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The Cambridge History of Latin American Literature

VOLUME I

Discovery to Modernism

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A brief history of the history of Spanish American Literature¹*Roberto González Echevarría*

It was not until the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when the idea of literature as an independent category emerged, that it became possible to conceive of a Spanish American literature, one, moreover, worthy of a history. From the early Renaissance on, arts and letters were thought to be derived from the classics, the immanent and ideal model of all aesthetic expression, either as copy or corruption. The fundamental change that allowed for the possibility of a Spanish American literature was the gradual abandonment of the formalist abstraction of Neoclassicism, and the adoption of a psychological, empirical, and contingent concept of artistic creation. If the milieu, in all its concrete details, and the individual psychology of the creator are determining factors in artistic creation, then the work will reflect the conditions that define that individual and the particular nature that surrounds him and which he expresses. The issue of the difference of American nature could not be thought of in terms of its influence on the creation of literature until the emergence of what can be broadly termed the romantic spirit.

This does not mean, however, that some writers of the colonial Baroque did not write as if there were already an American literary tradition. Tradition is not synonymous with literary history. Tradition is the sum of works that a writer or group of writers conceive as antecedent, as origin, as the connection with a literary past from which they issue. Tradition is a binding, living, and dynamic past. Its existence may or may not be explicit, but it is necessarily and always implicit. Literary history, on the other hand, is the conscious and deliberate activity of recounting how certain works determine each other in time and among people who share a language and sometimes a geographic space. It is an activity that is metadiscursive in intention, and that manifests itself not only in the actual

¹ Whenever I write Latin American I mean to include Brazilian literature. For the history of Brazilian literary historiography see Chapter 1 of volume 3, by Benedito Nunes.

writing of literary histories, but also in essays, didactic works destined to shape a curriculum, and, quite often, in the edition of anthologies. Histories, manuals, critical essays, and anthologies are the narrative forms through which literary history is expressed. Yet, in their historiographical dimension, these books are also the product of the stories they tell, inasmuch as they often share a common ideology with the literary works whose history they narrate. For this reason it is possible to argue that literary histories are not really metadiscursive, but rather that they belong to the textual economy of the period in which they are written. Literary history, then, is a narrative form, perhaps even a minor genre, born in the period between the Enlightenment and Romanticism, in the transition from a conception of literature as one and eternal to another of literature as the creation of a given time and place which determine its characteristics. Herder, Schlegel, Villemain, La Harpe, Sismondi, Madame de Staël, Sainte-Beuve, are the all too familiar names at the head of the history of literary history.

Paradoxically, because it was produced in regions so distant and so different from Europe, both in terms of its geography and its culture, Spanish American literature and its history could only be conceived of in the context of these European ideas. The more distinct, the more peculiar and different, the more likely literature was to be thought through notions created to promote the expression of the new. The individuality, the difference at the origin postulated by Romanticism, transforms the distance that separates Europe from America into an enabling factor in Spanish American literary creation, one that serves as its pre-text or as its foundational myth. Without this prerequisite originality, Spanish American literature would have always had to think of itself as a belated, distant, and inauthentic manifestation of European literature. However, it can also be argued, if one were to adhere to neoclassic doctrine, that all literature, wherever it is created, will follow classical forms, which are neither diminished nor made inauthentic by their distance from the place of origin. In this line of argument, Spanish American literary works really differ little from European ones. This position has been intermittently defended, consciously or unconsciously, by various Spanish American writers, among them some of the most prominent, like Octavio Paz and Jorge Luis Borges. Yet the position that has prevailed has been the other, more polemical one, which assigns Spanish American literature an individuality sometimes linked with the struggle for political and cultural independence.

If the idea of Spanish American literature has existed since the beginning of the nineteenth century, and if the very idea of literature has also existed only since that period, then Spanish American literature has existed since there has been literature. In this sense, it is not a recent

literature, as some would suggest, but rather a literature whose foundational peculiarities are more concrete and intense than those of European literatures, but not necessarily different. This is my own position as I reconstruct somewhat schematically the story of the multifaceted social, political, and textual activities that first defined the boundaries of Spanish American literature and its history. This reconstruction is the opposite of what Enrique Anderson Imbert set out to do in his valuable and canonical *Historia de la literatura hispanoamericana* [*Spanish-American Literature. A History*]. For Anderson Imbert, what mattered was what he conceived as the history of literature itself, not the activity that produced it and defined it: "In Spanish America there are often extraordinary personalities in literary life who study and promote literature, but who do not produce it. Furthermore, at times the men who most influence literary groups are precisely the ones who write neither poetry, nor novels, nor dramas. It may be lamentable, but it is obvious that they do not belong to a history of poetry, novels, and dramas" (*A History*, 16). I, on the contrary, attempt to focus precisely on those figures that make literary production possible, defining it and inventing it in the process.

The inherent difficulties of this task, beyond the most tangible ones involving the actual research itself, arise from the possibility of fragmentation already implicit in the romantic concept of national literatures and literary historiography. Because, inasmuch as it is possible to think in terms of a Spanish American literature that exists by virtue of its temporal and spatial distance from European literatures, it is also possible to think in terms of an Argentinian literature, a Mexican literature, a Cuban literature, and so forth. This dilemma has been the source of many polemics that extend to the present, as well as of the most varied solutions, none entirely satisfactory. If diversity is renounced, then Spanish American literature is a mere projection of European literature; if diversity is embraced, then the existence of a Costa Rican, a Colombian, or a Bolivian literature cannot be denied. For some, the defense of one position or the other has become a kind of crusade, appealing either to a national or a cultural loyalty whose source would be a love of language or of certain local traditions. In the final analysis, the polemic itself cannot be ignored; it is part and parcel of the continuous effort of Spanish American literature to define itself. However, it is a process of formation that does not lead to a satisfactory solution, and whose function is only part of the whole, not that which defines the whole.

This inquiry into the origins of Spanish American literary historiography has as its inevitable point of departure a reading and gloss of the first major narrative enterprise taking Spanish American literature as its object: Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo's *Antología de poetas hispano-americanos*. Although the *Antología* only includes poetry, as a history it

takes poetry really to mean literature. As such, Menéndez y Pelayo's influential work, reissued as an *Historia de la poesía hispanoamericana*, played a vital role in the elaboration of Spanish American literary historiography, both at a continental level, and on that of each individual Spanish American country. The first question asked of the venerable and often quite irritating *Antología* was the following: what were Menéndez y Pelayo's sources, what books were at his disposal as he labored to produce his vast and influential panorama? An inquiry into Menéndez y Pelayo's library unveils a good portion of the map outlining the diffusion of Spanish American literature in the nineteenth century. It also brings to the surface the names of the founders and promoters of Spanish American literature, making it possible, by going directly to their works, to step beyond the confines of Menéndez y Pelayo's library, even while recognizing its impressive range.

As in nearly everything concerning the origins of Spanish American literature, the founding figure is that of Venezuelan Andrés Bello (1781–1865). Bello, of course, cuts across fields and disciplines: he was a poet, a grammarian, a classicist, an educator, a botanist, and the drafter of Chile's civil code. For our purposes, however, Bello is fundamental for two reasons. First, though a Neoclassicist by training, his interest in the various possibilities inherent in American nature, one of them being as source of poetic inspiration, marks him as a Romantic. He neatly straddles the two tendencies at whose juncture the idea of a Spanish American literature developed. Second, during his prolonged exile in London (1810–1829), Bello's activities as cultural promoter and editor foreshadows the work that other Spanish American writers will carry out, about thirty years later, in Paris. In those years Bello publishes two journals, *Biblioteca Americana* and *Repertorio Americano* which are the forebears of many influential Spanish American journals published in Europe, from *Correo Americano* in the mid nineteenth century to *Mundo Nuevo* in the 1960s. It is through these journals, and the activities surrounding them, which involved Spanish Americans from several countries, that Bello gave impetus to the possibility of a Spanish American literature, independent from that of Europe because it reflects a peculiar American nature. This is the theme of his great poems of the period, particularly the "Alocución a la poesía," published in *Repertorio*. Bello's was a romantic spirit, who had experienced the culmination of Romanticism in London, arguably its most important center, but who expressed himself in neoclassic form. His followers, the founders of the Spanish American literary tradition, would be romantic in both spirit and form, but none would surpass the master as poet, editor, or thinker. These founders are the ones on whose work Menéndez y Pelayo based his famous *Antología*.

