



"Comic books retain enough outsider, underground cachet to tackle subjects many of us wouldn't dare touch."

Luis Alberto Urrea

CAMINO REAL

Año 2021
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Número 16

Estudios de las Hispanidades Norteamericanas

Latin@ Comics en los Estados Unidos
Editores invitados: Jorge Catalá y Francisco Sáez de Adana

Latinographix: The Vital Pulse that Beats at the Heart of World Storytelling Today!
FREDERICK LUIS ALDAMA

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JUAN POBLETE

A-Z of My Life as a Cartoonero
ILAN STAVANS

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En esta ocasión el número de *Camino Real* está dedicado a un género artístico que mantiene similar deuda con la literatura y la pintura: el cómic latino en los Estados Unidos. Este singular modelo de expresión artística resulta tan útil como adecuado para reflejar las características de la sociedad en la que se produce, pues los artistas que optan por este modelo toman con referente el entorno social en el que viven. El lector apreciará cómo los artistas —desde Gus Arriola hasta Frank Espinosa, pasando por Antonio Prohías y los Hermanos Hernández, entre muchos otros— utilizan el cómic como medio para expresar las voces, inquietudes, y particularidades de su comunidad.

Para ello hemos contado con la colaboración como editores invitados del Dr. Jorge Catalá, profesor en la Newcastle University, y el Dr. Francisco Sáez de Adana, catedrático en la Universidad de Alcalá y director del Instituto Franklin-UAH, ambos reconocidos expertos en los estudios de cómic.

Camino Real es una publicación abierta a la colaboración con otras instituciones e investigadores, especialmente en Norteamérica. En este sentido, y como en anteriores volúmenes, invito a colegas y grupos de investigación en disciplinas como Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades de los Estados Unidos a enviar sus propuestas de publicación como “Guest Editor” para futuros volúmenes proponiendo temas de interés para la académica comunidad latina de Estados Unidos.

Agradezco una vez más vuestra confianza en *Camino Real*; gracias a vuestras colaboraciones esta publicación del Instituto Franklin-UAH es ya referencial en el estudio de los hispanos en Estados Unidos a ambos lados del Atlántico.

En las circunstancias de pandemia mundial que venimos sufriendo desde 2020 finalizo deseándoos toda la salud posible para vosotros y vuestras familias.

José Antonio Gurpegui

ÍNDICE / CONTENTS

Prefacio/Foreword

FREDERICK LUIS ALDAMA	Latinographix: The Vital Pulse that Beats at the Heart of World Storytelling Today!	11
-----------------------	---	----

Introducción/Introduction

JORGE CATALÁ Y FRANCISCO SÁEZ DE ADANA	Latin@ Comics en los EE. UU. Breve panorámica y estado de la cuestión	19
---	--	----

Ensayos/Critical Articles

PAUL ALLATSON	Of farmworkers and other exploitations: The enduring relevance of Rius's <i>The Chicanos</i>	39
HÉCTOR FERNÁNDEZ L'HOESTE	The Isle is Full of Noises: <i>Puerto Rico Strong</i> , Hurricane María, and the Role of Memory in the Reimagination of a Boricua Nation	55
ANNA MARTA MARINI	The Fantasmical Gothic Heterotopia in Rhode Montijo's <i>Pablo's Inferno</i>	85
ANA MERINO	La pulsión literaria en la narrativa gráfica de los Hermanos Hernández	103
JUAN POBLETE	<i>Diary of an Undocumented Dreamer</i> . Undocumented Vignettes from a Pre-American Life and the Heterogeneity of American Life	123

Testimonio/Testimonials

ILAN STAVANS	A-Z of My Life as a Cartoonero	143
--------------	--------------------------------	-----

Creación Literaria/Creative Writing

PANCHULEI	La creación de un mundo latino en EE. UU.	161
-----------	---	-----

Reseñas/Reviews

IRMA CANTÚ	Oswaldo Estrada. <i>Las locas ilusiones y otros relatos de migración.</i>	175
MARÍA MAGDALENA GUERRA DE CHARUR	Fernando Piñón. <i>A Man Named Fernando.</i>	181
JOSÉ JACOBO	Guillermo Cotto-Thorner. <i>Manhattan Tropics / Trópico en Manhattan.</i>	185
JESÚS RIVERA	Melita M. Garza. <i>They Came to Toil. Newspaper Representations of Mexicans and Immigrants in the Great Depression.</i>	189
JOSÉ PABLO VILLALOBOS	Carlos Cisneros. <i>The Paper Lawyer.</i>	193

PREFACIO
FOREWORD

FREDERICK LUIS ALDAMA

PRÓXIMO CONGRESO DE LITERATURA CHICANA Y ESTUDIOS LATINOS

**La ética de la hospitalidad y el compromiso
con el Otro en la literatura chicana y los
estudios latinos**

Barcelona, junio de 2022



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LATINOGRAPHIX: THE VITAL PULSE THAT BEATS AT THE HEART OF WORLD STORYTELLING TODAY!

Frederick Luis Aldama

Back in the mid-2000s when I first thought to bring some scholarly rigor to my otherwise scattershot seeking of pleasure (and pain) in the word-drawn Latinx storyworlds, I had no idea that the study of Latinx comics could be a thing. It is—and swiftly and robustly so. When Jorge (Newcastle University, UK) and Kiko (Instituto Franklin at the Universidad de Alcalá, Spain) invited me to write the Foreword to this special issue of *CAMINO REAL: Estudios de las Hispanidades Norteamericanas* on US Latinx comics, I jumped up and down—and at the chance. I wanted to celebrate. Latinx comics and their study have become mainstays in learning spaces in the US. And, their study is being shouted from the proverbial rooftops of a journal published in Spain. Wow!

But why such a blazing interest in US Latinx comics, as I'm often asked. And, relatedly, is there something about the word-drawn hybrid form that can do something better (deeper?) to pleasure and wake our brains to new ways of understanding the very varied identities and experiences that make up Latinoness? To at least begin

Frederick Luis Aldama (also known as Professor Latinx) is an academic and award-winning author of over 45 books, including the International Latino Book Award and Eisner Award for *Latinx Superheroes in Mainstream Comics*. He is editor of the trade press, Latinographix, creator of the first documentary on the history of Latinx superheroes, and co-founder & director of SÓL-CON: Brown, Black, & Indigenous Comix Expo & Symposium. This fall, Aldama will publish a Spanish translation of his kid's book *The Adventures of Chupacabra Charlie* (2020) as well as join UT Austin's English Department as the Jacob & Frances Sanger Mossiker Chair in the Humanities and launch his Latinx Pop Lab—a creative and knowledge generating incubator focused on Latinx pop narratives that will bridge campus with community in Austin.

to answer these questions, let me properly step us into contexts of creating, distributing, and consuming US Latinx comics.

It's no wonder that we've been *drawn* to shaping our stories (autobiography, biography, memoir, history, mythic) in the comic book form. When largely locked out of other narrative spaces (film, TV, novel, for instance), Latinxs have gravitated to Bristol Boards, pencils, and inks. Since veteranos like Gus Arriola (*Gordo*), Judge Garza (*Relampago*), Los Bros Hernandez (*Love and Rockets*), Laura Molina (*The Jaguar*), Rhode Montijo (*Pablo's Inferno*), Carlos Saldaña (*Burrito*), Richard Dominguez (*El Gato Negro*), Frank Espinosa (*Rocketo*), Ivan Velez (*Blood Syndicate*), Lalo Alcaraz (*La Cucaracha*), Héctor Cantú and Carlos Castellanos (*Baldo*), and Javier Hernandez (*El Muerto*) cracked open word-drawn storytelling spaces, legions of us have gravitated to the comic book narrative form to tell our stories—and to imagine stories distant from our proximate experiences as Latinxs. Indeed, with new gen LGBTQ+ Latinx and Blatinx creators vitally and powerfully entering the fray, this is where the real revolution is happening within Latinx storytelling spaces. The vitality and abundance of Latinx comic creations today has my head perpetually in a joyous spin.

In many ways, that we've become legion as comic book storytellers is not surprising. Telling and shaping our stories in the ways that we choose and control is easier when on our own; the more establishment (i.e. money) is involved, the less control we have. Think: film and TV. This creative control is important as it allows us to willfully and skillfully *geometrize* word-drawn narratives in ways that breathe dignities and complexities into our subjectivities and experiences. (I first formulate the concept of *geometrizing* in in *Latinx Superheroes and Mainstream Comics* where it becomes a shorthand of sorts to identify the significance of the visual shaping devices in the making of narratives that move and to creating protagonists that pop.) By this I mean that it is the comic storytelling spaces where we can most freely and vitally give visual shape (layout, line, color, perspective, balloon shape and placement, lettering, and gutter size and width, among others) to characters, spaces, themes, and plots that furnish the universe anew with complex Latinx entities and worldviews.

And, with comics we can create without the gatekeepers. You know, those establishment venues controlled by legacies of

disconnected whiteness that largely don't see us and when they do, it's in stereotypical ways: buffoon, hypersexualized lover, lazy, and as "bad hombres." As long ago as the 1940s when Gus Arriola began publishing his nationally syndicated strip, *Gordo*, there was already in place the establishment's idea of what stories and types of character Latinx creators could give birth to. And so for Gus, the only way he'd get his Latinx protagonist to see the light of publishing day was as a rotund, lazy, heavily Spanglish accented, *sombrero* wearing *campesino*. And while Gus managed to breathe a certain quixotic complexity into *Gordo*, the character remained largely straightjacketed by white newspaper editor-room expectations—and this for the over 40 years of newspaper syndication.

For the past several decades and especially today, Latinx comic creators are able to resist more and more being forced to fall into line. We're not sitting on our hands waiting for the doors to open, either. I think readily of *Latinxgrapeurs* such as: Jason "Gonzo" Gonzales (*La Mano del Destino*), Oscar Garza & Rolando Esquivel (*Mashbone & Grifty*), Jaime Crespo (*Tortilla*), Elvira Carizzal-Dukes and Ronnie Dukes (*A.W.O.L.*), Kat Fajardo (*La Raza Anthology* and *Bandida Comics*), Eric J. García (*Drawing on Anger*), Javier Hernandez (*El Muerto*), Crystal Gonzalez (*In the Dark*), and Alberto Ledesma (*Diary of a Reluctant Dreamer*). I think, too, of: Breena Nuñez, Candy Briones, Dave Ortega, Rafael Rosado, Juan Argil, John Gonzalez, José Alaniz, Vicko Alvarez, Mark Martinez, Rafael Rosado, Victor Ávila, Fernando Rodriguez, José Cabrera, Mark Campos, Cristy Road, Sebastian Kadlecik, MÖM, Alberto Morales, Mike Centino, Jaime Cortez, Federico Cuatlacuatl, Richard Dominguez, Chris Escobar, Eric Esquivel, Kelly Fernandez, Jandro Gamboa, Jenny Gonzalez-Blitz, Raúl González, Roberta Gregory, David Herrera, Juvera, Jeremiah Lambert, Mayra Lara, John Jota Leños, Liz Mayorga, Rafael Navarro, William Nericcio, David Olivarez, Daniel Parada, Zeke Peña, Carlos "Loso" Pérez, John Picacio, Lila Quintero Weaver, Theresa Rojas, Jules Rivera, Grasiela Rodriguez, Héctor Rodriguez, Stephanie Rodriguez, Miguel Angel "Miky" Ruiz, Ilan Stavans, Santiago Cohen, Samuel Teer, Ivan Velez, Andrés Vera Martínez, Stephanie Villarreal Murray, Roberto Weil, and Ray Zepeda, Terry Blas, Jordan Clark, Eliana Falcón, Joamette Gil, among many others.

We're telling our word-drawn stories. And, we're getting them into the hands of our readers—Latinx or otherwise—through the internet (social media and its funding platforms). And, when possible as in my case with Latinographix (OSU Press), we're amplifying the voices and moving into educational curricular spaces with trade-press publications specifically focused on the Latinx creators and their stories.

As the scholars in this special issue amply demonstrate, Latinx comics not only tell our stories, they actively decolonize our perspectives, thoughts, and feelings; they powerfully peel back the cloudy films over our eyes, to see the ways that our families and communities have been shamed by mainstream media and sociopolitical policies. The scholarship herein shows us how Latinx comics can and do create palimpsests in our minds, overlaying the past (US occupations and imperialist invasions of the Americas and Hispanophone archipelagos) with today's xenophobic, neoliberal practices. They wake us to our collective trauma as targets of US imperialist practices at home and across the Americas. Latinx comic book narratives crack open the perceptual, imaginative, and feeling systems. They tell stories to Latinx readers primarily, and secondarily inviting all others to learn to step into our shoes to experience the bountiful ways that our experiences, cultures, identities enrich, shape, and transform the world we all inhabit.

SUGGESTED FURTHER READING

- Aldama, Frederick Luis, editor. *Graphic Indigeneity: Comics in the Americas and Australasia*. University of Mississippi Press, 2020.
- . editor. *Multicultural Comics: From Zap to Blue Beetle*. University of Texas Press, 2010.
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- . *Latinx Superheroes in Mainstream Comics*. University of Arizona Press, 2017.
- . *Latinx Comic Book Storytelling: An Odyssey by Interview*. San Diego State University Press, 2016.
- . *Your Brain on Latino Comics: From Gus Arriola to Los Bros Hernandez*. University of Texas Press, 2009.

- Aldama, Frederick Luis & Christopher González, editors. *Graphic Borders: Latino Comic Books Past, Present, and Future*. University of Texas Press, 2016.
- Aldama, Frederick Luis & Ilan Stavans, editors. *¡Muy Pop! Conversations on Latino Popular Culture*. University of Michigan Press, 2013.
- Fernández L'Hoeste, Héctor D. *Lalo Alcaraz: Political Cartooning in the Latino Community*. University Press of Mississippi, 2017.
- Santos, Jorge. *Graphic Memories of the Civil Rights Movement*. University of Texas Press, 2019.

INTRODUCCIÓN

INTRODUCTION

JORGE CATALÁ
FRANCISCO SÁEZ DE ADANA

LATIN@ COMICS EN LOS EE. UU. BREVE PANORÁMICA Y ESTADO DE LA CUESTIÓN

Jorge Catalá
Newcastle University

Francisco Sáez de Adana
Instituto Franklin-Universidad de Alcalá

La revista *Camino Real. Estudios de las Hispanidades Norteamericanas*, en los más de diez años que lleva publicándose, ha venido reflejando las diferentes sensibilidades de la comunidad hispana o latina en los Estados Unidos desde muy diferentes puntos de vista atendiendo al carácter multidisciplinar con el que fue concebida. Así en sus dieciséis números anteriores (incluyendo el inicial número cero) se han publicado artículos que analizan lo latino desde el punto de vista histórico, político, lingüístico y, especialmente, se ha atendido a la producción artística realizada por esta comunidad, sobre todo, en lo que se refiere al ámbito literario y, en cierta menor medida,

Jorge Catalá es profesor titular de Estudios Hispánicos en Newcastle University (Reino Unido). Sus áreas de investigación son la cultura popular (en especial el cómic), las narrativas culturales y la historia cultural en España y América Latina, con especial atención a Cuba. Entre sus publicaciones destacan *Vanguardia y humorismo gráfico en crisis. La Guerra Civil Española (1936-1939) y la Revolución Cubana (1959-1961)* (Boydell y Brewer, 2015) y la coedición del volumen *Comics and Memory in Latin America* (Pittsburgh, 2017; edición española Cátedra, 2019).

Francisco Sáez de Adana es catedrático en la Universidad de Alcalá y director del Instituto Franklin de la misma universidad. Su línea de investigación está relacionada con los estudios de cómic y en este ámbito ha publicado diez capítulos en libros, así como dieciocho artículos en revistas tanto nacionales como internacionales. Es codirector de la revista académica *Cuco. Cuadernos de cómic* y ha coordinado también tres números de la revista *Tebeosfera*. Forma parte del Consejo Editorial de las revistas *Studies in Comics* y *Sequentials*. Desde el año 2014 organiza un curso de verano dedicado al estudio del cómic en la Universidad de Alcalá.

Catalá, Jorge y Francisco Sáez de Adana. "Latin@ Comics en los EE. UU. Breve panorámica y estado de la cuestión". *Camino Real*, vol. 13, no. 16, 2021, pp. 19-35.

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cinematográfico. Se puede considerar, por tanto, que la revista es, en muchos aspectos, una referencia a nivel académico para entender las peculiaridades de los latinos que viven en los Estados Unidos.

Sin embargo, hasta el número que el lector tiene en sus manos no solo no se había dedicado ningún monográfico al cómic latino en los Estados Unidos, sino que solo hay un artículo relacionado con este campo centrado en el estudio de las caricaturas antifranquistas que Sergio Aragonés realizó en el periódico del exilio *España Libre*. Esta omisión está probablemente relacionada con la escasa importancia que, hasta hace poco, se ha venido otorgando a los estudios de cómic en el mundo académico. Sin embargo, en los últimos años, esta tendencia ha cambiado y se ha demostrado que el cómic es una representación artística de una gran trascendencia a la hora de realizar una radiografía de la sociedad en la que se produce, como muestran, por ejemplo, McAllister et al., Gardner, o Babic. Por este motivo, el cómic latino en los Estados Unidos es una aportación importante en la consecución del objetivo de la revista y, con tal fin, se publica este monográfico que, con el título “Latin@ Comics en los EE. UU.”, pretende efectivamente estudiar la sensibilidad de esta comunidad a través de sus expresiones por medio de la narrativa gráfica.

Hay que tener en cuenta que la evolución del cómic latino corre paralela a la integración y la mayor visibilidad de la comunidad latina en los EE. UU. donde se han producido importantes hitos como la reciente elección de Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez en 2019 como congresista a la edad de 29 años, convirtiéndose en la mujer más joven que ostenta dicho cargo en el Congreso de los Estados Unidos. El peso específico del cómic latino en el país cuenta con una larga historia y una nómina de autores amplia que ha reflejado con su producción artística los cambios vividos en el país.

En el presente número especial contamos con la participación de aquellas personas que, desde la investigación, han tenido un impacto decisivo en el proceso de ampliar la visibilidad de la comunidad latina en el mundo del cómic, como es el caso de Ilan Stavans, que desarrolló el primer curso universitario en los EE. UU. ofrecido en español el año 2000 en Amherst. La investigación del cómic latino debe mucho a Frederick Luis Aldama, cuyos pioneros y rigurosos trabajos en obras como *Your Brain on Latino Comics*:

From Gus Arriola to Los Bros Hernandez (2009), *The Routledge Companion to Latino/a Pop Culture* (2016), la antología *Tales from la Vida: A Latinx Comics Anthology* (2018) o el recientemente galardonado *Latinx Superheroes in Mainstream Comics* (ganador del Premio Eisner a la mejor obra académica de 2018) han contribuido a posicionar el cómic latino dentro de los *comic studies*.¹ Las obras en colaboración de Aldama como *Graphic borders: Latino Comic books past, present and future* (2016) con Christopher González, o la reveladora *Latinx Comic Book Storytelling: An Odyssey by Interview* (2016) con González y Héctor Fernández L’Hoeste que compila 29 entrevistas con autores latinos, ofrecen un panorama detallado de la realidad del cómic latino en los EE. UU. Fernández L’Hoeste y Juan Poblete también integran esta destacada lista de investigadores que colaboran en el presente número especial. No en vano su volumen editado *Redrawing the Nation. National Identity in Latin/o American Comics* (2009) profundiza en la identidad nacional a través del cómic y dedicó dos capítulos al cómic latino, uno a la obra *Latino USA: A Cartoon History* (2000) de Stavans (ilustrada por Lalo Alcaraz) escrito por Paul Allatson y otro a la influyente presencia de Los Bros Hernandez en el cómic latino a cargo de Ana Merino. La crucial influencia de Merino, no solo a través de su labor investigadora con una obra fundamental como *El cómic hispánico* (2003), sino como integrante del grupo directivo del Center for Cartoon Studies (2004-2014) y también del International Comic Art Forum (2001-2011) ha sido muy relevante para posicionar el cómic latino en organismos de reconocido prestigio. Finalmente, Allatson integra el comité editorial de la revista *Latino Studies* y es co-editor de la serie para University of Wisconsin Press titulada *Writing in Latinidad: Autobiographical Voices of U.S. Latinos/as*. Nos alegra por ello que tanto Allatson como Merino firmen sendos artículos en este número especial de la revista *Camino Real. Estudios de las Hispanidades Norteamericanas* con el que esperamos contribuir a ampliar el conocimiento del cómic latino. A esta nómina de reconocidos autores se une en este número Anna Marta Marini con un artículo sobre uno de los cómics latinos pioneros como es *Gordo* de Gus Arriola que se comentará más adelante.

1. LA COMUNIDAD LATINA EN LOS EE. UU.

Para entender la importancia del cómic latino hay que considerar que la comunidad latina constituye, dentro de las minorías de los Estados Unidos, la más numerosa y pujante, y la que más rápido está aumentando en los últimos años. Según datos del censo de los Estados Unidos², en el año 2019 el número de latinos subió casi un 2 % con respecto a los datos del año 2010 y se situó alrededor de los 60,5 millones de personas, lo que supone el 18,4 % del total de la población. Esta velocidad de crecimiento hace estimar que, en el año 2030, este porcentaje será cercano al 25 % aunque algunas estimaciones sitúan esa cifra en torno al 30 %. Es de destacar que este incremento es el más alto de todos los grupos de población de los Estados Unidos. Por otro lado, aunque sus ingresos medios anuales están un 23 % por debajo de la media del país, actualmente gracias al aumento de la población latina su actividad económica supone aproximadamente un 10 % del total (1,3 trillones de dólares), superior al de otras minorías y, por tanto, se trata de un mercado muy destacable y con proyección de futuro. Hay que tener en cuenta que el número de negocios regentados por latinos en los Estados Unidos ha ascendido un 52 % en la última década situándose en 3,8 millones. Por tanto, es razonable que su presencia en la industria del cómic (que produce entre 30 y 40 millones de dólares solamente en ventas directas), así como en cualquier otro ámbito de la sociedad, vaya más allá de una contribución anecdótica.

Evidentemente, no se puede considerar a la comunidad latina como un todo homogéneo. Aunque existen cuatro grandes grupos de latinos en los EE. UU. (los mexicanos, los puertorriqueños, los cubanos y los centroamericanos) las características de estos núcleos poblacionales, su distribución geográfica en el país y la existencia de otras comunidades más pequeñas con otros orígenes hacen que sus intereses y su ideología sean muy heterogéneos (Criado). Sin embargo, una cuestión que tienen en común es que, a diferencia de otras minorías, el crecimiento de su población ha venido acompañado por una presencia de su cultura de origen unida a un aumento del uso del idioma español. Por ese motivo, en muchos ámbitos de la cultura esta comunidad se hace visible, como nos recuerda Francisca Cárcamo (Panchulei) en el cómic que aparece en la sección de creación artística de este mismo número.

Este carácter no monolítico de la comunidad latina ha tenido su reflejo en las recientes elecciones presidenciales de los Estados Unidos. Mientras en Florida, donde hay una importante comunidad cubano y venezolano-estadounidense, Trump ha afianzado la ventaja que obtuvo en las elecciones de 2016, en el otro extremo de la Unión, en los estados fronterizos con México, Arizona se ha unido a California y Nuevo México como estado de mayoría demócrata y aunque Texas sigue siendo republicano, la diferencia entre ambos partidos se ha reducido en dos puntos porcentuales. En todos estos estados, tanto en Florida como en los estados del oeste, el voto latino ha sido decisivo en el resultado, pero ha decantado la balanza en sentidos opuestos, ya que los intereses de los diferentes colectivos latinos son diversos. En el caso de Florida, la política de Trump con relación a Cuba y Venezuela se ha visto respaldada. Pero su actitud con respecto a la inmigración procedente de México le ha pasado factura en los estados en los que la comunidad mexicano-estadounidense es importante. Por tanto, el ejemplo de las elecciones de 2020 nos muestra que la comunidad latina de los Estados Unidos tiene una diversidad y un peso específico en la política del país que merece un estudio pormenorizado y sin ideas preconcebidas.

2. ORÍGENES, EVOLUCIÓN Y TEMÁTICAS DEL CÓMIC LATINO

Como la mayor parte del cómic en Estados Unidos, el origen del cómic latino se puede encontrar en las tiras de prensa. Dos son las obras que se pueden considerar pioneras en este ámbito: *Gordo* de Gus Arriola (1917-2008) (Figura 1), cuyo autor, tras muchos esfuerzos, consiguió publicar a través de la agencia de prensa United Features en 1941 y que mantuvo su tirada hasta el año 1985, llegando a aparecer en su momento de mayor popularidad en 270 periódicos en todo el país; y *Pedrito* de William de la Torre (1916-1955) que tuvo una vida más corta (entre 1948 y 1953, a causa del fallecimiento prematuro del autor) y una distribución más limitada al publicarse exclusivamente en *The New Yorker* y no a nivel nacional. Se puede afirmar, por tanto, que la presencia del cómic latino en el fenómeno de masas que fue el cómic de prensa en los Estados Unidos no fue muy extensa y, además, fue ciertamente tardía, ya que las tiras de prensa ya gozaban de un enorme éxito desde comienzos del siglo XX, con mucha anterioridad a la

llegada de *Gordo*. De hecho, la venta de la serie de Arriola a los periódicos fue un proceso muy arduo, ya que la comunidad latina no estaba, hasta ese momento, presente en los cómics y “el comercial que vendía las tiras a los periódicos no sabía muy bien cómo vender *Gordo*” (Aldama, *Your Brain to Latino Comics* 121).

Y es que *Gordo* recoge toda la tradición de la cotidianeidad del cómic de prensa de los Estados Unidos presente en series como *Gasoline Alley*, *Blondie* o *The Gumps*, pero lo lleva al terreno de la comunidad mexicana a la que Arriola pertenecía. Como el propio Arriola afirmaba, creó un personaje estereotipado que se inspiraba en fuentes tan ajenas al lector estadounidense como el cómic mexicano *La Familia Burrón*.³ La importancia de Arriola es fundamental en el posterior desarrollo del cómic latino. Como refiere el propio autor, tomará “una forma de arte propia de los Estados Unidos” (Aldama, *Your Brain to Latino Comics* 127), las tiras de prensa, y, por primera vez, la llevará al terreno de la comunidad, hasta ese momento, poco representada en el arte popular de ese país. Esta influencia es



Figura 1. Página dominical de *Gordo* de Gus Arriola.

Fuente: Arriola y Harvey. *Accidental Ambassador Gordo: The Comic Strip Art of Gus Arriola*, 2000, p. 135. © 2000 University Press of Mississippi – Arriola y Harvey.

evidente en otros autores que, posteriormente, adoptarán también la tira de prensa como forma de expresión como Hector Cantú y Carlos Castellanos y su serie *Baldo*, donde de nuevo hay una apuesta por la cotidianeidad. Otro caso destacable es el de Lalo Alcaraz en *La Cucaracha*, donde se introduce una mayor carga política, convirtiéndose en la única tira de humor político distribuida a nivel nacional que representa el punto de vista de la comunidad latina.

Si Gus Arriola (1917-2008) ejemplifica la aculturación de la primera generación de latinos nacidos en el país de familia migrante (su padre nació en una hacienda de Sonora en México), Los Bros Hernandez, llegados a la adultez coincidiendo con el cómic *underground* estadounidense en la década de 1970, representan la mirada desde la periferia, cuestionando la aculturación que invisibiliza desigualdades y despoja a toda una comunidad de una parte fundamental de su herencia cultural. En la serie de *Love & Rockets* (1981–1996), Jaime y Gilbert Hernandez abordan una representación de la identidad matizada que actúa a modo de crónica de la mezcla de culturas en el sur californiano (Fernández L’Hoeste y Poblete 12). El trabajo de estos dos artistas ha convertido *Love & Rockets* en uno de los cómics más importantes del panorama del cómic alternativo en los Estados Unidos. La serie (o podríamos decir series teniendo en cuenta que los hermanos Hernandez trabajan en paralelo cada uno de ellos en sus propias historias) consolidó el reconocimiento del cómic latino por parte del público general cuya culminación es su inclusión en el Will Eisner Comic Book Hall of Fame junto a los más importantes autores de cómic de los Estados Unidos.

Mucho se ha escrito sobre el trabajo de los hermanos Hernandez (su apellido americanizado y sin acento gráfico), pero hay un aspecto muy importante que merece la pena subrayar y es la adopción de las estrategias de la serialidad que han sido clave en las grandes series del cómic norteamericano y que ellos llevan a su terreno para “humanizar a los Latinos” (Aldama, *Your Brain to Latino Comics* 173). Este proceso de humanización no es ajeno a este uso de la serialidad. El hecho de que las historias de las protagonistas de Locas o de los habitantes de Palomar se hayan ido construyendo durante todos estos años y los personajes hayan ido creciendo, envejeciendo y evolucionando con el paso de los años es una característica distintiva

del trabajo de ambos autores y un rasgo definitorio de su obra. Una serialidad que, en el ámbito del cómic latino, recoge el testigo del *Gordo* de Arriola y, al igual que en esta obra, dialoga con los grandes clásicos del cómic de prensa de los Estados Unidos ya mencionados, donde la cotidianeidad era un factor fundamental para mantener enganchados a millones de lectores diariamente. Jaime y Beto, ya sea en determinados barrios de California, o en el emplazamiento ficticio de Palomar, lo que hacen es desgranar esa cotidianeidad de manera que el lector siente que lleva años incluso décadas viviendo con esos personajes, lo que facilita una aproximación empática y emotiva hacia los mismos que es una de las claves del éxito de su trabajo.

Finalmente, Lalo Alcaraz y sus contemporáneos como Peter Ramirez representan la generación aculturada que tras conseguir llegar al *mainstream* de la industria busca redefinir las condiciones de la cultura, alzando la voz y cuestionando el orden establecido sin tapujos. (Fernández L’Hoeste 39). Como apunta Frederick Luis Aldama en *Your Brain to Latino Comics* (2009), no hay límites para los artistas de cómic latinos y la temática y los géneros tratados es muy amplia. Si bien la crítica abiertamente política con un enfoque latino era un tema que presentaba cierta resistencia por parte de los medios de prensa tradicionales en EE. UU., Lalo Alcaraz rompió esta barrera con su tira de prensa *La Cucaracha*, que narra las vicisitudes de Cuco Rocha, una cucaracha antropomorfa a través de la cual el autor dialoga con el lector sobre etnicidad, racismo y crítica social en la sociedad estadounidense. Un hito en la historia del cómic latino, ya que su comienzo como tira de prensa sindicada fue avalado por 38 periódicos y actualmente se publica en más de 60. La etnicidad es un tema más prevalente en el cómic latino que en el cómic latinoamericano debido a la centralidad del mestizaje en los procesos de formación de la nación en América Latina. Los cómics de autores latinos que reflexionan sobre la etnicidad en los EE. UU. (donde el racismo tanto a nivel político como social está muy presente) no hacen otra cosa que trabajar en el campo de la cultura popular las transformaciones de dicha sociedad (Hall). La historia cultural de la comunidad latina en los EE. UU. y la crítica a la formación de la nación son el objeto de las colaboraciones de Ilan Stavans y Lalo Alcaraz en *Latino US. A Cartoon History* (2000) y *A Most Imperfect Union* (2014). Por otro lado, el género negro tiene en la serie *100 Bullets*

de Brian Azarello y Eduardo Risso un exponente que ha conseguido fidelizar a una audiencia amplia, aunque en este caso el guionista no es de origen latino y Risso reside en Rosario (Argentina). Otros ejemplos en esta línea son *Sonámbulo* de Rafael Navarro (Fernández L'Hoeste 52) que empezó a publicarse en 1996 o *Chicanos* de Carlos Trillo y Risso publicada en 1997.

Los artistas de cómic latinos tienen a su alcance todo un repertorio de recursos técnicos y una herencia cultural multiétnica que les convierte en un universo creativo en sí mismos, a la vez que son parte fundamental de la industria del cómic estadounidense. Esta industria ha estado tradicionalmente dominada por el género de superhéroes pero con el empuje del cómic *underground* y la apertura a nuevas sensibilidades e imaginarios sociales, el cómic latino ha entrado con paso firme incluso en aquellos en los que no se le asocia con frecuencia. Por ejemplo, el género post-apocalíptico con tintes mitológicos tiene en *Rocketo* de Frank Espinosa (2005) un ejemplo sobresaliente que comentaremos más adelante. Pero no podemos olvidar aquellas historias domésticas que reflejan el día a día de una comunidad que ha crecido hablando dos o más lenguas y en las que la herencia cultural se mezcla con la cultura *mainstream* estadounidense. Nos referimos a la mencionada obra de Gus Arriola o a *Raising Hector* de Peter Ramirez, que está entre las pocas tiras de prensa sindicadas junto con *La Cucaracha* de Alcaraz y *Baldo* de Héctor Cantú y Carlos Castellanos. Las vicisitudes de la comunidad gay en Los Ángeles son el material con el que trabaja Jaime Cortez y ello apunta, como sugieren Fernández L'Hoeste y Poblete, al enorme potencial del medio para educar y transformar la sociedad (Fernández L'Hoeste y Poblete 12).

Otro tema interesante respecto al cómic latino es su integración en la cultura de los Estados Unidos a través de una de las figuras más importantes de dicha cultura, al menos en lo que se refiere a lo popular, como es el superhéroe. “Los superhéroes latinos se remontan a los años 70, cuando Marvel introdujo a su primer cruzado con capa hispano (El Tigre Blanco, 1975) y el juez de Texas, Margarito Garza, se autopublicó el primer cómic de superhéroes latino independiente creado por un latino (*Relámpago*, 1977)” (Aldama y González 181).

Relámpago será el primero de los muchos personajes que a partir de la década de 1990 empezarán a poblar el universo superheroico

con un acento latino. Por ejemplo, el sello Milestone publicó Kobalt en 1993 (un vigilante, cuyo verdadero nombre es Miguel, que lucha contra maleantes y corporaciones sin escrúpulos en la ciudad de Dakota) y Blood Syndicate de 1993 a 1996, protagonizada por un conjunto de superhéroes multiétnicos de barrio. También podemos incluir en esa época los personajes creados por artistas latinos para el cómic independiente como El Gato Negro, de Richard Domínguez (creado en 1993), o El Muerto, de Javier Hernández (1997), y todos sus continuadores que se han multiplicado con el crecimiento del panorama del cómic independiente y, sobre todo, del cómic digital. Otro aspecto importante de la influencia latina en el cómic de superhéroes es la introducción de personajes latinos en los universos *mainstream* de Marvel y DC, que empezó en Spiderman 2099 en 1992 y ha culminado, más recientemente, con Miles Morales y Anya Corazón (cuyo alias superheroico es Araña escrito en español) en la parte del Universo Marvel relacionada con el superhéroe arácnido o la nueva versión de Blue Beetle publicado por DC.

No deja de ser curiosa la vinculación de los personajes latinos con la parte del Universo Marvel dedicada a contar las aventuras de Spiderman, tendencia en la que también se podría incluir la versión de Blue Beetle ya mencionada, ya que la versión original de ese personaje (tanto en sus orígenes en la Charlton como en su versión para DC) es una respuesta de ambas editoriales al éxito del superhéroe arácnido en Marvel. Se trata en todos los casos de personajes muy jóvenes que además forman parte de un subuniverso, el arácnido, tradicionalmente identificado con lo juvenil, desde la propia creación del personaje original que no era más que un chico en edad de instituto. Esta identificación del personaje latino con lo juvenil y con personajes en proceso de crecimiento no es más que un reflejo de la pujanza y el crecimiento que la población latina está experimentando en los Estados Unidos y que ya se comentó anteriormente.

