Left Standing in a Field of Texts

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When I first moved toward the Latin Americanist field in the late 1960s, everything was as fresh as the world of Macondo that García Márquez described in his celebrated novel. Some events were so unnamable that we could only signal them with a finger. They seemed to lack noun and verb. We learned of the birth of the new and were startled by what we observed.

The cultural effects of the Cuban Revolution, the migration of Caribbean populations to Florida and New York, the arrival of Argentines to the United States after the 1966 military coup, the disputes between exiled Spaniards, who had found a place in the US academy, and a batch of freshly seeded university professors who had fled from their Latin American homelands—none of this had been well digested. Meanwhile an explosion of novels largely published in Spain but written by Latin American authors promised to change our habits of reading and gave us daring perspectives on writing, the use of language, and literary form. Some referred to this as a "boom" of Latin American fiction, but it also triggered a "boom" in standard academic discourse, a radical detour from the ways in which we had apprehended the fictional work. What's more, the authors identified with the "boom" stretched our habitual ideas about the role of the writer: the Latin American author became a hero of the anti-imperialist cause. To be sure, the role of the leftist intellectual expanded and, by the late 1960s, under the aegis of writers like Julio Cortázar and José María Arguedas, it came to embrace matters of social responsibility and stirring ethical critique. As the decade ended, the United States also changed due to civil rights protests and Third World strikes that insisted on minority inclusion. In university settings, these stormy demands were sometimes met with a new set of courses and revised pre-doctoral exams, acknowledging a literature from the margins even as Hispanism held strong. Some might claim that the force of ideology propelled these university expansions; others might say, in the least complex terms, that it was simply time for change.

The process of transformation of Spanish departments to which I allude was neither direct nor easy. The rich history that precedes the decade of the 1960s certainly merits our attention[1] as does the crisis in the humanities today, troubled

[1] My own department at Berkeley was founded by Rudolph Schevill in 1919, and its Latin American section was developed in 1928, with the arrival to the department of Arturo Torres Rioseco. It became the Department of Spanish and Portuguese in 1931. In its one-hundred-year

as it is by a national leadership that has turned against immigrant cultures and scientific research along with its pitiful English-only defenses, but here I focus on the decade in which I joined the discipline of Hispanic studies.

As I began my work as a graduate student in 1968, Hispanism in the United States was marked by a world of exiled scholars who inherited the traditions of Ramón Menéndez Pidal: we felt the weight and influence of Américo Castro, the Lidas (Raimundo and María Rosa), Jakov Malkiel, Leo Spitzer, and their many disciples. Displaced from their countries of birth owing to various political conditions, these scholars curated the historical past by reassembling textual fragments, and from there, they imagined a resilient wholeness that defined Hispanic tradition. Their authority was based on what one critic described as a kind of "methodological nationalism" (McMahon 2), a combination of scientific classification that in its early version blended positivist inquiry with a romantic search for the national soul. In this pursuit, Menéndez Pidal sought the popular origins of epic; years later, Castro sought out the "morada vital," the basic *convivencia* of religious-based cultures (or *castas*) that for Castro defined the uniqueness of Spain. Unmistakably, their deep dive into the past carried a plan and motive: to understand what they viewed as the modern decline of Spain and to find a sustaining narrative that might prove Spain's contemporary worth due to "its glorious past" (Castro vii). Assembling the fragments to find the whole, text editing, and extensive commentary: this was the philologist's task. It served to define the authority of the scholar and held the promise of completeness and truth. In our field, the truth reinforced the exceptionalism of Spanish culture and Spain's dissent from the norm.[2]

Hans Gumbrecht refers to these tactics as part of the "powers of philology" (5) to be exercised in the present in order to control the story of the past. On the side, philology celebrated the ownership of rare and precious ephemeral texts that sustained a system of prestige. The acquisition of relics qua shards of texts under close inspection might at first seem like a disinterested passion, and in fact

