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## A Voice from Oblivion: The Return of the Subject as Agent in Richard Rodriguez's *Hunger for Memory*

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I might surprise, even offend, you by how inconveniently Mexican I can be. I am, for example, still very much influenced by Mexican Catholicism. But do not worry. I learned long ago to shield this particular inheritance from public view.  
 Richard Rodriguez ("An American Writer" 6)

As a counterdiscourse to the assimilationist tendency expressed within the Chicana/o experience of the pre-Civil Rights Movement period, the vast majority of the literature written by Chicana/o writers during the 1960s and 1970s in the United States was crafted according to an ideological model. This anti-establishment ideology negated the discourse of assimilation, characteristic of earlier generations, and instead forged a sense of identity based on a historical awareness and an affiliation with the socially disadvantaged. To this end, the nationalist ideological project sought to emphasize ethnic and cultural pride through the recuperation of history within its counterdiscourse of cultural preservation:

Identity was seen as a process of historical review carried out through an ideology of nation building which stressed several key points: retrieval of family and ethnic tradition, identification with the working class, struggle against assimilation, and the dire results if these efforts were not continued. Identity was not simply to be found, but to be forged, with careful attention to history and ideology. (Bruce-Novoa, *Retrospace* 134)

Recognizing the influence of history and ideology as basic to the discourse of the Chicana/o Nationalist Movement, Bruce-Novoa outlines a problematic implication of those nationalist ideologues of the 1960s and 1970s. The nationalist ideology resulted in the finalization, within the signifying activity, of the Chicana/o subject. The discourse of cultural

(patriarchy) and linguistic preservation (bilingualism) quickly became adopted publicly as the definitive discourse of Chicana/o cultural identity. As a result, the hybrid figure of the *pachuco*<sup>1</sup> was glorified; the hybrid figure of the *campesino*<sup>2</sup> was idealized; and the monological figure of the *vendido*/assimilationist<sup>3</sup> was condemned.

This definitive discourse was profoundly institutionalized within the Chicana/o community; so much so that any deviation from it, in the eyes of the nationalist ideologue, became subject to public censure and exclusion from the discourse of “Chicana/o cultural experience.” Adversely, any literary work that adhered to the model of the Chicana/o nationalist tendency was celebrated within the community and thereby legitimized as a valid voice. Writers like José Antonio Villarreal, or Richard Rodriguez much later, were chastised for succumbing to the assimilationist tendency in their works, while Luis Valdez and Tomás Rivera were celebrated for erasing it.

Bruce-Novoa warns, however, that the danger of erasure within the signifying activity is that it lends itself to a myriad of interpretive possibilities “by those who read in a different light” (*Double Crossings* 16). Thus, eliminating the possibility of an assimilationist tendency within Chicana/o identity allows for the possibility of what Homi K. Bhabha calls “the individuation of the agent”:

The individuation of the agent occurs in a moment of displacement. It is a pulsional incident, the split-second movement when the process of the subject’s designation—its fixity—opens up beside it, uncannily *abseits*, a supplementary space of contingency. In this “return” of the subject, thrown back across the distance of the signified, outside the sentence, the agent emerges as a form of retroactivity. [. . .] As a result of its own splitting in the time-lag of signification, the moment of the subject’s individuation emerges as an effect of the inter-subjective—as a return of the subject as agent. (185. My brackets)

Such “supplementary space of contingency,” or “time-lag,” is, I argue, the creative moment of post Civil Rights Movement Chicana/o literary production. As a product of the paradigm in which the nationalist ideological project denied the previous generation’s discourse of assimilation and institutionalized what it meant to be Chicana/o, Chicana/o literature of the 1980s is located within (an)other discursive dimension. It is precisely what Bruce-Novoa is referring to when he writes: “Chicano literature is a response to chaos, but at its best it

rejects limitations, perversely working from and returning to the space of nothingness, for *only from nothing are there infinite possibilities—all simultaneously possible. Only in nothing can you find everything* (Retrospace 11).<sup>4</sup> Thus, it is from this oblivion, within Bruce-Novoa’s notion of “nothingness,” that it is possible to refigure and renegotiate more inclusively the meaning of the binary notions of “assimilation” and “nationalism.”

