

## On Avatars of Historical Scholarship of the Colonial Americas in the Home of the Brave: An Interview with Rolena Adorno

This interview took place at Yale University on June 2-5, 2003. The following selection was edited for *Revista de Estudios Hispánicos*. The expanded version of the interview is included in a forthcoming book, *Foreign Sensibilities*. Early transcription of the interview was done by Diana García-Denson.

FG: How could we explain to someone outside the US the tremendously transient nature of the academic profession in the US? When you look at a CV of a, let's say, solid full professor in the field, clearly there is quite a bit of institutional travel, and clearly it is that person's choice, but it also comes with the profession. It's a nonnegotiable condition of being an academic in this country, to be this mobile. How do you account for that? What are the good things that come with that package, what are the bad things, if there are any?

RA: First of all, great mobility is not universal in the American academy. Many disciplines do not have the mobility that we enjoy. I think that for Spanish as a field, and Latin American studies, particularly in the language and literature areas, the wave has not yet crested. We've had nothing but the expansion of Spanish studies in American universities, both a tremendous increase in numbers of students as well as the expansion of the curriculum. This is a phenomenon that began in the late 1970s and, with minor "blips" along the way, the trend has continued upward. There are reasons for this. Spanish is becoming the second language spoken in this country; lots of college students who want to be doctors, lawyers, and nurses want to know Spanish. The number of Spanish heritage speakers has increased and draws an additional clientele to our departments. These developments affect the quantity of Spanish-language teaching, which is the "bread and butter"

platform on which everything that we do in Hispanic literary criticism and history rests.

The post-Sputnik boost of foreign language teaching (federally funded as well as supported by the philanthropic foundations), has provided a significant basis for the development of Spanish and Latin American studies as fields. However, if you and I were in departments of History, or if we were fortunate enough to have gotten positions in departments of English, we would find that our kind of mobility does not prevail. We in Spanish are especially privileged in this regard.

What makes all this possible, besides the explosion of Hispanic studies, is the staggering total of some 2,800–2,900 colleges and universities in the US. Unlike nearly any other country, we have a unique combination of large state-supported university systems, as well as hundreds of old and new(er) private liberal arts colleges and universities. The state university systems have expanded greatly over the last thirty years (not to mention the post-World War II G.I. bill that brought about exponential growth in the US university). We've also had a very healthy tradition, whose origins are in the nineteenth century, of small, private liberal arts colleges that dot the landscape in states like Ohio and Pennsylvania. Despite its deeply anti-intellectual character, US society has put tremendous resources into education and given it an enduring emphasis. We are the beneficiaries of it. And that's what has given people in fields like ours the opportunity for mobility.

FG: That great mobility that you talk about in relation to Spanish and Latin American studies, would you say it is a sign of strength, weakness, or both, or neither, in relation to English and History?

RA: It's a sign of strength. There is nothing more difficult to effect in the university than change. The university is a slow moving vehicle, always "driving on the right," you might say. And, as a result, with the professorial mobility in our field we are able to bring new blood, new ideas, and new courses into our departments, and this is good all the way around. Shaking things up is always good, especially in an institution that by its own lights would be the slowest in the world to move. Because it's not as though we were driven by the profit motive, which requires immediate responses to the winds of change in order to survive. We are, for the better (but sometimes, it seems, for the worse), more or less isolated from that dynamic.

FG: In relation to academic cultures, and perhaps highlighting literary criticism and schools of historical thought out there, what would you rescue for the critical attention of my generation?

RA: I would rescue the literary text itself, more than any of the adjuncts made possible by its existence. I would say what I say to my students: before you write about any given work(s) or literary problem, you really have to know the materials that constitute your object of study. You have to know the text, because only then can you evaluate the critical or theoretical judgments made about it or its class. To students, I would say "Read x, y, or z, and then come back and tell me how well the person who wrote that article or that monograph knows the works that he or she is, in fact, discussing. What are the indications of a deep familiarity with a textual corpus, or lack of it? Can you show that you have that deep textual familiarity yourself?" But this is a kind of "cook-book" answer, Fernando.

FG: Could I rephrase what you are saying in the following way: are you suggesting that perhaps, using again this kind of language, there is a tendency to go for the big theory of things, and perhaps sometimes you get the sense that the way x, y, and z are talking about that text or that context is a little bit frivolous or too superficial, or he or she goes too fast, moving from one century to the next?

RA: Yes. If I think of the graduate seminar papers that I have just been reading, I'm reminded about the number of times I remark, "Wait a minute there! Let's make sure we know the material that we're writing about." I always say that you have to study the work or the body of work "in its own sauce," *en su salsa*. Before we attempt to make or take something out of it, to make it key to something else that we think, at least for the moment, is more interesting as a critical research problem, we have to know the text(s). There is today a general, "fast-track" tendency to shortchange works as not quite being worthy of study in their own right but rather as small and necessary stops (or obstacles) on the road to some other, presumably more important destination.

