

# INTRODUCTION

## CHICANA/O NARRATIVES, THEN AND NOW

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In the study of Chicana/o literature, few works have had the sustained influence of Ramón Saldívar's 1990 monograph *Chicano Narrative: The Dialectics of Difference*. Since its publication, graduate students have carefully studied the volume as they prepare to enter the field, while literary scholars writing about novels, short stories, nonfiction, and film created by Chicana/o and Latina/o writers and artists have consistently cited the work. As we elaborate below, *Chicano Narrative* arrived on the scene at a crucial moment in Chicana/o literary studies, when a wide range of issues was being heatedly debated. These issues included everything from questions of identity and what should "count" as Chicana/o literature to political and ideological commitments, institutional considerations, and questions of aesthetic value and narrative form. Saldívar's work negotiated a number of competing imperatives as it positioned itself within these debates: the desire to develop a theory of the Chicano novel; the desire to maintain the political character of the Chicano even as Chicana/o novels entered the institutional realms of the university; an expectation that both the novel and its theory would recuperate and generate historical knowledge; and a desire to advance the presence and profile of Chicana/o letters. His navigation

of these ambitious aims was held together through his commitment to elucidating the power of the Chicana/o literary imagination, even as he developed a theory of Chicano narrative that understood literature not as the product of an exterior reality that the author and work should serve but as a reality capable of producing concrete effects in the world. This theory, which he called the “dialectics of difference,” argues that the Chicano novel is thus not so much the *expression* of the ideology of difference as it is a *production* of that ideology. Through his influential theory, Saldívar galvanized the use of dialectical criticism in the study of Chicana/o fiction and made the case that cultural production was itself a political act.

Because of the influence *Chicano Narrative* has exerted on the field imaginary of Chicana/o literary studies, any assessment of its impact is also an assessment of the field as a whole. The essays in this volume originated in a seminar, conducted at the 2010 American Comparative Literature Association convention in New Orleans, that was devoted to this reconsideration of the book and the field. Entitled “*Chicano Narrative* Now: Chicana/o Literary Discourses in an Age of Transnationalism,” the seminar paid special attention to two recent developments in Chicana/o studies: the wealth of early writing by Mexican Americans that has been recovered in the interval between *Chicano Narrative*’s first appearance and the present, and the “transnational turn” in the study of American literature. *Chicano Narrative* played an integral role in each of these developments. It pointed in the direction of a budding transnational approach to Chicana/o, Latina/o, and US literature when it connected Chicana/o experiences to such historical events as the United States–Mexico War of 1846–48 and the Mexican Revolution. Moreover, through its attention to the important work of figures such as Genaro Padilla and Clara Lomas on nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Mexican American and Chicana/o writers, *Chicano Narrative* also registered the early contributions of the Recovering the US Hispanic Literary Heritage Project—contributions that have reshaped the field.

Although *Chicano Narrative* registered these developments, it could not fully anticipate the course they would take. For instance, transnational approaches have shifted the Chicana/o subject from the margin to center, making *Chicano Narrative*’s intervention in American literary history less pressing as the field of Chicana/o studies has imagined forms of citizenship and cultural life that are not constrained by the

nation. Additionally, the work of the Recovery Project has exposed new narrative genres that differ from those explored in *Chicano Narrative* in terms of their narrative form and in how they orient themselves around critical categories such as race, class, gender, and sexuality.

These developments raise a number of crucial questions addressed by the essays in this volume: If nation-time is not the primary determinant of the (literary) historical event, how has the historical “event” itself been transformed? What narrative forms or discursive modes demand renewed critical attention? How have contemporary writers responded to these developments, by producing narratives that are more historical (rather than, say, autobiographical) and/or transnational (rather than confined within a US experience)? What Mexican and Latin American cultural and historical coordinates become more evident as influences on Chicana/o narrative when viewed through a transnational lens? How do Chicana and Chicano writers transform these influences to engage their positions as subjects and citizens of the United States? Behind these inquiries are questions about the future of Chicana/o literary studies, especially in light of the rise of Latina/o studies: Has Latina/o studies rendered Chicana/o studies obsolete or assigned it the role of a period marker? What is the relationship between Chicana/o and Latina/o studies? In what ways does Latina/o studies demand a rearticulation of Chicana/o studies’ political, aesthetic, and cultural aims? How does “Chicano” remain generative as the historical and geographical parameters of the field expand?

The essays in this volume offer a robust testament to the ongoing significance of Chicana/o literary studies as well as to the continued generative potential of *Chicano Narrative*. Although diverse in their approaches and in their responses to the key questions enumerated above, the essays, taken together, reveal how “Chicano” names a literary critical sensibility, as well as a political one, and show how this critical optic can be projected backward and forward to yield new insights about the status of Mexican Americans, the legacies of colonialism, and prospects for social justice. Far from being scaled away by the transnational turn, Chicana/o literary representations emerge here as significant instances of the local for interrogating globalization’s attempts to erase difference. The field’s defining interests in racial justice and the minority experience grow more complicated in the expanded historical and archival frame of our present moment, producing important intersections with

new disciplinary formations, such as Latina/o studies and critical ethnic studies, while also retaining a distinctive character. The recalibration of Chicana/o literary studies in light of these shifts raises important methodological and disciplinary questions, which these essays address directly or by example, exposing the new skills necessary for the study of Chicana/o literature.

If our current moment is one in which the field is changing rapidly, it might be useful to refer to the emergence of Saldívar's *Chicano Narrative*, a work that was also responding to a shifting critical terrain. The development of that work offers a case study for negotiating competing intellectual demands, while also elucidating some of the unfinished business of that volume, to which scholars can now turn their attention.

