

INTRODUCTION

THE HEART AND ART OF LATINO/A YOUNG PEOPLE'S FICTION

FREDERICK LUIS ALDAMA

In the last decade, I found myself reading literature that is not meant nor marketed for my age group. This coincides with my compulsive need to share in all aspects of my daughter's life. Corina is ten. In the past, I have relished in the marvelous art and word swirls of children's picture books. Today, I am indulging more and more in the literary recreations of the sensory, cognitive, and emotional life of tweens and teens—especially those works by Latino authors. While there has been no prescriptive menu set—all themes and characters are up for grabs—the floors, baskets, and shelves in our Latino-Filipino (or, Mexipino) household spill over with books created by Latino authors and illustrators.

Putting together this book is personal. It is a way for me to think more deeply about all the literature that I gorge on under Corina's careful direction. It is also more. Indeed, it is about putting front and center for others (parents, teachers, students, and scholars) the creators and creations that make up this growing corpus of literature that draws from and radically expands our planetary republic of letters. It is about understanding the journeys of Latino authors and artists who commit their time, energy, and skill to giving shape to narratives that at once vitally reflect the myriad of experiences of young Latinos in the United States and that invite others to share in these experiences.

In the United States we see our everyday world changing right before our eyes. Latinos are the relative plurality in places like California, and the Southwest generally. The umbrella term “Latino,” preferred by Latinos over the US Census designation, “Hispanic,” includes inhabitants of the United States whose heritage grows out of cultural ties to Mexico, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Cuba, and Central and South America. (Notably, the most recent term preferred by Latinos is “Latinx”—the term that signifies gender and LGBTQ inclusivity and that Norma Cantú uses in the preface to this book.) Indeed, today Latinos are the majority minority across the nation. According to the US Census Bureau’s numbers, in 2015 the US Latino population already made up 17.6 percent of the population, with African Americans making up 13.3 percent and Anglos 61.6 percent. As scholars like Jamie Naidoo remind us, there is not a child in the United States who will *not* be interacting with Latinos on playgrounds and in classrooms. The building blocks of today’s US reality *are* Latino. And the authors you will meet in this book choose to re-create, in wondrously captivating ways, this reality.

The ever-growing body of Latino children’s and young adult (YA) literature is built on the expansive and rich ways that Latinos exist in the United States. It draws on a Latinoness informed by Mexican, Puerto Rican, Dominican, Cuban, and Central and South American ancestries and cultures. It grows from the experiences of those recently arrived in the United States and those who have been rooted here for generations and even centuries. It flourishes from the ways our communities move in and out of and in between Spanish and English. It is nourished by the diversity of future generations of Latinos. It is nourished by the work and technique of Latino and other artists and writers from across the Americas.



This book aims to open doors and windows to significant areas of creation: children’s and young adult literature by and about Latinos. In no way is this meant to be the scholarly end all and be all to this bountiful cultural space. And, of course, there are others who have fixed their sights on creating conceptual models to enrich the complexities of children’s and young adult literature by and about Latinos. Among the most important scholarly books are *Multicultural Literature for Latino Bilingual Children* (2015), edited by Ellen Riojas Clark et al., and Jamie Naidoo’s *Celebrating Cuentos* (2010). Other important works include Frances Ann Day’s *Latina and Latino Voices in Literature for Children and Teenagers* (1997), Sherry York’s *Children’s and Young Adult Literature by Latino Writers* (2002), Alma Flor Ada’s *A Magical Encounter* (2003), and the updated and expanded edition of Frances Ann Day’s *Lati-*

na and Latino Voices in Literature (2003). There are several essential books that excavate the social and political landscapes in and around award institutions like the Pura Belpré and the Américas Awards. There's Rose Zertuche Treviño's edited volume, *The Pura Belpré Awards: Celebrating Latino Authors and Illustrators* (2006), as well as Teresa Mlawer's edited *The Pura Belpré Award: Twenty Years of Outstanding Latino Children's Literature* (2016), and Laretta Henderson's *The Américas Award: Honoring Latino/a Children's and Young Adult Literature of the Americas* (2016). In each volume, we see the history of establishing these significant institutions, analysis of the books of awardees, and how best to use and teach these children's books by Latinos and about the Latino experience created both within the United States (Pura Belpré Award) and the hemispheric Americas (the Américas Award, with its consideration of Latino and non-Latino authors and illustrators). Others are focused less on Latino culture and more generally on diversity, such as Sonia Nieto's *Affirming Diversity: The Sociopolitical Context of Multicultural Education* (1992) and her more recent *Finding Joy in Teaching Students of Diverse Backgrounds* (2013), both of which grow from research based on teachers' experiences in the classroom with such things as ideological bias in standardized testing and necessary reforms for growing diversity curricula and transworld pedagogy practices (linguistic, racial, cultural) to create well-rounded future generations of learners and citizens.

