LATINO IN SPITE OF HIMSELF:

THE WORKS OF RICHARD RODRIGUEZ

AS CHICANO AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Doctoral Dissertation Presented

by

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For Francisco e Irene

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how Richard Rodriguez explores issues of U. S. Latino identity, in particular those relative to Mexican-American and Chicano individuals, by means of analyzing the autobiographical narratives of the author. Autobiography, driven by the self-interested impulse that the individual has to explore her/his consciousness in order to attain deeper knowledge of the self, has been instrumental in the establishment and development of non-mainstream literatures, in particular those penned by so-called hyphenated authors.

Rodriguez reliance on the autobiographical genre to present his arguments on Latino identity also underscores his allegiance to the Anglo-American literary tradition in contrast with the trends that other Latino authors have manifested in their works. Rodriguez has been a controversial voice within the Latino, and specifically within the Chicano, contexts. Although his discordant stance has been tempered throughout the four decades in which his autobiographies have appeared, he remains a dissonant voice within Latino Studies due to the contradictory positions he adopts, a voice worth analyzing if it only were just for that. Nevertheless, critical interest in his work dwindled after the commotion that his first autobiographical installment created.

After a revision of the emergence and development of the autobiographical genre and its consideration as a genre that, rather than being centered on the self, needs of the Other to exist, this study analyzes Rodriguez's production. The approach of the project has been to consider major topics within each autobiography. Because the four texts are interconnected, this approach helps us, in turn, to arrive at a comprehensive view of Rodriguez's work. Hence, examining the

author's analysis of educational policies aimed to foster development of non-mainstream Americans leads us to considerations of social class that pertain to Latinos. Looking at the cultures of origin allows the author and, consequently, the reader to deconstruct the cultural milieu of the diasporic subject in the United States. This project, then, considers Rodriguez's take on race and ethnicity, and how he shifts from race to culture in order to support and advance his views on Latino identity. Rodriguez's initial trilogy has been subsequently expanded to a fourth autobiographical installment that explores his spirituality and sexuality. This is perhaps the gayest and most personal of his four autobiographies and one in which reconciliation of opposites becomes a key concept.

While the analysis of each of the narratives of the self Rodriguez has penned allows us to regard particular issues in depth, the present study also pays attention to the author's oeuvre and to consider his arc of thought. In this regard, it can be posited that there has been a change in tone and a relative centering of the author's stance when addressing Latino identitary issues. It is when one looks at Rodriguez's work comprehensively that it can be said that he is a Latino author, despite his claims to the contrary.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

AUTOBIOGRAPHY: THE MAKING OF A LITERARY GENRE

1.1. Introduction

Autobiography[1] has great appeal for any mainstream culture, since it tends to reproduce the myth of the success story. Western culture employs autobiography to culturally redistribute to consumers the mythic formulas of success in society, of reaching celebrity, and acquiring a certain standing in society. Autobiography places the reader in the experience and thought of another person and, consequently, sets the reader off in a process of self-reflection that produces a contemplation of humanity. Narratives of the self are uniquely poised to affect the reader precisely because they relate an experience that is at the same time both unique and universal. There is a constant reminder of the shared experience that is involved in our existence as human beings. The cultural value of autobiography resides in being subjective and internal –the truths it portrays are not necessarily verifiable factually—as well as objective and external –the historical and social issues it exposes refer us to certifiable, exterior realities. Hence, autobiography becomes a matter of the spirit and of the mind.

The present project looks at the four autobiographies by Rodriguez as individual yet interconnected works. Stemming from a preoccupation with issues regarding identity, the approach has been to consider the major topics of each autobiography: bilingual education and affirmative action; the impact of the culture of origin in the diasporic subject; race and ethnicity as constituents of identity; the integration of two diverse issues such as religion and

[1] For the purpose of this study, and in order to simplify matters for didactic reasons, we will consider the term 'narrative of the self' as synonym to 'autobiography'. We are aware of the complex nature of the concept

sexuality in the identitary makeup of the autobiographer. While the different chapters that deal with the literary works appear to treat detached, unconnected themes, there is a pervasive look that considers Rodriguez's oeuvre as a whole. In fact the same themes appear in all the autobiographic installments, and it has been duly noted as such. The chapter that analyzes with Rodriguez's sexuality is a clear example of this. Also, following the author's lead, his third book has been also studied from the premise that it is a coda of his earlier narratives.

In order to situate the four books in their context, the project looks at the emergence and development of autobiography as a genre, and its relation to literary theory. It was deemed essential, as well, to place Richard Rodriguez in the specific literary context of Chicano autobiography, especially given his controversial standing within the field.

Richard Rodriguez is a particularly appropriate author to study when it comes to consider issues of identity because of the contradictory positions he adopts in approaching his own. Representation is a key factor in ascribing to an identity, but being recognized with such markers; in other words, being identified, is equally crucial. Autobiography is an ideal literary genre to reflect on identitary issues, owing to the nature of the field.

The first chapter of this project is a brief revision of how autobiography emerged as a literary genre with the interest of man in exploring how the individual could approach and take up knowledge of the self and of her/his own consciousness, interests that shaped the work of thinkers in the 18th century. While there was an increase in turning the biographical interest from a third person to the self, authors' interest on exploring their self appeared long before, and this chapter reviews representative narratives of the self that are part of the field, from before it was conceived as a genre, paying special attention to the use of narratives of the self by ethnic minorities in the United States other than Latinos. By looking at the evolution of the field, the chapter explores how literary theory has shaped the corpus into a

genre, and how different theoretical schools have approached the study of autobiography. The chapter ends by analyzing autobiography and narratives of the self in relation to narrative strategies and structures characteristic of the essay. Autobiography aims to construct an argument in front of the reader and in doing so this chapter proposes the apostrophe as the generating trope for the narratives of the self, since the text is built upon an allocution to the other. In this sense, and as performative instances of the self and the author's exploration of identity, autobiographical genre enters the realm of ethics.

Chapter two centers the study of narratives of the self within the broader field of U.S. Latino literature, paying special attention to Mexican-American and Chicano letters. After reviewing and placing in context the label Chicano, the chapter analyzes the emergence and progress of Chicano oral and written narratives of life. In order to do so, the chapter looks at different themes and how they have been portrayed in the autobiographical narratives. It is necessary to take into account the socio-historical and political factors from these narratives that reflect upon the identity of the self, and issues like migration, displacement, gender, sexuality, among others help us in our approach to these narratives. The last section of the chapter looks at the controversy that arose around Richard Rodriguez at the appearance of his first autobiography, and the criticism the author received from the Chicano intelligentsia due to his stance on many of the issues that the Chicano agenda was advocating. Because of the frontal disagreement with the program that was being set forth by Chicanos, Rodriguez refused to be labeled as one, while the Chicano intelligentsia rejected any claims to include him among the members of that group. Because Rodriguez promoted issues put forth by the conservative segment of the country some saw in his words a direct attack to what the Chicano Movement and other ethnic social forces campaigned for, and in allying him with the mainstream, Rodriguez was branded as an anti-Chicano author.

Rodriguez's first autobiography, Hunger of Memory, is the focus of the third chapter. The book created many ripples among the scholars and critics of the field. This autobiography can be considered a coming-of-age text and, as such, the chapter approaches it from the critical framework of *Bildungsroman*. Rites and myths are very important elements in the incorporation of an individual into society, and this chapter pays attention to their function within the structural axis of *Bildungsromane* and in relation to Hunger of Memory. A great part of the controversy that the book generated stemmed from the author's stance with regards to bilingual education. The chapter, thus, focuses on Rodriguez's ideas in relation to the educational reforms that the Chicano Movement and other Latino advocates were fighting for, namely the implementation of bilingual programs in schools. Affirmative action was another point of contention between Rodriguez and the activists fighting for the claims of ethnic minorities during their struggle for civil rights and the culture wars of the seventies and eighties. The autobiographer's position fueled accusations that he was being too complacent with hegemony in his agreement with the attitude of the mainstream. Other critics saw in Rodriguez's ideas, and in his autobiography, a class-conscious anxiety for upper mobility and a degree of snobbery. The author himself refers to class when speaking of his first autobiography; therefore, it is only fitting that the chapter that analyzes the book addresses the ways in which Hunger of Memory is a class-conscious argument in favor of assimilating into the mainstream culture of the United States.

This project's fourth chapter turns its focus to the analysis of Days of Obligation. In this text Rodriguez endeavors to come to terms with his Mexicanness, and to that aim he sets to deconstruct his father's Mexican and indigenous heritages. One can interpret this as a cultural journey to his past on the part of the author, journey that has a physical aspect in Rodriguez's trip to Mexico. The chapter, then, examines the tension between the autobiographer's yearning for assimilation into mainstream United States, and the hold that

his Mexican cultural ancestry has on him For this reason, rather than analyzing Rodriguez's sexuality in this autobiography, as much of the criticism has done, chapter four in this study inquires about both, the search for and deconstruction of Mexicanness by the autobiographer, and the (im)possibility of the journey of return to the culture of origin on the part of the ethnic minority subject. In this second book, Rodriguez also explores what Mexican identity north of the border comprises. The image of the journey permits this fourth chapter to dissect Rodriguez's considerations about the ways in which Mexican-Americans and Chicanos have cannibalized traditional Mexican icons in order to forge their identity. In establishing an argument with his father, the chapter posits, Rodriguez analyzes what constitutes Mexican culture and heritage north and south of the border, with special interest in seeing how those elements feature in the construction of identity of the diasporic subject, more specifically one that looks to assimilate rather than resist the hegemonic mainstream.

Chapter five tackles Brown, Rodriguez's third book in as many decades, a text that he considers the wrap-up of his trilogy on class, ethnicity, and race. The chapter analyzes how ethnicity has been explained from the frameworks of race and culture, and how Rodriguez shifts from race to culture as the foundation for his notion of ethnicity. In doing so, he questions an essentialist idea of ethnicity, based on race. This is a concept that he considers being reductive and excluding of others who might fit in that ethnicity, and thus he sees it as misconstrued. In the chapter, we look at how Rodriguez and other critics deconstruct such essentialist idea, and how the autobiographer shifts the foundation of ethnicity to one based on culture. This allows him to debunk governmental categorizations of race and ethnicity, and look at Latinos –or, rather, Hispanics, a term he prefers— as a group that crosses race boundaries. The chapter then considers the idea of ethnic authenticity within the framework that Rodriguez's idea of brownness proposes, before it moves on to explain how Rodriguez deconstructs terms like "Hispanic" and "Latino" in order to support his assimilationist goal.

The chapter ends by looking at the last chapter of Brown as a return to all the issues Rodriguez discusses in the book, and also by considering Brown as a text that echoes themes from the previous autobiographies, as well as advances the major issues Rodriguez will tackle in his following book, and that we will analyze in chapter six.

"Darling Contemplations", the sixth chapter in this project, explores the major two themes of the fourth book by Richard Rodriguez: religion and homosexuality. While those topics have surfaced since his first autobiography, Rodriguez uses the terrorist attacks on New York City on September 11, 2001 as the generating image on which to meditate on his spirituality and his allegiance to the Catholic Church. In a sense, this book picks it up where Brown left it, since the author claimed that it had been unfinished due to the attacks on September 11 Chapter six of this project looks at how Rodriguez looks into his Catholic spirituality from the beginning, how that outlook has changed with time, and how his perspective has placed him with regards to other Chicano and Mexican-American writers who also have tapped into Catholic imagery in order to establish their allegiance to Chicano culture. We also place Rodriguez's Catholicism in contrast to the Protestant nature of mainstream United States. The chapter looks at how Rodriguez is ready to "convert" into a mainstream American, but he is not ready to convert to another religious belief, despite de fact that his Catholicism seems to be a contradiction with his sexuality. It is Rodriguez's sexuality that the chapter analyzes next. The open discussion of his homosexuality contrasts with the topic's absence in his first autobiography. Nevertheless, the chapter looks at how the author's homosexual gaze was already present, albeit in a subtle way, in Hunger of Memory. As the chapter evolves, we will see how his closet door opens little by little, and the author engages more and more with his sexuality in his texts, until he addresses it head-on in this last book. Chapter six analyzes the arguments of Rodriguez regarding gay marriage, gay love, and gay activism which in turn shape his religious spiritualism. By looking at these two

topics in Darling as a progression of what he exposed in earlier books, the chapter allows the reader to see Rodriguez's arc of thought.

As we will see in this first chapter, autobiography has been approached from different theoretical perspectives, and as a consequence of it, the analysis of autobiography as a genre has benefited from an array of literary theories and schools of criticism: from Structuralism to Reader Response, New Historicism, Psychological approaches, Postcolonial, and Cultural Studies, to name a few. This project will also consider the autobiographies of Richard Rodriguez from an eclectic theoretical framework, which will allow us to provide a more comprehensive analysis to his life narratives.

1.2. Autobiography as literary genre

Understanding what elements contribute to classifying narratives of the self and autobiographies as a genre is not merely an issue of defining the term, and yet a working definition seems indispensible. For the majority of readers, an autobiography would be the narration of a person's life told by that same person; in a sense, it would be the biography of a person written by the subject of it. However, this basic definition falls short for a more inquisitive reader, since the notion of autobiography involves questions of identity and, thus, becomes a complex issue. In order to clearly establish the concept of autobiography, we will consider the emergence of the term itself and its development, as well as how literary theory and criticism have approached the field and, in turn, shaped it.

1.2.1. From self-biography to autobiography: Coining the term

When it comes to *autobiography*, scholars have suggested several dates ranging from the 18th to the 19th centuries that may mark the emergence of the term itself. However, before this name appeared as such, texts that reflected on the life of the self had been called *confessions* and *self-biographies*, whether hyphenated or not. It was Isaac D'Israeli who, in 1796, coined the English neologism *self-biography* to designate the narrative of the self, in "Some Observations on Diaries, Self-biography and Self-characters," a chapter within his Miscellanies or Literary Recreations. Commenting on this text, William Taylor doubts the adequacy of the name, and adds that using *autobiography* would have been pedantic. The Oxford English Dictionary has not recognized the term as a word. On top of contributing his own neologism, D'Israeli also employed the hyphenated term *auto-biography* during the first quarter of the 19th century. For instance, in 1823, he describes a series of paintings as "an auto-biography in a series of remarkable scenes painted under the eye of the describer of them" (Curiosities 161), and later on in the essay titled "Sentimental Biography," the author differentiates between biography and *auto-biography*.

When it comes to the formation of autobiography as a literary genre, we need to refer to Germany. Already in the Stuttgart of 1791, we see a switch from biographers to autobiographers in the publication of Christian F.D. Schubart's Leben und Gesinnungen Von Ihm Selbst, in Kerker Aufgesetzt, although there is sound evidence that the text was written in 1779. In 1789, Theodor Gottlieb von Hippel wrote Biographie Des Königl. Preuß. Geheimenkriegsraths Zu Königsberg, Theodor Gottlieb Von Hippel, Zum Theil Von Ihm Selbst Verfasst: Aus Schlichtegrolls Nekrolog Besonders Abgedruckt, where he uses the term *self-biography* (460). It was in February 1795 that the transition from *self-biography* to *autobiography* can be traced for the first time in an article for Deutsche Monatsschrift under

the title "Über Selbstbiographien". Two years later, this transition will appear in England, when William Taylor comments on the legitimacy of the term in Monthly Review. Returning to Germany, the first use of *self-biography* in a title can be traced back to 1796 in the collection Selbstbiographien berühmter Männer: ein Pendant zu J.G. Müllers Selbstbekenntnissen, edited by David C. Seybold. It seems that the term was dominant in Germany until the 20th century, even though Frederich Schlegel comments on the writings of the self using the term autobiography in Athenaeum (1798), by saying that their authors are either pedantic, egomaniacs, self-deceivers or making a legal plea to the audience.

In the world of English letters, Robert Folkenflik challenges the historical account of the term that Felicity Nussbaum puts forth in The Autobiographical Subject (1989), and claims that autobiography appears in print for the first time in 1786, thus predating any German usage of the term. The text in question that Folkenflik cites is the preface to the fourth edition of Ann Yearsley's Poems, On Several Occasions, which describes the work as autobiographical narrative. However, upon examination of the preface in question, there is no evidence of the word autobiographical, although there are several appearances of the word narrative, and the text is itself autobiographical in nature. Both Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, in their second edition of Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives (2010) note that "[a]lthough Ann Yearsley's preface to the fourth edition … is an extended autobiographical refutation of the charge of ingratitude to her patron, Hannah More, the *autobiographical* does not appear in its title ("Mrs. Yearsley's Narrative")" (297), and they mention private correspondence with Robert Folkenflik acknowledging his error. This brings us back to Taylor's review in Monthly Review of D'Israeli's Miscellanies as the first evidence in print of the term autobiography in the English language. Nonetheless, it is Robert Southey who is credited with the first minting of the term in 1809, when speaking of a poem by Francisco Vieira in his article "Portugueze [sic] Literature" that appeared in the first

volume of Quarterly Review. Folkenflik refers to self-biography and autobiography as synonyms, and remarks that until the 20th century the word memoir also serves as a synonym.

With regards to the appearance of the word autobiography in an English title, Folkenflik credits a series that first came out in 1826 under the title Autobiography: A Collection of the Most Instructive And Amusing Lives Ever Published, Written by the Parties Themselves. And, while Felicity Nussbaum and Jacques Voisine mention W.P. Scargill's The Autobiography of a Dissenting Minister (1834) as the first work to carry the term in its title, Folkenflik affirms that several other texts appeared before then: William Brown's The Autobiography, or Narrative of a Soldier (1829), Matthew Carey's Autobiographical Sketches: in a Series of Letters Addressed to a Friend (1829); in 1832, James Browne published The 'Life' of the Ettrick Shepherd Anatomized in a Series of Structures in the Autobiography of James Hogg, and John Galt published two works under the titles The Member: An Autobiography and The Radical: An Autobiography; Galt went on to bring out The Autobiography of John Galt in 1833, the same year that Asa Greene, under the penname Elnathan Elmwood Esq., issued the fiction novel A Yankee among the Nullifiers: An Autobiography. It seems that by 1834 the term autobiography was widely accepted. For instance, in addition to Scargill's text, Sir Egerton Brydges published The Autobiography, Times, Opinions, and Contemporaries of Sir Egerton Brydges, and women writers were also producing titles, such as Elizabeth Wright Macauley's Autobiographical Memoirs. It seems that the first book of poems to include the word autobiography in its title was that of Charles Armitage Brown's Shakespeare's Autobiographical Poems: Being his Sonnets Clearly Developed with his Character Drawn Chiefly from his Works. By the 1840s, the frequency of the term in titles had increased, and perhaps one of the most widely-known titles today is that of Charlotte Brontë's novel Jane Eyre: An Autobiography (1847).

1.2.2. Autobiography *avant la lettre*

The coinage of the term in the 18th and 19th centuries was spurred by the notion of the self-interested individual and the concepts of self-knowledge and self-consciousness that shaped the "enlightened individual" that philosophers and social thinkers were already describing in the 18th century. Yet, it does not mean that writing about the self began in the 1700s. Narratives of the self and autobiographies existed before the term was minted, as George May suggests with his expression "autobiography *avant la lettre.*" Many of these texts stand as classics in world literature, let alone in their respective national literary canons. The following list of works is a representative sample that brings us back to ancient Greece with Socrates' delivery of his Apology in 399 BC, and published by Plato, where the Stoic philosopher delves inward into matters of conscience and projects his thoughts outward to analyze the world's moral condition, in what might be considered a dual-perspective in issues of self-reflection, and by such becoming a precursor for the works of Saint Augustine and Rousseau. By the year 180, Marcus Aurelius had composed his meditations To Myself, an attempt to understand the impact of the universal on an individual's life, a contemplative intent that will be taken up again in the autobiographical works of Merton and Thoreau.

Saint Augustine wrote his Confessions around 400, a text that is often referred to in many studies on autobiography. The confession as a form of autobiography underscores issues of intellectual, moral, and spiritual nature by means of the author's exposing his mind and soul. Confessional autobiography will be a model until the Renaissance. Dante Alighieri penned a sequence of poetry and prose, an account of his love for Beatrice as well as his apology for romantic poetry, under the title of La Vita Nuova (1294). The year 1436 marks the completion of The Book of Margery Kempe, which details the life of this English Christian mystic, her travels and her alleged experiences of divine revelation, including her

visions where she interacts with Jesus and other biblical figures, as well as her presence at important biblical events. While the book is written in third person and she refers to herself as "this creature," many scholars consider it the first autobiography in the English language. Some others differ, based on the fact that Kempe was illiterate and she dictated the book to two scribes, and refer to it as a "confession of faith." Nevertheless, Kempe's narrative fits within the confessional autobiographies, which have Saint Augustine's text as precedent. From 1558 to 1566 Benvenuto Cellini writes The Life of Benvenuto Cellini: A Florentine Artist, which will not be published complete until 1728. This narrative of the self is closer to a memoir, since it brings together the recollections of a person who witnesses (and/or partially is involved in) significant events. The author uses the incidents of her or his active public life as a means to provide understanding of the political or cultural tone of her or his era. As such, this form of life narrative is favored by politicians.

Spanish Christian mystic Teresa de Ávila completes The Life of Teresa of Jesus in 1565. Following the directives of her Catholic spiritual guides, the nun recounts her life following the confessional mode of autobiography that Augustine had instituted.

Later in that century, in 1580, Michel de Montaigne publishes his Essays for the first time, which he had started writing in 1572. He would continue to enlarge the text in subsequent years, and published major expanded editions in 1582 and 1588. Montaigne adopted an unequivocally different perspective in writing about oneself, which resulted in a different literary strategy. Instead of addressing a superior, supernatural being, Montaigne addresses humanity, shifting the focus from God and the confessional autobiography, to a reflection on the individual human conduct and on the shared principles of society. This humanistic shift resumes for autobiography the classical rhetoric form of apology that we had already witnessed in Socrates' address. In an apology, the author aims to assert his own

beliefs and actions in front of his allies, and most importantly, his foes. Contrary to the confessional autobiography, in the apology there is no implied admission of guilt, and the writer will correct any unfair judgment of his actions by means of explaining the rationale behind them. In 1637, René Descartes publishes his autobiographical and philosophical treatise entitled Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting One's Reason and of Seeking Truth in the Sciences. English Puritan John Bunyan published Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners in 1666. This is a spiritual autobiography that Bunyan composed while serving twelve years in prison in Bedford for preaching without a license. This text would see five editions prior to Bunyan's death in 1688. In 1725, Giambattista Vico writes the first part of his autobiography, published in 1728 by the priest Angelo Calogerà, in a Collection of pamphlets scientific and philological. In 1731, Vico will extend his life account and publish the second part of his autobiography. Both parts together are what we now know as Life of G.B. Vico written by himself, a text that analyzes his own intellectual evolution, similar to what Descartes had done in his philosophical and autobiographical treatise. Less than ten years later, around 1740, we witness the publication of the confessional autobiography of American Puritan Jonathan Edwards: Personal Narrative. Between 1766 and 1770 Jean-Jacques Rousseau writes his Confessions, a confessional autobiography referred to in a myriad of studies on the genre, which was published in two parts (1782 and 1789, respectively). A projected third part was never completed. Rousseau's Confessions are particularly interesting to the scholars of autobiography because it marks a distinction between factual accuracy and narrative of the self. The book contains factual errors (events out of order, frequent wrong dates, for instance), but the intention of the text is to provide an account of the experiences that shaped the self. While published posthumously in 1791 and in French, Benjamin Franklin wrote the unfinished record of his own life from 1771 to 1790. What we now know as The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin had a tortuous publication

history alternating translations to the French and to the English, until John Bigelow published in 1868 a more reliable text than that of Franklin's grandson's 1818 edition. Subsequent editions by Max Ferrand, Leonard W. Labaree, and J.A. Leo Lemay, all in the 20th century, have produced more reliable versions. In fact, the latter is the most accurate edition, showing all revisions and cancellations in Franklin's handwritten manuscript. It was around the time of the first publication of Franklin's autobiography that Giovanni Casanova writes his Memoirs, a twelve-volume work that covers his life from birth to 1774. Although written between 1789 and 1798, the volumes did not start to appear in print until 1822, and in expurgated, censored versions that even contained passages fabricated by the translators themselves. It was not until 1960 that the first original edition of the manuscript saw the light. British historian and M.P. Edward Gibbon starts composing his Memoirs of My Life and Writings in 1788, and they constitute a series of six fragmentary autobiographical accounts that were compiled and published in 1796, after Gibbon's death, by his friend Lord Sheffield.

As we have seen, most of the narratives of the self written before the 19th century can be classified in three categories, corresponding to their principal intentions. The confession has to do with issues independent of the social determining factors of the writer: the author bares his or her self in order to reveal intrinsic truths about the self. The apology articulates the autobiographer's coherent and mature position as a comeback to a critical opposition. The memoir is a literary device by which the writer documents the historical event(s) in which she or he had an involvement. The start of the 19th century marks a distinct approach to life writings: relating the account of one's life is worthy of attention because the individual merits intrinsically the attention. Both Rousseau and Franklin contributed to pave the way for this shift. Autobiography becomes a literary record of human evolution in individuality.

William Wordsworth started an autobiographical poem in 1798, which he intended as an appendix to a work under the title The Recluse. In 1804 he expands this “poem to Coleridge”, as he called it, and decides to make it a prologue instead of an appendix to the bigger piece. He finished the thirteen-volume opus in 1805, but refused to publish it. In 1850, his widow posthumously published the autobiography (or "the poem on the growth of my own mind," as he called it) under the title The Prelude, or Growth of a Poet's Mind; An Autobiographical Poem. By this time Robert Southey, another of the Lake Poets, had already used the word *autobiography* in the Quarterly Review. 1833 sees the publication of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s autobiography: From My Life: Poetry and Truth, more commonly known by the second part of the title only. In it, the German writer covers his early life and ends with his departure for Weimar.

The year 1845 is when Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself was published, and within four months of this publication, five thousand copies were sold. Having received many positive reviews, by 1860 almost 30,000 copies were sold. Ten years after the first publication of the first autobiography by the abolitionist leader, in 1854, Henry David Thoreau publishes Walden, or Life in the Woods. A year later, in 1855, Frederick Douglass publishes his second autobiography: My Bondage and My Freedom; and P.T. Barnum put together his first autobiography Life of P.T. Barnum, Written by Himself, which he published massively in order to promote himself and, in turn, his business. Barnum’s other autobiography, which had the same purpose, is Struggles and Triumphs, or Forty Years’ Recollections of P.T. Barnum, Written by Himself (1869).

Frenchman Victor Hugo published Contemplations, his autobiography in verse, in 1856. Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, the first autobiography by a female slave, was published in 1861 by Harriet Jacobs under the pseudonym Linda Brent. Life and Times of

Frederick Douglass, Written by Himself, published in 1881 and revised in 1892, is Douglass' third autobiography. In it, the abolitionist gave more details about his life as a slave and his escape from slavery than he could in his two previous autobiographies, because of the emancipation of slaves in the US. It is also the only one of his autobiographies that deals with his life during and after the Civil War. By 1897, Oscar Wilde writes Epistola: In Carcere et Vinculis, which is published bowdlerized in 1905 as De Profundis. After a turbulent history of editions, the full, corrected text saw the light in 1962 in Rupert Hart-Davis's Collected Letters of Oscar Wilde.

Danish émigré to the United States, Jacob Riis, published his autobiography The Making of an American in 1901. Six year later, in 1907, The Education of Henry Adams is printed privately and distributed by its author. Its commercial publication did not happen until 1918, after Henry Adams' death, to be awarded the Pulitzer Prize a year later. Bicontinental writer Henry James wrote three autobiographies in the 1910s: A Small Boy and Others (1913), Notes of a Son and Brother (1914), and the incomplete, posthumous The Middle Years (1917). Lithuanian immigrant to the U.S. and anarchist feminist Emma Goldman penned Living My Life in 1931. In 1932, John G. Neihardt transcribes the autobiography of Lakota medicine man Black Elk, under the title Black Elk Speaks: Being the Life Story of a Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux. This book has caused quite a controversy, due to issues of authorship: Native Americans and scholars have questioned whether Neihardt's account is accurate and fully represents the views or words of Black Elk. H.G. Wells published Experiment on Autobiography in September of 1934. By now, the boundaries between autobiography and other genres start to blur, and Henry Miller's Tropic of Cancer (1934) is seen as both a novel as well as an autobiography by different scholars. In 1937, Gertrude Stein published Everybody's Autobiography, which was devised as the continuation of her 1933 The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas. In 1945 Richard Wright published Black Boy:

A Record of Childhood and Youth, putting off until 1977 the publication of the second part of his autobiography: American Hunger. French-American mystic Thomas Merton issued his spiritual autobiography The Seven Storey Mountain in 1948. The decade of the 1960s sees the following autobiographies penned by American figures: Man Ray's Self-Portrait (1963), Malcolm X and Alex Haley's The Autobiography of Malcolm X (1965), Norman Mailer's The Armies of the Night (1968), which seeks to muddle the limits among history, fiction, and narrative of the self.

As we can see by the 1960s, the peak of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, the so-called 'ethnic' writers have found a literary tradition within the autobiographical genre. There were already texts in circulation written by authors whose identity was '"hyphenated" (i.e. Danish-American, Lithuanian-American, African-American, Mexican-American, etc.), but the late 1960s saw an increase in these texts. In a sense, autobiography as a genre has helped in its history to democratize literature. This is particularly relevant in the context of the United States, where autobiography provided forms of cultural enfranchisement to the non-mainstream communities, whether they be 'ethnic', non-heteronormative, and/or feminist. This increase in life narratives by women, the working class, the poor, the minorities has brought to national attention their social conditions, and has helped depict the actual composite of the nation, whether social, cultural, or otherwise.

While African-American literature might come quickly to mind when speaking of life narratives by minorities (from the autobiographies of Douglass to those of Booker T. Washington, Richard Wright, Langston Hughes, Malcolm X, Sidney Poitier, Maya Angelou, to President Obama –to name a few), other groups have also produced narratives of the self. Among the Asian-American autobiographies we should mention Chiang Yee's The Silent Traveller (1937), Carlos Bulosan's America Is in the Heart (1946), Monlin Chiang's Tides

From the West: A Chinese Autobiography (1947), Maxine Hong Kinsgston's The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts (1976), Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's Dicteé (1980), Akira Kurosawa's Something Like an Autobiography (1982), Nien Cheng's Life and Death in Shanghai (1986), Meena Alexander's Fault Lines (1992), and Amy Tan's The Opposite of Fate: A Book of Musings (2003).

US Latino authors have not been extraneous to this, and have often resorted to the narratives of the self to build and cement a group conscience in the community. Autobiographical writing has not been profuse in Hispanic letters (whether Latin American or Spanish), but these authors do take advantage of the richer tradition in English letters. We will review the presence of narratives of the self in U.S. Latino literatures, with a special emphasis on Mexican American and Chicano letters in the following chapter.

1.2.3. Literary theory and autobiography: Mapping the genre

Autobiography exists, without question, but one wonders, then, what constitutes the genre, formally speaking. As Virginia Woolf states in a 1935 letter to her nephew Julian Bell: "… all we can do is to herd books into groups…and thus we get English literature into A B C; one, two, three; and lose all sense of what it's about." (Bell 173n) In our impulse to classify into groups, define and categorize, sometimes we construct a definition that obscures the defined, thus becoming moot.

As we have seen, autobiography is a textual expression that has been solidly established for several centuries already, although recognition as a literary genre did not occur until the twentieth century. In part, this lack of recognition as literature –and hence, as a literary genre—stems from it not being granted aesthetic value. Elizabeth Bruss puts forward that the only effective definition would be one that reflects a literary category that

can be experienced as something that constrains or directs the acts of reading and writing and allows both reader and writer an interpretation of their actions (1).

In order to become a genre, a literary text must comprise recognizable features, and the roles and purposes that make up said text must be relatively stable within a community of readers and writers. In this way, a genre is similar to Merleau-Ponty's notion of institution: "those events in experience which endow it with durable dimensions, in relation to which a whole series of other experiences will acquire meaning, will form an intelligible series or a history" (40). In this sense, a literary genre –in our case autobiography as a genre—depends on the organizing nature of human beings.

However, recognizing the autobiography as an established genre does not imply there have been no changes. Russian formalist Tynjanov already pointed out the variable nature of genres when he stated in "On Literary Evolution": "The novel, which seems to be an integral genre that has developed in and of itself over the centuries, turns out to be not an integral whole but a variable. Its material changes from one literary system to another […] we cannot […] define the genre of a work if it is isolated from the system. For example, what was called an ode in the 1820s or by Fet was so labeled on the basis of features different from those used to define an ode in Lomonosov's time" (70).

Bruss cleverly points out that in spite of the existence of elements within a given text that "help us recognize what generic force it should have, we cannot state a priori what these features will be […] Outside the social and literary conventions that create and maintain it, autobiography has no features – has in fact no being at all." (6) When it comes to consider autobiography as a literary genre, we need to combine change with continuity in autobiographical writing, and build our justification in a way that it will not misrepresent

individual autobiographies. So as to achieve this, we need to look at the form of a text, as well as at the function assigned to that text.

Although autobiography has been around in literature for centuries, and the subject referred to specifically with that name since the for a bit more than two hundred years as we illustrated in the previous sections, critical interest in the field is more recent. German philosopher Georg Misch (1878-1965) wrote Geschichte der Autobiographie, a monumental history of autobiography in several volumes, the first of which was published in 1907. The first English edition was not published until 1950 by Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd. This publication set off an increasing interest in studying the area from a critical and theoretical perspective. While Misch's focus was from a historical perspective, it signaled some shift from previous interest in the field. In the past, both readers and critics expressed a concern for the self. Those who were attracted to a particular author's work found in the writer's life an answer that allowed them to better understand his or her texts and at the same time it was a motivator for reading. According to this deterministic outlook, one could understand a text through the analysis of its source, thus establishing a causal relation between the author and his/her work. By providing a more historical approach, Misch opened the door for other critics who dealt with the study of autobiography based on the notion of a preexisting ontological self. Misch defined autobiography as "the description (*graphia*) of an individual human life (*bios*) by the individual himself (*autos*)" (5) and it is intrinsically linked to its time and period: "autobiographies are bound always to be representative of their period, within a range that will vary with the intensity of the author's participation in contemporary life and with the sphere in which they moved." (12) Thus, only individuals who have led lives in the public arena, or who have had crucial participation in historical events, and/or are famous, are the appropriate agents of an autobiography. This responds to the strict divide between high and low culture, proper of that time. This historical perspective, and consequently this

division between high culture and low culture, will be challenged much later with the interest in micro-history by the marginalized minorities. In a sense they try to overcome Misch's restrictive notion of autobiography; a notion that is also prescriptive, in the vogue of his time. By separating high and low culture, many forms of recording private life –letters, journals, diaries, etc.—were excluded from the genre, and from scholar attention.

New Criticism considered autobiography a lesser form of literature, and the critical study of the genre became dormant. Thus, the next seminal study on the genre, Georges Gusdorf's "Conditions et limites de l'autobiographie", published in 1956, became a milestone by claiming that autobiography is something specific to culture: "[t]he author of an autobiography gives a sort of relief to his image by reference to the environment with its independent existence."(29) Gusdorf, who launched what later would be called the classic theory of autobiography, asserted that autobiography was a firmly established genre whose history could be easily established through the masterpieces of Western literature. For him, autobiography is limited in time and space: it is a late occurrence in Western culture, beginning with the embedding of Christian contributions –especially the idea of confession— into Western traditions. Gusdorf goes on further to affirm that non-Western narratives of the self, such as Gandhi's, use Western means –the autobiographical genre—to uphold the East. Thus, he surmises that the concern of the self by Western man has been a useful tool in intellectually colonizing the other and a means to systematically conquer the world (28-29). Moreover, for Gusdorf, it is peculiar to western man the idea of narrating one's own life in order to elongate such life even beyond death, again recalling Christian concepts and, therefore, obliterating Eastern notions of life writing. In a sense, an according to Gusdorf's ideas, the autobiographer delights in being looked at, and believes her/his achievements should not be forgotten, thus disappear, with her/his passing. Thus, autobiography develops in a cultural system where consciousness of self is central, which will point towards issues of

identity. Gusdorf points out that while in biography the historian –who is aware of carrying out a task similar to that of an artist— is removed from his subject of study by the passage of time and/or a social distance, in autobiography artist and model coincide, and the historian regards himself as object of study. Thus, the interest, indicates Gusdorf, is turned from public to private history. As the theoretician explains, the image depicted in autobiography "is another "myself," a double of my being […] invested with a sacred character that makes it at once fascinating and frightening."(32) The critic brings in the psychological theories of Jacques Lacan about the mirror stage in the formation of the self. For Gusdorf, autobiography and the mirror reinforce the ritual of self-examination encouraged by Christianity: the self presents her/his accounts according to some rhetorical tenets. Renaissance and Reformation remove penitence from the self-examination, since Western man starts to disregard the tarnish of the transcendent, and sees himself a man of nature. This is the self that Montaigne brings forth in his Essays, where there is no adherence to any doctrine, thus becoming secularized, and man starts to reveal facets of his individuality. This new freedom of the individual allows him to believe that everything is at his reach. This praise of the individual self heightened in Romanticism brought new interest in autobiography. Individuality as a virtue is related to the concept of sincerity: the value of telling all, which Rousseau advocated. The emphasis now is on the complexity of man, and his contradictions as a human being. Therefore, autobiography is veering away from the model of Christian confession and into a form bolstered by the principles of the psychological.

We can argue, then, that Georges Gusdorf noticed the Western man's common interest in the consciousness of the singularity of individual life, even if that life reflects a cultural and historical totality. With the studies in historiography by Wilhelm Dilthey and Georg Misch, Gusdorf assumed that the artistic and literary purpose of autobiography was secondary to its anthropological function, an assumption which, on the one hand, was a

departure from the tenets of the New Criticism and, on the other, established the basis to believe in autobiography as a genre committed to convey truth.

According to this understanding of the genre, the limits to which he refers in the title to his seminal article are those of time and space, as they are applied to contemporary Western culture. As a result of the ideas owing to both anthropology and history, man positions autobiography in its cultural moment. Context, then, becomes an integral part of the discourse. Not only does the author consider her/his life worthy of special interest, but s/he gives witness of her/his self and rebuilds her/his own history reorganizing the events in a comprehensive outline that is aimed to allow the author to safeguard her/his legacy which in the views of the autobiographer must not wane. It is important that we underline the efforts on the part of the author to compose a narrative in retracing a part of her/his life, and not just put together a series of life events side by side. To this purpose, the author distances from him/her self so that s/he can re-create him/her self in the focal point of the text both within a given cultural moment and across time. In other words, the autobiographer has the benefit of finding out and uncovering her/his self from the other side of the mirror and the advantage of doing justice to her/him self better that anyone else. Through autobiography, Gusdorf posits, the author restores an incomplete or deformed truth, the text being devoted then to the defense and/or exaltation of the author's life. It is, then, a task of personal salvation. However, the narrative of a life is not the mimetic double of such life. The past is gone, and we are in front of a re-creation of the past, where conscious discourses blend with unconscious motivations in the narrating of a life. According to Gusdorf "the narrative is conscious, and since the narrator's consciousness directs the narrative, it seems to him incontestable that it has also directed his life." (41). However, memory brings back details in a particular light, which is an unconscious process. When it comes to narrate a life, the narrative itself bestows a given significance to the event depicted, which might be different to

the one it had when it originally occurred, or just one of many, or even an importance it never had to begin with. This brings us back to the idea of truth that was key in the confessional autobiographies of the beginning. Because the narrating of a life is a re-presentation, it cannot be a mere "record of existence, an account book or a logbook," (Gusdorf 42) but a recounting of events with a given meaning, meaning that is subordinated to the truth of the author, subjected to both: his unconscious view of the events, and his conscious effort to construct the narrative. Autobiographical truth is, hence, subjective truth. An element that takes part of that subjective truth is the effort of the author to re-construct her/himself in her/his own resemblance at a given time. The narrative of self is a historical document about a life. In this sense, the early theorists of autobiography followed the ideas of Dilthey: man is a historical being. And according to the German positivist philosopher, we understand everything (whether outside or inside of us) in relation to what we are: history is linked to our autobiography.

Gusdorf, however, notices that there is a literary element in autobiography, which is "of greater importance that the historic and objective function," (43) but the French scholar is reluctant to give it a central role, for he claims that the literary is less important than the anthropological (43-44). Gusdorf views re-presentation as a problem: the rhetorical relationship between what autobiography is and what it represents. Given that autobiography cannot be a faithful account of life, but just an account, Gusdorf views it as a symbol or "the parable of a consciousness in quest of its own truth." (44). As the individual is always in progress, autobiography is never a fixed, unchanging, image of such life, but the fixing of a creation of such existence at a given time. It fixes a retrospective look, but not a finished life. In sum, Gusdorf underlines that autobiography does not reveal the objective events or periods of a life, but the attempts of a writer to provide with meaning the myth of his/her re-created life.

Following Gusdorf's theories, Roy Pascal wrote Design and Truth in Autobiography (1960), where he revealed his interest in the individuality of self. By asserting that autobiography is a product of Western civilization subsequent to the Roman times, Pascal laid emphasis on defining the subject as a sieve through which the outside world is filtered, and in the fact that the selectivity with which certain experiences are accumulated creates a bigger truth than the objective account of an era by a historian or biographer.

After Gusdorf and Pascal, this historic treatment of the self ended in a series of criticism about autobiography that received the label of transcendentalist or existentialist, in reference to the notion of a pre-existing, autonomous self from which autobiography would derive. This branch of criticism was interested in the authorial subject, whether just in the self or as provider of insight into the writer's work.

It was unavoidable that the historic perspective of autobiography as a culturally determined phenomenon, dependent on certain notions of individualism, took some theoreticians to specifically relate the origin of the genre with Romanticism and its enthusiasm with subjectivity; more so when it was the Romantics the ones who saw the work as the clear materialization of the author's creative genius. They used the "I" in its more personal dimension, even existentialist one may say, to the point of opening the possibility to assert that all of the Romantic works can be interpreted from the standpoint of autobiography, regardless of their genre.

James Olney's Metaphors of Self (1972) opens the genre to a higher theoretical plateau, allowing for the concept of subjectivity to become part of the analysis. This led to the challenging of that prescriptive and restrictive notion of autobiography that earlier theoreticians had conceived. In turn, the ways of self-narrating, and of approaching autobiography expanded.

William Boelhower puts the emphasis on the fragmentation and de-centering of identity. For him, autobiography in the mid-1900s displayed a rupture from modernism in reflecting the fluidity of identity. By bringing de-centered identities into the discussion, Boelhower opens a new direction of analysis.

This de-centering of the self leads Michel Leiris to parallel the examination of the self with the analysis of others. This triggers the concept that autobiography is an apostrophe, an address to the other, which presents the writer's ideas to others in a communicative circuit. This is particularly evident in the case of serial autobiographies; that is, successive autobiographies by a writer that appear with a given cadence. This is the case of the writer in this study: Richard Rodriguez has published a new autobiography every ten years approximately. By addressing the others in an apostrophic manner, autobiography shatters the limits of the genre to particularized lives. Leiris, who is an ethnologist and ethnographer by training, helps us understand how the "I", by being subjected to the presence of the others, becomes the self of a community. Thus, personal autobiography can become the autobiography of a community, something that is of particular interest to underrepresented groups within the genre, namely the so-called "ethnic" communities. This brings about a particular problem: being both the subject and the object of the autobiographical discourse, which Roland Barthes explores in his autobiography. Other writers will explore issues of language and representation in their inquiry on the self, calling autobiography into question and attempting to demonstrate the impossibility of conceiving the genre in a traditional way.

Postcolonial and multicultural critics also propose alternatives to the traditional notion of self. This becomes germane to the analysis of autobiographies by non-mainstream authors. Calling Western norms of identity and experience into question, these autobiographers bring their status as the West's "others" and their demand to be taken into account within the

cultural discourse into the limelight. For these authors and critics, contemporary autobiographies are invested with a redemptive quality that is essential to the genre. These autobiographical acts construct subject positions through which to contest displacement and marginality, and posit a new subjectivity, based on its hybrid, transcultural, diasporic, and/or nomadic nature. These narratives of the self move the "I" towards the collective and challenge traditional boundaries of identification. Derridean deconstruction, Barthesian semiotics, and Foucaultian discursive notion of power are significant theoretical foundations.