3. DOS AUTORES: ANTONIO PROHÍAS Y FRANK ESPINOSA

De entre la extensa nómina de autores, vamos a detenernos brevemente en Antonio Prohías (Cuba, 1921-Estados Unidos, 1998) y Frank Espinosa (Cuba, 1962) ya que representan dos generaciones de artistas latinos que han conseguido un merecido reconocimiento en el mundo del cómic tanto en los Estados Unidos como de manera internacional. Ambos autores son de origen cubano y emigraron a los Estados Unidos, concretamente a New York, en periodos distintos de su vida personal. Prohías marchó de Cuba en 1960 con 39 años al darse cuenta que su posición como humorista gráfico dentro de un circuito de medios de comunicación capitalista se volvía insostenible ante la formación del estado socialista con la toma del poder de la Revolución Cubana en 1959 y la gradual desaparición de la prensa de capital privado en 1960. Por su parte, la familia de Espinosa salió de Cuba cuando él tenía 7 años en 1969, por motivos fundamentalmente económicos como tantos otros migrantes que desde América Latina han buscado nuevos horizontes en el vecino del norte. Prohías era ya un humorista gráfico consagrado en Cuba. En 1959 se convirtió en presidente de la Asociación de Caricaturistas de Cuba y años antes había recibido distinciones por su trabajo humorístico. Su adaptación a la industria estadounidense del cómic fue fruto de un estilo singular que se acomodó de manera natural a la sátira humorística de *Mad* en un contexto político de guerra fría entre capitalismo y comunismo. Tras salir de Cuba, Prohías pasó por algunos trabajos manuales característicos de la emigración cuando no se domina la lengua del país, pero ya en enero de 1961 aparecía la primera entrega de su historieta más icónica, “Spy vs Spy” en *Mad* #60 (Figura 2), la revista satírica más importante de la segunda mitad del siglo XX en los Estados Unidos. La calidad del autor cubano no pasó desapercibida en la redacción de *Mad* y Prohías supo hacer de la necesidad virtud al desarrollar un cómic que, por su ausencia de texto, su dinamismo y su humor corrosivo supo conectar con una audiencia masiva en un contexto internacional cada vez más politizado. El concepto de su tira cómica era sencillo e inteligente. Fue una evolución de su tira ‘El hombre siniestro’ publicada en las revistas cubanas *Zig-Zag* y *Bohemia* de 1956 a 1959. “Spy vs Spy” está dibujada en blanco y negro, presenta a dos espías que se diferencian únicamente por su vestimenta,

uno viste de negro y el otro de blanco. El juego de opuestos es una excusa ya que ambos espías son ontológicamente iguales y buscan de manera feroz terminar con la vida de su némesis. La historieta es un ejercicio de creatividad sobre las incontables maneras de asesinar a su enemigo, algunas más sutiles que otras. En definitiva, “Spy vs Spy” es una manera satírica de representar y liberar las tensiones de la guerra fría y se ha convertido en uno de los cómics de más larga duración en el mercado estadounidense. Prohías dibujó la tira hasta 1987 y tras él otros artistas han continuado la serie hasta Peter Kuper que tomó el relevo en 1997. Los lazos entre la comunidad latina hicieron posible la entrada de otro fantástico humorista gráfico en la revista *Mad*. Nos referimos al hispano-mexicano Sergio Aragonés (España, 1937) que con 25 años, 20 dólares en el bolsillo y su carpeta de dibujos, llegó a New York en 1962 a probar fortuna. La historia es bien conocida. Aragonés, que no hablaba una palabra de inglés, le pidió a Prohías que le ayudara presentándole a los editores de *Mad*, confiando en el supuesto dominio de la lengua inglesa del cubano. Aunque Prohías tampoco hablaba inglés, los editores de *Mad* contrataron a Aragonés y para 1963 ya colaboraba en la revista, iniciando una larga y prolífica carrera que le ha llevado a crear 12 000 gags humorísticos para la revista (Evanier).

En el caso de Espinosa toda su carrera artística se ha desarrollado en los Estados Unidos. Tras estudiar animación, comenzó a trabajar en 1983 para Disney creando los personajes de sus parques temáticos, además de diseñar juguetes y crear anuncios comerciales. En 1992 Espinosa reinventó Looney Tunes para Warner Bros además de dibujar los personajes de Baby Looney Tunes. Todas estas experiencias profesionales le valieron para aprender a crear historias, además de conseguir una gran soltura en el abocetado de personajes, un estilo que queda reflejado en su obra *Rocketo* (2005-2006) (Figura 3), por su dinamismo y el empleo de una línea mínima para construir a los personajes. Según confiesa el propio autor, su estilo está influido a nivel compositivo por Miyazaki y a nivel artístico por el expresionismo alemán y su aplicación al cómic a través de una línea clara en artistas franceses como Yves Chaland (1957-1990).⁴ Espinosa es un artista latino que ejemplifica a toda una comunidad porque ha conseguido triunfar gracias a su talento y a su dedicación plena en los proyectos en los que ha trabajado. Con *Rocketo* consiguió imaginar un mundo

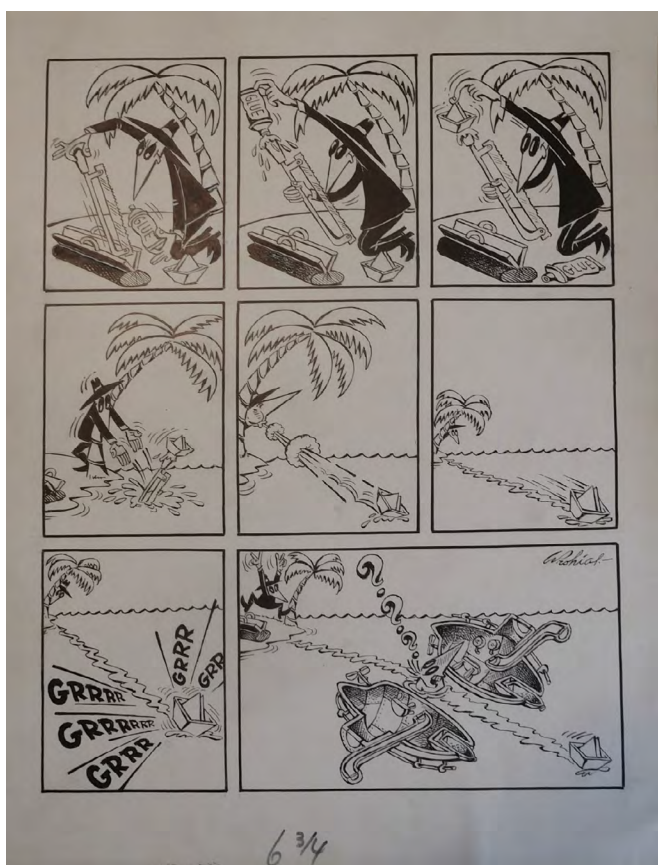


Figura 2. Página de “Spy vs. Spy” de Antonio Prohías.

Fuente: Prohías. *Spy vs Spy. The Complete Casebook*, 2001. © 2001 Watson-Guption - Prohías.

que no está constreñido por la experiencia diaria de la comunidad latina en los Estados Unidos (Fernández L’Hoeste 2017: 50). El logro de Espinosa es la creación de una atmósfera que acomoda de manera natural a sus personajes y en la que los lectores se sumergen para conocer las aventuras de los protagonistas. Al hacer esto, el autor ha tomado distancia con algunos de los temas recurrentes del cómic latino (migración; relaciones sociales; doble identidad; discriminación; herencia cultural latina) con una propuesta fundamentalmente estética que combina su experiencia en el campo de la industria audiovisual con un homenaje al cómic de la edad de oro estadounidense con claros guiños a Flash Gordon y Buck Rogers.⁵



Figura 3. Imagen de *Rocketo* de Frank Espinosa.

Fuente: Espinosa. *Rocketo*, 2006. © 2006 Image Comics – Espinosa.

De los cuatro libros y 48 números pensados para *Rocketo*, solamente vio la luz el primero, que le valió al autor la nominación en 2006 a tres premios Eisner por mejor serie nueva, mejor serie continuada y mejor portadista. La historia narra las aventuras de Rocketo Garrison, un famoso cartógrafo y explorador nacido en la isla de Kova (Cuba) en una post-apocalíptica Tierra. Con tintes cybermitológicos (y tomando como inspiración a Simbad el marino), el mundo de Rocketo está poblado de criaturas genéticamente modificadas como hombres-tigre, hombres-perro, hombres-pájaro, harpías, o criaturas marinas, además de poderosísimos robots que juegan un papel clave en las aspiraciones de dominación mundial que Lucerne, el imperio monárquico que aparece en la serie, tiene sobre el resto de naciones en el planeta. El cómic tuvo una buena acogida en Estados Unidos y también en Francia e Italia, donde se publicó en edición italiana en 2006 y 2009 y se ha reeditado en un solo volumen con Double Shot en 2020. La estrecha relación de Espinosa con Italia le ha llevado a ser nombrado director artístico de la Scuola Internazionale dei Comics en Florencia desde 2018 (Padovani et al).

CONCLUSIONES

Aunque la aparición de lo que podríamos denominar como cómic latino en los Estados Unidos se produce con cierto retraso con respecto al desarrollo del cómic como medio en ese país, a partir de la aparición de *Gordo* de Gus Arriola en 1941 ha experimentado un radical crecimiento comparable al de la propia comunidad latina en los Estados Unidos con obras destacadas como *Love & Rockets*, *Rocketo*, *La Cucaracha* y otras mencionadas en este artículo. Un cómic que, además, de forma general, siempre se ha preocupado por representar su comunidad en diferentes aspectos que incluyen su enorme diversidad y su variedad de preocupaciones e intereses. Por ese motivo, en este trabajo, se ha realizado una breve panorámica de las expresiones gráficas realizadas por los latinos con el fin de contextualizar las contribuciones que aparecen en este número especial y que entran en mayor profundidad en algunas de las obras aquí mencionadas. Este breve recorrido nos demuestra cómo la sensibilidad de este colectivo encuentra un excelente vehículo de expresión en el cómic, un medio que, en los últimos años, ha demostrado una enorme capacidad, precisamente para la expresión de las diferentes sensibilidades y preocupaciones de personas y colectivos que, en ocasiones, tenían dificultad para expresar su voz y demuestra la necesidad de incluir este medio en los estudios académicos si se quiere tener una perspectiva completa de la riqueza y la complejidad de la comunidad latina en los Estados Unidos.

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NOTAS

- 1 En 1995 un número especial de la revista *The Americas Review* titulado “Cartooning and Other Graphic Arts” incluyó ejemplos satíricos y políticos de Lalo Alcaraz, Alejandro Sánchez y Jaime Crespo. En la introducción Rosaura Sánchez y Beatrice Pita argumentan que el arte visual latino, el humor gráfico y los cómics pertenecen al ámbito de la tradición latinoamericana que trata de cuestionar los sistemas dominantes de representación (Aldama, *Your Brain to Latino Comics* 12).
- 2 Datos obtenidos de la página <https://www.census.gov/>.
- 3 *La Familia Burrón* es una historieta mexicana de corte costumbrista creada en 1948 por Gabriel Vargas. El retrato de esta familia de clase baja de la Ciudad de México se publicó hasta el año 2009 de manera ininterrumpida, convirtiéndose en una de las series más longevas del medio.
- 4 No en vano el personaje Spirou en *Rocketo* es un homenaje a *Spirou*, la emblemática revista de cómics belga que comenzó a publicarse en 1938 y que también da nombre al cómic *Spirou*. Yves Chaland retomó esta historieta a principios de los años ochenta y en total publicó 46 tiras, desde el 22 de abril al 16 de septiembre de 1982.
- 5 Para un público español, *Rocketo*, recuerda a las aventuras de Roco Vargas, el personaje creado por Daniel Torres en 1983.

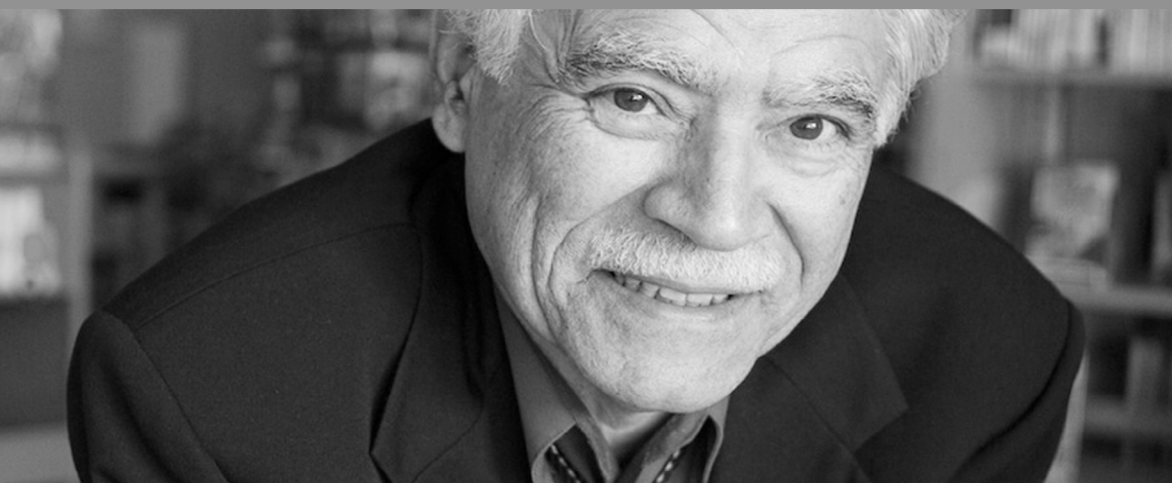
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ENSAYOS
CRITICAL ARTICLES

PAUL ALLATSON
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OF FARMWORKERS AND OTHER EXPLOITATIONS: THE ENDURING RELEVANCE OF RIUS'S *THE CHICANOS*

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ABSTRACT

In 1972, the North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA) published a comic by the Mexican comic artist Rius: *NACLA Presents Rius: The Chicanos*. This was an English-language version of *Los Chicanos*, which Rius had released in his Los Agachados series in 1971. In US Latino cultural and comic history *The Chicanos* is an overlooked artefact: it is the first comic book-length treatment of Chicanos and the diverse drives of the Chicano Movement. In this essay I assess *The Chicanos* as a key example of transborder information exchange about a US population with direct links to Mexico. *The Chicanos*, I suggest, survives as a cultural artefact—which comes to the discussion with inevitable historical biases and oversights—that illustrates how important historical memory is in a USA in which prevail ephemeral media soundbites and claims of “fake news.”

KEYWORDS: Eduardo del Río García; Rius; Chicanos; Chicano Movement; North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA); Los Agachados; comics; farmworkers; undocumented immigrants; COVID-19.

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RESUMEN

En 1972, el Congreso Norteamericano de América Latina (NACLA) publicó un cómic del dibujante mexicano Rius: *NACLA Presents Rius: The Chicanos*. Ésta era una versión en inglés de *Los Chicanos*, que Rius había lanzado en su serie *Los Agachados* en 1971. En la historia cultural y del cómic latino de los Estados Unidos, *The Chicanos* es un artefacto pasado por alto: es el primer tratamiento de longitud de un cómic de los chicanos y los diversos impulsos del Movimiento Chicano. En este ensayo, evalúo a *The Chicanos* como un ejemplo clave de intercambio de información transfronterizo sobre una población estadounidense con vínculos directos con México. *The Chicanos*, sugiero, sobrevive como un artefacto cultural—que llega a la discusión con inevitables sesgos y descuidos históricos—que ilustra la importancia de la memoria histórica en un EE. UU. en el que prevalecen fragmentos efímeros de los medios de comunicación de masas y afirmaciones de “noticias falsas.”

PALABRAS CLAVE: Eduardo del Río García; Rius; Chicanos; El movimiento chicano; Congreso Norteamericano de América Latina; *Los Agachados*; historietas; campesinos; inmigrantes indocumentados; COVID-19.

* * *

In the Fall of 1972, the Berkeley-based North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA) published a comic by the Mexican comic artist Eduardo del Río García, aka Rius (1934–2017), entitled *NACLA Presents Rius: The Chicanos* (henceforth *The Chicanos*; Rius 1973).¹ The comic was an English-language version of *Los Chicanos*, which Rius had released in Mexico as number 82 in his *Los Agachados* series in 1971. The publication event did not signal a novel relationship between NACLA and Rius. NACLA had already issued a translation of an earlier Rius comic on the Uruguayan left-wing guerrilla-group the Tupamaros. But in the evolution of US Latino cultural and comic history, *The Chicanos* remains an overlooked, if modest, milestone: it is the first comic book-length treatment of Chicanos and the diverse drives of the Chicano Movement in its heyday in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Given that importance, in this essay I provide a detailed overview of *The Chicanos* and its primary concerns, noting that the comic’s narrative contains inevitable historical oversights and biases. That overview is preceded by a discussion of the relation between the comic and its publisher NACLA as an example of transborder

information exchange and awareness raising about a US population with historical, genealogical and cultural links to Mexico. I then plot how the work of Rius continues to inform US Latino comics and comic scholarship in the 21st century. Finally, I argue that *The Chicanos* and its laying bare of the chronic marginalization of Mexican Americans remains apposite half a century after its English-language appearance. That relevance has to do with longstanding exploitations of Mexican American and Mexican documented and undocumented farm- and other workers—a key focus of *The Chicanos*; and a glossed over point of tension within it—which continue in the USA in the shadow of COVID-19. My analysis relies on a transcultural theoretical reading that locates the comic's internal concerns in evolving historical contact zones. The “contact zone” is Mary Louise Pratt's concept, one that attempts “to invoke the spatial and temporal copresence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures, and whose trajectories now intersect” (Pratt 7). For Pratt, a contact zone reading focuses on “copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, often within radically asymmetrical relations of power” (Pratt 7).

1. NACLA AND AWARENESS RAISING

The inside front cover of *The Chicanos* (Figure 1) contains the following justification for NACLA's translation and publication of *Los Chicanos*:

This comic book has been prepared and adapted from the highly popular comic series, ‘Los Agachados,’ by the Mexican artist Rius [...] The Spanish edition was directed at a Mexican audience and so the tone reflects not only the Mexican setting, but also the way the Mexican people feel about the U.S. government. However, it is important to remember that although the comic book may reflect a natural resentment against U.S. domination, it is directed only at the government and its imperialist policies and not at the American people.²

This explanation fits the brief of NACLA, a progressive organisation of US “civil rights, antiwar and labor activists” formed in 1966 with the aim of forging a coalition that could intervene in US national debates by raising awareness of transcontinental political and cultural developments and exchanges. As the NACLA website notes, NACLA

was committed above all to furthering mutual understandings between the USA and the peoples and countries of the Caribbean and Latin America:

[NACLA], announced its organizers, would be a source of reliable information and analysis on Latin America that could be of use to activists. It would focus on systemic analyses of wealth and power in the Americas rather than on scandals or policy ‘mistakes.’ It would be informed by a belief that what happened in the United States was integrally related to what happened in the rest of the world. In this context, NACLA’s understanding of U.S. policies and power was formed by looking at the United States from a Latin American perspective, through a Latin American lens (NACLA 2020).



Figure 1. Cover of *The Chicanos*.

Source: NACLA Presents *Rius: The Chicanos*. NACLA, 1972. © 1973 NACLA.

The historical setting for the birth and evolution of NACLA was, of course, the Cold War, as envisaged critically within US borders, and as manifest outside them with regard to often brutal US political, economic, and military influence and interventions. The first NACLA newsletter, which became a regular mouthpiece for the organisation's operations and trans-American interests, was published in February 1967. *The Chicanos*, then, was an early edition to the newsletter's roster, which continues to be released more than five decades later. The comic was something of a cultural coup (within NACLA's small but growing readership) given that Rius was, at the time, one of the most famous political cartoonists in Mexico, and his work was attracting readers outside that country (Tatum & Hinds 5).³ According to Howard, *Los Agachados* was produced bimonthly beginning in September 1968, and ran for nine years until its closure in 1977. The series had a print run of sales of some "50,000 copies its first few weeks and 150,000 issues at its height" (Howard 13). Tatum states that between 1968 and 1977 "Rius wrote and illustrated 291 issues" of the series (767). Among the few critics to recognise the gendered division of labour involved with the series, Tatum adds: "this endeavor was almost entirely a one-man production except for his wife, who functioned over the years as the person who would provide the color. More recently, their young daughter has also contributed to the production of the comic book" (Tatum 767).⁴ Surveying a long history of what he termed "Mexico's combat cartoonists," Barajas notes that:

From the beginning, cartooning was an axis around which political debate turned in Mexico. If in the nineteenth century it was an essential weapon of the combative Liberal press, by the end of the twentieth century cartooning's influence had been well established in Mexican politics by artists such as Eduardo del Rio, more popularly known as Rius, and Rogelio Naranjo.

As these analyses iterate, there is no Mexican comic history without Rius. NACLA's publication of *The Chicanos* also indicated a radical conceptual shift for the organisation's approach to Latin American political and sociocultural developments to include Mexican American minorities in the USA. That is, the comic implied, Latin America does not stop at the US-Mexico border, for around that border are borderlands that form a historically charged contact zone (Pratt).

2. *THE CHICANOS* AND ITS CONCERNS

The front cover of *The Chicanos* features a character familiar to readers of the Los Agachados series, Uncle Sam (Howard 57), who wears a hat decorated with stripes and dollar signs. He is being bucked unceremoniously from the back of a Chicano with a saddle on his back. The visual and historical message here is not subtle, but that message will be clarified with more nuance in the comic that follows: the USA exploits its Chicano populations, but those communities are now fighting back against a history of enforced discrimination dating back to the Mexican-American War of 1846–1848, after which the USA annexed Mexico's northern half. The comic book's self-conscious didactic approach—"half *historieta*, half didactic manual" (Stavans, *My Debt to Rius* 176)—utilizes recurring characters and icons to construct its historical narrative of gringo exploitations of Chicanos, and of Chicano resistance to such treatments. This approach is in keeping with Rius's wider aims in the Los Agachados series, whose name has been variously translated into English as the "stooped ones," the "underdogs," and the "bending ones" (Stavans, *My Debt to Rius* 174). Pancho in *The Chicanos* is very much legible as a stooped one. *The Chicanos*, however, differs from many of the comics published in the series for being set outside the imagined Mexico—the fictional city of San Garabato or rural Chayotitlán—that Rius utilized for many issues of the series (Tatum 770; Neria & Aspinwall 27). The comic combines hand-drawn cartoons with collage and balloon text as it lays bare the harsh daily realities of life in the USA for the Chicano minority in the 1960s and early 1970s.

The Chicanos commences with a skit, "2 Faces of el Patroncito (the Boss)," based on one by the famous agit-prop performance ensemble, El Teatro Campesino (ETC), founded in 1965 by the playwright Luis Valdez. The ETC was noted for its *rasquache* or making do aesthetic, and for its social protest ethos that saw the ensemble deliver awareness-raising performances to farmworkers in the field (Allatson, *Key Terms in Latino/a Literary* 222–223). The "2 Faces of el Patroncito (the Boss)" introduces to the comic's readers El Patroncito (the Boss) and Pancho (misnamed by the Patron as Pedro), as the two characters swap roles for a day. Pancho has his revenge over his master by exploiting him as the boss would normally do. Pancho remains the main character in the rest of the comic, moving through space and time as the comic's didactic intentions are iterated (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Image of “The 2 faces of El Patroncito”.

Source: *NACLA Presents Rius: The Chicanos*. NACLA, 1972. © 1973 NACLA.

The comic accordingly provides an historical overview of how the US southwest derived from territorial handovers stemming from the Mexican American War (1846–1848). As per standard Chicano Movement discourse, *Los Chicanos* argues that the 1848 territorial handover produced the Mexican American minority, and with it a related history of labour exploitation, as well as undervalued involvement in the US military, most notably in World War II and the Vietnam War. The comic also attends to the first cultural signs of new Chicano identifications, Pochos and Pachucos, the latter name deriving from Mexican American Spanish slang for El Paso in southwestern Texas (Allatson, Key Terms in Latino/a Literary 186–187). However, Rius does not recognise in Pachucos a positive development in the history of Mexican American culture, as the voice balloon in one panel says: “The nickname stuck, and soon there were Pachucos all over the place. In L.A. they formed a terrible gang that even scared the cops,

but they had no political direction.” This reading of Pachucos ignores such events as the infamous zoot-suit riots of 1943 in which Chicano and other zoot-suiters in Los Angeles were targeted by sailors, soldiers and the police. The event was important in politicizing Chicano youth in that city (Allatson, Key Terms in Latino/a Literary 247–248). Rius’s position here is not surprising. He takes an orthodox leftist position that Pachucos were not conscious of their own class oppressions, thus evoking earlier Mexican intellectual interventions into the terrains of *chicanismo*, notably Octavio Paz’s infamous 1950 dismissal of Mexican Americans as an abject, “orphaned” constituency—lost to both Mexico and the USA—in *El laberinto de la soledad* (Paz; Allatson, Key Terms in Latino/a Literary 186–187).

Condensing diverse civil rights drives, the comic continues with panels that represent longstanding US police brutality and legal discriminations, and Chicano responses to that history. One set of panels focuses on Reies López Tijerina, the founder of the Alianza Federal de Mercedes (Federal Land Grant Alliance, February 1963) in New Mexico, an organization that fought to reclaim lands taken off Mexican Americans from the early 1880s. The next set of panels introduces readers to the National Farmworkers Association (NFWA) that was formed in 1962 in California under the leadership of César Chávez. The panels extend from the Teatro Campesino skit that opened the comic by reiterating a long history of the exploitation of Mexican American farmworkers. Here, the comic also refers to government and agricultural farm owners’ use of hired Mexican—not Chicano—strike breakers to work on the farms during the strike by Chicanos in 1965 for better pay and conditions in the Californian grape growing sector. This is the only moment in which the comic refers to political tensions between Mexican Americans and Mexicans. The comic thus glosses over the complex realities of migrant labour, mostly from Mexico, in the agrarian sector in the 1960s, and US farmworker—in California largely drawn from the Chicano and Filipino communities—resentment of that labour.

Nonetheless, for Rius in *The Chicanos* the NFWA (which became the United Farm Workers in 1966, and the United Farm Workers Association in 1972) was the most important and influential political organization in the Chicano Movement. He recognized in the NFWA a militant agenda that had affinities with anti-imperialist and anti-

capitalist resistance movements outside the US, a reading in line with such commentators as Mariscal:

Years before the full-blown Movimiento burst onto the historical stage, the NFWA had become a classic version of what Raymond Williams called a 'militant particularism'—in which a group of workers in a specific geographical locale, faced with intolerable conditions, organize [sic] to change those conditions for the better. But the particularities of the farmworkers' struggle spoke to a wide range of related issues that affected virtually every Mexican American community in the United States during the Vietnam War period. [...] In a dialectical and often contradictory process, the union's project fed into an emergent cultural nationalism and provided it with a repertoire of symbols and tropes even as it worked against the construction of a sectarian ethnicity-based identity by insisting on multiethnic coalition building and international solidarity with workers around the world (Mariscal 23-24).

Endorsing such transnational resonances, *The Chicanos* shows how the Chicano Movement in the early 1970s was operating on a number of fronts. First the comic emphasizes the importance of education at school level, which needed to be more inclusive of Chicanos and their history. Second the comic supports the rise of a militant Chicano identification, as typified by the formation of the La Raza Unida Party, a party that represented the Chicano Brown Berets, as well as by Chicano involvement in the Anti-Vietnam War movement. Noting how Chicano activism generated its own symbolism, the comic explains the importance of "Aztlán," a conceptualisation of the US Southwest as the location for the original homeland of the Aztecs, which in the Chicano Movement functioned as a geocultural imaginary and a place in which Chicanos were neither American nor Mexican, but a transcultural entity in between those national blocs. While Rius does not endorse the ambition of some Chicanos in the early 1970s for an independent Aztlán, *The Chicanos* does assert that there are political lessons to be learned from the Chicano Movement in Mexico and elsewhere. *The Chicanos* in effect advocates a transborder alliance between Mexican workers and intellectuals and Chicano workers and activists in the north.

As a finalising statement, the comic lists sources consulted, along with contacts for numerous Chicano Movement organisations and media outlets, and then ends with a poem from the Chicano

poet Alurista (Figure 3): “The man say we making noise.” With that conclusion, *The Chicanos* confirms its inherent androcentric approach to the quotidian realities of Mexican Americans in the early 1970s. Women are peripheral to the comic’s narrative. The first mention of women occurs in the opening skit about El Patroncito, in which the boss’s swapping of places with Pancho leads a baton-wielding policeman to accuse El Patroncito of daring “to look at a white woman.” Toward the end of the comic two images of women appear. The first depicts César Chávez embracing—patriarch-like, protectively—a woman and child. The second occurs in a panel that shows a female African American protester holding a “Free Ruchell Magee” sign.⁵ The panel asserts that Chicano civil rights concerns are linked with those of “Blacks, Indians, Filipinos, and all other victims of the system.” The labour and contributions of Chicana activists in the various wings of the Chicano Movement discussed in the comic lie outside its remit. As a cultural artefact from 1972, the comic embodies an historical moment before Chicana feminist critiques of Chicano nationalism, machismo and patriarchy began to appear in the mid- to late-1970s and early 1980s (Allatson, Key Terms in Latino/a Literary 64–65).

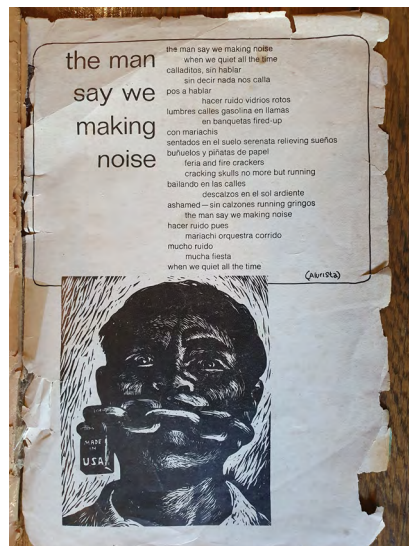


Figure 3. Illustration for a poem by the Chicano poet Alurista.
Source: NACLA Presents Rius: *The Chicanos*. NACLA, 1972. © 1973 NACLA.

3. RIUS AND HIS ENDURING INFLUENCE

Rius died in 2017, and numerous commentators have since described his legacy in terms of his impact on comics outside Mexico, especially on didactic comics (Howard 9-10). Surprisingly some of the critical literature on the US Latino comic has tended to downplay that legacy, or ignore it. It is important, then, to note a few examples of Rius's influence on US Latino comic artists and scholars in the twenty-first century. As is well known, the Los Angeles-based Chicano cartoonist Lalo Alcaraz, has cited Rius as one of his key influences (Aldama 19; Fernández L'Hoeste). Alcaraz collaborated with Ilan Stavans to provide the illustrations in two significant comic projects: *Latino USA: A Cartoon History* (2000) and *A Most Imperfect Union: A Contrarian History of the United States* (2014). As I have argued elsewhere, *The Chicanos* seems to provide a tacit point of reference for *Latino USA: A Cartoon History* (Allatson, Ilan Stavans's *Latino USA* 244). In a detailed assessment of Rius's importance for his own political education, Stavans notes that while he had not made a direct link between *Latino USA* and Rius, his readers did (Stavans, *My Debt to Rius* 177). Rius's impact on Stavans' second collaboration with Alcaraz was, however, overt: "This second title has a more sparse style that shies away from excess and strikes me as closer to Rius's. It also has a more irreverent, anti-establishmentarian approach that plays homage to him" (Stavans, *My Debt to Rius* 177). Noting that the two comic books—which are clearly didactic in intention as accords with the Rius tradition—feature the recurring protagonists of Author and Cartoonist, Stavans concludes: "In sum, my debt to the Mexican *historieta*, and to Rius in particular, is substantial: they taught me how to laugh while questioning the world I live in" (Stavans, *My Debt to Rius* 177). Traces of Rius, too, can be detected in Maceo Montoya's *Chicano Movement For Beginners* (2016), whose title references the many "For Beginners" books that Rius pioneered, and the speculative cartoon, "Los Borrados," by Oscar "The Oz" Madrigal (2003).

Rius's *The Chicanos* survives as a cultural artefact with inevitable historical biases and oversights. And yet the comic draws attention to the importance of historical memory in a USA in which, five decades later, prevail ephemeral media soundbites and claims of "fake news." Given that context, assessing the comic's enduring relevance also asks readers to focus on the enduring systemic structures of marginalization and exploitation that the comic itself laid bare.

4. CODA: *THE CHICANOS* IN THE SHADOW OF COVID-19

The plight of farmworkers in the fields of California in the early-1960s lead to the formation of the National Farm Workers Association. That organisation's strikes and activism would, after many years of struggle, improve the working conditions of Chicano farmworkers. For Rius, the NFWA was the most important of the Chicano Movement's diverse drives. Yet even Rius felt obliged to mention in *The Chicanos* a fundamental tension between Mexican American farmworkers and the non-unionized Mexican farmworkers brought into the fields during the 1965 boycott of Californian wine grape companies (Allatson, Key Terms in Latino/a Literary 237). That strike would last five years, and was supported by such cultural operatives as el Teatro Campesino, which provided the opening skit for *The Chicanos*. In 1972, the NFWA morphed into the UFWA, and its mission would then expand to fight for improving the working conditions of all farmworkers irrespective of national status. The UFWA continues to do this work at the beginning of the third decade of the twenty-first century.

The chronic exploitations of farmworkers discussed in *The Chicanos* remain strikingly apposite in the USA in the shadow of COVID-19 in 2020 and 2021. The pandemic hit undocumented farmworkers heavily across the USA, and in ways that evoke the structural discriminations of the 1960s and 1970s discussed in *The Chicanos*. According to Dorning and Skeritt, 75 percent of farmworkers, or just under three million people, in the USA are undocumented migrants, most from Mexico and Central America (2020). Once COVID-19 took hold in the USA, that laboring community was vulnerable. Farms across the country became de facto mini-contact zones in which "conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict" were commonplace (Pratt 1992: 6), and in ways that have been replicated across the globe (Morley 2020). As Godoy pointed out in April 2020: "the SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) pandemic ... threatens to worsen the already precarious conditions in which these workers plant, harvest, process and move fruits and vegetables in the U.S" (2020). He adds: "Exposed to illegal charges for visa, transport and accommodation costs, labour exploitation, lack of access to basic services and unhealthy housing, Mexican seasonal workers driven from their homes by poverty must also now brave the risk of contagion." Recalling the work of the late César

Chávez, whose birthday March 31 is commemorated in the USA, Godoy warns his readers to heed the exploitations of undocumented farmworkers, whom he calls essential workers during the pandemic. Bobadilla echoes this position: “immigrant farmworkers ... deserve economic support, worker protections and our gratitude—and the story of the iconic leader of the farmworkers’ movement decades ago may provide guidance for how to build political support for such measures” (2020). Such warnings are precisely what *The Chicanos* attempted to heed at the height of the Chicano Movement in the early 1970s. An overlooked cultural artefact in the history of US Latino comics, *The Chicanos* thus remains prescient some five decades after its translation and publication by NACLA, in an historical moment in which farmworkers across the USA have been hard hit by the COVID-19 global pandemic, and debates about farmworker rights and exploitations are again attracting media and political attention.

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NOTES

- 1 The comic states that the date of publication is Fall 1972, but it also contains the copyright date of 1973.
- 2 In this essay I focus on the English translation and not the original Spanish version because my interest lies not in assessing the translation per se, but in reading *The Chicanos* in relation to its targeting of, and commitment to "educating," an English-speaking US readership.
- 3 Useful overviews of Rius and his work's influence are Proctor (1972), Tatum (1991), Stavans (2016), Neria and Aspinwall (2016), Galindo (2017), Howard (2019) and Sánchez González (2019). The online record of a notable Mexican exhibition on Rius, *Rius para principiantes*, is also of interest (2014).
- 4 Rius reestablished the series in 1978 (Tatum 767).
- 5 Ruchell Cinque Magee is an African American activist who has the dubious honour of being the USA's longest serving political prisoner (Prisoner Solidarity n.d).

THE ISLE IS FULL OF NOISES: *PUERTO RICO STRONG*, HURRICANE MARÍA, AND THE ROLE OF MEMORY IN THE REIMAGINATION OF A BORICUA NATION¹

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ABSTRACT

The text discusses the case of *Puerto Rico Strong*, a 2018 comics anthology by United Way of Puerto Rico (Fondos Unidos de PR) and St. Louis comics publisher Lion Forge. Profits from the sale of the volume went to a number of relief efforts following the disaster of Hurricane María. The article discusses some of the main narrative lines of the volume, in particular, stories that are representative of what is called the *prosthetic nation*, an experience proper of the Latinx community across the US. The prosthetic nation is a notion based on ideas suggested by Allison Landsberg and Celia Lury on prosthetic memory and culture, respectively, which show how identity can be reconstituted by deliberate transformation. It is a community imagined with the memories of others—specifically, a community imagined as nation, yet a nation unlived or not experienced materially firsthand. A prosthetic nation is one in which the sense of allegiance to an imagined community

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results from memories experienced and lived by someone close to you, who has taken the effort and time to share and nurture them industriously. For this reason, it focuses mostly not on immigration, but on what *preceded* immigration. In some cases, these fabricated involvements may be triggered through associations with events and/or occurrences parents or relatives have mentioned repeatedly with more than a touch of nostalgia, to the point of generating a sense of familiarity with unexperienced involuntary memories, echoing deceitfully the spirit of the Proust phenomenon, based on emotional sensorial connection. In this sense, the prosthetic nation is the result of a process involving affect—or, at the very least, the consequences of affect resulting from imaginary or highly theorized contact. It does not speak merely of a longing for a homeland—as experienced by many immigrants—but rather of the manufacture of a remembrance for/by a generation of people who never really experienced life in this point of family origin, given they were born or raised in another place, the heart of a colonial experience. Thus, it is a fabrication used to cultivate and preserve a critical discourse involving resistance.

KEYWORDS: Puerto Rico; hurricane María; comics; prosthetic nation; memory.