In this study, I will explore Richard Rodriguez’s autobiography *Hunger for Memory* as an exemplary work of Chicana/o literature written during the “time-lag of signification,” or else that “supplementary space of contingency” that is the period following the Civil Rights Movement. I choose this autobiography in order to reveal the unique and innovative ways in which the author crafts his contentions regarding the newly created binary imperative. In my analysis, I seek to reposition Rodriguez as the subject of his own agency in hopes of offering a more inclusive consideration of the author’s discourse regarding a Chicana/o cultural experience.

Since its publication in 1982, much debate has centered on the politics of Richard Rodriguez’s autobiography *Hunger for Memory*. Henry Staten explains:

*Hunger for Memory* drew fire from the defenders of bilingual education and affirmative action and most heatedly from advocates of Chicano-Chicana identity, who charged and continue to charge that he had abandoned his ethnicity and aligned himself with the conservative political forces in the United States seeking to stifle the self-empowerment of the Chicano-Chicana people. (104)

The response on the part of those “defenders” to which Staten alludes would seem valid considering Rodriguez’s own rhetoric: “Once upon a time, I was a ‘socially disadvantaged’ child. [. . .] Thirty years later I write this book as a middle-class American man. Assimilated. [. . .] I have argued particularly against two government programs—affirmative action and bilingual education” (*Hunger* 3-4. My brackets). Rodriguez thus seemingly threatens the enunciative practice (the institutionalization of meaning within the hybrid moment of cultural rearticulation) achieved by the previous generation. In constructing his own discourse according to the rhetoric of the assimilationist tendency, Rodriguez voices an experience that the nationalist tendency, up to that

point, had attempted so vigorously to stifle. Thus, cultural hybridity, insofar as it legitimized the nationalist ideologue's discourse, seemingly has abandoned Rodriguez because he advocates for assimilation and publicly opposes the efforts of bilingual education.

Closer analysis reveals however, that Rodriguez's complex autobiographical text is not completely abandoned by the theories of cultural hybridity. Instead it emerges from the "supplementary space of contingency," which is a by-product of the achievement of the hybrid's journey of "minimal rationality." The reader will remember the latter activity as one that "alters the subject of culture from an epistemological function to an enunciative practice [. . .] by which objectified others may be turned into subjects of their history and experience" (Bhabha 177-178. My brackets). Insofar as writers like Luis Valdez and Tomás Rivera canonized Chicana/o experience during the hybrid moment thereby allowing individuals to play the part of both the subject and the object of their narratives, these authors also allowed for the creation of another space of hybrid negotiations, one that makes possible "the individuation of the agent." Thus, I approach Rodriguez's text as a particularistic articulation of identity, one that is not simply an extension of nationalism's attempt to eliminate assimilation, but rather as a result of that argument and therefore existing outside its ideological parameters. Through Rodriguez's voice, we see that the Chicana/o is capable of revisiting the binary construction of nationalism versus assimilationism from a tangential point of view in order to renegotiate more truthful articulations of Chicana/o identity.

*Hunger of Memory* tells the story of a life that began in the 1940s. It retraces the author's lived experience prior to and during the nationalist ideology's institutionalizing discourse of the Chicana/o experience, and thus grows out of the nationalist/assimilationist dichotomy. Inasmuch as Rodriguez contradicts the efforts of Chicana/o nationalism by evoking an assimilationist tone, the fact that he is indeed aware of nationalism's efforts distances him from traditional assimilation, the dialectic of social survival that was perceived as the only option. Though he has been accused of ideological transgression, Rodriguez's reality fortifies his peripheral position outside of the discussion, thereby able to articulate objectively distinct identity possibilities. Rodriguez's autobiographical discourse represents what Bhabha calls:

