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## Transnational forms

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Introduction: our American genres

In 1990 Cuban American literary critic Gustavo Perez-Finn at posed what was to be a field-defining question: "Do the Americas have a common literature?" The question holds particular significance for Latino/a literature and, in turn, invokes further questions: What is the place of Latino/a letters in this literature of the Americas? How is Latino/a literature influenced by both Latin American and U.S. American literary traditions? Moreover, what genres circulate in the Americas and how do Latino/a writers mobilize and modify these narrative forms?

There is a range of answers to these questions as numerous aesthetic influences and genre forms have helped shape Latino/a literary production. One approach to transnational form is a focus on "influence" in which we might trace, for example, how the structure of Chicana writer Ana Castillo's first novel *The Mixquiahuala Letters* draws on the structure of Argentine writer Julio Cortazar's *Rayuela* [Hopscotch], or how Peruvian American writer Daniel Alarcon's *At Night We Walk in Circles* (2013) is thematically and narratively indebted to Chilean writer Roberto Bolafio's *Los detectives salvajes* [The Savage Detectives]. Shifting the focus from direct influences to genres, we might consider the ways a variety of genres such as *lo maravilloso* [marvelous or magical realism], *testimonio* [testimony], the historical novel, and the migration novel shape Latino/a literature. Indeed, the two genres that have "emerged from Latin America to go global" and have seen the most substantial creative and scholarly attention in Latino/a studies are magical realism and the *testimonio* (Nance 2012: 239). Although all writers must wrestle with form and choose one that best fits their aesthetic and political designs, the options available to Latino/a writers are multiplied by their transnational linguistic and narrative inheritances.

In this chapter we examine the transnational forms of Latino/a literature through two canonically Latin American genres—the *cronica* [chronicle] and the dictator novel that are not widely studied or taught in Latino/a studies. We argue that an attention to form and genre adds another layer to the trans-American aesthetic productions and literary relations delineated by scholars such as Jose David Saldivar, Kirsten Silva Gruesz, Anna Brickhouse, Doris Sommer, Lois Parkinson Zamora, Ana Patricia Rodriguez, Alicia Schmidt Camacho, and Raul Coronado who have mined hemispheric connections that are not visible through the optic of nationally bounded literary studies. As Paula Moya and Ramon Saldivar articulate it, "an interpretive framework that yokes together North and South American instead of New England and England" is "an alternative and epistemologically valuable way of describing our place in the world and understanding the literature we teach" (2003: 2). It is thus imperative to be attuned to the particular literary forms Latinos/as use to represent their lived experiences and even reimagine their social worlds: Since most trans-American literary criticism has been archival, thematic, genealogical, and/or discursive, we focus in this chapter on the critical import and pedagogical utility of genre-based hemispheric approaches to the study of Latino/a literature.

We read hemispheric relations of domination and creative resistance through the circulation and modification of Latin American narrative forms and through the aesthetic tactics, discursive tropes, and transnational subjectivities that constitute the imaginative horizon of the Latino/a chronicle and the Latino/a dictator novel. In reading narrative form and hemispheric geo-politics together, we contend that Latino/a literature cannot be fully understood without

considering how Latin American literary traditions migrate to the United States and undergo a process of transformation, transculturation, and reformulation through the pens of Latinos/as.' An attention to form situates Latino/a novelists in an active role in shaping contemporary literary, cultural, scholarly, and political movements that seek to redefine "Americanness."

Below, we layout the landscape of two emerging transnational generic traditions in Latino/a literature with roots in Latin American literary traditions: the chronicle and dictator novel. We each first provide brief overviews of the histories of our respective genres (Hanna on the chronicle and Harford Vargas on the dictator novel) and then offer examples for how to integrate these transnational forms in the classroom. We hope that our suggestions for teaching chronicles and dictator novels will serve as helpful resources for faculty and students and will further an understanding of how deeply embedded Latino/a literature is in Latin American literature, and how the two mutually inform each other.

The Latino/a cronica

The chronicle is a genre that is well known and studied within Latin American Studies because of the long established tradition of the cronica in Latin America, but it is not as well known or recognized in U.S. American Studies, despite the fact that there are many overlaps between the cronica and narrative and advocacy journalist traditions in the United States. Modern and contemporary cronicas integrate literary techniques usually associated with fiction into nonfiction journalistic writing in order to create narratives that give historical and narrative depth rather than just answering the "five w's" of conventional journalism. Latin American cronicas have narrative and interpretive functions that can be political, investigative, ethnographic, historical, educational, consciousness-raising, and/or denunciatory.