RESUMEN

El texto analiza el caso de *Puerto Rico Strong*, una antología de cómics de 2018 de United Way of Puerto Rico (Fondos Unidos de PR) y Lion Forge, la editorial de cómics de San Luis. Las ganancias de la venta del volumen se destinaron a una serie de esfuerzos de socorro tras el desastre del huracán María. El artículo analiza algunas de las principales líneas narrativas del volumen, en particular, historias representativas de lo que se ha dado por llamar la nación protésica, una experiencia propia de la comunidad latinx en los EE. UU. La nación protésica es una noción basada en las ideas de Allison Landsberg y Celia Lury sobre la memoria y la cultura protésicas, respectivamente, que muestran cómo la identidad puede reconstituirse mediante una transformación intencional. Es una comunidad imaginada con los recuerdos de otros —de manera específica, una comunidad imaginada como nación, pero una nación no vivida o no experimentada materialmente de primera mano—. Una nación protésica es aquella en la que el sentido de lealtad a una comunidad imaginada resulta de los recuerdos experimentados y vividos por alguien cercano, que se ha tomado el esfuerzo y el tiempo para compartirllos y nutrirlos laboriosamente. Por esta razón, se centra principalmente no en la inmigración, sino en lo que precedió a la inmigración. En algunos casos, estas implicaciones fabricadas pueden desencadenarse a través de asociaciones con eventos y/o sucesos que los padres o familiares han mencionado repetidamente con más que un toque de nostalgia, hasta el punto de generar una sensación de familiaridad con recuerdos involuntarios sin experiencia personal, haciendo eco engañosamente del espíritu del fenómeno de Proust, basado en la conexión sensorial emocional. En este sentido, la nación protésica es el resultado de un proceso que involucra el afecto

—o, al menos, las consecuencias del afecto resultantes de un contacto imaginario o altamente teorizado—. No habla simplemente de un anhelo de patria —según lo experimentan muchos inmigrantes— sino de la fabricación de un recuerdo para/ por una generación de personas que nunca experimentaron realmente la vida en este punto de origen familiar, dado que nacieron o fueron criados en otro lugar, el corazón de una experiencia colonial. Por lo tanto, es una fabricación utilizada para cultivar y preservar un discurso crítico que involucra resistencia.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Puerto Rico; huracán María; cómics; nación protésica; memoria.

* * *

On Wednesday September 20, 2017, at 10:15 UTC (6:15am local time), Hurricane María made landfall with winds of 155 mph (250 km/h) as a high-end Category 4 storm near Yabucoa, Puerto Rico. Its winds were the most intense to strike the island since 1928. In the aftermath, once María emerged over the Atlantic on its way to the island of Hispaniola with lessened winds of 125 mph (205 km/h), the impact of the storm became blatantly clear. Much of Puerto Rico's infrastructure, already lagging in maintenance as the result of a prolonged economic crisis, was severely affected. 95% of the island lacked power and cell phone service, while less than half of the population had access to tap water. Flooding, storm surges, and strong winds wreaked havoc on the island's agriculture. Initial estimates suggested over 8 billion in damages. Though FEMA reported 60,000 damaged homes, subsequent response from the federal government was dismal. In the end, help arrived through a variety of efforts.²

Among them was *Puerto Rico Strong*, a 2018 comics anthology jointly published by United Way of Puerto Rico (Fondos Unidos de PR) and Lion Forge, the comics publisher founded in 2011 by David Steward II and Carl Reed and headquartered in St. Louis, Missouri (Terror). Profits from the sale of the volume went to the Early Childhood Relief Program, leading to the promotion of reading programs, psychological support for the stress resulting from natural disaster, the re-establishment of child facilities, and support of community schools and health-care centers. Lion Forge offered to match 25K of all profits generated while Diamond Comics Distributors donated 5 percent of retail sales. Co-edited by Lion Forge's own Desiree Rodriguez and Hazel Newlevant, alongside

Marco Lopez, Neil Schwartz, and Derek Ruiz, the volume features art and writing by Rosa Colón (*Soda Pop Comics*), Vita Ayala (*Bitch Planet*), Naomi Franquiz (*Misfit City*), Javier Cruz Winnik (*A Reason to Smile!*), Sabrina Cintron (*La Borinqueña*), Tristan Tarwater (*Hen & Chick*), Fabian Nicieza (co-creator of *Deadpool*), Joamette Gil (*Power & Magic*), etc.

In the following pages, I will discuss some of the main narrative lines of the volume, in particular, stories that I find representative of what I have chosen to call the *prosthetic nation*, an experience proper of the Latinx community across the US. It is a notion based on ideas suggested by Allison Landsberg and Celia Lury on prosthetic memory and culture, respectively, which show how identity can

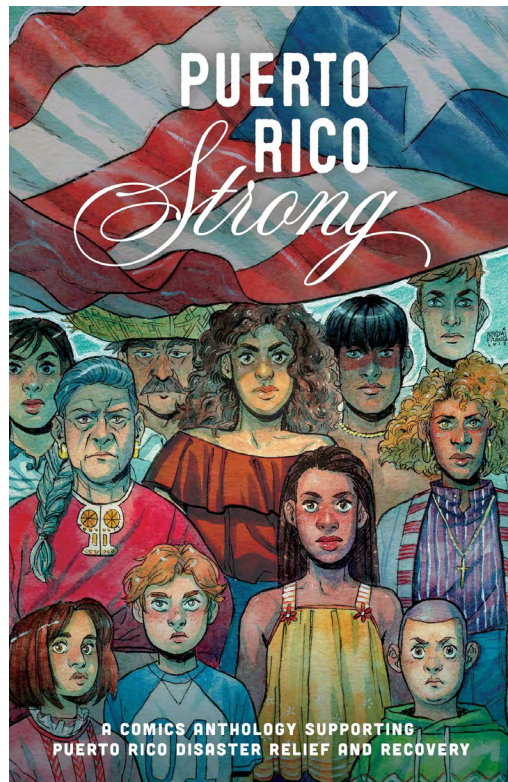


Figure 1. *Puerto Rico Strong* Cover.

Source: López, Rodríguez, Newlevant, Ruiz & Schwartz, editors. *Puerto Rico Strong*. Lion Forge, 2018. © 2018 Lion Forge.

be reconstituted by deliberate transformation. The prosthetic nation is a community imagined with the memories of others—in particular, a community imagined as nation, yet a nation un-lived or not experienced materially firsthand. It does not speak merely of a longing for a homeland—as experienced by many immigrants—but rather of the manufacture of a remembrance for/by a generation of people who never really experienced life in this point of family origin, given they were born or raised in another place, the heart of a colonial experience. Thus, it is a fabrication used to cultivate and preserve a critical discourse involving resistance.

A prosthetic nation is one in which the sense of allegiance to an imagined community results from memories experienced and lived by someone close to you, who has taken the effort and time to share and nurture them industriously. For this reason, it focuses mostly not on immigration, but on what *preceded* immigration. In some cases, these fabricated involvements may be triggered through associations with events and/or occurrences parents or relatives have mentioned repeatedly with more than a touch of nostalgia, to the point of generating a sense of familiarity with unexperienced involuntary memories, echoing deceitfully the spirit of the Proust phenomenon, based on emotional sensorial connection. In this sense, the prosthetic nation is the result of a process involving affect—or, at the very least, the consequences of affect resulting from imaginary or highly theorized contact. In general, the prosthetic nation is a common occurrence in the lives of many Latinxs, particularly those who, like Dreamers, cannot travel back and forth to Latin America.³ If anything, the current crisis resulting from the world pandemic will only exacerbate this phenomenon, given that many families used to habitual travel to Mexico, the Caribbean, and Central or South America will find it more difficult to accomplish. And so, while I'm embracing the case of the impact of Hurricane María in Puerto Rico to propose the notion, I clarify that it applies equally well to Latinxs of many descents and ancestries throughout the US.

In her book, Landsberg clarifies prosthetic memory enables the transmission of recollections beyond “natural” or biological claims (18). This consideration is strongly rooted in the notion that prosthetic memory questions how specific remembrances may be the exclusive property of certain groups (22). In addition, she ratifies that flow of

memories and other practices isn't just from one generation to the next, as in homeland to diaspora, but in both directions, providing an alternative to social construction and essentialism (10)—in fact, Landsberg seems enthused by how prosthetic memory may challenge the essentialist leanings of identity politics. While my view of the flow of memory emphasizes generational shift, I wish to make clear it's not the only way in which I understand the process. Correspondingly, as Landsberg demonstrates in the third chapter of her book, the fact that mnemonic prosthetics is unlimited by ethnic claims of ownership certainly doesn't mean it cannot be embraced by an ethnic community. To Landsberg, the interest in prosthetic memory is justified by its potential to alter subjectivity—as the foundation for counterhegemonic collective identification in which naturalized structures of oppression are rendered visible, given the way in which recollection may change our understanding of the present (21–22). At the end of her book, she introduces the notion of transferential spaces, locations that invite people to relate experientially to events they themselves did not live (113). These are sites in which prosthetic memories propound ethical thinking by fostering empathy (149). In this text, I propose the narratives resulting from the coverage of María in *Puerto Rico Strong* as precisely this kind of space.

In *National Identity*, Anthony D. Smith uses the French term *ethnie*, which designates an ethnic community, to speak of the ethnic basis of national identity. Among the main attributes of this kind of community he includes, in addition to common ancestry and a collective proper name, the sharing of historical memories (21). Now, what happens when the object of mnemonic exercise is the promotion of an ethnic community past the point of migration? When a new generation, one charged with the preservation of a sense of *ethnie*, is born and/or raised with new experiences and historical memories in an altogether different territory? How is it possible to recreate in them memories akin to the ones of those who first migrated, feeding a longing for something unexperienced? Migration is not an uncommon topic in comics. Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, a pioneering graphic novel, is to a fair extent a narrative of immigration; as Landsberg points out, it is a key example of the socially responsible, empathetic potential of prosthetic memories (115–121). Theoretically and/or graphically driven approaches, like Brian Caplan and Zach Weinersmith's *Open*

Borders and Shan Taun's *The Arrival*, represent tours de force. From Gene Luen Yang's *American Born Chinese* to Malaka Gharib's *I Was Their American Dream*, graphic narratives on immigration abound. In Latinx terms, Lila Quintero Weaver's *Darkroom*, dutifully covered by Jorge J. Santos Jr.'s *Graphic Memories*, is one sophisticated stab. On the other hand, Lalo Alcaraz's entire oeuvre is bent on discussing immigration. However, unlike *Maus*, most of them focus on what happens after arrival. Yet in the case of the prosthetic nation, I must make clear, texts converge on what came before migration. Few narratives engage the fabrication of memories of this nature in a following generation—using a storm as an excuse—as openly and unwaveringly as *Puerto Rico Strong*.

Growing in a place is not the same as visiting it occasionally or even regularly—as any immigrant knows well—despite an increased feeling of familiarity with distant locations thanks to technology. As noted by Turkish-British novelist Elif Shafak, today's technology—the readily available access to imagery and sounds from far away, distant locations—supports the impression of immediate familiarity and mastery of certain topics, failing to distinguish between information (exposure to data), knowledge (in-depth acquaintance with a topic), and wisdom (emotional connection with a topic).⁴ To Shafak, empathy is crucial in the formation of wisdom, a notion consistent with Landsberg's argument, which identifies empathy as a key element in the formation of prosthetic memories (19). Nonetheless, modern technology tends to bypass the connection between data and emotion, skipping knowledge while generating a false sense of wisdom. As a result, many times we tend to believe we know more about a place than we actually do. This includes visiting a country and noticing only what we are aware of and that which contributes to ratify our previous impression of events, while simultaneously failing to notice unknown unknowns, quite simply, because we are unaware of their existence and relevance and they are not easily translatable with our cultural codes. After all, these are the makings of ethnocentrism.

Our cultural repertoire tends to limit what we notice because, in the case of most people, even when we notice difference, we only notice difference that can be broken down and explained with elements of our own culture. More radical forms of difference, which are harder to explain in the limited context of our home culture, escape

our awareness and, unknowingly, boost ethnocentrism. In most cases, more radical forms of difference contribute to otherization. This is where technology comes in. Plain and simple, technology generates feelings of assistance and support, but it also mediates and deceives, creating a superficial sense of familiarity that, in the end, contributes to an equally superficial understanding of the cultural fabric of a nation in a far away, remote place. Thus, while we are increasingly unaware of unknown unknowns, technology makes us feel like we are ever closer to truly engaging and understanding a target culture on its own terms, even though, for all practical purposes, we may be even setting ourselves more and more apart from its context and nature, generating a misleading sense of familiarity that toys with appropriation and commodification. Consequently, it is necessary to become acutely aware of the workings of this operation if Latinxs—or anyone in the process of engaging a separate culture—are ever going to develop a more grounded awareness of their family circumstances, rather than some romanticized notion of origin. Pride in identity—cultural/ethnic essentialism—can be a treacherous foundation for the concoction of a family history. After all, if someone migrated, it surely must have been because, at the very least, the conditions at the new place were better than those at the point of origin. In this sense, the prosthetic nation plays and will continue to play a significant role in the Latinx imaginary.

Some of the stories in *Puerto Rico Strong* hint at the strong role memory plays in the construction of Puerto Rican identity, especially now, when there are more Puerto Ricans living in the continental USA than on the island. In this sense, the case of Boricuas may be more critical than those of Latinxs of mainland origin, for whom numbers still remain far superior in the place of origin. However, the overall dynamics of the process by which the prosthetic nation comes into being behave in an analogous fashion regardless of nationality of origin and/or ancestry. With a Latinx turning 18 every 30 seconds, the implications of the prosthetic nation upon variants of US identity become everyday more discerning, fostering a relationship with the past that may sustain a more expanded construct of *Latinidad*, one not based on the recurrently idealized memories of many an immigrant—“*como en* (fill in the blank) *no había igual*”—but on the curiosity of a generation bent on exploring its background and,

hopefully, the nature of the exclusion that brought forebears to the point of departure (Fernández Campbell & National Journal). In this way, a more constructive, critical interpretation—and not just some glorified memory—could contribute to an expanded sense of US identity, according to which contemporary Latinxs would play a more enlightened role as US citizens of the world than previous generations, deeply cognizant of the many implicit responsibilities in the act of embodying a world hegemon.⁵

Allegiance to nation works in mysterious ways. Very seldom do the descendants of immigrant parents contemplate how the flag or colors they proudly wave revealing their descent speak more about an exclusion by a state of origin—i.e., the fact that their parents, though members of the nation, were invisible to a corresponding state, thus being forced to migrate—rather than of inclusion within a nation. When immigrants celebrate colors of origin, very seldom are they aware they're celebrating the colors of a state that failed to recognize/visualize their parents. After all, a flag is more a symbol of the state than of a nation. People only read it as of the nation because the state may have claimed custody of nationality in such a manner that many fail to notice the difference between both constructs. In principle, when there is yet to be a state, the flag does intend to represent the nation (or at least an aspiring project of state). Yet, as the idea of nation is implemented, eventually materializing in the form of a state through written documents, infrastructure, borders, and a geomaterial reality, the flag becomes more and more representative of the state (while remaining associated with the nation). Ideas can live without geometric arrangements of color. The states, on the other hand, beseech them. As material embodiments of certain ideas of nation, states do tend to favor these colorful enactments. Flags work best for the nation when people feel included in the state and the symbol is thus validated by actions (yet this is not usually the case for many populations of the world, thus global migration). This is why many people fail to distinguish between nation and state, given the state may be doing such a cohesive job that both constructs overlap, failing to reveal disparity. On the other hand, if one has experienced life in an emerging economy, the gaps between nation and state are usually palpably visible in the peripheral zones of any large metropolitan area or in the countryside.

In the case of Puerto Rico, given its problematic, oxymoronic status as an *Estado Libre Asociado*, the implications are even more troubling. Displayed in the continental USA, a Puerto Rican flag speaks of a project of nation that never came to be, thanks to imperialist repression. It can also attest to the fact that its bearers are here because, in one or another manner, the Puerto Rican state failed to provide them with the means necessary to implement a successful project of life on the island (never mind the fact that this failure of project of life on the island could be in itself the result of imperialist schemes, hence a vicious cycle). This is typical of US dynamics in terms of immigration. In many cases, people migrate to the US because the US has contributed to the conditions that make it necessary for them to leave their place of origin, never mind the fact that some US citizens reject immigration while failing to notice how the US government is propitiating migratory trends. Think for example of how, thanks to NAFTA, subsidized US corn from the Great Plains effectively killed many *ejidos* in Mexico, eventually leading to migration to the north.⁶ What is particularly relevant is that, in one or another way, these circumstances may be replicated in the contact with the US of many other countries throughout the Americas.

And so, the makings of the prosthetic nation say much about how the ideas of nationality and origin have been processed by a Latinx population, impacting upon how it will think of itself as part of the US. After all, though processed by others and in a different fashion, most of the notions pertaining to the construct of an ancestral nation tend to come from the generation that experienced migration. The codes with which this collection of notions will be assessed and interpreted, though, will be US-centered. Objects and practices emanating from the alien national repertoire—history, gastronomy, geography, music, weather, etc.—may belong to the vast assortment of constructs supportive of unlived experiences. It all depends on how well the place of origin's conditions are replicated in the US. As I suggested previously, today the internet excels at fostering a phony sense of familiarity, since the cultural connection with the place of origin is not severed as radically as in the times of the melting pot—when acculturation ruled supreme. The interpretive schemes through which these objects and practices will eventually gain significance will be eminently US-centric and contemporary, tinting things in a different light and with a thoroughly internalized—

and aptly denied—imperial condition. In other words, like many other Latinxs, Boricuas will imagine themselves in the role of “minority,” yet, just as many other US inhabitants, may fail to think of themselves as the accomplices of an imperial project (with respect to other countries, rather than Puerto Rico, in which they tend to see themselves, rightly so, as the objects of imperialist momentum).

This brings us to the main examples of prosthetic memory in *Puerto Rico Strong*. In the book, memories are construed around two main axes: in the first case, it will be a matter of the triggering of involuntary memories, trying to establish a bond that mimics the recollections of earlier generations; in the second, it will be through a more formal association with history, willing to establish a common ground in terms of heritage and tradition. Let's start with the initial alignment. In “Stories from My Father” (52–57), the story authored by Adam Lance Garcia and illustrated by Heidi Black, we witness the story of a Boricua whose imagination has been nourished by her father's memories; a father who has shared with his daughter recollections of walking barefoot till his soles turned into leather, wearing lizards for earrings, climbing up coconut trees and eating a fruit called “cat shit,” etc.

Coloring plays a key role in this account, as it hints repeatedly at the state of mind of the main character. There are four coloring schemes in the story: 1) bright colors, which represent contemporary reality; 2) sepia tones, which embodies mixed feelings and confusion; 3) diffuse coloring, very similar to the photographic effect, in which color appears glistening and soft; and 4) a mixture of the previous two styles of coloring, hinting at acceptance and resolution. In particular, when the protagonist reaches for a can of Florecitas, the container appears colored amid a background of sepia tones. Once she swallows the cookie, however, things turn colorful, suggesting the power of the experience in evoking distant, pleasant memories. These are memories about Puerto Rico, a world of magic that, according to the narrator, she never saw. While she visited her grandmother on the island and went the beach at Poza del Obispo (diffuse coloring); visited the Parque de las Botellas in Arecibo, where recycled beer bottles and mortar gain the shape of dinosaurs (more diffuse coloring); and ate Florecitas cookies and rice soup (yet more diffuse lighting), her memories do not equate to the world of magic

described by her father. It is assumed that her world, the world of her childhood, is that of a Puerto Rican growing in the US. Fifteen years later, she returns to the island (sepia tones), proud of her heritage. Yet, in the hotel (more sepia tones), just after she speaks over the phone with her dad, she questions herself, “How can I be proud of a heritage that does not feel like my own?” (54). Immediately, she rushes to a grocery store and purchases a can of Florecitas, the iced gem cookies by Royal Borinquen, which melt in her mouth, bringing forth the memory of the flavor (and associated events). In this context, Florecitas play the role that the madeleine plays for the narrator in *Swann’s Way*, the first volume of *Remembrance of Things Past*, by French novelist Marcel Proust.

In Proust’s masterpiece, when the narrator eats a madeleine dipped in tea, it reminds him so much of childhood afternoons at his aunt’s home in Combray that his mind summons endless images and stories from decades earlier in life, resulting in the lengthy volumes authored by the French author. The episode is well known as a primary example of involuntary memory, in marked contrast to voluntary memory, exactly the type of mnemonic exercise shared by the father in “Stories from My Father.” Yet, what the main character in “Stories” refuses to notice is that, even when she consumes the cookies, it is not in the context experienced by her father. The main character in Proust’s classic is indeed remembering something he experienced, triggering involuntarily a longing for a specific context. In the Puerto Rican case, even if the main character shares the love of the cookies, she never consumed them in the way her progenitor did. Like many other things, memories of food are deeply influenced by the context in which the food was consumed. So, within this devious setting, the recreation of an act rooted in a memory, is a matter of prosthetics, even if it works jarringly. At the end of the story, once the main character decides she will keep searching till one day Puerto Rico feels like home, her world turns colorful and real.

This is not the only case of involuntary memory evident in *Puerto Rico Strong*. Two other stories, “Breaking Bread” (106–113), by Tara Martínez, and “Cocinar” (126–129), by Vito Delsante, attempt a similar strategy. In the first case, it’s arepas that will trigger the mnemonic association. In the second, it’s *empanadillas* with *sazón* (seasoning). Once again, the food, while reminding characters of their



Figure 2. *Stories from My Father.*

Source: López, Rodríguez, Newlevant, Ruiz & Schwartz, editors. *Puerto Rico Strong*. Lion Forge, 2018, p. 52. © 2018 Lion Forge.

Boricua quality, may acquire a new meaning in a different context. In “Breaking Bread,” we learn the story of a young Boricua who migrates at early age to New York City, landing in the Bronx, like many fellow Puerto Ricans. The story also narrates the plight of her single mother, who gives birth and nurtures the protagonist despite being shunned by other women in her town. The story contrasts the mother’s fertility with the low birth rate in Puerto Rico at that point in history, the result of aggressive sterilization campaigns (a topic covered in another story in the volume, “La Operación” [The Operation], by cartoonist Ally Shwed). Once the child faces discrimination at school in the US, to comfort her, the mother cooks arepas, reminding the child not to mind the mean spirit of some people, just like she had ignored the critical looks by other women on the island. When the child grows, becoming an empowered Boricua, and suffers a head-front collision, the mother brings arepas to the hospital, replicating the sense of care and warmth that she used to foster during their early years in New York and embodying a connection with Puerto Rico as a safe haven. Thus,



Figure 3. *Stories from My Father*.

Source: López, Rodríguez, Newlevant, Ruiz & Schwartz, editors.
Puerto Rico Strong. Lion Forge, 2018, p. 55. © 2018 Lion Forge.

by way of arepas, the narrator is transported to a state of well-being, where she can feel protected and connect with an origin experienced, to all intents and purposes, during a very short period of her life, yet extremely important in terms of identity. In this respect, Puerto Rico is not so much an experienced reality, but a sentiment that is recalled each time life poses a challenge. The sentiment is the result of the mother's actions—her cooking of arepas, her association with the will to ignore ostracism (which would not have been as apparent to the child were it not for the mother's underscoring an instance of fortitude)—but it is perpetuated through the narrator's memory, in a classic example of prosthetics.

In “Cocinar,” Ramón, a young Puerto Rican sous chef, arrives to a restaurant for his interview. Marnie, the owner, is quite clear about what he must bring to the restaurant and insists on watching him while he cooks something with *sazón* (seasoning), seeking to



Figure 4. *Breaking Bread*.

Source: López, Rodríguez, Newlevant, Ruiz & Schwartz, editors.
Puerto Rico Strong. Lion Forge, 2018, p. 107. © 2018 Lion Forge.

know whether he can deliver under pressure. Little by little, Ramón starts cooking small *empanadas*—*empanadillas*, he likes to clarify—finding refuge in his recollection of a grandmother’s cooking and his large family—the only one a Puerto Rican knows, he claims. “Smell,” the young sous chef argues, “is everything; it permeates Nuyorican culture” (127). Now, the use of the demonym “Nuyorican” ratifies Ramón’s awareness that he is the product of migration, having grown in the US. He does not claim allegiance to the island, yet his sense of identity seems rooted in a distant mythical notion connected to the practice of cooking. It is his grandmother, who most surely left the island, who has instilled in him this sense of identity associated with the aromas of the kitchen; in particular, with whipping something out of nothing, as the spices hit the butter or oil. It is the art of mixing things up well what makes Puerto Rican families so big, he explains, alluding to the fact that his Nuyorican family has grown

to include African Americans, Irish, Italians, and Japanese. Even today, when his mother cooks *pasteles*—which habitually confused the protagonist, never convinced about the smell—and announces that she’s making them on Facebook, family from all over comes to the house. In this respect, it becomes clear that the kitchen is a place through which one may echo and evoke the culture of the island, unacknowledging the distinction between a US setting and the island’s *cocina*. Cooking, Ramón appears to ratify, is a strategic way of enacting *puertorriqueñidad*, regardless of location, while the kitchen, any well-tended-to Boricua kitchen, is the mythical time-travel portal through which one may immediately connect with ancestors and traditions, past oceans of difference and miles of misapprehensions. In the end, when he offers some empanadillas to Marnie, she succumbs to their flavor, asking, “How many of these can you make an hour?” (129).

This is pretty much the same umbilical relationship that brings the narrator of “Stories of My Father” back to the island, willing to see if anything she remembered remained after María. She returns to the island to find out whether things feel like home. Much to her chagrin, she discovers they do not. The fruit seller by the side of the road reminds her of her grandmother, but she is not her. The waves still crash beyond the Poza, but they don’t feel like home. They never did. After the storm, she is expecting something different, almost like a catharsis. At this point, she understands that to her, thanks to her father, Puerto Rico is a story, an account she wishes to believe. So she chooses to keep searching for the story, for the memory, hoping one day Puerto Rico will feel like home. In other words, it is not by way of Puerto Rico itself that the island will come to feel like home, but through a memory, a remembrance created and nurtured by others, which, once inside, once internalized, will not be allowed to die, almost in a manner analogous to the main argument in Pixar’s *Coco* (2017). As long as people manage to pass on a memory to their family, even if the other members of the family have never experienced certain events and realities—just their mnemonic re-creation—they will be able to keep the notion alive. This is, most certainly, the case of this type of nation as an imagined community, which, thanks to the illusory encouragements of technology, does not entail actual contact with the physical geomaterial reality of a location, but merely

an affective bond with its context and circumstances, beyond the unstable topography of ethnocentrism.

Then again, gastronomy is not the only refuge of memory. In a more formal way, history, a discipline empirically founded on the notion of the study of the past, is an ideal turf for this task. A prosthetic nation has many pillars; the acceptance of a common history by generations lacking an actual bond with the island experience is a major contributing factor to the consolidation of an imagined community, given its promotion of a sentiment of belonging, in stark opposition to the sense of disenfranchisement usually following a migratory experience. Yet, as Smith reminds us, when it comes to shared historical memories, it is not facts of ancestry that are crucial, so much as myths of common ancestry (22). In *Puerto Rico Strong*, there are all sorts of references to a “shared” past, starting with the initial story of the compilation by Ronnie Garcia, aptly named “Here” (10–15), which, in the matter of a few pages, glosses over centuries of history, speaking of a “common” pre-Columbian, African, colonial, and calamitous past.

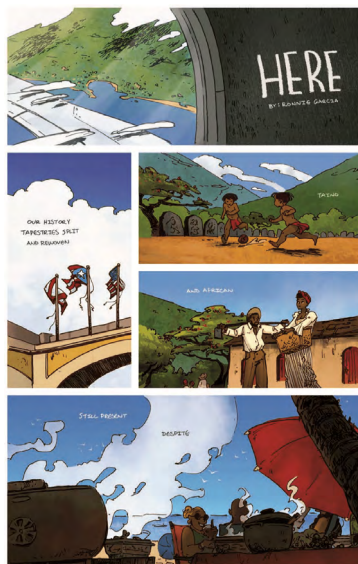
The panels chronicle the trip back and forth to the island, across dark oceans, with people in the mainland caring for the ones left at home. The title makes clear that the place of choice is not the actual place of residence or physical presence of readers, but the island, hinting at the space’s place in the heart of many—there is no other option. Within this framework, perhaps because it is just a myth—the actual culture was decimated within fifty years of the arrival of the Spaniards to the Americas, as attested by colonial census numbers—Taíno culture reigns unmatched. Since a functioning Taíno culture disappeared centuries ago, its recollection is equally prosthetic to islanders and mainlanders. Thus, as a device for extensive mnemonic prosthetics, the recalling of Taíno culture and history is ideal. While modern genetic analysis is able to retrace the presence of heritage in people from centuries ago, as an operational culture rooted in indigenous practices of pre-Columbian nature, Taínos ceased to exist around the sixteenth century, given economic exploitation, rampant diseases, and widespread genocide resulting from the Spanish conquest.

Recent controversies on genetic heritage, flirting with nationalism and populism, fail to take in consideration the fact that, while genetic

makeup survives in small percentages, links to a functional culture cease to exist (Yong). Or, if it does exist, it signifies something different. My own genetic heritage is a virtual retracing of history, from the Bering Strait to Al-Andalus, passing through Ashkenazi Jews, and Southern East and West-African slaves; however, this does not mean that Asian, Moorish, Jewish, or Southern East or West-African culture is alive in me. Thus, when it comes to resurrecting Taíno culture—despite the efforts of almost ten thousand people identifying themselves as Taíno in the 2010 US Census—for the most part, it is possible to say that it is a matter of a prosthetic exercise. This is certainly evident in the contents of *Puerto Rico Strong*: the sheer effort made by many cartoonists and scriptwriters set on educating their audiences about and establishing an emotional link with Taíno culture. I've written about this elsewhere, but one of the main reasons for the importance of Taíno culture is the work of the Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, occasionally emulating the idealization of pre-Columbian cultures in other Latin American countries (e.g., Mexico) for purposes of modern nationalism and populism (Fernández L'Hoeste).⁷

The first story to propose a mnemonic connection with Taínos is “Areytos” (41–50), written by Vita Ayala and illustrated by Jamie Jones. Graphically, the style of the narrative is ominous; the coloring is dark and the graphics intimidating, setting the tone for a tragic account. The areyto or areíto was a type of religious song or dance performed by Taínos. In this case, an areyto opens the story, supposedly the night before a crucial clash between natives and invaders, in which thousands of Taínos and Caribs faced about one hundred Spaniards. The story chronicles the historic event, a battle set in 1511, almost two decades after the arrival of the invaders in 1493 (Amador de los Ríos & Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés). During the initial years after the coming of the Spaniards, Taínos experienced a short-lived peace as the result of a *guaytiao*, a ritual in which two people accepted each other as friends and exchanged names, as the cacique Agüeybaná did with Spanish invader Juan Ponce de León. However, the Spaniards started imposing the payment of tributes upon the natives (in the form of gold or cotton), generating sweeping resentment.

Once Agüeybaná passed away, his brother Agüeybaná the Brave came to power. Agüeybaná the Brave harbored doubts about the invaders' godly status—just like in the case of Mexico, a cacique from

Figure 5. *Here*.

Source: López, Rodríguez, Newlevant, Ruiz & Schwartz, editors.
Puerto Rico Strong. Lion Forge, 2018, p. 10. © 2018 Lion Forge.

nearby Hispaniola, Guacanagarix, from Marién, had prophesied the arrival of the Guakimena (the fair-skinned, divine strangers)—so, together with Urayoán, another cacique from the western side of the island, he ordered the drowning of a Spaniard called Diego Salcedo. After the drowning, the body was watched closely, to make sure it wouldn't come back to life (in Mexico, the Spaniards even hid when they got off their horses, since the Aztecs construed horsemen as divine entities). Once it became clear Spaniards were not gods, Agüeybaná the Brave organized a revolt against the invaders, the 1511 rebellion. This is the main event of “Areytos.”

In the story, we witness the dialogue between Agüeybaná the Brave and Karaya (Moon), his religious advisor, who claims to have seen the field of battle in her dreams and warns the cacique numerical advantage will not be enough and that he will most likely perish in battle. Agüeybaná's response is lucid: if he doesn't battle, the devils will consume Taínos one by one, destroying everything they love; if he does, some may live and one day Taínos will become strong again.

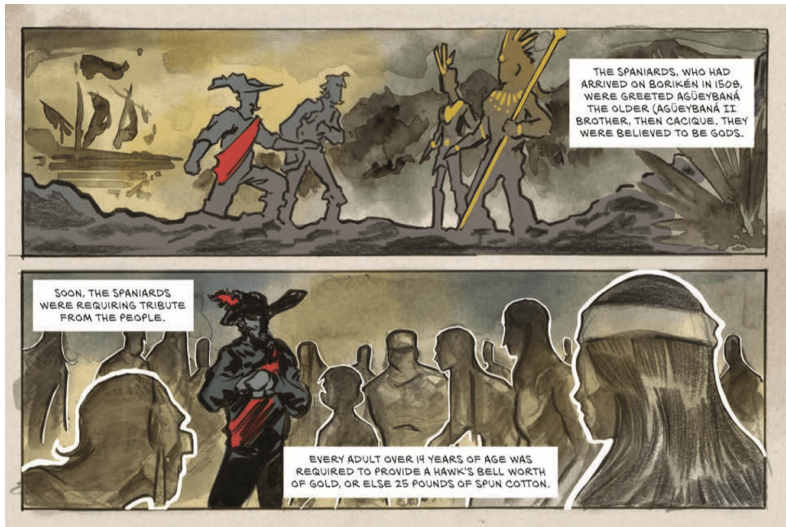


Figure 6. Areytos.

Source: López, Rodríguez, Newlevant, Ruiz & Schwartz, editors.
Puerto Rico Strong. Lion Forge, 2018, p. 47. © 2018 Lion Forge.

The call to become strong again is meant to resonate in the heart of the modern-day audience, reading a narrative in which readers are framed as the contemporary descendants of an indigenous race, in spirit, if not biologically, culturally, or socially. In short, the narrative is a call to identify as Taíno.

The conflict between Taínos, Caribs, and Spaniards culminated with the battle of Yagüecas, in which Agüeybaná the Brave died—as suggested by Karaya, a fictional character—supposedly from the shot of an arquebus. As caciques usually wore golden pendants as a sign of distinction, Agüeybaná the Brave must have represented an easy target. Following the cacique's death, the Taínos disbanded and settled for a guerrilla warfare that lasted two decades. According to the story, a 1530 government census claimed there were less than 2,000 Taínos left on the island, from an earlier estimated population of between 500,000 to one million at the time of the arrival of the Spaniards, a precipitous demographic drop in the matter of less than forty years and genocide by any standards. Ultimately, Taíno culture dissolved by way of exclusion and miscegenation, like many other indigenous communities throughout

the Americas. Nonetheless, as the story evinces, it is by way of memory that Taíno identity, ideally cohesive for the Puerto Rican nation, is meant to be resurrected, regardless of an actual cultural connection (in terms of practices) between the indigenous tribe and the current inhabitants of the island or those who have migrated to the mainland.

The next story to draw on this connection, “A Taíno’s Tale” (80–85), by Shariff Musallam, and art by Alejandro Rosado, is certainly more picturesque. The narrative is framed like an elementary class—in fact, the audience within the narrative is a group of elementary students listening to their teacher’s lesson on Taínos and their culture, based on a book titled as the comic strip. From the beginning, it is apparent that the target audience for this account may be of a younger age. The art of the story, reminiscent of children’s drawings, embraces playful, uncomplicated strokes, with clear delineation, multihued backgrounds, and lots of iconic facial imagery. Then again, in the manner of prescriptive knowledge that is to be assimilated with little questioning, the lecture includes an entire catalog of deities: Yúcahu, the creator of humankind; Atabey, the earth spirit, the supreme goddess who created the heavens; Maboyas, lord of the dead; Opiyelguabirán, a half-human, half-dog who guards the entrance to the land of the dead, like Cerberus; Guabancex, the goddess of winds and storms; and Jurakán (yes, his name is the origin of the word “hurricane,” just like many other English words come from Taíno), the storm god and one of Guabancex’s mightiest warriors. Now, the way in which all these deities are portrayed visually, with dramatic poses and fashionable costumes, echoes more a catalog of superheroes than a religious creed. Rosado is quite skillful at employing a palette of very bright colors and delineating figures that, while looking indigenous and pre-Columbian, embrace some of the aesthetic codes of characters like Hasbro’s Transformers; they’re menacing yet playful at the same time, a thoughtful combination for any collection of immortals.

Along the same lines, the comic strip describes Taínos in an ethnographic vein—emphasizing the importance of the family unit compellingly—as farmers, excellent fishermen and sailors, skilled hunters, very family and community-oriented, and as very happy people who loved to celebrate, favoring bright attires and ritual dancing, with an almost toy-like artistic appeal, as though an action-hero family set were about to sprout in the market. This is definitely no

accidental coincidence. Both the gods and the humans are modeled after figures familiar to children. On the other hand, at the formal level, the contents also cater to a younger audience. The descriptions of the divinities and the actions of the humans are more coded as a popular culture mythology, with the gods exhibiting superpowers and the humans engaged in regular adventure. Thus, from its title up to its conclusion—the children can't wait to learn more about the superpowers of the gods (already embracing a code from the culture of comics) or about the awesome Taíno women—"A Taíno's Tale" is more geared at children than any other narrative in the volume. Certainly, its object is to appeal to a younger audience, educating them about Borinquen's earlier inhabitants while simultaneously striving to support the notion of a direct connection between Taínos and present-day Boricuas via the language of comics, in some way negating the demise of the culture, not to mention the people.

Following in the footsteps of "A Taíno's Tale," there is "Of Myth & Monsters" (86–94), written by Marco Lopez and Derek Ruiz, and illustrated again by Jamie Jones. A playful take on the topic of the Chupacabra, the story mixes rural folklore with cultural mythology, transgressing the boundaries between them. Though sightings have been reported all over Latin America, the Chupacabra is allegedly of Puerto Rican origin. Benjamin Radford's *Tracking the Chupacabra* (2011) chronicles the first reported attack in March of 1995 in Puerto Rico, where eight sheep were found with three punctures in their chests and completely drained of blood (Gabatiss). Some months later, there was a witness, a woman called Madelyne Tolentino, who reported seeing what was purportedly the Chupacabra in Canóvanas, to the east of San Juan, where around 150 animals were reportedly found dead. As word of the creature spread out, aided by sensationalist media, soon there were sightings or related events recorded all over the Americas.

