

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Literacy is often considered to be a basic set of skills to be mastered by the student; the conventional wisdom maintains that the individual who has mastered these skills is then literate. Scholars in the field of literacy studies, however, argue that such assumptions about literacy fail to take into account the social nature of literacy acquisition. Because literacy involves a socialization process, those who possess the cultural capital valued by the dominant culture upon entering the education system are best situated to succeed at literacy acquisition, while those who do not are at a decided disadvantage. Because this political aspect of education, which privileges certain types of knowledge over others, exists, marginalized groups, including people of color, non-native English speakers, and the poor, are required to discard home literacies in favor of dominant ways of knowing in the literacy socialization process. Failure to acquire the necessary social practices leads to a failure to attain literacy.

The goal of this project is to demonstrate that literacy involves a set of social practices which, when developed in a hegemonic institutional setting, are informed by a political agenda that privileges the dominant group and disables the marginalized. Through close readings of the literacy narratives of selected Chicana/o authors, I identify various influences, or literacy sponsors, that contribute to the construction of literacy identities. I then examine the various assumptions that are made about literacy and the disabling effects of this belief system. Finally, in an analysis of literacy in two novels by Chicana/o authors, I demonstrate how, through alternate forms of socialization that value the discourses of the marginalized, literacy that emphasizes a blending of cultural values can be attained.

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Literacy Politics and Literacy Education:
Thematic Perspectives in Contemporary Chicana/o Narrative

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER ONE – ESCUELITAS AND CUENTOS AS INROADS TO LITERACY: THE CONCEPT OF LITERACY SPONSORSHIP	9
CHAPTER TWO -- RICHARD RODRÍGUEZ: PRIVILEGING THE DOMINANT DISCOURSE.....	30
THE LITERACY MYTH.....	33
THE STORY FOR A NATION – THE CANON AND AMERICAN IDEOLOGY.....	35
THE IMPORTANCE OF LANGUAGE.....	39
THE GREAT DIVIDE.....	42
REPRODUCTION OF THE DOMINANT DISCOURSE THROUGH PLACE.....	46
CHAPTER THREE - ESTABLISHING OTHER STANDARDS OF LITERACY: CONTESTING HEGEMONIC STANDARDS FROM THE MARGINS THROUGH CHICANO TEXTUALITY	52
WRITING BACK.....	53
THE ROLE OF PLACE IN COUNTERING DOMINANT LITERACIES.....	59
HYBRIDITY ON LA FRONTERA.....	61
SUBVERTING THE CANON.....	68
APPROPRIATION FOR RE-PRESENTATION.....	70
CONCLUDING THOUGHTS: EDUCATION AND EDUCATION.....	78
IN CONCLUSION.....	81
WORKS CITED.....	83

La Memoria de Violencia

"I mean, how would you like for somebody to come up to you and tell you what you speak is a dirty language? You know, what your mother speaks is a dirty language." Quoting Edgar, who was beaten by his teachers for speaking English" (330). Ruben Salazar, "Aquí No Se Habla Español," Language Loyalties.

"I spent many hours standing against a chain-link fence in the hot desert sun of the Imperial Valley (in California) for speaking Spanish in school. As students, we also were subjected to having our mouths washed out with soap, or 'taxed' a penny for every Spanish word we spoke" (1). John Halcón, The Best for Our Children: Critical Perspectives on Literacy for Latino Students.

"No one dared write or read in Spanish because of repercussions. My friend and I would sneak under the slide and bushes to talk to one another in Spanish. We were often caught and reprimanded. Although some of the teacher's aides and teachers were Hispanic, they never spoke to us in Spanish" (263). René Galindo, "Family Literacy in the Autobiographies of Chicana/o Bilingual Teachers", What Counts as Literacy: Challenging the School Standard. Ed. Margaret A. Gallego and Sandra Hollingsworth.

"I remember being caught speaking Spanish at recess – that was good for three licks on the knuckles with a sharp ruler. I remember being sent to the corner of the classroom for 'talking back' to the Anglo teacher when all I was trying to do was tell her how to pronounce my name. 'If you want to be American, speak 'American.' If you don't like it, go back to Mexico where you belong'" (75). Gloria Anzaldúa, Borderlands/La Frontera.

Literacy Politics and Literacy Education: Thematic Perspectives in Contemporary Chicana/o Narrative

Introduction

I became interested in researching literacy as an extension of my developing concerns over racial inequality. I came to the university to major in English, but soon decided to add a minor in ethnic studies because I was growing increasingly more concerned with the privilege I had been assigned because of my white, middle class status. This status, I believe, has led me to have certain opportunities, such as a college education. As a graduate student in English, I am considered by most to be highly literate; yet what does that mean, to be literate? Is literacy, then, merely an honorific term? Until recently I had never questioned the notion that it was important to absorb all information that is presented in schools, and that mastering this information meant that I would be truly literate. But does this set up a severe contrast between me and those who do not enter the university, or even finish high school? I realize now that it is easy to make the assumption that I, and other diligent students who had made it to the top – the majority of whom are white -- must simply have worked harder. Beneath this assumption, I have come to believe, lay the undeniable marks of racism and classism. If not, then why are there a disproportionate number of white students who go on to university, in contrast to Latino and African American students? I was not entirely sure of the answers to my questions, but I was aware of the popular assumptions, that literacy is attained through hard work and intelligence, and conversely that those who do not achieve literacy either lack the intelligence or have not worked hard enough for it. These assumed notions about literacy set up a disturbing contrast in both work ethic and intelligence levels based upon race and/or ethnicity. As I moved my way through the graduate program coursework, I became motivated to look at the assumptions surrounding literacy in order to better understand how it might figure into the social stratification that I find so disturbing, based, I believe, in the ideology of racism and classism, which is largely invisible.

One problematic assumption is in how literacy is defined. Literacy is typically considered to be a set of skills to be acquired that enable one to read and write, or as literacy studies scholar Deborah Brandt, author of *Literacy in American Lives* defines it, “literacy lodged merely in discrete linguistic and scribal skills such as sounding out, spelling, or semantic fluency” (Brandt 3). Too often, however, such definitions fail to consider the social nature of literacy learning, with its contextual conditions. In fact, some scholars have

described the collection of popular assumptions about literacy as a literacy myth¹. These assumptions imply that through literacy an individual will improve his or her economic and social status, so literacy is equated with social progress. Beyond a doubt, under the best circumstances, literacy can be used as a tool for empowerment, especially for the disempowered. Considering the work of educators such as the Brazilian social activist Paulo Freire moves us to understand that providing literacy education – the right type of literacy education, under the right circumstances – can politicize people and enable them to affect change for the better (Freire and Macedo 8-9). But because literacy is a social process, Freire maintains that it is imperative to engage the student, making the curricula relevant to that student's experiences, in order to prompt literacy development rather than disinterest. He points out, however, that the nature of literacy education in schools typically is to view the student as a vessel in which to deposit information. This puts the student in the role of passive learner, disengaged from the material, which then contributes to societies filled with people who are easily dominated and controlled.

In fact, institutionalized literacy systems are one device used to manipulate the unwary in order to maintain oppressive systems that marginalize. The most common methods for instruction produce students who are not challenged to learn but instead are made to conform to certain standards. J. Elspeth Stuckey observes in *The Violence of Literacy* that although literacy under the best circumstances is a "powerful, unique technology" (viii), she is nonetheless pessimistic about its positive effects; she warns that literacy practices "corroborate other social practices that prevent freedom and limit opportunity" and that the social and political contexts for literacy are directly related to class structure, a structure that the powerful have an interest in maintaining (vii). Indeed, class issues, commonly interconnected with issues of race, rather than the student's intellectual capacity, most often determine the type of literacy education an individual will receive. The contrast we see here between Freire's model and the realities presented by Stuckey represents literacy as an ideal versus the reality of literacy in schools and other social institutions.

The politics of literacy are illuminated by education researcher Jean Anyon in her study of the different types of classroom work expected from students based upon their social class communities. When Anyon compared five elementary schools, two in working-class neighborhoods, one in a middle-class neighborhood, the fourth in an upper middle-

¹ Numerous theorists address the literacy myth in various ways. These include Harvey Graff, James Paul Gee, Janet Carey Eldred and Peter Mortensen, among others.

class neighborhood, and the fifth in a very wealthy neighborhood, she found that in the elite school the emphasis was placed on developing the student's analytical skills (261); in the upper middle-class school students worked on creative activities carried out independently (257); in the middle-class schools the emphasis was on getting the right answer (255); and in the working-class school "work is often evaluated not according to whether it is right or wrong, but according to whether the children followed the right steps" (251). Anyon concluded that the students from working-class homes were rewarded for "docility and obedience" (248) and that the "skills leading to social power and reward" are "withheld from the working classes, to whom a more 'practical' curriculum" that enhances a student's ability to perform manual and clerical skills is offered (248). If we look at the types of work that the students in their respective schools perform, it is easy to see the direct correspondence between their schooling and the probabilities for their future work. Although this study examined class-based issues, when we look at the classroom practices for Chicano students, we see that the same types of skills-oriented coursework and tracking into low-level classes are (and have always been) prevalent.

This ethnicity-based tracking began early on. At the turn of the 20th century there were already segregated schools for Mexicans. The founders of such schools rationalized that Mexican students were racially inferior and unclean (Bernal 69-71) and therefore needed to be Americanized. Oppressive schooling practices coupled with negative media and with social ostracization served to maintain the Mexican status in the working class. Economically, Mexicans were supposed to remain in jobs that required heavy labor and that paid low wages. Thus, in their segregated schools, Mexican children were trained to become obedient workers and then eventually take their parents' place in menial-type jobs. The prevailing attitude among white farmers in Texas, as an example, was that the schools were expected to reproduce the labor force. In one authoritative history, the comment of one typical farmer was that "educated Mexicans are the hardest to handle They would make more desirable citizens if they would stop about the seventh grade" (Takaki 327). Therefore, children of Mexican migrants were trained in school to carry on their parents' work, nothing more. The function of literacy education for this segment of society, then, was not to send students on to college so that they could improve their social status, but rather to educate a work force to follow directions in order to be good workers.

This practice of maintaining the status quo by training students for certain jobs is not a new concept. In his study on literacy and social structure in the 19th century, historian Harvey Graff argues that assumptions about the connection between literacy and social

mobility were already in place during that time period. Graff found that for certain groups, there was almost no social mobility based upon improved literacy, if literacy was taken as an independent variable. For the working class, it did not matter whether an individual learned to read and write; even with higher literacy levels, people rarely changed their social or economic status. In actuality, Graff concluded, historically the institutional role of schooling has had to do with instilling the hegemonic moral code to the masses as one means of ensuring the “continuous development of the economic apparatus of production” (Graff 28). Furthermore, the school curricula were designed to persuade the working class *not* to aspire to a different social status – they were, instead, schooled in such a way so as not to consider their jobs as “narrow or regard them with contempt and disgust” (Graff 31). In fact, linguistics anthropologist Shirley Brice Heath tells us that historians researching literacy of the 19th century have discovered that developing high reading levels did not improve chances for upward social mobility. Instead, acquiring certain *values* did: “. . . if students acquired the social and moral values and generalized ‘rational’ and ‘cultured’ behaviors associated with literate citizens, occupational mobility resulted” (464-465). What Heath is saying in essence is that developing literacy has to do with acquiring a set of social practices that then allow the individual a degree of social mobility.

It follows, then, that if we look at the history of education for Chicanos, we see that literacy, at least within the public schools, follows this pattern of shaping students to fit into a certain designated place in society. The shaping of students, indeed, shaping their identities, is often done violently in that it requires that the student give up aspects of his or her home culture, including language, in order to develop the values of the dominant culture. If we look at current statistics regarding Chicano students, we see that the schools are still failing to equip these students with the ideal of literacy that would result in empowerment. The following statistics indicate some of the findings by the National Center for Education Statistics regarding Chicanos and the school setting:

- In 2000, 17% of Hispanic² students were enrolled in schools where 100% of the students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (free and reduced-price lunches are available only to students from low-income families).
- In 1999, 13% of Hispanic students had repeated a grade.

² “Hispanic” is the term used by the National Center for Education Statistics, and would apply to all individuals that fall under that classification, not strictly Mexican Americans. Nonetheless, I would argue that these statistics would be largely representative for Mexican American students, who make up a large percentage of the “Hispanic” population.

- In 2000, the dropout rate for Hispanics was 28% (compared with 7% for whites).
- Hispanic students are less likely than white students to have a computer at home or to use the Internet at home.
- In 2001, Hispanic students (10%) were more likely than white students (5%) to feel too unsafe to go to school.
- Hispanics are disproportionately enrolled in 2-year colleges (14% of college population) compared with 4-year institutions (7%).
- More than 1 in 4 whites over the age of 25 (28%) have at least a bachelor's degree; about 1 in 10 Hispanics (11%) do.
- Hispanic adults have lower average reading literacy scores and also are less likely to report reading regularly (29% of individuals over 25) than whites (53%).
- There is a positive relationship between education and salary for all racial/ethnic groups, but the incomes of Hispanic men are lower than those of white men at most educational levels.

These statistics suggest that Hispanic students (a great number of whom would be Chicano) are poorer than white students, have less access to resources, attend school in dangerous environments, often do not finish school, do not advance from school into better situations, and have lower literacy levels. The economic status of a student, not individual ability, is the strongest predictor for school success.

So what is going on with Chicano students that would cause them to perform so poorly in school? There are the racist (and classist) assumptions that would insist that these students either do not try hard enough and thus cannot manage to move up the social scale, or they simply are not smart enough. But a closer examination of literacy as a social practice and means for shaping identities gives a clearer picture of why many Chicano students do not measure up by mainstream literacy standards, and thus continue to have low social status.

In my thesis, I discuss how literacy as a social process functions to construct identities. Moreover, because literacy is a site where individuals construct their own identities as writers, a strong theme in both fiction and autobiography, I use discussions about literacy from several individual Chicano perspectives to acquaint the reader with the social nature of literacy. These literacy perspectives are in the form of interviews, literacy narratives, and fiction, and illustrate the ways in which the identities of the writers were shaped through

literacy and literacy sponsorship. With each of the writers I discuss, there is evidence of violence. The writers discuss both the more blatant, such as punishment for speaking Spanish, and the subtler forms that lead to feelings of ambivalence. This simultaneous attraction and repulsion develops for some of the writers as their home culture is disparaged when set against the hegemonic values that spell acceptance and possible mobility in mainstream culture. Despite any ambivalence, however, each writer is a published author, and thus has found some type of balance that has allowed him or her to become literate by the dominant society's standards.

In order to explore the distinctions in these writers' literacy development, I use as my analytic framework the concept of literacy sponsorship, described by Brandt as the presence of "those agents who support or discourage literacy learning and development as ulterior motives in their own struggles for economic or political gain" (Brandt 26). For instance, the aforementioned Texas farmer who hired migrant workers to work his land was a typical literacy sponsor for his employees' children because he had an interest in them learning only enough to follow directions and perform simple tasks, nothing more. There are, however, more positive forces, too, including the writers themselves, who have become sponsors that influence young people toward literacy by writing of themes that are relevant to Chicanos' lives. Literacy education, after all, is a social process, and an individual's success in developing literacy is based to a large degree on who and what is supporting (or disabling) that student's ability to become literate. I believe that understanding these literacy sponsorships is key to knowing why some become highly literate while others do not.

In Chapter One I discuss at greater length the concept of literacy sponsorship and how various authors, as revealed through interviews and literacy narratives, became literate through the influence of literacy sponsors. The writers in this chapter write of the violence of literacy, but also of the positive influences, like the *escuelitas* that many young Mexican Americans attended alongside the Anglo schools (primarily in Texas), that helped shaped their conception of literacy at an early age. In addition to the negative sponsors, these authors write of numerous positive forces that encouraged them to want to learn; ultimately, each author has come away with an identity uncompromised by the standard literacy gained in the white schools, due to the greater force of positive sponsors in his or life.

In Chapter Two I look at how the dominant forces for literacy can distort a marginalized child's identity, robbing him of the comfort of a home culture in order to replace it with the dominant one. Richard Rodriguez's narrative plainly illustrates the ways that

literacy can be violent and serves as a paradigm for the marginalized child who becomes Americanized at the expense of his family and home community's discourse. In Rodriguez's story, we learn the ways that some students will internalize hegemonic values and defend the social practices and literacy sponsors that enable them to become literate by conventional standards. Rodriguez sees no alternative to achieving literacy.

Chapter Three is a contrast to Richard Rodriguez's tragic story of assimilation, and provides an alternative route to successful literacy acquisition, demonstrating a hybridized literacy that allows for the maintenance of the home culture, with its distinct values, traditions, and language, alongside the positive aspects of the dominant discourse's literacy presentation. This chapter shows how *writing back* is a powerful narrative strategy for creating new ways of looking at literacy while denouncing the old, ineffective and narrow ideologies so often used by the dominant culture. In effect, the writers featured in Chapter Three "write back" to the belief in the necessity of privileging the dominant discourse above one's home discourse. In looking at the fictional works of the two Chicana/o authors I have selected, the whole idea of what literacy is comes into question. Postcolonial writers Ana Castillo, in her novel *So Far From God*, and Alfredo Véa, in his novel *La Maravilla*, redefine borders and subjectivities by writing back to the hegemonic discourse that defines what literacy is supposed to be; the message that comes through their texts makes it evident that one can be literate, in fact gain literacy, through one's home discourse, in contrast to Richard Rodriguez's contention that one can only gain literacy by adopting the dominant discourse. Castillo and Véa, through their novels, demonstrate ways in which those who live on the borders develop unique and multiple literacies (and thus redefine the notion of what constitutes literacy) through literacy sponsors that perhaps seem unlikely yet compelling. These authors make valid the influence of home discourse, and in the process their narratives reveal ways in which multiple literacies, gained by living on the borders between home discourse and dominant discourse, serve to produce new processes for literacy.

With the above statistics, we can see that depositing education into the marginalized Chicana/o student via the "banking model" (Freire's term) is not effective, particularly because in the process other ways of knowing are being subtracted. The current means for providing literacy education, which essentially maintains the status quo through violence, is both ineffective and harmful to students who have already been marginalized. In this thesis I dispel the myth that literacy (as commonly defined) leads to success and demonstrate how an expanded vision of literacy through positive literacy sponsorship can empower the student rather than disable him. By employing a more humanistic view of education, like Freire's,

students can become actively engaged in their schooling; and if students are “posed with problems relating to themselves in the world and with the world, [they] will feel increasingly challenged and obliged to respond to that challenge” (Freire 217). Literacy instruction that engages the student, and which validates his identity, then, is the ideal for an education that empowers the individual rather than excludes him. This altered vision for literacy development, a vision that values the experiences of all students, not just white middle-class students, is one in which all students can develop literacy without violence.

Chapter One – Escuelitas and Cuentos as Inroads to Literacy: The Concept of Literacy Sponsorship

Literacy is a social process. Students learn in settings where they participate in social and cultural activities that give meaning to reading and writing. Context is everything. When educators expect students to perform in a classroom where rote learning is the typical form of instruction rather than engaging them with methods that make the material relevant to them, most fail to succeed. By looking at the statistics we can see that many Chicano students do not have high literacy rates, and a sizable portion of those students even drop out of school. When we look at the type of financial support that Chicano communities typically get for education, it is apparent that many of those who take an interest in student success - the literacy sponsors for these students - have an interest in maintaining the status quo, and indeed, many of these students go on to work at low level jobs due in part to failure in attaining literacy, or at least the right type of literacy. In order to better understand literacy in a marginalized community, and how the interests of various agents affect students' literacy education, it is useful to examine the writing of Chicano authors, writers who demonstrate a high degree of literacy, in order to understand the ways these individuals were able to become highly literate despite the politics of public schooling. By examining their writing, we can see the influences, both positive and negative, which helped shape these writers' literacy development against the odds.

In her research on tracking literacy, Deborah Brandt discovered that literacy sponsors, both negative and positive, appear in various forms in people's memories of how they learned to read and write. Among the various types of sponsors include people, both family members and interested individuals within the community, and these were largely positive sponsors who enhanced the individual's capacity for becoming literate; moreover, Brandt found that "commercial products, public facilities, religious organizations, and other institutional and work settings" (26) functioned as literacy sponsors. Additionally, schools, local business owners, and employers, at least in areas where large numbers of Chicanos live and work, have provided literacy sponsorship, oftentimes negative.

So literacy sponsors function both to enable and disable those who are acquiring literacy. Brandt discusses what she calls the "pull" of literacy - "the various economic, political, and social factors that induced literacy use or denied it," and the "push" for literacy -

“the motivations, aspirations, and struggles by which common people gained access to reading and writing” (27). In order to gain understanding of these aspects of literacy development, it is useful to read literacy narratives as a way of studying the socialization process of the writers, and what forces “pushed” and/or “pulled” them to literacy.

The literacy narratives that I have selected are blurred genres that combine autobiographical material with fictional elaboration and present three individuals' accounts of the factors that influenced the acquisition of their individual literacies. Literacy narratives are informative as sites for understanding how identities have been shaped because they give insight into “how the text constructs a character's ongoing, social process of language acquisition” (Eldred and Mortensen 512). The literacy narratives of Ernesto Galarza, Norma Elia Cantú, and Luis Rodríguez illustrate how these three developed literate behaviors and how each was motivated to gain literacy despite various difficulties. In addition I have included several autobiographical oral accounts through interviews that help further develop literacy themes for this chapter. Each writer has experienced some “violence of literacy” through the process of schooling, yet each has also benefited from positive literacy sponsorship and therefore succeeded in gaining a high degree of literacy despite the social forces that function to maintain a social order which perpetually disenfranchises minorities, immigrants, and the poor. But while there are similarities in the writers' experiences, what enriches this study are the differences in their styles, or in other words, how literacy sponsors (among other things) have helped to shape each in a unique manner, illustrating the importance of understanding that each individual has a personal story regarding literacy. By listening to these stories we can better understand that each student is more than a member of a group, a statistic to be presented as hopeless or hopeful – he or she is capable of literacy if the right influences are in place.