### FROM NOVEL TO NARRATIVE

Describing the diverse body of theoretical writing on the novel, Dorothy J. Hale notes that novel criticism is a “braid of traditions” rather than a monolithic statement (*Novel* 4). If this is true of the body of novel theory, it also characterizes how particular attempts to theorize the novel often constellate a number of different approaches as they advance their arguments. This is certainly true of Saldívar's *Chicano Narrative*, which answered debates within Chicana/o literary criticism as it also mobilized various poststructuralist and Marxist approaches to the novel to make its case for the “dialectics of difference.” In order to understand how *Chicano Narrative* negotiated Chicana/o politics and how it connects to theories of the novel, we examine *Chicano Narrative*'s relationship to Saldívar's 1979 *MELUS* essay, “A Dialectic of Difference: Towards a Theory of the Chicano Novel.” By tracking the shift in the title keywords—from “novel” to “narrative”—we can appreciate the scope of Saldívar's intervention and the ways in which it has been generative for the field for more than two decades. At the same time, we can also discern the work's unfinished business: the paths that its historical moment restricted it from investigating and how it might connect to new developments in the study of the novel.

Saldívar's 1979 *MELUS* article begins as a response to a controversial 1977 essay by Joseph Sommers entitled “From Critical Premise to the Product: Critical Modes and Their Application to a Chicano Literary Text.” In his article, Sommers identifies two kinds of criticism that he

sees dominating Chicano literary studies in the late 1960s and early 1970s: formalism and culturalism. Formalism not only encompasses close reading but often includes “comparative criteria” that unfairly measure Chicano literature against “consecrated masterpieces” of the canon (55, 56), while culturalist approaches fixate on the search for cultural identity and attempt to show that “the work is distinctive because it emerged from Chicano experience” (67). As a remedy to these tendencies, Sommers proposes a “historical-dialectical” approach that regards “literature as a cultural product” and thus studies the text in relation to its “cultural ambience” and “societal structures” (59). In “The Dialectics of Difference: Towards a Theory of the Chicano Novel,” Saldívar responds to Sommers’s call for a new critical engagement with Chicano literature by pointing out that “this reassessment is already taking place in Chicano studies,” and he then cites the work of such scholars as José David Saldívar, Juan Bruce-Novoa, Juan Rodríguez, and Raymond Paredes (73). He thus situates his own theoretical intervention in a broader historical context, showing its connectedness to an emerging critical idiom. Saldívar ventures a “new unified theory of the Chicano novel” that demonstrates how the Chicano novel “uses a dialectical concept that determines the *semantic* ‘space of Chicano literature’ as the intersection of the cultural-historical reality appropriated by the text to produce itself, and of the aesthetic reality produced by the text. Opting for conflict rather than resolution, for difference over similarity, the Chicano novel is thus not so much the *expression* of this ideology of difference as it is a *production* of that ideology” (88).

For Saldívar, this theory of the novel—what he refers to as the “dialectics of difference”—is consequential because “it allows us to examine the formal and thematic dynamics *within* the literary text and to account for the nature of its special interaction with both the Mexican and American social and literary history that *surrounds* it with a clarity which other critical methods do not allow” (89). While there are certainly connections between Sommers’s call for a “historical-dialectical” approach and Saldívar’s dialectics of difference, not the least of which is a shared appeal for dialectical approaches, Saldívar significantly leveraged poststructuralist theory in order to move beyond Sommers’s recommendations. In an early assessment of the exchange between Saldívar and Sommers, Bruce-Novoa notes that Sommers “saw [literature] as the product of an exterior reality which the author and work

should serve . . . while [Saldívar] studies [literature] as a reality capable of producing concrete effects in the world. Sommers saw and analyzed the message; Saldívar accepts that symbolic action constitutes a real praxis in itself" (*RetroSpace* 170). In a later assessment of Sommers's essay and the responses it instigated, Marcial González notes that Sommers's method is "more synthetic than dialectical" and that dialectical criticism is something that Saldívar's essay galvanized in the study of Chicano fiction (23).

It is important to underscore the significance of the novel in Chicano literary criticism at this historical moment. Marcial González notes that novels were never the dominant genre of Chicano literature. Through the 1960s and 1970s, poetry was the most prevalent form of Chicana/o literary production, and, in the 1980s, memoir, autobiography, and mixed-genre texts rose in popularity, "influenced in part by the rising interest in cultural studies" (3). In the 1990s, the poet Ray González declared the short story "the strongest genre in Chicano literature today" (qtd. in M. González 3). The novel was marginal not only in terms of its influence in this period but also in terms of its numbers. Marcial González notes that, in the period between 1970 and 1989, "approximately 60 Chicano novels were put into print" (2), or about three per year. Although this low number of novels is in part explained by a publishing industry that was initially reluctant to support Chicana/o writers, critics such as Bruce-Novoa note that "[p]oetry was the preferred form of expression in the early period of the Chicano Movement" because of its orality ("History" 32). On this account, poetry's oral transmission of history made it a "ritual of communal cementing and initiation," granting poetry an affective charge and epistemological authority over the written word ("History" 32). In contrast, the novel, at least initially, seems too mediated and too distant from the intimate truths that Chicanos want to tell and share.

In accounts of the novel like these, which see it as superseding more "immediate" forms of representation like poetry, we can detect two attitudes: first, that the novel alters the relationship between the writer and history, and, second, that the novel represents the most recent achievement in literary production and therefore is accorded a heightened status. This tendency to grant the novel greater prestige characterizes not only Chicano literature but literature in general during this period. In "The Short Story: The Long and Short of It," Mary Louise Pratt

claims that literary genres are understood in relation to other genres. Comparing the novel to the short story, Pratt explains that “the novel is, and has been for some time, the more powerful and prestigious of the two genres” (96). The cultural capital associated with the novel in the 1970s and 1980s may be one way of explaining the amount of critical attention the form received during this period despite the fact that the actual number of Chicano novels published was relatively low.

