

perspectives

Monstrous Mapping: A/Typical American Journey through the Re-mapping of the Americas¹

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“Damas y caballeros, profesionales y colegas, meritorios profesores y eminentes señores: no preparé mi conferencia y les pido las más sentidas disculpas. [. . .] Una sola razón argumento en mi favor: no puede afirmarse cosa alguna sobre lo que a Uds. les preocupa y quien les diga tan sólo dos palabras a ese respecto, les puedo asegurar que miente. Hay que dejar lugar al silencio inteligente, suprimir los aullidos de un intelecto enfermo y fingido, conjugar una ponderada evaluación de la circunstancia y asegurarse el viejo y añorado paraíso.”²

(Teresa Porzecanski *La Invención de los soles* 73)

On the first day of my upper-division undergraduate class “Typical American?: Narratives of Multiculturalism in the Americas from 1492 to the Present,” I ask my students what they think about when they hear or read the term “typical American.” They brainstorm, and the answers are mostly pejorative, often humorous, almost exclusively focused on the present, and largely grounded in an understanding of “America” as the United States—even if the range of retorts always extends beyond the white male as norm—or monster—or even monstrously normal. That’s probably not surprising, but the exercise remains consistently energizing and engaging for my annually “new” students, acting as a kind of funhouse mirror that reflects back more than any one can see on that charged first day.

The course as a whole consists of a whirlwind tour of prose narratives from the Americas that complicates both that overdetermined signifier “typical American” and most students’ points of departure. The semester ends on an experimental project where students are asked to “map” all that we have read, seen, discussed, and thought over the course of the semester. The most crucial part of the prompt reads as follows: “Using your notes and the texts and your imagination, think of as many specific connections between individual texts as possible, jotting down ideas and queries, cutting across national boundaries, genres, and genders, finding ways to display these multiple connections visually.” The results start at the banal but gravitate toward the astounding, the proliferation of “maps” mirroring back a class that has been experienced in decidedly different fashions. From the outside these might look like monstrous maps from a *manicomio*, both because of confusion and because the texts themselves often speak of monstrosities; from the inside, they are monstrously ambitious, and often monstrously instructive, perhaps taking us back to a time when monster overlapped with portent, when maps often depicted monsters at the mysterious margins.

When I was invited to offer a perspective on “Theoretical Cross-Pollination in Latin America: Mapping Transnational Exchanges,” I decided to do for my own practice in Comparative Literatures of the Americas what I have been asking my students to do in the “Typical American” class: sketch a map of the re-mapping of the Americas that has been going on for decades (if not millennia) and continues to go on—both metaphorically and quite literally in this volume—all around us. I survey scholarship primarily focused on literature, especially scholarship that self-consciously re-maps the Americas, and my monstrous map splices together explicit reflection on two modes of work on Literatures of the Americas—the scholarly and the pedagogical—with theoretical maps appearing palimpsestically. Following the best of my students’ re-mappings, which tend to magically and monstrously combine description, reflection, analysis, and provocation, I intend to generate further thinking rather than providing either a perfect pathway to one more scholarly but chimerical El Dorado or a hydra-headed list of cautions that might unintentionally say “No Trespassing.”

My exploration of the topics raised in this issue of *Brújula* and in the many new mappings of the Americas stems from interest in the broad questions of disciplinary, intellectual, and institutional boundaries raised by the editors combined with a long engagement with the history and present of this hemisphere. But I speak professionally as someone who is neither in American Studies nor in Latin American Studies, neither in an English nor a Spanish department, for I have been professing Comparative Literatures of the Americas within a department of Comparative Literature for over a de-

cade now. To the Americanists in the English department, to the extent they know me at all (“typical Americans” who can’t see past the borders of their departmental empire?), I’m a “Latin Americanist”; to the Latin Americanists from the Spanish department, I’m a “comparatist” who knows a little something about Latin America. For Comparative Literature students, I might be the faculty member who taught them “Myths of the World” or made them read theory in “Introduction to Graduate Study in Comparative Literature.” That the crisscrossing of prose fiction from Spanish-America and the United States over the past 130 years or so has been the center of my research is less well-known, perhaps little understood outside of a small circle of a/typical “Americas” folk. When I teach “World Literature,” I strive to map a globe and millennia—while foregrounding this as impossible—or at least to bring to light and possible transformation the imagined map already within each student. The Americas may be just a sliver on that map, but sometimes the sliver can refract the whole.³ It is to how that latter map has changed—for me and my field—that I now turn.

