

# EMERGING FROM A CLOUD: THE INTER-AMERICAN DISCURSIVE POSITION OF HISPANO-CANADIAN LITERATURE

## EMERGINDO DE UMA NUVEM: A POSIÇÃO DISCURSIVA INTER-AMERICANA DA LITERATURA HISPANO-CANADENSE

*Norman Cheadle<sup>1</sup>*

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**Resumen:** Este artículo defiende la tesis según la cual la literatura hispanocanadiense acusa diferencias cualificativas frente a la que se produce en castellano en EE.UU., examinando dos representativas antologías de cuentos escritos en español, una de cada país. La metáfora del archipiélago cultural/literario se invocará y se lo contextualizará dentro del modelo teórico de los estudios interamericanos y contra el ejercicio forjador de un canon que ha realizado la *Norton Anthology of Latino Literature* (2011). Se argumentará que la literatura hispanocanadiense, más que un mero epifenómeno del importante fenómeno latino-estadounidense, se destaca cualitativamente, en buena parte gracias a la diversa situación histórica y geocultural del Canadá en el hemisferio americano.

**Palabras clave:** Literatura hispanocanadiense; literatura hispana en EEUU; Estudios interamericanos; archipiélago hispano.

**Abstract:** This article will defend the thesis that Hispano-Canadian literature exhibits qualitative differences vis-à-vis Spanish-language literature produced in the United States, by examining two representative short-story anthologies written in Spanish, one from each country. The metaphor of the cultural/literary archipelago will be invoked and contextualized within the theoretical model of Inter-

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<sup>1</sup> Laurentian University in Sudbury, Canada; [ntheadle@laurentian.ca](mailto:ntheadle@laurentian.ca).

American Studies and against the canon-forming exercise undertaken by the *Norton Anthology of Latino Literature* (2011). The article will argue that Hispano-Canadian literature, rather than a mere epiphenomenon of the larger U.S. Latino phenomenon, is indeed qualitatively distinct, due in large part to Canada's historically and geo-culturally different situation in the American hemisphere.

**Keywords:** Hispano-Canadian literature; Latino-US literature; Inter-American Studies; Hispanic archipelago.

## Introduction

The geo-cultural map of the world is in flux. The turbulent flow of populations from south to north and from east to west, a result of the latest wave of globalization over the last few decades, has made it more difficult to accurately map cultural identity formations, trace their boundaries, conceptualize their relational matrix. Borders between nation-states still separate countries politically. Demographically, however, it is a different story. Even if international borders were seldom hermetic seals, they at least served as more or less fine-meshed sieves; now they look more like washed-out dykes. The beleaguered Mexican-U.S. border is an obvious example, its paranoid militarization a symptom of its ineffectiveness; as Edmundo Paz Soldán has put it directly, “no se puede hablar de Latinoamérica sin incluir a los Estados Unidos” (PAZ SOLDÁN, 2000, p. 19). So massive is the Hispanic presence in the tottering *Coloso del Norte* that a slogan coined by the famous champion of Chicano rights, César Chávez, helped Barack Obama win the presidential election; Chávez's “¡Sí se puede!” became Obama's “Yes we can!” Even politically, then, Fortress USA has been irremediably infiltrated and altered, a fact whose negative symptom is the hysterical persecution of Hispanic immigrants. North of the Fortress, Canada too has received a considerable flow of Hispanic immigration in recent decades, though in numbers that pale in comparison with

those in the USA, not only in absolute terms but, more significantly, in proportion to the total population.<sup>1</sup> Outside major cities such as Montreal, Toronto, Calgary, and Vancouver, the Hispanic population barely registers in Canada's national consciousness, in direct contrast with that population's imposing presence in U.S. cultural awareness. Hispanocanáda's existence can seem almost nebulous, as reflected in the title of the anthology of Hispano-Canadian short stories, *Retrato de una nube* (2008) to which we will return presently, in order to compare and contrast it with *Se habla español: Voces latinas en U.S.A.* (2000).

In response to this fluid state of global affairs, a recent book titled *Worldwide: Archipels de la mondialisation / Archipiélagos de la globalización* (ETTE and MÜLLER, 2012) has proposed the model of the archipelago as an effective conceptual metaphor for geo-cultural mapping. Etymologically meaning "archi-sea" (WESTPHAL, 2012, p. 387), the archipelago concept privileges the fluid element as opposed to the rigidity of land mass and implies a perceptual inversion: the container is no longer a continent but a body of water whose outer boundary is likewise fluid and indefinite. The islands of an archipelago, while appearing as discrete, independent formations above the sea's surface, are in fact linked by a deep geological substrate. The metaphor works quite well to conceptualize Franco-America, for example (see LÜSEBRINK, 2012); it allows one to conceive of Quebec as a large island (but also an archipelago in itself) among an expansive network of small island-enclaves scattered westward across northern Ontario and beyond, eastward through l'Acadie, various islands (in the literal sense) of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and the "French Coast" of eastern Newfoundland, and southward through New England, Louisiana, Haiti, and the French Guiana.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the islands of an archipelago are related to one another in a non-hierarchical manner; the literatures of Franco-Ontario or Acadia, for example, are not dependencies or subsets of Québécois literature, though they share a deep historical

substrate.<sup>3</sup>

Jorge Volpi has contributed to *Worldwide* with his occasional piece titled “Archipiélagos literarios. América Latina, las batallas de lo universal y lo local.” Though he does little to make the archipelagic metaphor convincing, Volpi seems to imply the existence of a literary archipelago he terms “«**narrativa hispánica de América**» (NHA), en donde *hispánica* no se refiere a la lengua del escritor (que a veces es el inglés), sino a su filiación imaginaria” (VOLPI, 2012, p. 274). Provocatively declaring that “*América Latina ya no existe*” (p. 267),<sup>4</sup> he argues that Latin American literature as such no longer exists either; instead, there is Hispanic literature in America (in the original, inclusive sense of America, one wants to assume), though it seems to be a sub-category of international market-oriented English-language literature, the “universal” of Volpi’s title having triumphed under the sign of the international market.<sup>5</sup> Volpi’s sketchy description suggests not so much a literary archipelago as a particular line of commercial literary product. Nevertheless, leaving aside his cynically blasé acceptance of the Market as the supreme matrix of the global order, Volpi’s implicit positing of a literary archipelago of Hispanic narrative points to a potentially fruitful approach to Hispano-Canadian writing in relation to the rest of the “Hispanic archipelago” of North America.

Undeveloped though it is, the notion of a Hispanic archipelago can usefully be related to two more coherent and established models. Whereas the field of *Transatlantic Studies* assumes the Castilian language as the ground of continuity between the Peninsula and Spanish America, Volpi (besides downplaying the language criterion) retains the hemispheric boundary, as do *Inter-American Studies*. The concept of a hemispheric Hispanic archipelago has the virtue of combining two theoretically valid models – the transatlantic and the hemispheric inter-American – that are apparently at cross-purposes, though not necessarily in conflict.

