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INTER-AMERICAN STUDIES AS AN EMERGING FIELD: THE FUTURE OF A DISCIPLINE [1]

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Inter-American Studies is an exciting and fast developing new field, one that has the potential to revolutionize not only how we think about the Americas (including their relationships with Europe [Morency, 1998] and Africa and their pre-Columbian worlds) but about the various disciplines—from literature to economics, from politics to law, and from anthropology to music—that link them together. Although we must credit historians like Herbert E. Bolton with having charted the original conceptual framework for this undertaking early in the twentieth century, and though we have seen interest in the Inter-American project wax and wane through the years, we are now living in a time when, for a variety of reasons, interest in Inter-American relations suddenly looms larger and more urgent than it ever has before. Concerned with a wide range of issues and agencies, such as NAFTA, popular music, literature, and law, the Americas have become, in the early years of the twenty-first century, a deeply interconnected site of tremendous energy and potential. And of conflict.

However, as an emergent (and therefore disruptive) intellectual discipline, Inter-American Studies must also be considered part of the larger process of 'globalization' that, like the arrival of the banana company train in Garcia Márquez's *Cien ańos de soledad* [*One Hundred Years of Solitude*], is causing so much upheaval and consternation in so many places. Major players in this vast international game, the Americas are taking note of each other as never before, and the Inter-American paradigm (understood as involving both Francophone and Anglophone Canada, the United States, Spanish America, Brazil and the Caribbean) offers an excellent, though by no means foolproof, method of ensuring that this difficult process of rediscovery and reconsideration proceeds with fairness and accuracy. This is our challenge.

But nowhere is the pressure of change being felt as acutely, perhaps, as in the closely related fields of American Studies and American literature, mainstream academic areas involving vast numbers of students and where 'a broad critique of the narrow, nationalist conflation of the Americas and the United States has sparked vig-

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orous efforts to resituate the study of United States literature and culture in a hemispheric or Pan-American context' (Jay, 2001: 45). Although our understanding of what it means to speak even of the literature of the United States has, since the 1970s, itself been steadily evolving, Inter-American Studies is fast becoming an integral part of this process and, as such, seems certain to change the ways traditional units, such as Anthropology, English and American Literature, African American Studies, History, French, Economics, Law, Spanish and Portuguese, and Comparative Literature, envision their missions, their subject matter, and their relationships with each other.

Rather than trying to sum up what we already know about Inter-American Studies as an academic discipline—that it is appealing to some and subversive to others and that it is both immensely complicated and, quite often, contentious, for example—I would like, in this essay, to enumerate what I take to be the five major problems that eventually have to be confronted and dealt with before even a well-intended program in Inter-American Studies can flourish—in any discipline. Some of these issues deal with course content and orientation while others deal with philosophic and methodological matters, but all are crucial, I believe, to the healthy growth and development of this field. It is my hope that by raising these issues at the outset, they will serve as a kind of theoretical and procedural backdrop against which the reader can better consider the particular issues they address.

THE LANGUAGE PROBLEM

Perhaps the greatest obstacle we must confront is what some are terming the 'language problem', the fact that in order to perform teaching and research that engages even two or three of our American cultures, we need linguistic competency in, as I will argue, at least three of our New World languages, a grouping that includes our numerous Native American languages as well as our European-based tongues (in alphabetical order): English, French, Spanish, and Portuguese. This issue is a problem because many of us simply have not had extensive, serious linguistic training in our own doctoral programs. Those who would like to get into Inter-American Studies are all too often mono-, or, in some cases, bilingual, simply ill-equipped, in terms of language preparation, to do so. But, in truth, we cannot allow ourselves to be derailed by this problem, which, if it cannot be quickly overcome, can certainly be mitigated.