The general profile of these founders is as follows. They were,

naturally, Romantics, many of them Argentinian, but also Peruvian, Chilean, Venezuelan, and Colombian. They acquire or reaffirm their sense of continental citizenship in their travels to other Spanish American countries, either as political exiles or in the diplomatic service of their respective governments. More likely, however, they will discover each other in Paris, where they also wind up as exiles or diplomats, and where they publish some of their anthologies and other works of criticism. Paris became then, and continues to be today, the cultural supracapital of Latin America. These founders, who meet in the inevitable cafés and created the now familiar artistic and political allegiances, are for the most part politically active and concerned with education in their respective countries of origin, which are in the turbulent process of organizing themselves into republics. Literature, needless to say, plays an important part in the curricula being devised for the nascent school systems and universities.

This sense of being part of a continental cultural and even political domain is revealed in collections of essays compiled by a given author, containing writers from Latin American countries other than his, and in anthologies, where, for instance, an Argentinian editor included Cuban poets like José María Heredia or Plácido (José de la Concepción Valdés). There is even one anthology that includes Brazilian poets in the original Portuguese; its editor was the Argentinian Francisco Lagomaggiore, and the collection was titled *América literaria; producciones selectas en prosa y verso*. Yet another, edited also in Argentina by Carlos Romagosa, included North American poets (Poe, Longfellow, and Whitman) in Spanish translation: *Joyas poéticas americanas. Colección de poesías escogidas. Originales de autores nacidos en América*.

A representative example of this group of founders is the Colombian José María Torres Caicedo (1830–1889), a diplomat, essayist and critic who lived in Paris toward the middle of the century, where he came to know many other Latin Americans like him, about whom he wrote in a series of volumes that he called *Ensayos biográficos y de crítica literaria sobre los principales publicistas, historiadores, poetas y literatos de América Latina*. Torres Caicedo was one of the first and most assiduous promoters of the term *Latin America*, and had planned to write what would have been the first history of Latin American literature. He died in an insane asylum in Auteuil, near Paris, as the Argentinian scholar Emilio Carilla reports in the most complete study devoted to Torres Caicedo, whom he considers the "discoverer" of Argentinian literature, because of the studies that the Colombian devoted to the likes of Juan Bautista Alberdi (Carilla, "José María Torres Caicedo, 'descubridor' de la literatura argentina"). The founders of Spanish American literary history were not exclusively editors of anthologies; some were critics, chroniclers, journalists, and scholars. They also had their predecessors.

Before these founders formulated the concepts that were to give rise to

Spanish American literary historiography, and also as they did so, there existed a group of individuals, scattered in time and space and without a common sense of purpose, who constituted a kind of tradition of their own, and who preserved the memory of works written in Spanish America during the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries. This formidable if forgotten lineage is composed of antiquarians, bibliophiles, and bibliographers and continues to the present day. Its genealogy extends from Antonio de León Pinelo (Peru, late sixteenth century–1600), to Nicolás Antonio (Spain, 1617–1684), to Juan José Eguiara y Eguren (Mexico, 1695–1763), and more recently from Alejandro Tapia y Rivera (Puerto Rico, 1826–1882), to Joaquín Icazbalceta (Mexico, 1825–1894) and José Toribio Medina (Chile, 1852–1930). While some of them, like Tapia y Rivera, were also poets, they were above all collectors and bibliographers. But the word “collector” is not meant to suggest a passive hoarder of old books and papers. In some cases, like that of José Mariano Beristáin y Souza (Mexico, 1756–1817), these antiquarians wrote true books of literary criticism. His *Bibliotheca Hispano-Americana Septentrional*, for example, published in 1816, contains incisive essays under the entries for Columbus, Sor Juana, Hernán Cortés, and others. To be sure, this group did not promote the idea that the works they listed and discussed constituted an autochthonous body of literature (with the exception of Medina and García Icazbalceta), but rather a prolix example of American genius applied to the task of composing literature in the universal and ahistorical sense that prevails until Romanticism. This notwithstanding, the work of these collectors made available to the founders knowledge that was indispensable for the elaboration of a historical beginning, an origin for their narrative scheme.

The founders did have a common sense of purpose and did establish a strong connection between their activities and the independence of the continent. They were a prolific group that has been the object of excellent studies by Rosalba Campra and Beatriz González Stephan. What stands out among the considerable assortment of books either written or edited by them is the prodigious number of anthologies. The most important among these is undoubtedly the first: *América poética*, compiled by the Argentinian Juan María Gutiérrez, and published, significantly, in Valparaíso, Chile, not in Buenos Aires, during the author’s exile there. In a gesture that proclaims his desire to found an American poetic tradition, Gutiérrez opens *América poética* with Bello’s “Alocución” as a kind of epigraph. His anthology would be the answer to the Venezuelan’s call to the Muses, a truly foundational act of continental dimensions. Many others followed, including a new *América poética* (Paris, 1875), edited by the Chilean José Domingo Cortés. Cortés was also the author of a *Parnaso peruano*, as well as of a *Parnaso argentino* [sic]. Cortés was, obviously, the

most assiduous of these founding anthologists, whose collections were not only called “parnasos,” but also “galerías,” “albums,” “coronas,” “ramilletes,” “guirnaldas,” and “mixturas.” The picturesque titles of these venerable volumes, many of which served as Menéndez y Pelayo’s sources, give us the tenor of the times, a glimpse of the beginnings of the Spanish American literary tradition, as well as of the earliest manifestations of a kind of Spanish American literary historiography. That tradition and early history is, of course, not only textual, but also human, in that it is constituted as much by the traffic of individuals as by that of books. It is a transcontinental traffic that naturally continues until the present. It affects the concept of a Spanish American literature, as opposed to national literatures, in a very powerful way.

In chronological order the appearance of anthologies begins with the anonymous but fundamental *La lira argentina, o colección de las piezas poéticas, dadas a luz en Buenos Ayres durante la guerra de su independencia* and ends, after that all-important peak in *América poética*, with Pedro Pablo Figueroa’s *Prosistas y poetas de América moderna*. By this time *Modernismo* was already in full swing. The tendency culminates with the publication of “parnasos” of nearly all Spanish American countries by Barcelona’s Editorial Maucci, between approximately 1910 and 1925. These are uneven collections of a chiefly commercial nature, sometimes without even a prologue or biographical notes. These modest books still reveal, however, the extent to which American poetry was prized after *Modernismo* [Modernism], and the longevity of the poetic movement that the founders initiated and promoted with their anthologies.