A True and Verifiable History of Studying the Studying of Comparative Literatures of the Americas based on Travels through NAFTA-landia, Puerto Vallarta, and Puebla

My monstrous mapping begins in the past with what I call—diabolically inspired by a shipload or at least a raft of colonial savants—“A True and Verifiable History of Studying the Studying of Comparative Literatures of the Americas based on Travels through NAFTA-landia, Puerto Vallarta, and Puebla.” The title and perspective play off of the broad range of readings I assign in the “New World Identities” section of “Typical American,” where claims to truth and veracity often seem to increase with the likelihood that the European observer could not possibly have known all the truth that he claims. The readings are surprisingly diverse for most students, continually distressing, and often unintentionally humorous, as when Louis Hennepin believes he can pontificate on “the indifference [Indians] [. . .] feel for everything” (193), but these observers’ repetitive inability to understand what they see inspires both caution in my truth claims and reckless levity in my form.

In my dreamlike memories, I’d like to think I founded the field when I walked into Jorge Ruffinelli’s class “La crítica literaria latinoamericana” in Fall 1987, an intrepid explorer from the English department entering *terra incognita*. While my claim to a founding memory is clearly more fictional than foundational, it captures a feeling of the new that I truly if not verifiably felt as I began to make that “Comparative Literatures of the Americas” sign in space. That founding feeling is a sign of my own ignorance at the time, but

it is also a marker of a time when such work *seemed* new because you might be the only one around you doing it. I was the only graduate student in literature from my cohort—and I mean all literature departments at Stanford at that time—putting together a program that would include both substantial amounts of work on US literature and substantial amounts of work on Spanish–American literature, mapping them on and through the theories of the day. Today, in the MA program in Comparative Literature at San Francisco State University that I have coordinated for over a decade, at least a third of the students typically focus on Comparative Literatures of the Americas. I take no personal pride from that number, for I support students no matter what their field of concentration and believe in a Comparative Literature open to literature from any time and any place, but the numbers suggest substantial growth in this field of Comparative Literature. And looking back at this antiquated map may help us better see our collective present, perhaps even enhance our collective presence.

In 1994, I finished a review-essay on recent studies in “Comparative Literatures of the Americas” entitled “Intellectual Free Trade.” As the title ironically suggested, the then newly felt disciplinary freedom that might be captured in the phrase “Intellectual Free Trade” generated considerable positive energy. Like “free trade,” however, I found that the good of the idea can mask past inequalities that march into the present under the banner of free and equal. My essay focused on some of the texts that helped to found Comparative Literatures of the Americas as a self-conscious field in the 1980s and 1990s. I compared Earl Fitz’s *Rediscovering the New World* (1991) directly with José David Saldívar’s *The Dialectics of Our America* (1991). I examined the following three anthologies more symptomatically: Bell Chevigny and Gari Laguardia’s *Reinventing the Americas* (1986); Gustavo Pérez Firmat’s *Do the Americas Have a Common Literature?* (1990), and Hortense Spillers’ *Comparative American Identities: Race, Sex, and Nationality in the Modern Text* (1991). Whether figured as brave explorer, gentle archaeologist, or weaver of discourses, the comparative Americas critic of yore saw virgin lands to survey, lost relics to dust off, threads to be re-woven. Whether deploying metaphors of exploration, economics, or gardening, the watchword was growth. The work of that time was broadly disruptive of past myths of “America” by way of mapping differently composed unities of “our” America. An implicit but unresolved tension within the field was whether attention to new arrangements of texts also necessitated a re-orientation of methodology. And there seemed to be what one might call a Comparative Literatures of the Americas of the right and the left. To be able to sing the Americas was a goal of both, but the former valued the master, the unifying figure who contains multitudes, while the latter focused more on the border-crosser, the hybrid, the *mestizo*, the one who may reveal the mix that is everyone’s subjectivity.

I also placed on that past map what one might call a precursor of the subsequent wave of comparative American literary studies, the *Inter-American Literary Relations* volume (from the 1982 International Comparative Literature Association Congress). The range of topics and approaches represented in the thirty-eight papers suggested many of the parameters of the on-going Comparative Literatures of the Americas project. On the whole, however, the research displayed in this volume tended toward one or another version of careful, albeit decontextualized, *explication de texte* with little explicit or implicit argument for a comparatist perspective when texts from different literatures were brought together. Typically, already canonical authors from several nations were removed from their national context and yoked together in a discussion of some thematic or stylistic affinity. The complex history of cultural, economic, and political power that contributed to the neglect of Latin American, Caribbean, and Canadian literature outside of Canada, the Caribbean, and Latin America, in particular, and to the neglect of the relations among the literatures of the Americas, in general, were almost wholly forgotten and forgiven once the unquestioned or supposed masters of this hemisphere were given their day under the formalist lamp. At the same time, the very existence of this volume struck a declaration of independence within Comparative Literature, for it repudiated a “Europe first” perspective that had—and perhaps has—continued to haunt Comparative Literature as a discipline despite its global logic and global aspirations.