Scholars not only turned their critical eyes to these works but also were actively involved in encouraging novel writing. The best known of these attempts was the Premio Quinto Sol, a prize inaugurated by the Quinto Sol publishing house in 1971 in order to promote works by Chicano authors.<sup>2</sup> Of the four prizes that the publisher awarded, three went to novels, suggesting that the novel genre was, even in the early period of the Chicano Movement, a key vehicle for raising the profile of Chicano letters. The first of these prize winners, Tomás Rivera’s . . . *y no se lo tragó la tierra*, is an example of a work being labeled as a novel when it could also be classified (as some have) as a short-story cycle, a series of interlocking vignettes, or a novella. A similar kind of ambivalence shrouds critical discussions of another canonical novel, published thirteen years after Rivera’s: Sandra Cisneros’s *The House on Mango Street*. Paula M. L. Moya’s essay in this volume examines the ways in which this classification has inhibited the criticism of *Mango Street*. In the cases of both Rivera and Cisneros, the inclination to speak of the works as novels is bound to attempts to establish a canon of Chicana/o literature. As John Alba Cutler notes in a recent study of recovered New Mexican writer Eusebio Chacón, genre categorizations can affect our interpretations if they obscure the ways in which the works understand themselves (129–30). Cutler draws upon the work of Pratt, who notes that the short story has been used “to introduce new regions or groups into an established national literature, or into an emerging national literature in the process of decolonization” (104). As Cutler notes, classifying a work as a novel rather than a short story might obscure the emergence that Pratt describes, as well as how “Chicana/o writers use short prose fiction to voice skepticism toward the incompletely rendered projects of modernity,” projects with which the novel form has been associated (130).

The desire to establish a canon of Chicana/o literature was not the only thing driving the interest in the novel as a literary form in the

interval between Saldívar's *MELUS* essay and the publication of *Chicano Narrative*. As Dorothy J. Hale notes, the 1980s saw an "explosion everywhere of the novel," which surpassed poetry in some respects to become a "vital object of interest to scholars both within and outside of English departments" (*Novel* 453). For some of these scholars, the novel was regarded with suspicion because it was a popular form that was closely associated with the market. Some critics, such as D. A. Miller and Nancy Armstrong, saw the novel as a technology of power that exerted social control over its readers by interpellating subjects into the norms of citizenship. Bruce-Novoa expresses concern about this ability of the novel when he notes that the form could change the Chicano subject's relationship to knowledge and history. Other critics, such as Raphael Dalleo and Elena Machado Sáez, examine the shaping force the market plays in the production of Latina/o literature. They argue that "any cultural form that enters the market—and today, it is that entry that allows a text to become popular—becomes subject to negotiation between the cultural producer and the culture industry" (10). Focusing on a post-1960s generation of Latina/o writers, Dalleo and Machado Sáez scrutinize these writers' relationships with the US publishing industry, located in New York City. As they do this, they bracket out Chicana/o writing because its "imagined and institutional centers" are distant from New York, resulting in "a much different historical relationship to the city's publishers" (11). Chicana/o writers, scholars, and activists have responded to this vexed relationship to the US publishing industry by building their own institutions. Publishers such as Quinto Sol in California and Arte Público Press, now in Texas, were instrumental in discovering, recovering, cultivating, and disseminating the writing of Chicanos. Although these presses did an enormous service to Chicana/o letters, they could also produce their own norms for what constituted Chicana/o literature. The long and vexed publishing history of Arturo Islas's *The Rain God* demonstrates how Chicano writers could sometimes be caught between the expectations of mainstream *and* Chicano publishing industries.<sup>3</sup>

While some critics suspiciously regard the novel as an apparatus of ideological control, Saldívar's *Chicano Narrative* better fits with the work of another group of novel theorists who see the genre as capable of producing political and social reform and as providing opportunities for social representation. These scholars tend to be concerned with the



writings of socially marginalized groups and are deeply influenced by the work of Mikhail Bakhtin and Fredric Jameson. Bakhtin's concept of "heteroglossia" helps these critics see the novel as a form that linguistically captures disparate ideological points of view, which allows for the representation of social conflict. Viewing the novel's inclusivity and diversity as positive attributes, Bakhtin demonstrates how capitulation to a dominant ideology is not inevitable and how speakers cross ideological boundaries all of the time. Bakhtin's understanding of the novel as an assemblage of social discourses supplies one link to Jameson's psychoanalytically inflected Marxist theories of the novel. Jameson's *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (1981) inaugurated an era in which "symptomatic reading" dominated the analysis of narrative. Jameson rejects the idea that the text reflects its society and instead regards narrative as politically motivated. In his phrase, narrative is a "socially symbolic act" of interpretation that resolves contradictions and produces meaning. The task of the critic is not to read the surface of the text but to regard the text as a symptom pointing to an unconscious, absent cause, which for Jameson is history itself. While *The Political Unconscious* made a significant impact in literary studies, its influence was especially profound in Chicana/o studies. As Marcial González explains, "Jameson's work indeed represented a 'new kind' of criticism for Chicano literature in the 1980s" (20–21), and José Limón declared in 1992 that this generation of critics "recognize[s] . . . Jameson's work as the prime example of a new kind of American criticism" (*Ballads* 167).

Jameson's arguments about romance in the second chapter of *The Political Unconscious* link his criticism with Bakhtin's and explain the underpinnings of Saldívar's development of the *corrido* paradigm for the analysis of Chicano narrative. Jameson urges Marxist critics to shift their attention from realist narrative to romance, which he sees as a crucial genre for the dispossessed because it produces magical resolution to conflicts that cannot be resolved. If the realist narrative engages conscious imaginings about one's social world, the romance, with its happy endings that symbolically resolve contradictions, operates in a form of fantasy and wish fulfillment that urges critics to investigate the unconscious motivations for such actions. Against the "reification of realism," romance becomes the location of "narrative heterogeneity" and "offer[s] the possibility of sensing other historical rhythms" (104). For Jameson,

romance is a varied category and includes “oral tales of tribal society, the fairy tales that are the irrepressible voice and expression of the underclasses of the great systems of domination, adventure stories and melodrama, and the popular or mass culture of our time” (105). With the corrido paradigm, Saldívar combines Jameson’s injunction to discover a romance genre that makes legible “other historical rhythms” with Bakhtin’s understanding of the novel as an assemblage of discourses whose cultural work might be best understood when compared to other social discourses. Just as Henry Louis Gates Jr. turned to African mythology and African American folklore to unpack the cultural work of the African American novel and Jane Tompkins and Nancy Armstrong turn to conduct books and homemaker manuals to explain the significance of women’s writing of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Saldívar discovers in the corrido a social discourse for illuminating the significance of Chicano narrative in the twentieth century.

