

# Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage, Volume VIII

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Edited by Clara Lomas  
and Gabriela Baeza Ventura

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# Introduction

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The 2008 Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage conference's call for papers highlighted two important events as the topics for that year's meeting: 1) the mapping of contact zones in Nuestra América alluding to José Martí's well-known essay on U.S. expansionism and imperialistic plays where he expresses a desire for the people of America (Latin America) to stand united and make America strong by rejecting European and U.S. ideology; and 2) the bicentennial celebration of the first printing of *El Misisipi*, a Hispanic newspaper published on September 1808 in New Orleans. The conflation of both topics called for a revision and analysis of how the "contact zones" that were initiated and dominated by European travelers, merchants and conquistadors produced a multiplicity of diverse cultural clashes and/or syntheses. This is evident in many printed works, which exist precisely because many Latino authors had the newspaper as a venue to print their works and share them with the newspaper's readership. These early publications were the means through which many Latino authors were able to preserve views and to, above all, contest and respond to a hegemony that was imposing and limiting. The contact zones that were generated via the newspaper formulated a decolonized "third space" that is now evident to U.S. Latino scholars.

The essays included in this volume span the nineteenth and twentieth century, the United States, Mexico and Cuba, female and male writers, and map cultural, political, linguistic, gender and historical connections/disconnections



between individuals and groups. Each essay attests to the contact zones that are created and are reproduced in the United States; many also disclose the violence and displacement that is often present in works within a postcolonial atmosphere. The collection is comprised of twelve essays and is divided into four sections: Contesting the Canon, Mapping Latino Voices in the United States, Postcoloniality in Autobiography and Nationalism in Contact Zones.

In the first section, Donna Kabalen de Bichara's article "Discourse Production and the Expression of Gender Roles in the Writing of María Cristina Mena" contributes to the critical discussion of Mena's works by focusing on lesser-known narratives that allow for "an understanding of [her] work from a feminine perspective" by exploring portrayal of male-female power relations, gender issues and the symbolic power of her writing as an author of Mexican origin in contact with an Anglo culture in the early part of the twentieth century. In a comparative study of two short stories and two newspaper columns, found in the Recovery Collection of the María Cristina Mena Chambers Papers, Kabalen shows that Mena artfully uses a contestatory stance to question women's assigned and limiting position in society. Of particular interest is Kabalen's teasing out the symbolic power of Mena's authority as a writer capable of challenging traditional paradigms by handwritten commentary found on an edition of one of her columns. Belinda Linn Rincón in her essay "Heroic Boys and Good Neighbors: Cold War Discourse and the Symbolism of Chapultepec in María Cristina Mena's *Boy Heroes of Chapultepec*" analyzes how early twentieth-century young adult literature that featured Mexico as its setting frequently reproduced the tropes of empire to foster U.S. imperialism. Rincón identifies a powerful voice in Mena's young adult literature that predates the Chicano movement and that offers a "subtle critique of U.S. militarism and its cultural corollaries . . . by presenting forms of Mexican patriotism and heroic sacrifice in opposition to U.S. cultural military invasions, as well as by resignifying the historical narrative of the U.S. Mexican War of 1848 within a Cold War context." In this section, Beth Hernandez-Jason's article "Squatting in Uncle Tom's Cabin: Intertextual References and Literary Tactics of Nineteenth-Century U.S. Women Writers" explores María Amparo Ruiz de Burton's role as a cultural *mediador* with cultural authority using Wolfgang Iser's concept of repertoire and Ángel Rama's *transculturación* to analyze the intertextual and rhetorical parallels and departures between Harriet Beecher Stowe and Ruiz de Burton. She calls for a reading of Ruiz de Burton's novels alongside that of her contemporaries, such as Stowe and Helen Hunt Jackson, for a more profound understanding of Ruiz de Burton's work within her own historical moment. Moreover, she cautions against "the type of reading and teaching of Ruiz de Burton that seeks to 'understand'

difference as a general phenomenon” and advises that we “constantly fight the urge to hegemonize an already elitist text ‘within the economics of pedagogy.’”

