

The Pittsburgh Model and Other Thoughts on the Field (Hispanism/Latin Americanism)

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I am writing in the midst of the coronavirus crisis, sheltered in place at home like many of you. What will come after this is unclear, but it is probable that we will be living in a somewhat altered social and cultural world. That provision should be kept in mind as we try to think together about the future of Hispanism and Latin Americanism. And it is not only the pandemic that is reshaping our reality but also the Black Lives Matter protests that have erupted all over the country over the last few months. It is worth remarking that many of the monuments being pulled down or defaced by the wave of demonstrations in the wake of the killing of George Floyd by officers of the Minneapolis Police are of the ancestors of the Hispanic heritage in the United States: Columbus, of course, and various conquistadors, but also the saintly Fray Junipero de Serra, and even Cervantes, whose bust in Golden Gate Park in San Francisco was splashed with red paint.

We should be rightly suspicious of one who, leaving the field out of fatigue or irrelevance, proclaims grandly that the game is over, as if somehow the experience of his or her own life and career mapped onto the movement of history, even the minor movement of the histories of academic fields. The field is a limitation, and there is always the temptation to test its limits or go outside them altogether, *au fond de l'inconnu*, as Baudelaire put it. It is a temptation I have not resisted myself. But the field is also a condition of possibility, an enabling condition, even for transgression (no limits, no transgression). Without its proliferation of departments, institutes, journals, conferences big and small, debates and squabbles, books and articles, graduate seminars, graduate students, professional gossip, fellowships—all supported economically as a more or less incontestable public good (today less)—I would not have enjoyed the kind of career I have had. But I am now retired after some sixty years of involvement in the field (beginning in 1960 with a prep school senior essay on Lorca's *Poeta en Nueva York*), and it seems also that I am coming out of a tunnel and can see things in a new light.

What I see now is the *mortality* of Hispanism. Hispanism will last longer than my own life—this very volume we are contributing to is part of its continuous remaking—but not too much longer. This prospect is quite different than for

someone who began their academic career as I did in the 1950s or 60s. Then, Hispanism seemed like a giant train (as in the film *Snow Piercer*) that over the course of the twentieth century gained size and speed, becoming a massive presence in the US and global academy in the 1960s and 1970s. Its movement pointed to an open-ended future but also had a stable past behind it of almost a century and a half. But the train is now moving from the effects of momentum alone, as each generation of graduate students and professors strives to produce new generations, each slightly diminished. The inflection of each new generation will be different: more towards Latin American literature than Peninsular; instead of a Thomistic reading of *La vida es sueño*, Lacanian readings (they are not so far apart as one might think). The train has many individual railway cars of different shapes and sizes, each one of them a specialization or sub-specialization, but many now empty (my first idea for my dissertation was *Pepita Jiménez* and the Spanish novel of late Romanticism, for example). And the train is beginning to slow down. In fifty years, it will be dead on the tracks, each of the individual cars rusting and decayed, covered by graffiti. Every day there are new efforts to expand the field, bring in new energy: Spanish cultural studies, Atlantic studies, Asia-Pacific, postcolonialism, global Hispanism; but none of them will be sufficient to add enough energy to keep it going.

Of the new trends, postcolonial studies might be seen as the last attempt to bring forward a notion of the totality of the field (one reads with Latin American eyes the *crónicas*, the letters of Columbus, Cervantes, the *comedia*, *costumbrismo*) but from a perspective that necessarily anticipated the negation or *Aufhebung* of Hispanism, to the extent that Hispanism remains even today bound up with what postcolonialists like to call the coloniality of power, that is the persistence of colonial forms of thought and institutions beyond the end of formal colonial rule itself. Fernando Degiovanni has written brilliantly about this in his recent book *Vernacular Latin Americanism*, showing a neocolonial, even imperialist bias in the construction of Latin Americanism as a field in the early to mid-twentieth century (as he notes, the *Revista Hispánica Moderna* was itself a result of that process). But while postcolonial criticism produces a “totality” of Spanish and Spanish American texts—in other words one has to read both Garcilaso de la Vega and el Inca Garcilaso—the nature of that unity was that of what Antonio Cornejo Polar called, apropos Peruvian literature in Spanish and its relation to indigenous cultural expression, a “contradictory totality.”