Karl Weintraub in The Value of the Individual (1978) saw in autobiography the genre that emerged as corollary of the valuation of Western culture. Weintraub focused on the history of individuality from Saint Augustine to Goethe, and he noticed a clear escalation in individualism once the 19th century began. This rapid development has its explanation in the fact that it is not until then that the point of view of the individual and the self-consciousness of the author were articulated with considerable prominence. Then autobiography starts to be judged by its truth-value, which is no other than the subjective truth of the author's opinion on his or her life. Because author and subject are considered the same entity, there is the need of certain consistency between style and subject: autobiography.

When it comes to establish a theory of the autobiographical genre, scholars have explored many more variations of autobiography as an individual or social dimension of the intellectual or moral character, depending on the times. However, the most outstanding intellectual when it comes to formulate a formal generic definition of autobiography is Philippe Lejeune. He is the first theoretician to devote a considerable effort to establish categorical differences between autobiography and the novel, even though the former employs resources that one normally associates to the latter, let alone the fusion of autobiography and fiction by some writers. Lejeune tried to define autobiography in

L'Autobiographie en France (1971) but he realized that such definition needed to be further clarified and refined, in part because the theoretical discussion surrounded the same triangle: fiction, biography and autobiography and the relationships between the latter and the former two terms. In order to shed light on the nature of the genre, Lejeune published in 1975 his fundamental essay *Le Pacte autobiographique*. For Lejeune, autobiography consists of a "[r]etrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality." (4) This definition requires that the text is narrative and in prose; its subject is the life of an individual and/or the story of a personality; the author and narrator are one and the same; the narrator and the protagonist coincide, and the narrator takes a retrospective viewpoint. Thus, Lejeune isolates autobiography from memoirs (these are not the account of an individual life); from biography (the narrator is not the same as the protagonist); from personal novels (where author and narrator are not one); from diaries and journals (where the narration is not retrospective); from the autobiographical poem (since the text would not be in prose); and from the essay (which Lejeune does not regard as having a retrospective point of view nor a narrative form).

Therefore, according to Lejeune, the textual attribute by which once can distinguish more autobiography from fiction is framed in a contract, or pact, between the text and the reader. This pact starts with the attribution of authorship from the title page of the text, and continues the length of the work. Thanks to this autobiographical pact; that is, by means of the autobiographer's first name, the self-referential dimension of the text finds verifiable referents in society and in history. Within the tradition of first person narrative, which is the dominant tradition in the genre, identity is shared at the same level by author, narrator, and protagonist. One can state that narrative in autobiography is the statute of self-reference, and the identification among them of the three constituents of the self in the text. This "pact" establishes the identity among author, narrator, and protagonist, and serves to uphold the

borders between autobiography and the novel. Contrary to other forms of fiction, Lejeune observes that autobiography offers actual, non-hypothetical information on an outside reality, which in turn makes him consider the issue of authenticity in autobiographical writing. Because of the "autobiographical pact", Lejeune is able to demarcate the space of autobiography against other neighboring fields, such as that of biography, memoirs, diaries, biographical sketches, or first person novel, since one cannot detect the autodiegetic identification that the French theoretician posits.

While Lejeune allows for some relaxation in the limits he establishes ("[i]t is obvious that the different categories are not all equally restrictive: certain conditions can be met for the most part without being satisfied completely" (5)), his definition of autobiography is meant to be quite limited, and while he distinguishes between autobiographical poems and autobiographies, other contemporary scholars see the possibility of an autobiography in poetic form. Likewise, we will contend later, that some autobiographies can adopt features proper to the essay form.

The crucial element for Lejeune is the distinction between autobiography, biography and the personal novel, which he summarizes in the strict observance to the following features: the author, narrator and protagonist must be identical in the case of autobiography. This has been summarized among the scholars of the genre as the "autobiographical pact", echoing Lejeune's title. By calling this a pact, it stresses the need of the reader to agree to read the text with the implied accord that protagonist, narrator and author are one and the same entity.

Lejeune himself observed that this autobiographical pact as not without problems. These issues arise in part from the challenges that the notion of identity presents, especially in

regards to its inscription in the text and its relation to the construction of a discourse[2]. The French scholar asks himself how the author's and narrator's identity appears in the autobiographical text. He follows Benveniste's theories, but unlike him, Lejeune asserts that "I" does not lose himself in anonymity, but there is a proper name behind the first person. When it comes to the written autobiography, the proper name along the title or on the cover assumes responsibility and is automatically linked to the "I" of the text. Furthermore, it is the only incontestable link between the text and the world beyond it. By social convention, the author is a real person responsible for the creating a discourse, whose existence is beyond doubt. To this effect pseudonyms are but another given name, but in essence do not alter anything regarding the issue of identity, especially since in the text the author might explain the origin of such pen name. To Lejeune there is a distinction when it comes to considering authorship of autobiographical texts: there has to be other non-autobiographical texts for the autobiographical space to exist, in other words, to instill in the reader a sign of reality. Autobiography, therefore, assumes an identity claimed at the level of enunciation, the uttered similarity between the life of the character and the author is secondary. To Lejeune, the texts where the reader suspects of similarity between protagonist, narrator and author, but there is no claimed identity, are autobiographical novels. The autobiographical pact allows no room for guessing or suspecting; its entire mission is to affirm in the text the equation author-narrator-protagonist by connecting the text to the name in the title page. This identity is confirmed by entitling the text in a way there is no doubt or by explaining at the beginning of the text that the "I" refers to the author. Lejeune calls this implicit. The equation among the three elements can also be determined by using the same name for narrator and protagonist than that of the author. According to Lejeune, we are only in front of an autobiography if

[2] Lejeune explains expands these challenges especially when questioning the role of the author, more so when there is narration in third person, since identity is not ascertained by the use of "I", and we may be facing a biography while being consistent with the essence of autobiography, since author, character and narrator coincide. However, this is not the case in the autobiographies we are analyzing in this project, so we will set aside this distinction.

there is an autobiographical pact and either the protagonist's and author's name are explicitly the same, or the protagonist has no name, but the author has declared that the identity is the same as the narrator; or if there is no pact but the reader confirms their equal identity. In the case of the autobiographies that we are analyzing here, the author has declared the texts as autobiographies, and the name of the protagonist and narrator are one and the same with the author.

We should consider what Lejeune understands by identity. For him, "it is a fact immediately grasped –accepted or refused, at the level of enunciation," (21) while the mere nuances at the utterance level will constitute resemblance between the "I" and the author, but no identity can be established.

Criticism to Lejeune's paradigm stems from his lack of rigor in applying the "autobiographical pact." He included the work of Sartre in his study, under the assertion that new forms of narrative would allow for the evolution of the autobiographical genre. Also, by placing Proust in an ambiguous area between autobiography and fiction, Lejeune seems to mine the definition of the genre he had laid down.

Elizabeth Bruss publishes her Autobiographical Acts in 1776. In it, she also focuses in the referential quality of the autobiographical; that is, in the identity between author and narrator. Bruss's study argues that autobiography cannot be approached by means of chronology, nor as the writer's disclosure of experience. For the scholar, autobiography is neither mimetic, nor linear, but a series of performative acts. Memory plays a crucial role in the performance of autobiography. However, in her exposition Bruss proposes a series of requirements that need to be met: there must be an identifiable subject, a truth value linked to the honesty of the writer, and a part of what is being treated has to directly relate to the identity of the author. This attempt to define the genre ends up being too restrictive, and it is

incapable of closely following the evolution of the autobiographical genre in the last decades of the 20th century and the first of the following one. Bruss' theory remains in the concrete without arriving to the realm of the general.

Taking the performative nature a step beyond, Louis Renza postulates that the writer brings the past to the present by way of memory, and that process is not a simple recollection. As a consequence of this "presentifying" of the past –as the scholar calls it—, the past informs the moment of the writing. Autobiography, hence, is an active cognitive process. We can argue, then, that in autobiography there are three times: that of the past, that of the actual writing –which is informed by the past—, and that of the reading –which is informed by the reader himself.

As we can see, by now there is an established opposition to those theoreticians who defended the substantiation of autobiography from external factors to the text. The prevailing scholars center their analyses in the exploration of the self by the self, and thus, they favor the intentional content of the text, going further than the representative value of the narration. William Spengemann treats autobiography as a genre that evolves from history to philosophy, to end up in the realm of poetics. Far from limiting the scope of the genre, he widens it, when he declares that in contemporary writing that which started as a biography of the self takes on features belonging to fiction.

For his part, Richard Coe adopts a thematic approach when he attempts to define a variation of narrative of the self closely related to the childhood experience. This leads him to bring about the notion of inner truth in place of a historically verifiable truth. This inner truth, often a symbolic and even poetic one, is exclusive to the author. Therefore, the autobiographical text is closely related to the novel, since it mainly deals with a narrative

sequence that reflects the development of the author's self until he or she acquires a certain degree of maturity.

For Linda Peterson the autobiographical genre is demarcated by a closed, spiritual interpretation that has its origins in the interpretation of Biblical commentaries. According to Peterson, the difference between novel and writing of the self resides in that the former is concerned with the narration, with the expression of a self, and with representation, while the latter focuses on the interpretation of self by the same self whereas the narrative structure is not a central feature. Despite the fact that Peterson centers her study in English Victorian texts, her distinction can be applied to a broader theoretical frame. This application is also backed by the influence of Victorian letters in subsequent narrative. As a curiosity we should remark here that one of the chapters of the autobiographies that we analyze here, Days of Obligation, is titled "Late Victorians."

At the same time that this historical vision based on the existentialist concept of self as an independent entity is being developed, there are attempts to define the autobiographical genre from deconstructivism, especially after the questioning of the authorial figure that both Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault put forward. Barthes' "The Death of the Author" distinguishes between the author's emotion and intention, and it is opposed to the personal notion of author inherited from the classics. Foucault sustains that the author's facts of life limit the texts, stating that the author is "the principle of thrift in the proliferation of meaning." ("What is an Author?" 118). This is a convenient functional construction that allows for the limiting of the work's meaning. The structuralist Genette questioned any approach that connected the life of the author with his or her work. In Figures III, Genette considers the literary work, in this case Proust's autobiography In Search of Lost Time, as a series of rhetoric strategies that are oblivious to any referent in the real world. By refuting the

assumption of a previous existence of an ontological I in an objective world external to the text, deconstructivist theories expropriated autobiographical discourse of the referential truth that classic and essentialist theoreticians transmitted, even though they related other types of truth to these narratives.

Mehlman had affirmed in the mid-1970s that the modern attempts in the field of autobiography revealed the impossibility of re-living one's life, what later on will be addressed as the impossibility of self-representation. Along these lines, Paul de Man argues that writing of the self, or the texts qualified as autobiographical, offer a mirage of reference rather than a referential truth. For de Man the writing of the self cannot even be considered a genre. Michael Sprinkler is, perhaps, of all deconstructivist theoreticians, the one who goes furthest in his dismantling analysis. Sprinkler posits that both autobiography and the idea of the author as the sovereign of the discourse are purely epistemological products, and they have no validity from the very moment when the ontologic self of the 19th century has disappeared, thus ending any formal possibility for the writing of the self.

Deconstructivist criticism on autobiography evolved into postmodernism. Ihab Hassan considered autobiography an impossible form, since he questioned the possibility of reviving a life without falling in the creases of its own hermeneutic circle.

However there are other stances that have viewed the narratives of the self less as a literary form preoccupied with rhetoric strategies and more as a cognitive form of perception. These psychological orientations are apparent in the critical works of James Olney and Paul John Eakin. By associating with the narrative of the self the terms of metaphor and fictions, respectively, both these scholars posit that autobiographical truth is designed after certain configurations produced by the phenomenological I. That is, they are worried about the mechanics of that mental activity, thus leaving behind the idea of a fixed self, characteristic

of the static psychology. In this way, Olney and Eakin perceive autobiography from a theory that we can label as theory of perception, based on a notion of a dynamic self that is at the same time operative and experimental.

In Metaphors of Self, James Olney deems the mind of an autobiographer a metaphor generating mechanism. He intuited from the onset that one should not judge the narratives of the self as a formal nor historical matter, but rather as the presentation of self in its development through the interference of metaphor, since considering the I from an existentialist point of view, or any other point of view for that matter, becomes irrelevant to the role of that I in the autobiographical text. Therefore, instead of busying himself with the prescribing of an ontology of being, Olney develops what he calls the ontology of autobiography, which he describes as "the order of reality that an autobiography can make claim to." ("Some Versions" 237) In the same article, he upholds that the I is manifested by means of figurative constructions that transmute their historical past –his or her life—into a second degree life, product of the creative power of the mind: "The bios of an autobiography, we may say, is what the 'I' makes of it… neither the autos or the bios is there in the beginning." ("Some Versions" 247) The creation of this life –*bios*—in what can be called its derivative results in in the ontology of autobiography, which reconstitutes the first narrative and historical level within the phenomenological that is present in the text by virtue of the creative act of remembrance itself. Hence, facts from the past are reinterpreted under the light of the current awareness of the autobiographer, and the relationship between the actual events in the past and those portrayed in the text is based more in their significance than in chronology. In this light, certain elements linked to the life of the author, such as places, times, or individuals are portrayed as universal, eternal, and poetic. By eliminating the narrative and chronologic criteria in regards to the lived events while at the same time avoiding any generic obstacle, Olney centers his attention in the practice of what can be

called autobiographical, more than what has been labeled as autobiography according to generic terms strictly. This scholar has also occupied himself in establishing the resources that allow us to operate with a feature present in most of the narratives of the self: the relationship between the I from the present and the I from the past.

With a similar disposition to Olney's, Paul John Eakin argues that autobiography is a psychological activity typified by a progressive process of creativity and re-invention of the self by himself. According to Eakin, the autobiographical act is a restaging of the drama of identity formation, not as a mere unblemished, transparent record of a completed, polished, refined self, but as a decisive stage within the uncertainty, ambiguity, and anguish that self-definition entails.

In his first book, Fictions in Autobiography (1985), Eakin reveals his preoccupation for the degrees of truth and fiction that may be present in formal autobiographies. Already in 1957, Northrop Frye had dealt with the cultural ramifications of literature and by placing autobiography under the epigraph of fiction, he contributed to the ambiguity we perceive today. In Anatomy of Criticism (1957), Fry fused together fiction and narrative of the self by means of a gradation that made him classify the texts as "confession" or "fictional autobiography" whether they had been published before or after Rousseau's Confessions. In Frye's words, autobiography "merges with the novel by a series of insensible gradations. Most autobiographies are inspired by a creative, and therefore fictional, impulse to select only those events and experiences in the writer's life that go to build up an integrated pattern" (307).

Instead of starting from this traditional standpoint, passed down from Rousseau, which supports the notion that fiction favors the success of the autobiographical text, Eakin assumes from the onset that autobiographical truth is made up by certain myths or fictions.

He asserts that individual personality is ascertained along with the acquisition of language, and that it is a mythical structure. Eakin shows how writers have incorporated fiction in the publication of their lives when they try to touch on biographical truth, and the scholar affirms that it is precisely that intentionality what characterizes autobiography as such. Together with Olney, Eakin believes that one may consider as factual, real, the past that memory formulates, as well as the needs of consciousness in the present; thus, attenuating the differences between the being from the past and the being from the present, and in this way creating a self through the writing of memory.

In Eakin's Touching the World (1992), the scholar reaffirms the referential structures of narrative and chronology, while at the same time underscoring the interdependence between language and the self, and mitigating the tensions that appear in the debate about autobiographical writing between essentialist and textualist critics. When Eakin upholds that autobiography is a narrative that is necessarily based on temporality, he is defending Lejeune's "autobiographical pact", although he regards autobiography's referential art with a caveat: the nature of referentiality in the 20th century does not necessarily presuppose a simple model of cohesive individuality, something that was characteristic of an earlier epistemology. It is clear, then, that Eakin partakes of a phenomenological notion of self that has its origin in Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics. It was Ricoeur who analyzed representation of time in narrative by stating that narrative as a reference structure cannot be interpreted as something proper to a specific time, which was a literary convention inherited from the 19th century historicist paradigm of subject.

Because of the close relationship between contextual referentiality and autobiography, we must approach the ties between sociology and the narratives of the self. This connection is particularly important due to the concerns of literary theory and criticism with ethnic and

gender issues. In this sense, the historical treatment of subject has been replaced with these orientations, foci perceived as representative of the social groups that ooze multicultural diversity. Interest on multiculturalism emerges from the social improvements of the 1970s and 1980s, and it acquires special relevance in the field of literary theory from the mid-1980s onwards. In 1994, David T. Goldberg theorizes on the effects of cultural heterogeneity with regard to the individual. It is in this context that the notion of the individuality of the self is being appraised, but instead of examining it as a private subjectivity, it is being studied as a cultural construction where terms such as "the other" and "difference" come up constantly in the critical discourse. This discourse attempts to make inventory of those differences based on gender –feminine, masculine, heterosexual, homosexual—, and/or differences grounded on cultural otherness. It aims to define and theorize autobiography by including these variables in the practice of textual analysis.

The narratives of the self have contributed in a significant way to the development of social history and political thought because they offer the possibility of enunciation to individuals who otherwise would be excluded of the spheres of public, social, and political representation. The debates on gender and sexual issues have been important in the development of the social movements of women and of lgbttq+ groups[3]. What is more, they have been invaluable in the formulations about the distinctive nature of women's and of lgbttq+ literatures. Because the distinction man/woman and heteronormative/non-heteronormative (whether gay, lesbian, bisexual, …) have function in Western history as basis for social differentiation, we can assert that issues of identity, experience, and representation that one finds in women's and lgbttq+'s autobiographies are closely linked to more global affairs such as politics, culture and society.

[3] We use the term lgbttq+ to represent lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, transgender, queer, and by the addition of the plus sign, we aim to include all other identities in the non-heteronormative communities. We are aware that the term lgbttq+ is not an exhaustive label, as there might be populations that fall outside it.

The body is a site of autobiographical knowledge –memory itself is embodied— and autobiographical narrators are embodied subjects, therefore life narrative is a site of embodied knowledge. Paul John Eakin argues "our lives in and as bodies profoundly shape our sense of identity." (How Our Lives xi) Cultural discourses dictate which aspects of the bodies become significant: what body becomes visible, how and when it becomes visible, and what that visibility means. In this sense, the autobiographers are also embodied in the sociopolitical body, since a series of cultural tenets and attitudes have encoded the public meanings of those bodies and at the same time have founded and reinforced social relationships of power. Chicana authors and activists Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga draw attention to their lesbian body as a source for their political consciousness, elaborating their complex position as women, lesbians, biracial and multicultural Chicanas.

Since the 1980s, feminist critics and scholars have found in the life narratives by women a wide, unexplored field that has allowed them to analyze the literary genre in relation to gender and sexual parameters. Elaine Showalter labeled them "gynocritics." ("Women's Time" 37) In using this term, Showalter includes the idea that these women belong to the American school of criticism, a school that aims to recover lost texts and to subvert the established literary canon. For their part, those scholars who build their work in a European philosophical, psychological, and/or linguistic intellectual tradition also find in autobiography fertile soil to explore gender issues. This is what Alice Jardine calls "gynesis." (26) A considerable group of female critics have explored the ways in which women's narratives of the self are different from the male written counterparts. Estelle Jelinek maintains in The Tradition of Women's Autobiography from Antiquity to the Present (1986) that women's autobiography shows a narrative discontinuity that is unique. Mary Mason claims that the female expresses her self through the other (207). Sidonie Smith argues that women autobiographies are constantly exploring the borders between the public and private

(A Poetics 43). Smith denounces that life narratives by women have been silenced or segregated –often labeled as anomalies (A Poetics 40)—, and that the only ones receiving the mainstream's attention are those that imitate male models and therefore reinforce the erasure of women from the field (A Poetics 41). Susan Friedman conceives female autobiography as a space where a collective consciousness is exhibited (64). One can postulate the same for lgbttq+ texts, as we will discuss later on.

After French feminism established how "man" erased "woman", French and American feminist theory has argued that the very term "woman" has altered, and even eliminated, the historical distinctiveness of many women. Thus, they search for a theoretical apparatus that allows for the affirmation of differences among women as well as of different voices within each individual woman. Françoise Lionnet uses the concept of *metissage* (248) to address this multiplicity, especially in relation to the postcolonial subject.

These cultural meanings that are assigned to particular bodies affect the types of stories people can tell, as we have seen in the case of women autobiographers. Something similar happens in the case of the lgbttq+ authors. Until the last decades of the 20th century, to speak of sex was to shame oneself. Only males that spoke about heteronormative sexual relationships found some reprieve. We do find some examples of narratives about sexual encounters by women and lgbttq+ subjects, but unless they are confessional autobiographies in which they seek redemption –and even then, they might not be published—, these narratives either reproduced or are read as reproducing the identification of sexual freedom with society's lower-classes. Thus women, and many men, were self-censoring about their bodies and their sexuality. Studies such as David Jackson's Unmasking Masculinity: A Critical Autobiography (1990) carries out the double task of critiquing articulations of

masculinity as well as reporting his findings on the social construction of his gendered and sexual identity.

Analogous to what happened in the case of life narratives by women, lgbttq+ narratives of the self make visible formerly invisible subjects. Oftentimes, these autobiographies are *Bildungsromane* in which the coming-out experience is recounted. In the majority of cases, lgbttq+ subjects address the cost of passing as heteronormative citizens and their efforts to be respected in their chosen sexual identities. In the beginning, these narratives of the self declare that their subjects have neither been represented, nor representable, in autobiographies. Because of this, lgbttq+ have been alienated twice when participating in the autobiographical act. This is the reason why they tackle their narratives from the standpoint of someone who speaks from the margins of autobiographical discourse. This raises a particularly conflictive relationship with the reader. Since autobiography is a public utterance, the lgbttq+ autobiographer speaks for both: the members of his/her lgbttq+ community as well as for the heteronormative subject. However, while addressing the latter, the writer manifests her/his position, and in her/his writing that s/he is conscious of the possible readings that her/his authorial discourse and reputation are subjected to. This way s/he projects onto the reader a series of cultural expectations with regards to the autobiographical narration. The autobiographer reveals the degree of self-consciousness of her/his position as writer who writes from a heteronormative genre through the dialogue with the reader, with that "other" to whom s/he is trying to explain and/or justify her/his life. By paying such attention to the reader, the autobiographer affects a change to the rigid nature of the genre.

Nevertheless, in recent years the texts that deal with sexual awakening have changed, and continue to do so, from an earlier narrative of victimization, loneliness, and secrecy to

stories of living within a recognized social group and rejecting a marginalized, stigmatized identity. While feminist collections of essays, usually published by small, independent presses, have served as an archive of lesbian writing (This Bridge Called My Back (1983) by Moraga and Anzaldúa, and Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras (1990), edited by Anzaldúa come to mind), new directions in gay life writing came into the literary scene a bit later (Dan Savage's The Kid (2000) or Augusten Burroughs' Running With Scissors (2002), among others).

Lgbttq+ autobiographies often develop from a crossroads of identities, for instance Fries's Body, Remember (2003) intertwines the author's identities as disabled, Jewish, and gay. This intersection of different identities is also present in the narratives of the self by U.S. Latino authors. For instance, in Eminent Maricones (1999) Jaime Manrique narrates his identity as a gay Latino artist while interconnecting it with the lives of three other prominent gay, Hispanic writers: Reinaldo Arenas, Federico García Lorca, and Manuel Puig. The Ortiz Taylor sisters collaborate in their narrative of life Imaginary Parents (1996) by piecing together words and artistic installations. Carmelita Tropicana, the *alter ego* of Alina Troyano, probes her identity as Latina lesbian performing artist in I, Carmelita Tropicana (2000). Two decades of Latino lgbttq+ narratives of the self have challenged prevailing discursive configurations of the non-herteronormative subject. We will explore in a later chapter the shift in lgbttq+ autobiography, and how and up to what extent the prevailing discourses are challenged in Richard Rodriguez's autobiographies, from Hunger of Memory (1982) to Darling (2013).

1.2.4. Blurring the distinction between autobiography and essay: Performative identity and the ethical

We have come to define autobiography by the distinction of fiction and non-fiction, as well as by the difference between rhetorical and experiential first-person narration. As we have already mentioned, such differences are products of culture, and as such they might be portrayed differently. As a literary artifact, narratives of the self are also subject to developments in the literary system as a whole. The emergence and disappearance of other genres, as well as the use of new forms of narration, have an effect on autobiography as well. Popular features from earlier times –diaries and epistles, for example— make it possible for narratives of the self to adopt them as a way to express closeness, while textual strategies and structures associated with one particular genre might be appropriated by another –for instance, autobiographies, such as the ones we will analyze in this study, adopt narrative strategies and structures characteristic of the essay. By the same token, when the novel adopted the first-person narrator as a way of granting realism to the plot, its presence alone ceased to be enough to discriminate autobiography from fiction and its use was no longer the prevailing feature in the definition of the genre. Moreover, the use of this autobiographical first-person voice adopted a subjective, less pragmatic, value. Direct observation, eyewitness accounts no longer appear as marke autobiographical features. On the other hand, autobiography has adopted strategies and techniques of other forms of discourse. Such is the case of the apology, which has become almost exclusively associated with the narratives of the self, leaving behind its original functions.

Despite the fact that the diversity of narrative techniques and strategies seem to point towards the notion that there is no intrinsically autobiographical forms, there are some common features that allow us to qualify a given text as autobiography, as we have seen in

the previous section. One, the autobiographer is at once author, narrator and protagonist; that is, s/he is the source of the subject matter as well as the supplier of the structure of the text. Two, the events concerning the author are alleged to be truthful: regardless of their public or private nature, the reader is expected to accept the account as true. Three, the autobiographer proclaims to believe in what s/he contends. Regardless of whether the author sporadically breaks these characteristics or not, it is imperative that the reader understands the autobiographer to be responsible for meaning to meet them. As we have stated before, this is what Philippe Lejeune coined as the "autobiographical pact." The act of self-imaging and self-evaluation by the author is understood to take place, and it is acknowledged as a kind of self-evaluation. Because readers are conscious of this, any amount and type of revelation, as well as their form of expression become central to the reading of a work perceived and understood as autobiographical. But the narrative of the self is also a construct, and from the manner in which an author manipulates his readers, and in the fashion he imagines his implied readership, the audience can extract inferences about the autobiographer's interaction with others. Since identity is composed not only by self-perception, but also by our looking at others looking at us, and how we reconstruct and alter those views of the others about us, context is also of significance when reading autobiography.

Due to the significance of context, the concept of autobiography as the literary reproduction of one's life has been replaced with the notion of autobiography as a performance; that is, the re-creation of the self in the time of writing. This evolution was already traceable in the early works by Georges Gusdorf, who asserts that autobiography "effects a true creation of self by the self" (44) and as a result we have access to a "new and more profound sense of truth as an expression of inmost being" (44). Because of the intended manipulation of the discourse by the author, in order to affect the reader as well as to build an apology or justify the protagonist's actions, we must detach autobiography from the concept

of truth, to which it was closely related originally. The early forms of autobiography stem from the Christian model of confession, and thus were fixed around the belief that what the author poured on the pages was the truth. If we consider the text to be a construct, we cannot rely on this belief. In fact, contemporary studies in narratives of the self reject the concept of autobiographical truth as something external to the self, something objectively verifiable, and replace it with a much more elusive definition. Autobiographical truth is an internal concept, created by the self. Truth, as we alluded to in the previous section, becomes subjective rather than objective, and therefore the mechanisms of verification of truth become far more complex, if at all possible. This opens the flood gates to new considerations, among which the one that interests us is that autobiography, when considered as an act of self-creation, becomes a rhetoric artifact.

Along those lines, Paul John Eakin maintains that autobiography is a form of self-invention that is being produced at the time of writing, and which is parallel to the person's access to identity at the time of language acquisition. For Eakin "the writing of autobiography emerges as a symbolic analogue of the initial coming together of the individual and language that marks the origin of self-awareness" (Fictions 213). Eakin, however, does not clarify what he means by that "symbolic analogue."

Another reaction to the considerations that derive from the shift of emphasis in autobiography to the moment of its writing is that which centers on the control the reader has over the text. As we have already seen, this is a point of view upheld by Elizabeth Bruss, who asserts that autobiography functions as illocutionary acts. Philippe Lejeune also reflects on the role of the reader. To this regard, Paul de Man states that critics such as Lejeune maintain that "the identity of autobiography is not only representational and cognitive but contractual,

grounded not in tropes but in speech acts" (71), which turn the reader into a significant authority.

At the beginning, we saw how autobiography was regarded as mimetic, then with the shift from text-centered towards the notion of subject, de Man used the figure of prosopopoeia as a trope for autobiography. With the increased interest on the figure of the other, that trope changed. Scholars were aware that the writer of narratives of the self was cognizant of an implied reader and, therefore, the text was being seen as an address to the reader. For Paul de Man, "the restoration of mortality by autobiography (the prosopopeia of the voice and the name) deprives and disfigures to the precise extent that it restores. Autobiography veils a de-facement of the mind of which it is itself the cause."(81). This refutation of autobiography as mimesis aimed to restore a life implies that the genre is more than a simple restoration or recount of a life. Autobiography is seen now as a referentially-productive discursive practice. Narratives of the self provide life with form and meaning, constructing a meaning of life by means of refutable discourses. Therefore, autobiography is in the end a performative act, not a mere cognitive function.

Turning our eyes now towards the so-called minorities, when it comes to draw a markedly feminist autobiography, critics like Sidonie Smith, within the frame of Women Studies, also center the argument in the time of writing when they affirm that autobiography is an interpretative act of the past, and that because of its interpretative nature, this act is neither fixed nor completely recoverable from the present time of writing. One of the contributions of the feminist theories to the field of autobiography –and one which is particularly relevant to the so-called ethnic autobiographies— is the unending exploration of a variety of discourses, at times contradictory among themselves, that take part in the construction of feminine subjectivities. This is something that Smith underscores. In this

sense, the creation of a history of subjectivities –promoted mostly by Michel Foucault— has produced a comprehensive and detailed analysis of the discourses that take part in the construction of said subjectivities through different cultures and different times. In other words, identity is not merely expressed in autobiography. Rather, it is created, constructed, at the time of writing by means of a number of collectively shared discourses

As in any performance, the autobiographical discourse is aimed towards an Other. Similar to what happens in the realm of the legal framework, prosopopeia in autobiography appears along apostrophe, another trope that has a key role in the ethic and discursive endeavors of the genre. Apostrophe is a form of beckoning the receptor's attention –in our case the reader's— which turns the text towards the other. Autobiography is, thus, a text written for the Other, rather than for the self. On the one hand, apostrophe brings out the self's alterity and the creation of the self as a response to the Other. On the other hand, it reveals that autobiographical truth is not something that pertains to the past, but to the present time of writing, and the future time of reading. Hence, what matters is not what is being said, but the practice of saying it: the illocutionary act.

These perspectives bring about a political dimension to autobiography that gives narratives of the self a sort of ethical turn. If we consider that the self is not autonomous, but rather it originates as a response to the other, that response results in responsibility towards the Other. This responsibility that constitutes the initial essence of the self is the core of ethics. This notion of ethics is devoid of morality; rather, it is the idea of ethics that Emmanuel Levinas brings forward: ethics as the domain of the other. By proposing that the other comes before the self, that it antecedes the subject, Levinas displaces the subject from the center. Nevertheless, this decentralization does not involve a neither a reduction nor a devaluation of the subject's obligations and competences. As Levinas argues, even though

deposed, the subject remains a singular entity because nobody else can respond for it. Nobody can take the place of another, and by the same token nobody can take responsibility away from, or for, any subject. In other words, the discursive dimensions of autobiography (as both an attempt at cognitive self-reconstruction, and as a performative act) that make it political are linked to the ethical dimensions of the genre.

This ethical dimension, the inexcusable need to respond to the Other, manifests itself in autobiography through the rhetorical figure of the apostrophe. It is this dimension too that allows for the blurring of the distinction that Lejeune established between autobiography and essay. Because the subject has been displaced from the center of the discourse, autobiographers necessarily write through the intervention of other discourses, be them scientific, philosophical, psychological, historical, sexual, religious, journalistic, etc. These discourses are located in the social context, and have become ingrained in the self. By not being visible, they are helped into becoming disguised as the personal truth of the writer. Autobiography goes beyond re-presentation of the self, or restoring the self from the past, and, like any essay, undertakes an interaction with the other, with the world, that orients the writing toward the future. It is no surprise, then, that autobiography can adopt the form of an essay.

The essay-like nature of the autobiographical text has been widely used in the development of a literary corpus by non-mainstream ethnic communities. As such, it allows the subject to expand his/her life to the community, as if the author-protagonist were a spokesperson, or rather an exemplary poster-child, for the whole community. As a result, the author can use her/his life to comment about what s/he considers crucial aspects for the community at large. We have already seen in this chapter a very brief overview of the incursion of autobiography in the U.S. ethnic literatures. In the next chapter we will focus on

the emergence of Chicano literature and the role of the narratives of life within that field. At the end we will look at the figure of Richard Rodriguez with regard to the Chicano context, a controversial figure at best.

CHAPTER 2

A CHICANO CONTEXT FOR AN ANTICHICANO AUTOBIOGRAPHER

In this chapter we will provide an overview of the use of narratives of the self in Mexican-American and Chicano literature, which will take us from the 19th century to contemporary times. As we can already intuit, this employment of the autobiographical genre is not exclusive to the Mexican-American and Chicano writers; it does happen within the broader context of U.S. Latino letters, and we can establish a canon of life narratives in literatures of other Latino communities, explicitly Nuyorican, Cuban-American, and Dominican-American. We have briefly seen in the previous chapter how other minorities – African-American and Chinese-American, but we could widen the list to include other groups—incorporate autobiographies into their literary traditions. Among the Nuyorican and U.S. Puerto Rican (i.e. not necessarily linked to the New York Puerto Ricans) narratives of the self we must mention Pachín Marín's "New York from Within," which appeared in 1892 in the New York newspaper La gaceta del pueblo. Las memorias de Bernardo Vega, published posthumously in 1977, is another seminal life narrative that describes the life of Puerto Ricans in New York at the beginning of the 20th century, and the importance of tobacco workers in the political and social life of both the homeland and the US. Similarly, Jesús Colón collected a series of personal short narratives in A Puerto Rican in New York and Other Sketches (1961), which garnered greater attention after critic Juan Flores published a new edition in 1982. William Carlos Williams explores the ambivalence of his ancestry (his father was British while his mother was Puerto Rican, and he himself grew up in the West Indies) in his Autobiography (1951). Perhaps one of the most popular autobiographies by a Nuyorican is Piri Thomas's Down These Mean Streets (1967) a *Bildungsroman* about a life

amidst racism, marginality, and displacement. He followed this text with two other personal narratives Saviour, Saviour, Hold My Hand (1972) and Seven Long Times (1974). Tato Laviera's AmeRícan (1985), Miguel Piñero's La Bodega Sold Dreams (1980), and Sandra María Esteves' Yerba Buena: Dibujos y poemas (1980) are central autobiographical texts by writers of the Nuyorican Poets Café. Martin Espada's poetry often combines autobiography with struggle and resistance; among his autobiographical poems we can list "Revolutionary Spanish Lessons", "Niggerlips" from Rebellion is the Circle in a Lover's Hands (1990), and "My Name is Espada" from A Mayan Astronomer in Hell's Kitchen (2000). Essential to autobiographical poetry is the popular "Ending Poem" included in Getting Home Alive (1986) written by both Rosario Morales and Aurora Levins Morales, mother and daughter, where they explore their Latina identity. Among other life narratives by women writers we must mention: Judith Ortiz Cofer's Silent Dancing (1990), Esmeralda Santiago's When I Was Puerto Rican (1994), Nicholasa Mohr's Growing Up inside the Sanctuary of My Imagination (1994).

Among the Cuban-American authors, we need to mention the following life writings: Pablo Medina's Pork Rind and Cuban Songs (1975) and Exiled Memories: A Cuban Childhood (1990), Achy Obejas' collection of stories We Came All The Way From Cuba So You Could Dress Like This? (1994) in which the writer blends memoir with essay, Virgil Suarez's Spared Angola: Memories from a Cuban-American Childhood (1997) that combines poetry, fiction, and essays in a remembrance of childhood, violence, and loss. Richard Blanco's first collection of poetry, under the title City of a Hundred Fires (1998), draws on this Madrid-born Cuban-American's upbringing in Miami and describes the tensions growing up as a Latino immigrant, a child of working-class exiles. He is better known for another autobiographical poem, "One Today" which he read at the 2013 Obama Presidential Inauguration, being the first Latino writer to be invited to read at a U.S. Presidential

Inauguration ceremony. Most recently, he has published his prose autobiography: The Prince of Los Cocuyos: A Miami Childhood (2014).

Playwright María Irene Fornés explored her Cuban heritage in her play Letters from Cuba (2000), based on the more than two hundred letters she received from her elder brother, who remained in the island. This divide is also explored in My Father Sings, To My Embarrassment (2002) by Sandra M. Castillo, who writes of her childhood memories in Cuba and the shared anguish of those who left and those who stayed.

Also in 2002, Ruth Behar explores issues of identity in her autobiographical documentary for television Adio Kerida: Goodbye My Dear Love. Behar has created in her literature a voice that represents herself and her subject: a woman who has been culturally translated. As a Cuban Jew, Behar has continued to explore what she calls 'Jubanidad' in her book An Island Called Home: Returning to a Jewish Cuba (2007), an autobiographical text that incorporates photography, continuing in the contemporary trend of blurring borders between autobiography and other genres. In 2013, Behar penned Traveling Heavy: A Memoir in between Journeys, where displacement is the motif that allows the writer to relate her memories of Cuba, Spain, Poland… Another writer who has explored his religious heritage – also Jewish, by the way—and his Cuban roots is José Kozer, some of whose personal diaries have been published in Una huella destartalada: diarios (2003).

An example of how autobiography in the 21st century is blearing the once clear distinction between literary genres is Carlos M. Eire's Waiting for Snow in Havana: Confessions of a Cuban Boy (2003). In it, Eire depicts his childhood in Cuba in the 50s and early 60s, as well as his coming of age as a refugee and foster child in the US. While the author conceived the text as a novel, this factual account was released as memoir by the publisher, eventually winning the 2003 National Book Award in the nonfiction category.

Narratives of the self are still being published by Cuban-Americans in our decade. For instance, Enrique del Risco issued Siempre nos quedará Madrid (2012), his personal account about leaving Cuba for Spain, and his subsequent arrival in the United States.

Among the Dominican American writers, we should highlight Julia Álvarez's Something To Declare (1998), a text that, again, blurs the limits between autobiography and essay. These literary canons are by no means exhaustive, but they aims to be a brief representation of how life writing is an important part of the literary traditions of the most relevant communities in U.S. Latino letters.

The writings of the self have served Latinos, and Mexican-Americans and Chicanos specifically, to establish an identity within the U.S. and to build a sense of community during much of the 19th and 20th centuries. This group-conscience building might have been more apparent during the Civil Rights Movement, but it does extend back to the times of the Guadalupe-Hidalgo Treaty, and stretches up to our times.

Afterwards, this chapter will look at Richard Rodriguez's emergence into Latino letters and analyzes the controversy that surrounded the publication of his first autobiography. The debate that ensued placed the autobiographer at a conflicting stance vis-à-vis the Chicano intelligentsia of the 1980s. Finally, we will pay attention to the ways in which New Journalism has informed life writing, and how the autobiographies of Richard Rodriguez reflect techniques that might be perceived as being informed by New Journalism.

2.1. Chicano: A socio-politically charged label

In the 19th century, Anglos who wanted to establish a clear difference between them and the people of Mexican heritage referred to the latter as Mexican-American, whether they had crossed the border or the border "had crossed them" as a result of the Guadalupe Hidalgo Treaty and the Gadsden Purchase. Mexican-Americans were called *pochos* in Mexico, to signify their greater degree of cultural and linguistic fluency with regards to the US. The Mexican workers who were arriving into the U.S. were named simply *Mexicanos*, which was shortened to *Xicanos* and then spelled as Chicanos. Both Anglos and Mexican-Americans used the term Chicanos to label the newcomers, thus classifying them in a lower category that reflected their transiency in the US, and their lesser cultural and linguistic fluency within the Anglo mores, if any at all. It did not take long before this difference was also a signifier of the class-consciousness of *pochos*, who felt to be more from the U.S. than from Mexico, in part due to the Americanization process. As a result the Mexican-American established the social marginalization of their compatriots, while vying for the acceptance of the hegemony. Soon enough, as immigrant farm workers and the urban proletariat perceived their entrance into the "better integrated" group, they started to align with the Mexican-American middle class and use the term Chicano for the non-English speaking, transient Mexican worker. There is no doubt that the term Chicano, at first, was considered to be derogatory. Conversely, Chicanos themselves started to use the term as the designation of an in-group that resisted acceptance of the Anglo-American cultural norms. In doing so, they were starting to change the pejorative connotation of the term. As these individuals started to develop and strengthen their class and group conscience in the 1940s, they started to use the term more actively and proudly. It was in the 1960s, amidst the Civil Rights Movement, when the students and Mexican-Americans wanted to demonstrate pride in their *mestizaje* and in their working class background that they adopted the still somewhat derogatory term,

eventually owning it and as a consequence starting to move towards depriving it of its derogatory stigma. What had started as an informal label adoption became political, and the sociopolitical fight towards equal rights by Mexican-Americans was named Movimiento Chicano. By and large, those who call themselves Chicanos are making a political and cultural statement that is imbued with pride in their cultural and linguistic heritage. There are still individuals who do not embrace the term Chicano, since they view it as something less than respectful, and/or something that goes against their intent to assimilate to the mainstream. Conversely, Chicanos perceived the term Mexican-American as a referent to second class status, and a representation of the undermining of the socio-political advancements that they were trying to achieve. In sum, the term Chicano has been charged with a political significance that we need to be aware of, especially when we discuss later on the controversy surrounding Richard Rodriguez.

2.2. Chicano autobiography

As we have discussed in previous sections, autobiographies by minorities are intrinsically associated with the conscience building of the community. As well, these are texts that fade the boundaries between the autobiographical genre and other textual categories. Furthermore, some earlier Chicano[4] autobiographies are oral histories that have been recovered from archives, transcribed and later published as books. We have subdivided the section in two different categories: oral and written autobiographies. We could have subdivided these in different sub-categories, but the texts included in them, being complex

[4] Under the term Chicano here, and when discussing Chicano autobiography in this section, we are not distinguishing between Mexican-American and Chicano. Our purpose here is establishing a literary tradition of autobiographical writings within Chicano literature, rather than distinguishing whether they are Mexican-American or Chicano texts *sensu stricto.*

narratives, can fit in more than one category. Therefore, we opted for the simplest classification in our effort to be didactic[5].

2.2.1 Autobiographical oral histories

Scholar Genaro Padilla places the foundational Chicano narratives of the self in a context of sociohistorical conditions that is triggered by the transition of Mexican peoples in the Southwest in the 19th century. He describes the ways in which the Mexicans who chose to remain in their territories and, thus, stay in their new country as mapped by the Guadalupe Hidalgo Treaty and the Gadsden Purchase had to rapidly adapt to new Anglo legal, social, economic, and cultural traditions. Padilla's work in the Bancroft archives of the University of California Berkeley has pushed back the dates of the earliest Chicano life narratives. Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo's personal account "Recuerdos históricos y personales tocante a la alta California," date to 1875. Belonging to a member of the elite, he had been dispossessed of much of his estate in what now are the Sonoma and Napa Valleys and the San Francisco Bay. The "Recuerdos" disclose the disintegration of Vallejo's material and social power, something that sets them against the trend of American autobiography (i.e. Benjamin Franklin's) where the progress of the American nation and, consequently the American individual, is celebrated. Vallejo criticizes the derogation of Spanish language and Mexican culture in favor of other European languages, and that might be the very reason why Vallejo chose to compose his autobiography in Spanish. In his mind, he was a guardian of the culture and history of California. José María Amador is another of those Californios who compiled his memories of the history of the land in mid-nineteenth century in "Memorias sobre la historia de California." Likewise, Salvador Vallejo chronicled his "Notas históricas sobre

[5] We do not intend to provide an exhaustive canon of Chicano life narratives, nor is this list meant to be a canonical one. Our purpose here is to illustrate the existence of these narratives of the self, while elaborating a thread that would lead us to place in context the subject of this project: the autobiographies of Richard Rodriguez.

