

Interpreting the New *Milenio*

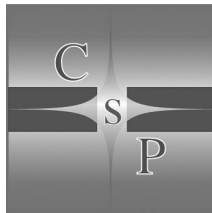
Interpreting the New *Milenio*

Edited by

José Antonio Gurpegui

Assistant editor

M. Carmen Gómez Galisteo



Cambridge Scholars Publishing

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Assistant Editor M. Carmen Gómez Galisteo

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INTRODUCTION

INTERPRETING THE NEW *MILENIO*

JOSÉ ANTONIO GURPEGUI
AND M. CARMEN GÓMEZ GALISTEO

Postmodernist writer Don DeLillo claimed a few years ago that we were in “a period of empty millennial frenzy.” This idea is what the title of the V International Conference on Chicano Literature intended to convey. “Interpreting the New *Milenio*” other than drawing attention on this bilingualism we have already pointed out, also acknowledged the importance that, in the 21st century, interpreting Chicano Literature in this new, post-2nd millennium context, had. It may be argued if Chicano literature experienced any sort of millennial frenzy as the 20th century gave way to the 21st, the 1st millennium to the 2nd, but what these essays prove is, that, definitely, there was no empty in this period of time.

Section I, Enfoques de revisión histórica, deals with writers or situations that may be disputed to be truly Chicano but that are an integral part for understanding Chicano literature now. González Calvo vindicates the historical and literary figure of María Amparo Ruiz de Burton, a Mexican-born but U.S. citizen 19th-century writer who, in the words of her lifelong friend and correspondent Mariano Vallejo, had “el alma atravesada.” Ruiz de Burton’s novel, *The Squatter and the Don*, brought back to light by Sánchez and Pita’s 1997 edition, illustrates the problems that former Mexican citizens encountered upon their lands becoming American soil.

The discrimination that the Californios, the original Mexican settlers of present-day California, underwent after the Mexican-American War, lies its roots on the Spanish and British colonization of the New World. Gómez Galisteo shows that some of the situations of discrimination that Spanish-language Chicano authors experience in contrast to English-language Chicano literature date back from the colonial period. “Conquistadores” like Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca or Bernal Díaz del Castillo saw how the accounts they had written upon their experiences as

eyewitnesses in America were, at best, considered untrustworthy and, at worst, regarded as fabrications, while those chronicles written by historians who had never set a foot in the New World were deemed to be the only accurate versions of the Spanish conquest and colonization. Meanwhile, their British counterparts, though not thoroughly trusted, were, for the most part, considerable as valuable sources about America and, in time, became the origin of all subsequent reports and histories dealing with the New World.

But not all Spanish eyewitnesses writing reports about their experiences in America were conquistadores; friars also proved to be fervent recorders. Acker uses the portrait of the coyote and the janissary in *Derrotero y Diario de Domínguez y Escalante* to illustrate issues of “mestizaje,” pure blood and native populations in colonial Spanish America, coyote being one of the many derogatory terms used to refer to the children of mixed blood. In Acker’s essay we see how, despite the fact that religious factors (converting the natives to Catholicism) was given pre-eminence when it came to draw the goals of an expedition, financial considerations were very much in the minds of the participants of the expedition parties, even though they were friars. Colonizing prospects as well as financial opportunities fused with the religious zeal of those friars who took part in expeditions and “entradas.”

Sometimes the many different elements that converged in the exploration and colonization of America are so many that it is hard to understand them all and one must recur to fiction. This is what Carlos Morton’s play *Rancho Hollywood* attempts to perform and, in turn, Morton’s essay analyzes the background that inspires his play. Fictionalizing the real historical figure of Pío Pico, the last Mexican governor of Alta California, Morton constructs his Rió Rico, who has to overcome the problems that *mestizaje* involved in the 19th century.

A century apart from the characters in Morton’s play or Ruiz de Burton’s novel, working-class Chicanos in the 20th century also face discrimination and labour exploitation. Martín Junquera, taking into account *The Brick People* by Alejandro Morales, explores how Chicano workers relate to the Anglos, to themselves (particularly their women) and to their environment. Further than the traditional class struggle issue on which most analyses of this work have focused, Martín Junquera deals with environmental concerns and feminist criticism.

Lenguas nuevas, verbos viejos, illustrates how linguistic concerns are at the core of Chicano novels, becoming a fundamental tool for the analysis of plot or structure. Arcidiacono, using the case of Rolando Hinojosa Smith’s self-translation of his novels, illustrates that the choice

of language for the bilingual Chicano writer poses a number of questions and problems, decisively affecting the work itself. García Vizcaino and Melchor Iñiguez both turn to Sandra Cisneros's novels, concentrating on aspects of language, identity, the representation of biculturalism and Chicano English. If Hinojosa has written novels both in English and in Spanish and has translated into English some of the novels he wrote in Spanish, Cisneros is a U.S.-born Mexican-American whose English (the only language in which she writes) contains features only to be found in Spanish.

