

ADOLESCENT TIME: ADOLESCENCE AND THE FORMATION OF CHICANO
LITERATURE

BY

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the function of adolescence in the formation of Chicano literature. Theories of assimilation and concerns over Mexican-American cultural inauthenticity animate much of Chicano literature and its criticism, yet my research aims to focus on the liminal space during which Mexican-American adolescent males negotiate complex ideological forces on their way toward manhood. To examine the continually shifting parameters of adolescence I combine readings of literary representations with theories of temporality to study what I call “adolescent time,” which brings together theories of temporality, biopolitics, and subjectivity to illuminate the coming-of-age process for Mexican American men. Building on these readings, the dissertation also comments on the politics of Chicano literary history. Chapter One examines two Chicano canonical novels—Americo Paredes’s *George Washington Gomez* (1930s) and José Antonio Villareal’s *Pocho* (1990)—that rely upon the generic conventions of the bildungsroman and of adolescence to establish legible representations of Mexican American masculinity which were strategically recovered by Chicano activists and scholars. A strategic identification with the protagonists of these texts shows their recovery to be keyed into debates regarding their literary value, thus shedding light on the politics of canon building. Chapter Two looks beyond the criticism against Richard Rodriguez’s *Hunger for Memory* (1982) to focus on the adolescent time of the novel—paying special attention to issues of class, race, gender, and sexuality—to better understand the author’s conservative views. An iconoclastic figure in Chicano studies, Rodriguez’s refusal to generate a reproductive model of kinship and ethnic identification, a failure akin to the adolescent as failed investment. While Rodriguez may be bereft of literary forebears—a branch presumed dead on the tree of Chicano literary history—his

work has generated decades of criticism and debate, and in this way he has borne a different kind of fruit. Chapter Three reconsiders the value of Young Adult literature to Chicano Studies, heretofore woefully understudied. I read authors Matt de la Peña and Benjamin Alire Sáenz as attuned to the concerns of both Chicano Studies and Children's/Young Adult Literary Studies; their work eschews ethnic nationalism to attend to the traumatic experiences of the adolescent period to model positive types of subject formation for its young reader. Nevertheless, like many Chicano canonical texts about adolescence, these Young Adult texts continue to grapple with notions of race, gender, and sexuality and thus expand the available representations of masculinity beyond heteropatriarchal nationalism. To conclude, the dissertation's fourth chapter examines Rudolfo Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima* (1972), an extremely popular crossover text, making it apropos to blur the lines of adolescent time by expanding the parameters of adolescent time to speculate on the narrative and perform the dissertation in miniature. Overall, the dissertation maintains that Chicano literary history's formation hinges upon adolescent time, which in turn allows us to grasp the high stakes of assessing gender and sexuality in its constitution.

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INTRODUCTION: CHICANO LITERATURE AND ADOLESCENCE

Again, no biography, and especially no autobiography, should henceforth be complete if it does not describe this period of transformation so all-determining for future life to which it alone can often give the key.

-G. Stanley Hall, *Adolescence*

The “it” in question, adolescence, was the basis for the psychologist G. Stanley Hall’s most famous 1907 study which articulated the then emerging developmental period in psychological as well as literary terms (Kidd 139). His quote, which serves as prologue to this dissertation on adolescence in Chicano literature, highlights a fundamental point that informs this study: attention to the coming-of-age experience can lend insight to subject development, especially those that evade analysis. “Lindo y Querido,” the first short story in Manuel Muñoz’s short story collection, *The Faith Healer of Olive Avenue* (2007), illuminates the social function of Chicano literature while allowing simultaneously pointing toward under-examined issues in Chicano/a critical discourse, namely, adolescence and queer identities.

Faith Healer is situated in California’s Central Valley and focused on the at-times intertwining lives of a Mexican American community. “Lindo y Querido” opens with Concepción “Connie” Islas, an undocumented single-mother, solemnly grieving the recent loss of her only teenage son, Isidro, who died days after surviving a motorcycle accident that claimed his friend’s life, Carlos Martínez. Recalling Chicana narratives detailing socio-economic hardships experienced by Mexican-American women, Muñoz’s narrative focus splits between the grieving and her son’s posthumously discovered, closeted life.¹ “Isidro’s mother works for a

¹ For example, *Weeping Woman: La Llorona and Other Stories* (1994) by Alma Luz Villanueva, *Under the Feet of Jesus* (1995) by Helen María Viramontes, *So Far From God* by Ana Castillo (1993), *Woman Hollering Creek*

woman on the good side of town, doing work that doesn't need defining," the narrator explains, pointing to the ubiquity of lives lived in the service sector: "You know what she does and how she does it and how hard it is" (2). "She could be worse off," the narrator continues, having been abandoned by her husband years ago at least Connie can rely on his financial support and continued informal work situation which allows her to avoid submitting the fake documents she purchased (4). This is a familiar narrative, the proliferation and study of which is foundational to Chicana feminist scholarship. Ellie Hernandez hails this monumental shift from the Chicano Movement's early focus on "embodying Chicana/o political and class subjectivity, to the exclusion of all other terms, including color, sex, gender, and sexuality" as potentially one of the "greatest achievements in Chicana/o discourse" (8).

But rather than focus on the quiet dignity with which Concepción navigates her world—a quality immediately recognized—the story is attuned to how she cares for her son in the wake of the accident. Informed of possible avenues for affording Isidro's continued hospitalization, a legal citizen, Connie refuses to give any of her own information while filling out applications for fear of having her son taken by the State, and so arrangements are made to return the boy home with his mother where she assumes his care, assisted by daily nurse visits until Isidro passes on the fourth day. She sets to cleaning out her son's room, recalling how methodically she did the same after her husband left, tossing his hidden adult magazines "fold[ing] what she can donate anonymously to the Salvation Army," and in the process finds a collection of envelopes beneath Isidro's mattress (16). Although she is initially hesitant to intrude upon her son's secrets, Connie eventually opens the largest of the nine letters.

(1991) by Sandra Cisneros, and the autobiographical writings of Gloria Anzaldua and Cherrie Moraga from the 1980s, to name a few.

Isidro, she reads, and then the date, and then the words start, the words give her no meaning, but she thinks she knows enough of them. The closing now, *Love*, *Carlos*, says more than anything else.

Carlos was the boy driving the motorcycle. (19)

Sitting on the bare mattress, she checks the other letters and continues to find Carlos' name, prompting her to think about the boys' accident ("Everyone knows that road, that intersection" notorious for claiming lives) and further back to her own youth when she had driven with Isidro's father to the recreational area at the road's end.

The story links Connie and Isidro through their adolescent love lives—the contrast being that one story survives to be told—pointing, across generations and sexual identities, toward the dynamism of a shared developmental stage that has hitherto gone overlooked, despite its frequent invocation. Connie recalls welcoming the privacy afforded by the “sneaky trails that disappeared into the hillside” and her own naiveté when she was “so young she could not recognize the deep pause and heaviness in [Isidro's father's] chest, the difficulty in saying something he did not want to say” like “te quiero,” “I love you” (20). In the midst of this memory grief finally befalls her and Connie characterizes her circumstance as a “double loss,” either indicating the unfair absence of the men in her life or in reference to Isidro's sexuality—unable to reproduce the family, he robs her of grandchildren (20). Or perhaps both, as she only briefly compares Isidro's departure with his father's, similarly responding to the truth of their secret lives “rip[ping] the letters angrily, just as she did with her husband's magazines all those years ago (20). Ultimately, however, these feelings will subside as she reflects on the beauty and fulfillment her son must have felt with Carlos, dreaming of their afternoon rendezvous' which she inflects with her idealized memories of driving back with Isidro's father in a way that lets her identify with her

son: “She will dream of her son hugging Carlos as the motorcycle speeds faster ... feeling with her son as Carlos takes in a deep breath, the boys waiting for clearance, Carlos’ back widening” (22-23). “This was love,” she realizes, both relieved that Isidro would not know “how men sigh with a deep pause and heaviness,” having found love as he had and dismayed that there had been “so much of it ahead for them, so much” (23). “Lindo y Querido,” or “beautiful and dear,” Connie’s preferred letter salutation due to its unabashed sentiment, tethers mother and son together through a quintessential adolescent experience—first love—even as one gets resigned to the shadows as Connie does not share her discovery with anyone, not even Carlos’ mother; a poignant reminder of the historic state of queer narratives.

As yet there is not an abundance of scholarship focused on adolescence as a category of analysis in Chicano/a literary studies. Thus, in order to create a framework to discuss adolescence, I will put literary texts in conversation with studies from the social sciences and other landmark works on adolescence. As previously mentioned, Chicano literature is teeming with narratives and recollections of adolescence (not to be confused with adolescent literature, a genre in its own right). Before and during the Chicano Movement, fiction with adolescent protagonists and autobiographies depicting adolescence comprised what would become the Chicano literary canon. Americans are drawn to the memoir and autobiography, Harold Augenbraum and Ilan Stavans have noted, for the “sense of self, space, and place” such texts provide, reasons that have made the literary tradition all the more popular in US ethnic literatures whose respective communities have sought to establish a sense of self within the dominant white culture (“Introduction” xix). A bibliography of adolescence in Chicano literature, a worthy but daunting project in my estimation, would most tangibly indicate the preponderance of these texts but one need only look to the literature’s canonized texts to make the point: Rudolfo Anaya’s

Bless Me, Ultima (1972), Tomás Rivera's ... *y no se lo trago la tierra* (1971), and Sandra Cisneros' *House on Mango Street* (1984).

But what exactly do we mean when we invoke the term “adolescence”? If childhood is a dark continent, as Jean Baudrillard suggests, then adolescence is a castle of sand.² *Invented*. Formed by many hands, it is unstable, changing from age to age with the constantly rushing tide of research. Adolescence's mutability is, perhaps, only matched by its opacity. Popularly conceived of as a season of “storm and stress,” as the psychologist G. Stanley Hall famously put it at the turn of the nineteenth century, adolescence is difficult to define, yet it is a time when biologic and social forces compete to interpellate youths into becoming “good” subjects. Kent Baxter, in *The Modern Age: Turn of the Century American Culture and the Invention of Adolescence* (2008), marshals a century of research, historicizing the work of foundational scholars like Hall, Phillippe Ariès, Margaret Mead, and others to argue that the terms emergence of the term was the result of efforts to bridle (educate and discipline) a population made hypervisible following the mass migration of agrarian families to urban centers during the Industrial Revolution. As such, adolescence—a privileged, indeterminate space not yet encumbered by adult obligations—provides a testing ground of sorts unique to the individual based on gender, space, place, and class.

Traditionally, studies in Chicano literature have focused on the ethnic experience. More recently, however, work is emerging that attends specifically to the coming-of-age process, a shift in which my work joins.³ While these other studies are predominantly interested in children,

² “The Dark Continent of Childhood,” *Screened Out* (2002): 102-106.

³ With regards to work on Chicano children's literature and popular culture, Phillip Serrato's work has been influential, and in terms of Mexican American youth, I am indebted to Cristina Herrera and Melissa M. Hidalgo. See Serrato, "Promise and Peril: The Gendered Implications of Pat Mora's *Pablo's Tree* and Ana Castillo's *My Daughter, My Son, the Eagle, the Dove*." *Children's Literature* 38, 2010, pp. 133; Herrera, ""The Girls Our Mothers Warned Us About": Rejection, Redemption, and the Lesbian Daughter in Carla Trujillo's *What Night Brings*." *Women's*

my research aims to focus on the liminal space where Mexican-American adolescents negotiate complex ideological forces to emerge as “authentic” Mexican-American individuals. As John Alba Cutler has recently shown, assimilation and concerns over Mexican-American cultural inauthenticity animate much of Chicano literature and its criticism: “because assimilation discourse continues to exert such a powerful influence on US politics, the literature continually returns to assimilation as a way to mediate on ideas about race, gender, and culture” (6).

Building on this insight I attend to the ways that gender and sexuality are bound up with notions of authenticity and thus inform my discussion on adolescence in Chicano literature.

Due to the overwhelming presence of male protagonists in earlier Chicano literary texts, historicizing Mexican-American male authenticity—which I see as inextricably tied to the reification of normative masculinity—emerges as a necessary part of my project. The call for attention to issues of Chicano masculinity goes back to the foundational work of Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987). In a section titled “*Que no se olviden los hombres*” (or “Let’s not forget the men”) that rounds out the first section of her text, the celebrated feminist turns her attention to men, less to consider their contradictory racial shame and sexist behavior (“Though we ‘understand’ the root causes of male hatred and fear, and the consequent wounding of women, we do not excuse, we do not condone, and we will no longer put up with it”) than to demand words and actions so that *mestizas* can begin to support each other and change the culture (105). “Men, even more than women, are fettered to gender roles,” Anzaldúa argues, going further to say that only the latter and gay men proving to have the strength to break these chains, however, she also gestures to a “few scattered and isolated gentle straight men” whom she thinks “need a new masculinity and the new man needs a movement” (106). This new

Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal 39.1 (Jan-Feb 2010) 18-36; and Hidalgo, ““He Was a Sissy, Really”: Queering *Pocho* by the Books,” *Aztlán A Journal of Chicano Studies* 40.1 (2015) 7-36.

movement, from scholarship to activism, which expands the representations of Mexican American masculinity stands in stark contrast to the overriding heteropatriarchal nationalism reinforced in certain quarters of the Chicano Movement, leading to what Sandra K. Soto has called “reactional strains” of opposition that see Chicana feminism and its legacy as the cooptation of *el movimiento*, work which, in Ignacio M. García’s words does not reflect what the “predominantly working-class community thinks” (qtd. in Soto 11). Alongside Soto, then, I aim to develop an intersectional approach that both “think[s] harder and more flexibly about Chican@ subjectivity” (6).

This attention to masculinity is, for better and for worse, a product of the Chicano literary canon. As illustrated in an earlier bibliography of the literature by Annie Eysturoy and Jose Antonio Gurpegui which takes into account pre-Chicano literature (writings composed before 1848), the bibliography is dominated by male authors for over a century until the emergence of Chicana writers in the 1970s (the single outlier being Josephina Niggli’s short story collection, *Mexican Village* (1945). However, owing to our contemporary vantage point and through the recovery work done by the Recovering the U. S. Hispanic Literary Heritage Project and others, we know that other female authors were also writing at this time, such as María Amparo Ruiz de Burton (1832-1895), Leonor Villegas de Magnón (1876-1955), Adelina Otero-Warren (1881-1965), María Cristina Mena (1893-1965), Jovita González de Mireles (1904-1983). The inclusion of these women in the recent *Norton Anthology of Latino Literature* (2011) and pre-Chicano literature points to the contested nature of the canon, a debate with which this dissertation seeks to engage.⁴ The texts I’ve selected have been chosen specifically to illustrate the evolution of Mexican American masculinity and for this reason the chapters unfold chronologically, beginning in the 1930s and ending in our contemporary moment. But these

⁴ At a later point I will use female authors and observations on masculinity to get a distinctly feminist perspective.

male-centered texts were also chosen for the unique effect they have had (and may yet have) on Chicano literary history and scholarship, illustrating in different chapters the strategic decisions that go into recovering a text as well as what might preclude a text from acclaim and/or study.

In examining adolescent, racialized masculinities in each chapter, my goal is to more fully understand the dynamics of Mexican-American male subjectivity. Following the lead of critics like Soto, Vincent Cheng, and Mark Anthony Neal, I approach Mexican-American authenticity as the successful performance of a gendered identity that draws on a constellation of signifiers to indicate its belonging to an ethnic group. In *Inauthentic: The Anxiety Over Culture and Identity* (2004), Vincent Cheng focuses on how “authenticity” works and what animates the desire for it. Using Benedict Anderson’s theory of “imagined communities,” Cheng argues that although the political scientist was discussing national populations that same could be said of “the cultural, racial, and ethnic identities *we singularly construct* as imagined communities with authentic and definable essences” (emphasis added 4-5). The construction of what is deemed “essential” or “authentic” creates a “discursive problem,” however, as these concepts imply the existence of “its opposite, the inauthentic, the nonauthorized,” especially important when considering national ethnic projects like the Chicano Movement as “this quest for authenticity ... frequently takes the form of national nostalgia for origins, a yearning for a premodern and uncontaminated past that somehow authorizes and defines the authenticity and essence of the cultural present” (34).

Aztlán, the mythical homeland of Chicanos, serves as a powerful example, so much so that its invocation also operates as a signifier for community amongst like-minded individuals whose ethnic authenticity is guaranteed by their claiming it as their homeland, but these legible practices and rhetorics are not stagnant; indeed, their performers move through time and space,

leading them to influence and be influenced by others. Paradoxically then, such an authenticity is always remaking itself, yet by studying its history we can chart when such reconfigurations take place as well as what occasions them. “Legibility,” in Neal’s sense, refers to normative gendered and ethnic specific embodied performances. In *Looking for Leroy: Illegible Black Masculinities* (2013), Neal ruminates on the eponymous Leroy from *Fame* (the film and television series), a figure, he argues, whose radical performance of an indeterminate masculinity “represented the foundation for a queering of black masculinity in contemporary popular culture” as it went against the grain of the dominant, legible, forms available in the 1980s, such as the “pimp or petty criminal” or “uptight ... bourgeois” types (3). Thus, Neal sees “radical potential” in rendering “legible” bodies “illegible” and vice versa, a practice which “might represent a theoretical axis to perform the kind of critical exegesis that contemporary black masculinity demands” (8). Akin to Neal’s project, I focus on the “bad” subjects, texts, and genres of Chicano literary history but specifically chose subjects, texts, and genres whose refusal to be hailed by dominant ideologies (national or otherwise) creates provocations that have shaped and are continuing to shape debates within the discipline. Framing my study of these through adolescence allows the coming-of-age period to become a prism through which to view how young men learn the rhetoric of authenticity and legible masculinities. By performing an alternative reading practice wherein I focus on and contextualize illegible masculinities by attending to the representation of adolescence time in the literature, I plan on charting a history of Mexican-American masculinity that challenges authentic notions of male masculinity and community belonging.

Adolescent Time

To study the Mexican American coming-of-age process, I propose the critical and theoretical framework of “adolescent time.” Adolescent time combines studies of adolescence and racialized masculinity with theories of temporality. I begin by showing how “adolescence” emerges as a signifier for a unique time of life whose bounds continually shift. I identify adolescence as a form of what Dana Luciano has termed “chronobiopolitics,” or the “sexual arrangement of the time of life” (9). In *Arranging Grief: Sacred Time and the Body in Nineteenth-Century America* (2007), Luciano studies the way that the human body’s affective response to grief and attachment create alternative temporalities that rise against the biopolitics of the nation. “Biopolitics, as the corporeal regulation of populations, is fundamentally connected with but not identical to anatomo-politics . . . both are conjoined in the deployment of sexuality under the rubric of a biopower that operates to [as Foucault argues] ‘invest life through and through’” (qtd. in Luciano 10). As she shows in “Moments more Concentrated than Hours: Grief and the Texture of Time,” although middle-class nineteenth-century Christian values maintained that mourning over the loss of a beloved attachment was natural (indeed, it could even be pleasurable), overindulgence in grief and/or mourning reduced material productivity and eternal salvation. Identified as different temporal structures, the melancholic individual’s extended mourning period, or protracted access of extralinear (private) time, negatively affects the yield of linear (public) time (35). Through an analysis of the era’s comfort literature, Luciano demonstrates how “the ‘arrow’ of linear/public time pulled the inclusive circles of repetitive/private time forward, permitting the retention of affective ties to the past without allowing them to overtake the future-directedness of the present” (36).

Building on Luciano’s study of the mourning period and grief’s affective power to alter public time, I sketch out what I am calling “adolescent time.” Recent work on temporality and

subjectivity questions this normative trajectory to consider those who do not fit within such a narrative. Judith Halberstam's *In a Queer Time and Place* (2005) avers that participants of subcultures experience time queerly by "believ[ing] that their futures can be lived according to logics that lie outside of those paradigmatic markers of life—namely, birth, marriage, reproduction, and death" (2). Her examination of queer time is a great way of identifying normative development and how its respective times hail youth towards an idealized "reproductive time." For example, "family time" refers to an imagined set of needs related to beliefs regarding child rearing, such as "early to bed, early to rise" (5). Extending her earlier work in *Female Masculinity* (1998), Halberstam argues that tomboys, or preadult, preidentitarian adolescent girls, offer a rich site of analysis precisely because they occupy a space of "not yet," in that they are not fully realized, nor are they expected to be: "the desires, the play, and the anguish they access allows us to theorize other relations to identity" (*Queer Time* 177). In *The Queer Child* (2009), Kathryn Bond Stockton points to the troubled relationship between a child's proper growth, their metaphorical "growing up" towards Halberstam's markers of life, and the multiple means by which adults seek to delay the child's entrance into adulthood due to the chronobiopolitics previously depicted; "[D]espite our culture's assuming every child's straightness, the child can only be 'not-yet-straight,' since it . . . is not allowed to be sexual" (Stockton 7). Elaborating on Lacan's notion on *delay* (i.e. the inescapable deferral of meaning that occurs while reading a sentence based on sequential reading), Stockton investigates the hitherto unexplored presence of the "ghostly gay child," a "publically impossible identity" that can only emerge in the past tense ("I was a gay child") due to a presumed and enforced "innocence" placed on childhood (11). No longer a child, the adult can publically access sexuality and give "birth" to their gay self by reaching back in their memories to recall queer

experiences—subsequently resulting in the death of their straight childhood (11). “Hence, ‘growing up’ may be a shortsighted, limited rendering of human growth,” as Stockton insists; “By contrast ‘growing sideways’ suggests that the width of a person’s experience or ideas, their motives or their motions, may pertain at any age, bringing ‘adults’ and children’ into lateral contact.” (11). By embracing the potentiality, and necessity of non(re)productive sideways growth for queer children (Stockton calls this “self-ghosting” [19]), the “(e)motion in the back and forth of connections and extensions,” Stockton gives validity to those whose trajectory appears inappropriate, winding, and unusual (13).

To more carefully consider the chronobiopolitics of adolescence, and the queer temporalities that consequentially/necessarily emerge in response, “adolescent time” conjoins the work of these theorists while focusing on the time-body specificities captured by this term. Adolescent time gestures to the temporal moment of life where a youth balances the chronobiopolitical demands placed upon them against the exploration of a burgeoning sense of self. In other words, adolescence emerges as a unique, liminal temporality in which adolescents simultaneously have their growth circumscribed and yet they are nonetheless permitted to explore nontraditional ways of being. The adolescent differs from the child, whose innocence, or lack of experience, serves to queer them: “[Children] share estrangement from what they approach: the adulthood against which they may be defined” (Stockton 31). It is the adolescent’s expected linear progression towards adulthood that necessitates their acquisition of experience (prescribed and otherwise) and subsequently places an injunction on retaining childlike innocence. Inspired by Halberstam’s investigation of subcultures, adolescent time takes the dynamic chronobiopolitics of adolescence as a site of inquiry to search for other examples of spaces that afford the opportunity to queer linear progression. For my purposes, I am specifically

interested in how Mexican-American males experience adolescent time, thus my analysis performs spatio-temporally contextual readings of literary representations. In the spirit of Halberstam's and Stockton's formulations, I am interested in the ways that individuals delay their entrance to "reproductive time," their "self-ghosting" practices, but widen my approach to include illegible masculinities that may also be heterosexual. My approach is indebted to Halberstam and Stockton but departs from the specific contexts with which they are concerned. First, adolescent time brings the study of queer temporality out of Halberstam's subcultures to focus on the forces that attempt to streamline an adolescent's entrance into reproductive time. This is not to suggest that adolescents do not participate in subcultures; rather, given the over policed state of adolescence I am interested in the more ubiquitous forms of "self-ghosting" queer youths employ. Additionally, adolescent time centers on the cultural and institutional forces that shape racial identity, while Halberstam's attention to subcultures is grounded in a primarily white subjectivity. Criticism of queer theory's privileging of the white subject aside, adolescent time here engages with queer of color critique in particular. For example, although my thinking on the young subject in this project is indebted to Stockton's text but I aim to push the boundaries of her framework. In this wide ranging theoretical work she wonderfully articulates how the child can be queered by race, as exemplified by her reading of William Blake's "Little Black Boy" where the titular character is robbed of innocence. But Stockton's engagement remains with the *figure* of the raced child, as such it does not address the social forces that work in concert to queer the raced child or police a queer raced child. By going beyond Halberstam's queer, unraced subcultures to investigate the socio-culturally specific realities of Stockton's child queered by race, adolescent time centers race in ways that the work

of these scholars that renders it peripheral while simultaneously exploring how youths might queer time by delaying their arrival into adulthood and reproductive time.

This dissertation aims to put recent queer work in conversation with Chicana/o literary studies to investigate how adolescence time operates in the literature. Doing so expands the parameters of queer studies' presumed white subject by centering the Chicano subject. Additionally, adolescent time expands the parameters of Chicana/o literary history by bringing adolescence to bear on earlier work on gender, sexuality, and youth. Shifting the focus in this manner allows for what Soto calls the "de-mastery" of these texts as we are allowed to approach them with a new set of questions which can lead to new perspectives, illuminating how adolescence has been and will continue to be central to the study of Chicana/o literature. (87). The study of adolescent time is too complex and shifting to completely encapsulate here as different foci might yield different results, thus, what I offer in the following chapters is a narrowing of scope in more ways than one. Generically, as the chapters move from fiction to autobiography to Young Adult, temporality within the texts is dilated as we move from a lifetime to a collection of memories spanning a lifetime to one year or a summer, but engagement with adolescent time thickens in response. Moving from the macro to the micro in this manner draws us from the formal institutions of adolescence and places us more squarely in the realm of informal institutions, as such analysis of institutional assimilative forces like the School and Church gives way to an investigation of intensely personal experiences. Based on the analysis of these texts I argue that their position within Chicano literary history fluctuates in accord with the temporality of the latter. That is, the parameters of the canon shift and expand in relation to ongoing scholarly efforts, efforts that seek to, at different times, strategically coalesce a nascent

ethnic literature, bolster cultural nationalism, and represent subjectivities hitherto unaccounted for.

Chapter One focuses on the centrality of adolescence and the bildungsroman in early-twentieth-century and Movement-era fiction to explore how notions of the developmental period (namely linear subject formation) and genre conventions have shaped Mexican-American masculinity. These early novels of identity formation unfold according to the protagonist's biological time and his development is strictly policed along heteronormative lines by (in)formal chronobiopolitical institutions—the study of which is fundamental to understanding adolescent time—lest he develop illegibly. Yet adolescence as a temporal status of “not yet” permits the premature male to explore different ways of being. Ultimately, the illegible male figures emerge as cultural traitors and failed investments—as shown in Americo Parades' cautionary tale *George Washington Gómez* (1930s)—while legible figures ascend to manhood by crossing cultural thresholds, as in José Antonio Villareal's *Pocho* (1959). Nevertheless, both protagonists of these texts emerge as untraditional representatives of Mexican American masculinity, necessitating an accounting for the politics of their recovery.

Chapter Two reconsiders critiques of the infamous writer Richard Rodriguez as a failed Chicano through an examination of his adolescent time. Rodriguez's views on assimilation have long drawn criticism from Chicano authors and scholars, but the gendered/sexual aspects of his assimilated identity have begun to be examined relatively recently. Despite not aligning himself with the Chicano Movement, the expectations of Rodriguez (like the fictional George Washington Gómez) as an educated Mexican American benefitting from affirmative action were for him to use his powers to improve the lives of *la raza*, and because he refuses this obligation, while simultaneously arguing against the efforts of others, he is maligned as a pocho. This

refusal results in Rodriguez's failure, similar to the adolescent as failed investment, to reproduce a reproductive model of kinship and ethnic identification, leaving him bereft of literary forebears—a presumed dead branch on the tree of Chicano literary history. Yet in excavating the adolescent time of *Hunger of Memory* (1982), a ghostly, queer youth emerges and a reconsideration of his motivations and desires begins to account for some of his conservative viewpoints. He may not be the author longed for by Chicana/o scholars, but his work has generated decades of criticism and debate, and in this way he has borne a different kind of fruit in the genealogy of Mexican American letters.

Chapter Three reassess the value of Chicano Young Adult (YA) literature to both Chicano Studies and Children's and Young Adult literary studies. Often castigated as unserious by the former, Chicano YA nevertheless follows in its predecessor's ruminations on subject formation but, moved beyond post-Movement politics, reflect our contemporary postnational moment to account for the fragmentation of the Mexican American experience. Indeed, authors like Matt de la Peña and Benjamin Alire Sáenz are expanding the available representations of masculinity beyond heteropatriarchal nationalism. Breaking from accounts of racialization, de la Peña's *We Were Here* (2010) and Sáenz's *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* (2011) focus on adolescent trauma and forms of difference within their respective texts. As Eric Tribunella has shown, trauma is a common means by which a protagonist matures in children's and YA literature experiencing and as such these representations offer up an avenue for scholars to better understand adolescence while modeling strategies for young readers to overcome their own trauma. The significance of these representations of illegible Chicano masculinities for a younger audience is of extreme importance and has the ability to shift cultural and gender stereotypes. Indeed, the author's attention to the young reader might prove how the

YA genre exemplifies “adolescent time” in a way that the canonical, or “mature,” texts comprising the Chicana/o literary tradition cannot.

In response to and building on the work of other scholars, this project’s goal is to better understand subject formation by reading Chicano literature through the lens of adolescent time. Focusing on the coming-of-age experience within these narratives highlights what (in)formal forces police cultural identity vis-à-vis questions of masculinity and authenticity. Interested as this project is in centering adolescent time, a concluding section brings the ideas from the three chapters to bear on one of Chicano literature’s most widely read and celebrated texts, Rudolfo Anaya’s *Bless Me, Ultima* (1972), in doing so pointing to how we can use youth as a focal point for ascertaining how we understand the politics of gender and sexuality and what roles these play in literary history.

CHAPTER 1: CANONICAL JOVENES: ADOLESCENCE, THE COMING-OF-AGE NARRATIVE, AND THE CHICANO MOVEMENT

Before and during the Chicano Movement, fiction with adolescent characters and autobiographies depicting adolescence comprised what would become the Chicano literary canon, such as María Amparo Ruiz de Burton's *The Squatter and the Don* (1885), Luis Perez's *El Coyote: The Rebel* (1947), and Ernesto Galarza's *Barrio Boy* (1971). As Harold Augenbraum and Ilan Stavans have noted, Americans are drawn to the memoir and autobiography for the "sense of self, space, and place" such texts provide, reasons that have made the literary tradition all the more popular in US ethnic literatures whose respective communities have sought to establish a sense of self within the dominant white culture ("Introduction" xix). In ethnic American literature, this desire to account for one's self and community finds its earliest stirrings in Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself* (1845), a text which, along with other autobiographical narratives of African-Americans, would set the foundation for African-American literature. Chicano literature mirrors this trajectory, but with difference, of course.⁵

In its infancy in the 1960s and 1970s, the Chicano literary tradition was formed in part along ideological lines in support of the Chicano Movement. A monumental stepping stone to creating and sustaining a canon was the fight for and implementation of Chicano studies in higher education. As *El Plan de Santa Barbara* acknowledges, "the Chicano has not often enough written his own history ... his own literature," a fact which must be remedied "if he is to

⁵ A note here on my use of the term *Chicano*. As an ethnic-political identity, I primarily use it to identify those who identify/identified with the goals of the Chicano Movement. As such, while I can see the significance of claiming de Vaca and Jovita Gonzalez as predecessors, the value I place on historical context makes such a move, in my opinion, anachronistic. Nonetheless, I participate in the disciplinary norm of allowing "Chicana/o literature" to refer to works published by authors of Mexican descent before and after the Chicano Movement.

survive as a cultural entity in this melting pot society” (59). Through his reading of foundational movement documents Richard T. Rodríguez has argued that *la familia* served as an “organizing principle and symbol for cultural empowerment” yet it “often rested upon a heteropatriarchal order,” as exemplified by the masculinist language of *El Plan de Santa Barbara* (20). The need to maintain the family and traditional values through cultural production was meant to bolster ethnic nationalism, as indicated in the Chicano Movement’s early manifesto, *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán*: “We must ensure that our . . . artists produce literature and art that is appealing to our people and relates to our revolutionary culture. Our cultural values of life, family, and home will serve as a powerful weapon” (qtd. in Rodríguez 20). Exemplary of the kind of art sought is the stirring epic poem, “I am Joaquín,” which, with its antiassimilationist rhetoric and calls for unity, served as a “springboard for Chicano Movement mobilization,” but, as Rodríguez persuasively argues, “his refusal to be absorbed [by US culture] is fueled by the need to absorb la raza, which . . . reduces the people to a family of (one) man” (29, 28). Following an ideological imperative, the Chicano literary tradition grew in response to the movement’s call in the 1960s and 1970s and afterwards, in part, to exploring *antepasados*, with works from authors such as de Burton and others illuminating the tumultuous experiences of early Californios and Tejanos, respectively, among others. As we will see in the recovered works of José Antonio Villareal (*Pocho* (1959) and Americo Paredes (*George Washington Gómez* (1990)), neither the authors’ temporal nor ideological distances kept their texts from being absorbed into the movement, despite their protagonist’s not exactly embodying the “revolutionary culture” called for by *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* and signified by “I am Joaquín.” This chapter will focus on the adolescent male protagonists that populate these canonical works to argue that notions of adolescence, particularly linear subject formation, and the bildungsroman’s overriding concern

regarding assimilation assisted authors in writing coming-of-age narratives that echoed movement rhetoric and in the process policed representations of masculinity. Identifying adolescence as a chronobiopolitic, I suggest that paying special attention to the (in)formal institutions of adolescence—an important aspect of adolescent time—lends insight to the transmission of performances of racialized masculinity in these texts. Authors like Paredes and Villareal, I suggest, were cognizant of the politics of representation and, akin to their German predecessors, used the novel of formation to validate the experiences of Mexican Americans but this often came at the price of scapegoating queer identities, a message Chicano nationalism could abide as it was dependent on certain forms of masculinity (Chabram-Dernersesian and Fregoso 204). In doing so, these texts also become the standard bearers for legible, or “authentic,” representations of identity despite the volatile forces that threaten to queer these adolescents.