In the short run, the easy solution is to use translations. While this is not an altogether adequate solution, especially when issues of style, authorial development, or cultural context are involved, it does have the advantage of getting more scholars immediately involved in the Inter-American project. And it is a realistic recommendation since many of us will simply elect to use translations anyway. Then, too, the question of whether to rely on translated material or not is more of a problem for some disciplines than others. Speaking from the perspective of a literary scholar, I see little value in arguing that we should remain totally ignorant of great New World writers like Guimarães Rosa, Clarice Lispector, Nicole Brossard, Maryse Condé, Neruda, or Borges simply because we feel we cannot—or should not—use an existing translation. We should take some care, of course, with the particular translation we use (the Scott-Buccleuch/Penguin translation of Machado de Assis's great *Dom Casmurro* sim-

ply omits certain key chapters from the original, for example), and we should always be cognizant of what inevitably 'gets lost' in even the best translations, but, in the end, we should feel that it is better to know an author even partially via a good translation than not to know her at all. A similar argument pertains for other disciplines as well, I believe, though its particularities will certainly vary.

In the long run, however, we need to change the ways we train our graduate students. Specifically, we need to require them to have real proficiency (if not necessarily native fluency) in at least three of our American languages. This is absolutely imperative for the long term development of Inter-American studies as a field because of the growing pressure of what might be termed the 'binary model', the methodological approach that I fear is fast establishing itself as the norm in Inter-American Studies (which, even in its incipient form, is coming to be dominated by what some in the academy, in a moment of high irony for Latin Americanists, are now referring to as the 'imperialism' of both English *and* Spanish), and that calls for linguistic competence in only two languages, and then perhaps only minimally. To be able to work only in, say, English and Spanish, is simply unacceptable because it ignores the profound linguistic diversity of our Americas while at the same time restricting the greater scope of the overall Inter-American initiative. Methodologically and conceptually, two languages simply constitute too narrow a perspective for this project. We know only too well that people in the United States have never been much interested in serious language training, but the signs are all around us that the times are indeed changing, and that this old isolationist and parochial attitude is dying out. We can only hope so. And, as a new field of intellectual inquiry (one that both relates to and connects many different disciplines), Inter-American Studies could well play a major role in its demise.

In practical terms, however, to demand that our doctoral students in Inter-American studies must be able to work in at least three languages means, of course, that not everyone who applies will have the requisite background and training necessary to enter into this type of doctoral program. We will have to be very selective, therefore, choosing only those students who are naturally bi- or trilingual or who have studied enough language in undergraduate school (and, if we are serious about this, in elementary and secondary school as well) that they could pick up at least their third (or, depending on their areas of interest, perhaps fourth) required language as part of their doctoral course work. Given the extreme importance of verifiable language competency, then, to our project, the selection of students for advanced study in Inter-American Studies will thus be a most painful one, with many otherwise excellent candidates not being chosen, but if we are to properly chart our discipline's future course of development, it is absolutely essential that we maintain the highest entrance requirements. To fail here will be to fatally imbalance the development of Inter-American Studies as a methodologically valid field of intellectual inquiry by allowing it to become the near exclusive province of only one or two languages. This scenario, which privileges certain languages (and their cultures) while relegating others to second- and third-class status, must be avoided at all costs.

As they are currently configured, many departments of English and American literature (to speak of the obstacles one particular—and absolutely essential—unit will have to overcome very quickly) are finding themselves in an unexpectedly precarious

situation in this regard. Unless they are rash enough to 'confuse', as Stephen Greenblatt observes, 'the globalization of literary studies' with 'American triumphalism and an insurgent English-language parochialism' (Greenblatt, 2001: 59) programs in American literature are finding it necessary to confront and deal with the fact that the United States is itself deeply and irrevocably pluralistic, that it is only one of several, interrelated Americas, and that, replete with their own voices, histories, and cultures, these are now demanding recognition and attention, acknowledgement of their rightful places in the New World sun. Innovative, engaging literature has long been written throughout North, Central, and South America in languages other than English, and if English department faculty and students do not know at least two or three of these hitherto 'Other' tongues they run the very real risk of being left behind, limited to texts originally written in English or to what they can glean from what translated materials exist. How large, influential units like English accommodate this sea change in our approach to the entire concept of what it means to be 'American' constitutes a great challenge for our traditional programs in American literature (as it does for a great many other disciplines, history, for example, or political science), and their response to it will almost immediately emerge as one of the decisive factors in the development of Inter-American studies generally.