From *Lazarillo* to *Sandinismo*: The Pittsburgh Model

The biggest change in the course of my career was, especially in the period following the Cuban Revolution and the boom, the emergence of Latin American literature out of the shadow of Hispanism, at first as its *hijo natural*, so to speak, but then as its Oedipal rival. I think I can claim that my department at the University of Pittsburgh, still called the Department of Hispanic Languages and Literatures (although the plural foreshadows a multinational and multicultural heterogeneity), was the first not only to give more emphasis to Latin Americanism, but for all practical purposes to shift to a Latin American focus, not only in

questions of literature and culture, but also in the models for how Spanish was taught as a language to undergraduates.

Del Lazarillo al Sandinismo was the title of a book of my essays I published in 1987. My colleagues had gently but firmly let me know that promotion to full professor was not going to happen without a second book. At the time, I was wrapped up in thinking about Louis Althusser's famous essay on ideology and ideological state apparatuses. This led me to become interested in the reception of Góngora and baroque writing in the American viceroyalties in the seventeenth century, rather than in the close reading of the *Soledades* itself I had done in my dissertation. And I was increasingly involved in solidarity work with the Central American revolutionary movements of the 1980s, particularly the Sandinistas. So, at the advice of my friend Hugo Achúgar, I cobbled together some essays I had written under that title. The essays included one on the *Lazarillo*, but also others on Ernesto Cardenal and Central American revolutionary poetry, the question of national allegory in the modern Latin American novel, and the new genre that came to be called *testimonio*. Hernán Vidal at the Institute of Ideologies and Literature at the University of Minnesota generously agreed to publish the book. (The vital work of the Institute of Ideologies and Literatures in the 1980s needs to be revisited.) I say generously because it would probably not have been published by a conventional academic press. But since it was, as the Chilean saying goes, *ni chicha ni limonada* in terms of its relevance to a determined specialization, it attracted little notice in either Spanish or Latin American criticism at the time, and quickly went out of print, although the essay on *testimonio* had a new life in a rewritten form in the 1990s. It did accomplish its function though, which was to get me tenure.

In retrospect, that title anticipated the shape of my career. I remember talking with a young French woman who worked on literature and theory at a cultural center in Managua in the heyday of the Nicaraguan revolution. What brought her to this commitment? I asked. She replied that there was nothing interesting happening then in Europe, what was interesting was what was happening in this tiny out-of-the-way country, suddenly thrust into the center of world history. That was an "aha" moment for me, because I found I felt exactly the same, though I would not have put it that way before hearing her say that. That was the moment when I stopped thinking of myself as a Hispanist who dabbled in Latin American issues, and started to become a Latin Americanist. To tell the truth, I have never actually stopped being a Hispanist. But I do know what it is to be perceived as abandoning one field for another. I was more or less banished from academic Hispanism in both the United States and Spain; the Latin Americans were more welcoming.

In a way, it was a misunderstanding that led me to Hispanism in the first place. I spent the first 12 or so years of my life in Latin American, a "colonial" child, so to speak, with the difference that the metropolitan center for me was the United States rather than Spain. But when I chose Spanish as my undergraduate major at Princeton in the early 1960s, the focus of my department was massively Peninsular. There were two professors who did Latin American: John Hughes and James Irby. Hughes offered *novela de la tierra*, which I disdained out of a modernist hubris common to my generation (a mistake; I came late in my career to

admire and teach *novela de la tierra*). But Irby offered Borges, and some of the writers who were then (1963–64) forming the boom. So, I took his course, and enjoyed it very much. I also took Stanley Stein's course on colonial Latin America, which introduced me to dependency theory. My political passions were Latin American, not Spanish, having to do mainly with the Cuban Revolution, which I sympathized with, particularly as someone raised in the bourgeois world of Latin America (we are all aware today of the disappointments the Revolution has produced, but that should never lead one to warm, cuddly thoughts about the Latin American bourgeoisie, which was and is one of the meanest and most narrow-minded in the world).

