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Spanish American and Brazilian Literature in Inter-American Perspective: The Comparative Approach

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Thematic Issue *Comparative Cultural Studies and Latin America*
Edited by Sophia A. McClennen and Earl E. Fitz
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Abstract: In his paper, "Spanish American and Brazilian Literature in Inter-American Perspective: The Comparative Approach," Earl E. Fitz argues that although Latin American literature has gained international acceptance and acclaim steadily since the 1960s, it is still underrepresented in the primary research journals of comparative literature. This situation is both troubling and puzzling: troubling because Latin American literature has much to contribute to discussions of world literature and puzzling because only the most narrow and nationalistic of reactionaries would deny that Latin American literature has produced some of our most beautiful and powerful works of literary art. By any criteria, Latin American literature is one of the world's most important area literatures, one that deserves a more central place in the scholarly deliberation of the discipline's leading journals. Fitz offers three suggestions for the future of comparative studies of Latin America. First, Latin Americanists should attempt to include the exceedingly rich cultural production of Brazil in critical studies, thereby comparing texts written in more than one language. Second, Latin Americanists should learn to think more in terms of "inter-American" literature, the study (inherently comparative in nature) of the literatures and cultures of North, Central, and South America. Third, Latin Americanists should provide studies of Spanish American literature and culture that stress the crucial differences that exist between the various cultures of Spanish America.

Earl E. FITZ

Brazilian and Spanish American Literature in an Inter-American Perspective: The Comparative Approach

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, the place of Latin American literature within the discipline of comparative literature is both exciting and perplexing. On the one hand (as we all know), Latin American literature has a great deal to offer comparative literature; on the other hand, as statistics compiled recently by Sophia A. McClennen clearly show, Latin American literature is egregiously underrepresented in comparative literature journals worldwide (see McClennen at <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol4/iss2/8/>). Why is this so, especially since, as Roberto González Echevarría and others have argued, Latin American literature has the potential to reinvigorate and even revolutionize the study of comparative literature (see González Echevarría at <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol4/iss2/7/> see also Pratt 63; Greene, "Generation" 152-53)? In answering this question, two issues must, I believe, be considered: first, there still is, I fear, a lingering bias, in some quarters, against the literary value of literature written in Spanish and Portuguese, though I also believe that this is fast waning; second, there sometimes exists among us, the Latin Americanists, an imperfect understanding of how, vis-à-vis the expectations of its professional journals, comparative literature tends to define itself, both as a discipline and in terms of the number of languages typically made use of in a critical study.

Historically, comparative literature has defined itself as the study of literature from an international perspective. Methodologically, this has meant that true comparative studies have to involve texts written in more than one language, this principle having firmly established itself (even in an age of interdisciplinary studies) as a sine qua non of the discipline. Thus, a study examining, say, the poetry of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and that of Góngora would, by the editors of most comparative literature journals, not be judged to be sufficiently "comparative," in the current professional sense of the term to be included in one of them. Even though writers from two different countries were involved, and even though the working methodology might well involve comparisons of similarities and differences, the editors would likely conclude that the authors under consideration are still working in the same language and that the essay therefore would be more appropriate for a journal dealing with issues germane to Hispanic literature. In my several years as an associate editor for Comparative Literature Studies (a journal that, I am delighted to say, has been notably receptive to Latin American literature), this was a rationale often employed in evaluating manuscripts, and, given the way comparative literature continues to define itself as a distinctive academic discipline, I think it is an appropriate editorial policy, especially in certain cases. In considering the future of comparative literature programs across the nation, one can see, for example, that there is a very distinct disciplinary value to requiring comparison of works written in different languages.

Related to this policy tangentially, the "crisis" facing comparative literature today (to invoke similar concerns voiced by René Wellek back in 1958), however, is that, as a discipline, it is in danger of allowing itself to elevate certain languages and literatures to canonical (and therefore privileged) status and, in so doing, relegate others to lesser, or "marginal," status. This creeping and increasingly sclerotic hierarchism (which, if allowed to stand, is tantamount to sounding the death knell for comparative literature; for a brief discussion of this problem, see "The Bernheimer Report" 42) constitutes the discipline's real danger, and it may fairly be said that Latin American literature, long derided as "inferior," "secondary," or "derivative" by many traditionalists, offers it a chance for revivification, for regaining its original sense of mission, of relevance, and of egalitarianism, the very qualities that have long made it such an admired and important form of literary study (see also papers on this in Totosy de Zepetnek, ed. Histories and Concepts of Comparative Literature, a thematic issue of CLCWeb, at <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol2/iss4/>).

Our problem, as Latin Americanists, is how to react to this situation, how to shape our essays so that they are more suitable for publication in comparative journals. In saying this, however, I