FG: Rolena, is this a good moment to be a scholar or an academic in the vicinity of the sign "Spanish" in the "home of the brave"?

of Spanish and Portuguese. Or perhaps one should say “Latin” as in “Latin American Studies,” mostly, as in your case, in relation to historical dimensions, because Spanish is not an obvious sign anymore: it is not just the language, not just the culture, not just an “outside.” You could make it panoramic, if you wish: in the last thirty years what has happened to that sign? One thing that you already mentioned is that it’s growing; it’s growing beyond anything anyone had ever imagined.

RA: What has happened to the sign “Spanish” in the last thirty years and how does it relate to my own professional trajectory (also thirty years long)? It’s like a butterfly, I can’t capture it. That is to say, to me the sources of fascination with the world of Spain and Latin America began with the Spanish language itself and they were deepened by my year of study in Spain. I became acquainted with the complex historical traditions of Spain, including half a millennium’s worth of experience in Latin America. These things eventually became a focal point in my life, and they can never become boring, because I can never know or understand enough about what it is that I would like to know and understand.

Why does a farm girl from Iowa, with no Hispanic heritage, choose to study Spanish and then, later, devote her life to it? Like all of life’s greatest decisions, for all of us, it was a leap of faith. An interest, and then a hope, but never a “plan.” Exciting things were happening in the academy in the 1970s, and they affected the Spanish field, too: the advent of women’s studies, of African-American studies, of ethnic studies, and the burst of literary theory, from structuralism to poststructuralism and deconstruction. Everything seemed to be in flux. It was a thrilling time to become involved and to try to keep up.

We all have colleagues in the humanities who may be experiencing burn-out and boredom with their fields or objects of study. I find this impossible, in my own case, because our fields are to me an inexhaustible source of interest and inspiration. The fact that colleagues in other areas of the humanities have now turned to fields defined by Spanish as the language of expression (starting with Todorov [*The Conquest of America*] in 1982 and, notably, with Stephen Greenblatt [*Marvelous Possessions*] in 1991) suggests, objectively, a broad fascination with the events and processes and verbal arts of the Hispanic experience of the period from 1492 onward.

RA: Yes, it is. Here’s why. By the way, the old “home of the brave” is now the [new] home of the “struggle against terrorism,” as the media and the politicians continually emphasize. All prevailing political rhetoric aside, it’s very hard to sustain the myth of being “the home of the brave,” when we have become “the land of the attacked and the fearful.” The very popularity of “home of the brave” talk among politicians proves that that is precisely what we are *not*. I’ll give you my Carlos Fuentes anecdote and then go on from there. This was probably one of the most memorable lectures of my Syracuse University years (1976–1985) and maybe of a lot of years beyond that. When asked why it was that he was a writer of novels in a country where the majority of the population was illiterate, Fuentes replied: “to keep language free and out of the hands exclusively of politicians and demagogues.” That idea struck me profoundly, and it resonated with what I had learned earlier from Charles Aubrun, while auditing a course at Cornell before I began my doctoral studies there. “What we do in the humanities,” Aubrun said, “is to teach people how to read and write.” He didn’t mean it *only* in the literal sense (but he did not *exclude* the literal sense, either), as he emphasized by the use of the presumed metaphor the importance of fomenting critical thinking.

When you put this definition of the pedagogical mission in the humanities together with Fuentes’s vision of his literary mission, you have my answer to your question. All we need do is think of our students—reading *USA Today* (which isn’t such a bad newspaper, but not the best), watching CNN and soaps, and surfing the Internet for quick and easy information on complex topics for term papers. What is revealed in all these media is a narrowing of the focus, a reduction of language, an extreme reduction and narrowing of the terms of analysis. So my view is that this is a great time to be a teacher in the humanities. It’s a great time to be a teacher in the Spanish field, because in the arena of the study of this, or any other literary and cultural tradition, we have the opportunity to sit down with young people and help them reflect on what it is they are reading, and to help them learn to express themselves with subtlety and precision.

FG: How could we make sense of the sign “Spanish” in relation to your intellectual and professional trajectory? Because obviously something happened in that Fulbright scholarship year [in Madrid in 1965–66] that clicked, because I find you here today at Yale in the Department

I have been thinking for the past few years—since my first presentation on the subject in 1994, at a conference at Princeton, and articles I wrote and published in 1997 and afterward—about the origins of Hispanism and Latin Americanism in the United States, about how they came into being in the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> This is a subject of great interest to me, because I feel related to it personally. It's a little closer to home than the chronicles of the Indies, my usual object of study, and yet it is the very prominence of the chronicles of the Indies at the heart of those early US Spanish cultural endeavors—starting with Thomas Jefferson and including, most prominently, Washington Irving and William Hickling Prescott, for their biographies of Columbus and histories of the conquests of Mexico and Peru, respectively—that have sparked my own interest in the early days of US literary culture. I can't say this is the topic that grips me the *most*, but it grips me right now. It is one that I have come to (or that has found *me*) after working so many years in the Spanish colonial field.

FG: You don't see it becoming the central point of your scholarship, of your interests?