In addition to these anthologies, there also began to appear, after the midpoint of the nineteenth century, books of criticism or literary journalism about Spanish American writers, written by other Spanish Americans, attesting to the depth and breadth of the tradition. For example, as already mentioned, in 1863 the Colombian José María Torres Caicedo published a biographical essay about the Argentinian Juan Bautista Alberdi, and in 1882 the Chilean Miguel Luis Amunátegui published a biography of the Venezuelan Andrés Bello, entitled *Vida de Don Andrés Bello*. Torres Caicedo, as we saw, was a promoter of Latin American cultural unity, and published in Paris a journal called *El Correo de Ultramar*, where his articles on fellow writers appeared (Carilla, “El primer biógrafo de Alberdi [José María Torres Caicedo]”). Among other volumes of this kind one should mention the Venezuelan Rufino Blanco-Fombona’s *Autores americanos juzgados por los españoles*; the Chilean José Victoriano Lastarria’s *Recuerdos literarios: datos para la historia literaria de América española i el progreso intelectual en Chile*; the Mexican Francisco Sosa’s collection of essays *Escritores y poetas sudamericanos*, which already argues against some of its predecessors, and

the Argentinian Martín García Merou's entertaining and indiscreet *Confidencias literarias*.

Works of a more academic nature were also published, such as those by the Chilean Diego Barros Arana, whose projected *Bibliotheca Americana. Collection d'ouvrages inédits ou rares sur l'Amérique* attempted to publish in Paris editions of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century works. There are also the many studies by the Mexican Joaquín García Icazbalceta, as well as his translations of Francisco Cervantes de Salazar's Latin dialogues, and his treatise entitled *Francisco de Terrazas y otros poetas del siglo XVI*. In Chile, Gregorio Víctor Amunátegui and B. Vicuña Mackenna published their *Informes presentados al decano de la Facultad de Humanidades sobre la Historia de la literatura colonial de Chile (1541-1810)*, a critical response to José Toribio Medina's *Historia de la literatura colonial de Chile*, which had been entered in a contest and published in 1878. Meanwhile, the Colombian José María Vergara y Vergara published his *Historia de la literatura en Nueva Granada*, the first part of which was subtitled *Desde la conquista hasta la independencia (1538-1820)* and the Equatorian Juan León Mera his *Ojeada histórico-crítica sobre la poesía ecuatoriana desde su época más remota hasta nuestros días*, the second edition of which appeared in 1893.

The historical orientation of these academic books stands in contrast to the more journalistic, present-day bias of many, though certainly not all, anthologies. Many of the latter, as well as some of the early literary journalism, constitute American poetic manifestoes, not only because they gather poems by poets from a variety of Spanish American countries, but also because they incorporate, almost exclusively, works from the period immediately following Independence. It seems clear that one of the ideas implicit in these books is that Spanish American literature begins with political freedom from the metropolis and the birth of the new nations. But naturally, from the historical spirit that prevailed among these Romantics, thinking about the existence of Spanish American literature and writing its history meant elaborating a narrative which should have a beginning, a middle, and, if not an end, at least ties to their present. The romantic imagination in which the idea of a Spanish American literature takes place is eminently narrative, as is the science of philology, which expresses the concept of the birth and development of national languages and literatures as an evolution, understandable in much the same way as that of the fossils discovered and studied by the naturalists. What could constitute the beginning of that literature?

In the philological tradition, literary history originated with an epic song, which expressed the birth of a language and a literature that began in the popular, oral tradition. This gave rise to foundational studies of the *Chanson de Roland*, the *Nibelungenlied*, and the *Poema de Mío Cid*. It

should be remembered here that Bello was the first critic to devote important studies to the *Poema*, which culminated in an edition. Quite clearly, the origin of a Spanish American literary tradition, the beginning of the narrative of this history, could well have been medieval or renaissance Spanish literature. Yet this would not have made it distinct and autochthonous in its development, but rather a mere appendix, branch or deviation. The origin had to be a literature written in the colony, with all the delicate and complicated issues such an idea would inevitably generate. Juan María Gutiérrez, José Antonio Echeverría, José Toribio Medina, and other founders of Spanish American literary historiography would formulate a narrative beginning that originates in the colony and that often places a renaissance epic such as *La araucana*, *Espejo de paciencia*, or *Arauco domado*, at its roots.

Works of the colonial period were problematic because the era in which they emerged belonged to the Spanish past that Independence had attempted to eradicate. How could works conceived under the aegis of *colonialaje*, the negative term used to refer to the colonial era, be privileged as being the origin? There was also an aesthetic difficulty. Many of the colonial works were explicitly baroque, a style the Romantics detested and associated with Spanish domination. Creating an origin out of these elements was not at all an easy task. The way in which Juan María Gutiérrez and José Toribio Medina dealt with these issues is exemplary in the way Spanish American literary historiography attempted to become a narrative. In spite of the nearly fifty years separating them, Gutiérrez and Medina start their narrative projects from a common beginning, based on identical foundational ideas. What these founders effectively accomplish is a monumentalization of the colonial epic based on the romantic-philological model of the origin and evolution of European languages.

By monumentalization I mean granting something a privileged position, forcing it to embody, in its purest state, the core of metaphors constituting an ideology. These metaphors are intensified in an inverse proportion to the inadequacy of the object being monumentalized. The monument, in this sense, is erected according to patterns analogous to those that operate within fiction, but is characterized as the kind of discourse that claims to reveal or contain the truth about its own origin. The truth, what is authentic or appropriate, is the obsessive theme of monumentalization as discourse. This is, then, the projection or hypostasis of the conceptual-metaphoric nucleus that constitutes an ideology and within which is frequently housed a discipline, such as literary history or criticism. The romantic philological model was based on the kind of evolutionary scheme that progressed from the simple to the complex, from the primitive to the decadent, from the singular to the plural and prolix, from clarity to ambiguity and confusion. Hence the epic's allure

for a romantic project of literary historiography, given its one-piece heroes and its Manichean world divided neatly between good and evil. The epic thus becomes the sought-for origin, whose world of violence (killings, revenge, bloody battles) echoes the rupture, the break of a birth. There is an exaltation of national values associated with this aesthetic; a linguistic, ethical, and political simplicity that is a projection of the general primitivism of romantic ideology, which explains its rejection of the Baroque. Yet the colonial epic was a typical renaissance product, derived from Ariosto and Tasso, and with characteristics diametrically opposed to the romantic conception of a national epic. This is a challenge that provokes one of the most characteristic philological fictions composed by the founders.

During his exile in Chile, Juan María Gutiérrez took on the daunting task of composing a scholarly edition of the *Arauco domado*, which was eventually published in Valparaiso in 1848. His project has much in common with that of the Cuban José Antonio Echeverría, who "discovered" the *Espejo de paciencia*, an epic he too situates at the foundation of the Cuban literary tradition, and which he culls out of the first history of the island ever published (González Echevarría, "Reflections on *Espejo de paciencia*"). Gutiérrez's interest in the epic also parallels that of the Chilean Diego Barros Arana, whose edition of Captain Fernando Álvarez de Toledo's *Purén indómito* inaugurated his series of colonial American works published in Paris. No matter how modest Gutiérrez's edition of Oña's poem may seem today, its elaboration was an act fraught with ideological choices that the Argentinian made with consummate care and deliberation. In an essay contemporaneous with the edition and collected in a volume entitled *Escritores coloniales americanos*, Gutiérrez lays out the criteria, beyond that of his collector's vocation, that led him to study Oña's poem and make it available to the American public. It may seem surprising to us, but Gutiérrez had no illusions about the literary value of *Arauco domado*: "Two centuries have passed over the poem we are speaking about, and taking its age into account it has the right to have its inflections of bad taste forgiven, its sententious affectation, the flagging intonation, the unkept and uncultured tone that stain its stanzas" (p. 360). What matters to Gutiérrez, in his effort to monumentalize the poem, is the historic truth that it supposedly contains, and, as a result, its value in attesting to Chile's and America's singularity as a territory capable of producing its own original artistic expression. America's fundamental and foundational differences are not a function of the renaissance packaging of Oña's poem (which, on the contrary, would constitute an impediment to the expression of its genuineness and authenticity) but rather the contents, which forthrightly reflect verifiable episodes that mark a true origin in a given time and space: "Oña's book is not precious