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do not wish to give the impression that I in any way advocate that, as Latin Americanists, we should "pull our punches," that we should feel obliged to prostrate ourselves in the face of the editorial practices of journals that we believe have discriminated against us in the past. If we wish to gain access to even the most conservative journals of the discipline, we must learn to present our authors and texts not as unworthy interlopers begging for admission into the "elitist" citadel but as great artists and enduring works of art, worthy in every respect of comparison with any others and, indeed, of serving sometimes as the model, or standard, against which these other, perhaps better known works should themselves be measured. We must dispense with the outmoded and self-defeating notion that, as Latin Americanists, we are somehow second class citizens of world literature, that there is "nothing new to invent, no new books to write," and that our fate is "always to repeat what had already been done better in Europe or the United States" (Monegal, The Borzoi Anthology, vol. II, xiii). We must begin to assert ourselves, to argue with conviction that, at the present time, we are the ones to change the norms and parameters of Comparative Literature in the twenty-first century. Indeed, as Roland Greene has written, comparative literature is a discipline long defined by change, by being a field "permanently under construction, and that ... this is how the Auerbachs and Spitzers would have wanted it" ("Reticence" 297). Long accustomed to being on the outside looking in, Latin Americanists are now the straw that stirs the drink (as Reggie Jackson once described himself), the catalysts for disciplinary renovation and growth. We must feel free to insist, for example, in our classes and in our scholarly work that the significance of Hélène Cixous and her theoretical apparatus should be considered only after a thorough reading of Clarice Lispector, and not vice versa, and that our understanding of the Renaissance epic is not complete until we have carefully read Alonso de Ercilla y Zúñiga's La araucana and worked it into discussions of the better known exemplars of this venerable form. We must no longer be timid about arguing that Brazilian concretist poetry is as energetic and sophisticated as can be found anywhere in the world or that a new genre, which we might wish to term the "Inter-American Novel", is fast arising out of recent work by such contemporary Latin American masters as Carlos Fuentes (La frontera de cristal), Isabel Allende (El plan infinito and Hija de la fortuna), and Silviano Santiago (Stella Manhattan). In short, we, as advocates of Latin American literature, must drop our traditionally mendicant posture and (politely but firmly) demand recognition as a vital part of the larger processes of globalization, democratization, and decolonization that, as Mary Louise Pratt has noted, are "transforming the way literature and culture are conceived and studied in the academy" (Pratt 59). As we can see, then, there are many things we can do to increase our representation in comparative publications (and in ways that stress the originality and vitality of our authors and texts), but I would like to call attention to three in particular.

First, and perhaps most important of all, is that, as Latin Americanists, we should all learn Portuguese so that the richness and diversity of Brazilian literature is open and available to us. This, of course, is not easy to do for those of us who are working in full-time positions, nor can it be done quickly. Nevertheless, it is worth doing, for to do so immediately gives us that all important second language that comparative literature journals so often require. More importantly, it does so without this second language having to be either English, French, or German, the languages that some academic conservatives still mistakenly regard as somehow "defining" the field of comparative literature, a discipline better understood as an issue of methodology, of how we seek to study the world's many languages and literatures, rather than as a pantheon of certain texts written in certain languages. Comparative studies involving Spanish American and Brazilian literature are "naturals" in terms of their legitimacy and in terms of their utility to us, and, although still not common, they unquestionably represent exciting new research opportunities. And because we, as Latin Americanists, understand quite clearly that they are essential to the healthy growth and development of comparative literature as a discipline, we should regard it as our duty to integrate Brazilian and Spanish American literature into it and to do so from a perspective not of inferiority but of strength. For those scholars who work on the Caribbean, French, or Dutch might be a more useful second language than Portuguese, but, in most cases, knowledge of Portuguese and Brazilian literature enriches our potential as comparatists.

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A relatively early model of this type of study is Samuel Putnam's pioneering 1948 effort, Marvelous Journey: A Survey of Four Centuries of Brazilian Writing, which undertakes a comparison of Brazilian literature with that of the United States and which, in so doing, makes possible a number of later studies engaged in the same sort of inter-American work (see, for example, Wasserman and Cohn). Working in a similar mode are Stephanie Merrim's Logos and the Word: The Novel of Language and Linguistic Motivation in Grande Sertão: Veredas and Tres tristes tigres (1983), and Judith Payne and Earl Fitz's Ambiguity and Gender in the New Novel of Brazil and Spanish America: A Comparative Assessment (1993). In these latter cases, the Spanish American and Brazilian traditions are not discussed separately, as if they existed in isolation from each other (this being the old paradigm that dates back as far as 1942 and Torres-Ríoseco's groundbreaking The Epic of Latin American Literature, a work which, although it does deal with Brazilian literature, does so in only one chapter, not making any effort to integrate it into the corpus of Spanish American literature), but woven together into a single, comparative argument.

In our book, Judith Payne and I sought to use the advent of Latin American literature's "new narrative" in the 1960s to examine not just how it manifested itself in the works of such Spanish American masters as Borges, Rulfo, García Márquez, and Fuentes but also how the defining concepts behind this "new narrative" related to the production of Brazilian narrative during this same period. Our basic argument, which was based on a careful comparative consideration of key narrative works from both Brazil and Spanish America, was that although the Brazilian narrative tradition was much less known outside of Brazil, and although the term "new narrative" rarely appeared in Brazilian scholarship relating to this question, the Brazilian novel was, until the late 1970s, considerably more radical, in terms of style, structuring, and thematics, than its better known Spanish American cousin. Specifically, we found that if one includes Brazil in the mix, a "new narrative" first appears in Latin America in Brazil in 1880/81, with the publication of Machado de Assis's revolutionary novel, As Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas, and that, in the course of its development in Brazil, this Brazilian "new narrative" would come to be characterized by two qualities, both of which differentiate it quite distinctly from the Spanish American "nueva narrativa:" its continuous and deliberate cultivation of ambiguity (this being a function of its concern with language as a very basic and inescapable problem of both ontology and epistemology and not merely as a mechanism by which reality can be described or represented) and, especially after 1944 and the publication of Clarice Lispector's first novel, Perto do Coração Selvagem, its steady cultivation of women, both as writers (Lispector, for example, or Nélida Piñon) and as strong willed, sexually charged, and socially iconoclastic characters. In terms of Latin American literary history, then, we can see that the year 1944, which, of course, also marks the appearance of Borges's world renowned -- but radically different -- Ficciones, is a very decisive moment; although the "nova narrativa" in Brazil had begun some sixty years earlier (with Machado, whom González Echevarría judges to be "the premier nineteenth-century Latin American writer and one of the best of all time anywhere" [The Oxford Book of Latin American Short Stories 95]), Lispector's extraordinary novel has as much influence on the way narrative would be written afterwards in Brazil as the Borges Ficciones had on the future of Spanish American narrative (see Fitz, 1997; 1998). Thus, in what amounts to a revised sense of the genre's historical development, we can see that not only does the "new narrative" really begin in Brazil with Machado de Assis, it begins even then (first as very singular characters, then as authors) to make space for the participation of women.

