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Chicano/A Childrens' Literature: A *Transaztlantic* Reader's History

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In order to (re)write the history of Chicano/a literature, scholars have outlined different phases that coincide with significant political events affecting the people we identify today as Chicanos/as, and their ancestors. A pioneering effort in that regard was Luis Leal's systematic classification of 1973. Leal distinguished seven periods in Chicano/a literary history: the pre-Hispanic (until 1539), the Hispanic (1539-1820), the Mexican (1821-1848), a Transition period (1848-1910), a period of Interaction (1910-1942), an Adjustment period (1943-1964), and the Chicano/a period (1965-to date). Each of those moments was characterized by shifts in political allegiances or systems, linguistic and cultural transformations and, in most cases, substantial demographic adjustments, as population groups crossed one border or another to relocate in new areas.

Writing from a reception-informed perspective, I proposed elsewhere a complementary approach to Leal's (and similar) production-oriented nomenclature(s). My focus there was not so much on the succession of periods but on the rhyzomatic, non-linear appearance, disappearance, and reappearance of texts (as they have been read at different moments), and on the fact that the historiographic endeavor is never independent of the time and discoursive agency of the historian (*Life*, passim). To this, I added a third key element by stressing the possibility of reading Chicano/a literary history not as the chronicle of the progressive development of letters within a self-contained group (the Chicanos/as, in this case), but as a transnational history of the fluid interaction of that particular group with other peoples with whom it shares historical experiences and cultural capital, an aspect I later expanded upon by calling for an assessment of *transaztlantic* developments in Chicano/a literature and historiography ("Recovering" 796).[1]

The latter approach informs this article on the history of Chicano/a children's literature. As a consequence, the loosely chronological support I will follow (for the sake of expository clarity) will be problematized at every turn by the dis/continuous interruptions of rhizomatic and transnational forces that pull Chicano/a children's literature in centrifugal directions, both in space and time. At the same time, I intend to acknowledge the historicity of the constructed terms "Chicano/a" and "child" and, as a consequence, I will strive to avoid broad generalizations. Rather, I will concentrate on specific developments related to historically-situated understandings of what it is/was to be a Chicano/a and/or a child. More precisely, and for reasons of space, I will concentrate on just four specific aspects of the history of Chicano/a children's literature: 1) the nineteenth century, in which Spain and Latin America serve as commercial and cultural

referents for children's literature produced and/or consumed by Latinos/as in the United States; 2) the Chicano/a—and the Latin American—child as a character in mainstream books of the twentieth century; 3) literature for children written during the Chicano/a Movement; and 4) the current state of affairs, in which a U.S. market exists for children's books by Chicanos/as (and other Latinos/as) whose intended readers include Chicanos/as and Latinos/as as well. In the process, I will identify areas where further research is needed, and others in which my own analysis will have to be summarized for space reasons.

Nineteenth Century Children's Literature: *La Edad de Oro* and Its Contexts

José Martí's magazine *La Edad de Oro* (1889) has been described as a new beginning in writing for children in the Spanish-speaking world (Ada 38). Published in New York, this influential publication may have been the first direct and sustained effort to address Latin American children as readers, and to offer them a diversity of printed material with which to establish a new rapport with the world at large. In that sense, *La Edad de Oro* reflects Martí's ideals of pan-American unity and a meaningful education for the Latin American youth. In addition, as documented by Eduardo Lolo, *La Edad de Oro* is significant for its early attempt to tap into the institutional support of international and transnational networks of marketing and distribution, something that Chicano/a publications would rely upon during the 1960s as well (while creating their own national channels). According to Lolo, *La Edad de Oro* sold 1,250 copies in Argentina, 500 in Mexico (with another thousand set aside for later shipments), an indeterminate number of copies in the U.S.-Mexico border, in Cuba, and--of course--in New York and the East Coast as well (300-01).

A combination of stories, poetry, chronicles, and graphic art, *La Edad de Oro* was also indicative of Martí's attempt to enrich the vocabulary, reading habits, civic spirit and cosmopolitan sophistication of Latin(o/a) American children. Thus, he reported extensively on the 1889 Paris Exhibit (a major contemporary international event), while including old stories from the Hindustan, and a selection of the best in international children's literature. He also devoted substantial space to highlighting the lives of Spanish American heroes, in whom he wanted his readers to recognize a common cause toward the construction of what he defined elsewhere as "Our America."[2]

In this novel understanding of children's literature, he clearly pioneered many of the current trends in books for the young. And yet, important as Martí's work is for a history of Latino/a children's literature (particularly for a production-oriented history), an absolute emphasis on its foundational role would obscure the work of earlier writers and magazines that can be claimed to form part of Chicano/a and Latino/a children's cultural capital as well, and that most certainly are relevant contextual presences and readings for Martí and his times, as well as for subsequent periods. In that sense, I would advocate for a deeper, broader history of Latino/a and Chicano/a children's literature that reaches out to those earlier developments,

while acknowledging our own situatedness in recovering Martí and/or those other earlier writers and magazines..

Though much empirical research is still needed in this area (to trace the actual presence of books in Latin American and U.S. libraries, for instance, and their influence in both readers and writers), a history of children's literature in any part of the Spanish-speaking world would be remiss not to mention writers such as the Spaniards Félix María de Samaniego (1745-1801), Tomás de Iriarte (1750-1791) and Juan Eugenio Hartzenbusch (1806-1880) who authored fables and rhymes for children, and the Mexican José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi (1776-1827).[3] The latter was the author of several books rich with information on the colonial Mexican school system (and, as a consequence, on childhood in general), including *La Quijotita y su prima* (1819), whose relevance for Chicano/a children's literature (and for gender studies) should not be underestimated.