These important scholarly books variously provide scholarship and guides useful for teaching Latino literature from elementary through high school grades; they variously include historical overviews, biographic, and bibliographic lists of each of the authors' works, interviews and sources, quotes, photos, criticism, awards, and professional resources; online resources; and lesson plans. Each book provides teachers with the roadmaps to address the cross-cultural and linguistic literacy needs of and concept building necessary for our radically expanding young Latino population—and for non-Latinos to positively reflect on and learn from the culture of their Latino peers. In each we see different ways that making children's and young adult literature by and about Latinos visible and available to young readers is in some measure a form of social justice. It is, as Jamie Naidoo so nicely sums up, “integral in helping children navigate our culturally pluralistic society” (*Celebrating Cuentos* xv). Taken as a whole, this scholarship ultimately defends the inclusion of Latino literature (and diversity literature more generally) in K–12 curriculum and libraries, where social and political pressures continue to gate-keep, as with Arizona's House Bill 2281, which banned the teaching of ethnic studies.

While the pedagogical element is here in the creating of this book, it ex-

ists alongside all the experience and wisdom shared by the Latino creators of children's and YA literature interviewed herein. In each case we learn not only about important challenges faced and overcome in their multiple geographical, language, and cultural negotiations but also how each gives shape (with art and words) to stories that make new our perception, thought, and feeling about what it means to be Latino yesterday, today, and tomorrow. We learn of how the hunger to create and consume stories about other people and their lives is given particular shape by each of the authors and artists. We learn directly from the creators themselves the journeys taken and the choices made to dedicate a great deal of their lives to giving shape to the minds and, therefore, to the stories of Latinos.



The interviews that make up this book focus on contemporary Latino artists and authors of children's and young adult fiction and nonfiction. And while this body of literature is certainly more abundantly present today than in the past, it did not appear ex nihilo. Before Latinos in the United States had access to print venues (largely in Spanish in the nineteenth century and then in English in the twentieth), storytelling for young audiences happened as it has for centuries: orally and visually. Of course, this continues as an important creative venue today. As many of those interviewed for this book attest, it was listening to stories as children that magically transported them out of their present moment; it was the engagement with oral storytelling in the family that whet appetites to become artists and authors. And these stories went anywhere and everywhere: from past lives in lost homelands to myths and legends. Some, like Xavier Garza, mention the deep impact of hearing about El Cucuy and *chupacabras*. Carmen Tafolla talks about how those in the community would tell stories of La Llorona, "a story that's been told for more than five hundred years." For Monica Brown and Yuyi Morales, it was the mother figure who opened their senses to other visual and textual means (painting and stitching and weaving) for preserving and reproducing experience.

With increased access to print venues in the nineteenth century, however, Latinos created more literature about Latinos for young readers. Scholars such as Mary Pat Brady, among others, consider Cuban writer and activist José Martí to have been one such writer creating works for children. While living in exile in New York, Martí published a four-issue magazine titled *La edad de oro* (1889) wherein he published stories and poems aimed at a young Latino/a audience. In 1993, the stories were published as a book on tape titled *Selecciones de la edad de oro*. And in 2013, they were published as a book,

La edad de oro, which includes Martí's welcome to his young readers that originally appeared in the magazine, *La edad*. He offers his stories and poems aimed at children as a way for them to get to know how others once lived, as well as how others continue to live in "América" and around the world (4). He also addresses the parents, reminding them of the importance of children: "sin las niñas no se puede vivir" (4).

As we move into the twentieth century, important authors such as María Cristina Mena, Pura Belpré, and Mario Suárez arrive on the scene. The first Latina to be hired by the New York Public Library system, the librarian, educator, and activist Pura Belpré wrote children's stories specifically aimed at a young bilingual Latino audience. As seen in her first published story, "Pérez and Martina" (1932), and later with the publication of *Juan Bobo and the Queen's Necklace* (1962), among many other titles, Belpré transported (and translated into English) many Puerto Rican folktales and fictions for her young US Latino listeners and readers. Many of her children's stories have since been recovered, collected, and published by Lisa Sánchez González in *The Stories I Read to the Children* (2013). In the late 1940s, Mario Suárez wrote short stories such as "Cuco Goes to a Party" and "The Migrant," which featured Latino children whose existence intertwined in complex ways with the adults who populated the Tucson *barrio* known as El Hoyo. These stories have since been recovered and published by Francisco Lomelí, Cecilia Cota-Robles Suárez, and Juan José Casillas-Núñez in *Chicano Sketches*. Between 1942 and 1953, María Cristina Mena published five children's books: *The Water-Carrier's Secrets* (1942), *The Two Eagles* (1943), *The Bullfighter's Son* (1944), *The Three Kings* (1946), and *Boy Heroes of Chapultepec: A Story of the Mexican War* (1953). As Amy Doherty writes in the introduction to *The Collected Stories of María Cristina Mena*, "she was devoted to recreating her short stories, and other narratives from Mexican history and legend, into fiction for young people" (xvi). It was the time of the Latino civil rights struggle and its concomitant creation and affirmation of a Latino activist arts scene that witnessed a flourishing of Latino children's and YA fiction. The time of the late 1960s and early 1970s saw the arrival of Latino authors (Chicano and Nuyorican especially) who created literature not only for adult audiences but also for young people. Victor Ochoa and Alurista published the Spanish-language picture book *Colección Tula y Tonán* (1973) that celebrated the indigenous roots of Chicanos. Ernesto Galarza self-published *Colección minilibros* (1971–73), a series of handcrafted bilingual books that Latino-ized mainstream English nursery rhymes. He also published his coming-of-age novel, *Barrio Boy* (1971). This same year, Tomás Rivera published . . . *y no se lo tragó la tierra*, which opens in the narrative voice of a Latino child, the son

