

LATEINAMERIKA / AMÉRICA LATINA

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¿Se habla español? The Challenge of the Hispanic Wor(l)d

Coming back from a recent trip to Argentina and Chile as faculty host of a group of thirty UCLA alumni, all young at heart, I came across an article by Argentine writer Tomás Eloy Martínez, “El subcontinente olvidado,” published in the Chilean newspaper *El Mercurio* (18).¹ In stark contrast to the general attitude of my fellow travelers, all quite well informed and eager to learn more about the new world we discovered together, Martínez insists on the supposed indifference and even ignorance of North Americans towards their South American neighbors. Even if my peer group might not be representative of the average American and taking into account a few unfortunate blunders by leading political figures, I dare say that an ever growing awareness of the importance of understanding Spanish and the Hispanic world is more characteristic of the United States today than the knowing attitude repeated as a stereotype by Martínez.

In fact, after decades of comfortable satisfaction with the worldwide possibilities of English, more and more Americans accept the necessity of learning a second language in the context of rapid globalization and tight competition with countries where foreign language teaching and even bilingual education is common. In order to improve their opportunities, university students learn not only the classic languages of Western culture, such as Latin, French, German, Italian, and, of course, Spanish, but also Chinese, Japanese, and Arabic. Students’ keen perception of market conditions is clearly reflected in the change of language choices between 2002 and 2006: if Spanish remains the most widely taught language, with a total of 823,000 enrollments, its growth during that four year period only shows a slight increase of 10%, while Japanese rose by 27.5%, Chinese by 51%, and Arabic by 126.5%. Of course, the total number of 24,000 students of Arabic is more than modest in comparison with the number of Spanish students and it might seem especially low given the demands for Arabic due to U.S. engagement in the Arab-speaking world.²

If we consider that Spanish is one of the four most important languages in the world—together with Mandarin Chinese, English, and Hindi/Urdu—and if we take into account that most native speakers of Spanish are our neighbors, linked to us by economic ties of inevitable reciprocity, nothing should be more normal

than amicable relations and the search for mutual understanding.³ So where is the challenge of the Hispanic world and word? Paraphrasing James Carville, I am tempted to say: it’s immigration, stupid! Harvard professor and prophet of the clash of civilizations Samuel P. Huntington said the same thing in a more elegant way: “The single most immediate and most serious challenge to America’s traditional identity comes from the immense and continuing immigration from Latin America, especially from Mexico” (1). Massive Latino immigration and the problem of what Fernando Romero has called the “hyper-border,” “the world’s longest contiguous international divide between a superpower and a developing nation” (42), obviously are major issues in the current political debate. In January of this year, Rob Rogers of the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* had this view of the Latino presence in the Democratic Primaries:

The caricature effectively sums up not only the hypocritical handling of race throughout the presidential campaign, but also the superficial approach to the puzzle of expectations, needs, fears, and linguistic quarrels linked to the existence of minorities in general and to the largest American minority population, Latinos. Commenting on Rogers’ drawing for the *Los Angeles Times*, Joel Pett, a Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist himself, highlights the lack of political courage when he writes that “Rob Rogers drew up a few thousand reasons why even a big-tent debate needs to be widened” (Jan. 20, 2008: Opinion M3).

Tomás Eloy Martínez, the Argentinean writer I referred to earlier, rightly states that “the presidential candidates handle with utmost care the problem of migration” and he continues “McCain as well as Hillary and Obama offer lukewarm solutions to the problem” (18). Actually, after the failing of immigration reform in June 2007, politics seemed to reduce “the problem” to the identity issue raised by Huntington, for whom the very concept of identity is linked to the traditional conservative conception of Anglo supremacy. “Making the border safe” and “English first” or even “English only” are the catchwords of an attitude marked more by what Geraldo Rivera has recently called “Hispanic,” underline panic, and less by the facts of a social phenomenon due to globalization and the inequalities which characterize our whole world and not just the U.S.-Mexican border. Europeans have got a very similar problem at their Mediterranean and Eastern borders where Africans and people from the East are attracted by the high

standard of living enjoyed in the old continent, relatively open to innovation and the respect for liberty and human rights after the unforgotten horrors of German fascism and Soviet communism. Neither racism nor wall-building are ethically convincing solutions to the plea of humankind for a life of dignity. So let us take a brief look at the concepts of border safety and the protection of English in order to assess their usefulness for problem solving in the context of Hispanic immigration.

A common language is certainly a key element of national cohesion. On the other hand, the nation as one model of social organization is not necessarily founded on the presence of a single language, as the examples of Switzerland, contemporary Spain or India compellingly show. Even more interesting might be the ongoing process of building the European Union where the existence and fostering of multiple languages is no obstacle to the formation of a growing sense of community. As a consequence, the extreme vision of a bilingual United States should not be a major cause for concern. The fact of the matter is that English isn't at any risk of losing its position as the prevailing instrument of communication inside the country and probably in the world. According to the MLA, in 2005 English was spoken by 80.6% of the U.S. population and Spanish by only 12.03%. Even if Spanish is by far the most frequently non-English language used in the U.S., horror visions of Spanish replacing English seem to be highly exaggerated.

Moreover, empirical studies on the linguistic behavior of Spanish speaking immigrants initiated in the 1970s by Calvin J. Veltman demonstrate that Hispanics take the same road of assimilation as other groups before them. Most second generation Hispanic-Americans speak English and maintain the use of Spanish at home. But already in the next generation, that is the third, 66% of them speak only English at home, meaning that English has become their primary language.⁴ One can only hope that in the present state of global development they will preserve Spanish as their second language. The fear that Spanish might fade away could be founded on the fact that it actually disappeared in the course of the 20th century in several countries and U.S. territories like Guam, Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, and even the Philippines, named after Spanish King Phillip II. We may sum up, then, the supposedly problematic status of English in the words of Los Angeles major Antonio Villaraigosa: "If you want to be successful in the United States, you have to know English, the language of commerce and success. But by the same token, we in this great country understand that in a global economy, we want our kids to speak English, Spanish, Korean, Mandarin, and the many other languages of commerce in the world. The real point is we want our kids to learn English, but we want them to be bilingual and trilingual as well" (quoted by Rivera 108).

The problem of the border is more difficult to tackle because of the huge economic interests and social impli-

cations hidden behind the fence rhetoric. Imagine for a moment that Canada is not one of the richest countries in the world, but a developing nation such as Mexico and you will almost feel the avalanche of troubles invading South Dakota. Avoiding panic, keeping cool, and searching for profitable as well as humanly sustainable solutions is certainly a difficult task, yet it is also the most rewarding. One example might suffice to illustrate the point.

