Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage, Volume VI

Edited by Antonia Castañeda
and Gabriel Meléndez

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Board of Editorial Advisors

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Introduction
Antonia Castañeda and A. Gabriel Meléndez

The eighth conference of the *Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage Project* held in Albuquerque in November 2004 was realized in partnership with the 15th Annual Spanish and Portuguese Department Conference on Hispanic American Culture and Society at the University of New Mexico. The meeting represented a departure from what had come to be the established practice over some years of hosting the conference at the University of Houston, the Recovery Project's home institution. In this way, the joint-conference, the first to be held away from strong conceptual and archival moorings that Houston represents for Recovery scholars may have moved the conference organizers to commit scholars and researchers to the conference theme, "The Critical Importance of Region." New Mexico, in matters of U.S. Hispanic culture and society, is commonly regarded as a region that both deeply configures and contains the vestiges of those earlier moments of scholarship known as Southwest regionalism. And these vestiges come with the perceived limitations of writings filled with nostalgia, parochialism, and sentimentality. Despite apprehensions that the very idea of regionalism might irreversibly and forever place Recovery scholars in some backwater camp of dim-witted, uncritical parochialists, the site committee boldly moved forward its call for scholarly engagement in "critical regionalism," thus challenging Recovery scholars to aim for a region studies model, that specifically not be construed as criticism from a circumspect inquiry, but that would emerge as critical engagement to re-theorize and re-conceptualize how region, place, and nation operate along the fluid continuum of the local and the global. Place, indeed had become a relevant consideration for the conference in as much as an earlier call for participation included the caveat, "In this regard, New Mexico seems like the perfect conference site to

consider the implicit and explicit perimeters of regional markers that make up what we consider the U.S. Hispanic Recovery Project." Responding to this provocation the conference was immensely fruitful as can be deduced from perusing a sampling of session titles:

- The Hemispheric Dimensions of Recovery Literature
- Religion, Mythology, and Representations of Colonialism
- Corridos. Patria Chica, patrimonio grande: la universalidad del corrido regional
- Translating Latinidad for the Anglo-American Audience
- Women Bridging the Gaps Between Space, Gender, and Nation
- (Re)Imagining Regional, Literary, and Historical Values
- Constructions of Gender, Nation, and Literary Culture in Early Hispanic Periodicals

In all, some sixty-plus scholars grappled over the two days of the conference with a set of critical questions such as: How do recovered authors consider region as opposed to nation? When does region become nation? How might we re-theorize or re-historicize the importance of "place" in the colonial period or after 1848 or 1898? In the 21st century, is the Recovery Project aiding and abetting the "browning" of America—a code word that might mean spatializing/racializing Anglo America?

It is from the powerful exchange and interaction of these scholars that the twelve essays comprising this sixth in a series of volumes document the decade and half of interdisciplinary work fostered by the Recovery Project. Each of these essays, and, indeed nearly all the scholarship that the Recovery Project has fostered has never been reducible to circumspect matters of local color or local context and, even when the staring point of recovery work is nearly always a locale, a site, be it canton [*mi cantón* as pachucos came to understand it] or province or region. We would do well to remind ourselves that all locales, by virtue of having been engulfed in global human affairs, in colonialism and post-colonialism, are always situated in ever widening frames of political and social meaning resulting from the processual associations of *plaza, pueblo, comarca, cantón, estado, nación, hemisferio, reino, imperio* and *diáspora*.

Thus, the most apt methodological description of what critical regionalism has meant to the present volume comes from the procedure digital imagery affords contemporary scholars. Here we speak in terms of the technological means that contemporary researchers have at their disposal with which to digitally enhance, enlarge, augment, reduce, sharpen, shade, shave, filter, center, and de-center at will any image in any given data bank. It should, therefore, not surprise us that the simultaneous and coterminous "zoom," so ubiquitous a fea-