In the section devoted to Construcciones masculinas, three writers analyze how the construction of masculinity in Chicano literature is performed. Wehbe Herrera's essay explores how masculinity has been represented in Chicano narrative, an aspect, however, on which not much criticism has been produced. De Chiara's and Delgado Melgosa's essays, in turn, analyze masculinity as represented by poet Guillermo Gómez-Peña and in the Vietnam War novel *Gods Go Begging* by Alfredo Véa, respectively.

As we have already seen in Arcidiacono's essay on Rolando Hinojosa, he is a writer who chooses Spanish or English according to the language in which he lived the experiences recorded in that particular work. Alfredo Véa, a lawyer who participated in the Vietnam War, recorded in *Gods Go Begging* his experiences as a soldier. Far from the archetypal Chicano novel, *Gods Go Begging* is a trauma novel, a Vietnam War novel, from the point of view of a Chicano soldier.

In the section on "Legados, sonidos y apetitos culturales," Villagrán Backman reminds us of the importance that food has been given in any society but, particularly, in Chicano culture, where the ritual of cooking and eating becomes a method for establishing firm social bonds in the Chicano community. Villagrán Backman analyzes three texts, the short stories "El pavo" by Alicia Gaspar de Alba and "Las repatriaciones de noviembre" by Francisco X. Alarcón and the novella *Paletitas de Guayaba* by Erlinda Gonzales-Berry in order to explain that though food is a secondary matter, it is a pervading and ever-present feature of Chicano literature.

Castro Dopacio examines the figure of the Virgen of Guadalupe, the patron saint of Mexico and object of the most ardent religious fervor, to explore the connections between Chicano literature and Puerto Rican literature, becoming a "chicano-riqueño" literature. As illustrated by Chicano author Graciela Limón in *The Memories of Ana Calderón* (1994) and by Puerto Rican writer Rosario Ferré in the short story "La Batalla de las Vírgenes" (2000), female authors are using the Virgen of Guadalupe to

make claims about women's role. The Virgen of Guadalupe represents traditional womanhood in Mexico – she is the mother, the caretaker, all of them roles envisaged by the traditional Mexican housewife and mother. However, Limón and Ferré re-negotiate this in order to attribute to the Virgen of Guadalupe with features that bring her closer to modern day professional Chicanas, who want to go beyond “what God had put her on earth to do: to work and have babies.”

In this post-millennium-craze era, Esparza Celorrio speaks about the legacies of Chicano literature for the new millennium that are to be found in the short stories of Sabine Ulibarrí. For Esparza Celorrio, in Ulibarrí we can find a message of tolerance.

If in the previous essay we have the legacy of Chicano literature for the new millennium, Rodríguez López analyzes, in turn, the legacy of the Andalusian heritage of Chicano literature. For Rodríguez López, the mythical Aztlán shares close similarities with Al-Andalus in their being mythical places. Aztlán and Al-Andalus, in this mutual comparison, become a golden place for authors to develop their narrative fantasies.

But not all the legacies of Chicano culture are literary; sometimes, this legacy comes in the form of songs, as is the case with Ry Cooder's song about Chávez Ravine. An all-American element such as baseball is the excuse Ry Cooder uses to speak about how Chicanos living in the neighborhood of Chávez Ravine were dispossessed of their houses in order to make room for the construction of the new Dodgers stadium. The loss of the houses in favor of a symbol of American culture is a reminder of the way in which Californios were, a few generations earlier, also dispossessed of their lands after the Mexican-American War.

Chicanas have sought ways of empowering themselves, be it by means of their special connection with the spiritual world or by means of discourse. The essays in section “Chicanas en su poderío discursivo y espiritual” deal with this.

Ramón Torrijos's essay explains the difficulties that a Chicana must face, in their two-fold plight of being a woman and a Chicana. In a male-centered society such as the Chicana community, Chicanas have to find the means (sometimes only within themselves) to empower themselves and that way, speak with a voice of their own.

The House of Mango Street is also the object of Díaz López's essay, in which she considers the evolution in Cisneros's narrative universe from *The House on Mango Street* to *Woman Hollering Creek* marks the development of Chicanas themselves, going from a *Bildungsroman* to the new mestiza, in a coming of age for Chicanas.

But this exclusion from mainstream U.S. society and the identity problems that Chicanos in general and Chicanas in particular have to endure are not exclusive to the Chicano community. In her essay, taking into account *So Far From God* by Ana Castillo, Einsiedel explains that the U.S. is a country based upon the principles of exclusion of the other, of the one who is different from Anglos. For Einsiedel, the lives and deaths of Sofia (Greek for wisdom)'s daughter (also bearing very significant names such as Fe [Faith], Esperanza [Hope] and Caridad [Charity]) represent the departure (and eventual return) from Chicano traditions, equated with the house of wisdom, that is, Sofia's home.