Practitioners and theorists of the Latin American cronica such as prolific Mexican journalist Carlos Monsivais and scholar Esperanca Bielsa trace its history back to the cronicas de Indias produced during the Spanish conquest in which Spaniards documented their experiences in the Americas. <sup>4</sup> The contemporary form of the Latin American cronica, however, is more closely related to the cronica modernista of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, which was practiced by politically engaged writers such as statesmen Jose Marti from Cuba and Ruben Dario of Nicaragua. In the contemporary period in Mexico, the genre has been used by post-1968 heavy-hitters like Carlos Monsivais and Elena Poniatowska, and continues to be relevant today [or writers like Sanjuana Martinez, Anabel Hernandez, and Diego Enrique Osorno. Modern and contemporary cronicas are marked by techniques such as a focus on quotidian experiences rather than traditional journalistic subjects, the use of a stylized voice, the inclusion of the cronista [chronicler] in the narrative itself, and fictionalization (Bielsa 2006: 39).

The chronicle has a transnational and transhistorical genealogy, as a hybrid genre associated with periods of intense social change dating back to the earliest contact between Europeans and indigenous Americans. Latino/a chronicle draws on this Latin American cronica tradition and US. "new journalism," while also drawing on overlapping genres of life writing such as testimonio, memoir, and travel writing. The chronicle is a "liminal genre" (Corona and Jorgensen 2002)-located between generic conventions, geographies, and traditions-that mimics the spaces of the inter-American borders so central to the writings of many Latino/a chroniclers. Contemporary Latino/a writers (including those with a literary formation and those with a journalistic formation) concerned with issues of transnational identity and social justice have adopted the genre in order to represent those realities as fully as possible. As a border- and genre-crossing narrative form, with a history of documenting often-ignored issues related to social justice, it is a genre well suited to contemporary writers seeking to document transnational

Latino/a political, economic, and cultural concerns. A partial list of Latina and Latino writers who have published in this genre includes: Daniel Alarcon, Alfredo Corchado, Francisco Goldman, Daniel Hernandez, Sonia Nazario, Mirta Ojito, Hector Tobar, and Luis Alberto Urrea.

In looking at transnational generic connections, it is important to not view these as simple transfers from one nation to another, but rather to look at the ways in which genres travel. At the same time that US. Latino/a chronicle writing shares important similarities with the Latin American *cronica*, it also has differing concerns. Latino/a chronicles offer engaging and generally accessible narratives that immerse students in questions regarding the ethics, politics, rhetoric, and representational aesthetics of contemporary Latino/a realities. They add to the genre an emphasis on the individual and cultural repercussions of lives lived across national borders, which is often expressed generically in explicit referencing of transnational influences and on the level of content with their interest in representing *Latinidad* as an ethnic formation; on seeing US. Latino/a experiences as intimately tied to Latin American phenomena; and on their often increased level of self-reflexivity, which derives from the chroniclers' multiple positionings somewhere between "insiders" and "outsiders" in a variety of national and situational contexts. Latino/a chronicles depict migration as a process that does not end on arrival in and subsequent assimilation into the United States, like the "melting pot" model embraced in the country for so many decades.

US. Latino/a chroniclers often make connections across intra-ethnic national borders, drawing similarities between people and experiences across Latin American nations and not just in the United States. Moreover, they often cite a transnational set of writing influences that bridge borders. Daniel Hernandez, for example, a Chicano journalist whose collection *Down & Delirious in Mexico City* (2011) chronicles his experiences as a "pocho" living and working in Mexico City, cites influences that include New Journalists Joan Didion and Hunter S. Thompson; the Italian writer Oriana Fallaci who has a crucial Mexican connection, as she famously and very publicly condemned the massacre at Tlatelolco in 1968; the US. historian and writer Mike Davis; US. Latino writers and journalists Francisco Goldman, Daniel Alarcon, and Ruben Martinez; and Mexican journalists Alma Guillermoprieto, Diego Enrique Osorno, Laura Castellanos, and Sanjuana Martinez." This list contextualizes Hernandez's work within the productions by young chroniclers across the borders of the Americas, with the strong participation of U.S. Latino and Latina writers. Reading one of Daniel Hernandez's chronicles that takes place wholly within Mexico City and has no explicit transnational referent, such as his "The Warriors" in *Down & Delirious*, next to a chronicle such as "Dancing: The Funky Dive" by Carlos Monsivais, another chronicler of the megalopolis who influenced Hernandez in his representation of subcultures, reveals the Chicano chronicler's concern with authenticity, belonging, and perspective that is influenced by his transnational experiences.

Because of their generic "in-betweenness" and the range of topics they explore, Latino/a chronicles can easily be integrated into a variety of different types of courses in literature, journalism, ethnic studies, Latin American studies, politics, history, and anthropology. The genre can be studied on its own, or integrated into units that include a variety of generic forms seeking to represent a relevant thematic topic, such as migration, popular culture, media, politics, and ethnic identities across the Americas. Below I offer some suggestions for introducing the genre to students and integrating it into a variety of different syllabus formats.

In the classroom, when studying U.S. Latino/a chronicles, there are several questions I pose to students that help to guide our discussions. Before we even begin our readings, I prepare

students for our examinations of the alternative journalistic approach of Latino/a chroniclers by inquiring about their existing understanding of journalism with questions such as:

- What are/should be the goals of journalism as you understand it?
- What topics should the news inform us about?
- In the United States, we tend to place high importance on objectivity in journalism. Why do you think this is? How does this look? Is objectivity possible? To what extent?
- What do you think of the term literary journalism? Is this a paradox?