One of the most frequent prejudices about illegal as well as legal immigration is that Hispanics are stealing jobs. Among supporters of a recent legislation meant to protect jobs in the U.S. was Democratic Senator Byron L. Dorgan from North Dakota. As reported by Geraldo Rivera, Dorgan insisted that immigration is causing a decline in jobs and standard of living for American citizens (158). Rivera tries to show that probably the opposite is true. He refers to a U.S. Department of Labor study prepared in 2001 for the Bush Administration that "called the perception those immigrants are stealing American jobs 'the most persistent fallacy about immigration in popular thought'" (163). The argument is backed by a study on "Growth in the Foreign-Born Workforce and Employment of the Native Born" made by the PEW Hispanic Center in 2006, which "found no evidence that the large increases in immigration since 1990 have led to higher unemployment among American citizens" (163). Furthermore, Rivera cites a recent study of the University of Arizona, the state with the strictest anti-immigration legislation, which shows that "if all undocumented workers were removed from Arizona's workforce, economic output would drop annually by at least \$29 billion, or 8.2%. In Arizona alone, noncitizen immigrants are in high demand, adding \$6.56 billion in construction output, \$3.77 billion in manufacturing, \$2.48 billion in service sectors, and \$600.9 million in agriculture" (163). In the same context, Rivera refutes the argument that undocumented immigrants are draining government entitlement programs: "Instead of draining public programs, those here illegally are subsidizing the rest of us, paying into programs with no hope of being paid back" (168).

Rivera is far from alone in recognizing the debt of U.S. society to legal and illegal immigration. Fernando Romero's comprehensive book on the "hyper-border" dramatically speaks about "U.S. Dependency on Undocumented Labor": "according to many economists, undocumented migrants are fundamental to Americans' access to inexpensive goods. Without them, many industries—particularly in the agricultural sector—would likely lose their business to companies south of the border, as U.S. consumers have become accustomed to cheap products, which require access to low-cost labor" (100). Paradoxically, the same cheap agricultural products manufactured by Hispanic immigrants in the U.S. saturate the Mexican market as a consequence of the North American Free Trade Agreement, NAFTA: "Cur-

rently, U.S. wheat products represent 75% of the Mexican wheat market, up from 56% before NAFTA's inception. In 2001, statistics showed that approximately 6.2 million tons of U.S.-grown corn were exported to Mexico annually—a particularly low blow for the southern nation, considering the crop's sacred value for the country where corn originated an estimated 4,000 years ago. [...] U.S. government-subsidized crops allow American farmers to keep prices low, crippling Mexican farmers' ability to compete with the imported goods. At a loss for alternatives, farmers must opt for survival, leading them to migrate, join the informal sector, or increasingly to enter into partnerships with Mexican drug cartels as cultivators of illegal narcotics heading to the U.S. market" (43-44). Migration turns out to be a gigantic circle, profitable for Americans, and a rather vicious one for Mexicans.

What I want to make clear is that if identity is at stake it is not only American cultural patterns, but also deep rooted Mexican or Hispanic customs, which are undergoing a process of adaptation and change unseen perhaps since the days of the Spanish conquest. The challenge of the Hispanic world is precisely to try to avoid violence and to take advantage of the best of human creativity in order to find new ways of living together.

Geraldo Rivera provides a good example of bold, constructive thinking in the conclusion of his personal and well-documented synthesis on the Hispanic question. Under the title "An Emancipation Proclamation for the New Century," Rivera tries to think of George W. Bush as "a latter-day Lincoln" forging "a legacy that is worthy of himself" by issuing "his own Emancipation Proclamation for this age": "Bush can pardon the illegal immigrants, grant a general amnesty, and say to the entire world that those immigrants who are here are absolved of any crime of status" (260). This daring measure "would define us as the nation for the new century, in a grand display of American vigor, competence, courage, compassion, ingenuity, adaptability, inclusiveness, and openheartedness" (262). Not a small side effect would be to "boost the economy," and the marketplace, more than any law or fence, would "set the level of immigration" (261). Rivera concludes: "The policy must fit the geopolitical realities of the twenty-first century, while specifically recognizing the exceptional nature and necessary priority of Mexican immigration. They deserve a head start. Our shared history requires it" (261).

It's precisely the lack of awareness of a shared history and the narrow-minded pursuit of easy profit which define the following counterexample of disregard for good neighborhood relations. During February and March of 2008, the Swedish vodka maker "Absolut" ran this advertising in Mexico:

The obvious intention of the ad is to sell vodka as a promise for a better-than-tequila world by showing on the Absolut screen a picture of recovered Mexican terri-

tory. In fact, the colored map outlines the Mexican border with the United States at the time of Mexican Independence from Spain (1821) and before the Mexican-American War of the 1840s (1846-48). Moreover, the Spanish names, including the United States as "Estados Unidos de América," seem to enhance the dream of Mexican greatness. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, the ad worked well in Mexico, but raised protests in the U.S. (April 5, 2008: A5). The company hastened to declare that the ad never intended to be insulting either to the U.S. or to Mexico: "This ad certainly has nothing to do with immigration issues or anti-Mexican sentiments. It's based on a historical perspective on what Mexico was once. That's all" (A5). In a statement left on its consumer inquiry line, the company seems mostly worried about angry reactions in the U.S.: "In no way was it meant to offend or disparage, nor does it advocate an altering of borders, nor does it lend support to any anti-American sentiment, nor does it reflect immigration issues." The company's disclaimer couldn't be more helpless, and its effort to mitigate damages on both sides of the border only underpins the rather ugly result of mixed messages and cultural insensitivity for it is not only history which is ill-treated, but even the language problem and pending political issues of the present. It is surely problematic to try to exploit "a very painful episode of Mexico's history" as Eduardo Caccia, vice president of a Mexico City advertising consultancy, puts it, without considering that the same episode is a success story on the other side of the border (A5). The spirited world of the Swedish vodka is dominated by defective English. One wonders if anybody thought about the possible implications of the slogan beyond the obvious reference to the brand. Are we to believe that in a restored Mexican territory English would still be the official language? Would it be a kind of Pidgin English which corresponds to the worst fears of English only supporters? Or is it just a drunken Latin American, some sort of Hugo Chávez from the depths of Venezuela where the vodka bottle has been placed? Even the gentle reminder not to consume alcohol in excess is ambiguous. As you can see, the bottle is counterbalanced on the opposite side of the ad by the inscription "Conocer es no excederse," which in the first place means, of course, not to drink too much. But it also may be read as a sort of philosophical reminder of the Latin "know yourself" (*nosce te ipsum*) before making far-reaching political proposals, such as trying to re-conquer lost territory or identifying the American President with the devil. The icon of the compass suggests both in English and in Spanish to keep in mind the "due limits" or "el norte," which ironically is identical to the U.S. as seen on a map from a Mexican perspective. Read this way, the more subtle parts of the ad contain almost a denial of the most explicit message: if you know your limits, you better not engage with the North. All in all, the

ad creates a perfect diplomatic mess and the occasion for much sound and much fury.