But when it came time to write a senior thesis, I ended up working on Baltasar Gracián and the Spanish Baroque. I went to Spain for a year after my BA; joined the graduate program in Spanish literature at the University of Wisconsin for my MA in Peninsular (my MA thesis was on Tirso de Molina in the history of Spanish literary criticism); then moved in 1966 for my PhD to the Spanish section of the new Literature Department created at the fledgling University of California, San Diego, where several of the Princeton Hispanists, including my mentor Claudio Guillén and Américo Castro, had also ended up.

So when I arrived as an ABD lecturer at the University of Pittsburgh in the fall of 1969, with the grand salary of \$7000 a year and a six course load, I was not only a bona fide Hispanist but also lodged in the field's most dominant specialization, *Siglo de Oro*, with an ambitious but yet to be written dissertation on Gongora's *Soledades*, clear as crystal in my mind but invisible on the written page. Twenty years later I was in Managua, reading and writing about *testimonio*. In 1969, Pitt was, like most Spanish departments, overwhelmingly Peninsular-centered, not to say -centric. Among the named chairs or distinguished visitors were names like Dámaso Alonso, Javier Herrero, Juan Cano, L. J. Woodward, Juan Goytisolo, Gonzalo Sobejano, Ciriaco Morón Arroyo, Edmond Cros (I am not sure all these names will have that much resonance with contemporary readers). There was one tenured Latin Americanist, Alfredo Roggiano, but he was a large presence. He brought the prestigious *Revista Iberoamericana* to the department and he invited his friend Eduardo Lozano, also an exile from Peronism, to create a library of Latin American literature at Pitt. And there were visiting professors in Latin American from time to time—one was Octavio Paz, for example.

Roggiano had set up a deal with the Hispanists to support them as long as they left him with power over the *Revista* and the then few graduate students working on Latin American literature. As part of that deal, the department hired in the mid-1970s a chair who had been a protégé of Roggiano's, Keith McDuffie, known for his work on Vallejo. So, there was one other Latin Americanist. McDuffie basically enforced the *entente cordiale* between the Hispanists and Roggiano.

The department had been pretty drastically retrenched (by about a third) in the decade between roughly 1972 and 1982. The big Hispanists like Javier Herrero began to leave for more prestigious positions. Sometime in the mid-1980s, the question came up in a department meeting about how to replace the latest departing Hispanist: should we, instead of finding another Hispanist to replace him, orient our work in a more Latin American direction? I think I was the one who raised this question, but McDuffie and other faculty supported it. We had the

resources of the *Revista Iberoamericana*, a strong Center for Latin American Studies, and the collection of Latin American literature and film built by Lozano. The more interesting critical and theoretical work in the 1980s was coming from the Latin American side (we were all digesting Angel Rama's posthumous *La ciudad letrada* at the time). As a reduced department, we could do one thing well, but not both Peninsular and Latin American. The upshot was that all new appointments in literature were over time shifted to Latin American. The key turning point was the presence in the department for several years of Antonio Cornejo Polar, who brought with him many brilliant students from the Universidad San Marcos in Lima. By the early 1990s, with the return of Edmond Cros to France, we had no faculty who were explicitly Hispanists. Some of us still taught courses on Peninsular (I taught *Don Quijote*, baroque Survey, and Spanish film). We began to get more graduate students from Latin America. In the late 1990s Mabel Moraña became chair and at the same time director of the *Revista Iberoamericana*. Hermann Herlinghaus and Elizabeth Monasterios were recruited soon after. Our Mellon Professor was Gerald Martin, then working on his biography of Gabriel García Márquez; today it is Daniel Balderston, who edits *Variaciones Borges*.