For Einsiedel, the fate for Xicanas (to use the term Castillo coined herself) when entering (or attempting to enter) the world of Anglos is death and grief. Lomeli's essay also speaks about the pervasiveness of the frontier and the *compenetración*, not only in Chicano novels, but also in films, songs, and so forth. The importance and omnipresence of the frontier, as cultural force or as background, is visible in the characters in *Chasing Shadows* by Lucrecia Guerrero. Family relations serve to illustrate the conflicts at the frontier, between being Mexican and being American, and the spaces in between the two categories, using memory not only to remember the past but also to take a look on the future.

For a Chicana writing about spiritual matters, this is entering in still another frontier. Facio speaks about clairvoyance and the spiritual journeys of Chicanas in a search for an identity and a voice of their own.

Rebolledo's essay explores the empowering of Chicanas by means of their clairvoyance. Drawing on her own family history and her grandmother's clairvoyant abilities, Rebolledo analyzes how Chicanas use clairvoyance, their "dark gifts," to compensate for the silences imposed by the taboos of the Chicano community though sometimes the burden from social pressure proves to be too much and the only available option for them is becoming "la Loca," the crazy one.

But clairvoyant powers or madness are not the only ways in which Chicanas can attempt to make sense of their existence and their heritage. Fernández de Pinedo shows how sometimes this redefinition of Mexico and, subsequently, of oneself, can be achieved by means of the rewriting of a well-known, mainstream plays such as *The Wizard of Oz* or *Alice in Wonderland*. This is what Silvia González S. performed with her *Alicia in wonder tierra*, the object of Fernández de Pinedo's analysis. This Alicia does not look for a white rabbit, but for herself, and like Dorothy, she must go back home, to the origins, to Mexico.

Chicano novels have been oftentimes accused on relying too heavily on the author's autobiographical experiences in detriment of truly fictional

material. The essays in section “Autobiografía más allá del yo” go a step beyond in that they analyze the opposite phenomenon – how Chicano autobiographies are much more than an account of the life of oneself and become a monument to the testimony of the Chicano community in its entirety.

Tatum’s essay serves as an introduction to Chicano autobiography, signaling the major trends in current autobiographical narratives and pointing out the most relevant examples of each.

Pluecker analyzes how poet and novelist Arturo Ríos is able, in his role of poet, of being more open about his sexuality (that is, more autobiographical) than in his novel production.

The pervasiveness and the importance of the border is visible not just in fictional writings, but also in the autobiographies of Cleofas Jaramillo and Frances Esquibel Tywoniak, examined by Kabalen de Bichara. For Kabalen de Bichara, these border autobiography is both a cultural model and a powerful generator of meaning. That way, the works by these two writers pose a number of significant questions when it comes to acknowledge one’s cultural heritage and ancestry – Jaramillo saw herself as a descendant from the Spaniards, ethnically unrelated to the Mexicans, whereas Esquibel Tywoniak thought of herself as a Mexican American, the daughter of a Mexican father and a Mexican-American mother from New Mexico.

The next section, *Teorías y teóricos*, opens with Zygadlo’s essay on the importance of Mexicans in California society. Whereas Samuel Huntington has devoted a great deal of his research to vindicate the Anglo-Saxon values of American society while warning of the threat that Latinos are posing to the unity of the United States, Zygadlo reminds us of the important contributions and the essential role that Mexicans play in U.S. society. Moreover, Zygadlo speaks of the Spanish roots of the U.S., contrary to Huntington’s beliefs that it was only with the coming of the Anglo Protestants that America began its history.

Mesa González takes *Caramelo* by Sandra Cisneros as a starting point for her analysis of how memory becomes, for Chicanas, an instrument of search and healing in the face of historical trauma.

Veritch deals with the postmodernist features to be found in Chicano literature, signalling the coming of age of the Chicano novel. Now Chicano novels no longer are required to convey distinctive features of the Chicano experience but, in contrast to the works written in previous decades, Veritch argues, they have become part of mainstream literature, including postmodernist trends.

The next section, “Lo fronterizo fluctuante,” explores in depth a phenomenon that, up to a certain extent, other essayists have explored – that there is not such a clear-cut notion as the frontier, for this has to be negotiated, it fluctuates, it is ever changing.

Karrer explores the frontier as a social construct for Mexican immigrants in the U.S. who speak about their lives, concentrating on their sense of change and ethnic differences and how ethnicity is constructed.

Spires sees in Sandra Cisneros’ *Caramelo* an ongoing process by which the Mexican-American frontier is gradually assimilated. Spanglish and consumerism, in Spires’ analysis, illustrate the process by which Celaya, the protagonist of the novel, has to come to terms with her identity as Mexican-American.