The Bildungsroman and Adolescence

Given the preoccupation early (and some contemporary) Chicano authors had (have) with assimilation it is fitting that in representing their communities’ lived experiences they turned to the bildungsroman. Formally, Jerome Buckley thematically defined the genre as a novel wherein all but two or three of the following characteristics are portrayed: “childhood, the conflict of generations, provinciality, the larger society, self-education, alienation, ordeal by love, the search for a vocation and a working philosophy” (18). Additionally, beyond this aesthetic requirement the protagonist must be socially engaged, unlike the Romantic self-involved characters found in the realist English and French “novels of society” (Boes 232). Franco Moretti suggests that “youth” is the key factor in these narratives. In *Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in*

European Culture (1987), Moretti cites Karl Mannheim's argument that for generations, in traditional communities "youth" was considered "'invisible' and 'insignificant'" in that every individual simply repeated that of his forebears, "introducing him to a role that lives on unchanged" (4). But slowly, with the rise of capitalism and the Industrial Revolution on the horizon, these communities broke down. A herald of these forces, and prime example of how these communities were destabilized, is land enclosure, specifically in England.⁶ And so when the countryside is abandoned for the city there is more than just a geographical change taking place: "it is also a yearned for exploration, since the selfsame process gives rise to unexpected hopes, thereby granting an *interiority* fuller than before, but also ... perennially dissatisfied and restless" (Moretti 4). For this reason, the bildungsroman emerges as the genre best suited to explore the changes brought on by modernity; as the young protagonist learns how to negotiate the social world, compromising his/her freedom in the process—and in this way the genre is marked by its focus on assimilation—but ultimately the protagonist emerges with a clearer sense of self. Youth, Moretti goes on to argue, is chosen by European culture as the symbol of modernity because it needed to ascribe meaning to the new era; it is chosen precisely because it can both represent "modernity's dynamism and instability" and is temporally circumscribed, for without limits youth as symbol is limitless and unrepresentable (5-6). According to George Lukacs, the novel adheres to the "biographical form" focusing on the central problem and in this way "[the protagonist] becomes a mere instrument, and his central position in the work means only that he is particularly well suited to *reveal* a certain problematic of life" (83 emphasis

⁶ During the sixteenth-century England operated under a manorial system wherein serfs worked farms on land rented from landowning lords. To increase their production serfs depended on access to "common" or uncultivated land owned by a lord in the manorial system, for "pasture, building timber, and fuel" (Warde). This manner of lifestyle, however, becomes untenable when over the course of generations the common land is enclosed; coupled with rising rent and competition from rapidly industrializing large-scale farms, many commoners chose to find wage labor in the cities. See Paul Warde "Enclosure." *Europe, 1450 to 1789: Encyclopedia of the Early Modern World*. Ed. Jonathan Dewald. Vol. 2. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2004. 256-258. *Gale Virtual Reference Library*. Web. 22 Aug. 2016.

added). Thus, the dominant “problematic of life” for the individual was how to find self-recognition in the midst of modernity, and so “the ‘great narrative’ of the bildungsroman comes into being ... because Europe has to attach a meaning, not so much to youth, as to *modernity*” (Moretti 5).

In Chicano literature, authors, often through male protagonists, sought to explore how the ethnic individual might negotiate the dominant “problematic of life”—assimilation into US culture—and did so through the bildungsroman. Therefore, for my study of adolescent time, I focus on these texts. Adolescent time’s attention to matters of “youth,” however, goes beyond genre and concerns itself with the socio-historical aspects that pertain to the literature, which necessitates an understanding of the predominant form of youth in coming-of-age narratives, adolescence. As we will see, it is perhaps not coincidental that adolescence in the US, much like the bildungsroman, was born upon modernity’s arrival and the need to contain it.

Containment. In a sense that is the work of the bildungsroman and autobiography, accounting for and strategically limiting the representation of lived experience—especially youthful follies.⁷ Attention to the adolescent experience usually commands much attention in the autobiography and certainly so in the bildungsroman. A seemingly innocuous classification, the designation “adolescent” is commonly understood as a developmental stage that begins when a child enters puberty and ends with adulthood.⁸ But the designation is highly contested. Prior to my analysis of adolescent time in Chicano literature, it is necessary to explain how I understand this term as a form of chronobiopolitics, or the “sexual arrangement of the time of life” (Luciano 9). I begin by calling attention to the way that from its legal inception the designation

⁷ One need not look further than Benjamin Franklin’s famous autobiography to note the careful omissions the genre employs, especially of his first visit to London. See *Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* (1916), ed. Frank Woodworth Pine.

⁸ “Adulthood” is a highly contentious term as well since it is predicated on the assumption that we know when adolescence ends and “the way it is constructed shapes these [age] categories indefinitely and invisibly” (Baxter 19).

“adolescence” was a product of biopower, the state’s efforts to “invest life through and through” via twin Althusserian ideological state apparatuses: school reform and juvenile courts (9). This brief history of the chronobiopolitics of the adolescent in the US can be traced to the Industrial Revolution.

The “invention of adolescence,” as Kent Baxter argues in his authoritative *The Modern Age: Turn-of-the-Century American Culture and the Invention of Adolescence* (2008), emerged as a response to cultural needs for identifying “a new and expanding segment of the population” as well as creating a “vehicle for expressing many concerns associated with the movement into a new era” (3).⁹ The magnitude and speed of the changes urbanization led to social apprehensions about how to best prepare children and teenagers for the workforce as well as how to discipline them, resulting in a two-pronged effort in the form of education reform and juvenile courts and making the term “adolescence” a largely “reactionary concept” used for “rehabilitative purposes” (24). Both state apparatuses aim at investing in the youth, both through education and/or rehabilitation, and a legal history of the term in this way points to the malleability of adolescence as a concept. Necessarily or not, Baxter’s study of adolescence—a liminal space in many ways overdetermined by (in)formal institutions—is unraced; my goal in studying adolescent time in Chicano literature builds on lessons from Baxter and others to analyze the transitional period while paying special attention in this chapter to the chronobiopolitics and social context of Mexican American coming-of-age narratives and their adherence to the bildungsroman’s generic conventions.

⁹ The marked increase in the number of urban cities (defined as having a population over 2,500) during the second half of the nineteenth century due to this mass migration sets the stage: according to US Census records, in 1860, of the approximate 31 million people in the US, slightly over 6 million people lived in 392 urban cities, whereas by 1890, of the 63 million people accounted for 22 million resided in 1348 urban communities (Baxter 25).

As I hope to have made clear, is essential to turn to coming-of-age narratives when considering adolescent time. The bildungsroman mirrors the normative development expected of the adolescent in that the narrative ends when the protagonist reaches maturity.¹⁰ In this way, the genre affectively molds our perceptions of the adolescent period and its expected outcomes. Additionally, coming-of-age narratives, are best suited for studying the space-time aspects of adolescent time, not only because they present “the image of *man in the process of becoming*” as Bakhtin states, but the genre depicts the protagonist “emerg[ing] *along with the world* and he reflects the historical emergence of the of the world itself. He is no longer within an epoch, but within the border of two epochs, at the transition point This transition is accomplished in him and through him” (*Speech Genres* 19, 23-24). As stated at the outset, autobiographical works (a type of bildungsroman) have been a way of establishing a sense of self for ethnic communities within US culture and often serve as the foundation for ethnic literatures.

The following analysis of adolescent time in the novels by Villareal and Paredes show their protagonists (and novels) to have a tenuous relationship to the overriding message of the Chicano Movement: on one hand, the novels realistically depict the coming-of-age of Mexican American males in California and Texas (states crucial to Chicano history and activism); yet, on the other hand, these protagonists, contrary to Movement rhetoric, are willing to eschew social engagement (a major feature of the bildungsroman) and be absorbed by US culture. How, then, do we account for these texts’ recovery by the Chicano Movement as in the case of *Pocho*, and their adoption into the Chicano canon? As these protagonists negotiate complex ideological

¹⁰ As Roberta Trites notes, “[T]he protagonist’s growth is neither accidental . . . Nor simply a matter of normal developmental growth . . . ; rather, the hero self-consciously sets out on a quest to achieve independence. The *Bildungsroman* is therefore an inherently Romantic genre, with its optimistic ending that affirms the protagonist’s entry into adulthood” (11-12).

forces to emerge as “authentic” Mexican-American individuals, their coming-of-age narratives depict a privileged temporal space not yet encumbered by adult obligations. I contend that this is, as Lee Bebout observes of the Chicano Movement, one of the narratives that is “potentially overlooked” when we only consider the social movement’s strategies and goals, which in the case of these texts has more to do with recovering a historically descriptive work than identification with either of the protagonists (1). Our engagement with adolescent time here will consider the forces most prevalent in the maturation of our young protagonists (the family, the school, and the church) and their relationship towards assimilation, that great preoccupation of Chicano literature. Privileging the adolescence of the protagonists in these familiar texts allows us to approach them anew, asking new questions and ultimately yielding new insights. My analytic approach for studying adolescent time in the two novels, given the historical, legal, and social specificities of each, necessitates that I address them individually and with difference. As my goal is to get a better sense of Mexican American adolescence I will attempt to bridge the divide between the thematically similar texts by having my analysis of one complement the other, and so I will follow the narrative arc of *Pocho* to study the chronobiopolitics of Richard Rubio’s youth, while my attention to *George Washington Gómez* will be focused on the assimilative imperative of the eponymous protagonist.

Within two epochs: *Pocho*

José Antonio Villareal’s *Pocho* is a semiautobiographical bildungsroman focusing on Richard Rubio’s coming-of-age in Depression-era California. Torn between two cultures, Richard endeavors to educate himself to become a creative writer, a dream deferred when his father abandons the family and forces Richard to become the bread winner until he enlists in the

Navy. Most autobiographies, memoirs, and bildungsroman begin with the circumstances of the author or protagonist's birth, but not *Pocho*; instead the narrative time of the novel is not proscribed to Richard's life because it sets out to establish Juan Rubio, and later his son, as authorities and exemplars of Mexican culture and masculinity.¹¹ The picaresque first chapter follows Juan as he arrives at a cantina in Juarez. Immediately taken with a young dancer, Juan beckons her over, much to the chagrin of her Spanish male proprietor. It's important to note that the dancer remains nameless for some time (until page 21); no accident, Juan, who "[has] not had a woman in a week" (3), asserts his masculine dominance and her insignificance by refusing, both before killing the Spaniard and after bedding her, to learn her name even after she inquires as to why he hasn't asked: "¿Qué importa?" he replies (4). Taken to jail shortly thereafter, Juan escapes punishment after his identity is revealed as Colonel Juan Manuel Rubio, a renowned Revolutionary soldier in Pancho Villas' army. The man in charge of the case, Hermilio Fuentes, an old friend and Revolutionary brother-in-arms turned general, inquires as to how Juan has found himself in such a mess, to which Juan relates that he "got tired of playing soldier with idiots" (8). Following the Revolution, he had been sent to the "Academy," or the Heroic Military College in Mexico City, where he and his fellow veterans were put under the command of a "snotty cadet sergeant with the walk of a maricón" more concerned with appearances than learning from the veterans' experience (8).

The final straw for Juan came when, despite his time as a cavalry officer, "this capon," or castrated rooster, informs him that he must wait until his third year to perform drills on horses (9). Disgusted with the propriety of the Academy and his queer commander, Juan decides to leave. But before doing so he wanted to make it abundantly clear that he and the other veterans

¹¹ Ramón Saldívar correctly identifies Juan Rubio as "paradigmatic hero, patriarch, and warrior, a virtual model of the stereotyped, sentimental, and reified hero of the very different Greater Mexican corrido tradition" (60). See *Chicano Narrative* (1990).

are the most experienced and, by extension, most manly, soldiers; having stolen a horse and lasso, Juan set off on one last ride wherein he charged through the ranks of soldiers to rope the young sergeant's leg and proceeded to drag him across the drill field, breaking an arm and leg in the process (9). Having asserted himself and validated the veterans—at the queer cadet sergeant's expense—Juan explains that he sought retirement but was convinced to instead take a leave of absence, a leave which he knows to be permanent because nothing can match the purpose he felt during the Revolution nor the admiration he had for his commander, Pancho Villa. Revered by Juan, his description of Villa further indicates his veneration while simultaneously denigrating homosexuality. General Fuentes confides to Juan that he also wishes to retire, fearing that his prior affiliation with Villa will do him harm in the current Obregón government, especially with rumors circulating that Villa is soon to be assassinated. “How can they kill a man like that—a man with such balls! He walks with God,” Juan exclaims (11). Recalling a losing battle wherein he, unintentionally, ended up beside Villa, Juan describes how his commander asked him to become a martyr:

“I need an example, muchacho. Go over and bring me that fieldpiece that is irritating me so much.” He was telling me to go die for him and it might help him win his battle and I knew it, but at that moment if he had asked me to turn my backside and submit to him, I would have done it without a qualm. (11)

There's an odd logic at play here. Certainly, the goal was to win the battle, but Juan, (over)eager to assist in any way and in thrall of being near Villa, acknowledges that he would've agreed to being penetrated if need be. Such an act would not have emasculated Juan; according to his logic, and despite Carlos Decena's observation on anal sex between Mexican men that “the idea of opening in the context of either being anally receptive or being open in other ways [is seen] as

a kind of betrayal and a foundational betrayal in Mexican national ideology,” Juan’s submission would have been to the godly Villa who could *only* accept the abdication of others (255).

Additionally, the queer act is aligned with dying in that both would serve as sacrifice to the nation, an honor, yet the former would be construed as an abject act to be ameliorated in the future. Or perhaps this is simply an exaggerated moment of hypermasculine performance that threatens the vulnerable homosocial relationship between men. In either case the situation, indicative of what Robert McKee Irwin has called the “paradox of masculinity,” makes clear that Juan’s commitment to a purpose is complete and this validates his masculinity, a prerogative he maintains when he leaves for Texas, despite being given leave to return to his wife and children in Torreon (224). Despite the fact that he refuses to return to his family, Juan considers himself honorable and in this way represents a *machismo* that depends on the unflinching loyalty of *marianismo*, or the sacrifice and abnegation of the woman to the family: “There must always be a sense of honor or a man will have no dignity, and without the dignity a man is incomplete. I will always be a man” (15).

“Thus Juan Rubio became a part of the great exodus that came of the Mexican Revolution” (15). Resigned to live in exile until the time that his commander should call upon him, Juan illegally runs cattle between El Paso and Juárez, visiting Dolores, the reformed (and now named) young woman from the cantina until his wife, Consuelo, and three daughters arrive. “[F]eeling that perhaps destiny had chosen him to be a part in the changing of history,” Juan accepts an invitation to meet with exiled politicians to discuss an assassination attempt on President Obregón during which he is reacquainted with Rene Soto, an exiled political strategist of the Revolution, journalist, and homosexual (21). A self-described “maker of generals,” Soto assuages the concerns of the others who fear that Juan is too arrogant for such delicate matters,

flattering the former by way of analogy: “A spirited horse must be given his head” (18, 24). “Take such ideas out of your head.... For to control a strong beast a man must first have a strong hand,” indicating his opinions of all assembled but epitomized by Soto, whose general during the Revolution ignominiously had his testicles shot off by a woman, coupled with his perceived failure as a man, led Juan to dismiss Soto out of hand: “He was nothing, and thus you are nothing.” (24, 19). The meeting is abruptly interrupted by a messenger who reports Villa’s assassination, news which leaves Juan inconsolably sobbing “as a child would cry,” yet “his grief was as short as it was intense” and he immediately composes himself to denounce the conspirators who request his assistance with other plots (26, 27). Aware of the danger his prior connection to Villa entails, Juan uproots himself once more, this time heading to Los Angeles to work construction and is found by his wife and children shortly thereafter, leading him to find “a new respect for this woman ... [whose efforts] made him love her for the first time in his life” (28). The narrative focus is so centered on Juan that it rhetorically offsets the monstrous nature of his actions; much could be said (indeed, should be said) about Consuelo’s plight amidst her abandonment and subsequent tracking of Juan, yet, the attention is on his change of heart and as such it does not mean he changed his ways: “He stopped his drinking and gambling, and learned to be discreet in his love affairs” (28). Quitting Los Angeles, Juan and the family instead worked the fields, following the California harvests, and were in Brawley when “their manchild, Richard, was born,” an occasion which, combined with the tedium of endless migration, convinced the family to settle in Santa Clara (28).

Similar to *Pocho*’s departure from the bildungsroman form via its focus on Juan and not the young protagonist, Richard, this consideration of the former is integral to understanding the complexity of the latter’s coming-of-age. Juan Rubio comes to be an important representation in

the genealogy of Mexican-American masculinity—a complex identity configuration marked by transnational histories and influences—for his experiences highlight commonalities shared across generations, but especially those of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans in the 1920s. In *Desert Immigrants* (1981), historian Mario T. García points to political turmoil in Mexico and abundant work opportunities in the US to explain the immigration of nearly one million Mexicans between 1880 and the beginning of the Great Depression (4). The immigration of such a large number of Mexicans was aided by an exemption in the Immigrant Act of 1917, also known as the Asiatic Barred Zone Act, which permitted entry (after paying \$18 for a visa and \$8 “head tax”) if they had resided in Mexico for one year prior to applying for residency (US Congress 875). “Together the Immigrant Generation viewed itself as a ‘México de Afuera’—Mexico of the Outside ... [seeing] their experiences north of the border as transitory... hoping to return to *la patria* and a better life” (García 15). Juan Rubio, as described by Villareal, encapsulates these experiences and sentiments:

The nomadic pace increased. Lettuce harvests in Salinas, melons in Brawley, grapes in Parlier, oranges in Ontario, cotton in Firebaugh—and, finally, Santa Clara, the prune country.... Now this man who had lived by the gun all his adult life would sit on his haunches under the prune trees ... and think, *Next year we will have enough money and we will return to our country*. But deep within he knew he was one of the lost ones. (31)

These experiences and sentiments are of particular import when considering how cultural knowledge is transmitted. As Jessica M. Vasquez argues, “[t]he family is a key source on factual family-history information and a wellspring of informal education on ‘what it means to be’ and ‘how to be’ of a particular heritage” (15).

In her study, *Mexican Americans Across Generations* (2011), Vazquez draws on Mannheim's work to consider identity formation as the interplay between "appropriated memories" handed down from someone else and "personally acquired memories," with childhood being especially significant as the "'primary stratum of experience' upon which worldviews are drafted" (qtd. in Vazquez 15). While there are others, an early example of this is when Richard hears his mother, Consuelo, singing songs of the old country. Folklore and corridos, as many scholars since Peredes have averred, serve to maintain cultural history yet its romanticization is not lost on Villareal who explains that while Richard was "caught in [the songs's] magic" he was "totally unaware that his imaginary remembrances, being free of pathos, were far more beautiful than her real ones" (34). A type of appropriated memory, Consuelo's songs gives Richard a sense of anemoria, or nostalgia for something he's never known, however, as Ramón Saldívar recognized, these songs—and much of Chicano literature, I would argue—also "represent[] by omission another history of oppression," for example, Consuelo's history in relation to those songs (71). Nonetheless, as I demonstrate in my reading of Richard's adolescent time (and later in *George Washington Gómez*), in addition to the family there are other forces set to the task of shepherding youths safely to adulthood. While her text is an analysis of young adult literature, many of the lessons from Roberta Trites's landmark text, *Disturbing the Universe* (2000), inform the present study. Borrowing from Michel Foucault and Louis Althusser, Trites argues that adolescent growth is predicated on negotiating fluctuations of power, making it "fundamental to adolescent literature," pointing toward how the adolescent must "learn to negotiate the many institutions that shape them ... balance their power with their parents's power and with the power of other authority figures in their lives" (x). And so "[e]ven when authors have not intentionally written for adolescents, they invariably portray adolescents

engaged in a domination-repression model, so authors, too, are complicitous” in reifying a certain coming-of-age narrative (8). Bringing together research on adolescence as it pertains to the historic conditions of the assembled protagonists, notes on the bildungsroman, and lessons from Trites, I will move into these canonical Chicano novels to consider how although their representations of adolescence are made to reify a legible Chicano experience at the cost of illegible masculinities, the dynamism of the developmental stage threatens to queer the presumed linear process and undermine the nationalistic undertones recovered by the Chicano Movement.

The description of Richard Rubio’s birth and youth foreshadow how he is meant to succeed his father as the next generation’s representation of Mexican American masculinity, yet it also signals how the manchild will escape the cultural ossification of Juan Rubio. As Richard enters the world he brings his warrior father to tears, not because he is endowed with oversized genitalia, but because Juan “caught a glimpse of the cycle of life . . . and he knew love and he knew also that all of this was good” (31). While the focus of the novel turns to Richard this epiphany of Juan’s, read alongside his resignation to exile, indicate his intention to continue the “cycle of life” he glimpsed; having begotten an heir to carry on the family name it is his duty to maintain the male privilege he previously enjoyed (drinking, gambling, affairs), however, despite his best efforts, Juan’s heteropatriarchal *México de afuera* will prove fragile over time. Indeed, it will be undone by his own son, no less.

As Juan Bruce-Novoa explains, by age nine we recognize that Richard is “manchild” in the sense that he will “refuse the utilitarian justifications of life. He is blessed and condemned to be unable to accept false simplifications of the world” (69). We see this in our introduction to Richard as he returns home from his first confession at church, pondering along the way one of Christianity’s founding tautological principles (“*Who made the World? God made the world?*”

Who made God? God is the Creator of Heaven and Earth” [33]) and temporarily placating himself by not questioning God further (a good subject doesn’t question power). Consuelo quietly revels in her son upon learning of his confession, noting how his outward appearance is incongruous with his flourishing intelligence and linking these in a racial hierarchy: “All indio, this boy of mine, she thought, except inside. The Spanish blood is deep within him” (35). And yet she fears the day that Richard’s intelligence will put him beyond her ken so when he begins to bring up the nature of his confession Consuelo attempts to evade, reminding him that to discuss the matter is sinful. Undeterred, Richard, in a literal translation to his mother relates that the priest, rather pruriently, asked if he “liked to play with himself,” leading to a comic mistranslation on the boy’s part when he responds in the affirmative and offers that he also plays with his sister (35). Unable to fathom a reason for the priest’s anger and harsh penance, how “one mortal sin could be worse than another,” Richard seeks understanding from his mother, who again attempts to evade her son and instead is thrown into further turmoil as his recognition of the misunderstanding leads him to explain that although he has never sexually interacted with his sister, he knows how: “She grasped the table for support. ¡Por Dios! She thought.... ‘Tell me how you know what he meant! Tell me now!’” (36).

Consuelo’s indignation over Richard’s knowledge evokes Kathryn Bond Stockton’s insight that “delay” is central to defining youth. Here Stockton elaborates on Jacques Lacan’s use of the term to indicate how “meaning is delayed” when reading precisely because we do so in sequence, “go[ing] forward in a sentence, not yet knowing what words are ahead of us, while we must take the words we have passed *with* us as we go,” as a result meaning temporarily hangs “in suspense” (4). For Richard, as for youths in general (as my larger argument suggests), growth, like a sentence, is expected to proceed along a line and adhere to rules, thus Consuelo is

incredulous that he has (assumed to be) forbidden knowledge of words further along the sentence, in this case, sex. “[D]espite our culture’s assuming every child’s straightness, the child can only be ‘not-yet-straight’ since it . . . is not allowed to be sexual,” Stockton points out (7). But Richard, as heir of Juan Rubio and representative of Mexican American masculinity, must have that knowledge, and spectacularly so as he proceeds to tell his mother that, as a child (again, he’s but nine years old here) the neighborhood girls would “take[] my trousers off and play[] with my palomas. Then they took their clothes off, and hugged me and rolled around in the grass” (36). Because he is a male (read “man” here), Consuelo views him as a sort of Lothario instead of a victim of sexual abuse: “Pig! Pig! Ah, what has God given me? A shameless!” (36). Sworn to secrecy by the girls and who used ice-cream cones to ensure his silence, it is only when the church and family institutions inform Richard that his acts are sinful that he gains that knowledge.

Richard is truly “blessed and condemned”: blessed in that his critical faculties will allow him to see beyond the realm of Santa Clara, and cursed because eventually, he must seek that out. Richard senses early on that reading may provide him with the knowledge he seeks—even if he is still too young to recognize the school, alongside his family and the church, as an institution that would mold him to its desired image—however, given that he is the child of migrant farmworkers Richard initially has difficulty attending school regularly, a similarity shared by many generations of minority migrant workers; born two months after Villas’ assassination in July 1923, Richard was lucky to have been able to attend school at all. “As far as can be determined,” suggests historian Irvin G. Hendrick, “the children of Mexican migrant farmworkers were totally ignored before 1920” until the State Department of Education stepped in, efforts that were more interested in enforcing state attendance requirements than any real

concern for the students (13, 14). California State Superintendent Bill Wood, apprised of the escalating population, made several recommendations, such as focusing resources on crop areas during harvest time and amending compulsory education law to require students to attend school in their current district as opposed to a permanent residence, which the constant migration made difficult if not impossible (14-15). Because migrant families spent much time away from their permanent residences truancy officers had little success enforcing attendance laws which, through the through the 1920s, maintained that parents of children between eight and sixteen were responsible for their school attendance.

Assembly Bill 705, an amendment to the California compulsory education law written by Elizabeth Hughes and approved in 1921, required that parents keep their children enrolled in school regardless of their migration, such that families might at different times be enrolled in up to five different districts (Hendrick 16). Georgiana Carden, state supervisor of attendance chosen by Wood, was tasked with using funds and the enforceability of the compulsory law to turn the tide, as it were. No small task, the erection of temporary schools sought to overcome the “distance” exemption in the compulsory law for “children residing more than two miles from the school house” (*Hennings* 2894), the first being in Saticoy, and their attendant curriculum were “[c]onsistent with goal of Americanising [sic] the foreign born” (Hendricks 18). Absences abounded, in part due to the contrasting values of school officials and Mexican parents, as Cardenas notes that “efforts at evasion [were] on the part of the parents who tried to keep the children out to work, not in the groves but around the camps, taking care of younger children, cooking and the like” (qtd. in Hendrick 18-19). Despite woefully subpar educational outcomes the temporary schools like Saticoy they were victories because they succeeded in getting migrant students to attend. The first indication we get of Richard’s education and sincere interest in

reading comes as a moment of escapism; fearing for his mother's life while she is in labor, he turns to *Toby Tyler, or Ten Weeks with the Circus*. He "had read it five times before. His teacher in Brawley had given it to him, once when he went to school for about a month, and told him he should keep until he learned to read" (40). It's fair to assume that the Rubio family returned to the melon farm in Brawley on which Richard was born as their familiarity with the proprietors would ensure that Juan would be hired for picking, and the short duration of Richard's enrollment was due to the family moving north to follow the harvest. Of additional interest in the passage is *Toby Tyler*. Serialized in *Harper's Young People* in 1877 and published as a book in 1881, the novel tells the tale of the eponymous orphan's decision to run away from a foster home and his subsequent experiences with the circus where he sees the graphic reality hiding behind the glamor of the big top. The novel was popular with youths longing to escape the tedium of their daily lives, but the "bad boy novel" was meant to instruct them as to the perils of following their instincts as opposed to their conscience and intellect, a message young Richard would have seized upon even if, ultimately, he becomes the eponymous pocho by leaving his family and running away to a very different kind of circus.

Developing his intellect becomes increasingly important to the bookish young Richard who, along the lines of James Joyce's Stephen Daedalus, seeks to be an individual free of influence and unbound by obligation, in direct contrast to his father's zeal during the Revolution. Thus, when Richard's mother explains that due to financial needs he will be forced to leave school and start working it is important note *how* he protests. Consuelo, recognizing her son's earnest desire to learn, says, "[w]e cannot help you, and soon we will not even be able to encourage you, because you will be obliged to work. We could not afford to spare you to go to school even if there was a way for you to do it, and there is a great sadness in our hearts" (61).

This, of course, is of no surprise. As Viviana Zelizer shows in *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children* (1985), the birth of a child in the rural US in the eighteenth century signaled “the arrival of a future laborer and security for parents” (5). In the early 1990s it was estimated that 25 percent of farm labor in the US was performed by children with at least one third of migrant children working to supplement their family’s income, and so it is fair to assume that this would also have been true (if not more so) for the for the Rubio’s in 1930s California (Flores and Hammer 13). “I will finish the secondary, Mamá. Of that I am sure” a frightened Richard asserts, going on to reason that “as long as we live in town [my] father cannot take me out of school until I become of age. Anyway, the girls can help out” (61). Rarely are we given clear indication of what age Richard is throughout the novel, yet it is safe to assume he is at least ten years old, given his prior description of the failed community organizing in 1931 Santa Clara. “[B]ecom[ing] of age” here is also ambiguous; he could be referring to when he graduates from secondary school at sixteen or fourteen, the minimum age requirement for a student work permit (Henning 2806) or Villareal could have anachronistically referred to the legal threshold for adulthood, eighteen. Regardless, Richard is sure to remind his mother that Juan cannot remove him from school, otherwise he could be subject to penalties which would surely be enforced given the family’s proximity to the school and its truancy officers.¹² Nonetheless, understanding that help is needed, he is only too happy to offer up his older sisters in his stead, predictably invoking his privilege as the family’s male heir to pursue his goals at the cost of his female siblings. He is pleased that his growth is not circumscribed to Consuelo’s plans for him to become a priest—thanks in large part to Juan’s disdain for religion and a desire

¹² Truancy would “be deemed a misdemeanor, and upon conviction, shall be liable for the first offense, to a fine of no more than ten dollars or to imprisonment for not more than five days, and for each subsequent offense he shall be liable to a fine of not less than ten nor more than fifty dollars, or to imprisonment for not less than five days nor more than twenty-five days, or to both such fine an imprisonment.” See *Henning’s General Laws of California* (2895).

to see the “cycle of life” he glimpsed continued—and yet Richard sees that their traditions and faith in destiny also seek to ensnare him. In an early scene that irrevocably rents his relationship with his mother, Richard (ever the manchild) explains that for him, contrary to Consuelo’s assumptions, a formal education is valuable because it could give him a better sense of the world, not for the potential financial security and prestige it could bring his family: “Try to understand me. I want to learn, and that is all. I do not want to be something—I *am*” (64). Unable to see beyond education’s pragmatic use, Consuelo expectedly identifies these notions as an abandonment of tradition and family, going as far as to suggest that “[i]t is as if you were speaking against the Church,” which brings the argument to a head as her son explains that his diminishing faith in Christianity is what has intensified his desire to learn (64). Horrified, Consuelo recoils from her son, calling him a “Devil in a little angel’s body”—pointing to how Family and the Church emerge as the most influential factors in subject formation for the Richard (66).