because it has become so rare to find in the world, but because it is one of the sources to which one must go to soak oneself in the truth when writing about certain episodes about the primitive history of Chile" (p. 357). The key terms here are "to soak oneself in the truth" and "primitive history," which go back to the romantic formulation of the national epic. The artistic defects, the coarseness, lend the poem greater authenticity. Reading *Arauco domado* is equivalent to "reliving" that "primitive" history, to letting oneself be penetrated by history itself in its pristine form, to being "soaked in truth." Primitivism, in this context, transports one to that shapeless origin wherein truth shines amidst the violence of birth. Oña's motives, according to Gutiérrez, can be summarized as follows: "He was duty-bound to sing the glories of the fatherland, the soil where he was born that he had to describe" (p. 356). The compiler of *América poética* concludes his essay with a resonant manifesto of poetic Americanism and a defense of colonial literature. He first explains that by virtue of America having been inseparable from the metropolis, American men and their deeds were indistinguishable from those of Spain, hence their difference was not properly credited ("American men and their works were taken to be Spanish"), and he proclaims that "the glories of the American Continent have only begun to be ours since the beginning of this century" (p. 372). He ends with a declaration that is itself the gloss of a line from Bernardo de Balbuena's *Grandeza mexicana*:

Those who served as inspiration to portentous European masters were destined to be born *Where there was thought to be no world*. If the Mexican Ruiz de Alarcón had not written *La verdad sospechosa*, the French theater would not have, among its classical beauties, Corneille's *Le Menteur*. If Pedro de Oña had not written *Arauco domado*, it is quite probable that Lope de Vega would not have written either the play by the same title, nor the love song and the scene on the banks of the lake between Caupolicán and his mistress that embellish the first act.

(p. 372)

Colonial writers appear here not as the followers of the European ones, but, on the contrary, as their precursors, dwellers in that primeval moment of history that can only be adequately expressed in an epic poem. The monumentalization is completed with this final gesture.

Gutiérrez was prudent enough to erect as the monument in the origin a work written by a native of the New World. José Toribio Medina, on the other hand, imposed upon himself the more arduous task of making of *La araucana* the necessary foundation, in spite of Ercilla's irreducible Spanishness, which Medina never downplays or denies. How, then, can the poem be considered Chilean? Medina's argument is presented as follows: the only literary works from colonial Chile worthy of attention are those that depict the wars with the Araucanian Indians. Medina says

in the introduction to his *Historia de la literatura colonial de Chile*: "Who would read today about the lives of mystical characters, the bloated volumes of sermons, the compilations of extravagant verse that were written at that time in the capital of the viceroyalty? On the other hand, are none of the numerous books written about the wars in Arauco monuments deserving of consultation?" (p. xii). The subject of wars is, as we have seen, an important component of the epic, one of those that define it and make it distinctive. A second crucial fact can be added to this, namely, that the poets who sang of the Araucan wars were all participants in those actions, and as a result their testimony is trustworthy, the product of direct experience, not of literature. As such, that literature is already Chilean because it emerges from episodes that occurred in Chilean territory, episodes that determine the character of all texts born of them, regardless of a writer's nationality: "The deeds carried out on that narrow stretch of land [Arauco], were the ones that awakened Ercilla's poetic genius and unquestionably influenced the inclination of his work [...] This is why *La Araucana* is eminently Chilean, and should have a place in our literature..." (p. 4). Medina attributes to the wars of Arauco the initial spark of Ercilla's poetic gift: not merely the poem, but the very possibility of writing originates at the moment when the poet confronts his new surroundings, a meeting that marks him indelibly and enables him to produce the foundational text. This is the reason Medina opens his *Historia de la literatura colonial de Chile* with three chapters about Ercilla, the pedestal upon which he will erect his entire narrative project.

That project was, of course, a history of Chilean literature in the colonial period, not of Spanish American literature as a whole, although in other countries (as in the case of Cuba mentioned above), a parallel process was under way. Yet, despite all the activity summarized above, no history of Spanish American literature was written during the nineteenth century. The first work that can be considered a history of Spanish American literature was Menéndez y Pelayo's *Antología de poetas hispano-americanos*, the first volume of which appeared in 1893. The project of a full-fledged history, which some like Torres Caicedo had envisioned, was probably postponed by the more pressing need to write the histories of each national literature, which did begin to appear during the nineteenth century. This was a task that was incited by the prevalent nationalisms and was often tied to the elaboration of school programs, university curricula, and the like. Torres Caicedo's unfinished project and Menéndez y Pelayo's successful one share one quality with nearly all the comprehensive histories of Spanish American literature written since then. They are written outside Spanish America, either by Spanish Americans or by foreigners. It is as if the broad view could only be focused with distance, and without the nationalistic pressures of each fatherland.

Yet the mere existence of these founders, and particularly of their books and magazines, changes the conceptions generally held about when the idea of Spanish American literature began to emerge. Emir Rodríguez Monegal, for instance, wrote in his *Borzoi Anthology of Latin American Literature* that "Only with the advent of modernism did a general Spanish American literature begin to emerge out of separate strands of development. Writers began to circulate all over the continent; for the first time their works were published and discussed outside their native countries, and achieved fame even in Spain and France" (1, 337). The anthologies, critical works, and even scholarly treatises discussed here demonstrate that the process had begun at least forty years before. Menéndez y Pelayo's *Antología* stops precisely when *Modernismo* is beginning to loom on his horizon (the early 1890s), and he had already had access to quite a few books that had either crossed the Atlantic to reach his voracious library, or been published in neighboring France, or in Spain itself.

Menéndez y Pelayo's *Antología* remains the first and most influential statement on the topic. Evidence of this enduring influence is not only the widespread presence of the Spaniard's judgments in histories of national literatures throughout Spanish America, but also how histories written years later by Spanish Americans (for instance, José J. Arrom's) are conceived *against* the Spaniard's principles and opinions. Whether positive or negative, Menéndez y Pelayo's *Antología* is the point of departure for most of the historiography of Spanish American literature in the twentieth century. Because he was so opinionated, self-assured, and paternalistic, it is often difficult to come to terms with the fact that Menéndez y Pelayo's *Antología* was a major accomplishment; that the weighty tomes are still replete with valuable information and analyses, not to mention carefully reproduced texts. Menéndez y Pelayo was able to gather a prodigious amount of information from all corners of Spanish America at a time when communications were slow and unreliable, and when very few scholars, if any, had a comprehensive knowledge of the poetry being produced in the New World. Because of the dramatic progress in communications, as well as many other improvements, his feat will never be equalled.

The foregoing must be kept in mind earnestly when one considers Menéndez y Pelayo's motives for bringing about such an impressive compilation. As should be evident from the date of publication of the first volume, the *Antología* was conceived to commemorate the four-hundredth anniversary of the discovery of America, or as Menéndez y Pelayo puts it with his customary bombast: "that marvelous and superhuman deed, thanks to which our language was allowed to resonate mightily from the banks of the Rio Bravo to the lands of Tierra del Fuego"

(*Antología*, iv). The Royal Spanish Academy, of which Menéndez y Pelayo humbly considers himself a mere scribe, wishes to compensate for the sorrowful state of Spain as a world power with this proud display of its enduring influence and survival – he has earlier discussed how Greece and Rome live on through their colonies. The *Antología*, this “modest monument erected to the glory of our common language” (p. iv), will, furthermore, grant “Spanish American poetry official entry to the treasure of Spanish literature, where it should have been incorporated a long time ago” (p. v). The inclusiveness of the *Antología*, it is clear, reproduces the lost unity of the Spanish Empire, a transnational identity could not lead the new Spanish American nations to any other common origin than Spain itself. Another motive, and again the date of the *Antología* is crucial, is to ward off what Menéndez y Pelayo sees as the pernicious influence of French poetry on Spanish American poetry, which is leading it away from its true Hispanic sources. *Modernismo* is exploding around him, and anything modern alarmed the Spanish sage, who saw plainly that it would imply a rejection of the retrograde Mother Country, and play havoc with his system of values.