In the story by Lopez and Ruiz, a family is at the El Yunque National Forest, in the vicinity of Canóvanas, checking that an archaeological site has been secured properly. While checking the site, the father finds a symbol that looks like a *vejigante*, the folkloric character from Puerto Rican festival celebrations. At the same time, the children discover a big-eyed, toothy creature that looks like an emaciated rabbit and decide to nickname it Chupacabra. Suddenly,

a huge *vejigante*-like creature appears out of nowhere and attacks the father, yelling “Spaniard” and “murderer” in Taíno language. The small Chupacabra leaps into action and faces the *vejigante* while the mother stands with a stick, trying to protect her kids and the now unconscious father. As the Chupacabra bites the creature, the family members take the opportunity to hit back, pounding on the monster’s hind. The *vejigante* then transforms into a multicolored spirit that apologizes quickly, presenting himself as the ghost of a Taíno. The apparition explains that, following the arrival of the Spaniards and subsequent conflicts, it turned to a *zemi*, an ancestral spirit of the Taínos, for help.

As a result, the *zemi* sent magical guardians to protect the Amerindians from the Spaniards, but the invaders were relentless. Despite the help of the spirits, the Spaniards prevailed and the Taíno found himself angry and frustrated, thinking the *zemi* had failed him. As a consequence, he was punished and trapped as a spirit till someone would release him. Until then, he would have to witness the pain and anguish of his people. Once released, he shares, he will be able to return to his people. The lesson, he reiterates, is to believe in yourself, to rely on each other and understand that what is lost and sacrificed can be again (94). As it dissipates, the father wakes up only to ask what in the world is the smiling, big-eyed and sharp-toothed creature playfully standing next to them.

The story conflates centuries of history in just a few pages, mixing a formal sense of time with pop-culture sensibility. The Chupacabra, the monster, becomes a roguishly aggressive Disneyesque creature, with droopy ears and a large-toothed smile (as though Stitch had gone on a diet while his ears had fallen), that sides with the humans—in fact protecting them. The *zemi*, personified by an enormous *vejigante*, treats the family as though they were the authentic descendants of Taínos, ratifying a link between its people—the Amerindians—and the current inhabitants of Puerto Rico. The entire demise of the people and culture seems to go unnoticed. While it has attacked a local mistaking him for a Spaniard, it soon realizes its error, and moves on to offer advice. In fact, the otherization of the father as a “Spaniard” represents just a distraction, as the true object of the story is the legitimation of Taíno ancestry as an agglutinating element of the Boricua nation; past the demise of the Spanish Empire, the most effective other remaining for



Figure 7. *Of Myth & Monsters*.

Source: López, Rodríguez, Newlevant, Ruiz & Schwartz, editors. *Puerto Rico Strong*. Lion Forge, 2018, p. 87. © 2018 Lion Forge.

this story is the Anglo colonizer, standing in opposition to the Boricua imagined community.

The thread of the narrative is, quite literally, the unbroken connection the spirit seems to make between the Taíno and current Puerto Ricans, most surely a narrative device meant to condone the acceptance of Taíno ancestry as the favored strategy of cultural resistance, not only before the Spaniards—after all, that conflict is long over—but against the cultural onslaught represented by US pop culture. In sum, the story employs the tools of the new colonizer (on this particular occasion, the pop-culture sensibility and love of comics of US culture) to defend its own version of Boricua identity and fight back, if only for a moment. The images by Jones are, by far, some of the most adventurous in the volume, combining dashes of color with goofy characters that seem out of a young-adult graphic novel. Even the Taíno's physical profile, with chiseled cheeks; long, angular features; and a hawk-like nose, seems more at home in a story from the Far West than as a representation of Caribbean physicality. In the end, the story accomplishes its object. Readers will be so dazzled by the graphic display that they will forget to question how is it that the spirit of an almost 500-year old native draws an immediate connection between twenty-first century Puerto Ricans and his kind. Must surely be because it is evident and unquestionable, benefitting the politics of populist nationalism.

The final story bent on drawing a nexus with the Taínos at a more formal level is "Taíno Online" (140–142), authored by Joamette Gil and colored by Christopher Sotomayor. The story opens with the author learning her grandmother was of Amerindian descent. This opening mechanism is especially pertinent, as it proposes circumstances with which many readers may identify, having "discovered" their roots recently thanks to modern genetic analysis. Next, there is an image depicting the Arawaks' influx into the Caribbean, populating the islands Columbus claims to have "discovered." Once again, the image provides an easy graphic equivalent for the understanding of the populational flows of the West Indies prior to the arrival of the Europeans (British, Dutch, French, etc.). As a result of the revelation, the author decides to search for more information online, which she promptly shares with readers: the food the Taíno ate (cassava root, aka *yuca* [not to be confused with yucca]); how they wore their hair in bangs, with

occasional headbands and face paint; how they associated bats with the dead; and the art they practiced honoring the sun (glyphs).

Then comes the discovery of the number of words in English that come from Taíno language: hammock, canoe, hurricane, guava, tobacco, and even barbecue. Among them stands out Borikén or Borinquen, the indigenous name for the land that today is Puerto Rico, thus leading to Boricua, the alternate demonym for Puerto Ricans. Finally, the story shares what I have discussed previously in this text: Taíno genes live on. Modern technology allows genetic analysis to go back centuries, so uncovering lineage that goes back 500 years becomes almost child's play, so to speak.⁸ According to the comic strip, DNA studies show that roughly 60% of all mothers since the beginning of Puerto Rico have been of Taíno descent. In Cuba, in comparison, the number is only 34%, leading to conjectures about the annihilation and lack of miscegenation of the Ciboney, the native people of the island, and the greater influence of African descent, i.e., the slaves imported to the island as soon as the Amerindian population dwindled. In any case, the fact that genetic studies confirm a small portion of Taíno descent in many Puerto Ricans provides physical linkage to an imagined communitarian bond. The minimal percentage of DNA may not amount to much and the culture of the people that it represents may have disappeared long ago, but nonetheless it still serves to justify a collective sentiment of identification liable to ideological manipulation. Witness the many times the colors of the Puerto Rican flag are displayed in *Puerto Rico Strong*, from the cover to no less than fourteen other instances, effectively conveying a sentiment of allegiance to readers.

There are more stories in the book that combine in one or another manner many of the aspects I have attempted to describe. "On Traditions & Being Homesick" (120–124), by Jesenia Santana, merges both approaches: the love for a common palate with the power of folklore, basing part of the account on the character Juan Bobo and the power of a folk tale. "Knowledge of Self" (143–147), with art by Javier Cruz Wuznik and a script by Taylor Esposito, reimagines the moment of discovery of Taíno culture between two high school friends, feeding a sense of curiosity toward the island, much like many of the accounts shared previously. My intention with this text has been to prove that, aside from generating a wide variety

of actions seeking to address calamities and misfortunes, mostly from the economic or infrastructural perspective, a natural disaster instigates the creation of cultural products that may be employed to advance an identity-driven agenda, perhaps flirting with nationalism and/or even populism—though this may not be necessarily the case, depending on the orientation of the cultural product. In the case of *Puerto Rico Strong*, most of the argument revolves around feelings of nostalgia and tradition, both key ingredients of national memory. However, how is it possible to create a feeling of solidarity—a sense of the need of support—when many of the potential advocates/benefactors lack a cohesive bond to the geomaterial reality of the island despite their family relations? This is where prosthetic memory comes in to play a critical role.

To the extent that these memories have been absent and, in many cases, are even a recreation of something that has ceased to exist and lost any relationship to the living conditions of populations that departed decades ago, lacking a recurrent physical connection with the place of origin, prosthetic memory does play a role in the configuration of a national memory in the minds of new generations of immigrants, be it Puerto Ricans or Latinxs of other affiliations. Current linguistic research shows the native language of the first generation of immigrants disappears within two to three generations (Escobar & Potowski). Research by the Pew Research Center shows the majority of Latinos no longer deem speaking Spanish necessary to be considered Latino (Krogstad). Thus, new approaches must be implemented if Latinxs are to move on as a collective body, not to mention the multiple nationalities associated and the vast diversity of cultural practices. Imagining a prosthetic nation may be one of the best underhanded alternatives to remain cohesive.

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NOTES

- 1 The title is a verse from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, a text commonly viewed as a retelling of the colonial experience. In his homonymous play, Aimé Césaire sets it in Haiti. Roberto Fernández Retamar, who passed on in 2019, sets it in Cuba. I embrace it modestly to draw an analogy with the current situation of Puerto Rico, reimagining the tension between a theoretically barbaric aboriginal past (Caliban) and a purportedly learned colonial invader (Prospero/Ariel).
- 2 For a detailed account of the impact of Hurricane Maria, see Padilla & Rosado.
- 3 It is important to note that, among the children of undocumented parents, years go by without a visit to their family's home countries, given risks associated with border crossings. Thus, one of the favored ways of supporting identity constructs in children is the nurturing of unlived memories.
- 4 An author of 17 books, 11 of which are novels, and women's rights activist, Shafak is one of the most distinctive writers in contemporary world literature. Her work combines the local and the global, bringing the margin to the center and vice versa, while instilling meditations on identity politics, feminism, and memory. For a look at her words on this particular subject, see her video on the distinction between knowledge, information, and wisdom on YouTube, dated July 12, 2019 and available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S9OMqDBsjdQ>. For a wider explanation on this topic, see "A Conversation with Elif Shafak," an interview by Vikas Shah MBE, available at <https://thoughteconomics.com/elif-shafak/>.

- 5 This is the familiar case of US citizens from disadvantaged backgrounds initially traveling abroad to Latin American countries or other international locations: while they become increasingly aware of their Americanness, a process that may be challenging at best and distressing at worst, many find it problematic coming to terms with their embodiment of hegemony, accustomed as they may be to not necessarily experiencing entitlement or privilege at home (hence making it more difficult for an individual to imagine her/himself as hegemon).
- 6 News of a corn-flooded Mexican market were available as early as 2013. (See Robbins).
- 7 By 1550, roughly 60 years after Spanish arrival, the island's native population had been thoroughly decimated. According to Salvador Brau's canonical text on the history of Puerto Rico (edited by the Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña in 1966), in the figures from the 1531 census, 14 out of 71 married Spaniards claimed wives of native descent. The island's population claimed a total of 1,148 Amerindians. Yet, by 1542, when Sevillian clergyman Rodrigo de Bastidas was appointed to enact the freedom of natives, as mandated by Spanish king Charles V, only 60 Amerindians were left in Puerto Rico. In 13 years, the group's mortality rate had soared, effectively annihilating the race. By the early nineteenth century, in 1808, governor Toribio Montes eliminated the group altogether as a census category, given widespread miscegenation had diffused its presence among *pardos libres*. Hence, to speak of Indian descent in Puerto Rico is truly a matter of genetic archaeology. Modern technology can claim genetic descent because it can reach far into the past, but, for practical purposes, Taínos and their culture lost viability centuries ago. Whatever is now called Taíno is a thoroughly modern construct (Fernández L'Hoeste).
- 8 My own genetic analysis goes back more than eight generations, using 1690 as chronological marker at the farther end while combining Eastern Asian, North African and Arabian, Ashkenazi Jewish, and even Southern East and West African descent past that point, with these distant lineages representing small percentages of my makeup. Like many Latin Americans, I share some European (66.7%) and Amerindian (20.4%) descent.

THE FANTASMICAL GOTHIC HETEROTOPIA IN RHODE MONTIJO'S *PABLO'S INFERNO*

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ABSTRACT

Rhode Montijo's work is characterized by a distinctive blend of diverse elements converging in his "fantasmical world". As comic book artist, he is the author of the limited series *Pablo's Inferno* (1999-2000), narrating a little Mexican American boy's travel through the underworld. Accompanied by fallen demi-god Quetzal, Pablo embarks in a quest to (re)discover his cultural roots and commit to them. Like most of Montijo's work, the comic book series holds an intrinsic gothic mode exploiting the playful nature of the comic medium and interrogating Mexican American heritage, by means of absorption of different genres, tropes, and diegetic elements. By examining the use of the Gothic distinctive of his work, the analysis will highlight the representation of the elements the author retrieved from his strong connection with Mexican heritage and the modes of children's gothic fiction, revealing the unique cross-genre Montijo created to convey the identity related issues peculiar to the Mexican American experience.

KEYWORDS: Chicanx comics; gothic; Mexican American heritage; children's gothic; Mexican folklore; Aztec mythology.

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RESUMEN

La obra de Rhode Montijo se caracteriza por ser una mezcla peculiar de distintos elementos que convergen en su propio “fantasmical world”. Como creador de cómics, es el autor de la miniserie *Pablo’s Inferno* (1999-2000), que recuenta el viaje de un niño mexicoamericano a través del inframundo. Acompañado por Quetzal, un semi-dios caído en desgracia, Pablos se embarca en una expedición en búsqueda de sus raíces culturales para comprometerse a ellas. Como acontece en la mayoría de los trabajos por Montijo, la miniserie presenta un modo gótico intrínseco que aprovecha la naturaleza lúdica del cómic y pone en tela de juicio el patrimonio cultural mexicoamericano, absorbiendo una variedad de géneros, tropos, y elementos diegéticos. Examinando el empleo del Gótico que caracteriza su trabajo, este análisis enfoca tanto la representación de los componentes que derivan de su conexión con el patrimonio cultural mexicano como los modos típicos de la ficción gótica para niños, revelando el género narrativo único que Montijo ha creado para expresar los asuntos identitarios propios de la experiencia mexicoamericana.

PALABRAS CLAVE: cómic chicano; gótico; patrimonio mexicoamericano; gótico infantil; folklor mexicano; mitología azteca.

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The evolution of Californian creator Rhode Montijo’s work has been characterized by a rather distinctive blend of diverse elements, spanning across artistic media and with a strong connection to his Mexican American heritage. Besides his renowned Halloween-related creations populating his “fantasmical world”, Montijo has engaged in the industry of animation as character designer and is the co-creator of viral award-winning web series *Happy Tree Friends* (1999–2016). Aside from working as an illustrator, he has created several standalone illustrated books for children—such as *Cloud Boy* (2006), *The Halloween Kid* (2010), and *Skeletown* (2011)—as well as the chapter book series *The Gumazing Gum Girl!* (2013–present) revolving around the adventures of a little superpowered Mexican American girl.

As comic book creator, Montijo is the author of the limited series *Pablo’s Inferno*, published between 1999 and 2000 thanks to the granting of the Xeric Foundation award. Its plot starts off with the violent death of Pablo, a little Mexican American boy who subsequently finds himself at the doors of the underworld; from there, he will embark in a quest to (re)discover his cultural roots and commit to them. Like most of Montijo’s work, the comic book series holds an intrinsic gothic mode that exploits the playful nature of the medium

and interrogates Mexican American heritage, by means of absorption of different genres, tropes, and diegetic elements. In *Pablo's Inferno*, the identity crisis implicit to gothic fiction becomes a crisis of cultural identity and Pablo's journey unfolds as a reconstruction of ethnic belonging, sprouting from heritage-related anxiety. Transgressing boundaries and borders—both metaphorical and material—the little protagonist finds himself facing the strange and unknown and yet, through this journey a world opens for him, allowing him to deal with inner conflicts and form a satisfactory identity as Mexican American. Aside from the intrinsic preoccupation with death, the gothic mode facilitates an “unconscious outlet for [one's] own pain” (Howarth 6), as well as gothic elements can be exploited as tools to discover oneself and, by extension, one's own—forgotten, forcedly assimilated, or simply unexplored—heritage. The gothic chronotope—in adult as much as in children's literature—is “often a place [...] haunted by a past that remains present” (Jackson, McGillis & Coats 4) and so is the eerie spirit world in which Pablo's journey is set, where space and time are irrelevant, supernatural elements intertwine, and mythic mysteries untangle. The first book—whose narrative outline was actually written by Dan Chapman (Montijo, *The (re)Discovery*)—functions as introduction to the following four, in which Montijo's vision emerges and Pablo's adventure finds its true shape. The author connects the shift to his own personal experience: after creating the first installment of the series, he traveled deep into Mexico—instead of just limiting his visit to Mexicali, his parents' hometown on the border—in what he considers a personal (re)discovery of heritage (Montijo in Aldama 217-218; Montijo, *The (re)Discovery*). Thus, Pablo finds himself within a transformative heterotopia (Foucault), a space for self-reflection conflating a diversity of heritage elements and functioning as facilitator to articulate and embrace Mexican American otherness.

Other Mexican American comic book creators have tackled heritage related narratives by shaping cross-genres inspired by horror—from Rafael Navarro's horror lucha-noir *Sonambulo* (1996–present) to Eric Esquivel's magic realist horror *Border Town* (2018)—, whereas the nuances of the gothic remain fairly unexplored in Chicanx comics. By analyzing the use of gothic modes distinctive of Rhode Montijo's work, the analysis will highlight their connections with the representation and reinterpretation of different elements the author retrieved from

his Mexican heritage—and thus, how the gothic can be a suitable genre to convey identity related issues. In fact, the peculiarity of *Pablo's Inferno* lies in both the thoughtful insertion of pre-Hispanic, folk, and popular culture themes, and the unique cross-genre the author creates. Furthermore, it will be shown how Montijo's work is characterized by a connection to the modes of children's gothic fiction in particular, and their focus on specific child related struggles.

1. IDENTITY FRAGMENTATION AND THE SYNERGY OF KNOWLEDGE

Following his untimely death, Pablo finds himself at the doors of the underworld. Book #1 is structured as a parody of the initial steps of Dante's journey described in his epic poem *Divine Comedy*, from one hellish place to the following. The second book starts off with a connection between this narrative structure and the articulation related with the quest for Mexican American identity: in a quirky gothic carnival, Pablo meets his future companion Quetzal (#2 6) and from there, their shared adventure begins on a trail of signs and tropes. After overcoming some initial obstacles and meeting a few significant characters—which will be analyzed further on as they belong to Mexican cultural heritage—the two find themselves in a secret vault hidden under an abandoned church (#3 16). In this space—constructed according to eminently gothic tropes—they discover a great collection of texts compiled by a fictionalized San Bernardino, blending Catholic Novohispanic notions and pre-Hispanic knowledge (Figure 1).

The protagonists will leave the vault taking with them some of these texts, which they will consult later to better understand the depth of their quest and the necessity for their mission. Gothic modes engage with collective anxieties, as well as issues related with cultural and political oppression. The fear and sense of confrontation intrinsic to otherness often establishes dichotomic boundaries, whose apparent stability can be challenged by the transgression of the boundaries themselves. The gothic undertaking represented by attaining and dealing with forbidden knowledge is a device that allows the exploration of taboos, as well as neglected perspectives. The acquisition of such knowledge could put the gothic subject in the realm of the divine (Punter, *Literature of Terror*), possibly



Figure 1. *Pablo's Inferno*

Source: Montijo. *Pablo's Inferno*. Issue 3, 2000, p. 20. © 2000 Abismo – Montijo.

dangerously and yet, in Montijo's narrative the mediatory handling of the texts is performed by Quetzal, a fallen ancient god in search of redemption, whose profound care is evident. In *Pablo's Inferno* the (re)discovery of ancient texts is crucial, as the collection embodies the hybrid Mexican and the even more hybrid Mexican American heritage.

It is worth reminding—and employing here as a critical tool of comparison—Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* (1980), a renowned novel characterized by intrinsic gothic modes, whose study has been often neglected in favor of the semiotic value of the text. Eco's medieval protagonists are friar William of Baskerville and his novice assistant Adso of Melk, who get involved in solving a series of murders happening in the abbey that they are visiting to attend a theological disputation. The unfolding of the mystery is strictly connected to the search for texts censored by the Catholic church, vetoed for containing allegedly subversive—and thus dangerous—perspectives and interpretations of reality. The access to the vault is quite similar in both works, as the protagonists descend through a trap door on the floor of a chapel, hidden by a sculpture. For William and Adso the locus enclosing knowledge is a labyrinthine monastic library, whereas for Pablo and Quetzal it is a dark, eerie cave in which they get to face a historical past fundamental to deconstruct the intrinsic conflicts of Mexican American identity. Both Montijo

and Eco exploit the self-conscious features of the gothic mode, and thus the trope represented by the finding of manuscripts, connected to mysteries about and contained in the texts themselves, leading to an interpretation in which knowledge and power intertwine. In gothic fiction, the problematization of authenticity and legitimacy can be achieved, indeed, through the reference to “a previous tale or lost text” (Horner & Zlosnik 10). Facing a postmodern crisis of cultural legitimacy, a fragmented gothic identity faces a diversity of possibilities and goes through processes of exploration, opposition, exclusion, and embracement, discovering marginalized elements and delving into its otherness.

Thus, a critical reading of the (re)discovered texts, followed by acquisition and reinterpretation, is necessary to the formation of a well-rounded, aware identity. The texts that Quetzal retrieves in the vault are considered to an extent forbidden—much as Aristotle’s book on comedy (from his *Poetics*) was for Eco’s William of Baskerville—, deliberately hidden and obscured by a dominant subject. In *Pablo’s Inferno*, the keys to explore and understand Mexican heritage are informed by the history of Mexico itself, accessed through the knowledge and culture contained in pre-Hispanic texts that were almost completely destroyed by colonizers in the 16th century and throughout the Spanish domination. In a way, within his heterotopia Montijo reinvents a crucial pivot in the Mexican people’s past, constructing a retrieval of Mexica codices and religious scrolls—mostly condensing notions of good and evil—and their interpretation as complementary texts in the formation of Mexican (American) identity. The reading of these texts and the assimilation of their content lead to the possibility to achieve fruitful empowerment, applying the teachings that emerge from the synergy of knowledge they represent. In practice, the acquired knowledge allows Pablo and Quetzal to bring back life in the barren spirit world, withered by the fading of its gods—or, possibly, the neglect of cultural roots. Quetzal takes upon himself the burden of keeping the heritage alive by writing and documenting their history in the spirit world, as he is “the last link to our past” and he is writing “so that our history will live on” (#5 49). Montijo’s story creates a spirit world that corresponds to the heritage diversity constructing the Mexican American subjectivity. By means of its gothic modes, Pablo’s heterotopia challenges the

dominant discourse on culture, as well as the structural assimilation of otherness exerted by the US institutional system—monoglossic and based on Anglo heritage.

In book #5, the protagonists—as it often happens in gothic fiction—have to act against evil as the gods are either dead, forgotten, or ineffective. In a postmodern challenge against a stable, preconceived order, Pablo will defeat the Devil himself resorting to actions inspired by a blend of different fragments that constitute Mexican heritage and the shared sets of beliefs characterizing it. For the final confrontation, Montijo creates a Devil that is shapeshifting and comes to embody all forms of evil, mutating in each panel from representation to representation of evil in different iconographic configurations. Without reaching the level of complexity that can be observed in Eco's novel (see Stubbs), intertextuality is present in *Pablo's Inferno* and structures the diegetic unfolding of the protagonists' journey. Heavily based on allusion and intertextual play, the comic books recreate Catholic and pre-Hispanic texts, either real or fictional—and yet inspired by real texts. Likewise, Montijo inserts a variety of Mexican cultural references, spanning from superstitions to mythic tropes, reproducing them with conceptual and iconographic accuracy.

2. CULTURAL ABSORPTION AND THE MEXICAN AMERICAN GOTHIC

Before analyzing the elements that Montijo extrapolated from Mexican culture, history, and iconography, it is necessary to underline the existence of gothic configurations peculiar to the Latinx ranges of heritage. So-called tropical gothic appropriates and adapts the gothic perspective to problematize and deal with contexts outside the European and Anglo American traditions (Edwards & Guardini Vasconcelos). When it comes to Latin American and US Latinx gothic, its modes are inevitably characterized by postcolonial stances and inclusivity, as well as an orientation toward racialized identity and resistance against imperialist practices (Lundberg, Ancuta, & Stasiewicz-Bienkowska). The gothic mode becomes a tool to confront an ethnic otherness that within the American society is depicted as exotic—and consequently commodified—and yet, at the same time it embodies a core cultural pivot “upon which racial, psychological,

and sexual anxieties are projected” (Hughes & Smith 3). It is worth reminding that in American popular culture Mexico has often been the setting for a gothicization of unknown exotic elements, in order to build horrific otherness—rather than an exploration of tropical or Mexican gothic—and perpetuate a colonial manifestation of cultural consumption (Ajuria Ibarra, *Gothic Re-Constructions* 121). Through his child protagonist’s ingenuousness and initial unawareness, Montijo’s work reverses this kind of perspective by approaching the colonial theme in an unprejudiced way, digesting it, and creating a fundamental postcolonial awareness. Reclaiming historical texts and traces, the construction of Pablo and Quetzal’s awareness avoids simple dichotomies favoring the “interplay of often opposed, but not mutually exclusive sources” (Santos) of Mexican (American) heritage.

Mexican fiction and folktales show an inclination for horror and gothic modes that Punter—aptly drawing on Octavio Paz—has defined as “a Kierkegaardian sense that the dreadful has already happened” (Punter, *Cyborg*). Such is the feeling the readers get when Pablo and Quetzal move out of the grotesque carnival limbo and into the mysteriously and oddly forsaken spirit world, in which haunted places recur. Ruins are a fundamental element in the gothic imaginary (see among many, Punter, *Literature of Terror*), as well as they are in the Chicane imaginary embodied mostly by Aztec and Mayan architecture. Pre-Hispanic constructions have been crucial in constructing a Chicane visual rhetoric and have recurred in murals and art (among many, Benavidez; Mahler); likewise, Mexican pre-Hispanic legends—such as the tale of Popocatepetl and Iztacchíhuatl—have been appropriated as symbols of the Chicane cultural resilience. In these representations, a mythical—at times even idealized—past and the present collapse, highlighting the persistence of conflicts in the coexistence between the dominant culture and the native.

In Mexican cultural expressions, the boundaries between life and death, magic and reality, frequently blur. Fiction has often relied on the hybridization of genres, accompanied by a sense of intrinsic ambivalence and ambiguity characterized by a blend of indigenous and colonial elements, as well as unequal political, socioeconomic, and ethnic relations. Spectral figures populating Mexican folklore have been appropriated and embraced by Mexican American communities, becoming symbols of sociocultural resistance. The present configuration

of these mythical ghosts and ghostly monsters—such as La Llorona, the Cucuy, the *nahuales*—often originated in the encounter between colonizers and pre-Hispanic groups, and they can be considered as vessels disclosing “anxieties over identity by means of spectral haunting” (Ajuria Ibarra, *Ghosting the Nation* 134). Their enduring haunting revives conflicts and fears rooted in the past, constructing a “phantasmatic historical projection” (ibid. 135) that supports a postcolonial exploration of conflictual and unresolved identities. They are specters raising from a layered past, in which the pride in *mestizo* heritage clashes with the reproduction of inequality (Rozental) and a fragmented, complex diaspora. Montijo’s intertextual play exploits several references to the uncanny that is pervasive in Mexican folktale. In book #4, for example, Pablo and Quetzal visit the Spiderwomen, a Mexican instance of the motif represented by the Fates, here described as three old Indigenous women weaving the future (Figure 2). Once again, the gothic mode surfaces in their reference to the lost past as “the thread that binds together the fabric of all existence” (#4 19).



Figure 2: *Pablo's Inferno*.

Source: Montijo. *Pablo's Inferno*. Issue 4, 2000, p. 18. © 2000 Abismo – Montijo.

Right after their meeting with the Spiderwomen, the two have to deal with a nahual (21-24), a shapeshifting entity that is often embodied by a person with magical or divine powers who can turn into an animal and perform witchcraft. In this case, it is indeed a malicious *bruja* who can transform into an owl; besides imprisoning Quetzal, the witch exerts power and violence on Nayelli, a girl that the protagonists encounter in the desert and who will help them defeat the Devil. Elements of Aztec culture and cosmogony are interspersed throughout the whole series and their analysis would require a separate study. Quetzal himself is described as a fallen god in need of redemption, with a story remindful of god Quetzalcóatl's exile (#3 9). Right out of the limbo, he and Pablo encounter a Chac Mool (#2 9) and meet fire god Huehuetéotl (12-17), whose depiction reprises renowned Mexica sculptural representations of the deity. In the final confrontation with the Devil, to save his companions Pablo needs to retrieve for him a precious treasure from a cave where he meets a waning water god Tlaloc. Nonetheless, before dying the deity entrusts him with "the ultimate treasure" (#5 20): the corn and—thanks to Tlaloc's own sacrifice (Figure 3)—the water necessary to revive the barren land in the spirit world.

Montijo's intertextuality delves into popular culture as well. In book #3, there is an evident absorption of the *lucha libre* film tradition—or *cine de luchadores*—as Pablo and Quetzal find El Calambre wandering in an otherwise deserted cemetery (#3 10). The undead masked luchador—"heavily inspired by El Santo" (Montijo, The (re)Discovery)—joins the protagonists in their discovery of the aforementioned vault and will sacrifice himself to save them from the attack of monstrous wolves. Besides facilitating the iconography of Mexican wrestling, El Calambre embodies the ethos distinctive of legendary luchadores and the apogee of *lucha libre* cinema in the 60s. Wrestlers such as El Santo (Rodolfo Guzmán Huerta) and Blue Demon (Alejandro Muñoz Moreno) embodied a mythic dimension in and out of the ring, never breaking character and delivering cinematographic performances as well-meaning heroes, ready to fight against villains and classic horror monsters to protect innocent people. Throughout narratives that often verge toward campy horror, luchadores would fight off evil, just as El Calambre tries to protect Pablo and Quetzal by facing the wolves himself. His fight is



Figure 3. *Pablo's Inferno*.

Source: Montijo. *Pablo's Inferno*. Issue 5, 2000, p. 22. © 2000 Abismo – Montijo.

accompanied by captions containing fragments of the ancient texts Quetzal retrieves from the vault and in which he seeks a formula to save the luchador from transforming into a werewolf. It is worth mentioning that Mexican American culture—in particular in the borderland regions—holds a strong connection with classic *lucha libre*, also because the *cine de luchadores* films used to be broadcasted by local Latinx-oriented networks (see Greene).

Blending such a variety of elements, *Pablo's Inferno* participates in filling a void in the exploration of Mexican American heritage by interrogating its past from Montijo's personal perspective, without recurring to consolidated Chicana paradigms and discourses. In a way, the peculiarity of his work challenges the boundaries of the definition of Mexicanness, as Mexican American identity can encompass such a wide and diverse range of elements, both connected with Mexican heritage and related to the acquisition and reinterpretation performed by the subject.

3. CHILDHOOD WONDER AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF AGENCY

Upon his death, Pablo leaves behind a familiar world to go on to a new existence in the spirit world, from which he will not come back. His acquisition of heritage and adaptation to the heterotopia in which

he finds himself existing are the result of a process of growth and development of insight, achieved through his fantasmical journey. Quetzal's role is that of a tentative protector for Pablo, albeit in search of his own redemption and a consequent new existence. If—at first and by comparison with the literary source of inspiration—he might be interpreted as a Virgil-like figure, Quetzal is not a wise, unfaltering guide: throughout their journey, he will commit mistakes, fail at responding to critical situations, and be overwhelmed by the events. He is not a role model either, as the Roman poet was for Dante; rather, he is humbled by the failures and weaknesses that characterized him as a god and led to his fall.

The protagonist couple is characterized by horizontal, complementary dynamics and an equal amount of agency, although Pablo's is much more powerful. As children do, he acts on emotion and basing his instinctive reactions on immediate feelings, contrary to Quetzal, who fails to solve problems due to overthinking (e.g. #3 28) and even puts himself in danger when overwhelmed (e.g. #4 23). Pablo's innocence is preserved and yet, at the same time, the child is provided of resilience and shrewdness that enable him to face the obstacles and overcome them in clever ways. Thanks to his heightened receptivity and sense of imagination—as many a child characters in children's gothic literature do—he has a more open, unprejudiced acceptance of incongruity (Cross 58). This kind of protagonists possess clear agency in the fictional space they inhabit, as they are “questioning, assertive, change-embracing” and accompanied by “adult (or supernatural) allies who likewise embrace change, in opposition to the conservative forces of evil” (Jackson 7), just as Pablo is. Drawing on Howarth—who reprises Erik Erikson's work (1950; 1968)—and his psychoanalytic approach to gothic children's narratives, a parallel might be traced between a child's development through resolved crises and the (re)discovery of one's own cultural roots and subsequent development of a cultural identity. Discovering his/her individual agency and its scope, the child has thus to “find out what kind of person [s/he] may become” (Erikson in Howarth 53). Without delving into the field of psychoanalysis, it is worth mentioning as well the existence of research—such as the longstanding work by Phinney (1992; 2007)—that has established connection between the passage to adulthood and the achievement of ethnic identity, based on

individual exploration and commitment. Pablo might be a little boy, but his journey in the underworld represents a process of collision, learning, and eventual commitment to his own heritage. Despite starting off with an already evident individual agency, throughout the comic book series he develops more nuanced insight and power strictly connected with his exploration.

One of the most noticeable editorial and diegetic aspects of the comic books is the continuous play on the very nature of *Pablo's Inferno*: is it supposed to be aimed at adult or child readers? Aside from sketches and original art, the books' extras comprise a cut and glue model to build a Pablo mobile, complete with instructions and diagrams (#1), or a connect the dots game (#5). Montijo also inserts little games allegedly directed to children, in order to find subliminal messages in the recap text on the inside front cover from the second book on. Pablo's cartoonish design was inspired by Precious Moments figurines in order to create a contrast with the spooky ambiance (Montijo, *The (re)Discovery*). In this sense, it is worth reminding the main contrast characterizing the bright colored world depicted in the *Happy Tree Friends* series co-created by Montijo. Its characters are designed as cute anthropomorphic animals and each episode is introduced by the trope of a children pop-up book's opening; nonetheless, the protagonists' daily adventures are marked by gore, extreme violence, and grotesque outcomes. In *Pablo's Inferno*, Montijo's heterotopia pushes the—most likely adult—readers' perception of adulthood, blurring the boundaries between children's and adult literature as Pablo challenges the adult standpoint throughout his journey. If gothic narratives can be fundamental to help children progress through different stages of growth and development (Howarth), Pablo's gothic quest can definitely help adult readers to approach complex issues related with identity and the crucial importance of learning about one's own history and cultural roots. Trying to figure out his place in the spirit world, Pablo forms the basis of his identity as a child and, metaphorically, of the Mexican American cultural consciousness. As Aldama has pointed out, Pablo's experience upon his death follows a sacrificial diegetic paradigm (85), as he does not come back to life: despite defeating the Devil and restoring life in the spirit world thanks to his acquired self-knowledge, he is destined to remain there for eternity. This kind of narrative structure can

confer sacrifice “a quality of transcendence to the performer of the sacrifice” (Melin Schyllert 15), embodying the negotiation of identity that a whole community is experiencing. Pablo’s permanence in the underworld after his undertaking entails both his achievement—in expanding his knowledge and consciousness—and, at the same time, his eradication from the tangible reality of his community.

Moreover, Montijo’s work holds a distinctive humor strictly related with grotesque renditions and childlike wonder tale modes, exploiting the ludic quality intrinsic to many a gothic narrative. Through devices such as parody and exaggeration, the gothic is often characterized by an underlying comic quality foregrounding a critique of modernity and thus, a postmodern “self-reflexivity and dialectic impulse” (Horner & Zlosnik 4). In *Pablo’s Inferno*, both protagonists are characterized by an implicit self-reflexivity, albeit expressed in very different ways; Pablo’s comments often reveal a witty dark humor, whereas Quetzal often delivers worrisome, disenchanted, or brooding considerations. The child’s openness toward incongruity is accompanied by his cheeky remarks blurted out unexpectedly, inducing a comic effect and a momentaneous relief from the eerie ambiance and scary characters

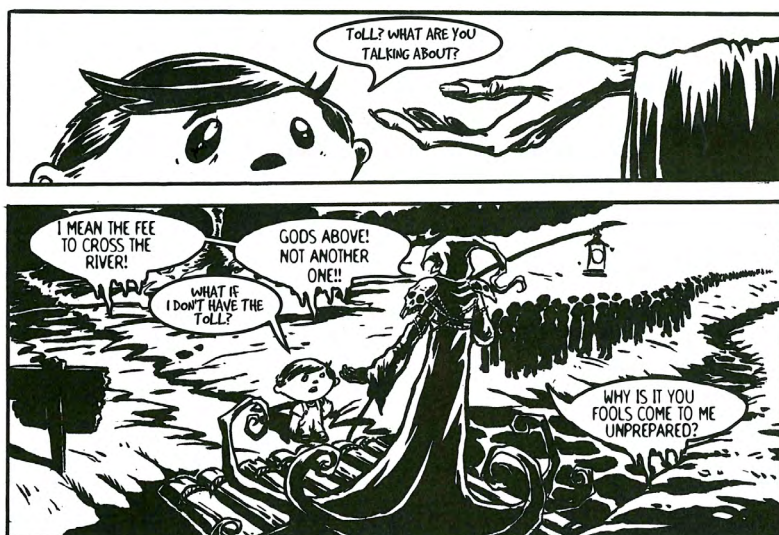


Figure 3. *Pablo's Inferno*.

Source: Montijo. *Pablo's Inferno*. Issue 1, 1999, p. 11. © 1999 Abismo – Montijo.

he faces. For example, in book #1 his interaction with psychopomp Charon (10-12) is marked by a few comic exchanges. Despite his frightening grim appearance, Charon indulges in a parodic tirade that turns into a rant as he faces a rather unimpressed Pablo, nagging at him about the toll he is supposed to pay for crossing (Figure 4). Further on, even when Pablo's adventure verges on horror—or when Quetzal expresses his anguish provoked by the waning of the gods—the underlying playfulness contributes to structure a space where cultural concerns and conflicts can be played out.

