

## PODCAST – “LA BIBLIOTECA”

Hispanic Division, Library of Congress

*An exploration of the Library’s collections that focus on the cultures of Spain, Portugal, Latin America, and the Hispanic community in the US.*

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### SEASON 1/Episode 1

#### *The Archive of Hispanic Literature on Tape: An Introduction*

##### *Introduction*

**Catalina Gómez:** ¡Hola! and welcome to *La biblioteca* the podcast series from the Hispanic Division at the Library of Congress. I am Catalina Gómez, a reference librarian, and I’m here with...

**Talía Guzmán-González:** Talía Guzmán-González, also reference librarian in the Hispanic Reading Room. Hi Catalina!

**CG:** Hi Talía! We’re finally launching our podcast today -- we’re so excited! It’s wonderful to share with our listeners some of the treasures and talk about the resources here at the Library of Congress. Our collection holds over 10 million items related to Spain, Portugal, Latin America and the Hispanic community in the US. In fact, our Luso-Hispanic collection is the largest collection in the world

**TGG:** Indeed! Before we begin, we this is important to specify the term “Luso” since probably some of our listeners are not as familiar with that term as they are with Hispanic, right? Luso-Hispanic were the Latin names for both entities, the regions of the Iberian Peninsula. That is, Portugal was Lusitania and Spain was Hispania. Historically, “luso” has been used as shorthand to refer to Portuguese language and the culture of those countries that were once colonized by Portugal like Brazil, for example.

**CG:** So that means that when we talk about Luso-Hispanic collections we are talking about materials related to Portugal, Spain, but also the countries they once colonized like Brazil, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Colombia, Ecuador, Perú, etc.

**TGG:** And the list goes on. Our collection covers all of the 31 of countries in Latin America, the Iberian Peninsula, and also Latinos in the United States; and most if not all the languages and dialects spoken in our region.

**CG:** So let me tell our listeners a bit about our first season! It will consist of eight episodes where we will be talking with scholars, writers, curators, and translators about the legacy of some of the poets and writers that are part of our *Archive of Hispanic Literature on Tape*. This is an archive curated here in the Library of Congress that includes audio recordings of prominent 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century Luso-Hispanic

writers and poets reading from their works. In fact, most of these recordings have in this studio, where we're sitting right now, which is extremely exciting.

**TGG:** Yes it is.

**CG:** So this is one of the Library's most unique literary treasures, it's truly a gem of a collection and we are just so happy to be able to share the recordings more widely now that we're digitizing and uploading the material online!

**TGG:** Yes, the collection has over 750 recordings. That is an amazing number. Today, during our first episode, we will be talking about the history of this collection since it began in 1943, as well as our more recent efforts to digitize it and make the items available online. We will also get to hear from Georgette Dorn, who is the Chief of the Hispanic Division and the curator of this collection. She has been working with the collection for more than 40 years. Dr. Dorn has lived through some of the most fascinating years of this project and she got to interview and record figures like Jorge Luis Borges, Julio Cortázar and Gabriel García Márquez, just to name a few. And you, Catalina, have been spearheading this important digitization project for the past 3 years; why don't you tell us a little bit, first about the history of the Archive, a little bit of context, and then a little about the digitization work.

**CG:** Sure, I'd be happy to. The Archive is... I mean I love this Archive, I've been working with it, and it's such a precious collection. It began, as we already said, in the early '1940s, and it really began because at that time the Library of Congress began to record, to do audio recordings of literary readings, this was the time of magnetic tape technology. This was the time when a lot of the readings... the Library has a very strong tradition of literary readings of really prominent writers... began capturing a lot of the readings and also bringing poets and writers to the studio, in the beginning mostly American figures. So in 1943, Francisco Aguilera, who worked in the Hispanic Division, was asked to participate in a session translating a poem by the poet Archibald MacLeish, a very important American poet who actually at the time was the Librarian of Congress, the head of the Library. So Aguilera came to the studio, translated this poem, and my theory is that this is the moment when Aguilera really envisioned to begin a similar collection in the Hispanic Division and to begin to capture voices of literary figures from Latin America and Spain. He began in 1943 this collection. He began recording and bringing to Washington D.C. many poets and writers and he began mostly focusing on Latin America and Spain. Some of the first figures he brought were Spanish poets Juan Ramón Jiménez, and Pedro Salinas, also some poets from Chile like Pabla de Rokha and Winétt de Roka – his wife; so this collection took off. In the '60s, sorry in the '50s Gabriela Mistral, who is one of our Nobel Laureates, a poet from Chile, recorded and she also said something that was very instrumental to the Archive, she sort of advised Aguilera to not just record people here in D.C. but also to go to the regions and capture voices there – which he did.