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existence, the UC-Berkeley Department of Spanish and Portuguese, like that of Columbia University, leaves a record of the ups and downs of a profession evolving over time. It also reveals the weight of professorial voices in Hispanism to interact with national policy and sustain a central role in debates about international relations. At Berkeley, for instance, in the late nineteenth century, Bernard Moses was then the preeminent historian of Spain's domination in the Americas and the major scholar at the time of the Spanish American war. His work made him, according to one bibliographer, "an instant expert on the worsening Spanish-American relations" (Constance 2). For his reward, President McKinley in 1900 made him a member of the Philippine commission. Alfred L. Kroeber's work on Peruvian archeology was also significant for his early contributions to the Museum of Anthropology at Berkeley, founded by Phoebe Apperson Hearst. He set the tone for establishing an exchange between scholar and native subjects that was hardly disturbed until indigenous voices in recent years protested the paternalism of Kroeber's view.

[2] In this dimension, scholars like Castro wanted to elucidate difference, to claim that Spain was not the same as other countries in Europe. Difference was the basis of meaning. There was a healthy irony to this endeavor for while the Nazis unleashed a reign of terror, Castro substantially celebrated the Semitic roots of Spain that had traveled north through Al-Andalus. This mode of research was debated in the prominent Spanish departments of the United States: some, like Albert Sicroff, opted for the Castrista version, others like Eugenio Asensio heatedly defended the uninterrupted primacy of Castilian catholic culture (Asensio).

in the work of scholars like Rodríguez Moñino, who collated inventories of early Iberian documents and identified related sources, we saw the interweaving of print and oral traditions, the linkage of *crónicas* and *cantos* in order to sustain this fervor. But this kind of work with fragments also introduced the mission of the scholar in creating and sustaining the *value* of the text as object. In other words, the collection of first editions and various types of ephemera set the terms for sustaining academic distinction, based on the scarcity of the materials that scholars held in their possession. Seen from the perspective of the student, this activity was another way of maintaining hierarchy within university halls. And indeed, if you studied philology in those years, and a kind professor took you under his or her wing, you then took part in the antiquarian's bonus: whether touching the vellum of sixteenth century books or inhaling the mold on parchment, you felt the passing of time right under your nose and fingers, and felt like a pioneer. Archive fever, indeed. Most of us were aflame.

That said, by the late 1960s, the work of philologists began to cede to emergent issues that pressed upon the Hispanic field. It was time for Spanish department faculty to address not just the value of the manuscript itself and methods of collection, not just the comparison of variants and the shifts in lexicon and syntax driven through different editions, not just the collation of rhetorical tropes or motifs with the goal of defining a literary style, but to reconsider the situation of texts and their relation to the political world (here, a nod to Amado Alonso and more significantly Leo Spitzer who guided Hispanists in the Americas and Spain through the field of stylistics).[3]

This revision began in stages. Against those who asserted the depoliticized nature of Spanish *comedia*, Spanish scholars like José Antonio Maravall, trained in the method of the *Annales* school, began to find in the works of Renaissance Spain an occasion to speak about conflict of classes. And Carlos Blanco Aguinaga, repudiating the old order of scholars like Rudolph Schevill, reassessed Spanish literature through the power of Marxist critique. Later came the incisive critiques of philology staged by younger scholars trained in peninsular literature. John Beverley, for example, spoke admiringly of philology and in particular of the achievements of Américo Castro insofar as he illuminated the Arabic and Jewish presence in Spain. But Beverley argued that the focus on *castas* suppressed issues of class and political consciousness, and he insisted that the *limpieza de sangre* was not simply about religion but about one's position in the social hierarchy of a sixteenth-century town (141–45).