of two migrant workers. And, in 1973, Rudolfo A. Anaya published *Bless Me, Ultima*, a young adult novel told from the perspective of a New Mexico boy, Antonio. On the East Coast we had notables such as Nicholasa Mohr, with her 1974 book *Nilda*, a novel that richly textures the life of a young Nuyorican Latina. Many of these pioneering young adult novels that fleshed out the Latino experience from a child's or teen's perspective continue to be taught in high schools today.

In the decades that followed, more and more Latino creators entered the children's book and young adult literature arena. In the 1980s we saw the arrival of Latinas such as Sandra Cisneros, Pat Mora, and Pam Muñoz Ryan, among others. And in the 1990s and 2000s we saw Latino authors who wrote for adults (poetry and prose fiction) testing the waters of this literature for the younger set. I think readily of Francisco X. Alarcón, Juan Felipe Herrera, Francisco Jiménez, Daniel Olivas, Oscar Hijuelos, and Benjamin Sáenz, among others.

This also marks an important moment for Latino illustrators. During the late 1990s and the 2000s especially, numerous influential illustrators arrived on the scene, including Antonio Martorell, Joe Cepeda, Felipe Davalos, Enrique Sanchez, Carmen Lomas Garza, René Colato Laínez, Stephanie Garcia, Jorge Argueta, Angela Dominguez, Consuelo Mendez, Yuyi Morales, Monica Brown, Maya Christina Gonzalez, George Ancona, Raúl Colón, David Diaz, Duncan Tonatiuh, and Xavier Garza. As Maya Christina Gonzalez discusses in her interview, it was during the period of the 1990s when she paired up with Gloria Anzaldúa to create the children's book *Prietita and the Ghost Woman/Prietita y la Llorona* (1996), where she could apply her fine art skills in realizing her Latina identity, where she could paint the round faces of Chicana girls. This was a time when she was no longer relegated "to scratching myself onto the blank pages at the back of someone else's book" ("Afterword" 319). This was a time when Gonzalez would fill all the pages with her "own paintings *and* words" (319).

As we move into the second decade of the twenty-first century, we could add to these Latino pioneers a number of new authors—many of whom choose to write for the middle-grade and teen reader. These include many of the authors interviewed herein, including Matt de La Peña, Alex Sanchez, Ashley Hope Pérez, Francisco Stork, Maya Christina Gonzalez, Jenny Torres Sanchez, Manuel Martinez, and Daniel José Older. And with each author we see all variety of storytelling shapes, including noir, sci-fi, fantasy, historical realism, urban bildungsroman, and suspense, among many others.



While there is a long tradition of Latinos choosing to create art and fiction/nonfiction for children and teens, many faced the closed doors of mainstream publishers. While each of the authors I interviewed shares different experiences with the publishing marketplace, all express frustration with an industry that often ignores diversity—especially Latino identities and experiences. As many of the authors and artists discuss in the interviews, their choice to create culturally and linguistically rich stories that re-create the experiences of young Latinos was risky.

Fortunately, Latino creators have had access to publishers who have had their eyes wide open. Arte Público (with its Piñata Books imprint), Children's Book Press, Luna Rising, Lectorum, Santillana USA, Greenwood Books, Cinco Puntos Press, and certain university presses have been instrumental in opening doors for many of the authors and artists I interviewed. And there have been some exceptions to the rule with the New York presses, such as Scholastic, and Simon and Schuster, among others.

Publishing, however, is only part of the journey. There is also getting books into the hands of readers, whether in schools, libraries, or homes. This effort requires visibility in terms of marketing but also library-recognized national awards. The American Library Association, which sponsors the Caldecott and Newbery Medals, has infrequently recognized books by Latino authors. These awards are also limited to books in English. As such, other recognitions have come to play an important role here. Many of the authors and illustrators included in this book have been recognized with the Américas Award, the Tomás Rivera Mexican American Children's Book Award, and the Pura Belpré Award. These national recognitions not only celebrate and affirm Latino cultural experience in children's and young adult literature but they bring visibility to the artist. This has material consequences, such as securing more work as well as increasing sales; they are more likely to be on the radar of librarians and teachers across the country. And, of course, this helps sustain the small presses that have historically been the ones to take the risks in publishing stories by Latinos and with Latino themes and characters.

