (191) because the political and cultural metropolis did not coincide. Moreiras reexamines the baroque episteme. Epps calls his article "Keeping Things Opaque" and he "makes good on" the title.

Finally, Part IV, "Hispanism/Latin Americanism: New Articulations," has articles by Idelber Avelar, Nicolas Shumway, and Román de la Campa. Avelar wants us to be alert in the cultural wars and to denounce xenophobia. Shumway says the (very important) obvious, which is that we live in the best of times and in the worst of times. It is fascinating to do Hispanic Studies in the United States nowadays but we cannot sell an essentialist Hispanism. De la Campa proposes some points like "abandon the traditional split between high and low culture" (307). This is extremely important because it would allow us to give more significance to arts such as the cinema, which is mainly middle-brow; bestselling novelists such as Esquivel, Allende, Mastretta, and Piglia; and TV programs in Spanish—not just telenovelas, but also dramas, comedies, and sitcoms. He also advocates accommodation to some market pressures and a reintroduction of aesthetic values. He wants us to understand that intellectuals are not the avant-garde of the cultural wars but soldiers in the trenches, and he maps out a new field of cultural studies more akin to cultural history and anthropology. This is very sound advice. The afterword of the book by Nicholas Spadaccini among other things defends Maravall from Cascardi's misreading. Maravall did not analyze the development of subjectivity in Hispanic from the Baroque period to Romanticism. In fact, no scholar has been able to produce such an analysis. We cannot blame Maravall for not doing what no one has been able to do.

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After more than 1,800 pages of reading how others try to conjugate three interrelated geographical and cultural realities—Spain, Latin America, and the Latino United States—(realities that are not homogeneous but multicultural and multilingual), some comments are pertinent. Whatever the name we give to the studies of Spanish, they are a precious commodity in today's cultural market. We have departments at the best universities all over the world, though in many of them we are part of more than one department. Like it or not, this is because of the fact that the Spanish language is a language of culture used by millions. I do not understand the resistance to this idea because Spanish, like English, is a postcolonial language. Different countries and different regions use it in different ways; at the same time, the users freely understand the need to preserve a certain unity for the welfare of the community. This fact may come from a brutal act of violence that happened five hundred years ago, but it is also for the value of the language and the multicultural culture (sic) that it represents. Only Basque has survived among the Iberian languages. Romance languages fought each other, supplanted Latin, and expelled Arabic. There is not a conspiracy in the twenty-first century to use Spanish. People in the United States do not speak English because they are told by others to do so. It is not even in the Constitution. Some of the critics resent Spanish as a colonial language. We should celebrate the fact that hundreds and thousands of writers and cinematographers, journalists and scientists, and artists of all kinds do their jobs professionally in Spanish because they can rely on a large community of millions of ordinary people who use it every day. The larger and the more powerful economically and culturally these nations become, the greater their capacity to be open to subaltern languages and cultures and to implement bilingual programs. When in doubt we should ask our colleagues in the Czech department.

In the essays I regretted not finding more references to democracy and the role of culture in strengthening democratic institutions, human rights, and the *estado de derecho*. I do not understand the fear of capitalism and free trade. Most economic problems arise from autarky, the lack of progressive tax systems, and national elites who have had a firm grip on power and resources and have condemned millions to poverty. The problem of Mexico is not NAFTA but having been a de facto autarky until the mid-1980s. We all need strong and democratic institutions to make the playing field more open and to provide more opportunities for all of us.

Most of us agree that Spanish essentialism is dead, but the classics belong to all. Borges recommended that we read Quevedo instead of his own work. Let us read both of them. Latinos in the United States need to learn Spanish. Bilingual programs are a huge success in Cataluña and Quebec. Why not in the United States? Why can the Caucasian

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elites hire us to sell them our culture while we deny the same privilege to our sons and daughters?

As I have already said, in the four books covered by this essay the historical and diachronic studies do well while theoretical articles get mixed results. Not because of that old stupid and racist question of whether or not Latin Americans could do theory, but because some theoretical models are not based on reality. They are just abstract thoughts and empty rhetoric. Once postmodern cartographies implode they only produce a tiny cloud of smoke that soon disappears before our astonished eyes. Meanwhile history is there for us to learn from our mistakes and successes and to help create a progressive future.

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