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Portrayals of Assimilation in Chicano Poetry

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Introduction

I became interested in this topic through experiences that involved my identity. My introduction to the idea of identity happened on my second trip to Mexico; I was about 12 years old. One night while in the plaza I heard English being spoken and naturally I looked around to see who was speaking English. My parents and I saw a middle-aged couple speaking English, and they dared me to go speak to the couple. I walked up, introduced myself to them and asked where they were from; they were from Missouri. The next thing they said struck me. They asked me how long I had been practicing my English. I remember telling them I was from Michigan, but after that I only remember feeling conflicted. I was a fourth generation Mexican-American from Grand Rapids, Michigan. Of course it was only natural for them to assume I was Mexican; we were in Mexico and I blended in with my brown skin and long black hair. At this time I realized that although I felt American being fourth generation and seemingly fully assimilated—I wasn’t perceived that way. I had two identities at play being Mexican-American. I couldn’t avoid my hyphenated identity; I could not be one without the other.

Defining Chicano

Before discussing the history of the Chicano heritage it is important to define the term Chicano for the purpose of this study. Chicano is a term that is highly debated in the scholarly community. For instance many scholars define Chicano as any American of Mexican descent and often the terms Mexican-American and Chicano are used interchangeably (Shirley and Shirley, 4). Other scholars deny the interchangeability of these two terms. The term was originally used as a derogatory term to shame immigrants from low socio-economic backgrounds from smaller towns (Tatum). Chico means little in Spanish, and -ano means man so when translated Chicano means the little people. The term was very popular during the Chicano movement as Mexican-Americans embraced it as an identity to take pride in. Since the 1970’s it has lost popularity because it typically refers to politicized Mexican-Americans. Today many Mexican-Americans take pride in the Chicano identity.

Chicano History

The origin of the Chicano is rooted in the connection to the Mexica, otherwise known as the Aztecs. The Aztecs were a militant people who migrated to the Valley of Mexico, located in central Mexico, from Aztlan under the command of their foremost god Huiztilopochtli (Buchenau, 12) Aztlan is the legendary homeland of the Aztecs, and it has been hypothesized that Aztlan would be modern day Texas or Oklahoma. During the Chicano movement Chicano’s embraced Aztlan as a spiritual homeland that represented their feelings of displacement.

The indigenous part of the Chicano’s culture is derived from the Native American roots of the Aztec. Centuries later large portions of Mexico became part of the United States after Euro-American encroachment upon Mexican land. The states of New Mexico, Texas, Nevada, Arizona, California, and Utah all became a part of the United States (Buchenau, 52). Mexicans living in these states were given two choices. One choice was to leave their ancestral homelands and relocate to a shrunken Mexico. The second choice was to attempt to assimilate into Anglo-American society. Those choosing to stay were subject to an unjust and discriminatory United States justice system that was unsympathetic of their language barrier and ignorant of their connection to their homeland. Being born in the United States, but being of Mexican ancestry made Chicanos neither Mexican nor American. These early frustrations led up to the Chicano movement that took place amidst the chaos of the turbulent 1960’s.

During the radical protests of the 1960’s the Chicano movement began urging for a country that was sympathetic and accommodating to Chicano concerns. Chicanos began establishing associations to support their people’s educational, economic, and political rights to combat the alienation and discrimination. Cesar Chavez became the face of the movement after leading the Delano grape strike and helped found the National Farmworkers Association. Chavez fought on behalf of migrant workers like himself and in the process became an inspirational figure for many Chicanos.
Chicano Poetry

Poetry has both an oral and written history. With the arrival of the Spaniards, Spanish traditions had a heavy influence on poetry wherever these settlers chose to inhabit. The most common forms of poetry found in areas heavily impacted by Spaniards are the romance, the corrido, the decima, and the canción.

The corrido is most relevant to a discussion of Chicano poetry as corridos are often referenced and written by Chicano poets during any discussion of Chicano poetry. This is due to its popularity in the southwest as well as Mexico. It tends to be a faster narrative ballad. These ballads typically focus on themes of struggle or adventure. Oftentimes corrido will address the tensions between Anglos and Mexicans. They are usually written immediately after an important social event happens, which made the corrido particularly popular during the Chicano movement.

Most Chicano poetry originates from the 1960’s. This was a time of great tension for the United States because of the Vietnam War, the black power movement, a strong left wing, and the Chicano movement. Naturally, Chicano poetry from this period tends to deal with the socio-historical circumstances that affected Chicanos. During this period their poetry tended to focus on the indigenous roots of the Chicano and the traits of the Chicano heritage. Joel Hancock describes poetry of the 1960’s as a period of defining and providing a description of the Chicano people (Tatum, 139). Many of the poets were also militant activists.

Common themes throughout the writing of Chicanos during this time were the Aztec or Mayan indigenous roots of Chicanos, the contemporary struggle of the Chicano, the family as a source of strength and cultural continuity, carnilismo (brotherhood), and political action through solidarity (Shirley and Shirley, 21).

Language was and still is so significant to Chicano poets they use it to both reclaim their heritages and define themselves as Chicanos and Chicanas. Poets began using syntactic blends of English and Spanish in their poetry to express themselves. This is often referred to as code-switching or interlingualism (Shirley and Shirley, 31). They used it to authenticate their experiences and as a way to validate their heritages. We see this especially in the poetry of Gloria Anzaldua and Lorna Dee Cervantes.

The four Chicano poets analyzed are from this time period and their poetry centers on the frustrations of Chicanos. They all argue on behalf of Chicanos in their poetry. These poets include Gloria Anzaldua, Gary Soto, Lorna Dee Cervantes, and Alberto Rios. These poets are all from the same geographical region in the southwest at the heart of the Chicano movement.

The Chicano poets of the 60’s had a militant tone to their poetry, but in the 70’s the poets began to shift their focus (Tatum, 153). The major social poets of this period were Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales, Alberto Delgado, Alurista, Ricardo Sanchez, and Sergio Elizondo. “Corky” Gonzales was a significant figure in the Chicano movement. Gonzales was very politically active and he even was in the process of arranging a march on poverty in collaboration with Martin Luther King shortly before King was assassinated. In Gonzales’ “I am Joaquin” he addresses the search for identity and cultural roots. Joaquin is a character who resists assimilation into Anglo-society. He resists the subjugation to oppressive forces and instead searches for strength and endurance within his own heritage. In “Villains and Heroes” Gonzales focuses on dual ancestry. He discusses being both the colonizer and the colonized due to his indigenous and Spanish roots.

Alberto Delgado was very influential among Chicano poetry. Delgado was essentially a historiographer of Chicano history. He did so by reporting on events that were not recorded in the newspapers. The newspapers were a prominent source of news for the Chicano movement. Delgado tried to create harmony between the alienated Chicanos and Anglos.

Alurista is another very prominent Chicano poet (Chicanos’ History of the Mexican-American Civil Rights Movement). His poetry stands out due to the creativity of his experimentation with bilingualism. Alurista tended to use bilingualism to discuss indigenous themes in his poetry. According to Charles Tatum he was the most successful Chicano poet to incorporate Spanish, English, and barrio slang. Through bilingualism he creates bicultural experiences that often compares and contrasts two worlds. In Floricanto he compares the two worlds of the Chicano; the indigenous mestizo world of the Chicano and the materialist world of the Anglo. His poetry has much to do with spirituality by referencing various Aztec gods as a source of strength to combat the dehumanization of society. In his second book of poetry titled Nacionsh Plumarjza calls for a group effort that resists Anglo exploitation.

Ricardo Sanchez urged Chicanos toward a carnilismo or brotherhood. His poetry tended to be much louder in relation to other Chicano poets. There was no tone and his views were often extreme. His poetry dealt with the social realities of the Chicano. Sanchez’s poetry can seem undisciplined in form according Charles Tatum. Sanchez spent time in prison and so much of his poetry deals with his personal struggle. It also deals with the denigration of inmates. He encourages finding peace in love, your family and the barrio. Sanchez also tends to be very anti-establishment since he is an extremist. He argues against the Chicano drug culture and the superiority of males.

Sergio Elizondo’s work was used primarily in regard to education. His work was meant to be the voice of the various injustices Chicanos have faced such as the Alamo, the Great War and returning to racism, and a cycle of work as migrants in the fields. Elizondo also argued for carnilismo and hope. Unlike Sanchez he has a different view of women. In his Libro para vatos y chavalas characas he focuses on love, but then he shifts to characterizing the woman as the earth mother and discusses her role in providing care to the male. He then characterizes the male as the warrior who must deal with the injustices of society.

There was a transition from the 1960’s to the 1970’s when the poets took decisively different tones in their poetry. The poets had switched from the militant poetry of the 1960’s to the more self-reflective and stylistically concerned poetry.

Thesis

In Chicano poetry there are realms of possibilities for Chicanos to follow in their approaches to assimilation. These four thematic approaches include: struggling to assimilate, culture blending, resistance to assimilating, and attempted recovery of an identity lost after assimilation.

Methodology

For my research I did analytical readings of poetry. I read some literary criticism on Chicano poetry in order to develop a better understanding of Chicano poetry. By reading a series of nine anthologies of American poetry I chose the poets...
according to which ones have been most heavily anthologized. The four authors I decided to focus on in particular are Gloria Anzaldua, Lorna Dee Cervantes, Gary Soto, and Alberto Rios. After choosing the four Chicano authors to focus on I read collections of their poetry. I then chose which poems we would discuss in depth. I read and discussed these poems with several literary frameworks in mind. These frameworks included Formalism, Feminism, Marxism, and Post-colonialism.

Formalism was the lens most heavily utilized. Formalism relies primarily on textual evidence by providing support directly from the texts. It also places heavy significance on close readings (Parker, 11). Formalism relies on the text itself, so the reader must refrain from seeking authorial intent or their own personal response to the text. This contributed to our analysis of the texts because it allowed us to focus on the structures, forms, and poetic devices each author puts to use.