For the same reason, it is worth remembering that the Spanish Jesuit Luis Coloma (1851-1915) published numerous pieces for children in the magazine *El Mensajero del Corazón de Jesús*,[4] writings that he later collected as *Colección de lecturas recreativas* (1885) and *Cuentos para niños* (1888); the connections between Spanish religious periodicals and their New Mexican counterparts still needs further research and analysis, but there is no doubt that it constitutes an important avenue for approaching the historical study of Chicano/a children's literature.[5] As A. Gabriel Meléndez has suggested:

> The most durable journalistic achievement of the Jesuits at Las Vegas was the establishment of the Jesuit newspaper *La Revista Católica*. *La Revista* offered *Nuevomexicano* youth and the *Mexicano* community of Las Vegas and the rest of New Mexico unheard possibilities for voicing positions on secular and religious issues. For the first time, journalism became a realistic aspiration for the region's youth. (53)[6]

In that light, I would claim that by examining lay and religious periodicals within a comparatist, *transaztlantic* framework, our understanding of the depth of Chicano/a children's literature would be greatly enhanced. Such an inquiry, moreover, would make it possible to historicize what it meant to be a Mexican American child during such transitional times as New Mexico's territorial period, for instance.

For the very same reasons, Martí's original contribution in *La Edad de Oro* cannot be isolated from earlier developments in the area of literary journals for Hispanic children around the world, which included *El mentor de la infancia* (1843), *La Educación de los niños* (1849) *El Faro de la Niñez: Periódico de educación oficial de la Sociedad de Socorros Mutuos de Instrucción Pública* (1849), *Periódico de la infancia* (1867), *Los Niños* (1872), *La primera edad: Niñez ilustrada* (1873), *El Amigo de la infancia* (1874), *La Ilustración de los Niños* (1877), and *El Camarada: Semanario infantil ilustrado* (1887), among other periodical publications that shared with *La Edad de Oro* an understanding of childhood as an idyllic, gilded age that presented well-intended adult educators with fertile ground for moral teaching and civic indoctrination.[7]

Martí's selection of topics, likewise, is in line with similar developments elsewhere in the Hispanic world. Thus, his piece on Homer's *Iliad* in the inaugural issue of *La Edad de Oro* must be read alongside contemporary efforts to introduce the classics to children by the likes of Swiss-born Spanish novelist and folklorist Fernán Caballero (1797-1877), who published *La Mitología contada á los niños é Historia de los grandes hombres de la Grecia* (1877) a few years before Martí launched *La Edad de Oro*.[8] And if Martí did not hesitate to incorporate fantastic tales by French writer René Lefebvre de Laboulaye (1811-1883) in the pages of *La Edad de Oro* it is, no doubt, because French children's literature already enjoyed a degree of success in Spain and Latin America, where other authors like Léon Gozlan (1806-1866) had seen their works in print. In Mexico, a country that had suffered a French invasion and that had deposed the French-backed emperor Maximilian less than twenty years earlier, Gozlan's works were nonetheless read and printed, as the case of his *Interesantes y maravillosas aventuras del Príncipe Cañamón y de su Hermanita* (1881) demonstrates.

The situation of the publishing industry as *La Edad de Oro* began publication also provides us with a relevant context that should not be ignored. Elsewhere in the Hispanic world, the Madrid (Spain)-based Saturnino Calleja stands out as one of the foremost publishers of children's literature of all times. Starting in 1875 (the year in which Martí visited New York for the first time), Calleja printed numerous books of stories and poetry for children as well as textbooks.[9] Martí might very well have familiarized himself with this press during his brief stay in Spain in 1879, prior to escaping to New York in 1880.

In New York, on the other hand, Lolo has documented upwards of ten magazines for children published during the 1880s (one of them written in German), which provided *La Edad de Oro* with successful precedents to emulate and a market ready for expansion (299). Of relevance as well is Martí's work as translator for Appleton (in 1883), a New York-based press that produced a significant number of books for children in Spanish destined to the Latin American market, and that employed other exiled Latin American intellectuals as well. In Argentina, for instance, elementary schools used textbooks printed by Appleton, which may explain in part the success of *La Edad de Oro* in that country. Moreover, Martí's work for Appleton must have kept him appraised of new developments in children's literature while, in all likelihood, awakening in him a desire to produce children's literature not only *for* Latin American readers but *by* Latin American authors as well.

Focusing more specifically now on the present-day southwestern United States, it must be noted that the nineteenth century signals the birth of the Latino/a printed tradition in the area. New Mexico's first printing press, purchased by Ramón Abreu in 1834, produced newspapers and school texts, including primers for Father Antonio José Martínez's schools, while presses in Texas and California have been documented as early as 1812 and 1834, respectively.[10] The oldest of the New Mexican school primers preserved is a volume entitled *Cuaderno de ortografía dedicado a los niños de los señores Martines de Taos* (1834), printed by the Imprenta de Ramón Abreu, in Santa Fe.[11] Earlier, imported primers have also been documented

in New Mexico. Among the volumes in the private library of Governor Bernardo López de Mendizábal, as embargoed in 1662, figures "Vna cartilla de muchachos," said to be the lone survivor of its genre but probably not the only one brought to New Mexico by colonists.[12]

While books were certainly printed during this period, much of the Mexican American literature of the nineteenth century is to be found in the numerous periodical publications that flourished in all areas of the southern and southwestern United States. Children's literature is no exception. Eusebio Chacón's poem "A Enriqueta," for example, was published by *El Boletín Popular* in 1893, and it shares much of the aesthetics of Martí and a similar concept of childhood. Announcements for book sales in the press of the times also included titles that satisfied a demand for suitable readings for children, including Aesop's fables (Meyer 144). Continuous research on the Mexican American periodicals of the nineteenth century will be essential to reconstruct children's literature of the time, as well as to better define what it meant to be a Mexican American (and a) child at the time.

On the other hand, it is important to keep in mind that children in Mexican American communities were being socialized in a culture rich in oral traditions. Mexican American folklore, a combination of Spanish, Mexican, and native compositions encompassing stories, sayings, songs, verses, etc. largely tended to the aesthetic, social and pedagogical needs of children throughout the Southwest. Many of these forms have survived and they have been anthologized in the works of notable folklorists of the twentieth century, which gives scholars and readers ample material to reconstruct a better picture of the culture of childhood. Future studies on this topic, particularly those with less rigorous space constraints, would do well in documenting the cross-fertilization between the print and the oral traditions (where some stories, for instance, are based on ancient printed sources), as well as the actual development of children's literature in the periodical press of the times (including an investigation into the impact of *La Edad de Oro* in the borderlands, since we know it was sold in the area).