The importance of Hispanic studies in general and in the United States in particular is to enhance mutual understanding. Solid knowledge of the language of our neighbors and in-depth studies of their culture will help us to live together in our shrinking planet. Fortunately, there has been a long if not always acknowledged tradition, which in both North and South America has sought to unite the most humane aspects of the two worlds in the vision of a common future. In what follows, I would like to give you some examples from the past and the present of this constructive humanism, which tells a different story from that of the clash of civilizations. I shall concentrate on the South American side of this tradition in order to counterbalance the perhaps more current image of the resentful anti-Yankee Latino. Let me begin, though, with great North American art, the film *Giant* (1956), based on the novel by Edna Ferber.

As you may remember, Ferber's novels show deep concern towards American minorities, such as African and mixed race people in *Showboat* (1926) and *Cimarron* (1929). In the much later novel *Giant* (1952), her sympathy goes to Mexicans in a plot where the East and the West of the United States—Maryland and Texas—meet to create a modern society. One of the challenges is racism, which the family at the center of the saga has to face when the oldest son marries a Mexican woman. The film, directed by George Stevens, is based on a screenplay by Fred Guiol and Ivan Moffat who transformed the rather loosely knit strands of the novel into a convincing dramatic development. At the end of the film, the white Texan patriarch, Jordan "Bick" Benedict Jr.—one of Rock Hudson's best performances—has to defend his family, including a brown grandchild, from racist humiliation and exclusion (minutes 185.10-191.23). Even if the patriarch doesn't prevail in the fist-fighting duel with the restaurant owner, Sarge, who wants to keep Mexicans out of his small property, the moral victory is on Benedict's side.

The potential of the duel between the two white men for Chicano identity building is highlighted by the fact that it is the focus of Tino Villanueva's sequence of poems *Scene from the movie Giant* (1993). The poems show the development of a Chicano boy from silence and despair—"I must have made a fist / in desperation, as tough as the years / to my name / and there grew in my mouth / a great shout which never came" (42)—to self-confidence—"Now I am because I write: I know it in my heart / and know it in the sound iambics of my fist that / mark across the paper with the sun's exacting rays" (50). Not surprisingly, the last poem ends with a mingling of English and Spanish: "O life, this body that speaks, this // repetitious self drawn out from *la vida revivida*, / *vida sacada de cada clamor*. Home at last, I am // trusting the light that attends me, and the / natural

physic of breathing, with words to / show the measure. *O vida vivida y por venir* (52). Alluding to Villanueva's poems, Charles Ramírez Berg confirms the empowerment bestowed on him through the film: "I watched it in the mid-1960s, when I was in High School, with my Mexican mother, who had seen the film when it was first released in 1956. Just before the fight scene, she leaned over to me and whispered, "Pay attention to this." I did, and it is not too much to say that it affected my entire life. It is one of the reasons I am teaching and writing about films all these years later" (287). These reactions to the film question Rafael Pérez-Torres's assertion that mestizaje as presented in *Giant* "does not provide an empowered subjectivity, does not offer agency in the epic battle over racial/national redefinitions. The titanic white father stands up for the Mexicans, represented as they are by an ineffectual old man, helpless youngsters, and sobbing women" (160). Keeping in mind the findings of the Birmingham School of Media Studies about the relative independence of reception from product, we should at least distinguish between the representation of mestizaje in the film and the reaction to this representation due to moments of resistance inherent in the structure of the representation.⁵ As Villanueva's poems show, the mythical fight between a good and a bad white guy might encourage Chicanos to take the place of the good guy: "Two men have organized / Their violence to include me, as I am on the side / Of Rock Hudson, but carry nothing to the fight but // Expectations that, when it is over, I can repeat the / Name of goodness in Sarge's Place [...]" (36).

The hollowness of the white sense of racial superiority is all the more patent because the film had earlier shown the sacrifice of Mexican American lives in defense of the true values of the United States during the Second World War. The scene which conveys this message is the burial of Angel Obregón (minutes 143.50-147.12). Angel is the son of a Mexican American farm hand, and Leslie Benedict—played by Elizabeth Taylor—first met him as a baby dying in a miserable hut on the outskirts of the family ranch Reata. Against her husband's will, Leslie starts to care for the health of the workers and sees Angel grow up only to be drafted and die in the war. He is buried early one morning in a poor desert churchyard. The proud flags and the gunfire of the military ritual contrast with the frail voices of the Mexican American catholic children who intone the national anthem. The same frailty marks the symbolic recognition of the Mexican Americans by the white elite as represented in Bick Benedict's passing of the Texan flag to Angel Obregón's grandfather. The giant Benedict, dressed all in white but not quite sure of how to behave, approaches the small Obregón, dressed in black, who in his grief does not know how to appreciate the gesture. Benedict's step towards an official acknowledgement of the Mexican American is not comparable to the personal sacrifice of the Obregón family. Still, the

progress in forging *e pluribus unum* is undeniable, as the somewhat nostalgic whistle blow of an unseen train emphasizes. This core of the scene is framed by two long shots which show an awakening brown boy untouched by the ceremony, going to play ingenuously and unaware of his future. At the end of the scene, the dissolve into the image of a white baby, followed by a brown baby, creates the impression of the melting pot at work: the grandchildren of Leslie and Bick Benedict present a different looking and yet morally identical America.

There is no doubt that the coincidence of death in service to the nation and the beginning of life at the dawn of a new morning is meant to stir the spectator's thoughtfulness about the creative potential of American democracy. Curiously, neither Tino Villanueva nor Rafael Pérez-Torres pays much attention to this scene. The poem "The 8 O' Clock Movie," which sums up the story of *Giant*, mentions it in barely two lines: "When the 40's / Came, two young men were drafted, the one called *Angel* / Dying at war" (16). In a footnote, Pérez-Torres speaks about Bick's "gesture of national reconciliation" (175). But the film clearly goes beyond the local meaning of a Texan nation, implied in Pérez-Torres's formula. What is at stake is North American national integration, which needs understanding, self-questioning, and active participation for its accomplishment. It is the merit of José E. Limón to stress the significance of *Giant* for the formation of a Chicano conscience. In his discussion of *Giant* along with *High Noon* (1952), Limón, who gives due importance to the burial scene, finds that Pérez-Torres offers "a stimulating counter-reading of this film," but misses "any historically specific appreciation of how radical the film was in including such a Mexican presence as it did in the 1950s" (123; his emphasis). Limón is yet another example of an eyewitness reaction since he remembers how he first saw the film "in a segregated theater, in Corpus Christi, Texas" (119). Based on Gramsci and Raymond Williams, Limón rejects what he calls the "rhetoric of suspicion," "blurring 'mestizo agency' for the ordinary reader" (122). Within "a period of continuing racism, the accelerating global expansion of U.S. industrialism (especially in Latin America), and repression at home through the anti-'Communist' McCarthyite practices of the period" (128), Limón looks at *High Noon* and *Giant* as expressions of a "structure of feeling" (Williams), which "contributed to the precipitate formation of Mexican-American labor unions, political organizations, academic programs, literary and art groups, etc., in the 1960s and 1970s, known collectively as the Chicano movement" (129).