Unfortunately, the stories surrounding literacy for Chicanos have been almost consistently negative in this country, in unison with the history of Mexican Americans in the U.S. During the early part of the twentieth century, with a demand for labor in the U.S. in response to booming industry, many Mexicans were encouraged to cross the border into the southwest (which until the late 1840s had been a part of Mexico) (Barrera 69). Because the majority of Mexicans who came here worked as laborers, and were seen strictly as laborers, they were isolated from white society “by the borders of racial segregation” where “integration did not mean equality” (Takaki 326). This segregation was apparent, too, in the classroom. Evidence that educators were among the more powerful voices against Mexican immigration to the U.S. comes in the form of a petition to Congress signed by thirty-four prominent

educators, including the president of Harvard University, demanding the maintenance of “the nation’s genetic purity by including Mexico in the national origins quota” (Takaki 330), which labels Mexican as a “race” and calls for limits to be placed upon Mexican immigration.

For the children who were already present in this country, educators insisted that the children needed to be taught English at the expense of their Spanish language (Bernal 71) in order to “Americanize” them. According to Gilbert G. Gonzalez, professor of Chicano/Latino Studies and Social Sciences at the University of California at Irvine,

The desired effect was the political socialization and acculturation of the Mexican community, as well as, ironically, the maintenance of those social and economic relations existing between Anglos and Mexicans. Indeed, more than anything else, Americanization tended to preserve the political and economic subordination of the Mexican community. Moreover, Americanization merged smoothly with the general educational methodology developed to solve the “Mexican education problem,” as it went hand in hand with testing, tracking, and the emphasis upon vocational education. (158)

So not only were these students being socialized to adopt “American” values, but they also were being tracked into classes that would ensure their futures in vocational rather than academically-oriented occupations. When we examine the treatment of Mexican immigrants in the U.S., it is easy to see the concerted practice of subordination by both educators and the economic and political forces within communities that operated as literacy sponsors.

With increasing numbers of Mexicans entering the U.S. (triggering a xenophobia in the nation), magazines and newspapers also became literacy sponsors that contributed to the negative atmosphere in the nation as they joined in the “hysterical denunciation of racial and ethnic diversity” by publishing abusive editorials (Takaki 330). According to the AFL’s Advocate, “True Americans do not want or advocate the importation of any people who cannot be absorbed into full citizenship,” while *The Saturday Evening Post* argued that “We are under no obligation to continue to make this country an asylum for the Mexican peon” (Takaki 331). These quotes bear a chilling similarity to those we hear in the media today. At any rate, by presenting Mexicans in such a negative light, magazines and newspapers functioned as powerful literacy sponsors by adding credence to the notion, in fact consolidating it through concise and articulate means, that Mexicans did not belong in this country and most certainly should not be citizens – a notion that would likely, if we were to examine research on the influence of the media, be absorbed uncritically by the average reader, including schoolteachers and administrators.

Not only did ideas about the function of education relegate Mexican Americans to the vocational rather than academic track, but additionally the insistence upon English only instruction damaged identities and hindered the native Spanish speaker's ability to attain literacy at the same rate as the native English speaker. Poet Miguel Mendez, in an interview with Juan Bruce-Novoa in *Chicano Authors: Inquiry by Interview*, comments on the importance of language to his identity: "language is the structure on which all culture rests. If the language disappears, there remain memories that, as they slowly fade away, take the ancestral culture into oblivion. In our case, the Spanish language is the most powerful factor with respect to means of identity" (87-88). Thus, by insisting upon English usage, the schools were chipping away at the identities of the students. Mexican American children have been taught in the schools that their culture and their language do not matter, and as Gonzalez notes,

[t]he assumption that Mexican culture was meager and deficient implied that the child came into the classroom with meager and deficient tools with which to learn. This implication was quite consciously woven into the methodology and content of instruction. (170)

Then with so many disabling literacy influences established, how have some individuals managed to find literacy sponsors to enable their literacy? The answer is that for members of a marginalized group, it is often necessary for the community to produce its own literacy sponsors. In order to maintain strong community ties and reinforce the value of local literacies, the adults act as the primary literacy sponsors that can sometimes counteract the impact of negative sponsors.

In every marginalized group, when literacy is viewed positively, there is a push for individuals to learn within the safety of their own communities. In his book of interviews with Chicano authors, Juan Bruce-Novoa reveals many of the influences that helped shape the literacy of the writers he interviewed. One of the most compelling, as discussed by both Rolando Hinojosa and Tomás Rivera, was attendance of the neighborhood Spanish school, or *escuelita*. Rivera elaborates:

I learned to read and write Spanish when I was five and six in the *escuela del barrio* Although these people had had no formal training themselves, they still felt that schooling was needed. You paid five cents every day and if you didn't go you didn't pay. (Bruce-Novoa 146)

In the little neighborhood schools, the students would not only be taught the basics, but also cultural values such as respect and a sense of community. By reinforcing tradition and

language, these little neighborhood schools bolstered the students' identities and thus provided positive literacy sponsorship in contrast to the Anglo schools that the children also attended.

Rivera was fortunate to have this positive early schooling experience as a counterbalance to hegemonic schooling, for he writes of the time spent later on in white schools, particularly in junior high school, as entirely lost: "no reading that was worthwhile, pure mishmash. First of all, they didn't think you could read, *porque eras Mexicano* [because you are Mexican]" (144). And although his parents had not been formally educated, Rivera says that his father, too, had encouraged him in his literacy: "My dad knew I liked to read, so he would go knocking on doors, asking if they had any old magazines, which he then brought home to me" (143). In addition, Rivera speaks of going to the dump and finding the discarded reading materials of those with easier access to literacy: "I found encyclopedias and different types of books People threw away a lot of books" (Bruce-Novoa 143). Rivera and his family had strong motivation to gain access to reading and writing materials which were denied Spanish-speaking youth in the most typical setting for literacy development, the public school. Students without Rivera's motivation and who lacked a literacy sponsor like the one Rivera had in his father were effectively disabled from literacy by sponsors intent upon maintaining a population of non-literate students who would not threaten to change the status quo.

A high regard for literacy among Mexican American families can be noted in Bruce-Novoa's interviews, and many times it was a family member who taught the children to read. Miguel Mendez writes of how his mother taught him to read at an early age:

I was always bothering my mother, distracting her from her chores, trying to get her to read me the comics in the papers. She would explain the letters to me, while I constantly asked her questions Among the modest belongings that my parents had taken to El Claro, there were several boxes of books. (86)

Here, we see how the social context – being read something of interest to him by his mother – enhanced Mendez's interest in developing his own reading skills.

Another influential location for literacy development has been the church. Both Alurista and Bernice Zamora, in interviews with Bruce-Novoa, cite the literature within the church as early (and easily accessible) reading choices. Zamora, in fact, cites the biography of a saint, Tomás Aquinas, as an inspiration for her to develop her own goals in life (207),

thus signaling the important influence of the right kinds of books as socializing agents that provide relevant lessons for shaping a young person's life.

It is worth noting that each of the authors featured in Bruce-Novoa's collection of interviews, besides noting the strong presence of positive literacy sponsors, can be described as being pushed toward literacy by his or her high degree of motivation to read and write. Without books in their own homes, these writers managed to discover libraries, garbage dumps full of discarded books, church literature, and storytellers as conduits to literacy. They in turn, have used their own literacy to gain a sense of self-expression, leading them to become literacy sponsors for others, with their tales that reflect Mexican culture and traditions. And according to Antonio Marquez, who writes extensively about autobiography, much of what these fiction writers produce is autobiographical (57). The autobiographical nature of much of their writing is, perhaps, an extension of the oral tradition, a common form of story (and life lesson) transmission in Mexican culture. Sociolinguistics scholar Mary Soliday refers to the oral tradition as "a rich and complex social practice through which family members establish their identities as language users in culturally specific ways" (513). The practice of presenting literacy narratives orally, it is believed, "provides an imaginative, although not fully understood, avenue through which children and adults develop a cultural sense of the literate self" (513) though the oral tradition is, curiously, devalued as a literacy tool by many scholars. Many of the authors I look at speak of the stories that were told within the family and the community, and their importance in developing an understanding of the world around them, and thus cannot be discounted as literacy tools.

These orally transmitted stories are an invaluable means of staging cultural literacies, despite the fact that they are not in written form. And yet what is striking about the texts by many Chicano authors is the rhythmic beauty of their storytelling, reminiscent of tales that have been told many times – a technique received by writers who have been influenced by the sounds of spoken stories in a continuous flow over time, linking one generation to the next. Not only do the stories teach about culture and thus help to shape identity, but they also have a style that would be difficult to replicate by someone unfamiliar with the unique cultural form. José Antonio Villareal tells of how "at about age eight I discovered that I could read in Spanish, but we had few books. Until then my mother had read to us every night or older Mexican people would tell stories about their *tierra* [homeland];" he tells us that "the oral tradition has always been very strong in me" (Bruce-Novoa 40), and surely has influenced his writing style. Rudolfo Anaya also relates the importance in his community of the oral tradition:

Any time that people gathered, family or friends, they told stories, *cuentos* [tales], anecdotes, *dichos* [sayings], *adivinanzas* [riddles]. So I was always in a milieu of words, whether they were printed or in the oral tradition. And I think that's important to stimulate the writer's imagination. (qtd. in Bruce-Novoa 188)

Stimulated imaginations – this, no doubt, is what Paolo Freire had in mind for reading the world. For when we read Anaya's work, we hear the resonance of the *cuentos* that have influenced him. In the following selection from Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima*, which is the tale of a young boy entering the white school system at the same time that the magical *curandera*, Ultima, enters his life, we can hear the storyteller's influence as we are led into this written account of the boy's education:

Let me begin at the beginning. I do not mean the beginning that was in my dreams and the stories they whispered to me about my birth, and the people of my father and mother, and my three brothers – but the beginning that came with Ultima. (1)

Anaya is signaling for the reader the importance of his home culture that will continue to influence and shape his identity as he enters the foreign school system. His fictional narrative functions nicely as an illustration of multiple literacies gained through multiple types of sponsors.

An examination of autobiography in the form of written literacy narratives further illuminates for us the development of literacy. The literacy narratives of the marginalized often function to oppose conventional notions of literacy, in this case for Chicanos. In fact, many Chicano writers have a huge stake, as literacy sponsors themselves, in countering the damage that dominant discourses have often inflicted. Historian Genaro Padilla suggests that the autobiographical narrative functions for Chicanos as "a major articulation of resistance to American social and cultural hegemony, [and it] appears in nearly all of the current thinking on Chicano autobiography as a genre in which individual experience and collective historical identity are inextricably bound" (Padilla, "Recovering Mexican-American Autobiography" 154).

Both for Mexicans in the Southwest who watched their Mexican soil turned to U.S. territory and for Chicanos who have watched as their culture has been misrepresented, writing accurate histories has been an important mission, both personally and for the community. In fact, according to Greene, Mexicans were the first North Americans to place real importance on literacy, with the inhabitants of New Spain demonstrating uses for literacy such as extensive record keeping, while the indigenous people of the region also employed

writing as a system for accounting (Greene 253). But accounts of Mexican writing have not made it into the standard textbooks.

Because beliefs about the literacy levels of Mexicans have been seriously distorted by the dominant group's accounts, it should come as no surprise that Mexicans and indigenous people would not be expected to record their life stories, perhaps because such narrow parameters have been set to define autobiography. According to Georges Gusdorf, author of what is considered the definitive examination of autobiography, "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography" (1956), writing about self has been the concern solely of Western man, the only being who felt he "existed outside of others" (29). This notion is presented despite the fact that Native Americans were "telling, performing, and painting their personal histories long before ethnographers came along," (Padilla, *My History, Not Yours* 8) an indication that definitions for self-representation are unnecessarily narrow and ethnocentric. An expanded understanding of autobiography is therefore necessary, especially the autoethnographic dimension of it, in order to better understand Chicano literacy narratives.

The undeniably rich autobiographical history for Chicanos can be witnessed in the mid-19th century writing that emerged as Mexican Americans became increasingly distressed by the recent acquisition by the U.S. of their territories and by inaccurate representations of their culture. Autobiography emerged in the form of personal correspondence, poetry, *corridos*, *chistes*, newspaper editorials and essays, and narratives that "remain generally unpublished and unread" (Padilla, *Recovering* 154). Padilla writes,

[t]he rupture of everyday life experience by some 75,000 people who inhabited the far northern provinces of Mexico in 1846 opened a terrain of discursive necessity in which fear and resentment found language in speeches and official documents warning fellow citizens to accommodate themselves to the new regime or at least to remain quiet lest they be hurt or killed outright. (*Recovering* 153)

In the midst of this atmosphere, "autobiographical desire also arose as part of this discursive necessity" in an attempt to find historical presence for those who had gone from living within a nation whose traditions they were familiar with, to becoming residents of an "alien political system in an alien culture" (Padilla, *Recovering* 153). And alongside these accounts of lives torn by conquest came literacy narratives.

One literacy narrative that is particularly informative for understanding literacy acquisition is the autobiography of Ernesto Galarza, *Barrio Boy: The Story of a Boy's*

Acculturation. Although Galarza wrote his text in the early 1970s when consciousness about oppression emerged as a dominant literary theme, we see very little animosity regarding his literacy. Perhaps Galarza writes positively about his literacy education because he was not born in the U.S., but instead left Mexico when it was being torn up by revolution when he was very young. Galarza's positive estimation of U.S. education is in keeping with more recent findings, that "foreign-born Mexicans in the United States have a more positive self-image than do U.S.-born Mexican-Americans" (Attinasi 291). Linguist and bilingual education specialist John Attinasi writes

The hegemony of Anglo culture is reflected in the finding that self-concept among Mexican-Americans became more negative as time in the United States increased. The implication from this work is that the U.S. experience engenders and reinforces bi-racially divided language attitudes. (291)

For Galarza then, unlike the other authors I discuss, the education process, his Americanization, was quite positive. Writing of Galarza, historian Takaki notes, "in his school, Americanization did not mean 'scrubbing away' what made them Mexican." Additionally, and in contrast to the experience of many non-native English speakers, the students in Galarza's school were never scolded for speaking Spanish (328). On his journey north from Mexico, Galarza, clearly a linguistically precocious youth, begins to decode the English language before he even reaches Sacramento, where he would enter formal schooling. He recounts an episode on a train where he begins to discover the links between the two languages, Spanish and English:

When the conductor came by to check tickets, he punched two colored tabs and slipped them through a metal frame on the seat in front of us. I discovered to my delight that the brass letters on his cap were exactly like those of the conductor in Mazatlán. I spelled them out silently as I watched him – c-o-n-, con, d-u-c, duc, t-o-r, conductor. In a whispered conversation with my mother over the subject, we agreed that a gringo conductor would not be wearing Mexican letters on his cap, and that *conductor* in Spanish was the same as conductor in English. This started a guessing game that kept us amused the rest of the trip. Some words worked out neatly in both languages, like *conductor*, others failed to match by a syllable or a letter, in which case we thought English spelling idiotic. (188)

In this first, and quite positive, encounter with English, Galarza and his mother delightedly discover cognates that accentuate the links that bind the two languages – a significant metaphor that foreshadows the ease with which Galarza will also move between the two cultures. Unfortunately, for many Spanish-speaking youth entering this country, the first encounter with English is instead accentuated by difference, a difference that extends beyond language.

Eventually Galarza was diagramming sentences in English and Spanish and building for himself a bilingual library. Yet Galarza makes it clear for the reader that his two worlds were neatly separated where necessary. He writes, "it was at the family parties that the world of Americans was completely shut off" (239). In these instances, songs led to talk of the revolution, of strikes put down by gringo soldiers, and the Mexican government. "In the family parties, the funerals, the baptisms, the weddings and the birthdays, our private lives continued to be Mexican" (239-240). In these passages, we can see that Galarza was able to maintain his identity as a *Mexican* American rather than falling victim to mainstream white society's devaluation of cultures dissimilar to the dominant one.

Galarza makes the point in his book title that he was *acculturated* rather than assimilated, and this distinction is important. Galarza indicates that he has found a balance between his Mexican culture and his American one, and in this way Galarza's text is didactic, for he makes a good literacy sponsor for others coming after him by demonstrating the value in his Mexican heritage and the ways he is able to balance the two worlds he is a part of. One reason he gives for writing down his stories is that psychiatrists and anthropologists were insisting that Mexican immigrants had lost their 'self image'; his intent was to demonstrate that this is untrue. In writing with the vision of a certain collective experience for Mexican American immigrants, he is answering these critics who believe "that a Mexican doesn't know what he is; and if by chance he is something, it isn't any good" (2). Galarza's text appears perhaps atypically optimistic, but he recorded his story in an era when younger Chicanos were just beginning to explore the question of loss; nonetheless, Galarza's account of literacy acquisition is instructive in that it provides insight into the cultural experiences of a Mexican boy adapting to a new culture.

Galarza's education came early, and his literacy sponsors were many. His mother was his first teacher and one of his first texts was a cookbook. Practically speaking, it is appropriate that literacy should come most readily from daily life, the real world, for watching his mother cook in the kitchen would have been a socially meaningful activity that lends relevance to reading. Additionally, Galarza watched with fascination as his mother worked in a manner that involved writing. In Mexico, Galarza's mother had been a scribe, composing letters for others who could not write, and for this reason, learning to write seems to have taken on a rather mystical aspect for Galarza. As he and his mother trek north to the U.S., Galarza describes the experience of watching a scribe at work:

Under a canvas shade an elderly man sat writing a letter for people who didn't know how. We always watched him, for that was what my mother had done in Jalco. While the customer dictated, the scribe designed the words slowly and neatly, decorating them with curves and loops to make the letter look pretty. My mother pointed out to me that the person sending the letter always put a cross at the end instead of his name. That was his signature. (88)

In this way, we can see that education for Galarza was all around him, including the lesson that writing was viewed with reverence within the community – it was a skill not possessed by all – and Galarza's mother was influential in making sure that her son understood such lessons. Galarza, like the Chicano authors interviewed by Bruce-Novoa, recounts the influence of the tales that were handed down to him through the oral tradition and the storytellers who brought them alive for him. He tells us that "the story of Jalcocotán was stored in Tata Cleofas's head" and that he and his friends had received the story "second-hand from the talk that my uncles and Don Catarino had with the old, wise man, who was very much respected by everyone" (42). In this passage Galarza illustrates how the tales are passed from generation to generation – and not only the histories, but also the stories. Galarza notes, "Doña Eduvijes was not like Don Cleofas, an historian." In contrast, she told stories like that of La Llorona, "the Weeping Woman, who walked at night through the forest chilling your blood with her wail" (43). He talks, too, of the *corridos* that the men would sing when they got together drinking, which were tales of heroic deeds by courageous marauders – resisting the force of the *rurales*, or mounted police. And at home, Galarza received instruction from his mother's proverbs and folk sayings: "Something strange, something funny, something sad was put into a familiar phrase that not only explained matters but also gave you a safe rule to go by" (148).

So for Galarza, it is apparent that an entire community sponsored literacy for him with the various forms of orally transmitted information that amount to an alternative form of cultural capital, one that enhances the literacy received through the school system. We cannot discount the oral tradition as a type of received literacy and part of his socialization because in Galarza's text we can hear the influence of these stories. He presents these traditional stories with his own story added to them, a continuation of a community's collective cultural repertoire. He tells the reader at the beginning of *Barrio Boy* that he has become the storyteller, as he notes that his text "began as anecdotes I told my family about Jalcocotán, the mountain village in western Mexico where I was born" (1). Galarza's story may be his own, but the text is familiar to many because it is like one of the stories that his uncles (and, we can imagine, the uncles of many other children, for many generations) would recount; he

is telling the story of immigration to the U.S., not unlike the trek that many others have made. He writes:

What brought me and my family to the United States from Mexico also brought hundreds of thousands of others like us. In many ways the experiences of a multitude of boys like myself, migrating from countless villages like Jalcocotán and starting life anew in *barrios* like the one in Sacramento, must have been similar. (1)

Galarza, with his storytelling, is able to link his text to the experiences of many who have come north. Surely numerous immigrants can relate to his narrative that recounts the physical characteristics of immigration; how many, though, will reflect so positively upon their literacy acquisition? Galarza is fortunate that he benefited from strong literacy sponsorship within his family and his community, and apparently was not subjected to the violent means used to Americanize immigrant children; his text therefore reflects a positive literacy experience.

Norma Elia Cantú's *Canícula: Snapshots of a Girlhood en La Frontera* is more difficult to imagine as a literacy narrative because rather than presenting the standard chronological narrative of a life lived, Cantú's is a text filled with photographs, snapshots of her life, which she interprets for the reader. Yet woven throughout the text are instances of literacy, and Cantú's autobiography is fascinating in that she is reading, or rather decoding, the photographs for us and then encoding them with meaning. And why not photos as text? They are documentation of our histories, Cantú poignantly proves, as she "reads" for us the baby photo stapled to her U.S. immigration papers: "The eyes are the same as the ones on another photo where I am twelve – this one stapled to a document that claims I am a Mexican citizen so I can travel with Mamagrande into Mexico without my parents" (21). Cantú effectively narrates what literacy theorist Mary Soliday describes as "commonplace stories" for the reader, making them come alive as "meaningful social dramas"; instead of merely ordinary photos, they are snapshots of a life. In the process of narrating her life, she "defamiliarizes reality for the reader" (Soliday 513-514) in order to infuse with meaning the events recorded by camera.

