

Latin American Studies: Literary, Cultural, and Comparative Theory

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"Latin American Studies: Literary, Cultural, and Comparative Theory"

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Abstract: In "Latin American Studies: Literary, Cultural, and Comparative Theory," Román de la Campa explores the post-1989 era of Latin American literary studies, particularly the way in which theoretical production has responded to the collapse of left-wing state projects and the growing influence of market forces in academia. De la Campa suggests that in this context it becomes even more important to study the different ways in which national and regional imaginaries continue to shape Latin American literary studies in both Latin America and the United States. He asks whether we are witnessing the onset of new paradigms better able to comprehend or articulate the field in its ever-increasing complexity or a turn toward projects that are both more hermetic in their regional or national scope of application, as well as more immanent in their capacity to absorb difference in the abstract. De la Campa contends that the shifting grounds for Latin American postmodernism are particularly illustrative of how the post-1989 era converges on Latin American literary studies. As an example, he surveys the postcolonial turn, particularly as it pertains to two differing readings of *testimonio*, one largely articulated in the United States through the work of John Beverley and subaltern post-symbolic aesthetics, the other in Chile through the work of Nelly Richard's cultural critique of the dictatorship and post-dictatorship. According to de la Campa the current state of Latin American literary and cultural studies calls for a new comparativism willing to recognize a growing field of contradictory differences among nations, regions, and scholars.

Román DE LA CAMPA

Latin American Studies: Literary, Cultural and Comparative Theory

Latin American literary studies today comprise a wide-ranging array of discourses that are barely recognizable from the perspective of traditional disciplinary frameworks. The same could be said for other areas of study, but perhaps not to the same degree. The field -- particularly as understood in the North American academy, but also in significant pockets of higher learning in Latin America -- now beats to the drum of projects always aiming to redefine the object of study. These projects are not necessarily in search of novel geographic configurations or interdisciplinary discoveries, but are moved rather by a new and perhaps unsuspected nexus between conceptual and marketing impulses. One often hears that cultural studies in the United States has evolved precisely from this questionable nexus, but the issue demands further inquiry. After all, it seems evident that a good deal of cultural studies flows from the re-articulation of literary studies, a discipline whose object of study and institutional support system must constantly absorb disciplinary offshoots in order to preserve its academic status. Needless to say, the work of post-structural theory, in its many guises and applications, continues to kindle the extraordinary reach and ambition of many of these projects, but little attention is paid to the ways in which concurrent marketing pressures are changing the place of humanist intellectuals in research universities, and are perhaps even changing theory itself (an important register of these symptoms, in Spanish, for instance, can be found in the two-volume anthology *Cultura y tercer mundo*, edited by Beatriz González Stephan.)

Possibly the most acute example of such disciplinary shifting pertains to Latin American postmodernity, a fertile matrix of theoretical and applied work that has been defined in many different and disparate ways during the past few decades. Boom, post-boom, neo-Baroque, magic realism, testimonio, feminist writing, mourning theory, and various other discourses have claimed postmodernity at some point or another, each doing so by deploying their own combinations of epistemic indeterminacy, unremitting de-signification and ludic textuality, a nimble archive of theoretical metaphors especially able to adjust to current ebbs and flows. Perhaps the greatest challenge to this paradigm in Latin America surfaced after 1989, following the near absolute demise of left-wing state projects and the subsequent onset of neoliberal order throughout the continent. Literary study, armed with the ambitious arsenal of semiosis, deconstruction and meta-narrative critiques that Roland Barthes, Paul de Man and Michele Foucault had theorized far beyond the realm of literature, suddenly found itself caught in a discursive vacuum it had never quite imagined.

The postcolonial turn offers an even more specific example of academic realignment(see, for example, one of the few published scholarly debates on the topic in *Latin American Research Review* (1993), as well as my discussion of the problems and possibilities of postcolonial studies in my essay "Latinoamérica y sus nuevos cartógrafos: Discurso poscolonial, diásporas intelectuales y miradas fronterizas." Within Latin Americanism the postcolonial turn began as a radical questioning of the postmodern apparatus constructed around a few boom -- generally all male -- writers from a predictable set of nations whose indigenous past was either minimally regarded or totally repressed. A postcolonial understanding of Latin America required much more attention to coloniality as an ongoing logic that lingered past the onset of modernist aesthetics and developmental schemata in the social sciences. Modern Latin America thus came into question through "negative alterity," a critique imbued by theoretical notions of "impossibility" and "ungovernability" which are not meant to articulate new social or political programs but rather to capture the course of coloniality as a persistent, long-lasting logic of discourse production. This approach included, but was obviously not limited to, literature. It understood all too well that writing, particularly in Latin America, could hardly sustain neat generic distinctions.