California." Among those oral narratives we also find the voice of women. An elite Californio woman by the name of María de las Angustias de la Guerra dictated "Ocurrencias en California" to one of Bancroft's assistants, who tried to steer her comments towards social customs, while she chose to speak about political events and figures of the time, mucho more risqué topics for a woman in that time. Bancroft and his assistants also collected the stories of other women: Apolinaria Lorenzana's "Memorias"; Catarina Avila's "Recuerdos", María Inocente Pico's "Cosas de California", Josefa Carrillo's "Narración de una californiana", Teresa de la Guerra's "Narrativa de una matron de California", Felipa Osuña's "Recuerdos del pasado" and Maria Amparo Ruiz's "Biographical Sketch" among many others. Genaro Padilla sharply points out that while all these narratives appear in the Bancroft collection, their author's names appear only in the footnotes and obscured behind their American husband's names. Along with the efforts of Bancroft to archive these narratives, the Works Project Administration –under the sponsorship of Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration— established the Federal Writers' Project. The FWP was very active in New Mexico, interviewing older residents as early as 1933. Scholars Tey Diana Rebolledo and María Teresa Márquez have selected some of the autobiographic material collected by the FWP and included their transcriptions in Women's Tales from the New Mexico WPA: La diabla a pie (2000). Many of these stories, though they are a personal account portraying their difficult rural lives, also intend to be a cautionary message to other women or as warnings about the injustices stemming from the Anglo domination; therefore, these narratives of the self can also be seen as a reflection of the community on the self, which appears to be a common feature in Latino autobiographical writings.

An important part of these life writings is formed by collected interviews to Mexican-American and Chicano women. Thus, in 1997, Nasario García compiled many of these oral narratives in Comadres: Hispanic Women of the Río Puerco Valley. The interviews were

conducted in the late 1980's and early 1990s. Arizonian Patricia Preciado Martin has published several oral histories of southern Arizona Chicanos since 1983. She does not limit herself to one gender, nor to those in rural settings. As in the case of other scholars and writers, Preciado Martin aims to refute the negative images of Mexican-American and Chicano peoples that mainstream media and commercial films have perpetuated. In doing so, she has transcribed and edited the memories of immigrant and non-immigrant, rural and urban men and women of the Tucson area.

But contemporary oral histories are not the exclusive realm of women, although we do seem to find more by them. Eugene Nelson interviewed an undocumented Mexican worker in the mid-1960s, transcribing and publishing the account in 1975 under the title Pablo Cruz and the American Dream. As the title may suggest, there does not seem to be any trouble to overcome to become part of the U.S. as the ordeals we saw in the case of the female narratives, although Cruz's hardships while and after crossing the border are gruesome. In the end, though, there is a sense that he overcomes adversity, something that cannot be so readily said about his female counterparts.

The endeavors to recover and bring out these oral narratives are ongoing. To that end, the University of California Los Angeles maintains an archive where Mexican Americans and Chicanos are interviewed and their reminiscences stored. This is part of the Chicano Studies Research Center. Leonard Ramirez has edited a book where he compiles the personal narratives of Chicanas and their participation in the Chicago Chicano Movement. The University of Colorado State also maintains archives of oral narratives by Chicanos. As we can see from these examples, oral narratives are not just limited to the unsettling 19th century in the Southwest but, on the contrary, are being kept well alive. Recovery projects are ongoing and recordings of contemporary narratives continue to be made. It is important to

note, however, that women are in the majority among the preservers of these rich oral personal narratives.

2.2.2 Written autobiographies

Recording the life of the self has not been limited to the work of ethnographers, anthropologists, literary and cultural scholars combing the U.S. Southwest and recovering its people's (hi)stories before transcribing and publishing them. Several writers have recorded their own lives in text: in some cases, autobiographies in the strictest, narrowest definition of the genre; in others, blending different genres.

While in the previous section we dealt with the oral narratives of the self by people who had not been formally educated and not at ease with the English language, and those were mostly women, there is also a significant number of women writers who are very comfortable writing in English and who have received formal education. Some of these women, as the ones that Tey Diana Rebolledo brings together in Women Singing in the Snow (1995), reveal "details of their lives and their families" (29). Among them we find Fabiola Cabeza de Beca Gilbert and Cleofás Jaramillo. The reception of their work has been different, depending on the gender of the critic. Women scholars have valued their "narrative strategies of resistance" (Rebolledo and Rivero 31), a struggle against erasure: Chicanas were being assimilated into both, the mainstream culture and a male-dominated literary arena. Their strategies also include an effort to hold on to their heritage, counterattack the imposition of Anglo culture by recalling their past, using translation as a way to criticize the Anglo-American superficial understanding of Hispanic cultures and history, and blurring the borders of literary genres by means of blending history and autobiography, for instance (Rebolledo and Rivero 17-18). In a sense, these female autobiographers are perceived as the pavers of the way for the Chicana boom of the 1980s and later.

Some of these texts by women, who disguised their texts under the curtain of fiction and their authorship behind their husband's name, deal with the socio-economic changes that take place in the Southwest and with the position of Mexican Americans soon after 1848. María Amparo Ruiz de Burton writes The Squatter and the Don in 1885. While not an autobiography in the proper sense of the term, it does depict what she herself was going through in her legal battle against the government of the U.S. in order to preserve her ownership of the land from the squatters settling on it. This text brings to the foreground the issues of borders and migration.

On the one hand, the border between Mexico and the United States has particular political, cultural, and social factors. The new boundaries established with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848 and with the 1852 Gadsden Purchase created political and economic factors that engendered a series of twin cities along the border, which while fostering the notion of a porous border, intensified migratory movements across the line. At times those crossings had a clear political reason: immigration from Mexico into the U.S. proliferated during the Mexican Revolution. Leonor Villegas de Magnon wrote The Rebel, where she documents her involvement in the Mexican revolutionary conflict. Her criticism of Porfirio Díaz prompted her crossing of the border into the US. Like other women who are not intimidated by the linguistic barrier, she published her English autobiography once the Spanish one –La Rebelde – proved to be not the success she had anticipated. Both life narratives are different, revealing that the author was conscious of her readership vis-à-vis her message. Like Ruiz de Burton's text, Villegas de Magnon's autobiography was forgotten until Clara Lomas recovered it in 1994. The Rebel looks at the Mexican Revolution through the eyes of a border woman, thus placing the concept of border front and center in the narrative, and reveals how these migrant women were using their privileged positions to cross the geo-political line, and to support the revolutionary cause.

Another Nuevo Laredo native who immigrated into Laredo, Texas, almost five decades later, also records her life in the border. Norma Cantú published in 1995 what she dubbed in her introduction as a fictional autobioetnography, a term that signals that the text might not be always autobiographical, and that it definitely seeks to blur the divide between fiction and nonfiction when it comes to narratives of the self. While Cantú creates a fictional narrator in Canícula, her memories are triggered by the discovery of family photos in a box. Those photos are included in the text, and they are of Cantú's family. The pictures also serve to relate the personal experience to the communal, something that is not uncommon in the narratives of the self by these autobiographers, as we will see a couple of paragraphs later. The community that Cantú depicts in her autobioethnography is severely stratified, and points towards the distinctive multifaceted manifestations that occur at the border: the title refers to the suffocating climate and the uncomfortable social conditions of life in this space. Like Cantú's, many of these autobiographies that dwell in the border narrate the life experience of subjects who inhabit an area that is not entirely Anglo nor Mexican nor Chicano. It is an interstitial space, to use Gloria Anzaldúa's concept (Bordelands/La frontera, 20), "a vague and undetermined space created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition" (Bordelands/La frontera, 3). This unresolved interstice becomes the locus of a complex combination of those three cultures –Anglo, Mexican, Chicano— that contributes to a dynamic, fluid border existence that some scholars label as "in-between". This is not exclusive to women autobiographers. For instance, Alberto Álvaro Ríos argues in Capirotada that "we talk about the border at Nogales as a place only, instead of an idea as well. But it is both *where* two countries meet as well as *how* two countries meet" (12). This is why Ríos depicts both towns (Nogales, Arizona and Nogales, Sonora) as one. While he portrays the pervious nature of town, he also describes the construction of a solid fence between the two cities as expression of separation of the towns, "a pathetic version of the

Great Wall of China" (12), thus illustrating the tension between union and disjuncture in his autobiography. Yet, the title of his autobiography refers to the typical bread pudding that mixes different ingredients to make up an entity; in this sense, another image of the "tossed salad" metaphor that has been used to describe these hyphenated loci.

Luis Alberto Urrea has written about the clash of cultures and languages and living among opposites in his memoir of a childhood divided between San Diego and Tijuana. His autobiography Nobody's Son (1998) ends a trilogy about life on the border. In this *Bildungsroman* the writer combines the gentle moments of an almost mythical Tijuana: "When I was a boy, Tijuana was a place of magic and wonder, place of dusty gardens laden with fruit, of pretty women, dogs, food, music…And everyone was laughing" (66) with the violence and fear he had to put up with in the ostracized barrio and at home, where his parents fought over their son's ethnicity. While Urrea's story is unique, it is also an autobiography, since his story is not too different from other life stories where the individual has had to fight in the public arena and in the private one in order to assert her/his identity. In this sense, Urrea's autobiography can also be read as the autobiography of a community. The author acknowledges that sense of community when he states "I am nobody's son / But I am everybody's brother" (59). We will explore this duality in which the individual self-construction of Chicano autobiography attempts to portray a community-oriented experience when we address the autobiographies of Richard Rodriguez. In a certain way, in Nobody's Son, the geopolitical frontier of Tijuana/San Diego has surpassed the physical space and has become the border that divides every individual from each other. As we have seen with other writers, Urrea's life writing also encompasses poetry, like in his book The Fever of Being (1994).

Ray Gonzalez has penned three autobiographies that illustrate the border landscape of El Paso/Ciudad Juárez: Memory Fever (1993), The Underground Heart (2003), and Renaming the Earth (2008). The first of those texts is a memoir, while in the other two he employs autobiography to create a series of essays on the border as space. The Underground Heart received the 2003 Carr P. Collins/Texas Institute of Letters Award for Best Book of Non-fiction, was named one of ten Best Southwest Books of the Year by the Arizona Humanities Commission, named one of the Best Non-fiction Books of the Year by the Rocky Mountain News, named a Minnesota Book Award Finalist in Memoir, and selected as a Book of the Month by the El Paso Public Library. Like Rodriguez and other U.S. Latino autobiographers, Gonzalez resorts to what has been called as serial autobiography: the "extension of autobiography beyond a single text" (Gilmore 211), concept that we will discuss later when addressing the writings of Richard Rodriguez.

Another type of autobiography deals with the immigration experience, whether that immigration was by their own accord (they actually crossed the border in search of advancement), are the descendants of immigration (their ancestors moved from Mexico into the US), or they found themselves in the U.S. once the geo-political borders were reset in 1848 and subsequently in 1852. These texts are not limited to the geographical space of the border, although the border as intellectual category is at the core of these narratives. We can classify in this fashion Ernesto Galarza's Barrio Boy (1971), where the author describes his own immigrant experience. Scholar Genaro Padilla remarks that Galarza's *Bildungsroman* tends to romanticize this migratory experience by "locating his childhood in a utopian space" and writing "the past as an adventure". (235). A lot more poignant is the more recent autobiography of Ramón "Tianguis" Pérez: Diary of an Undocumented Immigrant (1991), where the author provides raw and explicit accounts of his experience as an undocumented worker while presenting an unexpurgated look at the United States, its economy and culture

from the perspective of the undocumented immigrant. Disheartened by the exploitation and the alienation he has to endure, Pérez returned to Mexico where he issued another autobiography –Diary of a Guerrilla (1999)—, this time relating his involvement and strife in a guerrilla movement to reclaim the communal lands of his people in Oaxaca, prior to his crossing into the US.

Gary Soto is another autobiographer who recounts his coming-of-age in an interstitial space. While he might be located physically in Fresno, and relatively away from the border between Mexico and the US, in Living up the Street (1985) Soto describes the alienation that springs from coming to terms with one's own identity. This text was followed by three other collections of autobiographical essays: Small Faces (1986), Lesser Evils: Ten Quartets (1988), and A Summer Life (1990), where he draws from his childhood memories. Several of these essays were later compiled in a single volume under the title The Effects of Knut Hamsun on a Fresno Boy (2001). In all of his autobiographical works, Soto depicts his past experiences with precise detail, almost photographic memory. Most recently, he has issued What Poets are Like (2013), a loose collection of mostly autobiographical vignettes and anecdotes where he turns the eye to the writing process and profession. Raymund Paredes noted in the *Rocky Mountain Review,* "Soto establishes his acute sense of ethnicity and, simultaneously, his belief that certain emotions, values, and experiences transcend ethnic boundaries and allegiances" ("Recent Chicano Fiction" 125-126). Soto includes social commentary about the conditions of the Fresno neighborhoods where he grew up, and the societal conditions that foster the creation of those conditions. Furthermore, he gives a picture of the disparities between working-class poverty and the idealized middle class that the American dream promotes. Again, we see a writer who explores serial autobiography to convey a sense of commonplace among the Latinos in general, and the Mexican-Americans

and Chicanos in particular. The life of a particular self is depicted as the average life of the community.

Other writers render a more downtrodden vision of barrio life. Luis J. Rodríguez spent much of his young life as a member of different street gangs of East Los Angeles, the site of a very intense activity during the Chicano Movement of the 60s and 70s. He includes this raw vision of East L.A. in his autobiography Always Running: La vida loca, Gang Days in L.A. (1993). Rodríguez renders his criminal behavior without qualifying it; he is more interested in showing the conditions that lead to it, and turning to activism and community organizing after recanting from it. In a sense, one could see this autobiography as a confessional *Bildungsroman*, where the author finds a way to make amends for his actions.

This motif of the improvement of the author's life is popular among the narratives of the self by subjects that do not belong to the mainstream. Jimmy Santiago Baca's 2001 autobiography, A Place to Stand is a dramatic example. Baca, who was abandoned by his parents, went on to live with his grandparents first and later was sent to an orphanage from which he repeatedly escaped until he ended in a juvenile detention center, wrote his autobiography at a prison while serving a drug related sentence. This *Bildungsroman* details how Baca taught himself to write, and how he overcame his lack of basic education.

If we take into consideration, as it has been stated before, that the autobiographical is an expression of who the author is, and an attempt on her/his part to reveal their process of self-identity and explain or justify their actions and lapses, we can think through the autobiographies we have mentioned so far and see how intertwined these narratives (and these lives) are with the political. A clear example of this, as well as of serial autobiography, are Oscar "Zeta" Acosta's The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo (1972) and The Revolt of the Cockroach People (1973). Acosta was a dynamic social activist in both his work as a

writer as well as a defense lawyer until his disappearance in Mexico a year after his second autobiography was released. In both texts, Acosta portrays the turbulent times of the Civil Rights era, and the political commotion that surrounded the Chicano Movement and the upheaval in the struggle for civil rights. Like in other autobiographies we have already mentioned, the protagonist endeavors to discover himself as well as to map and (re)establish or (re)define his relationship to his cultural past. In The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo, Acosta grows weary of his life as a lawyer, which he ascribes to his uprootedness. He sets on a self-destructive path, as we have seen in other autobiographies, and it is through his search for Chicano roots that he discovers his mestizo roots and his pride in himself. The Revolt of the Cockroach People is a sequel to the first autobiography, where he involves himself in the political activism of the times by defending falsely accused Chicano Movement militants. While Chicanas accused his works of partaking in the so-called "chingón politics" that many Chicanos were wielding, his autobiographies portray the mayhem of the times.

For other Chicano autobiographers, the path of self-discovery had a different political tenor: the search for their sexual identity**.** John Rechy entered the literary arena with his autobiographical text City of Night (1963). The book follows the travels of a young hustler narrator around the U.S. and depicts his encounters and adventures. It reveals many aspects of the gay culture of the time. While the book was negatively received at the beginning, it has become now a canonical work. In a 2013 interview with June Thomas, just after the celebration of the 50 anniversary of the publication of City of Night, Rechy explained: "I am a Mexican-American, but for a long time I was pushed out of any references to Mexican-American writers… They didn't want me –a Mexican-American gay man—but that's changed" (Thomas) something he had complained about before. For some people, however, City of Night does not fit the bill of an autobiography, since there is not a clear identification between protagonist and author, even though Rechy himself has clarified that he was

describing his life at the time. In 2008 Rechy wrote openly about his life in an autobiography that meets Lejeune's pact. In About My Life and the Kept Woman the author talks about how his light skin and English last name (his father was Scottish) led people to assume that he was Anglo, to the point that one teacher "changed" his name from Juan to John –something that would happen to Rodriguez, as we will discuss later. The discussion on his identity involves not only his heritage, but also his sexuality, as young Rechy becomes aware of his differences with his peers, their bigoted relatives, or the diverse people he encountered throughout his life. In centering his argument on the difference, Rechy's last autobiography becomes an essay on how to defy the intolerance of the mainstream in order to forge one's path. In this sense, and while sharing features, Rechy's narratives of the self offer a stark contrast to the autobiographical works of Richard Rodriguez, who is more preoccupied with fitting in than with being discordant.

Cherríe Moraga's Loving in the War Years: lo que nunca pasó por sus labios (1983) is a narrative of the self across several genres that also tackles lgbtt+ identity. In this case, Moraga, by means of poetry and prose that spring from the autobiographical, composes an influential critical work among third wave feminists and scholars in Chicano Studies. Along with other books Moraga has co-edited, Loving in the War Years allows her to explore the multiple identities that interconnect and shape her, as well as how these identities allow her to interact with the lgbtt+ and the Chicano movements. As a lesbian Chicana feminist, in Loving in the War Years Moraga establishes a bond between her sexuality and the female figures that were influential in her life, most notably her mother. She does this through a set of oppositions, and by being conscious of her oppositional identity, Moraga places herself in contrast to the assimilationist Latinos that she criticizes. For her, as for Rechy, identity is not about easy solidarity, but about active identification that has actual consequences. In a sense, Moraga articulates what Rechy did not: the personal is political and both our body and

experiences are the territories in which the political is mediated. In this sense, Moraga is the revolutionary that Richard Rodriguez is not.

Arturo Islas wanted to make "visible Chicano/a creative expression and [the] struggle against institutional and individual racist acts" (Aldama, Dancing with Ghosts 26), so he wrote from his own heritage and experience. The Rain God (1984) is an example of this, as it is full of autobiographical details: Miguel is an alter-ego to the author, Mama Chona represents his disciplinarian grandmother Crecenciana, the narrator constantly connects the writer to the protagonist through indirect speech. Marta E. Sánchez posits that while the narrative is not told from a first person perspective, it can be deemed a fictional autobiography "because it is, first and foremost, the protagonist's own account of how the Angel family shaped his self-identity" (285-6). Like in other Chicana/o authors, the exploration of sexual identity is present in Islas's work, even though the characters tend to use a more ambiguous terminology and the narration is not as explicit as that of Rechy or Moraga; for instance, there is not direct talk of "homosexual" characters, but they are referred to as "joto" or "queer". This language, in turn, serves to exemplify the stereotypes of masculinity and homophobia in Chicano culture. It is precisely this examination into sexual identity, and the parallel that they establish with Islas' self-enquiry, that prompt scholars like Aldama to support the idea that there are strong autobiographical links in The Rain God.

Richard Rodriguez has produced four autobiographies in as many decades. His first autobiography, Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez (1982) caused much controversy among Chicano writers, activists, and scholars for his stance on the advancement of Chicano peoples. Ten years later Rodriguez (who, like Rechy, had his first name anglicized by a teacher, and who deliberatedly erases the tilde from his last name) penned Days of Obligation: An Argument with My Mexican Father (1992), where he uses his

autobiographical memories to discuss his relations to Mexico, as well as his musings on what constitutes the Mexican character. In 2002 Rodriguez published Brown: The Last Discovery of America where he ponders on race issues with relations to himself, the Latino community, and the multicultural US. In 2013 he issued Darling: A Spiritual Autobiography, a text where he contemplates the implications of his Catholic faith on the rest of his identity traits. It is clear that Rodriguez employs serial autobiography, a genre that allows him to make public his viewpoints and positions on issues pertaining to Latinos, to Mexican-Americans and to Chicanos. His position has shifted in these forty years, and while remaining controversial within the Chicano establishment, illustrates how identity is instable, fluctuating, and non-fixed.

2.3. Richard Rodriguez, a controversial writer

In his first autobiography, Hunger of Memory, Rodriguez describes his struggle in his first years of schooling at a Catholic parochial school run by nuns. Part of this struggle was the different social class of his classmates and the linguistic barrier. In his narrative of the self, Rodriguez depicts his "journey from social disadvantage to social acceptance, from public alienation to public integration" (Saldívar, Chicano 157), and in order to do so he attacks one of the pillars of the Chicano Movement's struggle: the efforts to organize a sound system of bilingual education. Because he turned his work into an attack on bilingual education, Rodriguez was ostracized from the Chicano intelligentsia and made a pariah for many Chicano and Latino scholars. Rodriguez's insistence on learning, using, and mastering English by all U.S. citizens, as well as his contention that Latinos must not let the Spanish language be an obstacle to their assimilation into the U.S. culture and society, have put him at odds with many Latino and multicultural advocates in the country. What is more, his

argument against bilingualism and bilingual education goes against those studies which prove that an individual can retain and continue to develop his native linguistic skills while at the same time becoming completely articulate in another language, in this case English.

In addition to his opposition to bilingual education, Rodriguez challenges affirmative action. The concept of affirmative action was introduced as a way to fight racial discrimination when, in 1961, President Kennedy signed an executive order commanding not to discriminate against any employee or applicant for employment based on their race, religion, or national origin and to "take affirmative action" to make sure that they are treated without regard to those features. Afterwards, in 1967, gender was included in the list of protected categories, thus condemning sexual discrimination. Therefore, affirmative action is intended to promote the opportunities of defined minority groups within a society to give them equal access to that of the majority population. It was another of the demands that sprung with the Civil Rights Movement and its purpose was to pressure the establishment and its institutions to comply with the mandate against discrimination of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Along its history, affirmative action's legitimacy has been questioned, and after several court cases some educational institutions have been allowed to take race into account when recruiting and admitting students. Other universities and colleges have used other variables to attract students from groups that have traditionally been under-represented.

Because of his criticism and opposition to bilingual education and affirmative action, most Chicano activists have disavowed him. They have portrayed his work as uninformed, if not as the worst example of an expression of hate towards Chicana/os. For instance, Ramón Saldivar declares that Rodriguez's position against bilingual education and affirmative action "involves him, whether he admits it or not, in a political service to the Right" (158). Soon after the publication of Hunger of Memory, Rodriguez became a spokesperson for specific

agendas like the “English only” movement, which made him even more popular among the conservative Anglo establishment.

If we consider that the term Chicano has a political agenda, and that the difference between Mexican-American and Chicano resides precisely in that political awareness that we alluded to earlier in this chapter, then qualifying Rodriguez as Chicano is problematic, based on his stance. On the contrary, he could be defined as *antiChicano* precisely for his opposition to the political agenda of the movement and his siding with the mainstream. What is clear is that Chicanos have wanted to establish a difference with him, to mark their distance. They criticize his autobiographical work as naïve and not rigorous, that his ideas come from oversimplification and from being uninformed. Yet, Rodriguez is writing an autobiography; that is, he is telling his experience, and who knows better than the autobiographer about the protagonist’s experiences. Coincidentally, many of his critics also speak from experience, but in the case of Rodriguez’s discourse the autobiographical trumps many rules of essay writing.

We can argue that Richard Rodriguez’s autobiographies are essays, where he puts forward his ideas about politics, culture, social relations, religion, etc. But by adopting the autobiographical genre, he does away with some of the conventions used in essay writing. Essentially, Rodriguez is writing from his experience, and that fact alone simplifies his need to support assumptions, speculations, and hypotheses with a sound argument. His support is his experience, his discourse is subjective.

In this sense, Rodriguez’s subjectivism places his essays in the context of New Journalism. This was a form of journalism that appeared in the 60s and 70s which employed unconventional techniques to write news, techniques often borrowed from other genres that blurred the borders between journalism and literature. Journalist and writer Thomas K. Wolfe

described New Journalism as the response to the impasse of American novel for striding away from realism. Wolfe believes journalism is much more relevant than fiction and, thus, he proposes its mixture with literary techniques in order to document in a more effective way than the novel. In 1973, Tom Wolfe and E.W. Johnson published an anthology that contains a sort of manifesto as well as exemplary articles by Truman Capote, Barbara Goldsmith, Norman Mailer, Gay Talese, Joan Didion, Hunter S. Thompson, and Tom Wolf among others. These articles had appeared not in newspapers, but in periodicals and magazines such as such as The Atlantic Monthly, Harper's, Esquire, The New Yorker, Rolling Stone, etc. The manifesto rests of four main ideas: the journalist has to witness events first hand and recreate them for the reader, as opposed to relying on background information or second-hand reports; give the reader a real feeling of the events by treating the people involved as characters in a novel; record dialogue as fully as possible so that it builds the characters and involves the reader; and provide the specific surroundings of the people, so that the reader can see them as they see themselves.

As we can see, these features are not too far away from autobiographical writing; for instance, Robert Stein believed that in New Journalism "the eye of the beholder is all –or almost all" (168), which underscores the subjectivity that is present in the narratives of the self. Especially in those autobiographies in which there is the intention of positing an argument, of putting forward a discourse that goes beyond the mere recounting of one's life (whether there is the purpose to justify one's actions or omissions and/or criticize one's antagonists). This seems to be the case of Richard Rodriguez's four autobiographies: each is constructed around a set of cohesive topics that function as the spine that gives entity to the work in question (be it bilingual education and affirmative action, Mexican history and character, race in the Americas, spirituality in the 21st century, …), rather than the revision of

the author's existence and accomplishments. In fact, these seem to take a back seat and function as support to the posited arguments.

It cannot escape to us that Richard Rodriguez has aligned himself with the Anglo-American literary tradition, leaving aside the Mexican and Latin American literary and cultural traditions that other Latino and Chicano authors have engaged with. While some Chicanas seek to rewrite Mexican female myths or other Chicano storytellers address the symbolic and magical realism –to give just two examples— and by those means establish a dialogue with their Latin American counterparts, Rodriguez has embraced the English literary tradition. The title of the first autobiography is significant enough, for it recalls one of the canonical works in American literature: The Education of Henry Adams. Thus, by employing autobiography in a way that parallels the use of literary techniques by the new journalists, Rodriguez –who works as a journalist, incidentally— places his narrative a step closer to canonical writers of the twentieth century like Truman Capote, Gay Talese, or Norman Mailer. In doing so, the Mexican-American writer underscores his aspiration to be included in the ranks of Anglo-American writers. By the same token, it also highlights his assimilationist stances which made him popular in the Anglo establishment, and demonized him among the Chicano intelligentsia.

When Rodriguez published his second autobiography Days of Obligation: An Argument with my Mexican Father a decade after causing ripples with the issue of his first narrative of the self, there was less of a commotion. On the one hand, partly due to the negative reception that Hunger of Memory had received some Latino scholars were reluctant to approach the book. Rodriguez had already been cast as a conservative author who had sold himself out to the Anglo-American mainstream and had turned his back to the efforts and struggles of ethnic minorities in the United States. On the other hand, the themes Rodriguez

explores in Days of Obligation are of a less controversial nature than those in the earlier volume and certainly less politically sensitive. It is unclear if this was a move on the part of the author in order to keep in check possible negative criticism and polemic reception of the text –for what is worth, Rodriguez is known to stand his ground and not back off from a controversial reception of his work; and yet, it is also true that this is a writer that has a sharp awareness of how the literary market works and the risks that negative reviews and criticism imply towards business. What is apparent is the change in tone and scope of the book. Moving away from politically sensitive topics in relation to the attainment of civil rights on the part of U. S. Latinos and towards a discussion on the cultural roots of diasporic ethnicity ensured a less controversial reception of the book.

While Rodriguez mulls over his ethnicity in his second autobiography, one cannot maintain that the author wholly embraces it. In his exploration of the cultural cues that define and shape Mexican-American and Chicano ethnicity, Rodriguez looks to the past in what can be called a trip to the culture of origin. Yet, while he travels to Mexico with the intention of exploring a set of features that help understand the cultural milieu of Mexican-Americans and Chicanos, the author is reluctant to let go of his pervasive link to the United States and European cultural settings. Actually, some critics pointed out that Rodriguez was showing a refreshing interest in matters unrelated to the U. S. mainstream; however, his exploration of Mexican cultural icons and features reveals quite the opposite: Rodriguez makes an obvious effort to promote the tenets of the Anglo-American mainstream. Given that this was a criticism that had already been made ten years earlier, scholars spent a significant less amount of space in addressing Days of Obligation's treatment of Latinos of Mexican descent in California.

Instead, substantial criticism focused on issues of sexuality and sexual identity. In fact, the book was dubbed as Rodriguez's coming-out story because the author addresses his homosexual identity from the first pages in the book. This obviousness marked a stark contrast with the subtlety with which homosexual desire was addressed in Hunger of Memory: in the second installment of Rodriguez's autobiographies it is impossible that his gay gaze goes under the radar of the reader, as it had happened ten years earlier.

Although this second autobiography was received as a continuation of Hunger of Memory, due to the portrayal of the protagonist as an alienated man longing for assimilation and regretting the role his Aztec looks play in the achievement of said assimilation, there is a perceptibly less conservative stance; the author seems to move slightly to the center. Perhaps this subtle reposition has to do with his need to support his gay agenda, despite adding to the contradictions Rodriguez is so often accused of. Nevertheless, this turn in his discourse was not enough for the majority of the Chicano establishment to change the established perception of Rodriguez. As a result, Days of Obligation did not make such a splash in Latino letters as the previous autobiography.

However, like in the earlier text, sections and chapters of the book had already appeared as essays in magazines such as Time and Harper's. Rodriguez had also addressed some of these topics in public appearances such as conference talks and lectures on and off the academic world. Broadcasting companies on both sides of the Atlantic had featured some essays on television, in part due to Rodriguez's professional engagement with the BBC.

Loyal to his decade-long intervals, Rodriguez issued another installment of his narratives of life. Brown: The Last Discovery of America was published in 2002. This third autobiography was born when Rodriguez –as he himself revealed in several interviews— heard a newscaster report on the radio that Latinos are destined to replace Arican-Americans

as the largest minority in the United States. There is little doubt, too, that Brown also stems in part from Rodriguez's involvement in the 1998 presidential dialogues on race, dialogues he was requested to take part in by the Clinton administration. Yet, while his public visibility has increased with time through his contributions as essayist, journalist, and public speaker, scholarly attention to his narratives of self has drained away, with occasional exceptions. The story of his writing career and reception suggests that Rodriguez causes pain to a diversity of readers given his location upon multiple axes of difference.

Rodriguez considers Brown to be the last piece of a trilogy. This has led scholars to contemplate each of the three texts as pieces of a larger whole that represents the life and evolution of Rodriguez as both a character and author. Even though the three autobiographies are interrelated thematically, the third installment makes a theoretical intervention that is not quite as explicit in the earlier works. Michael Depp notes that "Brown is both a departure from his earlier work and the culmination of his most potent arguments" (10). Brown presents a more theoretically dense argument because Rodriguez is proposing brownness as a new approach to understand community, sexuality, history, and identity in the United States. Marking a departure point from the earlier two autobiographies, Rodriguez proposes different conceptual tools for rethinking universally accepted truths about race, ethnicity, borders, and sexuality. The introduction of brown subjectivity as a discursive strategy opens the space for various participants –especially the colonizer and the colonized— and starts conversations that allow alternative perspectives on the distinct roles individuals have played in the cultural interpretation of the Americas.

Thus, following a relative opening that we had already witnessed in Days of Obligation, Rodriguez dialogues with U. S. voices –de Tocqueville, among others— as well as Latin American intellectuals –Vasconcelos and Paz, chiefly. He maintains a distant,

divergent position with respect to Chicano scholars in the interpretation of Mexican and Mexican-American and Chicano cultural features, but it is a position much less confrontational than decades before. It is particularly significant that in this third autobiography Rodriguez looks at the Americas as a whole, debunking the idea of an isolated identity, which is somewhat of an anachronism in a globalized context as that of the twenty first century. Brownness lets Rodriguez do away with the purity that essentialist ethnicity fosters, a position the author sees as naïve in this day and age. In order to transcend this innocence, Rodriguez shifts gears and turns to a more comprehensive solution to cultural identity and affiliation.

Having conceived Brown as the last part of a trilogy, it functions as a coda where Rodriguez mulls over topics and motifs present in earlier works, re-evaluating them. It is perhaps in this aspect of the book where critics and scholars have noticed a manifest centering of Rodriguez's stance or, at least, a relaxation of stern conservative opinions. In spite of this, it is Hunger of Memory the text that continues to draw steady attention, particularly in the context of autobiography studies or literacy narratives. In interviews, Rodriguez has suggested that he prefers the vociferous criticism against his first autobiography to the indifference with which his later work was received.

If critical reception of the second and third autobiographies by Rodriguez progressively drained away, it is practically non-existent in the case of Darling: A Spiritual Autobiography. Having been published in 2013, it has only received critical attention in religious reviews and radio programs devoted to spirituality and religion. In the latter case, the book has become an almost excuse to bring the author and expand the dialogue into issues of race, ethnicity, and the status of Latino concerns in the United States. There has been little critical reception among the scholars of gay and queer issues, other than the occasional

review. A possible reason behind this is the nature of the text, where discussion of homosexuality refers to his analysis of social agents –namely the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence— that have already been the subject of several other studies in the field, or it refers to his personal autobiographical account, which was also critically reviewed some twenty years before with the publication of Days of Obligation.

The significance of Darling lies in the reconciling of two very divergent aspects of Rodriguez's personality: his Catholicism and his homosexuality. The lack of critical works that address the text has been a challenge for this project. Nevertheless, the autobiography provides room for fruitful discussion about his presentation of Catholic faith and how the author understands religion and spirituality. In addition, Rodriguez's frank consideration of gay issues reveals how far along he has come and how much more open he is to discuss these topics in comparison with his meek approach to them in his first book. Rodriguez's analysis of gay activism is especially rich and allows for the approach of the autobiography from the perspective of queer studies.

In the following chapters we will analyze Rodriguez's autobiographies, paying attention to the discourses he postulates. In order to do so, we have structured each study of his autobiographies around the analysis of main ideas he proposes in them. While his position has changed somewhat and it is not as controversial as he was a few decades ago, he is still at odds with Chicano scholarship. While being more critical with the mainstream, Rodriguez still covets a place in the Anglo-American literary canon.

CHAPTER 3

WRITING ON LANGUAGE, EDUCATION AND CLASS: THE DISTINCTIVE MEMORY OF RICHARD RODRIGUEZ

"This autobiography, moreover, is a book about language"
(Hunger of Memory 7)

Richard Rodriguez's 1982 autobiography, under the title Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez, was vigorously attacked by Latinos –and among those, especially the Chicano intelligentsia. At the same time, however, the book was acclaimed by critics in mainstream venues. Paul Zweig in The New York Times Book Review qualified the book as a "superb autobiographical essay […] uncannily sensitive to the nuances of language learning". In adding that "[t]he exquisite clarity of Mr. Rodriguez's writing is the product of long care, an attention to nuance that, one senses is not only esthetic but moral", Zweig emphasizes the quality of the writing and the perceptiveness with which Rodriguez portrays the power of language to shape life. Alison Comey, while misspelling the Spanish, praised the English writing and the author's eloquence in The Christian Science Monitor. Jean Strouse also nodded to the book in a respectful review in Newsweek. Time magazine also covered it, and Rodriguez was interviewed in prominent radio and television programs such as "The Today Show", as Fr. John W. Donohue, S.J. notes in his review (403). In their accolades to the autobiography, both Zweig and Donohue are perceptive enough to point to the controversial aspect of the text: its content when it comes to bilingual education and affirmative action. Along these lines, Zweig accurately predicted that the book would be "a source of controversy among educators committed to the recent idea of bilingual education, and to other forms of special treatment, in schools, for 'minorities'" (his emphasis). Donohue, for his part, contrasts the "quixotic protest" that turned the author "unpopular with minority

activists who consider him a coconut: brown on the outside, white on the inside" (404) with the position of Latino judges, Congressmen, community leaders, Catholic bishops, and political lobbyist who were in favor of the Federal Government's backing of bilingual education and affirmative action.

Nevertheless, not every mainstream publication applauded the book. Susan Seidner Adler, in Commentary, stated that in this "unconvincing book" most issues are "analyzed strictly in terms of class", which would explain why his family is caricaturized into mannerisms –his parents— or simply described –his siblings— in terms of their complexion, their job, their cars, or any other symbol denoting class status. Adler argues that this "is true of friends" as well, and that "[e]ven the reader is imagined in class terms", what allows her to contend that Rodriguez suffers "from a sense of superiority. He is in fact guilty of nothing but being a snob".

But, while Rodriguez affirms that language "has been the great subject of his life" (Hunger of Memory 6), his standpoint vis-à-vis bilingual education and affirmative action also dominates his discourse in this autobiography. It is precisely because of his assimilationist posture and his rejection of bilingual education that the majority of the Chicano scholars have attacked the book and the autobiographer.

This chapter focuses on how Rodriguez establishes his autobiographical voice and persona to weave an essay where he calls into question, and ultimately rejects, the sociopolitical ideals and programs that were inherent to the Civil Rights Movement: bilingualism and affirmative action. In rejecting them, Rodriguez is regarded as a threat to the moral authority of the Movement. It also focuses on how Rodriguez is proposing advancement of Latinos by other means than those supported by the Chicano Movement, and how the means that he intends are in direct relation to the anxiety of class that the middle

layers of society often display. To this end, it is essential to pay attention to how family is depicted in this text, moreover since the autobiography deals with the coming of age of the protagonist and can be included in the *Bildungsroman* genre.

3.1. The *Bildung* of an autobiographical hero

The writing of the self that deals with the forming of identity and coming of age of the protagonist is grounded on the *Bildungsroman*. As such, this writing establishes its structure in certain anthropological constants that are surveyed in a diachronic manner, as well as along the *topos*. If the essence of the narratives of the self that are also *Bildungsromane* is the knowledge of the self that the protagonist acquires by means of the experiences he lives through, its narration becomes a literary variant –that is, a symbolic one— of the route to self-identification, which the protagonist –and all human beings as well— must undergo. In this sense, it is an intrinsically human path. As humans, we feed on our cultural surroundings and education is a key factor in shaping the cultural milieu in which the individual becomes aware of the self and acquires a conscience of belonging to a culture. In "Defining *Bildungsroman* as a Genre", Marianne Hirsch Gottfried and David Miles posit that "the *Bildungsroman* maintains a peculiar balance between the social and the personal and explores their interaction" (122). This definition of the *Bildungsroman* suggests that there is a tension between the individual and the communal in the process towards a textual resolution of mutual, societal and personal conflicts. This resolution can be one in which the subject ends integrated in the community, or one in which s/he remains an outcast. In either case, the genre implies a search for identity.

In other words, as Gottfried and Miles state, "*Bildung* is the organic unfolding of a totality of human capacities by the contact with worldly experiential powers, a process which

results in an accommodation to those powers" (122). At times, this adaptation can be best achieved, or performed, by ascertaining a model. Hence, *Bildungsroman* would be the process by which an individual identifies with his model, and becomes the image of that agent, as François Jost contends (98-99). It is clear, as it will be seen later, that Rodriguez identifies with and attempts to become a model that is closer to the Anglo-American cultural context and tradition, than a Mexican, Latin American, or even Hispanic one. Hunger of Memory occupies itself with this process that Jost describes in his study. In this sense, the *Bildungsroman* is a question of engagement, culture, society, and agency. Qualifying this process as developmental, James Hardin goes further in asserting that it is "a slippery concept" fixed to the manner in which we read a set of cultural values, and therefore the coming-of-age involves a comprehensive label for the cultural values of a given group or social layer in a specific time in history, and the attaining and absorption into the designated value system (xi-xii). Of course, in the case of Hunger of Memory, as in the case of other Latino –and diasporic— *Bildungsromane*, the process of coming-of-age involves friction among dissenting cultural values, in the course of searching and ascribing to an identity.

Rites are indispensable elements in the process of adjusting to a set of values, a process that one might as well call acculturation. Among those rituals, those labeled as 'rites of initiation' stand out in literature and, most especially, in the narratives of the self, above all in those that deal with the formative years of the protagonist, and thus are part of the genre *Bildungsroman.* Texts that are part of this genre recount how characters come to terms with societal quests that allow or impede complete insertion into the given social order. These rites of initiation may be also called 'puberty rites' or 'tribal initiation rites' as Mircea Eliade points out in Rites and Symbols of Initiation. If the essence of autobiographical *Bildungsromane* is the knowledge of the self that the protagonist acquires through the life experiences he goes through, the text itself becomes a literary variant –thus, a symbolic one,

as it was pointed out earlier— of the path towards self-identification. This is an intrinsically human path, since it is not limited to the protagonist of the text but it is walked on by each and every man and woman in the process of living. An instrumental element in the process of coming-of-age and self-knowledge is the array of cultural expressions that feed our development into adulthood. Along with culture come myths and their narratives, stories that are fictional in their origin, but which society accepts as truthful. As Northrop Frye states in Anatomy of Criticism, the imitation of nature in fiction does not produce reality nor truth, but plausibleness (77). Consequently, truth is not a reliable image of reality but the consensus of a given collectivity with respect to a symbolic explanation about the human experience, mediated through a given cultural milieu. As Northrop Frye indicates in his study, this culturally enabled arrangement is manifested by means of expressions of a strong symbolic character. Among those, the aforementioned rites are expressions of cultural myths. And the rites of initiation are particularly recurrent in literature, especially in those writings of the self that occupy themselves with the coming of age of their characters.

In these narrative structures, the reader encounters the following pattern: the protagonist is removed from the maternal –or familial— custody and remains ostracized from the community. Then, under the watch of one or several members of the community, the adolescent undergoes the rites of initiation. It is then when there is a return to the origin, a *regressus ad uterum*, which symbolizes the death of infancy and the inception of a spiritual rebirth, a renaissance. This symbolic death is usually preceded by physical or mental undertakings, some of which can be traumatic. Once these deeds have been accomplished, the individual enters the sphere of adulthood and becomes integrated into the community. Leaving behind the religious attributes that puberty rites might have in certain cultures, and focusing on their secular aspects, contemporary persons must perform certain tasks in order to enter a category perceived as superior: that of a full-fledged member of the adult

community. Initiation into the community becomes, as a result, a critical transition phase, one that is decisive and recurrent in human life. Ultimately, the individual acquires a better understanding of the self through the accomplishment of those quests within the societal context.

The structural axis of *Bildungsroman* is the construction of a personality which, in the course of the narration, must overcome an initiation process of self-formation in order to arrive to the experienced self. As a consequence, the protagonist of the autobiographical coming-of-age narrative is transcended by the renewed being that results from his or her own telling of the initiation quest. The subject becomes a true literary archetype, a simplified version of human life, one that is limited by the temporal parameters of the narrative. The narrative of the self, especially if it can be read as a *Bildungsroman*, composes a discursive model that, in turn, enhances the narrative tradition: it garners the dialectics by which the innocent self attains the experience of adult life by means of a series of undertakings that beget the death of innocence. It is precisely because of this relation between ritual and *Bildungsroman* that the latter takes part in the universal and timeless nature of human truth, a truth that is a creative source of the literary structure. Hunger of Memory and other autobiographical *Bildungsromane* attempt to put on paper the way in which men and women *understand* how human beings are crafted. There is emphasis on the verb understand precisely because the coming-of-age process implies intellect and, as intellectual realization, it requires a language in its construction.

When addressing narratives in which the removed or isolated protagonists must overcome hurdles and complete undertakings in their search for identity, one's mind indeed drifts towards terms such as "hero". In fact, the term refers us to the body of ancient mythical narratives where the protagonist endures and surmounts obstacles placed in front of her/him,

at times with the intervention of supernatural powers. The function of these narratives was primarily cathartic, since they illustrated the possibility of mankind to transcend their human life and gain access to the superior realm of the gods through the figure of the hero, who was regarded as the redeemer of her/his peers. Unquestionably, in Hunger of Memory, as in other contemporary autobiographical *Bildungsromane* one will not find supernatural elements that assist the protagonists to overcome the rites of initiation they must undergo in their path towards self-knowledge. Secularization of literature has brought to an end the demigod nature of the classic hero and contemporary ones prevail over their mundane quests immersed in the quotidian routine of their lives. Nevertheless, the ethnic and/or minority hero, in the autobiographical coming-of age narrative still fashions her/his character and her/his role as one of intercession on behalf of the rest of the community, as in the classic models. Many Latino autobiographers portray themselves as an example to be taken into account –if not to be followed altogether— by the constituency of their community.