Menéndez y Pelayo’s unrestrained colonialism is also shockingly manifest in his conception of the character of Spanish American poetry. He claims that Spanish American poetry has undergone all the changes brought about by artistic movements in Europe, with no visible difference, except that brought about by the description of the peculiar landscape of the continent and the political ardor created by the Wars of Independence. Hence for him the most original Spanish American poetry is the descriptive or political: Andrés Bello, Joaquín Olmedo, and José María Heredia are the best Spanish American poets (though he regrets the latter’s anti-Spanish stance). Of course, what Menéndez y Pelayo is attempting, quite explicitly, is to deny the influence of the indigenous peoples of the New World on Spanish American poetry, thereby underlining the purity of its Spanish lineage: “about the few and obscure literary fragments remaining of those primitive languages... their influence on Spanish poetry in America has been so slight, or better, so non-existent (outside of the passing whims of this or that poet), that the history of that poetry can be told in its entirety omitting altogether those alleged origins and leaving them to the philologist’s study and analysis” (p. viii). This idea is repeated with annoying insistence throughout the *Antología*, and as a result much Spanish American literature and criticism is written to counter it, projecting the *Antología*’s influence to the present.

Menéndez y Pelayo divided his *Antología* according to region or nation. He devotes most of the space to Mexico, Chile, Peru, and Argentina, providing in passing the most complete history of colonial Spanish American poetry available then and now. He then studies national literatures until more or less his day, but leaving out living

writers for fear of making hasty judgments. This limits his range considerably, but what is left of his study of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Spanish American poetry is quite remarkable. The Spaniard was a Neoclassicist at heart, hence he was enthralled by odes written by the likes of Bello, Heredia, and Olmedo. He was also quite taken with nationalistic poetry, inspired by military feats like those of Simón Bolívar. Menéndez y Pelayo was not far off the mark in these predilections, and there can be little doubt that his *Antología* helped to canonize those worthy writers. One is less sanguine about his judgments, however, when noting that one of the models with which he compares these Spanish Americans is the shallow and bombastic Quintana, a Spanish poet mercifully forgotten today. One is also irritated, of course, by his dismissal of poets like Plácido, less academic in their classicism, hence more romantic, about whom the Spaniard says, with intolerable condescension, that he “writes nonsense, although sonorous nonsense” (II, xxxvi). The list of extremely orthodox as well as rhetorically and grammatically correct poets whom Menéndez y Pelayo lauds, but who have, quite rightly, been relegated to footnotes in national histories of literature, is very long. However, the value of the *Antología* as a reminder of the existence of a unity worth preserving and cherishing is undeniable, and would be reasserted, ironically, by the *modernista* [modernist] movement he so abhorred, and by its most influential figure, Rubén Darío. The peripatetic Nicaraguan would rekindle the unity of all Spanish poetry, including most energetically that of Spain, at the same time as the volumes of the *Antología* were circulating throughout Spanish America. It would be short-sighted to view these two as antithetic phenomena.

According to Carlos Hamilton, the first chair in the United States exclusively devoted to Spanish American literature was inaugurated at Columbia University by Federico de Onís in 1916 (Hamilton, *Historia de la literatura hispanoamericana*, 7). In that same year, another member of the Columbia faculty, Alfred Coester, published his *The Literary History of Spanish America*, which was, strictly speaking, the first history of Spanish American literature, given that Menéndez y Pelayo’s was a history of poetry. Coester’s work owes much to Menéndez y Pelayo’s *Antología*, and like it, has much to offer still, in spite of very questionable premises. His intention in writing the book is to make Spanish Americans known to his fellow countrymen, for “The main characteristics and trends of the Spanish-American mind are revealed in his literature” (p. vii). However, Coester is not even sure that what Spanish Americans write is literature: “But shall we call Spanish-American writings literature?” (p. vii). He answers with a very revealing anecdote worth citing:

A professor in Argentina wished a few years ago to establish a course for students in Spanish-American literature. The plan was opposed by Bartolomé Mitre, ex-President of the republic and himself a poet and

historian of the first rank, on the ground that such a thing did not exist. He held the view that mere numbers of books did not form a literature; though united by the bond of a common language, the printed productions of Spanish Americans had no logical union nor gave evidence of an evolution toward a definite goal. On the other hand, he admitted that their "literary productions might be considered, not as models but as facts, classified as the expression of their social life during three periods, the colonial epoch, the struggle for freedom, and the independent existence of the several republics." (p. viii)

Coester adopts this division suggested by Mitre. His history covers the colonial period as a whole, divides the Revolutionary Period into two, south and north (Mexico and the Antilles), then devotes chapters to the literatures of individual countries, except for Bolivia, which is paired with Peru (respecting colonial boundaries), and the central American countries, which he subsumes in a chapter covering the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico. He closes with a chapter on the *modernista* movement that again restores the unity.

Coester warns, however, that "the originality of Spanish-American literature lies chiefly in the subject-matter, in its pictures of natural scenery and social life" (p. ix). He adds, echoing Menéndez y Pelayo, that the "form of Latin American literature has been imitative while the matter original" (p. x). He wishes the reader to have these qualifications in mind: "The reader, aware at the outset that he has before him an extremely provincial type of literature, will not expect great masterpieces" (p. x). Having said this, however, Coester produces a quite remarkable volume, with detailed information that shows that his research was extensive, serious, and little affected by his prejudiced view of the subject matter. Coester's knowledge of nineteenth-century Spanish American journals is outstanding, made possible by the extensive collections he had at his disposal at Harvard, Columbia, and the Hispanic Society of America. He also had the help of Pedro and Max Henríquez Ureña, and his mentor J. D. M. Ford. His overview of the colonial period is also quite complete, as is his concluding chapter on *Modernismo*.

Coester is followed by one of the few exceptions to the rule that comprehensive histories of Spanish American literature are written abroad, Luis Alberto Sánchez's *Nueva historia de la literatura americana*, which was written at home by the Peruvian. This was, as far as I know, the first history of Spanish American literature written by a Spanish American. Sánchez is cautious in his approach to the polemical issues, and relies on Menéndez y Pelayo's *Antología* as authority to back up his opinions. He speaks of the existence already of a "sensibility, a direction, and culture" (p. 23) that are properly Spanish American. Sánchez writes in a completely different climate from Menéndez y Pelayo, however, one in

which the self-assurance in European culture shown by the Spaniard has been lost with the catastrophes of the First World War. A general climate of repudiation of the West and exaltation of the "primitive" as well as powerful political movements against the rule of the classes that had guided Europe in the nineteenth century turned artists to a search for radically new modes of expression. In Spanish America the Mexican Revolution had brought attention to the decisive Indian component of Mexican culture, and in the Caribbean the Afro-Antillean movement had exalted the African component in the culture of the islands. In Sánchez's case it is clear that his orientation is influenced by APRISMO, the political movement led by Raúl Haya de la Torre that sought to do for Peruvian society what the Mexican Revolution had done for Mexico: to make the impact of the Indian population visible and to turn it into a political program. For him, too, it is the novel, rather than poetry, that has brought out the true character of Spanish America. Sánchez sees in the *novela de la tierra* the epic that Spanish America was looking for (p. 35). The *Nueva historia de la literatura americana* is far less reliable than Menéndez y Pelayo's *Antología* and far from Coester's *History* in terms of its overall quality. However, it is a harbinger of things to come and a true reflection of the ideology underlying Spanish American literature in the wake of the artistic and political avant-garde movements of the 1920s.

