

## Editor's Note

I remember that, as a first-year graduate student at Cornell, a professor introduced the class to *Problems in Aesthetics*, edited by Morris Weitz. While I am quite certain that very few, if any, scholars currently pay attention to this collection of essays, back then it was presented to us as an indispensable anthology, insofar as it contained many of the fundamental problems of literature. The book, which was divided into five parts, highlighted issues such as “What is Art?,” “Some Basic Concepts and Problems,” “The Arts,” “Tragedy and the Problem of Genres,” and “The Problem of Response to Art.” The topics were broad and reflected a variety of artistic forms like architecture, dance, film, painting, music, and so on, though our main focus was literature. The class, made up of three entering students and the professor, discussed the problems of aesthetics and beauty, the distinction between form and content, art for art’s sake, the meaning of a poem, among others. While most of the essays became relevant only for class discussions, and are stored in the most remote corners of my recollections, there were some that have been useful in my career. For example, Wimsatt and Beardsley’s “The Intentional Fallacy” marked my approach to reading and still helps guide my students when discussing literature.

As I continued with my studies, I was exposed to other forms of reading, in particular to the French Schools of Literary Criticism, promoted by renowned scholars—mainly from Yale, Hopkins, and Cornell—and works featured in the pages of the Department of Romance Studies’ celebrated journal, *Diacritics*. Like other graduate students before me, I was immersed in Russian Formalism, Saussurian linguistics, Structuralism, Semiology, and Post-Structuralism. As we read Barthes, Foucault, Derrida, Girard, Freud, Nietzsche, among many others, students and faculty began to resemble a Greek chorus, as we imitated one another and spoke and gestured in the same manner. However, there were a few mavericks who did not follow the current. I recall one in particular: a young, dynamic, and bright professor of Comparative Literature, who offered a course on Marxism, in which we read the fundamental works by Marx and other relevant Marxist scholars. The course began in the traditional manner, in a classroom setting, with students and professor gathered around a conference table. But as the political climate changed, both on and off campus, so did the course. The professor decided that the classroom location was not conducive to the study of Marxism and opted for a less restrictive environment. He invited us to his apartment where we continued our readings and discussions in his living room, sitting on the furniture and floor from around ten or eleven o’clock in the evening until the wee hours of the morning. It was not unusual for the class to finish so late, or early, that some of us went out to watch the sun rise.

In that same semester, the department sponsored a conference on criticism which all of the major figures attended, including Erich Segal, who had recently published his *Love Story*. The rumors were rampant. Some accused him of not being a serious scholar, since he had written a popular novel. Others whispered that the comments had more to do with his financial success, affording him to arrive in his own jet. I recall sitting in the audience, listening to talks about the importance of theory and the theory of theory without giving any consideration to the text. There was one professor in particular from Hopkins who was known for his theoretical insights. He wore a denim suit, which separated him from the rest of the participants; he dressed in the traditional attire, with a suit and tie, but he did so in a manner that undermined and even challenged those who represented the more “established” authorities. His topic was contemporary criticism, and he made references to Hegel, Derrida, and Marx. The talk was followed by the usual question and answer period. After listening attentively to the speaker, I was compelled to ask a question. I should state here that questions could be as important or, at times, more important than the answer. So I asked the question in the same way members of the faculty did, that is, starting with a prolonged commentary that expressed the central idea in a leading and convoluted manner, ending it with an inflection that indicated to the listener that I had arrived at the question mark. Of course, these types of questions are meant to challenge the speaker, but contain their own coherence. As was to be expected, the speaker had difficulty grasping the central idea and asked for it to be repeated, which I obliged and restated in the same manner I had formulated it, this time with more intensity and persistence. After a back and forth exchange, the speaker, much to my surprise, admitted that his presentation had been conducted in bad faith. My classmates and I, and probably others, were shocked by his admission.

After immersing myself in literary criticism, I arrived at the stage of writing my dissertation. I was appreciative for having read all the prominent critics and discussed their ideas with professors and students, but felt disappointed that it did not seem to be sufficient for approaching the works that I was analyzing. In some respects, I felt that my training was incomplete. There was something missing. I realized that I needed to understand more about the context, and, in particular, the events unfolding during the time of writing and those of the narration. It became apparent to me that I needed to complement my years of studying criticism with readings in history, politics, economics, and other bodies of knowledge. Literature had become inseparable from history and other disciplines. This approach became clearer to me as I researched a variety of topics in Caribbean, Latin American, Afro-Hispanic, and Latino U. S. literatures. But just

as literature must be analyzed within the context of other disciplines, those other areas of inquiry also benefit from the study of literature. We are all engaged in learning systems and strategies of writing. This interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary approach to literature has allowed me to sustain ongoing dialogues with colleagues in other departments and fields.

The current issue, dedicated to Afro-Asia, is the fruitful outcome of collaborative work with colleagues in areas of investigation outside of literature. Some may rightfully ask, what does Africa (Sub-Saharan Africa) or Afro-Hispanic literature have to do with Asia? Are they not two different continents with distinct and separate cultures? I would venture to ask my own questions, this time in a more direct and unobtrusive manner: Does the Afro-Hispanic world exist in isolation? Are we better informed by discussing other dominant and marginal cultures that reside in the same region? Do Asians and Africans share a similar history as they were taken from their countries of origin and forced to adopt different environments wherein their cultures invariably merged with those of others?

As I had indicated in a previous Editor's Note, both Africa and Asia have a unique relationship to Europe insofar as these regions fell prey to European expansionism. When Europeans ventured outside of Central Europe, they came in contact with Plinian people, members of the monstrous races. While many of these colorful figures have passed into western mythology, others continue to exist into the present. Pliny's classifications may help to explain why Europeans imposed their will on these "monster" figures and seized the opportunity to control natural and human resources in "remote" areas of the world. The Portuguese and Dutch relied on their maritime skills and traveled to Africa and Asia, as Spaniards made their way to Africa and westward towards the Americas and Asia. Other European powers soon followed the same course that would outline dominant aspects of western history. Indeed, European superiority has been well documented in European writings. After all, European cultures, economic systems, languages, writings, and religious systems have been imposed on non-European peoples.

The Asian presence in the Caribbean and other parts of Latin America narrates a human story of struggle and survival, adaptation, cooptation, alienation, and transculturation, which recalls the lives of Africans and Amerindians in the Americas. One should consider reading the Afro-Hispanic experience in conjunction with those of other non-European cultures, and those of other racial and ethnic groups together with Afro-Hispanic literature.

As with other monographic issues, in this one we continue to focus on Afro-Hispanic literature but also other disciplines such as history, politics, and

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sociology. We also reflect on the lives of East Asians (mainly Chinese and Japanese) alongside those of people of African descent. I want to thank professors Evelyn Hu-DeHart and Kathy López for accepting the challenge of compiling the present issue, thus gathering an impressive team of scholars willing to share their research with the readers of the *Afro-Hispanic Review*. I am especially indebted to Kathy and her son, Bobby, who was born while she prepared the materials.