Another example of this new, contrastive type of Latin American scholarship, and one that applies the comparative approach to the case of women in modern Latin American literature, is Entre Resistir e Identificar-se, a collection of essays organized by Peggy Sharpe and published in 1997. Stemming from a conference held in March 1996 at the University of Illinois, these studies, including several by such prominent Brazilian authors as Lygia Fagundes Telles, Nélida Piñon, Helena Parente Cunha, and Lya Luft, examine the numerous contributions that Brazilian women writers are making within the larger contexts of Latin America and the world. A recurring issue in the conference papers and in the discussions that ensued was how the work of Brazil's women writers differs from that being done by Spanish American women, how it compares and contrasts

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to that tradition. Although some of the pieces tend to focus more on issues of Brazilian culture and history, the overall thrust of the "encontro/meeting" and of the collection was therefore to identify and define Brazil's very powerful tradition of women's writing and to bring it to the critical attention of larger audiences worldwide. Perhaps the greatest lesson learned from the conference was that comparative approaches to Latin American women's writing constitute a new and growing field that offers tremendous opportunities for those linguistically and culturally prepared to perform the close textual analysis that is required.

Finally, mention must also be made of the 1998 thematic issue, O Brasil, a América Hispânica, e o Caribe: Abordagens Comparativas of the journal Revista Iberoamericana, devoted to comparative approaches to the literatures of Brazil and Spanish America (see Costigan and Bernucci). This important volume, edited by Lúcia Helena Costigan and Leopoldo M. Bernucci, was divided into five sections: "Agendas, Ciclos e Tendências da Literatura e da Crítica/Agendas, Cycles, and Tendencies of Literature and Criticism;" "Das Relações Culturais e Literárias na América do Sul/Of Cultural and Literary Relations in South America;" "O Brasil em Diálogo com o Caribe e o México/Brazil in Dialogue with the Caribbean and Mexico;" "O 'Entre-Lugar' da Voz e da Escritura Feminina/The 'In-Between' Place of Voice and of Female Writing;" and "Resenhas/Reviews." The titles of some of the essays give a good idea of the type of work that is being done in this fast evolving and important area: "Global ou local?: O tropicalismo brasileiro e a presença da cultura de massa na narrativa da América Hispânica e do Caribe/Global or Local?: Brazilian Tropicalism and the Presence of Mass Culture in the Narrative of Spanish America and the Caribbean," by Lídia Santos; "Machado, Borges e Clarice: A evolução da nova narrativa latinoamericana/Machado, Borges, and Clarice: The Evolution of the Latin American New Narrative," by Earl Fitz; "A lua e o domador: símbolos literários e divisões sociais na poesia nacionalista de Cassiano Ricardo e Leopoldo Marechal/The Moon and the Tamer: Literary Symbols and Social Divisions in the Nationalist Poetry of Cassiano Ricardo and Leopoldo Marechal," by Luiza Franco Moreira; "América Latina reinventada: Octavio Paz e Haroldo de Campos/Latin America Reinvented: Octavio Paz and Haroldo de Campos," by Maria Esther Maciel; and "La subjetividad femenina en la metaficción feminista latinoamericana/Feminine Subjectivity in Feminist Latin American Metafiction," by Laura Beard. The importance of this entire project is aptly underscored by the closing words of the editors: "The assembling of the essays published here, more than a simple editorial effort, constitutes one step more in the trek that we began some time ago, and that has taken a certain direction, in the sense of bringing together the two sides of the Continent. We continue, then, with this journey, whose primary goal is the reduction of the great distance that still separates the Brazilians from the other Latin American peoples. May the works included here serve as a point of departure for the new paths made into the field of Latin (and inter) American comparatism. Let us be comparatists! / A reunião dos ensaios ora publicados, antes que um simple esforço editorial, constitui um passo a mais na caminhada que iniciamos há algum tempo, e que tem tomado uma direção segura, no sentido de aproximar os dois lados do Continente. Continuamos, por tanto, nesse percurso cuja meta principal é a diminuição da grande distância que ainda separa os brasileiros dos demais povos latino-americanos. Que os trabalhos aqui incluídos sirvam como ponto de partida para novas veredas no campo do comparatismo latino-(e inter)americano. Sejamos comparatistas!" (12).