Feminism was the second lens used to interpret the literature. Feminist criticism pays attention to how literature reinforces the political, economic, and social oppression of women (Tyson, 92). Feminist criticism deals with how the texts are “gendered” and how women are portrayed. We read texts through a feminist lens partly because a couple of our authors identify as feminists. Feminism provided a fresh perspective of the texts because each lens highlights a different aspect. Some texts seem to be more heavily influenced by feminism such as the poetry of our two female poets. Other poetry may seem more heavily influenced by post-colonialism.

Marxism sees texts as products of history through the social and material conditions in which they were created. Marxism argues that the reality behind the human experience are the economic systems that structure society (Tyson, 54). It deals often with the base and the superstructure, of which the base is economics and the superstructures are the realities created from there (Parker, 212). I used Marxism because nearly all of our poets discuss the struggle with poverty in their poetry. The last lens is post-colonialism. Post-colonialism is highly relevant to this study because it deals with the relationship between the colonized and their colonizers. It seeks to understand how colonialist and anti-colonialist ideologies function (Tyson, 418). Post-colonial theory can deal with all human experiences. For example, it can discuss the experiences of African Americans, or it can deal with the Native American experiences. In this study we use it to discuss how Chicanos have been affected by the neo-colonialism of the United States.

Four our research we read a variety of poetry from our four chosen authors. We then wrote our analyses of the poetry with the four lenses in mind. We responded to at least two poems by each poet.

**Discussion**

The various authors considered in this analysis all illustrate a relationship with assimilation coming from Mexican-American backgrounds. Each author fluctuates between these four approaches. Oftentimes the boundaries between these categories hover throughout the poetry because none of the authors are ingrained in their approach. For example, an author may resist assimilation in one poem but may reveal a struggle to assimilate in another poem which indicates that there is a complexity to these four approaches.

**Lorna Dee Cervantes**

Cervantes is the first author I would like to discuss. Cervantes is from San Francisco, California which is in located in the Southwest region of the United States. Much of her poetry deals with the struggle of poverty, racism, and sexism. Her poetry takes a very militant approach and she strongly expresses her frustrations with social injustice in her poetry.

*“Barco de Refugiados”*

In the poem “Barco de Refugiados” the narrator explains the disconnect she feels from her culture. This poem is relatively short and was originally printed in English and subsequently printed in Spanish years later.

When the narrator says “Mama raised me without language/ I’m orphaned from my Spanish name” she illustrates the disconnect she feels. She feels connected to Spanish because of her name. Her name is not an Anglo-American name which makes her feel ostracized from Anglo-American culture. This in turn leads her to want to be accepted by her Mexican culture, but being raised without the language makes her excluded from that culture as well. She can’t blend in with either culture; it seems there is no room for her. One reason is that her name separates her from the Anglos; it is so foreign to them revealing she is not one of them. At the same time it leads her to feel connected to her Mexican heritage, but she cannot even speak their language. She may fear that Mexican culture will reject her for being so anglicized that she cannot even speak the same tongue.

In the next line she discusses speaking Spanish “The words are foreign, stumbling on my tongue”. She is not comfortable in the language she feels tied to by her name. She travels over these words that she was raised without. She has an accent that reveals to others that she is not one of them. This accent and her name are both stigmas because it reveals to Anglo-Americans she is too Mexican, and to Mexicans she is too Anglo-American; this prevents her from feeling like a member of either community.

In line eight the narrator expresses that she sees herself as a Mexican although no one else does. Not only does the narrator see herself this way, but others do as well. When she looks in the mirror she sees “bronzed skin, black hair,” these two features. These are the features she sees as the primary forces preventing her from assimilating into Anglo-American society. They give her a sense of identity conflict that makes her feel unwanted by two cultures. This conflict of identity is a product of being separated from her family’s native tongue; therefore, she is unable to blend in with the culture that she physically and maybe culturally identifies with. She geographically identifies with Anglo-American culture and possibly culturally identifies with Anglo-American society to a degree.

The last stanza is so powerful because she clearly identifies how she feels being a Mexican-American. She feels like she is “…a captive aboard the refugee ship,” meaning that she feels forced to leave her homeland. She could be expressing that she feels forced to abandon her native culture in order to get off the refugee ship. She says “The ship that will never dock” to illustrate that she has been rendered immobile by having to balance two different cultures each with their own languages, names, and even physical characteristics.

The last two lines stand out because she uses code-switching which is a very common poetic device in Chicano poetry. She repeats the line “the ship that will never dock,” in Spanish after she says it in English. Here it illustrates her duality because she speaks both English and Spanish. Spanish is the language she feels
culturally inclined to, yet she was raised without it so she uses English. The Spanish at the end could infer many things. For example it could illustrate an attempt to rediscover her heritage through language. She has chosen to speak Spanish even though the words stumble across her tongue. She is making an attempt to reconnect to her heritage even though this tongue is foreign to her. It could also illustrate that she is making a decision. A decision that she will no longer be on a ship that never docks; she is going to choose a side. Maybe that side is Mexico. She could possibly be saying she has made the decision to identify as a Mexican in an attempt to recover a lost heritage she has been orphaned from. This seems feasible enough considering this poem was reprinted in Spanish years later.

This poem reveals a great deal about the Chicano experience. It is a common experience for Chicanos to feel ostracized by both cultures. Many Chicanos struggle with speaking Spanish, yet they struggle to assimilate being marked by their skin as Cervantes would say.

“Poem For The Young White Man Who Asked How I, An Intelligent, Well-Read Person, Could Believe In A War Between The Races”

In Lorna Dee Cervantes’ “Poem For the Young White Man Who Asked Me How I, An Intelligent Well-Read Person, Could Believe In A War Between The Races” the narrator is discussing two worlds that juxtapose one another. One world lives only in her imagination while the other is her reality. She addresses the fact that in her imaginary world there is peace, but in reality there is war.

“In my land there are no distinctions. The barbed wire politics of oppression have been torn down long ago. The only reminder of past battles, lost or won, is a slight rutting in the fertile fields.” (Cervantes 1-4)

In the first stanza of this poem she begins contrasting these two worlds by saying “In my land there are no distinctions.” She is claiming a space of her own by saying in “my” land. In the second line our narrator discusses “The barbed wire politics of oppression/ have been torn down long ago.”; she is discussing racism here. Racism is often defined as a system of oppression and here she describes it as barbed wire politics, which no longer exist in her world. She is creating an image of racism as a fence that separates as if in a prison because of the barbed wire. Barbed wire is used to keep something out, and in this case it would be harmony between races. According to lines 3-5 there is still evidence of those fences in her world when she says “The only reminder/ of past battles, lost or won, is a slight/ rutting in the fertile fields.” There are ruts in the dirt where the fences once stood leaving a reminder for her and those who live in this world. She leaves the reminder—the fence—in her world because to forget would make the battles likely to recur.

“In my land people write poems about love, full of nothing but contented childlike syllables. Everyone reads Russian short stories and weeps. There are no boundaries.” (Cervantes 6-10)

In the second stanza our narrator begins by saying “In my land/” once again emphasizing the fact that this is only her imagined world, as it is not the world we live in. Perhaps the reason she emphasizes “my” is because to people like the young white man the world she is describing already exists due to ignorance. In the next line she says “people write poems about love./ Full of nothing but contented childlike syllables./”; she begins creating an image of peace. She does this by discussing the idea of love and the people in this land being in touch with their artistic selves. This communicates the idea that people in her land are innocent; they don’t remember things like hate and sadness. When she says the poems are full of childlike syllables she once again communicates this idea of happiness and innocence. In the last line she is once again expressing the idea of no distinctions that she brought up in the first stanza. She says in lines 9-10 “Everyone reads Russian short stories and weeps./ There are no boundaries./” . This line illustrates that there is a genuine acceptance of all ethnicities in this world. It seems that there is true amity between races because she is Chicana living in America, yet in her world Americans are reading Russian short stories. This line illustrates the honesty behind the last statement “there are no boundaries” because she is providing an example by saying in her country people appreciate each other’s creativity regardless of nationality or race.

“There is no hunger, no complicated famine or greed.” (Cervantes 11-12)

The third stanza consists of one sentence in two lines. The author meant to emphasize this line for a reason. She says “There is no hunger, no/ complicated famine or greed./” She is once again expressing this idea of naivety or innocence. People in this land know nothing of sadness because this is a land of peace. In her land people have food, and greed and famine are no longer ubiquitous.

“I am not a revolutionary. I don’t even like political poems. Do you think I can believe in a war between races? I can deny it. I can forget about it when I’m safe, living on my own continent of harmony and home, but I am not there.” (Cervantes 13-19)

In the fourth stanza the author continues describing herself in this world and the stanza culminates with a shift in tone. She begins talking about herself for the first time in the poem saying that she is not a revolutionary. The next lines are ironic because the title and the text give the audience some insight into what this poem is about. In the 14th line she says she does not even like political poems, yet this poem is undoubtedly political given the title and subject matter. She asks how she could believe in the war between races, and the answer is she can’t; she can forget about it, but only because she is in her imaginary world. She is saying that if the world didn’t need people to be revolutionaries she wouldn’t be one. In her world they do not need revolutionaries, therefore she isn’t one. She says she is “living in my own continent of harmony”/; this place doesn’t have a race war and she is safe here from the dangers of a race war and revolutionaries. The poems shifts in tone when she says “but I am not there/” because our narrator is about to describe her reality.

“I believe in revolution because everywhere the crosses are burning, sharp-shooting goose-steppers round every corner, there are snipers in the schools... (I know you don’t believe this. You think this is nothing but faddish exaggeration. But they are not shooting at you.)” (Cervantes 21-28)

In the first line of the fifth stanza there is already a stark contrast from the first four stanzas. She begins by saying “I believe in revolution/” directly contrasting line 13 when she said “I do not believe in revolution” because she has returned...
to reality. The next line is very political because it is illustrating the reason she is a revolutionary and the violence that has driven her there. The narrator explains “because everywhere the crosses are burning./ sharp-shooting goose-steppers round every corner./.” These lines are dealing with politics in the United States. Line 22 discusses crosses burning which was a scare tactic used by the Ku Klux Klan and is often associated with racism. The next line discussing sharp shooting goose-steppers is a reference to the military. Soldiers often do something called goose stepping during military parades in which they march by swinging their legs and extending them fully and unbent high above the ground. By describing them as sharp shooting she is implying they know who their targets are—minorities—and they have skillful aim. It seems as if she is suggesting that the targets of the goose-steppers are the oppressed. Then in lines 25-28 she puts in parentheses what seems like justification for her statements. She begins by saying “I know you don’t believe this.” She is illustrating how exasperating it is to explain this to those who do not experience this type of oppression like the young white man. When she continues with “But they are not shooting at you.” she is explaining that he does not understand this because he does not experience it.

