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"Dialogical Horizons:
Latino Voices and U.S. Audiences:
E Pluribus Plures?"

Ann McBride-Limaye

When diverse cultures encounter each other in a spirit of true dialogue, each is enriched, not only in the discovery of unsuspected riches in the other but also in the recognition of unnoticed potentials in itself. (Mikhail Bakhtin)

This essay explores the problem of writing across cultural boundaries in the recent dialogical encounter between Latino writers and mainstream audiences in the United States by examining imagery and perspectives in literary creations which are beginning to fill the lacuna which is the Latin absence in the collective memory of the United States. Contemporary Latino writers are constructing vibrant narratives of cultural experience and imagination that provide audiences a new perspective on American life, a reinvention of the authors’ own histories, and a reinvigoration of a more inclusive American history. In the process, they are creating anew a branch of literature that goes back over one hundred years, and like other dialogues, this one is proving to be a process of mutual discovery at the historical moment when the Latino presence in the United States is becoming substantial. Given current demographic trends, by 2010 Latinos will be largest minority in the United States.

Et pluribus plures? To what extent does the literary expression of transculturation corroborate findings of the recent poll, Latino Voices, which suggest that Spanish–speaking Latinos primarily identify with their ethnic group of origin, and desire assimilation and integration into the larger Anglo, i.e., English–speaking, society? This inquiry traces out the many other possible outcomes the encounter is having: denial of the other and persistence of ethnic identities, acceptance of the other and appreciation of the other’s “outsidedness”, pluralistic integration, or a process of Latinization that leads to engulfment of Anglo culture by a continuing process of mestizaje, i.e. cultural and physical blending and hybridization.

Is there an emerging Latino consciousness? One finds in the voices of Latino writers a recognition of a shared, submerged cultural past made up of suppressed histories and memories. In this essay, I am listening to and engaging with voices in works by Latino writers who share varieties of linguistic and cultural continuity:
Chicano: Tomás Rivera, Victor Villasenor
Mexican American: Richard Rodriguez, Arturo Islas
Americanized Mexican: Carlos Fuentes
Mexican: Gloria Anzaldúa
New Mexican: Rudolfo Anaya
Latina: Sandra Cisneros
Puerto Rican/Nuyorican: Rosario Ferré, Edward Rivera
Cuban exile: Reinaldo Arenas, Cristina García, Oscar Hijuelos
Dominican exile: Julia Alvarez.

These are writers who come from a cultural context which is a combination of the following elements: familiarity with the Spanish language and Latin American culture and myths. They write principally in English (or collaborate with others to create English translations) but their writing shows clear marks of Spanish–English hybridization. They show the common feature of what Victor Villasenor calls “thinking in Spanish and writing in English” (Rain of Gold xi:). Although these writers share Latin origins, it is linguistic, ethnic and cultural heterogeneity that characterizes them. Some have a dialect of Spanish as a first language, others have a dialect of English, some are bilingual or multidialectical and still others use some form of “interlanguage”, a metamorphosing variety of discourse made up of a prismatic blend of grammaticosemantic elements from two or more different languages. (The phenomenon of interlanguage will be addressed further below.)

Out of the dialogue of the present with the past which constitutes history, these writers are creating new narratives. Carlos Fuentes uses the term “reinvention” to address the problem of recreating a past that has been lost: “Vivimos rodeados de mundos perdidos y de historias desaparecidas” [We live surrounded by lost worlds and their lost histories.] (Valiente 47). The language of the hybrids in this emergent literary landscape is considered here in its expressive and revelatory aspects and is analyzed in terms of metaphors of positionality, displacement and negotiation. Where are the roots of this emergent literary tradition, and in particular, how is it connected to Latin American literature and the immigrant literatures of North America? Why have U.S. audiences applauded the political nature of Latin American literature and, at the same time, tended to reject Latino literature for its political—and therefore, in this case, not universal—qualities which were said to make it unmarketable? (Shorris 384, 386). In attempting to answer these questions and to describe the audiences for these works, one immediately identifies problems of intelligibility to match the complexity of the voices: ideal readers of Latino texts must know English and Spanish as well as be familiar with myth and metaphor from Latin American and Latino cultures.
The contested terminology and meaning of the Hispanic–Latino/Anglo encounter in political, social, gender, geographical and linguistic terms grows out of the competing identities that shape the diversity of both writers and audiences in post-modern, multi-ethnic America. Since the 1970 census “Hispanic” has been used as a category, but not since the 1930 census has “Hispanic” been used as a racial term.3 “Anglo” is a conflation that scarcely carries the weight of “non-Latino”. Neither group, Anglo nor Latino, can be defined racially. Earl Shorris, author of Latinos: A Biography of the People, voices a representative view when he describes how:

During preparations for the 1980 U.S. Census, several names for the group were discussed. Latino won out, according to people who took part in the discussions, but at the last minute someone said it was too close to Ladino, an ancient language of Spain, now spoken by only a few Spanish Jews. Hispanic was chosen instead. Since then, Hispanic and Latino have taken on political, social and even geographic meaning. Latino is used in California. In Florida, Hispanic is preferred by Cubans no matter what political, social or educational views they hold. Hispanic is used more often than Latino in Texas but neither word is used much; Mexican, Mexican-American and Chicano dominate there. Chicago, which has a mixture of people from the Caribbean and the mainland, has adopted Latino. In New York City, both names are used, depending largely on one’s politics.

Hispanic belongs to those in power; it is the choice of establishments, exiles, social climbers and kings. Latino has been adopted by almost everyone else. Latino and Hispanic are the left and right, commoner and king of names. Democrats are generally Latinos, Republicans are Hispanics. Many Anglos, people who oppose bilingual education and those who support English-only laws prefer Hispanic, which is an English word meaning, “pertaining to ancient Spain” (Shorris, Latino, Sf “A15). Clearly, “Latino” voices are not unitary but are an aggregate expression of proliferating cultures. One might well ask, does the term “Latino” denote resemblance or common difference? Shorris puts the question this way: “How shall the category be defined? by ancestry? surname? language? subject matter? or geography?” (386). Representative Thomas Sawyer, chair of the House Subcommittee on Census, Statistics and Postal Personnel, formulated this definition: “the creation of the meta-concept ‘Hispanic’ has resulted in the formation of a peculiarly American group. ‘It is a mixture of ethnicity, culture, history, birth, and presumption of language’”.4 For Marc Zimmerman, “Latino” expresses “paradox, complexity and defiance” and is a synthesis of Hispanic, indigenous and African culture (14–15). Rodolfo O.
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de la Garza maintains that: “Whether this group was identified as Hispanics or Latinos was less significant than the assertion that a coherent group existed and must be recognized” (2–3). The problem of how to de-limit or define which writers to include in the category “Latino” parallels the problem of definition in the general population.

Overview of Latino Writers
Chicanos/Mexicans:

Rudolfo Anaya, perhaps the most familiar Chicano voice in his community, writes an idyll of origins in Bless Me, Ultima and tells the reader: My people have always been here no matter what flag has flown over us. In Albuquerque, he restores the original phonetic spelling of the city to reclaim its multiple histories. Victor Villaseñor writes of a young man in Macho! who travels the dangerous road north to become a “norteño”, a migrant worker in California who works and suffers with César Chávez before he returns to his Mexican roots in the end. In Rain of Gold he writes an epic vision of his family’s migration from Mexico to California. Tomás Rivera’s book And the Earth Did Not Devour Him tells the story of a migrant family through the magical eyes of a young boy who sees the world in the process of becoming and full of paradox, ruled by both the vengeful Judeo-Christian God the Father and the Aztec god of the sun, Tonatiuh, devourer of humans who sacrifice their lives in the fields. Arturo Islas writes of the lives a Mexican family who fled to south Texas during the Mexican Revolution. Richard Rodriguez, son of Mexican immigrants, tells us in his controversial autobiography Hunger of Memory of his will to assimilate into Anglo culture, i.e., how he lost his private Spanish voice and gained a public English one. Gloria Anzaldúa writes a critique of the melting pot in the voice of the nueva mestiza [new mestiza] and speaks of a hybrid utopia being born in Borderlands. Sandra Cisneros translates the Mexican/Texas myths of everyday life into magical experiences in Woman Hollering Creek. In an oral history, “Coming to America, To Clean,” a Mexican woman identified simply as Antonia tells how she has come to America illegally to live her dream of a better life, and how she understands the irony of Anglos, who having achieved their dreams, are anxiously caught up in grandiose desires for ever more wealth and comfort. Carlos Fuentes, a writer Earl Shorris calls “a heroic pocho [Americanized Mexican], the man who overcame his fate” (Latinos 169) initiates a dialogue between United States and Mexican history and culture in The Old Gringo. In that novel, a young American school teacher and an embittered Ambrose Bierce figure seek to understand Mexico.
as they are both first accepted with admiration, then confronted, and ultimately rejected by a young general in Pancho Villa's revolutionary army.

