

# Two languages, one world

*Andrés Henestrosa \**

**T**he Meeting of Two Worlds<sup>1</sup> was also the meeting of two men, of one man with another. One event was the discovery of another land; another event, no lesser and perhaps greater, was encountering another man. History would have been different if all that was found were another world. Different indeed without the encounter with another man. There would be no New World without a new man.

And he who says man says language, blood, spirit; in a word, he is saying culture. From the conjunction of all this, from its harmonization after violent conflicts, was born a new man, one who was half Indian and half white: the Latin American, the Hispano-American, the Ibero-American or the Indo-Spaniard, as I like to say.

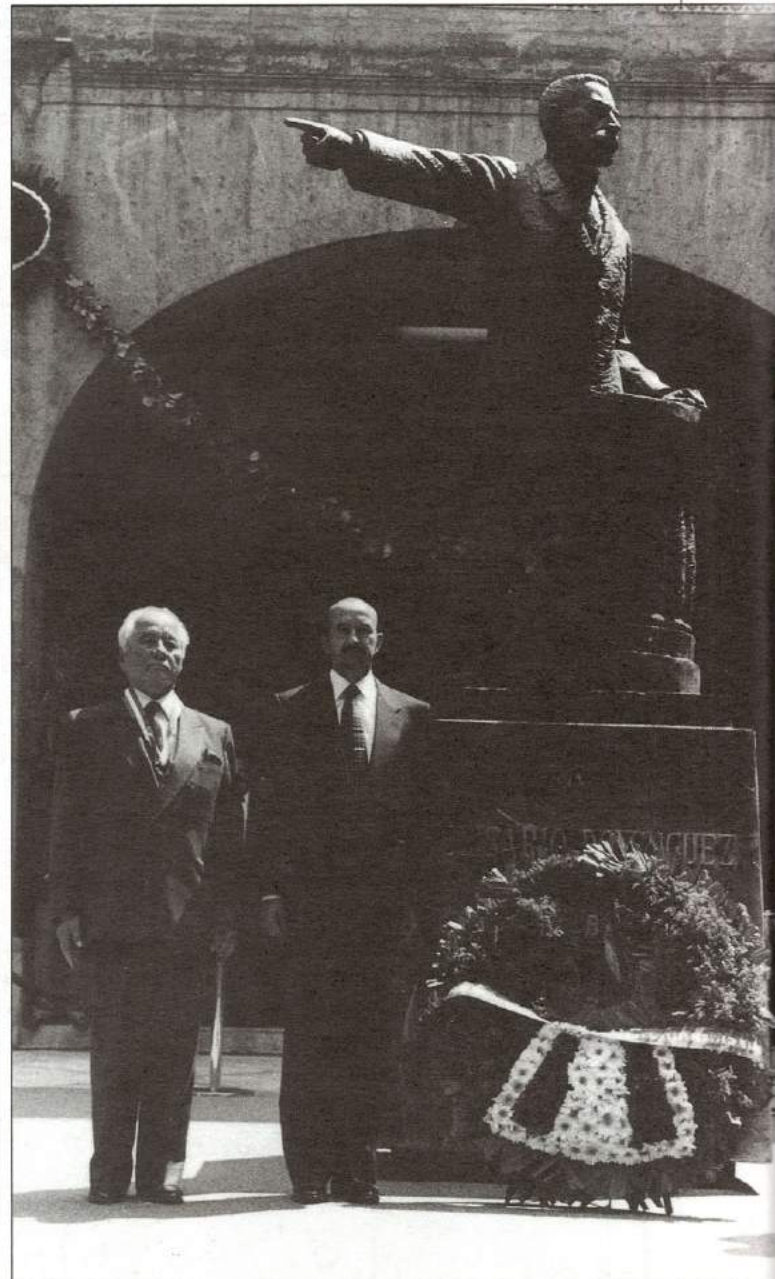
He who succeeded in making peace among and bringing together his bloods and his souls is the all-round American. And what is said of the Indian is said of the white man too: he who accepts that from a certain day onwards Spain cannot be explained or understood at all without the presence of America is the Hispanic in the full sense.

Those who succeeded in passing from the Indian language, their mother tongue, to the foreign, newly arrived language, going from the glyph, the ideogram and scroll, which were their alphabet, spelling and grammar book, to the letter, and making them brothers, making a single whole of them all, carried out a cultural feat whose magnitude has still not been fully grasped and which verges on the marvelous and providential.

This business of being one man and becoming two, one for each language you speak, and then making one out of two, has the appearance of a miracle. This is what happened with the native and the foreigner. Jerónimo de

<sup>1</sup> Meeting of Two Worlds: the combination of European and pre-Columbian cultures that began when the Spanish Conquistadors set foot in the Americas. (Editor's note.)

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*President Carlos Salinas (right) awards the Belisario Domínguez Medal to Andrés Henestrosa.*

Aguilar learned the language of his captors and became a Maya Indian. Gonzalo Guerrero was a total Maya Indian. Doña Marina —Clavijero tells us— learned the Spanish language with great speed and facility, and was also fluent in the Mexica and Maya languages, speaking them as her own. And what this meant for the Conquest of Mexico is already known. Because —as Nebrija said— language was always the companion of Empire.

Languages have their syllabic reckoning, their intonations, pauses, a spirit in which they are spoken; a



physical as well as emotional effort which every word, sentence, paragraph demands of the speaker and which there is no way to evade or get around, since they are impossible to cancel out. Without this, no language is possible.

In my native language, Zapotec, there are monosyllables which have the duration of a polysyllable, of a whole phrase. The language consumes that physical and emotional force already mentioned. All languages — we have been speaking only of the Indian ones— have particularities which defend them and characterize them. Particles and even entire words which have no meaning, but without which there would be no language.