“I’m marked by the color of my skin. The bullets are discrete and designed to kill slowly. They are aiming at my children. These are facts. Let me show you my wounds: my stumbling mind, my “excuse me” tongue, and this nagging preoccupation with the feeling of not being good enough.” (Cervantes 29-36)

In this stanza she explains how racism affects her. She is also explaining how racism is a clandestine process. She explains this when she says “The bullets are discrete and designed to kill slowly.” When she says these bullets kill slowly what she means is that racism does not cause immediate death which may be a reason it is so easy to deny when you do not experience it. Since it does not cause death how can it be harmful? The reality she is trying to express is that it does cause intellectual harm; it has created a system of oppression according to Cervantes. It has affected her children. Things such as education, crime, and employment are biased toward her and her children. These are things that add to an individual’s quality of life; their identities, pride, and self-confidence suffer as a result. This is illustrated when she says “Let me show you my wounds: My stumbling mind, my/ ‘excuse me’ tongue.” Here it is illustrated that racism has unnoticed effects such as a stumbling mind. She could possibly be suggesting a struggle with identity or worrying about saying the right thing. Her excuse me tongue is how she feels she must speak white people. Racism tends to make the subordinate groups wish they could disassociate from their subordinated groups. For example, many Hispanics do not teach their children Spanish in an attempt to prevent prejudice against them. Oftentimes they do this fearing that speaking another language would keep them from being successful. This relates to the excuse me tongue. She is describing code switching because she is implying that they have to be polite to those that are dominant in society. They use their excuse me tongue to help the dominant feel more comfortable around them. The last line states “... and this/ nagging preoccupation/ with the feeling of not being good enough.” Here she is explaining another effect of racism. It leads groups to feel like they aren’t good enough because the dominant sets up the standards for what is good enough. She is suggesting that it leads to sentiments of inferiority for those subjected to racism in society.

“These bullets bury deeper than logic. Racism is not intellectual. I can not reason these scars away.” (Cervantes 37-39)

When she says “these bullets bury deeper than logic./” she is explaining that racism is so hurtful that even though it does not make logical sense it has a deep and painful impact. Even though it makes no sense to mean less than someone because of our skin color it still hurts. She says “Racism is not intellectual./ I can not reason these scars away./”; she is explaining once again that racism is not an intelligent concept, but it is a product of human prejudice. Therefore she cannot use logic to reason these scars away because it is a product of emotion and it produces an emotional response.

“Outside my door there is a real enemy who hates me.” (Cervantes 40-42)

When she says “Outside my door/ there is a real enemy/ who hates me./” she is again talking about racism. They could hate her for many reasons. For example, the fact that she is a revolutionary. They hate her because of racism, and they judge her based on the color of her skin as she said earlier when she explained being marked by skin color.

“I am a poet who yearns to dance on rooftops, to whisper delicate lines about joy and the blessings of human understanding. I try. I go to my land, my tower of words and bolt the door, but the typewriter doesn’t fade out the sounds of blasting and muffled outrage. My own days bring me slaps on the face. Every day I am deluged with reminders that this is not my land and this is my land.” (Cervantes 43-54)

In the third to last stanza she begins discussing an imaginary world once again. She says “I am a poet/ who yearns to dance on rooftops.” She just wants to be blissful which she cannot do if there is a race war. She is a poet who wants to focus on the beauty of life, but instead she writes about this and the sadness of it. She desires compassion from other human beings when she says she wants to write “about joy and the blessings of human understanding.” She tries to write poems about happiness, but she can’t when she is confronted with the harsh reality every day. She hears these bullets outside and what she is expressing is that for her there is no escaping this reality for more than a few seconds to envision this imaginary world. Even when she does imagine this world she is inevitably jerked back into reality as she has illustrated throughout the poem by transitioning from describing her imaginary world to explaining the real world. The last few lines of this stanza she says she is constantly reminded that this is not her land. What she means is that it is not her land because the soil is owned by those in power, and she is powerless. When she says “and this is my land.” she is continuing from the sentence where she said it is not her land. So there are two meanings here. The land is not hers because she is the oppressed, yet this is her land because it is the land her ancestors lived on. The Aztecs owned this land. They were connected spiritually and slowly their land was taken from them. She is Chicana meaning that she lives in this country so it is her land and it is the place she was raised. This is her home yet she cannot claim it as her own.
She continues by repeating she does not believe in the war between races. She could be suggesting that she does not support it; she is not a separatist. She wished all races could live in peace. In the last lines she says “but in this country / there is war”; she is explaining that although she doesn’t believe in a war between races it does not eliminate the fact that there is war in this country. To her it is an indisputable fact. She says this with such confidence by isolating the last two lines. It is dependent on the preceding line, yet she sets it apart to illustrate its significance. She wants these lines not only to be read but to be seen. They stand out as the last two lines of the poem. They are expressing a truth that Cervantes knows and that is she doesn’t support racism, but she is certain that it exists.

"From Where We Sit: Corpus Christi"

In her poem “From Where We Sit: Corpus Christi”, author Lorna Dee Cervantes compares seabirds to Chicanos. This poem makes another political statement although it is slightly less aggressive than “Poem For The Young White Man Who Asked Me How I Am Intelligent, Well-Read Person, Could Believe In The War Between The Races”. She takes on a tone of vexation throughout the poem by describing the actions of the seagulls.

“We watch seabirds flock the tour boat. They feed from the tourist hand. We who have learned the language They speak as they beg / Understand what they really mean As they lower and bite” (Cervantes 1-6)

The poem begins with our first person narrator saying “We watch the seabirds flock the tourboat.” At this point it seems that the narrator is literally discussing seabirds. It also reveals that our narrator is not alone in watching these seabirds crowd around this tourboat. When she continues with “They feed from the tourist hand. /,” she communicates a sense of disgust. This is partially because of the way she describes them eating. She does not say they eat she says they “feed,” almost as if their eating is undignified. Another reason we can see a shift in tone is because of the way she says tourist’s hand. She is expressing that she identifies as something other than a tourist by explicitly saying they are tourist’s hands. She is doing this to isolate herself from them.

When she continues in the next line she says “We who have learned the language/” there is a change in tone. The narrator seems to take on a more aggressive tone especially with the use of we. The narrator is purposefully isolating herself from the tourists and identifying herself as a native. When she says we she also seems to be communicating a sense of community. This must be purposeful because she does this twice in the first three lines of the poem. When she discusses the language they speak it leads us to wonder what this language is that she knows. She answers this question in the next line.

She continues in the fourth line by saying “They speak as they beg/,” and this line takes on a more negative tone than the last three. She has revealed to the audience the language of the birds that she understands. The language she is discussing here is the language of begging. It is now becoming clear why our narrator seems to take on a tone of vexation; she is vexed. It is becoming more evident that this poem is about more than birds because she seems to be comparing herself to the birds. She has something in common with the birds, which she revealed in the third line. She understands their language: the beggar’s language. She also seems to be expressing some anger. The anger is at the fact that the seabirds have to beg the tourists for scraps. Figuratively this seems to be aimed at Chicanos and Mexicans who struggle to make decent livings in the U.S.

The last lines do the most to express her anger. The poem has gone from a vexed tone to an angered tone by the penultimate and final lines when she says “Understand what they really mean/ As they lower and bite. /.” She is expressing the fact that the seabirds are not proud of begging. The tourists believe that the seabirds feel grateful for their scraps, but she understands what they are really feeling. They are discontented over the fact that they have to beg to have a decent living. They must work and beg for nourishment, and in the end all they receive are leftover scraps that no one else wants. Both the seabirds and the “we” that our narrator discusses want more, they want the same treatment as the tourists. She is expressing that the tourists are blind to the genuine feelings of the seabirds because they do not understand the language of begging. Perhaps because they have never had to beg as tourists; it is reasonable to assume they have some privilege. The natives on the other hand have little access to capital and the tourists are the buying class. The poem seems to address Marxist ideals here because Cervantes is a Marxist. By the end the poem begins to take on a Marxist tone.

In the final line the narrator says “As they lower and bite. /” Here we see the anger expressed vividly. We see a harshness to the word choice of this sentence. The word bite has a very aggressive connotation. Bite indicates a sharpness or haste, which would be reasonable as they are beggars. They fear they have to grab what is offered quickly before it is taken away. It also seems to look like bowing. She could be suggesting that her people must bow down to those in power; those with capital. In this case the seabirds are bowing down to those with nourishment and they are taking their food with haste and irritation. Haste because those in power could take away the scraps at any moment as they wish. They express irritation at the fact that they must beg for food instead of having access to their own.

This poem expresses Cervantes’ discontentedness with the fact that her people must beg for a happy living. She communicates this idea by expressing sympathy for the seabirds who beg. Her poem seems to take on a Marxist tone near the end. This is because of the fact that the tourists have the food and the seabirds must beg for it. She illustrates that this is dedicated to her people by saying we multiple times. Overall this poem seems to argue for the justification of the anger of her people at being treated unfairly.

Gary Soto

“Black Hair”

In his poem “Black Hair” Gary Soto discusses baseball and emphasizes the fact that he is Hispanic. This poem consists of three larger stanzas of ten lines each.

