

***Higher Ed Now*— Core Texts in a Hispanic Context: a Special Spanish Episode A Conversation with Clemente Cox (Universidad de los Andes, Chile)**

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Veronica Bryant: Clemente, thank you for joining in this conversation today about the Hispanic canon, the Great Books or “core texts,” the Hispanic tradition and its role in higher education, both in the United States and perhaps around the world. Any time I am talking about a somewhat abstract subject such as the Hispanic canon or “Great Books”, it seems to me that the term needs to be defined. I don't know if you agree. So then I would like to start with a question of translation. You are an academic director at the Universidad de los Andes, in Chile, where you teach courses on the Great Books, as I understand it, right?

Clemente Cox: Yes, that's right, Veronica.

Veronica Bryant: Right. So among the various courses that you teach are some of the Great Books. On the other hand, you and I know each other from the so-called Association for Core Texts and Courses or ACTC, which is a largely English-speaking association at whose conferences you have presented and in whose Hispanic Studies program in Navarra you are going to teach. So, you have this experience with the term and the concept of core texts and at the same time with this concept of Great Books, right? The other day when I spoke with José Torralba from the ACTC Board of Trustees, he told us on the podcast that at another university—and I think it was Chilean—they felt that translating the English term “core texts” into Spanish was complicated, because the Spanish equivalents had more normative philosophical implication than the term “core” in English, right? And so, they chose to translate it as the term that for English speakers would be “Great Books”, and perhaps is more old-fashioned for us. Would you agree with this Spanish translation of Great Books? What does this term Great Books mean to you? And is there any difference in connotation between the two Core Texts and Great Books according to, well, according to your experience?

Clemente Cox: Veronica, thank you very much for the question. Thank you very much for the introduction. I am very happy to be here with you. And the subject you raise is, the truth is, a very complicated subject and one to which I think we have devoted little time and little thought in the Hispanic tradition, or at least I do not know many references to it, because the truth is that the movement of Great Books or core texts—and later we can talk about the differences between these two—that movement has been timidly introducing itself in the universities of the Hispanic world over the decades. Maybe in the last decade. So it's not like we have a great tradition of using these terms. These terms sound, yes, a bit foreign, so to speak. In other words, whether one hears the term “great texts” or “Great Books” or the term “core texts” or “core curriculum”, they do sound a bit foreign. I mean, even if you are [speaking] in Spanish, let's say great texts and Great Books are terms in Spanish, but for me at least, and I think for any, let's say, person who moves in the university environment, it does sound a little strange. And maybe some people recognize that that is more of a calque, we would say linguistically speaking, a calque of “Great Books” or “Great Texts”. Now, since we use that calque and we talk about Great Books, for example in our university and later I can tell you more details, but we have some courses that are titled Great Books and since that is a calque in that sense, we don't have the attention that apparently exists in the United States, between those who use the term Great Books or great texts and the term core texts.

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Basically it seems to me--and then you can give me more details because you know more about it than I do--that in the United States there are certain connotations in the use of the terms. Probably Great Books directs the thinking more in the tradition of Mortimer Adler and the whole Great Books movement, whereas—and that seems to have a more normative character or, so to speak, a more authoritative voice with respect to what should be included and what not—while “core” seems to indicate that we are simply alluding to something that is central, but from a more particular vision, let's say, not with a claim to universality in that sense. But then I was telling you that here we do not have that complex, simply because both terms are borrowed, one as a loan word when we say great texts or Great Books and the other simply as an Anglo-Saxon term that I know is also used in English here, as when we say core text or core curriculum. Now, perhaps some people prefer the term “core” and like it in our tradition, simply because, understanding that it is a term in English, it refers directly to something like the *heart* [in Spanish, “corazón”], like the nucleus, right?, like the core of something. And therefore they believe that it also has then an important rhetorical power for the promotion of these kinds of programs, because one is referring to certain texts or certain courses in which one is going to deal with themes or texts or authors that are considered central to understanding the tradition and to understanding the idea from our part of the world.

Veronica Bryant: Yes. I think you captured pretty much the essence of it in terms of the tension that there may have been in the United States between those two, well, those two alternatives. And thank you for delineating a little bit the nuances of the history in the Hispanic world. By the way, there's a Core Curriculum Institute and it's called exactly that way “Core Curriculum Institute,” at least, at the University of Navarra, in Spain, right? That is to say, they already kind of embraced, as we would say, that foreign term “core” as you say.