Under Moraña's leadership, we began an intensive effort to move into new areas of Latin Americanism, including postcolonial and cultural studies. We still had, however, a contingent of three tenured positions in Hispanic linguistics left over from the old days of the department. They were there mainly to run the language teaching dimension of the department, but they also had their own quota of graduate students. Two of the tenured professors retired the same year, and instead of replacing them, in a kind of *coup d'état*, the literature section of the department decided to convert their positions into Latin American literature ones. The third tenured linguist left some years later, and her position likewise became a Latin American one. By the end of the 1990s we were a department focused almost entirely, especially in its graduate program, on Latin American literary and cultural studies. As I said, the "turn" was partly a pragmatic one: what could we do best as a department after retrenchment? But it was also a cultural and ideological one: a commitment to the new energies coming out of Latin American criticism and what got called loosely "theory" (poststructuralism, deconstruction, cultural studies, postcolonial studies, queer studies . . .), which had permeated Latin American criticism much more than Hispanism. Though every now and then there was the whiff of a suggestion that we should bring a Peninsularist back in (with perhaps a "global" Hispanism focus), or someone who was both a Hispanist and a Latin Americanist, like myself, the department is still that way today.

There were costs, of course, for example, in terms of graduate program rankings, still dominated by Hispanist criteria. But the results were, to repeat, very satisfying: we were able to attract and work with graduate students who were tuned in to the same things we were doing, many of them with prior MAs from Latin American universities; we were able to place them in good jobs in both the US and Latin American academy; we had big, cutting edge international conferences; and we developed (despite the inevitable *rencores* and squabbles) a collective presence in the field that was more than the sum of our parts (we were at our maximum only ten tenured faculty). That is the "Pittsburgh model," then.

So my department went from *Lazarillo* to *Sandinismo* in a sense too. With this difference perhaps: that while the Sandinistas collapsed with their loss in the elections of 1990 (taking down with them my own first properly Latin Americanist book, *Literature and Politics in the Central American Revolutions*, written with my friend Marc Zimmerman), the department prospered.

But it goes without saying that all things are subject to entropy, and now some 20 to 25 years later, the department is facing new challenges that are dividing and pushing it in new directions. We never did address during my time adequately the question of US Latinx literature and culture (now the department has a professor in that area). And then, inevitably, because of our own orientation to questions of identity and multiculturalism, what about Philippine literature in Spanish, or Equatorial Guinea, or the question of *sudacas* in Spain and Europe, or Brazil and Portuguese Africa, or what was at stake in saying Latino instead of Hispanic, or was Latin America itself coterminous with indigenist thinking about territoriality? Could Latin Americanism, born out and largely sustained by the *criollo* lettered elites be an adequate signifier for those issues?

Moreover, Latin America itself which seemed full of possibility when I was a graduate student and young professor, failed in some ways to meet the challenge of globalization. Latin American studies similarly lost its autonomy and influence at the university. In the bygone days of the Cold War, it was a self-administered program, the largest of the area studies programs at the University of Pittsburgh. Now it is one of the programs operating under the banner and direction of Global Studies. In my most recent book, I speak about the “failure of Latin America” (2019), which is also a way of saying the failure of literary Latin Americanism as a political-cultural project deeply centered in the academy, but with consequences beyond it.

The Last Hispanist? A Note on Américo Castro

If there is one thing I have learned, it is that Spaniards and Latin Americans do not get along all that well. That is because Spain has not, to use the term in vogue, “decolonized” itself, even in relation to its own national minorities. That is the reason for the slash between Hispanism and Latin Americanism in my title. Otherwise, we would be talking about departments of Iberoamerican studies, which has the advantage of including Portugal and its former colonies, including Brazil. Américo Castro was not the first, but certainly one of the most influential and active proponents of this idea. Degiovanni has a brilliant chapter in his book on Castro’s tract, *Iberoamérica*, published first in 1941 and then republished with revisions almost yearly over the next decade or so. Castro sought to extend the force of a liberal Hispanism now in exile to embrace the emerging New World literatures and cultures of its former colonies. What he proposed was uniting the still (in his view) excessively raw, heterogenous, and linguistically anarchic Latin American countries to the “morada vital” of Spain at a linguistic, existential, and cultural level, with the support of the United States, then in the mode of Roosevelt’s Good Neighbor Policy and anxious to block the emergence of Fascism in the hemisphere. This was a popular idea in the 1940s and the early 1950s—hence,

for example, the concept of the Instituto Internacional de Literatura Iberoamericana. But it is a laughable one today, unless I miss my guess. That is because, as Degiovanni shows, there was an element of neocolonial *noblesse oblige* or condescension in the idea, a condescension that still dogs Spain's attitude towards its former colonies: now that the independence movements had faded, Spain could be reunited with its many somewhat unruly "children," so to speak, to their advantage, and with the blessing of the emerging world power, the United States.