“At eight I was brilliant with my body. In July, that ring of heat We all jumped through, I sat in the bleachers
Of Romain Playground, in the lengthening Shade that rose from our dirty feet. The game before us was more than baseball. It was a figure—Hector Moreno Quick and hard with turned muscles, His crouch the one I assumed before an altar
Of worn baseball cards, in my room.” (Soto 1-10)

He begins the poem by giving some background. He says “At eight…” right away to introduce the audience to this
time of his life, and it also gives some perspective. He goes on to say “I was brilliant with my body.” He tells us that it is July so it is hot outside. He begins describing a memory from childhood to his audience. We can see that this is genuinely a child’s memory in the next line when he describes “shade that rose from our dirty feet.” They are children and they don’t want to wear shoes; they are brave and innocent. The language is also that of a child as he keeps it simple and colloquial. In the next line he expresses his excitement about this game with all the “amazement” of a child. He says, “The game before us was more than baseball.” He is expressing to the audience the grandeur with which these children saw baseball. To these children baseball was “...a figure- Hector Moreno.”

This man means so much to these children. They try to imitate him as they play baseball. Perhaps this is because as children you look up to successful people who you can identify with. You try to find people that you can identify with to admire, and in this case they found Hector Moreno. Hector Moreno is Hispanic, so when they think of him they can imagine themselves becoming successful baseball players as well.

“I came here because I was Mexican, a stick of brown light in love with those Who could do it—the triple and hard slide, The gloves eating balls into double plays. What could I do with fifty pounds, my shyness, My black torch of hair, about to go out? Father was dead, his face no longer Hanging over the table or our sleep, And my mother was the terror of mouths Twisting hurt by butter knives.

In the bleachers I was brilliant with my body, Waving players in and stomping my feet Growing sweaty in the presence of white shirts. I chewed sunflower seeds. I drank water And bit my arm through the late innings. When Hector lined balls into deep Center, in my mind I rounded the bases With him, my face flared, my hair lifting Beautifully, because we were coming home To the arms of brown people.” (Soto 11-30)

In the next stanza he continues, and this concept of identity seems significant because he emphasizes the fact that he is Mexican twice. At the beginning of the second stanza he says, “I came here because I was Mexican.” This is the first time the narrator tells the audience he is Mexican, although we may have assumed it by this point. He says he is “a stick of brown light in love with those/ Who could do it.”

Clearly he is proud to be Mexican because he refers to himself as a brown light. He wants to be like them. He probably doesn’t wish to be a migrant worker or factory worker; instead, he dreams to be a baseball player and for people to know his name. Children dream big and he being Mexican does not make him an exception. It appears that having grandiose dreams is universal for all children. Perhaps this is why he highlights the fact that he is Mexican. Often times Mexicans and other minorities end up in poverty. More often than not they end up in the working class.

Next he describes himself as a skinny tan boy with dark hair. He looks like the majority of young Mexican boys. The way he introduces his hair is interesting. He does not just say he has black hair he says, “black torch of hair…” which gives the audience an image. He paints a clear picture to his audience of a dark Mexican child with wild fierce black hair. He also seems to present to his audience the struggle within his family. They seem to be stuck in a cycle of poverty. This would also highlight why he wants a job that pays so highly; it would raise their social status to one of prestige. His mother being the terror of mouths may suggest that she takes out her stress on her family. It appears that even before the father died they struggled. He says that his face was no longer “hanging over the kitchen table,” which conveys that the father was drained from the drudgery of his life, and after his death this has passed on to the mother.

The middle stanza explains why he loves Hector so much and presents us with an image of being drawn to the game. He begins the third stanza saying “I was brilliant with my body” once again. Now he is in the bleachers. He only watches the players; he doesn’t play. He imitates their actions as he chews sunflower seeds and is an avid fan from the bleachers. He is aggressive as he watches, stomping his feet and waving his arms. He is such an active spectator he actually sweats. He might be sweating because he is nervous. He gives the impression that they make him nervous when he says “Growing sweaty in the presence of white shirts./.”

He so strongly identifies with Hector that he imagines himself as Hector. He imagines himself being able to maneuver around bases the way a professional ball player does. He is so excited blood rushes to his face as he says, “my face flared.” In the last lines he illustrates an acceptance of his identity. He almost illustrates a culture blending because baseball is a largely U.S. American sport, yet he gets excited when he thinks of his role model. He is proud of his two heritages, but he holds more allegiance with his Mexican side. He is expressing what is often referred to as brown pride.

He is proud to be a brown person which he illustrates when he says “because we were coming home to the arms of brown people./.”

In “Black Hair” Soto draws upon both his ethnicity and poverty of his youth. He is illustrating the difficulty to assimilate without the economic means to do so. They have no money so instead they dream to become legends in the most adored American sport: baseball. This illustrates his desire to blend into this culture as well as bring his pride in his brown heritage to the stadium.

“The Elements of San Joaquin”

In his poem, “The Elements of San Joaquin,” Gary Soto discusses the land and the fact that the land yields nothing for him. He includes an epitaph addressed to Cesar Chavez, a Chicano civil rights leader who fought for migrant workers. Throughout the poem he illustrates a deep connection to the land. Soto provides vivid details to describe the relationship of migrant workers to the land. The poem is divided into nine sections and each section deals with the struggles of the migrant laborers. The first section is titled “Field.”

“The wind sprays pale dirt into my mouth The small, almost invisible scars on my hands.

The pores in my throat and elbows Have taken in a seed of dirt of their own.

After a day in the grape fields near Rolinda A fine silt, washed by sweat, Has settled into the lines On my wrists and palms.

Already I am becoming the valley A soil that sprouts nothing. For any of us.” (Soto 1-12)

In the first line the speaker says, “The wind sprays pale dirt into my mouth” He is explaining that he works in the dirt. The fact that the soil is pale tells the audience that it is very dry soil, which gives the audience a clue into the conditions the migrants
work under. The soil is very dry and so it gets mixed in with the air. He is telling the audience this when he says, “The pores in my throat and elbows/ Have taken in a seed of dirt of their own!” These workers work under very unpleasant conditions because of the dry heat in the valley.

The speaker goes on to illustrate just how much the dirt has permeated his pores while working in the grape fields. In lines seven through nine he continues describing the soil and how it covers him saying, “A fine silt, washed by sweat./ Has settled into the lines/ On my wrists and palms.” It is illustrated here how the soil just takes over his body, as he is so covered by it that it’s difficult to differentiate between his skin and the dirt. The soil blends in to his skin because of the sweat from his hard labor. When he sweats the dirt just settles into his skin and rests there as if it is a part of him. This leads into the next stanza further illustrating that the soil is a part of him.

The last stanza of this section is a turning point because he is making a statement. The entire poem so far has been leading up to this statement. The speaker says, “Already I am becoming the valley./ A soil that sprouts nothing./ For any of us.” He is further illustrating that because he works the land and the land consumes him by permeating his skin and his body it is turning him into the valley. It is digging into the wrinkles and lines of his skin and making him resemble nothing more than the valley itself. In the next line he tells the audience that the valley sprouts nothing. Literally what he means is that it produces nothing because it is very dry soil and lacks many nutrients that would allow it to sprout life. When the last line is taken into consideration this line is figurative. He is telling his audience that he feels this deep connection to the land, yet it holds no value for him. He does not own the land, rather the land owns him. This leads into the next stanza further illustrating that the soil is a part of him.

In the next section of the poem called “Wind” the speaker continues his comparison of himself to the land. The land is once again him. The first stanza consists of a description of the land that highlights both the heat and dryness of the land. He tells the audience it is dry when he says “A dry wind over the valley.” The audience understands that it must be very hot already, but he takes notice of the red ants. The speaker is once again trying to solidify in the reader’s mind the conditions of the valley. They are communicating very miserable conditions to work under, yet migrant workers do and worse there is no profit for them.

“When you got up this morning the sun Blazed an hour in the sky,”

A lizard hid
Under the curled leaves of manzanita
And winked its dark lids.

Later, the sky grayed,
And the cold wind you breathed
Was moving under your skin and already far
From the small hives of your lungs.” (Soto, 30-38)

In the third section also titled Wind, the speaker is talking to someone else. He seems to highlight the difference between them, and making note of his struggles, it seems in juxtaposition to the first section titled “Fields.” He begins the first stanza of this section saying “When you got up this morning the sun/ Blazed an hour in the sky”; he implies that others have the luxury of sleep and not having to deal with the blazing heat of the sun every morning at dawn. In the next line he presents his audience with a lizard hiding from the heat of the sun. Even the lizard has the privilege of staying out of the sun.

In the last stanza of this section the speaker says, “And the cold wind you breathed/ Was moving under your skin and already far/ From the small hives of your lungs.” When he tells his audience they breathe cold wind he seems to be suggesting they are lucky because he breathes the dry wind of the valley. The wind is important because the wind brings dirt with it. The speaker mentioned earlier how the soil permeates his skin and his throat. Whomever he is speaking to seemingly doesn’t have the same experience because the wind moves under their skin far from their tiny lungs. The whole section seems to be directed toward a child because earlier he talks about a lizard and a manzanita. Language like manzanita with the “ita” at the end could suggest the speaker is being playful with language for a child as if to tell a story. When he discusses the wind being far from their lungs he says “small hives of your lungs,”; it implies he is speaking to a child. Due to the narrative nature of this section it seems more likely that he is speaking to a child.

“At dusk the first stars appear.
Not one eager finger points toward them.
A little later the stars spread with the night
And an orange moon rises
To lead them, like a shepherd, toward dawn.” (Soto, 39-43)

In the next stanza called Stars, he says at dusk the first stars appear, yet not one soul is eager at their sight. This is possibly because they are migrant workers. They are not on a set schedule and they can work all day until they have completed their quota for the day. To most people stars mean time to sleep, but for them there is no rest only more work. This stanza gives the impression that the migrant workers finish work at dusk and head home from there, especially when he says, “And an orange moon rises/ To lead them, like a shepherd, toward dawn.” It could be that the migrant workers are going to sleep when the first stars appear. They are not excited because the stars signal going to sleep.
only to prepare for the next day. When dawn arrives they will once again have to work until dusk. They work long hours in difficult manual labor. The image of them being led towards dawn bears resemblance to a hoard of workers leaving work only to return at dawn.