Caribbean Voices: Puerto Rican, Cuban American, Dominican

Edward Rivera relates what it is like to "grow up Hispanic" in Puerto Rico and New York and survive to tell a tale in many voices in *Family Installments*. In his narrative of how he became a "nuyorican" acculturated to life in the United States, Rivera weaves a story full of rich personal experience fortified with Shakespeare and Joyce. Unlike Richard Rodriguez, he does not feel compelled to give up his Spanish voice to gain an English one. Rosario Ferré writes in two languages from the ironic forefront of the gender wars in *The Youngest Doll*. Cristina García and Oscar Hijuelos write novels of family life to fill in the gaps of history left in the wake of economic dislocations and the revolution in Cuba in *Dreaming in Cuban* and *The Mambo Kings Sing Songs of Love*. In *Before Night Falls*, Reinaldo Arenas narrates his autobiography of life in Cuba before, during and after the revolution, as well as his coming to America as a gay writer in exile. In *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, Julia Alvarez writes of regret and loss in the life of an émigré family that flees the Dominican Republic in the Trujillo era. Alvarez's *In the Time of the Butterflies* tells the story of the three Mirabar sisters, moved to participate in the underground that seeks to overthrow Trujillo, and who meet their deaths in the process.

Initiating Dialogue

The works of these Latino authors initiate dialogue with and demand active participation by the reader. Sandra Cisneros writes "Los Acknowledgements" to *Mi Querido Público* [sic] [Acknowledgements to my Beloved Public] in *Woman Hollering Creek*. Richard Rodriguez speaks of how he creates the listener, how he constructs the reader he calls "you", and tells us "You who read this act of contrition should know that by writing it I seek a kind of forgiveness—not yours" (153, 188). Reinaldo Arenas tells us in *Before Night Falls* that he writes in opposition to the false dialogue that Castro has attempted to establish with exiles.

To analyze the dialogues these authors give voice to one must consider the following:

1) Who is speaking? (author, narrator, or character).
2) What is the question being responded to? (Who are you, where did you come from, how did you get here, and what do you want?)

3) Who is being (explicitly or implicitly) addressed? (A double audience: Latino and Anglo)

4) Does one text address another text? (Latino writers comment on each other intertextually, and they reference a dual literary heritage: Spanish and English.)

The voices create heterogeneous discourses that are dialogical by initiating encounters in many parts of the text: author, narrator, character, theme, image, as well as in the language. Taken together, the dialogic elements engage one complex of cultures (Latino) with an other set (United States) centered on the issues of identity:

1) immigration:
   monologic permanent dislocation v. dialogic relocation

2) assimilation v. bicultural identity

3) illegal miscegenation v. idealized mestizaje

According to Mikhail Bakhtin, characteristic elements of dialogism include: potentiality, unfinalizability, and possibility of consonance and dissonance. Significantly, dialogue is not dialectic since: "Dialect abstracts the dialogic from the dialogue" (Morson and Emerson 57). As discourses of alterity, these texts represent moments of encounter produced during periods of mixture: they are made up of what Carroll Quigley refers to as radical uncertainty, hybridization, incorporation, and ambivalence. If we accept the definition of cultures as ethnographic collections, we can begin to account for the range of "artifacts" will we find in texts produced by these—to a greater of lesser extent—voices from connected cultures. Like the cultural anthropologist, these writers are selective and strategic in representing their cultures in narrative form: "From a complex historical reality ... they select what gives form, structure, and continuity to a world" (Clifford 231).

The Chronotope of Migration

These authors are writing migration stories which show a complex and
problematic relationships with the writer’s country of origin. Ernesto Galarza, a leading Chicano essayist, describes the conflicted relationship as follows:

Migration is the failure of roots. Displaced men are ecological victims. Between them and the sustaining earth a wedge has been driven. Eviction by droughts or dispossession by landlords, the impoverishment of the soil or conquest by arms, nature and man, separately or together, lay down the choice: move or die (128).

In the process of writing their fables of identity, these authors are producing a chronotope, i.e., a unique time-space, of the migration experience. In Bakhtinian terms, the chronotope functioning as “...the primary means of materializing time in space, emerges as a center for concertizing representation, as a force giving body to the entire novel” (250). Further, each genre has its own chronotope, i.e., “... a specific and above all concrete sense of how individual agency, historical context and social milieu interact... genres are not just empty forms but are ways of conceptualizing the shape of time and ‘the image of a person.’” The Latino texts provide alternative, dialogizing narratives of migration that restore memory that has been erased, absorbed or defined by master, monologizing discourses.

The Monologic Discourse of Assimilation

These dialogical Latino texts are written into the Anglo monologue of assimilation. Monologism is the voice of authority, a self-legitimizing voice that negates or suppresses the value of otherness. The monologic demands assimilation into dominant forms: “Monologism tends to emphasize not presences in other cultures but absences, deficiencies, negations” (Palencia-Roth, “Quarta” 7). The impact of the monologue, according to Gary Morson writing on Mikhail Bakhtin, in “Bakhtin and the Present Moment” is one wherein:

[To] disregard the past is therefore to desiccate the future. ... It is also, despite all claims to the contrary, to engage in ethnocentrism and cultural imperialism. ... radically different cultures are lumped together as opposed to us, and millennia of diverse cultural achievements that have nothing to do with us are disregarded (221).

Master narratives include the hegemonic language of territorial imperatives including slogans for “just” wars. For example, “Manifest Destiny” pushed the frontier westward and displaced the border southward by the appropri-
ation of Indian, Mexican and Spanish land. The language of expansion was English-only and the according to the myth, agents of civilization were rugged male individuals embodied in the prototypical cowboys and prospectors. Traditions of racial purity and tenets of Puritanism designated miscegenation as taboo. Indian women were sanctioned as helpers: Pocahontas to John Smith, Sacajawea to Lewis and Clark, but they are not considered to be appropriate vessels of racial assimilation. As for Indian men, popular sentiment is echoed in the refrain “the only good Indian is a dead Indian,” the individual whose effigy appears in the cigar store wooden Indian. The Spanish-speaking peoples of Mexico and Puerto Rico, living in lands appropriated in 1848 and 1898 respectively, were simply redefined in political terms as citizens of the United States, even though the terms may have been more accurately described as those of colonial subjects.

In spite of the fact that the master Anglo discourse is constructed on a tradition of assimilation and the central metaphor is that of the crucible of the melting pot, this synthesizing process of assimilation effectively displaced the native populations and then excluded the African American peoples. Until this century, the United States blend was uniquely European while the real multiracial melting pots were Mexico, the Caribbean and Brazil. Linda Chavez describes the phenomenon in the United States as “gentle assimilation”—not a “melting pot” experience—and voices a benign characterization of that assimilation as one of reciprocal effects: “America changed its immigrant groups and was changed by them” (161). In the title of John F. Kennedy’s book, America is a “nation of immigrants”, a nation of nations, a construction that assumes assimilation for all. This image of the melting pot worked to create an ideology of civil harmony and egalitarianism for generations of European immigrants. Earl Shorris’s reading of Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s Beyond the Melting Pot is succinct:

The book argued there was not a melting pot [i. e., that all patterns of immigration were not the same], and then proceeded to prove that there was: “As a view of the United States in the middle of the twentieth century, the theory could not have been more comforting. It promised domestic tranquility, national unity, and generally rosy ethnic future (125).” Yet, Richard Rodriguez says this metaphor is apt:

The best metaphor of America remains the dreadful metaphor—the Melting Pot. Fall into the Melting Pot, ease into the Melting Pot, or jump into the Melting Pot—it makes no difference—you will find yourself a stranger to your parents, a stranger to your own memory of yourself.
A literary example of how the melting pot functioned is found in José Antonio Villareal's novel *Pocho* (1959), the life story of a Mexican American in the World War II era named Richard who is eager to assimilate and ends up joining the Army. *Pocho* is written into the monologue in English, the language of assimilation, with only children's taunts voiced in Spanish: "Frijoley bomber," "Tortilla Strangler," and epithets: "maricón" [slang for gay man]. The hero reflects on changes in his family's experience that adapting to the new culture has brought:

As the months went by, Richard was quieter, sadder, and, at times, even morose. He was aware that the family was undergoing a strange metamorphosis. The heretofore gradual assimilation of this new culture was becoming more pronounced. Along with a new prosperity, the Rubio family was taking on the mores of the middle class, and he did not like it. It saddened him to see the Mexican tradition begin to disappear (132).