Turning back to the later anthologies listed above, it seemed new in the mid- to late-1980s and early 1990s to see Martí, a revised Caliban, or magic realism as radiating centers of an entire American discourse rather than as an adjunct to the norms of the United States or Europe—or rather than not being on the map at all. At the same time, the Caribbean as generative of a literary and theoretical corpus was still largely absent. Furthermore, much of the work tended to implicitly or explicitly unify the nations of Spanish America and even Latin America into a collective.⁴ This is perhaps a necessary bulwark against US hegemony and certainly a pedagogical necessity in many cases; however, it has the adverse effect of allowing only the United States a national identity and even regional identities within that, reinscribing an unfortunately traditional imbalanced focus on the United States in scholarship and perhaps teaching of literatures of the Americas.

The sense of newness of studying Comparative Literatures of the Americas was repetitively noted; the sense of a lack of dialogue between “Americanists” and “Latin Americanists” was repetitively bemoaned. Even in the anthology I found to be the best single introduction to the field at the time, Pérez Firmat’s *Do the Americas Have a Common Literature?*, the late colonial period (which, as a time before the United States asserted economic

and political hegemony over the hemisphere, would seem to be especially fruitful for comparison based on shared or analogous histories) continued to be neglected, and Canada had once again been lost, present in retrospect only through its complete absence. In fairness the collection made no claims for comprehensiveness, but its broad title aspired to a coverage to which the book is blind. In the impressive introduction to a different anthology, *Comparative American Identities*, Hortense Spillers challenged Comparative American literary scholars to do more than decontextualized readings of a classic text from the North, another classic from the South. One of the ironies of the collection is that Spillers' essay is more daringly comparative and more methodologically inquisitive than anything in the still solid volume she edited. Despite the aspirational speech—acts of Chevigny, Spillers, and others, the extent to which studying Literature of the Americas comparatively was able to decenter the received notions of Western literature, of traditional generic categories, and of the institutions of literary studies itself, remained largely a map toward rather than a map of, hope and lament twisted together in the lofty goals that were not quite met.

As a transition to and more densely coded contrast with the scholarly present, which I map in part through reflecting on the 2007 American Comparative Literature Association (hereafter “ACLA”) convention, I want to return to the 1997 ACLA convention, which was held in Puerto Vallarta. This return provides both some tantalizing symbolic contrasts and some unsettling repetitions. For Puerto Vallarta, I was involved in putting together a seminar entitled “Inter–American Crossings” where the proposal played off the name game of “this field which is not one” and went on to stress the new: “texts that were often erased,” “different paradigms,” “refusing re-unification,” “emphasizing and analyzing the play of differences in the Americas,” “deployment of new methodologies,” crossings crossing, and more Inter–American crisscrossings. Along with the puppy-like sense of the new, we unconsciously retained too much of the false-sense of being just about the only ones doing this kind of work. Turning to the 2007 ACLA convention, held in Puebla, Mexico, the overall title—“Trans, Pan, Inter–Cultures in Contact”—seemed to come straight out of my relatively long-held hemispheric obsessions, while also illustrating how non-hemispheric specific some of the most productive terms of Americas engagement might be. Puebla was a repetition with difference of country–location that symbolically speaks to the health and aspirations of Comparative Literatures of the Americas. Instead of the resort created out of Hollywood romance, we re-located to a vibrant urban space that wears its complicated histories materially. We had grown from what I remember as our one intense yet isolated seminar to a conference where at least twenty seminars fell within the Americas I'm map-

ping here, with even more that had allied texts, theories, and gestures. If one were multiple in ACLA 2007, one could have heard about both “American Frontiers: Actual, Imagined, and Metaphorical” and “When Inter-American Hitchhikers, Naturalized Migrants, and Locals Collide.” One could have learned about “Framing Comparative Studies in the Hemisphere” and about “Diversifying Jewish Literature and Experience in the Americas.” One could even have partaken of an early version of my mapping through a seminar on “Intersections and Weaknesses in Latin American and American Studies: Reading ‘American’ Literature Transnationally.” The list goes on and on, and it speaks to one critical difference between the present and the past: that there is simply much more and more varied scholarship going on or touching the boundaries of Comparative Literatures of the Americas now than there was a decade or so ago. It is a rich, complicated map of possibilities—paradise ahead rather than the “añorado paraíso” of the epigraph. But what of the reappearing monsters? What recurs in the seemingly new New World?