These types of questions help students to articulate ideas they have about journalism coming into their study of Latino/a chronicles, especially since narrative journalism can sometimes be easily disregarded because of its recourse to advocacy at times. One of the key characteristics of the chronicle, for example, is the explicit presence and involvement of the chronicler who uses the first person singular pronoun; this is something conventional journalism (much like many English classrooms) often frowns on. As a result, it is important for students to recognize this as a different approach and interrogate how and why these writers might use this strategy. At the heart of this shift is the notion that traditional journalism cannot fully capture the complex experiences that the chronicler attempts to represent, and that notions of "objectivity" can obscure relations of power.

Once we begin our study of the primary texts, which I pair with Latin American examples as well as secondary readings, I ask students more questions about genre. Because the 'chronicle draws from conventions associated with a variety of different genres, it is difficult to categorize. In fact, Mexican journalist Juan Villoro has called the *cronica* the "ornitorrinco" or "platypus" of the prose world since it draws on genres from reportage to short story to modern theater (2012: 578-79). The generic slipperiness of the form can open a productive discussion in the classroom on the boundaries of these various genres. Some questions I use to direct the class include:

- How do the readings differ from the conventional journalism that you are accustomed to reading in U.S. newspapers? Can you make any connections to journalistic and literary genres that you are familiar with?
- How do these writers mix journalistic and literary narrative modes within their work? Why do you think they do this?
- Do you find this hybrid form effective? What does the form inspire in the reader? How might that answer vary by audience?
- How does the work of U.S. Latino/a writers in this genre compare to major U.S. and Latin American practitioners of related genres?

The chronicle as genre cannot be divorced from an intense focus on the content, of course. Latino/a chronicles address some of the most politically contentious issues of our time. And, significantly, the popularity and wide circulation of the form allows these authors to intervene in U.S. public discourse in a way that can be more difficult for fiction to achieve given the literary market. Contemporary Latino/a chronicles of undocumented migration between Latin America and the United States, such as Sonia Nazario's *Enrique's Journey* (2006), Jorge Ramos's *Dying to Cross* (2006), Ruben Martinez's *Crossing Over* (2001), and Luis Alberto Urrea's *The Devil's Highway* (2004), have won awards, become bestsellers, and/or been adopted as part of high school and college curricula, while their authors have been interviewed on national television about their work. These Latino/a chronicles thereby successfully intervene in and reshape the

current rhetoric regarding the subject of undocumented migration and immigration reform that is so central to politics in the United States and across the Americas.

When teaching a course in Chicano/a Studies, on literature or on cultural studies, I often discuss representations of migration and since many chronicles center on themes of migration at the heart of U.S. Latino/a identities, organizing a discussion of genre that is linked thematically to this issue is productive. The contemporary boom in U.S. Latino/a chronicle writing has been inspired in part by massive numbers of migrants and an increasingly impermeable and perilous U.S.-Mexico border." As we write this essay, projections suggest that the number of detainments of "unaccompanied minors" migrating to the United States primarily from Central America in 2014, which had already reached over 50,000 in June, could reach 90,000 by the end of the fiscal year." In my courses I link statistical data and media representations of migration with fictional and non-fictional literary representations as well as representations in the visual arts. In integrating chronicles, I might teach the following together: a section of Sonia Nazario's *Enrique's Journey*, a chapter from Hector Tobar's *Translation Nation* (2005), Reyna Grande's (2012) excellent recent memoir *The Distance between Us* (which has been a favorite among my students at Cal State Fullerton), and Patricia Riggen's film *La misma luna/Under the Same Moon* (2007). Though two are journalistic narratives, the other a life writing narrative, and the last a fictional film, these works all represent the undocumented migration of children, and in two cases "unaccompanied minors," from Latin American countries to the United States. These narratives are all linked through a "zoomed in" perspective on a political "hot topic" by looking at individual lives of ordinary people dealing with the consequences of an economically and culturally globalized hemisphere. In examining representations of migration through a variety of genres, students can consider and discuss in class the ways in which these different types of narrative form converge and diverge, what limitations and possibilities each afford, and how these different representations allow for different perspectives on the issue. In classrooms with widely varying political views on issues of migration to the United States, it will be important to note and think through the different reactions to these kinds of texts, including feelings of authorial bias that different audience members might register in relation to some or all of these representations. Such moments, while sometimes awkward or tense, are nonetheless productive. Another issue I like students to consider is the ways in which these narratives imagine divisions and alliances among different Latin American-origin groups, including those between foreign-born and native-born Latinos/as in the United States.