It must be said, in this same regard, that, at least initially, bi- or trilingual Canadianists and Latin Americanists could enjoy distinct advantages as the field of Inter-American Studies develops since, in terms of the requisite language preparation, they are also natural and experienced comparatists, having long studied their literatures (those of English- and French-speaking Canada, Portuguese-speaking Brazil, and Spanish America) in terms of other, more 'canonical' texts and literary traditions. Something very similar can be said of scholars working in a variety of other disciplines as well, I suspect. What this means, in realistic terms, is that Latin Americanists and Canadianists have long had to know more—much more—about the literature, culture, and history of the United States and Europe than students of European and 'American' literature (meaning that of the United States alone) have traditionally had to know about Canadian or Latin American literature, culture, and history. Thus, another problem we face here (one well known to the comparatists) is that of balance, of knowing one thing very well but another, closely related thing not at all, and feeling compelled to examine them both together.

Beyond this issue (daunting as it is), it is interesting to consider the 'language question' with respect to Canadian and Latin American literature and culture themselves. Nowhere in the Americas, perhaps, has language been more viscerally connected to issues of cultural identity than in Québec, though giant Brazil, too often overlooked even within the larger context of Latin America, has long defined itself on the strength of its mellifluous and quirky language as well, though perhaps not as militantly. Indeed, interest in Brazil/Québec studies has been steadily rising in recent years (as work by Zilá Bernd, Yvan Lamonde, Gérard Bouchard, and others admirably demonstrates),[2] with some scholars coming to regard these two very unique New

[2] For information regarding Professor Bernd's CD on Inter-American literature, go to the following address: www.ufrgs.br/cdrom. See, also Lamonde and Bouchard (1997).

World cultures as the most marginalized of all, the two cultures most consistently—and most conspicuously—ignored in the Inter-American purview. Yet on balance it also seems likely that there has been closer linguistic and literary interaction between England and France in Canada than between Spain and Portugal in Latin America, a cultural and historical setting in which Spanish America and Brazil have evolved separately and 'apart, since the first days of the discovery and conquest of the New World' (Monegal, 1984: xii).

In sum, one must conclude that, as the complex and demanding field of Inter-American Studies continues to develop, we will need to think in terms not of the past, and the ways we were trained as doctoral and professional students in our respective disciplines, but of the future and the new kinds of training (particularly linguistic training) that we want our graduates to have. If we are to make them successful Inter-Americanists, we must train them better than we were trained,[3] and we must remain steadfast in insisting that certain standards be met (foremost being the linguistic requirement). This, I believe, is essential for in truth we are preparing a new generation of scholars for a multi-dimensional, fluid, rapidly evolving new field, and we must ensure that they are prepared to deal with it fully and properly, to become, in short, leaders in the field.

PROGRAMMATIC COHESION

Since I am adamantly in favor of requiring our doctoral students in Inter-American Studies to work with at least three separate languages, I also favor requiring them to work with the three culture groups associated with them. The goal here, I believe, is to help our students select courses that will allow them to develop, semester by semester, a coherent, logically unified program, one that, with careful planning, will enable the student to develop a primary area of specialization (out of which a dissertation might well arise) as well as secondary and tertiary areas of teaching and research interest. Advising will thus become of paramount importance, as will the issue of the course selection for each student's program. For the student, then, as well as for the advisor, the goal, always, must be the creation of a unified, cohesive program of study, one that coalesces in meaningful, professional ways, that avoids being merely a conglomeration of disconnected courses, credits, and topics, and that clearly features the student's primary area (or areas) of interest. But until Inter-American Studies develops as a separate field to the point that it begins to produce a job market calling, specifically, for Inter-Americanists, I also believe that we must insist that our students ground themselves in the requirements of a traditional doctoral program. This, for me, would reflect the student's primary area of specialization, though, this, too, would have a clear and fundamental Inter-American dimension to it. For the time being, at least, I therefore feel we should be training Inter-Americanists who can compete successfully in the job markets that currently exist for more traditional PhDs in these same areas. Inter-American literature, for example, enjoys a close affinity with Comparative Literature in that both require that work be done in more than one language and both rest