A New Home—Who’ll Follow? Or, Glimpses of Comparative American Life by Dane Johnson, an Actual Practitioner⁵

When I returned to the ACLA last year, I found a “New World” of studies that at first glance seemingly had passed me by, but perhaps it was just a wave returning to the shore I had always been on, to knock me off my feet. The possible names of the field, fields, and sub-fields still trip off the tongue like Steinian word-play: Literatures of the Americas; American Literatures; Comparative American Literatures; Comparative Literatures of the Americas; Inter-American Literature; Inter-Americas Literature; North/South Literary Relations; New World Writing; Comparative American Literary and Cultural Studies; New World Studies; Hemispheric American studies; transnational this and that; post that and this. Here and There a Name.⁶ There are meaningful stakes and nuanced distinctions but just as often overlapping perspectives in the name game. Drawing that map in detail, however, goes beyond the scope of this essay and has already been tackled in some of the more recent scholarship.⁷ But I can sketch some of my encounters in this putatively new world of Americas studies.

So I went on a journey to map the remapping of my home in the Americas, a journey to know the unknown in this new era. And seemingly every time I caught an absence—a known unknown rather than an unknown unknown as now nearly forgotten wannabe philosopher Rumsfeld reminded us—I got hit by it around the next corner. Canada? Oh, Canada special issue of *Comparative American Studies* on “Canada and the Americas.”⁸ Poetry not on your map? Well there’s a couple doses of Octavio Paz with x and y,

and Sor Juana seemingly with many, but maybe still not enough.⁹ Too much North/South? Well we're also seeing a new vision of East/West, and we're mapping diasporas, and we're taking geography critically.¹⁰ What about the Latin Americanists? They've already been asked, and they've answered, thank you.¹¹ In short, as I worked through some of my seemingly "known unknowns" of the present, I found them to be pretty easily trumped by another week of reading and research. And the cautions I felt necessary to note in looking at Americas of yore? Well, there exists a thorough, convincing, collective guidebook to what ought to be and not be done. If the "old" Americas map was perhaps under-theorized and excessively utopian, the present one is produced under the shadow of so many critiques that it might be seen as always already insufficient. I don't mean to mock the careful critiques that I have read. Collectively, they are judicious, careful, constructive assessments. Collectively, however, they are also foreboding, and they speak to some monstrous fears at the edges of a map that is by all other measures becoming both larger and more detailed.

In the introduction to his 2000 book *Postslavery Literatures in the Americas*, George Handley, "takes to task recent developments in American studies that, in my view, have dangerously replicated the imperialist extensions of the United States into Latin American territories" and calls for engaging "Americanists, Latin Americanists, and Caribbeanists" in a rare but necessary dialogue" (9). The 2007 ACLA seminar in which I was involved, organized by Handley and Deborah Cohn, in part re-made that call, once again potentially engaging American Studies in a "constructive conversation" with Latin American, Canadian, and Caribbean studies and scholars—and it was a fruitful conversation. In essay after essay that re-maps the Americas the call is repeated: US-focused studies need changing; some version of a vision beyond the nation is the antidote (see the name game above); continued dialogue is the process. There is exuberant hope wrapped in historically-grounded fear. I'm neither dismayed nor bothered by these repeated calls to dialogue, but the repetition is symptomatic. The call needs to be repeated because the pulls of nation, language, discipline, corpus, and department remain very strong, perhaps stronger than the pluralization of a unifying signifier, stronger than the change from "American" to "Americas," stronger even than the attempt to back up from the United States of America to see all of the Americas.

In many ways, the field has become more and more like Comparative Literature as a whole: too big to skim; fraught with a frenetic combination of aspiration and anxiety, as prone to fads, trends, as any—and very much alive, despite some death threats and death pronouncements.¹² The re-mappings typically combine some sense of new possibility or earned exuberance bouncing off cautions. The hope for the new repeats but so does the worry

about the terms of that new. What are we hoping for? Paul Giles puts part of it pithily: “The hemispheric dimension puts yet another stake through the heart of the unquiet corpse of American exceptionalism” (648). Claire Fox notes of a special issue on which she is commenting that “by placing the nation in tension with categories of analysis that transcend national boundaries, these essays illuminate networks of race, ethnicity, religion, and class that often pre-date nation formation; they theorize subaltern or minoritarian social positions; and they provide cautionary tales about imperialism in the Americas” (639). These new maps of the Americas can, as Kathryn McKee and Annette Trefzer experience, productively “remap and unmap endlessly the literary, historical, geographic, ideological, and disciplinary spaces we thought we knew” (689).

