



Modernist Quick Characters: Translation as Anti-Colonial Action

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Introduction

In 2014, Arte Público Press released a Spanish edition of Américo Paredes's novel *George Washington Gómez* (1990, hereafter referred to as *GWG*), translated by María Jesús Fernández-Gil. As universities across the U.S. slash humanities programs, and anti-Mexican rhetoric hardens into law, such a translation carries tremendous intellectual and cultural potential (García & Davis Winkie, 2024; Hartocollis, 2023). Yet this Spanish edition is not without features that warrant further investigation: key among these are accuracy, tone, and race which I cover elsewhere.¹ However, in this article, I perform an original translation of the English version into Spanish to analyze the leadership of women characters in the novel that to date are exceedingly misrepresented in criticism of the text. Indeed, the publisher's advertisement for the novel's Spanish edition equates "the struggles of Texas Mexicans" (Arte Público Press, 2024) with the hero's journey of its titular male protagonist. Whereas all the men in Washington Gómez's family feature in the online text description, there is not a single mention of any woman character despite the vital role they play in struggling against borderland colonization.

Using context-based translation, this essay argues that George's sisters, Carmen and Maruca, as well as his high school classmate, Elodia, constitute a Mexican American coalition of women. This group recognizes more equitable land and citizenship practices require language as self-determination. By choosing to signify bilingually, these characters refuse legally codified border-making and social gender constructs that deny personhood. The consequences of this bilingual strategy foreground how any anti-colonial struggle first requires a shift in power by recognizing the already present (albeit provisional) agency of women.

Ostensibly, the final punchline of *GWG* is that George vehemently, but ambivalently, renounces his Mexican heritage, dreaming of undoing the White colonization of México while railing against "Mexican Greasers" (Paredes, 1990, p. 300). However, this reading fundamentally overlooks the role of women working with provisional forms of agency as leaders and activists in the novel. Postwar gender constructs of separate spheres ideology no doubt made these roles

¹ A more detailed translation analysis can be found in chapter one of my manuscript "U.S.-México *Frontera* Fictions: Afterlives of 1848."

contingent, but they were and are significantly performed by women (Olcott, 2005; Salas, 1990; Sosa, 2020). Still, for critics, the conclusion most often registers a modernist fragmentation of male identity.

The *Corrido* as Default Framework

The frequency of male-centered analyses, in part, stems from a critical overemphasis on the novel's integration of a *corrido* aesthetic. Part of the balladry tradition, the *corrido* is defined by Américo Paredes (1958) as a "narrative folk song" (p. xi). According to Christopher Schedler (2002), the novel's inscription and deconstruction of *corrido* forms represent the pluralistic identity of emergent male middle-class subjects (p. 108). Leif Sorensen (2008) reads the novel's hybridization of *corrido* and elements of bildungsroman as illustrating the failures of totalizing male subject formation. Drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin, Ramon Saldivar (2006) reads the novel as highlighting "dialogizations of consciousness" (p. 188), the subject effects constitutive of a Mexican American subject that prefigured contemporary Chicana/o identities. Reading *GWG* alongside *The Shadow* (1998), Paredes's novel about the "psychic disintegration" of *ejido* president Antonio Cuitla, Monika Kaup (2017) posits that understanding these novels as a border diptych "offers new clues to Paredes's conceptualization of split borderlands identity and racialized subject formation under modernity" (p. 791). What these readings share is an overemphasis on male heroification such that "subject formation" ultimately means the big stories, or *corridos*, of great men rather than comprehensive analyses of personhood and community.

The Modernist Quick Character as Alternative Framework

Moving past emphases on male power stylized by the *corrido*, I propose that the novel's core theme is the strategic link between multilingual women and their re-definition of community. In turn, this linguistic change acts as a precondition to anti-colonial struggle. To support the analysis, this article theorizes what I term the "modernist quick character." I define modernist quick characters as figures that necessarily demand an audience's revaluation of strength. While they do not numerically occupy large portions of text, rhetorically they exhibit a substantial narrative impact. I term these figures "quick characters" for critical and stylistic reasons.

Critically, the language of "minor," "under-developed," "secondary," etc., would counter-productively frame narrative action as the sole domain of one individualist male hero, which I argue the text refuses in place of a communal ethos. Stylistically, the quick character is markedly in keeping with modernist iterations of brevity as technique. Modernist brevity takes many forms, though some characteristic examples include the modernist short story, Imagist poetry, the thematic and stylistic preoccupation with the atom, and narrative representations of temporality (Davis & Jenkins, 2015; Head, 1992). In the case of *GWG*, quick characters refer to George's immediate family and extended kinship networks. According to the novel's naming scheme, the eponymous character is first "Guálinto," then "Guálinto/George," and finally "George," the designation I use throughout this article to reflect his internalization of White supremacy.

To be sure, literary modernism names an intensely varied set of international projects. However, this article focuses on *frontera*-based historical transformations. Specifically, I conceptualize modernist quick characters within the intertwined context of White border-making

protocols and people of color's counter-conquest movements along the México-Texas *frontera* after the 1910 Mexican Revolution and the 1915 Seditious Rebellion. In *GWG*, modernist quick characters help trace evolutions in how we imagine our consciousness, our relationship to time, and our linguistic commitments to each other.

Modernist quick characters in *GWG* emerge through an aesthetic strategy of bilingual worldbuilding. Paredes writes the novel mostly in English with rhetorical cues to signal that dialogue and discursive commentary actually happen in Spanish. Tracking that multilingual style (especially in relation to quick characters) is rhetorically instructive. Specifically, context-based translation of characterization, dialogue, and discursive commentary foregrounds a power shift from individualist male heroes to a women-of-color coalition rooted in rhetorical sovereignty. This term, writes Scott Lyons (2000), refers to the "inherent right and ability of peoples to determine their own communicative needs and desires in this pursuit" (p. 449).

Before moving further, my use of Chicana feminism warrants contextualization. In terms of positionality, I am a cisgender first generation Mexican American male. To be sure, these distinct subject positions may illuminate my relationship to U.S. identity-based power hierarchies. However, in solidarity with those committed to transforming White and male dominant power structures, my self-identification as a cisgender male also requires framing my analysis as that of a scholar borrowing established Chicana feminist concepts. While a number of postnational Chicana feminists inform how I read *fronterizo* fiction today, this essay borrows from Cristina Devereaux Ramirez's (2015) concept "*ocupando nuestro puesto*." Originally conceived as a critique of male monopoly in México's journalism industry, I extend this concept to analyze women's multilingual rhetorical action in private and public spaces throughout *GWG*. In particular, *ocupando puesto* helps analyze how multilingualism positions women characters to signify—and thus critique—post-1910 South Texas power hierarchies across a range of marginalized and culturally sanctioned spaces.