As with many adolescent narratives, these institutions (in addition to the school) continue to influence Richard’s coming-of-age, yet, given the privilege afforded to the temporally circumscribed space of adolescence other factors outside these institutional spaces emerge to police his linear growth in addition to providing sideways growth. Richard’s first real lesson in how to be a “man” arrives when he is confronted with physical violence from a classmate. Zelda, an adolescent tomboy and bully, offers to “initiate” two newly arrived Protestant children, Ronnie and Mary Madison, into the Catholic neighborhood. The self-appointed leader of the neighborhood children, Zelda takes offence to Richard’s opposition to publically disrobing Ronnie and turns her threats on him after the deed is done. Richard’s attempt to protect the Madisons yields a new friendship in the form of Mary who immediately recognizes that “[he’s]

not like the others” and through their interactions we gain a better understanding of Richard’s growing distrust of authority figures (70). Months after the initial fracas the two are reintroduced after school at the library where Mary, looking to check out a book, is greeted by Ms. Moore who is delighted to see another reader beside the stoic, ever-present Richard. Ms. Moore, in an effort to make conversation inquires of Richard which shelf he’s on, to which he condescendingly answers, “Why do you ask.... You already know exactly where I am” (69). Impressed by Richard’s voracious reading and goal of reading all the books in the library, Mary is also taken aback by his attitude toward Ms. Moore. “I hate dumb teachers,” Richard says, and goes on to explain that his intense reading habits stem from his frustration with the half-truths and lies he is told and which his reading complicates.

To further impress Mary, Richard invites her to his home to see his other books, most of which he has recovered from the city dump, and confides that he has been reading a Bible found there. Surprised that it needs to be a secret, Richard explains that “It’s all right for Protestants to read it, but it’s a mortal sin for [Catholics]. I’m going to finish it before I tell the priest, though. And, boy, will I get it then!” (74). Historically, the Catholic Church was concerned with the possibility of the laity coming to numerous different conclusions after reading the scriptures, but the prohibition of such activity was never very clear.¹³ And so Richard’s reading of the Bible, almost certainly a Protestant version, represents a major rebellion, which further explains why Consuelo recoiled at his previous admission of reading in an effort to learn how to commune

¹³ In 1559 the Council of Trent, in response to the rise of Protestantism, created the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* which “consisted of a list of forbidden books and included ten general norms that would regulate the censorship and reading of future books” (“Index of Prohibited Books”). Along with forbidding the Bible’s translation from Latin into a vernacular language and works considered heretical, such as those of Martin Luther’s, “rule four” indicates that reading sanctioned Catholic translations of the Bible could be permitted by local clergy those for whom “such reading will not lead to detriment but to the increase of faith and piety” (qtd. in Hillerbrand 474-475). The *Index* would be updated and more or less maintained through the years as indicated by the preface to the 1930 edition; written by Cardinal Merry de Val, he explains that “it was in consequence of heretical abuses ... that the Pontiffs and the Councils were obliged on more than one occasion to control and sometimes even forbid the use of the Bible in the vernacular” (x).

with God. While Trites is writing about school rebellion her argument regarding its function is apropos here in that they recall Bakhtin's notion of carnivalesque, or the transitory appearance of "a completely different, nonofficial, extraecclesiastical and extrapolitical aspect of the world" (*Rabelais* 6). Richard, in other words, looks forward not to the punishment he will receive for admitting to reading the Bible but perhaps the ensuing discussion wherein he can challenge the priest's authority, temporarily "buil[ding for himself] a second world and second life outside of officialdom" (6).

Thus, while it may seem odd that one of Richard's most influential mentors comes from beyond the institutions charged with his upbringing, in retrospect, it is completely in keeping with his character. While grazing the family goats on the outskirts of town he happens across João Pedro Manôel Alves, an educated, aristocratic Portuguese and latent homosexual turned hermit cowherd. An afterthought to the community, the solitude of Joe Pete (as he is called) is only infringed upon, and joyfully so, by the town's children who delighted in playing with his animals. The only two constant visitors are Genevieve Freitas and Richard, and while the former rarely joined the conversation Richard and Joe Pete bridge their linguistic divide by relying on the similarities between Spanish and Portuguese to share numerous afternoons together. Usually reticent, Joe Pete senses "an innate communicableness in the small, honest face" which allows him to treat Richard like a student and, in this way, they discuss a great many things. Yet he is hesitant to push away the young pupil so Joe Pete often, only obliquely, makes mention of his queer sexuality as it arises in retelling his personal history (81). A budding poet sent to the University of Lisbon to study law, Joe Pete's arranged marriage fell apart "[f]or political reasons" (in 1910 Portugal's monarchy was deposed and the bride's family would not renounce the crown while the Manôel's became Republicans) and, against his father's wishes, rather than study for

coursework he read the classics, “wrote verses, and had some great times with literary friends, and then something happened” (83).

The reader, like Richard, is held in suspense as Joe Pete redirects to brusquely explain that he fled the country and “my people” in large part “because [he] used to be frightened” of his sexuality, which, for his pupil’s sake, he describes as going no further than “a strange urge to kiss a man walking past me...but no more than that” (84). Richard, apropos of his age, attempts to parse this information in terms of familial greetings, comparing it to kissing one’s father, and alludes to understanding what “more than that” might mean for two men but Joe Pete refuses to elaborate, indicating that while those desires have “disappeared” recalling his past is a source of depression. Richard, calling upon his father’s wisdom, recommends that Joe Pete, like all men, “should have a woman” to ease his mind, a suggestion he graciously accepts outwardly but inwardly he ambiguously asserts that “before long I will surely be well,” thereby indicating either that he will pursue a heteronormative relationship once his depression lifts or, having accepted societal notions of homosexuality as sickness, he hopes that he will soon be “well” enough to pursue such a relationship (84).

Joe Pete’s insistence on mentoring Richard as opposed to deciphering the world for him goes beyond sexual knowledge—a pedagogical decision which will influence Richard’s outlook for years to come. Confused by the mystery of the Immaculate Conception, Richard turns to Joe Pete who in turn pushes his concern aside, stating that his attention would be better spent contemplating beauty. Undaunted, Richard explains “[y]ou are the smartest person I know,” priests and teachers included, and so it he is frustrated that Joe Pete refuses to discuss religion (85). “[A] man must find out some things for himself, inside himself,” Joe Pete replies, going on to explain “I would do you great wrong to teach you what I feel, because to you it should only be

important what *you* feel” (85). This perceived promise of intellectual freedom, a boon to Richard, runs contrary to the major institutions in his life and he goes on to describe how his pursuit of knowledge is thwarted by them: “First, I know that one should never discuss matters of sex with one’s parents. Second, one should not, on penalty of going to Hell, discuss religion with the priests. And, last, one should not ask questions on history of the teachers, or one will be kept in after school” (86). Joe Pete reassures his pupil that the time will come when he can decide his stance on religion and other institutional teachings, the limits of which he tests when he attempts to tell Richard about what we presume is the incident that brought about his self-exile. Nearing the end of Spring, Joe Pete inquires whether Richard knows about women. Recognizing that Richard may not understand all of what the tale of his first sexual encounter will entail, Joe Pete proceeds with it regardless, stating “I have tried too long to forget it, and cannot. It will do me good to speak of it” (86). Invited to the home of a “great poet,” Joe Pete describes his ensuing confusion when, upon his host’s brief departure, the lady of the house began seducing him. Joe Pete, despite fearing the host’s return, gives in to the attraction but becomes dismayed to find the “great poet” voyeuristically enjoying the scene, having fetishized playing the role of cuckold which for the former culminated in “d[oing] something” to Joe Pete that “filled him with disgust, and [I] hated them and myself, for even *I* was now repugnant” (87). Joe Pete once again cuts his narrative short, vacillating between recognizing Richard’s wisdom and finishing the story and withholding it due to his age, recalling Stockton’s observation that the “child who ‘will be’ straight is merely approaching while crucially delaying [and being delayed] the official destination of straight sexuality, and therefore showing itself as estranged from what it would approach” (7).

While this is true of the child I would suggest that it is even more so for the adolescent given their perceived proximity to adulthood, which is why Joe Pete struggles with the decision to share his complete story with Richard; although he considers Richard wise enough to confront this sexual knowledge (“perhaps you *can* understand. Else why would I be telling you all this?”) Joe Pete must consider his pupil’s age, 12, and subsequently does not tell him. Shortly thereafter Joe Pete is arrested for impregnating Genevieve, and later institutionalized before going to trial. As rumors begin to swirl that perhaps Richard was also a victim (the community assumes that Joe Pete’s predilection was towards any and all youths) he is questioned by the authorities who are surprised at his knowledge. Explaining the nature of his relationship with Joe Pete as an intellectual one, Richard is unphazed by the officer’s inquiry into any “funny stuff,” replying, “You mean was he a homosexual? No, he wasn’t”; taken aback by the “*Wise little bastard*,” the officer is further shocked when Richard provides “queer” as a synonym for the “big word” (89). Perhaps more important, however—for Villareal as well as Richard and the reader—was to allay Juan Rubio’s fears about Richard’s sexuality: “It is nothing, Papá...I have the feeling for girls already” (90). As the representative of Mexican American masculinity, given the underlying potential for homosocial relationships to (d)evolve into queer ones, Richard must “continue the cycle” and his promise to do so overcomes his father such that he “held his son tightly and said ‘That is the way it should be son. That is the only way.’ And his voice was full of pride” (90).

Up until now my discussion has largely dealt with external influences (Church and School) to Richard’s coming-of-age, and admittedly the discussion of his relationship to his ethnicity has nearly gone untouched. This is due in large part to the constant reinforcement of Richard’s Mexican heritage from his family, best exemplified by his father’s perpetuation of

México de afuera and continued dream of *el regreso*, or the return to Mexico. And so Juan Rubio delights in Richard's infatuation with reading, seeing his growing English fluency as preparation for their return, but he is wary of the potential loss of his first language, for fear of having "our people ... think I had a brute for a son" (96). It is a plausible concern given the assimilative effects US culture is having on Richard and his family, however, in his efforts to slow the process Juan Rubio will unknowingly hasten it. The first instance of the family's assimilation is represented in Consuelo's decision to question Juan Rubio's fidelity in front of the children. "This was their first argument," notes Villareal, for although Juan Rubio "occasionally" beat her while they were living in Mexico she never opposed it, but upon seeing the way other families in Santa Clara behaved Consuelo dared to dream of another life (92). And while Juan Rubio was indeed being faithful (and had been "for years") he refuses to allay her fears because he would not have been apologetic had it been true; such was his privilege as a man. Richard notes the double standard and laments for his mother and sisters, who see their future in the scene played out, and yet upon hearing Consuelo assert that in the US women "have certain rights" he tells her that as a Mexican woman she must adhere to *marianismo* (94). Afterwards, as Richard puzzles through the changes wrought in his mother, he darkly becomes aware of the "demands of tradition, culture, of the social structure on an individual" and his role in these—exemplified just then by his harsh words towards Consuelo—obligations which he refuses: "'¡Mierda! ¡Es puro mierda!' And he knew that he could never again be wholly Mexican, and furthermore that he could never use the right he had as a male to tell his mother that she was wrong" (95). Indeed, this moment signals how going forward he will draw on both Mexican and American culture to arrive at a hybrid identity that better suits him.

Regardless of his growing awareness of culture and tradition's role in his maturation, however, Richard is by no means impervious to their influence. "I am a man," Richard proclaims on his twelfth birthday, owing to his first sustained erection that morning and linking the onset of virility with manhood (95). Nevertheless, while he certainly "could fool a lot of people" into thinking he was tough while "striking a boxer's pose," in truth Richard was still afraid of Zelda; "[i]n short, he was a sissy, really," as Villareal notes, doted on by an overprotective mother and a father who encouraged his education. Eager to live vicariously through other men, Richard shows himself to be caught up in US popular culture, exclaiming to his parents in English, "I am Buck Jones and Ken Maynard and Fred Thompson, all rolled into one—I'm not Fred Mix, too, because I don't like brown horses" (96). The insidious nature of racism in pop culture is such that Richard has internalized that "brown" is inferior to "white," taking his cue from Western movies wherein his heroes, astride pale horses, save damsels and towns in distress.¹⁴ Juan Rubio immediately corrects Richard when the latter asserts that, owing to their superiority, he wants a white horse upon their return to Mexico. Laughing off his son's naiveté and its source, with Consuelo joining in, both parents aim to supplant Richard's fictions with reality: "Your father was the greatest horseman in our whole section of the country, and in Mexico are found the greatest horseman in all the world" (97). As the conversation turns towards his parents varying views on the Spanish and their role in Mexico, Richard comes to understand his father's enmity towards the country's colonizers and sees him anew as a model Revolutionary: "[f]ull of reverence, he looked down at the table, and the blood rose to his chest enough to stifle him.... When he looked up he saw a flushed, nervous look on his mother's face, and noticed that his

¹⁴ Colorism emerges as a complicated site for the characters discussed here and the following chapters. Darker features, while considered socially inferior, also serve as evidence of ethnic heritage. Paradoxically, dark-skinned subjects like Richard Rodriguez in Chapter Two will lament their position while light-skinned subjects like Miguel and Aristotle in Chapter Three are ill at ease with how their appearance does not signal ethnic belonging.

father had run his hand up under her dress” (101). Here in miniature Villareal repeats the thrust of the novel’s first chapter—Juan Rubio as epitome of Mexican masculinity—but this time for Richard’s benefit as opposed to the reader. Rather than fawning over the produced escapades of Western movie heroes Richard can instead take pride in his father’s righteousness when told about how he “traded” his huaraches for a Spaniard’s boots and be both relieved and impressed that, without denying wrongdoing, Consuelo would still succumb to his advances.

In Richard, as heir apparent to the “cycle of life” of his forefathers, we will indeed see the repetition of cultural and masculine mandates as he comes of age yet it comes with difference, and in this way the manchild, written by Villareal and coopted by the Chicano Movement, points beyond ethnic nationalism. Of course, Richard more or less continues along the path he has charted for himself, routinely challenging institutions in an effort toward self-enlightenment: “Codes of honor were really stupid... He had the feeling the *being* was important, and he *was*—so he knew that he would never succumb to foolish social pressures again” (108). The aegis under which Richard will operate for the remainder of the novel is his desire to become a writer. Revealed to Mary Madison during their discussion on reading the Bible, Richard barely hid his embarrassment as he shared his secret dream but going forward it animates many of his motivations (74). And so it should come as no surprise that his sexual awakening is tied to his desire and obligation as a writer to expand his known world. At 13, “Richard’s friends were caught up in the erotic past time of youth,” but he refuses to participate in the “narcissistic orgies” taking place in his family’s barn because he thought it “too personal, too intimate, to be enjoyed in the presence of others” (113). Richard overcomes this hurdle by recalling he had previously read that a “writer should try to live a full life in order to write about it” and that a priest once manipulated his confession to make the young man guilty of that carnal sin, which

allowed Richard thereafter to “derive[] great pleasure at the confessional,” (114). As Roberta Trites notes of adolescent sexuality,

The division of the Self from the Other necessitated by language at once creates the inevitability of sexuality as a discursive construct and brings with it the power (and pleasure) of knowing the Other. Perhaps this is why experiencing sex serves as a rite of passage for so many teenagers. The experience of sexuality may indeed mark a new level of discursive consciousness for adolescents struggling to understand the distinction between themselves and the Others who constitute the society in which they must live. (115)

As a rite of passage, Richard’s previously described vision of a sexual encounter with a partner is torn asunder following a wrestling match with Zelda and the boys, illuminating how he will manipulate this “new level of discursive consciousness” in the name of the homosocial and patriarchy. The boys, having noticed the changes wrought in Zelda’s pubescent body, join Ricky Malatesta’s request of seeing the young woman’s naked body. Defiant, the de facto leader of the group sheds her clothing, surprising all except for Richard who uses the moment to usurp her. “Your legs are dirty,” he jeers, undercutting the splendor of her body and seemingly elevating himself by affecting a non-interest in her nudity due to its uncleanliness (118). Ricky takes things further by asking Zelda to have sex with the group, a moment seized on by Richard to goad her into fulfilling his desire despite fearing the potential retribution: ““You’re still scared,’ he said, and he was trembling” (118). Promising to thrash him afterwards, Zelda agrees to have sex with the group with the exception of Thomas Nakano, a Japanese American, until Richard asserts “If he doesn’t do it, nobody’s gonna do it” (118). Taken aback, Ricky questions the group’s hierarchy, identifying himself second to Zelda who remained silent (indeed, “it was the first time

she had not interfered in an argument”) until Richard assures him, “I just beat Zelda” (119). With the onset of puberty the strictures of gender roles come crashing down on the group: for Richard, this means that he can more fully access heteropatriarchal privilege and finally overcome Zelda, sexually if not physically; consequently, Zelda sublimates herself to social expectations, only accessing that “old joyfulness” and “camaraderie” by paying the price of “her body for their company” (119)

“The world of Richard Rubio was becoming too much for him. He felt that time was going by him in an overly accelerated pace, because he was not aware of days but of weeks and, at times, even months” (102). Such is the affective temporal experience of adolescence when, caught between a number of competing institutions, youths are bombarded by a number of contrasting experiences and influences. For the remainder of the novel issues of ethnicity and masculinity come to the fore, subjects with which Richard is finally prepared to grapple based on his refusal to blindly obey social codes, an attitude confirmed in an altercation he has with his father. Juan Rubio’s perennial efforts at returning to Mexico come to a close with his purchase of a home in Santa Clara; despite viewing it as an investment to be sold in preparation for their return, the purchase secures their ties to the new country and middle class status, in addition to emboldening the family’s increasingly assimilative tendencies. Richard, out wandering the neighborhood, ruminates on the situation, concluding that “he was a product of two cultures” and so he is both relieved and saddened at the news—acknowledging that his preference for the familiar comes at the loss of a new (albeit potentially difficult) experience in Mexico (129). Arriving home late, he is confronted by Juan Rubio who attempts to enforce the family curfew but the conversation quickly becomes much, much more. In contradiction to Juan Rubio’s “old-country ideas,” Richard implores his father to allow him to live his life only to be told that

“[y]our life belongs to us, and will belong to us even after you marry, because we gave it to you,” echoing the familial obligation the “cycle of life” entails (129).¹⁵ “Yes, Papa, but can you not see that I cannot stand living this way?” Richard asks, encapsulating the modern shift wherein youths, afforded opportunities unavailable to their forebears, break from traditional lifestyles—a generational as well as a cultural change. Charging his son with speaking like “an errant grown person,” Juan Rubio is appalled at the lack of respect Richard is showing but his son points to the artificial delay his parents impose; “it pleases you to think of me as a child in this moment” “[but y]ou taught me to be a grownup I was never a niño to you but a macho, a buck,” leading Juan Rubio to see his son as an adult (130). Acknowledging Richard’s maturity, he bestows on him a piece of wisdom that will become one of his lodestars: “[Y]ou are a man, and it is good, because to a Mexican being *that* is the most important thing. If you are a man, your life is half lived; what follows does not really matter (131). To be clear, in this case to be a “man” Richard is expected to live a life like his father’s (Mexican macho, working-class adulterer), and so he is unsatisfied with what seems a facile answer to the meaning of life. Richard also refuses his father’s assertion that continuing the “cycle of life” is God’s will, stating “[t]hen there is something wrong with God” and that he cannot find happiness in such a mundane role as another link in the chain, a problem which Juan Rubio recognizes but, being “an [un]educated one,” one with which he feels he cannot assist (131). In this way the pair are rehearsing a generational conflict that marks adolescence but it has an ethnic difference which brings it into the realm of adolescent time: Richard, refusing to be beholden to his Juan Rubio or his way of life is understood by the former to be a product of his son’s assimilation. For Juan Rubio, the recognition of Richard’s maturity coincides with his growing disgust at the

¹⁵ Famous Chicano activist Reies López Tijerina, who fought for the return of land grants in New Mexico, explains that even after marriage “the son remains indebted to his father . . . the head and king of the family” (166). See Tijerina, *They Called Me “King Tiger”: My Struggle for the Land and our Rights* (2000).

unmistakable assimilation his family is undergoing—as Villareal notes, “[t]o be just, no one could be blamed, for the transition...should have never been attempted in one generation”—nonetheless, he resolves to return to his traditional customs by “satisfy[ing] his body of its needs—and his body needed more than tortillas,” vowing to never again be “weak” or “compromise” (135, 136).

In this way, Richard begins to become the man of the house as Juan Rubio, increasingly absent, ceases to concern himself with the home, the maintenance of which soon becomes neglected as the women cast off their duties in an effort toward gender parity until Richard demands otherwise. The one aspect of his family that Juan Rubio still concerned himself with, however, is maintaining respectability outside the household and so he becomes livid with his daughter Luz’s refusal to account for returning home in the early morning; this despite Richard having arrived after his sister, returning from a tryst with the now domesticated Zelda—such is his privilege. Juan Rubio, in the face of Luz and Consuelo’s protestation, refuses to relinquish his authority in the home and proceeds to beat the two with Richard watching in disbelief. Chastised by Luz for not defending his mother, “[j]ust stand there, you weak bastard,” Richard attempts to stop his father who has moved on to destroying the house, the greatest, “cancer[ous]” sign of their assimilation!” (166, 167). After unsuccessfully pleading with him the two get into a physical altercation which leaves Richard unconscious, and upon awakening learns from Juan Rubio that he will be leaving the family but not before sharing a final, lasting conversation. Commenting on the Mexican penchant for emotional farewells, Juan Rubio recalls an anecdote from Rene Soto, a one-time traveling partner he identifies as “an acquaintance” and whom he suspected of being gay. Afterwards he is surprised by his son’s ambivalence to the existence of such men, confessing an early fear that Richard may be “like that” as well (being raised with so

many sisters and coddled by his mother) and should that have been the case, “I thought I would strangle you with my own hands” because in that case the Rubio “cycle of life” would have been doomed (168). So perverse is his macho masculinity that this is the only way that Juan Rubio could bring himself to declare his feelings to his son: “to do that would mean that I would destroy myself, because although I never told you, I feel about you as strongly as your mother does” (168). In this intimate moment Richard relates that, like Soto, he wishes to be a writer, and is given advice from his father that elaborates on his previous lesson and affirms his son’s personal outlook, telling him to “never let anything stand in your way of [becoming a writer] ... Only that, promise me—that you will be true unto yourself, unto what you honestly believe is right. And, if it does not stand in your way, do not forget that you are Mexican” (169). Richard emphatically reassures his father that he will follow his advice and in doing so he will, in a manner, be following in his father’s ideological footsteps; while he is not aiming to live the life of a migrant farmworker (like a “real” Mexican based on working-class notions of authenticity) Richard is harkening back to his father’s single-minded devotion to a purpose (the Mexican Revolution), which for Richard becomes, arguably, correcting the politics of representation in American literature such that the novel in the reader’s hands, his *kunstlerroman* (or artist’s novel), sheds light on the conditions in which a Mexican American youth came of age in Depression-era California.

Although Richard has become more secure in himself and his purpose, he understandably loses sight of this upon becoming head of household. Following his father’s departure Richard reminds his mother that their separation only affects him in that he will now work to support the family “because I do not want anything else at the moment,” making it clear that he “can never be changed by that which is outside me” (171). Ever faithful, Consuelo suggests that the family

attend church to seek a blessing for their new life but Richard refuses, declaring himself free of such beliefs and their confining obligations on him; the significance of the moment was not lost on Richard, who had anticipated doubts and apprehensions following his statement but they never came “and at last he was really free” (172). This hard-fought freedom happens to coincide with his graduation in the summer of 1940 and leaves Richard in an awkward space. Recalling that youths were to remain in school until at least 16 (he turns 17 in September), he was free to work in agriculture “outside of school hours” given the exemption provided in the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, and he does so with his friend Ricky, but “after summer fruit work was terminated, they went to work in a steel mill” (174). Aside from curtailing child labor, the Act sought to improve working conditions, introducing the forty-hour work week and minimum wage, in addition to restricting youths from working in “hazardous” jobs, such as “mining and factory jobs”; not to be deterred, “for the small fee of two dollars a piece the priest had given [Richard and Ricky] affidavits that made them old enough,” thereby allowing them to avoid all potential work restrictions (“Fair Labor and Standards Act of 1938”; *Pocho* 174).

Regardless of Richard’s prior assertion to being impervious toward exterior influence he slowly becomes ensnared by familial obligation, recognizing that without his earnings the family would not survive and consequently he becomes mired in duty, knowing the terrible cost of his “emancipation” (175). Determined to remain intellectually active, Richard begins taking creative writing courses at night school, and, much like his prior education, he does most of his learning outside of the classroom from older, educated, liberal friends but he ultimately distances himself from these due to their perceived “threat to his individuality,” hypocrisy, and patronizing suggestions that he dedicate his life to the “Mexican cause” (175). Trapped providing for his family and intellectually stymied, Richard is also unable to find solace with friends: pressured

into driving into nearby Watsonville to visit prostitutes he demands to drive until “suddenly he had the thought that he was trying to commit suicide,” shaking at the realization of his subconscious desperation to escape his life (179). While Richard’s situation is in no way unique, it helps illuminate some of the general issues facing Mexican American male youths: on account of his gender the budding artist is snatched from the relative privilege of adolescence and thrust into adulthood, forced to substitute his personal goals for the care of his mother and older sisters—yoked to a half-life that threatens to tear him asunder. Salvation, ironically, comes in the form of war. Following the US’ entrance into WWII, Richard and his friends discuss enlisting, yet he knows that due to his youth and number of dependents his only means of entry would be the draft. Acknowledging the duplicity of “us[ing] the war, a thing he could not believe in, to serve his personal problem,” Richard nevertheless decides to enlist, reliant on his sisters’ newly-found (if not temporary) earning power which he promises to supplement from abroad (186). While on the surface the decision may seem illogical given his refusal to identify with any institution or cause, it instead is an “escape into life” as Bruce-Novoa puts it; rather than accepting the tedium of home he sees it as the opportunity to learn “what his fight was” and “[b]ecause he did not know, he would strive to live” (74; 187)

Thus far I’ve conveyed Richard’s tale according to the temporality of the novel which “tends to unfold its full epic totality only within that span of life which is essential to” “reveal a certain problematic of life,” following the text in a linear manner to show how the genre of the bildungsroman provided Villarreal the ability to analyze what he considered to be the protagonist’s central problem: negotiating the bicultural and (in)formal institutions of adolescence (Lucaks 83). As Bruce-Novoa previously commented, upon *Pocho*’s publication the

text was “treated usually as a sociological, anthropological, or historical document” which, when coupled with the foment of the Chicano Movement, resulted in the text being seen as assimilative and Villarreal as a failed Chicano prophet (65-66). I, however, would argue that *Pocho* is more than an “American book with Mexican American characters and themes” as Raymund Paredes suggested, especially when read as literature as Bruce-Novoa calls on critics to do (807).

Despite arguments to the contrary, the text in some ways does the work of the Chicano Movement, reifying Mexican American representations of legible masculinities in while linking illegible masculinities primarily to the few non-Mexican Americans characters in the novel. When queer characters are introduced they often function to showcase the finer qualities of these representative men. For example, during Rene Soto’s attempt to enlist Juan in the assassination plot early in the novel. Juan, as a man of action and honor, despises men like Soto because—in addition to not embodying a heterosexual, working-class masculinity like Juan and other revolutionaries—he epitomizes the politicians and foreigners he blames for Mexico’s fall, and so as readers we are meant to identify with Juan’s heroic ambition over Soto’s queer identity and cowardly scheming. For Richard, the representation of Mexican American masculinity is more complex given how it draws on two cultures. Thus, it is especially beneficial that the bildungsroman focuses on the adolescent period as it carefully depicts what influences weigh on the young protagonist. Much of the novel is given over to depicting Richard’s intense negotiation of Mexican and American culture and institutions, yet ultimately, his father’s life and his own “form parallel movements towards a break with their family and surroundings; a separation marking personal liberation and fulfillment” (Bruce-Novoa 66-67). To be clear, “personal liberation and fulfillment” for Richard could not come from leading a traditional, agricultural working-class lifestyle; indeed, his goal to become a writer leads to his constant rebellions

against the institutions which sought to mold him. His efforts to become a writer lead Richard to “radically,” “revolutionary[ily]” become the “observer and artist” and as such he will coyly participate in pachuco culture but, in the end, decline complete affiliation—similar to how he refuses dedicate himself to a “Mexican cause” (69, 73). This “perversity,” as Bruce-Novoa identifies it, also accounts for Richard’s tolerance of queer sexualities, or “understanding” as Juan Rubio calls it. For example, while as a youth his knowledge of Joe Pete’s sexuality does not diminish the esteem in which he holds him as an educated, worldly man, neither does this happen after the former’s arrest—indeed, he is fondly remembered at the novel’s end as one the “beautiful people” he had known, listed only after his parents.

While Richard may privately be ambivalent about another man’s sexuality, publically this queerness must be denounced as he does with the gay couple from night school and with whom he’s seen in the company of by Ricky. The invocation of queerness here is akin to that of Juan Rubio with Soto in that Richard defends his friendship with the unnamed couple because it is borne out of respect and intellectual comradery. Nonetheless, no longer in the relative safety of adolescence which might permit defense (as he did with policeman and Joe Pete), as an adult Richard feels compelled to rehearse dominant views of masculinity, describing the couple as deficient, incomplete men to his assembled childhood friends, “[l]ike a guy with one leg, or a deaf-and-dumb guy” (117).

Within two cultures: *George Washington Gómez*

Focusing on the institutions of adolescent time in *Pocho* reveals the coming-of-age process for Richard and through it we see how representations of masculinity and adulthood are reified despite a number of non-normative influences. Thus, I agree with Bruce-Novoa when he

writes that “[o]nly superficial reading would call this process assimilation” and Alfred Arteaga who highlights hybridity as fundamental to *chicanismo* (74; 11). However, as a “manchild” Richard only occasionally concerns himself with hybridity and assimilation, focused as he is on following the path of a writer. Certainly, there are passages where he describes the changes occurring within his own family, but rarely does he truly concern himself with the implications of these on his identity and instead he accepts them for what they are. For example, upon meeting Pilar Ramirez (his soon-to-be step mother) he notes how she embodies a traditional Mexican femininity, and he identifies, by way of apology, the source of his imperfect Spanish for the bemused girl: “I am a Pocho ... and we speak like this because here in California we make Castilian words out of English words. But I can read and write in the Spanish, and I taught myself from the time I had but eight years” (165). “It matters not,” Pilar replies, and for the slightly embarrassed young man it ceases to matter as well for his goal is to become a writer, not the perpetuation of *México de afuera* nor the uplift of his “people” (165). This obligation, self-imposed or otherwise, to improve the lived realities of *la raza* is prevalent in much of Chicano literature and echoes sentiments of *el movimiento* with many protagonists grappling with “how” and/or “if” they will participate. A consideration of this “certain problematic” is the narrative crucible through which the eponymous protagonist of *George Washington Gómez* must travail. Combining his responses to this social imperative with those of Richard gives us a better sense of the dynamics for Mexican Americans coming of age in the 1930s, despite the change in locale from northern California to southern Texas, because in George we see a more normative development in that he does not (nor is willing to) sacrifice everything to heed Art’s calling; in other words, he doesn’t have Richard’s idealism to help him choose his path and instead is molded by his relation to this obligation. As such, my focus here will not be specifically on the

role of domineering institutions in George's youth—although they will definitely arise throughout—but what, I would argue, is gender's inconspicuous role in his vacillation between becoming a savior of his people and the border control agent he ultimately becomes. In other words, I would suggest that while George's adolescent experiences and education make it apparent that he could be a champion for his people, but by looking at his youthful romances, a hallmark of the bildungsroman, it becomes clear prior to the concluding chapter that he would never take up that mantle.