This view of the process of assimilation by means of the melting pot is one of loss of Mexican traditions and transformation into the ways of American culture.

At the present, the fact of assimilation is naturalized in the liberal as well as the conservative mind. "They" do not speak to "us": they have nothing to say. To illustrate with a mainstream media example: on May 16, 1993, the final segment of the ABC-TV program "This Week with David Brinkley," dealt with the topic of the then upcoming repeal of the English-only ordinance in Miami, Florida. When the issue came up for discussion, the liberal-conservative monologue of assimilation immediately came into play: Sam Donaldson said he believed the United States needs a certain measure of bilingualism in the interest of public safety, such as traffic signs that say "Alto" so drivers would know when to stop. George Will maintained people who don't read English probably should not be driving and that repeal of the ordinance was the first step that would lead to the United States having the problems of a Quebec or a Belgium. Cokie Roberts asserted that eventually all immigrants learn English—it is just a matter of time—and that we then worry about children losing the richness of their first language. Assimilation was clearly the only legitimated outcome in spite of the likelihood of the English-only ordinance failing which it did.

A Recontextualizing Polylogue: Latino Voices in an Ethnographic Moment: The Role of the Writer

[a] Gerald P. López (author of *Rebellious Lawyering*, professor of law at Stanford University):
So what else is new? For the umpteenth time, we Latinos haven’t made it onto some list of nationally prominent folks—in this case it’s “The NEWSWEEK 100” of cultural elite. Big deal. Besides, the whole thing was only a sendup, wasn’t it? A cover story to tweak the noses of both Dan Quayle and his mortal enemies. So forget about it. Right?

Well, shrugging off our absence isn’t so simple for many Latinos in this country. By now I have overheard probably dozens of comments from Latinos about “The NEWSWEEK 100.” In San Francisco, where I live, patrons in a local taquería championed their own personal favorites: Edward James Olmos. Christina. Raul Julia. And at Stanford where I teach, student defended their own choices. Sandra Cisneros. Rubén Blades. Gloria Anzaldúa. Culture clash. We’re all to conclude, I take it, that even in 1992, there are almost no stories we tell, almost no stories to be told about us and almost no roles we competently fill.

[b] Carlos Fuentes: Somos los autores de nuestra historia, empezando con nuestros mitos, y en consecuencia somos responsables del pasado que hicimos para ser responsables de un futuro que podamos llamar nuestro. [We are the authors of our history, beginning with our myths, and as a consequence we are responsible for the past we have made in order to be responsible for a future that we can call our own.]

c) Rosario Ferré: Language, in the words of George Steiner, is like a living membrane; it provides a constantly changing model of reality. Every civilization is imprisoned in a linguistic contour, which it must match and regenerate according to the changing landscapes of the facts and of time.

d) Fuentes: I believe in the Latinization of the United States—we are going to resemble each other and more.

e) Richard Rodriguez: Señor Fuentes is a mystery to us, for there is no American equivalent to him.

[f] Tomás Rivera: Richard Rodriguez’ book [Hunger of Memory] is a personal expression, an autobiography, and it much be understood as that in his singularity. It should not be used as a single way or method of understanding the bilingual, bicultural phenomenon of the Hispanic group.

[g] Rodriguez: Consider me, if you choose, a comic victim of two cultures (5). Pocho they called me... The Mexican–American who, in becoming an American, forgets his native society. I felt guilt over having learned
English. I felt I had betrayed my family. . . . [h] I write today for a reader who exists in my mind only phantasmagorically. Someone with a face erased; someone of no particular race or sex or age or weather. A gray presence. Unknown, unfamiliar. All that I know about him is that he has had a long education and that his society, like mine, is often public (un gringo).

[i] Earl Shorris: Chicanos admire Carlos Fuentes and detest Octavio Paz. Paz sees the U.S. as the great “other.”

[j] Fuentes: [A]s I started to scribble my first stories, even publishing them in school magazines, I learned that I must in fact write in Spanish.

The English language, after all, did not need another writer. The English language has always been alive and kicking, and if it ever becomes drowsy, there will always be an Irishman... ."

[k] Ferré: In my experience of being a woman writer from Latin America, I have a sense of belonging to a continental community. In fact, a woman writer (like a man writer) must live traveling between two very different cultures (much more so that English and Spanish), two very different worlds which are often at each other’s throats, the world of women and the world of men.

[l] Reinaldo Arenas: I scream therefore I am.

[m] Gloria Anzalduá: We are overcoming a tradition of silence. Language is a male discourse.


[o] Oscar Hijuelos: The language of my education is English. . . . Hey, I can barely write in English. Reviewers can be ‘myopic’ and limit themselves to frequent comparisons between my style that of Gabriel García Márquez. Like, I love Yeats and Flan O’Brien, for example . . . That’s why I call them the Montez O’Brien, in homage to him.

Part of the “psychic patterning” of The 14 Sisters was a reaction, he said, to the pigeonholing that seems to dictate that if you have a Hispanic last name, you have to write within certain cultural limitations.

[p] Arenas: The sad fact is that Cuban exiles were not very interested in literature; a writer was looked on as a strange, abnormal creature. . . . [It is a]
tragic fate Cuban writers have suffered throughout our history; on our Island we have been condemned to silence, to ostracism, censorship, and prison; in exile, despised and forsaken by our fellow exiles.

[q] Ferré: I believe that it is the duty of the Puerto Rican writer, who has been privileged enough to learn both languages, to try to alleviate this situation [cultural suicide wherein young Puerto Ricans people in the United States do not learn to speak or to read Spanish] making an effort to either translate her own work or to contribute to the translation of other Puerto Rican writers.

[r] Cisneros: I was traumatized that it [Woman Hollering Creek] was going to be one of the first Chicano books “out there”. I felt I had this responsibility to my community to represent us in all our diversity.

[s] Cristina Garcia: As Latino immigrants make their way in the United states and their children become better educated, there is going to be more and more good writing surfacing. . . . Now this is our language and this is our place, and we writers are inhabiting a new literary landscape. Yet we’re still close enough to our culture—and to the migration—to be both scarred and enriched by it.

[t] Julie Grau (Cisneros’s editor): Editors may now be looking more carefully at books that before they would have deemed too exotic for the general readership.

[u] Victor Villaseñor: They [Putnam publishers] were going to destroy the book [Rain of Gold, the compelling saga of his family’s migration from Mexico to California]. It’s nonfiction; they wanted to publish it as a novel And they wanted to change the title to “Rio Grande”, which sound like some old John Wayne movie.

stand a people’s myths because myths are the subtexts of the narratives. To understand the new Latino narratives therefore the reader needs to look to informing myths, archetypes and images of the cultures from which these writers sprang. These elements center on the meanings of migration and immigration, origins and identity, geographical limits, and intercultural encounters. A critical concept for understanding of these Latino voices is what I am calling polyvalent imagery. Polyvalent images obtain by virtue of a surplus of meaning accomplished through their potentiality and unfinalizability. These images emerge when connotative dissonance overwhelms denotative consonance in similar terms from two languages, i.e., “phenomena themselves disparate can be called by analogous names” (Eco 249). Polyvalent images in the chronotope of immigration center on identity: the relation of the self to the other:

border/la frontera
melting pot–miscegenation/mestizaje
racism/racismo

For example, the denotative meaning of “the border” in Spanish is la frontera, that of “miscegenation” is “mestizaje”; however, the terms cannot be used interchangeably because the semantic referents are contested phenomena that have radically different, even contradictory, cultural readings. Here I am locating connotative associations of these terms in the Latino texts in an attempt to amplify their resonance for the English-language reader.

Polyvalent Imagery:
United States and Mexico: Border/La frontera

To begin, “border” is abstract, la frontera is concrete. Richard Rodriguez writes in Days of Obligation: “In San Diego people speak of ‘the border’ as meaning a clean break, the end of us, the beginning of them. In Mexican Spanish, the legality takes on distance, even pathos, as la frontera, meaning something less fixed, something more akin to the English ‘frontier’” (84–85). For the United States, its border with Mexico is not a frontier but a sovereign boundary, a barrier and the legitimate limit to the land it expropriated from Mexico in 1848. The border marks out the space of conquest. In the language of the Border Patrol, the border is called “the line”, and the recent operation to halt the flow of illegal immigrants into El Paso, Texas, was called “Hold the Line” using an expression from the American game of football (J. Brinkley A9). For ambitious young undocumented workers like Antonia in “Coming to America, To Clean,” the border between
Tijuana, Mexico and San Diego, California, is an opportunity, a fence with an invisible gate that leads into the land of promise of work. Using the same metaphor, U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno announced “Operation Gatekeeper” which: “is specifically tailored for California [to help it maintain] a secure border defensible against illegal immigration” (“U.S. Plans” 3). Former President Ronald Reagan called the border the front line in a war zone, i.e. the war against illegal immigration from Mexico. From time to time lawmakers speak of building an impregnable wall to seal off the highly permeable border and its hordes of unwanted illegal immigrants.