**TGG:** Those were the missions.

**CG:** Right. He called them "missions." We have all the documents, and the reports of "the missions." He did three extensive trips in the late '50s and early '60s. So this archive really began to grow and become a really beautiful collection of Latin American, and Spanish and Portuguese Literature. In the '70s that's

when a lot of the writers from the Latin American Boom, like García Márquez, Julio Cortázar, Mario Vargas Llosa, Carlos Fuentes recorded for the Archive. Then, actually earlier, Neruda recorded in 1966. So it really became of the most unique audio archives, literary audio archives, and just a very beautiful treasure.

So starting in 2013, I began the effort to digitize the collection, and began collaborating with Library's Recoded Sound Division because the original master tapes of the Archive are in the custody of this division. So I began collaborating with the Recoded Sound staff to digitize these tapes, which is also actually a preservation move, you know... you want to digitize analog and tape material because it's not going to last forever. So we began this project and in 2015, we launched the site where we began to upload the recordings. It was really a thrill to bring this Archive to the world, really, and to have it be available to anyone with an internet connection and also to have the people in Latin America and in Spain and these countries from whom these writers are so meaningful, be able to listen to them for free. It really has been a great ride to work with this collection.

**TGG:** Something that I love about this Archive is how it documents so many languages: Spanish, English, Portuguese, Catalan, Basque, French, Dutch, Creole, Nahuatl, Zapotec, Quechua, and Aymara; and also the distinctive regional dialects and speech patterns of these authors. We have many authors reading in Spanish, but then we have Spanish from Spain that is going to be very different from Spanish from Cuba – right we have some Cuban poets recorded – or from Puerto Rico, or from Argentina. So documenting those differences is also very, very important. And just so you have a taste of the variety of languages that we have in the Archive, let's listen Guadelupan author Maryse Condé reading in French from her novel *Windward Heights*.

- **[Excerpt] Guadelupan author Maryse Condé reading from her novel *Windward Heights* (1998). (*Archive of Hispanic Literature on Tape*, Library of Congress, 1999)**

**TGG:** Fantastic. That was Maryse Condé, her book *Windward Heights* published in 1998. This is a novel that reimagines Emily Brontë's novel *Wuthering Heights* set in Caribbean society.

**CG:** Next we'll listen to an excerpt from a recording with Mexican Friar and scholar Angel María Garibay. In this recording Garibay reads his own translations of Nahuatl poetry in Spanish, but what we're going to show right now is him reading the original Nahuatl version of one of the Aztec poems.

- **[Excerpt] Aztec poem read in the original Nahuatl by Father Ángel María Garibay (Mexico) (*Archive of Hispanic Literature on Tape*, Library of Congress, 1999)**

**TGG:** These voices and many more are part of our collection thanks to the efforts of curator, such as Georgette Dorn, the Chief of the Hispanic Division of the Library. Let's talk with Georgette and see if she will share with us some of her anecdotes about the archive!

Georgette Dorn is the Chief of the Hispanic Division of the Library of Congress. She has a Ph.D. in History from Georgetown University, and her special fields include the political and cultural history of the

Southern Cone and the literature of Iberia, Latin America, and the Caribbean. She has recorded close to 500 writers for the Archive of Hispanic Literature on Tape, which today contains more than 750 readings. She is also the curator of the archive since 1970. She has published numerous essays and articles on Latin American history and culture, and papers on the Library's Luso-Hispanic collections. She is a member of the adjunct faculty of the Georgetown University Center for Latin American Studies and she chaired the Premio del Rey prize committee of the American Historical Association, and in 2006 received the distinguished Service Award from the Conference in Latin American History.

