theories and methodologies

Mapping the Hemispheric Divide: The Colonial Americas in a Collaborative Context

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LA GRACIA TRIUNFANTE EN LA VIDA DE CATHARINA TEGAKOVITA ("GRACE TRIUMPHANT IN THE LIFE OF CATHERINE TEKAKWITHA"), AN account of the miraculous life of Kateri Tekakwitha, an Iroquois Indian from New France, traversed language and space to be published in Mexico City, New Spain, in 1724. Juan de Urtassum, a Basque Navarran Jesuit who had spent many years in Mexico, translated his fellow Jesuit Pierre Cholonec's hagiographic text from its original French (first published in Paris in 1717). Two appendixes accompanied the translation. In the first, a learned theological apology, the Mexican cleric Juan Castorena y Urúsa extolled the piety of indigenous women whom he deemed fit to be nuns; the second consisted of short narratives detailing the exemplary lives of New Spanish indigenous women. Urtassum and Castorena compiled the volume in order to advocate for the foundation of convents for indigenous women, presenting Tekakwitha's piety as evidence of indigenous women's capacity for Christian virtue (Díaz, *Indigenous Writings* 56; Greer, "Iroquois Virgin" 237). While Tekakwitha's sanctity helped Urtassum's case, his knowledge of and indeed interest in her provenance were scant. He locates the Iroquois Nation (the "Provincia de los Iroqueses") on the northern frontier of New Spain (today's New Mexico), where indigenous groups had resisted Spanish attempts at colonization and evangelization for centuries. He "domesticates" the distant Iroquois for the New Spanish reader, comparing them with the Araucanian Indians of Chile, whose bravery Alonso de Ercilla immortalized in his epic poem *La Araucana* and who, though geographically distant from Mexico, seemed familiar through the Spanish colonial condition they shared with Urtassum's readers. In a telling moment, in the dedication to his patron that precedes the translation, Urtassum refers to "todo este emispherio" ("this entire hemisphere"). It is clear, however, that this reference encompasses only Spanish imperial possessions, including the recently founded California missions. The distant Iroquois Nation, located in geographically indistinct New France, does not figure in this geopolitical economy, nor do

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other American territories in the possession of rival imperial powers.[1]

The publication history with which I began this essay elucidates the difficulties and dangers that early Americanists and colonial Latin Americanists confront when they look to forge a comparative model of hemispheric analysis. The geographic elision in Urtassum's text and the ethnic metonymy he practices in positioning Kateri Tekakwitha as a universally applicable model of indigenous female piety speak to the pitfalls of trans-American comparisons. As Urtassum's dislocation and appropriation of Tekakwitha through language and space show, little circulation of people, goods, and ideas existed between the hemispheres in the early modern period. What did circulate among the various European imperial territories was a conjunction of mythologies, exemplified here in Urtassum's representation of the Iroquois or, in other contexts, through the diffusion of the Black Legend in British America. Yet perhaps we can also draw inspiration from the obstacles to concrete trans-American connections displayed in Urtassum's translation. Tekakwitha's deracinated colonial journey from New France to New Spain might hint at a strategy for a meaningful comparative analysis of colonial American experiences. Urtassum's translation suggests an approach to hemispheric relations in which we aim to locate a series of discrete and even oblique points of contact informed as much by myth as by the reality of contact. Finally, Urtassum's juxtaposition of the experiences of female indigenous converts to Christianity indicates how religion exposes fundamental convergences and divergences in the lived experiences of colonial subjects in a trans-American framework.[2]

Religion presents us with the most dynamic staging ground for collaborative scholarship through its capacity to embrace a wide expanse of texts, artifacts, and archives. Religion provides a similar point of departure for scholars of both early America and colonial Latin America as we chart the important transformations Christianity underwent in "new" American environments. Common to Protestants and Catholics and to the European colonizers and conquerors of British America and Spanish America was the sense that the New World "held a special place in God's providential design" (Elliott 184). This commonality intensifies with the realization that Spain's religious conquest provided the model for England's imperial effort. As Ralph Bauer and José Antonio Mazzotti write, "The sixteenth-century English promoters of empire were, for all of their anti-Spanish rhetoric, profoundly informed by the Spanish messianic model, by the imperative of rivaling everything that Spain had done in the New World—except for doing it the *Reformed* way" ("Creole Subjects" 18–19). Sarah Rivett and I have argued that religion functions as a key category of hemispheric analysis, exposing an organizational division between the Old World and the New as religious identities and practices transform and expand in the American setting. Despite great differences between competing empires—principally Catholic Spain and Protestant Britain—and the colonial identities they each engendered, religion offered a key motivation for New World colonization on both sides of the divide and proved instrumental in the shaping of new ethnic and racial identities in the greater whole of New World Christendom.