But this contemporary re-mapping also seems to be work fraught with potential for impermanence or even monstrosity. Fox comments that “the hemispheric concept is not particularly new in academic, political, and literary discourse. [. . .] The hemispheric has irrupted at particular moments in history, only to recede into obscurity once more” (639). McClennan adds, “historical amnesia plagues inter-American relations” (401). Handley observes a hopeful turn on that matter but maps out potential disappointment: “U.S. culture is beginning to take account of its history of amnesia. But unless literary critics take seriously the obligation to look elsewhere in the Americas to understand concretely the different ways in which different literatures have responded to New World history, there is little chance that such desire will result in anything more than democratic fantasies facilitated by imagined ahistorical otherness (“New World Poetics” 47). Too much of this re-mapping of the Americas, Caroline Levander and Robert Levine find, often assumes the US nation as the default unit of intellectual engagement governing ‘comparativist’ approaches. Obsessed with the ‘new,’ this body of work ignores scholarship that has been done in other fields, such as Canadian and Latin American studies, and that is often published in non-US venues and in languages other than English. As a result, it too often reproduces the same totalizing structure of US privilege that include ‘others’ only to subordinate them to US interests, keeping the US at the center of seemingly pluralist debate” (400). Each of the essays quoted above retains hope and cites good work that is already being done, but the hope remains aspirational, the warnings a bit scary as a group. Giles suggests one way out:

It is arguable, though, that the hemispheric discursive matrix operates most compellingly as a kind of agent provocateur, a way of interrupting the smooth circuits of institutional power. Rather than seeking an imaginary plenitude or establishing any new internation-

alist orthodoxy, it could be said to work best in a heterodox mode, cutting against the grain of naturalized custom and so forcing American literary history into unfamiliar shapes and patterns” (654).¹³

He may be right, but since Comparative Literatures of the Americas is my home, I still want more, even if it requires another journey, another map.

Turning from those varied ports of call, turning from the monstrous sketch of all that might be new—too much for one person to thoroughly map—I return to places I have mapped before: the sense of excitement, for one thing—that sense of something perpetually new. But the sense of anxiety has never entirely subsided; in fact, the anxiety and excitement may well be linked. When I saw the 2002 anthology entitled “*Do the Americas Have a Common Literary History?*” almost exactly repeating the title of a 1990 anthology that I have already discussed, I was at first taken aback. Haven’t we already answered that question? And then I got snappy: I can answer that question in three words or less! Do the Americas have a common literary history? Yes and No! That is, it depends on your scale; it depends on your perspective; it depends on which Americans and when? That is, it depends on which map is in front of you and which maps are in you. However, as a generative force for further comparative work on Literatures of the Americas, the 702-page count shows it to be of obvious effectiveness—I still haven’t found time to read it all. But the near repetition of question and title is equally interesting to me as a symptom of recurring anxieties, and I see these anxieties as grounded more in institutional in-betweenness than textual in-betweenness. There have been texts and bodies crisscrossing the Americas far longer than there have been national, linguistic, and/or disciplinary attempts to mark and defend their borders. Institutionally, however, especially at the level of teaching and hiring, the status of Comparative Literatures and Cultures of the Americas is less certain in the United States than the mad mapping of growth in scholarship might portend, for there are few if any institutional entities with the power to hire on their own that are wholly controlled by people professing in the name of Comparative Literatures of the Americas. Our textual scope and our institutional size are nearly in inversed relation to each other, so the repetitive need to justify and the worry over what comes next, are almost inevitable. In the United States, at least, there will always be more professors of Literature whose primary corpus is literature of the United States originally written in English than the alternatives that come into play from a hemispheric perspective. The complaints and the cautions mapped above are necessary, but they are unlikely to re-balance an intellectual trade grounded in political and economic power. Even from a Comparative perspective, there is little assurance of long-term continuity of the questions, concerns, and texts

that have motivated my study over the years. When I'm fired or retired from San Francisco State University's Comparative Literature department, there is no certainty that I'll be replaced by another teacher of the Americas. My beloved bailiwick, my intellectual red star marking "you are here," might well go the way of the emeritus professor of Norse sagas.