“In June the sun is a bonnet of light
Coming up,
Little by little,
From behind a skyline of pine.

The pastures sway with fiddle-neck,
Tassels of foxtail.

At Piedra
A couple fish on the river’s edge,
Their shadows deep against the water.
Above, in the stubbled slopes,
Cows climb down
As the heat rises
In a mist of blond locusts,
Returning to the valley.” (Soto, 44-57)

In the next stanza entitled Sun, he provides beautiful imagery of the land. He has an intimate relationship with the land and pays attention to the most intimate details of it because of his experience with it. He knows the types of trees, and he describes the light from the sun with such ardor; he doesn’t merely say the bright sun. He calls the sun “a bonnet of light.” The next lines where he again names the types of plant life illustrate his connection to the land. He does not say the yellow flowers; he says the “pastures sway with fiddle-neck.” He also adds more detail about the foxtail by saying tassels of foxtail.

“When autumn rains flatten sycamore leaves,
The tiny volcanos of dirt
Ants raised around their holes,
I should be out of work.

My silverware and stack of plates will go unused
Like the old, my two good slacks
Will smoother under a growth of lint
And smell of the old dust
That rises
When the closet door opens or closes.

The skin of my belly will tighten like a belt
And there will be no reason for pockets.”
(Soto, 58-69)

In the next section called Rain, he continues discussing the experiences of migrant workers. They are out of work when the season changes and there is no longer work on the farms. He says when autumn comes he “should be out of work.” He is expressing to his audience that after the harvest he will go back to being jobless. He says his silverware and plates “will go unused.” Once the harvest is over he will not have money to buy food and cook meals, so his utensils will go without purpose. His pockets will be empty because he will not have money to fill them. He will be penniless and therefore the only thing that will supplement his pockets is lint. When he says his silks will smell like dust it almost sounds like depression has rendered him immobile. Being jobless has left him hopeless because he has no food, no money, and a poor quality of life. This stanza brings attention to the condition that migrant laborers must suffer through. He again mentions his lack of money and food when he says the skin of his belly will tighten and there will be no use for pockets. This short stanza communicates the unhappiness felt by the migrant laborers.

“East of the sun’s slant, in the vineyard that never failed,
A wind crossed my face, moving the dust
And a portion of my voice a step closer to a new year.

The sky went black in the ninth hour of rolling trays,
And in the distance ropes of rain dropped to pull me
From the thick harvest that was not mine.”
(Soto, 70-75)

In the stanza entitled harvest it seems that the end of the farming season has passed or is approaching and the migrant laborers are preparing for the next growing season. At the end of the harvest we once again see the narrator express the fact that he does not profit from the harvest.

“If you go to your window
You will notice a fog drifting in.

The sun is no stronger than a flashlight.
Not all the sweaters
Hung in closets all summer

Could soak up this mist. The fog:
A mouth nibbling everything to its origin,
Pomegranate trees, stolen bicycles,
The string of lights at a used-car lot,
A Pontiac with scorched valves.

In Fresno the fog is passing
The young thief prying a window screen,
Graying my hair that falls

And goes unfound, my fingerprints
Slowly growing a fur of dust—

One hundred years from now
There should be no reason to believe I lived.”(Soto, 76-93)

During the section called Fog it seems as if our narrator is just observing. This could be because he is jobless and has no money or energy to leave the house. This stanza gives the impression that he has taken to people watching from his room. He seems to be slipping into a deeper depression in the way that he describes things. This scene is almost ominous with the fog swallowing everything in its vicinity. At the same time it expresses the hopelessness that he feels. This is expressed when he says in 100 years “There should be no reason to believe/ I lived.” He is basically saying that his existence is so insignificant because in 100 years no one will even remember him or what he contributed to the world.

“In this moment when the light starts up
In the east and rubs
The horizon until it catches fire,

We enter the fields to hoe,
Row after row, among the small flags of onion,
Waving off the dragonflies
That ladder the air.” (Soto, 94-100)

In the next section called Daybreak, the tone has shifted once again. It seems the growing season is back. Daybreak gives the impression that their lives are better somehow. This section feels uplifting almost as if their souls are rejuvenated. The laborers are restored. They once again have jobs, money, and access to food. But what happens when the growing season is over? The cycle will start all over again and they will slip into an abyss of hopelessness. The narrator begins to express this toward the end of the section. He began the section with an optimistic tone, as these workers were happy they had their jobs back, but then reality sunk in.

“And tears the onions raise
Do not begin in your eyes but in ours,
In the salt blown
From one blister into another;” (Soto, 101-104)

In this stanza we see the workers come to the realization that this happiness is only temporary. Tears have already begun to well up in their eyes. They are coming to terms with the fact that this is their lives and once the growing season is over they
will have to once again face poverty, misery, and hunger. This stanza is heartbreaking; the narrator adequately communicates the despair of these people. If it was not clear before, it is clear now that the narrator is communicating a message on behalf of migrant laborers when he says, “And tears the onions raise! Do not begin in your eyes but in ours,”. He seeks to make the individuals aware of the labor that goes into the food they eat. Then he goes on to say that salt is blown from one blister into another. This phrase seems like he is saying salt is rubbed in to their wounds. This is probably because once the growing season is over and their work day is over they will see others profit from their work. They will see other people eat the fruit and crop that they labored over.

“They begin in knowing
You will never waken to bear
The hour timed to a heart beat,
The wind pressing us closer to the ground.” (Soto, 105-108)

In this stanza he is describing the process of how this realization starts. It starts with them realizing they won’t wake up like clockwork at the same time anymore. Their internal clock won’t matter once the growing season is over. The wind pressing them closer to the ground is hard to interpret. He could possibly be saying the wind pushes them into realization and sadness. It pushes them to the ground into a depression soon to overwhelm them.

“When the season ends,
And the onions are unplugged from their sleep,
We won’t forget what you failed to see,
And nothing will heal
Under the rain’s broken fingers.” (Soto, 109-113)

This last stanza almost seems like a challenge. It is a jab at those who do not seek to understand the pain of the workers who picked the food they enjoy. He says, “We won’t forget what you failed to see,”. He is taking a very accusatory tone. The audience can feel his vexation in this line. He is angry that people cannot see their struggle and the lack of sympathy from others. In the last line he is saying there are no reparations for this pain. The rains broken fingers reflect the theme of a broken cycle. During one season they are full of life and content with their lives, and then during the next season they are empty swallowed in despair. The rains broken fingers are a metaphor for the cycle of their lives. The rain does not come down in one continuous line instead it is broken up in small dashes of droplets, tiny with barely enough to supplement the earth’s crops. Their happiness comes in droplets as it is not and cannot be continuous because they will always be subject to a vicious cycle of poverty. They are migrant laborers and their lives depend on the crop and those in power of the agriculture.

In this poem Soto does an impeccable job of creating an awareness of the conditions of the migrant farm laborers. He communicates this unfair cycle of despair and happiness. He communicates their struggle with poverty and hunger. This poem does exactly what Soto intended, which is to communicate and allow the audience to feel the anxiety that those who experience this go through.

**Alberto Ríos**

*“Day of the Refugio”*

In Alberto Ríos’s poem “Day of the Refugees” Ríos finds a way to blend his two cultures. Ríos differs in his approach to assimilation compared to many Chicano authors who have been canonized. A majority of Chicano authors struggle to assimilate or to be comfortable with balancing two cultures. Ríos seems to strike harmony between his two identities by blending them. In this poem he illustrates that he is proud of both of his cultures; Ríos has created his own way for his two cultures to coexist. He does this through a charming narrative discussing his Fourth of July from childhood. Throughout the poem he illustrates both how the poem aligns with the American holiday and how it had dual meanings in his family.

**In Mexico and Latin America, it is common to celebrate one’s saint’s day instead of one’s birthday. This is an act of community.**

“I was born in Nogales, Arizona,
On the border between
Mexico and the United States.” (Ríos, 1-3)

Before the poem begins he provides information relevant for a deeper understanding of the poems context. If he had not included this the audience may not have understood that it is more common to celebrate one’s Saint’s Day in Latin American countries. He begins the poem explaining the geographical significance to him, which also gives insight into the idea of culture blending. He says he is from “Nogales, Arizona, On the border between Mexico and the United States.” He is providing background information while introducing the idea of between-ness. He does so through the use of these two words, “border between”; both mean to be between or to separate. He also introduces the two country’s cultures that he must strike a balance between: Mexico and the United States.

“The places in between places,
They are like little countries
Themselves, with their own holidays” (Ríos, 4-6)

In the second stanza he explicitly introduces his inbetween-ness. He says the Nogales is one of “The places in between places,” so he is introducing his duality already. He highlights Nogales because it is a special place, much like himself. It is special because it is a place in between places. He addresses its significance when he says, “They are like little countries/ Themselves, with their own holidays!.” He is expressing that these places are so different that they are like countries themselves. Like himself this place must struggle between two cultures, languages and customs. For instance it is a place with both Anglo-Americans and Mexican Americans. Each culture has its own values and holidays which is the main idea of this poem. What would normally be culture clash has taken on a new meaning different from a single solidified meaning. Thus it is unlike Mexico and the United States because in Nogales the best parts of both cultures have combined to create their own little holiday.

“Taken a little from everywhere.
My Fourth of July is from childhood,
Childhood itself a kind of country, too.” (Ríos, 7-9)

In this stanza he discusses the idea of blending the cultures. They seem to take pieces from each culture since he says, “Taken a little from everywhere!”. He continues the poem with an air of wonder and amazement. This stanza illustrates how significant this single holiday is to him. Perhaps it is his favorite childhood memory. This could be because he has an interesting relationship with countries since he lives in between two. The celebration of one country is on this day and the celebration of his Mexican heritage through his “saint’s day” is on the very same day. He equates his childhood with a country to illustrate not only its significance but to further emphasize this day’s significance. It seems to represent his patriotism. He is proud of both of these countries and the country he has created on his own. The
idea of patriotism is so significant in this poem because our narrator is Mexican-American. He is so proud of these two cultures which he is trying to communicate in this poem.

