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Edited by John Morán González

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PART I

Early Trans-American Contacts
and Conflicts

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I

RODRIGO LAZO

The Trans-American Literature of
Conquest and Exile, 1823–1885

When José María Heredia arrived off the coast of Cape Cod in 1823, his first impression was desolation. “I did not see one man, not one animal, not one insect,” he wrote in a letter to his beloved Emilia, who had remained behind in Cuba as Heredia escaped from authorities pursuing him for plotting to overthrow the Spanish colonial government.¹ Off the coast of Massachusetts, a ferocious December wind tormented the thin Heredia as he made his way to a lighthouse. The scene reminded him of Miltonic verses: the “immense solitude” leading to Satan’s throne. “They passed, and many a region dolorous, / O’er many a frozen, many a fiery Alp, / Rocks, caves, lakes, fens, bogs, dens, and shades of death, A universe of death,” Milton writes in *Paradise Lost*, as if he also knew about having to escape from a tropical island in fear for his life.² Heredia had probably read Milton in French from the 1805 translation by Jacques (L’Abbé) Delille. At the lighthouse, Heredia encountered a veteran of the War of 1812 who took pity on the shivering poet. As Heredia told it, the veteran, who was missing a leg, took the exile’s cold hand and whispered something that sounded like consolation. But the English language was incomprehensible to Heredia. And thus Heredia’s initial impression of the United States was one of “total isolation.”

Movement and migration are defining characteristics of this figure whose life and work exemplify the trans-American dimensions of nineteenth-century Latina/o literature. As Heredia traveled throughout the northeastern United States and other parts of the Americas, he developed a body of work that spoke to hemispheric perspectives, politics in his home country, and the pain of exile. As such, his poems and other writings were marked by dislocation even as they spoke about specific contexts. Heredia’s trajectory differs in important ways with the situated lives of many contemporary Latina/o subjects, who are either born in the United States or immigrated to U.S. sites. Heredia, who went to Mexico in 1825, did not remain long in the United States and cannot be tied to one location. Although he published and wrote

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important work in the United States, including some of his best-known poems, Heredia has been most commonly situated in Cuban literary history for expressing the exilic spirit of many important intellectuals from that country. As Kirsten Silva Gruesz has noted, many of the U.S. writers involved in nineteenth-century trans-American encounters defy easy categorization. “Many were exiles, expatriates, im-/emigrants, or determined cosmopolites,” she writes. “Others seem, in a way, hypernational: iconic figures rendered representative of a country, celebrated in patriotic engravings and statues now superannuated, both aesthetically and ideologically.”³ The national histories of Latin American countries have offered a conceptual home for some of these writers, although at times in their lives they moved in and out of various nations and even across the Americas. That movement complicates national classification.

Heredia’s feeling of “total isolation” on the shores of Massachusetts is the product of social, geographic, and even linguistic dislocation. Rather than view his trans-American journey as creating a new geographic space of the Americas, I want to emphasize the force of dislocation. “Trans-American” movement calls for crossings and changes that create the discomfort of feeling out of place; it is at once across America and beyond the United States, so that even as Heredia stops in U.S. sites, he is never integrated or integrates himself into the United States. Rather than invoke a hemispheric geographic space that stands in as a map for a field of writing from North to South, “trans-American” emphasizes disruption, which is in part created by sociopolitical conditions.

For those nineteenth-century figures that we claim retroactively as part of Latina/o literature, writing became a nexus for the consideration of political upheaval, governmental reorganization, economic transformations, and personal separation. Their writing, which included literary genres but just as often pamphlets and newspapers, encode disruption and tumult both at the subjective level of the speaker and in the subject matter. Most of the intellectuals who made their way to the United States from Spain and Latin America in the 1810s and early 1820s published political tracts primarily. For example, the texts published in Philadelphia by Vicente Rocafuerte, José Álvarez de Toledo, and Manuel Torres show how intellectuals deployed essays and translations to further their cause.⁴ As the nineteenth century continued, the sites of publication became more varied, and so did the socio-political upheavals affecting their communities. Some writers continued to emphasize political writing and journalistic work, and periodicals became one of the most important venues for publication. Another trajectory also emerged: the politically minded writer who turned to literary forms in the United States without extricating him or herself from the trans-American revolutionary

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changes of the time. In some cases, literary forms were imbedded in the political content of newspapers and other forms of publication.