From Texaco to Mexico, or, with apologies to Juana Manuela Gorriti, She or He Who Listens May Hear—To Her or His Regret.

But they haven't booted me out yet, and I have classes to teach, so let's call this pedagogical detour "From Texaco to Mexico, or, with apologies to Juana Manuela Gorriti, She or He Who Listens May Hear—To Her or His Regret."¹⁴ The turn to the pedagogical is not just a chance to map another area of interest. It may well be a partial answer to the institutional realities that will always stack themselves against a balanced mapping of the Americas from within the United States, for the syllabus has at least some power to disrupt the US–American as Americas.

Looking back on my a/typical American journey, I realize that many of my intellectual choices were largely driven by either critique of a dominant paradigm or an inchoate sense of lack in my own education. When I was studying International Relations as an undergraduate, I was shocked at the absence of a Latin American point of view in studying US foreign policy in Latin America. When I was focusing mostly on American Literature, I was struck at how easily claims were made on and of the "typical American" with no comparative perspective, particularly, given my already developed interest in Latin America, a sense of hemispheric perspective. When I turned to Latin American literature, entering with the Boom like so many others, I wondered why the flash of the Boom seemed to blind us to what came before. And as I began to construct courses that built on my sense of a plural Americas, I was struck by how often "multicultural" reified a contemporary version and vision of the United States with this version then standing in for understanding of the hemisphere or even world. The latter point is hard to overcome, but the scholarly re-mapping of the Americas understands this as at least a present problem if not an on-going concern. But what of our "typical American" students?

When I first proposed "'Typical American': Narratives of Multiculturalism in the Americas from 1492 to the Present" in the wake of my faux-1990s—mastery of Comparative Literatures of the Americas, yet before news of the new millennial New World studies, it sounded partially like this:

This upper-division undergraduate course provides a distinctive understanding of narrative in the Americas through historical and hemispheric comparison of multicultural literary texts. Looking at North and South America and the Caribbean brings in to play contrasting ideas and ideals of the ‘typical American’ while providing diasporic perspectives on Europeans, Africans, and Asians coming to the Americas and encountering the peoples already here. The historical perspective complicates contemporary categories of difference, providing an opportunity to see how categories like race, class, and gender change across time, while also observing their interaction with other constructions of group identity, like region, religion, nation, and empire.

That makes it sound a bit pre-programmed, but the clash of widely and wildly different texts makes for an exciting and meaningful ride. It is also a course consciously designed to be useful not only for literature majors but also for our future California K-12 teachers coming through the Liberal Studies program at San Francisco State University. This group may come in with a more “typical American” outlook on what is typical, but I hope they exit with an indelible hemispheric perspective.

As the “Texaco” in the above alludes, we begin with Martinican novelist Patrick Chamoiseau’s re-mapping of the Americas in *Texaco*, a novel that manages to map most of the Americas—back even to Columbus—through the necessary narrative meanderings of Marie-Sophie Laborieux, who saves her shantytown by making a well-educated man, a lettered city-planner bent on a belief in razing for raising, understand the voice of an Other. To understand how Martinique may well be as good a hemispheric center as any, we circle back to the first encounters between Europeans and First Americans, learning to listen for multiple stories even when the voice of the colonizer is all we have.

As the mapping assignment of the opening suggests, it’s a course that is at least aspirationally transnational and in some ways postnational. I am less certain of how that impacts on students arriving to class as largely still-national readers/subjects—recall the “Typical American” prompt. But I remain amazed at how their monstrous mappings push me to see things I had missed and to reconsider things I thought I knew I knew. Talk of a failed map might be the most telling of the magic of going beyond one’s certainties: One of my students had mapped our texts in a two-fold manner of re-reading. First, she pulled out what she considered to be the single most striking passage from every text we read—30 or 40 or so—I’ve never actually counted. She then handwrote these on note cards with no reference, gluing them in a

spatial arrangement roughly based on their place of origin, although without any markings drawn on the black posterboard. Then she took push pins and thread to string together every quote that seemed to resonate with any other. I'm sure it was monstrous. But I don't know for sure because, in the midst of transporting this to class, most of the push pins fell out. While others presented their maps, she madly reconnected this to that to another, admitting with astonishment, when it came to her turn, that most of the connections were different than before, that she had forgotten the source of some of her quotes, but that they all made sense—at least at that magic moment. I loved it.