The next history of Spanish American literature, strictly in terms of publication date, was Arturo Torres Ríoseco's *The Epic of Latin American Literature*, written by the Chilean while a professor in the Department of Spanish at the University of California. It is truly a history of *Latin American literature*, because it includes Brazil. Torres Ríoseco was already the author of an *Antología de la literatura hispanoamericana* (New York, F. S. Crofts & Co., 1939), which anticipates his *Epic*. Both books were written with the US public in mind, particularly university students (the preface to the *Antología* has an interesting account of Latin American literary studies in the US up to that point). His aim is to show that Latin American literature has reached a golden age because its authors have realized that an "earthbound" conscience can lead them away from imitation. He extols, as did Sánchez, the *novela de la tierra*, which is really his point of departure. In spite of its unfortunate title and somewhat proselytizing tone, the *Epic* is a well-researched, broad-ranging book with much useful information. It was a popular book in its time, being issued in a second, augmented edition, by the California Press (1961), and having enjoyed the rare privilege of being translated into Chinese (Beijing, 1972).

Torres Ríoseco is closely followed by the Dominican Pedro Henríquez Ureña's *Literary Currents in Hispanic America*, the first really significant history of Spanish American literature, which originated as the Charles

Eliot Norton Lectures at Harvard for 1940–1941. As well as the distance apparently needed to capture the broad view of Spanish American literary history, an additional element appears in Henríquez Ureña: his book was originally written in English and translated into Spanish, after his premature death, by Joaquín Díez-Canedo. (It appears that Torres Ríoseco wrote his *Epic* in Spanish and either he or someone else translated it into English.) *Literary Currents* is a superb book, the product of a man of letters as well as a scholar, whose prodigious cultural background is evident on every page. It seems as if Henríquez Ureña had read everything in every European language. His book is still persuasive because of his ability to see Spanish American literature in such a rich context with such naturalness, and also because of his minute knowledge of the literature and art of each Spanish American country. Hence when he speaks of Spanish America's search for individual artistic expression, the main theme of the book, he does not sound provincial, as is often the case with his many disciples and imitators. A true heir of Bello, with whom he begins his history, only to go back to the colonial period, Henríquez Ureña was a humanist in the very best tradition and in every sense of the term.

Although Henríquez Ureña claims that his book is not a complete history of Spanish American literature, but only of that literature in search of Spanish American expression, the truth is that *Literary Currents* is not only a history of Spanish American literature, but perhaps still the best. Henríquez Ureña's most felicitous strategy concerns the colonial period, that is to say, the beginning of Spanish American literary historiography, which, as seen before, was a major source of concern for the founders. In a fascinating first chapter, where he displays his vast knowledge of medieval and renaissance letters, Henríquez Ureña maps out the founding topics of Spanish American literature. Some of these, like the depiction of "natural man" were to have a lasting impact on European thought. The recurrence of utopias placed in America (More), the Edenic description of nature, the disputes about how to deal with indigenous populations, become a treasure of topics and tropes that will become the core of Spanish American literature. The origin of Spanish American history is to be found in that trove of topics, in that thematic, a kind of literary mythology that weaves itself in and out of poems, novels, essays, and plays throughout time. In this way, Henríquez Ureña cuts through the problems of nationality. By founding literary tradition in tropes, in literary discourse, as it were, Henríquez Ureña successfully binds Spanish American literary history, allowing one to see the continuity between Columbus and Carpentier, or between Balbuena and Neruda.

Henríquez Ureña's is a holistic view of culture. *Literary Currents* is also a history of Spanish American culture, and even just a history of Spanish America (including, by the way, Brazil). His chronological subdivisions

fall naturally within this broad scheme, with three periods parcelling out the nineteenth century, and two leading up to his day. The Spanish version, published in Mexico, has incorporated a more complete scholarly apparatus involving notes and bibliography taken from Henríquez Ureña's other comprehensive volume, his *Historia de la cultura en la América Hispánica* (1947). *Las corrientes literarias en la América hispánica* is as detailed a history of Spanish American literature as there is, with the exception of Enrique Anderson Imbert's (to which more space will be devoted below), and a book that is the culmination of the tradition whose history it aims to relate: that of the search for American expression. Other books will follow it, such as José Lezama Lima's brilliant *La expresión americana* (1958), making contributions of their own, but none will surpass it in richness, elegance of thought and style, and intellectual rigor.

Henríquez Ureña was followed by another exception, Julio A. Leguizamón's, *Historia de la literatura hispanoamericana*, written and published by the Argentinian in his native Buenos Aires. The massive, two-volume history grew out of a bibliography of Spanish American literature which the Argentinian set out to compile. The *Historia* retains much of the bibliographical cast of the original project, particularly in the chapters dealing with contemporary literature. In this sense, Leguizamón is more the heir of the antiquarians, bibliophiles, and bibliographers discussed above. Leguizamón's dependence on Menéndez y Pelayo is extensive, and his criteria for chronological and geographical divisions are vaguely derived from the Spaniard. The *Historia* is a handsomely printed and bound set that was intended more as a reference work than as a work of literary historiography. It is significant that a publishing house such as Emecé in Buenos Aires would have been willing to risk such an expensive book dealing with Spanish American literary history. It seems to indicate that by the mid 1940s the existence of the field is a given. The appearance of histories of Spanish American literature in languages other than Spanish or Portuguese seems to indicate the same.

Two French professors published histories of Spanish American literature in the early 1950s: Robert Bazin's *Histoire de la littérature américaine de langue espagnole* and Charles V. Aubrun, *Histoire des lettres hispano-américaines*. Bazin's is a manual for French schools whose principal merit, according to its authors, is "merely to exist" Aubrun's is more ambitious, though its author also calls it a "manual." He opines that great works are rare in Spanish America, where the quality of life "has not allowed its strong personalities to realize themselves in works of eternal value" (p. 5). For Aubrun, whose criteria are avowedly aesthetic, Spanish American literature does not begin to have an independent life until the 1890s, claiming that until then there was a strong, lingering Spanish influence. None of these works come close to Henríquez Ureña's, and

were soon superseded by the publication of Anderson Imbert's monumental history.

Argentinian scholar, critic, and writer Enrique Anderson Imbert published his *Historia de la literatura hispanoamericana* while a professor at the University of Michigan. It remains to this day the most authoritative of all the histories, by far the most inclusive and detailed, and the one written by the best literary critic. A man of exquisite taste and sensibility, the author of fine essays and short stories, Anderson Imbert also proved to be a relentless researcher, with a powerful capacity to process enormous amounts of information. His *Historia* covers the range of Spanish American literature from Columbus to the latest novels and poems. Anderson Imbert is careful to include writers from all Spanish American countries and to mention works of all genres, providing the basic facts, such as dates, as well as an overall appraisal of each significant period. He parcels his history, approximately by generations, but is not wedded to the strictures of method. Anderson Imbert is not interested, as was Henríquez Ureña, in Spanish American literature as a search for or expression of cultural identity. He is interested in Spanish American literature as literature, as the expression or creation of aesthetic values.