[. . .] the return of the subject as agent, [which] means that those elements of social "consciousness" imperative for agency—deliberative, individuated, action and specificity in analysis—can now be thought outside that epistemology that insists on the subject as always prior to the social or on the knowledge of the social as necessarily subsuming or subsuming the particular "difference" in the transcendent homogeneity of the general. (185. My brackets)

Rodriguez's return as agent results from his ability to resist nationalism's institutionalized notions of a Chicana/o voice and thereby locate alternate loci of enunciation. In the Prologue, Rodriguez, in the form of a confessional disclaimer, speaks from "outside that epistemology" while alluding to his particular position as subject. In doing so, he interrogates the presumption of a Chicana/o homogeneity:

I do not write as a modern-day Wordsworth seeking to imitate the intimate speech of the poor. I sing Ariel's song to celebrate the intimate speech my family once freely exchanged. In singing the praise of my lower-class past, I remind myself of my separation from that past, bring memory to silence. I turn to consider the boy I once was in order, finally, to describe the man I am now. I remember what was so grievously lost to define what was necessarily gained. (*Hunger* 6)

Thus, Rodriguez participates in a particularistic discourse of Chicana/o cultural experience as the subject of his own personal lived experience, which obliges him to caution, once again, against those who would categorize him according to the paradigm of nationalism versus assimilation: "Mistaken, the gullible reader will—in sympathy or in anger—take it that I intend to model my life as the typical Hispanic-American life. But I write of one life only. My own" (*Hunger* 7).

This is exactly what Rodriguez does. His autobiography is comprised of six chapters preceded by a Prologue entitled "Middle-Class Pastoral" where he asserts that his educational experience within U.S. political borders altered him in profound ways. He proclaims that this education ultimately renders him, as a middle-class product of this education, incapable of maintaining a connection with his socially disadvantaged past. In the subsequent chapters, Rodriguez recounts poetically the principle experiences of his life—the childhood struggle to survive in an English-only society, higher education, religious formation,

the significance of his skin color and, perhaps most important, the relationship with his immediate family. Richard Rodriguez relates all of these events in order to divulge the significant role they played in his formation as a Chicana/o citizen.

In the first chapter, titled "Aria," Rodriguez focuses on his experience as a Spanish-speaking child struggling to learn English in a public setting. He characterizes his dual linguistic background not only as "an accident of geography" (*Hunger* 11) but also as the birth of the individual in society upon hearing the nun pronounce his name: "It was the first time I had heard anyone name me in English. 'Richard,' the nun repeated more slowly, writing my name down in her black leather book. Quickly I turned to see my mother's face dissolve in a watery blur behind the pebbled glass door" (*Hunger* 11). Rodriguez thus sets the stage for the remainder of his autobiography, which is played out through the "death" of his private, familial identity of the Spanish language and the "birth" of his public, English progressive identity.

In recalling the importance of language in his "transformation" of identity, Rodriguez progresses into a discussion of bilingual education. Here he restructures the dialogue that had been recently settled between the nationalist ideology and the assimilationist tendency:

Today I hear bilingual educators say that children lose a degree of "individuality" by becoming assimilated into public society (Bilingual schooling was popularized in the seventies, that decade when middle-class ethics began to resist the process of assimilation—the American melting pot). But the bilingualists simplistically scorn the value and necessity of assimilation. [. . .] Thus it happened for me: Only when I was able to think of myself as an American, no longer an alien in *gringo* society, could I seek the rights and opportunities necessary for full public individuality. The social and political advantages I enjoy as a man result from the day that I became to believe that my name, indeed, is *Rich-heard Road-ree-guess*. [. . .] Those middle-class ethnics who scorn assimilation seem to me filled with decadent self-pity obsessed by the burden of public life. (*Hunger* 26-27)

Thus, Rodriguez directly confronts the advocates of bilingual education who have profoundly bought into the ideological project of Chicana/o nationalism, and he presents them with a particularistic discourse that threatens the linguistic precepts of that project. Rodriguez's discourse, that is, is located within "the supplementary space of contingency" as

he travels against the discursive grain of linguistic hybridity to explore other cultural meanings. Though he seemingly takes a step backward and is accused of nullifying the cultural preservationist's progress during the 1960s and 1970s, I believe his argument offers much more than one transgressive stance merely opposing another.