Contemporary theory has responded to many historical and commercial turns in rather intricate ways during the past decade and a half. We have all learned the lesson that there is theory in every text, but perhaps we should also pay greater attention to the literary lineaments of theory, that is, the storylines, drama, and lyrical force attendant to its own evolvment. One of these

narrative strands, a rather productive one, pertains to testimonio literature. Awareness of this Latin American genre begins in the 1960s with texts such as *Autobiography of a Runaway Slave* by Miguel Barnet and steadily increases throughout the 1970s and 1980, reaching worldwide attention after the publication of *I, Rigoberta Menchú* in 1984. These texts were first read as a sign of promise, if not within the literary canon represented by the boom novel, then as an articulation of narrative possibilities largely stemming from the idea of socialist alternatives to modern state formation. Now the same texts stand as signs of a failed history that spells a theoretical impossibility, both in literature as well as in state formation.

Reading testimonio as a counter-postmodern genre was first advanced by scholars within US Latin Americanism who ultimately turned to subaltern studies, a critical framework closer to the postcolonial work of Ranajit Guha than to postmodernism proper. Working from the suppositions of John Beverley, for example, Latin American testimonio is said to offer a model -- perhaps even an axis -- of postmodern anti-literature, understood as a post-humanist corpus capable of opening a new left-wing stance on postmodernity through a complex fusion of critical and theoretical strategies (although many scholars wrote about testimonio during the 1970s and '80s, the ongoing evolution of the subaltern perspective that interests me begins with the work of John Beverley in the early 1990s -- particularly encapsulated in *Literature and Politics in the Central American Revolution*, co-written with Marc Zimmerman -- and it later evolves into a subaltern critique of the state, within which there are many different, at times even opposing, perspectives). These include the notion that deconstruction in the 1990s could not help but focus on the relationship between modern Latin American state formation and modernist aesthetics, that the two worked in tandem to formulate a New World Creole utopia bound to failure or defeat and that subalternity confers a theoretical model of discursive resistance in the face of that colonial/modern tradition or writing.

More importantly, it should be highlighted that this assessment of testimonio emerges after the stiff reversal of the Central American revolution, a political phenomenon that for the most part had given rise to various jingoistic articulations of this very same genre. A subaltern reading consequently demands a series of valuations in the space of postmodern Latin American studies. They include, at least initially, isolating testimonio from the immediacy of revolutionary defeat and framing it as the narrative logic of Latin American subalternity. The intriguing possibilities for national revolutionary movements claimed for testimonio by Beverley and Zimmerman in *Literature and Politics in the Central American Revolution* are now left behind. Ultimately, subaltern aesthetics moved beyond testimonio to invoke a re-reading of all modern Latin American literature in terms of the insights imbued by negative alterity. Such readings embarked on an exploration through the anti-aesthetic of impossibility, in this case that of modern state projects, its literature and culture, regardless of whether they emerged through coups, electoral regimes, or revolutions (a related important essay in this context would be "On Zapatismo: Reflections of the Folkloric and the Impossible in a Subaltern Insurrection," by José Rabassa).

The deeper literary issues pertaining to the subaltern reading of testimonio bear closer attention, given that the subaltern approach tends to negate and reaffirm the importance of literature at the same time. That is to say, subaltern studies aims to problematize official literature (particularly the boom period, but by extension the entire modern tradition) thereby consigning testimonio to a "postliterary" form. The tacit literary pacts between authors and editors that generated so many early debates concerning the genre's avowed adherence to strict realism are now readily acknowledged, even if the emphasis remains on the way these texts articulate the repressed indigenous historicity forgotten or ignored by the more self-referential postmodernity of the boom. A counter position has been articulated by Roberto González Echevarría who argues, for example, that testimonio amounts to a step backward in comparison to the boom as far as Latin American literary development is concerned. He sees its return to a realist domain as closer to earlier literary moments, such as the *novela de la tierra* from the 1940s, but finds testimonio potentially more naïve (221). It seems pertinent to note that the new emphasis of the subalternist position aims to transfer the weight of Latin American textuality from a literary to a culturalist matrix, say from Gabriel García Márquez to Rigoberta Menchú. As such, it appears to respond (though not exclusively so) to many debates over the use of postmodern and multicultural

curricula in the United States (a nation-state whose modernity is hardly in question) even if it must also continuously grapple with the historical negation of its own indigenous history and the growing presence of cultural, racial and ethnic minorities.