In *Chicano Narrative*, the corrido emerges as the basis and animating force of contemporary Chicano narrative discourses. Saldívar identifies the corrido as “the dominant socially symbolic act” of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, as well as “the very ground of future Chicano narrative fiction” (32). Insofar as it opposes Anglo American accounts of events that were of significance to Mexican American communities in the Texas borderlands, the corrido not only documented acts of cultural resistance but also celebrated them as heroic. Although the corrido would decline after the 1930s as the form for expressing “symbolic resistance,” “[o]ther expressive forms, in song, drama, lyric, and narrative begin to be appropriated by Chicano artists. Residing as a repressed element of the political unconscious, thereafter the corrido exerted symbolic force in the spheres of the alternative narrative arts” (41). Thus, for Saldívar, the corrido exists in an analogous relation to its historical moment, the late nineteenth century, as Chicano narrative exists to the contemporary period: both are “self-consciously crafted acts of social resistance” (42). Beyond this, the corrido provides Chicano letters with a folk base that determines both its politics and aesthetics.

To be sure, Saldívar’s arguments about the significance of the corrido to our understandings of Chicano narrative have powerfully organized the field imaginary of Chicana/o literary studies. However, given the large body of scholarly and creative writing that has been produced and recovered since *Chicano Narrative*’s publication, it is worth applying

critical pressure on the corrido paradigm as we search for new approaches that might help us confront the growing variety of Chicana/o experience. In a recent article, María Cotera expresses a desire to seek new paradigms:

[I]f there was once a time when we could look back at the body of work otherwise known as the “Chicano literary tradition” and find coherence—of ideology, form, or even social context—that time is surely passing. It is helped on its way by a host of new protagonists: injured aristocrats, migrant souls, queer bodies, and postmodern subjects who have entered a literary universe once populated almost exclusively by rebellious warrior-heroes and working-class saints. These new protagonists and the literary work that they produce and populate demand that we read texts and even traditions in new ways. (158–59)

Cotera’s call to look beyond “rebellious warrior-heroes” echoes feminist critiques of the corrido paradigm. In *The Borderlands of Culture*, Saldívar acknowledges how Chicana/o cultural critics have criticized the corrido paradigm for “express[ing] a specific construction of male mastery, articulating ideologies of resistance and historical agency with ideologies of masculinity” (176). Although he takes these critiques seriously, he does not imagine other possible social discourses or discounted forms of romance that could illuminate other historical rhythms. Recently, though, a group of scholars in Chicana/o studies has begun to investigate narrative genres and social discourses that capture different aspects of Chicana/o experience. Here we could include Cotera’s work, Ralph Rodriguez’s investigation of the detective novel as a form that registers anxieties about identity rather than concerns about resistance, Marissa López’s and Marcial González’s efforts to read Chicana/o narrative “more broadly as critiques of modernity and postmodernity” (M. González 15), and Frederick Luis Aldama’s studies of comic books that aim to understand how narratives function and how they work on the minds of their producers and consumers. Even Saldívar has turned toward popular genres such as historical fantasy and speculative fiction in order to understand the writing of a “postrace” generation of writers of color who have no lived experience of civil rights-era social movements. Drawing on the resources of queer of color critique, scholars such as

Sandra K. Soto, Richard T. Rodríguez, and Ernesto Javier Martínez demonstrate how fundamental categories such as race, sexuality, and the family must be reconceptualized in order to account for past and present queer experiences. These queer scholars show how these recalibrated categories necessitate new techniques of reading. The result of these analyses is an expansion of how we conceive the Chicana/o subject and an attempt to see Chicana/o literature anew, at both the level of text and the level of tradition.

In Cotera's list of new Chicana/o "protagonists," there are two—the injured aristocrat and the migrant soul—who, in different ways, insist on the transnational character of Chicana/o writing. The injured aristocrat is a figure who emerges in the novels of María Amparo Ruiz de Burton, Jovita González, and Josefina Niggli, among others. Although these works date to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, they were recovered in the 1990s and challenge ideas about the Chicana/o subject that informed *Chicano Narrative*. These authors were often connected to transnational literary networks, and their novels chronicle attempts to negotiate two rapidly changing national political spheres that were threatening to diminish their social, political, and economic privilege. In contrast, the migrant soul is a more recent protagonist, born of various forms of late twentieth-century neoliberal governance, and enjoys none of the injured aristocrat's evaporating privilege. Both of these figures, though, produce new narrative forms and demand a new accounting. Key, then, to understanding Chicana/o narrative in the twenty-first century is not only confronting a wide range of genres and literary forms but also understanding Chicana/o studies' complicated relationship with transnationalism, to which we now turn.

## FROM NATIONALISM TO TRANSNATIONALISM

In the new subjects that Cotera identifies as emerging in Chicana/o letters, we see a loosening of the commitments to nationalism that animated an earlier generation of Chicano thinking and politics. But the emergence of new subjects not only extended cultural citizenship to more people; it also altered the geographical imaginary that organized Chicana/o studies as a field. That imaginary was transformed in part by the renewed emphasis on transnational critical orientations that are now central to American studies and that Chicana/o studies helped ini-

tiate. While *Chicano Narrative* does not usually figure in discussions of transnationalism, we submit that its critique of entrenched nation-based models of American literary history through a Paredes-inspired border studies played a key role in clearing ground for the transnationally oriented approaches to US literary studies that were emerging in the same period. Moreover, we suggest that Saldívar's resolute focus on the "literary"—broadly conceived to include his methodology, theoretical apparatuses, and concern with institutions—has occluded his role in the reemergence of transnational modes of analysis at the same time that it is one of his most significant contributions. Combining the geographical specificity, transnational optic, and ideological critique of border studies with the formal textual analysis and theoretical approaches of literary studies, Saldívar showed that the nation-based and northeastern orientations of criticism based in English departments were no longer tenable.