Since quite a few Latino/a chroniclers, such as Hector Tobar, Francisco Goldman, and Daniel Alarcon, also produce fiction, a study of the chronicle within a literature course could pair works by one of these individual authors in both fiction and literary journalism in order to more closely examine the generic choices made by the authors and analyze the effects of their choices. The three authors mentioned above all produce fiction that is invested in the historical and contemporary realities faced by Latinos/as both within the United States and within Latin America, and their journalistic work represents those interests. A class discussion of Daniel Alarcon's recently published *At Night We Walk in Circles* (2013), for example, would be incomplete without a discussion of his Harper's piece, "All Politics Is Local (2012)," in which students consider the shifts Alarcon makes between his journalistic representation of the Lurigancho prison outside Lima, Peru and his fictional take on the aftermath of war in an unnamed South American country that sets a significant part of its narrative action in a prison modeled on Lurigancho. Pairing works by the same author working in different narrative modes

allows students to further consider the reasons why authors with multiple "tools" at their disposal might choose one over another, while considering the effects of those choices on the audience.

My final example of a text worth integrating in the classroom also has a connection to Daniel Alarcon. The chronicles of the Radio Ambulante podcast present the producers' (including Alarcon's) and journalists' vision of Latinidad that is bilingual, stresses transnational interconnectedness, and views the Latino/a population in the United States as one that constitutes a Latin American country. The program features stories that crisscross Latin American countries. The production also features transnational collaborations between producers and journalists across borders. It is distributed worldwide as an audio program via SoundCloud audio on the Radio Ambulante website, and airs on radio stations in the United States, Mexico, Argentina, and Colombia. One classroom exercise is to have students review the first episode, "Moving," for discussion. The episode brings together four stories that span countries (the United States, Honduras, Mexico, and Argentina) and time, but are thematically linked by representations of "moving," including migration, exile, and experiences of acculturation. The episode, which is available on the Radio Ambulante website, allows students to discuss issues including: the significance of language and translation, the ways in which new media and "old" media methods of distribution might affect reception, and the connection between technologies like audio recordings and written narratives. Questions to pose to students might include:

- What do you think of the undifferentiated use of English and Spanish between the stories?
- How might your experiences differ if you are monolingual or if you are English-Spanish bilingual?
- Does Radio Ambulante bring anything different to our experiences as listeners than a radio program like *This American Life*, which is very similar in format?
- How does the way in which chronicles are distributed affect their content and audience?

Because of the economy of the format, Radio Ambulante chronicles are easy to integrate into classroom discussions of Latino/a literature, and can open up the discussion to the many intersections of the short radio journalism pieces with various other types of Latino/a literary narratives.

#### The Latino/a dictator novel

In February 2013, Radio Ambulante hosted a special live show in New York City at the Instituto Cervantes featuring a conversation between executive producer Daniel Alarcon, Francisco Goldman, and Junot Diaz. Perhaps unsurprisingly given that all three writers have written about dictatorship in their respective home countries of Peru, Guatemala, and the Dominican Republic, their conversation turns from the politics of Latino/a linguistic practices and different genre designations across the hemispheres to shared histories of dictatorship. Relating how he tries to render the violent and hallucinatory traumas of Central America's history in his writing, Francisco Goldman recalls how Roberto Bolafio declared Latin America an insane asylum. Daniel Alarcon builds on this, noting:

If one of the premises of Radio Ambulante is the idea that two things—that political borders may be real but cultural borders are much more fluid and another being that with 55 million Latinos in this country the United States is a Latin American country as well—I was just thinking about it. If what Bolafio says is true, then that

would make the United States also an insane asylum. ["It obviously is," Goldman interjects.] And I think that intuitively feels very true. But that reminds me a lot of what I read from you, Junot, where you talk a lot about these traumas that particularly affect our communities and the cultural wounds that we carry with us ...  
("Junot Diaz and Francisco Goldman Live in New York")

Diaz elaborates on both comments as he describes the myriad ways those who flee their "country of horror" carry their trauma to the United States and this trauma, in turn, becomes their children's haunting inheritance. Latinos/as are thus shaped by the twinned insane asylums of Latin American authoritarian regimes and the United States imperialism.

Latino/a fiction and Latin American fiction share a common concern with dictatorial power in its multiple instantiations. The Latin American dictator novel, written in Spanish, depicts authoritarian regimes such as caciquismo, caudillismo, dictatorship, and military juntas in Latin America. The tradition is a long and rich one beginning its modern instantiation with Domingo Faustino Sarmiento's influential mid-nineteenth century text *Facundo: Civilization y barbarie* [*Facundo: Civilization and Barbarism*], though some scholars trace the genre's genealogy back to the *crónicas de Indias*, the chronicles documenting Spain's encounters with the Americas. (It is thus not hard to see that the *crónica* and dictator novel have a twinned history and can easily be taught together.) The tradition includes such earlier works as Jose Marmol's *Amalia*, Miguel Angel Asturias's *El señor presidente* [*The President*], and Enrique Lafourcade's *a fiesta del rey acab* [*King Ahab's Feast*]. During the 1970s, the Boom generation of writers produced a seminal group of dictator novels: Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *El otoño del patriarca* [*Autumn of the Patriarch*], Augusto Roa Bastos's *Yo el supremo* [*I, the Supreme*], and Alejo Carpentier's *El recurso del método* [*Reasons of State*]. The genre remains vibrant and contemporary in particular due to novelists from the Southern Cone and Central America such as Ariel Dorfman, Luisa Valenzuela, Sergio Ramirez, Gioconda Belli, and Roberto Bolaño who use their creative productions to explore issues such as exile, Latin American feminisms, and truth and reconciliation.