Like Galarza's text, Cantú's could serve for many Chicanos as an invitation to link one's own life to the one that Cantú has presented, a life that seems not to be hers alone but that of many: her extended family, friends, and community members who are featured in the photos, or whose memories are evoked for Cantú by gazing at the photos. The collective nature of her narrative is a departure from what is considered standard autobiography, and

Cantú is innovative in her vision of reality. With her introduction, Cantú informs us that this text is part of a trilogy that “goes from the late 1800s to the late 1900s” (xi) which brings to mind Genaro Padilla’s discussion of early Mexican American autobiography that links the past with the present. Quoting Pat Mora, Cantú states that “life en *la frontera* [on the border – and this has significance on several levels] is raw truth, and stories of such life, fictitious as they may be, are even truer than true” (ix). And thus Cantú creates for the reader not only a link within her family from era to era, but also, because of the experimental nature of her text that combines imagination with “reality,” a connection with all who live en *la frontera*; this is a collective autobiography that asks readers to take from it those aspects which they can relate to from their own lives. Cantú writes:

As in most fiction, many of the characters and situations in these three works originate in real people and events, and become fictionalized. In *Canícula*, the story is told through the photographs and so what may appear to be autobiographical is not always so. On the other hand, many of the events are completely fictional, although they may be true in a historical context So although it may appear that these stories are my family’s, they are not precisely, and yet they are (xi).

In fact, Cantú calls her work an autobioethnography, and by moving from the individual to the ethnic in her descriptive study, Cantú examines culture and how her identity has emerged from (and yet remains anchored in) that collectivity. Within the text we gain knowledge of her literacy development, again in some ways a collective literacy experience, and that qualifies *Canícula* as a literacy narrative – one that points at common obstacles as well as unique literacy opportunities. And because texts like Cantú’s represent experiences which Chicana/o students do not typically find in standard educational settings, Cantú, with her presentation of an *Other* perspective, also functions powerfully as a literacy sponsor by validating the experiences of many.

Cantú seems intent on turning the notion of autobiography on end, and in this respect she provides the perspective, which can readily be applied to literacy, that nothing is exactly what it seems. Therefore, close examination is in order. Rather than giving a straightforward reading of her life, Cantú, in her epilogue, begins by leaving clues for her reader. In fact, she begins by noting the death of Roland Barthes, a man who developed theories about the reader’s role in understanding ideas about a text based on clues. Significantly, Barthes wrote an “antiautobiography,” and thus we have Cantú’s first clue as to what her intent is. According to Gusdorf, the autobiographer creates a text that is a mirror “in which the individual reflects his own images” (33) so that he can be certain his image will be fixed in the imaginations of

readers, and thus never disappear (30). But Cantú, perhaps in Barthian style, seems to be saying with her photographs that the images do not always reflect truth: "In photos, smiles belie tired aching feet and backs; smiles on serious faces, stiff bodies posed for life" (3). The author, who identifies herself in pictures, some of which reportedly are not even truly Cantú's image but that of another, appears to be asking us to consider reality and how it is constructed, for the autobiographer can say that she is whoever she would like the reader to believe she is.

Cantú is writing an alternative to the traditional autobiography, and maybe this is because some who have been marginalized do not necessarily wish to set themselves apart from the community (and this is in stark contrast to dominant U.S. standards, where individual achievement is a primary value), but rather wish to examine their own individualities based upon the influence of others. She writes that "the stories of her girlhood in the land in-between, *la frontera*, are shared; her story and the stories of the people who lived that life with her are one" (2). Like Galarza, Cantú is keenly aware of the collectively resonating nature of her experience. Yet Cantú also tells of crossing her own personal borders. She describes for us her first school, like those attended by Rolando Hinojosa and Tomás Rivera – Sra. Piña's *escuelita*, which she must cross "both the street highway and an empty block to reach" (102). In this school she learns everything in Spanish, followed by treats of sugar tortillas (102). Positive reinforcements for literacy would perhaps embolden her for later "crossings" involving schools where she "had to pay a fine or write lines as punishment" for using the Spanish she had earlier been rewarded for using well (89).

Cantú has positive literacy sponsorship at a young age that enhanced and reinforced cultural notions that would come into question with her exposure to Anglo schools, where she is tormented for not plucking her eyebrows and shaving, a practice she has gained from her mother and which therefore distinguishes her both positively (because she identifies with her mother's beauty) and negatively (because she disidentifies with dominant cultural ideals for beauty). Cantú's ambivalence in her position as one who is caught between two competing cultures, positioned *en la frontera*, is common and experienced by many who have been marginalized, as their home culture's values clash violently with the dominant one's.

Traditions reinforced in the *escuelitas*, and the severe contrast between the schools, are read by Cantú for us in the photo of Panchita, the Avon lady/school teacher. In this photo, Panchita

Sits amid a group of preschoolers at her *escuelita* where she taught the alphabets – English and Spanish – numbers, colors, and rhymes. The same things she had learned as a child attending one of the earliest *escuelitas* in the twenties. She had learned to read and write in Spanish and became a teacher in a tradition that all but disappeared when Head Start came. (58)

Again we see the continuity that influences Cantú to value both her home culture's literacy as well as the literacy valued in the public schools. Tragically, the public schools did not place the same importance on multiple literacies, which were effectively lost when the government effectively diminished the apparent necessity for the *escuelitas*. However, it is obvious in reading the accounts of their strong positive influence, that there were necessary benefits, irreplaceable by government programs, which have now been lost.

In *Canícula*, we can document Cantú's own push for literacy. She is clearly motivated to learn, writing essays for contests and reading every book in the public library as well as "all the magazines and books 'El Viejo,' Papi's boss at the smelter, was going to throw away and Papi brought home for us – Reader's Digest Condensed Books, *Life* magazine, and comic books" (92). In addition to the reading material that would typically be considered useful for encouraging literacy development, throughout the text Cantú also provides us with other clues to literacy sponsorship. She discusses women's magazines that she reads; tales of *La Llorona* she listens to; the local department store where the family opened up a line of credit in order to buy school supplies (indicating the store's economic interest in sponsoring literacy for the local children); the newspaper where her photo appears after she is honored for receiving good grades; her uncle Maximiliano, who works as a printer; and, as is commonly written of, the Church. It is apparent that Cantú had a rich variety of sponsors to enhance her literacy.

In her reflections of childhood, Cantú recognizes the negative sponsors that made life unfair for Mexican Americans. She declares her anger toward the politicians:

Our money lines their pockets, paves private roads on their ranches, while our streets remain unpaved, run like rivers after every rain, while our public library remains as small as someone's private library; while the dropout rate remains between 50 and 80 percent. (30)

For many in her community, the greater force of negative literacy sponsorship signifies disinterested students; we can imagine, with the obvious lack of interest by local government to put money into resources for Mexican Americans in the region, that the pull toward literacy was nearly nonexistent, which logically affects an individual's push, or self-

motivation, toward literacy. Cantú fortunately had numerous sponsors that enhanced her own push toward literacy; these forces enabled her to escape the more serious effects of literacy's violence. Unfortunately, Cantú's story is not a common one.

More typical for a child of working class Mexican American parents is the story that Luis Rodríguez presents us. His is a strikingly different literacy narrative, relayed in his autobiography titled *Always Running: La Vida Loca: Gang Days in L.A.* Much of Luis's education occurs on the streets of the *barrios* in and around Los Angeles, where he grew up involved with gangs. Luis Rodríguez's autobiography signifies the effect on individuals who live in communities where the school system offers little incentive to learn, especially for non-English speakers; the schools, along with the streets, are locations for violence, and where positive forces are nearly absent. In this uninviting environment, Rodríguez struggled with issues surrounding literacy. But despite the many strikes against him, he managed to develop a strong push toward literacy.

One might assume that Rodríguez's father would have been an important literacy sponsor for him. His father was an educated man, which Luis says was "unusual for our border town" in Mexico. Luis lived his early years in Mexico despite having been born in the U.S.; his father had been a high school principal in the Mexican town that Luis describes as "a hunger city filled to the hills with cardboard hovels of farmer peasants, Indians and dusk-faced children" (14-15). Luis's father had first come to the U.S. on a visa for a study program in Indiana for foreign teachers, and "liked it so much, he renewed it three times" (15). So Luis's family left Mexico because his father was enamored with the life he thought he could build in the U.S. He wished to attain the American Dream. But because of his poor English and the "constraints of society" (136), and because his discourse for literacy was not valued in U.S. society, the man who was formerly an educator in Mexico ended up becoming a school janitor in the U.S. The situation that Luis's father found himself in demonstrates how the social and economic factors here in the U.S. serve to relegate minorities and immigrants, even the well-educated, to lower social positions within society.

Luis's early literacy-based environments were entirely negative. He remembers moving to a series of locations where, he writes, the "schools' teachers were made up of misfits" (46), or in other words, teachers who could not get jobs in the better paying school districts, and had little motivation and/or skill to instruct children who spoke only Spanish. The Rodríguez children did not speak English upon entering school, so their school experience was both abusive and unproductive; unable to understand the language, Luis "just stayed in

the back of the class, building blocks" (26) while his brother's lack of English skills landed him in classes with developmentally disabled children (21). Although he could not understand her words, Luis says of the teacher, "I understood a large part of what she was saying. I knew I wasn't wanted" (26). The message received from this literacy sponsor was that Rodríguez did not speak the proper language to become literate. Given the dismal performance statistics for Mexican American students, we can deduce that the experience Luis's family had is not uncommon. Strong evidence suggests that the mindset persists that Mexican Americans should be educated only minimally, in order to produce a low wage workforce. At any rate, the teachers with attitudes like those in Luis's school certainly would serve to discourage improved literacy.

As a teenager, when Luis finally enters a high school that holds a degree of potential, he is rebuffed when he tries to take classes that truly interest him – photography, advanced art, and literature. He is told that he is not "academically prepared," and that such classes are "privileges for those who have maintained the proper grades in the required courses" (136-137). Rodríguez suffered for not having become enculturated. Having lived entirely among Mexican Americans, he had not interacted with those who have access to the dominant discourse, and therefore could not become "academically prepared." This type of gatekeeping ensures lack of social mobility for those who lack the necessary cultural capital. According to literacy studies scholar James Gee, the necessary enculturation is a "type of apprenticeship that exposes the individual to social practices through scaffolded and supported interaction with people who have already mastered the [dominant] Discourse" (527), which then leads to greater access to literacy. White middle-class students have access as insiders to social practices that the marginalized are blocked from. Luis did not have access, and could not gain access without the proper sponsorship. Through Rodríguez's narrative, we can see how the marginalized continue to be disenfranchised by a system that devalues those outside the mainstream, and how privileges are continually bestowed on the already privileged.

Despite his "social disadvantages," Luis had the makings of a scholar early on. He writes of his keen interest in literature; he was drawn to literature, but because of the language barrier, had to struggle with literacy. He writes:

The fact was I didn't know anything about literature. I had fallen through the chasm between two languages. The Spanish had been beaten out of me in the early years of school – and I didn't learn English very well either. This was the predicament of many Chicanos (219).

It is only when Luis begins reading literature by and about the disenfranchised – Eldredge Cleaver’s *Soul on Ice* and *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* which relate the Black experience, and Puerto Rican author Piri Thomas’s autobiography, *Down These Mean Streets*, which relates the story of a Spanish-speaking boy in a white-dominant society - that he begins to examine the experiences of the marginalized. This was literature he felt a connection with (Rodríguez 138); he could identify with the subjects and therefore literacy held social relevance for him. In the books Luis began to read, he was discovering politics, philosophy, economics – “the dynamics of social revolution” (156). This is the type of positive literacy that reflects Freire’s model for empowerment and ultimately for social change. Luis had begun to develop critical consciousness, an indication that he was intervening in his education; texts that more accurately reflected his own reality would lead him, ultimately, to transform his world.

Deborah Brandt, in *Literacy in American Lives*, writes of a similar phenomenon occurring in the African American community. Brandt suggests that the civil rights movement was a type of literacy sponsor for many because suddenly there were printing presses producing material by Black authors and providing relevant material for its intended audience. Brandt writes:

Rising literacy levels were vital to the development of the mass consciousness on which the civil rights struggle depended for its many local manifestations and successes. At the same time, the need for political activism stimulated reading and writing in the lives of ordinary African Americans of various ages and classes through out the second half of the twentieth century. In very practical ways, mass literacy and mass movement were realized together (134).

For Chicanos, too, during the civil rights movement there were emerging presses that were producing texts by Chicano writers for the first time in history, and this not only encouraged literacy for its potential audience, but also led to raised consciousness levels. One of the results of publishing Chicano texts was the recuperation of the mother tongue and the legitimization of “Spanglish,” the language of the *barrio* that blends Spanish with English into a kind of poetry on the written page. As Luis’s consciousness grows with his literacy, his social activism begins as he serves as a sponsor for others. Monica Brown writes in *Gang Nation*:

Growing more knowledgeable about his cultural heritage, Rodríguez gets involved with a youth center that provides the Lomas gang members with their first-ever recreation facility. Under the director's mentorship, Rodríguez joins in the student activism that leads to the opening of the first Chicano student center at his high school. (72)

This contribution to the local community influences the lives of his neighbors. And as he begins writing, just as Piri Thomas and others had so deeply affected his life, Luis Rodríguez also becomes a sponsor for others' literacy. As a published author describing his experiences within an unwelcoming society, he is able to affect the consciousness of many young people with few (or no) relevant literacy sponsors.

In his literacy narrative, Luis Rodríguez is openly intent upon instructing others through his storytelling; he understands that his is a collective experience. Dismayed by what occurs daily in Chicano neighborhoods, he notes the craziness of a phenomenon where the frustration and anger stay within the community rather than being directed at those with power. Of Chicano youth he writes: "They murder and they are killing themselves, over and over" (9). Aware of his potential capacity to help others based on his own successes, Rodríguez serves as a literacy sponsor for Chicanos because literacy is an identity practice, and many can relate to his experiences much more than they can relate to much of the material that is presented, uncritically, in their schools. Rodríguez, who once wrote an opinion piece in the Los Angeles Times titled, "Pages of Power: Before you censor me, know this: Books can save lives" (www.luisjrodriguez.com), works to provide Chicanos with both literature that is relevant and a voice in literature, as well as creating situations for greater literacy sponsorship in marginalized settings. To this end he helped create the publishing house of Tía Chucha, and has spent 25 years conducting workshops in juvenile facilities, migrant camps, homeless shelters, schools, and universities (www.luisjrodriguez.com), as a sponsor of literacy.

Role models who write, like Luis Rodríguez does in his literacy narrative, serve to influence and educate others by presenting the message that the underprivileged in society are not responsible for their situation. Instead, his text draws to the forefront the violence of literacy as he describes how systemized oppression is the root of many of the problems faced by the youth in his community. Oppression in the schools denies Chicano youth appropriate educational opportunities, which then limits economic opportunities. Yet the repercussions that stem from the perpetual limitation of opportunities remain largely in the affected community, leading society to place the blame on the already victimized.

Rodríguez's hope is that by articulating the social factors which relegate many Chicanos and other minorities to the lowest rungs of society's ladder, common assumptions can no longer prevail – assumptions such as the notion that it is acceptable for white students to have better school facilities and teachers; assumptions that there is something essential in the nature of Chicanos that would lead them to take drugs, drop out of school, and kill one another; and assumptions that Chicanos cannot succeed despite grave odds against them, including a lack of positive literacy sponsors.

And so despite the often-violent nature of literacy for Chicanos, each of the authors I have discussed, in his or her own way, uses the power of their own literacy to sponsor others towards literacy and improved consciousness. As literacy sponsors, they are additionally helping to shape the identities of young Chicanos who often feel tremendous ambivalence within school systems that devalue Mexican and Mexican American culture.

When we look at the *escuelitas* that helped shape the young lives of Rolando Hinojosa, Tomás Rivera, and Norma Elia Cantú, and the real-life lessons related to literacy provided by Ernesto Galarza's mother, we can see how certain counter-hegemonic literacy sponsors provided tools for these future authors to develop understanding, in their native language, of their home culture and the values of the community. These tools then helped them to develop a strong foundation before they encountered the violence inflicted through dominant discourse in the public schools. These "little schools" have nearly disappeared, but their influence is felt in the voices of authors like Hinojosa, Rivera, and Cantú, who serve as role models for young Chicanos by writing to validate cultural values that are all but absent from the public schools. In addition, the strength of powerful written documentation of literary identities informed by the violence inflicted of an unaccepting society, as a means to reshape a person's perspective, can be seen in Luis Rodríguez's turnabout after discovering writers who empowered him through their literacy sponsorship. And when we look at the adults who told *cuentos*, histories, *chistes*, *corridos*, and proverbs to their young audiences, we can see how those storytellers, too, not only shaped the way that Chicano authors write their contemporary tales, but also were invaluable literacy sponsors for children who were not receiving affirmation in the world outside their communities.

These literacy narratives demonstrate the enabling pull of literacy alongside an excess of disabling sponsors that do not value literacy for Mexican American children. Through their narratives, we can clearly see the push that these authors had that enabled them to overcome the barriers to literacy. Unfortunately, these writers' positive experiences

are not so common. It is a societal tragedy that literacy sponsorship more commonly involves the violent and oppressive forces that serve to disable the student and reshape him in the form of the Americanized student who conforms to dominant norms.

Chapter Two -- Richard Rodríguez: Privileging the Dominant Discourse

Once there was a young boy whose skin was brown – a feature that determined his status in society - and he started school in the United States. His parents were from Mexico, and the language that they spoke with their children was Spanish. So, when the little boy began school, he was confused because he could not understand his teachers. He preferred to be at home, comforted by the loving sounds of his family. But one day, the nuns from his school came to his home and told the parents that the young boy must learn English. They told the parents that they must discontinue speaking to their children in Spanish, and speak only in English, or their children would never learn the language, and this would lead to their failure as students. The parents, who were devout Catholics and thus had absolute faith in the Church, believed the nuns, so from that day forward, Spanish was no longer heard in their home. It was as though his schoolteachers had taken a large eraser and had begun erasing the knowledge of this boy's language and culture from his mind and began writing a new script into his unsuspecting thoughts.

The boy's parents were intent upon seeing their children succeed by becoming middle-class in this new country. To this end they made certain to buy a home in a neighborhood far from other Mexicans; so their children learned the unusual ways of their white neighbors rather than living in a barrio near other families speaking Spanish and enjoying the rich cultural traditions of los mexicanos.

This couple wanted so badly to blend in; they wanted to be Americans, and so it was necessary to be a certain way. To the mother's way of thinking, her son had two strikes against him – the wrong color skin in a color-coded society, and the wrong language in a society so linguistically narrow. Thus when the nuns offered the key to assured success, the tool of language, the parents chose accordingly. And little by little, as Ricardo became Richard, he became more comfortable with the sounds of English while losing his beloved Spanish.

The years passed, and Richard became not simply a good student, he became an exemplary student. Soon, he was a model for American success in the classroom, particularly because he was a Mexican American boy and not many Mexicans seemed to succeed in American classrooms. He was the great American success story.

And now, this boy has become a man who gives lectures about great literature. He tells the American people that it is necessary for brown children to lose the language of their homes in order to become middle-class. He claims that bilingual education is a nonsensical thing that disables the second language student and forever leaves him at a disadvantage. Ironically, Richard's story, which speaks of the tragedy (for the loss of culture and identity) that comes with triumph, has received a kind of status in our American canon of tales that depict the protagonist's victory over adversity. For his story, which details the formula for minority assimilation into American society, is the only sanctioned story for success in America for those on the margins. – A vignette, Chris Bowman

People tell stories to entertain, to give information, to teach lessons, and essentially, to influence the audience. In the vignette above, I have told a story, a narrative, with the intent of teaching the reader about the dangers that may occur when a child enters a school system to become educated. As in any storytelling, my narrative uses only those details that I hope will influence my audience to agree with my viewpoint, while excluding those details that may lead the reader to another point of view. When people tell stories then, there is always an agenda by the teller(s) to shape the listener's imagination in a particular way, and it is always subjective. In this chapter I examine a particular literacy narrative that tells the story of how Richard Rodríguez's education, or literacy acquisition, provided particular details and excluded other important ones, and I discuss why the effects of such an exclusionary curricula on a child from a marginalized population are tremendous. My point is that education, too, involves a type of storytelling, and the institution of education is cultural pedagogy. When we think of the various storytellers that influence children, the teachers in their schools cannot be excluded. Educator Paulo Freire describes the teacher-student relationship as always having a *narrative* character; and he argues that because in most educational settings there fails to be a dialogue between educators and students, education is "suffering from narration sickness" (209). In other words, the teacher is simply depositing information into the unsuspecting minds of the students rather than enabling them to be active learners, drawing from their own cultural depositories for depth of meaning.

An analysis of the story that Richard Rodríguez tells will reveal the ways in which the education system, with its promise of literacy, is used as a tool for the effective reproduction of Western cultural hegemony. In the process of gaining academic literacy, Rodríguez, a man who boasts of having gained a public voice through literacy, has instead become one more instrument for advancing dominant ideology. And the most troublesome aspect of the education process that Rodríguez and others in his situation endure is the deliberate erasure of the home language, and with it a large degree of the family's culture, to be replaced with a different set of values and ideas which have come to represent the "American" ideology.

Rodríguez's 1982 autobiography, *Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez*, a narrative in which he tells the story of his language acquisition, could be understood uncritically as nothing more than a typical coming-of-age tale, the classic *bildungsroman*, with the character dealing with conflict in a manner that ultimately permits him, after the inevitable loss of his innocence, to realize what he sees as full individuality. If we simply focus upon the story that Rodríguez tells, it is possible that we will understand the details of his life and perhaps be persuaded by Rodríguez's message that it is necessary to

set aside the language and comfort of the home in order to develop literacy and enjoy the power that is reserved solely for the fully literate individual. For Rodríguez tells a persuasive tale; indeed, he tells us that his history is “a parable for the life of its reader. Here is the life of a middle-class man” (7). Thus he is suggesting that the information of his life, as presented in his words, is analogous to a truth that comes with following the troubled path that he has taken -- this path leads one to become a part of the middle-class, and thus worthy of the rewards that come with such status. This is the message that Rodríguez wishes to teach, for this is the message that Rodríguez received in the process of acquiring literacy, and it is easy enough to be persuaded by his argument if we simply listen to his presentation and view the tangible effects of his education.

