

2005 ACS Technology Fellowship Application

Post-revolutionary Cuba: A Videolit© on Leonardo Padura Fuentes An Intersection of Literature, Film and Pedagogy

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1. Background: Rationale for Overall Project

As educators in our present time, we compete with media products that affect the approach, understanding, and processing of information and as a result the traditional classroom often fails to attract students and excite learning. The purpose of my work on videolits© is to respond to the contemporary learning and viewing habits of a television-literate¹ student population. By exploring the potential of time-based² media for carrying traditionally print-based literary information, this project seeks to employ emerging technologies to enhance both the learning experience and the message itself, especially as it reveals itself through the written word.

Effective supplementary materials in the contemporary classroom for the teaching of Latin American Literatures and Cultures are self-evidently absent. The lack of integration in the many approaches to the teaching of the Spanish language and Latin American literature and culture is a further obstacle to the quality of materials.

Videolits© unite writing, orality, and computer wizardry into an innovative use of technology that enhances the interaction and dissemination of literary products. This synthesis of contemporary technology and literature helps disclose the grounds of human cultural production that have been occluded by the traditionally linear educational format and the textual separation of audience from artist. Through the video format, students of literature once again gain access to the sound of the author; they observe his/her gestures and interact with him/her in a manner that the printed text alone cannot provide.

In videolits©, animation serves as an interpretative point of departure in a time-based adaptation. Moving type is layered with electronically manipulated video to re-create and expand meaning through visual and kinetic metaphors. The visual possibilities of the printed word are emphasized as a means to grasp the texts' literary depth and significance. Additionally, original soundtracks include theatrical readings and music.

2. Description: Part of the Project To Be Done Under ACS Funding

I am requesting a 2005 summer grant for the **postproduction stage of a videolit© on Leonardo Padura Fuentes** (Havana, Cuba, 1955). The grant will allow me to cover the essential costs of graphic design, original music, and editing, which a videolit© entails.

Leonardo Padura Fuentes is one of the most recognized writers in contemporary Cuban literature. He is internationally known as one of creators of the new detective novel. This new and popular genre uses the *hard boil* composition in order to examine the crucial questions of our time. He has been the recipient of prestigious awards: UNEAC (Cuban Writers Guild Award, 1993), Café de Gijón (1995), Dashiell Hammett, and Premio Internacional de Novela Negra (1998). His best know work is a tetralogy, *Las cuatro estaciones* (The Four Seasons), four novels depicting post-revolutionary Cuban society through the eyes of Mario Conde, a character that personifies the best qualities of the New Detective Novel.³

3. Timeline: Deliverables/Milestones for ACS Funded Part of Project

- December 2004: Film-interview with writer Leonardo Padura Fuentes in Havana, Cuba. (This interview has been already arranged with Padura Fuentes, and I have already obtained partial funding for this part of the project)
- Spring semester 2005: Videolit© script writing.
- July 2005: Editing. Completion of the videolit© on Padura Fuentes.
- Fall 2005: Classroom and researcher testing.
- Spring 2006: Evaluation, Revisions.

4. Technology: Technical Requirements for the Project

- Video editing facilities with Final Cut Pro and software for graphic design. I will film in mini-DV format and edit the master in Beta format.

I have been working on the concept as well as on the technological aspects of Videolits© for the last ten years. The videolits© I already completed, *Ernesto Cardenal, Cántico Cósmico* (1995); *The Voice of Rigoberta, Granddaughter of the Maya*, and *The McOndo Continent* (2002) received the 1995 and the 2002 Latin American Studies Association (LASA) Award of Merit in Film, respectively. These films were screened at festivals (national and international), conferences (national and international), special meetings at various US universities, and classrooms.

5. Other Support: Institutional and/or Outside Support for Project

I have already obtained partial funding for the project (film-interview stage) from the Latin American Studies Association (LASA) and the UR Department of Modern Languages and Literatures. This funding covers most of travel expenses to Havana, Cuba. For the additional funding needed for this stage of the project, I am applying for a UR Research Grant.

6. Learning Outcomes: How the Project Will Enhance Teaching/Learning

A Videolit© explores the possibilities that the illuminated screen (TV, computer and projected film) may bring to the reception and dissemination of literature. In a Videolit©, the screen is valued and used for its ability to channel literary and analytical messages. Videolits© build on the stimulating pedagogical possibilities that the medium "screen" brings to the teaching and delivery of literary texts.

Critical to the success of this project is the understanding that these materials are not intended to replace the act of reading but to enhance and extend it. The very nature of this material activates a new kind of reading (the reader reads while listening and watching), in which the graphic and spoken word are at the center of the interaction. This new reading performance provides the receiver with the immediacy of lyric and prose communication, merging sound and musicality with language.

These sensory features are especially important for a non-native reader/receiver as well as for any student who seeks to familiarize him/herself with literary language in Spanish.

7. Curriculum: How the Project Will Be Integrated into the Curriculum

Videolits© intend to respond to the increasing caesura, or schism, between literary production, electronic communication, and academic criticism and debate. Videolits© are intended primarily for use in classes of Latin American Literature and/or Culture, by any Spanish, Latin American, or Literature studies program. However their format makes them also suitable for mass media release, and therefore for wide-ranging access and consumption.

8. Assessment: How the Project Will Be Evaluated

The material will be tested in two different settings, and by two specialists teaching at two ACS campuses: Birmingham-Southern College, and Centenary College. Both instructors agreed to participate in this project.

- Classroom test: The videolit© will be presented and discussed with students in the context of the undergraduate seminar "Cultura cubana post-revolucionaria" (Post-Revolutionary Cuban Culture). Instructor: Dr. Barbara Domcekova, Fall 2005 (Birmingham-Southern College)
- Research Project on Leonardo Padura Fuentes: Dr. Maureen Murov, Fall 2005 (Centenary College)

9. Collaboration and Dissemination: How the Project Will Be Shared with ACS Colleagues

In the Spring of 2001, and under the auspices of the Consortium, a group of representatives from the various Latin American Studies Programs at ACS institutions met in the context of the Latin American Studies Symposium at Birmingham Southern and constituted the Latin American Studies Planning Committee. I have been participating in this committee since its inception. The group discussed and defined a series of coordinated actions towards the creation of the Latin American Virtual Program, LAS. LAS has already accomplished the following collaborative educational projects:

- A traveling exhibition on Cuban Art that previewed at University of Richmond in October 2003, and opened concurrently with the 12th Annual Latin American Studies Symposium at Birmingham-Southern College;
- *Cuba Plástica, It's Not Easy, Cuba*, a film that travels with the exhibit. The film portrays most of the participant artists in the exhibit, their workshops, and even the actual painting of some of the works included in the exhibit. The film premiered concurrently with the exhibit preview, October 2003.
- A 2003 joint Spring Break in Cuba: ACS sponsored a group of 10 participants (6 ACS faculty and 4 students) who participated in a spring break experience in Cuba.

My project for a videolit© on Leonardo Padura Fuentes is inspired and informed by these initiatives. I see this project as a continuation of the close collaboration with my teacher colleagues of Latin American Studies in the context of LAS, as well as a follow up on many of the issues that the Cuban art exhibit and the associated film convey. Barbara Domcekova has expressed interest in presenting this videolit© on Padura at a future Latin American Studies Symposium, at Birmingham-Southern College.

¹ Visual literacy: the ability to interpret content through images.

² Messages that exist and unravel in time; the meaning of the message is exposed over time.

³ The titles are: *Máscaras*, *Paisaje de otoño*, *Pasado perfecto*, and *Vientos de cuaresma*.