Up to this point, Rodriguez has outlined for his audience his transformation as a sociolinguistic subject, a paradoxical activity in which, at times, he participates actively: "I was able to think of myself as an American" (*Hunger* 27). And yet, he also expresses as passive sense of deception regarding his role in this transformation: "I grew up victim to a disabling confusion. As I grew fluent in English, I no longer could speak Spanish with confidence" (*Hunger* 28). Later, he reveals, "[. . .] I would answer in English. No, no, they would say, we want you to speak to us in Spanish. ('. . . *en español*.' ) But I couldn't do it. *Pocho* then they called me" (*Hunger* 29). Thus, Rodriguez attempts to demonstrate the inconsistent notion of subjectivity within the supplementary space of contingency for the Chicana/o who follows the previous generation—a constant struggle for legitimacy within the dual institutionalized signifiers of Chicana/o (nationalism) and *pocho* (assimilation).

I perceive Rodriguez's conflict regarding his own particular subjectivity as a parallel to the ideas of "selection and indefinability" outlined by Alfred Arteaga in an analysis of the epic Chicana/o poem "I am Joaquín" by Corky Gonzales. There he asserts that:

[. . .] first, subjectivity is implicated further in selection, rather than merely combinatory sequence; and second, the epic project of writing the subject is itself undermined. [. . .] Both instances, selection and indefinability, project a characteristic of chicanismo that corresponds with contemporary notions of subjectivity: it is something performed rather than simply essential. (150)

As cultural subject, Rodriguez selects his identity from the two competing, monological discourses of assimilation and nationalism. Torn between and influenced by the two, he labels himself "scholarship boy,"<sup>5</sup> who "has used education to remake himself" (*Hunger* 65):

The scholarship boy is a very bad student. He is the great mimic; a collector of thoughts, not a thinker; the very last person in class who ever feels obliged to have an opinion of his own. In large part, however,



the reason he is such a bad student is because he realizes more often and more acutely than most other students—than Hoggart himself—that education requires radical self-reformation. [. . .] But he would not be so bad—nor would he become so successful, a *scholarship* boy—if he did not accurately perceive that the best synonym for primary “education” is “imitation.” (*Hunger* 67. My brackets)

Thus Rodriguez recognizes the inherent nature of identity performance within his postcolonial subjectivity, especially within a classroom setting that enables him, albeit subconsciously, to put into question the same “absoluteness of the cultural either-or (either Chicano or American) that he proclaims” (Staten 104). By evoking an assimilationist tendency, Rodriguez, burdened by nationalism’s ideology of what is essentially Chicana/o and what is not, is attempting to speak against the forces that would prescribe him a place in U.S. society. In its resistance, Rodriguez’s identity discourse exists outside the paradigm fashioned by Chicana/o nationalism and is therefore able to revisit it from a fresh perspective.

The fact that Rodriguez is cognizant of his own self-fashioning performance (the imitative action) represents a disruption of nationalism’s conclusive binary imperative. Bhabha asserts that:

[. . .] to interrupt the occidental stereotomy—inside/outside, space/time—one needs to think, outside the sentence, at once very cultural and very savage. The contingent is contiguity, metonymy, the touching of spatial boundaries at a tangent, and, at the same time, the contingent is the temporality of the indeterminate and the undecidable. It is the kinetic tension that holds this double determination together and apart within discourse. (186)

Such is the position of Richard Rodriguez. As a “tangential figure” he touches both the dominant culture (“I have taken Caliban’s advice. I have stolen their books. I will have some run of this isle” [*Hunger* 3]) and the local culture (“though I knew how to translate exactly what she had told me, I realized that any translation would distort the deepest meaning of her message: It had been directed only to me. This message of intimacy could never be translated because it was not *in* the words she had used but passed *through* them” [*Hunger* 38]).