Clemente Cox: Mhm. That's right, there at the University of Navarra, in Spain, what was formerly called, if I'm not mistaken, something like the Department of Anthropology and Ethics or something like that. Then it got the name of Core Curriculum Institute, which openly adopted the term in English, which is also surprising for Spain. Specifically because within the Spanish-speaking countries or Spanish-speaking territories, the truth is that Spain is perhaps the one in which it is more difficult for Anglicanisms to enter, that is, Anglicisms. And instead in Chile we are much more, we are much more comfortable with using a term that comes from English, pronouncing it like in English: to say something very trivial, we say “Wi-Fi”, while in Spain they say wee-fee. Maybe we do pronounce it wrong, but we pronounce it in the English style or like it's pronounced in English, right? But yes, Navarre made this move and--and probably also with the intention of giving a certain communicational blow, that is to say, to demonstrate that what they were doing and what they wanted to continue doing towards the future. It also had a support and had a support and had some referents in the Anglo-Saxon world, mainly in the tradition of the core curricula of the United States. And this is a topic that José Torralba, whom you recently interviewed in the podcast, has traced very well in his book *A Liberal Education*.

Clemente Cox: In that sense, I see in the program of the University of Navarra and in other programs that have emerged, such as the one of the Universidad Adolfo Ibáñez here in Chile,-- and I can comment later on some of its characteristics—I have seen the intention to openly show that what is being done has its referent in the United States, and that the ACTC and other

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associations and universities in the United States are looking for help to carry it out. There is no formal recognition of a formula, so to speak, that has worked well in some universities in the United States and that they want to bring here. Now, bringing it here, bringing it to Spain or bringing it to Chile are not, let's say, transfers without a precedent here. It's not that nothing like that has existed here, but there are also many universities in the Hispanic world that recognize the importance of a general education, we could say, right? We're not using a term that I would say has a little more roots in the Hispanic tradition. It's not so much "core texts", but "general education".

Now, if you notice, the use of the terms immediately points in different directions, because when you say "core texts" or Great Books, your mind goes to certain texts, to certain authors, to certain contents that are linked to certain works. Whereas when you use the term "general education" or "general formation," which in a certain sense function as synonyms in our tradition, general education or general formation, you are referring instead to a set of teachings or to a certain system of thought that you think is relevant to transmit to the student, you think it is important to train them and in this sense to train their intellect, in what we could call a *forma mentis*, that is, a way of seeing things and a way of understanding, a certain intellectual habit to approach reality, regardless of the profession they want. Now, what we can also comment on is the difficulty that this type of approach has, or the resistance that this type of approach encounters, of the importance of formation in general, or of a general education in a university tradition that is marked by the Napoleonic tradition, in the sense of universities with a much stronger professionalizing approach.

Veronica Bryant: Yes, indeed. As you probably know, in the Anglo-Saxon university tradition we had less tendency towards professionalization until well into the nineteenth century, at least in the United States, which is the environment I can really comment on where, among other things, the German influence of the research university did enter. So I would love to know a little more about what you were saying about the question of formation or, well, about the history of general formation or general studies, perhaps you could also say, in the Hispanic world, because at least the concept that perhaps one has of this pre-professional Napoleonic system, as you say of the university in other countries, is that there is no general formation that is really launched from, let's say, high school or secondary school to a super advanced level of specialized studies. On the one hand I would love to understand a little bit more of that history and on the other hand, I would also like to comment that obviously the United States has this strong tradition of general education, as we usually say today, which is really general education or what used to be called "core curriculum". And that is where most students, until really well into the 20th century, learned those Great Books, that is, not necessarily in their course of study for the major, for professionalization in the 20th century, but rather in those general education programs, in the United States.

Clemente Cox: Yes, right? It's very interesting what you're saying, because we from the Hispanic tradition, at least from Chile, have always recognized the virtues of the approach to this subject that is seen in the United States, in which the College of Liberal Arts includes a strong dose of general education courses or a broader humanistic training. In a sense, the terms general education and humanistic education can be used as synonyms. In other words, we can comment a

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little more on the characteristics, but it seems that a very important element of a general education is precisely training in the humanities, right? So, from Chile, when we look at the university panorama in the United States, we are struck by the great flexibility they have in that a person can study a master's degree in philosophy at university and then work in any other field - and this apparently also happens in England- a person can then work in a bank. I think this is recently changing in the United States and there is a certain tendency toward professionalization. And in that sense perhaps there is an important heritage in humanistic training that is going to be lost and hopefully will not be lost. Let's say perhaps associations like the ACTC and ACTA are trying to maintain that heritage, but it has always seemed to us a great virtue of the Anglo-Saxon system that someone can study humanities and then dedicate himself to something else. Why? Because that tells us something about the perennial value of the humanities in intellectual formation.