But if finding the time to become fluent in Portuguese is not really possible (and for many of us it simply isn't), then I would suggest that we try to use it as a reading language, as a language that most of us can, with the aid of a good dictionary, make use of at least to the extent that we could begin to work it into our studies. Moreover, I would not be averse to reading works of Brazilian literature in English translation first and then going back to the original for more careful stylistic exegesis. Although it is always better, of course, to be able to work with a text in its original language, in the case of Portuguese and Brazilian literature I firmly believe it is more advantageous for us, as Latin Americanists, to integrate these into our studies than to leave them out, a choice which, if made, weakens our case as comparatists at the same time that it cuts us off from one of Western literature's most engaging and surprising national literatures (see Bernheimer 44). Although, as Rodríguez Monegal pointed out over twenty years ago, "Spanish America and

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Brazil have always been separate and apart, since the first days of the discovery and conquest of the New World," and though history has thickened and hardened the line that has for so long separated them (Monegal v. 1, xiii), it is now time for us to cross that line and bring these two great Latin American traditions together in our classes and in our research. Thinking ahead, however, to the training of the next generation of Latin Americanists, we should insist that our graduate students study as much Portuguese and Brazilian literature as they can get. We must do this in order to prepare them as Latin Americanists in the most comprehensive sense possible, that is, as young scholars able to study and teach literature written in both Spanish and Portuguese (or, perhaps I should say, "Brasileiro/Brazilian," the very distinctive language of Brazil). If we are successful in this venture, we will be producing a new and more comprehensive type of Latin Americanist, one formally prepared to work comparatively in the literatures and cultures of both Spanish America and Brazil (see Rabassa and Merquior).

The importance of additional language instruction for Latin Americanists is not, of course, limited to Portuguese. Given its rich and diverse indigenous heritage, Latin American culture desperately needs scholars who are trained in such languages as Nahuatl, Quechua, and Tupi, just to name three of the most renowned. We would be well advised to remember the words of Oswald de Andrade, the enfant terrible of Brazilian modernism, when he famously declared, in reference to the direction the work of his modernist colleagues might take, "Tupi or not Tupi; that is the question." Oswald was right to call our attention to this issue; it would indeed be a travesty if we were to let these languages (and their cultural traditions) die out, for to do so would be to abandon an exceptionally vital and creative past that has given, and that continues to give, modern Latin American literature some of its greatest works of literature. Linguists tell us that, in their totality, our Native American languages are disappearing at an alarming rate, and while it is difficult to find a place to study these tongues, it is imperative that some of us, at least, make this a fundamental feature of our training as modern, comparatively inclined Latin Americanists. Once again, however, I would like to stress that I make this recommendation not as a form of ideological appeasement to the would-be guardians of the citadel but to the most venerable and ennobling standards of our discipline, those that seek to branch out, linguistically speaking, and connect the European tradition to other, non-Western literatures and cultures. Comparative literature has long championed the legitimacy of the oral tradition and so there is every reason to think that, if we can keep it alive in our work as Latin Americanists (and as inter-Americanists), we will be offering comparative literature journals scholarly studies in which they will likely have a keen interest, studies that their editors will view as having an invigorating and tonic effect.

The second matter we can do is to learn to think, at least part of the time, in inter-American terms, that is, in terms of courses and critical studies that compare and contrast the literatures and cultures of North, Central, and South America (see Fitz 1998). There can no longer be any doubt that inter-American literature is already well along in the process of establishing itself as a major new area of literary study, one that, as suggested above by Costigan and Bernucci, is custom made for Latin Americanists of a comparative bent. Studies of this type might, for example, look at the development of the novel as a form in, say, Brazil, Spanish America, Canada, and the United States, or at the various ways modernism, romanticism, or even the different colonial eras developed in the New World. Or they might examine how and why certain themes, miscegenation, the presentation of the Native American (including the nature of the oral tradition), the idea of "progress," or nature, for example, manifest themselves in the Americas. The possibilities for this type of scholarship are virtually endless, and the field, as important and full of potential as it is, remains wide open. Because inter-American literature is a vast and extraordinarily complex new field, one in which very few, if any, of us have any formal training, I do not recommend that we declare ourselves "experts" in all aspects of it. To claim this would be patently absurd, and would serve only to make us look foolish. But to claim, as well we might, that, as Latin Americanists we have a very special historical relationship with the United States, for example, and that we do indeed know a great deal about the literature and culture of the United States, is to make an argument for inter-American scholarship that is entirely reasonable and proper and that would be of considerable interest to many comparative literature journals. Indeed,

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it must be noted that scholars who work today with the literature of the United States, along with those concerned with American Studies programs, are changing their views of what constitutes "American" literature and culture.

Another, more distinctly inter-American model is emerging, one that, as Paul Jay argues, involves "a broad critique of the narrow, nationalist conflation of the American and the United States," and that has, as a consequence, "sparked vigorous efforts to resituate the study of United States literature and culture in a hemispheric or Pan-American context" (Jay 45). Although Jay, who teaches English at Loyola of Chicago, does not discuss the importance of this sea change in terms of what it means, in the year 2002, to be "American" has for inter-American studies (he says, still thinking only of English, that "Taking these new, innovative fields as models, we will be in a better position in our more advanced courses, and in our research and writing, to articulate how English has developed over time into a transnational mode of writing," Jay 45), we, as Latin Americanists, understand very well what is really at issue here. It might be said, in fact, that to train as a Latin Americanist is precisely to train as an inter-Americanist, and that this explains why, although an inter-American reconfiguration of literary and cultural study may seem a strange and unsettling new field for some students and scholars in departments of English, it is old (and, because of a history of racism, military intervention, and economic exploitation, sometimes painful) news to Latin Americanists.