By contrast to the transatlantic and inter-American approaches, a third response to the hemispheric condition alluded to by Paz Soldán seems to have grown out of a national-imperial project. If one can no longer speak of Latin America without including the United States, then the continental hegemon has taken seriously Paz Soldán's corollary statement: "[y] no se puede concebir a los Estados Unidos sin necesariamente pensar en América Latina" (PAZ SOLDÁN, 2000, p. 19). To the influx of Latin America within its national territory, corporate America had already responded with an aggressive acculturating strategy by creating the Latino brand as the latest flavour of U.S. capitalist culture (see Darlene Avila's book *Latino Inc.*). Now the academic establishment has stepped up to the plate with the *Norton Anthology of Latino Literature* (2011). Having taken to heart the injunction to think about the Latin America ensconced within its territory, the academy has responded energetically. Canon-forming anthologies inevitably involve ideological power moves which often enact, retrospectively, teleological realignments; but in this case the moves are especially audacious. The criteria for inclusion, defined by Ilan Stavans in his Preface, are conveniently loose:

the editors have defined Latino literature in elastic terms, as the artistic, written manifestation, in Spanish, English, Spanglish, or any combination of these three, by an author of Hispanic ancestry who has either lived most of his or her existence in the United States *or; while having only some tangential connection to the Latino community, has helped define that community through his or her work.* (STAVANS, 2011, p. lvii; my emphasis)

Such criteria allow the editors to cast a very wide net, not only geographically but also temporally – all the way back to the New-World Spanish *cronistas*. Once caught in the net, the draw-string is gradually and subtly drawn tight. By the end of the Introduction, Latinos by definition are USian<sup>6</sup>: "They are Latin Americans. They are U.S. citizens" (STAVANS,

2011, p. lxviii).<sup>7</sup> What would the Spaniard Bartolomé de las Casas (1484-1566), “Protector de los Indios,” think of his new status as a founding figure in the literary canon of the nation of General Custer? Or El Inca Garcilaso de la Vega (1539-1616), now imported into the nation-state that made “miscegenation” a dirty word? The mediator between two defunct empires, the Incan and the Spanish, has now been pressed into service to symbolically legitimate a third in decline.

The most audacious inclusion is that of José Martí. The great theoretician of *Nuestra América*, whose worst fear was that the “monster” would devour the Antilles and more, must be rolling over in his grave at finding himself sequestered between the covers of this tome and converted into a U.S. Latino writer. Aware of their chutzpah, the editors confront the issue head-on, quoting Martí at length at the outset of the Introduction subtitled “The Search for Wholeness.” Suffice it here to point out the obvious: Martí’s quest for the wholeness of *Nuestra América* specifically *excluded* the Anglo-American monster. A symbolic “wholeness” under the sign of a factitious U.S. Latino-dom was *not* what he had in mind.

Though Jorge Volpi himself has not been claimed by the Norton Latino anthology, its discursive appropriation of the cultural capital of others, a symbolic last gasp in the empire’s losing war for hemispheric hegemony, dovetails nicely with the Mexican writer’s contention that Latin America and its literature no longer exist. “La idea de América Latina, a principios del siglo XXI, es cosmética. Una copia pirata que intenta resucitar una marca en desuso” (VOLPI, 2010, p. 269). By the rules of engagement in the Market, if the brand-name has gone bust, then all its “content” is available, up for grabs. Instead of the Latin American canon, why not recycle all that old product, re-brand it, and create the U.S. Latino canon? However, Volpi’s breezy flippancy might be sobered at the thought that, if the Russian academy were to match the American Empire’s gambit in the

game of symbolic one-upmanship, the ailing imperial power presided by Putin could use the same criteria as the Norton anthologists to claim Volpi as one of their own, since the Mexican writer put the Chernobyl disaster front and centre in his novel *No será la Tierra* (2006).

Not surprisingly, the existence of *Latinocanáda*, to cite the term coined by Hugh Hazelton in 2007, four years *before* the publication of the Norton Latino anthology, is nowhere on the horizon of the latter. Hazelton's criteria for including writers in his anthology is much stricter; they must be Latin American writers living and working in Canada (HAZELTON, 2007, p. 23). Of course, this Canadian anthologist's project is much more modest; he aims to promote dialogue between the English- and Spanish-language literatures of Canada (p. 23). The Norton move problematizes – yet again – the term “Latino” which Hazelton has used to describe Spanish American writers in Canada. A Canadian Latino may be an allowable variant on the “real thing” – i.e., an epiphenomenon of the U.S. Latino – but perhaps we should just relinquish the word, deriving as it does from the ever-problematic place name Latin America (NEWCOMB, 2012, p. 11-20), and leave it to corporate America and the U.S. academy. Instead of Latino-Canadians, we will speak of Hispano-Canadians, as do the editors of *Retrato de una nube*.

## Inter-American Studies

Y el *Sun* dice así: “Compramos a Alaska ¡sépanse de una vez! para notificar al mundo que es nuestra determinación formar una unión de todo el norte del continente con la bandera de las estrellas flotando desde los hielos hasta el istmo, y de océano a océano”. (MARTÍ, 1963, p. 59)

The traditional geo-cultural image of the hemisphere is divided by the Río Bravo into North America and “Latin” America or, for the Martí lineage of Spanish-American intellectuals: *América del Norte* and *Nuestra América*. The axis formed by these two dominant blocks, Anglo-American and Spanish-American, have been the main focus of Inter-American Studies. But both blocks tend to overshadow, and more or less subtly to assimilate, two major outlying nations – Canada in the north and Brazil in the south, the two zones of what Albert Braz, critiquing this state of affairs, has ironically termed *Outer America*. Both outliers have always chafed against the creeping assimilation implied by continentalist discourse (in the north) and Latinamericanist discourse (in the south).<sup>8</sup>

If the Mexico-U.S. border has been a dyke, now somewhat embattled, the Canada-U.S. border has been a very porous sieve. The relationship between the two North American nation-states has always been hugely lopsided. Whether or not José Martí quoted the *New York Sun*’s editorial of 1889 (in the epigraph above) with scrupulous textual accuracy, there can be little doubt that he correctly translated its bullish expression of continentalist imperialism. Canadians cannot forget for a moment that the American Empire looms over us. For the U.S.A., Canada is merely an empty territory, its northern backyard. Canadians are deluged by the products of the U.S. culture industries; U.S. citizens are scarcely aware of our existence. This simple fact does much to explain why Hispanocaná has *not* registered, as Elena Palermo has pointed out, in two recent major histories of Latin American literatures that do, however, include Hispanic literatures of the U.S.<sup>9</sup> Simply put, Hispanocaná doesn’t exist because, as the ironic narrator of Pablo Brescia’s short story “La manera correcta de cita” observes parenthetically, “(Canadá, lo sabemos, no existe)” (BRES-CIA, 2000, p. 143). And Spanish American intellectuals hardly need emigrate to the U.S.A. to learn this attitude. Alberto Manguel, who once read for Borges, recounts his master’s reaction to news of Alberto’s move north:

He had been once to Canada and he couldn't understand why I had chosen it as my home. "Canada!" he said in his hesitant, asthmatic voice. "Canada is so far away, it almost doesn't exist." (qtd. in BRAZ, 2010, p. 119; original MANGUEL, p. D9)

For the generation of Spanish American writers forced into exile by the Condor Plan dictatorships of the 1970s, Canada – possessing the merely negative virtue of *not* being the enemy empire – was a convenient place to go, but was certainly no Mecca. The late Gonzalo Millán (1947-2006), Chilean poet and real-life model for the protagonist of Leandro Urbina's novel *Cobro revertido* (1992), once remarked that, yes, he ended up in Canada but "sin ningún interés, porque me hubiera gustado irme a Europa o a México" (MILLÁN, 2007, p. 242).

The asymmetrical Canada-U.S. relationship is reflected in Inter-American Studies. Even when the field, dominantly centred on the U.S./Spanish-American axis, gets around to thinking about Canada, the relative points of view of U.S. and Canadian scholars are tellingly different. As Rosemary Sullivan once remarked apropos of a conference on the literature of western Canada and the western United States: "In this experiment in comparative cultural analysis... the American scholars were concerned with similarities and the Canadian scholars with differences" (qtd. in MORRISON, xv; original: SULLIVAN, 1979, p. 144). To illustrate this perspectival difference, let us briefly consider New Jersey scholar Monika Giacoppe's article comparing Québécois and Chicano literatures. Well researched, well argued, this polished piece of scholarship starts from a premise that strikes Canadians as patently false: "Chicano/a and Québécois literatures [are] both 'borderland' phenomena" (GIACOPPE, 2005, p. 47). Now, Québécois literature, though a minority literature in the continental context, is anything but a "borderland phenomenon," first of all because Quebec is both geographically and politically *central* to Canada, from the beginning of the Canadian nation-state up to the present. Gia-

coppe develops a series of *similarities* between the two cultures and their literatures, only getting around to their differences at the end of her article. Focusing on two Québécoise writers who, in the Quebec context, are relatively marginal (Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood and Nicole Brossard), Giacoppe compares their dual-identity struggles to those of Chicana writer and activist Gloria Anzaldúa, which is fine except that most Québécois writers are rock-solid in their cultural identity. A glance at a more representative writer, such as Jacques Poulin (whose *Volkswagen Blues* [1984] really *is* a significant inter-American novel), would suffice to confirm the point. For Giacoppe, Spanglish is analogous to *joual*, but the superficial similarity is misleading. Michel Tremblay's (bygone) heyday notwithstanding, *joual* is not the language of most Québécois literature, nor is it the language spoken by most Quebeckers. A Canadian literary critic, by contrast, would probably invert Giacoppe's methodology: after pointing toward the vaguely similar histories of Chicanos and Quebeckers in order to justify the comparative exercise at all, s/he would then proceed to draw out the differences between the two and would likely conclude – once again – that *Canadians Are Not Americans*, as historian Katherine Morrison semi-facetiously titled her book on the subject.<sup>10</sup> (Indeed, such will be my method in the following section.)