At Princeton, Castro had been unavailable to mere undergraduates like myself. But as a graduate student I was able to work with him briefly at the University of California, San Diego. In a way, I can say I was Castro's last student. Like so many other Peninsularists of my generation, I might have become an (Américo) Castriista myself. The problem was the other Castro, Fidel, and my own discovery of Marxism and the New Left.

Américo Castro, or don Américo as we were wont to call him, like many of the older post-Civil War Spanish liberals who chose exile in the United States or Latin America, replaying some of the internal battles of the Republic, saw communism as a greater threat than US imperialism. That leaning determined Castro's position on the Vietnam War, about which we had more than one conversation. This was 1967–68. I was draft age. So it was clear that I was not to become another disciple. I was drawn instead to the other *eminence grise* in the humanities at San Diego, Herbert Marcuse. And then Fredric Jameson arrived and showed me a way to do Hispanist textual criticism in Marxist way.

Years later I wrote about Castro at a conference at Princeton to honor his memory:

Castro came to the United States on the eve of the Cold War. He offered a vision of Spanish history and civilization which, particularly in its active repudiation of a Marxist or class based-historiography, fitted both the private and the public assumptions of U.S. liberalism in the post-World War II period. In that sense, his historiography could be said to have constituted *an ideology* of North American academic Hispanism. That was perhaps the source of its power to attract and influence, to create a school, but also its ultimate limitation. ("Class or Caste" 148).

For different but not unrelated reasons, Borges astutely pronounced Iberoamericanism dead on arrival in his famous polemic with Castro in 1941, "Las alarmas del Doctor Américo Castro." There never was and there never will be a unified Iberoamerican field; more exactly, the field, already split between Spain and Latin America, will itself become more divided and heterogenous.

When I was briefly chair of my department in the early 2000s, I expressed my concern to my dean about uniting everyone in a foreign languages department, which was an idea making its way among administrators at the time (and probably still is). The dean told me not to worry, because "Spanish is not a foreign language." Of course, he was right, and that seems to be the way things will go. But paradoxically, as I suggested at the start, there probably will not be departments of Spanish as such anymore. Hispanism will have ended, and along with it

the philologically based historicism which is almost second-nature for many of us. As happens today in the US academy with, say Persian or early Arabic literature, some people will be specialists in Spanish literature. Spanish will probably be a general requirement, as French is in Canada. And the *Quixote* will be taught one way or another. But there will be no departments of Spanish as such. Similarly, Latin Americanism will have melted away into something less centered on a constantly shifting canon of Latin American literary texts written in Spanish or Portuguese, something more multifarious, global, or “glocal,” as Néstor García Canclini put it—just as Castro feared.

What do we do in the meantime? (Some of you may be just entering into your careers and would like some guidance.)

The Option of Deconstruction

One answer might be deconstruction, which has proposed to renovate the field in the last twenty years or so, seeing as its main task to dismantle *from within* the canon of literary Latin Americanism and cultural studies. I was very strongly drawn to deconstruction myself, through the influence of Gayatri Spivak, in the 1980s my colleague at the University of Pittsburgh, and then Alberto Moreiras. Moreiras and I shared a partisanship in the so-called Latin American Subaltern Studies Group in the 1990s. We were both Young Turks (more exactly, Moreiras was young and I was middle-aged) anxious to shake up the field. But then our ways parted.

I published, in 1992, a book Moreiras admired, *Against Literature*. Perhaps alluding to that title, he recently brought out a book based on earlier material in Spanish titled *Against Abstraction: Notes from an Ex-Latin Americanist* (2020). “Ex”: that is to say, he was once a Latin Americanist, part of that field, but he is no longer. He has left it in (one imagines) the way Nietzsche left behind philology. Moreiras came into the field in the 1990s as a young Spanish philosophy student in the mode of Derrida and Heidegger, who, as he explains in his book, decided to put his very sharp mind to the question of Latin American literature and cultural studies, questioning in a deconstructive manner the characteristic tropes of literary Latin Americanism, like *mestizaje*, *indigenismo*, magic realism, transculturation, *testimonio*, or more broadly literary nationalism itself. The result was a book that was difficult but challenging for the field: *The Exhaustion of Difference* (2001). It promised “as relentless and savage a practice of clearing as possible,” in Moreiras’s own words, for a renovated project, both critical and political, of Latin Americanism (299).

