Jun-2003

Research Note: BSC Foreign Language Department Hosts First International Symposium

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Recommended Citation
Available at: http://vc.bridgew.edu/br_rev/vol22/iss1/13

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On April 5, 2002, the Foreign Languages Department sponsored its first symposium, entitled “Hispanic Studies, Theory and Pedagogy, Fin de Millenium.” The event was co-sponsored by the English Department, the Women’s Studies Program, the Honors Program, the Philosophy Department, and the Club de Español, and made possible with the kind support of Dean Howard London, Acting Provost Laurence Richards, and Acting Chair of Foreign Languages Dr. Thomas Turner. Drs. Duilio Ayalamacedo and Leora Lev coordinated the Symposium with the help of Ms. Lisa Shaw. After opening remarks by Dean London, panelists from the University of Connecticut, Boston University, the University of Toronto, Fitchburg State College, and the Winsor School in Boston lectured on such topics as Latin American feminism and globalization, Chicano literature, medieval Iberian court and courtesan culture, and pedagogies of foreign culture and writing. Members of the BSC Foreign Languages Department responded to the panels. The audience of one hundred fifty attendees encompassed BSC faculty and students, area high school teachers, BSC alumni, and New England college instructors.

A highlight of the proceedings was the presentation of Dr. Tino Villanueva of Boston University. Dr. Villanueva is part of the Chicano Renaissance, an established Chicano poet working in both Spanish and English. His poetry, according to Rodolfo Anaya, “reclaims the identity of every Chicano who has ever sat in the back row.” His presentation was divided into two parts, the first being a brief summary of roots of contemporary Chicano (Mexican American) literature, beginning with the sixteenth-century Spanish chronicles, i.e., diaries, journals, travel reports, poems, and religious plays written by Spanish explorers and priests involved in the exploration and settlement, between 1598 and 1821, of what is today the region extending from Texas to California. Villanueva also touched on the literature written in Spanish during the so-called Mexican period during 1821 and 1848; the latter date marks the year that Mexico, after losing the U.S.-Mexican War, ceded the tract of land which today constitutes the Southwest. Villanueva’s discussion of Chicano literature encompassed the nineteenth-and twentieth-century popular form of the corrido, the Mexican ballad that is based on the Spanish romance. He then pointed to ways in which memory has been thematized in Chicano literature and discussed briefly Abelardo Delgado’s poem “From Albu to Tucson.”

The second part of Poet Villanueva’s presentation involved a reading of some of his poems concerning memory and writing. Everyone has memory, he explained, but the writer makes use of it as inspiration for works of literary art. As examples, he read two poems from his 1999 chapbook of poems, Primera causa / First Cause.

The Symposium culminated in two splendid keynote addresses. Dr. Josiah Blackmore, the first keynote speaker, came to us from the University of Toronto, where he is Associate Professor and a distinguished scholar of medieval and Renaissance Portuguese and Spanish literature and culture. He is the co-editor, with Gregory Hutcheson, of Queer Iberia: Sexualities, Cultures, and Crossings from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance; the translator and editor of The Tragic History of the Sea, which is a compilation of translations of Portuguese shipwreck narratives rendered by the British scholar C.R. Boxer; and the author of Manifest Perdition: Shipwreck Narrative and the Disruption of Empire. Dr. Blackmore’s work has received international acclaim.
from such notable figures as Juan Goytisolo, one of Spain’s premier contemporary novelists and cultural critics, Harvard and Yale University scholars, and the brilliant soprano diva and performance artist Diamanda Galas.

Dr. Blackmore’s lecture, “Moorings: Portugal and Cultural Identity in the Shadow of Africa,” was the product of his previous and continuing scholarship. In the volume *Queer Iberia*, Dr. Blackmore and co-editor Gregory Hutcheson considered the Iberian Peninsula of the Middle Ages and Renaissance as a space of cultural, linguistic, theological, geo-political, and gendered heterogeneity unique to the European continent. This book explores the richness and complexities of Iberia’s eight-century “convivencia,” or co-existence of Muslim, Jewish, and Catholic populations, which was enabled by the great Muslim empire that controlled Spain between 711 and 1492. The volume illuminates the byzantine resistances to harsh Inquisitional logic engaged in by Semitic and humanistic Christian individuals and communities after the Catholic Kings reconquered the Peninsula from the Muslims, and instituted their hegemonic regime in 1492. The book unveils Iberia’s secret histories of rebellion against the type of tyranny exemplified by the Spanish Inquisition, highlighting the brilliant cultural, artistic, and philosophical production that resulted from the heterogeneity of the multiracial, multicultural, and multiethnic legacy of the “convivencia.” Ways in which oppressed groups such as converted but still “impure” Jews and Muslims countered the Inquisitional forces of cultural homogenization and purification are freshly examined in the book.

Blackmore’s *Manifest Perdition* explores the shipwreck narratives of Portugal’s imperialist expansion in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. These narratives are related by survivors, and tell terrible tales of the hardships and disasters suffered by Portuguese explorers at sea or in the untamed “New World.” Blackmore’s innovation is to discern within these narratives “a type of counter-historiography that troubles the hegemonic vision of empire evident in the canonical accounts of colonialism.” These dramatic accounts thus question and disrupt the imperialistic hubris and nationalist affirmations articulated in the more official reports of explorers and conquistadors such as Hernán Cortés, Columbus, or Pero Vaz de Caminha.

Dr. Blackmore’s keynote address drew upon this research, as well his book in progress, *Moorings: Camões and the Invention of Africa*. He explored Portuguese writer Luís de Camões’s epic 1572 poem *Os Lusiadas*, which tells of the historic navigation of a new sea-route between Portugal and India. Dr. Blackmore examined the poem’s central figure, the monster and phantom Adamastor, who represents Africa to the Portuguese explorers braving this sea expedition. Dr. Blackmore interpreted the poetic, geographical, political, and psycho-cultural resonances of Adamastor within this epic poem as a means of exploring the complexities of Portugal’s geo-cultural relation to Africa. He pointed to the paradoxes of a Portuguese expansionist national self-image that both embraced its European origins, and also identified with and internalized the “otherness” of the African continent that it colonized. Dr. Blackmore’s presentation shed fascinating light on the complexities of Portuguese-African interrelations, Portuguese conceptions of national identity, and the cultural politics of colonization.

The second keynote address was given by Pedro Lasarte, Associate Professor of Spanish at Boston University. Dr. Lasarte’s teaching and research center on the Colonial period of Spanish-America, with special emphasis on textual criticism and cultural production of the Viceroyalty of Peru, although he has also been active in the field of Modern literature. He has lectured extensively in the United States as well as Europe and Latin America. Currently Professor Lasarte is a member of the Board of Directors of the Society for Renaissance and Baroque Hispanic Poetry and serves on the Editorial Boards of *Revista Iberoamericana* and *Colonial Latin American Review*.

Professor Lasarte’s presentation dealt with the elaboration of the colonial subject through satirical texts written in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in the Viceroyalty of Peru. Using various examples, he explained how the poets of that period criticized the political and social context in an elliptical way in order to avoid being persecuted by the powerful Inquisition.

The two keynote addresses complemented each other felicitously, resulting in a lively discussion session that concluded the stimulating events of the day.

—Leora Lev is Associate Professor and Duilio Ayalamacedo is Assistant Professor, both in the Department of Foreign Languages