Rodriguez, however, recreates inventively the traditional linguistic dichotomy of post-colonialism (metropolitan versus local language) as

a spatial construct (public versus private relations). That is, Rodriguez locates himself between the “spatial boundaries” that define his experience, thereby creating a postmodern notion of the metonymic gap as one that allows for accessibility not in terms of language, but rather in terms of relationships. This dialectic, in turn, leads him to advocate the assimilationist tendency:

Intimacy thus continued at home; intimacy was not stilled by English. It is true that I would never forget the great change of my life, the diminished occasions of intimacy. But there would also be times when I sensed the deepest truth about language and intimacy: Intimacy is not created by a particular language, it is created by intimates. The great change in my life was not linguistic but social. If, after becoming a successful student, I no longer heard intimate voices as often as I had earlier, it was not because I spoke English rather than Spanish. It was because I used public language for most of the day. I moved easily at last, a citizen in a crowded city of words. (*Hunger* 32)

Thus Rodriguez, speaking from the space of contingency, has fashioned a particular discourse that exists outside the well-defined parameters of nationalism. By employing an assimilationist tone, he undermines one of the principle precepts in nationalism’s institutionalization of Chicana/o identity—bilingualism. For expressing his own thoughts regarding bilingual education, he has been accused of transgression, of negating the progress of the Chicano nationalist ideology. And yet, I perceive Rodriguez’s discourse to represent the “individuation of the agent.” Rodriguez refashions, retroactively, the discourse of *chicanismo*, fixed at “bilingualism,” to suit his own personal sociopolitical setting as a tangent touching two cultures. As he does so, we must recognize that he does not, nor wish to succumb to the homogenizing impulse that defines the Chicana/o experience categorically. Rather, inasmuch as he speaks from that “space of contingency,” Rodriguez constructs his discourse upon “nothingness,” those ashes left-over from the argument between nationalism and assimilation, as he attempts to explore new possibilities of identity within his particularistic experience.

Rodriguez’s tangential discourse is not, however, restricted simply to the linguistic sphere. He also addresses, from that “supplementary space of contingency,” the institutionalized notion of Chicana/o identity as an inherently socially disadvantaged subjectivity. Adhering to a

nationalist discourse, Rodriguez identifies his childhood in terms of a nationalist Chicana/o identity: "I was a bilingual child, a certain kind—socially disadvantaged—the son of working class parents, both Mexican immigrants" (*Hunger* 12). But he also invokes a discourse of assimilation as he becomes distanced from this identity as a result of his education, of his experience as the "scholarship boy:" "It mattered that education was changing me. It never ceased to matter. [. . .] I was not proud of my mother and father. I was embarrassed by their lack of education" (*Hunger* 52. My brackets). The majority of the scholars of the nationalist tradition who have publicly rebuked Rodriguez for his valuing of assimilation have misread him, inasmuch as they fail to recognize him as a tangential figure who, paradoxically, employs both the discourse of assimilation *and* nationalism.

It is no understatement to say that Rodriguez problematizes the binary imperative. The result is a splitting of the subject between two extremes, manifested in the ability of Rodriguez to perceive himself as both a bilingual youth *and* an assimilated adult:

The boy who first entered the classroom barely able to speak English, twenty years later concluded his studies in the stately quiet of the reading room in the British Museum. Thus with one sentence I can summarize my academic career. It will be harder to summarize what sort of life connects the boy to the man. (*Hunger* 43)