For the Chicano writer Luis Valdez, this border is “fictitious”, a purely imaginary division of space. For literary critic Jorge Klor de Alva, the border is a hybrid space. Gloria Anzaldúa dedicates her book, *Borderlands. “La Frontera”*. The New Mestiza, “a todos los mexicanos [to all Mexicans] on both sides of the border”. For her, *la frontera*, the south Texas borderland, is not a transitional area but a mythic space: “A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary” (3). This view would seem to be shared by some Anglos such as Charles Rossman: “The truth is the Texas-Mexico border has been a justifiably fluid legal fiction ever since it was established by American conquest a century and a half ago. . . . The phrase ‘Tex-Mex’ speaks of this cultural reciprocity. Even the actual border has changed with the changing course of the Rio Grande” *(A10)*.

In metaphoric terms Anzaldúa speaks of gays as border crossers. For her, it is the English notion of “border” as a dividing line that creates an open wound [*una herida abierta*]. In a corresponding image, the border is characterized as a scar in Carlos Fuentes’s *Gringo viejo* [*Old Gringo*]. César Lievana, theoretician of the Comité Tlacolulense de Los Angeles [*Tlacolula Committee of Los Angeles*] says the border is what turns Mexicans into *deleitos* [criminals] (Shorris: 124). For the protagonist of *Machito*, the young man going north to prove himself a *norteño*, the border marks his first step in the reconquest of the land of his people, Aztlan. In another sense of the word he tells how the border is dislocated several hundred miles into Mexico as far as Empalme when United States work recruiters set up camp there to select field workers. This image reflects how, contrary to popular view, U.S. Mexican population originates less from people migrating north, and more as a result of “the southward and westward migration of the border itself” (Zimmerman 18).

Arturo Islas addresses the Río Bravo/Río Grande as the place of crossing for migrant, not immigrant, souls:

The Río Grande—shallow, muddy, ugly in those places where the bridges
spanned it—was a constant disappointment hardly a symbol of the promised land to families from San Miguel Allende like Mama Chona's. They had not sailed across an ocean or ridden in wagons and trains across half a continent in search of a new life. . . . They simply and naturally went from one bloody side of the river into a land that just a few decades earlier had been Mexico. They became border Mexicans with American citizenship . . . led double lives and followed the rules of both cultures the best they could (41–42).

These migrant souls do not consider themselves outsiders: "We are American citizens of Mexican heritage. We are proud of both countries and have never been and will never be that word you just said to me [alien]" (29). Tomás Rivera's father tells him that for the migrants arriving is leaving: "We never arrive" (213).

In a recent New York Times feature, "Fear of Compassion" which addresses mainstream attitudes toward illegal immigrants, A. M. Rosenthal writes of an "historically recent border" perhaps signaling a change in U.S. historical perspective (A15). In a business feature by Allen R. Meyerson, "The Booming, Bulging Tex-Mex Border," in the same newspaper, one finds further evidence of conceptual change in how the border is characterized by North Americans:

Call it the broadening border. Or better yet la frontera amplianda [sic] . . . Its not that such rapidly increasing commerce is causing the border to vanish, as some scholars and writers have insisted. Language, laws, living standards and business practices remain vastly different along the world's longest boundary between an information-age nation and one still building its sewers, phone lines and roads. . . . In many ways, the new trade pact [NAFTA, North American Free Trade Agreement] defines the border more sharply, requiring more detailed inspection there, especially to screen out goods from beyond North America. . . . Along this broadening border, a national boundary offers less and less protection from rivals (1 and 6).

In "Illegal Immigrants: Prophets of a Borderless World," Richard Rodriguez envisions the coming century when the great question will be: "What is a border?" Whatever the definition, Rodriguez believes that the central fact is that the border does not hold (62).

Polyvalent Imagery: Miscegenation/Mestizaje
Racism/Racismo

It is ironic that in the self-styled melting pot of the United States, that
miscegenation (race-mixing) was long classified as a criminal offense: Rodriguez characterizes the difference between miscegenation and mestiza-
je as follows: “Miscegenation was a sin against Protestant individualism (13). I take it as an Indian achievement that I am alive, that I am Catholic, that I speak English, that I am an American. My life began, it did not end, in the sixteenth century” (Days 24). Racism in the United States is a black-white polarizing phenomenon perhaps best illustrated by the “one-drop of blood” rule, i.e., “a peculiarly American institution...which defines as black a person with as little as a single drop of ‘black blood.’ This notion drives from a long-discredited belief that each race had its own blood type” (Wright 48). By extension, racist categorizations apply to others with dark complexions, e.g., Latinos. Racismo is culturally a more complex phe-
nomenon of at least six dimensions: language, color, economics, education, citizenship, and national origin, and comes out of the colonial period in Mexico when attempts were made to codify rapidly proliferating racial mix-
tures (Shorris 149). In Migrant Souls, the mother voices a sentiment typical of the racismo of the early twentieth century when she says that although she likes North American Indians, she does not think that pelados (recent arrivals) “deserve to be in the United States” (24). Yet, assuming pocho (Americanized) aspects of identity is recognized as a way to get ahead: “Having an Anglo name will help you get a better job” (83). In Bless Me, Ultima, Indians are marginalized, but in Migrant Souls mestizos denigrate Indians and Indian physical heritage is devalued or denied.

Origins and Identity for Chicanos/Mexican Americans:
Mestizaje as Cultural Blending

This chronotope of mestizaje incorporates these elements:

Conquest of Aztecs by Spaniards
La Malinche—Doña Marina/La Chingada
Aztec god Quetzalcóatl/Cortés
La Llorona [Weeping Woman of Conquest period]
Virgin of Guadalupe + Aztec goddess Tonantzin
Curan-dera [woman healer]
The Reconquest of Aztlan [homeland of Chicanos]
Migrant Worker
pelado [new arrival from Mexico]
pocho [Americanized Mexican]
Gringo/Anglo
Revolution
Nueva Mestiza [New Mestiza (woman of mixed race we)]:
Any reference to mestizaje carries with it the memory of the sixteenth-century Conquest of Mexico by the Spaniards led by Hernán Cortés, enabled by his translator La Malinche deftly to enact the role of the returning god Quetzalcoatl. Metamorphoses of these characters move from history to myth and resonate in Mexican narratives including those of Carlos Fuentes, Sandra Cisneros and Gloria Anzaldúa. Rachel Cypess Messinger finds a “Malinche paradigm” in Fuentes’s work: the foundation story is always ones of betrayal, albeit a fruitful one remembering that La Malinche and Cortés had a son, Martín, the symbolic beginning of the mestizo race. Cisneros retells the Cortés–La Malinche story in “Never Marry a Mexican” (Woman Hollering Creek) with a south Texas setting by giving the La Malinche figure her revenge on the conqueror for taking their son away and abandoning her in order to reunite with his Spanish wife. In her book Borderlands, “La frontera”, the New Mestiza Gloria Anzaldúa speaks of the need for Chicanos to recover their roots and uncover earlier associations of images from their unique history as a people. She explains the multiplicity of ethnic definitions an individual such as herself has recourse to as follows:

[When we know we are more than nothing, we call ourselves Mexican, referring to race and ancestry, mestizo when affirming both our Indian and Spanish (but we hardly ever own our Black ancestry) [sic]; Chicano when referring to a politically aware people born and/or raised in the U.S. Raza when referring to Chicanos; Tejanos when we are Chicanos from Texas . . . Chicanos did not know we were a people until 1965 when Caesar [sic] Chavez and the farmworkers united and I Am Joaquin was published and la Raza Unida [sic] party was formed in Texas. With that recognition, we became a distinct people (63). Anzaldúa calls up the three Mexican mother figures: La Malinche (La Chingada), La Llorona and the Virgin of Guadalupe: Ambiguity surrounds the symbols of these three “Our Mothers.” Guadalupe has been used by the Church to mete out our institutionalized oppression: to placate the Indians and mexicanos and Chicanos. In part, the true identity of all three has been subverted—Guadalupe to make us docile and enduring, la Chingada to make us ashamed of our Indian side, and la Llorona to make us a long-suffering people. This obscuring has encouraged the virgen/puta [virgin/whore] dichotomy (311).]