One could argue that our contemporary heroes are devoid of the sense of triumph, of that victorious halo that comes with a happy ending. In many cases the quest of these minority or ethnic heroes ends up with a bittersweet recognition of the self. However, this is far from failure. The protagonists achieve their goal: a greater knowledge of self, a better understanding of themselves as well as of their surroundings (a habitat that oftentimes is perceived as antagonistic, if not thoroughly hostile). A substantial basis for that bittersweet feeling is the fact that loss is an integral part of the process of getting to know the self. It is humanity that begets success to contemporary heroes: the hero's character repeatedly tested through continuous search. As a result the importance lies in the process, the search itself, not in the outcome. Along these lines, Fernando Savater makes a difference between the triumphant hero –which Savater contends is essential to sustain faith in life, hence his continuity in existence— and the tragic one by means of their correlation with social strata.

While the former is aligned with expressions of popular culture, such as sports, serial movies, popular music, television …, the only acceptable hero for 'high culture' is the one vanquished, left behind, through whom the unfeasibility of virtue is revealed (134). This analysis can help us explain why Richard Rodriguez, in Hunger of Memory, portrays himself, in the end, as a lonely individual who has cast off his Hispanic community, as well as seemingly rejected kinship into Anglo-American academe. At the same time, it exemplifies how his narrative gears Rodriguez towards an allegiance with the upper classes, thus echoing some afore mentioned criticism.

While our hero-protagonist ends up isolated, similarly as he found himself in the beginning and through his quest, one cannot uphold the notion that the hero returns to the start point, nor that the structure is a circular one. Due to the introspection that the coming-of-age yields, the protagonist while in a cyclical movement is never at the onset, but in a spiral bend, where the initial situation is revisited except that each time the subject has been informed, in consequence transformed in someone different. Hence, s/he is never at the same pre-heroic initial point. The intention here is not to negate the return, but to qualify it as an informed return. In this way, Rodriguez does not return to his family in Hunger of Memory, neither to Mexico in Days of Obligation, because both connections are rendered impossible by virtue of the self-knowledge that the subject has acquired in his coming-of-age. This return to the origin, which will be discussed further in the next chapter, has a relevant function in the structure and discourse of *Bildungsromane* since it supports the rites of initiation and rebirth. This function is also present in the writings of the self by means of retrospective and remembrance. In Myth and Reality, Eliade underscores the importance of knowing the origins and history of something in order to master it. The Romanian scholar parallels remembrance of an ancient myth with remembering a personal experience because in both instances the task is to remember what happened at the onset and subsequently with

detail and precision (89-90). Following Eliade's thoughts on the function of memory in recovering the past, one could argue that the autobiographer-protagonist remembers details in order to overcome her/his past, transcend time, and return to the primal instant, that which anticipates the renewal of the individual. Memory, therefore, unites the human nature of introspection and the impulse for self-knowledge, both present in the narrative structure of rites and of the narratives of the self. In a similar way in which heroes trace their past actions and learn about their identity by means of the remembering of their development, in the imaginary time of narration, the author-protagonist of the narratives of self crafts, with the agreement of the reader –since the reader is an inherent member of the autobiographical pact— a coherent I, one which tries to uncover by way of remembrance and memory his or her personal identity. David Hume considers memory as the origin of the notion of causality, which builds up the structure of the self in a sequence of correlations between cause and effect (196). It is through memory that the autobiographer acquires conscience of the self and constructs her/his identity. In turn, these retrospective journeys that the author-protagonist embarks on are reflected in the self-consciousness of the reader. Wolfgang Iser, in The Act of Reading, posits that reading does not just involve what is contained in the text but that the reader finds in the act of reading the possibility of formulating herself, or himself, that which may not be articulated in the text and, consequently, find that which escapes her, or his, conscience. In this way the remembering conscience of the protagonist helps us to evoke our own memories, to define our own experience, to project our values, and to delineate a sketch of our consciousness by dint of our interpretation of the gist of the written text. This is particularly pertinent in the case of the literature of U.S. Latinos and other minorities. These texts, given the nature of their composition, either consciously or unconsciously appeal to the community they ascribe to. Therefore, the personal experience described in the texts, can be

perceived beyond the particular and be extrapolated to the community at large, even if this was not the explicit intention on the part of the author.

This bridge between the protagonist's experience and the reader's one is underscored precisely through the rites themselves. Rites are the social expression of an individual experience which every human encounters. As the reader has undergone –to a greater or a lesser degree— the same or a similar introspection that the protagonist has been subjected to, it is not far-fetched to establish a correlation. This is perhaps more obvious among members of the same social bracket, who can see echoes of their own personal trajectory in the development of the textual persona they have in front. Alternatively, if the education that results from the rites of initiation that characters go through is a product of experiencing life rather than a social training, one cannot but infer that knowledge is an effect of the confrontation between individual and society, and this is something that occurs in both literature and real life. In one and the other, it can be witnessed the gradual process of acculturation —as opposed to indoctrination— by which the individual assimilates guidelines of different nature that society provides. These parameters come from different social clusters surrounding the person: family, school, class bracket, gender, sexual orientation, etc. These are, precisely, the norms that are sanctified by the rites. Then again, all these social models form interacting forces with the self. By means of these forces, the individual – be it real or literary— develops her/his own identity and personal entity. In consequence, one can add that the rites of initiation offer an interpretation that clarifies the balance of both opposing forces as well as cooperative ones, which together design the personal, non-transferable maturing of the individual. Therefore, as an integral part of the human community, the person develops, grows. The subject is not a given, but it is formed. The essence of an individual lies not in an *a priori* ontological category, but it resides in the progressive implementation of her/his

potentialities. An example of this can be found in the narratives of the self and in the concrete examples that Richard Rodriguez places before us.

3.2. Bilingual education: The politics of language

While Zweig concluded that Hunger of Memory portrayed the process by which its author "learned to become part of the American family," the book outraged most Chicana/o and Latina/o academics and those in tune with the reforms being brought forth by the Civil Rights Movement because of Rodriguez's controversial arguments against bilingual education and affirmative action programs. In doing so, Rodriguez endorsed the neoconservative wave that was spreading widely in the 1908s and focused on the elimination of both programs. In Rodriguez's view English is the one and only public language in the United States and bilingual education is nothing but an unwise "scheme" on part of the politicians and "Hispanic-American social activists" (Hunger of Memory 10). Hence, according to Rodriguez, schools should not waste resources nor time in using the student's "family language" for instruction, because doing so "is to misunderstand the public uses of schooling and to trivialize the nature of intimate life" (10). One of the primary roles for schooling the students who speak other than English at home is to try to assimilate them as swiftly as possible into the dominant language and, by extension, culture. It is this tacit position against multiculturalism and diversity that one can infer has garnered much opposition to Rodriguez's book. More so since it is underlined by his stance against affirmative action, as it will be discuss later. Those opinions have also been used to substantiate Rodriguez's endorsement of conservative views. However, it must be noted that while both text and author are seen as promoting a conservative political agenda, the autobiography is still being used in college curricula to represent a voice from the minorities

and as an example of a diverse literary canon. In a sense, this is opposite to what Rodriguez's assimilationist intentions in the book are. In other words, as Barthes asserted, the author is dead[6]. The fact that audiences with politically opposed views find this autobiography compelling illustrates the complexity of its reception. A contributing factor in that complexity is the element that while the text points towards a conservative, monolingual –if not also monocultural— agenda, and the author has been invited to and has spoken at events and forums supported by (neo)conservative thinkers. In Chicano Narrative, scholar Ramón Saldívar declares that Rodriguez wants to "market his existential anguish to the most receptive audience imaginable: the right-wing establishment and the liberal academic intelligentsia" (158), and Juan Bruce-Novoa declared that voices such as this are "representative of the conflicting plurality" (130) within the Chicana/o community, a community that, in the opinion of Bruce-Novoa, at times treats ethnicity as a "monological absolute" (139) as a result of what he calls "truncating definitions" (94) of ethnicity. These statements by Saldívar and Bruce-Novoa showcase the diverse reception of Rodriguez's viewpoints in Hunger of Memory and the fact that his opinions and work may not be easily pinned down politically. Some other literary critics leave aside the realm of the political, and base their assessment on the literary qualities of the book. This is the case of Antonio Márquez: "I contend that there is a level of artistry in Hunger of Memory that should not be shunted […] I contend that its ultimate value lies in its literary qualities." (133) Márquez, however, goes on to assert that reading this autobiography is not equivalent to reading history or sociology because of the licenses that are associated with the literary construction of one's memories. While this scholar perceives that sociopolitical readings might have guided readers and made them forget the literary nature of the text, he also privileges the literary as a self-

[6] Barthes' notion of the death of the author also questions the definition, and perhaps the whole genre, of autobiography. We will not open the door to that debate in this project, although we acknowledge the existence and validity of such a discussion in the study of the narratives of the self.

sufficient sphere. Critic Laura Fine also wants to separate the political from the literary when she claims that one should not read this text as a political manifesto, and that the "primary concern of autobiographers like Rodriguez is not promulgating a political agenda, but evoking the rich complexity of personal identity." (135) Although one might agree with both scholars that a sensible reader should not reduce a literary text to its sociohistorical aspect, reading means engaging with these issues when approaching any text; in other words, paying attention to its context. Furthermore, the texts that occupy the core of this project are autobiographies and, as such, they aim to portray the author's position in a given moment that is itself historically and politically charged. Rodriguez himself describes Hunger of Memory as "a history of my schooling" (6) forcing the reader to take into account history and context when reading the book. In engaging with the context of a text, especially one where the author is presenting his own identity as a construct, one cannot set aside the political. The very act of interacting with society and its norms is a political one. When Rodriguez presents himself in contrast to other identities, as many Latino authors do, he is forming a political agenda of sorts. While Márquez and Fine propose to set aside sociohistorical and political dimensions of Rodriguez's autobiographies, one must take them into account when approaching critically his literary texts. This is especially evident in the instances when Rodriguez discusses the issues of bilingualism and affirmative action in relation to his educational process. Along this line of thought, Raymund Paredes argues that while the author might emphasize the "literary, aesthetic qualities" of Hunger of Memory in interviews, one should focus on "how Rodriguez marshals autobiographical form, and attendant literary and rhetorical devices, to validate his political and cultural choices and to vindicate a particular ideology." ("Autobiography" 281). Rodriguez himself states: "My book is necessarily political, in the conventional sense, for public issues –editorials and ballot stubs,

petitions and placards, faceless formulations of greater and lesser good by greater and lesser minds— have bisected my life and changed its course." (7)

Rodriguez did speak disparagingly of bilingual education and advocated for fast assimilation into the mainstream, dominant language and culture. From the very beginning, the text embraces the importance of language in the life of an individual. "This autobiography, moreover, is a book about language." (7) But, also, intrinsically connected to language there is a dichotomy that Rodriguez establishes, which in turn helps him to construct his essay in favor of assimilation. For Rodriguez, there is private language: that of the home, the family, that which has to be spoken in the intimacy of the familial; and a public language: what which is spoken in the public domain, in the community. Because in Rodriguez's view the latter is the unrestricted language, while the private one is to be constrained, a hierarchical assessment is solidified. Issues of power and prestige are directly related to the establishment of a hierarchical order. In Rodriguez's view, English, the public language, holds the upper hand. The book opens with a reference to Shakespeare's The Tempest when the autobiographer says "I have taken Caliban's advice. I have stolen their books" (3). Once language is perceived in such a ranked order, it becomes power. This hierarchy between public and private language –between English and Spanish— is furthermore underlined when Rodriguez describes that the "speech of people in public seemed to me very loud, booming with confidence" (14). This is the confidence that comes when someone perceives s/he holds power. And holding power is achieved through the detriment of those who are subjected to this power; hence, in Rodriguez's system of private versus public language, the reader is really witnessing two groups with different hold on power; in other words, two social classes based on language. As it will be analyzed later on in this chapter, the underlying issue pervading the entire autobiography is class.

While the debate regarding bilingual education nowadays is not as passionate as it was in the 1980s, Rodriguez's autobiography still prompts emotional responses from its readers when it comes to this topic. In an article published in Colby Quarterly under the title "Richard Rodriguez and the Art of Abstraction," Latino critic Gustavo Pérez-Firmat writes:

> "When I teach this book, as I often do, I'm always struck by the vehemence of some reactions. A few years ago, the final paper of one student took the form of an extended letter, in Spanish, to Rodriguez. After upbraiding him for his abandonment of his mother tongue and his opposition to affirmative action, she ended with the following admonition: 'Señor Rodriguez, *get a life!"* (255).

In other words, Rodriguez's voluntary decision to forsake Spanish, thus severing ties to his mother tongue, turns into an issue that is morally reprehensible for the readers, as it is perceived as the author's rejection of his ethnic heritage.

However, one should pause to consider that Rodriguez's position vis-à-vis bilingual education (and affirmative action) is an expression of his philosophical principles. This is a position that forces us to confront the differences in approaching the essence of Chicana/o identity. While, for some scholars, Mexican culture is at the crux of Chicana/o identity, Rodriguez's stance towards Spanish and bilingual education brings up a division in how Chicanismo (and/or the Mexican American experience) can be constructed. In the first decades after the publication of Hunger of Memory, it was generally easy for scholars and critics to deplore, and even reject, Rodriguez's ideas based on its politics. Nevertheless, one ought to take into account that this text –and, by inclusion, the politics it implies— unwraps different queries with regards to the construction of a Chicano and/or Mexican American identity. While for some intellectuals "authentic" Mexican culture and Spanish language are central to Chicano and Mexican American culture, for other Latino intellectuals there must be a parting from the Latin American cultures of origin. It is safe to assume that some of these – like in the case of Rodriguez— advocate for assimilation into the mainstream Anglo culture.

The current trends in Latino Studies tend to analyze the object of study vis-à-vis the Anglo-American milieu and independent of their cultures of origin, in part due to the interests and nature of departments of English and American Studies, as well as those of the disciplines and fields of study usually filed under the rubric of social studies. Yet, Rodriguez is a step beyond in his rejection of bilingual education and affirmative action, since despite the fact that current Latino trends do not look as much to the cultures of origin as in earlier times, they do acknowledge the political corollary that both bilingual education and affirmative action bring about in relation to Latinos. For his part, Rodriguez's early emphasis on the different perspectives within Mexican-American and Chicano identities prompted his regard as a threat, and as a representative of the politics that compromised and imperiled the advances gained after the Civil Rights. In 1980s, Latino identity was still fragile, and many cognoscenti were still in the process of mapping its terrain and nature. Part of this process is language, and the relation between English and Spanish, and the different dialects and idiolects that may be involved, as Gloria Anzaldúa expressed in the chapter entitled "How to Tame a Wild Tongue" of her seminal book Borderlands/La frontera . The decade of the 1980s saw an increase of "English-only" movements and pushes towards making English the official language of the US, as a consequence of anti-immigrant and xenophobic standpoints. Official language policies may serve the purpose of creating rifts and divides among ethnicities, races, and it could be contended social classes as well[7]. Rodriguez might be seen

[7] Further information on the resurgence of English-only movements in the 1980s can be found in Crawford's At War with Diversity: U.S. Language Policy in an Age of Anxiety; Bilingual Education: History, Politics, Theory, and Practice (later revised and published under the new title Education English Learners: Language Diversity in the Classroom); English Language Learners in American Classrooms: 101 Questions, 101 Answers (co-authored with Stephen Krashen); Hold Your Tongue: Bilingualism and the Politics of English Only; Language Loyalties: A Source Book on the Official English Controversy; Cummins' Language Power and Pedagogy: Bilingual Children in the Crossfire; Negotiating Identities: Education for Empowerment in a Diverse Society; Kloss' The American Bilingual Tradition; Krashen's,Under Attack: The Case against Bilingual Education; Lindholm-Leary's. Dual Language Education; and Reyes' Diary of a Bilingual School (co-authored with Crawford). Also of importance are the articles by Sánchez : "Face the Nation: Race, Immigration and the Rise of Nativism in Late Twentieth Century America" and by Crawford: "The Decline of

as endorsing the idea that people in the U.S. speak a common language in the nation –in this case English— but, given the socio-political context of the times, it was not perceived as inclusive. Because of Rodriguez's insistence of leaving behind Spanish language and Hispanic heritage, underlined by his insistence on the public/private dichotomy, his contentions were consistent with the arguments and the aims of the English-only lobbies that were reviving at the time. Rodriguez was, thus, interpreted as a voice from within that pushed for the marginalization of Latinos and the maintaining of the cultural and linguistic hegemony of the dominant group, in great part due to his stigmatization of the public use of Spanish. By Rodriguez's insistence of limiting Spanish to the private domain, he contributed to develop the notion of the non-English speaker as foreign –regardless of her/his citizenship status— and, more gravely, inassimilable. In a posthumously published article, Chicano writer and scholar Arturo Islas quoted Rodriguez's statement: "Bilingual education is worthless" given "at the beginning of his talk to the English-Speaking Union [a non-profit group dedicated to promoting global English] meeting in San Francisco in 1979, and he received the most enthusiastic ovation of the conference for this" ("Richard Rodriguez" 225).

On November 4, 1986, Proposition 63 appeared on the California electoral ballot. This proposition sought an amendment of the state's constitution in order to declare English as the official language of the State of California. It was approved by 73.2% of the votes and it directed the California State Legislature to enact legislation in order to ensure that English be the official, common language of Californians. The official ballot summary stated that Proposition 63:

> "[p]rovides that English is the official language of State of California. Requires Legislature to enforce this provision by appropriate legislation. Requires Legislature and state officials to take all steps necessary to ensure that the role of English as the common language of the state is preserved and

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Bilingual Education: How to Reverse a Troubling Trend", and "La educación bilingüe en Estados Unidos: política versus pedagogía."

> enhanced. Provides that the Legislature shall make no law which diminishes or ignores the role of English as the common language. Provides that any resident of or person doing business in state shall have standing to sue the state to enforce these provisions." ("California Ballot Propositions")

It has been suggested that Richard Rodriguez contributed to the passing of the above proposition by means of his writings. For instance, George Yúdice in his article "Marginality and the Ethics of Survival" asserts so, although he gives no specific information as to which of Rodriguez's text(s) he refers to. In any case, Rodriguez did promote the political stance of the English-only movements by providing them with a Hispanic voice.

Hunger of Memory also advanced the "Culture Wars' of the 80s. Attempts to diversify the educational curricula and to define United States cultures in diverse terms encountered a hostile response by the mainstream. In the later years of the decade, some hegemonic voices made a case for a return to a traditional curriculum they saw threatened in its quality and values by the new emphasis on multiculturalism[8]. Among those, E.D. Hirsch Jr. stresses the need for a common culture to be taught in public schools, for those are the places that provide "the only sure avenue of opportunity for disadvantaged children" and the sole "reliable way of combating the social determinism that now condemns them to remain in the same social and educational condition as their parents" (xiii). These words bring to mind those of Rodriguez when he states that "as a socially disadvantaged child, I considered Spanish to be a private language," (18) or that using another language but English, is "to misunderstand the public uses of schooling." (10) Much like Rodriguez's perception of school and education: "What I needed to learn in school was that I had the right –and the obligation— to speak the public language of *los gringos*," (18) Hirsch believes that the school is the place –and education the means— to propagate "a mastery of national culture

[8] Among the most famous academic works against cultural pluralism we must cite Allan Bloom's The Closing of the American Mind; D'Souza's Illiberal Education; and Hirsch's Cultural Literacy.

[…] a perspective of our own traditions and values." (18) Multicultural education, in Hirsch's view,

> "should not be allowed to ensure our children's mastery of American literate culture […] To teach the ways of one's own community has always been and still remains the essence of the education of our children, who enter neither a narrow tribal culture nor a transcendent world culture but a national literate culture." (18)

Hirsch does not define what he calls "American literate culture" and he seems to mix multiculturalism with world culture. Multicultural studies in the 1980s sought to provide a space in the national cultural milieu for all those non-mainstream cultures that were being left out due to racist and hegemonic exclusions, rather than the internationalist nature that Hirsch alludes to. In this sense, both Rodriguez and Hirsch seem to advocate for a path of assimilation, in which the nation's linguistic –and otherwise— diversity is substituted by a hegemonic culture that spreads, by means of schooling, to the middle-class first and, subsequently, to less advantaged strata of society. Moreover, there is a pervasive notion in Hunger of Memory that public language revolves around Anglo-American culture, with an unequivocal emphasis on British culture, in part given the educational path Rodriguez followed. Likewise, Hirsch's book lists foundational European cultural artifacts as essential things that informed Americans ought to know. Ronald Takaki criticizes how Hirsch mentions the role of New York's Ellis Island in the categories that an American should know about the make-up of the country, but does not mention well-known entryways for immigrants of Asian origin, like San Francisco Bay's Angel Island. Takaki denounces that "cultural literacy, as defined by Hirsch as well as by educators and pundits like him, reflects a widely held but mistaken view that 'American' means 'white' or European in origin" (xi-xii). Both, Hirsch and Rodriguez view schooling as an instrument to homogenize, level, and acculturate the disadvantaged groups, and language instruction is fundamental to their notion of common –read hegemonic— cultural knowledge. What Rodriguez fails to acknowledge is

that bilingual education programs are designed to aid students whose native language is not English to acquire the necessary linguistic skills in order to successfully navigate their schooling in English and, subsequently, be fluent in the country's *lingua franca*. Therefore, one can contend that bilingual education programs sought to arrive at a common cultural understanding. In essence, those programs can be regarded as another means to assimilate minorities to the mainstream, and not as advocacy for multiculturalism, like their opponents want to believe.

It is not surprising, then, that the publication of Hunger of Memory and, consequently, its echoing –if not promotion— of such knotty ideas which associated the author with reactionary mindsets made the Latino intellectuals of the time suspicious of Rodriguez. Chicana/o scholars called into question the competence of Rodriguez as a valid representative of Latinos, and specifically the Mexican-Americans. The autobiographical nature of the text provided them with the argument that this was a private, personal experience, and it should not be taken "as representative of enlightened Chicano thinking" (Candelaria 4). Tomás Rivera went further to state that this "book is a personal expression, an autobiography, and it must be understood as that in its singularity. It should not be used as a single way or method of understanding the bilingual, bicultural phenomenon of the Hispanic group" (5). Islas said that Rodriguez generalized "from only his personal experience with bilingual education and affirmative action to judge them pernicious" ("Richard Rodriguez" 222). Of course, other autobiographies and narratives of the self that have not been controversial or against the tenets of the Latino intelligentsia have been considered to be representative of the community. Perhaps the reason behind this is an identity issue; in other words, that their authors have not been seen uncomfortable with the Latino label, whereas Rodriguez was perceived as someone who "did not, and still does not, hesitate to speak for Mexican-Americans and Chicanos, despite the fact that he never felt comfortable with the identity

others ascribed to him or with the people who proudly claim it" (Gutiérrez 386). For other scholars, like Raymund Paredes, Rodriguez is not a Latino but a Hispanic intellectual, referring in this manner to the conservative political connotations imposed on the term Hispanic since its use by Richard Nixon and linked to governmental efforts to homogenize Latinos. Due to his assimilationist position on bilingual education, Rodriguez helps his critics to depict him as a minion subservient to the hegemonic supremacy. Members of the conservative establishment ultimately sought to change the linguistic policy of the country. The United States does not have a language declared as official language, although English is regarded as the lingua franca. Supporters of the English-only movement lobbied for the U.S. government to declare English as the official language of the country, and thus delegitimizing the use of languages other than English. This would be deemed as an escalation of the push towards linguistic and cultural homogenization of the U.S. by those in favor of the measure, and the efforts to reject said homogenization by those against it.

By dismissing the need for bilingual education –and other social programs, such as affirmative action— Hunger of Memory stressed the notion of individualism: the scholarship-boy can move up in society primarily on his own choices. This notion that one is able to overcome difficulties alone, without the support of the community and/or certain social programs echoes the conservative discourse that worked toward to denial of the systemic, historical oppression of minorities in the United States, and ultimately to disavow the state's role in the social inequalities, thus refusing to do something to compensate for them.

3.3. Disavowing affirmative action: Refuting a path to success

In the same way that Rodriguez spoke disapprovingly of bilingual education, he argued against affirmative action, as it has already been mentioned in the previous section.

His rationale is that they take into consideration only race-based discrimination as opposed to a class-based differential. This argument has reverberations with the line of reasoning that was set forth by the Reagan administration at the time of the publication of Rodriguez's autobiography. In the late 70s and early 80s, there was a substantial shift to the right in politics that saw Reagan being elected to the Oval Office which ensued a period of conservative social and economic laws that made every effort to reduce or even remove many of the federal programs intended to ameliorate the situation of the less advantaged segments of society –among them the minorities— vis-à-vis the inequalities underlying American society. Many of those programs had been initiated in the forties and the sixties, under the administrations of Presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt and Lyndon B. Johnson, respectively. During the Reagan administration the United Sates Department of Justice engaged in a number of legal disputes over affirmative action laws, since those were programs that the President particularly opposed. The controversy over the value and efficacy of affirmative action programs went on throughout the nineties and Rodriguez's views articulated in Hunger of Memory contributed to mainstream's movement towards conservative politics. In other words, Rodriguez's attacks to affirmative action made a case for the dismantling of the program, rather than helping against its elimination. Once again, Rodriguez is seen as the voice within that is critic of social programs meant to help Latinos and other non-hegemonic groups, hence legitimizing their eradication.

Rodriguez's opposition to affirmative action drew the attention of a segment of white population, who felt aggrieved with the advancement of racial minorities and who saw nothing to be gained in abating social imbalances. Therefore, the publishing of his first autobiography, and its success among the mainstream, antagonized Rodriguez with the Chicano scholars and critics at the time Latinos were becoming more visible. And just at the time in which this group was getting the attention of a widespread readership, beyond the

Latino constituency, a well-articulated Mexican-American writer who had benefited from the affirmative action programs was arguing against them by means of his effective language use and his privileged access to the mainstream discourse. The animosity that Rodriguez's position on affirmative action gathered was grounded on two main factors. Firstly, it was precisely those affirmative action programs that minorities had fought hard to secure from the administration which had given him an ivory tower from where to speak. The apprehension in Rodriguez's critics stemmed from fear that the text would be embraced by the mainstream as representative of the Mexican-American experience, and that its author's words would be perceived as the insider's acknowledgment that changes to affirmative action needed to be implemented. Ramón Saldívar wondered: "Who would read another editorial on affirmative action? But who can turn away from an anguished denunciation of it by one who has benefited from affirmative action?" (Chicano 159). Secondly, it bothered critics that Rodriguez did not found his attack on the legitimacy of affirmative action on authoritative facts, but merely on his personal experience as related in an autobiography. As already observed, Arturo Islas stated:

> "Because [Rodriguez] assumes the tone and rhetoric of authority on matters about which he speaks subjectively - he generalizes from only his personal experience with bilingual education and affirmative action to judge them pernicious - those who ought to know better but who agree with his views may be misled to see him as representative" ("Richard Rodriguez 222-223).

Of course, Hunger of Memory became one of the first texts to be published by the mainstream press and it successfully was made into a bestseller.

Consequently, many Latino scholars saw in Rodriguez's comments on affirmative action the thoughts of someone who looks to be complacent with the mainstream for his own benefit (Saldívar, Chicano 158) at the expense of "silencing […] the disenfranchised" (Alarcón 150). Not all of them agreed, however. José Limón points out that Rodriguez has

collaborated with broadcasting companies that have been attacked by conservatives, such as PBS and Pacific News Service, while there is no evidence that "conservative bastions" have sponsored him (395).

Ilán Stavans goes further into stating that "[p]olitical analysis is neither his interest nor his strength" ("The Journey" 21), yet Rodriguez's argument in Hunger of Memory constantly refers to the political. When the author affirms that "[h]igher education was not, nor is it yet, accessible to many black Americans" (144), he is being political. He goes on to say that the African-American activists limited the impact of their movement. Moreover, an insightful reader might perceive an attempt on his side to distinguish between blacks and other minority groups. In fact, there seems to be a pervasive need to differentiate himself from the rest –not only other minorities, but Latinos as well, for he never lived in the community, really. Rodriguez states that he believed he was a minority, only to later qualify that assertion by saying that he was not "more socially disadvantaged than the white graduate students in my classes" nor as disadvantaged as "many of the nonwhite students who were entering college, lacking good early schooling" (147). The autobiographer insists that he is "[n]ot like *los pobres* I had encountered", and that he is not representative of "lower class Hispanics" (147). Yet, none of those statements lessens the validity of affirmative action programs aimed towards those who are disadvantaged. It might help Rodriguez to distinguish himself by the negative way: "affirmative action, however, was never able to distinguish someone like me" (150-151) to the point of making a case that his "experience was different" (155). Criticizing affirmative action becomes a means for bragging about his successes, what brings to mind Adler's charge of his snobbery.

In his criticism of affirmative action programs, Rodriguez also makes a case directed against programs that have gender at their core, because he considers preposterous that

privileged white women benefit from them, while lower class women do not. By muddling questions of identity with problems of oppression, Rodriguez does, precisely, what he reproached other activists of having done. Again, the issue of affirmative action becomes a question of class, as it had previously been discussed in the case of bilingual education.

> "In the era of affirmative action it became more and more difficult to distinguish the middle-class victim of social oppression from the lower-class victim. In fact, it became hard to say when a person ever stops being disadvantaged. Quite apart from poverty, the variety of social oppressions that most concerned Americans involved unchangeable conditions. (One does not ever stop being a woman; one does not stop being aged –short of death; one does not stop being a quadriplegic.)" (150).

His argumentation, which is being borrowed from feminism, serves him the purpose of establishing that class mobility is at the crux of his quandary. In other words, class remains the only legitimate oppression as far as the author seems interested, one that is also assessable in an objective way. Instead of taking into account a larger form of social inequality, he focuses on specific, discrete aspects of identity and how those individual characteristics fit into a system that shows partiality towards certain identities to the detriment of others. Hunger of Memory is, therefore, as much about class as it is about bilingual education and affirmative action.

3.4. A matter of class

From the onset, Rodriguez's autobiography manifests a preoccupation with class. "Thirty years later I write this book as a middle-class American man. Assimilated. […] Perhaps because I have always, accidentally, been a classmate to children of rich parents, I long ago came to assume my association with their world" (3). The book ends with another reference to class, depicting how Rodriguez and his siblings have climbed the social ladder

and "[n]owadays there is money enough for buying useless and slightly ludicrous gifts for my mother and father. […] My mother is not surprised that her children are well-off" (193-194). These and other quotes that describe issues of class seem to illustrate Rodriguez's fixation on upward mobility. His awareness of the class and cultural differences between what he persistently calls his private and public worlds— i.e. the world of his Spanish-speaking family and that of the English-speaking mainstream— is what in the structure of the *Bildungsroman* constitutes the critical division in a child's awareness of her/his surroundings: the separation between the personal and the impersonal and the finding of one's space within the impersonal. Class status becomes a way for Richard to approach this impersonal, outside world and for Rodriguez it becomes a way to present, if not altogether justify, his path towards assimilation. The autobiographer presents his –and his siblings'— success in the public mainstream, and the corresponding distancing from his parents, as his ascension in class, although it remains unclear why his climbing the social ladder entails a separation from his parents and, really, all his family. The author points at education as the reason for his estrangement from them, as well as his culture of origin. It seems as if Rodriguez's understanding of society is a division among impermeable layers, be they of generic, racial, or class nature.

As a matter of fact, Rodriguez's anxiety of class pervades every category in the book to the point that one can assert that there is little in Hunger of Memory that is not considered in terms of class. Education is made to appear as the key concept that supports the autobiographical *Bildungsroman*, and for this reason appears in the title. As it has just been suggested, education is once and again described as a difficult to navigate passageway towards upward mobility. Acquiring English, reading books, and receiving degrees become symbols and trophies of social accomplishment, rather than quests for enlightenment.

Similarly, his determination to distinguish himself from his family and his family from the rest suggests that a certain anxiety of class is present. The parents clearly want to differentiate themselves from other Mexican-Americans: "[o]ptimism and ambition led them to a house (our home) many blocks from the Mexican south side of town. We lived among *gringos*" (12). Mainly, they seek to make a distinction between themselves and the laboring underclass of Mexican descent that allegedly composes that community. It is necessary to remind us here that the migrant laborers were at the center of the most prominent definitions of Chicano identity. The description that Rodriguez gives us of his parents and siblings seems to imply that while they are not as white as the Anglos, they are European in phenotype, distancing them from the darker mestizo complexion of the migrant *braceros*:

> My father's face recalls feces I have seen in France. His complexion is white – he does not tan; he does not burn. My mother, whose surname is inexplicably Irish—Moran—has an olive complexion. People have wondered if she is Italian or Portuguese. And, in fact, she looks as though she could be from southern Europe. […] My brother has inherited her good looks. When he was a boy people would tell him that he looked like Mario Lanza, and hearing it he would smile with dimpled assurance. (114)

Establishing that his father is white and his brother burned and peeled when his skin was exposed to the sun rays, allows Rodriguez to distinguish his family from the Mexican working class and place it closer to the Anglo mainstream he aspires: the skin of his brother peeled ad burned like that of the *gringos*, a source of envy for Rodriguez. Being pale becomes something exotic to be admired "My youngest sister is exotically pale, almost ashen. She is delicately featured, Near Eastern, people have said." (115) However, Richard and one of his sisters manifest Indian blood, claiming the mestizo Mexican cultural

background. But, in Rodriguez's opinion, this is not to be taken as an approximation to other Mexican-American migrants, let alone a Chicano phenotype[9].

Richard's father evokes to a degree the historical events of the Mexican Revolution, memories that transpire a mourning tone, in the sense that the past struggles were better articulated than the present ones –that is, the Chicano Movement. This was a common thought of the time and one that has been portrayed in many Chicano works to also reflect the generational gap among Mexican-Americans and Chicanos). To a certain degree, Richard is unable to disentangle himself from this Mexican vision, something that will be further explored in the next chapter, which, in turn, puts Rodriguez in an odd position because he ends up not being as detached as he would like to make us think from the Mexican-American identity he rejects.

While the family resembles the Mexican mestizo ancestry, and the parents "scorned those white Mexican-Americans who tried to pass themselves off as Spanish" (115), they are not like the Chicanos, "'[w]e are Mexicans' my mother and father would say" (115). This implies that the Mexican background of the family would not be that of the more disadvantaged classes. While Richard's father was orphaned at an early age, he had rich relatives for whom he worked (as Rodriguez relays in the following autobiography Days of Obligation). They do not come, nor should they be associated with, the disadvantaged migrant workers, "*los pobres*" (113) as his mother calls them and teaches Richard to differentiate himself from. In Days of Obligation he will further remember his mother telling him to "not judge Mexico by the poor people you see coming to this country" (214), for even though the Rodriguezes are working class, they never identify with the *braceros* or any other Mexican worker of the lower social classes. Mrs. Rodriguez's admonishments that Richard

[9] Rodriguez will discuss race at large in his third autobiography, Brown, and his views on the topic will be discussed in a later chapter. At this moment, the focus here is with racial issues as they pertain to social class, since this seems to be the concern of Rodriguez in Hunger of Memory.

stay out of the sun so that his skin complexion does not get him mistaken for a migrant field worker speaks as much of race as it does of social class. For instance, the manner in which the autobiographer reminisces about his parents' younger days as he browses through their honeymoon pictures (121), judging by the author's phrasing and word choice, signals an anxiety regarding status and upward mobility.

This crossroads between ethnicity and social class that Rodriguez brings up in Hunger of Memory, and that it encompasses other autobiographies, as it will be discussed later, has been labeled as *ethclass* by Henry Staten. This critic derives the concept from Milton Gordon who defines it as a "social space created by the intersection of the ethnic group with the social class" (51). For his part, H. Edward Ransford studies this intersection with regards to both African-Americans (101-120) and Chicanas/os (56-62). However, while Ransford sees Chicanas/os as a homogeneous racial group –and one should also include Mexican-Americans under the same label, for Ransford does not make the distinction between these groups that this study makes— Staten notices a racial element in how Latinos of Mexican descent merge, or fall, in the different class layers. Therefore, the concept of *ethclass* serves Staten to analyze and illustrate how issues of race affect the inclusion of a given Mexican-American and/or Chicana/o subject in a particular social class. Staten posits that this *ethclass* starts in Mexico and is then transposed north of the border when the person moves. The most oppressed Mexican-American and Chicana/o is degraded twice: first in relation to Mexican society –for certain racial make-ups are at the nethermost of the social and economic ladder— and subsequently with respect to U.S. society – since there is not a fresh start, but the abjection is brought along. Richard Rodriguez's yearning for upward mobility is, therefore, in accordance with this concept of *ethclass*, because it is an inheritance and a perpetuation of the cultural trajectory that had been established by the family's Mexican background:

> In their manner, both my parents continued to respect the symbols of what they considered to be upper-class life. Very early, they taught me the *propria* [sic] way of eating *como los ricos*. And I was carefully taught elaborate formulas of polite greeting and parting. The dark little boy would be invited to by classmates to the rich houses on Forty-fourth and Forty-fifth streets […] I intended to make an impression, to be invited back […] From those early days began my association with rich people, my fascination with their secret. (122)

However, Rodriguez is quick to alert us that he "was, at best, a visitor to the world I saw there. For that reason, I was an especially watchful guest" (123). He is aware that he is not part of that social class he longs for, and his behavior reveals so: "[t]hings most middle-class children wouldn't trouble to notice, I studied. Remembered to see: the starched black and white uniform […]; the Mexican gardeners –their complexions as dark as my own" (123). This attitude, inculcated by his parents and his Mexican ancestors, is what prompts Staten to consider the reason for his refusal to identify with the Chicana/o activists. In the words of Rodriguez: "*Chicano*, the Spanish word, was a term lower-class Mexican-Americans had long used to name themselves." (158)

Nevertheless, Staten treats class as the most relevant assessment of oppression, which might be inaccurate and might constitute basis for criticism to his argument. Such a perspective might put forward a weakened understanding of racism.

Rodriguez seems to contemplate African-Americans from a class standpoint, as well. This is most evident when he is criticizing the federal programs of affirmative action. "Those who were in the best position to benefit from such reforms were those blacks least victimized by racism or any other social oppression –those culturally, if not always economically, of the middle class." (145) Again, the concept of *ethclass* put forth by Staten pertains, more so when Rodriguez posits that he does "not think that all blacks are equally 'black.' Surely those uneducated and poor will remain most vulnerable to racism." (150) He goes on to say that the leaders of the Civil Rights Movement in the southern states came from well-educated,

middle-class strata of society. “Even in the South of the 1950s, all blacks were not equally black.” (150)

Though Rodriguez seems to found his concern for assimilation into the United States, and the success of federal programs designed to help the disadvantaged, on class inequality, his opposition to such programs made his autobiography very appealing to the white Anglos who resented the advancement of ethnic, racial, and gender minorities and who had no interest whatsoever in the eradication of those inequalities, simply because such disparities were the support for their tenet of supremacy, seen also as one of class. All of a sudden, however, Rodriguez stops to consider the subtle racism of upper-class whites, who have been the object of his fascination, when he denounces that he “was increasingly annoyed by the fact that the white students who complained about affirmative action never bothered to complain that it was unfair to lower-class whites. What solely concerned them was that affirmative action limited *their* plans" (165). In a sense, Rodriguez was aware that he had presented himself to the dominant culture as Shakespeare’s Ariel, the good subject, the good “Hispanic," perfectly in tune with hegemonic values, insisting on the need for cultural minorities to assimilate to the mainstream. In stating that it was “[e]asy to forget that those whose lives are shaped by poverty and poor education (cultural minorities) are least able to defend themselves against social oppression, whatever its form” (149-150), Rodriguez recognizes that his analyses can be used to foster the conservative agenda, and wants to shield himself from that.

The opinions put forward in Hunger of Memory promoted in part an assault on the legitimacy of bilingual education, affirmative action, and race-based politics which, always according to Rodriguez, had rendered “easy to underestimate, even to ignore altogether, the importance of *class*” (149) when taking into account he manners in which a given society

exerted oppression onto certain sectors. One can conclude, as a result, that Rodriguez's discourse on language and education cannot be wholly understood without taking class into account.

CHAPTER 4

JOURNEY TO THE ORIGIN, TRAVEL TO THE DESTINATION

"'Someday you will go there,' my mother would say.
'Someday you'll go down and with all your education
you will be 'Don Ricardo.'"
(Days of Obligation 215)

The previous chapter saw how Rodriguez became a controversial model for Mexican-American identity. Taking his allusions to Shakespeare's The Tempest, it has been suggested that Rodriguez is more Ariel than Caliban, for his politics –as expressed in regards to bilingual education, affirmative action, and anxiety of class— lead Chicano scholars to think that Rodriguez "clearly illustrates a colonized mind" (Decker 124). In his second autobiography, Days of Obligation: An Argument with my Mexican Father, Rodriguez seems to have changed the tone and moves toward his ethnicity, although it cannot be wholly affirmed that he completely embraces it: while he travels to Mexico and searches for cultural cues in what has been perceived as an interest in matters unrelated to the U.S. mainstream, he still takes pains to align himself with said mainstream. Yet, the book speaks to and of Latinos, specifically Californian Latinos. Parts of the book had already appeared as essays in magazines such as Time and Harper's. The British Broadcasting Company had featured some essays on television.

Many scholars have paid attention to issues of sexuality that appear in the book as early as the second chapter. Some critics have dubbed the book as Rodriguez's platform to address gay issues, including his homosexuality. Since Rodriguez is more open about this in his most recent autobiography, this chapter will undertake the analysis of Rodriguez's perspectives on the issue in chapter six, when Darling: A Spiritual Autobiography is

considered. Thus, in the present chapter, the focus will be on analyzing the impact of cultural mores on the makeup of the identity of the individual.

This second autobiography was received as a continuation of Hunger of Memory, where the protagonist is seen as an alienated man longing for assimilation and, consequently, lamenting his looks: "No one in my family had a face as dark or as Indian as mine. My face could not portray the ambition I brought to it. What could the United States of America say to me?" (1). His words bring back to mind E.D. Hirsch's conservative views, something an adroit reader might recognize as a feature that was present in his first autobiography. Also, his alienation from the mainstream is painful, perhaps more poignant than in his *Bildungsroman*, for one deals here with a grown-up protagonist. Rodriguez is aware here that his perspective is biased, that there is a degree of irony in presenting himself as a representative for Mexican and Latino cultures and issues. But, in spite of that, he speaks: "A man who spent so many years with his back turned to Mexico. Now I am to introduce Mexico to a European audience" (xvi). Rodriguez is to serve as an interpreter of Mexico to the Anglo-European audience, yet the self he portrays declares to be "repelled by Mexico's association with the old" (209).

Days of Obligation opens with a scene that sets the tenor for the rest of the autobiography. The author describes how he has been hired by the British Broadcasting Corporation to "introduce Mexico to a European audience" (xvi) and the text opens with him vomiting physically, but also metaphorically: "[a]ll the badly pronounced Spanish words I have forced myself to sound during the day, bits and pieces of Mexico spew from my mouth, warm, half-understood, nostalgic reds and greens dangle from long strands of saliva" (xv). In this chapter, the analysis will center on how the journey of return to the culture of origin is problematic for a hyphenated subject and much more poignantly so for someone like

Rodriguez who is at odds with his Mexican-American ethnicity to begin with, as his exploration of this hybrid identity proves. The autobiographical genre, and especially one that is designed to blend itself with the rhetoric of essay writing, allows the author to ruminate about her/his relationship vis-à-vis the culture of origin. The chapter will also look into how Rodriguez uses the character of his father as a rhetorical tool in order to contend his positions. Lastly, after looking at his perspective on Mexican culture, this chapter will approach how the author weaves his identity as Mexican-American in relation to the interstitial nature of a border, hybrid identity.