While I believe that reference to multiple maps can be salutary, at least for teaching if not scholarship, I'm constantly reminded that the dangers of domestication are hard to dislodge. No matter how carefully I intone the codewords of a self-consciously multiple critical practice toward literature produced in this hemisphere, many of my students still just hear "American" when I say "Americas." It's not their fault, for domestication is what the colossus to the North—and perhaps any colossus—does, as I was humorously reminded on my trip to and through two airports on the way to the ACLA conference in Puebla last year. On the drive into San Francisco Airport, the powers—that-be quickly split the international from the domestic passengers with a parenthetical note: "domestic, including Canada." At Los Angeles International, they repeat, with a nod in the other direction: "flights to Mexico leave from the domestic terminal." I suspect the return feels different depending on where you come from and what you look like, and that's a difference that must not be forgotten. And I don't have a solution, but more and more in classes I'm trying to turn the map upside-down, subordinating the US-texts to those from other Americas, even if the US-texts have been a touchstone for me. More and more I'm trying to push for more than one kind of mapping, even if that risks incoherence.

The monstrous mapping sketched above is too broad and ambitious for a proper perspective, even for a typically American one, just as "Narratives of Multiculturalism in the Americas from 1492 to the Present" is too broad a scope for a typical literature class. But it's the questions and connections that matter, whether I'm re-tracing a scholarly journey or remembering a student's intuitive flash. The Americas: 30 or so nations; hundreds of languages now; thousands past in a history of millennia. There is reason to be excited about what remains to be mapped or re-mapped, regardless of one's starting point.

In the Jewish-Uruguayan writer Teresa Porzecanski's novella *Invención de los soles*, there's a moment when the narrator-protagonist, a professor, is invited into the office of "El Director." She enters, looks around "para compro-

bar si están todos sus diplomas,” and takes a seat. Suddenly, with no punctuation marking the shift or the speech, we are hearing El Director verifying that “los estudiantes han evaluado sus cursos como muy positivos,” assuring the protagonist that “las pruebas” “denotan un claro entusiasmo por los temas tratados,” and adding “que también a nivel de sus métodos pedagógicos, las cosas van muy bien.” El Director wants to call a meeting of professors “Para que exponga sus técnicas, que, de alguna manera, parecen ser innovadoras.” Without pause, Porzecanski puts us back into the mind of the narrator:

Consulto papeles, me coloco los lentes, espero un tiempo prudencial. Por supuesto, es sabido que es necesario *siempre* un intercambio entre los profesores, porque *siempre* bregamos por el mejoramiento de los procesos, lo que *siempre* hemos repetido: no sólo la información sino la tan maldita formación, formación, formación. [emphasis in text]

The protagonist seemingly agrees to “una mesa redonda” but also seemingly warns that “hay un límite que no puedo transgredir, bien que me gustaría. Es la fórmula mágica, el huevo inicial, es la germinación oculta cuyas reglas domino, pero, como estricto ocultista, no puedo develar.” She goes on to unpeel a mind that enjambs “sensaciones, miradas, laberintos, trasplantes de la mente” with “un nuevo arreglo esbozado apenas en la mente” (26-27). When we finally arrive at that or another presentation from the enigmatic, troubled professor, she confesses her lack of preparation to the esteemed audience in the epigraph that began this essay. To them, she stops by saying “no tengo nada que decir” (74). To us, who have already traveled into her mind and out into outer space, back to her pasts and forward to possible futures, it’s one more call to the imagination to escape the prescriptive maps from above.

This is mind-reeling stuff, one more monstrous mapping. And, remember, I’ve only given the slightest slice, quite simplified, of a text that re-maps time and space and histories and religion in a productively mystifying manner. This passage speaks both clearly and cryptically about my unease with my own attempts to carefully map what is or should be done in researching and teaching Comparative Literatures of the Americas. The work is meaningless to me if there are not also moments of magic, moments that are reflected back by what individual students do in the next class period, the next semester, or even ten years hence; moments of questioning and possible transformation that might require more rather than fewer monstrous mappings.

NOTES

1. I dedicate this perspective to the editors of *Briijula*, Belén Bistué, Shawn Doubiago, Mela Jones Heestand, and Daphne Potts, who inspired me to re-map my imagined Americas through the honor of this invited essay. I dedicate it as well to all of my students, including the most recalcitrant, for they have taught continue to teach me what I cannot learn from fellow scholars.