The three mother figures suffuse the texts of all of these Latino writers including Anaya’s novel of origins Bless Me, Ultima. The old woman curandera Ultima knows magic and witchcraft, and she: “has knowledge of herbs of the Indians of North, Aztecs, Mayas and the old, old country, the Moors” (39), an image which extends the range of the term “mestizaje” back to Spain.
Ann McBride-Limaye

Although the Mexican Revolution of 1910 drove many Mexicans north across the border back into territory the United States had conquered from Mexico in 1848 in the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, the mother in Migrant Souls: "had looked with scorn on the Revolution that drove them away from their home. 'It's just another excuse for the men to kill each other and make every one miserable'" (38). Another character believes that "modern Mexico [was] founded on a fraud. . . . There was no Revolution" (201). Carlos Fuentes's novels Where the Air is Clear, The Death of Artemio Cruz, and Old Gringo take an antiheroic perspective on the revolution as well, but where the first two novels focus on how the revolution promoted the process of mestizaje, the third one eschews it entirely in favor of impermeable lines of demarcation between Anglos and Indians. Victor Villasenor's Rain of Gold is a family epic with mestizo roots: "This, then, isn't fiction. This is a history of a people—a tribal heritage, if you will—of my Indian-European culture as handed down to me by parents, aunts, uncles and godparents" (xiii). Anzaldua describes the necessity of a new mestiza consciousness of the borderlands which will at last realize the positive, hybrid vision the Mexican philosopher, José Vasconcelos articulated in La raza cósmica in the 1920's. This utopian, feminist consciousness will be, in the title of her poem, "Una lucha de fronteras/A Struggle of Borders" (77). In Richard Rodriguez's essay "India" from Days of Obligation: An Argument with my Mexican Father, it is La Malinche, the original site of cultural and physical mestizaje, who will continue to be the site into the next century:

The Indian [La Malinche] stands in the same relationship to modernity as she did to Spain—willing to marry, to breed, to disappear in order to ensure her inclusion in time; refusing to absent herself from the future. The Indian has chosen to survive, to consort with the living, to live in the city, to crawl on her hands and knees, if need be, to Mexico City or L.A. (24).

Polyvalent Imagery
Caribbean and United States: Virtual Borders/Repeating Islands

In the Mexican-American experience "border/frontera" expresses a duality; in the Caribbean-American experience virtual borders and repeating islands reflect a multiplicity of imaginary spaces. Miriam Muñiz Varela identifies Antonio Benítez-Rojo's The Island that Repeats Itself: The Caribbean and the Post-modern Perspective as a text that could:

represent the Caribbean as a space of multiplicity, heterogeneity, discontinuity, and boundlessness. Searching in those Caribbean zones of the world that escape the ever-dreamed-of frontier of identity. Recognizing that any
reflection on the Caribbean confronts a problematic, that of tapestry whose threads are knotted by multiple figures that extend to infinity, without origin, without central fixed point” (105).

Benítez-Rojo “proposes a border for the Caribbean from the perspective of ‘chaos’ developed by physics”, i.e., a space that extends outward and at the same time “bends and folds over its own history, its own inwardness.” Because it is an metaarchipelago, the Caribbean has neither boundary nor center.

The Hispanic Caribbean has a long history as a colonial space. In fact, the Caribbean was colonized before any other major geographical region outside Europe (Mintz 302). Puerto Rico, Cuba and the Dominican Republic suffered a double colonialism, first Spanish from the time of the conquest, then American since the end of the last century. “All have felt the massive effects of North American influence—economic, cultural, political—yet all remain in very significant ways triumphantly Spanish” (Mintz 261). How can one talk about borders when it is a matter of island possessions, or countries that are treated as colonies by mainland? The islands effectively have no “border” with the mainland, and the political is mirrored in geographical i.e., the watery space separating them is both a boundary and a bridge.

Cuban refugees refer to the period since Fidel Castro seized power in 1959 as the “Exile”. From the American perspective, for more than thirty years—until August 19, 1994—U.S. borders were open only to Cubans who claimed political refugee status and thereby renounced Cuban citizenship. Cuba’s minister to the United Nations, Abelardo Moreno, addressed the same phenomenon from the other side when he defended his country’s revised, short-lived policy (August 19–September 13, 1994) of allowing Cubans to leave the island at will: “We’ve been trying to discourage these journeys [Cubans fleeing the country by boat] for many, many years. In practice, we’ve been protecting the U.S. border. So there is a moment when we cannot protect the U.S. border anymore” (21). In an unexpected accord with the Castro regime, the Clinton administration abruptly changed course on May 3, 1995, when it announced yet another immigration policy for Cubans. Once the Guantánamo Bay refugees from the 1994 exodus are resettled in the U.S., no more Cuban refugees will be admitted. Rather, refugees will be intercepted at sea and returned to Cuba establishing what amounts to a new offshore U.S. border. A. M. Rosenthal points out that: “Fidel Castro taught us that over there is now over here” (“Refugees” A13).

It is entirely problematic to specify a relation between the islands and mainland. The status of Puerto Rico—a post-colonial colony according to Juan Flores and Maria Milagros López—embodies that problematic: Is it a
Latin or North American space? Will it continue to be a U.S. dependency as a commonwealth, or will it become a juridical, fiscal American state or an autonomous country? [40]. Puerto Rican literature operates between two national literatures and is marginalized by both, a situation that reflects Puerto Rico's political condition (Zimmerman 35). For Puerto Rican, Cuban and Dominican workers who displace themselves to the U.S. to escape the rural or urban forms of the “plantation” on the islands by going north—to otro mundo [another world] in Edward Rivera’s terms—is to find themselves embraced by the mainland versions of the same pernicious institution. The islands may be what Michel Foucault calls heterotopias, what Benítez-Rojo defines as spaces without locations, “[t]his space, where everything is hopelessly confused, is the antidiscursive (anti-Utopian) space” (141). Writers from these “repeating islands” occupy a privileged space, as Julia Alvarez says: “We travel on that border between two worlds and we can see both points of view” [emphasis added] (Miller 76). Ferré goes on to suggest that the ambiguous colonial relation that obtains between the mainland and its colonies is parallel to that which obtains between men and women.

Origins and Identity in the Caribbean:
Mestizaje as Collision of Races and Cultures

This chronotope of mestizaje incorporates these elements:

Conquest
Indigenous Chiefs Orocovic and Guaroniex in Borinquen [pre-conquest name for Puerto Rico]
Virgin of la Caridad de Cobre= Virgin of Illescas + Taino deity Atabey or Atabex + Yoruba deity Oshun
Santería [magic religion based on Yoruba and Christian mythologies]
Changó, Obatalá, Oggún, Elleguá [Yoruba gods]
Recolonization by United States
Displaced plantation worker/musician Gringo
Revolution (Cuba)

Mestizaje has meanings in the Caribbean in opposition those that attach to it the Mexican setting: here it can be understood as a process of “whitening” that is the opposite of synthesis, and rather a “concentration of differences”:

It involves a positivistic and logocentric argument, an argument that sees in the biological, economic, and cultural whitening of Caribbean society a
series of successive steps toward “progress” (Benítez-Rojo 26).

For Benítez-Rojo, it was the plantation that created the conditions for mestizaje in the Caribbean:

Caribbean people themselves, in referring to the ethnological processes that derived from the extraordinary collision of races and cultures thus produced, speak of syncretism, acculturation, transcultural, assimilation, deculturation, indigenization, creolization, cultural mestizaje, cultural cimarronaje [condition of being maroon], cultural miscegenation, cultural resistance, etc. Which illustrates not just that these processes occurred again and again, but also, and above all, that there are different positions or readings from which they may be examined (37).

Although evidence of racial hybridity characterizes the context, mestizaje is not a cultural foundation for identity in Cuba or Puerto Rico, although it is in the Dominican Republic where Indian-European mixing is part of an imaginary foundation story employed to explain the brown skin of its inhabitants [Benítez-Rojo 50]. In Family Installments Edward Rivera inserts a reference to mestizaje element that is usually omitted from master narratives about the Puerto Rican identity—when he describes his grandfather:

Gigante Hernández was the Puerto Rican version of the hidalgo of La Mancha and had something Taino Indian in his face: enough to suggest that way back in the island’s hills some ancestor got down off the family tree long enough to knock up an Indian maiden. Or the reverse: that some likerish warrior from the tribe of Chief Orocovix or Guarionex scampered up the family tree and straddled a fertile version of the Hernández tribe [emphasis added] (Rivera 21).

