Identity and Mirrors: Reflections of a Latin Americanist

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Identity and mirrors: Reflections of a Latin Americanist

by Galo F. González

Editor's note: Galo F. González was a participant in the second Macalester Faculty Development International Seminar, held in June in Brazil. This article is adapted from the conclusion of his essay about the seminar.

MY VISIT to Brazil has impacted me on three fronts: personally, as a scholar and pedagogically.

At the personal level, it has made me reflect upon my own search for identity. Having been born into hybrid societies, Brazilians, like the rest of Latin Americans, struggle with the notion of who they are. In the U.S.A. we struggle with the same question, for immigrants, with the added question of where we belong. In a way we are forced to see ourselves in divided mirrors; each mirror gives us a different angle, a different face. Our responsibility is to consolidate the image reflected in the mirrors. One way of doing this is through teaching others to look more critically at their own realities and existences, and then to look at other peoples and cultures.

My visit and participation in the Faculty Seminar has awakened more enthusiasm for expanding my knowledge of Brazilian literature. Because of the restricted knowledge of Portuguese used in my interactions with scholars and common folk in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Bahia, I felt that I was missing important details about the host nation. Nevertheless, this experience has made me a more complete Latin Americanist. I have crossed the boundaries of regionalism that rooted me as an Ecuadorean dealing with another nation of South America.

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Another asset gained from my visit to Brazil is the immediate application to teaching and to my ongoing research projects. I envision incorporating the research I began in Brazil into my courses. The First-Year Seminar, for example, will benefit from studying Parente Cunhas' and Clarice Lispector's novels. I also would like to integrate my initial findings in a more global context if not in a comparative study of women's literary production from the various regions of Latin America. The preoccupations that move Brazilian writers are the same as the ones found in Ecuadorean women writers Alicia Yáñez Cossío and Natasha Salguero, Mexican women writers Rosario Castellanos, Carmen Boullosa and Angela Mastretta, to cite a few.

These novelists and their works are "mirrors" for women across the Americas;

Macalester Faculty Development International Seminar

Theme: "Culture, Landscape and Globalization: Views from Brazil"

Time: June 1–21, 1997

Places: cities of Campinas, Sao Paulo and Salvador, with faculty pursuing independent research projects in various parts of Brazil as well as Argentina

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