PART I:
ENFOQUES DE REVISIÓN HISTÓRICA

MARÍA AMPARO RUIZ DE BURTON'S
THE SQUATTER AND THE DON:
THE AFTERMATH OF THE GUADALUPE-
HIDALGO TREATY AND THE POLITICS
OF EXCLUSION IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY
AMERICA

OLGA GONZÁLEZ CALVO

María Amparo Ruiz de Burton was a nineteenth century Mexican writer who witnessed the expansion of the United States into the Southwest, into California, and offered her testimony of the effects this process had on the inhabitants of this area at the time of the aftermath of the Mexican-American War. María Amparo's life and work covered this turbulent period and the tensions facing Hispanic and Anglo populations after the treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo was signed. In her work, she questioned the predominant ideological discourses of the time, which presented the American way of life as a liberating force to get rid of all the obsolete un-American systems of organizing social and economic life. In her novel she depicts a period of crisis as 1848 represented the watershed that marked the transition between two different modes of economic production, from cattle raising to farming, and eventually to a modern capitalistic system based on market forces and controlled by monopolies and corporations. Ruiz de Burton contested the land hunger of Anglo settlers, offering a mixture of genres, the historical and the romantic, and using the female sphere and its circumscription in the domestic realm to criticize America expansionism and to offer an imaginary solution for the problems encountered by the californios, her own class, in trying to carve a meaningful space for themselves in the new American national scenario.

María Amparo Ruiz de Burton, although later acquiring the U.S. citizenship, was born a Mexican citizen in Southern California in the early 1830s, and her novel *The Squatter and the Don* deals with the consequences that the armed struggle known as the Mexican-American war had for the population of the Southwest. Although the population had been promised full citizenship rights after the Guadalupe-Hidalgo treaty in 1848, in real fact, they were soon relegated from the circles of political and economic power, becoming second-class citizens. They also lost their wealth as they mortgaged their properties to pay for the legal costs of validating their land titles before a Land Claim Commission, as made mandatory by the Land Law in 1851, while newcomers were squatting in the big tracts of land, in the hope of finally being able to claim their settlement as legally valid. However, the new settlers were eventually frustrated by Congress and state legislature, as land in the emerging market economy was rapidly becoming a very valuable asset. The annexation of the Southwest by the U.S. government also implied a clash of two different ways of production, as it was a moment of transition from cattle ranches to farming, and eventually to an economic system based on monopoly and corporate capitalism. It was the time when the railroad monopolies, the big textile companies and the Rockefeller Standard Oil Trust were developed (Sanchez and Pita 1992: 14).

In *The Squatter and the Don* the conflict between the Mexicans and the Anglos is posed at first between the Alamares, a landholding Mexican family in San Diego, and the squatters who come to take their land. Ruiz de Burton used romantic and sentimental elements as narratorial devices on which to hinge the plot of the book, and offers an imaginary solution to the problems posited by the clash of Anglos and Californios. Sentimentality was a currency that Ruiz de Burton's contemporaries understood well enough. As Shirley Samuels points out in *The Culture of Sentiment: Race, Gender and Sentimentality in Nineteenth-Century America*: "Sentimentality in nineteenth-century America, then, appears not so much a genre as an operation or a set of actions within discursive modes of affect and identification that effect connections across gender, race, and class boundaries" (1992: 6). As McCullough reminds us in *Regions of Identity*, Ruiz de Burton's historical romance employs the figure of woman and her naturalized domestic sphere to reunite and repair painful fractions along national, regional, ethnic, and religious lines in order to envision an American future that includes Californios, the landed gentry of Mexican origin, her own class, as meaningful agents in the construction of the national project (1999: 133). The term Californio itself points to the privileged ruling class to differentiate them from Mexicans

and Indians, as Creole descendants of the Spanish colonial elite. In fact, Californios, unlike African or Asian Americans were considered white from a legal point of view, and therefore had the right to vote under U.S. legislation. However, they were often subjected to the same prejudices as other racialized groups.

The story is framed around the fortunes and misfortunes of two families, a Mexican one, the Alamares, and an Anglo one, the Darrells, and the difficulties on the path to true love for Mercedes Alamar and Clarence Darrell, children from these antagonistic families. Ruiz de Burton's fiction attempts what Genaro Padilla qualifies as one of the main generative principles of Chicano literary production: "the reconciliation of vexing contradictions" (quoted in McCullough 1999: 184). In *The Squatter and the Don*, as in other work by 19th-century women writers, the narrative of the conflict between the Alamares and the squatters coheres around the topic of finding a stable place to locate a familial community in a productive land. Paul Lauter in *Canons and Contexts* finds that women's work very often focuses on the topic of establishing a home or being deprived of it (1991: 122). The organization of home and family as the alternative to the corrupt male world of business was one appropriate channel for their literary aspirations, as it placed women in the domestic realm, which was felt as their proper sphere in the nineteenth century.

As a romance, the text is encased within generic constraints, and the development of the lovers' affair follows all the predictable convolutions of the genre, but the novel is a denunciatory legacy for future generations of Latinos whose novelty is that it is narrated from the perspective of the conquered people, and is constantly challenging the stereotype of Hispanic Mexican people as backward and unable to cope with the modern world. This was the justification for U.S. expansionism and therefore it was crucial to deconstruct it, if the Californios were going to play a significant role in the American national scenario. However, the novel displaces all the negative stereotypes onto the Indians, who are lazy and backward, while the European ancestry and qualities of the Californios are highly stressed.