A Burro of One's Own: Mexican and Mexican American Children in Anglo American and Mainstream Literature

The early years of the twentieth century present us with an interesting historical and cultural context for the United States-Mexico relationship, in general, and for Mexican American literary developments, in particular. For Mexican Americans, the Spanish-American war of 1898 represented a difficult moment of redefinition of cultural and political allegiances, as I have discussed elsewhere ("'A Net Made of Holes'" 12-15). In the span of fifty years, Mexican Americans had seen the United States take over roughly half of Mexico, defeat Spain in the Caribbean, and occupy the island of Puerto Rico. With Theodore Roosevelt in the White House, intervention in Latin America would only intensify, as the United States government directly got involved in the Venezuela Claims Dispute (1902), the Panamanian revolution (1903), and the Dominican Republic (1904). Nicaraguan poet Rubén Dario, the most influential Latin American poet of the time, sounded the

alarm against this rampant expansion of the "northern neighbor" in his "Oda a Roosevelt," in which he warned the American president in unequivocal terms about the strength of a united Spanish America.

Mexican Americans, therefore, were in a peculiar position at the turn of the century, since (culturally) they were very much a part of Latin America while (politically) their allegiance was with the United States. In places like New Mexico, where intellectual and political debates were intense in the numerous periodicals of the times, the situation was exacerbated by the territorial status that would prolong itself until 1912. In addition, recent immigration from Mexico (whether to work in the railroads, in agriculture, or in the mines) and a wave of political refugees escaping from Porfirio Díaz's regime added an element of transnational re-articulation, as the U.S-Latin American border was extremely porous at the time.[13] The Mexican Revolution of 1910, in turn, contributed to massive transnational crossings, as a substantial number of Mexican nationals relocated north of the border during that decade.

In that context, literature about Mexico and Latin America became quite abundant, as Anglo American authors constructed a complex web of discourses about these other Americans (in a hemispheric sense) that seemed intent on ignoring the political borders, and whose proximity was felt in physical, social, cultural, and economic terms. In literature and films for adults, stereotypes and seriously limited characterization were the norm of the day, as Robinson, Pettit, and others have documented. Children's literature was no exception to this unfortunate trend, and the twentieth century abounds in texts that represented Latin Americans (and even Mexican Americans) as disadvantaged neighbors who needed to be helped one way or another by their most successful and enlightened "big cousin" of the north.

Right at the dawn of the century, the tone was set by Edward C. Butler, a former secretary of the U.S. Legation in Mexico City, in his *Juanita, Our Little Mexican Cousin* (1905), part of the "Our Little Cousin Series" centered on children from all over the world. In the preface to his book (a rather plotless, picturesque view of Mexico), Butler proclaims the Mexico of Porfirio Díaz to be a new country that had suppressed unrest and embraced modernity ("the only revolutions being of car-wheels and machinery belting" [v]), while undergoing a "mental revolution [that] includes the boys and girls of Mexico" (v). Allegedly, these youngsters shunned tradition and embraced modernity (and the U.S.): "English is now spoken by the youth" and the Mexican boys "are as enthusiastic over baseball and football as are the American boys" (vi). In case the reader assumes this makes Mexico in any way an equal partner with its northern neighbor, Butler swiftly concludes his preface with a less-than-veiled justification of U.S. interventionism and a paternalistic tone that would mark much of the subsequent literature as well:

> In 1894, the writer . . . in conversation with President Porfirio Díaz, heard him call the United States 'Mexico's big brother.' God grant that this big brother may always treat his Mexican sister with

> gallantry and kindness, thus helping her to work out her own wonderful destiny. (vi-vii)

This feminization of Mexico, reduced to the status of a little sister in Butler's mind, not only sets up a very peculiar gender dynamics that resonates throughout the century, but it becomes all the more charged in the context of a presidency marked (as was former Rough Rider Roosevelt's) by an undeniable cult of rugged masculinity.

Interventionism, inspired by the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine, provided the allegorical support for numerous plots in children's books of the first half of the twentieth century (and it continued beyond that date, as did U.S. intervention in Latin America). Thus, beyond the racial undertones of the "White Savior Fiction" that Gerald A. Reséndez identified as typical of the period (108), books from this era also support themselves in a theory of economic and political dependency that has Mexicans (and Mexican Americans) represented as incapable of solving their own problems, and thus in need of constant U.S. involvement.

Emblematic of this powerful, trend-setting structure is *Taco, the Snoring Burro* (1957) by Helen Holland Graham. The storyline features Antonio, a child who needs to go to the city to sell his mother's wood-carved chest (a gift from Antonio's late father) because of financial hardship. As he gets to the city, his lazy *burro*, named Taco, gets frightened by the cars, and it falls down, breaking the chest. Antonio then decides to enter a *burro* race in hopes of raising some cash, but lazy Taco just dozes off instead of running. When Antonio is about to lose hope, the Morgans (an American couple) save the day by offering the child one hundred pesos to allow them to film Taco for a movie (while adding an extra twenty pesos for Antonio to eat).[14]

Dependency is also exemplified in numerous plots involving (American) tourism as the engine driving local economies in Mexico, most notably in Betty Cavanna's *Carlos of Mexico* (1964), in which the title character earns a living selling fish to the tourists. As if to reinforce the absolute lack of agency of the protagonist, when his *burro* is injured on Christmas day, Carlos only manages to pray for a miracle… that materializes in the form of an American doctor who cures the animal. The doctor, described as tall and red-haired (58), "earnest and sincere" (62), patiently treats the animal while Carlos waits helplessly on the side. After the doctor examines and diagnoses the *burro* with a rather curable ailment, Carlos is left speechless: "So choked up with relief that he couldn't speak, he stood glancing from the man to his beloved burro. On Christmas Day, a miracle!" (62) To top the miracle off, the doctor's wife throws in ten pesos for Carlos to buy the liniment her husband prescribed for the animal. The gender and cultural elements in this book are also of notice, as they construct a discourse of desire that marks the Mexican as lacking that which Americans have. The description of the doctor's wife is eloquent in that respect: "A slender woman whose fair hair was brushed back and caught in a rubber band like a little girl's, attracted Carlos' attention because she was smiling so happily, as though the world were specially good" (58). The happiness of the Americans, here and everywhere in these children's books, stands as a sign of

agency and empowerment: they are in control of their own destiny. By contrast, the poor Mexicans lack both agency and power, and all they can hope for is an American savior to come to the rescue.