Surely, *Pablo's Inferno* mirrors the creator's own discovery of Mexican heritage, which helped his taking diegetic control, informed the shaping of his protagonists, and fostered the distinctiveness intrinsic to his following work. Nonetheless, the comic book series also represents a significative take on Chicana heritage and cultural resilience, eliciting the necessity to know and delve into one's own cultural roots and history to form an identity. While expressing such a fundamental message, Montijo's work sidesteps consolidated paradigms by reframing his narrative—and overall artistic production—within gothic modes, and exploits Pablo's journey as a subversive tool to challenge a “society ignorant of its history” (Aldama 88).

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LA PULSIÓN LITERARIA EN LA NARRATIVA GRÁFICA DE LOS HERMANOS HERNÁNDEZ

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RESUMEN

Este ensayo reflexiona sobre algunos de los aspectos literarios que definen los cómics de los Hermanos Hernández y el concepto de tiempo que se evoca en sus respectivas series dentro del ciclo *Love and Rockets*. Compara algunos ejemplos de cuadernillos de 2016 con ejemplos tempranos de 1985 con tramas de Jaime. Analiza las formas en las que los personajes de Maggie, Hopey, Izzy o Penny Century interactúan y definen los Cómics Alternativos y el poder e impacto de “Locas” a la hora de explicar a las Latinas en Estados Unidos. Los personajes femeninos de Jaime y Gilbert representan importantes modelos que motivaron a los lectores a pensar sobre género y multiculturalismo en los cómics. El cómic seriado en formato de cuadernillo ha permitido a lo largo de los años una mayor comprensión de la importancia de las tramas con sentido creativo. Este ensayo también trabaja la dimensión poliédrica de las protagonistas y las transformaciones que experimentan al crecer y definir su propia identidad. El trabajo de Jaime y

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Gilbert ha sido fundamental y una gran influencia en la obra de las autoras que han ido desarrollando sus propios personajes ficticios femeninos mientras buscaban su propia voz.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Love and Rockets*; el tiempo en el cómic seriado; modelos feminista; Latinas; cómic alternativo.

ABSTRACT

This essay works around some of the literary aspects that defines the Hernández Brothers comics and their concept of time in the development of their personal projects as part of *Love and Rockets* comic book series. Compares some comic books samples from 2016 with early comic books samples from 1985 done by Jaime. Analyzes the ways characters such as Maggie, Hopey, Izzy or Penny Century interacted and defined the underground of the Latin Punk since the 80s. And explains the evolution of Alternative Comics and the power and impact that the “Locas” to define Latinas in the US. Jaime and Gilbert female characters represented important feminist role-models that motivated readers to think about gender and multiculturalism in comics. The serial comic book format allowed a deep understanding of the importance of the plots with a creative sense that evolves over the years. This essay also works on the main characters as a multifaceted entity and the transformations they experience to grow and define their own identity. The work of Jaime and Gilbert has been pivotal and a great influence on the work of female comic artist developing their own female fictional characters and searching for their own voice.

KEYWORDS: *Love and Rockets*; Time in serial comics; Feminist role-models; Latinas; Alternative comics.

* * *

Los Hermanos Hernández inauguraron la vertiente más literaria del cómic alternativo estadounidense a comienzos de los 80 del pasado siglo. En este ensayo quiero navegar por algunos de los elementos más originales de sus series y la construcción de sus ficciones, así como destacar el impacto lector que tuvo la evolución de sus carismáticos personajes femeninos como personajes múltiples en constante evolución temporal. Jaime Hernández ejemplificó la articulación de lo periférico de la expresión del punk latino en las afueras de Los Ángeles; mientras que la ficción imaginada de Gilbert Hernández creó Palomar un pueblo inventado en algún lugar de la

costa del Pacífico de Latinoamérica donde el sustrato coral de la trama de los personajes afianzó una nueva forma literaria de narrar en el ámbito del cómic.

En octubre de 2016, los Hermanos Hernández volvieron a la mesa de novedades con el cómic *Love and Rockets* en formato de cuadernillo de treinta y seis páginas. Jaime y Gilbert Hernández continuaban con la esencia de sus personajes, pero el editor introdujo en la página interior de la cubierta una pequeña aclaración para los nuevos lectores que en el siglo XXI descubrían por primera vez a estos dos autores. En la nota aclaratoria celebraba el regreso al formato clásico de los cuadernillos que habían caracterizado las propuestas del cómic seriado alternativo de los ochenta y los noventa del siglo XX; y explicaba, que este peculiar cómic, que aparecía bajo la etiqueta de *Love and Rockets* llevaba existiendo desde 1982 bajo el sello de Fantagraphics. Datar los orígenes es importante para entender la evolución y el contexto de lo que fue la propuesta de dos jóvenes, que inicialmente eran tres hermanos, ya que estaba Mario, el hermano mayor que también participó. Pero Mario, no llegó a consolidar tramas con personajes de largo aliento y fue apareciendo de forma cada vez más esporádica en los cuadernillos. Para ser exactos, habría que matizar entonces, que el primer ejemplar de *Love and Rockets* fue un cuadernillo en blanco y negro que se auto-editaron los Hermanos Hernández en 1981 y del que enviaron copia a Gary Groth con la esperanza de que lo reseñara en *The Comics Journal*; la revista sobre cómic que dirigía y en la que prestaba atención a las nuevas voces que estaban saliendo. Groth, que en esos momentos se encontraba construyendo con su socio Kim Thompson el sello editorial Fantagraphics para dar cabida al tipo de cómic que les interesaba, quedó fascinado con el material de estos jóvenes latinos y decidió editar la serie que empezaría a aparecer en el otoño de 1982 de forma profesional y distribuida por las tiendas de cómics.

Love and Rockets a lo largo del tiempo se ha convertido en un proyecto de cómic que enmarca dos obras grafico-narrativas, es decir, que representa dos universos creativos diferenciados donde los hermanos Gilbert y Jaime, van desarrollando sus propias tramas, sus atmósferas y sus personajes. El nuevo cuadernillo, que aparece como número uno en el otoño de 2016, en realidad inaugura el proyecto del volumen IV. El volumen I lo componen cincuenta cuadernillos que

se publican entre 1982 y 1996. El volumen II, veinte cuadernillos que aparecen entre 2001 y 2007. Mientras que el volumen III fueron las publicaciones de ocho piezas, una por año, entre 2008 y 2016, tituladas *Love and Rockets: New Stories*. Hay por lo tanto una construcción seriada y episódica en sus propuestas que se tejen a lo largo de casi cuarenta años, y definen lo que significó el formato seriado alternativo y la construcción de sendos microcosmos corales literarios.

Para los estudiosos del cómic alternativo, el trabajo seriado de ambos hermanos representa por lo tanto dos obras cumbre del contexto estadounidense. Son los autores que más han profundizado en la realidad femenina dentro del marco de las obras de pulsión ficticia de sustrato literario; y, además, son los pioneros que mejor representan la diversidad cultural de la comunidad latina y su reconocimiento en la sociedad estadounidense. Figuran también como los referentes de la primera ola alternativa que expresa la latinidad desde parámetros complejos donde hay tensión dramática y denuncia social. Sus historias describen la realidad de la época con sus tensiones raciales. *Love and Rockets* es una propuesta doble que agrupa, por un lado, las historias y el trazo dibujado de Jaime Hernández con sus personajes Maggie, Hopey, Izzy o Penny, entre otros muchos amigos y familiares, viviendo en el ámbito de la periferia de Los Ángeles. Mientras que su hermano Gilbert Hernández lo centraría casi siempre en el matriarcado del personaje de Luba desde el que irradia la vida de sus descendientes alrededor de un pueblo llamado Palomar que se localiza en el espacio simbólico de América Latina. Gilbert también desarrolla historias en Estados Unidos sobre Fritz, la medio-hermana de Luba y su compleja existencia.

Los Hermanos Hernández entraron en el espacio del cómic de manera intuitiva, ofreciendo su pasión juvenil y su experiencia vital de latinos que habían crecido en Oxnard, en California. Gilbert nace en 1957 y Jaime en 1959, son hijos de un mexicano de Chihuahua que había emigrado a los Estados Unidos y de una madre texana de ascendencia mexicana. Son latinos nacidos y criados en Estados Unidos que no olvidan la ascendencia mexicana que contribuye a fraguar su imaginario, y en el caso de Gilbert, su constante evocación del espacio latinoamericano. La sociedad estadounidense de los años sesenta y setenta en la que crecen está marcada por el discurso del “English only” y les obliga a renunciar al bilingüismo para integrarse

en los parámetros de la sociedad anglosajona. Estados Unidos está lleno de prejuicios y no reconoce la diversidad con todos sus matices. Ellos son diversidad y se impregnan de las otras realidades que constituyen el sustrato narrativo de sus cómics.

Las imágenes de la cubierta del cuadernillo número 1 (2016) combinan variantes que dialogan con el coleccionismo clásico que hacen que el objeto cuadernillo multiplique su valor y que un lector apasionado quiera todas las variantes de ese número. Para los nostálgicos de la propuesta de “Locas”, subtítulo que se utiliza para aludir al universo de Jaime Hernández, hay dos escenas de cubierta y contracubierta complementarias que hacen un guiño a la genealogía de sus protagonistas y al paso del tiempo (Figuras 1 y 2). Cuando Jaime se encarga de la versión con su cubierta de portada nos ofrece un plano de grupo de las carismáticas amigas siendo jóvenes reunidas en un bar de Hoppers o Huerta, su vecindario. Estaríamos en la temporalidad de la década de los ochenta y aparecen dibujados los personajes del grupo de las llamadas “Locas”. En el lado izquierdo, en primer plano está Daffy teñida de rubio, y en el lado derecho Izzy de estilo gótico con su larga melena oscura y algunos mechones teñidos de verde y rosa. Junto a Daffy, está Terry con pelo largo y flequillo mirando desde el fondo con su camiseta a rayas rojas y negras y su cazadora de cuero verde. Detrás de Izzy, sobresale una sonriente Maggie de pelo corto con boina negra sosteniendo un botellín en la mano, y justo, a su lado, está Hopey gritando con gafas de sol negras de montura redonda. Al fondo, y haciendo entrada estelar, está la sensual Penny teñida de rubio platino y vestida de rojo. La pared está decorada con las fotografías de otros rostros de personajes carismáticos: un joven Ray Domínguez, su mejor amigo Doyle Blackburn, las niñas gemelas Chiness y Machi, o Joey Glass, el hermano pequeño de Hopey.

“Daffy” es el sobrenombre de Daphne Matsumoto una de las amigas punk de origen japonés nacida en 1968, que aparece por vez primera en la historia de “Mechanics” e irá a la universidad a estudiar. “Izzy” es Isabel Ortiz Ruebens nacida en 1958, canguro de Maggie cuando era niña, y hermana mayor de Speedy. Izzy es un personaje clave en muchas tramas, pues sufre diferentes transformaciones y altibajos mentales. Se casará joven con su profesor de la universidad, Jack Ruebens, un hombre blanco que le dobla la edad, y, posteriormente, se divorciará de él. Se hará escritora

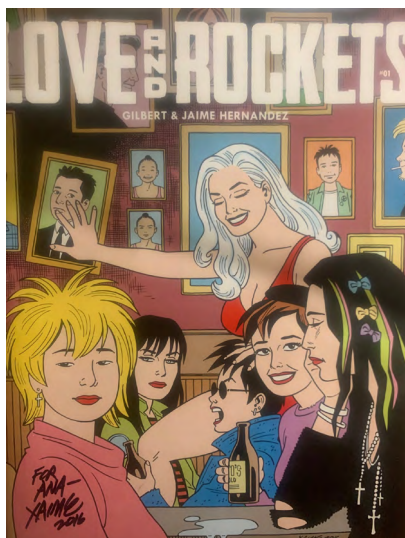


Figura 1. Cubierta del cuadernillo 1 de *Love and Rockets*.

Fuente: Hernandez y Hernandez. *Love and Rockets*. Issue 1, vol. IV, 2016.

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y vivirá sorprendentes experiencias que hacen guiños a la atmósfera de la literatura fantástica, incluida una estancia en México que está recogida en un volumen titulado *Flies on the Ceiling*. Izzy, que además es la mayor, se convierte en una voz literaria que Jaime Hernández utiliza para narrar las historias del grupo de amigas. Será, además, la que presente a Maggie y a Hopey y posibilite la amistad entre estos dos personajes protagónicos. “Terry” es Theresa Leeanne Downe nacida en 1963, guitarrista de las bandas de punk “La Llorona” y “40 Thieves”, será durante un par de años la amante de Hopey que la introduce en el mundo *underground* y a veces tendrá una relación tensa con Maggie. “Maggie” es el sobrenombre de Margarita Luisa Chascarrillo, la más pequeña de este grupo a la que también llaman “Perla” o “Perlita”. Es un personaje que a lo largo de los años sufre un obvio cambio físico al engordar y hace que el lector pueda ver cómo cambia su cuerpo y el modo en que le afecta esa transformación. Jaime Hernández hace que Maggie nazca en 1965, y sea la mejor amiga de Hopey con la que tendrá una relación amorosa intermitente. Otra de las personas de su vida será Ray, que aparece en una de las



Figura 2. Contracubierta del cuadernillo 1 de *Love and Rockets*.

Fuente: Hernandez y Hernandez. *Love and Rockets*. Issue 1, vol. IV, 2016.

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fotografías de la pared, con el que tendrá una relación sentimental larga y compleja. “Hopey”, Esperanza Leticia Glass, de ascendencia colombiana escocesa, es una punk lesbiana y un año mayor que su gran amiga Maggie. Toca con poco talento el bajo en varias bandas como la de “La Llorona”, “Missiles of October” o “Soul Train Line”. Ha trabajado de camarera y también será maestra en prácticas en un colegio. Por último, “Penny Century” se llama en realidad Beatriz García nacida en 1961 y que juega a disfrazarse de superheroína, y se casará con el rico “Herv” Costigan del que quedará viuda.

La representación de la feminidad bisexual y homosexual de algunos de estos personajes tendrá un gran impacto en la década de los ochenta. Sorprendió sobre todo por su naturalidad y la fluidez de sus pasiones. La representación del sexo explícito en el mundo del cómic venía anteriormente de las *Tijuana Bibles* (pequeños cuadernillos eróticos) que se hicieron populares en la gran depresión, y después del *underground* sórdido de los sesenta donde la masculinidad falocéntrica copaba el imaginario lector. Sacar mujeres que ofrecían introspección afectiva y sexual desde la

naturalidad narrativa fue absolutamente revolucionario. Es cierto que autoras del *underground* como Trina Robbins, Diane Noomin, Aline Kominsky o Roberta Gregory, ya pusieron el sexo explícito femenino sobre la mesa, pero en los Hermanos Hernández se depura y se ofrece como construcción literaria de la trama que refuerza la emocionalidad lectora desde parámetros seriados de largo aliento. El argumento de sus cómics al construirse como ficción ofrece unas posibilidades narrativas más complejas que los guiños autobiográficos que marcaron al *underground*. Además, en la cultura latina, la expresividad de las pasiones y el peso del matriarcado son otros componentes que también se representan. Lo anglo, por otra parte, está ligado a la rigidez del protestantismo mientras que lo latino al peso del catolicismo. Ambas tradiciones influyen en la forma de entender el pecado y el espacio de los afectos y la forma en la que los personajes reaccionan ante esas herencias culturales. La familia extensiva como personaje coral es otro rasgo del imaginario latino que los Hermanos Hernández desarrollan en sus propuestas.

En estas ilustraciones de cubierta que muestran el abanico de los personajes principales de “Locas”, están las claves que marcan la dinámica femenina del cómic de Jaime Hernández ambientado en el barrio ficticio de Hoppers, cerca de Los Ángeles. La versión de la portada de 2016 donde rebosan juventud dialoga directamente con la portada del cuadernillo número 13 de la primera serie de *Love and Rockets* que apareció en 1985. Son todas ellas, y algunas están con la misma ropa: Daffy teñida de rubio y con el jersey color salmón y Penny de rubia también, con su espectacular vestido rojo.

Jaime Hernández, a la vez que presenta su cómic a los nuevos lectores *millennials*, sabe que tiene un inmenso grupo de seguidores fascinados con el microcosmos de estas mujeres desde comienzos de los ochenta y que han ido creciendo a lo largo de los años. Lo seriado enlaza también con la posibilidad de crear tramas episódicas que se anexionan y siempre suman. El cuadernillo número 13 de 1985 costaba 2,25 \$, mientras que el de 2016 cuesta 4,99 \$. Hay variaciones también en el tamaño, las publicaciones recientes son de mayor tamaño y con mejor papel. Por otra parte, ya no aparece la frase “Recommended For Mature Readers” (Recomendado a lectores adultos), que caracterizó a las publicaciones alternativas de los ochenta. Al entrar en las páginas iniciales de ese número 13 de

los ochenta el lector descubre que fue un ejemplar que había subido de precio 30 centavos, cuestión acerca de la cual el editor Gary Groth necesita dar explicaciones mientras anima a los lectores a que compartan su pasión por *Love and Rockets* y generen más audiencia:

We should probably just thank our lucky stars that work this good find as large an audience as it does. Spread the Word Love and Rockets is one of the few comics worth keeping in your library and re-reading. Show copies to your Friends and suggest they pick up copies themselves.

En esa página interior de créditos, donde el editor Gary Groth celebra y comenta el nuevo número, hay varias cartas de lectores que dan interesantes pistas sobre la recepción en aquel momento del trabajo de los Hermanos Hernández. Charles Van Meter, por ejemplo, de Greer (Carolina del Sur), comenta lo frustrado que a veces se siente de esperar por el siguiente número cuando Jaime desarrolla historias complejas con muchas partes que necesitan de varios cuadernillos para completarse. Destaca además la relación entre Maggie y Race, y los profundos cambios de Hopey, y espera que Jaime siga desarrollando con valentía esa potente pulsión narrativa que lo caracteriza:

I only hope that Jaime doesn't allow these plot threads to evaporate: so many comics writers are too afraid of change to allow for any substantial character development!

Y con esa afirmación, confía en que Jaime continúe avanzando en su proceso creador. Además, el lector está aludiendo también al peso que ha tenido el cómic estático donde los personajes no evolucionan y se acomodan en el espacio de una trama repetida. Sin embargo, Jaime y Gilbert problematizan la realidad existencial de sus personajes e introducen también el factor temporal como un elemento que potencia el principio de interés narrativo:

One of the greatest strengths of Love and Rockets (and this includes Gilbert writing too), has been that the characters change (and even aged!) over time.

Los lectores de *Love and Rockets* de los ochenta mostraban ya entonces mucha sensibilidad por la obra de los dos hermanos y lo que significaba su revolucionario trabajo. Podían notar grandes diferencias frente al poso estático de los superhéroes del momento y comparan por ejemplo

el impacto que ha tenido la historia del cuadernillo número 10 de L&R donde la luchadora Rena Titañón conocida como “La Toña” enfrenta la muerte y su fragilidad: “After witnessing Rena Titañón confront her own mortality [...] the typically ‘ageless’ comics hero just seems so incredibly shallow”. La profundidad y el nivel de introspección de los personajes sorprende a los lectores acostumbrados a tramas estereotípicas donde los personajes apenas sufrían variaciones.

En ese mismo cuadernillo número 13 de L&R Michelle J. Cioeta, desde Prospect Park en Pennsylvania, escribía con entusiasmo y celebraba el universo femenino de los personajes y su fuerza: “And what characters! I absolutely love the strength of the female you’ve created. No Marvel Universe sexism here, for sure”. Esa reflexión sobre el Universo Marvel es interesante, porque los superhéroes de ese sello tienen rasgos introspectivos, pero muy pocos personajes femeninos en proporción, lo que empobrece sus posibilidades. *Love and Rockets*, sin embargo, llevan el universo femenino a un nivel de representación revolucionaria para su época: “It’s about time some comic-book were strong and human at the same time”. La naturalidad de los personajes que crearon Gilbert y Jaime son un aspecto que gusta mucho a los lectores y le hace sentir una vinculación íntima: “I like the way your female characters are their own women, or at least they try. Or you’re trying. To me the characters live, or are alive, independent of their creators”.

Este cuadernillo número 13 de 1985 todavía se publicaba cuando la editorial Fantagraphics estaba en Thousand Oaks en California. Ofrece piezas que consolidan el universo de Locas, y es por eso que se entiende el claro vínculo con la portada de 2016 en la que Jaime recupera el espíritu de sus primeros cuadernillos y sus queridas Locas en su momento más efervescente. En la primera página por ejemplo aparece un monigote llamado Roy Cowboy que quiere presentarnos a estas mujeres a las que describe como amigas personales: “They are the women of tomorrow today! They are wild! They are crazy! They are... LOCAS”. Son las mujeres del mañana en aquel presente, mujeres salvajes, y locas. Su locura se construye con un guiño a sus orígenes latinos, son “LOCAS” en español. La página ofrece una galería de las seis protagonistas Maggie, Hopey, Izzy, Daffy, Terry y Penny Century con sus nombres completos: Margarita Luisa Chascarrillo, Esperanza Leticia Glass, Isabel María Ortiz Ruebens, Daphe Matsumoto, Theresa Leeanne Downe y Beatriz García. Jaime estaba construyendo un proyecto

coral y quería asegurarse que los lectores tuvieran clara la identidad de cada una con todo el espectro familiar que arrastran sus nombres y sus apellidos. La fuerza de determinados nombres y apellidos como Margarita Luisa, Esperanza Leticia, Isabel María, Beatriz, Chascarrillo, Ortíz o García dice mucho de la identidad latina que los define.

La primera historieta que aparece en este cuadernillo 13 sitúa a Hopey y a Maggie en el contexto de su juventud viviendo en la casa de Izzy que las acoge. Maggie ya no trabaja de mecánica, ahora lo hace en Vandy's, un restaurante de comida rápida. Maggie ha comenzado a engordar porque cuando se siente deprimida come sin medida. Los kilos de más hacen que a Maggie se le rompan sus antiguos pantalones y las dos amigas decidan ir a una tienda de segunda mano a comprar ropa. En la calle se cruzarán con Julie Wree, su enemiga, con la que se intercambian algunos insultos. Luego se encuentran con el viejo Chucho sentado en las escaleras de un bar acompañado de algunos amigos. El anciano Chucho que solo habla español las critica por vestir como los hombres y comenta que se quedarán sin maridos si siguen llevando ese aspecto. Hopey molesta le responde en inglés que ella no presta atención a los "viejos borrachos comemierda". Maggie trata de persuadir a Hopey para que no insulte al anciano pese a los comentarios machistas con los que les ha provocado, pero Hopey está tranquila porque Chucho no entiende el inglés: "It's OK, Mag, Chucho doesn't understand English. Only español, right, Chucho you old pathetic heap?". Pero Maggie le recuerda a su amiga, que, aunque él no lo entienda, sus amigos la están entendiendo y las miran enfadados. Las amigas se marchan, aunque a lo lejos Hopey sigue gritando que Maggie lleva falda porque se le abrió un agujero en..., pero no termina la frase, mientras Maggie la empuja y grita que no importa. En primer plano veremos a Chucho hablar en español y preguntar: "¿Qué dice?". Esta escena de barrio es muy relevante porque representa el bilingüismo que caracteriza a las protagonistas y los enfrentamientos que tienen con los patriarcas hispanos de su cultura por ser punkis. Jaime, al igual que Gilbert, insertará frases y palabras directamente en español en sus cómics, aunque la resolución narrativa clásica para conversaciones complejas será indicar en qué momentos se habla español y diferenciarlo del inglés al ponerle corchetes al texto en inglés que representa el habla en español.



Figura 3. Escena del cuadernillo 13 de *Love and Rockets* (1985).

Fuente: Hernandez y Hernandez. *Love and Rockets*.

Issue 13, vol. I, 1985. © 1985 Fantagraphics Books – Hernandez y Hernandez.

En otra escena de esa misma historia Hopey lanzará unas botellas abollando accidentalmente un coche con una de ellas. Cuando el propietario del coche les pregunte si saben quién fue el que arrojó la botella ellas jugarán a no saber inglés: “No hablo inglés, señor” (Figura 3) y el hombre furioso hará un comentario racista al llamarlas espaldas mojadas analfabetas: “Wetback illiterates”, mostrando los prejuicios contra los inmigrantes ilegales.

Una de las viñetas más carismáticas de la primera historieta de este cuadernillo es la de la página 6 en la que Maggie y Hopey aparecen en la barbería de Leo, que es para hombres, y a Hopey le están rasurando el pelo al estilo punki que le gusta llevar (Figura 4). La viñeta, de gran belleza, ocupa dos tercios de la página y ofrece la perspectiva de un plano entero desde el interior con profundidad espacial de la barbería con su puerta y el escaparate dando a la calle. Dentro del local las amigas aparecen de perfil conversando sobre la necesidad de buscar un lugar para vivir porque la paciencia de Izzy

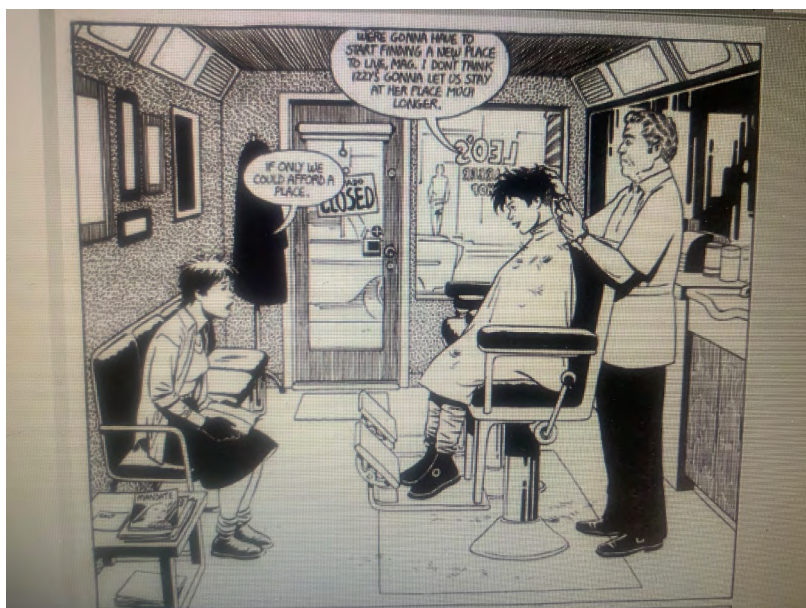


Figura 4. Viñeta de la página 6 del cuadernillo 13 de *Love and Rockets* (1985).

Fuente: Hernandez y Hernandez. *Love and Rockets*.

Issue 13, vol. I, 1985. © 1985 Fantagraphics Books – Hernandez y Hernandez.

con ellas se está agotando. Hopey, para construir su identidad necesita las manos del peluquero de la barbería que sabe cortar el pelo como a ella le gusta. Las amigas se apropian de territorio masculino, se cortan el pelo con estética provocadora, pero, son enormemente femeninas. El dibujo y la pericia del plano consolidaban el talento de Jaime que no solo dibujaba a unas amigas interactuando, sino que era capaz de crear atmósferas en unas viñetas de indudable valor artístico.

Este cuadernillo también tendrá dos historias claves, uno sobre el personaje de la Toña, la gran luchadora retirada, viviendo en paz consigo misma. Y otra titulada “Young Locas” que cuenta la historia de Maggie adolescente y su gran amiga Letty que muere muy joven en un accidente de coche. Jaime ya va entonces construyendo un universo de tramas del pasado que como un puzle en donde todo encaja, irá dando respuestas a las personalidades del presente.

La historieta inicial del cuadernillo número 1 del volumen IV de 2016, se sitúa en el contexto de la portada alternativa donde las

protagonistas aparecen como mujeres maduras en nuestro presente. En esta versión Jaime ha dejado a Penny Century formando parte del pasado juvenil y la transforma en una fotografía de la pared del fondo. Esa es la imagen que nos lleva a la otra escena, a la otra cubierta donde todas eran jóvenes y el futuro estaba de su parte. En la imagen de la cubierta de madurez Duffy tiene la misma mirada, pero ha recuperado el tono oscuro de su pelo y ha ganado un poco de peso. Izzy se ha dejado el pelo canoso y lo lleva recogido en una trenza baja que le sale de la altura de la nuca. Maggy, que ha engordado, sigue sonriente con su pelo teñido y mostrando una foto de su gato en el teléfono. Al fondo también está Hopey, esta vez ajustando unas gafas de vista cansada mientras sostiene y trata de mirar la pantalla de su teléfono móvil. Terry conserva su misteriosa belleza intacta, con el cabello sin teñir, mostrando su tono plateado y un corte de pelo muy favorecedor.

En la primera página Jaime inserta en letras mayúsculas una oración que alude a las formas de evitar la papada: “I come from above to avoid a double chin”. Vemos a Daffy haciéndose un selfi con su hija. La historieta arranca en la página dos con Hopey entrando en el bar y mirando alrededor. Ya no viste como una joven punk, es ahora una señora menuda con gafas y traje de chaqueta. A lo lejos, aparece Maggie consultando con seriedad el móvil. Luego habrá otra viñeta donde Daffy y Hopey conversan sentadas en una mesa. La misma mesa del dibujo de la portada. Daffy se siente mal y se disculpa por haberles obligado a venir. Hopey deja claro que no ha obligado a nadie, que ya son todas adultas. Pero Daffy insiste porque piensa que Maggie que era la que más ganas tenía de venir, ahora no quiere estar. Hopey recalca lo dramática que puede llegar a ser Maggie. Un primer plano de la cara de Hopey pensativa con la mano apoyada en la barbilla proyecta una sensación nostálgica mientras reflexiona sobre lo intensa que llega a ser Maggie y lo cansada que está a estas alturas de su vida del drama: “She’s our Mag, but... always *gotta* be drama... Don’t need no more drama...”. Ese gesto pensativo es interrumpido por Daffy que sugiere que se acerquen a la zona donde toca la banda “The 40 Thieves” (Los 40 ladrones). Los integrantes de la banda ya son hombres maduros tocando con fuerza. Daffy los escucha mientras por detrás aparece Maggie que se la lleva a rastras para mostrarle como Hopey está conversando con Julie Wree. Los viejos lectores de “Locas” la reconocemos y sabemos que es de la zona

rica del West End, que fue amiga de Hopey hace mucho tiempo, pero, se transformó en una gran enemiga de Maggie y Hopey en la época de la juventud provocadora y desbocada. Con los años ha dirigido un programa de televisión en la cadena pública. Daffy propone salvar a Hopey de esa conversación comprometida, pero Maggie no lo ve problemático porque parece que Hopey y Julie están teniendo una agradable conversación entre adultas. La respuesta de Maggie le hace un guiño al paso del tiempo y sorprende a Daffy. Sin embargo, vemos como Maggie al final no dejará de ser la divertida provocadora que fue y se subirá la camiseta para mostrarle los pechos a Hopey desde un ángulo en el que Julie no puede verla.

Jaime quiere que los lectores descubran la esencia de sus protagonistas desde el principio. En este capítulo impregnado de la alegría exultante del pasado, se dan muchas claves sobre lo importante que fue la música en sus vidas y la dimensión coral del grupo. Curiosamente cuando Jaime recopile todos los cuadernillos publicados de este volumen IV, establecerá un orden distinto. En abril de 2019 aparecen como un elegante libro de tapa dura titulado: “*Is This How You See Me?*”, donde la ilustración de la portada son los ojos de Maggie en primer plano mirando al lector, seguidos del perfil de Hopey y otras personas, prestando atención a lo que imaginamos, los que hemos leído el primer cuadernillo, es el concierto de la banda de punk rock. En esta ocasión Jaime va a organizar el libro con un cambio en el orden de las escenas que ha ido publicando de forma seriada. Le interesa destacar primeramente la amistad entre Maggie y Hopey, y su viaje juntas al concierto. Ese será entonces el argumento de arranque bajo el capítulo titulado “*Do I look At The Camera Or Do I Look At Me?*”. La mirada es el núcleo temático que construye la constante reflexión existencial de algunos de los personajes. El libro también ofrece un juego de saltos temporales que directamente titula con las fechas: 1979 y 1980 en los capítulos correspondientes. Aunque el libro, al ser distribuido en librerías además de tiendas de cómic, encuentra en este formato un espacio lector más amplio, pierde sin embargo el encanto del cuadernillo de las historias compartidas con su hermano.

Hay, además, otro elemento fascinante que sirve como *paratexto* y que da importantes referencias del impacto de estos autores. Me estoy refiriendo de nuevo a las cartas de los lectores que incluso el editor las destaca al celebrar la publicación de este cuadernillo como

un formato que permite recuperar la página de cartas de los lectores que tan peculiares e interesantes fueron en los cuadernillos de los comics alternativos que se editaron en el último cuarto del siglo XX.

En una de ellas, Acacia Lasita saluda a Beto (como se le suele llamar a Gilbert) y a Jaime y les cuenta lo importante que han sido en su vida. Para empezar, se dirige a Beto y le explica que es una profesora de secundaria de 22 años que el año anterior escribió su tesina de licenciatura sobre “Human Diastrophism”:

I talked about how disability can be depicted through the language of comics, and I had so much fun writing it. I am so grateful for your masterful storytelling, the lack of self-consciousness with which you create complicated and fun storylines, and for your creation of characters that will always be close to my heart, like Pipo, Venus, and Ofelia.

Acacia Lasita se está refiriendo a la pieza de Gilbert que apareció seriada entre 1987 y 1988 (número de cuadernillos del 21 al 26), que es recogida en 1989 bajo el título “Blood of Palomar”; y que ahora, de nuevo, se puede encontrar dentro del volumen 2 de la serie “Palomar” y que para muchos estudiosos representa la consolidación de la pulsión literaria del autor. Aunque, ya el cuadernillo número 13 de 1985 ofrece claves magníficas a través de dos historias breves sobre los habitantes de Palomar. Una de ellas es “Boys will be boys” y representa la masculinidad verbalizando el espacio femenino del pueblo de Palomar. En esta historia Anacleto llega del pueblo de Felix a visitar a su amigo Pepo en Palomar con el deseo de encontrar una posible pareja. Pepo junto a su amigo Heraclio, le irá describiendo a Anacleto algunas peculiaridades de las mujeres que pasan frente a ellos. El título es claro, los chicos seguirán comportándose como chicos cuando están delante de las chicas. Pero, sorprende la construcción mítica y misteriosa de esas mujeres que son admiradas por los hombres. Así el lector descubre que la bella viuda Tiburcia se volvió cristiana renacida y ya no amará a ningún hombre porque le dio su corazón al Señor. Que la India Luba derrite glaciares o que la joven Diana Villaseñor tiene las piernas de una gran corredora. También está la sheriff Chelo, que se enfrentará a todo lo que sea necesario por la ley y el orden, o Carmen, la mujer de Heraclio, inmensamente amorosa y diminuta en tamaño, que tiene a su esposo fascinado. Luego pasará por delate Tonantzin Villaseñor, la hermana

mayor de Diana, que se la conoce por ser una devoradora de hombres, aunque la más peligrosa, que no aparece, pero que todo hombre debe temer porque les hace enloquecer es Zomba. Entre comentarios y bromas Anacleto quedará cautivado por Tonantzin, con la que logrará conversar, mientras que Horacio volverá a casa para encontrarse a Carmen esperándole para hacer el amor. Hay una textura risueña en la forma de representar a los hombres del pueblo y su ingenuidad frente a unas mujeres inteligentes y muy sensuales. Palomar se transforma en un lugar exótico y enormemente atractivo.

En otra de las historias de este número titulada “An American in Palomar” aparece el personaje del fotoperiodista Howard Miller visitando Palomar e interactuando con sus habitantes, especialmente con Luba, en su etapa de propietaria del cine del pueblo, y con Tonantzin que anda vendiendo babosas.

El concepto del cómic alternativo como literatura emergente ha sido trabajado en profundidad por el académico Charles Hatfield. En 2005, Hatfield publicó un ensayo en el que trazaba la genealogía de un nuevo tipo de cómic que mostraba un inmenso potencial literario en la forma de construir sus relatos. Gran parte de los orígenes del llamado cómic alternativo según Hatfield, estaba ligado al movimiento del *comix underground* que fue tan importante en la década de los sesenta y setenta del pasado siglo. La fuerza de la contracultura que cuestionaba a la sociedad conformista y conservadora generó avances expresivos en el contexto de la creatividad gráfica. Hatfield destaca, por ejemplo, la importancia de las revistas *Raw* (1980-91) y *Weirdo* (1981-93), que estimularon la transición expresiva de viejos y nuevos creadores que pudieron experimentar en sus páginas. Pero, también menciona el peso del cuadernillo seriado *Love and Rockets* de los Hernández publicado por Fantagraphics, como un modelo creativo que consolida nuevos lectores y abre el espacio narrativo a otras miradas en los ochenta.