2. “Ladies and gentlemen, professionals and colleagues, meritorous professors and eminent sirs: I didn’t prepare my lecture and I most deeply beg your pardon. [. . .] There is one sole argument in my favor: not a single thing can be affirmed concerning your preoccupations, and anyone who puts his two cents in to the contrary, I can assure you, is lying, catastrophically lying. Space must be left for intelligent silence, the howls of sham, infirm intellect must be suppressed, a thoughtful evaluation of circumstances conjugatged, and the old, yearned-for paradise made sure of” (Porzecanski, *Sun Inventions* 60).

3. Literatures of the Americas are an integral part of current World Literature anthologies even if at a level that may still disappoint specialists in literatures of this hemisphere. The *Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces*, for example, greatly expanded its Literatures of the Americas offerings from its 1995 to its 2002 editions. The more conceptually ambitious *Longman Anthology of World Literature* even has the 20th century Argentine poet Alejandra Pizarnik as a “resonance” in its volume on “The Ancient World.” For the volumes on the 19th and 20th centuries, Literature of the Americas makes up about 20 percent of the offerings in the *Longman*.

4. Like the signifier “America,” “Latin America” has a history and remains a name with fuzzy edges. I use it here to refer to that part of the Americas south of the United States where French, Portuguese, and Spanish are spoken, and Catholicism is the dominant religion. For one of several fascinating plays with “America” that I encountered, see Djelal Kadir’s “The Commons of History,” with the direct parsing found on pg. 601. For both historicizing and criticizing uses of “Latin America,” see Walter Mignolo’s *The Idea of Latin America*, especially pp. 57-72. Mignolo also takes on the naming of the “American” continent, and, throughout this book, he makes the case that our differing maps of America/Latin America are constitutive and not merely reflective.

5. The title to this sub-section on my “new” home plays off of Caroline Kirkland’s 1839 pseudonymous memoir *A New Home—Who’ll Follow? Or, Glimpses of Western Life by Mrs. Mary Clavers, An Actual Settler*, where Kirkland’s narrator Mary Clavers manages to make sense of her new life on the “western” frontier—Michigan—through a delightful combination of canny self-dep-

recation, lacerating humor, self-consciousness about multiple perspectives, and an enveloping blanket of mostly British and American literary intertexts. She is a healthy far cry from the manly truth-telling of earlier, male chroniclers of life far from “civilization” all over the Americas.

6. I allude here directly to Gertrude Stein’s “Wherein the South Differs from the North,” but more broadly to the collection as a whole, *Useful Knowledge*, which is multiply disruptive in many ways, a taste of which is suggested in just the following titles: “An Instant Answer or A Hundred Prominent Men,” “The Difference between the Inhabitants of France and the Inhabitants of the United States,” “Wherein Iowa Differs from Kansas and Indiana.”

7. Among the contributions of Claudia Sadowski-Smith and Claire F. Fox’s “Inter–Americas Work at the Intersection of American, Canadian, and Latin American Studies” is a systematic accounting of what has already been done through a hemispheric perspective by scholars grounded in Canadian or Latin American studies, two sources of study, especially the former, that have often been neglected in the US–centered push to re–map itself. I list in alphabetical order other scholars in my works cited whose articles provide both a broad map of recent Americas studies and some street–level detail: Fox, Giles, Gillman, Levander and Levine, and McClennen. The more specifically–focused work of legions of Americanistas is perhaps equally inspiring but most definitely beyond the scope of this note.

8. For an additional overview, see Rachel Adams and Sarah Phillips Casteel’s introduction to that special issue. The aforementioned Sadowski-Smith and Fox essay is also essential reading to begin filling in that blank space. Albert Braz specifically interrogates Canadian absence in “North of America. Racial hybridity and Canada’s (non)place in inter-American discourse.”

9. See Irene Artigas Albarelli and Cecilia Enjuto Rangel for the former.

10. See especially Giles and Sheila Hones, et al.

11. See especially Cohn, Fox, Irwin, and McClennen.

12. For the single best introduction to controversies, histories, and possibilities of Comparative Literature as a discipline practiced in the United States, see Haun Saussy. For a fuller appreciation of the productive tensions in the field, see the collection *Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalization*, edited by Saussy.

13. Susan Gillman echoes Giles celebration of provocation and partiality with her praise for noticing “incommensurability” and “disjunctive comparisons” (331).

14. The second part of this title alludes to the English translation of a mid–nineteenth century story by the Argentine author Juana Manuela Gorriti, “Quen escucha su mal oye. Confidencia de una Confidencia.” It’s a story

marked by stories within stories, hearing another but not listening to one's self, and the play among individuals, lovers, family, friends, religion, and state. It's also about learning and equally about uncertainty about what one may learn.

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