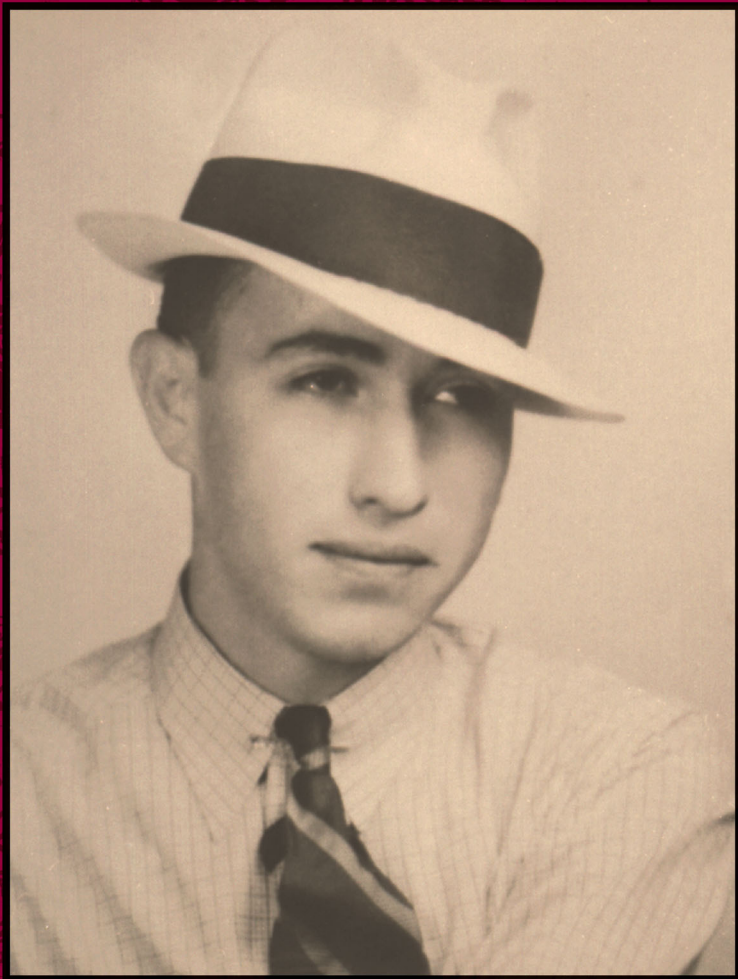


RECOVERING THE U.S. HISPANIC LITERARY HERITAGE

*Cantos de adolescencia*  
**Songs of Youth**  
(1932–1937)



**Américo Paredes**

Translated with an Introduction and Annotations by  
B.V. Olguín and Omar Vásquez Barbosa

*Cantos de adolescencia*  
**Songs of Youth**

# Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage

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*Para don Américo  
con todo respeto*

*y para las poetas chicanas y los poetas chicanos  
que se han inspirado en su vida y obra*

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## Américo Paredes

### Literary Chronology

- 1915** Born September 3, in Brownsville, Texas.
- 1932** Wins High School poetry contest representing Brownsville High School.
- 1934** Wins statewide poetry contest sponsored by Trinity University while a student at Brownsville High School. Paredes' sonnet submission, "Night," is published in the *Valley Morning Star*, May 3.
- 1930s** Reads and writes poetry in collaboration with advertising campaigns by local Mexican-American merchants in Brownsville.
- 1935** Wins academic contest for essay on Miguel Cervantes de Saavedra while a student at Brownsville Junior College.
- 1935** Writes first version of landmark poem, "The Mexico-Texan" and publishes it in the *Brownsville Herald* a year later.
- 1935-40s** Active literary exchanges with writers from the Lower Rio Grande Writers Circle. Members send unpublished poems and *décimas* in correspondence and hold regular meetings to discuss literature and political philosophy.
- 1936** Publishes poem "Guadalupe la Chinaca" in unidentified local newspaper (probably the *Brownsville Herald*) on June 7.
- Sketches plan for first poetry collection to be called *Black Roses*. Some of the poems subsequently included in *Cantos de adolescencia*. Others remain lost or were destroyed by the author.