Reading retrospectively, philology has much to offer scholars today regarding our current attentions to material culture and our regard for the primacy of close reading as a first step toward critical thinking. Today we could echo its praise of otherness and difference studied from the perspective of the fragment or margin. Additionally, our attention to the conflict between oral traditions and print, the miniature, the minor, the popular, and questions of race and migration; our renewed commitment to studies of Al-Andalus; and even the idea of

[3] It is still amazing to think of the connections between philology and war. Spitzer, for example, developed his strategy for close textual readings through his work for the Austro-Hungarian army as a censor of the correspondence of Italian prisoners in the camps of World War I.

transculturation that prominently inhabits our writings can find roots in the work of philologists who addressed multicultural Spain. I often thought that we threw out the baby with the bathwater, but by 1970 there was no marching back. Instead, the draw of theory came forth while, from another camp, in cities from Havana to Managua, from Caracas to Santiago de Chile, we heard the call for a politics of emancipation that expressed itself in literature and culture. We sought to explain the nature of colonial domination, the effects of modernity on the metropolis/periphery axis; we signaled the power of the margin as a way to set up our readings and let the fragment stand on its own. If Castro studied Jews in Morocco and the transactions between North Africa and Spain, later scholars would excavate Iberia's overarching colonial projects that included the Spanish hold on the Philippines, the Portuguese ties to Africa and Brazil, the multiply colonized Caribbean, the indigenous resistance from Latin America and, of course, the question of borders upheld by empire yet traversed by migrants.

In light of this, the old model could no longer hold. Pressures were placed on the Hispanic curriculum to accommodate the newfound (and reasonable) objects that commanded our attentions. We altered our perceptions of the canon and redirected the critical gaze. And along with this, the field of literary criticism expanded to a much-needed modernization. Philology was old and criticism was new—and then, of course, there was theory.

In the 1960s, several events altered the direction of Hispanic studies. The Cuban Revolution gave impetus for this change starting with its anticolonialist thrust and the promise of socialist thought, followed by the leftist political persuasion of many writers defined by the so-called "boom." This social consciousness (despite the later failings of Cuba) was expanded by writers of marginal status who spoke from genres outside the canon, giving space to subaltern voices defined by race, class, and gender. A redirection of "high" culture demanded both a political and theoretical focus that would allow us to consider emerging literatures defining Latin America and Spain. Meanwhile, the formal study of literature that emerged in the late 1960s gave rise to theory as its proponents argued for a study of literary systems and codes. As if to argue against the philological search for an original "truth," theorists began to imagine a textual engagement based on the possibilities of infinite meaning. Derrida's concept of undecidability regarding the stable nucleus of texts became a watchword to guide us through an endless deconstruction of signs.

In all of this, university debates became refractory: the elusiveness or instability of meaning and the pulsations of free-floating signifiers that escaped easy capture stirred new ways of reading and demanded new obligations of teaching. Psychoanalysis marched hand in hand with these investigations and accounted for the subliminal workings of the text, its silences, and omissions while, from another perspective, the Marxist gaze reordered the discursive signs to make sense of ideology and history. Following this, came the split between orality and writing, the separation of criticism from theory, and a study of the internal positions that different discourses and ciphers assumed in reading. Here, Julia Kristeva's *La productivité dite texte* (1968) was fundamental, as was Josefina Ludmer's close reading of *Cien años de soledad* (1972), both signs of an emergent critical virtuosity that began to define the theoretical field.

This activity was slow in penetrating Spanish departments in the United States. Rising student petitions for courses on literary theory were tepidly received. Even when nudged by the most prodigious Latin American cultural critics of the time, Spanish departments overall issued a half-baked response. Nonetheless, by the mid-1970s, these same departments began to acknowledge the demands for theory even though, to be truthful, their curricular solutions often displayed a conflict: when a theory course was instituted as a nod to student requests, this specially designated offering was isolated from regular courses. Conventional genre study and inherited periodization defined the usual course definitions while undergraduate surveys continued to separate Spain from Spanish America. In the Spanish track, medieval through baroque, the eighteenth century through the Civil War; in the Spanish American track, the colonial period through early nineteenth or up to the *gauchesca,* the poetry of *modernismo* through the *vanguardia* of the 1920s, the *novelas de la tierra* ending with the modern novel. In a smaller frame, Luso-Portuguese literature entered if university budgets allowed it. There was thus no urgency to incorporate the lessons of theory across the board, to move the pieces around; instead, the only required theory course signaled a strategy of containment. Harnessed in a single space, it was usually assigned to a single (junior) professor and in general, the syllabus extended from Shklovsky to Genette, leaving aside the more radical reflections that Spanish-language intellectuals or continental philosophers at the time supplied.