At times, the symbolic "lack" of the Mexicans and their appreciation for American richness and *savoir-faire* is rendered almost ludicrous, as in Eleanor Clymer's *Santiago's Silver Mine* (1973), where the predicament of the Mexican protagonists is likewise associated with disease, this time as suffered by the sister of the protagonist. The main characters are two boys who take on whatever work they can (including serving as tourist guides) to help their families. On one particular day, some nice American tourists buy them coca-colas, which provokes the following comment from one of the boys: "Oh, that was good! But I didn't drink it all. I saved most of it to give to Maria because she was sick" (33-34). The reader is left to wonder if a diet rich in coca-cola is all this particular girl needs to heal.

Modernization, American interventionism, and cultural transformation are also at the heart of María Cristina Chambers' books for children. Chambers [née Mena] was born in Mexico, but relocated to the United States at an early age. She authored numerous stories, published in some of the most influential magazines of the early to mid-twentieth century and, in addition, wrote five children books. The first of them, *The Water-Carrier's Secrets* (1942) is initially set against a rural background in which poverty does not seem to prevent characters from living happy lives. Juan de Dios, the book's young protagonist, hears the call to continue in his father's and grandfather's footsteps, and he becomes a water-carrier. Though Juan de Dios's travels around the countryside could have opened the book up to deeper social commentary, as he enters different social spaces while delivering water, Chambers keeps that to a minimum. It is only when Juan de Dios decides to leave for Mexico City (to save some money before marrying Dolores) that the story takes an interesting twist, for now rural traditions can be read against modern transformations in the city. Juan de Dios's mixed feelings about "Modern Improvements" and his hate for "the machine which produced all pieces alike" (147) do not stand in his way to visit once a month the shop of "a good old widow who sold American canned food" (100), of which Juan de Dios never fails to buy one or two cans. At the end of the story, Juan de Dios's ultimate refusal (or inability) to embrace American-based modernization (he cannot bring himself to operate the American-made water pumps installed in some neighborhoods) is symbolized by his withdrawal to the Tepeyac area, to serve as water-carrier for the pilgrims to the basilica of the Virgen de Guadalupe, while his brother Tiburcio takes charge of his former city routes.

Chambers's somewhat ambiguous stance vis-à-vis modernity is not exempt from a certain idealizing glance at tradition that borders on the picturesque. To her credit, though, it should noted that *The Water-Carrier's Secrets* is firmly grounded on Mexican cultural history, as the inclusion of legends, historical information, and cultural commentary demonstrates.[15] Moreover, here and there, she inserts scenes and paragraphs that open her book up to a deeper kind of social criticism. The narrative tension during the scene in which Juan de Dios's family is forced to

entertain, feed, and pose for the cameras of a group of American tourists is illustrative in that regard (107-08).

In any case, contrary to Butler's claims of 1905 about Mexico's modernity, and excepting Chambers' deliberate contraposition of the rural and the urban (the traditional and the modern), subsequent Anglo American and other mainstream authors of books for children appeared intent on depicting a backward country where a boy's main aspiration seemed to be that of owning a *burro* of his own. That was Carlos's desire in *Carlos of Mexico*, as indicated, but the motif had been established long before, perhaps nowhere as boldly as in Lorraine and Jerrold Beim's *The Burro That Had a Name* (1939). Its main character is Chucho, a boy "who lived in a bamboo house in Mexico" (n.p.); Chucho's ambition in life is made clear early in the book: "What Chucho wanted more than anything else in the world was to have a burro, too. One day Chucho asked his father, 'When can I have a burro all my own?'" (n.p.). Published exactly ten years after Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929), *The Burro That Had a Name* resonates as almost ironical (if not altogether cynical) in its dis-empowering (but extremely influential) storyline.

Lest the reader thinks that this kind of discourse and symbolism is restricted to stories taking place south of the border, I will turn the analysis now to Helen Laughlin Marshall's *A New Mexican Boy* (1940). Pancho, its Mexican American protagonist, shares with his Mexican counterparts their unique desire to have a *burro* of his own. In his case, his aspiration comes true at the very beginning of the novel, as he wakes up with a "fiesta feeling" (15) on the day of his patron and name saint:

> Over the low adobe wall of the corral, Pancho could see Susana, the gray burro, and beside her, a new baby burro, the most enchanting and lovable little creature Pancho had ever seen. His little burro. His very own, because Papa had promised him that if Susana's baby came on Pancho's feast day, it should be his. (16)

For Anglo American and most mainstream authors of the twentieth century, it seemed to matter very little whether their "Mexican" characters live south or north of the border. Their position is not relevant in geographical, but in cultural terms and, in that sense, they are routinely portrayed as primitive Others whose space is marginal with respect to mainstream society.[16] As a consequence, the reader is consistently presented with static portrayals of Mexican and Mexican American culture, best summarized by what Reséndez has labeled "the 'Olvera Street' perception of culture (defining a culture by its foods" while refusing to "deal with the total experience of the child)" (108). In that sense, mainstream children's books with Mexican or Mexican American protagonists and background construct the Mexican (American) child almost on symbolic terms to stand, metonymically, for the groups they "represent;" thus *little cousin* Juanita stands for *little sister* Mexico in Butler's mind, much as Pancho, the New Mexican boy, is made to stand for a less-than-mature group of population that insists on preserving their quaint way of life while missing the train of modernization in Marshall's novel. Marshall, indeed, makes a point of informing her readers that "[w]hen at last the railroads were