RA: No, I don't, although I will not deny that the topic is the current focal point of my major research-in-progress. What does come to the heart of my interest, and why I cannot seem to put aside the sixteenth-century chronicles and their attendant polemics, is that there are very interesting people, or rather, subject positions that are revealed in those presumably historical narratives, in the exercise of those verbal arts. That's going to remain at the heart of my interest. It centers on what happened after the Europeans arrived in this to-them-unknown hemisphere and how they, and the peoples they encountered, interpreted it all. In the writings of Oviedo, Las Casas, Bernal Díaz, Cabeza de Vaca, and so forth, their own struggles to comprehend and interpret what they saw and experienced shines through. This is perpetually interesting to me, because I'll never be able to explain its persistently attractive but elusive quality to myself or to others.

FG: You'll never catch the butterfly.

RA: I'll never catch the butterfly.

FG: You know you have one of the most intimidating vitae out there in the galaxy (close to 30 pages on your website). How would you define your scholarly trajectory in relation to persistent themes, main concerns, central preoccupations, nagging obsessions, etc.?

RA: I would define it by having been, I think, fortunate, fortunate in the choice of my starting point. In starting out, and I really did begin with the Andean chronicler, Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala, I felt that a body of work as complex and many layered as *El primer nueva corónica y buen gobierno* generated for me questions that extended well beyond my own study of it. Reading that book led me to ask the next set of questions. That is to say, the *Nueva corónica* led me back in time, to think: Well, if there was an individual—an ethnic Andean, at that—who was reading Las Casas's unpublished works fifty years after the Dominican's death, then I needed to know about those earlier debates for which Guaman Poma cited (without naming) Las Casas. And I had to know about how those works in manuscript circulated in order to have a minimal idea about the dynamics of colonial-era reading and writing and their polemics. In this regard, I felt—and I know that it sounds mystical, but it absolutely isn't—that Guaman Poma's book had been one of my best teachers because its own presentation is not at all self-evident, and it led me to others and other considerations. I'd like to think that that's the way I've carried out most of my work found in the publications listed on my CV: one formulation or hypothesis or provisional conclusion led me to another, in a way that I like to regard as rather more coherent than arbitrary.

I don't think I've ever actually written, out of the blue, a research proposal for such and such a project and then carried it out according to the preliminary outline. I've always moved forward by trying to answer the questions that had been generated by the previous stop on the road. So that's how I moved, for example, from Guaman Poma to Las Casas and Sepúlveda, and from Las Casas to Bernal Díaz, because I studied Bernal Díaz's citations of Las Casas. From Bernal Díaz, I decided to do some work on Hernán Cortés's writings. But I got interested in the controversial figure of Nuño de Guzmán, who had been a major rival of Hernán Cortés in New Spain, although a minor figure in Cabeza de Vaca's *Relación* (1542; *Naufragios*, 1555).

“Connecting the dots” between, on one hand, the voluminous documentation on Nuño de Guzmán, collected, transcribed, and

photostated by Franz Scholes and bequeathed to the Latin American Library at Tulane University, and on the other, the slim line or two in Cabeza de Vaca's *Relación* devoted to Guzmán as governor of Nueva Galicia (in northwestern Mexico), I decided to pursue the latter references. In doing so, not only Cabeza de Vaca's *Florida* account (*La Florida*, to the Spanish of the 1520s, meant the lands to the north of New Spain, from sea to sea), but also his entire Indies career, in North and South America, intrigued me. I started that long-term project in 1988 while at the University of Michigan, and three years later, while I was teaching at Princeton (1990–1996), I invited my former student, Patrick Pautz (Princeton, '91), to join me on the project.<sup>2</sup> Completed in 1999, the co-authored three-volume work, which includes the first transcription of the 1542 Spanish-language publication since 1542, along with our new English translation, brought to fruition an endless series of queries that I, and we, had had about the make-up of seagoing, settlement-oriented expeditions, and the politics at court and in the vicerealties that affected them and their protagonists. But we were not writing history as such; the point of our exercise was not to establish an objective criterion for “what happened” to the Pánfilo de Narváez expedition or to Cabeza de Vaca, but rather to examine the means by which the verbal arts of the day—from *relaciones* to chronicles to *pareceres* (formal legal opinions) and *interrogatorios*—interpreted and memorialized an otherwise forgotten expeditionary experience and gave it a life that has lasted half a millenium.

FG: But if instead of using individual names, you were to name a big problematic or a set of issues or main concerns, what would these be?

RA: It's the subject positionality of the marginal that interests me. All of the historical individuals, or rather, the literary subject positions identified by the names that I have mentioned, have been on the outside of something, with which they were trying to get into dialogue and upon which they would like to have had a persuasive influence. In all these cases the central expressive question is how, through narrative textual practice, to enter the mainstream from the margin. From my interest in the multiple and often contradictory positions of the marginal literary subject flow two related issues: the circulation of texts and ideas in metropolitan and colonial cultures in the period of absolutist monarchy, and, closely related to that, the politics and practices of textual censor-

FG: In relation to your *vitae*, do you sense any stages, continuities and discontinuities, any breaking points, blind alleys, lost highways?