This so-called good news should still be taken with caution. As Jamie Naidoo politely sums up, “publishers and distributors see the market for these books as a specialized and limited market. Consequently, books about Latinos go out of print quickly, even if they have received one of the major Latino children's awards” (*Celebrating Cuentos* 54).

The big publishers do take note when an author wins a Caldecott or a Newbery. Gold stickers are plastered on covers and new print runs launched. However, these awards have a long track record of recognizing only a narrow bandwidth of experience: the Anglo (and straight) one. While the Newbery

Medal has been around since 1922, it was not until 2009 that the first Latina was awarded the Newbery's runner-up recognition (Newbery Honor): Margarita Engle. In 2016, a Latino finally won the yearly Newbery Medal award: Matt de la Peña. The Caldecott, established in 1937, has gone to less than a handful of Latino illustrators: Matt de la Peña, David Diaz, and Yuyi Morales. Others, like Bonnie J. F. Miller ("What Color Is Gold?") and Kenneth Kid ("Prizes! Prizes!") call these award institutions racist and homophobic. (For more on this, see Clark et al.)

While Latinos are nearly 17.6 percent of the US population, we are only represented in roughly 2 percent of children's books published annually. In "*En aquel entonces y hoy en día*," Mary Esther Soto Huerta and Carmen Tafolla cite the 2010 findings of the Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC): "of the three thousand volumes of children's books published in 2009 and sent to the center by publishers, large and small nationwide, only sixty-one had significant Latino content, and of these, only sixty (or 2 percent) had been written by Latino authors and/or illustrators" (147–48). In January 2016, Lee and Low Books published the results of a diversity baseline survey of children's book publishing that determined that its products present characters that are overwhelmingly white (79 percent), straight (88 percent), able-bodied (92 percent), and female (78 percent) (see Low's "Where Is the Diversity").

I should mention briefly, too, that this white mirroring is not happening just in the mainstream publishing and awards industry. It takes place with the reviews of children's, middle-grade, and young adult literature in places like *Kirkus*, *Publishers Weekly*, *Book Links*, *School Library Journal*, and other publications read by acquiring librarians across the country. And it is present in the academy. The two-thousand-plus-page behemoth, *The Norton Anthology of Children's Literature* (2005) does not include one US Latino author. And, out of the more than one hundred books now published in Jack Zipes's famous children's literature and culture book series with Routledge that features Asia, Africa, Canada, and India, among many others, none focus on Latino/a (or Latin American) children's literature. And while important inroads have been made in the academy in the study of children's and YA literature by and about Latinos, these changes remain largely confined to education departments—and not departments of English or Spanish, for instance. And this situation exists even though these departments can and do provide a rich area of scholarly study to understand questions of identity as informed by nation, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and gender.

Along with these instances of gatekeeping in the children's book marketplace, there have also been cases where non-Latino children's and YA au-

thors have excavated and co-opted Latino-identified culture to great laudatory appeal and monetary gain. We see this in some early twentieth-century children's book titles such as Charles Finger's *Tales from Silver Lands* (1925), which exoticizes Central and South American indigenous folk culture, as well as Leo Politi's patronizing *Pedro, the Angel of Olvera* (1947). Both received national recognitions, picking up the Newbery and Caldecott Medals, respectively. More recently, there is Judith Byron Schachner's multiple-award-winning Skippyjon Jones series, which features a heavily accented Siamese cat who imagines himself as a ferocious bandido Chihuahua. As his fantasized brown Other, Skippyjon sprinkles his sentences with words like "ees," "buzzito," "indeed-o," and "Holy Guacamole." Schachner's brown-palette illustrations further mark this popular narrative series as a children's book in brownface. These, along with a long list of other books created by non-Latinos, create age-old stereotypes (bandidos, buffoons, and machos) in the misuse of Spanish and lazy reference to Latino cultural traditions; at times they reproduce destructive master narratives in which Latino-brown equals bad and Euro-white equals good (see Brady's "Children's Literature" and Saldivar's "Sonic Brownface").

It is important to keep in mind that the Latino authors and artists interviewed in this book are acutely aware, too, of essentializing Latino culture. We see this in their careful anchoring of their stories and characters within specifics of cultural traditions, experiences, habits, and the like. But they are also very aware of how the various ancestries that inform US Latino communities struggle with a past filled with racial prejudice, or colorism; this is an ideological byproduct of the Spanish Conquest, with its indoctrination of a *casta* (or caste) phenotypic system that privileges Euro-Caucasian features. The Latino authors and artists interviewed here often put the internalizing of this caste system within the Latino community, as well as related issues such as violence and sexism, front and center in their work. These authors and artists carefully give shape to these issues in ways that affirm complexity within the very varied Latino communities. That is, their works complicate representations of the Latino community as merely preternaturally happy-go-lucky, "Spanglish"-speaking, straight families (Brady, "Children's Literature" 380). Awareness and critique of such internalized destructive thinking and behavior weave their way with great subtlety into the Latino-created children's books; Latino YA fiction authors like Daniel José Older hit hard and direct with self-aware critiques of the Latino community. In his interview herein Older sums up his process: "I think when we love something, we also have to critique it. That is why I include in my fiction issues of patriarchy, colorism, and violence within our community. Because these topics have been

used by the mainstream to negatively portray us and to keep us down, there's a lot of difficulty in writing this into my fiction. To find that truth, though, we have to check ourselves, too. Writing overly affirmative, glorious, magical versions of who we are is a lie; it's still not getting at the complex truth of who we are as human beings."