The real point of contention, then, is that while Latin Americanists are, traditionally, conversant in both English and French and know the literatures that pertain to these languages quite well, our colleagues in these departments rarely, if ever, know Spanish or Portuguese or the literatures they have produced. The long standing hegemony of English departments, for example, and of their "American" literature sections (the term "American" being understood here in its traditional sense, as a synonym for the United States alone), within the academic and administrative structures of universities will thus be an obstacle that has to be overcome. And, indeed, it is. Stephen Greenblatt, for example, has written, of this issue, that while "It is easy enough to confuse globalization with American triumphalism and an insurgent English-language parochialism," "world culture does not depend on recent events or on the current strength of the English language" (Greenblatt 59). Although it is clear that English departments, concerned, at the dawn of the twenty first century, about what they regard as the "globalization" of literature (an issue that Latin Americanists and comparatists have long embraced as an article of faith) and the changes this will necessitate in their programs, are beginning to recognize that other "Americas" exist all around them (see Porter, for example, or Mulford), their faculty and students are too often untrained in their languages, literatures, histories, and cultural differences.

In all fairness, however, it must be recognized that this situation, too, is changing, as more and more "Americanists," bilingual in both English and Spanish, are being developed, though, of course, French and Portuguese need to be cultivated as well. Recent work by Gregory Jay, Paul Jay, and Carolyn Porter, for example, should be lauded for its attempt to begin to comment on "Latin American" literature even though these same critics totally ignore Brazil, the largest nation in Latin America (thus rendering it, to paraphrase Ralph Ellison, "invisible" as a New World national literature) and even though much of what they are saying has long been common knowledge among Latin Americanists and inter-Americanists. Although I would not want to put too fine a point on it, this quite thorny problem of cultural (im)balance can be put in the following fashion: Latin Americanists, because of their training (both linguistic and literary), their cultural and historical experience, and the nature of much of their literature, tend to know much more about the literature and culture of the United States than, typically, students and scholars of United States literature know about Latin America. The one (Latin America) has, historically and culturally speaking, simply had to pay much more attention to the other (the United States), being forced, generation after generation, to measure its achievements against those of the other, an other (or "Other") that has never, until now, been much interested in its hemispheric neighbors. If inter-American studies is to succeed (as I truly feel it will), then this great cultural and academic imbalance, this near total ignoring of one side by the other, will have to be confronted and done away with, remaindered to the scrap heap of hemispheric history. González Echevarría, referring

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only to the relationship departments of Spanish and Portuguese have traditionally endured with respect to departments of French, sums up the problem tartly this way: "A Latin American intellectual would choose a slow, painful death over being caught short on his Mallarmé, and I have yet to meet one who did not know French. But I have never met a French intellectual or professor who knew Spanish [much less Portuguese, EF]. We, the 'colonized,' are cultural polyglots ... We 'know more,' yet have to constantly justify our membership in the field of comparative literature" (González Echevarría <http://clcwebjournal.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb02-2/gonzalez-echevarria02.html>). And much the same could be said of departments of English and their relationships to departments of Spanish and Portuguese, to Latin American Studies, and to inter-American literature generally.

Yet as inter-American study continues to grow and develop as a field, its impact on the definition and practice of comparative literature will be great (as will its impact on departments of English housing programs in American Studies and American literature). It is no exaggeration, I think, to speculate that inter-American literary study, featuring, as it does, truly outstanding texts from several literary cultures rarely heard from (English Canada, Québec, and French Canada, Brazil, and the Caribbean, for example) will not only renovate but also revive comparative literature as a discipline. Of the future and importance of inter-American studies, J. Hillis Miller, for example, has recently written that "Going forward" with humanistic study in an age when "Manifold changes are making literary study more and more obsolete ... means inventing courses and curricula that respond to the new situation and keep the teaching of reading and writing alive. Examples are new regional, transnational, multilingual, multiethnic programs (e.g., literatures of the Americas) and expansions of existing single-language programs" (Miller 2062), such as English, French, Spanish, and Portuguese. The real issue for Latin Americanists (and, indeed, the issue that lies, restively, at the heart of the entire problem) has to do with the question of whose books finally end up on the readings lists for our newly reconfigured courses in comparative inter-American literature. Will we have only Anne Bradstreet representing "American" colonial letters, or will we also be reading Sor Juana and Gregório de Matos? Will evaluations of the "new narrative" of the 1960s focus only on Spanish American writers or will it also include texts from Brazil, the United States and Canada (the Québécois novel of the 1960s is especially interesting in this regard)? Will discussions of individual authors, John Barth, for example, deal with his innovations in isolation in the United States or will they take into account the influence such hemispheric cohorts as Borges, Cortázar, Márquez, and Machado de Assis had on his work? In what ways, if at all, will Latino-American writers serve as cultural bridges between the United States and Latin America? These are the types of issues that Latin Americanists can raise as they enter into the inter-American fray and, equally important, as they begin to reconstitute the discipline of comparative literature for the twenty-first century. From our perspective, then, as Latin Americanists possessed of a larger, Pan-American outlook, we will most likely agree with González Echevarría when he avers that: "it is really the more recent canon that the struggle is about, the unstable edges where new membership is still being issued ... I believe that the issue is that many writers from areas not represented in the canon are better than those routinely included in the canon" (González Echevarría <http://clcwebjournal.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb02-2/gonzalez-echevarria02.html>). Because, as we have seen, comparative literature is best conceived of as an issue of methodology rather than as a pre-ordained list of "classics" from certain, select languages, it will respond positively to the introduction of artistically innovative and intellectually challenging texts from, for example, Latin America, an area we know to be rich in high quality literature and one that has myriad connections, culturally, intellectually, and artistically, with both the rest of the Americas and the rest of the world.

