

◆ Afterword

Hispanism—*disciplina moriendi*

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Acabo de oír el grito necrófilo de "¡Viva la muerte!" Esto me suena lo mismo que "¡Muera la vida!" Y yo, que he pasado toda la vida creando paradojas que provocaron el enojo de quienes no las comprendieron, he de deciros, con autoridad en la materia, que esta ridícula paradoja me parece repelente.

-Miguel de Unamuno (Thomas 294–95)

"Spain is different," Manuel Fraga and countless advertisements proclaimed. Does this also mean that *death* is different, in Spain? That Spain—or the Hispanic world—understands death differently, remembers its dead differently, grieves and celebrates differently, thinks differently about the afterlife? Differently—from whom or from what? The essays collected in this volume on *Death and Afterlife in the Early Modern Hispanic World* will interest students of the early modern period as well as philosophically-inclined critics, historians and anthropologists more broadly, for three reasons. In the first place, because the subject is imagined with a polemical broadness that's not just invigorating, but also productive in the extreme. It seems important to rescue the notion of a "Hispanic world" from the province of Reagan-era political taxonomies, or from post-1898 imperial nostalgia in the Peninsula, or from the condescending *ninguneos* with which the Spanish academy refers to non-Spaniards who study Iberian literature and culture. That there *was* such a thing as an "early modern Hispanic world"—and that the study of mortuary practices as well as the study of linguistic variation, administrative consolidation, imperial expansion,

indigenous resistance, etc., can help define its borders—this will be the first challenge this collection presents. The essays will also provoke because they move toward an increasing *differentiation* of the concepts of “death” and the “afterlife” in this baggy Hispanic world of early modernity. They do so by attending carefully to the different registers designated by the verbs on which I open—“understanding” and “thinking about” death and the afterlife, “remembering” and “grieving,” and “celebrating” the dead. This is refreshing and important, because studies of death tend, perhaps for obvious reasons, to move very quickly either toward the register suggested by the faintly paradoxical “thinking about” or “understanding” death, or to the more-than-faintly positivist register in which descriptions of individual or social “remembering,” “grieving,” or “celebrating” are set. We find on one side arguments that take as their starting point the general unthinkability of death (death, Wittgenstein says in the *Tractatus*, is not an event in life: “Der Tod ist kein Ereignis des Lebens. Den Tod erlebt man nicht” (184–5) (we do not live to experience death); on the other, arguments that enumerate and analyze the array of practices that respond to the fact of another’s death. Here, a universal limit to what can be known or spoken about, and an attendant turn to mysticism (in Wittgenstein’s case), to speculation and metaphysics; there, a condition of utter cultural particularism, and a turn toward the anthropology of every-day life. Seldom are these two arguments, or strategies, put into conversation. Finally, these essays will be of interest because they help us to ask this question: what does the Hispanic world’s understanding of death and the afterlife contribute to our understanding, in broad terms, of modernization (i.e. secularization, state-formation, technological shifts, etc.)?

About the first matter there isn’t much to say. (Rather, there is too much to be said, and the essays of this volume enact rather than say it.) “Hispanism” has been a tormented notion for a long time indeed. It is highly symptomatic of the term’s drift and charge that it is only in 1899, the year after the *desastre* of Spanish decolonization, that the Diccionario de la Real Academia Española (DRAE) adds to its definition of “hispanismo,” stable since the early eighteenth century, the notion of a foreign perspective or a foreign use of Spanish: “Hispanismo, Giro ó modo de hablar propio y privativo de la lengua española. Vocablo ó giro de esta lengua de esta lengua *empleado en otra*. Empleo de vocablos ó giros españoles *en distinto idioma*” (my emphasis). On the evidence of the essays collected in this volume, this “distinto idioma” that begins to haunt the DRAE’s Hispanism in 1899 haunts the Hispanic world since early modernity. As the Hispanic world was not defined linguistically (it included, used, *empleaba otras lenguas*), or religiously—at home, the specters of heterodoxy, crypto-Judaism, Lutheranism, false-conversion haunted the confessional state, which sought to export and re-import procedures of conversion and confessionalization back and forth between Spain and the New World, *las Indias* and *las Indias*

en casa—, or even administratively, the *virreinos* retained a remarkable degree of autonomy from the Crown. Hispanism in its modern sense is born just when Spain's imperial identity fails, even when it *dies*—which is why the term *hispanista* so often rings with the compensatory condescension of *ressentiment*. How appropriate to stake out an early-modern sense of “Hispanism” on the basis not of a concept or a substantive (language, religion, imperial administration) but of a relation—an encounter, a contrast, a partially failed or partially successful translation, between the regionally, economically, and religiously differentiated mortuary customs of the Peninsula, and those equally differentiated customs of the first imperial outposts!