RA: Continuities and breaking points, yes. One of the continuities already mentioned is my interest in the problems of book circulation and censorship, and of course state and inquisitorial censorship in particular . . . But this continuous interest has, in itself, led me to blind alleys or breaking points. I am extremely interested in what happens through those procedures that attempt to control the uncontrollable. It's a variant of the Carlos Fuentes citation actually, isn't it? You can't ever actually kill an idea, but you can keep the expression of that idea out of circulation (maybe), and I'm very interested in that dynamic, that is, not what the censorship *is*, but what *it is not*, capable of doing. This is a very tough problem to reach and resolve. It's like Irving Leonard (one of my heroes) trying to prove—something that he always acknowledged that he could *not* prove—that the Spanish conquistadors' heads were filled with the fantasies of the romances of chivalry as they undertook the conquests and that those fictions guided their efforts at arms.<sup>3</sup> The breaking point, then, comes when the proof is impossible and only the intuition remains. The intuition is a dead end, insofar as it cannot be proven or disproven in a scholarly way. Yet it can nevertheless be powerful and persuasive because it is popular, gaining consensus in the scholarly community.

My own view about the general ineffectiveness of Inquisitorial censorship is such an intuition, that is, a dead-end breaking point because it cannot be proven or disproven. And the popular side of the issue takes the view opposite to my own. Mario Vargas Llosa, for example, has written many times about how the “steamroller of censorship”—that's the expression he has used—“crushed” literary creativity during the Spanish colonial era in Latin America. Speaking before the P.E.N. Club in New York, a decade or two earlier, Octavio Paz announced that in Latin America three centuries of colonialism had produced only three writers of interest. Yet the great and obvious counterargument stands before us: the fabulous fertility of mind and creativity of the Spanish “Golden Age,” both at home and abroad, which was, at the same time, the era of maximum cultural closure and repression. Even Phillip II's most repressive policies could not prevent literary creativity from reaching extraordinary heights of accomplishment.

Continuities. Of course, you know, Fernando, that one of the things I've done has been to prepare scholarly editions of works in our field, and it's a course of action that I have never regretted. In fact, I've only done more of it, rather than less, over the years, and I have another chronicle edition planned: Fray Martín de Murúa's *Historia general del Perú* (1613), housed at the Getty Research Center in Malibu, California. The only published edition(s) of this final version of Murúa's work are the ones brought out by Manuel Ballesteros Gaibrois (1962–1964, 1987), and in both cases Ballesteros ignored the evidence of the censorship of the manuscript that I have recently discovered and discussed. In any case, I did my first editorial project with one of my professors, Ciriaco Morón Arroyo, at Cornell University when I was there in graduate school (1971–1974). It was an edition of one of the *comedias* of the Siglo de Oro, Tirso de Molina's *El condenado por desconfiado*.<sup>4</sup> After more than a dozen printings, the edition was updated, and I was unable to join Ciriaco, at the time, to redó the new edition, that now appears solely under his name.

Scholarly editions are a constant interest of mine, and I challenge students to look for the best editions and not just to accept anything because it's in print; to persuade them that using a philologically sound edition, instead of a cheap, popular edition, makes a great deal of difference. Of course, I can't encourage graduate students to make [their] first projects critical editions, because I am aware that there is a strong bias against doing so, thanks to the death of philology in most of our academic departments. And for more senior scholars and publishers, there are the deterrents of time, and cost, in preparing and producing print editions of the big books that need editing, such as el Inca Garcilaso de la Vega's *Comentarios reales de los Incas*, Las Casas' *Apologética historia sumaria*, and Oviedo's *Historia general y natural de las Indias*.

I am hopeful, however, that the opportunity to utilize new, electronic formats of presentation on the Internet, as an alternative to cumbersome and costly print editions, will encourage and facilitate larger collaborative efforts among scholarly editors. Ideally, I'd invent a graduate course or seminar (my dream course), with an accompanying set of electronic editions, in which graduate students and I together would read the "basic book shelf" of educated persons in sixteenth-century Spain and the viceroalties. By "educated" I mean the councilors at court and prelates of the church who took an active role in public, par-

ticularly ultramarine, affairs. The list would include, for example, some Aquinas, probably Aristotle's *Politics*, the *Siete partidas*, St. Augustine, the writings of Fray Luis de Granada, and so forth. The challenge in creating the course would be to identify those philosophical, theological, and devotional works that were influential at the time—which do not necessarily correspond to the ones we have canonized today.

Such is one of the potentials that I see for the capacity of electronic publication, particularly for those books that are too cumbersome and expensive to bring into print (and for students to buy), and more than that, that have too many complex layers within them for a single kind of print presentation that takes everything into account. How often have you looked at a work that has a complicated critical apparatus and, if it's multi-volume, you've got a thumb in volume one, an elbow somewhere in volume two, and an index finger (called that, not coincidentally!) somewhere in the index at the end of volume three.