Here Rodriguez seemingly contradicts himself by invoking, once again, Arteaga's theories of "selection and indefinability." As a tangential figure *between* assimilation and nationalism, he is able to assert that "I can[not] claim unbroken ties with my past" (*Hunger* 5)<sup>6</sup> while also admitting a connection between the boy and the man. This notion of "selection and indefinability" results from Rodriguez's attempts to define his own particularistic identity as one that exists both outside the binary paradigm of assimilation and nationalism and yet is still dictated by it. Such a problematic locus of enunciation is what allows him to assert that "the scholarship boy must move *between environments*, his home and the classroom, which are at cultural extremes, opposed" (*Hunger* 46. Emphasis mine.) Rodriguez's hybrid refiguring of identity allows for a *continual* choosing of the self.

Moving "between environments" is in fact the most salient characteristic of Rodriguez's rhetoric. As both a tangential figure in and

a product of an epistemology that does not recognize non-essentiality, Rodriguez takes pains to determine exactly where his discourse of identity may rest. His sense of displacement, of non-essentiality, obliges him overwhelmingly to align himself with a certain camp at different times in the narrative. Reflecting upon this issue during his college years, Rodriguez reveals how he came to a finalization regarding his identity:

In a way, it was true. I was a minority. The word, as popularly used, did describe me. [. . .] I was a minority, I believed it. For the first several years, I accepted the label. I certainly supported the civil rights movement; supported the goal of broadening access to higher education. But there was a problem: One day I listened approvingly to a government official defend affirmative action; the next day I realized the benefits of the program. I was the minority student the political activists shouted about at noontime rallies. Against their rhetoric, I stood out in relief, unrelieved. *Knowing*: I was not really more socially disadvantaged than the white graduate students in my classes. *Knowing*: I was not disadvantaged like many of the new nonwhite students who were entering college, lacking a good early schooling. [. . .] I was not—in a *cultural* sense—a minority, an alien from public life. (*Hunger* 146-47. My brackets. Italics in the original)

Here, Rodriguez returns as subject. Regarding all of the possibilities that lay before him, which he perceives uncritically to result from the color of his skin, his sense of honesty and truth oblige him to face the fact that his education has indeed changed him. He aligns himself, in the rhetoric of the "either-or fallacy" (Guajardo 105), with the assimilationist tendency. And yet, what he does not understand is that instead of defining himself in terms of sameness with the dominant group, he articulates his identity much more profoundly as a non-minority. According to Staten, "because he accepts the to-be-or-not-to-be of identity talk, he misformulates his relation to the name *Chicano* as an absolute nonrelation" (114). Rodriguez's essentialist misconception is addressed once again in his last chapter.

Throughout *Hunger of Memory*, Rodriguez rationalizes himself not to be among the socially disadvantaged, thereby seeming to abandon his people and their cause for civil justice in favor of a privileged life. Yet, while leading up to the concluding episode of his celebrated

premiere work, he admits once more his non-essential nature as a tangential figure:

In the company of strangers now, I do not reveal the person I am among intimates. My brother and sisters recognize a different person, not the Richard Rodriguez in this book. I hope, when they read this, they will continue to trust the person they have known me to be. But I hope too that, like our mother, they will understand why it is that the voice I sound here I have never sounded to them. (190)

Rodriguez explicitly crafts his discourse of identity in such a way that allows for the tendency of identity performance. In admitting to being "a different person" while in the company of either intimates or strangers, he articulates a discourse of identity that celebrates non-essentiality. He therefore represents unknowingly the return of the subject in the sense that he wishes to tolerate the ambiguity of "the space of contingency." This space, however, is burdensome. As a product of the paradigmatic struggle between assimilation and nationalism, wherein cultural fixities are institutionalized within the signifying activity, Rodriguez fails to recognize himself as a tangential figure that is inherently capable of exploring and celebrating new non-paradigmatic perceptions of Chicana/o cultural identity. Thus, Rodriguez is held hostage within the rhetoric of assimilation by the efforts of the Chicana/o nationalist project.