### **Interview with Georgette Dorn**

**TGG:** Hi Georgette, How are you?

**Georgette Dorn:** I'm fine, thank you.

**TGG:** We're very excited that you're talking with us again about the Archive because you've been such an integral part of the history of the Archive for decades and you've met everyone, I think. Every time we talk about an author, she's like "Oh I remember when he came to the Library." Every time I am jealous that you met all these incredible and fascinating people. So would you tell our audience how did you start working for the Archive?

**GD:** I really started working Howard Cline, who was the Chief of the Hispanic Division. Although I was a Reference Librarian, and mostly did translations for him from German to English on the Maya Codex, and different scholarly articles, and I also worked on New Mexico Land Grants for him because I did reference. Then Francisco Aguilera was the head of the Archive and he asked me to be at some of the recordings. So I think I was there when Homero Aridjis recorded – Mexican – and Pablo Neruda, which was very exciting. Then we had lunch with Neruda after the recording in the Deputy Librarian's office. He was talking about the Civil War and he had been in the Civil War with Stephen Spender. And Stephen Spender was another friend who was here; he's a poet, a recorded poet by the Library's English-language poets. So he would reminisce about Octavio Paz and the Spanish Civil War. Then Neruda talked a lot about food, and how he loved food and cooking. It was interesting.

Aguilera had leave of absence in '69. He was in Wisconsin teaching, and then I kind of did the Archive, and once he retired at the end of '69, I fell into it. So it was very exciting, it is a very exciting project.

**CG:** So you worked with this collection for, like close to 30 years, right? A little bit more than 30 years.

**GD:** Like 40!

**CG:** 40 years, yes. So what has been your experience, progressively, with building an archive like this and continuing such a historic archive of literature?

**GD:** Well, you know, it's interesting because Aguilera always said I was the ideal person because I was not a trained literature person, I was a historian, a trained historian. So he also talked a lot about the

schools, at the time they began analyzing the authors... So he kind of looked at poetry as a historian himself. In 1975 there was a conference just for Cortázar in the University of Oklahoma, and that was my first real interview with a writer and it just kind of felt natural, I never planned to do an interview. So it was really great fun.

**TGG:** I like that interview a lot. If our audience, if you have an opportunity to listen to that recording of Cortázar, at the beginning there's an interview with Georgette and Julio Cortázar about different topics. You asked him about what movies he likes, about his short stories, and it's a very nice and natural conversation with this author who is, you know, very honest. This is the interview where he says "I'll tell students never to ask for advice about how to write."

**CG:** It's one of my favorite recordings, too. It's wonderful. And you did a beautiful job with it.

**GD:** The short stories he recorded were really good, very playful; and that's very much like him.

**CG:** Yes, and Cortázar is so influential in the world of literature in Latin America. Which have been some of the favorite moments and anecdotes?

**GD:** Well I thought it was very exciting to record Cortázar, and Vargas Llosa two years later, also in Oklahoma; he's another great favorite of mine. I have no favorites because it's like asking which one my children I like best. I like them all. All of my, I don't know, 400 plus authors, maybe almost 500, I like all of them; but I like Nicanor Parra a lot. He was very plain spoken, very regular, nice, and he was wonderful. Unfortunately I never thought of – then that was my first real recording, I think in 1970 – of doing an interview, but I talked to him afterwards, so he just read straight poems and he was very good.

**CG:** And of course, there is Borges, who recorded repeatedly for this collection.

**GD:** He recorded before my time, in 1958, when Aguilera travelled because he did three travels. I think the Rockefeller foundation and they went to Latin America... Central America/ Mexico, Latin America, Spain and Portugal, and that's when they began really doing Portuguese in earnest, and Catalanes. So he recorded Borges in Buenos Aires in, I think, 1958 and then Borges went to the Library many times. I recorded him in '76, which was a very interesting recording because he talked about his influences, the English authors and he told me how he had read English as a child, he spoke English because of his grandmother was an English person. So he spoke English and Spanish at home. He read *Don Quixote* in English, the translation, he read *Huckleberry Finn*, he read Conrad...