In that book Rivera also addresses the metaphor of the melting pot in terms of the denial of origins and racism, as well as the fact the mestizaje was characteristic of his Spanish ancestors even before they arrived in the New World:

My own accent was closer, though not really close, to the speech of American disc jockeys and TV–radio detergent pushers. This was a result of having spent eight submissive years under the influence of the hard–driving Christian Brothers, who subscribed as faithfully to the myth of the American melting pot as they did to their vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Nobody had ever taken me for someone whose veins might contain Negro or Arab or Caribbean Indian blood. I was too light–skinned for that. On various occasions I had been mistaken for a Jew, an Italian, a Greek, even a Hungarian; and each time I had come away feeling secretly proud of myself for having disguised my Spik accent, and with it my lin-
eage. I could almost feel myself melting smoothly evenly into the great Pot" [emphasis added] (Rivera 148).
Cristina Garcia creates a character Felicia in *Dreaming in Cuban* who devotes herself to a syncretistic mix of santería and Catholicism:

Against the back wall, an ebony statue of Santa Bárbara, the Black Queen, presides. Apples and bananas sit in offering at her feet. Fragrant oblations crowd the shrines of the other saints and gods: toasted corn, pennies, and aromatic cigar for Saint Lazarus, protector of paralytics; coconut and bitter kola for Obatalá, King of the White Cloth; roasted yams, palm wine, and a small sack of salt for Ogún, patron of metals. In the front of the room, Elleguá, god of the crossroads, inhabits the clay eggs in nine rustic bowls of varying sizes [emphasis added] (14).

Pilar, the young Cuban American woman who grows up in New York eventually returns to Cuba to become a “daughter of Changó”, god of fire and lightning. Before she leaves New York, she visits a botánica where the elderly owner of the shop prescribes a variety of spiritual cures: “...a statuette of La Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre, a yellow candle, and five special oils: amor (love), sigue (follow me), yo puedo y tú no (I can and you can’t), ven conmigo (come with me), and dominante (dominant) (199).” Garcia’s novel describes the momentous and destructive, if entirely accidental, dislocations Castro’s revolution wrought on a family: both those who stayed in Cuba and those who fled to the United States.

In *Before Night Falls*, Reinaldo Arenas insists on the purely verbal rather than the physical reality of the revolution: “During my whole time with the rebels I never took part in any battle; I never even witnessed a battle; those battles were more myth than reality. It was, rather a war of words. ... [Castro] had won a war that had never been fought” (43–44). The fact that the Cuban revolution turned out to be a betrayed revolution is clear in Garcia’s terms:

The leaders forget what they looked like themselves fifteen years ago. ... Today they’d be thrown in a Social Disgrace Unit with drug addicts and maricones [gay men]. Look at me [a young man who had just been sent to jail for having long hair]. They say I’m rebellious, but it was rebels who made the revolution!’ (108–109)

The phenomena of racism and racismo are ever present in these texts: for a dark-skinned Cuban immigrant to be accompanied by a light skinned
woman in New York of the 1950s was to improve his status—to have a passport or a diploma (Hijuelos, *Mambo* 19). Garcia describes how two women “rubbed whitening cream into their dark, freckled faces. . . [They] left the paste on overnight to remove any evidence of . . . mulatto blood” (41). In Julia Alvarez’s *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*, an old servant who practices *santería* is described as follows: “Chucha was super wrinkled and Haitian blue black, no Dominican *cafe-con-leche* black” (218). The Dominican maids are afraid of her because of her skin color.

In their works, the Caribbean writers express the exile’s melancholy and nostalgia, the dream of return to the island as the return to origins of a history that are lost, destroyed, obliterated or hidden.12 In three of the works the young male protagonists start out life in an rural setting, get displaced or displace themselves to an impoverished urban setting, make their way to the United States where their immigrant dreams are betrayed. In *Before Night Falls* Arenas reveals that: “In those days of extreme poverty [1952], the dream of all who were down- and-out in Cuba was to go ‘north’ to work” (31). The same could be said of the fate of the Castillo brothers, musicians in *The Mombo Kings Sing Songs of Love*. The inevitable of the migration result will be what characters in *Family Installments* articulate: “There was also a great deal of talk about the day when I and you, we and us were going to save up some money and go back to the island, because this New York experiment was a mistake. But most of it was just talk” (205).

This sense of permanent displacement “here” and “there” leads to a profound melancholy: the Castillo men of *Mambo Kings* are said to suffer from a plague of memories (365). García’s characters in *Dreaming In Cuban* understand that memory is a skilled seducer as they dream of a return to the island, and at the same time they realize the impossibility of return (97). The exile’s loss of his/her country is like the phantom limb phenomenon, that is, the country is lost but the pain of the country is still felt.13 For García’s character Pilar, the young woman who has returned to Cuba to reunite with her grandmother and find her roots, the result in the positive realization that she cannot stay: “sooner or later I’d have to return to New York. I know now it’s where I belong— not instead of here, but more than here” (236). Pablo Medina, a novelist who left Cuba at age twelve and now lives in the United States, realizes that: “If we admit that, in fact, there’s no going back, it would force a kind of terrible reckoning. . . . We’d have to put down the torch of the lost society, and sink some roots” (Sontag A1). Ferré is optimistic as well about how memory, inscribed by the writer, might one day overcome melancholy and nostalgia: “The melancholy of the Puerto Rican soul may perhaps . . . one day be assuaged, and its perpetual hunger for a lost paradise be appeased. Memory . . . can, through translation . . . perhaps be
reinstated to its true abode” (163–164). García’s character Pilar feels a responsibility to write because “there’s only my imagination where our history should be” (138). By restoring memory the writers can choose past origins to create alternative futures: they are writing history by means of the rediscovery of suppressed images and realities.

**Interlanguage: A Mestizaje of Languages**

Interlanguage is a plethora of evolving heterogeneous linguistic discourses, a kind of mestizaje of language. The problem of representation of the language is significant in these narratives, e.g., which language, Spanish or English, is foreign and thereby should be italicized? (Poey and Suarez 16) The authors are all fluent in code switching, i.e., using a mixture of Spanish and English. They construct simple equivalences, metaphoric uses that add dimensions of meaning, as well as translilingual forms and codes that carry multiple, simultaneous meanings resulting in code switching having a prismatic effect. Shorris maintains we are listening to combinations and permutations of at least four languages: English, Spanish, Spanglish and Caló (387). Anzaldúa identifies eight languages in play in the south Texas region of what she call the “borderlands”: Standard English, working class and slang English, standard Spanish, Standard Mexican Spanish, North Mexican Spanish dialect, variations of Chicano Spanish, Tex–Mex, and Pachuco (also called caló) (55).

In Macho! the narrator uses Spanish when no English equivalent, or uses English to teach reader Spanish term:

Saying this, the squat old man began going off toward the oxen... he ushered them along with his oattle, a long bamboo shaft... The bueyes moved slow and easy... The man put the yoke to them and crosstied it to their long horns with the leather straps called callundas. Or aperos. Depending on the local custom (13).

Sandra Cisneros creates code-switching mix of a neighborhood conversation, i.e., English spiced with Spanish expressions and informed by Mexican and classical western myths. In the short story “Eyes of Zapata” from Woman Hollering Creek, she calls up Emiliano Zapata, icon of the Mexican Revolution, the murdered hero of agrarian reform in Morelos:

You [Emiliano Zapata] used to be tan chistoso. Muy bonachono, muy bromista. Joking and singing off-key when you had your little drinks. Tres vicios tengo y los tengo muy arraigados; de ser borracho, jugador, y enamorado... Ay, my life, remember? Always muy enamorado, no? Are
you still that boy I met at the San Lazar country fair? Am I still that girl you kissed under the little avocado tree. It seems so far way from those days, Miliano” (89).

Cristina Garcia writes English laced with Spanish and African languages. Lourdes welcomes her new language, English, and its possibilities for reinvention:

They’d [Celia and Felicia] sit together for hours listening to the rhythm of the sea and the poems her mother recited as it in a dream.

*Por las ramas del laurel  
i las palomas oscuras  
La una era el sol  
la otra la luna.*

[Through the branches of the laurel tree  
I saw two dark doves  
One belonged to the sun  
the other one to the moon.]

Felicia learned her florid language on those nights. . . . Now they fight constantly, especially about El Líder. How her mother worships him! She keeps a framed photograph of him by her bed, where her husband’s picture used to be. But to Felicia, El Líder is just a a common tyrant. No better, no worse than any other in the world (109–110).