The novel grants a special emphasis to the female sphere, both in the Anglo and in the Mexican families. Doña Josefa, the Mexican matron is presented as the main guardian and transmitter of the values of tradition, honour, pride and modesty. She is a handsome matron, a proud lady with an aristocratic portly air, and very punctilious as to minor points of behaviour etiquette, who watches like a hawk the demeanor of her daughters. It was important for Ruiz de Burton to insist on the moral, sexual and racial purity of the Californio female sphere to deconstruct the

Victorian prejudice which represented women from different ethnic background as erotic beings. Ruiz de Burton is paving the ground for the eligibility of the family's youngest daughter, Mercedes Alamar, as the consort of the Anglo hero, Clarence Darrell. The figure of the chaste pure blood Spanish woman seeking out the superior Anglo was also flatteringly embedded in the patriarchal Victorian psychological mores as McCullough points out (1999: 133). American culture was more willing to regard women from different ethnic backgrounds, rather than men, as American, as women did not represent a threat to the dominant expansionistic system due to the fact they did not have legal or economic rights, and were therefore much easier to assimilate through marriage.

Mercedes Alamar lacks the strength of the older female characters, the matriarchs. She is the paradigm of the obedient Spanish daughter, brought up to meekness and submission. As Diana Tey Rebolledo states in *Women Singing in the Snow* patriarchal culture has always rewarded women that are passive, self-denying and nurturing (1995: 11). Ruiz de Burton stresses Mercedes' asexuality, she is described as prepubescent, almost like a baby or a young child, with tiny hands and feet and golden ringlets. When Darrell tries to kiss her, she recoils: "Such warm caresses she intuitively felt must be improper in the highest degree, even on the eve of marriage. No lady could allow them without surrendering her dignity. That was the effect of Doña Josefa's doctrines, which she had carefully inculcated into the minds of her daughters" (Ruiz de Burton 1992: 240). It is in her that the Victorian ideal of the feminine stereotype of the-angel-about-the-house is portrayed. She is modest and obedient to her parents, willing to accept uncomplaining the patriarchal rules, sacrificing and self-renouncing, therefore a fitting female to effect the union with the Anglo world thorough her marriage to Clarence.

The strong Californio matron is mirrored in the Anglo family's matron, Mary Moreneau. She is also a guardian of morality, although in this case, more centered on fine ethical points. In fact, she represents the moral conscience of the Anglo side. She challenges patriarchy, when she undermines her own husband by deciding with young Darrell, her son, to pay Don Mariano for the land her family occupies. When this fact comes to light she makes a highly dignified and coherent public defense of her position in front of the squatters:

And now, gentlemen, let me add this, only this, that I do not mean to criticize anybody's actions or opinions, but, from my point of view, I say, those laws which authorize you to locate homesteads upon lands claimed as Mexican grants, those laws are wrong, and good, just, moral citizens

should not be guided by them. ... I love my country, as every true-hearted American woman should, but, with shame and sorrow, I acknowledge that we have treated the conquered Spaniards most cruelly, and our law-givers have been most unjust to them. Those poor, defenseless ones, whom our Government pledged its faith to protect, have been sadly despoiled and reduced to poverty. (Ruiz de Burton 1992: 255)

The squatters, nevertheless, do not pay heed to these words, and seek to thrive at the cost of destroying the Mexican family's livelihood feeling justified in doing so because of their prejudices against them. Ruiz de Burton remarks on the unfairness of such attitudes, pointing out the rationale behind the large Mexican land grants of the Spanish and Mexican governments, whose intention was to help civilize the Indians, set up pueblos and villages and to civilize and organize the wilderness: "It was a good policy. In fact, the only one in those days of a patriarchal sort of life, when raising cattle was the principal occupation of the Californians" (Ruiz de Burton 1992: 176). This reasoning produces in the modern reader a sense of disquiet, as Ruiz de Burton offers as justification for taking away the land from the Indians exactly the same reasons the Anglos were using to take it away from the Californios. The Indians are thus presented as savages who deserve to have their land occupied and with no economic or legal rights. Meanwhile, the conflict between the Californios and the Anglos becomes more acute as Old Darrell, the patriarch of the Anglo family, takes sides with the squatters against the judgment of his wife and children. However, he is punished in the end because of his inability to accept his wife's moral superiority. When he learns that the land he has settled in has been paid for by his son Clarence with the connivance of his wife, he feels enraged and tries to vent his fury on the Californios. He challenges Don Mariano to fight, only to end up undermined even further and made a figure of ridicule (even the Indians laugh at him) as he is beaten and physically marked by the reata, the lassoing rope. This is symbolic of his moral and ethical deterioration. He is punished because he insults women, and consequently becomes ostracized from the female side of him, that is, his moral conscience, personified in his wife. He is the character in the novel that gives voice to the equation between women and land, which means the reification of females as mere chattels or commodities with a market value. He attacks the aristocratic value of honour, implying that the Don uses his daughters, specially Mercedes, as the bait to gain ascendancy over young Darrell and that he uses his daughters to parade them in New York to gain political influence, and congressional favours in Washington D.C.: "Roper guessed that the girls

had been pressed into service to help with their smiles to bamboozle Senators” (Ruiz de Burton 1992: 226).