In fact, in putting *Pocho* and *George Washington Gomez (GWG)* together side by side, the two emerge as incredibly similar, in both content and their status as recovered texts. While *Pocho* was rediscovered by scholars and educators partaking in and inspired by the Chicano Movement a decade after its initial publication, *GWG* was written by Américo Paredes in the 1930s and would not be published for another 60 years. Although its appearance skips the Movement generation, the text's appearance (encouraged by such Chicano luminaries as Ramón Saldivar and Ricardo Romo in the novel's acknowledgements) reveals recovery as a strategy for Chicano literature, as the back cover describes the text as “a true precursor of the modern Chicano novel.” Thematically, the text details the numerous assimilative forces that weigh on George as he comes of age in Jonesville, Texas, a fictional representation of Paredes' hometown of Brownsville. Similar to Villareal's text, *GWG* also does not begin with the protagonist (he does not speak a word until page 50) but sets the foundation for him to take center stage, so to speak, by illustrating the circumstances of his family's departure from San Pedrito to Jonesville. Here the text follows *Pocho* in linking cultural authority to a masculine, working-class, revolutionary character in the figure of Feliciano García, the protagonist's uncle. Adherent to the 1915 Plan de San Diego, Feliciano, along with his brother Lupe, joined *los sedicios*'s

“movement for a Spanish-speaking Republic of the Southwest,” much to the chagrin of his brother-in law, Gumersindo Gómez, who fled the interior of Mexico with his family to escape the bloodshed (25). Living in San Pedrito in the midst of the *sedicio* movement’s collapse and increasing vigilante violence across the border, Gumersindo and his wife, María, finally settle on a name for their seven-month-old son. Maria adamantly demands that her son have an important name because “he’s going to grow up to be a great man who will help his people,” to which Gumersindo adds that his son, named after the famous American general (mispronounced as “Guálinto” by his grandmother and later adopted by), will be “a great man among the Gringos” in part due to the fairness of his skin (16). As the narrator indicates, “Born a foreigner in his native land, he was fated to a life controlled by others. At that very moment his life was being shaped, people were already running his affairs.... Nobody asked whether he, a Mexican, wanted to be born in Texas, or whether he wanted to be born at all” (15). Foreshadowing the disconnect between Guálinto’s aspirations and culturally imposed obligations, Paredes illustrates the lack of agency youths have in the face of the institutions that mold them. Unfortunately, border violence claims Gumersindo’s life in San Pedrito, leading Feliciano to abandon his brother Lupe and *los sedicios* to move his sister and her family to Jonesville so that he can provide for them in her husband’s absence.

Like Richard, at no point in the narrative is the linear progression of Guálinto toward adulthood questioned; instead, what *kind* of man he will be becomes the overriding concern. The reader is made to understand early on that he aligns with Mexican values, largely due to the immense respect he has for his uncle. For instance, upset at being teased about wearing a “sailor suit, a striped sissy-looking outfit” and having his hair combed with shortening (the brilliantine having run out), Guálinto is left feeling that no one understands his plight (58). While the teasing

and Guálinto's response to it are typical of youths, his feelings of difference is unique in that it goes beyond (if not exasperated by) his clothing and hair product: "He disliked being called *güero* and *gringo* because his hair was not as dark as that of other people" (59). Only by invoking his ill-reputed neighborhood, the "Dos Veintidos," does he signal his belonging—working-class origins long being the hallmark of cultural authenticity and masculinity—but Guálinto finds no joy in his victory, "his hate drained away, leaving him weak and crushed" because it came at his denigration (61). These feelings are multiplied when Guálinto sees his tormentor's richly adorned mother and throw him into a bout of self-pity and violent fantasy, "[h]e would go away and become a big bandit. Or a *rinche* [Texas Ranger] maybe. And then he would come back and kill people" (62). These fantasies are more indicative of Guálinto's perceived lack of agency than a genuine desire for violence, and interestingly enough within them he sees himself as able to embody both racialized positions, that of "big bandit" like his uncle Feliciano and Anglo *rinche*, based on his cultural heritage and appearance, echoing his father's sentiment upon his naming. "No. He couldn't be a *rinche*, after all. Uncle Feliciano hated the *rinches* and he'd have to kill him to," Guálinto reasons, and so he muses that he could fight against the *rinches* instead, in this way making everyone sorry, especially his mother, for making him look like a fool (63).

The school emerges as the gamut through which Mexican American's undergo assimilation, and Guálinto's story is no different. As Paredes explains, at eight years old he "developed simultaneously in two widely divergent paths": American in the classroom and Mexican beyond it; "It would be several years before he fully realized that there was not one single Guálinto Gomez ... each of them double like the images reflected on two glass surfaces," an image that recalls W.E.B Du Bois' famous description of double consciousness, "One ever

feels his two-ness” (147; 2). Similar to Richard, Guálinto becomes the product of his education, both the one he receives in the classroom and the oral histories he learns from his community; nonetheless, there remained the “secret[] desire[] to be a full-fledged, complete American without the shameful encumbrance of his Mexican race” (148). His successes in school become indications of his prophesied greatness with his family at times arguing over how he will use his gifts—“a lawyer who would get back the lands the lost,” “an orator,” “a doctor”— but what remains clear is that the “family’s mission in life was to give him every opportunity possible to their limited means” (125). So zealous is the family in this belief that when circumstances call for the children to quit school to care for María, Guálinto’s older sisters offer themselves so that he can continue on. While Maruca admits that she is no longer interested in school, it was Carmen’s dream to graduate from high school. “She was very smart and worked harder than Guálinto,” and so it is an especially dear sacrifice she makes for him, one which goes unnoticed by Feliciano who states that she “already has more education than any woman needs” (152, 154).

And so Guálinto proceeds apace, “feeling his two-ness” and excelling in school, however, academic success does not protect him from racism and he has his first major encounter with it in his senior year. This is not to say that up until then he has been sheltered from racist behavior; on the contrary, he confronts it daily in and out of the classroom. Most spectacularly, Guálinto challenges the racist, imperialist, historical accounts of US’ expansion offered in the school’s textbooks by contrasting it with the oral histories of his community, all the while avoiding being assimilated into the dominant narrative. The debates are hard fought, all the more so considering that by this time he is one of five Mexican students in a class of 30 with the remainder being comprised of white students, the other Mexican student’s having dropped out to seek work. Arguments over the truth of Texas’ history escalate with one young man, Ed

Garloc, pointing to the disproportionate number of Mexican criminals: “Well . . . you’ll have to admit that [they]like to break the law, most of them” (160). In response Elodia, the only female Mexican student in class, and Guálinto point to the unfair meting out of justice that the Rangers dealt in the wake of *los sediciosos*, which they argue institutionalized their racist behavior. Ed, the son of a deputy sheriff, takes offense to Guálinto’s suggestion that his father is a “killer-diller,” at which point the teacher, Miss Barton, demands that they reconcile. Aiming to diffuse the situation, Ed offers that he was certainly not referring to Guálinto as, owing to his appearance, “you’re not Mexican, you’re Spanish,” a point which the former sharply denies (161). Guálinto’s need to perform self-confidence in the classroom (as indicated in these debates) is revealed to be more than an exercise in “history from below,” to borrow the historian E. P. Thompson’s phrase; he is also preening for María Elena Osuna, a beautiful, light-skinned classmate from a wealthy family, who, unbeknownst to the young protagonist, insincerely reciprocates his romantic advances in exchange for academic assistance.

Guálinto’s romantic attachment to María Elena and the “American” world she moves in due to her class privilege comes into conflict with his sense of ethics and cultural obligation. Having kept his two worlds separate thus far has been easy enough for the young man, but as he grows up they begin to encroach on one another and consequently he must negotiate them. With the onset of Great Depression, the class’ celebratory senior activities were canceled due to lack of funds until the students banded together to raise money for a private party, the bulk of which came from Antonio Prieto’s guitar playing, and La Casa Mexicana in nearby Harlanburg is suggested by classmate Elton Carlton as the perfect venue for the Christmas party. Ecstatic at the opportunity to have an entire evening with María Elena, Guálinto does not notice that she responds to his compliments with inquiries about his preparation for an exam the following

week. Cajoled into riding with her friends in the Shigemara boys' vehicle instead of Antonio and the other Mexicans, he greatly enjoys having María Elena sit on his lap during the 35-mile ride to the nightclub.

A simulacrum of Mexican culture, La Casa Mexicana is a “fancy stucco building made to resemble a Mexican *jacal*,” replete with imitation Diego Rivera murals and a white jazz orchestra costumed in *charro* attire; as Paredes explains, it was “as Mexican as it could be without having any Mexicans around” (171). And so it should not have been a complete surprise when, confronted by the doorman, a “burly tough in a Mexican bandit’s costume,” that certain ethnicities were not welcome (172). Having already entered alongside María Elena, Guálinto is within earshot when Elodia, Antonio, and his Orestes Sierra are barred entry to the nightclub and his subsequent protestation raises the doorman’s interest in his ethnicity. María Elena, conscious of her ability to pass as white, tries to convince Guálinto to do the same, “tugging at his arm” she tells the doorman “He’s a Spaniard. Can’t you see he’s white?”, but Guálinto refuses and asserts “I’m a Mexican” (173). The doorman’s response, “Make up your mind,” speaks volumes here as Guálinto is made to see the two paths before him—the splendor of American life and its attendant hypocrisy on one hand, and righteously enduring racist discrimination alongside his friends—and he chooses to leave the party (173). The scene resembles the prior classroom debate and has the effect of creating a solidarity among the Mexican students, who later surmise that the venue was chosen specifically to keep them out, and they rally behind Guálinto, protecting him for some time from María Elena’s self-interested advances.

Given my focus on Guálinto’s negotiation of his cultural identity, returning to the form of the bildungsroman both sums up his narrative as well as prepares us for its end. Roberta Trites sums up Buckley’s outline of the bildungsroman, as follows:

a sensitive child grows up in a rural setting feeling confined by his entire family, but especially by his father. School also proves restrictive for the protagonist, so he leaves home for the urban center, where he is likely to have at least two romantic experiences, one of which has the potential to corrupt him and the other has the potential to purify him. (11)

Paredes cleaves to this formula, which Trites identifies as “essentially” one for a “novel[] about adolescence intended for adult readers,” rather closely (11). “Confined” by the destiny his father glimpsed before his death, Guálinto’s life is hemmed in by his mother and uncle Feliciano, who foregoes personal happiness in the name of familial duty. That school “proves restrictive” is an understatement in his case, exasperated as it is by his race and his state’s tumultuous, violent history. Guálinto’s progress in school would have proceeded apace if not for the Great Depression and his refusal to be a burden on his uncle, and so his efforts at finding part-time work (a difficult task as Paredes’ account of “*La Chilla*” attests) account for his escape to the urban center. His earlier tryst with María Elena, from the perspective of Chicano nationalism, proves to be the potentially corrupting relationship in that through her tutelage he may have completely embraced his unspoken desire for American whiteness. The potentially purifying relationship comes in the form of Mercedes who serves as foil to María Elena. While out purchasing ice he is taunted about his sister Maruca’s condition (she having been sexually manipulated by a supposed boyfriend) by a young man named Chucho, and feeling compelled to defend his family’s honor he vows to return for a knife fight. Upon his return Chucho is gone but in Guálinto’s search he happens across a *baile* at someone’s house. Deemed beneath his family by his mother and uncle due to their middle class status, Guálinto has never attended one and he curiously watches from the gate until he is invited in by the home’s owner. Learning that the

party is for his daughter's *quinceañera*, Guálinto compares her beauty to his previous paramour, noting her working-class femininity and appearance: she was "very dark but very pretty"; wearing her hair in a pompadour, as "she talked and jerked her head ... the glittering silver pendants on her earrings trembled and flashed against her checks" (243). "Pretty but not for him, he thought," and as he prepares to leave Guálinto encounters Chucho, with whom he crosses knives and nearly murders with a slice across the abdomen while receiving a large cut across his own face (243). Guálinto, reeling from victory, is celebrated by the party attendees and has his face attended to by none other than Mercedes herself, whose cradling him against her "heavily scented breast" fills him with sexual longing (245). Giving in to offers of mezcal, he is immediately taken with these people, especially Mercedes, yet he distances himself by suggesting that, despite assurances that none would comply with legal inquiry, his reputation with the police might result in his arrest. Assuring Mercedes' father that he would return soon, he offers his name when asked and another partygoer inquires whether it's "Aztec," "[l]ike Guatémoc" (246). Guálinto is both eager to leave and maintain the party attendees esteem and so he confirms that this is the case, but in truth he knows that he identifies very little with the last Aztec emperor. Generically than, Guálinto is seen to finally escape the "Spaniards" like María Elena, whom is meant to signify the potentially corrupting relationship which would lead to his complete assimilation, and finally align himself with Mercedes in a purifying relationship for which the reader has longed. And as he climbs into bed that evening he feels "triumphant," acknowledging that "[t]hese were his people" and that he would "marry Mercedes and live on the farm. He would go back. Tomorrow night he would go back," but as Paredes informs us (and as we darkly suspect) "[h]e never did" (247).

As the text draws to its conclusion it becomes more and more apparent that Guálinto is uninterested in being the “great man” his family expects him to be and his vacillation on this front exemplifies the difficulties in negotiating cultural and familial obligation with individual desire, a conflict made more turbulent on the waters of adolescence. Mistaking an unknown assailant for Chucho, after a brief altercation he is unwittingly responsible for the arrest of his long-lost uncle Lupe, who dies shortly thereafter in custody from pneumonia brought on by tuberculosis. Already dying, Lupe crossed the border to take revenge for Gumersindo’s murder by killing one of the Rangers responsible; a story which ultimately makes Guálinto question the integrity and honor of Feliciano who never made such an attempt. Guálinto, told only a select portion of the story by his uncle for fear of reprisal for his actions as a *sedicioso*, no longer saw him as a “being of heroic proportions” but as a “coward” and lashes out in a way that is sure to hurt the man—by pointing to the futility of Feliciano’s self-sacrifice and himself as a failed investment: “I’ll just be another Mexican with the seat of his pants torn and patched up.... Help my people? What for? Let them help themselves, the whole ragged lot, dirty *pelados*” (266, 265). However, just as violently as he lashes out against his perceived “destiny” does he again bring himself to see the potential—indeed, the need—of fulfilling it. At his high school graduation Guálinto is surprised when “[a]ll the tales of hate and violence from his childhood” rise from his subconscious (273). Perhaps it is in response to the presence of Texan apologist and pseudo-academic K. Hank Harvey (the satirized caricature of historian J. Frank Dobie), but in recalling the many injustices visited upon him and “his people” (and those to come) by “an Anglo” there is a fleeting moment wherein he contemplates his own complicity. Looking at his hands, he blames the Anglos for his inadvertent yet deadly confrontation with his uncle Lupe, and given

the fairness of his complexion one cannot help but wonder what he sees: the hands of a *rinche* or the hands of a Mexican?

Given the lack of prior knowledge and the absence of intention it is obviously an unfortunate coincidence, I would suggest that in addition to his hands' role in Lupe's death the dueling images (recall his earlier invocation of *rinche*/bandit) are partially responsible for the dissonance he feels: "They were the same hands as always, but he wondered if they would ever stop looking strange to him" (273). Guálinto sheepishly arrives at his uncle's farm following the graduation having decided to distance himself from the Anglo world, and while mending fences with the ranch hand, Juan, he figuratively does the same with his uncle after learning the full extent of the man's sacrifice to the Gómez family. The mystery of his uncle laid bare, Guálinto emerges with a newfound respect for the man but, in conventional macho fashion, there is no need for verbal reconciliation beyond the former agreeing to apply to college. Feliciano, surmising the reason for his nephew's change of heart, feared that the young man would "get emotional and weep and ask to be forgiven," and so when this does not occur he applauds the manner in which his nephew conducted himself (280).

As the reader comes to learn in the final section, "Leader of His People," Guálinto emerges as anything but. A number of years have passed since he applied to college and it appears to have made a world of difference; after graduating with his bachelor's, passing the bar and briefly practicing law in Washington D.C., he accepts a position as a border security officer in the Army, just before marrying Ellen Dell, the daughter of a Texas Ranger. Indeed, his transformation is so complete that after meeting Ellen's father, who adroitly if not callously identifies the crux of his soon to be son-in-law, he changes his name to George G. Gomez, thereby casting off his obligation as liberator of his people. A work assignment brings him back

to Jonesville and during the visit his friends and family slowly come to understand that the person returned it is not the Guálinto of their self-willed prophecy. Chastising his former friends' suggested foray into local politics as "a bunch of clowns ... trying to organize yokels," it does not bother George in the least when Elodia calls him a "*vendido sanavabiche!*" (300, 294). In describing the situation to his uncle later on George is slightly more generous, suggesting that his old friends could go far like himself if only they would "[g]et out of this filthy Delta ... and get rid of this Mexican Greaser attitude," an opportunity for which he thanks Feliciano (300). And so in the end the novel becomes something of a cautionary tale, the final pages seemingly cementing George as more of a *pocho* than Richard Rubio ever was, and in this way the texts differ dramatically, but they also highlight a significant generic quality of the bildungsroman. As Moretti notes, drawing on Yuri Lotman's work, the textual organization of bildungsromane either follow a "classification principle" or a "transformative principle":

When classification is strongest ... narrative transformations have meaning insofar as they lead to a particularly marked ending: one that establishes a classification different from the initial one but nonetheless perfectly clear and stable -- definitive This teleological rhetoric -- the meaning of events lies in their finality -- is the narrative equivalent of Heglian thought, with which it shares a strong normative vocation: events acquire meaning when they lead to one ending, and one only.

Under the classification principle, in other words, a story is more meaningful the more truly it manages to suppress itself as story. Under the transformation principle The opposite is true: what makes a story meaningful is its narrativity, its being an open-ended process. (7)

Here we can see how *George Washington Gómez* cleaves to the classification principle. Recalling Buckley, George emerges triumphant as a married, well-to-do military man and soon to be father, but the ending introduces a “classification” diametrically different from the initial one; not the “home-town boy who made good” story expected, George returns as a sort of super-*rinche* who, aided by his appearance and cultural hybridity, moves between Anglo and Mexican culture to help enforce immigration law (285). In this way, the text resolves the “teleological rhetoric” of that narrative, concerned as it was with George’s negotiation of his cultural identity. In contrast, *Pocho*, of course, falls under the transformative principle with the dynamism of the text rejecting “a final solution” by making the ending nigh “meaningless.” As indicated in my readings of the respective text’s adolescent time—focused on the role of institutions in *Pocho* and cultural identity in *GWG*—both of the protagonists, canonical *jovenes* in their own right, emerge as untraditional representatives of Mexican American masculinity despite the rigorous policing to which they were subjected. So how do we account for their vaulted positions in the Chicano literary canon?

I would suggest that a large part of these texts’ significance to Chicano literary history has to do with the need to establish and bolster it. As an early account of the Mexican American experience, *Pocho*, published in 1959 by Doubleday, was hailed as the first Chicano novel with Villareal, arguably, instantiating a new ethnic literature. The novel was not widely read, however, until 1970 when Anchor Books (an imprint of Doubleday) “placed a reprint before the new Chicano reader,” and a new edition in 1984 (de Jesus Hernandez-G). This despite the authors’ proclamation that his “intent goes far beyond barriers or limits imposed ... by any social or political movement” (Bruce-Novoa “Interview” 42). While some critics see his work as “accommodationist” for espousing such a “universal discourse” at odds with the Chicano

Movement, however, what is prized in *Pocho* above all and what connects Villareal to other Chicano writers is how he writes about “[his] pueblo” (de Jesus Hernandez; Bruce-Novoa “Interview” 42). Hence, when a critic suggests that *Pocho* is indicative of the Mexican American Generation’s assimilative tendencies they are foisting on the author the same cultural obligations the fictional character Richard refuses. Far more interesting is that in writing about his “pueblo” and asserting his rights as an artist Villareal presages the Chicano Movement and looks beyond it, as post-Movement authors are less concerned with maintaining a legible Chicano experience. The same charges of accommodationism, however, could never be levied at *GWG* because of its legendary author. Paredes, often called the “godfather of Chicano literature” for his powerful, pioneering work in Chicano folklore and literature, began writing the semiautobiographical *GWG* in 1921 at the age of 17 and although it was completed in 1959 the novel was not published until 1990 (Medrano 2).¹⁶ It also appears unrevised from its original conception; as Rolando Hinojosa describes it in his introduction, to have altered the novel to fit the “these times... would have damaged its integrity,” as such the “’30s are not seen through the prism of nostalgia, that half-dead sister of debased romanticism, but through the eyes of a young writer, true to the times” (6). The recovery of this text, while working to cement a Chicano literary tradition before the 1960s, however, presents us with anachronism in that it, alongside *Pocho*, reifies representations of “authentic” Mexican American masculinity. This is achieved less by the texts’ respective protagonists and more by the “relationship between the narrator and the implied reader [as it] often proves to be the crucible in which ideology is smelted ... because the source of narrative authority in a text can reflect much about the text’s ideology” (Trites 73). For this reason, the “age of didactic characters” who serve as mouthpieces for the text’s ideology are

¹⁶ This account does not square up with the introduction to *GWG*, however. Written by Rolando Hinojosa, he states that Paredes worked on the text “between times, from ’36 to ’40” and that as a “first draft ... it should be seen and appreciated as an historical work, not as an artifact” (“Introduction” 5).

of extreme importance; as such, the father figure in these novels loom large (73). The former Revolutionary soldier and *sedicioso*, Juan Rubio and Feliciano, respectively, act as standard bearers for Mexican culture (with the latter emerging nearly Hector-like in his self-sacrifice to familial obligation) and so their working-class, traditional masculinities are confirmed for the reader against protagonists whose adolescent experiences drew them toward untraditional ways of being. That this is the case is strongly exemplified by the conclusion to *GWG*: completely disgusted with how George has turned out, Feliciano articulates his wish for a life after death, if only to “have a good long talk” with Gumersindo (302). Thinking it a joke, George is surprised at his uncle’s newly found sense of humor, which Feliciano denies having, and as readers, we know that the discussion will focus on the ghostly guardians’ disappointment in their son, a sentiment we are invited to share in.

As Susan Ashley Gohlman argues, “[T]he truly significant Bildungsromane are the products of intellectual instability, and it is the absence, rather than the presence, of an objectively definable cosmos that provides the greatest stimulus for the composition of such works” (19). The genre was chosen by Villareal and Paredes for the same reason that European culture chose it to represent modernity; in other words, the Chicano bildungsroman did the work of depicting the difficult transition between generations through their respective protagonists, young men “within the border of two epochs” as Bakhtin instructs us, and ascribing meaning to a new era. In a time of intellectual instability critics sought a hero for the nascent Chicano Movement and found *Pocho* too assimilative, but focusing on the formative institutions of adolescent time in conjunction with a consideration of generic conventions in the novel reveals the reification of representations of masculinity and adulthood despite a number of non-normative influences. *El movimiento* found echoes of itself in *Pocho*, a “truly significant

bildungsromane” that dared to question and struggle against the dominant cultural institutions, and, alongside *George Washington Gómez*, used these legible representations of the Mexican American coming-of-age narrative to establish and bolster a Chicano literary tradition. But what happens when echoes are too dissonant to be smoothed over and recourse to an interest in lived conditions is unavailable due to a text’s overwhelmingly contrary ideology? In the next chapter I will turn to the (in)famous *Hunger for Memory* by Richard Rodriguez (1982) to suggest that if we take adolescent time seriously, a narrative like his has much to teach us about the role class, gender, and sexuality plays in responding to the questions of assimilation.

CHAPTER 2: THE BAD SUBJECT OF CHICANO LITERATURE: RICHARD RODRIGUEZ'S CRUEL OPTIMISM AND ITS QUEER FRUIT

In Louis Althusser's landmark essay, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," the Marxist theorist describes how a dominant ideology hails and interpellates subjects into ascribing, often unknowingly, to its ideology. The results are either a thoroughly interpellated "good subject" or a "bad subject" whose outright rejection of the dominant ideology occasionally provokes "the interventions of one the detachments of the (Repressive) State Apparatuses" (123). Like the one preceding it, this chapter is primarily interested in adolescence and the "bad subjects" of Chicano literature whose provocations have shaped/are shaping the discipline and literary canon. As such, I would be remiss to not consider, arguably, *the* "bad subject" of Chicano literature: Richard Rodriguez. "Bad," of course, is a matter of perspective—as is what accounts for growth in subject development— and for quite some time (and perhaps even still) critics have had a difficult time seeing Rodriguez as anything but a "bad subject" who refuses to be hailed by the Movement. He is, in Rubén Martínez's estimation, "the Mexican American that Chicanos love to hate."

In recent years, a number of critics have reconsidered Rodriguez's role in the Chicano literary canon and my work is indebted to theirs, especially that of Cristina Beltrán, Isabel Durán, and Sandra Soto. To begin, Beltrán highlights the particular problem Movement activists had with an assimilation narrative like Rodriguez's by pointing to Heather Love's observations on queer history; having linked assimilation with "alienation, shame, and self-hate," Beltrán suggests that Movement activists sensed that these feelings ran counter to revolutionary actions and were "bad [for] politics" (42-43; Love qtd. in Beltrán 42). Durán also homes in on the

sociopolitical context of the criticism to strongly reject it. Perhaps the most incisive and subsequently oft-cited criticism of *Hunger of Memory* (1982), Rodriguez's first book, is found in Ramón Saldívar's *Chicano Narrative: The Dialectics of Differences* (1990), and as such serves as Durán's primary grounds for contestation. Noting the penchant for critics to judge ethnic literature in relation to political ideology ("bad politics' equals 'bad art,' whereas 'good, obedient politics' equals good art"), Durán instead refutes Saldívar's main claims about the autobiography (anti-Chicano, individualistic, failure to adhere to a preferred chronotopic structure, and willfully not adhering to the lessons of "the masters" i.e. Augustine and Rousseau) by focusing on the text as an aesthetic object rather than one primarily comprised of political statements (91). Doing so allows Durán's to counter Lauro Flores' and Raymund Paredes' respective, earlier analyses which charge that *Hunger* is mired in superficiality due to its eschewal of cultural and sociological signifiers in favor of the individual—in spite of Rodriguez's original (and ongoing) refusal of the Chicano Movement and *La Raza's* siren call of community which has never sat well with Chicano scholars and artists. Indeed, Tomás Rivera, the *padrino* of Chicano literature, goes as far as to call the work "anti-humanistic" (100; 5).

At the time of *Hunger's* publication, these politics of representation were very present in the minds of Chicano cultural producers and academics whose synergistic efforts saw the birth and validation of the Chicano Movement and this perhaps accounts for the at times vitriolic responses the text received. However, such ideological policing could prove limiting and the negotiation of two such instances are particularly instructive.¹⁷ As John Alba Cutler's "Quito Sol, Chicano/a Literature, and the Long March Through Institutions" convincingly shows, the

¹⁷ See, for instance, John Alba Cutler's "Quito Sol, Chicano/a Literature, and the Long March Through Institutions" for a captivating history of the interplay of the editors of the publication, the winning authors of the Premio, and their combined role in setting the foundation of Chicano literature. *American Literary History* 26.2 (Summer 2014): 262-94.

editors of the publication, in conjunction with its Premio winners, consciously worked to set the foundation for Chicano literature by “instantiating culture and laying special claim to the cultural capital of the university” (264). Nevertheless, as Dennis López rightfully argues, the “literary nationalism” of the publication was “anchored around a particular rhetorical image of the Chicano—male, heteronormative, traditional” (qtd. in Cutler 264). But this is not to say that all representations were sanitized—rather, they were calculated. This is perhaps most clearly illustrated in the exclusion of one of the original stories submitted in Rivera’s prize-winning manuscript ... *y no se lo tragó la tierra* (1971). As Rivera later reveals, “El Pete Fonseca” was removed primarily because the titular character, “a pachuco type,” “was represented in a derogatory manner and negatively sensitive for Chicano literature at the time.” Yet, as Cutler notes, the horrid couple don Laíto and doña Boni are far worse, thus complicating arguments of Quinto Sol’s literary nationalism (qtd. in Cutler 273). However, I would suggest that El Pete is an especially important figure worthy of intervention as his representation “did not conform to the romanticized portrayal of the pachuco as the rebellious Chicano hero that was appearing in this formative period” (Olivares 75). This very real concern with the politics of representation was not limited to literary representation as scholars similarly felt themselves obligated to produce work in line with the ethos of the Chicano Movement which was about self and communal affirmation and subscribing to an ethnic politics that approximated a cultural authenticity that brought people together.

A particularly telling instance comes from the preface to Genaro Padilla’s study of mid-to late-nineteenth century Mexican American autobiography, *My History, Not Yours* (1993). Padilla relates that on numerous occasions he nearly abandoned the project on political grounds as the era’s distinct class differences meant that his working-class ancestors, or *antepasados*,

would almost certainly have been excluded from the world of the landed writer's being studied (x). Thankfully, this response—evocative of the Chicano Movement's cultural-political emphasis on *los de abajo* (to borrow from Jose Montoya)—was eventually overcome and Padilla's text powerfully shows how "Mexican American autobiography came into formation as a personal and communitarian response to the threat of erasure." But another lesson lies in the scholar's description of how he adjudicated between his politics and work:

One can't—we can't—turn away from the difficulties, the contradictions, and accommodations experienced by many of our *antepasados* without engaging in a form of arrogant dismissiveness much like that responsible for the wholesale suppression of our literary production.... What I was forced to learn ... is that the more deeply I read into the circumstances that produce ideologically contradictory narratives, the more clearly was I able to discern alternate (alternating) enunciations of opposition." (x-xi)

Indeed, it remains imperative to cast aside ideological prejudice to attend to "the difficulties, the contradictions, and accommodations" of literary forebears and uncover "alternate enunciations of opposition," and when figured in this way the "shame" we lay at their feet is better understood, as Frances Negrón-Muntaner argues, as "constitutive of social identities generated by conflict with asymmetrical power relations" (qtd. in Beltrán 40).

Thus, my rereading of Rodriguez aims to better understand Rodriguez and to do so through a consideration of adolescent time. Recent work on temporality and subjectivity questions the normative trajectory of the individual toward (re)productive adulthood to consider those who do not fit within such a narrative and what occasions these exceptions. Building on this insight I identify adolescence as a form of what literary critic Dana Luciano calls

“chronobiopolitics,” or the “sexual arrangement of the time of life” (*Arranging Grief* 9). Thus, adolescent time refers to the time of life where a youth balances the chronobiopolitical demands placed upon them against the exploration of a burgeoning sense of self. In other words, adolescence emerges as a unique, liminal temporality in which adolescents simultaneously have their growth circumscribed and yet they are nonetheless permitted to explore nontraditional ways of being. Given my attention to the specificities of youth discussing sexual desire in a text like *Hunger* presents a challenge due to the assumed asexuality of children and social delay.¹⁸ Yet, others scholars have pursued readings that tentatively ascribe sexual desire to the young Rodriguez. Sandra Soto, for example, reads the public pool scene from *Hunger* as a “primal [one] that at once stimulates the young Rodriguez’s own sexual desire as he voyeuristically observes his parents’ flirtation, *and* crystalizes for him the racialized dynamics of that encounter,” signaling the need to more fully consider sexuality as racialized (51). “If the swimming pool story casts the seven-year-old Rodriguez as desirous spectator, then a second passage from *Days [of Obligation]* depicts him more in the role of desiring subject,” Soto goes on to suggest, calling our attention to the a sexually-charged description of an uncle whose “skin was darker than Mexico” (229). And so how do we account for according sexual desire to Rodriguez the child? We begin by recalling that these texts, autobiography and memoir, are childhood memories reread through the language of adulthood. As Kathryn Bond Stockton writes in *The Queer Child*, asking a queer adult about childhood can trigger “pangs of despair or sharp unease” as they recall “feeling that there was nowhere to grow” given the dominant expectations of linear progression toward a heterosexual adulthood (3). “To grow up homosexual

¹⁸ “Cultural constructions of childhood and enduring beliefs about the inability of the child to deal with or understand their claims to pleasure and knowledge are central to the problem of sexual agency in children. The plausibility of homoerotic pleasure, knowledge and desire even more anathema. This is not to say that children were, in fact, passive” (364). See R. Danielle Egan and Gail L. Hawkes, “Imperiled and Perilous: Exploring the History of Sexuality,” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 21.4 (Dec 2008): 355-67.

is to live with secrets and within secrets,” Rodriguez states, highlighting one of the difficulties in self-identification for the gay child as “certain linguistic markers arrive only after it exits childhood, after it is shown not to be straight” (30; Stockton 6). This “backwards birthing mechanism” signifies the metaphorical death of the “straight child” and emergence of the “ghostly gay child,” making any search for queerness retrospective—hence Rodriguez’s queer, sexualized recollections of the swimming pool and his uncle—and so, in a sense, R. A. Rodriguez’s claim that *Hunger* is a “coded personal gay manifesto” is correct (410). It is clear that the gay child requires “self-ghosting measures” to keep up a semblance of normativity, must “live with secrets and within secrets” as Rodriguez recalls, making his childhood decision to become a voracious reader particularly successful as it helps him grow academically/abstractly while creating greater distance between himself and peers socially (Stockton 11). Due to the backwards birthing taking place in Rodriguez’s writing it is important to allow ourselves to read sexuality and desire into the text as this is how Rodriguez-as-adult chooses to translate his youthful experiences. For, as Stockton reasons, “[since] they are ‘gay children’ only after childhood, they never ‘are’ what they ‘were,’” making Rodriguez’s text his preferred (if not approximated) narrative of those events. Additionally, it is necessary to recognize the self-ghosting techniques “Mr. Secrets” employs, less as a means of identifying *Hunger* as a coming-out narrative as R. A. Rodriguez might have it, but more as a means of understanding how he negotiates his queer coming of age.

