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

Edited by Gerald E. Poyo
and Tomás Ybarra-Frausto

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Introduction

Gerald E. Poyo and Tomás Ybarra-Frausto

Recovering the U.S. Latino Literary Heritage project is ambitious and tackles big goals and ideas; it has done so since its inception in 1990. Its trajectory is documented in the six previous volumes of this series. This seventh contribution derives from the ninth biannual conference, "Encuentros y Reencuentros: Making Common Ground," held in St. Louis, Missouri, in collaboration with the Western Historical Association in October 2006. Here also the Recovery program organizers set expansive goals for participants, including reaching out explicitly to historians of the west and encouraging scholars to consider methodological approaches to integrating the diverse U.S. Hispanic story. "It is fitting that this geographic center of the United States, serve as the place for our historic encounter: that of western history and Recovery scholars," noted Nicolás Kanellos, director of the program. Common themes, he said, are plainly evident in "the intersecting paths of our intellectual and cultural concerns, the conflict and contestation so apparent in western and Latino histories of the United States, as well as the confluence, cooperation and syncretism." [from Introduction of the Recovery Conference Program]

Besides continuing the practice established in the seventh and eighth conferences of partnering with scholarly groups interested in similar pursuits (the American Studies Association in 2002 and the University of New Mexico Spanish and Portuguese Department in 2004), this conference constituted the Recovery project's first collaboration with an association of historians. "Making common ground" with historians has been a Recovery project goal since early on and this joint meeting represented an effort to promote institutional scholarly collaboration. The meeting made eminent sense since Recovery's work is inherently historical and western history of the United States is intricately linked with the history of Hispanic peoples since the sixteenth century.

Recovery project scholars routinely place the literary and historical in dialogue, which involves examining recovered literary documents within their historical contexts and interpreting them through diverse cultural, textual and linguistic analytical approaches. This endeavor begins with the practical process of identifying and making available for scholars the written record of Hispanic populations during four and a half centuries. Recovery scholars have interpreted unknown, or little known, literary texts fully within their historical context, in this way linking the rich Hispanic literary tradition to the historical trajectory of the United States. The historical contextualization by Recovery project scholars of the writings of Cabeza de Vaca, Amparo Ruiz de Burton, Daniel Venegas or Jovita González, for example, have helped interpret historical moments, just as continuing research into the historical moments themselves clarify and explain the texts. As the available body of Hispanic documentary texts grows, scholars also engage in a continuing reinterpretation of the historiographic record. Despite the still "insufficient theorization of the historical presuppositions underwriting the endeavor" observed by Kenya Dworkin y Méndez and Agnes Lugo-Ortiz in the fifth volume of this series, this process of literary and historical "dialogue" has deepened scholarly understanding of the political, socioeconomic and cultural effects and legacies of the United States conquest of the regions from Texas to California on the lives of the people.

With this methodology in mind, Recovery scholars at the ninth conference succeeded in creating openings and opportunities for cross-disciplinary and intra-ethnic discussions. For their part, they highlighted the rich Hispanic literary contributions and encouraged Western historians to incorporate recovered texts in their research and courses. On the other hand, a seamless engagement grounded in shared intellectual and logistical concerns between the Recovery project's essentially literary constituency and historians proved challenging. Divergent assumptions, methods, discourses and rhetoric often prevent effective interaction across disciplinary boundaries, always challenging for those interested in promoting multidisciplinary scholarly approaches. Nevertheless, the experience identified a fruitful collaborative path and initiated conversations that resulted in the inclusion of Recovery-sponsored panels at the 2008 Western History Association meeting in Salt Lake, City Utah.

In addition to the collaborative scholarly goals involving literature and history, conference organizers also used the common ground theme to encourage literary critics and historians of the Hispanic experience to integrate research "in Latina and Latino Studies disciplines, from Chicano to Cuban to Dominican to Puerto Rican studies to Sephardic Studies and beyond" as a complement to the previous conference's focus on region. Calling for the use of "trans-disciplinary, trans-national and trans-cultural" methodologies, Recovery project organizers

encouraged scholars to analyze and interpret texts and themes beyond specific ethnicities, creating aperture for convergence of similar issues across diverse national groups. [from Recovery Conference, Call for Papers, 2006]

This integration also proved challenging. While one conference plenary session addressed the intra-ethnic character of the Recovery project's work, the overall integrative enterprise remains in its infancy. The unbalanced scholarly production favoring Mexican-American and southwest studies observed in most Recovery conferences and volumes persists. This tendency reflects demographic and other realities, including a strong commitment by Recovery scholars to what Dworkin y Méndez and Lugo-Ortiz describe as "questions of territoriality and regionalism deemed proper to the Southwestern experience." Together, this collection and volume six, for example, include only two articles that focus on "other" Hispanics which highlights the need to further encourage Recovery scholars to advance writing about the broad Latino experience. Certainly, sufficient research material exists. During the last fifteen years the Recovery project has identified and made available valuable literary and historical sources pertaining to all the historical communities that await interested scholars.