If, as we argue, *Chicano Narrative* played a significant role in reflecting, anticipating, and mobilizing the transnational turn that was under way in American literary studies, it also opened itself up to revision through that very process, for of course it could not foresee the myriad subjects that such transnational imperatives would unearth and produce. In his contribution to this volume, Jesse Alemán shows how recently recovered literature produced by Mexicans in the United States prior to 1960 vexes without superseding the "resistance" paradigm that is central to Saldívar's formulations in *Chicano Narrative*. The authors of this literature were not fully interpellated into US citizenship and were still active participants in the political life of Mexico. As a result, the recovery of earlier texts has necessitated a transnational turn in the field of Chicana/o literary studies. On the other end of the historical spectrum, recent Chicana/o cultural productions have keyed in on the repercussions of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) for a variety of interrelated and broadly conceived border subjects, while also surfacing the agency these subjects enact under neoliberal conditions. Such developments in Chicana/o cultural production require a reimagining of *Chicano Narrative's* arguments.

In the first part of this introduction, we considered Saldívar's mobilization of the corrido in terms of genre, narrative theory, and the politics of literary value, ending with a brief review of new directions in Chicana/o formalisms that draw from, extend, and depart from *Chicano*

*Narrative's* commitments to form. In what follows, we remain attentive to Saldívar's mobilization of the corrido paradigm and the "literary" more generally, but now we do so against the backdrop of the transnational turn that took on a renewed significance for American studies at roughly the same time as *Chicano Narrative's* appearance. Reflecting on the nature of *Chicano Narrative's* transnational orientation elucidates how transnationalism functions within the field of Chicana/o studies in ways that differ from its deployment in other fields of inquiry.

As was true of Chicana/o studies more generally, Saldívar's work in *Chicano Narrative* was deeply influenced by Paredes's themes of intercultural conflict and resistance, as well as his conceptualization of the borderlands as a transnational space. Saldívar's enduring contribution in this respect was to mobilize these elements in a study of Chicano narrative framed in terms of the problem of "American literary history," a "tradition" constituted—as is usually the case—through hierarchies of aesthetic value and processes of canon formation. Such hierarchies had a spatial as well as aesthetic focus, as US literary studies traditionally positioned the Northeast as the locus of US literature and national identity. The result was a "unitary model of American culture or an American ideological consensus arising from a Puritan, New England, middle-class perspective of the origins of American literary history" (R. Saldívar, *CN* 217). Saldívar was intervening in such entrenched models, but he was also calling into question a "revisionist" project that had arisen in the period leading up to *Chicano Narrative's* publication. Scholars such as Sacvan Bercovitch and Werner Sollors were keying in on "dissensus" as a framework for a "new" American literary history, one constituted through a dialogue of conflicting views and interests rather than the "consensus" of old. Such a history would be "integrative," with the focus on conflict revealing much, in Sollors's words, "about the creation of *an* American culture out of diverse American pasts" (qtd. in R. Saldívar, *CN* 217, original emphasis).

Saldívar mounted a withering critique of this revisionist project, pointing out that its interest in "dissensus" and "dissent" applied only to those "among the ruling group . . . and to their legitimacy as members of the ruling elite state apparatus" (216). A seemingly counterhegemonic project, then, ultimately reconsolidated a unitary notion of American culture based on the same exclusions as before: of "working-class people, people of color, gays and lesbians, women" (216). Saldívar challenged

such parochialism and the forms of dominance it sustained by asserting the importance of including the US Southwest—especially the border region—as one of the predominant coordinates of US literary studies. Through this assertion, he disrupted the hegemonic geographical conceptualization of US literary history.

As Saldívar signals through his own attention to the region's deeply transnational history, taking the Mexican-inflected culture of the US Southwest into account would entail much more than simply “adding” examples of Chicana/o literature to the dominant Anglo American corpus; it would demand the “reconstruction of American literary history” in a way that would fundamentally transform understandings of US literature and culture (R. Saldívar, “Narrative”). Today such an intervention in literary history and canon formation might seem of minor importance in making space for transnational analyses. But as Wai Chee Dimock reminds us, the fields constituting the humanities have most rigidly adhered to the boundaries of the nation in delimiting the parameters of knowledge production (223). Saldívar's focus on the border region's Mexican-inflected social and cultural history was a significant aspect of his argument for the transformation of the dominant literary canon, challenging US literary studies' reliance on the “nation” as one of its defining epistemes.<sup>4</sup>

In response to our characterization of Saldívar's work, one might argue that his approach to border studies is better understood as “regional” rather than “transnational,” especially given that his analysis largely focuses on the US side of the border. That is, what differentiates our description of a transnational approach to the border from one that views the border as part of the region known as the US Southwest? We contend that both the regional *and* the transnational are relevant for understanding Saldívar's work—his approach is regional in relation to US literary history but transnational insofar as his understanding of the borderlands is always already a part of Greater Mexico, and he thus shows that these two categories are not mutually exclusive when it comes to the US Southwest. Américo Paredes famously coined the term “Greater Mexico” in *With His Pistol in His Hand* and further elaborated on the concept in a subsequent essay (“Folk Base”). For him, Greater Mexico indicates a Mexican national cultural identity that transcends the US-Mexico borderline, resulting in a transborder community of Mexican people united by shared cultural traditions, prac-

tices, mores, and memories. Saldívar's discussions of Chicano narrative follow from this formulation: he takes as his key historical coordinates the "Texas Revolution" (1836), the United States–Mexico War (1846–48), the Mexican Revolution (1910–20), and the bracero program of 1942–64, attending carefully to changing Mexican contexts and perspectives and their role in influencing and at times shaping Mexican American and Chicana/o narrative practices.