Focused on the chronobiopolitical aspects of adolescent time (legislation and formative institutions) as with the previous chapter, I wish to discern here the “circumstances that produce [an] ideologically contradictory narrative” such as Rodriguez’s. Here I will also overlay a psychoanalytically-informed queer critique of *Hunger of Memory* (1982) to reveal how the

author's experiences as "*el negrito*" of his family and his repressed homosexuality emerge as catalysts in the conservative writer's life.¹⁹ While numerous other scholars have written on the subjects of Rodriguez's youth and sexuality, I will foreground his racialized sexuality in terms of queer theory and psychoanalysis, and when taking this into account I will argue that Rodriguez's inability to access a self-same body causes him to identify with heterosexual whiteness via education and its link to higher class in a cruelly optimistic attempt to achieve a modicum of self-sameness. This desire to identify with heterosexual whiteness on Rodriguez's part is instilled by his family who contradictorily push him to aspire toward "the good life" while simultaneously expecting him to remain culturally loyal to his Mexican heritage. Meanwhile, Rodriguez's primary exterior influences, school and church, both reinforce his desire to identify with whiteness by placing those representations on pedestals while largely limiting any positive representations of ethnicity. Failure in the narrative is tied to race and class, thus in regards to Rodriguez's assimilationist ethos the most instructive subjects of *Hunger* are the *braceros*, the fetishized subjects whom the author intensely studies throughout his youth and confronts as an adult.

Jouissance Denied: The Desiring Racialized Child

That adolescence is an intense site of self-discovery is not in question but, psychologically, how does a subject establish a stable sense of identity? Identity, as David Eng insists, is "historically and psychically bound by the particularities of race, ethnicity, national origin, sexuality, gender, class, and age" (*Racial Castration* 4).²⁰ Eng's queer/psychoanalytic model, with its linking of Jacques Lacan's Mirror Stage and Kaja Silverman's theory of the self-

¹⁹ Hereafter *Hunger of Memory* will be referred to as *Hunger*.

²⁰ While Eng's work in *Racial Castration* is primarily concerned with masculinity his model can arguably be adapted to analyze how femininity is conceptualized as well.

same body, works exceedingly well to read social difference in subjectivity in Rodriguez (Eng 111). Briefly, Lacan's Mirror Stage suggests that the genesis of selfhood is dependent on the infant's identification with its external image, resulting in both *méconnaissance* and *jouissance* (111-112). The theory of the self-same body by Silverman extends the idea of the mirror stage's visual ego to include Freud's body-ego and argues that for the infant to attain jubilation "the presence of a third term [is required to] provide social sanction, ratification, and support" (qtd. in Eng 113). As Eng explains:

it is only when the cumulative looks of others provide symbolic validation and social support that the subject can gain access to the desired image. Without this collective affirmation, the imago cannot be successfully mapped onto the bodily ego to produce any feeling of psychic triumph or self-sameness. (115)

Validation, however, is unavailable to all individuals because these "desired images" are largely predicated on societal ideals of white heteronormativity, making the attainment of a self-same body impossible—especially for raced subjects (115). Therefore, due to the constant reassessment of the raced individual's self-same body a socially-sanctioned stable identity is unachievable.

Exploring his youth across the series of essays which comprise *Hunger*, Rodriguez beautifully, if not melancholically, relates his coming-of-age experience as it relates to his conservative political views on race, among other things. The seemingly transactional nature of life and literature points to an ongoing debate that due to fictions subjective nature it should not be used to gauge reality, consequently I would like to take a moment to provide a rationale for my usage of autobiography to validate my observations. In *The Fin-de-Siècle Culture of Adolescence* (1992), John Neubauer points to the ways that early theorists commonly used

fictional texts as evidence of the adolescent experience while acknowledging that the problematic nature of using it as a social-historical document lies in how such texts “select but one of the many voices and tends to advance the writer’s personal choice as historical fact” (206). Indeed, Rodriguez himself has argued against his tale being taken as representative of a Mexican-American experience, asserting instead that *Hunger* details “One childhood: that summer in 1955. One street in Sacramento, California ... One yellow house. One solitude,” rhetorically tapering a “graduated funnel of representation,” as Soto points out, such that “questions of accountability posed by anyone other than the author himself unfeasible, if not petty” (“An American Writer” 12 qtd. in Soto 44).

The line between fiction and historical fact becomes even more blurred when we consider an autobiographical text like *Hunger* due to the author’s inability to completely account for all of the social factors that bear down on him as well as the temptation to avoid giving a negative self-portrayal in the midst of the backwards birthing being undertaken through his writing, “[y]et the truth of fiction cannot be gauged by some statistically ascertainable social reality, for the meaning of even ‘hard’ data depends on social norms and values” (Neubauer 207). It then becomes the literary critic’s job to adjudicate between the potential inaccuracies of autobiography to bridge the gap between a literary text and its context. Employing adolescent time to look at Rodriguez’s experiences gives us a better understanding of what conditions were like for a gay racialized youth in the mid-twentieth century, the experience of which, I would argue, may have influenced his conservative views. In the previous chapter I analyzed the formative power of institutions (the Church, the School, the Family) on the adolescent protagonists of *Pocho* and *George Washington Gomez*. With this chapter I turn my gaze inward, reading Rodriguez’s adolescent time through a psychoanalytically-influenced queer critique.

While the adolescent's exploration of their identity is encouraged by their family and peer groups in the hopes that he/she will emerge as a "normal" adult," the extent of the exploration is policed by the aforementioned groups to ensure that this occurs.²¹ Within Eng's model then, what are the ways in which a Chicano adolescent's access to attaining a self-same body are enabled/disabled by their cultures? I argue that in conjunction with gender and sexuality, colorism and whiteness are the primary factors that inform Rodriguez's adolescence. Ann Cheng's analysis of racial melancholia in *Race and Melancholy* echoes Eng's in its description of how racial subjects exist within "a condition of endless self-improvement" that for the child results in "the imaginative loss of a never-possible perfection, whose loss [they] must come to identify as a rejection of [their self] (8, 17). This loss is not instantaneously handed down from parent to child; instead it "travel[s] a torturous, melancholic path," necessitating the lateral growth of children queer(ed) by color who "by reigning cultural definitions can't 'grow up' [so they must] grow to the side of cultural ideals" (Cheng 18, Stockton 14). Cultural ideals, either dominant or minor, tend to wed the aim of growth (up/sideways) and successful adulthood with the ability of an individual ("white" or raced) to enjoy "the good life," or what Lauren Berlant identifies in *Cruel Optimism* (2011) as an object of desire that is a cluster of normative promises from our capitalistic, meritocratic society (23). "All attachment is optimistic," states Berlant, and while recognizing the necessity of hopeful/optimistic attachment lower classes have with "the good life" it is especially cruel that the ability for individuals to realize it is either "impossible, sheer fantasy, or *too* possible, and toxic" (1, 24). To distinguish how melancholia differs from cruel optimism, Berlant specifies how the former is a subject's grief over experiencing loss while the latter is based on attachment to a problematic object; additionally,

²¹ Here I disagree with Neubauer's argument that peer groups play a greater role in subject development than the family. This may be due to his focus on non-racialized European adolescent texts of the early nineteenth century.

while children become conscripted to the cruelly optimistic “worlds of their parents’ desires” racial melancholia rises out of racial discrimination (24, 169).²²

In the following analysis, I follow Rodriguez’s melancholic path from adolescence to adulthood to show how the precocious queer boy emerges as a cruelly optimistic, racially melancholic gay man. By focusing on images within the text I show how Rodriguez moves from self-loathing due to his inability to access a self-same body into a pleasing self-willed identification made possible by his proximity to “the good life.” Arguably, the image that looms largest in the text is that of the *bracero*—a multivalent site of fear and desire for Rodriguez—and one which, when finally confronted, results in the crystallization of the conservative essayist whose writings would (and continue to) serve as primer for debates in Chicano and Latino studies.

The Informal *Education* of Richard Rodriguez

Born in 1944, Richard Rodriguez in *Hunger for Memory* attempts to provide a representation of his formative years as the child of an immigrant, working-class Mexican American family in Sacramento, California. While describing his family Rodriguez suggests that Mexico’s colonial past provides the answer to why the family’s physical appearances vary so greatly, from his parents looking French and Italian to a younger sister that is “exotically pale” and “delicately featured,” potentially hailing from the Near East (123). Although Rodriguez is not the only child with a dark complexion (his older sister looks “Polynesian”) his features set him apart due to their resemblance to “ancient Indian ancestors. My face is mournfully long ... my profile suggests one of those beak-nosed Mayan sculptures—the eaglelike face upturned,

²² Cheng recognizes that parents have a hand in racial melancholy as well: “The little girl must internalize not only the white ideal but also the ideal of black womanhood as a longing after a white ideal.” (18)

open-mouthed, against the deserted, primitive sky” (123). Here we see a hierarchy based on color and features with Rodriguez aligning the more aesthetically pleasing (in his opinion) of his family members with ostensibly white European countries (France, Spain, Near East), while situating himself and his older sister with socially undervalued groups, ascribing himself to the more seemingly “primitive” of the two through his use of negative language. “Throughout adolescence, I felt myself mysteriously marked,” Rodriguez observes, “Nothing else about my appearance would concern me so much as the fact that my complexion was dark. My mother would say that how sorry she was that there was not enough money to get braces to straighten my teeth. But I never bothered about my teeth” (134). From where does Rodriguez get these values?

Theories of assimilation and its link with colorism, or the discrimination of an individual based on the social meaning of their skin color, manifests through cultural racism and media representation, begin to explain Richard’s informal education in racial identification. In *Mexican Americans and the Question of Race* (2014), sociologist Julie Dowling investigates the assimilative trajectories of self-reporting Mexican Americans which she situates along a continuum, and in reading her reviews of competing assimilative theories she cites the work of Eduardo Bonilla-Silva which suggests the emergence of a “trichotomous racial identification system” in the US (qtd. in Dowling 4). This multi-tiered racial system posited by Bonilla-Silva, in which Latinos either become accepted as “white,” “honorary whites,” or a part of the “collective black” alongside African Americans, is determined by a subject’s skin color and socioeconomic status (4). That Rodriguez’s family both aspires toward and has access to “honorary white” status, with the exception of the author and one of his sisters, is partially evidenced in Richard’s recollection of his mother’s sexual attraction to his father in the

swimming-pool story, as mentioned previously.²³ As Soto importantly notes, in addition to linking his mother's sexual attraction to his father's light complexion "the scene also brings into relief the distinction between his parents' heteronormative relationship ... which can circulate in public spaces, and his own sexual desires" (51). While I agree with Soto when she distinguishes between Rodriguez's desires and his parents' in terms of "conjugal heterosexuality and racial etiquette" I would go further to suggest that in addition to his "racial alterity" it is Rodriguez's queer sexuality which must be "relegated to and regulated through a private register" (51). To reiterate, that the seven-year-old Rodriguez is a "desiring subject" is established through Soto's reading of his description of Raj, the beautifully dark uncle from *Days* previously mentioned, and in that scene, as with the swimming pool story, Richard is censured from basking in the sun lest he become darker and more unlike his attractive father. As Rodriguez explains, he was his "parents' child," learning from them what things were and were not of value (132). For Eng, this exemplifies how "it is not possible for all mothers to provide the kind of social validation and gendered support that Lacan's generic mother in "The Mirror Stage" is presumed to offer her joyful infant" as identification with a white body is impossible for Rodriguez, despite his mother's attempts at various remedies like the egg-white and lemon juice concentrate that are applied to his face (Eng 116; Rodriguez 124). Mother's desire for Rodriguez to be lighter is internalized to the extent that he envies an older brother who, because of his light complexion, would come home with "glamorous" blonde girlfriends which thus triggers his sense of self-loathing (123).

As depicted in one of the novels most harrowing scenes, at the age of 12 Rodriguez recalls locking himself in the bathroom and observing his image "without any pleasure," after

²³ Public swimming pools, with their racially charged histories based on discourses of "hygiene," often served as the battlegrounds for entry into honorary white status at this time. See David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986* (1987): 285-86.

which he proceeds to hear in his mind “the swirling voices of aunts, and even my mother’s voice, whispering, whispering incessantly about lemon juice solutions and dark, *feo* children” resulting in his attempt to “somehow lessen the dark” by scrapping a razor as close to his skin as he could without cutting (133-134). Not being able to joyously identify with his body like Lacan’s presumed white baby and being denied social validation of its worth causes such anguish and shame for Rodriguez that he tried to “divorce” himself from his body, resulting in his constant attempts to deny himself an active lifestyle: “I wanted to forget that I had a body because I had a brown body” (135).

For young Richard, having internalized the social value of his dark skin, the figure of the *bracero* links race to class, epitomizing his worst fears and most secret desires. Darkened by the summer sun, he recalls being chastised by his mother: ““You look like a *negrito*’ ... ‘You know how important looks are in this country. With *los gringos* looks are all they judge on. But you! You’re so careless!’ ... ‘You won’t be satisfied until you end up looking like *los pobres* who work in the fields, *los braceros*”” (121). This image of the *bracero*, those “Powerful, powerless men” who worked very hard for very little is what an upwardly mobile immigrant family like the Rodriguez’ feared being identified as in a country where “looks” (read here as whiteness and affluence) are the most important thing, leading his mother to conclude that dark skin was a “symbol of a life of oppressive labor and poverty” and that Richard’s similarly dark body will cause others to discriminate against him, relegating him to Bonilla-Silva’s “collective black” (127). They were men with brown-muscled arms I stared at in awe on Saturday mornings Passing by on my bicycle in the summer, I would spy them there ... frightening and fascinating men” (122). Rodriguez comes to recognize in the *bracero* everything that he wishes not to be: dark (ugly), poor, and option-less due to a lack of education and English fluency. The fear of

becoming like them due to his dark complexion is made even more real by his mother's insistence that if he is not careful he will "end up looking just like them" (122). "*Los pobres*," as mother calls them, are pitiable for having to labor so strenuously for so little, but Rodriguez also is in "awe" of the strength and virility these dark men command.

Recall that the descriptions of the braceros in the text are prior to the author's "coming-out" in the *Harper's* essay "Late Victorians" some eight years later in 1990 and as such are not as effusive as that of Uncle Raj in *Days*. Nonetheless, through his commentary on them it is difficult not to see Rodriguez as a ghostly, desirous gay child: "I would notice the shirtless construction workers, the roofers, the sweating men tarring the street in front of the house.... I was unwilling to admit the attraction of their lives. I tried to deny it by looking away. *But what was denied became strongly desired.*" (emphasis added 135). Read through the adolescent's queer desire the scene recalls the 28 bathers passage from Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself." Section eleven of the famous poem describes a lonely young woman voyeuristically watching and longing to join the nude assembled male bathers. Whitman's depiction of the bathers in repose is eroticized by the young woman who imagines herself in their midst, "The young men float on their backs, their white bellies bulge to/ the sun, they do not know who seizes fast to them," read alongside Rodriguez's description of watching the braceros they emerge as one and the same—indeed, neither bather nor bracero "know[s] who puffs and declines with the pendant and bending arch,/ they do not think whom they souse with spray" (28). This necessarily becomes a sustaining fantasy for young Richard who thinks, as previously indicated in the pool scene, that his racial alterity and homosexuality can only be embraced privately, making his tryst with *los pobres* a dream within a dream.

In this way the braceros, those “powerful, powerless men,” become a fetish for Rodriguez which must be disavowed. Here I follow Anne McClintock who asks us to look beyond Freudian and Lacanian phallogocentric theories of fetishism to consider how race and class inform sexuality. In *Imperial Leather* (1995), McClintock avers that “fetishes can be seen as the displacement onto an object (or person) of contradictions that the individual cannot resolve at a personal level” (184). We see how this is the case with Rodriguez and his vexed relationship to the braceros: in addition to the physicality necessitated/cultivated due to their employment, their dark complexion is made all the more so, linking perceived normative and non-normative desires through his homosexual longing (rippling muscles and “ugly” dark skin), yet, he also understands the socially abject position of braceros, as exemplified by his maternal uncle who in the face of abusive treatment (back-breaking menial labor with wages withheld) returned to Mexico (126-27). For young Richard, then, the sexually desirable yet socially abominable bracero becomes a fetish, “mark[ing] a crisis in social meaning [,] the embodiment of an impossible resolution” (McClintock 184) The intensity of the fetish for Rodriguez is exasperated by his resemblance of and fear of becoming the bracero, as well as his queer desire, which for McClintock are some of the universal features: “a social contradiction experienced at an intensely personal level; the displacement of the contradiction onto an object or person, which becomes the embodiment of the crisis in value; the investment in intense passions (erotic or otherwise) in the fetish object” (184-85). Unable to overcome his attachment to the bracero as social/sexual fetish, the ghostly gay Richard displaces his anxiety by focusing on his education and shadows his queer sexuality in the umbrage of adolescence, focusing on his education and outwardly rejecting homosexuality: “At seventeen, I may not have known how to engage a girl in small talk, but I had read *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*” (136). Read through the “backwards birthing

mechanism” this self-imposed delay shows how the ghostly gay child, having “nowhere to grow” according to a normative Oedipal trajectory, grew sideways and shows how school/education, despite dominant normative efforts, can be made into a crucial site of delay. The benefits for Rodriguez are numerous as his academic excellence becomes a buffer for heteronormative expectations and eventually helps socially distance himself from the image of the *bracero*.

To accomplish this, Rodriguez becomes the “scholarship boy” and begins to use his successes in the classroom as a way into the white world, along with the cultural literacy his middle-class family could afford him. Rodriguez’s comment, “what most intrigued me was the connection between dark skin and poverty,” and his ensuing rumination over authentic racial identity suggests that he thinks he can elide the social meaning of his skin. In comparing a set of African American adults, the first being the ostensibly wealthy parents of a schoolmate and the other a garbage collector, Rodriguez links authenticity to working-class representations, calling the latter “unmistakably black” whereas the parents did not seem “really ‘black’” because they were well-dressed and drove a “shiny green Oldsmobile” (126). And in his upwardly mobile mother and father, ever concerned with class position and distancing themselves from *los pobres*, Rodriguez finds willing, if not demanding, instructors who teach him “the *propia* way of eating *como los ricos*” as well as “elaborate formulas of polite greeting and parting” (131). These mannerisms become extremely beneficial to Rodriguez as he uses them to impress the parents of his rich classmates in the hopes of garnering invitations to their homes. Thus begins his association, fascination, and I might suggest further motivation to identify with rich white people. Describing a dinner scene, Rodriguez writes that he saw everything through his parents’ eyes: “When I was not required to speak, I’d skate the icy cut of crystal with my eye; my gaze would follow the golden threads etched onto the rim of china” (132). Despite his motivation to

identify with whiteness and seeming acceptance to this white table, however, and evocative of Lacan, Rodriguez still perceives himself as trapped within a “dark self, lit by chandelier light, in a tall hallway mirror” (132).

While whiteness as an ideal is certainly upheld by Rodriguez’s family this also occurs outside the home and often those representations are tied to class. Comparisons between the Mexican church his parents preferred and the *gringo* church where he attended school and eventually came to frequent are drawn along class lines and reinforce the superiority of whiteness. In Rodriguez’s eyes the “wooden Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe, which was decorated with yellow Christmas tree lights all year long” could not possibly compare with the “*gringo* church floors [that] were made not of squeaky wood but of marble” (86, 91). Preferring the “elegant simplicity” of Sacred Heart Church, he grows to appreciate the way the devotional was not so cluttered, despite his mother’s complaints that “[it] doesn’t feel like a church” (91). The way he uses language here is rife with class distinction and evidenced in his uneven praise: if Sacred Heart wished to have a cluttered devotional, they could, but instead they’ve *chosen* “elegant simplicity,” whereas if Our Lady of Guadalupe made the same choice it would probably be phrased as “lack”: as José Esteban Muñoz makes clear,

It is not so much that the Latina/o affective performance is so excessive, but that the affective performance of normative whiteness is minimalist to the point of emotional impoverishment. Whiteness claims affective normativity and neutrality, but for that fantasy to remain in place one must only view it from the vantage point of U.S. cultural and political hegemony. (206-207)

The distinctions between the two churches are drawn further in Rodriguez’s descriptions of the differing depictions of the Virgin Mary. The “wavering statue “of *Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe*

appears to Rodriguez “astride a black moon” on her feast day, “a young Indian maiden-dark just like me” being carried by young men up to the altar (90-91). In contrast to this is the image of the white Mary’s statue that has been stationed in a side altar “who matter-of-factly squashed the Genesis serpent with her bare feet” (91). Despite knowing that these two women are supposed to be the same and feeling that he should identify with *La Virgen* (as his mother tells him due to her appearing to one of their countrymen), his language again indicates that he prefers the “European Mary triumphant” over “the shy Mexican Mary” (90-91).

The further Rodriguez ascends the educational ladder, the more he hopes to be identified with whiteness and higher class as well as increasing the unlikely-hood that he could be identified as a *bracero*, but an opportunity in college brings him face to face with the fetish object. During his description of Stanford, the author explains that he would study the “physical confidence” of his classmates as they reclined in the sun to study, an activity he envied as he still denied himself the same pleasure. Despite his assertion that he was only “kin to the boy [he] had been,” the similarity between this observation and the previous one of his father at the swimming pool leads me to believe that at this point Rodriguez still held the self-image of the *feito negrito* who could still be confused with a *bracero* (140). This is supported by the fact that although Rodriguez ever so briefly mentions that he began dating women—perhaps another self-ghosting measure—it merely serves to point to his difference from the “golden children of western America’s upper middle class,” those who did not notice not conceive of his relation to the “Mexican-American janitors and gardeners on campus” and so he cannot trust in their attraction to him (140). And so Rodriguez’s description of his elation at being able to “at last grasp desired sensation . . . at last to become like a *bracero*” via summer work as a laborer can be seen both an opportunity to approach that feared/desired image as well as a space in which to forever set

himself apart from the pitiable group. Finally having an excuse to violate his mother's law against sun exposure (he also refuses to tell her about it until after the fact), Rodriguez takes full advantage of the opportunity to experience the pain/pleasure his body undergoes during manual labor, relishing the way an ache would "fly up my arm and settle to burn like an ember in the thick of my shoulder" while digging out tree stumps (142).

The final moment of identification/disidentification for Rodriguez arrives when the *braceros*, "anonymous men" show up to work²⁴ (144). These solitary men who had arrived for freelance work avoided the rest of the workers and only interacted with the main contractor (who knew a little Spanish), that is until Rodriguez is made into a translator (based on the contractor's assumption he could still speak Spanish). Rodriguez nervously goes over to the group whose "dark sweating faces" turned toward him as he spoke and nodded in response, but Rodriguez, in seeking to be "assured of their confidence, our familiarity" searches for something more to say to the men beyond the work instructions, even "(a lie, if need be)" (145). Here, the desire to be accepted on Rodriguez's part is based on his appreciation of these "powerful" men, the desire to have his own power affirmed by their acceptance, something his mother could never do. In the following moment a crucial transformation takes place, necessitating the full passage:

The eyes of the man directly in front of me moved slowly over my shoulder, and I turned to follow his glance toward *el patrón* some distance away. For a moment I felt swept up by that glance into the Mexicans' company. But then I heard one of them returning to work. And then the others went back to work. I left them without saying anything more. (145)

²⁴ The men Rodriguez initially met and worked with were "middle-class Americans" and not "*los pobres* my mother had spoken about" (144).

Such is Rodriguez's longing to identify with the group that his language changes in this moment. This is especially important given that leading up to this he describes being afraid of incorrectly pronouncing the Spanish words and prior to this scene he has only referred to his boss as "the contractor," but here he opts to use the Spanish version, "*el patrón*". And finally, due to his proximity to the them and the darkness of his body he is joyously "swept up" into the *brazos* of the braceros, but the moment is fleeting and the self-willed identification is not validated; Rodriguez's inability to speak causes the men go back to work, signaling that while he might look like them ultimately, he is excluded from their group. When the braceros are preparing to leave the work site Rodriguez realizes the extent of the "powerlessness" of these men as he overhears the confident tone the contractor uses while paying the men "collectively" for the job and the "quiet, indistinct sounds of the Mexican, the oldest, who replied"—reminiscent of the "confused," "falsetto" sounds his father made when speaking English (145-46, 14).²⁵ It is then that he finally realizes that his education has so far distanced him from the braceros that "a few weeks of physical labor" could not bring him closer to "*los pobres*" and that he could embrace the image of the bracero while simultaneously disidentifying with their powerlessness, their "compliance. Vulnerability. Pathos" because of his education (146, 149). As he goes on to explain, if he were suddenly forced to work in a factory his education would enable him to "defend my interests, to unionize, to petition, to speak up- to challenge and demand" (149). The experience leaves Rodriguez utterly transformed: "I shuddered, my face mirrored with sweat. I had finally come face to face with *los pobres*" (149). For Rodriguez, the bracero as fetish comes to work as a coping mechanism; as McClintock explains, "By displacing power onto the fetish, then manipulating the fetish, the individual gains symbolic control over what might otherwise be terrifying ambiguities" (184).

²⁵ This is similar to his previous description of the Mary imagery he encountered in the Church.

Rodriguez ends the “Complexion” section of *Hunger* by declaring that he has “finally come face to face with *los pobres* to indicate that he has finally overcome his fraught relationship with his body, if not his sexuality: “After that summer, a great deal...changed in my life. The curse of physical shame was broken by the sun; I was no longer ashamed of my body.” Or, as Beltrán puts it, “Shame teaches; one develops skills of coping and survival. And such mastery is a kind of satisfaction. For Rodriguez, it is precisely this facility to engage negative affect as form pleasure that is part of “feeling brown”—a practice of identification that [Muñoz] has described as ‘always mediated with ethnic/racial abjection’” (56). The darkness of his body becomes imbued with power as commanded by the *braceros* but Rodriguez is distanced from them by the access to whiteness he has due to his education. Of great importance is the way this performance of his identity has to be maintained in order to maintain the disidentification. For Muñoz, *disidentification* refers to “the survival strategies the minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere” by “scramble[ing] and reconstruct[ing] the encoded message of a cultural text” to represent a “disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture” (4, 31). Rodriguez embraces the physicality of the *bracero* but is careful to maintain an identificatory distance, choosing to take up the “middle-class sport of long distance running” (146). A self-described “dandy” in Italian suits and English shoes, Rodriguez’s clothing scrambles the “encoded message” of his skin (poverty as linked to darkness), allowing his complexion to become a “mark of leisure” as he registers at luxurious hotels, a reconstruction that would fail, he admits, were he to enter through the service entrance, exemplifying how, as Guy Debord argued with regards to commodity culture, ultimately “[the] spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images” (149). That his need to assert his belonging “tempts vulgarity to be

reassured” cruelly reminds Rodriguez, and us, of the impossibility of some subjects to attain the good life, hence the elegiac tones of the entire narrative or what Norma Alarcón identifies as “rage at our embodied history, for while his wit may pass muster, his face does not” (140; 150). Perhaps most indicative of Rodriguez’s understanding of this are the lines with which he opens *Hunger* in which he compares himself to Shakespeare’s Caliban: “I have taken [his] advice. I have stolen their books. I will have some run of this isle” (1).²⁶

Conclusion: Rodriguez as Fetish for Chicano Studies and his Queer Fruit

Reading the adolescent time of *Hunger of Memory* through a psychoanalytically-informed queer critique that foregrounds Rodriguez’s racialized sexuality gives us insight to how the author negotiated his coming-of-age. Thus, along with Soto and Beltrán, I am less interested in joining the chorus of Chicano scholars and activists in debating Rodriguez’s conservative views on assimilation, affirmative action, and bilingual education than I am in joining others to find value in his work. That is to say that my focus in this text falls in line with Durán’s and others’ in taking up what Eve Sedgwick’s call for a “reparative criticism” that “concerns itself less with the political failings of a text than with an appreciation of the complexities of the attempt to represent ... the social, political, and psychological problems that concern” the author (93). Swati Rana, for example, judiciously reads Rodriguez’s *Brown* (2002) with and against the author’s universalist postracial message, identifying the text as a failed “dream of reconciliation” which nevertheless “exposes the rhetorical emptiness and racial violence of postracial discourse and opens up new imaginative possibilities (301). For my part, in this chapter I sought to better understanding the “accommodations,” as Padilla puts it, Rodriguez felt that he needed to make as

²⁶ For more on Rodriguez and Caliban, see Ramon Saldívar, *Chicano Narrative* (1990), 154-57.

a queer youth, and when we read the text as a product of the queer child's backwards birthing we come to see some of his self-ghosting strategies and what necessitated them.

Reading the text as such calls into question a strain of the criticism Rodriguez and the text received and which can be summed up by Ramón Saldívar's contention that Rodriguez "chooses to assimilate without ever considering whether he acted by will or merely submitted to an unquestioned scheme of political ideology" and Tomás Rivera's assertion that the author has a "colonized mind" (158; 9). The chronobiopolitics of adolescence certainly marshal youths toward "the good life," yet I suggest that Rodriguez operated by "will" as (to use Saldívar's words) "he feels himself capable of functioning only as an isolated and private individual, deprived of any organic connection with his ethnic group" (158). As a ghostly gay, racialized youth who came of age in the midcentury "[p]rivacy and isolation are his essential features" and as such it makes sense that the figure "we come to know in the autobiography is less the inner secret man ... than the rhetorically highlighted, publicly apologetic voice" (158-59)—a "Mr. Secrets," indeed. Describing his trajectory as one that "move[s] from mimicry to theatricality," Beltrán notes that Rodriguez's later writings depict how the author begins to gauge "freedom" in terms of one's ability to reconfigure identity to move across social boundaries as we saw in the hotel scene (51). His racialized vision of freedom is understood—as it was by the protagonists of *Pocho* and *George Washington Gómez*—as the "ability to refuse the burden of cultural maintenance" (hence his disdain for most Chicanos and the opening quote), yet his queering of assimilation in this manner is nonetheless "haunted by racial and ethnic shame" and, evocative of Berlant's cruel optimism, "continues to link freedom to an aesthetic invested in whiteness" (58, 60). This continued refusal sustains the "Rodriguez wars" but, as Soto suggests, "where so much energy is expended in disliking, of course love, loss, and desire must surely be nearby" (41).

While ideologically difficult to agree with, readers—especially Chicano academics—could strongly identify with some of the growing pains described in *Hunger* and so I suggest that Rodriguez’s work has come to be a sort of fetish for Chicano studies, a social contradiction not easily resolved even 30 years after the fact.

