

◆ Afterword

Hispanic Studies, Disciplinary Dialogues, and the Crises of the Humanities

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As editors of *Hispanic Issues* and *Hispanic Issues On Line*, we are pleased to revisit a debate about the place of Hispanic linguistics and Hispanic literary/cultural studies in a liberal education, and to reflect on the possible complementarity of those areas within university departments. Such a topic, which was broached a decade ago in previous volumes of *Hispanic Issues* and *Hispanic Issues On Line* (respectively, *Ideologies of Hispanism* and *Debating Hispanic Studies*), seems to have rekindled a lively discussion at a time when universities in general, and Humanities departments in particular, are in an increasing state of turmoil. Such a situation may be the result of multiple factors—among them, the continuing decline of public funding for state institutions, the corporatization of higher education, a reliance on metrics that are often more in tune with the immediate needs of a market economy than with educational standards, and a diminished interest in those aspects of our work that are most directly connected to teaching and public engagement. In this context, a thorough self-examination of our frameworks and practices could well serve us to adapt what we do as teachers and scholars to the changing academic and social landscapes.

One of the first conclusions that can be drawn from this debate is that the latest concerns regarding a new crisis in the Humanities are not the result of a dearth of ideas. Rather, the essays generally argue that the Humanities, and Hispanic Studies within them, show clear signs of vibrant activity as spaces for intellectual dialogue and the advancement of ideas that often interact with fluidity with other academic fields and, more importantly, with the world beyond academe.

Notions derived a fresh look at Hispanic cultural and literary history with an eye toward confronting the present (as Castillo and Egginton propose regarding Cervantine skepticism), or from linguistic inquiry in fields, such as critical discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, and pragmatics

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(as underscored by Face and Del Valle), enrich our perspectives not only as scholars and educators, but also as citizens who are compelled to navigate daily through a myriad of electronic media guided largely by ratings and economic self-interest. The relative lack of scrutiny of the initial stages of Donald Trump's primary campaign by electronic media outlets is a case in point: wall-to-wall live coverage of jingoistic speeches at rallies (occasionally interrupted by protests), the constant recycling of provocative Twitter messages by the candidate, the scapegoating of undocumented immigrants and of a religious minority, and casual statements on the use of nuclear weapons, were often discussed in terms of Trump's brilliant dominance of news cycles, without regard to the potential reception of those messages among various audiences, some of whom viewed the candidate as truth teller and unmasker of "the Washington establishment," the very political power groups (in both political parties) to which the candidate had been contributing campaign funds for years.

One could argue that an important aspect of a humanistic, and more broadly speaking, liberal education is the development of critical thinking, knowledge of self and other, and the responsibilities to the various communities to which one belongs; it ideally involves empathy for the pain and suffering of others, an openness to dialogue, and an awareness of the dangers of authoritarianism and its dependence on the "manipulation of hearts and minds" (Brooks 1). These are also some of the very issues raised in texts to which we find ourselves returning as teachers and scholars. One thinks, for example, of Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quijote*, which continues to be studied and analyzed by literary/cultural critics with renewed interest, in light of current concerns. Yet, it is equally clear that linguists—in this case, especially (though not exclusively) those working in critical discourse analysis—could also continue to make valuable contributions to the analysis (and, yes, interpretation) of this and other literary/cultural texts, keeping in mind the social and political contexts of reception, a position not far from the one espoused in some respects by Del Valle and, in others, by Castillo and Egginton. The latter colleagues underscore the "ethical dilemmas and political consequences of the modern culture of the spectacle" (a notion explored by thinkers as different as José Antonio Maravall and Guy Debord), which is now made urgent by a more globalized environment in the "Age of the Digital Baroque" (Sherwin). Thus, in line with the core values of a liberal university education, Castillo and Egginton "refocus the discerning gaze of the Cervantine reader" on today's "media condition"; on what they call "our mediology," which is tied to "the current market society" (93). In a sense, their reflection is an *aggiornamento* of both Maravall's and Cervantes's own reflections on the culture industry of the baroque of the early 1600s (Spadaccini 1052–1056) and a revitalization of Cervantes's

message for our own digital age, which the authors do brilliantly through an analysis of Cervantes's *El retablo de las maravillas*.