“It’s a place that’s far from me now, A place I’d like to visit again. The Fourth of July takes me there.” (Rios, 10-12)

In this stanza he addresses the fact that he has grown older. He no longer experiences the same Fourth of July. This could perhaps be because as he grew older he saw border security become heavily reinforced. Either way he is suggesting here that he no longer experiences the same Fourth of July, and it may just be because he has aged. The narrator still holds the same amount of love for this holiday. It is still a savory memory. The memory of the Fourth of July is so strong that it can take him to his childhood. This holiday alone takes him back to the pure joy he experienced as a child. This is communicated in the poem; he shares this happiness with his audience. The audience can feel the excitement in his voice when he says, “The Fourth of July takes me there.” (Rios, 13-15)

This holiday is the epitome of his childhood because it represents who he is. This holiday illustrates his duality. It heightens his sense of love and pride with his identity as he demonstrates in the rest of the poem. The Fourth of July means multiple things to him. It represents this country which he is so proud of. It represents himself and his identity. It represents the women in his life. All of his family have a personal connection to this day and he shares this with them.

“In the United States the Fourth of July, It was the United States. In Mexico it was the dia de los Refugios,” (Rios, 16-18)

In the fifth stanza his excitement about this holiday once again is revealed. We see the excitement because of his use of semantics. He purposefully uses italics to emphasize the significance of these two words. The first time he does this is with “It was the United States.” His emphasis on this holiday representing the United States illustrates his excitement about this holiday. He is attempting to communicate more than the fact that the Fourth of July is important in the United States. He is trying to express that this holiday was representative of this country. He does this also when he italicized “dia de los Refugios.” This could possibly be because it is a foreign language, but more than likely he was trying to put emphasis on these words. He could have said it in English like he did for the title. Perhaps it is more respectful to say it in Spanish because it is a Latin American holiday.

“The saint’s day of people named Refugio. I come from a family of people with names, Real names, not-afraid names, with colors.” (Rios, 19-21)

In the sixth stanza he explains the significance behind the phrase he used in the sentence prior. He explains that “Dia de los refugios” is the saint’s day of people named Refugio. In the last stanza we heard the narrator’s pure excitement about this holiday. Here he is going to discuss his pride in the other half of his identity. He does this by beginning to discuss his family’s name. He adopts a childlike pride in discussing the names. It almost seems as if he is poking fun at people with common Anglo-American names. This is because of the way he says “I come from a family of people with names.” Don’t all people come from a family with names? Then he continues by saying “Real names, not-afraid names, with colors.” It seems apparent that he is making a jab at Anglo-Americans in favor of his Mexican heritage. He seems to be joking because he is so proud of his family’s colorful names. He is essentially saying that Anglo-American names are colorless or bland. It seems like he is suggesting that Hispanic names have flavor and boldness.

“Like the fireworks: Refugio, Magarito, Matilde, Alvaro, Consuelo, Humberto, Olga, Celina, Gilberto.” (Rios, 22-24)

He continues by proving how flavorful these names are. He is so proud of these names he feels the need to display them to his audience. He says each name with pride, avoiding nicknames or American translations. He does not even offer American translations for these names as he feels they deserved their chance to be pronounced correctly without having to compromise them for the typical American tongue. His family has real names “Like the fireworks…” he says. He aligns their names with something as magnificent as fireworks because in his eyes they are worthy of this much celebration. What’s more interesting is the fact that he doesn’t introduce a couple of names, but he takes the time to include a multitude of names. It’s almost as if he doesn’t want to stop saying these names, as if each new name brings him a sense of satisfaction pronouncing it to his audience. This stanza holds such beauty because of the pure love that is explicit within the nine names that he feels must be uttered.

Throughout the rest of the poem he continues giving in-depth detail into the pride he has for both cultures. He seems to exemplify the theme of culture blending in a positive way. He chooses to embrace and combine both parts of his heritage. Rios seems to have found a healthy approach to assimilation in this poem.

“A Simple Thing To Know”

In “A Simple Thing To Know” Alberto Rios presents his audience with a different perspective from the one presented in “Day of the Refugios.” In this one he is much more sympathetic toward the struggle of those growing up on the wrong side of the Mexican American border. The poem consists of a series of 19 couplets and the last stanza consisting of only one line breaking the form. The poem is a narrative poem and it focuses on one single happening. The story is about a man who crosses the border to Douglas at his wife’s request to buy some tuna.

“The whole thing is not much: A man On the border between Douglas and Agua Prieta,” (Rios, 1-2)

Each stanza adds something significant to the story and builds on the intensity of the situation. It is clear that what is about to ensue will seem very unjustified somehwow. We can tell that it is because of the way the narrator downplays the event at the beginning only to propagate the intensity as the story continues. In the first line the narrator provides a disclaimer saying, “The whole thing is not much:/.” In this he is minimizing the severity of the situation by saying it wasn’t much. This is perhaps because this is an event that will upset people and provide a sobering effect on them. This event is sobering because the residents of Nogales who witness this will be reminded of just how strict border policy is. The residents on the other side of the border will be made to feel insignificant due to a later event where the guards actually forget about the man in the cell. In the second line of the first couplet he provides the setting by telling the audience
that this is about a border between Mexico and the US; specifically Douglas and Agua Prieta.

“The man, on instructions from his wife—For the family and because she couldn’t, He went shopping, He crossed from Mexico to the United States,” (Rios, 3-6)

In the next couplet the narrator tells us the reasoning behind the event; his wife asked him to go shopping on this side of the border because she couldn’t. There may be multiple reasons she could not go, but it seems as if it was because she could not cross legally while her husband could. We begin to feel the intensity here as we realize he is crossing the border from Mexico which means he will be treated with more hostility than if it had been the other way around. In the next couplet he tells us that he is in fact crossing from Mexico to the United States. The line ends with a comma telling us there is more to this story. This makes it seem as if he did not cross the border; instead, something is about to happen.

“Walking past the officials, who looked busy. He didn’t want to bother them
And he didn’t want to wait. He walked past them, just a little.” (Rios, 7-10)

Next the intensity is full force because it is apparent what is about to happen. If he crosses the border and walks past the officials it will seem as if he is crossing illegally. He is not trying to be clandestine in this process as the narrator says, “He didn’t want to bother them,” but he also “didn’t want to wait.” This was his mistake because even though it was an innocent action he was immediately perceived to be guilty. He only barely passed the officials when they caught and threw him in a jail cell. When the officials forget that they had locked him in a cell the audience immediately begins to sympathize with his sense of insignificance. Later, when he tells the janitor why he had not said something, we begin to see this idea of oppression because he admits he knew better than that. This implies that there is some language that those on the wrong side of the border must know.

In this poem Rios depicts the struggle of dealing with border security through the short tale of a man who gets arrested and forgotten about. This poem does a lot to illuminate how those on the other side of the border are treated.

**Gloria Anzaldua**

*Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*

Gloria Anzaldua’s book of poetry entitled *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* is an amalgamation of poetry, Chicana/o history and prose. It is an interesting blend and the poetry reveals much about Anzaldua’s approach to assimilation. Interspersed throughout the poetry are various references to Aztec gods such as Huitzilopochtli the Mexican god of war and La Llorona. Along with the various references to Aztec theology there is also a balance of English and Spanish in the poetry. Oftentimes Anzaldua will begin speaking in Spanish or Nahuatl and it may require the reader to have some knowledge of her native tongue. Occasionally some of the poems lack titles so I must speak about them in terms of the chapters found in her book.

In an excerpt from Chapter 5 entitled “How to Tame a Wild Tongue,” she starts her section on linguistic terrorism with a paragraph addressing the Chicano’s struggle with language. She begins saying “Deslenguadas. Somos los del español deficientes.” (Anzaldua, 80). She begins the poem in Spanish illustrating both the primacy of Spanish and the significance of the feminine—as in deslenguadas. Translated she is saying “Outspoken. We are the Spanish deficient.” This stanza is significant for many Chicano readers because she is addressing the insecurity many Chicanos face about their language. They fear that they speak Spanish poorly, and therefore they are Spanish deficient.

In the next sentence she says, “Your linguistic nightmare, you linguistic aberration, your linguistic mestizaje, the subject of your *burla.*” (Anzaldua, 80) She seems to be addressing dominant culture, or people who do not believe Chicanos Spanish to be good enough. She is addressing Chicanos in this paragraph. Chicanos are a dominant cultures linguistic nightmare. She seems to be suggesting they are other Spanish speaker’s nightmare. Possibly because some may believe that Chicanos butcher Spanish with their various contributions to their language. Apart from that many Chicanos are increasingly speaking English as their primary language meaning much of the language could be sacrificed in this process. They are the subject of *burla* or ridicule.

They are mocked because others believe their Spanish is insufficient.

In the next lines she says, “Because we speak with tongues of fire we are culturally crucified.” (Anzaldua, 80) This could suggest two things: they speak with passion and a pride in their linguistic identity or humiliation because others criticize them for their Chicano-ness. They are culturally crucified because they are meant to be humiliated by their Chicano linguistic identities.

In the last sentence she says “Racially, culturally and linguistically *somos huérfanos*—we speak an orphan tongue.”(Anzaldua, 80) She is saying that they are orphans. They are orphans because they speak an orphan tongue. It is not their language and it is broken from true Spanish because they are Chicano. They speak a version of Spanish that is different from Spaniard Spanish. The Chicanos being Mexican they speak only a version of it that has evolved and been separated from its mother tongue. They speak a combination of languages being that they must find ways to speak English, Spanish, and other Chicano dialects.

In this short paragraph Anzaldua communicates the way that being linguistically inefficient makes her and other Chicanos feel while also arguing for linguistic pride for Chicanos.

"Don't give in Chicanita"

In this poem Anzaldua argues for Chicana cultural pride. She is speaking to a miss Anzaldua and telling her not to be pressured into assimilating into dominant culture. It is such an inspiring poem. It is as if she is talking to a child, reassuring and encouraging her to take pride in her heritage. It is a beautiful poem and it is very affectionate in essence while having a political element.