It should surprise no one to find that scholars in Latin America understand postmodernity, testimonio and subalternity in radically different ways, even if the pertinence of these critical frameworks seems just as crucial there as it is here in the United States. One major reason for this may be that academic postmodernity in Latin America has not been mainly articulated by literary scholars, nor has multiculturalism been tailored by a global marketing interest caught within the limits of an American ideal solely derived from European provenance. This is not to say that concepts such as "mestizaje" and "transculturation" have not lent themselves to the creation of racist myths promulgated by privileged Creoles in Latin America, but rather to suggest that a simultaneous critique of the discourses of the "melting pot" and the "construction of whiteness" found in the United States seldom comes into play as we deconstruct the links between modern aesthetics and state formation in the Americas as a whole. European and North American modernities, perhaps due to the relative strength of their institutions, seem more capable of resisting theoretical shortcuts between literary studies and state formation (for a broader exploration of this problematic link see my essay "Split States and Global Imaginaries").

It seems relevant to note that African-American scholarship provides many insights for a comparative critique of racial imaginaries in the Americas, even though it is seldom registered in contemporary Latin Americanism as it is practiced both in the United States as well as Latin America. It is also important to recognize that recent subaltern, postcolonial, and testimonio scholarship actively engages in yet another crucial turn on Latin American Studies. I am thinking here of US Latino cultural forms -- literature, film, music, and gender critique, with their attendant ethnic and diasporic thematics -- most of which are rejected or resisted in Latin America, particularly in literary circles. For many scholars there, and some here, the inclusion of Latino mapping constitutes a distortion, if not a threat, to Latin Americanism, both in terms of literary history and disciplinary markets. Needless to say, theory should question these positions. It certainly cannot advance with simple here vs. there, autochthonous vs. foreign binaries, but difference will not be served either if we fail to account for the differing sites of production, consumption, and legitimation that claim to define what constitutes Latin America.

Despite the need for comparative frameworks for Latin Americanist specialists who are both theoretically and historically informed, such approaches seem lacking. It is not difficult to find imaginative books arguing for Latin American postmodernity based on Argentinean or Cuban literature, for example, but few study the phenomenon transnationally or compare postmodernity in two nations with equal rigor. One-nation, or one-region specialists, by and large, continue to drive Latin Americanist mapping. If there is a common theme in many of the new approaches discussed thus far, perhaps it can be found in their multifarious -- at times even heretical -- attempts to accommodate deconstructive theory. Needless to say, the sense of closure and frustration that came upon utopian thinking after 1989 obviously had an impact on new Latin Americanism, but the pre-eminence of post-structural theory in the humanities, established prior to 1989 -- particularly in literary studies -- also demanded more attention and some readjustment. The general critique of literature as a discipline that ensued may have been aimed less at literature than at widening the reach of deconstructive insights initially confined to the literary boom and postmodernism in its strict artistic sense. Could that theoretical framework address the everyday world, most specifically the alterity of those forgotten by the modern Latin American state at a time devoid of national emancipation narratives? Was it possible to speak in the name of the subaltern while declaring an exhaustion of -- if not an end to -- the possibilities of the states in which the subaltern lived? How would the call for a post-national theory of Latin America be met by subjects who actually live there and are still harboring hopes for national reconstruction?

The storyline I have tried to draw thus far -- limited no doubt by its exclusions and oversights, as all stories tend to be -- clearly outlines a new Latin Americanism whose ways of articulating the area's literary and cultural referents must now respond to increasingly transnational dimensions. These have been deeply felt in North American academia (the U.S. and Canada, although in

different ways) not only through testimonio and the Latino diaspora, but also in the considerable, if not extraordinary, growth of feminist approaches to the field. In Latin America, the unraveling or splitting of modern states has become the norm rather than the exception. Many different types of crisis have enveloped the area -- in Chiapas, Colombia, and Argentina, for example -- not to speak of what it means for more than ten Latin American nations to have permanent communities of considerable size residing in the United States, whose remittances to their countries of origin constitute a leading line item in their former nations' respective economies. Latin American texts, literary and otherwise, evidence an array of postnational entanglements that demand our critical attention and that call for new ways of reading, theorizing and representing the region as an object of study.