Columbus said one of these languages was the softest, the sweetest, the happiest of all, since those who spoke it were always smiling. This is well known by those, like me, who speak one of these languages.

One can recall the first Nahuatl-speaking Indians who went over to the Spanish language. They were pure in blood but *mestizo* in spirit and culture. One of them, Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxóchitl —the sole rival of the Inca Garcilaso— was called Tito Livio del Anáhuac by José de la Riva Agüero. Another, Hernando de Alvarado Tezozómoc, was an author in both Spanish and Nahuatl; both, Alva Ixtlilxóchitl and Alvarado Tezozómoc, members of the Indian nobility, were trained in the schools established by the Conquistadors, where, in addition to the Christian religion, they learned the Spanish, Latin and Italian languages.

One more, this time from Peru, a *mestizo* in a double sense through both blood and language, was Garcilaso de la Vega, the Inca, son of a *ñusta* (Inca princess), Isabel Chimpuc-Ocillo, and of the Spanish captain Sebastián Garci Lasso de la Vega Vargas, who was in turn the son of Alonso de Henestrosa, an Extremaduran from Badajoz. At one maternal breast Garcilaso learned Spanish and at the other, Quechua. In the living room he heard and learned of the grandeur of his paternal lineage, in Spanish; in the kitchen, from his mother, grandparents, aunts, uncles and servants, he learned the grandeur of his maternal ancestry, in Quechua.

As a man, when he wrote the *Royal Commentaries of the Indians of Peru*, he did it with equal pride in his two bloods and his two languages. And if at times he seemed more inclined towards his maternal lineage, this was because it was on that side that injustice fell. Garcilaso, the Inca, so called in order to distinguish him from his namesake of Toledo, was equally expert in his two languages, although he wrote only in Spanish, while his works are full of Quechuaisms, which enrich the language without straying from the essence of either tongue.

In 1493, five hundred years ago, Antonio de Nebrija's *Vocabulario* (Vocabulary) was published, in which he said of his *Arte de la lengua española* (Art of the Spanish Language): "I learned the Spanish language, my second tongue; I gained the other half of my soul; I became the *mestizo* that I am. To say this and proclaim this on this day fills me with pride."

## Andrés Henestrosa awarded the Belisario Domínguez Medal

The Mexican Senate has awarded the Belisario Domínguez Medal to the Oaxacan poet and historian Andrés Henestrosa, for his contributions to the nation and his work in favor of our identity, roots, and national values.

Henestrosa was born in Ixhuatán, Oaxaca, on November 30, 1906. He became known as a literary critic through numerous essays, articles and stories, in addition to his books. The theme of his work has been the exaltation of the Indian past, the defense of the liberal spirit and the study of the expressions of national culture.

In 1929 he participated in the presidential campaign of José Vasconcelos. In 1936 he received a scholarship from the Guggenheim Foundation of New York to study the significance of the Zapotec culture in Mexico. For 40 years he taught Language and Literature at the National University of Mexico (UNAM); he also served as congressman and senator. *Voices of Mexico* has the honor of having him on our Editorial Board.

Among his most important works are *Los hombres que dispersó la danza* (Men Scattered by the Dance, 1929), in which he recreates the stories and legends of the Zapotec people; *Los cuatro abuelos* (The Four Grandparents, 1960); *Una confidencia a media voz* (Half-Spoken Confidence, 1973); and *El maíz, riqueza del pobre* (Corn, Wealth of The Poor, 1981).

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Staff Writer.





*Without letters there is no fatherland, there is no republic: Andrés Henestrosa.*

**I prolong everyone, I prolong myself. I have not been their copier, their follower, their epigone**

On August 13, 1521, the great city of Tenochtitlán-Mexico fell to the Spanish. From that day on Spanish was the official language. After the silence which followed the din of the city's defense and fall, the word which was heard was new, dyed in the two bloods of the Indian and the white man: the *mestizo* word of Mexico.

The Indian languages did not die out; they are alive, victorious survivors of the persecution and negation aimed against them. That which praised idols was not a language. Language was that which praised the true God. They called them dialects, and chatter, little but noise. And if these languages were learned it was because they discovered that without mastering them it would be impossible to penetrate, and thus defeat, the Indian cultures.

The Indian languages revealed what the Conquest concealed. It was as if they had broken a polished vase and then bent over it lovingly, gathering the pieces and putting it back together. This is the origin of the Sahagúns, the Motolinías, the Gantes, with Nahuatl. That of Landa with Maya. And that of Córdova with Zapotec. All in the 16th century. The knowledge of Indian languages is what made possible the excellence of the works on Mexican antiquities, by such as Clavijero, who worked in the 18th century; and Garibay Kintana, in the 20th.

My literary work is but the signs and tokens of an apprenticeship; one which has been arduous, constant, tenacious, devoted. It began when, leaving adolescence behind me, I arrived in Mexico City, almost seventy years ago. Like two others I knew, I soon realized that without knowing the Spanish language I would not be the man I darkly dreamed of being. And that meant reading books, memorizing lessons, consulting the dictionary. And I'm still at it.

I come from Indian languages. One person for each language I spoke. One more man was I when I learned Spanish. To bring together my languages, to make the men I was one, that could be the feat of the soul which I would like to claim as my own.

What did I do, what do I do, what do I seek to keep on doing with this wealth, these gifts and these tools? What every writer has to do: to serve those like him; to unravel the mystery of his people; to raise, with his songs, the walls which will defend the fatherland; to shore up and fortify the Constitution. Because without letters there is no fatherland, there is no republic; one does not exist without the other, or neither of the two exists. Because of this it was said that the pen and the sword are brothers. The one does not blunt the other. As far as I have been able, this has been my literary work **M**