Seen in retrospect, Moreiras’s ambition may not have been as intrinsic to the field as he supposed (Mabel Moraña, if you are reading this, I am admitting you were right about Moreiras and I was wrong back in the days we debated this). Moreiras seems to be seeking in his engagement with Latin American literary and cultural thinking, or beyond it, a “supplement” that could summon up an original and radical experience, something like Heidegger’s *Dasein*. But in doing this he never leaves the field of European philosophy, or as he likes to say now “critical reason.” He scrutinizes Latin Americanism from the point of view of that

philosophy. He describes his kind of thinking as *marrano*, that is, in terms of sixteenth-century Spain, neither Jewish/Muslim nor Christian. In between. Abject. He would like to claim by this that his location of enunciation is neither Hispanist or Latin Americanist, neither postcolonial or European, to the extent each of these categories involves a philologically constructed idea of identity, a “metaphysics of presence.”

Now, discouraged by the persistence of identity politics in Latin Americanism, even in its subalternist or “decolonial” forms, he looks beyond it altogether to something that would bring forth an “infrapolitical” or “posthegemonic” experience. Still Heidegger in other words, no? (on this see Bosteels). This is not to say that Heidegger or Derrida are not pertinent to Latin Americanist thought. Quite the contrary. But deconstruction in particular seems like a procedure that can be used to scan *anything*, irrespective of its concrete historical grounding or specificity. As such, it risks becoming yet another form of *blanqueamiento*.

Moreiras’s “infrapolitical” Latin Americanism turns out, ironically, to be not unlike Américo Castro’s more genteel Iberoamericanism, though they would probably urgently deny that affinity themselves (both Moreiras and Castro have a common root in phenomenology and existentialism). But Castro, in his later work, represented above all by *The Structure of Spanish History*, at least seems open to a kind of play of collective identities—thus his famous concept of *convivencia*, a word Gramsci might have translated as hegemony. I do not mean here to question some of the brilliant work done by the practitioners of deconstructive criticism in the Latin American field, including Moreiras himself; it can stand on its own (moreover, it is not all of one sort). But I do think that in terms of the radical renovation or “clearing” of the field it promised deconstruction is a dead end. It does not summon up new energies, political or otherwise. At best, it can only finally point to itself, with the self-satisfaction of a magician pulling a rabbit out of a hat. The first time we see this leaves us astonished; the fourth or fifth time it has become familiarized.

So, to answer my own question about what to do next, I suggest the example of Gramsci and the question of the conditions of hegemony. Gramsci was also a European, of course, but as a Sardinian somewhat at a postcolonial slant to European philosophy. In the *Prison Notebooks*, he undertook a historically and politically inflected engagement with Italian literature and culture. He models what Edward Said called a “worldly” criticism, whereas deconstruction is at the same time aporetic (undecided) and apocalyptic. Degiovanni’s book shows how this could be done in a way that is still intrinsic to the field of Latin Americanism, that is philological rather than philosophical. I would also point to Julio Ramos’s *Desencuentros de la modernidad* (1989), now a generation old. Recently I have been reading my colleague Gonzalo Lamana’s new book *How “Indians” Think* (2019). In one part, Lamana reads el Inca Garcilaso reading the tradition of European history, theology, and ontology “upside down,” as it were, showing that tradition’s sometimes comic inability to come to terms with a colonial other, the same way African American comedians like Richard Pryor or Chris Rock make fun of the mannerisms of whites. Lamana’s kind of criticism, figuratively, pours red paint on the bust of Cervantes, like the demonstrators in Golden Gate Park. It is not a

transculturation or a deconstruction, but a *debunking* (much like Cervantes's own). I started with that image and will end with it.

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