stretched across this wide country they did not come near the mountain villages [of New Mexico] which remained genuine Spanish towns, backward only in the sense of keeping old ways and speech" (10) …and an isolated economy of subsistence, one might add after reading her book. As a consequence, New Mexican Hispano culture is also portrayed as frozen in time, untouched by modernity, and part of the idyllic fiction of the primitive: "Next to the American Indians, Pancho's people are the oldest Americans. They were singing with guitars on sunny doorsteps before the Pilgrims landed on a stern and rockbound shore, before the Cavaliers began carving plantations out of the wilderness of Virginia" (10). There is no space for analyzing in detail the contrast of economies and characters invoked in the quote, but the ability of the Pilgrims and the Cavaliers to surmount and conquer the barren land they encounter (apparently out of sheer will, since slavery is not alluded in the quote) starkly contrasts with the lassitude of Pancho's ancestors, always ready for (and happy with) a little serenade here and there.

Chicano/a Children's Literature During the Chicano/a Movement

In Marshall's characterization of New Mexicans there is no mention whatsoever of the printed press culture that started, as discussed above, in 1834 (if not earlier) with the first primer for New Mexican children. Rather, her book takes for granted that Mexican American children had little use for school or literacy. Though he is enrolled in the local school, as we learn midway into the book,[17] we never see Pancho or any of his relatives with a book or a newspaper in hand. There is a chapter devoted to *Los Pastores*, the play that the oral tradition has preserved since colonial times, but none whatsoever to literary endeavors of any kind.

It would take the Chicano/a Movement of the 1960s to start constructing a different meaning for what it meant to be a Chicano/a and a child (or, more precisely, a Chicano/a child), and to re-construct the Chicano/a child's relationship with reading and literature. In that sense, Chicano/a Movement children's literature was a major effort to re-educate Chicanos/as and children through the discoursive and visual construction of a tradition of which to be proud. Rosalinda Barrera, reflecting on her own childhood, has summarized what it meant to be a child before the Chicano/a Movement. Referring to Latino/a educators, she states:

> So many of us are in need of healing from the *culturalectomies* that we endured as children in U.S. schools. . . . many currently practicing Latino educators in the U.S. Southwest, in particular those of Mexican American heritage, never saw their culture, language, and history reflected in the school curriculum as they moved through the elementary and secondary grades. (Jiménez et al., 217)

The Chicano/a Movement child, by contrast, started benefiting from the pioneering work of individual authors like Ernesto Galarza, as well as from the forceful intervention in school curricula of Latino/a parents, educators, publishers, and other intellectuals, intent on promoting a deep educational transformation that would bring Chicano/a culture and history to the foreground.

Galarza, a labor activist and memoirist, took it upon himself to write, illustrate, and publish a series of children's books that he called Colección Mini-Libros. To that end, he founded his own printing press, Almadén, not a unique development for a period that saw the creation of a myriad other Chicano/a micro-presses. The Mini-Libros were bilingual projects (thus contributing to the Movement's overall goal of fomenting bilingualism) that validated Chicano/a English and the vernacular Spanish, in contrast with widespread marginalization of the latter, the mother tongue of many Chicano/a children both then and now. The illustrations were pictures taken by Galarza himself, and the texts were normally short poems, as in *Poemas pe-que pe-que pe-queñitos/Very Very Short Poems*, or in *Zoo-Risa*, one of two Mini-Libros devoted to zoo animals, in whose title we can perceive Galarza's invitation to his young bilingual readers to feel good about playing with language, as the Spanish word *sonrisa* (smile) would come, no doubt, to their minds upon reading Galarza's book title.

Of even greater interest for this analysis is Galarza's Mini-Libro *Todo mundo lee*, a Spanish-language book (with a bilingual glossary at the end) illustrated with pictures of people of all ages and walks of life engaged in the act of reading. In this book, Chicano/a children could see pictures of *braceros* reading the press (and their labor contracts), of other children (including Chicano/a children) lining up to check out books from a bookmobile or reading in the library, as well as of professionals whose jobs involves reading (a lawyer, a doctor, etc.). The pictures, and their accompanying texts, contribute to dispel the myth of the Chicanos/as as an illiterate people, while suggesting that Chicano/a children could rather wish for a book of their own (or a profession of their own) than the omnipresent *burro* of the stereotypical literature analyzed in the previous section.

Galarza's empowering message of cultural and ethnic pride took different forms and shapes as it appeared in the literature of other writers of the time as well. Nephtalí de León, for instance, dealt with Chicano/a children's difficult experiences in school in his *I Will Catch the Sun* (1973), where he also vindicated Chicano/a speech, so often scorned by institutions and educators. In addition, he produced a coloring book (*I Color My Garden*, 1973), that was used in schools throughout the Southwest. Poet Alurista (and others who formed with him the group Toltecas en Aztlán) translated into children's literature their message of pride in the Chicano/a's indigenous heritage. In *La Calavera* (1973), part of the Colección Tula y Tonán, Alurista and the Toltecas discuss life and death in ways that instill in young readers an awareness of indigenous philosophy and beliefs. The illustrations are typical of the indigenist trend of the Chicano/a Movement, which tried to bring back to life the rich cultural past represented by the Aztecs, Toltecs, Mayas, and other native peoples of the Americas by depicting some of their accomplishments and physical traits. On the inside of *La Calavera*'s front cover, the Tula y Tonán series is described as an effort to develop an alternative pedagogy based on humanitarian values and indigenous teachings: "Cada uno de los libros desarrolla una moraleja indígena relacionada con el arbol [sic] de la vida y con la constante lucha humanizante contra la mata de espinas" (n.p.).[18]

It is important to note that *La Calavera* was developed in connection with the Curriculum Adaptation Network for Bilingual Bicultural Education (CANBBE), a grant-funded organization created to supply schools with bilingual materials on Latinos/as, in response to a higher awareness and demand for such texts in bilingual education programs. As that demand increased, so did the will of Chicano/a authors, publishers, and educators to promote Chicano/a-produced materials, where the risk of cultural misrepresentation was smaller than in books created by other writers less familiar with Chicano/a life. Quinto Sol Press, the most influential Chicano/a publishing group of the Movement period, also joined the effort with such books as *El piojo y la liendre* (1974), written by Susana Madrid Rivera.