What is the "Latino" in children's and young adult literature? The book publishing industry tends to use the term "Latino" to lump together all variety of rich cultural heritages. To this end, the umbrella term risks erasing important differences. For Phillip Serrato, the term "encompasses too easily a spectrum of unique texts that embody diverse and distinctive mixtures of cultural, historical, political and artistic specificity, influence, and significance" (137). However, the authors interviewed for this volume and their work push against this erasure of difference. In this sense, "Latino" serves as a useful category for identifying some common ancestral grounds, as well as common themes within the stories, but it never unseats the voice of the authors and their work, which powerfully resists identity categories that try to set limits on experience and subjectivity.

Children's and young adult literature by and about Latinos is as rich and varied as all of the ethnic, linguistic, cultural heritages that make up the diverse US Latino population. Authors whom I have interviewed for this book and many others identify themselves as being of Dominican, Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Central and South American descent. Judith Ortiz Cofer is Puerto Rican–Georgian. Born to an Anglo American father and Mexican mother in San Miguel de Allende, Duncan Tonatiuh lives in Puerto Rico. Lulu Delacre is Puerto Rican and of Argentinian and Uruguayan descent. Meg Medina identifies as Cuban and Diane Bertrand and Pat Mora, as Tejanas. Pam Muñoz Ryan identifies as Mexican American. Alex Sanchez identifies as German and Mexican Latino. And Monica Brown identifies as a mixed Peruvian and Anglo (Italian, Scottish, and Eastern European/Hungarian) American Latina. Others interviewed here represent a wondrous mix of these and other ethnic and racial heritages. While they predominantly write in English, they move fluidly in and out of Spanish; some writers, such as Jorge Argueta and René Colato Laínez, among others, choose to weave into their stories indigenous linguistic rhythms and sounds. To different degrees of presence, these authors choose to create themes, events, and characters that gravitate toward issues, occurrences, and people of the Latino/a Americas.

Children's and young adult literature by and about Latinos is linked to

the rapidly changing demographic presence in this country. According to US Census data from April 1, 2010, one out of every six people in the United States is Latino. Those of Mexican origin represent the largest group: approximately 31 million. Those of Puerto Rican origin: 4 million. Those of Central American origin: 4 million. Those of Cuban origin: 1.6 million. (These numbers do not account for the millions of undocumented Latinos living in the United States.)

It is a literature linked to Latinos having increased access to education, allowing new generations of Latinos to have the energy, time, and choice to write fiction—and not work in factories and fields. Like much literature created by those kept at the socioeconomic margins, gains in civil rights led to more and more Latino authors entering the children's and YA fictional fray (see Reynolds's *Children's Literature*).

It is a literature grown (and growing) to satisfy the rich and diverse appetite for a wide variety of literary experiences that appeal to *and* gravitate toward the sensory, emotional, and cognitive landscape of our Latino youth. Its Latino storyworlds powerfully connect young Latino readers. As Jackie White writes, “children develop as skilled readers the more that they read, and they are more likely to keep reading if they find relevance and pleasure in the content, language, and style of what they read. That relevance and pleasure come from seeing one's self and one's experiences reflected in the text and from making connections with others. Therefore, from picture books and YA series to crossover works from the Latino/a literary canon, Latino/a YA and children's material have the potential to create lifelong readers from all microcultures and, thus, a more empathic, informed, and critically thinking citizenry” (193).

Deep immersion in storyworlds by and about Latinos can lead to greater plasticity in the reader's cognitive schemas about the world. This can have consequences long after the turning of the final page of a given narrative fiction. It can show non-Latino readers other ways of existing and can hold at bay rigid ways of thinking about race, gender, and sexuality. As Kimberly Reynolds writes, “stories are key sources of the images, vocabularies, attitudes, structures, and explanations we need to contemplate experience” (4). And Rudolfo A. Anaya writes, “Growing up is one of the universal themes of literature [because it] is where our values are formed” and how we come to “understand our place in the world” (5). The growing body of Latino children's and YA literature aesthetically re-creates a reality that has been actively transformed and enriched by Latinos past and present.



Children and young adults (Latino or otherwise) are sophisticated listeners and readers; they are complex, perceiving, feeling, and thinking subjects. They are not passive sponges but active *re-creators* of all that they encounter. They use their reasoning (causal, counterfactual, and probabilistic mechanisms) to make meaning from images and strings of words. In each instance, they exercise the mental mechanisms that allow them to interface, discover, and explore the world they inhabit.