The problem of course is that Canadians *are* Americans, if one restores to this term its proper meaning. The peculiar, historically-conditioned pathology of English-Canadian mentality is exemplified in the oft-cited verses of F.R. Scott; in praise of the Mackenzie River, which flows through the Canadian Northwest Territories into Arctic Ocean, Scott writes: “a river so Canadian/ it turns its back on America” (qtd. in HULAN, 2002, p.12). We turn our backs on our Anglo-American cousins and gaze northward – to a metaphysical North – in search of a quasi-transcendental escape from our historical situation. That our porous southern border barely holds the U.S. behemoth at bay keeps us in a state of permanent anxiety about our

cultural identity; only our strategic alliance with Franco-America in the Canadian federation prevents our total absorption by the Anglo-American sea to the south.<sup>11</sup> And in turning our backs on the U.S.A., we also turn away from the rest of the Americas; as Braz and others have pointed out: “English Canadians... have never embraced the concept of ‘Americanity’ the way that Spanish Americans, Brazilians, and Québécois have” (131). On the other hand, the sociologist Victor Armony has found a considerable amount of evidence to confirm his hypothesis that “le Québec se situe culturellement entre l’Amérique du Nord – *plus précisément l’Amérique de tradition anglo-saxonne* – et l’Amérique latine” (247; my emphasis). Anglophone Canada’s self-defensive disengagement from the hemisphere is partially offset by a greater openness to the Americas on the part of francophone Canada.<sup>12</sup> All of which will surely have had consequences for the Canadian zone of the Hispanic literary archipelago.

## Two Anthologies: Hispanocanáda and Latino-U.S.A.

The following examination of two representative Spanish-language anthologies of short stories, one from Canada and the other from the U.S.A., will depart from a few basic points of contact – language, immigration, exile, violence – from which to develop their contrasting features. The anthologies’ respective subtitles illustrate one distinction already mentioned earlier. Luis Molina Lora and Julio Torres-Recinos have edited *Retrato de una nube: Primera antología del cuento **hispano canadiense*** (2008); editors Edmundo Paz Soldán and Alberto Fuguet’s *Se habla español* is subtitled ***Voces latinas en U.S.A.*** (2000) (my bolding in both cases). I shall use this subtitle as a handy tag to refer to the latter anthology.

Regarding language, one notes a much greater use of Spanglish in *Voces latinas en U.S.A.* Spanglish is celebrated deliriously in Gustavo Escanlar’s experimental text “Pequeño diccionario Spanglish ilustrado”

and humorously in Francisco Piña's "Seven veces siete," which thematizes language and the literary marketplace in the U.S. Language issues are nearly always treated with humour.<sup>13</sup> For example, the narrator-protagonist in Martín Rejtman's "El pasado" seems surprised that his sister, twenty years resident in Chicago, still speaks perfect Spanish, but he facetiously qualifies: "salvo cuando tiene que decir alguna palabra en inglés" (REJTMAN, 2000, p. 157). On the other hand, he feels fortunate to find a helpful airline attendant, "una portorriqueña que todavía habla un poco de español" (p. 157); he apparently takes it for granted that one eventually loses one's Spanish in the U.S. The theme is echoed by Junot Díaz, born in the Dominican Republic and raised in New Jersey. He jocosely mocks his own defective command of Spanish in his "Instrucciones para citas con trigueñas, negras, blancas o mulatas," where he instructs his narratee-apprentice: "Si la muchacha no es de por aquí [New Jersey] llévatela a cenar a El Cibao. Pide las cosas en español, por muy mal que lo domines. Si es latina deja que te corrija y si es negra la dejarás asombrada" (DÍAZ, 2000, p. 232). Díaz's major literary production has been in English; Volpi cites him, along with Daniel Alarcón, as one of the Hispanic-archipelago authors who write in English, and finds it amusing that both were invited *as Latin American writers* to a conference in Bogotá in 2008 (VOLPI, 2010, p. 275). Not surprisingly, both Alarcón and Díaz are included in the Norton Latino anthology.

In *Retrato de una nube*, by contrast, Spanglish is seldom employed by the Hispano-Canadian writers, except to illustrate the tragic degradation of the mother tongue. In David Rozotto's "La partida," there is nothing funny about the defective Spanish of 13-year-old Adelita, daughter of Yolanda, a recent immigrant to Canada. Adelita's telephone conversation with her grandmother in Guatemala is painful:

---*Jelou* ---Adelita contestó el teléfono con desgano pues le interrumpía el programa [televisivo] de turno.

---Bueno, hija, aquí te habla tu abuela, ¿cómo estás?

---*Jelou*, aguelita, estoy *oquey*, y du?

---Bien, hija, bien, aquí recordándolas, el otro día...

---*Oquey*! ¡MAMÁ! *IS GRANMA*!

---¿Ya saludaste a tu abuela, Adelita?

---*Yep*!

---¿Y no hablaste con ella?

---*Yep*! (ROZOTTO, 2008, p. 238)

Adelita's Spanish, along with her social being, is literally *broken*, just as her body will be broken by violence at the story's end. The italicized Spanish-phonetic orthography applied to the English words signals that they are barbarisms invading and destroying the mother tongue.

However, this does not mean that Hispano-Canadian writers are language purists. Hybrid languages, as well as the habit of code-switching, develop out of a sustained coexistence in one place of two languages. Spanglish is not a Canadian phenomenon because, unlike Spanish in the U.S. or French in North America, the language of Castile is itself, for all practical purposes, a recent immigrant in Canada. All authors gathered in *Retrato* are first-generation immigrants, but so are most of those in *Voces latinas en U.S.A.*, including the above-cited Francisco Piña. His first-person narrator is a Mexican immigrant who must come to grips not only with English but also with Spanglish – never a problem for Hispanic immigrants to Canada. Giannina Braschi, native of the U.S.'s annexed territory Puerto Rico, writes her short story “Blow Up” – the final text of *Voces latinas en U.S.A.* – from start to finish in code-switching mode in Spanish and English, symmetrically echoing the editors' prologue, which opens and closes with lively code-switching passages. The editors and their anthology do not resist or resent English; even if it's a challenge, they embrace it with gusto and claim it as their own. It is a gesture of appropriation carrying the message: we are here to stay; we *live* here.