Because part of the mission of the Recovery project is to preserve and recover, the second section includes three articles that analyze the role of the press and they discuss its significance in regards to the preservation and the way it provides writers a venue to voice their opinion with regard to the situations that Latinas and Latinos face in the United States as well as to unite divergent ideologies within the same source. With her essay, “*España Libre*: periódico de exilio español en Nueva York,” Montse Feu examines a newspaper, published in New York between 1939 and 1977, that served as a propagandist publication for the Spanish political exiles’ association, Sociedades Hispanas Confederadas. Throughout its 38 years, *España Libre* provided a forum for columnists with divergent ideological positions and diverse class interests—from progressive bourgeois intellectuals to anarcho-syndicalist leaders and workers—with the goal of uniting a heterogenic exile community and its international supporters in their opposition to the Franco regime. Feu points out that they successfully put aside their differences and came together in the United States to create a political solidarity that fostered international aid for refugees, political prisoners and the Spanish people who survived the totalitarian regime. Patricia A. Bonn in “¡No Hay Justicia! The Execution of Simplicio Torres” describes how, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the Arizona Spanish-language newspaper *Justicia* challenged a criminal judicial system whose systematic discrimination against racial minorities too often lead to unjust executions. Bonn chronicles the events surrounding the crime committed by 23-year-old Simplicio Torres, the legal proceedings of the all-Anglo jury trial that placed him on death row and the political machinations to deny him an appeal. This initial study of the case offers further insights into the vital role of the Spanish-language press not only in providing critical alternative views contesting those of the English-language press, but also in documenting and preserving them for posterity. In “Recovering Spanish-Language Education in Alta California: Ecologies, Ideologies and Intertextualities” Robert W. Train analyzes a small cluster of extant school texts printed in 1836 and 1843 in Monterey, California. By situating these textbooks within other texts and contexts of pre-U.S. California, he provides a glimpse of cultures of print and schooling within a postcolonial ecology shaped by the intersection of imperial ideologies and intertextualities of pedagogies of reduction and violence. A critical understanding of these historical texts, Train suggests, is germane to present-day policy surrounding Spanish-language education in California. He recommends the creation of a decolonial third space in which Spanish and English are reconstituted in language education; the validation and fostering of the emergence of complex intercultural

spaces for bilingual communicative practices; and the development and appreciation of translingual and transcultural competence as an education goal.

The third cluster of essays shares postcolonial concerns in its relation to autobiography. Erin Murrah-Mandril in “Autobiographical Politics in the Contact Zone: Miguel Antonio Otero’s *My Life on the Frontier*” explains how Otero undermines the dominant concept of a westward-moving frontier that transformed savagery into civilization. In his autobiography, he refuted the most dominant U.S. interpretation of the frontier by reconstituting the politics of conquest in the Southwestern United States and by redrawing the lines of civility and wildness. Murrah-Mandril maintains that Otero attempted to tame the wild representations of New Mexico that circulated in popular fiction by recasting his life as a romantic comedy—triumphing over the “wilds of the west” and drawing on the United States’ own romantic narrative of Western expansion—to position *nuevo mexicanos* within the United States formative contact zone as heroes of progress. In “The Autobiography of Conversion of Rev. Santiago Tafolla, Sr., Runaway, Soldier and Methodist Minister: a Postcolonial *Bildungsroman*” Norma Mouton argues that the unfinished life narrative left by Tafolla not only combines some fundamental characteristics of both an autobiography of conversion and the traditionally Eurocentric bourgeois literary form of the *bildungsroman*, but that it reflects postcolonial theories as well. Her study posits that Tafolla’s quest for Truth is two-pronged: at one level is his spiritual journey and at another is an exploration of his identity as a Mexican American. Drawing on José Santiago Fernández Vázquez’s discussion of postcolonial *bildungsroman* scriptures, Mouton reveals how Tafolla utilized this genre to evade hegemonic domination during the late nineteenth century. The essay by Laura Garza “De la experiencia a la enseñanza: Contrastes estructurales y didácticos en *El sol de Texas* y *¡Macho!*” is a comparative analysis of the novels of Conrado Espinoza and Victor Villaseñor as examples of the “novela de inmigración” and the “novela nativista” as defined by Nicolás Kanellos. Garza asserts that Espinoza’s *El sol de Texas* exemplifies the immigration novel marked by nostalgia, anti-acculturation sentiment and a longing to return to the country of origin, while Villaseñor’s *¡Macho!* promotes rejection of the values of that old country and incorporation to the new culture. Despite their differences, what the two novels published in different historical periods have in common, she argues, is their portrayal of women as advocates for full assimilation to U.S. culture.