- 1936-40s** Wrote journalism features on folklore for the *Brownsville Herald*.  
Writes first novel *George Washington Gómez*.
- 1937** Publishes *Cantos de adolescencia* with Librería Española, San Antonio, Texas. Prominent businessmen and writers honor Paredes, who had come to be known as “El joven bardo,” at literary banquet in Matamoros, Mexico.  
*La Prensa* (San Antonio) publishes a two-page special pull-out section of excerpts from *Cantos de adolescencia*, October 18.  
Gregorio Garza Flores, editor of *El Regional* (Matamoros, Mexico), encourages Paredes to write prose fiction through correspondence dated August 25.  
Noted University of Texas librarian Carlos E. Castañeda praises *Cantos de adolescencia* and predicts Paredes “will obtain the success he deserves and will vindicate the reputation of his people” (*obtendrá el éxito que merece y vindicará el nombre de su raza*) in a letter dated October 25.  
Receives award of decorative leather jacket for *Cantos de adolescencia* from *The Arizona Quarterly*.
- 1938** Publishes poem “Mi pueblo de amanecer,” dedicated to fellow writer Sabas Klahn, in unknown Brownsville newspaper (probably the *Brownsville Herald*) in May.  
First documented payment for unknown poem published in *Texas Farming and Citriculture* trade magazine.
- 1939** Writes “The Hammon and the Beans,” which is published in the *Texas Observer* on April 18, 1963.
- 1940-50s** Wrote column for *El Universal* (Mexico City).
- 1941** Publishes Spanish version of “The Mexico-Texan” (“*El Mexico-Texano*”) in *La Voz* (Brownsville), August 31.  
University of Texas Library requests a copy of *Cantos de adolescencia* for its archives.
- 1944** Wrote Prologue to fellow Rio Grande Writers Circle poet Manuel Cruz’ collection of poetry, *Romanso Azul*. An early draft of Paredes’ prologue is included in the Américo Paredes Papers, but Cruz’ manuscript remains lost.

- 1944-46** Drafted into the U.S. Army in 1944. Wrote as enlisted soldier for U.S. Army newspaper *Stars and Stripes*, and served as a political editor who covered the war crimes trials of Japanese officers.
- 1945** Featured poetry performance with musicians in Brownsville, Texas, November 21-22.
- 1946-50** Works as uniformed member of the American Red Cross stationed in various countries throughout Asia. Imbeds unpublished poems in letters home to his wife on American Red Cross stationary, and also lays out sketches for borderlands stories and novellas on U.S. government stationary.
- 1948** Writes the short story “Over the Waves” published in the *New Mexico Review* in 1953.
- 1951** Graduates with B.A. in English from the University of Texas at Austin.
- 1953** Receives M.A. in English from the University of Texas at Austin.
- 1955** While still a graduate student at the University of Texas at Austin, wins prizes for a novel, *The Shadow* and unidentified short story.
- 1956** Receives Ph.D. from the University of Texas at Austin at age 40.
- 1958** Dissertation, *With His Pistol in His Hand: A Border Ballad and its Hero*, is published by the University of Texas Press. Paredes receives death threats for his critical treatment of the Texas Rangers.
- 1963** Short story “The Hammon and the Beans” is published in the *Texas Observer* on April 18.
- 1966** With Joseph Castle and M.M., Cole Press publishes *Folk Music of Mexico: Book for the Guitar No. 671*, Chicago, Illinois.
- 1968** Publishes scholarly folio *The Décima on the Texas-Mexican Border*.
- 1976** Publishes *A Texas-Mexican Cancionero: Folksongs of the Lower Border*, University of Illinois Press.

## Literary Chronology

- 1989** Awarded the Charles Frankel Prize from the National Endowment for the Humanities.
- 1990** Publishes *George Washington Gómez: A Mexico-texan Novel*, Arte Público Press.
- 1991** Publishes collection of poetry, *Between Two Worlds*, Arte Público Press. Paredes claims in introduction to have destroyed many early poems.
- Awarded *El Águila Azteca*, the Order of the Aztec Eagle, the highest honor bestowed on foreign nationals by the government of Mexico.
- 1993** Publishes *Uncle Remus con Chile*, Arte Público Press.
- Publishes *Folklore and Culture on the Texas-Mexican Border*, University of Texas Press.
- 1994** Publishes *The Hammon and the Beans, and Other Stories*, consisting of stories written in the 1930s and 1940s, Arte Público Press.
- 1998** Publishes novella, *The Shadow*, Arte Público Press.
- 1999** Dies on *Cinco de Mayo* (May 5) in Austin, Texas, on the anniversary of the Mexican defeat of French occupation troops in Puebla, Mexico in 1862.
- 2002** Américo Paredes Papers opened to the public at the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection.

## Preface

This translation of Américo Paredes Manzano's first collection of poetry was undertaken as a collaborative project by Omar Vásquez Barbosa, a former graduate student research assistant at the University of Texas at San Antonio, and me, an Associate Professor of Chicana/o Literature at the same institution. We were a perfect match for this project for several reasons. We are both bilingual and, as published poets, we both have an intimate knowledge of poetry as an art and, above all else, as a difficult, oftentimes tedious, and emotionally taxing craft. This insight has enabled the creativity and perseverance required to reconstruct and, at times, recompose Paredes' varied and sometimes convoluted style and forms of verse.