Re-Defining the Interpretive Terrain

Though usually critical of the novel, gender analyses of *GWG* also tend to read the subordinate role of women as a foregone conclusion of postwar South Texas. "Guálinto finally fails at becoming a 'leader of his people,'" writes Sandra Soto (2010), "precisely because his grooming to be a leader is diametrical to the subjectification of Maruca and Carmen" (p. 120), George's sisters. Elsewhere, Melina Vizcaíno-Alemán (2017) argues that separate spheres define the landscape of the novel's fictional city Jonesville-on-the-Grande, a terrain where "women and girls operate within, between, and against each other and the structures of patriarchy and national belonging in the female-dominated zones of the novel's home and classroom" (p. 37). One outlier to this critical trend is Melanie Hernandez's "With His Pistol in Her Hand." Hernandez (2019) recognizes that the "novel's outcome ultimately suggests that more collective and inclusive leadership structures will need to be employed in the Mexico-Texans' resistance strategies" (p. 1). However, in her reading, the novel's "narrative asides that focus on female characters [ultimately] do nothing to advance the central storyline" (Hernandez, 2019, p. 1). My reading differs from these gender critiques in two ways. First, I recognize that women in *GWG* face racial, capitalist, and patriarchal constraints. Yet I reject the argument that women are inherently subjectified because of their gender or can only be signified in overtly gendered spaces. Second, I read women characters as central rather than incidental to the novel's core theme of leadership and identity.

The role of women as communal leaders necessarily requires an overview of the term “community” within Paredes scholarship. Most often scholars understand community in *GWG* as representative of what Paredes (1995) termed “Greater Mexico,” “all the areas inhabited by people of Mexican descent—not only within the present limits of the Republic of Mexico but in the United States as well—in a cultural rather than a political sense” (p. xiv). Ramón Saldívar (2006) proposes that “Greater Mexico” is less a geopolitical term designating “state membership” than a “transnational imaginary” (p. 59). To define and elaborate on this term, Saldívar (2006) draws from Bakhtin, asserting that the “transnational imaginary” is a “chronotope, a spatial and temporal indicator of a real contact zone” (p. 62) where subjectivity depends on dialogic codes, symbols, and languages.

The problem with this definition of community is its presupposition of an abject status for women as foundational within the context of postwar south Texas. Of the “masculinist ideologies” and “patriarchal hierarchies” in *GWG*, Saldívar (2006) writes that “Paredes attains them precisely through his internalization of the community of impulses that originate from that world in that time” (p. 9). In other words, women in the novel are “anonymous” and “disappeared” because that is how South Texas borderland culture “defines [their] role” (Saldívar, 2006, p. 179) and Paredes is simply rendering historical fact through fiction.

Furthermore, the vision of “community” signified by literary-critical elaborations of “Greater Mexico” also presupposes that the genre of the novel is a fundamentally monomythological structure. To date, the *corrido* and the bildungsroman feature exclusively in *GWG* criticism as the novel’s fundamental aesthetic components. According to this interpretive trend, it is George as hero whose formation (or lack thereof) is narratively central. While such male-centered individualism is directly in keeping with both the bildungsroman and the *corrido*, an overemphasis on these forms short-circuits more multidimensional conceptions of the novel. By ascribing narrative centrality to aesthetic forms rooted in European tradition, monomyth readings severely delimit sustained consideration of *frontera*-based characters and knowledges antithetical to individualist heroification. Furthermore, such readings also mischaracterize literary modernism as a singular and internalized set of techniques. But modernism is as much about an everyday mind on an ordinary day as it is about societies and languages in transit. In *GWG*, mixed language forms demand our attention to both distinct points of view and multiple subjectivities, rooted in their respective historical contexts.

The most enduring, and flawed, critical assumption that the power to signify and therefore demonstrate agency is exclusively male territory results from assuming that the *corrido* functions as the core of the novel’s transnational form and content. One root cause of this assumption is a narrow reading of the histories that structure the novel—key among these is the 1915 Seditious Rebellion. Indeed, the rebellion and its aftermath provide the historical context of the South Texas setting in *GWG*. Seditious rebels organized the rebellion as a grassroots revolt against the Anglo appropriation of Mexican land during the post-1900 agricultural modernization of South Texas. In addition to land sovereignty, the larger trajectory of this anti-colonial resistance was the creation of an independent Spanish-speaking republic of the Southwest. Importantly, this Hispanophone republic would be realized by an armed, pan-ethnic coalition of Mexican, Japanese, Black and Native American seditious rebels (Harris and Sadler, 2013, p. 212).

The U.S. government, however, responded with the so-called “Bandit Wars,” offensives where U.S. Texas Rangers operated with impunity for the purpose of “housecleaning” the multi-ethnic seditious rebels and insurgent Texas Mexicans (Santos, 1992, p. 3). This episode is part of a

larger history of state-sanctioned violence perpetrated by the Rangers.² “From a small body of volunteers charged with scouting against Indians in the 1820s,” Arnoldo De León (1983) writes, “it became a corps that enjoyed the tacit sanction of the white community to do to Mexicans in the name of the law what others did extra-legally” (p. 75-76). Ultimately, White violent suppression of the rebellion extended the spatial regime of White power along political and economic lines.

However, women become historical afterthoughts when critical interpretive frameworks posit the *corrido* as the exclusive unit of historical analysis. Undeniably, the Indigenous, *mexicana*, and Mexican American historical record paints a completely different picture, one in which women are not marginal but active participants. Indeed, “the story of the [Mexican] revolution, and its impact on both Mexico and Texas, [is] to a great extent the story of ‘revolutionary women’” (Sosa, 2020, p. xvi). As *sediciosos* in South Texas fought to undo conquest, *mexicanas* south of *la frontera* waged an ongoing struggle for *revolución*. Among these fighters were women such as María Quinteras de Meras, Angela “Angel” Jiménez, and Carmen Amelia Robles Ávila, better known as Amelio Robles (Stephen, 2020).

We can also look to women’s *revolución*-era activism, such as the *campesinas* led by Concha Michel who overtook the Hacienda Santa Bárbara, a compound belonging to former president and Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) architect Plutarco Elías Calles (Olcott, 2005). Across the early twentieth century *frontera*, women worked as “soldiers, journalists, nurses, scouts, political activists, and telegraph operators” (Speed, 2022, p. 1). In other words, these are women who *ocuparon y ocupan puesto* in distinct and consistent ways. Yet an inability (or refusal) to read women in the historical archive is part of what B. Christine Arce (2017) terms the larger “paradox of invisibility,” the simultaneous erasure of women from official state discourses and a deep-seated fascination with women in the popular imagination. As a result of interpretive frameworks that assume the *corrido* as the novel’s singular aesthetic, women in *GWG* become both objects of patriarchal surveillance and incidental to male progress narratives.