ture of photo software can help us conceptualize the methodological approach that we see operating in scholarship given to recovered texts. This is most especially true, when this engagement demands that we reframe knowledge and concern ourselves critically with place, site, and region. It is therefore most recommendable that scholars "zoom in" and "zoom out" out of the text in an endless and continual sweep of vision, that sizes the local against the global, inverts background (past) and foreground (present), moves from accession to recession point, measures longitude to latitude, fits the past to the present and so forth. Critical regionalism therefore makes every point of convergence on a given text, a potential doorway for critical examination, just as Jorge Luis Borges imagined Pascal's sphere and thought of it as "a fearful sphere whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere." The marvel for us today, of course, is that we not only can speak of such an imaginary, but that we can see it demonstrated before our eyes with technology. It is, of course, this newfound ability to calibrate for scale, with the virtual simultaneity and precision that digitalization allows that can be a most useful parallel to the new critical regionalism that emerged from the Recovery Project's eighth conference. Therefore, much of the work included here reflects a simultaneous and precisely displayed consideration of the local to global, of region to hemisphere, and of past to present. It is precisely by adjusting for scale, by resizing and re-imagining the local in the global, the canton in the hemispheric, as it were, and the past in the present and, by alternatively and repeatedly reversing these operations, that we are made aware that things do not stand monolithically as the stasis of imposed representative moments, locked as they might once have been in parochialism, sentimentality, and nostalgia. Technology, in the service of the phenomenology of critical regionalism, permits us to consider all moments at once as it were, and to reconsider how seemingly isolated places in "our Américas" have always been fused to historical processes (how could it be otherwise?) and that locales have and continue to be in relation to all other parts of the planet. Technology, as we have been discussing here, redeems our paradoxes, resolving as it were the apparent contradictions we see boldly writ and unfettered in the language of our conference program: "The Hemispheric Dimensions of Recovery Literature"; "Patria Chica, patrimonio grande: la universalidad del corrido regional"; and "Translating Latinidad for the Anglo-American Audience." Thus, as editors of Volume VI we seek to embrace the virtual simulteanity and precision imparted by virtual displays of texts, what we now know to be inherent to the contemporary ways by which we assign meaning to region. To this end we have sought to group the essays in this volume into the four thematic areas, which we see as evocative of the method we have been describing:

I. Recalibrating the Local and Global: History as Region and Region as History
II. Voicing Dissent, Staging Identity, Speaking into Time
III. Translating Latinidad, Hispanismo in the World
IV. From Canton to the Nation-state and Beyond, Transnational Authors and Activists

In Part I, "Recalibrating the Local and Global: History as Region and Region as History," we group essays by Juan José Alonso, Erlinda Gonzales-Berry, Manuel M. Martín-Rodríguez, and Melina Vizcaíno-Alemán. Alonso's article, "Representing the Tejano on Screen: Américo Paredes and *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez,"* is a well-written piece that brings into play competing notions, often at odds, stemming from the screen representation of the story of Gregorio Cortez as Alonso asks readers to consider what weight should be given to the views expressed by Américo Paredes in unpublished items in his archives? The premise that Paredes's views should be given special regard and consideration in assessing the film is an interesting one and is well realized in this essay. Including a film study in the work of the Recovery Project adds a fresh new perspective to the recovery work.

Nuevo Mexicanos' struggle for historical veracity and interpretive authority, evinced in the historical writings of Benjamin Read and the literary imaginary of Fray Angélico Chávez focuses the long-lived critique of U.S. historiography that unmoors New Mexico and the Southwest from the global, hemispheric, and national anchors of its Spanish colonial and Mexican Republic past, and thus from its Hispano legacies. Gonzales-Berry's "Benjamin Read: New Mexico's Bernal Díaz del Castillo," spatializes time and historicizes space and links two pivotal eyewitness accounts of invasion, of Spain in Mexico and the U.S. in New Mexico, that del Castillo and Read respectively write to tell *la verdadera historia*, and to contest "official" hegemonic history. In Read's published and unpublished histories, in his struggle with the *New Mexico Historical Review* and the politics of historical erasure, Gonzales-Berry underscores critical issues and tensions in the larger historiographic design of U.S. History—the construction of Euro-American centered national history and national identity—within which the local arbiters of the nationalist project marginalized Read and misconstrued New Mexico history.

In "'Las Almas y Las Letras:' Recovering Fray Angélico Chávez's Poetry," Manuel M. Martín-Rodríguez interprets Chávez's literary and cultural production, here centered on his poetic works, as the scholarly priest's own recovery project—his intervention in the growing Anglo American displacement of New Mexico's Hispanic history, culture, and identity. In Chávez's poetry (1939-1969), Martín-Rodríguez reads not only the most successful distillation of his

religious thought but a bicultural fusion, a cultural syncretism and synthesis of English- and Spanish-language lyric poetry traditions designed to provide spiritual and cultural nourishment to Nuevo Mexicanos, and to reinstate Hispano cultural agency.

Chávez's complex historical vision is the subject of Melina Vizcaíno-Alemán's "New Mexican Triptycs: Anglo Southwesternism, Chicano Nationalism, and the Tri-Partite Cultural Critique of Fray Angélico Chávez's Fiction." In her examination of the learned friar's historical novel, Vizcaíno-Alemán deftly crosses temporalities (17th to 20th centuries), genres (poetry, painting, and novel) and historiographies to develop a sophisticated and convincing argument that this New Mexican author-priest's triptych work moves beyond dualism to a more complex hybridity in which the myth of tri-cultural harmony among Native Americans, Spanish-Mexicans, and Anglos becomes a mode of triptych cultural critique. The triptych critique, Vizcaíno-Alemán further argues, is a useful methodology for recovering U.S. Hispanic literature precisely because "it points to the Southwest's triple-voiced literary history, its hybrid colonial histories, and contested cultural icons and foreshadows Chicana feminist's third space, while simultaneously showing up the limitations of oppositional ideologies" (22).