That is to say, this is not an extra addition, it is not a completely superficial and dispensable matter that we add to a curriculum, but it is a set of disciplines that form the intellect with a certain rigor and with a certain systematicity and that then allow the development, let's say, of many skills that are very valuable for the professional world. However, in Chile perhaps we have a fixation, we also have a narrow-mindedness, in thinking that only the person who has gotten his major in an area can do a job well in a certain area, which today is also beginning to make water, it is beginning not to make sense because the professional world is also increasingly flexible and requires every day more updating of very specific skills in certain fields. Therefore, more than the professional career or the undergraduate degree, other types of continuing education are important later on, a diploma or something like that, or a master's degree. And perhaps the most worthwhile thing to do at the undergraduate level is to learn how to think. Therefore, it seems to me that there is a key element of why we should have and why it is wise to have a general humanistic type of formation, even for pre-professional degree programs.

Well, with respect to what you were asking, in the Hispanic world, in the university world, at least in Chile and other Spanish-speaking countries, the term “general studies” has been used perhaps because it is a term that has a very extensive tradition in the European university, let's say in the European university—there was recognized the importance of what was called the *studium generale*, right? What is this *studium generale*? The Latin term is for general studies, that is, studies that should be part of a curriculum at the foundation, no? at the foundation of the curriculum this should be there. That was what led the Universidad de los Andes in Chile, the university where I work, to establish in 2011 the Centro de Estudios Generales (Center for General Studies) as the unit in charge of transversal courses, that is, those that are present in all the curriculums, in all the undergraduate programs. And so, this term “general studies” became closely linked to general education. That is, the Centro de Estudios Generales (Center for General Studies) is the one in charge of general education. Now, this term “Center for General Studies” is not one that I see regularly. It is not one that I have seen in any other institution in Chile, at least. And perhaps that is because many programs and many universities in Chile simply lack anything, such as a general education or a humanistic type of education. In many universities, the idea is that when you enter the program, when you are 18 years old, you have just finished what we call here secondary education, that when you leave secondary education, you go directly to study your degree and you also have to have, ostensibly, the maturity to decide

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what you are going to dedicate yourself to at 18 years old. And no, I want to be an engineer and therefore at 18 years old I have to be decided and go for that degree and study that. And that has certain advantages in the sense that the degrees in Chile, especially in the best universities, are in fact very formative degrees in the discipline. That is to say, they are degrees that produce extremely well-trained and highly valued professionals. Also when they go to study outside of Chile, they are highly valued as people very prepared in their discipline, but it has the other negative side of what I outlined before about the narrowness of the labor market, in the sense that all doors are closed to you for that which you did not study. And on the other hand, there is also the risk that this is a very specialized formation in which what Ortega y Gasset called the “barbarism of specialism” spreads. That is, here we have enlightened barbarians. That is, we have people who are very enlightened on a particular subject, but who lack general notions and broader humanistic notions to understand the meaning of life and understand the most important questions of existence.

Veronica Bryant: I love this concept of Ortega’s that you just mentioned. Could you, well, do you remember the precise context in which he names it? Well, not *precise*, precise, but it was in a political context perhaps?

Clemente Cox: Mmm no, I don't know specifically in which work of Ortega. Well, we know that Ortega wrote “What is the University?” and other texts, so, I know that he dedicated himself to thinking about the university question, but I don't know the particular context. But it seems to me that it is a claim that perhaps in a certain universal sense, that is, everywhere, there is always a danger that the barbarism of specialism will spread, because it is also a very worrying symptom of what is happening and of what has happened in the world of knowledge, in our culture, in the sense that if the barbarism of specialism spreads and expands in the university world, then there will be people who cultivate culture in its broadest sense, where there will be professionals and where there will be educated and cultured people who are capable of accepting the heritage of the past and with that heritage, having assimilated it, confront the most urgent questions of the present. In that sense we also learn many civic virtues, so to speak, and many opportunities to improve politics and to improve the life of society.