About the second intervention this volume makes. The face-off between speculative universalism and cultural empiricism could hardly be posed more starkly than in the question of “death and afterlife.” “[L]a muerte [. . .] es una puerta general de naturaleza,” (death is a door for all nature generally) writes Francisco Pérez, in an unexceptional *Via Sacra, y Exercicios espirituales, y Arte de bien morir* of 1619. “[Y] aunque todas las otras criaturas cuando se corrompen, en su manera dezimos que mueren: mas propriamente se dize del hombre racional” (And although we say of all creatures when they suffer corruption, that in their way they die . . . it is more properly said of rational man). Pérez is making a broad, traditional claim not just about what “la muerte” is, but about what sorts of creatures possess it (or are susceptible to it, or characterized by it). It is the proper of the human, rational animal to die; other animals, unconscious of their end, soul-less, die “en su manera,” but not “propriamente.” Man is the creature that *dies*. Among creatures, man is exceptional; qua human, no man is exceptional before or in respect to death, the universal condition, since man is only man inasmuch as he can die. (And anyone can die well—as the general Catholic principle, or fantasy, of deathbed-conversion attests, and the very preponderance of *artes moriendi* tracts confirms.)

What is paradoxical about the matter is at the heart of the little phrase from Wittgenstein I mentioned. Although “Death is not an event in life,” as he says in the *Tractatus*, not an event in my life inasmuch as it is not an experience that I can have (his German is stronger: “Der Tod ist kein Ereignis des Lebens. Den Tod erlebt man nicht”), it is also *not* something other than an event in life. My death is something you and I can discuss, in the way we discuss what lies over the horizon or the rising of the sun tomorrow—*ex hypothesi*. But what makes “my death” different from (say) the city of Paris (also a destination, also over the horizon), or the event of my birth, or a square circle, or the identity of the present king of France, is that, although it is not an event in my life, it is also, as “my death,” Jacques’s death, not an event in anyone else’s life either—though this condition of “not-being-an-event-of-life” obtains for all others in an entirely different way from the way in which that event obtains for me. The most that we can

say about “my death” and your own, in conversation, is that for each of us “my death” is not a part of “life,” though this not-being-an-event-of-life is not something that we *share* as experiences. When we give this not-being-an-event-of-my-life the same name, “my death” or “death” *tout court*, we act out of a communicative necessity, though in fact “my death” is the least translatable of terms, and perhaps the only genuinely untranslatable designation we have. (Whereas Paris is part of someone’s life, and square circles and the identity of the present king of France are not part of anyone’s life, but they are “defective,” as Austrian philosopher Alexius Meinong might say, in exactly the same way for anyone.)

Still on the distinction between universalism and culturalism, but on the other side, we find a claim regarding cultural and historical particularism. Certainly, “[L]a muerte [. . .] es una puerta general de naturaleza,” but when we consider death “*propriamente*,” as it pertains to the creatures-who-can-die, to human animals, this “puerta general” becomes many doors immediately. For the relation between “naturaleza” and what today we would call *cultura* or *sociedad* is not itself natural, if by that we mean given, inflexible, essential. Natural points of inflection are precisely where cultural and historical differences collect; death in Spain is different from death in France, in the Maghreb, in the Hispanic world; death in the early modern period is different among the Spanish and among the indigenous populations of New Spain. Death *then* was not what it is *now*; that death has passed away, though its ghostly traces remain, in the form of vestigial practices or unassimilated iterations of customs prevalent at other times. One could be even more forceful: these differences don’t just merely collect at points of natural inflection (births, deaths, epidemics; the sharing of cooked or raw foods, the institution of taboos on incest, fratricide, etc.) but are constituted by them. The fact that “death” is different, or treated differently, in Spain and in the Andean societies, among Catholics in Cuenca or the Inka in Cuzco, is what distinguishes these societies, and also what makes necessary a discipline devoted to the description of those distinctions. The classic study of the collective representation of death is Robert Hertz’s “*Contribution à une étude sur la représentation collective de la mort*” of 1907. One is not surprised to find that Hertz’s groundbreaking study is also importantly meta-disciplinary, an inchoate effort to understand the limits of epistemologies that map cultures upon a developmental grid (“*les faits que présentent nombre de sociétés moins avancées que la nôtre*” [the facts we find in a number of societies less advanced than ours]) or seek to enumerate their differences from a metropolitan norm, or from other peripheral societies. The “representation of death” is where “collectivities” form, and where disciplines devoted to studying different “collectivities” also collect, differentiate themselves, form rules for their own subsistence, live, die.