This is where digitization and electronic publication on the Internet offers magnificent possibilities. What I'm doing right now is precisely working on an Internet edition of the work I've edited in print, *El primer nueva corónica y buen gobierno*—basing myself on the earlier Murra/Adorno/Urioste editions, but figuring out new ways to take into account the many levels and dimensions that are required to deal with such a work. With the encouragement of my earlier co-editors, John V. Murra and Jorge L. Urioste, I am preparing this new incarnation of our 1980 (Mexico City) and 1987 (Madrid) editions, correcting the transcription on the basis of the digitized facsimile of the Copenhagen autograph manuscript (GKS 2232, 4to), with the collaboration of Ivan Boserup, Keeper of Manuscripts and Rare Books at the Royal Library. It will appear on the Royal Library's Guaman Poma website, along with the digitized facsimile of the manuscript that was inaugurated in May, 2001: <www.kb.dk/elib/mss/poma/>.

FG: Any self-critique that you'd like to pose in relation to your work? Anything that you have done that you are not too happy with, or anything that you have written that now you see was not a good performance on your part, that was a blunder, that you would [wish to] correct now in this way?

RA: A couple of years ago, actually, *five* years ago, I decided that I would take some of the articles that I'd written that I thought could be

useful to graduate students reading for their courses or comprehensive exams, and pull them together in an edited collection. Actually, a great many of my publications have been motivated by my wish to write in a way that answers questions that students pose—or that their assumptions reveal that these are questions that *need* to be posed. These include such things as the commonplaces about the Sepúlveda/Las Casas 1550 debates in Valladolid on the rights of conquest, and the supposed widespread belief among the Spanish that the Indians of the New World were not human beings, etc. No one ever thought or wrote—except for a couple of deranged sixteenth-century friars—that the Indians weren't human, but it's the commonplace that you hear repeated all the time. Likewise, the Indians of the New World did not universally believe that the Europeans were gods (far from it!), but it's another commonplace that keeps percolating through each new generation of students. The Black Legend of Spanish history is alive and well in both Anglo-North and Latin American cultural traditions, and its assimilation, in both, seems to have been flawless. Some of my writing has been responsive to these commonplaces.

In any case, you've asked about the blunders and I'm getting to them. Just when I sat down to say, "OK, let me look at these essays and maybe edit them," written, as they were, over a long period of time, I found myself both pleased and dissatisfied. Of course, it is no secret that looking back over a body of thirty years' work takes both stamina and courage. My blunder was not to proceed, at that time, with the collection and correction of those essays. But, now, as I look around at other colleagues' books of revised and collected essays, I am encouraged by the fact that they acknowledge the difficulty of the task, and that they give account of having done the kind of arduous and often tedious work that I have now set out for myself to do: to make the necessary corrections and additions while retaining and maybe strengthening the positions taken and arguments presented.

My biggest blunder was not to have anticipated the desirability of, and therefore to have gotten, a better literary education. I have always felt the lacunae created by the lack of early, serious study of the Spanish/Latin American literary canon. In spite of all my enthusiasm, I'll never get over the fact that I didn't study Spanish or Latin American literature in my high school years and that I just barely managed to begin the process as a college student.

FG: In relation to critiques, are you aware of the critique of José Rabasa of the very notion of "peaceful conquest" in relation to Cabeza de Vaca (*Writing Violence on the Northern Frontier* 31–83). How would you respond to that critique?

RA: Would you mind, Fernando, summarizing for me the way *you* see that critique? Let me have that critique through your eyes.

FG: I would say that in the case of Rabasa, a "postcolonial sensibility" will display something of an impatience with what could perhaps be described as the euphemistic oxymoron of peaceful conquest. Now I may not see him building a fully satisfying argumentation in relation to this impatience that has to do with Cabeza de Vaca, but I would say that the claim that perhaps some historical scholarship out there may be consciously or not reproducing some of these peaceful conquests is still a big charge.

RA: It was not my objective to romanticize or justify the strategy that Cabeza de Vaca set out in his narrative in reference to his experience, but rather to explain how and why his narrative account was successful in its day. That is, his *Relación* was successful enough for the book that contained it, first printed in 1542, to be reedited and republished by the author in 1555. That editorial achievement must have meant that the work was attractive to its readers, and I wanted, therefore, to investigate what in the work would have been agreeable to its courtly Spanish sixteenth-century readership, when, after all, the specter of a colossally failed settlement expedition would not have been, at the Castilian court, the work's strong suit, the cause of its appeal. My point about Cabeza de Vaca's interpretation of his experience in northwestern Mexico as a "peaceful conquest"—yes, it is an oxymoron!—pertains to his *claims* of having been able to persuade the natives of the Sinaloa Rivera area to come down out of their mountain refuge, to which they had fled out of fear of Spanish slavers, and resettle on the rich alluvial flood plain where they customarily lived and cultivated their crops.