Veronica Bryant: Yes, indeed. And then, well, that specialized barbarian cannot deal with the personal backgrounds, the personal stories of his, for example, fellow citizens, compatriots to a certain extent if he has only specialized in his own thing and has not thought of another approach, another, as we would say, “worldview”, right? So, it seems to me an extremely relevant concept for our current situation, as you said, politically, because the same specialization that the United States is also arriving at, which you mentioned before? Well, it seems so, insofar as it’s accelerating our political polarization, right? So, this possibility of having a cultural background perhaps, at least a cultural one, perhaps not generally throughout the nation, but at least in that world of the university, of the campus, that shared culture among students seems fundamental to me to be able to—really in the original sense of fundamental, right?—a that is, a foundation on which everyone can build their university experience and then, after graduation, their life.

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Clemente Cox: Indeed, we must think that the leaders of the future and the leaders of a not-too-distant future will come from universities and from the best universities. The leaders of tomorrow, that is, will soon have important positions in society, and what is required of a person who has an important position in society, both in the world of business and civil society as well as in public institutions, is precisely a comprehensive vision and an ability to look more broadly at the problems that arise, which are human problems. And I say this to the students, but it is like a kind of apology for humanity. I like to ask students who study any other degree, who study commercial engineering, business administration, civil engineering. What are they learning in the Humanities courses? It is something extremely valuable for their career and also for the professional world. Now, that is not the first justification for why I would have that in a university, but it is an important argument that can also serve to convince those who design the curricula of these courses of the importance of having these subjects. Because a person who acquires leadership positions in an institution increasingly has to deal with more human problems and fewer technical problems. He will use less and less the specific technical tools of his profession. He has to know them, he has to master them because he must also have authority in that to be able to say something pertinent to his subordinates. But what he will mainly have to deal with is people. He will have to deal with what is happening in the national reality. In that sense, he will have to have an eye to read the culture of the moment, to read what is happening today, right? In this sense, the general humanistic education that is promoted in a core curriculum, in the programs of Great Books, etc., is a very important education in general so that the leaders of tomorrow who are our university students, have the ability to read what we could call the continuum of culture. Culture is dynamic. It moves, right? But there is a continuum, it's a river, right? One that goes, twisting from here to there, but in which I must know how to locate myself and for that, I must know how to understand myself and those around me. And by reading this current moment, where can we advance to? And that is given to us by the humanities when they allow us to acquire certain intellectual habits and also a certain cultural heritage in our memory and references to place ourselves in that panorama, right? In this sense, I am a little concerned—and I think that here, of course, there is room for great freedom and each person, each institution, can decide what they want—but I am a little concerned that in certain universities, and I see this in certain Chilean universities, when a certain need for training is recognized, in general it is not recognized that there is a certain need to train in transversal skills, no, that is what they call transversal skills. And then, to give an example, it may be that a certain degree program at some university only includes courses in the discipline and nothing else, only courses in the discipline. Fine, but the administrators, the authorities realize the need for transversal skills and then begin to define what these transversal skills will be and what worries me—I said that I had a concern—what worries me is that the definition of these transversal skills remains at a level that is a little more, I would say, a little more secondary. No, it is not unimportant, but it *is* a little more secondary to the extent that it is not aimed at the formation of intellectual habits, but rather of other transversal skills that are, I would say, important, but a little less important, right? For example, universities that when they define the transversal skills and the general education subjects that they must have, then tend to include English courses.

And that's good. It's very good to include English courses. I think it is necessary to include English courses, but the cultural formation that we need is not only English courses. Or then they

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say: “Well, we need transversal skills so that people can deal with others and can have social relationships. Therefore, we are going to have empathy workshops,” right? “And workshops on managing emotions.” That is all very good, but in the context of a university curriculum we cannot abandon the effort to acquire the intellectual habits that have been bequeathed to us by, let's say, the cultural heritage of humanity. And if we think that a transversal education is complete only with these tools that are rather important, but rather secondary or of another order, I think that we also do a disservice to the university as an institution and we continue to relegate it to a professional training institution only, right?