What is odd about Limón's otherwise illuminating interpretation is his location of Leslie Lynnton's origins in "the South" (119, 121). Leslie is described as a "Virginia Southern belle" (119), "raised in Virginia in a plantation home" (120). Though in fact shot in Virginia, the story locates the Lynnton's home in Maryland, traditionally

seen as sharing characteristics from both North and South, as defined by the Civil War's divisions. In addition, Maryland is mainly catholic. This location clearly facilitates the possibility of contact between the Northeastern Leslie and the Southwestern Mexican Americans. The film does not question religion or racism against African Americans as might be expected. African Americans are represented only by the subaltern servant in the Lynnton's estate. It seems that this omission of a problem obviously related to racism against Mexican Americans accounts for the superimposition of both types of discrimination in Limón's story about the South. The burial scene is, of course, the direct complement to the bitter representation of exclusion, which shows Ángel, already in uniform, as a constant background figure to Bick Benedict, half-drunk on Christmas morning 1942, just after Pearl Harbor, involved in a conversation about the future of Reata first with his son Jordan III and then with his son-in-law Bob Dietz (minutes 127.44-134.25). Ironically, both young men have other plans than to run Reata, while Ángel has shown his potential as a rancher when he easily rides the pony given to Jordan III on his fourth birthday who breaks into tears at the mere sight of the animal (minutes 88.13-89.37).

The final sequence focuses on the bundle of contradictions striving for harmonious solutions throughout the film. Right at the beginning of the family narrative, Leslie Lynnton, the young woman from the East, confronts her future Texan husband: "We really stole Texas, didn't we? I mean away from Mexico" (minute 12.50). At the end, Leslie Benedict has learned how to belong to the West, without giving up her ideals of equality and participation. Bick, the white macho from the West, has accepted the challenges of a wider democracy, which includes women and different races. Both parents have learned from their children that authority is different from authoritarianism. They have had to accept that applied science is as worthy as oil production or farming and that small is beautiful. They even grudgingly admit the existence of Hollywood when the maverick daughter Luz II plans to become an actress. However, the most formidable change Bick and Leslie have to face is as grandparents of a mestizo member of the family, young Jordan IV, the son of Jordan III and Juana Guerra (!).⁶ The Mexican Americans only admitted in the house as servants now claim their space in it. The brown toddler, looking at his grandfather, vigorously shakes the bars of the crib while the white toddler at his side remains passive. Jordan IV will eventually take the reins of Reata at the end of a race that started when young Ángel Obregón took the reins of the pony Jordan III refused to ride. Significantly enough, the last shot of the film is a close-up of the brown toddler.

I have to disagree once again with my colleague Rafael Pérez-Torres on his interpretation of the end of the film. Pérez-Torres affirms that "the discourse of in-

clusion and equality suggested by the film is belied by the details of the closing shot" (161). He rejects the pairing of the white child with a white lamb and the brown one with a black calf as a "pastoral vision of peace" and finds it "difficult not to see in it a more sinister suggestion": "The closing moments of *Giant* suggest that different races are different species, thus evoking one strain of nineteenth-century racial theory" (161). If there is such an evocation, the structure of the film immediately negates the validity of racial theory. In contradiction with its stereotypes, the white child is associated with a weak, if not dumb, animal, good for sacrifice. That has been the traditional role of the Mexican, stubbornly questioned by Leslie. On the other hand, the calf might become a brave, if not raging, bull, as the ones seen by Leslie when she first rides to discover Reata (minute 38.23). The energy, stereotypically ascribed to whites, is passed to the Mexican.⁷ Thus, *Giant* fits perfectly within the definition of *mestizaje* given by Pérez-Torres himself: "Mestizaje embodies the struggle for power, place and personhood arising from histories of violence and resistance" (156). This struggle is just beginning in 1956: the crib rattled by Jordan IV is purposely placed on the threshold of Benedict Castle.

As Charles Ramírez Berg writes in his book *Latino Images in Film*, *Giant* is "one of the most enlightened of all of Hollywood's wide-screen epics. Its female protagonist allows it to question some of the key principals of the dominant ideology: patriarchy, the imperialistic bent of America's westward expansion [...], racism, the class system, and the social construction of manhood" (126). Much more convincingly than the irresponsible advertising of the Swedish vodka, this all-American Hollywood movie puts a question mark on dominant white culture in a moment when the Mexican migrant workforce had become a problem. As the American soldiers were returning from the war the demand for Mexican workers dropped dramatically during the fifties. In this context, it would have been easy to draw on the habitual prejudices exploited in a whole series of conventional movies. To withstand this temptation and to make a case for the contributions of Mexican Americans to the nation is an act of civil courage in the best American tradition.

It is the United States as a stronghold of human and humane possibilities and achievements that Latin Americans have admired throughout the last two hundred years of history. Abraham Lincoln's definition of democracy as "government of the people, by the people and for the people" linked to Walt Whitman's view of "athletic democracy" define the guidelines of a positive perception of the United States by its neighbors (Lipp 101). In the long list of admirers we find Chileans Victorino Lastarria and Francisco Bilbao, Argentineans Juan Bautista Alberdi and Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, Peruvian Manuel González Prada, and Colombian Germán Arciniegas. Of course, this perception has not

always gone unquestioned. To quote Solomon Lipp from his book *U.S.A.-Spanish America: Challenge and Response*: "Pro- and anti-U.S. sentiment in Spanish America continued to see-saw in accordance with the historical circumstances of the moment" (81). The long chain of U.S. interventions in Latin America created a tradition of "U.S. bashing" (121) and, on the other hand, a tendency among Americans to view their neighbors as resentful troublemakers. Concrete history is much more subtle. Not all Americans always agreed with their nation's expansionist policies. Let us remember that the young Mr. Lincoln opposed the Mexican-American War which he considered unnecessary and unconstitutional (81). On the other side of the border, even staunch Spanish American critics of the big brother of the North didn't hide their admiration for American values. The great Spanish American poets Rubén Darío and Pablo Neruda provide illuminating samples of this attitude.