“Don’t give in mi prietita
Tighten your belt, endure.
Your lineage is ancient, your roots like those of the mesquite,
firmly planted, digging underground toward that current, the soul of tierra madre—your origin.” (Anzaldua, 1-7)

She begins the poem saying "Don’t give in mi prietita". She seems to be talking to a child as prietita is a nickname for a dark Mexican woman and prieta suggests it is a little girl because of the -ita ending. She is telling the child not to give in to peer pressure it seems. At this point it
seems to be related to her race because she points out the dark girl’s skin color in a comforting manner. This illustrates that even at a young age children face issues with their racial identities. In the next line she says, “tighten your belt, endure,” and it evokes such emotion within the reader. The strength she is trying to instill in this young woman is already evident. She tells her to endure instead of telling her everything is okay. She tells her the truth, that things may not be okay, but she is strong enough to endure it.

In the next line she begins to reach far back to her ancient roots, which is a common thread throughout her poetry. She often makes references to her ancient Aztec lineage. She says, “Your lineage is ancient, your roots like those of the mesquite/firmly planted, digging underground/toward that current, the soul of tierra madre/-your origin.” In this line she is discussing her Mexican heritage as she tells the young girl that her roots are strong. She says her roots are firmly planted in mother earth or tierra madre. This line seems to be directed at those whose roots are not in North American soil. This becomes especially evident in the next few stanzas.

“Yes, mi ijita, your people were raised en los ranchos—hear in the valley near the Rio-Grande you descended from the first cowboy, the vaquero,” Right smack in the border
in the age before the Gringo when Texas was Mexico
over en los ranchos los Vergeles y Jesus Maria-
Davila land.
Strong women reared you:
my sister, your mom, my mother and I.” (Anzaldua, 8-16)

In the second stanza she begins by saying, “Yes, m’ijita, your people were raised en los ranchos/here in the Valley near the Rio Grande/you descended from the first cowboy, the vaquero.” Again in this stanza she addresses the person she is speaking to with an -ita again which communicates a tone of affection. The way she tells this girl she is descended from the first girl almost seems as if she is trying to say don’t be ashamed, we were the original cowboys. She seems proud to be descended from those who were raised in the Valley. It seems as if she is suggesting there is purity to her roots that Anglo-Americans lack. In the next line she says, “right smack in the border/in the age before the Gringo when Texas was Mexico.” Here, she is illustrating some bitterness toward the United States confiscation of Mexican land. There seems to be irritation in her tone especially with her word choice. Gringo is often a term of derision used against Anglo-Americans.

In line 15 she tells the young girl “Strong women reared you: my sister, your mom, my mother and I.” This almost gives the reader a clue as to who Missy Anzaldua is. It seems that Missy Anzaldua could be her niece.

“And yes, they’ve taken our lands. Not even the cemetery is our now where they buried Don Urbano your great great grandfather.
Hard times like fodder we carry with curved backs we walk.” (Anzaldua, 17-22)

In the next stanza the first line says “And yes, they’ve taken our lands./ Not even the cemetery is ours now/ where they buried Don Urbano/ your great-great grandfather.” Here she is talking about the significance of land in the Mexican American heritage. When the United States confiscated a large portion of Mexican-American land they forced many Mexicans out of their homeland. This land held spiritual and sentimental value to them. Family cemeteries, acres of land, and homes were taken from them. Here, she is illustrating that she was a part of this herself. The gringos have taken their lands and not even their family cemetery belongs to them anymore. They have claimed everything that was theirs including the land that holds their family’s remains. They kept the land that her great grandfather Don Urbano was buried. This illustrates the disrespect behind the act of their confiscation. “Don” is a term of respect in the Hispanic heritage often used to address our elders. When she says Don Urbano she suggests he was meant to be respected because he was an elder, yet the land where his body was buried was disrespected. They take Mexican culture and tradition for granted when they deny the spiritual value that the land has to them. In the next line she says, “Hard times like fodder we carry/ with curved backs we walk.” This line seems to depict them sullenly leaving their lands. They are being forced out of their homelands. Their curved backs illustrate their grief over being forced to leave their land behind.

“But they will never take that pride of being Mexicana-Chicana-tejana nor our Indian woman’s spirit.
And when the Gringos are gone—see how they kill one another—here we’ll still be like the horned toad and the lizard relics of an earlier age:
"And when the Gringos are gone—/see how they one another—/ here we’ll still be like the horned toad and the lizard/ relics of an earlier age/survivors of the First Fire Age—el Quinto Sol.” (Anzaldua, 23-30)

In line 23 she says, “But they will never take that pride of being Mexicana-Chicana-Tejana/ nor our Indian women’s spirit.” In these lines she takes pride in her heritage. She embraces all aspects of her cultural identity. She does not merely identify as Mexican or Chicana, or Tejana but instead all three. This illustrates the need to embrace all of her that is not Anglo. She is embracing all parts of her identity here that are not Anglo-American. She illustrates that she is in a recovery stage by resisting all of the Anglo-American aspects of her identity and holding on to the Mexican and Indian instead.

In the next few lines she illustrates a hatred toward Anglo-American culture when she yet again addresses them as gringos. She says, “And when the Gringos are gone—/ see how they one another—/ here we’ll still be like the horned toad and the lizard/ relics of an earlier age/survivors of the First Fire Age—el Quinto Sol.” Once again she illustrates the pride she has in her heritage. She also illustrates her disdain toward “Gringos.” She continues to address Anglo-Americans as gringos. She seems to hope they will destroy themselves and her race once again will survive. Here she seems to be discussing how they survived the first colonization by the Spanish. Her race is full of survivors and this verifies the strength of her race to her. She predicts they will remain there even when Anglo-America has fallen.

“Perhaps we’ll be dying of hunger as usual but we’ll be members of a new species of lizard skin tone between black and bronze second eyelid under the first with the power to look at the sun through naked eyes.
And alive m’ijita, very much alive.” (Anzaldua, 31-36)

In the second to last stanza she continues saying, “Perhaps we’ll be dying of hunger as usual but we’ll be members of a new species /skin tone between black and bronze /second eyelid under the first /with the power to look at the sun through naked eyes. And alive m’ijita, very much alive.” Again, she is expressing her belief in the strength of her people. She says
they are strong because of strife they are used to facing. They constantly struggle with poverty. Without money it is hard to purchase food which is why she says they will be dying of hunger as usual. Even though they will be starving they will survive again. She addresses their skin color saying they are between bronze and black. This is because Anzaldua believes in them being the cosmic race and thus a blend of Spanish, Indian, and black resulting in her blended skin color. When she says we can look straight into the sun she is saying we can face even the worst suffering. She wraps up the stanza saying, “And alive mijita, very much alive.” This line seems very comforting with the way she says my child and repeats the word alive. The confidence she has in their continuity is also evident in the way she says very much alive.

Yes, in a few years or centuries la raza will rise up, tongue intact carrying the best of all the cultures. That sleeping serpent, rebellion(-r)evolution, will spring up. Like old skin will fall the slave ways of obedience, acceptance, silence. Like serpent lightning we’ll move, little woman.

You’ll see.” (Anzaldua, 37-45)

In the last stanza she addresses the idea of her various cultural identities saying, “Yes, in a few years or centuries la raza will rise up, tongue intact/ carrying the best of all the cultures.” In this line she is proud to be an amalgamation of all of these different cultures and she wants to take the best part of each. She continues saying, “That sleeping serpent,/ rebellion(-r)evolution, will spring up.” This is interesting because she is saying revolution and evolution, equating them to each other almost. She could be suggesting that evolution will lead to a revolution or vice versa. In the last lines of the stanza and the poem she says, “Like old skin will fall the slave ways of obedience, acceptance, silence./ like serpent lightning we’ll move, little woman./ You’ll see.” In these last lines she is saying that Chicanos’ will no longer be ashamed of being Mexican or Chicano. They will no longer be obedient to dominant culture, and they will no longer be forced to stifle their opinions. She says they will be like serpent lightning meaning they will be powerful and strong. Then she tells the girl “you’ll see” which illustrates her confidence yet again that one day Mexicans will rise up from the hardship. They will still suffer, but they will no longer be forced to feel inferior because they will be the survivors.

This poem is about having pride in her heritage. She has faith that one day conditions will improve for her people. She also illustrates much defiance toward Anglo-American culture. In this poem Anzaldua clearly resists Anglo-American culture and thus reverts only to her Chicana roots. She is in the recovery stage because she resists Anglo culture and instead turns to her indigenous Mexican and Chicano heritage.

“Ito live in the Borderlands means you”

In “To live in the Borderlands means you” Gloria Anzaldua discusses a conflict living on the border has had on her identity. She discusses living in a state of limbo because she must live with several identities. For the most part she deals with her identity as a Chicana, but she also deals with her identity as a mix of several races including black, Hispanic, Indian, and mulata.

“aré neither hispana india negra espanola
ni gabacha, erez mestiza, mulata, half-breed
cought in the crossfire between camps
while carrying all five races on your back
not knowing which side to turn to, run from;” (Anzaldua, 1-5)

The title actually serves as the first line of the poem because the first stanza continues the sentence. In the first line the narrator is saying that living in the borderlands means your identity cannot be defined by any one thing instead you are neither hispana india negra espanola, ni gabacha, erez mestiza, mulata, half-breed. Living in the borderlands makes you all of these identities. The next line continues with “caught in the crossfire between camps/ while carrying all five races on your back.” In this line the confusion that has been caused by this conflict in identity is evident. Our narrator feels that they are under attack and there is no refuge because they are half breed. They are under attack from various angles since they are a blend of so many races they cannot form a full alliance with one race. They cannot be seen as just Hispanic, Indian, black, mestiza or mulato. They are all five which makes it hard for them to form an allegiance or pride in one. This confusion is further illustrated when she says “not knowing which side to turn to, run from;” She does not know which part of her identity she wants to embrace. She could possibly fear judgment from anyone who disagrees with which part of her identity she chooses to embrace.