Indeed, within the context of Chicana literature, the most authoritative reading of *GWG* posits the *corrido*’s narrative centrality and therefore must assume women’s secondary status as a de facto feature of Mexican American history.³ Ramón Saldívar (2006) claims

A fully gendered reading would be concerned not only with the separate fates of Guálinto’s mother, María, and his two sisters, Carmen and Maruca, as they fulfill their familial roles as mother, daughters, sisters, nieces, and wives. It would also be concerned with how that fate is legislated by Mexican patriarchal ideology, expressed most starkly in the guiding speech genre of the text, the *corrido*. (p. 176)

But, of course, the fates of the characters are not separate: without Carmen’s help, George can never succeed academically the way that he does. Notice, too, the gender typology of feminine roles, a character listing that Saldívar repeats verbatim twice: women are only ever mothers, daughters, sisters, nieces, or wives. For Saldívar, and virtually every other literary critical reading I have cited thus far, women in *GWG* are subject to pre-determined identity scripts. But this reading of identity is less an instance of fidelity to the historical record than how we read that record itself.

² On the chilling but historically necessary account of the lynching of *mexicanos* and Mexican Americans, see William D. Carrigan and Clive Webb, *Forgotten Dead: Mob Violence Against Mexicans in the United States, 1848-1928* (2013, p. 55-110).

³ I use Chicana as a gender expansive term to reflect the multi-empire experience of Mexican Americans living in colonized lands. For more on the “x” in classifying terminology, see Contreras (2017) and Chavéz-Moreno (2021).

What Ramon Saldívar, and in fact many *GWG* critics, misread is the novel's peculiar combination of aesthetic forms. Despite his assertions of inhabiting a "post-Marxian era," Saldívar works through a vulgar cultural Marxist lens to propose that modernism is the "ideological form that the superstructure takes in reaction to" changes in the economic base via modernization (2006, p. 147). In this version of modernism, "*nonsynchronicity*, *heteroglossia*, and *mestizaje*" arguably characterize "the postmodern border" (Saldívar, 2006, p. 147). The problem with this reading is its deterministic structure. "What happens," asks Saldívar, "to the non-*corrido* figures that do not aspire in real or imaginary terms to the status of warrior hero?" (2006, p. 178). The answer, according to Saldívar (2006), is the complete marginalization of women. María "cannot exist outside her role as mother" (p. 178), Carmen "agree[s] to withdraw from the role of agency" (p. 179), and Maruca only signifies "through an unwanted pregnancy" (p. 179). What is more, despite hearing from Paredes firsthand that the character Elodia represents a literary distillation of Paredes's high school classmate—a way of dramatizing a female fiery, radical political leader—Saldívar (2006) makes no mention at all of Elodia in terms of what he labels the novel's "emplotment" (p. 178).

While he peripherally mentions postwar Chicana writers striving to interrogate male-dominant texts, in the end Saldívar produces a reading where the novel's gender-specific outcomes are historically overdetermined. In fact, for all the inclusion of formalist, structuralist, and post-structuralist terminology, his reading is decidedly binary. When Bakhtin (2010) theorized the genre of the novel, he wrote that "the novel orchestrates all its themes, the totality of the world of objects and ideas depicted and expressed in it, by means of the social diversity of speech types [*raznorečie*] and by means of the differing individual voices that flourish under such conditions" (p. 263).

In addition to limning "the social diversity of speech types," rendered in English as "heteroglossia," we would do well to recognize "totality" as less an instance of permanent authorial control than an audience's collective (i.e., total) signifying potential that is necessarily aspirational. However, Saldívar (2006) cannot escape a reading in which the *corrido* is the preeminent interpretive keystone that subordinates all others: it is the novel's "guiding generic emplotment" (p. 178). Yet the very premise of narrative deconstruction is the rejection of authorial master narratives to allow for the creation of rhetorical readings, whose usability is always contingent on audience, genre, and historical context. Because the audience is also responsible for the meaning of the work, we must return to the crucial role of women characters in the novel that signify multilingually.

Agency and Leadership Through Shared Literacy

If we recognize the novel's early characterization of Carmen as public-facing, intellectually curious, and agential, then the significant leadership role of women is clear at the onset. Importantly, her character development is simultaneously intrepid and group-oriented and contrasts with George's timidity and egocentricity. For example, as Carmen gazes at the night sky trying to count all its stars, Paredes (1990) writes: "Carmen could make the nicest stories out of any little thing. She also read stories and little verses from her schoolbooks to Guálinto, who was not yet in school. Guálinto liked the verses that Carmen was always chanting, though they were in English and he didn't understand everything they said" (p. 83-84). Indeed, George learns English literacy from Carmen, who is already bilingual and capable of communicating with her elders in Spanish and reciting verses learned at school in English: "She was only nine and was already in third grade" (Paredes, 1990, p. 83). As a matter of fact, Carmen's bilingual literacy flourishes even as it is

George who receives Spanish language lessons from Doña Domitila, the neighborhood's resident "learned woman" (Paredes, 1990, p. 53).

Furthermore, Carmen and George's distinct versions of courage respectively symbolize their communal and individualist natures. During a family nighttime get-together, Carmen and Maruca ask permission to cross the street and visit their friends the Gracias, no small feat for children in a rural area with developing infrastructure. They are granted permission by María their mother, provided they include George: "each took one of his hands, and with him between them they ventured into the blackness of the street" (Paredes, 1990, p. 84). But when George stubs his toe as the street becomes "awfully wide in the darkness" (p. 84) stretching out interminably, George masks his fear with bluster: "Don't get so close. Are you afraid?" (p. 84) he chides. After Maruca startles him, he refuses to go further and demands to head back home.

This refusal to continue is not merely a case of fear. It is also a crucial instance of foreshadowing George's selfish nature. By demanding to return, George has effectively split up the trio, contravening his mother's stipulation that everyone visits the Gracias or no one does. In this scene, as he does throughout the rest of the novel, George chooses himself over the group. By contrast, Carmen defends George, intervening when Maruca calls him "*vieja*" and holding his hand the entire way back home so that he can feel safe in the dark (p. 84). Carmen's willingness to do for others presages her character arc, no doubt. But her selflessness is also not self-abnegation.

Carmen's kindness and sense of duty toward others never subordinates her capacity for language. In fact, Carmen's solidarity with the marginalized coexists with her rhetorical prowess despite the imposition of separate spheres of ideology by Feliciano, the novel's representation of a "corrido warrior." "When Maruca and then Carmen entered grammar school," Feliciano's self-ascribed job was to drive the family to school and wait outside while the task of class registration fell to María. This separation of roles occurred because the children's teacher was "Miss Josephine." However, when George enters school, Feliciano's adherence to gender roles required that George "should be registered by a man" (p. 107).