Fantagraphics, en mi opinión, representa la búsqueda de un canon editorial que trascendiera las propuestas del cómic *underground* y compitiera con el espacio narrativo del texto literario. Gary Groth fundador de Fantagraphics, suele recordar que la serie *Love and Rockets* será clave para su entonces incipiente editorial. Groth intuye en esas viñetas e historias dibujadas la pulsión del nuevo cómic

alternativo y apuesta inmediatamente por sus propuestas pese a la juventud amateur de los Hermanos Hernández. El carisma y el peso de Groth en el mundo del cómic ya era importante entonces gracias a su trabajo en la revista *The Comics Journal*. Groth desde 1976 se preocupaba por establecer un espacio crítico y reflexivo en el ámbito del cómic que abriera perspectivas y potenciara el conocimiento divulgativo sobre el proceso creador frente al mercado. En su revista publicaba largas entrevistas incisivas con elaboradas reflexiones sobre los cómics que van saliendo. Groth cuenta como su revista *The Comics Journal* sale en el mismo mes que el último número de la serie *underground* de antologías *Arcade* (que editaban Art Spiegelman y Bill Griffith), en el otoño de 1976. Parecía que el *underground* perdía fuerza y se entraba en un período de decadencia del cómic más rompedor. Pero, en los ochenta habrá un renacer que *The Comics Journal* recogerá en su sección de noticias cuando en el número 58 de septiembre de 1980 anuncien que Art Spiegelman y Francoise Mouly publican desde Nueva York el primer número de *Raw*, una revista que describen como experimental y en gran formato con obra de diferentes creadores. La idea era, como recoge la reseña de Kim Thompson publicarla entre dos y cuatro veces al año. Por otra parte, ya Spiegelman anuncia que en su segundo número insertará la serie “Maus”, una novela gráfica que está construyendo y que surge de una pieza de cuatro páginas que se basaba en los testimonios grabados de su padre sobre el holocausto judío. Esta crónica de vida familiar y de supervivencia bajo la ocupación nazi estaba narrada a través de dibujos antropomórficos en los que los gatos representaban a los nazis y los ratones a los judíos.

Un año después, en 1981 será Robert Crumb el que comience a editar la revista *Weirdo* desde el sello Last Gap de San Francisco. También quiere dar a conocer nuevas voces y abrir el abanico a proyectos de jóvenes creadores. Hay por lo tanto un esfuerzo de renovación que viene desde el *underground* y entiende que los discursos contraculturales escatológicos o satíricos provocadores ya se están superando y hay que abrirse a nuevas tramas y estilos de narrar en el espacio gráfico. *Raw* lo tiene muy claro y apelaba a la inteligencia literaria, el cómic tenía que avanzar desde ese espacio ideológico contracultural del *underground* a otras formas de narrar. En esta transición desde el *underground* es donde aparecieron las propuestas de Jaime y Gilbert Hernández, pero

las hacen desde su propia expresividad gráfica y vivencial, construyendo mundos femeninos latinos como ejes temáticos. Fueron ajenos a las dinámicas de contactos entre los autores de las grandes ciudades y los discursos narrativos de poder tan WASP (*White Anglo-saxon*, blancos anglosajones) que habían marcado la producción tradicional.

Las voces que crean y surgen en los ochenta se convierten en la fuerza coral de la representación latina que ha evolucionado a lo largo de casi cuarenta años. Ambas propuestas contenidas en la serie *Love and Rockets* fueron por lo tanto claves en el impulso del cómic alternativo que trataba de abrirse un espacio en las ficciones gráficas. Como hemos visto, la fuerza de los personajes y el dinamismo de sus vidas han permitido que las tramas avancen dentro de su propia temporalidad. Jaime y Gilbert abrieron con sus obras las posibilidades del espacio multicultural latino y estimularon su desarrollo. Los Hermanos Hernández con sus propuestas de personajes femeninos marcados por una personalidad extraordinaria han logrado perdurar y ser modelo a seguir por muchas lectoras mujeres que se sintieron acogidas por sus tramas en las tiendas de cómics, y por autoras como por ejemplo Jessica Abel, que comenzaron a elaborar cómics y a buscar su propia voz a finales de los noventa. La deuda del mundo del cómic con los Hermanos Hernández es incalculable.

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DIARY OF AN UNDOCUMENTED DREAMER. UNDOCUMENTED VIGNETTES FROM A PRE-AMERICAN LIFE AND THE HETEROGENEITY OF AMERICAN LIFE

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ABSTRACT

This essay focuses on Alberto Ledesma's *Diary of an Undocumented Dreamer. Undocumented Vignettes from a Pre-American Life* (2017). Ledesma's graphic autobiography vividly illustrates his struggles to do justice to his story as, at some point in his life, an undocumented person while also presenting the story of undocumented students. This oscillation between singularity and the claim for broader representation is fully engaged in the *Diary* and constitutes one of its most important contributions, politically and culturally.

KEYWORDS: Undocumented; DACA; citizenship; illegality; Dreamer.

RESUMEN

El ensayo analiza el texto *Diary of an Undocumented Dreamer. Undocumented Vignettes from a Pre-American Life* de Alberto Ledesma (2017). La autobiografía

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gráfica de Ledesma ilustra con gran vividez sus esfuerzos por hacerle justicia a su propia historia en tanto indocumentado, al menos durante un período de su vida, al mismo tiempo que propone esa vida como un caso paradigmático en la vida de los indocumentados en general. Esta oscilación entre la singularidad y el reclamo de un grado mayor de representación se transforma en uno de los ejes del texto y constituye una de sus más importantes contribuciones en lo político y cultural.

PALABRAS CLAVE: indocumentado; DACA; ciudadanía; ilegalidad; Dreamer.

* * *

“Just because you only value my arms and my back, it does not mean that I lack a mind with which to reflect on my condition. [...] But the kind of literacy I possess is not one you value, my voice is not one you can hear.”
(Ledesma, *Diary of an Undocumented Dreamer* 5)

“Today, I am a Mexican American citizen [...] Safety is no longer contingent on remaining silent and invisible. [...] I want my citizenship to matter.”
(Ledesma, *Diary of an Undocumented Dreamer* 47)

This essay focuses on Alberto Ledesma’s *Diary of an Undocumented Dreamer. Undocumented Vignettes from a Pre-American Life* (2017). Ledesma’s graphic autobiography vividly illustrates his struggles to do justice to his story as, at some point in his life, an undocumented person while also presenting *the* story of undocumented students. This oscillation between singularity and the claim for broader representation is fully engaged in the *Diary* and constitutes one of its most important contributions, politically and culturally. Going from undocumented child arriving from Mexico with his parents to East Oakland, California in 1974, to documented American through amnesty in 1986, Ledesma explores the compulsiveness of the exemplary undocumented student story with its concomitant obligations to talk and to speak for others, and the political uses and limitations of that exemplary Dreamer story. In Ledesma’s book the identity of the undocumented is not simply the direct result of national origin or legal status, but, instead, a much more complicated mix of

multiple cultural identifications, mainstream American historical discourses, socially constructed illegality, and deep xenophobia and racism.

In order to analyze Ledesma's book, I will proceed in three parts. First, I will situate some of the issues presented by and affecting undocumented Americans. Then, I will study *Diary of an Undocumented Dreamer. Undocumented Vignettes from a Pre-American Life* along the lines of its emphasis on singularity/universality, the force of the Dreamer paradigm, and the obligations and uses of representability. Finally, I will focus on the graphic narrative adscription and the structure of Ledesma's book and its contribution to a proper understanding of the situation of undocumented Americans.

1. CONTEXTUALIZING UNDOCUMENTED AMERICANS

There are, as of 2020, at least 10 million undocumented immigrants in the United States. Many of them are what can be called undocumented Americans: people who have spent most of their lives in the United States, are fully part of their communities, and are inextricably linked to many US citizens as their friends, colleagues, relatives, spouses, parents, tenants, clients, etc. 2.1 million of them are children of school age. Five million kids in the United States live in a family with mixed status in which one of their direct relatives, a parent, a sibling, or they themselves are undocumented. All of them are part of the United States' marginals or informals, a full class of people who work daily but without the state's authorization or recognition. They have been waiting since at least 2001 for legislation that would bring them out of the shadows.

Undocumented American workers, who constitute 5% of the US labor force, cluster in sectors such as: farming (24%), construction (15%), production (8%), services, (8%) and transportation (6%) (Passel & Cohn 28).

Most obviously, the undocumented have an important economic impact. Through the work of millions of undocumented people in the United States, big, labor intensive industries such as construction, agriculture and services garner higher rates of profit, while consumers have access to goods, produce and services massively subsidized by the low paying labor of immigrants. The

undocumented also, however, have a dual politico-economical yield. Here their high political and economic productivity empowers dominant white sectors of the American population, as described above, while it disempowers immigrants and people of color. They have also functioned as the foil for a politics of white resentment and white reaffirmation.

Finally, the undocumented, insofar as they are immigrants, can be said to participate in what Bonnie Honig identifies in *Democracy and the Foreigner* as their key politico-philosophical role in American history. According to Honig foreigners and foreignness always perform a double function within and on the American national imaginary. On the one hand, they force social scientists to ask if the alleged equilibrium between social integration (homogeneity) and democratic system has been altered or could be threatened by the presence of foreign elements such as immigrants, who supposedly would not share the cultural principles that sustain the nation. On the other hand, the immigrant is central to that national imaginary insofar as immigrants choose freely and actively to belong to that community of citizens and, thus, confirm for the native born the many advantages of their belonging. Such imaginary also considers the country as the land of freedom and opportunity for anybody who, regardless of class, origin or religion, is willing to work hard. If the doors are closed for the immigrants, internal coherence is, at least hypothetically, reinforced. At the same time though, a central value to American self-perception is sacrificed. And if the doors are opened, the alleged identity of the *we* is questioned by its pluralization and widening.

The politically deconstructive and economically over-productive quality of undocumented Americans' work is matched by their capacity to question radical separations between formal and informal citizenship statuses, inclusion and exclusion, and belonging and non-belonging in and to the American polity. The case of undocumented American students further complicates this separation and highlights the political, economic and social stakes of thinking labor, citizenship and belonging in the current US situation.

In particular, undocumented students retrace and undo the time trajectory of immigrant assimilation by length of stay in the United States. In the narratives about assimilation it is often said that

time is what truly produces assimilation more than anything else. Thus, assimilation is what happens when you are doing other things in the country. The longer you are here the more assimilated you become. Immigrants, in these narratives, are always, and unavoidably, Americans in waiting and in the making, as Hiroshi Motomura has called them.

However, and moving in the opposite direction, undocumented students, who are included and protected while in K-12 school contexts, move out of inclusion into exclusion when they graduate from high school and need a Social Security number and government-issued form of identification to get access to all the forms of adulthood that define this new stage of life. They devolve, becoming not more, but less American in legal, and then in practical terms, as the levels of their exclusion broaden (Gonzales). This is a different and new sense of the American-in-waiting. This is a person, an undocumented American, who sees her American-ness erode, rather than grow over time. Time is playing against their assimilation. With the passing of time they, at least before the law, belong less. They are being robbed of a form of social life that they always deemed theirs. Their gradual and long-standing assimilation has been radically threatened with exclusion and criminalization. For undocumented Americans temporality has taken a negative and decisively un-American turn. What was formally recognized as a status becomes a dangerous form of informality.

And yet, as those few who manage to overcome their exclusion from higher education and do Dreamer activism have shown—often by embodying an ideal American model of educationally attained deservingness (more on this below)—it is possible to re-define, re-socialize and re-possess what society—after having implicitly granted it and recognized it for most of their lives—has now tried to steal from them. Responding to this theft, they insist on taking advantage of educational resources on which they have what they consider legitimate claims. They become deep questioners of immigration laws, the reality of the American dream, and deservingness itself as it affects the life chances of the poorest Americans (Gonzales; Truax; Dreby). They in fact question the Americanness of Americans by asking them to revisit their commitments to freedom and equality, their attachments to the United States as a country of immigration and upward mobility narratives, their sense of fairness, hard work, and family values.

2. *DIARY OF AN UNDOCUMENTED DREAMER.*
UNDOCUMENTED VIGNETTES FROM
A PRE-AMERICAN LIFE

Alberto Ledesma's book struggles with content, expression, and form in telling *his* own story as a former undocumented student while also unavoidably telling *the* story of the undocumented in the United States. And this honest and evident struggle is integral to the cultural and political value of his text. His own professional career is here illuminating. After receiving B.A. and Ph.D. degrees from UC-Berkeley, Ledesma landed a tenure track position in English at California State University-Monterey Bay. His doctoral dissertation, *Undocumented Immigrant Representation in Chicano Narrative: The Dialectics of Silence and Subterfuge*, was a study of the representation of the undocumented in Mexican American narrative. More specifically, he tried to show how the undocumented—often times present in such literature as a secondary figure, sometimes absent—was a powerful force in need of a certain degree of repression or control by the text, and especially, by the Chicano critics.

This intellectual pursuit, however, became a frustrating effort due to what the author came to see as the incompatibility between his expressive needs and desires and the format and audience of scholarly production. While there were also practical family factors explaining his decision to leave that tenure track position to become a student affairs officer at UC-Berkeley, it would seem appropriate to highlight how the change also involved both a transformation in Ledesma's understanding of how he would serve and honor the undocumented students he had been a part of until his family benefitted from the IRCA amnesty in 1986, and a search for a new medium through which a representation and communication platform could be established for the same purpose.

This evolution involved overcoming a series of well patrolled cultural and political borders: from undocumented immigrant to American citizen, from professor to student affairs staff, and from literature to non-fiction, comics and cartoons. This is how Ledesma arrived to the hybrid form of his *Diary*: half way between the graphic novel, the cartoon collection, the series of vignettes, and the autobiographical essay. The text, in fact, incorporates a number of different graphic art and discursive traditions in multiple, often time

one-page, efforts: among the former, sketch panoramas, muralist style scenes or portraits, caricature, cartoon-like sequences with multiple panels with images and captions using standard thought and speech bubbles; among the latter: the didacticism of muralism, the dictionary or glossary, the presentation of an intellectual or social hero, satire, artistic appropriations (as of Winnie the Pooh or Superman), personal essay, often illustrated too.

While some of these decisions clearly reflect time restrictions in the non-professional and on the side nature of Ledesma's graphic art career (see the section Lunchtime Sketches), what this hybrid form—a deeply personal artistic decision as well as a profoundly political one—is trying to guard against is the violence of mis-representations and mis-appropriations of the undocumented story. In the chapter “The Undocumented Alphabet”, he attempts to gain linguistic and conceptual precision by redefining some of the key terms used in both common undocumented and racist and xenophobic discourses. When he gets to the letter I, he states:

‘I’ stands for ILLEGAL, a term so well designed to dehumanize, that as soon as it is invoked, all empathy for suffering that compels immigrants to brave a dangerous border goes out the window. It is a term that perpetuates ‘epistemic violence’ on all undocumented kids whose families are, or who are themselves subject to it. (81)

Ledesma has a deep suspicion of this “epistemic violence” as it forces complex realities into political binaries useful for and prone to Manichaean deployments. One central such use is what we could call the force and danger of the Dreamer paradigm.

In his important book, *Lives in Limbo. Undocumented and Coming of Age in America*, Roberto G. Gonzales explores the paradox of two different but eventually interesting trajectories: that of those he calls ‘early exiters’ (who stop attending school at some point) and that of college-goers. The paradox is that while early exiters are, from early on, trapped in a life of low wages and few rights in the shadows, college goers see their relative acceptance and access to rights as college students, disappear as soon as they graduate with a degree they cannot exercise. Early exiters, with low expectations, adjusted to their level of exclusion, seem to adapt better and faster to the reality of their situation, while college-goers have a harder time

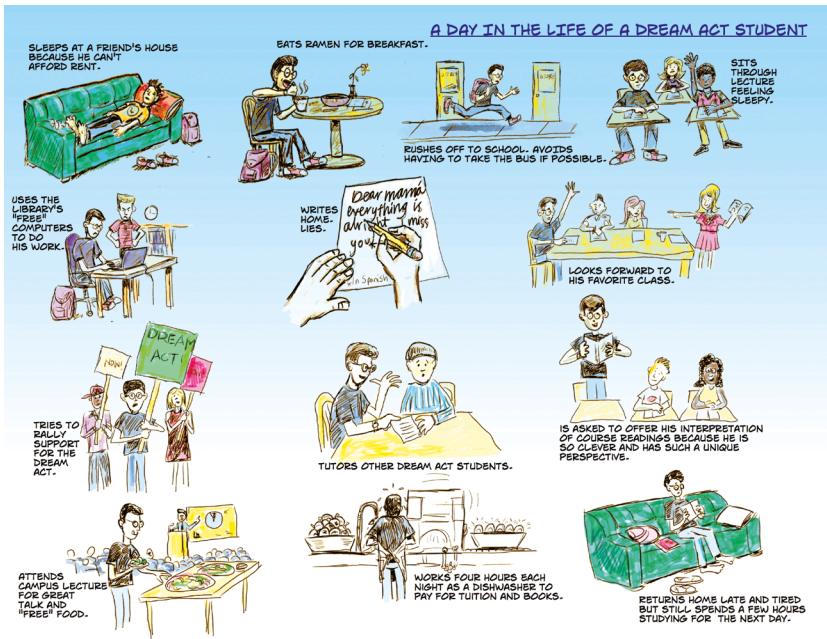


Figure 1. A Day in the life of a Dream-Act student.

Source: Ledesma. *Diary of an Undocumented Dreamer. Undocumented Vignettes from a Pre-American Life*, 2017, p. 8. © 2017 Mad Creek Books-The Ohio State University Press – Ledesma.

accepting that their rights were temporary and their accomplishments irrelevant to their labor incorporation. A *Dreamer* is, in this context, the undocumented student associated, first, with the Dream Act (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act) proposal of 2001 which was never voted into law, despite more than ten attempts to do so in Congress since, and, second, with DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) the executive decision of 2012 with which the Obama administration also attempted to protect young undocumented people. Many sympathetic media portrayals, “have profiled high-achieving undocumented immigrant youth—valedictorians, star athletes, Ivy League students—whose talents are wasted because current laws do not allow them to pursue their dream careers” (Gonzales 244, note 31). This meritocracy-infused accounts depend on the currency of the American Dream as seen

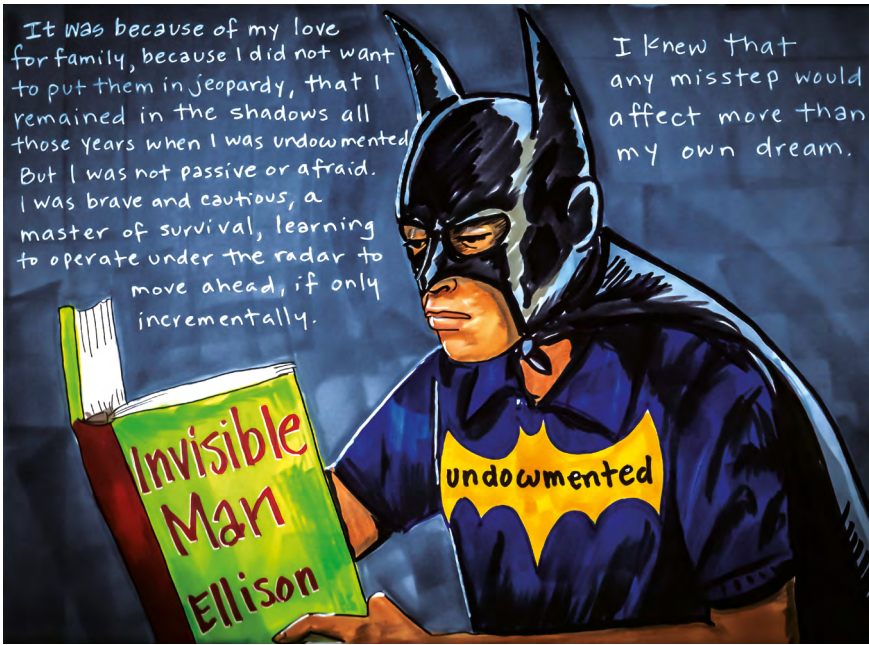


Figure 2. Source: Ledesma. *Diary of an Undocumented Dreamer. Undocumented Vignettes from a Pre-American Life*, 2017, p. 38. © 2017 Mad Creek Books-The Ohio State University Press – Ledesma.

from education. Here hard-working and high performing dreamer college students are presented as quintessential Americans and have become “the public face of undocumented youth” (53). The problem is, as Gonzales and Ledesma make clear, that the exemplarity standard is unreasonable and the respite it provides, temporary and, in the end, misleading. It functions to privilege less than ten per cent of the undocumented immigrants residing in the United States and further displaces and silences the case of the majority of them in the American mainstream’s consideration (Schwartz). It also exerts enormous pressure on those forced to play “the brilliant while undocumented’ role” (52), in a process Aurora Chang has labelled “hyperdocumentation”, i.e. “the effort to accrue awards, accolades, and eventually academic degrees to compensate for [one’s] undocumented status.” (508)

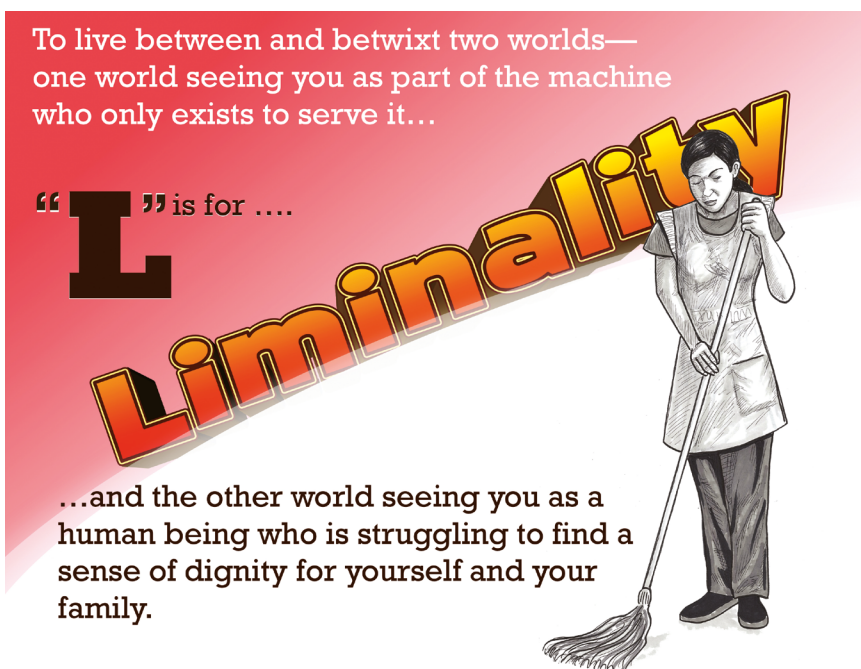


Figure 3. Undocumented Alphabet 'L'

Source: Ledesma. *Diary of an Undocumented Dreamer. Undocumented Vignettes from a Pre-American Life*, 2017, p. 84. © 2017 Mad Creek Books-The Ohio State University Press – Ledesma.

3. BREAKING THE SILENCE THROUGH IMAGES AND WORDS

Ledesma emphasizes the degree of silence that affected the undocumented experience in the 1980s and 90s, even after amnesty, identifying two potential explanations: those stories were silenced by fear or the community of formerly undocumented—the three million who like himself benefitted from IRCA in 1986—did not have the language to articulate those experiences in writing. He also lamented the loss of a potential sense of community “that comes when you know that others have gone through the same things that you have gone through” (5) such silence had produced. Thus, he begins his *Diary* by reminding us of the therapeutic and transformative power of creativity: “These doodles represent a sort of therapy that helped me grapple with my shifting identities. In the process, what I found was a

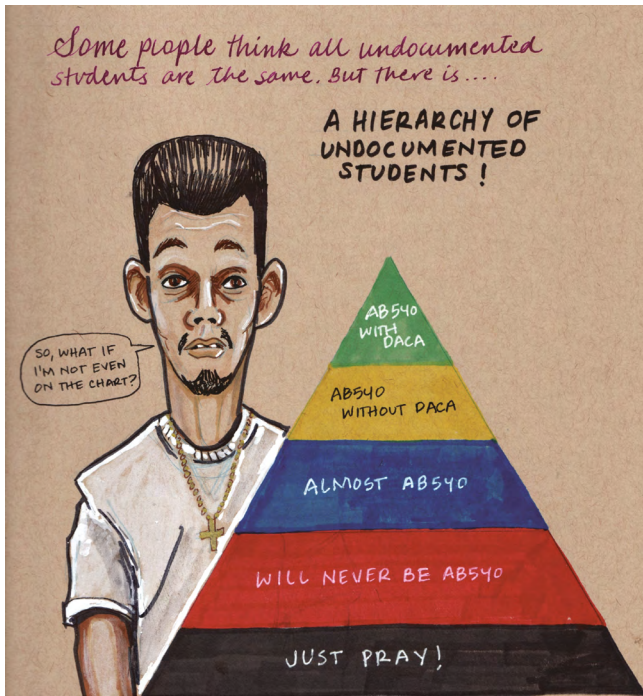


Figure 4. Source: Ledesma. *Diary of an Undocumented Dreamer. Undocumented Vignettes from a Pre-American Life*, 2017, p. 31. © 2017 Mad Creek Books-The Ohio State University Press – Ledesma.

way to help those who are still undocumented and who are afflicted, as I was, by a profound ambivalence about our Americanness.” (1) What the doodles help with is, first, the fear of undocumentedation and then, once, at least in Ledesma’s case, citizenship has been acquired, “the twelve years of conditioning” as an undocumented which, contrary to his hopes, did not immediately vanish after legalization. The doodles also keep the narrative bounded by scale and proximity, close to the intimate and autobiographical, while allowing for specific and contained historical or political forays into the broader context. Finding the right form to give material support to a voice, one capable of doing justice to both the conflicted but also privileged experience of going from pre-American to American and the need to be read and heard by intra and extra ethnic multiple publics, deeply shapes Ledesma’s book. Doodling and sketching

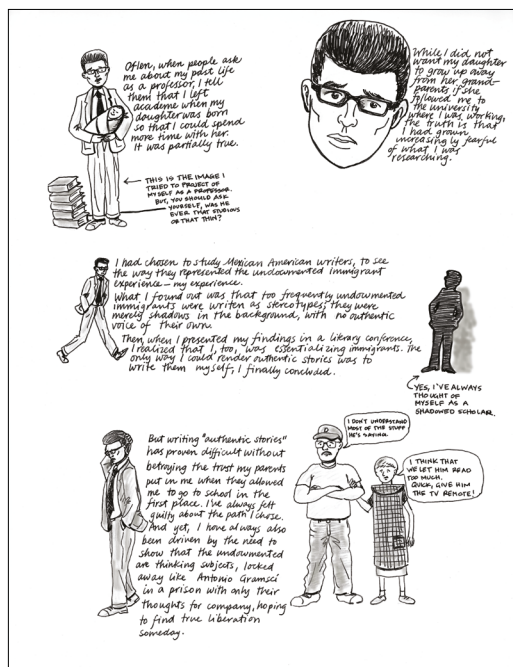


Figure 5. Diary of a Dreamer. Source: Ledesma. *Diary of an Undocumented Dreamer. Undocumented Vignettes from a Pre-American Life*, 2017, p. 6.

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become ways of solving, gradually, the problem of repression: the difficulty of expressing his own voice and the experience of being undocumented, both carefully suppressed for survival through twelve years of hiding and fear. Because “Grappling with the emotions of being undocumented [...] is an exercise in exorcising contradictions, in sharing the most vulnerable secrets.” (55) Sketching turns out to be then, an alternative form of hyperdocumentation, a way of producing a graphic/written testimony of one’s own thoughts and experiences, an attempt at communicating with others while claiming a voice of one’s own: “Hyperdocumentation generates a semivisible force field—however imagined and to whatever extent credible—that protects one from undocumented status. Hyperdocumentation can be used in an agentic way as a tool of resistance.” (Chang 519)

Historically speaking Latin American readers reading comics—*historietas*, *pepines*, *paquitos*, *monitos*, or *muñequitos*—have found



Figure 6. *Diary of a Dreamer*. Source: Ledesma. *Diary of an Undocumented Dreamer. Undocumented Vignettes from a Pre-American Life*, 2017, p. 20.
© 2017 Mad Creek Books-The Ohio State University Press – Ledesma.

clues for a deciphering of their situation, characters with whom to identify, and a language with which to give form and meaning to the expression of their thoughts and feelings in their new, contemporary realities. Within this context, comics have often provided a sentimental and civic education attuned to the demands of a modern urban setting. They have frequently depicted the struggles of a heroine/hero in an unfriendly urban context while representing both the powerful and superior forces that she/he faces in this context, and her/his daily life, including the subversive strategies used to cope and survive in this milieu. Ledesma updates this tradition of production and consumption to the needs and specificity of the historical case of undocumented immigrants in the United States, finding in the double appeal of activist graphic art and deeply felt personal essay the right vehicle to represent, without misrepresenting or misappropriating, his people. If comics can be seen historically as

a way of mediating between two literacies, one based on orality and the image and another based on the written word, in the effort to represent new cultural and political subjectivities in the polis, then Ledesma's *Diary* is doubling down by using the comic as a vehicle to explore the bicultural, bilingual, and political complexities of undocumented Latinx life in an American context.

Form itself reflects Ledesma's transculturation and redefined assimilation process, his internality and externality to the American traditions of minority representation, his concrete belonging to and specific difference from and within American identity and political discourses. In that search for a proper medium and language—to make his voice audible and his ideas known by both an immediate audience of undocumented immigrants whose experience he is also trying to represent, and a more mediated mainstream audience he is trying to reach and convince—Ledesma is using the hybrid form of *Diary of a Reluctant Dreamer* as a mediation device. The graphic multiplicity of Ledesma's book and its combination of image and literacy have deep roots in the history of popular discourses in Mexico and, more broadly, in Latin America. His book connects the three basic spaces of concrete cultural mediation for Latin American popular culture: everyday family life, social temporality (when a stage of social capitalist production connects with everyday routine in the form of work schedules and leisure time), and, finally, a cultural competence based on an aesthetics grounded on repetition and recognition, that is, a set of forms known as popular genres. Its forms reflect, as is more often than not the case with US-based Latinx texts, a dual expected audience straddling diverse languages, cultural competences, cultural consumption habits, and, in this case, different legal statuses.

CONCLUSIONS

I have proposed elsewhere (Poblete) two hypothesis concerning Latino US literature that may help close this essay on Alberto Ledesma's *Diary of an Undocumented Dreamer. Undocumented Vignettes from a Pre-American Life*. The first one posits that the best Latino literature in times of globalization potentially forces both US national literature and Latin American literature to confront their

status as interconnected, complex and non-homogeneous literary formations, and thus to accept the unavoidability of cultural and linguistic translation as one of their constitutive elements. This constitutive heterogeneity becomes part of US national literature insofar the latter attempts to assimilate, by way of its incorporation to the national literary tradition, a literature such as the Latino one, which, written in at least two different languages and involving at least two cultural imaginaries, actively resists this nationalizing assimilation and must be understood as a counter story, always in critical dialogue with its two constitutive traditions.

My second hypothesis posits that the best Latino literature strives to transform the multicultural monolingual reading (and in fact, monocultural American reading), into a true intercultural encounter in which the end results have not been limited to the uniforming translation or assimilation of difference or to its purely commercial exoticization, but remain open to the true experience *of and in* otherness in a globalized context. Contrary to certain Latino literature still dominant in the US, its best examples attempt to actively question any effort to reduce the complexity of Latino experiences to the clichés of a textual economy specialized in the domestication of an ethnic alterity. In this way, Latino literature is part of a new form of national literature which implies the transition from the forms of cultural homogenization characterizing national modernization processes, to which traditional national literatures contributed so decisively, to multiple and, sometimes, contradictory forms of heterogeneization and re-arrangement of the national sphere in times of neoliberal globalization. The attempt to explain/refer/represent literarily the new dis/order of the nation occurs now, moreover, under conditions of high globalization of culture and in the midst of the culture of globalization. Those two forms of heterogeneity help explain the importance of Ledesma's book. As present in *Undocumented Vignettes from a Pre-American Life* they force us to see an American life as potential in every undocumented immigrant. The *Diary of an Undocumented Dreamer* is, on the other hand, written from the other side of an alchemic miracle: the Dreamer who could only dream of a better life, has now become a full American, his *de facto* Americanness is now fully backed by a *de jure* status. Nothing changed in him, only the law, to finally do

justice, around him. The pre-American is now an American who insist on not forgetting the other ten million Americans in waiting. He wants to show “how undocumented immigration is another kind of American experience.” (7)

The book is also, beyond what I had the space for here, a deep mediation on what it means to be a father while undocumented and formerly undocumented, and on how memories of a childhood in the shadows trace conflicted paths across and between personal identity and American citizenship.

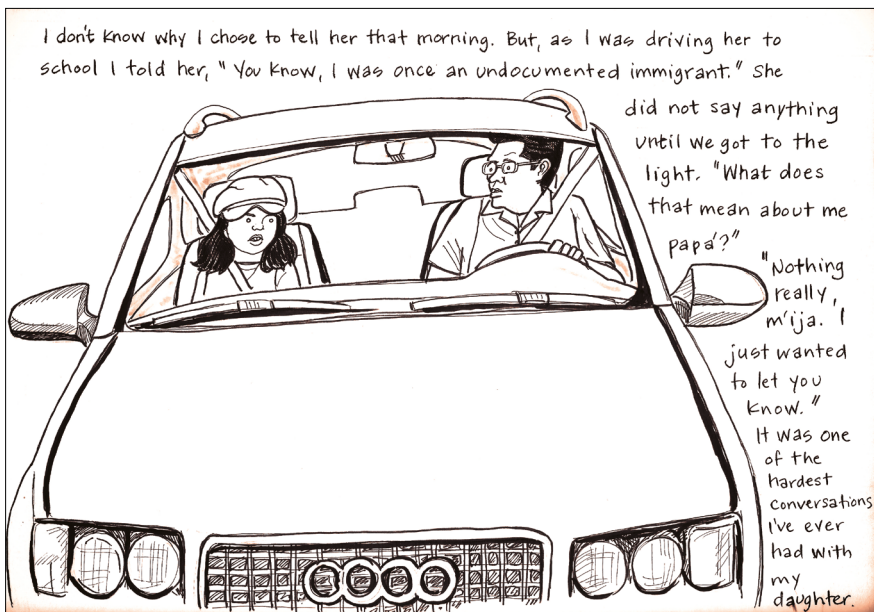


Figure 7. Source: Ledesma. *Diary of an Undocumented Dreamer. Undocumented Vignettes from a Pre-American Life*, 2017, p. 58.

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TESTIMONIO
TESTIMONIALS

ILAN STAVANS

A-Z OF MY LIFE AS A CARTOONERO

Ilan Stavans
Amherst College

ANGELITOS: The groundwork for my graphic novel *Angelitos* (2018), done in collaboration with illustrator Santiago Cohen, the New Jersey-based Latinx cartoonist, began about five years before its publication. A common friend introduced us. I was an admirer of Cohen's children's books. I was eager to retell the story of how, when I was in my early twenties, I collaborated with Father Alejandro García Durán de Lara (1935-1999), aka Padre Chinchachoma, internationally known for his work with Mexico City's homeless children.

Although I delivered the script in a matter of months, it took a while for Cohen and me to find a syncopated rhythm for our collaboration. Finally, with a substantial amount of material ready, we showed it to an assorted group of editors. It was flatly rejected as being too dark and unappetizing to what was mistaken to be a

Internationally acclaimed essayist, translator, poet, and short-story writer Ilan Stavans is the Lewis-Sebring Professor of Humanities and Latin American and Latino Culture at Amherst College and the publisher of Restless Books, an international publishing house devoted to translating extraordinary literature into English, giving voice to immigrant writers, and reintroducing the classics to underserved communities through prisons and public libraries. His many books include *On Borrowed Words*, *Dictionary Days*, *Spanglish*, and a biography of Gabriel García Márquez. He has edited *The Norton Anthology of Latino Literature*, the *Collected Stories of Isaac Bashevis Singer*, *The FSG Book of Twentieth-Century Latin American Poetry*, the speeches of César Chávez, and *The Poetry of Pablo Neruda*, among others. He is the author of children's books and graphic novels in collaboration with artists from different parts of the world, among them *Mister Spic Goes to Washington* (with Roberto Weil), *Latino USA: A Cartoon History* (with Lalo Alcaraz), *El Iluminado* (with Steve Sheinkin), *Golemito* (with Teresa Villegas), *Angelitos* (with Santiago Cohen), and *Don Quixote* in Spanglish (with Roberto Weil). The recipient of numerous international awards and honors, his work, translated into 20 languages, has been adapted into film, theater, TV, and radio.

Stavans, Ilan. "A-Z of My Life as a Cartoonero". *Camino Real*, vol. 13, no. 16, 2021, pp. 141-156.

Recibido: 28 de octubre de 2020

mostly youthful readership of graphic novels. When it was released, *Angelitos* was greeted with enthusiasm.

The plot addresses the accusations of child molestation that were targeted against Padre Chinchachoma by the Mexican police. I set the story a few years after it actually happened in order to make it coincide with the devastating earthquake that shook Mexico City in 1985. I was already in New York at the time. My inspiration wasn't only the actual ordeal I experienced when I shadowed this almost mystical figure.

In response to the question of how much is real and how much is invented in *Angelitos*, I told Alex Dueben of Smash Pages¹:

The early part of the narrative is close to reality. I remember that through phone calls and personal messages, I tried to find Padre Chinchachoma. It was difficult because he was always on the move.