Veronica Bryant: Yes, agreed. I don't know what the accreditation of universities would be called—the system of what in the United States we would call the accreditation of universities. But here in the United States we already have that. This tendency has been going on for several decades to change a particular formation in certain content for a training in more or less what you mention about Chile, which are those skills, I don't know if they would say transversal here, perhaps fundamental skills instead, but there are agencies called accreditation agencies in the US that only accredit universities if you can train students in, let's say, disciplines that give training in these skills, for example social studies or social sciences, natural sciences, quantitative skills or humanities. If a student takes two courses in each group and somehow the universities can, well, they can verify that their students have learned a certain writing skill, a certain basic “critical thinking” skill, right? Well, with that, the agency considers that the university has formed its students well in their general education. It is a strong change from what was previously known to be certain content, as I said before, common ground for everyone. And it is not that everything has to be exactly the same for everyone, but if we are only talking about certain skills as general and vague, without really a definition of how it is applied in the classroom, each student comes out with a completely different concept of the world, which is fine because they are individuals, but we cannot really guarantee that the student has thought deeply in these disciplines because we have not really verified that they have been exposed to, well, a certain level of difficulty in these disciplines if they are only developing one skill and there is no way to evaluate an abstract skill.

Clemente Cox: Yes, I think you are referring to a very complicated issue for the university world, perhaps everywhere, which is precisely the pressure of accreditation. And I think that there, there I wanted to comment a little on this and then also on the issue that you mention of what are perhaps called “distribution requirements” or not, or true? Yes, well, the way in which that is organized, right? I want to comment on that, but starting with the issue of accreditation, is that there we have a series of misunderstandings and problems that I don't know how we are going to get rid of. The truth is that I don't know how we are going to get rid of, but there is one thing, there is a risk in this: and that is that when universities define their entire operation around accreditation, then they all become uniform, right? They all begin to be the same. When are we going to end up having only universities that are the same? All with the same profile? All the same, right? And all the same around certain quantitative parameters, certain measurement parameters. And that is where the humanities have a major problem, because we are talking about immersing oneself in the cultural heritage and moving with a certain ease there, which is not always measurable. That is to say, perhaps the most valuable thing that the humanities do is precisely something that I will not be able to measure in the student today, but it has to do with a

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process that is beginning in him, which will be extremely beneficial for his life as a whole, but *sometimes the most important things are also those that we can measure the least*. So, there we have a significant misunderstanding regarding the way accreditations work, and that also leads to the unification of all kinds of parameters for the different sciences. And so the work of academics, both in the sciences and in the humanities, will be measured in the same way and publications will also have to be in the same formats, etc. And I think that all of that will lead, although it may have positive effects on certain things, to an impoverishment of diversity in another way, right?

Now the problem that I wanted to comment on was these distribution requirements, when sometimes universities believe that they comply with what the accreditation requires because they offer a set of general courses and ask students to take a certain number of credits in these courses. With that, they may indeed comply with the accreditation requirements. However, in many cases they do not comply with systematically forming students in what is the basis of general education, general formation or education. In other words, what they have is more of a buffet, a potpourri, as we would say in Chile, of many things. I can choose here and there.

It is a miscellany, but it is a miscellany without systematicity and therefore it does not build relevant intellectual habits in the student, but rather it superficially familiarizes him with something, but does not necessarily give him the tools to be able to then approach reality with a unifying vision that allows for harmonizing the differences, which I think is what we are looking for, but here, of course, "I had a more or less superficial encounter with this subject, with this other one, but without reaching the core, without precisely reaching the basis of the intellectual problems that gave birth to the different disciplines." [Yes.] That is one advantage that courses on Great Books have over a textbook course on Great Books, precisely because they focus on close confrontation and close encounter with great works and great thinkers that allow us to elucidate the culture of each place. Precisely for that reason, they help the student to see with his own eyes how a certain discipline arose, how such intellectual problems arose, and then there is a lot to be gained, because it is precisely there that he is, on his own, thinking about these things, not so much by becoming familiar with certain secondary literature and with certain secondary and derived problems that are important. But in a general education, the most important thing will be to understand how such an intellectual problem arises, where the bases of the disciplines are. And do the Great Books help us in that sense?