[3] This is a point that Robert K. Martin has made as well. See Martin, 1993.

on issues of methodology, on how and why certain texts can be brought together for study (by genre, theme, period, or movement, for example). Yet as we have seen, Inter-American scholarship is also very germane to the type of work being done by Latin Americanists, by Canadianists, and by Caribbeanists, all of whom possess particular areas of expertise and specialization that could be of keen interest to a wide range of academic units, including some not normally considered in this context, such as law, education, and medicine. In contrast to trends and developments in the job market, the academic structure of the university changes very slowly and so we would want our fledgling Inter-Americanists to be trained so that they would be immediately attractive to a college of Law, Medicine, Music, Business, or Education as well as to a typical department of History, Comparative Literature, English, French, Ethnomusicology, Political Science, Economics, African American Studies, or Spanish/Portuguese.

There are at least two reasons why they should be: first, our students would be prepared to teach the traditional courses required of such a department and, second, they would also be prepared to offer new courses in a vibrant and rapidly evolving new field—Inter-American history, literature, anthropology, politics, law, education, and music, to mention just a few of the most immediately promising possibilities. Such a person will, I think, be highly desirable for any department seeking to remain current and up to date or to forge ahead into new areas, which, as we all know, is a worthy goal of nearly every college and university.

COURSE COVERAGE AND FACULTY EXPERTISE

Operating, once again, at the level of the practical, my concern here is with how an actual Inter-American course is structured, how it is organized, and how it selects certain texts and readings and not others. My comments here stem from my own experiences in designing and teaching courses in Inter-American literature, which I have done now for nearly twenty-five years. Although the same organizing principles may not work for every discipline when it comes to the construction of Inter-American courses, I am strongly in favor of breadth rather than depth, excluding, of course, graduate seminars that focus on more limited or specific Inter-American issues. At all levels, however, I advocate courses that have representation from all five of our New World literatures (English and French Canada, the United States, Spanish America, and Brazil), and including both our Native American heritage and the Caribbean, a region rightly understood by many people as the 'crossroads of the Americas' and one fully emblematic of both the potential and the challenge of the entire Inter-American enterprise. The responsibility of the professor is to demonstrate to the students that the very concept of Inter-American Studies necessarily involves all of the Americas and not just a few selected parts of it. Research papers and areas of future specialization can certainly be scaled down to reflect each student's linguistic preparation and area of interest, but a basic conceptual and organizing principle of each Inter-American class should be a commitment to inculcating in the student the need to reach beyond narrow, binary thinking, the kind that produces the two-sided, two-language scholarship that, unfortunately, we are seeing more and more of in this type of study. It is, I believe, critical that in our courses we expose our students to issues that man-

ifest themselves, often in very different ways, in all our New World nations and cultures and that we continuously remind them of the Americas' extraordinary diversity as well as of their common (but not identical) heritage.