The Hispano-Canadian anthology, considered collectively, makes no such bold claim to residency in the new country. At most, only nineteen out of the book's 53 texts have an explicit Canadian connection, sometimes very tangential. Unlike the stories of *Voces en U.S.A.*, all set in the United States, relatively few of the stories gathered in *Retrato* are actually set in Canada. Often, the Hispano-Canadian author's country of origin is both setting and subject matter, with no reference at all to Canada. "La primera taza de café," Martha Bátiz Zuk's gripping story of domestic claustrophobia and equivocal liberation, is a thoroughly Mexican story thematizing that country's gender relations. Gabriela Etcheverry's finely chiseled anecdote, "El fotografo," palpably evoking the ambience of La Serena (Chile) through the narrative perspective of a child, does so with a photographic clarity perhaps intensified by a nostalgia for the distant worlds of both childhood and la *madre patria* (the children's mother is significantly absent). Equally palpable and vivid is the ambience of El Salvador in the time of the death squads which Julio Torres-Recinos recreates in his story "Con Aurora después" (again, perhaps, with an intensity resulting from nostalgia). Significantly, for our present purposes, the plot of the same author's story "Tristán," set in San Salvador, does not refer to Canada but to his native country's perverse ties to the U.S.A. The eponymous protagonist has been damaged linguistically (his childhood in L.A. degrades his Spanish), emotionally (by violence in both L.A. and San Salvador), and at last physically (by a stray bullet emanating from a gunfight between guerrillas and the forces of repression). His crippled condition and arrested social development are direct results of that destructive hemispheric matrix, whose metaphor is Tristán's entrapment by a rapacious older woman in an abusive sexual relationship. But nothing in either of these stories betrays the fact that their author has been living in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan for a decade and a half.

In both anthologies the immigration experience is often a theme,

whose structure entails a dual setting between country of origin and North American nation. In *Voces latinas*, the experience of arrival may be difficult (“Las palmeras atrás” by Ramón Menéndez) or violent (“El silbido” by Rosina Conde) but, even if bitter-sweet, it is usually triumphant.<sup>14</sup> There is no counterpart in *Voces latinas* to *Retrato*’s “El juguete inglés” by Luis Molina Lora, whose protagonist arrives in Canada paralyzed by fear and insecurity, nor to Anita Junge-Hammersley’s “Cerrando el círculo,” recounting a jubilant return journey from Montreal back to Chile. In *Voces latinas*, the theme of return is exceptional and it spells failure, as in Alejandra Costamagna’s “Santa Fe” where a destitute family of illegal Mexican immigrants is forced back across the border. Or, in the above-cited “El pasado,” the feckless protagonist plans to return home to Argentina and the past with his tail between his legs, but manages to escape into sexual fantasy-land before getting on the plane. Rejtman’s story seems to hang ambiguously between a satire of the American Dream and a hysterical embrace of it.

It is the very strong attachment to the Spanish-American countries of origin evidenced in *Retrato de una nube*, rather than any fastidious cult of language purity, that naturally excludes Spanglish and Spanish-English code-switching. The corresponding lack of attachment to Canada, as compared with the embrace by the *voces latinas* of the U.S.A., also results in a generally amorphous sense of place. Remarking on this feature of Hispano-Canadian literature, Carol Stos invokes the title of Carmen Rodríguez’s story “El agujero negro” as emblematic of this “indistinct geography of exile” (STOS, 2013, n.p.). David Rozotto’s story is set in a small, drab city that could be anywhere in central or western Canada, from Thunder Bay to Lethbridge. The setting of many stories, such as Ramón Sepúlveda’s “La tigresa en el congreso” (in a Toronto hotel) or “La maestra de lenguas” (probably in Ottawa), seems generically urban and not particularly Canadian. Ramón de Elía’s precisely detailed evocation of Montreal in “Las

doce noches” would be vivid, were the story not so obviously a knock-off from Borges’s canonical story “El Aleph” and infused with the ambience of Leopoldo Lugones’s *Las fuerzas extrañas*; the antagonist Leopoldo seems the wandering ghost of the pathological Lugones himself. As a result, Montreal in this story has the artificiality of a set-design for a studied performance-piece that might have been subtitled “Argentines in Montreal”; and so the attachment to the mother country, in this case through its overpowering literary tradition, again prevails.<sup>15</sup>

There are significant exceptions to this general state of affairs, among them Alejandro Saravia’s stories. Saravia is exceptional among his generation of Hispano-Canadian writers for his active engagement with the country of arrival – its history and cultural geography, its languages and literatures. However, “Los osos de Port Churchill,” set in Montreal and Churchill, Manitoba, reads almost like a preparatory exercise for entry into literary Canadian citizenship. The protagonist, solitary and ensconced in his east-end Montreal apartment, studies his Canadian environment like an anthropologist, visiting a pow-wow at Kahnawake, reading, watching documentaries, all of which prepares him for a purely fantastic, conceptual adventure. The single, fleeting encounter with another human being – an elder at Kahnawake – serves a strictly informative purpose; the old man might as well be an image from a TV documentary. Otherwise, there is no social interaction, no direct engagement with Canadian social reality as it is lived.

Much richer is Saravia’s story “La orureña,” set between Orura and La Paz in Bolivia, and Toronto in Canada. The protagonist, María Isabel, makes initial contact with English-Canadian culture dancing as a 16-year old to the music The Four Lads. Decades later, she follows her children and grandchildren, who have fled Bolivia’s political violence, to Toronto, and by happenstance enters a relationship with James, one of the original

Four Lads who is now very old and afflicted with Alzheimer's disease. Depending on a Spanish-English dictionary, their real communication takes place through music, the melodies and lyrics of old songs, whose recollection partially revives James's memory, his sense of self and reality. In conversation, they begin to invent satisfying new memories by stitching together their individual souvenirs, but also to re-create Toronto: "A veces [ella] le cuenta cómo es la vasta ciudad de Toronto que ella va inventando en su nueva lengua" (277). Reciprocally, "James va haciéndose orureño a fuerza de pasear por las mismas calles, los mismos lugares" as those places are recalled and verbalized by María Isabel. Alongside the universally human pathos of the situation, there is the pathetic poignancy of a fleeting encounter between two cultures, Bolivian and English-Canadian. Unlike the ongoing, historical U.S.-Latin American relationship, this Bolivian-Canadian encounter is almost purely fortuitous. The accident of María Isabel's relationship with James, rich as it may be, seems an ephemeral instant condemned to cruel oblivion by age and disease. At the story's outset, an engineer from Toronto visiting Bolivia is considered by the local *orureños* as exotic as a Martian (272). Likewise, for James, María Isabel's otherness is so great that it can only come gradually into focus through the mediation of Leonard Bernstein's song "Maria" from the Broadway play *West Side Story* (1957). He can begin to grasp the cultural reality of his Spanish-speaking interlocutor only through a show-business characterization of a Puerto Rican girl from New York's Spanish Harlem. This is significant: English Canada's notion of the Hispanic fact in the Americas is mediated through the U.S. culture industries. (Another story exceptional for its clearly Canadian sense of place is Carmen Rodríguez's "Rompiendo el hielo" to which we will return presently.)

The editorial organization has a large bearing on the sense of place or relative lack thereof in the two respective anthologies. *Voces latinas en U.S.A.* is organized by region. Beginning in Miami, the anthology's itiner-

ary then proceeds west through the old South, the Southwest, and California; then back eastward through the mid-west, the northeastern states, ending up in New York. The national territory of Fortress America is thus effectively encircled. But the editors have cleverly keyed each region to a mainstream U.S. cultural reference – literary, cinematic or pop-musical.<sup>16</sup> In their introduction, the bi-culturally literate editors take us on an advance tour of this itinerary, referencing English and Spanish idioms specific to each region of the U.S., all in a single brilliant, paragraph (20). Taking advantage of the existing cultural map of the U.S. in order to ground the Latino voices in a sense of place, this display of cultural capital also has the effect of establishing the cultural citizenship of the *voces latinas* in the empire's centre. First they take (back) Miami, New Orleans, Austin, Los Angeles and San Francisco; then they take Chicago, Philadelphia, and finally the Big Apple. Not only the editors but many contributing authors, such as Jorge Volpi and Ilan Stavans, besides the knowledge of their own region's traditions, display an accumulated cultural capital far superior to that of the average educated U.S. citizen. Pablo Brescia's narrator-protagonist, a Latin American intellectual living in California, is quite conscious of this: "Estoy más o menos a salvo de la ignorancia exasperante de la clase media gracias a las burbujas universitarias norteamericanas" (BRESCIA, 2000, p.143); with his superior sophistication, he can mock his naïve gringo interlocutor: "Y Jason... Bueno, Jason es un tipo especial: un gringo que ama equivocadamente nuestros mitos culturales" (144). The traditional imperialist subjugation of the subaltern Latin American, as denounced in books such as Ariel Dorfman's *How to Read Donald Duck: Imperialist Ideology in the Disney Comic* (1975), has been reversed in a cultural manoeuvre recalling those of Go, the Japanese board game. Some of the stories were originally written in English and translated into Spanish, an act of linguistic/cultural anthropophagy.

