

Twentieth-Century Latin American Literary Studies and Cultural Autonomy¹

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During the twentieth century, and with accelerated speed in recent decades, Latin American literary studies have undergone transformations that have changed the issues that practitioners face. At the century's outset, the prevailing Latin American *modernista* movement provoked polemics. The discussion, however, took place in cafés, newspapers, and magazines. The academic research and teaching of literature of the early 1900s afforded little space to Latin American literature, considered, if at all, as an extension of the study of Spanish and Portuguese letters.

The twentieth-century drive to study Latin American writing is inseparable from the broader issue of Latin America's search for cultural autonomy. Advocates of Latin American literary studies needed to argue that their subject was not only significant, but different from literary scholarship on Iberian topics. One of the first intellectuals to make his name (in the 1920s) as a student of Latin American letters, Pedro Henríquez Ureña, pursued both issues. He promoted university research into and teaching of Latin American literature, and worked to develop a canon. His research specialty was the search for a Latin American identity in intellectual and artistic work, and his outstanding book is *Seis ensayos en busca de nuestra expresión* (Six Essays in Search of our Expression, 1928; rev. 1952), on Latin American intellectuals' often tortuous quest to distinguish their cultures from those of the old colonial powers.

As the century progressed, and especially from the 1960s onwards, critics of Latin American literature could devote less time to justifying their subject as an academic field or capturing turf from peninsular Spanish and Portuguese studies. Surer of their place, they turned to the more reflective task of considering where their field was heading. This

evolution appears clearly in the twentieth-anniversary issue (1992) of *Latin American Literary Review Educated Guesses: Personal Reflections on the Future of Latin American Literary Studies* (Carlos J. Alonso, ed.). Some contributors evince amazement at the rapidity with which Latin American literature has spread through academia—especially U.S. universities, where the essayists, whatever their origins, are based. Gustavo Pellón sums up: “Three decades ago, few Hispanists would have believed that Latin American literature could challenge the predominance of Peninsular literature in the colleges of the United States. Today, student enrollments, publications, and hiring practices attest to this major rearrangement of Hispanism” (80).

Though the 1920s held out few offerings and the 1990s a cornucopia, there is still concern that studies of Latin American literature leave out of account the region’s distinct cultural evolution. The observers in *Educated Guesses* are aware that critics worldwide did not turn to Latin American writing simply because of its merit. Rather, this literature came to their attention via the Boom of the 1960s. That was when the international limelight was on new Latin American fiction, often with a fantastic strain, constructed along typically twentieth-century lines of experimentation with time, space, and narrative voice. Roberto González Echevarría, recalling that “the study of Latin American literature was a marginal sub-field . . . in the late sixties,” specifies “The Boom of the Latin American novel changed all that” (51). Pellón unhesitatingly attributes the growth of Latin American literary studies to “the popularity and prestige of the novels of the Boom” (80). Boom, an English word for prosperity, is a reminder that Latin American literature spread via the marketing of writing that could sell to foreign publics. Novels successful in translation, such as Julio Cortázar’s *Hopscotch* and Gabriel García Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, appealed to connoisseurs of twentieth-century narrative innovation; they required little knowledge of Latin America or its literary history. Pellón notes with unease “the effects of the Boom on the canon and on literary history” (80).

A preoccupation common to several responses is that Latin American literature is being used by critics whose focus is not on the historical culture of Latin America, but rather some major theme in twentieth-century literary studies, defined in European-U.S. terms. Neil Larsen and John Beverley question Anglo-U.S.-style cultural studies on Latin American topics. Both express concern lest English-language academics shape Latinamericanist cultural studies to help resolve their own

problems, whether intellectual perplexities or a desire for administrative and public approval. Jean Franco, who has long complained that critics fail to understand the importance of oral culture in Latin America, now sees improvement (“Remapping”; see also Mignolo and Slater). Enrico M. Santí discerns a Latinamericanism paralleling the Orientalism decried by Edward Said.

These anxieties over the state of Latin American literary studies lead back to longtime intellectual problems in Latin America. Latin America underwent what was in some ways a very thorough colonization at the hands of Spain and Portugal, in the process losing many means of distinguishing itself as unique and autonomous. Henríquez Ureña suggests that early twentieth-century literary intellectuals eager to isolate and display the originality of Latin America contemplate a sobering reality: the region’s literature is written almost exclusively in the language of the conquerors (Henríquez Ureña 44). There are rare exceptions, such as the work of Maya-language writers’ collectives and written versions of Guaraní verse and narratives—set down in Roman alphabet. But these are exceptional cases involving very limited publics. Latin American authors who hope to gain a sizable readership cannot compose in a native language that predates and bypasses the colonial experience.