In terms of education, the most egregious choice of gender-based preferential treatment results from an imposition of gender norming aided and abetted by both Feliciano and María. Academically, for as long as she is in school, Carmen routinely outperforms Guálinto. "Graduating from high school," writes Paredes (1990), "was one of Carmen's dreams, and now her dream was coming true" (p. 152). He continues, "[i]t would be no problem for her. She was very smart and worked harder than Guálinto. She loved to study, to read and to know" (p. 151-152). But when María breaks her leg, both she and Feliciano deem it only natural that caretaking duties should fall to the girls, Maruca and Carmen, while George must necessarily remain in school if he is to become "a great man among the Gringos" (p. 16). The rationale for this choice is exploitative and implicitly sexual. Given that Maruca struggles in school, María had already "been talking about taking her out" (p. 152). It is not just that Maruca learns differently. In the eyes of María, it is that Maruca's biology has caught up to her perceived social value: "At sixteen, her mother said, Maruca was no longer a school child" (p. 152). The implication, endorsed by María, is that Maruca's value is her capacity to attract the eyes of men, become a wife, carry babies to term, and raise them.

The family's choice for Carmen's new role is no less chauvinistic and gender essentialist. According to María, while Maruca will do just fine as a housekeeper, Carmen is better suited as María's nurse: Carmen, unlike Maruca, is not hasty or rough, but intrinsically "gentle and careful" (Paredes, 1990, p. 154). Not only does Feliciano agree, but as the family patriarch endowed with final decision-making authority, he proclaims that the new arrangement is natural because Carmen "already has more education than any woman needs" (p. 154). Leadership, resistance, and nation-

building, according to Feliciano (and by association María) are purportedly male territory.

However, the most important component of this scene—and in fact Carmen’s narrative arc—is not that adults decide to remove a child from school because of her gender. Rather, it is that this child flourishes in spite of restrictions against her literacy to become a leader in her own right. But making this read entails a refusal of monomyth and a mindfulness of bilingual worldbuilding. Specifically, examining *GWG* through the lens of the modernist quick character allows us to reckon with the heteroglossia of the novel: Paredes writes character dialogue and discursive commentary in English that audiences are meant to understand as occurring in Spanish. For example, after admiring Carmen’s capacity for memory and bilingualism, Paredes (1990) writes of Guálinto,

He loved to hear grownups talk. Their most random words had a pithy juiciness for him. Their slightest gestures were things to be imitated...

“How strange!” exclaimed María.

Extrañ-ñ-ño. What a pretty word. It felt like a piece of rock candy rolling back and forth in your mouth. (p. 84)

The significance of this moment is not reducible to a bildungsroman reading: young George learning language to one day become a great man. Rather, this scene creates the possibility of an audience performatively engaging the text’s heteroglossic potential. What happens to Carmen, in other words, if we dive back into postwar South Tejas not through an Anglophone frame of reference *sino un marco teórico bilingüe*?

There are profound implications for reading the novel in Spanish, among them a re-framing of the novel’s modernism, a re-evaluation of long held critical assumptions about the novel’s women characters, and a re-adjustment of the novel’s transnationalism. Addressing these far-reaching concerns in detail warrants quoting what is known as “The Room” scene at length:

Carmen estaba acurrucada en el sofá, leyendo con avidez una revista antigua que hacía tiempo se había separado de sus tapas. Guálinto arrojó su gorra grasienta sobre una silla y preguntó:

“¿Ha vuelto tío de la granja?”

“No,” respondió Carmen desde detrás de la revista...

Guálinto vio holgazanamente la gastada revista que Carmen sostenía ante su cara, entonces vio detrás de la revista a sus ojos. Estaban húmedos y enrojecidos como si había estado llorando.

“¿Qué estás leyendo?” él le preguntó. “No me digas que has estado leyendo ridículas y sollozantes historias. ¿Qué revista es esa?”

Carmen no contesto. “Déjame tenerla,” exigió, arrebatándosela de Carmen.

“¿Una vieja revista de historia natural? ¿Qué hay allí para llorar acerca de estas cosas?”

Carmen intentó sonreír pero permaneció en silencio. “A ti te gusta sentirte mal,” le dijo él, devolviéndole la revista. Él fue al baño a lavarse. “Es extraña,” pensó. “A ella le gusta toda clase de cosas, especialmente novelas sobre lo extraño y misterioso.” Carmen tendría la edición dominical del periódico de San Antonio y devoraría los artículos de la sección prensa. Entonces ella le recontaría en español, casi palabra por palabra, a su madre. (p. 221-222)

Carmen was curled up on the sofa, reading avidly from an ancient magazine that long ago had parted with its covers. He threw his greasy cap onto a chair and asked, "Has Uncle come home from the farm?"

"No," Carmen answered from behind the magazine...

Guálinto looked idly at the worn magazine Carmen was holding before her face, then looked behind it at her eyes. They were moist and reddened as if she had been crying. "What are you reading?" he asked. "Don't tell me you've taken to reading silly sob stories. What magazine is that?"

Carmen did not answer. "Let me have it," he demanded, taking it from Carmen. "An old natural history magazine? What is there to cry about in this thing?"

Carmen tried to smile, but she remained silent.

"You just like to feel bad," he said, handing back the magazine. He went to the bathroom to wash. She was a funny one, he thought. She liked to read all kinds of things, especially novels about the strange and the mysterious. She would take the Sunday edition of the San Antonio paper and devour the feature section. Then she would retell it in Spanish, almost word for word, to their mother. (p. 221-222)

Context-based translation shifts the interpretive focus away from transcultural male subject formation to modernist quick characters. In this scene, as throughout the novel, Carmen is resolute, intelligent, and capable, whereas George is stagnant, oblivious, and impotent. Carmen is "*acurrucada en*" (Paredes, 1990, p. 221) the sofa not because she is lounging but because she is trying to think through the problems of overt and internalized patriarchy. Specifically, María has forced Maruca to an obstetrics-gynecology visit due to antiquated notions of cultural shame. "*Putá, puta, puta!*" (p. 223) María will later exclaim, humiliating and betraying Maruca because Maruca dared to choose her own romantic affiliations.

While George cannot have known the specifics of a forced medical examination he nonetheless participates in a logic that devalues women who enact bodily autonomy. "*Si tuvieras la vergüenza de la puta más barata no dirías nada*" (p. 220), he exclaimed to Maruca four weeks before the Room Scene, for the supposed transgression of *persiguiendo un gringo* (p. 221). Carmen's poise and leadership, however, compel audiences to read shame not with Maruca but with María, Feliciano, and (most of all) George.