The authors interviewed herein speak to the importance of their youth not only as a time when they cleared spaces for visual and verbal creative expression as a way to explore their own identities and limits but also as a way to hold off mainstream forces that threatened nullification, that viewed them as nonentities. They talk about looking for and sometimes discovering important role models in family stories, library books, and art—cultural phenomena of all sorts that would enable them to externalize unfulfilled sensory and psychological needs, that would help them answer (even if only partially) questions such as, What am I capable of? What is my place in society and in the world at large?

The authors herein variously express how they were hungry to explore, to know, to feel—and to be affirmed. They speak of living in a world that deprived them of this acknowledgment, that threatened them with invisibility, outsidership, and disorientation anchored in the complex ways that ethnicity, race, sexuality, and gender tangle up. They talk about the deliberate choice to create through their literature social mirrors that would reflect positive images of Latino youth, to create a literature that would affirm young Latinos and that would propel them forward toward engaging with and then transforming the larger world. They all talk about creating literature that seeks to open up multiple spaces of culture and of geographic and linguistic experience to enrich the lives of all other readers that make up the nation as a whole.



Conveying relatable content is important, but it is not the end of the story. There's the willful way that a given author chooses to give shape to this story. It is for this reason that children—my daughter included—ask for the reading of a story over and over again. It's not because they've forgotten the content. It is because they relish the way the story is given shape: syntax, diction, pace, reiterations, imagery, and other textual features of the narrative that crystallize in their minds as a particular, identifiable voice of the story. My daughter today reads and rereads ad infinitum Christina Diaz Gonzalez's *Moving Target*. She relishes how the story stretches wide the storyworld spaces and speeds up and slows down the narrative pacing.

There are few instances of ironic or postmodern storytelling in Latino children's and YA literature. There are not any Latino equivalents to children's narratives that call attention to their artifice, like *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales*, or that are deeply ironic (sarcastic even), like *Go the F***K to Sleep*. These seem to appeal to adult readers more than to the children. And Mary Pat Brady discusses, too, how Latino children's literature tends *not* to follow the Aesop fable formula, one that "seeks to frighten, thrill and, more importantly, develop a repertoire of examples of human vulnerability and vulnerability's requisite engagement with community-making" (379). Latino authors are more interested in creating a space for communion with the child. They aim to create what Seth Lerer identifies as being at the heart of children's books: the "communion and communication" built out of the child's touch, sight, sound, and smell of the book—and, ideally, of the parent reading with the child. We see with the Latino authors and artists in this book that they seek to clear this space where child and adult can experience together the pleasures and warmth of reading together. As Lerer sums up, "the bonds of literacy are the bonds of parenting, and the imaginative lives of children develop both in reading and in listening" (14).

Latino children's literature is largely absent of the irony and metafiction seen in, for instance, Jon Scieszka's *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales* (1992). In Latino children's books (and young adult fiction), their authors seek other ways to make new the reading, listening, and viewing experience. For instance, Latino authors use shaping devices like language and the move across Spanish and English (translanguaging) not only to anchor characters in their Latino identities but also to give rhythm and shape to the narratives. And others experiment with the reading experience by choosing, for instance, to have the story in Spanish if read one direction and in English if flipped and read in the other direction. Also, the use of poetry or haiku provides not only a tempo to the narrative voice but also visual experience that interacts with the visual material of children's books; children want to return again and again to these stories, less for a content that is already known after a first read and more to relish in its visual and verbal narrative layers.



Most Latino children's and YA fiction takes place in a clearly delineated past or present. And the authors can choose to give shape to this temporality through third-person omniscient and limited-omniscient narrative perspective, as well as through the eyes or the perspective—*filter*—of a protagonist/character, and with a *slant* or worldview of the narrator. Angela Yannicopoulos identifies how children's books inevitably convey (explicitly or implicitly)

certain ideological assumptions through the use of omniscient narrators that naturalize as neutral the conveying of information. Conversely, a polyphonic narrative can “encourage children to become competent readers and critical of their own reading process” (80). For instance, Monica Brown chooses the present-tense, first-person narrative voice to give shape to *Lola Levine*. It conveys the sensation of the actual formation of the subject in real time: “Dear Diario, I can’t sleep. I want to juggle my soccer ball, but I’m pretty sure that would wake everyone else up. I could paint on the walls of my room, but I’m not feeling full of what my artist dad calls ‘creative expression.’ What I am feeling full of is creative energy—inside and out” (1). The reader seamlessly steps into the emotions and thoughts of Lola as she explores her everyday world—and in an absolutely unmediated way.