These concerns have increasingly caught the attention of new specialists. A recent anthology of critical essays on testimonio entitled *The Real Thing*, edited by Georg Gugelberger, attempts, for example, to articulate a more complex understanding of Latin American literary post-modernity. It also provides an imaginative register of how the practice of Latin Americanism can intervene in curricular debates within the United States. One should note, however, that in spite of the theoretical reach of many of the essays contained in this volume, few venture into the comparative terrain of cultural differences within Latin America, or how such knowledge would affect theoretical models largely framed in the United States. The notion of "post-humanist" literature, together with the subaltern remapping that it often encompasses, seems to beg for a specific awareness of how it applies to the widely different cultures that pertain to the object of study. Without that level of specificity and without the onus of a comparative optic, Latin America easily folds into a synchronized global domain in which negative alterity becomes readily applicable to all nations and regions from a distance, perhaps signaling an unwitting return of the universalizing principle traditionally associated with modern aesthetics.

In their aforementioned book on the literary politics of the Central American revolutionary movements during the 1980s, Beverley and Zimmerman observed that the poetry of Rubén Darío, a turn-of-the-nineteenth-century poet of refined, if not aristocratic tastes, took on a completely new meaning for the peasants involved in the Nicaraguan insurgency. Following the logic of these uncertain allegorical destinies, one might be tempted to question any attempt to consign the symbolic value of writers like Gabriel García Márquez to the dustbin of modern, failed, Creole Latin American discourses. Indeed, one could surmise that such a wide-sweeping gesture might inadvertently engender its own subaltern object -- the existing masses of mestizos and Creoles in Latin America whose identity constitutes an ongoing cultural and political reality. Literature, historically understood as a distinct artistic domain within culture, issues an inextinguishable strata of aesthetic effects that give meaning and specificity to cultures, and these aesthetic effects can surface in multiple as well as unexpected combinations and contradictions. Declaring an end to this symbolic order -- as with calls recording the end of ideology or history -- may imply another globalizing symptom, itself filled with symbolic potential.

If modernity equated state formation with national literature, postmodernity seems to move toward equating the postnational with postliterature, perhaps privileging the globalizing tendencies of states able to absorb -- and often promote -- epistemic crises from a position of relative stability seldom found in regions like Latin America. That difference may be one way to understand the lingering, and perhaps untheorized, distinctions between First and Third World provided that we recognize the disappearance of the Second World and that we realize the changing and differential elements within nations belonging to either category. An unsuspected example of such postnational thinking could well be hidden behind Harold Bloom's recent call for a new "Western" literary canon, a global literary model in which English -- together with the American institutional apparatus of literary criticism and research universities -- would function as the only exchange currency capable of reconstituting literary values after the onslaught of cultural studies he finds so troubling in the United States. Needless to say, the relationship between literature and the nation-state in regions with compromised modernities comes up here once again by implication, albeit from a canonical aesthetic, rather than as a sign of negative alterity. Indeed the mapping

suggested by Bloom may also require a closer reading of the possibilities of the role of literature and criticism during global re-ordering, particularly if written in a language other than English.

Calls for a new literary order of sorts, no doubt an interesting and timely symptom, would therefore require many clarifications and distinctions. One example would be the literature of the Argentine master Jorge Luis Borges, for many a model of the twenty-first century post-symbolic imaginary. There is no doubt that his short stories presented the deepest challenge to literary conventions held in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many of which favored surrendering the uniqueness of individual texts to the tedium of literary history. It is also true, however, that by the end of the twentieth century his oeuvre took on a new symbolic meaning. Indeed, it became a primary point of reference for postmodern official aesthetics, a restoration of sorts within literary values that goes beyond the Western to perhaps a global appreciation. Borges's mastery may well lie precisely in having taken literature to an aesthetic plane that knows, or values, only how to probe its own making, a state of immanence eminently capable of renewing its own metaphysics (for instance, Alberto Moreiras makes an extensive argument for the centrality of Borges within post-symbolic theory in "Pastiche, Identity and Allegory of Allegory").