Regarding the Mexican American community and Chicano literature, Rivera aligns Rodriguez with those at the extremes (*el pelado*, *el pachuco*, *el pocho*) and likens his work to graffiti: “Done in silence. Powerful. Exact. It calls out attention to itself as if saying ‘I want to understand myself,’ ‘I want you, the passerby, to understand me. I am at the (extreme) margin. I want to be; I hunger to be part of your memory.’ Graffiti [sic] beckons us. It calls to tell us that they *are* us — in an extreme way, that they exist between cultures, but outside a culture” (10). Ever the outsider, Rodriguez’s ongoing refusal to produce a reproductive model of kinship and ethnic identification has left him bereft of literary forebears—a presumed dead branch on the tree of Chicano literary history—yet while he may not champion a rhetoric of cultural maintenance his work has generated decades of criticism and debate, and, in this way, he has borne a different kind of fruit.

CHAPTER 3: POSTNATIONALISM, ADOLESCENCE, AND YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE

At the 2016 Children's Literature Conference, the Diversity Committee and Membership Committee sponsored a panel titled, "Needs of Minority Scholars." Following an illuminating set of presentations (later published in *The Lion and the Unicorn*, a major publication for scholarship on children's literature) and the ensuing discussion, it became clear that "within and beyond the Children's Literature Association" there needed to be a commitment to "do more for marginalized scholars and marginalized scholarship (Slater 78). In particular, Marilisa Jiménez García's contribution struck a chord as it highlighted some of the difficulties this project on Chicano/a literature and adolescence attempts to work through. In "Side-by-Side: At the Intersections of Latinx Studies and ChYaLit," Jiménez García points to the difficulty of "negotiat[ing] divisions both in the field of Latinx Studies and children's literature in order to exist in academia," something she does by "draw[ing] on the parallels, the intersections, and the contradictions" of the respective disciplines (113). Unfortunately, this effort largely goes unnoticed as "scholars of Latinx studies rarely consider the position of literature for youth and writers for young audiences in the study of historically oppressed peoples" (115). This difficulty affects both the scope of scholarship as well as its volume as one field's overriding concerns are brought to bear on the other and vice versa, exemplified by Phillip Serrato's observation that "Presently, not a lot of scholarship exists on Latino/a children's literature. Of the work that does exist, there seems to be a tendency toward matters of immigration and immigrant experiences Such matters are certainly important and worthy of attention, but there is more to Latina/o children's literature than just immigration." The possibilities open at the intersections of Latinx

studies and children's literature are numerous yet rarely considered; for Jiménez García's part, she engages with literary theory and educational policy, valuable work that sees past the limitations of others in Latinx studies who do "not critically consider the role of literature for youth in Latinx literature and culture" while simultaneously "lament[ing] the lack of equity on the bookshelf" (116).²⁷ While also concerned with equity, Serrato calls upon us to "work with what we've got" in terms of literary offerings, to "explore, innovate, test out, flesh out, and demonstrate diverse methodologies for working with these texts" to "effect a shift in how Latino/a children's literature is regarded and handled."

This chapter aims to answer Jiménez García and Serrato's respective calls to more fully consider effect of Chicano young adult literature on young readers and its significance to Chicano literature to argue for a reconsideration of its value to both disciplines. In the preceding chapters I have focused on how adolescence as an idea has influenced authors and how an attention to adolescence as a formative process can lend insight to subject formation, all the while signaling toward the politics of Chicano studies and canon formation. My aim in turning to Chicano young adult literature as a genre and its scholarly value is to show how, given the literature's postnational bent and its intense preoccupation with its intended reader, it does and does not align with its literary predecessors. These texts, at the intersection of Chicano literature and young adult (YA) literature, eschew ethnic nationalism to attend to the traumatic experiences of the adolescent period to model positive types of subject formation for its young reader.

²⁷ A note on the appearance of "latinx" and my lack of engagement with the term here. As Richard T. Rodriguez sums up in his insightful essay, "X Marks the Spot," "the current application of [a/o/@ that] stabilize masculine and feminine pronouns aims to undermine both binary constructions of gender and essentially assigned, exclusively contoured categories in favor of non-binary identification or gender neutrality, non-conformity, and inclusivity" (203). My hesitance, alongside Rodriguez's, has to do with the terms' at times uncritical adoption and with the way it "quickly elides the continued significance of gender—even for queer constituencies" (203). In any case, as the texts and identities studied here are gender conforming I do not think it necessary to adopt "Chicanx" for this project. See *Cultural Dynamics* 29.3: 202-13.

Nevertheless, like many Chicano canonical texts about adolescence, these YA texts continue to grapple with notions of race, gender, and sexuality, necessitating a psychoanalytically-informed intersectional methodology to analyze how they are operating. This chapter's engagement with adolescent time is similar to that of Chapter Two's study of Richard Rodriguez's *Hunger for Memory* in this regard; however, these texts, with youthful readers in mind, trade melancholy for mourning as they address the traumatic experiences of their characters' lives. The deployment of trauma in YA literature, as Eric Tribunella argues, often serves as a fulcrum for a certain type of subject development (melancholic adulthood) and yet, as we will see in the award-winning novels *We Were Here* (2009) by Matt de la Peña and *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* (2012) by Benjamin Alire Sáenz, it is possible for Chicano YA literature to represent positive outcomes for traumatized protagonists while combatting cultural and gender stereotypes—incredibly powerful messages for any reader. Thus, regarding these texts and Chicano YA literature writ large, I argue alongside Jiménez García that “perhaps like no other Latinx led space at the moment, [it] publicly amplifies voices of people who have been left out of both U.S. and Latinx canons, and collectively questions and engages with key stereotypes of U.S. literature and culture” (117).

Young Adult Literature and Chicano Postnationalism

To tell the story of Chicano Young Adult literature is to tell a story of convergence; that is, to more fully engage with these texts we must first study the traditions from which they emerge—on one hand, the adolescent novel and its psychologization, and in the other, Chicano cultural production in the wake of the Movement. To begin with the former, Kenneth Kidd's *Freud in Oz: At the Intersections of Psychoanalysis and Children's Literature* (2011) offers a

thorough investigation of another set of fields that grew “side by side,” influencing and shaping one another from the beginning of the twentieth century forward, leading to the psychologization of adolescence and its literature. Regarding adolescent literature, typically, J. D. Salinger’s *Catcher in the Rye* (1951) or S. E. Hinton’s *The Outsiders* (1967) are offered as the first young adult “problem novels,” a genre wherein the protagonist encounters their first personal or social problem; Kidd, however, traces an earlier literary history that sees the literature move through three major stages before arriving at those canonical texts. The first stage harkens back to the foundational work of G. Stanley Hall in *Adolescence: Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education* (1902), which originally articulated adolescence in “psychological as well as literary terms” (139) as a universal season of “storm and stress,” and called for the intensified study and creation of *ephebic* literature (Greek for “male youth”) owing to its analytic and didactic potential in addition to prescribing self-writing for adolescents: “[No] biography, and especially no autobiography, should henceforth be complete if it does not describe this period of transformation so all-determining for future life to which it alone can often give the key” (qtd. in Kidd 145). The second stage involved the disciplinarily diverse range of research in adolescence that followed in Hall’s wake with psychologists and anthropologists either championing or refuting his theory of adolescence, resulting in the framing of a “problem interior in and around notions of ‘identity’ ... by way of explorations of gender and sexuality” (139).²⁸ As Kidd notes, the American literature of adolescence of the 1940s and 1950s attempted to reconcile these views with some authors “testing out new theories of identity ... attending to the issues of race, class,

²⁸ For example, the psychologist Norman Kiell found affinities in the work of Hall and Freud whom saw the transitional period as universally tumultuous, an assertion challenged by the cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead whose work in Samoa found adolescence to be “merely symptomatic of the (adult) culture to which it belongs” (Kidd 150).

and gender while plumbing the depths of the psyche,” a trend which Helen White Childers identified as shift from the novels of the 1920s and 1930s which were focused on social issues; a shift which also truncated the temporal span of the novel from a lifetime to perhaps, a school year, or a summer (153). As a result, given the chronobiopolitics of the developmental period and its expected telos of (hetero)productive adulthood, gender and sexuality become the prime movers in theories of identity as they pertain to adolescence and its literature, echoing Roberta Trites’ major claim in *Disturbing the Universe* (2000). These discourses of identity are crystallized in the final stage of adolescent literature’s psychologization as they transform this interiority into what Kidd calls a “‘young adulthood’ at once confident and highly vulnerable,” or capable but still requiring maturation, such that adolescent literature “begins to overlap with the literature of trauma” (139).

But why trauma? For better and for worse, the function of trauma in young adult literature has served as a means of accelerating maturation for the protagonist, and, subsequently, the reader. As Eric Tribunella proposes in *Melancholia and Maturation: The Use of Trauma in American Children’s Literature* (2009), the “striking recurrence of this pattern”—“love and loss”—makes it seem as if trauma operates as a “form of discipline” that “generates the escape velocity of youth” for the protagonist/reader to become mature adults (xiv, xi). Conceiving of trauma as both an “event and an outcome, that which causes symptoms and the symptoms themselves,” Tribunella focuses on “traumatic loss,” namely sacrifice, as an act which “works to purchase subjection, community and national membership, maturation, and thus adult citizenship” through the denial or relinquishing of self-interest (xiv). He sees the psychic toll of traumatic loss as instrumental to subject formation, following Judith Butler’s powerful work on subjectivity in *The Psychic Power of Life* (1997) where she draws on Freud’s “Mourning and

Melancholia,” identifying the former as the gradual withdrawal of identification with an object while the latter preserves it for all time, a distinction which allows her to assert that the ego’s character is “the sedimentation of objects loved and lost, the archeological remainder, as it were, of unresolved grief” (qtd. in xvi). In this way, argues Tribunella, attending to the loved objects of childhood, the context for their loss, and the lingering identifications associated therein proves “critical to comprehend[ing] how social subjects and the relations between them are formed” (xvii). The result of the super-ego’s insistence on sacrifice—made in conjunction with society—and the ensuing traumatic loss cultivates what he calls “melancholic maturity,” a particular type of mature adulthood prized by US culture for its ideological fealty, hence, the narrative deployment of traumatic loss in children’s and YA literature often comes to work “as a literary rod to discipline child readers, to threaten them into submission, to show them the unpleasant realities of life and the consequences of defying the rules and norms” (xxiii). As my readings of de la Peña and Sáenz will show, although I agree with Tribunella in part I believe that YA also has the ability to expose norms as arbitrary and that traumatic experiences need not mire a subject in melancholy.

As this brief overview has shown, young adult literature, ever preoccupied with producing “proper” adults, has evolved due to the psychologization of the genre to the point that it deploys, perhaps unknowingly, traumatic loss as an instructive tool. This is one side of the Chicano/a YA literature coin, so to speak, but what are the shifts that have occurred in Chicano/a literature and its scholarship? Quite provocatively, Ellie Hernandez asks this question to think through the current state of Chicana/o studies:

Where are we, since nationalist projects no longer address the issues of identity or no longer seem relevant in academic or cultural situations—not because there is

nothing more to say but because the way in which we talk about, write about, perceive, represent, and express ourselves within our own nation has significantly changed? (5)

“[W]e find ourselves in a bit of a quandry,” she admits: “Chicana/os, like other US minorities, still seem rooted in a history, legacy, memory, and dialectics of the civil rights era that cannot be easily forgotten”; nevertheless, “cultural nationalism as an organizing theme for community or cultural production no longer sustains the same effect of unifying Chicana/os” (5, 9). While recognizing the significance of *el movimiento*, Hernandez observes that its gravitational pull has in some ways limited scholarship and activism, centered as it was on what would become problematic object choices and unforeseen economic shifts. She argues that the strategic early focus on “embodying Chicana/o political and class subjectivity, to the exclusion of all other terms, including color, sex, gender, and sexuality” garnered Chicana/os a modicum of representation in the US, a problematic success that seemed to reinforce patriarchy as it “takes place at the level of the symbolic and is understood at the level of national pride, patria, patrimony—that is masculinities” (10, 8). However, “the economic shift toward global society altered the dialectics—and the direction—of US civil rights movements” such that minorities groups, for example, were forced to contend with the bittersweet commodification of their culture (14). Thus, Hernandez argues that gender and sexuality emerged as categories in response to the apparent unsuitability of the Chicano Movement’s “logics” (nationalism and orthodox Marxism), effecting a change in “trajectory from a cultural nationalist movement to one that openly celebrated difference” that is potentially one of the “greatest achievements in Chicana/o discourse” (8).

Hernandez's interest, then, lies in exploring what she terms the *postnational*, a post-1960s "adjustment phase" of Chicano cultural production, a "fragmented part of an earlier cultural nationalism" wherein the focus of the text is on "representations of anomalous states" wherein there is "no longer a need to situate an essence or a 'Chicano' character within it" (9, 12). One such *potentially* postnational figure is nearly synonymous with his first novel: Richard Rodriguez and his autobiographical *Hunger for Memory* (1982). In this text, Hernandez sees Rodriguez's plight as standing in for the formation of the Chicana/o subject where she/he must reconcile their past with the promise of their future (152). Rodriguez's coming-of-age narrative, pursuant to his queer identity and conservative politics, "denaturalizes the Chicana/o experience" by recounting, largely, tortured childhood memories to legitimate himself as an intellectual, moving himself beyond "identifications of the social group" (129, 152). Yet, for Hernandez, owing to Rodriguez's refusal to politically identify with anything Chicana/o—"Aztec ruins hold no special interest for me," he asserts—he and his works float as a signifier, a complicated part of the "adjustment phase" that is the postnational (152). Aligning his work this way shows the postnational as multifaceted and multivalent, especially when considering its similarities to YA literature like *We Were Here* and *Dante and Aristotle Discover the Secrets of the Universe*: all three texts present "anomalous states" of Chicano identity in terms of gender and sexuality and have varied responses to the issue of ethnic belonging—reasons for which, I argue, that the genre has failed to garner the same scholarly attention as *GWG* and *Pocho*. In this way these texts reinitiate many of the same questions Rodriguez, Paredes, and Villarreal took up decades ago.

Attempting to bridge the gap now, I would briefly like to consider the deployment of Latino young adult literature as a postnational genre that operates didactically while educating its young reader on ethnic realities and serves as a gateway toward canonical texts. Indeed, these

comments are echoed in Judith Ortiz Cofer's introduction to *Riding Low on the Streets of Gold: Latino Literature for Young Adults* (2003), an anthology she edited which focuses on the "specials skills young people of Latino heritage—those of us marked by language, ethnicity, economic and social factors as *los otros*, the outsiders—must master in order join the bigger circle of American mainstream society" (vi). But what exactly does she, do we mean when we designate a text as YA literature? Lee A. Tailey, in *Keywords for Children's Literature* (2011), points to the mixed meanings the term "Young Adult" signals and reviews how competing communities' (professional, retailers, scholars, and authors) beliefs were founded on either "sheltering these readers from or introducing them to a range of texts." Identified as between the ages of 12 and 18 (or up to 25 in the publisher Random House's estimation), the young adult reader is marketed texts specifically intended for them (YA literature) yet this differs from a text about adolescence ostensibly for adults (like *Pocho* or *George Washington Gomez*) or so-called "crossover" texts, such as J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series which is read by children, young adults, and adults alike. Looking to Cofer's anthology shows how these different meanings easily sidle up against each other and helps us think both about how canonical Chicano works are presented to the young adult reader and can come to be considered YA literature. Published by Arte Público Press, the selections for *Riding Low on the Streets of Gold* were largely culled from across their archives and academic and children's and young adult imprints, Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage Project and Piñata, respectively. "In each of the pieces," Cofer asserts, "we find an authentic human voice speaking to us in an accent the [Latino] reader will recognize as familiar, guiding us down a path of knowledge through shared experiences," and this is exactly what transpires as the works of such luminaries as José Martí, Tomás Rivera, and Helena María Viramontes are proffered to the young reader (10-11).

And while these works speak to the coming-of-age process and its unique difficulties, few of them would be considered YA literature in the strictest sense: that is, of the 16 authors presented only the selections of Victor Villaseñor, Pat Mora, Beatriz de la Garza, and the editor herself are specifically intended for young readers and, incidentally, all are from the Piñata imprint. Operating under the umbrella of “shared experiences” facilitates the slippage of genre from fiction and autobiography to YA (and exemplifies the dilemma of what defines the category) as evidenced by the selection of the editor’s two pieces which end the anthology—the first, “Primary Lessons,” from *Silent Dancing: A Partial Remembrance of a Puerto Rican Childhood* (1990) and the second, “Volar,” coming from her YA collection of short stories and poems, *The Year of Our Revolution* (1998). However, as in the case of Rivera’s *...y no se lo trago la tierra* (1971), a young reader will be introduced to a foundational text in Chicano literature, one whose lasting popularity and influence has only spread further in the wake of multicultural education in the US, leading it to become, arguably, a crossover text.

If it is indeed the case that canonical Chicano texts, given their proximity to YA literature and use in the classroom, can become crossover texts, then why is the inverse untrue?²⁹ Why is YA literature not more widely studied for its literary merit by Chicano studies scholars? The answer, I believe, rises from the assumption of the literature as facile given its intended audience and its postnational bent wherein authors, ambivalent about reifying a legible Chicano experience, instead focus on expanding the available representations of Mexican-American identities. Contemporary Chicano YA literature ruminates over the complexities of the coming-of-age process with just as much wit and artistry as its vaunted predecessors with the primary

²⁹ Ted Hipple suggests that YA literature has different criteria to fulfill to reach the level of “classic,” positing that if these texts remain popular for “generations” (with “generation of adolescents that lasts but four or five years”) there are a number of texts that already fit the bill. While *We Were Here* and *Aristotle and Dante* are still relatively young in this regard, it is not difficult to see them becoming “classics.” See Hipple, “Young adult literature and the test of time.” *Publishing Research Quarterly* (Spring 92) 8.1:

difference being that the former has a specific audience in mind. What's more, given this preoccupation, YA authors are perfectly poised to exhibit, in Cofer's words, the "special skills" young Latino readers must perfect to be successful in the US:

We are shaped by the stories we hear and read during our lives. Our personal narratives elevate us beyond the daily struggle for survival, giving our *luchas* meaning and purpose. *Las luchas* over the little and big hurdles we must conquer and the battles we must win in order to become strong and free individuals, have to be preserved as *cuentos y poemas* so that others will learn from our victories as well as our mistakes and failures. (v)

Learning from "*las luchas*," whether large or small, is paramount in YA literature and the texts selected for study here, de la Peña's *We Were Here*, and Alire Sáenz's *Dante and Aristotle Discover the Secrets of the Universe*, are no exception. Yet these Mexican American protagonists also face many of the same issues of their male literary forebears, namely concerns over questions of cultural authenticity, particularly around questions of ethnicity and masculinity. Two key differences between those Chicano authors and those writing for a younger audience is the latter's focus on traumatic *luchas* in relation to the aforementioned trend in YA literature that reifies melancholic adulthood, however, the works of de la Peña and Sáenz, with their postnational orientation, are pushing beyond foreclosed futures to instead posit a protagonist poised for the road ahead. These texts, about adolescence and primarily for adolescents, exemplify the complexity and richness of adolescent time, offering a window into the coming-of-age process for contemporary Mexican American youth. Secondly, owing to the postnational nature of these texts, the protagonists are less influenced by formal institutions

(school and church) than they are by the personal relationships they have/make and experiences they undergo; as such my readings of the protagonists' adolescent time primarily attend to these.

From Trauma, to Melancholy, to Mourning: *We Were Here*

As *Catcher in the Rye*, according to Kidd, marks the beginning of writing about troubled youth it seems apropos to begin with Matt de la Peña's *We Were Here*. Listed as a "Best Book for Young Adults" and "Quick Pick for Reluctant Readers" by the American Library Association/Young Adult Library Services Association, the novel is heir to what Kidd calls a "bibliotherapeutic tradition" inaugurated by *Catcher* wherein a youth, often a "budding writer or artist, ... tells his or her story to forestall [a] breakdown or to recover from trauma" (170). Recall that Holden Caulfield's written narrative which comprises the novel is his recollection of the previous Christmas season (i.e. "madman stuff that happened to me") and ends opaquely with him "getting sick," being sent to an institution, and enduring a psychoanalyst who asks "stupid questions" (6, 213). Similarly, *We Were Here* begins with Miguel Castañeda, a light-skinned Mexican American teen from Stockton, California, explaining that because of "something he did" a judge has ordered him to live in a group home for one year, and, akin to Holden, he must "write in a journal so some counselor could try to figure out how I think" (5). "Here's the thing," Miguel clarifies, "I was probably gonna write a book when I got older anyways," and among other topics alights on the possibility of writing about "me and my brother, Diego. How we hang mostly by ourselves How sometimes ... we'll sneak out of the apartment and walk around the neighborhood" (5). As the reader comes to learn, the constant use of the present tense in reference to Miguel's adored older brother masks the reality of the former's crime: the accidental

death of Diego amid sibling rough-housing and his relegation to the past tense. Rather than a stratagem against self-incrimination, Diego's refusal to recognize the passing of his brother or as an identification in a move that averts the experience or need of grief" (Tribunella xvi). Over the course of the novel, the reader comes to understand the traumatic event as one steeped in matters of masculinity and race and Miguel's subsequent outlook as one marked by abjection and melancholy. By the conclusion, however, through the friendships he makes with Mong and Rondell (fellow group home teens) and the experiences they have during their trip south from San Jose to San Ysidro and back again, Miguel matures beyond Tribunella's melancholic adulthood into a productive mourning.

The journalistic entries that comprise the novel, stretching from 13 May to 13 September, although unfolding sequentially, are often nonlinear in terms of advancing the plot but in this way Miguel illustrates for his reader (the presumed counselor or actual reader of the text) the near oedipal relationship he has with Diego and their lives in Stockton. Biracial youths, Miguel and Diego's parents (Mexican father and white mother), according to the latter's version of the story, were married very young. A case of "slumming gone too far," as Pops later relates to Miguel at the dinner table, it is not exactly a "true-love story" (93). Perhaps this characterization is a jaded one though; married at 18 and 16 owing to an unplanned pregnancy (having been together seven months beforehand), Pops was a "hippie Mexican" whom afterward would enlist in the army, a curious choice perhaps forced by their circumstance but an experience which nevertheless could have hardened him (93). Pops' length of enlistment and deployment is uncertain as particulars are hard to come by, yet, from the limited and brief descriptions offered by Miguel, the man appears to be a difficult site of identification for the boy owing, in part, to his vexed relationship to his biracial ethnicity. Recalling a time when Mom sent both boys to Fresno

to visit their Grandpa, a first-generation immigrant from Mexico, Miguel relates how they both “pretty much almost died” while picking strawberries in the heat of summer (10). “And all Gramps did was laugh the whole time,” explains Miguel, chastising the boys in Spanish in front of the others pickers, saying that “we were tired ‘cause we weren’t real Mexicans” like their father, that despite appearances “inside we were white”—insults that bothered Miguel all the more because Diego had to translate due to his limited Spanish fluency (10-11).

In this way, Miguel’s vexed relationship to his biracial identity emerges early on and helps explain how Diego comes have such a strong, nearly paternal presence later on. His preoccupation with performing an “authentic” Mexican identity in line with his forefathers, tied as it is to notions of masculinity, constantly find Miguel at odds with his appearance. Reluctant to accept his whiteness, which pales in comparison to his mother’s (“Her skin was so much whiter than mine and her eyes were big and blue”) Miguel also finds himself jealous of how much Diego favors their father’s ethnic and masculine features, and, unwilling to confront those feelings, he tears pages out of the notebook which address the topic (6, 300). Miguel’s internal identification with Mexican masculinity collides with his appearance and cultural knowledge, an ambivalent space which creates a lot of confusion for him, as well as opportunity. Having moved to a new school for freshman year, Miguel recalls when he and Pops attend the annual students versus the teachers and parents game, with the former arriving not in active wear but “his damn army fatigues and work boots” (275). Pops is confronted by the staff, concerned as they are about his boots ruining the hardwood, a situation he escalates by asking if “he should be punished for serving his damn country and was it really something to do with him being Mexican?” Ultimately, Pops and Miguel are allowed to participate, much to the embarrassment of the latter (“[Pops was] fouling the shit out of everybody who tried to dribble past him” and

scuffing up the hardwood floors) to the point that he eventually asks another boy to “come in for me so my dad would have to leave the court too” (275). Afterwards, in the locker room, some boys ask Miguel if that “crazy-ass Mexican army dude” was his dad but Miguel tells them that his father is dead, a lie that he has conflicting feelings about and which are difficult to ameliorate but nonetheless allows Miguel to briefly wonder what “it’d be like to have a different dad” (276). Miguel’s terse, regret-tinged recollection lends insight to his troubled relationship with his father: “Three months later he was sent to the war,” Miguel informs the reader, and a “full month after that a guy in full uniform came to our apartment to tell Moms the bad news”; afterwards, Miguel would find himself alone at the gym contemplating the nearly invisible scuffs, always present to him if not others, and his lie come true (276).

In Pops’ absence Diego assumes a paternal role for Miguel whom remains a complex attachment for the teen long after his older brother’s passing: Miguel performs and relies upon Diego’s example of toxic masculinity as a means of keeping his feelings of complicity in his brother’s death at bay. To say that Miguel adored his brother would be putting it blandly—he idolized him. In addition to being handsome, intelligent, athletic, and charismatic, Diego’s facility with people, whether smooth talking the school principal or manipulating female paramours (“Dude’s got more girls than there is hours in a day”), amazes Miguel to the point that he later confesses, “I used to try and be just like my brother. In every possible way. . . . Even copied the way he *walked*” (36, 186). This imitation extends to Diego’s violent, macho disposition, with Miguel learning how to fight both from his older brother’s counsel and first-hand via the frequent “scraps” the boys had and which play a large role in Diego’s accidental death. Anecdotes about Diego abound in the novel and frequently appear either in relation to Miguel’s current situation or Diego’s internalized voice emerging to discipline him. An example

of the latter, and the type of toxic masculinity his older brother embodied, occurs upon Miguel's arrival at the group home. Having spent some time in juvenile detention, the reality of Miguel's situation sets in upon arriving at the Lighthouse (a group home in San José), meeting Jaden (the group home supervisor), and seeing his new living quarters which has "like twenty sets of initials" carved into the bed: he was "[just] another random kid in their system ... a half-Mexican ghost ... I'd spend the year with a bunch of others ghosts ... until they said I could leave, and then I'd have to go haunt some other spot" (16-17). Distraught yet refusing to show it, Miguel becomes sick to his stomach while Jaden describes the Lighthouse's protocols and reviews his file, prompting him to excuse himself to the bathroom where he dry-heaves into the toilet. Teary-eyed and red-faced, he looks into the mirror to see "tears running down my stupid-ass face, man. I was crying like a bitch. I pictured Diego behind me pointing and laughing. Telling me I was mad soft" (19). "Look at your bitch ass," Miguel taunts his reflection and then proceeds to violently beat himself in an effort to regain composure before returning to Jaden. Miguel's adherence to a violent masculinity like Diego's forms the basis of an unlikely kinship with two other group home teens: Rondell Law, a large, slow-witted African American, and Mong, a small, sickly, skinny Chinese boy with scars on his face and a penchant for violence. Both boys physically beat Miguel, Rondell previously having done so in juvenile hall and Mong at Lighthouse in response to his blatant disrespect and each confrontation reveals something about his attacker. In Rondell's case, curious about his new cellmate, he queries Miguel about his journal. Having just written about him as a "straight up dumm[y]" in his journal, Miguel goes further to say as much to Rondell who, after pinning him to the floor by stepping on his neck and taking up the journal, but in this way Miguel learns that the large teen is illiterate as he says nothing of the rude comments (6). As for Mong, rather than an outright attack like Rondell's, the

Chinese boy spits on Miguel multiple times, smiling at him, and catches a thrown punch “in his bare hand and squeezed so hard I thought he was gonna break all my stupid fingers,” all while remaining calm which to Miguel makes him look like “a damn psycho” (24). And so when Mong presents an opportunity to escape the group home and live in Mexico as fisherman (a fantasy), he knows at the very least these boys are equal to the task—with Miguel stealing the Lighthouse’s petty cash as added assurance, in addition to the three boys’ resident files—although he claims to have little concern for his well-being (at one point he asks Mong to end his life). Recalling the relief on his mother’s face when she dropped him off at juvenile hall, Miguel’s uncertainty at leaving Lighthouse has less to do with his unwillingness to relieve his family’s pain and more to do with his own sense of abjection (as we will see), and a desire to do penance for Diego’s death.

As the boys begin their trek south from San Jose to, eventually, the US/Mexican border, it becomes apparent to the other characters (and the reader) that Miguel has a tenuous identification with the type of masculinity he performs—admitted only to his journal, the performance is a mask behind which he attempts to hide from his past. Stoic and terse with the other residents and refusing counseling, during Miguel’s short stay at the Lighthouse he opts for the solitude of the group home’s library and its books. Miguel’s penchant for reading has garnered him ridicule in the past, so much so that to avoid Diego’s criticism he would “sneak the shit—in the bathroom, under the covers, or I’d hide it inside a sports magazine. Trust me, where we’re from it ain’t cool to read no books unless some teacher’s making you” (38). Miguel takes up reading again as a means escaping where his thoughts would turn, “my moms or Diego,” turning instead to thinking “about the [fictional] character’s life and try[ing] to figure out what’s gonna happen”—a metanarrative moment in which de la Peña, speaking through Miguel to the young reader, aims to bolster identification with the protagonist and reading in general (40-41). It

is no accident that the first book Miguel reads is Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982). In an essay for NPR, de la Peña reveals that he was once a reluctant reader, but during his time at University of the Pacific he was introduced to the text and multicultural literature by an English professor and his response to the classic was similar to Miguel's: initially confused by Walker's use of English, he is eventually moved by the catharsis and hope that writing offers Celie to the point that the novel becomes his "favorite book ever" (40). "Even if it is mad nerdy," Miguel confesses, this is how he spends most of his free time at Lighthouse and after they escape, as compared to the other group home teens whom constantly watched hip-hop music videos. Expectedly then, Miguel's reading habits serve him just as well in Lighthouse as they did at home, but with a difference. While the other housemates brazenly declare the crimes they committed to end up at Lighthouse in a hypermasculine game of one-upmanship, Miguel refuses to participate; this in conjunction with his bookish tendencies leads the others to align him with a unserious crime and effeminate sensibilities: "Dude clipped a chain lock and rode off on some little girl's banana seat, handlebar tassels all blowin' in the wind," "Yo, it probably had a little basket in the front so he had a place to put his panties" (39). Of course, if the grave nature of Miguel's offence, even if accidental, were widely known it would place him beyond the ken of the other boys, yet, unwilling to accept or speak his reality, Miguel often remains quiet, wishing instead that he were indeed a bike thief. Later, after having left Lighthouse, Mong asks Miguel as to why he was sent there and the former describes the moment as an out of body experience wherein he watched from above as his body responds. Recall that the novel's epistolary form allows for Miguel to reflect on the moment and add nuance to his description; doing so allows Miguel to better illustrate his trauma as well as his perception of it. Partially eager to unburden himself, he opens his mouth but "nothing came out. And my chest felt hollow So hollow I

wasn't even in my own body anymore," leading to a moment of suspense where he does not know how his body will reply (123). Although Miguel's floating self "shook its head and whispered about what a little bitch-ass I was" when his body attempts to hide behind the bike thief story, ultimately, Miguel's refusal lies in his doubts about redemption. Recognizing that the floating part is his better, more optimistic self, he writes, "I didn't give a fuck about that part of my life"; instead, he chooses to cling to denial and silence as life rafts since "all I know is the only way I could go on living for even one more hour is if I kept everything exactly where it had to be" (123, 124).