I finally made my way to an abandoned building in Colonia Roma where he was said to spend the night along with a dozen homeless children. On my way there, I was mugged. At of nowhere, a band of adolescents descended on me. My wallet was stolen. Maybe my backpack too, where I kept notebooks, a novel I was reading, and so on. I was a college student at the time, penniless, interested in volunteering in programs committed to social justice.

Eventually I found Padre Chinchachoma. I asked him if I could become his assistant. He said he didn't need one but that I was welcome to help homeless children in ways all sorts of ways. I recall him saying, "There is no end to what they need!" But *Angelitos* isn't sheer autobiography. I have taken lots of liberties with the plot. For one thing, it is set against the backdrop of the earthquake of 1985 in Mexico City. I don't to give away anything. However, by 1985 I was no longer there. The earthquake caught me in New York City. I had decided to become an immigrant. I enrolled in graduate school. I also wanted to try my talents as a writer. I'm telling you this because I wrote the story in English, not in Spanish. For me languages are filters through which we comprehend the world. By delivering it in English, the audience I have targeted isn't exclusively local.

1 The complete interview can be found at <http://smashpages.net/2018/02/27/smash-pages-qa-ilan-stavans/>.

Along the way, I wanted to pay tribute to a work of art I admire, one that has influenced me deeply: Luis Buñuel's film *Los olvidados* (1950). I have watched this extraordinary movie dozens of times. For some reason, in English it was called *The Young and the Damned*, which sounds like a Norman Mailer reportage. It deals too with Mexico's homeless children. Buñuel was a Spanish surrealist, although in his Mexican period he is more realistic.

In the history of Latin American film, *Los olvidados* is my favorite, along with *Y tu mamá también* (2001) by Alfonso Cuarón, *Amores perros* (2001) by Alejandro González Iñárritu, and *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006) by Guillermo del Toro. When I was in high-school, my school bus would pass by a block away from where Buñuel lived. I sometimes would see him come out the door and walk slowly toward the corner. He was already in his late seventies.

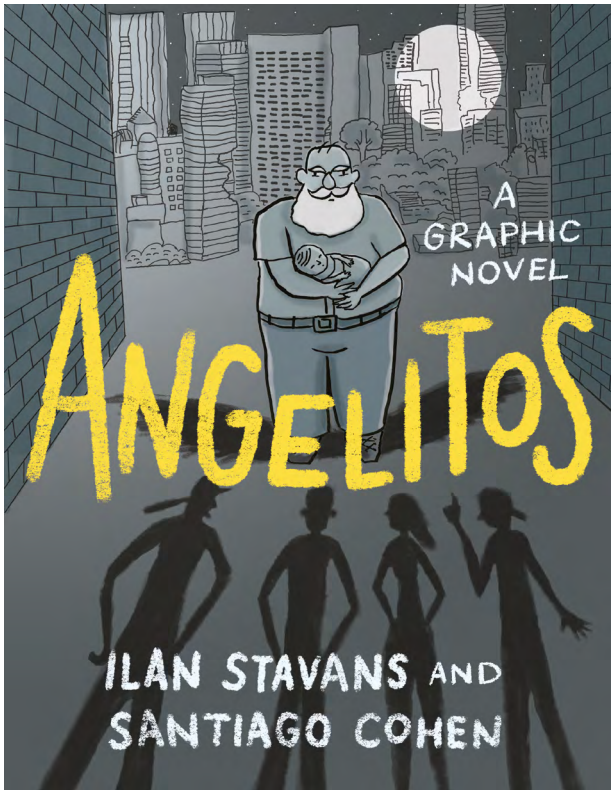


Figure 1. Cover of *Angelitos* (Columbus, OH: Mad Creek Books, 2018).

BEGINNINGS: My love for comic strips dates to my adolescence in Mexico City. There was a newsstand a few blocks away from my house in Calle Odontología #85, in Colonia Copilco, adjacent to the campus of UNAM. I spent the few pesos I made doing odd jobs in a dozen different comics. Some were US imports (Archie, Batman, etc.), others were national and continental (*La familia Burrón*, *Condorito*, *Kalimán*, and so on).

Having been an outdoors kid, around that time I suddenly became an avid reader of novels. The so-called Latin American literary boom, represented by writers like Gabriel García Márquez, Julio Cortázar, Mario Vargas Llosa, Carlos Fuentes, José Donoso, was by then a global phenomenon. I remember reading *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) in what felt like a single sitting that started on a raining afternoon. I also devoured *Hopscotch* (1963). Not surprisingly, in my mind my passion my literature and comics feels as it emerges from the same well.

Cortázar was the most genuinely experimental of these cadre. I remember the day I came across his comic *Fantômas contras los vampiros multinacionales* (1975). That a superb writer could borrow a pop-culture character to deliver his ideological message—in his later years, Cortázar became unwisely infatuated with left-wing causes—was simply magical. While I didn't quite like the content of the volume, I admired its hybridity.

Perhaps it was that volume that convinced me I could bridge the gap between visuals and the written word. I was also an avid follower of Umberto Eco's semiotic studies on Superman and other superheroes. And I kept a copy of Armand Mattelart and Ariel Dorfman's *How to Read Donald Duck* (1971). The primary lesson I learned from them was that high-brow art no longer existed in a bubble. The porousness between it and pop culture was everywhere. As it happens, that erasing of distinctions, commonplace in the twenty-first century, would be the terrain where I would eventually feel most comfortable.

My education at UAM-Xochimilco was important in my formation. Subcomandante Marcos was in the faculty. I read Carlos Monsiváis, Elena Poniatowska, Carlos Fuentes, and others. The Mexican intelligentsia sought to connect high-brow and popular culture. There was also a desire to acknowledge the resilience of the indigenous past that was suffocated by the ubiquitous consumerism fostered by the United States.

CARTOONISMO: There is a vibe about Latino cartoons. They represent a crossroads of several traditions. Latin America comes from a pictorial past represented in the graphics used by indigenous cultures. The idols in indigenous religions are artfully designed. Likewise, the stone architecture. Add to it a cornucopia of color and the outcome is addictive.

There is also the European tradition in the Americas, brought at first by soldiers, explorers, missionaries, and renegades, and then by ceaseless immigrant waves. The street art of Mexican muralists emerges from these two traditions. I love Diego Rivera's broad-stroke experimental spirit, even his theatricality. (In contrast, I find Frida Kahlo too artificial.) Among my favorite Latin American painters, one in which the European influence is unavoidable, is Argentine Oscar Agustín Alejandro Schulz Solari (1887-1963), aka Xul Solar, whose passion for surrealist images and invented languages is a source of admiration. I also feel close to Uruguayan José Gurvich (1927-1974). His paintings are in some covers of my books.

My own *cartoonismo* is self-conscious in that it pays tributes to its roots. There are recurrent themes in it. For instance, readers in my graphic novels often read graphic novels, maybe even the one in which they appear.

DON QUIXOTE OF LA MANCHA: No other book exerts a larger show on me. I have read around fifty times. I have written about it continuously. And I still don't tire about it. My second collaboration with Venezuelan illustrator Roberto Weil, who was forced to exile during the Hugo Chávez regime, is an adaptation of it. Like the original, the version we produced is playful. It even makes fun of itself, not to say the author.

EL ILUMINADO: I did this graphic-novel detective quest, released in 2012, with illustrator and young-adult author Steve Sheinkin. The topic of Crypto-Jews, in particular the odyssey of Luis de Carvajal the Younger, who was burned at the stake in an auto-da-fe in Plaza del Quemadero, in downtown Mexico City, in 1596. It takes place in modern-day Santa Fe. The plot delves into the currents of Hispanic anti-Semitism. The book remains a source of enormous pride for me.

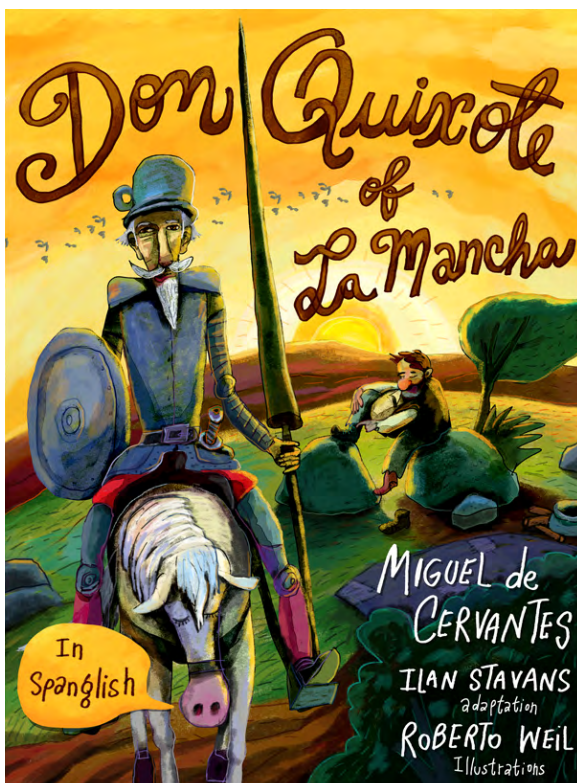


Figure 2. Cover of *Don Quixote de la Mancha* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2018).

FANTASTIC CREATURES: *A Pre-Columbian Bestiary* (2020), illustrated by Eko, isn't strictly a graphic novel. Instead, it a gallery of almost fifty indigenous creatures, real and invented, from Latin America. I have been infatuated with this menagerie almost since childhood, when my mother would take my siblings and me to the city's *zoológico*.

There were lamas, crickets, monkeys, birds, tigers, elephants, giraffes, hippopotamuses, and an assortment of fish in the nearby aquarium. I remember being struck by the Latinate names and, when available, with aboriginal names from Mexico, Central, and South America. My interest led me to the voyages of Charles Darwin and Alexander von Humboldt to various parts of the continent. I concocted about a third of the creatures in my bestiary.



Figure 3. Cover of *A Pre-Columbian Bestiary: Fantastic Creatures of Indigenous Latin America* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2021).

Over the years, I've collaborated with a variety of artists in creating non-existent beings. Once in the newspaper *El País* I published an arcade of political animals. For instance, one resembled Hugo Chávez. Another one fought in Latin America's wars of independence. My favorite—if memory serves me well—was one that was invisible yet dangerous in its capacity to corrupt everything around it.

Eko is a Mexican engraver with whom I've collaborated in numerous projects. He is part of the popular tradition of folk art popularized by José Guadalupe Posada. His work appears in the *New York Times*, and in many other newspapers around the world. I find his phantasmagorias enthralling. He also illustrated my book *The Return of Carvajal: A Mystery* (2018).

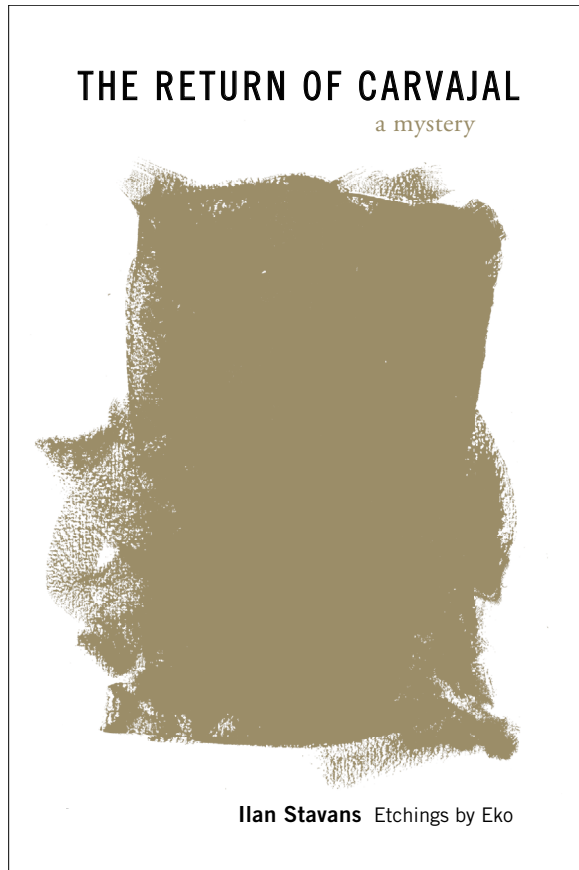


Figure 4. Cover of *The Return of Carvajal: A Mystery* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2019).

GRATITUDE: I feel grateful to fate for the opportunity to ceaseless explore. I'm aware of the 1,001 alternative lives I have not taken. The one I've built through small decisions has allowed me countless possibilities. There is an entrenched sense of determinism in the DNA of the Hispanic world: things are what they are and change is unlikely. I have taken the opposite route.

HISTORY: History isn't the past but what we make of it. It is as fictional as any autobiography and as autobiographical as any fiction. I think of myself as a buccaneer who pillages history for the sake of literature.

IMPROVIZATION: This is what moves me, where I find my grip. Cartoons are the marriage of two qualities the human eye is proficient in: to follow a story either in words or in images. A successful graphic novel to me manages to retain its jazzy quality. It doesn't allow the visuals to run ahead of the plot, nor does it push the text to overwhelm—or to eclipse—the visuals. It is easy to fall into either of these traps. The way out has no formula. It relays on preparation but it doesn't stigmatize it because of it.

JADED: Boredom is the most serious illness of modernity. (Where people bored in biblical times?) It results from a sense of idleness and a lack of direction. Although comics have often been associated with boredom, particularly in the Hispanic world, in my view they are just the opposite: a source of knowledge and a conduit for change.

KALIMÁN: This superhero was created in 1963 by Rafael Cutberto Navarro and Modesto Vázquez González for a radio show. Ironically, the character isn't native but Egyptian, a descendant of pharaohs. His nemeses are Black Spider, Karma, and Namilak.

I remember being flabbergasted by the sheer existence of *Kalimán: El hombre increíble*. The pantheon of Mexican superheroes was minuscule. In my adolescence, he was the most accomplished. I didn't think for a minute about stereotypes of Middle Easterners or any other kind.

LANGUAGE: This is my prime lens. Everything is filtered through language. In my graphic novels, my language are words as well as visuals. How the two interact is crucial.

MISTER SPIC GOES TO WASHINGTON: My graphic novel *Mister Spic Goes to Washington* (2008) was my first collaboration with Roberto Welí.

An Ecuadorian colleague introduced me to his art. I love its plasticity. To me it is somehow reminiscent of Fernando Botero, although at a smaller, more accomplished scale. Welí was a political cartoonist in Caracas. His views often turned him into targets of animosity of opposing flanks.

This first graphic novel we collaborated in follows the unlikely ascent to power of a Los Angeles gang member. A few years before,

I had written a small biography called *Bandido* (2003), on Oscar “Zeta” Acosta, the loud-mouth Chicano lawyer who is depicted as a 300-pound Samoan in Hunter S. Thompson’s *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1971). Acosta was never part of a gang but he was furious and unforgiving in his relationships to others—and to himself, too.

NIHILISM: At times I have been described as a nihilist, a rejection of all religious and moral principles. I want to set the record straight. It is true that I don’t believe in superstitions but morality isn’t one of them. For the most part, my moral code is based on language: whatever is definable in clear, unobtrusive language, I look at it with at least a modicum of esteem.

Ambrose Bierce, in *The Devil’s Dictionary* (1906), defines a nihilist as “a Russian who denies the existence of anything but Tolstoi. The leader of the school is Tolstoi.” As to me, I deny the existence of Ambrose Bierce himself.

Ñ: My late friend, Argentine *hombre de letras* Felipe Yriart, lived in a Madrid convalescent home. I met him only once, during a lecture trip to Spain. One of his legs had been amputated as a result of illness. He was isolated in his minuscule dorm. His only contact with the world was a library computer he used daily for an hour or so.

Yriart and I engaged in a correspondence that last close to a decade. He translated a number of my stories and essays into Spanish. He also edited a special issue on me of *Ómnibus*.

He arranged for a lavish dinner to take place in my honor in our sole occasion. A generous number of his friends were in attendance. It must have happened around 2005. Yriart declared the meeting to be called “El Club Ñ.” There were writers and painters from Argentina, Colombia, Uruguay, and Colombia. He told us all that we were bound by talent. One of the artists made a gorgeous painting of the letter Ñ, which Yriart framed for me. I reminded me that Spanish is the only language that contains such a letter.

“This is our plight, Ilan,” he said. “You will show the world our uniqueness.”

ORDER: When I create a graphic novel, order is foremost in my mind: how is the story organized, what comes first and what comes last. I have

a mind obsessed with order. I need to know where everything else in my house, for instance.

PROTEST: I remain puzzled by *A Most Imperfect Union: A Contrarian History of the United States* (2014), my second collaboration with Lalo Alcaraz. If he was difficult to work with the first time around, our efforts on this book—right at the middle of Barack Obama’s second term and two years before the apotheosis brought by Donald Trump—were next to impossible.

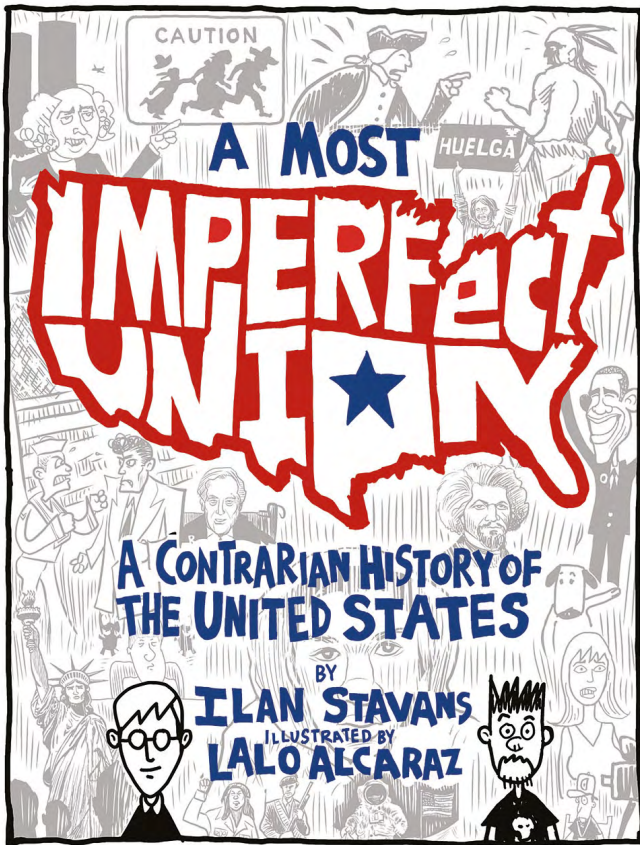


Figure 5. Cover of *A Most Imperfect Union: A Contrarian History of the United States* (New York: Basic Books, 2014).

Alcaraz had been a heavy cocaine user. His family almost fell apart. He was unreliable in terms of deadlines. The worst part is that the quality of his work, at least in regards to longer projects, had begun to deteriorate. In spite of his delinquent deliveries, I tried as much as I could to encourage him to focus his full attention on the cartoons. But they often arrived half-backed.

Basic Books had published *Latino USA: A Cartoon History*. At a time when Latino history was seldom studied, I wanted to approach it not as a standard historian but as a lop-sided carnival of prototypes, archetypes, and prototypes. Its success was immediate. There were dozens of prominent reviews, including a controversial one in *The Los Angeles Times*.

Not surprisingly, the publisher wanted more. I also wanted another collaboration. I believe *A Most Imperfect Union* will be reassessed one day.

Alcaraz's *La Cucaracha* is a masterful creation. It was my discovery of it what led me to its creator. I like Alcaraz's anarcho-syndicalist attitude. His irreverence is refreshing.

QUINO: Joaquín Salvador Lavado Tejón (1932-2020), alias Quino, is another idol of mine. *Mafalda* is one of Argentina's most lasting 20th-century creations. Her critical thinking makes it clear that Latin America isn't only a backland that lives from importing replicas. She makes me think of Borges' character Pierre Menard in that she rewrites history—local stories, global history—with a refreshingly old perspective.

RIUS: It is by sheer alphabetical luck that Rius comes after Quino. Prolific cartoonist Eduardo Humberto del Río García (1934-2017), better known as Rius, almost single-handedly created the *For Beginners* books. When I was young, I remember reading *Marx for Beginners*, *Freud for Beginners*, and others. I wrote about my admiration for—and repulsion to—Rius in an essay called “My Debt to Rius” featured *Graphic Borders: Latino Comic Books Past, Present, and Future* (2016), edited by Frederick Luis Aldama and Christopher González. I wouldn't have been able to create *Latino USA* without such forerunner.

SPANGLISH: Need I say more about Spanglish than I have in the last thirty years? I feel as if my entire life has been devoted to it. One

of my graphic novels, *Don Quixote*, is in Spanglish. (There is also an English version.) The reason behind it is that translation, in my eyes, is a synonym of appropriation. To have a visual *Quijote* in this jargon is to honor the hybrid nature of Latino culture and to give it what everyone else has: its own version of Cervantes' masterpiece.

TEACHING: I never aspired to be a teacher. I wanted to do scores of other activities. Yet today I can't imagine anything more satisfying. Even when I'm not teaching, I think as a teacher. *Latino USA, A Most Imperfect Union*, my adaptation of *Don Quixote, A Pre-Columbian Bestiary*, and some other cartoon volumes were conceived as non-didactic teaching tools, as a way to ponder knowledge from the perspective of popular culture.

ULTIMA THULE: This is a mythological reference to a distant and mysterious land. To me this is the address of Latino civilization, which, because it exists in America and because it is a byproduct of the utopianism—including the chivalric dreams of the Spanish renaissance—is a kind of double utopia.

VERISIMILITUDE: One of my recurrent sources of amazement is Erich Auerbach's book of criticism *Mimesis: The Representation of reality in Western Literature* (1946). How does Homer, Petronius, Boccaccio, Rabelais, Montaigne, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Molière, Flaubert, and others recreate our universe through words? It might be argued, with the growth of Netflix and other streaming services, that verisimilitude is easier to achieve now than when literature was the primary source of entertainment. Indeed, what we see on the screen nowadays is stunning in its authenticity. I beg to differ, though. What the camera does is only one side of the coin. True verisimilitude is achieved by surveying the complex inner world of characters. There are first-rate examples in TV production but they are few. The vast majority of series engage in pyrotechnics. Their intension is to captivate our eye but not our mind.

The question of verisimilitude in graphic novels is complicated. The confines of the genre are shaped for escapism, though not for hypnotism. Some *cartoonistas* aren't even interested in surveying their character's inner world, thinking as they do that the form

they are using is all about appearances. Yet those private horizons are open, ready for exploration. My impression is that, as the genre matures, more shall be achieved on this front. It is possible to have depth and complexity in cartoons though it isn't a given.

WONDERMONGER: Since I often jump out of habitats, I am seen as an interloper. This results in a feeling discomfort for people. It isn't really me but what I symbolize. I'm a scholar, a teacher, a fiction writer, a poet, a translator, an editor, and a publisher. Since I'm a scholar, for instance, the expectation is that everything I do is learned. Yet I dislike the halls of academia. They are stiff and unwelcoming. Plus, I'm not good with protocols and like to subvert whatever is in front of me.

It is easy for *cartoonistas* to relate to other *cartoonistas*, translators to translators, and so on. I like cartoonists but not too much. The same goes for translators, teachers, fiction writers, poets, editors, publishers, and other iterations of the self. Mostly I like keeping my distance from others.

XIBALBA: Xibalba is the underworld in the *Popol Vuh*, the K'iche' book of origins. I published a retelling of it in 2020. It was illustrated by Salvadoran artist Gabriela Larios. I'm surprised the depiction of Xibalba in the book isn't more widely known. In its architecture, in my eyes it rivals Dante's portrait of hell in *The Divine Comedy* (1472).

The Larios images are stunning. They have a childlike quality to them. Needless to say, depicting the underworld visually is a challenge. The best attribute of that world is its ethereal—and thus, menacing—nature. Ever since she showed me drafts, I have obsessed over Xibalba. K'iche' people still refer to it with fear. Modernity has made us more ironic: come on, hell is just a mechanism of controlled employed by religion to generate guilt. But Xilbabla isn't about guilt. Every paragraph about it in *Popol Vuh* is earnest and straightforward.

YIDDISH: Yiddish is my mother tongue. I learned it from an early age. I have dreamed of one day publishing a graphic novel in Yiddish.

ZORROPHILIA: Zorro is my favorite superhero. This folk hero lives in second-rate novels and, far more fecundly, in dozens of movies. Years ago, I reviewed a non-existent one purported released in 1993.

My piece was published in *Post Script*². Frustrated readers wrote to me asking for ways to access it. I believe a Zorro scholar wrote an encyclopedia entry on it. These are excerpts of my review:

[...]

The Treason of Zorro is an unqualified masterpiece. Its value lies in its clumsiness. As it reaches the hallmark of a twenty-fifth anniversary, it is clear it was meant as a reassessment *avant la lettre* of superhero vehicles, in particular those attending to minorities. Zorro, in this version, doesn't even have Spanish descent. He is a usurper, a man whose commitment to help the oppressed generates enormous anxiety in him. Does he really have to fight the establishment? If it was left to him, he would join it instead. The entire delivery is done with reticence. In other words, this is a mainstream movie unhappy with its pedigree.

Its director, René Carnicero, conceived it as a deliberate misrepresentation. Don Diego de la Vega is played by an Asian actor, Trevor Lin. His love interest is Cloris Leachman, who is Jewish. She looks like she is reprising the role of Frau Blucher in Mel Brook's *Young Frankenstein*. The setting is a hacienda, although the location is moved from El Pueblo de Nuestra Señora la Reina de Los Angeles, in California, and in other versions from the vicinity of Santa Fé, in New Mexico, to the northern Mexican state of Sonora, which reframes the plot. Zorro is no longer an avenger against corrupt government officials, since the fictional town is plagued by scores of them. As a substitute, the acrobatic vigilante defends the vulnerable population against gringos who have arrived to turn the place into a tourist destination. That Universal Studios disowned the production before its premier is shrouded in controversy. The budget was 12 million, a fraction of what mega-movies of the nineties usually required. The script went through a number of iterations. At one point it was "doctored" by John Sayles, as did Michael Cimino and Paul Shrader. In the final cut, the storyline belongs to Tony Mancuso and Cleo Day (the names—I'm not the first to notice it—sound like a cheap tribute to the famous Shakespearean couple) but the screenplay itself is uncredited.

2 *Post Script*, vol. 38, 2019, pp. 50-51. <https://www.questia.com/library/journal/1G1-602365263/the-treason-of-zorro-1993>.

[...]

The linguistic dimension is quite lucid. Zorro is a clumsy English speaker. He can't roll his "r"s. A sequence I am particular fond of is when Lin declares he will never align himself with the Mexican government. As the close-up focuses on his facial gesture, he repeated his sentences twice, even more, frequently stumbling on the diction. This clumsiness is present elsewhere, highlighting the protagonist's speech impediment. A policeman asks, "Is he a stutter?" To which a bystander replies, "Can you be a popular hero and not finish a sentence?"

Carnicero never worked again. Trevor Lin didn't pursue an acting career either. None of this ought to be a statement of value on *The Treason of Zorro*, whose durability will increment with the passing of time. This Zorro, mounting his brace horse Tornado, is an anti-hero in an anti-Hollywood Hollywood product. By placing a legendary hero out of context and to question the value of "originalism" as an approach to culture, the movie is an ingenious refutation of blind casting.

CREACIÓN LITERARIA

CREATIVE WRITING

PANCHULEI

Ayuda Nebrija Creadores

La Asociación HISPAUSA, en colaboración con el Instituto Franklin de la Universidad de Alcalá, convoca la ayuda Nebrija para fomentar la creación de nuevas obras en el marco de la Literatura Hispana en Estados Unidos. La ayuda consiste en una estancia de un mes en la sede de la Asociación (en el Colegio de Trinitarios. Universidad de Alcalá) para investigar/crear.

La convocatoria está dirigida a autores de origen hispano afincados en los Estados Unidos, con al menos tres títulos publicados individualmente.

Para más información:

<https://www.institutofranklin.net/investigacion/ayudas/ayuda-nebrija-creadores>

O contacte con Carlos Herrero

carlos.herrero@institutofranklin.net

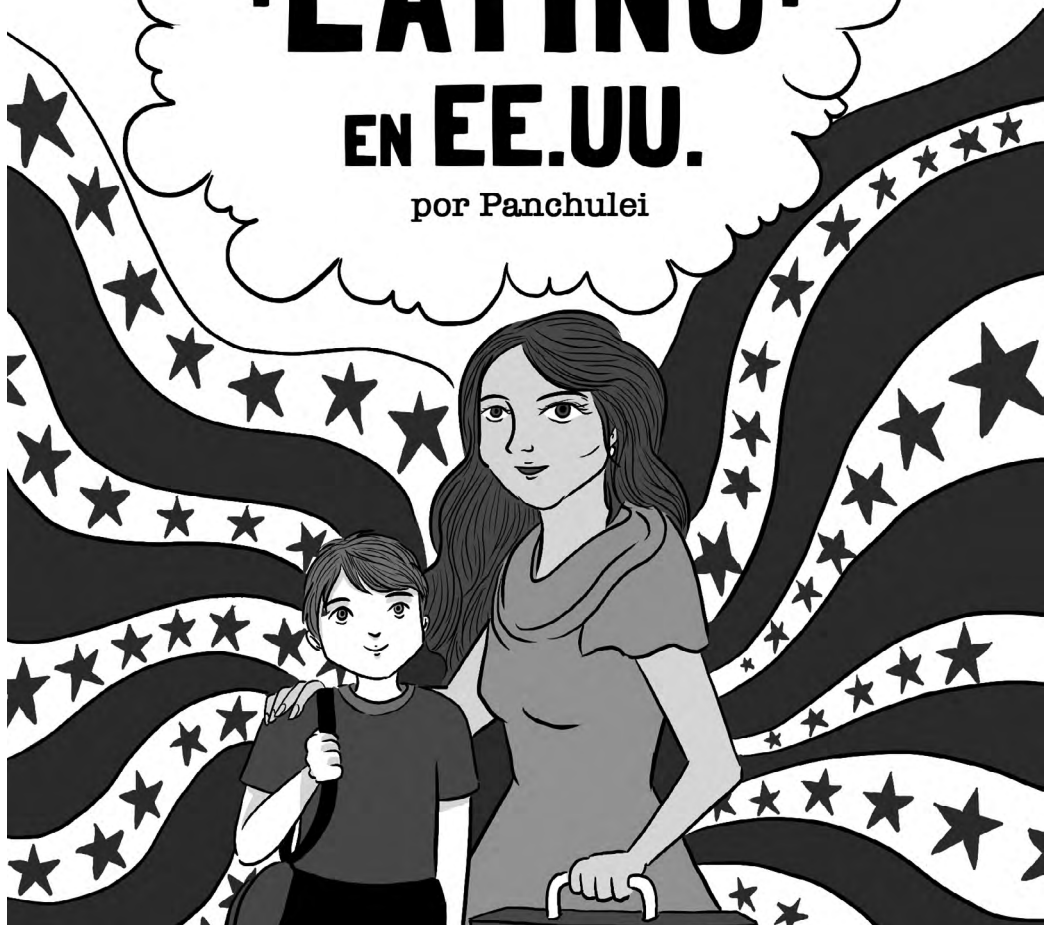




THIS IS
NOT
AMERICA

**LA
CREACIÓN
DE UN MUNDO
LATINO.
EN EE.UU.**

por Panchulei



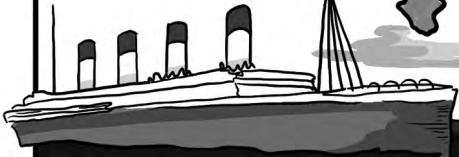
LA CREACIÓN DE UN MUNDO LATINO EN EE.UU.

por Panchulei



Estado Unidos ha sido un país gestado desde el colonialismo inglés, que supuso la desaparición de los pueblos indígenas, instalando grandes oleadas de inmigrantes europeos, para luego recibir al pueblo asiático y latinoamericano.

Desde el siglo XVII, los inmigrantes han conformado este territorio. Pero lamentablemente, no todas las migraciones han tenido la misma posibilidad de derechos y de desarrollo.



Muchos de ellos han venido a ser los explotadores y otros han llegado para ser explotados.



A diferencia de otros grupos de inmigrantes, la migración latinoamericana fue impulsada por la exclusión indígena existente en diferentes países, la falta de oportunidades creadas por la desigualdad propia del colonialismo y la economía extractivista, los conflictos políticos del siglo XX, así como de la necesidad propia de la población estadounidense por contar con trabajadores de corte precario, necesidad creada por los cultivos e industria post II Guerra Mundial.



Personas provenientes de Guatemala o El Salvador, vieron en Estados Unidos la posibilidad de mejorar, así como la migración desde México, Cuba y Puerto Rico, comienza a ser icónica desde mediados del siglo XX.

Pero la promesa del llamado «sueño americano», se comenzó a diluir para las comunidades conocidas por los términos «boricuas» y «chicanas», las cuales vieron en la precariedad, discriminación, marginalización e ilegalidad, diversos obstáculos para su desarrollo.



**NATIONAL CHICANO EAST
MORATORIUM AUG 29 LOS**

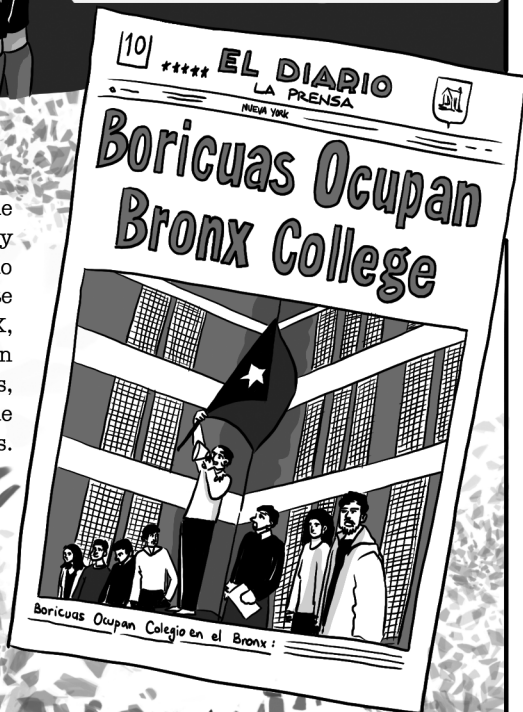




Fue en la contracultura boricua nacida en el Bronx de Nueva York, donde las voces denunciantes y disidentes comenzaron a ser cada más visibles, siendo estas reflejadas en sus formas de vestir, en la música fusionada con la de los afrodescendientes, así como en la impulsión de otras formas de protestas.

El estado de Florida como símbolo de resistencia cubana, así como Los Ángeles y Texas como lugares de acogida para el pueblo mexicano, fue solo el comienzo del constante éxodo latinoamericano. Ya a fines del siglo XX, las migraciones latinas comenzaron a ser un fenómeno recurrente en Estados Unidos, siendo escenario del surgimiento de diferentes movimientos reivindicativos.

Esta migración ha sido problemática, por la constante imposición de leyes migratorias injustas, pero también han comenzado a surgir diferentes formas de arte, que han ido de la mano, con la fusión de diversas estéticas, nuevas motivaciones de denuncia y creaciones desde la mezcla de orígenes y de culturas.



A continuación, les mostraré algunos de los artistas visuales que han colaborado con la instauración de una escena latina en Estados Unidos, creando una respuesta gráfica a esta fusión cultural, así como de visibilización de la dominación en todo ámbito, provocada por la división geopolítica, económica y cultural norte-sur del mundo, y que tan bien se refleja en el continente americano.



JUDY BACA



Artista y activista de origen mexicano, nacida en 1946 en la ciudad de Los Ángeles. Actualmente reconocida como una de las muralistas más importante de los Estados Unidos.

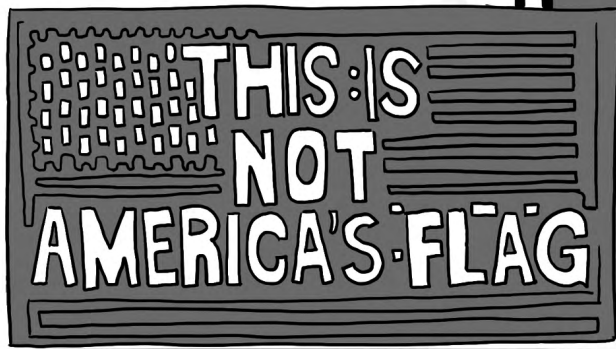
En gran parte de mi obra, he expuesto la diversidad étnica de la población que ha conformado el estado de California en Estados Unidos, no solo de la población latina, si no de todos los problemas derivados de la migración.



ALFREDO JAAR



Es arquitecto, pero su trabajo en las artes visuales ha dado la vuelta al mundo, mezclando la arquitectura, la fotografía y las artes escénicas.



Mi arte gira en torno a la temática de las crisis geopolíticas y sociales, las relaciones entre los países ricos y los tercermundistas, el conflicto de la inmigración, la violencia, el racismo y los refugiados en el mundo.

Su obra ha intervenido de forma impactante el espacio público en Nueva York, por ejemplo en Times Square o en las estaciones de metro cercanas al barrio de Wall Street.



TAMARA SANTIBAÑEZ

Nació en el Estado de Georgia, hija de mexicanos. Su arte en el mundo del tatuaje ha reflejado en su estilo el sentimiento de desarraigo y la mezcla cultural provocada por la migración.



Además, el retrato de las mujeres que ha creado, demuestra la mezcla étnica y el empoderamiento femenino.

Es representante del estilo gráfico nacido desde el anarquismo y el punk.