It seems pertinent at this point to ask whether an undifferentiated critique of modern meta-narratives has become a constitutive element of Latin Americanist deconstructive work as a whole. Is it only a symptom of the disillusionment that came about after the demise of revolutionary projects in Latin America? Or, is there no other available critique of the relationship between literature, culture, and the diverse state formations in Latin America at this particular moment in history? As I understand it, these questions obviously do not have singular answers, but they might well profit from a more comparative framework than the one currently prevailing in Latin American literary and cultural studies. By way of an example, it might be useful to explore a widely different reading of testimonio derived from analogous theoretical presuppositions yet articulated from a specific Latin American site. I will therefore refer to Nelly Richard's critique formulated from the perspective of the post-military dictatorship Chilean cultural scene. Her most elaborate critique of this issue can be found in "Bordes, diseminación, postmodernismo: Una metáfora latinoamericana de fin de siglo").

Richard has specifically questioned the attempt to privilege testimonio as a model of postmodern Latin American literature, which in her view corresponds to a prevailing logic of relegating Latin American texts to a use-value postmodernism imposed by metropolitan centers (read US) of academic power. Her critique seems to invoke a bit of the old center-periphery debate, but I believe that is not her purpose. Richard's main concern, rather, is to explore the contradictions and hierarchies within postmodernism, particularly the obvious pull of institutional frameworks whose influential positioning cannot help but function as centers of knowledge production even if they claim a theoretical commitment to de-centering. Richard's influential work can be followed from the late 1980s with *La estratificación de los márgenes*, through the early 1990s with *La insubordinación de los signos*, to her more recent *Residuos y metáforas*. Together these books comprise one of the most incisive contemporary Latin American cultural critiques encompassing feminism, literature, visual arts, and Chilean post-dictatorship national imaginary. Yet, the grounds of Richard's mapping of testimonio as metropolitan use-value seems to forgo an entire industry of Latin American postmodernism based on the boom novel. This was, and continues to be in many respects, a much more influential and perhaps even more hegemonic paradigm; indeed, it could be argued that the subaltern proposal, at least in its initial stages, was a direct response to it.

As I have argued here, the cultural wars in the American (US) academy had an obvious impact on the testimonio theory spearheaded by John Beverley, but so did the post-revolutionary context of indigenous movements in Central America, and by extension, in other areas, particularly after NAFTA in 1990 and after the Chiapas rebellion in 1994. This other side of the story, one would think, pertains to Latin America in the deepest sense, even if Richard's otherwise acute critique leaves it unmentioned. We are all prone to over-using Benedict Anderson's metaphor of imagined communities to explain nationalism, but I believe it is just as applicable to understanding objects of study such as Latin Americanism. One could argue, for instance, that scholars in Latin America

are necessarily bound to imagine Latin Americanism from the pull of their respective national communities. But perhaps the same could be said for those working in the United States, in spite of the protestations from many who believe themselves to be above such grounding. The "national" in the United States seems more diffuse -- perhaps due to the presence of so many diasporic Latin Americans working the field from their own national frameworks. Those working in the United States are more prone to conceive of their object of study as a transnational community of discourses able to absorb difference through theoretical paradigms. But, as Richard suggests, all contexts have their internal forms and needs, even if her understanding of the United States as a "metropolitan" center fails to account for her own localized -- but also metropolitan -- perspective of Latin America.

Richard's work may not directly address postcolonial and subaltern mapping for Latin America's indigenous texts and cultures, nor the wide-ranging impact of Latin American diasporas in the United States, yet I would argue that her Chilean-based critique has broad implications for Latin American and perhaps even American studies. That relevance, it seems to me, comes from the specific deployment of "metropolitan" theory -- deconstruction and negative alterity, for example -- with a distinctly local Latin American perspective. Her work aims to unhinge the metaphors that sustained Chilean national culture during the dictatorship and post-dictatorship period from their discursive foundations, be they military, economic, political, or, most importantly, academic, given the close relationship between disciplinary discourses and the pursuit of epistemic power (for instance, in addition to Richard's books, for a critique of knowledge and academic power, see her essay "Signos culturales y mediaciones académicas"). All of this gathers force due to its capacity to theorize the local in imaginative and often radical ways, perhaps because Richard's discourse does not issue directly from academia, but rather from a cosmopolitan cluster of scholars, writers, visual and performative artists to which she belongs. Their work, in that sense, suggests a different understanding of cultural studies, something closer to cultural critique, which involves theory but which retains the value of cultural and artistic forms, rather than operating as a conflation of the two or a reduction of art to a culturalist discourse at times indistinguishable from the logic of mass culture.