To appreciate the dimensions of this rift, and the slow progress toward reform, recall that that the manual of record for Latin American literature starting in the 1950s was Anderson Imbert's *Historia de la literatura latinoamericana*, organized in strict obedience to the authors' birthdates (and not a word about Brazil).[4] This book, partnered with Anderson's anthology of Latin American literature, was standard fare for undergraduate survey courses. Although first published in 1954, Anderson's book was used well into the new century (its last printing dates from 2005), along with its peninsular equivalents, the *Historia de la literatura española* by Ángel del Río (1948) and its recasting by Diego Marín (1966). A decisive turning point against these standards came with Jean Franco's *Modern Culture of Latin America* (1967). Taking many US students by surprise for its fervent analysis of the politics of style and its disarming cultural history, it quickly became a new critical model that absorbed the attention of students in the United States and Europe.

In all of this, it was no surprise that the boom writers rattled the academic cages. Borges became a primary object of study when he won, with Samuel Beckett, the Prix International in France in 1961; in 1962 he began his first lecture tour in the United States. A few years later, Cortázar and García Márquez made a

[4] Writing about Anderson Imbert's manual, Fernando Degiovanni reports that by 1979, over 100,000 copies had been sold (160). He also reminds us of Anderson's feeble admission that Latin America, despite its abundant literary production, scarcely had a corpus of distinguished texts that might compete with the global canon—hence, Anderson's attempt to usher Latin America into the market through an accumulation of names and dates yet without attention to merit. Degiovanni also notes that the anthologies, structured by chronology and not national histories, challenged the patriotic bent of populist regimes, notably that of Juan Perón (161–84).

plea for reading literature in terms of revolutionary promise. And the anthologies and memoirs of the boom generation consolidated the idea of a core of indispensable Latin American writers (recall especially Luis Harss and Barbara Dohlmann's *Into the Mainstream,* and the reflections about this moment published by Donoso and Fuentes). Aside from the many critiques lodged against them for their scarcely hidden nostalgia, for maintaining patriarchal privilege and exoticizing Latin bodies, for issuing magic realism as the commodity-imprimatur that announced Latin America to the world, these writers marked a dramatic turn in Hispanic studies (De la Campa; Franco, *The Decline*; Sorensen; Vidal).

The boom novels urged us to think about politics in the text and colonial history; they forced us to seek out critical strategies to understand modernization; they invited us to consider the consequences of reading against the grain. Ironically, as we began to think of the relation of writers to state, the boom writers also had us consider the question of the literary market not simply through the success of publishing houses that carried their novels, but also through the steady arrival of writers at universities coast to coast whom the North American public was pleased to engage. The superstar status of writers was soon to be followed by the superstar status of critics and university teachers, introducing a performative mode with which to stage one's scholarly work (see especially Franco's "Narrator, Author, Superstar"). Glossy publicity, rave reviews in the media, international hunger for the next bestseller—it was difficult for Spanish departments to avoid this draw, and indeed, by the close of the 1960s, market demands shaped university departments in strange, uncommon ways. Even the more conservative Hispanists among us were not inured to celebrity glitter.