Born in 1867 as the son of Italian immigrants in Nicaragua, Darío lived several years in Chile, Spain, and Argentina and founded an internationally renowned school of poetry called "modernismo", essentially defined by an artistic and philosophic eclecticism aimed at the creation of a universal poetry. His poem "A Roosevelt" neatly reflects this spirit as well as his fear of North American predominance which threatens to level cultural differences. Written under the impact of President Teddy Roosevelt's "big stick" policy in the early 20th century, the poem confronts the violent pursuit of wealth with the manifold richness of a living culture. While the "barbarous souls" of the North are linked to the man-hunting tyrant Nimrod, the evil king Nebuchadnezzar, Mammon, the personification of greed, and the brutal force of Hercules, the "naïve America," identified as Spanish America, is associated with true faith, passion for life, endurance, philosophy, and sparkling poetry through the bold combination of indigenous history and classic tradition. Nezahualcōyotl, a pre-Columbian sage and poet king, the last rulers of the Aztec and Inca empires—Moctezuma, Cuauhtémoc, Atahualpa—come along with Bacchus and Pan, the ancient gods of wine and song, Plato, and the catholic God. Curiously, civilized modern times are not only presented by the compassionate Russian novelist Tolstoy and the liberal French poet Hugo, but also by George Washington, Walt Whitman, and Ulysses Grant, who condemned the Mexican-American War as "One of the most unjust military operations which the strong have ever undertaken against the weak" (Lipp 81). If praying to Christ seems to be intimately connected with speaking Spanish, yet the "Biblical tones" necessary to oppose the hunter Roosevelt are possible in Whitman's English. If the poets and philosophers of the past "consulted the stars," the heroes of the present can not avoid consulting the stars of the United States in dialog with the sun of Argentina and the star of Chile as seen in their respective flags:

¡Es con voz de la Biblia, o verso de Walt Whitman,
que habría que llegar hasta ti, Cazador!
Primitivo y moderno, sencillo y complicado,
con un algo de Washington y cuatro de Nemrod.
Eres los Estados Unidos,
eres el futuro invasor
de la América ingenua que tiene sangre indígena,
que aún reza a Jesucristo y aún habla en español.

If Darío could have witnessed the U.S. today he would have been surprised by the Pope celebrating mass with thousands of Americans and speaking English as well as Spanish, with a German accent.⁸ Half a century after Darío, Chilean Nobel Prize Pablo Neruda also refers to Lincoln and Whitman when he invokes the true America as opposed to its ugly mask, which he considers to be the empire of big business like the United Fruit Company or the Anaconda Copper Mining. Neruda's commitment to changing the miserable conditions of miners and peasants in Latin America was triggered by the Spanish Civil War, which he experienced as the Chilean consul in Madrid. The fascist military insurrection backed by Hitler and Mussolini and the resistance of republican Spain organized by socialists and communists from all over the world led Neruda to join the Chilean Communist Party. Elected senator of one of the mining centers in Northern Chile, he is forced out of office when the Communist Party is outlawed at the beginning of the Cold War due to considerable diplomatic U.S. intervention. His most famous epic poem, *Canto general*, was written underground and first published in Mexico in 1950. The poem is a story of Latin American greatness in constructing cultures, suffering, conquest as well as repression, and fighting for liberty and social justice. It also is a testimony of self-affirmation, and it is in this context that Neruda places an astonishing declaration of love to the United States and some of its great writers. The humble North Americans who suffer and fight for dignity in the same way as South Americans are symbolized by Lincoln, the log cabin born woodcutter whom Neruda implores to awaken. The passage from "Que despierte el leñador," the ninth part of *Canto general*, is about the energy of American working men and women and the delicate expression of American poets. Neruda invents dense images of Melville, Whitman, and Poe, and when he speaks of the social novelists of the twenties—Dreiser and Wolfe—his metaphors allude to his own lack of conscience at the time:

Eres hermosa y ancha, Norte América.
Vienes de humilde cuna como una lavandera,
junto a tus ríos, blanca.
Edifica en lo desconocido,
es tu paz de panal lo dulce tuyo.
Amamos tu hombre con las manos rojas
de barro de Oregón, tu niño negro

que te trajo la música nacida
en su comarca de marfil: amamos
tu ciudad, tu substancia,
tu luz, tus mecanismos, la energía
del Oeste, la pacífica
miel, de colmenar y aldea,
el gigante muchacho en el tractor,
la avena que heredaste
de Jefferson, la rueda rumorosa
que mide tu terrestre oceanía,
el humo de una fábrica y el beso
número mil de una colonia nueva:
tu sangre labradora es la que amamos:
tu mano popular llena de aceite.

Bajo la noche de las praderas hace ya tiempo
reposan sobre la piel del búfalo en un grave
silencio las sílabas, el canto
de lo que fui antes de ser, de lo que fuimos.
Melville es un abeto marinote sus ramas
nace una curva de carena, un brazo
de madera y navío. Whitman innumerable
como los cereales, Poe en su matemática
tiniebla, Dreiser, Wolfe,
frescas heridas de nuestra propia ausencia,
Lockridge reciente, atados a la profundidad,
cuántos otros, atados a la sombra:
sobre ellos la misma aurora del hemisferio arde
y de ellos está hecho lo que somos.

Fifty years later, the youngest generation of Spanish American writers has completely surpassed the dual perception of American cultures. Whereas the novelists of the so-called "boom"—such as Mexican Carlos Fuentes, Argentinean Julio Cortázar, Peruvian Mario Vargas Llosa, and Colombian Gabriel García Márquez—may be seen as the definitive founding fathers of independent Spanish American national literatures with a marked critical stance towards the United States, the members of the new generation see themselves as citizens of the global village. In opposition to the "boom" novels of the sixties which try to define national or even continental identities and differences based on geography, history, language, races, and religion, the new novels start from a common experience: an urban world shaped by American popular culture and the impact of new communication technologies. The symbolic place of this experience is called McOndo. This hybrid of English—or more precisely Scottish—and Spanish is, of course, a pun on García Márquez's famous novel *Cien años de soledad*. You may remember that the mythical center of the story is Macondo. Founded by the Buendía family in a paradisiacal place in the middle of the jungle, the village grows into a buzzing marketplace and a town where politics and business meet only to vanish into oblivion after a series

of biblical catastrophes. These transformations are staged in a peculiar style, magical realism, which tells supernatural events as if they were real and real events in magical dimensions. Critics all over the world have tended to identify contemporary Latin American literature with this one style.

Chilean writer Alberto Fuguet discovered the one dimensional perception of Latin American culture when he participated in the Iowa Writers Program in 1994. He noticed that any written page which didn't bear the trademark of magical realism—be it Latin American, African, or Asian—had no chance to be published. In protest of the imposed uniformity, Fuguet went out to look for companions who shared his vision of the world. In his article "I Am Not a Magic Realist," significantly published only on the Internet, he writes: "Unlike the ethereal world of García Márquez's imaginary Macondo, my own world is something much closer to what I call 'McOndo'—a world of McDonald's, Macintoshes and condos. In a continent that was once ultra-politicized, young, apolitical writers like myself are now writing without an overt agenda, about their own experiences. Living in cities all over South America, hooked on cable TV (CNN en español), addicted to movies and connected to the Net, we are far away from the jalapeño-scented, siesta-happy atmosphere that permeates too much of the South American literary landscape."