Conversely, the introduction's title jokes that "El monstruo come (y

baila) salsa.” By referencing José Martí’s famous phrase about living in the belly of the beast, i.e. the U.S.A., perhaps they tempted fate.<sup>17</sup> De-clawed, de-fanged, the formerly scary monster now seems tame, a harmless Disney dragon. But the apparently tamed beast has a voracious appetite for consumption, and it keeps on growing, like the Blob. To revert to the Go-board metaphor, the Empire’s counter-move effects a similar reversal: the upstart *voces latinas* impudently re-writing the U.S. cultural map in Spanish and Spanglish get rounded up and translated into English by the Norton Latino anthology.<sup>18</sup> And not just those who have physically penetrated the Fortress: many of their forebears have been taken as well, including the symbolically all-important José Martí; in the war for discursive territory, whoever holds Martí holds the moral high ground. The new, expanded quasi-official version of the U.S. Latino canon would seem to have the board pretty well covered.<sup>19</sup>

For better or for worse, the Hispano-Canadians are on the sidelines of this hemispheric game of Go. A vaporous nebula of writers on the northern edge, they are presented in *Retrato de una nube* not according to region (or any thematic criterion) but in alphabetical order, a textual disposition that effectively leaves the anthology all but mute as a collective statement. This, in spite of lively *individual* fictions exploring the politics of language, sex, and the stakes of social and economic capital at play between North and South, such as Luis Molina Lora’s “El juguete inglés.” Nevertheless, the first-person narrator’s female antagonist, a beautiful woman twice his age who traps him as her sexual toy, could just as easily be from New York or Boston as from Montreal. In terms of content, or any concrete sense of place, there is nothing specifically Canadian in this story, unless it is the protagonist’s self-deprecating acceptance of being a loser. Though his victimization cannot be interpreted as emblematic of Hispano-Canadian narrative, it does nevertheless harmonize with a more general truth: so far, Hispano-Canadian writers, collectively, are not taking Canada, much

less taking it back.

## Two Tales of Violence

Not surprisingly, given the history of U.S. imperialism in Latin America, violence looms large in both *Retrato* and *Voces latinas*. In their great majority, Spanish Americans come north either expelled by political violence or compelled by economic violence, i.e. by structural economic differentials that both create poverty and feed the destructive fire of mimetic desire. In *Voces latinas*, Cubans flee their economically embargoed island for the garish mirage of Miami (in “Las palmeras atrás” by Ronaldo Menéndez); a Colombian couple attracted like moths to the bright lights arrive in New York only to fall precipitously into hell (in “Micos en el polo”). Ultimately, political violence and economic compulsion/seduction form a continuum; René Girard has built an entire theoretical edifice on the relationship between mimetic desire and violence, rivalry and sacrifice. But the theme of deceitful seduction is not prominent in *Retrato*; drab Canada just isn’t that attractive. Political and social violence, on the other hand, is present like a *basso continuo* in the Hispano-Canadian anthology, either as narrative events, their consequences, or their resonance in reflective memory, as Luis Molina Lora observes in his introduction (MOLINA LORA and TORRES-RECINOS, p. 21).

Violence in “La partida” by David Rozotto arrives, as it were, from a distance. It is not the immediate violence that permeates daily life in the U.S.A., which in *Voces latinas* elicits this comment from the protagonist of “Todas las mujeres son galgos” by Sergio Galarza, as he thinks about how easily he could get away with sexually abusing the girl sitting next to him on a Greyhound: “[Yo] podía abusarla, con la seguridad que nadie saldría en su defensa. Porque en este país de locos nadie es más importante que uno mismo, y tienes que caminar cuidándose de las balas perdidas”

(GALARZA, 2000, p. 74). By contrast, the adolescent Adelita, estranged from her mother in a safe and boring Canadian town, is not caught by a stray bullet, not even metaphorically. She is taken down anonymously, her body “brutalmente cercenado” (241), and overtaken by a violence that she herself unconsciously courts in her adolescent rebellion. The tragic irony is that Yolanda tried to protect Adelita from exactly that kind of violence, which was endemic in the Guatemala of the 1970s and 80s. Answering her daughter’s question as to why they have to leave Guatemala, Yolanda answers:

La vida aquí no tiene mucho valor, tú misma preguntas sobre todas esas muertes de las que hablan los noticieros en la tele o la radio. ¿Recuerdas lo que te contesté cuando me preguntaste lo que quiere decir violación? Pues de todas esas cosas es que quiero separarte, llevarte tan lejos de aquí que no pueden tocarte. (235)

Canada means one thing to Yolanda: a place that is as far away as possible from violence. Ignoring the *abuela*’s advice, Yolanda makes a fatal mistake – inadvertently committing violence herself – by tearing her pubescent daughter away from the cultural matrix that nurtures her. Once in Canada, their paths fatally separate. Adelita absorbs English quickly; Yolanda finds “aquel idioma infernal” impossible. Though Yolanda herself is treated well enough by the Canadian authorities’ services for immigrants, she has suffered a social displacement from the middle class (she was a successful school teacher in Guatemala) to the economic condition of a lumpen; much worse, she is now an outsider unmoored from the social web that once sustained her, unable to guide her daughter in the new circumstances. Adelita is subjected to the ubiquitous violence spread through the mediatized North American culture industries that prey on youth, aided by those pressurized incubators of violence that Canadian public high schools have become. Finally, Yolanda learns of her daughter’s cruel end through an image on her television screen – i.e., at a mediatized distance.

Her worst nightmare has followed her from Guatemala to Canada.

A comparison with another tale of violence, this one from *Voces latinas en U.S.A.*, will be instructive. If the central image of “La partida” – resonating with the title – comes from the *abuela*’s prophetic dream of a lightning bolt that cleaves Adelita, one of the two central images of Celso Santajuliana’s “American Dream” comes from the protagonist’s recurring nightmare. He dreams that his Chicano father, a poor agricultural labourer in Texas and other border states, is holding aloft the U.S. flag; he plunges the flagpole into the body of the dreaming boy and then into the U.S. soil that will never accept him. Still dreaming, the boy then looks down from the sky to see himself below with the U.S. flag impaled in his heart. The second, complementary image comes out when his *abuela* Dolores tells him that her son, the boy’s father, will never be at ease in America (the U.S.A.) because when he was born she buried his umbilical cord on the Mexican side of the border. The father, whose dwarfish stature reflects his condition of an embittered, angry, defeated man, is at once tied by a fatal curse to Mexico (the buried umbilical cord) and fervently devoted to the imperial U.S.A: “[E]l enano fue el profeta de un dios egoísta que jamás lo recompensó” (204). Worshipping the selfish god, or god of selfishness, and taking out his frustration through acts of violence against his family, the father is caught in a self-defeating sadomasochism which is fatally perpetuated in his son who, upon becoming a father himself, is again plagued by the nightmare, except he himself is now carrying the flag.