Veronica Bryant: Yes. And speaking a little about the transversal, so transversal to use that term, right? That is, about the university outside of the discipline itself. Not what it is, then, to be human, right? So, what are the fundamental questions, or the questions, if we can't say that they are fundamental, at least general, but universal, that most human beings really contemplate in our lives, right? Or that we are faced with. I think that it is also an essential characteristic of what would be called a "core" course or a course of Great Books, right? And speaking precisely of this question of universality, I really liked the term you used of "cultural heritage of humanity" and we should talk a little about what you would consider perhaps a "canon", or perhaps, precisely this concept of the universal in the... These questions that the Great Books or texts capture are what I want to comment on or question now, because you clearly mentioned this term of cultural and humanity heritage, or because the term heritage is often used, perhaps national or cultural

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heritage of a certain people, right? But I love the idea of a heritage, rather universal or human in general. So when we talk about the Great Books or when we talk about “core texts,” perhaps most scholars think that there is a certain list of approved texts or authors, perhaps these have traditionally only come from a certain tradition in the United States for the most part. For example, in my formation in Chicago, things changed a bit in my time, but before, perhaps in Adler's time, many of these authors started from... Well, obviously, the classical Greco-Roman tradition, well, medieval, from Western Europe above all. And well, with a culmination perhaps in the Anglo-Saxon tradition of Germany, of England and perhaps, well, a little bit of France and some like Don Quixote. But how is it that the canon or the courses of Great Books can be seen as an opportunity to perhaps incorporate other texts? Or perhaps they already see that the Great Books are or can be broader than those of a certain national tradition in your experience? You can talk about the University of Los Andes or another experience that you have had, what would a Hispanic canon be like? It would have to be only of texts that come from, that start from this Hispanic culture. Is there only one Hispanic culture, that is, the one that comes from the Iberian Peninsula? Or... I imagine that we would have to consider other indigenous cultures, for example, Afro-Hispanic. I would love to know a little more about what you think about this Hispanic tradition, these traditions and the formation of a certain canon.

Clemente Cox: Yes. Excellent question and also a very broad topic. I think it is important to consider that the canon is not a univocal concept, but rather, we could say it is said in many ways. In other words, it exists, so to speak. It is not a closed concept either, but rather it admits a multiplicity of applications. And if it does speak at all. If we speak of something like a canon, for me it does not necessarily mean a strong normative affirmation that restricts entry to that which we do not consider to be canon. You know what I mean? I don't think it should be taken too seriously in that sense. Now, what does it mean or in what sense can we speak of a canon? The thing is that a canon could be any set of texts that gives us the keys to understand ourselves. I would say that as a very basic thing. Fundamentally, what you'd define as a canonical text is a text that allows you to understand yourself, and the texts that allow you to understand yourself are, on the one hand, texts that allude to a certain universality or to certain keys that are essential to the human condition. But on the other hand, they are texts like every text, grounded, no? That is to say, every text is a text that is born in a place, that has an author or a group of authors, a history of its transfer, etc. Therefore, the combination of these two elements will configure different particular canons. A person may even say “I have my own canon,” so to speak. That is to say, there is a certain set of important references to understand me. It is not like what happens in conversations with friends, with other friends who are good readers who suddenly tell you, “Have you read this book?” “This book is key.” “This book is important, right? Sure. Well, that book.” And perhaps one says, “No, I haven't read it.” Now, probably if this recommendation comes from a close friend, whose judgment I trust, it is probably worth reading and perhaps it will also give me some insight into myself. But even without that book, I also have my own list of my key books to understand myself. And when someone says to you, friend, “Hey, this book is key,” it is because they think there is a common element. In other words, there is something in me that is also in you. And this book is appealing to that which is common to both of us. Now, if, for example, a friend, an American friend, comes to me and says—Clemente, I want to understand Chile better, I want to understand Chilean culture better. What should I read? Well,

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then I would recommend a book. I would say, for example, read *Cántico General* by Pablo Neruda so that you can better understand that, so that. And that would be a canonical book for understanding. A key book for understanding that culture, that specific cultural continuum, right? In that sense, canon will be a term that will be applied in different ways, at different times and depending on the culture, but always keeping in mind, I think, those two keys that I was telling you about before. On the one hand, the fact that a book that we consider canonical is a book that will help us understand ourselves better, but on the other hand it is always a situated book, because in the end it is about getting to know this or that better, right? Now, there and in that sense, the canon is also like a funnel, it is like an umbrella, it is like a pyramid, I don't know, we can suggest different images, but there will be something that will be more at the base and that will have greater universality. And then there will also be more particular concretions that will be relevant to this specific context.