4.1. Argument with his father

Days of Obligation: An Argument with my Mexican Father, if one reads the subtitle, is meant to engage Rodriguez's father into the discourse. The author aims to come to terms with Mexicanness by way of exploring his father's Mexican and indigenous heritages. However, the contentious dialogue that is promised in the subtitle is misleading, since the autobiography is more a monologue than a dialogue. One could ascribe another definition to argument, which is the set of reasons given with the aim of persuading others that an idea is right or wrong. In this sense, Rodriguez is justifying his position with his father; that is, using the figure of his father as a rhetorical tool to achieve the goal. In this sense, the book fits better within the autobiographical genre, since life narratives have been used traditionally by the author to reason her/his position regarding an action or belief that needs upholding in the face of its detractors or its supporters.

In Brown: The Last Discovery of America, Rodriguez will describe Days of Obligation as "the influence of Mexican ethnicity on my American life" (xvi). While on his first autobiography he had portrayed the family's Mexican culture of origin as private, and

both private language and culture had to be repressed in the process of becoming assimilated, in Days of Obligation, he examines that repressed culture on both sides of the border, in Mexico as well as in the U.S. as a way to show the conflict that the ethnic subject experiences between the culture of origin and the dominant culture. The representative of that Mexican culture of origin in the second autobiographical book by Rodriguez is his father. "My father remains Mexican in California", asserts Rodriguez (219). Rodriguez is aware that as a so-called hyphenated subject one "will find yourself a stranger to your parents, a stranger to your own memory of yourself" (161). His answer to this identitary quandary is to look at his father: "Much in life is failure or compromise; like father, like son" (219). It is precisely through the invocation of his father as representative that he is able to probe into his Mexican –and Mexican-American—cultural heritage or, at the very least, his ethnic identity.

His father is the keeper of Mexican culture north of the geopolitical border, as Rodriguez established in Hunger of Memory. In that sense, he becomes the familial memory of Mexico. And Mexico is portrayed in Days of Obligation as the "tabernacle of memory" (79), and the writer even personifies Mexico as memory: "Mexico is memory", he writes (73), and through those metonymies of his father as Mexican memory and Mexico as memory, Rodriguez typifies the cultural roots of the ethnic subject as memory. While this portrayal of one's ethnic roots as remembrance can be read as a dismissive take on the culture of origin because it relegates such heritage to the reminiscence of the past –and to the past itself— it is also true that the nostalgia for the past is a dominant theme in both narratives of the self: Hunger of Memory and Days of Obligation. Through much of the first autobiographical book Rodriguez is looking to the future, even though that means sacrificing the cultural mores of ethnic identity in order to assimilate. In the second autobiography, Rodriguez is critical of Anglo-American amnesia vindicating in a sense his father's resistance to complying with the "severing of memory" (171). Yet, the Anglo-American culture

demands that one must cut off the past in order to comply with "the belief that one can choose to be free of American culture" (171). This is the core of the "tension that describes my life" (xvii), in the eyes of the autobiographer. As much as he looks forward to assimilating into the mainstream, Rodriguez is conscious that culture and the past have a hold on the individual. By exploring his cultural past through the proxy of his father, Rodriguez is able to offset his defense of assimilation and melting into a common American culture with his personal urge to probe into his Mexican cultural heritage.

This tension between opposites is a constant theme in Rodriguez's work. He tends to reduce each opposing position to a generalized cultural portrayal of each, which in cases has granted him criticism for misrepresenting such cultures. In Days of Obligation, Rodriguez reduces the binary opposition between Anglo-American and Mexican cultures to comedy and tragedy, by means of emphasizing their religious differences: the Protestant versus the Catholic, which he extrapolates to other differences in character such as the individualistic versus the communal, the optimistically naïve versus the cynically mature. Out of these binary contrasts, Rodriguez needs to find a synthesis, following a dialectical approach. He recognizes that in his case, unlike in his father's, these two character traits exist within him: this is the tension that defines him and what he aims to resolve in an inward journey to his cultural pasts. The result of that introspection will be the synthesis of this dialectical opposition, the kernel that allows him to uphold his points, in sum his *argument*.

In examining his cultural heritages through this dialectical opposition, Rodriguez places the self as the synthesis of his argument. It is himself who will be the solution to his quandary, and his need for inclusion into the American mainstream will lead him to defend that the United States is a multicultural nation of immigrants that shares a common culture. This culture, he wants to prove, emerges from education as much as from cultural heritage.

This is why he affirms that "[t]o argue for a common culture is not to propose an exclusionary culture or a static culture" (170). As a consequence, the synthesis that is Rodriguez's self is made up of his analysis of the culture of origin, but also his education on the culture of destination. Therefore, Rodriguez cannot bisect the writer from the scholarship-boy turned reader in him. While he embarks in this exploration of his cultural heritage, he also makes ample reference to the Anglo-American literary tradition. His approach to the Mexican culture is also literary: he will nod to Vasconcelos and Paz, primarily. But his numerous mentions to the literary tradition in English –William Shakespeare, John Milton, Thomas Carlyle, T.S. Eliot, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Margaret Mitchell, Helen Hunt Jackson, Charles Macomb Flaudrau, Carey McWilliams, to name a few— play to the tension that Rodriguez requires in order to support his argument: "In 1973, I went to England to pursue a study of Puritanism and the rise of the novel […] Then I was recalled by the Catholic necessity to avert my soul's eye from a Protestant logic that would make mere individualism a virtue" (193-194). Curiously enough, he does not mention other Chicano and Mexican-American works, most notably the foundational Chicano poem "I am Joaquín" by Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzáles.

> Joaquín straddles two worlds. The handsome stranger appears in the mining-town saloon. He is perfectly (and without accent) bilingual. He passes among the *norteamericanos* until, like El Cid, he proclaims himself –"It is I, Joaquín!"—and escapes into the night […] Even as the body of Murrieta lies dissected upon a historian's slab, the myth has passed whole into the hands of poets –to Pablo Neruda, to "Joaquin" Miller, to William Everson, to the anonymous Mexican singers who compose ballads. (139)

In the end, it seems that Rodriguez's synthesis is looking into the future, albeit silencing other Mexican-American and Chicano voices. Mexico does not seem to be part of it either: "Mexico was the old country […] When things got old enough they went to Mexico, where the earth shook and buildings fell down and old people waited patiently amid the

rubble for their old clothes" (209). Rodriguez tries to hold to the past, for it assures a lineage that he finds exotically alluring: "Mexico City had universities and printing presses, cathedrals, palanquins, periwigs, long before there were British colonies in New England" (209). And the writer acquiesces that before Western civilization landed in the Americas there were indigenous peoples and cultures on both sides of the Rio Grande, even though books render them as uncivilized (209). But, eventually, the past fades. "'Nothing lasts a hundred years,' my father says, regarding the blue DeSoto, as regarding all else" (217). Rodriguez wants to free himself from the ghost of his Mexican-American past, and he wishes to choose who he is, regardless of his past: "We can deal with the guilt history places on us only when we free ourselves from the ghosts" (141). After some consideration, the author wonders who is more right, if the father "who knew that life is disappointment and reversal" (230), the same father who is the repository of memory, thus stands for the past, or the son who is all self-made future. It seems that for Rodriguez it is all the same: nothing lasts a hundred years and Mexico was the old past that needed to be reversed, if not forgotten. Ultimately, the argument looks towards the future.

4.2. The journey to the culture of origin

If a person acquires knowledge of self by means of those life experiences s/he goes through, in U.S. Latino literature, the image of the journey can become a literary variant, hence a symbolic image, of the path towards self-identification. Among those metaphors of the journey, the trip towards the places of origin is something common in Latino narratives of the self. While one cannot accurately call it a journey of return, since it is usually the first trip that the subject makes to the land of his/her ancestry and culture of origin. This journey results in many anxieties, as Chicana poet Sandra Cisneros expressively describes in her

poem “Original sin” which appeared in her book Loose Woman. Rodriguez’s quest is also personal, although he tries to describe it in not so personal terms as Cisneros, in spite of both using their bodies as images through which to approximate the Mexican country and culture. Unlike her, he is not so ready to embrace his “Mexican kin / on my father’s side of the family” (Cisneros 7) like the good, scholarship boy that his father would like them believe he is. There is a detachment between Rodriguez and Mexico that one does not perceive in other Mexican-American and Chicano writers. While Rodriguez tries to seek in a Mexican village square the origin of his face, one that is darker and displays more indigenous features than any other family member’s, he also establishes a distance with his object of study.

Scholars who have studied these trips to the cultures of origin have referred to them as a return to the origin, since the subject embarks not only on a trip in space, but also in time. In a sense, this displacement symbolizes the death of a previous stage and the naissance of a spiritual one. The physical trip is fused with a metaphorical one: an introspective journey into the essence of the self. The autobiographical genre is, in consequence, a very appropriate one to display these expeditions.

The Latina/o traveler inscribes her/his self in the text as a world voyager whose experience takes us “to places of subjectivity that shift and hyphenate into the worlds of others” (Sylvester 946). Edward Said reminds us that “exile, migration, and the crossing of boundaries are experiences that can therefore provide us with new narrative forms or, in John Berger’s phrase, with *other* ways of telling” (“Representing” 225). In the case of Latino writers, the porous boundaries among genres (including the debate about the limits that separate autobiography from fiction when the former is not understood as a confessional one), the dialectic relationship between the self and the other (as it is manifested in the use of apostrophe as the generating trope of these narratives of the self), and, lastly, the negotiation

of those elements that make up the dichotomy travelling/dwelling coined by James Clifford comprise the features that distinguish U.S. Latino narratives as new or other ways of telling.

The journey (whether as part of the diasporic displacement or as the journey of return to the cultures of origin) becomes a means of narrating memory within specific historic contexts. As migrant individuals, U.S. Latino authors travel/dwell different cultural spaces. Nevertheless, the label 'migrant' does not apply here only to the specific migratory movements north of the Rio Grande. Instead, it encompasses the constant movement of individuals proper to contemporary times, be it is a physical displacement or a move towards other cultural spheres regardless of an actual reposition. This is more evident in the present-day globalized context. As a consequence of this traveling/dwelling of diverse cultural territories, Latino authors are immersed in practices of cultural translation, which in turn leads to the de-centering of the self and to the Derridean notion of "a world of signs without fault, without truth, and without origin which is offered to an active interpretation" (121). The negotiation that emerges from the biculturalism of these authors provides them with the tools to re-create a new space and a new historic sense that stems from the experiences of the characters of their texts, and it will also allow the so called hyphenated authors to inquire into a still incomplete identity.

U.S. Latino narratives of the self do not give a conclusive answer to the questions about what constitutes the space of the culture of origin. This could be defined as the chronotope that symbolizes the protagonist's identity; an identity that is in a permanent process of development and, therefore, it does not exist in texts except in an incomplete form. With regards to diaspora, the space of the culture of origin is the vacuum that the individual attempts to fill from the locus of displacement by means of remembrances, dreams and fictions in order to assemble an image in time and space. In this way, the space of the culture

of origin is constructed on a trivet made up of three realities, realities that are, at the same time, based on three different experiences as they relate to diaspora: the experiences of those who remained in the culture of origin (in the case analyzed here, those who stayed in Mexico), the experiences of those who left (the first generation migrants), and the ones of the members who constitute the subsequent generations (group in which Richard Rodriguez can be included). For those of the second and successive generations, the journey to the culture of origin –whether the trip is physical or strictly intellectual; that is, by means of approaching the culture through scholarly endeavors— is not but a one-way journey. They are not returning, since they never inhabited that space. Moreover, this journey is, in a sense, a trip to nowhere because the actual destiny does not match the mythical place that is part of the collective imagination. Similarly to what happens in the case of autobiographical truth, memory deceives the self and re-creates other truths. Whether the culture of origin stays still in the mind of the displaced, or it develops according to a sequence of developments that are in the mind of the expatriate and her/his descendants, it fails to correspond to reality. In the former case, the individual fails to recognize that culture is a living entity, therefore a changing one. In the latter case, the individual fails to put in place a system of checks and balances to compare fiction with reality, either because it is not possible or because re-creating a fiction is less harrowing than confronting the feeling of exclusion that comes with the diasporic distance from the culture of origin. That poignant experience is left for the members of the second and subsequent generations in their confrontation with the culture of origin.

Days of Obligation considers the return to the culture of origin as part of the process of introspective knowledge of the self that is expected in a narrative of the self. As it had already been witnessed in the case of Hunger of Memory, the reader is presented with an imagined Mexico. It is imagined because it is a Mexico product of the mind of the

protagonist, but it is also imagined for the reason that Mexico is an image, one that is sketched from outside, from the diaspora in the United States.

In both autobiographies, Rodriguez reveals the stages thorough which the displaced individual progresses, weaving in the narrative the threads of history, memory, and the assimilationist discourse he wants to privilege. At the same time, the author underscores the intercultural identity issues that arise specifically due to the crisscrossing of said discursive threads. While Hunger of Memory presents us with the *Bildungsroman* of a young Richard who fashions himself as a "scholarship boy," Days of Obligation depicts a protagonist that is rendered as a worldly adult who arrives in Mexico as a reporter for an elite broadcasting company and whose charge is to unveil in an objective manner the authentic, genuine reality of the country to a remote, British audience.

By opening his book with the physical and intellectual shock that Mexico affects him, Rodriguez makes clear that his transition from his Anglo-centered reality of mainstream United States to Mexico requires what scholar Eliana Rivero has described as "coming into a personal awareness of biculturalism, and takes for granted the reality of permanence in a society other than the one existing in the country of birth" (191). The major difference between Rodriguez and other Latina/o writers resides in the particulars of that particular consciousness that Rivero alludes to. In the case of Richard Rodriguez, his cognizance highlights an alignment with the Anglo-American mainstream, which is what ostracizes him from the Chicano community, and even from the Mexican-American one. When Rodriguez describes his trip to Mexico as a voyage into the past, he is revealing his personal standpoint, which includes all the caveats already noted. The past Rodriguez refers to is not the earlier experiences lived by the author-protagonist, but a bygone, obsolete place, one that is lost in time.

The BBC caravan arrives to this village in Mexico amidst a funeral procession, and the journalists are forced to back up and literally reverse their entry into the village square. This scene evokes in the reader the idea that this arrival is seen as an intrusion, and therefore an image that needs to be conjured, erased. The funeral scene in this anonymous village is portrayed as something archaic, a stark contrast with the technology that these English speaking journalists from the north represent. Furthermore, the fact that this is an unnamed village emphasizes the generalization that Rodriguez wants to stress: this could be anywhere in Mexico. The fact that Rodriguez's first portrayal of Mexican culture involves funeral rituals alludes somewhat tacitly to the stereotypical image of Mexican culture in the United States: the customs and traditions surrounding death. In a sense, this second book reverberates the criticism that the first one already produced, like that of Ramón Saldívar when he says that "the private side of the individual is huge, abstract, schematized, and tends to produce archetypal images" ("Ideologies" 28).

Death brings us to a tragic image of Mexico that contrasts unambiguously with the comic visualization of the journalist driving in reverse after being admonished by the locals for trespassing, even if only culturally. This serves the autobiographer to support his rhetorical construct: "For the last several years, I have told friends that I was writing a book about California and Mexico. That was not saying enough. I've been writing a book about comedy and tragedy. In my mind, Mexico plays the tragic role" (xvi). The whole village gathered for the funeral procession illustrates how "[t]he comedy of California was constructed on a Protestant faith in individualism. Whereas Mexico knew tragedy" (xvi). In a sense, this standpoint, along with the description of the nausea that opens the book, signals the tensions with which the linguistic, historical, and cultural debate on colonialism was approached already in Hunger of Memory; the same debate that Rodriguez intentionally revisits in Days of Obligation.

In his second autobiography, Rodriguez presents an introspective journey along with the trip of return. In fact, it is the knowledge of the self that comes from the reflection that causes the introspective journey what makes possible coming closer to the culture of origin. To put it in another way, Mexico, which in Rodriguez's view represents the past, is an integral part of the search for identity and its formulation by the protagonist-author. For this reason, Rodriguez's connection with the Mexican space acquires a special relevance. The Mexico the reader sees in the autobiography becomes the center. In a sense the author already foretells this, if one leaves aside a few stereotypes, when he turns the tables in the introduction by declaring "Mexico has been the happier place for being a country of tragedy. Tragic cultures serve up better food than optimistic cultures; tragic cultures have sweeter children, more opulent funerals. In tragic cultures, one does not bear the solitary burden of optimism. California is such a sad place" (xvi-xvii). However, while Mexico will become the center of the book, it is a center that is always going to be approached from the periphery, thus building a tension between both spaces –center and periphery—, a tension that one witnesses in other U.S. Latino texts, as well as in other ethnic literatures.

The link with the past allows for the re-creation of one's origin, which in Rodriguez's case it seems to have the purpose of defining the cultural community. His intention in this text is to present the reader with his interpretation of what Mexican-American means, and this is the reason why his identification with –and re-creation of—certain Mexican myths and historical figures. Étienne Balibar affirms that "there is no identity which is 'self-identical,' all identity is fundamentally ambiguous" (57) in order to signify that identity does not exist. Instead, there is a series of identifications. This underscores the notion that identity is fluid, never unchanging, and that the series of identifications that the subject submits himself to is part of a process that develops from the relationship of the self with the others and, thus, is dependent on the other. As a result, "there is nothing natural in the area of identity: there is a

process of identification or production of form of human individuality in history" (Balibar 71). Identity is constructed in the self's relationship with the other. It is, therefore, historical and political.

The Mexican historical and mythical figures that Rodriguez is going to bring up and develop in his discourse are those that contribute to the weaving of his narrative. Among those, the reader finds Benito Juárez, the only Zapotec president of the country. Rodriguez brings him to the argument in order to reflect on racial issues and the different attitudes regarding race from the U.S. and Mexican cultural milieux. This consideration on race will be further developed in his next autobiography, Brown: The Last Discovery of America. In his analysis of racial issues in Days of Obligation, Rodriguez already arrives to a somewhat surprising conclusion: Mexico is the capital of modernity, since all that is old, everything already known, is renewed through miscegenation and transformed into the biological future. One finds this notion surprising because none other than Mexican writer and philosopher José Vasconcelos had already formulated it at the start of the twentieth century in his 1925 essay book La raza cósmica. Vasconcelos, who had just ended his position at the helm of the Secretariat of Public Education the previous year, allows Rodriguez to align himself with a series of Mexican canonical thinkers in what might be considered an elitist position, which in turn echoes the snobbery criticism that his first book had garnered.

Another mythical figure that Rodriguez turns to in his exploration of Mexican identity, narrowly related to race, is that of Malinche. Rodriguez's analysis is presented as problematic in a triple way. Race is here linked to a Eurocentric perspective, on the one hand, and a generic viewpoint that contributes to the sexualizing of discourse[10].

[10] We will analyze Rodriguez's sexualized viewpoint at length when we study his fourth autobiography, Darling, in chapter six.

While this autobiographer flirts with the concept of miscegenation, a concept he will develop further in his next autobiography, it seems that the syncretic hybridization that should result from it bears no weight in the author's consideration of the ways in which Europe influenced the indigenous Mexico, or how the United States affects the Mexican immigrants that cross the border to the north. In using the term India to found his re-elaboration of the Malinche myth, Rodriguez accepts and incorporates a Eurocentric stance, one that is centered on the confusion that results from labeling all Americans as Indians. Yet, in order to make his dialectic point, he must distinguish those individuals who resulted from a mixing with Spaniards. And Rodriguez turns to his elitism: "Hispanics are recognizable European" (166). If one links this vision to the absence of a point of view where there is a specific cultural syncretism, one is left with a series of Mexican values understood in an across-the board, universal manner.

Rodriguez is particularly critical with the nationalist attempts to construct a Mexican identity, or even a Chicana/o one, from a reified reading of Mexican history, where the influence of Catholic religion and Spanish colonialism are set aside. Yet, there is a time in the book when Mexico stops being perceived as an overwhelmingly rural, indigenous, provincial, and static space. In fact, he considers that perception to be a flaw on the part of those who use it to depict the complex contemporary Mexican historical and cultural milieu. In Rodriguez's eyes, the Mexican is an individual that is open, receptive, mobile, unbound by blood ties, history or an established national space. In structuring the Mexican in this dislocated manner, and one might even add with a certain cosmopolitanism, Rodriguez shifts among fluid subjectivities in order to re-present United States and Mexico from divergent points of view. Nevertheless, his viewpoint ends up being ironic because from the estrangement of the conventional affiliations out of which he builds his perception, his comments are little more than indications of contradictory realities. If the author places himself outside of cultural and

historical specificities, he misses the implicit connections that come from observing reality through the lens of the other. In other words, while Days of Obligation postulates a complex panorama of Mexico, it falls short in its formulation of a response to such scene.

Along his analysis of what constitutes Mexicanness, Rodriguez continues with his self-examination. In a parallel of what he does with respect to Mexico, Rodriguez's introspection renders the author-protagonist as an outsider looking in, someone who addresses the issues from outside. This is so because Rodriguez is constantly privileging intellectual knowledge over experience. This is clearly seen in the way he tackles the issue of Mexican identity: everything is reduced to an intellectual exercise, where his personal experience in this journey of return is sifted through his scholarly readings. Thus, his academic knowledge of the culture of origin is limited to what Octavio Paz, "Mexico's sultan son, her clever one –philosopher, poet, statesman" (58) had said almost fifty years before. Actually, in Rodriguez's eyes, Paz becomes Mexico himself: "this was Mother Mexico talking, her good son" (58) and our autobiographer adopts Paz's notion that Mexican-Americans and Chicanos are really Mexicans living in the United States, a concept that has been shared by others and which has been minted as "Mexico outside Mexico" or *"el México de afuera."* This theory helps Rodriguez to take on the identity of those Americans of Mexican descent: "[l]ike wandering Jews, Mexicans had no true home but the tabernacle of memory" (48), an angle that allows him to blur any distinction between migrant subjects and those who have already established roots in the United States, especially when he remarks that "Mexicans are notorious in the United States for their skepticism regarding public life. Mexicans don't vote. Mexicans drop out of school." (61)

It is obvious that Rodriguez uses the term "Mexican" in more than one sense, something that he also does when he brings the word "Indian" into play. There are times in

which Mexican refers to the Mexican-American, others to Chicano, others to the Mexican migrant, regardless of its seasonal or lengthier stay in the US. And at times, the signifier Mexican is used to denote the person who resides in Mexico. This semantic plurality contributes to the ambiguous perspective that Rodriguez often holds. It serves him well, too. On the one hand, it allows him to claim his Mexican ancestry: "Mexican-Americans shored up our grievances, making them altars to the past. *May my tongue cleave to my palate if I should forget thee. (Tú)*. Ah Mother, can you not realize how Mexican we have become?" (66). On the other hand, the autobiographer portrays himself as the tourist who is arriving in Mexico: "[t]here is a turnstile. Through which American tourists enter Mexico as at a state fair [sic]. Mexicans pass with the cardboard boxes they are using as suitcases. […] I pass through the turnstile" (80). Rodriguez's disjointed view of himself impregnates his grammar to the point that he writes in fragmented sentences.

Part of the ambiguity in which Rodriguez wades is apparent from the first page of the autobiographical essay. In the chapter entitled "India," the text starts with an epigraph from Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca: "They sent their women and children to look at us" (1). From the onset, Rodriguez announces his intention of reverting to the traditional conventions regarding appropriation and control of the space. He is staring at his own image in the mirror, much like the indigenous people in the epigraph are staring at the Spaniards. The author is who has the darkest complexion and most indigenous features of all his siblings, yet he is quick to distance from that ancestry: "my father family is (despite the evidence of my face) – of Europe. We are not Indians" (2). Once this has been uttered, he is flattered to be approached "as if I were a stone totem" by a student who is fascinated by his Aztec ancestry, he seems pleased to be an exotic figure to him (2). Yet, at the same time, Rodriguez is being unsympathetic towards the discourse that depicts the indigenous as a passive individual, removed from both modernity and the evolution of Mexican culture: "Mexicans imagine their

Indian part as deadweight" (2). Exoticism, Rodriguez knows, is akin to reification. In the end, the author does not seem to be as interested in reverting to traditional conventions as it appeared earlier on. To further illustrate this ambiguity, he turns to comment how it is possible to marginalize the indigenous while at the same time there is an established national rhetoric based on the glory of Mexico's indigenous past:

> The rhetoric of Señor Fuentes, like the murals of Diego Rivera, resorts often to the dream of India –to Tenochtitlán, the capital of the world before conquest. "Preconquest" in the Mexican political lexicon is tantamount to "prelapsarian" in the Judeo-Christian scheme, and hearkens to a time Mexico feels herself to have been whole, a time before the Indian was separated from India by the serpent Spain. (13-14)

The author's reply to this romanticized view of the indigenous past set forth by the Mexican official discourse is in either the indigenous man begging at the door of the National Museum of Anthropology, or in the "man of the world, a man, like other working-class Mexican men, eager for the world. He speaks two languages. He knows several cities. He has been to the United States. His brother lives there still" (22). The men the reader is confronted with here are nothing like the passive indigenous who is depicted as a victim of colonization, but as a man who exercises his agency as a worldly man. By the same token, Malinche is not a victim of colonial oppression, but the seductress who, in her conscious active role, cannot avoid being labeled as traitor and, yet, end up betrayed. In presenting Malinche as the *chingona* and not the *chingada* Rodriguez aims to suggest a challenge to the official discourse of Mexican national history.

Yet Rodriguez keeps on referring to the indigenous past and cultural heritage of Mexico with the word "India", which cannot be applied to the historical reality that he tries to analyze. In doing so, he accepts the Eurocentric perspective. Moreover, when the writer asserts that "Mexicans say she [Malinche] betrayed India for Europe" (22), he bases this

foundational myth on the European confusion of naming Indians to the native peoples of the Americas. The inclusion of Europe is important, for it allows him to come closer to the Anglo-American mainstream.

Rodriguez also looks at another *mestiza* icon in his analysis of Mexican culture: the Virgin of Guadalupe. But, unlike the Chicana writers of the eighties and nineties, he is not interested in the empowerment of the female figure. For him the interest lies in the crossroads of miscegenation, hegemonic religion and European culture. Rodriguez believes that the "Virgin of Guadalupe symbolizes the entire coherence of Mexico, body and soul" (16). The author, in his approach to Mexican culture, does not present the religious syncretism resulting from imposing Catholic onto indigenous beliefs. In the eyes of Rodriguez, the Virgin of Guadalupe represents another symbol of the assimilation that Mexico experienced during the conquest and colonial era: "You will not find the story of the Virgin within hidebound secular histories of Mexico […] and the omission renders the history of Mexico incomprehensible" (16). For Rodriguez Juan Diego's story of the Virgin's apparition is a "legend" (19), a Spanish ruse that resulted in "a mass conversion of Indians to Catholicism" (19). The only concession to the indigenous is that "privately, affectionately, Mexicans call her La Morenita" (19). The indigenous Mexican spirituality, in the eyes of Rodriguez, has "absorbent strength" (20) and Catholicism has become indigenous, not because of a syncretism, but just "by virtue of numbers". In a sense, Rodriguez posits that the Mexican indigenous has been assimilated into the religious hegemony that Spain imposed without contributing other than skin color to the iconic figure of the Virgin. There is no mention to Juan Diego, other than being an accessory to the "legend." One can safely infer that, according to Rodriguez, European culture is the one playing a role in Mexican life, when he concludes that "[t]he Indian eye becomes a portal to through which the entire pageant of European civilization has passed" (23). This perspective of the indigenous Mexico is very

different to the one that the Chicano intelligentsia of the late twentieth century held. For them, the indigenous character of Mexican culture is precisely what separates it from Spain, from Europe.

However, it is true that Rodriguez provides the indigenous with agency in the course of the Spanish conquest of Mexico. In this way, he is able to depict a young, lively Mexico in development, opposed to the static and decadent role that other discourses allow for the Mexican native indigenous. Yet, he insists on using the label India to refer to the non-European Mexico, which –one must insist— is in itself an acceptance on the part of the author of the Eurocentric point of view, since he bases his re-telling of the history on the European confusion of naming the indigenous Americans Indians.

Nevertheless, for Rodriguez the contribution of the indigenous peoples is their ability to assimilate: "I take it as an Indian achievement that I am alive, that I am Catholic, that I speak English, that I am American. My life began, it did not end, in the sixteenth century" (24). In order to survive, the Indian has "to crawl on her hands and knees, if need be" (24). Rodriguez accepts miscegenation as long as it allows him to further his assimilationist discourse, and it is the key to the future:

> Mexico City is the capital of modernity, for in the sixteenth century, under the tutelage of a curious Indian whore, under the patronage of the Queen of Heaven, Mexico initiated the task of the twenty-first century –the renewal of the old, the known world, through miscegenation. Mexico carries the idea of a round world to its biological conclusion. (24-25).

Ironically, his idea Mexican miscegenation is the key to the future is an old one. The argument he makes had already been put forth by José Vasconcelos in La raza cósmica. However, unlike Vasconcelos, in Rodriguez's formulation of the process of creation of the new, of the future, that which is mestizo, he places the emphasis in what is European: "What

strikes the eye of the beholder is a hybrid of imperfect European memory –the loosening of rigid perspective—compensated by the exuberance of necessity" (108).

Throughout the chapter entitled "Mexico's Children," Rodriguez continues to promote the idea of a Mexican culture based on the sublimation of the indigenous. In that chapter, the author refutes the arguments that posit that the dislocation of the individual is a relevant factor in the identity of Mexican migrants, and consequently by extension, of Chicanos. It needs to be brought into attention at this point that Rodriguez refuses to distinguish between Chicanos and Mexicans, in what seems to be an acceptance of the dominant view of the Anglo-American mainstream. "Like wandering Jews, Mexicans had no true home but the tabernacle of memory" (48), says Rodriguez when he discusses how the schoolteacher reprovingly told the author's mother how Mexicans "took their children out of school" (48). One moment he is commenting on Mexican migrant families, and the next he is remarking about Mexican-American populations.

Rodriguez centers exclusively on the landscape and leaves aside cultural connotations when he argues that the geography of the U.S. Southwest is so similar to the geography of Mexico that "the sense of dislocation otherwise familiar to immigrant experience" (49) is notably waned. In the mind of the author, rather than the geopolitical border, which he considers invisible, cultural issues are what prompt the individual's displacement. Whereas Mexico is the fixed, immutable space "where things are not necessarily different from when your father was your age" (51), the cultural reality is what alters the person and what signifies a difference between north and south of the border. Hence, Mexicans moving north must leave behind their Mexican idiosyncrasy: "To enter America, which is invisible, Mexicans must become invisible" (51). Rodriguez admits that it is not easy to leave behind such idiosyncrasy because that baggage from the past also affects the future. While the author's

view of Mexico is that of the past, something concrete, the United States are seen as "a jut of optimism, an aerodynamic law" (51), something ineffable. He criticizes that Mexicans only know the America they see on mass media, from the outside, yet his perspective of Mexico is also that of the outsider. His vision of Mexico is sifted through an intellectual approach, and that contact is reduced to what Octavio Paz wrote of the country and of the country's perspective of its neighbor to the north (58-59). It will be observed below, in the third part of this chapter, how these authors' take on Mexican culture affects their analysis of the Mexican-American and Chicano realities north of the border.

If Mexicans looks at the mirage of the U.S. of the American dream, as Rodriguez contends, he is also limiting himself to a Mexico understood through stereotypical images, for instance those of woman. First, Mexican culture and history was impersonated by the Virgin of Guadalupe, the mother. Next, that mother figure was impersonated in the figure of Malinche. Now, the image of the mad woman is substituting that of the *chingada*. "Mexico, mad mother" (52) fails to understand the migration to the US, as Rodriguez goes on to explain the push and pull factors that made Mexicans migrate to the "north for work, for wages; north for life. Bad enough that so many left, worse that so many left her for the gringo" (52). For Rodriguez, the Mexican nation turns into a "false mother" (61) who is careless with her progeny.

These images serve him to establish a contrast with those that he would use in order to establish a dichotomy between Mexicans and Mexican-Americans and Chicanos. In his analysis of these, he will resort to a male imagery: César Chávez, Henry Cisneros, and Joaquín Murrieta. If the Mexican mother left her children to their own devices, these men are quite the opposite: "The male is serious. The male provides. The Mexican male never

abandons those who depend upon him. The male remembers" (56). The images he uses are all applied to the Mexicans, Mexican-Americans, and Chicanos north of the border.

4.3. The journey north of the border

Throughout Days of Obligation, Rodriguez is trying to examine the role of culture and socio-historical context in the forging of Mexican identity. But he also explores what he considers Mexican identity north of the border, following the ideas of Paz and the notion of "Mexico outside Mexico" or "*el México de afuera.*" To this end, he considers the manner in which Chicanos and Mexican-Americans have appropriated traditional images of the Mexican rural sphere in order to forge their identity. It is important to remember, at this point, that Rodriguez offers no distinction between Chicanos and Mexican-Americans, even Mexicans living in the US, often switching from one label to another.

Rodriguez believes that those of Mexican origin north of the border wear a mask and acquire a public persona. For him, it seems but a representation issue. The author criticizes that these attempts to forge a group identity on the side of Chicanos (and Mexican-Americans, for that matter) are based on a sublimated image of the rural and the indigenous Mexico. Hence, he is censuring the perspective held by the majority of Chicano scholars in the seventies, eighties, and nineties who see in that image their distinction not only with other Latin American cultures of origin but also with Spain, to the point of rejecting the label Hispanic that the U.S. government put into use. In Rodriguez's opinion, the rural and indigenous Mexican mask that Chicanos bear is something phony: "We are the people of the land, we told ourselves. Middle-class college students took to wearing farmer-in-the-dell overalls and they took as well a rural slang to name themselves: Chicanos" (65-66). According to Rodriguez, the same as it happened in the case of Mexican identity, this

Chicano identity does not take into account the complex factors of Mexican-American identity when they extol the indigenous and obviate other aspect that constitute national identity. Thus, Rodriguez has reservations about the activities of Chicano organizations, like the 1966 Lenten Pilgrimage and considers such organizations as groups of "private people praying in public" (68); that is, activities that are essentially private that are brought into the sphere of the public. Again, the reader is faced with the dichotomy private/public that was one of the focal points of the narrative of the self this author penned ten years earlier. Furthermore, Rodriguez considers that these activities are being carried out under the shadow of symbols that are essentially rural, which, in his opinion, are disconnected from the reality of the Mexican-American who dwells in cities and who is conscious of the forward-thinking and progress of the U.S. mainstream.

By ridiculing the activities of these Chicano organizations, Rodriguez is partial to a Chicano reality because he is not taking into account the actual experience of the rural farm worker. Thus, when he compares the political activity of César Chávez with that of Henry Cisneros, he is establishing his assessment on contrasting the rural setting with the urban one, and ascribing cultural values to them; in other words, he is comparing the traditional world to the modern world. For Rodriguez, Chávez stands for "who our grandparents used to be" (70), while "a man of the city, Cisneros reflected our real lives" (68). Moreover, Cisneros "attempted a reconciliation between the private and the public, between the family and the world" (68), which in Rodriguez's terms has come to mean assimilation.

The greatest degree of parody of rural imagery on which Rodriguez bases the Mexican and Chicano idiosyncrasy that he is intent on debunking can be seen when he narrates the scene at the nightclub where he goes along with other Mexican intellectuals. By means of the woman who is singing over pre-recorded music and two lines of dancers who

comprise the show, Rodriguez describes what he considers a simulacrum of the new Mexico that appears before him: "'appear' cannot quite account for their corporeality" (75). The singer is overwhelmed with "nostalgie de la boue" (75), the author describes, and invites Rodriguez to sing, beckoned by one of the writer's companions who wants to play a prank. The lyrics are significant, and this is why they are quoted in the text: "Vete pero no me olvides" (76) becomes a parody of the relationship between expatriate and culture of origin, a relationship mediated by memory. With the performer's invitation to sing, Rodriguez seems to have no other choice but to parody his own construction of Mexico. However this construction is being presented as a simulacrum and, as a consequence, the authenticity of such construct is being undermined. For the "infinitely bored' (77) singer, this song is just another task to perform on stage, another re-presentation to convey to the audience. The biased perspective on Mexico that the writer's table party provides is not real either. Nothing seems to be authentic, which leads the reader to suspect that Rodriguez's constructions of Mexican and Mexican-American identities are but re-presentations, constructions that can be taken apart as easily as they can be put together.

Rodriguez is conscious of this, and as counterbalance to this degraded image of Mexicanness, he introduces the figure of his nephew in the narrative. His nephew serves him to meditate on the Mexican identity of those people who settled in the United States. It is striking how Rodriguez insists in that stereotypical dichotomy light/dark to epitomize both the U.S. and Mexico. "He has light hair; he stares at me with dark eyes. I think it is Mexico I see in his eyes, the unfathomable regard of the past […] What will he know of his past, except that he has several? What will he know of Mexico, except that his ancestors lived on land he will never inherit?" (71). The nephew, second generation Mexican-American, is presented as someone completely assimilated to the mainstream U.S. Anglo-American culture. As the next generation, the nephew stands for the future. What is more, he is

presented as a child who grows on toys created and imported from England, like Winnie-the-Pooh or the waist-coated frog, "all his compliant toys […] [r]efugees of some long English childhood have crossed the Atlantic, attached themselves to the court of this tyrannical dauphin" (71). Even the nursery rhyme is a British import: Ride a cockhorse to Banbury Cross. In a sense, the nephew is far more connected to these children games than to the traditional nursery rhymes in Spanish that Rodriguez was sung as a child. The writer is crafty enough to just remember the lyrics of the rhyme in Spanish that are common to all variants on both sides of the Atlantic, suggesting that the nursery rhyme his mother chanted was also of European origin. The reader is left to wonder if he was sung the Mexican variant or not. By the greater proximity of his nephew, the second generation Mexican-American, to the Anglo-American cultural heritage, in detriment to the Hispanic one, Rodriguez wants to highlight the cultural assimilation of Latinos. Sesame Street opens to his nephew as the future that lies ahead, while the Mexican past of the child is impenetrable, as it was impossible for the journalists to drive into the Mexican square at the beginning of the book. For Rodriguez, the fading of Mexican cultural values is indispensable to assimilation. And it is a requirement, although he tries to pull the wool over our eyes with his attempt to explore and vindicate the Mexican cultural roots of Chicanos and Mexican-Americans. Moreover, for Rodriguez, this fading of heritage and its associated acculturation into the mainstream starts from the first generation of immigrants: "The knowledge Mexico bequeaths to him [his nephew] passes silently through his heart, something to take with him as he disappears, like my father, into America" (71).

Rodriguez approximates his literary forefathers by means of this celebratory discourse of displaced heritage. Those forefathers are the English language writers of the start of the century. According to Edward Said, after her/his disillusion with the national and familial ties, the writer of the early twentieth century turns to "institutions, associations, and

communities whose social existence was not in fact guaranteed by biology, but by affiliation" ("Secular" 614). In this sense, one can assert that Rodriguez overcomes familial and national bonds when he dissents with the national construction of Mexico and when he finds problematic the relationship between Mexico and those of Mexican origin who put down roots in the United States. Hence, he affiliates his nephew to a community he belongs due to educational affinity, and not based on ancestry. It must be underlined, nevertheless, that the affiliation that Rodriguez establishes is European, basically British, in what can be read as a projection of the hopes and desires of the author's self.

When it comes to reinforce the transnational notion of the cultural attachment, Rodriguez is careful to associate with Mexico a series of values that easily overcome national borders. Consequently, one of the values he focuses on is memory. However, his concept of memory does not lie on a concrete remembrance, tied to a specific locus. In fact, he criticizes precisely the memory fixed to the "mythic northern kingdom of Aztlán" (66). The memory that Rodriguez is interested in is the one that allows the individual to know "that tragedy wins; that talent is mockery" (219). It is, then, a universal knowledge, not one restricted to a specific time or concrete place, but instead a sort of bridge over the boundaries of time and space.

A distinct example of this type of knowledge is presented in the description that our writer renders of Tijuana, one of the foci of contamination to the eyes of mainstream Anglo-Americans. His depiction helps the author to highlight that "Mexico has a more graceful sense of universal corruption" (90) and that if there is corruption in Tijuana, Mexican cynicism points towards the hypocrisy of the United States when it is revealed that other cities across the border, like San Diego, are not exempt of corruption. The conscience of universal corruption is, in the eyes of Rodriguez, a legacy of the Spanish conquest and

colonization, but it has granted base for success to places such as Tijuana, where neither strict limits, nor the restrictions proper to a taut Mexican identity are taken into account. Whereas "Mexico City worries about a cultural spill from the United States" (83) and criticizes the lack of history of the country to the north, Tijuana, in the eyes of Rodriguez, is a city where positive encounters are attained and such encounters allow for productive innovation: "Tijuana stares north, as towards the future […] Tijuana is the future" (84). Of course, Rodriguez's definition of future lies in the economy of production, which is germane to the Anglo-American ethos. On the contrary, in the opinion of the author, San Diego is the past, the same as Mexico City, and both are the opposite of Tijuana. In a sense, Rodriguez is proposing a subversion of the conventional configuration of Mexico and the United States. Tijuana overcomes territorial boundaries and becomes the perfect example of the universality that Rodriguez places on the shoulders of his nephew: "Tijuana is an industrial park on the outskirts of Minneapolis. Tijuana is a colony of Tokyo. Tijuana is a Taiwanese sweatshop. Tijuana is a smudge between the Linden trees of Hamburg. There is a complicity between businessmen –hands across the border—and shared optimism" (94).

The concept of the cosmic race that Vasconcelos put forward, and Rodriguez followed somewhat has been meshed with issues of economic globalization. Rodriguez adopted Vasconcelos's idea that the Mexican, as a mestizo race, would encompass the virtues of all other races and, consequently, be the future. Rodriguez, as it has been stated before, adopts this notion in his evaluation of the Mexican-Americans and Chicanos. But Rodriguez adds a pecuniary twist to this alliance with Vasconcelos. The Tijuana *maquiladoras* provide Rodriguez with a response to the traditional Mexico and the hypocritical optimism of the United States, albeit from the cynicism of Western culture. In doing so, Rodriguez moves away from the traditional perspective of the European traveler that Mary Louise Pratt considers in Imperial Eyes. In her book, Pratt describes how the observation performed by the

traveler was a passive, innocent act, separate from the act of conquest, although conquest provided the traveler with uncontested authority and legitimacy over that which is being contemplated. On the contrary, in Rodriguez's depiction of what he sees in Tijuana, he does not hold an omniscient perspective. He becomes part of what is being surveyed. In fact, a Mexican child atop a ledge is observing him. Our traveler is blended into the crowd, which causes him anxiety. "The point in the United States is distinguishing yourself from the crowd," compares Rodriguez, "The point in Mexico is the crowd. Whatever happens in Tijuana, I caution myself, do not imagine you have been singled out. You have entered the million" (81). The writer's anxiety is to become amalgamated. Richard Rodriguez has striven to stand out as a means of assimilating himself to the mainstream, but in Mexico he is apprehensive he will disappear: "Because Mexico is brown and I am brown, I fear being lost in Mexico" (96). Rodriguez's presence in Mexico is not an ingenuous one, it does not end unanswered: from the village idiot who censures the BBC reporters, to his assumption of the role of explorer, Richard Rodriguez subverts the notion that the observed individuals (be they indigenous or not) are passive subjects who depend on the legitimacy of their discovery: "the Europeans were not predisposed to imagine that they were being watched, awaited" (9). Faced with his fear of becoming trapped and melted into the Mexican crowd, lost in Mexico, Rodriguez "must find the airport –the American solution—I must somehow escape, fly over" (21).

The tension that comes from being observed is critical the moment the power relations and the concept of nation are in place. This is evident when Rodriguez participates as observer along a member of the U.S. border patrol. On the one hand, the patrolman is also of Mexican descent, which reinforces the undermining of the opinion that presents Chicanos as innocent victims of Western oppression. On the other hand, Rodriguez is unable to obviate his own agency in the power relations that regulate border surveillance. Finally, when he

takes pictures of the detained undocumented immigrants, they return his stare with a stare of their own, in what can be interpreted not only as an exercise of dignity, but also one of power: “to them I am not a bearing witness; I am part of the process of being arrested” (103). For his part, the author is trapped in the tunnels that the eyes of the undocumented have become. Rodriguez realizes that the concept of an innocent look is but a myth: the observer is also immersed in the surveillance process, as it has already been pointed out. The voyeur is also being appraised and, as a consequence of this, his self is transformed. In this way, Rodriguez raises awareness of the ethical factors involved in transnational and transcultural crossings: the other is never passive, and it interacts with the self constantly. While looking at Tijuana from the Chapultepec neighborhood, the writer tries to grapple a universal knowledge that allows him to overcome borders, realize the contradictions between both sides of the geopolitical border. However, as we stated before, this omniscient perspective is not viable anymore, “the knowing self is partial in all its guises, never finished, whole, simply there and original; it is always constructed and stitched together imperfectly” (Haraway 193). The perspective that Rodriguez wishes for is only seemingly possible from the hang-gliders that hover the La Jolla beaches, and not from firm land.