The outcome of his search is the anthology of short stories *McOndo*, published in 1996, which includes Latin American and even Spanish writers who grew up in a world defined by individualism and freedom. Fuguet sums up the first aspect pitting personal against Latin American identity: "I feel the great literary theme of Latin American identity (who are we?) must now take a back seat to the theme of personal identity (who am I?). The McOndo writers—such as Rodrigo Fresán and Martín Rejtman of Argentina, Jaime Bayly of Peru, Sergio Gómez of Chile, Edmundo Paz Soldán of Bolivia and Naief Yeyha of Mexico, to name a few—base their stories on individual lives, instead of collective epics. This new genre may be one of the byproducts of a free-market economy and the privatization craze that has swept South America." The self-conscious definition within a social framework taken for granted led critics to overlook the dissenting note—free market economy is O.K., but privatization should have its limits. As a consequence, critics attacked the group as narrow-minded middle-class climbers. Fuguet therefore felt obliged to be more explicit about the significance of their revolt. He did so highlighting the second aspect which identifies the group, namely freedom. In an interview given in 1998, Fuguet asserts: "Unas cosas que nos hemos ganado, la gente de *McOndo*, por así decirlo, de lo norteamericano, es la libertad de escribir de lo que uno desea [...]. Nuestra influencia no es tanto McDonalds, no es tanto comiendo M y Mes, eso es lo superficial, lo que a la

gente le puede parecer. A mí lo que más me gusta de la literatura y del cine norteamericanos, es la libertad absoluta" ("De Macondo a *McOndo*" 19).

Paradoxically, the recent development of communication techniques which spread from the United States through the World Wide Web seems to bring back Latin American dreams about a greater vision of the planet. In an article written for *Time Magazine* in 2000, Fuguet links the utopia of a Latin American Union forged by the independence hero Simón Bolívar and the search for metaphysical universals in the work of Jorge Luis Borges: "Bolívar's megalomaniac idea of a unified continent blossoms in the chat rooms of the Internet. Instead of surfing north, I take a virtual tour of the Americas and see why Spanish is the second language of the Web—a tangled, labyrinthine Web that would have made Borges proud" ("The Internet Ladder" 51).

The McOndo esthetics was consecrated in the United States when the *Los Angeles Times* published a front page article on Fuguet (Feb. 23, 2000) and *Newsweek Magazine* featured him on its cover (May 6, 2002):

Encouraged by his success, Fuguet conceives a second anthology together with his fellow Bolivian writer, Edmundo Paz Soldán. The idea was "narrar la diversidad de la experiencia latinoamericana en USA" (14). If the first anthology, *McOndo*, wanted to show the significance of North America for Latin America, the new anthology would illustrate the presence of Latin America in the North. The result of this conception is the book *Se habla español*, published in 2000 in Miami by the Publishing Company Alfaguara, which for the first time dares to release a book in Spanish for the U.S. market. In their preface, Fuguet and Paz Soldán stress the fact that it's no longer possible to speak about Latin America without including the United States and that one can't conceive of the United States without necessarily thinking about Latin America (19). They even go further when they deny the long held dichotomy between 'them' (North Americans) and 'us' (Latin Americans). This dichotomy—still maintained by the 'boom' writers—leads to the conviction that "la unión entre el Sur y el Norte jamás podrá ocurrir" (18). Challenging the stereotypical division, Fuguet and Paz Soldán gather a corpus of stories arranged as a sort of road trip through the U.S. in order to document how these texts overcome the opposition between 'them' and 'us' to explore instead "lo que hay de 'ellos' en 'nosotros', y de 'nosotros' en 'ellos'" (21; their emphasis).

The last page of the preface is not only a declaration of principles, but, perhaps more importantly, a sample of how these principles can actually work in practice. The typewritten part of the page is in fact the prolongation of their credo mixed with a chat on the Internet between two strangers who try to find a common language. The praise of Spanish as a language as "flexible y abierto" as English and the assertion that both languages benefit from

their combination form the first of two intercalated series of sentences. The second series is the story of a confused chat between UrbanCowboy and an anonymous user of the Web who discover that they speak both English and Spanish. Communication, therefore, is possible either way or in multiples combinations of both. Since English and Spanish are the main languages of the Web, Fuguet and Paz Soldán are right to state that the sealed frontier between the two cultures doesn't exist any longer. If according to Carlos Fuentes it was a "crystal frontier," transparent but unsurpassable, the Web has made it virtual, easy to trespass thanks to the unlimited possibilities of communication it seems to offer.

This is of course a very optimistic view of our world. We know that in reality borders, especially the hyperborder, continue to stand tall. It is up to us to accept the challenge of the Hispanic world and word in order to find a way to tear those borders down. The Pulitzer Prize just awarded to Junot Díaz for his McOndo novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* is one more step on this long and winding road.

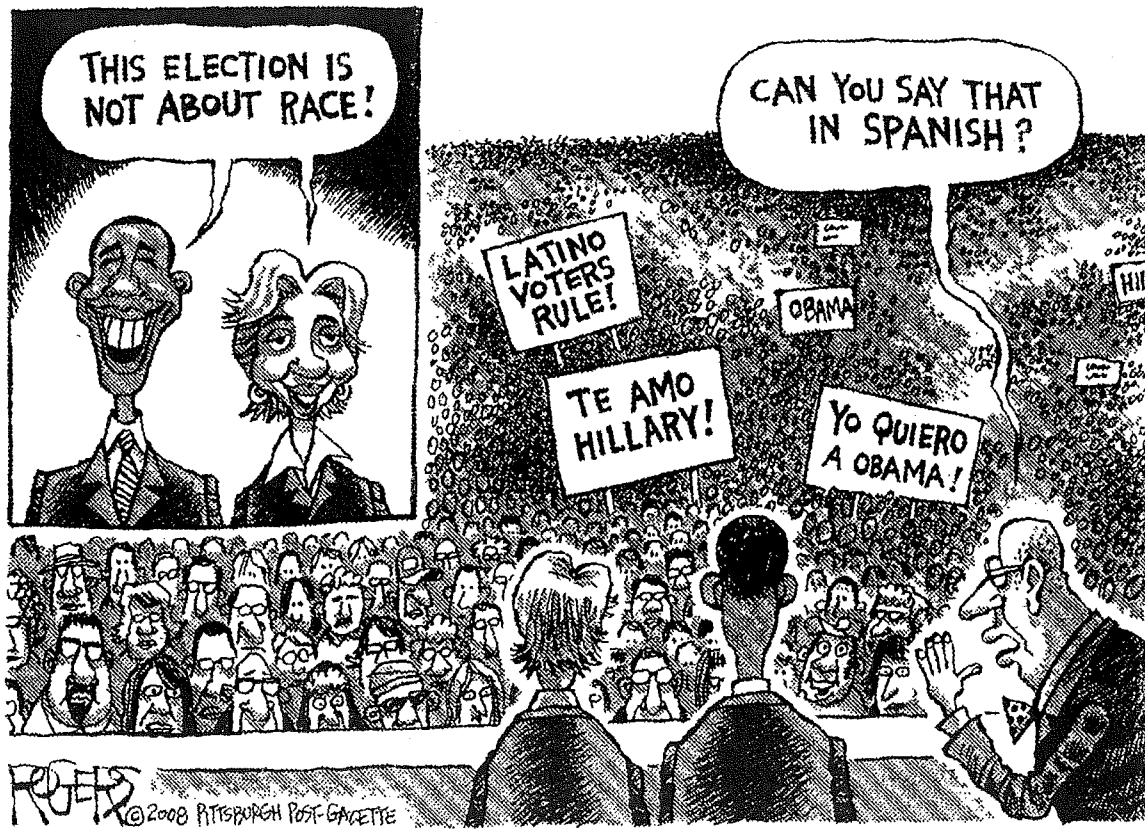
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Notes