The metaphors of the story clearly figure the Mexico-U.S. relationship through the lens of a strain of fatalism at least as old as Tenochtitlan and which Porfirio Díaz, the self-hating *mestizo* and servant of foreign capital, distilled in his famous aphorism.<sup>20</sup> It is this inextricable, violent relationship that for two centuries has festered at the hemisphere’s core and which “American Dream” outlines with acute clarity. A hemispheric

political reading of “La partida,” by contrast, seems diffuse, veiled by the mists of distance and mutual ignorance. Yolanda knows nothing of Canada except that it is very far away; she seems to believe, mistakenly, that nothing connects the two countries, separated as they are by the enormous combined landmass of the U.S. and Mexico. Likewise, Canadians – English-Canadians especially – are in general quite ignorant of Guatemala and of the fact that Canadian mining companies, in the past and present, have intervened there (and many other countries in Latin America and elsewhere) in a destructive and predatory fashion, often in collusion with corrupt and even genocidal dictators. The violence that seems to fall like a lightning bolt out of the blue to destroy Adelita may not have a direct author, the angry god of selfishness figured in “American Dream,” but neither does it come out of nowhere. Inheriting its exploitive role from British-colonial enterprise, English-Canadian capitalism has become a junior partner of the U.S. empire. Less arrogant but sneakier than the chest-thumping imperial god of selfishness, Canadian capital interests have been able to operate in that god’s shadow.

## Two tales of non-violence

Another image of English Canada emerges from Carmen Rodríguez’s story “Rompiendo el hielo,” the majoritarian Canada of ordinary people who live far from the boardrooms of banks or big oil and mining corporations. Its Hispano-Canadian specificity can be appreciated by reading it against the foil of the Chicano story “Esperando en el Lost and Found.” Its author, Santiago Vaquera-Vásquez, is the only one included in *Voces latinas* who was born in the U.S.A. (in northern California). His fluently bilingual protagonist and first-person narrator expresses himself in excellent Spanish and never indulges in Spanglish; the English words sprinkled throughout his discourse are there for literary reasons, either

realism or literary efficacy. The metaphorical possibilities of the English phrase in the title, “lost and found” – which has no neat formulaic equivalent in Spanish – reflect the thematic core of the story. The protagonist, like the author, gets a doctoral degree in Spanish American literature at the University of Santa Barbara. Dumped by his girlfriend, he then leaves for Texas as one would go into exile – with trepidation: “Hay puros cowboys ahí. Puro ranchero. Puro redneck” (82). In this native Californian, there is no evidence of enthusiasm for the mythical Aztlán nation. Lonely and lost, he meets Monica in the Spanish language class he teaches at the university in Austin. A girl of Venezuelan background, Monica too wanders as though lost, with “un aire extraño, algo así como tristeza, algo así como que está extraviada” (84). More than a story of love lost and potentially found again, the title’s metaphor resonates on other levels. Monica had lost her Spanish along with the accent in her first name. Though clearly not an economic casualty of the North American oil industry in her parents’ native country, she does appear to be a cultural casualty, perhaps of the “American” schools established there by the oil industry for their local managerial employees. By re-learning Spanish, she now seems on the verge of recuperating her lost cultural past. On the historical level, without invoking the Aztlán myth, the protagonist and Monica seem to be recuperating for civilization the lost territory of Tejas, invaded by the progenitors of the redneck state in the early nineteenth century, presaging the loss of much more Mexican territory in the war of 1845. Implied is not vengeful vindication, nor a stridently ideological discourse demanding justice, but rather the possibility of a peaceful *modus vivendi* between the long-established Spanish-American Chicanos with Anglo-America, if only in the island-like city of Austin, whose ambience is vividly evoked. The protagonist’s Chicano colleague and buddy, Arturo, has reacted to the prohibition of Anglo-American culture against physical contact by going to the other extreme and becoming predatory himself, insatiably seducing

his Anglo-American students. The protagonist, by contrast, refuses that vindictive response to alienation.

It is this story's option for gentleness, its gesturing toward intercultural *convivencia* that links it thematically to the Hispano-Canadian story "Rompiendo el hielo." In the Chicano story, that *convivencia* is still at the minimal level of respectful love between a woman and a man – Alain Badiou has called love "communism in its minimal state" (BADIOU and TRUONG, 2012, p. 86) – which promises an integrated, bicultural living-together. In Carmen Rodríguez's story, the characters are feeling their way towards a *convivencia* that is more complex, not bicultural but multicultural. Three women who have immigrated from elsewhere meet at the Britannia hockey rink in east-end Vancouver, the traditional working-class zone of the city. They are Luzia, a Portuguese mother originally from the Azores; *Signora* Carmella, an Italian grandmother; and the first-person narrator, Sylvia, a progressive activist originally from Chile, like the story's author. A crisis arises when Luzia's sixteen-year old daughter rebels against her mother's old-world values and leaves home with her black boyfriend. This classic clash of values – a staple theme of Canadian immigration stories in the twentieth century – is faced by the three women bound by a non-ideological feminine solidarity.

There are two aspects of this story that make it powerful. First of all, its lack of triumphalism, even though its denouement promises the overcoming of racism to attain multicultural living-together. Sylvia, a middle-class psychologist and feminist, is thrown into as much confusion as the working-class women steeped in the solid values of the "Latin" Mediterranean, along with their component of irrational prejudice. There is no implicit triumph of politically-correct ideology; instead there is primary sense of humanity and community-building solidarity. It is a story that connects with community values that most Canadian readers will recog-

nize and affirm.

However, the story does more than simply reaffirm what at some level already exists Vancouver's East End, an old bedrock of British working-class culture and its transplanted values. It brings a new perspective that contributes to the ongoing development of Canadian life. It is refreshing to see the typically Canadian sport defamiliarized through Sylvia's eyes as she watches a Peewee hockey match: "los pequeñitos ... disfrazados de astronautas" (RODRÍGUEZ, 2008, p. 220). More shocking for native Canadians is to come upon the National Hockey League translated as "la Liga Profesional Norteamericana" (221). We unconsciously think of the NHL as the *Canadian* National Hockey League: hockey is *our* game. The power of myth is such that we overlook the obvious fact that, even though the organization was founded in the early twentieth century in Montreal – home of the illustrious *Canadiens de Montréal* – it has been since 1924 a bi-national league; now three-quarters of its teams are based in the United States. The immigrant Canadian's perspective reminds us that we are North American, even though *Signora Carmella* absorbs and makes her own the specifically *Canadian* working-class dream of seeing her grandson triumph some day in the NHL.

Luzia's hockey-playing little boy is named Américo, a circumstance that reminds us even more forcefully of our American condition. Throughout the Americas, from Argentina to Canada, migrants leaving the Mediterranean have been naming their sons Américo, invoking the magic of the name to ensure their progeny's successful installation in *América*.<sup>21</sup> For Luzia, Canada *is* America, or at least one zone of it. Luzia reminds us of what we forget. Their European origin distinguishes Luzia and *Signora Carmella* from the Chilean-born Sylvia as much as their difference in class and education, though this distinction is not underlined in the Rodríguez text. Sylvia has not migrated across an ocean to arrive in Vancouver; she

has moved north on the Pacific coast, displaced her position along the unbroken line of a continental continuum, and brought another American perspective to Canada.

## Conclusion

The value in Jorge Volpi's image of an American archipelago of Hispanic literature lies in its projection of a loosely defined whole, an internally diversified quasi-unity whose boundaries of containment are fluid. The many national and regional literatures of Spanish America are neither parts of a continuous, homogeneous entity called Latin American literature, nor are they isolated literary entities with no connection to one another. This much was already clear. What is new is that the archipelagic concept permits one to conceive of the Hispanic literary archipelago extending well beyond its traditional continental territory – that which was formerly colonized by the Spanish empire – and much further north into territories colonized by the French and British and finally the U.S. empires. But the cultural geography of these contiguous territories varies greatly. Staying with the archipelagic metaphor, one can say that in travelling north through the borderlands one experiences important cultural sea-changes, porous though the Mexico-U.S. and the U.S.-Canada borders may be. The northern zones of the Hispanic archipelago superimpose themselves on the existing cultural archipelagos and, in so doing, enter into a process of transculturation with their idiosyncratic, island-like shapes.