We have to remember that, after all, one of the common means to acquire land was to marry an heiress. However, this is deconstructed in the novel, as Clarence Darrell marries an impoverished Mercedes that has lost her land and wealth, and whose family has suffered a process of pauperization. The old patriarchal system is destroyed as men of the older generation disappear, or lose influence and power. The old patriarchy is replaced by new patriarchal values, the values of money and capitalism. Like women, the colonized Californios are rendered powerless and therefore unacceptable to occupy the space of American masculinity. The Californios were unable to solve their problems. However, the novel offers the possibility of the resolution of their conflicts through the figure of Clarence Darrell and his marriage to Mercedes Alamar, thus saving the family from total bankruptcy. By challenging the squatters and siding with the Mexican family he opens the way for becoming the new patriarch, but one who treads the higher moral ground through his rejection of the squatters’ attitudes and his choice of paying the Alamars for the land he and his family occupy. This way, Clarence, the honourable young capitalist, is apt to marry Mercedes and offer a solution to the problems encountered by the Californios. However, the consolidation of the new patriarchal values, those of money and corporate capitalism, spell doom not only for the old Californio families, but for the new settlers and the whole population of the Southwest, as the area is deprived of its prosperity by the control on property performed by railroad barons in collusion with corrupt politicians. The novel ends in a note of despair as Doña Josefa laments the fate of her friends and family, who have been driven to poverty and distress, losing life and health:

Doña Josefa evidently did not believe that because “*misery there must always be in the world, no matter who causes it,*” that she was called upon to stoically submit to unmerited infliction. In a mild and dignified way, her mind rebelled. She regarded the acts of the men who caused her husband’s ruin and death with genuine abhorrence. To her, rectitude and equity had a clear meaning impossible to pervert. No subtle sophistry could blur in her mind the clear line dividing right from wrong. (Ruiz de Burton 1992: 363)

Ruiz de Burton closes the novel with a warning to her readership of the imperialist designs of the U.S. over Latin America: “Towns are crushed and sacrificed in California to carry prosperity to other countries. And California groans under her heavy load, but submits, seeing her merchants and farmers ground down with “special contracts” and discriminating

charges, and the refractory punished with pitiless severity” (Ruiz de Burton 1992: 371). To conclude, it could be said that this novel is an attempt to use a literary text as a historical agent, to put the record straight and point out at the unfairness of the relegation of the native Californios of the Southwest after the annexation of their territory by the U.S. It also uses the figure of woman and her circumscription in the domestic realm to criticize the ruthlessness that a process of national expansion inevitably entails, using sentimentalism and romantic elements to repair the painful fractions that the growth of the American nation created.

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THE LANGUAGE IN WHICH THE TALE IS TOLD: SPANISH *CONQUISTADORES*' ACCOUNTS AND ENGLISH HISTORICAL CHRONICLES

M. CARMEN GÓMEZ GALISTEO

Chicano writers nowadays face the quandary of writing either in English or in Spanish. What might seem like a decision of minor consequences is not at all for the implications of this choice have far-reaching effects. This situation is not a new one, though, but as old as American literature itself. Right after the discovery of America, Spanish *conquistadores* and English explorers and colonists began writing reports and accounts of that newly-discovered land. The different historiographical traditions existing in Spain and England in the 16th and 17th centuries determined the reception of these works by *conquistadores* and English explorers in altogether different ways. The accounts by *conquistadores* were rejected due to their authors not being professional historians and for their reporting incredible things. Meanwhile, English reporters became sound, respected historical sources for subsequent authors. That way, Spanish historians, by rejecting the works written by Spanish *conquistadores*, contributed up to a great extent, though inadvertently, to undermine the value of Spanish as a language of scholarship and literature.

One of the challenges of Chicano Literature, from its very beginnings with the publishing of the first Chicano works in the late fifties and early sixties, has been the language in which Chicano Literature was to be written. This might seem to be a minor issue, whose importance is exclusively confined to the linguistic aspect. Nevertheless, this choice has serious implications that should not be overlooked. For a Chicano writer, choosing to write either in English or in Spanish has important consequences – it helps define the author's self-positioning within one or another literary tradition, how others are going to perceive him/her, and even the kind (and number) of readers the work may appeal to.

This literary diglossia is no new phenomenon when we talk about American literature, though. The fact that English is the dominant language in the U.S. has helped determine what is considered to be American literature, i.e., what is to be included in the American literary canon and what is to be left out. Traditionally, it has been established that American literature was that produced after the arrival of the first English explorers. Thus, Thomas Hariot's *A Briefe and True Report of the New-Found Land of Virginia* (1588) is considered to be the first American literary work. Due to this periodization, works written in Spanish much earlier were excluded from the canon of American literature, though they are very similar to those in the canon in most (or all) regards, except for the language in which they were written. Works such as Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca's *Naufragios* (1542) share themes, literary conventions, concerns, topics, world view, motivations, intentions, and so forth, with, for instance, *The General History of Virginia* by John Smith.