Within this new intellectual framework, one of the most noticeable transformations affected the concept of what it meant to be a (Chicano/a) child. As Reséndez has noted, Chicano/a children were seen during the Movement as students and readers, and also as potential writers (111). As a result, numerous anthologies of works by children were published during this period. For the first time in Chicano/a history, children and literature seemed to be natural partners, and Chicano/a children were encouraged and nurtured to explore all areas of the literary process, from writing to reading.

Chicano/a Children's Literature at the Turn of the Century

As the twentieth century came to an end, significant transformations occurred that had a positive impact on the field of publishing and children's literature, particularly as it related to Chicanos/as and Latinos. Demographic trends clearly signaled that Latinos/as were the fastest-growing group of population in the United States, well on its way to surpass African Americans as the largest minority. Moreover, Latinos/as were also a very young group of population: by the early twenty-first century, thirteen percent of the U.S. population was Latino/a (a large majority of them Chicanos/as), and a third of all Latinos/as were under eighteen years of age. Cultural changes also had an impact on the field, as multiculturalism and its proponents succeeded in opening up the literary canons for all ages, and schools followed suit with more text adoptions that embraced a broader attempt at multicultural inclusiveness. Finally, economic trends also contributed to the expansion of Chicano/a and Latino/a children's literature at the turn of the century: the expansion of the Latino/a middle class entailed a significant growth of the Latino/a purchasing power, part of which translated into better sales for publishers of Latino/a children's literature. As a result, more presses were willing to publish children's books by and about Chicanos/as, as the titles mentioned below will exemplify.

An additional factor that helped fuel the growth of Latino/a children's literature in the 1990s was the creation of literary prizes specifically devoted to promoting quality in Latino/a and Chicano/a children's literature. The Pura Belpré Award, established in 1996, has been presented since then to Latino/a authors or illustrators "whose work best portrays, affirms, and celebrates the Latino cultural

experience in an outstanding work of literature for children and youth".[19] The Tomás Rivera Mexican-American Children's Book Award, in turn, was established in 1995 "to encourage authors, illustrators and publishers of books that authentically reflect the lives of Mexican American children and young adults in the United States."[20] These awards confer an immediate seal of recognition to some of the best works by and on Latinos/as and Chicanos/as, and they promote standards of excellence to be expected from the publishing industry.

As a result, Chicano/a children's literature in the twenty-first century is no longer marked by the "outsider's and a tourist's perception and nostalgic view of what a typical Mexican should look like" that, according to Oralia Garza de Cortés, had characterized earlier periods (121). Rather, Chicano/a children's books present these days a multifaceted picture of what it means to be a Chicano/a, a child, and a Chicano/a child living alongside children and adults from other cultures. Advancing on the directions started during the Chicano/a Movement, writers, illustrators, and publishers are producing books that create new contexts for engaging readers in an exploration of culture, cross-cultural dialogue, and personal and collective agency. Well-known authors such as Gary Soto, Rudolfo A. Anaya, Pat Mora, Juan Felipe Herrera, Francisco X. Alarcón, and Ana Castillo, among many others, have been joined by new writers and illustrators whose works are centered on the world of childhood. The diversity of their creations is too vast for this article to explore in detail, but I will delineate some of the main trends in this section with examples.[21]

Recovering Cultural History

For Chicano/a literature in general, the task of recovering early Mexican American and colonial texts that had been forgotten or were unknown has become a major factor for cultural redefinition. For children's literature, the task becomes equally important, as authors and illustrators expose young readers to Chicano/a prominent figures of the recent present (e. g. César Chávez) and the past, as well as to beliefs, cultural practices and traditions that have shaped Mexican American culture through the centuries. Two of the most successful books in this regard are Pat Mora's *Tomás and the Library Lady* (1997) and *A Library for Juana* (2002), both of them winners of the Tomás Rivera award. The former, winner of several other awards as well (including the Teacher's Choices Award from the International Reading Association), was illustrated by Puerto Rican artist Raúl Colón, and it tells the story of young Tomás Rivera's encounter with books and libraries. This is Chicano/a children's metaliterature at its best, since young Chicanos/as can read about a child like them who is also a reader (and, later in life, a distinguished writer). The fact that Rivera was a focal point of the Chicano/a Movement literary scene, and a successful university administrator, further contributes in this book to projecting positive role-model images that go well beyond the "*burro* of one's own" of yore. *A Library for Juana*, exquisitely illustrated by Argentinean artist Beatriz Vidal, centers on the life of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, the most celebrated Mexican poet of the colonial period. To the thematics of reading and cultural agency, Mora adds in this book many gender issues that expose present-day readers to

inequalities of the past while engaging their thoughts on how to overcome adversities.

Building a Sense of Community

Reading is often described as an individual, solitary activity, even when the reader is a child. Contemporary Chicano/a children's literature, however, reflects a trend toward exploring the world of community and, in particular, the engagement of the individual with his/her community. An outstanding example is Juan Felipe Herrera's *Grandma and Me at the Flea: Los meros meros remateros* (2002), illustrated by Anita de Lucio-Brock. This bilingual book tells the story of Juanito, who joins his grandmother on a trip to the flea market, where she is planning to sell some things. As Juanito and his friends go from booth to booth of the market, they are subtly exposed (as is the reader) to the inner workings of a community. They run errands for different vendors, at times delivering gifts for services rendered by others and, at other times, bringing news or articles intended to help the recipient. The material and symbolic exchanges culminate when Juanito's grandmother offers a book of poems by her grandson to one of her customers: "He [Juanito] gave them to me when I returned from the hospital last year. They always give me hope" (29). By the end of the book, the protagonist (and the reader) have learned about community values and, more importantly, about being responsible members of such a community: in bartering Juanito's book of poems, his grandmother makes him realize that he is not a mere observer that needs to learn a lesson on civics, but an active contributor to community-building.