As one can see from Rodriguez’s exploration on Mexican and Mexican-American and Chicano identities, his position is ambiguous. This ambiguity is not limited to those searches for identity, but it is also present in his reflections on the Anglo-American sphere: “[t]he best that immigrants bring to America is diversity. American education should respect diversity, celebrate diversity” (169).

He attempts to combine that notion of diversity with assimilation, a stance he postulates from his first autobiography. “To argue for a common culture is not to propose an exclusionary culture or a static culture”, he affirms in Days of Obligation (170) in order to

illustrate how Susan B. Anthony, the Massachusettsian suffragist, or Martin Luther King Jr., the Georgian Civil Rights leader, do not fit into the United States canon as "figures of diversity, but as persons who implicate our entire society" (170). However, that seems to be precisely what Rodriguez is positing all along: to argument in favor of a common culture that functions as an exclusive culture. This appears to be one of the pillars on which his dichotomy public/private stands. "You betray Uncle Sam by favoring private over public life" (63).

In the end, his defense of assimilation taints his analysis of Mexican and Mexican-American and Chicano identities. He ends up making a caricature of Mexicanness portraying it as dark, obscure, in contrast to the clear virtues of the Anglo-American character:

> Americans distrust Mexican shading. The genius of American culture and its integrity come from fidelity to the light. Plain as day we say. Happy as the day is long. Early to bed, early to rise. Up and at 'em. American virtues are daylight virtues: honest, plain style. We say yes when we mean yes and no then we mean no. Americans take short shrift from sorrow, reassuring one another that tomorrow is another day or time heals all wounds or things will look better in the morning." (88)

In making this comparison between the Anglo-American and the Mexican characters, Rodriguez is also making a not too indirect declaration that he is not Mexican, and that he aligns with the Anglo-Americans, the "we" of the comparison.

In the end, he would like to unite both worlds, but always giving preeminence to the Anglo-American character, which in his mind is dominant. This is so because for him the United States represent the future, while Mexico stands for the past that must be surpassed: "America might provide the symbolic solution to a Mexican dilemma: if one could learn public English while yet retaining family Spanish, *usted* might be reunited with *tú*, the future might be reconciled with the past" (66).

Thus, one can assert that the introspective journeys that Rodriguez embarks on turn out unproductive. It is difficult to elucidate if the I of the author achieves further knowledge of himself. There are glimpses of it but, in the end, the writer negates any ulterior finding for the sake of assimilating into the U.S. mainstream. In a sense, these introspective journeys are a failure, for he does not arrive at the destination he set himself to reach. Then, it might be necessary for us to place the emphasis not on the destination, but on the journeys of inquiry themselves, in the process of analysis. In this way, the reader might be able to redeem the text. In the introspective movement that this autobiography presents, it is the writer the one who articulates both memory and imagination in order to present the reader with a subjective opinion on Mexican, as well as Mexican-American and Chicano perspectives. This articulation manifests the artificiality and the intentionality on the re-creation of both cultural spaces. Richard Rodriguez himself affirms that he re-creates the past "as a means of finding connection, of healing the break in the discontinuous life" ("An American Writer" 8). It is his re-creation that, ironically, enriches the Latino experience in the United States.

CHAPTER 5

BROWNING THE ARGUMENT, SHIFTING THE PARADIGM

"The future is brown, is my thesis"
(Brown 35)

In 2002, Rodriguez intertwines identity, ethnicity, and religion to extend the socialization of identity that was already postulated ten years earlier in Days of Obligation. That is, to see identity, ethnicity, and religion within a social context, yet in relation to the individual. It has been pointed out that Brown, along with the two preceding autobiographies, "is among the most incisive reflections and visualizations of the self in relation to the ever-changing U.S. cultural and political landscapes" (Milian Arias 274). Rodriguez posits the concept of brownness as one that allows the self to claim an identity that is multifaceted, flexible, and historical, in order to respond to the different contexts the individual might find her/himself in. This idea of brownness, allows the author to make ethical claims regarding identity and, consequently, the individual. Brown allows him to contemplate the United States in its context, and to regard the two continents (North America and South America) as a whole: the Americas. Brownness allows him to do so and to debunk the notion of an isolated identity based on the concept that borders maintain the purity of what they contain, as the writer asserted in a radio interview: "This notion that the United States exists independently of its neighbors […] leads more deeply to a kind of innocence on our place in the world" (Ashbrook). Thus, by advocating a hemispheric re-positioning (north-south, rather than east-west), Rodriguez proposes that the United States transcend "innocence" by embracing a broader-based solution to cultural identity, affiliation, and citizenship. In response to a question by scholar Ibarrola-Armendáriz, Rodriguez states that "the opportunity in this modern age is to move between these alternatives [multicultural/cosmopolitan versus a

"civic" conception of the self] rather than settle permanently on either one" (Ibarrola-Armendeariz "Call and Response", 93) and as a result he does not conceive himself as a minority separated from his societal context, but rather as a minority whose identity moves within the parameters that mainstream allows.

This chapter will look at how Rodriguez looks at identity from the framework of miscegenation that crossing all those borders proposes. In order to achieve that mixing, which he will wrap under the label 'brownness', Rodriguez considers race and culture as frameworks that can explain ethnicity. This part of the study will analyze how basing ethnicity on either race or culture allows Rodriguez to postulate identity in a different light vis-à-vis his discourse. The chapter will consider his controversial stance when he disturbs the monolithic approach to the concept of identity, and his critique of "ethnic" as an adjective to that identity. Finally, this section of the project will read the book in relation to his other works, with special emphasis on the first two narratives of the self, for he has considered this third volume as the end of a trilogy. In order to do so, the analysis will concentrate mostly on the last chapter, which serves as a recapitulation of the major ideas exposed in Brown.

5.1. The politics of a brown ethnic identity

It has already been stated in previous chapters how provocative, if not entirely disruptive, Rodriguez has been to Chicana/o scholars due to his assimilationist standpoint. While for some scholars and authors his views were unacceptable, others see in him the complexity of someone who has mastered the paradox of being prominent, yet despised. At the root of this seeming contradiction lies the battle of representation: who is able to represent, circumscribe Mexican-American and Chicano identity. As Aureliano María DeSoto states when addressing the identity-politics debates over assimilation, Rodriguez's

place between his prominence amongst the mainstream and the repudiation of his work by Chicano intelligentsia "is indicative of the battle over who defines Chicana/o identity, and how such an identity is understood both within Chicano communities and by the public at large" (53). Brown contributes to those identity-politics debates that have made its author both a renowned and divisive Mexican American intellectual. It would seem that the specific issues that provoked antagonism, namely Rodriguez's opposition to bilingual education and affirmative action, have evolved into a disagreement about who represents and who is to define ethnic identity. In this context, some critics have used the politically charged label of neoconservative to describe Rodriguez, in an attempt to emphasize his individualized sense of self, and his view of ethnicity as an individual, private, experience (Alarcón 142). Besides his opposition to bilingual education and affirmative action, an opposition that in the culture wars of the 1980s meshed well with the conservative political programs, as chapter three of this study analyzed, Rodriguez's liberalism and his refusal to resolve the contradictions that arose with regarding ethnic identity in a complex way helped in casting him as a neoconservative. However, this label seems to be problematic. It simplifies the contradictions that he displays in his texts regarding a more progressive agenda (gay issues, poverty and its relation to morality, …) and it contrasts with his public identification as "left of center" (Guillespie and Posrel).

By the time Brown was published, Rodriguez's ideas on ethnic identity in the United States grew to be more multidimensional, wider, to the point of encompassing the Americas, rather than limiting himself to the U.S. Of course, the United States is his immediate context, and that is what he reflects most upon, although placing now his observations in a wider context. Instead of taking the path of political activism, as many Chicano scholars feared he would in the eighties, Rodriguez's thoughts on identity in the Americas –and that includes the United States— fit more under the rubric of advocacy. An advocacy that is colored with

ambiguity, for ambiguity allows him to address the contradictions of his reflections: "You will often find brown in this book as the cement between leaves of paradox" (xi). Therefore, it is paramount that one directs the attention to what constitutes the brownness that he writes from.

Rodriguez starts the book by asserting that brown is not a singular color. It is a mix of several colors; it is the color of many. "Brown confuses. Brown forms at the border of contradiction" (xi), says the writer, and this reflection reminds us of what Bhabha said a decade earlier: "the borderline engagements of cultural difference may as often be consensual as conflictual; they may confound our definition of tradition and modernity; realign the customary boundaries between the private and the public, high and low; and challenge normative expectations of development and progress" (3).

Brown is the mixing of elements that together create a whole, the blending of elements that defies the pure essence of an entity. Brown stands for the diversity that surrounds us, and that is impossible to be kept at bay by means of borders: national, ethnic, aesthetic, sexual, etc. Brown signifies the miscegenation that does not only refer to race, but that alludes to all aspects of human experience, including culture. Rodriguez, who wants to reflect on contemporary identity, acknowledges that "[t]he most important theme of my writing now is impurity" (35) for brownness prevents any clear-cut identification and classification. Moreover, "[t]he future is brown, is my thesis; is as brown as the tarnished past" (35). The juxtaposition of opposites that serves Rodriguez as a dialectical tool through which to establish his analysis becomes the mixing of brownness. It is that mixing of elements that constitutes brown what calls into question the purity of essence. When the autobiographer muses about the apparently incoherent concurrence of dissimilar elements in postmodern contemporary times, he arrives at the idea that the signifier is a simulacrum. In

other words, the re-presentation defies the notion of authenticity. To be brown, to be essentially impure –racially, culturally, ethnically— challenges the concept that there is an authentic race, culture, ethnicity. Then, man can only perform race, perform culture, perform ethnicity; brownness is what allows us that performance. Yet, we live constantly with the need to claim the "authenticity" of our context: "we live in a nation whose every other impulse is theatrical, but whose every other impulse is to insist upon 'authenticity'" (67). This conundrum is brown in itself, suggests Rodriguez.

Therefore, brown does not only refer to the color of his skin, the result of *mestizaje* or merging of blood, but the "complexity of narrative and of desire"(46) that comes with the mingling of customs, languages, faiths, viewpoints, and the influence of one onto another. Brownness is close to the idea of transculturation (the coming into contact of cultures and the cross-pollination that comes with it), and separates Rodriguez from the concept of acculturation (where the mixing is non-existent, if at all possible). Rodriguez also separates himself from the idea of multiculturalism, which he regards as simple. He portrays himself as a more complex, more radical creation where the cultural components that make him are blended to the point that "I don't know which part is the Indian part speaking to you" (Rodriguez, qtd. in Ibarrola-Armendáriz "Call and Response" 94).

The concept of a brown United States calls into question the idea of authenticity and "the nation is automatically divided between those who insist upon the need for 'authenticity' and those others –with a browner sensibility—who are able to see the allusive/delusive, 'polluted' theatrical impulse in American culture" (Ibarrola-Armendáriz "Call and Response" 94).

5.2. Brownness and authenticity

Authenticity and essentialism have been points of contention in the study of identity, and as such the debate is present in ethnic literatures. When analyzing Rodriguez's work, Petra Fachinger critiques his placing of the mainstream culture as the core of his stance because it makes him "view reality in terms of dichotomies" (124). She goes further to indicate that Rodriguez's intended reader belongs to the mainstream and his readership consider him an "insider informant of a culture" who "essentialize[s] 'English' as a monolithic structure that opens the door to privilege" (124). In the "trilogy on American public life and my private life" (Brown xiv), Rodriguez stresses that "literature flows from the particular" (12), but Fachinger emphasizes that the author "assumes a representative voice by claiming that his experience is a typically American one" (120), thus transcending the personal into the collective, regardless whether the autobiographer refuses to be categorized as representative of any ethnic experience. Linking collective and individual memory is a characteristic feature of ethnic narratives of the self and Fachinger criticizes Rodriguez's resistance to this dual voice. As such, he is regarded as an inauthentic ethnic.

Many scholars of identity, nevertheless, are cautious about essentialist ideas like collective consciousness and racial memory as appealing elements through which to undertake issues of ethnic and racial identity. In "Ghosts of Essentialism", Su outlines the constant presence of essentialism in studies of ethnic identity as well as ethnic literary texts. He contends that racial memory helps putting "alternative narratives of the past" (380) in their context. Su observes that trying to achieve greater social objectivity ensures the presence of essentialism, though it may be ironic. When approaching ethnicity from the framework of authenticity, culture tends to be explained through biological tenets.

The misleading conceptualization of ethnic authenticity has been brought into the foreground by Werner Sollors among others. In Beyond Ethnicity, he observes the consequences of reading ethnic literature against the elusive concept of authenticity. This call for non-biological essentialism appeals especially to those discussing Latino identity, since it is not a racial categorization per se, and excludes any allegation posited from the framework of racial essentialism. This is what Rodriguez calls "blood" in his text when he says: "Hispanics in the United States are united in the belief (a Latin American belief) that culture is a more uniform source of identity than blood" (131). In place of this racial essentialism, one, then, has ethnic authenticity. Thus, Latino identity is opposed to American or any other cultural identity, so that it can be an amalgamating feature uniting Latinos as a community. As a consequence of this, Rodriguez appears as a sold-out, a "coconut" when he resists the notion of an ethnic literature as separate of American literature. Paradoxically, the claims that a text must be ethnically authentic have the hegemonic effect that has been intended to derail, because ethnic authenticity fails to recognize how heterogeneous ethnic communities can be and how complex their relationship with the mainstream and other minorities might be. They become hegemonic in their imposition of a single narrative that interprets the authentic ethnic experience. "Simply put, the essentialist view would be that the identity common to members of a social group is stable and more or less unchanging, since it is based on the experiences they share" (Mohanty 202). If one believes that a social group is unchanging and stable, then different ethnic identities are mutually exclusive, and there would be no cross-fertilization, no overlapping, no interstitial space for hybridity.

In spite of their contradictory nature, both arguments have been present when discussing Latino identity: the ethnic existentialist position, and a counter-discourse of cultural miscegenation. The idea of ethnic authenticity has shared the analytical space with

the belief that cultures neither happen in isolation, nor in the void and are in constant cross-pollination or interpenetration.

Richard Rodriguez posits in Brown his take on the notion that cultures are in constant negotiation with each other. He suggests that the individual who belongs to a minority is in constant negotiation among cultures in contact, in a flux of transculturation. This position represents a change from his earlier books, and that shift has also altered the critical reception of his works.

5.3. Race vs. culture: Shifting the paradigm

In using the personal experience that the narrative of the self provides Rodriguez with, the author resists the essentialization of race and questions the meaning of belonging to a particular race. While the physical features of race are biological, interpretations of race are cultural and appear determined by context. In other words, visibility of race and ethnicity is the outcome of awareness on the part of the individual. When Rodriguez mentions "Hispanicity is culture. Not blood. No trace. Culture, or the illusion of culture" (129), he is alluding to the awareness that social context places on the ethnic self. For Rodriguez culture is more important than race, since culture is tied to social class in his eyes. Culture tints the thoughts and beliefs of the individual, while race is a pigment that is skin deep. For Rodriguez, contact with other cultures, which happens constantly, may alter one's cultural identification, something that the racial discourse does not allow. Experience begets culture, "becomes the pigment, the grounds, the *mise-en-scène*, the medium of refraction, the impeded passage of otherwise pure thought" (34, italics in the original). Because Rodriguez is aware that there are different racial features under the cultural rubric of Hispanic, he gives greater emphasis to cultural than to racial identity when addressing Latino ethnicity.

Nevertheless, a lot of the established narrative on race has been transferred to the discourse of ethnicity-as-culture and, hence, social divisions have been kept. For African-Americans, being black was the essence, and as such it was "a restriction imposed by whites in defiance of obvious history" (141), in creating a rejection model, black is now a culture that is imposed by blacks to keep the mainstream at bay. This model that Rodriguez displays looks at ethnicity as something that is exclusive of other cultures, disregarding any intersection or influence. However, Rodriguez is unable to explain, based on this model, how African-American spirituals become the quintessential definition of American music, or how non-black adolescents in the United States are so mesmerized with urban African-American rhythms like hip-hop. The question is whether those consumers of hip hop or of spirituals see these products as something Afro-American; that is, if they are seeing those cultural products ethnically. Sollors defines ethnicity as "belonging and being perceived by others as belonging to an ethnic group" (xiii). The word "belonging" suggests that there is a process of self-identification in ethnicity, while "being perceived" stresses the need of recognition from the social context, and as a consequence both, interpretation and context, come at play in ethnic identity.

Rodriguez is less interested in race, in blood, as he is interested in ethnicity, in so far as he contemplates ethnicity as culture. The writer is not interested in the relationship ethnicity-race because race is fixed, unchanging, indelible, and therefore it does not allow him the flexibility and the permeability than relating it to culture provides. "The word 'culture' in America comes equipped with add-on component jacks. The word 'culture' in America pivots on a belief in the individual's freedom to choose, to become a person different from her past" (130), asserts Rodriguez, freedom and change which would not be possible if one were contemplating ethnicity as race.

Seeing ethnicity as race rather than culture means considering ethnicity as exclusive: belonging to an ethnic group based on racial traits not only excludes others who do not share those traits but forces those who do to be part of such ethnicity, even if they do not recognize themselves in it. This is the case of Richard Rodriguez and this is the basis of his considering ethnicity based on culture. This reasoning is also behind his defense that Latinos are not a race but a culture. There are no pure heritages; thus, there are no intrinsic links uniting Latinos based on a common origin other than a vast region. Moreover, "Hispanic is the only category that has no reference to blood" (128-129).

But there are no pure cultures either: "National borders do not hold. Ethnic borders. Religious borders. Aesthetic borders, certainly. Sexual borders. Allergenic borders" (213). Cultures are in contact and, being porous, they have an effect on each other, to the point that culture has also become brown. It is because of this blurring of the borders that some critics are considering Rodriguez in a very different light twenty years after the author issued his first narrative of the self. From the writer set on establishing a clear cut between his Mexican-American private self and his mainstream Anglo-American public I, the reader faces now an author who mulls over the notion of a mixed identity, where fusion of cultures is not severely frowned upon. Thus, scholar Juan de Castro teams Rodriguez up with Chicana/o theorists Gloria Anzaldúa and José Saldívar on the basis of Rodriguez's evolution "towards a celebration of hybridity" (116). Claudia Milian puts Rodriguez side by side to Anzaldúa when the critic observes that "whether or not he has achieved 'white freedom,' or whether he no longer desires it, one cannot help but turn to Gloria Anzaldúa's foundational book Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza" because both writers seek the freedom to portray their own self on the texts (273).

Now that Rodriguez bases his identity on culture, and that culture is a brown territory of blurred borders – or as Kevin McNamara posits: "[Rodriguez] enacts a poetics of cultural miscegenation" (106)— it seems that critics can reconcile the autobiographer's paradoxes, contradictions, and ambiguity, and pairing him off to Anzaldúa is possible when one recalls that she asserts: "The new mestiza copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity […] She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode –nothing is thrust out, […] nothing is rejected, nothing abandoned" (101). Furthermore, Chicano scholar Frederick L. Aldama notices the shift of paradigms that Rodriguez has proposed when he says that "Rodriguez re-visions himself neither simply as *activo* nor *pasivo*, *gringo* nor *hispano*, Chicano nor *indio*, but as a confluence of existing identities" (Brown on Brown 78, italics in the original).

Other critics want to see a return to Spanish in Richard Rodriguez, as exemplified by Gustavo Pérez-Firmat when he contends: "Contrary to what Hunger of Memory wants to assert, however, the contest between Spanish and English is resolved in favor of the former, for *lenguajes* cannot rival *lenguas* or *idiomas* in their hold on individual speakers" (Tongue Ties 19, italics in the original). Martha Cutter also notices a change in Rodriguez's language use in Brown, although she remains more contained in her assessment than Pérez-Firmat: "English becomes interlingual, miscegenated, brown, and inflected by Mexican Spanish, by ethnicity itself" (190). Despite the fact that one might detect enormous optimism in Pérez-Firmat's opinion that because Spanish was Rodriguez's mother tongue "he cannot escape her"(155) –an optimistic critical approach to Rodriguez that will be contested in the next section—, the Cuban-American's words underline a change in perspective on the part of the critics.

There is a fraction of critics of the work of Rodriguez who have not altered their appraisal in such dramatic manner. The ideological demands of the Chicano Movement and other ethnic cultural movements of the Civil Rights era still persist and affect how a number of scholars approach Rodriguez's texts. The burning of bridges between the Mexican American autobiographer and the Chicano intelligentsia cannot be undone with his re-thinking of identity, although it is a step worth noting. Rodriguez's first two books made enough ripples as to be readily dismissed with the shifting of paradigms presented in Brown.

5.4. Now that we are all brown…

"In Spanish, culture is indissoluble, culture is everything that connects me to the past and with a sense of myself as beyond myself. When I was a boy and refused to speak Spanish (because I spoke English), then could not speak Spanish from awkwardness, then guilt […] If culture is so fated, how could have I lost it?" (129). By means of these words, Richard Rodriguez disallows the notion that his identity is historically determined by Spanish culture and the idea that one fits exclusively in one culture impervious to other cultural influences. In fact, he believes that the idea of the United States lies not in the separation of black and white that the one-drop rule of Jim Crow laws established, but in *mestizaje*. "What Latin America might give the United States is a playful notion of race. […] What the United States might give Latin America is a more playful notion of culture. Culture as freedom. Culture as invitation. Culture as lure." (142). Thus, cultural miscegenation seems to be only contemplated within the Anglo-American sphere. This outlook debunks the assessment of Pérez-Firmat, while it deflates his optimism. Rodriguez does not speak of language here, it is true, but one cannot contemplate culture without it; and the autobiographer is interested in strengthening his American identity all along.

Now that Rodriguez has established that ethnic identity is culturally driven, and that culture in the United States is brown, miscible, he can place his enunciate his discourse from a stance of ambiguity. Rodriguez might look at Latin America in order to construct his discourse of brownness, but he is not interested in celebrating Latino culture. He might show some degree of nostalgia towards his lost Mexican culture, but he is not remorseful about it: Hispanic culture is the "belief that the dead have a hold on the living" (129) and Rodriguez does not want to be held back by his past. Even if doing so means remaining silent, in the realm of ambiguity: "What I will not say, when I get up to speak, is that from childhood I have resisted the notion of culture in Spanish" (129). It should be no surprise, then, that Rodriguez continues to be accused of being inauthentic by some cultural agents who accuse him of avoiding political engagement and self-identification with the ethnic group because of his inability to link collective ethnic memory and individual memory in a dialogue (Fachinger 124). Whereas it is true that not all writers who present a hybrid identity are neither border residents nor equally bilingual and bicultural, as an essentialist perspective might postulate, it is true that Rodriguez seems to speak from the standpoint of his American identity, casting to the side his Latino counterpart.

Rodriguez's line of reasoning through the concept of brownness proposes the creation of a consciousness that transcends race, class, or even cultural identity. His focus is on pointing towards the irrelevance of Hispanic culture, on the basis that every culture is mixed and cross-fertilized… so we are all brown. The chapters "Hispanic" and "The Third Man" allude to this idea that one cannot claim a concrete identity for communities that are intrinsically hybrid.

In the eyes of Rodriguez, "Hispanics, particularly Chicanos in the Southwest –the noisiest among us— made their reputations 'against' assimilation" (163), although there is a

yearning that betrays them: they act wounded by day, but are attracted by gringos at night. At the crux of this concept of hybridity developed in the United States, and to appreciate its value to the eyes of Rodriguez, one needs to understand –if not altogether accept— the role of dominance of white people of European descent when it comes to the definition of an immigrant to the United States.

The theory of brownness that Rodriguez puts forth reminds us of the postcolonial concept of the value of the "irreducible" (139) as a way to build consciousness and foster acceptance among the different communities in the world. Rodriguez presents us with his take on the complex process of human interaction, where identitary conflict is what generates change: "The borderline engagements of cultural difference may as often be consensual as conflictual; they may confound our definition of tradition and modernity; realign the customary boundaries between the private and the public, high and low; and challenge normative expectations of development and progress" (Bhabha 3). Rodriguez emphasizes a Hispanic identity that typifies that "antagonistic or affiliative" (Bhabha 3) fight through which the members of this community relate to their surrounding social context, in particular the Anglo-American hegemony. Rodriguez writes Brown in order to deconstruct and silence considerations of ethnicity that insist on using "traits set in the fixed tablet of tradition [of communities]" (Bhabha 3).

The chapter "Hispanic" reflects on the power of reflection and the social impact of words. Words, as the building blocks of language, are the elements with which mankind constructs elocution but they also convey that which is unconsciously projected. In doing so, words build our discourse. When Rodriguez wonders "do Hispanic exist?" (104), he brings to the essay dictionary entries, quotes census data, draws examples from popular culture, politics, and sports to support his *a priori* conclusion: "Hispanicism cannot interest me

anymore" (104). Rodriguez cannot accept any identity that questions his adherence to the mainstream Anglo-America. "For years I have pursued Hispanicism, as a solitary, self-appointed inspector" (104), he asserts, but the writer has come to the conclusion that it is but a hoax. The autobiographer reminisces about his lectures and talks where "[f]or a fee, I rise to say I am not Latin American, because I am Hispanic. I am Hispanic because I live in the United States. *Thank you*. (For a larger fee, I will add there is no such thing as a Hispanic. *Thank you*.)" (104, italics in the original). After years of confrontational opposition, Rodriguez is shifting gears. Although he is maintaining his irony: Hispanic has become an institutional label coined by the Nixon administration and, as such, a hoax: "Hispanic (the noun, the adjective) has encouraged the Americanization of millions of Hispanics. […] Hispanic –the ascending tally announced by the U.S. Census Bureau—has encouraged the Latinization of non-Hispanics" (105). By reducing the label to a bureaucratic categorization, ethnic identity has been turned into a tool for assimilation; because ethnic identity is brown, essential ethnicity does not prevent said assimilation.

Despite the fact that Rodriguez approaches with irony the Census Bureau racial categorization of 1973 –changed to ethnic categorization in its 2010 edition—, Rodriguez partakes of the erasure of the ethnic categorization by means of his theory of brownness, which rejects the essentialism upon which the Census Bureau originally established the five racial categories. By erasing any differentiating marks of ethnic identity, it becomes nothing more than a box to check, another empty label that by bureaucratic consensus carries a given label –Hispanic in this case— but is, nonetheless, just another identity in the United States. Speaking about Hispanic identity in those hotel ballroom conferences becomes, as a result, an empty discourse that is nothing but (well) paid rhetoric. Denouncing the lucrative business of ethnic identity allows him to discredit the belief in an essentialist ethnic identity. Latinos, suggests Rodriguez, should abate the allegiance that they automatically assume in relation to

their cultural identity, because "there is no such thing as Hispanic blood" (106); that is, cultural (ethnic) identity is not biological, is not essentialist. Consequently, those who call themselves Latinos should question their identity, explore the discourses behind it, examine the interests that are at stake in sponsoring such identity, and effect the necessary changes to avoid being manipulated by it: "*What do Hispanics mean to the life of America?*" (106, italics in the original). The "ficticious, inclusive genus" (107) of Hispanics lies, therefore, in an identity that many of its members, historically involved in the movements for civil rights as well as those of more recent coinage, reject:

> Surviving Chicanos (one still meets them) scorn the term Hispanic, in part because it was Richard Nixon who drafted the noun and who made the adjective uniform. Chicanos resist the term, as well, because it reduces the many and complicated stories of the Mexican in America to a mere chapter of a much larger saga that now includes Hondurans and Peruvians and Cubans. Chicanos resent having to share a mythic space with parvenus and numerically lesser immigrant Latin American populations. (108-109).

In other words, the resistance to the term stems in the inclusion of other Latin American peoples under the same rubric and the reluctance to lose a space connected to the essential myth of the ethnic group –or to perceive its loss— to other immigrants or even to peoples regarded as immigrants. In essence, Rodriguez is turning the tables on the "settler argument" and presenting Chicanos as a hegemonic group that is averse to lose self-perceived power to other groups of Latin American origin, hence rejecting a marker that brackets them together. By means of doing so, the meaning of ethnic identity becomes something slippery. Others reject the label because they reject a Eurocentric perspective, which is at the core of the Anglo-American mainstream classification, as it has been mentioned before: "One finds Hispanics who refuse Hispanic because of its colonial tooling. Hispanic, they say, places Latin America (once again) under the rubric of Spain. An alternate noun the disaffected prefer is 'Latino,' because they imagine the term locates them in the Americas" (109). In this

fashion, Rodriguez challenges the term Latino as a more appropriate identifier, reminding us that his views on the matter are anchored in his looking towards Europe rather than Latin America. This is why his argument turns the table on the term Latino and explains that it remits Latin America to Spain, since it is a Spanish word. By the same token, one could argue that the signifier America commits the continent to Italian memory by virtue of Vespucci. In any case, his point is made; in Latin: "*Hispanicus sui*. […] I am Latino against my will" (109-110, italics in the original). Rodriguez also reminds us that his perspective hails from an American angle: "In fact, I do have a preference for Hispanic over Latino. To call oneself Hispanic is to admit a relationship to Latin America in English. *Soy* Hispanic is a brown assertion" (110, italics in the original). In establishing that his relationship to Hispanic is in English, he reminds us of his linguistic alliances with English: he is speaking from the standpoint of the English language in relation to the ethnic community. By coloring the label Hispanic with brown hues, Rodriguez incorporates the notion of *mestizaje*, of brownness, to the mainstream perception of Hispanics. Let's remember that the term Hispanic is regarded with disapproval because, as the author points out, it represents a nomenclature imposed by the hegemony and it aims "to describe the world that exists by portraying a world that doesn't" (105). It appears that the reader is in front of another of Rodriguez's contradictions, since he is criticizing the racial classification imposed in the 1970s, since it tries to homogenize ethnic differences under the same rubric. Yet, he ends up ascribing himself to the term based on its brownness.

Furthermore, he criticizes those Latinos who reject the label Hispanic because it is imposed by the mainstream by revealing that they are guilty of what they accuse: whereas they "would never call themselves Hispanic", they encapsulate their "Others" under the word "Anglo" without paying attention to the composite of those they perceive as Other to their identity. It would seem that "Anglo" is also a brown assertion, but it is one that he is not

comfortable with: piling other non-Latino ethnicities under that rubric or, more importantly, including in the term groups that historically resisted Anglo-Saxon domination –like Irish-American— accounts for that. He has the upper-hand in the debate with the point that he makes.

But Rodriguez loses the rhetoric edge when he brings the linguistic card into his argument in his defense of "Hispanic" and his disagreement with "Anglo". As it was mentioned before, he claims that the former is a term that manifests a link with the English language. He criticizes that the latter label is based on those who speak English. He seems to leave aside the fact that *anglo* can also be regarded as a root in Spanish language –while the Hispanic equivalent would be *hispano*. He ridicules the position opposite to his by saying "Hispanic who call Anglos Anglo are themselves Anglo?" (110) forgetting that the label might be a rubric in either language. Moreover, if "Americans do not speak 'English'" (111) due to their independence from England and the fact that the language spoken in the British colonies "tasted of Indian", then he must admit the same in the case of Spanish: Latin American peoples do not speak Spanish by virtue of their independence from Spain, and by the adoption of indigenous words. Rodriguez mentions *succotash* and *Mississippi*, and while it is true that he could have named a long list of words of Native American origin that are of common use in the United States, he forgets words like *canoa*, *huracán*, or *barbacoa*, which have the same origin in Spanish. In fact, 'canoe', 'hurricane', and 'barbecue' have entered the English language through contact with the Spanish.

Our point here is not to defend an essentialist notion of ethnicity, nor to argue against the brown connotations of all the labels that have been discussed about before. Upholding those views would be supporting what the author has accurately described as setting peoples against each other. Our aim is to debunk the impression the writer wants to give that his

argument is presented objectively. Rodriguez explicitly tells us that his relationship to ethnicity is founded on placing English in the middle. “I am not a Hispanic writer. I’m a writer who comes out if some weird hybrid of cultures. I belong as much to England and probably more to England than I do to Mexico” (Stavans, La Plaza) His argument, whether in an unconscious or a deliberate way, leaves elements of analysis out, implicitly underscoring his stance. In taking that position regarding English, he is favoring the mainstream position since he partakes of the hegemonic parceling of identity.

Essays like the chapters “Hispanics” and ‘The Third Man” remind us that ethnic labeling in a society composed by subjects of immigration and diaspora is a complex endeavor. Part of the value of Rodriguez’s discourse lies in illustrating that “our world is far from ready for the apolitical and anesthetized discourse” (Balan 414). Rodriguez grants more weight to the main hegemonic components of the history and politics of the United States in building his notion of hybridity. His interest verges toward integration rather than resistance, thus the focus has to be removed from those that need to be integrated. In his effort to decentralize Latino identity, Rodriguez tries to portray it as a myth or a construct. In order to debunk such construct, the writer opts to confront the reader with the social and educational reality that has shaped him: a predominant Anglo-American education that culturally determines his hybrid self. Hence, the Latino insistence on promoting their ethnicity in the United States is criticized and subdued, because it causes friction. In “The Thrid Man”, Rodriguez expresses this suppression or erasure in racial terms: “who can blame the Irish steward or the Sicilian hatmaker for wanting to be white? White in America was the freedom to disappear from a crowded tenement and to reappear in a Long Island suburb, in an all-electric kitchen, with a set of matching plates. […] I grew up wanting to be white. That is, to the extent of wanting to be colorless and to feel complete freedom of movement.” (140). This freedom of movement must be read in terms of class mobility, which according to the

mainstream is attainable if one undergoes "a bleaching bath –a transfiguration— that burns away memory" (140). The author confesses that he wanted that freedom for himself (142). By the miscegenation that Rodriguez's brownness proposes, ethnic differences fade, thus the bleaching transfiguration starts to take place.

5.5. Peter's Avocado: Summarizing concepts

It has already been stated that in 2002 Rodriguez conceived Brown as the third part of a trilogy, and as such he intended to wrap up his meditation on identity. With that outline in mind, the writer echoes many of the ideas exposed before in this last chapter: "This volume completes a trilogy on American public and my private life. Brown returns me to years I have earlier described. I believe it is possible to describe a single life thrice, if from three isolations: *Class. Ethnicity. Race.* (xiv, italics in the original).

With regards to the narratives of the self the text presents and concerning the sustained critique of the political construction of "minorities", Brown echoes the previous autobiographies by Rodriguez. The first chapter, "The Triad of Alexis de Tocqueville" revisits his childhood as reader: "My reading was a thicket, a blind from which I observed. […] A scholarship boy, and sexually secretive, I was deaf to the rock-and-roll blaring from the radio. I did not know that the great drama of integration –White and Black— was playing itself out" (14). Referring to himself as a "scholarship boy" is a direct intertextual link that sends us to Hunger of Memory's "The Achievement of Desire". Douglass appears in the three books of the trilogy, showcasing the significance of African-American writers in Rodriguez's reading, and how he has approach African-American culture through reading. "I cannot imagine myself a writer, I cannot imagine myself writing these words, without the example of African slaves stealing the English language, learning to read against the law,

then transforming the English language into the American tongue, transforming me, rescuing me" (31). Yet, the author's relation to African-American culture remains in the realm of ambiguity: "I remain too much a cultural xenophobe, but also too convinced a mestizo to permit myself to claim any simple kinship with Black, with partition America" (31); "[t]hat part of America where I felt least certain about the meaning o my brown skin was also the part of the country I came to know best in my reading" (15). As such, Baldwin's essays exert a particular influence in his writing. Through him, as well as by referring to Carl T. Rowan and Malcolm X, Rodriguez depicts his feelings of invisibility in black-white relationships –"I felt myself rejected by black literature and felt myself rejecting black literature as theirs" (27) – yet sensing recognition to a degree via their words: "Something in his [Malcolm X's] manner, something I recognized, rhymed with the scholarship boy I was" (15); "I am not who I was. All the cells of my body have changed since I cradled Carl T. Rowan's book in my lap" (30). Because America is a very spooky place to be (30), in the eyes of Rodriguez, he acknowledges to be "more a white liberal than I ever tried to put on black", yet he "ended up a 'minority', the beneficiary of affirmative action programs to redress black exclusion" (25). This ambivalence towards African-American culture and his questioning of the affirmative action programs remits us to Hunger of Memory's "Profession".

Rodriguez's revision of the ethnic label "Hispanic", which was analyzed in earlier chapters, also revisits previous published essays: "The Achievement of Desire" from Hunger of Memory, for instance. Brown's "Hispanic" considers the creation of racial categories in the United States; "The Third Man" focuses on the racial debate from a the standpoint of brownness, specifically when it comes to African-American and Latino relations, an analysis where he introduces issues of class mobility into the discussion.

"Peter's Avocado", the last chapter in the book, summarizes most of the points that Rodriguez makes in Brown and echoes his ideas from earlier works. It also offers us the author's musings on his own writing and structuring of the text, and in that sense it becomes a metanarrative. In a sense, both features refer to the same: form shapes content, *what* one is cannot be separated from one's discursive possibilities and constrains, in other words, *how* one is: "The way we must hold the guitar constructs music" (205). In this chapter, Rodriguez provides the reader with a theory of writing autobiography that might help us interpret his work. He turns to the metaphor of cubism in order to speak about the formal aspects of his writing as well as to recapitulate the points that have been thematically important in Brown:

> I recently asked a painter which were the brownest paintings he could think of.
>
> He said cubists found their preoccupation with form disallowed a bright palette; nothing more than burlapy brown. The capture of form rather than the capture of light. Form, space, but not progression. There is no time in cubism. All is present tense. The Nude cannot descend the staircase. Though she has reached the bottom, she has not yet left the top. (204)

In presenting the multifaceted rendition of cubism, Rodriguez is alluding to narratives of the self and their depiction of identity. Like in cubism, in the writing of narratives of the self there is the suspension of time. If a cubist painting aims to present the object in the present time from all points of view possible, narratives of the self bring together at least three different times: the past that is being reminisced, the past of the writing, the present of the act of reading. In bringing the past to the present, albeit all the tricks that memory presents us with, there is a suspension of time similar to what happens in a cubist work of art. Likewise, there is an effort on the part of the writer to present the self from all points of view possible, with the intention that this new observation of the self by the reader constructs a new self, a more complete picture. How the writer presents the self, constructs the self. A self that is at

the same time in the past of what is being recalled, in the present time of the writing –which is at the same time the past time of the reader— and in the present time of the reader.

But in these quotes Rodriguez is also revealing his subtle use of allusion. While an informed reader might think of the guitars of cubist Pablo Picasso, there is no mention here of either the painter or his painted guitars. In a same fashion, he does not mention Marcel Duchamp's Nude Descending a Staircase when he refers to the impossibility of the Nude to descend, since she is at the same time at the top and the bottom of the stairs. This exclusion of attribution happens elsewhere in Rodriguez, and brings to the critical reader's mind the theories of allusion and intertextuality that Kristeva posits with her sense of "sign systems", which makes us wonder how it works when the reader is unaware of the intertext. While some critics have judged Rodriguez of being cryptic in his intertextual references, accusing him of hiding under a heightened euphuism, it is also true that the manner in which Rodriguez exhibits intertextuality functions as a rhetoric strategy at the service of his distinctiveness: the reader who will be able to peel off most layers; that is, the one who will most understand him, is likely to be one who has navigated the same literary paths.

"Peter's Avocado" aims to present the book's chapters' main ideas as if presenting them together could offer us the same multifaceted, complex view of a cubist work of art. The storyteller Rodriguez's account of Franz's dilemma regarding the purchase of an organic or standard avocado leads to a reflection of love within the parameters of Christian religion. As such, one can regard this segment as foreground for what will be his next book, Darling. In fact, he mentions in the Prologue the chapter's relation to the events of September 11, 2001, which are also the trigger for his reflections in the next book. Moreover, the contemplation of love and religion that is the core of Darling already appears in "Peter's Avocado" reinforcing the possibility of seeing here a linkage, if not the genesis altogether, of

his future work. Nevertheless, the viewpoint from where love and religion is regarded here is filtered through race, which echoes how race and sexuality have been intimately linked for Rodriguez since the writing of Hunger of Memory.

The chapter then turns from an emphasis on the historical revision of racial hate and religion to the realm of the autobiographical. Asserting that "[t]he stories in the history book that interested me were stories that seemed to lead off the page" (196) brings to mind his musings on the scene from de Tocqueville's Democracy in America from the first chapter:

> I want to speak of such unpursued scenes and lives as constituting brown history. Brown, not in the sense of pigment necessarily, but brown because mixed, confused, lumped, impure, unpasteurized, as motives are mixed, and the fluids of generation are mixed and emotions are unclear, and the tally of human progress and failure in every generation is mixed and unaccounted for, missing in plain sight (197).

"Impure" and "unpasteurized" brings the reader back to the generating image of the chapter – Peter's fear of tainting his body with an avocado that is not organically grown, thus impure— as well as to the adjective "unclean" of the epigraph of the chapter: "Can't you see that nothing that goes into someone from outside can make that person unclean, because it goes not into the heart but into the stomach and passes into the sewer?" (193). But on page 197, by suggesting "the fluids of generations" are mixed, brown –thus impure—, the writer is wondering whether they taint the heart or, as in the epigraph, the heart remains clean. In a physical plane, Rodriguez might be referring to homosexual love and its rejection by the Catholic Church. In an abstract plane, he is referring to the cultural and ethnic miscegenation that is being passed down by generations and mixes humans in a brown history yet remains unaccounted, erased, by the silencing of micro-history. Thus, the sequence of the different museum cards in Boston point towards histories that "lead off the page" but that remain silenced, erased.

Fortunately, Rodriguez reminds us of the Whitmanian "I am the observer" (199), the reader, hence interpreter, of the card. The emphasis is on the subject who willfully regards: "[t]he I may be an instrument of connection, but even as such it is an assertion of will" (199). And a declaration of individuality: "become a man different from your father" (199) that is ingrained in the culture of the United States, whose people –unlike the children of immigrants, Rodriguez points out—are fixated on choices. By including "gay or straight" in a series of petty choices, Rodriguez questions the mainstream position that being gay is a lifestyle, a choice. Yet, "[a]s the son of immigrants, I do not remember America seeming like a choice" (199-200). If assimilation for him is not a choice, then sexuality does not seem like a choice for him either; and as a consequence he should not be chastised based on "the apprehension of others who did not see, who do not know what I know" (200). It is unclear whether he is referring here to being admonished because of disapproval of his sexuality or due to criticisms about his assimilationist stance. It seems that both desires are taboo.

His defense lies in that he "never questioned how we were made […] Somehow we were all brown" (201). What triggers this sentence is his wondering about his Indian uncle's nephew and his wife, musings that reveal that he "had impure thoughts" (201), revisiting the very beginning of the "Preface" where Rodriguez first outlines his concept of brown, and the whole text:

> Brown as impurity.
>
> I write of a color that is not a singular color, […] but a color produced by careless desire, even by accident; by two or several. I write of blood that is blended. I write of brown as complete freedom of substance and narrative. I extol impurity.
>
> I eulogize a literature that is suffused with brown, with allusion, irony, paradox—ha!—pleasure.
>
> I write about race in America in hopes of undermining the notion of race in America.