Mi arte es un reflejo de los nuevos códigos de expresión de las subculturas presentes en Estados Unidos, identificándome principalmente por el movimiento chicano del cual yo provengo.



CARLOS ALMARAZ

Nació en 1941 en Ciudad de México y murió en 1989 en Los Ángeles. Fue uno de los principales exponentes del arte chicano de las décadas de los setenta y ochenta, siendo fruto de la llamada «era multicultural» en Estados Unidos.



YREINA CERVÁNTEZ

Nació en 1952 en Kansas,
artista y activista chicana,
se ha especializado en
las disciplinas del
muralismo, grabado
y pintura.



Su obra se basa principalmente y a modo reivindicativo, en la estética precolombina de Centro América, reflejando la historia y el presente de los pueblos latinoamericanos.



Mi obra cuenta con muchos
retratos y autorretratos de mujeres
latinoamericanas, ya que al crecer me
di cuenta de que estos rostros no estaban
presentes en las Bellas Artes.



Al igual que en muchas partes del mundo, incluyendo varios países de Europa, la migración en Estados Unidos ha comenzado a ser criminalizada, generando una brecha social aún mayor para los inmigrantes.

En la actualidad, Estados Unidos cuenta con alrededor de 44.7 millones de inmigrantes. La población latina equivale al 18% del total de los Estados Unidos.

La migración latina en los Estados Unidos, actualmente corresponde a más del 50% de los inmigrantes legales e indocumentados, y la mayoría de ellos son de origen mexicano.



Condenan A "Silla" Joven Asesinó Anciana



EL DIARIO
LA PRENSA

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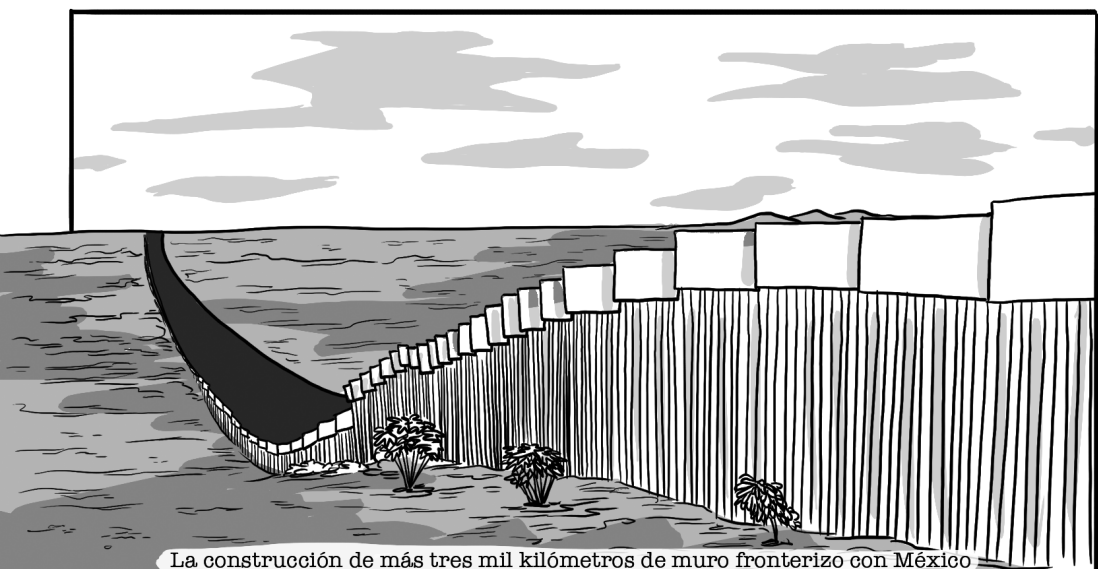
Boricuas Ocupan Estatua Libertad



Trata de Suicidarse
Acosado de Matar
Hermanitos Hall

Es indudable que en donde hay humanos en el mundo existe la migración, pero particularmente en Estados Unidos, se han endurecido estos últimos años sus políticas migratorias.

¿Por qué sucede esto en un país que no existiría de la forma en la que lo hace actualmente sin la inmigración?



La construcción de más tres mil kilómetros de muro fronterizo con México no ha hecho más que acrecentar el dolor del desplazamiento forzado para la subsistencia, separando familias, llevando la muerte y la desesperanza en este sector tan dispar del mundo.



Desde adentro de Estados Unidos, los artistas denuncian las injusticias, pero también celebran esta mezcla cultural, la diversidad y las nuevas oportunidades que los inmigrantes traen al llegar.

El mundo clama a gritos igualdad de derechos para los seres humanos, porque migrar es uno de ellos.

RESEÑAS

REVIEWS

IRMA CANTÚ
MARÍA MAGDALENA GUERRA DE CHARUR
JOSÉ JACOBO
JESÚS RIVERA
JOSÉ PABLO VILLALOBOS



Submitting books for review

Camino Real accepts unsolicited books for review on any aspect concerning Latinos in the United States from various perspectives – including artistic, political, economic, sociological, cultural, literary, and historical approaches. *Camino Real* will also include two reviews of creative works per issue. Authors who would like their work considered for review in *Camino Real* should have their publisher contact the Book Review editor for information about the details:

José Pablo Villalobos
resenascaminoreal@gmail.com

Readers who would like to suggest recent titles for review should contact the Book Review editor at resenascaminoreal@gmail.com

While at *Camino Real* we will do our best to find a reviewer for all titles submitted, we cannot guarantee that all books received will be reviewed.

OSWALDO ESTRADA.

LAS LOCAS ILUSIONES Y OTROS RELATOS DE MIGRACIÓN.

AXIARA EDITIONS, 2020. 112 PP.

Galardonada con el Premio Feria Internacional del Libro Latino y Latinoamericano en Tufts (FILLT) 2020, esta segunda colección de cuentos posiciona al peruano-americano Oswaldo Estrada como una de las revelaciones del llamado New Latino Boom. Este movimiento engloba a los escritores hispanoamericanos que escriben en español desde los Estados Unidos e incluye plumas de reconocimiento como las de Santiago Vaquera-Vásquez, Nadia Saavedra, Pedro Medina León, Melanie Márquez Adams y Keila Val de la Ville entre otras. A semejanza del Boom latinoamericano, también se trata de un movimiento continental donde el variado lugar de origen de sus autores –del Cono Sur al Caribe– encuentra un punto de coincidencia en el territorio estadounidense, un destino tan diverso y amplio como los distintos puntos de partida.

Este vaivén migratorio –entre el origen y el destino–, además del tema central del texto, es también la sustancia de la palabra ilusión. De acento autobiográfico, “Las locas ilusiones” es justamente el cuento que abre la obra y que da el título a la colección porque ilusión es una palabra que evoca la tensión entre la ansiedad y la esperanza, entre el padecimiento de un cuerpo y la fuerza de un sueño. Los doce relatos que conforman este texto dan cuenta de los muchos caminos entre el lugar de origen y la llegada/estancia en los Estados Unidos. Tres de ellos ya habían aparecido en su primer cuentario *Luces de emergencia* (2019) y aquí adquieren una segunda vida con otros textos que abordan el tema de migración. A modo de apéndice, también aparecen en el libro tres cuentos reconocidos por el jurado: “Bay Ridge” de Rocío Uchofen, “Buscando al Cheo” de José A. Serna y “Ruta 17” de Freddy Amílcar Roncalla.

Si bien la llamada “literatura latina” aborda temas de constante negociación de lugar, de lengua y de identidad, no necesariamente trata la experiencia migratoria de manera directa puesto que la mayoría de sus autores pertenecen a la segunda o tercera generación, con lo cual no son inmigrantes, sino sus hijos y sus nietos. De hecho, la academia estadounidense suele incluirla en los departamentos de inglés; por lo cual, que su diálogo más intenso se establece con la literatura angloamericana. El New Latino Boom, en cambio, mantiene el nexo con la literatura que se produce en América Latina, y muchos de los autores además de publicar en Estados Unidos, publican también en sus lugares de origen o en otras latitudes, incluida España.

Aunque todos los personajes de la colección son migrantes de algún tipo, la variedad del tránsito es tan amplia que admite diferentes criterios de clasificación. Hay inmigrantes que llegan legalmente al país con documentos en regla: nacidos en Estados Unidos, pero criados en Latinoamérica, como es el caso de “Las locas ilusiones”, “El último zarpazo” (el personaje del marido) y “Las manos de papá”. O llegan con otros documentos: ya sea como refugiados en “Ganar la guerra”, con visa de turista en “Assisted Living” y “Un traguito de Benadryl” (el personaje de la madre), o por una lotería de visas, como vemos en “El otro mar”. O bien con una *green card* como observamos en “Los sueños de la razón”. En este amplio abanico de posibilidades migratorias, hay protagonistas que se casan por conveniencia, o llegan a Estados Unidos con pasaporte falso: “El último zarpazo” (el personaje de la esposa). Entre los indocumentados, aparecen en alto relieve los habitantes de “La última frontera”, “Un traguito de Benadryl” (el personaje de la niña) y “El hombre y el mal”. Además hay en el texto otros personajes de los que no sabemos su condición migratoria y que parecen flotar en el aire: “Náufragos en la ciudad” y “Los columpios”.

No en vano Estrada utiliza un poema de Ida Vitale como epígrafe de todo el libro en cuya primera estrofa dice:

Están aquí y allá: de paso,
en ningún lado.
Cada horizonte: donde un ascua atrae. Podrían ir hacia
cualquier fisura.
No hay brújula ni voces. (*Ilusiones* 12)

Así aparecen los personajes de este texto, en medio de *aquí y allá*, estando a medias o no estando en ninguna parte, en una serie de cuentos que combinan lo real y lo inventado. El mismo autor lo aclara en el prefacio: “Los relatos en este libro confunden a propósito las líneas de la vida y la ficción para hablar por aquellos que no pueden hacerlo: los migrantes que cruzan playas y desiertos siguiendo una loca ilusión”. A medida que pasamos de un cuento a otro, de las fisuras oímos las voces reales de tantos hombres, mujeres y niños, y el texto se convierte en una frágil brújula para entender esta inestable condición donde algunos llegan por aire, otros por agua, los muchos por tierra, pero siempre pasando por fuego; y todos, y cada uno de ellos, con horizonte y con ascua. Al tablero aséptico de estatus y documentos de la Agencia de Servicios de Migración y Naturalización (la migra), con sus puntos y sus íes, estos relatos dan músculo, sangre y voz; y el efecto es, justamente, el entramado vital y complejo que estas leyes imponen en los migrantes.

Además del estatus migratorio hay que agregar un doble pasaje: porque, más allá de los territorios y los trámites, también se peregrina en la cultura y en las lenguas. Y de pronto, se extraña el remedio casero de la abuela y se desconfía de la prescripción médica. Es lo que vemos en “Los sueños de la razón”, donde el protagonista: “Sabía que en los veinte minutos de consulta hurgarían en su vida para mandarlo a un loquero. Y eso sí que no. Ni de chiste se sentaría en un sofá para contarle su vida a un desconocido. Aunque llevara años en este país de terapias y ejercicios para nutrir la mente y el espíritu, seguía pensando, como su madre y toda su familia, que sólo los locos van al psiquiatra” (52). A fin de cuentas el personaje cede y se somete a terapia, pero no sin antes esforzarse en levantar de las profundidades el ancla cultural aquella que llega hasta el lugar de origen.

Lo mismo sucede con la lengua materna a la que se le han de sumar los modismos de las patrias hermanas. Y con esos compañeros migrantes de otras tierras hay que aprender la lengua ajena, el inglés, el idioma del patrón. Ya en esta ruta, aún los más avanzados, padecerán la extranjería eterna del acento, como lo explica el protagonista de “El otro mar”:

Me fastidia que la gente quiera averiguar de dónde soy apenas abro la boca, cuando mi nombre les crea cierta molestia en la lengua y el paladar. O cuando descubren en mi aspecto foráneo los vestigios de imperios autóctonos, como los que han visto en algunas revistas.

Se les iluminan los ojos, abren ligeramente la boca, se alegran de haberme encontrado. Otras veces mi origen les confunde. Eso está cerca de Guatemala, ¿no? ¿O del Salvador? Soy benevolente. Mi país está en América del Sur, explico en cámara lenta. Pronunciando bien las palabras. Trazando en el aire un mapa elemental para hacerles la vida más fácil. Los más ágiles hacen como que entienden. Pero los negados sonríen con dificultad, maldiciendo la hora en que se les ocurrió hablarme. (64-5)

No sorprende, pues, que algunos de los personajes, aunque caminen en un parque, parezcan flotar sobre una ciudad ajena como la pareja de “Náufragos en la ciudad”, cuento donde la enfermedad terminal se impone sobre el amor. Y en “Los columpios” las nanas/chachas dejan a sus propios hijos para cuidar a los hijos de otros, concluyendo: “Nosotras somos como los columpios que van y vienen, que suben y bajan de aquí para allá. Los niños crecen y se olvidan de una. Vente nomás un sábado, un domingo, y verás que tengo razón” (63). Esa maternidad transferida es tan pasajera como el amor de aquellos enamorados que no pudieron convertir la banca de los besos en la tabla de salvación. Aquí no hay asideros, sino naufragios; y en el mejor de los casos, columpios. O si algunos migrantes afortunados parecen tener sus asideros, estos quedan en otras tierras. Como en otras tierras está la cultura literaria de estos autores del New Latino Boom.

Vuelvo a los Booms: creo que la acusación de marketing que cayó sobre el primer Boom se queda cortísima para explicar este movimiento literario de alcance continental y que tras él se atisba, genuino, el sueño de Bolívar de hermanar a la América española, de contarla entera y junta. En la *Historia personal del boom* (1972) del chileno José Donoso se narra la figura del chasqui, aquel mensajero inca que era capaz de correr en relevos llevando el mensaje. Narra Donoso cómo Carlos Fuentes sirvió de chasqui para *El obsceno pájaro de la noche* (1970) y cómo cada encuentro entre autores servía para activar el intercambio literario con este rudimentario sistema de apoyo y promoción. Este autor-chasqui llevaba las novelas del otro y así los congresos, los encuentros literarios y las clases se volvían el punto de partida del chasqui, de suerte que las novelas iban poco a poco dándose a conocer en todo el continente. Ese compañerismo incluía mencionar a los otros autores del Boom en entrevistas y clases.

También el New Latino Boom posibilita una *communitas* de afectos y chasquis digitalizados. Basta escuchar las entrevistas de varios autores de esta nueva ola literaria para descubrir no sólo la referencia al colega escritor, sino el intenso intercambio que hace que un peruano en Estados Unidos conozca a fondo la literatura mexicana actual, y que una mexicana en California lea voraz la narrativa ecuatoriana. Estrada ha declarado en repetidas ocasiones su admiración por la escritura de Rulfo y se nota en cierta oralidad controlada, en la construcción sintáctica simple y evocativa, pero nunca sentimental; y también, como en *El llano en llamas* (1953) el dolor se cuenta con un cristal y una luz en cada mano. Así se amplía con vigor la cultura literaria y se renueva el alcance continental del primer Boom, pero con una variante: la inclusión de la América sajona; y allá donde el sueño de Bolívar fue aliento, ahora es la ilusión contenida en *Nuestra América* (1891) de José Martí la que opera como sustrato seminal del New Latino Boom.

En *Las locas ilusiones y otros relatos de migración* circulan las variantes de la experiencia migratoria, pero también esta entrega nos da el cierre emocional de quien salió ilusionado siendo un niño en el primer cuento (“Las locas ilusiones”) hasta el adulto que vuelve al entierro del padre a echar un puñado de tierra y rencor sobre el féretro en el último (“Las manos de papá”), desde la vida hasta la muerte, desde la piedra fundacional hasta el páramo del padre ausente y donde la experiencia migratoria está hecha de vida y ficción, de músculo y sangre. Y el círculo se cierra y es quizá este balance de ética y estética, pero sobre todo de vida y verdad, lo que Estrada nos entrega como un cuenco entre las manos donde se halle su gesto más rulfiano.

Irma Cantú

Texas A&M International University

FERNANDO PIÑÓN.
A MAN NAMED FERNANDO.

SENTIA PUBLISHING COMPANY, 2020. 112 PP.

El confinamiento impuesto por el surgimiento de la crisis sanitaria causada por la aparición de COVID-19 en el 2020, hizo que Fernando Piñón, un exeditor de *Laredo Morning Times*, periodista y columnista político de *San Antonio Express News*, profesor retirado de Ciencias Políticas en San Antonio College e instructor adjunto en la Universidad Texas-San Antonio, además de autor de varios libros de política en el sur de Texas, se aventurara a escribir un texto diferente desde la soledad de su hogar.

Piñón, confiesa que el auto encierro le ha llevado a un viaje de introspección en el que busca encontrar la armonía a las disonancias que le han acompañado durante su vida. El texto, entonces le permite definir los factores que modelaron su identidad como mexicanoamericano y su pensamiento sociopolítico, influido principalmente por la familia, el barrio y su lugar de origen, Laredo, Texas, un espacio en la frontera sur de Estados Unidos donde la mayoría de sus habitantes, hasta el día de hoy, comparten un origen común con México y es desde aquí que surge *A Man Named Fernando*.

En este recorrido, Piñón reconoce el impacto que los valores religiosos de una familia profundamente católica hizo en él, pues lo convirtieron en un firme creyente de la existencia de un Dios todopoderoso, pero al mismo tiempo contrasta su fe con la práctica religiosa de los protestantes, profesada por los angloamericanos que vivían en Laredo. Este contraste por un lado presenta a una religión que enarbolaba la pobreza, la sumisión y el sufrimiento de la vida —un tránsito por un “valle de lágrimas”— como una forma de redimir los pecados y alcanzar la vida eterna, mientras que la otra mezclaba lo material con lo espiritual, donde el trabajo era un

llamado divino que permitía la prosperidad y que, finalmente, actuó como un catalizador en la riqueza del país. Pero esta prosperidad no se permeaba a las familias, el barrio o la ciudad de Laredo porque, de alguna forma, la comunidad mexicoamericana vivía marginada física, social y económicamente.

Laredo, clasificada en un tiempo como la ciudad más pobre de la nación, adolecía de un gobierno democrático y estaba dominado por líderes políticos que controlaban la educación, el empleo y donde los puestos importantes o de elección popular eran heredados en un continuum de autoridad para las “antiguas familias” o los angloamericanos y de dependencia para los mexicoamericanos. Injusticias como estas hicieron que Piñón escribiera su primer poema, publicado en el periódico local, que denunciaba las pocas oportunidades de los laredenses ante un sistema político denominado de patronazgo.

Al cumplir 18 años Piñón ingresa a la Marina de Estados Unidos y por primera vez se da cuenta de que el mundo contenido en su barrio lo había protegido de la discriminación racial y de las tribulaciones de otros grupos minoritarios de color. Recién obtenida la ciudadanía estadounidense, se da cuenta que no se sentía totalmente mexicano o americano, a la vez que toma nota de las realidades duales que prevalecían en el resto del país. Su salida al mundo le abre los ojos sobre los movimientos de derechos civiles vigentes en la década de 1960 por los que desarrolla empatía y, en cierta forma, activismo desde la trinchera del periodismo.

Una importante lección que Piñón logra dilucidar de su experiencia es la que aprende de las diferentes perspectivas que sus padres le brindaron sobre un mismo hecho histórico: la Revolución Mexicana. Mientras que su madre añoraba tiempos prerrevolucionarios mejores y se refería a los participantes de esta gesta como bandoleros que provocaron un rompimiento del orden establecido, el padre apoyaba la ideología que permitió la lucha armada; la una decía que la ley debía proveer la justicia social, mientras que el otro creía que la justicia social debía modelar la ley. Para Piñón, en el sur de Texas, la ley versus justicia social, entendida como la noción de que todos merecen la igualdad económica, política y social sin importar raza, género o religión, no era ni justa ni proporcional. Atrapado entre estas visiones, Piñón, concluye que

lo importante es la conexión entre estos dos conceptos, la justicia y la ley, que emergerán de una sociedad igualitaria donde las personas estén conscientes de sus derechos, creando un sistema político que les permita alcanzarlos.

En su reflexión Piñón establece un dualismo entre el mexicano-americano y el anglosajón que proviene de la historia y concluye que es la continuación del conflicto histórico entre los valores del Viejo y el Nuevo Mundo, de Inglaterra y España, en una lucha por defender sus imperios; de los valores del Renacimiento de Locke y Rousseau enfrentando el centralismo de Platón; del protestantismo luchando contra el monopolio de la Iglesia Católica; y del capitalismo norteamericano y el centralismo económico mexicano. Conflictos históricos que le dieron vida a otros como el del patrón y el peón, entre los estadounidenses y los mexicanos.

Finalmente, Piñón concluye que sus disonancias se ven reducidas por el reconocimiento de su propia historia, la de los movimientos sociales que han luchado por la igualdad, así como por las historias de éxito de individuos pertenecientes a grupos minoritarios, como los mexicoamericanos, que han contribuido y continuarán contribuyendo a cambiar el panorama político, cultural y social de este país.

María Magdalena Guerra de Charur
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GUILLERMO COTTO-THORNER.
MANHATTAN TROPICS /TRÓPICO EN MANHATTAN.

EDS. J. BRET MANEY Y CRISTINA PÉREZ JIMÉNEZ;
TRAD. AL INGLÉS POR J. BRET MANEY.
ARTE PÚBLICO PRESS, 2019. 426 PP.

Como texto sociohistórico, *Trópico en Manhattan* (1951) de Guillermo Cotto-Thorner ofrece una visión de la comunidad puertorriqueña en Nueva York y el proceso de transformación que causó la migración masiva desde la isla después de la segunda guerra mundial.

Cotto-Thorner introduce la premisa del texto en el prólogo donde presenta a Nueva York como una “amarga prolongación de la colonia de siglos en el Caribe: Puerto Rico” (199). Desde esta perspectiva, los barrios puertorriqueños en Nueva York se convierten en pequeñas islas donde la vida y la cultura boricua florecen a pesar de la condición subordinada que ocupan en la sociedad estadounidense. En otras palabras, *Trópico en Manhattan* invierte el papel del boricua de individuo colonizado a agente colonizador rechazando así la asimilación hacia la cultura angloamericana además de enfatizar la necesidad de construir y pulir una imagen puertorriqueña y panhispanica.

En el texto, la colonización puertorriqueña de Nueva York ocurre de manera pacífica y a voces que hacen ecos a discusiones entre civilización y barbarie por medio de la manifestación de expresiones culturales. Juan Marcos, inmigrante de clase media recién llegado, toma la iniciativa de crear un centro cultural hispanico una vez que consigue un puesto en la Biblioteca Pública. Aunque con el tiempo se disuelve, el propósito original del Club Eugenio María de Hostos fundado por Juan Marcos era mejorar la imagen de la cultura hispana ya que él está consciente de que el grupo dominante opina que los hispanos son incapaces de crear alta cultura por su

supuesta condición salvaje. Por esta razón, para Juan Marcos era necesario establecer un centro donde confluyeran diversos artistas que ayudaran a limpiar la imagen hispana para ser aceptados en la sociedad como seres racionales.

Juan Marcos, como sociólogo y miembro de la clase media, comparte ideas similares a los angloestadounidenses puesto que mira con desdén las expresiones culturales de la clase trabajadora. Por ejemplo, frente al espectáculo que presencia en un teatro local, Juan Marcos expresa la falta de talento de los artistas y critica la híper exaltación del público hacia la mala interpretación de una canción puertorriqueña de índole patriótico. Dicho de otro modo, Juan Marcos rechaza la construcción nacional que se concibe en espacios frecuentados por la clase trabajadora e, implícitamente, sugiere que la única vía al progreso es adoptar actitudes culturales y comportamiento de la clase media a la que él pertenece.

Más a fondo, queda clara la visión específica que Juan Marcos anhela para la identidad boricua en Estados Unidos. Para él, el sentir nacional se centra en un origen puertorriqueño refinado o culto por lo que cualquier transgresión pondría en peligro la materialización de esta identidad colectiva. Por ejemplo, la novela expone que inclinarse hacia identidades relacionadas con los poderes colonizadores corrompe, o podría corromper, al individuo boricua como en el caso de Lencho (quien proclamaba su origen español) y el rechazo de Juan Marcos hacia una joven blanca estadounidense que no consideraba virtuosa. Por un lado, falto de educación, Lencho fue incapaz de redimirse a tiempo y muere de forma trágica. Por otro lado, Juan Marcos opta por inclinarse hacia los valores puertorriqueños y cumple, o intenta cumplir, su función de promotor de una cultura boricua refinada.

La colonización o construcción nacional que supone la novela se basa únicamente en la agencia masculina ya que no se le otorga el mismo anhelo patriótico a la mujer. Al comienzo se expone que Finí “no compartía totalmente el romanticismo de su esposo” quien estaba entusiasmado de recibir a su compatriota Juan Marcos en el aeropuerto. Por su parte, Antonio había exaltado su carácter puertorriqueño en Estados Unidos ya que “se sentía más boricua en Harlem que en la apacible serenidad de Barranquitas” (203). Por lo tanto, el texto sugiere una incapacidad o la falta de interés femenino

de construir una identidad colectiva. Asimismo, la mujer se reduce a un simple complemento del hombre capaz de desequilibrar su estabilidad emocional.

En cuanto al elemento racial, el texto carece de cierta verosimilitud puesto que ignora la segregación racial de la época. Cuando Juan Marcos solicita empleo en la Biblioteca Pública no se presenta ningún conflicto entre el estadounidense blanco y él. Esto infiere que Juan Marcos posiblemente se vale del *passing* y de su educación para ocupar espacios que generalmente se le niegan al inmigrante de clase trabajadora.

A pesar de este aspecto de *whiteness* en Juan Marcos, el resto de los puertorriqueños se presentan de una forma casi genérica como un grupo más o menos homogéneo. Esta caracterización genérica elimina la existencia del afro-puertorriqueño y, por lo tanto, de su contribución al desarrollo cultural boricua en Nueva York. La desracialización del puertorriqueño conduce a que los problemas de la construcción nacional se deban a ideologías políticas. Al principio el Club Hostos tiene éxito por la neutralidad política que Juan Marcos mantiene. También, el hecho de que haya personas tanto de clase media como de clase trabajadora en la organización demuestra que las clases bajas pueden redimirse si se les prestan las herramientas necesarias.

Pese al fracaso del Club Hostos, la novela ofrece un final optimista hacia el futuro boricua en Nueva York ya que Juan Marcos está contento porque pronto se casará y volverá a la universidad. Sin embargo, la novela expone que el progreso sólo es posible por medio de la incorporación a la clase media, la educación y la construcción de un hogar heterosexual. No obstante, Juan Marcos no refleja las experiencias del puertorriqueño común puesto que él no emigró por motivos económicos sino para continuar sus estudios.

Aunque *Trópico en Manhattan* no ofrece una solución a los problemas de la sociedad puertorriqueña, la novela aporta una pesquisa general de la vida y de las interacciones de esta población. Como texto sociohistórico, la obra debe leerse tomando en cuenta que no ofrece una representación completamente fiel a la sociedad estadounidense de entonces. Como producción cultural, el texto rompe con la tradición latinoamericana de la época por su ambientación urbana y transgrede *el buen uso de la lengua* al incluir

préstamos del inglés hispanizados que satisfacen las necesidades lingüísticas de los boricuas en Nueva York. Por último, *Trópico en Manhattan* (1951) invierte los roles de poder y le da la oportunidad a la comunidad boricua de crear su destino y recrear a Puerto Rico dentro de los límites que ocupa en Nueva York. La novela y la colonización cultural que presenta sirve como texto seminal para la literatura puertorriqueña posterior en los Estados Unidos y es de celebrarse esta nueva edición bilingüe con la traducción al inglés de J. Bret Maney.

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MELITA M. GARZA.
THEY CAME TO TOIL.
NEWSPAPER REPRESENTATIONS OF MEXICANS
AND IMMIGRANTS IN THE GREAT DEPRESSION.

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS PRESS, 2018. 264 PP.

The history of the United States Civil Rights Movement is often told as an easily digestible narrative with all the elements of a good story. *They Came to Toil* by Melita M. Garza is an attempt to uncover an invisible and understudied part of United States history. Repatriation remains a civil rights issue little known to most Americans, in part because it falls outside the racial binary through which such civil rights issues are traditionally viewed. This study seeks to fill a gap in understanding the role that news media played in the construction of ideas about Mexicans and immigration. From the get-go you get the impression that Garza truly believes that the press has the power and responsibility to do more than just report the news.

Garza looks at the media's representation of the Mexican and Mexican Americans in San Antonio during the Great Depression. Garza analyzes three key newspapers: the *San Antonio Express*, a locally owned English-language daily newspaper, the *San Antonio Light*, a national chain-operated daily owned by William Randolph Hearst, and *La Prensa*, a thriving independent Spanish-language daily newspaper owned by Mexican immigrant Ignacio Lozano. Garza argues that *La Prensa*, with its base in San Antonio, the critical hub of emerging Mexican American identity, and its circulation throughout the United States and Mexico, served a key role in providing a voice and platform for Mexican and Mexican American agency nationwide, not just in Texas. With the passing of the Undesirable Aliens Act of 1929, crossing the border without proper documentation became punishable as a federal crime. Meanwhile, Mexicans living in the

United States, including longtime residents and US citizens, were targeted in immigration crackdowns as the Hoover administration (1929-1933) sought to keep more jobs for Americans. It is during these years that we see an estimate of half a million Mexicans returning to their homeland both willingly and unwillingly.

These three newspapers framed Mexicans in dichotomous and often contradictory ways in order to meet the perceived beliefs of their audiences. Chapter after chapter, Garza shows how these newspapers used frames like the “Somos Amigos” frame or the financial frame to portray Mexican Americans as either a burden or benefit to society. In Hearst’s newspaper the *Light*, you would often see the rhetoric of Congressman John C. Box, that defined Mexicans as inferior and un-American. For the *Express*, Mexicans workers were a critical economic component that the Texas economy needed to thrive. *La Prensa* columnist, Rodolfo Uranga, believed himself to be Pro-Mexican but not Pro-Mexico. In other words, he was not in favor of a Mexico that trampled the rights of the people. Mexicans who had repatriated had such confidence in *La Prensa*, that they turned to the newspapers to reach their compatriots in the United States. *La Prensa* also provided advice and warnings to Mexicans that wanted to return home but at the same time did not shy away from reporting the lack of opportunities on the other side.

They Came to Toil is a worthy addition to the project that we call the Wide Civil Rights movement. Garza is an award-winning journalist herself and her admiration for *La Prensa* and Lozano ring throughout the book. Here, Lozano’s efforts to help his countrymen are celebrated and rightfully so. Lozano’s newspapers *La Prensa* and *La Opinion* helped Mexican Americans develop a voice long before they could coalesce into a movement. Even the *Light*, that at times ignored to mention the struggles that Mexican American faced during the Great Depression, unintentionally contributed to the formation of a Mexican American identity. In their shared editorial space, Mexicans would defend themselves against the Anglos by arguing that they too paid taxes and fought by their side in the Great War. Garza says, “these public expressions of civil rights were keystrokes in the Mexican American role in what should now be understood as a Long and Wide Civil Rights Movement” (138).

Looking at these stories it also becomes apparent how both sides of the river saw these people like pawns on a chessboard. Both countries understood the value these workers possessed, but neither did much to improve their working and living conditions. Lozano's readers found they were "Mexicans on the outside" of any national imagination. As Garza puts it, "Mexico had seemingly forgotten them, while the United States had yet to truly see them" (163). Whether they realized it or not, this sentiment of not belonging neither here nor there, would be passed down to the Chicano movement.

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CARLOS CISNEROS.
THE PAPER LAWYER.

ARTE PÚBLICO PRESS, 2019. 365 PP.

With his fourth novel, South Texas practicing attorney Carlos Cisneros offers a smart, fast paced legal thriller that shows a clear dedication to his moonlighting gig as a writer. Always situated along the US-Mexico border that is his backyard, his work –published by Arte Público Press– also involves social and/or cultural institutions that are often in conflict with the everyday citizens of *la frontera*. These corporate bodies –insurance firms (*The Case Runner*, 2008), pharmaceutical companies (*The Name Partner*, 2010), and the Catholic church (*The Land Grant*, 2012)– invariably appear conflicted as ethical quandaries appear between their aim to serve their clients and the greed born of the fight for institutional self-preservation.

The Paper Lawyer is no different, only this time the foe is law enforcement itself, as the novel offers a much fictionalized version of the scandal involving Hidalgo County's Panama Unit, an anti-narcotics police taskforce gone rogue that found temptation too difficult to resist, becoming what *Rolling Stone* magazine called "America's Dirtiest Cops" (J. Heels, *Rolling Stone*, January 5, 2015). As with the corporate bodies named above, *The Paper Lawyer* involves a police unit created for the purpose of combating drug trafficking along the US-Mexico border, all for the greater social good. The perks of the drug trade, however, seduce these officers so that they become key players in the sale and distribution of drugs, often taking the place of those they arrest. One such apprehension is what leads to the legal case that is the central piece of the courtroom drama at the core of the novel. Vicente Aldama, an undocumented Mexican immigrant who commits a crime in an attempt to make enough money to cover his daughter's medical costs, is illegally detained by a

group of law-bending cops who confiscate what he is transporting for their own benefit. Corruption, in other words, abounds and plagues all characters regardless of which side of the law they stand. The narrative clearly makes the reader sympathetic to the unauthorized migrant who is mistreated by the legal system that would rather look the other way than face the turmoil of its internal corruption.

While the legal drama and the subsequent investigation to uncover the truth about the illicit activities of the police unit in question is the main course, the novel's concurrent drama surrounds attorney Camila Harrison Cantú. While up to now Cisneros' fictional protagonist lawyers had all been male, Harrison provides a chance for Cisneros to highlight the place of women in the practice of law. But this isn't much of a concern, however, as Harrison's issues lie elsewhere. First is that, a successful real estate attorney in her own right, she is engaged to a calculating, up-and-coming Austin, Texas lawyer with connections and a pedigree that point to that of a future elected official. This guaranteed life of social and financial success, however, comes crashing down when private communication emails between Harrison and a client reveal her mocking stance towards "blacks, Mexicans, the poor and other minorities" (32). While she reveals candidly that *everyone* in her social circle feels the same way about these groups, she is made to pay only because she gets caught. To separate Harrison from and damage she could cause her firm's reputation, she is fired. To separate her from the damage she could cause her fiancé's clearly laid out roadmap to political success, he breaks off the engagement. She is, in today's parlance, canceled.

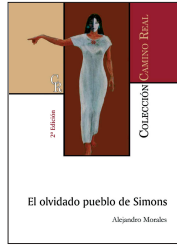
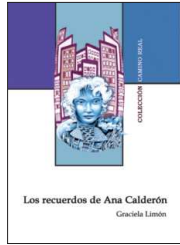
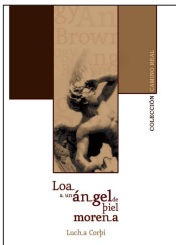
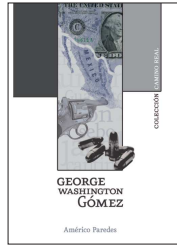
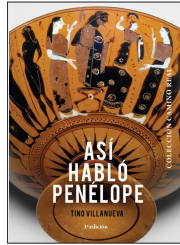
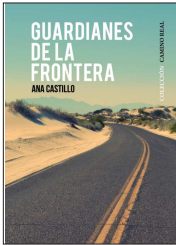
Self-exiled to Houston, away from state capital where she is a liability to her acquaintances and her desire to rehabilitate her career, she begins anew and sets herself on a path of regeneration. A complex character that has issues with her Mexican past, something she can hide behind her "green eyes, reddish-brown hair and alabaster skin" (74), this geographic move should not be confused with an outright embrace to make amends to those she has hurt with her insensitive words and actions. Career-minded first and foremost, it is in attempting to remake herself professionally that she accepts the opportunity to do greater social good by agreeing to help an undocumented immigrant. Apprehended improperly by the rogue anti-narcotics taskforce, Harrison goes against all odds to

eventually get the charges against her client dropped. In such a way, in the process of helping Aldama reunite with his family, she is also reunited with hers and with her Mexican ancestry. She is, in some ways, made whole and in the end, to quote the last sentence in the novel, “She felt like a brand new person” (365).

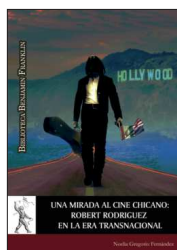
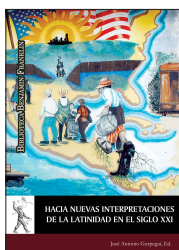
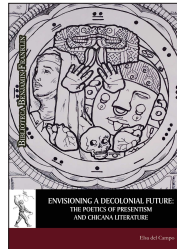
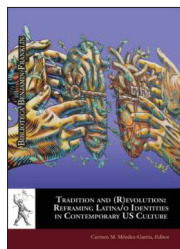
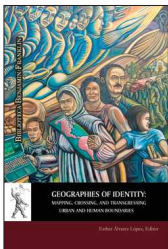
While at times *The Paper Lawyer* is weighed down by the legal proceedings that are described in great detail, overall the novel is an engaging quick read. At its core is a tale of legal corruption where regular members of the public often stand no chance against the state and its actors. Beyond this, however, it is also the story about a Mexican American who, after rejecting her personal history in becoming someone of success and social stature, is made whole again after coming to terms with her personal demons.

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COLECCIÓN CAMINO REAL



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