But Rodríguez’s story neglects to address the social and political elements involved in the process of language acquisition. In order to examine the less evident effects of Rodríguez’s education, I am applying rhetorician Seymour Chatman’s theory on ethnographic narrative in order to emphasize the difference between the events that occur, and the way in which events are expressed in the narrative. This distinction is crucial because, as literacy scholar Linda Brodkey points out, “when narrators focus on the story, readers tend to forget that someone is telling it” (109). Therefore, key to understanding Rodríguez’s narrative (as well as the narrative for literacy acquisition presented within this society) is to remember that he is telling it from a particular vantage point, and his presentation of the events that transformed him from a “socially disadvantaged” child (3) to a “public man” (7) are revealing. In fact, reading Rodríguez’s text provides the reader with a critical vantage point for understanding literacy acquisition through literacy narrative. The way that Rodríguez constructs his story tells us as much about this socialization process as the events surrounding his education.

The colonial order has placed Rodríguez, and all Mexican Americans, on the margins. Rodríguez, then, spent his childhood struggling to move toward the center by learning the only valued discourse, that of the dominant culture. Thus we should look upon Rodríguez’s text as representing a particular type of conflict that reflects broader social and political discourses. For Rodríguez, the tension involves choosing between Spanish, which not only represents family but also a set of cultural values that have capital within the Mexican American community (and very little within the dominant culture), and English, which in Rodríguez’s eyes is the only language that can be recognized within the public domain. The trade-off, the lure for Rodríguez, was the notion that he could attain success - the American Dream as presented from the dominant perspective - if he traded his home

language for (what he has been told is) the language of public discourse. The key to attaining this success is to become literate, and this type of literacy is defined solely by those who wield power in the dominant society.

The Literacy Myth

Literacy studies scholars Janet Carey Eldred and Peter Mortensen suggest that literacy narratives are stories that “foreground issues of language acquisition and literacy” by using tropes for literacy that have been internalized by the writer (513). A better understanding of how tropes function will illuminate their role in reflecting and influencing values in a culture. A trope can be seen as a “rhetorical code,” and understanding the codes gives a person membership within a particular culture. Most figures of speech, because they have become a part of the lexicon, have become transparent – we do not give thought to their significance. Because of their transparency, we generally do not notice that these figures of speech act as a way of familiarizing us with the dominant ways of thinking in our society. The repetition of these tropes then “subtly sustains our tacit agreement with the shared assumptions of our society” (Chandler). These assumptions can be seen as that society’s myths. If we consider Jung’s belief that myths are stories that unfold the worldviews of a people, that indeed create a “collective consciousness” (or unconsciousness), we can begin to understand the power that tropes have to shape and maintain beliefs. Thus, tropes for literacy such as “books will open doors,” in this case an object presenting an idea, contain a rhetorical message that is culturally specific but that creates shared assumptions about literacy and its benefits. Such tropes shape what Eldred and Mortensen, among others, have called the literacy myth.

For those who subscribe to the literacy myth, that becoming literate in the traditional sense leads to economic development, cultural progress, and individual improvement (Eldred and Mortensen 512), Richard Rodríguez represents the great American success story, for he indeed gains power through knowledge. But there is an irony in analyzing his literacy narrative in relation to oppression and resistance, since he is the product of the literacy myth. The son of immigrant parents, a child who had to learn English in order to survive in a school system that maintained an ‘English only’ policy, Rodríguez not only survived the system, but in fact mastered its language and the system’s techniques to become a writer. Due to his education, he now almost certainly earns more money as a lecturer and essayist for various national publications than his working class parents ever did, thus signaling economic

improvement. As a scholar, he has become a custodian of books and their knowledge-making power.

Rodríguez has absorbed the cultural values of the middle-class society in which he lives, and as a consequence of his adoption of dominant cultural values, he has assumed the role of cultural instructor, both as a literary scholar and as a lecturer on cultural matters. In this way he facilitates “cultural progress.” As a vocal opponent of bilingual education and affirmative action, measures designed to increase opportunities for minorities, the academically successful Rodríguez represents for the conservatives intent upon maintaining the status quo a minority voice that lends credence to the argument in favor of English-only in schools and the belief that anyone can pull himself up by the bootstraps through determination and hard work.

Because Rodríguez, a beneficiary of affirmative action, possesses a PhD in English, by typically class-conscious ‘American’ standards, he has improved himself substantially, and he displays his status by wearing “double-breasted Italian suits and custom-made English shoes” (136), valuable markers that represent Old World (i.e. European) excellence. Because of his successes, Rodríguez has been given the opportunity, as media spokesperson and intellectual, to be one of the few voices representing the “successful” Hispanic (the term he prefers) in the U.S.

For those who subscribe to the literacy myth or who read his narrative uncritically, Richard Rodríguez, the writer, celebrity, and public intellectual, is an example of the close relation that literacy has to certain democratic and enlightenment ideologies. They see success as a natural and unproblematic result of literacy, rather than the notion of enlightenment being highly subjective and tied to power structures. Rodríguez’s passage from a working class family whose first language was not English to the middle class appeals to the romantic idea that any child can be molded by his teachers into a literate individual who will then become a productive member of society. This idealistic vision of the student from a working class, non-native English-speaking family, and his story of success is based upon assumptions, however, that fail to accurately embody the student’s experience with literacy acquisition (Eldred and Mortensen 516). Moreover, this vision presents the literacy process as unproblematic.

The romanticized vision that singles out the working-class student who eagerly embraces his education fails to take into account the problems involved with the literacy

process for those from marginalized cultures, who bring with them to school diverse values and ideologies which rarely are represented in the classroom. One cannot deny Rodríguez's success, but his token status is confusing because it is presented as the story of the abstract individual who chooses freely. However, throughout Rodríguez's text we see one example after another of problematic choices: "I grew up victim to a disabling confusion. As I grew fluent in English, I no longer could speak Spanish with confidence" (28). So while one language is being valued in the classroom, the other is becoming obsolete for him, due to the lack of value placed upon Spanish. This is common according to Brodkey, who writes,

[I]n the course of privileging those ways of knowing and telling (the ideologies) that serve dominant interests such as capitalism, schools ignore other ways of knowing and telling that might speak more directly or fruitfully to the interests of nondominant groups" (109).

The unsuspecting and compliant child follows the path most readily presented. And along with the devalued language, whole histories that relay the experiences of nondominant groups are excluded from U.S. classrooms. The result of presenting only European and European-American texts and histories, and only in English, is the effective exclusion of those whose families do not share those narratives, leading to devalued identities. In addition, the child who does not grow up listening to Mother Goose rhymes and speaking English, because of their importance as cultural capital, is at a marked disadvantage from the day he enters school. This child, if he can manage to overcome his confusion, is left with the feeling that he must discard his home literacies in favor of the dominant one in order to succeed. And what goes unmentioned is the price exacted for those individuals who acquire this type of literacy. The romantic, from-a-distance glance at Richard Rodríguez's narrative, then, provides us with the largely unproblematized version of a man who has achieved success through literacy based upon acquiring the type of cultural capital that is valued by mainstream society while devaluing all other ways of knowing, and perhaps, too, the devaluing of self.

The Story for a Nation – The Canon and American Ideology

Non-native English speakers and/or those who deviate from the hegemonic model are categorized as Other, and education for this group involves a process of "Americanization," or cultural reproduction. Education's role in perpetuating literacy is that it institutionalizes. Educators therefore are presented with the task (for they, too, have been

schooled in the belief system which presents the “Western tradition” as the only true knowledge) of narrating the story of “America” from the perspective of the hegemonic group. Accordingly, teachers present information to students that necessarily portrays the values and legacies of the dominant group as superior to any other and the standard for this society (Shafer 25). This reproduction, as critical education theorist Henry Giroux writes, “refers to texts and social practices whose messages, inscribed within specific historic settings and social contexts, function primarily to legitimate the interests of the dominant order” (87). We need only look at the texts that Rodriguez reads in school, and then proudly re-presents in his own text as invaluable to his development as a successful individual in this society, to begin to understand the system of reproduction for maintenance of societal control at its most effective.

In Chapter Two of Rodriguez’s narrative, we learn of his literacy acquisition and the impact that books began to have on his life when Rodriguez is given a list of books to read, and told that “reading would open up whole new worlds” (61) for him, a trope for literacy. The story that Rodriguez was being presented by his teachers becomes even more apparent when we consider the books on the list he is given, for they represent a world different from his own; they indeed open up a new world for him, distinct from the one he had been living in. By selecting books that represent the values and ideas that dominate a particular cultural tradition, the message being unconsciously expressed to the student is that literacy involves absorbing the value system presented in the suggested texts. Rodriguez notes that in the fourth grade (and by then he is a student wholly enamored by his instructors and their authority), he began asking what he should read (“Give me the names of important books”) (61). With list in hand, Rodriguez proceeded to read, among others, *The Scarlet Letter* and Franklin’s *Autobiography*; *Great Expectations* and Kipling; the *Iliad*; *Moby Dick*; *Gone with the Wind*; *The Good Earth*; *Ramona*; *Crime and Punishment*; and so on (61). And with each book that he completed, he “reported the achievement to a teacher and basked in the praise” (61). So we see that Rodriguez is receiving positive reinforcement for following the wishes (or unspoken rules for success) of his teachers.

The list of books is significant because they are books that thematically fit neatly within what can be termed a “Western tradition” of literature, or the revered canon of literature. Literary critic E.D. Hirsch, whose 1987 book *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* seems to have created for the guardians of the dominant order a validated list of what is important in this society, argues that a common cultural literacy is imperative in the creation of a strong society. He insists that there is not a culture which

“exists that is ignorant of its own traditions” (167); but the values and traditions which Hirsch is referring to are quite narrowly defined and exclusive. Intent upon more forcefully re-establishing in the schools a canon of “Great Books” in order to ensure a literate democracy, Hirsch maintains that every child should become a “common reader” (indicating a shared knowledge of the canon), but insists that the material must remain “within the dominant British heritage” (160). Hirsch is arguing for a universality that excludes material that fails to mirror the (largely) British model. The creation of such a “national literature” in no way reflects accurately the history of the U.S., but nonetheless has become a tradition (Berlin 7) that goes undisputed and is in reality unrepresentative due to its glaring omissions and distortion of facts. The creation of a standard set of literary texts, however, has led to a definition of what “literary values” should be (Berlin 7), so that any text that deviates from those values is not considered worthwhile literature.

Such standardization, the elevation of key texts that highlight the values of the dominant group, is fundamental to reproduction of those values in the society because it requires only that students passively memorize the people and their works important to reinforcing a value system, while disregarding all others. Right wing political groups, intent upon maintaining the “rhythms of power,” have become astute at recognizing which books reflect the desired cultural values (Shafer 25); hence the maintenance of a list of relevant works. When Hirsch calls this information canonical, accepted as the standard, he is “suggesting it is essential not only to reading comprehension, but also to membership in the social group” (Bizzell 145), or membership as an “American.” Indeed, not only did Rodríguez claim his membership in society upon his acceptance of English as his primary language (“At last, seven years old, I came to believe what had been technically true since my birth: I was an American citizen” 22), but he also writes of the positive change the “Americanization” of their children had on his parents (whom, it is important to note, did *not* qualify as “American”) and their confidence in public. Upon their status change, his mother, too, changed; he writes: “She learned the names of all the people on our block. And she decided we needed to have a telephone installed in the house” (23). Rodríguez’s parents continue to speak heavily accented English, but for Rodríguez the evidence is clear – his whole family’s standard of living improves when one accepts the notion that the dominant norm, to speak in English, brings rewards.

Mastering English through reading the Euro-centric canon was the first step in the process toward Richard’s Americanization, followed by one-on-one reading sessions with a nun who read her favorite texts to him, “usually biographies of early American presidents”

(60), an indication that Rodríguez's instructors were provided (and providing) the same message as Hirsch about what information should be valued. This creation of a common reader functions to shape in the imaginations of readers an idea of what it is to be "American," and this model is based upon a European ancestry. Thus the mainstream European-American child, through his hereditary association with the prescribed histories, is positioned at the center of the school curriculum while all others are marginalized, and their "cultural and linguistic differences are treated as deviations from the norm" (Reyes and Halcon 4). The marginalized child, who typically does not possess the white skin or the "right" native heritage that will enable him to move closer to the center and claim the "American" identity, must learn more than the ABCs which lead to reading and writing – he must acquire the *cultural* literacy that helps anchor dominant ideology.

Hirsch, who unapologetically elevates English as the only acceptable American language, writes that language skill is more than words as "counters of language"; words, in fact, represent "large underlying domains of content" (Hirsch 164), which the individual must be privy to in order to be a legitimate member of the society. Hirsch is right about the fabric of language. As rhetoric and composition scholar James Berlin points out, language is a

pluralistic and complex system of signification that constructs realities rather than simply presenting or reflecting them. Our conceptions of material and social phenomena, then, are fabrications of signification, the products of culturally coded signs (58).

Therefore, not only the stories presented in the texts, but also the meaning embedded within the language itself, functioned to construct a new reality for Rodríguez. Richard Rodríguez was forced to give up his native Spanish, complete with its own underlying domains of content, in favor of English; therefore, this new language must be viewed as more than simply a conveyor of words as direct translations. Instead it must be seen as a tool for conveying cultural messages as well. Consequently the story that Rodríguez is presented throughout his school years teaches him that he should learn about values, *Puritan* values, from Nathaniel Hawthorne; about romance from D.H. Lawrence; about controlling the "uncivilized" Other in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*; about class distinctions from Orwell; and about self-improvement from Ben Franklin. These authors shaped Rodríguez's imagination. He writes that reading enabled him to "sense something of the shape, the major concerns, of Western thought" (63); any other type of thought apparently lacks importance. Nonetheless, he was unable to critically evaluate all that he had been presented, and thus he read "in order to acquire a point of view" (64). The perspective that he then developed was based upon his

cultural literacy as a “common reader,” or one who entered the text with a standard set of core values. This commonality, in Rodríguez’s mind, made him an American; but for those who see the “American” as white-skinned and of European ancestry, no amount of cultural literacy will make a difference.

Rodríguez’s acquisition of cultural literacy in the classroom illustrates the manner in which schools function to supply a system of ideas. Indeed, the education system is one of the central agencies for nation building. But this notion of nation building is limited and exclusive. It fails to address the history of “Others,” and it does not instruct regarding the ways in which the ideals of the nation fall short of fulfilling the promise of democracy. In the classroom, “values of citizenship are underlined, patriotism is legitimized through particular views of the nation’s history, and binding all of this is the particular language or languages in which the curriculum is offered” (Mar-Molinero 113). Rodríguez’s *Hunger for Memory* reinforces these ideas, and its valorization of English-only schooling contributes to the monolithic literacy myth.

The Importance of Language

Richard Rodríguez grew up in two literacy worlds, and thus we can view him as a paradigm for Mexican American students. In the world at home with his parents and his siblings, his early communication was in Spanish, where he says he listened to the comforting “tender accents of sound” (24) that his family spoke with him. When he began school he felt alienated, unable to communicate in the language valued by his educators. Those teachers, in turn, looked upon him with dismay for his lack of comprehension. His story, if we were to stop at this point in the narrative, could be the story of countless other non-native English speakers in the United States, many of whom end up never finishing school because this alienation and confusion continues throughout their years in school.

Conventional wisdom maintains that from a practical perspective it is an important and necessary aspect of schooling that all students learn to speak the same language, plain and simple, just as all students must learn arithmetic. But as linguist and education scholar Lily Wong Fillmore points out,

To many and perhaps most Americans, English is more than a societal language: it is an ideology. The ideological stance is this: To be American, one must speak English . . . English gives access to participation in the life of a society, but it is also proof of an individual’s acceptance of and loyalty to the American ideal (207).

We hear this sentiment in the words of Rodríguez: "What I needed to learn in school was that I had the right – and the obligation – to speak the public language of *los gringos*" (19). And it is this ideology that makes the issue of English acquisition not simply practical, but political: the non-native English speaker is forced to choose which language he or she is going to be loyal to. In fact, according to journalist and bilingual education researcher James Crawford, historically, language politics has meant that "language predominated as symbol, weapon, and stake of ethnic conflict" (Crawford 3).

Thus, the tensions over language have less to do with improving the chances for an individual to thrive in this society, than with marking language as a threat to the Western European paradigm that many cling to as imperative to the American culture. Language is inextricably linked to culture, or in other words, *ethnic* culture. If we consider cultural historian Ron Takaki's assertion that in the "creation of our national identity, 'American' has been defined as 'white'"(2), it becomes apparent that for many from the dominant culture, the use of languages other than English in the U.S. is seen as a way of upsetting the social order.

Thus, Rodríguez develops ideas about the positioning of languages as social tools, necessarily divided for very specific usage. This division relegated Spanish to private language status, and English, the one acceptable to the outside world, as public. He writes:

I couldn't really believe that Spanish was a public language, like English. Spanish speakers, rather, seemed related to me, for I sensed that we shared – through our language – the experience of feeling apart from *los gringos*. It was thus a ghetto Spanish that I heard and I spoke. Like those whose lives are bound by a *barrio*, I was reminded by Spanish of my separateness from *los otros*, *los gringos* in power (16).

Rodríguez, therefore, must cross over into another language world, the one he had once felt separate from. Reflecting the claims that Wong Fillmore and Crawford make, he privileges this dominant discourse from which he can gain power, over his home discourse. In this conversion he proves his acceptance of, and loyalty to, the dominant ideology. In fact, Rodríguez carefully illustrates for us the process in which this shift in loyalty occurs:

I needed a full year of attention. I also needed my teachers to keep my attention from straying in class by calling out, *Rich-heard* – their English voices slowly prying loose my ties to my other name, its three notes, *Ri-car-do*. Most of all I needed to hear my mother and father speak to me in a moment of seriousness in broken – suddenly heartbreaking – English (21).

In Rodríguez's words, despite the ultimate choice he makes, the emotion in his decision is palpable as his straying loyalty is wrenched away from the familiar and attached to the more socially advantageous. When the nuns anglicize Rodríguez's name there is a symbolic break that leads to his acceptance of the new language. The school has instigated a battle over language and culture, with English the symbolic weapon. As Rodríguez works toward becoming more proficient with his English, he becomes more horrified with his parents' incapacity as English speakers. He writes, "It was one thing for *me* to speak English with difficulty. It was more troubling for me to hear my parents speak in public Hearing them, I'd grow nervous, my clutching trust in their protection and power weakened" (14-15). This passage clearly illustrates the violence of literacy, as Rodríguez becomes intolerant of his parents' struggle with the language that he will soon master; for him, they seem to represent those who cannot claim their place legitimately as "Americans," for they have not mastered the language and the culture, and thus have become impotent to him. Rodríguez therefore has lost more than his desire to speak Spanish – in a sense he has lost his family.

It is clear that, beyond being a tool for communication, language symbolizes a marker for conflict between groups of people, but additionally it signifies much more. As Native American philosopher and Modern Languages scholar Robert Bunge points out, "language is not just another thing we do as humans; it is *the* thing we do. It is a total environment; we live in the language as a fish lives in water. It is the audible and visible manifestation of the soul of a people" (376). Language is more than a literal means for telling; there is a set of values encoded within language, for language is infused with meaning, or codes for understanding; these learned codes are necessary for literacy acquisition.

For Richard though, his literacy is devoid of his home language and its set of values, and therefore the alteration of his name signifies a great deal; he is being socialized to change as a new identity is being forced upon him, and perhaps it is this reality which causes the greatest heartbreak and leads to the immense ambivalence that comes through in his writing. Because his educators expected Richard to begin viewing the world through a lens that presented so many things in a manner philosophically different from what he was accustomed to, creating a clash of conflicting logics, we cannot look upon the socialization process that led to Rodríguez's literacy as unproblematic.

The Great Divide

What is perhaps most unfortunate in this socialization process is the notion that an individual has to choose between one way of knowing and being and another, setting up a series of dichotomies that determine that one is either an insider or an outsider, and included in this binary are views surrounding literacy. Brodkey writes that in anthropology, literacy is a marker used to differentiate between traditional and modern societies (82). In fact, anthropologists have devised a “‘scientific’ distinction between civilized and savage cultures” (Eldred and Mortensen 527), and definitions of literacy have helped to uphold these distinctions. Communications scholar Daniel Chandler writes,

Theorists involved in the comparative analysis of modes of communication frequently assume or refer to a binary divide or dichotomy between different kinds of society or human experience: 'primitive' vs. 'civilized', 'simple' vs. 'advanced', 'pre-logical' vs. 'logical', 'pre-rational' vs. 'rational', 'pre-analytic' vs. 'analytic', 'mythopoeic' vs. 'logico-empirical', 'traditional' vs. 'modern', 'concrete' vs. 'scientific', 'oral' vs. 'visual', or 'pre-literate' vs. 'literate'. Such pairings are often also regarded as virtually interchangeable: so that modernity equals advanced equals civilization equals literacy equals rationality and so on Binary accounts have been referred to as '*Great Divide*' theories. Such theories tend to suggest radical, deep and basic differences between modes of thinking in non-literate and literate societies. They are often associated with attempts to develop grand theories of social organization and development (Chandler).