Nineteenth-century trans-American writing is intricately bound with (and sometimes the result of) political and military conflicts, including the Latin American wars of independence, the U.S.-Mexico War, and U.S. expansionist designs in the Caribbean. From the novels of María Amparo Ruiz de Burton to the essays of José Martí, texts engage with and sometimes explicate trans-American connections and dislocations. Early in the century, some writers expressed admiration for U.S. republican forms of government and saw the potential for alliance. A notion of a hemispheric Americanism that would stand in anticolonial opposition to Europe influenced some writers; this perspective was intertwined with constitutional readings of social organization and often de-emphasized class and racial hierarchies affecting Latin American societies. As the century went on, it became clear that the United States, despite the proclamations of equality in its founding documents, would not prove an easy ally to the nation-states of Latin America. After the U.S.-Mexico War, writers increasingly saw that U.S. expansionist ideology was intertwined with depictions of populations south of the border as undemocratic and racially inferior. Filibustering expeditions to take over Cuba and Central America in the 1850s were supported not only by economic interests but also by ideological arguments.⁵ After the U.S. Civil War, projects for territorial acquisition were driven by industrial capitalism's hunger for new commodities and markets. By the time Martí was publishing his essays in the 1880s, it was clear that the aspirations for hemispheric American republican solidarity had given way to realpolitik driven by the ascendancy of the U.S. empire. Trans-American writers recognized that U.S. nationalist agendas inspired by white supremacy were at odds with notions of equality beyond U.S. borders.

These historical conditions remind us that approaching nineteenth-century writing demands putting contemporary notions of Latina/o subjectivity in dialogue with conditions encountered by writers at the level of print culture and in the sociopolitical arena. Contemporary debates about *latinidades* bring forward difference rather than point to a monolithic subjectivity, and those differences cut across national affiliations (Cuban American versus Chicana/o), racial formations, immigration and citizenship status, gender, and sexuality. Given the complex proliferation of identities in Latino America today, the hermeneutic challenge is not how to reconcile a bounded notion of identity with a historical condition in which such a notion did not circulate. Rather, the challenge is how to bring forward the textual remains of the past in a way that recognizes its contexts and considers the ways those texts generate a multiplicity of meanings. Difference emerges both in the

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past and the present. This involves working across languages, genres, print culture formations, and literary histories.

At times the desire of writers and publishers to reach readers beyond the United States meant that much of the literature appeared in periodicals. Because of their size and thinness, newspapers and other serial publications were easier to transport on ships and circulate, if necessary, clandestinely. Newspapers and other periodicals appeared from East to West in very different contexts, and they provide a view into the heterogeneity of concerns among writers and their communities. While publications put out by Cubans and Puerto Ricans provided news of importance to the Caribbean, periodicals in the West grappled with the effects of U.S. expansion on populations that had previously been part of Mexico. The periodical press supported local communities and kept an eye on events in the homeland of origin. This dual vision crossing the Americas spreads not only from the content of the articles in periodicals but also onto the language of literary texts. Newspaper pages often included poems, stories, and serialized novels, often as supplementary material to the main news and concerns. Newspapers such as *El Mensajero Semanal* (Philadelphia and New York, 1828–29), *La Verdad* (New York, 1848–60), *La Patria* (New Orleans, 1846–50), *La Voz de la América* (New York, 1865–67), and *La República* (San Francisco, 1885) were established to connect U.S. readers with Mexico, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and other places.⁶ The conditions of periodical print culture may be the most important consideration in the analysis of trans-American nineteenth-century writing.

The archival conditions of such material lead to a state of fragmentation. To work in the nineteenth-century Spanish press is to confront an incomplete archive. In some cases, repositories of those documents do not have a complete run of a newspaper and researchers may even have to settle for a single issue. A researcher may come across a reference to a writer's participation in a particular periodical only to find that the periodical is available only in a fragmentary form. The result is that nineteenth-century Latina/o writing is as much about discrete pieces and incomplete information – indeed, about epistemological stopping points – as it is about the recovery and reconstitution of print culture conditions. Given these conditions, reading may involve focus on an isolated text that raises more questions than answers.