If the conference faced challenges, it also accomplished the primary and essential function of all Recovery conferences: to bring together scholars dedicated to presenting new knowledge about the Hispanic experience in the United States. Recovery contributions to the joint conference included seventeen panels with formal presentations, two plenary sessions, several roundtable discussions, literary readings and receptions that provided scholars the opportunity formally and informally to engage a wide-range of themes on mostly Mexican-American topics. Not surprisingly then the eleven essays included here organized into four sections reflect this continuing interest. In some ways these essays represent a continuation of the regional theme that informed volume six; indeed, it seems fitting that collaboration with the Western History Association resulted in a volume that deals essentially with the Hispanic West.

Part I brings together three essays on "History, Culture and Ideology," uncovering aspects of historiography, cultural identity and exile thought. The collection begins with an exploration of the way in which the once much maligned sixteenth century chronicle over a century gained acceptance as a legitimate source of historical "truth." José Antonio Gurpegui and Carmen Gómez Galisteo's, "Describing the 'New World': *De dicto* vs. *de re,* Historians vs. Eyewitnesses," traces the development of Spanish historiography of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries through the eyes of historians and chroniclers. In the sixteenth century, historians viewed themselves as uniquely positioned and trained to offer accurate historical accounts. Though historians relied on first person accounts in combination with other sources to offer their version of

events, they considered chroniclers biased eyewitnesses with inherently limited perspectives. By the time of the publication of Bernal Díaz del Castillo's *Historia verdadera de la conquista de a Nueva España,* the chronicler established greater legitimacy and gained "the right of historicizing himself in the events in which he had so actively participated."

The relationship between culture, representation and power is the subject of Alicia Verónica Sánchez Martínez's, "Recuperando la memoria cultural: Cleofas Jaramillo y las recetas originales de Nuevo México." Sánchez's examination of a cookbook of "recetas originales" raises many interesting issues related to the complicated legacy of class, race and ethnicity in Hispanic New Mexico. Sánchez points out that in representing her "authentic" New Mexican dishes as "Spanish recipes," Cleofas Jaramillo ignores the Mexican and indigenous influences from which her dishes emerge. "Se destacan," notes Sánchez, "los mecanismos que las instituciones tienen para producir y reproducir el poder y la ideología."

Alejandra Balestra's, "Women Writers in the Nineteenth-Century Hispanic Southwest: Letters, Discourses and Linguistics," examines the historical role of women in the U.S. Southwest. This examination of Spanish-language correspondence by Hispanic women who belonged to the privileged classes demonstrates their involvement in quotidian matters and concern with protecting their families and possessions, seeking justice and commenting on society in general.

Part II, "Women's Voices: Gender, Politics and Culture," includes three essays that explore women's political, socio-cultural and economic critiques and engagement with the world around them. In "Recovering the Self: The Unnamed Characters of Luisa Capetillo's *How Poor Women Prostitute Themselves*," Nancy Bird-Soto explores the worldview of Puerto Rican activist Luisa Capetillo, a subject of previous attention in volume five of this series. Bird-Soto analyzes Capetillo's play *Cómo se prostituyen los pobres* (1916), which revolves around an unnamed prostitute who is a metaphor for the life of poor women everywhere who become prostitutes "whenever they enter an unequal relationship that subordinates them, financially, politically and personally."

Pilar Melero follows with her essay, "*El héroe agachado* or the Hero that Wasn't: Virile Language and Women's Quest for Political Participation," which examines gender representations in the writings of *activistas* Juana Belén Gutiérrez and Andrea Villarreal González during the Mexican Revolution. Melero reveals how the writings of the women activists sought to shame men into involvement in revolution and to "rearticulate femininity away from the confines of passivity" toward greater involvement in politics.

Commentary by women on politics, economics and society is also the subject of how Mexican expatriates constructed a "México de Afuera" in the 1920s is the topic of Gabriela Baeza Ventura, "Treacherous Women in the *crónicas* of

Quezigno Gazavic: A Strategy in Creating Commmunity." Particularly concerned with the expression of gender ideology as part of an overall strategy of promoting traditional Mexican values in the United States, Baeza analyzes a *crónica* that appeared in San Antonio's *El Heraldo Mexicano* in the 1920s. The *crónica* "demanded that Mexican women remain Catholic, that they treasure their traditions and culture and they not lose their language."