Deborah Cohn's recent book, History and Memory in the Two Souths: Recent Southern and Spanish American Fiction (Vanderbilt, 1999), is a good example of the type of innovative research that will speed this process along, as are Renata Wasserman's Exotic Nations: Literature and Cultural Identity in the United States and Brazil, 1830-1930 (Cornell, 1994) and Stephen V. Hunsaker's Autobiography and National Identity in the Americas (Virginia, 1999). And, as we well know, many more works of this type are appearing every year (my own contribution, focusing on

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the development of narrative in Brazil and the United States, should appear, via the Modern Language Association, in 2003), a fact which tends to underscore something we already know: Latin Americanists are uniquely prepared to play a crucial role in the evolution of inter-American letters, an enterprise that is inherently comparative in nature and that will help immensely in what González Echevarría has identified as the decisive role Latin American literature can play in the formulation of "a new, redefined [and, one might add, re-energized; EF] comparative literature" (González Echevarría <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol4/iss2/7/>).

Finally, I would like to suggest that the third thing we can do to promote our work in comparative journals is to write studies of Spanish American literature and culture that clearly stress the often very great differences that exist between the various nations and regions of Spanish America itself. In undertaking these sorts of studies, we might, for example, emphasize such issues or topics as literary history, genre evolutions, and contrastive thematics and argue that while a writer from Buenos Aires and a writer from, say, Tegucigalpa might both work in Spanish, the many cultural, racial, historical, and even linguistic differences that separate them can justify a comparative approach. "Comparatists," as we read in the 1993 Bernheimer report: "should be alert to the significant differences within any national culture, which provide a basis for comparison, research, and critical-theoretical inquiry. Among these are differences (and conflicts) according to region, ethnicity, religion, gender, class, and colonial or postcolonial status. Comparatist research is ideally suited to pursue ways in which these differences are conjoined with differences in language, dialect, and usage (including jargon or slang) as well as with problems of dual- or multiple-language use and modes of hybridization" (Bernheimer 44). For the editors of very traditional minded comparative journals, however, this will be a tough sell (since the texts studied will all be written in what is more or less the same language), but there is an intellectual validity to it and so it is an argument worth making. On the other hand, journals that emphasize cultural issues, like Cultural Critique, Cultural Anthropology, or Hopscotch: A Cultural Review, or that demonstrate an interest in issues of cultural studies might, as Steven Totosy has suggested, be particularly receptive to this type of study (see Totosy's "From Comparative Literature Today toward Comparative Cultural Studies" at <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol1/iss3/2/>).

A question that arises here, however, is the following: to what degree will studies of this type truly be exemplary of comparative literature? The study of literatures written (or spoken) in more than one language has long been the defining feature of comparative literature as a discipline, and so, if our primary goal is to see our work published in mainline comparative literature journals, perhaps we should be cautious about demanding that work done entirely in one language be regarded as truly comparative in nature, at least as the field has come to be defined by its leading journals. At the same time, perhaps we, as Latin Americanists, should feel that since we are well positioned to reinvigorate the entire field of comparative literature, we are also free to publish new, non-traditional work in new and non-traditional journals, especially those with some degree of a cultural studies orientation. If the discipline needs to change, we could argue, then let us be in the forefront of that change. Latin American literature, long vitalized by its historical concern with power structures, with social inequities and with issues relating to both political and economic justice, offers tremendous opportunities for culturally inclined criticism, more so, one might argue, than many industrial and post-industrial nations. In Brazil and Spanish America, hunger, disease, and poverty, for example, are still such widespread problems that, in some places, they threaten the existence of entire societies and populations. Literature, in such settings, cannot avoid having a powerful political dimension to it, and, indeed, this is one of Latin American literature's most venerable characteristics. As a result of this engagé aspect of its historical development, then, fiction, poetry, and drama in Latin America do not have such a great problem seeing themselves as "cultural texts" as opposed to elitist or belletrist literature. Although this tradition has, of course, existed in Latin American letters, the view that literary texts were largely, if not fundamentally, cultural documents imbued with very pronounced, and often deliberate, social, political, historical, and economic referents, has long been a vital one. In Latin America, real lives have often been dramatically affected by the literature that has been produced and consumed, and this makes it somewhat easier for the advocates of cultural studies to make their case for a closer

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working relationship with comparative literature, which, on many points, has a natural affinity with it (see Bernheimer 45).