Miguel's seclusion is intruded upon as the the teens' journey, an update to the common YA literary trope of conveniently absent parents combined with the road novel, specifically "its chance encounters and roguish characters," pushes them to interact in ways inconceivable at Lighthouse—providing an opening for Miguel to better understand Mong, Rondell, and himself ("The Road Novel"). Aided in their escape by Mong's older cousin, Mei-li, the trio are driven toward west San Francisco instead of south to first visit Mong's grandfather, a stipulation of her assistance, owing to an alluded sickness of Mong's. During their trek west Miguel is regaled by Mei-li with a Chinese "true love story" which visibly upsets Mong. The latter feigns willingness until arriving in San Francisco when he, along with Miguel and Rondell, sneak away during a lunch break to take a bus to Santa Cruz, and from there, to Malibu, using the stolen petty cash from Lighthouse. The plan altered, the teens decide to purchase supplies as they make their south, sleeping on the beach and walking when transportation is unavailable, but encounter trials along the way that illuminate much of their character. In a subsection titled, "Me and Rondell's Surprise Shopping Spree," Miguel describes how the group is aggressively racially profiled while shopping in a convenience store in Santa Cruz by an older white cashier who warns

Rondell that should he touch any fruit with his “grubby hands” he would be forced to purchase the lot, and asks Miguel if he has money, “And I’m not talkin’ ‘bout no pesos, either, compadre” (113). Turning his vitriol on Mong following the teen’s request for respect, the cashier is shocked when the Chinese boy instructs the others to take what they please and proceeds to assault and tie up the old man with Miguel looking on in disbelief and Rondell casually eating chocolate. Mong aims to add insult to injury by issuing a warning to the cashier which lets us into his mindset, if not that of the other boys as well: admonishing him to respect other people’s races, Mong adds that he should take care “Especially when the people you’re saying it to don’t have nothing to lose. Like us three” (115). Shaken by the event, Miguel ruminates on agency and self-imposed limitations, realizing that anyone can do anything, as they just did, as Mong always seems to do, whether that be at Lighthouse or beyond it, and although Miguel went along with the shoplifting he stopped short of hurting the cashier despite Mong’s insistence, showing shadows of his better self despite his previous assertion. When asked by Miguel why he feels as he does, Mong replies, “I have nothing to lose because nothing belongs to me,” “I think that we’re all just passing through in this life. We’re only temporary” (131). This bleak existential outlook confounds Miguel and illustrates the distance between the two; in other words, while Miguel may say (and write) that he does not care about himself or others, Mong’s actions speak much louder.

Context for Mong’s mindset and Rondell’s behavior comes shortly thereafter when Miguel turns to the stolen Lighthouse resident files and combines the revelations of Mong’s file with Mei-li’s “true love” story to paint a fuller, more sympathetic picture, illustrating traumatized lives that make his past and present behavior pale in comparison—a fact not lost on his friends. The child of an extraordinary singer and ambitious US-trained lawyer, Mong’s

family settled in the US and were living an affluent lifestyle afforded by his father's law practice when his mother was diagnosed with bipolar disorder. Although Mong flourished in school, Father became distraught as Mother emotionally deteriorated, leading him to move her entire family to California to create a support system, all to no avail. Despondent, Father wished for happiness in the next life, murdering Mother and shooting Mong in the face before committing suicide. Following successful surgeries, the 14-year-old Mong emerged "clinically depressed, severely antisocial, [with] suicidal tendencies," leading to a series of violent crimes (burning his Santa Monica home) and drug abuse and two years later, while living with extended family in northern California, at the age of 16 he was diagnosed with major kidney disease which requires dialysis every 48 hours (135). Shocked at the revelation, Miguel turns to Rondell's file which provides context for the violent crimes the latter has already divulged and confirms a suspicion he already held about the large teen's mental faculties: born to a crack-addicted mother, Rondell was born "extremely prematurely" with a small head circumference, "Mild learning disabilities," and had been raised by his religious grandmother until age 6 when she passed away. "Held back in first grade, again in third," Rondell dropped out of school halfway through fifth grade (136-137). Temporarily in foster care, he was later adopted by an aunt and her partner but ultimately removed due to suspicions of physical and sexual abuse, "Placed back in foster care" until sentenced to Juveline Hall at age 11 for assault which, in his words, was incited by "hearin' the devil": "In system ever since," arrested at 12, 13 for assault, "History of alcohol and substance abuse" (137). At the time of his first arrest, owing to the dramatic improvement of his health at puberty which made him much larger and stronger than national averages, Rondell was a nationally ranked Amateur Athletic Union basketball player. The use of direct quotes in the preceding descriptions of Mong and Rondell are drawn directly from their files as Miguel

inscribes them in his journal. Note the difference between the two descriptions though: Mong's description is inflected by and benefits from Mei-li's rendition of his parents' courtship, lending insight to the devastation he must have felt (and the melancholy he endures) when his world was upended, but there is no equivalent for Rondell save his limited descriptions of a "devil ... twist[ing] his thoughts," hence, the over reliance on the terse, clinical language found in his file (128). Barely able to read a few words from his own file, Miguel destroys all the files, frustrated that those files could live on beyond himself and his friends, bearing the only recording of their selves and given more authority due to the officious nature of their source. For troubled youth feeling defined by their misdeeds, Miguel's sentiment might echo their own: "If somebody wanted to know about us they should meet us face to face instead of relying on typed words" (138). Nevertheless, the information within the files changes Miguel's perspective of his fellow travelers, allowing him to admit (to himself via the journal, at least) that their lives are far more troubled than his own. Mong recognizes as much and reads Miguel without the benefit of his file, "You're a normal kid who did something very bad. And even though it was just a mistake, you're trying very hard not to forgive yourself.... And you're trying to convince yourself that you don't care," insights that stun Miguel and derail his typical "whatever" defense (183).

Mong's planned suicide (unbeknownst to Miguel and Rondell) sets the pair adrift, forcing the former to take on the role of older brother to his cognitively challenged friend, an upsetting circumstance as it recalls Diego's vacated role in his life. Eight days since his last dialysis session, Mong's decision (to say nothing of his ability) to wait until arriving in Malibu is in homage to the happier memories he had at a beach house his family previously rented and his love of the ocean. Only as Mong begins to wade into the surf fully clothed does Miguel begin to realize that he never intended on making it to Mexico. Confronted with Rondell's frantic

questions, Miguel has no answers as they watch Mong swim into the distance, watching long after he can no longer be seen. Distraught, Miguel collects his belongings to head south again and Rondell follows suit, marching along the beach “like a guy in the marines,” attempting to evoke a militant stoicism as a defense in the face of this emotional loss. (193). Hours pass before Miguel decides to explain the situation to Rondell. Looking back to finally do so reveals the large teen sobbing; uncomfortable with the vulnerability of another male crying and unwilling to allow himself to do the same, Miguel writes, “Don’t think about it. Look at the sand. These are your orders. This is what you’re supposed to do” according to Diego’s masculinity lessons (194). Over a day passes without the two speaking until Rondell inquires whether they are still planning on going to Mexico, leading Miguel to not answer and instead begin ruminating on their relative insignificance in the larger scheme of the world, equating a person’s sentiments with “a dog barking or a cat meowing,” a mindset reminiscent of Mong’s and perhaps influenced by his passing (206). Despite constantly complaining about Rondell’s lack of insight or common sense (for example, Rondell gives law enforcement his real name following the fracas at the convenience store), Miguel is surprised when he correctly senses an attempt to abandon him; it is only after the second repetition of a statement to the contrary that Miguel realizes that he will indeed remain with his loyal companion and the two head to the border town of San Ysidro by bus using the stolen petty cash. Although it remains inexplicable to him, Miguel begins reaching out to assure himself that he is not as alone as his depressed mindset would have him believe, calling his mother and hanging up upon hearing her say his name and obliquely notifying Jaden of Mong’s passing.

Miguel’s burgeoning sense of himself as a capable young man akin to Diego compels him to abandon his flight to Mexico given its special meaning for him to instead face his troubles

according to his means. Looking through the border fence, Miguel recalls a map of the country his father put in his room but the description serves as a metaphor for his insecurities regarding his racial self-perception: “I’ve never actually looked at it. Not really. Once I remember pulling up the bottom corner and tripping out on how much whiter the white paint underneath was. But mostly it just hangs there in the background, hardly visible, hardly registering in my mind” (216). Miguel, as a light-skinned male, pays little heed to his family’s culture or how his appearance might hail him to it, recognizing that although he looks Mexican (indeed, Rondell’s nickname for Miguel is “Mexico”) he is far whiter underneath—a repetition of his grandfather’s earlier estimation. This sense of himself leaves him transfixed when, while watching the traffic and numerous street vendors, he sees a vendor of clay suns that is approximately his age. In a scene that recalls and departs from Richard’s experience with the *braceros* in *Hunger of Memory*, as the two teens stare at each other Miguel gets simultaneously swept up by a sense of recognition (“I was Mexican. Like him. Like my pops and my gramps”) and guilt at his privilege of living in the US (“Just ‘cause my mom is white”), a luxury dearly and illegally attained by his grandfather and one for which his father died (218).³⁰ Associating value with something strived for and achieved, Miguel feels like a “poser” staring at his Mexican counterpart, leading him to inform Rondell that he cannot cross the border because he does not “deserve it” the way his grandfather and father did, making his flight across the border the ultimate sign of his privilege (218, 219).

This decision and the subsequent one to return the stolen petty cash which they had been subsiding on marks a fundamental shift for Miguel—although there have been indications beyond a confession to the journal that Miguel took issue with the toxic masculine

³⁰ Here Miguel is conflating whiteness with citizenship when he posits that his mother’s appearance underwrites their relative Americanness.

representations of Diego and Mong this is the first time that he aims to take responsibility for his actions and make amends—a budding sign of maturity. Even Diego’s spectral hold on Miguel begins to wane. At the start of his fleeting romance with Flaca, a young Mexican American girl, Miguel moves from “saying shit straight out of Diego’s playbook”—largely performing superiority and appearing disinterested—such that his act would have made him “proud as shit. Or jealous even,” to a quiet confidence based on his own sincerity and vulnerability (254). Although this is not Miguel’s first romantic encounter he sincerely doubts the legitimacy of his prior experiences as they were all facilitated by Diego (“He probably *told* ‘em to hook up with me”), however, Flaca’s interest in Miguel and his own desire for a connection prompts him to disclose the details of his circumstances (minus Diego’s death, of course), eliciting a sympathetic response and a promise to meet the following night in the baseball park where the boys were temporarily staying (254). The heady elation of the connection is short lived, however, as Flaca and her friends steal the remaining petty cash—penniless and homeless, this situation is compounded by Miguel’s responsibility to/for Rondell and his feelings of failure in that regard—leading the teens to scam people for donations for an imaginary basketball team in order to subsist as they return north, but Miguel is nonetheless changed owing to Flaca’s reply to his confession. Of course, we could see her response as a calculated ploy to lower his guard as she and her friends prepared to steal the teens’ cash, but she seems genuinely dumbfounded at the Miguel’s circumstance and echoes Mong’s earlier assessment of him as a “normal kid who did something very bad”:

She shook her head, staring right back in my eyes. “It’s just so weird,” she said.

“What?”

“You totally don’t seem like that. My whole life I’ve been around kids who get in trouble. And they’re all a certain way. You seem so different” (266).

As Flaca walks away Miguel contemplates how Diego would have chastised him for opening up like this “Or leaning in to kiss her,” as the prevailing rule is to be uninterested and emotionally unavailable, but rather than linger on such concerns he metaphorically breaks with his older brother’s masculine performance to consider a potential relationship with the girl, interrupting the previous thoughts as he “picked up a stick, broke it in half and tossed both pieces to the ground” (268). Indeed, as the remainder of the novel shows this is Miguel’s major first step toward overcoming both his grief and toxic notions of masculinity and his next step will prove just as difficult.

On their trek north, the teens stop at the site of Mong’s final swim in Santa Monica, a moment which for Miguel crystalizes a number of the experiences he has had since leaving Lighthouse and helps him see the benefit of the “here and now” and the prospect of the future over remaining trapped in his traumatic past. While sitting in front of the beach house Mong’s father used to rent for “just the two of them,” Miguel contemplates the life his friend had before tragic circumstances consumed it (314). Doing so allows him to see why that place held such significance for Mong—so much so that he planned his suicide to occur there—and allows Miguel to finally appreciate his relative fortune; that although he was still homeless and poor and did not have a “family that wanted me anymore,” he was not terminally ill and had a life to live (318). Miguel comes to this realization as he and Rondell, both poor swimmers, head out into the ocean’s whitewater. Lost in the sensation of rising with the coming swells, the epiphanic moment nears euphoria as Miguel nearly begins to nearly hyperventilate not “’cause I was scared about being so deep or nothing. It was ‘cause at that exact moment I felt so damn happy to be alive and

breathing and free” (317). “Living in the moment” was a mindset previously unavailable to Miguel, trapped as he was in thinking about his traumatic past, but now “for the first time in forever I was looking forward to the next day instead of feeling depressed” (318). Miguel’s newfound outlook, combined with his need to atone for stealing the petty cash, fortifies him enough to reach out to his grandparents in Fresno for field work, another experience through which he will grow and finally confront his trauma.

The manual labor Miguel performs, rife with ramifications for his burgeoning ethnic identity, operates as a metaphor for working through his melancholy to mourning, an endeavor in which he is aided by his grandparents and Rondell. Anxious at the response Miguel’s arrival will garner as he has not spoken to his grandparents since the accident, the terse welcome offered by his grandfather does little to alleviate these feelings, nevertheless, the teens are offered shelter and work. The final section of Miguel’s journal begins with him weary from a hard day’s work, so much so in fact that he barely completes the entry, but, writing, atop an old bale of hay in an abandoned horse shed beneath the faint glow of a single dull lightbulb, he cuts the image of a working-class artist even if “the back part of my knees and between my fingers were sore as hell” (323). Having only learned the morning of their arrival that grandfather and his crew switched from field picking to landscaping (Fresno’s farmlands being transformed into real estate), Miguel’s fear of disappointing his grandfather (“Gramps”) grows. Recall that for Miguel working in the fields signifies more than simply earning money—manual labor, as indicated in his earlier retelling of a summer spent in Fresno, serves as an indicator of his racial identity and masculinity (shades of Richard Rodriguez’s *Hunger for Memory* to follow)—and so he is desperate to not come off as a “blonde boy from Beverly Hills with no heart” (327). The backbreaking labor does not spare Miguel, however, as when he gets teamed up with Gramps to

dig irrigation lines, the latter picking the dirt as Miguel follows to clear it. Unable to keep the older man's pace, he watches Gramps "shake his head and sigh, toss down his pick and grab a shovel" to clear the loose dirt, an embarrassment only surpassed by Miguel's anxiety at his Gramp's reception as the final sentence of the workday description indicates: "He didn't even look at me the whole time"—indicating to Miguel that he can never escape his past (crime) or overcome his ethnic/masculine lack (325). The following day Rondell and Miguel are tasked with removing a dead tree which, despite their best efforts, stubbornly resists them. "The minute I'd think we had it surrounded I'd bang my shovel into another fat root," Miguel laments, as much at their progress as his own efforts, seeing himself as lesser than the other Mexican workers that steadily worked while he struggled, nearly causing him to quit, but he resolves to prove he is not "a punk" and steadily cuts into the root, eventually breaking it in two (327). The next day Miguel builds on this success and inexplicably locks into a rhythm, matching his breathing with shovel stabs, which alleviates the strain of the work so that he can see himself as part of the workforce transforming the land, "We were all our own people but we were one" a revelation that drives Miguel to work harder than he ever has and allows him to bask in a sense of belonging as the other workers, including Gramps, recognize his efforts: "it felt like I was supposed to be there. All the Mexican guys were joking around with each other in Spanish and a couple of them even joked with me and Rondell. Who cares if I couldn't understand. I laughed my ass off anyway" (333). As the land is being transformed, so is Miguel, except in his case it has been the summer's experiences which have changed him, yet there remains a metaphorical and literal dead tree to dig up.

Miguel's workdays are punctuated by the nightly visits his grandmother makes, visits which console and coax him into confronting his past by finally confessing the circumstances of

Diego's death to Rondell and accepting his brother's tragic passing. The nightly visits are incredibly brief and not much is said but they rife with emotion as Grandma tries to console her grandson. Her plaintive, mournful inquiry "*Mijo*, are you okay, honey?" stirs up Miguel's emotions so much that he describes his eyes "getting all this pressure on 'em," a pressure nearly overcome when she begins silently crying but he "clenched up his whole body so nothing would come out," less out of disdain for showing emotion but more to stop a flood of emotion from surging (328-29). Assuring him that both she and Gramps are happy to see him, Grandma goes further by embracing Miguel in a way that for the teens seems to say, "I was still her grandson, even after everything I did, and it made me feel sick," this despite her saying that she feels terribly about the accident and the toll it is taking on him (330). Rondell observes all of this and queries Miguel to no avail, although the latter is "so tired of keeping shit to myself" (331). Miguel's obstinate refusal to address his trauma mirrors the tree's unyielding nature, a point not lost on one of the Gramps' friends who, inquiring about the deep roots, sagely states, "Sometimes roots are like that. Very deep. Much deeper than people can see.... Like life" (334). Missing the point, the roots of Miguel's trauma begin to show upon Grandma's second visit to the shed when she refers to Diego in the past tense, eliciting waves of nausea for Miguel who, for the first time, does the same, "I loved him too," but it is apparent that she is more pressingly concerned for him as she attempts to console him and assert that it was an accident, "I'm just so sorry for you, Miguel.... It's too much ... for a boy to take. I pray for you every night to be okay. But I don't know" (336).

After her departure, an exasperated Miguel turns on the dumbfounded Rondell and finally lets his mask fall away, revealing the depth of his abjection. Sobbing, Miguel describes a quotidian after school scene: watching TV, he refuses to give his older brother the remote to

change the channel. Diego, sitting in their father's old chair and long having assumed the role of man of the house, refuses to be denied and rises to take it until Miguel flings it at him, both boys laughing all the while as "we *always* mess around like this after school. It's our ritual" (338). And just as ritualistic is the challenge to superiority which Miguel brings to Diego when, encased in a headlock and told to scream "Mercy," Miguel, for the first time, frees himself from his older brother's grip and sees himself anew in the pseudo-Oedipal struggle—"Better watch it, D ... One day I'm gonna mess around and make *you* say mercy" (339). Elated, Diego chases Miguel into the kitchen where the former, coyly brandishing a kitchen knife, is fallen upon by his older brother, the knife entering his chest. Miguel's remaining retelling of the incident is evocative of the subject's confrontation with the abject. A complex term introduced by Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror* (1982), the one definable trait of the "abject" is "being opposed to *I*" in the psychoanalytic sense, or as Kidd puts it, that which "points to a real or perceived collapse between subject and object, or self and Other" (1; 174); for Miguel, the horror of bearing witness to Diego's death (his transition from subject to object and the confrontation with death) is compounded by his accidental role in it. Miguel's ensuing description becomes a temporal jigsaw as he careens between his initial response ("scream[ing] like a little girl," "scooping [Diego's blood] and trying to push it back in him," and finding the TV remote), the arrival of law enforcement with sound and meaning intermittently going out (he cannot hear his own screams nor can he understand the emergency personnel), ending with his shock at being left at the police station by his mother, his actions having made him abject in her eyes and, subsequently, his own (341, 342).

This sense of abjection, the source of Miguel's initial antisocial and pseudo-suicidal proclivities at the novel's outset, is figuratively confronted and ameliorated with the assistance of

Rondell, building as it does on the groundwork set by the former's grandparents. Attempting to understand Miguel's action in relation to his own, Rondell suggests his friend was a pawn of the devil, sending Miguel into a verbally ("You fuckin' illiterate!") and physically violent rage at the attempt to elide his culpability—a rage Rondell accordingly blames on the devil—until he is pinned to the ground via a shoe on his neck (345). Miguel, motivated by his sense of abjection (devil) claims that he "deserve[s]" to be killed for his actions and asks Rondell to crush his neck but his friend refuses and asserts the opposite, providing him a moment to contemplate the lessons learned over the course of the summer (i.e. letting go of the past, living in the present, and his meaningful connection with others). "Then I woke up," Miguel recalls, a literal and figurative description, watching as Rondell sat wiping blood from his face, for which Miguel sobbingly apologizes, realizing that he was also saying it to "Diego and to my moms and to my grandma and grandpa. And even to me" for how he has hurt these people beyond the accident through his absence and withdrawal (346). The labor, physical and emotional, of overcoming his melancholy over Diego's death and his own sense of abjection, mirrors that which he and Rondell put into digging out the tree, and so upon the duo's arrival at the worksite the following day Miguel is shocked when he "barely put [his] pick under the tree and the thing fell over on its side" (347). "Told you about those roots," Gramps' friend observes, suggesting that the "long and thick and deep" roots uncovered needed to be severed before felling the tree; similarly, an indirect approach to Miguel's trauma via his experiences with Mong and Rondell, a self-examination of his ethnic masculinity, in conjunction with his grandparent's undiminished affection for him, served as foundations from which he could address his melancholy and abjection (347).

Although this is a monumental breakthrough, Miguel realizes that he must return to Lighthouse to “do my time and figure my shit out,” returning us to the concept of temporality (348). Recall that at the novel’s/journal’s outset Miguel explains that in addition to spending a year at the group home he is to chronicle the experience to lend insight to the on-site counselor. Having only spent weeks at the Lighthouse (13 May to 16 July), Miguel’s escape temporarily halts this legislated, semi-incarcerated time intended to help him and his family cope with the traumatic loss of Diego. Miguel, in a sense, moves beyond time from 16 July to 13 September as during this period he is beyond the reach of the State and its rehabilitative efforts, or to use Dana Luciano’s apropos example here, by prolonging his access to private (extralinear) time he halts the future directedness of public (linear) time. Although he did not embark on his journey to work through his feelings over the loss of Diego, arguably, Miguel’s time spent away from Lighthouse and the experiences he had were more productive than any of the counseling sessions he might have had if he stayed, indicating the essential nature of sideways growth. Miguel’s return at the novel’s end (with stolen petty cash in hand) signals the restarting of his time at the Lighthouse but now that period can be more productive owing to his time away. Of course, his return is marked with conflicting feelings over his past deeds and his future as he continues to ruminate on the irrevocable nature of Diego’s death, yet Miguel nevertheless existentially resolves to “make good with the rest of [his]life” with a series of actions he “Might as well” complete, like his mandated counseling, his book, and talking to his Mom, understanding that nothing is promised but remaining optimistic all the same (348).

From a Chicano studies perspective, part of what makes de la Peña’s representation of Miguel in *We Were Here* so interesting is the character’s engagement with his Mexican-American identity. Issues of assimilation and authenticity have long preoccupied Chicano

literature; one need only look to the texts (*Pocho*, *George Washington Gómez*, and *Hunger for Memory*) discussed in previous chapters to see that this is the case. *We Were Here* treads very similar ground, but with difference. Although the novel is ostensibly centered on the traumatic loss of his brother, through the series of events that comprise Miguel's summer he works through his hitherto ambivalent acknowledgement of his heritage and conflicted relationships to the men in his family, experiences which eventually help him leave his melancholic outlook in the past. Miguel, unlike those other male predecessors, contends with a biracial identity, tethered as it is to his heterosexual masculinity, and in this way partially aligns with Cherrie Moraga's queer ruminations on the same in *Loving in the War Years* (1983). A Chicana feminist and one of the heralds of Hernandez's postnational, Moraga's confessional writing about her vacillating identification with her ethnic identity and lesbian longings spoke to a world of difference beyond the Chicano Movement's narrow view. Moraga, along with Miguel, are "representations of anomalous states," as Hernandez puts it, with neither bending to the politics of representation. In other words, Miguel is not cast from the same mold as Antonio Marez, the protagonist of one of Chicano literature's most beloved novels, Rudolfo Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima* (1972). Both novels trace the growth of their respective protagonists, but unlike Antonio Miguel is flawed (think of Homer's Hector as a child). He is withdrawn, occasionally violent, and biracial to boot. And this is where the novel becomes interesting from a children's and young adult studies perspective; in reading both novels the young reader finds models for grappling with the trials of growing up, "los luchas" like ethnic identification as Cofer aptly description, but, with de la Peña's novel the young reader is also privy to the example of a boy working through his grief with the assistance of others. *We Were Here*'s powerful message of redemption would resonate

with a young reader who thinks him/herself lost and could bring solace to a melancholic reader experiencing personal loss.

Sustaining Trauma to Discover the Secrets of the Universe: *Aristotle and Dante*

Benjamin Alire Sáenz's award-winning novel, *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* (2012), continues the postnational trend of representing Mexican American identity without "situate[ing] an essence or a 'Chicano' character within" the novel. Winner of the Stonewall Book Award, the Pura Belpré Award, and the Lambda Literary Award, among others, *Aristotle and Dante* is narrated by Aristotle ("Ari") Mendoza, a teenager in 1987 El Paso, Texas, and follows his friendship with Dante Quintana as they struggle with their ethnic and queer identities. The novel beautifully captures the liminal quality of adolescence and describes it for a young reader perhaps searching for such: "I knew I wasn't a boy anymore. But I still felt like a boy. Sort of. But there were things I was starting to feel. Man things, I guess.... I was changing into someone I didn't know" (81). In the midst of this becoming, a growth circumscribed by parental delay, Ari must contend with what he calls the "many ghosts in our house—the ghost of my brother, the ghosts of my father's war, the ghosts of my sister's voices. And I thought that maybe there were ghosts inside of me that I hadn't even met yet. They were there. Lying in wait" (93). Ari's family is wracked by trauma and he personally, along with Dante, experiences traumatizing events, however, contrary to the normative paths outlined in Tribunella's study, these youths are not made subject to society through the sacrificial loss of their beloved objects, namely, each other and their burgeoning homosexual longing. Instead, the teen boys steadfastly cling to each other to weather the storm of their adolescence—one fearing

and denying his feelings while the other fears his parents response—their trials and perseverance serving as lessons for Ari’s parents to address their own issues, and perhaps, young readers.

Aristotle and Dante, like *We Were Here* and a score of Chicano literary predecessors, ruminates on ethnic identity, an issue that holds more valence for Dante than Ari owing largely to their class difference, a widely overlooked aspect of intersectional identities which the text draws on to expand Mexican American representation.³¹ The only child of career professionals, Sam is an English professor and Soledad is a psychologist, Dante’s parents’ lives are a far cry from their humble beginnings (“my dad’s parents were born in Mexico. They live in a little house in East LA and they speak no English and own a restaurant”) such that Dante has difficulty relating to his extended family, especially his impoverished cousins who seem to resent him (87-88). “It’s like my mom and dad created a whole new world for themselves,” Dante explains, lamenting that he does not understand “the old world, the world they came from” and, subsequently, he feels as though he does not “belong anywhere” (88). As such, Dante bristles at but acknowledges himself to be a *pochó*, a “half-ass Mexican” according to Ari, owing to a lack of cultural knowledge (like the tendency toward morose first names and the logic of nicknames, for example, *how* Soledad becomes Chole) and mediocre Spanish speaking skills (45). Taking this in, it becomes clear to Ari (and the reader) how different Dante’s experience of Mexican American life is, a difference that flies in the face of common stereotypes. Ari matter-of-factly states his surprise upon meeting Sam Quintana at the family’s home, “I didn’t know [Mexican American professors] existed,” and marvels at someone having an in-home office, being much more familiar with people like Dante’s grandparents (restaurateurs) or his parents, Lilliana (teacher) and Jaime (postal worker) (24). These feelings of awe continue as the boys ascend to

³¹ As Maxine Hong Kingston writes questions regarding Chinese American identity in *The Woman Warrior* (1975), “how do you separate what is peculiar to childhood, to poverty, insanities, one family, your mother who marked your growing with stories, from what is Chinese? What is Chinese tradition and what is the movies?” (5-6).

Dante's room, "a big room with high ceilings and wood floors.... There was stuff everywhere. Clothes ... old albums ... books ... legal pads ... a couple of cameras ... sheet music" and a desk (27). Shocked at the disarray, Ari suggests the mess would not exist "if you didn't have so many things," a comment steeped in class consciousness as indicated by the Dante's naive reply, "It's just stuff," and Ari's internalized response, "I didn't say anything. I didn't have stuff," and his later thought on Dante's desk: "A desk. A real desk. When I had to write something, I used the kitchen table" (27-28, 30). Dante's obliviousness to his class privilege is made apparent when he visits Ari at home for the first time, calling the bare-walled room monastic, prompting the latter to list the few items present in defense, but ultimately these accidental slights are moved past as the boys choose to focus on other matters, "the ghosts" of their lives.

That Ari and Dante become friends at all is unexpected; closed off and insulated from dominant forms of adolescent masculinity, the teens, loners, have difficulty finding belonging. For Ari's part, the most detailed owing to his position as narrator, a number of "ghosts" crop up. Seeking relief from the heat of summer, Ari treks to the local pool despite not knowing how to swim and is pleasantly surprised when Dante offers to teach him how. On his way to the pool, however, he endures taunts from a group of neighborhood boys, a regular occurrence; undaunted, he flips "them the bird," confident that he can defend himself from the primary antagonist (whose brother Ari previously beat up) and the boys quickly leave (13). Ruminating on why he does not fit in with the other boys at school is something of a past time for Ari. "I watched them. Studied them," he states, finding them uninteresting and disgusting (and refuses Lilliana's suggestion that it is just a phase), and yet, although Ari wonders if this makes him superior he cannot help but feel "stupid and inadequate" in their presence despite his best efforts to fit in (sports and Boy Scouts) (22). Worse yet is that Ari does not think that he can discuss these

feelings with the men in his life: his older brother, Bernardo, or Jaime, his father. Boy Scouts, originally and to this day, are seen as a way to mold youth, a tool brought to bear on young Ari owing to the incarceration of Bernardo (having unknowingly hired a transvestite prostitute at the age of 15, he beats her to death upon learning the truth), a tale kept from Ari.³² Knowing full well that he is paying for his brother's crimes, Ari is exasperated after a year and is offered terse responses from Jaime when he tells him he is quitting the Scouts: "I think you're making a mistake," and, upon his son suggesting he will take up marijuana if forced to return, "It's your life" (23). Frustrated with his father, he complains to Lilliana who explains that before the Vietnam war "your father was beautiful" but his experiences changed him, remain with him (11). A quiet man given to bouts of sadness, the trauma of war remains with Jaime and its ripple effect is felt by Ari, compounding his other issues: "So I was the son of a man who had Vietnam living inside him. Yeah, I had all kinds of tragic reasons for feeling sorry for myself. Being fifteen didn't help" (14). As the only child of highly-educated parents, Dante has a similar, albeit different barrier to finding companionship. Unable to access the world of his parents' past (i.e. rejected by his cousins) he makes a world of their present, taking full advantage of their resources to expand his horizons. An extremely intelligent teen, the precocious Dante's personality is anathema to his peers but, luckily, he can discuss the matter with his father who assures him "you're an intellectual. That's who you are. Don't be ashamed of that" (35). Nevertheless, as Dante confesses to a sympathetic Ari, "I'm trying not to be ashamed," a confession that works to bind the two together beyond the swimming lessons (35).

Catastrophe and traumatic events serve as fulcrums to unravel the secrets of these teens' universes, especially Ari's tenuous relationship with Jaime and his closeted homosexual longing.

³² For more on the history of the Boy Scouts and its predecessor, the Woodcraft Indians, see Kent Baxter's "Playing Indian: The Rise and Fall of the Woodcraft Indian Movements," *The Modern Age: Turn-of-the-Century American Culture and the Invention of Adolescence* (2011): 93-115.

Taken sick with a debilitating flu (in the middle of summer, no less, making it an insult to injury), he is cared for by his parents with Jaime in particular showing a gentleness long forgotten by his son: “My dad picked me up and rocked me in the chair,” Ari notes, an experience he isn’t sure he has had before “and why didn’t I remember,” he wonders (61). Feverish dreams come to Ari where, amid a drenching thunderstorm he is lost, looking for Dante, and then his father, leading him to wonder if “he’d been as beautiful as Dante. And I wondered why I thought that” (63)—this, among other instances, serving as indications of his subconscious/denied homosexual desire. Studying his son as he slept, Jaime tells Ari he was talking in his sleep and heard his son’s cries. The following day Jaime apologizes for being “so being so far away,” and, despite Ari’s attempts to assuage his father’s regret, he tells him it’s not okay and that he also has bad dreams, a symptom of post traumatic stress disorder, an incredibly brief exchange that means the world to Ari: “All I did was smile at him. He’d told me something about himself. I was happy” (66). Dante regularly visits Ari as he recovers, a welcome distraction from his illness as “being sick made me feel fragile, like I might break. I didn’t like feeling like that. Laughing made me feel better”—the novel is ripe throughout with allusions and foreshadowing of Ari’s homosexuality, “breaking” here potentially alluding to a softness often aligned with gay identities (and their linkage with feminine qualities), something he is not ready to accept and the potential breaking of the barrier that keeps him from doing so (73). Ari indeed gets well over time, but this is short-lived as he quickly returns to the sickbed, this time, seriously injured. Having returned to Dante’s home after swimming at the pool, Dante informs Ari of his family’s temporary move to Chicago (Sam having secured a one-year visiting professor appointment), a revelation that deeply upsets Ari: “It felt like someone punched me,” yet, he refuses to voice these feelings as it would reveal his attachment to his friend (106).