An effect of the periodical press for readers today is that it creates sites of analysis rather than a body of literature that we can connect to particular writers. While books and collections of writing emphasize an individual author, newspapers and journals are at times difficult to place. Because many articles and poems went unsigned in the nineteenth-century periodical press, it is not always possible to connect the published material with a

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specific writer. The result for literary historical work is a tension between the production of a writing subject (the emergence of a notable writer) and the more collective production of a periodical press that sometimes speaks not only to but also for a community. The periodical press emphasizes the “collective” value of minor textual production, which in extreme case shows that “there are no possibilities for an individuated enunciation that would belong to this or that ‘master’ and that could be separated from a collective enunciation.”⁷

A handful of the writers in nineteenth-century United States, including Ruiz de Burton and Martí, have been elevated to the status of prominent literary figures. But to think of them in relation to literary distinction emphasizes the individual attainment of mastery and thus elides the lack of mastery (and the discomfort) that was created by exile and conquest at the level of entire populations. The tension between an individual writer and larger social context was a concern for Edward Said, writing about the twentieth century: “It is apparent that, to concentrate on exile as a contemporary political punishment, you must therefore map territories of experience beyond those mapped by the literature of exile itself. You must first set aside Joyce and Nabokov and think instead of the uncountable masses for whom UN agencies have been created.”⁸ This tension between, on one hand, a humanistic emphasis on individuation and, on the other hand, conditions that sought to deny identity to populations have an analogy in the historical reading of Latina/o literature in that we must simultaneously recover and contextualize the writers themselves even as the historical record shows a more collective scene of dispersal and textual fragmentation.

Part of that recovery and contextualization calls for working in at least two languages. With the exception of María Amparo Ruiz de Burton’s novels and a few sporadic publications, the majority of the poems, novels, and stories that appeared were published in Spanish and sometimes aimed at readers outside of the United States. These include the anonymous novel *Jicoténcal* (1826) as well as the collection of poems *El laúd del desterrado* (1858). The importance of Spanish means that scholars working on this nineteenth-century material must translate as a practice of reading. That is to say, translation itself becomes a form of interpretation. Because most of the materials, sometimes in bits and pieces, are not available in English, a critic must provide snapshots of the original. The choice of which texts, passages, or even sentences to bring forward in an article is a result of critical emphasis but also a reminder that the original materials are not easily accessible.

The Spanish language positions this literature and print culture between the expansion of one empire (Spain) and that of another (United States). As a language, Spanish is colonial in that it was used by the Spanish empire

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to dominate vast territories (one of the initial colonial languages of the Americas and in use in Florida, New Mexico, and California prior to the founding of the United States). But Spanish is also marginalized in that it becomes a minority language in the nineteenth-century United States. As a language of exiles, migrants, and conquered people, Spanish takes on the characteristics of what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari have associated with the “minor,” at once deterritorialized and displaced (even excluded) but also full of revolutionary potential because of its alterity. “We might as well say that minor no longer designates specific literatures but the revolutionary conditions for every literature within the heart of what is called great (or established) literature.”⁹ As such, the Spanish-language periodical press in nineteenth-century America can be considered a minor remain of a period that is often read in U.S. literary studies as belonging to the writers of the so-called American Renaissance (Whitman, Emerson) and their late-century counterparts (Twain, James). Spanish challenges English-only conceptions of U.S. literary history. The revolutionary conditions, to pick up on Deleuze and Guattari’s words, are not so much in the content of the language itself but in the materiality of the Hispanophone press, the fragmentation of its remains.

One periodical, which remains today only in partial run, provides insight into the role of literature in the periodical press. On October 3, 1829, *El Mensajero Semanal* out of Philadelphia published a front-page letter focusing on a polemic debate about the literary merits of Heredia as poet. The writer of the letter attacked the editors of *El Mensajero* for being “extremely cautious, considering that as Spanish journalists and compatriots and colleagues of the poet, it was your duty to tell us something of his merit.”¹⁰ The editorial team at *El Mensajero* included Cubans, and thus the references to Heredia’s compatriots. In response to the call to evaluate Heredia’s poetry, the editors *El Mensajero* noted that their paper did not focus primarily on literature. They continued:

El Mensajero no es otra cosa que una gaceta destinada á dar noticia de los acaecimientos políticos, y á hacer mas variada su lectura, si las circunstancias lo permiten, con los progresos mas notables de algunas artes y ciencias, ó con algunos articulos de util aplicacion á la isla de Cuba, ó finalmente con los chistes y agudezas del ingenio.”¹¹

[“The Messenger” is nothing more than a gazette intended to give accounts of political events, and we aim to reach a broader readership, if possible, by relaying the most notable accomplishments in arts and sciences, or with articles of relevance to the island of Cuba, or in the last instance with a few jokes and sharpness of wit.]