More importantly, our own personal backgrounds and disciplinary experiences add valuable perspective to the translation process and also provide insights to our overall attempts to produce an aesthetically pleasing and academically useful annotated translation of *Cantos de adolescencia*. That is, in an attempt to introduce this little-known work to a broader audience, we approached Paredes' U.S.-Mexico borderlands poetics from Aztlán (the Southwestern United States) and Latin America, respectively. My own background as a Tejano from a working-class Chicano barrio, along with my comparative literature training in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at Stanford University and subsequent experience as an English Professor at various universities in the United States, add depth to my firsthand knowledge of the Chicana/o vernacular Spanish

and popular culture that is so crucial to Paredes' life and work. My training in Peninsular Spanish Literature as well as my research and writing in Latin American and Chicana/o literatures are crucial to explicating Paredes' poetic discourse, which ranges from the high diction of the Spanish Renaissance to idiomatic Chicana/o Spanish as well as popular poetic and musical forms from the borderlands and the Americas at large. Omar, a *chilango* (Mexico City native) by birth and transplanted Tejano and world traveler, brings a bicultural metropolitan command of the Spanish- and English-languages as well as a corresponding knowledge about Mexican and British literature. In addition, Omar has written several experimental plays that creatively extrapolate from the works of canonical British authors such as Milton, which has given him insights into the complex process of mimicry and transformation that undergirds Paredes' own work. Moreover, Omar's youthful vitality and consummate love of poetry has helped us keep Paredes' art at the center of this archival recovery project.

In an attempt to collapse, as much as possible, the typically hierarchical faculty/student relationship, we divided this project into several components and tasks in order to equally share the joys as well as the burdens of the overall enterprise. Based on our experiences with and research on translation theory and practice, we developed a multiple-stage method that facilitated the task of translating Paredes' manuscript. We began the translation, chronologically from first to last poem, by first producing our own individual translation draft of the piece at hand. We then compared each individual draft and used them as templates to produce a jointly authored working English version of the Paredes original. This joint translation session ranged in time, from thirty minutes to as much as two hours for one draft of a single poem, depending on the complexity and difficulty of the piece. The difficulty oftentimes was compounded by Paredes' colloquialisms and neologisms as well as his frequent use of rhymed verse, irregular rhyme schemes, and highly convoluted



Spanish syntax. After completing jointly authored drafts of the entire manuscript, we approached our translations anew as poets for a third round of revision to make sure that each piece had its own internal integrity while still remaining true to the original. The fourth round of revision involved a joint re-reading of the whole manuscript. We both made minor revisions as appropriate. This was followed by further review, discussion, and collaborative revision via email after Omar returned to Mexico City and then moved to Spain to pursue a career in filmmaking. Finally, we decided to bring closure to the draft stage of the project after eighteen months in order to solicit feedback from outside readers. I then made one more review and revision of the entire manuscript in light of this feedback and submitted the penultimate version to Dr. Nicolás Kanellos, Director of Arte Público Press and the Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage Project. Final adjustments were made to the overall document in consultation with the editors of Arte Público Press.

Unlike the translation regimen, which we shared, we divided the research component of the project into individual tasks. I was responsible for initiating the project and writing all grants for support. We received several awards: a Faculty Research Grant awarded to me by the University of Texas at San Antonio in 1992 to conduct preliminary research and plan the project, a Grant-In-Aid from the Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage Project, which was awarded to Omar and me for the translation portion, and a Research Assistantship awarded to us both from the UTSA Department of English, Classics and Philosophy to continue the project. I conducted all the archival recovery research at the Archival Collections room at the Benson Latin American Collection at the University of Texas at Austin, where I searched for and reproduced Paredes' manuscript and relevant loose poems, correspondence, related writings, and photographs. Omar conducted research to trace Paredes' eclectic invocations of British, Spanish, French, and classical Greek literature and folklore. This involved extensive

study of poetry from a variety of literary figures that include Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer, Lord Alfred Tennyson, Algernon Charles Swinburne, Ben Jonson, and John Keats among many others. Omar also conducted musicology research to help define and describe the folk music forms that Paredes glosses, and he also provided etymologies and taxonomies to explain obscure references that frequently emerged in Paredes' verse (e.g., the *zenzontli* bird). We both worked together to track down other interpersonal and intertextual references, which ranged from former Mexican expatriate cultural arts patron Nemesio García Naranjo to Paredes contemporaries such as the obscure young Mexican-American poet Roberto Ramírez Ramírez.