We see here that Humanities scholars are working diligently on individual and collective projects that add value to their own disciplines as well as to the central educational mission of their institutions, which in turn acquire real significance as engaged components of democracies that must confront ever-evolving challenges related to values and worldviews, issues whose intricacies demand insights from our fields. It is interesting to note that this view has had eloquent defenders from the eighteenth century to the present day—from Thomas Jefferson (Roth 59) to Martha Nussbaum, among others. Moreover, an education that engages the Humanities prominently is an asset even from points of view that privilege chrematistic rather than civic interests. As Tom Perrault put it recently in the *Harvard Business Review*, “there will be a limit to how far computers can replace human capabilities, at least in the near long term. What can't be replaced in any organization imaginable in the future is precisely what seems overlooked today: liberal arts skills, such as creativity, empathy, listening, and vision. These skills, not digital or technological ones, will hold the keys to a company's future success.” We will return to some of these issues later, after addressing a narrower topic that is also the object of this “Debate,” namely, possible points of contact between Hispanic linguistics and Hispanic literature/cultural studies and how those two areas might better complement one another programmatically within the same department, to the extent that it is possible.

While the general sense that one gets from the introspective reflections included in these pages is that our disciplines are in relatively good shape, some contributors argue that they could be mutually strengthened through more productive connections between areas of knowledge whose relationship is often limited to the sharing of an administrative unit. Such is the case with Hispanic linguistics and Hispanic literary/cultural studies within Spanish departments. For within this common space, Hispanic linguistics is sometimes perceived to occupy a secondary position, or, as Milton Azevedo calls it (in this volume), that of “an administrative appendix” (22). Others, like Javier Gutiérrez-Rexach (in this volume) have a more optimistic view, pointing out that, in the last two decades, Hispanic linguistics has gained autonomy and visibility, and that, in some departments, the number of faculty in this area adds up to a half of the professorate. Gutiérrez-Rexach also views the current institutional pressures to maximize resources as an opportunity to generate common efforts among our disciplines. To this contextual condition, Timothy Face adds an academic one, arguing that the openness (or lack of precision) of most definitions of cultural studies signal another possibility for the encounter of linguistic and literary/cultural studies. At the same time, he urges

practitioners of the latter to welcome the scientific approach of linguists as an additional research tool, rather than dismissing it as being overly empiricist.

On the specific issue of building better bridges between our disciplines, Del Valle (in this volume) advances a proposal that hinges on a reconceptualization of the goals of Hispanic linguistics and underscores some of the criteria that might be used “to reconstitute our object of study” (35). His proposal places the Spanish language at the center of this project, with an emphasis “on the cultural, political and social relevance of such linguistic complexity” (35), while keeping in mind its malleability as cultural artifact and the importance of “evolving ... historical conditions” (35). Under this scenario, a case could be made that “linguists trained in social dialectology, discourse analysis, historical linguistics, language acquisition or language policy” (35) engage in the kind of research that fits within the broader frame of cultural studies. Del Valle comes upon those conclusions by reflecting critically upon his own discipline as well as on the work of Spanish and Spanish-American literary/cultural critics who place language at the very center of a “symbolic struggle” (Moraña x–xi qtd. in Del Valle 35), citing Mabel Moraña’s arguments in *Ideologies of Hispanism* to buttress his case.

It is clear that the centrality of the Spanish language cannot be understood in the same manner as the practitioners of philology did in the last century. Rather, viewing Spanish as a “discursively constructed political artifact” (Del Valle, “Language” 18) facilitates an exploration of some of those symbolic struggles, and thus make possible a dialogue between our fields. Moreover, such a dialogue ultimately enables the empowerment of students, who would be better prepared to address issues of linguistic normativization and cultural diversity (Azevedo). Along these lines, Del Valle (“Language”) and Germán Labrador (in this volume) point to possibilities for research that could be advanced by a glotopolitical approach and a recognition of the importance of new spatial conceptualizations that favor Iberian, transatlantic, or global perspectives.