Whereas religion might offer common ground between the disciplines of early American and colonial Latin American literature, to move forward we must acknowledge the imbalance that characterizes the study of Anglo-American and Latin American colonialisms in the United States academy today. The marginalization of Latin American studies in most sectors and regions of academe accounts for colonial Latin Americanists' reticence to embrace a "trans-American" model, and colonial legacies continue to inform postcolonial actualities.[3] Walter Mignolo has

identified the creation of an "epistemic imperial difference," whereby early modern knowledge production was located in northern Europe to the exclusion of southern Europe and its colonies (496). Ironically, postcolonial theories arising in the United States—for all their decolonizing intent—have reproduced imperial prejudices, and Latin American intellectuals find themselves "presented with a post-colonial 'model' to which Latin America is expected to conform." Relegated to this position of alterity, Latin Americanists throughout the Americas wield little influence in debates in the United States on postcolonialism, and in general Spanish is rarely ("if at all") considered a "language of authority or intellectual exchange" in the United States academy (Molloy 189).

Scholarly inequity persists even when the colonial subject of inquiry acquires historical distance. Writing in *PMLA* in 2009, Bauer, the foremost practitioner of the early modern hemispheric approach, mapped the trajectory of the so-called hemispheric turn, cogently analyzing the benefits and pitfalls of what he terms the "unwieldy facets" of the new paradigm (235). Located in a department of English, Bauer is one of few scholars whose work moves easily between early American texts and colonial Latin American texts. While advocating for hemispheric studies, Bauer nevertheless also addresses a problematic "tendency" in the American studies academy to "regard the hemispheric archive as a critical tabula rasa" and to "ignore the important critical bibliographies on these texts, often conducted in Spanish" (237, 243n26).[4]

Bauer's work as author, editor, and conference organizer nonetheless demonstrates that a hemispheric focus can result in the addition of productive methodologies and new ways of rethinking old concerns if we heed his warnings. Borrowing a phrase from Doris Sommer, Stephanie Merrim recommends that scholars "proceed with caution" when engaging in colonial hemispheric studies, wondering "what encrypted meanings lie waiting in the vast, under-explored landscape of colonial 'American' writing" (64). Alongside the "imponderables" Merrim eloquently invokes we find real linguistic, historiographical, and bibliographic knowledge that specific disciplines bestow on their practitioners and that we must not dismiss lightly. Perhaps a cautious but still profitable template is to be found in an interdisciplinary paradigm with which scholars from early American and colonial Latin American studies might bridge the hemispheric divide through collaborative projects, as I will address below.

Caution does not appeal to all scholars, and some instead advocate an actively comparative model, believing hemispheric or American scholarship provides the most value when scholars bring texts from the North and South into contact or perhaps even furnish evidence of historical hemispheric contact. Luis Corteguera, historian of the early modern Hispanic world, advances the first opinion in his review of the hemispherically focused conference Religious Transformations in the Early Modern Americas, held at Washington University in 2009. For Corteguera the conference presentations showed that the hemispheric approach had yet to fulfill its "promise of a comparative examination of historical problems" (206). He critiqued the lack of formal comparison, regretting how "the comparative analysis of the conference took place largely during the discussions following the presentations," which, for him, signaled a disconnection between hemispheric theory and practice: "Despite our conviction that we will gain much by venturing beyond our familiar surroundings, few of us still dare to do so more than just occasionally and off the record" (207). As a coorganizer of the Religious Transformations conference, I can attest that we had hoped for precisely the kind of spontaneous response that Corteguera viewed as a limitation. We wanted scholars to struggle a little to search for connections between their

own findings and those of colleagues working on regions of America held by other imperial powers.[5] As my collaborator Rivett and I selected speakers for this conference and two subsequent events held in 2010 and 2011, we found ourselves responding to anxious questions about whether we expected presenters to produce comparative work of a type with which they were not familiar. Our three conferences did feature presentations from scholars such as John H. Elliott, Ralph Bauer, and David Boruchoff, who skillfully and rigorously offered comparative analyses of imperial ideologies and colonial texts and experiences, presenting their research alongside scholars whose interventions elucidated aspects of religious experiences focused on one imperial or colonial national and linguistic region. This format, we found, succeeded in presenting a fluid and multifaceted methodological way forward for the hemispheric study of religion.

