INDIGENOUS LITERARY TRADITIONS IN MODERN HISPANIC LITERATURE

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During its imperial reign, Spain controlled extensive territories around the world and encountered diverse peoples. With continued interaction, hybrid cultures began to emerge, blending western and indigenous traditions. Contemporary Hispanic culture is thus a continuation of the patterns of Spain and the pre-Colombian legacy unique to each region. While Hispanic literature is often perceived as having grown primarily from origins in Spain, it may also take its roots in literary forms that predated Spanish arrival. Through focus on examples pertaining to the descendants of pre-Hispanic societies from in distinct geographic areas, I seek to explore the ways in which modern authors perpetuate indigenous heritage in the literature they produce. The pieces selected for analysis are Leyendas de Isla de Pascua, an anthology of Rapanui folklore compiled by Padre Sebastián Englert in Chilean Polynesia; Hombres de maíz (Men of Maize), a novel by Guatemalan Nobel laureate Miguel Ángel Asturias that draws upon early colonial writings of the Maya; and Mario Vargas Llosa’s El hablador (The Storyteller), which illustrates the evolution of indigenous narrative through the case of the Machiguenga in the Peruvian Amazon. In particular, I will examine how native myths are used and understood in contexts of present-day cultural conflict.