Limited to repeating the phrase “that’s great,” Ari faintly registers Dante’s conflicted feelings to his response when the pair notice an injured bird in the road which the latter rushes to rescue (106). “That’s the last thing I remember,” Ari recalls—aside from his internalized screams of “*Dante! Dante!*”—as he awakens in the hospital, dazed by pain medication and surrounded by his parents whom inform him of his injuries (107). Having pushed Dante out of harm’s way, “You took a dive like you were in a swimming pool” as his friend describes it, the car ran over Ari’s legs, fracturing them and necessitating over 30 hours of surgery to be followed by weeks of rehabilitation (116). Despite the heroic, self-sacrificing intent of his actions Ari chafes at the praise heaped on him and protests comments on his bravery made by his parents, the Quintanas, and the medical staff, calling the act an unconscious response. “I didn’t do it on purpose,” he tells Dante (to the laughter of all present), a point he expands upon when talking to his surgeon, Dr. Charles: “It was just a reflex, you know, like when someone hits your funny bone below the knee. Your leg just jerks” (122). Feeling responsible, an emotional Dante thanks Ari but the latter—hesitant and desperate to forestall thinking about what his actions mean—makes his friend promise to abide by the following rules: not to discuss the accident, to stop thanking him, to accept that Dante is in no way responsible, and agreeing to leave the accident behind them. With the Quintana’s moving away for the year, the boys agree to keep in touch via mail and phone calls, a period apart that lets them grow in different ways.

Before, during, and after this time Ari exercises intensely and consistently, perhaps as a means of obviating perceptions of a possible queer identity by relying on stereotypes of feminine, weak bodies, but the activity also serves as a means of escape, from himself and narrative time. After getting the casts off his legs and completing physical therapy, second and third on his list of “what my life is now” are: “lifting weights in the basement” and “running with

Legs [his newly adopted stray dog]" (195). These activities, alongside others (studying and working part-time), allow him to avoid "feeling sorry for myself" and overly contemplating his life, but attention to when he engages these physical activities and how he manipulates (intentionally or not) the assumptions of his bulked-up body (196). Visited at home one night by a classmate and recreational drug user, Charlie Escobedo, Ari politely, if not snidely, declines the former's invitation to taking narcotics, a refusal which for Charlie serves as occasion for lashing out. Calling him a "*pinchi joto*," or "fucking fag," Charlie identifies Ari's unwillingness to partake in the dangerous activity with unmanliness, and baselessly goes further by calling him "Mr. *Gabacho*," a Mexican slur for white people (205). Charlie's logic confuses Ari, less for the homosexual accusation than the ethnic slur and responds by performing authenticity in a hypermasculine manner: telling the "*vato*," Mexican slang for "man," to find someone else to drugs with, Ari sarcastically flips around the gay accusation by offering to kiss Charlie and offers to fight the latter when he gets offended (205-206). Charlie abruptly leaves and Ari, eager to not overthink the interaction, moves on. "The months sort of ran together," Ari relates, "School was okay. I studied. I worked out. I ran with Legs," a statement that indicates his routine as well as the passage of time—by the end of the school year a friend tells him "all that working out has turned you into a hunk"—but later in the novel exercise becomes more than self-imposed distancing from a stereotypically gay body and turns into a strategy to slow and stop narrative time.

During their time apart, the teens begin "you know, discovering the secrets of the universe," experimenting with, among other things (alcohol and marijuana), their sexuality for similar reasons but with varying results (207). The beginning of the school year finds Aristotle on the mend with casts on both legs when a girl, Ileana, comes up and signs one of them. "She

looked into my eyes,” Ari states, explaining how he was unable to look away, riveted as he was to her mystery (166). The preceding could be read as the early stirrings of heterosexual desire but the following and what later ensues shows it to be desperate curiosity and ghostly maneuvers. Ari, upon being gifted a beautiful pick-up truck on his sixteenth birthday, wishes to take it out into the desert with Bernardo and Dante, but when thoughts turn to his friend he doubles back, admitting that he missed Dante yet he tries very hard not to think about his friend lest those thoughts turn to his queer desire—“Dante. For some reason I thought of Ileana” (169). His conflicted feelings continue to manifest themselves in his dreams, this time, however, he trades Jaime for Ileana in thinking about Dante. Recalling the car accident from the summer, in his dreams Ari is now positioned as the driver with Ileana as his passenger; however, this time no one is there to save Dante when Ari, smiling at Ileana, comes charging down the road. Having heard him call out “Dante” in the night, Lilliana queries Ari about the dream but the latter does not confess that his negligence (read here as heterosexual charade) causes his accidental collision with Dante (169). Writing in a journal, Ari ponders over the logic of his dreams: “If dreams come from nowhere, then what does it mean that I ran over Dante? What does it mean that I had that dream again? ... I don’t want to think about this” (180). The hope that this heterosexual dalliance can put his feelings about Dante to rest, unfortunately, goes unfulfilled for although he pursues Ileana and experiences his first kiss with her she is ultimately unavailable (in a relationship with a local gang member, she is also pregnant and drops out of school). This, however, does not clear up Ari’s confusion about his feelings; instead he recognizes that perhaps he made too much of the kiss and vows to “become the world’s most casual kisser” (224).

In somewhat similar fashion, Dante learns more about himself through kissing as well. Acclimating well to life in Chicago, Dante writes letters to Ari (the bulk of which go

unanswered) and describes how he has begun socializing with classmates and attending crowded parties where teens provide him access to alcohol and marijuana. “We were like roaches!” Dante gushes, and somehow ends up meeting an interesting girl with whom he has his first kissing session but, even though she seems genuinely interested in him, Dante is hesitant as indicated by the end of his letter: “I’m still thinking about that kiss.... I’m not sure about all of this” (175, 176). Or is he? In the final letter of the summer Dante opens with a rebuke to his friend for not being a better pen-pal (“Seven to one”) and threatens to drown him when he returns in three weeks but promises to “give you mouth to mouth and revive you. How does that sound? *Sounds good to me*. Am I freaking you out yet?” (225 emphasis added). Dante goes on to explain that the “girl I’ve been experimenting with” asked if he imagines another person when they kiss (a guilty conscious on her part as she has been trying to make another boy jealous) and when he responds in the affirmative she goes further to inquire if it is a boy or girl, “a very interesting and forward question,” Dante admits and confesses that it is a “good-looking boy” (225-226). This realization, and the knowledge of needing to come out to his parents and Ari, causes much anxiety for Dante especially since he cares for and respects them so much. “I wonder how that’s going to go over. I’m the only son. What’s going to happen with the grandchildren thing? I hate that I’m going to disappoint them, Ari. I know I’ve disappointed you,” indicating how much he assumes this to be a foregone conclusion, so much so that he gives Ari permission to end their friendship (227). Dante has already drafted a speech but plans to revise it as “it sounds too needy. I hate that.... I have more self-respect than that,” showing that although he is resolute in his decision to embrace his homosexual identity he fears the potentially negative response he could get, hence his hedging questions like the postscript that ends the letter: “It would be very

weird not to be friends with the guy who saved your life, don't you think? Am I breaking the rules?" (228).

Ari, of course, does not respond, not until he is asked in person upon Dante's return to El Paso in an exchange that highlights their fundamentally different positions. Assuring Dante that they will always be friends, Ari's reply to his friend's promise to "never lie to you about anything" is the tongue-in-cheek "I might lie to you" (242). Both teens are secretly fond of rules for the authority they bestow the giver and the opportunity to have an opinion go uncontested, which the other interrogates nevertheless, but the stipulations they make going forward sow the seeds for the challenges of their friendship with Ari demanding the Dante not attempt to kiss him and the latter's rule is "a question of loyalty," a promise to remain friends in the wake of his coming out and the potential strife it could bring (248). Ari agrees, commenting that Dante's rule is the more difficult one to follow while the latter argues the point, all but declaring his feelings for his friend: "all you have to do is be loyal to the most brilliant guy you've ever met.... I, on the other hand, have to refrain from kissing the greatest guy in the universe" (249). This rule is promptly broken, however, as a shared kiss becomes a litmus test for Dante's homosexuality, a moment rife with implications for the boys. Ari, although he is posing questions to Dante, is also asking them of himself as he watches his friend's growing anxiety and fear over coming out to his parents. Consoling a sobbing Dante, Ari assures him that he is not disappointed and that his parents will not be either, but Ari questions if they should even be told, asking "What if you fall in love with a girl?", pointing to his previous efforts with Ileana, but Dante assures him that no such thing would happen (252). Dante, perhaps taking his suggestion to heart or simply taking the opportunity, suggests that the two, as best friends, "try an experiment" (255). "Look, it's just a kiss. You know. And then we'll both know," Dante coaxes Ari, who indeed is darkly aware of

his own desires as he responds, “We already know”— know that heterosexual pairings will not negate the teens’ homosexual longings and that their suggested kiss will validate feelings Ari is not ready to have (255). Ari’s voiced refusal, however, is in direct contrast to his actions, as when Dante tells him to stand, he does immediately, all the while internally thinking, “I don’t know why I did it, but I did it. I stood up” (255). Eyes closed, the boys kiss with Ari responding to Dante’s kiss but pulling back when it becomes more intense, refusing to accept his feelings and telling Dante as much when asked, “Didn’t work for me” (255). “Okay. It sure worked for me,” Dante confesses but immediately registers Ari’s sexual confusion and anger and apologizes but the context of the moment overwhelms him—in love with his best friend, Dante’s hope of having someone to face a queer new world with is dashed and his attempt may have damaged their friendship. Told from Ari’s perspective, the closing exchange depicts how he tries to police Dante’s masculinity along normative lines as well as his own:

“Don’t cry, okay?”

“Okay,” he said.

“You’re crying.”

“I’m not.”

“Okay.”

“Okay.” (256)

It takes a few days for the boys to contact each other as “It took a while for the ghost of that kiss to disappear,” Ari explains, and the boys attempt to resume their summer plans (working part-time jobs and hanging out) but tragedy strikes once again, this time on both fronts in ways that push the boys and their families to contend with the ghosts in their lives.

Called to Tucson to pay final respects to a beloved aunt, Ari and Jaime (Lilliana already being there) make the trip, discussing the woman's esteemed role in their family and in the process break through the silences the family has cultivated as a means of hiding their personal struggles. Ari feels an inexplicably special affinity to this Aunt Ophelia that strikes him as "weird" because he "can't remember not loving her," feelings not shared with the rest of his extended family (276). Having noticed his son's growing anger and confusion, especially in Lilliana's absence, Jaime endeavors to break his typical silence to engage Ari and truthfully answer the question of why he was sent to live with Ophelia for a summer as a boy. "You were there for nine months," Jaime explains, describing the decision as one that coincided with Bernardo's trial ("He didn't want you to think of him that way") but the length of Ari's stay was extended upon his brother's sentencing because Lilliana "had a breakdown," "it was like your brother was dead" (282, 283). Pulling the car over, Jaime exits so that he can compose himself, allowing Ari to recognize that the family's tendencies toward secrecy and seclusion "was killing us" and he moves to open up to Jaime—a monumental shift in his outlook—confessing his resentment toward them for burying the memory of his brother (283). The nature of Bernardo's crime is still withheld, owing to the homophobic violence of it, but Ari's parents begin to question how and whether they should have delayed his access to this knowledge following Ophelia's funeral. Lilliana, remarking on the absence of their extended family, tells Ari that they did not approve of Ophelia's lesbian lifestyle, a point that infuriates Jaime and leads him to pointedly answer Ari's question about their feelings on the matter, saying their decision to place him with her during that time was owing to their love and respect of her. Sensing the veil of the family's secrets coming down, Lilliana apologizes for withholding this information and tells Ari she would like to discuss Bernardo upon their return home, an invitation which, combined with a

knowledge of their attitudes toward queer sexualities, brings him to tears: “I think I’m crying because I’m happy” (286).

A new day for Ari, this happiness does not last as upon returning to El Paso and going to Dante’s house he learns that his friend is once again in the hospital, this time, as the victim of a hate crime, an event which forces the boys and their families to come confront their respective issues. The attack, a result of four teens seeing Dante kiss another male, leaves the Quintanas shocked and disheartened since their son never came out to them, as a result they turn to Ari for understanding and, in this way, he gets to experience a prelude to his own coming out. Ari, feeling as though he is betraying Dante by voicing his fears, nevertheless explains to Sam that he was afraid of disappointing their family, especially by not being able to reproduce it, a concern an emotional Sam casts aside, “I don’t care about grandchildren. I care about Dante” (303). Buoyed by this response but still afraid for his friend, Ari visits Dante (concussed with cracked ribs and facial bruising) in the hospital and learns more about the incident from his Mrs. Quintana, in particular, that as the attackers descended on them Dante stood his ground while the other boy ran, a decision Soledad cannot understand but Ari does—unashamed of his sexuality, Dante will not sacrifice his dignity even in the face of violent homophobic policing. “What am I supposed to do?” a shaken Ari asks, aware that his “voice was cracking,” yet in this extraordinary moment he recognizes his attachment to Dante, which he divulges at length to the reader if not the Quintanas: “I wanted to tell them that he had changed my life ... that somehow it felt like it was Dante who had saved my life and not the other way around” (308). Instead of saying these things, however, Ari lashes out, acknowledging that while men can compose their emotions, boys cannot, and that day he “was a boy, a boy who went crazy. Crazy, crazy” (310). In a rage, Ari confronts the *other* boy, Daniel, asking for the names of the attackers and

admonishing him for allowing his closeted sexuality to demand such cowardly behavior, “Dante’s lying in a hospital and the only thing you’re worried about is who I’m going to tell? Who am I going to tell, asshole?” (311-312). With a name in mind Ari seeks out one of the boys responsible at his work, provoking a fight that leaves the other boy bruised and bleeding, an outburst of violence that scares his parents owing to its inverted similarity of his brother Bernardo’s crime—his being in retaliation to a homophobic assault. Discussing the attacks with his mother, Ari is surprised by his mother’s understanding and willingness to finally share Bernardo’s story, a painful burden she attempted to hide (“You just don’t look. But it doesn’t go away, Ari”) but she does not put her sons’ actions on par with each other (321). “I think I understand,” she says, unnerving and confusing Ari as it “was like she understood something about me that she’d never quite understood before” (322). The subject changed, Ari’s thoughts turn toward Dante, now recovering at home, as he vents his frustration that the former continues to see Daniel, seeing him as an unworthy fair-weather friend, and begins to avoid the Quintanas.

Ari’s increasingly detached behavior in the wake of these events compels his parents to coax him out of this silence by having Mr. Quintana talk about his “ghosts” in the hopes that they draw the same out of their son. Increasingly disappointed in Dante’s decisions and afraid of his reactions to them, Ari avoids confronting his feelings under the guise of his exercise regimen by descending to the basement to lift weights. For hours “I lifted and lifted until every part of my body was in pain,” Ari recalls, exhausting himself so that sleep can take him (342). In a conversation that intentionally ends the chapter, Lilliana, concerned for him, points out that “When you’re upset, you do weights,” a theory Ari brushes aside but is further borne out by the beginning of the next chapter in which it is revealed that he continued this behavior for for or five days: “Moping and lifting weights” (342). This desperate, if not imaginative, use of exercise

temporarily works as a façade for delaying engagement with his family, Dante, and questions of his sexual orientation. Lilliana calls a “family meeting” (their very first), and, having already shared with Ari her struggle with Bernardo, has Jaime begin by sharing his war story: during an ambushed reconnaissance mission, he and his squad attempted a retreat by helicopter (346). “Louie went down. He yelled my name,” he recalls, “Beckett pulling me onto the chopper” and they left the young soldier behind in a war “I don’t know if I believed in” (346). Watching as his father tearfully relates these memories and feelings, Ari, once again gives him an opportunity to not relive those memories (as he did regarding his mother’s breakdown), bury them by not talking (like Lilliana did with Bernardo), but Jaime suggests that “maybe it’s time to stop the dreams” and, turning the tables, suggests to his son “it’s time you stopped running” (347). Unsure or afraid of their meaning, Ari is further blindsided by Jaime’s suggestion that “the real problem—for you, anyway—is that you’re in love with [Dante],” a beautifully phrased assessment which, coming from the patriarch, undoes any preconception Ari might have about his parents’ response to his homosexuality (348). Jaime points to Ari’s extreme behavior (saving Dante and beating up his assaulter) —a desperate clinging to an attachment he refuses to sacrifice or name—to support his belief that “you love him more than you can bear,” a realization that terrifies and shames Ari; “I hate myself,” he confesses, but his parents assuage these feelings by declaring their love for him and alluding to an understanding of his confused feelings by calling upon Aunt Ophelia’s memory (349). Ari returns to Dante and confesses his feelings, coming to the realization that he subconsciously refused to let himself recognize those sentiments, and, empowered by his parents’ compassion and understanding, moves beyond those feelings to instead ask, “How could I have ever been ashamed of loving Dante Quintana?” (358).

Adolescence as the Intersection between Chicano Studies and Young Adult Literary Studies

In writing about *We Were Here* and *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe*, I have endeavored to explore their impact and potential influence in both Chicano literature and Young Adult literary studies. For the former, these postnational depictions of Mexican American identity, while treading the same paths as Jose Antonio Villarreal's *Pocho* and Americo Paredes' *George Washington Gomez*, step beyond to consider "anomalous states" in the same vein as John Rechy's "youngman" in *City of Night* (1963) or the saints and sinners of the Angel family in Arturo Islas' *The Rain God* (1984). In fact, it is the postnational characterizations and specifically adolescent sideways relations which allow Peña and Sáenz's respective character' to overcome their traumatic circumstances. *We Were Here*'s Miguel's exploration of his ambivalent connection to his ethnicity via his escape from the Lighthouse affords him the opportunity to work through his melancholy and begin mourning the tragic loss of his brother when he returns to the group home to complete his mandated time in residence. Meanwhile, *Aristotle and Dante*'s eponymous characters sidestep the heteronormative prescriptions of Tribunella's theory of maturation (the social's demand of sacrificial loss) to grow sideways, clinging to each other and securing the support of their respective immediate families all while expanding and the representation of Mexican American and uncoupling the linkage between whiteness and queerness—Ari, in response to Dante's question on whether or not wanting to "kiss boys" negates his Mexican authenticity, matter-of-factly replies, "I don't think liking boys is an American invention" (273). That is not say that the teens do not mature; indeed, the traumatizing events they endure work to dearly purchase a queer knowledge which brings its own difficulties, as Ari notes of Dante after his attack, "He was different. Sadder...."

They cracked more than his ribs” (325). These tales of overcoming grief and finding acceptance are important for young readers, to again quote Cofer, “so that others will learn from our victories as well as our mistakes and failures,” and if scholars of Chicano literature are truly interested in post-Chicano Movement processes of socialization, Young Adult literature is a veritable well of unconsidered texts that engage with adolescent time and provide unique insight for the contemporary moment.

AFTERWORD: TIME TO GROW UP

“We don’t always make the right decisions, Ari. We do the best we can,” Lilliana Mendoza tells her son in *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* (2012), pointing toward the difficult decisions parents make in delaying their children’s access to more “adult” knowledge (Bernado’s crime, her subsequent breakdown, Jaime’s post traumatic stress disorder, and Aunt Ophelia’s lesbian identity) (286). Eric Tribunella’s *Melancholy and Maturation*, discussed in Chapter Three alongside *Aristotle and Dante*, opens with this same issue as he prepares to study the preponderance of trauma in YA literature, pointing to Barbara Feinberg’s earlier rumination of the same. In that essay, “Reflections on the ‘Problem Novel,’” Feinberg bemoans the texts her children are assigned in school and her initial uncritical response, telling them to “Just do it,” only realizing afterwards that it was similar to how “someone might believe that a child ought to endure a beating, because even though it hurt, it was a ‘good beating,’ would make him better, build character. Was this reading akin to a ‘beating?’” (“Reflections”). It seems authors also ruminate over these questions: Is this material too much? Too early? Recently, author Matt de la Peña wrote an essay defending his and illustrator Loren Long’s decision to argue for the inclusion of an image in their bestselling children’s book, *Love* (2018). “Is the job of the writer for the very young to tell the truth or preserve innocence?” he asks, explaining how the image, a saddened boy hiding under a piano with his dog as his parents argue in the adjoining room, drew the suggestion from “a major gatekeeper” publisher to “soften” the “heavy” image lest support for the project be withdrawn (“Why We Shouldn’t”). Heeding that advice and in the midst of revision, however, in the wake of some difficult news de la Peña’s daughter saw her mother cry for the first time. “This rocked her world,” he writes, and,

after the ensuing tears and comforting the little girl, although she was finally able to rest the author could not help but wonder at the innocence lost that day, thinking that perhaps “instead of anxiously trying to protect our children from every little hurt and heartache, our job is simply to support them through such experiences. To talk to them. To hold them.” As a result, he and Long argued for the inclusion of their image in the book as a means of expanding the “representation of interior lives,” an expansion which allows those experiencing these feelings to be seen and provides a safe space for others “who’ve yet to feel that kind of sadness.” In his study of what he calls “the history of the children’s literature of atrocity,” Kenneth Kidd sees this sentiment as part of the reevaluation of childhood, following Jane Thraillkill’s work which sees this as the literary version of Viviana Zelizer’s *Pricing the Priceless Child* (from “economically useful” to “emotionally priceless”), leading him to agree that “childhood is now constructed as a psychic-developmental space at once sacrosanct and violated” (183).

The difference, of course, between the degree to which trauma is explored is a matter of audience—the distinction between literature and children’s and young adult literature or literature about childhood and the same literature intended for youth— but what about the crossover book that toes this line? While compiling my primary texts for investigation I constantly circled around one such book, Rudolfo Anaya’s *Bless Me, Ultima* (1972), and for good reason. Winner of the second Premio Quinto Sol (following Tomás Rivera’s *...y no se lo tragó la tierra*), Anaya’s coming-of-age story of Antonio Márez y Luna is one of the most celebrated in Chicano literature. Indeed, as indicated by the text’s selection to The Big Read (community reading program sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities) in 2008, the feature film released in 2013, and, most recently, an operatic adaptation in 2018, the beloved text continues as it nears its fiftieth anniversary. But perhaps the most telling testament

to the book's significance lies in its frequent contestation and attempted censorship by school boards and parents. As reported by the most recent report by the Office for Intellectual Freedom branch of the American Library Association (ALA), Anaya's coming-of-age narrative has appeared on the "Top Ten" challenged books list for 2008 and 2013 on the grounds of "occult/Satanism, offensive language, religious viewpoint, sexually explicit, violence" ("Frequently Challenged Books").³³ Anaya joins the likes of Toni Morrison, Mark Twain, Harper Lee, J. D. Salinger, and Maya Angelou in appearing on this list; good company to say the least. What kept drawing me back to *Bless Me, Ultima* was the numerous ways that the different ideas explored in each chapter are applicable to the text, however, the child protagonist's age barred me from considering him for this study of adolescence. While there are scenes of childhood in some of the included texts, their inclusion is often superseded by the protagonist's adolescent experience and often serves to inform it in interesting ways. For example, Richard Rubio's breaking with Catholicism in *Pocho* seems a foregone conclusion when considering how his anticlimactic experience of his first confession is in part owing to his skepticism, or how Richard's adolescent desire "to forget that I had a body because I had a brown body" as influenced by his melancholic childhood recollections of inferiority as depicted in the pool scene. Although Antonio's childhood experience will not illuminate what his adolescence held—the tale is told in retrospect by the now-adult protagonist—as a crossover text about childhood and written for adults I think it apropos here to join in with the blurring of lines by expanding the parameters of adolescent time to speculate on the narrative and perform the dissertation in

³³ The OIF only began collecting this data as of 1990 so it cannot speak to previous years. Additionally, these are only "snapshots" as challenges often go unreported or are reported long after, necessitating the OIF to update its lists. It is important to note that the "vast majority of challenges were initiated by parents ... with patrons and administrators to follow."

miniature, but as always, with a little difference.³⁴ Set against the backdrop of Guadalupe, a town in rural New Mexico, Antonio, like the other protagonists discussed in the previous chapters, experiences many of the same (in)formal institutions which seek to map his trajectory and he also finds an avenue for sideways growth.

Given the decades of scholarship on Anaya's text I've one critical texts with which to engage with as it sets up the main ideas I would like to expand upon by centering the age of the characters under consideration it comes to bear on issues of gender, sexuality, and temporality. Debra Black's analysis of the novel in "Times of Conflict: *Bless Me, Ultima* as a Novel of Acculturation" rightly foregrounds issues of gender in her analysis of the novel and works backwards, in a sense, by first studying the how assimilation affects the Chicanos in the text in order to understand the roles Chicanas play in it. Although I find questionable some of the assertions she makes, her insightful analysis of the masculine world in which Antonio and his family move highlights how gendered notions of authenticity are inflected by traditional markers, as when she describes the loss of stature Gabriel Márez undergoes amongst his old friends as he abandons the *llano*, or open plain, for work in the city as a highway construction worker, "adding to his sense of displacement and loss of identity" (151). "In retaliation against his sense of displacement and his disenfranchisement with his public world," she writes, "Gabriel exerts his power more fully in his private life: his family," and thus, like a math equation cancelling out variables, does Black focus in on how the women operate in the text in response the men (152). Foregrounding the age of the characters under consideration is of the utmost importance as this informs the chronobiopolitics which bear down on them, and in doing so lead to new insights which I posit as questions for further study.

³⁴ It is unclear how far removed Antonio is from his childhood in his retelling of it.

Like Guálinto in *George Washington Gómez*, Antonio's future is a site of contention. Will he take after the restless, vaquero Márez clan on his father's family or like the peaceful, agrarian Luna's on his mother's? In either case, he is meant to maintain one of the family's traditions into the next generation. Witnessing it in a dream, Antonio describes the scene of his birth where the assembled families fight over which will symbolically inaugurate their grandchild through the use of the afterbirth. Antonio, watching the scene unfold which might shape his future, is as bewildered as the assembled families are when Ultima, the old *curandera* whom oversaw his birth, demands silence and offers a third way: taking the afterbirth from the small altar to the Virgin Guadalupe, she will bury the afterbirth and be the only one to know his destiny (6). And here we are introduced to the dominant sets of binary's Anaya employs as he describes this momentous time in Antonio's life—old generation versus the new; Márez versus Luna; Christianity versus folk beliefs—but there also are other forces at play as this coming of age narrative, like *Pocho* and *GWG*, deals with issues of assimilation, making the school an important site of inquiry with similar findings.³⁵ Perhaps most interestingly though, we are given example of the power and respect Ultima commands as she stays (temporarily, if not indefinitely) the onslaught of generations by in a sense claiming Antonio for herself, to the chagrin of the contesting families. Recall Karl Mannheim's description of youth in "stable" i.e. rural communities as lives largely "pre-scribed," the repetition of generations that goes on largely unchanged (300n2). This is indicated by Gabriel Márez when he explains that

In my own day we were given no schooling. Only the ricos could afford school.

Me, my father gave me a saddle blanket and pony when I was ten. "There is your

³⁵ Black identifies Antonio's entry to school as the first step in his assimilation which will put him a part from his family, especially his mother upon his learning English (150).

life,” he said, and pointed to the llano. So the llano was my school, it was my teacher, it was my first love. (54)

In addition to indicating the relative inaccessibility of education in youth even after the creation of public education in New Mexico in 1912 (the same year it gained statehood), this story arguably illuminates a familiar scene in the Márez family that probably stretches back to the arrival of the conquistadors from whom they trace their lineage. Hence, Ultima interrupts the procession of generations by denying both families claim to the afterbirth and, upon her arrival at the Márez household, goes further by taking young Antonio under her wing to instruct him in her mystic ways. But the adherence to traditional lifestyles exemplified by Gabriel’s generation is shown to be waning, strained by the onslaught of history as we see in Antonio’s father and older brothers recently returned from World War II. Indeed, owing to the social forces of modernization, “the Tejano came and built his fences, the railroad came, the roads—it was like a bad wave of the ocean covering all that was good,” “the life Gabriel led [on the llano] is no longer a viable option for Antonio,” or anyone else for that matter (54; Black 150). For this reason, Black’s positioning of the three brothers’ “almost total assimilation into the Anglo World” as exemplified by their “reject[ing]the old ways of their culture” seems unfair as these charges are not levied against Antonio, perhaps owing to his relative youth (148, 149). In either case, for the young Márez’s, there is no llano to roam; only highway to lay or soil to work. Bearing this in mind, perhaps choices related to assimilation could be revisited with attention to the circumstances in mind?

Returning to Antonio, his ability to see the numerous connections between what appear to be incongruous binaries (for example, Christ [religion] and the Golden Carp [folktale]) is tied to the opportunity afforded by Ultima’s mentorship. Like Richard’s relationship with Joe Pete in

Pocho, Antonio's "soul [grows] under [Ultima's] careful guidance" as through her he "learns to listen to the mystery of the groaning earth and to feel complete in the fulfillment of its time" (15). The relationship between the two pairs is interesting for how it appears to operate, in a sense, to the side of time. As Dana Luciano's suggests, linear time is tied to notions of productivity, or of benefit to society while extralinear time is indulgent, private, selfish although occasionally necessary, like abstaining from work while mourning the loss of a loved one. Both mentors give the appearance of productive with their time while pursuing decidedly individual goals: longing for companionship (amorous and/or intellectual), Joe Pete's conversations with Richard occur while the former is watching his cows graze, while Ultima, sensing the end of her days, is adamant about passing on her knowledge to Antonio, instructing the boy while collecting herbs for her medicines. The boys also participate in the charade of linear time in their respective manner: Richard brings the family goats out the graze and converses with Joe Pete and Antonio is tasked by his parents with accompanying Ultima whenever she leaves the house. Looking beyond this text, what are the other ways youths move along the margins to grow?

This dissertation on adolescence in Chicana/o literature has argued that the developmental period—ever present in the literature—serves as the premier site of identity formation and as such warrants more rigorous study. Adolescent time, an intersectional, psychoanalytically informed methodology attuned to the shifting chronobiopolitics of the age, emerges as a lens with which to engage the coming-of-age narratives that abound in Chicana/o literature but could also be adapted to examine other tales of youth. This investigation into the representations of adolescence in the literature and its findings have operated on two levels: speaking to the adolescent experience and then commenting on how based on these findings a given text is subsequently situated within the literature. In some cases, as with Jose Antonio

Villareal's *Pocho* and Americo Paredes' *George Washington Gómez* discussed in the first chapter, the description of the coming-of-age narrative established and/or bolstered the then recently emergent Chicano literary and political enterprise, even if the protagonist's did not perfectly align with the latter's tenets. Through an examination of adolescent time of the chosen protagonists it has explored how the developmental stage has been over and under policed as the subject grows to maturity as well as how youths, cognizant of these various (un)official ideological forces (school, family, church, community, etc.), sidestep dictums occasionally by hiding in plain sight. Engaging with ideologically controversial texts, like Richard Rodriguez's *Hunger for Memory* from Chapter Two, and paying special attention its adolescent time assists in seeing the author and his motivations in a new light; maligned as a *vendido* for his conservative views, when we consider Rodriguez's experiences as a dark-skinned, homosexual Mexican American youth, the author's ghostly strategies of exploring his identity while evading discovery come into view. The third chapter aimed to champion the value of Chicana/o Young Adult literature, serving as it does as a gateway for young readers to the literatures more "adult" texts even as it treads the same path of these vaunted predecessors. Young adult literature's thematic focus on trauma is only superseded by its attention to its young reader and in this regard its Chicana/o offerings are no different, but the latter's work in modeling strategies for coping with and overcoming trauma go further by destabilizing stereotypes and expanding the available representations of ethnic identity. Based on these finding, I argue that attention to the adolescent experience will remain an important site of inquiry for Chicano studies.

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