The final section is dedicated to works that deal with nation-building and the resignification of symbols. Yolanda Padilla in “The Mexican-American Novel of the Revolution: Reading the Immigrant Nationalism of Leonor Villegas de Magnón’s *The Rebel*” renders a sophisticated reading of Villegas de Magnón’s memoirs identifying an immigrant nationalism with expressions that

“respond to outreaches from the home nation, but which produce activities that are shaped by the local political situations and affective needs of the immigrants themselves.” The memoirs reveal a transnational understanding of the Mexican civil war from a borderlands perspective, which also articulates an ethnic identity for Mexicans in the United States. Padilla submits that the use of an anti-revolutionary pastoral in Villegas de Magnón’s narratives works as one of the author’s strategies to “rehabilitate the border” in Mexican imaginaries, to position the border region as central to the Mexican nation through the peacemaking mission of the nursing corps and to make Mexico legible to the United States through a cross-cultural translation key to ethnic identity of Mexicans in the United States. Julianne Burton-Carvajal’s essay “The Return of José Castro: The Baja California Correspondence of Alta California’s Last Commander General” is a summary of 18 letters recently rediscovered that offer an initial reconstruction of an important figure in the 1850s during the transition from Mexican to American California. The correspondence spanning from 1856-1860 documents Castro’s final years, his separation from his family and constituents and the process of change from oligarchic New Spain to Republican Mexico. Burton-Carvajal presents this overview of apparent miscellany of letters, noting that they indeed tell “a surprisingly coherent and revealing tale,” in an attempt to help us understand this significant figure who was part of an influential trio with his associates Juan Bautista Alvarado and Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo, but who has been negated or misrepresented during the past 150 years. Castro’s correspondence has the potential of providing valuable insight into the interrelationships between Californios and Mexicans in Baja California during a time of resistance, alliance-building, betrayal and displacement. In her essay, “La figura del sacrificio como expresión nacionalista en *Hatuey* y *La muerte de Plácido*” Cecilia Marrugo explores the literary recreations of Cuban historical figures in works of Cuban exiled journalists, poets and translators Diego Tejera and Francisco Sellén. Published in New York at the end of the nineteenth century, Sellén’s dramatic poem and Tejera’s dramatic plays are nostalgic reminiscences of their native country meant to foment national patriotism and unity. Marrugo draws on Benedict Anderson’s and Claudio Lomnitz’s postulations on sacrifice for the nation, to convincingly argue that these Cuban exiles appeal to the defense of their country by successfully creating a sense of national sacrifice through the dynamics of racial and social representation.

All of the essays included in this eighth edition of the Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage Project continue to “chronicle how we imagine and study the Hispanic literary past” while critically examining issues of “nomenclature, periodization, genres, the politics of textual production and reproduction, the primacy of written over oral forms of literature, and most importantly,

the silence and resistance of female and subaltern voices” as Gutiérrez and Padilla indicated in the first volume of the series (25). With *Recovery* entering new avenues of dissemination with the recent sponsorship of EBSCO publishing, that is now distributing and placing *Recovery* collections in all major libraries throughout the United States and abroad, the written and oral legacy of Latinos will no longer be a thing of the past but an irrefutable present and future.

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