Other scholars long for the type of contact that characterizes Atlantic studies; however, the hemispheric context cannot sustain it. In her 2005 review essay on the "hemispheric turn," Susan Scott Parrish addresses Bauer's 2003 book *The Cultural Geography of Colonial American Literature: Empire, Travel, Modernity* alongside a series of conferences that explored early modern American experiences in a hemispheric framework. In her otherwise complimentary review of Bauer's important book, Parrish laments that, in certain sections of the book, it is only through Bauer's "interpretative work" that the epistemic connections between Hispanic and Anglo creoles become meaningful (550). Elsewhere in her review, she calls for scholars to "explor[e] the many geographic border zones where intercolonial exchanges occur" since, in her opinion, most compelling is how the people of the early modern period experienced "hemisphericity" (553). I agree with Parrish that exchanges and experiences of this kind would indeed be compelling. I wonder, however, if they are there to be found. Perhaps the border zones Parrish refers to might offer proof of such contact, but areas at a further geographic remove are unlikely to do so, as Urtassum's hazy command of American geography indicates in his discussion of Tekakwitha.[6] Instead, the hemisphere encompasses a series of empires that did not enjoy exchange and circulation in the early modern period but remained "historically separated" (Quijano and Wallerstein 552).[7] In making this plea for evidence of historical hemisphericity, Parrish seems to wish for the hemispheric approach to mirror the contours of Atlantic studies. Indeed, she writes of her hope to "continually reintegrate this hemispheric awareness back into a circum-Atlantic scope" (553). The lack of transhemispheric contact I alluded to earlier precludes the use of an Atlantic studies methodology in which, in broad strokes, the circulation of people, ideas, and objects has emerged as an important field of study. The success of Atlantic studies rests to a large degree on the wealth of archival materials historians have uncovered as they chart these multiple circulations, as David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick emphasize in their edited volume, which has shaped the field. An Atlantic paradigm in history and literature has contributed much to our understanding of the early modern period, especially because it helps to restore the significance of the lives and actions of so-called marginal subjects.[8] I believe, however, that giving our work a transhemispheric focus enables us to learn less about empire and more about colonial cultures and the new social and racial identities they engendered (Quijano 534).[9] As we consider how unique American identities are created in "new" locales, perhaps the concept of transformation could characterize our hemispheric approach much as that of circulation does the study of the Atlantic world.

By sharing work in conferences and publications, scholars in our fields could pool case studies, theoretical frameworks, and methodologies.[10] Over the last decade, scholars from

early American and colonial Latin American studies have coorganized conferences, resulting in an increased knowledge of comparative colonialisms, American experiences of empire, and American manifestations of phenomena such as gender, race, and ethnicity, as well as the dissemination of a wide range of interdisciplinary methodologies.[11] Lamentably, few of these conferences have resulted in published volumes, despite a healthy number of monographs on trans-American colonial issues.[12] Only two exclusively hemispherically focused anthologies have emerged over the last decade. Fortunately, both succeed admirably in advancing the study of the early modern Americas through a collaborative, interdisciplinary editorial pairing and through the compilation and juxtaposition of scholarship addressing the cultural production and historical experiences of regionally diverse American subjects. Bauer and Mazzotti's *Creole Subjects in the Colonial Americas: Empires, Texts, Identities* brings together the work of prominent literary scholars of Spanish, English, and Portuguese to interrogate creolization in different New World settings and to extend the wide-ranging discussion over creolization in Latin America to British America (Bauer and Mazzotti, "Creole Subjects" 3). Allan Greer and Jodi Bilinkoff's *Colonial Saints: Discovering the Holy in the Americas, 1500–1800* juxtaposes case studies on early American Christianity drawn from British, French, and Spanish American texts and histories to offer comparative and contrasting approaches to early modern American sainthood. In his preface to the volume, Greer, a historian of New France, underscores the volume's American but not Atlantic focus.[13] For Greer exclusively hemispheric projects expose the intricacies of American colonization processes, and the volume serves this purpose well with work analyzing New World responses to sainthood among, for example, creoles in Lima, Puritans in Massachusetts, Guaraní converts in northern Argentina, and slaves in Haiti.[14] The wealth of experiences recounted in *Colonial Saints* should inspire us to seek out other ways in which lived experiences of religion and its role in society transformed in the Americas, changing the way we think about early modern Christianity.

The collaborative model I present in these pages does not flatten important differences in the service of a forced hemispheric turn but rather highlights the textual complexity, geographic diversity, and contradictory nature of our shared colonial American literary and cultural history. New collaborative projects on religion and other areas of inquiry point us toward dynamic historical accounts of transformative American experiences while at the same time transforming our disciplines through the creation of new scholarly communities in which colonial legacies become solely our object of study.

Notes

This essay benefited greatly from the invaluable help that Sarah Rivett offered during the writing process.

1. Despite his ignorance of the location of New France as evidenced by his subsuming of the Iroquois within a Spanish American global framework, in his dedication to his patron, José de la Puente y Peña Castejón y Salcines, a Spanish nobleman and soldier long established in New Spain, Urtassum shows knowledge of many corners of the world as he praises de la Puente for his military and financial support of Spanish imperial and religious activities in China, "Tartaria," India, and the island of Mindango (in the Philippines), as well as territories in "Nuestra America" ("Our America"), including California.