Carmen strategically navigates both support for her sister and the continued development of multilingual literacy despite the imposed misogyny of George as an "*holgazán*." George does not merely look at the magazine "*holgazanamente*" (p. 221). Rather, he is completely oblivious to both his own complicity in the subjugation of his sisters and the fact that he has the male privilege to challenge privilege itself, particularly in ways that would evade the punishment and ostracism that undoubtedly befall the women in his family. Given that he lacks both situational awareness and basic care for other people, he does nothing to help his sisters. Like when he was a boy, George can only think of himself. Moreover, George's obsession with himself requires a worldview in which all others are ridiculous and inferior. Carmen must be reading "*historias sollozantes*" (p. 222), he assumes. After he realizes she is actually reading natural history, he clumsily declares that she is "*extraña*" (p. 222) and likes to feel bad.

When patriarchal mores delimit the spaces for verbal interaction, as in "The Room" scene, calculated behavior like Carmen's is an alternative way of signifying. As George stumbles, prods, and chides, Carmen remains steadfast. While her eyes are "*húmedos y enrojecidos*" (p. 221) at what is happening and will happen to Maruca, Carmen reads "*con avidez*" (p. 220). Carmen does not

respond to George's hectoring because she recognizes that his solipsism precludes any mutual intelligibility. As a result, his pestering amounts to an echo chamber of projected sentimentality. Meanwhile, Carmen remains unwavering in her reading as a multilingual act. Crucially, for Carmen, this determination to read is necessarily a shareable process, as she will continue to devour the English "*edición dominical*" (p. 222) and recount it *en español* to María, despite the latter's continued betrayals. In fact, throughout the entire novel, Carmen directs this resolve for literacy outward toward her community, in spite of the figurative and literal attempts of chauvinist men and complicit women to "*arrebatar*" (p. 221) textuality—and therefore self-determination—from her hands.

Carmen's multilingual capacity not only allows her to share literacy with others but also roots George to South Texas and its *fronterizo* histories despite his internalization of White supremacy. At novel's end, during George's return trip, as he is forced to reconcile his past and present, it is Carmen who operates as intermediary, positioned "in the middle so she could serve as interpreter" (p. 289). In fact, we learn that for all his grouching about returning to South Texas as a mistake, George is plugged in and "up to date on what had been going on in Jonesville" (p. 289) precisely because of Carmen's letters. Carmen's textuality, her capacity for narrative, will not allow George to forget the land and people that sustained him his entire life. Indeed, what we witness by attending to modernist quick characters is not individual male heroification but the striving of a community whose *gente* understand that their self-actualization is ultimately part of a communal ethos.

Specifically, we learn that Carmen's husband, Aquiles, is a middle-class businessman, and his brother, Orestes, is a pharmacist. José Alvarado, known earlier in the novel as El Colorado, is a "bookkeeper for Acme Produce" (p. 289). Operating as a network of Mexican American businesspeople, Alvarado loans Elodia and Antonio Prieto the money to open a restaurant, *La Casita Mexicana*, whose creation is a form of entrepreneurial reprisal: as high school students, "*los cuatro mexicanos*" (p. 177) George, Elodia, Orestes, and Antonio were denied entry into the Whites-only *La Casa Mexicana*. In the novel's final scene, as George backwardly declares that "Mexicans will always be Mexicans [unless they] get rid of their Mexican greaser attitudes" (p. 300), we learn that Carmen remains steadfastly devoted to supporting both her agency and community through multilingualism: Feliciano reports, "Carmen has been good to your mother... And they talk about all the things Carmen reads, as they always have" (p. 300). Whereas George presumes that modernity requires the assimilation of whiteness, Carmen will signify *en inglés y español para la posteridad*: her multilingualism is an evolutionary imperative for future generations of inclusive and resilient Mexican Americans. Rather than see modernity and whiteness as synonymous, as George mistakenly does, Carmen recognizes that there are multiple disjunctive modernities whose legibility is contingent on the narrative codes that we (de)value.

Soldaderas and a War of Words

The modernist quick character Elodia symbolizes a *soldadera* fighting for rhetorical sovereignty as a precondition to anti-colonial action. In this analysis, I define *soldadera* as a woman participant in the intellectual struggle against a White supremacist regime. Throughout *GWG*, Paredes (1990) represents this regime through the confluence of White-led agricultural capitalism, the U.S. Texas Rangers, and the U.S. military's "border counter-intelligence" (p. 299) units. To fully recognize the nature of the intellectual struggle waged by modernist quick characters, it is

critical to understand that historically dominant epistemologies routinely distort the term *soldadera*.

"In Mexican history," writes Elizabeth Salas (1990), "it is not considered appropriate to link legendary and historical figures, such as Coyolxauqui, Malinche, Leona Vicario, the *coronelas*, and the *soldaderas* of the 1910 revolution, when analyzing women's participation in armies and warfare" (p. xi). I would add that this definitional problem extends beyond Mexican historical accounts. The Real Academia Española, Spain's official royal institution dedicated to "linguistic prescription," and affiliated with the Association of Academies of the Spanish Language, can only define *soldadera* as "*mujer que convivía con los soldados durante las campañas de guerra*" (RAE, n.d.). One way to treat such elisions is re-imagining the *soldadera* within a larger *tras-frontera* historical context that includes *mexicanas* and Chicanas.

Crucially, however, we must also be mindful of historiographic tendencies to ignore intersectionalities. In addition to *mexicana* history, binary logics in which non-normative women like *soldaderas* read as historical ciphers regularly obfuscate Chicana history. Despite the efforts of Chicano nationalism to preserve the integrity of Chicano people, writes Cherrie Moraga (2009), what "was wrong about Chicano Nationalism was its institutionalized heterosexism [and] its inbred machismo" (p. 225). For Elodia, her female gender and Mexican American ethnicity are not mutually exclusive but coextensive. Consequently, rather than hierarchical militant or cultural nationalisms, Elodia's goal as leader is organizing resistance coalitions rooted in multilingualism. The end goal of these coalitions is to redefine struggle and power respectively as the terms of engagement and the ability to allocate resources toward the enactment of structural changes.

Unlike Carmen, whose *machista*-driven exclusions condition her leadership, Elodia's presence in male-dominant spaces enable her to directly confront entrenched power discourses of postwar South Texas. Throughout the novel, Carmen must challenge heteropatriarchy across a spectrum of liminal spaces: negotiating the demands of dutiful daughter-conscious agent and loyal sister-community leader. No doubt she is one of the strongest characters in the novel. However, Carmen operates less as a *soldadera* because while she participates meaningfully, this participation happens indirectly and outside the conventional theatre of battle. In fact, Carmen's power is to transform otherwise marginalized spaces, to *ocupar puesto*, via multilingualism. By contrast, Paredes never removes Elodia from sites of meaning socially adherent to postwar mores surrounding knowledge production: the classroom and culturally sanctioned public leadership roles.