> Brown bleeds through the straight line, unstaunchable—the line separating black from white, for example. Brown confuses. Brown forms at the border of contradiction (the ability of language to express two or several things at once, the ability of bodies to experience two or several things at once) (xi)

By referring back to the conceptual framework of the book, Rodriguez reminds us that Brown is not just about his take on the concepts of race and ethnicity, but about the paradoxes and contradictions of thought and by the limitations that language imposes on our narrative. In bringing back these words and tagging to them the notion of sexuality, he is giving the opening paragraphs an additional nuance: sexual identity is as brown a matter as ethnicity or race. Rodriguez is positing that every aspect of identity is mixed, contradictory, brown. Consequently, he insists:

> The reason I remain interested in brown history today is because, as a boy, I was embarrassed by my sexual imagination. I was looking for the world entire. I suspected dimensions I could not find –by find I mean read about, I suppose. I never expected to form a "we" beyond my family. When would the impulse come, as it came to the birds, as it came to the bride? That was why the presence of the blond woman disturbed me so. She was proof of some power in the world I could not admit I felt. (209).

He tells us later that the reason why he remains interested in brownness is because he needs to explain a "life in fragments", a life so compartmentalized that has become a "cubist life" (206). Still, a life that can be contemplated as a whole and brownness provides with that possibility:

> My advantage (my sympathy towards brown and the bifocal plane) was due to the fact that from an early age I needed to learn caution, to avert my eyes, to guard my speech, to separate myself from myself. Or to reconstruct myself in some eccentric way –my pipe protruding from my ear, my ear where my nose should be—attempting to compose myself in a chair that slants like a dump shovel. (206)

If the reader is unable to realize that being brown is an amalgamation of race, sex, religious belief, he insists: "Sodomy is among the brownest of thoughts […] Homosexuality requires cubism to illustrate itself" (207-208). It is because of brownness that he reads "as erotic" (210) the expeditions Parkman describes in Oregon Trail, the Arabian drag of T. E. Lawrence, and the diverse 38 Geary bus.

Much like the diversity Rodriguez experiments in the bus that crosses San Francisco, there is diversity in the different audiences he addresses in his speaking engagements. "There is a mystery of plurality about our bodies. The way we are constructed persuades us of duality" (221). But he does not linger on duality for individuality prevails in the mind of the writer: "We have one brain […] mouth, throat, spinal cord, stomach, digestive tract, heart, navel, sexual organ, anus. One memory. One stalk. It is the stalk that seems to yearn for complement" (221). One of these people in the audience tells him of her brother, a Mexican-Japanese that felt culturally black "in his gut, in his ear […] in everything beyond and beneath his skin" (210). But since he was not included in the black community he had to act alone. Individuality was the redeeming factor: from an outlaw he transformed himself in a reader and a writer "of disembodied voices [who overmastered] the competing claims of an impure ancestry by writing, at last, I" (210). This anecdote brings us back to his reflection on Thornton Wilder's musical Our Town when Emily questions if people "*realize life while they live it*" (205, italics in the original), to which the autobiographer replies that people cannot, but that we "notice however, how oddly we are constructed, how oddly we are evolved" (205). Rodriguez's experience of difference within several contexts has guided him to a fixed sense of fragmentation, similar to what James Joyce dubbed as the cracked Irish looking glass, a cubist self-portrait where the autobiographer portrays his fragmented I that he tries to reconcile.

For Rodriguez, in order to become acquainted with this world one needs to consider all its contents as simultaneous and to estimate their interrelationships in a single point in time. This fixed need to see everything as coexisting, to perceive and show everything as neighboring and simultaneous leads him to play up the paradoxes and contradictions that incur in the development of the individual. Brown, by itself and when read in the context of his other works, reminds us that Rodriguez's memories are not only present (treating each social and political question at the plane of present-day), but experienced by him as a sin for which he still needs to do penance (be it his sexual guilt or his relation towards his Mexican cultural milieu).

CHAPTER 6

DARLING CONTEMPLATIONS

"My place in the Church depends upon you, Darling"
(Darling 116)

In 2013, Rodriguez publishes his fourth autobiography, following the previous cadence of one installment per decade. Under the title of Darling: A Spiritual Autobiography, its essays center around two points that he has been adamantly fixed on since the publication of his first autobiography: his religion and his sexuality. The former topic has been very present since the opening chapter of Hunger of Memory, while the latter was played down at the beginning, and the writer has developed a clearer queer voice as subsequent autobiographies were being published. In Darling, Rodriguez offers his opinions from an unconcealed gay perspective, one that is intimately tied to his experience as a practicing Catholic. This might seem a contradictory stance, and by now one should be able to recognize that, as Ibarrola-Armendáriz states, "Rodriguez feels relatively at ease speaking for the paradoxes and seeming contradictions –like being Catholic and gay—that he discovers in himself" ("Reversing" 91). While he does not hesitate to encourage Mexicans to "be fearless about swallowing English and about becoming Americanized" (London), he is averse to giving up his cultural framework of Catholicism for another less homophobic religion.

The fact that Rodriguez embarks in the specific exploration of his spirituality by means of the autobiographical genre is especially relevant. Augustine's Confessions has been considered the first introspective autobiography in Western letters. Composed as a spiritual address to God, Saint Augustine surveys his life in what the examination of his personal past is. Other elements of Saint Augusntine's autobiographical narrative are essays that contemplate memory, the nature of time, the role of the Church, etc. Throughout his writings,

it is apparent that Rodriguez yearns to occupy a spot within the traditional Western literary canon. His inclusion would underscore his assimilation into the mainstream, leaving behind assumed implications about his ethnic background. By discussing his spirituality within the parameters of the autobiographical genre, Rodriguez evokes St. Agustine's masterpiece. Moreover, in speaking from and about such an intimate perspective as that of the author's sexuality, the autobiographer connects the text to the confessional tradition of the genre.

In Darling, Rodriguez's exploration of his Catholic spirituality from his queer perspective might be considered contradictory, given the position of the Church regarding queer culture and politics. However, this contradiction in Rodriguez's cultural politics seems to be in accordance with the rest of his work. While he embraces conversion into the mainstream, assimilation seems to contravene his resistance to personal religious conversion. Rodriguez's maintaining the Catholic faith is drawn by an abiding belief in an almost biological attraction to an ancestral religion.

This chapter will explore how Rodriguez delves into his Catholic spirituality, especially vis-à-vis other Mexican-American writers of his time. In previous autobiographies, Rodriguez has wavered between Protestantism and Catholicism, and has even gone as far as referring to his first autobiography as his Protestant book, labeling the second as his Catholic book. Regardless of self-imposed labels on his autobiographies, perhaps done for little more than shock-value, Rodriguez insists on Catholic spirituality and traditions, especially those prior to the Second Vatican Council. Perhaps in Darling, more than in any other of his autobiographies, Rodriguez presents the reasons why he is loyal to a religion that has been disloyal to him. Next, the chapter will look at Rodriguez's rhetorical position as a homosexual. While totally explicit in his fourth autobiography, his queer perspective is not without precedent. There is a gay gaze that is present since his first book, albeit in a much

less overt way, and this chapter will trace that queer perspective that is gradually more evident, as the writer feels more secure as he matures.

6.1.Darling: Religious Regard

As the subtitle of Darling: A Spiritual Autobiography indicates, spirituality is at the core of this fourth autobiography. Then again, Rodriguez's outlook on religion –and more specifically, Catholicism—is noteworthy since Hunger of Memory was published in 1982. In a sense, religion is tied to education in the eyes of Richard Rodriguez –the role of the Irish nuns is central to his schooling— and education is for him the way to assimilation into the mainstream. It is possible, then, to relate religion to assimilation when one approaches the works of this author. In Hunger of Memory, he also acknowledges the English speaking nuns for introducing him to the community and Anglicizing his name: "The nun said, in a friendly but oddly impersonal voice, 'Boys and girls, this is Richard Rodriguez.' (I heard her sound out: *Rich-heard Road-ree-guess*.) It was the first time I had heard anyone name me in English" (11). Immediately after these lines, the autobiographer mentions noticing how his mother dissolved behind a pebbled glass door. By means of the Irish nuns that schooled him, the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, to whom Rodriguez dedicates Darling, his conversion into an Anglo-American was started. Hence, religious conversion is tied to assimilation. In 1997, Rodriguez talks about religious conversion as cultural absorption in an interview: "Conversion. Perhaps cultures absorb one another. If it is true that the Franciscan padre forced the Eucharist down the Indian's throat, maybe she forgot to close her mouth. Maybe she swallowed the Franciscan priest" (Crowley 260). For Rodriguez, religious institutions are altered by the conversions they perform: as if a cannibalistic rite were performed, the Indian's swallowing of the Franciscan priest accomplishes her own conversion, and at the same time

as the ingestion takes place, the priest/church is converted into other material. Perhaps, Rodriguez wants to see acculturation in the same light: as an individual is assimilated into a mainstream culture, Rodriguez wants to believe that the hegemonic culture is transformed. This would be what other scholars label as transculturation, and not necessarily in complete accordance with the assimilationist position that Rodriguez has posited all along. Once again, it seems that Richard Rodriguez wallows in ambiguity.

Yet, while Rodriguez seems to employ religious conversion as a metaphor for cultural assimilation, it is clear throughout his four autobiographies, that he does not see religious transformation as possible. In a July 21, 2006 interview with Bill Moyers in his PBS program Bill Moyers on Faith and Reason, Rodriguez states that he does not think of his religion as something of his choice, but rather as something that has chosen him. Thus, when he is asked about the seemingly contradiction of being gay and Catholic, he replies "Well, like, how could I not be a Catholic. It's not something that I choose. It's chosen me. It feels larger than me. It feels like, you know, they're asking me how can you be your parents' son? It's nothing that I chose. It's something that I believe in. It encompasses me some" (Moyers). However, in the same interview, he states that he feels at odds with the community, since family and procreation are central to the Catholic Church and he is without issue. Parenthood is at the crux of his definition of family. He goes on further to define himself as a sinner and a loser within the eyes of the Church, yet he "never thought of the church as a place for winners. I've always thought of the church as a place for losers" (Moyers). It is no surprise, then, that he considers the Catholic hierarchy, including the Pope, as sinners. It is because of his self-description as a marginal member of the Catholic community, that his religious contradiction is underscored. And, as it has been seen all along, contradiction is a territory where Rodriguez feels perfectly comfortable, for it helps him with his dialectic discourse. Hence, this opposition between gay and Catholic structures the whole fourth autobiography.

In a 2014 radio interview with Krista Tippett, after the publication of Darling, Rodriguez declares that the religious and spiritual context of his childhood was total: "I grew up, uh, Roman Catholic. Though that doesn't even do it justice. […] So people ask me now, you know, what was the church to you, um, it was completely embracing. And total." (Tippett). He grants this unmitigated and pervasive role of religion and Catholicism in his life based on his desire to align himself with a Western European outlook that is not exempt of orientalism: "it [his Catholic spiritual background] began, at an early age, and just grew in mystery and majesty. We had, uh, Mozart masses. And there was this sense that I belonged to this European civilization" (Tippett). Again, one perceives in Rodriguez's words a mystification of mainstream European culture that has contributed to critics considering him elitist, if not accusing him directly of snobbery. In Rodriguez's mind there are two worlds which his childhood straddles: the United States of Mark Twain and Henry James, and the Europe he accesses via the Catholic Church and the Irish nuns. He writes: "[s]o it was like living two seasons, summer and winter. There was the Church, the Catholic Church, and then there was America. The America of Mark Twain and Henry James" (Tippett). Furthermore, Rodriguez's childhood places him in a Eurocentric tradition, for he believes that Henry James "goes to Europe to meet a society that was already mine in Sacramento" (Tippett).

Rodriguez credits the Roman Catholic liturgy and ritual with the power of reflecting inwards, and as a result, with making the person aware of his/her experience of life. This brings to mind the reflective aspect of autobiography, especially its confessional tradition. In the majority of canonical autobiographies, the inwards reflection of the self emerges after a relevant change, and in the case of the confessional autobiographies, this change is usually a conversion. However, in the case of Rodriguez, while he acknowledges his spirituality with the drive for introspection, one cannot strictly speak of conversion in his case. In fact, given Rodriguez's same-sex relationship for thirty five years, and some of his relatives "anti-

theism" –as the writer describes it in Tippett's On Being– one could say that, if anything, there is a resistance to religious conversion in Rodriguez. He remains a staunch Catholic. This abiding belief is almost a biological pull towards an ancestral religion, as he indicates: "I think we [Americans] don't realize the complexity of people that have created us, complexity of civilizations. I was created by Spain, and by native societies in the Americas. I carry on my face the Indian nose, the Indian mouth, all my religion came from Spain" (Tippett). While he acknowledges his Indian ancestry, Rodriguez is not as interested in indigenous spiritual manifestations, nor is he attracted to mestizo interpretations of Catholicism, as other Mexican-American and Chicano artists and writers have been drawn to. The names of writers such as Rudolfo Anaya, Gloria Anzaldúa, or Sandra Cisneros come to mind, just to name a few. John Rechy, another gay writer of Mexican descent, in The Miraculous Day of Amalia Gómez, states that leaving Catholicism in not only a mortal sin but "unnatural" (116), which might help us to understand the reasons why ethnic American writers might have treated religion as a last sphere, and why these limits to converting religiously are regarded not only as social, but also cultural ones. Oscar "Zeta" Acosta, for his part, went from the Catholic to the Protestant church, and back to Catholicism and justified his oscillation in his autobiography by stating "I am neither a Catholic nor a Protestant" (199). In other words, there is a cultural force that limits conversion; Rodriguez is aware of the cultural nature of the force, as it can be concluded from his words. Therefore, religion can be considered as the only aspect from his childhood that he is reluctant to give up in his assimilation to the Anglo-American mainstream, even though his religion sees him as a depraved being given his sexual orientation. However, let's remember that he draws his concept of Roman Catholicism from a European, namely Irish, cultural milieu, and thus, is closer to the U.S. mainstream than Latin American Catholicism. This is the reason why the writer puts so much emphasis on his religion coming from Spain: in doing so he nears himself to his hegemonic aspirations.

This would be in line with his opinions on religious conversion as cultural absorption that has been mentioned earlier on in the chapter, and that the writer focuses on in Days of Obligation, as well as racial and cultural conversion to brownness on the part of the United States, as it is posited in Brown.

Rodriguez has been described as "crypto-Catholic", namely in an article in Commonweal where author Paul Elie tries to figure out whether Rodriguez, among other San Francisco autobiographers, is "'essentially' or 'sufficiently' Catholic" (35). Elie describes a crypto-Catholic writer as someone within "an underground movement of Catholic writers, working out of the flare of publicity and the scrutiny of the hierarchy" (35) and goes as far as to label Rodriguez as "enigmatically Catholic" (35). Nonetheless, it seems difficult to adhere to those labels, when Catholicism is so predominantly present in the work of Rodriguez since Hunger of Memory. Elie himself notes this when he comments on the chapter "Credo" from the first of Rodriguez's autobiographies (36). For Elie, Rodriguez is enigmatic because he remains ambivalent in his handling of his religious development: in Hunger of Memory he is "a Catholic defined by a non-Catholic world"; in Days of Obligation his contrasting between what Rodriguez called Catholic optimism and Protestant pessimism is seen by Elie as wavering; in the third autobiography, brownness as impurity is seen as a Catholic attribute, and Elie criticizes that Rodriguez alludes to, even dramatizes, rather than declares, his Catholic faith (36). Yet, Elie's assessment and, consequently, the formulation of his criticism of Rodriguez's spirituality are flawed. There is no secret about Rodriguez's Catholicism, neither about his position as a gay Catholic. Perhaps his faith has been unawarely downplayed in the literary criticism of his work, due to the dominance of Rodriguez's stance on Chicano issues, affirmative action, bilingualism, hyphenated identities, etc. Along these lines, Thomas J. Ferraro notes that Rodriguez's writing about the Catholic faith and spirituality "went virtually unnoticed in the controversy surrounding its politics of race and

language" (7). Yet, Rodriguez's faith figures prominently in his books, his articles, and in his interviews. More so lately, since his publication of Darling, and it is likely that the publishing of this book also aims to place his faith in the center of the debate, especially when it comes to browning Catholicism: "there are things going on religiously in America that our religious institutions are bewildered by, people who belong to more –more than one faith or Catholics who call themselves Zen Sufis. I mean, uh, it's within the complexity of that, is the brownness that may envelop us" (Tippet).

While Rodriguez purports to endorse mixing, when it comes to religion he does not, will not, cannot mix. He is truly fascinated by people of interfaith marriages, like "the daughter of a 'New York Jew' and an 'Iranian Muslim'" that he mentions in Brown (202, 222) and in his interview with Tippett. But, while being fascinated and seeing it as an example of brownness, he strives to preserve the purity of his Catholic faith, anchored in an early cultural component and nurtured by his Mexican-American family and the Irish-American nuns to whom he dedicates Darling. His keeping with the Catholic faith can be read as a compensation for his assimilation to the U.S. mainstream: he will remain at odds with American Protestantism. Much like Mary McCarthy's narrative of the self tells us: "Our ugly church and parochial school provided me with my only aesthetic outlet, in the words of the mass and the litanies and the old Latin hymns" (xxv); Rodriguez credits Catholicism with granting him "the power of memory, the power of poetry to instill itself on a child's imagination" (Tippett). His appreciation on the Latin mass, which echoes that of McCarthy, has also been the basis for the argument that Rodriguez advocates for a Roman Catholicism on the margins, somehow unchanged by the Second Vatican Council. In this sense, his argument against bilingualism is applied to the mass: for Rodriguez, the use of vernacular languages promotes separation among Catholics and, consequently, postpones assimilation and, in the U.S. context, the process of Americanization. Keeping the Catholic liturgy in

Latin extends the "*knowledge of union, the mystical body of Christ*" (Days of Obligation 196, italics in the original). In the eyes of Rodriguez, this union, this communal experience, is what distinguishes Catholicism from Protestantism –which he views as representing a fierce individual worship and, by extension, individualism in the United States— and quite possibly the reason why the autobiographer is reluctant to assimilate into Protestant America, opting to remain a steadfast Catholic.

The communal aspect of worship, along with its mystical traits, is not exclusive to Catholicism, in Rodriguez's eyes. In fact, he considers the three most widely spread monotheistic religions in the world: Christianity, Islam and Judaism, and constructs another set of oppositions among them. He had already brought this point in Brown's "Dreams of a Temperate People"—"Abrahamic religions, religions we call 'Western' are, in truth, oriental and connect us to the desert" (165)—, but Darling stems from this juxtaposition. Rodriguez employs the image of the desert as one of the binding elements of these religions, and as initial motif for his fourth book: "I moved to the desert, to the great desert of the Middle East. And I realized that the God of Abraham, who is the God of the Jew, the Christian, and the Muslim, revealed himself in the desert" (Tippett). This desert is not exempt from the mysticism of his orientalist construct: "Most occidental Christians are unmindful of the orientalism of Christianity" (Darling 26), a perception that the author is ready to change:

> *Not only is the light golden, Ahuva, but I must mention a specific grace. Around four o'clock, the most delightful breeze comes upon Jerusalem, I suppose from the Mediterranean, miles away. It begins at the tops of the tallest trees, the date palm trees; shakes them like feather dusters; rides under the bellies of the lazy red hawks; snaps the flags on the consulate roofs; lifts the curtains of the tall windows of my room at the hotel –sheer curtains embroidered with an arabesque design—lifts them until they are suspended perpendicularly in midair like the veil of a bride tormented by a playful page, who lets them fall. And then lifts. And then again*. (Darling 32, italics in the original)

Yet, the desert is for the writer "a holy landscape" (Tippett) that while it "beckons the solitary" it also "gives birth to the tribe" (Darling 41). At this point, it must be pointed out that Rodriguez focuses on the desert in the Middle East, but it is significant that he disregards the desert in the Southwestern United States, which is so prevalent in the Mexican-American and Chicano experience, not only because of the migratory experience, but also in the re-creation of the myth of Aztlan. While other Mexican-American and Chicano writers such as Alurista, Pat Mora, Gloria Anzaldúa, Alicia Gaspar de Alba, or Arturo Islas, to name but a few, have directed their attention to the desert landscape as a locus for the Mexican-American and Chicano experience, Rodriguez does refer to Las Vegas as "our own American desert city" (Tippett), but mainly because it serves him to compare it to Jerusalem and, more importantly, to establish a comparison between a Middle East desert where the communal experience is vital –what he refers to as the tribal allegiance— and a Las Vegas desert where individualism –and this means lack of spiritualism in Rodriguez— is at the core. This contrast underscores even more the difference in his treatment of the U.S. Southwest desert, compared to what other Latino authors have been writing about.

Jerusalem helps Rodriguez, in his fourth autobiography, to anchor the three monotheistic religions, as well. "I have come to the Holy Land because the God of the Jews, the God of the Christians, the God of the Muslims –a common God—revealed Himself in this desert" (25). This location also allows him to address the events of September 11, 2001, as if it were a dais. "My curiosity about an ecology that joins three religions dates from September 11" (25-26). Jerusalem serves the autobiographer as the place where emptiness is created, like the box containing the supposed, then discredited, remains of the brother of Jesus. Jerusalem becomes, in the writer's mind, a metaphor for New York in that it has been "a city of ossuaries, buried, reburied, hallowed, smashed, reconstructed, then called spurious" (33). Much like what happens when constructing a narrative of the self, the author here is creating

a story, and authenticity is not the point he wants to make (33). The Jerusalem that lies before Rodriguez's eyes is a city that has been "superimposed" on the one he wants to visit, he wants to enter. As a reader of the city, the writer stands in front of buildings trying "to reconstruct the interior from memory" (34), much like what an autobiographer does in the process of narrating the self. An astute reader of Darling will be aware of the parallelism that Rodriguez hints at when he is linking Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, to an unnamed protagonist. The three religious figures "ran afoul of cities: Moses of the court of Egypt, Jesus of Jerusalem, Muhammad of Mecca. The desert hid them, emptied then, came to represent a period of trial before they emerged as vessels of revelation" (39-40). What is being unsaid here, and a clever reader can infer, is that Rodriguez himself ran away from his original environments, as he has revealed in his two first autobiographies (in one, Sacramento, the familial realm; in the other, the Mexican culture left behind), and he took refuge in Anglo-America, by means of his education and assimilation to the mainstream. If one considers that trial, one must contemplate the possibility that Rodriguez might envision himself as a vessel of revelation, which would not be in too much of a disagreement with the snob and elitist perspective that he has been accused of holding. Yet, he asserts that "[i]f the desert beckons the solitary, it also, inevitably, gives birth to the tribe" (41). In his case, however, the tribe he ascribes to is far from "brown" –to use his image—, but predominantly the canonical Anglo writers (he quotes images of the desert in Helen Waddell and W.H. Auden, for instance).

In Rodriguez's system of oppositions, the desert becomes "the fossil of water" (47), the loneliness of its landscape can produce discernment about the monk's "true nature" (46), but it also can produce its opposite: lack of judgment. The desert creates warriors that overcome adverse situations, but also warriors that destroy in the name of religion: Rodriguez mentions the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas in 2001: "the desert that cherishes no

monuments, wants none" (46). These opposing views of the desert allow Rodriguez to bring the mythical land of Eden into the argument. According to the writer, the desert inhospitality results in the evocation of a mythical land for Jews, Christians, and Muslims. "For Jews, Eden was pre-desert. For Christians and Muslims, paradise –reconciliation with God—is post-desert" (47). Again, the mythical Aztlán reverberates in those words, for it also holds a mythical quality vis-à-vis the desert that Mexican-Americans and Chicanos have endured. Perhaps this nonappearance is the absence that Rodriguez refers to when he states that the desert "is, literally, emptiness –its synonyms "desolation," "wasteland." To travel to the desert "in order to see it," in order to experience it, is paradoxical. The desert remains an absence" (49). It could also be the case that the absence of the U.S. Southwestern desert is present when the writer tells us of his need to clean himself from the desert: "many nights I return to my hotel with the desert on my shoes. There is a burnt, mineral scent in my clothing. The scent is difficult to wash out in the bathroom basin, as is the stain of the desert, an umber stain" (50). Washing the desert off, cleansing himself from its sands and scents, is an attempt to erase evidence of his experience, which echoes previous lines in other autobiographies when the protagonist tries to shave off the brown of his skin, the evidence of his own experience.

If there is a chapter in Darling that reconciles desert, the Mexican-American worker experience, and spirituality, that is "Saint Cesar of Delano", where Rodriguez pays attention to the founder, along with Dolores Huerta, of the National Farm Workers Association (later to be called United Farm Workers), the organization that fought for the rights of farm laborers, most of them of migrant workers or of Mexican descent. Here, Rodriguez does not feel obliged to relate his ethnic origins in order to discuss about Chávez's work. Doing so, "hubiera representado un retroceso en el contexto de la totalidad de su obra" (Barradas). Nevertheless, in this chapter, the autobiographer "can recall", and can "remember" (134)

Chávez's speaking event at Stanford. Following his habit, Rodriguez "stood at the back […] I wouldn't give him anything" (134). The writer declares his embarrassment at Chávez's talk, and compares it to a talk by a member of his family, adding that to many Mexican-Americans, Chávez became a "figure of spiritual authority" (135). He then adds the fact that he remembers him as a "small brown man with an Indian aspect" (135), which orientalizes and belittles him in equal parts. It is safe to assume that Rodriguez is being ironical when he elevates César Chávez to the altars, for he says that by the time he had become famous in his fight for the farm workers, most of the Mexican-Americans "lived in cities, […] were more likely to work in construction or in service-sector jobs than in the fields" (135). In the eyes of Rodriguez, John Steinbeck had beaten him by a generation in making the California Central Valley farm workers famous. Once again, Rodriguez takes from the Latino civil rights activists to give to the mainstream Anglo-American hegemony. Unlike the autobiographer, César Chávez "put away his ambitions for college" (135), and that sets them apart, for they chose separate paths, to the point of suggesting an interested reader to think that one is the nemesis of the other. In keeping with the opposing binaries that Rodriguez is so keen on, he credits Chávez with studying the black civil rights movement (a movement impregnated in Protestant Christian religions), while praising him for studying "most intently the lives and precepts of Saint Francis of Assisi and Mohandas Ghandi" (135). While Chávez "modeled his life on the lives of the saints" (136) –and the reader is here to assume that Rodriguez refers to the lives of Catholic saints—, the writer also wallows in "that there were flaws in the character of Cesar Chavez [sic]" (135). In the end, for Rodriguez, "[t]he question is whether the Mexican saint survives the tale of the compromised American hero" (136) for, apparently, one cannot coexist with the other. While Chávez was "brilliantly theatrical" (136) –a true back-handed compliment— there is no speech in the opinion of the autobiographer that "approaches the rhetorical brilliance of the Protestant ministers of the black civil rights

movement" (136). So, while Rodriguez remains an adamant Catholic, he is unable to measure any Mexican-American to any Anglo activist, whether another ethnic activist or not. In the eyes of Rodriguez, Chávez "seemed to understand, the way Charlie Chaplin understood, how to make an embarrassment of himself" (136). Of course, Rodriguez is fully aware that the comedic intent of the latter is not the purpose of the other. He adds to this: "Chavez [sic] made the smallness of his union, even the haphazardness of it, a kind of boast" (137).

But Rodriguez is aware that Chávez has an American side that has to be saved, according to his particular standards. Hence, he depicts a "struggle between the Mexican Cesar Chavez [sic] and the American Cesar Chavez [sic]" (137) that helps him, and his argument, in establishing a difference between them. Rodriguez is of the opinion that Mexico showed Chávez how to value suffering, while the U.S. schooled him to fight against that suffering. In Rodriguez's view, "Mexico assumes the inevitability of suffering" (138), and while one might assume that it is a virtue, and as such Rodriguez presents it, given his Catholic beliefs, the autobiographer seems to value American optimism and American activism even more positively. It is through the adoption of an American know-how that César Chávez is redeemed, and brought up to the altars, so to speak: "He persuaded notoriously apathetic Mexican Americans to register to vote by encouraging them to believe they could change their lives in America" (139). It is obvious that Rodriguez is oblivious to the history and tradition that Mexico has shown with regards to the fight for independence from Spain or the Mexican Revolution at the onset of the twentieth century. Rodriguez is interested in creating a tension between the U.S. and Mexico, based in the oppositions by simplification that he has used all along in his career:

> […] the psychic tension between Mexican stoicism –if that is a rich enough word for it—and American optimism. On the one side, the Mexican side, Mexican peasants are tantalized by the American possibility of change. On the other side, the American side, the tyranny of American optimism has driven

> Americans to neurosis and depression, when the dream is elusive or less meaningful than the myth promised. (139)

In addressing the myth of Chávez, Rodriguez turns to the dichotomic perspective: "Someone sympathetic to Chavez [sic] might argue that the Game [a disciplinary practice adopted by the UFW] was an inversion of an ancient monastic discipline […]. Someone less sympathetic might conclude that Chavez [sic] was turning into a petty tyrant" (140-141). Following his dialectic approach, Rodriguez must arrive to the synthesis of that opposition. He turns to the Catholic Church to offer his assessment of the figure of Chávez, and he compares him to the figure of Francis of Assisi and points out that the latter realized he had to hand over the administration of his religious order to persons specifically devoted to that task when the growing number of followers made it difficult for him to administer it, while the former never relinquished power. Thus, Rodriguez depicts Chávez as a tyrant. If "[t]he American hero was also a Mexican saint" (142), the autobiographer is less charmed by his sainthood –his Mexicanness—than by his work as activist in the United States. The title of the chapter, therefore, must be read ironically. The Saint of Delano will not be among those Rodriguez turns to in prayer.

The people he elevates to the altars are the Irish nuns that were instrumental in his education: "The Sisters of Mercy of the Americas –the women I revere—are fewer and older" (108). They are among the people, rather than he Chicano activist, whom he credits with social change in San Francisco: "The *Christian Advocate*, and anti-Catholic newspaper, published calumny about the nuns; the paper declared them to be women of ill repute and opined they should move on –nobody wanted them in San Francisco" (107). Another nun that he admires is Mother Teresa of Calcutta, who occupies the last pages of Darling, where the writer opposes her to atheist Christopher Hitchens, who had been criticizing her in U.S.

magazines and who aimed to assess her "reputation by her actions and words rather than her actions and words by her reputation" (96) in his 1995 exposé, under the title The Missionary Position. The result in Richard Rodriguez's last dialectical triangulation is no surprise to the reader by now. Rodriguez commends her inspiration "that she must leave the Loretto convent and venture into the slums of Calcutta to care for the poor of India" (230). That inspiration was, the writer explains, in response to a voice she heard in the desert of her solitude. The bishop who was to grant her permission "was unmoved, unconvinced, unwilling" (231). In the end, Mother Teresa prevailed and, once she was able to leave the convent, "she was alone in India; she was a beggar" (231). In an interview for On Being, he also recounts an anecdote where the nun tells a group of thugs, prisoners in San Quentin penitentiary, that God is in the face of the prisoner standing next to each other, "look more closely at the face of the sinner to find the face of God" (Tippett). What is interesting here is how Rodriguez sees in these religious figures their positioning with those on the margins. His admiration for those who side with the underdog contrasts with his yearning for assimilation into the American mainstream, disregarding the stance and locus of civil right and ethnic activists. For him religion, faith, is an impulse against diversity, and therefore religion justifies his assimilationist perspectives. Rodriguez believes that "the word diversity comes from the word divide" (Tippett) and the Christian impulse is to seek commonality rather than diversity. Yet, it is interesting that he considers the migratory experience of Mexican children from the vantage point of the Anglo-American literary canon. The nuns had given him to read Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, and it is through this narration of leaving home that Rodriguez filters the experiences of Latin American children "seven and eight years old and they're at the border and we're horrified by them now because we don't even recognize our own myth" (Tippett).

Religion also helps Rodriguez to negotiate his homosexuality, for he attributes Catholic iconography with the luscious physicality that contributed to his having an acute sense of the erotics of religion from an early age. He has stated that the church, while denying him a space, has also given him a great deal. It might be seen as a way of partially excluding himself from those marginalized by religion, yet the religious figures that populate Darling all tend to the underdogs. And most of them happen to be women. This crossroads between gender and religion serves Rodriguez as a framework in order to further explore his homosexuality in this fourth autobiography. In the following section, his perceptions on this topic will be under analysis.

6.2.Darling: Gay Gaze

In the previous section it was established that Rodriguez's fourth autobiography intersects his sexual orientation with his spiritual faith. Women are essential in that intersection and, as the writer concedes, the book is "the relationship between gay rights and women's rights" (Jamison). In fact, the autobiographer has stated in interviews and book presentations that one of the guiding themes of his last book consists of the common elements between gay men and straight women. The author acknowledges the influence of the women's liberation movement in the emancipation of homosexual men, and in particular the work of suffragist Susan B. Anthony on behalf of women's rights. Rodriguez feels liberating, as a gay man, the revolutionary act of women beginning to call for their right to vote, since it means that women do not want to be identified with who or what they are in the domestic sphere. For the autobiographer "when women get the vote, they move out of the kitchen in something like the way that they allowed me several decades later, to move out of the closet. These movements are related to each other. I cannot imagine my freedom without women"

(Tippett). It is remarkable, however, that he dedicates this book to certain women who do not distinguish themselves for being independent thinkers or liberated women: the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, the Irish-American nuns that schooled him as a boy.

Yet, Rodriguez sees these nuns as marginal members of society, "women of low repute" in the mind of anti-Catholic publications in San Francisco, who advocated that "they should move on –nobody wanted them in San Francisco" (107). It is precisely this marginal position of the nuns that allows the essayist to bring gay issues to the front. "I cannot imagine my freedom as a homosexual man without women in veils" (132).

If the Sisters of Mercy are depicted, martyr-like, as the sufferers of ill repute, Rodriguez brings to the discussion another collective who "took their mission in bad repute" (108): the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, a group of gay drag queens dressed-up as nuns and, who, unlike the conventional drag queens, do not mask their masculine features (facial hair can be seen along a veil in what can be defined as gender-bending aesthetics). The Order of Perpetual Indulgence combines charity and protest as its mission. "Unlike the Sisters of Mercy", Rodriguez points out, "the Sisters of P. I. have done everything in their power to maintain a bad repute" (108), because through their high camp street performances in the Castro District of San Francisco they have been able to draw attention to issues of sexual prejudice and bigotry, as well as deride mainstream morality with regards to gender issues. Their activism includes AIDS education, sexual health awareness, campaigning for social justice, promoting a feminist agenda, and raising funds for charitable projects and AIDS and breast cancer research. As Rodriguez points out, these activities are "what nuns have always done: They heal; they protect; they campaign for social justice; they perform works of charity"(109).

But they "have an additional mission: They scandalize" (109). And scandal is what seems to earn them most detractors. "I was one" (108), confesses Rodriguez. However, as critic Efraín Barradas points out, "[l]o que para un fanático religioso o una persona con poco sentido del humor podría parecer una burla que llega al insulto y a la herejía, para Rodriguez, quien en este libro de madurez es capaz de mirar con ojos más agudos y ver la complejidad de la realidad que le rodea, es un profundo acto de caridad" ("Leer a Richard Rodriguez"). Part of that rejection has its basis on the rebellion against gender roles and religion, a controversy that the Order seeks, even though it has garnished them harsh criticism. Their looks and their actions parody and satirize Catholic icons and policies. For instance, they hold a pub crawls that parodies the *via crucis*, where actors portray individuals central to the Catholic Easter traditions; throughout the Stations of the Cross, the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence educate for safer sexual practices and promote gay rights. A relevant aspect in many of these performances is satirizing symbols and accessories used in Catholic iconography and regalia, by means of stressing their sado-masochist nature, in what is a clear attempt to desacralize and demystify religious emblems. Richard Rodriguez is right in pointing out that these gay activists depend on the Catholic Church, since without it their performative activism would make no sense. It is this dependency that makes the autobiographer consider the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence in a different light. "They are as dependent on the nun in a brown wool suit as I am" (110).

Another aspect that the Order of Perpetual Indulgence has in common with Rodriguez is that they both question the expendability of a gay individual in the eyes of the Church hierarchy. However, the writer still places the burden on the individual, not on the hegemonic system when he states that said disposability of the gay person "is how he imagines the Church hierarchy sees him" (104). For their part, the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence hold the religious structure responsible for the problem. And Rodriguez reveals how the activism of

these nuns in drag fits in the wider perspective that he has adopted regarding Catholicism. "Sólo alguien profundamente convencido de su fe, pero quien no niega la posibilidad de ver la realidad como una red muy compleja de hecho en un amplio contexto cultural que no podemos entender plenamente, puede darse cuenta de que lo que parece una mofa grotesca es, en el fondo, una acto de solidaridad y de alegría de vida" (Barradas). This is why Rodriguez ends his thoughts on the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence by saying that they are jesters whose enemy is hypocrisy (110).

In Rodriguez's eyes, the Catholic Church is a male dominated system, where religious women who promote feminist topics or have an opinion on women's reproductive rights are seen as dissenters. Rodriguez includes as dissenting women those who remain silent with regards to the hierarchy's position on homosexuality too: "A nun's silence is interpreted as dissent in this instance" (104). Rodriguez is of the opinion that the religious bond is between God and man, and "even the God of scripture is rather shy of women" (105). This position allows him to state that: "God made covenants with men. Covenants were cut of the male organ" (110), and establish a patriarchy against which to place the gay self. Even though he spares his own father, he sensed "a miasma of psychological fear" and "associated heavy, dangerous elements with fathers, with men" (110). In this line, Rodriguez is equating the concept of man and father, and associating it to the patriarchal system. And he is placing homosexuality in opposition to this relation among man, father, patriarchal power.

Fatherhood, accordingly, becomes the key component. "Bringing into being was a potency that the prophets, the evangelists, the compilers of scripture, conceived anthropomorphically as male" (112). This is why women and homosexual men are relegated to a less prominent position, and the reason why "desert cultures of the Middle East, religious communities regard homosexual acts as abominations –unnatural, illegal, unclean" (112). By

now, Rodriguez has established the three monotheistic religions as desert religions; notice, however, how he has left women –who also hold a less privileged status— outside of this equation. The autobiographer criticizes that view, but instead of arguing for the right of the individual to a gay performativity, Rodriguez screens homosexual behavior behind fatherhood, when he says that: "homosexual behavior does not preclude marriage or fatherhood" (112). Instead of claiming that there is an essential or distinctive homosexual identity, he considers the idea of said identity "a comic impossibility. What alone confers an appropriate sexual identity on the male is fatherhood" (112-113). Rodriguez is not being ironic when he qualifies sexual identity as appropriate based solely on procreation. Nor is he being sardonic in considering homosexual identity as a fixed, immutable, unchanging concept.

Ascribing to a sexual identity based on procreation allows the autobiographer to address same-gendered families: "[t]he new gay stereotype is domestic, childrearing – homosexuals willing to marry" (113). While he affirms that same-sex marriage has no effect on heterosexual unions, and suggests that gay people are not the cause for the demise of the institution of marriage, Rodriguez seems to believe that a fatherless family (whether by means of a single mother or a lesbian couple) is challenging the status quo of society. Gay male marriage is supported on the basis that fatherhood reinforces the patriarchal authority. A family where the parental figure is made up solely of the female gender leads children to believe that women are strong, and "religious institutions whose central conception of deity is father, whose central conception of church is family, whose only conception of family is heterosexual" (113) are being challenged. Hence, "the course more comparable to the gay rights movement is the feminist movement" (114), since the feminists "became inclusive not only of wives, mothers, and unmarried women but also of lesbians, and thus, by extension of nonfamilial sisterhood, of homosexual men, of the transgendered, of the eight-legged

acronym, LGBT" (114). By coming out of the closet and being unapologetically themselves, feminists and gays, in the eyes of Rodriguez, demanded a reorganization of civil society, much like what African-Americans had sought out through the Civil Rights movement. (It is interesting to note here, though, that Rodriguez alludes to the African-American fight for rights, he does not mention the Latino pursuit of their rights within the Civil Rights Movement).

In Rodriguez's view, the ultimate reorganization of civil society will be achieved when homosexual marriage is not seen as a threat to the patriarchy of natural order. This will not happen "until the desert religions reevaluate the meaning of women […] and see the woman as father, the father as woman" (116).

In the meantime, what is left is a system of labels that has to keep up with the changes that are being brought to society. "It is the queer lexicon that is behind the times now" (116), says the writer. In order to partially solve this, Rodriguez brings the word 'darling' into the discussion. The term "is a voluble endearment exchanged between lovers" (95) that allows for multiple interpretations given "this personal-classical, asexual, theatrical form of address" (97) that interests Rodriguez. The autobiographer introduces the term in the context of male-to-male relationships by means of the Arab word *habeebee*, in a section not exempt of orientalist approach. On the one hand, Rodriguez wonders how it is possible for an Arab to use the label to address a male friend in an affectionate manner without implying any homoerotic desire. In this line, reflecting on the term allows the autobiographer to reminisce over his school years and recall the male bonding that occurs in an all-boys school (and by extension in patriarchal societies). On the other hand, Rodriguez is aware that the term becomes a wildcard that is charged at times with a homosexual connotation. As such, "'Sissy' is the chrysalis of 'darling'" (100). As such, the use of irony by women to refer to the

exclusive world of men is shared by gays. In sum, "'darling' serves as a signal to women that one's relationship to them is going to be a comic pas, an operetta, a tease. (If that's the signal you got, Darling, you were not wrong)" (120).

Darling is the book where Richard Rodriguez addresses head-on his homosexuality – the chapter "The True Cross", for instance, addresses the challenges that a same-sex couple and their gay friends experiment when one of them is facing the end of life—; however, the writer's gay gaze is present in his earlier works. In fact, Brown is dedicated to Jim Armistead, his partner of thirty-six years, who also appears as a character in Darling. Most of the criticism signals Days of Obligation as the book where the author comes out as gay and presents a narrative of the self from that perspective. It is true that Rodriguez's second autobiography is where he reveals an obvious queer subjectivity; however, that homoerotic perspective was already present in Hunger of Memory, a perspective that the author masks and unveils in a parallel to what he does with regard to his ethnic identity. It is in Hunger of Memory that Rodriguez sets the basis, and even advances, a notion of masculinity that will serve as foundation for a queer aesthetics. In a sense, Rodriguez's first autobiography cracks open the door of the closet, albeit in a subliminal way, and the self starts to build interstitial spaces where the I dwells, spaces that grow wider as the autobiographical writings develop in their cathartic experience.

Alexander Doty states in Making Things Perfectly Queer that the decisive element in order to understand queerness is its permeability and its capacity of transgression. "Queerness", he says, "is a quality related to any expression that can be marked as contra-, non-, or anti-straight". And he adds that it "has been set up to challenge and break apart conventional categories, not to become one itself" (xv). In other words, queer defies categorization, much in the same way as Rodriguez himself makes it difficult for his

readership to classify him in a given group. Much like identity, queer is fluid and ever-changing, and not a stationary, lineal, univocal position.

Richard Rodriguez begins to weave his refusal to write autobiography in accordance with heteronormative expectations in Hunger of Memory. The author envisages an alternative masculinity from the dichotomy public/private that he uses as discursive element throughout his texts. In order to satisfy his hunger for knowledge, the writer cannibalizes female heroes that teach him alternative ways of thinking about his public masculinity. In a sense, that is the embryo of what he will develop thirty years later in Darling when he says that he cannot conceive his freedom as gay without women. His craving for education transgresses and, at the same time, resists the traditional notion of masculinity. Consequently, his self-portrayal as a scholarship boy exemplifies a certain dissidence from the hegemonic concept of masculinity, while simultaneously manifesting an assimilation to mainstream values. The boy Richard is not in control of intellectual nourishment, of his appetite for Anglo-American culture, and not being in control distances the scholarship boy from the ideal of hegemonic masculine hero. The autobiographer adopts a definition of self that disagrees with the traditional foundations of masculinity: "Scholarship boy: good student, troubled son. The child is 'moderately endowed,' intellectually mediocre. […] Brooding. Sensitive. Haunted by the knowledge that one *chooses* to become a student" (Hunger 50, italics in the original). What is significant here is that the learning of the norms of the new culture presupposes a degree of passivity that is not associated with heteronormative masculinity under the parameters of the hegemonic norm. Our scholarship boy disagrees with that masculinity, because he does not take the initiative, he does not exercise control, but he passively ingests it: "He is the great mimic; a collector of thoughts, not a thinker; the very last person in class who ever feels obligated to have an opinion of his own […] relies on his teacher, depends on all that he hears in the classroom and reads in his books […] a dummy mouthing the opinions

of others." (Hunger 71-72). This submissiveness in learning prolongs itself until his college years: "Here is no fabulous hero, no idealized scholar-worker […] He lifts an opinion from Coleridge, takes something else from Frye or Empson or Leavis. He even repeats exactly his professor's early comment. All his ideas are clearly borrowed. He seems to have no thoughts of his own" (Hunger 70-71). The notion of a physical representation as well as an intellectual development that dissent from the traditional concept of masculinity is implicit to the extent that the self adopts the dominant cultural epistemology. At the same time, an alternative masculinity is being put forth.