Anderson Imbert is, above all, a formalist critic, with an idealistic conception of historical development, in the sense that he chronicles, precisely, the history of ideas and artistic movements. History in the stricter sense serves as a background, ably integrated into the picture when necessary, but never obtrusively. Anderson Imbert voices his ambitions and frustrations in this revealing opening paragraph of the "Prolog" to the *Historia*:

Of the many dangers an historian of literature risks, two are quite serious: that of specializing in the study of isolated great books, and that of specializing in the study of the circumstances under which those books were written. If the historian elects the first, he produces a collection of unconnected critical essays, that is, a history of literature containing very little history. If he chooses the second, the result will be a series of external references to the process of civilization, that is, a history of literature containing very little literature. Is it possible to achieve a history of literature that fulfills both the true historical and the true literary function? At least, is it possible to attempt one? It would be a history that gave meaning to the expressive moments of certain men who, through the passing of the centuries, set themselves to write. Instead of isolating the literature produced, on the one hand, and the circumstances under which it was produced, on the other, this history would integrate the two within the concrete existence of the writers. Each writer asserts those esthetic values that he has formed while contemplating the possibilities of his historical environment, and these are the values that should constitute the real subject matter of any history of literature. (A *History*, 15)

In his best moments, which are many, Anderson Imbert realizes this desired synthesis of text and context, given the elegant seamlessness of his discourse. The *Historia* is rich in insightful readings mainly of the major works, and with quite useful overviews of a history that is really never truly historical, but more ideological.

In any case, Anderson Imbert is not only vexed by the difficulty of this task in the abstract, but more by the prospect of its application to Spanish American literary history. Echoing sentiments found earlier in Coester, and repeated in Aubrun, Anderson Imbert deplores the overall quality of Spanish American literature, particularly the absence of truly great works: "The effective contributions of Spanish-American literature to international literature are minimal," he asserts, and after citing a dozen or so writers "who would do honor to any literature," laments that "In general, we are afflicted by improvisation, disorder, fragmentation, and impurity" (pp. 15-16). This condition of Spanish American literature forces him to include "many unaccomplished writers," while "we anxiously look for the few who have expressed aesthetic values that can be assigned to the category of beauty" (p. 16). This aggravation does not stop Anderson Imbert from writing memorable pages about the chroniclers of the discovery and conquest of the New World, though he knows that they did not write with the purpose of reaching that elusive category of beauty. In other cases he is not so kind, but on the whole, he is generous in his judgments and, more often than not, not far off the mark in his assessments. In this practice of passing aesthetic judgments he follows Menéndez y Pelayo's *Antología*, to which his *Historia* is a worthy heir. The main difference, however, between the Spaniard and the Argentinian is that Anderson Imbert is also an heir to *Modernismo* and the *Avant-Garde*, and therefore his aestheticism is based on more cosmopolitan values. Yet in terms of inclusiveness, Anderson Imbert's *Historia de la literatura hispanoamericana* is the first successful historical enterprise to best Menéndez y Pelayo's *Antología*.

Anderson Imbert's *Historia*, re-issued several times in the 1950s, was followed by Angel Valbuena Briones's, *Literatura hispanoamericana*, published as the fourth volume of Angel Valbuena Pratt's popular *Historia de la literatura española*. Not too concerned with issues of historiography, Valbuena Briones begins his volume with Bernal Díaz del Castillo, whose *Historia verdadera* he terms a great Spanish American book written by a Spaniard. As in Menéndez y Pelayo, Valbuena Briones emphasizes the links between Spanish American literature and Spain, thus closing his volume with a paean to Alfonso Reyes, whose links to the fatherland and devotion to Spanish literature are well-known.

José J. Arrom, a Cuban, wrote his *Esquema generacional de las letras hispanoamericanas* at Yale, where he was professor of Spanish American literature for over thirty years. It is the most explicit of the histories

concerning its historiographic point of departure. Arrom, a disciple of Henríquez Ureña not only in the details of his methodology, but in the overall objective of his book, which is to discover the peculiarities of Spanish American expression, follows a generational method, as his title proclaims. He claims that he follows in this Henríquez Ureña, who had divided his history in generations lasting thirty years, without explicitly saying so. Arrom, a critic of Anderson Imbert (and Menéndez y Pelayo), takes for granted much of what had been polemical in the origins of Spanish American historiography, mainly the overall unity of Spanish American literature, stating that the only problem is to find a chronological unit to organize the mass of literature that has accumulated during four centuries of creation. As is obvious, he also assumes that the colonial period is part of Spanish American literature. It is clear that Arrom's application of the generation method is far too mechanical, and seeks precision sometimes by invoking different categories of events: for instance, the publication of a book and the moment when it was written. The method also assumes that all of Spanish American history, not just literature, moves at the same thirty-year pace. Arrom falls into the trap that Anderson Imbert had warned against in his prologue, when he says that "excessive regularity [in periodization] would indicate that the historian, through his great desire to embellish his vision, is allowing himself to be carried along by symmetries and metaphors" (*A History*, 17). The failings of the *Esquema* are most obvious in periods of either very little or too much production, where Arrom either has to give undue relevance to very obscure works, or force the material into a strait-jacket. Furthermore, as opposed to Henríquez Ureña, whose familiarity with European literatures allowed him to place Spanish American literature in a vast context, Arrom's generational method makes Spanish American literature seem autarchic and self-generated, a quality that it most certainly does not have. There is a stifling academicism in the *Esquema*, as if books had been piled on separate tables in a library and organized according to their author's dates. In addition, Arrom is weakest as a critic when it comes to the modern period, particularly after *Modernismo*, when Spanish American literature is at its most cosmopolitan. The *Esquema* is, in fact, inimical to modern Spanish American literature; its ideological underpinning is to be found, ultimately, in a kind of nineteenth-century biologism.

Having said this, however, one must add that Arrom's *Esquema* is the best introduction to colonial letters available, and a major contribution to the study of the *Barroco de Indias*. There are many insights scattered also throughout other periods, but the chapters on colonial literature, which is the foundation of Arrom's project, are by far the best in the book. Although he follows Henríquez Ureña in the discussion of topics of

Spanish American letters that emerge in the sixteenth century, Arrom gives a fuller treatment to how Spaniards became Creoles, claiming explicitly that by the sixteenth century American literature was being written by people with an American perspective. This is really Arrom's boldest, and perhaps most productive argument in the *Esquema*: locating the origin of an American creative consciousness further back in history. This insight is most useful in its application to works of the *Barroco de Indias*, many of which are rescued from oblivion by Arrom's perspective: the excesses of American baroque aesthetics issue from the effort to incorporate American reality into European molds of expression. Arrom's discussion of poets like Bernardo de Balbuena and Hernando Domínguez Camargo are exemplary in this respect. Arrom's contribution to the study of what I call the colonial Baroque (see chapter 6 of this *History*) is substantial, and has been bolstered in the second edition of the *Esquema*. It is the most modern element of the book, the part that best links it to contemporary Spanish American literature.

No truly significant overall history of Spanish American literature has been published since Arrom's, by which I mean a work conceived from an explicit historiographic point of view that attempts to cover the sweep of Spanish American literature. This does not mean, of course, that the many partial attempts, or projects of such a history, published since the 1960s are of no value. The very existence of these books is, in and of itself, a historical fact of particular relevance. They reveal the increasing interest in Latin American literature both in Latin America and abroad. Recent developments, such as the so-called Boom of the Latin American novel and the Cuban Revolution, focused world attention on Latin American literature, drastically changing its own self-perception and that of those who write about it.

Although very insightful in its assessment of individual authors, Giuseppe Bellini's *Historia de la literatura hispanoamericana* is in part a re-write of a work published in the 1950s. Emiliano Díez-Echarri and José María Roca Franquesa's *Historia de la literatura española e hispanoamericana*, lavish in historical detail and bibliographic information, as well as beautifully written, provides the best integration of peninsular and American literatures. It is, unfortunately, often overlooked. Raimundo Lazo's *Historia de la literatura hispanoamericana* sees the colonial period of each region as precursor of national literatures and mixes history and literary history convincingly. It is also often ignored. Jean Franco's *An Introduction to Spanish American Literature* and her *Spanish American Literature Since Independence* (1973) circulated in the English-speaking world, where they profited from the sudden popularity of Latin American literature in the academic world. Luis Leal's *Breve historia de la literatura hispanoamericana* is a fine manual. Luis Iñigo Madrigal edited the

collective *Historia de la literatura hispanoamericana*, a very uneven project beset by very poor copy-editing, while Cedomil Goic gathered critical fragments on significant authors and movements in his *Historia y crítica de la literatura hispanoamericana*. Both of these books give proof of the prominence achieved by Spanish American literature in Spain, where several chairs on the subject have been created in the past twenty-five years.