Immigration and Citizenship

In building and imagining communities, Chicano/a writers and readers are constantly faced with the issue of (im)migration. In books for children, this topic normally appears as part of the character's family history or as a direct experience of the characters. Gloria Anzaldúa's *Friends from the Other Side/Amigos del otro lado* (1993), illustrated by Consuelo Méndez, is a good example in this regard. The book tells the story of Prietita, a Mexican American girl from Texas, and Joaquín, a boy from the Mexican side of the border. In Texas, the boy and his mother suffer the scorn of some of the Mexican Americans, as well as the economic hardship that comes from not finding jobs. The topic of immigration is dealt with in a complex way that explores the feelings of children and adults from both sides of the border, and with a good dose of Chicano/a humor, as when Prietita's neighbors pull the Chicano migra's leg by claiming that there are some "illegals" living in "the *gringo* side of town" (n.p.). Though the book is not overtly didactic, it paints for its readers a picture of humanitarian engagement that also contributes to the idea of building community. In addition, both the illustrations and the storyline are rich with cultural references (Don Pedrito Jaramillo, the mesquite tree, folk objects) that lend themselves to exploring deeper levels of reading with young readers.

Novel Understandings of Gender Issues

Prior to the Chicano/a Movement (and even during the Chicano/a Movement) Mexican American and Chicana girls had been presented in literature in

very limited roles, most of them associated with a patriarchal understanding of family and society. If the Mexican (American) boy's sole aspiration appeared to be that of owning his own *burro*, girls were portrayed as wanting, more than anything else, American dolls with blue eyes and blonde hair, as in Laura Bannon's *Manuela's Birthday in Old Mexico* (1939). Manuela, as a matter of fact, is given a *burro* as a present from her parents, but Bannon's readers are quickly informed that she covets something else, something nobody seems to be able to get her. Fortunately for Manuela, an American couple comes to the rescue, and they provide her with the object of her desire:

> There on the table stood the American doll. She was looking right at Manuela. What a lovely doll she was, thought the little girl, with her beautiful dress, her bonnet, her mittens, and her shoes. Best of all, she had eyes that were kind of blue. (32)[22]

Even in more recent times, the stereotypical depiction of Latina women continues to be perpetuated on the pages of otherwise more culturally-sensitive children's books. In Lynn Reiser's *Margaret and Margarita*, for instance, a drawing reproducing the mothers of the title characters has Margaret's reading a book while Margarita's knits.

The reductive roles reserved for girls in earlier books have been the target of younger writers, for whom reassessing what little Chicana girls want (and how they set about to get it) becomes a viable tool for developing novel storylines and novel identities for Chicana/o children. One of the most successful books in that regard is Amada Irma Pérez's *My Very Own Room/Mi propio cuartito* (2000), illustrated by Maya Christina González, and a winner of the Tomás Rivera Award. In her book, Pérez takes the emblematic feminist quest for a space of one's own and she gives it a twist that is appropriate for the culture depicted and for the age of her intended readers. The nameless first-person narrator lives with her family in a crowded small house. Through sheer determination, she convinces her mother to let her turn a small space (used as a closet) into her very own room, which she then does with help from the entire family. Next, she goes to the library to check out as many books as she can. Back in her room, she reads for a while to her younger brothers but, when they go back to their room, she is left all alone to sleep "under a blanket of books in [her] very own room" (30). Pérez's character redirects societal expectations by assuming control of her own life (in the narrated story) and of the narrating discourse (through the first-person narrative). She is not dependent on external forces to fulfill her desires, as Manuela, was but rather, she is empowered to fend for herself. That she does so by working with others, however, also serves to reinforce the importance of family and community, two of the most widely shared values in Chicano/a literature.

Class Is Not Dismissed

A majority of Chicanos/as are familiar with the life of the working class, either because of personal experience or as part of their family history. It comes as no surprise then that Chicano/a children's literature would highlight class as one of the

main parameters to take into account when addressing Chicano/a children. The three books that I will briefly analyze in this section will give an idea of how this element has been treated in recent Chicano/a children's literature.

For Tito Campos in *Muffler Man/El hombre mofle* (2001), illustrated by Lamberto and Beto Alvarez, the task appears to be one of dignifying the working-class experience and of rejoicing in the creativity of working-class Chicanos/as to address economic hardships.[23] *Muffler Man* adroitly connects with a long oral and written tradition of stories about the false promise of a *tierra de Jauja* or land of milk and honey on the other side of the border. When Chuy's father migrates from Mexico to the U.S., thinking he will sweep money off the streets, a period of family hardship ensues. Chuy then gets a job in the muffler shop where his father used to work. Don César, the shop owner, not only pays him his salary, but he gives him some extra money for Chuy and his mother to go join his father. Once in the U.S., and seeing that his father is still unemployed, Chuy convinces him to build a "muffler man" out of old parts, like the one he built for don César. Pretty soon, the muffler men become the new rage, and the city fills with his father's creations. The myth of quick riches is thus dispelled by invoking work ethic and creativity, two qualities Chicano/a literature has always associated with the working class.

Diana Cohn's *¡Sí, se puede! Yes We Can: Janitor Strike in L.A.* (2002), illustrated by Francisco Delgado, chronicles the "Justice for Janitors" campaign and strike in Los Angeles. Carlitos, the protagonist and narrator, learns about organizing, justice, and the power of solidarity as he helps his mother and her fellow strikers. After finding out that some of his classmates also have parents on strike, Carlitos organizes the other children as they prepare signs in support of the strikers. The book is based on a recent historical event and, as such, it is closely related to the *testimonio* genre, which enjoys a long tradition in Latin(o/a) American letters.

Taking an additional step toward the *testimonio* is S. Beth Atkin's *Voices from the Fields: Children of Migrant Farmworkers Tell Their Stories* (1993) in which the goal is to let children be not only the intended readers but also the "writers" by telling their own stories. Illustrated with photographs by Atkins, *Voices* features a combination of poems and testimonials that allow the reader to see what the children's perspectives on migrant work are, thus connecting with such seminal Chicano/a literary works as Tomás Rivera's *…y no se lo tragó la tierra/and the Earth Did Not Part* (1971).