This binary vision, when applied to literacy, serves to privilege those who use writing and thus are considered literate over cultures without a written language. Regarding literacy, language theorists Walter Ong and Jack Goody, among others, theorized that only through literacy can a person achieve higher order thinking. And while we know that Rodríguez's parents are literate by the standard definition – they can read and write -- we understand through Rodríguez's narrative that he views himself as distinguished from their 'traditional' mindset due to his gained cultural literacy. Indeed, in his conception of the world Rodríguez indicates in his coming-of-age story that “I became a man by becoming a public man” (7), suggesting that it was necessary to cross a divide and travel beyond the private world he had lived in as an Hispanic child (implying that those who do not make this passage will forever remain handicapped in the limited realm characterized by the private and intimate).

Rodríguez insists upon this public/private split based upon historical conceptions of the roles of the public sphere versus the private sphere, and the dichotomy that results from this divide. The public sphere has been regarded as a space where opinions are exchanged, while private spaces, usually associated with women, were linked with

intimacy. Public spaces were places where one could position oneself politically. Implicit in this construction of space were qualities such as rationality, objectivity, individuality, and critical judgment, all, incidentally, qualities associated with men. Private spaces then embody characteristics associated with women – sensuality, comfort, and dependence (Goswami). Rodríguez makes clear the comfort he draws from his home: “Intimate moments were usually soft moments of sound. My mother was in the dining room while I did my homework nearby” (32). Yet private spaces are feminized spaces in the private/public binary, and Rodríguez links Spanish with the private space, thus implying that it lacks strength in the public sector. He writes that “Spanish was associated with closeness” (30), and regards all that is intimate to him, including his language and culture, with the private. Rodríguez, in fact, associates the private with all of the traits that signal differences between individuals, such as “culture, language, ethnicity, race, and implicitly, gender and sexual preference” (de Castro 403). Conversely, English is associated with openness, with public spaces. As Rodríguez learns English, and speaks more English in his home with his family, he determines that English opens up public spaces for him. Rodríguez concludes that the great change in his life was not due to loss of language, but instead to a shift in social practices. He notes that “if, after becoming a successful student, I no longer heard intimate voices as often as I had earlier, it was not because I spoke English rather than Spanish. It was because I used public language for most of the day” (32).

But while Rodríguez initially feels the comfort of doing homework in his home with his mother nearby, this changes as he adopts new social practices in his acculturation process; soon he prefers the regimented order of his school in contrast to the chaos he observes in his home, reflecting the perspective of modernism as a cultural formation. In “modern societies”, there is fear of anything that can be considered as “disorder,” because it may disrupt the order that has been created for that society. Modernism theorist Mary Klages notes that “modern societies rely on continually establishing a binary opposition between ‘order’ and ‘disorder,’ so that they can assert the superiority of ‘order.’ . . . In western culture, this disorder becomes ‘the other’” (Klages 3).

In Rodríguez’s text, it is just such a binary that is set up. We hear the story of his need to separate from the Other, from the disorder of the home, where “the house is too noisy for study” (46), preferring to join the ordered world of the classroom, which is more conducive to higher order thinking: “There are even rows of desks. Discussion is ordered. The boy must rehearse his thoughts . . . And there is time enough, and silence, to think about ideas (big ideas) never considered at home by his parents” (47). Consequently, even

Rodríguez's own parents are relegated to Other status in his text, which then serves to reinforce the binaries necessary for maintaining an ordered society, an *American* society.

In this colonial binary, the quality perhaps most valued in the notion of the "American" is the concept of individuality, which is contrasted with community. In his chapter titled "The Achievement of Desire," Rodríguez produces an argument for the individuality that comes from solitude – individuality that is deemed an essential quality in "Americans" – and the necessity for the austere and unforgiving education that led to his literacy. Individuality is set in contrast with community, which is chaotic. Solitude, he argues, is imperative for reflection, and is hard to come by for the child from the working class family, whose home is typically disordered and noisy. According to the account that Rodríguez quotes from Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy*, "There is a corner of the living-room table [for studying]. On the other side Mother is ironing, the wireless is on, someone is singing a snatch of song or Father says intermittently whatever comes into his head" (47), suggesting in his words the lack of a proper learning environment for the serious student.

Rodríguez has also set up a contrast between the qualities of the working class, who are often regarded with condescending affection, and the ordered world of his educators. Rodríguez, apparently on a quest for self-discovery in the British Museum, locates the book by cultural critic Richard Hoggart, the scholar who emerged from a similarly chaotic upbringing in his working-class family in Great Britain. Rodríguez discovers himself in Hoggart's descriptions, as Hoggart details the difficulties encountered by the determined and exceptional working-class student, the scholarship boy, in contrast to typical working-class children, who, in Rodríguez's words "are barely changed by the classroom" (47-48). Rodríguez then compares his own experiences as a scholarship boy alongside those from Hoggart's text in order to reinforce the claim that the loss of culture is worth the gain of literacy. From Hoggart we learn that there is "intense gregariousness" in the working-class family (qtd. in Rodríguez 47), and Rodríguez tells us of the comfort and happiness he felt "in the rhythm of our family living" (51). Indeed, Rodríguez tells us that for the scholarship boy, "Lavish emotions texture home life" (46), a nod to the primal and simplistic nature of his own home life, which he places in stark contrast with the school's environment, where "the instruction bids him to trust lonely reason primarily" (46). At home, "Immediate needs set the pace of his parents' lives. From his mother and father the boy learns to trust spontaneity and nonrational ways of knowing" (46). At school, we learn "there is mental calm. Teachers emphasize the value of a reflectiveness that opens a space between thinking and immediate action" (46).

The consequence of juxtaposing the chaotic yet loving home life (for he means to represent all working class homes here) with the ordered environment of the school is a reinforcement of the binary that divides the emotional from the rational. In this case, Rodríguez insists that the two environments are at “cultural extremes” and thus are mutually exclusive. These regions of exclusivity are key elements in Rodríguez’s understanding of literacy. Rodríguez’s point is that students must become assimilated into the classroom environment, despite the loss of intimacy in the home. He concludes the chapter (and his schooling) with a vision of just how great the divide really is, based upon his literacy, between his parents and himself:

My need to think so much and so abstractly about my parents and our relationship was in itself an indication of my long education. My father and mother did not pass their time thinking about the cultural meanings of their experience. It was I who described their daily lives with airy ideas The ability to consider experience so abstractly allowed me to shape into desire what would otherwise have remained indefinite, meaningless longing in the British Museum. If, because of my schooling, I had grown culturally separated from my parents, my education finally had given me ways of speaking and caring about that fact (72).

And so Rodríguez comes to the conclusion that desire – to succeed (and for him this means to become an abstract thinker) in this case, in a European-based culture – can only be achieved by subordinating his home discourse and privileging the dominant one, which will then lead to a life of reflection.

In reproducing the argument for the dominant discourse, it is not insignificant that Rodríguez uses the British Museum as his site of self-discovery. The British Museum, with its collection of Elgin Marbles from the Grecian Empire, wrested from the clutches of the Ottoman Empire; its Aztec and Mayan treasures which record the conquest of those great empires (albeit by the Spaniards); and its possession of the Rosetta Stone, the artifact that represents the translation of silent symbols into a living language, signifies perhaps the ultimate realization of conquest of the “savage” by the “civilized,” as the repository for the world’s treasures gathered during Britain’s empire-building. And Rodríguez uses this imagery to bolster his argument for the superiority of the ordered life of the scholar. All of this imagery is linked; with its neatly catalogued items, the museum displays those items that were carelessly lost by the nonrational and disordered who have been conquered by those who possess rationality, or so Rodríguez’s associations might imply.

Reproduction of the Dominant Discourse through Place

Reading Rodríguez's text as a literacy narrative is particularly useful when we consider its structure and how he relies on the use of "learned, internalized 'literacy tropes'" to "affirm culturally scripted ideas about literacy" (Eldred and Mortensen 513). We see this learned script for success in his description of the ordered classroom, the insistence upon English, the teacher as revered authority figure, the posters in school that counseled, "Open the doors of your mind with books" (59). And conversely he suggests that the mind's doors are perpetually closed without the books implied in such advertisements. Of equal interest, though, are the tropes that Rodríguez uses in his text surrounding region, which serve as ideological constructs in the negative representation of racial and cultural difference. Region can encompass "a particular space, geography, group, or nation" and the tropes used as signifiers for those regions then affix a set of traits, images, and values to them (Aparicio 8); region, then, like language, is encoded with meaning. Rodríguez uses tropes to signify the literate spaces in his vision of the world, then goes on to contrast these spaces with what have been re-presented to him as *illiterate* spaces in the colonial imaginary, to illustrate the necessity (in his mind) of setting aside the home discourse (and reconcile the loss he has suffered) in favor of the acquired literacy he perceives as superior.

Eldred and Mortensen tell us "constructions of region and literacy form familiar tropes in our history and folklore, and in turn, become familiar parts of our literature" (524). Thus the stories we are told, in our home discourses, in the media, and in the discourses of the school, to name a few, shape our ideas about which spaces are ultimately associated with success. *Hunger of Memory* begins with Rodríguez literally delineating physical space in his effort to infuse region with meaning, in this case the city and the country. Rodríguez, as a self-perceived model for success for the "socially disadvantaged" (3), uses the colonial binary split as a guide for which regions to be avoided as impeding a person's ability to acquire literacy. In his opening chapter, "Middle-Class Pastoral," Rodríguez chastises those who insist upon romanticizing the pastoral, his metaphor for that space associated with the working-class. He recognizes the temptation in exalting the lives of the poorer classes, whose lives seem to reflect the "intimate pleasures of rustic life" (6). Consequently, he sets up his discussion on the foolhardiness of imitating the poor by introducing himself as a dark-skinned man in tuxedo at a cocktail party in Bel Air, rubbing shoulders with the rich, in contrast to the one other dark-skinned person present. He notes, "a Mexican woman passes in a black dress" (5), but this other Mexican is wearing a white apron and carrying a tray of hors

d'oeuvres. She is serving him. It is with this imagery established that he commences to tell the reader that it is literacy that has made the difference in his life, and thus distinguishes him from the maid. In this description, Rodríguez is indicating that those with money, those who live in spaces like Bel Air, are there because they possess the specific kind of literacy that he has gained – at least those who have brown skin. For him, the ones who exist in the margins of these spaces, like the maid, almost without exception have brown skin and represent the reality of the pastoral.

Rodríguez's persuasive techniques are alluring. We can see in his choice of metaphors his intimate familiarity with a literary form most readily understood by those who have been exposed to high art forms. Thus, his knowledge lends him authority to speak of the folly in succumbing to this romanticization of the "simple life" by those from the middle-class. He insists that his writing is necessarily political because it "concerns my movement away from the company of family and into the city" (7); he has polarized the regions between home, which is understood to mean the pastoral, and city, which then represents civilization. Rodríguez tells the reader, "I must resist being tempted by this decadent solution to mass public life. It seems to me dangerous, because in trying to imitate the lower class, the middle class blurs the distinction so crucial to social reform" (6). In his eloquence he insists that he must be pragmatic in discarding the past: "I turn to consider the boy I once was in order, finally, to describe the man I am now" (6). He uses the master narrative that signals his coming-of-age, and this is familiar to readers who were raised on these same types of stories – the Western reader understands, then, the necessary route for the colonized to pull himself up by his bootstraps. This is Rodríguez's vision. But in actuality, this binarial space that Rodríguez has created is an indication of the degree to which he has internalized the rules set up for membership within the dominant discourse.

Rodríguez continues to use physical space as a means of representing what he perceives as the less sophisticated aspects of Mexican culture that serve to restrict mobility. In his treatment of religion, Rodríguez shows his movement from being *un católico* in the very Mexican church of his parents, to a more Protestant way of seeing the world by the time he is an academic. The movement from his early religious experience to his adult preferences coincides with his transformation from a disadvantaged child to a sophisticated man, as though he crosses an invisible barrier that then allows him access to the higher social status. But it is in the way that he tells the story, the construction of space, that Rodríguez presents one space as inferior, and the other space as superior, thus serving to transparently valorize one space over the other. He writes, "in those years when we felt

alienated from *los gringos*, my family went across town every week to the wooden church of Our Lady of Guadalupe, which was decorated with yellow Christmas tree lights all year long” (81). This was a space that early on provided comfort for his family. But Rodríguez quickly determines that there was something about the *gringo* church that held greater importance. He remembers on the occasion of the white priest’s first visit to their home for dinner, his mother dressing each of her four children in new clothing “it had taken her weeks to sew”; she had even prepared a “*gringo* meatloaf” (82). Thus, his parents present Rodríguez with the first notion that the English-speaking church has greater worth. But then Rodríguez compares unfavorably not only the spaces but also the traditions and symbols that go along with each space. Of the Mexican church he writes of the Virgin of Guadalupe’s feast day, that early in the morning the celebration would begin with “a blare of trumpets imitating the cries of a cock” and “the Virgin’s wavering statue on the shoulders of men” is carried to the altar, near where Rodríguez is seated on the floor with two or three hundred children, “many of them dressed like Mexican cowboys and cowgirls” (86). In his narration, we imagine the chaos, the lack of sophistication, and the quaint primitive nature of the setting.

The chaotic space of the Mexican church is contrasted with the immaculately presented *gringo* Catholic Church, where “Mary’s statue was relegated to a side altar, imaged there as a serene white lady” and the church floors were made “not of squeaky wood but of marble. And there was not the devotional clutter of so many pictures and statues and candle racks” (86). With the *gringo* church there is serenity – conducive to reflection. With the Mexican church there is clutter – the disorder, which hinders contemplation. He proceeds to discuss his family’s Catholicism as “superstitious” – “I’d remember my grandmother’s instruction to make a sign of the cross in the direction of my window. (That way Satan would find his way barred)” (87). In contrast, the religion in his school, though, became “increasingly academic” (88); by high school it was “rigorously intellectual,” a distinction from his parents’ religion. Of his parents at this time, he notes that they seemed “piously simple. . . unwilling to entertain intellectual challenges” (103-104). And finally, after his Americanization process is complete, Rodríguez verifies the conversion by claiming that now his “spiritual fathers are those seventeenth-century Puritans” (110). In his religious conversion, Rodríguez is illustrating for us his move across the binary, from the primitive to the civilized, from simple-mindedness to the intellectual. And in this construction, all that can be considered traditional (i.e. Mexican) is packaged as a trope for the reader in order to present a cultural script that signifies the primitive.

So this physical space, the Mexican Catholic Church – and those who inhabit the space - is yet another polarized dichotomy, and is re-presented to us by Rodríguez in a way that links the value system of Mexicans to illiteracy in contrast to an American-made literacy; we are shown the disorder, and we have been told that literacy spaces require order. Therefore, ultimately Rodríguez is trying to demonstrate that the Mexican American who is tied to his tradition must move away from his home discourse, with its disorder and simplicity, in order to attain literacy and the benefits that are considered an intrinsic part of it. We can look, then, at his use of *The Tempest*, Shakespeare's famous tale of empire building, in the prologue of *Hunger of Memory*, and his choice to identify himself with Ariel ("I sing Ariel's song" 6) as Rodríguez's allusion to the proper role of the colonized to the colonizer. Ariel is the grateful servant to a master who has benevolently set him free, in contrast with Caliban, whose space, his island, has been stolen by the colonizer (a point that goes unmentioned by Rodríguez). Caliban is presented as the personification of savagery and childlike behavior, while Ariel's compliance with Prospero's wishes gains him the favor of his master. The contrast of the two and Rodríguez's choice of whom to identify with signifies his determination to valorize the Euro-centric as superior to the undisciplined and unruly that his parents' culture signifies for him. Shakespeare, an author with unshakeable status in the Western imagination, is said to have created in Caliban the image that forever embeds in the colonial imaginary the notion of the savage in the New World. In Ariel we see the one who is beholden to the more knowledgeable Westerner (the possessor of books), and in this binary we see only two choices for the colonized, to be the savage or the simulation.

Thus, Rodríguez uses Ariel and Caliban as contrasting tropes for the literate and illiterate, disparate and polarized choices for the colonized. In *The Tempest* we see the European conquest of an island that had been the domain of Sycorax, the mother of Caliban, who is then exiled. Ariel, who counts himself fortunate for being released from Sycorax's spell by Prospero, becomes the obedient servant to him. Caliban, on the other hand, is "a thing most brutish" (Shakespeare 1378) and is relegated to manual labor. And although Miranda attempts to teach Caliban the King's English, he learns instead to curse. Therefore, we see in Prospero's empire-building an attempt to 'civilize the savage' by bringing the civilized, printed word, a common language, to those who were "made backward and primitive by their reliance on orality" (Eldred and Mortensen 531). And Shakespeare, in creating his characters, was defining for his audience the obedient and disobedient colonized subjects. Takaki suggests that Shakespeare's play was a "defining moment in the making of an English-American identity based on race" (26). Because the English audience had never before seen

an Indian, Shakespeare's imagined characterizations resulted in a re-presentation of native people as "savage" to be a negative contrast with the social norms of 17th century England, and these images became embedded in the minds of his audience as accurate. These very images are the ones that Rodríguez uses to present his argument for assimilation, suggesting that there is a space for Mexican Americans within the empire, but they must learn how to behave. Because Caliban takes care of the fire and fetches the wood for Prospero and Miranda, he is viewed by Rodríguez as the worker who will always be forced to do the bidding of the dominant culture as long as he refuses to assimilate. For Rodríguez, like Caliban, the maid in *Bel Air* perhaps represents the "brute body, responding to sensory and sensual instincts and desires, and operating at the *subsistence* and reproductive level of life," while Ariel acts sensibly "under the instruction of a rational soul [Prospero]" (Berry 37), and therefore is the model to imitate.

Rodríguez presents Caliban to us as the character who advises the theft of Prospero's books, for as Caliban notes, "without them/he's but a sot, nor hath not/One spirit to command" (Shakespeare 1387), suggesting that Prospero's power comes from his book-knowledge, which then leads to empire-building, or in other words, success. Rodríguez writes, "I have taken Caliban's advice. I have stolen their books. I will have some run of this isle" (3). Rodríguez follows this admission with his justification for such savagery, for he tells us that he was a 'socially disadvantaged' child (3). This identifies him as a Caliban, in need of the advantage that books will bring to his life and that will convert him into Ariel ("In Beverly Hills will this monster make a man" 3). This is the literacy myth, with its message that one can have a better life, the life of a middle-class citizen (and perhaps intellect), if only he absorbs the books, the stories, of the master.

Rodríguez does expend the tremendous effort necessary to acquire the language and cultural capital that afford him the opportunity to enter the prestigious Stanford University. At Stanford, Rodríguez, who had always made a "connection between dark skin and poverty" (117), enters a space filled with the "golden children of western American's upper middle class" who "in the afternoon . . . lay spread out, sunbathing in front of the library" (130). Rodríguez is drawn to this group who can acquire darker skin at leisure, and with equal whimsy (and even less effort), choose to return to pale. Yet next to this jet set crowd, Rodríguez is seen as exotic. He notes that in the deluxe hotels in Europe, people comment on his complexion as though it were a "mark of leisure and wealth to have a complexion like mine" (113). He is Ariel, perhaps alongside Miranda and her peers. He is their friend. He writes as well as they do; he writes better. Yet though he spends time in these spaces that

are tropes for success – Stanford University, the British Museum – we can sense in his narrative the ambivalence that comes with competing discourses. With contempt, he discusses the other Mexican American students he encounters on campus, those he believes attempt to retain their status as Calibans:

I am not the best person to evaluate the Third World Student Movement. My relationship to many of the self-proclaimed Chicano students was not an easy one. I felt threatened by them. I was made nervous by their insistence that they still were allied to their parents' culture. Walking on campus one day with my mother and father, I relished the surprised look on their faces when they saw some Hispanic students wearing serapes pass by. I needed to laugh at the clownish display. I needed to tell myself that the new minority students were foolish to think themselves unchanged by their schooling. (I needed to justify my own change.) (159).

After all, perhaps these students had not had to change quite so radically after all. Maybe they had found a way to use the dominant discourse without losing their home discourse. This idea is too much for Rodríguez to consider. He is relieved of his fears by his parents' response to these students. But as hard as Rodríguez tries to convince his audience that he should not be singled out, noting, "The reason I was no longer a minority was because I had become a student" (147), he nonetheless is. Despite his efforts to be the undifferentiated middle-class citizen, Rodríguez the storyteller, who argues against bilingual education and affirmative action, and who wants so badly to be colorless like those he has modeled himself after in this society whose myth he has embraced so uncritically, wishes most of all to be set on a shelf next to his beloved Lawrence and Dickens. But he is not; finally, after this lengthy and painful socialization process, he is, with his text, marginalized to the section of the bookstore set aside for ethnic literature.

Richard Rodríguez positions himself squarely on the side of the divide that represents economic privilege and a certain social status that distinguishes him from the past. He has internalized the messages that were presented to him as imperative for success and now uses his position as author and public commentator to influence others to follow his prescription. And what can be said for his losses? Rodríguez would say that they are inevitable and vital in order to achieve success, for he writes, "I remember what was so grievously lost to define what was necessarily gained" (6). And in Rodríguez's story, filled with notions from the dominant ideology, there is no other way.

Chapter Three - Establishing Other Standards of Literacy: Contesting Hegemonic Standards from the Margins through Chicano Textuality

"Literature is a collective memory bank of a people's experience in history – it mediates our relationship with the world." – John Marx

We have been told that "books will open doors" – the doors to cultural literacy. And it is true that they do, but typically we are taught that the doors can be opened only by a key set of books, limited in number and cultural characterization, but a characterization which touts a universality of experience. This is the message that cultural commentators like E.D. Hirsch would have us believe in arguing for the necessity of a canon. But postcolonial theorists point out that embedded in the carefully constructed canon is a set of reading practices that lead to "the enactment of innumerable individual and community assumptions, for example about genre, about literature, and even about writing" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 189). These assumptions become entrenched in institutional structures like education and are uncritically presented to students in their literacy education. However, for the marginalized student who is either not represented at all in the canonical texts, or at the very least is represented in a horribly inaccurate caricature, this literature is not representative.