South Texas's de facto racial segregation provides the context for distinguishing between leadership as male-centered heroification and as collective resistance. During a senior trip, when George's high school friends are denied entry into a local White-owned restaurant, *La Casa Mexicana*, and settle for a "drive-in" instead, it is Elodia and not George who performs as a communal leader. To be sure, George notices that dark-skinned students cannot enter "[b]ecause [they are] Mexicans" (Paredes, 1990, p. 173). However, I posit that George assumes this posture out of a misguided sense of chivalry. Despite his light skin, George self-identifies with dark-skinned students denied entry because he thinks it is an act of bravado that will make him more appealing to his love interest, the White-passing María Elena Osuna. Realizing that she is unfazed by his swaggering, and ultimately "dancing with an older man," George eventually feels "weak and tired" (p. 174).

George's mistake is that he confuses heroification and action. In his skewed calculus, there is no tangible distinction between the conquest of María Elena, a Mexican American passing as "Spanish," and conquering South Texas prejudice against people of color. In other words, for George, both acts are equally heroic. At the end of this episode, his response to segregation is a cacophonous "*grito*" that ultimately "die[s] out" into "silence" (p. 174). In this way, George's

posturing as *corrido* warrior is ineffectual and I read this detail as a rejection of monomythological narrative.

By contrast, Elodia displays an intelligibility that makes action possible. First, after the group decides to head to the drive-in rather than return home, she importantly relays to the members, “[w]e’re having our own party” (p. 175). This statement is less an instance of cultural separatism than a glimpsing of political orientation. That is to say, Elodia’s comment requires that the group consider the terms by which they can access belonging and self-actualization. Indeed, this comment suggests a constant striving after the intellectual and material conditions in which South Texas people of color can thrive. What do they need to have their own party, so to speak? Furthermore, she articulates the group’s segregation within a framework of distributive justice that is conceptually accessible. She says to the multilingual guitarist Antonio Prieto, “[t]hey’re eating and dancing back there on the money you made for them, playing the blind beggar at the carnival” (p. 175). Not insignificantly, rather than a sense of lack, Elodia reminds Antonio that he can potentially exert control over the availability of his cultural productions.

No doubt, in post-rebellion South Texas, capital accumulation and race-based exploitation remained mutually constitutive. However, by reminding him of his aesthetic and linguistic capacity as a Mexican American musician, Elodia clarifies to Antonio that political activism and economic participation need not be mutually exclusive. This capacity to analyze the function of power in user-friendly terms is vital to the novel’s central theme of socially conscious leadership. At one of the most pivotal moments requiring measured social activism, Elodia delivers while George can only think of relationships as scoring and, when that fails, to tip “ostentatiously” (p. 175).

Moreover, Elodia’s analytical and language capacity is an evolutionary imperative within the context of a violently transformed South Texas political landscape. Ethnic cleansing campaigns against Native Americans, displacement of *ranchero* communities, U.S. border-making law, and the use of White police forces as retribution against persons of color by White propertied Texans necessitated unique counter-hegemonic strategies.⁴ Within this context, the “savage, martial rhythm” (Paredes, 1990, p. 174) of the *corrido*, and by extension the individual male *corrido* warrior, are less effective than adaptive resistance coalitions. The resistant core of these coalitions is rhetorical sovereignty, in this instance the multilingual power to identify and categorize the varied struggles of lower class Mexican American, mixed heritage, and Indigenous peoples against imperial modernity.

Not unlike the foundational ethos of the Seditious Rebellion, the modernist quick characters in *GWG* are decidedly eclectic and pan-ethnic: comprised of men, women, both light and dark-skinned Mexican Americans, and characters who are “black, with some Indian mixed in” (p. 77). According to anti-capitalist thinkers from Karl Marx to Terry Eagleton, the insidiousness of capitalism is that even society’s most abject believe economic and ideological domination to be the natural order of human life. During his imprisonment for critiquing the Mussolini regime, Antonio Gramsci proposed that both direct physical confrontation and intellectual struggle, which he respectively termed “war of maneuver” and “war of position,” were necessary to overthrow capitalist ruling orders. Across the post-1910 *frontera*, given the array of unique subject positions and differential accesses to power, the novel’s modernist quick characters cannot fight imperial modernity bullet for bullet or dollar for dollar. In Gramscian terms, any struggle to begin a counter-conquest must take place first as a “war of position,” a “long ideological and political preparation [...] to awaken popular passions and enable them to be concentrated and brought simultaneously to

⁴ On racism, White power, and the Texas Rangers, see Monica Muñoz Martínez, *The Injustice Never Leaves You: Anti-Mexican Violence in Texas* (2018).

detonation point” (Gramsci, 1971, p. 110). And it is vital to understand that this rhetorical attention to pathos is not mutually exclusive with calculated speech choices.

During a high school lesson in which a White student racially over-generalizes—echoing right-wing claims today—by stating that “Mexicans like to break the law, most of them,” Elodia has the savvy—and gumption—to call out, “[l]ook at this *pendejo*” (Paredes, 1990, p. 160). This rejoinder is a rhetorically savvy declaration given that the White schoolteacher allows the previously racist statement to go unchecked and also because it is historically fitting. No doubt the term *pendejo* is colloquial yet Elodia supplements it by providing irrefutable demographic observations. She states, “[b]ack in Rio Grande City... We run the town. The sheriff is Mexican, the mayor is Mexican. We have Boy Scouts and church picnics and school dances” (p. 161). As a counter to the absurd but no less popular assumption of Mexican lawlessness, Elodia tempers her curse words by asserting Mexican duty toward the law, leadership, and civic engagement.⁵ Indeed, Elodia displays this rhetorical balance throughout the entire novel, speaking both colloquially and with the ability to make fine-grained sociohistorical distinctions.

After their symbolic exclusion from *La Casa Mexicana*, a plain colonial metaphor in the wake of U.S. border-making, it is Elodia who names the group “*los cuatro mexicanos*” and gives them direction. In a crucial moment of role-reversal that will persist for the rest of the novel, Elodia says to George, “‘You sit here,’ pointing to a desk surrounded by other empty seats,” which she and the others will fill. Paredes’s omniscient narrator even marks the moment by noting that unlike the novel’s earlier sections, it is not George but “Elodia in the lead” (p. 177). As a matter of fact, this scene plays itself out again, happening after a time lapse in which the characters have aged and George returns to South Texas as a self-loathing White supremacist border security agent.