- ¹ An earlier version of this article was delivered as the Lifo Amundson Lecture, sponsored by Alpha Chapter of Phi Beta Kappa, University of South Dakota, April 24, 2008.
- ² All numbers come from the Modern Language Association (MLA) survey on "Enrollments in Languages Other Than English in United States Institutions of Higher Education, Fall 2006," a summary of which is available in "New MLA Survey Shows Significant Increases in Foreign Language Study at U.S. Colleges and Universities" (http://www.mla.org/pdf/release11207_ma_feb_update.pdf).
- ³ The estimated number of speakers of Spanish around the world differs depending on the sources and the distinction made between native and non-native speakers. According to the well-informed and seemingly cautious Wikipedia article "Spanish Language," "Today between 322 and 400 million people speak Spanish as a native language, making it the world's second or third most spoken language by native speakers" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spanish_language). The Spanish Cervantes Institute includes speakers of Spanish as a second language and gives an estimate of 500 million for 2007, placing Spanish fourth, behind Chinese, English, and Hindi <http://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2007/04/26/cultura/1177610767.html>).
- ⁴ Veltman's findings were published in *The Future of Spanish Language in the United States* (1988). The book has an excellent introduction by Siobhan Nicolau and Rafael Valdivieso, "The Veltman Report: What It Says, What It Means" (I-X).
- ⁵ A summary of these developments in reception theory may be found in Stuart Hall's article, which stresses the importance of individual and social circumstances.
- ⁶ Limón relates Juana's father, Dr. Guerra, to "the real-life activity of Dr. Hector Garcia at that moment in Texas" (122), whom earlier in the book he had introduced as a "new young Mexican-American leader, a medical doctor and veteran of World War II" (114). In this context, Limón refers to the efforts of García and then Congressman Lyndon B. Johnson "to secure burial for the body of a Mexican-American soldier in a previously segregated cemetery in 1948" (114).
- ⁷ An in-depth study of the animal symbolism throughout the film is still to be made.
- ⁸ I am referring, of course, to Pope Benedict XVI's pastoral visit to the United States on April 15, 2008. On Sunday, April 20, the last day of his tour, the Pope celebrated mass at Yankee Stadium in New York, attended by approximately 60,000 people.



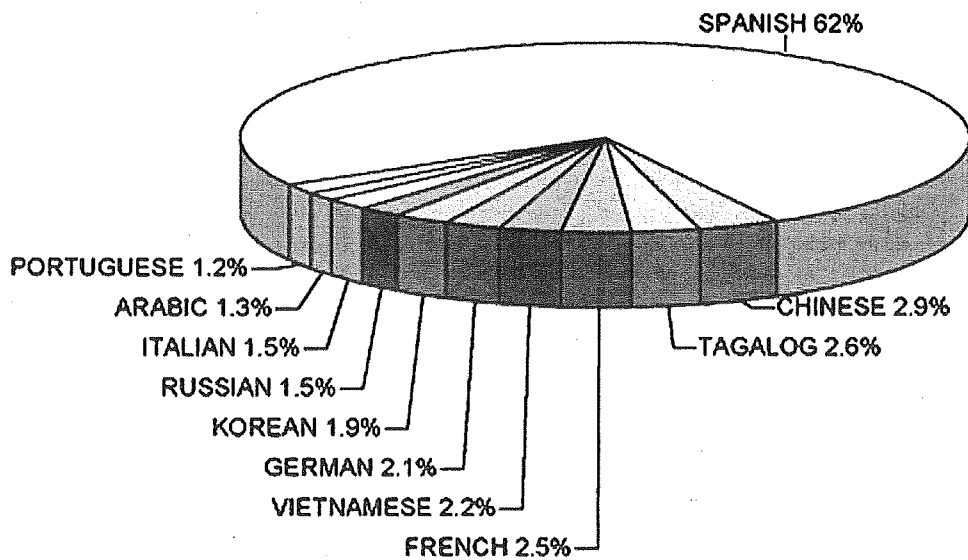
ROB ROGERS *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*

