

For me, developing a book collection was an afterthought, a symptom of my need to acquire the books that enthralled me and kept calling me back for more. If I were to pinpoint a beginning to my book collection, I would have to place it during my junior year of high school. My English teacher, Ms. Russell, assigned us to read Isabel Allende's *The House of the Spirits*, my first foray into magical realism. I was sucked in by the book's gripping prose and complexity, and its subtle, punchy political assertions. For me, this book became the prism through which I began to develop my own sense of self as South American, and the vector that pushed me to understand South American literature as a bona fide corpus in its own right.

My grandfather was born in Ecuador and, like many Latin American people, found his way to New York City midway through the 20th-century, leaving behind a continent with an identity in flux, one that has yet to cease developing, becoming increasingly self-aware and empowered. Through this, I believe that South Americans have crafted a body of literature so rich, yet so greatly underappreciated. I know that some may write this off as an exaggeration as *Cien años de soledad* (*One Hundred Years of Solitude*) finds itself rightfully in the top quartile of nearly every greatest books listicle. My collection, "To Stroll South America," is my way of appreciating South American literature in its entirety, beyond that which may find itself appreciated by the canon, the literature that defines my relationship to the continent that I feel has so directly influenced my personal and intellectual journeys.

As with any book collection, but especially one focusing on South American literature, the act of assembling is a satisfying mix of art, science, and luck, an artistic archeological endeavor itself. My collection, therefore, represents my artistic practice of book collecting, with each book taking on a personal significance to me. Take for instance one of the first books in my collection, Mario Vargas Llosa's *La Fiesta del Chivo*, which was found in my grandfather's closet while doing some sly combination of cleaning and youthful snooping. Its first page is stamped with the nameplate "Dr. Osawaldo Moran Pinto," my grandfather's brother in Ecuador who has long since passed. This book is incredibly important to my collection, as I feel it has followed my family's path, from Quito to the United States, but never losing its essence. Or Pedro Lemebel's *Loco afán: Crónicas del sidario*, a collection of chronicles of the Chilean AIDS epidemic whose rights were for many years owned by Spanish press Seix Barral and can largely only be sourced there, a testament to the continued influence of Spain over Spanish language cultural and economic capital.

Other books in my collection have been collected from bookstores around the country, and a particular many in Chicago, gifted to me by friends, and uncovered in unlikely places like church sales. For the past year I have worked at Open Books, an independent non-profit bookstore in Chicago, which has not only provided me access to books galore, but crucially an understanding of what makes each book special. Not to mention, I have developed an undying appreciation for the art of bookselling, without which none of our book collections would be possible.

Another crucial element of my collection is Spanish-to-English translations of the original texts. As a student of Comparative Literature, and a budding translator, I am in awe of how a translator can take the beauty of an authentic text, and transform it into a different language inflected by completely different cultural factors, and maintain the integrity and splendor of the original work. Chicago based Chilean poet and translator Daniel Borzutzky's translation of Chilean poet Jaime Luis Huenún's collection *Puerto Trakl* is one such example. I see this not as an authorless movement from Spanish to English, but rather a collection colored and shaped by Borzutzky's own authorial identity, one that modifies and enhances Huenún's verse such that it resonates across these linguistic differences.

As I continue my own evolution as a collector, reader, student, and translator, I am indebted to the motivations that pushed me to collect in the first place: to continue to explore my identity as South American and to continue my exploration of how South American literature can continue to develop its own identity outside of the continent. I hope to continue my study of Latin American literature, particularly queer literature, in graduate school with the hope of being able to teach students about that which I have learned. My dream for the collection is one where I have myself strolled through South America, something I have not yet been able to do. I will stroll, finding books, feeling how the literature has shaped my personal history, how South America defines itself and has yet to be defined.