Another important aspect of Richard's critique is its refusal to harbor a nostalgic look at the Allende period or any earlier moment of Chile's national formation, even if her focal point remains the Pinochet regime and most particularly, its aftermath. Richard's deconstructive approach to the nation comes into play in her assessment of Latin American testimonio, as evidenced in her analysis of *El padre mío* by Damiela Eltit, a Chilean novelist closely connected to Richard's circle of artists and critics in Santiago de Chile. In Eltit's text, Richard finds a counter-example to John Beverley's model of subaltern testimonio inspired in Rigoberta Menchú's life story. Eltit's protagonist is a deranged, apparently incomprehensible homeless man, whose life story hardly seems to inspire anything but nausea and disgust. But his insanity somehow provides a very clear picture of national unraveling, if not decomposition. His speech acts are filled with proper political names, key historical periods, and well-known public figures, but they are all mingled, precisely because his aphasia prevents him from placing them in their "proper" order. Moreover, he cannot even speak about anything else in any other way, no matter how trivial the circumstance. Chilean history and grammar come before our eyes in the words of this loathsome paternal figure as a most disturbing, yet articulate critique, one eventually offering a different understanding of subalternity not bound to specific subjects or specific claims to redress but, rather, to the differential possibilities of theoretical discourse itself.

The contrast with the traditional subaltern hero could not be clearer, but Eltit also seeks important distinctions in terms of form. The customary preface, in which the role of recorder, transcriber, and compiler of the Other's story is revealed, also gets a complicated, if not disturbing treatment in *El padre mío*. Eltit claims a different ground between herself as editor and her informant. She has lost contact with her informer, is not sure she could find him again, does not claim to understand him, and at some point leaves room to wonder whether this is a total work of fiction. Her introduction, a highly stylized theoretical piece prefacing *El padre mío*'s "own discourse" tips its hat a bit when it suggests that the only way of construing her protagonist's story

as an image of contemporary Chile would be if it were seen as a negative. Needless to say, flirting with the possibility of total fiction may indeed provide the ultimate deconstruction of testimonio's claim to realist representation, particularly if one understands it as a canonical expression in the United States, which, as I have argued, leaves room for discussion. On the other hand, Eltit's counter-testimonio, transgressive though it seems, could also be read as a return to a symbolic form of estrangement well established in contemporary literary history, even in such Latin American writers as Severo Sarduy, whose work has also explored the limits of linguistic saturation and national de-signification since the 1970s, particularly in the dramatic context of dictatorship regimes.

Eltit's text raises perhaps an even more important question: How does one navigate such contrastive readings of testimonio as the two I have tried to present in this essay? We have here two deeply distinct, if not opposing readings of postmodernity, subalternity, and the possibilities of literature at this moment of the breakdown of Latin American nation-states. One of these approaches is anchored in the US academy, the other in Chilean cultural praxis, and both are, in their own way, imbued by the theoretical archive of negative alterity. How does the Latin American scholar -- here, there, everywhere -- approach the implicit disconnect between these and other valuable projects? It could be said that in spite of the growing number of theoretical monographs, critical anthologies and symposia, these differences are hardly ever recognized as important discrepancies or submitted to scholarly dialogue. Readers are often left in the vacuum, or passively consume a field in which difference is absorbed immanently, or find themselves adhering to paradigms caught in a logic of the continuous promotion of their own symbolic capital.

As I understand it, Latin American literary and cultural studies would be well served by conceiving of more comparative frameworks able to approach the differential application of literary studies, postmodernity, feminism and cultural studies as well as the growing disconnect between the humanities and social sciences. The question of difference seems paramount here. Latin American Studies, particularly after the period in which area studies became deeply entrenched during the Cold War, requires a mapping of multiple contradictory textual and cultural practices difficult to encompass from national or regional paradigms, even those expansive enough to establish themselves as influential centers of epistemic value. Postmodernity in Latin America may well require a deeper understanding of the relationship between literatures and cultures in the twenty-first century, without conflating the two, a problematic that will not likely release scholars from the need to simultaneously study both I, Rigoberta Menchú and *El padre mío* in their contradictory richness.

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