For example, to end with an anecdote on this, I taught a course on Great Books that was actually called “Reading the Classics” before. But well, it is a course on Great Books but we were focused on reading Greco-Roman epics. That is, we read Homer and Virgil and the course started in the first class with displaying a map, a world map, a map of everything, of the entire Earth. And I showed them on the map where Chile is located. And I told them, look, you are here, we are in the year 2024, we are trying, we are in a university, etc. But to understand ourselves, perhaps we should update and go back to looking in a very distant source for certain keys in Greece. I told them, look, what appears there in a certain sense will seem very foreign to you, it will seem very far away, it is in another language, it refers to another culture, it has a lot of, let's say, particular concretions that do not have much to do with our time. However, there is something universal that has to do with you and that allows us to understand ourselves.

Now, there is also a mediation there. A lot of water has passed under the bridge and many generations have—there's a lot of history, let's say. But a course of Great Books also has the intention of covering that gap of, basically, jumping a little in time and being able to grasp how what is in the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey* is also relevant for you today, now and relevant for you today, now, because it is also a key for you to understand yourself, not because of a completely personal and foreign historical interest, let's say, but it also has an existential key to the extent that there is an element that allows a friend to say to another this is key, this allows you to understand yourself, right? And that will then have some more fundamental, core texts, which can be very transversal to the culture. And in that sense we can speak of a Western culture. And well, that is the most complicated issue, let's say, but we can refer to Western culture, but then there will also be more specific details and then I will have to say well, if I want to understand myself from Chile and I want to understand Chile, I must also understand the literature of these latitudes. I must understand the literature of the Iberian Peninsula. Also the literature of the Americas. Chilean literature. So there will be a process of, let's say, narrowing the panorama a bit or getting a bit more specific, depending on the specific place we are in.

Veronica Bryant: OK, let's talk about a specific context, Clemente. For this course that you plan to implement, this program that for the American would be to study abroad at the University of

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Navarra that the ACTC is going to implement next year. This course is about the Hispanic canon, right? So, how did you and your colleague, María José, come up with the list of texts, or rather, the curriculum that the students have, how did they come up with this list and more or less what texts do you incorporate, consider necessary. It can be a brief summary; we don't have to go into details for everything, but give some examples.

Clemente Cox: Yes, the challenge you pose is a very good one, because we met with María José Gómez, from the Universidad Panamericana in Mexico, who in principle along with me will teach this course at the Universidad de Navarra in the summer of 2025. We were faced with the challenge of defining something like a Hispanic canon for a course that has a certain universality, so to speak, a certain generality, because it is a course that should also be interesting for students who come from different countries, both from the United States and from other latitudes, and who want to better understand the Hispanic world as a whole and by “Hispanic world”—the truth is that we made a decision that was partly arbitrary, right? But there are always certain somewhat arbitrary decisions here—restricting it to the Spanish language. Basically, we thought about which works were key to understanding the development of Spanish literature. That was the theme, right? The development of Spanish literature and hopefully being able to go from the origin of Spanish in the Iberian Peninsula to America and show a certain continuum there. So, here, when a set of canonical works or central works for a course is defined, I like to always think of it in this sense as a continuum, as a process in which I want to place the students and I want them to understand it, in which there is a constant play between tradition and innovation.

In other words, there is a relevant starting point that marked certain elements and that marked a certain character and that marked a certain, the importance of certain themes and that will later be taken up by some and varied ones. There will not be an interplay between tradition and innovation. And in that, to think about literature in the Spanish language, the inevitable starting point is the *Cantar del Mio Cid*. There we have a fundamental piece of the epic in Spanish. So the course starts with that. And then, obviously, we also had to make many arbitrary decisions regarding what to leave aside, because time is not, no, time is limited too, right? The course lasts three weeks on the campus of the University of Navarra. And so the idea was to choose, perhaps not too many—that is, no, not too many authors or too many texts, but to be able to delve a little deeper into them and see them well, but that they were very central and fundamental to understanding this. So we started with *El Mio Cid*. Then we have a selection of Spanish medieval poetry, medieval poetry from the 12th to the 15th centuries. Then we jump to colonial literature with some colonial texts that also have a very novel freshness, precisely because they are texts that arise from a very powerful experience which is the meeting of two worlds and therefore we see there a literature with its own characteristics that is very interesting.