These individuals, marginalized in the institutional setting, are in essence the colonized. In order to assert the right to inclusion and to establish a truly universal library, some have turned to subversive action. Because there is power in the written word, an ideal way to subvert the established canon is through writing. Postcolonial theorist John Marx suggests that through the appropriation of the power in writing, creative writers can "redefine the meaning of cultural literacy and literary culture" (83). Creative writers like Alfredo Véa and Ana Castillo, by rejecting notions of universality and instead valuing local wisdom and literacy, reject what is considered central and present the reality on the borders, centered in the margins. These authors "make hybridity and syncreticity the source of literary and cultural redefinition" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 78) and set the stage for alternative reading practices. With their alternative writing practices, Castillo and Véa re-present the history that has been forced upon the marginalized. Postcolonial writers tamper with renditions of history and realign them from the victims' point of view (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 34).

Although Castillo and Véa's texts are fictionalized accounts of the lives of the marginalized, they are similar to the literacy narratives I have examined in that they illustrate the ways that literacy acquisition is really no more than developing a set of literate behaviors through a social process that teaches the student what to value and what to discard. And as

in the narratives by Galarza and Cantú, we see that literacy for the characters in the novels is very much based in the community – it is a collective effort. Moreover, as Galarza and Cantú point out, their stories represent more than their own lives; they are shared stories and lived experiences. Cantú's in particular blurs the line between memoir and fiction, and ends up resting in the margins between the two. As with the literacy narratives, these fictional texts that speak to the realities of many are important because they oppose conventional notions regarding the lives of Chicanos. The two authors' novels illustrate the types of literacy learning that occur when individuals develop literacy within the safety of their own communities as a counter measure to the destructive influences in the school system. Additionally, Véa demonstrates quite specifically the ways in which his main character, Beto, develops literate behaviors, despite the lack of formal schooling he receives in his community. With fiction, we have the opportunity to understand possibilities we had never considered before. For the dominant culture, reading this type of postcolonial literature is educational. For those represented in these noncanonical texts, it is a source of empowerment.

Writing Back

In Ana Castillo's *So Far From God*, Esperanza has the hope of "broadening her horizons" and "freeing herself from the provincialism of her upbringing" (35) by moving away from New Mexico and taking a job as a journalist in Washington D.C., the political center of the nation. Unfortunately, Esperanza, the outspoken, college-educated Chicana (with a B.A. in Chicano Studies, no less), who believed in fighting for rights, and "working to change the system" (142), is sent off to another province, this time in the Middle East, where she becomes one of the *desaparecidos* in her quest to escape the local, her unincorporated village of Tome. The official word of her death is delivered to her family by two Army privates (although the sources of the information, we are told, cannot be revealed) in a letter that states that "Esperanza died an American hero" (159), a status to be envied, it might seem, by all. The letter implies that Esperanza has escaped her fate as an unknown, unimportant, and maybe even un-American Chicana from her little corner of New Mexico, by serving her country. This government-issued piece of text seems to present the authoritative word. Or does it? Not from Ana Castillo's pen; for it turns out that the message regarding Esperanza's death is also delivered by word of mouth, and the messenger is a local legend – La Llorona. It is evident that her lamentation – this ghost woman's tale – is received with believing ears (in contrast to the word from the federal government), for Sofi, Esperanza's mother, takes the news "as if a baseball bat had just struck her across the back and taken the wind out of her,"

and even the doubting Fe “began to wail and moan” (162). For Sofi and her family, who live on the edges of civilization from a modernist perspective, this alternate story that is locally transmitted knowledge from a credible source, is the one that resonates and thus holds true value, in contrast to the official story presented by a shady source.

The official story is always told from within the dominant discourse. To understand this, we must look at the broader notion of literacy, wherein discourses are more than “connected stretches of language that make sense,” they are “combinations involving “saying (writing)-doing-being-valuing-believing” that signify insider status (Gee 526). Official literacy involves using language in ways that are valued by the white middle class (or those who wish to control the masses), and we should also understand that much of what is gained as literacy, and more specifically cultural literacy, is presented in the form of text. Postcolonial theorist Howard McNaughton writes,

In education, in legislation, in books ranging from the Bible to airline timetables, the textuality of the . . . empire has written itself across the globe, to be internalized by its subjects. . . . Imperialism is a more pervasive phenomenon than its obvious geopolitical manifestations. (218)

The author’s point is that with pervasive force, the empire strives to socialize the colonized through ideas and values embedded in texts which “transform the local population into a ‘familiar’ one” (Brennan 135). The official story regarding Esperanza’s disappearance is expected to make the family feel proud that their daughter/sister has died serving her country as a patriotic American. In other words, she has earned the right to be called “American,” and for this they should all be proud. When the colonized are socialized in the dominant discourse, they ostensibly gain membership in the society, and this should displace any dissatisfaction that might come with an unwarranted loss.

Véa and Castillo insist upon presenting alternatives to the official story through their texts. We see the effects of the internalized empire, based upon the Western ideal of empirical knowledge, in marginalized individuals who have embraced the ideology of the empire, only to be marched off to war or given employment in hazardous working environments, all, they are lead to believe, for the greater good of society. As postcolonial writers, Véa and Castillo have created texts that enable the reader to consider other ways of developing literacy, a literacy that does not devalue marginalized cultures but instead celebrates multiple literacy practices, or ways of knowing, for in reality there are few universal truths. Véa uses characters such as Josephina, to make this point. Josephina tells the central

character, young Beto, "You must distrust any idea that the majority of people believe in" (154). Conventions, in other words, do not equal wisdom. This perspective is in direct opposition to the dominant model that presents only one vision, the Western perspective, which is regarded by the majority as gospel.

But those seemingly infallible truths, the official stories, are always problematic, and in fact are precisely the stories that are presented in the literacy process by authorized individuals in authorized institutions. Thus, author Alfredo Véa creates his own official record keeper, a local insider in *La Maravilla*, to tell the true story on her "word-keeper" (179). Boydeen, who has quite literally gone underground (having taken up residence in the basement of the local market) after killing the man who had bewitched her with words, is a former court stenographer, and she takes it upon herself to take down "every syllable" (185) in relation to the events that occur above her, in this dusty little town on the outskirts of Phoenix. As town stenographer, Boydeen is committed to being a "true independent observer" (182); therefore, in this lively locale, "nothing went unchronicled" (184). With Boydeen's training in exactitude (for she records only that which is spoken), the town's residents could be ensured of an unbiased accounting of the occurrences in this town, in contrast, we can imagine, to how they might be represented by outsiders. *La Maravilla*, a book whose central focus is the marginalized, is set in Buckeye Road, a town that was "less than unincorporated, it was unknown" (24).

In this environment, Josephina and Manuel, each in a particular way, race to fortify their nine-year-old grandson, Beto, against the impending official story he will inevitably be subjected to in the formal schooling his currently absent mother, Lola, will no doubt inflict upon him in her efforts to Americanize him. But Beto's mind "had been seeded and tended by both of his *abuelitos*" (13), so that, through repeated storytelling, he already knew many of their tales by heart. Josephina tells Beto stories of how in her youth as a proper Catholic girl from Alhambra in Spain, a "criolla beauty with enamel skin and a will of her own" (33), she met and fell in love with the Yaqui, "half creosote then" (33), with the "crazy religion" (16); it was a meeting of two seemingly disparate worlds, producing hybrid children and a hybridized world into which Beto comes to live. For Beto, her words bring knowledge of many things, including an understanding of the herbs that can heal (or do harm), and the true genealogy of gospel music (69), a lesson in how whites had appropriated the music created by "the Negroes and the Latins," who were "the true geniuses of American music" (68). These are not lessons he would learn in the Anglo schools. From Manuel, who in Yaqui "was a repository of his people's history and a sage, as his fathers were before him" (32), Beto

learns the story of the Yaquis and the Mayos, and of the Spaniards as well – oral histories that would never appear in the history books. From Manuel, Beto learns that he was “born in America, *también*, and that’s what a Chicano is. You don’t become nothing. It’s only the gringos that become!” (35); from the words of those who love him, Beto thus gains a sense of who he is, a grounded identity with a precious history to be valued.

All this education is in preparation for the day when Lola, who left “no lasting impression” (23) on her son, will whisk Beto off to the world outside of Buckeye Road, where *gringos* have different *arquetipos* than the *Mexicanos* and the *Indios* (304), and where schools are the locations for molding the young and impressionable into the standard archetype – and this standard is based upon the model created by the *gringo*, with his distorted vision of history and his lust for conquest and control. Beto is the politicized Other child who will be subjected to the outsider’s education. Therefore, Josephina counsels Beto, “when you go to school, *mijo*. . . and the teacher wants to take a vote, close your eyes when you make your vote. . . . Don’t look around at the others. Close your eyes, make up your own mind, *mijo*, then you can vote” (304). Josephina’s words carry wisdom about the way things are outside of Buckeye Road, the studied necessity of maintaining the status quo, whereby schools, along with the other institutions within the dominant culture’s domain, construct a new value system for their subjects. For in building an empire – and the U.S. is indeed doing so – those in control utilize the education system to spread the types of propaganda that lead the unsuspecting to internalize the values presented to them (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 3), and this is a means for controlling the masses, thus preparing them to serve without questioning their status.

Thus, Josephina proceeds with her cautionary words to tell Beto that he will go to war – are these prescient words from a woman who has seen the future, or an easily made assumption regarding the fate of the marginalized? For in Castillo’s tale, too, Esperanza, who is well educated in the Western sense and therefore “chooses” to go to war, can be seen as a representation of the excessive number of Chicanos sent as the sacrificial soldiers on the frontlines of an abundance of American wars.

In fact, the lives of countless numbers of people have been sacrificed in the colonial system, and authors such as Alfredo Vea and Ana Castillo in battling to expose this hegemonic system for all of its horrors, discard notions of universal truths (established by the dominant culture), and create new meaning that valorizes different ways of knowing and being. To this end, in *La Maravilla*, Vea creates a corner of the world filled with Yaquis,

Pápagos, Pimas, and Apaches, Arkies and Okies, *Mexicanos*, a Spanish *Curandera*, a Maya *Curandera*, Black lesbian prostitutes, a white prostitute and her Filipino-African-Anglo American son, upper class and working class Chinese, “sissy mans” as well as *los maricones*, a wandering Jew, an African-Filipino-American physics student, an old Irish woman who recites Andrew Marvell, her ghost husband, Indian Pinoys and Cajun Pinoys, *los sinónimos* (the signifying *viejitos negros*), and a physically and emotionally scarred Black woman scribe who records the town’s official story.

These are the people who are typically marginalized and whose stories have as a rule been re-presented to us negatively through colonial texts. In Vía’s re-construction, the richly-drawn characters are a cross section of America, whose personal dramas weave together, creating new stories and meanings daily as Arkie boys play with Chicano boys; Pima Indians become pleasurably enveloped in doughy white flesh; a Spanish *curandera* mends with needle, thread, and local wisdom, the violently slashed black woman. It is where the seemingly disparate meet and make new meaning: as Josephina’s Spanish criolla loves the Yaqui Manuel, in like manner sprang the love of the genteel Southern belle, Mrs. Perkins, with her rough-edged Manassus: “No one who saw them together could imagine the act of love between them: a white, silk scarf caught on a rough, toppling fencepost” (66). Indeed, the insight Vía is providing us is that we should in reality *expect* the attraction of opposites, in some unexplained law of physics, that leads to the creation of new lines to cross and spaces to explore, with meaning taking shape in the spaces in between. In this rural enclave, far from the clutches of the governing educators, literate spaces blossom as myriad cultures mingle and blend ways of knowing that enhance the literacy of Beto and his friends. They are exposed to a great variety of discourses from which to read the world.

In this in-between Arizona town, Buckeye Road, live the masses, which Phoenix acknowledges in “only one way: each morning at four o’clock its *jefes y potentados* sent buses and flatbeds rumbling down Broadway past the tract homes and into the desert to load on workers by the hundreds” (24), to spend the day on the outside. Within *this* community, the bourgeois white man is the Other. These workers are the colonized proletariat that the colonizer wishes to control and utilize for his own purposes. Vía demonstrates how this community, although utilized by the dominant group for menial work, nonetheless has a rich literacy embedded within the community, and that far from feeling excluded from the material benefits of the dominant culture, this seemingly eclectic mix of characters has created new, hybridized realities.

Castillo, too, creates an alternate vision for the reader. *So Far From God* provides an important contrast to V\'ea's text because it shows the damage to those who have been harmed by dominant ideology, and the ways in which the characters' lives improve when they embrace local wisdom and discard hegemonic ways of knowing. The book focuses upon the character Sof\'ia and her four daughters, who grow stronger only when they discard conventions; the book's setting is Tome, a fictional small town in the Rio Grand Valley that is suddenly being plagued by the invasion of outsiders who possess capital and the technological products from the outside. These foreigners, with their destructive weapons, threaten to destroy not only an age-old way of life, but humanity. In the generically named ACME International (for this factory could be any number of workspaces for the disempowered), a short distance from Tome, the unfortunate employees work cleaning parts for high-tech weapons using cancer-causing chemicals. In this high tech death trap, Castillo illustrates the dangers of chasing the American Dream, which is the fateful folly of Fe. As a dutiful student, Fe learned well the lessons taught in school and had proudly claimed a diploma as proof. But at ACME, an equal opportunity employer, Fe's diploma holds no real value (and in fact had not afforded her greater pay when she had held a more prestigious job at the savings and loan company). For at ACME, Fe works alongside women without credentials, who speak "Spanish, Tewa, Tiwa, or some other pueblo dialect as a first language" (179), because ACME makes no discrimination in its employment of the marginalized. Fe, a woman who is literally without a voice (having lost command of her vocal cords after the traumatic demise of her American Dream Wedding, leading to the lengthy wailing session that destroyed her voice), has no disadvantage in this setting, because understanding (and vocalizing) by the employees is, in fact, discouraged by the powers that be. Hence, a welcome (for the company) language barrier. In this job that gives "raises on the sheer basis of utilization and efficiency," Fe, with her "American" values, works harder than all of the others in order to get ahead, for she has learned that this is the way to achieve the American Dream. The payoff for Fe though, is cancer, caused by the toxic substances from the plant. Fe, whose literacy has led to the internalization of values presented within the colonial system, displays all of the classic signs of the assimilated: feeling embarrassment for her family, desiring the trappings that come with the Dream, and trying to escape from her roots. It is only when she returns to the fold, the comfort of Sof\'ia's home to be cared for in her dying days, that Fe finds self-actualization, that she finds a voice to speak out in anger against the atrocities that have been done to her in the name of the technology designed for imperialistic purposes. Fe learns this fatal lesson too late. With Fe's story, Castillo is critiquing a system that values the corporate world, the current foundation for the American way of life,

and the ways in which it maintains a worker population through ideology. These ideas are most readily absorbed within the schools by those who do not question the nefarious practices linked with capitalism.

The Role of Place in Countering Dominant Literacies

Castillo and Véa make it clear that the settings for their novels, these little, forgotten towns, are where the center lies, and everything outside of the immediate community is foreign, is outside. In *Buckeye Road* the traditionally unconventional (by hegemonic standards) is the common. As Josephina notes, “things are backward here” (8), and this is a good thing. For Castillo, too, the unusual, the crazy, the unexpected, are normalized. In fact, the novel’s first words - “La Loca was only three years old when she died” (19) - which present a seemingly sad scenario, unsettle the reader. What does this mean? Castillo means to show us through the rest of her tale, the celebration in these words – a rebirth in which the unconventional, that which is seemingly considered crazy, is deemed quite ordinary by a sizable segment of the population. Thus the two authors, in locating power away from colonial order, effectively dismantle the center/margin binary. And in these regions where folk knowledge abounds, and wisdom resides in some of the least considered spaces, standard literacy is looked upon with grave suspicion.

In Castillo’s story, some “kind of trick of fate” has sent Sofía’s and Domingo’s “only college-educated civilian daughter off to war” (48); and even before her unfortunate assignment, Esperanza had felt “like a woman with brains was as good as dead for all the happiness it brought her in the love department” (26). So at best, a college-educated woman found it impossible to meet a good man. Her sister, Caridad, had “tried a year of college” (26), but found that she had greater capital in her attractiveness to men than what a college degree could bring her (thus the internalization of yet another type of oppression). And Fe, even with her high school diploma, finds it most lucrative to work in a toxin-filled factory. It is only Loca, who has never attended school in her life, who benefits readily from the knowledge she develops in her home environment, far from standardization techniques. We learn that Loca can train a horse, perform abortions, play the fiddle, and she embroiders “the most beautiful pillowcases and ruanas as Crismas presents;” in addition to all that, she “was a “one hundred percent manita cook” (165). Loca, indeed, was the one most helpful to her mother, for she was the daughter who “did not have to do homework nor get up in the

morning, ironing pleats into uniforms and looking for a clean white blouse and a pair of socks that matched like her other sisters had to" (165); La Loca, it is implied, benefited quite nicely from a lack of the uniformity that is imposed on those who attend school.

Beto, too, is kept from formal schooling, and the narrative demonstrates that it is much to his benefit. For Manuel tells the story of his own sons, and how the schools in the U.S. that Beto's uncles attended served to create in them embarrassment for their culture, as the schools labored to transform them into "Americans." Manuel says,

We are antiques to them. Everything we had to give them made them ashamed to their gringo friends. They wouldn't even take *burritos* to school, we had to make fucking sandwiches. Can you believe that, sandwiches! Bread like air and meat that was never alive. (49)

The schools, then, were violent spaces where children were socialized to develop preferences for the white ways of doing things. In fact, what value does the schoolroom possess? Véa seems to be asking when he implies that it is problematic for more than just the students. After all, Floyd, the owner of a local pub, has given up his life as a schoolteacher for bartending: "I was a schoolteacher in Tucson with all the so-called classic symptoms of alcoholism" (82); he has given up teaching, we learn, to serve drinks instead, and is a happier man for it. But the most telling and disturbing commentary of formal education and its violent side effects is when we learn of JB, the "mulatto Einstein" (115), who had the audacity to both study physics and date a white girl. He is hung from the "hoary oak tree in front of the lending library" (130), his white executioners having "stuck his physics books and notes inside his pants" (128) as a symbolic gesture to signify their violent disapproval of a black man showing the impudence to try and educate himself formally, beyond the level deemed appropriate for his station, as a black man, in life. In this literary narrative are illustrated incidents that speak volumes, of the collective histories of those who have experienced violence in relation to literacy. Thus, we can ascertain from these texts that it is more prudent to attain an education far from the disturbing environment of the white-dominated world that Castillo and Véa re-present for the reader.

In the process of presenting alternate means for gaining literacy, the values and ideals of the powerful, oftentimes violent and destructive, are exposed additionally as corrupted. Josephina alludes to the aberrant value system that exists outside of Buckeye Road in her warnings to Beto:

Satan is everywhere these days, *mijo*. He seems to have gained ground in this country, but he hasn't won yet. . . . He hides in *satisfacción*. What is the English word, complacency? Yes, *mijo*, complacency. . . . The people who now have dominion over this land that is sacred to your grandfather and his forefathers have no respect for it. (153-154)

Josephina is counseling her grandson to understand that the ways of the dominant group, the powerful ones who try to create standards for all, are tainted by self-righteousness.

Because the dominant ways pose such problems, particularly for those who live in the margins outside of the hegemonically-defined center, one effective strategy used by both authors is to situate their novels away from the centers of "civilization" and expose the existence of vibrant centers in the space deemed marginal by dominant standards. In both novels, we see communities nearly devoid of dominating figures, yet nonetheless impacted by the effects of the domineering outside world. But while the world outside depends upon these communities (for labor, if nothing else), those who live in Buckeye Road and Tome would fare much better, we can assume, without the effects from the outside. Because the two fictionalized communities are self-sufficient and their residents content, the authors are able to demonstrate the effectiveness with which these self-contained communities thrive specifically because they have *not* been incorporated by the dominant culture. By locating the novels in isolation, far from the gaze of the outside world, with its institutions for learning and its ideology of technological advancement and empirical knowledge, the authors create a space for understanding and appreciating Other environments for literacy practices, where local knowledge is the esteemed form of higher education. And while individualism, order, the scientific, the official, the canonized, and the ideology of capitalism are valorized in the dominant culture, in Vea's and Castillo's characters, we grow to understand the value of the community, the unknown, occasional chaos, and shared resources; in fact, the gaze is turned back upon the "master" in a critique of all that is esteemed within mainstream society.

Hybridity on La Frontera

Instead of the one-world perspective, Manuel reveals to Beto the contrasting visions of the two different worlds that border one another: "A gringo will go to the edge of his city to look 'out' into the desert, while a Yaqui will go to the edge of the desert and look 'out' into the city." Building on this notion of very different conceptualizations, the narration then illustrates how language is created to reflect different realities, including "concepts that were immaterial to the Indian" (31). We learn from Manuel, that there is "no Yaqui word for the kind of loneliness that is found on the crowded sidewalks of Phoenix" for in the Yaqui language there

does not exist a word for loneliness - there is simply no concept for “alone” (31); in the Yaqui ethos, where additionally there is no concept for “poor,” rather than feel lonely, one would simply be by one’s self. Different languages, different concepts, different worldviews – in this revision of the horizon and reconceptualization of the individual, the reader is given insight for better understanding of culturally different world visions.

This region between one culture and another is referred to as border space, where new meaning develops. In these border spaces new understanding comes by stretching one’s psyche “horizontally and vertically” (Anzaldúa 101), reading between, rather than remaining on, the lines. In the beginning of his novel, *Véa*, through the words of the recently deceased Josephina, presents precisely this idea. Josephina tells us that where she lies, you can “touch the margin between air and water and see your own reflection reaching. Then you could fragment it, touch the surface, make the margins chaos” (1), suggesting the possibilities of lines that are fluid. She continues, “Did I tell you that I am convinced that when Christ walked upon the waters, He made the very same statement: that there is as much below as above; that there is as much before as after?” (1). Josephina, speaking to us on the written page as a space beyond life as we know it, is telling us that there is room for both the Christian as well as other less conventional aspects of the supernatural, and in fact they are blended. Indeed, as postcolonial theorist Andrew Smith writes, the postcolonial “creates a fluid landscape that shows life as a world where everything is becoming border space” (247).