Distressingly, however, the leading theoreticians of cultural criticism have, for the most part, ignored literary texts written in Spanish and Portuguese. Although this trend is slowly beginning to change, Spanish and Portuguese are still not the "preferred" languages for cultural critiques. Edward Said's hugely influential Orientalism, for example, barely recognizes -- and then only in a footnote -- "the existence of an earlier, much different form of Orientalism, in a Spain where Arabs were the dominant force for eight centuries" (González Echevarría <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol4/iss2/7/>) while Fredric Jameson's often cited introduction to the English translation of Roberto Fernández Retamar's "Calibán," seems "to ignore the fact that the essay is an answer to 'Ariel,' arguably the most important essay every written in Latin America," a critical omission that "reveals an overseer mentality that is much more that of the colonizer than of the would-be decolonizer" (González Echevarría <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol4/iss2/7/>; see, also, Pratt, 59). This sort of problem is indicative of the fact that Spanish (to say nothing of Portuguese!) is still not widely regarded as a language whose literary importance is sufficient for critics like Said and Jameson to bother with. But, as we have seen, the times are changing, and new studies, many of which are focusing on issues of inter-American literature and culture, that feature both Spanish and Portuguese prominently are appearing all the time.

One excellent example of this trend is Renata Wasserman's article, "Mario Vargas Llosa, Euclides da Cunha, and the Strategy of Intertextuality," in which Wasserman argues that intertextuality, well known "as a condition for the existence of a text," can also be used "for the purpose of validating a cultural configuration, of asserting cultural power" (Wasserman 1993, 460). Using two twentieth-century Latin American texts as her examples, Mario Vargas Llosa's 1981 novel, La guerra del fin del mundo, and Euclides da Cunha's 1902 novel-like discourse on the bloody and wrenching 1896-97 revolt at Canudos (Os Sertões), Wasserman takes up the fundamental problem of cultural identity; what does it mean for the nations of Latin America, born out of European concepts and structures but grown into something quite different, when they are forced, as they inevitably are, to confront their American, or New World, realities? The issue of race, for example, is central to both works (as it is to New World literature generally), coming, finally, to demonstrate most vividly one of the most fundamental differences between European society and Latin American reality, with its mixed-blood population. The political issues that inform and circumscribe Latin America's troubled struggle for cultural identity constitute another key tie between the two books. While da Cunha slowly but inevitably comes to question whether he can honestly continue to attribute the noble qualities of the newly formed Republic, and of its European heritage, to "progressive," southern Brazil and "barbarism" to the interior of the nation (and specifically to the culture of Canudos), Vargas Llosa creates a fictional character, a European anarchist, Galileo Gall, whose espousal of "entirely coherent" but "completely irrelevant political theories lead him to interfere (destructively) in the American action and keep him from understanding it" (Wasserman 1993, 467). "Taken together," then, as Wasserman rightly asserts, "the two books create an inter-American intertextuality and affirm a kinship among American nations based on the recognition of shared problems that, even more than economic, are social and cultural, ontological and epistemological" (Wasserman 1993, 469).

What is especially effective in this study is that while the author clearly makes use of two literary texts to illuminate a larger historical and cultural issue, she does not fail to pay close attention to these same texts as objects of literature. Too often, in cultural studies, outstanding literary texts become lost, or neutralized, in the discussions of culture that they help germinate. Without denying the validity of one of the basic assumptions about cultural studies, that literary texts are always part of a larger social, political, and economic milieu and that, as participants in a culture's structures and practices, they are therefore never "politically neutral" (Saldívar 252), Wasserman manages to connect the "cultural" significance of Os Sertões and La guerra del fin del mundo to their literary, or textual, singularity. The result is a study in which the cultural importance of two seminal Latin American texts is clearly shown to derive, in large part, precisely

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because they are as powerfully and as effectively written as they are. Traditional literary analysis, in other words, enhances our ability to see the cultural impact these two works have. Although Wasserman's study makes use of texts from both of Latin America's two great literary traditions, its basis in the old problem of Latin American identity, in all its myriad forms and manifestations, amply confirms the unique value of cultural studies to nations like Brazil and its Spanish-speaking neighbors.

In thinking about the application of cultural studies to the situation of Latin Americanists, however, it is also interesting to consider how this term is understood when it is applied to Hispanic literature being written in the United States. For example, as José David Saldívar, has written, "Cultural studies, as it is practiced in the US, already seems to have taken its place as one of the established contemporary approaches to Chicano literature" (Saldívar 251). For Saldívar, however, who, in the beginning of his essay, critiques a study, "Ethnicity and the Post-Modern Arts of Memory" (see Clifford and Marcus, Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography, 1986), on Chicano literature by Michael M.J. Fischer, the danger of cultural studies is that (as he believes happened in the Fischer piece) it can all too easily do little more than present the reader "with an overwhelming catalogue of ethnic textual 'data' with far too little discussion of local knowledge and local history" (Saldívar 253). While this danger seems more likely to exist in a predominantly English speaking but multiethnic nation like that of the United States, where anthropologists and literary scholars not seriously trained in either Spanish or Latino culture will find themselves led to make critical judgments about artistic production and consumption in cultures they do not really understand, it is much less problematic for professionally trained Latin Americanists, who, by dint of years of study, are fully prepared, linguistically, historically, and culturally, to speak both discerningly and authoritatively about Brazil and Spanish America.