Fantasy and Imagination

Last but certainly not least, it should be noted that contemporary Chicano/a children's literature is also enriched by numerous works whose main purpose is to celebrate fantasy and the imagination within a Chicano/a cultural framework. Perhaps the most significant writer in this respect is Francisco X. Alarcón, though certainly many others could be named here, including some of those discussed in previous sections.

Alarcón has published a tetralogy of bilingual poetry books for children, illustrated by Maya Christina González, that are organized around the seasons:

Laughing Tomatoes and Other Spring Poems (1997), *From the Bellybutton of the Moon and Other Summer Poems* (1998), *Angels Ride Bikes and Other Fall Poems* (1999), and *Iguanas in the Snow and Other Winter Poems* (2001). Building upon a rich tradition of semi-conceptual poems and poetry of the everyday (as in Pablo Neruda's *odas elementales* and in Galarza's mini-libros), Alarcón appeals to the imagination of his Chicano/a and non Chicano/a readers by subtly teaching about metaphor ("each tortilla/is a tasty/ round of applause/for the sun," *Laughing* 16), culture, history, and—above all—language. After planting words on the pages like seeds, Alarcón hopes for a reader to make those seeds grow. As he avows in the "Afterword" to *Laughing Tomatoes*, he believes—as I do—that "poems are really incomplete until someone reads them" (31).

Finding someone to read *them* has been the goal of Chicano/a and Mexican American authors for a more than a century and a half. From the days of the early primers, back in the nineteenth century, to the peak of self-representation during the 1990s and beyond (and through a long period of intense stereotyping and distortion), Chicano/a children's literature has also had to negotiate appropriate ways in which to make that communication happen. In the process, the concept of what it means to be a Chicano/a (or Mexican American, Hispano, Latin[o/a] American, etc.), and a child, has also experimented changes, from the idealized *golden age* view of childhood typical of nineteenth century literature to the validation of the experiences of farmworker and working-class children in that of the twentieth and the twenty-first. As this brief history has illustrated, those changes have come upon under specific historical circumstances that allow us to reflect on the distinctiveness of Chicano/a children's literature while connecting it to the larger cultural contexts in which it participates.

Chicano/a children's literature is undergoing one of the richest, most creative periods in its history: it is enjoying a remarkable growth (to satisfy an increasing demand for literature of quality for children), it can rely on adequate publishing industry support, it has sparked the interest of critics and institutions willing to establish literary prizes to recognize its best books, it is providing Chicano/a children with nuanced and more complex representations of their culture and history, and it is succeeding in exposing that culture and history to wider and wider audiences beyond the Chicano/a community. All these factors bode well not only for the future of Chicano/a children's literature, but also for the literature that the children of today will be able to produce and enjoy in their adult years.

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Notes

[1] By "transaztlantic" I refer to those elements in Chicano/a literature or literary history that go beyond the nationalistic drive that Aztlán came to symbolize in earlier decades.

[2] *Nuestra América*, passim. This is one of the elements in Martí's project that subsequent Latino/a (including Chicano/a) children's literature has embraced with enthusiasm.

[3] Indeed many of these authors are mentioned in Goode's 1927, New York-published bibliography of Spanish books for children.

[4] Founded in 1869 by Father de la Ramière.

[5] An additional line of research might explore the dialog between Father Coloma's *Ratón Pérez* and Pura Belpré's *Pérez and Martina*.

[6] In 1896, in an editorial discussing Hispanic New Mexican letters, leading journalist José Escobar explicitly compared Eusebio Chacón's works to those by Father Coloma (see Meléndez 139).

[7] See García Padrino, 29-34.

[8] It is worth noting that Martí translated books on classical antiquities for Appleton.

[9] So influential was Calleja's role as a printer that his name has become synonimous with storytelling in vernacular Spanish: "tener más cuentos que Calleja" is an expression frequently used when someone engages in some fanciful piece of discursive oratory.

[10] On the history of this press, see Meyer 114. The first printing press in California (operated by Agustín Zamorano) arrived in 1834 as well. Texas, had one in 1812, brought in by José Álvarez de Toledo.

[11] Available online at http://www.privatepress.org/exhibition/cuaderno.html.

[12] Adams and Scholes, 264. More scholarship is needed on the presence of books for children in the area during colonial times.

[13] On both directions, I might add, as the case of the "San Patricios" (Irish soldiers that defected to Mexico) suggests. Acuña, Chapter 6, provides figures for Mexican labor in the U.S. between 1900 and 1930. On the San Patricio Corps, see Smith I, 550.

[14] The topic of the American helpers continues well into the Chicano Movement era. See Mary Stolz's *Juan* (1970) for instance.

[15] For examples, see pp, 66, 81-85, and 98-99, among others.

[16] Gender parameters in these and other similar books also serve their authors to construct Mexican-ness as a lack, and as a desire for American-ness as a superior way of life and identity. Space limitations, however, preclude me from fully addressing them in this article, though I will come back to them in the last section of this article.

[17] "It was Saturday. No School" (31).

[18] "Each book develops an indigenous morale related to the tree of life as well as to the constant humanizing struggle against the thorny weed."

[19] http://www.ala.org/ala/alsc/awardsscholarships/literaryawds/belpremedal/belprmedal.htm.

[20] http://www.education.txstate.edu:16080/subpages/tomasrivera/.

[21] For additional types, topics, and examples, see Ada 47-55

[22] For an interesting contrast with this desire for the American doll, see Rebolledo and Márquez 336-40, where the focus is on the craft of New Mexican makers of dolls, and on people's appreciation of them. In *La Edad de Oro*, see Martí's short story "La muñeca negra" (The Black Doll), in which the protagonist chooses an old black doll over the new blonde doll she is given on her birthday (259-68).

[23] Incidentally, this topic was already present in Chamber's *The Water-Carrier's Secrets*.