**TGG:** He was a great reader.

**GD:** At nine he wrote his first poem, and at fourteen he was translating English and American writers into Spanish. So then of course he talked about his ancestors. He writes about these heroic figures in his poetry. His one great grandfather fought in Peru in the independence movement, another one fought in the wars of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and he was also related to Rosas, the dictator of Argentina in the 1800s. So he had this thing about ancestry, heroes, knife fights, you know? That was mainly because he has spent a lot of time in Europe – his father was going blind so he spent the World War 1 years in Europe, in

Switzerland, where he learned German, and he learned how to translate German into Spanish. He also began studying Germanic, I mean, Nordic Literature, Icelandic and all of those... the Norse Literatures. So when he came to Buenos Aires he rediscovered the city, the living cities. So he wrote the most wonderful poems about, you know, the *barrios* of Buenos Aires, and all of that. And I still think as a great prose writer that he is, he's probably the greatest poet of the Spanish language of the second half. I mean that's what I think.

**TGG:** That's your personal opinion.

**GD:** Yeah.

**CG:** I love his poems, too.

**TGG:** Borges was also a librarian, and you were a librarian at the time. Did you commiserate about that?

**GD:** He was a librarian like I am.

**TGG:** Yes, of course, by default or...

**GD:** By doing the profession. By *aprendizaje!*

**TGG:** Of course.

**GD:** He was an apprentice. He worked at a municipal library in the 30s... 30s or 40s He said that he used to work in the morning and do cataloguing and go to the basement to read books and so he read Gibbon... He adored English authors. Chesterton... you know? And he talk a lot about that. As it happens I am also an anglophile having grown up in Argentina. So we talked a lot about English literature. After one, he had an illness... I think in the library he fell on some steps and he hurt his head, then he said he was sick for a long time, for like several months. Then his mother read him C.S. Lewis *Out of the Silent Planet*, and it just so happened that I also read that. I love C.S. Lewis, he's a very interesting whimsical kind of author. Out of that I think grew his later works about other planets.

**CG:** But, how was that day with Borges?

**GD:** Well, you know, by the time I really got to know Borges he was completely blind. So you kind of went with him, and you told him where to go because he never had a cane, but he was very alert for things, so you would tell him where to go. So he would ask me "Let's go into the stacks because I want to smell the books." You know, for most blind people, all the other sense are very keen, the smell and the touch and so forth. So he just loved the library because he said this was the library of Babel. So he really liked coming here.

**CG:** Georgette, were there any recordings that were very surprising, that whatever the author read was something completely unexpected, or something unpublished?

**TGG:** ... or whatever he said at the moment...

**GD:** Juan Goytisolo came to give a lecture at the Whittall Pavilion. I think he was invited by the Spanish Embassy. And at the Whittall he said, "I won't talk my prepared speech, I am going to talk about Franco's death," because Franco had just died. So then, that afternoon when I recorded him, he also mentioned this momentous time when Franco has died. He is another one of my favorite authors, a very inventive, interesting author.

**CG:** So he read some sort of epitaph for Franco, right? ...that he had just written. Well, Georgette is doing and she has done an amazing job with this archive.

**GD:** Well thank you! It was very nice talking to you! Thank you very much.

**TGG:** Thank you, Georgette.

**GD:** Thank you.

### ***Conclusion***

**CG:** Thank you for tuning in! To listen to some of the recordings from *the Archive of Hispanic Literature on Tape* go to [www.loc.gov](http://www.loc.gov). You can find the project clicking on our "Digital Collections" link on our homepage and selecting the "Audio Recording" collections category. You can also find it by going to the Library's Hispanic Division's website, which is [www.loc.gov/rr/hispanic](http://www.loc.gov/rr/hispanic). ¡Hasta pronto!