No denizen of the U.S.A. was ever perplexed by Northrop Frye's famous question: "Where is here?" Likewise, even the new waves of Hispanic migrants into the Colossus of the North have no doubt about where they are arriving: they are installing themselves in the heartland of the empire. Consequently, the U.S. Latino anthology *Se habla español: Voces latinas en U.S.A.* is able to perform and sketch out a cultural map of

the Hispanic literary archipelago in that country. The differences between Hispanic narrative produced in discrete though related “islands” – Miami, Austin, Chicago, the old Novo-Hispanic cities of the California coast, etc. – come into view, thanks to the anthology.

By contrast, the anthology *Retrato de una nube: Primera antología del cuento hispano canadiense* [my bolding] offers what its title literally promises: a *first* sketch of the nebulous cloud of the Hispanic narrative presence in Canada. Even the decision to deliberately separate the terms *hispano* and *canadiense* (rather than write *hispanocanadiense*) is eloquent of an as-yet missing sense of connectedness between these Spanish American writers and their Canadian context. Hispano writers in Canada, consciously or unconsciously, are still struggling with Frye’s existential question. In general, their only answer so far to the query “Where is here?” is “Very far away.” Hispano-Canadian literature, powerful exceptions such as Carmen Rodríguez and Alejandro Saravia notwithstanding, still seems close to ground zero of its own self-mapping.

And yet, this sense of disorientation is in fact entirely consistent with English-Canadian historical experience; it has only been quite recently, in the last few decades, that English Canada has begun imaginatively to form an answer. Noah Richler’s anthology *This is My Country, What’s Yours?: A Literary Atlas of Canada* does for English Canadians in 2006 what Edmundo Soldán Paz and Alberto Fuguet could do for Latinos in the U.S.A. already in 2000. At end of his mapping exercise, Richler finds himself still echoing Frye’s question:

What exactly is this place called Canada? Does it even exist? *How?*... As Canadians, we love our country, but we do not describe ourselves as “patriots” much. We understand more than the citizens of almost any other country in the world just how tenuous is the very idea of the modern nation-state. We have learned the absurdity of nationhood from the land and from political experience.

(RICHLER, 2006, p. 455-56)

Every nation-state, strictly speaking, is a fiction, but Canadians are acutely aware of the fictional nature of ours. If those of us who were born and raised here are still wondering if Canada really exists, there can be little wonder that recently arrived Hispano-Canadians feel what Borges verbalized.

Richler's literary map of Canada, that tenuous fiction, can be called archipelagic, as a glance at its table of contents confirms; beginning with a chapter on "The Virtues of Being Nowhere," it hopscoches from one literary "island" to another across the vast expanse of Canadian territory. The Hispano-Canadian literary archipelago is only beginning to emerge, and it does not appear to have calqued the existing archipelagos of Canadian literature written in French and English – notwithstanding the exploratory work of the precocious geocultural navigator Alejandro Saravia, who has indeed explored those Canadian literary archipelagos (CHEADLE, 2011). The collective Hispano-Canadian literary nebula is only beginning to condense into discrete island-forms.

The most visible of these forms emerging from *Retrato de una nube* coheres around the island of Montreal, that point of confluence of historical currents, its shores washed by the jetsam of successive geopolitical vectors, both imperial-colonial (French, British, Anglo-American) and national (Canadian, Québécois). Not surprisingly, the island of Montreal has been especially fertile for literatures in both French and English, before Hispanic writing took root there. Writing in 1994 about the literature of "Quebec Hispánico," Hugh Hazelton noted five Spanish-language presses operating in the Montreal area. A decade later, he mentions the Ottawa-Montreal-Toronto triangle of Hispano-Canadian writing (HAZELTON, 2007, p. 8), but Montreal appears as the most conspicuous of its vertices. From Montreal came the first important Hispano-Canadian novel, José

Leandro Urbina's *Cobro revertido* (1992), as well as strong novels in French by Mauricio Segura, whose *Côte des nègres* (1998) is set in Montreal; its sequel *Eucalyptus* (2010), protagonized by the same Chileno-Québécois character, takes place in Chile. Whether one conceives of Hispano-Montreal as part of Quebec or as part of a trans-provincial formation, it stands out clearly as an important island of the Hispano-Canadian narrative archipelago.

The second most visible topographical feature emerging from *Retrato de una nube* is Ottawa. Most of the anthologized writers are based either in Ottawa or Montreal, both of which are bilingual (French-English) cities; the much larger city of Toronto remains relatively invisible in this collection's snapshot of the Hispano-Canadian narrative archipelago. Other islets are scattered from Fredericton (in New Brunswick) in the east to Vancouver on the west coast – an atomized nebula whose collective work does not yet adumbrate any cartographical design.

The concentration of Hispano-Canadian writing in the bilingual Montreal-Ottawa axis is surely significant. Ilan Stavans can confidently state that U.S. Latino writing evidences a “connection to two different intellectual mores, the Anglo and the Hispanic” (STAVANS, 2011, p. liii). In Canada, there is a three-way connection, with a tendency to open to further connections. Camila Reimers says of herself: “He sido influenciada no solamente por la cultura francesa e inglesa, sino también por los nativos canadienses y por los inmigrantes de diferentes países del mundo” (MOLINA LORA and TORRES-RECINOS, 2008, p. 194).

As a result of this encounter with bilingual, multicultural Canada – and in spite of its dispersion across a continental sea from Fredericton to Vancouver – Hispano-Canadian writing presents a recognizably distinct whole, rather than a spill-over of U.S. Latino literature. From the comparison of *Voces latinas en U.S.A.* and *Retrato de una nube*, a contrasting

thematics comes into view. Instead of a triumphant (or hysterical or ironic) embrace of the United States, one finds a sense of bemusement and distance in Canada; in lieu of a clear sense of place, disorientation; rather than straightforward biculturalism (resulting in Spanglish), a tentative negotiation with complex multiculturalism (while conserving Spanish). Perhaps, after all, we should thank the editors of the Norton Latino anthology, with its “search for wholeness,” for respecting the Canadian cultural border.

The future of Hispano-Canadian literature is as uncertain as that of the Spanish language in this country. Stephen Henighan has observed that “[t]he future of writing on Hispanic topics seems to rest with the children of immigrants, who write in French or English” (HENIGHAN, 2010, p. 292n). The future of U.S. Latino literature will be in Spanglish and English, as much as in Spanish – but not in French. Conversely, Spanglish does not seem likely to have a literary future in Canada. Pondering the Chicano-inspired “borderland” ideology of Argentine-Canadian Guillermo Verdecchia, Henighan wondered speculatively “[w]hether such a vision [as Verdecchia’s] presages the wholesale absorption of Anglophone Latin American-Canadian literature into US Latino culture,” concluding that “it is too early to say” (p. 299n). The work of Carmen Aguirre, for example, whose novelized autobiography *Something Fierce* (2011) has made an international splash, could conceivably gravitate into the U.S. Latino sphere – and the Chilena-Vancouverite’s recent self-confessed seduction by Hollywood glitz may augur that future.<sup>22</sup> But Mauricio Segura’s French-language Hispanic novels are much less likely to fall into some future expanded edition of the Norton Latino anthology. Just as the precarious artifact of the Canadian nation-state perennially risks being sundered, so may the Hispano-Canadian narrative of the future. The boundaries are fluid, the oceanic currents turbulent, the cloud shape-shifting.

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(Endnotes)

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Hispanics are about 1.5% of the Canadian population, as opposed to at least 13% in the U.S. (HENIGHAN, 2010, p. 288).
- <sup>2</sup> "[L]a métaphore des territoires francophones noyés dans un océan anglophone fait partie de l'autoreprésentation des minorités francophones en Amérique du Nord depuis le début du XXe siècle," the metaphor having been coined in a speech made in 1912 by Quebec politician Raoul Dandurand (LÜSEBRINK, 2012, p. 279). The French-speaking "island(s) in a continental sea of English" has been a stock image ever since.
- <sup>3</sup> The Franco-Ontarian and Québécois literatures, for example, grow from a common

French-Canadian trunk. And yet, cultural differentiation between Upper French Canada (now Quebec) and the Detroit area, may have begun centuries ago, as suggested by Marcel Bénéteau's exhaustive research into stylistic differences in the French-Canadian folksong (HOTTE and MELANÇON, 2010, p. 28).