There is a clearer evidence of gay gaze when Rodriguez considers the body. In those instances, a queer masculinity becomes more physical. The body of the protagonist is presented as soft, smooth, in stark contrast with the virile models that are seen as examples. In the autobiography, the figures of authority remind the boy of his lack of tone: "It was my father who laughed when I claimed to be tired by reading and writing. It was he who teased me for having soft hands" (59). In the opinion of Richard's father, calloused hands are analogous to manual work, and they characterize a masculine body, instead of a passive, intellectual body that sits to read and process information in an abstract manner that is not physically verifiable. Unlike the trophies that a student athlete would display on the shelves or a cabinet, the prizes and honors that Richard received "got left in closets at home. […] My medals were placed in a jar of loose change" (60). The only award that was saved was the high school diploma, for it is proof of the invisible intellectual work. Furthermore, the only intellectual work that is justified is that which includes manual work. This is why Richard's father "had great expectations of becoming an engineer (Work for my hands and my head)" (58). These different perspectives on work will project divergent masculine aesthetics, which will be underlined by the lack of communication between father and son.

Perhaps in Hunger of Memory's fourth chapter, "Complexion", is where Rodriguez displays homoerotic desire, albeit somewhat subliminally. He dwells in that dichotomy between evidence / lack of physical labor. Contrary to the soft hands of an intellectual Richard, the physical strength of the *braceros* and its manifestation on their muscled arms draws the attention of the protagonist. His gaze is not exempt of orientalist exoticism but, nevertheless, it reveals homoerotic desire. Richard is attracted to these bodies because they represent the existing difference from the public masculinity of Richard: intellectual, refined, soft. The young man is erotically attracted by the mysterious, dark, masculine demonstration of physical strength.

While the brown body of these migrant workers is perceived as the object of desire, the protagonist rejects his own body. This is so in part due to the cultural emphasis on whitening the skin that the protagonist has been subjected to. Richard sees his own body as undesirable because of his brownness, to the point of trying to eradicate his skin color by shaving (133). This racist perspective merges with the vision of his own body as something repellent within the heterosexual context: he suffers negative comments from the women in his family based on the darkness of his skin (134). Little by little, Richard inhibits from displaying his body and from showing any signs of hedonism: "the sensations that first had excited in me a sense of maleness, I denied" (135). As scholar José Limón argues in American Encounters, erotic desire is relegated to the imagination, where it roams freely. "Closer to home I would notice the shirtless construction workers, the roofers, the sweating men tarring the street in front of the house. And I'd see the Mexican gardeners. I was unwilling to admit the attraction of their lives. I tried to deny it by looking away. But what was denied became strongly desired" (Hunger 135).

These homoerotic desires are fulfilled in the end when the autobiographer describes his work as manual laborer during his last summer at Stanford. At the same time, this homoerotic desire merges with the longing for seeing himself as the traditional masculine hero, masking for three months the definition of alternative masculinity he had embraced before, where the intellectual prevailed over the physical.

Richard Rodriguez never manifests his homosexuality in Hunger of Memory, but he presents a queer masculinity that defies heteronormativity: a feminine aesthetics, unafraid of verbal expressiveness or of revealing emotions. In doing so, he sees himself as a subversive agent to the Anglo-American cultural hegemony.

Days of Obligation presents a clearer gay gaze. The chapter entitled "Late Victorians" focuses on the homosexual identity of the protagonist, as well as on the gay culture of San Francisco. In this chapter the autobiographer exhibits a new approach to his queer outlook that comprises the whole text. Rodriguez sets himself to review what he stated ten years before. He retakes the dichotomy passive / active that had employed before, and he filters it through gender and colonial relations: "the Indian must play a passive role … the female, the passive, the waiting aspect to the theorem –lewd and promiscuous in her embrace…" (Days 8). The female metaphor is Mexico, involving the national identity along those lines, an identity that is presented as defiled by others. Similar to what happens to the nation, the I is also penetrated: Rodriguez becomes *el chingado* who is rejected because of his alliance with the Anglo-American colonizer.

Rodriguez, nonetheless, tries to invert the terms and to present an alternative to that heteronormative dichotomy. In Days of Obligation, La Malinche becomes a seductress, an agent of change, although Rodriguez falls short vis-à-vis the agency that Chicana intellectuals of the time confer to the Indian woman. But Rodriguez does not pursue feminist assertion; the

autobiographer seeks to portray a subversion that can function as a model for the autobiographical self. Thus, the protagonist presents himself as a *chingado* by his situation, in comparison with the mainstream to which he wants to assimilate. And he also presents himself as a subject with agency: a *chingón*. This ambivalence highlights a dissident masculinity, according to the norm. In other words, even though he presents himself consciously as queer, far from appearing as the passive being that heteronormativity postulates, he assumes an active attitude, which in turn allos him to inhabit a public space of queer resistance that manifests itself in several inversions, as well as in identities centered around hybridity, fluidity and complexity. In this regard, José Piedra suggests that the 'passive' man can deceive the 'active' one by means of undermining masculine power through his alliance with victims, martyrs, and heroines (306). This becomes obvious when Rodriguez explains how he obtains the attention of Brother Michael:

> Brother Michael is in his twenties, passionate, athletic, sarcastic, the stuff of crashes. Not only does he impart the classics, he plays the lead roles. All the boys think he is their favorite teacher. But he is mine. After school Brother Michael encourages me; he spends time with me; he gets me to write for the school paper. In class I am careful not to act kissy. I am the class wit. Like Falstaff, I take hits and then I hit back. I am as ready to laugh at your humiliation as you are to laugh at mine (178-179).

Peter Stallybrass and Allon White in The Politics and Poetics of Transgression, and Ronald Takaki in Iron Cages address the relational process of demonization and repressed desire for the demonized "other". The parallels with Rodriguez and his peers in the passage above are suggestive. In general, it is the fear of the "other", of seeing oneself in the "other" subconsciously or figuratively, that triggers and motivates demonization and repression. The uncontrollable body, desire, chaos, the fear of the unknown, instinct, perversion, unrestrained change, are the substances that construct the other and that fuel difference. Rodriguez

embodies many of these attributes of the stranger, especially when he ponders about homoerotic desire. His gay identity drives much of what Rodriguez writes and does. He admits that his queer sexuality is integral to his identity as a man and as an American. It also reflects a multiple, complex aesthetic.

Brown continues presenting the gay gaze in an open way, almost from the beginning, where the autobiographer recalls his perception of movies from a homoerotic stance, like the couple performed by Sidney Poitier and Tony Curtis in The Defiant Ones (5), making a tongue-in-cheek comment about the ideal casting of Johnny Depp as a nude Caliban (38), or describing a Peter O'Toole as a transvestite hero in his portrayal of Lawrence of Arabia (48). This erotics of the exotic, not exempt of orientalism, of course, is also evident in his description of a young gypsy in downtown Sacramento and referring to the experience as his "first consciousness of the necessity for oxymoron" when he describes the object of his stare as "the most beautiful man" (6). It is in this third autobiography that Rodirguez reviews the early years he wrote about in his first book, and describes them as those of "[a] scholarship boy, and sexually secretive" (14), thus including in his description a sexual orientation that had been in the closet in Hunger of Memory, as it was discussed before. It seems that Rodriguez is considering his homosexuality in Brown from a performative angle. This is why he resorts to the movies and characters, even the common people he sees with homoerotic desire seem to be portraying a part. It is no surprise, then, that he thinks "the musical comedy soliloquy was the perfect vehicle for blocked homosexual emotion" in those years (65). Of course, he is aware that the times memory revert to and the times of writing autobiography are different, and acknowledges that "[f]or today's young queers and lonely these songs must seem quaint and campy and not useful" (65).

Perhaps the chapter where one sees that passing of time and a clear crossing of the closet threshold is the last one, "Peter's Avocado". He admits to be "embarrassed by my sexual imagination" as a boy (203), the years when he was infatuated by Billy Walker but he could only solve the attraction by throwing him a rock (205), while being conscious that he "never expected to form a "we" beyond my family" (203). It is in these pages that he starts to address his sexual orientation in relation to the Catholic religion he professes: his confession thirty years later of his attraction for Billy Walker allows him this analysis. It is an analysis that lets Rodriguez consider homosexual love as impure, dangerous, brown love: "I lived my life in fragments. For I knew nothing was so dangerous in the world as love, my kind of love" (206). The autobiographer establishes a triangulation among God's love, homosexual love, and brownness, where impurity is the link:

> Love comes first. The first principle comes first. God's love comes first and is not changed, cannot be diminished or turned away by the instrument. […] God became brown. True God and true man. […] Sodomy is among the brownest of thoughts. Even practitioners find it a disagreeable subject. Theological condemnations of sodomy have scrolled into a pillar of negotiation rising from a small, hometown passage if Genesis wherein some redneck rowdies of Sodom –heterosexuals all, I'd be willing to bet—make obscene remarks about a couple of hunky angels they see passing through town. (207)

If love –if God himself—, states Rodriguez, is impure, brown, then it is ironical that the churches join in declaring "that homosexuality is a grave moral offense and a vanity" (208), or that same-sex love is a lifestyle, a choice. Rodriguez illustrates through cubism that "homosexuality is not a lifestyle. Homosexuality is an emotion" (208).

Because of homosexuality being an emotion, it is difficult for Rodriguez to describe to his young interviewer how he measures its influence on his writing, perhaps his best reply lies in the brownness of his analysis (222, 223). It is also difficult for the autobiographer to distinguish between the Roman Catholic "I" and the gay "I", a paradoxical tension that

explains his meaning of brown (224). For Rodriguez being gay is an essential quality –"I was born gay"—, while being Catholic is a lifestyle –"I came to Catholicism in deliberation" (224). If brown is love, as he powerfully concludes his third autobiography, Rodriguez's brown paradox is that the church that taught him how to approach, understand, believe in love, also tells him that what he feels lying next to his partner is not love, and he is baffled as to how to protect it (230). In the preface of Brown, the author explains that this chapter was interrupted by the events of September 11, 2001. He retakes the analysis in Darling, as previously seen.

It is clear that, when it comes to his gay gaze, Rodriguez has maintained a fixed conceptual thread from the publication of Hunger of Memory in 1982 until Darling some thirty years later. He continues to develop his autobiographical project, and his gay identity is a central part of it. One can read his four autobiographies as different parts that combine to create a whole. When the reader looks as his treatment of homosexuality throughout his works, s/he realizes that in 2013 Rodriguez tackles the issue far more openly than in his first book, where it only appears subliminally. Darling, written from the stance that maturity provides, shows evident changes. Rodriguez introduces nuances when he defends his arguments; he is less of a Manichean and refuses to see issues in either black or white. In contemplating queer issues –as well as his Catholicism, among other matters—as more complex and through a multi-faceted prism, Rodriguez is able to adopt positions and perspectives that he was unable to support four decades ago.

Rodriguez multidimensional approach is also observable in the structure of Darling. The chapters have abandoned the traditional, linear structure of earlier autobiographies. Each essay in this fourth book seems to skip and bounce from one topic to another, giving an initial impression that the author lacks a clear argumentative thread. However, there is a thematic

unity in all the chapters. Rodriguez tries to deceive the reader with apparent open endings in some essays, but these endings and the apparent disconnect among the essays compel the reader to review the chapter titles and search for nuances on the issues. This reflection on the side of the reader makes the text cohesive. There is a consistency also when one looks at this narrative of the self in relation to the others: Rodriguez has left behind the disavowal of his ethnicity, for it has already been established. As a critical reader, one can look for it and discuss its presence or absence, but the autobiographer does not feel the need to return to that matter, which in itself is a mark of maturity and of contemplating the writer's work as a whole.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUDING REMARKS

"I am Latino against my will"
(Rodriguez, Brown 110)

Richard Rodriguez has been considered a controversial writer since the appearance of his first autobiography, Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez in 1982. While his position has changed with the passing of time, as it can be seen in his subsequent autobiographies, he remains a dissonant voice from the rest of Latino writers in the United States. This dissonance stems not only from the topics he discusses in his books but also from his socio-political stance and his self-identification vis-à-vis ethnic literatures in the country.

The use of the autobiographical narrative allows the writer to portray a self-portrait through which he attempts to regard and expose the many aspects of his existence in their simultaneity, juxtaposing and contrasting them in a dramatic manner. Writing his essays as narratives of the self lets the author build an argument to support his perspective on the world without having to resort to other non-fiction expository techniques, for the micro-history of the author, his experience, is presented as endorsement for the ideas he postulates. While the reader is the ultimate interpreter of the text, and Rodriguez follows the theory of the death of the author that Barthes posited, it is also true that the arguments the author uses to support his ideas come from his own life-experience, one that the reader has limited access to. Furthermore, the reader's access to the author's experience is biased by the same author's portrayal of said experience. Yet, in the employment of one's reminiscences of experience to support one's ideas –that is, in looking at essays through the lens of autobiography— there are some risks. One of those risks is the distortive power of memory and its relation to objectivity and truth: what one remembers is tainted by other elements that might or might

not be apparent to us and, thus, what one considers to be the objective truth might be a subjective consideration of events that is partially true and/or partially fabricated. The different times that come into play –the time of the event, the time in which the event is evocated, the time of writing, the time of reading— also play a factor in the positing of the arguments. The fact that one's stance can change in time is also an aspect worthy of consideration when looking at narratives of the self that aim to be essays on social issues such as ethnicity, race, and cultures in contact. Nevertheless, the literatures of ethnic minorities have turned to narratives of the self as a way to convey their ideas and perspectives, precisely because they allow the reader into the experiences and thoughts of the author, experiences and thoughts that tend to be concerning the self's relations with the ethnic community and the mainstream. By means of portraying the authors' introspection, the purpose of these writers is for the reader to engage in a process of self-reflection that compels her/him to contemplate a given community or communities, and society at large. In this sense, ethnic authors relate an experience that is at once unique and universal, subjective and objective. In appealing to the reader's engagement in self-reflection, the trope of autobiography is no longer (just) metaphor of the self and prosopopoeia, but apostrophe, an address to the other.

This project, therefore, has looked at the emergence of autobiography and its establishment as a literary genre, with the intention of providing a framework within which to approach Rodriguez's texts, ideas, and experiences. By paying attention to the motivations that lie behind the development of the genre, the aim is to underscore that autobiography allows us to understand human experience beyond cultural borders because it responds to similar triggers in mankind. This is not to say that all autobiographies are alike and the different literary theories show us that the narratives of the self can be approached from different perspectives and illuminate different facets of human experience. The autobiographical essays of Richard Rodriguez fit perfectly well within this concept, given

that, in his opinion, to get one's bearings on the world means to conceive all of its contents, private and public, subjective and objective, past and present, as simultaneous and to consider their interrelationships in a single moment of life. His willful insistence on seeing everything as coexisting, to regard and display all issues side by side and simultaneous –a as if coexisting in space rather than time— appeals to the notion of the different, yet simultaneous, times of autobiography. In addition, his stance leads Rodriguez to play with the developmental stages of identity and with the internal contradictions of the individual. These internal conflicts and contradictions have their counterpart in Rodriguez's rhetoric and have been perceived as such by the critics. In fact, his contradictions have been a point of contention in the reception of his work.

If one considers narratives of the self as illocutionary and performative acts of the self, one can affirm that these autobiographical acts construct subject positions through which to posit a new subjectivity. Rodriguez does so and from the location of his new subjectivity tries to contest issues of marginality and displacement, while defining his concept of the hybrid, transcultural, nomadic individual.

As many of his Chicano counterparts, Rodriguez tends to mythologize history, which allows him to bring every social and political question to the present. His career as a journalist influences his view that writing is a living reflection of the contradictions of contemporary society. The autobiographical genre allows him to do both: mythologize the past and portray contradictory, diverse material side-by-side. Following a dialectical triangulation, Rodriguez presents his ideas as the logical consequence of those contradictions, as the obvious result of his attempt to reconcile those diverse, contradictory materials. It is precisely there where the future lies for Rodriguez: in the struggle that consists of bringing coexisting forces together.

One can interpret Rodriguez's addressing of concomitant, contradictory materials on the same plane as a way of crossing borders. As a first generation Mexican-American, the writer has been exposed to many different borders, and he presents them as constitutive of his self, and therefore, as a simultaneous occurrence in his person. This crossing of borders places Rodriguez within the milieu of other U.S. Latino writers, who also reflect on their experience and see it in relation to the clash of cultures that results from diaspora. Rodriguez has carved a place for himself within Latino letters precisely because of the controversial nature of his stance, given the context in which his texts started to appear. Therefore, it is necessary to take into account the socio-historical and political issues concurring at the time of the publishing of the texts.

When Hunger of Memory first appeared in the early eighties, Rodriguez caused quite a stir in the sphere of Chicano culture as well as in the broader context of Latino and other ethnic cultures. This is the reason why it is of the essence to take into account socio-historical and political factors in the study of these texts. Also, at the same time, the context surrounding the narratives of the self contribute to the reflection upon the identity of the self, because issues like migration, displacement, gender, sexuality, social class, historical developments, among other elements, constitute an important space for the construction and dismantling of identities.

Richard Rodriguez's position against bilingual education and affirmative action programs, items on the program for social advancement that Latinos as well as African-Americans and other minorities, had put forward in their struggle for civil rights, instantly placed Richard Rodriguez against the ethnic communities at large. The most averse to his ideas was, needless to mention, the Chicano intelligentsia, who saw in Rodriguez's stance an attack from within to all socio-political advancements they had achieved. Critics immediately

perceived Rodriguez as a traitor to their cause and a sold-out to the program of the Anglo-American hegemonic mainstream. As a consequence of this frontal disagreement, Rodriguez himself refused to be labeled as Chicano. Ironically, however, Rodriguez continues to be a staple author on syllabi of courses on Chicano and Latino literatures, mainly due to his first and third books.

Hunger of Memory deploys a perspective that is contrary to the Chicano establishment, as it has been mentioned already. From its very title, the book recalls canonical *Bildungsromane* of the Anglo-American literary tradition, most notably the text by Henry James. In doing so, it underscores the assimilationist position of the author, position that is at the crux of the critique the text and author have received. Presenting the text as a *Bildungsroman* allows Rodriguez to depict his persona as a successful child of immigrants who has ameliorated his position in life through the challenges that life in the U.S. has placed in front of him. The structure of a coming of age novel allows him to portray the image of a scholarship boy, and academics and education are the foundation of his argument, which in the end is an advocate for his ideas on upward social mobility. Rites and myths are essential elements in the incorporation, or lack of it, of an individual into society and, as such, Rodriguez supports certain myths and rites while undermining others. The objective of this *Bildungsroman* is to underscore the insertion of the subject into society-at-large and, for that reason, the hegemonic values of the mainstream tend to be upheld. Schooling is a key instrument in the inclusion of the individual in any society; thus, it is only fitting that Rodriguez centers his argument on his educational development.

The author describes his successful schooling experience on the basis that his education was not hindered by the implementation of a bilingual program in the Catholic parochial school he attended. Because he lacked the support of a bilingual program, young

Richard was exposed to a "sink-or-swim" strategy that, in the end, turned out to be beneficial for him and one that allowed him to thrive scholarly. Yet, the author fails to notice that his example might not be valid for everyone and that in advocating for an unmediated linguistic incorporation in the educational system of the non-English speaker. He is not advancing the same possibilities for social integration and upward mobility that he showcases in his own case. His argument against bilingual education programs rests on a dialectical opposition between private and public language. Rodriguez will set his argumentation on this dialectical triangulation, where he places ideas in opposition, out of which the argument he posits appears as the best solution to the dilemma that is being debated.

Affirmative action is another line of reasoning in his argument for educational success of minorities. It is also a different point of contention between the advocates for the rights of ethnic minorities and Richard Rodriguez. Perhaps this is a more political disagreement, and one that has placed the author at odds not only with Latinos but with other minorities. Black activists advocated for the inclusion of quotas into the educational system, quotas that would reflect the racial diversity of the country in comparison with the all-white make up of the different educational levels. Latinos and other minorities followed African-Americans in this claim. By writing in opposition to this measure, one that was essential in the culture wars of the seventies and eighties, Rodriguez alienated himself from the ethnic intelligentsia. His siding with the white hegemony fueled accusations that Rodriguez was being too complacent with the mainstream and that rather than supporting diversity, the author was advocating for servile assimilation. The critics' apprehension also stemmed from fear that Rodriguez's success story would be embraced by the mainstream as representative of the Mexican-American experience and that the autobiographer's words would be perceived as the insider's acknowledgment that changes to –or even derogation of – affirmative action needed to be implemented. While some critics have noted that Rodriguez's book remains in the sphere of

his own experience with regards to educations, it is unquestionable that his book is also political, and as such it has been read by many.

Because Rodriguez brags about his success in the educational system, one that he leaves due to his opposition to affirmative action, this provokes the accusation that he is a snob author. This charge of snobbery brings attention to issues of class, which are apparent throughout his work. By muddling identity with problems of oppression and gender issues, Rodriguez incurs in making of affirmative action and bilingual programs an issue of class mobility.

Rodriguez's focus on his education, and seeing it as an instrument for class mobility, also furnishes him with the possibility of opening the door to other topics that have shaped his identity, like family and religion. Class status becomes a way for Richard to attain this impersonal, outside world, and for Rodriguez it becomes a manner in which to depict and justify his path towards assimilation. The autobiographer presents his success in the public mainstream, and the corresponding distancing from his parents, as his ascension in class. By including his siblings in this depiction, Rodriguez seems to open the possibility that his experience sets the example to anyone in the community. The author suggests that education is the reason for and motivation behind his estrangement from the family and Latino community as well as his Mexican culture of origin. It seems as if Rodriguez's understanding of society is a division among impermeable layers, be they of generic, racial, or class nature. This intertwining between ethnicity and class has been labeled as *ethclass*. As a matter of fact, Rodriguez's anxiety of class pervades every category in the book to the point that one can assert that there is little in Hunger of Memory that is not considered in terms of class. Education is made to appear as a difficult to navigate passageway towards upward mobility.

Acquiring English, reading books, and receiving degrees become symbols and trophies of social accomplishment, rather than quests for enlightenment.

The analysis of Days of Obligation presented in this project has seen how Rodriguez endeavors to come to terms with his Mexican identity. In order to do so, he aims to deconstruct his father's heritage. The approach to this study has been one of a journey in two directions: one towards the culture of origin, in this case Mexico; and another towards the Mexican-American culture, north of the Rio Grande. In this second autobiography, the study has focused on how Rodriguez examines the culture he repressed in his previous text and how he shows the conflicts that ethnic subjects experience in the coming into contact of their culture of origin and the dominant culture.

The author's physical travel to Mexico opens the door to the tensions that are going to be apparent throughout the text. As in the rest of his books, Rodriguez builds those tensions through the contrasting of opposites in a dialectical triangulation. One of those tensions is the regard of Mexico as the past, the tradition, the realm of the collective, while the United States are perceived as the future, the innovation, the realm of the individual. Mexico is the place of memory, the United States the locus of amnesia. In examining his cultural heritages through these dialectical oppositions, Rodriguez places the self as the synthesis of his argument. It is the author-protagonist himself who will be the solution to his quandary, and his need for inclusion into the American mainstream will lead him to defend that the United States is a multicultural nation of immigrants that shares a common culture. The author wants to prove that this private, individual culture –in sum, his self-perceived identity— emerges from education as much as from cultural heritage. In this fashion, Rodriguez retakes themes from his previous book.

The trip of return to the culture of origin places in the foreground many tensions within the ethnic self. In a sense they become a return to the origin where the individual embarks on a trip in space and in time. Their displacement symbolizes the death of a previous stage and the naissance of the consciousness of a new self. Thus, the physical trip is often fused with an introspective journey, which in turn makes autobiography a most appropriate genre to display these expeditions. Here, Rodriguez presents the reader with an imagined Mexico: a product of the mind of the protagonist and also an image, an impression that is sketched from the locus of diaspora. The author turns to Mexican cultural icons in order to present his imagined locus and, more importantly, in order to deconstruct his Mexican cultural identity. This project has looked at some motifs that are shared with other Chicano writers and has seen how Rodriguez treats them in a different fashion, one that supports better his assimilationist argument. In order to do so, the author structures the Mexican identity in a cosmopolitan yet dislocated way that allows him to consider subjectivity as a fluid concept. In the end, however, his perspective ends up being ironic due to the estrangement of the conventional affiliations out of which he builds his opinion; if the author places himself outside of cultural and historical specificities, he misses the implicit connections that come from observing reality through the lens of the other. Whereas Rodriguez postulates a complex panorama of Mexico, he is unsuccessful in responding to that view, in part because Rodriguez is constantly privileging intellectual knowledge over experience in his approach. Mexican identity is reduced to an intellectual exercise where Rodriguez follows closely the ideas of Octavio Paz, himself a controversial figure when addressing the Mexican-American community as "*el México de afuera*".

Nevertheless, Rodriguez's use of the label "Mexican" is manifold, as it happens when he uses the term "Indian". At times he refers to Mexican-Americans, others to Chicano, others to the Mexican migrant; and sometimes Mexican denotes the resident of the country in

Mexico. This plurality leads to Rodriguez's ambiguous perspective that he finds so useful because it lets him claim his Mexican ancestry or he can portray himself as an outsider arriving in the country. Rodriguez, like other Chicanos, cannibalizes Mexican cultural icons and concepts in order to forge his identity. Yet, that look limits Rodriguez to a mirage of Mexico, understood through stereotypes, much like the vision of the United States on the part of the Mexicans –and other immigrants— in search of the American Dream.

When moving north of the border, Rodriguez posits that Chicanos and Mexican-Americans wear a mask and acquire a public persona, reducing the identitary quandary to an issue of representation. In this way, he can disparage that the efforts to build a Chicano collective identity rests on a sublimated image of the rural and the indigenous Mexico –the traditional, the past. In doing so, Rodriguez attacks the notion that by claiming the indigenous ancestry, Chicanos distinguish themselves from other Latin American cultures and from Spain. This last point is of special interest, since it allowed Chicanos in the 60s, 70s, and 80s to of reject the government imposed label of Hispanic that the United States Census Bureau adopted during the Nixon administration. Distinguishing Chicanos from Spain establishes a conflict for Rodriguez, who constantly advocates for his European ancestry in his efforts to move up socially and to move into the mainstream. In order to highlight his position, the author approximates his literary forefathers by means of this celebratory discourse of displaced heritage. Those forefathers are the English language writers of the start of the century, and a case in point of this is the title of his first book. In spite of this position, Rodriguez turns to ambiguity when he realizes that he cannot completely belittle his Mexicanness. The solution to his conflict is to follow the ideas that José Vasconcelos put forth in La raza cósmica that a miscegenated race, would encompass the virtues of all other races. Rodriguez updates this idea, though, by means of including an economic twist to the theory via his reflection on the *maquilas*.

As one can see from Rodriguez's exploration on Mexican and Mexican-American and Chicano identities, his position is ambiguous; a stance that he also maintains with regards to Ango-American identity. Rodriguez speaks about those cultures being diverse, but then attempts to reconcile diversity with assimilation. The author claims for a non-exclusionary, common culture, a notion that is in clear conflict with the mainstream culture: a common culture that functions as exclusive. This claim contributes heavily to the perception that Rodriguez makes a caricature of Mexicanness portraying it as dark, obscure, in contrast to the clear virtues of the Anglo-American character. In the end, he would like to unite both worlds but always giving preeminence to the Anglo-American character, which in his mind is dominant.

In the introspective movement that our analysis of Days of Obligation presents, one sees that Rodriguez, as a true autobiographer, is the one who articulates both memory and imagination in order to present the reader with a given subjective stance on Mexican as well as Mexican-American and Chicano perspectives. This articulation manifests the autobiographer's artificiality and the intentionality on the re-creation of both cultural spaces.

Our approach to Brown originates in the consideration of the book as the author's manifested conclusion of a trilogy. Rodriguez considers the book as the wrap-up of his trilogy on class, ethnicity, and race. In this sense, the book can be regarded as one where the author echoes many of the topics he has already considered in his two earlier autobiographies. The book continues to emphasize an individualistic sense of self, which has earned Rodriguez the label of neoconservative, an adjective that has been underscored by his steady opposition to agendas and programs supported by ethnic essentialists. In this sense, Brown contributes to the identity-politics debates that have made its author equally a renowned and divisive Mexican-American intellectual.

The debate, however, has evolved into a disagreement about who is able to better define ethnic identity and, as a result, who can better represent a given ethnicity. In declaring from the offset that brown is not a singular color, but the color of miscegenation, the color of many, Rodriguez allows himself to remain in the realm of contradictory ambiguity when it comes to his argument. When contemplating the mixing that brownness encases, Rodriguez looks at race and culture as the essentials that can explain ethnicity. The present analysis considers how Rodriguez debunks essentialist notions of ethnicity, popular among mostly earlier advocates for ethnic identity. Dismantling this essentialist view allows the autobiographer to distance ethnicity from race and to look elsewhere as the basis upon which to formulate his definition of it. Rodriguez's idea of brownness cooperates with this dismantling as miscegenation allows for the departure from a monolithic approach to the concept of ethnic identity.

Having departed from a monolithic, essentialist concept of ethnic identity allows Rodriguez to support the fact that race cannot be a defining term when it comes to Latinos, given that Latino constitutes a multiracial group in itself. Rodriguez then turns to culture as the significant element that characterizes ethnicity. In shifting the paradigm from race to culture, Rodriguez questions the notion of ethnic authenticity. According to this new model, ethnic authenticity is culturally attainable and not biologically related. In spite of being regarded as a sold-out, white-on-the-inside-and-brown-on-the-outside "coconut", Rodriguez undermines the idea that ethnic identity is fixed, stable, unalterable and debunks governmental categorizations of race and ethnicity. By placing culture at the root of it, the writer opens the door to the malleability, the fluidity, the changeable nature of ethnicity. This is supported by the processes that come into play when cultures are in contact and transculturation takes place; thus allowing for cross-pollination and/or overlapping of cultures and for an interstitial space where hybridity can dwell.

Looking at ethnicity as a cultural construct lets Rodriguez reconsider the role of national boundaries. It also allows him to re-evaluate linguistic issues, although his argumentation is especially contradictory when he tries to maintain his allegiance to English. It is because of his preference –almost devotion—towards English that he questionably knocks terms like Latino in favor of Hispanic, a label that the community considers obsolete and with reminiscences of certain governmental policies and impositions. In order to better understand his position one needs to realize and acknowledge that Rodriguez identifies with the notion that white people of European descent have a dominant role when it comes to define immigration into the United States, a position that has been proclaimed by certain conservative views within mainstream elitist Anglo-American society. As a result, maintaining such label and such stance supports the assessment that Rodriguez continues fixed on his assimilationist ambitions. Nevertheless, as it has been pointed out in the project, the pinning of identity is not the exclusive domain of the subject. The responsibility also lies on the "Other". As much as Rodriguez derides the label Latino, he is considered a Latino author by many: the readership, the critics, and the publishing powers that be. As Rodriguez himself reveals, he is invited to give talks and lectures as a Latino. Moreover, Rodriguez is aware that his success as a writer, journalist, and thinker is in no small part due to the perception that the other has of him as a Latino. In the end, one can argue that Rodriguez is a Latino in spite of himself, as the author himself recognizes in his third autobiographical essay.

Finally, our analysis of Brown reads the book in relation to Rodriguez's other essays, with special emphasis on the first two autobiographies. To this end our study reads the last chapter of the book as a coda of this autobiography and of the trilogy as a whole. In agreement to his parents' struggle for upward class mobility, he was raised in an all-white neighborhood and encouraged to climb socially through education, in an all-English Catholic

school. Being educated by Irish nuns, women who were also immigrants in the United States and who contributed to Rodriguez's awareness that Irish were not regarded as "white" by mainstream America. Given the socio-historical context of the country in the 1950s and 1960s, Rodriguez's brownness made him invisible. Arriving at college just before the fight for inclusion of non-mainstream students in the educational system ensured that he had a meager cohort of minority students, which in turn underscored his invisibility. What is more, to awaken into a gay identity in the 1950s, within the Latino and Catholic contexts must have been the recipe for utter isolation. Public language used to talk about diversity did not reflect his intricate personal experience, as he has said; and the value of his writing lies in his efforts to negotiate the external acknowledgment of his identity with the complex individuality his self experienced. This might explain why Rodriguez's autobiographies have been considered to be both, presentational and representational, political and poetical, eliciting responses from the ethnic reader as well as from mainstream readership. This might clarify the reasons behind the constant shift of Rodriguez's address in keeping with the (dis)location of the subject, which impedes the reader's clear-cut position, either inside or outside, vis-à-vis the text. Rodriguez's use of section breaks, italics, bold and bigger fonts, incomplete sentences, and other features operates to de-naturalize logocentrism, thus destabilizing the reading process and, ultimately, the reader.

The last chapter of Brown also serves as a bridge between the initial trilogy and the fourth autobiography, as if Darling were an extension of said trilogy. Using the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 as generating force behind the text, and as a link with the chapter "Peter's Avocado" from the previous book, Rodriguez returns to earlier topics discussed in prior autobiographies and re-assesses them.

The analysis of Darling carried out in this project focuses on religion and sexuality. Both themes have appeared since the publication in 1982 of the first book, but it is in this 2013 text that Rodriguez aims to reconcile his religion with his sexuality and where he tackles the issues head-on.

Rodriguez looks into his Catholic spirituality from the beginning. The author mulls over how that outlook has changed with time and how his perspective has placed him with regards to other Chicano and Mexican-American writers who also have tapped into Catholic imagery in order to establish their allegiance to Chicano culture. In order to do so the opposition Catholic/Protestant as well as Christian/other monotheistic religions and monotheistic/non monotheistic spiritualities come into play. It is noteworthy how Rodriguez is ready to "convert" into a mainstream American but he is not ready to alter his religious belief, especially one that represents a conflict with an important part of his identity: his sexuality. Having established in previous works that identity is culturally driven, and having exposed that his culture has been deeply Catholic, Rodriguez is able to reconcile both sides, albeit controversially. For instance, his longing for religious practices prior to the reforms imposed by the Second Vatican Council contrast with his idea that one needs to assimilate to the United States because they represent the future, or because they stand for a rupture with colonial practices employed in Latin America. Yet, linking his Catholicism to Spain allows him to vindicate a European pedigree that finds an echo in the autobiographer's earlier publications.

Rodriguez's advocacy for Catholicism has been dubbed as enigmatic because of the contradictions he incurs in. Far from being a crypto-Catholic, Rodriguez displays his faith from the first pages of his first autobiography. However, Rodriguez remains ambivalent in his religious advancement, a product of the oppositions he brings into his arguments: being a

catholic defined by non-Catholics, opposing Catholic and Protestant worldviews, relating purity and impurity to Catholicism, his defense of the communal aspects of religion and the individualism latent in Anglo-American mainstream culture, etc. While he proclaimed to be an advocate of mixing in his third autobiography, when it comes to Catholicism he cannot mix.

Rodriguez's contemplation of Catholicism as a desert religion –along with Judaism and Islam— allows him to bring into the argument an orientalist perspective that, in turn, contributes to the mythical rendering of religion. An aware reader perceives in Rodriguez's orientalist regard the construction of an argument that lets him work out the contradictions he is aware of incurring into, although the reader might not be sure whether the author is able to resolve them. In addition, Rodriguez is able to transpose the religious structure to other secular figures. Thus, his consideration of Lawrence of Arabia or of César Chávez allows him to apply a religious discourse to the socio-political and historical discourse he is never far away from. By addressing Chávez through religion, Rodriguez does not have to revert to ethnicity to discuss the work of the social activist. By looking at his results from a spiritual framework, his assessment of them is less confrontational and his evaluation of the historical figure appears less violent.

Looking at religious women allows him to pay tribute to the Irish nuns who first educated him –and to return to the early pages of his first autobiography, almost in a full circle— as well as to ponder on the marginal position of women in the Catholic Church. This leads him to consider feminism and the struggles of women for their rights, which in turn lets him jump into the rights of those marginalized by the mainstream because of their sexuality.

Through his reflection on the role of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence Rodriguez is able to discuss the struggles for the rights of the lgbtt+ community without an overt reference

to the fight for civil rights that he had confronted in his earlier advocacy for assimilation into the mainstream. The campy aesthetics and the performative nature of the activism of these transvestite nuns let Rodriguez deconstruct the gay fight for equality and the role of sexual identification within the larger societal context. For Rodriguez, fatherhood is at the crux of patriarchal society and this is why women and the lgbtt+ hold a less privileged position. By bringing same-sex parenthood into the equation, Rodriguez calls for a reorganization of civil society.

Language is also present in Darling, as the word that gives title to the book becomes the image through which the closet door is opened. The section that discusses the word is far from being like those paragraphs from the eighties in which Rodriguez made hidden or unconscious remarks about homoerotic desire. The analysis presented in this project traces Rodriguez's gay gaze to the first autobiography where an alternative definition of masculinity was being laid out. As the chapter evolves, the reader will see how his closet door opens little by little, and the author engages more and more with his sexuality in his texts, until he addresses it head-on in this last book. The intention of this project is to portray the evolution of Rodriguez's arc of thought with regards to this topic.

It has been shown how Rodriguez has shifted his perception throughout the four books that have occupied us in this study. From a rather strict stance that one might even consider Manichean, the author has moved to a more open-minded attitude and outlook towards the recurrent topics in the texts. Along with this change in perception there has been a subtle change in tone, leaving behind some of the corrosive, belligerent tenor that the earlier essays showed. There is little doubt that the changes of time lie behind this transformations in point of view and tone. Rodriguez is aware of his readership and employs the autobiographical apostrophic nature to persuade his readers of his arguments. It is this figure

of the apostrophe that confers an ethical dimension to Rodriguez's autobiographies. Rodriguez's self is constructed as a response to the reader, his "Other"; that is, the Other comes before Rodriguez's discourse and his arguments are the expression of Rodriguez's responsibility towards the Other. It is this ethical dimension that permits the blurring of the distinction between autobiography and essay. Thus, autobiography goes beyond re-presentation of the self, or restoring the self from the past, and, like any essay, undertakes an interaction with the other. It is reasonable, then, that one can read Rodriguez's autobiographies as essays and his essays as narratives of the self.

Due to didactic reasons, this project has not addressed some issues, nor has considered every issue from every single aspect. There are several avenues of future inquiry that I hope to undertake in future projects. One of the topics not yet discussed is the role of truth in the writing of autobiography. One might ponder if the writer is referring to objective truth when composing her/his narrative of the self or, rather, manipulating facts in order to construct an argument that is only verifiable as long as it is one's account of his/her own life. It has been mentioned that this is one of the reasons why one can consider that Richard Rodriguez favors autobiography over traditional essay form. Another line of inquiry rests on the role of the writer. The study has referred to Barthes' concept of the death of the author to signal the reader's responsibility in front of the text; but the notion of the ethnic alter ego has not been considered. It is common that the reader of ethnic literature, not just ethnic narratives of the self, ponders whether the characters portrayed in the texts are ethnically representative and autobiographical. One might wonder if the protagonist seen as an alter ego modifies authorial power over a fictional character; in other words, how associating protagonist and author mediates our reading of an ethnic writer. This project has only considered the reception of the text by readers from north of the border, but it leaves out the reception of Rodriguez's autobiographies and ideas in Mexico, where the relationship

between Latinos and Anglos is mediated by other factors. Even within the Latino community in the United States, it would be worth to notice how Rodriguez's ideas regarding assimilation of Latinos are perceived by other Latinos of non-Mexican descent, who are subjected to other tensions. By the same token, it would be interesting to study how these four autobiographies compare to other literatures of the periphery or by minorities, leaving aside the ethnic label. For instance, this study has signaled the "whitening" of the Irish, but it has not developed said issue or its representation in literature. There is little doubt that those lines of inquiry would provide scholars with a rich network of intertexts that would expand the limits of this study.

Staying within the four texts considered, most of the chapters in them have appeared published as drafts in other venues before their inclusion in the final texts. A rhetoric study that would compare them would throw light into the narrative process of Richard Rodriguez. Focusing on specific topics, there is room for further analysis within the theoretical framework of Queer Studies. Likewise, masculinity is a pervasive theme in Rodriguez's work; analyzing them under the light of the divergent theories in the U.S. and Latin America would enrich the discussion of the autobiographies. Along those lines, looking at the texts from the perspective of studies that place the body at the center would also enrich the facets of the prism through which to analyze Rodriguez's work. An analysis of the autobiographies strictly from the tenets of Theology would probably yield rich results with regards to the author's religious thought. A strict focus on the portrayal of a given theme in the four books – race, Mexican icons, familial relations, the self versus the community, etc.—would unquestionably deepen the knowledge of the works, the author, and the field. Those are all research topics for future projects.

Rodriguez says of his youthful fascination with Malcolm X: "Something in his manner, something I recognized rhymed with the scholarship boy I was" (Brown 15). While I

remain somewhat a cultural "outsider" some of Rodriguez's contradictions resonate within me. One can find the yoking of a conservative Chicano Catholic with a radical Black Muslim odd, yet the approach to identity issues can be recognizable. There is something similar in the echoes I hear in Rodriguez's texts, an autobiographical "rhyming" that allows me to recognize my own approach to identity. Something in Rodriguez's discursivity, his contradictions, his mode of indexical realism, equally rhymes and is at odds with who I am. On one level, I believe that my being a relative "outsider" to Chicano discourses enabled me to detach from certain pressures of identification as they come to bear upon scholarship. However, Arnold Krupat makes here an important point that knowledge production in all humanistic fields is perhaps best served by a respectful mix of both cultural insiders and outsiders. There will always be a way in which outsiders are only translating, learning by analogy and never quite inhabiting the "worldview" shared by people raised inside a complex network of cultural reference. At the same time, the comparatist or outsider brings the value of questions that can prompt a review and clarification of first principles, bringing insiders to look at their enterprise with fresh eyes. On another level, and paradoxically, I now see that I only came to these works and their surrounding discourses because my interest in them was already part of my "insider" experience. Therefore, for me the most striking conclusions of this project have to do with the uncanny ways in which the relation between subjectivity and objectivity, autobiography and theory, work well below the scholarly surface. Whether we inhabit a shared orbit of biography or culture has little to do with it. On this level, scholarly content functions like a screen memory. The "truest" investigations of knowledge production may therefore be those that begin to question why we engage the particular projects that we do. I now understand better my interest when the Joseph Ellis scandal broke at Mount Holyoke College, Massachusetts, in 2001: the story of a prominent historian who lied about his (non) service in Vietnam. These different kinds of lies, of omission or of commission,

resonate, precisely, as the congruity of autobiography with scholarship. That is, in his depersonalized theory of language, De Man may have sought to contain his own history of collaborationist authorship. In a career built upon painstaking archival work on U.S. colonial history and as the biographer of Thomas Jefferson, Ellis created "facts" about himself that the historical record could easily disprove. When the scandal broke, virtually every report on Ellis described his situation as "ironic," presumably because he was a historian and historians are dedicated to truth. Of course, "we" in literary and cultural analysis are well beyond this particular equation of historical fact with truth. One needs to understand how lies can be autobiographically truthful, and documented histories can be false by virtue of not telling everything (hence the juridical demand that we tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth). Similarly, I'm beginning to think the most "objective" scholarship is that which takes into account its own "situated subjectivity." In the case of Ellis, the truth of his scholarship lies somewhere in his autobiography, and the truth of his autobiography would be illuminated in the shape of his scholarship.

In exploring Henry James's mysterious and "obscure hurt," John Eakin noted how often biographers fail to account for the writing of autobiography as itself a biographical "fact," as itself an "event" in an author's life. In asking, "Can autobiography serve biography?" he notes that biographers typically discount such writing as source material that would illuminate their subject; thus, ironically, James's own depiction of his "obscure hurt" is not deemed as important a source of knowledge as Leon Edel's perusal of the historical record that would confirm or deny the "truth" of the source of James's injury. In the end, Eakin decides to trust James account, believing in the truth of an obscure hurt that cannot be verified. This brings to mind the words of Salman Rushdie: "… in autobiography, as in all literature, what actually happened is less important than what the author can manage to persuade his audience to believe" (343).

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