Oscar Hijuelos inserts Spanish into English expressions resulting in double marking, e.g., “And I ‘te quiero’ too” [And I ‘I love you’ too.] (18). Desi Arnaz’s television sitcom tirade is given in first in Spanish, then translated into English (141). Julia Alvarez relies on fractured idioms in the figure of Mami as Mrs. Malaprop: “She spoke in English when she argued with them [daughters]. And her English was a mishmash of mixed-up idioms and sayings that showed she was “green behind the ears,” as she called it. If her husband insisted she speak in Spanish to the girls so they wouldn’t forget their native tongue, she’s snap, “When in Rome, do unto the Romans” (García Girls 135).

Edward Rivera invents an interplay between Spanish and English including bilingual puns: people think a cura [priest] “cures” people (33). The image of “gateway” money signifies both “gateway” money and “get away” money (51). He also uses double marking, e.g., absolutely- mente” [absolutely-ly]. The aptly named teacher Maestro Mal-consejo [Master Bad Advice] instructs the children with: “...dead, useless words, most of them fit only for Spain. ‘Great Mother of our tongue’ he called that country. ‘And of our misery’ Papi would add years later (45).
Towards a New Epistemology

In his *Culturashíbridas* [Hybrid Cultures], Néstor García Canclini defines modernity as a conjuncture of “numerous traditions [that] coexist with varying degrees of modernity, and where social heterogeneity presents a multiplicity of simultaneous patrimonies” (Flores and López 121). In terms of space: “The planet cannot be seen as divided into distinct, textualized ways of life. . . . [We see] a growing sensitivity to the epistemological problems of writing across cultural boundaries” (Clifford 147, 153). In terms of time: “La otra cultura es el otro tiempo. Y como hay muchos culturas, habrá muchos tiempos” [The other culture is another time. And as there are many cultures, there are many times] (Fuentes, Valiente 127). Thus, writing across cultural space is writing into other times.

E Pluribus . . . ?

The recent passage of California Proposition 187 recently clearly reflects anti-immigrant feelings. What has happened in that state in the last decade demonstrates ambivalent, expedient feelings toward legal/illegal immigrants: embrace them when your economy needs their cheap labor; reject them when you do not. A. M. Rosenthal observes that: “now there is a growing American antagonism toward immigrants including refugees: hordes of them will take our jobs. Refugees, of specified colors, always are counted by the horde, sometimes the wave.” Is it possible for the several to be one [unum] at this point in the history of the United States? Is the United States now or has it ever been a pluralistic society? Can it become one? What should we as a country do about cultural difference? How can we think about difference other than by referring to images of assimilation, separatism, dualities, or polarities without falling into racism and xenophobia, or on the other end of the spectrum, into the platitudes of multiculturalism and political correctness? Is the problem, as T. W. Adorno suggests, not one of recovering unity, but of restoring difference and reasserting plurality? Or, in Giambattista Vico’s terms, is it to activate the differences? Is there a middle ground, common ground (unum)? Are there many middle grounds? Is Richard Rodriguez right when he asserts what assimilation into the melting pot amounts to is loss: “Lacking any plural sense of ourselves, how shall we describe Americanization, except as loss?” (Rodriguez, Days 164). Or is Henry Louis Gates, Jr., closer to the truth of our current historical experience when he speaks of the necessity of being inclusive, of learning the history of groups that make up the United States to allow expression of collective talents in *Loose Canons: Notes on the Culture Wars*? Arthur
Schlesinger’s *The Disuniting of America* addresses the cult of ethnicity and the countervailing power of love—erotic love that leads to mestizaje—to overcome difference. César Lievana has created a piquant culinary image of to express that mestizaje: “The United States . . . is a mole de todos los chiles” [a spicy blend of every kind of pepper] (Shorris 124). Perhaps it is not simply an issue of the persistence of ethnic identities versus assimilation, but an issue of creating new models of multiplicity, of moving beyond fixed hierarchies that dualities and dialectic construct, and into intercultural dialogue of equals.

**Future of Latino writing: Toward an Ethnographic Poetics**

In the texts we are engaging with, do Latinos primarily entify with their ethnic groups of origin and wish to assimilate as the poll *Latino Voices* finds? There is no single answer to the question, but there are a multiplicity of responses: from Anzaldúa’s denial of the other and belief in the persistence of ethnic identities, to García’s acceptance of the other and appreciation of the other’s “outsidedness”, to Hijuelos’s ideas of pluralistic integration, to Fuentes’s and—ironically Rodriguez’s conclusion—of an inevitable Latinization that leads to engulfment of Anglo culture by a continuing process of mestizaje, i.e. cultural blending and hybridization. In contradistinction to earlier immigrant cultures Shorris believes that Latino culture in the United States will continue to develop both in Spanish and in English: “Unlike earlier immigrant cultures, it is destined to have a long, ironic life in both the old country and the new, to be a culture neither here nor there—not pocho, meaning the degradation of two cultures, but Latino” (384). What Latino writers present us with are multilingual and multicentered texts, spaces of heterogeneity where the author gathers and records many voices, yet maintains the centrality of the storyteller and the story. In effect the authors are scribes who give voice to collective, collaborative, hybrid texts. Rather than looking backward in time to find their origins, these Latino writers are involved in a process of creating their identity from heterogeneous cultural possibilities.

What can we expect from Latino voices in the future? If we understand fiction as revelation, as prophesy of cultural meaning and human identity, then literature, which is made up of multiplicity of contradictory mirrors, can present us with alternative visions of the future. In Carlos Fuentes’s equation:

\[
\text{[past (memory) + future (desire) = present (imagination)] = horizon of literature.}
\]
On the horizon of literature unexpected new metamorphosing forms are appearing. They are forms of intercultural discourse ever more hybrid, ever more mixed, perhaps evermore subversive to the monologue of assimilation. Latino writers and their U. S. audiences are involved in a process of reinventing the continent by reinventing the myths of the Spanish and English speaking peoples and thereby creating a new intercultural version of our collective memory. Rather than seeking to directly transform American culture, society, and language in an oppositional sense by means of active cultural resistance to hegemonic norms, perhaps Latino voices can be better understood as seeking to generate new—often chaotic—patterns and possibilities in the cultural transformation of signifying systems. To answer the question I posed at the outset in the language of our common heritage, i.e., Latin: _E pluribus plures?_ I answer: _E pluribus novum unum_. Our new “common ground”—our _novum unum_—may well express itself in two languages.

Madison, Wisconsin
References

Literary Voices


Ann McBride-Limaye


CRITICAL VOICES


NOTES

1 I am indebted to Diane Ravitch for my subtitle: “Multiculturalism: E Pluribus Plures,” American Scholar. The opening quotation from Mikhail Bakhtin comes from: Gary Morson, “Bakhtin and the Present Moment” 222. “Outsidedness” is Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept interpreted by Morson and Emerson as follows: “‘Outsidedness’ creates the possibility of dialogue, and dialogue helps us understand a culture in a profound way. For any culture contains meanings that it itself does not know, that it itself has not realized, they are there, by as potential” (Gary Morson and Caryl Emerson, eds., Mikhail Bakhtin. The Creation of a Prosaics: 5). Both of these analyses offer good introduction to the theoretical works of the Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin (1895–1975). For a discussion of monologism and dialogism in the analysis of the intercivilizational encounter of Europe and the New World in the early sixteenth century, see Michael Palencia-Roth’s essay “Quarta Orbis Pars: Monologizing the New World.” The 1992 poll I refer to is the most comprehensive of its kind addressed to Latino audiences: Rodolfo O. de la Garza, Latino Voices: Mexican, Puerto Rican and Cuban Perspectives on American Politics. “American” as a term that refers solely to people of the United States is a usage hotly contested by other peoples of the Americas. Marc Zimmerman points out that: “Contrary to common understanding, literature by Hispanics of Latinos, mainly in Spanish, but sometimes in English as well, has existed in what is now the U.S. since the sixteenth century; and a distinctly ethnic Latino literature as being evolved for well over a hundred years” (U.S. Latino Literature 9). Latino voices in poetry, drama and song abound. I am limiting this study to prose narrative because that genre is most adequate to a Bakhtinian dialogical analysis. My rendering of mestizaje as “cultural blending” comes from Ruben Medina: “The Politics and Poetics of Mestizaje.” Mestizaje in the Mexican context was principally variations of an Indian-European blend with an African admixture. In the Caribbean, since most of the indigenous population had been obliterated in the years immediately following the conquest, mestizaje refers to variations in a European-African mix. See Michael Palencia-Roth’s “Transformations of Latinity for an analysis of mestizaje as physical and cultural processes in the new world. Use of diacritics in Spanish names and terms follows individual authorial practice resulting in a variety of usages in my text.