In recent years, the dictator novel has migrated north of the U.S.-Mexico border and into the English language. To invoke the words of Nicaraguan Sergio Ramirez, "the astonishing excesses of dictatorships, crime, torture, the disappeared" do not only haunt the pages of Latin American fiction; for, as Ramirez so eloquently puts it,

[t]he old ghosts that have come out of the basements of the presidential palaces do not stop the sounds of the chains they are dragging. And these ghosts have crossed the United States border like many other clandestine migrants, hidden in the genes or in the luggage of the immigrants who will one day be first class writers.  
(author's translation)

In the past two decades, a wide range of Latino/a novels have been haunted by the ghosts of dictatorships past. Consider, for example, Julia Alvarez's *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* (2010) and *In the Time of the Butterflies* (1994), Francisco Goldman's *The Long Night of White Chickens* (1992) and *The Ordinary Seaman* (1997), Graciela Limon's *In Search of Bernabe* (1993), Demetria Martinez's *Mother Tongue* (1994), Hector Tobar's *The Tattooed Soldier* (1998), Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of Bones* (1998), Loida Maritza Perez's *Geographies of Home* (1999), Achy Obejas's *Memory Mambo* (1996), Salvador Plascencia's *The People of Paper* (2005), Angie Cruz's *Let It Rain Coffee* (2005), Junot Diaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007), Sylvia SellersGarcia's *When the Ground Turns in Its Sleep*



(2007), Cristina Garcia's *King of Cuba* (2013), and Daniel Alarcon's *Lost City Radio* (2007) and *At Night We Walk in Circles* (2013), among many others."<sup>9</sup>

Unlike their counterparts in Latin America, these Latino/a novels are written in English and infused with a Latino/a trans-American consciousness. Most of the novels are situated in the United States and peppered with references to life under dictatorship or with backstory conflicts and flashback sequences that occur in Latin America. Moving between New Jersey and the Dominican Republic, Massachusetts and Guatemala, Chicago and Cuba, New Mexico and El Salvador, New York and Peru, among other sites, they foreground the transnational afterlife of historical dictatorships on contemporary Latino/a communities and individuals. The authors, along with most of their characters, were born or grew up in the United States so their identity formations are rooted in U.S. Latinidad. At a generational and geographic remove from Latin American authoritarian regimes, they arc what Holocaust scholar Marianne Hirsch terms a "post-memory generation" and, as such, they grapple with how to "remember" and write a history they have not lived.!? Given their different geo-social location, the U.S.-based post-memory Latino/a generation looks to the south and to the past to confront their parents' experiences of dictatorship and the transnational residual traces of that oppressive past in their present.

At the same time, the novels disabuse readers of their stereotypical associations of the United States with democracy and Latin America with dictatorship because modes of domination in the United States echo or mirror those in Latin America. <sup>11</sup> The novels complicate such facile and inaccurate binaries and enact intersectional analyses of domination and privilege. Latino/a dictator novels highlight how the experience of being racialized minorities in the U.S. is marked by oppression and how hierarchies of power—be they racial, gendered, sexual, economic, linguistic, or bodily—dictate subjects' agency. The novels thereby sketch out a complex spectrum of dictatorial power that models for students how to conduct transnational and intersectional analyses of power dynamics.

Dictator novels also provide a lens through which to consider a range of themes shared by Latino/a writers from various national origins. These include different forms of state violence, imperialism, social justice, migration, racial discrimination, economic exploitation, machismo and heteropatriarchy, language politics, cultural identity formation, and transnational history. <sup>12</sup> Dictator novels can thus be easily included not just in Latino/a literary studies courses but also courses in history, political science, sociology, LGBTQ studies, U.S. ethnic studies, and Latin American Studies. They can be incorporated into broader survey courses of U.S. literature, Latino/a cultural studies, literatures of the Americas, or world literature; they can be the focus of discrete genre courses; or they can be taught in individual units on any of the aforementioned thematic topics.