How did this come to be so? The answer that immediately comes to one's mind is that ever since the US became an English-speaking country, those works written in English were naturally preferred to those written in a foreign language – be it Spanish or any other, such as French. Nevertheless, the favouring of works written in English and the subsequent neglect of those written in Spanish, was not entirely promoted by (either American or British) English-speaking literary authorities. Spanish chroniclers and historians also contributed up to a great extent, though inadvertently, to the neglect of Spanish by rejecting the works written by Spanish *conquistadores*. Thus, they opened the path for British historians to do the same and, in turn, favour the writings by their fellow countrymen.

During the first years of Spanish and English colonization of America, writings dealing with it were numerous. Those who went to America and those who did not all enthusiastically embraced the duty of writing about the New World – either out of free will or because it was their official assignment to do so. So vast came to be the body of writings dealing with America that “in 1492 America was, from the European standpoint, simply an event. But in 1493 it became a collection of words” (Franklin 1979: xi).

The writings about America written in English in the 17th century were for the most part the work of explorers and adventures, men like John Smith or Thomas Hariot. Those written in Spanish, in a similar fashion, were written by *conquistadores* such as Cabeza de Vaca or Bernal Díaz del Castillo (author of *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España* [1632]). Such chronicles were mainly written to report to the monarch, advance one's career and promote the colonial venture. In

recording their American experience, all these chroniclers, regardless of their nationality, faced with the challenge of lacking literary models available for the depiction of such a new reality. Before them they had

the problem of how to create a text where none had existed before. This led to the creation of new genres or, at least, to new versions of old genres. First-person narratives, such as that of Bernal Díaz de Castillo, declaring to be “True Histories”; overextended letters, part descriptive and part evaluative, such as Hernán Cortés’s *Letters of Relation*; even attempts, such as Oviedo’s *Historia general*, to impose a loose Plinian structure upon the natural and human history of America – all these belong to recognizable European genres – chronicle, natural history, legal deposition – but they are all also sufficiently unlike those genres for Carlos Fuentes to be able, without undue hyperbole, to claim them as the first ‘novels’ to be written about America. (Pagden 1991: 150)

To the unavailability of previous literary or historical models to convey their first-hand experiences in America, it was added a tendency, particularly acute in 16th-century Spanish historiography, of valuing *de dicto* (Latin for “of the word”) over *de re* (Latin for “of the thing”). Accordingly, more value was attributed to that re-told by a historian than to what was told by an eyewitness of the event reported. This contradiction might result most incomprehensible for us, who, living in a predominantly audiovisual culture, prefer watching what is actually happening rather than being told – thence, the live broadcasting of natural disasters, military actions, and so forth... The reason for what might seem to us a paradox is that, in the Renaissance mind, more value was attributed to men of letters with a formal background (that is, historians) than to less knowledgeable eyewitnesses (such as *conquistadores*). Only those statements coming from an authority (*de dicto*) were straightforwardly accepted; those coming directly from a first-hand testimony (*de re*) were considered suspicious and untrustworthy on the grounds of a bias which those who had not directly participated in the event described lacked.

The most common accusation held against eyewitnesses was that “they may lie by authority, because none can controule them,” as William Wood, eyewitness and author of *New Englands Prospect* (1634), put it. Subsequently, it was the historians’ job to examine eyewitnesses’ reports in an attempt to discern the truth from exaggerations or personal opinion. This task was even tougher because at the time history was considered a sub-branch of fiction (Murray 1994: 11). In addition, probable for the Renaissance mind meant “being capable of being ‘proved’ or developed through the techniques of dialectical argument” (Hutson 1993: 85). In this

respect, eyewitnesses could hardly compete with the florid prose or the rhetorical mastery of professional historians, since

the language of scholarship, moreover, makes it sound as if history, not historians, were doing the talking, the authoritative voice of the all-seeing author lulling readers into believing that the information comes from a transcendent place. These conventions for presenting historical knowledge, moreover, create the appearance of a dispassionate approach, uncontaminated by partiality or interest, unconstrained by the limitations of a single vantage point. (Appleby and others 1994: 245)

History is “a verbal representation or imitation of reality and must, in some generally understood manner, conform to that reality” (Humphreys 1980: 2) but the newness of America made it impossible to conform to reality as it was known up to then. Eyewitnesses’ lack of a formal training and the existence of things unheard before provoked that neither could History nor the truth defended by eyewitnesses be defined as what was usually agreed as being likely. *Conquistadores*, for instance, warned their readers about the possibility that some things, on the grounds of their newness, would be hard to believe, a strategy also used by Herodotus, Seneca and Dante (Pupo-Walker 1992: 89).