In doing this, however, I am not claiming that everyone needs to be an expert in everything, for to do so would be fatuous in the extreme. Rather, I am claiming, via the inclusiveness of our courses, that to be a properly trained Inter-Americanist of any particular stripe (literature, history, economics, law, religion, music, etc.) it is necessary to possess at least a rudimentary understanding of how any given topic plays out in the rest of the Americas. To do anything else, to organize courses only centering on, say, certain English- and Spanish-speaking sectors of 'nuestra América' (as Martí put it in his seminal 1891 essay), is to fatally undercut the very argument of hemispheric commonality that we use to justify the entire Inter-American outlook. While the primary thrust of the course may well be limited to three of our New World cultures, we, as faculty, should take the time and trouble to ensure that our students at least consider, if only in passing, how the topic under consideration relates to the other American cultures, the ones not being focused upon in more detail. To be sure, this is never an easy task, and few (if any) of us were ever trained to do it. And, it must be said, to gain even this minimal level of knowledge about our sister American cultures means that we must commit to doing a lot of reading and research, to educating ourselves about the histories, traditions, and cultures of hemispheric neighbors we have hitherto known little or nothing about but whom we should know much better. In short, we must show our students (and ourselves!) that, for all their very real differences and for all the ways they can be compartmentalized into separate, isolated classes and programs (this being the typical model in most universities), the Americas share a common historical background, one that, to paraphrase Herbert E. Bolton's famous argument (Bolton, 1933: 448–74), continues to dramatize the interconnectedness of our often fractious but ongoing epic experience.

But while it is one thing to stretch one's intellectual horizons and organize a course that involves texts from the other Americas, it is quite another thing to try and teach these texts (which, per force, will often be in translation), or, at least, to do so in a way that connects them, in meaningful ways, with their often very different social and cultural contexts. The obstacle here that must be overcome is, once again, the nature of the graduate training that most of us received, linguistic and otherwise. Since most of us were not taught to think about our disciplines in broad, Inter-American terms (indeed, many of us were taught to think only in terms of narrow specializations), we must rethink and retrain ourselves as Inter-Americanists, and this is not easy to do, even if we are inclined to do so.

One very effective way to do it, however, is simply to commit large amounts of time to reading in the areas in which we find ourselves insufficiently prepared. For me, this was chiefly the literature of Anglophone and Francophone Canada, and I spent the better part of twenty years putting myself on a rather rigorous reading program in Canadian literature. This was great fun and I gained immensely from the experience (my reading skills in French grew exponentially, for example), but it was time-consuming in the extreme. And it was often difficult to maintain in the face of the many other demands made upon our time. Still, to be able to read deeply and systematically in

other of our New World literatures was an invaluable experience, and I recommend it to everyone.

A second possibility is to establish funding for some sort of 'release time' program that would enable faculty to study, to take classes, or to travel to places where more specialized training could be gotten. Although more dependent on institutional largess and foresight, the 'release time' method has the advantage of structure, control, and, above all, focus, all these being critical for a time-pressed faculty member seeking if not thoroughgoing expertise then at least basic competence in some important and hitherto missing aspect of the Inter-American course that is being envisioned.

Finally, faculty wishing to begin participating in an Inter-American studies program might well wish to organize team-taught courses, or courses organized by a single person but built around a series of carefully integrated and coordinated guest speakers. The team-teaching approach is becoming increasingly popular, at least at universities in the United States, as faculty realize that no single person has the full expertise needed to develop an Inter-American course with both the breadth and depth it should have. The flaw to be avoided here, however, is, once again, the binary approach, the urge we seem to have to seek only two professors to constitute the 'team' rather than the three, or even the four, that are really needed. To go beyond four to five, however, is to begin to risk the loss of control, focus, and integration that are nearly always the hallmarks of a successful course. Thinking, again, of the need always to engage at least three of the New World's languages and cultures, it is easy to see how a team-taught course involving faculty from three interlocking areas, programs, or departments could be very successful, however, especially if it were able to take advantage of the new technologies, such as video conferencing, that are available.

The development of an entire Inter-American program is always greatly aided by an administration open to the suggestion that, in order to avoid the problem of having to ask people to take on overloads, all participating faculty be given credit for teaching a full course. If such an agreement could be worked out, and if the faculty member charged with actually writing the syllabus and organizing each day's session could rely on the cooperation and flexibility of the other participants, perhaps, this triadic approach (with occasional forays into the other New World cultures) will eventually emerge as the most efficacious model, the one that best serves the needs of the successful Inter-American seminar, its students, and its faculty.