2 The definition of history as the dialogue of the present with the past comes from a conference presentation by Steven Stern: “Paradigms of Conquest, Moments of Discovery, History, Historiography, and Politics.” In Carlos Fuentes’s study of Latin American literature Valiente mundo nuevo, the focus is both intratextual (Bakhtin) and intertextual dialogical elements (Volosinov). The Puerto Rican writer Rosario Ferré asks: “What does Latin American literature bring to the North American tradition? How do diverging cultural matrices determine to a certain extent the themes that preoccupy literature? By creating language play that defies apparent social meanings and the established structures of power, magical power of images, historical and geographical tradition, and magical occurrences in the world of the


4 Shorris adds a further complicating characteristic evidenced by an Anglo writer, Daniel James, who sought a new identity after being black-listed by translating his name into its Spanish equivalent, “Danny Santiago,” and winning a prize for fiction in 1984 (395). Sawyer’s definition appears in Wright (45). In a provocative statement Zimmerman maintains that “Latinos” may be the name of a non-existent group: “... of course there are no Latinos ... the word is a construct bringing together diverse people who while they clearly share certain bases, are often quite distinct and only identify with each other in opposition to the non-Latinos and that usually for very specific, contingent and often political, epiphenomenal and ephemeral concerns” (41).

5 Morson, “Present” 216. In Bakhtin’s theory, “context is necessarily chrono-topic and partially shapes the act of understanding” (Morson and Emerson: 432). The representational significance of chronotopes is central as: “They are the organizing centers for the fundamental narrative events of the novel. The chronotope is the place where the knots of narrative are tied and untied. It can be said without qualification that to them belongs the meaning that shapes narrative ...” (Morson, *Bakhtin* 250). The relationship between real and fictive worlds is accounted for as follows: “Out of the actual chronotopes of our world [e.g., the encounter, the road, the threshold, which serve as the source of representation, emerge the reflected and created chronotopes of the work represented in the work [in the text]” (Morson, *Bakhtin* 253).

6 It is of interest to note that selective historical memory is operating in the oft-told tale of how Pocahontas saved Captain John Smith from a ritual execution. The fact of her subsequent marriage to John Rolfe and the birth of their mixed-blood son Thomas in 1615 is usually suppressed. Recognizing the historical fact of miscegenation, Lawrence Wright notes: “Of course races have been mixing in America since Columbus arrived. Visitors to Colonial America found plantation slaves who were as light-skinned as their masters. Patrick Henry actually proposed, in 1784, that the State of Virginia encourage intermarriage between whites and Indians, through the use of tax incentives and cash stipends. The legacy of this intermingling is that Americans who are descendants of early settlers, of slaves, or of Indians, often have ancestors of different races in their family tree” (47). It was not until 1967 that the United States Supreme Court ruled that the prohibition of interracial marriages by state laws was unconstitutional. Yet, even today, the issue of interracial dating in
a school setting calls up the miscegenation taboo and can provoke extreme social reactions as seen in the recent incidents (spring and summer 1994) in Wedowee, Alabama where the principal of the high school that was later destroyed by arson, had forbidden interracial couples to attend the prom, and pointedly told a biracial student that she was a mistake her parents had made, thereby provoking outrage in the African American community.

7 See Oscar Handlin, *The Newcomers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959) for another reading of the process of immigration as it was experienced by Blacks and Latinos. Rodriguez’s observations on the metaphor of the melting pot are found in *Days of Obligation* (16)1.

8 These statements were made in public forums. Although I am removing them from their original texts, my intent is to perform the découpage in order to create a format in which the utterances can be put into play in a recontextualized dialogizing form for the voices to comment on each other.

b. Carlos Fuentes, *Valiente mundo nuevo* 140. [The English translation is mine.]
f. Tomás Rivera,”Richard Rodriguez as Humanistic Antithesis” 406.
h. Rodriguez, *Hunger* 182.
l. Reinaldo Arenas, *Before Night Falls* 301.
m. Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 54.
q. Ferré 163.
r. Sandra Cisneros in: Susan Miller, “Caught Between Two Cultures” 79.
s. Cristina García in: Miller 79.
t. Julie Grau, Cisneros’s editor in: Miller, 78–79.
u. Villaseñor in: Miller 79.

9 For a discussion of the figure of La Malinche, see McBride–Limaye, “Metamorphoses of La Malinche and Mexican Cultural Identity”; and Sandra Messinger Cypess, *La Malinche in Mexican Literature: From History to Myth for a description of the Malinche paradigm in the works of Carlos Fuentes* (46–47). Roger Bartra discusses how the patron saint of Mexico, the Virgin of Guadalupe (a
syncretic figure with Tonantzin, the Aztec maize goddess) conflated with La Chingada (La Malinche) produces a dialectical archetype of great resonance he calls “La Chingadalupe” in La jaula de la melancolia: identidad y metamorfosis del mexicano [The Cage of Melancholy: Mexican Identity and Metamorphosis].

10 Muñiz Varela 108, Benítez–Rojo 36.

11 For a discussion of “collision of cultures” see Benítez–Rojo 37. Like the Virgin of Guadalupe, the patron saint of Cuba, the Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre (also known as the Virgen mulata) is a syncretic cult figure. According to Benítez–Rojo, the cult is based on three sources: “one of aboriginal origin (the Taino deity Atabey or Atabex), another native to Europe (the Virgin of Illescas), and finally, another from Africa (the Yoruba orisha [spirit] Oshun)” (12, 26). Further, the Taino deity, Atabey, is itself a syncretic figure with ties to Orehu, “mother of wa–ters to the Arawaks of the Guianas” linking Cuba to the Amazon basin, the encounter with the Mayans of the Yucatan, and the epic of the Caribs since the Arawak islands were objects of Carib desire (13).

12 In her paper “Nostalgia and Language as Cultural Identity: A Sociological Analysis of the Literature of Caribbean Migrants to New York,” Ana María Díaz–Stevens addresses the works of Piri Thomas, Edward Rivera and Nicholasa Mohr works among others.

13 The emotional space these characters inhabit is the same as that described by Deborah Sontag in her recent article “The Lasting Exile of Cuban Spirits”: “As yet another exodus from Cuba reminds them of their original journey, many exiles are focusing with a kind of melancholic clarity on the fact that a reverse migration grows more unlikely with every year. Most Cubans will never return to live in their island homeland. [paragraph] Instead, exile has become for them a place in and of itself, a state of mind, an emotional limbo, a country neither here nor there” (A1).

14 Rosenthal, “Refugees” A13. Nathan Glazer’s essay on the current debate about immigration, “Debate on Aliens Flares Beyond the Melting Pot,” asks: “Haven’t we been through all this before? Haven’t we had anti–immigration movements every few decades or so, since the founding of the Republic, and didn’t we decide with the immigration reform of 1965, that this is, and should be, a country of immigration, open to the world without restrictions of origin, race or ethnicity? Yes, but it is also true that every time anti–immigration sentiment rises, there is something new as well as much in the way of prejudice, ethnocentrism and racism that is old” (2). Glazer goes on to acknowledge that many strong social measures of assimilation or “Americanization” of immigrants are no longer in force.

15 The term “ethnographic poetics” comes from James Clifford’s The Predicament of
Ann McBride-Limaye

Culture: “What’s called for is an ethno(GRAPHIC) poetics.” This would amount to a “critical cultural politics.” What would this look like? DIFFERENCE IN THE FORM OF JUXTAPOSITION and DISPLACEMENT. “Global modernity seems to involve the permanent ironic displacement of the familiar and the strange, the here and the elsewhere” (146–147). This phenomenon is not dualistic but rather one of heterogeneity rather than fixed oppositions. The hybrid is not usually considered authentic (231), but global modernity increasingly involves intercultural phenomena: “a new multivocal field of intercultural discourse” (256). Since it is intercultural discourse, it is not likely it would be nationalistic; in fact it would be a critique of nationalistic forms of culture.

Marc Zimmerman discusses the phenomenon of “crossover culture,” “a vehicle for Latinos to create new, hybrid signifying forms that involve linkages and relations in a variety of often unexplored directions. . . .[and] creating one’s roots from heterogeneous elements rather than going back to some place of origin. The search is not for some original axis mundi or fixed essence, but distinct sets of identity possibilities from within the givens of an expanding multicultural universe” (U.S. Latino Literature 44). See Fuentes: Valiente mundo nuevo (48) for a discussion of the horizon of literature.