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Although it promoted Heredia's poetry, the newspaper did not position itself as a site for literary criticism, in part because of limited print space. Here the use of the Spanish *gaceta* (gazette) is important because it implied a periodical that covered commercial and governmental topics. And yet *El Mensajero's* support of the poet displayed an implicit understanding of Heredia as a writer of the Americas in contra-distinction to the European and particularly Spanish domains of literature.

The newspaper's reluctance to get involved in that type of a dispute (despite publishing Heredia's poems) shows its commitment to a cosmopolitan tenor in which political events and commercial news took precedence over artistic concerns and proto-nationalist considerations. To the assumption that they should evaluate Heredia's poetry because they share a homeland (Cuba) with the poet, the editors wrote that *El Mensajero* did not have the space to provide a thorough and informed critique of literature. Without negating a Cuban affiliation, they also resented the belief that they would praise Heredia simply because of their common island home. "Who has said that because we are Spanish journalists and compatriots and companions of the poet, we are obliged to critique his poems?"¹² The use of the term "Spanish journalists" shows the broader Hispanicism informing the way writers referred to one another. The nineteenth century had no common ethnic label such as Latino or Hispanic; regular usage in English-language publications was "Spanish" or "Spanish American."

The appearance of *El Mensajero* as part of a Hispanophone print culture context, and the fight for Latin America's future raging behind it, cannot be divorced from the publication of Heredia's collection of poems, *Poesías*, published in New York in 1825, which featured some of his best-known verses. In some selections, we see a desire for a repetition of U.S. events in other countries. In his poem "A Washington," written during a visit to Mount Vernon, Heredia connects his Romantic longing for immortality with the U.S. president:

Viva imagen de Dios sobre la tierra,
libertador, legislador y justo,
Washington inmortal, oye benigno
el débil canto de tu gloria indigno,
con que voy a ensalzar tu nombre augusto.

[Vivid image of God on earth,
liberator, legislator just,
immortal Washington, listen benevolently
to the faint, indignant song that exalts
your glory and your majestic name.]

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These lines from the opening stanza to this paean are driven by Heredia's desire for the repetition of the verses in the future. The invocation of a god-like Washington positions the president-general as a figure that carries Heredia's poetry into the future while also connecting the poetic voice to the president's "indignant" position against tyranny. Ultimately, Washington is deployed as inspiration for the countries of the southern Americas struggling to form governments after colonial rule. That type of exchange – Spanish-language poet at Mount Vernon sending verses about a U.S. president in a southern direction – showed the intricate dialogues that emerged in nineteenth-century trans-American writing.

My discussion of the important role of Hispanophone print culture to literary productions, which creates a panorama of the minor, shows the unusual place of the novels by Ruiz de Burton within Latina/o literature. The publication of *Who Would Have Thought It?* (1872) and *The Squatter and the Don* (1885) in English is an anomaly among U.S.-based nineteenth-century writers of Latin American descent. Although she was fluent in her native Spanish, Ruiz de Burton's decision to publish novels in English and her engagement with U.S. culture and politics help us situate her in several other critical frameworks, among them sentimental novels, historical romance, and fictions of Reconstruction. One effect of this commitment to the English language is that she has become almost canonical in Anglophone U.S. literary study, if by canonical we mean a frequency of inclusion in syllabi and the number of articles published about an author. Scholars who might not otherwise be inclined (or be able) to read Spanish trans-American literature can turn their attention to Ruiz de Burton.

Like Hispanophone writers from Mexico and Cuba, Ruiz de Burton contended with the role of empire in the Americas, particularly the conquest of the southwestern United States. In response to the U.S.-Mexico War, *The Squatter and the Don* offers a portrait of the challenges faced by an elite California family at risk of losing their land and calls attention to the illegal U.S. appropriation of territory previously owned by Mexicans. Together with the satirical *Who Would Have Thought It?*, the two novels raise questions about race and ethnicity in the United States and Mexico. Scholars have noted the contradictory positions of Ruiz de Burton, whose fiction and life at times reflect her upper-class status.¹³ Ruiz de Burton also adopts certain racial hierarchies and is consumed with drawing a distinction between elite white Mexicans and the indigenous populations at the periphery of societies in California and Mexico, even if she is not always successful.¹⁴

While Ruiz de Burton's fiction differs in important ways from other trans-American nineteenth-century writing, she herself does share a social position with many of the figures. Like certain light-skinned Latin American