The three essays in Part III, "Amparo Ruiz de Burton: Literature and History," reflect the continuing interest in the writings of Ruiz de Burton. As noted in the fifth volume of the Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage series, *The Squatter and the Don* "is the only recovered work that consistently reappears as an object of obsessive critical attention." After an abeyance in volume six, Ruiz de Burton appears again.

"Mechanical imagery" is the focus of Kevin Anzzolin's "Building a Bridge to the Twentieth Century: Ruiz de Burton's Novel Techne in *The Squatter and the Don.*" By concentrating on three nineteenth century technological innovations—telephones, trains and cameras—Azzolin analyzes how the subtle use of mechanical imagery becomes a primary organizing trope in the novel. In his reading, "it is the divestiture of technological know-how that ultimately derails the *californio* plans for national assimilation and reconciliation."

Timothy P. Gaster, "Irony and Laughter in Ruiz de Burton's Public Sphere," examines how an incipient public sphere is represented in the novel through the literary devices of irony and humor. Framed by Michael Baktin's notion of the carnivalesque, Gaster elucidates how laughter is the medium through which the *californios* loss of socio-political status is critiqued and challenged.

Alberto Varon, "The Interior Frontier Man: *The Squatter and the Don,* the Conquest of Manhood and the Making of Mexican-American Literature," contrasts forms of masculinity in the Southwest frontier. The Anglo-frontiersman devoid of feeling represented by the Squatter is contrasted to Don Mariano Alamar who exemplifies the sentimental self-aware male characterized by a dialectic of patriarchy and defeat. These two myths of American manhood become integrated with questions of identity and subject formation in the subsequent evolution of Mexican-American literature.

Part IV treats the subject of "Language Representation and Translation" in two essays. In "Representations of Language in Three Early Novels by U.S. Latinos," María Irene Moyna considers the divergent language strategies used to represent bilingualism in the work of María Amparo Ruiz de Burton, Daniel Venegas and Jovita González. Ruiz de Burton's protagonists employ "elite Spanish-English bilingualism" while Venegas' main characters are working-class Spanish monolingual speakers who use non-standard forms "including rural dialect and urban caló." González uses English to represent Spanish to a mostly

monolingual English-speaking audience. Each author's choice of strategy reflected their particular social environment and literary goals.

In the final essay of the volume, Ethriam Cash Brammer de Gonzales argues that a faithful translation of any work of literature must remain consistent with the original text in form, genre and historical period. In "'Keeping it Real': The Translation of *El sol de Texas,*" Brammer de Gonzales offers a painstaking literary analysis that reveals Conrado Espinosa's text to be a realist novel with some elements of naturalism, a finding that must inform a translator's decisions when rendering the work into another language.

Like previous volumes, the essays in this seventh compendium respond to questions of nomenclature, genre, subject and identity formation, gender and the omnipresent themes of cultural resistance and affirmation. Scholars attend to the heterogeneous class positions and aspirations of writers and how they relate to their literary production. There is continual attention to gender and how historically women have nurtured interstitial social spaces to voice their concerns. Also how dominant myths of manhood are revised and re-articulated by Latino writers and thinkers. The papers push forward the primary goal of the Recovery project as a whole—to make new knowledge about the texts and socio-historical contexts of Hispanic literary production within the United States from the colonial period through 1960.

Latinos are now the largest ethnic group in the United States and the Recovery enterprise is a critical part of a larger multicultural and multilingual Latino Cultural project encompassing Latina/o images and imaginations in all the arts. Today's Latina/o culture is nurtured within local, national and international spaces and is vibrant in the formation of new mobile identities, incipient collations and solidarities and possible social formations of connection, communications and conciliation within national groups and across borders. Shared historical processes such as colonization, immigration, mestizaje and resistance are seen as possible links for cultural convergence in the Americas.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, Latina/o scholars and activists continue a quest to imagine and sustain public spheres of inter-cultural dialogue and the maintenance of an intellectual commons that affirms both difference and common ground. The envisioning of what cultural theorist Arjun Appadurai calls "communities of sentiment across borders." Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage Project remains a foundational enterprise for seeding, nurturing, gathering and disseminating the intellectual and symbolic production of U.S. Latino writers as integral components of an inter-dependent global community.