My "peaceful conquest" argument is thus not about the conduct of the Spanish conquests but rather about the stimulation of readerly interest in one of the accounts of expeditionary failure. We get a glimpse of this "reader response" through Las Casas, writing in the

de la Frontera,” as he called him, word for word on the question of the comportment and character of the Indians of *La Florida*. Discovering that intertext helped me understand the ideas that were attractive enough to get the book published a second time and make it cited by major writers of sixteenth-century Spain, such as Las Casas and Gómara who, indeed, had read and cited it.

FG: So, what can we do—and not do—with Colonial Latin American Studies inside the Anglo-American academy? What are the boundaries, limits, or the potentialities?

RA: I think the potentialities are to be a Janus-like figure in departments of Spanish and Portuguese, capable of looking in both directions, not only forward and back in time; but also laterally across the Atlantic, focalizing the Americas and Europe. The potential for the field is great precisely because of this flexibility. Even if for some departmental colleagues specializing in other areas the colonial period per se is something they'd rather not discuss—pretending that Spain did not expand westward or that Latin America has no colonial past—the colonial field and its practitioners have the possibility of building a bridge across the (often painful) peninsular/continental divide. Colonial studies is quite a late development in the American academy. Irving Leonard was one of the first to develop it, at the University of Michigan, and he was joined by José Juan Arrom here at Yale, among others in a select handful of universities in the 1940s and 1950s. Colonial studies is, in a way, nobody's stepchild, claimed neither by Hispanists nor Latin Americanists. Because of this, since it occupies a kind of no-terrain, a kind of a no-place, I think it is incumbent upon those of us who are in colonial studies to be able to keep the conversation going with both sides of our departments. And often it really comes down to that.

FG: And what about outside of the department?

RA: And outside of the department? There we look exotic. The challenge for colonialists working in Spanish and with Spanish-American materials in the North American university is to be able to get colleagues beyond the “Oh, those evil Spaniards, oh, those good British!” knee-jerk reactions, which represent, as I mentioned earlier, the assimilation of the Black Legend of Spanish history by our colleagues in

nearly all fields. I think that for Americans, and also for the British (and also for the Spanish, in a different way), it's very hard to get beyond the legacy of the ideological role that one's own culture has played in colonialism. In my view, both colonial and contemporary Latin Americanist scholars face the challenge of keeping the Hispanic world “on the map” of important academic regional interests worldwide.

FG: What are we to make today, seventeen years later, of, if you allow me, the “canon-defining moment” for Colonial Latin American Studies, at least within the US environment: “In the pages that follow I have attempted to perform an act of decolonization in the forum of historical literary scholarship” (Introduction to *Guaman Poma: Writing and Resistance in Colonial Peru* 3). How do you feel today about that kind of a beginning, also a bold statement?

RA: At the time, that claim about the need for cultural and historical decolonization, for which I cited Roberto González Echevarría's essay, “José Arrom, autor de la *Relación acerca de las antigüedades de los indios* (picaresca e historia)” (1976), was very important. Perhaps “decolonization” has become nearly a hollow buzz word today, but in the 1970s it referred explicitly to the need to recover the histories of those who had become “peoples without history,” to quote Eric Wolf's title. The idea of the decolonization of history, that is, the decolonization of the histories of peoples autochthonous to the western hemisphere, made it possible for me to examine *El primer nueva corónica y buen gobierno* within the purview of Spanish colonial literary and cultural history rather than as a source for ethnology or archaeology. To that date, such discussions had been impossible; Guaman Poma and his work had been disregarded or defamed, you could say, in the manuals of literary history. That's why the first article that I ever published was entitled “Racial Scorn and Critical Contempt.” It was under Roberto González Echevarría's guidance and editorship of that issue of *Diacritics* that I was able to publish the piece. Today I would not be likely to use the term “decolonization” because we have passed the historical moment in which it was absolutely appropriate—and, I believe, necessary—to use it.

A larger issue here is “detemporalization,” and by this I mean the lack of our ability today to temporalize: the victims of this blindness are not only the writings of the Spanish colonial period (or any



historical period) but also the writings of modern scholarship. As one looks back on any scholarly career—and, certainly, as I look back upon my own—I can only see it within the context of its own temporality. In 1972, for example, everyone knew that “Indians didn’t write books.” But in 2004, we understand that such was not the case and that these texts, small but significant in number, provide glimpses into worlds that, as El Inca Garcilaso wrote, “were destroyed before they were known.”

FG: What are we to make today of another great moment—I am referring to the debate in which you are keeping company with Hernán Vidal, Walter D. Mignolo, and Patricia Seed about colonial discursivity [*Latin American Research Review* 28 (1993): 113–52]? How do you see that debate today? A certain exhaustion by now of “discourse analysis” a la Foucault, or no?

RA: Probably so, probably yes. Do you think, may I ask you, do you think it was a productive assembly of pieces?

FG: Completely. I would define this, again I use it in my teaching, as a canon-defining moment. I just don’t know if perhaps the claims in relation to colonial discourse really age gracefully, let’s say. But it is clearly important, there is no question about it. There are many things that one could find fruitful and productive in many ways. So maybe if you want to add what your current perception of that moment in 1993 is, maybe you could add that later, it’s almost like a recap. How that debate remains with you, if it remains at all.