COURSES, NEW AND REVISED

As Inter-American Studies evolves into an organic and definable field of study, new courses will have to be developed while many existing courses will have to be modified to fit the demands of a changing curriculum. In order for Inter-American Studies to develop into a full-fledged discipline, however, it seems likely that the creation of new courses will prove to be the more crucial undertaking, the one that will have the greatest impact in the years to come. While courses that are currently on the books can often be modified at least somewhat in order to cultivate their Inter-American connections and relevancies, it is not easy to do this without sacrificing much of the

course's original intended purpose. Still, with careful planning, it can be done successfully, and when it is, it adds a great deal to the intellectual scope of the course.

As an example, I offer my own course on Brazilian literature from its origins through the 19th century. Traditionally, I have taught this course by focusing only on Brazilian authors and texts. These days, however, I have sought to expand the cultural context of the course to include references to and, on occasion, brief discussions of literary issues pertinent not only to Brazil but to Brazil's hemispheric neighbors as well. In short, I now teach this course by focusing, clearly and consistently, on Brazil's literary development but also by calling attention to the many parallels and differences that link it to its New World neighbors. Because many of them are already familiar with the literatures and cultures of both Spanish America and the United States, I consistently find that my students greatly appreciate this comparative and Inter-American perspective and find it exciting. As many of them have said, it helps them see the uniqueness of Brazil, its literature and culture, and at the same time to see it in a larger international perspective, as part of the world's community of nations.

Some examples of topics that have lent themselves to this type of comparative discussion include the following: the famous and very different 'cartas' written by Christopher Columbus, Pęro Vaz de Caminha, and John Smith; the Jesuit Catholicism of New Spain, New France, and Brazil (and the differences within these) versus the Protestant Puritanism of New England and the nature of the societies these founded; race relations and contrasting views of miscegenation; the oratory and political thought of such individual figures as Vieira, de Las Casas, and Mather; Romanticism in the Americas (including the Confederation Poets) and the figure of the Indian (the pairing of Alencar and Cooper make for a fascinating paradigm in this respect, particularly as this issue relates to nation building and national identity in the nineteenth century); Machada de Assis, Henry James, and the development of the novel in the New World; and the as yet unexplored question of the 'new novel' in the Americas of the 1960s, a subject that, in addition to the United States and Latin America, must include both the English Canadian production of the period (Leonard Cohen's extraordinary *Beautiful Losers*, for example, Malcolm Lowry's *Under the Volcano*, or Sheila Watson's *The Double Hook*[4]) and the French Canadian tradition of the same turbulent era, which features such culturally volatile and technically iconoclastic 'texts' as Hubert Aquin's *Prochain épisode* [Next Episode], Réjean Ducharme's *L'Avalée des avalés* [*The Swallower Swallowed*], Marie-Claire Blais's *Une saison dans la vie d'Emmanuel* [*A Season in the Life of Emmanuel*], and Jacques Godbout's *Le couteau sur la table* [*The Knife on the Table*].

In a more contemporary context, one might also wish to argue that a new literary genre is rapidly emerging in the Americas, a form that we might well wish to term the 'Inter-American Novel', a type of extended narrative that is being practiced in very distinctive fashion by such New World masters as Carlos Fuentes (*La frontera de cristal/The Crystal Frontier; Gringo Viejo/The Old Gringo;* and *Los ańos con Laura Díaz/The Years with Laura Díaz*), Isabel Allende (*Hija de la fortuna/Daughter of Fortune* and *El plan infini-*

[4] *The Double Hook*, first published in 1959, is often referred to as the first Canadian novel to break free of the strictures of rote realism and regionalism and to create an intensely symbolic and mythically grounded new narrative.

to/The Infinite Plan), Alberto Fuguet (*The Movies of My Life*), Silviano Santiago (*Stella Manhattan* and *Keith Jarrett no Blue Note*), Ann Patchett (*Bel Canto*), Margaret Atwood (*Surfacing*), Harriet Doerr (*Stones for Ibarra*), and Jacques Poulin (*Volkswagen Blues*), among many others. What we need here is something akin to what Ralph Freedman did for the 'lyrical novel' (Freedman, 1963), that is, to recognize it, define it, and then to carefully discuss the texts that most prototypically manifest it, showing, in the process, how it differs from other sub-categories of this most protean of literary genres, how it developed, and why it is so endemic to the American, or New World, experience.