Moreover, professional Latin Americanists who were born and raised in the United States possess two additional, and invaluable, skills, namely, their native linguistic competence and their experience as American citizens, both of which make them uniquely able to compare and contrast the cultures of Latin America with those of the United States. "Border studies" are particularly important here and they can serve as a kind of bridge connecting the United States and its hemispheric neighbors. As Greene has shown ("Generation" 152-53), much of the work of Rolando Hinojosa, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Carlos Fuentes exemplifies the possibilities inherent in this type of approach (I say this holding in abeyance the question of Canada and all it brings to the issue of "border studies"). Of course, it is also important to remember that native Spanish and Portuguese speaking Latin Americanists also have a lot of experience with "border studies" (as do English- and French-speaking Canada) and that these can and should be developed as important subjects for research. And cutting through all these European-based societies is the autochthonous tradition, the still powerful presence of Native America that, in ways both ancient and contemporary, binds us together by reminding us, sometimes painfully, that there are always borders within borders. Yet while it is easy and exciting to talk about the "expansion" of "American" literature and "American" cultural studies into the "Hispanic" sphere (even the language can sound imperialistic), certain crucial problems become immediately evident, the language question looming large among them. For those coming at this problem from the perspective of the literature and culture of the United States, real fluency in Spanish will be a necessity, at least if the scholar wishes to move beyond even a very important work like Anzaldúa's Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza (1987), which is written primarily in English with a few Spanish words and expressions embedded in it. The problem is that few, if any, doctoral programs in English and American Literature currently require a student to be sufficiently fluent in Spanish (to say nothing of Portuguese) to read complex literary texts (and criticism) written in those languages. Thus, though a scholar might be able to work effectively with Borderlands, could she or he do so with untranslated Fuentes, Rulfo, or García Márquez? If she does not possess at least reading fluency in Spanish and Portuguese, how far can the American literature doctoral student's incursion into Latin American literature go? Once again, we see the unexpected advantage that Latin Americanists have in the application of cultural studies not merely to Latin America itself, with all its own diversity, but to the United States as well. At a time when the entire concept of "American" literature is being

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debated and rethought amongst scholars in English departments across the country (see, for example, J. Hillis Miller's enthusiasm for the development of programs that deal, in a more pan-American context, with the literatures of the Americas; see also Gregory Jay, Paul Jay, and Carolyn Porter), Latin Americanists must realize that they are suddenly in a position to forge ahead in the area of both Latin American and inter-American cultural studies, that they are uniquely prepared to make significant contributions to this important and fast growing new field.

Since the 1980s especially, cultural studies has, as a movement, sought to analyze discourse, and discursive practices, as rhetorical constructs that relate directly to larger, socio-political issues of knowledge and power. While these goals are unquestionably germane to any culture, they are particularly important for Latin American culture, which, in so many ways, still suffers from dependency, exploitation, and discrimination. Cultural studies, "a border zone of conjunctures," as Saldívar argues, "must aspire to be regionally focused and broadly comparative, a form of living and of travel in our global borderlands" (Saldívar 264), an argument that is applicable to both Latino literature produced and consumed in the United States and to Latin American literature as it seeks to take its rightful place in the context of world culture. In conclusion, then, I would like to repeat that I believe the best, long term solution to the problem we, as Latin Americanists, face with regard to our presence in comparative literature journals is for us to include Brazilian literature and culture in our studies (even if we have only a reading knowledge of Portuguese and even if we have to rely on translations to help us). In gaining competency in (Brazilian) Portuguese, we become more complete as Latin Americanists and we connect ourselves to a tremendously fecund field of literary and cultural study. Secondly, we need to think, at least part of the time, in terms of the larger inter-American issues, so many of which engage Brazil, Spanish America, the Caribbean, Canada, and the United States (see Morency) in ways that we, as Latin Americanists, can speak to with authority and generations of experience. The third approach I have suggested, the merging of comparative literature and cultural studies, will certainly generate legitimate scholarship but it may well elicit an adverse backlash, one that could be disadvantageous to our overall goal. We must never forget that, even as cultural studies teaches us to read literary texts as social and political documents, the greatness of writers like Machado de Assis, Borges, Guimarães Rosa, Clarice Lispector, Octavio Paz, Alejo Carpentier, and García Márquez resides in their abilities to change the ways we think about writing and about literature itself. Although cultural studies has much that will benefit Latin American literature, we must beware of reducing our greatest artistic and literary innovators to the level of popular culture. In entering the arena of world literature, we need to show our brilliance, not our commonality. We need to show, as González Echevarría puts it, how novels by Fuentes (or, I might add, Machado de Assis) can be used to read James and how those by Lezama Lima (or Guimarães Rosa) serve as perspectives from which we can better understand Joyce (González Echevarría <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol4/iss2/7/>).

In this same context, we should be developing ourselves as a "new class of readers," one "trained in the marginal literatures" and ready, willing and able to show, for example, how reading Clarice Lispector can teach us more about Cixous's concept of écriture féminine than we can glean from reading the French woman's texts alone, how, in other words, reading texts long relegated to the margins of world literature "mobilizes elements in the hegemonic texts that were previously inert, beyond the reach of criticism and theory" (González Echevarría <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol4/iss2/7/>). In any event, I firmly believe that Latin American literature, working in close consort with the development of inter-American studies on a variety of fronts, will inevitably transform not only the field of comparative literature but its very conceptualization. Of this I have no doubt. As we seek to make our literature better known among professional comparatists, however, and to increase the frequency of our appearance in comparative literature journals, we must never forget that the discipline of comparative literature is a profoundly humanistic, integrative, and inclusive approach to literary study, and, as Latin Americanists, we must seek always to strengthen and enrich it, and never to weaken or debase it.

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