A possible way to reinforce the role of our departments within institutions and, at the same time, diminish the traditional divisions between specialists in Hispanic linguistics and those who work in literature/cultural studies, might be to abandon the notion of tracks where they exist, especially at the undergraduate level, and develop more fully integrated programs in which both disciplines have a role in the training of majors as part of a humanistic, liberal education. An important part of this integration would be to make stronger connections between beginning language courses—usually perceived as the “service” part of a department’s mission—and the minor and major programs, which currently attract only a small percentage of students who enroll in those initial courses. Máximo Rafael Salaberry (in

this volume) argues that in order to foster the increasingly important translingual/transcultural competence among students, our programs need to give more relevance to the spoken mode of the language, bringing to the fore different types of interactions than those emphasized in writing-centered courses. For Salaberry, increasing the critical attention paid to “oral grammars” would entail a reconfiguration of beginning language courses so as to make them a more “meaningful scholarly enterprise” (50). He further advocates for the education of administrators about the intellectual worth of such endeavors and for the engagement of those faculty who focus primarily on the written aspects of language.

In examining the contributions to this volume, we noticed both an openness by some contributors as well as an apparent reluctance by others to go beyond the traditional divisions of our disciplines for the purpose of finding common ground, both for practical, administrative reasons and, above all, to afford students a more complete, liberal education. As pointed out by several contributors, the fact remains that colleagues in Hispanic linguistics do their teaching (or a great deal of it), not in departments of Linguistics, but in departments in which Spanish is the object of study. Moreover, it could be argued that while the study of Spanish can be “scientific” (a term used by some linguists to distinguish it from the study of literature and culture and its reliance on hermeneutics), it need not, and often does not, stop with observation and analyses of its uses in order to arrive at, or fit into, general linguistic constructs. Rather, it can also address (as it does in some areas of linguistics), political, ideological, identitarian, and, therefore, cultural issues. To some extent, the same could be said for colleagues whose area of specialization is literature/cultural studies, for, in the end, they are also dealing with language, which, in turn, can neither be divorced from history and culture nor from one’s locus of enunciation.

On the graduate level, at least in its initial stages, students without a basic preparation in certain areas of either Hispanic linguistics or Hispanic literature/cultural studies— courses that are useful to their preparation as scholars and teachers— might be advised to take one or two key courses outside of their general area of specialization. After all, graduate students, with some exceptions, end up teaching at four-year colleges and universities and must often do so outside their immediate areas of concentration, while the training of undergraduates (including those oriented toward language study) might ideally fit within the general parameters of a humanistic, liberal education. Without some kind of integration of the curriculum and the recognition in practice of the centrality of Spanish and/or Portuguese (in their various cultural and historical manifestations through literature and the arts, as well as in the acquisition and uses of those languages both within our country and in those in which they are spoken and lived as a first language), the separation between Hispanic linguists and Hispanic literatures/cultural

studies scholars is likely to remain. In practical terms, those divisions weaken our position in the current realignment of resources within United States universities. Moreover, in the specific case of Spanish programs, there is the additional paradox (pointed out by Labrador in this volume) that contrasts the demographic and cultural push associated with this language in a broad variety of contexts and the uncertain future that awaits the very academic departments in which Spanish is studied.

Speaking from the vantage point of our own discipline, we believe that the study of certain texts that allow us to reflect upon issues that are central to a humanistic education is important for all students, regardless of whether they specialize in Hispanic linguistics or Hispanic literature/ cultural studies. We also believe that certain areas of Hispanic linguistics (see Del Valle in this volume) are especially well positioned to bridging the gap that currently exists between our disciplines. Likewise, we are privileged to have at our disposal all sorts of “texts” (through various forms of transmission) that offer a common ground where different disciplinary approaches can show their relevance for a well-rounded education that has at its core the critical reflection on the social production of meaning. For some of us, the works of Cervantes are a good example of such a meeting point, as they provide opportunities to reflect on issues that have resonance in our lives today.