Nor do Latin American authors enjoy any real option of utilizing a specially marked Creole, some unofficial variant of Spanish or Portuguese, as a medium of writing. Henríquez Ureña’s 1920s research shows that at the time of Independence—circa 1810 with the obvious exception of the Spanish-speaking Caribbean—some Utopian seekers of autonomy hoped to bolster cultural identity with new American linguistic variants (44). Other observers feared a loss of mutual intelligibility between the independent New World and Spain and Portugal; Latin Americans would then lose access to a great portion of their intellectual birthright encoded in literary, historical, and legal documents. Yet the language of Spain and that of the Spanish American countries have never grown that far apart; educated speakers of Spanish enjoy intercontinental mutual comprehension. Almost as much may be said for Brazil and Portugal, though here the language of the former colony has evolved farther from that of the mother country. The fact that Latin American authors depend on European languages assures that the region’s literature can never clean the slate of European influence.

Not just Independence, but also the various intellectual movements of the twentieth century, have brought projects to strengthen Latin America's unique cultural identity by stressing that which is not from Europe. The idea that a pre-European or at least non-European identity can predominate has led to such twentieth-century proposals as renaming Latin America *Indoamérica*. (The name was part of the program of Peru's *Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana*, and it continues to enjoy limited currency among students of the indigenous element in Latin American culture.) These suggestions raise the hope of purging the European element from such formulations as *Spanish America* and *Latin America*. Hybrid forms, too, have been proposed throughout the century; the Argentine Ricardo Rojas long attempted to promote *Eurindia*. But new terms fail, in large part, because they leave out significant portions of the population; not every part of Latin America has an Indian population of any size, African-Hispanic populations are a significant presence in some regions, and in other areas the population is fundamentally of European descent. The longtime names *Spanish America* and *Iberoamérica*, for Spanish-speaking countries only, and *Latin America*, to include Brazil, appear inevitable and inexpugnable. Consider, by way of contrast, how easy it has been for immediately postcolonial nations to make a symbolic fresh start by completely replacing a national name that had included that of the colonizer. In the cases of The Belgian Congo, British Guinea, and French West Africa, the adjective indicating nationality had the force of a possessive and could be discarded along with the rest of the name the colonizer had conferred.

Categories developed for other purposes, then applied to Latin America, have opened up painful issues. To offer a recent example, when the term *Third World*, now regarded with suspicion, was in vogue, there was extensive debate over Latin America's inclusion in this category. The celebrated Mexican poet and essayist Octavio Paz has long examined the problem of situating cultures in relation to one another and, especially, locating Latin America in the world system. His fundamental argument is that, however attractive a non-Western identity might seem, Latin America is unavoidably part of the West. Yet it is an eccentric part that Paz often compares to a far-flung settlement. Paz has elaborated the metaphor of Latin American as an out-of-the-way neighborhood of Western civilization in such reflections as: "A Latin American is a being who has lived in the suburbs of the West, in the outskirts of history. At the same time he feels (*and is*)

part of a tradition which despised him until a short while ago” (interview with Guibert 215).

While Paz was referring to cultural identity, in other ways, too, Latin America is part, but an off-beat part, of the highly developed world. Latin American economies have such strong connections with those of Europe and the United States that they are rapidly affected by fluctuations abroad. Yet it is misleading to speak simply of global interdependence, a term that suggests equal exchange. In economic relations, Latin America remains the partner that must accept the other’s terms.

A major problem for twentieth-century essayists has been to speak, without exaggeration, of Latin America’s relations with the powerful, technologically advanced nations. On the one hand, these relations are close and intimate, yet, on the other, Latin America is persistently at a disadvantage that is both economic and cultural. The region is made distinctive in great part by its important non-European cultural strands, but these may not show up clearly in standard literary reading lists. In working with these problems, twentieth-century literary studies have received help from anthropologists who reconstruct the writings and oral lore of native peoples. (However, Mignolo, 67, reports that because of his research and classroom use of such reclaimed texts as the Maya *Popol-Vuh* and Andean *Huarochiri Manuscript*, “I have been asked several times whether I should remain in a literature department or move to anthropology.”)

