

Preface

Before/Beyond Borders is an anthology of Chicano/a literature that attempts to encompass the entire historical scope of Chicano letters beginning with one of the earliest cultural exchanges between Native Americans and Europeans during the first half of the 16th century and ending with some of the most relevant Chicano writing of our time. To date, there have been several quality literary anthologies published that have made it possible for Chicano/a literature to be more accessible to interested readers. Many of them, however, focus on the production of Chicano/a literature created since the 1960s. To the credit of Nicolás Kanellos, Tey Diana Rebolledo and Eliana S. Rivero, and Manuel de Jesús Hernández-Gutiérrez and David William Foster, all visionaries in the field of Hispanic Literature in the United States, students have access to quality anthologies such as *Herencia/En otra voz* (2002), *Infinite Divisions* (1993), and *Literatura Chicana, 1965-1995: An Anthology in Spanish, English, and Caló* (1997), respectively. Building upon their work, *Before/Beyond Borders* focuses on the Chicano/a literary production and its broader literary heritage since 1542.

Living in the borderlands of Southern New Mexico, the idea of creating a border themed anthology made sense. Although border studies have been popular since about the mid-90s, I believe scholars are finally beginning to understand the complexity of border culture and to what extent we can apply the border metaphor in our studies, classrooms, and daily lives. For years, apart from the Río Grande, the border for many was just a line in the sand dividing two countries. Now, well after the implementation of NAFTA and the subsequent growth of the *maquiladora* industry, the negative repercussions of globalization affecting people on both sides of the border are much clearer: mass migration and displacement, new divisive border walls, and a sharp increase in violence in the borderlands due in large part to drug and human smuggling.¹

All of these bi-products of the border are hard to ignore and on the surface it can appear that the borderlands make for a difficult place to live. In some cases this may be true, just as in many other parts of the world. But what makes this place special, despite its problems, is the people and their culture. At any number of cultural events such as a religious pilgrimage to a sacred site, a *matachines* performance, or a *charreada*, one hears Spanish being spoken all around, recreating a Mexican ambiance well within the borders of the United States.² These cultural practices and others remind us that Chicano

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culture and its connection to Mexican culture is strong and longstanding in the borderlands; we can hope that this will always be the case.

For this reason, I chose the title of *Before/Beyond Borders*, to show that Chicano culture predates any artificial borders that now exist and that it transcends any physical, social, or psychological borders that society has attempted to create and impose upon the people that inhabit this region. However, to be clear, there are a number of literary works in this anthology that were created well before the Southwest was annexed by the U.S. and some even predate the formation of the United States itself, which means that these works also predate the creation of a Chicano identity.

Many authors in this anthology are thus not considered Chicano because they lived in a time before such a term existed. And others, despite growing up aware of the term Chicano and knowing what it means, still do not self-identify as Chicano. So why include these groups in this anthology? In short, because each work here contributes to the historical and social formation of the Chicano identity at some level. Historical figures such as Álgvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca and Gaspar Pérez de Villagr may have written from a Spanish perspective, but it was one that was heavily influenced by their years of living amongst the Native American people of their time, sometimes coexisting, other times clashing.

Daniel Venegas and Jorge Ulica, who wrote during the 1920s, strongly ridiculed Chicanos as they perceived them as abandoning their Mexican heritage and for speaking a “pocho” dialect.³ But in actuality these working class Chicanos whom they were degrading had more in common with most Mexican working class immigrants than did Venegas and Ulica, who were well educated and would have been considered of a higher social class. And Richard Rodriguez, despite his strong preference to be labeled as an American writer and general disassociation with Chicano/a literature and the even broader ethnic American voice, simply cannot stop writing about his Mexican past.

The creation and acceptance of a Chicano literary canon has indeed undergone much scrutiny, but knowing the complex nature of Chicano identity, it almost seems natural that this is the case. Therefore, regardless of the author’s intent or background, what shall be evident through this collection of works is that they point to an experience that is unique and yet appreciable by all who have shared in these experiences or have crossed borders in their own life, real or imaginable. This collection of stories, poems, essays, and plays not only represent how Chicano/a literature predates borders, but also transcends them.