When Gloria Anzaldúa and other postcolonial theorists speak of border spaces, they are writing back to the theory of the great divide, wherein there is a distinction between traditional societies and “modern” societies. Traditionally, those who are of European descent fit into the privileged, or “modern” side of the binary, and everyone else is marginalized. This marginalization has created a cultural divide that presents the world in terms of black and white, either one way or the other – science vs. superstition, civilization vs. barbarism; and individualistic vs. communal – with one side representing that which is acceptable and the other side considered in need of change.

Typically, this divide is seen as surmountable by the marginalized only when they determine to cross the divide and adopt the values and beliefs that are a part of the dominant culture, as we have seen in Chapter Two. But postcolonial artists see the divide as a “cultural mirage sponsored by the people in power” (Gomez-Peña 18); therefore, it is unrepresentative. In this reconceptualization of literacy on the borders, postcolonial performance artist Guillermo Gomez-Peña writes that “whenever and wherever two or more

cultures meet – peacefully or violently – there is a border experience” (19). It is within this border space that truth lies. Véa reflects this concept when his character Manuel tells Beto, “the gaps are where life really is” (221).

By writing in the gaps, Véa has created a border space in which to explore ways that the official story – the social, economic, historical, political, linguistic, cultural tale that is pressed upon these Third World subjects (Gomez-Peña’s term), has manifested itself on the colonized subject. In writing back, postcolonial writers demonstrate through their texts how literacy can redefine borders as well as subjectivities. These two authors demonstrate how the official story can be subverted in border spaces; their writing back nullifies the “policy of racial purity that white America practices” (Anzaldúa 99) by celebrating the “mixture of races” and ideologies in the hybridized region where an “alien’ consciousness” emerges – a *mestiza* consciousness. In *Buckeye Road*, Véa has created the Rainbo Market, a place in which to buy necessities, but also in which to sample the multitude of perspectives present – and Véa’s market represents only one of the nearly infinite number of “mixed” communities in the world from which the *mestiza* experience emerges. *Mestiza* – the historical product of the Spaniard and the indigenous -ideology refutes the dominant order of things and instead produces new meaning (Anzaldúa 99) that resides in the space along the border, the space that is “sandwiched between two cultures” (100), and is in a “constant state of transition” (Anzaldúa 25).

In *Tome*, new meaning emerges (or is it reclamation of the original meaning?), when on Holy Friday, the customarily formal and regimented procession that typically parades through town on that day, is replaced by the faith-filled marchers who lend new meaning to the ceremony for by protesting the harm that has come to their community and loved ones. Thus, *La Loca*, the spiritually blessed child that is viewed with disdain by the Church’s fathers, leads the procession. Castillo presents commentary on the syncretization of Catholic religion and native realities in writing of this *mestiza* march of consciousness: “Jesus met his mother, and three Navajo women talked about uranium contamination on the reservation, and the babies they gave birth to with brain damage and cancer.” And later one of the protesters points out, “Our people have always known about the interconnectedness of things; and the responsibility we have to ‘Our Mother,’ and to seven generations after our own. But we, as a people, are being eliminated from the ecosystem, too. . . .” (242). Her words speak of the literacy linked with space that is disregarded by the powers that teach the masses that “advanced” technology is always superior to local knowledge. Castillo’s hybrid

form here combines the Catholic with the indigenous, and protest with religion. This is only one of many battles being fought in the colonized world.

The literacy space that has been carved out for Beto, too, speaks of multiple generations of literacy sponsors that know how to educate their children. Nonetheless, because the character of Beto is the hybrid grandchild of the colonizer and the colonized, so to speak, and is a subject of the colonial system, he must struggle to establish a sense of self in a country where the place of *mestizo* has been culturally denigrated through “conscious and unconscious oppression” by means of a “supposedly superior racial or cultural model” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 9); hence, we see the values of the standard “American” reflected in his absentee mother, Lola, who speaks harshly of her parents’ values:

In California, Indians are history and Sunday is for football, not for church. . . . Those two old fools have filled your head with such garbage. . . . This is the twentieth century and this is America. Nobody believes in their stupid superstitions and dumb stories anymore. (293)

Beto’s mother has internalized the values of American culture, for she says that “the best thing to learn is the value of a dollar” (294); yet in this woman, Lola, we see someone whose world, made important by new cars, sliding aluminum windows, and refrigerators (21-22), is “greedy and seductive” (303), and therefore an unattractive archetype who offers no worthwhile lessons for her son. For Lola, communication consists of “English from now on” (22), the ultimate betrayal, because by adopting the ‘standard’ language while subsequently discarding one’s home language, a person ultimately loses self. Beto, fortunately, has been fortified with local literacies by his *abuelos*, both exemplary role models and teachers, and the collage of other inhabitants that live on the outskirts of Phoenix, to contest the dominant vision of the world. Véa implies that the not so fortunate are those Others, including Lola, who were unable to plant themselves in space grounded in tradition literacies.

And although the indigenous and the non-European within the cultural hierarchy have been marginalized, along with their cultural practices and beliefs, it is authors such as Véa and Castillo who are contesting that marginalization through literacy themes in literature. Theirs is a mighty task. Postcolonial theorists Tiffin and Lawson explain that imperial texts, over time, have typically served to maintain the imperial relations that initially were established through “guns, guile, and disease” (Tiffin and Lawson 3). After the initial use of force, the imperial system has typically been maintained through textuality, which provides the subject with a series of social practices that are then internalized through tropes; these

tropes develop in the subjected figure a series of values, beliefs, and attitudes that lead to the desired cultural practices (Gee 159), including the use of language in ways that are valued within the academy (Bizzell 141), which constitute literacy in the larger society (Gee 159). Although this socialization process purportedly leads to rewards that are present for those who attempt to become incorporated into the mainstream, with the ultimate goal being an entirely homogenized society, we see the negative results of such valorization in the characters of Fe and Lola.

In the “high ideals of the colonial imagination” with its “civilizing mission” (Bhabha 234-235), lies an ambivalence toward colonial discourse. Homi Bhabha writes of the tension between the demand for an identity and the counter pressure for change and difference that leads to mimicry as one strategy against colonial power and knowledge. This ambivalence can be seen as a painful reminder of that which is lost, as we see in Richard Rodriguez. Writing back to a system that values only one type of literacy, Véa shows the possibility of what can be gained as new hybridized literacies develop. Take for example the incomparable Mister Andre, the clever hairdresser that stylizes in Buckeye Road. In his earlier days he had attended Howard University, but his funds had run out, destroying his chances to complete his degree. However, despite his lack of official status (which must be awarded by the University), he skillfully mimics his philosophical idol, Descartes. Unfortunate, perhaps, that he has only “half a diploma,” but he creates new meaning as he puts his own spin on the “philosophical questions of being and nonbeing” when he sagely notes, “I comb, therefore I is” (100). The practical application is apparent; while Descartes can sit in an ivory tower creating quotable truths, Mister Andre, a man who cuts hair, uses language to affirm his own identity while articulating the reality of that universal truth for the people with working class roots.

Therefore, it is in the ruptured spaces, the border spaces, that new meanings for literacy are created, and multiple practices are valued. It is in these postcolonial texts that writers work to “identify, valorize, and empower what colonialist discourses label the barbarous, the primitive, the provincial” (Lawson and Tiffin 230). Both Véa and Castillo choose to locate their novels in “provincial” regions, but their vision is anything but narrow. These “unincorporated” spaces show us different ways of knowing because the center of activity is in the margins and far from the realities of the monocultural and hegemonic mainstream, where, in the words of Manuel, the water is “tasteless” (221). He notes that “the fountains,” those repositories of knowledge, actually lie “in the gaps” (221), the region outside of the U.S. Anglo-European culture, where there is a “much larger cultural complex in

constant metamorphosis" (Gomez-Peña 13). In mining the gaps for meaning, the authors provide a rich base for learning not found in those spaces typically regarded as literacy sites by the mainstream.

Both authors also display spirituality as border crossing. Characters in each novel drift between the spirit world and the physical world. Castillo normalizes the notion of communing with the spirit world, as the majority of her characters either speak with or at least catch sight of the "dead" on occasion. All of Sofía's daughters eventually pass away, but we are made to feel the greatest sorrow for the daughter who is, indeed, dead and gone; poor Fe had suffered most from the violent effects of the hegemonically-enforced literacy, trying hard to achieve her vision of the American Dream; in the process she had discarded her own. Caridad, however, while alive gains greater health and insight as she grows distant from the conventional and cultivates her psychic don, her "faculty" (164), as a channeler, working under the apprenticeship of doña Felicia. We understand the valuable role these two play for their community of clients, many of whom would show up as late as 10 p.m. because they "worked and had to go home first to make supper for familias and put their hijitos to bed" (64), before visiting Caridad and doña Felicia. These two women administered remedies for everything from gastrointestinal obstruction to internal air to spiritual cleansing.

Castillo demonstrates the hybridity that exists within the community, and thus the blending of knowledge from both worlds. We see it with the treatment of Loca's malady: the Filipino Doctor Tolentino, who had attended Northwestern University Medical School to honor his father, but learned traditional *tratamientos* from his mother, conferred with doña Felicia to treat Loca; we understand that both literacies are valued. The hybridity in religion is pronounced in both texts in a way that articulates a history of combining indigenous practices with the oftentimes-unwelcome religion of the colonizers that was pressed upon the colonized. So prior to performing an operation on Loca in which "his left hand made an opening through her flesh and disappeared right up to the wrist inside her stomach" (228), Doctor Tolentino asked that they pray together. We read of how doña Felicia, a *curandera*, nonetheless has an intimate relationship with the saints of the Catholic Church, and consults them heavily in her practice. She turns to St. Anthony in her search for Caridad,

But St. Anthony kept silent and did not give doña Felicia so much as a clue, not even when she turned his small statue upside down to persuade him to cooperate. Instead, he kept more tight-lipped than ever. The truth is St. Anthony probably just didn't know where Caridad went, since like I said, he is for finding things, not people. (82)

And in her condemnation of colonialist practices, Castillo reveals in her writing the myriad ways that second-class status has been bestowed upon the colonized, even through religion. In this case, it turns out, St. Anthony's failure to assist has to do with privilege: doña Felicia has "had a falling out" (82) with him after reasoning that this "little saint in Spanish regal dress" had chosen to save Christians over Muslims in Spain and to save Catholics from "pagan" Indians in North America; ultimately, doña Felicia, in an act of appropriation, exhibits power in appropriating the colonizer's religion by punishing St. Anthony, who had "saved souls or abandoned them depending on their nationalistic faith" (82). Doña Felicia instead turns to el Santo Niño de Atocha, a better choice for helping the mestiza. As an agent for literacy, in this passage Castillo writes back as a voice repudiating this valorized symbol for oppressive ideology. She demonstrates for the reader how the hybrid community in Tome, descendants of Indians and Spanish, are able to use religious figures and ideals in ways that speak to the community's needs.

One way that Vea shows value in religious hybridity is by presenting us Josephina, the ultra-pious Catholic from Spain who dresses only in black, complete with mantilla. Yet on her wrist hangs a "hammered silver crucifix hanging next to a small sealed jar of oils, herbs, and lizards' toes" (5): hybrid religion. She is not the only devotee of syncretized religion. We learn of Ana Martinez, an old Mayo *curandera* who explains the history of the cross with various relics glued to it that she has given to Josephina, who perceives "a cross that was barely Christian. It was Indian with a thin Christian veneer, like Manuel. It had ancient pre-Spanish origins and little to do with Christ" (150). Ana, though, explains that it is "older than churches, older than missions," and thus symbolic of a compromise: "As we *Indios* have hidden ourselves beneath their religions, so this old wood takes this form, the cross. The cross is only a translation of the wood as the singing prayer is a translation of the spirit" (152). This embracing of combined religious symbolism for a metamorphic ideology shows how value is attached to multiple literacies and is in stark contrast to Richard Rodriguez's determination to value only the dominant literacy and to discard the religious traditions of his family.

In Vea's commentary we understand the practical wisdom of those who have been oppressed and choose to appropriate and reinterpret what has been forcefully thrust upon them in ways that are useful, without discarding their own belief system. Consequently, in these border spaces, new meaning is created, and identities are not compromised, yet are enriched with hybridization. Additionally Vea signifies for the reader that Ana's knowledge is neither antiquated nor insignificant. She tells Josephina that she has run a check on her to

ensure that she is the curandera she has been searching for: "I have already investigated you. It's like a screening; don't worry, it's standard procedure. I have to be certain" (153). She knows her stuff. Glued to the cross are representations of Josephina's life: a Spanish *peseta*, the word PHOENIX, a small toy trailer representing Vernetta's home, and a clump of white hairs. Ana has Josephina nailed; her technology for investigation is comparable to any computer search engine.

And as with Castillo's text, syncretism is involved in healing for Véa's characters, too. The boy Beto learns his grandmother's blend of Catholicism and indigenous cures alongside his grandfather's Yaqui spirituality. There is no problem for him in this; he is a child absorbing the forces that surround and influence him. This is Beto's cultural literacy; he is learning to read the world without the filters put in place by the dominant culture.

Véa and Castillo are not saying, however, that all that comes from the colonizer is flawed. After all, postcolonial writers are products of a system that they must now learn to make sense of. Véa, Castillo, and numerous other postcolonial artists work to present the colonized, along with their devalued (through Western re-presentation) cultures, as value-laden. And through their textuality, they re-inscribe the local wisdom as worthy forms of knowing. They show that literacy, the absorption of cultural values, is most valuable when one has the opportunity to learn from multiple sources rather than absorbing the prescribed notions designed to create uniformity that are forced upon him by the dominant culture. Most importantly, these authors illustrate the ways in which the borders, *las fronteras*, which exist between the disparate, are rich frontiers to be explored and mined for the meanings that lie embedded within the wealth-laden gaps.

Subverting the Canon

Postcolonial writers wish to rescue the sites, oftentimes violently taken, to which colonized identities are tied. Literacy and canonical knowledge are among the most harmful sites for glossing true histories. So Véa re-presents a different truth for the reader. We learn that Manuel's father and his people "walked away from the slave camps in the Yucatán" and "like so many times before, the peaceful nations of Sonora and Chihuahua were forced to transform their self-image" (9). Véa, Castillo, and others write to re-present histories from the margins. In order to displace the canon of literature that represents the marginalized and their stories and histories inaccurately, it is necessary to write back to imperialist texts in a subversive fashion, to break down the foundations of knowledge as typically perceived. And it

would not do simply to replace one set of canonical texts with another, because “a canon is not a body of texts *per se*, but rather a set of reading practices” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 189). Instead, it is necessary to change the reader’s perception.

One of the ways that Castillo and Vía write back to those who privilege standardized forms is to show the value in traditional storytelling methods. The oral tradition, relegated by hegemonic scholars such as Jack Goody and Walter Ong to inferior status compared to literary traditions from the West is integral to the understanding of both authors’ texts. Castillo’s entire tale is narrated as if told orally, and this storyteller is an obvious insider. Thus her presence is key to the effective telling, for she can relay the intimate details of Sofía’s and her daughters’ lives as only a storyteller with a gossip’s sensibility would tell it. But this narrator is only omniscient to a degree: we become aware of her presence each time her vernacular speech shows a deviation from Standard English (“Nobody could say nothing about it but wait for the inevitable failure of Sofí’s marriage”) (21). By using the vernacular rather than strictly standard speech, Castillo is breaking rules. And in subverting standard notions of what a piece of quality literature should look like, she lends value to the local voice and establishes the legitimacy of the vernacular and of storytelling. Castillo gets away with this bold effrontery by having mastered alongside the local speech patterns, the dominant methods, with her descriptive, Cervantes-like chapter titles and her adept manipulation of language; with her multi-lingualism, she establishes legitimacy with the jaded reader.

In *La Maravilla*, Vía demonstrates the ways in which literacy is developed by handing down knowledge through storytelling. One of the keys is in the use of repetition. Josephina asks Beto if he knows how she met his grandfather: “This was not a question meant to be answered. Though he had heard the story before, the boy still shook his head no” (12). She begins to tell the story and he follows along from memory. The tale is punctuated with questions: “Do you know what I did?” Beto knows. “His mind had been seeded and tended by both of his *abuelitos*, and the interior of the now-demolished Downtown Lumiere Theater was as real to him as the Yaqui wars. He could feel the soft restriction of the velvet rope and the cool brass latch where it terminated” (13). To be sure, as postcolonial theorists argue, in oral societies, “words, uttered under appropriate circumstances have the power to bring into being the events or states they stand for, to embody rather than represent reality” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 81). This was history unfolding to his senses, better and certainly more real than any textbook, even more so than a movie.

Moreover, Véa seeks to remind the reader that orality specifically signifies empowerment with many disenfranchised groups. Thus he presents for us *los sinónimos* -- the synonyms -- four "*viejitos negros*" who were really wordsmiths creating meaning in their manner of speaking, complete with standardized rules: "When not doing a traditional 'telling' to the children, an allegorical tale that required straightforward narration, the old ones followed to the letter the ancient rule that old black men sitting together must repeat everything six times" (99). One would start with "It sure is hot," followed by a companion stating, "I reckon you is right about the heat." After that a third would comment, "Yeah, it's hot. It's hot." Then, "Uh, hum, burning." After that, "Yeah, burnin' up." Finally, "Goddamn temperature." Beto most assuredly is becoming literate in this traditional form, for he loved the "singsong of everyday speech that lured him in to listen." And as with standard colonial forms and structures, this naming and renaming ritual had conventions, which "required the introduction of at least one new subject before returning to any previous subject" (99).

In using storytelling in their novels, what Véa and Castillo do is present it as not only an art form, but a didactic art form, thus defying the argument that oral-based societies do not possess higher order thinking skills. In this way, both authors are writing back to a system that insists that reading, writing, and learning -- in other words, literacy -- can only occur properly under a prescribed set of circumstances, preferably with a prescribed set of texts. Castillo's text, however, complete with unconventional grammar usage, informs the reader of literate practices that never hold value in canonical texts. And for Véa's character, Beto, local literacy has shaped a child who will not be torn up by ambivalence. We have no doubt that he has "kept himself" in the end, a direct result of the seeding and tending his grandparents have both so lovingly provided. In these ways, postcolonial writers are creating alternative reading practices, while additionally validating ways of knowing that are often discounted by institutional structures.

Appropriation for Re-presentation

As noted earlier, Chicana/o writing is writing on the border. There is a necessary hybridization because postcolonial texts are always embedded in colonial structures such as language. In both texts, we see an amazing blending of languages, and as Véa's character Toop notes, "Shit, there's a universe between all the words we got. . . . The magic words sits in the spaces between the regular words" (84). Indeed, meaning emerges from within the gaps. Thus, Castillo and Véa make clear to the reader the necessity of using the language most suited for each particular description or situation. As Ashcroft notes, "language is

crossing borders by linking one previously distinct language to another to create new meaning. The “‘marginal’ . . . is becoming the actual” (42). Thus, in this lengthy passage, we see the description of Manuel, “a different man with each tongue” (31) and the necessity for moving between languages for accuracy:

As he spoke he slipped from Spanish to Yaqui and back with an occasional English word. It wasn't because he ran into a thing he could not say in one language. It was because that specific tongue could not say the thing he wished to say.

Beto had long since grown accustomed to his grandfather's speaking in this fashion. So much so that he was no longer sure which words went with which language.

When with his Yaqui *compadres*, Manuel's thoughts were in Yaqui; otherwise he had difficulty thinking in Spanish and only translated into English with conscious effort and great difficulty. The differences in color and texture and perspective of the other tongues gave him trouble, not the words. Even Josephina, who was perfectly bilingual, almost never thought in English, except when she sang. Neither Manuel nor Josephina was the same person in their different languages.

English could not speak to the shared tribal compacts of Manuel's past any more than Yaqui or Pima can speak to modern contracts with their conditions precedent and third-party beneficiaries. . . .

As precise as English is, only Spanish could meet Manuel's and Josephina's need for a rounder and softer language. A language with many more words for skin or soul or pain or love, familial and sensual honorifics. Manuel's Mexican Spanish embraced *cariñosos* that were holdovers from the ancient Nahuatl tongue. To Josephina, its conventions are more indulgent and endearing than English; it's an affectionate, impressionistic tongue. Mexican Spanish can sound petty and gossipy or angry in a way that only black English or Cantonese can match. Only English as it's spoken by the Irish can echo the irony of Spanish, and only the Welsh singsong resembles the cadence in the streets of Guanaguato. (30)

In this passage, Véa demonstrates the rich “underlying domains of content” (Hirsch 164) contained in language that give a person cultural literacy, and in this case, a *mestiza* literacy for communicating across many borders. Véa is arguing for the need, above all, to communicate meaning through appropriate signifiers. Manuel and Josephina are mixing ideologies in their *mestiza* manner of communication. And with this code-switching, Véa is denying the privilege of English over other languages. Postcolonial writing, in fact, seizes the language of the center and replaces it “in a discourse fully adapted to the colonized place” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 38).

The process of creating hybrid forms involving language, as an example, is an abrogation and then appropriation of the dominant language; in this way the value that has been placed on that language simply due to its status as the masters' tongue is negated, then appropriated for use in ways that are more functional for the user. This process rejects the "metropolitan power over the means of communication" and at the same time "captures and remolds the language to new usages and marks a separation from the site of colonial privilege" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 38). Therefore, Castillo's narrator transforms English as a standard code with all of its negative connotations, to english, a form that is then useful for telling stories. The denial of this normative code leads to innovative forms that reflect the realities of those lives that are being re-presented, in stark contrast to the manner in which the colonized are typically portrayed in canonical texts.