This face-off between universalism and cultural particularism strikes one at first as a merely apparent disagreement. When we say “death” in this

second sense we are generally referring to something a little different from what we mean in the first, universal or ontological sense. (I'll get to the question of who "we" are in this phrase in just a moment.) There, an organic fact, an event pertaining to one organism (and also to all organisms) is what we mean: creatures die, some properly (the rational ones: humans), all others merely "en su manera." Here, though, on the exceptionalist or culturalist side, "death" refers to the extensive collection of practices, technologies, rituals and stories that surround and shape that fact. There is no need to make the distinction weaker than it need be: the cultural value of the term "death" extends to the shape, even the status, of the biological fact that it seems to surround. The (biological, ontological) fact of death is not just re-semanticized by its (cultural, technological, social) shaping: its borders are shifted or redrawn, its characteristics and value changed, its time modified (think Karen Ann Quinlan or Terri Schiavo; time of death; legal death; zombie films; the Resurrection). Contemporary interest in biopolitics would be entirely ephemeral if the life of the *fact* were not at stake in the construction of death. (Hertz: "les faits que présentent nombre de sociétés" [49] [the facts we find in a number of societies]). It is not clear that one can talk about death; it is not clear that one ever does anything but talk about it. This might be the general shape that modern academic disciplines, including moral philosophy, sociology, and theology, have given the question of death, or more properly, of the experience of finitude. This paradox sounds pleasingly out-of-date, each of its elements somehow bypassed, so tightly linked to a historical moment as to appear, dare one say, ghostly, a sort of revenant from philosophical times past. And this is where the last two matters come in—the question of who "we" are in all this, and the question what, specifically, the Hispanic world of early modernity can contribute to a discussion that I have made sound by turns dangerously fuzzy, absurdly scholastic, or merely sophomoric, the subject of late-night head-butting at a certain age. For it turns out that the only way to talk about an event which is not part of life is to change radically the sense we have of what "talking" is, what an "event" is, and what "life" is. A new discipline, a different sense of history, a changed sense of what a life is. Why the Hispanic world? Why early modernity? One controversial hypothesis might go like this. The case of Spain is exceptional and troubling to secularization theory and to modernization theory on two grounds, which come together in these essays. Spain does not conform to the theologico-political pattern that Schmitt associates with modernization—or if it does, it is out of phase with the procedures of state-formation in Europe. Spain comes late to secularization—which is another way of saying that a religious conception of life and of its finitude persists in Spain past the point at which, on Schmitt's description, it should. (The black legend of Spanish obscurantism, the Enlightenment blocked at the Pyrenees, and so on.) It is quite possible to take this exceptionalism in a radically reactionary direction, as Donoso will

do; but it is possible to imagine that Spain's, and the Hispanic world's, *desfase* with respect to the conception of finitude can provide a distinct approach to modernization, one in which the event of death is not susceptible, or not at any rate in the same way, of conversion into a "moment" to be absorbed into the machinery of the political state apparatus, or the machinery of the dialectical thought in which death becomes, as Hegel puts it in the *Phenomenology*, "the portentous power of the negative [. . .] the energy of thought, of pure I" (93). What he famously calls "tarrying with the negative," a disposition toward death understood as the power of negation, can come to have an entirely different sense when death is not understood to be thinkable in the same way, when "tarrying" with it has a different time-scheme from that provided by the providential structure of the theologico-political grid, when an unmodern—which is to say a Hispanic—death comes on stage.

What is this Hispanic death, and who are "we" who are asked, solicited, to think, understand it? "We build museums to death since death itself has died." This is the conclusion to which the editors of this special issue of *Hispanic Issues Online* arrive. The echo of Donne's great sonnet of ca. 1609–1611 is not lost on contemporary readers: "One short sleepe past, wee wake eternally, / And death shall be no more; death, thou shalt die" (29). The matter of death's death should interest particularly scholars of the early modern Hispanic world, the editors of this volume tell us:

Working through death and afterlife in the early modern Hispanic world is also a working through mourning in contemporary Spain and the Spanish-speaking world. Moreover, the study of death and afterlife has taken on special urgency today, not just as a means of moving beyond past political ideologies, but because of the way that technology is radically altering the assessment of death and how societies remember.

This is perhaps a bit stenographic, since the phrase "is also" has the burden of providing a complicated theory of mediation and genealogism, the historic circumstance of early modernity "worked through" the mediation of or relation to present circumstances, those circumstances understood as they are inflected by, or formed in, the "early modern Hispanic world"—a difficult dynamic to describe, harder to theorize. Because Spain and the Spanish-speaking world are living, uniquely, a relationship to recovered memory, the memory of the figure of death in the period of early modernity is of particular concern to Hispanic societies. The recovery of memory in Spain and in other societies traumatized by civil war, by *desaparecidos* and by *escuadrones*, always comes to us in the cultural figures used toward the consolidation of the nation as such—the memory of the recently dead, the dead in the *fosas* around us, comes cloaked in the fantasy of the formation of the state. And because the Hispanic world, and particularly the Spanish

world, has formed the fantastic myth of state formation in the shape of Hapsburg imperial expansion (one remembers how fond José Antonio Primo de Rivera was of citing Herrera's lines about the battle of Lepanto), structures like the ephemeral *túmulos* to the Hapsburg kings, or their cognates in the New World, marks of the finitude of the monarch if not the monarchy or the state, are places where our double relationship, to the past and to the present, each by means of the other, is "worked out." The Hispanic world today (in its unique relation to this specific form of mediation) can, with some care and attention to its specific relation to finitude to *death*, also be the place where a different way of speaking about an event that is not part of life can be envisioned. A different discipline, a different lexicon. *Otra vida*.

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