The shaping devices used are rich and varied. Where an author like Judith Ortiz Cofer chooses to construct narratives built out of a single character’s filter, others choose different options regarding the filtering of the events, including relaying events from multiple perspectives, unfolding one meaning to a mainstream audience and another to a Latino audience; specifics of cultural practices and values resonate deeply with diasporic Puerto Rican Latinos living in the United States, while at the same time, for example, the broader-brushstroke emotions experienced by Ortiz Cofer’s characters will appeal to all readers. Indeed, such Latino children’s and YA fiction can and does invite non-Latino readers to exist “*in difference* as distinct from *indifference*,” as Shirley Brice Heath succinctly identifies (44). The mindful, carefully created children’s and YA fiction about Latino identities and experiences can resonate deeply with both Latino and non-Latino readers. Conversely, the careless and shallow children’s and YA fiction that disconnects cultural and experiential anchors to the complexity of being Latino can be seen to seek only a singular and limited non-Latino readership. It’s the difference between Yuyi Morales’s *Niño Wrestles the World* and Schachner’s *Skippyjon Jones*. Morales immerses her readers in the detailed specifics of Latino culture being created in the everyday American reality of the United States and thus engages simultaneously both Latino *and* non-Latino readers. Schachner’s approach appeals essentially to those who know of Latino culture only through some mainstream stereotypes.

With Latino children’s picture books, the visual and verbal elements also make for layered reading possibilities and multiple readership communities. They are written and drawn to be read by a reader (usually older) but are also created to appeal to a child who is either not reading yet or in the incipient stages of making meaning from alphabetic text. Even without an

older reader present, the book's visuals can and do trigger a child's cognitive and emotive meaning-making processes. They suggestively guide the child to interface with the image in front of them and to imagine far beyond the image itself. As Shirley Brice Heath sums up, "as images expand in their conveyance of meaning, words shrink in their own power or work in sync to retain it. Authorities beyond the child lose control over interpretation. Through images, young readers can take charge" (40). As seen in the work of Jorge Aguirre, Yuyi Morales, Duncan Tonatiuh, Joe Cepeda, Raúl González III, Rhode Montijo, and many other visual arts creators included in this book, the carefully constructed visuals work as a nonprescriptive guide for the young child's imagination.

When Latino authors create for young children who are already in the full swing of literacy, the visuals continue to play an important albeit somewhat diminished role in triggering the child's gap-filling processes. The visuals for middle-grade readers tend to fall more on the comic book or cartoon side of the representational spectrum—and not toward the realism of a photograph. For instance, in Monica Brown's Lola Levine series of books, the visuals punctuate a dominance of text narrative. And these visuals express character and theme in, say, a more comic book *drawn* and geometric format. The artist Angela Dominguez chooses to distill from the building blocks of reality Latino children as colored brown and with big heads and saucer eyes on small body frames. It's the *Peanuts* visual trick. It's something that Angela distills and then re-creates with her geometric drawing skills, not only for young Latina readers to see themselves mirrored in a character like Lola and her pals but also to trigger positive feeling and empathy in readers for the characters that make up the Lola Levine storyworlds. This disproportion between head and body is something we see in our everyday lives with infants and children. The drawings trigger in all readers of the Lola Levine series a reflexive tendency to protect and cuddle the young ones around us.

When we move into young adult fiction for Latinos, the only visuals used appear on the jacket covers. At the opposite end of the mimetic spectrum, the visuals are usually photographs. Photographs of carefully composed Latino teens appear on the front covers of the young adult fiction of Malín Alegria, Benjamin Alire Sáenz, Daniel José Older, Alex Sanchez, and Jenny Torres Sanchez, where they function as an advertisement of sorts to attract the attention of the Latino teen reader. It's the cover design and title that the Latino teen reader first encounters. It's what will determine if he or she chooses *Yaqui Delgado Wants to Kick Your Ass* or *Rainbow Boys* over, say, a *Twilight* or *Hunger Games* book, for instance. With middle-grade readers

there's already a hint of the assertion of independent taste in fiction. This becomes even more pronounced with teens who not only want to exercise the growth of their own independently driven tastes for fiction but who also want to explore the world as widely as possible, independent of parents. The fictional worlds created by Alegria, Sáenz, Older, Sanchez, and Torres that prominently feature issues of gender, race, and sexuality open avenues for Latino teens to explore and discover their own worldviews without some of the shackles of prejudice borne by their parents. Once the book is selected, then, the Latino teen reader experiences the perception, thought, and feeling of all variety of Latino identities and experiences.



Language is a key ingredient in the creation of children's and young adult literature by and about Latinos. Monolingual, bilingual, and polylingual children and teens can experience the shaping of the same content and story-world with different languages. As Alma Flor Ada writes, "language allows us to communicate experiences and add to the growing heritage that each new generation receives. Language offers us the means to explore our feelings and emotions, to create meaningful relationships with others, and thus, to better understand ourselves" ("Foreword" xi). In bilingual children's narratives, both languages interconnect chiasmatically and can and do construct another layer of experience. In creating the bilingual text, the translator (sometimes this is the author-as-translator) becomes the ideal reader of the source text and then distills, reconstructs, and transports this text into the new language—the new home—in ways that convey the worldview of the source but not in a one-to-one way.