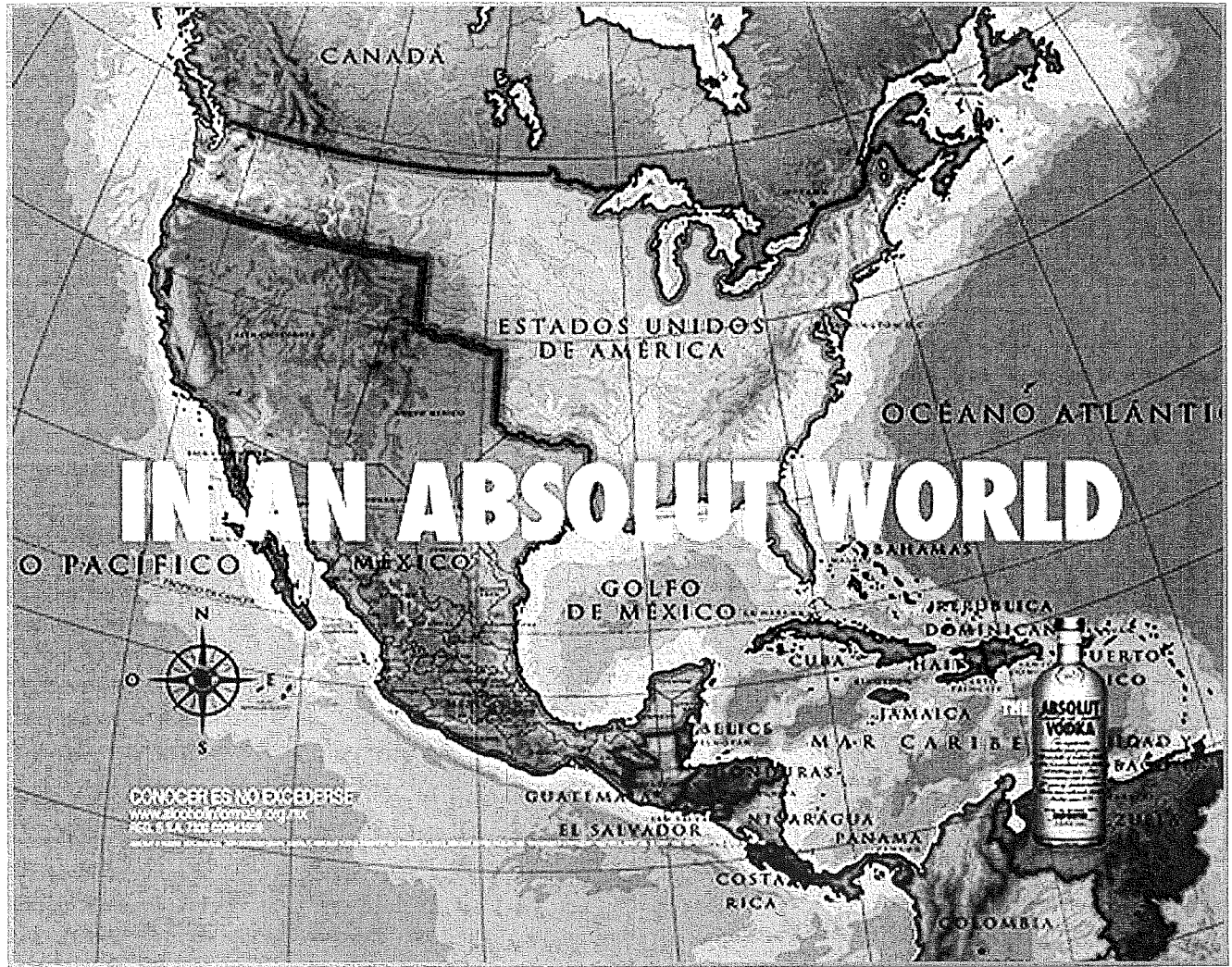
Most spoken languages in the entire US in 2005

English is spoken by 80.60% of people over 5 years old in the entire US.

Languages other than English are spoken by 19.39%.

Speakers of languages other than English are divided up as follows.



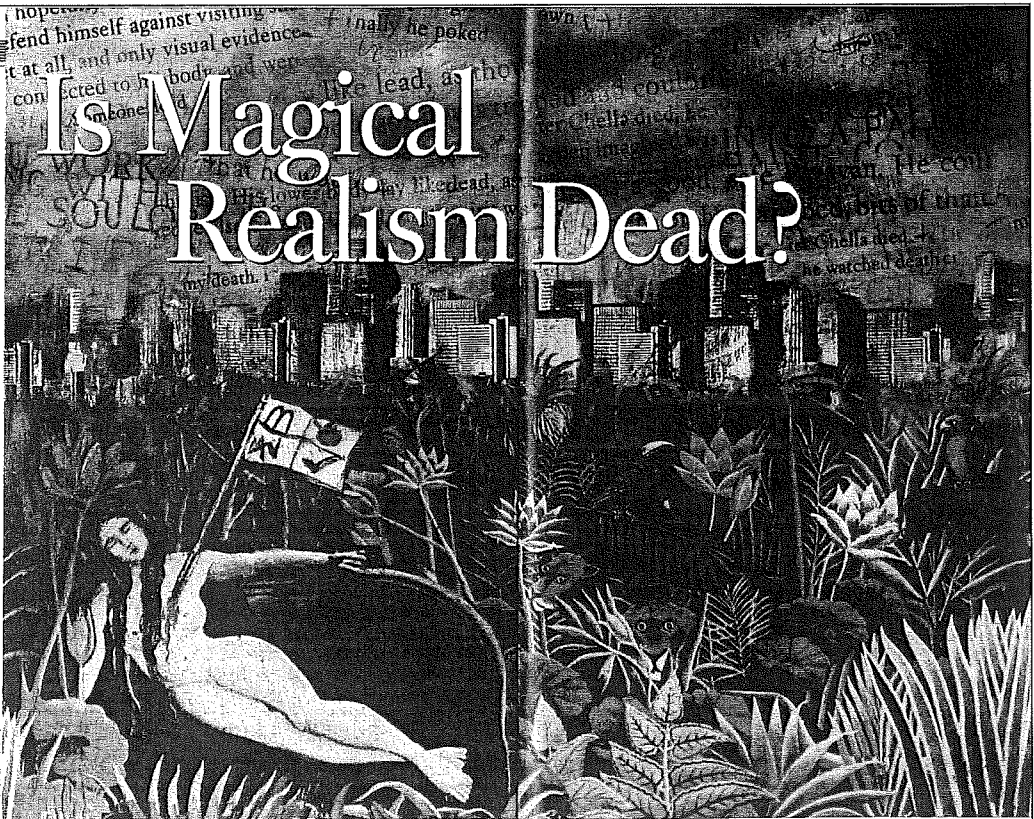


Society & The Arts

Latin America's new generation of writers is urban, savvy and full of grit. So cancel the toucans.
 BY MAC MARGOLIS

IN THE RECENT SHORT STORY BY Chilean author Alberto Fuguet "Más Estrellas Que en el Cielo" ("More Stars Than in the Sky"), two young Chileans are holding forth in a Los Angeles coffee shop. The pair—a photographer and a filmmaker—are part of a delegation boosting a Chilean film that did not win an Academy Award. But they are still high on Hollywood, and glad to be away from Chile, "which is like kryptonite," one says. "Get near it and you lose all your strength." In their next scenes, they dream aloud about the victory speech they would have made and all the sex an Oscar would bring. In another tale, by another Latin American, this might have been the cue for some sorceress to materialize from the Formica and whisk them off to glory in a spritz of fairy dew. But this is Fuguet, the latest *agent provocateur* of Latin American letters, and the setting is not a house of spirits but a 24-hour Denny's. The closest this pair will get to glory is a brief flirtation with Finslown grumpies who mistake them for movie-star-fino drivers.

Fuguet's story skewers not only Hollywood hype and foals in paradise but also a fantasy called Latin America. Magical realism, it says—the literary style that made the mundane seem marvelous and put Latin American fiction on bookshelves everywhere—is dead. As dead as jackboated generalissimos, as passé as Columbian coffee's poster boy Juan Valdez and his mule.



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THE INTERNATIONAL NEWSMAGAZINE

Latin Literature's New Look

Goodbye, Magical Realism. A Generation of Gritty, Street-Smart Writers Is Making Waves.

Author Alberto Fujant, the voice of McOndo

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Small text at the bottom of the cover includes distribution information for various countries and regions.

Top of the Week



Move Over, García Márquez

Latin America has become a whole different place since the groundbreaking magical-realist classic "One Hundred Years of Solitude" first appeared. Now a new generation of young regional novelists is making its mark. Forget the toucans and ghosts; these writers see the world in their own way.