In this view, truth was not something to be found in the exact rendering of events but in the manner – though maybe not entirely accurate – in which these events are told. Both historians and eyewitnesses were very much aware of this double standard and prologues generally addressed these questions, defending the author’s right (especially if he was an eyewitness) to write the work it preceded¹. However, as the controversy became more heated, not only prologues were devoted to this controversy, but often entire works.

So, the writings and chronicles of Bernal Díaz del Castillo, Bartolomé de Las Casas, Cabeza de Vaca and many others were suspected and questioned due to this tradition in Spanish historiography of undervaluing eyewitnesses’ accounts in favour of professional historians’. What Jameson, an American historian wrote: “The sixteenth and the early seventeenth had been an age of great historians who were also great men. Prominent statesmen and soldiers wrote brilliant accounts of events in which they had borne an active part” (1891: 726) would have never been said by any Spanish historian, back then or even much later.

¹ For a more detailed analysis of the reasons alleged against the credibility of eyewitnesses and the subsequent strategies used by eyewitnesses to be trusted, see Gómez Galisteo 2006: 34-58.

Meanwhile, the situation in England was altogether different. While Spanish *conquistadores* were neglected and scorned on the grounds of a tradition of discrediting eyewitnesses and their accounts, English explorers (and later on, colonists) were taken as sound historical sources. Contrary to Spanish historiography, in England there was a tradition in historiography of following previous chroniclers verbatim without having any question about their accuracy being raised. This had, in turn, the negative result that in English historical works mythical and biblical elements which passed unnoticed (and not criticized) were included.

In Spain, Fernández de Oviedo accused historians of having collected their knowledge from many books whereas he had obtained his own from personal experience². Meanwhile, in England, the very conception of truth was completely different – “a chronicler should not be considered as affirming the truth of what he wrote, but only what he had seen in other books” (Trimble 1950: 32). Consequently, claims like Fernández de Oviedo’s that historians were unable to report events they had not witnessed, were less forceful in England than in Spain. In England, truth depended not so much on the writer being a professional historian or not – but on the veracity of his sources. That way, a book was true if what it contained came from other previous books, regardless of the veracity of those books. As long as it was in a book, it was true; seeing was not a question of being an eyewitness of events but of being an ‘eyewitness of books.’

While Bernal Díaz del Castillo’s or Cabeza de Vaca’s accounts were scorned in Spain, in England, Smith’s writings, though suspected, became a previous source for many subsequent writers. Díaz del Castillo’s first-hand chronicle of Cortés’ conquest of Mexico went unnoticed and scarcely known until the 18th century, but in England Smith was trusted so much that

latter-day historians, anthropologists, ethnologists, and the like have been so willing to trust early English eyewitness accounts that, for instance, they construct virtually their entire picture of the Powhatan society out of them, right down to telling us its settlement patterns, political forms, burial and marriage practices, tribute systems, sumptuary rules, puberty rites, and the like, on the basis of little more than the perceptions of thoroughly

² “I have not taken the material of these books from two thousand thousands of books I have read, ... but I accumulated everything that I write here from two thousand millions of hardships and privations and dangers in the twenty-two years and over that I have been seeing and experiencing these things personally” (quoted in Iglesia, 1940: 526).

Anglocentric and prejudiced men, not one of them trained for the track.
(Sale 1990: 389)

That way, despite a certain reluctance to accept writings that were not based on previous sources, it cannot be said that the tendency to distrust eyewitnesses existing in Spain was thoroughly shared by English historiography.

What is more, English historians did not limit their credibility to their fellow countrymen. The same credibility they gave to English chroniclers and recorders was also given to Spanish chroniclers. For instance, the first English edition (1583) of Las Casas's *Brevísima relación*, titled *The Spanish Colonie, or briefe chronicle of the acts and gestes of the Spaniards in the West Indies, called the Newe World* attributed to the Dominican friar the condition of historian whose words should be considered true. Certainly, it was most convenient for Englishmen to consider Las Casas a historian so as to give credit to his denouncing the brutality and wrongdoings of the Spaniards in America. Yet, it is very significant that they gave full credit to Las Casas' words, something he would have never attained in Spain. Las Casas was not the only Spanish eyewitness given credit as a historian by English historiography, though. The translations of Peter Martyr's, López de Gómara's and Fernández de Oviedo's works, which arouse interest in England for the colonization venture, were as widely read as respected.

As a conclusion, the problems that Chicano writers face nowadays depending on the language in which they choose to write their works are rooted in two different historiographical traditions that gave different (historical and otherwise) value to the accounts of their fellow countrymen. That way, works written by English explorers and soldiers were given greater value and critical attention than those by Spanish *conquistadores*, resulting in writings in English being thoroughly accepted while ignoring and undervaluing those in Spanish. In a gradual manner, English was favoured while rejecting Spanish as a possible language of scholarship, historical reporting, veracity, and literature. Now as then, the choice of writing in one language or the other is a decision with serious implications and consequences for the acceptability, credibility, and readership of both the work and the author. In their claims to have their decision to write in Spanish accepted, the situation of Chicano writers resembles that faced by Spanish *conquistadores* and eyewitnesses when striving to be considered serious historians.