Perhaps most valuably, I use Latino/a dictator novels to teach students how to analyze hierarchies of power, both in terms of sociopolitical relations and in terms of the structure of novels. Dictatorship in Latino/a novels is not just a thematic concern but also an aesthetic concern. That is, the novels do not simply represent dictatorial power; they also strategically use the novel form to critically interrogate dictatorial power. Thus they enable students to engage with formalist analysis, and deepen their understanding of how form shapes content and structures their reading experiences. I ask students to be attentive to the narrative politics of: which characters are granted attention, who has power and agency, whose perspectives focalize the narrative, what languages are privileged, how plots are constructed, how space is used on the page, the significance of paratextual material, how metafiction makes us conscious of the novel itself, why different artistic forms are transculturated in a novel, and so forth. In doing so, I teach

students to read power relations at the levels of both content and form. Students can thereby analyze how the novels dictate or tell their stories while attempting not to be dictatorial or, to use another useful word play, how the novels navigate the slippery similarities between authoritarianism, authority, and authorship. What follows are some ideas about how to teach dictator novels with an attention to social hierarchies of power and structures of power in the novel form.

Dominican American public intellectual Junot Diaz's novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007) provides a wonderful opportunity for students to read political and narrative power together through the lens of what narrative theorist Alex Woloch calls the character-system. I ask students to track how narrative attention is distributed among characters in a novel, pointing out how the novel reverses the correlation between characters' positions in the sociopolitical hierarchy and their position in the text's narrative hierarchy.' Students thereby examine the impact of having the politically powerful dictator Rafael Trujillo be a minor, flat character while socially marginalized Afro-Dominican characters are major, round protagonists. Given the central role of U.S. minority experiences in the novel, students also analyze why structurally and thematically the novel figures a transhistorical and transnational relationship between the Latino/a lives of Oscar and Lola and their Dominican mother Beli, grandfather Abelard, and even their slave ancestors in the sugarcane fields.

Dominican American poet, essayist, and fiction writer Julia Alvarez's *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* provides the occasion for students to reflect on U.S. ethnic identity formation. As we analyze the novel's reverse temporal structure and its multi-perspectival structure, I ask students to reflect on who has access to survival and self-invention and how the past shapes futurity and the kinds of Latina selves imaginable. Focusing on the novel's various metaphors as well as on the symbolic function of language and naming, I invite students to question the pressures to literally lose one's accent and symbolically lose one's culture, opening up a conversation about the dictatorial mandates of monolingual and monocultural ideology. This gives us the opportunity to debate models of cultural assimilation and transculturation, and to consider them within the context of hemispheric histories of colonization and authoritarianism.

Chicana activist-author Demetria Martinez's *Mother Tongue* provides students with the opportunity to analyze intra-ethnic solidarity across different Latino national origin groups through the Sanctuary Movement' and how a novel can function as testimony against trauma. I ask students to track the power dynamics in the romance between Maria (a Chicana rape survivor) and Jose Luis (a Salvadoran torture survivor) and compare their different forms of violation. I also encourage them to interrogate what I call domestic dictatorship within the context of Maria's physical abuse in the domestic space of her home in the domestic United States and to consider how patriarchy dictates female subordination and represses female sexual agency. We also discuss how the novel's incorporation of different genres (such as testimony, poetry, epistles, recipes, and news reports) redefines storytelling as a place of refuge and sanctuary as an aesthetic space.

Guatemalan American journalist and novelist Hector Tobar's *The Tattooed Soldier* enables students to investigate how plot and narrative perspective can structure comparative visions of racial regimes and state violence in the hemisphere. I point students to the multiple significations of "plot" in the novel: as the main sequence of events, as Antonio's plan to assassinate the military killer Longoria, and as Longoria's attempt to establish order and control over his environment after attending the U.S. Army School of the Americas. I then ask students

to consider how the narrative formally fractures the binary between the victim of dictatorship (Antonio) and the perpetrator of dictatorship (Longoria) and between democracy (the United States) and dictatorship (Guatemala), pointing them to look at how the foil characters of Antonio and Longoria are given equal attention as narrators and to the parallels between Guatemalan military brutality and Los Angeles police brutality. Perhaps most valuably, students unpack the relevance of the Rodney King uprisings in Los Angeles that serve as the backdrop for the novel's explosive events. This provides a prime opportunity to discuss contemporary racial profiling and debate whether justice can be achieved given mass impunity and, in the context of the disproportionate incarcerations of Latinos/as and Blacks in the United States, an unequal penal system designed to maintain white supremacy.

Returning to Peruvian American cronista Daniel Alarcon, his novel *Lost City Radio* gives students the chance to explore how different technologies from the photograph to the radio can serve as sites of memory and modes of challenging state violence and official history. I ask students how the radio, a technology of aural visibility, is represented in a print novel and how Norma's radio show functions as a form of memory work and a technology of reappearing the disappeared. We then analyze how the state's arbitrary profiling and torturing of potential dissidents is represented as a form of so-called "tadek," illuminating how the spectacle of state power renders its injustices invisible, I also challenge students to draw parallels between the multiple kinds of disappearances in the novel as well as with contemporary kinds of disappearance such as the undocumented migrants who have vanished during their harrowing treks across Mexico and the Arizona desert.