For example, in his now classic reading of José Antonio Villarreal's 1959 novel *Pocho* (often touted as the first Chicano novel), Saldívar elucidates the intertwined emotional and geopolitical transnationalisms operating in Villarreal's treatment of Juan Rubio, father of the novel's young Mexican American protagonist, Richard. Saldívar primes us for his reading of this and other texts at the outset of his study, when he asserts that "history cannot be conceived as the mere 'background' or 'context' for [Chicano narrative]; rather, history turns out to be the decisive determinant of the form and content of the literature" (CN 5). "History" means Mexican as well as US, and Saldívar's analysis of *Pocho* emphasizes the importance of the Mexican Revolution—the defining event of twentieth-century Mexico—in playing a part in animating the profound struggles of identity-formation faced by Richard. While Saldívar observes that the revolution's chief importance for the narrative comes in its "tremendous personal meaning" for Juan (60), Villarreal derives that meaning from the war's specific sociopolitical imperatives, which he characterizes in broad strokes. These include, in Saldívar's words, grand dreams of "social justice and individual dignity" (61), both of which are symbolized by Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata. While Richard is born and raised in the United States long after the revolution's conclusion, the war plays a profound role in his life, shaping his development on many levels.

Scholars often use the notion of the "transnational subject" to indicate individuals involved in prolonged circumstances of circulation among distinct national localities. However, the example above presents a different understanding of the transnational, one that Paula Moya and Ramón Saldívar capture in their development of the concept of "transnational persons," meaning individuals "whose lives form an experiential region within which singularly delineated notions of political, social, and cultural identity do not suffice" (2). This formulation communicates the important sense in which understandings of Greater



Mexico have been transnational, and it elucidates how Mexican Americans, even when long settled and anchored in particular locales (often for generations), can nonetheless continue to be influenced and shaped by Mexican and more generally Latin American phenomena.

We suggest, then, that early Chicana/o border theorists were practicing a mode of transnationalism that focused less on the literal, physical crossing of borders—whether by the agents being studied or the scholars themselves—and more on how cultural phenomena that cross or transcend national boundaries can be formative in producing subjectivities and geopolitical formations that remain illegible if studied strictly through nation-based paradigms. Such phenomena include but are not limited to cultural mores, political commitments, and allegiances that cross national boundaries, all of which are often significant elements of immigrant experience, ethnic identity formation, and racialization that would otherwise elude analysis. Another way to approach such elements is to recognize what Moya and Saldívar characterize as the influence of “competing nationalisms . . . within the borders of the nation” (4), thus attending to the roles that other national projects play in the US national-cultural space. While this approach does not necessarily involve the physical crossing of borders, both are transnational to the extent that they require tracking the active presence of Mexican politics and culture in the United States, regardless of whether that presence be in terms of processes of subject formation informed in some way by Mexican codes and mores, and/or in terms of Mexican political ideologies, nationalisms, or geopolitics more generally.

Despite the importance of recognizing the generative innovations toward transnationally oriented cultural criticism produced by Saldívar and Chicana/o border studies more generally, the field is susceptible to Latin Americanist critiques of transnational American studies. Scholars such as Claudia Sadowski-Smith and Claire Fox take American studies’ transnational methodologies to task for, among other things, “privileging the United States as the primary interlocutor vis-à-vis other countries in the hemisphere, focusing on Anglophone material, marginalizing other fields’ perspectives, and extending US-based research paradigms to the hemispheric level” (8). Moreover, they contrast transnational American studies’ grounding in the humanities with Latin American studies’ “deep engagement with social scientific theories of globalization and the legacy of dependency theories” (8), suggesting

that the latter enables more rigorous interrogations of the implications and logics of US foreign policy and transnational capitalist expansion (7). As they and others have observed, culturally oriented Chicana/o border studies played a significant role in spurring and shaping American studies' much remarked "transnational turn" (e.g., Kaplan; Porter; Wald; Adams); such criticism, as Sadowski-Smith and Fox pointedly note, "has rarely entered into dialogue with Mexico-based border studies or with social science-oriented forms of border cultural studies" (23).

Debra Castillo and María Tabuenca Córdoba make a similar critique but with a focus on the literary realm. They argue that "the border as perceived from the United States is more of a textual—theoretical—border than a geographical one" (6) and that, as a result, such work overlooks key differences between those who live on either side of the international line. While Chicana/o culture and criticism have arisen as an expression of an embattled minority culture within the United States, the artists and scholars who produce this work enjoy a position of privilege in relation to their counterparts to the south. These privileges include the "differential in the ability to simply cross to the other side" (4), a situation that "applies to literary texts as well as persons" (6) and that also speaks to the comparative economic and citizenship advantages of Chicana/o border theorists and cultural workers. Such disparities shape the very different projects that have emerged on either side, with Chicana/o theorists mining the border's metaphorical potential as a signifier of Chicana/o hybrid identity formation and Mexican border critics remaining attendant to the materiality of the border, to its "economic issues and local conditions of relative privilege and deprivation" (16). They warn that mobilizing the border as metaphor potentially obscures the "social, cultural, and economic policies that affect very real human beings who inhabit the borders" (15).<sup>5</sup>

A body of work has emerged in Chicana/o border studies that is more in line with the kind of cultural criticism envisioned by Castillo and Córdoba. Scholars working in this mode retain a focus on the specificities of the US-Mexico border region and mobilize an interdisciplinary, multinational/multilingual approach in their analyses of more recent developments. They foreground the repercussions of globalization for social formations and cultural politics in the borderlands and combine the insights of globalization studies with the methodologies of transnational critical paradigms.<sup>6</sup> Scholars in this mode generally argue that

recent economic transformations in the region require a cultural criticism that takes into account the material conditions of the border, as well as their consequences for everyday life (Sadowski-Smith 2; Schmidt Camacho 264).