In Part II*, "*Voicing Dissent, Staging Identity, Speaking into History," Patricia Gubitosi's work on 19th century Hispanic journalism provides a qualitative analysis of nine instances of language/linguistic practices that help chart the social discourse of the New Mexico historical newspaper *La Voz del Pueblo.* In describing these linguistic practices, Gubitosi shows how a set of cultural, ideological, and political assumptions operated and were shared by the readership of *La Voz del Pueblo*. While also examining the role of Hispanic journalists, Edwin Karli Padilla Aponte draws our attention to the advocacy of the Spanish in New York in support of Puerto Rican nationhood at the end of World War II. The theme of nation status for Puerto Rico, here, is critically important for assessing notions of community and nation and for righting about the short-shrift literary scholars have given to the press as an important institution of community.

In "Josephina Niggli as a Regional Voice: A Rexamination of *Mexican Village* and *Step Down Elder Brother,*" Donna M. Kabalen de Bichara uses concepts of cultural space, Lotman's theory of the semiosphere, and Bakhtin's notion of the folkloric chronotope to analyze Niggli's two works, written in the mid 1940s, as an expression of coming to terms with the ideological conflicts resulting from dual Mexican and Euro North American identities. In Niggli, who affirms the mestizaje of Hidalgo and Monterrey in the Mexican north as the transformative agent of modern Mexico, Kabalen de Bichara finds an early

and powerful, if not prophetic, regional voice. The future, proclaims the Mexican-American Niggli, is mestizo.

Part III, "Translating Latinidad, Hispanismo in the World," speaks most directly to the continual sweep of vision evident in the serious critical assessment of region. In particular, Melissa Marie González's piece entitled, "Resisting the 'Fatal Allurement' of Local Color: María Cristina Mena's Mexico in *American Magazine* and *The Century Magazine*" is especially centered on the act of sizing the local against the global. The paper rests on the premise that Mena is aware and conscious of her role as cultural translator and mediator and that her submissions to *The Century Magazine* reveal an author who is writing with and against the grain of the misimpressions widely held about Mexico and Mexican culture by her American readership. Key to González's assertions is her use of Mena's letters as co-relational texts that support her argument. From these letters readers can now better consider translational tensions and questions of Mena's translatability and non-fictional sentiment.

Charting new recovery ground, Guillermo de los Reyes Heredia's "Translating, Smuggling, and Recovering Books in Nineteenth Century Mexico: Thomas Smith Webb's *El Monitor de los Masones Libres: ó, Ilustraciones sobre la Masonería*, reveals the world of Freemasonry books translated from English to Spanish, published in Philadelphia and New York, and smuggled into Mexico and Latin America during the political upheavals and independence movements of the 1820s. Among different nationalist movements, de los Reyes Heredia reminds us, translation was important to the process of building a national culture. Recovery of translated Freemasonry texts is central to a more complete understanding of complex intellectual, political, and ideological developments in Mexico, among Hispanics in the United States, and indeed, in the Américas.

In Part IV, Sergio Reyna's article, "La resistencia cultural en la novela de inmigración mexicana a los Estados Unidos," examines five shared attributes in early novels of Mexican immigration to the United States The author has chosen well among possible texts upon which to rest the premise that there is a shared and common experience registered in El *sol de Texas* (Espinosa, 1926); La *patria pérdida* (Torres, 1935); *La aventuras de don Chipote* (Venegas, 1928), and *Aventuras de un bracero* (Topete, 1948). One finds a clear synthesis and a well-estimated unfolding of ideas, that allows amply discussion in the paper of "a) la resistencia cultural del inmigrante, b) nacionalismo cultural de la comunidad inmigrante, c) El "México de fuera" d) el papel de la prensa en la formación del nacionalismo cultural," and "e) lo carnavalesco como una filosofía de vida in the four works being studied."

While revolution impelled Mexican immigration to the United States, Mexicana journalists, intellectuals and activists writing and publishing in San Anto-

nio, Texas, challenged masculinist gendered constructs of revolution and nation. In "Sara Estela Ramírez and Andrea Villarreal Gonzalez: Revolutionary Voices?," Pilar Melero recalibrates the cultural space of motherhood to analyze the contestatory discourse on the emancipation of women of two pivotal Mexicana writers, regarded as transnational precursors of Chicana/Latina feminisms. Ramírez and Villarreal González, Melero convincingly argues, utilized motherhood, an integral element in Mexican woman's construction of self, as a heteretopian site of resistance—one that both reproduced and challenged hegemonic propositions of orthodox Mexicana femininity. Finally, in this section, Melissa L. Garland, offers "Deism and the Authorship of *Jicoténcal*," a cleanly written article that evaluates deism and Enlightenment ideas in *Jicoténcal* as a means to further authenticate the authorship of the novel as the work of Félix Varela.

The twelve essays that compose the sixth volume of the series zoom in and out of recovery material as they respond to considerations of the local to global, of region to hemisphere, and of past to present.