In addition, late twentieth-century literary studies have drawn upon economics, where dependency theory, to be discussed shortly, arose in the 1960s. Before arriving at the topic of dependency theory as such, it is worth taking a rapid survey of the long history of thought and expression concerning Latin America’s dependent relations with more developed areas and the efforts made to strengthen a sense of region-wide identity.

The Spanish and Portuguese takeover is a reference point for researchers with the above-noted concerns. Twentieth-century students of Latin American letters have been taking a new look at the documents attesting to the conquest and colonization period, and not simply because of the Quincentennial. Scholars have been eager to reconstruct, from evidence left by the invaded Indians, what Miguel León-Portilla has called, in the memorable title of his 1959 collection of Aztec accounts of the conquest, “the outlook of the conquered” (León-Portilla). Seeking autonomy amid colonization, anthropological

and literary researchers look for the expression that survived despite colonial rule. Students of literature tend to prize documents that offer clues to the colonized population's sense of its own identity.

Until the recent drive for diversity, anthologies, histories, and reading lists of Latin American literature usually covered the conquest via the letters and reports of Columbus, Cortés, and others. There is certainly no lack of official documentation claiming to give a contemporary Spanish- or Portuguese-language reader the most correct account. The generally official character of many accounts of the conquest is understandable. Not only were the authors almost invariably Europeans, but tight government control over written expression through laws concerning printing and printed matter made it unthinkable to question the wisdom or justice of the Conquest and Christianization of the New World—at least in print and explicitly. The Inquisition was still active during this period. Critical questioning had either to go between the lines, go underground in clandestine publications, or find oral outlets.

Literary studies have long treated one chronicler with an Indian past: the Inca Garcilaso de la Vega (1539-1616), descended from an Inca princess and a Spanish soldier, was guarded in the information he gave about the Inca empire. Like a number of lesser-known contemporaries, the Inca Garcilaso struggled to place the Incas' civilization in a favorable light without casting doubt on his devotion to Christianity and Spanish rule. It could not be stated in print that the Spaniards' destruction of the Indian civilizations and imposition of European governance and Christianity had been less than a good thing.

Current-day students of Latin American literature are still fascinated by the Inca Garcilaso's situation between cultures. Yet, with the campaign to variegate the canon, scholars and instructors have become more aware that the Inca cannot represent the native side. He lived his entire adult life in Europe and wrote the prose of a highly educated Spanish gentleman; his audience was composed of Europeans. Including him in a reading list falls short of going beyond European sources.

Increasingly during the latter part of the century, critics have researched and taught more indigenous versions of the conquest era. Scholars are also tracing the efforts made by former citizens of the native empires to preserve the information that distinguished their civilizations. Cosmologies, genealogies, calendrical cycles, creation

narratives, and instructions for rituals were among the types of knowledge that leaders of indigenous communities hoped to maintain.

The struggle to record history and codify knowledge produced a variety of hybrid documents, since the conquered indigenous peoples were losing the ability to preserve information by encoding it in native systems of writing and notation. (It should be remembered that the Inca empire employed not writing as such, but a code of knots for record-keeping and administrative *comunicués*.) The scriptural and notational practices developed by the great Indian civilizations were not immediately discontinued following the Conquest. Even the Spaniards made occasional use of them for such purposes as the inventory and description of their new possessions. Yet, from the time of the European invasions those skilled in the use of native forms of writing, record-keeping, and enumeration were dying out.

Without their own writing, native peoples were forced to become resourceful in maintaining their version of history and of the knowledge that distinguished their communities from others. To maintain information, they turned to oral transmission and to new forms combining oral lore, writing, and pictorial recording.

Researchers are increasingly attracted to such hybrid documents as the *lienzo*, or stretch of cloth, on which the people of Tlaxcala represented to the Spaniards their participation in Cortés' conquest of the Aztec empire. A mixture of modes of representation is employed to show, in Martín Lienhard's words, "the invaluable assistance the Tlaxcalans extended to Cortés in his conquest of Tenochtitlan" (47).