Elodia’s rhetorical performance as a *soldadera* is the novel’s strongest rejection of the individualism and White nationalist identity politics typified by George. As an alternative to George’s xenophobic individualism, Elodia and other modernist quick characters offer models for communally oriented agency and multilingually-rooted belonging. To witness these models, the following translation is necessary:

Él tuvo el sentimiento que estaba viendo un sketch o niños jugando. Él estaba sentado al lado derecho de Elodia y le sonrió para no reírse. Ella felizmente regresó la sonrisa.

Elodia otra vez alzo la voz. “Miembros del comité ejecutivo de Latinos por Osuna. Hoy estamos aquí reunidos para dar la bienvenida a casa a uno de los nuestros, un hombre que ha sido un fuerte defensor de los derechos México-Tejanos desde que era un muchacho estudiante. Y es muy apropiado que debe ser que en este lugar hagámoslo bienvenido...”

“Gracias, gracias,” dijo George. “Mi corazón está lleno de gratitud por esta bienvenida. Pero no tengo idea de que se trata.”

“Vamos a romper el monopolio que O’Brien mantiene en las políticas ciudadanas, eso mero,” dijo Elodia. “Mike Osuna es nuestro candidato para presidente municipal y tenemos otros dos mexicanos en la boleta, Orestes y Enrique Leytón. Por primera vez mexicanos tendremos voz en el gobierno de la ciudad.”

“¿Mike Osuna? O Miguelito. Bueno, él tiene suficiente dinero para participar. ¿Pero porque no está aquí con nosotros?”

“Está en el otro lado del pueblo reuniéndose con algunos gringos influyentes que

⁵ Relative to undocumented immigrants, U.S.-born citizens are “over 2 times more likely to be arrested for violent crimes, 2.5 times more likely to be arrested for drug crimes, and over 4 times more likely to be arrested for property crimes” (Light et al, 2020, p. 32340).

están cansados de tener a O'Brien controlando el espectáculo. Con el apoyo de ellos podemos ganar, si podemos obtener el voto mexicano. Después de todo, somos más del ochenta por ciento de las personas de este pueblo."

"¿Cuántos de ellos han pagado sus impuestos?"

"Esta vez nosotros montamos una campaña de impuestos electorales," dijo Orestes, "y pienso que lo hicimos muy bien."

"¿Tú no les compraste los impuestos electorales?"

"¿Como podríamos," dijo Leytón, "cuando no hay nadie pero gente de O'Brien en la corte?"

"Pero tú les diste a ellos dos dólares y esperas que no gasten el dinero en cerveza." (Paredes, 1990, p. 292)

He had the feeling he was watching a comic skit or children at play. He was sitting at Elodia's right hand and he smiled at her to keep from laughing. She smiled back happily.

Elodia raised her voice again. "Members of the executive committee of Latins for Osuna. We are gathered here today to welcome home one of our own, a man who has been a strong defender of the Mexicotexan's rights since he was a schoolboy. And it is fitting that it should be at this place that we make him welcome..."

"Thank you, thank you," George said. "My heart is full of gratitude for this welcome. But I have no idea what this is all about."

"We're going to break O'Brien's hold on city politics, that's what," Elodia said. "Mike Osuna is our candidate for mayor and we have two other Mexicans on the ticket, Orestes and Enrique Leytón. For the first time Mexicans will have a say in city government."

"Mike Osuna? Oh, Miguelito. Well, he has enough money to play around with. But why isn't he here with us?"

"He's on the other side of town meeting with some influential Gringos who are tired of having O'Brien running the show. With their support we can win, if we can just get out the Mexican vote. After all, we're more than eighty percent of the population in this town."

"How many of those have their poll taxes paid?"

"We mounted a poll tax drive this time," Orestes said, "and I think we did pretty well."

"You didn't buy their poll taxes, did you?"

"How could we," Leytón said, "when there's nothing but O'Brien people in the court house?"

"So you just gave them a couple of dollars each and hoped they wouldn't spend the money on beer." (p. 292)

The significance of this exchange is threefold. First, modernist quick characters led by Elodia function as community activists committed to social change via political representation. Second, language and memory root the activism of modernist quick characters to South Texas as part of Indigenous lands. Third, the scene exposes both George's racism and his complete detachment from reality. The setting provides the first symbolic cue that modernist quick characters continue to function as activists despite the patterns of South Texas disenfranchisement toward persons of color. Indeed, the "*Latins por Osuna*" political action committee headquarters is *La Casita Mexicana*, owned and operated by Elodia and Antonio Prieto. Moreover, we learn that the White-

owned *La Casa Mexicana*, from which Elodia and Antonio were once blacklisted, is now struggling financially because of its new competitor. By staging a grassroots movement for a Mexican American mayoral candidate at a profitable locally owned restaurant, the text indicates a measured form of political and economic progress for Mexican Americans and those tired of White-led politics, symbolized by “*el monopolio que O’Brien mantiene*” (p. 292).

We can trace the ways in which language and memory anchor the group’s social activism by analyzing repetitions of the grammatical person “*nosotros*” and its variants. These language patterns emphasize the collective and inclusive framework of modernist quick characters. Throughout the scene, Elodia consistently addresses all members of the group in the first-person plural: “*estamos*,” “*vamos*,” “*podemos*” (p. 292). This inclusive language creates the potential for horizontal rather than vertical social relationships, a framework in which participants have shared accountability. While Elodia “*preside la mesa*” (p. 291), Osuna is the mayoral candidate; Orestes is also on the ticket; and El Colorado, Aquiles, and Antonio Prieto helped with the “*campaña de impuestos electorales*” (p. 292).

What is vital about this grammar is that it asks both the characters and audience to practice historical memory. The rhetorical endpoint of Elodia’s first-person plural is the concept of rights, signified in the text first as “*derechos México-Tejanos*” and later as “*derechos de nuestra gente*” (p. 292). By yoking the language of “we” to the concept of rights, Elodia returns both characters and audience to a pre-1848 moment when the rights to land ownership and citizenship—though not always consummate for lower-class and Indigenous peoples—were within the purview of *el estado mexicano* and not a White imperialist regime.⁶

While Elodia’s language aspires toward a collective distribution of rights, she nonetheless tempers her speech by offering two vital conditional statements. First, the use of the term “*México-Tejanos*” illustrates that if modernist quick characters are inclusive and potentially cooperative rather than hierarchical, they are also not a homogenous set of people. After all, throughout the text, as Elodia does in this scene, Paredes uses a variety of ethnic markers—“Indian,” “Mexican,” “Mexicotexan,” “Spanish,” “*tejana*,” and “black”—that suggest a spectrum of *mexicano* and mixed heritage identities rather than a monolith. By cataloguing “*México-Tejanos*” as one of a number of identity forms, audiences can recognize that modernist quick characters both have a shared stake in *derechos* and that they each possess distinct political concerns. Second, Elodia understands that during the struggle for self-determination modernist quick characters must reckon with forces akin to an “interest convergence dilemma”: if “*Latins por Osuna*” will have any success in changing South Texas politics, they must strategically align with “*gringos influyentes*” (Paredes, 1990, p. 292), if only temporarily.⁷