To make a unit on the dictator novel more comparative and transnational, it can also be extremely useful to create Latin American-Latino pairings for students to explore how Latino/a imaginaries differently interrogate dictatorial power. For example, reading Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *EI otoño del patriarca* [*Autumn of the Patriarchs* or *La fiesta del chivo* [*The Feast of the Goat*]] alongside Cristina Garcia's *King of Cuba* opens up a discussion about the value of narrating from inside the presidential palace from the perspective of the dictator (a technique characteristic of the Latin American Boom generation) as well as what happens when incorporating oppositional exilic and second generation Latina perspectives within the text. Placing Augusto Roa Bastos's *Yo el supremo* [*I, the Supreme*] in conversation with Salvador Plascencia's *The People of Paper* facilitates an analysis of the critical import of metafiction and the trope of the dictator-as-writer; this highlights the differences between using metafiction to undercut the authority of the authoritarian figure or, in the case of the borderlands Chicano novel, to interrogate the novel form itself and the exploitation of characters who are not compensated for their labor and whose lives are plotted by the writer-as-dictator, which is particularly symbolic given the characters are undocumented farm workers. Positioning Manuel Puig's *EI Beso de la mujer araña* [*Kiss of the Spider Woman*] alongside Junot Diaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* allows a comparative reading of the function and value of footnotes and popular film in a novel about authoritarian power, as well as a discussion of how the Latino/a imagination is shaped by other modes of popular culture and how Latino/a gender and sexuality is differently policed and embodied.

I often tell my students at Bryn Mawr College that our classroom is not a dictatorship where, as the professor, my singular voice is authoritative and dominant; rather, it is a discussion-based seminar where myriad perspectives and voices collectively generate knowledge and develop varying readings of our texts as we learn from each other. I find that one useful way to enrich the syllabus, encourage a more dialogic classroom, and familiarize students with often

unfamiliar political histories is to have Cultural Critics Panels or Dictator Critics Presentations. For the Cultural Critics Panel, I group students into thematic panels and then ask them to find a cultural production that relates to dictatorship. Students are responsible for finding relevant supplementary material to present on, contextualizing and offering their own analysis of it for the class, and posing a couple of discussion questions to engage the class in a communal analysis of their particular text. The cultural product they choose can take any form—a performance, a mural, a poster, a photo, a film clip, a song, a poem, a dance, a crónica, a testimonio, a memorial site, etc.—as long as it relates to the topic of dictatorial power. My students at Bryn Mawr have come up with creative and fascinating examples. For example, they have done critical analyses of different altars [altars] and monuments to the disappeared; the theater group Yuyachkani; the murals in Balmy Alley in San Francisco; the cueca sola that the mothers of the disappeared dance alone; the poetry of Pablo Neruda and Roque Dalton; the documentary *Nostalgia de la luz* and the film *Men with Guns*; and the protest songs of Violeta Parra, Víctor Jara, and Calle 13.

For the Dictator Critics Presentation, I have students focus on researching important relevant background to deepen the class's contextual understanding of a novel. For example, I have them research the Dominican Republic under Rafael Trujillo's dictatorship, the U.S. Army School of the Americas, the euphemistic discourse used to describe state violence and torture, official and alternative forms of memorialization in the public sphere, truth and reconciliation commissions, or the Sanctuary Movement. I often guide students to useful secondary texts such as Lauren Derby's *The Dictator's Seduction* (2009), Lesley Gill's *The School of the Americas* (2004), Marguerite . Feitlowitz's *A Lexicon of Terror* (1998), Diana Taylor's *Disappearing Acts* and *The Archive and the Repertoire*, Macarena Gomez-Barris's *Where Memory Dwells* (2008), Ariel Dorfman's *Exorcising Terror* (2002), or Renny Golden and Michael McConnell's *Sanctuary* (1986). After presenting their research, students pose textually based questions that help illuminate how such issues are depicted in a given novel, with particular attention to the how of representation and to a specific passage in the novel. I find that shifting the power dynamics in the classroom so that students are the teachers during their panels/presentations helps students feel empowered as analysts participating in the project of cultural studies and counter-dictatorial narrative production.

Conclusion: crossing borders, crossing genres

Just as genres cross borders, so do peoples. In order for students to understand contemporary Latinos/as and their cultural production, they must first acquire a historical consciousness about Latin American immigration to the United States. As Juan Gonzalez makes clear in his landmark history of Latinos/as in the United States, *Harvest of Empire* (now a fantastic documentary integral to any Latino/a studies classroom), we cannot understand Latin American migration without taking into account the U.S.'s countless interventions in Latin America—colonization, annexation, occupation, counter-insurgency campaigns, propping up dictatorships, support for military coups, exploitative trade agreements, foreign policy drug measures, and border militarizations, not to mention its Bracero Program and its incessant demand for cheap labor—all of which constitute the push and pull factors that shape hemispheric migrations.

We have proposed that the chronicle and the dictator novel are two highly useful genres through which we can teach such important historical and contemporary transnational issues. We have focused on Latino/a authors' aesthetic choices, on why they represent transnational realities

through the use of forms that originate from Latin American literary traditions and how they adapt and modify these forms to their experiences as U.S. Latinos/as. Finally, we have argued that doing so allows students to understand the ways in which visions of Latinidad have shifted decisively from the model of acculturation prevalent just a few decades ago to one which takes into account the enduring connections (physical, emotional, artistic) that continue to culturally tie citizens of the Americas to each other across borders.