- <sup>4</sup> The idea isn't new. In the 1960s Borges had already declared that "América Latina no existe" (JUSTO, 1999, p. 185). In 2000, the Argentine Pablo Brescia sardonically echoes his countryman: "soy uno de esos autodenominados intelectuales latinoamericanos (Latinoamérica, esa ficción)," adding in a second parenthesis "(Canadá, lo sabemos, no existe" (BRESCIA, 2000, p. 141) to round out his Borgesian lesson in the cultural geography of the Americas.
- <sup>5</sup> "El siglo XXI señala el fin de la vieja y amarga polémica entre literatura nacional y universal que azotó a *América Latina* durante dos centurias. Pero con la globalización no ganaron los cosmopolitas, sino el mercado internacional" (VOLPI, 2011, p. 274).
- <sup>6</sup> The neologism "USian," adjectival form of the abbreviation U.S., is used by David Leahy in his polemical article "Counter-Worlding *A/américanité*" (2010). Anglophone Canadians are in a terminological quandary when it comes to referring the inhabitants of the United States, whom we habitually misname "Americans" in common speech. The term "Anglo-American" doesn't really work either, since *stricto sensu* English-Canadians, too, are Anglo-Americans. However, I'll use the unflattering word "USian" as sparingly as possible.
- <sup>7</sup> To be fair, the complete passage nuances this straightforward definition: "Many Latinos value their divided selves, which allow them to exist in multiple states of being at the same time. They are Latin Americans. They are U.S. citizens. They identify by their individual national backgrounds. *More than anything else, they are their own creations*, whether they struggle with or celebrate their complex identities" (lviii; my emphasis). Many, not necessarily all, Latinos are U.S. citizens; in cases where the category of Latino has been forced upon someone like José Martí, quite literally over his dead body, an honorary green card is issued. Inasmuch as they are Latin Americans, they identify with their nation of origin. But "more than anything else," as USians, they are self-creations. Invoked here is the myth of the U.S. as the promised land of individual self-fulfilment, the place where personal fantasies can be realized. A further clarification: the Introduction is not signed; one assumes that it has been authored by the rest of the team of anthologists, who are Edna Acosta-Belén, Harold Augenbraum, María Herrera-Sobek, Rolando Hinojosa, and Gustavo Pérez Firmat.
- <sup>8</sup> See Newcomb's chapter "The Problem: Brazil as *Necessarily Problematic*" (NEWCOMB, 2012, p. 20-24). The present discussion will bracket the Luso-American archipelago, i.e. Brazil and its emigrants to other parts of the Americas.
- <sup>9</sup> The two works are *The Cambridge History of Latin America Literature* (1996, 2006) and *Literary Cultures of Latin American Literature: A Comparative History* (2004) (PALMERA, 2011, p. 66).
- <sup>10</sup> Up until the war, writes Morrison, "[t]he Loyalists were Americans who still hoped to reunite the [British] empire, a hope that was dashed with the 1814 Treaty of Ghent. On the other hand, they had escaped capture and annexation, and could proudly

claim that they were still British, living in an outpost of the empire. Since that time Canadians have had a secondary identity; they became 'not Americans,' a myth that lingers" (MORRISON, 2003, p. 7).

- <sup>11</sup> The Canadian nationalist and "Red Tory" George Grant wrote in 1965: "The keystone of the Canadian nation is the French fact; the slightest knowledge of history makes this platitudinous. English-speaking Canadians who desire the survival of their nation have to co-operate with those who seek the continuance of the Franco-American civilization" (GRANT, 2005, p. 20-21).
- <sup>12</sup> Quebeckers, for example, like to consider Jack Kerouac as a native son; his beat classic *On the Road* (1957) anticipates not only Jacques Poulin's *Volkswagen Blues* (1984) but also, in Franco-Ontario, Jean-Marc Dalpé's award-winning play *Le Chien* (1987).
- <sup>13</sup> The exception is "American Dream," in which a self-hating Mexican-immigrant father prohibits his son from speaking Spanish (SANTAJULIANA, Celso, 2000).
- <sup>14</sup> The exception is Jorge Franco Ramos's "Micos en el polo" in which the protagonist has been tricked into emigrating from Colombia to New York by his ambitious girlfriend.
- <sup>15</sup> It is noteworthy that none of the writers appropriated for the Norton Latino anthology comes from Argentina, though Borges, canonized in the pages of *The New Yorker* in the 1960s, could at least have been a candidate. Francisco Piña's story "Seven veces siete" facetiously makes the case that Carlos Fuentes and Borges should be considered Chicano writers (PAZ SOLDÁN and FUGUET, 2000, p. 172).
- <sup>16</sup> In order of appearance they are: **Welcome to Miami** (tag-line in Will Smith's rap song "Miami" that celebrates partying with the rich and the cool: "Hundred thousand dollar cars, everybody got 'em / Ain't no surprise to see in the club Sly Stallone"; **Southern Comfort** (a 1981 Hollywood action film named after the whisky); **South by Southwest** (a 1997 TV movie whose title plays off Hitchcock's *North by Northwest* [1959]); **California Dreamin'** (the famous 1965 pop song by The Mamas and the Papas); **Central Standard Time** (this reference is more obscure; it could be the folk duo so named from eastern Iowa); **Look Eastward, Angel** (the eastward facing angel that supposedly inspired Thomas Wolfe's famous novel *Look Homeward, Angel* [1929]); **New York, New York** (doubly famous, first as the song title by Leonard Bernstein in the 1944 musical *On the Town*, and then as the theme song in Martin Scorsese's 1977 homonymous movie).
- <sup>17</sup> "Viví en el mostro, y le conozco las entrañas." The phrase serves Carlos A. Jáuregui as the epigraph to his chapter titled "José Martí y el miedo a ser comido del latinoamericanismo finisecular" (JÁUREGUI, 2008, p. 313).
- <sup>18</sup> I refer here to Latino writing about the U.S.A. as a category, not to specific writers. Only three of the writers included in *Voces latinas* are also in the Norton Latino anthology: Giannina Brashi, Junot Díaz, and Ilan Stavans.
- <sup>19</sup> The majority of the writers anthologized by the Norton tome are/were either natives of, or have/had ancestry in, the countries of Mexico (82 authors), Puerto Rico (45), and Cuba (37). As Martí feared, the Caribbean theatre has thus been well occupied.

The unmentioned antagonist in the discursive war is of course the Cuba/Venezuela axis, i.e. that more recent “quest for wholeness” under the sign of Hugo Chávez’s *bolivarismo*.

<sup>20</sup> “Pobre México, tan lejos de Dios y tan cerca de los Estados Unidos.”

<sup>21</sup> “En effect, c’est une habitude très répandue, parmi les familles italiennes habitant l’Amérique, que celle de donner à leurs enfants au prénom rappelant le lieu de leur naissance; et c’est ainsi qu’*Américo* est devenu un prénom « géographique », par un retour inattendu des choses” (DEVOTO, 1964, p. 284).

<sup>22</sup> Carmen Aguirre’s one-woman play *Blue Box*, presented at the festival “Panamerican Routes / Rutas panamericanas” in Toronto (May 27, 2012), recounts a love affair with a Hollywood TV star. In the autobiographical *Something Fierce*, during the return trip from Vancouver to Chile, a stopover in LAX airport (Los Angeles), where she is “surrounded by the sound of Mexican Spanish,” reveals to her for the first time Latino U.S.A., after five years of relative isolation in Vancouver. When an elderly Chicana vendor touches her cheek and speaks to her in Spanish, the protagonist notes: “She’d recognized herself in me, and somehow I understood that. For the first time in five years, I thought maybe I belonged somewhere” (AGUIRRE, 2011, p. 2). The feeling was ephemeral, but perhaps prophetic nonetheless.