Finally, the exchange at *La Casita Mexicana* exposes George’s paternalism and shamefully mistaken belief that he can hate his way into claiming a White racial status. Despite Paredes’s reported narration that George “*tuvo el sentimiento que estaba viendo un sketch o niños jugando*” (p. 292), it is George who is crude and naive. He refuses to acknowledge, both as fellow human beings and as viable political candidates, the group who would gladly welcome him as “*uno de los nuestros*” (p. 292). To George, they are no longer his own for racial and qualitative reasons: in a

⁶ On pre-1846 settler-colonial historical representation and Indigenous dispossession, see Christen Mucher, *Before American History: Nationalist Mythmaking and Indigenous Dispossession* (2022). On Indigenous nation-building in the borderlands, specifically via focus on Yaqui, Kickapoo, and Tohono O’odham peoples, see Jeffrey Schulze, *Are We Not Foreigners Here?: Indigenous Nationalism in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (2018).

⁷ Bell, D. A. (1980). Brown v. Board of Education and the interest-convergence dilemma. *Harvard Law Review*, 93(3), 518-533.

complete denial of land, memory, and family, George believes himself to be racially White and therefore superior to “Mexican Greaser[s]” (p. 300). In his condescending eyes, their political activism amounts to “*niños jugando*” (p. 292).

What is more, in place of a sustained engagement with the group’s fundraising and election strategy, George can only revert to essentialist tropes of Mexican decadence. According to George, the *mexicano* majority, “*más del ochenta por ciento de las personas de este pueblo*” (p. 292) have neither the ethical commitment nor restraint to use the “*dos dolares*” on the poll tax—instead they will spend it, he presumes, on *cerveza*. However, when audiences remember that George attended university only because his *tío* Feliciano had “been adding to a special cache” (p. 193) since George’s birth, we have to question George’s presumptions. When we recognize that Feliciano offers up his cache of “good gold coins” even after George decries his deceased father as “just an ignorant Mexican” (p. 193) and demeans Feliciano as “the same old *ranchero*” (p. 190), we have to acknowledge that the most disappointing (and definitive) character trait of George is how his complete egomania blinds him to a historical truth persistent to anyone who has ever tried to pass as White. No matter how much he hates, represses, or grovels, White folks in postwar South Texas will never see him as one of their own.

Significantly, Elodia’s grace, intellect, and rhetorical acuity empower her to confront and check George’s White supremacy. As the novel’s vaunted “leader of his people,” George possesses every advantage adherent to social conventions necessary for a persuasive debate. At *La Casita Mexicana*, George is part of a statistical gender majority, the meeting has been called in his favor, and the group initially proposes operating under his “*liderazgo y experiencia*” (p. 292). Yet at every turn, George is rhetorically no match for Elodia. When he maligns *mexicanos* as apathetic drunkards, Elodia tactfully critiques his assumptions with sarcasm rather than an emotional outburst: “*De veras tienes mucha confianza en tu propia gente*” (p. 292). Next, when George tries to lie about his reasons for returning to South Texas, Elodia has the clarity to press George. After refusing to specify his rationale, Elodia changes tactics and asks George the location of his new post. In a colonized, gentrified, and segregated South Texas, Elodia knows that geography and political orientation are fundamentally intertwined. When George once again refuses to answer—the supposed leader of his people now reduced to dodgy silence—Orestes intercedes, “*En el edificio que queda en la esquina de Riverside y Main*” (p. 292). Instantly, Elodia realizes who George has become: “*¡Frente a la puerta principal de Fort Jones!*” (292). If we consider that “Jonesville-on-the-Grande” is a fictional stand-in for Brownsville, Texas, we can infer that “Fort Jones” is the literary representation of Fort Brown, erected in 1846 during the U.S. invasion of México.

By exclaiming at the location of George’s new post, Elodia signals to the audience a reckoning with the colonial history of the Americas. In March of 1846, U.S. General Zachary Taylor, under orders from U.S. President James Polk, marched south of the Nueces River, which was used by México to draw the boundary of Texas, and planted a U.S. flag on the north bank of the Río Grande. By April of 1846, on that same bank, the U.S. military initiated construction of a fort (eventually named Fort Brown) and with the April 25 *Rancho Carricitos* battle, the invasion had officially begun. Elodia is astonished, and disappointed, because after growing up learning the history of White violence and thievery, George willfully chooses to return to the site of U.S. invasion and continue the conquest of Indigenous lands. As he leaves *La Casita Mexicana*, Elodia correctly calls out, “*¡Vendido!*” (p. 294). This scene is in fact the novel’s punchline but not merely because Elodia calls out George for ending up fully subservient to White power. Rather, Elodia’s statement is a necessary declaration of intent. For any chance of re-directing the power of historical narratives, popular resistance movements on *la frontera* must be contingent on multilingual

practices.

Latent Futures and Evolving Readerships

Given the economic, political, and ecological threats posed by White supremacy, it is critical to re-imagine what leadership looks like. The political program of many elected officials today openly combines the advocacy of elite economic interests with White ethnonationalism. In such a regime, sustainable futures are not possible for working class people of color. If you are a *mexicano* undocumented immigrant in this country, you are anathema to the system. If you are currently undocumented by virtue of your childhood arrival to the U.S. as the son or daughter of immigrant parents, you are legally frozen in time—the same judge who in 2016 demanded the names and addresses of approximately 50,000 DACA recipients ultimately declared DACA illegal in 2023 (Aguilar, 2016). For those whose applications were pending at the time of the ruling, “wait and see” is the apparent U.S. policy.

Novelists, of course, do not create legislation, but readers can. Committed readerships possess the capacity to link aesthetics and politics toward practices of social transformation. One way to begin realizing local (but important) change is through investigating gaps in previous research via translation and invention. The argument in this article is that translation fundamentally shifts the focus of received interpretive tradition: examining the role of underrepresented women characters provides both a critique of thematic male-centrism and the exegetic practices of Chicano literary canonization. Of course, the practical use value of readerly imagination depends on its persistence as both spontaneous and programmatic.

Today our interpretive and political strategizing must be keener than the hostile actors we face, and fiction can help us strengthen this discernment. Yet any increase in our perceptive faculties necessarily requires a constant renewal of how we process narrative and the ways that we approach literary tradition. If new ways of seeing the world necessarily precede its transformation, we must always challenge the language systems with which we imagine and share stories.

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