#### Notes

There is an abundance of critical literature on these two genres, especially in relation to their U.S. ethnic, hemispheric, and global migrations and adaptations. The collections on magical realism edited by Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy Faris, and by Lyn Di Iorio Sandin and Richard Perez and those on testimonio edited by the Latina Feminist Group, and by Louise Detwiler and Janis Breckenridge, are particularly useful texts in the classroom.

2 These works by individual scholars—as well as essays included in collections such as those edited by Gustavo Perez Firmat, Juan Poblete, Jon Smith and Deborah Cohn, Jeffrey Belnap and Raul Fernandez, and Caroline F. Levander and Robert S. Levine—participate in what literary scholar Paul Jay (2010) has labeled the "transnational turn in literary studies."

3 This is not exclusively a South-to-North process; indeed, just as migratory routes are circular, so are generic routes. We can consider, for example, how in 2007 Latinos Daniel Alarcon and Junot Diaz were both named in the highly prestigious and selective Bogota 39, a list of the top 39 Latin American authors under 39 years of age.

4 Examples include sixteenth-century cronicas written by Hernan Cortes, Bernal Diaz del Castillo, and Bartolome de Las Casas.

5 This connection makes particular sense because of the generic intersections between cronica and "New Journalism," one that has been noted by various Latin Americans investigating the genre, including Carlos Monsivais. New Journalism, which was codified by Tom Wolfe in the 1970s, is characterized by its use of novelistic conventions (free indirect discourse, characterization, symbolism, etc.) in journalistic writing.

6 See Monica Hanna's interview with Hernandez, "Chronicling the New Transnational Migrant Experience: An Interview with Daniel Hernandez" in *Label Me Latina/a* (2014).

7 See Marta Caminero-Santangelo and Ruth Brown for useful scholarly articles on the subject of contemporary chronicles about undocumented migrations. On the ironies of border security, see Wendy Brown. An accessible text to use in the classroom on the subject of transnational Latinidad and its effect on United States cities is Mike Davis's *Magical Urbanism* (2001). Although the data is from the 2000 census and thus not fully lip-to-date, his concepts continue to be relevant, such as his discussion of "transnational suburbs."

8 This projection was supplied by the Department of Homeland Security, according to the *New York Times*. See Richard Fausset and Ken Belson (2014).

9 Since shorter forms can sometimes be easier to incorporate into a syllabus than long-form novels, see Helena Maria Viramontes's "Cariboo Cafe" (1985), Benjamin Alire Saenz's "Alligator Park" (1992), Achy Obejas's "We Came All the Way from Cuba So You Could Dress Like This?", Edwidge Danticat's story cycle *The Dew Breaker* (2004), and Daniel Alarcon's story collection *War by Candlelight* (2005).

10 In this sense, we could think of them as doing similar work as African American neo-slave

narratives. African American literature and scholarship is highly attuned to the traumas of slavery and to the residual elements of slavery in the present, so reading a non-slave narrative like Toni Morrison's *Beloved* together with a Latino dictator novel like Junot Diaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* enables students to think intergenerationally and interracially about the afterlife of trauma.

11 In order to get students to articulate their stereotypes about dictatorship, I begin by having them watch trailers for the films *The Great Dictator*, *Bananas*, *Moon over Parador*, *Last King of Scotland*, and *The Dictator* and then ask them to identify the tropes used to portray dictatorship (embodied in the dictator) and democracy (embodied in white savior figures).

12 For example, we can use Latino dictator novels to teach about state violence such as repression, torture, disappearance (e.g., *Lost City Radio* and *The Long Night of White Chickens*); social justice in the form of revolutionary and solidarity movements (e.g., *In the Time of the Butte/flies* and *Mother Tongue*); imperialism in the form of occupation and interventionism (e.g., *Let It Rain Coffee* and *The Tattooed Soldier*); migration such as exile, undocumented migration, or reverse migration (e.g., *In Search of Bernabe* and *When the Ground Turns in Its Sleep*); racial discrimination and economic exploitation (e.g., *The People of Paper* and *The Ordinary Seaman*); machismo and heteropatriarchy (e.g., *Geographies of Home* and *King of Cuba*); language politics and cultural identity (e.g., *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* and *The Farming of Bones*); and history's impact on the present (e.g., *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* and *Memory Mambo*).

13 See Jennifer Harford Vargas, "Dictating a Zafa: The Power of Narrative Form in Junot Diaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*." *MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States* 39.3 (fall 2014): 8-30.

14 The Sanctuary Movement was a political-religious movement in the United States in the 1980s that sheltered Central American refugees from military dictatorships and imagined itself as a contemporary underground railroad. The New Sanctuary Movement currently aids undocumented migrants in the United States.

Resources for teaching transnational forms

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