Postcolonial theorist John Marx writes that "to appropriate Western canonical literature one must first unwrite it, dismantle it, and come to see it less as an inviolate whole than as a collection of parts suitable for recycling" (89). In fact, the most significant form of appropriation is writing. It is by appropriating the power that is "invested in writing that this discourse can take hold of the marginality imposed on it and make hybridity and syncreticity the source of literary and cultural redefinition" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 78). Therefore, Vía's record keeper, Boydeen, with her stenographer's machine, is re-writing from the margins: "She must really know words," Beto's friend, Claude observes: "Look how she's busted them up. The pieces don't look nothing like when they was said together" (179). There, on that narrow strip of paper, Boydeen has the opportunity to set the record straight. She is, in effect, taking the essence of each word down, and leaving the rest behind.

As if to illustrate this concept of abrogation and appropriation literally, Vía weaves through his story the spirit of Andrew Marvell, a seemingly odd choice for a postcolonial text, given his status as canonical poet. But this metaphysical poet used paradox in his verse to force the juxtaposition of apparently unconnected ideas, and this is an evocative means for examining the border experience that weaves together so many seemingly disparate traditions. At the site for Josephina's new home, chosen for this devout Catholic woman by Yaqui Indians and which faces the home of the prostituting Vernetta, is found a leather bound book with charred pages: "It is *The Complete Poems of Andrew Marvell*. *Quién es?*" asks Josephina, as she shrugs and drops the "crumbling book to the ground" (48). A canonical text discarded. Later we find that the book must have belonged to Wysteria, the hopelessly self-marginalized homeless woman who wanders the desert, citing Marvell's couplets to her many dogs and who Beto sees on his Vision Quest with the Yaquis, listening to Marvell verse read

to her by her long deceased Irish railroad worker husband. That an Irishman would read poetry by a defender of Cromwell (the man who had raped and pillaged Ireland) is paradox in itself.

Later on, Andrew Marvell's name pops up once again, this time as the subject of Beto's encyclopedia quiz, administered by Harold, the wandering Jew-Fuller Brush man. It turns out that another aspect of Beto's homemade education involved reading copiously from the *New World Book Encyclopedia*, from which he could recite at length. In this quiz, Harold first asks what the "average television watcher's answer" is to the question, "Who was Andrew Marvell?" Beto's confident response: "I don't know." – "Right!" proclaims Harold (206). The fact is, this canonical figure is not even recognizable to the typically educated, media-addicted person from the dominant culture. But the boy, intrigued by his poetry after hearing the distraught Wysteria recite "The Nymph Complaining for the Death of Her Fawn" in memoriam to her dogs each time one is hit by a car, has memorized numerous Marvell poems. To Harold, Beto says, "All this time I thought she was saying crazy nonsense, then I read that part of the book again after seeing her the other day" (206). Beto is studying to read the world, making connections without the benefit (or hindrance) of standard schooling. Later Beto helps Wysteria recite the poem, having memorized it himself, after yet another pet passes on. Finally, when Wysteria passes on, Vernetta reads "The Mower Against Gardens," a piece that deftly speaks of the imperial penchant for appropriating from others, and the hybridization that results from uniting previously unconnected pieces:

Another world was searched through oceans new,

To find the marvel of Peru;

And yet these rarities might be allowed

To man, that sovereign thing and proud,

Had he not dealt between the bark and tree,

Forbidden mixtures there to see.

No plant now knew the stock from which it came;

He grafts upon the wild the tame.

That the uncertain and adult'rate fruit

Might put the palate in dispute. (Abrams 1424)

Appropriate selection for an author whose prevailing theme in this novel is the “forbidden mixtures” that have resulted, largely, from the colonial movement that created border spaces. Véa is arguing for the sumptuous flavors of the “adult’rate fruit” as a corrective for the “palate in dispute.” After all, Josephina and Manuel, though different in some ways, had come together through respect and love for one another, producing their mestiza offspring and ultimately, the hope for the future, the further hybridized Beto.

The hybridization of language in Véa’s and Castillo’s novels serves a crucial purpose, because a main feature “of imperial oppression is control over language” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 7); postcolonial writers therefore appropriate the language of the colonizer and then introduce elements from native dialects and languages to reflect hybrid reality. As Ashcroft notes, “representation is contested, where language is supplemented” (42). Thus we hear of “esos salvages del sherif’s department” (55) in Castillo, and punctuations like “*entiendes, hijo?*” (37) in Véa. With the use of untranslated words, the writer is forcing the “reader into an active engagement with the horizons of the culture in which these terms have meaning” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 65). Such code switching represents the real world, and is a way of utilizing the most accurately descriptive words to convey meaning, not constricted by distinctions between languages. Véa illustrates the naturalness of such an action by demonstrating Beto’s budding language literacy. In speaking of Wysteria to his Arkie friends, Claude and Louie, he notes, “I hear tell she’s got a new dog, big as a bull.” In fact, “he had gotten the ‘hear tell’ from his two friends and felt good using it” (77). And because Josephina reveals for Beto the richness in language, reminding him often that among the “true geniuses of American music were the Negroes” – he understood “she could never deny the music or the language” – so the boy

knew that the language spoken there [in the tantalizingly forbidden Blue Moon] would never be foreclosed to him and to the other kids. More and more black words and phrases were creeping into his sentences every day.
(68)

Beto, surrounded by a multitude of rich sounds with rich meanings, reflecting myriad languages and ideas, is taking all of the best that surrounds him, and manipulating it for the most articulate communication possible. He is code-switching not simply between defined

languages, but between multiple dialects and vernaculars. Most importantly, Beto's identity is shaped by these multiple literacies.

Castillo, too, demonstrates how literate behavior emerges through code switching. Although she at times glosses the text for the reader, we are to understand that for the bilingual speaker, no translation is necessary. And in writing back to a dominant system that insists on using specific codes for identifying difference, she refuses to adhere to the rules established by the official rule makers. Castillo determinedly does not italicize words that are in Spanish. This forces the reader to read in the gaps rather than noting the codes, in this case italics, which mark distinction, or Otherness. Castillo's occasional use of glossing the text for the reader allows the non-native speaker an explanation of terms. Thus, "¡El mal vecino ve lo que entra y no lo que sale!" becomes "A bad neighbor sees what goes in but not what goes out" (145). But as Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin point out, glossing also exposes the problems in juxtaposing words in a way that "suggests the view that the meaning of a word is its referent," because oftentimes "simple ostensive reference does not work even for simple objects, [so] it is even more difficult to find a referent for more abstract terms." Thus there is a gap between the original word and the referent and "a requisite sense of difference is implicitly recorded in the gap." And it is in this difference that "an identity (created or recovered) can be expressed" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 61-62).

As noted earlier, identity is linked closely with language, so the subject of naming comes up and the relationship between hegemonic control and naming. In Chapter Two, we see a systematic conversion, which serves to distort a child's identity, as Ricardo accepts a new, anglicized name. This is a linguistic defeat in symbolic terms. In Vía's text, though, the main characters are keenly aware of the violence that can take place in naming. Manuel, who "hated the Spanish part of Mexicans while he loved the Indian part. . . . especially despised the word *Hispanic*." He asks, "Would the Irish like to be called English just because the language was forced on them and because they were subjugated by the English?" and continues, "Find me a black man from Johannesburg who would like to be called Afrikaans. Just one. Find me a black man from the Congo who wants to be called Belgian" (208). His is a bitter condemnation of the system of naming that has been carried out by imperialists and involves an attempt to mold identities through naming. Castillo, too, shows how labeling can affect a person's self-perception. Her character, Francisco el Penitente, a "lanky six feet in height," is called Chico by his "buddies in 'Nam" – a generic term for small that they seemed to be using for all Latinos (a Puerto Rican from Rio Piedras was called "Little Chico"). It does not matter that Francisco "didn't like Chico – which back home meant a roasted corn" (94); he

is labeled in a way that lumps all Spanish-speaking Others together, denying them their individuality, and particularly their cultural identity.

We see defeat in the characters that have accepted the names pressed upon them by the dominant culture. Lola calls all Filipinos that work in the camps with her “Goddamn Flips” (294). Her most recent fiancé, she calls Joe Fish, although that is not his real name. But he is an amenable guy, and “leap[s] from the driver’s side obediently” (274) to open Lola’s door for her. Joe Fish, whose original name was José Pescado, is, in fact, Filipino, but has become assimilated and proudly wears a belt buckle with SEMPER FI emblazoned upon it as evidence of his patriotism and service to country. We must assume that Joe has become deeply enamored of the “American” system (although his “eyes flashed at the word ‘Flips’” 274), for we learn that “Not one American soldier in the Philippines had ever pronounced his name right or even tried to. Jose Pescado had come to admire that” (274).

Indeed, naming is key to existing in this country, it seems, for the immigrant, for whom giving up a name is accepted as the compromise necessary for establishing any type of status. Véa demonstrates this re-naming game for us in Mr. Lee, “who had almost forgotten his own true Chinese name and who had certainly forgotten it in its anglicized form” (89). He had named his children Maria and Newton, “after the mother of the Christian God and a box of cookies with a fig filling” (90) in his efforts to have a family that seemed to fit society’s conventions. Conversely, Boydeen’s mother, in striking contrast, named her child for a waitress who had been “a beautiful Liberian girl named after her great-grandfathers, both former slaves who had returned home, their Bassa and Vai tongues seeded with English” (92). We understand in these passages the compromises that the marginalized sometimes have to make, and additionally the power and meaningfulness in choosing without concession.

We see, too, how different it is to be named from the outside, by the dominant, in contrast to being named from within. In Castillo’s novel, Sofia’s youngest is named “La Loca,” the crazy one, by the community, after her miraculous resurrection:

The funny thing was (but perhaps not so funny since it is the way of la gente to call a spade a spade, and she was called ‘La Loca’ straight out), even La Loca’s mother and sisters called her that because her behavior was so peculiar. Moreover, La Loca herself responded to that name and by the time she was twenty-one no one remembered her Christian name. (25)

We understand that La Loca, who was initially named La Loca Santa after her miracle resurrection, having been given unofficial saint's status, is being revered by her own community, rather than being denigrated by outsiders wishing to dominate.

Naming can also be central to creating one's own identity. Among the typically marginalized are *los maricones*, the transvestites and homosexuals, who, according to Anzaldúa are the "the supreme crossers of culture" (106). In order to cross, Véa's most marginalized characters must carefully select the names that will assist them in shaping their personas. Véa shares how marginalization can unite these "girls" from different ethnic backgrounds in carving out a new world in the gaps. He writes: "They were two blacks, two whites and one Mexican, boys who met at college, the University of Texas at El Paso, and who had managed to turn their mutual misery and alienation into an odyssey" (102). As they shed their conventional clothing for the attire that would "in the right light and at the right distance with the eyes squinted just so" turn these college boys into women, they also shed the names that bound them to a gender they refused to claim. They changed from Robert to Angelique; Wilson to Diablo; Roosevelt to Evangeline; Lawrence to Starlet; and Francisco to Panocha, in a "quiet ceremony, [where] they renamed each other and, like Adam, gained dominion, but only over themselves and only to some degree" (102). Through re-naming, the girls undergo an alternative coming of age experience, distinct from the journeys typically presented in canonical texts, with self-actualization occurring significantly only after leaving the conventional institution for learning. In this way, Véa shows an Other route for creating literacy spaces in the margins.

By far the most meaningful naming ceremony that represents a coming of age in Véa's novel though, is Beto's rite of passage to Alberto. After Beto spends the night in the desert with Manuel and his Yaqui friends, his grandfather talks to the boy of community and tradition, and how the "white man has all the rights in this country, but we have the rites, the rituals. Their children see a world without mysteries" (231). All of the education that Beto has been receiving from his *abuelos*, from Harold, from his Arkie friends, from *los maricones*, from *los sinónimos*, and all of the other people in his community, has led to this moment that culminates in him becoming Alberto: "The boy looked up at the sound of his full, given name. Alberto. The recognition that his name had changed caused him to smile broadly" (231). We recognize that, unlike many children from marginalized groups who are forced to give up their cultural identities, who are sometimes even renamed, Alberto will follow the advice his *abuela* has given him, as Lola whisks him away from Buckeye Road to a school system where he will no doubt be called 'Albert'. Josephina shouts to him, "Keep yourself, *mijo*" (305) as he is

taken away, and somehow, we know that with this wealth of local fortification, he will. For Alberto emerges from Buckeye Road with the mestizo consciousness, and with this consciousness a wealth of literacies from which to read the world.

Concluding Thoughts: Education and education

Postcolonial theorists write of English as the standard language inherited from the empire which serves to oppress the colonized, but also containing the possibility of the concept of english as a subversive form that represents the many possibilities available to its multiple users. I believe we can use the same conceptualization in looking at the tropes for literacy that are uncritically foisted upon schoolchildren, along with the canonical agenda that serves to oppress – what I think of as education with a capital “E” - and then contrast it with the multiple forms that education can take in the local communities to strengthen the identities of their youth, permitting them to “keep themselves.” At times this may involve unlearning ideas that have been so strongly embedded as truth by those who have been “seeing with white eyes too” (Véa 241), like the Reverend Drake, Black minister of The Mighty Clouds of Joy Church of God in Christ. His tale is instructive, for in eulogizing Manuel, the Yaqui, at his funeral, he tells the story of how he learned, finally, to be “an African-American man of God. Not a Negro minister no more” (241). He discarded his Education, and became educated. He begins his tale in call-and-response manner with the congregation (who acknowledged each of his statements with an affirmative reply) by relaying the way he judged Manuel as an Indian against his own life, shaped by the ideas of whites: “to a lot of us American was white and I was kinda white and the Indians, well, they were just invisible. I say I was kinda white because I measured my life against theirs. I saw their wealth, I hated my poverty.” Followed by, “I saw their clothing and Lord, I despised my rags.” Then “I Heard their English and I deplored my gulla-speak. I saw their meat and potatoes and I shamefully hid my poor neckbones and grease. Yes, I was kinda white when I crossed that lot” to make a judgment about Manuel’s life. After all, he states, “I’d gone to college, you see,” so “I felt good about myself stooping to converse with this obviously uneducated man” (241). But because of the Education that he had received up through college, seeing everything “with white eyes,” he discovers in his evening spent drinking a “bottle of good Irish whiskey” with Manuel that he had “never seen the nations that live in this desert. I couldn’t see them any more than I could see the true image of myself. Just like whites staring at the nations of the Cameroons or the Gold Coast and seeing only chattels, only property” (241). He is learning firsthand the history of Manuel’s people, and in the process, thinking about his own; as postcolonial

theorists point out, this type of socially-mediated truth that Manuel presents “has at least as much legitimacy as one that is abstract” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 166). Thus, only after learning the truth, by listening to the source with his own ears, seeing the truth with his own eyes, learning about life through local knowledge in storytelling format, was the reverend now, finally, “an African-American man” (241). The “congregation roared,” for, it is implied, they had also been blinded by the same forms of Education all of their lives (241).

Véa, a lawyer as well as novelist (but who had worked as a farm laborer as a child), presents a compelling argument against a standardized Education, for those who are not white and standing at the center of the dominant discourse. So he moves the center into the margins so that the marginalized, in fact, are those, like Lola and her Joe Fish, who refuse to blend cultures, but instead see only with white eyes. For only with the *mestizo* consciousness can a person take what is of greatest value, from a multitude of sources, to create meaning. As Manuel counsels Beto, “We are people of the gaps, *mijo*. Only we know that the gaps are where life really is” (221). In fact, we learn that the true innovators are in the gaps. Andrew Marvell, with his 17th century British sensibilities, wrote about the gaps. We learn that Rosa Parks was a “black magnet in the gaps” (221), and “Albert Einstein is the doorman of the gaps” (222). The gaps are where innovation occurs. Those who refuse to enter the gaps, and more distressingly common, those who never know about the gaps, suffer the fate of uniformly accepting the official story, the canonical tale, as the one and only truth, with all else shamefully buried or obscured.

By reading these border narratives, we are given insight into the perspective that perhaps the individuals who maintain the strongest identities are those who are isolated far from the influences of the white world, instead insulated and nurtured by local teachers. These are the ones who risk less chance of sacrificing identity to the colonizing forces found in standard education. At its most effective, the literacy process causes the subject to internalize that which is deemed conventional so that those who govern can feel at ease with the masses. Thus Castillo’s character Fe, who had conformed to white society’s norms, “couldn’t wait until she got out – of her mother’s home as well as Tome – but she would get out properly, with a little more style and class than the women in her family had” (29). The blind Fe had been destroyed from within by her learned notions of the “Land of Enchantment” (172); only by returning to the fold, her mother’s home and homegrown wisdom, and understanding that she has been caught up in the “Land of Entrapment” (172), does Fe find peace in her final days.

Most commonly, the colonial system has been responsible for forcing ideology and a value system onto the colonized population to make it uniform and familiar to those with power. Véa and Castillo, by writing back from the gaps inhabited by vibrant and multi-literate characters, create new understanding and subvert the standard order of Education by illuminating the hybrid reality. By writing subversively of lives in the margins, these authors help to redefine the meaning of cultural literacy. Additionally, these authors act as literacy sponsors as their texts help construct new reading practices that represent the hybridized realities of individuals. The literacy narrative that demonstrates a more inclusive and realistic picture of what literacy learning as a social process should look like helps “redefine the meaning of cultural literacy and literary culture” (Marx 83); for this reason, *these* are the types of books that will more readily “open doors,” acting as mediators for relating to the world, and as an identity practice, bolstering individuals to “keep themselves.”

In Conclusion

In researching the subject of literacy, what became most obvious to me was the complexity in the issue. It is assumed that by attending classes in reading and writing and working hard at the task of learning, a person will eventually become literate. But literacy simply cannot be viewed as a set of basic skills that, once mastered, will lead to individual success. This literacy myth fails to account for the socialization process that is inherent in literacy learning. Instead, it is necessary to look upon literacy as a set of social practices to be learned. The social process for literacy involves storytelling, both literally and figuratively, that contributes to the construction of literate identities. And because politics determine which stories will be told in school, the place where most children are sent to develop literacy, some will thrive and some will not from their literacy education, or socialization process, in this institutional setting. The child most likely to benefit will already have been socialized to understand the stories in his or her English-speaking home. And the assumption is that literacy will always be in English. For the child from a non-native English-speaking background, there are not only language barriers to literacy, but also different cultural values and practices that come into direct conflict with the social practices imposed through this compulsory education. This narrow vision of literacy that comes from the dominant culture serves to marginalize all who do not come to the classroom with the type of cultural capital that makes literacy development (largely) unproblematic. For those without the right kind of capital, there is violence, because the standard practice has been to attempt to subtract through socialization, the cultural practices – including the use of Spanish for Chicana/os – in order to add in the dominant ideology. This is always harmful, because language, with its “underlying domain of content” is a part of one’s identity.

Therefore, by examining the literacy narratives of Chicana/o writers, it is apparent that those who are best able to develop literacy and also maintain an identity that embraces the home discourse and other literacies are those who have strong literacy sponsors. These sponsors generate practices that encourage critical thinking, most often by making literacy socially-relevant to the individual’s life. Additionally, these sponsors often tell stories that reinforce the values important to the community, and as an extension, to the young student. These stories sometimes function, as well, as an antidote to counteract the effects of hegemonic discourse. Indeed, the community as sponsor is an important and recurring theme in these positive literacy narratives.

It would be tempting, then, to emphatically contrast the community-based values with the value typically placed on individualism in the dominant culture. But as we have seen in

the various texts highlighted in this thesis, such binary thinking does not begin to encompass the experiences of the colonized subject's pursuit of literacy. In looking at the texts by Castillo and Vía, as well as work by other postcolonial writers, it is important to understand the richness (and necessity) in embracing hybridity, and this includes that which comes from the colonizer's language. These "mestiza" writers demonstrate how borders are redefined and new subjectivities arise through a blending of language and culture. They have learned to appropriate that which is useful from the dominant discourse, blend it with indigenous literacy practices, and turn it into something new (meanwhile discarding that which is harmful). These authors have moved literacy from a dichotomized vision to a transcultural view of the world.

It is, indeed, particularly tempting to think in absolute terms by contrasting as binary, the narratives of Richard Rodriguez with those postcolonial writers who embrace their hybridity rather than deny it. But Rodriguez, who wrote *Hunger for Memory* in 1982, when postcolonial theorists were just beginning to examine closely the gaps, is also writing back, in his own way, to the colonial order, whether he appears to be mimicking the dominant ideology or not. Because every mestiza narrative, whether bolstered or enfeebled by literacy sponsors, is composed upon the palimpsest that is undergirded and influenced by the Spanish that preceded literacy gained from dominant ideology. Rodriguez has, in fact, changed his words a bit; while lecturing at Oregon State University in 2003, he spoke of the "browning of America" and the "new cosmic race," as acknowledgment of border crossings. He speaks, too, of the violence in his own literacy, graphically describing how the English words were "forced down his throat" to be choked upon. But while he speaks of the gaps, he continues to privilege English as the only valid public language, and fails to acknowledge the imperial nature of literacy education and how *it* serves to divide.

I now understand what divides me from those who have not attained a high level of literacy by society's standards. I can see how literacy education is not created equal for all individuals in our society, and how some do attempt, tragically, to leap a great divide to attain success. In this there is great violence. But I also can see the possibilities, the type of learning that Paolo Freire espouses, and which postcolonial writers hint at in their texts that celebrate hybridity. My hope is that eventually, with this "browning of America," there will be enough magnets in the gaps to finally draw the center entirely into the margins so that literacy learning becomes about reading the real, transcultural world.

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