Twentieth-century Latin American critics have increasingly studied and taught about a document completed around 1615 and discovered in 1908. This is an 1189-page letter, the *Nueva Corónica y Buen Gobierno* (New Chronicle and Good Government), by Guaman Poma de Ayala. It has the distinction of being the only account of the conquest and early colonial period written by a native speaker of Quechua, the indigenous language that continues to be widespread in the Andean area. Guaman Poma was still in the process of acquiring his Spanish when he undertook the writing of his letter to Philip III, who never received it. It is a complaint and petition in which Guaman Poma attempts to set the monarch straight on the Andean situation and proposes power-sharing between the Crown and a renewed Inca government. Lienhard emphasizes the advance in autonomy represented by the letters of Guaman Poma and a similar Indian petitioner: "For the first time, here, the bearers of collective conscience and

memory stop being 'native informants' or composers of European-style reports to become the authors . . . of a text that is fully their own, the makers of a radically new literary practice" (59).

While the above two examples involve Indians writing to present themselves to Spaniards, there is also current interest in Indians' use of writing to preserve their own pre-Conquest culture. Transmission by oral means, amid upheavals and threats to the community's continuity, seemed too precarious. Many readers are familiar with the case of the *Popol-Vuh* and the *Books of Chilam Balam*, sacred and informative Maya works committed to writing after surviving for some time in oral form. Lienhard reports that such celebrated compilations of myth, history, cosmology, calendar-keeping and ritual are only the best-known manifestation of a generalized effort to preserve oral lore. Many indigenous governing boards engaged the services of "a secretary charged with transcribing the memory of the community," so as "not to allow collective memory, which was now so imperiled, to be lost" (55). The results are absorbing to researchers with the concerns Mignolo describes.

Still, with print under such tight government control, talk took on a special importance—including the talk of *criollos*, American-born Hispanics. First, of course, it is notoriously difficult to prevent people from speaking ill of the authorities, whether Church or State. But beyond the uncontrollable nature of talk, and especially subversive backbiting and gossip, oral expression had other significant dimensions. The dissatisfaction with colonial rule that would build up to the Independence movement certainly spread in part through talk.

A number of Latin American writers succeeded in utilizing in their work some of the wealth of information, beliefs, and attitudes that were being spread by word of mouth. In recent times, Latinamericanists have taken a new look at texts like the 1773 *Lazarillo de ciegos caminantes*, or *Guide for Blind Travelers*, by "Concolorcorvo" (Alonso Carrió de la Vandera, approx. 1715—after 1778). Wisely published clandestinely, this work presents itself as a guide for travelers between Lima and Buenos Aires. In its rambling course, it collects many bits of hearsay and anecdote that attest to the development of a sense of distinctively *criollo*, that is, American-born, no-longer-Spanish, identity and a discrediting of the Spanish authorities. Many pretentious and wrong-headed types are lampooned in this work, none more ridiculous than a man with a colonized mentality. Amid the realities of the

American continent, he can tell the traveler nothing of the region. In his outlook, only what occurs in Spain and Europe can harbor significance.

Readers and scholars of Latin American literature, while looking for writings like the ones described above, are also seeking a theoretical vision to account for the difference of Latin American literature and its relation with European literature. Observers have long noted that Latin American literary movements follow a unique chronology. For example, Spanish American Romanticism runs longer than its European counterpart, and has more heterogeneous features: in Latin American writing, it is common to find mixtures of romanticism with realism and naturalism, with neo-Classicism, and later with *modernismo*. Literary tendencies mutually incompatible in Europe, once appropriated by Latin American innovators, fuse into original hybrid forms. Angel Rama cites observations and criticism stretching back to the early twentieth century to argue that Latin American writing is most original in its hybrid use of sources. For Rama, this heterogeneity “is the consequence of a colonized way of functioning. . . . It is distinguished by the anxious drive for novelty as it is dictated by the imperial centers and a corresponding resistance to abandon values already acquired, trying out sometimes eccentric combinations that have given rise to original inventions” (*Máscaras* 62).

The same heterogeneity continues throughout the twentieth century. *Educated Guesses* contains warnings that students of the postmodern be alert to its uniquely Latin American forms; indeed, perhaps “Latin America was postmodern *avant la lettre*” (Franco).