While I do not have enough time in a typical class session to do much more than bring these issues up with my students, this is often sufficient to at least whet their interest and allow them to see that the nations of the New World are linked together in many more ways than they had originally supposed. Indeed, these Inter-American connections often generate very interesting research papers and presentations at the end of the semester, projects that permit the students to delve much more deeply into these issues and which they seem to find quite fascinating. And for graduate students, courses structured in this fashion can become career-altering experiences, involving choices about subjects and areas of interest that perhaps had never before been considered. We cannot, of course, even pretend to be authoritatively knowledgeable in everything germane to the Americas (nor should we), but, by dint of extensive reading and research, we can most certainly call certain issues to the attention of our students, to help direct their own investigations, and, in the process, to aid them in their breaking of new scholarly and disciplinary ground.

The alternative to modifying long-standing courses is, of course, the creation of new ones, and, as I suggested earlier, this would seem to be the undertaking that will, in the long run, most facilitate the development of Inter-American Studies as a coherent field of study, one replete with its own methodologies its own bibliographies, its own theoretical issues and traditions, and its own identifiable areas of specialization. To this end, I have created, for Vanderbilt University's Program in Comparative Literature, a series of three interlocking new courses which, if taken in sequence or in their totality, will provide the student with a complete overview of Inter-American literature. The first course discusses the nature of pre-Columbian Native American literature (as well as its force as a constant factor in New World literature up to the present moment), the literature of the Conquest, and the development of colonial literature in the Americas; the second course, more chronologically limited, examines nineteenth-century literature in the Americas and begins to follow some of the lines of influence and reception that are already developing; the third deals with New World literature in the twentieth century, when Inter-American literary studies really comes into its own as a viable academic discipline. Additional courses are envisioned on such topics as the New World novel, Modernism in North, Central, and South America, a history of drama in the Americas, and Inter-American film, poetry, and music. Methodologically, the constant for all these courses is breadth of coverage; the reading list for each one carries at least one work from each of the New World's major linguistic and cultural groups,[5] and they are to be selected because at least some of them deal with

[5] This means, normally, that each course features at least one text from each of the following

the same topic or engage each other in different ways.[6] The creation of new, distinctly Inter-American Studies courses will, I am sure, become the key element as Inter-American Studies continues to evolve and develop as an academic field. Whatever the discipline, the need for new courses that, through their content and structuring, tie the Americas together will only grow.

As we have seen, more traditional courses can, to some extent, be altered in order to at least recognize their relevance to the Inter-American enterprise, but care should be taken that they not be changed so much that they lose their originally intended focus. Inter-American Studies cannot succeed unless, at the same time that it sees its new and intrinsically comparative courses becoming available, it can also rely on the student's ability to take courses that focus intensely on issues germane to particular countries. To be well-grounded (and therefore well-trained) Inter-Americanists, our students will need a mix of courses, some exclusively (or primarily) national in nature, others more deliberately Inter-American in design and coverage. And, by requiring our students to be registered in a traditional department or program and that they develop specialties and sub-specialties within these traditional academic units, we help ensure that they will be well prepared not only for the current job market but for its future permutations as well. We must not allow our programs in Inter-American Studies to be synonymous with superficiality or vagueness, for to do so would be disastrous, and we are best able to obviate this potentially ruinous problem by insisting that our students ground themselves in a standing discipline.