The case for the importance of a classic such as Cervantes in the affirmation of humanistic values and the notion of inclusiveness within the public space of the university, is made by Castillo and Egginton (in this volume) through an analysis of one of Cervantes’s *entremeses*, a one-act comic play (*El retablo de las maravillas*, ca. 1612), which deals with issues of legitimacy, or the lack of it, within a society obsessed by blood statutes, in which descendants of converts from Judaism or Islam as well as those born outside of marriage suffer discrimination and/or extinction from the social body. The internal audience of the *Retablo*, made up of townspeople (rich peasants of old Christian stock), adheres to the conditions of visibility set by the inventor and manipulators of the puppet show, namely, that only those of pure blood and born within a legitimate, Christian, marriage will be able to see it. Predictably, all attendees adhere to those conditions and “see” the representation even though there is little to see. Thus, pretension of “seeing” is generated by a blindness caused by internalized prejudices that suppress any kind of critical thinking. Castillo and Egginton argue for the urgency of that same kind of discussion today, in light of our own media conditions and market forces, reminding us through Cervantes of the importance of a healthy skepticism toward authoritarian discourses that ultimately aim at the erasure of otherness through the complicity of passive receivers who lack a capacity for reflection and self-examination.

These issues are brought to the fore in most of Cervantes’s writings, especially *Don Quijote*, where Cervantes posits a critical reader as opposed

to a non-discriminating one (*el vulgo*). Similarly, in other texts (including the “Adjunta al Parnaso” (Addendum to Parnassus), there are explicit reflections to the facile consumption of the Lopean *comedia*, which goes on to propagate social myths with the complicity of a culture industry that has turned the popular theater of the time into a marketable commodity. Cervantes’s writing speaks to us today for many reasons, among them, its propensity for laying bare the very mechanisms of representation and its dilution of the center-point perspective in favor of oblique ones—thus expanding a discussion about literature and life to an entire literary and human continent—, which make it difficult for us to disregard voices from the margins.

Reflections on these and countless other topics, derived from analyses and discussions of literary/cultural texts (including oral and visual ones), are unlikely to cross the path of our students outside of a classroom, even as the intellectual preparation derived from critical reading and awareness appears to be increasingly important for them, at a time when they are saturated by mass-oriented messages. As Peter Brooks puts it, “The ability to read critically the messages that society, politics, and culture bombard us with is, more than ever, needed training in a society in which the manipulation of minds and hearts is increasingly what running the world is all about” (1). A humanistic, liberal education cannot return to being the privilege of those who can pay for it, nor can it be regarded as a luxury. Yet, it is not uncommon to see political figures present it as something superfluous. Recently, Kentucky Governor Matt Bevin warned that he would push to eliminate the Humanities from public universities and redirect funding to STEM fields; in his own words, “All the people in the world that want to study French literature can do so, they are just not going to be subsidized by the taxpayers like engineers will be” (Cohen). Governor Bevin, who holds a degree in Japanese and East Asian Studies from a private college, seems reluctant to provide new generations of Kentucky students in public institutions with the opportunity to obtain a liberal education, much like the one that—at least partly—prepared him to run for, and serve in, the highest office of his state.

Statements such as the one made by the Governor need to be interpreted in connection to an ideological climate, within a specific context, and with some awareness of the rhetorical tradition to which they belong. One’s ability to assess that kind of message beyond its most literal sense requires a proficiency that no single discipline can provide. As teachers and researchers who are strongly interested in the different uses of language and their broader implications, we can aspire to advance our students’ ability to process critically the incessant flow of information that is directed to them from all kinds of sources, with different intentions. Along these lines, the aesthetic issues that traditionally concerned literary scholars have not lost

their relevance—if anything, they are now involved in new, more intricate experiences that greatly exceed the artistic realm. As Gilles Lipovetsky and Jean Serroy argue, today’s capitalism functions to a large degree by exploiting aesthetic, imaginary and emotional dimensions, which have become entangled with the old instrumental rationality in an endless quest for greater returns and efficiency. Linguistic and literary/cultural approaches that inform each other may help us and our students get a better sense of how this profit-driven aesthetization of the world is (re)produced by the languages that we speak and write.

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