

Book Review/Reseña

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***The (Latin) American Scene, Present and Future (Im-)Perfect: Five Critical Conversations.* By Fernando Gómez Herrero. Anthem Studies in Latin American Literature and Culture 1. Anthem Press, 2025. Pp. 388. Hardcover, \$110.00; Kindle \$35.00.**

Fernando Gómez Herrero, PhD (Duke University), research scholar at the Ibero-American Institute (Salamanca, Spain), shares thirty years' worth of conversations with colleagues. The resulting transcriptions become individual chapters devoted to each scholar. *The (Latin) American Scene, Present and Future (Im-)Perfect: Five Critical Conversations* explores the interests, intellectual pursuits, and careers of Rolena Adorno, John Beverley, Roberto González Echevarría, Walter D. Mignolo, and José Rabasa.

Gómez Herrero, who spent his formative years in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Spain, shares his concern over the relevance and longevity of Latin American Studies in academic settings and invites colleagues to address this issue. The conversations are lengthy and detailed. They bring forth archival, historical, and experiential anecdotes that highlight the pertinence of the Spanish language and the importance of its literary and cultural heritage.

The five academics weigh in on how reading historical Spanish literature continues to be important despite our living in an Internet-informed world. Does reading books from the Golden Age, Baroque, Renaissance, pre-Columbian, Colonial, and Postmodern eras, all valued by these scholars, have relevance today? The professors share their reading preferences and how they impacted their instructional choices. They also talk about their actualization pursuits in exploring instructional approaches adapted to the current instructional landscape, given the many changes recently experienced in academia. Readers will enjoy delving into the past while projecting into the future as we all adapt to the transitions required in the twenty-first century.

Each transcribed interview results in an extensive, detailed chapter interspersed with experiential and anecdotal commentary. The questions addressed are: the influence of literary readings in formative years, intellectual pursuits, and actualization efforts. These conversations result in rich exchanges.

Gómez Herrero asks each interlocutor what they read during their formative years and whether these readings are relevant to their teaching situations. He also asks them about the influence of current events and contemporary thinking pre-Internet. As a scholar who considers himself “letrado” (well-read), Gómez Herrero ponders whether being familiar with the historical literature has any significance in today’s universities. Deeper inquiries surface as they discuss current trends and the role of the humanities.

His interlocutors offer new perspectives on multiculturalism as they respond to the status of cultural studies. Beverley, for example, refers to a subalternist perspective in critical pedagogy. They all refer to the “dance of two languages” in one way or another within Latin Americanist criticism as a fragile area of studies. They also ponder whether academics and scholars in this field are foreigners and are seen as part of a cultural exchange. They question whether these studies should focus only on practical aspects and uses of the Spanish language. Gómez Herrero stresses the need for including the teaching of culture and literature to reinforce language learning.

Proud of the strong historical and cultural heritage of the Spanish language, Gómez Herrero articulates a well-balanced literary perspective where he celebrates Latin American Studies as a field of learning, while adding wit and humor to his conversations with fellow scholars.

The book opens with a brilliant foreword by Neil Larsen (University of California, Davis), who highlights its relevance as he refers to an “erosion” within the field. Larsen underscores how precarious the course offerings on Latin American literature and culture have become at universities worldwide. He suggests the need for new paradigm shifts to make room for this important field of study.

The title of the book piques the reader’s interest, as do the names of each chapter.

1. “Avatars of Colonial Studies of Latin America in the Home of the Brave” (Rolena Adorno)

In this chapter, Adorno reflects on her undergraduate teaching experience and the impact of being the first academic person in her US family. In terms of her formative years, she views learning Spanish and delving into Latin American Studies as opportunities. She understands migration as generating mobility within the US and creating potential

possibilities for growth. She views current academic paradigms as those suited to current needs. She quotes Carlos Fuentes's views about sharing the humanities, urging academia to create opportunities for people to become literate. In terms of actualization and staying current, she views this as a commitment to continue to grow with the needs of the times.

2. "About The Postmodernist Convergence of the Baroque, the Subaltern, and Many Other Signs" (John Beverley)

Born in Venezuela and raised in the United States, Beverley is excited about the challenges that lie ahead. He has embraced Latin American culture and language and shares his experiences in the US during the tumultuous 1960s. The revolutionary ideas circulating at that time inform and cultivate his interest in Latin America as a whole. In terms of actualization, his curiosity informs his pursuits.

3. "The Pleasure of Literary Criticism Without Attachments to Any Method or Ideology Whatsoever" (Roberto González Echevarría)

As a student of Hispanic Studies, González Echevarría was inspired by his academic parents of Cuban origin. Proud of his Castilian and Basque roots, he has a wide perspective and strong motivation. His earlier focus on the Golden Age and critical perspectives on Latin American literature bring up the issue of being a foreigner. This point of view informs how he views current paradigms within the Anglo-American academy.

4. "About the Colonial Difference or the Emergence of Thinking that Was Not Considered to be Thinking" (Walter D. Mignolo)

Mignolo spent most of his formative years in Argentina. Furthering his studies, he focused on semiology, discourse analysis, and literary theory. His linguistic background provides a backdrop for him to explore Indigenous languages and issues in North America. His early studies in philosophy and anthropology also shape his perspective. He includes Foucault, Sartre, and Derrida in his commentary on actualizing literary analysis. As he situates the past with the present, the *thinking / not thinking* from his chapter title becomes a dance. In terms of current paradigms and actualization, there is an exchange between modernity / coloniality and globalization.

5. "Pre-Columbian Legacies and Indigenous Presents in the History of Mexico; Or How to Find Other Possibilities within Constitutive (Post-)Colonial Violence" (José Rabasa)

Rabasa has an interdisciplinary orientation. He spent his formative years in Mexico, where he experienced the tensions of the 1970s. Having studied philosophy and literature,

his interests vary as he is fascinated by historical processes. These studies become an archaeological quest. He is also interested in learning the Indigenous languages in Mexico. In terms of actualization and staying current in the field, he views today's academic landscape as experiencing a transitional moment which takes time to evolve.

An index and substantial set of bibliographical references complete the volume.

In summary, this important work familiarizes readers with the challenges and constraints shared by educators who wish to honor their predecessors as they bequeath a contemporized and useful legacy to future generations, which, as Gómez Herrero points out in the title, may be (im-)perfect.

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