We have there some extracts from *El viaje de Colón*, the diary of Christopher Columbus' first voyage, and from the *Second Letter of Relation* by Hernán Cortés. And then we return partially to the Iberian Peninsula, although here it is also shared with some of the territories of the colonies with poetry from the Golden Age. We have there a selection of some of the main exponents of the Spanish Golden Age. Then we move on as it should be and dedicating several sessions to Don Quixote. We are not going to read it in full, of course, but we will read quite a few chapters from the First Part. And then we have a play from the Golden Age, because the

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truth is that there can't be only poetry from the Golden Age. There has to be one, a dramatic work, because the production from that period is completely extraordinary. And we chose *La vida es sueño (Life Is a Dream)* by [Pedro] Calderón de la Barca. And then we moved on to, I would say, the 19th and 20th centuries. The truth is that there, of course, we made the decision to leave a couple of centuries behind, but we had to move forward and the third week we went straight to Latin America and the production of Latin American poetry, starting with Rubén Darío and then the avant-garde movements in Latin America and some more contemporary poetry. And then a brief sample of what the Latin American Boom was with the novel. With *Cien años de soledad (100 Years of Solitude)*, by Gabriel García Márquez and some short stories by Cortázar and Borges, and perhaps some other author, because in the Boom they were also masters of the short story, right? And now it's also interesting to consider that the course is held in Navarra, it's held in Pamplona, right? So we also decided to include something a bit atypical, but that would also allow us to allude to that *place*, to Pamplona. Therefore, in one session we decided to watch a film “The Sun Also Rises” which is based on this little novel by Hemingway, set in Pamplona. And then that is accompanied by a visit to the city. Therefore, I think we took on the challenge, we took seriously the challenge of taking charge of the Hispanic canon in a place also located here in Pamplona and I think it will be a very good experience. We hope that it can be taught next year and of course, all those who are listening to this are very welcome to promote the course or to go themselves.

Veronica Bryant: Great. Thank you for giving a quick overview of the course content. And also, your approach to putting together the syllabus, the content, because it is surely very difficult to distinguish between historical texts and other types. Well, perhaps as a final comment, I would like to know what you see as the attractiveness of a Hispanic canon or of this Hispanic tradition for a more American audience, especially perhaps thinking about this future of the United States, in which we are going to be increasingly Hispanic as a country. And well, that would be the last question I ask you.

Clemente Cox: I believe that the United States will have the challenge of better understanding the Hispanic constituency that exists in its nation, because as you say, it will be a country with an increasingly greater presence of Spanish speakers and there are even certain linguistic statistics that show this must be taken very seriously for education. That is, more and more bilingual teachers and administrators will be needed, both at the secondary and primary level as well as at the college level. Therefore, for anyone from the United States, whether that person has Hispanic roots or not, this course can be extremely attractive and interesting to better understand their own nation. In this sense, connecting with what I said in a previous question, this course will not only be a historical curiosity, it will not only be a kind of cultural tourism to appreciate something completely foreign and distant, but it will be a course that will provide keys to understanding the same cultural processes that are occurring in the United States. In that sense, it can also be an opportunity for university or school teachers to be encouraged to introduce themselves and to delve deeper into the most important texts of the Hispanic tradition, in order to have resources for their own teaching, to have resources for their own reading of, let's say, the situations that occur every day in the United States, right? And in this sense, the course will have an advantage because we hope to teach it in both English and Spanish. Therefore, whoever speaks Spanish can join in Spanish and whoever speaks only English, of course, can take this course in English.

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Therefore. Well, in short, in response to your question, I think that it is a course that gives keys to understanding the component, the tradition of that Hispanic component that is also very much at play and making a lot of movements in the same, in the same nation of the United States, right? Therefore, I imagine that it is also relevant for anyone in the United States.

Veronica Bryant: Indeed. And then to return to other concepts that you have mentioned in our conversation, eh? And very appropriate, I think. Well, yes, it shows—the study of this tradition shows a certain pattern of cultural heritage of all humanity, right? Universal themes for us as human beings, and I hope that all those who can study this Hispanic tradition also experience this continuum of culture that is found or that is found in many cultures or well, human culture. And well, I wish you much, much success with this course and we will have to talk later about how it goes, well, clearly. I want to thank you very much for the time and the very insightful ideas that you have shared with us today. I hope that your arrival in Dallas, in this country, goes well and that your studies at the University of Dallas and then the program next year in Navarra that you will teach go very well. Again, thank you.

Clemente Cox: Thank you very much, Verónica, for this conversation.