And in all of this, there was Cuba. In university circles, the Cuban Revolution provoked feverish debates about the relationship between literature and politics; it focused on the role of the committed intellectual and the role of an avantgarde. It set up a new geopolitics of culture, based on global solidarity, and a transnational esthetics that spoke to race, class, and revolution propelling the need for social change. It introduced a debate about postcolonial struggle, dependency and emancipation, and the obligation of Latin American writers to exercise a voice of conscience. Nevertheless, the effects of the Cuban Revolution divided faculty of Spanish departments in left- and right-wing factions; it separated young and old. Cuba came to define a "before and after" in Hispanic studies.[5]

I remember wandering, as an undergraduate, through a bookstore in lower Manhattan—one of two or three bookshops devoted to Spanish language publications in New York in the 1960s—where, apart from the abundant copies of Clásicos Castellanos piled precariously on ladders that pushed against the peeling paint of a vastly unkempt store, a stack of magazines caught my eye for their brightly striped design. Only for the force of the covers, I bought them up and carried them home on the subway. These were the issues of Parisian-based *Mundo Nuevo,* a project that proposed the radical novelty of emergent literatures from Latin America. But it would take a while for me to understand that whatever was new in Latin America was also fraught with conflict. Not only had the politics of

[5] On the Cold War and boom politics, see Cohn.

the boom emerged, but *Mundo Nuevo,* we soon discovered, had recruited its stunning line-up of talent with the financial aid of the CIA. In the vein of an art for art's sake project, the journal supported the larger State Department objective of distracting our attentions from Cuba.

Cuba marked fissures in newly assertive Latin American programs; it severed the field in camps of left and right so that departments were often divided about which literary texts should be read in the classroom. As such, the cold war affected the widest range of Spanish departments throughout the country and, by the time the Padilla affair (1971) elicited protests from leftist intellectuals outside of Cuba, the lines within Spanish departments had already been sufficiently drawn.

Outside the purview of Spanish departments of this country but integral to their well-being, the Cold War discussions evoking Cuba triggered federal funding for Latin American studies. Through the Higher Education Act of 1965, and its Title VI provision for International Education Programs, the National Resource Center (NRC) began to support the Latin American research initiatives of faculty and students. As an example, the joint program at NYU and Columbia received the first Title VI endowment and featured Caribbean area studies as a central part of this support. Other universities followed suit.

Much harsh criticism has been launched against area studies insofar as these programs focused the government's attention on national security and control of insurgent left-wing thought, but the Latin American studies centers, it must be noted, also supplied a place on university campuses for interdisciplinary exchange. Dependency theory, from the social science mold, was extended to our analysis of culture. The centers also provoked discussion about the logic of regional borders and transnationalism, race, and insurrection. And its funding allowed an international exchange that supports us until this day.

One more note. The Cuban Revolution was more than a Cold War reminder. It opened Hispanists to a set of compelling issues: race in relation to culture, colonialism in relation to nation, emancipatory politics and identity formation in transnational focus, the reminder of solidarity as concept and promise. Of course, this had a correlative in the United States in the civil rights movement and protests against the Vietnam war, and in the Chicano activism of 1968–69 that spread to Third World strikes on campuses whereby students demanded recognition of ethnic studies programs and, pertinent to Spanish departments, the inclusion of Chicano/Latino cultures in their curriculum and agenda. It was also time for the women's movement and queer activism triggered by Stonewall, which opened a space for research and teaching that informs Spanish departments today. In sum, the late 1960s proved that the traditional center did not hold. It was time for academic programs to respond by expanding minority questions and by acknowledging a literary cultural life that extended beyond the canon. True, it took a few decades before the trinity of race, class, and gender would fully enter department curricula, and even today, the inclusion of minority presence is still an art in formation. And at Berkeley the Department of Ethnic Studies celebrates its fiftieth anniversary this year.

We have come far from the days of philology's reign over the traditional canon. Our field has since acknowledged the power of the margins, the value of intersectional debate, the case for hybridity as advantageous disruption, the dissolution

of the center that once held things in place. Nonetheless, as we went on to prove the value of minority voices and otherness as sources of vital compulsory knowledge that changed the shape of our field, we also began to face the shrinkage of the humanities as part of a nationwide crisis and now confront the anti-intellectual stance of those who would decide against full recognition of migrants and fail to see multilingualism as both art and cultural advantage. Will someone patch this up? It remains for a younger generation to figure out the next move.

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