This more material-based border criticism generally takes as its starting point NAFTA, the 1994 treaty that “solidified the project of neoliberalism and economic globalization” in the region (Fregoso 6). The treaty accelerated the industrialization of Mexican border towns, turning the Mexican side of *la frontera* into an export-processing zone dominated by US-owned manufacturing plants known as maquiladoras. Border critics attend to the consequences of such transformations by combining examinations of the processes themselves with cultural analysis. Their attention to transnational capital expansion and foreign policy ensures that they cross the border in their analyses both substantively—in terms of their engagement with Mexican people, contexts, and cultural productions—and conceptually, through their mobilization of critical paradigms developed by scholars in Latin American studies, especially the field’s long-standing practice of deep engagement with social scientific theories of globalization and dependency (Sadowski-Smith and Fox 8). One result of such shifts is that Chicana/o cultural criticism and transnational approaches still meet at the border but that post-NAFTA analyses increasingly link the specificities of the border with hemispheric and global concerns, including economic justice, human rights, and transnational feminisms.<sup>7</sup>

It might seem a long way from Saldívar’s work in *Chicano Narrative* to this more material-based and explicitly transnational scholarship, especially given that the latter tends to operate in a cultural studies rather than literary-critical mode. But the kind of narrative analysis that marks Saldívar’s contributions to Chicana/o border studies continues to resonate in studies of the “new protagonists” that we identify at the beginning of this section. We understand Alicia Schmidt Camacho’s book, *Migrant Imaginaries: Latino Cultural Politics in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands*, to be exemplary here. Schmidt Camacho examines the transnational movements of Mexican migrants through her formulation of the “migrant imaginary,” her name for an imaginary that “addresses the entwined processes of racial, gender, and class subjection, territorial displacement, and agency from the vantage point of the displaced, rather than that of the rights-bearing citizen” (4). Her study

combines concepts and figures central to Chicana/o cultural criticism of the border (e.g., corridos, the life and work of Américo Paredes) with an attention to the material conditions and theoretical approaches called for by Latin Americanists working in hemispheric studies. Thus, as she argues in studying testimonials by *obreras* on the border, “the narrative agency of *fronteriza* subjects cannot be understood apart from the material conditions of its own production, its place in a chain of labors that are simultaneously performed and contested” (282).

While Schmidt Camacho’s methods and objects of study are wide-ranging, she consistently turns to narrative analysis to catch glimpses of the neoliberal processes that she tracks and the new migrant subjectivities that have arisen in response.<sup>8</sup> Examining Mexican popular media, documentaries, and websites—what she collectively terms “emergent narratives of the border crossing” (283)—she brings together narrative analysis and cultural studies, submitting her objects of study to the kinds of rigorous narrative analysis for which *Chicano Narrative* equips us. We see this in, for example, her analysis of an article published in *La Jornada*, a Mexico City newspaper. The article, an indictment of the maquiladora system, focuses specifically on girls recruited into “the global assembly in direct violation of their rights as Mexican citizens.” At the heart of the article is an interview with a fourteen-year-old garment worker named Teresa, who says at one point that she “still has a girl’s dreams” (252). Schmidt Camacho deftly analyzes Teresa’s brief but incisive statement, teasing out how her struggle to retain her girlhood demonstrates her awareness of the subjective split that her labor imposes on her: “she is both obrera *and* child” (252). Schmidt Camacho further argues that Teresa’s struggle to maintain her integrity of self punctures the “capitalist fantasy that constructs her as a body available for appropriation” (253). For Schmidt Camacho, testimonies by obreras such as Teresa exemplify a coming to consciousness in which a “growing awareness of class domination enacts a symbolic reentry into the body” as the obreras “set limits on corporate capital’s access to their bodies” (241).

Schmidt Camacho’s work demonstrates how trying to account for the new protagonists of Chicana/o culture requires turning to cultural expressions—*retablos*, documentary film, *testimonios*—that reside more easily in cultural studies than in literary studies. However, in this period in which the shifts that we have chronicled have occurred, the field

of Chicana/o literary studies has reckoned with the recovery of a past body of literature as well as a growing body of Chicana/o writing that shares many of these concerns. In this volume, we train our attention on the *literary* output of Chicanas and Chicanos in light of these developments in order to understand how new approaches to Chicana/o literature are connected to work like Saldívar's pathbreaking volume even as they point the way toward new paths of analysis in literary studies, Chicana/o studies, and beyond.

The essays compiled in this volume redirect the forms of narrative analysis that have extended beyond literary study back to Chicana/o literature itself. In doing this, we hope to demonstrate how Chicana/o literary study remains a vital intellectual field on its own, separate from the broader field of Chicana/o studies and from an increasingly established Latina/o studies that, for some, foreshadows the obsolescence of the Chicana/o project. On the contrary, these essays bespeak the vitality of Chicana/o literary study by directing us to new archives in need of investigation, new concepts that require further elaboration, and new methods that not only renovate the study of Chicana/o literature but may also invigorate the intellectual fields that are adjacent to it.

In his contribution to this volume, Jesse Alemán notes that *Chicano Narrative* appeared just as the field of Chicana/o literary studies was beginning to cleave, with one segment articulating a theory of Chicano Movement-era literature and another turning toward a historical past that was becoming available through the efforts of the Recovering the US Hispanic Literary Heritage Project. If *Chicano Narrative* deferred consideration of this new archive, those whose critical attention focused on a repressed past that was returning with force discovered what Alemán calls a "diachronics of difference," which acknowledged how a "critical turn toward the contemporary could not simultaneously account for the past in the way it was being recovered in early US Hispanic writings." Confronting these new materials required not only new accounts of subjects who differed remarkably from movement-era formulations of the Chicana/o but also new methods to relate this work to the literary publics from which it emerged. In his essay, David Luis-Brown notes that, as Chicana/o studies scholars worked with the new archives that the Recovery Project recuperated, they developed a "centrifugal" mode of analysis that is distinct from the "polycentric"

approaches that characterize other work in hemispheric studies. In the work of scholars such as Alemán, Raúl Coronado, and John Morán González, Luis-Brown detects “methodologies, in which the analysis begins by zeroing in on a historical figure or a geographical site and then spins out numerous threads of transnational analysis.” In her essay on the “other” novel of the Mexican Revolution, Yolanda Padilla pursues a transnational analysis that, in part, constructs a new literary history in which we can examine the novels of Mexican American writers such as Leonor Villegas de Magnón, Josefina Niggli, and Luis Pérez. In a move that parallels Saldívar’s attempt to reconstruct American literary history, Padilla reshapes accounts of postrevolutionary *Mexican* literary history, arguing that narratives about the Mexican Revolution by Mexican Americans “demand a reckoning with the refuse of nations—those migrants, immigrants, and border subjects who were cut loose by the Mexican nationalist project and who subsequently probed the cracks in that project from a transnational perspective.” While Alemán, Luis-Brown, and Padilla all examine material that *Chicano Narrative* did not attend to and produce different accounts of literary history and the Mexican American subject as a result, they simultaneously share Saldívar’s commitments to history, literary form, and politics figured within and across national boundaries.