RA: Yes, of course. The moment, the time itself, was ripe for reflection because we were all “on stage”: it was the Columbian Quincentenary. A defining moment, I think, for the full recognition of Colonial Studies as a field. I guess that we’d have to say that this was the “hatched from the egg” moment, breaking through the shell and here we are. The *LARR* feature gave a few of us the opportunity to present ourselves and to attempt to describe (and advocate or defend) what we thought it was that we were doing. These statements were an expression of the recognition of the field, and in that regard it may have had a certain value. I’m looking now at what you underlined in my essay.

FG: I would say there is a healthy restlessness in relation to the double call to historicize and “decolonize” vis-à-vis conventionalities that have to do with the “literary” and “cultural” dimensions. This is done, at least in this debate, with an “Americanist” focus vis-à-vis “Europe.” And perhaps the enormous difficulties embedded in this thinking operation could be highlighted with the inclusion of quotation marks.

RA: Yes, there is. I was thinking along those lines when I was invited to write the piece. I am still concerned about the comment you made to me during the process of the interview about a certain fascination with the “position of the underdog.” Looking at the piece now, I notice that I cited the Klor de Alva essay, which he went on to publish in a couple of different versions and which introduced a significant debate about the defining features of colonialism.<sup>5</sup> He suggested a shift, or a complement, to the definition of colonialism in terms of economic relationships of inequality to include a focus on the phenomenon of racial mixing and cultural *mestizaje*. I was interested in Jorge’s hypothesis because it allowed for the introduction of cultural issues and identities into the discussion of colonialism, which for me constituted the dimension of the phenomenon on which I most wanted to focus. What was my concern, in 1992 and 1993? There were readings that were bothersome to me at the time because they seemed too facile; I perceived a too-easy reduction of the terms of colonial writings to a few quick, if I may borrow your term, “Fox News” type responses. I wanted to introduce into the *LARR* discussion the problem of complex subject positions and ambiguous cultural identities—again multiple subject positions.

FG: You say that at the very beginning of that essay, and I think it’s very convincing.

RA: That’s all I’ll say right now. I might look it over.

FG: What about the present and future of Rolena Adorno? You have already passed me three essays, “La censura de la *Historia general del Perú* (1611–13) de fray Martín de Murúa,” “La Historia de los Incas narrada desde el Norte: relejendo a Prescott,” and “Sombras y fantasmas: El pasado colonial en *El mundo alucinante* de Reinaldo Arenas y en *El arpa y la sombra* de Alejo Carpentier.” Yet, how do you see yourself in the near future and also what are the things that you have in terms of projects?

RA: Each of those essays reflects one of my abiding concerns: the problem of circulation and censorship in the chronicles of the Indies; the appropriation of the hemispheric Spanish heritage by the founders of US arts and letters; and the literary reflections of contemporary Latin American writers on the Spanish American colonial past. When you refer to “the present and future of Rolena Adorno” I cannot but mention, because it’s a significant part of my working situation, that in the face of the loss of my husband, David S. Adorno (1927–2003), who was my greatest reader and supporter, and my greatest collaborator in bringing students into our home and into our lives, the question stymies me a bit. I suddenly see myself more solitary. So yours is an intimidating question in an affective way, but you also provide me with the moment to give due recognition to the memory of the person who had enormous confidence in me and encouraged me to go to graduate school, to take up new challenges, and, ultimately, to develop my work. That was David Adorno.

Number one, although I’m sixty years old [now fully sixty-two] and could begin to think of retirement, an early retirement, I’m convinced that I will continue to teach for several more years. That’s a new perspective for me, because I’ve always looked upon retirement in my early sixties as the obvious goal. But “retirement” wouldn’t be from my work; it would simply mean freedom from attending faculty committee meetings and grading student papers. If you ask any academic approaching retirement age, I think they’ll say that those two things are what they’d be happy to give up, whether they’re planning to retire or not. I feel that I have some good time left, and as I approach this period, I’m more comfortable with the scholarly approaches that I take and the ways in which I try to teach undergraduate students and help to train graduate students (both of which have been, for me, continually evolving processes over the last thirty years). So my present and future is the evolving status quo carried forward.

Projects I have in abundance, and that’s what makes it easy for me to say that I’ll go ahead. I am going to do at least one more scholarly edition [of Murúa’s history of the Incas]. I’m doing a project right now with David Carrasco, formerly my Princeton colleague and now at Harvard, which is an edition of selected readings in English of Bernal Díaz del Castillo’s *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España*. I also want to continue to serve as a scholarly consultant and editor on

the Royal Library Guaman Poma website, helping to turn it into a small virtual research center of pertinent documents and studies.