THE INTER-AMERICAN DISSERTATION

The culmination of a carefully constructed Inter-American doctoral program, the dissertation must, like the program that engenders it and the committee that oversees it, involve at least three New World language groups and must advance an argument, or thesis, that is truly Inter-American in terms of its argumentation, structuring, and cultural grounding. That these requirements are met must, ultimately, be the responsibility of the thesis director and/or the chair of the thesis committee. Inherently comparative in nature, the Inter-American dissertation must establish the salient similarities between its constituent parts while also undertaking a detailed explication and analysis of the many differences that distinguish them and that make them unique. In order to avoid the problem of 'homogenization' that plagues so many studies of this type (that is, of seeming to regard very different texts or issues as exactly the same thing

groups: English- and French-speaking Canada, the United States, Spanish America, and Brazil. In certain cases, the Caribbean, arguably the epitome of the Inter-American experience, may be considered an additional group and therefore merit a text on its own. These numbers are often somewhat adjusted in accordance with a particular theme or issue that the professor in charge might wish to feature in the course. Thus, there might be more than one text from a single country, though, again, balance is what we are seeking in these courses.

[6] For example, a recent Honors Seminar that I gave at Vanderbilt (Spring, 2002) featured Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*, Faulkner's *The Bear*, and Alejo Carpentier's *The Lost Steps* (*Los pasos perdidos*), along with four other novels, because these three works all deal, in different ways, with the symbolism of the land in the New World and with the conflict between the wilderness and what we normally think of as civilization. The entire course could have been developed around this theme, though I wanted to pursue other issues with the other texts..

and to be too quick to reach exactly the same conclusions about them), this step is absolutely critical, whatever the discipline involved. It cannot be successfully taken, however, unless the student is prepared linguistically to read her texts in their original language and to discuss them in the full range of the historical, social, and cultural differences that pertain to the issue being focused upon. As in any good comparative study, these essential and distinctive differences must be carefully and accurately accounted for while also maintaining the more comprehensive and international perspectives that tie our texts together and that manifest and validate the larger critical contexts in which we are able to compare and contrast them. In Inter-American work, then, as in Comparative Literature scholarship generally, the differences between texts are often more important, more revealing of a particular text's uniqueness, than the similarities that connect them, and we must be careful to give these essential differences their full critical due.

The goal of the Inter-American dissertation, again following the model of the Inter-American doctoral program, should also provide clear evidence of expertise in a subject that is of direct value to a traditional academic program while also demonstrating that the candidate in question truly has a larger, Inter-American perspective, one that would allow her to create new courses for a program or department that wished to develop Inter-American Studies as part of its regular curriculum or as part of its regular degree tracks. The potential to do this should be clearly apparent in the dissertation, which should also reflect the student's primary and, perhaps, secondary areas of specialization and interest.

The properly done Inter-American dissertation should therefore also provide the student with a sense of direction for the writing of the publications that are so crucial to success in the academic world. Reflecting the nature of the dissertation itself, the student will be prepared to publish in at least two complementary fields, the traditional area of expertise and the newer area of Inter-American studies, however this latter field comes to be defined in the context of the student's particular discipline. This, too, is an area in which the student's doctoral committee can be of special importance and utility, providing advice and counsel that is invaluable to the young scholar who is preparing to enter the not infrequently arcane academic world. Thus, even at this late date in her graduate school training, the fledgling Inter-Americanist can be alerted to the need to publish both as a traditional scholar in a particular discipline might and as a pioneer in a new field, someone anxious to help an established discipline connect with a fast evolving and multi-disciplinary new enterprise. Such advice, especially if framed in the context of the standard demands of academic tenure and promotion procedures, could be invaluable to our Inter-American students.

We who seek to investigate it recognize that for however much Inter-American Studies is a compelling and fascinating new field, it is also one that, for a number of reasons, will not reach its full potential without overcoming some formidable obstacles and without our remaining vigilant with respect to the basic requirements we deem necessary. At the same time, I have every confidence that it will. Indeed, it is already doing so. Our task, then, as teachers, researchers, and mentors is to facilitate this process, to consider both the exciting possibilities and the daunting problems inherent in Inter-American scholarship and, by coming to grips with these in a logical, co-

herent way, to help shape its growth and development as a vital, new academic discipline.

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