To look at these problems, some late twentieth-century studies of Latin American literature have drawn on dependency theory. In economics, dependency theory is a way of accounting for the persistent disadvantage ex-colonies suffer in their relations with established powers. It arose during the 1960s, when many countries were decolonized. Neither these new nations nor those of longer-standing independence appeared to be enjoying economic autonomy. The former colonies remained disadvantaged partners of the ex-colonial powers, unable to set their own agendas. The concept of development—of underdeveloped countries that needed foreign aid to develop, much favored at the time among U.S. economists—was losing ground. It was unable to explain why many former colonies failed to thrive, despite the construction of manufacturing plants, hydroelectric dams, and other facilities. An inequity is inherent in the relations between the powerful economies of the metropolis—the dominant

countries—and the weaker ones of nations in the periphery. The former, whether ex-colonial powers, including the United States, or multinational concerns, having exhausted domestic investment opportunities, must take their capital farther afield to continue to accrue profits. They can perpetuate such advantages as being the ones to sell a more technically refined and therefore more sophisticated product, buying cheaper raw materials, or hiring unskilled labor. In the information age (as in any era) groups dominate others by possessing needed technical expertise.

Latin America appeared to provide the perfect case study, and indeed much of dependency theory was the work of Latin American economists or those studying the region. Latin America's relations with stronger partners showed distinct stages. Before Independence, Latin American countries had been colonies in the most literal sense. Later, during the era of industrialization, the region's role as a producer of raw materials kept it perennially behind those countries with sophisticated manufacturing capacities, though a new elite of Latin American financiers now flourished. In the current era, where electronic communications, marketing, and advanced technological services count heavily, Latin America is utilized as a market for news, information, and popular entertainment created elsewhere or imitative of foreign models.

Clearly, theory generated by economists must be greatly transformed before it can apply to problems in literary studies. Before dependency theory traveled to literature, it first became part of communication studies, a more closely related field, since literature is a special form of communication. Herbert I. Schiller's 1969 *Mass Communications and American Empire* convinced many readers that Latin America, in the face of foreign-made mass media, was in danger of losing its ability to generate its own popular culture. The work of Armand Mattelart and his collaborators reached literary intellectuals during the 1960s and 1970s and affected the development of literary studies. The Chilean writer and literary critic Ariel Dorfman was probably the single individual who most successfully spread dependency analysis to literary studies. With Mattelart, he wrote the 1971 *Para leer al Pato Donald*, published in English as *How to Read Donald Duck: Imperialist Ideology in the Disney Comic*.

Students of literature were drawn to the detailed and ingenious content analyses of Donald Duck cartoons. At the same time, *Donald Duck* spread the word on dependency analysis. Dorfman and Mattelart

discovered a recurring plot in the comics. When their domestic economy was floundering, the ducks sought new resources by traveling to an unmistakably Third-World country, such as Inestablestan or Azteclandia. There the simple natives were easily separated from the riches of their homeland, and the ducks succeeded in establishing some profitable enterprise, in one case, turning the former Aztec empire into a theme park. Dorfman went on to produce many insightful dissections of popular culture artifacts; on many occasions, he traced a pattern in which the most strongly established nations succeeded in exporting not only their technology and entertainment products, but also a set of assumptions to accompany them.

Adapted to serve literary analysis, these concepts have proven useful in understanding, for example, the problematic originality of turn-of-the-century Spanish American modernism. (The reader may note that Spanish America, but not Brazil, developed terminology confusing to English speakers. In Spanish, *modernist* refers to innovations of approximately 1880-1915.) Spanish American modernism is widely hailed as the first literary movement to arise in the Americas and then exercise an influence on European letters. Though this impressive “first” would seem to be proof of Latin America’s coming into its own, modernism also involves a good deal of Francophilism and imitation of European models. So one finds critics expressing pride in modernism as a landmark in Latin America’s independent cultural evolution, yet modernist writers are often castigated for their reliance on European models. Paradoxically, the modernists’ striving to be up-to-date by standards set in Europe results in texts that are a new American hybrid. As Franco summarizes, “some mysterious oddness marks even the work of those writers who labor most strenuously to enter into the paradise of universal culture” (“Dependency” 66). Perhaps it is the self-consciousness striving to achieve modern sophistication that signals a non-European origin. The American difference of Spanish American modernists, whose eyes turned to French symbolism and Parnassianism, confirms one of the central arguments of Henríquez Ureña’s *Ensayos en busca de nuestra expresión*. Henríquez Ureña observes that Latin America’s expression will ineluctably swerve away from that of Europe. However, simple divergence is not sufficient to strengthen independent identity. To achieve the latter, Henríquez Ureña enjoins the makers and students of twentieth-century Latin American literature to invest painstaking care and thought into the

shaping of their discourse. He cites the modernists as a precedent for deliberate literary thought and creation.