2. Using different methodologies, both Díaz, "Native American Women," and Greer have written comparative work on the indigenous women of New France and New Spain.

3. Two recent articles by colonial Latin Americanists indicate some interest in hemispheric scholarship. Merrim proposes a theoretical framework in which early modern issues serve as points of departure for a "chronological range that extends beyond the colonial period" in search of a point in time when "inter-American work becomes most exigent or most meaningful" (69–70). With this model, she stresses, she does not abandon the colonial period but

rather hopes to "identify post- or neo-colonial issues, moments, and spaces from which we can backread profitably to the colonial worlds themselves" (70). In a comparative study of indigenous women in New Spain and New France, Díaz proposes the idea of a hemispheric female indigenous "imagined community" in order to recuperate "Native American women's presence in the early American Catholic Church" ("Native American Women" 206).

4. Although Parrish writes influential and exemplary scholarship of her own on British America and does not produce the type of scholarship cited by Bauer, her exhortation to early Americanist scholars in the pages of *Early American Literature* could be read as an invitation to this sort of problematic engagement with the colonial Latin American archive: "Connected to this political process [a "re-Hispanicization of the southern border zones and a significant Hispanicization of the electorate"], and to the wider virtualization of national spaces brought about in post-modernity, we in colonial American studies are attempting to dismantle field boundaries based upon older geopolitical divides. Inasmuch as this 'hemispheric turn' opens up new texts, new scholarly paradigms and new regions for all of us scholars to consider, it makes us grow and stretch in healthy ways" (552).

5. Voigt warns of the pitfalls of "intermingling" early American and colonial Latin American texts: individual scholars not trained to read texts outside their discipline risk error when engaging in "canon expansion and comparative studies." She advocates that we instead rely on "the expertise of early 'Americanists' housed in other departments and fields" (416).

6. The Caribbean does, of course, emerge as a contact zone for hemispheric interactions. The experience of the Mexican author Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora's luckless sailor Alonso Ramírez is instructive here. After suffering at the hands of savage English pirates in a variety of global locales, he struggles to find a place to weigh anchor in the Caribbean since each island's imperial identity offers a particular set of problems for the ethnically diverse crew of Spanish colonial subjects (for a detailed analysis of the text and its context, see José Buscaglia-Salgado 128–31). Notwithstanding the contact the Caribbean Sea facilitated, many locations throughout the Americas remained cut off from transhemispheric and transcolonial exchange. Mexico, Brazil, and the Andean regions did not interact with the relatively isolated worlds of such British and French colonies as the Connecticut River Valley, Nova Scotia, and the Great Lakes region.

7. The emerging field of oceanic studies in a hemispheric context could bring forth examples of sailors and travelers who, usually through misadventure, ended up on the wrong side of the hemispheric divide. I thank Alexandre Dubé for reminding me of this possibility.

8. Historians of the Atlantic have generated excellent scholarship. Foundational in shaping scholarly exchange in the field is Bernard Bailyn's International Seminar on the History of the Atlantic World, held annually at Harvard since 1995.

9. Quijano describes the formation of these new identities in the following terms: "Social relations founded on the category of race produced new historical social identities in America—Indians, blacks and mestizos—and redefined others. . . . Insofar as the relations that were being configured were relations of domination such identities were considered constitutive of the hierarchies, places and corresponding social roles and consequently of the model of colonial domination that was being imposed" (534).

10. A potentially fruitful crossover is the so-called return to religion in early American studies. Justine Murison and Jordan Stein argue that their field would benefit from a more "reflexive and theoretical engagement" with religion that would promote inquiries focusing on concepts and critical problems instead of simply reiterating a scholarly tendency to "presume religion as a staple topic" (5, 1). In colonial Latin American studies, we have experienced no "return to religion" or "religious turn," since religion has constantly been at the heart of our investigations into the culture and society of a colonial project formed in the crucible of state-sponsored evangelical conquest. However, we would do well to heed Murison and Stein's call for this more reflective engagement with religion as a conceptual category and perhaps bring further nuances to our study of religion in colonial Latin American society.

11. The most widely attended of these hemispheric conferences are the Early American / Ibero-American summits. The third of these, Early American Borderlands, cochaired by Bauer and Santa Arias, took place in 2010.

12. Bauer and Mazzotti offer a useful bibliography of recent books taking a hemispheric focus ("Creole Subjects" 55–57).

13. Greer mentions how "[h]istorians of slavery have long been accustomed to thinking at the level of the 'New World'" but finds himself perplexed by how the "approach is still fairly rare in other fields of scholarship, notably religion" (Pref. x).

14. Two edited volumes offering an Atlantic-world perspective on religion have recently been published: Kostroun and Vollendorf's *Women, Religion, and the Atlantic World, 1600–1800* and Gregerson and Juster's *Empires of God: Religious Encounters in the Early Modern Atlantic*.

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