

John Maddox

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Learning Spanish and Portuguese has given me a special sense of freedom. I grew up in a mostly monolingual community in rural Georgia, but ever since I took Jane “Juana” Futral’s Spanish 1 class at Wheeler County High School, I knew I wanted to be a language teacher. She was always creative, energetic, and encouraging, and she took me on my first trip to Spain. I saw that I could travel the world and meet new people. I have not stopped moving since. When I learned that I could study literature by authors like Gabriel García Márquez, I was hooked.

At the University of Georgia, I spent three years in the Mary Lyndon Foreign Language Community, where I used Spanish on a daily basis. There I met life-long friends who spoke Portuguese and introduced me to the cultures of Brazil. Georgia’s diverse faculty in both Romance Languages and Foreign Language Education encouraged me to pursue my love of literature as a graduate student and college professor, but I wanted the experience of teaching high school first. I taught Spanish for five years at the Athens Academy Upper School. I got to take my students to Spain for the first time and even introduced some of them to Spanish-language literature. Meanwhile, I pursued a Romance Languages Masters at the University of Georgia and compared Brazil with Hispanic writers.

In 2009, I started my Combined PhD in Spanish and Portuguese at Vanderbilt University. I had two major professors, Earl Fitz and William Luis. I worked with Dr. Luis as Assistant Editor of the *Afro-Hispanic Review* for a special issue on Afro-Brazil, and I saw that its goal of pushing the boundaries of African Diaspora Studies fit perfectly with Dr. Fitz’s project of comparing the three largest literary traditions of the Americas (Anglophone, Brazilian, and Hispanic), or inter-American literature. I was the first to use Vanderbilt’s archives from Afro-Colombian Renaissance man Manuel Zapata Olivella in my research, and I got to interview Afro-Brazilian novelist Ana Maria Gonçalves. Along with support from the Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities, these unique opportunities formed my dissertation, which I am revising into a book that interprets today’s Latin American historical novels about slavery through the lens of Greek tragedy.

I have found an academic home at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, where I teach and write on Afro-Hispanic and Afro-Latino literature. Additionally, my students are meeting conversation partners via Skype at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México through the Teletandem program. I am grateful to my mentors and enjoy discovering new possibilities by collaborating with other teachers and scholars.



John Maddox has published articles on literature and culture of the Hispanic Caribbean and Brazil. He was awarded the *Hispania* Outstanding Publication Award in 2015. He is Vice President of the Alabama chapter of the AATSP and serves on the AATSP Higher Education Committee. His forthcoming projects include the first bilingual edition of abolitionist playwright Alejandro Tapia y Rivera’s *La cuarterona*.