Sandra Cisneros is one writer who has been especially attentive to history, form, and nation throughout her career. For instance, her novel *Caramelo* ends with a chronology that self-consciously situates her narrative in a history of the Americas at a moment when hemispheric studies was just beginning to get traction in the academy. It is not surprising, therefore, that Cisneros emerges in this volume as a key figure for thinking about the current state of Chicana/o literary criticism. Linking Cisneros’s short story “The Eyes of Zapata” with Mexican playwright Sabina Berman’s *Entre Villa y una mujer desnuda* (Between Villa and a naked woman), Belinda Linn Rincón’s essay argues that both women imagine the historical legacy of the Mexican Revolution through the lens of female desire and, in the process, interrogate the ideological function of that historical event in shaping political identities on both sides of the border. Rincón exposes how, “for Mexicana and Chicana writers, shaping the meaning of the revolution is a transnational and feminist project.” While Rincón focuses on how Cisneros’s transnational orientations affect historical understanding,

Olga Herrera stresses the ways in which Cisneros's fiction discursively produces Chicago as a transnational space. Working in the hemispheric mode that Luis-Brown describes as "centrifugal," Herrera shows how Cisneros's work is both local and transnational—deeply rooted in one location but connected to other places through family memories, cultural practices, and economic activities. As Herrera demonstrates, a focus on the transnational character of Mexican Chicago licenses fresh readings of space, identity, and power in the work of Sandra Cisneros that may have previously been foreclosed by theoretical frameworks grounded in the geographic consciousness of the Southwest. If Herrera attempts to loosen the hold of the Southwest on the field imaginary of Chicana/o studies, Paula Moya attempts to free discussions of Cisneros's first work, *The House on Mango Street*, from the ideological hold of the novel. Moya argues that, by reading the book as a set of prose poems rather than as a novel, readers will note a temporal dialectic in the work between "keeping" and "waiting," the former associated with a poetic Chicana/o communitarian ideal and the latter with a narrative account of the protagonist's development. Taken together, these three essays on the work of Sandra Cisneros encapsulate this volume's sense of how changes to the historical, national, and formal characteristics of Chicana/o literature and literary criticism have opened new critical pathways.

Moya's argument that we should think about form in new ways connects her work to the essays by John Alba Cutler and Ralph Rodriguez. Noting that Saldívar's readings in *Chicano Narrative* favor finished, autonomous, and basically stable objects, Cutler demonstrates how attention to print cultural histories of works like Américo Paredes's "Over the Waves Is Out" and Oscar Zeta Acosta's *Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* reveal that there are new histories to uncover by analyzing Chicana/o literary works as material objects, determining the conditions and extent of their circulation, and tracking the shifting, critical protocols of Chicana/o literary counterpublics. Within the field of Chicana/o literary studies, print culture studies were developed by such scholars of recovered material as Raúl Coronado, John González, and Kirsten Silva Gruesz. Cutler shows that this approach to Chicana/o literature can be as illuminating for texts in the post-1960s era as for those that are more historically distant. By shifting our focus from the text as a bounded object to regarding it as a work that takes shape in conversation with

diverse publics and institutions, Cutler highlights the social character of Chicana/o literary production. In addition to turning toward fixed textual objects, *Chicano Narrative* also examined narratives that were formally similar to those in the American canon, even as it, in Jesse Alemán's words, "theorized the politics of Chicano Movement-era literature . . . and provided a critical language for reading a broad body of emerging contemporary literature as radical, oppositional, and polemical." In his essay, Ralph Rodriguez reminds us that, although ideology critique and symptomatic reading have been the dominant modes of analysis in Chicana/o literary studies, there is much to be gained through slow reading that attends to and describes the surfaces of texts. His essay performs such a reading of "Monkey, Sí," a short story by Manuel Muñoz, who is one of the most discussed Chicano writers to emerge in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Carefully attending to the story's first-person plural narration, Rodriguez shows how Muñoz deploys narration to modulate intimacy and to reveal that "[c]loseness does not preclude division." The essays by Moya, Cutler, and Rodriguez demonstrate that studying Chicana/o narrative now requires a more elastic notion of literary form.

The essays in this volume, then, provide an expanded picture of Chicana/o literary criticism. Since the publication of *Chicano Narrative* in 1990, the historical coordinates of the field have stretched into the eighteenth century, the geographical imaginary is no longer bounded by the United States but includes Mexico and other nations, and our ideas about narrative form extend beyond traditional works fixed in their final form. Has this expanded sense of Chicana/o narrative diluted its political commitments and radical potential? What, then, is Chicana/o narrative *now*? Since his work was the impetus for this volume, Saldívar provides the last word. For Saldívar, the expanded field in which Chicana/o literary studies now finds itself is no cause for alarm. If Chicana/o literary studies took the nation as its object of critique when *Chicano Narrative* was published, its object of critique is now globalization, neoliberalism, and militarism. From this new position, it continues its commitments to illuminating Chicana/o lives in the United States, but it also seeks new solidarities with other groups committed to reining in globalization's excesses and to imagining a more just world. In this connection, Chicana/o literature is now a world literature. The stakes of Chicana/o literary studies have never been higher.