Every anthology carries the unenviable position of selecting which works to include and which to exclude. A Chicano/a literary anthology requires the additional task of deciding what language to publish it in as some Chicano authors write in Spanish, but the majority write in English, and many switch between both languages. It is therefore common practice to include translated works to garner a wider English-speaking readership. However, with this anthology I have chosen to publish every work in its original version, making only a few minor changes in older texts to aid comprehension. I realize this will create an impediment for some, but I believe the value of reading an original language text far outweighs any disadvantages. Readers will have the opportunity to appreciate the author's true voice and study the linguistic undertones of a work, as well as the story itself. This will also help maintain a consistency within the anthology as it would be impossible to translate several pieces that are written in Caló (Chicano slang), speech that can defy translation, or, at the very least, a reliable one.

I have divided the anthology into four major sections: *Contact Zones: Conquest, Colonization, and Conflict (1542-1848)*, *Cultural Survival: Remembering Our Alamo (1848-1910)*, *Birth Rites: Pochos, Pachucos, Chicanos, Oh My! (1910-1986)*, and *Cultural Warriors: Between Barrios and Borders (1986-Present)*. I chose these four sections so that the reader could manage the broad historical framework that spans the breadth of the Chicano/a literary production. However, there are several works that bridge a section and their date of publication alone does not necessarily mean that the author's sensibility aligns with that of the other writers within that section. In fact, these sections could be further divided as the complexity of ideas and themes posed by these writers merit a more scrutinized organizational framework. However, I believe these section headings, historical timeframes, and their assigned literary works help organize this anthology in a way that the reader will find useful and engaging.

As Mexican Americans compose approximately 60% of the U.S. Hispanic population, the largest minority group in the country, it is pertinent that students of all levels and backgrounds have access to the works produced by members of this ethnic group.⁴ Unfortunately, it was not that long ago that literary works by Chicanos were not considered worthy for high school or university curriculum, let alone as the basis for research. Not until the late 1970s did Chicano/a literature finally begin to receive academic notoriety by non-Chicano scholars, thus finding acceptance as a scholarly subject.⁵ However, as a high school student, I was completely unaware that such a literature existed. And as a college student I was only faintly knowledgeable of Chicano/a

literature, or U.S. Latino/a literature for that matter. Looking back, I feel that my teachers and the educational system failed me considering that the first time I was really exposed to Chicano/a literature in the classroom was while studying Hispanic literature during my Master's program in Spanish in a course taught by Dr. Kanellos at the University of Houston.⁶ Finally, in the new millennium, we can say that Chicano/a and U.S. Latino/a literature are taught in high schools and universities across the country. However, we still have a long way to go as there are many schools at all levels that do not teach Chicano/a literature as part of their curriculum.

Before/Beyond Borders is my attempt to further the work done by my mentors. With this anthology, students will learn that Chicano/a literature is not a new literature first created in the second half of the 20th century. This anthology will show that Chicano/a literature, dating back to its literary precursors, is in fact one of the first literatures that bridges the Americas and the Old World. It also chronicles some of the major historical markers since the conquest of the Americas, spanning Spanish colonization and the subsequent Mexican period, the formation of the United States, the defining moments of WWII and the turbulent 60s, to the present-day. Chicano/a literature is truly part of the "American" literary heritage and all students in the U.S. should have access to it.⁷ I hope that the words and stories that follow find young readers at an earlier age than they did me, striking them with the same profound meaning as they have for me and my life.

Notes

¹ *Maquiladoras* are factories that large corporations set up along the border to produce manufactured, technological, textile, and others goods at low costs due to substandard labor laws in Mexico.

² *Matachines* is a sacred dance performed by Native Americans and Hispanics in the Southwest United States and Mexico. A *Charreada* is a Mexican rodeo in which special attire is worn and horsemanship tricks are performed.

³ A *Pocho/a* is derogatory tag given by Mexicans to Mexican Americans who have supposedly betrayed Mexico for assimilating into American culture, particularly for losing the ability to speak Spanish well.

⁴ See U.S. Census <http://www.census.gov/>. This number is based off the 2000 census, a number that surely has increased during the last ten years.

⁵ See Joseph Sommer's "From Critical Premise to the Product: Critical Modes and Their Application to a Chicano Literary Text" (1979) and Joseph Sommer and Tomás Ybarra-Frausto's *Modern Chicano Writers: A Collection of Critical Essays* (1979).

⁶ Dr. Nicolás Kanellos is founder of Arte Público Press, the largest publisher of U.S. Hispanic authors, Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Project, and Piñata Books.

⁷ By "American" I am referring to all of the Americas, not solely the United States.