Yet the major project of the present and coming years is the book about the nineteenth-century origins and development of Hispanism and Latin Americanism in the United States. One piece of it, or rather an epilogue to it, is a commissioned essay for the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, to be included in a volume entitled *Humanities and the Dynamics of Change, 1945–2000*, edited by David Hollinger of UC-Berkeley.<sup>7</sup> My topic is the development of the humanities side of Latin American Studies in the US academy from the end of the Second World War until the end of the century, in other words, from the post-World War II era through the Cold War to its aftermath. (The Cuban Revolution figures prominently, as you might imagine.) And then, finally, I want to do an English translation of major portions of *El primer nueva corónica y buen gobierno*, again as a collaborative project, with my historian and *quechúólogo* colleague, Jan Szeeminski of Hebrew University, Jerusalem, and my former student, and now colleague, John Charles of Tulane University. Again, it will be a team approach. I will continue to do, as I’ve done from the very start, projects that are collaborative in nature. Roberto [González Echevarría] and I have talked occasionally for some years about doing an anthology of Spanish colonial literature for the classroom and, who knows, someday we may actually do it when our other books are written.

I was once invited to a conference at the University of Michigan on academic collaboration in the humanities, and I didn’t accept the invitation because I was too busy collaborating. I think that for the future of the humanities we will be doing more of it. Your own project [of interviews collected in *Foreign Sensibilities*], Fernando, is a certain type of collaborative project. I hope that we will see more of this kind of dialogue because, as we go forward, the humanities become more complex and our understanding of one another’s work requires more explanation, more conversational give-and-take. At the same time, our aspirations for humanities scholarship demand more kinds of expertise than any one of us can bring to any single problem we want to address.

FG: I thought you were also working on Bartolomé de Las Casas.

RA: I am: that’s the secret project.

FG: Then you don't have to tell me, if you want to keep it secret, but I remember I heard something about it . . .

RA: I'll tell you. My approach to Las Casas is analogous to my views regarding the field of art history, which is a discipline I love but to which I have never made a formal commitment. Because I wanted my enjoyment of art to be something that didn't have a professionalized and academic dimension. (It's wonderful, you know, to have avocations.) Las Casas is an avocation for me, because if I were to sink myself into the immense corpus of his works, written over a period of nearly half a century, taking into account his long experience in America and the endless resonances of his work throughout the centuries, there would be no coming up for air at all! I have written one essay exclusively on Las Casas and a couple of others that have put his work in relation to those of others.<sup>6</sup> My intention is to continue to think about Las Casas, without pressure and without making any promises to myself. One of my former students, Eyda Merediz of the University of Maryland, College Park, is working on Las Casas' literary and historiographic legacy, and a current doctoral student of mine at Yale, José Cárdenas Bunsen, is taking up the *Apologética historia sumaria* and its place in intellectual and literary history. Those efforts, carried out by others, may well be satisfaction enough for me.

FG: Anything else that you might want to add in relation to the interview, in relation to anything said or unsaid?

RA: I would like to say, about the interview process itself, that I find the experience to be extremely stimulating and hopefully productive. It underscores the convictions I have about the value and importance of doing collaborative work, of many types, in the humanities.

FG: Aren't you guilty, Rolena, of too much politeness?

RA: No; I'm sorry, that's just the way I am.

FG: Thank you very much, Rolena.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See Rolena Adorno, "El encuentro con Anacaona: Frederick Albion Ober y el Caribe Autóctono: Comentarios"; "Early Anglo-American Hispanism in the 'Columbian Encounter' of Washington Irving and Martín Fernández de Navarrete"; "Un caso de hispanismo angloamericano temprano: el 'encuentro colombino' de Washington Irving y Martín Fernández de Navarrete"; "Washington Irving's Romantic Hispanism and Its Columbian Legacies."

<sup>2</sup> Rolena Adorno and Patrick Charles Pautz, *Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca: His Account, His Life, and the Expedition of Pánfilo de Narváez*.

<sup>3</sup> See Irving A. Leonard, *Books of the Brave: Being an Account of Books and Men in the Spanish Conquest and Settlement of the Sixteenth-Century New World* [1949], 2nd ed., with a new critical introduction by Rolena Adorno.

<sup>4</sup> Tirso de Molina, *El condenado por desconfiado*, ed. Ciriaco Morón Arroyo y Rolena Adorno, Madrid: Cátedra, 1974.

<sup>5</sup> See J. Jorge Klor de Alva, "Colonialism and Postcolonialism as (Latin) American Mirages," and "The Postcolonialization of the (Latin) American Experience: A Reconsideration of 'Colonialism,' 'Postcolonialism,' and 'Mestizaje.'"

<sup>6</sup> See "The Intellectual Life of Bartolomé de las Casas," the Andrew W. Mellon Lecture, Tulane University, Fall, 1992; "The Discursive Encounter of Spain and America: The Authority of Eyewitness Testimony in the Writing of History"; "Censorship and its Evasion: Jerónimo Román and Bartolomé de las Casas"; "Colonial Reform or Utopia? Guaman Poma's Empire of the Four Parts of the World"; "Sobre la censura y su evasión: un caso transatlántico del siglo XVI."

<sup>7</sup> See "Havana and Macondo: The Humanities Side of U.S. Latin American Studies (1940s–2000)."

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