Paramount among the more ambitious historiographic projects are Octavio Paz's *Los hijos del limo: Del romanticismo a la vanguardia* [*Children of the Mire*] which, like Henríquez Ureña's *Literary Currents* was the product of the Charles Eliot Norton lectures at Harvard, this time in 1972, and Emir Rodríguez Monegal's *Borzoi Anthology of Latin America Literature: From the time of Columbus to the twentieth century*, compiled by the Uruguayan critic while he was a professor at Yale. Like Franco's, the *Anthology* is fundamentally a pedagogical tool conceived to take advantage of the sudden popularity of Latin American literature in the English-speaking world. It does cover the full range of Latin American literature, including Brazil. Director of the influential magazine *Mundo Nuevo*, published in Paris during late 1960s, Rodríguez Monegal played a role similar to that of the compilers of anthologies in the nineteenth century. Like his predecessors, Rodríguez Monegal's center of operations was Paris, from which his magazine helped bring about the Boom of the Latin American novel, a movement of continental dimensions and aspirations that had a tremendous impact on the criticism of Latin American literature as a whole. The most important was to endow Latin American writers, as well as those who write about Latin American literature, with a sense of the prominence and relevance of that literature. Latin American literature is no longer seen as the poor cousin of Spanish literature, or as a mere reflection of European literatures, hopelessly out of pace with developments in the centers of culture. There is no need, in other words, to apologize for the quality of Spanish American literary works, as Anderson Imbert had done. Latin Americans now feel that their literature is one of the leading world literatures, perhaps the only one to enjoy a truly international currency. While this attitude prevails mostly among writers of narrative prose, there is a chain reaction that affects poetry, the essay, and even drama, in decreasing proportion. The last thirty years have seen four Nobel Prizes from Spanish America: Miguel Ángel Asturias (Guatemala), Pablo Neruda (Chile), Gabriel García Márquez (Colombia), and Octavio Paz (Mexico). Two poets and two novelists have attained that ultimate recognition, but many felt that Alejo Carpentier (Cuba), and above all Jorge Luis Borges (Argentina), deserved the prize, and today many clamor for Carlos Fuentes (Mexico), and Mario Vargas Llosa (Peru). Yet this is only the tip of the iceberg. Latin American

writers have won numerous prizes in the past thirty years, and their books, both in the original and in translation, have sold as never before. In addition, important literary journals have devoted countless special issues to Latin American literature or to individual Latin American writers, chairs have been founded at prestigious universities to study it. In short, because of the international character of the Boom, the history of Latin American literature could no longer be conceived as a self-enclosed development, a genealogy leading from Rómulo Gallegos to Gabriel García Márquez, or from Rubén Darío to Octavio Paz. It became evident that Latin American literature was produced at the crossroads of all the major modern literary traditions. This is reflected in the construction as well as the tone of Rodríguez Monegal's *Anthology*.

Paz's *Children of the Mire* deals only with poetry, but his formulation is capacious enough to encompass the whole of Spanish American literature. His point of departure is that modern poetry is created against modernity, meaning against the rationalist claims that issue from the Enlightenment. Yet, since, as he believes, there was no Enlightenment in the Hispanic world, romantic poetry, the foundation of modern literature, was necessarily hollow. The Romantics, Paz claims, had nothing to oppose. There is no significant Romanticism in Spanish, hence modern poetry does not really begin until *Modernismo* and the Avant-Garde. Paz's premises are refuted in this *History* in Andrew Bush's chapter on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Spanish American poetry, and books such as Flitter's furnish evidence that also raises questions about them. Be that as it may, what is indisputable is that, by denying the Romantics as precursors, Paz and other current Spanish American writers then reach further back to the Baroque as their origin. If this is an enabling fiction, a literary myth, so be it, the important matter is that at this point in Spanish American literary history, the Baroque is perceived as a more current, vibrant, and present origin than Romanticism. Work by Bush and others on the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries – a field in dire need of a reassessment that Paz really did not carry out – is likely to change that perception in the near future. Yet as a historiographic project, Paz's, like Rodríguez Monegal's, reflects the yearning of Spanish American writers for an origin as close to the beginning as possible, to recover the works of colonial writers and rewrite them from a modern perspective. Ironically, this is a very romantic kind of project, very much akin to what the European Romantics did with the Middle Ages.

A different sort of project emerged during the past thirty years, given impetus above all by the Cuban Revolution; first by its triumphs, later by the propaganda efforts of the regime in the cultural realm on a continent-wide scale. This venture was to write a social history of Spanish American literature, one that, from a Marxist perspective, would see that history as

the result of the social praxis of the elites, that is, of the groups that produced that literature. Alejandro Losada, Ana Pizarro, and others, published interesting prolegomena to this endeavor, but no history has emerged, except for scattered, and very partial efforts. The most successful among these was Angel Rama's *La ciudad letrada*, which, particularly in the modern period, establishes interesting connections between the "lettered" (enlightened) elites and the production of literature. But Rama, who did not even live to see this essay into print, had no time to develop fully what would have needed years of research. One wonders about the fate of all these projects in the wake of the collapse of Communism in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, and the general discredit of Marxism.

Perhaps, given the enormous growth of the field, it is impossible to write a history of Spanish American literature as a continuous narrative from a single methodological point of view. The embarrassment of riches brought about by extensive and intensive study of Spanish American literature has, paradoxically, made such a project impossible. It could very well also be that literary history as a narrative form is already obsolete, particularly when dealing with such a variegated phenomenon as Spanish American literature. Current methodological fashions make it seem unlikely that a history such as Arrom's or Anderson Imbert's will again be written. I, for one, do not believe that prose and poetry are chronologically compatible, and have tried a different approach when attempting a history of the Latin American narrative (*Myth and Archive*). What I observe around me as I write these pages seems to indicate that others feel the same.

In the case of the present history, our aim has been to produce, by using a patchwork of differing approaches, a kind of present-state of Latin American literary historiography.

[2]

Cultures in contact: Mesoamerica, the Andes, and the European written tradition

Rolena Adorno

The range of texts and traditions to be considered here corresponds ultimately to the interpretive responses made by native American cultures to life under colonialism. Without colonialism from Europe, there would not exist this *corpus* of cultural productions, "written down" in alphabetic script in various languages. Without the inclusion of native American voices and related subject positions (such as those taken by *mestizo* writers), there can be no full history of colonial Spanish American culture as manifest in the spoken and written word. "Cultures in contact" is thus the point of departure from which we begin this essay on indigenous American cultural expression after 1492.

Introduction: Cultures in contact

But, we,
 what now, immediately, will we say?
 Supposing that we, we are those who
 shelter the people,
 we are mothers to the people, we are
 fathers to the people,
 perchance, then, are we, here before you,
 to destroy it, the ancient law;
 the one which was greatly esteemed
 by our grandparents, our women;
 the one which they would go speaking of
 favorably,
 the one which they would go admiring,
 the lords, the speakers?

(Klor de Alva, "The Aztec-Spanish dialogues [1524]," 107-8)

These words represent one of the earliest examples of the cultural traditions to be considered here. Like most of those to be studied, this