Paz, in his famous essay "The Siren and the Seashell," from his 1965 *Cuadrivio* (also in the 1976 English-language anthology of Paz essays *The Siren and the Seashell*), gives some valuable clues to understanding this simultaneous literary autonomy and dependence. In Paz's summation, the modernists were attracted to Europe, not for its European identity, but for the modernity they perceived in that continent's cultural life. The modernists "were not anti-Latin American; they wanted a Latin America that would be contemporaneous with Paris and London" (23). Paz observes that Latin American writers had a more struggling relation with modernity than their European contemporaries; while Europeans might well assume that they were living out the modern era, Latin Americans were striving "to share a history that belongs to others but that one somehow makes one's own" (23). Their anxiety over the possibility of being backward fueled a greater eagerness to stand out as advanced.

Paz, known in recent years for his conservative social views, may seem an unlikely link between literary studies and dependency theory, an outgrowth of Marxist thought. Yet Paz's vision presents many similarities to dependency theory. He is eager to think about the world's societies as forming a system whose parts are in a constantly shifting interrelation, and he is especially concerned with modernity and its uneven impact on different cultures. He draws readers' attention to the fact that modernism appeared just as Latin America was being drawn toward Europe by intensified trade relations, the spread of technology, and more rapid transport and communications: "Technological progress had partially eliminated the distance between America and Europe. That nearness made our remoteness more vivid and perceptible" ("Siren" 23).

Angel Rama was probably the literary critic who most successfully made an explicit application of dependency theory to the paradox of modernism. Rama draws conclusions from the simultaneity of modernism and the late nineteenth-century boom in international trade and technical advances. Modernism produced the most technically refined, cosmopolitan writing that had yet come out of Latin America at the very moment that Latin American economies were strengthening their ties to those of the highly developed countries. Foreign industry needed Latin America's raw materials, and sophisticated finance and trade spread in the region. For the first time, many Latin Americans were able

to import luxury goods such as exotic objets d'art. This sudden upsurge in purchasing power is reflected in the many modernist texts that dwell on beautiful and costly imported items, such as decorative screens and statues from Asia. At the same time that they marvel at the esthetic pleasures prosperity can bring, modernist authors frequently express horror at the mercantile, acquisitive outlook that they see spreading as a Latin American elite of financiers and middlemen benefits from closer trade relations with Europe and the United States.

Many other features of modernist writing, and of the careers of modernist authors, bear testimony to a crucial moment in Latin America's struggle for autonomy. Technical expertise and sophistication were highly prized as Latin Americans struggled for a place among the up-to-date international elite. Imitation or adaptation of foreign models of refinement and modern technique was inevitable. At the same time, modernist writers could not help being original in following a distinctively Latin American pattern of innovation; they were living out a different historical dynamic. The subtitle of Rama's much-cited book of 1970, *Rubén Darío y el modernismo (Circunstancias socioeconómicas de un arte americano)* (Rubén Darío and modernism [socioeconomic circumstances of an American art]) boldly asserts that modernism was Latin American in its way of dealing with esthetic as well as ideological issues. Modernist writers, attempting to live by their writing, were as much a part of the economic system as any other workers; however revolted they were by the vulgarity surrounding them, they could not drop out of society or the economy. They had no choice but to develop their art either in line with or in reaction against the changes Latin America was undergoing in its relations with the developed world.

Henríquez Ureña predicted that Spanish America's original literary language would emerge as writers consciously "work out their expression in depth, take pains to purify it, getting to the things we most want to say; to sharpen, to define, in a struggle toward perfection" (49). He recognizes that untutored writers, or those with little time for art, move away from European patterns, as indeed does the culture as a whole, with or without a guiding program. But this inevitable nationalism produces less lasting significance than "the deliberate nationalism that produces great literatures" (54). The latter features a well-considered conceptual program and the search for a literary language both American and esthetically cultivated.

Most of this discussion has gone to writers and, in some cases, transmitters of oral tradition and producers of talk. Yet audiences also have a role in furthering the development of distinctive literary and artistic forms. Reading publics in the Latin American literary capitals have often been slow to recognize the most innovative writers from other Latin American countries or, a more worrisome case, from their own countries. It has been widely observed that one benefit of the Boom was that foreign recognition of Latin American writing sparked interest at home. However original an expression Latin American writers and artists cultivate in their search for a distinctive mode, they require always an audience willing to follow them in their search.

Note

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