We used the resultant data to complete the annotations and addenda and also to jointly author the introduction. I was responsible for researching and writing the first part of the introduction on Paredes' significance to Chicana/o and American cultural studies, and Omar was responsible for researching and writing the second section regarding the different schools of translation theory and practice. We jointly reviewed and revised the overall draft of the introduction. As the Director of the Américo Paredes Translation Project I took editing license to complete the final draft of the entire manuscript for submission to Arte Público Press. While I am the founder and director of the Américo Paredes Translation Project, we both share authorship and equal copyright for the manuscript.

B.V. Olguín, Director  
Américo Paredes Translation Project

## Acknowledgments

Many people are responsible for the publication of this translation of Américo Paredes Manzano's inaugural collection of verse. The project had its genesis in an invitation made to Ben by Professor José Limón, Director of the Center for Mexican American Studies at the University of Texas at Austin. He was asked to make a presentation at the first annual Américo Paredes symposium in 2001, and became aware of the existence of *Cantos de adolescencia* during the research for the presentation. Ben's presentation, incidentally, was the only one devoted to Paredes' verse, which illuminated the need for greater access to this text. University of Texas at Austin Professor Emiliano Zamora provided enthusiastic encouragement for the translation project.

Ben received a grant from the College of Liberal and Fine Arts at the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) to conduct preliminary archival research in 2002, which resulted in a research article in *Aztlán* published in the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Special Issue in 2005. Both Ben and Omar received a grant to begin translating the book from the Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage Project. The Department of English, Classics and Philosophy at UTSA also provided generous support to the translation team by awarding Ben and Omar with a Research Assistantship to continue with the project. We thank these agencies and programs for their support.

The archivists at the Benson Latin American Collection ensured the success of the project. Margot Gutiérrez was help-

## Acknowledgments

ful throughout the entire process and the entire staff of the Archival Collections and Rare Book Room were absolutely wonderful. Their proficient help in locating relevant materials, including those that are not part of the Américo Paredes Papers, was invaluable. Moreover, their enthusiasm for research was contagious and inspiring and motivated the completion of the project that, after the first one hundred hours of archival research, had become quite tedious even as it was always thrilling to watch a literary life unfold page by page.

This project to translate the early poetry of a foundational figure in Chicana/o literary history also relied on the research of distinguished Paredes scholars such as Ramón Saldívar, José David Saldívar, Rafael Pérez-Torres, María Herrera-Sobek, José Limón, Hector Perez, Rachel Jennings, and Louis G. Mendoza. John M. González introduced Ben to the possibility of Chicano signifying in Paredes' verse during a bus ride several days after the 2001 Paredes Symposium that, incidentally, was stopped by the U.S. Border Patrol. We offer the Immigration and Naturalization (INS) officers who interrogated them a bit of gratitude for reminding us that the colonial context that Paredes engaged in the 1930s is still an intrusive and oppressive part of the Chicana/o reality today. As an addendum to the forced response to the INS query of "where were you born," we note that the "here" they referenced is the geopolitical terrain Don Américo called Nuevo Santander to the day he died. We call it Aztlán.

UTSA Professors Wendy Barker and Norma Cantú provided Omar with invaluable mentoring in creative writing and also helped inspire his interests in poetry and translation.

We are particularly grateful for early readings of the manuscript by UTSA Professors Louis G. Mendoza, Norma Cantú, Santiago Daydí-Tolson, and Bernadette Andrea. Professor Barker also provided crucial insights on overcoming some translation challenges in the preface to her jointly authored translation of Rabindranath Tagore, which served as a model for our project. The staff of the College of Liberal and Fine Arts at the

UTSA Downtown Campus, especially Sylvia Rodriguez and David Espinoza, provided crucial technical and logistical support. This project simply could never have been completed without their patience and solidarity. More importantly, the college also helped defray costs for printing, phone calls, postage, and materials related to the research and writing. We offer a special thanks to former UTSA Dean Louis Mendoza for taking a personal interest in the project and his continued solidarity and consultations from his new post as the Director of the Chicana/o Studies Department at the University of Minnesota.

Finally, Dr. Nicolás Kanellos deserves another thanks for his diligent support of broader efforts to recuperate and publish Paredes' early works. This project, like so much of the relatively new discipline of Chicana/o literary studies, is indebted to Kanellos' vision, diligence, and overall commitment to Raza Letters. He is an unsung hero who gave many Chicana and Chicano writers their start by publishing their works when no one would even read their writing. Moreover, Kanellos continues his trailblazing mission to expand and diversify the conventional understanding about the literatures of the Americas by also enabling us to recover the unread works by major Chicana/o authors. Un abrazo.

B.V. Olgúin and Omar Vásquez Barbosa