I argue that the concluding episode, however, emphasizes metaphorically a sense of optimism regarding Rodriguez's discourse of identity and thus closes the autobiography on a promising note. After spending an emotional Christmas evening together at the house of Richard Rodriguez's parents, siblings and spouses prepare themselves and their children "to leave." During their departure, Rodriguez offers a depressing description of his parents' sense of abandonment and unfamiliarity with their own children:

I watch my younger sister in a shiny mink jacket bend slightly to kiss my mother before she rushes down the front steps. My mother stands waving toward no one in particular. She seems sad to me. How sad? Why? (Sad that we are all going home? Sad that it was not quite, can never be, the Christmas one remembers having had once?) I am tempted to ask her quietly if there is anything wrong. (But these are questions of paradise, Mama.) [. . .] I take [the coat] to my father and

place it on him. In that instant I feel the thinness of his arms. He turns. He asks if I am going home now too. It is, I realize, the only thing he has said to me all evening. (*Hunger* 194-95)

Thus Rodriguez concludes his memoir. Significant, however, is the innocent use of the term of endearment "Mama," which implies a persistent sense of intimacy between child and parent. Also, the fact that he offers to his reader no answer regarding his father's question is striking in that it leaves open the possibility of either remaining within or departing from the familial context. Rodriguez reemphasizes, as a final point, that his nature is indeed that of a tangential figure capable of "touching" two essentialist extremes, which he articulates as the public and private worlds. Does he remain or does he leave his parents' house? The question is rhetorical, for it is more important to understand that he is capable of either one.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> According to Rafaela G. Castro, the term *pachuco* refers to those individuals "who make up a fascinating urban subculture" (177). She goes on to quote Alfredo Mirandé, who stated "The *pachuco* has been an especially visible symbol of cultural autonomy and resistance. His distinctive dress, demeanor, mannerism, and language not only express his manhood but set him off culturally from the dominant society. To be a *chuco* is to be proud, dignified, and to uphold one's personal integrity as well as the honor and integrity of the group. It is at once an affirmation of one's manhood and one's culture" (179). The *pachuco* figure is the focus of many of Luis Valdez's works including his play *The Shrunken Head of Pancho Villa* and his play-turned-film *Zoot Suit*.

<sup>2</sup> The *campesino* refers to the Mexican-American individuals and culture in rural communities found along the United States/Mexico border. The late Américo Paredes focused much of his scholarship on the culture and folklore of these individuals in his work *With His Pistol in His Hand*. The *campesino* figure is also the focus of Tomás Rivera's . . . *Y no se lo tragó la tierra*.

<sup>3</sup> The term *vendido* is a noun formed by using the past participle of the verb *vender*, which means to sell. Therefore, the closest translation of this term

would be "the sellout" or the individual who has "sold himself." It refers to someone who hides, inhibits or otherwise forsakes his Chicana/o or Mexican-American cultural identity in favor of adopting a more monological American/Anglo identity. The *vendido* figure is the focus of Tomás Rivera's *George Washington Gómez* and José Antonio Villarreal's novel *Pocho*. Because of his oppositional stance regarding bilingual education and affirmative action, Richard Rodriguez has become widely associated with the term *vendido* as well.

<sup>4</sup> This idea of Chicana/o literature as a response to chaos is articulated most explicitly in the opening lines of Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales's epic nationalist poem "I am Joaquín": "I am Joaquín / lost in a world of confusion, / caught up in a whirl of a / gringo society, / confused by the rules, / scorned by attitudes, / suppressed by manipulation, / and destroyed by modern society" (Gonzales 207).

<sup>5</sup> Rodriguez is borrowing the label created by Richard Hoggart to designate those whom we now refer to as the "minority" or "underrepresented student."

<sup>6</sup> Brackets mine. In the original: "Perhaps because I am marked by indelible color they easily suppose that I am unchanged by social mobility, that I can claim unbroken ties with my past. The possibility!" (*Hunger* 5).

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