“To live in the Borderlands means knowing the the india in you, betrayed for 500 years, is no longer speaking to you, that mexicanas call you rajetas, that denying the Anglo inside you is as bad as having denied the Indian or Black;” (Anzaldua, 6-11)

In this stanza we see that she does fear judgment from her community. She fears what they will call her if she acts on a particular identity. When she says, “To live in the borderlands means knowing/ the india in you, betrayed for 500 years/ is no longer speaking to you;” she acknowledges the Indian part of her, but says that she no longer speaks to her. This could suggest that she feels disconnected from the Indian in her because of the conflict with all of her other potential identities. She could be suggesting this part of her no longer exists because for 500 years it has been systematically taken from her. Her Indian identity could have possibly been muzzled. She is also bothered by the fact that Mexicans call her a “rajeta” or traitor for denying the Anglo in her. They get angry because denying the Anglo “is as bad as having denied the Indian or Black;” This sentence is confusing because they say that denying the Anglo in her is as bad as denying the black or Indian. This suggests that they want her to embrace all of these races. Being chastised for not embracing all three of these identities leaves her even more confused because she still does not know which identity she wants to embrace or which one she can feel comfortable in.

“Cuando vives en la frontera
people walk through you, the wind steals your voice,
you’re a burra, buey, scapegoat,
forerunner of a new race,
and half-and-half woman and man—
either—
a new gender;” (Anzaldua, 12-17)

This stanza begins in Spanish with “Cuando vives en la frontera” meaning when you live in the Borderlands. She goes on to say “people walk through you, the wind steals your voice,” which implies she feels insignificant or underappreciated. People treat her differently and they separate her from themselves because she is a burra which means a donkey. They are calling her a cross-breed and shaming her for it instead of celebrating her multiplicity. In the first part of the sentence she says she is a “Burra, buey, scapegoat./” These descriptions all have negative connotations. Burra and buey translate to donkey and ox. It is interesting that she is saying they are like oxen because oxen are castrated to make
controllable. She could be trying to suggest that something has been taken from her, possibly the ability to feel comfortable in her identity; instead, she must struggle to find which identity she can turn to. In the next line there is a shift in the tone. Instead of referring to the negative aspects of this identity she says, “you are a forerunner of a new race.” This has a very powerful connotation. It almost seems like she is a leader because she has all of the identities to deal with and they are part of a new race.

“To live in the Borderlands means to put chile in the borscht, eat whole wheat tortillas, speak Tex-Mex with a Brooklyn accent; be stopped by la migra at the border checkpoints;” (Anzaldua, 18-22)

In this stanza she begins with, “To live in the Borderlands means to put chile in the borscht.” In this line she is blending two culinary traditions. Borscht is a European cuisine whereas chile or jalepeño is found in many Mexican dishes, illustrating unity of two cultures. In the next line another culinary tradition is altered by making whole wheat tortillas. Whole wheat is healthier, but that is not how they were meant to be made. They were meant to be flour tortillas or corn tortillas. Making them whole wheat illustrates how they have been anglicized. In the next line she says it means to speak tex-mex with a Brooklyn accent meaning that they speak Spanglish with Brooklyn accents. These cultures are all colliding and they are not necessarily in harmony. In the last line she says that it means you will “be stopped by la migra at the border checkpoints.” She is stopped at checkpoints by la migra which is immigration. She is stopped because she is Mexican-American and she appears Mexican so they have to make sure she is a citizen of the U.S. This is difficult for her because she does live on the border so this is an everyday part of her life.

“Living in the Borderlands means you fight hard to resist the gold elixir beckoning from the bottle, the pull of the gun barrel, the rope crushing the hollow of your throat;” (Anzaldua, 23-26)

She says that in the borderlands it’s hard to fight alcoholism. In the Borderlands alcohol is not just alcohol but “the gold elixir.” She refers to pulling the gun barrel suggesting that this is dangerous. It seems she is suggesting that once they drink it’s like a trigger and she won’t be able to quit. The way she continues to describe what it will do to her almost sounds as if she is comparing it to dying. She says “the rope crushing the hollow of your throat,” which sounds like a severe thirst or suffocation. It also seems to be part of the culture in the borderlands. Alcoholism is probably very prominent among the border because of all the stress dealing with poverty and border conflicts.

“In the borderlands you are the battleground where enemies are kin to each other; you are at home, a stranger, the border disputes have been settled the volley of shots have shattered the truce you are wounded, lost in action dead, fighting back.” (Anzaldua, 27-34)

In the third to last stanza she begins by saying “in the borderlands/ you are the battleground/.” She is taking a more defensive tone in these lines. She says, “you are the battleground” meaning that they fight over us. This seems to parallel how conflict is often fought over land and in this case they hold a deep connection to the land. In this sense they are the land because they hold a strong connection to it, and with the border conflict they are the battleground because the land is what’s being fought for. She continues saying where enemies are kin to each other. This could mean two things. First it could mean that Mexicans are enemies to each other because they are separated by a border and so must oppose their kin. Second it could mean that the United States and Mexico are enemies, but they are kin because they share European ancestors.

“To live in the borderlands means the mill with the razor white teeth wants to shred off your olive-red skin, crush out the kernel, your heart pound you pinch you roll you out smelling like white bread but dead;” (Anzaldua, 35-39)

The penultimate stanza is much more aggressive than the preceding stanzas. The scene she is depicting is graphic. She says, “To live in the borderlands means/ the mill with the razor white teeth wants to shred off your olive red skin.” This scene is taking on a morbid tone because she is describing skin being shredded off with teeth. Their skin is being shredded off because of its color; perhaps it delineates her as a Mexican. Her skin color makes her different, yet it is one of the few things she has left to connect her to her culture.

Taking her skin color would take away part of her identity. Next she says, “Crush out the kernel, your heart?” meaning that they take away what gives her life to her heart. She could be suggesting that they want to take away her heart which is her identity. The kernel that represents her heart also represents her identity that lies in her culture which she takes pride in. They are trying to beat out her culture to make her more synonymous with Anglo-American culture. She expresses this when she says “pinch you roll you out/ smelling like white bread but dead.”

“To survive the Borderlands you must live sin fronteras be a crossroads.” (Anzaldua, 40-42)

In the last stanza she makes a switch from the word live to “to live in the borderlands” to “to survive in the borderlands.” It seems she has gotten to what she means to express the entire time; one does not live in the borderlands instead you survive the borderlands. There are targets on your back from various vantage points because you are an easy outcast. When you are an amalgamation of several identities it is easy for you to serve as everyone’s scapegoat. She concludes with “you must live sin fronteras/ be a crossroads/.” She is saying you must live without borders in the borderlands. In the borderlands you must compromise to survive.

In “To live in the Borderlands means you” Anzaldua expresses why life is difficult in the borderlands. Life is difficult because she lives in a place where her identity causes great conflict for her. She struggles balancing this complexity, and concludes saying one must compromise each of these identities to survive in the borderlands.

**Conclusion**

This research sought to illuminate thematic assimilation in Chicano poetry. I was hoping to document how Chicanos deal with the theme of assimilation in their poetry. My thesis states that there are four thematic approaches to assimilation in Chicano poetry: Successful assimilation, resistance to assimilation, struggle to assimilate, and a recovery from assimilation. Through my research of the topic I can now conclude that my original prediction was partially correct. I have three conclusions:

1.) Not all Mexican-Americans identify as Chicanos.

2.) Some Chicanos deal with assimilation
at a different depth than other Chicanos.

3.) There are not four approaches but rather a spectrum of Chicano authors’ approaches.

While all of our authors dealt with the topic of assimilation in their poetry, not all of the authors identified as Chicano. In fact, many of the authors were identified as Chicano poets by other scholars. Many discuss Chicanos and what it means to be Chicano. Mexican-American is a term that seems equally appropriate for some of the authors, as the hyphen imitates the conflicted identities they discuss. Some of the authors have been identified as Chicano because of the political stance in their poetry; for example, authors such as Cervantes and Anzaldua who both embrace this part of their identity. Other authors like Gary Soto do not explicitly identify as Chicano but do not separate themselves from Chicano concerns such as field labor and the struggle of balancing cultures. Other authors like Alberto Rios do not identify as Chicano and seem more aligned with the term Mexican-American. Rios also does not separate himself from Chicano concerns, but he does take a significantly less political stance and instead focuses on the complexity and beauty of each of his cultures.

My second conclusion is that some Chicanos deal with assimilation in their poetry at different depths, meaning some discuss assimilation a great deal and others do not. The poetry of Anzaldua and Cervantes was heavy with their approaches to assimilation. The other two poets, Rios and Soto, dealt less with assimilation. Their poetry dealt with a variety of things such as other common Chicano or Mexican-American experiences.

My third conclusion is that I was too narrow in my original prediction of the four stances. As I was conducting research I noticed it was hard to categorize authors into an approach. Facets of some of the approaches occasionally overlapped. These rigid four approaches did not allow for a smooth discussion of each authors’ relationship with assimilation in their poetry. It was very confining. I came to realize there are not 4 approaches to assimilation. It is closer to a spectrum of Chicano authors’ approach to assimilation. There are not 4 delineated approaches but rather a spectrum of approaches that authors can take. The authors can also move on the spectrum, as at different times an author may be resistant to assimilation and at other times they can appear to be struggling to assimilation. Other times they may illustrate a desire to assimilate.

In the future it would be interesting to incorporate a sociology faculty member regarding this research. The topic of assimilation is a sociological concept, making it hard to concentrate in depth on the topic, given that it is not my field of study. With the help of a sociology faculty member we could focus more in depth on the relationship between assimilation and Chicano poetry.

Illuminating upon the work of Chicano authors is significant because representation in literature is important. There must be room for underrepresented cultures in the literary cannon. There is a growing Hispanic community in the United States; therefore, it is significant to recognize that representation matters. Children and adults will look for experiences they can identify with in literature: One of those experiences being assimilation. These works by different Chicano authors offers a variety of experiences regarding assimilation for readers to identify with.