Translanguaging happens naturally with Latino children as they decide (without conscious cognitive work) which word or phrase best fits a situation and audience to convey message and meaning; this often begins at an early age for second-generation Latino kids as they function as language brokers for the monolingual Spanish-speaking adults (see Clark et al., esp. chap. 1). Bilingualism and bilingual identities throughout the Americas are the air we breathe.

In some cases we have bilingual children's books in which the English original and Spanish translation appear next to one another. This juxtaposition not only carves out new sound systems but also deploys new narrative and rhetorical strategies to engage the readers; the Spanish translations stand on their own, proudly displaying their own new garb, but as intimately tied to the English. The Spanish translations carefully select (and omit) words and adapt appropriate syntax to convey the feeling and intent of the original, but

within the grammatical forms and rhythms most suitable to Spanish. In other cases the authors create narratives that code-switch between English and Spanish—and pre-Columbian indigenous languages. In each case, language does not just act to convey information (say, a character's cultural heritage); it becomes a shaper of the story. The interplay of English, Spanish, and other tongues offers many of the authors included in this book a significant shaping device, sculpting stories in unique and powerful ways. As bi-linguaged imagining and acting subjects, the authors herein seek to reflect our contemporary world as such: as English and Spanish, a world where English and Spanish work as chimeras of one another and with shared DNA.

As you will see, some of the authors choose to write in bilingual (translanguaging) formats. As the authors herein attest, movement betwixt and between languages invites readers first to connect with the rich cross-pollination of rhythms, sounds, sights, and smells experienced by Latino protagonists and, second, to experience how polylingual creation is *itself* a central part of the aesthetic experience. Taken as a whole, the Latino body of children's and YA literature aims to be experienced polylingually, with multiple perspectives—and always as an aesthetic whole.



The Latino creators interviewed and included in this book create stories aimed at young audiences, but they do so across all genres—all varieties of style. We have those working within the sci-fi and fantasy realms, such as Samuel Teer and Daniel José Older. We have those who, like Rhode Montijo and Xavier Garza, use a graphic-novel style to create young Spanglish-speaking Latinos and Latinas with superhero powers. We have authors who choose to create stories that seek to affirm the experience of being a Latina girl, young woman, and Latino/a teen, as seen in the works of Monica Brown, Pam Muñoz Ryan, Angela Dominguez, Alex Sanchez, Benjamin Alire Sáenz, and Jenny Torres Sanchez, among others. (Unfortunately, Gabby Rivera, author of the coming-out Latina YA fiction *Juliet Takes a Breath* [2016] wasn't available for interview. She invents a Nuyoric first-person narrator and protagonist, Juliet Palante, who sits uneasily between the white feminist queer movement and people of color queer activism.) We have those who turn their sights back in time to keep alive precolonial myths and indigenous ancestry, as with Pat Mora, Margarita Engle, and Judith Ortiz Cofer, among others. Those like René Colato Laínez and Duncan Tonatiuh choose to recreate the dangers of crossing borders and the loss of homelands. We have authors who choose to anchor their narratives in a strong sense of Latinidad, like Lulu Delacre, Judith Ortiz Cofer, Duncan Tonatiuh, René Colato Laínez, Raúl Gonzalez III,

and Malín Alegria. Other authors choose to whisper Latinoness in their art and stories, as with Alex Sanchez, Rafael Rosado, Joe Cepeda, and Christina Diaz Gonzalez. Then there are those who at once embrace and push against Latinidad, as with Cristy C. Road. Some, like Matt de la Peña and Ashley Hope Pérez, create fiction that explores Latinoness as it interfaces with other racialized subjects. And those like Monica Brown, Carmen Tafolla, and many others create characters that celebrate their mixed-race and ethnic identities, including even Peruvian Irish.

Of course, this is an oversimplification of all the ways that these artists and authors use their skills in art and writing to distill and re-create a Latino reality that is itself complex and ever changing. In different ways and to different degrees, all the creators gathered in this book give rich and layered texture to characters and themes that touch on issues such as connection and phantom disconnection to land, nation, and language; intergenerational hardship and healing; fractured and rebuilt selves and communities; biological and non-biological kinships; a social tissue ripped apart by the violence of racism and sexism; the power of art and story to heal; and situations of deep shame and trauma, along with wondrous affirmation and happiness.

In each creator's work we see all sorts of intermixing of styles and voices, as well as the bending of genre expectation: poetry where one might expect prose, myth where one might expect historical artifact. And for many of these authors, creating children's and young adult fiction and nonfiction happens alongside their writing of poetry, fiction, and nonfiction for adults. For these creators, the sky is the limit when it comes to re-creating the Latino experience.

Children's and YA literature created by Latinos covers all the genres, formats, and media. It covers all subjects. It is planetary in its shapes and in its reach. The heart of Latino children's and young adult literature beats to its own wondrous and distinctive rhythms. Its vitality breathes life into the planetary republic of letters.

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